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Irish apocrypha in Norse tradition?

On the sources of some medieval homilies

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For a long time already the two Old Norse homily books, the “Icelandic” (*Homilius-bók, islánda skó homilier . . . utg. af Th. Wisén, Lund 1872*) and the “Norwegian” (*Gamal norsk homiliebok, utg. . . . ved Gustav Indrebo, Oslo 1931*) have been recognized as central documents within the field of Old Norse studies. As linguistic sources they have been zealously studied by philologists and paleographers; but in many respects they are equally important as sources of Norwegian-Icelandic literary and ecclesiastical history.

A central problem in the investigation of these two books, interesting from all three points of view (linguistic, literary and theological) is the question: are all their homilies faithful translations from the Latin (occasionally, other European vernaculars)—or are there any “original” compositions among them?

Source studies during the last years have clearly shown that this question cannot be properly answered by an either-or, as Ole Widding rightly says. In fact we find various different forms:

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1 In this paper I quote Wisén’s edition of the Icelandic book as *Homil*, and Indrebo’s of the Norwegian book as *Hom*.

2 “Dette resultat viser, at det er forkert at stille spørgsmålet både vedrørende den enkelte homilie i sin helhed og for homilisasningen som sådan: Er det originaler eller er det oversættelser? For svaret kan sådan som Stephan-prædiken klart viser være et både-og”. (*Maal og Minne 1959* (Oslo), p. 43, in a paper on “De norrøne homiliebøgers prædiken på Stephansdag”.)
word-for-word translation from one single source (e.g., Gregory’s *Homiliae in Evangelia*), combination of smaller bits or fragments from different sources, and freer compositions on the basis of reading and foreign models—in the words of Fredrik Paasche: “personal authorship in a framework of ecclesiastical tradition”—a description with which many other investigators have agreed.

Starting from Paasche’s statement one may, however, ask a new question: in what kind of ecclesiastical tradition do these homilies belong, and what kind of sources do we find behind them?

The question might be answered, from the point of view of church history or “cultural geography”, by referring to the similarity between the Old Norse books and English (Anglo-Saxon) collections from the tenth and eleventh century, and—further back—the dependence of both traditions on the important Frankish homiliaries from Carolingian time. But we may also put the question in another way, asking for the “quality” or the theological content of these homilies. In this respect too we shall find various forms or layers in the Norse tradition. Some of the Norse homilies go back to famous and important church fathers (Gregory the Great, Bede), others seem to be translated from contemporary (twelfth-century) second-rate compilators (Honorius Augustodunensis), and some, finally, show contact with rather obscure medieval apocrypha. For Old Norse literary and ecclesiastical history these last are in many ways the most interesting ones: we find in them traces of a “religious folklore”, now almost forgotten, which must have been widely spread in early medieval “popular” christianity.

A typical text of this last kind is the so-called “First Christmas homily”: *In nativitate domini*, in the Norwegian book, *Hom* 31.24–35.15. No single source for this homily has yet been found, and very likely it is, at least in part, an “original” Norse compilation. But the original work done by the Norwegian preacher here might seem to

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2 See, among others, Ole Widding, op. cit., p. 44–45.
consist chiefly in the interpolating of a few traditional Christmas motives into a curious apocryphal construction, of which only a minor part has been originally connected with the Christmas celebration.

Within this homily a folklorist may find some curious beliefs which apparently belong to this kind of medieval folklore:

1. On Christmas night the emperor Augustus went to Bethlehem with a great army (Hom 32.3 ff.).

2. Eight years before Christ's birth the sun shone at midnight as bright as in the brightest day (Hom 32.26 ff.).

3. All souls in Hell have rest on this day, if they have been baptized (Hom 32.29-30).

4. Christ was born into this world on the day which we call Sunday (Hom 32.34-35).

In a previous work I have pointed out (somewhat inexactly) the sources of the last two of these ideas: the "Sunday respite" is a well-known motive in the apocryphal Visio Pauli, and the equally apocryphal belief that Christ was born on a Sunday comes from a form of the medieval "Sunday letter". Further investigations in order to find possible sources for the first two ideas have revealed that many other traits in this homily—at first sight not very strange or peculiar ones—may also be traced back to apocryphal stories of a similar kind. In many ways the Norwegian homily is closely parallel to a group of Old English homilies which have been most thoroughly studied by Rudolph Willard, and which, according to him, "abound in apocryphal material of an uncanonical nature, what, indeed, might be called ecclesiastical fiction"—a description which might easily be applied to the Norwegian homily as well.

In the following investigation parallels to quotations and motives in the Norwegian homily will be given from Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Old

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Irish and Middle High German sources. This particular distribution of an apocryphal fiction appears to be most easily explained by assuming that the tradition is originally Irish. In the same way Rudolph Willard has assumed Irish originals behind much of the apocryphal matter he has found in his Old English texts.1

A few words on the German tradition may be said in advance. It appears that there are some significant parallels between the Norwegian homily and two Middle High German texts, actually German (abbreviated) versions of the "Sunday letter"—which have not, to my knowledge, been recognized as such before. One of them is found in the Middle High German homily book ("Predigtsammlung") Speculum ecclesiae—a work which has got its (not quite suitable) traditional name from a Latin work with the same title by the early twelfth-century scholar Honorius Augustodunensis. Honorius' work is an important, but not the exclusive source of the German collection.2

About Honorius, "the unknown Frenchman Honorius of Autun",3 "den nicht nachweisbaren Honorius Augustodunensis"4 (this is how he is frequently presented by earlier scholars), we now know for tolerably certain that he was not from the French town Autun, but from Augsburg—that in his youth he studied in Canterbury, and finally, that for more than ten years, towards the end of his life, he was a monk in the Irish foundation of St. Jakob, in Regensburg.5 Accordingly, if Honorius has not himself brought these—presumably Irish—

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1 "Its traits are non-Roman, and one would look to heterodox, rather than to orthodox, theology, and to the Celtic, rather than to the Roman, elements in Old English ecclesiastical life, as the milieu in which it thrived" (Willard, op. cit., p. 145).
2 The traditional title is due to its first editor, Johann v. Kelle (Munich 1858). I follow here the modern edition by Mellbourn (Speculum ecclesiae, eine frühmittelhochdeutsche Predigtsammlung, hg. von Gert Mellbourn, Lund 1944 = Lunder germanistische Forschungen, 12).
apocryphal stories to Germany, his life gives anyway an example of how it may well have been done.

(That the works of Honorius are not quite proof against spurious and apocryphal stories, has been noticed already in the Old Norse tradition. The learned fourteenth-century Icelandic author of the Tveggja postola saga Jóns ok Jacobs expressly refutes a story told in Honorius' popular theological dialogue Elucidarius: that the apostle John was taken up to heaven in the flesh. The Icelandic author reproaches "the mendacious Lucidarius" for telling this: "It is no disgrace to St. John that he went the same way as other flesh".—As Jón Helgason quite rightly says, this shows that "the prestige of the work was already declining": see his Introduction to the phototypic edition of the Old Norse Elucidarius, Copenhagen 1957 (Manuscripta Islandica, 4) p. XV, with references.)

Further evidence for connection with Regensburg (and Honorius?) may be seen in the parallel to this Sunday epistle (Speculum ecclesiae 64, p. 147–148 in Mellbourn's edition) appearing as no. I in the collection Altdeutsche Predigten, in Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie 27, Halle 1895, p. 148 ff.—The manuscript containing Speculum ecclesiae has been preserved in the famous monastery Benediktbeuern (cf. Mellbourn's edition, p. XIII), but need not have been written there. On the other hand, the source of the collection Altdeutsche Predigten, mentioned above, is a manuscript from the Benedictine monastery St. Emmeram, of Regensburg (cf. Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie 27, p. 201).

Another interesting point here: only a few years after the death of Honorius (about 1137), a famous medieval text containing "Irish matter": the well-known Vision of Tundale, was also written down (according to its preface) in a Regensburg convent: the nunnery of St. Paul, shortly after 1150. (Cf. here, among others, Gustav Ehrismann: Geschichte der deutschen Literatur bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters, II.1, Munich 1954, p. 163–164.)

Finally, it also seems relevant to mention, in this connection, a point made by M. R. James. In a paper on "Irish apocrypha", while
speaking of some homiletic fragments published by the Benedictine scholar Dom De Bruyne, he concludes as follows:

"... this leads me to the remark that all the fragments printed by De Bruyne from the Reichenau MS (Reichenau was an Irish foundation) appear to be from a Celtic workshop. They are linked together by many catchwords and phrases, and the same peculiar Latinity runs through them all. In no. 3 there is a distinct quotation from the Apocalypse of Thomas, another indication of the fondness of the Irish for obscure apocrypha".¹

From now on I shall take the actual text of the Old Norse homily (Hom 31.24 ff.) as my starting point. In some cases, however, the commentary will develop into excurses discussing the distribution of various apocryphal motives in a wider European context—with Ireland as a probable place of invention and origin.

Our homily opens with a familiar phrase, Hom 31.25 ff:

Goðer brøðr lyðið til hvat hær sægir á þesse hinni helgu boc um þenna drottens dag.

As Joan Turville-Petre has pointed out, phrases like this are also "rather common in Old English compilations" similar to the Old Norse homily books.² According to her, it may possibly refer to some "manual of devotional extracts". It may, but need not, be translated from a foreign source here. The actual source probably enters in the next lines, Hom 31.26 ff:

þvi at þesser dagr er hælgaðr hinum hælga konunge til lofs ok til dyrðar sva vít sem cristin dómr er.

In nearly the same way begins the sermon Speculum ecclesiae 64:³

¹ M. R. James: "Irish apocrypha", in The journal of theological studies XX, Oxford 1919, p. 16 (italics mine).—The evidence given above would seem to indicate that Irish traditions were well known and widely spread in Southern Germany, in the twelfth century as well as earlier.


³ In the following I quote this text as Speculum ecclesiae 64, with reference to page and line in Mellbourn's edition. For typographical reasons quotations have occasionally been simplified (likewise in the Old English quotations, given below).
Dirre here sunnetac der ist uns wol zerenne unde ze uirenne unde ist genamet dominica . . . Von diu ist er ze erenne unde ze lobenne allen christenen luten (147.13–18).

This is not in itself very remarkable. But then the two texts go on in the same way, with a Latin quotation from the Psalter: *Hom* 31.28–32.3:

Ok sva komr gud til hværs briost. ok scalum ver oss væl halda amot þessonm dægi sva sem Davið mæler umm þenna dag. Hec est dies quam fecit deus. exul temus et letemur in ea. Desser er sa dagr er gud gerði. fognom ver hanom ok glædiumc ver . . .

Von deme tage sprichet der herre Davit: Hec est dies, quam fecit dominus: exul temus et letemur in ea. Er sprach, daz der sunnetac ware der tac, den got selbe gescoufe; uon div mohten wir uns wol urowen . . . (*Speculum ecclesiae* 64, 147.22 ff.)

It would seem likely, here already—from the reference to “drottens dag” (the Lord’s day) in the Norwegian homily, and also from the Latin quotation: *Ps.* 117.24—that the source of the Norwegian preacher is not a proper Christmas homily. One would rather expect to find this quotation in a “Sunday text” (as the German homily)—or an Easter text, e.g. *Speculum ecclesiae* 22 (p. 54–55). Actually it is also found in another Christmas text, the Old English *Vercelli* homily VI.1

In the Norse text, *Hom* 32.3 ff., there follows the first of the four apocryphal motives mentioned above (p. 113):

Hvat var tit á þæirri not er guð var boren vár drotten. þa for Augustus kæisare með myccum hær til Bethléém borgar þæirrar er guð var boren i. en þa sa kæisaren up til himna ok sa stiornu æina liosare en hann hafðe fyrr sena. Ða mintisc hann hvat spa-menn hoðu fyrir spát umm burd guds . . .

To a modern reader it seems quite obscure how the emperor Augustus has come into this story here, going to Bethlehem (!) on the night of Christ’s birth. One is tempted to think of some gross mis-

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understanding. But exactly the same story is found in the homily
_Vercelli VI_, referred to above:

Da þæt ge-eode þy sylfan dæge, þe gyrsandæg wæs, þæsðe
Dryhten on niht ge-boren wæs, ær morgen-steorra upeode, þæt se
casere ferde mid ealle his man-prymme to Bethlem þære byrig, þe
Dryhten on geboren wæs . . . .¹

The starting point for this curious belief is probably the story told
by Orosius, that the emperor Augustus went in triumph _to Rome_ on
_VIII idus Ianuarias_, that is: on Epiphany, when the birth of Christ
was celebrated or commemorated according to the oldest Christian
tradition. These two events are expressly connected by Orosius in this
same passage:

Porro autem hunc esse eundem diem, hoc est VIII idus Ianuarias,
quo nos Epiphaniam, hoc est apparitionem siue manifestationem
Domini sacramenti, obseruamus, nemo credentium siue etiam fidei
contradicentium nescit.²

Orosius is also, apparently, the original source for the “great light”
seen _in Rome_ at the time of Christ’s birth (op. cit., p. 419). According
to Orosius (and his source, Suetonius) the light appeared as a bright
ring around the sun. In the course of time, this and other miracles
have been “moved” by tradition from _octava idus Ianuariis_ to _octava
kalendas Ianuarias_, the day traditionally accepted for Christ’s birth
from the fourth century onwards—and the light has “developed” in
various ways, e.g. into a _star_, in the Old Norse text, or a “_threelfold
golden ring_” according to _Vercelli VI.44_ (p. 133). But obviously both
the statement that Augustus went “to Bethlehem” and his remembering
“what the prophets had said about God’s birth” (cf. _Vercelli VI.45_
ff.) imply that the Roman emperor has been mixed up with the Jewish
king Herod.—The Latin _Incipit_ of _Vercelli VI_ appears to be taken from
the common source of these two vernacular texts (cf. Förster’s note,
p. 131).

¹ _Vercelli VI_. 37–40 (p. 132–133).
² Pauli Orosii _Historiarum adversus paganos_ VI. 20, Vienna 1882 (Corpus scrip-
torum ecclesiasticorum latinorum V), p. 418.
There follows in the Old Norse text (Hom 32.11 ff.) a description of heaven, in negative terms: "there is no hunger, nor thirst, nor old age, nor darkness, nor laments, nor crying . . .". One and a half page later (Hom 33.35 ff.) the same description, in positive form, is applied to the horrors of hell: "there are laments and tears, and hunger, and thirst . . . darkness without light, old age without youth . . .". Both passages emphasize man's inability to describe these joys (horrors). The second time this is told with a famous phrase, descending from Vergil (Aeneis VI.625), but most familiar to mediaeval writers from the apocryphal Visio Pauli:¹ "the hundred heads and the hundred tongues of iron" (Hom 34.2 ff.). The first time, however, the preacher uses more general words (Hom 32.14 ff.).

I have not been able to find any exact parallel to these descriptions of heaven and hell; but many more or less similar passages may be found, e.g., in Latin or Old English homilies similar to this Old Norwegian one.—As regards the Old English texts, direct comparison is somewhat difficult, because some of the relevant homilies appear to be still unpublished, or only partially published. This is the case, for instance, with a few texts studied by Rudolph Willard, in his book Two apocrypha in Old English homilies.

One of these texts is a homily from the ms. Corpus Christi College Cambridge, 41 (CCCC 41), of which Willard gave a brief summary (op. cit., p. 2). Twenty years later, in 1955, the first part of it was published by Max Förster.² From this text I shall quote a few parallels (not quite identical ones, I admit) to the Old Norse text:

Hwær is þonne nu þa, men ða leofestan, menniscra manna ænig, þæt asecgan mæg þa eadgnisse and þa fægernisse þæs wuldor-lican plegan an þære heofoncundan Hierusalern . . . þær is leoht ealles leochtis, and þær bið se eca gefea . . . and þær bið sio ece blis butan

¹ See Theodore Silverstein: Visio S. Pauli, London 1935 (Studies and documents, ed. by Kirsopp and Silva Lake, 4), p. 65–66: "In just this form the passage represents a motif which became common in the later vision literature, particularly that of England”.

² Max Förster: “A new version of the Apocalypse of Thomas in Old English”, in Anglia 73, Tübingen 1955, p. 6–36.
The second half of this homily was published by Willard in his book, mentioned above. And here we find this variation of the Virgilian phrase:

And ðeah de hwylc mon hæbbe c. tungena, and ðara æghwylc hæbbe isene stefne, ne magon hi asecgan helle tintrego and ða fulnisse ðara dracena and ðone singalan hungor ...

After this passage there follows a comment on the “inadequacy of mortal man to describe a) the pains of hell . . . , b) the joys of heaven” (Willard, op. cit., p. 2). This conclusion is the only part of the homily that is still unpublished, and I have not, after all, found it worth while to consult the manuscript on this point.

Another variation of these descriptions has been printed by Willard from the Oxford ms. Bodley Hatton 114:

Se witega cwæð be heofonarice and be hellewite, þæt næfre nære gemet on heofonanrices wuldre swa mycel unwynsumnes on ænigum laðe, ðæðe on hungre ðæðe on þurste, ðæðe on cele ðæðe hæte, ðæðe on ece ðæðe on adle, ðæðe on ænigum laðe gewinne þæt wære swa mycel swa anes lytles fugeles sweg. Swylce he cwæð: . . . va þam þe geearnoð helle vite. ðær is ece bryne grimme gemencged, and þær is ece gryre. þær is granung . . .

The obvious starting point for this “negative” description of heaven is of course the biblical passage, Revelation 21.4. The Old Norse homily, and the two Old English ones quoted above, appear to have expanded and varied this passage in much the same way. An exact (Latin) source need not, perhaps, have existed behind any of them.

1 Anglia 73, p. 17-18.
2 Willard: Two apocrypha . . . p. 6.63 ff.
3 Willard: Two apocrypha . . . p. 56. The last lines I have taken from my photostat of the manuscript (Bodley Hatton 114, f. 102 r). The rest of this piece is identical with the end of the homily “Wulfstan XV” (Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen homilien . . . hg. von Arthur Napier, Berlin 1883, p. 94): cf. the description of Hatton 114 in N. R. Ker: A catalogue of manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon, Oxf. 1957, p. 396.
But for Latin passages resembling (and probably more or less akin to) the vernacular forms, cf. especially the miscellany called “Catéchèses celtiques”, as published by Dom André Wilmart, in his very interesting collection, *Analecta Reginensia*, Rome 1933 (Studi e testi, 59), p. 44.190 ff.:

... uita sine fine letitia sine tristitia, iuuentus sine senectute, sanitas sine dolore, lux sine tenebris ... , and 46.56 ff.:

VII sunt quae homo in hoc mundo habere non potest si rex fuisset totius mundi: uita sine morte, iuuentus sine senectute, letitia sine tristitia, pax sine discordia, lux sine tenebris, sanitas sine dolore, regnum sine commotione.—In a note to this last passage the editor points out (p. 46, note 8) that it is also found in a pseudo-Bedean text, the “Excerptiones patrum”—actually linked together with the well-known “octo principalia vitia” and the “duodecim abusiva in hoc sæculo” (cf. *Patrologia Latina* 94, 545 C-D). But also within the “Catéchèses celtiques” this list of “seven things” occurs again, as a separate item: p. 111.51 ff.

In the Old Norse homily the description of heaven is followed by a quotation from “the prophet Daniel” (*Hom* 32.19 ff.): actually a combination of Dan. 7.10 with Esaiah 6.3. Now it is well known that just these two chapters contain the most typical and famous other-world visions of the Old Testament. One is tempted to see, here again, an indication of from what kind of sources the Old Norse homily has been drawn.

The quotation is followed by a few more general remarks, and then a new apocryphal story is introduced, *Hom* 32.26–28:

Atta vetrom fyrir burð guðs at samu tid. þa skæin sol i miðja not sva fagrt sem umm miðjan dag þa er hon skin fægrst ok liosast.

Here again we have a close parallel in *Vercelli* VI.25 ff.:

Swylce þæt eac ge-eode, þæt-te siofon nihtum, ær Crist ge-boren were, þæt sio sunne æt midre nihte ongan scinan, swaswa on sumera, þonne hio hattost and beorhtost scind . . .

One is apt to believe that this “sun in the middle of the night” is another “development” of Orosius’ miraculous light. In fact this
tradition appears in two different forms within the homily *Vercelli* VI—and in still another in the preceding homily, *Vercelli* V, within another collection of miracles to which I shall return below (p. 125).

In *Vercelli* VI it is told a few lines below, VI.38 ff., that Augustus went to Bethlehem on the night when Christ was born, “*before the morning star arose*” (cf. p. 118 above). Then it says, VI.40 ff.:

> Mitte-þe hit þa wæs sio þridde tid þæs dægæs, þæs gyrsan-dæg wæs, he ða besæah on þa lyft ongean þa sunnan; and he ge-seah mid ealle his werede, þe mid him wæs, þæt sio sunne beorhtor scan, þonne hio æfre ær scine; and hio wæs eall utan ymb-worpenu mid þry-fealde gyldene hringe . . .

There appears to be a sudden jump in the time-reckoning here. At first one gets the impression that the emperor is actually on the way “*before the morning star*”, in the middle of the night. But then the light is seen “at the third hour of the day”—which is of course not three o’clock in the morning, but the *hora tertia* of the breviary, that is nine o’clock. This is expressly said in the older (?) and more traditional account of this miracle in the preceding homily, *Vercelli* V.68 ff. (p. 115):

> þa se casere com to Rome mid sigefæste gefean and mid blisse: da æt þære ðriddan tide þæs dægæs, þæt wæs æt underne, þa wæs mannum on heofonum gesine gyldnes hringes onlicnes ymb-utan þa sunnan.

There is a peculiar divergence between *Vercelli* VI and the Norwegian homily in the dating of this miracle: “seven nights before Christ’s birth” according to the Old English text, but “eight years before” in the Norwegian.

It is rather difficult to see the “motivation”, for popular belief, of placing this miracle a long time before Christ’s birth, and apparently impossible to reconcile the two different dates. One is tempted to regard both as different misunderstandings of some phrase meaning “eight days before New Year” (*octava kalendas ianuarias*). And in fact there exists a third account, which places the miracle at this day. The transition from *octava idus ianuariis* to *octava kalendas* . . . (our present
Christmas Day) for this and other miracles has been accomplished in the (rather late) Irish versions of "The seventeen miracles at Christ's birth", published (with English translations) some twenty years ago. One version of these miracles, a versified account found in the ms. Liber Flavus Fergusiorum, gives this parallel to the miracle in the two homilies:

"Bright thereafter was the sun
In the middle of that night—
Pleasant (was) the story nor did the span of time grow weary
When it illumined Jerusalem".

Although the Irish text is a good deal younger than the two homilies, I am inclined to think that it has preserved this miracle in a more "original" form, from which the story in the homilies may have developed in some way or other.

In his translation, forty years ago, of the Norwegian homily the learned Norwegian church historian Oluf Kolsrud mentioned a parallel between the miracle told in Hom and a similar one in a Christmas homily from the "Icelandic" book (Homil), p. 47.18 ff.:

*pat barsc at i hans riki at sol raN upp a mipra nott i gegn eple sino.*

This is only one of many miracles told in this Icelandic homily, beginning with Homil 46.31: A tip Augustus urpo margar iarteiner þær er synðo at cristr var borrIN i riki hans. The first three of them agree with the old version in Orosius: the bright ring around the sun (Homil 46.37, Orosius VI.20.5), the oil fountain (Homil 47.3, Orosius VI.20.6), the great peace, pax Romana (Homil 47.10, Orosius VI.20.8). Then, according to Homil, came a "great earthquake", landskialfte mikill (Homil 47.14). The source of this belief, and indeed very nearly the exact source of this whole miracle story in Homil, may be found in a Christmas text (a homily?) from Dom Wilmart's "Catéchèses celtiques"

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2 Modern Philology 43, p. 38—cf. the original Irish text, p. 33.

3 "Ei norsk joledagspreika frá umlag ár 1200", in the Christmas publication Norsk jol 1927, Bjørgvin (Bergen) 1927, p. 4–5.
(cf. *Analecta Reginensia*, p. 99–100). According to this text, “In Augustino autem tempore multa mirabilia facta sunt, quae Christo conveniunt” (99.17–18)—namely, 1) the golden ring, 2) the oil fountain, 3) the great peace, and the closing of porta Iani (Orosius VI.20.1), 4) the remission of the emperor’s taxes (*Homil* 47.6–7), 5) the sun in the middle of the night: In eius quoque tempore ortus est sol postquam defeceisset caligine tenebrarum. Quod significat quia in eius tempore nasceretur uerus sol post caliginem ueteris testamenti, idest Christus de quo dixit Esaias: Orietur in vobis timentibus nomen Domini sol iustitiae . . . (Anal. Reg. 99.32–36).—This quotation from “Esaias” (that is: *Malachias* 4.2, as *Homil* rightly says) apparently gives a clue to another curious transformation of this motive in popular tradition. The quotation, and the comparison: Christ = the sun appears first (?) in the pseudo-Cyprian *De pascha computus*, from the year 243, according to which Christ was born on Wednesday, March 28 (!):

O quam praeclera et diuina Domini prouidentia, ut in illo die quo factus est sol in ipso die nasceretur Christus V kl. Apr. feria IIII. et ideo de ipso merito ad plebem dicebat Malachias propheta: orietur uobis sol iustitiae . . .

The sixth miracle, according to Wilmart’s Latin text, was an “abundance of bread”, *habundantia panis* (not in *Homil*). The seventh was the earthquake (*Homil*: landskialfte):

Item in eius tempore terre motus magnus factus est. Quod significat quod in eius tempore nasceretur qui elimenta in diae iudicii mouebit, ut dictum est: Stellae cadent de caelo et virtutes caelorum commovebuntur (Anal. Reg. 99.42–45, cf. *Homil* 47.13–17, which is clearly a word-for-word translation of this passage).

The eighth miracle: run-away servants were brought back to their masters (not in *Homil*). The ninth and tenth relate to the great peace

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1 Cypriani *Opera omnia*, pars III, Vienna 1871 (*Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* III.3), p. 266 (*De pascha computus*, 19).

2 The use of the Latin *elementa* (= O. N. *hufdskepnur*) here is characteristic of medieval Irish Latinity, according to Paul Grosjean S.J., in *Analecta Bollandiana* 54, Bruxelles 1936, p. 120.
"Some" of these miracles are found also in the Christmas homily Vercelli V: "To middan wintra", mentioned before:

Manegu wundor gelumpon in Agustes rice. purh þa wundor wæs getacnod Cristes cyme on middan-geard. þæt wæs sum para wundra . . .

namely, 1) the golden ring (V.71), 2) the remission of taxes (V.78 ff.), 3) run-away servants brought back (V.82 ff.), and 4) the great peace (V.90 ff.)

Others occur among the miracles in Vercelli VI: the great peace (VI.21 ff.), the sun in the middle of the night (VI.25 ff.), the three (sic) oil fountains (VI.30 ff.), and "many other wonders" (VI.34). Obviously the Norse homily in Homil is much closer to the Latin source, as printed by Wilmart, than the two English ones.

After this peculiar miracle at Christ's birth the Norwegian homily brings in a well-known apocryphal motive, Hom 32.28–30:

Nu er þesse dagr harðla hæligr goder vinir. ok allar þær salor er i hælviti ero þa fa þær ro. ef þær fenge cristni fyrir hælgi þessa dags.

The ultimate source of this popular belief in a "Sunday respite" is, as I have already mentioned, the apocryphal Visio Pauli. But not in any other medieval tradition, as far as I know, is this respite connected with Christmas day. Originally the respite in Visio Pauli was perhaps thought of as annual, at Easter, and the idea of a weekly Sunday respite seems to be due to influence from the Sunday letter. In fact the respite appears as an integral part of this letter, in many of its versions. That one such version, and not the Visio Pauli proper, is involved here is apparent from the characteristic restriction on the respite given in the

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1 Vercelli V.66 ff., p. 115.
2 Wilmart's text is also a better source here than the parallel version in pseudo-Alcuin: Liber de divinis officiis, 1: Cur nativitas Domini celebretur, in Patrologia Latina (PL) 101, 1173 ff., mentioned by Rudolph Willard (Speculum 9, Cambr. Mass. 1934, p. 229).
3 See above, p. 113, note 1.
4 On the interaction on each other of Visio Pauli and the Sunday letter, see especially Rudolph Willard: "The debate of the body and the soul", in PMLA 50, Menasha, Wisc. 1935, p. 969 ff.
Norwegian homily: þa fa þær ro. ef þæir fenge cristni (if they were Christians, that is: baptized?)—Hom. 32.29.

Much the same “restricted” form of the Sunday respite is found in the Middle High German Sunday letter from Emmeram:

an dem suntag habent alle dy sele gnad, dy zu der helle nicht geacht sind, das sy ewicklich vorlorin sein, sunder dy da gelautert sullen werden mit demfewr...

—and an Old English version in pseudo-Wulfstan 44:

þæt is eac cup, þæt for þæs dæges halgunge and weorðunge þæt þa sauwla onfop reste, þa þa beop on witincstowan, gef hi mid ænigan þingan Crist gegladodan on pisam earman life...

According to these two texts the respite is given only to sinners in Purgatory. But an exact parallel to the Norwegian text is found in pseudo-Wulfstan 43:

and is eac cuð, þæt for þæs dæges halgunge and weorðunge ealle hellware onfòd reste, gif heo æfre fulluhtes onfangen hæfdon, fram nontide þæs sæternesdæges od monandæges lihtincge (p. 211.20–23).

After this “restricted” form of the Sunday respite the Norwegian homily introduces another motive from the Sunday letter: the idea that Christ was born on Sunday or Sunday night, Hom 32.30–35:

Nu er þvi sia dagr sva hæilagr at drotten vár var boren á þesse nott. sa er alt man-kyn læysti fra hælviti... sva mykit vældi atte diofull-en aðr en gud lete berasc í þenna hæm af Mariu möyiu. a þæim dægi er ver kallum sunnu-dag... 

That Christ was born on a Sunday is only one of a long series of biblical events which, according to popular belief, happened on Sunday, as signs of its importance and holiness. To these biblical events

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1 Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie 27, p. 148–150. See the lines 61 ff. (p. 150). In the following I quote this text as Emmeram I.
2 Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien... hg. von Arthur Napier, Berlin 1883, p. 219.32–36.—The similarity between these two texts has been noticed by R. Priebsch: “The chief sources of some Anglo-Saxon homilies”, in Otia Merseiana I, Liverpool 1899 (p. 145).
3 See, on this belief, the article “Les bénédictions du Dimanche” in Cabrol-Leclercq: Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie, IV, 986–990.
the two German versions in the *Speculum ecclesiae* and the *Emmeram-
collection* add the “un-biblical” Sunday respite, in the beginning
(*Speculum ecclesiae* 64, 148.18 ff.):

Er ist der erste unde der herste tac, den got ie gescouf . . . Uon dem
tage habent alle tage anegenge unde ist ein tac aller urowude. An deme
tage urowent sich alle geloubige sele, *sich urowent ouch die armen
sele da ze helle . . .*

—or at the end (*Emmeram* 1.61 ff., quoted above).

In his study of the German *Speculum ecclesiae* and its sources the
Austrian scholar Anton E. Schönbach maintained that the homily 64
(=the Sunday letter) in this work was translated from some form of the
“benedictions of Sunday” (dignatio diei Dominici): “eine Anpreisung
des Sonntags . . . die allem Anscheine nach sehr alt ist.”¹ Following
Schönbach, R. Priebsch² noticed that the *dignatio diei Dominici* here
is “almost identical” with the version in the pseudo-Wulfstan homily
45 (Sermo angelorum nomina). According to Priebsch these vernacular
texts might be compared with the Latin version found, e.g., in pseudo-
Alcuin: *Liber de divinis officiis*, ch. 27.³ Apparently the two authors
have not been aware that these “benedictions of Sunday” might seem
to have a literary history of their own, having developed from a shorter
form, agreeing with biblical tradition, towards a much longer, apocry-
phal version, which appears together with and within the Sunday
letter. This long form must likewise be an integral part of this letter
in some of its versions.

The short version quoted by Schönbach and Priebsch may be found
e.g. in the pseudo-Augustinian Sermo 280 (PL 39, 2274 ff.). This
story contains only four “Sunday events”: Resurrection (Easter day)
and Pentecost, which are expressly mentioned in the Bible;—the
First day of creation, which was “necessarily” also the first day of the

¹ Anton E. Schönbach: “Studien zur Geschichte der altdeutschen Predigt, I.
Über Kelle’s *Speculum ecclesiae*," in: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften:
² R. Priebsch: “The chief sources of some Anglo-Saxon homilies”, in *Otia
³ PL 101, 1226 ff.
week, and finally, the first coming of manna in the desert, which must also “necessarily” have occurred on the first day, i.e. Sunday.

An intermediate stage might seem to be found in another pseudo-Augustinian text, the *Quaestiones ex Novo Testamento* 95: “Unde orta sit observatio Pentecostes” (PL 35, 2288 ff.). This text is able to tell us that “totum quod ad salutem humanam proficit, dominico die et inchoatum et adimpletum noscatur. Dominico die enim factus est mundus, et post lapsum dominico die reformatus; cuius reformationis figura data est prima in circumcisione” (PL 35, 2289). It is not said expressly here that the circumcision of Christ was done on a Sunday; but probably the wording would easily be interpreted in this way, giving thereby a possible basis for further speculations. On the other hand, I cannot find stated in this text the belief that the Ascension also took place on a Sunday (as maintained by Schönbach, op. cit., p. 134).

Much similar to the “Sunday-letter” versions is, finally, the account in the pseudo-Augustinian Sermo 167 (PL 39, 2068). On good reasons its editor, in a note, regards it as spurious or false: *Sine teste* auctor docet, in dominicum diem omnia illa incidisse miracula, scilicet transitum maris Rubri, baptismum Christi in Jordane, mutationem aquae in vinum, quinque panum multiplicationem, etc. . . . (PL 39, 2069, note e).

It is quite impossible, on the basis of the old and unreliable edition of these pseudo-Augustinian texts in *Patrologia Latina*, to determine the age and provenance of these three versions. Generally speaking, however, one is apt to believe that the fullest text (Sermo 167) is also the youngest. Among the texts published in modern critical editions one of the oldest “apocryphal” versions is apparently found in the fictitious Acts of the Council of Caesarea, probably composed in the British Isles in the seventh century.¹ A further “development” is found in a *contestatio dominicalis* from the eighth-century *Bobbio missal*² (Bobbio was also an Irish foundation!).

1 See the DACL IV, c. 986, and the text given by Wilmart, also in *Analecta Reginensia*, p. 19–26.
² DACL IV, c. 987. The text may now be found in a modern edition: *The Bobbio
The fullest Latin version of these “benedictions” known to me is the text *De die dominico*, from the “Catéchèses celtiques”, mentioned before.¹ Here (and in the *Bobbio Missal*) we find for the first time (?) in this Western tradition,² the belief that Christ was born on a Sunday: Dies dominicus dies beatus, in qua venit Christus in mundo (*Anal. Reg.* 112.28) — Die in qua natus est dominus Die sancto dominico baptismum introibit (*The Bobbio Missal* 150.33-34).

Closely related to the Latin text in *Analecta Reginensia* are the German homilies in *Speculum ecclesiae* 64 and *Emmeram I*, the Old English versions in pseudo-Wulfstan 45 and 57, and a third Old English homily, published by A. Napier from the manuscript Corpus Christi College Cambridge 162.³

To my mind it is not quite to the point when Paul Grosjean says that this Latin text is not “derived from” the Sunday letter.⁴ It seems to me that it might rather be called another form or a new branch of this fluctuating apocryphal piece. That the Latin text belongs with the Sunday letter is clearly shown by the promises and threats connected with the right observance of Sunday, which form the end of this piece.
In fact the chief difference between the Latin version and its German translations and derivations is just this, that the concluding threats and promises are not found in the German versions. Instead of these there seem to be found in the *Speculum ecclesiae* 64 traces of another piece among the "Catéchèses celtiques": the no. XIII, *Sermo de secundo adventu*. Cf. here *Speculum ecclesiae* 148.10 ff:

An deme heilige sunnentage ist unser herre der heilige Christ chunftic in siner magenchrefte mit alleme himelisscen here zerteilenne lebenten unde toten. Dannan sprichet der heilige wissage: Veniet dominus cum uirtute terribili . . .,

and the Latin parallel, *Anal. Reg.* 109.2 ff:

Secundus autem aduentus eius in maiestate fulgebit, ut profaeta dicit: . . . Veniet dominus in virtute terribili . . .

—Actually the "ut profaeta dicit" of the Latin text is immediately followed by another biblical quotation: Ignis ante ipsum procedet et inflamabit in circuitu inimicos eius (*Ps.* 96.3)—which appears in the heading or first line of *Speculum ecclesiae* 64 (147.12). The Latin passage, *Anal. Reg.* 109.2–13, appears to be a separate unity, quoted in exactly the same form also in the long Christmas sermon, "Catéchèses celtiques" XI (*Anal. Reg.* 106.28–40, cf. Wilmart’s notes, p. 109).—There is nothing corresponding to this element in the homily *Emmeram I*. Anton Schönbach, who was not able to find any source for this concluding passage of *Speculum ecclesiae* 64, suggested that it might be due to the German translator.¹

Among the vernacular texts of this form of the Sunday letter: the "benedictions of Sunday", by far the longest and the most fantastic is the ninth-century Irish *Cain Domnaig*, published (with English translation) in the Irish periodical *Ériu*, II.² Besides the many different prose versions, there also exist several vernacular versifica-

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1 Cf. the letter from Schönbach quoted by the editor of the *Altdeutsche Predigten*, in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 27, p. 184: "Der schluss der predigt rührt wahrscheinlich von dem deutschen bearbeiter (im Speculum) selbst her".

tions of the same theme. It is not possible to treat these also in full here.¹

Of events in the early life of Christ we find in the already mentioned prose texts his conception (pseudo-John, *Cain Domnaig*), birth (pseudo-John, *Bobbio Missal, De die dominico* (Wilmart), *Cain Domnaig*, pseudo-Wulfstan 45 and 57, and the Old English homily from CCCC 162 (Napier), the German *Speculum ecclesiae* 64 and *Emmeram* I, and finally, the Norwegian homily), circumcision (*Cain Domnaig*, *Emmeram*), and baptism (*Bobbio Missal, Cain Domnaig*, pseudo-Wulfstan 45 and 57, pseudo-Augustinus 167, *Speculum ecclesiae* 64, *Emmeram*).

Starting from this catalogue one point could be made concerning the source of the Old Norse religious poem *Leiðarvisan* (cf. note 1 above). It apparently agrees with the Irish *Cain Domnaig* (and pseudo-John: *Liber de dormitione Mariae*) in giving Sunday as the day of Christ's conception (*Cain Domnaig*, p. 199 and *Leiðarvisan*, stanza 22); on the other hand, it shares with the Old English pseudo-Wulfstan 45 the peculiar idea that Christ was not only baptized with water, but at the same time anointed with chrisma (this particular word occurs both in *Wulfstan* 229.3 and *Leiðarvisan*, stanza 24).² The tradition that Christ was born on a Sunday is also, of course, found in *Leiðarvisan* (stanza 23).

¹ The "benedictions of Sunday" have been put into verses in Irish (*Denaig cain domnaigh De dil*, in *Ériu* IV, 1907, p. 143–147, cf. the DACL IV, c. 987, and *Anaelcta Bollandiana* 54, p. 134), Middle High German (*Diu vrone botschaff ze der cristenheit*, hg. von R. Priebsch, Graz 1805), and Old Norse (*Leiðarvisan*, in Finnur Jónsson, ed.: *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, A. I, Copenhagen 1912, p. 618–626). On the other hand, only a small trace of these benedictions is left in the Middle English versified Sunday letter (*John Audelay’s Poem on the observance of Sunday*, ed. by R. Priebsch, in *An English miscellany dedicated to Dr. Furnivall*, 1901, p. 397–407. Cf. here the stanza XIII, p. 406).

After the accumulation of apocryphal motives and stories on these few lines, *Hom* 32.26–35, the Old Norse homily continues down half a page or so (p. 33) with traditional Christmas (or Bible) stories, which do not present any problems. Then a new element enters at p. 33.24: "Pvi ægum ver væl at halda þessa tið með rænum lutum . . .": an exhortation to behave properly at Christmas time. This exhortation again develops into a warning, and a description of the horrors in hell (*Hom* 33.35 ff.)—reversing the previous description of the joys of heaven (*Hom* 32.11 ff.) Within this warning there occurs the famous Virgilian motive: "the hundred mouths and the hundred tongues of iron" (*Hom* 34.2 ff., cf. *Aeneis* VI.625 ff.), which has for a long time already1 been recognized as not of course a direct quotation from Vergil, but an obvious loan from the medieval *Visio Pauli* in this homily. As this particular motive is not relevant to and has apparently not been taken up by the Sunday letter, it might seem to be taken directly from the *Visio* here.

The whole remaining matter on this page (*Hom* 34.6–35) is remarkably like the "dialogue" between Christ and the damned sinners in *Visio Pauli*, before the granting of the Sunday respite. In the homily, however, no respite follows at this point, but only eternal damnation: "pa fara þær til hælvitis pinsla. þar er enda-laus vist" (*Hom* 34.35). I have previously2 interpreted this whole passage as a reminiscence from the *Visio Pauli*—but I am now inclined to think that we have here a somewhat different version of it, which need not have been combined with the *Visio Pauli* and the Sunday respite.

As has been pointed out by Rudolph Willard,3 passages like this one in *Hom* may remind one of three different Latin texts: the words of Christ to the damned in the *Visio Pauli* (referred to above), the *Improperia* of the Good Friday office from the Roman Mass, and

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2 En norron versjon av *Visio Pauli*, Bergen 1965, p. 15.
finally, the powerful lamentation *Ego te, homo* ... from Caesarius of Arles: Sermo LVII (Admonitio de die iudiciij).¹

Of these three texts the *Improperia*, in their present form, are obviously too late to be considered as a source of the Old Norse passage.² However, one little detail (and possibly a significant one) is similar in these two versions: the division of Christ's words into *three* questions (replies): *Da svarar drotten var* (*Hom* 34.8), *En þa mæler en var drotten* (*Hom* 34.16), *Da mæler var drotten* (*Hom* 34.28).

The first of these replies in *Hom* includes a Latin quotation from the Psalter: *Quid gloriaris in malitia qui potæns es in iniquitate? (Ps. 51.3)* —a quotation which is apparently not a regular feature of such address-es. Is it, now, merely a coincidence that Rudolph Willard has also found this particular Latin quotation in another curious apocryphal construction of probable Irish origin: the "Three utterances of the soul", in his *Two apocrypha in Old English homilies*?³ And further, is it also a coincidence that one of his sources for this apocryphon is the very same homily in the ms. Hatton 114, which has been quoted above (p. 120) for another parallel with the Norse text—and a second one an *Irish* text from the Liber Flavus Fergusiorum, a manuscript which has also been quoted as a source before (p. 123)?

The three parallel texts printed by Willard in *Two apocrypha*⁴ ... agree on one rather curious point: in all three this quotation is laid into the mouth of *devils*, while drawing an unjust soul towards hell. It really looks quite strange when devils quote David's words here, and much more natural when "*the Lord* answers with the words of David the prophet", as in the Norse homily (*Hom* 34.8). Have the two traditions (possibly) used a common source in two different ways—?

³ Text in *Two apocrypha* ... p. 38–57.
⁴ The Old English text, Hatton 114, item 53 (according to N. R. Ker's *Catalogue*), the Old Irish (in English translation here, originally published by Carl J. S. Månstrander, in *Ériu* V, 1911), and finally, a Latin homily. The *Quid gloriaris* is found on p. 46, 45 and 44 respectively, according to Willard's edition.
Attention has been drawn to one special feature in this account of the fate of an unjust soul. In another (shorter) Old English version of this apocryphal story the devils take the soul "because it would not give alms of its worldly possessions" (cf. Hom 34.14–16!):

And þa deofla cwepa: We agan þa sawle, forþam þe heo nolde of hyre woruldgestreonum ðælman".¹

In his commentary on this passage, Willard quotes (op. cit., p. 97) a letter from the Harvard theologian Carl Kraeling, stressing the importance of just this idea: "I think it deserves particular prominence as a witness to the origin of the conceptions embodied in the . . . material" (Kraeling). There would seem to be distant and obscure connections between the Old English material here and the Norwegian homily. It is impossible for me now (and perhaps it will not be possible at all) to get a clearer picture of their interrelation.

The second and the third of the Lord's replies in the Norwegian homily (Hom 34.16–35) show general similarities and parallels to the Ego te, homo of Caesarius, and the Old English version of it in Vercelli VIII, which has been identified by Rudolph Willard.² The Norse text or its source must, however, be radically shortened and revised.— One little detail is similar in the Old English and the Old Norse homily, as against the Latin source: the added remark, "This I did for you. What did you do for me"? (Hom 34.25: Hvat gerðu þer fyrir mic á veroldo siðan ec þolda sva mykit fyrir yðr . . . Vercelli VIII. 66: ic þis eal fremede for ðe. Hwæt gedydest ðu for me?)

The Old Norse passage ends with a paraphrasis of the biblical Discedite a me, maledicti . . . (Matth. 25.41), occurring also at the end of Caesarius' Sermo LVII. A more traditional form of the same scene,
starting with just this Latin quotation and closely translating the biblical text, is found in the last piece of Indrebo’s edition, the *Sermo ad populum ultrae necessaria*, Hom 168-171 (the *Discedite: Hom 169.21 ff.*). These two homilies also continue in a similar way, bringing in the words of Paul (1. Cor. 2.9): Quod oculus non videt nec auris audit . . . (cf. *Hom 170.1 ff. and 35.3 ff.*).

After this quotation, the First Christmas homily draws to its end with a new exhortation to behave properly, and go to Mass (or rather the Hours, O.N. *tōrir*) “these twelve nights” (*Hom 35.7*).

These fairly general, final remarks (*Hom 35.6-15*) may well have been composed by the Norwegian homilist, as a suitable conclusion to this curious, although (one is apt to think) not very orthodox Christmas sermon.