LITERARY DEVELOPMENTS OF THE TABLE OF NATIONS AND THE TOWER OF BABEL IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Centre for Medieval Studies
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the various ways Anglo-Saxon authors interpreted and adapted Genesis 10–11: the Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel narrative. Although Genesis 10–11 offered Christians of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages a scripturally authorized understanding of the origins of ethnic and linguistic diversity of the world, its nature as an ancient Jewish text that deals with matters more suitable to its original audience than to its late antique and medieval readers allowed these later readers to transform the meaning of the text in order to give it a significance more fitting to their own times.

In the first section of my dissertation, I treat the topos of the number 72, which becomes prominent when authors of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages read it into the Table of Nations as the number of descendants of Noah’s three sons. My first chapter deals with the initial development of this topos in Christian and Jewish writings of Late Antiquity; my second chapter with the topos in the Latin writings of early Anglo-Saxons, from the biblical commentaries from the School of Canterbury to Alcuin; and my third chapter with the topos in the writings of later Anglo-Saxons, from King Alfred to the Old English texts of the eleventh century.

In the second section of my dissertation, I treat the interpretations of the Tower of Babel as they form and are informed in Late Antiquity and Anglo-Saxon England. As in the first section, three chapters are presented: the first on the initial developments in Late Antiquity; the second on the continual development into the Latin authors of early Anglo-Saxon England; and the third on the mainly Old English authors of the later Anglo-Saxon period.
Acknowledgments

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Abbreviations
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Ælfric
CHomI  First Series of Catholic Homilies
CHomII Second Series of Catholic Homilies
DSA    De sex aetatibus
Interrogationes Ælfric’s Translation of Alcuin’s Interrogationes Sigeuulfi in Genesin
LUTN   Libellus de ueteri testamento et nouo
SH     Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection (2 vols.)

Alcuin
Ep     Epistolae

Aldhelm
CdV    Carmen de uirginitate
CE     Carmina ecclesiastica
Ep     Aldhelmi et ad Aldhelmum epistulae
EpA    Epistula ad Acircium (De metris et enigmatibus ac pedum regulis)
PdV    Prose De uirginitate
Poetic Works Aldhelm: The Poetic Works, trans. Lapidge and Rosier
Prose Works Aldhelm: The Prose Works, trans. Lapidge and Herren

Alfred
PC     Old English Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care
Bo     Old English Boethius

ANQ    American Notes and Queries

ASE    Anglo-Saxon England

ASPR   Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records (6 vols.)

Augustine
DCD    De ciuitate Dei
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>EvII</td>
<td>Commentarius in evangelia secundus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gn-Ex-ExIa</td>
<td>Commentarius augmentatus in Genesim, Exodum et Euangelia</td>
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<tr>
<td>PentI</td>
<td>Commentarius primus in Pentateuchum</td>
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<td>Bede</td>
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<td>Act</td>
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<td>In epistulas VII catholicas</td>
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<td>In Ez</td>
<td>In Ezram et Neemiam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Gen</td>
<td>Libri quatuor in principium Genesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>In Lucae evangelium expositio</td>
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<td>In Marcum evangelium expositio</td>
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<td>Re</td>
<td>Retractatio in Actus Apostolorum</td>
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<td>CCSA</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Cameron, Amos, Healey et al., eds., <em>Dictionary of Old English: A to G online</em></td>
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<td>EETS s.s.</td>
<td>Early English Text Society, Supplementary Series</td>
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<td>GCS n.f.</td>
<td>Die griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte, Neue Folge</td>
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<td>HTR</td>
<td><em>Harvard Theological Review</em></td>
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<td>Jerome</td>
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<td>HQG</td>
<td><em>Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum</em></td>
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<td>IHN</td>
<td><em>Journal of Medieval Latin</em></td>
</tr>
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<td><em>Medium Ævum</em></td>
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<td>Epp.</td>
<td>Epistolarum</td>
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<td>Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini</td>
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<td>Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</td>
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<td>OED</td>
<td><em>Oxford English Dictionary</em></td>
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<td>Or</td>
<td>The Old English <em>Orosius</em></td>
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<td>Orosius</td>
<td><em>Historiae aduersum paganos</em></td>
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<td>OUP</td>
<td>Oxford University Press</td>
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<td>PTS</td>
<td>Patristische Texte und Studien</td>
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<td>S</td>
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<td>SC</td>
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<td>UTP</td>
<td>University of Toronto Press</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vulgate</td>
<td><em>Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem</em></td>
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Abbreviations for biblical books are taken from this edition.
Introduction

The biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel is one of the most intriguing stories from the first half of Genesis. The foolish attempt to build a tower that will reach heaven and the repercussions that created diversity in language and culture are poignant accounts of the weakness of human pride against God. But essentially, this etiological narrative, along with the connected account of the Table of Nations, is concerned with answering fundamental questions regarding differences in ethnicity, culture and language. It is surrounded by other mythical stories and, along with the rest of Genesis, is a part of Scripture. As both a mythic and scriptural narrative, the story of the Tower of Babel was taken very seriously by Jewish, patristic and medieval interpreters who read it with the intention of unveiling its mysteries and making it accessible for their own historical contexts and cultures. Such attitudes towards the Tower of Babel were no different in Anglo-Saxon England. Its mythical elements provided not only a scriptural, and therefore authoritative, understanding of the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the world, but also a poignant moral exemplum that could be applied specifically to the sin of pride or generally to any kind of opposition against God.

The biblical account, however, left much to be interpreted by later authors, whose accounts in turn needed to be interpreted by subsequent authors. Some authors used the Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel as guides for understanding the world, while others employed them for specific purposes that supported individual agendas. Still others found the biblical accounts to be lacking in certain detail and had to modernize the scriptural information in order to benefit from the authority of the biblical accounts and to enliven that very authority with fresh relevance. As Arno Borst has outlined in his magisterial study, Der Turnbau von Babel, the traditions regarding the Tower of Babel in the centuries before Theodore and Hadrian arrived at Canterbury on 27 May 669 are vast and complex.¹ Sources and analogues range from Hellenistic Judaic writings to those of the Greek Patriarchs and the Latin Fathers to apocryphal material to Germanic folklore; and each deals with issues as assorted as numerology, linguistic theory or ethnic diversity. It took Borst over 2000 pages in four volumes of six parts to outline the complexity of the interpretive traditions regarding the Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel

¹ Borst I, II.363–470.
narrative—three parts alone are dedicated to the subject from Antiquity through the Middle Ages. But even then, Borst neglects by necessity much of the material, and as one reviewer has stated, the work is missing “a proper framework”, and seems “a ‘mer à boire’ with little inner architecture”.2 Borst’s erudition in this work is vast and extremely valuable, but the amount of information that he treats prevents him from elucidating certain developments of all of the “opinions regarding the origin and multiplicity of languages and nations”, as his subtitle states. For this reason, Borst does not treat the subject in Anglo-Saxon England to its fullest potential. With such a large endeavor, he cannot properly trace the origins of the interpretive traditions of the Table of Nations and the Babel narrative for Anglo-Saxon authors who at times are heavily dependent on the authorities of the past, but at other times reveal stark deviation and originality. This study, therefore, undertakes Borst’s subject, but with a sharper focus and different aims.

This study is divided into two general parts, and each part has three chapters. The first part deals exclusively with the topos of the number 72 as it develops through Late Antiquity into late Anglo-Saxon England. It was the question “Wie es 72 Sprachen gibt?” that led Borst to begin his *magnum opus* on the Tower of Babel,3 and the topos of the number 72, which becomes intricately connected to the Table of Nations and Babel narrative, is important for understanding how Anglo-Saxons viewed not only biblical texts and patristic interpretations of those texts, but also the significance of numbers for comprehending the way the world is. The first chapter deals with the origins of the number 72 in Hellenistic Judaic texts in the centuries before Christ and traces its development until Isidore of Seville. Although many of the texts treated in this first chapter were not read or known by the Anglo-Saxons, these texts disclose important links in the tradition of the topos of the number 72 and serve not only to elucidate the process by which such a topos develops over centuries of interpretation, but also to contrast the differences between the topos in its formative years with the topos much later in Anglo-Saxon England.

The second chapter deals with the topos of the number 72 among the early Anglo-Saxons, by which is meant the authors of the Latin texts attributed to and surrounding the school of Canterbury in the seventh century, as well as Aldhelm of Malmesbury, the Venerable Bede and Alcuin of York. The third chapter treats the topos among the late Anglo-Saxons, by which is

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3 Borst I.3.
meant the Anglo-Saxon period from the translation program of King Alfred in the late ninth century until the Old English ecclesiastical authors of the eleventh century, such as Ælfric, Wulfstan and Byrhtferth. Because of the notorious difficulty of dating Old English poetry, all Old English poetry that is connected to the number 72 is treated in the third chapter.

In the second part of this study, the development of the interpretive tradition of the Tower of Babel narrative is given fuller treatment. Not only did the Babel narrative provide a framework for understanding the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the world, but it could also offer an array of typological elements. Since the Hebrew word Babel meant not only the city of the great Tower described in Genesis 11, but also the city and empire of Babylon, Babel and Babylon were closely connected and, throughout Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, used synonymously. In this study the term Babel refers to the original city, while Babylon refers to the later city or empire. The term Babel / Babylon is used for situations where the two are to be understood synonymously.

As with the first part of this study, the second part begins with attitudes towards ethnic and linguistic diversity in ancient and late antique authors in order to establish the cultural values inherited by the Anglo-Saxons, before discussing the reception and treatment of the Babel narrative in Anglo-Saxon England. The first chapter also deals with early Christian interpretations of the Tower of Babel narrative, especially as it helps to create and define Christian identity, and its typological connection to Pentecost. Likewise, early interpretations of the Tower’s builders, who are often understood to be giants, are examined in light of the early formation of Christian identity. Chapters 5 and 6 continue this trend of examination. Anglo-Latin commentaries of the Canterbury School to the exegetical corpus of Bede reveal an understanding of the world that is based on the notion of a Church that has overcome the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the world. The theological dichotomy created between those who are part of the Church and those who are not comes forth in these early Anglo-Saxon explanations of the Babel narrative. Likewise, the Old English texts from Alfred to Byrhtferth reveal a vast range of variety in interpretations of the Tower of Babel. While it is used as a moral exemplum by Alfred and Ælfric, other texts syncretize it with aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture: in Genesis A, for one example, the builders of Babel are presented as Germanic warriors looking for fertile land.
Although this study focuses on the interpretative tradition that arises from Genesis 10–11, mainly in Anglo-Saxon England, it provides a case-study that reveals trends that can enlighten the history of biblical interpretation in general. The history of interpretation of the Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel in Anglo-Saxon England shares parallels with other interpretive histories and can provide a more informed image of the Christian cultures of Anglo-Saxon England and the early Middle Ages.

Short titles for Old English anonymous homilies and Old English poems correspond to those of the Dictionary of Old English Project. The editions for Old English poems are from the ASPR, unless stated otherwise.

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4 These can be found online at [http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/st/index.html](http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/st/index.html)
Chapter 1
72: The Beginnings to the Patristic Tradition

1 Introduction

The number 72 had much significance in Medieval England. As Hans Sauer has outlined,\(^1\) it was used in a variety of different ways and in a range of texts from the early Anglo-Latin authors to the late Middle English poets. But the topos of the number 72 did not develop solely in England, as it were, in a vacuum. Rather, there is a long tradition behind the number, which developed slowly from the centuries before Christ into Late Antiquity before it reached the Christian authors of Anglo-Saxon England. The Anglo-Saxons merely inherited the cultural value of the number 72 from their preceding biblical and patristic authorities. Despite the confidence that some Anglo-Saxons exhibit regarding the ways by which the number 72 can illuminate the nature of the world, their predecessors did not enjoy the same advantage of a seemingly unified and authoritative tradition. In fact, it was only because of the ways that these predecessors employed and altered the symbolic significance of the number 72 that they inherited from their own predecessors (and so on) that the Anglo-Saxons could employ the number 72 meaningfully and with some originality within their understanding of the world. This chapter examines the development of the topos of the number 72 from its traceable beginnings in the Bible to Isidore, who presents the final stage of development before the Anglo-Saxons adopt it. Such an examination will aim to elucidate both the evolution of a cultural idea and the immensity of that evolution.

2 The Table of Nations

Although today the Tower of Babel narrative (Gn 11:1–9) is one of the most recognized stories in the early chapters of Genesis, biblical interpreters of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages often found equal, if not more, significance in the Table of Nations of the preceding chapter (Gn 10:1–32), which gives a list of the immediate descendants of the three sons of Noah.\(^2\) In light of Deuteronomy 32:8, “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he

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\(^2\) A similar list is found in I Par 1:4–26.
separated the sons of Adam”, these early interpreters viewed the Table of Nations as the list that recounted this “division” or “separation” of the “sons of Adam” and thereby supplied all the names of the original founders of the nations of the world. But, since the scepticism of the Enlightenment, and the later innovations of Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) regarding Higher Criticism and the Documentary Hypothesis, which understands the text of Genesis as a compilation of four different sources (JEDP) that were woven together by a final redactor, the original unity of these two chapters has been put into doubt. According to the Documentary Hypothesis, the Tower of Babel narrative is a composition of the P source, while the Table of Nations is a composition of P and J. Portions of the Table of Nations, therefore, are understood to have been originally separate from the text as it appears today. Around the middle of the twentieth century, however, Wellhausen’s arguments for the Documentary Hypothesis, which had gained a strong footing among Old Testament scholars, were beginning to be questioned, especially by those of the literary criticism camp who interpreted Genesis as a unified work of literature.

The Jewish scholar, Umberto Cassuto, was one of the first to argue against the source divisions proposed for Genesis by showing that there exist broad thematic and stylistic connections throughout Genesis. In his treatment of Genesis 10, Cassuto argues that the Table of Nations, although based on ancient traditions, presents a complete original version which contains significant numerology that is only apparent if the text is regarded as the composition of one author, or at least the composition of a highly involved redactor. Although close analysis of

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3 The Vulgate reads: “quando dividebat Altissimus gentes quando separabat filios Adam”; and the LXX: “ὁτε διεμέριζεν ὁ ὕψιστος ἔθνη, ὡς διέσπειρεν υἱοὺς Ἄδαμ”. The second part of the verse in the LXX contains the phrase “ἀγγέων θεοῦ”, “angels of God”, for the Hebrew, “sons of Israel”, which in turn gives rise to the belief that each nation had its own angel. See James M. Scott, Geography in Early Judaism and Christianity: The Book of Jubilees (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 51–2, nt. 52; and Borst I.128–9. All English translations of the Bible are from the King James Version, unless accompanied by the Greek or Latin, in which case the translations are mine.


7 See Wenham, Genesis 1–15, xxxv–i.
the essential strengths and weaknesses of either method is beyond the scope of this study, Cassuto’s reactions against the Documentary Hypothesis are important here because of their resemblance to the earliest interpretations of the Tower of Babel and the Table of Nations.\footnote{Cassuto’s works are only now beginning to be considered seriously. Scholars such as E.M. Good, \textit{Irony in the Old Testament} (London: SPCK, 1965); J. Licht, \textit{Storytelling in the Bible} (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978); and Robert Alter, \textit{The Art of Biblical Narrative} (New York: Basic Books, 1981), are responsible for the shift away from the Documentary Hypothesis; see Wenham, \textit{Genesis 1–15}, xxxii–xxxiii.}

As mentioned above, ancient interpreters generally considered the narrative of the Tower of Babel to be a dramatic account of how all of Noah’s descendants listed in the Table of Nations came to be spread across the face of the earth as the progenitors of nations of unique cultures and languages. With some exceptions, each name in the Table represented one nation and, consequently, one language. In fact, because of the Table of Nations’ detailed enumeration of the peoples of the ancient Mediterranean world, modern scholars have suggested that Genesis 10 was most likely written by “an author well informed about world affairs and possibly connected with a royal court”,\footnote{Wenham, \textit{Genesis 1–15}, 214.} whose list is much in line with the complex lists or “catalogues” of ancient Greece.\footnote{See, for example, the so-called “catalogue of the ships” in Homer, \textit{Iliad}, eds. David B. Monro and Thomas W. Allen, \textit{Homeri opera}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920; rpt. 1989), vol. 1, II.494–759, and the list of nations that owe tribute to the Persians in Herodotus’ \textit{Historiae}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed., ed. Karl Hude (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927; rpt. 1986), vol. 1, III.90–4. The dates of these texts are difficult to assess; the \textit{Iliad} was written between 900–600 BC, and Herodotus lived in the middle of the 5\textsuperscript{th} c. BC.} Nevertheless, it must be stated that “there are remarkable omissions, some of which defy reasonable explanation”.\footnote{John Skinner, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), 191.} Scholarly opinion is divided on whether or not the Table of Nations was originally intended to be an exhaustive list of all the peoples of the world,\footnote{While Wenham, \textit{Genesis 1–15}, 214, claims that the list is not meant to be an exhaustive account, Skinner, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis}, 187–8, claims otherwise. Borst I.126, also assumes that the list is exhaustive, with the exception that it does not mention Israel.} but conclusive evidence does not exist to support either assumption. If, as the Documentary Hypothesis states, the Table of Nations is itself a composition of separate sources, the later source(s) may simply have been employed to expand the list to include all known nations; on the other hand, the “remarkable omissions” and the stylized use of numerical patterns and symbolism associated with the Table suggest that the list was never intended to be an exhaustive record of ethnography, but rather an ornate narration. However, for the early traditions of interpretation, including those of Anglo-Saxon England, as part of divinely inspired scripture, the Table of Nations was not only often interpreted as a definitive list of all the original nations of
the world, but also formed the basis for understanding why there are the differences between cultures and languages. The Table, as Borst states, lies at the foundation of many “Grundurkunden der Weltgeschichtsschreibung, der Sprachbetrachtung und der Völkerkunde”.

3 Beginnings of the Topos of the Number 72

Along with being the definitive list of the original nations of the world, the Table, as Cassuto would come to understand it centuries later, seems to contain much latent numerical symbolism. Despite the fact that there are textual issues that make the numeration more complex than it initially seems, such as the presence of names of races and places alongside personal names, or differences in the various versions, it is clear that symbolism involving the number 70 or 72 plays an important role throughout the chapter. The biblical interpreters of Antiquity and the Middle Ages were also not unaware of this stylized enumeration, which they expounded upon mainly to calculate the putative number of nations and languages of the world. But, as with much biblical interpretation, the standard count of names in the Table differed among authors: while early Jewish interpreters tended to claim that the number was 70 because of the significance of the number 70 in Judaic thought, the Christians of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages tended to claim that the number was 72 for similar reasons.

While there have been many other attempts to discover the origins behind the traditional significance of the number 72 outside of Judaic and Christian texts, including some which trace its beginnings back to Egyptian, Babylonian or Indian sources, no explanation has yet been satisfactory. It is only with the Table of Nations that a more concrete basis for understanding the origins of the significance behind the number can be detected. As mentioned above, proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis tend to find no, or only accidental, significance in the numerical patterns of the Table of Nations. Others scholars, however, have offered rich numerological interpretations. Borst best sums up the issue when he writes, “daß man auch die Völkerzahl der Welt in diesen Konnex [of the significance of the number 70] bringen wollte—

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13 Borst I.126.
14 There were some exceptions; see, for example, the discussion on Aldhelm below pp. 46–8.
15 See Borst I.32–158 for Old Egyptian, Asian, Indian and Greek uses of the number 72.
16 Lothar Ruppert finds “ist es wohl eher unwahrscheinlich, daß der Endredaktor ein derart kompliziertes Zahlenspiel beabsichtigt“,
"Genesis: Ein kritischer und theologischer Kommentar", vol. 1: Gen 1,1–11.26, Forschung zur Bible 70 (Würzburg: Echter, 1992), 449. See also Borst I.126–7 (126): “Man hat sie oft als ‘zufällig’ hingestelle”.

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vielleicht nicht von Anfang an, aber doch recht früh—, scheint mir unbestreitbar”.17 Regarding the numerology, Cassuto states that if Nimrod is disregarded because he is not the founder of a nation, the sum total of all the eponymous names in the Table of Nations creates a total of 70, which, as just stated, was an important symbolic number in Ancient Middle East.18 The household of Jacob in Egypt, for example, consisted of 70 souls (Gn 46:27; Ex 1:5);19 there are said to be 70 palm trees at Elim (Ex 15:27, Nm 33:9); and most importantly, Moses appointed 70 elders at Mount Sinai (Nm 11:16–17, 24–5).20 Moreover, among ancient Greek authors, the number 70 was rhetorically used to enumerate all the elements of a particular category of the cities or nations of a specific region.21

Along with his claim for the presence of the number 70 in the Table of Nations, Cassuto interprets other numerical patterns within the textual structure of the Table. He states that the numbers seven, fourteen, twelve and twenty-eight are found entrenched within the narrative—numerous progenitors are said to have seven or twelve sons,22 and certain words important for the structure of the narrative are used fourteen and twenty-eight times (both multiples of seven).23 All of these figures also can be broken down into multiples of twos, threes, fours and

17 Borst I.127.
22 Japheth has seven sons and seven grandsons. Among the descendants of Ham, Cush has seven sons and grandsons; Mizraim (Egypt) has seven sons; Canaan has twelve sons. Among the descendants of Sem, “the sons and grandsons of Sem, up to Pelag, are twelve; the sons of Joktan are thirteen, and with Joktan fourteen—twice times seven”, Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part II, 178–9.
23 According to Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part II, 179, “the Hebrew word (ū)bēnē, ‘(and) sons of’, which is typically used in Hebrew genealogies, appears seven times in the first half of the Table (vv.1–7) and
sevens—each of which bears significance in various ancient and medieval cultures. Cassuto further argues that because the numbers seven and twelve were thought to be numbers of perfection in the Ancient Middle East, the numerology in the Table of Nations expresses how Noah was blessed by God and thereby enabled to fulfill the command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gn 1:28, 9:1). Within a text of such complex numerical patterning, it is, therefore, reasonable to infer that the absence of numerical significance among certain groups of the Table may have been done intentionally. As Bruce K. Waltke states, “by contrast, there are uniquely no sevens in the structuring of the Canaanite genealogy. The representation of the Canaanites in the Table of Nations stands apart by its asymmetry to match their chaos”.

Although a proper assessment of the numerology of the Table of Nations proposed by Cassuto and Waltke is well beyond the scope of this study, their findings must, nevertheless, be treated with caution. For one, it should be emphasized that there are actually 71 names in the Hebrew version of the Table of Nations, and Cassuto’s choice to exclude Nimrod from the count seems somewhat arbitrary. Secondly, it is difficult to tell how readily the Table’s original audience would have realized the complexities of numerical patterns. Cassuto’s discussion on the number of repeated words seems highly coincidental and, without further evidence, suspect. Lastly, Waltke’s observation that there are no sevens used in the presentation of the Canaanite seven times in the second half (vv. 20ff). The total of the four other words ‘that are characteristic of a genealogy’: ‘ābhī, ‘the father of’, bānīm, ‘sons’, tōl dhōth, ‘generations of’, and forms of the verb yāladh, ‘to bear’, come to twenty-eight in the Table”.

Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part I: From Adam to Noah, 1st English ed., trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961; rpt. 1998), 12–5; and idem., A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part II, 178–80. Most commentaries also agree that the Table of Nations is included in the Genesis narrative to stress that Noah was blessed and fulfilled the command to multiply and fill the earth; see Vawter, On Genesis, 144; and Gerhard von Rad, Genesis, 2nd ed., trans. John M. Marks (London: SCM Press, 1963), 140. Philo, one of the best representatives of the Jewish and Greek syncretism in Hellenistic Judaism, places much significance on numerology for interpreting Scripture; there is a lengthy treatment of the number seven in De opificio mundi, ed. Leopold Cohn, Philonis Alexandrini opera 3 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1898) 30.90–34.128; shorter treatments of the number ten (in relation to the number four) appear in De opificio mundi, 15.47 and De plantatione, ed. Paul Wendlan, Philonis Alexandrini opera 2 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1897), 29.123–5; a treatment on the numbers twelve and 70 based on biblical uses of the number appears in De fuga et inuentione, ed. Paul Wendlan, Philonis Alexandrini opera 3 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1898), 33.183–6. For Philo’s treatment of the number six, see below p. 13.

Waltke, Genesis, 165.

See above p. 9, nt. 18.

See above p. 9, nt. 23.
genealogy is irrelevant since Caanan is said to have twelve sons, a number whose positive significance both Cassuto and Waltke emphasize.  

Despite almost universal agreement among early interpreters (and some modern commentators) that the Hebrew version of the Table of Nations has 70 names, the Septuagint version, in contrast, is often said to have 72, which account in part for the tradition of the number 72 in Christian sources. Whereas this numeration appears to give biblical support to the topos of the number 72, it is, however, unlikely that the Christian topos began with this reckoning, since the Table of Nations in the Septuagint actually contains 73 names. It is most likely, therefore, that the Christian tradition influenced and encouraged interpretations that read 72 names in the Table of Nations. In sum, the textual differences of the Septuagint Table of Nations involve the repetition, inclusion and omission of certain figures: the name \( \text{Ελισα} \), “Elisa” is repeated twice at verses 2 and 4; the name \( \text{Καιναν} \), “Cainan”, is introduced at verse 22 as the son of Sem, and is mentioned again as a son of Arphaxad at verse 24. Cainan is also mentioned in the Septuagint translation of Genesis 11:12, again as the son of Arphaxad, and on the basis of these appearances in the Septuagint, came to enjoy a part in the apocryphal book of Jubilees, and more importantly in the genealogy of Christ in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 3:36). Furthermore, the name \( \text{Οβολ} \) (also \( \text{Ebal} \) or \( \text{Gebal} \)) is omitted at verse 28. One later text of the Septuagint, Venice, St Mark’s, Gr. 4 (11\(^{th}\) c.) includes the name \( \text{Ρουδ} \), “Roud”, at verse 22, and is probably associated with the name \( \text{Futh} \), which appears in the \textit{Chronicon Alexandrinum} (otherwise known as \textit{Chronicon}

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29 For example, Josephus, \textit{Libri antiquitatum Iudaicarum}, 4 vols., ed. Benedict Niese, \textit{Flavii Iosephi opera} 1–4 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1887–90), I.122–9, arrives at a total of 70 by omitting the name Dodanim of Japheth’s line and including Nimrod. See above p. 9, nt. 18.
30 For a helpful overview of the various Christian uses of the number 72, see Heinz Meyer, \textit{Die Zahlenallegorese im Mittelalter: Methode und Gebrauch} (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1975), 168.
33 Wever, \textit{Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis}, 153–4, convincingly argues that the figure of Cainan was introduced to the LXX text for structural unity; the addition of Cainan allows for the generations from Noah to Abraham to equal ten (thereby matching the number of generations from Adam to Noah), and for 1000 years from the son of Sem to Thara, Abraham’s father to have elapsed. Cainan appears in Jub 8:1–4.
34 Certain minor LXX manuscripts contain the phrase, “καὶ (τον) γεβαλ”, “and Gebal”, or variants thereof; see Brooke and McLean, eds., \textit{The Old Testament in Greek}, 25, nt. 10:27.
It is possible that the early Christians who first found significance in the number 72 were using an atypical version of the Septuagint that omitted one name; there is a significant range of difference in the names of the Table of Nations used by early Christians. But even if this is so, as will be shown, early Christian authors who actually record the 72 nations will often interpret their source text in a way that gives the number 72. Moreover, the Vetus Latina versions, the first Latin translations of the Septuagint, do not clarify matters.36 For the most part, the Septuagint additions of Ἑλίσα at verse 2, and the first instance of Καινάν at verse 22 are rejected in the Latin, but the second instance of Καινάν at verse 24 is included in the Italic version. Unlike the Septuagint, the name Gebal at verse 28 is also included in the main versions of the Vetus Latina. Without further study, all that can be said at the moment is that the Septuagint numeration of the Table of Nations most likely did not provide the West with the original topos of the number 72, but was used with hindsight, when some early Christians began to recount the number of nations of the world as 72 in light of an already established tradition.

The origins of the tradition of 72 names in the Table of Nations start to appear, albeit unclearly, in the Hellenistic world during the third and second centuries before Christ. Initially, the number 72 was an important astrological number among the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians and Babylonians. It is often repeated that the heavens were divided into 72 parts, or that there were 72 stars that are able to influence the world.37 Significance was also attached to the numeric parts that made up the number 72, especially six and twelve. According to Greek mathematical theory, the number six was the first perfect number (τέλειος ἀριθμός) because “it is both the sum and product of its own parts: it is formed either by adding 1 + 2 + 3 or by multiplying 1 x 2 x 3”.38

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36 All readings of the Vetus Latina are from Fischer, ed., Genesis.
37 See Burrows, “The Number Seventy in Semitic”, 389–90; and James M. Scott, Geography in Early Judaism and Christianity, 53, who gives a large range of examples with references.
38 Annemarie Schimmel, The Mystery of Numbers (New York: OUP, 1993), 122. See also Vincent Foster Hopper, Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 36–7; and the quotation of Philo below. The locus classicus for the perfect number is the ninth book of Euclid’s Elementa, ed. E.S. Stamatis (Leipzig: Teubner, 1970), prop. 36: “τέλειος δὲ ἀριθμός ἐστιν ὁ τοῖς ἑαυτῷ μέρεσιν ἴσος ὁμόν” “the perfect number is the one that is equal to its parts”.

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Moreover, the Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria (20 BC–c. AD 45), one of the great fathers of the allegorical approach to scriptural interpretation and an icon for the Hellenistic syncretism of the time,39 connected the mathematical significance of the number six allegorically to the six days of creation. He writes:

τάξει δὲ ἀριθμὸς οἰκεῖον, ἀριθμῶν δὲ φύσεως νόμοις γεννητικῶτατος ὁ ἕξ· τῶν τε γὰρ ἀπὸ μονάδος πρῶτος τελείος ἐστιν ἱσούμενος τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μέρεσι καὶ συμπληρούμενος ἐξ αὐτῶν, ἡμίσους μὲν τριάδος, τρίτου δὲ διάδος, ἐκτού δὲ μονάδος, καὶ ὡς ἐποίησε ἄρρην τε καὶ θῆλυ εἶναι πέρικε κάκ τῆς ἐκατέρου δύναμεως ἠμοσταί: ἄρρην μὲν γὰρ ἐν τοῖς οὐσί τὸ περιττόν, τὸ δ’ ἀρτίων θῆλυ· περιττών μὲν οὖν ἀριθμῶν ἀρχή τριάς, δυάς δ’ ἀρτίων, ὁ δ’ ἁμορφοί δύναμις ἕξας. ἐδει γὰρ τὸν κόσμου τελειώτατον μὲν ὑπὲρ τῶν γεγονότων κατ’ ἀριθμῶν τελείου παγήναι τὸν ἕξ

Number is fitting to order, and the number six, most of all numbers, by the laws of nature, pertains to producing; for it is the first perfect number from the number one that is equal to its own parts and is constituted of them: its half is three and its third is two, and its sixth is one; and, so to say, it is by nature both male and female, and is arranged from the quantity of each. For in the things that exist, the odd is male and the even is female; therefore, while the number three is the beginning of odd numbers, the number two is the beginning of all even numbers, and the quantity of both is six. For it was necessary that the world, which is the most perfect of all things produced, to be established according to the perfect number, six.40

Secondly, the number twelve had significance in Greek thinking as it is the number of the zodiac. But more considerably in Jewish culture, because it is the number of the tribes of Israel, it plays a frequent role in the Old Testament. Along with the twelve tribes of Israel, there are twelve springs of water at Elim (Ex 15:27, Nm 33:9, along with 70 palm trees), and twelve minor prophetical books.41 As stated above, there also appears to be numerological elements involving

40 Philo, De opificio mundi, 3.13. A similar exposition on the number six is also found in Philo, Legum allegoria, ed. Leopold Cohn, Philonis Alexandrini opera 1, II.3–4.  
41 Schimmel, The Mystery of Numbers, 193, who needs to be treated with caution on account of a lack of sources.
the number twelve in the Table of Nations. Waltke states that for the Jews the number twelve “seems to represent God’s ordering of creation and history”.42

4 The Letter of Aristeas and the 72 Translators

In the second century BC, the Hellenistic Judaic text, the Letter of Aristeas, offered the first unambiguous reference to the number 72 that would later play an important role in the tradition of the number. According to the Letter, King Ptolemy II Philadelpheus of Alexandria (285–47 BC) commissioned the High Priest Eleazar to send six Hebrew scholars from each of the twelve tribes of Israel (making a total of 72) to translate the Pentateuch into Greek, which they accomplished in 72 days:

βουλομένων δ’ ήμῶν καὶ τούτων χαριζεσθαι καὶ πάσι τοῖς κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμενήν ἱουδάιοις καὶ τοῖς μετέπειτα, προηρήμεθα τὸν νόμον ύμων μεθερμηνευθῆναι γράμμασιν Ἑλληνικοῖς ἐκ τῶν παρ’ ύμων λεγομένων Ἑβραϊκῶν γραμμάτων … Καλῶς οὖν ποιήσεις … ἐπιλεξάμενος ἄνδρας καλῶς βεβιωκότας καὶ δυνατοὺς ἐρμηνεύσαι, ἀφ’ ἐκάστης φυλῆς ἔξ

And since we want to show favour to these men [former Jewish captives] and to all the Jews throughout the world and to those hereafter, we have proposed to translate your law from the Hebrew letters of your language into Greek letters … Therefore, you will do well to choose elders, who live well, who have proficiency in the law, and who are able to translate—choose six from each tribe.43

The phrase “ἀφ’ ἐκάστης φυλῆς ἔξ”, rhetorically underlines the numerical importance of the Letter by means of parechosis or alliteration as well as its disjunct position at the end of the clause. Elsewhere in the Letter, the number 72 is stressed three times,44 and becomes a major aspect behind the suggestion that the translation was accomplished through divine action.

42 Waltke, Genesis, 347.
44 Pelletier, ed., Lettre d’Aristée, 50, 273, and 307; the number 70 is found at 33 and 84.
Modern scholarship does not accept the *Letter’s* account of the translation of the Septuagint as historically valid, but rather considers it to be a piece of propaganda, perhaps for Greek proselytization, of a Hellenized Jew who, in the guise of a Greek pagan, wanted to stress the favour that Judaism found in the Alexandrian court. In fact, only one third of the letter, which is divided into 322 sections and runs to about 70 pages in the modern edition, deals with the actual translators and translation; the other two-thirds set out descriptions and digressions that all cast the Jewish people and their Law in a positive light. In terms of the number 72, as Hermann J. Weigand states, “[i]t can hardly be doubted that legend selected this number of translators in order to support the conception that the law originally given to the Jews only was to become the rule of life for all races of men”. While the number 72 in the *Letter of Aristeas* attains some symbolic value in its association with the use of the number 70 (or 72) in the Old Testament and perhaps even in the Table of Nations, it probably attained equal value in its association with the numbers six and twelve, which the *Letter* specifically mentions as the parts that make up the number 72. As a piece of Hellenistic propaganda, the *Letter’s* reference to the numbers six and twelve cleverly syncretizes numerology important to both Hellenistic and Jewish cultures, and insinuates that sophistication found among Jewish thinkers was comparable to the sophistication of the Greeks. However, although the number 70 played a more important role in Judaic numerology than the number 72, especially as the traditional number of elders at Sinai, this number of elders was questioned during the second-century BC. Some Jewish authors found that the number of elders represented in Exodus 24:14, where Moses seems to add two more to the 70 elders with the words: “Behold, Aaron and Hur are with you”, could be interpreted as 72. It is, therefore, possible that the author of the *Letter* legitimately used the number 72 as a symbolic (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 22–5; but for the argument that the letter was written only for Jews and not as propaganda for converting the Greeks, see V. Tcherikover, “The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas”, *HTR* 51 (1958): 59–85. Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint*, 24, give a brief description of the contents not concerned with the translation; these include descriptions of the liberation of the Jews, gifts to the High Priest, Jerusalem and Palestine, priestly service in the Temple, the Jewish law, and honours bestowed upon the translators by the king. Hermann J. Weigand, “The Two and Seventy Languages of the World”, *The Germanic Review* 17 (1942): 241–60, at 249–50. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study*, 57–8. See also Steinschneider, “Die kanonische Zahl der muhammedanischen Secten” *passim*. In a similar manner, the Irish-Augustine adds two names from Nm 11:26 to the 70 elders in order to come to the figure 72: “Moyisi spiritus in septuaginta seniores distribuitur: et aliis duobus qui in castris resederant, Heldat videlicet et Medad, ejus spiritus prophetiae donum condonatur”, “the spirit of Moses is distributed among 70 elders, and the gift of the spirit of prophecy was granted to another two who stayed in the camp—Eldad and Medad”; *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae libri tres*, PL 35, col. 2161.

45 Abraham Wasserstein and David J. Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint From Classical Antiquity to Today* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 22–5; but for the argument that the letter was written only for Jews and not as propaganda for converting the Greeks, see V. Tcherikover, “The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas”, *HTR* 51 (1958): 59–85.
46 Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint*, 24, give a brief description of the contents not concerned with the translation; these include descriptions of the liberation of the Jews, gifts to the High Priest, Jerusalem and Palestine, priestly service in the Temple, the Jewish law, and honours bestowed upon the translators by the king.
48 Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study*, 57–8. See also Steinschneider, “Die kanonische Zahl der muhammedanischen Secten” *passim*. In a similar manner, the Irish-Augustine adds two names from Nm 11:26 to the 70 elders in order to come to the figure 72: “Moyisi spiritus in septuaginta seniores distribuitur: et aliis duobus qui in castris resederant, Heldat videlicet et Medad, ejus spiritus prophetiae donum condonatur”, “the spirit of Moses is distributed among 70 elders, and the gift of the spirit of prophecy was granted to another two who stayed in the camp—Eldad and Medad”; *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae libri tres*, PL 35, col. 2161.
number that echoed the elders at Sinai, and consequently the wisdom of Judaism, again in order present a syncretism of Greek and Jewish knowledge.

Interestingly, however, the number 72 and its possible association with divine influence in the translation of the Septuagint did not have a strong following in Hellenistic Jewish sources after the Letter of Aristeas, despite the fact that the Letter enjoyed a wide circulation throughout Antiquity: it now survives in more than twenty manuscripts dating from the eleventh to sixteenth centuries, and much of it is quoted verbatim by Jewish and Christian authors. The great first-century Jewish historian, Josephus (AD 37–100), for example, who includes the Letter with some abridgement in his Libri antiquitatum Iudaicarum, copies the parts of the Letter that state that there were six translators from each tribe, but renders the number of translators as only 70. While it is possible that Josephus “carelessly forgets that there were 6 from each tribe”, it is more likely, as Harry M. Orlinsky argues, that the numerological tradition of 70 was stronger than 72 and Josephus simply used a number of more significance. Josephus, however, does not hesitate to associate the number 72 with certain other topics: for example, the 70 kings of Judges 1:7, and the 77 lambs of Ezra 8:35 become 72. Similarly, Philo expands the origins of the legend as it is found in the Letter and solidifies the notion that the translation of the Septuagint was a divine and miraculous act, on par with Old Testament prophecy, but he does not use the number 72—a surprising omission for one so imbued in Greek mathematical theory as Philo. Like Josephus, it is possible that Philo did not find the number 72 to have the same significance placed on it by the Letter of Aristeas, and therefore failed to mention it.

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49 Pelletier, ed., *Lettre d’Aristée*, 8–9; the manuscripts survive exclusively in *catena in Ochateuchum*, “chains” of quotations attached to certain verses of the Octateuch.

50 See Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint*, chs. 1–2 and 5.

51 Josephus, *Libri antiquitatum Iudaicarum*, XII.57; Ralph Marcus, ed., *The Jewish Antiquities, Books XII–XIV*, vol. 7, Loeb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 31, states that some scribes correct the figure to 72, but he does not list the manuscripts that provide the variant. Niese also does not list variants in the app. crit. For the Latin translation, see Josephus, *The Latin Josephus*, vol. 1, ed. Franz Blatt, Aarskrift for Aarhus Universitet 30.1 (Copenhagen: Universitetsforlaget i Aarhus, 1958); because Blatt’s edition only encompasses Books I to V, and as the second volume does not seem forthcoming, it is impossible to check the Latin variants.

52 Marcus, ed., *The Jewish Antiquities*, vol. 7 p. 31, note b.


54 Josephus, *Libri antiquitatum Iudaicarum*, V.123, XI.137. See Borst I.171 for other minor examples.


56 For Philo’s dependence on the Letter of Aristeas, see Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study*, 39.
As the accounts of Josephus and Philo reveal, the numerical significance behind the number 72 was not as well established as the numerical significance behind the number 70 in Judaic literature. Likewise, among the early Christian authors, the number of translators of the Septuagint varied between 70 and 72. Among others, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, Rufinus, and Jerome mention that there were only 70 translators of the Septuagint. On the other hand, those who state that the number of translators was 72 are far fewer: Tertullian, who is also the first Christian author to mention the Letter of Aristeas by name, Epiphanius, Philastrius, and Augustine all declare that there were 72 translators. And, as will be discussed, the early Anglo-Saxon biblical commentaries from the school of Canterbury also state that there are 72 translators. But the name that was in popular usage by Late Antiquity, Septuaginta (not Septuaginta duo), probably played a role in the reduction of the number. Augustine, for example, while recognizing that there were 72 translators, states, “quorum interpretatio ut Septuaginta uocetur, iam obtinuit consuetudo”, “their translation, which is called the Septuagint, has now prevailed as the custom[ary translation]”. It is evident that the use of the number 72 in the Letter of Aristeas, never gained much importance as such, and in most cases the tradition regarding 72 translators did not prevail against the more significant numerology of 70.

5 72 in Luke 10:1 and Irenaeus

Along with the account of the number of translators of the Septuagint first provided by the Letter of Aristeas, the symbolic significance of the number 72 increased with the New Testament. In some early manuscripts of Luke 10:1, including most of the Vetus Latina translations and the Vulgate, Jesus sends 72 disciples ahead of him to preach. This numeration of disciples,

57 Wasserstein and Wasserstein, The Legend of the Septuagint, 53, give more examples of later Judaic writings where the number of translators is not established.
58 See the Testimonia in Paul Wendland, ed., Aristeae ad Philocratem epistula cum ceteris de origine versionis LXX interpretum testimoniiis (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1900), 87–166; and Wasserstein and Wasserstein, The Legend of the Septuagint, 95–131, for references.
60 See note 58.
61 See below pp. 41–2.
62 Augustine, DCD, XVIII.xlii.21–2.
despite its opaque origins, breathed new life into the cultural value of the number 72 among Christians in a manner that was lacking in the numeration of the *Letter of Aristeas*. But the manuscript witness of Luke 10 is not unambiguous, and this ambiguity, along with that of the number of Septuagint translators, reveals that the significance of the number 72 was very much in transition during the first century AD. According to the careful study of Bruce M. Metzger, the evidence for the priority of either 70 or 72 in Luke 10:1 is of equal weight, despite the tendency for modern translations to favour the number 70.\(^6\) With the inconclusive evidence of the textual traditions and other early witnesses aside, it is the symbolic significance of either number that becomes the strongest factor for determining priority. Mikeal C. Parsons, for example, suggests that the number 70 or 72 in Luke 10 has symbolic value in its association with the Hebrew or Septuagint reckonings of the names of the Table of Nations.\(^6\) Although this suggestion is especially alluring in light of later Christian and medieval interpretations that make this very connection,\(^6\) there is no strong evidence that the association between the numbers 70 or 72 and the Table of Nations had been formed by this time, and Parsons’ suggestion is, therefore, not only unhelpful for determining priority but also unlikely. But the value of the number 72 of the *Letter of Aristeas* was not completely abandoned at this point, and, as Sidney Jellicoe has argued, an educated Gentile author such as Luke, who relies more on the Septuagint than any other Gospel writer and would have almost certainly been familiar with the *Letter of Aristeas*, might have used the number 72 as a direct allusion to the *Letter of Aristeas*. This suggestion gains further currency when the similar aims of Jewish and Gentile syncretism in the Gospel of Luke and the *Letter of Aristeas* are considered.\(^6\) If Jellicoe is correct in his assumption, the cultural value of the number 72, which seems to begin with the *Letter of Aristeas*, is strengthened by a latent allusion to the *Letter* in some of the early manuscript traditions of the Gospel of Luke.


\(^6\) For example, many Anglo-Saxon exegetes were fond of connecting the disciples to the number of nations in the world; see ch. 2 and 3.

However, even the appearance of the number 72 in Luke 10 did not have an immediate impact on early Christian authors. And to confuse the issue further, some Christian authors symbolically employed the number 72, but with no apparent reference to Luke 10 or the number of the translators of the Septuagint. Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 130–c. 200), for example, is the first Christian author after Luke to find symbolic value in the number 72.\(^69\) Importantly, he is also the first person to connect this number to the number of nations and languages of the world. In the third book of his *Adversus haereses*, which survives in its entirety through a literal Latin translation of the original Greek, Irenaeus, making reference to the genealogy of Christ in the Gospel of Luke (3:23–38), writes:

> Propter hoc Lucas genealogiam quae est a generatione Domini nostri usque ad Adam LXXII generationes habere ostendit, finem coniungens initio et significans quoniam ipse est qui omnes gentes exinde ab Adam dispersas et uniuersas linguas et generationes hominum cum ipso Adam in semetipso recapitulatus est.

On account of this [theology of recapitulation] Luke shows that the genealogy that goes from the generation of the Lord even to Adam has 72 generations; he connects the end to the beginning and signifies that the Lord himself is the one who has ‘recapitulated’ all nations from Adam thereafter [including] all the dispersed languages and generations of humans with that same Adam.\(^70\)

Despite Irenaeus’ claim regarding the number of names in Luke’s genealogy, there actually exists no manuscript or other witness of the Greek New Testament that contains exactly 72 names in this genealogy (the standard number is 77, which is also a number of symbolic value). While it is possible that Irenaeus was using a now lost manuscript that contained a genealogy of only 72 names,\(^71\) or that he simply miscounted, it is probable that he interpreted the genealogy on the basis of a budding tradition regarding the number 72. But even though Irenaeus is evidently

\(^69\) Borst I.230.


\(^71\) The manuscript N, St. Petersburg, Ross. Nac. Bibli., Gr. 537, contains 73 names; see Swanson, ed., *New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, 47.
making use of a symbolic tradition involving the number 72, it is unclear which of his sources, besides his dubious count of the names of the genealogy in Luke, had acquainted him with the symbolism of the number. When Irenaeus speaks of the number of translators of the Septuagint, he claims that there were only 70,\(^72\) and the version of Luke 10 that he uses has Jesus sending out only 70 disciples.\(^73\) Because the phrase “dispersas et uniuersas linguas” alludes to the dispersal of languages at the Tower of Babel, Irenaeus must have associated the number 72 with the Table of Nations. But unless he miscounted here or was using an irregular version, the Table of Nations of the Septuagint provides 73 names.

There remain two other analogues for Irenaeus’ statement, which although they are too late to be sources for Irenaeus, at least show that there was a developing tradition that associated a fixed number to the nations of the world. The first is the Talmud, Jewish commentary on certain scriptural books, which was orally transmitted during Irenaeus’s life, and later written down during the fifth century.\(^74\) The second is the developing genre of the Christian chronicle. Although the written versions of the Talmud, and the Christian chronicles that survive were recorded after Irenaeus and could not have influenced him directly, it is most likely that Irenaeus, the Talmud, and the chronicles were all drawing on the same tendencies to begin to look at the Table of Nations as a scriptural basis for the number of nations of the world.\(^75\) While the Jewish sources favoured the number 70 because of its traditional symbolic value (and because it is also possible that the Hebrew author(s) of Genesis 10 meant to express the symbolic number of 70),\(^76\) the Christian sources may have favoured the number 72 because of its precedence in the Letter of Aristeas, in the dissenting Jewish notion of 72 elders, in the Gospel of Luke or, most likely, on account of all or most of these factors together. The obscure and vague notions of the symbolic significance of the number 72 most likely allowed early Christian authors to employ the number

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\(^{72}\) Irenaeus, \textit{Contre les Hérésies Livre III}, 21.2.29–30: “perfectiores Scripturarum intellectores et utriusque loquellae LXX seniores”, “70 elders who were very accomplished in [the study of] the Scriptures and who also knew both languages”.

\(^{73}\) Irenaeus, \textit{Contre les Hérésies Livre III}, 13.2.32–4: “Quomodo autem septuaginta praedicabant, nisi ipsi prius uritatem praedicationis cognouissent?”, “and how did the 70 [disciples] preach, unless they themselves had known beforehand the truth of what they were preaching”.

\(^{74}\) See \textit{ODCC}, s.v. ‘Talmud’, 1338.

\(^{75}\) A refined approach to the argument that the Book of Jubilees is the source for later discussions on the Table of Nations can be found in James M. Scott, “The Division of the Earth in Jubilees 8:11–9:15 and Early Christian Chronography”, in \textit{Studies in the Book of Jubilees}, eds. Matthias Albani, Jörg Frey and Armin Lange (Tübingen: Mohr–Siebeck, 1997), 295–323.

\(^{76}\) For the Talmudic sources that connect the number 70 with the number 72, see Metzger, “Seventy or Seventy-Two Disciples?”, 72.
72 for its symbolic value but, at the time, did not allow for any one text to claim a beginning to the phenomenon with any certainty before the end of Late Antiquity. Naturally, the biblical texts of Genesis 10 and Luke 10:1 were later favoured and interpreted by early medieval and Anglo-Saxon authors to bestow, almost unequivocally, authority to the symbolism of the number 72 tradition in a way that the *Letter of Aristeas* or Jewish tradition could not.

6 Early Christian Chronicles

Alongside Irenaeus’ mistaken association between the genealogy of Christ in the Gospel of Luke and the number of nations, the early Christian chronicles provide the most prominent examples for the connection of the number of names in the Table of Nations to the growing, but still vague, tradition of the 72 nations of the world. The first Christian chronological compilation, the *Chronographiae* of Julius Africanus, now only survives in quotations from other authors of Late Antiquity; but these quotations, which often interact with the text of Julius, reveal much information on the textual criticism behind counting the names of the Table of Nations. While there does not exist a list of nations (or *Völkertafel*) in the fragments of Julius, other authors note certain discrepancies between him and their own received biblical text. For example, Georgius Syncellus (9th c.) quotes a short list derived by Julius from Genesis 10:

Μετὰ δὲ τον κατακλυσμὸν Σὴν ἐγέννησε τὸν Άρφαξάδ.
Αρφαξάδ δὲ γενόμενος ἐτῶν ρλε’ γεννᾷ τὸν Σαλά, βτρζ’.
Σαλά γενόμενος ἐτῶν ρλ΄ γεννᾷ τὸν Ἐβερ, βΦκζ’.
Ἐβερ γενόμενος ἐτῶν ρλδ΄ γεννᾷ τὸν Φαλέκ, βχξα’

And after the Flood, Sem begot Arphaxad. Arphaxad, at the age of 135, begot Sala in 2397. Sala, at the age of 130, begot Eber in 2527. Eber, at the age of 134, begot Phalek in 2661.78

Unlike the main textual tradition of the Septuagint, Julius omits the second instance of the name Cainan, the son of Arphaxad and father of Sala—an omission that was followed by Eusebius.79

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77 Brian Croke, “The Originality of Eusebius’ Chronicle”, *The American Journal of Philology* 103 (1982): 195–200, argues that Julius Africanus’ five volume work was not considered a “chronicle” by the Church of Late Antiquity, and that Eusebius is to be credited as the first Christian chronicler.

But other chronographers, such as Georgius Syncellus, and the authors of the *Anonymous Matritensis* and the *Chronicon Epitomon* all take issue with the absence of this second Cainan, an absence which agrees with the Hebrew version, but which they reject because of the presence of Cainan in Luke’s genealogy (Lk 3:36). Whatever was the original count of the names in Julius’ *Chronographiae* (if there even existed a full list), the discrepancies between Julius and his later readers reveal the textual instability of the Septuagint version at this time and hinder the simplistic theory that the number 72 is based on an universal count of the names in the Table of Nations. But at the same time, they disclose an important issue on the presence of Cainan in the Septuagint which will continue to be an issue of contention as late as the Anglo-Saxon period when, as will be discussed, Bede renews the debate in one of his own chronological tracts.

After Julius Africanus, the first extant chronicle is found in the works of Hippolytus (c.170–c.236). Borst places much emphasis on the role Hippolytus played on the opinions of multiculturalism and multilingualism in the early Church, and makes sweeping statements such as, “Hippolyts prägnante Formeln hatten eine glänzende Zukunft vor sich”, and “mit Hippolyt beginnt, wenn man so will, das Mittelalter avant la lettre”. Although the *Liber generationis*, a fifth-century Latin chronicle based on Hippolytus’ Greek text, was widely read in the Middle Ages, Borst’s own views towards Hippolytus’ influence on the Christian tradition, however, are exaggerated, especially in light of recent scholarship on the figure. Neither Eusebius nor Jerome knew much about this early Christian commentator: Jerome, following the same source as Eusebius, states that, Hippolytus was a bishop, “nomen quippe urbis scire non potui”, “indeed the name of [whose] city I have not been able to learn”. And while many modern scholars, following Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger, have understood Hippolytus to be a Roman ecclesiastic of the third century who refused to acknowledge the authority of Popes

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81 See below pp. 55–6.
82 Borst II.370, 373.
84 J.A. Cessato, *Hippolytus between East and West: The Commentaries and the Provenance of the Corpus* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 38, 43; the putative common source is the lost *Apology for Origen* of Pamphilus.
Callistus, Urban and Pontian, and even set himself up as an anti-pope.\textsuperscript{86} J.A. Cerrato has recently cast much doubt on the history of the so-called Hippolytus Romanus.\textsuperscript{87} Although the cult of Hippolytus enjoyed a large reputation in the West, his writings, which survive in Greek, along with some Syriac translations, were largely ignored after his death,\textsuperscript{88} although it has been suggested that the author of the Old English poem \textit{Daniel} borrows from Hippolytus’s commentary on Daniel.\textsuperscript{89}

Despite Borst’s exaggerations about Hippolytus’ influence, Hippolytus, or at least the author of the chronicle ascribed to Hippolytus, does reveal an important step in the development of the tradition of the number 72. For Hippolytus is one of the first Christian authors to provide a list of the descendants of Noah side by side with lists of contemporary nations, regions and languages of the world. In the \textit{Diamberismos}, a section of the chronicle that deals with the diversity of the world in light of the three sons of Noah, Hippolytus states that Japheth had fifteen sons, Ham thirty and Sem twenty-five to make a total of 70 descendants.\textsuperscript{90} Hippolytus overcomes the problems of the number in the biblical Table of Nations by using names that are not found in the Hebrew or Septuagint versions of Genesis 10, and omitting names that are. In one instance, Hippolytus, for example, states that two of the descendants make up one nation: “Ὡς καὶ Οὔλ, ὅθεν γεννῶνται Λυδοί‖, “Hos and Oul, from whom arose the Lydoi”.\textsuperscript{91} The number 70 was evidently important for Hippolytus and he was willing to adjust the biblical account in order to attain it. In another section, however, it is stated that there are 72 languages in the world that arose from the 72 nations that divided at Babel.\textsuperscript{92} This discrepancy, which also appears in the Latin \textit{Liber generationis} and cannot be explained by the unstable textual transmission of chronic writing,\textsuperscript{93} reveals a merging of the Jewish and Christian traditions: the number 70,

\textsuperscript{87} Cessato, \textit{Hippolytus between East and West: The Commentaries and the Provenance of the Corpus, passim.}
\textsuperscript{88} ODCC, s.v. ‘Hippolytus’, p. 652.
\textsuperscript{90} Hippolytus, \textit{Die Chronik}, eds. Adolf Bauer and Rudolf Helm, \textit{Hippolytus Werke} 4, GCS 46 (Berlin: Akademie, 1955), 56–73 (Japheth has fifteen sons); 92–130 (Ham has thirty sons); 158–88 (Sem has twenty-five sons). See Borst II.370–1.
\textsuperscript{91} Hippolytus, \textit{Dei Chronik}, 167.
\textsuperscript{92} Hippolytus, \textit{Die Chronik}, 198–201. See Borst II.932–6, who provides a convenient edition of the 72 languages listed in Hippolytus’s chronicle
\textsuperscript{93} Mommsen, ed., \textit{Liber generationis, Chronica minora saec. iv. v. vii.}, vol. 1, 197.
which has more significance in Jewish thought, is united, albeit awkwardly, with the number 72, which has already gained significance among the Christian authors such as Luke and Irenaeus.

Similarly, in the *Diamerismos*, Hippolytus provides an important precedent for later authors by disconnecting the number of the descendants of Noah from the number of nations that have arisen in the world. Essentially, Hippolytus has updated the Table of Nations with his own knowledge of contemporary ethnicity: Japheth’s fifteen sons give rise to forty-seven nations (ἔθνη), Cham’s thirty sons to thirty-two nations, and Sem’s twenty-five to only sixteen nations. And after Hippolytus, the *Liber generationis* updates Hippolytus’s list further by adding three more nations (gentes) to Japheth’s lineage and two more to Sem’s. Once Hippolytus has established this disconnect between the descendants of Noah and the nations of the world, it is not difficult for him to separate the number of descendants from the number of languages in the world. Some of the languages are clearly connected with a tribe; Ἑβραῖοι, ‘Hebrew’, is connected to the name Ἔβερ, ‘Eber’, for example. But other languages, such as Ταῖνοι, ‘Taienoi’, have no precedent in the Table of Nations or in a contemporary nation.

As Anna-Dorothee v. den Brincken states, “Zwar gibt es zu allen Zeiten kritische Denker, die jedoch in dem zu behandelnden Zeitraum gewöhnlich Furcht haben, als Neuerer angesehen zu werden, und daher vor allem das Ziel verfolgen, ihre Neuerkenntnisse nach Möglichkeit mit der Überlieferung in Einklang zu bringen”. In this case, Hippolytus must accept the tradition that he has inherited (his Überlieferung), but also revise it according to his new knowledge (Neuerkenntnisse). He thereby provides the next step that later readers and writers will need to harmonize with their own knowledge of the world. As will be seen, while the number of languages in the world was thought to remain static at 72 throughout Late Antiquity and Anglo-Saxon England, similar notions regarding the number of nations of the world were not as common—nations could rise and fall, multiply or diminish and in each case alter the total number of nations in the world. 72 (or, in these earlier accounts, 70) was merely the number of the nations that originally dispersed at Babel.

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96 Hippolytus, *Die Chronik*, 172, 200. Borst II.933, no. 9, connects the Ταῖνοι to an “Araberstamm”.
The Developing Tradition: Epiphanius, Philastrius, Pacian of Barcelona

But despite the influence that Hippolytus’ chronicle and the Liber generationis had for reckoning the number of names in the Table of Nations and the number of nations and languages in the world, there was still no consensus and much instability over the traditional number. For example, Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 315–403), who had minor influence in Anglo-Saxon England, persistently uses the number 72. Along with asserting that there are 72 nations and languages of the world in his Ancoratus, Epiphanius also recognizes the 72 translators of the Septuagint according to the Letter of Aristeas, and is accredited for expanding the legend to include the thirty-six cells. In his work, De Mensuris et Ponderibus, which was originally written in Greek but only survives in whole in a Syriac translation, Epiphanius claims that the act of translating the Septuagint was done by 72 scholars, who worked in pairs, a point that Jellicoe notes is probably to be associated with the phrase, “two by two”, in Luke 10:1, and thereby recollects the 72 disciples.

Some of Epiphanius’ contemporaries, however, reveal that the symbolic significance of the number 72 was neither universally accepted nor stable. Philastrius (d. c. 397), in his Diuersarum hereseon liber, makes use of the number 72 when writing about the number of translators of the Septuagint, the number of singers for each of David’s four choirmasters (I Par 25:7), and the number of David’s psalms. But Philastrius also expresses the unusual view that there are 75 languages of the world: “nomina prouinciarum diuisa sunt, ueluti septuaginta quinque linguarum”, “the names of the regions were divided just as the 75 languages”. Although there is the biblical precedent for a possible numerological connection with the 75 souls who went

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98 Epiphanius is one of the authors quoted and mentioned by name in the biblical commentaries from the school at Canterbury; see Micahel Lapidge and Berhard Bischoff, BCCS, 211–4; and below pp. 41–2.
102 Philastrius, Diuersarum hereseon liber, ed. F. Heylen, CCSL 9 (Turnout: Brepols, 1957), 142.5.28–9 et passim: “LXX duorum interpretatio”, “the translation of the 72”; 129.5–6: “Zelo enim diuino ductus beatus David ... quattor choros posuit secundum mundi aditus ana [i.d. ἀνά] septuaginta duo”, “For blessed David, who was lead by a divine zeal ... placed four choirmasters, according to the entrances of the world, to 72 [singers]”; 130.4.134: “septuaginta duos psalmos”, “72 psalms”.
103 Philastrius, Diuersarum hereseon liber, 112.1.7–8.
down into Egypt in the Septuagint version (Gn 46:27; Ex 1:5; cf. Act 7:14), Philastrius derives his number from his count of the sons of Noah: “Et de primo [filio, Sem] quidem uiginti quinque generationes numerat descendisse, de secundo triginta quinque id est Cham. De Iapheth autem, cui minor generatio numerabatur tunc temporis, id est quindecima”, “And from the first son, Sem, it is numbered that indeed twenty-five generations had descended; from the second son, that is Cham, thirty-five. But from Japheth, whose generation at the time was number the smallest, there were fifteen”.104 The view that there are 75 languages also has a precedent beyond the Bible. In his Stromata, Clement of Alexandria mentions a certain Ephoros who (erroneously) held such an opinion.105 It is unlikely, however, that this Ephoros had any influence on Philastrius.

Even more idiosyncratic than Philastrius’s view is that of Pacian of Barcelona (4th c.) who makes no mention of either 70 or 72 languages in the world, but on account of the 120 disciples mentioned in Acts 1:15, states that there are 120 languages of the world: “lingua est secundum copiam Domini, qui eam in centum viginti ora modulatus est”, “language is according to the abundance of the Lord, who has orchestrated it in 120 mouths”.106 Although Pacian appears briefly in Jerome’s De viris illustribus,107 he does not seem to have enjoyed a wide readership after the fourth century, and his idiosyncratic view on the number of languages in the world did not prevail.

8 Jerome

Even Jerome himself, one of the doctores ecclesiae whose works would be widely read throughout the Middle Ages, and notably in Anglo-Saxon England, expresses an unusual phrase that strays from the tradition regarding the number 72. In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Jerome comments on the pericope from Matthew 26:53: “An putas quia non possum rogare Patrem meum, ut exhibeat mihi modo plus quam duodecim legiones angelorum”, “do you

104 Philastrius, Diuersarum hereseon liber, 121.4–5.22–5.
105 Clement of Alexandria, Stromata: Buch I–VI, ed. Otto Stühlin, Clemens Alexandrinus 2, GCS 15 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1906), I.xxi.142.1: “Ἔφορος δὲ καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοὶ τῶν ἱστορικῶν καὶ ἑθη καὶ γλώσσας πέντε καὶ ἐβδομήκοντα λέγουσιν εἶναι, ἑπακούσαντες τῆς φωνῆς Μωυσέως [LXX Gen. 46:27 is then quoted]”, “Ephoros and many other historians state that there are 75 nations and languages, following the word of Moses”. See also Borst I.232.
106 Pacian, Epistola II. de Symproniani litteris, PL 13, col. 1060A; for the reference to Acts, see Borst II.380–1.
107 Jerome, Gli Uomini Illustri, 106.
not think that I can ask my father to reveal for me now more than twelve legions of angels”. Jerome calculates that, because a legion consists of 6000 soldiers, Jesus here could have had 72000 angels sent to protect him. His next comment, however, Borst finds so striking that he can only “wischt sich die Augen”. Jerome continues: “Pro breuitate temporis numerum non occurrimus explicare; typum tantum dixisse sufficiat septuaginta duo milia angelorum (in quot gentes hominum lingua diuisa est) duodecim legionibus fieri”, “for brevity’s sake, we do not object to explain this number, [but] let it only be sufficient to have spoken of this figure: the 72000 angels (in just as many nations of humans, was language divided) are made up of twelve legions”. It is unlikely that Jerome actually believed that there are 72000 languages in the world, which is even more than modern estimates that place the figure around 7000. In all likelihood, Jerome is making reference only to the first two digits of the number 72000, through which he can evoke a typus that his readers must have been familiar with by this period.

Elsewhere, Jerome makes another small but important contribution to the development of the topos of the number 72. In his Epistula 64, Jerome states that according to the requirements of the priestly garments described in Exodus 28, each robe held 72 bells hemmed onto the lowest fringe: “in extrema uero parte [sc. uestimentorum], id est ad pedes, septuaginta duo sunt tintinabula et totidem mala Punica”, “in the lowest part [of the garments], that is at the feet, there are 72 bells and just as many pomegranates”. The reasons for Jerome’s association between the number 72 and the priestly bells, which has an unclear origin in Exodus 28:33, are vague, and he seems to be borrowing in part from Josephus, his primary source for the description of the priestly robe. But while Josephus states that the six names of Joseph’s sons are written on the twelve stones of Aaron’s breastplate, which would total 72 names, and claims that there were

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108 Borst II.390.
109 The Ethnologue website, which is run by SIL International (formerly, the Summer Institute of Linguistics) places the number of language of the world at 6912, http://www.ethnologue.com, accessed January 21 2009.
112 Ex 28:33: “deorsum vero ad pedes eiusdem tunicae per circuitum quasi mala punica facies ex hyacintho et purpura et coco bis tintco mixtis in medio tintinabulis”, “and down at the feet of the same tunic around the hem, you will make, as it were, pomegranates of blue and purple and twice dyed scarlet with bells inserted in between”.
113 Josephus, Libri antiquitatum Iudaicarum, III.166. See also Meyer, Die Zahlenallegorese, 168, and Valentina Izmirlieva, All the Names of the Lord: Lists, Mysticim, and Magic (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 94–5, who shows this tradition also to be present in the Kabbalistic text, Book of Bahir.
70 pomegranates alongside the “little bowls” of the temple candelabrum,\textsuperscript{114} he does not explicitly mention that there were 72 bells and pomegranates.\textsuperscript{115} Alternatively, in the later Jewish Babylonian Talmud, the use of 72 bells and pomegranates on the priestly robe is mentioned,\textsuperscript{116} and although the written Talmud is too late to be a source for Jerome, it is possible, especially considering his residence in Bethlehem, that Jerome used oral Jewish tradition regarding the 72 pomegranates alongside his readings of Josephus. In any case, Jerome’s \textit{Epistula} 64 provides a major source for medieval and Anglo-Saxon commentators, most notably Bede, who use the numerical information that Jerome provides for their own typological purposes.\textsuperscript{117}

9 Augustine

Although the topos of the number 72 in connection to the languages and nations of the world was prevalent enough for Jerome to be able to connect it without much comment to the 72000 angels of a legion, it was not until Jerome’s younger contemporary, Augustine of Hippo (354–430), that the symbolic importance of the number 72 became so solidified within late antique and medieval thought that it was rarely questioned as the number of nations and languages that dispersed at Babel and as the number of Christ’s disciples. Augustine, in his \textit{magnum opus}, the \textit{De ciuitate Dei}, devotes numerous pages (in the CCSL edition) tackling the number 72 and its connection to the Table of Nations. Like the Christian chroniclers before him, Augustine provides an enumeration of the names in the Septuagint version of Genesis 10, which according to his text has 73 names. In this aspect, Augustine is the first to examine seriously the inconsistency

\begin{footnotes}
\item[114] Josephus, \textit{Libri antiquitatum Iudaicarum}, III.145.
\item[115] Josephus, \textit{Libri antiquitatum Iudaicarum}, III.160: “κατὰ πέξαν δ’ αὐτῷ προσερραμμένοι θύσανοι ῥὸῶν τρόπον ἐκ βαφῆς μεμιμημένοι καὶ κώδωνες χρύσεοι καὶ πολλὴν ἐπίτηδευσιν τῆς εὐπρεπείας, ὥστε μέσου ἀπολαμβάνεσθαι δυοί της κωδώνοιροί σοφοί, καὶ ροῖν κωδώνιοι”; Josephus, \textit{The Latin Josephus}, 238: “ornatusque in fimbriis eius inest velut malagranatorum et tintinabulorum aureorum multo decore factorum, ita ut inter duo tintinabula malum granatum habeatur. item tintinabulum inter duo malagranata”, “the attire on its fringes is as if of pomegranates and golden bells made with much beauty, such that there is a pomegranate between two bells, and a bell between two pomegranates”.
\item[117] See Isidore, \textit{Ety} XIX.xxxi.4, and Hrabanus Maurus, \textit{De universo libri viginti duo}, PL 111, col. 568C. For Bede, see below pp. 59–61. An interesting idiosyncrasy appears in the work of Quodvultdeus, \textit{Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei}, ed. R. Braun, CCSL 60 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), II.iii.43–7, who gives the unusual figure of fifty bells, and then connects them typologically to the languages spoken at Pentecost: “In quinquaginta uero tintinnabulis totidemque malis granatis linguae sunt ecclesiarium quae per spiritum sanctum die pentecosten in specie ignis diuiae discipulis insederunt, ut etiam numerus ipse ostendit”, “In the fifty bells and just as many pomegranates are the languages of the churches which became divided into the disciples through the Holy Spirit in the image of fire on the day of Pentecost, just as the number itself reveals”.
\end{footnotes}
between the text and the growing tradition. In book sixteen of *De ciuitate Dei*, a book that treats the world’s ethnic and linguistic diversity, Augustine states: “Vnde colligitur septuaginta tres uel potius (quod postea demonstrabitur) septuaginta duas gentes tunc fuisse”, “therefore it is calculated that there were then 73, or rather (which will be demonstrated afterwards) 72 nations”.

As he hints, Augustine is unsatisfied with the actual number 73 probably because of its divergence from the growing tradition of the number 72, and he, therefore, attempts to reconcile the difference. Augustine essentially argues that the father and son, Eber and Pelag, count as only one nation. His evidence is that because Pelag was born at the time the languages of the world were divided, as Genesis 10:25 states, it is not necessary that he spoke a language that differed from that of his father, Eber, who as the name indicates, spoke Hebrew. In fact, because Pelag is an ancestor of Abraham, who spoke Hebrew, it must be that both Eber and Pelag spoke the same language and only count as one in the reckoning of the 73 names. Pelag is mentioned in the Table of Nations not to indicate another nation, different from his father Eber, but to indicate that during his lifetime the languages were confused:

> Phalech autem propterea commemoratus est, non quod gentem fecerit (nam eadem ipsa est eius gens Hebreæa eademque lingua), sed propter tempus insigne, quod in diebus eius terra diuisa sit.

> But Pelag was mentioned for this reason: not that he made a nation (for his is the very same Hebrew nation and language), but because of the notable time that the earth was divided in his days.

On account of the effort that Augustine expends to syncretize the 73 names of the Table of Nations and the notion that there are 72 original nations, it is clear that by the fifth century the number 72 had gained much symbolic value. Augustine firmly believes that the tradition of the 72 names and the Septuagint count of names are both true, albeit in variance with one another, and he uses his utmost ingenuity to reconcile the two. With Augustine, the typological potential of the number 72 might not be at the heights that it will reach among some of the authors of Anglo-Saxon England, but Augustine, along with his vast influence on later authors, does

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118 Augustine, *DCD*, XVI.iii.89–90.

provide an important step towards standardizing 72 as the number of nations that dispersed at Babel and consequently the number of languages of the world.

Of equal significance is Augustine’s opinion that the Table of Nations only represents the original founders of the world’s nations, not the current state of the world’s ethnic division. Just as in the chronicle of Hippolytus and the Liber generationis, the nations of the world far exceeded their original number, but languages, on the other hand, remain static at 72. In De ciuitate Dei, Augustine observes that, as is evident among the African nations, there are more nations than there are languages: “Auctus est autem numerus gentium multo amplius quam lingarum. Nam et in Africa barbaras gentes in una lingua plurimas nouimus”, “the number of nations has increased more than the number of languages. For in Africa we know that many barbarian nations speak in one language”.

For this reason, Augustine later states: “Quid enim aliud intellegendum est terram esse diuisam nisi diuersitate linguarum?”, “for how otherwise should it be understood that the earth was divided unless by the diversity of languages”. In these lines, Augustine attempts to reconcile the authority of the Genesis 10–11 and his own observations of the world. Serving as a bishop in Hippo Regius (in modern-day Algeria), Augustine could not deny that there are more African nations than are presented in the Table of Nations, and he must interpret the biblical Table of Nations accordingly. Like Hippolytus, Augustine has harmonized a traditional text with new knowledge of the world. It is Augustine’s harmonization that provides the next step of tradition for later Christian authors.

10 Arnobius the Younger

Although the number 72 was standardly interpreted as the number of descendants of Noah’s sons after Augustine’s influential treatment in De ciuitate Dei, opinions on the number of descendants from each son would never become uniform. Among the authors of a generation after Augustine, Arnobius the Younger (late 5th c.), who is quoted by Bede on this very matter, mentions that there arose 72 languages after the Tower of Babel, but offers highly irregular numbers for the number of descendants:

120 Augustine, DCD, XVI.vi.48–50.
121 Augustine, DCD, XVI.x.12–3.
122 Bede, DTR, LXVI.26.185–6: “Cuius diuisionis Arnobius rethor in expositione psalmi CIII ita meminit”, “Arnobius the Rhetorician so mentions this division in his exposition of Psalm 104”.
Noe tres filios habuit, Sem, Cham, Iafeth. Sem primogenito pars facta est … quae spatia terrarum habent linguas sermone barbarico uiginti et septem … Cham uero secundus filius Noe … habens linguas sermone … numero uiginti duabus linguis … Iafeth autem habet … in linguis uiginti tribus. Fiunt ergo omnes simul linguae septuaginta duae

Noah had three sons: Sem, Cham and Japheth. A part [of the world’s inhabited places] was made by the firstborn, Sem … these places of lands have twenty-seven languages in barbaric speech. And the second son of Noah, Cham, had twenty-two languages in number. Yet Japheth has [lands that speak] in twenty-three languages. Therefore all together there are 72 languages.\(^\text{123}\)

While Arnobius’ figures do add up to the number 72, he is in accordance with neither the biblical enumeration nor his predecessors, as is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: The Descendants of Noah from the Hebrew Table of Nations to Isidore**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Japheth</th>
<th>Ham</th>
<th>Sem</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew Bible</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulgate</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LXX</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephus</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hippolytus’</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philastrius</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epiphanius</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augustine</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27 / 26</td>
<td>73 / 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnobius</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


31
Although, as this table shows, there was little agreement over the number of descendants of each son, Arnobius’s reckonings are the most atypical. Only his reckoning of the descendants of Sem conforms to the number of the Septuagint and Augustine; Arnobius’s reckonings of Japheth and Ham are unique to all other authors. What is even more astonishing here is that Arnobius does not follow his sources—the chronological tradition represented by the Latin Liber generationis, or the Greek chronicles of Hippolytus or Epiphanius—in his enumeration of the languages of the descendants of Noah. The line following the above-cited quotation, however, does provide a clue: “patriae autem generationum mille, quae in tripertito saeculo hoc ordine sitae sunt‖, “yet provinces of the generations come to a thousand, which have been situated in a threefold world in this order”. Like Hippolytus and Augustine before him, Arnobius does not equate gentes and linguae, but rather disconnects them in two ways: first, ambiguous terminology, such as patriae and generationes instead of gentes or nationes, is used effectively to focus the division of Noah’s descendants not on ethnic but rather geographic and linguistic distinctions. Secondly, the number 72 is used to contrast the number of the world’s languages with the equally symbolic thousand geographical units that are inhabited by Noah’s descendants. Arnobius realizes that any interpretation of the Table of Nations that equates nation with language is too strict, since he knows that numerous nations may all speak one language. For example, he describes various Latin speaking patriae: “cum una lingua Latina sit, sub una linguæ diversæ sunt patriæ Bruttiorum, Lucanorum, Apulorum, Calabrorum, Picentum, Tuscorum et his atque huiuscemodi

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125 Arnobius, Commentarii in Psalmos, CIV.77–8.

126 The Vulgate does not use the word patriae in Gn 10–11, but it does use the word generationes (Gn 10:1, 10:20, 11:10) albeit with different nuances than Arnobius. The commonest words of ethnic division in Gn 10–11 are familiae, gentes and nationes.
patriis similia‖, “although there is one Latin language, under one language are dispersed the
provinces of the Bruttii, Lucani, Apuli, Calabrians, Picentes, Tuscans and there are [other]
similarities to these and to the other provinces of the sort‖.127 Like his predecessors, Arnobius is
working within the framework given by the Table of Nations and the chronicle tradition, but
modifies his sources to accord with his own geographical and linguistic understandings, which
were more complex than the original biblical framework had provided. Especially after the
authority bestowed on it by Augustine, the number 72 was almost always evoked as a necessary
structure for categorizing the world, but the elements within this structure were not limited by the
same authority, and the freedom to diverge from a source was often gladly accepted by authors
such as Arnobius, who gives a model for the later authors of the Middle Ages and Anglo-Saxon
England.

11 Isidore

Unlike Arnobius, whose account of the world’s ethnic and linguistic diversity was relatively
inconsequential outside of Bede, Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636) enjoyed an enormous influence
on later thinkers. In his well-known work, the Etymologiae, Isidore follows Augustine almost
verbatim by writing:

Gentes autem a quibus divisa est terra, quindecim sunt de Iaphet, triginta et una de Cham,
viginti et septem de Sem, quae fiunt septuaginta tres, vel potius, ut ratio declarat,
septuaginta duae; totidemque linguae, quae per terras esse coeperunt, quaeque crescendo
provincias et insulas inpleverunt.

And the nations by which the earth was divided: there are fifteen from Japhet, thirty-one
from Cam, and twenty-seven from Sem, which total 73, or rather, as reason demonstrates,
72; and just as many languages, which began to exist throughout the earth, each filled
provinces and islands by increasing.128

In this passage, Isidore affirms Augustine’s numeration of the sons of Noah by stating that while
there are 73 names mentioned in the Table of Nations, the number of original nations and

127 Arnobius, Commentarii in Psalmodiam, CIV.65–8.
128 Isidore, Etym. IX.i.2; the Augustinian source is DCD, XVI.vi.45–8.
languages is actually 72. But, unlike Augustine, Isidore does not give the ratio for this change. In fact, in his *Chronica*, Isidore ignores the differentiation between 73 and 72 by simply stating that there were 72 sons: “Fuerunt autem Noe filii tres, ex quibus septuaginta duae gentes sunt ortae: id est XV de Iafeth, XXX de Cham, XXVII de Sem”, “and there were the three sons of Noah, from whom arose the 72 nations, that is fifteen from Japhet, thirty from Cam, twenty-seven from Sem”. Surprisingly, this numeration differs from the logical conclusion of Augustine’s ratio. Both Augustine and Isidore want the descendants of Noah to come to 72 in the final count; one name, therefore, needs to be removed from the Septuagint’s total of 73. According to Augustine, Sem’s two sons Heber and Pelag only count as one; this amalgamation, therefore, brings the number of Sem’s descendants to twenty-six and the total number to 72. But without explanation, Isidore subtracts one of Cam’s thirty-one descendants instead of Sem’s in order to preserve the total of 72. As this reckoning reveals, Isidore is careful enough to follow Augustine’s lead to have the sum of Noah’s descendants equal 72, but he does not take into consideration how Augustine’s tally of the individual parts should logically occur. Evidently, neither Isidore nor his audience was much concerned with the individual figures of the descendants of Noah as long as the total of 72 was retained. Isidore’s account, thereby, provides a perfect example of the standardization of the number 72 for the number of Noah’s descendants that is lacking standardization in its parts (see Table 1). Although Augustine and Isidore’s accounts will be later reviewed and revised by the ever so careful Bede, they will be reaffirmed by Bede’s successor, Alcuin.

Moreover, Isidore is one of the first to make the significant association between the topos of the number 72 and the number of books in the Bible. While attempts at “closing” the official canon of the Bible began in the fourth century, there was and still is no universal agreement regarding the contents of sacred Scripture. Early lists of canonical books almost never agree exactly in number and content, and there is no emphasis placed on the significance of the number. But most likely because there was numerological significance placed on the number of books of the

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130 See below p. 65.


132 For these early lists, see Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 191–207 et passim.
Old Testament by Jewish authors, and because some early Christian lists came close to totaling 72, by the seventh century, it was no great step for Isidore to bring the number of canonical books to 72.

Before Isidore, various writers hint towards the later formation of a tradition of 72 canonical books. 4 Esdras 14: 46–7 cryptically mentions 70 books that contain a “sapientiae fons et scientiae flumen”, “fount of wisdom and river of knowledge”. And in the Syriac version of Epiphanius’s De mensuris et ponderibus it is stated that there are 72 apocryphal books. More importantly, Augustine provides a list of 71 biblical books in his De doctrina Christiana, forty-four from the Old Testament and Apocrypha and twenty-seven from the New Testament. Apparently, for Augustine the number 72, which had significance for him elsewhere, was not yet connected to the number of biblical books, even though he could have easily reached the number by separating the book of Lamentations from Jeremiah, which was commonly done. After Augustine, the Council of Hippo (393) and the Third Council of Carthage (397), both of which were African dioceses that Augustine had much influence over, also decreed that there were 71 canonical books. Even in the sixth century, the pseudo-Gelasian Decree lists 71 books.

Likewise, Cassiodorus, in his Institutiones, lists three divisiones of sacred Scripture, one according to Jerome, another to Augustine and a third to the Septuagint. Each division is different, and Cassiodorus plays upon the numerical symbolism of each total. In his division

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133 According to Jewish and early Christian traditions, the number of books in the Old Testament totalled either twenty-two, which was the same number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, or twenty-seven, which included the second pronunciations of the five so-called begadkephath letters. See Josephus, De Iudaeorum vestustate sive contra Apionem libri II, ed. Benedict Niese, Flavii Iosephi opera 5 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1889), 1.37–41, and Jerome, Prologus in libro regum, ed. Robert Weber, Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 1, 21: “Viginti et duas esse litteras apud Hebraeis ... ita viginti duo volumina supputaturn”, “There are twenty-two letters according to the Hebrews ... thus there are reckoned to be twenty-two books”. For the begadkephath letters, of which there are actually six, see Wilhelm Gesenius, Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar, as Edited and Enlarged by the Late E. Kautzsch, 2nd English ed., trans. A.E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), § 6n.

134 Jellicoe, The Septuagint and Modern Study, 45, nt. 7.


136 For example, Jerome, Prologus in libro regum, 45–7, states that some people count Cinoth (i.e. Lamentations), among others, as a separate book for a total of twenty-five.


according to Augustine, Cassiodorus lists 71 books. But because the number 71 is not associated with any typological or allegorical significance, Cassiodorus simply tells the reader to add the sanctae Trinitatis unitas, assumedly to make a total of 72, which is “totius librae competens et gloriosa perfectio”, “in agreement with and glorious perfection of the whole scale”.¹³⁹ This same reckoning would be found later in the famous Codex Amiatinus, a biblical manuscript created in eighth-century Northumbria, whose exemplar, the Codex Grandior, was overseen by Cassiodorus himself.¹⁴⁰ What is surprising in this case of Cassiodorus and the Codex Amiatinus, is the absence of the typological connections to the number of Christ’s disciples or the languages of the world—both of which were prominent at the time. Only the libra, which is part of the duodecimal system and therefore associated with the number 72,¹⁴¹ is mentioned.

Isidore, in his Etymologiae, also follows Augustine in his reckoning of 71 books of the Bible.¹⁴² But significantly, this reckoning is abandoned in his De ecclesiasticis officiis, where Isidore states that there are 72 books, and then goes a step further to connect the number of books to the more common typologies:

Hii sunt libri canonici LXXII, et ob hoc Moyses LXX<II> elegit presbiteros qui prophetarent, ob hoc et Iesus dominus noster LXXII discipulos praedicare mandauit; et quoniam LXXII linguae in hoc mundo erant diffusae, congrue prouidit spiritus sanctus ut tot libri essent quot nationes quibus populi et gentes ad percipiendum fidei gratiam aedificarentur.

These are the 72 canonical books, and in connection to this, Moses chose 7(2) elders who prophesied; in connection to this Jesus our Lord commanded 72 disciples to preach, and because 72 languages had been dispersed in this world, suitably did the Holy Spirit

¹³⁹ Cassiodorus, Institutiones, I.13.2.
¹⁴¹ See Isidore, Ety XVI.25.22.
¹⁴² Isidore, Ety VI.ii.1–50.
arrange that there would be just as many books as nations, in which the people and nations would be built up by receiving the grace of faith.\textsuperscript{143}

In these lines, Isidore makes the typological associations involved with the number 72 that his predecessors had given cultural value to. Even the number of Moses’ elders is slotted into the list, although some emendation of the text is necessary. It appears that the temptation to make a further typological connection involving the number 72 was strong, and among later authors, especially of Ireland and often of Anglo-Saxon England, all other reckonings, including Augustine’s, were left in favour of Isidore’s.\textsuperscript{144}

Isidore also provides an important step in the tradition regarding the number 72 by connecting the number of languages dispersed at Babel with the number of languages spoken at Pentecost. Whereas such a connection may seem obvious, Isidore is the first author (to my knowledge) to do so. In his own study of the notion of the 72 languages of the world, Weigand writes, “a case that fairly cries for identification with our tradition [i.e. of the 72 languages of the world] is the Pentecostal miracle … Up to the present I have not come across any instance of such a version [i.e. that connects Pentecost with the 72 languages], but it is a fair expectation that one may turn up”.\textsuperscript{145} Isidore, in his \textit{Allegoriae}, does include the reception of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in a brief treatment of the number 72. He writes, “Viri septuaginta duo seniores, super quod cecidit Spiritus Dei, septuaginta duas nationum linguas in hoc mundo diffusas ostendunt, ex quibus multi credentes gratiam Spiritus sancti acceperunt”, “The 72 elders whom the Spirit of God came upon revealed the 72 languages of the nations—languages that were dispersed in this world from which many believers received the grace of the Holy Spirit”.\textsuperscript{146} This instance is important in the development of the tradition, because, even though the association with 72 languages and Pentecost will not become very widespread, other writers after Isidore, including some in Anglo-Saxon England, will make the same connection.

\textsuperscript{143} Isidore, \textit{De ecclesiasticis officiis}, ed. Christopher M. Lawson, CCSL 113 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989), I.xi.7.
\textsuperscript{144} See Hall, “Biblical and Patristic Learning”, 332. For an Irish example, see Pseudo-Isidore, \textit{Questiones sancti Hydidiorm de nouo quam de uetere testamentum}, in \textit{Scriptores Hiberniae minores}, part 1, ed. Robert E. McNally, CCSL 108B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1973), 3, p. 197: “Iuxta septuagenta due linguas, septuagenta duo libri intellectuntur”, “According to the 72 languages, it is understood that there are 72 books”.
\textsuperscript{145} Weigand, “The Two and Seventy Languages of the World”, 257.
\textsuperscript{146} Isidore, \textit{Allegoriae quaedam sacrae scripturae}, PL 83, col. 109B–10A, 65.
12 Conclusion

From its obscure origins in the Table of Nations and the translators of the Septuagint, the significance and uses of the number 72 vastly develops by the end Late Antiquity. In all likelihood, the number, which finds no (or very little) support in the Old Testament, would have remained in obscurity if it were not for various fortuitous circumstances. The existence of the variant in Luke 10:1 that attributes 72 to the number of disciples that Christ sent out to preach greatly increased the importance of the number through the typological associations—so much in fact that throughout the Middle Ages, the Gospel’s variant of 70 had almost completely disappeared. Moreover, by the time Isidore was alive and writing, the number 72 had attracted enough attention that it could be further developed and used for other atypical purposes. For example, the total number of biblical books, which had previously been counted at 71, would probably not have made the leap to 72 if it were not for the previously established tradition that gave the number 72 so much significance.

But the development of the number 72 does not end in Late Antiquity. Although certain aspects become crystallized and simply taken for fact, the symbolism associated with the number continues to evolve. In Anglo-Saxon England, to which this study will now turn, the number is used in ways that reaffirm its traditional significance, but also develops in new ways that would not have been imaginable in Late Antiquity, let alone in the formative centuries before Christ where the tradition was born.
Chapter 2
72: Early Anglo-Saxon England

1 Introduction

By the time Isidore was writing in the seventh century, the topos of the number 72 had become well established. Most commonly, it was the traditional number of the nations and languages of the world, and the number of disciples that Christ sent out to preach to those nations. But the number was not restricted only to such elements. As has been shown, it could also be used for the number of bells and pomegranates on the priestly robe, the number of books of the Bible, and even, for Isidore, the number of languages spoken at Pentecost. Conversely, the idea that there were 72 translators of the Septuagint began to wane and was rarely used. Similarly, in early Anglo-Saxon England, the significance of the 72 original nations and languages of the world becomes less significant in contrast to the significance of the number of Christ’s disciples. The reconciliation between a new understanding of the world and authoritative tradition slowly developed a tendency to use the number 72 typologically to connect first and foremost the number of Christ’s disciples to other biblical or ecclesiastical elements. 72 as the number of nations and languages of the world, therefore, takes a secondary position to 72 as the number of Christ’s disciples with the result that when the number 72 is mentioned, reference to Christ’s disciples is almost always made, even sometimes without reference to the number of nations and languages of the world. This shift in focus can partially be explained by the cultural importance that Christ’s disciples, who were thought to have preached the Gospel to all the nations despite ethnic and linguistic diversity, had for the Anglo-Saxons who saw themselves as a barbarian race living on the edges of the world.¹ The multicultural and multilingual Christians of Anglo-Saxon England knew of the world’s diversity; what they desired was the evangelization of their pagan neighbours, and the notion of the 72 disciples of Christ converting the nations must have had more appeal than the notion of the 72 languages of the world. Of course, the notion that 72 languages dispersed into the world at Babel would never be fully abandoned in Anglo-Saxon England; it would, however, become altered, especially alongside typologies that involved the number of Christ’s disciples.

¹ This subject will be treated in ch. 5.
2 The Canterbury School

In 667 the archbishop-elect of Canterbury, Wigheard, who was in Rome seeking the *pallium*, died of the plague and left the see at Canterbury vacant. Pope Vitalian, who then took on the responsibility of choosing an archbishop for Canterbury, offered the see to Hadrian, who was at the time an abbot of a certain *monasterium Hiridanum*, not far from Naples. But Hadrian did not feel worthy of the position because of his youth and inexperience, and recommended to Vitalian a Greek monk from Tarsus named Theodore, who was living outside of Rome, most likely, in the monastery *ad aquas Saluias*. The Pope accepted Hadrian’s request and ordained Theodore to the see of Canterbury on 26 March 668, but not without suspicion of Theodore’s Greek background, which had definitely exposed him to Greek heretical notions such as monotheletism—the heresy that Christ has only one will—and the rejection of the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed. On account of these suspicions it is likely that Vitalian ordered Hadrian to accompany Theodore to keep an eye on him and his orthodoxy. The result, however, according to Bede, was an inseparable friendship between the two.

Out of these two figures, Theodore and Hadrian, sprang a golden age of learning in Anglo-Saxon England that was to be one of the high points of scholarship in the early Middle Ages. They founded a school at Canterbury where they taught biblical exegesis through Latin, Greek and possibly Syriac patristic texts, and provided their students with the ability to read Greek to a limited extent, if not perhaps as fluently as Bede attests. On account of their individual learning, Hadrian was probably responsible for ensuring a high quality of Latinity within the school, and

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3 For the lives of Theodore and Hadrian before their arrival into England, see chs. 2 and 3 in Bischoff and Lapidge, *BCCS*, 5–81 (Theodore); 67–9 (*ad aquas Saluias*); 82–132 (Hadrian); 120–3 (*monasterium Hiridanum*); and Michael Lapidge, “The Career of Archbishop Theodore”, *ALL* II, 93–121.
5 Theodore proved to be expedient for the English Church. In a council that must have put the Pope’s fears of heresy to rest, Theodore himself affirms the addition of the *filioque* clause at the council of Hatfield (679), *HE* IV.17.
6 On propagating right living and orthodoxy regarding Easter together, Bede, *HE* IV.2, writes, “per omnia comitante et cooperante Hadriano”, “Hadrian altogether assisted and accompanied him”.
7 Bede, *HE* IV.2, writes, “usque hodie supersunt de eorum discipulis, qui Latinam Graecamque linguam aequo ut propriam in qua nati sunt norunt”, “even today there are living some of their students who know Latin and Greek as well as the language in which they were born”; see *HE* V.8, V.20, and V.23. For a sceptical view of Bede’s statements, see Michael Lapidge, “The Study of Greek at the School of Canterbury”, *ALL* II, 123–39.
Theodore responsible for the introduction of Greek learning and Eastern exegesis. The extent of Theodore’s own Latinity has been recently questioned, most notably by Carmela Vircillo Franklin and Jane Stevenson. Franklin suggests that the Passio S. Anastasii—a work that Bede notes is “male de greco translatum”, “poorly translated from the Greek”—is to be attributed to Theodore; and Stevenson attributes the Laterculus Malalianus to Theodore partially on account of Theodore’s “superficial” Latinity, and the “un-Classical characteristics” of the Laterculus. Moreover, of the four surviving Latin poems that are attributed to Theodore, each reveals a strong dependence on “Greek anacreontic hymns of late antiquity”.

But the most important Latin works that have come out of Hadrian and Theodore’s Canterbury school are the biblical commentaries contained in the manuscript Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, M. 79 sup., which although not written by either Hadrian or Theodore, were composed from the notes of some of the students at the Canterbury school sometime “between the mid-seventh and mid-eighth century”. These commentaries are significant for this study because they provide the earliest Anglo-Saxon reference not only to the Tower of Babel, which will be discussed below, but also to the number 72. In the first series of Pentateuch commentaries (PentI), reference is made to Epiphanius’s legend of the translation of the Septuagint:

Epiphanius autem refert eos primitus congregatos in stagno qui dicitur Mariam in una insula ibi prope Alexandriam, ibique habuisse triginta sex cellulas binique semper unum librum in una basilica transtulisse

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And Epiphanius states that [the translators] were initially gathered on one island in a lake called Maria, which is near Alexandria, and that the translators, having been put into pairs, occupied thirty-six cells, and in the one building translated one book.\(^{12}\)

In some ways it is remarkable that the first reference to the number 72 in Anglo-Saxon England is to the 72 translators of the Septuagint, a figure that by the time of Augustine had almost entirely been eclipsed by the number 70. It is only through the introduction of Epiphanius’s Greek or Syriac text by Theodore that the earliest reference to the number 72 in Anglo-Saxon England is associated with the translators of the Septuagint.

Moreover, later in the Commentary, the notes on Genesis 7:11 read, “\textit{Omnes fontes abissi magnae: i. e. lxxii. fontes et lxxii. interpretes et lxxii. discipuli; dicunt hec paria fuisse}”, “All the fountains of the great abyss: that is, 72 fountains and 72 translators and 72 disciples; they say that these were equivalent”.\(^{13}\) Again, this reference reveals the strength of the topos of the number 72, but the lack of standard typology in its parts. First, as Lapidge notes in his commentary, there does not seem to be a precedent for the 72 fontes in patristic literature.\(^{14}\)

While the connection to the twelve springs and 70 palm trees of Elim (Ex 15:27, Nm 33:9) is probably at the origin of this comment, as Lapidge again notes, it is improbable that the biblical text is the source here. Most patristic comments on these verses claim that there are 70 palm trees,\(^{15}\) but one homily by Origen, which survives only in a Latin translation by Rufinus, brings the number of palm trees to 72: “\textit{Aelim est, ubi sunt duodecim fontes aquarum, et septuagintae duae arbores palmarum}”, “Elim is where there are twelve springs of water and 72 trees of palm”.\(^{16}\) Although there is not enough evidence to argue with any certainty that the Canterbury biblical commentary has misunderstood Origen in this instance, it is easy enough to speculate how confusion may have arisen. The number of fontes may have simply been mistaken for 72 because of their proximity to the arbores palmarum in the biblical verse when the notes were composed. Or perhaps the line was originally glossing the springs and palm trees of Exodus 15:27, which is left without comment later in the work, and somehow became attached with

\(^{12}\) PentI 10. For the Epiphanius text, see above p. 25.

\(^{13}\) PentI 76.

\(^{14}\) Bischoff and Lapidge, BCCS, 451.

\(^{15}\) See, for only one example, Augustine, \textit{Quaestionum in Heptateuchum libri septem}, PL 34, col. 617.

slight alteration to the springs of Genesis 7:11. In any case, the 72 fontes of the abyss, whatever its source, evidently recalled to the commentator the numerical typologies of the 72 translators and disciples. The fact that there is no mention of the 72 nations or languages reveals that this element of the number has diminished in importance for the Canterbury commentator.

A final reference to the number 72 in the Canterbury biblical commentaries is found in the first group of comments on the gospels (Gn–Ex–Evla). In a note on Matthew 26:53, the commentator states: “Duodecim legiones: .lxxii. milia habent in se”, “Twelve legions are made up of 72,000”. Although Lapidge offers a historical reckoning of the number of soldiers in a legion and cites Vegetius’s Epitome rei militaris as a source—a text that was known in Anglo-Saxon England, a more immediate source is Jerome’s commentary on Matthew where, as stated above, Jerome glosses Matthew 26:53 in a similar manner. Jerome’s commentary is used as a source throughout the Canterbury commentaries and was surely consulted in this instance by Theodore and Hadrian. But it is interesting that there is again no mention of the number of nations and languages in the world even though Jerome includes such a mention.

3 Aldhelm

Reference to the 72 languages, however, does occur in the works of the most famous student of Theodore and Hadrian, Aldhelm of Malmesbury (c. 639/10–709/10). According to Lapidge’s recent interpretation of William of Malmesbury’s life of Aldhelm, Aldhelm was a son of Centwine, king of the West-Saxons (676–85). After most likely studying with an Irish scholar

17 Gn-Ex-Evla 25. The manuscript here has been emended from .lxx. The same line appears in the Leiden Glossary of Leiden, Bibliothek der Rijksuniversiteit, Voss. lat. Q. 69, fol. 39v, which also seems to be a product of the Canterbury school; see Bischoff and Lapidge, BCCS, 547, no. 18, for the text. On the Leiden Glossary and the Canterbury school, see Lapidge, “The School of Theodore and Hadrian”, 154–6.


19 Jerome, Commentariorum in Matheum Libri IV: “typum tantum dixisse sufficiat septuaginta duo milia angelorum (in quot gentes hominum lingua diuisa est) duodecim legionibus fieri”, “let it only be sufficient to have spoken of this figure: the 72000 angels (in just as many nations of humans, was language divided) are made up of twelve legions”; see above p. 27, nt. 109.

20 Bischoff and Lapidge, BCCS, 203–4, who state that Jerome’s commentary was also used in the Leiden Glossary.

either at Malmesbury or Iona. Aldhelm left for Canterbury around the age of thirty to study under Theodore and Hadrian; he addresses Hadrian in one of his letters (Ep 2), and in another letter (Ep 5) recommends both Theodore and Hadrian to Heahfrith as superior teachers over the Irish. After Canterbury he was appointed abbot of Malmesbury, and then Bishop of Sherborne, where Bede states that he presided over the see with much energy. Although Aldhelm is still relatively understudied today for one with such a copious literary corpus, he is often referred to as the “first English man of letters”. His Latin is full of syntactically dense constructions and difficult vocabulary with an extensive array of Latin and Greek nonce words, and his works were widely read in Anglo-Saxon England and formed part of the learning curriculum for tenth-century Hermeneutic Latin.

It is no surprise, therefore, that Aldhelm, whose reading of classical and patristic literature was extensive, was aware of the significance of the number 72 within Christian thought. In his Carmen de virginitate, Aldhelm states that Jerome translated 72 books of the Bible:

Qui fuit interpres et custos virgo pudoris,
Ebrea Romanis vertens oracula verbis
Nam rudis et priscæ legis patefecit abyssum
Septuaginta duas recludens bargina biblos,
Quos nunc sacratis describit littera cartis.

Rosier translates these verses as:


22 William of Malmesbury, Gesta pontificum Anglorum, V.189, asserts that Aldhelm was tutored by the Irishman Maíldub. This assertion has been doubted, however, by Winterbottom, “Aldhelm’s Prose Style and its Origins‖, ASE 6 (1977): 39–76; and Lapidge and Herren, Prose Works, 6–7. Orchard, Poetic Art of Aldhelm, 4–5, 54–60, 96–7, maintains that Aldhelm was taught by an Irishman, and Lapidge, “The Career of Aldhelm‖, 22–7 et passim, argues that Aldhelm was tutored by the Irish abbot Adomnán at Iona.

23 HE V.18: “altera [parrochia] Aldhelmo, cui annis quattuor strenuissime præfuit; ambo et in rebus ecclesiasticis et in scientia scripturarum sufficienter instructi‖, “the other diocese was given to Aldhelm, which he oversaw very energetically for four years; he was sufficiently instructed in both ecclesiastical affairs and the knowledge of the Scriptures”. 


He [i.e. Jerome] was a virgin guardian and interpreter of chastity, who translated the Hebrew prophecies into Roman words, for he revealed the depth of the New and Old Testaments, disclosing the two books of the foreign Septuagint, which his version now sets out on holy pages.27

While it is easy to see how Rosier mistakenly understands *septuaginta* with *bargina* and *duos* with *biblos*, on account of the similar endings and the semblance of a “golden line”,28 he is incorrect with the translation: “disclosing [recludens] the two [duos] books [biblos] of the foreign [bargina] Septuagint [septuaginta]”.29 The difficulty seems to be in the word *bargina*, which Rosier translates as “foreign”. This meaning is supported by marginal glosses and a second appearance of the word later in the poem, which reads, “Thesaurososque simul librorum forte Pelasgos / Edidit in lucem, quos bargina texerat umbra”, “he [i.e. Jerome] (thus) brought to light the Greek treasury of books which a foreign shadow had obscured”.30 But in line 1626, Rosier ignores the Latin case and translates it as an English possessive (“of a foreign Septuagint”). The case of *bargina*, however, is not genitive, but first declension nominative with the meaning, “foreigner”.31 Such an epithet for Jerome would not be out of place, since he spent his later years in Bethlehem, and was well recognized for his treatment of the two foreign languages, Greek and Hebrew—a point that Aldhelm emphasises at line 2149: “Transtulit in Latium peregrina volumina pandens”, “[Jerome] brought to the Latin world (many) foreign volumes”.32 It is therefore most likely that the lines, “Nam rudis et priscae legis patefecit abyssum / Septuaginta duos recludens bargina biblos, / Quos nunc sacratis describit littera cartis”, should read “For that foreigner opened the depths of the old and new law, and disclosed the 72 books which his version now sets out on holy pages”. This translation not only makes

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27 Poetic Works, 139.

28 Aldhelm, however, tends to avoid *homoeoteleuton*, adjectives of similar ending; see Orchard, Poetic Art of Aldhelm, 10. For the golden line in general, see S.E. Winbolt, *Latin Hexameter Verse* (London: Methuen, 1903), §191–4; for Aldhelm’s use of golden lines, see Orchard, Poetic Art of Aldhelm, 96–7.

29 Rosier is also mistaken in his translation of line 1623, which should read, “he was a translator and a guardian of chastity, a virgin”.

30 Aldhelm, CdV 2151–2; Poetic Works, 150. For the marginal glosses, see Ehwald’s apparatus for line 1626, in which he gives the glosses: “peregrina”, “alienigena”. There is also evidence that this word means “parchment”, on account of the Latin gloss *pagina* at line 2151 and the Old English gloss *boccfel*; see Herbert Dean Meritt, *Some of the Hardest Glosses in Old English* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968), 27–8; DOE, s.v. ‘bēc-fell’; and DML, s.v. ‘bargina’, fasc. I, A–B, 182.

31 The meaning, “foreigner”, would also correspond more closely to the gloss *alienigena*, which is also a first declension masculine nominative; see the critical apparatus for Aldhelm, CdV 1626.

better sense of the Latin semantics and grammar, but it reveals that Aldhelm was aware of the tradition that there are 72 books in the biblical canon. While Borst argues that Aldhelm is here giving a “strikingly bold continuation” of Cassidorus’s reckoning of the 71 books of the biblical canon, as shown above, Isidore had already made such a Fortführung and surely it was no great step for Aldhelm to suggest that Jerome translated 72 books of the Bible. This instance is also the first of many in Anglo-Saxon England where it is stated that the biblical canon consists of 72 books.

Elsewhere, Aldhelm reveals that his attachment to the number 72 is fluid enough that he could mould it for his own purposes. In the opening to his Epistula ad Acircium, Aldhelm reveals an extensive interest in the numerological significance of the number seven, and he provides a long list of the spiritually important instances where this number is involved:

Porro sacrosancta penticostes solemnitas revoluta et reciproca septem ebdomadarum vicissitudine nonne huiuscecoli suppugationis laterculum satis competentere adstipulari denoscitur, quando paracletus ex summa caelorum arce, post decem dierum indutias destinatus, iure pignus promissae hereditatis vocatus, apostolorum praeordia supernorum charismatum gratia fecundans defusarum septuaginta linguarum loquela ditavit, quas decies septena bellicosoi Hirobaal id est Gedoenis progenies a nefando Abimelech tyrannide potius quam legitima regandi monarchia subnixo et consangineae germanitatis iura et devotae fraternitatis vincula limphatico ritu rumpente interfictria praefigrasse monstratur?

Further, is not the sacrosanct feast of Pentecost known to stipulate quite properly a number of this sort, according to a revolving and returning recurrence of seven weeks, when the Paraclete who is rightly called the ‘pledge of our inheritance’ was sent from the highest citadel of heaven after an interval of ten days and enriched the minds of the Apostles with the grace of spiritual gifts from on high and fecundated them with the speech of seventy tongues covering a wide area which the seventyfold progeny of warlike Hirobaal, that is Gideon, who were slain cruelly, with terrible slaughter unheard of in earlier ages, by the impious Abimelech, who employed tyranny rather than the rightful

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33 Borst II.475: “Das war eine reichlich kühne Fortführung von Cassiodors Rechnung mit 71 Bibelbüchern”.
34 See below pp. 104–7.
rule of kingship and broke the laws of brotherhood and the bonds of devoted fraternity upon a craggy peak in the fashion of a mad man, is shown to have prefigured?\textsuperscript{35}

In this passage, Aldhelm provides another example, along with Isidore, that connects the number of languages of the world to the number of languages spoken at Pentecost.\textsuperscript{36} But Aldhelm departs from the established tradition by asserting that there were 70 languages spoken by the disciples (or in this case apostles), not 72—an assertion that even differs from one of the main models for this work, the pseudo-Isidorian Liber numerorum.\textsuperscript{37} It may be suggested that Aldhelm is here employing the Lukan variant of 70 (not 72) disciples, which he was aware of through Isidore’s De ortu et obitu patrum—a text that Aldhelm elsewhere quotes in reference to the 70 disciples: “Mathias … Unus … fertur de septuaginta fuisse / Discipulis Domini”, “Matthias … is said to have been one of the Lord’s seventy disciples”.\textsuperscript{38} But it is more likely that, in this passage from the Epistula ad Acircium, Aldhelm is simply rounding down the number 72 in light of the numbers given in the earlier part of the sentence. The number seven in the septem ebdomadarum, “seven weeks”, that the solemnity of Pentecost revolves around, and the number ten in the decem dierum, “ten days”, that the apostles wait to receive the Holy Spirit, are both multiples of 70, and facilitate a connection to the 70, rather than 72, languages. Moreover, by using the number 70 instead of 72 for the number of languages, Aldhelm can easily move into the seventyfold (decies septena) progeny of Gideon (Idc 8:30).\textsuperscript{39}

Furthermore, one of Aldhelm’s poetic predecessors, Prudentius, uses the same division of seven and ten in his Apotheosis to refer to the number of names in Luke’s genealogy of Christ and the number of Christ’s disciples: “septenos decies conscendit Christus in ortus / et duo (nam totidem doctores misit in orbem)”, “Christ comes to the seventy and second [generation] in his birth (for

\textsuperscript{35} Aldhelm, EpA, 67.18–68.5; Prose Works, 38–9.
\textsuperscript{36} For Isidore, see above pp. 37–8.
\textsuperscript{37} According to pseudo-Isidore, “Hic duodenarius numerus sexies multiplicatus facit septuaginta duos discipulos, qui missi sunt ad praedicandum per totum mundum in septuaginta duabus linguis divisum”, “This number twelve, when it is multiplied by six, makes the 72 disciples who were sent to preach through the whole world, which was divided into 72 languages”, Liber numerorum, PL 83, 193B. For the Liber numerorum as a model for EpA, see Herren and Lapidge, Prose Works, 32.
\textsuperscript{38} Aldhelm, CE V.1–3; Poetic Works, 57, 242. Isidore, De ortu et obitu patrum, PL 83, col. 153B, lxxix: “Matthias, de septuaginta discipulis unus”, “Matthias, one of the 70 disciples”.
he sent out just as many learned men into the world). On account of other various verbal echoes between the two works, Aldhelm must have had a copy of these lines of Prudentius either in front of him or in his memory while he composed this section of the *Epistula ad Acircium* (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Comparison of Prudentius’s *Apotheosis*, 986–1004 and Aldhelm’s *EpA* 67.18–68.5**

<table>
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<th>Prudentius</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Septimus ebdomadi</em></td>
<td><em>septem ebdomadarum</em></td>
<td><em>sanguinis heres … germine</em></td>
<td><em>hereditatis … consanguineae germanitatis</em></td>
<td><em>sanctiloquus revoluto</em></td>
<td><em>sacrosancta penticostes solemnitas revoluta</em></td>
<td><em>septenos decies</em></td>
<td><em>decies septena</em></td>
<td><em>sacro sancta penticostes solemnitas revoluta</em></td>
<td><em>decies septena</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>986</td>
<td>67.19</td>
<td>1000–1</td>
<td>67.22, 68.2–3</td>
<td>1001</td>
<td>67.18–9</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Besides the fact that the number 70 better suited the context, as mentioned above, Aldhelm probably also did not continue to use Prudentius’s numeration of Luke’s genealogy simply because it is not true; despite Irenaeus’s original claims, Luke lists 77 names, which Aldhelm himself notes and extensively comments upon a few lines later. But the fact that Aldhelm does state that the disciples spoke only 70 languages reveals that the topos of the 72 languages of the world was not so established in early Anglo-Saxon England that it could not be moulded for individual purposes.

## 4 Bede

Although Bede (c. 673–735) did not attend the school of Canterbury like some of his contemporaries, but rather spent almost his entire life after the age of seven in the two monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow, as he says himself at the end of his *Historia*

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41 This last phrase, *decies septena*, occurs only here in Aldhelm’s corpus.

ecclesiastica, he was by no means less accomplished in scholarly activity. Bede had access to "the largest library ever assembled in Anglo-Saxon England", and used its resources to write, along with his Historia ecclesiastica, for which he is most well known today, extensive commentaries on Scripture that became foundational resources for later exegetes. It is without surprise that he is often called the last of the Latin Church Fathers, and "the most important forerunner of the Carolingian Revival". But although Bede’s writings consist of much borrowing from the orthodox tradition of the Latin Church Fathers, it was with a blend of faithfulness to and reappraisal of that very tradition that Bede created a balance between his inherited authorities and his own individual input that allowed him to enjoy such great prestige. While sometimes liberally borrowing from his patristic authorities, he is also known to have scrupulously questioned their conclusions. Damian Fleming, for example, has recently argued that Bede’s meticulous study of the Hebrew language, derived almost solely from the writings of Jerome, led Bede to go so far as to question Jerome’s own methods regarding etymology and even in one instance to correct Jerome’s translation of the Bible. It is, therefore, no surprise that

43 HE V.24. For Bede’s life and works, see George Hardin Brown, Bede the Venerable, TEAS 443 (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987); and idem, A Companion to Bede (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2009).
46 Alcuin is one of the earliest to count Bede among the four Church Fathers; see Roger Ray, “Who Did Bede Think He Was?”, in Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of Bede, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2006), 11–35, at 13.
50 Damian Joseph Fleming, “The Most Exalted Language': Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Hebrew', PhD diss. University of Toronto, 2006, 69–70. The example is from In Gen. Ill. 39–44, where Bede, using Jerome, IHN, insists that the Septuagint’s reading of Rhodamin or Rhodim better represents the Hebrew and is preferred over the Vulgate.
Bede was often defending his views, against accusations, in the words of Paul Meyvaert, “of being an innovator”. 51

Among his other innovations, Bede presents further developments regarding the number 72. In fact, Bede’s treatments of this number, which range throughout his corpus, offer not only the most extensive examinations in Anglo-Saxon England, but also in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. 52 In a sense, Bede represents the height of the typological significance of the number 72: for him, there is symbolic value with the 72 descendants of Noah, the 72 nations and languages of the world, the 72 disciples, the 72 bells on the priestly robes, and even the 72 hours that Christ spent in the tomb. While mention of each of these elements can be found among Bede’s sources, it is only with Bede that they are given the same typological frequency and importance. But as with the accounts of the number 72 in the Canterbury biblical commentaries and the works of Aldhelm, the number of languages and, especially, nations of the world is downplayed by Bede, while the number of Christ’s disciples is emphasized. As this study will show, for Bede the number of nations is only significant for its typological value.

Throughout his career, Bede was very concerned with the correct presentation and lineage of Noah’s descendants, and this concern affected Bede’s count of the names in the Table of Nations. In one of his earliest works, De temporibus (703), Bede briefly treats the chronology of the world through the six ages—the second of which traditionally begins with the birth of Noah’s sons and the dispersal of nations after the building of the Tower of Babel. While Bede does not treat the number 72 specifically in this section, he does refer to a discrepancy between the Septuagint and Hebrew versions of Genesis that is at the centre of some of his later treatments of the number of the 72 nations. As outlined above, the name Cainan appears in the Septuagint count of Sem’s line in the Table of Nations, which is later used by Luke in his genealogy of Christ. But Bede, who finds greater authority in the hebraica veritas of Jerome’s Vulgate, shows

52 One exception may be the Irish Book of Lismore recension of the Evernew Tongue, which claims that “there are not only 72 languages in the world but precisely this same number of human races; troops of angels; seats in God’s mansion; wandering stars in the heavens; manners of torment in hell; species of birds, serpents, sea-beasts, fruits and animals of the forest; and kinds of melodies sung by leaves and blossoms of the tree Nathaban in the land of the Hebrews to the south of Mount Zion”; Hall, “Biblical and Patristic Learning”, 332. The text is edited by Whitley Stokes, “The Evernew Tongue”, Ériu 2 (1905): 96–162.
hesitancy towards the presence of Cainan in the Table of Nations. In De temporibus Bede writes, “iuxta Hebreos CCXCI, iuxta LXX interpretes DCCCCXLII uel abieto Cainan ĪLXXII”, “according to the Hebrew version 292 years, according to the Septuagint 942 years or if Cainan is added 1072”. Bede, following Isidore’s chronicle, then provides a genealogy of Sem’s line from Sem to Abraham, which omits Cainan. Although this omission deals more with chronology and is admittedly in his source, it does point forward to later and fuller discussions that Bede offers on the number of names in the Table of Nations, especially where the omission of Cainan affects the total number of descendants.

Similarly, in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke (706 × 16), Bede almost goes so far as to challenge Luke’s use of the Septuagint on the matter of Cainan. As mentioned earlier, the name Cainan appears in Luke’s genealogy of Christ, and this appearance has allowed numerous chroniclers to justify the presence of Cainan in the Table of Nations and to condemn those who follow the Hebrew by not including him. Bede, on the contrary, expresses ambivalence in accepting Luke’s authority over the Hebrew version:

Nomen et generatio Cainan iuxta hebraicam ueritatem neque in genesi neque in uerbis dierum inuenitur, sed Arfaxat Sela uel Sale filium nullo interposito genuisse perhibetur … Scito ergo beatum Lucam hanc generationem de septuaginta interpretum editione sumpsisse ubi scriptum est … Sed quid horum sit uerius aut si utrumque uerum esse possit Deus nouerit.

The name and generation of Cainan is not found according to the Hebrew truth in Genesis or Chronicles, but Arphaxad is said to have been the father to Sela or Sale, his son, without any other generation in between … Note therefore that blessed Luke took this generation from the Septuagint, when he wrote this … But which of these is more true, or if each could be true, God knows.

53 Bede’s most famous defence of the hebraica veritas—an issue he would defend his whole life—can be found in EpP pp. 617–26. See also Fleming, “‘The Most Exalted Language’”, 73–9.
54 Bede, DT 18.1–2.
55 Isidore, Chronica, 18.
56 For Julius Africanus, see above p. 22.
57 Bede, In Le 1.2796–2807. See also Bede, Act pref.38–41.
This last statement, which goes so far as to suggest the possibility that Luke himself was wrong, or at least less correct, is striking, and it further reveals Bede’s belief in the supreme authority of the *hebraica veritas*.

Alternatively, later in his commentary on Luke, Bede shows no hesitancy in mentioning the 72 nations of the world, even though the absence of Cainan would have potentially created some problems with the number of names. If he had accepted the Septuagint’s genealogy in his commentary on Luke, which includes Cainan in the list, Bede could have used Augustine’s authoritative argument for arriving at the number 72. It is, therefore, surprising that Bede seems almost willing to admit an error on the part of Luke, but still hold steadfastly to the tradition of 72 nations of the world. But the typological connections that are possible with the number 72 are evidently more important for Bede than the problem of the number of names in the Table of Nations. Treating Luke 10:1, Bede uses the number 72 to make typological connections between the number of nations in the world, the number of disciples that Christ sends out to preach, which reveal the *figura* of the priest, and the number of hours in a three day period, which, since three is a multiple of 72, further connects to the number of the Trinity and to the number of hours in Christ’s three-day period in the tomb.\(^58\)

Sicut duodecim apostolos formam episcoporum exhibere simul et praemonstrare nemo qui dubitet sic et hos septuaginta duos figuram presbiterorum, id est secundi ordinis sacerdotum, gessisse sciemus est. Tametsi primis ecclesiae temporibus ut apostolica scriptura testis est utrique presbiteri utrique vocabantur episcopi quorum unum sapientiae maturitatem alius industriae curae pastoralis significat. Bene autem septuaginta duo mittuntur siue quia totidem mundi gentibus euangelium praedicandum erat ut quo modo duodecim primo propter duodecim tribus Israhel ita et hi propter exteram gentes distinctamentur inbuendas seu quod ipso praedicantium numero totus orbis per euangelium summae et individuae trinitatis illustrandus intimabatur sicut solem hunc constat

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\(^58\) Bede borrows the typology of the number of hours in a three day period from Augustine, *Quaestiones evangeliorum*, ed. Almut Mutzenbecher, CCSL 44B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1980), II.xiv.2–4: “Sicut uiginti quattuor horas totus orbis peragitur atque lustratur, ita ministerium inlustrandi orbis per euangelium trinitatis in septuaginta duobus disciplinis intimatur”, “just as the entire globe is travelled around and illuminated [by the sun] in twenty-four hours, so the ministry of illuminating the globe is imitated in the 72 disciples through the gospel of the Trinity”. Elsewhere, Bede discusses the 72 hour period in *DTR* V.13–8; and *Tab* III.763–72. An opaque discussion on three twenty-four hour periods that does not use the number 72 appears in the Canterbury biblical commentaries, PentI.23.
triduanum suae lucis ambitum mundo per septuaginta duas horas adflare solitum … Sed et multis santae scripturae locis per tres dies mysterium trinitatis ostenditur praeципue quia dominus tertia die resurrexit a mortuis. Sed et in ueteri testamento populus ad montem Sinai perueniens die tertia legem accepit idem fluuium Iordanen quo baptismi gratia commendata est tertia quam adierat die transiuit.

Just as no one doubts that the twelve apostles present and at the same time reveal the form of bishops, so it should be known that these 72 bore the figure of priests, that is priests of the second order, even though in the early days of the Church, as the apostolic writing is a witness, both bishops and priests were referred to by the same terminology: of these, the one signifies maturity of wisdom, and the other pastoral care. And truly the 72 are sent out either because the gospel was to be preached to the same number of nations of the world so that, just as twelve were originally designated on account of instructing the twelve tribes of Israel, so these disciples were designated on account of instructing the foreign nations; or because, with that same number of preachers, the whole world, which was to be enlightened through the gospel of the highest and inseparable Trinity, was described just as this sun certainly is accustomed to give to the world a three-day circuit of its light through 72 hours … But also in many passages of sacred Scripture is the mystery of the Trinity displayed through three days, especially when the Lord resurrected from the dead on the third day. And also in the Old Testament, the people came to mount Sinai and received the law on the third day, and that same people crossed the river Jordan, where the grace of baptism was given, on the third day of their arrival.59

Bede’s fondness for typological connections is strikingly clear in this passage. Each element is connected and woven with the others solely on the basis of the numerical similarities that stem from the number 72. The twelve apostles, which relate to the twelve tribes of Israel, and 72 disciples who preach to the same number of nations are even given current meaning as figures of the bishops and priests of a contemporary ecclesiastical structure. Likewise, the 72 hours of a three-day period—an element Bede borrows from Augustine—represent not only the Trinity and the three days Jesus spent in the tomb, but also the giving of the law and the crossing of the

59 Bede, In Le III.1872–96.
Jordan. The connection between the resurrection of Jesus on the third day and the crossing of the Jordan is also further emphasized, not only by mentioning the baptismal connection, but also, and much more subtly, by the use of the word *transiuit*. Since Bede is well aware that the word *pascha* means both ‘a crossing-over’, and ‘Easter’, he can bring the typological connection between the resurrection, baptism and the crossing of the Jordan even closer by means of a pun.

In this passage, however, it is clear that Bede has not given much consideration to the problems behind the number 72 in the Table of Nations. First, he is not concerned whether the absence of the name Cainan will affect the total, but rather without question states that there are 72 nations. Secondly, Borst takes issue with Bede’s phrase, *exterae gentes*, which seems to create a distinction between the twelve tribes of Israel and the 72 “foreign nations”; if Israel is not included in the count of 72—a point which is supported by the word *exterae*, the total number of nations in the world would therefore be 73. This reasoning leads Borst to wonder if Bede is here invoking Augustine’s reckoning of 73. But again, it does not seem as though Bede is much concerned with the problems behind the number of nations in the world in this passage. He is more concerned with numerical typology that is based foremost on the number of Christ’s disciples. Bede takes it for granted that there are 72 nations, and allows this reckoning to be confirmed through a spiritual reading full of typological connections. The omission of Cainan and the typologies surrounding the number 72 are evidently two distinct issues for Bede.

Likewise, in his *De temporum ratione* (725), a later revision and expansion of *De temporibus*, Bede again treats the presence of Cainan in the Septuagint’s Table of Nations. He notes that Luke follows the Septuagint and adds Cainan but that while the Greek chronographers, by whom he means Eusebius, condemn the addition of Cainan, they fail to correct their own reckoning of years. As the great defender of the *hebraica veritas*, Bede rejects both the reckoning of the

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60 The interlingual relationship between *pascha* and *transitus* was common knowledge among Christian authors of Late Antiquity; see Matthias Thiel, *Grundlagen und Gestalt der Hebräischkenntnisse des frühen Mittelalters*, Biblioteca degli Studi Medievali 4 (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 1973), 380–1. Bede himself gives the etymology *pascha id est transitus*, or *pascha transitus dicitur*, no less than seven times throughout his works (*DTR* 61.14; *HE* V.21; *Hom* II.1.80, II.2.80, II.5.7; *In Ez* II.714; *In Lc* VI.22.403–4; *In Mc* IV.14.367–9). For other examples of Bede’s use of etymologies, see Fleming, “‘The Most Exalted Language’”, 142–61; and below pp. 179–80 and 187–90.

61 Borst II.477.

Gospel of Luke for adding Cainan, and the Greek chronographers for not agreeing completely with the Hebrew:

MDCXCIII. Arfaxat an. XXXV genuit Sale. Hic LXX interpretes una generatione plus quam Hebraica Veritas posuere, dicentes quod Arfaxat cum esset annorum CXXXV, genuerit Cainan, qui, cum CXXX annorum fuerit, ipse genuerit Sale. Quorum translationem evangelista Lucas hoc loco uidetur esse secutus. Verum chronographi Graecorum cum generationum seriem ad auctoritatem Hebraicam castigassent, ablata una generatione Cainan, nec tamen numerum annorum in generationibus, quas cum eis habuere communes, ad eorum auctoritatem castigare curassent, propriam securit auctoritatem dederunt huic aetati annorum summam minorem quidem LXX translatorum editione an. CXXX; sed Hebraica Veritate annis DC et L maiorem, id est, annos nongentos et XLII

In the year 1693, Arphaxad, who was thirty-five years old, bore Sale. Here the Septuagint gives one generation more than the Hebrew Truth, by saying that when Arphaxad was 135 years old, he bore Cainan, who in turn bore Sale when he was 130 years old. Luke the Evangelist seems to have followed this translation in this passage. But although the Greek chronographers condemned this series of generations on account of the authority of the Hebrew when they omitted the one generation of Cainan, and although they did not take care to condemn, on account of the authority of the Septuagint, the number of years in the generations, which they considered to be in accordance with the Hebrew, they followed their own authority and gave to this age a sum of years, indeed, 130 years lower, according to the Septuagint, but gave a sum 650 years greater according to the Hebrew Truth, that is a total of 942.63

A few lines afterwards, Bede refers the reader to Arnobius’s reckoning of the 72 languages that arise from Noah’s descendants, which he then quotes verbatim.64 This reproduction of Arnobius’s reckoning poses an interesting issue though, since Arnobius’s figures are atypical and do not represent the descendants of Noah in any version of the Table of Nations. In the one instance, Bede is extremely careful to defend the Hebrew Veritas even to the minutest detail, but

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63 Bede, DTR LXVI.160–73. Similar lines are repeated in In Gen III.769–83.
64 Bede, DTR LXVI.185–206. For Arnobius, see above pp. 31–3.
in the other, he sees no problem referring the reader to an account that conforms to neither the standard authorities nor Bede’s own reckonings elsewhere. Is it possible that Bede recognizes that the distinction that Arnobius makes between languages and *patriae generationum* allows him to avoid dealing with the problem that, without the presence of Cainan in the Table of Nations, it is more difficult to reach 72 names? By quoting Arnobius’ line: “fiunt ergo omnes simul linguae LXX duae, patriae autem generationum mille”, “therefore, all of the languages together come to 72, but provinces of the generations come to a thousand”,65 Bede can disassociate the traditional number of languages in the world from its customarily ascribed source, the Table of Nations, and thereby need not worry about reconciling the absence of Cainan with the accepted number of languages.

But in Bede’s later commentary on Genesis (709 × 31),66 Bede can no longer avoid dealing directly with the problem of the number of the 72 names in the Table of Nations. Like Augustine, who had to use his exegetical wits to bring the 73 names in the Septuagint’s Table of Nations to 72, Bede has to bring the 71 names of the Hebrew Table up to 72. After spending what amounts to no fewer than ten pages in the CCSL edition on a detailed commentary on Genesis 10, Bede summarizes the problem by stating:

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Inuenitur numero septuaginta et unum—quattuordecim uidelicet de Iafeth, triginta unum de Cham, uiginti sex de Sem. Ex quibus totidem gentium linguas et nationes mundum implesse creduntur—uel potius septuaginta duo, ut clarior fama habet
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There is found 71 names—namely, fourteen from Japheth, thirty-one from Ham, twenty-six from Sem. From these just as many languages and nations of peoples are believed to have filled the world—or rather [there is found] 72, as clearer report holds.67

This last phrase, *uel potius septuaginta duo, ut clarior fama habet*, represents a new deviation from Bede’s predecessors. For a similar phrase appears in both Augustine’s treatment of the

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subject: “uel potius ut ratio declaratura est, septuaginta duas”,” and also Isidore’s minor variation: “vel potius, ut ratio declarat, septuaginta duae”. Whether Bede has Augustine’s or Isidore’s account in front of him at this point is irrelevant. What is more important is that Bede does not use the word ratio, which implies rational calculation, but the more dubious term fama. This deliberate alteration suggests that Bede might have found Augustine’s argument unconvincing or, more likely, irrelevant because it is based on the Septuagint and not the Hebrew. Furthermore, Bede’s use of the word fama in his preface to the Historica ecclesiastica, may be informative: “siqua in his quae scripsimus aliter quam se uertitas habet posita reppererit, non hoc nobis inputet, qui, quod uera lex historiae est, simpliciter ea quae fama uulgante collegimus ad instructionem posteritatis litteris mandare studuimus”, “if the reader finds anything other than what is true written down in these pages that I have composed, may he not blame me, who was eager to put into writing in a non-theological manner those things which I have gathered from popular report, according to the inherent limitation of historical discourse, for the instruction of posterity”. While this sentence has been the subject of much discussion, Walter Goffart has recently argued that Bede is making a distinction with the word simpliciter between unbending doctrine and topics that may not be wholly historically accurate, but rather are useful for instructing the laity “non-theologically”. Although theology, strictly speaking, does not necessarily deal with historical fact, Goffart’s argument convincingly shows that for Bede historical accuracy is not the most important issue for instruction. Bede’s amendment of ratio to fama in his commentary on Genesis, even with the inclusion of the adjective clarior, may reflect an attitude that the notion of 72 nations and languages may not be historically true, but rather formed from a “report” that is helpful—more helpful, in fact, than what is historically true. The reservation reflected in the word fama probably stems from reluctance on Bede’s part to accept any interpretation of an Old Testament text that is not supported by the hebraica veritas.

68 Augustine, DCD XVI.vi.46.
69 Isidore, Ety IX.i.2.
70 See Lewis and Short, s.v. ‘ratio’, II.B.2, 1526.
72 See previous note for references.
A further explanation for the shift from *ratio* to *fama* is that Bede does not use Augustine’s argument to resolve the discrepancy between the number of names in the Table of Nations and the received tradition. Because Bede sees Jerome’s translation of the Hebrew to be more authoritative than Augustine’s Septuagint, Bede must resolve the discrepancy in Genesis by means of the Hebrew text alone, which he does, albeit somewhat disappointingly—Borst calls Bede’s solution “scheinbar banalen, in Wahrheit genialen Gedanken”.  

Bede writes:

> aliquis fuerit eorum [i.e. names in the Table of Nations] de quo postmodum duae nationes et populi nascendentur, nisi forte duo esse Assur et duos creasse populos intellegendi sunt— unus qui de terra Sennaar egressus Niniiuem aedificauit et alter filius Sem (et sic numerus septuaginta duarum nationum adimpleatur)

> there might be one of these [descendants] from whom two nations and peoples were afterwards born, unless perhaps two Assurs should be understood to exist and to have created two peoples—the first Assur who came out of the land of Sinar and built Nineveh, and the second the son of Sem (and so the number of the 72 nations may be filled).

While the second solution—that because the name Assur is mentioned twice in the Table of Nations, two Assurs might have created two different nations—is admittedly not on par with Bede’s exegetical finesse, the first solution—that one of the names in the Table produced an unnamed nation—has precedent in Arnobius’s *mille patriae generationum*, and Augustine’s *barbaras gentes in una lingua plurimas*. But perhaps more pertinent to Bede, it simply concedes to common sense; there were many *gentes* known to the Anglo-Saxons who do not have an eponymous founder named in the Table of Nations, including the Angles and the Saxons. Japheth’s lineage traditionally formed the European part of the world, but out of the fourteen (or fifteen) names mentioned in his line, not one looks even remotely like any of the peoples living on the island of Great Britain. It should also be noted that Bede’s use of the perfect

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73 Borst II.479.
74 Bede, *In Gen* III.345–349.
75 See Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods”, *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 54 (1997): 103–42, at 111–5; and Bede’s own comments on the matter, *In Gen* II.5.929–31: “Sem etenim filii maxime Asiam, Cham liberi Africam, Iapheth posteri Europam possedere”, “for indeed, the sons of Sem possessed mainly Asia, the children of Ham Africa, and the descendants of Japheth Europe”.

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infinitive, “quibus totidem gentium linguas et nationes mundum *implèsse* creduntur”, supports the notion that the Table of Nations presents the original account of diversity, but not one that remained static. The evident proliferation of nations in the world, according to Bede, is not at odds with the biblical account.

The fact that Bede does feel the need to bring the 71 names of the Vulgate into agreement with the tradition of the number 72 again reveals that this number was too important for Bede to be disregarded, even if it was not supported in full by the *hebraica veritas*, or his knowledge of the world. After offering his solution to the problem of the number 72 in the Table of Nations, Bede immediately connects it to the number of Christ’s disciples:

> Neque ab re uidetur quod Dominus ideo septuaginta duos ad praedicandum discipulos miserit, quod tot essent gentes et linguae quibus uerbum praedictionis erat committendum … Ita postmodum septuaginta duos designaret doctores ad insinuandam gentium uniuersarum salvationem, quae eodem essent numero comprehensae

It does not seem unrelated that the Lord, for that reason, sent out 72 disciples to preach, because there were just as many nations and languages to whom the word of preaching was to be conveyed … Thus he later would chose 72 learned men for bringing salvation to all peoples which come to a total of that same number.76

Again it is clear that Bede’s desire for the typological connection between the Table of Nations and Luke 10 is so strong that he will not part with the tradition of the 72 nations and languages of the world, even though his greatest authority, the *hebraica veritas*, must be forced into accordance with tradition.

Moreover, the absence of any mention of the 72 nations and languages of the world is striking in a section of *De tabernaculo* (c. 721–5)—a work that was written around the same time as Bede’s commentary on Genesis. As with the commentary on Genesis, Bede’s concern is focused on the number of the 72 disciples, which is at the centre of Bede’s longest discussion on typologies connected by the number 72:

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Quod si Iosephi uerbis intendere uoluerimus quibus dicit mala in tunica pontificis septuaginta duorum fuisse et eiusdem numeri tintinnabula, congruit hoc figuris mysteriorum ut sicut in umero ac pectore apostolicum ferre numerum iussus est ita etiam discipulorum septuaginta duorum circa pedes numerum assignatum habet. Constat enim quod sicut duodenarius apostolorum numerus episcopalis gradum dignitatis inchoavit sic discipuli septuaginta duorum qui et ipsi ad praedicandum uerbum sunt missi a domino gradum sacerdotii minoris qui nunc presbiteratus uocatur sua electione signarunt. Vnde et apte horum numerus in ultima parte sacerdotalis habitus ille in prima figuratus est. Decebat enim ut qui maiores gradu in corpore summi sacerdotis, hoc est in ecclesia Christi, erant futuri sublimiorem in habitu typici pontificis locum typice haberent. Verum si quis ipsos etiam numeros utriusque ordinis mystice uel interpretari, duodecim gemmas Aaron in pectore praeferebat ut significaret tempus instare futurum quo fides sanctae trinitatis in omnibus quadrati orbis partibus generi humano praedicaretur uel certe sicut et supra docuimus duodecim gemmas, id est ter quaternas, gestabat ut omnes ammoneret doctores opera iustitiae quae quattuor uiuuntibus principaliter comprehenduntur simul cum fide veritatis quae in trinitate est et ipsos habere semper et suis habenda commendare discipulis. Portabat et septuaginta duo tintinnabula aurea cum totidem malis punicis ut ostenderet mystice quod eadem fides et operatio iustitiae uniuersum esset mundum ab errorum tenebris ad ueram lucem perductura. Tres namque dies ac noctes habent horas septuaginta duas, et quia sol iste uisibilis omnes mundi partes in septuaginta duabus horis supra infraque lustrando tribus uicibus circuit apte hic numerus tintinnabulorum et malorum duersi coloris tunicae pontificis inditus est ad docendum figure quod sol iustitiae Christus orbem esset illuminaturus uniuersum eique donum praebiturus et uerae fidei quae est in agnitione et confessione sanctae trinitatis et bonae operationis quae in uariantur est flore ac splendore viuuntus.

But if we desire to apply this to the words of Josephus, in which he says that the apples [i.e. pomegranates] on the tunic of the priest, along with the bells, were 72, this is in accordance with the spiritual sense: just as it was commanded that the apostolic number be born on the shoulder and breast, so also that assigned number is understood to be around the feet of the 72 apostles. For it is fitting that just as the number of apostles, which is twelve, represents the grade of episcopal dignity, so the 72 disciples, who were
sent themselves by the Lord to preach the word, signify the grade of the lesser priest who now is called presbyter according to his election. For this reason and suitability, the number of [the apostles] is presented on the upper part of the priestly habit, the number [of disciples] on the lower. For it was appropriate that those who would be greater in rank in the body of the high priest, that is in the Church of Christ, should figuratively hold the higher place on the habit of the figurative priest. But if anyone desires that those numbers of both orders be interpreted mystically, [it is that the high priest] carried the twelve gems of Aaron on his breast to signify that the time to come was close at hand when the faith of the Holy Trinity would be preached to humankind in all parts of the four-cornered globe, or indeed, just as we mentioned above, [the priest] carried the twelve gems, that is three fourths in order to admonish that all scholars should always keep and remind their students to keep the works of justice which are understood principally in the four virtues together with the faith of truth which is in the Trinity. [The priest] carried the 72 golden bells with just as many pomegranates to reveal mysteriously that the same faith and work of justice would lead the whole world from the darkness of errors to the true light. For three days and three nights contain 72 hours, and because that visible sun circulates in three turns all parts of the world in 72 hours illuminating above and below, suitably was this number of bells and pomegranates of diverse color put onto the tunic of the priest in order to teach figuratively that the sun of justice, Christ, would illuminate all the globe and give to it the gift of true faith, which is in knowledge and confession of the Holy Trinity, and the good work which is in the flower and splendour of diverse virtues.\footnote{Bede, \textit{Tab} III.737–772. For the reference to Josephus, and Jerome’s role in the development of this tradition, see above pp. 27–8.}
was not the most important element behind the number 72, but rather the number of disciples who are sent ad praedicandum uerbum, a major theme throughout Bede’s works. For Bede, some doubt could be placed on the notion that there are 72 names in the Table of Nations, but no doubt could be placed on the number of Christ’s disciples.

However, in one of his last works, the Retractatio in Actus Apostolorum (c. 725–31), Bede addresses the topos of the 72 nations for the final time. While discussing God’s promise to Abraham that in his seed, all the familiae of the earth will be blessed, Bede writes: “familiis siue cognitionibus septuaginta et duabus, in quas post diluuum in constructione turris diuisum esse genus humanum legitimus”, “72 ‘families’ or ‘kinsmen’ in which we read that humankind was divided after the flood in the construction of the tower”. In his original commentary, Bede does not mention the number 72, but simply writes: “Semen quidem Abrahae Christus est in cuius fide nominis omnibus terrae familiis, Iudaeis uidelicet et gentibus, est beneficidio promissa”, “certainly, the seed of Abraham is Christ; in the faith of his name was the blessing promised to all the ‘families’ of the earth, that is, both Jews and gentiles”. It is noteworthy that Bede felt the need to include the number 72 in his retraction, and to introduce the topos of the 72 nations to the blessing of Abraham’s seed. The addition shows that despite the troubles and inconsistencies regarding the proper reckoning that Bede faced in his other works, he still felt free to include the topos when it suited him. In this case, Bede does not bother to make the usual typological connections that he does elsewhere; his scrutiny of tradition has silently receded into the common confirmation of the traditional view that 72 nations dispersed at Babel.

As quoted earlier, v. den Brincken states, “Zwar gibt es zu allen Zeiten kritische Denker, die jedoch in dem zu behandelnden Zeitraum gewöhnlich Furcht haben, als Neuerer angesehen zu werden, und daher vor allem das Ziel verfolgen, ihre Neuerkenntnisse nach Möglichkeit mit der Überlieferung in Einklang zu bringen”. Bede is a prime example of such a critical thinker who treads the line between tradition and development to bring new knowledge into harmony with the

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78 A search in the Brepols databases revealed that the phrase “ad praedicandum uerbum” appears no fewer than seven times in Bede’s corpus; and Boolean searches of the forms of uerbum and prædico gave a figure of over 250.
79 For the date, see M.L.W. Laistner’s introduction to Bedae Venerabilis expositio Actuum Apostolorum et retractatio (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1939), iii–xvii.
80 Bede, Re III.116–8. Bede also connects the descendants of Noah with the word familiae in In Lc III.851–4, but does not give a numeration of the descendants.
81 Bede, Ex III.63–5.
old. In the case of the number 72, he was able to use the topos when it suited him, but also able to question its putative origin in favour of the *hebraica veritas*. As Willmes states, Bede treaded the line between tradition and innovation; he “zeigt sich eine Zwischenform zwischen Rezeptivität und Selbständigkeit”. Bede’s *Zwischenform* is no less evident in his comments involving the number 72.

5 Alcuin

In the Latin works of Anglo-Saxon England that come to be written after Bede, the tradition of the number 72 is evoked less, probably on account of its authoritative status, and at the same time its diminishing importance. While earlier authors were eager to show a connection between the dispersal of nations, the disciples of Christ, the number of books in the Bible, and other minor elements involving the number, these controversies become less of a concern by the ninth century. The number is mentioned almost out of necessity to follow tradition and nearly all of the instability of the topos that appears in the early Anglo-Saxon authors is gone.

For example, the number 72 can be found in the works of Alcuin of York (c. 735–804), a great admirer of Bede, who was born and educated in Northumbria during the eighth century by the archbishops of York, Ecgberht (737–58), a pupil of Bede, and Ælberht (767–78). After travelling to Rome to collect the episcopal *pallium* for Eanbald I, Alcuin was invited in 781 to join the retinue of Charlemagne who at the time was gathering scholars from all over Europe to foster an educational reform within his empire. Alcuin took up residence at Charlemagne’s court—a move that he felt obliged to defend as providential—and only returned to England in 786 and 790–3. As Alcuin spent most of his time on the continent, he is a major link between the thought of the early Anglo-Saxons and the Carolingian world, which in turn preserved the

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85 Alcuin writes, “ad . . . Carolum vocatus adveni; sicut mihi quidam sanctissimus vir prophetaeque spiritu praeditus Dei esse voluntatem in mea praedixerat patria”, “Having been summoned to Charlemagne, I came, just as a certain very holy man who was endowed by the spirit of prophecy had related to me to be the will of God” *Ep* 200, 332.24–7; Godman suggests that the prophecy was made by the hermit Echa, whom Alcuin describes as predicting “many future events with his prophetic mind” (*multa prophetali ... mente futura*); *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, 1388–93, at 1393; see also pp. xxxvii and 109.
continuum of learning of early Anglo-Saxon texts during the Viking raids in England and helped to transmit that same learning into the later Anglo-Saxon period.

Compared to Bede’s extended treatment of the number 72 in relation to the number of nations and languages of the world, Alcuin’s treatment of the subject is less frequent. Alcuin’s *Interrogationes Sigeulfi in Genesim* (c. 796) was the most popular commentary on Genesis in the Carolingian period; Michael Fox notes that its fifty-two surviving manuscripts more than double the twenty-two of Bede’s commentary. This work, which was originally written for one of Alcuin’s students, a priest named Sigwulf, who would later become the abbot of Ferrières, is a simple question and answer text that treats the exegetical problems of Genesis at a cursory level. While Alcuin includes much original thought and weaves a variety of sources in the first sections of the commentary (1–82, 93–4), he gradually becomes more reliant on Augustine’s *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* and Jerome’s *Hebraicae quaestiones in Genesim* (83–92, 95–281). In sections 192–281, Alcuin makes almost no editorial changes, and copies his two sources almost verbatim. At section 141, however, Alcuin uses neither Augustine nor Jerome, when he gives the numbers for each of the descendants of Noah:

Quot gentes singuli eorum procrearunt?—*Resp.* De Japhet nati sunt filii quindecim, de Cham triginta, de Sem viginti septem: simul septuaginta duo, de quibus ortae sunt gentes septuaginta duae, inter quas misit Dominus discipulos septuaginta duos.

How many individual nations were born of these (sons)?—*Answer:* From Japheth fifteen sons were born, from Ham thirty, from Sem twenty-seven: altogether 72, from which the 72 nations arose, among which the Lord sent 72 disciples.

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87 O’Keeffe, “The Use of Bede’s Writings on Genesis in Alcuin’s *Interrogationes*”, 468–9.

Although Alcuin follows neither Augustine nor Jerome in this instance, it is possible that he was influenced by a question-and-answer text of the same nature. The oldest surviving text of the *Ioca monachorum*, Schlettstadt, Stadtbibliothek, 1093, which was written in half-uncial around 700, contains the line, “De tres filios Noe. Inde exortae sunt lxx et ii generationis”, “From the three sons of Noah: hence arose the 72 generations”. 89

This text, however, does not contain the specific reckonings of the descendants, and it is also noteworthy that Alcuin, in his numeration, completely ignores each of Bede’s counts. The disregard for Bede’s counts is understandable, since Bede’s initial numeration follows the unusual count of Arnobius, and the later numeration in his commentary on Genesis is far too ambiguous for Alcuin’s purposes in the *Interrogationes*. The most likely source for this numeration, outside of a deliberate miscount of the Bible, is the chronicle of Isidore, which gives the same figures (see Table 1 above). The subtleties behind the number of names in the Table of Nations that Bede carefully recorded is lost in a treatment that would later set the standard numeration of the descendants of Noah for the rest of the Carolingian era and most of the later Anglo-Saxon period.

Equally significant as his treatment of the number 72 in the *Interrogationes* is Alcuin’s use of 72 in canonical contexts. 90 Twice Alcuin refers to the necessity for the presence of 72 bishops at a synod for the condemnation of another bishop. In his *Epistola* 245 (801–802), Alcuin complains to his two disciples, Candidus / Witto and Nathanael / Fridugis, about Theodulf of Orléans, one of his great poetic rivals, refusing ecclesiastical sanctuary to a criminal sent from the Church of St Martin of Tours. 91 In this letter, Alcuin, after quoting a canon of the Council of Orléans (511) that commands the necessity to respect and protect criminals that seek sanctuary, pugnaciously

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90 I am very much indebted to Michael Elliot for help with this section.
accuses Theoldulf himself of acting against a canon that was confirmed by 72 bishops: “O Aurelianensis pontifex [i.e. Theodulf] contra Aurelianensem synodum facere audet, in qua fuerunt episcopi, ut legitur, septuaginta duo”, “O the bishop of Orléans [Theodulf] dares to act against a synod of Orléans in which there were 72 bishops, as we read”. However, Dümmler notes that the first Council of Orléans that Alcuin cites actually had only thirty-two bishops, not 72 as Alcuin claims. Alcuin may have deliberately falsified the number in order to strengthen his accusation against Theodulf, but since there can be much variation in the subscription lists to early medieval councils, it is also possible that Alcuin had seen a copy of this council’s acta which mentioned the presence of 72 bishops.

Following his first reference to a past Council of Orléans, Alcuin further emphasizes the disgraceful actions of Theodulf by quoting a canon from another “synodo Aurelianensi”. Alcuin does not bother to distinguish between the councils of Orléans, but as Dümmler again notes, the council quoted in the latter instance is the 549 Council of Orléans, which had in attendance 71 ecclesiastics. The number of ecclesiastics at this later council may be the source of confusion for Alcuin’s earlier statement regarding the presence of 72 bishops. For, although the figure for the number of attendees at the 549 Council included other clergy besides bishops, it was later understood that the number represented the bishops in attendance. For example, in the collections of Deusdedit and of Anselm of Lucca (A version), and in the Collectio XIII librorum, the fifth canon of the Council of Clermont (535) there appears the inscription: “ex concilio Aurelianensi episcoporum LXXI”, “from the Council of Orléans of 71 bishops”. It is no great stretch to imagine that Alcuin either was misled into thinking the number to be 72, or that he deliberately rounded it up for greater symbolic effect. In any case, Alcuin’s claim that 72 bishops at a synod of Orléans had legislated in favour of church sanctuary was certainly thought

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94 According to Wallach, Alcuin and Charlemagne, 129, and 132, Alcuin was using a copy of the Collectio codicis Laureshamensis, which exists in Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Palatinus Latinus 574; unfortunately, the text has not been edited and I have been unable to consult the manuscript. For the Collectio codicis Laureshamensis, see Friedrich Maassen, Geschichte der Quellen und der Literatur des canonischen Rechts im Abendlande bis zum Ausgange des Mittelalters, vol. 1 (Graz: Leuschner & Lubensky, 1870), 585–91.
to be efficient ammunition against Theodulf, especially since this legislation occurred in
Theodulf’s own diocese.

Moreover, in this accusation against Theodulf, Alcuin likely had in mind a specific rule of
traditional canon-law. In his earlier *Epistola* 179 (August 799), Alcuin writes, “Memini me
legisse quondam, si rite recordor, in canonibus beati Silvestri non minus septuaginta duobus
testibus pontificem accusandum esse”, “If I remember correctly, I recall once reading in the
canons of saint Sylvester that a bishop could not be accused by fewer than 72 witnesses”. The
canon that Alcuin is recalling is from the *Constitutum Silvestri*, a sixth-century forgery under
Pope Symmachus, attributed to the fourth-century Pope Sylvester, which states: “non
damnabitur praesul nisi in LXXII”, “a bishop will not be condemned by fewer than 72”. While
the number 72 had some significance in the judicial history of the early medieval church, likely
on account of its association with the 72 disciples, the popularity of the number in canonical
texts is more likely attributed to the *Constitutum Silvestri*. It is not, however, until after the ninth
century that the number gains stronger canonical significance through the inclusion of the
*Constitutum Silvestri* in the extremely influential pseudo-Isidorian collection of forged decretals,
which, in the words of Horst Fuhrmann, were intended “to protect suffragan bishops from
intervention by the metropolitans, the provincial synods, or the secular power”, and thereby

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99 For the Symmachian forgeries, see W.T. Townsend, “The So-Called Symmachian Forgeries”, *The Journal of
Religion* 13.2 (1933): 165–74, and esp. 169–70 for the *Constitutum Silvestri*; and Jeffrey Richards, *The Pope and the
Papacy in the Early Middle Ages*, 476–753 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 82. Alcuin, incidentally, also
refers to the *Constitutum Silvestri* in Ep. 245 (Dümmler, ed., *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, p. 396, ll. 1–2).

100 Eckhard Wirbelauer, ed., *Das Konzil Silvesters mit 284 Bischöfen*, in *Zwei Päpste in Rom: Der Konflikt zwischen

101 For example, Augustine, *De haeresibus*, CCSL 46 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), 46.16.172–3, p. 318, claims that
there were 72 Manichean bishops: “episcopos [sc. Manichaeorum] autem septuaginta duos, qui ordinantur a
magistris”; “there are 72 bishops [of the Manicheans], who are ordained by the master”. It is also reported that there
were 72 bishops present at a synod in Rome under Symmachus (March 499), at the Third Council of Toledo (May
589), and at a synod under Boniface III (February–November 607); see Richards, *The Popes and the Papacy*, 70
(Symmachus), 261 (Boniface III); and Roger Collins, *Visigothic Spain*, 409–711 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004),
67 (Toledo). It is possible that the canonical significance behind the number 72 arose only superficially on account of
the connection to the 72 disciples, and more because of Symmachus’s *Constitutum Silvestri*, and the related
Sinuessaean synodi gesta de Marcellino which “was fabricated to prove that the pope could not be judged by his
Concept”, *Traditio* 3 (1945): 129–214, at 202–3, briefly sketches the canonical origins and development of the rule
that a bishop could only be disposed by 72 of his peers.
make “trial procedure and the possibility of deposing bishops … immeasurably difficult”.

After appearing in the pseudo-Isidorian decretals, this canon became widespread in numerous other canonical collections. But, in the case of Alcuin, the pseudo-Isidorian decretals, which were composed only after his death, cannot provide the source of the canon in the Constitutum Silvestri. He seems rather to have read it via some other collection, possibly while on the continent, or even in Anglo-Saxon England. Excerpts of the Constitutum Silvestri can be found on pages 201–2 in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 265, an Anglo-Saxon manuscript which proves that at least selections of the Constitutum Silvestri were known by the eleventh century in England. Alternatively, a more promising lead is found in Cologne, erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek, Codex 213, an early eighth-century Northumbrian manuscript that made its way to Cologne before 800. Cologne 214 contains the Collectio canonum Sanblasiana, an Italian canon-law collection that includes the entire Constitutum Silvestri. Although, at this point the extent of Alcuin’s involvement in the provenance of this manuscript can only be speculative, it is not inconceivable that Cologne 214 was read by Alcuin, who was himself an eighth-century Northumbrian and part of Charlemagne’s court in North Rhine-Westphalia. But until further study is able to clarify the issue, it is clear from Alcuin’s quotation of the Constitutum Silvestri, which he claims to have quoted from memory, that Alcuin is well-read in the literature of canon law, so much so that he actually anticipates the legal concerns over episcopal status that would vex future generations of Carolingian canonists.

6 Question-and-Answer Texts

One of the most important literary genres of the Middle Ages is that of the question-and-answer texts—texts comprised of short questions and corresponding answers that were usually used for monastic teaching. This common medieval genre stems from a similar tradition in Late Antiquity, apparent in texts such as Jerome’s Hebraicae quaestiones in Genesim, a commentary

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103 Ker 53. The canon in question, however, does not appear in CCCC 265.

104 Again many thanks to Michael Elliot for these references. See Wirbelauer, Zwei Päpste in Rom, 122–8 (Collectio canonum Sanblasiana), 180–1 (Cologne, 213).

105 See Charles D. Wright, Irish Tradition, 60–3, for the Irish preference for question-and-answer texts.
on Genesis that proceeds in the form of questions and answers, which itself finds precedent in the works of Philo and rabbinic texts. As has already been discussed, Alcuin’s *Interrogationes* is another example of a text that uses the genre of questions and answers in order to comment on a biblical text. But along with these more systematic biblical commentaries, there also existed a series of usually anonymous texts, such as the *Ioca monachorum*, that proliferated in Europe since the sixth century, and, as Robert E. McNally complains, are “divorced from the true spirit and method of the patristic tradition”. The subject matter of these texts was not confined to biblical commentary, but rather to any sort of knowledge of the world.

The *Collectanea pseudo-Bdae* is an enigmatic collection of very short texts, many of which are questions and answers, that were originally printed in Johann Herwagen’s 1563 edition of the complete works of Bede. While the author, date and origin of the *Collectanea* are unknown, it does contain Irish, Anglo-Saxon and continental elements. The certified Anglo-Saxon elements—a series of Aldhelm’s riddles—allow Lapidge to suggest that the text, or parts of the text, may have been composed in Northumbria during the lifetime of Bede, although the evidence is scant and of an indefinite nature.

In the *Collectanea*, there are a few lines that deal with the number of biblical books and the languages of the world. For the number of biblical books, the text reads: “Veteris Testamenti sunt libri quinquaginta quinque, Noui autem uiginti septem”, “there are fifty-five books of the

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Old Testament and twenty-seven of the New”.\footnote{Bayless and Lapidge, eds., Collectanea Pseudo-Bdae, 62.} Although the number of New Testament books accords with the Christian tradition of Late Antiquity, the reckoning of Old Testament books makes a total of eighty-two—ten more than that which is found in Isidore and Aldhelm. While it is very possible that the number fifty-five of the Collectanea is due to scribal error, perhaps even by Herwagen, it is certainly the case that the total of eighty-two, if it was ever included, has been omitted on account of its insignificance. In contrast, the later question-and-answer text of Anglo-Saxon England, the Prose Solomon and Saturn, uses the number 72 to connect the total number of biblical books to the other usual typological numbers.\footnote{Bayless and Lapidge, eds., Collectanea Pseudo-Bdae, 138. See also, Borst II.507–8.} The fact that the Collectanea fails to make such connections can be explained by the idiosyncratic reckoning of the books of the Old Testament. Later in the Collectanea, however, the number 72 is used for the familiar element of the 72 languages of the world. Among a series of short questions and answers that deal either with characters or places in Genesis or the quantity of certain things (years, birds, serpents, and provinces), there appears the line: “Quot linguæ? Septuaginta duae”, “How many languages are there? 72”.\footnote{Bayless and Lapidge, eds., Collectanea Pseudo-Bdae, p. 232. See the edition by Charles D. Wright and Roger Wright, “Additions to the Bobbio Missal: De dies malus and Joca monachorum (fols. 6r–8v)”, in The Bobbio Missal: Liturgy and Religious Culture in Merovingian Gaul, eds. Yitzhak Hen and Rob Meens (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 79–139, at no. 29: “Quod linguas sunt? LXXII”, “How many languages are there? 72”.

But as Bayless notes, further parallels to this question can be found in many of the Ioca monachorum texts, where “because of this unambiguous [sic] scriptural source, the number of languages cited in the trivia-dialogues varies much less than other subjects of inquiry”.\footnote{Bayless and Lapidge, eds., Collectanea Pseudo-Bdae, p. 232. See the edition by Charles D. Wright and Roger Wright, “Additions to the Bobbio Missal: De dies malus and Joca monachorum (fols. 6r–8v)”, in The Bobbio Missal: Liturgy and Religious Culture in Merovingian Gaul, eds. Yitzhak Hen and Rob Meens (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 79–139, at no. 29: “Quod linguas sunt? LXXII”, “How many languages are there? 72”.}

Elsewhere among the texts of Anglo-Saxon England, there exists another tradition of the question-and-answer texts that contains an expanded discussion on the number of descendants of Noah’s sons. A series of texts in later Anglo-Saxon England all contains similar material. For example, a note on fol. 89r of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 448, an eleventh-century manuscript from Winchester, borrows and alters Alcuin’s question and answer on the sons of Noah: “Quot sunt linguæ in mundo? lxxii. Cur non plures uel pauciores? Propter tres filios Noe: Sem, Cham, et Iafeth. Sem habuit filios xxviiem, Cham xxxta, Iafeth uero xv. His simul iunctis fiunt lxxii”, “How many languages are in the world? 72. Why are there not more or less? Because of the three sons of Noah: Sem, Ham, and Japheth. Sem had twenty-seven sons, Ham

\footnote{Bayless and Lapidge, eds., Collectanea Pseudo-Bdae, 62.}
thirty, and Japheth fifteen. Altogether these come to 72”.¹¹⁶ Like the Collectanea pseudo-Bedae, these lines affirm an interest in the 72 languages of the world, but do not mention the number of nations in the world. The reckoning of the descendants of Noah’s sons, which follows Alcuin’s reckoning, is in contrast to Alcuin’s question in that the lines from Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 448 ask about the world’s multilingualism and not multiculturalism.

7 Conclusion

By the end of the eighth century, the Christian topos of the number 72 had been greatly modified from its roots in Late Antiquity. With an expanding view of the world, the association between the number 72 and the nations of the world had diminished. Instead, awareness of the world’s multiculturalism in Europe, which had gained much validity with the rise of Christianity and the decline of the Roman Empire, caused the focus to move from a limited number of nations in the world to the necessity to preach the Gospel to all the nations of the world. Luke’s account of the 72 disciples, therefore, became the most prominent element associated with the number 72 in Anglo-Saxon England. Aldhelm, for example, while providing reference to the 72 books of the Bible and 70 languages spoken by the apostles at Pentecost, does not use the number 72 for the number of Noah’s descendants or the number of nations and languages of the world. Likewise, the biblical commentaries of Theodore and Hadrian’s school at Canterbury do not mention the 72 nations and languages of the world, even though 72 disciples are typologically associated with the translators of the Septuagint, and the cryptic 72 fontes of Genesis. While Bede is the first Anglo-Saxon author to mention the 72 nations and languages, he most often does so merely to fill out the typologies involving the number of Christ’s disciples. At the end of the era, Alcuin gives a relatively scant attention to the number 72 (especially when compared to the ample discussion of his predecessor, Bede), and in the majority of instances where the number is discussed in Alcuin’s works, it is in a canonical context that probably finds its roots in the 72 disciples, not in the Table of Nations.

As these examples reveal, the development of the cultural significance of the number 72 was never static before the ninth century. Its nebulous roots in the Letter of Aristeas, the Gospel of

Luke and the early Christian writers who come to associate it with the Table of Nations have much evolved over the centuries. After Augustine, the number had gained enough value to be established as a topos for the number of nations and languages of the world, and in most instances the number of Christ’s disciples. But by the seventh century, and especially among the early Anglo-Saxon authors, the numerical significance had firm enough footing for further developments, and it thereby evolved to a greater extent than was imaginable for those of Late Antiquity. Just as it would be unthinkable in Anglo-Saxon England to use, for example, Philastrius’s atypical numeration of the sons of Noah, which totals 75, so also would it be unthinkable for an author of Late Antiquity to make as many typological connections involving the number 72 as Bede does in his De tabernaculo, especially without making mention of the number of nations and languages of the world. As is to be expected, the evolution of the tradition of the number 72 does not end with the early Anglo-Saxons; instead it continues to appear in more atypical ways in the later Anglo-Saxon period.
Chapter 3
72: Late Anglo-Saxon England

1 Introduction

Around 865, the high degree of Anglo-Saxon learning, which had culminated in Aldhelm and Bede, was hampered by the Viking invasions that destroyed many of the monasteries, along with the many treasures, literary or otherwise, of the monastic libraries. It was not until 878 that King Alfred was able to defeat the Viking raiders at Edington, and make the initial steps for military, political and, most importantly for this study, literary and cultural reforms. This literary reform, which consisted mainly of translating “certain books that are most necessary for all men to know” (sumæ bec, da de niedbedearfosta sien eallum monnum to wiotonne), forms a large part of the Old English corpus that survives today, and sowed the initial seeds for vernacular writing in Anglo-Saxon England, which would peak with the homilists of the eleventh-century.

It is in this period that the topos of the number 72 regained a certain vitality that is more or less undetectable after Bede. While the focus behind the number 72 had shifted away from the number of nations and languages of the world toward the number of Christ’s disciples, from the ninth century on this focus shifts in part back to the number of nations and languages, especially as new contexts arose in which the number could be utilized. The consistent use of the number 72 to indicate the number of nations and languages in the world confirms that the topos had some degree of standardization. But new uses and new contexts reveal that the fluidity of this numerical topos continued to allow development long after the tradition had been established by authoritative predecessors, and indicate how versatile authors of this period were when adopting and adapting the traditions passed down to them.

2 Alfred

While the centre of European learning had shifted away from England to Charlemagne’s continental court during the eighth and ninth centuries, Alfred, king of Wessex (871–99), made

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1 Alfred, PC, Pref.6–7, p. 7.
large strides to restart educational quality, despite the turmoil created by the Viking invasions. In imitation of Charlemaigne, he surrounded himself with a select group of national and international scholars, whose efforts resulted in a large group of Old English translations of Latin texts. Although Alfred’s own involvement and claims to authorship in this translation program have been questioned ever since William of Malmesbury first attempted to define the Alfredian corpus, Alfred, like Charlemaigne, was nevertheless the central driving force behind the creation and distribution of one of the most important literary movements of the Anglo-Saxon era.

Alfred is not only one of the first of the later Anglo-Saxon authors to treat the Tower of Babel, but also the first to employ the number 72. In chapter 18 of Alfred’s translation of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, the character Reason (Wisdom or Gesceadwisnes) admonishes Mind (Mod) against the futility of desiring fame by emphasizing the minute size of the inhabited earth in relation to the universe. By using an analogy of the earth as a courtyard, Reason claims that even if all the nations of the world could be brought into this one area, fame that was somehow able to spread throughout the courtyard would be of useless value on account of the inability to transcend the linguistic diversity of the nations and, therefore, reach every single person. In his translation of Boethius’s phrase: “hoc ipsum breuis habitaculi saeptum plures incolunt nationes lingua, moribus, totius uitae ratione distantes”, “numerous nations inhabit this very enclosure [i.e. of the earth] with a brief residence, and they are distinct in language, custom and manner of

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6 See below ch. 6.2.
living”, 7 Alfred writes: “heora spræc is todæled on twa and on hundseofontig and ælc ðara spræca is todæled on manega þeoda”, “their language is divided into 72 and each language is divided among many nations”. 8 It is possible to imagine that the inclusion of the number 72 is the result of a desire, first, to underline the totality of the world’s linguistic diversity in light of the futility of fame, and second, to include a putative fact about the nature of the world that Boethius does not include. But it is also possible that, along with the Latin reference to distinct languages, the very idea of the futility of seeking fame or, in the words of Genesis, “creating a name for [one]self”—a prominent aspect of the Babel narrative (Gn 11:4)—recalled the Babel narrative and, thereby, the number 72 to Alfred. A similar association between notions of fame and the number 72 is highlighted later in the text, where Alfred again digresses from his source to comment on the building of the Tower of Babel by Nimrod. Alfred concludes his digression by stating that God

hiora spræce todælde on twa and hundseofontig geþeoda. Swa gebyreð ælcum þara de winð wið þam godcundan anwealde. Ne gewexð him nan weorðscipe on þam, ac wyrð se gewanod þe hi ær hæfdon

divided their speech into 72 languages. So it happens to each of those who struggle against that divine power. No honour grows for him in that, but what honour they previously had becomes diminished. 9

Though the use of the number 72 is typical here, the two following admonitory sentences suggest, as in the earlier instance, that for Alfred the number 72 is intrinsically connected to the futility of seeking fame. Although the word weorðscipe in these lines has been translated as “honour”, it is elsewhere associated in the Old English Boethius with the more negative concept of “fame”. In chapter 24, for example, the word weorðscipe is modified by the adjectives læne, “temporary”, and hreosende, “perishing”, and is also associated directly with the Old English word hlisa, “fame”: “eft þone hlisan heora naman hi wilniað þæt hi gebrædan. On swelcum and on oðrum swelcum lænum hreosendum weorðscipum ælces mennisces modes ingeþanc bið geswenced”, “again they desired that the fame of their name be spread abroad. In such and in

8 Bo, vol. 1, B text, 18.44–5, p. 279.
9 Bo, vol. 1, B text, 35.137–40, p. 334.
other such temporary and perishing honour is the thought of each person’s mind distressed”. But more significantly, in chapter 18, only a paragraph before the mention of the 72 languages, the word weorðscipe is associated with the futility of fame: “hu micelne weorðscipe an Romanisc man mæge habban on þam lande þær mon furðum þære burege naman ne geherde ne ealles ðæs folces hlisa ne com?”, “how much honour can one Roman have in the land where no one has even heard of the name of that city, and where the fame of any of that people does not appear”. For Alfred, the lesson of the 72 languages of the world, in both of the times that it appears in the Old English Boethius, warns against an overabundance of fame or honour. Unlike many Anglo-Saxon authors before (and after) him, Alfred does not make any typological connections around the number 72; the number of Christ’s disciples, for example, is left unmentioned. For Alfred, the notion of the 72 languages of the world is best used to indicate an impossibility—in this case, the impossibility of spreading fame throughout the entire world. As will be discussed, the use of the number 72 to express impossibility is not unique in the Old English corpus to Alfred. Various Old English homilists also use the number 72 to indicate the impossibility of describing the joys of heaven or the pains of hell.

3 The Inexpressibility Topos in Old English Homilies

The so-called inexpressibility topos, or Unsagbarkeitstopos, was a commonplace throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and one that later became associated with the number 72 in Old English homiletic literature. As Ernst Robert Curtius states, the inexpressibility topos is the “emphasis upon inability to cope with the subject”, which is often used in, but not limited to, panegyric literature that underlines the greatness of the one being praised. While Curtius further claims that the topos is extended to descriptions using vague reference to universality (“all peoples, countries, and times sing so-and-so’s praises”), it is also often associated with a specific number. The most common number used in the Latin works of Anglo-Saxon England

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10 Bo, vol. 1, B text, 24.43–6, p. 290. See also Bosworth-Toller, s.v. “weorðscipe” sense ix, p. 1204.
11 Bo, vol. 1, B text, 18.63–5, p. 280. Likewise, the adjective weorðfullic, which shares a common first element with weorðscipe, is used in association with the word gilp, “boasting” or “fame” in the same discussion: “hwæt . . . weorðfullices hæfð se eower gilp”, “what . . . honour does that fame of yours have” (Bo, vol. 1, B text, 18.33–4, p. 279).
for the inexpressibility topos is not 72, but rather 100, which has a traceable origin in Homer’s *Iliad*. But while Homer seems to supply the earliest reference to an inexpressibility topos with the number 100, Virgil’s adaptation was far more influential among the Latin authors of Late Antiquity and, thereby, Anglo-Saxon England. Virgil writes:

non, mihi si linguæ centum sint oraque centum,
ferrea uox, omnis scelerum comprehendere formas,
onmia poenarum percurrere nomina possim.

If I had 100 tongues and 100 mouths and an iron voice, I would not be able to express all the types of evil deeds, [or] expound upon all the accounts of the punishments.\(^{15}\)

After Virgil, as Pierre Courcelle jokes, the topos is picked up by so many subsequent Latin authors that “même si j’avais cent bouches … je ne saurais me flatter d’avoir procédé à un dénombrement exhaustif”.\(^{16}\)

For the purposes of this study, it will suffice to show that the topos was widely used by Anglo-Latin authors. For example, Æthilwald, a student of Aldhelm, uses a variation of Virgil’s lines in his own composition:

\begin{quote}
Nam si centenis clamitet
Quisque linguis et uocitet
Ferrea uoce, fremitans
Valde et ore crepitans,
Nequit sane in saeculo
Vllus fare oraculo
Quantum mondo mirabilem
<Te praestes et laudabilem>
\end{quote}


\(^{16}\) Courcelle, “Histoire du cliché virgilien des cent bouches”, 240.
For if anyone may proclaim and call out with 100 tongues, clamouring and shouting greatly with an iron voice and mouth, he could not say in this age or by an oracle how marvellously and admirably you present yourself in the world.  

Likewise, Alcuin employs similar phrasing in his *Epistola* 39, “O si mihi uox ferrea esset et omnes pili uerterentur in linguas, ut uel sic ad aures tui cordis uerba dilectionis meae peruenire ualuisserent”, “O if I had an iron voice and all my hairs were turned into tongues, thus would the words of my love be able to reach to the ears of your heart”.  

And in the later Anglo-Saxon period, the so-called author, B., writes of Dunstan: “Ego quidem si die noctuque millenos sonos ferrea lingua contra naturam emitterem, nequirem utique omnia beneficiosa virtutum suarum opera, quae vel manifeste vel etiam secrete peregit, prompsisse”, “if I, for one, could utter, contrary to nature, 1000 sounds with an iron tongue, I could not have brought forth all the good works of his virtue, which he did openly or also secretly”. Moreover, Byrhtferth of Ramsey uses the topos twice: “Licet etsi mihi facundia daretur Homeri peritissimi uiri, aut centenos possem humano pectore reddere sensus, non ualuissem cuncta perstringere bona …”, “Even if the eloquence of Homer, a most learned man, were granted to me, or if I could express 100 thoughts from my human breast, I would not be able to relate all the good things …”; and, “Quantus in cordibus apostolorum gloriosus resplenduit fulgor, quis digne centenis linguis redimitus possit edicere?”, “who, endowed with 100 tongues, could worthily proclaim how greatly the glorious radiance shone in the hearts of the apostles”.

Similarly, in Old English prose an inexpressibility topos that uses the number 100 is present. In a homily in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41 (*HomU* 12.2), a translation of the Virgilian

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lines appears in Old English: “And ðeah ðe hwylc mon hæbbe .c. tungena, and ðara æghwylc hæbbe isene stefne, ne magon hi asecgan helle tintrego”, “and even if one had 100 tongues and each of those had an iron voice, they could not describe the torments of hell”. The same formula is found with slight variation in a homily that survives in British Library, Cotton Faustina A.ix, and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 302 to express the inability to describe hell: “Men þa leofestan þeah ænig man hæfde hund heafde 7 þære hæfde æghwilc hæfde hund tungan. 7 hi wæron ealle isene. 7 ealle spræcon fram frymðe þysse worulde oð ende. ne mihton hi asecgan þæt yfel þe on helle is”, “Beloved congregation, even if somebody had 100 heads and each of those heads had 100 tongues, and they were all of iron, and all spoke from the beginning of this world until its end, they would not be able to express the evil that is in hell”. As is noted by Antonette diPaolo Healey, the Visio Pauli, which itself uses the Virgilian cliché in later redactions, is probably the most direct source for the topos in these Old English texts.

Some Old English homilies, however, reveal significant changes to this inexpressibility topos. Remnants of the original Virgilian lines, which in turn have been filtered through the Visio Pauli, are apparent in these homilies, but various elements not found in Virgil or the Visio Pauli have been included for rhetorical effect. Most importantly, the number 72 (iwa and hundseofontig) is

23 Rudolph Willard, ed., Two Apocrypha in Old English Homilies, Beiträge zur englischen Philologie 30 (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1935), 6.63–5; cf. HomS 5 (Willard, ed., Two Apocrypha, 24–5.11–5): “And syþþan heo bið gelæd to þam ealdordeofle Satanas. He is swyþe andryslic, he hæfð an hund heafda, and þara heafda gehwylc an hund tungan; and he hæfð egeslice fingras, and on ælcum fingre hynd clifra. Se lið innan helle gebunden onbæc mid fyrenum raceteagum”, “And afterwards she was led to the chief-devil Satan. He was very terrible; he had one hundred heads and each head had one hundred tongues, and he had horrible fingers, and on each finger a hundred claws. He lies in Hell, bound backwards with burning chains”, which appears “as a sequel” to HomU 12.2 (Willard, ed., Two Apocrypha, 24). Although Sauer, “Die 72 Völker”, 36, states that the form found in HomU 35.1 is probably the “ursprüngliche Version”, he does add that HomU 12.2 represents the original topos on account of the number 100 (37, nt. 21a).


added in a handful of homilies. For example, in *HomU* 35.1, perhaps the earliest Old English homily to use this new development of the number 72,²⁶ appear the lines:

\[
\text{and } \text{þa cæþæ } \text{se deofol to } \text{ðam ancre: } \text{‘ne mæg nænig man wordum asecgan fram } \text{þam susle, þe in } \text{þære } \text{helle is.’ } \text{ða cæþæ } \text{se deofol to } \text{þam ancre: } \text{‘þeah } \text{ðe } \text{seofan men sittan on middaneardæ, and } \text{heo mihton sprecan on } \text{æghwylcere þeode, } \text{þe betwu } \text{heofonum and eorðan } \text{wære (þara is twa and hundseofontig) and } \text{þara manna } \text{æghwylc } \text{â to life gesceapen wære, and } \text{þara } \text{æghwylc } \text{hæfde seofon heafda, and } \text{þara } \text{heafda } \text{gehwylc seofon tungan, and } \text{þara } \text{tungena } \text{gehwylc isene stemne, ne magon } \text{heo arîman ealle } \text{þa wita, } \text{þe on } \text{helle } \text{syndon’}.}
\]

and then the devil said to the anchorite: “no person could describe in words the pain that is in hell”. Then the devil said to the anchorite: “even if there were seven men on the earth, and they could speak in every language, which was between heaven and earth (of which there are 72), and each of these men were created to live forever, and each of them had seven heads, and each of these heads had seven tongues, and each of these tongues had an iron voice, they could not express all the punishments that are in hell”.²⁷

While these lines contain both the inexpressibility of hell and the *isene stemne*, both of which appear in the *Visio Pauli*, much else has been altered. The number 100 has been replaced with the number seven (a number of much symbolic value to Anglo-Saxons²⁸); and the multiplicity of heads, along with the hypothetical possibility of speaking in all 72 languages of the world, have been included. What is more, this section of *HomU* 35.1 is not unique in Old English homiletic literature; it shares similarities with two other Old English homilies (*HomS* 4 and *HomU* 15.1).²⁹

Although Hans Sauer states that *HomU* 35.1 is the most likely candidate for introducing the topos of the 72 languages of the world into the Old English homiletic descriptions of heaven or hell, in his edition of *HomS* 4 and *HomU* 15.1, Donald Scragg disagrees with Sauer’s assertion:

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²⁸ See, for example, the extensive treatment of the number seven in Aldhelm, *EpA*, *passim*; and Wright, *The Irish Tradition*, 102–5, for the Irish and Anglo-Saxon use of the number seven to describe the joys of heaven.
“Sauer suggests that [HomU 35.1] is the source for [HomS 4] here, but offers no detailed argument. From other evidence it would appear that the reverse is the case”.30 But to be fair, Sauer never actually states that HomU 35.1 is “the source for [HomS 4]”, but rather that HomU 35.1 is the earliest text to represent “eine gemeinsame Vorstufe” for HomS 4 and HomU 15.1.31 As is often the problem for establishing a chronological order for Old English homilies that contain similar passages, the issue is not at all clear, at least not as clear as Scragg presents it in this case. While each of these three homilies draws on a number of composite sources that seem to have origins in Irish, Latin and Old English traditions, such as Pehtred’s lost heretical book and the “Niall Sunday Letter”, or the source(s) behind the homily, “The Devil’s Account of the Next World”,32 there certainly survives no common text that can account for all the material in each. And to further complicate issues, it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish any sort of helpful date for these homilies. It has been argued that HomU 35.1 was probably composed sometime before the English Benedictine Reform, perhaps during the early tenth century,33 but even this date is merely speculation.34

For the sake of convenience and clarity, the relevant sections of the three homilies are arranged with new lineation, so as to highlight their similarities and differences, in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparison of Homilies HomU 35.1, HomS 4, HomU 15.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HomU 35.1</th>
<th>Omitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HomS 4</td>
<td>ðonne is þære fiftan helle onlicnes tintrega genemned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HomU 15.1</td>
<td>þonne is þæt fifte hell susl nemned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30 Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies*, 187. The “other evidence” that Scragg, 155, mentions is his claim that HomU 35.1 borrows from the “opening paragraphs” of HomS 4.
33 Whitelock, “Bishop Ecgred, Pehtred and Niall”, 51, states that this homily was written “probably not before 962” on account of a definition of Sunday that matches that of Edgar’s law-code; and Batley, “Old English Prose before and during the Reign of Alfred”, 114–8, argues that specific geographical terminology used in the homily reveals a possible date around 920, on the assumption that the dialect did not persist beyond that date.
34 See Wright, *Irish Tradition*, 266–7, who cites Mary Clayton’s “reminder” that the only “unambiguous proof” for the dating of these homilies is the date of the manuscripts; Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, CSASE 2 (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 263.
As this comparison reveals, the textual relationship between all three homilies is very complex. Sauer notes that neither HomS 4 nor HomU 15 seems to be dependent on each other: HomU 15.1 provides the incorrect number “twam and hundteontigum”, “102”, which appears in HomS 4 as “twa-7-hund-siofontig”, “72” (5); and HomS 4 is missing the phrase “seofun heafdu”, “seven
heads”, which appears in HomU 15.1 (8). Moreover, in contrast to HomU 35.1, HomS 4 and HomU 15.1 both contain a line referring to the fifth hell (1); use the verb beon in similar ways (3, 6, 7, cf. 10); share similar vocabulary (5: gereorda; 6: swa ealles ... middangeardes; 10: eæc; 11: hellewitu); and in one case present similar syntax (11). But HomU 35.1 and HomU 15.1 reveal similarities not found in HomS 4: both homilies omit a line that appears in HomS 4 (2); share a whole line lacking in HomS 4 (8); and present similar syntax (7). And to come full circle, HomU 35.1 and HomS 4 share similar, or even verbatim, phrases that do not appear in HomU 15.1 (7: manna æghwylc; 9: heafda gehwylc; 10: isene stemne; 11: ariman ealle). Because each of the homilies seems somewhat, but not wholly, related to each of the other two, no stemma can be construed, and any attempt to establish dependence based on verbal parallels only makes the issue unnecessarily complicated. Both Sauer and, to a greater extent, Scragg overemphasize the originality of one homily without firm evidence. One possibility, which is not taken into consideration by either scholar, is that two or even all three of these homilies are simply reworkings by the same author. Andy Orchard has shown that similar phenomena can be seen in the homilies of Wulfstan, and it is no stretch to suggest that Anglo-Saxon authors often re-wrote and revised their compositions. If this is the case, to try to find dependence of one homily upon another is futile and in a sense asks the wrong kind of questions. All that can be proved, from the verbal similarities and differences among these three homilies, is that there was a tradition in place that made use of the number 72, among other elements, as the total number of languages in the world to exclaim inexpressibility.

Moreover, there are two other anonymous Old English homilies, HomS 42 and HomS 37, that should be mentioned on account of their similar formulaic phrasing with HomU 35.1, HomS 4, and HomU 15.1. While both HomS 42 and HomS 37 use analogies that start with a number of people, move to descriptions of the number of their heads, and then to the number of their tongues, there are noticeable differences. HomS 42, for example, alters the number seven to 72 in an attempt to underline the inability to describe the bliss of the seven heavens:

35 Sauer, “Die 72 Völker”, 36–7. It is easy to imagine how the number, twam and hundteontigum, of HomU 15.1 may have arisen through scribal error, if the medial /s/ of hundseofontig was long, and then mistaken for a /t/.
Men þa leofestan, þær syndon heofonas us to blisse togeanes þam helle brogan; nu syndon ealle þa mid mærdan afylled. ðeah þe were twa and hundseofontig manna and hæfde ælc þara manna twa and hundseofontig heafodo and ælc þæra hæfda twa and hundseofonti tungena and ælc þære tungena hæfde twa and hundseofontig gereorda and hig swa lange spræcan þæt hi ealle wæron werige, ne mihten hi þone teodan dæl asecgan hu feola beorhtra beama is on þan seofan heofonum ne hu fela hwitra blosmena.

Beloved people, there are heavens of bliss for us in contrast to the terrors of hell; now all of them are filled with glories. Even if there were 72 people and each of these people had 72 heads and each of these heads had 72 tongues and each of these tongues could speak 72 languages, and they spoke as long as they could until they all became weary, they could not even express one tenth of the bright joys there are in the seven heavens, nor how many white flowers.37

In this passage, it is the number 72 that prevails as the dominant rhetorical number. Unlike HomU 35.1, HomS 4, and HomU 15.1, which only mention 72 (or 102) as the hypothetical number of languages spoken, HomS 42 employs the number 72 for almost all of the elements. This use of the number 72 reveals that it had gained cultural value beyond the number of languages of the world.

In contrast, HomS 37 differs from all the previously mentioned homilies in two significant aspects; first, it uses the number twelve for its numerations, and second, it does not include any number for the languages of the world:

And ðær is wanunga and wita ma þonne æniges mannes earan ahlystan magon ne nanes mannes tunga nis to þam swyft, þeah þe he hæbbe XII heafdu and ðæra heafdu æghwylc hæbbe XII tungan and ðæra tunga æghwylc hæbbe XII stefna and ðæra stefna gehwylc hæbbe snyttro Salomones; ne magon hi þeahhwæðere ealle þa wean and ða witu ariman ne areccan þe þa earman and ða werigan sawla gehafian and þrowian sculon.

37 HomS 42, eds. Joyce Bazire and James E. Cross, Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies (Toronto: UTP, 1982), 64.84–90.
And there is suffering and torments greater than the ears of anybody can hear, nor is any
tongue fast enough [to describe these pains], even if one had twelve heads and each of
those heads had twelve tongues and each of those tongues had twelve voices and each of
those voices had the wisdom of Solomon, they could not in any way express or describe
the woes and torments which the ears and the weary souls have to suffer and endure.\(^{38}\)

It is possible, as Bazire and Cross suggest, that the Roman number \textit{lxxii} of an exemplar, such as
\textit{HomS} 42 for instance, was reduced to \textit{xii} by scribal error if the first two letters of the number
were accidentally overlooked in each of the cases.\(^{39}\) Similarly, it could also be argued that the
homilist or scribe of \textit{HomS} 37 read the Roman numeral \textit{vii} of an exemplar, such as \textit{HomU} 35.1,
\textit{HomS} 4, \textit{HomU} 15.1 or any related text of a now lost manuscript, as the Roman numeral \textit{xii}, or
vice versa. But there are problems with these conjectures; in particular, the same scribal error
would have to be made each of the three times that the number \textit{XII} appears. It is more convincing
that the homilist of \textit{HomS} 37 deliberately altered the number 72 to twelve in each case,
especially since the number twelve in Old English literature, as Wright has noted, is sometimes
connected to “apocryphal descriptions of hell”.\(^{40}\) The Old English poem \textit{Christ and Satan}, for
example, uses the number twelve in reference to hearing the sounds of hell: “Forðon mihte
geheran, se ðe æt hylle wæs / twelf milum neh, þæt ðær wæs toða geheaw, / hlude and geomre”,
“For anyone who was in hell could hear that there was a gnashing of teeth, twelve miles away,
loud and miserable”.\(^{41}\)

Even though there is no solid evidence for establishing a chronological order or an exact textual
relationship for any of these homilies, it is clear that the number 72 was understood after the
ninth century in Anglo-Saxon England not only as the specific number of languages of the world,
but also as a tool that could be employed for certain rhetorical purposes. Much like the use of the
number 72 in Alfred’s translation of Boethius, there is no attempt to make typological
connections based on the number 72—theological or exegetical arguments that often
accompanied the number in a writer such as Bede are absent.\(^{42}\) Instead, the number is creatively

\(^{39}\) Bazire and Cross, eds., \textit{Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies}, 60–1.
\(^{40}\) Wright, \textit{The Irish Tradition}, 131.
\(^{41}\) SAT 337–9. Short titles for Old English poetry correspond to those of the Dictionary of Old English Project; see p.
79, nt. 23; all editions of poetry are from the ASPR, unless stated otherwise.
\(^{42}\) An exception, however, appears in the statement that there were 72 languages spoken at Pentecost in \textit{HomU} 35.1.

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employed to underline a specific point: it is impossible to describe heaven and hell. Evidently, inexpressibility featured more prominently in the minds of these anonymous Old English homilists than the theological or exegetical potential behind the number.

4 Old English Poetry

4.1 Franks Casket

The trend among Alfred and the anonymous Old English homilists to use the number 72 without using its theological or exegetical potential continues in the references (or lack thereof) to the number in Old English poetry. The earliest dateable Old English poetic text to offer a possible allusion to the number is the runic inscription on the Franks Casket, a small box carved out of whale bone (*hrones ban*) in Northumbria around the year 700 that portrays scenes from Roman, Germanic and Christian history with accompanying enigmatic descriptions. 43 As Alfred Becker mentions, 72 runes and dots make up the total number used for the inscriptions on the front, and on the left and right sides of the casket. 44 He suggests that the use of 72 runes reflects an element of magic, because of its nature as a product of twenty-four, the number of letters in the runic alphabet, the *fuþarc*. The Gummap stone (now lost), for example, contained twenty-four runes before three final f-runes, and the Lindholm amulet uses twenty-four runes on each side. 45 According to Becker, the 72 runes on three sides of the Franks casket, therefore, indicate that the casket’s creator intended to protect the contents of the casket by means of magic. 46 Marijane Osborn, however, has questioned Becker’s interpretation of the number 72 in favour of her own creative approach. Osborn interprets the whole of the Franks Casket as “an admirable missionary device for the persuasion of pagans inclined towards either superstition or sophisticated speculation”. 47 The “pagan materials” that are present on the Franks Casket have been turned “to a Christian evangelical purpose”, and the 72 runes, therefore, allude to the 72 “gentile nations”. 48

44 Becker, *Franks Casket*, 99–100 (front), 106 (right side), 109–10 (left side), 306 (for English); the front of the casket actually uses sixty-eight runes, but completes the number 72 by adding four dots (100).
45 Becker, *Franks Casket*, 99; see also 143 and 146.
Although Becker’s specific conclusions that the 72 runes on the Franks Casket have “magic-inducing quality” that secured the goods of the casket from “unwelcome access” are not entirely convincing, Osborn’s argument is even less compelling. As Sauer states, Osborn’s argument is “nur überzeugend” once her general interpretation that “das Franks Casket insgesamt primär einem christlichen Zweck diente” is accepted. Even if the casket was intended by its creator as an evangelizing tool, whose main strength for proselytizing was its syncretistic elements, it is difficult to imagine that it was very effective. In the assumption of one recent scholar, “the Franks Casket’s message was required to be transparent to viewers with far less access to and interest in book learning than its ecclesiastical designers”, and, if so, the Christian connotations behind the number 72 would probably have been lost on most viewers, especially when concealed in such a form. Indeed, it takes a very careful and deliberate count of the closely spaced runes to conclude that the number is, in fact, 72.

Moreover, even though the topos of the number 72 can be removed from a theological or exegetical context in order to serve different purposes in Anglo-Saxon England, the number, to my knowledge, never stands alone, unqualified. The subject that is numbered, whether it be descendants, disciples, or languages, is always mentioned. Even if an Anglo-Saxon had counted the series of 72 runes and dots on the three sides of the Franks Casket, in this context, it is unlikely that the number of languages or disciples would be recalled before the significance of the number in association with the fuþarc. Again, if Osborn’s thesis is correct and the Christian elements on the casket were to turn the pagan mind away from the magic elements associated

53 Insignificant instances of the number 72 appears elsewhere in Old English texts, usually to describe a distance or time, such as the “twá and hund-seofontig geare”, “72 years” in Ælfric’s Life of St Maur, ed. Walter W. Skeat, Ælfric’s Lives of saints, vol. 1, EETS 76 (London: Trübner & Co., 1881), 168.361; or the “twam 7 hundseofontigan marcan”, “72 marks” of Old English charter S 1389, ed. A.J. Robinson, Anglo-Saxon Charters, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 1956), no. 89.1. Asser, Asser’s Life of King Alfred, ed. William Henry Stevenson, updated by Dorothy Whitelock (Oxford: OUP, 1959), 104.4–6, also refers to candles weighing 72 pennies.
with the number 72 to the Christian elements, the Franks Casket surely must have been one of the worst evangelizing devices ever conceived.

### 4.2 Widsið

It has also been suggested that the number of names in the Old English catalogue poem, *Widsið*, is meant to present all the 70 or 72 nations of the world. In 1891, R. Michel argued that the topos of the 72 nations of the world appears in *Widsið* on the basis that the poem mentions 72 names.\(^{54}\) In the next issue of the same journal, K. Bojunga convincingly dismantled Michel’s argument with two salient points. First, because *Widsið* does not draw attention to the fact that he has visited 72 nations, it would be very improbable to expect his audience to be able to count and remember every name that was mentioned.\(^{55}\) Secondly and more importantly, the method that Michel uses to count the 72 nations is not consistent. For example, Michel counts *Dene* (line 35), *Sædene* (28), and *Suðdene* (58) separately, but does not differentiate between the *Headoheardan* (49) and the *Longbeardan* (32, 80), or the *Wicingas* (47, 59) and the *Lid-Wicingas* (80).\(^{56}\) Bojunga also points out that if any numerical association were present in the poem, it would have to be attributed to the latest redactor, since the version of the poem which now survives seems to have undergone much interpolation.\(^{57}\)

D.R. Howlett, however, who does not seem to be aware of the early debate between Michel and Bojunga, has more recently retackled the issue by arguing against numerous scholars who consider “*Widsið* an uneven poem full of discrepancies, its structure obscured and its style marred by interpolators”, in favour of an idiosyncratic structure for the poem (which contradictorily he can only argue by emending four lines of the poem).\(^{58}\) While the possibility of discovering a neat, albeit hidden, symmetrical structure of the poem is alluring, especially considering the poem is carefully framed by two sets of nine lines that introduce and conclude...

\(^{54}\) R. Michel, “Zweinundsiebenzig Völker”, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 15 (1891): 377–9; his list can be found at 378.


\(^{56}\) Michel, “Zweinundsiebenzig Völker”, 546; see Bojunga, “Die 72 Völkerschaften im Widsið”, 546–7 for a more thorough critique.

\(^{57}\) Bojunga, “Die 72 Völkerschaften im Widsið”, 544.

Widsið's dialogue, such a search will most likely prove to be a vain endeavor. Howlett, after heavily criticizing Klaus von See's own eccentric structure for the poem, makes some helpful observations based on the manuscript layout of the poem, but nevertheless comes far from the conclusion that his interpreted structure of Widsið "is obvious on the written page". Although a thorough critique of Howlett's argument is beyond the scope of this study, part of his conclusion must be addressed. He states that by excluding lines 79, 82–4, "one restores a balance between the number of peoples named in the poem (seventy) and the number of kings, queen, and scops (seventy)", which he in turn connects to the "list of Noah's descendants born after the Flood". But, like Michel, Howlett does not clarify his method for counting names, nor does he even provide any sort of list of names. The only hint that is given appears in his statements that (what he calls) Episodes 1–2, and 3–4 (lines 35–49, and 119–30), both contain thirteen names of "kings, nations, and regions", and that there are thirty-one names in the thula of Fit I, fifty-one names in the thula of Fit II, and twenty names in the thula of Fit III. But when examined closer, these numbers are not as certain as Howlett makes them out to be. First, in Episodes 1–2, for some reason, he does not count the place name "Heorote" (49), but does the river Eider ("Fifeldore", 43), and the forest Vistula ("Wistlawudu", 121). Moreover, although Howlett states that there are 70 "kings, queen, and scops", there are in fact 71 mentioned, including Widsið.


61 Howlett, "Form and Genre in Widsið", 510. The structural pattern that Howlett creates is unconvincing and much more awkward than that of von See.

62 To my knowledge, no one has accepted his proposed structure, nor even bothered with a critique. For a critique of Howlett's methods in general, see Helen McKee and James McKee, "Chance or Design? David Howlett's Insular Inscriptions and the Problem of Coincidence", Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies 51 (2006): 83–101.

63 Howlett, "Form and Genre in Widsið", 510–11. It is often agreed among scholars that lines 82–4 are interpolations on account of the inclusion of biblical names and metrical discrepancies; see R.W. Chambers, ed., Widsith: A Study in Old English Heroic Legend (Cambridge: CUP, 1912), 8–9; and Malone, ed., Widsith, 45–6. There is less debate around the interpolation of line 79, however.

64 Alphabetically, the 71 names are: 1 Ägelmund (117), 2 Älfwine (70), 3 Ätila (18, 122), 4 Alevi (35), 5 Alexandreas (15), 6 Beadilca (112), 7 Becca (19, 115), 8 Billing (25), 9 Breoca (25), 10 Celtic (20), 11 Casere (20, 76), 12 Eadgils (93), 13 Eadwine (74, 98, 117), 14 Ealhild (5, 97), 15 Eormanric (8, 18, 88, 111), 16 Eastgota (113), 17 Elsa (117), 18 Emerca (113), 19 Fin Folcwalding (27), 20 Freoþe (124), 21 Fridlan (113), 22 Gifwulf (26), 23 Gifica (19), 24 Gisbath (123), 25 Guðhere (66), 26 Hagina (21), 27 Hama (124, 130), 28 Heaforic (116), 29 Helm (29), 30 Heoden (21), 31 Hereling (112), 32 Heðca (112), 33 Hilde (116), 34 Hnéf (29), 35 Holen (33), 36 Hringweald (34), 37 Hroðgar (45), 38 Hroþulf (45), 39 Hun (33), 40 Hungar (117), 41 Hwala (14), 42 Ingendþeow (116), 43 Ingeld (48), 44 Ingeld (23), 45 Mearchealf (23), 46 Ofa (35, 37, 38, 44), 47 Ongendþeow (31), 48 Osswine (26), 49 Redhere (123), 50 Rondhere (123), 51 Runstan (123), 52 Seferd (31), 53 Scafa (32), 54 Scaþere (32), 55 Scilling (103), 56 Seafo (115), 57 Secca (115), 58 Sifeca (116), 59 Sighere (28), 60 Ærcric

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Again, some of the problems with counting names in *Widsið* come about because there is little agreement on how much of the poem is interpolation, scribal corruption, or even what should count as a name. As Joyce Hill has proposed, a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon audience would hardly have been able to recognize as many of the allusions to Germanic legend as modern editors have. Some names, such as the “Herefarena” (34) which simply means “warriors or pirates”, are too generic to apply to any one specific nation, and have been termed “epic fictions”. Although the number 72 (or 70) was certainly recognized throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, in the case of *Widsið*, Bojunga’s observation that the poet would have probably drawn explicit attention to the 72 nations, as is the case in later medieval German poetry, provides an important caveat for attempting to connect *Widsið* with the number 72.

### 4.3 *Genesis A* and Later Middle English Versions of Genesis

Surprisingly enough, the Old English poetic account of Genesis, entitled *Genesis A*, which paraphrases the story of the descendants of Noah’s sons and the Tower of Babel, does not mention the number 72. The account mentions each of the sons of Noah (1551–2), along with the names of their wives (1546–8), and even devotes numerous lines to general descriptions of some of the descendants of each son (Japheth: 1604–14; Ham: 1615–39; Sem: 1640–8). Moreover, the poet makes mention that: “From þam gumrincum / folc geludon and gefylled wears / eall þes middangeard monna bearnum‖ (1552–4), “From those men, people sprang forth and all this earth was filled with the sons of men”. It is conceivable that the absence of any specific number of descendants is due to the possibility that the phrase *twa ond hundseofontig*
may have simply been too awkward to insert into an Old English poetic line. However, the similar numerical line *fif ond hundseofontig* appears in both the Old English poem *Juliana* (587), also even in *Genesis A* (1776, cf. 1157 and 1220), and, as will be seen, the phrase *twa ond hundseofontig* itself appears in the Old English poem *Lord’s Prayer II*. Although it is tempting to suggest that the poet did not include the number of descendants because he felt an urge to disregard any limitation on the world’s diversity, such a reason would be exceptional considering the amount of precedent already established in Late Antiquity and early Anglo-Saxon England.

Moreover, the absence of any figure for the descendants of Noah in *Genesis A* is atypical among the other medieval English poetic paraphrases of Genesis. Contrary to *Genesis A*, the Middle English *Genesis and Exodus* (c. 1250), the *Cursor mundi* (c. 1300) and the *Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament*, all participate in the tradition of the 72 nations and languages of the world. But even in these accounts, the tradition is not as stable as one would think. In the Middle English, *Genesis and Exodus*, the number of male children begotten from Noah’s three sons, adds up to 24,000: “Vten childre and vten wimmen, / Wel fowre and .xx. ðhusent men” (653–4), and from these children, Nimrod selects 72 workers to build the Tower of Babel, from which spread the 72 languages of the world:

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Twelwe and sexti men weren ðor-to
Meister-men, for to maken it so.
Al was on speche ðor-bi-foren:
Ðor weren sundri speches boren (663–6)
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Sexti lond-speches and .xii. mo
Weren delt ðane in werlde ðo. (669–70)
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Twelve and sixty men were there, builders, in order to build it so. Beforehand there was only one language, now various languages arose … Sixty human languages and twelve more were divided then in the world there.71
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The unusual form, *Twelwe and sexti*, which Sauer attributes to the Old French form of the number 72, *seissante e doze*,\(^{72}\) may have partially created confusion regarding the number of workers at Babel. The variation in the *Cursor mundi*, for example, which contains numerous lines on the descendants of Noah’s three sons and the building of the Tower of Babel, does not use the expected number 72, but rather the numbers 60 (*sixe siþe ten*) and 62 (*sixty & two*).\(^{73}\) Brian Murdoch suggests that the number *twelwe* in the *twelwe and sexti* of the *Middle English Genesis* may have been read as *two*, and therefore created the number 62, “although other explanations are possible”.\(^{74}\)

One of these other (more probable) explanations can be found by examining not the Middle English analogue, but the French source for the *Cursor mundi*. According to Sarah M. Horrall’s source work, it is probable that the number 62 in the *Cursor mundi* derives from the Old French metrical translation of the Bible, *Traduction anonyme de la Bible entire*, a version of which survives in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fr. 763, fols. 211-77. According to Horrall’s transcription, the text reads, “Deuant nauoit ou monde que i langaige / Sesante & ii enfut par cel outraige”, “afterwards the world did not have only one language, but 62 on account of this scandal”.\(^{75}\) But in the more recent edition of the manuscript, Julia C. Szirmai has emended the phrase *sesante & ii* to read, “Setante et ij”, which corresponds closer to the form “Septente et ij”, “72” only three lines above.\(^{76}\) It is easy to image the single letter *p* dropping out of the second instance due to scribal error or even simple spelling deviation, which in turn allowed the *t* to be misunderstood as an *s* by the Middle English author of the *Cursor mundi*. Because the number 62 for the number of languages or nations of the world is relatively widespread in Middle English texts, it may be possible that this numerical deviation arose simply because of the

\(^{72}\) Sauer, “Die 72 Völker”, 38.
\(^{74}\) Brian Murdoch, *The Medieval Popular Bible: Expansions of Genesis in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 139.
\(^{75}\) Horrall, ed., *The Southern Version of Cursor Mundi*, 377; the quotation is found at fol. 222r, col. 1.
confused reading of this important text. However, as Sauer notes, “außerdem ist damit noch nicht das zwischen 62 und 60 im Cursor mundi erklärt”.

Naturally, it is dangerous to compare the Table of Nations and Babel narrative of the Old English Genesis A with the analogous examples found in the Middle English accounts, especially since the Old English account does not seem to have been read by the Middle English poets. But the Middle English accounts do provide, at the very least, a contrast to the Old English poem that makes the absence of the number 72 (or any number) in Genesis A surprising. While it is possible to offer speculation for the reasons behind this absence, which might include its supposedly early date, its relative faithfulness to the biblical text, or even just poetic license, nothing can be said for certain except that Genesis A is an anomaly among early medieval accounts of Genesis in its omission of the number 72.

4.4 Lord’s Prayer II and Gloria I

In fact, as Sauer mentions, the number 72 only appears once in the Old English poetic corpus. Under the lemma Sanctificetur nomen tuum, the poem Lord’s Prayer II contains the lines:

Swa is gehalgod þìn heah nama
swiðe mærlice manegum gereordum,
twa and hundseofontig, þæs þe secgað bec,
þæt þu, engla god, ealle gesettest
ælcere þeode þeaw and wisan.
Þa wurþiað þin weorc wordum and dædum,
þurh gecynd clypið and Crist heriað
and þin lof lædað, lifigenda god,
swa þu eart geæþelod geond ealle world. (18–26)

Thus is your high name hallowed very marvelously in many languages (72, as the books say), in that you, God of Angels, established all customs and manners for each nation. They honour your work in words and deeds, in accordance with nature they call upon and worship Christ and bring forth your praise, living God, just as you are glorified throughout the whole world.

While Dobbie points out that the probable source for these lines is Bede’s commentary on Genesis,81 it is more likely that the poet does not have any specific source in mind, but was drawing from the well-known tradition of the 72 nations and languages that dispersed at Babel. The poet gives a clear allusion to the Babel narrative a few lines later under the lemma *Et in terra*:

\[ ðu geæþelodest þe ealle gesceafta, \]
\[ and tosyndrodest hig siððan on menega, \]
\[ sealdest ælcre gecynde agene wisan \]
\[ and a þine mildse ofer manna bearn. (64–7) \]

You glorified yourself in all creation, and divided it afterward into tribes; you gave to each nation their own customs and always your mercy over the sons of men.

Similarly, in the manuscript of *Lord’s Prayer II*, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201, the Old English poem, *Gloria I*, shows no indication that it is to be read separately from *Lord’s Prayer II* other than the fact that it is a different liturgical text.82 The two poems were written by the same scribe, and the only distinctive mark separating them is the title, *Gloria*, on folio 169, which is presented by the abbreviation [G]la (the letter G is an unrealized initial). Significantly, *Gloria I* contains three lines similar to those of *Lord’s Prayer II*:

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Þu settest on foldan  swyðe feala cynna
and tosyndrodost hig  syðdan on mænego;
Þu gewrohtest, ece god,  ealle gesceafa. (20–2)

You set on the earth very many nations and divided it afterward into tribes; you formed, eternal God, all creation.

In both Lord’s Prayer II and Gloria I, the Babel narrative is alluded to in order to emphasize the notion that God blesses all nations of the world. Although the reference to the number 72 in Lord’s Prayer II is unique in the Old English poetic corpus, its presence is not unexpected within the textual and manuscript contexts. An Anglo-Saxon author, who saw himself and his audience as living on the edges of the world, would take comfort in a God that blesses all of the dispersed nations. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that allusions to Babel, the putative origin of ethnic and linguistic diversity, and the number 72, which represents the extent of that diversity, are found in an Old English rendition of the Lord’s Prayer.

5 Ælfric

Ælfric of Eynsham (c. 955–c. 1010), one of the most prolific authors of the Old English period, was a student of Æthelwold and Dunstan, two of the great initiators of the tenth-century Benedictine Reform in England. Like Bede, Ælfric’s life was fully imbued in the monastic conversatio, and, at around the age of fifty, after spending eighteen years at the monastery of Cerne Abbas, he became the abbot of a newly established monastery at Eynsham. Not long after his move to Eynsham, however, Ælfric’s literary output discontinued, either because he decided to retire from writing and recede quietly into a less active life, or more likely, because he died. Although Ælfric never rose to great heights in the ecclesiastical hierarchies—unlike his contemporary Wulfstan—and would always remain an abbot at Eynsham, his outstanding

83 The dates of Ælfric’s life are difficult to determine. Because the minimum age for ordination as a priest was thirty, Ælfric must have been at least that old when he was sent to Cerne Abbas as a mass-priest in 987, and his last work seems to have been written between 1006 and 1012; see Peter Clemoes, “Ælfric”, in Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature, ed. Eric Gerald Stanley (London: Nelson, 1966), 176–209, at 179; and James Hurt, Ælfric, TEAS 131 (New York: Twayne, 1972), 27.

84 Hurt, Ælfric, 37. See also the recent accounts of Ælfric’s life by Joyce Hill, “Ælfric: His Life and Work”, in A Companion to Ælfric, eds. Hugh Magenis and Mary Swan (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 35–65; and Helmut Gneuss, Ælfric of Eynsham: His Life, Times, and Writings, trans. Michael Lapidge (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009).
erudition, which comes forth in his numerous and diverse writings, ensures his place as one of the important authors of Anglo-Saxon England. It is, therefore, no surprise that Ælfric, an eager student of the authoritative writings of the Christian tradition, was well aware of the multifaceted use of the number 72. Within his vast corpus, he makes use of the number more than any other single author in later Anglo-Saxon England with references to 72 descendants of Noah’s sons, 72 disciples, and even 72 biblical books.

5.1 The 72 Descendants of the Sons of Noah

Despite his great dependence on the authorities of the past, Ælfric does deal with the 72 descendants in slightly unusual ways that suit his own concerns. In three of his works, the translation of Alcuin’s *Interrogationes in Genesim* (992–1002), the *Libellus de ueteri testamento et novo* (1005–6; henceforth *LUTN*), and *De sex aetatibus huius seculi* (1006; henceforth *DSA*)—three works that span his literary career—Ælfric uses the notion of the 72 descendants in connection to the building of the Tower of Babel and the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the three parts of the world. In what is probably the latest of these three works, *DSA*, Ælfric refers to the 72 descendants of Noah’s sons as the builders of the Tower of Babel:

Noes sunan Ḟa sydhpan gestry[ndon twa] 7 hundseoftig sunana.
TCHA woldon sona wyrcean mid heora mycclan mæg(ene) [ane] burh.
7 ænne heahne stypel. þe astige upp oð þa heofonan.
7 beginnon [þa to wyrcenne on]géan Godes willan.

After Noah’s sons bore 72 descendants, those sons desired to make with their great kin, one city and one high tower which rose up to the heavens and they began to make it against God’s will.

Likewise, almost the same words are used in the *LUTN*, where Ælfric writes:

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Nu segð us seo boc be Noes ofspringe þæt his suna gestrindon twa and hundseofontig suna, þa begunnon to wircenne þa wunderlican burh and þone heagan stipel þe sceolde astigan upp to heofenum be heora unræde

Now the book tells us about Noah’s offspring, that his sons bore 72 sons; they began to make the marvellous city and the high tower which should rise up to heaven, according to their foolishness.87

The verbal similarities between these two passages not only indicate their close textual and temporal relationship, but also that Ælfric was, in more than one instance, eager to exclaim that the descendants of Noah’s sons were the builders of the Tower of Babel.

It also seems that Ælfric’s view that the 72 descendants of Noah’s sons built the Tower of Babel was present when he translated Alcuin’s Interrogationes a few years earlier. Although in the relevant sections of this work Ælfric, following Alcuin, begins with the division of the world into three parts, he strays from the Latin in order to connect the 72 descendants with the 72 builders and the 72 languages. In the first instance in the Interrogationes where the descendants of Noah’s three sons are mentioned, Ælfric translates:

Hu wæs þes middaneard tođeled æfter þam flode? Se yldesta noes sunu sém gestrynnde mid his sunum seofon 7 twentig suna. 7 hi gebogodan þone eastdæl middaneardes þe is gehate asia. Se oðer noes sunu chám gestrynnde mid his sunum þrítig suna. 7 hy gebogodan þone suðdæl þe is gehaten. affrica. Se þridda noes sunu iafeth gestrynnde mid his sunum fiftyne suna. 7 þa gebogodan norðdæl. þe is geháten europa. þas ealle togeđedere syndon twa 7 hund seofontig þeoda.

How was the earth divided after the flood? Sem, the oldest of Noah’s sons, bore twenty-seven sons (including the sons of his sons), and they inhabited the eastern part of the world which is called Asia. Ham, the second of Noah’s sons, bore thirty sons (including the sons of his sons), and they inhabited the southern part which is called Africa. Japheth, the third of Noah’s sons, bore fifteen sons (including the sons of his sons), and they

inhabited the northern part which is called Europe. All these come to a total of 72 nations.  

But later in his translation, Ælfric significantly includes a line not found in the Latin. Whereas Alcuin writes of Nimrod’s involvement as the “exstruendae turris et condendae Babyloniae auctor”, “builder of the tower soon to be raised and of Babylon soon to be founded”, Ælfric broadens the involvement in the building of the tower by stating: “æt þære getimbrunge þære mycelan byrig babilonian … hi woldan þone stypel úp to heofenum æræran. on þære wurdon þa gereord on twa. 7 hund seofantig todæled”, “at the building of the great city of Babylon … they wanted to raise up to heaven the tower where languages were divided into 72”. Although slightly earlier in the Latin text, Alcuin includes the line, “Itaque per linguas divisae sunt gentes dispersaeque per terras”, “and so through languages were the nations divided and dispersed throughout the lands”, this line does not appear in the Old English, and Ælfric evidently found it not specific enough for his purpose to include the 72 descendants in the building of the Tower of Babel.

It should, furthermore, be mentioned that, as in his translation of the Interrogationes, Ælfric makes mention of the three-part division of the world in his LUTN. A few paragraphs after the mention of the building of the Tower of Babel in the LUTN, Ælfric connects the sons of Noah to ethnic and geographical areas of the world:

Of ðam [sc. Sem via Abraham] com Crist siððan, þe eall mancyn alysde. Of Cham, Noes suna, com þæt Chanæisce folc. And of Iaphet þam gin[gl]stan, þe wæs gebletsod þurh Noe, com þæt norðerne mennisc be þære norðsæ, for þan þe ðri ðælas sind gedælede þurh hig: Asia on eastrice þam yldstan suna, Affrica on suðdæle þæs Chames cynne, and Europa on norðdæle Iapheþes ofspringe

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89 Alcuin, Interrogations, 148, col. 533C.
90 Ælfric, Interrogations, 40, § 57.379–3.
91 Alcuin, Interrogations, 145, col. 533A.
Later from him [Sem via Abraham] came Christ, who redeemed all humankind. From Ham, Noah’s son, came the Chanaanite people. And from Japheth, the youngest, who was blessed through Noah, came the northern people near the North Sea. Therefore these three parts [of the world] were portioned out through them [the sons]: Asia in the eastern kingdom to the oldest son, Africa in the southern part to the family of Ham, and Europe in the northern part to Japheth’s offspring.\(^92\)

Contrary to his translation of the *Interrogationes*, Ælfric here expands on the three parts of the world to provide more specific detail about Japheth’s line. For one, Ælfric limits Japheth’s line to the area around the North Sea, seemingly in order to provide a kind of *origo gentis* for himself and the West Saxons.\(^93\) Although Ælfric is likely aware that many other gentes throughout Europe (not just those *be þære norðsæ*) were thought to be derived from Japheth’s line, it is possible that he is simplifying the matter for his lay audience, who might become confused over the complexities of the issue. It is probably easier for Ælfric to state that Japheth’s line comes from those who settled around the North Sea—an area that all Anglo-Saxons would probably recognize as their original homeland—than to try to provide an unknown place of origin that connects all the nations of Europe. It is interesting, however, that by locating the origin of Japheth’s line to the North Sea, Ælfric alters the centricity of Europe, which previous Mediterranean authors placed near the Mediterranean Sea. Secondly, in this passage of the *LUTN*, Ælfric is able to single out the blessing placed on Japheth’s line by Noah. Although Christ came through Sem’s line, Japheth “wæs gebletsod þurh Noe”; Ham, on the other hand, who is often interpreted allegorically as a reprobate, is only singled out as bearing the *Chanaeisce folc*—traditional enemies of Israel.\(^94\) Again, the centricity is shifted to give special note to the *norðerne mennisc* of Ælfric’s world.

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\(^92\) Ælfric, *LUTN*, 166–70.

93 See Borst II.548.

94 The allegorical interpretation of Ham, which goes back to Philo, figures most prominently in Ambrose, *Expositio euangelii secundum Lucam*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 14 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1957), VI.44.452–5: “Ex duobus illis [sc. Cham et Iaphet] duersarum nationum populi pullularunt, quorum alter maledictus … benedictus alter”, “from these two [Ham and Japheth] the peoples of diverse nations sprang forth: from the one, the people were cursed … from the other, the people were blessed”. See Borst II.385.
5.2 The 72 Disciples

As with other Christian authors before him, Ælfric is also interested in the typological connections between the number of descendants and the number of disciples. Again, in his translation of Alcuin’s Interrogationes, after allotting the three continents to the descendants of the three sons, Ælfric translates the Latin line, “ortae sunt gentes septuaginta duae, inter quas misit Dominus discipulos septuaginta duos”, with “7 swa fela leorníngcnihta sende crist to bodigenne þone soðan geleafan geond ealne middaneard”, “and just as many disciples did Christ send to preach the true faith to the entire world”. Although Ælfric’s reference to the 72 disciples is here dependant on Alcuin, this is not the first instance where Ælfric uses this topos. In the first homily of his First Series of Catholic Homilies, for example, Ælfric states, “syþðan he [sc. Christ] geceas twa 7 hundsyfentig. þa sint genemnede discipuli. þ[a]t sint leornincnihtas”, “afterwards Christ chose 72 who are called discipuli, that is disciples”. And likewise, in his sermon on the Memory of the Saints, Ælfric writes: “Twelf apostolas wæron þe wunedon mid him. and twa and hund seofontig he geceas him to bydelum”, “there were twelve apostles who dwelt with him, and 72 whom he chose as preachers”. Moreover, the 72 disciples are referred to in Ælfric’s first letter to Wulfstan (1006):

Eac þa twelf apostolas þe þam helende folgodan, þapa he her on worulde wunode mid mannun, and þa twa and hund-seofontig were, þe wunedon mid him on his lareow-dome, þa synd leornincgnihtas, ealle hi forletan heora æhta and wif and wunedon on clænnysse, Criste folgigende.

Also there were twelve apostles who followed the Saviour when he dwelt here in the world among humans, and 72 men who dwelt with him in his teachings—those are disciples; all of them left their property and wives and dwelt in purity, following Christ.

95 Alcuin, Interrogationes, 142, col. 532C.
97 Ælfric, CHomI 1. 252–3.
99 Ælfric, Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics in altenglischer und lateinischer Fassung, ed. Bernhard Fehr, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 9, rpt. with supplement by Peter Clemoes (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), 76–8, § 17.
It is surprising that in these three instances, Ælfric does not take advantage of the typological associations between the number of descendants and the number of disciples, as he does in his translation of the *Interrogationes* and in his *LUTN*. Ælfric clearly believes that 72 descendants arose from Noah’s three sons who then built the Tower of Babel and dispersed throughout the world. But upon closer examination, Ælfric’s choice to leave out the typological associations becomes clear. The typological associations in Ælfric’s first letter to Wulfstan probably would not have been appropriate within the context; in this instance Ælfric is speaking of the importance of virginity among clergy and uses the number simply to show either that all the closest followers of Christ gave up their wives to follow the Messiah, or that, according to allegorical interpretation, all bishops (as the twelve apostles) and all clergy (as the 72 disciples) should be celibate.\(^\text{100}\)

Likewise, in his Homily on the Memory of the Apostles, Ælfric’s concern is solely with the twelve apostles and the 72 disciples. Much of the section, in fact, is simply a paraphrase of Luke 10:1. Ælfric does mention that the apostles and disciples went forth to preach and that “heora lár becom to ðam ytemestum landum”, “their teaching came to the farthest regions”,\(^\text{101}\) and could easily have made reference to the 72 nations and languages. But because he has included the twelve apostles with the 72 disciples, the total number of preachers is eighty-four (*feower and hundeahtatig*).\(^\text{102}\) For this reason, the numerical connection is broken, and it would perhaps have been inappropriate to make a note of the 72 nations.

The lack of typological connection in Ælfric’s first Catholic Homily, however, is more difficult to explain, especially since Ælfric provides a full paragraph on the builders of the Tower of Babel only about forty lines (in Clemoes’s edition) before he mentions the 72 disciples. It is possible that Ælfric did not feel that he had enough time to elucidate the typological connections between the two, and wanted to move on with an already ambitious sermon that attempts to trace the history of the world from creation to the ascension of Christ. But it is more likely that Ælfric wanted to connect the Tower of Babel narrative and Christ’s resurrection and ascension. He does not provide a number for the builders of the Tower of Babel here, which in itself is slightly surprising since any potential typology with the number 72 is lost. Furthermore, there are no

\(^{100}\) For the allegorical interpretation of the twelve apostles and 72 disciples, see Bede’s comments above pp. 60–1.

\(^{101}\) Ælfric, *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, vol. 1, 346.153.

\(^{102}\) Ælfric, *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, vol. 1, 346.149.
explicit verbal parallels between the 72 disciples and the builders of the Tower of Babel, but there are some verbal parallels between the builders and Christ’s resurrection and ascension. While the builders raise (*astige*) the tower “up to heofonum”, “up to heaven”, so Christ himself “aras of dæðe … [and] astah to heofonum”, “rose from the dead … [and] ascended to heaven”. Likewise, while after the nations dispersed, “asprang þis gedwyld geond ealne middaneard”, “this heresy [of idolatry] spread throughout the entire world”, so Christ commands his apostles to “faran geond ealne middaneard bodigende fulluht 7 soðne geleafan”, “go throughout the entire world preaching baptism and true faith”. Again, it is possible that Ælfric wanted to emphasize the building of the Tower of Babel and the dispersal of nations with the resurrection and ascension of Christ and, therefore, in this instance suppressed any connection between the number of descendants and the number of disciples.

However, in a homily on the apostles in his second Series of Catholic Homilies, which has a pericope of Luke 10:1—the sending out of the disciples, Ælfric again mentions the 72 disciples without any reference to the 72 nations, but with a concealed reference to the Tower of Babel:

Þis godspell belimpð to eallum halgum lareowum: þe on godes gelaþunge his folc læran sceolon; ða twelf apostolas and ða twa and hundseofontig leorningcnihta: synd ða heafodwyrhtan þyssere getimbrunge. and we sceolon him geefenlæcan; Drihten sende his bydelas ætforan him. and he sylf com æfter. for ðam ðe se bodung forestæpð. and drihten cymð syþþan to þæs mannes mode ðe þa bodunge gehyrþ

This Gospel is befitting to all holy teachers who in God’s Church must teach his people. The twelve apostles and the 72 disciples are the chief workers of this building and we should imitate them. The Lord sent his preachers ahead of himself and he himself came afterwards; therefore the preaching precedes and the Lord comes afterwards to the heart of a person who hears the preaching.

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In this passage, to which Malcolm Godden does not ascribe a source,Ælfric refers to the 72 disciples as the chief-builders of this building (heafodwyrhtan þyssere getimbrunge), which seems to be an unmistakable allusion and contrast to the builders of the Tower of Babel, especially since the same image of building the Church is used in another homily in contrast to Babel:

men woldon him aræræn swa heahne stypel þæt his hrof astige to heofenum. ac se ælmihtiga towærp heora anginn … Eft siððan þæs ælmihtigan godes sunu … hé wolde com to middanearde. and tæhte mid hwilcere getimbrunge we sceolon to heofonum astigan

men desired to raise such a high tower for themselves that its roof would ascend to heaven. But the Almighty overthrew their enterprise … Afterwards the son of the almighty God … would come to earth and taught with what kind of building we must ascend to heaven.

Again, it is somewhat surprising that the typological connections by means of the number 72 are not utilized to emphasize the relationship between the builders and disciples.

Moreover, Ælfric also makes connections between the Tower of Babel narrative and Pentecost, but he never uses the number 72 to strengthen the typology. This is perhaps unexpected since precedent for claiming there to have been 72 languages spoken at Pentecost appears in the works of Isidore, Aldhelm and even the Old English homily HomU 35.1, which contains the lines:

And drihten asende on sunnandæg his apostolon þone halgan gast on fyres ansyne. And on þam dæge wurdon todælede manna gereordu; and ær wæs eall weoruld sprecende on an gereord, and nu synd gereord twa and hundseofontig.

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107 Ælfric, CHomII.32.94–100, p. 275. Another analogue can be found in Bede, In Gen III.499–501, where the builders of Babel are contrasted to the apostles who gather the people “ad constructionem eiusdem sanetae civitatis, id est ecclesia Christi”, “for the construction of that same holy city, that is the Church of Christ”.
The Lord sent on Sunday to his apostles the Holy Spirit in the appearance of fire. And on that day the languages of men became divided; for previously all the world spoke in one language, and now there are 72 languages.\textsuperscript{109}

While Ælfric is happy to express the traditional belief in the 72 sons of Noah and their dispersal after the building of the Tower of Babel, he is hesitant to apply the figure to the number of languages spoken at Pentecost, even though it would strengthen his typological interpretations.

5.3 The 72 Biblical Books

Ælfric, however, does not hesitate to apply the number 72 to the number of biblical books, especially for typological purposes. In his \textit{LUTN}, Ælfric uses the number 72 to connect the descendants of Noah’s sons, the disciples of Christ, and the books of the Bible. He writes:

Twa and hundseofontig boca sind on bibliothecan … And swa fela þeoda wurdon todælede æt ðære wundorlican byrig, þe þa entas woldon wircean mid gebeote, æfter Noes flode, ær þan ðe hi toferdon. And swa fela leorningnihta asende ure Hælend mancinne to bodienne þære boca lare mid þam cristendome, þe þa com on þas woruld þurh ðone Hælend sylfne and þurh his bydelas

There are 72 books in the Bible … and just as many nations [or languages] were divided at that marvelous city which the giants boastingly desired to build after Noah’s flood, before they were dispersed; and just as many disciples did our Saviour send to humankind to preach the doctrine of those books with the Christian faith that came into this world through the Saviour himself and through his preachers.\textsuperscript{110}

In respect to this passage, Thomas N. Hall has convincingly argued that Ælfric, who names each of the books of the Old and New Testaments in his \textit{LUTN}, has gone so far as to include the New Testament apocryphal \textit{Epistle to the Laodiceans} in order to bring his own count of books up to the number 72—a highly unusual move for an author who is concerned elsewhere with

\textsuperscript{109} HomU 35.1. 211.16–20 . Sauer, “Die 72 Völker”, 35, notes that this instance differs from Ælfric in its lack of direct typology. For Isidore and Aldhelm, see above pp. 37–8 and 46–7.  
\textsuperscript{110} Ælfric, \textit{LUTN}, 836–43.
suppressing apocryphal texts.\textsuperscript{111} But the \textit{LUTN} is not the only place where Ælfric notes the number of biblical books. In his homily on the Assumption of the Virgin in his First Series of Catholic Homilies, he states that Jerome:

\begin{quote}
waes halig sacerd 7 getogen on hebreiscum gereorde. 7 on greciscum. 7 on ledenum fulfremedlice 7 he awende ure bibliothecan of hebreiscum bocum to ledenspraec; He is se fyrmesta wealgstod betwux hebreiscum. 7 grecum. 7 ledenwarum. twa 7 hundseofontig boca þære ealdan á. 7 þære niwan he awende on leden to anre bibliothecan
\end{quote}

was a holy priest and educated in Hebrew, and in Greek and thoroughly in Latin, and he translated our Bible from the Hebrew into Latin. He is the foremost interpreter between Hebrew and Greek and Latin people. The 72 books of the Old and New Law he translated into Latin in one Bible.\textsuperscript{112}

In fact, it appears that during the English Benedictine Reform, the standard number of books to be counted in the Bible is 72. For example, among the glosses of Aldred, the glossator of the Lindisfarne Gospels, in the Durham Ritual (c. 970),\textsuperscript{113} it is stated that there are 72 books of the Bible. The Old English phrase, “ic gihalsigo ðec ðerh blod driht' vs' hæl' crist' 7 ðerh feor' godspelle' no ðon læsse 7 ðerh hvnd seofontig tvoegi boec aldes 7 nives gicyðnisses”, “I bless you through the blood of the Lord, our saviour, Christ, and also through the four evangelists, and through the 72 books of the Old and New Testaments”, glosses the Latin, “adiuro te per sanguinem domini nostri iesu christi. et per .IIII. euangelistas. nec non et per septuaginta duos libros ueteris ac noui testamenti”.\textsuperscript{114} A similar enumeration appears in a later Old English list of


\textsuperscript{112} Ælfric, \textit{CHomI}.30. 9–14.


relics written between 1020–40.\textsuperscript{115} In this list, there is a similar connection between Jerome and the 72 books that appears in Ælfric’s homily on the Assumption of the Virgin:

\begin{quote}
Of sco. Hieronime þam æþelan lærowe, se-þe betwix oðrum mænigfealdum bocum, þe he gedihete, þa mycelan bibliothecan, on ｄære beoð twa 7 hundseofentig boca, of ebreisce 7 of greccisce to ledene æðelice awende.
\end{quote}

Of Saint Jerome, that noble teacher, who, among the various other books which he composed, eloquently translated from Hebrew into Latin the great Bible in which are 72 books.\textsuperscript{116}

The reckoning of 72 books also appears in the \textit{Prose Solomon and Saturn}, which was also possibly composed during or after the tenth century.\textsuperscript{117}

But it should be stated that, while the enumeration of the 72 biblical books appears more frequently in later Anglo-Saxon England than in early Anglo-Saxon England, such numeration is by no means new or restricted to the English Benedictine Reform. As already mentioned, the notion of 72 biblical books first appears in Isidore’s \textit{De ecclesiasticis officiis}, which was read in Anglo-Saxon England.\textsuperscript{118} The Carolingian scholar Hrabanus Maurus borrows verbatim from Isidore on the 72 biblical books in his \textit{De institutione clericorum} and \textit{De universo}, both of which were also read in Anglo-Saxon England,\textsuperscript{119} even though out of all of the texts of Hrabanus’s \textit{De institutione clericorum} and \textit{De universo} that survive in Anglo-Saxon England, all are incomplete, and not one contains the relevant sections on the Isidorian notion of 72 canonical books.\textsuperscript{120}

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{116} Förster, ed., “Zur Geschichte des Reliquienkultus in Altengland”, § 73, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{117} See the following section.
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{See Helmut Gneuss, \textit{Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100}, MRTS 241 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), 263, 713 and 845. For the Isidorian text, see above pp. 36–7.
\textsuperscript{120} All of the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts that contain \textit{De institutione clericorum} (three of which appear in versions of Wulfstan’s handbook) excerpt only II.1–10, or parts of that section.
\end{flushright}
Conversely, the notion of the 72 biblical books appears in Aldhelm’s *Carmen de virginitate*, which, as the manuscript evidence attests, was much more popular in Anglo-Saxon England than the texts of Isidore and Hrabanus. It is, therefore, possible that Aldhelm, whose works formed a basis for school texts during the Benedictine Reform, is primarily responsible for the numeration of the 72 biblical books in some of the texts of later Anglo-Saxon England. His “tam densa totius latinitatis silua”, “so thick a forest of all Latinity”, was heavily glossed by its tenth-century readers in Latin and Old English, and offered vocabulary for numerous glossaries of the period. Further evidence for Aldhelm’s influence on later Anglo-Saxon authors concerning the numeration of the biblical books is apparent in the fact that Aldhelm offers a number for the books in the Bible among his comments on Jerome’s biblical translations, which find parallels in both Ælfric’s comments on Jerome in his homily on the Assumption of the Virgin, and in the later Old English list of relics.

6 Prose Solomon and Saturn

As has already been discussed in the previous chapter, the Latin question-and-answer texts commonly transmitted brief comments on the 72 nations and languages in the world. Within the extant corpus of Old English literature, the so-called Prose *Solomon and Saturn*, a question-and-answer text probably of the eleventh century, shared “a definite relationship” with the texts of the *Ioca monachorum* tradition. As with the Latin question-and-answer texts, the Prose *Solomon and Saturn* mentions the number of descendants of Noah’s sons:

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121 See above pp. 44–5.
122 See Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 93, 458, 462, 464, 466, 473, 509, 545, 613, 707, 806, 857; out of these ten manuscripts, eight are glossed in Old English.
Tell me how many nations arose from [Noah’s] three sons.
I tell you that there are 72 nations; from Sem, his oldest son, arose thirty, and from Ham, thirty, and from Japheth twelve.¹²⁹

Cross and Hill claim that the discrepancy between the traditional number of Japheth’s lineage, fifteen, which would have been represented in the manuscript as xv could easily have been mistaken for xii due to minim confusion, and for this reason, the other two numbers are used to bring the total number to 72.¹³⁰ This explanation seems likely enough, especially since Alcuin’s reckoning, which becomes more or less the standard reckoning in the Carolingian and later Anglo-Saxon periods (see Table 4), was probably present in the exemplar of the Prose Solomon and Saturn. There is also precedent in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages for adjusting the numbers of ancestors in order to make 72. A telling example can be found in an eleventh-century manuscript of Remigius of Auxerre’s Expositio super Genesim, Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, 234 (648), that offers a variant to the Alcuinian reckoning that is found in other manuscripts; Mazarine, 234 (648) takes the non-standard figures that are also found in Epiphanius and reapplies them so that Japheth has fifteen sons, Ham, twenty-five and Sem thirty-two.¹³¹ In this instance and in the Prose Solomon and Saturn, what seems to be most important is that the total number of figures adds up to 72.

Table 4: The Descendants of Noah according to Alcuinian Tradition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Japheth</th>
<th>Ham</th>
<th>Sem</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcuin</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ælfric</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹²⁹ Cross and Hill, eds., The Prose Solomon and Saturn and Adrian and Ritheus, § 14, p. 28.
¹³⁰ Cross and Hill, eds., The Prose Solomon and Saturn and Adrian and Ritheus, 75.
Additionally, in the very last question and answer in the *Prose Solomon and Saturn*, the topos of the number 72 is used, but not in reference to the descendants of Noah’s sons. Instead the number is used for the biblical books, the nations (or languages) of the world and the disciples of Christ:

Saga me hwæt bockinna, *and* hu fela syndon.
Ic þe secge, kanones bec syndon ealra twa *and* hundseofontig; eall swa fela ðeo[da] [s]yndon on gerime *and* eall swa fela leornyingcnihta buton þam xii apostolum

Tell me something of the types of books and how many there are.
I tell you, all the canonical books total 72; there are just as many nations [or languages] in the world and just as many disciples if the twelve apostles are not counted.\(^{132}\)

In this instance, which is likely a compilation of material added “at some stage”,\(^ {133}\) the focus of the question is the number of “kanones bec”, “canonical books”, presumably of the Bible. Much like Ælfric’s typologies in his *LUTN*, the number of nations or languages is added, along with the number of Christ’s disciples. Again, the notion that there are 72 books of the Bible is not new, but it may have gained some popularity during the Benedictine Reform. Alternatively, it appears

\(^{132}\)Cross and Hill, eds., *The Prose Solomon and Saturn and Adrian and Ritheus*, § 58, p. 34.
\(^{133}\)Cross and Hill, eds., *The Prose Solomon and Saturn and Adrian and Ritheus*, 125.
that, while the topos of the number 72 continues in *The Master of Oxford’s Catechism*, a Middle English question-and-answer text of the fourteenth century that seems to be translating the same Latin source of the *Prose Solomon and Saturn*, the number is only used for the number of nations and not for the number of books. The fact that the number of books is not present in *The Master of Oxford’s Catechism* suggests either that it was a feature that the *Prose Solomon and Saturn* invented, or that by the later Middle English period, the reckoning of 72 books lost the popularity it once enjoyed in tenth- and eleventh-century England.

7 Byrhtferth of Ramsey

Byrhtferth of Ramsey (c. 970–c. 1016), one of the most important, but understudied, authors of the late Anglo-Saxon period, does not give much discussion on the number 72. In his *Enchiridion*, a commentary mainly on the computus that is composed in both Old English and Latin, Byrhtferth elucidates the mystical *significationes* of various numbers. Although he does not give an individual section to the number 72, in a general section on the number twelve, Byrhtferth notes, “Tot sunt hore in tribus diebus; totidem horis iacuit Dominus in sepulchro; tot discipulos habuit Dominus absque .xii.“, “there are just as many hours in three days; just as many hours did the Lord lie in the tomb; [and] just as many disciples did the Lord have, not counting the twelve [apostles]”. While Baker and Lapidge note the biblical quotations ultimately behind these lines, they neglect to mention that Bede, one of Byrhtferth’s major sources, had made the same comments on the 72 hours spent by Christ in the tomb—borrowed from Augustine—and is probably the direct source for these Byrhtferthian lines.

Further evidence for this conjecture that Byrhtferth is drawing on Bede in this instance can be found in a number of glosses on Bede’s *De temporibus*, which Byrhtferth seems to have composed. While the original manuscript of these glosses is now lost, they do survive in an early printed edition by Johann Herwagen, who first attributed authorship to Byrhtferth. Although

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134 Sauer, “Knowledge of Old English in the Middle English Period?” 804–9; and *idem*, “A Didactic Dialogue in Old and Middle English Versions: The Prose Solomon and Saturn and the Master of Oxford’s Catechism”.
there has since been some debate on whether the author of these glosses should be referred to as pseudo-Byrhtferth, Michael Gorman and Michael Lapidge have most recently argued that there is strong evidence to attribute authorship to Byrhtferth himself.\(^{138}\) In these glosses on Bede, there is further discussion on the 72 hours. For Bede’s phrase, “horis ac bisse” in the *De temporum ratione*, there appears the gloss: “Et accipe sex horas duodecies, et fiunt septuaginta duae horae, id est tres dies”, “And understand, six hours times twelve makes a total of 72 hours, that is three days”.\(^{139}\) The parallels between this line and that of the *Enchiridion* offer another example supporting Byrhtferth’s authorship of these glosses.

The emphasis placed on the 72 hours in a three day period is not unique to Byrhtferth; while it appears in the writings of authors no less authoritative than Augustine and Bede, it is also utilized in liturgical texts. The ninth-century Carolingian liturgist, Amalarius of Metz, for example, states:

Accenduntur in quinta, et sexta, et septima feria, per singulas noctes XXIII\(^{or}\) lumina, et extinguuntur per singulas antiphonas et responsorios; et fiunt simul LXX duae inluminationes et extinctiones. Totidem enim oris iacuit Christus in sepulchro. Lumen et cantus gaudii et laetitiae particeps sunt; extinctio enim luminum signat defectum laetitiae septuaginta duorum discipulorum, et mestitiam eorum, quam habuerunt quamdiu Christus iacuit in sepulchro, sive mestitiam apostolorum quam pertulerunt per septuaginta duas horas quae consecratae sunt Christi seulpturae

Twenty-four lights burn on the fifth, sixth and seventh days through the respective nights and are extinguished during the respective antiphonies and responses; there are all together 72 lightings and extinguishing; for just as many hours did Christ lie in the tomb. Light and singing are partakers of joy and gladness; for the extinction of the lights signifies the absence of gladness of the 72 disciples and their grief which they had while


Christ lay in the tomb or the grief of the apostles which they endured through the 72 hours which were sanctified at the burial of Christ.\textsuperscript{140}

Similar lines can be found in the early tenth-century text \textit{Liber de divinis officis}, once erroneously ascribed to Alcuin.\textsuperscript{141} It is, therefore, evident that by the early eleventh century, when Byrhtferth was glossing Bede’s \textit{De temporum ratione} and composing his \textit{Enchiridion}, there had already developed a tradition of placing emphasis on the 72 hours of a three day period, which could then be typologically connected to the 72 disciples of Christ.

8 Late Old English Anonymous Notes

By the end of the Old English period, the topos of the number 72 can be found in a handful of notes compiled in miscellaneous fashion within various manuscripts. In British Library, Cotton Tiberius A.iii, fol. 43, a mid-eleventh-century manuscript from Canterbury,\textsuperscript{142} the total number of the descendants of Noah’s sons is mentioned according to each son:

Nôe se heahfæder hæfde þry sunu þa wæron þus hâtene. sêm. châm. iaphêt. 7 of þam þrim sunum wearð onwæcnad. 7 awrîdad eall manna cynn wearð onbesenced 7 þær næfre to lâfe ne wearð ma þonne him eahtum. ac hit eall se gifra flod forswelah. 7 forgrinde. 7 he eac þa gyt nolde urne drihten for his myldheortnesse þ[æt]te ðes middangeard nære ortydre manna cynnes. ac ascyrede to lafe þ[æt] þ[æt] we eft of awocon þurh þaes halgan heahfæderes geearnunga nôes 7 his goddra dæda mycelnesse. 7 of him þrim eft wearð awridad twa 7 hundseofontig þeoda ealdorlicra mægða. 7 swa fela is eac manna gereorda 7 heora gespræc todæled. þonne awôc ærest of iafeðe noes suna .XV. mægða ealdorlicere 7 mîcele. þonne onwocon. of chame .XXX. theoda mycelra 7 eac þ[æt] cynn wæs gesead


\textsuperscript{142} Ker 186.
Noah the patriarch had three sons who were named thus: Sem, Ham and Japheth, and from these three sons, all humankind arose and sprang forth. They were drowned and there were not more than eight of them who survived, but the greedy flood swallowed and destroyed them all. And yet he also, our Lord, on account of his mercy did not desire that the earth should be barren of humankind, but he separated as a remnant such that we came forth afterwards through the merit of the holy patriarch Noah and through the greatness of his good works. And from these three sons, afterwards sprang forth 72 nations of the chief tribes, and just as many tongues and languages of humans were also divided. Then fifteen chief and great tribes arose first from Japheth, Noah’s son; then thirty great nations arose from Ham, and also that race was separated by our Lord from the other two races in captivity and in slavery. And that was done because he insulted his father Noah when he looked at his genitals and laughed at them in scorn. Then twenty-seven nations arose from the third son, Sem who was the youngest of them but nevertheless eldest in wisdom. And from this son the noblest and best race was produced, because he did not insult his father Noah. And undoubtedly, from these three men, the sons of Noah, all the earth became afterwards populated, though the Lord separated them into three and so divided the kin according to lineage.\(^{143}\)

Likewise, in British Library, Cotton Caligula A.xv, fol. 139v, a late eleventh-century manuscript also from Canterbury,\(^{144}\) there exists a similar note: “Noe hæfde .III. suna þus wæron hatene. Sêm. châm. Iafeð. of þam þreom awocan 7 forð côman .LXXII. þeoda. fram Iafeðe. XV. 7 fram châme .XXX. 7 fram Sême .XXVII.”, “Noah had three sons who were thus called Sem, Ham and


\(^{144}\) Ker 139.
Japheth. From these three rose and came forth 72 nations [or languages]: from Japheth came fifteen, and from Ham came thirty, and from Sem came twenty-seven". The proximity in provenance and date between Caligula A.xv and Tiberius A.iii, as well as the similarity of content, suggests that the similarities between these two texts did not arise by coincidence, and that Caligula A.xv probably derived its note from that of Tiberius A.iii.

Recently, Daniel Anlezark has argued that a certain reaction against heterodox Anglo-Saxon notions that there was a fourth son of Noah born on the ark can be detected in the text in Tiberius A.iii, whose tone he calls “uncompromising” and “suggestive of controversy”. Despite Anlezark’s fairly subjective reading of the note in Tiberius A.iii, his interpretation is feasible. His strongest evidence can be found in the note’s mention that “þær næfre to lâfe ne wearð ma þonne him eahtum”, “there was not more than eight of them who survived”. However, it is more likely the case that both Tiberius A.iii and the related manuscript Caligula A.xv are simply exhibiting knowledge of the long standing tradition regarding the number of descendants born from each of Noah’s sons: this line is simply a rendition of 1 Peter 3:20: “octo animae salvae factae sunt per aquam”, “eight souls were saved through the water”. Moreover, both of these notes are surrounded by other material of miscellaneous nature in the manuscripts; their compilers seem to be more interested in collecting intellectual curiosities than attempting to promote orthodoxy against rival, heterodox traditions.

9 Conclusion

Throughout the literature of Anglo-Saxon England, the number 72 is much used. From King Alfred’s earliest appropriations of the topos in Old English, to the late Old English notes, the notion behind the number shifts and develops in ways that best suit the individual author. While almost all the authors seem to be at least somewhat conscious that the origin of the number 72 begins with the descendants of Noah who dispersed throughout the world after the building of the Tower of Babel, the number is able to transfer its significance and usefulness to other contexts. A handful of the authors who make use of the inexpressibility topos, for example, latch

\[147\] For the contents of the manuscripts, see Ker 139 and 186. Admittedly, the note in Tiberius A.iii could have been collected from a different context more suitable to Anlezark’s interpretation.
onto the number 72 as a figure that finds greater rhetorical rather than theological or exegetical importance. In these cases, the figure 72 is symbolically used to point to the notion that it is completely futile to describe the pains of hell or the joys of heaven.

Likewise, the traditional typologies that formed around the number 72 in Late Antiquity and the works of Bede are not as significant in many of the later Old English authors. The number is scant in Old English poetry, and surprisingly does not even make an appearance in the Old English *Genesis A*. The important ecclesiastical figure, Wulfstan, does not ever mention the number in his corpus, and his well-educated contemporary, Byrhtferth is only interested in the number’s importance as it relates to issues of time. Ælfric alone presents the most extensive treatment of the number in later Anglo-Saxon England by using the traditional typologies based on the number of descendants, disciples and even biblical books.

But such deviation from and development of the topos of the number 72 is no surprise when its own history is considered. While the cultural value of the figure never enjoys complete stability and standardization that is recognized and used by authors across the board, its very instability gives the number its strength and vitality in Late Antiquity and Anglo-Saxon England. It can be employed as the traditional number of descendants of Noah’s sons or of the disciples of Christ, but it is also not limited to these figures, and is able to extend its usefulness into other areas that would have been unimaginable for those who first introduced the number in the centuries before Christ, or for those who contributed to its development in the early centuries afterwards.
Chapter 4
Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity: The Beginnings to Late Antiquity

1 Introduction

The Babel narrative, along with the corresponding Table of Nations, played an important role in Judaic and Christian worldviews, by etiologically describing ethnic and linguistic diversity within salvation history. Throughout Jewish and early Christian traditions, attitudes towards other cultures could be incorporated theologically into world-views that interpreted and explained the relationships between different cultures within divine providence. Since God alone was considered to be not only the Lord of the Jews, but also the “King of all the earth”, who “reigneth over the heathen” (Ps 47:7–8, cf. Rm 15:9–12), all of the world’s ethnic diversity had potential theological importance. According to the early chapters of Genesis, all humans descended from the common origin of Adam and Eve, and therefore could find divine favour based on their humanity rather than ethnicity.1 But because of the biblical account of the dispersal of the descendants of Noah’s three sons, judgments about ethnic groups were able to gain theological currency that aided in the founding of, in all likelihood, an already established hierarchical framework. For ancient Jewish thinkers, the narratives of the Tower of Babel and the Table of Nations describe the fundamental origins behind such a hierarchical framework, and at the same time, confirm that framework; it is no coincidence that Israel’s enemies fell under Ham’s “cursed” lineage.

Similarly, the Christians of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, who were faced with the even stronger theological challenge of including people of all ethnic and cultural origins into salvation history, were able to make use of the Tower of Babel narrative in ways that affirmed the new Christian inclusiveness of the Gospel by positioning orthodoxy at the centre and paganism or heresy at the margins; the hierarchical framework inherited from Israel and to some extent Greece and Rome prevailed, but with shifted emphasis. Certain elements of the New Testament, such as Pentecost, which was interpreted typologically in light of the Tower of Babel narrative, or the urgency to preach the Gospel to all the nations of the world, gave a solid theological basis for accepting, at least theoretically, all the world’s cultural diversity as equal.

2 Ethnography and Ethnocentricity

2.1 Ethnic and Geographical Centricity

But before treating the manners in which the Tower of Babel was interpreted in light of ethnic and linguistic diversity, a brief survey of ancient ethnography will be helpful, because of its far-reaching influences on late antique and medieval authors.\(^2\) As Patrick J. Geary has argued, the “neutral” views of ethnic diversity found in Herodotus, the first ethnographer of the ancient world, were largely ignored by Roman historians who saw the prowess of Rome to be superior to that of other peoples.\(^3\) The essential ethnography that emerged proposed a dichotomy of Sameness and Otherness, or “us” and “them”, with preference naturally placed on the “us”.\(^4\) As Edward Said claims, “it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures”.\(^5\) Although Said is speaking of modern Europe, the same can be said of the dominant cultures of Late Antiquity, where cultural validity was determined by the social or spatial proximity that was shared with an accepted focal point. One of the primary manners in which individuals are able to view themselves in relation to the world around them is by means of mental maps that express cultural relationships over geographical reality.\(^6\) Ethnographers and geographers of Antiquity, for example, tended to orient the world with a specific focal point that then established centricity and marginality. The focal points expressed among classical and late antique texts, which depended

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\(^2\) The vast amount of debate and scholarship surrounding ethnography among ancient and late antique writers and “ethnogenesis” will not be dealt with in this study. For a brief overview of the main players in the debate, see Guy Halsall, Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568 (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 14–9.


\(^4\) Much has been written on postcolonial and postmodern anthropological theories of the Other or Alterity, and admittedly, the binary approach behind Sameness and Otherness is too simplistic to present a realistic picture of ancient ethnography. Elucidation of this topic, however, is beyond the scope of this study, but for a helpful introductory essay, see Johannes Fabian, “The Other Revisited: Critical Afterthoughts”, Anthropological Theory 6 (2006): 139–52.


\(^6\) The foundational study on mental mapping is Peter Gould and Rodney White, Mental Maps, 2nd ed., (Boston, MA: Allen and Unwin, 1986).
on the author and his religious orientations, included areas on the northern shores of the Mediterranean, especially Rome,\textsuperscript{7} and the religiously important city of Jerusalem.

For the inhabitants of ancient Israel, centrality played a major role in theological understanding. For example, according to Genesis, the source of the four rivers of Eden create the recognized geographical bounds of the Middle East (Gn 2:10–14);\textsuperscript{8} and in the Babel narrative, the builders build the tower as a focal point lest they “be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Gn 11:4). More commonly, Israel and Jerusalem in particular were thought to be at the centre of the world. In the retelling of the Table of Nations in 1 Chronicles, the genealogy functions as a \textit{mappa mundi}, in which the nations of the world are displayed counterclockwise “from the North, to the West, to the South, and to the East—with Israel in the center”.\textsuperscript{9} Likewise, according to Ezekiel, God has set Jerusalem in the centre “of the nations and countries” (Ez 5:5).

But the diversity created at the Tower of Babel was more commonly used to separate the world into individual ethnic entities by early Jewish authors; the tripartite division of the descendants of Noah outlasts any other ethnic division of the world until the modern period. Outside of the Old Testament canon, in a section of Jubilees that expands upon the Genesis narrative of the Table of Nations, the descendants of Sem came to inhabit the “center of the earth”, and were expected “to rule the world from their privileged position”.\textsuperscript{10} The descendants of Ham came to inhabit the hotter southern parts of the world (Jub 8:22–24), and those of Japheth the colder northern parts (Jub 8:25–30), a division that was likely influenced by a Greek division of the world.\textsuperscript{11} In all probability, the author of Jubilees and afterward Josephus, who felt the need to defend Judaism in a Graeco-Roman world, were eager to show that the tripartite division of the world, along with each part’s unique climate, was in accordance with Greek and Roman mental maps. Since the

\textsuperscript{7} On the other hand, see Alessandro Barchiesi, “Centre and Periphery”, in \textit{A Companion to Latin Literature}, ed. Stephen Harrison (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 394–405, at 394, who subverts the traditional notion of Roman centricity to argue that Rome saw itself as a “self-avowed periphery”.
\textsuperscript{10} James M. Scott, \textit{Geography in Early Judaism and Christianity: The Book of Jubilees} (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 33, who is commenting on Jub 8:12.
sons of Noah already had provided a nascent framework, it was no great task to accept the Graeco-Roman tradition that most easily corresponded to that of the Table of Nations. The so-called Sallust maps that appear in manuscripts of De bello Jugurthino (86–34 BC), which formed the basis for medieval TO maps, separated the world into the three continents Asia, Africa and Europe by a graphical division that has the semblance of a T inside of an O. Especially after Josephus had strengthened the bond between the tripartite division of the world with the three sons of Noah by syncretizing the names in the Table of Nations with contemporary ethnic groups, the Christians of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages were unable to view the world in any other manner: Sem’s descendants inhabited Asia, Japheth’s Europe, and Ham’s Africa.

According to Jewish thought, the area inhabited by Sem’s lineage, notably Jerusalem, remained at the centre of the earth despite the adoption of a classical, pagan tripartite division of the world. But according to other cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world, the location of the centre of the earth was naturally oriented to reflect individual ideas of cultural superiority. For the pagan authors of the classical or late antique periods in the West, a sense of cultural unity was strongly placed on proximity to the city of Rome. Ethnically, people who did not participate in the culture of Rome were often classed generically as barbarians—an often racist term originally borrowed from Greek ethnographers—despite numerous efforts to specify the various distinctions among the barbaric tribes. Geographically, even those who were living in Rome felt culturally superior to their fellow “provincial” citizens. As Ammianus Marcellinus states in the fourth century, “inanis flatus quorundam, vile esse quicquid extra urbis pomerium nascitur aestimant”, “the vain snorts of these people judge anything that arise beyond the boundary of the city [i.e. Rome] to be

14 See Geary, Myth of Nations, 48–9. For some authors, “barbaric” terms could also be applied to Romans who did not act with accepted morality; see T.E.J. Wiedemann, “Between Men and Beasts: Barbarians in Ammianus Marcellinus”, Past Perspectives: Studies in Greek and Roman Historical Writing, eds. I.S. Moxon, J.D. Smart and A.J. Woodman (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), 189–201, esp. 196.
worthless‖. Moreover, ethnic affiliation and geographical centrality were often not distinct from one another. Just as Jubilees claimed that Sem’s Israelite lineage was to rule the world from the superiority of its central position in Israel, the early-first-century pagan authors Strabo and Vitruvius claimed that the Grecian or Roman position at the centre of the earth endowed it with superiority to command control over the people living in the southern and northern regions. This centrality was also supported by the distinction between the different climate zones of the world, which is apparent in Roman authors and hinted at in Jubilees, and further reveals an ethnocentricity that posited a normal climate at the centre of the earth, and excessively hot or cold climates in the South or North, which would then affect the ethnic make-up of a person.

Among the early Christians, who borrowed mental maps and notions of geography from both the Judaic and classical traditions, a middle ground was sought. For one example, albeit atypical, Origen (c. 185–c. 254) states in his Contra Celsum that all humans originally spoke in a divine language (τῇ θείᾳ διαλέκτῳ) and lived in the East (τῶν ἀνατολῶν).

\[\text{paradidósódosan ἕκαστος κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς «ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν» κινήσεως, ἐπὶ πλείον ἢ ἐπὶ ἔλαττὸν αὕτως γεγενημένης, καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς κατασκευῆς τῶν πλίνθων εἰς λίθους καὶ τοῦ πηλοῦ εἰς ἀσφαλτόν καὶ τῆς ἐκ τῶν ὀίκοδομηῆς ἀγγέλου, ἐπὶ πλείον ἢ ἐπὶ ἔλαττὸν χαλεπωτέροις καὶ τοιούτῳ ἐπὶ ποιοτίᾳ, ἐως τίσῳ δίκας ἑφ’ οἷς τετολμήκασι· καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀγγέλους ἀγέσθωσαν ἕκαστος τῶν ἐμποιησάντων τὴν οἰκείαν ἐασθοῖς διάλεκτον ἐπὶ τὰ μέρη τῆς γῆς κατὰ τὴν ἐαυτῶν ἀξίαν, οἴδε μὲν ἐπὶ τὴν φέρ’ εἰπεῖν καιουδῆ χώραν ἀλλοί δ’ ἐπὶ τὴν διὰ τὸ κατεψύχθαι κολάζουσαν τοὺς ἐνοικοῦντας, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἐπὶ τὴν Διὸς πολεμοῦντας.}

δυσγεωργητότεραν ἄλλοι δὲ ἐπὶ τὴν ἔλαττον τοιαύτην, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἐπὶ τὴν πεπληρωμένην θηρίων οἱ δὲ ἐπὶ τὴν ἔλαττον ἔχουσαν αὐτά.

And each one is handed over to angels who are more or less stern and whose character varies in proportion to the distance that they moved from the east, whether they had travelled far or a little way, and in proportion to the amount of bricks made into stones and of clay into asphalt and to the size of the building made out of them. Under them they remained until they had paid the penalty for their boldness. And each one is led by angels, who put in them their native language, to the parts of the earth which they deserve. Some are led to parched land, for example; others to country which afflicts the inhabitants by being cold; and some to land that is difficult to cultivate; others to land that is less hard; and some to country full of wild beasts, and others to country that has them to a lesser degree.¹⁹

While Origen’s six-fold division of the inhabited world, which ultimately stems from Polybius,²⁰ becomes idiosyncratic and unpopular in later years, it does reveal an early Christian tendency to find compromises between the world-knowledge of Judaic and classical authorities. For the purposes of this study, it is notable that Origen uses the Tower of Babel narrative as a starting point for the world’s ethnic and linguistic diversity—diversity which is then corroborated by a classical scheme that helps to explain ethnic diversity by means of climate.

After the decline of the Roman Empire, the so-called barbarian tribes that came to occupy Europe made matters of ethnography more complicated not only through their own ethnic diversity, but also through a reorientation of the centrality of the world away from Rome or Jerusalem and into positions more agreeable to the geographical and ethnic spheres of individual authors. The once marginal barbarians had adopted the educational tools of the Romans to write about themselves and their own historical or political interests, and thereby shifted the focus away from Rome. This shift can be found among authors such as Gregory of Tours (538–94), incidentally a Gallo-Roman, who restructures the geographical bounds of his Historiae to focus

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on Gaul;\textsuperscript{21} or the Lombard Paul the Deacon (c. 720–c. 799), who reveals an interesting shift to prefer the Northern climates over the Mediterranean in the opening of his \textit{Historia Langobardorum}: “Septemtrionalis plaga quanto magis ab aestu solis remota est et nivali frigore gelida, tanto salubrior corporibus hominum et propagandis est gentibus coaptata”, “The more the northern region was removed from the heat of the sun and icy in the snowy cold, the more healthy it is for the bodies of humans and was more adapted for propagating nations”.\textsuperscript{22} The ways in which Anglo-Saxon authors reorganized their own views on centrality will be touched upon in later chapters.

\section*{2.2 Ethnography and Ethnic Diversity}

During the first centuries before and after Christ, Greek and Roman imperialism gave Jewish and Christian authors access to texts that offered new information about the ethnic diversity of the world that did not concur with those of the Old Testament; ancient observations regarding the number of people in the world varied greatly from that of the Table of Nations. Pagan authors, who probably did not know and probably would not have cared much about the authority of a Jewish Table of Nations, provided information that contrasted with the Genesis account. Many of the barbarian tribes mentioned by Pliny, Livy and Tacitus among others did not have any direct correspondence with the names of the Table of Nations, and the vastness of their number implied a limitlessness to the number of nations the world could hold. In the fourth century, historians such as Ammianus Marcellinus could make statements about the innumerability of the Scythian \textit{gentes}: “gentesque Scytharum innumerae, quae porriguntur ad usque terras sine cognito fine distentas”, “and [there are] innumerable tribes of the Scythians which extend even to lands that stretch to unknown boundaries”.\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{23} Ammianus Marcellinus, \textit{Ammianus Marcellinus}, vol. 2, XXII.8.42; see also Geary, \textit{Myth of Nations}, 48.
Despite the clash between pagan and Jewish accounts, efforts were made among Christians to converge and facilitate the differing cultural notions regarding ethnic diversity. Luke, for example, provides new ethnic groups in his own version of the Table of Nations in Acts 2:9–11 that, despite its ethnographical paucity, takes into account areas of the world that are not mentioned in Genesis. Likewise, Tertullian (c. 160–c. 225) provides a revised list of nations in his Adversus Iudaeos that expands Luke’s account. After positing the rhetorical question, “In quem enim alium uniuersae gentes crediderunt, nisi in Christum, qui iam uenit”, “in whom else do all the nations believe except Christ who has already come”, Tertullian lists the nations mentioned in Acts 2:9–11, and then offers his own supplementation:

et ceterae gentes, ut iam Getulorum uarietates et Maurorum multi fines <et> Hispaniarum omnes termini et Galliarum diuersae nationes et Britannorum inacessa Romanis loca, Christo uero subdita, et Sarmatarum et Dacorum et Germanorum et Scytharum et abditarum multarum gentium et prouinciarum et insularum nobis ignotarum [et], quae enumerare minus possumus

and other nations such as the various nations of the Gaetuli, and the many boundaries of the Moors, and all the borders of the Spanish, and the diverse nations of the Gauls and the realms of the British that are inaccessible to the Romans but are placed under Christ, and those places of the Sarmatians and Dacians and Germans and Scythians and many other nations and provinces and islands that are unknown to us, which we are not able to recount.

Furthermore, among some Christian writers, attempts were made to interpret the names in the original Table of Nations according to the new awareness of ethnic diversity. In Hippolytus’s


chronicle, as discussed above, 26 72 languages of the world are listed, but only some correspond to biblical peoples—those without a biblical equivalent have been borrowed from classical authors such as Strabo or Herodotus. With Hippolytus, the Jewish centrality of the Table of Nations also shifts in favour of a Mediterranean viewpoint—one that includes relatively exotic languages, such as Ἡνδοί, Indian, or Βριτανοί, British, but gives much more attention to the specific languages and dialects that would be familiar to the Greek author of the chronicle, or at least to the authors that he is borrowing from.

Moreover, because the notion of the 72 nations of the world was not rigidly held, it was not a problem to make claims about the vastness of ethnic diversity in the world. Again, Augustine explicitly states that there were numerous African nations who all spoke one language, and Arnobius shifts the emphasis from the 72 nations to the thousand (ambiguously termed) patriae or generationes who spoke a total of 72 languages. 27 A few centuries later, Isidore gives two of the most explicit statements on the matter: “initio autem quot gentes, tot linguae fuerunt, deinde plures gentes quam linguae; quia ex una lingua multae sunt gentes exortae”, “originally there were as many nations as languages, but later more nations than languages, because from one language many nations arose”, 28 and later, “ex linguis gentes, non ex gentibus linguae exortae sunt”, “nations arise from languages, not languages from nations”. 29

Another strategy that was employed to account for the discrepancies between the biblical texts and the awareness of ethnic diversity attempted to trace back the ethnicities of an individual people by means of origines gentium myths, which could make tenuous connections to a name in the Table of Nations with a contemporary (or more well known) people. 30 Once a contemporary name is connected to a biblical one, possibilities arise for creating biblically supported attitudes towards a specific people. An association between the contemporary Goths and the biblical

26 See above pp. 23–4.
28 Isidore, Ety IX.i.1. Despite the word initio here, this sentence must referring to gentes that arise out of the 72 original nations, since earlier Isidore states, “una omnium nationum lingua fuit, quae Hebraea vocatur”, “there was one language for all the nations”.
29 Isidore, Ety IX.i.14.
Magog, for example, could enable writers of Late Antiquity to associate the Goths with the same negativity that the Bible allotss to Magog. But because there was no actual historical connection between the Goths and Magog, folk etymology had to be employed on account of the similarities between the word *Gothus* and Magog or its equivalent Gog. After this false etymological connection had been established, the apocalyptic disposition of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38:2 and Revelation 20:8 could be associated with the Goths, who would then be thought of as demonic agents that would help usher in the end of the world.\(^{31}\) The Goths, however, had already been viewed negatively as barbarians antagonistic to the Roman Empire before the connection to Magog and Gog was established.\(^{32}\) Folk etymology was simply used to corroborate not only an opinion already in existence, but also the biblical account that could be interpreted as providing accurate insights into the actions of future nations.\(^{33}\) Moreover, the effectiveness of associating Gog and Magog with a negatively viewed ethnic group is attested throughout the Middle Ages: Matthew Paris, a thirteenth-century English chronicler, would connect Gog and Magog to the Mongols,\(^{34}\) and notably in Anglo-Saxon England, the Old English homilist Wulfstan, or one of his imitators, would define them as an Eastern people who represented helpers of the antichrist:

> “God … læt þone deofol Antecrist rabbian 7 wedan sume hwile 7 þa ðe him fylstað [þæt is Gog 7 Magog, þæt beoð þa mancyn þe Alexander beclyysde binnan munctlysan]”, “God … allows the devil, the antichrist to rage and rave for awhile along with those who help him, that is, Gog and Magog: these are the people that Alexander enclosed within a mountain prison”.\(^{35}\)

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\(^{31}\) Ambrose seems to be the first to make this connection: “Gog iste Gothus est, quem jam videmus exisse”; *De fide ad Gratianum Augustum libri quinque*, PL 16, col. 588A, II.16.138; see Borst II.384. Jerome, *HQG*, 10.21, p. 11, however, questions the association between Magog and the Goths, and Augustine states that Gog and Magog are not to be understood as “aliqui in aliqua parte terrarum barbari”, “certain barbarians in a certain part of the earth”; *DCD*, XX.xi.13. See also Isidore, *Ety* IX.ii.27: “Magog, a quo arbitrantur Scythas et Gothos traxiosse originem”; IX.ii.89: “Gothi a Magog”; and XIV.iii.31: “Scythia sicut et Gothia a Magog”.


\(^{33}\) Similarly, the Picts were understood by Bede, *HE* I.1, to be Scythians, who were also associated with Magog by Christian etymologists.

\(^{34}\) Heather Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 84–5.

Likewise, an ethnic group could be traced back to a biblical name for positive propaganda, especially when the specific author associated himself with that ethnic group. For instance, as soon as a connection between any ethnic group and the Romans was established (a usually positive connection in itself), a further connection to a name in the Table of Nations was not difficult, since according to many Christian authors, the Romans were descendants of Japheth’s son, Kittim.\footnote{See Borst II.935; Jerome, however, interprets Kittim as “Citii, a quibus hodieque urbs Cypri Citium nominatur”, “the Citii from whom even today the city of Cyprus is called Citium”; \textit{HQG}, 10.4.8, p. 12.} Also, in many cases, ethnic groups were given origins that could be traced back to the fall and dispersal of the people of Troy.\footnote{See Reynolds, “Medieval \textit{Origines Gentium} and the Community of the Realm “, 376–7; Ian Wood, “Defining the Franks: Frankish Origins in Early Medieval Historiography”, in \textit{Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages}, eds. Simon Forde, Lesley Johnson and Alan V. Murray. Leeds Texts and Monographs, n.s. 14 (Leeds: Leeds Studies in English, 1995), 46–57; and Matthew Innes, “Teutons or Trojans? The Carolingians and the Germanic Past”, in \textit{The Uses of the Past in the early Middle Ages}, eds. Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 227–49. For the debate on the genre of the \textit{origo gentis}, see Goffart, \textit{The Narrators of Barbarian History}, ix–v; Herwig Wolfram, \textit{The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples}, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 31–4; and idem, “\textit{Origo et religio}: Ethnic Traditions and Literature in Early Medieval Texts", \textit{From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms: Rewriting Histories}, ed. Thomas F.X. Noble (London: Routledge, 2006), 70–90.} In these cases, any ethnic group that could be connected to Troy could then be associated with the original grandeur of Troy, which might parallel or even surpass that of the Roman Empire.

A second, and often related, strategy consisted in the promulgation of sometimes completely fabricated genealogies. The ninth-century \textit{Historia Brittonum} by pseudo-Nennius, which had minor influence in Anglo-Saxon England,\footnote{For the false attribution to Nennius, see David N. Dumville, “‘Nennius’ and the \textit{Historia Brittonum}”, \textit{Studia Celtica} 10–1 (1975–6): 78–95. Asser appears to have been familiar with the \textit{Histiria Brittonum}; see Lapidge, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Library}, 239.} is able to confirm the origin of the British people through its eponymous founder, Brutus, and the biblically sanctioned Table of Nations by means of a complex lineage. The author begins with Noah’s sons and proceeds to give a genealogy down to the founder of Britain:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
I learned another explanation about that Brutus from the ancient books of our elders. Three sons of Noah divided the earth into three parts after the Flood—Sem in Asia, Ham in Africa, Japheth in Europe—and dispersed to its ends. The first man who came to Europe was Alanus with his three sons whose names were Hisicion, Armenon and Neugio. And from Hisicion arose four nations—the Franks, the Latini, the Alamanni and the Britons.\(^{39}\)

In this instance, the mention of the three sons of Alanus, which itself is analogous to the three sons of Noah, has most likely been derived from a Graeco-Roman tradition. The attribution of the origins of the German people to three sons appears in Tacitus’s *Germania*, which may be connected to Herodotus’ origins of the Scythians.\(^{40}\) After Tacitus, the three sons appear in the so-called, “Frankish Table of Nations”, and then in the *Historia Brittonum*.\(^{41}\) There is also an analogue in Old Norse mythology involving the three first Æsir: Odin, Vili and Ve,\(^{42}\) and it is clear that the motif of the three sons could be employed by an author without any specific source in mind.

Furthermore, in accordance with its eclectic nature, the *Historia Brittonum* offers two other elaborate genealogies that give full record of the lineage between Alanus and Adam (via Noah):


\begin{align*}
\text{Aulanus}, & \text{ ut aiunt, filius fuit Fethuir, Fethuir filius Ogomuin, Ogomuin filius Thoi; Thoi filius Boib, Boib filius Simion, Semion filius Mair; Mair filius fuit Ecthactus, Ecthactus filius Aurtherc, Aurtherc filius Ethec, Ethec filius Ooth, Ooth filius Abir, Abir filius Ra,}
\end{align*}


\(^{40}\) Geary, *Myth of Nations*, 44, 51–2. For Tacitus, see M. Winterbottom, ed., *De origine et situ Germanorum*, in M. Winterbottom and R.M. Ogilvie, eds., *Cornelii Taciti opera minora* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), § 2.8–10: “Manno tris filios adsignant, e quorum nominibus proximi Oceano Ingaevones, medii Hermiones, ceteri Istaevones vocentur”, “they assign three sons to Mannus, from whose names are termed the Ingaevones who are closest to the ocean, the Hermiones who are in the middle, and the Istaevones who are the rest”. For Herodotus, see Karl Hude, ed., *Herodoti Historiae*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), IV.5.2–IV.6.1: “γενέσθαι πάιδας τρεῖς, Λιπόξαιν καὶ Ἀρπόξαιν καὶ νεῶταν Κολάξαιν … ἀπὸ μὲν δὲ Λιπόξαιος γεγονέναι τούτους τῶν Σκύθων οἱ Αὐχάται γένος καλέονται, ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ μέσου Ἀρπόξαῖος οἱ Κατίαροι τε καὶ Τράσπιες καλόνται, ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ νεωτάου αὐτῶν τοὺς βασιλέας, οἱ καλόνται Παραλάται”, “he bore three sons: Lipoxais, Arpoxais and the youngest Kolaxais … From Lipoxais were born the Scythians who are referred to as the Auchatae race; from the middle son Aproxais were born those referred to as Katiarians and Trasprians, and from the youngest son were born the kingly [Scythians] who are referred to as Paralatians”.


\(^{42}\) See Andy Orchard, *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend* (London: Cassell, 1997), s.v. ‘Odin’, 123, and ‘Vili(r)’, 175.
Ra filius Esraa, Esraa filius Hisrau, Hisrau filius Bath, Bath filius Iobath, Iobath filius Iohan, Iohan filius Iafeth, Iafeth filius Noe, Noe filius Lamech, Lamech filius Matusalem, Matusalem filius Enoch, Enoch filius Iared, Iared filius Malalehel, Malalehel filius Cainan, Cainan filius Enos, Enos filius Seth, Seth filius Adam, Adam filius et plasmatio Dei uiui.

Bryttones a Bruto dicti; Brutus filius Hisicionis, Hisicion filius Alani, Alanus filius Reae Silueae, Rea Siluea filia Numae Pampilii, Numa filius Ascanii, Ascanius filius Eneae, Aeneas filius Anchisae, Anchises filius Troi, Troius filius Dardani, Dardanus filius Flisae, Flisa filius Iuuani, Iuuan filius Iafeth.  

The first of these genealogies uses a series of suspect Jewish-looking names, Ooth, Ra, Esraa, Hirau, Bath, and Iobath, to connect Alanus nominally to the Israelites and genealogically to the “living God”. The second, which offers anew a lineage that includes the Roman heritage of Aeneas and the Trojans, not only affirms the authority of the biblical and Roman genealogies, but also allows the existence of a British people to be affirmed through the biblical and Roman narratives. The phrase, “ut aiunt”, while further supporting the textual validity of the biblical and Roman accounts, also reveals the acceptance of such conglomeration of biblical and non-biblical witness.

3 Linguistic Diversity

While the numerical limitations set upon the Table of Nations were questioned and reshaped to reflect current ethnography, the limitation of 72 as the number of languages of the world was for the most part not altered. In contrast to the more fluid notions of ethnic multiplicity, the static notions of linguistic diversity among Christians of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages is observed among Augustine and Arnobius, for example, who state that many nations speak the same language, but that there does not seem to be more than 72 languages in total. In all likelihood the more or less stable linguistic control that Latin and Greek had over the Roman

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43 Dumville, ed., The Historia Brittonum 7; these passages need not to be translated. See also Isidore, Ety. 9.2.102, for the association between Brutus and Britain.
44 See Thiel, Grundlagen ung Gestalt der Hebräischkenntnisse, 149 (oth), 387 (raah), 309 (Ezra-), 244 (Hira / Aras), 260 (bath), 332 (Jobad)
45 Aldhelm provides a unique example by stating that there were only 70 languages spoken at Pentecost; see above pp. 46–7.
world prevented much discussion on the multiplicity of languages.\textsuperscript{46} In the words of Umberto Eco, “A civilization with an international language does not need to worry about the multiplicity of tongues”.\textsuperscript{47} The kind of theological limitation to linguistic diversity that lies behind the Christian notions of the 72 languages of the world does not seem to have been a concern to the Roman mind. However, some Romans did assume that there were potentially just as many languages as there were distinct, and unassimilated, ethnic groups. Pliny the Elder, for example, makes mention of “tot gentium sermones, tot linguae, tanta loquendi varietas”, “so many languages of the nations, so many tongues, such great variety of speaking”,\textsuperscript{48} and later provides an anecdote on the linguistic ability of the Persian king Mithridates, who knew all of the twenty-two languages of the twenty-two gentes that he ruled over: “Mithridates duarum et viginti gentium rex totidem linguis iura dixit, pro contione singulas sine interprete adfatus”, “Mithridates, king of twenty-two nations, uttered laws in the same number of languages, and spoke to each nation before an assembly without an interpreter”.\textsuperscript{49}

From the Christian perspective, however, there was general agreement that, unlike ethnic groups, languages revealed little or no change throughout history. Many authors, for example, argued that the Hebrew language, which was regarded as the language of Adam, remained unchanged after the manifestation of linguistic diversity at the Tower of Babel.\textsuperscript{50} Notably, by the later Anglo-Saxon period, Ælfric is able to claim that the animals Adam named in Eden have retained their Hebrew names: “adam him eallum naman gesceop. 7 swa swa hé hí þa genamode. swa hí sindon gyt gehatene”, “Adam created a name for all [of the animals] and whatever he named them, they are still called”.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{46} See Balsdon, Romans and Aliens, 137–45, esp. 137: “we hear surprisingly little of language difficulties in antiquity; only in the Bible does the story of the Tower of Babel point to the segregation of humanity through differences in language”. Balsdon also provides a few anecdotes on regions thought to contain many more languages than 72, 144.


\textsuperscript{49} Pliny, Pliny: Natural History, VII.88.xxiv; see Balsdon, Romans and Aliens, 144. Emily Elisabeth Butler gives this example of Mithridates as an analogue to the linguistic capacities of the Anglo-Saxon king Oswald, “Textual Community and Linguistic Distance in Early England”, PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010, 33, nt. 50.


\textsuperscript{51} Ælfric, CHomI 1.85–6.
the language spoken by Israelites in the first centuries after Christ, was considered a language separate from Hebrew, even though philologically it is simply a later development of classical Hebrew. Alternatively, dialectal and sociolectal differences were recognized in Late Antiquity. Isidore, for example, lists five different dialects of Greek, and four dialects of Latin, and the enigmatic seventh-century grammarian, Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, proposes that there were even twelve Latinities: “Latinitatis autem genera sunt XII”, “there are twelve types of Latinity”. Evidently, Christian authors of Late Antiquity in the West were more concerned with presenting knowledge of the dialects of Latin and Greek than with the dialects of languages that were more exotic, infrequently known or of lower status.

Along with dialectal variation dependant on regional differences, late antique and early medieval authors also show an awareness of sociolectal variation dependant on differences of social class. However, as with their treatments of the dialects of Latin and Greek, these authors did not think that sociolectal variations constituted enough difference for new language categorization. For example, the ubiquitous, rhetorical topos of the *sermo rusticus* may in some cases indicate an awareness of sociolectal variation, but variation that is still categorized within the Latin language. The topos of the *sermo rusticus*, however, only provides limited evidence for sociolinguistic notions of linguistic hegemony and quasi-prescriptivism in Late Antiquity and the

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53 Isidore, *Ety* IX.i.4–7. See also the comment by Servius Grammaticus, *In Vergilii carmina commentarii*, vol. 1, eds. Georg Thilo and Hermann Hagen (Leipzig: Teubner, 1881), III.122: “quinque Graecae sunt linguae, Aeolica, Ica, Dorica, Attica, communis”, “There are five Greek languages: Aeolian, Ionian, Doric, Attic, and koine”.


Middle Ages. Incidental anecdotes have the potential to expose more telling evidence. For instance, Bede offers a story of an Anglo-Saxon prisoner who is recognized as a noble by his appearance, clothing and speech (“ex uultu et habitu et sermonibus”). Such a narrative detail indicates that sociolects were distinguished in early Anglo-Saxon England, but not different enough to be considered separate languages. The limitations that the Bible and other ancient texts placed on linguistic diversity provide a conceivable basis for knowledge of the languages of the world among Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. While an author such as Augustine, who had experience with the ethnic diversity of North Africa, could speak of numerous gentes, he could not yet speak of the numerous languages of Africa.

4 Christian Identity

Within the multicultural and multilingual world of Late Antiquity, the early Church had to form a distinct identity that was not dependant on ethnicity, but rather on shared beliefs. In light of two clashing traditions, the Jewish Table of Nations and Greek and Roman accounts of the world’s ethnic diversity, along with the expansion of Christianity to the gentile world, early Christians refigured their own relationship with non-Christians, especially in quasi-ethnic terms. Hence arose the notion of the Christian genus that tried to distance itself from, or claim superiority over, Jewish and pagan religions, philosophies and even ethnicity. World diversity occurred at Babel, but especially through the unity of diversity at Pentecost, all Christian people, though separated by culture and language, were united by faith. The conditions in which people looked at ethnic diversity, therefore, greatly changed. Barbarian tribes were no longer necessarily seen in a negative light, but rather as people who potentially played an important part in salvation history. The result of such a shift created new uniting factors; those who believed in the orthodox teachings of Christianity were accepted as a separate Christian genus despite their previous ethnic or cultural background, while those who did not—Jews, pagans or heretics—

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57 One contrary example made be found in Seneca, Apocolocyntosis, ed. P.T. Eden (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), 5.3, p. 36, where Hercules thinks that Claudius’s “uocem nullius terrestris animalis sed qualis esse marinis beluis solet”, “language was typical of no land animal, but of the sort of a sea monster”; see also Balsdon, Romans and Aliens, 137.
58 Bede, HE IV.22.
59 This theme will be important among the writings of Bede; see Georges Tugene, L’idée de nation chez Bède le Vénérable, Collection des Études Augustiniennes – Série Moyen Âge et Temps Modernes 37 (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 2001), 302: “Il était du moins tenu de justifier en droit cette pluralité de fait, de l’intégrer dans sa vision d’un peuple chrétien indivis dans sa foi.”
became associated with the negativity once attributed to those on the cultural peripheries by classical authors. While a dichotomy between “us” and “them” remained intact, along with the various manners of describing each group, new qualifications arose for inclusion or exclusion.60

Early Christians, finding themselves in opposition to the classical pagan religions, but no longer compatible with the Jewish religion, found a new route to maneuver by identifying themselves as a tertium genus, a third race.61 Clement of Alexandria’s Stromata is the earliest surviving Christian source to claim identification with the “third race”, in a quotation from the now lost Kerygma Petri, a New Testament apocryphal work.62

«νέαν ἡμῖν διέθετο· τὰ γάρ Ἑλλήνων καὶ Ἰουδαίων παλαιά, ἣμεῖς δὲ οἱ καινῶς αὐτῶν τρίτῳ γένει σεβόμενοι Χριστιανοί.» σαφῶς γάρ, οίμαι, ἐδήλωσε τὸν ἑνα καὶ μόνον θεὸν ύπὸ μὲν Ἑλλήνων ἑθικῶς, ύπὸ δὲ Ἰουδαίων ἱστορικῶς, καινῶς δὲ ύπ’ ἡμῶν καὶ πνευματικῶς γινωσκόμενον

“He conferred upon us a new [covenant]; for those things of the Greeks and of the Jews are old. But in new ways, we are Christians, who, as a third race, revere him”. For clearly, I think, he revealed that the one and only God was known by the Greeks in Gentile ways, by the Jews in Jewish ways, and by us in new and spiritual ways.63

Although a proper study of the tertium genus is far beyond the scope of this study, it does figure importantly into the manners in which early Christians felt the need to reposition themselves in terms of the religious diversity around them. It may be significant that the term tertium genus has parallels among the later attitudes towards the descendants of Japheth who were neither inherently favoured like the descendants of Sem, nor cursed like the descendants of Ham. By adopting a middle way, the concept of the tertium genus is able to free itself from the restrictions

60 See Aaron P. Johnson, Ethnicity and Argument in Eusebius’ Praeparatio evangelica (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 1–2.
61 See Adolf Harnack, The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, vol. 1, trans. by James Moffatt (London: Williams & Norgate, 1904), 313–52; and Christine Mohrmann, “‘Tertium genus’ les relations judaïsme, antiquité, christianisme reflétées dans la langue des Chrétiens”, in Études sur le latin des chrétiens, vol. 4, 195–210, esp. 195–7; and the important caveat in eadem, “Linguistic Problems in the Early Christian Church”, in Études sur le latin des chrétiens, vol. 3 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1965), 171–96, at 172: “the word γένος here is used in a religious, spiritual sense. It rises above all ethnic ideas, and indicates that the Christians are new as ἐκκλησία, as a religious community, as much with respect to the Jewish religious community as to paganism”.
62 Most of the Kerygma Petri survives only in quotations from Clement and Origen; these fragments have been edited by Michel Cambe, Kerygma Petri, CCSA 15 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003).
63 Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, VI.v.41.6–7.
of ethnicity in salvation history. It distances itself from both the theological concepts of the election of a specific ethnic group, such as the Jews, and the unacceptability of the religions of the pagans. But by doing so, early Christians had to reexamine the negative account of Babel to view diversity positively. The outcome presented Christianity with a powerful tool—the ability to be united as a community based on shared faith despite any political, ethnic or linguistic barriers.

This ambiguous, or rather lack of specific, ethnic or national identification among the early Christians was a point of criticism that was capitalized upon by some of Christianity’s early opponents. In the “first detailed pagan attack in writing against Christianity”, the pagan Celsus, whose arguments Origen adresses in his Contra Celsum, criticized Christians for being landless and therefore lawless. As Joseph Ratzinger writes, “Kelsos wirft den Christen nicht bloß eine gesetzeswidrige Verschwörung vor, er behauptet, sie seien vaterlandslose Gesellen, die nirgends hingehörten, die ihr völkisches Gesetz verraten und sich so außerhalb aller Gesetze gestellt hätten”. But it was exactly this transcendence of nationality that gave Christianity its evangelizing force. Origen is able to retort to Celsus that nationalistic association is a result of the sinful division at the Tower of Babel, when people left the East and were given over to specific angels. Only Israel remained behind in the East, who had no nationalizing angel, but God himself, whom the Christians now follow.

Likewise, Eusebius, writing about a hundred years later, was eager to show that Christians constituted a new type of group that transcends nationalistic or ethnic categories. In his Praeparatio Evangelica, he writes:

Πρὸς τὸν μὲν γὰρ εἰκότως ἂν τις ἀπορήσει, τίνες ὄντες ἐπὶ τὴν γραφὴν παρελθόθαμεν, πότερον Ἐλληνες ἢ βάρβαροι, ἢ τί ἄν γένοιτo τούτον μέσον; καὶ τίνας ἔαυτος εἴναι φαμεν, οὐ τὴν προσηγορίαν, οτι καὶ τοῖς πᾶσιν ἐκδήλος αὐτη, ἄλλα τὸν τρόπον καὶ τὴν

65 Ratzinger, Die Einheit der Nationen, 41.
προαίρεσιν τοῦ βίου; οὖτε γὰρ τὰ Ἑλλήνων φρονοῦντας ὁρῶν οὔτε τὰ βαρβάρων ἐπιτηδεύοντας

For in the first place any one might naturally want to know who we are that have come forward to write. Are we Greeks or Barbarians? Or what can there be intermediate to these? and what do we claim to be, not in regard to the name, because this is manifest to all, but in manner and purpose of our life? For they would see that we agree neither with the opinions of the Greeks, nor with the customs of the barbarians.67

But more significantly, in his Historia ecclesiastica, which played an important role in the West through its Latin translation by Rufinus, Eusebius claims that Christ is honoured “παρὰ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις καθ’ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου”, “by all humans and throughout the whole world”, and that Christians form a “νέον … ἔθνος, οὐ μικρὸν οὐδ’ ἀσθενές οὐδ’ ἐπὶ γωνίας ποι γῆς ἱδρυμένον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν πολυανθρωπότατον τε καὶ θεοσεβέστατον”, “a new race, not small nor weak nor established in a corner somewhere on the earth, but the most populous and devout of all nations”.68 Even Eusebius’s choice of words reflects the transcendence of Christianity over politically or ethnically divided lands: κόσμος, “the sum total of everything here and now”, is contrasted with γῆ, “portions or regions of the earth”.69

The desire to establish a connection between the newness of the Christian genus and a respected wisdom that reaches back to the beginning of human civilization is typical for Eusebius. As many scholars have pointed out, the Eusebian theology of history is most interested with showing the primacy of the Church to all other religions, including Judaism, which, according to Eusebius, began only with the giving of the Mosaic Law and, thereby, excluded the patriarchs.70

As Robert W. Hanning states, Eusebius’s theology of history “gave a literal fullness to the

history of the church even beyond what could be claimed as a result of typology. The patriarchs did not prefigure the church of Christ; they were its first concrete manifestation”.\(^{71}\) Such a theology is able to shift the emphasis away from strict ethnicity and “is perhaps more easily universalized to include not only Israel but all nations in a providential relationship with God”.\(^{72}\) Salvation history, therefore, becomes more of a “battle between the devil and Christ”\(^{73}\) than the election of one race. Eusebius, in the words of Arthur J. Droge, has “produced a new kind of national history” that claimed Christianity “was not just a religious movement but a ‘nation’”, but this notion of a Christian nation defies ethnic categorization by focusing on the congruity of its doctrine and practice with the ancient patriarchs.\(^{74}\)

A similar kind of theology, about a century after Eusebius, can also be found in Augustine’s notions of the city of God and the city of the Devil.\(^{75}\) In his *De ciuitate Dei*, Augustine, borrowing from Cicero, defines *populus* as: “Populus est coetus multitudinis rationalis rerum quas diligit concordi communione sociatus”, “A ‘people’ is a rational assembly of a multitude who are joined by a shared association of the things which they love”.\(^{76}\) Such a definition fits accordingly with Augustine’s theology of the two cities; those who are drawn to love God and the good form a specific *populus* that differs from those who do not. While this theology differs somewhat from the Eusebian model that identifies the Christian genus as a kind of primitive Israel, it is important in its contrast between Jerusalem, the symbolic City of God, and Babylon (or Babel), the symbolic City of Devil.

Augustine’s opposition between the city of the Devil and the city of God, which is strengthened by the typology between Babylon and Jerusalem, lies at the heart of his interpretation of the Tower of Babel narrative. In his *De ciuitate Dei*, Augustine underlines the confusion of Babylon by drawing attention to the Tower of Babel narrative: “Ista ciuitas, quae appellata est confusio, ipsa est Babylon, cuius mirabilem constructionem etiam gentium commendat historia. Babylon

\(^{71}\) Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain*, 24.


\(^{75}\) For Augustine’s theology of the two cities, see Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine’s City of God and the Sources of his Doctrine of the Two Cities*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

quippe interpretatur confusio‖, “This city, which is called confusion is Babylon itself, whose wondrous building, even the history of pagans commends. Indeed, Babylon is interpreted as confusion”.

To highlight the confusion of Babylon even further, Augustine uses the word *confusio* alongside Babylon four other times in book sixteen, and twice afterwards. But the most succinct account of Augustine’s theology of the two cities is not found in *De ciuitate Dei*, but rather in his commentary on Psalm 61, where Augustine clearly outlines the dichotomy between Babylon and Jerusalem, and the city of the Devil and the City of God:


Quid autem illi diuersi errores inimici Christi, omnes tantum dicendi sunt? nonne et unus? Plane audeo et unum dicere; quia una ciiuitas et una ciiuitas, unus populus et unus populus, rex et rex. Quid est: una ciiuitas et una ciiuitas? Babylonia una; Ierusalem una. Quibuslibet aliis etiam mysticis nominibus appelletur, una tamen ciiuitas et una ciiuitas: illa rege diabolo; ista rege Christo.

And why should those diverse errors of the enemy of Christ all be described as such? Are they not one? I dare to say openly they are one, because there is one city and one city, one people and one people, a king and a king. What do I mean by one city and one city? Babylon is one, Jerusalem the other. Whatever other spiritual names are used, there is nevertheless one city and one city: the one has the Devil as its king, the other has Christ as its king.

In line with the early Christian notions of a *tertium genus*, Augustine has abolished all remnants of ethnicity in order to focus the dichotomy within his theology of the two cities. Identification is no longer dependant on ethnic or linguistic characteristics, but on participation as a citizen in one of the two spiritual cities.

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78 Augustine, *DCD* XVI.x.5, xi.6–7, xi.72–3, and xvii.26–7.

79 Augustine, *DCD* XVII.xvi.62, and XVIII.lxi.70; see also the reference to the “ciuitas confusionis”, “city of confusion”, at XVIII.li.5.

Furthermore, along with this abolition of ethnic and linguistic identity in lieu of new, spiritual identification, also comes an irony that is created by describing a unified *ciuitas* that is based in diversity and confusion. While, for Augustine, the nations were dispersed at the historical Tower of Babel, the spiritual city of the Devil (Babel or Babylon), is not dispersed, but united (*una*). Indeed, though the city of God is also united in the exact same terms, according to Augustine’s theology, the roles, in a sense, have reversed, and it is now the Church, not the proud builders, that is dispersed throughout the world. As Peter Brown has pointed out, similar sentiment can be found elsewhere in Augustine’s writings where Augustine speaks of a Jewish, heretical and pagan “unity over against our Unity” of the Catholic Church, which, nevertheless, “had spread throughout the world”—the “principle argument”, according to Brown, “used to impress a pagan”.81 The unity of the Catholic Church finds much strength in its ability to transcend the ethnic boundaries created at Babel and spread across the world.

A fitting counterpart is found in Augustine’s slightly older contemporary, Rufinus of Aquileia, in whose translation of Eusebius’s *Historia ecclesaistica* that is quoted above,82 he alters the Greek in such a manner as to highlight Church’s dispersal among the nations. Rufinus’s translation, “Christi … nomen … per omnes nationes et per universum orbem terrae diffusum est”, “the name of Christ has been dispersed through all the nations and through the entire world”,83 provides greater affiliation with the Tower of Babel narrative than does Eusebius’s Greek, notably with its use of the word *nationes* for *πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις*, and the addition of the verb *diffusum est*. Rufinus’s alteration to Eusebius reveals the similar kind of sentiment found in Augustine: the unity of the Church is superior to that of heretics, pagans or Jews in that it transcends the ethnic and linguistic limitations created at Babel by ignoring, or even enveloping, those limitations.

By the seventh century, Isidore, drawing on Augustine, also reverses the dispersal of Babel in order to imply that only the Church is capable of spreading across the entire globe: “Catholica, universalis, ἀπὸ τοῦ καθ’ ὅλον, id est secundum totum. Non enim sicut conveniticia haereticorum in aliquibus regionum partibus coartatus, sed per totum terrarum orbem dilatata

82 P. 134.
diffunditur”, “Catholic means ‘universal’ from the Greek καθὸ ὅλον, that is ‘according to the whole’. For it is not restricted to certain parts of regions like the assemblies of heretics, but it is spread out, extended through the entire world”. According to Isidore and the Augustinian tradition that preceded him, the dispersing effects of the Tower of Babel have been adopted in order to show the solidarity of the Church throughout all the lands—something that neither Jews, nor heretics, nor adherents of pagan cults could claim for themselves.

5 Pentecost and the Evangelization of the Nations

The New Testament played an important role in the new reorientation of the world, as it declaimed the exclusiveness of salvation to the Jews, and revealed a Gospel that did not discriminate among nations. Jesus’ Great Commission was to preach the Gospel to “all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mt 28:19). The book of Acts is essentially a narrative that moves the focal point of the Church from Jerusalem, the capital of a Jewish world, to Rome, the capital of the gentile world. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles who claims that he himself was “made all things to all men” (1Co 9:22), described the image of Christ as that “where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all and in all” (Col 3:11). And as was discussed in the preceding chapters, the 72 disciples who were sent out to preach to the nations, along with their typological connections to the 72 nations of Babel, underlined the potential universality of Christianity.

Along with these examples, the universalism of the Church expressed in the narrative of Pentecost also guarded the early Church, for the most part, from discrimination based on linguistic differences. Although linguistic diversity was created at Tower of Babel, it was sanctified at Pentecost, and Pentecost became intricately connected to Babel as its New Testament typology. But despite the prominence of this typology in Christian intellectual history, biblical scholars have debated whether Luke, the author of Acts, was deliberately making

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84 Isidore, Ety VIII.i.1. The likely source for this line is from Augustine’s Epistula 52, ed. Al. Goldbacher, Epistulae, CSEL 34.2 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1898), LII.1: “ipsa est enim ecclesia catholica, unde καθολικὴ graece appellatur, quod per totum orbem terrarum diffunditutur”.
85 See James M. Scott, Paul and the Nations: The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul’s Mission to the Nations with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1995), 163–5; and idem, Geography in Early Judaism and Christianity: The Book of Jubilees, 57, “Jerusalem remains the center and focal point of Acts from first to last. Only when Paul finally comes to Rome does Jerusalem recede from view”.

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allusion to the Babel narrative when he composed the Pentecost narrative. Luke may have had the Table of Nations in mind when he wrote the tenth chapter of his Gospel, and it is clear that there are at least thematic similarities between the Babel narrative and the Pentecost narrative. The one separates the nations and languages of the world by divine action, while the other brings them together by divine action. Moreover, the contemporary, albeit much abridged, Table of Nations in Acts 2:9–11 mentions the people of various nations who were present at Pentecost. While those at Pentecost would likely have been Jews who had spread abroad to all nations during the Diaspora (Act 2:5), Luke places more emphasis on ethnic and linguistic inclusiveness that transcends specifically Jewish identity. In any case, along with the Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel narrative, which both stressed ethnic and linguistic diversity, Luke has provided a biblical passage that was to present to Christians a worldview that emphasized ecclesiastical unity despite, or rather by means of, ethnic and linguistic diversity.

Although the Pentecost narrative does not suggest that all the languages of the world were spoken in Jerusalem on that day, such a notion was quickly adopted, which in turn facilitated stronger typological connections between Babel and Pentecost. Irenaeus, in his *Adversus haereses*, does not explicitly mention the Tower of Babel in connection to Pentecost, but provides undertones that point to the later development of the typology:

Hunc Spiritum … descendisse Lucas ait post ascensum Domini super discipulos in Pentecoste, habentem potestatem omnium gentium ad introitum uitaet et adapertionem noui Testamenti; unde et omnibus linguis conspirantes hymnum dicebant Deo, Spiritu ad unitatem redigente distantes tribus et primitias omnium gentium offerente Patri.

Luke writes that the Spirit, after the ascension of the Lord, which had the power of all nations to introduce life and to disclose the new covenant, had descended upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost; hence those present spoke in all languages and sang hymns to God; the Spirit brought into unity distant tribes, and the Father bore the first fruits of all nations.

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86 See above p. 18, nt. 66.
Along with the novelty that all languages (omnibus linguis) and nations from around the world (distantes tribus) are represented at Pentecost, Irenaeus also introduces an important theme that would prevail in later interpretations of the two events. Irenaeus implies that the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the world is controlled by the Holy Spirit to restore unitas. Diversity not only comes to reflect unity, but provides an important tool for legitimizing the claims of Christianity. The success of Pentecost is, therefore, dependent upon the failure of Babel.

After Irenaeus, the typology between the Tower of Babel and Pentecost slowly developed among other Christian authors. Origen, a near contemporary to Irenaeus, treats the Babel narrative in light of Acts in his usual idiosyncratic fashion. He allegorically interprets the Septuagint verse, “Καὶ ἦν πᾶσα ἡ γῆ χεῖλος ἕν, καὶ φωνὴ μία πᾶσι”, “And there was over all the world one lip and one voice for each person” (Gn 11:1), as biblical support for the unity of the Father and the Son, and the hypostatic nature of the son (ὑπόστασιν ἰδίαν Ὑίου). Because of his attempt to understand the unity of lip and voice in the Tower of Babel narrative according to christological doctrine, Origen’s New Testament support for this typological interpretation has nothing to do with Pentecost, but rather the unity of the Church expressed in Acts 4:32: “ἦν πάντων τῶν πιστεύοντων καρδία, καὶ φυχὴ μία”, “there was one heart and spirit of all those who believed”. Though Babel is not connected directly to Pentecost in these lines, the theme of ecclesiastical unity among Babel’s diversity plays an important role in Origen’s thought. But it is no surprise that Origen’s decision to connect Babel with Acts 4:32 is abandoned by later authors in favour of the narrative of Pentecost, which expressed the universality of the Church beyond ethnic differences more clearly and dramatically.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329–89), for example, in a homily on Pentecost interprets the coming of the Holy Spirit in light of the division of languages at Babel, and thereby gives further support to the parallel among later Greek Fathers, such as his successor as Archbishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostomus (347–407), and the important Greek theologian Cyril of Alexandria (d. 89).

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89 Origen, *In Genesim*, PG 12, col. 109. See Borst I.236–7. It should be noted the christological debate over the “hypostatic union” arose far after Origen, and Origen’s use of the word “hypostatic” does not carry the same significance as it would after Cyril of Alexandria and the council of Chalcedon a few centuries later; see Marcel Richard, “L’Introduction du mot ‘hypostase’ dans la théologie de l’incarnation”, *Mélanges de science religieuse* 2 (1945): 243–70.

90 Borst I.236, however, interprets this reference in light of Pentecost.


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The homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus were also transmitted into the West soon after their composition through the Latin translation by Rufinus, and were read variously in Anglo-Saxon England. In Rufinus’s Latin, the text reads:

Admiranda quidem fuit et illa linguarum antiqua diuisio, cum ad turris superbam et inpiam constructionem male sibi sociata iniquorum unanimitas concordabat. sed discissione uocis atque in ignotum sonum uersae impiae conspirationis reprimuntur conatus. uerum multo admirabilior est ista diuisio. quod enim fuerat tunc ab una in plures sibi inuicem ignotas discrepantesque diuisum, id nunc per plures ad unam concordem et consonam reuocatur

Indeed it was an admirable thing, that ancient division of languages, when the unanimity of evil men wickedly bound to each other agreed to the proud and impious building of the tower, but the efforts of their impious conspiracy were repressed by the division of language which was turned into an unfamiliar sound. But more admirable is this division; for that first one [i.e. at Babel] then had been divided by one into many who were discordant and unknown to themselves; this one [i.e. at Pentecost] now is recalled through many to one that is in agreement and harmony.

Unlike Irenaeus, who hints at a connection between Pentecost and Babel that is based solely on the apostles’ ability to speak all the languages of the world, Gregory connects the two through the contrast between discordance and harmony. In Rufinus’s translation this contrast is given a typological turn that is based on a notion of the two diuisiones that occurred at both events. In fact, Rufinus’s appellation of Pentecost as diuisio is highly unusual and almost nonsensical. The

93 Notably, Pentl 24 refers to Gregory of Nazianzus, although this may only indicate that Theodore was “quoting here from memory”; Bischoff and Lapidge, BCCS, 153, nt. 85. Bede also quotes one of Gregory’s Orationes in Act II.70–84, which he must defend in Re II.45–8; and three Anglo-Saxon manuscripts contain a handful of the Orationes; Lapidge, The Anglo-Saxon Library, 307.
95 The repetition of the word diuisio is Rufinus’s; Gregory uses the Greek words: διάφρεσις, division, and θαυματουργομένη, miraculous working.
only purpose it must have served was to strengthen Gregory’s original connection between Babel and Pentecost, which Rufinus evidently thought was missing in Greek. What is important, however, is that in both the Greek and the Latin the theme of Pentecostal unity is contrasted and compared to the diversity of Babel. Rufinus’ translation of Gregory’s homily reveals an important text in the continuation of the typology, for the parallels between the respective *diuisiones* links the two events together, but, again, in an idiosyncratic and inconsequential manner.

It is only by the fifth century that Augustine would draw similar parallels between the Tower of Babel narrative and Pentecost and establish the typological elements that would become popular in the following centuries. But Augustine’s comparisons between the two are not uniform, and they reveal that Augustine was still working within a tradition that had not become standardized. Since language is of primary concern for Augustine, he speaks of the dispersal of languages at the Tower of Babel in numerous places, most famously in his extensive treatment of Genesis 10 and 11 in the sixteenth book of *De ciuitate Dei*. But this treatment does not actually make an explicit connection between Babel and Pentecost, and within Augustine’s vast corpus there are relatively few parallels drawn between Babel and Pentecost. In his *De doctrina christiana*, for example, Augustine hints at a theological solution for dealing with the variety of languages through biblical translations. Biblical translators, in a manner, act as the apostles at Pentecost:

scriptura diuina … ab una lingua profecta, qua opportune potuit per orbem terrarum disseminari, per uarias interpretum linguas longe lateque diffusa innotesceret gentibus ad salutem

divine Scripture, which began in one language, was fittingly able to be spread throughout the globe, having been diffused far and wide through the various languages of translators, and became known to the nations for their salvation.

Likewise, in his commentary on John, Augustine comes closer to making an explicit typological connection between the diversity created at the Tower of Babel and the unity of the Holy Spirit in the image of a dove. Select passages include: “Hoc significauit Spiritus sanctus diuisus in

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96 See Borst II.394–404; and above pp. 29–31.
linguis, unitus in columba‖, “this signifies the Holy Spirit divided in language, united in the
dove”; “In columba unitas, in linguis gentium societas”, “in the dove, unity; in languages,
community of the nations”; “De una lingua factae sunt multae … De multis linguis fit una; noli
mirari, caritas hoc fecit”, “from the one language many were made … from the many languages,
one is made; do not be amazed, love did this”.98

In his commentary on Psalm 54:11, “Submerge, Domine, et diuide linguas eorum”, “come down,
O Lord, and divide their languages”, Augustine does make a clearer connection between Babel
and Pentecost. After spending a few lines expounding upon the division of languages at Babel,
Augustine brings in the typology of Pentecost:

Per superbos homines diuisae sunt linguae, per humiles apostolos congregatae sunt
linguae: spiritus superbiae dispersit linguas, Spiritus sanctus congregauit linguas. Quando
enim Spiritus sanctus uenit super discipulos, omnium linguis locuti sunt, ab omnibus
intellecti sunt; linguae dispersae, in unum congregatae sunt

Through proud men, languages were divided; through humble apostles, languages were
gathered together: a spirit of pride dispersed the languages; the Holy Spirit gathered
languages together. For when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, they spoke in the
languages of all, they were understood by all; the dispersed languages were gathered
together into one.99

Similarly, in a sermon on Pentecost, Augustine connects the descent of the Holy Spirit with the
dispersal of languages at Babel:

linguae illae quibus loquebantur a Spiritu sancto impleti, per omnium gentium linguas
futuram Ecclesiam praesignabant. Sicut enim post diluvium superba impietas hominum
turrim contra Dominum aedificavit excelsam, quando per linguas diversas dividi meruit
genus humanum, ut unaquaque gens lingua propria loqueretur, ne ab aliis intelligeretur:
sic humilis fidelium pietas earum linguarum diversitatem Ecclesiae contulit unitati; ut
quod discordia dissipaverat, colligeret charitas, et humani generis tanquam unius corporis

98 Augustine, In Iohannis evangelium tractatus CXXIV, ed. Radbod Willems, CCSL 36 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954),
VI.10.10–35. These lines would later be used by Arator; see below pp. 145–7.
membra dispersa ad unum caput Christum compaginata redigerentur, et in sancti corporis unitatem dilectionis igne conflarentur. Ab hoc itaque dono Spiritus sancti prorsus alieni sunt, qui oderunt gratiam pacis, qui societatem non retinent unitatis

those languages, which the ones who were filled with the Holy Spirit spoke, distinguished the future Church throughout the languages of all the nations. For just as after the Flood the proud impiety of men built a tower to the heavens against God, when humankind deserved to become divided through diverse languages in order that each nation would speak in its own language but not be able to understand other languages; so the humble piety of the faithful gathered the diversity of their languages into the unity of the Church in order that what discord had dispersed, love would gather and that the dispersed limbs of each race, as if of one body, would bring back and join together into the one head, Christ, and would be refined by the fire of love into the unity of the holy body. Therefore, those who hate the grace of peace and who do not retain the fellowship of unity, are utterly outside of this gift of the Holy Spirit.  

It is in these two passages that a major theme appears in the history of the typology: the contrast between superbia and humilitas. While other authors previous to Augustine speak about the pride involved at Babel—Gregory of Nazianzus’s homily provides a fitting example—Augustine is the first (to my knowledge) to bring the contrasting theme of humilitas into the typology. There is really nothing in Acts 2 to connect the apostles to humility, and the addition seems to be due solely to the Augustinian tendency to create a theological dichotomy between the city of God and the city of the Devil, which are represented as Jerusalem and Babel / Babylon. In a sense, this dichotomy strengthens the earlier treatments of Pentecost and Babel that focused, more or less, on ecclesiastical unity despite ethnic diversity. In his condemnation of those who built the Tower of Babel and thereby created diversity in the world, Augustine allegorizes the event in a way that confirms an ecclesiastical unity that transcends diversity, but at the same time solidifies Christian identity by opposing it to the immorality of the wicked. While the application of humilitas, one of the great virtues of the Church, to Pentecost is not a great step, it is an important step for the later developments of the typology.

See Oort, Jerusalem and Babylon, 115–23.
With that said, the textual examples of the typology between Babel and Pentecost in the period immediately after Augustine and before Gregory the Great are fairly limited, perhaps on account of the paucity of sources. Relatively few authors of this period explicitly show much interest in the typological connections between Babel and Pentecost, and, as is clear from the evidence presented in earlier chapters, there was a reluctance to connect the topos of the 72 languages of Babel with the number of languages spoken at Pentecost. But one of the most influential poetic sources for the Anglo-Saxons, the sixth-century author, Arator,102 does draw a connection between Babel and Pentecost in his versified version of Acts:

Spiritus aetherea descendens sanctus ab aula
Inradiat fulgore locum, quo stemma beatum
Ecclesiae nascentis erat, quibus igne magistro
Inbuit ora calor dictisque fluentibus exit
Linguarum popolosa seges; non littera gessit
Officium, non ingenii stillruit ab aure
Vena nec egregias signavit cerlo loquelas.
Sola fuit doctrina fides opulentaque uerbi
Materies, caeleste datum, noua uoci origo,
Quae numerosa uenit totoque ex orbe disertis
Sufficit una loqui. Dudum uetus aequoris arca
Cum superasset aquas, terrim uoluere maligni
In caelum proferre suam, quibus impia corda
Sermonum secuere modos sociisque superbis
Affectus cum uoce perit. Confusio linguae
Consimili tunc gente fuit; nunc pluribus una est,

The Holy Spirit descending from the heavenly hall illuminates the blessed place with radiance where the wreath of the nascent Church was, whose mouths the heat instructed, with the fire as their teacher, and with words flowing, the populous field of languages went forth; the letter did not perform the duty; the vein of talent did not drip from the ear, nor did wax seal outstanding speeches: faith alone was the teaching and the opulent material of the word, a gift from heaven, the new beginning of a voice, which came forth numerously and was sufficient for the eloquent from the entire world to speak together. Formerly, after the ancient ark had overcome the waters of the sea, wicked men desired to build their tower into heaven, whose impious hearts divided the manners of speaking and whose love died with the voice in shared pride. At that time, there was a confusion of languages among similar nations; now there is one [language] for the many in that it will hold harmonious sounds and rejoice in the coming Church, and an eloquent return to peace comes about for the modest, and the humble group recovers what the puffed up men scattered.  

As has been noted by scholars, the connection in these lines between the Tower of Babel and Pentecost is heavily dependent on Augustine’s own treatment of the subject. But whereas there is a clear connection made between the Tower of Babel and Pentecost in these lines, the connection is not made simply to expound upon the Augustinian contrast between the pride of the builders with the humility of the apostles. Instead, Richard Hillier has argued that the parallel is made specifically as a comment on baptism. Arator’s references to Noah’s ark, which traditionally signified baptism, and the discussion on the Holy Spirit’s presence at Christ’s

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baptism in the Jordan, which appear in the next lines of the poem, both confirm Hillier’s interpretation.\textsuperscript{106} In any case, Arator’s treatment of Pentecost and Babel shows that Augustinian typology had begun to take some root, and that notions of a Church, which is dispersed throughout the whole world (\textit{totoque ex orbe}) but remains unified, continued to prevail.

With the late-sixth to early-seventh-century pope, Gregory the Great (c. 540–604), the so-called apostle to the English,\textsuperscript{107} appears the standard Augustinian typology between Babel and Pentecost that would prevail among many of the Anglo-Saxon authors. In his \textit{Homilia} 30, Gregory makes a clear theological parallel based on the multiplicity of languages that is present at both Babel and Pentecost:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

Indeed you hear that the Holy Spirit appeared over the disciples in tongues of fire and gave the knowledge of all languages to them. What, namely, is signified in this miracle unless that the holy Church, filled by that same Spirit, was about to speak with the voice of all nations? And those who attempted to build a tower against God, lost the communion of one language; among these people, however, when they humbly revered God, all languages were united. Therefore, here humility merited virtue, there pride merited confusion.\textsuperscript{108}


\textsuperscript{107} See Aldhelm, \textit{PdV} LV, p. 314.13–5: “Gregorius, pervigil pastor et pedagogus noster,—noster inquam, qui nostris parentibus errorem … abstulit”, “Gregory, the watchful shepherd and our teacher—‘our’ I say (because it was he) who took away from our forebears the error” (\textit{Prose Works}, 125); and Bede, \textit{HE} II.1: “quem [i.e. Gregorium] recte nostrum appellare possimus et debemus apostolum”, “we can and should rightly call him our own apostle”, \textit{HE} II.1. Walter Goffart, “The \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica}: Bede’s Agenda and Ours”, \textit{Haskins Society Journal} 2 (1990): 29–45, at 37, suggests that Gregory’s apostolic influence in Northumbria may have waned and been replaced by that of Wilfrid.

The languages of all the nations are said to be spoken by the apostles through the Holy Spirit; the linguistic confusion of Babel is contrasted to the linguistic unity at Pentecost, and superbia is contrasted with humilitas. Like most preceding authors, Gregory confirms the unity of the Church among the diversity created at Babel—an important theme that appears elsewhere in Gregory’s works.109

Gregory’s sermon also reveals that by the early seventh century an intellectual tradition for interpreting Babel and Pentecost had become more or less set. The eagerness of later authors to draw from authoritative sources ensured that this Augustinian typology would enjoy continued prominence. Idiosyncratic treatments, such as that of Origen or Gregory of Nazianzus / Rufinus, would be ignored (intentionally or not), and it would be almost unimaginable to see underdeveloped accounts such as that of Irenaeus. Along with the theme of diversity within unity, Augustine’s innovative contrast between superbia and humilitas becomes very popular, and dominates the way the two biblical passages are interpreted after the time of Gregory the Great. Especially in Anglo-Saxon England, with some exceptions, the typology between Babel and Pentecost will remain thoroughly Augustinian.

6 Christian Attitudes towards Non-Christians

Along with the establishment of a Christian identity that transcends ethnic limitations, many Christian writers of Late Antiquity came to describe those of different identities in a new manner. Interestingly enough, these new descriptions of the heterodox found a rhetorical foundation that was previously applied by classical authors to people living outside of the Greek or Roman Empires. “Greek writers had”, as three modern cultural critics have expressed, “collected a whole series of distinguishing characteristics that marked off the barbarians. These characteristics centered on dietary practices, sexual customs and cultural faculties”.110 Because these antique descriptions of “Otherness” constituted part of the preceding literary tradition, they were easily carried over into Christian literature.

Tertullian, for example, at the beginning of his *Adversus Marcionem* gives a description of Pontus, the birthplace of the heresiarch Marcion, as a barbarous, inhuman and wild country:

> Ceterum hospitalem Pontum nec de situ aestimes; ita ab humanioribus fretis nostris quasi quodam barbariae suae pudore secessit. Gentes ferocissimae inhabitant; si tamen habitatur in plaustro. Sedes incerta, uita cruda, libido promiscua et plurimum nuda; etiam cum abscondunt … Parentum cadauera cum pecudibus caesa conuiuio conuorant. Qui non ita decesserint, ut escatiles fuerint, maledicta mors est. Nec feminae sexu mitigantur secundum pudorem; ubera excludunt, pensum securibus faciunt, malunt militare quam nubere. Duritia de caelo quoque … Omnia torpent, omnia rigent; nihil illic nisi feritas calet

You would not judge the rest of Pontus to be hospitable based on its location; thus it has withdrawn from our more human seas as if by some shame of its own barbarity. The most ferocious peoples inhabit it—if, nevertheless, habitation can occur in a wagon. Its settlements are uncertain, life crude, sexual activity promiscuous and much of the time exposed, even when they hide it … They devour the bodies of their parents along with livestock in a wicked feast. For those who do not die in such a way as to be edible, their death is cursed. And women are not softened by their sex; according to shame they expose their breasts, make wool with axes and would rather fight than marry. Also there is a harshness in the air … everything is numb; everything is frozen stiff; there is nothing there to heat them except their ferocity.\(^\text{111}\)

Tertullian is then quick to note that “nihil tam barbarum ac triste apud Pontum quam quod illic Marcion natus est”, “nothing is so barbarous and sad in Pontus than that Marcion was born there”.\(^\text{112}\) Of course, Tertullian cannot verify any of these anthropological claims, but is rather borrowing from ancient ethnography with his assertions that the people of Pontus are known for nudity, sexual promiscuity, ferocious women, paternal cannibalism, and an uninhabitable climate. For example, the accusation of paternal cannibalism, one of Tertullian’s most striking


\(^{112}\) Tertullian, *Aduersus Marcionem*, I.i.4.16–8.
claims, is also made by Herodotus regarding the Issedones.\(^{113}\) It is an instance in which the hegemonic centrality discriminates those on the periphery by abolishing any human characteristics and emphasizing animal characteristics.\(^{114}\) In the case of Tertullian, the orthodox centre has deprived the heretical periphery its legitimacy through classical rhetoric that, incidentally, was even applied to Christians themselves.\(^{115}\)

The first Christian historian, Eusebius also describes heretics in such terms.\(^{116}\) For example, Mani, the founder of the Manicheans, is characterized by Eusebius in generic terms that are reminiscent of ancient ethnography. For Eusebius, Mani is not only mentally deranged and demon possessed, but also “βάρβαρος … τὸν βίον σωτήρ λόγῳ καὶ τρόπῳ”, “a barbarian in his way of living in both word and manner”, who brought “ἐκ τῆς Περσῶν … τινὰ θανατηφόρον ἰὸν”, “from Persia … some deadly poison”.\(^{117}\) While the invective is aimed at Mani, his description, in the off-hand reference to Persia, utilizes negative sentiment against the great Eastern enemy of the Roman Empire in order to condemn the character of Mani. Though not as strongly phrased as Tertullian, Eusebius’s description gives further evidence for a continuing tendency among early Christians to apply customarily negative language of ethnography to their theological opponents.

And for one final example, Jerome famously refers to Pelagius as “stolidissimus et scotorum pultibus praegrauatus”, “very stupid and bloated with Irish porridge”.\(^{118}\) While the reference to the scotorum is relatively innocuous, it might have had further resonances with Jerome’s views of the barbaric tribes living in the non-Christian parts of the Atlantic archipelago. In his *Aduersus*
Iouinianum, Jerome states that the “Scotorum natio uxoribus proprias non habet”, “[men of the] Irish nation do not have [their] own wives”.\(^{119}\) This ethnography of sexual promiscuity is standard among ancient descriptions of foreign people, and can be traced back to Herodotus.\(^{120}\) Furthermore, just previous to his statement on the lack of wives among the Scotorum natio, Jerome attributes cannibalism to the Allicoti: “humanis vesci carnibus”, “they feast on human flesh”.\(^{121}\) Although Jerome mistakenly refers to the Allicoti, an Irish tribe, as British,\(^{122}\) he must have been aware of their shared proximity: Ammianus Marcellinus, for example, places the Allicoti alongside the Scotti as “bellicosa hominum natio”, “a bellicose nation of humans”.\(^{123}\) And the attribution of cannibalism among the Scotti can be traced back at least to Strabo.\(^{124}\) For Jerome, whose cultural sensibilities were not extensive, the Scotti, along with other tribes of the Atlantic archipelago, acted in the stereotypical ways ascribed to them by previous authors. Pelagius, as a “Scottus”, must also, therefore, have participated in such deplorable cultural activities. As with other Christian authors of Late Antiquity, Jerome is able to apply the invectives of ancient ethnography to non-Christians and heretics in order to demonize their divergent beliefs.

Once a connection between non-Christians and the exotic or even monstrous was established, it was no stretch to connect the heterodox with the builders of the Tower of Babel. As has already been shown, the pride of the builders was a typical feature of late antique interpretations; often this pride was crystallized in the figure of Nimrod, who was considered not only to be the putative chief architect of Babel, but also the world’s first tyrant, astronomer / astrologer, and idol-worshiper, and the second city-builder after Cain.\(^{125}\) Most prominently, however, Nimrod was associated with gigantism because of the similar semantics used for the cryptic, and

\(^{120}\) Wiedermann, “Between Men and Beasts”, 191–2.
\(^{123}\) Ammianus Marcellinus, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, vol. 3, XXVII.8.5.
seemingly gigantic, Nephilim in Genesis 6. The Hebrew word *gibbor*, which as an adjective means “strong, mighty”, or as a noun, “strong, valiant man”, is used to describe both the Nephilim (Gn 6:4) and Nimrod (10:8–9). On account of the common use of the word *gibbor*, early Jewish authors understood Nimrod to be one of the gigantic Nephilim who had somehow survived the Flood. Perhaps with this tradition in consideration, the translators of the Septuagint rendered the Hebrew word *gibbor* as γιγας, giant, in Genesis 6 and 10, which in turn was rendered in the Vetus Latina as *gigans*. Although the ambiguity had been corrected in Jerome’s Vulgate, which uses the more accurate words *potens* and *robustus*, the inertia created by Jewish tradition, along with the Septuagint and the Vetus Latina, was too great to avert the course of tradition, and Nimrod was henceforth understood to be the first post-diluvium giant.

Augustine, in his *De ciuitate Dei*, has the earliest and one of the most thorough expositions on the matter. Since Nimrod, as the builder of Babel / Babylon, is a primary typological figure for his city of the Devil, Augustine interprets him in a negative light. In the early chapters of book sixteen, Augustine prepares the reader for his interpretation of Nimrod by providing general explanations for each of the three sons of Noah. From the beginning, Ham’s cursed line is associated with heretics: “Cham porro, quod interpretatur calidus … quid significat nisi haereticorum genus calidum”, “Indeed because Ham is interpreted as ‘hot’, what can he signify except the hot genus of heretics”. When Augustine comes to speak of Ham’s line again, he becomes more specific by addressing Cush, who is described primarily as the “pater gigantis Nebroth”, “father of the giant Nimrod”, whose “initium erat illa nobilissima Babylon ciuitas”, “beginning was that very noble city of Babylon”. In the next chapter, Augustine, after establishing a direct line from Ham’s general typology as the *haereticorum genus*, through to Cush, the giant-bearer, is then able to present the single figure Nimrod as a symbolic representative of the city of the Devil:

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128 Augustine, *DCD* XVI.i.i.9–13.
129 Augustine, *DCD* XVI.i.ii.18, 24.
Babylon quippe interpretatur confusio. Vnde colligitur, gigantem illum Nebroth fuisse illius conditorem, quod ... ait initium regni eius fuisse Babylonem ... Erigebat ergo cum suis populis turrem contra Deum, qua est impia significata superbia.

Indeed, Babylon means ‘confusion’. For this reason, it is inferred that that giant Nimrod was its builder, because ... it is said that the beginning of his kingdom was Babylon ... Therefore, Nimrod, along with his people, built a tower against God, which signified his impious pride.\footnote{Augustine, \textit{DCD}, XVI.iv.23–37, 53–5.}

In these lines, Augustine gives future authors further precedent to use Nimrod not only as the symbolic head for all pride and wickedness, but also for paganism and heresy. Nimrod’s nature as a giant, strengthened by Augustine, becomes part of the dichotomy between orthodoxy and heresy, especially when there is need to describe the supposed, and censured, practices of exotic non-Christians. After Augustine, the figure of Nimrod solidifies as a symbol for the heresy and the paganism of the world, especially since from an early date, Jewish authors associated Nimrod with the worship of fire, and therefore of Zoroastrianism. In the words of P.W. van der Horst, Nimrod becomes “the founder of paganism \textit{par excellence}, in this case the influential Zoroaster”.\footnote{Toorn and Horst, “Nimrod before and after the Bible”, 28; see also 19–20, and 26–8, for an excellent summary of the ancient and late antique sources that connect Nimrod to fire, fire-worshipping and Zoroaster.}

With his negative associations with tyranny, city-building, idol worship, and gigantism, Nimrod became a stereotypical figure in interpretations of the Tower of Babel. All peripheral groups or ideologies, such as paganism and heresy, could be connected to Nimrod and therefore exploited as not only wicked, but also monstrous and barbaric. It is no coincidence that Nimrod and the builders of the Tower of Babel would later become symbols for the confusion of the heretics.\footnote{See Augustine’s claim that the “ciuitas confusionis” is a city of heretics; \textit{DCD}, XVIII.li.5. Bede also uses the Tower of Babel to comment on heretics; see below pp. 181–7.}

As Late Antiquity became more Christian, the classical rhetoric that was used to describe foreign peoples, became incorporated in the biblical figures and images that could be used for the same purposes. Nimrod, as the builder of the Tower of Babel, perfectly fit this role and developed among various interpretations that could adapt and mould him for specific invective.
7 Conclusion

As in the case of the number 72, late antique interpretations of the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the world were widespread and influenced by many sources, biblical or otherwise. The cultural and religious tendencies of the age were moulded together in ways that appeared more syncretic and harmonized. As Christians were forced to deal with issues such as ethnic diversity and proto-nationalism, they were able to use the Tower of Babel narrative to understand and support their emerging beliefs. By allowing for salvation to spread beyond Israel into the numerous nations of the world, Christians of Late Antiquity were able to forge a new identity that, as neither pagan nor Jew, could boast of a universality that transcended and utilized the ethnic or linguistic boundaries created at Babel. By doing so, these Christians could then shift the cultural dichotomy between the centre and peripheries partially away from the realm of geography and ethnicity and focus it on differences of doctrine—on orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Although the Tower of Babel narrative is rarely at the forefront of these issues, it is a reminder of how powerfully textual interpretations could be used when needed to strengthen a specific worldview.
Chapter 5
The Universal Church and Babel in Early Anglo-Saxon England

1 Introduction

Due to its location at the ends of the Roman Empire (and the perceived world), Britain, the *alter orbis*, never attained the linguistic conformity that was experienced in other parts of the Empire in the West. As quoted earlier, Umberto Eco has stated, “a civilization with an international language does not need to worry about the multiplicity of tongues”.¹ But in Britain, the “international language” of Latin only had tentative holds on the multilingual inhabitants—even less so after the collapse of Empire, which was felt earlier in the Roman province of Britannia than elsewhere.² When the dust started to settle after the Anglo-Saxon invasions in the early sixth century, the island was a multilingual haven, which, as Bede could observe two centuries later, consisted of no fewer than five languages: Irish, Pictish, British, English and Latin;³ and Bede’s account does not take into consideration language contact with the continent, or all the languages that were used by Anglo-Saxons in their intellectual pursuits. Multilingualism permeated the culture and must have had much influence on the manner in which Anglo-Saxons interpreted the traditions of the Church Fathers and the Bible. From Theodore and the students of the school of Canterbury to Bede, the diversity of the world was a reality that not only played a part in daily life, but also in the ways that Anglo-Saxons interpreted texts.

2 Perceptions of Britain

The intellectual trends and traditions that were outlined in the previous chapter gave a framework for understanding the world to the early Anglo-Saxons, who were viewed, and consequently viewed themselves, as living on the periphery of the inhabited earth. As some scholars have recently outlined, the British and Irish Isles were held to be the furthest parts of the world

¹ Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, 11; see above p. 129.
² Guy Halsall, “The Barbarian Invasions”, in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 1: c. 500–c. 700, ed. Paul Fouracre (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 35–55, at 48, notes that once the British usurper Magnus Maximus is killed in 388, no further significant imperial presence is felt in Britain.
The Roman province of Britannia was, according to Virgil, “penitus toto diuisos orbe”, “fully separated from the entire world”, and only the uninhabitable regions of the quasi-mythical *ultima Thule* extended farther into the Ocean than the islands of the Atlantic archipelago. These notions of extremity enabled Christian writers to syncretize the classical traditions with the biblical. In the Table of Nations, the descendants of Noah’s son Japheth are said to have inhabited “divisae … insulae gentium in regionibus”, “the islands of the nations that are divided into regions” (Gn 10:5). Because Japheth’s descendants are supposed to have inhabited all of Europe, it was no stretch to imagine that these *insulae* were those of Britannia.

Furthermore, by adopting the mental maps of Antiquity, Christian authors were able to interpret Britain as positioned on the edge of the world, and therefore, could understand its conversion as the fulfillment of biblical prophecies that were understood to foretell the Church’s extension from “sea to sea” (Ps 71:8). While other foreign and exotic realms were thought to exist outside of Europe, such as the realms of the Far East that were thought to be inhabited by monstrous peoples, the position of Britannia at the extreme limits of the Roman Empire allowed Christian authors to claim that the Church had extended into the farthest geographic and ethnic parts of the world. These authors could assure that the Christians of Britain were not so foreign or exotic as to be deemed completely different from other people in the Christian world, but in a paradoxical manner, could also claim that the Romano-centrism of western Christianity was able to reside among the peoples at a geographical periphery by means of the *unitas catholica*. Christian nations of geographical marginality were thought to participate in and therefore affirm the centricity of the Roman See.

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4 Jennifer O’Reilly, “Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth: Exegesis and Conversion in Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica*”, in *Bède le vénérable entre tradition et postérité / The Venerable Bede. Tradition and Posterity*, eds. Stéphane Lebecq, Michel Perrin, and Olivier Szerwiniack (Lille: Ceges—Université Charles-de-Gaulle—Lille 3, 2005), 119–45; and Diarmuid Scully, “Bede, Orosius and Gildas on the Early History of Britain”, in *Bède le vénérable entre tradition et postérité*, 31–42.


7 See Jerome, *HQS* 10.4.14–5, p. 12, who claims that Japheth’s descendants inhabited Britain.

8 O’Reilly, “Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth”, 119–21.

be thought of separately, for they are of course the two sides of the same coin”, and “to represent distant reaches of the world is to know and to appropriate them”. The centre is strengthened by the fact that it can be found not only at what was thought to be the geographical middle, but also at its most outlining points.

Moreover, the geographical description of the island of Britain at the edge of the world had become prominent among Christian authors of Late Antiquity. Jerome, for example, “linked the biblical image of distant islands with the classical traditions concerning the western islands in the Ocean but showed, as Bede was to do, that their incorporation into the universal Church transformed the remoteness of their geographical location”. Likewise, Orosius’s description of Britain provides an early account of the threefold division of the world. After writing that the world’s three continents are all surrounded by water, Orosius places Britain in the “oceano infinito”, “boundless Ocean”, along with the Orkneys and Thule. Jordanes, similarly, in his *De origine actibusque Getarum*, describes Britain immediately after discussing the mostly uninhabited Orkneys and Thule; his description is fairly exotic with its “mari tardo”, “slow sea”, its goods that “peco magis quam homines alant” “nourish cattle rather than people”, and its kings who are as uncivilized as even the lowest inhabitants (“inculti aeque omnes populi regesque populorum”). Closer geographically and temporally, the British author Gildas, a major source for Anglo-Saxon authors, twice states that Britain is on the edge of the world. In the first instance, Gildas claims that Britain is “in extremo ferme orbis limite”, “almost in the extreme boundary of the globe”, and in the second he famously describes Britain as a frozen island that gets more rays from Christ than the actual sun:

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    glaciali frigore rigenti insulae et velut longiore terrarum secessu soli visibili non proximae verus ille non de firmamento solum temporalis sed de summa etiam caelorum
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12 Orosius, *HAP*, I.2.78.
That true [sun], Christ, reveals his brilliance (gleaming upon the entire world), and primarily bestows his rays, that is his commands, to an island frozen by icy chill and not near to the visible sun, as if in a remote place of the earth, far from not only the temporal firmament but also the highest stronghold that surpasses all times.\textsuperscript{16}

This manner of viewing the island of Britain from the southern perspective of Rome, and not from the actual geographical location of the author, reveals Gildas’s affirmation of the centrality of the Roman Church. And along with this affirmation, Gildas is able to uphold the capacity of Christ to unite all the diverse regions of the world, even the extreme regions of Britain.\textsuperscript{17}

Another one of the key figures in the propagation of this theological geography that played an important role in Anglo-Saxon England was Gregory the Great. As both the anonymous Whitby life of the Pope and Bede’s own account state, Gregory had an interest in converting the English before he became the Bishop of Rome.\textsuperscript{18} This interest was likely driven in part by the desire to fulfill the biblical statements that the entire world would hear the Gospel of Christ and be converted. In his \textit{Moralia in Iob}, Gregory interprets Job 36:30 in light of the universality of the Church and the conversion of Britannia:

\begin{quote}
Omnipotens enim Dominus coruscantibus nubibus cardines maris operuit, quia emicantibus praedicatorum miraculis, ad fidem etiam terminos mundi perduxit. Ecce enim paene cunctarum iam gentium corda penetrauit; ecce in una fide orientis limitem occidentisque coniunxit; ecce lingua Britanniae, quae nihil aliud nouerat, quam barbarum frendere, iam dudum in diuinis laudibus Hebraeum coepit Alleluia resonare. Ecce quondam tumidus, iam substratus sanctorum pedibus servit Oceanus; eiusque barbaros motus, quos terreni principes edomare ferro nequierant, hos pro diuina formidine
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} Gildas, \textit{Gildas}, 8, p. 91.


sacerdotum ora simplicibus uerbis ligant; et qui cateruas pugnantium infidelis nequaquam metuerat, iam nunc fidelis humilium linguas timet.

For the omnipotent Lord covered the hinges of the sea with flashing clouds, in that he led the end of the world to faith with miracles of the preachers bursting forth. For behold, he has now penetrated the hearts of almost all the nations; behold, he has joined the bounds of East and West in one faith; behold, the language of Britain, which knew nothing other than to gnash in barbaric manner, just recently began to sound the Hebrew Alleluia in divine praises. Behold, the Ocean, once puffed up but now spread out before the feet of saints, serves [the Lord]; and on account of divine fear, the mouths of priests with simple words bind these barbaric movements of the Ocean, which earthly princes could not dominate with the sword; and the man without faith who by no means dreaded the troops of soldiers, now with faith fears the tongues of the humble.19

While there has been some discussion, initiated by Nicholas Howe, on the linguistic theology of this passage, especially in light of the mention of the lingua Britanniae,20 Gregory’s main emphasis is not linguistic, but rather ecclesiastical: the Lord has caused the hearts of almost all the nations, from East to West, to be joined in una fide. Britannia, as an extremity situated in the Ocean of barbaros motus, is simply a metonymy of the universal Church.

Likewise, Gregory’s Libellus responsionum—a text that is contained in the first book of Bede’s Historia ecclesiastica—greatly emphasizes the theme of “diversity within unity”, as Paul Meyvaert has argued.21 Notably, Augustine of Canterbury’s second question to Gregory involves

the different uses of the liturgy throughout the Church. Gregory, with somewhat surprising cultural sensitivity, states:

\[ siue in Romana siue in Galliarum seu in qualibet ecclesia aliquid inuenisti, quod plus omnipotenti Deo possit placere, sollicite eligas, et in Anglorum ecclesia, quae adhuc ad fidelitatem nova est, institutione praecipua, quae de multis ecclesiis colligere potuisti, infundas. Non enim pro locis res, sed pro bonis rebus loca amanda sunt. \]

whatever you find that is able to please all-mighty God to a greater extent, whether it is in the Roman or Gallic or in whatsoever church, you may carefully select and bring (with special instruction) into the English church, which is still new to the Faith, whatever you have been able to collect from a number of churches. For things should not be loved on account of their places, but places should be loved on account of their good things.  

Gregory, a diligent reader of the Pauline Epistles, was greatly influenced by the notion that “the Church as the Body of Christ composed of a diversity of members”. In this passage, Gregory’s emphasis on the unity of the Church surpasses uniformity of ecclesiastical practice: ecclesiastical unity transcends diversity within the Church. Somewhat atypical for papal sentiment, the focus or centre of Christian identity is no longer only Rome, but rather wherever the bonae res are found—even if that is as far away as England.

3 Theodore and the Canterbury School

3.1 The Canterbury Commentaries

Among the authors of early Anglo-Saxon England, such notions of a unitas catholica that extended throughout the diverse world are present and implicitly connected to the Tower of Babel narrative. Although the biblical commentaries of the Canterbury school of Theodore and Hadrian do not offer any overt comments regarding a theology that tackles issues of ethnic or linguistic diversity or the universality of the Church, there is much unspoken sentiment that can be deduced from various remarks. While there is no mention of the extremities of Britain, the commentaries concern themselves with foreign nations of the East, a concern that is not

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22 Bede, *HE* I.27.
23 Meyvaert, “Diversity within Unity”, 146.
unexpected considering the ethnic background of Theodore. On the basis of historical probability and two glosses that describe customs of the Persians, Lapidge has argued that Theodore might have even had first-hand experience with invading Persians. Within the commentaries, there is a perceptible interest in clarifying apparent confusion over eastern peoples. The commentator describes the Saracens as “numquam cum omnibus pacem habentes sed semper contra aliquos certantes”, “never keeping peace with anyone, but always disputing against someone”; and clarifies that the term Saracen refers to the Madianites, Ishmaelites, Madiani and Aggarreni, albeit “abusae”, “inappropriately”. Elsewhere, the genus Orreorum is associated with the “filii Seir Orrei”, “sons of Seir the Horrite”, and the biblical phrase, “principium gentium Amalech” (Gn 24:20), is glossed as “septem gentium Chananaeorum”, “of the seven nations of the Canaanites”. Furthermore, there appears a comment attributing the seven heresies of the Jews to legal and cultural diversity: “barbarismos .i. omnis domus habens proprias leges moresque quibus utebantur”, “barbarism, that is, that each house had its own laws and customs which they practiced”. There are, however, surprisingly few comments on the Table of Nations within the material at hand. There is a cryptic reference to the names of the Tower: “Saba et Ophi et Euilath filii Iecthan [Gn 10:28–9]: de eis dicuntur nomina turris”, “Saba and Ophir and Hevila, sons of Iecthan: names of the tower are derived from these”; an affirmation that Melchisedech is neither Sem nor an angel; and the common mistake of confusing the ambiguous named city Assur (Gn 10:11) with the traditional eponymous founder of the Assyrians, Assur, who is later listed as a son of Sem (Gn 10:22). All of these examples reveal that ethnic diversity, especially

24 Bischoff and Lapidge, BCCS, 8–9.
25 PentI 104.
26 PentI 194. Bischoff and Lapidge, BCCS, 467, explain that these nations are termed Saracens abusiue “as if they derived from Sara” and not Hagar. For the two references to the Saracens in the BCCS and their relationship to Jerome’s comments on the matter, see Katharine Scarfe Beckett, Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World, CSASE 33 (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 117–22.
27 PentI 196.
28 PentI 445. A similar gloss is found in PentI 137.
29 PentI 59.
30 PentI 90; Lapidge, unfortunately, is silent regarding this baffling statement.
31 PentI 98; see Bischoff and Lapidge, BCCS, 453, for the patristic traditions associating Melchisedech with Sem; and Fred L. Horton, Jr., The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century A.D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Cambridge: CUP, 1976), 114–8.
32 Most modern translators and commentaries take Nimrod to be the subject of the phrase “de terra egressus est Assur” and Assur to be a place name, on the basis of Mi 5:6, which puts “terram Assur” in apposition with “terram Nemrod”; see Wenham, Genesis, 223–4. Jerome and later Bede take Assur to be the subject (Jerome, HQG, 10.11, p. 13; and Bede, In Gen III.164–5). For the Canterbury commentaries, see Bischoff and Lapidge, BCCS, 320.
that of the East, was an important issue for the commentator, who was eager to update the information of Genesis with Theodore’s first-hand experience.

In the only gloss on Nimrod in the commentaries, Nimrod is called the “rex in Persida et Calanne, in ipso loco ubi aedificata est turris”, “king in Persia and Calanne, in that exact place where the tower was built”. Lapidge shows that the association with Calanne and the place where the Tower of Babel was built derives from a gloss in the Septuagint, but the appellation rex in Persida is highly anachronistic. It is possible that the commentator intended to update the geography for his audience with a presentation of current historical circumstances; the prepositional phrase in Persida, instead of the expected genitive construction Persidos or the nominative adjective Persis, gives some support to this interpretation. But it is also likely that the commentator intended to vilify the Persians in an offhanded manner by associating them with Nimrod. For one, Nimrod is traditionally interpreted as the world’s first tyrant, and the connection between Persia and tyranny may reflect the negative experience of a young Theodore during the Persian occupation of Tarsus. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Nimrod was closely connected with Zoroaster, who in turn was connected with the religion of the Persians. In the Recognitiones of pseudo-Clement that were translated by Rufinus, Nimrod, who is otherwise called Zoroaster, is said to have gone to Persia where he taught fire-worship; in the sixth-century Syriac work Book of the Cave of Treasures, Nimrod is presented as a fire worshipper of the East and a magician; and in the Panarion, Epiphanius states the opinion that Nimrod was the “ἐφευρετὴς … κακῆς διδαχῆς, ἀστρολογίας καὶ μαγείας, ὠς τινὲς φασὶ περὶ τούτου τοῦ Ζωροσάστρου” “inventor … of wicked teaching, astrology and magic—some

33 PentI 86.
34 Lapidge, “The Study of Greek”,126; and Bischoff and Lapidge, BCCS, 451.
36 See above p. 153.
37 Pseudo-Clement, Recognitionen in Rufins Übersetzung, ed. Bernhard Rehm, Die Pseudoklementinen, vol. 2, GCS 51 (Berlin: Akademie, 1965), I.30.7, p. 26: “apud Babyloniam Nebroth primus regnavit, urubemque construxit et inde migravit ad Persas eosque ignem colere docuit”, “Nimrod first ruled at Babylon, and built the city, and from there travelled to Persia and taught them to worship fire”; and IV.26–29, pp. 159–61, where Nimrod is associated (albeit in a convoluted fashion) with the name Zoroaster. Rufinus’s translation of the Recognitiones provides a source for the Leiden glossary—a text connected with the Canterbury school; see Bischoff and Lapidge, BCCS, 175. Similar sentiment on Nimrod is also found in the Greek homilies of pseudo-Clement; Pseudo-Clement, Homilien, 2nd ed., ed. Bernhard Rehm, Die Pseudoklementinen, vol. 1, GCS 42 (Berlin: Akademie, 1969), IX(Θ),4–5, p. 133.
assert such about Zoroaster‖, but then goes on to correct this opinion: “πολὺ δὲ ἀλλήλων τῷ χρόνῳ διεστήκασιν ἄμφω, ὁ Νεβρὼδ καὶ ὁ Ζωροάστρης‖, “the two, Nimrod and Zoroaster, are much separated in time from one another”. It is probable that the Canterbury commentator, who would have been familiar with these three texts, knew of the connection between Nimrod and Zoroaster.

Furthermore, because Nimrod’s gigantism was such a prominent feature of his perceived character in both Latin and Greek sources, the Canterbury commentator may have felt no need to mention it. But what the commentator does state regarding the giants of Genesis 6 may be interpreted as an explanation for the survival of giants and, thereby, Nimrod after the Flood. Although Genesis 6 makes no explicit connection to the giants and the Flood, the Canterbury commentator, perhaps spurred on by his interest in measurement, states: “Gigantes: dicunt decem et octo cubitorum statuam illorum fuisse, et tribus cubitis supereminebat aquis, dum .xv. cubitis excelsior fuit aqua quam montes”, “Giants: it is said that their height was eighteen cubits, and three cubits above the waters, since the water was fifteen cubits higher than the mountains”. This unusual remark, which offers a solution to the existence of giants after the Flood, has no known source. It is possible that the commentator’s need to explain how the giants survived merely anticipates the mention of Nimrod later in the commentary, whose gigantism, albeit unstated, would not only taint his character but also the Persians associated with him to a further degree. Conversely, this unusual gloss does not seem to have been very popular; a corresponding gloss in the second Canterbury commentary on Genesis makes sure to give the giants a height that is one cubit less than the waters, presumably for the opposite reason—to indicate that all the antediluvian giants drowned in the Flood.

39 Epiphanius, Panarion, vol. 1, GCS 25 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1915), I.3.2–3, p. 177; See Toorn and Horst, “Nimrod Before and After the Bible”, 27. For the Panarion as a source for the Canterbury commentaries, see Bischoff and Lapidge, BCCS, 212.
40 PentI 70.
42 Gn-Ex-EvIa 12.
Additionally, there is brief discussion on the building of the Tower of Babel in the Canterbury commentaries, which, as Borst suggests and Lapidge confirms, quotes the sixth-century Greek author of the *Topographia christiana*, Cosmas Indicopleustes:

> Faciamus ciuitatem nobis et turrem [Gn 11:4]. Dicit Christianus Historiographus ideo eos fecisse, quia uoluerunt in caelum uindicare, eo quod inde in diluuio puniti sunt pluuia.  

> *Let us build a city and a tower for ourselves.* The Christian Historian says that they built these things because they wanted to take vengeance against heaven, for the reason that from there they were punished in the Flood by rain.  

It is interesting that the only comment on the Tower of Babel in the Canterbury commentaries, beside the cryptic reference to the *nomina turris* in PentI 90, leaves out any reference to the consequences of building the Tower and its ramifications on world diversity. The decision to deal solely with the intentions of the builders may reflect a greater concern for vilifying the builders than for providing a standard discussion on ethnic and linguistic diversity. If so, the commentator again shows himself to be more interested in presenting those associated with the Tower in a negative light, perhaps because of their associations with eastern, non-Christian nations.

Finally, the treatment of the Garden of Eden in the first Canterbury commentary on Genesis differs from the second commentary in a manner that may indicate two different attitudes regarding the East, especially in regard to notions of perceived centricity that either minimize or highlight the dichotomy between the West and the East. In the second commentary on Genesis, Eden is described, following Isidore, as if it currently has an actual place on the earth in the eastern regions (*in orientis partibus*). Eden is specifically given three possible locations: “Alii dicunt paradisum esse in medio terrae ubi Hierusalem est, alii eum putant post peccatum in aere leuatum; quidam in orientali mare collocatum esse volunt”, “some say that paradise is in the middle of the earth where Jerusalem is, others think that it was elevated into the air after [Adam’s] sin; others want it to be positioned in the eastern sea”. The commentator’s inclusion

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44 PentI 86.  
45 Gn-Ex-EvIa 9. See Bischoff and Lapidge, *BCCS*, 499, for the sources.
of a description of an inaccessible garden in the East increases the sense of eastern exoticness without condemnation. The climate is neither too hot, nor too cold, but has “perpetua aeris temperies”, “a perpetual moderateness of the air”, which is reminiscent of descriptions of the central regions of the classical climate models. Although the focus here is admittedly on the Garden of Eden, the fact that it is described as an actual place whose borders in the East someone could theoretically look upon, reveals a different kind of attitude than that which appears in the first commentary.

In the first commentary, which propagates negative attitudes towards the Persian and Saracen peoples, the exotic nature of Eden is not only minimized but also made familiar and even banal. The gloss specifically on Eden suggests only that the Garden was either once above the aplanes—the celestial spheres—or where Jerusalem is now. More attention is given to other matters such as the building of Sion, the killing of Abel at Emmaus, and the curse Jesus utter against the fig tree. Moreover, one of Eden’s rivers, Phison, is identified as the Rhône (Rodanus) or the Danube (Danubius). Such identification re-orientates the centrality of Eden according to geography that is more familiar to a western audience, and thereby removes some of its mythical, exotic nature. Whatever the motive behind this treatment of Eden, the first commentary seems to remove the association between Eden and the East—an association that the second emphasizes. While the evidence is very much inconclusive, it does suggest that the first commentator might have had an anti-eastern sentiment that is not prevalent in the second. This sentiment, in turn, explains the negative focus placed on the Tower of Babel and on eastern ethnic groups.

3.2 The Laterculus Malalianus and Passio beati Anastasi

Outside of the Canterbury commentaries, other brief comments on the world’s ethnic diversity can be found within Theodore’s putative corpus. In the Laterculus Malalianus, which has been

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46 Gn-Ex-EvIa 9; see also Isidore, Ety XIV.iii.2.
47 PentI 35; see also PentI 45, 47.
48 PentI 35–6.
49 PentI 37. See Bischoff and Lapidge, BCCS, 443, for patristic analogues and the possible interpretation of Rodanus as the Duna. The claim that Phison is the Rhône seems to be unique to this commentary. Bede, In Gen III.266–8, unequivocally, identifies Phison as the Ganges: “Fison… nostri Gangen uocant et esse in India non dubitatur”, “our [scholars] call Phison the Ganges and there is no doubt that it is in India”.

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hesitantly attributed to Theodore by its recent editor, the magi and their gifts are given a threefold interpretation: “trinitas adoraretur in Christo, crederetur in mundo, praedicaretur in gentibus”, “the Trinity is honoured in Christ, believed in the world and preached among the nations”. While allusion to a universal Church in a diverse world is not necessarily explicit in this passage, allegorical interpretation is in stark contrast to the gloss on the magi in the Canterbury commentary, which is not at all concerned with the world’s diversity, but rather with the meaning of John Chrysostomus’s name. A more prominent reference to the universality of the Church in the Laterculus, however, can be found a few paragraphs later where the twelve apostles are said to have illuminated the whole world with the sun of justice and the precepts of God:

sic totum mundum, tanquam menses totius annis, sol in se iustitiae continentes, perlustrauerunt et animas fluctis exuli uagas, lucida Dei praecepta tamquam in lina manibus ecclesia medio concluserunt.

just as the months of a whole year, they [i.e. the twelve apostles who correspond to the twelve months] illuminated / wandered around the entire world, holding fast the sun of justice in themselves, and they, exiles on the waves, with the clear precepts of God, just as with hands on a fishing line, enclosed within the middle of the Church the wandering souls.

The Laterculus’s language of illuminating or wandering around the world with the sun of justice is reminiscent of Gildas’s comments about the island of Britain (“radios suos primum indulget, id est sua praecepta, Christus”), although the phrasing between the Laterculus and Gildas is too dissimilar to assert any certain relationship. It is perhaps the case that, besides the frequency of the topos among Christian authors of Late Antiquity, both authors found the image of a sun

50 See above p. 41.
51 Stevenson, ed., The ‘Laterculus Malalianus’, § 15, p. 140.
52 EvII 3: “Magi duobus annis in uia fuerunt, quia duos annos ante nativitatem Christi apparuit eis stella, ut Iohannes Constantinopolitanus dixit Crisostomus, quem Graeci Crisostomum i. os auri clamant”, “The magi were on the road for two years, because the star appeared to them two years before the birth of Christ, just as John Chrysostomus of Constantinople said, whom the Greeks call Chrysostomus, that is mouth of gold”.
53 Stevenson, ed., The ‘Laterculus Malalianus’, § 18, p. 146.
54 The image of Jesus as the sun ultimately stems from John 8:12: “ego sum lux mundi”, “I [i.e. Jesus] am the light of the world”. See also Hugo Radner, “The Christian Mystery of Sun and Moon”, Greek Myths and Christian
fitting for an audience residing in the upper parts of the northern hemisphere. It is also notable that in this passage the author of the *Laterculus* creates an image of confinement within the middle of the Church (*ecclesia medio concluserunt*) that evokes notions of centrality in contrast to otherness. As was the case for early Christians, there is a noticeable shift from finding identification in ethnic or linguistic similarity to finding identification in religious belief. The Church is identified as containing, even encapsulating, justice and divine precepts in contrast to those who are wandering about (*animas uagas*), as it were, without anything concrete to identify with.⁵⁵

Later in the text, in a discussion on the gifts given by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the apostolic ability to speak in all languages is paired with the sacraments and ministry of the Church: “quidquid in diuinis spiritus omnium linguarum elucutione, in sacramento uel ministerio sanctae catholicæ ecclesiæ gesta sunt”, “whatever things are done through the speaking of all languages in the holiness of the Spirit, in the mystery or ministry of the holy catholic Church”.⁵⁶ The reference to all the languages of the world (*omnium linguarum*), especially when coupled with the mystery and ministry of the whole Church (*catholicæ ecclesiæ*), sheds further light on the earlier reference to the enclosing of souls within the middle of the Church. As with traditional interpretations of Pentecost in Late Antiquity,⁵⁷ in which each language is not only affirmed, but also affirms the unity of the Church, in this passage the Church crosses ethnic and linguistic boundaries and, thereby, confirms a notion of Christian identity that focuses on the faith and work of the Church (*sacramento uel ministerio*) rather than ethnic and linguistic diversity. The diversifying effects of Babel are no longer a hindrance, but rather an important tool for creating and propagating essential characteristics of the Church in the world.

Likewise, in another text that has recently been attributed to Theodore, the *Passio beati Anastasi*, an eagerness to preach the Gospel throughout all the world is presented:

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⁵⁵ See a similar description of Nimrod by Byrhtferth of Ramsey below p. 230.


eius passionum testes beati apostoli peruenrunq quidem cunctum orbem diuinno praedicamento, conuenurent autem ad pietam uniuersam ciuitatem et regionem et nationem et populum et tribum et linguam

as witnesses of his sufferings, the blessed apostles indeed went throughout the entire world, all the while proclaiming the divine [message], and gathered each city and region and nation and people and tribe and language into piety.\(^{58}\)

These lines, based in part on Revelation 7:9,\(^ {59}\) provide a further example of the tendency to create a Christian identity that transcends the ethnic and linguistic diversity of Babel. While it is a tendency that is by no means exclusive to Anglo-Saxon England, Christian identity that is said to prevail in all parts of the world surely would have had a strong effect on an English audience who saw themselves as living on the very edges of the world. Although recognition of Theodore’s authorship does not seem to have lasted long after its composition,\(^ {60}\) the possibility that it was written by a Greek-speaking monk from the distant lands of Tarsus underlines even further the notion that Christian identity has the potential to remain united while transcending all borders.

4 Aldhelm

Aldhelm, likewise, while never explicitly treating the Tower of Babel, makes much mention of issues involving ethnic and linguistic diversity, the universality of the Church, and the propagation of a centrality that reflects the prominence of orthodoxy. Moreover, Aldhelm’s conception of the world is in accordance with the traditional division of the world among authors of Late Antiquity. For one, in numerous instances Aldhelm speaks of a tripartite earth that, although never directly stated, represents the traditional division into three continents—one for each of the three sons of Noah. Adam and Eve are told to increase and multiply in “triquadra


59 “ex omnibus gentibus et tribubus et populis et linguis”, “from all nations and tribes and peoples and languages”.

60 Bede, who calls its author unlearned (*inperitus*), evidently did not recognize Theodorean authorship, *HE* V.24.
mundi latitudo”, “the three-cornered expanse of the world”; and Constantina is said to govern a “tripertiti mundi monarchiam”, “the monarchy of the tripartite world”. In similar phrasing, at the end of the prose De virginitate, Aldhelm states that the Holy Trinity governs the whole world: “alma trinitas, una deitatis substantia et trina personarum subsistentia, totius mundi monarchiam gubernans”, “the gracious Trinity—the one substance of the deity and the three-fold subsistence of its persons, controlling the monarchy of the entire universe”. Aldhelm probably does not use his usual tripartite division of the world in this instance in order to suppress potential confusion regarding the indivisible nature of the Trinity; it is conceivable that one part of a “three-fold subsistence” might be misunderstood as ruling one specific part of a three-fold earth.

In other instances where Aldhelm uses the image of a tripartite earth, he includes the image of light and illumination, much like Gildas and the author of the Laterculus Malalianus before him. In the prose De virginitate, for example, Aldhelm describes the sun as illuminating or wandering around the earth: “luculentus limpidissimi solis splendor triquadram mundi rotam clarius illustrare credatur”, “the bright splendour of the clear sun is thought to illuminate / wander around the tripartite orb of the world more clearly”. Elsewhere in the same work, Aldhelm uses similar phrasing as a metaphor for the New Testament illuminating the Old: “limpida sequentis testamenti liminaria per gratiam evangelicae praedicationis crassae noctis caliginem illustrantia in triquadro terrarum ambitu diffusius spargerentur”, “the clear lights of the subsequent testament, illuminating the darkness of dense night through the grace of gospel preaching, were distributed more widely in the three-cornered ambit of lands”. And a few paragraphs later, Aldhelm uses the same image to describe the Apostle Thomas illuminating not a three-fold earth, but the more specific, three-fold India: “Didymus … Eoae trpertitas Indiae provincias sereno evangelicae praedicationis lumine illustravit”, “Didymus [i.e. Thomas] illuminated the tripartite provinces of eastern India with the clear light of evangelical preaching”.

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61 Aldhelm, PdV XVIII, p. 247.15–6; Prose Works, 74.  
62 Aldhelm, PdV XLVIII, p. 302.10–1; Prose Works, 115.  
63 Aldhelm, PdV LX, p. 323.1–2; Prose Works, 132.  
64 See above pp. 157–8 and 166–7.  
65 Aldhelm, PdV IX, p. 237.6–7; Prose Works, 65.  
66 Aldhelm, PdV XXII, p. 253.2–4; Prose Works, 79.  
67 Aldhelm, PdV XXIII, p. 255.16–8; Prose Works, 81.
For a cleric living in Britain (again, in the words of Gildas, “glaciali frigore rigenti insulae et velut longiore terrarum secessu soli”⁶⁸), the metaphor of Christ’s illumination of the world as the illumination of sun probably had some impact, especially since it was a common feature in descriptions of Britain to note the darkness of the winter months.⁶⁹ For this reason, Aldhelm’s use of the image of illumination to describe Theodore and Hadrian’s presence in England is cleverly employed:

\[
\text{ast tamen climatis Britannia occidui in extremo ferme orbis margine posita verbi gratia ceu solis flammigeri et luculento lunae specimine potiatur, id est Theodoro \ldots et eiusdem sodalitatis cliente Hadriano}
\]

Britain, although situated in almost the outer limit of the western world, possesses, for example, the luculent likeness, as it were, of the flaming sun and moon, that is, Theodore and his colleague of the same sodality, Hadrian.⁷⁰

Although Aldhelm’s primary purpose in these lines is to highlight the grandeur of Theodore and Hadrian when compared to the teachers of Ireland (the “astriferis micantium vibraminibus siderum”, “stellar flashings of twinkling stars”);⁷¹ his manner of description borrows from rhetoric that is often used to assert the universality of the Church. First, with the notion of Britain’s geographical position at the edge of the world, Aldhelm is able to confirm the validity of the catholic Church which participates in such a strong unity that two of the world’s best scholars can easily be found at the edges of the world. Second, the image of the sun and moon, which is usually reserved for the preaching of Christ’s gospel, intricately connects Theodore and Hadrian with the apostolic tradition, and therefore affirms the quality of their orthodoxy over the heterodoxy of the Irish. Just as Christ’s disciples are sent throughout the world to illuminate the nations with the light of the Gospel, such as Thomas in India, for example, so also do Theodore and Hadrian fulfill this role— in a very real sense for Aldhelm, they participate in the mission of the 70 (or 72) disciples to preach to the 70 (or 72) nations.

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⁶⁸ See above pp. 157–8.
⁶⁹ For example, Bede, HE I.1; see also Howe, “An Angle on this Earth”, 10–11.
⁷⁰ Aldhelm Ep V, pp. 492.15–493.1; Prose Works, 163.
⁷¹ Aldhelm, Ep V, p. 492.14–5; Prose Works, 163.
Additionally, Aldhelm refers numerous times to the notion that the whole world has been embraced by the Church. To mention only a few examples: Aldhelm refers to a tripartite division of humankind: “Porro tripertitam humani generis distantiam orthodoxae fidei cultricem catholica recipit ecclesia”, “the catholic Church accepts a three-fold distinction of the human race, which increases orthodox faith”;\(^\text{72}\) he states that the birth of Jesus “totius mundi statum … beavit”, “made happy the condition of the entire world”;\(^\text{73}\) that the renown of Anatolia and Victoria are “per totos mundi cardines longiuscule crebrescunt”, “spread far and wide through all the corners of the world” on account of the shared liturgy of the Church;\(^\text{74}\) and that Peter’s doctrine has been made clear “ omnibus hic geminum digessit dogma per orbem”, “to all (peoples) throughout the world”.\(^\text{75}\) But one of the most revealing examples can be found in Aldhelm’s letter to Geraint, where Aldhelm describes the involvement of heretics and schismatics in the world:

\[
\text{Domus vero haec secundum allegoriam ecclesia per totos mundi cardines diffusa intellegitur. Heretici namque et scismatici ab ecclesiae societate extranei per contentionum argumenta in mundo pululantes et veluti horrenda zizaniorum semina in medio fecundae segitis sata dominicam messem maculabant}
\]

This house, according to allegory, is understood to be the Church, spread throughout all … points of the world. For indeed, heretics and schismatics, foreign to the society of the Church, sprouting up in the world and like, so to speak, the dreadful seed of darnels sown in the midst of a fertile crop, defile the harvest of the Lord by their contentious arguments.\(^\text{76}\)

Aldhelm uses the familiar portrayal of the Church being spread \textit{per totos mundi cardines} that claims ecclesiastical unity throughout the diversity of the entire world. His parallel account of heretics, who are distinguished as outsiders to the fellowship of the Church (“ab ecclesiae societate extranei”), clearly demarcates notions of centrality and marginality: the Church, though spread throughout the world, is at the centre, while heretics, only sprouting up in the world (“in mundo pululantes”), are at the periphery.

\(^{72}\) Aldhelm, \textit{PdV} XIX, p. 248.9–10; \textit{Prose Works}, 75.
\(^{74}\) Aldhelm, \textit{PdV} LII, p. 308.7–9; \textit{Prose Works}, 119.
\(^{75}\) Aldhelm, \textit{CE} IV.i.4, p. 19; \textit{Poetic Works}, 50.
\(^{76}\) Aldhelm, \textit{Ep} IV, p. 482.7–11; \textit{Prose Works}, 156.
Throughout Aldhelm’s corpus, much is made of the wickedness of heretics, magicians and pagans. Just as his accounts of the spreading of the Christianity through a tripartite world refer implicitly to the division of the world at Babel, so do Aldhelm’s accounts of heretics and magicians implicitly point to the Tower of Babel narrative. For example, in one instance, Aldhelm refers to Simon Magus as the “magicae artis inventorem”, “founder of the magical art”, even though, according to various Christian authors of Late Antiquity, Zoroaster is the magicae artis inuentor, or according to the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitiones, Nimrod (who is also referred to as Zoroaster) is the primus magicae artis auctor and the primus magica. While Aldhelm surely would have known that Zoroaster or Nimrod, not Simon Magus, was the traditional founder of the magical arts, it is possible, as Rosier notes, that in an attempt to condemn the unorthodox practices of tonsuring, Aldhelm connects Simon Magus to both the magical arts and unorthodox tonsuring—a connection that is possible to make with the heretic Simon Magus but not with the pre-Christian Zoroaster or Nimrod, who are never associated with tonsuring. In any case, for Aldhelm, Zoroaster and Simon Magus are closely related. In the prose De virginitate, Aldhelm couples the two, along with the sorcerer Cyprian, as infamous sorcerers: “Cyprianus … post Soroastren et Simonem magorum praestantissimus fuisse memoratur”, “Cyprian … is said to have been the most outstanding of sorcerers after Zoroaster and Simon Magus”. Moreover, there is further, albeit slight, evidence that Aldhelm viewed the sorcery and heresy of Simon Magus in light of the Tower of Babel, or at least in light of themes present in the Tower of Babel narrative. Aldhelm also narrates that Simon Magus “praecelsa rudis scandit fastigia turris”, “climbed the lofty summits of a new tower” in order to attempt to fly. While the account is based on the apocryphal Actus Petri cum Simone, Rosier states that Aldhelm has added “a number of details”, notably the tower. Along with the Zoroastrian

77 Aldhelm, Ep IV, p. 482.27; Prose Works, 157.
78 For example, see Augustine, DCD XXI.xiv18–20; and Isidore, Ety IX.2.43.
80 See Prose Works, 200, nt. 12, for a possible source being “Eusebius’s statement that ‘Simon was the prime author of every heresy’” (Eusebius, Historia ecclesiastica XIII.1)
81 Aldhelm, PdV XLIII, p. 295.9–10; Prose Works, 109.
82 Aldhelm, CE IV.i.28, p. 20; Poetic Works, 50.
epithet, *magicae artis inventor*, the addition of a tower strengthens the allusion to the Tower of Babel.

In another instance, Aldhelm also seems to give Babylonian undertones to his narrative by means of a tower. In the prose *De uirginitate*, a pagan *magister militum* is described as building a tower in order to confine his daughter, Christina, and force her to offer sacrifices to pagan gods: “Pater … turrem eidem minaci proceritate in edito porrectam et forti liturae compage constructam erexit”, “her father erected for her a tower that stretched aloft with a menacing height and was constructed with a strong framework of cement”. While it has been recognized that the immediate source of this line is provided by Gildas, its ultimate source is partly found in Orosius’s own description of the Tower of Babel: “domus … minaci proceritate mirabiles”, “buildings that were amazing with their menacing height”. Even if Aldhelm did not recognize the Orosian source when he read it in Gildas, the phrase “minaci proceritate” recalls the Tower of Babel’s own threat to reach heaven. Furthermore, the addition of the word *litura* is original to Aldhelm. Whereas the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, referencing this line and later Old English glosses on this line, defines *litura* as an “(act of) smearing, daubing” and “what is daubed, mortar, plaster”, these senses seem unsatisfactory within the context—a tower fortified by “what is daubed” or even “mortar” is not much of a marvel. In fact, Winterbottom, evidently also unsatisfied with the meaning “smearing” or “mortar”, admits that he does not understand Aldhelm’s use of this word, and offers a suggestion of John Grady which connects *litura* with *λίθος*, stone, or stonework. If Winterbottom is correct with respect to Grady’s suggestion, this meaning would not only heighten the putative strength of the tower, but also allow for a lexical parallel to the Septuagint’s account of the Tower of Babel, in which the builders make bricks for their stonework (“ἐγένετο αὐτοῖς ἡ πλίνθος εἰς λίθον”). Along with

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For the use of the *Actus Petri cum Simone* in Anglo-Saxon England, see Valerie Heuchan, “All Things to All Men: Representations of the Apostle Paul in Anglo-Saxon Literature”, PhD diss., University of Toronto, forthcoming, ch. 5. I am grateful to Valerie for allowing me to see her dissertation before completion.

86 Orosius, *HAP*, II.6.10, p. 97; Bede also quotes these words of Orosius for his description of Babel; *In Gen* III.540.
88 Winterbottom, “Aldhelm’s Prose Style and its Origins”, 48, nt. 8. See also Lewis and Short, s.v. ‘litura’, p. 1072.
89 LXX, *Gn* 11:3.
reference already made to a Babylonian minaci proceritate, it is not much of stretch to think that Aldhelm included the word litura in order to strengthen an allusion to the Tower of Babel.\footnote{A handful of Old English accounts also describe Babel as made of stone; see below pp. 200–1 and 208–9.}

However, litura as “mortar” makes sense if Aldhelm had the Tower of Babel in mind when he included the word litura to his source. For the word litura has Babylonian overtones in the Septuagint version of Micah 7:10–11, which reads, “ἡμέρας ἀλοιφῆς πλίνθου”, “on the day of moulding brick”, and is literally translated into Latin as “dies liturae lateris”.\footnote{Although this Latin translation is not found in the Vulgate, it does appear in Jerome’s commentary on the Minor Prophets; Jerome, In Michaeam, ed. M. Adriaen, Commentarii in prophetas, CCSL 76 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), II.vii.414.} In this case, the words, ἀλοιφή, and litura, both mean “smearing” or perhaps in the context, “tempering” or “pugging” the clay of the brick.\footnote{See OED, s.v. ‘pug, v.2’, III.4.a.} According to Jerome, this line is referring to the Babylonians who will be crushed “in morem lateris”, “in the manner of a brick”.\footnote{Jerome, In Michaeam, II.vii.414.} Since Aldhelm was familiar with Jerome’s commentary on the Minor Prophets,\footnote{Aldhelm quotes the work in PdV XXXI, p. 269.22–3; Prose Works, 90. See also Lapidge, The Anglo-Saxon Library, 181, 314.} he likely would have read Jerome’s Babylonian interpretation of dies liturae lateris, and it is, therefore, possible that Aldhelm intended the Babylonian undertones behind the word litura to transfer to the pagan tower in his prose De virginitate. Winterbottom is rightly confused over Aldhelm’s use of litura, especially in this context, but considering the number of ways it may allude to Babel and Babylon, it is very likely that Aldhelm felt free to use it, as a somewhat exotic word, to add flourish to Gildas’s line, and provide latent allusion to the more infamous Tower. Within the context, a tower fortified with a Babylonian material or method not only makes more sense, but it heightens the perceived wickedness of the tower through an allusion to Tower of Babel.

Besides its threatening height and this potential allusion to Babylonian building material, Aldhelm’s account also contains numerous other parallels to the Tower of Babel. It is associated with idolatry, which, as Aldhelm would have known from his sources, began with Nimrod and the fall of the Tower of Babel. And as if to underline the allusion to Babel further, Aldhelm makes reference to the Babylonian tyrant, Nebuchadnezzar, later in the text: “Chaldaici
regnatoris machinas”, “ovens of the Chaldaean [i.e. Babylonian] tyrant”\(^9^5\). Although this last reference is borrowed, perhaps from memory, from Sidonius Apollinaris,\(^9^6\) it functions as to vilify the pagan *magister militum* by comparing his deeds with the cruelty of the Babylonian Empire, which could be connected back to its earlier Tower. Moreover, the *magister militum* is said to have instructed his daughter in “liberalibus sofismatum disciplinis”, “liberal disciplines of learning”;\(^9^7\) because astrology was part of a liberal education, there may be slight allusions to Nimrod, who was thought to be one of the first astrologers and, according to later authors, the founder of the seven liberal arts.\(^9^8\) Just as Aldhelm’s telling of the death of Simon Magus from a *rudis turrim* has underlying allusions to the Tower of Babel, so does the account of the tower of the pagan *magister militum*. Although there are no concrete parallels in either account, it is probably no coincidence that Aldhelm’s description of each tower has Babylonian features. The negative characteristics of tyranny, idolatry, and soothsaying may have brought the Tower of Babel narrative to Aldhelm’s mind, who in turn introduced his own descriptions of towers within his narrative in order to heighten the nefarious actions of his villains.

5 Bede

Working within the similar intellectual tradition of Late Antiquity that other early Anglo-Saxon authors participate in, Bede saw himself as living on the edges of a Christianized world. As Uppinder Mehan has suggested in an attempt to understand Bede in light of post-colonial theory, “Although such [colonized] writers do not reject the cultural contributions of the colonizer, they regard the colonizer’s culture as having also been changed by the culture of the colonized”\(^9^9\). Whereas Bede’s comments on Britain are relatively scarce outside of the *Historia ecclesiastica*,\(^1^0^0\) he does promote a theology that focuses on ethnic and linguistic diversity in ecclesiastical unity. When Bede comes to speak of Britain in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, Britain plays the role of a marginal area that confirms the focal power of the Church of Rome. With a

\(^{9^5}\) Aldhelm, *PdV* XXXI, p. 301.16; *Prose Works*, 114. Aldhelm also refers to the *Chaldaicus regnator* in *PdV* XXI, p. 252.12; *Prose Works*, 78.


\(^{9^7}\) Aldhelm, *PdV* XLVII, p. 301.4; *Prose Works*, 114.

\(^{9^8}\) Livesey and Rouse, “Nimrod the Astronomer”, 235–6, cite Hugo of St Victor as associating Nimrod with the seven liberal arts.


\(^{1^0^0}\) A notable exception can be found in Bede, *Tem* II.1044–8.
mentality formed in part by interpretations of the diversity created at Babel and the unity brought about at Pentecost, Bede in his final historical work considers how the “colonizing” Roman Church is affected and changed by the “colonized” English people. But before he completed the *Historia ecclesiastica* near the end of his life, Bede revealed a great interest in defining Christian identity as having transcended ethnic and linguistic boundaries. Especially in his many comments on the Tower of Babel and world diversity, Bede advocates for an identity that finds support not only in its connection to the orthodoxy at Rome, but also in its contrast with non-Christian identity.

### 5.1 Ecclesiastical Unity in a Diverse World

In his early and extremely popular exposition on Acts (first version 703 × 709; second version 708 × 716), Bede claims that the description in Acts 2:3 of the Holy Spirit’s “linguae tamquam igne”, “tongues just as fire” indicates “quia sancta ecclesia per mundi terminos dilatata omnium gentium erat uoce locutura”, “that the Holy Church spread to the ends of the world was about to speak with one voice of all nations”. The phrase, *ecclesia dilatata*, and its variants, which are commonplace in Bede’s works, have a basis in the intellectual tradition that Bede inherited. For example, in his translation of Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History*, Rufinus uses the line, “Christi … nomen … per omnes nationes et per universum orbem terrae diffusum est”, “the name of Christ has been dispersed through all the nations and through the entire world”, which contains sentiment and phrasing similar to Bede’s comments, and Augustine, Rufinus’s contemporary, uses the phrase “ecclesia toto orbe diffusa” with some variant no fewer than sixty-five times throughout his works. For this reason, Bede’s reference to an *ecclesia dilatata* has already been established somewhat as a cliché. In this case, it performs the role of unifying language; a role that Georges Tugene has observed always accompanies reference to linguistic diversity.

It is, therefore, no surprise that reference to an *ecclesia dilatata* can be found at the end of Bede’s career in his *Retractatio in Actus*, but in this instance, outside of the context of Pentecost.

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103 Eusebius, *Die Kirchengeschichte*, I.3.19; see above p. 137.
104 The figure is derived from searches performed through the Brepols databases, [http://www.brepolis.net](http://www.brepolis.net) (28 March 2010).
Acts 9:31, Bede comments: “Vbi Latine dicitur per totam in Graeco habet καθ' ὅλης, unde notandum quod ex eo catholica cognominatur ecclesia, quod per totum orbem diffusa in una pace versetur”, “Where the words per totam are used in Latin, in Greek they are καθ' ὅλης, from which it should be noted that the catholic Church is named by these words, which is spread across the entire world and moves about in one peace”.  

While Bede has simply added information on the etymology of the word catholica, which he might have read in Augustine, Isidore or simply inferred from his own study of Greek, it is evident that Bede is concerned throughout his works with presenting the universality of the “catholic” Church that can be found spread across the entire world.

Another interesting example of the concern with an ecclesia per orbem dilatata appears in the homily, In quadragesima, where Bede reveals the significance of the universal Church for various linguistic groups, which presumably would include the Anglo-Saxons:

Dilatata autem per orbem ecclesia et Graecis ac barbaris in eiudem fidei unitatem confluentibus curauerunt praesules fidelium ut idem etiam in Graecum Latinumque transferretur eloquium quo modo etiam Marci Lucae et Iohannis euangelia quae deinceps Graeca lingua ediderunt mox in Latinum transfudere sermonem quatenus haec omnes per orbem nationes legere atque intellegere possent

And since the Church is spread out across the world among both Greeks and barbarians assembling in the unity of the same faith, overseers of the faithful took care that the same eloquence be rendered in both Greek and Latin, in the same manner that the gospels of Mark, Luke and John, which they produced thereafter in Greek, were at once translated into the Latin language so that all these nations throughout the world could read and understand them.

In these lines, the linguistic diversity of the world is made more concrete with an example of the textual history of the translation of the gospels. The repetition of the phrase per orbem underlines the necessity of ecclesiastical unity in faith, but not language. Though not explicitly stating such,
Bede hints at the ecclesiastical need not only for a Latin or Greek Bible, but also for one that has been translated into the vernacular—a translation that he was supposedly carrying out on his death bed. As these lines reveal, Bede’s theology of a Church within an ethnically and linguistically diverse world does have practical concerns. A Church that is *per orbem diffusa* must deal with overcoming some of the boundaries that make the world diverse, such as language.

Along with the examples mentioned above, Bede’s corpus is riddled with similar phrases concerning the universality of the Church throughout the world. In his commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles, which was written probably just before or at the same time as his commentary on Acts, Bede provides the comment: “una ecclesia catholica toto orbe diffusa saepe pluraliter appellantur ecclesiae propter multifaria scilicet fidelium conuentica uariis tribubus linguis et populis discreta”, “there is one catholic Church spread through the entire world, churches are often referred to in the plural because of the various assemblies—namely of the faithful—that are distinguished by various tribes, languages and peoples”. Not only does this line borrow from Revelation 7:9, as does Theodore’s *Passio beati Anastasi* and Bede’s revision of it, but in Gregorian fashion speaks of the multiplicity of churches within the one Church. Likewise, in his commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, Bede uses the participle *dilatata* alongside the synonymous *diffusa*: “hoc non pauci sed omnis terra facere per quam ecclesia sancta dilatata est … hoc non paucis auditoribus sed omnibus populis quibus ecclesia constat toto orbe diffusa”, “not only a few, but the entire earth makes this through which the Church is spread … this [was heard] not by a few listeners but by all the people for whom there is the Church, spread throughout the entire globe”. These two examples, which respectively stand at the beginning and end of Bede’s career, are typical of the numerous other instances that express the universality of the Church in similar fashion.

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109 See Cuthbert’s *Epistola de obitu Bedae* (HE, p. 582). For discussion on the importance of this homily for issues of language and translation, see Fleming, “‘The Most Exalted Language’”, 148.
110 Bede attached his commentary on 1 John to the copy of his commentary on Acts that he sent to Acca. See Bede, *Act* pref.76–9.
111 Bede, *In Cat* II.5.93–8.
112 Bede’s own comments on Apc 7:9 in *Ap* X.5–8, are not extensive, but do also point towards the spread of the Church to all people. For his revision of Theodore’s *Passio beati Anastasi*, see above p. 41, nt. 8.
113 Bede, *In Ez* I.673–7. See also Bede, *In Lc* IV.15.2475: “per orbem terrarum ecclesia dilatata atque diffusa”, “the Church is spread out and extended throughout all the earth”, which is borrowed from Augustine, *Quaestiones evangeliorum*, ed. A. Mutzenbecher, CCSL 44B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1980), II.33.103–4.
Normally, detailed discussion of such commonplace phrases as *ecclesia diffusa / dilatata* would not be justified, but in this case, the words *diffusa* and *dilatata* are significant, because they contain a pun. Bede, following patristic tradition, claims that the nouns *dilatatio* and *latitudo*, which were thought to be connected etymologically with the verb *dilatare*, provide the meaning of Japheth’s name. In his commentary on Genesis, Bede writes: “congruit autem profectibus sanctae ecclesiae, quibus orbem impleuit totum, etiam nomen Iapheth, quod latitudo dicitur; unde alludens ad nomen ipsum, dicit noe, dilatet deus Iapheth id est latitudinem”, “the name Japheth, which means ‘spreading abroad’ [lit. extent or breadth]’ is also fitting to the advancements of Holy Church with which it has filled the entire earth; referring to this, Noah puns on Japheth’s name when he says, ‘may God spread abroad Japheth’ that is ‘a spreading abroad’”. For Bede, Japheth represents the *ecclesia dilatata* not only in a historical sense, but also in an etymological sense. Japheth is the spreading abroad (*latitudo*) that God spreads abroad (*dilatet*), just as the Church has spread abroad (*dilatata*) throughout the entire world.

Bede also realized the potential for this pun early in his career. In his commentary on Revelation, he understands the biblical lemma “latitudinem terrae” (Apc 20:8) as referring to the Church—an understanding that foreshadows Bede’s comments on the name Japheth. Elsewhere, in his commentaries on the Seven Catholic Epistles, Bede offers a variant on the usual phrase that hints at involvement of Japheth (via the etymological meaning) in the dispersal of the Church: “pro omni ecclesia quae per totam mundi latitudinem diffusa est”, “on account of the whole Church which is spread through the entire breadth of the world”. And finally, in his work *De Templo*, which was written after his commentary on Genesis, Bede interprets the dimensions of the Temple as the Church spread throughout the world: “populi fidelium ex quibus sancta uniuersalis ecclesia consistit quorum dilatationem per orbem latitudo designat”, “the peoples of believers from whom the holy universal Church consists, and whose distribution throughout the world the breadth [of the Temple walls] signifies”; and “hoc per totam latitudinem diffusae ecclesiae per

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114 See Thiel, *Grundlagen und Gestalt der Hebräischkenntnisse*, 322. According to Lewis and Short, s.v. ‘latus’, 1041, and ‘dilato’, 579, *latus*, the etymon of *latitudo*, is not related to the participle form of *fero*, the etymon of *dilatare*.


116 Bede, *In Ap* XXXV.106–8: “ecclesia, quam potius nomine latitudinis terrae in omnibus tune gentibus persequendam”, “the Church, which [is referred to] rather with the name ‘breath of the earth’ since it was about to be persecuted then among all the nations”.

117 Bede, *In Cat* II.2.43–4.
orbem”, “this [watching and listening of the Lord is] through the whole breadth of the Church spread throughout the earth”.\textsuperscript{118} While the word \textit{latitudo} in these two instances primarily refers to the physical attributes of the Temple, Bede employs it in such a manner as to offer both an allegorical interpretation of the Temple as the Church and a pun on the name Japheth, whom he has stated signifies the achievements of the Church spread abroad. In this manner, he is participating in a well-documented tradition of the importance of etymology in Anglo-Saxon thought. Nicholas Howe, for example, has shown that Aldhelm is dependent on Isidore’s etymologies for many of his \textit{Enigmata}, and Fred C. Robinson has documented an Anglo-Saxon fondness “to exploit the multiple interpretations of names” in Old English literature.\textsuperscript{119} Again, although it is unlikely that Bede had the Hebrew etymology of the name Japheth in mind every time that he used the word \textit{dilatata} (or its synonym \textit{diffusa}) in reference to the Church, it is evident that in some instances that very connection is at the forefront of Bede’s intended meaning.

5.2 The Contrast between Jerusalem and Babel

Along with Bede’s continual references to a Church that can be found throughout the tripartite (or four-cornered) globe, Bede often makes a contrast between Babel / Babylon (which were synonymous in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages) and Jerusalem. As previously mentioned, Christians of Late Antiquity re-orientated notions of centricity in a manner that accepted, in theory, all ethnic, linguistic and geographical identity by placing emphasis on similarities of faith, doctrine or morality. But any dissimilarity of faith, doctrine or morality was not only rejected and marginalized, but once marginalized, also dehumanized.\textsuperscript{120} As early as Bede’s commentary on Acts (here Act 2:4), the positive virtues of the Church are contrasted with the negative characteristics of Babel:

\textit{Vnitatem linguarum quam superbia Babylonis disperserat humilitas ecclesiae recolligit, spiritualiter autem uarietas linguarum dona uariarum significat gratiarum. Verum non incongrue spiritus sanctus intellegitur ideo primum linguarum donum dedisse hominibus,}

\textsuperscript{118} Bede, \textit{Tem} I.902–4; I.1007–8.
\textsuperscript{120} See above pp. 148–51.
quibus humana sapientia forinsecus et discitur et docetur, ut ostenderet quam facile possit sapientes facere per sapientiam dei quae eis interna est.

The humility of the Church brings together the unity of languages that the pride of Babylon had dispersed; but in spiritual terms, the variety of languages signifies the gifts of various [divine] favours. And not inconsistently, the Holy Spirit is understood to have given the first gift of languages to humans—through which human wisdom is learned and taught externally—such that the Spirit showed how easily it could make men wise through the wisdom of God which is internal in them.\textsuperscript{121}

In these lines, which Lawrence Martin has regarded as “Bede’s theology of language”,\textsuperscript{122} Bede calls attention to the paradoxical image of the disparity of languages and the unity of the Church at Pentecost by contrasting the \textit{humilitas ecclesiae} with the \textit{superbia Babylonis} in typical Augustinian fashion. But he goes even further to offer a spiritual interpretation that the differences of languages signify the gifts of different \textit{gratiae}, and claims that it was the Holy Spirit who first gave languages to humans. The plural form, \textit{linguarum}, in the phrase “primum linguarum donum” can only refer to the division of languages at the Tower of Babel, and therefore indicates that it was the Holy Spirit acting in both instances. This comment implies a retrospective interpretation of the Tower of Babel narrative: just as the Holy Spirit was sent down at Pentecost to unite the languages of the world, so too it was sent down at the Tower of Babel to divide them. The Holy Spirit, according to Bede, has from the beginning been working in both linguistic diversity and unity by means of that very diversity. In other words, in Bede’s providential comprehension of history, the division caused by the wickedness of Babel should be understood in hindsight as an initial impetus in the unity of the multilingual Church at Pentecost. The Tower of Babel has been robbed of its negative connotations, and re-appropriated as an essential moment in salvation history.

Moreover, in his commentary on Luke (709 × 716), Bede writes on Babel / Babylon and Jerusalem in a manner reminiscent of Augustinian tradition and Bede’s own earlier comments on Acts, where a stark contrast is made between pride and humility, and the elect and the reprobate:

\textsuperscript{121} Bede, \textit{Act II.4.55–61}.
There was one heart and spirit of the believers in the multitude. Truly, just as at the building of Babel, the unity of languages was torn apart by a spirit of pride, at Jerusalem, the diversity of languages is united by the grace of the Holy Spirit; that city is interpreted as “confusion”, this one as “vision of peace”, namely because one faith and devotion confirms the elect in a multiplicity of languages and nations in the pacification of the entire world, but as many numerous sects as languages confuse the reprobate in their fractions.\footnote{I have taken the nonsensical Latin “autem plures sectae quam linguae” to read “autem tam plures sectae quam linguae”. \textit{In Lc} III.8.754–9. See also Bede, \textit{In Mc} II.5.164 (Mc 5:9), where these lines are repeated verbatim.}

These same lines underline the standard notion that linguistic diversity was created by superbia, and reiterate the notion in the commentary on Acts that ecclesiastical unity is brought about solely through the gratia of the Holy Spirit (interestingly, the Augustinian notion of humilitas is absent). Because Pentecost has, in a sense, redeemed Babel by using the linguistic diversity of the world to create a unified Church that transcends this diversity, the “confusion” of Babel must be updated and reinterpreted in light of heretics (sectae)—an interpretation that will be further developed in Bede’s commentary on Genesis.

Likewise, the same contrast between Jerusalem and Babylon is present in Bede’s homily, \textit{In vigilia nativitatis s. Iohannis baptistae}. As with Bede’s remarks in his commentaries on Luke and Mark, the negative “confusion” of Babel is removed from its original context of Genesis 11, applied to the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar, and in turn re-applied to sinners everywhere. Jerusalem, in similar fashion, is allegorically removed from its specific historical context and applied to the Church of Christ:
intellegere didicerit Hierusalem et templum Dei ecclesiam Christi Babilonem confusionem peccatorum Nabuchodonosor diabolum Iesum sacerdotem magnum uerum aeternumque pontificem esse Iesum Christum

it has been learned that Jerusalem is understood to be the Temple of God, the Church of Christ, and Babylon the confusion of sinners, Nebuchadnezzar the Devil, and Jesus the priest the great, true, eternal pontiff Jesus Christ.\(^{124}\)

In this passage, Bede’s attempt to universalize the typologies of Babylon and Jerusalem removes, by necessity, almost any connection to historical context. Because Babel and Babylon were synonymous to ancient, late antique and medieval authors, Bede is able to apply the general characteristics of Babel to the later Babylonian Empire, which he can then contemporize even further for his audience. By following Augustine’s theology of the two cities, which universalizes its representatives Babylon and Jerusalem, Bede is able to offer the usual contrast between Babel and Jerusalem in more succinct, polemic and applicable terms. Babel’s confusion is interpreted as the confusion of all sinners (\textit{peccatores}), or perhaps, even more generally, of all sins (\textit{peccata}); and Nebuchadnezzar is given a typology of the Devil. For Bede, Babel and Jerusalem simply become representatives of good and evil, and the notion of centricity becomes clear: those who are good are identified within the realm of Christianity, while those who are evil are outside of its boundaries.

This same tendency to generalize and re-apply interpretations of Babel appears in Bede’s hermeneutical treatments of the Tower in his commentary on Genesis. Bede, following Jerome and Josephus, spends numerous pages outlining the ethnic identities that are indicated in the Table of Nations. Along with his predecessors, he does not include the English people, nor any of the Germanic tribes that come to inhabit Britain, although he does ascribe origins to the Spanish and the Italians.\(^{125}\) Bede only hints at the English connection to Japheth when he, following Jerome, suggests that the biblical description of Japheth’s lineage: “\textit{Ab his diuisae sunt insulae gentium}”, “\textit{from these [descendants] the islands of the nations were divided}” (Gn 10:5),


\(^{125}\) Bede, \textit{In Gen} III.21, 23.
includes the British isles. But whereas Bede’s interpretation of the Tower of Babel focuses on its allegorical meanings, Bede’s interpretation of the Table of Nations remains for the most part literal. It updates the biblical names by re-assigning them to contemporary nations (or at least those nations contemporary for Josephus and Jerome), and only occasionally condemns wickedness or praises righteousness through a nation’s putative allegorical meaning; in general, most of the names in the Table of Nations are left as nations. Bede seems to be content with presenting 72 disciples as preachers for all of the 72 nations, who will be gathered together in “una et non dispari confessione ac fide”, “one, undivided confession and faith”.

Before Bede treats the allegorical meanings of the Tower of Babel, he begins with a literal interpretation that inquires into the motives for building the Tower. Bede suggests that the builders built the Tower either to retreat into the celestial realms when they become tired of the terrestrial dwellings, or to escape a second flood—perhaps not insignificantly, the same sentiment is also found in the Canterbury biblical commentaries’ translation of Cosmos Indicopleustes:

Mirandum sane qua intentione et culmen suae turris ad caelum usque ad tollere disponent … nisi forte ita se per orbem diuidere uanissima ac superbissima mente cogitabant, ut si forte delectaret pertesos terrenae habitationis, uel certa si aquae diluuii rursum terris ingruerent, per hanc superiora aeris siue caeli spatia peterent

It certainly must be questioned with what intention they decided to raise the height of their tower even to heaven … unless perhaps they thought with a most vain and proud mind to distinguish themselves throughout the globe in such a way that they sought in the tower a higher space of the air or of heaven, if perhaps it might please them when they

126 Bede, In Gen III.54; Jerome, HQG 10.4.15, p. 12. Bede also later claims that this line indicates “per orbem ecclesias”, “churches throughout the world”, In Gen III.312–3.
127 For example, Bede claims that the old enemy (antiquus hostis) arises from the dark people (obscurus populus) of Ethiopia, In Gen III.151–2.
129 Bede, In Gen III.376, p. 152. See also In Gen III.493–501, p. 156.
130 PentI 91, p. 320; see above p. 164. The suggestion that the Tower was built because of fear of a second flood has a long tradition going back to early Jewish commentators; see Jeffrey, ed., A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition, s.v. ‘Babel’, esp. 66–7.
became bored of their earthly dwelling, or indeed if the waters of the flood again threatened the earth.131

With this literal interpretation, which helps to anchor the historicism of the event among the more allegorical interpretations, Bede is also able to focus his condemnation onto the builders and away from the diversity of nations. Especially with the phrase *per orbem*, Bede provides a criticism of the builders for their most vain and most proud mind (*uanissima ac superbissima mente*) that is contrasted with the Church. It is perhaps ironic, however, that while Bede condemns the builders for wanting to escape the boredom of their earthly dwelling, he encourages divine contemplation only a few paragraphs later.132

Outside of these brief lines that offer a historical interpretation of the building of Babel, Bede selects the figure of Nimrod to make more general and universally applicable claims:

Babylon cum ciuitatibus quarum caput est, superbam huius mundi gloriand, quae confusioni obnoxia est, designat; Babel enim confusio dicitur. Recte conditor eius ipsum malorum omnium caput diabolum figure deuntiat; cui etiam Nemrod uocabulum, quod tyrannum uel profugum uel transgressorem sonat, apte congruit.

Babylon and its cities, over which it is the head, signify the proud glory of this world, which is liable to confusion. For Babel means ‘confusion’. Rightly the builder of this city figuratively denotes the head of all evils itself, the Devil; for this builder the name Nimrod aptly fits which means tyrant or exile or transgressor.133

Just as Bede interpreted Nebuchadnezzar allegorically as the Devil in his homily, *In vigilia nativitatis s. Iohannis baptistae*, so he associates Nimrod with the head of all evils in this instance. But it is in his homiletic *Interpretatio spiritalis* of the Tower of Babel—a subsection of the commentary on Genesis—that Bede reveals a *tour de force* of his hermeneutical attempts to contemporize the confusion of Babel by associating it with heretics, pagans, Jews and the generally wicked. Bede begins this section with a reminder that Babel is the “diaboli ciuitas”,

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“city of the Devil”, before associating it with the “reproba hominum multitudo uniuersa”, “the whole reprobate crowd of humans”, which are described with the rhetorical flair of a tricolon abundans that defines the target of Bede’s condemnation: “qui sunt nisi magistri errorum, qui uel contrarium ueritati cultum diuinitatis introducunt uel agnitam fidem ueritatis malis actibus siue uerbis impugnant”, “those who are [nothing] unless teachers of errors, who either introduce worship contrary to the truth of the divine, or fight the acknowledged faith of truth with evil actions or words”. Bede then contrasts the wickedness of the reprobates to the righteousness of the Church with any element possible in the Tower of Babel narrative. The one Lord is compared to many wicked lords of the pagans; the confusion of language at Babel to the unity of language at Jerusalem; Babel’s muddy, black, baked bricks of carnal desire and heresies to Jerusalem’s strong, white, tempered stones of righteousness; and the unanimous rebelling of Jews and heretics to the scattering of falsehood by catholic preaching.

Bede does not stop here; he continues to allegorize the Tower of Babel narrative to make it even more generally applicable by stating that every time any type of wickedness is done, the sinner builds his own Tower of Babel: “faciunt sibi ciuitatem omnes reprobi … Aedificant ciuitatem Babyloniam cum opera confusione digna faciunt”, “all the reprobate make a city for themselves … they build a city of Babel when they do works that are worthy of ‘confusion’”. Any literal implication of the building of Babel, which initially explained the origins of world diversity in a manner that strengthened the ethnic identifications of its first audience, is deliberately absent here as Bede explains the narrative in a way that absorbs and converts its elements such that the narrative provides a new framework for understanding Christian identity. And this framework becomes even more clarified with identification of those who are not identified as Christians.

After stating that every reprobate makes his own Tower of Babel whenever he sins, Bede goes on to define the reprobate as an enemy to the faith of God:

Quod gentiles faciunt multos deos colendo, haeretici fidem unius Dei erroribus polluendo, Iudei filium Dei Christum negando, falsi catholici fidem malis operibus siue schismatibus rectam profanando

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The pagans do this by worshipping many gods, the heretics by defiling the faith of the one God with errors, the Jews by denying Christ the son of God, the false catholics by profaning correct faith with evil or schismatic actions.¹³⁶

This contrast is further emphasized in the last sentence of the Interpretatio, which compares the lack of unity among the wicked with the unity of the Church: “Constat enim quia quanto nequam doctores siue operarii mali ab inuicem dissidente animo secernuntur, tanto magis ecclesiae colligendae spatum tribuunt”, “For it is evident that the more that wicked teachers or workers of evil separate from themselves with dissident minds, the much more they grant space for the Church to come together”.¹³⁷ Throughout his Interpretatio, Bede appropriates the narrative of the Tower of Babel in order to create Christian identity that is based on centricity and marginality; but because the Jewish geographical centricity of the Tower of Babel narrative is no longer valid, Bede uses the narrative to distinguish the true faith of the Church with the false beliefs of its enemies.

5.3 Wordplay and In Ezram et Neemiam

In his later commentary, In Ezram et Neemiam,¹³⁸ Bede’s theology of ecclesiastical unity in a diverse world and the typological contrast between Babylon and Jerusalem are well developed and appear with frequency—too much frequency for a full examination here. But one element that needs to be touched upon is Bede’s use of wordplay based on the Hebrew etymologies of Babel, Jerusalem and Judaea. This wordplay appears in earlier commentaries, however, and it may be beneficial to use an example already seen from Bede’s commentary on Luke: “illa confusio haec uisio pacis interpretatur quia uidelicet electos in pluribus linguis et gentibus una fides ac pietas toto orbe pacificando confirmat reprobos autem plures sectae quam linguae dissociando confundunt”, “that city is interpreted as ‘confusion’, this one as ‘vision of peace’, namely because one faith and devotion confirms the elect in a multiplicity of languages and nations in the pacification of the entire world, but as many numerous sects as languages confuse

¹³⁶ Bede, In Gen III.678–81.
¹³⁷ Bede, In Gen III.706–9.
¹³⁸ For a thorough introduction to this work, see Scott DeGregorio, Bede: On Ezra and Nehemiah (Liverpool, University of Liverpool Press, 2006), xiii–xliv.
the reprobate in their fractions”. In this passage, Bede not only is able to underline Jerusalem’s peace and Babel’s confusion with the words pacificando and confundunt, but he also creates a paronomastic contrast with the words confirmat and confundunt. In fact, paronomasia involving the verb confundo or the noun confusio seems to be preferred by Bede, who even uses it in one of his three examples of paronomasia in the *De schematibus et tropis*:

Paronomasia, id est, denominatio, dicitur, quoties dictio pene similis ponitur in significatione diuersa, mutata uidelicet littera uel syllaba, ut in psalmo XXI iuxta Hebraicam ueritatem: ‘In te confisi sunt et non sunt confusi.’

It is called paronomasia, that is *denominatio*, whenever a word appears very similar [alongside another] with a different meaning, namely with a letter or syllable changed, just as in Psalm 21 according to the Hebrew Truth: “In you they trust (confisi) and are not confounded (confusi)”.

While *De schematibus et tropis* is thought to be one of Bede’s early works, wordplay involving confusio is seen throughout Bede’s career, and it appears very prominently in his commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah.

In Bede’s *In Ezram et Neemiam*, a work which is primarily concerned with allegorically interpreting the Jewish return to Israel after the Babylonian captivity, the usual etymological meanings of Babel, Jerusalem and Judaea are present. Early in the commentary, Bede establishes that Jerusalem means *uisio pacis* and that Judaea means *confessio*. Although he does not directly define Babel / Babylon as *confusio* until later, Bede does not hesitate to pun on its etymology:

Cui enim non facile pateat solos illos cum quibus Deus est de *confusione* peccatorum ad uirgutatum opera quasi de seruitio de *Babylone* in *Hierosolimam* ad libertatem posse transire quia sine ipso nihil possumus facere … *Hierusalem* quoque esse in *Iudaea*, hoc

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139 See above p. 182, nt. 123. See also Thiel, *Grundlagen und Gestalt der Hebräischkenntnisse*, 255 (Babel, Babylon), 327 (Jerusalem). For Bede’s tendency to use Hebrew etymology in word play elsewhere, see Fleming, “‘Most Exalted Language’”, 142–61.

140 Bede, *DST* II.viii.90–3.


142 Bede, *In Ez* I.189; and I.242.
est in confessione, memoratur ut qui per obliuionem Dei captuari a Chaldeis qui interpretantur quasi daemonia, hoc est malignis spiritus, mancipari meruimus per confessionem diuinae pietatis ad uisionem liberae pacis et lucis redeamus ibique aedificemus domum domino Deo Israhel, hoc est in unitate catholicae pacis in confessione siue nostrae iniquitatis seu diuinae miserationis et gratiae

For to whom is it not readily apparent that only those, whom God is with, can cross from the confusion of sins to the works of virtues, as it were, from the servitude of Babylon to the freedom in Jerusalem, since without Him, we can do nothing? … Also it is remembered that Jerusalem is in Judaea, which means “in confession”, so that we who, by forgetting God, deserved to be captured and sold by the Chaldeans, who are interpreted as demons, that is evil spirits, may return, through confession of divine piety to the vision of free peace and light, and there build the house of the Lord God of Israel, that is, in the unity of catholic peace in the confession of either our iniquity or divine mercy and grace.  

The phrase de confusione peccatorum, which is paralleled with de seruitio de Babylon, is clearly enveloped by the paronomastic per confessionem diuinae pietatis later on. Furthermore, the line, in Hierosolimam ad libertatem is skillfully echoed by the later phrase ad uisionem liberae pacis, which repeats the connection between Jerusalem and freedom by means of an adjective. It is apparent that Bede had internalized this etymological word play in his commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah to such an extent that he is able to underline his allegorical interpretations by letting the Hebrew etyma become synonyms for the cities themselves.

Therefore, when Bede comes to indicate the meaning of Babel / Babylon a few paragraphs later, it is no surprise that he applies wordplay based on Jerusalem and Judaea. While commenting on the migration from Babylon into Jerusalem, Bede writes: “quamuis tempore aliquo in Babylonem, id est confusionem peccatorum, esse uideantur abducti diuina provisione per societatem iustorum quoquo modo ad pacem reducuntur ecclesiae”, “although they [the elect] seemed to have been taken for some time into Babylon, that is the confusion of sinners, away from divine provision, they are returned through the fellowship of the just in whatever manner to

Although the pun on Jerusalem is concealed in this instance, its etymological elements are skillfully inserted and contrasted with the *confusio peccatorum* of Babylon. And in case his audience missed the pun the first time, Bede repeats it only a couple of paragraphs later and again includes the etymology of Judaea: “de *confusione* uitae praesentis ad *visionem* perpetuae *pacis* et *confessionem* diui[nae] laudis quasi ad Hierusalem et Iudam de Babylone”, “from the *confusion* of the present life to the *vision* of perpetual *peace* and the *confession* of divine praise, as it were to Jerusalem and Judaea from Babel”. Again, Bede has so internalized the etymological meanings of these three places that he can simply employ the Hebrew etymologies in order to make the meaning clearer.

Between these two citations, there appears an interesting passage that gives a historical interpretation involving Babylon, Jerusalem and Judaea without any immediate use of etymological wordplay:

> Filios prouinciae Iudaeae dicit non Babiloniae. Ad hanc enim pertinebant non tantummodo illi qui de ea in Babiloniam transmigrati sed etiam qui ex illorum stirpe in Babilonia fuerant nati qui etsi in Babylone corporaliter orti sunt animo tamen toto Iudaeam et Hierosolimam suspirabant.

He says sons of the province of Judaea, not of Babylon. For this pertains not only to those who were transported from [Judaea] into Babylon, but also to those who were born in Babylon from the stock of those [who were transported]; these later ones were physically born in Babylon but desired Judaea and Jerusalem with their whole soul.

Elsewhere, Bede employs wordplay with the Hebrew etymologies of these cities so frequently that when the actual names of the cities are presented, as in this case, the reader is forced to make the etymological connection without Bede’s help, and the allegorical meaning becomes transparent. Surrounded by passages that explicitly give the etymologies of these three cities and then employ wordplay, these lines are striking in their lack of any further wordplay; it is almost as if Bede wanted to give his audience a chance to make the connections on their own. He has

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144 Bede, *In Ez* I.476–9.
145 Bede, *In Ez* I.530–2.
already established that Babel is *confusio*, Jerusalem *uisio pacis* and Judaea *confessio* previously in the work (and in others), and the reader cannot help but make an immediately connection. From his earliest to his last works, elements of Babel play a role not only in explicit commentary, but also at the level of wordplay.

6 Conclusion

Treatments of the Tower of Babel narrative in the Latin works of early Anglo-Saxon England conform, as is to be expected, to the intellectual tradition that these English authors inherited from Late Antiquity. But, far from simply parroting the opinions of earlier authors, Anglo-Saxon authors also reveal much variation and originality when treating the Tower of Babel. Because the narrative provided a basis for understanding the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the world, it must have resonated much with those who saw themselves living on the very edges of the world. But along with an understanding of the roots for diversity, early Anglo-Saxon authors also saw the great potential of the narrative when it was removed from the intentions of its original author(s). The Church had the power to transcend the diversity created at Babel, and just as the sun illuminates the earth without discrimination of ethnic or linguistic differences, so does the Church find itself in the corners of Britain, one of the most diverse, ethnically and linguistically, areas of Europe.

But along with this notion that the Church transcends Babel’s diversity came the need to re-interpret Babel in order to re-enforce this new identity that was no longer based, in theory, on ethnicity. The negative features of Babel were emphasized and in turn re-applied to the Church’s enemies. Aldhelm’s unique association of Simon Magus and the pagan *magister militum* with Babylonian elements such as towers or magic and astrology are no coincidence. Likewise, Bede’s lengthy invective against pagans, heretics, Jews and even false catholics in his spiritual interpretation of the Tower of Babel reveals the need to recreate meaning in a biblical text that no longer serves earlier purposes. These are also some of the trends that will continue into the later Anglo-Saxon period, where issues of world diversity and Christian identity continue to influence interpretations of the Tower of Babel narrative.
Chapter 6
The Tower of Babel in Later Anglo-Saxon England

1 Introduction

Much had happened in England between the writings of Bede in the first half of the eighth century and Alfred’s translation program at the end of the ninth. The Viking invasions had hindered the great age of learning in early Anglo-Saxon England, and by the time relative stability returned, different cultural interests and emphases had emerged. By the late ninth century, Old English rivaled Latin as the written language of Britain. Even though Old English must have prevailed as the language of oral discourse in early Anglo-Saxon England, the surviving corpus of Old English texts before Alfred’s translation program is relatively small when compared to the large number of Latin texts.\(^1\) After the ninth century, however, the reverse is true. Stronger “nationalistic” tendencies that had begun to arise with the political unity created by King Alfred facilitated writing in English instead of Latin,\(^2\) making Old English one of the first written vernaculars of the early Middle Ages. In effect, the new cultural and political conditions that dominated English sentiment inevitably manifested in all literary spheres, and the various interpretations and literary employments of the Tower of Babel narrative are no exception. The political uniformity of later Anglo-Saxon England (albeit at times very unstable) was not so concerned with justifying its position within a multicultural and multilingual Church as it was with preserving that homogenous identity and cultural independence. Elements of the inherited traditions of Late Antiquity and early Anglo-Saxon England that interpreted the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the Tower of Babel in light of the unity of the world-wide Church are, therefore, downplayed in numerous Old English texts because they have lost some of their cultural value. But other elements of the Babel narrative that could be used by an author for specific purposes—elements such as the transience of glory, the wicked (or noble) builders of the

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Tower, or the origins of idolatry, among others—are those that Old English authors emphasized and focused upon when offering accounts of the Tower of Babel.

2 King Alfred

The new political and cultural situations of Anglo-Saxon England, present during Alfred’s tenure as King of Wessex (871–99), forced reconsiderations of linguistic issues, especially those involving the vernacular. Alfred’s translation program is a direct result of reassessment of not only linguistic diversity, but also linguistic hierarchy. Although there is no direct evidence that the Tower of Babel narrative, along with its typological counterpart, Pentecost, played a part in forming the ways that Anglo-Saxons of the ninth century looked at and justified the use of Old English, the inherited biblical and patristic tradition that understood the world’s linguistic diversity to have resulted from the Tower of Babel and to have been legitimized at Pentecost was certainly at work here. After outlining various interpretations of Babel and Pentecost among authors familiar to Alfred, Robert Stanton argues: “Alfred made no grand claims for the sacrality of English or the Pentecostal possibilities of his reforms. But following many eminent thinkers before him, he valorized the vernacular through simple usage, which after all was what gave the three sacred languages their authority”. Stanton is also careful to emphasize the pragmatic necessity behind Alfred’s translation program and the desire to foster learning by disseminating texts which were linguistically accessible.

It is, therefore, a pragmatic rather than theological impulse that appears in Alfred’s preface to his translation of Gregory’s *Pastoral Care*:

> Da gemunde ic hu sio æ wæs ærest on Ebreisc goðiode funden, & eft, þa þa hie Creca geleornodon, þa wendon hi hie on hiora ægen goðiode ealle, & eac ealle oðre bec. And eft Lædenware swa same, siððan hi hie geleornodon, hi hie wendon ealle ðurf wise wealhestodas on hiora agen goðeode. & eac ealla oðra Cristena ðioda sumne dæl hiora on hiora agen goðiode wendon.

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Then I reflected on how the law was first found among the Hebrew people, and afterward, when the Greeks learned it, they translated it completely into their own language, and also other books completely. And afterwards the Romans did the same; after they learned it, they translated it completely through wise interpreters into their own language. And also all other Christian nations translated some part of it into their own languages.\(^5\)

Ironically, the concern here seems to be in opposition to the justification of languages at Pentecost. Although Alfred recognizes that all the world’s different Christian ethnic groups are permitted to render the originally Hebrew “æ”, “law”, into their own languages, it is significant that Alfred stresses the order in which translation occurs. Both the Greeks and the Romans learned the law before making their own translations. Unlike at Pentecost, where the Gospel was preached simultaneously to every language group present, in this case, the necessity of already knowing the wisdom of a text precedes translation of that text. Of course, practically speaking, every translator must know the language of the text that is to be translated, but Alfred’s emphasis on the prior learning of the Greeks and Romans is curious. Alfred provides a justification for translation into the vernacular, but at the same time qualifies the need of competence to translate. In this passage, is Alfred offering his own credentials with an inference that he himself has learned the text before undertaking his translation? In any case, neither Babel nor Pentecost seems to be at the forefront of Alfred’s mind in these lines, but rather an eagerness to translate that merely reflects the linguistic justification of Pentecost.

### 2.1 The Old English Boethius

Elsewhere in the Alfredian corpus, however, the Tower of Babel narrative is employed directly. In the Old English translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, Alfred expands upon Boethius’s Latin by including mention of Nimrod and the building of Babel. Whereas the Boethian reference to the gigantomachia, the mythological war between the giants and the gods, is for

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\(^5\) Alfred, *PC* pref., pp. 4.25–6.6. It should be noted, however, that according to tradition, the Israelites were given (or perhaps “found”) the Law on the same day as Pentecost. See, for example, Isidore, *Quaestiones in vetus testamentum*, PL 83, col. 300B–C: “Jam deinde quinquagesima die post actum pascha data est lex Moysi. Ita et quinquagesima die post passionem Domini, quam pascha illud praefigurabat, datus est Spiritus sanctus”, “then on the fifteenth day after the event of Passover, the Law of Moses was given. So also the fifteenth day after the passion of the Lord, which prefigures that Passover, the Holy Spirit was given”. See also Adler, *Das erste christliche Pfingsfest*, 46–54.
Alfred “leasunga”, lies, that are told “on ealdum leasum spellum”, “in old lying tales”, the true story (“soðspell”) tells of Nimrod and the builders of the Tower of Babel.⁶ Boethius’s Latin, “Accepisti … in fabulis lacessentes caelum Gigantas”, “you have heard … in the fables of the Giants that harass heaven”,⁷ effectively becomes a long discussion syncretizing the gigantomachia and the Tower of Babel narrative that provides extra-biblical material on the site of the Tower, the builders’ intentions, and a moral lesson:

Lo, I know that you often heard tell in old false tales that Jupiter, son of Saturn, was supposedly the highest god over all other gods, and he was supposedly the son of heaven and supposedly ruled in heaven. And the giants were supposedly the sons of the earth and they supposedly ruled over the earth … Then it supposedly displeased the giants that Jupiter had their kingdom, and they wanted to break heaven under him … [The poets] made up such lies and they could have easily told the truth if the lies were not more pleasant; nevertheless, there is one very similar to these [lies]. They could have told what

foolishness the giant Nimrod did. Nimrod was the son of Chus; Chus was the son of
Ham, and Ham the son of Noah. Nimrod commanded that a tower be built on that field
which is called Shinar, and in that region which is called Deira—very near to the city
which people now call Babylon. They did that because they wanted to know how high it
was to heaven and how thick heaven was and how secure, or what was beyond it. But it
happened, as was fitting, that the divine power dispersed them before they could
complete it, and cast down that tower, and slew many of them, and divided their speech
into 72 languages. Thus does it happen to those who strive against divine power. No
honour accumulates for them in that, but that which they previously had becomes
diminished.8

There has been much commentary attempting to explain the presence of and a source for this
Alfredian addition. The conflation of the giants and builders of the Tower of Babel may have
initially arisen on account of a gloss in Alfred’s Latin copy, such as the one by the St Gall
commentator who states: “loquitor secundum fidem gentilium vel etiam tangit veritatem, quando
divisio linguarum facta est”, “s/he [i.e. Lady Philosophy; or perhaps Boethius, the author] is
speaking according to the faith of the pagans or also touches the truth [concerning the time]
when the division of languages happened”.9 Although, as Godden and Irvine rightly suggest, “the
O[ld] E[nglish] author may have been prompted by some such gloss”, a long tradition connecting
Nimrod and the biblical giants to the gigantomachia had already been established by the ninth
century. Though ultimately uncertain regarding Alfred’s immediate source, John H. Brinegar
outlines many biblical or patristic analogues that might have influenced Alfred, the most
probable being Avitus’s De deluuio mundi.10 And even Bede refers to the connection between
the giants of Greek fables and Babel in his commentary on Genesis.11 Before Bede and Avitus,

9 Kurt Otten, König Alfreds Boethius (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1964), 129; see also Godden and Irvine, Bo, 409; and
Frankis, “The Thematic Significance”, 262.
10 John H. Brinegar, “‘Books Most Necessary’: The Literary and Cultural Contexts of Alfred’s Boethius”, PhD diss.,
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000, 71–85. For Avitus see, Liber quartus de diluuio mundi, ed.
239: “Haec sunt priscorum quae de terrence gigantum / Carmine mentito Grai cecinere poetae … Non prius absistens,
subitas discordia linguas / Quam daret et varius confunderet omnia sermo‖, “These are those which the Greek poets
sang about in a lying song on the terror of the first giants … [that race] did not subsist [in its madness] before
discord gave unexpected languages and various speeches confused everything”.
11 Bede, In Gen II.983–6: “Gigantes … etiam post diluuium, id est temporibus Moysi uel Davuid multos fusisse
legimus, qui nomen habent Greece ex eo quod illos iuxta fabulas poetarum terra genuerit”, “we read that there were
the tradition extends as far back as the pre-Christian author Alexander Polyhistor, as Robert J. Menner points out, and it is quite possible that Alfred did not use any one direct source when he connected the pagan giants with the builders of Babel. In fact, the manner in which Alfred does connect the gigantomachia and the Tower of Babel narrative is unique to the tradition.

Whatever the source (if any), the sections of this passage that seem to be original are also of much interest. The intentions of the builders of the Tower, for example, are explained as pure intellectual curiosity. Rather than instigating a rebellion against God or creating a shelter for a second flood, the builders simply want to discover the nature of heaven (“Þæt hi dydon for þâm ðingum þæt hi woldon witon hu heah hit wære to þam hefone and hu þicke se hefon wære and hu fæst, oððe hwæt þær ofer wære”). While it is likely that Alfred includes these motives in order to ridicule the absurdity of the builders, the motives seem disconnected with the moral provided at the end of the passage: “Swa gebyreð ælcum þara ðe winð þam godcundan anwealde. Ne gewexð him nan weorðscipe on þam, ac wyrð se gewanod þe hi ær hæfdon”. Apparently, too much inquiry into the things that lie beyond human understanding is equivalent to rebellion against the divine power. Likewise, it is possible that the intellectual curiosity of the builders regarding the heavens reflects the association between Nimrod and astrology that appears in some depictions of the giant.

The other interesting Alfredian addition is the distinction between the Tower of Babel and Babylon, along with the mention of the field of Shinar and the province of Deira. As previously mentioned, throughout Late Antiquity, Babel and Babylon were near synonyms; if a distinction was to be made, it was according to chronology: Babel was the original Babylon. By the time Alfred is translating Boethius’s *Consolatio*, however, there was evidently some confusion over the two different names. This confusion appears earlier than Alfred in Alcuin’s *Interrogationes*, where the question “An unum opus est turris et civitas, vel duo?”, “whether the tower and city [of Babylon] is one work or two”, is given the answer: “aestimatur a pluribus arcem esse civitatis many giants after the Flood, that is, in the times of Moses and David; they have their name in Greek because according to the fables of the poets, the earth bore them”.


Nimrod is most prominently associated with astrology in the *Liber Nimrod*; see Livesey and Rouse, “Nimrod the Astronomer”. See also the account of Byrhtferth below p. 230.
Babyloniae turrem illam‖, “it is thought by many that the citadel of the city of Babylon is that Tower”.\textsuperscript{14} But unlike Alcuin’s answer, which unequivocally locates the Tower of Babel within the city of Babylon, the Old English Boethius dislocates Babel and Babylon. While there is no sure explanation behind this dislocation, it is possible that the author is attempting to reconcile the idea that the city of Babylon, which has its origins in Babel, still stands, despite later notions that Babylon had been destroyed,\textsuperscript{15} or that the site of the city of the Tower of Babel had become uninhabitable.\textsuperscript{16}

Moreover, the mention of the field of Shinar in the province of Deira is interesting. According to Genesis, Shinar is the land that held the field where the Tower of Babel was built, “campum in terrae Sennaar”, “a field in the land of Shinar” (Gn 11:2); and it was the home of Nimrod (Gn 10:10). The presence of Shinar in a description of Babel is, therefore, not surprising, even if it is mistaken for the name of a field (felda þe Sennar hatte).\textsuperscript{17} The reference to Deira, on the other hand, is surprising. Originally derived from the place name Dura in Daniel 3:1, where Nebuchadnezzar makes a golden idol “in campo Dura provinciae Babylonis”, “on the field of Dura in the province of Babylon”, the reference to Deira serves a dual purpose. First, even though Alfred abstains from identifying outright Babel with Babylon, the reference to Deira helps to unite the two by creating a common local for both. It endows Babel and Babylon not only with a spatial connection, since it locates Shinar and Babylon within the same general province (ðiode), but also with a temporal connection that surpasses the biblical mention of Dura, which is used solely for Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon. With the inclusion of the place Deira, Alfred insinuates that ancient Babel’s lineage extends to modern Babylon, even if they are not synonymous. Secondly, the resemblance of Alfred’s Babylonian Deira to the Anglo-Saxon region of Deira cannot have been missed by an Anglo-Saxon audience. As Godden and Irvine state, the variant Deira for Dura is found in Jerome’s commentary on Daniel—a commentary that also appears to have been used by the author of Solomon and Saturn II;\textsuperscript{18} and although the

\textsuperscript{14} Alcuin, Interrogationes, PL 100, col. 533C, 149. See Frankis, “The Thematic Significance”, 263.
\textsuperscript{15} For example, see the Old English Orosius below pp. 201–3.
\textsuperscript{17} The C text of Alfred, Bo 22.100, p. 487, contains the unusual form “Nensar”.
Old English forms of the region were not *Deira* but “*Deiri, Dere etc.*”,\(^{19}\) it is likely that some affiliation would have been assumed. It would be astonishing to think that Alfred’s Anglo-Saxon audience should be so naive as to think that the site of the building of the Tower of Babel was as close as Deira. But it is not precluded as inconceivable that an Anglo-Saxon would recognize the English region Deira with Alfred’s Babylonian Deira, at least on a paronomastic level.\(^{20}\) In fact, the verbal similarities between the Babylonian province and the Anglo-Saxon kingdom may have been poignantly reinforced by the further connections between Nebuchadnezzar’s idolatry in Dura / Deira, and the Vikings’ idolatry in Deira, “an area rich in the remains of the past, both Roman and Northumbrian, and in Alfred’s day an area of pagan Scandinavian settlement”.\(^{21}\)

### 2.2 The Old English Orosius

Likewise, the Tower of Babel appears in the Old English translation of Orosius’s *Historiae adversum paganos*, a text that does not seem to have been translated by Alfred himself, but rather by an author or authors connected to his translation program.\(^{22}\) Although the Old English text remains, in general, faithful to its Latin exemplar, there are points where vast differences between the Latin and Old English versions are evident. One such difference is found at the very beginning of the Old English work. Whereas Orosius’s Latin account includes a preface and an outline of the work’s methodology, the Old English version, after a table of contents, begins immediately with the division of the world into the three continents, “Asiam 7 Europem 7 Affricam”, “Asia and Europe and Africa”.\(^{23}\) From this traditional division of the world the translator, following Orosius, sets out to provide a universal geography. But instead of rendering a faithful translation of the Latin, some of the geographical descriptions in the Old English have been added to or even rewritten in order to update the geography of the world, especially for continental and northern Europe.\(^{24}\) As Nicole Guenther Discenza points out, despite the authorial liberty to contemporize European geography, the presentation of Britain is much slimmer than what would be expected for an English author: “Britain’s peoples are not listed, unlike those of

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\(^{19}\) Alfred, *Bo*, 410. The Latin form, however, is *Deira*, as apparent in Gregory the Great’s famous pun in Bede, *HE* II.1.

\(^{20}\) The names of modern cities such as Boring, Oregon or Hell, Michigan, may provide modern analogues.

\(^{21}\) Frankis, “The Thematic Significance”, 264; see also Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 82.

\(^{22}\) Bately, *Or*, lxxiii–xciii.

\(^{23}\) *Or* 8.14.

other parts of Europe. The British Isles, like Thule, appear too distant to be known”.  

But, as Discenza goes on to argue, there is also a “geographical recentering” of England that occurs during the interviews of Ohthere and Wulfstan with King Alfred: “The interviewers say nothing of England itself, but the shifted viewpoint makes that unnecessary: England becomes the center to which these explorers return after they have gone to more marginal lands, and Alfred is their ‘lord’”.  

This recentering of England in the Old English Orosius discloses some of the nuances behind the political hegemony forming under King Alfred. The traditional division of the world into the three continents of Noah’s three sons is affirmed, but ethnic or national status is also recalibrated to legitimize the political identity of the Anglo-Saxons. Just as the Church validated and empowered the presence of Christianity on the margins of the world, so also is Anglo-Saxon political power presented in such a way as to confirm its control despite its position at the edge of the world.

Outside of the geographical descriptions, the Old English Orosius, following the Latin, specifically treats the Tower of Babel. In both the Latin and Old English, Nimrod is termed a giant; the description and measurements of the city and its fortifications are nearly consistent; and the building materials are, with one exception, brick and bitumen. But despite the relative consistency between the two works, there are some interesting alterations in the Old English. First, the one exception in the Old English to the building materials of Babel deviates not only from Orosius’s, but also traditional, descriptions of the Tower. After translating the Latin line, “murus coctili latere atque interfuso bitumine conpactus”, as “he is geworht of tigelan 7 of eorðtyrewan”, “it is made of brick and bitumen”, the Old English translator mistakes the homonymous form *later* of Orosius’s later line, “utroque latere”, “on both sides” as a second reference to the building material. But in this case, he translates it with the adjective “stænenum”, “stone”. Bately notes that “the only references to stone in classical descriptions of


26 Discenza, “A Map of the Universe”, 94, emphasis hers. For the Old English, see Or 13.29–18.2.


28 Orosius, HAP II.6.6–13; Or 43.19–44.6. See Bately, Or, 235.

29 Orosius, HAP II.6.9–10; Or 43.28, 43.32.
Babylon are to a stone bridge; the city was otherwise constructed of baked brick and bitumen”. The adjective *stænen* is also odd in light of the earlier use of *tigelan*. But while a description of Babel’s stone material may not be found in classical descriptions, it is found elsewhere in Old English literature. The Old English poem *Genesis A* used the adjective *stænen* to describe Babel. These two instances may point to a unique tendency in Old English to ascribe stonework to the building of Babel on account of the Anglo-Saxon familiarity with ruined stone buildings of the ancient past.

A second alteration in the Old English Orosius expands material regarding Babylon’s founders. Whereas Orosius simply states: “namque Babylonam a Nebro gigante fundatam, a Nino uel Samiramide reparatam multi prodidere”, “for many have asserted that Babylon was founded by Nimrod the giant and repaired by Ninus or Semiramis”, the Old English renders: “Membrað se ent angan ærest timbran Babylonia 7 Ninus se cyning æfter him. 7 Sameramis his cwen hie geendade æfter him on middeweardum hierce”, “Nimrod the giant first began to build Babylon and Ninus the king after him. And Semiramis his queen finished it after him in the middle of her reign”. The reasons behind the difference are subtle; Orosius’s word, *reparatam*, points towards the cessation of city-building when the workers of the Tower of Babel were scattered, and the reparation of a new city of Babylon under Ninus. The Old English, however, is not concerned with the unfulfilled motives of Nimrod and the builders of Babel, but rather with the continuity of the city’s early history, which is found in Orosius’s earlier treatment of Ninus, the first king of the Assyrians, a blood-drinker and the killer of Zoroaster, and his wife, Semiramis, a cruel queen who tries to kill her son after having incestuous relations with him. The continuity in the Old English account underlines to a greater degree than the Latin the wicked lineage extending from Nimrod, the giant, to Ninus, the tyrant, to Semiramis, the evil queen, and thereby represents the enduring wickedness of Babylon and the Augustinian notion of the city of the Devil.

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32 Orosius, *HAP* II.6.7; *Or* 43.21–3.
Once this wicked lineage of Babel / Babylon is established alongside its magnificent architecture, the author turns his description of the city into a moral lesson that is absent in the Latin. According to Bately, Orosius’s Latin word *confirmat* at the end of the description of Babylon “is apparently taken to indicate speech on the part of the city”. In the Old English, the city itself laments that its former glory has passed and warns that there is nothing secure or strong enough to last in the world:

> heo wære to bisene asteald eallum middangearde, 7 eac swelce heo self sprecende sie to eallum moncynne 7 cweþe: ‘Nu ic þuss gehroren eam 7 aweg gewiten, hwæt, ge magan on me ongietan 7 oncnawan þæt ge nanuht mid eow ñabbað fæstes ne stronges þætte þurhwunigeæ næge’.

[The city] was set as an example to all the world, as if it itself might be speaking and saying to all humankind: ‘Now I am thus fallen and passed away; see, you can look on me and know that you have nothing with you that is secure nor strong enough to be able to endure’.  

Although the city of Babylon is here referring to its later destruction by Cyrus, as Frankis states, it is explicitly connected to the original city of Babel through the chain of its original rulers, Semiramis, Ninus and Nimrod. The city, in other words, was created with evil intent and ruled until its destruction with evil intent. The desire for glory that its builders sought and, to some extent, achieved through its architectural grandeur becomes a moral lesson for the entire world (*eallum middangearde*) that speaks to all humankind (*eallum moncynne*)—a lesson that is poignantly underlined by the iron fact that the very city where linguistic diversity was created is now lamenting with one voice to everyone. Babel / Babylon, in a sense, is only able to transcend its linguistic punishment by offering a model of the retribution that accompanies such wrongdoing. But in this transcendence of its own linguistic punishment, the city’s speech provides a more fundamental role for the Old English author: it provides relevance to Babel / Babylon by turning it into a typology for the failure of all proud endeavors against God, in much

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34 Bately, *Or*, 235.
35 *Or* 44.1–6.
the same way that the building of the Tower provides an exemplum of divine punishment and the
futility of earthly glory in the Old English Boethius.

2.3 The Ark-Born Son of Noah

As mentioned above, the geography of the Alfredian Orosius states that there are three continents
of the world; this statement, of course, refers to the three sons of Noah. However, within some of
the West-Saxon royal genealogies of the ninth and tenth centuries, a fourth son of Noah is
included, probably for propaganda purposes. As Thomas D. Hill has shown, the notion of Noah’s
fourth son is not original to Anglo-Saxon England, and an analogue can be found in the
Revelationes of pseudo-Methodius, an eighth-century work that might have been known among
the antiquarians of Anglo-Saxon England who composed the royal genealogies. Hill argues that
the pseudo-Methodius text, which contains the extra-biblical figure of Jonitus, a son of Noah
who resembles the traditional characteristics of his later friend and student Nimrod, gives at least
one precedent to justify the inclusion of an ark-born son in Anglo-Saxon genealogies. Daniel
Anlezark, conversely, who overstates Hill’s presentation of an analogue as an argument for a
source, rejects any connection between pseudo-Methodius and the Anglo-Saxon genealogies, but
(strangely enough) argues that the source of pseudo-Methodius, the Syriac Book of the Cave of
Treasures, is a more likely candidate based on the possibility that Theodore of Tarsus, who
seems to have known the text, introduced the notion of an ark-born son into Anglo-Saxon
England. From Theodore, the notion of an ark-born son became removed from the context of the
Book of the Cave of Treasures but continued to offer an authoritative precedent to the Anglo-
Saxon genealogists. Anlezark’s criticism of Hill, therefore, rests solely on the date of pseudo-
Methodius and the lack of evidence that it was known by the ninth-century in Anglo-Saxon
England. It is just as likely, if not more, that English monks “either in their travels or by

37 Thomas D. Hill, “The Myth of the Ark-Born Son and the West-Saxon Royal Genealogical Tables”, HTR 80
30.
38 See Pseudo-Methodius, Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius die ältesten griechischen und lateinischen
39 Anlezark, Water and Fire, 254–8. See also Frederick M. Biggs, “Cave of Treasures”, in Sources of Anglo-Saxon
Literary Culture: The Apocrypha, ed. Frederick M. Biggs, Instrumenta Anglistica Mediaevalia 1 (Kalamazoo, MI:
Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), 6. Borst II.543, also suggests the Book of the Cave of Treasures as an
analogue for the ark-born son.
40 For a recent and very thorough study on the Revelationes of pseudo-Methodius in England, see Michael W.
Twomey, “The Revelationes of Pseudo-Methodius and Scriptural Study at Salisbury in the Eleventh Century”, in
courtesy of loans”, as Twomey suggests, learned of Pseudo-Methodius’s ark-born son which, removed from its own immediate context, provided a foundation for the ark-born sons of the royal genealogies. Anlezark’s preference for the Book of the Cave of Treasures as a source of the fourth born son is, therefore, less convincing than Hill’s suggestion for pseudo-Methodius as an analogue.

But whatever its origins, the presence of an extra-biblical ark-born son in the West-Saxon genealogies is curious, and despite his unnecessary disagreement with Hill, Anlezark gives a thorough treatment of the subject with much bibliographical reference that does not need to be repeated here. In sum, Anlezark argues that the ark-born son is an ideological, not theological, development from the time of King Alfred: “the fusion of the heroic Germanic past with the world of the biblical patriarchs which the invention of Sceaf as the fourth son of Noah suggests is certainly an ideological innovation appropriate to the reign of Alfred”. For the purposes of this study, it will be sufficient to mention that the presence of an ark-born son in the royal genealogies is important in that it reveals how fluid the interpretative tradition of the Table of Nations and Babel could be. Because the invention of a fourth son of Noah is perhaps the most atypical (and audacious) alteration to the biblical account of the descendants of Noah in Anglo-Saxon England, it provides a striking example of the fusion of Anglo-Saxon concerns with Christian authoritative texts. Some of the authors of Anglo-Saxon England were not so bound to the authoritative traditions of the past or of the continent that they could not offer creative deviations for their own specific purposes. Although the notion of an ark-born son of Noah enjoyed limited popularity and acceptance among later Anglo-Saxons, it provides one of the

43 Anlezark, Fire and Water, 272.  
44 For examples of authors who state there were only eight people in the ark, see Anlezark, Fire and Water, 273–82. His argument that these authors are reacting against the fourth son of Noah, however, is unconvincing, especially since there was biblical precedent to enumerate those on the ark: “octo animae salvae factae sunt per aquam” (I Pt 3:20).
more extreme examples of the freedom to alter the inherited tradition for, in this case, ideological or political purposes.

3 Old English Poetry

3.1 Genesis A

The Tower of Babel narrative also appears in the Old English poem, *Genesis A*, where Genesis 11 is rewritten according to the “natural features of an Anglo-Saxon versification”.45 The episode begins with a description of migration from the East that is reminiscent of other northern migration tales, and the poet of *Genesis A*, in the words of R.M. Liuzza, “appropriates the Biblical narrative into a kind of English Landnámabók”.46 Paul Battles has also outlined in some detail the ways in which the Old English narrative deviates from the biblical text in order to present a migrating people in search of “a more spacious domain” (*rumre land*).47 But beyond these more obvious alterations to the biblical source, there is some debate over the extent of the influence of Augustinian theology on this section.48 The Babel narrative of *Genesis A* is remarkably unlike many of the other accounts in Anglo-Saxon England that rely more heavily on Augustine’s theology of the two cities.49 Not only are the typical allusions to the gigantism of the builders of the Tower of Babel absent, but the builders actually seem to be portrayed in an indifferent, if not positive, light—noblemen in search of a homeland.50 Truly, the initial construction of a city on the pastoral fields of Shinar does not recall Augustine’s city of the Devil, nor the previous Alfredian accounts:

Gesetton þa Senna sidne and widne
leoda ræswan; leofum mannum
heora geardagum grene wongas,
fægre foldan, him forðwearde

49 Bede provides the most obvious examples; see above pp. 180–1.
50 See Battles, “Genesis A”, 47–9, who is Huppé’s strongest critic on this issue.
on ðære dægtide  duguðe wæron,
wilna gehwilces  weaxende sped

The leaders of the people settled Shinar far and wide; green fields, fair earth, were
enduring for the beloved people in their earlier days, were excellent at that time—success
of each delight increasing. (1655–60)

Karin Olsen, however, has recently revived an interpretation of the episode that places it more
firmly in the Augustinian tradition. Following a suggestion made by A.N. Doane, Olsen argues
that the poet’s reminder that the world was still monolingual during Nimrod’s reign (“Reord wæs
þa gieta / eorðbuendum an gemæne” [1635–6])—an insertion of Genesis 11:1 into material from
Genesis 10:10—“reinforces the connection between Nimrod and the building of city and tower

Likewise, the description of Nimrod as the “Babylones bregorices fruma, / ærest æðelinga”, “the chief of the kingdom of Babylon, the first noble” (1633–4), places him at the head of “both the allegorical Babylon, that is, the City of the World, and its representative, Babel”.\footnote{Olsen, “‘Him þæs grim lean becom’”, 138. But see Battles, “Genesis A”, 48–9, nt. 24.}

But Doane and Olsen’s argument needs clarification in certain aspects. For one, there is no
mention of Nimrod, Babylon or Babel in the Babel narrative proper of Genesis A. Instead, much
like the biblical account itself, the poet has unnamed noblemen building a tower and city at
Shinar (Sennar / Sennera feld).\footnote{The poet refers to Shinar three times: GenA 1655, 1668, 1701.} But it is likely that the resemblance to the biblical account and
the mention of Shinar would have been enough for the original audiences of Genesis A to
associate the Old English account with Nimrod and Babylon. Shinar, for example, is used as a
near synonym in apposition to Babylon in the Old English poem Daniel, which, with Genesis A,
is preserved in Junius 11.\footnote{Dan 600–1: “Babilone burh … Sennera feld”.} Similarly, Doane and Olsen’s suggestion that the Genesis A-poet’s
intercalation of Genesis 11:1 into material derived from Genesis 10:10 underlines the connection
between Nimrod with the building of Babel is unconvincing. Stronger evidence can be found in
the verbal parallels between Nimrod’s multilingual reign: “Reord wæs þa gieta / eorðbuendum

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53 The poet refers to Shinar three times: GenA 1655, 1668, 1701.
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54 Dan 600–1: “Babilone burh … Sennera feld”.
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an gemæne”, “there was still one common language for the earth-dwellers” (1635–6), and the linguistic confusion at Babel: “he reðemod reorde gesette / eorðbuendum ungelice”, “he [sc. God], fierce, made language for the earth-dwellers dissimilar” (1684–5).\footnote{Such close proximity of the words reord and eorðbuendum only occur in these two instances within the entire Old English corpus.} Likewise, further evidence for the influence of Augustinian theology in the Babel narrative can be found in the broader structure and context surrounding the narrative. Following the biblical order, the Genesis A poet presents his version of the Table of Nations before the Babel narrative. Very little attention is given to the names in Genesis, and only one or two descendants are chosen for comment. There are, however, significant parallels drawn between Nimrod (a descendant of Ham through Cush) and Eber (a descendant of Sem). Nimrod’s appellation, “eafora Chuses”, “Cush’s son” (1629), is paralleled a few lines later with Eber’s appellation, “eofora Semes”, Sem’s son” (1646);\footnote{As Andy Orchard has pointed out to me, there is also likely a pun made on the name Eber and the word eofera.} and Nimrod’s initial monolingual reign of “eorðbuendum”, “earth-dwellers” (1636), is paralleled by Eber’s one linguistic group, which “ealle eorðbuend Ebrei hatað”, “all earth-dwellers call Hebrew” (1648).\footnote{Doane, ed., Genesis A, 282, does make a similar observation on the structure.}

Moreover, immediately after the brief account of Eber, the poet begins the Babel narrative. In fact, the transition between Sem’s lineage and the Babel narrative is so abrupt that there is nothing but familiarity with the biblical account to indicate that the Old English poet is not continuing his account of Sem’s lineage.\footnote{Scheil, The Footsteps of Israel, 152–4 may be correct in his interpretation that the “proto-Hebrews” are meant to be understood as the builders of Babel.} Immediately after the Babel narrative, the poet, following the biblical order, again picks up with Sem’s lineage, in a manner that effectually demarcates the Babel narrative as an individual section as if it was almost arbitrarily inserted into an account of Sem’s lineage. This demarcation effectively contrasts the wickedness of the building of Babel with the righteousness of Sem’s lineage. Just as with the parallels created between Nimrod and Eber, the poet presents a distinction between the two races by means of verbal parallels that connect the Babel narrative and the later account of Sem’s lineage. While the Tower of Babel was proudly raised up to the heavens (1167: up … to rodortunglum; 1675: to heofnum up; 1681: to roderum up), Sem’s lineage grows and flourishes humbly under the clouds
While the men at Babel become a “mægburh fremde”, “hostile tribe” (1695), the lineage of Sem become a “mægburh Semes”, “tribe of Sem” (1703) only eight lines later. And the second element of the word mægburh must have created etymological and oral contrasts with the city or burh that is built on the field of Shinar (1666: burh; 1680: burhfesten; 1700: steape burh). Sem’s mægburh, therefore, contrasts with both the mægburh fremde and the burh of Babel in a way that may represent the Augustinian city of God in contrast to the Babylonian city of the Devil.

Outside of the Augustinian influences, the poet of Genesis A deviates from the biblical source in other manners. Just as the Old English Orosius uses the adjective stænen to describe the building material of the Tower of Babel, the same word appears twice, along with the noun stantorrr, stone-tower, in reference to the Tower of Babel in Genesis A. It is possible that the word stænen in the Old English Orosius and Genesis A was meant to recall the Old English theme of ruined buildings constructed by giants (enta geweorc). Although this Old English poetic theme has dubious origins and cannot be connected with any certainty to the Tower of Babel, an Anglo-Saxon Christian audience would likely recall the Tower of Babel when hearing mention of any building associated with giants, especially ruined ones. Because the theme of enta geweorc is used in Old English poetry in reference to stone buildings, and once to towers specifically, the authors of Genesis A and the Old English Orosius may have deliberately deviated from the tradition portrayal of a brick Tower in order to have their accounts resonate closer with an Anglo-Saxon audience.

Alternatively, both of these Old English texts may be deriving the image of stonework from an illustration of the Tower of Babel. Within Junius 11 there seem to be two unrelated pictures of

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59 The poet may also be employing an etymological pun here, since Sem is occasionally interpreted as nubilum, cloud, in Late Antiquity; Thiel, Grundlagen und Gestalt der Hebräischkenntnisse, 414. For other examples of etymological wordplay in GenA, see Roberta Frank, “Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse”, Speculum 47 (1972): 207–26, at 211–5; and Robinson, “The Significance of Names”, 29–34.

60 GenA 1676: “stænenne weall”; 1691: “weall stænenne”; 1700: “stantorr”. It is possible that the word stænen in the Old English Orosius and Genesis A was meant to recall the Old English theme of ruined buildings constructed by giants (enta geweorc).

61 Frankis, “TheThematic Significance”, 265. The phrase, enta geweorc, occurs with slight variance in And 1235, 1495; Beo 1679, 2717, 2774; Max II 2; the Ruin 2; and Wan 87.

Babel. The first depicts Nimrod and the builders sitting within a crenellated fortress; the second, four groups of people scattering across the four corners of the earth before an unfinished tower of smooth columns. Although the text and the images of Junius 11 do not seem to have been produced together, the images may provide some insight into the text. While it could not be said that the second picture of the Tower of Babel proper is made of stones, it is possible to interpret the large blocks of building material in Nimrod’s Babylonian fortress as stænen, and the Old English poet might have derived his description of the Tower from an image of this sort. Furthermore, the words “weall stænenne” (1691) appear in the very middle of the first line of the manuscript page that contains Nimrod’s stone fortress, and at least from the point of view of the audience it is impossible not to associate the image with the text. Likewise, Genesis A claims that the builders “to heofnum up hlædra rærdon”, “raised up a ladder to heaven”. Although (to my knowledge) there do not appear any textual references to ladders in the descriptions of the building of the Tower of Babel in the sources of Late Antiquity and early Anglo-Saxon England, ladders appear with some frequency among medieval pictures of the Tower of Babel. Whereas the images of Babel in Junius 11 do not contain a ladder, there are two ladders in the picture of the Tower of Babel in Cotton Claudius B.iv: one on which God inspects the work of the Tower and another which a builder carrying bricks uses. Because of the apparent lack of textual references to a ladder among interpretations of the Tower of Babel, it is likely that this detail derives from an illustration of the relevant image.

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63 Oxford, Bodleian, Junius 11 is digitized online at Early Manuscripts at Oxford University website: [http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msjunius11](http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msjunius11), accessed 14 April 2010. The images appear on pp. 81 and 82 respectively. For the relationship of this picture to others in the manuscript, see Catherine E. Karkov, Text and Picture in Anglo-Saxon England: Narrative Strategies in the Junius 11 Manuscript, CSASE 31 (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 95–7.


65 GenA 1675.


67 For the tradition of illustrations that provide possible exemplars for these manuscript illuminations, see George Henderson, “Late-Antique Influences in Some English Medieval Illustrations of Genesis”, Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 25 (1962): 172–98.
3.2 Solomon and Saturn II

The Old English poem, Solomon and Saturn II, which is a poetic dialogue between the pagan god Saturn and the Jewish king Solomon, is notoriously difficult to interpret. It is preserved incompletely in only one manuscript, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 422, has no known source, cannot be dated with any certainty, and arguments for its authorship range widely from the circle of Alfred to Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury (959–88). Moreover, the text provides a unique variation on the medieval genre of Solomon dialogues. As Menner points out, in other Solomon dialogues of the Middle Ages, Solomon’s opponent is not Saturn, but a certain Marcolfus (who is given brief mention in Solomon and Saturn II). It is only in the Old English versions, including Solomon and Saturn II, that the character of Marcolfus is replaced by the sagacious Chaldean Saturn. This Chaldean (that is Babylonian) characteristic of Saturn, which is not obvious to the modern reader, would have been more obvious to a medieval audience, especially since Isidore makes the connection clear: “Bel idolum Babylonium est, quod interpretatur vetus. Fuit autem hic Belus pater Nini, primus rex Assyriorum, quem quidam Saturnum appellant”, “Bel is a Babylonian idol, which is interpreted as ‘old’. For this Belus was the father of Ninus, [and] the first king of the Assyrians, whom some call Saturn”.

In accordance with Saturn’s association with Babylon, the Solomon and Saturn II poet has Saturn learn his lore among various eastern (and European) nations at the beginning of the dialogue, and in the Solomon and Saturn Poetic Fragment, which precedes Solomon and

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68 See Daniel Anlezark, ed., The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009), 1–4; and Ker 70.
69 For composition in Alfred’s circle, see Patrick P. O’Neill, “On the Date, Provenance and Relationship”, 139–68, at 152–64; for composition by Dunstan, see Anlezark, Old English Dialogues, 49–57.
72 Sol II 7–23. It is also interesting that, as O’Neill, “On the Date”, 143, observes, Saturn in Solomon and Saturn I obtains his knowledge from “Greece, Libya and India—a synecdoche for the three continents known to the ancient world, Europe, Africa and Asia”.

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Saturn II at the head of the manuscript, but is thought to be the conclusion of the poem.\textsuperscript{73} Saturn is referred to as the “Caldea eorl”, “chief of the Chaldeans” (7). Likewise, Solomon, who capitalizes on Saturn’s association with the Chaldeans, twice alludes to the building of the Tower of Babel. The first allusion appears after a substantial lacuna (one erased folio) that follows the poem’s introduction.\textsuperscript{74} Solomon, apparently on account of Saturn’s nationality, refers to the Chaldeans as the builders of Babel:

\begin{verbatim}
Wat ic ðæt wæron Caldeas
guðe ðæs gielpne  ond ðæs goldwlonce,
maerða ðæs modige,  ðæer to ðam moning gelomp
suð ymbe Sanere feld.
I know that Chaldeans were so boastful in war and so arrogant with gold, so brave in glory—a warning was given there, south about the field of Shinar. (29–30)
\end{verbatim}

And later in the poem, Solomon repeats his jab at Saturn and the Chaldean people with another allusion to the Tower of Babel:

\begin{verbatim}
Swa bið ðonne ðissum modgum monnum,  ðam ðe her nu mid mane lengest
lifiað on ðisse lænan gesceafte.  Ieo ðæt ðine leode gecyðdon,
wunnun hie wið Dryhtnes miehtum,  forðon hie ðæt worc ne gedegdon.
Ne sceall ic ðe hwædre broðor abelgan;  ðu eart swiðe bittres cynnes,
 corre eormenstrynde.  Ne beyrn ðu in ða inwitgecyndo!
So it then is these proud people who here live longest now with wickedness in this transitory creation. Long ago your people revealed that; they strove against the power of the Lord; for that reason, they did not complete that work. But I must not make you angry, brother; you are of a very bitter nation, an angry and mighty race. Do not move into that evil nature! (149–53)
\end{verbatim}

As O’Neill has shown, these lines find their source in Habakkuk 1:6–7 ("Chaldeos gentem amaram et velocem … horribilis et terribilis est", “the Chaldeans are a bitter and swift nation …

\textsuperscript{73} Anlezark, ed., \textit{Old English Dialogues}, 45.
\textsuperscript{74} See Anlezark, ed., \textit{Old English Dialogues}, 4.
it is horrible and terrible”) and, most likely, Jerome’s commentary on Daniel.75 Furthermore, both of the passages on Babel in Solomon and Saturn II have similarities with the Alfredian treatments of Babel.76 Just as the Old English Orosius describes Babylon as an example to all humans (to bisene), Solomon and Saturn II calls Babel a warning (to ðam moning). Likewise, just as the Old English Boethius describes the builders of the Tower as striving against divine power, Solomon and Saturn II describes the Chaldeans as striving against the might of the Lord.77 In both the Alfredian Boethius and Orosius, and in this passage of Solomon and Saturn II the Tower of Babel is presented as a moral lesson rather than an etiological explanation of the world’s diversity. Saturn, who is presented as a descendant of the very builders of Babel, reminds the poem’s audience that the danger of divine punishment as meted out at Babel continues to exist. As Kathryn Powell argues, the boastful, arrogant, glory-seeking Chaldeans, who evidently have not learned the lesson taught at Babel, are portrayed as a contrast to the righteousness of Solomon, the spokesperson for western Christendom. The Tower is used for a didactic purpose that makes Solomon “the corrector of Eastern error” and disguises “the fact that error [is] … endemic to the West as well”.78 This dichotomy between good and evil, and West and East, that finds expression in Solomon’s words on the Tower of Babel is present throughout the poem. As Anlezark argues, the structure of Solomon and Saturn II revolves around the interchange of two typological figures who represent the Augustinian cities of God and the Devil: “Saturn the Chaldean is associated with the sinful confusion of Babel, Solomon with the peace of Jerusalem”.79

Outside of the more explicit allusions to the Tower of Babel, the opposition between Solomon’s Jerusalem and Saturn’s Babel also appears in Saturn’s first riddle. Solomon, after offering the warning (moning) provided by the Tower of Babel, asks about the land where “nænig fyra ne mæg fotum gestæppan”, “no man may set with feet” (33). Saturn then provides an answer that is more cryptic than Solomon’s question itself. Saturn refers to a mysterious Wulf who slays serpents but is slain by death, a land where no man, bird nor beast may go, and a gleaming sword that stands over graves:

77 See O’Neill, “On the Date”, 157, nt. 82.
79 Anlezark, Old English Dialogues, 46.
Anlezark translates this passage as:

The great sea-traveller was called surging Wulf, known to the people of the Philistines, a friend of Nimrod. On that field he slew twenty-five dragons at dawn, and then death felled him, because no man can seek that land, no one that border-land, nor bird fly there, more than any of the beasts of the earth. From there first arose poison-kind, spread widely, those which surging now through poisonous breath make spacious the entrance. His sword shines yet, highly polished, and its hilt gleams over graves. (34–46)

This passage has been called “one of the most curious and puzzling passages in the poem”, and there have been numerous attempts at interpretation, some more successful than others. For one, since Menner’s edition, much light has been shed on the meaning of various elements of the passage. Anlezark has provided a close Virgilian analogue for the barren lands of *Solomon and Saturn II* that also describes a land of ominous steam or breath that is hostile to birds:

spelunca alta fuit uastoque immanis hiatu,  
scrupea, tuta lacu nigro nemorumque tenebris,
quam super haud ullae poterant impune uolantes
tendere iter pennis: talis se se halitus atris
faucibus effundens supera ad conuexa ferebat.

The deep cave was enormous with a vast opening; [it was also] rocky and guarded by a
black lake and the darkness of trees, over which no bird could have an unpunished
journey with their wings: some great steam poured from black fissures and bore itself to
the highest vaults. 81

And these lines can be further complemented by the description of the fall of Babylon in
Revelation 18:2, a description that would be fitting for Saturn’s affiliation to the Chaldeans:
“cecidit cecidit Babylon magna et facta est habitatio daemoniorum et custodia omnis spiritus
inmundi et custodia omnis volucris inmundae”, “the great Babylon has fallen, fallen, and it has
been made a habitation of demons and a guardian of each unclean spirit, and a guardian of each
unclean bird”. 82 Furthermore, along with these Latin sources, Orchard has noted connections of
Solomon and Saturn II to the Old English poem Beowulf, which include sea-faring and dragon-
slaying heroes, desolate marchlands (mercstede), and gleaming swords. Such connections
strengthen the heroic elements of the Solomon and Saturn II passage and place both poems
firmly into vernacular “traditions concerning antediluvian giants and, after the Flood, mighty
human figures of pride”. 83

But despite these putative sources and analogues, one of the most mysterious figures of this
passage of Solomon and Saturn II remains the figure Weallende Wulf, who is called a friend of
Nimrod (freond Nebrondes). On account of the heroic events in the passage and the verb was
haten, it has often been assumed that Weallende Wulf, or simply Wulf, is a legendary figure,
whose history (now lost) might have been familiar to the poem’s original audience. For this
reason, much scholarly effort has been spent trying to explain the origin of this figure. Montague
Rhodes James attempts to connect Wulf to the giant Og of Bashan; and Menner to the
Babylonian Bel and to Marcolfus (and therefore to Saturn himself), but neither of these

81 Mynors, ed., Aeneid, VI.236–41, p. 234. Anlezark, Old English Dialogues, 120; and idem, “Poisoned Places: The
82 Anlezark, Old English Dialogue, 120.
83 Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, 84.
suggestions is convincing. Likewise, Anlezark, following previous editions, capitalizes *Wulf*, but takes a more cautious approach: “whatever the full significance of the passage, Wulf is clearly a heroic figure whose great deeds lead to his death, linked to the origin of ‘poison-kind’.” But, along with these interpretive attempts, it should be stated that the word *Wulf* is not necessarily a proper noun. In fact, due to the enigmatic nature of the passage, it is probably more likely that the words *weallende wulf* do not represent an actual person but, much like all the other phrases describing this character, merely provide another clue for the riddle’s solution. In effect, even the word *weallende* itself has an enigmatic element, for it provides an Isidorian etymology to the word *wulf*. Isidore writes that the Greeks have named the wolf because it: “rabie rapacitatis quaequae invenerit trucidet”, “slaughters whatever it finds with a rage of rapacity”. The verb *weallan*, which can also have the meaning “to rage”, reflects Isidore’s *rabies*, “rage”.

Moreover, there are other elements in this riddle that reflect Isidore’s *Etymologiae*. Isidore’s twenty-five specifically named types of serpents correspond to the “xxv dracena”; the Isidorian phrase, “tot venena quot genera”, “as many poisons as kinds” may be behind the word “atercyn”; and Isidore’s statement that over the basilisk’s gaze “nulla avis volans inlaesa transit”, “no flying bird crosses unharmed” may be the source of the lines “ne mæg … mon gesecan, / fugol gefleogan”. Since Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe has shown that the author of *Solomon and Saturn II* is indebted to Latin geographical writings, including Isidore, in the opening passage of *Solomon and Saturn II*, it is no surprise that other Isidorian elements can be detected elsewhere in the poem, notably in Saturn’s first riddle.

But the first thing to note regarding this riddle’s solution is that Solomon does not ask about a person, but rather a certain type of land (*dam lande*); and when he does not get the answer that he is looking for, he provides his own solution: “on deop wæter … ne he mid fotum ne mæg / grund

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86 Anlezark, *Old English Dialogues*, 46; he later states that Wulf is “apparently a personal name” (119).
87 Isidore, *Ety XII*.ii.23.
88 See Bosworth-Toller, s.v. ‘weallan’, VII, p. 1174.
89 For Aldhelm’s use of Isidorian etymology in the *Enigmata*, see Howe, “Aldhelm’s *Enigmata* and Isidorian Etymology”.
90 Isidore, *Ety XII*.iv.2–32; *Ety XII*.iv.3; and *Ety XII*.iv.6, respectively.
91 O’Keeffe, “The Geographic List”, *passim*. 
geræcan‖, “in deep water … he cannot reach the ground with his foot” (47–50).\textsuperscript{92} But Saturn’s efforts are not completely off the mark. It is evident that Saturn attempts to give a topographical solution to Solomon, for his answer echoes Solomon’s question and persistently mentions land: “[Solomon]: Sæge me from ðam lande / ðær næg fyra ne mæg fotum gestæppan … [Saturn]: ða foldan ne mæg fira næg / ðone mercstede, mon gesecan, fugol gefleogan ne ðon ma foldan nita”. Despite its opening lines, the riddle, therefore, deals not so much with describing an enigmatic hero, but rather about the land that Solomon originally asked about.

One further clue for the solution to this riddle has been missed, perhaps on account of the modern editions. Both Menner and Anlezark, following the suggestion of Grein,\textsuperscript{93} emend the manuscript reading sæliðende to mereliðende in the first line of the passage in order to keep the alliteration with mæra. Such an emendation makes good sense according to rules of Old English versification. But it is possible that the line could be emended otherwise to retain the Old English alliteration. The first two words of the line, \textit{Se mæra}, may have originally been the single word \textit{Sennar}, which not only alliterates with sæliðende at the end of the line but also provides a solution to Solomon’s question regarding inhabitable land: “Shinar it was called”.\textsuperscript{94} It is conceivable that the scribe did not recognize the place name \textit{Sennar} in his exemplar, perhaps on account of minim confusion, and rewrote the word as \textit{Se mæra} in order to make sense of the line. If so, the first five lines should then be understood as two sentences: “Shinar it was called. The sea-traveller, the surging Wolf … on that field he slew, etc”. Along with Solomon’s initial allusion to Shinar, which may be repeated in Saturn’s first line, the reference to Nimrod, and the persistent mention of a desolate land, it is possible that Saturn’s enigmatic answer to Solomon’s question is simply: Shinar, the field of Babel, the origin of the Chaldeans and Saturn himself.\textsuperscript{95}

3.3 Beowulf

The most famous of all Old English poems, \textit{Beowulf}, has also been one of the most difficult to interpret, or at least has given itself to the largest array of interpretation.\textsuperscript{96} The profound complexity of the poem, from its numerous philological and textual cruxes to its grander

\textsuperscript{92} O’Keeffe, “The Geographic List”, 139–40, interprets Solomon’s response as a joke.
\textsuperscript{93} Christian W.M. Grein, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie, vol. 3.2 (Leipzig: Wigand, 1898), 314(68), n. 211.
\textsuperscript{94} The spelling \textit{Sennera} is found in Dan 601 and GenA 1668; the form in SollII 32, however, is \textit{Sanere}.
\textsuperscript{95} For now, the initial hero and the mysterious gleaming sword that stands over the graves remain inexplicable.
thematic paradoxes, has deservedly secured it a place among the great works of English literature. A large part of the poem’s intricacy lies in the manner which the *Beowulf*-poet has woven the beliefs of early medieval Christianity into a story about Germanic warriors and monsters. Although the subject of the poem focuses on the mythological feats of its hero, Beowulf, the poet was familiar with the early chapters of Genesis, along with some of the traditional interpretations of these chapters. Just after the opening hundred lines, for example, the first monster of the poem, a giant named Grendel, is said to have been created “in Caines cynne”, “in the race of Cain” (107, cf. 1261). There is then an allusion to the murder of Abel and Cain’s punishment from God before the poet states that all the world’s monsters are descended from Cain:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{þanon untydras} & \quad \text{ealle onwocon}, \\
\text{eotenas ond ylfe} & \quad \text{ond orcneas}, \\
\text{swylce gi(ga)ntas} & \quad \text{þa wið Gode wunnon} \\
\text{lange þrage;} & \quad \text{he him ðæs lean forgeald.}
\end{align*}
\]

From there all evil offspring awoke, giants and elves and monsters; such giants who struggled against God for a long time—he paid them recompense for that. (111–4)

However, this genealogy of monsters from Cain presents a problem in continuity with the biblical text, which has all land creatures that did not make it onto the ark destroyed in the Flood. Any postdiluvian creature that claims ancestry of Cain, such as Grendel or his mother, is therefore at odds with the biblical account. This contradiction is even underscored by the *Beowulf*-poet himself, who merges the biblical account of the Flood into the poem in his description of the sword hilt that Beowulf finds in Grendel and his mother’s underwater lair:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{hylt sceawode,} \\
\text{ealde lafe.} & \quad \text{On ðæm wæs or writen} \\
\text{fyrngewinnes;} & \quad \text{syðtan flod ofsloh,} \\
\text{gifen geotende} & \quad \text{giganta cyn} \\
\text{frecne geferdon;} & \quad \text{þæt wæs fremde þeod}
\end{align*}
\]

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he looked at the hilt, the old remnant on which was written the origin of past strife, when the Flood, a rushing ocean, slew the kin of giants—they brought about an audacious deed; that was a race hostile to the eternal God; the Ruler gave them retribution for this through a surge of water. (1687–93)\textsuperscript{99}

In these lines, the \textit{Beowulf}-poet may be solving his own problem of a surviving postdiluvian race of giants by describing both Grendel and his mother as monsters that live under water.\textsuperscript{100} Nevertheless, various apocryphal and patristic texts provide analogues of giants surviving the Flood, as Ruth Mellinkoff has shown in two extensive studies.\textsuperscript{101} And, as has been shown, in the Canterbury Biblical Commentaries, the giants are described as being three cubits higher than the Flood waters.\textsuperscript{102} It has also been pointed out that medieval authors occasionally conflated the antediluvian Cain and the postdiluvian Ham (Cam)—a conflation that in some cases might have been accidental on account of minim confusion.\textsuperscript{103}

In any case, it is evident that the \textit{Beowulf}-poet was familiar with the early chapters of Genesis and was especially interested in the monstrous elements that traditional interpretations of these chapters could provide. It is, therefore, likely that the poet was also familiar with the Tower of Babel narrative, even though it is never mentioned explicitly in the poem. But while not mentioned explicitly, there is a concealed reference to the Tower of Babel in the early part of the poem. The poet tells the story of Hroðgar’s rise to power and the building of his hall, Heorot, in terms reminiscent of Nimrod and the Tower of Babel:

\begin{verbatim}
þa wæs Hroðgare heresped gyfen,
wiges weorðmynd, þæt him his winemagas
gorne hyrdon, oðð þæt seo geogoð geweox,
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{99} The similarity in phrasing between the two passages also strengthens their connection: 114: he \textit{him ðæs} \textit{leæn forgeald}, and 1692–3: \textit{him ðæs} \textit{endelean} \ldots \textit{sealde}.
\textsuperscript{100} Orchard, \textit{A Critical Companion}, 139.
\textsuperscript{102} PentI 70; see above p. 163.
\textsuperscript{103} For an overview, see Orchard, \textit{Pride and Prodigies}, 69–79. The \textit{Beowulf}-manuscript itself shows minim confusion; in line 107 the scribe corrects the spelling \textit{comes} to \textit{caines}; and in 1261 the name is spelt \textit{camp}.
Then was military success given to Hroðgar, the glory of battle such that his retainers eagerly obeyed him until those young warriors grew into a great retinue. It came to him in mind that he wanted to order men to make a hall, a mead-hall greater than ever heard of in past age, and therein share out all to young and old, just as God gave to him, with the exception of ancestral property and lives of men. Then I heard far and wide that he commanded the work to many nations throughout this world to adorn the people’s place. In time it happened for him, swiftly with men, that it became fully prepared, the greatest of halls; he made the name Heorot for it, who widely held the power of his word. (64–79)

Just as Nimrod in Genesis A was a widely-known man (“widmære wer” [1630]), and increased the glory of his land (“eðelðrym onhof, / rymde and rærde” [1634–5]), Hroðgar’s military fame attracts large retinues of young men for whom he builds the greatest mead-hall ever heard of. But more significant is the account of Heorot being built by many nations throughout the world (manigre mægþe geond þisne middangeard)—a line that would surely recall the Tower of Babel

104 For the translation of the crux folcscares, see Roberta Frank, “F-Words in Beowulf”, in Making Sense: Constructing Meaning in Early English, eds. Antonette diPaolo Healey and Kevin Kiernan (Toronto: PIMS, 2007), 1–22, at 8–9.
narrative for any medieval audience: almost the same phrasing is used for the dispersal of Noah’s three sons in Genesis A: “monna mægðe geond middangeard” (1244). Moreover, the important distinction that Heorot is completed while Babel is not is somewhat undermined by the poet’s last foreboding comments on Heorot:

Sele hlifade
heah ond horngeap; heaðowylma bad,
lædan liges— ne wæs hit lenge þa gen
þæt se ecghete æþumsweoran
æfter wælmiðe wæcnan scolde

The hall towered high and wide-gabled; it waited the hostile flame, the hated fire—it was yet then not long that the sword-hate should awaken to the son-in-law and father-in-law on account of hostility. (81–5)

Although Heorot is not Babel and Hroðgar is not Nimrod, the Beowulf-poet seems to have inserted Babylonian allusions into his description of the building of Heorot, perhaps in order to hint towards the future fall of Heorot and Hroðgar, and emphasize the poem’s theme of the transitory nature of glory—the same theme that is present in other Old English accounts of the Tower of Babel.

4 Ælfric

So far, most of the literary uses of the Tower of Babel in Old English literature are somewhat atypical to the uses that appear in the patristic Latin traditions. But Ælfric of Eynsham, whose training during the Benedictine Reform placed him squarely into the Latin Christian traditions of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, reveals a return in Old English literature to more customary uses of the Tower of Babel. Along with many Christians before him, Ælfric understood the Tower of Babel as a biblical, and therefore authoritative, explanation of the diversity of the world—diversity that the Church had encompassed with the descent of the Holy

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106 It should also be noted that in Beowulf the related line “manigum mægða geond þysne middangeard” appears at line 1771, outside of the hall building context.
107 For the association of the ruined hall with transience in Old English poetry, see Hume, “The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry”, 69–71.
Spirit at Pentecost, where the apostles speak all the languages of the world, and with apostolic preaching to all the nations. But Ælfric does not always slavishly follow his sources, or tradition, and throughout his corpus he uniquely emphasizes certain elements that reveal his own interests and concerns.

Ælfric essentially has six extended treatments of the Tower of Babel outside of his translation of Alcuin’s Interrogationes: two occur in his first series of Catholic Homilies, De initio creaturae (CHomI.1) and In die sancto Pentecosten (CHomI.21), written in 989; one in his second series of Catholic Homilies, Natale Mathei apostoli et euangeliste (CHomII.32), written in 992; one in his homily, De falsis diis (SHII.21), written between 992 and 1002; one in the Libellus de ueteri testamento et nouo (LUTN), written between 1005 and 1006; and one in the related tract, De sex aetatibus (DSA), written in 1006. ¹⁰⁸ The homilies of the first series of Catholic Homilies are Ælfric’s earliest accounts of the Tower of Babel, and seem to give rise to numerous features, notably similar or exact phrasing, that appear in the later accounts. For the sake of convenience, the six accounts have been arranged to underline their shared phrasing in Table 3.

Table 5: Similarities in phrasing in Ælfric’s discussions of the Tower of Babel ¹⁰⁹

| 1 CHomI.1 | hi woldon wircan | ane burh | ænne stype swa heahne |
| 1 CHomI.22 | entas woldon aræran | ane burh | ænne stype swa heahne |
| 1 CHomII.32 | men woldon him aræran | ane burh | ænne stype swa heahne |
| 1 LUTN | suna begunnon to wircenne | wundorlican burh | þone heagan stýpel |
| 1 DSA | sunan woldon sona wyrcean | ane burh | ænne heahne stype |
| 1 SHII.21 | entas worhton | wundorlican | stýpel |
| 2 CHomI.1 | þæt his hrof astige up to heofonum | 7 begunnon þa to wyrcanne |
| 2 CHomI.22 | þæt his hrof astige oð heofon | 7 þæt weorc þæs begunnen | ongean godes willan |
| 2 CHomII.32 | þæt his hrof astige to heofenum |
| 2 LUTN | þe sceolde astigan upp to heofenum |
| 2 DSA | þe astige upp oð þa heofonan | 7 begunnon þa to wyrcenne | ongæan Godes willan |
| 2 SHII.21 | Omitted |
| 3 CHomI.1 | com god þæerto þa hi swiðust worhton | sealde ælce men þe ðær wæs |
| 3 CHomI.22 | God eac for þi hi tostentencte | swa þæt he forgeaf ælce þera wyrhtena |


¹⁰⁹ Editorial marks and punctuation have been removed. In order to emphasize similarities some phrases have been silently omitted or placed slightly out of order.

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This comparison reveals a great degree of similarity among all the accounts. As is to be expected based on their temporal and textual relationships, the accounts in *CHomI.1* and *CHomI.22* are the most similar: despite some minor differences, nearly exact phrasing is used in 1, 2, and 5; and with the exception of 3, close phrasing in 4 and 6. In fact, such similar phrasing, along with that of *DSA*, suggests that *CHomI.1* contains a lacuna of “ongean godes willan”, “against God’s will” to complete the phrase “7 begunnon þa to wyrcanne”, “and they began to work”, which is unusual by itself. *CHomII.32*, which was written after the two accounts of the first series of Catholic Homilies, offers an abridged version of the account in *CHomI.1* and *CHomI.22*. While it shares phrasing with *CHomI.22* against *CHomI.1* (1: arǽran; 3: swa þæt hé forgeaf ælcum ðæra wyrhıtena), it also shares phrasing with *CHomI.1* against *CHomI.22* (4: synderlic ... nyste hwæt oder gecwæð; 6: swa þæra manna wæs). The abridged nature of *CHomII.32* can be explained by the context of the homily: Ælfric has Matthew explain how the apostles came to understand all the languages of the world. Most likely due to a desire to keep background material at a minimum, Ælfric truncated the account of Babel in order to quicken the pace of the homily.
The account in *SHII.21* is the most idiosyncratic. The homily seems to have been written after the second series of Catholic Homilies but before Ælfric’s collection of saints’ lives.\(^{110}\) It omits many of the phrases found in the other accounts (2, 4, 5) and in one instance conflates two phrases (3, 6) into one: “and hym swa feala gereorda / God þar forgeaf swa þæra wyrhtena wæs”, “and God gave them just as many languages as there were workers”. The lack of similarity between the account in *SHII.21* and the accounts in the series of Catholic Homilies suggests that Ælfric did not have copies of these earlier accounts in front of him when he composed these lines. It is most likely that he composed the account in *SHII.21* afresh or perhaps from memory of his earlier accounts.

The accounts in *LUTN* and *DSA*, both of which were written later in Ælfric’s career, have the most complex relationships between themselves and the other accounts. They share unique phrasing with each other in four instances (1: *suna / sunan*;\(^{111}\) 2: *he*; 3: *sceawode heora weorc / þone stypell*; 5: *swa ... sona*); phrasing shared with at least one of the accounts in the Catholic Homilies in three instances (1: *heagan stipel*; 3: *God cóm þæerto*; 5: *hi ... geswicon ... þære getimbrunge / weorces ... 7 toferdon*); and phrasing shared with *SHII.21* in one instance (5: *to fyrlenum landum / lande*). *DSA* shares features with the accounts in Catholic Homilies that *LUTN* does not share (1: *ane burh*; 2: *begunnon þa to wyrcenne ongéan Godes willan*; 4: *heora nan nyste ... oðres spræce*); and *LUTN* shares one feature with *CHomI.1* (3: *sealde*) and one with *SHII.21* (1: *wundorlican*) that are not shared with *DSA*. The textual complexity of these relationships implies that Ælfric did not have one single text or even two texts in front of him which he could have copied with slight changes, when he composed his later accounts. Instead, Ælfric is most likely drawing from a series of his own stock phrases involving the Tower of Babel narrative that he could employ within different contexts, such as the sketches of Old Testament history in *CHomI.1, LUTN* and *DSA*; the accounts of Pentecost in *CHomI.22* and *CHomII.32*, or the explanation of the world’s idolatry in *SHII.21*. In fact, even in his translation of Alcuin’s *Interrogationes*, Ælfric deviates from the Latin in order to include the phrase “hi woldan þone stypel úp to heofenum aráran”, “they wanted to raise up a tower to heaven”,\(^{112}\) which appears with slight variance in 1 and 2. In any case, the shared phrasing in all of these

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\(^{110}\) Pope, *SHI.147*.

\(^{111}\) Their preceding lines are also similar: “Noes sunan ða syðþan gestry[ndon twa] 7 hundseofontig sunana” (*DSA* 41) / “Noes ... suna gestrindon twa and hundseofontig suna” (*LUTN* 135–6)

accounts reveals that the Tower of Babel narrative was important enough for Ælfric not only to record in writing at least six times, but also to keep stock phrasing regarding the narrative among his homiletic formulas that could be employed when needed. Although this phenomenon of formulaic phrasing is well documented in Old English homilies, it has rarely been attributed to Ælfric, who is more often praised for his “clear, unmannered, and easily comprehensible prose”, or “rhythmic style”. ¹¹³ Ælfric’s formulaic accounts of the Tower of Babel narrative suggest that his method of composition is also very much in line with the homiletic tradition of other Old English prose writers, such as Wulfstan.¹¹⁴

While the Tower of Babel narrative fundamentally explained the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the world, Ælfric seems to have been more interested in its causal relationship with idolatry and error (gedwyld), and its redemption through Pentecost. In all of Ælfric’s accounts of the Tower of Babel narrative, except CHomI.22 and CHomII.32, he explains that the nations, following the fall of Babel, took up idolatry. In CHomI.1, after cataloguing the different kinds of idolatry that arose after the fall of Babel, Ælfric writes: “Da asprang þis gedwyld geond ealne middaneard”, “then error arose throughout the entire world”.¹¹⁵ Similar lines are repeated in LUTN: “On þære ylcan ylde man arærde hæðengyld wide geond þas woruld”, “in that same age, idolatry was raised widely throughout this world”;¹¹⁶ in the DSA: “Æfter þissum wearð wolice afunden / swiðe myce(l gedwyld) on þam manncynne … þæt gedwyld þa a[sprang geond] ealne middaneard”, “after this, so much error sorrowfully was found among humankind … that error arose throughout the entire world”;¹¹⁷ and in SHII.21: “man arærde hæþengyld / on eallum þam fyrste ǽr Noes flode, / oðþæt þa entas worhtan þone [wundorlican] stýpel / æfter Noés flóde”, “idolatry was raised in that first age [that began] before Noah’s Flood until the giants made that marvelous tower after Noah’s Flood”, and later, “mancynn þa weox, þa wurdon hi bepæhte / þurh þone ealdan deofol þe Adam ár beswác, / swa þæt hi worhton wolice him godas”, “humankind then grew when they became deceived by the old Devil, who had deceived Adam, such that they sorrowfully created gods for themselves”.¹¹⁸ Although the connection between the Tower of Babel and idolatry is not new to Ælfric—it occurs as early as Jubilees and is found in

¹¹³ Gneuss, Ælfric of Eynsham, 18–20.
¹¹⁴ See above p. 83, nt. 36.
¹¹⁵ Ælfric, CHomI 220–1, p. 186.
¹¹⁶ LUTN, 143–4.
¹¹⁷ DSA 51–2, 57.
both Isidore’s and Bede’s chronicles\(^{119}\)—Ælfric emphasizes it more than is customarily found in previous authors.

But in contrast to his anxiety over the idolatry and error of the nations, Ælfric was also aware that the Church, having spread throughout the world, must conform to the languages of the nations. In his homily, *Dominica quarta post Pascha*, for example, Ælfric affirms the tradition that the apostles taught the Gospel in all the languages of the world:

\[
\text{Da halgan apostolas þurh þone Halgan Gást} \\
\text{wurdon swa gelérede þæt hi witodlice spræcon} \\
\text{mid eallum geréordum úncuðra þeoda,} \\
\text{and hí láéran mihton mancynn on worulde} \\
\]

Then the holy apostles through the Holy Spirit became so learned that they certainly spoke with all the languages of foreign people and they could teach humankind in the world.\(^{120}\)

Unlike his other accounts that deal with Babel and the rise of idolatry, in Ælfric’s two homilies that deal with the Tower of Babel and the linguistic abilities of the apostles (*CHomI.22* and *CHomII.32*), the Tower of Babel narrative is used to explain the origins of linguistic diversity in order to highlight the universal mission of the apostolic Church. In *CHomI.22*, Ælfric’s description of the Tower of Babel contrasts with the event of Pentecost in an Augustinian manner that underscores the linguistic connection in the two events but emphasizes the pride of one and the humility of the other: “On þysre geferrædene geearnode heora eadmodnys þas mihte. 7 þæra enta modignyss geearnode gescyndnysse”, “In this company their humility earned this power, and the pride of the giants earned confusion”.\(^{121}\) Likewise, in *CHomII.32*, Ælfric has Matthew narrate the origins of linguistic diversity at the Tower of Babel in order to explain the apostolic ability to speak in all languages. Besides the line: “seo dyrstignys asprang

\(^{119}\) Jub 11:1–7; and Isidore, *Chronica*, §24, p. 24–5; and Bede, *DTR* LXVI.210–1: “His temporibus primum templum constructa et quidem principes gentium tamquam dii sunt adorati”, “In these times [i.e. the second age of the world] temples were first built and indeed the leaders of the nations were worshiped as gods”.

\(^{120}\) Ælfric, *SHL* 7.196–9, pp. 348–9. Similar statements also occur in *CHomII.3* 143–5, p. 23; and *CHomII.15* 283–4, p. 158.

\(^{121}\) Ælfric, *CHomI.22* 126–7, p. 359. See Godden, *Commentary*, 179, and Dekker, “Pentecost and Linguistic Self-Consciousness”, 358–9, for the sources of this passage.
æfter Noes flode‖, “this presumption rose after Noah’s Flood”,122 which refers to the building of the Tower of Babel rather than to idolatry, Ælfric is more concerned with the implications of a multilingual Church that has spread across the world. There is no indication that linguistic diversity is connected with idolatry, but rather with the ability for the universal Church to use all the languages of the world to preach the Gospel of Christ.

One further point should be mentioned in connection to Ælfric’s six accounts of the Tower of Babel. Although throughout Late Antiquity and Anglo-Saxon England Nimrod and the builders of Babel are depicted as giants, Ælfric does not show consistency on this point. Whereas Ælfric refers to the gigantic builders in his translation of Alcuin’s Interrogationes (“Nembroð se ént”, “Nimrod the giant”),123 and in CHomI.22 and in SHII.21 (entas), elsewhere Ælfric describes the builders as the descendants of Noah or simply as men (see Table 5). Evidently, Ælfric was not committed to one single interpretation of the nature of the builders of Babel and could use whatever suited his purpose. In SHII.21, when Ælfric wanted to emphasize the wickedness of idolatry, he could refer to the builders as entas—a convention that Wulfstan would later employ in his own sermon De falsis deis (sic).124 Likewise, in CHomI.22, when Ælfric wanted to contrast the pride of Babel with the humility of the Church, he refers to the builders as entas and later enforces that reference with the phrase “enta modignyss” in order to present the wickedness of pride as monstrous and heinous. However, in CHomII.32, Ælfric is concerned with the linguistic diversity of the world and therefore plays down the gigantism of the builders by calling them simply men, a much less negative term. Similarly, Ælfric’s three accounts of Babel in works that provide outlines of human history (CHomI.1, LUTN and DSA) do not mention that Babel was built by giants, but rather the descendants of Noah; again the wickedness associated with giants would have less rhetorical effect in a history of humankind, and is omitted.

For Ælfric the Tower of Babel narrative had much significance as a narrative that he could mould for his own purposes. His six accounts of the Babel narrative, along with the translation of Alcuin’s Interrogationes, all share some degree of similarity in phrasing, but nevertheless the phrasing is employed in different manners for different purposes. Whether Ælfric wanted to

122 Ælfric, CHomII.32.93–4, p. 275. In this instance, Ælfric is somewhat following his source: “nata est praesumptio omnium hominum”; see Godden, Commentary. 609.
123 Ælfric, Interrogationes, 379, p. 40.
describe the roots of idolatry and therefore all error, or to underline the universality of the Church in a multilingual world, he could employ the Tower of Babel narrative in whatever manner suited him best. Just as other authors of Anglo-Saxon England could take various elements of the narrative and develop them to underline the moral or rhetorical value, so also did Ælfric utilize the Tower of Babel narrative to steer his audiences, lay or cleric, away from error to the true faith.

4 Wulfstan

One of Ælfric’s contemporaries, the homilist Wulfstan (d. 23 May 1023), who corresponded with Ælfric on numerous occasions,125 incorporated a version of Ælfric’s De falsis diis into his own homiletic corpus, most likely because of the perceived need to combat a renewal of Norse paganism in Northumbria.126 While Ælfric’s homily already confronted paganism from Scandinavia, which “would hardly have come into being without the sense that the age-old struggle between the true God and the pretenders was being renewed”,127 Wulfstan’s version is much more direct and seems to demand an immediate response to the pagan threats. Instead of beginning with an exposition on the Trinity as Ælfric does, Wulfstan begins the homily with a lament on the spread of paganism:

Eala, gefyrn is þæt ðurh deofol fela þinga misfor … 7 þæt hæðenscype ealles to wide swyðe Gode mishyrde, 7 gyt dereð wide. Ne ræde we þeah ahwar on bocum þæt man ðærde ænig hæðengyld ahwar on worulde on eallum þam fyrste þe wæs ær Noes flode.

O! it is long ago that through the Devil many things went astray … and that heathenism, altogether so widely, greatly injured and still injures widely. Yet we do not read anywhere in books that one raised up any heathen idol anywhere in the world in all that time which was before Noah’s flood.128

127 Pope, SHII.21, 668–9.
Notably, the line: “hæðenscype ealles to wide swyðe Gode mishyrde, 7 gyt dereð wide”, which does not appear in Ælfric’s version, has the effect of localizing the pagan threat to Wulfstan’s Northumbria and contemporizing it to eleventh-century England. This localizing effect is repeated a few lines later, when Wulfstan alters one of Ælfric’s common phrases for the dispersal of the nations, “hi toferdon to fyrlenum landum”, “they scattered to distant lands”, to “toferdon hy wide landes”, “they scattered widely in the land”. Although the word wide is one of Wulfstan’s “favourite words”, its presence in the phrase is not necessary and, strangely enough, breaks Ælfric’s alliteration between toferdon and to fyrlenum. But it does have the significant result of creating greater relevance for the homily in an ever-increasing pagan environment. The adverb wide indicates space that is much more personal than the adjective fyrlen, which implies a sense of removal or distance. For Wulfstan, paganism is not spread into distant lands, but rather widely spread in his own land—the wicked paganism of Babel is not restrained to a past, mythological event, but is a continual danger even to the parishioners of England or, even more locally, York.

Likewise, some of Wulfstan’s other minor additions to Ælfric’s text reveal his homiletic intentions. One of his most common homiletic phrases, “þurh deofles lare”, “through the Devil’s teaching”, is added to the homily no fewer than five times, after the appearance of the related phrase “ðurh deofol” in the very first line. As a stock phrase, it continually helps to remind the audience of the relationship between paganism and the Devil, and therefore paganism and evil. Wulfstan also includes six references to heathenism or error that do not appear in Ælfric’s version, probably in order to underline further the growing threat of paganism in Northumbria. Most interestingly, however, is Wulfstan’s persistence in describing God as “soð”, “true”. Within the first paragraph, Wulfstan alters Ælfric’s phrase, “þone Scyppend” (81) to “ðone soðan God 7 heora agenne scyppend”, “the true God and their own Creator”, which is repeated again in the last paragraph. Wulfstan is also not content with Ælfric’s adjective ana, one, in

129 Wulfstan, De falsis deis, 11.
130 Orchard, “Crying Wolf: Oral Style and the Sermones Lupi”, 246, Fig. 5.
132 Wulfstan, De falsis deis, 14, 82 (hæpene); 49, 53–4, 84 (hæðenscype); 56 (gedwyld).
133 Jost, Wulfstanstudien, 129, also notes Wulfstan’s use of soð.
134 Ælfric, SHII.21.81; Wulfstan, De falsis deis, 14–5.
135 Wulfstan, De falsis deis, 90: “ðone soðan Godd”.
reference to God, and replaces it with soð in two instances.\footnote{Ælfric, \textit{SHII}.21.91, 98: “ána God”; Wulfstan, \textit{De falsis dies}, 26, 33: “soð God”. In one instance both Ælfric and Wulfstan have “a(na) soða God” (\textit{SHII}.21.95; \textit{De falsis dies}, 30).} Evidently, the adjective \textit{ana} in a discussion on polytheism was not strong enough for Wulfstan—it is possible to conceive of one God among many gods—and he, therefore, replaced it with the unambiguous adjective soð. Lastly, Wulfstan deviates from Ælfric’s version by including mention of Nimrod who, as is to be expected, is included among the gigantic builders of Babel: “Ac syððan þæt gewearð þæt Nembroð 7 ða entas worhton þone wundorlican stypel æfter Noes flode”, “But afterwards it happened that Nimrod and the giants wrought that astonishing tower after Noah’s flood”.\footnote{Wulfstan, \textit{De falsis dies}, 7–9.} While perhaps simply a pedantic display of knowledge of Babel’s chief architect, Wulfstan’s reference to Nimrod also implies a kind of demonization of contemporary pagans. Nimrod, with the possible exception of \textit{Genesis A}, is always judged in a negative light in Anglo-Saxon England—he is even equated with the Devil (and therefore the \textit{deofles lare}) by Augustine and Bede.\footnote{See above pp. 153 and 185.} By mentioning the name of Nimrod, Wulfstan is able to connect the paganism in Northumbria with one of the nefarious giants of the Old Testament.

All of these alterations reveal that, for Wulfstan, the paganism of the Vikings in Northumbria was a more prominent threat than it was for Ælfric. While Pope can claim that Ælfric “seems to keep the Danish error at an academic distance while he entrenches the Christian stronghold against an attack that has not yet reached dangerous proportions”,\footnote{Pope, \textit{SHII}.21, 669.} the same cannot be said of Wulfstan, who presents a greater sense of urgency in his slightly, but significantly, altered version of \textit{De falsis deis}. For this reason, Wulfstan’s account of the Tower of Babel narrative has perhaps somewhat greater relevance for his audience. Instead of an academic discussion on the roots of paganism, the Tower of Babel reveals the great danger that accompanies the folly of turning from the true God to the false gods that is possible even in the present age.

5 Byrhtferth

Another author of later Anglo-Saxon England who deals with the Tower of Babel is Byrhtferth of Ramsey (c. 970–c. 1020), one of the great Old English prose authors alongside Ælfric and Wulfstan. Like Ælfric, Byrhtferth was well read in the patristic tradition involving the Tower of Babel elsewhere.\footnote{\textit{De falsis deis}, 136–142.}
Babel and Pentecost, and frequently uses two lines from Arator’s account of Pentecost as an invocation to the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{140} But it is difficult to appreciate Byrhtferth’s own understanding of the Tower of Babel narrative because of the lack of opportunity presented to him for discussing it. Byrhtferth (to my knowledge) never treats the Tower of Babel narrative, and only gives a single, brief, opaque mention of Nimrod in his \textit{Vita S. Ecgwini}: “Nichil contulit cursus Nemroth uagus per mundi climata sancte ecclesie”, “the course of Nimrod, wandering throughout the regions of the world, conferred nothing upon the holy Church”.\textsuperscript{141} Although Lapidge suggests that the \textit{Liber Nemroth} might be a source for Byrhtferth’s lines in this instance because of the shared word \textit{cursus} and its presence in an “Abbonian computistical manuscript”,\textsuperscript{142} this suggestion must be inconclusive until more is known about the \textit{Liber Nemroth} and its influence in eleventh-century England. For the same argument could be made for Isidore’s \textit{Etymologiae} as a source here. In his tract on astronomy, Isidore claims that the Chaldeans (who are traditionally associated with Babylon and therefore Nimrod) were the first to have taught astrology, and some of Isidore’s astrological vocabulary, such as \textit{mundus, cursus, climata}, are found in Byrhtferth’s line on Nimrod.\textsuperscript{143} Whatever the source, Byrhtferth’s allusion to Nimrod as possessing the knowledge of astrology reveals not only that the tradition connecting Nimrod to astrology had some significance in eleventh-century England, but also that Nimrod was not always connected to the Tower of Babel narrative; he could be used for other specific purposes, such as in this case, to represent a knowledge that contrasts to the wisdom of the Holy Church.

\section*{6 Conclusion}

Although many elements of the Tower of Babel narrative had become standardized in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the manners in which the authors of later Anglo-Saxon England could employ these elements reveal that there was much fluidity within the interpretive tradition. This multifaceted story had much value for elucidating the ways that the world functioned. Later Anglo-Saxons such as King Alfred and the scholars associated with his

\textsuperscript{140} Byrhtferth, \textit{Vita S. Ecgwini}, prae., p. 208 (see 209, nt. 20).
\textsuperscript{141} Byrhtferth, \textit{Vita S. Ecgwini}, prae., p. 206.
\textsuperscript{142} Lapidge, ed., \textit{Vita S. Ecgwini}, 207, nt. 10.
\textsuperscript{143} Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} III.xxv.1: “Astrologiam … Chaldaei primi docuerunt”; \textit{Etymologiae} III.xviii.1: “Definit enim quid sit mundi … quid sphaeræ situs et cursus … quae sint climata caeli”. For Byrhtferth’s knowledge of Isidore, see Lapidge, \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Library}, 271.
translation program could simplify the narrative in order to reinforce its value as a hortatory warning against pride and eagerness for glory. This hortatory characteristic was also reinforced at the other end of the period, when Ælfric and Wulfstan employed the more dramatic elements of Babel narrative, such as the gigantism of its builders, in order to condemn idolatry and paganism that they understood to be threatening England. Ælfric, however, is not constrained to the negative aspects of Babel, but also used the narrative to explain the diversity of the linguistic capacities of the apostles, and thereby underpin the ecclesiastical authority and necessity to preach correct belief among the nations.

Furthermore, other Old English authors who made use of the Tower of Babel integrated it into whatever genre or style for specific purposes. In Old English poetry, Nimrod could be a noble warrior, as in *Genesis A*, or an elusive friend of a “raging wolf”, as in *Solomon and Saturn II*. Even in a *vita* for an Anglo-Saxon saint, Nimrod could be used as the representative of incomplete wisdom, as in Byrhtferth’s *Vita S. Ecgwini*. All of these cases show that the Anglo-Saxons possessed the freedom to use authoritative texts and interpretations in manners that best suited their own purposes. The treatments of the past had their authoritative worth, but only to the extent that their authority could be helpful for a specific Anglo-Saxon purpose. These shifting Anglo-Saxon uses of the Tower of Babel narrative reveal the enduring quality not only of the biblical account but also of its interpretive traditions.
Conclusion

The Table of Nations and Tower of Babel narrative have a rich history of interpretation. As is evident by this study, a full documentation of this history in all times, places and cultures would be an enormous task. Even Borst’s magisterial four-volume work, Der Turnbau von Babel, falls short in many aspects, and in Anglo-Saxon England alone, the various uses and interpretations of the Babel narrative and its specific elements are extremely widespread and complex. This study can, therefore, only serve as one further step for future study. But documentation of the cultural interpretations and uses of the Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel narrative help understand elements of medieval culture in general. Most importantly, this dissertation, which is essentially a case-study of the specific developments of the Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel narrative among various authors and cultures of Anglo-Saxon England, hints at some of the trends in the history of biblical interpretation of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages specifically, and the history of biblical interpretation in general.

As the first part of this study reveals, the topos of the number 72 begins with obscure origins, but with its evolution throughout time, it becomes attached to certain texts and themes, which in turn evolve and become attached to other texts and themes, until the origins are no more distinct than the later evolutions are discernible. Chapter 1 deals with these putative origins and reveals how the number 72 becomes gradually more accepted by early Christians for understanding the world. As the cultural significance of this number becomes stronger among influential Christian authors, such as Luke, Irenaeus and Augustine, it begins to enjoy some authority. Specifically, while the number 70 prevailed as culturally significant to Jewish thought, the number 72 began to dominate in Christian thought. Texts that were only loosely associated with the number 72, including the Table of Nations, not only become more firmly associated with the number, but also started giving support to its cultural value. The momentum that is created continues and standardization begins to occur. As with many traditional elements of Christian thought, Augustine marks the turning point for the significance of the number 72.

But as Chapters 2 and 3 reveal, even Augustine’s authoritative use of the number 72 does not completely standardize the cultural value and employment of the number. Instead, the early Anglo-Saxons provide unique uses of the number as they syncretize it to their own cultural
values. The authority bestowed upon the number 72 is enjoyed but also transformed in a way that attempts to establish new foundations on the value of the number. The use of the number 72 has by this point evolved to such a degree that its obscure origins are no longer recognized. The original 71 names of individuals and tribes in the Hebrew Table of Nations had unequivocally become 72 in order to conform to the greater typological potential: the 72 languages of the world are spoken by the 72 disciples of Christ when they preach to the 72 nations the Word of God that is contained in 72 books of the Bible. In Anglo-Saxon England, traditional beliefs concerning the number 72 were used to understand the world, but these beliefs were not so stable that new opinions on the number could not provide fresh insights into the world. The anonymous Old English homilies, for only one example, show how easily the topos of the number 72 could be moulded into the inexpressibility topos and employed for the specific purpose of preaching on the afterlife. The statement that 72 tongues are not able to describe the joys of heaven or the torments of hell enjoys the authority surrounding traditional uses of the number 72 but at the same time alters it in such an effective manner that it begins to form its own traditions which are then developed further.

Likewise, the Tower of Babel narrative, which initially provided a way of understanding the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the world shifts away from its authors’ original intentions. Chapter 4 of this study outlines the ways that antique and late antique authors saw the world’s diversity. On account of the conflict between pagan and Christian understandings of the world, new uses of the Babel narrative appear that attempt to syncretize these understandings of the world. In attempts to create an identity that distinguishes between “us” and “them”, Christians used the Babel narrative alongside the Pentecost narrative. The result is that interpretations of the Babel narrative transform to emphasize the wickedness of the Tower’s builders and to polemicize them with the righteousness of the Church.

Especially in Anglo-Saxon England, as is traced in Chapters 5 and 6, the Babel narrative becomes useful as an exemplum of the punishment of pride rather than an etiological narrative on diversity. While the Anglo-Saxons, on account of the traditional views of the earth that they inherited, saw themselves as living at the edges of the world, understandings of the ethnic and linguistic diversity become associated with the Church’s identity that transcends diversity but focuses on orthodox belief. The builders of Babel are, therefore, universalized to represent
heretics, pagans and Jews, as opposed to righteous and orthodox Christians. Also much like the development of the significance of the number 72, the Babel narrative also finds new meaning as Anglo-Saxon authors use it for individual purposes. The builders of Babel in *Genesis A*, for example, appear more as migrating heroes than wicked giants.

The evolution of the significance of the number 72 and the Babel narrative reveal the process of development for specific elements that are significant for early medieval cultures. The cultural acceptance of a certain topos or an authoritative way of understanding the world is not simply created *ex nihilo*, even if its origins are not questioned by the culture. Instead, the inherited tradition of any culture helps to dictate what sort of values are to be retained or abandoned. The topos of the number 72 and the Tower of Babel narrative in Late Antiquity and Anglo-Saxon England, which are traced throughout this study, provide important examples of how early medieval cultures interacted and were influenced by their intellectual past. But more importantly, they show that the manners by which cultural values can be passed down through tradition and in turn evolve are multifaceted and complicated. The ways that the Anglo-Saxons develop the Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel narrative, therefore, assist to understand fundamental aspects of medieval and western European culture.
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