

BIBLICAL EPICS IN LATE ANTIQUITY  
AND ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND:  
*DIVINA IN LAUDE VOLUNTAS*

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Biblical Epics  
in Late Antiquity and  
Anglo-Saxon England

*Divina in Laude Voluntas*

PATRICK McBRINE

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*For my wife, Caroline,  
and for Kieran, Ellie, and William*

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# Preface

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The purpose of this book is to provide an accessible introduction to the Latin biblical epics of late Antiquity (c. 300–600) that were known in Anglo-Saxon England (c. 600–1100). The first five chapters introduce the poetry of Juvenius, Cyprianus, Sedulius, Avitus, and Arator, whose work was read and studied throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. These chapters form the core of the book and focus on the Latin approach to biblical versification and the evolution of the genre over the course of late Antiquity. Chapter 7 turns to the reception of this literature in Anglo-Saxon England, in the writings of Aldhelm, Bede, and Alcuin, whose poetry bears witness to the pervasive influence of Latin biblical epic on Anglo-Latin literature. The discussion concludes with analyses of episodes in Old English biblical verse, specifically in *Genesis A*, *B*, and *Exodus*, in order to consider how poets of the two traditions, Latin and English, approach the same scenes. Above all, the purpose of this book is to promote knowledge of a body of writing that was important to the Anglo-Saxons and played a vital role in the instruction of Latin verse and the dissemination of biblical lore.

In the course of finishing this book, I am grateful to a number of people. First, thank you to Suzanne Rancourt at the University of Toronto Press for her support in the publication of this book and to Michel Pharand for his careful attention to the manuscript. Thank you to George Clark at Queen's University for years of guidance and friendship. Thank you to George Rigg at the University of Toronto for weekly readings in late antique Latin verse over the course of a year. Those sessions led to many insights and a translation of the *Carmen paschale* of Sedulius. To David Townsend, I am grateful for support in the early stages of this project and for his friendship and guidance over the last decade. To Toni Healey and the *Dictionary of Old English*, I owe my knowledge of the corpus and its resources. Toni's

attentive eye has saved me on more than one occasion, and her suggestions for Chapter 8 (Old English Biblical Verse) have been invaluable. Thank you to Gernot Wieland at the University of British Columbia for reading early drafts of this book in my dissertation and for serving as my external examiner, and thank you to Julia Warnes at the University of Toronto for proofreading early drafts of the chapters on late Antiquity. Thank you also to Yale University for access to Sterling, Beinecke, and Divinity during my years in New Haven, and to Southern Connecticut State University and the English Department for supporting this project. Thank you to Roy Liuzza, Damian Fleming, and Mark Sundaram for reading a draft of my chapter on Old English biblical verse and for their thoughtful suggestions. And thank you especially to Andy Orchard for suggesting this project initially and for years of teaching and friendship. Much of what is good about this book is owing to his influence, and (as Arator would say) “*si quid ab ore placet, laus monitoris erit.*”

Finally, thank you to my family and above all to my wife, Caroline, for enduring these last ten years. I do not think that she will read Sedulius again, but to her and our children, Kieran, Ellie, and William, I dedicate this book.

Patrick McBrine (Toronto, 31 January 2017)

# Abbreviations

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AJP	American Journal of Philology
ALLG	Archiv für lateinische Lexikographie und Grammatik
ASE	Anglo-Saxon England
ASPR	Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
CdV	Carmen de uirginitate
CE	Carmina ecclesiastica
CM	Classica et Mediaevalia
Cp	Carmen paschale
ELN	English Language Notes
EC	Les Études Classiques
ES	English Studies
Ev	Euangeliorum libri quattuor
CMCS	Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
JAC	Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
LSE	Leeds Studies in English
HE	Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum
MÆ	Medium Ævum
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
MLN	Modern Language Notes
NM	Neuphilologische Mitteilungen
PIMS	Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies
PL	Patrologia Latina
PRIA	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i>
REA	Revue des Études Augustiniennes

xii Abbreviations

RMAL	Revue du Moyen Age Latin
SP	Speculum
TAPS	Transactions of the American Philosophical Society
TAPA	Transactions of the American Philological Association
TMLT	Toronto Medieval Latin Text
VC	Vigiliae Christianae

BIBLICAL EPICS IN LATE ANTIQUITY  
AND ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

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## Introduction

Sed non ut dignum tanti praeconia facti  
Eloquium captent: diuina in laude uoluntas  
Sufficit et famulo monstrari munere uotum.

[But I do not sing, that my praise of so great a story may capture the eloquence it deserves. My will to praise the Divine is enough and that this humble offering makes that wish clear.]

– Avitus, *Historia spiritalis* (5.6–8)

The subtitle of this book, *Biblical Epics in Late Antiquity and Anglo-Saxon England: Divina in Laude Voluntas*, is based on the above quotation from Avitus of Vienne’s sixth-century biblical epic (c. 500), *De spiritalis historiae gestis* (hereafter *Historia spiritalis*).<sup>1</sup> The relevant lines appear in the preface to his versification of Exodus, *De transitu maris rubri* (*On the Crossing of the Red Sea*), which emphasizes the baptismal symbolism of the passage through the waters. The will of Avitus to praise God through poetry is common to all of the writers in this study, and so it affords a fitting theme for this book. Moreover, despite his words to the contrary (“Sed non ut dignum tanti praeconia facti/Eloquium captent,” 5.6–7), Avitus, like every biblical versifier, Latin and English, does indeed strive to capture the eloquence worthy of the renowned deeds of the Bible. The general purpose of this book is to consider the manner in which this

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1 For the text see Peiper, ed., *Alcimi Ecdicii Aviti Viennensis Episcopi Opera*, MGH Auct. A.

will is carried out in the biblical versifications of late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

## Contribution of This Book

More precisely, the goal of this book is to provide an accessible introduction to the late classical Latin biblical epics known and studied in the Anglo-Saxon period, namely, Juvenius' *Euangeliorum libri* (c. 330), Cyprianus' *Heptateuch* (c. 400–25), Sedulius' *Carmen paschale* (c. 425–50), Avitus' *Historia spiritalis* (c. 500), and Arator's *Historia apostolica* (c. 544).<sup>2</sup> There is now ample evidence in the surviving manuscripts and booklists of the period, not to mention myriad echoes of this literature in Anglo-Latin writing, to confirm that these texts were part of a programmed study of Latin poetry meant to serve as devotional reading and introduce the Anglo-Saxons to the style of classical hexameter verse through biblical epic. There is at present, however, no book that treats these poems all together and with a view to assessing their reception in the later Anglo-Saxon period. That, then, is the primary objective of this book: to introduce each of these texts (chs. 2–6) and to consider how they are important for our reading of Anglo-Latin (ch. 7) and Old English poetry (ch. 8).

## Defining Biblical Epic

The Latin genre of biblical epic evolved continually over the course of late Antiquity (c. 330–544 CE), changing with the tastes of its writers and audiences, so that no two poems in this tradition are quite the same.<sup>3</sup> In simple terms, a Latin biblical epic is a poem based on one or more books of the Bible that incorporates features of classical epic.<sup>4</sup> As Paul-Augustin

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2 Huemer, ed., *Gai. Vetti Aquilini Iuueni Euangeliorum Libri Quattuor; Sedulii Opera Omnia*; Peiper, ed., *Cypriani Galli Poetae Heptateuchos*; for the text of Avitus, see note 1 above; and Orbán, ed., *Aratoris Subdiaconi Historia Apostolica*, 2 vols.

3 The year 330 is the approximate date of the first Latin biblical epic, *Euangeliorum libri quattuor*, and 544 is the year in which Arator dedicated his versification of Acts, *De actibus apostolorum*, to Pope Vigilius in Italy, effectively marking the end of the Latin genre in late Antiquity.

4 See also the definition of Roberts, *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase*, p. 4, n. 12: “poems written in the dactylic hexameter which owe their narrative continuity to a biblical sequence of events.”



Deproost defines them, “the poems normally placed within the category of biblical epic aspire to translate the stories of the Bible into the language, images, meter, in short the literary conventions of classical epic.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, though much space and time separate the two, the later genre of Old English biblical verse is defined in similar terms by Paul Remley as “compositions which maintain reasonable fidelity to biblical narratives while evincing their own distinctive poetical identities.”<sup>6</sup> Those distinctive poetic identities refer to the English author’s response to conventions in Germanic-heroic verse, but the general approach to biblical versification is comparable. In each case, the goal is transformation, to create the illusion that those biblical stories had always been a part of the older tradition even as they stood apart from it.<sup>7</sup> Latin- and English-speaking audiences knew the truth, of course, that this was all slight of hand, but they were willing to entertain the illusion, so long as the pleasures of pagan verse did not taint the more wholesome literature of the Bible. Balance was the key and only a few writers managed to devise a formula that won them any lasting fame; but their legacy endured for more than a millennium, inspiring generations of poets well into the Middle Ages.

### Audiences of Biblical Epic

The initial audience for Latin biblical epic was the literary elite of late Antiquity, sophisticated readers who were familiar with both the Bible and classical literature. “After the Edict of Milan,” as Michael Roberts puts it, “and the emperor’s increasing patronage of Christianity, the poet could count on attracting cultivated readers for whom a recasting of the biblical narrative in the culturally prestigious idiom of Latin (primarily

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5 Deproost, “L’épopée biblique en langue latine,” 14: “les poèmes que l’on range habituellement sous cette étiquette ‘épopée biblique’ prétendent effectivement traduire des histoires bibliques dans le langage, les images, le mètre, bref les conventions littéraires de l’épopée antique ...”

6 Remley, “Biblical Translation: Poems,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, 66–7.

7 See further Morhmann, *La langue et le style de la poésie Latine chrétienne*, 155.

Vergilian) epic would have a special appeal.”<sup>8</sup> That was certainly the case with Juvenius’ *Euangeliorum libri* (c. 330), a versification of the Gospels dedicated to Emperor Constantine, whose formal endorsement of Christianity in 313 (The Edict of Milan) opened the way for Juvenius and many other Christian writers eager to establish a corpus of Christian literature. In fact, all of the biblical epics of late Antiquity appealed to highly educated readers who could appreciate the sophisticated interplay of sources in the genre; one need only look to scholarly editions of these texts to find lists of learned individuals who knew them very well. Huemer’s edition of Juvenius, for one, contains endorsements by such famous writers as St Jerome, Isidore of Seville, Eugenius of Toledo, and many others who cited or echoed the poem in approbation of its merit.<sup>9</sup> These were all highly literate individuals, many of them highly placed in the Church.

The situation was somewhat different in Anglo-Saxon England, where Latin was not the native language of the English and where biblical epic arrived only after the conversion to Christianity around 600 CE. The Anglo-Saxons had to struggle with this literature more than their continental neighbours, but they became familiar enough with it to initiate their own tradition of Latin hexameter verse in the “classical” style, that is, poetry based on the Christian model of late antique writing. Thus Aldhelm’s verse and prose *De uirginitate* (*On Virginity*), Bede’s two lives of St Cuthbert (*Vita Cuthberti*) and Alcuin’s lives of St Willibrord (*Vita Willibrordi*), all treated in chapter 7, follow in the footsteps of Sedulius, who wrote the original *opus geminatum* (“twinned work”) with his *Carmen* and *Opus paschale*, a versification of the Gospels.

Vernacular audiences of Old English biblical poetry were probably not for the most part members of the literary elite, given the appeal of English writing to a more general audience. On the other hand, passages in *Genesis A* and *Exodus* (ch. 8) obviously appeal to sophisticated readers, and so we must be careful about generalizations. But given the fidelity of these poems to the basic events of the Bible over any symbolic messages, it is likely that this poetry was meant primarily to disseminate knowledge of the Scriptures

8 Roberts, “Vergil and the Gospel,” 47. See also p. 59 of the same article: “The *Ev.* could expect an enthusiastic readership among cultivated Romans for whom its Vergilian idiom would only enhance the appeal of Juvenius.” See also Deproost, “L’Épopée Biblique,” 24 and 21, where Deproost imagines an extremely cultivated audience participating in the culture of its author. See also Evenepoel, “The Place of Poetry in Latin Christianity,” 39; and McClure, “The Biblical Epic and Its Audience in Late Antiquity,” 305–21.

9 See further Huemer’s introduction, *Euangeliorum libri*, esp. i–xxiv.

in popular form. Again, however, because many of these poems can and do move unpredictably between passages of literal description and figurative allusions, it is safest to say that the audience of the English genre was a mixed but mainly general one.

## Purposes of Biblical Epic

As the title of this book suggests, there is a sense that these biblical poems represent in large the author's will to praise God. So the progenitor of the Latin genre, Juvencus, concludes his preface to *Euangeliorum libri* with the hope "that [he] may speak things worthy of Christ" ("ut Christo digna loquamur," *Ev. Praef.* 27), and a century later the poet Sedulius proclaims a similar desire to "speak the truth and ... praise the Lord-Thunderer with all [his] heart and soul" ("manifesta loqui, Dominumque tonantem/Sensibus et toto delectet corde fateri," *Cp.* 1.27–8). Avitus says much the same thing – "My will to praise the Divine is enough for me" ("diuina in laude uoluntas/Sufficit," *Hist. spirit.* 5.7–8) – and so does Arator, the sixth-century versifier of Acts, who declares, "there is a burning in my heart to celebrate the labours of the men by whose voice faith finds a path in the world" ("Sensibus ardor inest horum celebrare labores,/Quorum uoce fides obtinet orbis iter," *Epist. Vigil.*, 17–18), and "I will be guilty, if I ever stop giving thanks to Him" ("Esse reus potero, grates si reddere cessem," 15), that is, God.

Poets in the later English genre are less outspoken in every respect than their Latin predecessors, but the first work in the vernacular tradition, *Genesis A*, begins with the following words: "It is very right that we should praise the Guardian of heaven, the Glory-King of hosts, with words and love him in our hearts" ("Us is riht micel ðæt we rodera weard,/wereda wuldorcining, wordum herigen,/modum lufien"). Moreover, the only named biblical poet of the period, Caedmon, whose other works have not survived, begins his *Hymn* in the same way: "Now we should praise the Guardian of the Kingdom of Heaven ..." ("Nu sculon herigean heofonrices weard ..."). Other poems in the Junius collection of biblical poetry likewise emphasize the importance of giving praise to God. So in the context of the fall of Lucifer, the author of *Genesis B* writes, "He had to render praise to God ... to thank his Lord" ("Lof sceolde he drihtnes wyrcean ... and sceolde his drihtne þancian," 256b–7), although Lucifer's pride compels him to do "something worse" ("to wyrsan þinge," 259a). At the end of *Exodus*, the Israelites give due thanks and praise to God for delivering them out of Egypt (*drihten heredon*, 576b), and their faith, as Moses says,

will earn them “great glory” (*Bið eower blaed micel*, 564b). It is like the glory God’s angels enjoyed in heaven (“Wæs heora blaed micel,” *GenA* 14b), when they still praised the Lord (*beoden heredon*, 15b). Therefore, this theme of praise is an ongoing concern for the poets of the Junius Manuscript and for those of the Latin tradition as well.

There is also a strong didactic element to all of the Latin and Old English biblical poems. As Michael Roberts describes it, the wider justification for the genre, beyond its entertainment value, is attached to the “Christian purpose of spiritual instruction, moral edification or biblical exegesis.”<sup>10</sup> The German scholar, Reinhart Herzog, uses the term *Erbauung* (“edification”) in much the same way, and Klaus Thraede before him refers to “der überwiegend moralisch-didaktischen Auffassung der Poesie” (“the predominantly moral and didactic conception of [this] poetry”).<sup>11</sup> So while delight, or *delectatio*, is a strong draw for audiences, an important function of this literature, as Siegmär Döpp puts it, is attached to its “didaktische Intention” (“didactic intention”).<sup>12</sup>

## Overview of Chapters

The purpose of this book, apart from sharing what these poems are about, is to consider how their authors promote the values of Christianity. A summary overview of the chapters will thus be useful at this point. Following the present chapter, chapter 2 introduces the work of the Spanish priest and poet, Juvencus, whose verse rendition of the Gospels, *Euangeliorum libri Quattuor* (c. 330), establishes many of the normative practices in the Latin genre. In his preface, Juvencus confronts conventional themes of epic, notably immortality (*Inmortale nihil mundi*, 1), but also the lofty deeds of men (*homines sublimia facta*, 6), fame, praise (*famam laudesque*, 8), and the glory of the poets themselves (*gloria uatum*, 11). These Juvencus must convert (as it were) for Christian audiences to serve the “glory of the Creator” (*genitoris gloria Christus*, 24), whose “life-giving deeds” (*uitalia gesta*, 19) eclipse the heroic exploits of old, “which bind lies to the deeds of ancient men” (“quae ueterum gestis hominum mendacia nectunt,” 16). Unlike those, Christ’s life is without falsehood

10 Roberts, *Biblical Epic*, 107.

11 The didactic function of biblical epic is expressed early on as *Erbaulichkeit* by Herzog in his fundamental study, *Die Biblepik der lateinischen Spätantike*; see also Thraede, “Epos,” 983–1042, 1006.

12 See also Döpp, *Eva und die Schlange*, 19–22, for the purpose of biblical epic.

(*falsi sine crimine*, 20) and it reveals the true path to immortality (*Inmortale decus*, 18). As such it is more than worthy of epic song.

In versifying the Bible, Juvenecus moves systematically through the text of the Gospels, favouring Matthew, and authenticating his poetic rendition with verbal links to the Bible. Thus, for example, his versification of the Lord's Prayer begins, "Sidereo genitor residens in uertice caeli / Nominis, oramus, ueneratio sanctificetur" ("Father residing in the starry height of heaven, / may the veneration of your name, we pray, be hallowed," 1.590–1), and echoes of the original can be heard in the words, *caeli* ("heaven"), *nominis* ("name"), and *sanctificetur* ("be hallowed"), the last of which appears verbatim in the Bible: "Pater noster qui in caelis es sanctificetur nomen tuum" ("Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name"). Such fidelity is part of the reason why Jerome calls the poem a *paene ad uerbum* translation of the Bible, that is, "almost word for word."<sup>13</sup> That being said, the poetic diction Juvenecus adds to the prose – and this can be seen even in the excerpt of the Lord's Prayer above – introduces shades of meaning into the original story, and a careful reading of many scenes in *Euangeliorum libri* reveals a subtle, renovating hand at work, showing that Juvenecus adapts much of what he adopts. The purpose of this chapter, then, after a brief introduction to the author and some biblical and classical features of his poem, is to examine key scenes in the text, to show how the author blends biblical language with that of classical poetry. More often than not, Juvenecus strikes a balance between the sacred and profane, which accounts in large part for the popularity of the work, but he also manages to introduce subtle commentary through his choice of diction. Such commentary may suggest a point of contrast with the values of classical epic, what German scholars call *Kontrastimitation*, while other additions develop themes that are important to the author, such as the "life-giving deeds of Christ" (*Christi uitalia gesta*, *praef.* 19), which he highlights in the preface and emphasizes throughout his translation of New Testament miracles. In many ways, therefore, this chapter is the most important one in the book, because it introduces the Latin genre, its normative features, and a general template for all subsequent discussions.

Chapter 3 introduces the *Heptateuchos* (hereafter the *Heptateuch*) of the poet Cyprianus Gallus, a versification of the Old Testament written at the beginning of the fifth century (c. 400–25). In style, the *Heptateuch* owes much to the foundational work of Juvenecus and it is likewise a *paene*

13 See further Huemer, ed., *Euangeliorum libri*, vi.

*ad uerbum* translation of the Bible. That much is clear from the first words, “Principio dominus caelum terramque locauit” (“In the beginning the Lord established heaven and earth,” 1), which nearly renders the language of the original (“In principio fecit deus caelum et terram,” Gen. 1:1).

Little is known about the author himself (his name is a fabrication), but it is apparent from analyses of the metre and his choice of poetic diction that Cyprianus is a less gifted poet than Juvenecus. He shares with him an exuberant love of classical verse, especially of the *Aeneid*, but this same (youthful?) exuberance leads him to some unfortunate choices, not the least of which is the decision to attempt to versify all of the historical books of the Old Testament. That is over-ambitious, and judging from the general obscurity of the author and his work throughout late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, it appears the poem never enjoyed the kind of success and status *Euangeliorum libri* did. Even so, flashes of virtuosity reward the persistent reader, including the author’s rendition of the temptation and fall of Eve (*Gen.* 72–90), the description of the Flood (*Gen.* 287–321), and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (*Gen.* 661–7). The story of Pharaoh’s pursuit of the Israelites through the wilderness and into the waters of the Red Sea also captures some of that eloquence worthy of so great a story. Ultimately, the greatest virtues of the *Heptateuch* are its economy of style and close proximity to the biblical narrative, which make this poem an accessible and at times forceful rendition of the Old Testament.

Chapter 4 introduces the *Carmen paschale* of Sedulius (c. 425–50), a free and florid rendition of the Gospels and arguably the greatest achievement in the genre. Not only is Sedulius a skilled imitator of his epic predecessors, especially Vergil, but his translation of the Gospels is at once inventive and faithful to the original. His preface, written in elegiac distichs and not dactylic hexameter, which is itself notable, transforms the image of a Roman banquet into a metaphorical, Eucharistic feast for the consumption of spiritual food. No *paene ad uerbum* translation, this and all subsequent poems in the genre range farther afield to explore the deeper symbolism of the Bible and the connections between the Old and New Testaments. Thus Sedulius exhorts his reader, “Cognoscite cuncti, / Mystica quid doceant animos miracula nostros” (“Let us all recognize what these mystical miracles teach our souls,” 4.263–4), and unlike Juvenecus or Cyprianus, who remain detached from their narratives in observance of epic decorum, Sedulius and his successors intervene frequently in their poems, to guide the reader in the interpretation of the Bible. Consequently, the complexity of the genre, which was determined mainly by the juxtaposition of classical and Christian sources, now increases to include a

symbolic dimension. Thus the description of the advent of the Magi in Book 2 (2.89–101) includes biblical language augmented by classical-poetic diction, but it also contains symbolic meaning with a doctrinal message. The three gifts of the Magi now stand for religion (*pro religione*, 2.93), for the threefold power of God, the Holy Trinity (“in triplici uirtute sui,” 2.101). With such depth of interest and symbolism, it is easy to see why the *Carmen paschale* was among the most popular biblical epics of late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, because it offered not only an alternative to the pagan verses of the *Aeneid* but a rich source of devotional reading for the ruminating mind.

Chapter 5 introduces Avitus and his *De spiritalis historiae gestis* (hereafter *Historia spiritalis*), a very free rendition of the Old Testament with emphasis on the theme of salvation history. It was written around 500 CE. If the greatest virtues of the *Heptateuch* are its economy of style and general accessibility, the opposite is true of this work, which is expansive and magniloquent, at times to the point of obscurity. The poem contains five books, which cover the Creation, the Fall, God’s Judgment of Adam and Eve, the Flood, and the Crossing of the Red Sea. Each book is linked loosely to the scriptural narrative and shows that Avitus is more concerned with developing dramatic action and characters that exhibit greater emotional and psychological depth than their biblical counterparts; and much of everything promotes the symbolic importance of the Old Testament over its literal meaning. So the drama of the Fall is raised to epic proportions; we see into the devil’s mind, his hatred of God and man, and his determination to ruin both (2.90–116). We also see the internal struggle of Eve and the psychological turmoil that leads to her downfall (2.208–34), and we learn that Christ is to be the new Adam (*nouissimus Adam*, 3.21) who will atone for the sins of the first father (*prime pater*, 1.7). Equally, the stories of the Flood and Crossing of the Red Sea contain dramatic reenactments of the Bible with symbolism related to Baptism. The whole narrative is intricately composed of recurrent images linking the events of each book to the larger framework of salvation history, and although the expansive nature of the text can be excessive, *Historia spiritalis* remains one of the most vivid and entertaining poems on the Old Testament.

Chapter 6 introduces the final biblical epic of late Antiquity, Arator’s *De actibus apostolorum* (hereafter *Historia apostolica*), a free rendition of Acts alternating between passages of biblical translation and biblical commentary. It was written around 544 CE. As Arator himself says, “I shall in turn set out what the letter reveals and whatever mystical sense is given to my heart” (“Alternis reserabo modis quod littera pandit/Et res si qua mihi

mystica corde datur," *Epist. Vigil.* 21–2). This can be seen, for example, in his treatment of the storm at sea in Acts 27:13–20, which begins with a fairly straightforward account of the incident (2.1067–81), followed by an explanation of its greater significance in terms of Christian salvation (2.1131–51). What is more, although Arator is far freer in his adaptation of the Bible than Juvencus, Cyprianus, or Sedulius (though not Avitus) and pursues the mystical sense of Acts with ardent fervour, he does not (as many argue) lose sight of the Bible.

Unlike Avitus, who favours lofty poetic diction almost for its own sake, Arator reacts more to the semantic depth of language and its potential to express literal and figurative meaning, simultaneously. Indeed, Arator's fondness for wordplay permeates *Historia apostolica*, so that the challenge for the reader at times is to follow the poet's mental path from scenes of literal description to more symbolic interpretations. A passing reference to Troas in Acts 20.6 leads Arator into a digression on Troy, epic, and the proper place of praise (2.757–71), followed immediately by an interpretation of sleep as spiritual blindness, and all of this comes before his actual commentary on the deeper, general significance of the episode. But there is great richness in *Historia apostolica*, which offers plenty of instruction with delight.

Following these first five chapters on Juvencus, Cyprianus, Sedulius, Avitus, and Arator, chapter 7 sets out to account in some measure for the reception of this literature in Anglo-Saxon England. The chapter begins with a discussion of the Anglo-Saxon school curriculum and the place of Latin biblical epic in it. Evidence is given for knowledge of these poems in the surviving manuscripts, references on booklists, and verbal echoes in Anglo-Latin writing. The list of echoes is not exhaustive, but it does provide a sense of which works were well known and which parts of them. Analysis of two anonymous versifications of the Lord's Prayer from this period also provides a case study of how deeply the influence of that literature can go. The discussion then shifts to the work of Aldhelm, Bede, and Alcuin, the most prominent Latin poets of the period, each of whom was very well acquainted with the late antique tradition of biblical epic. The extent of their debt to this literature, however, has yet to be gauged fully, and so this section aims to show how these writers incorporated their knowledge of the earlier genre into their idiosyncratic compositions in Anglo-Latin, in particular in Aldhelm's *Carmen de uirginitate*, Bede's versified *Vita Cuthberti*, and Alcuin's *Vita Willibrordi*, but also in their other poetry. In short, this chapter provides much new evidence to support the argument that Aldhelm, Bede, and



Alcuin were deeply indebted to the language and style of the late antique Latin biblical epics.

Chapter 8 turns to the Old English versifications of the Bible in the so-called Junius Manuscript and specifically to *Genesis A*, *Genesis B*, and *Exodus*, which have in common many scenes with the earlier Latin genre. The primary goal of this chapter is to provide an objective analysis of Old English biblical verse from the point of view of someone familiar with the Latin tradition and to consider what vernacular poets may have in common with their late antique predecessors. Simply put, there is much to suggest that the working *modus operandi* of the English versifier is more like that of the Latin poet than not, especially in their shared desire to validate the scriptural poetry with verbal links to the Bible and to adopt features of traditional poetic diction (now from the Germanic tradition), to augment the entertainment value of the biblical story. There is also good reason to believe that the impetus towards extra-literal meaning in poems like the Old English *Exodus* owes as much to the earlier work of Sedulius, Avitus, and Arator as it does the liturgy or biblical commentaries in prose.

Finally, chapter 9 provides a brief summary and conclusion of the discussion as well as a few suggestions for future work in the field. In simple terms, there is a need for more translations of these texts and treatments of their reception in Anglo-Latin and Old English literature. This book only scratches the surface.

## Summary of Scholarship

Scholarly interest in the Latin and Old English versifications of the Bible has increased steadily over the last fifty years, gaining momentum in recent decades. A brief sketch here will be helpful. Important, early surveys include Max Manitius' *Geschichte der Christlich-lateinischen Poesie* (1891),<sup>14</sup> E.R. Curtius' *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948),<sup>15</sup> and F.J.E. Raby's *A History of Christian Latin Poetry* (1953).<sup>16</sup> Each says something about the tradition of biblical epic in the wider scope of early Christian literature. Klaus Thraede's 1962 article "Epos" treats

14 Manitius, *Geschichte der Christlich-lateinischen Poesie*; see also *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, 3 vols.

15 Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*; see also Trask, trans., *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*.

16 Raby, *History of Christian Latin Poetry from the Beginnings to the Close of the Middle Ages*.

the development of Greek and Latin epic, specifically, but includes a survey of the Latin biblical poems.<sup>17</sup> Thraede also introduces the term *Konstrastimitation*, which scholars now use regularly to define those moments in Christian poetry when a writer appears to adopt classical-poetic diction to suggest a point of contrast with the earlier tradition.<sup>18</sup> Thus Eve eats the apple, because she wants to be like God (*deo*), but Avitus uses the plural form, *dis* ("the gods"), because her ambition, like that of the pagan deities and Satan, is motivated by self-interest and a lust for power.<sup>19</sup> Christian poets would say, that is not what God is like.

Treatments of biblical epic, specifically, include Reinhart Herzog's fundamental study, *Die Bibelepik der lateinischen Spätantike* (1975), which emphasizes the devotional and edifying purpose of this literature in the fourth century.<sup>20</sup> Fontaine's *Naissance de la poésie dans l'occident chrétien* (1981) ranges more broadly, but includes many insightful discussions of the biblical epics.<sup>21</sup> Michael Roberts' *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase in Late Antiquity* (1985) is among the most influential surveys of the genre, which approaches biblical versification from the point of view of the procedures of rhetorical paraphrase.<sup>22</sup> "For Herzog, as for me," writes Roberts, "the biblical epic is an expression of the devotional needs of the Christian community. But my approach insists on the importance of rhetoric and the exercise of the paraphrase in the development of this new branch of Christian literature in the West."<sup>23</sup> Among other things, Roberts' work has helped to popularize the use of rhetorical language in the study of biblical epic, including such terms as "abbreviation," "omission," "amplification," "variation," etc.,

17 Thraede, "Epos," 983–1042; see also his article on Arator, "Nachträge zum Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum: Arator," 187–96. For a roughly contemporary survey in English, see also Hudson-Williams, "Virgil and the Christian Latin Poets," 11–21.

18 See further Thraede, "Epos," 1039; see also Sandnes, *The Gospel According to Homer and Vergil*, 58–9.

19 The passage appears in Book 1 (2.220–1): "she wants to be like God, and the poison creeps in, wounding her with ambition" ("Dis tamen esse cupit similis serpitque uenenum / Ambitione nocens").

20 Herzog, *Die Bibelepik der lateinischen Spätantike*; and his later article, "Exegese – Erbauung – Delectatio," 52–69; finally, "Juvenecus," 331–6.

21 *Naissance de la poésie dans l'occident chrétien*; see also Fontaine and Pietri, eds., *Le monde latin antique et la Bible*.

22 Roberts, *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase*. Aside from his individual articles, see also "The Latin Literature of Late Antiquity." See also Kirsch, *Die lateinische Verseepik des 4 Jahrhunderts*, which was published in the same year.

23 Roberts, *Biblical Epic*, 61.

which scholars now use to characterize the relationship of biblical poets to their sources. Finally, Roger Green's *Latin Epics of the New Testament: Juvenius, Sedulius, Arator* (2006) contains an excellent survey of these writers and their versifying *modus operandi*.<sup>24</sup> His article "Birth and Transfiguration: Some Gospel Episodes in Juvenius and Sedulius" (2007), moreover, provides a model exemplum of how to approach a passage of biblical verse, not just by isolating its classical and Christian sources, but by suggesting how particular allusions and rhetorical devices function in the context of the poetic narrative.<sup>25</sup> In other words, he does not lose sight of the individual achievement of the author.

The above works are supplemented by numerous studies of individual authors, which have helped to deepen our understanding of the genre. They include Jean-Michel Poinssotte's *Juvenius et Israël: la représentation des Juifs dans le premier poème latin chrétien* (1979), which explores anti-Semitism in *Euangeliorum libri*.<sup>26</sup> Carl Springer has written three books on Sedulius, including *The Gospel as Epic in Late Antiquity: The Paschale Carmen of Sedulius* (1988), *The Manuscripts of Sedulius* (1995), and a recent translation, *Sedulius: The Paschal Song and Hymns* (2013).<sup>27</sup> Two important monographs on Arator were published in 1990: *L'Apôtre Pierre dans une épopée du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle: L'Historia apostolica d'Arator* (1990) by Paul-Augustin Deproost,<sup>28</sup> and Schwind's *Arator-Studien* (1990).<sup>29</sup> Richard Hillier's 1993 book, *Arator on the Acts of the Apostles: A Baptismal Commentary*, makes it a trifecta.<sup>30</sup> In the same year, Daniel Niles published a general study of *Doctrine and Exegesis in Biblical Latin Poetry* (1993) that provides valuable context for the extra-literal meaning of the biblical epics; eight years earlier he also published an edition of Avitus for *The Fall of Man: De Spiritualis Historiae Gestis, Libri I–III* (1985).<sup>31</sup> Knowledge of *Historia spiritualis* has

24 *Latin Epics of the New Testament*.

25 See further Green, "Birth and Transfiguration," 135–71; also, "The *Euangeliorum Libri* of Juvenius," 65–80; and "Approaching Christian Epic," 203–22.

26 Poinssotte, *Juvenius et Israël*.

27 Springer, *The Gospel as Epic in Late Antiquity: The Manuscripts of Sedulius: A Provisional Handlist; Sedulius: The Paschal Song and Hymns*; see also "The Biblical Epic in Late Antiquity and the Early Modern Period," 103–26.

28 Deproost, *L'Apôtre Pierre dans une épopée du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle*.

29 Schwind, *Arator-Studien*.

30 Hillier, *Arator on the Acts of the Apostles*.

31 Niles, *Doctrine and Exegesis in Biblical Latin Poetry: The Fall of Man*; "Avitus of Vienne's Spiritual History," 185–95.

also been advanced by two books published in 1999: Alexander Arweiler's *Die Imitation antiker und spätantiker Literatur in der Dichtung* "De spiritualis historiae gestis" des Alcimus Avitus<sup>32</sup> and Nicole Hecquet-Noti's two-volume edition of Avitus, *Avit de Vienne: Histoire Spirituelle*.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to numerous other articles on the biblical epics, several commentaries have appeared over the last thirty years, most in German, and these have helped to temper generalizations about individual texts and the genre as a whole.<sup>34</sup> As Green says, "commentaries of this kind are extremely useful, not only in their analyses of particular sections – the closeness of the paraphrase, the possibilities of exegetical nuance, and the analysis of classical influence on Juvenius' language are favoured topics – but also because they form valuable testing grounds for some of the more generalizing studies of recent times."<sup>35</sup>

Anglo-Latin studies have advanced significantly in the last thirty years, due in large part to the influence of Michael Lapidge, and while he is among only a few to have addressed the reception of Latin biblical epic directly, awareness of the genre has been increasing steadily. Lapidge's two volumes on *Anglo-Latin Literature* (1993 and 1996) offer a wealth of context, but his chapters on Aldhelm, Bede, and the Anglo-Saxon school curriculum in particular are fundamental to chapter 7 of this book.<sup>36</sup> His translations in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (with Herren, 1979) and *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works* (with Rosier, 1985)<sup>37</sup> have, moreover, helped to make this writer's work accessible to a general audience, while his survey of sources in *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (2006) attests to widespread knowledge of the biblical

32 Arweiler, *Die Imitation antiker und spätantiker Literatur in der Dichtung*.

33 Hecquet-Noti, ed. and trans., *Avit de Vienne*; see also her article-length studies "La description du déluge," 229–35; "Le corbeau nécrophage, figure du juif," 297–320; and "Ève et le serpent," 2–17.

34 See further Kievits, ed., *Ad Iuvenii Evangeliorum*; van der Laan, *Sedulius, Carmen Paschale* Book 4; Flieger, "Interpretationen zum Bibeldichter Iuvenius"; Fichtner, *Taufe und Versuchung Jesu*; Mazzega, ed., *Sedulius, Carmen Paschale, Buch III*; Heinsdorf, *Christus, Nikodemus und die Samaritanerin bei Juvenius*; and Deerberg, *Der Sturz des Judas*.

35 Green, review of Heinsdorff, *Christus, Nikodemus und die Samaritanerin* *Classical Review*, 55.1 (2005), 163–4.

36 See further Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature, 900–1066* and *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899*; *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, and in vol. 1, "Aldhelm's Latin Poetry and Old English Verse," 247–70; "Bede the Poet," 313–38; "Bede's Metrical Vita S. Cuthberti," 339–56; and "The Study of Latin Texts in Late Anglo-Saxon England," 455–98.

37 Lapidge, and Herren, trans., *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*; Lapidge and Rosier, trans., *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*.

epics throughout the period.<sup>38</sup> Lapidge's collaboration with Helmut Gneuss in *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist* (2014) provides a valuable update to an essential book, and it contains a list of all known Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, including those containing biblical poetry.<sup>39</sup> Finally, many of Lapidge's articles touch on the reception of Latin biblical epic in Anglo-Saxon literature, notably "The Study of Latin Texts in Late Anglo-Saxon England" (1982) and "Versifying the Bible in the Middle Ages" (2006), while others treat features of style in Anglo-Latin and Old English poetry that have some bearing on the reception of late antique literature in Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>40</sup>

Andy Orchard's *Poetic Art of Aldhelm* (1994) is the definitive work on this writer's style and sources, and it includes much evidence for his knowledge of Latin biblical epic.<sup>41</sup> So does Orchard's earlier article, "After Aldhelm: The Teaching and Transmission of the Anglo-Latin Hexameter."<sup>42</sup> Peter Godman's *Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York* (1982) provides an edition and translation of Alcuin's York poem, which owes much to the style of late antique verse and alludes directly to the canonical biblical epics.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, his article of the previous year, "The Anglo-Latin *Opus Geminatum* from Aldhelm to Alcuin" (1981), highlights the debt of Anglo-Latin writers to the earlier work of Sedulius in the *Carmen* and *Opus paschale*.<sup>44</sup> So does Gernot Wieland's "*Geminus Stylus*: Studies in Anglo-Latin Hagiography" (1981), published in the same year, and his monograph *The Latin Glosses on Arator and Prudentius in Cambridge University Library, Ms Gg. 5.35* (1983) provides essential context for the study of the biblical epics in this period.<sup>45</sup> Wieland's article with George

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38 Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*.

39 Gneuss and Lapidge, eds., *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100*; and Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*.

40 Lapidge, "Some Old English Sedulius Glosses," 1–17; "The Study of Latin Texts in Late Anglo-Saxon England," 99–165; "Surviving Booklists from Anglo-Saxon England," 33–90; "Hypallage in the Old English *Exodus*," 31–9; "An aspect of Old English poetic diction," 153–180; "Old English Poetic Compounds," 17–32.

41 Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*.

42 Orchard, "After Aldhelm," 96–133.

43 Godman, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, esp. 124–5.

44 Godman, "The Anglo-Latin *Opus Geminatum* from Aldhelm to Alcuin," 215–29.

45 Wieland, "*Geminus Stylus*: Studies in Anglo-Latin Hagiography," in *Insular Latin Studies*, 113–33; *The Latin Glosses on Arator and Prudentius*.

Rigg, “A Canterbury Classbook of the Mid-Eleventh Century” (1975), initiated a critical debate about the educational potential of certain Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, and the biblical epics figure prominently in this discussion.<sup>46</sup> Emily Thornbury has taken the question up again in *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England* (2014), and she provides much new evidence for the reading and adaptation of Latin biblical epic in the period. As she puts it, “the most important genre in the Anglo-Saxon ‘curriculum’ was undoubtedly the biblical epic ... and in turn the works of Juvenius, Alcimus Avitus, Sedulius, and Arator were quickly integrated into Christian education – a tradition which ... the Anglo-Saxons enthusiastically perpetuated.”<sup>47</sup> Finally, Neil Wright’s articles “The *Hisperica Famina* and Caelius Sedulius” (1982) and “Imitation of the Poems of Paulinus of Nola in Early Anglo-Latin Verse” provide further context for the insular reception of late antique poetry.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the advances in Anglo-Latin studies confirming the pervasive influence of late antique biblical epic on writers throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, scholarly work on the reception of this literature in Old English poetry has progressed more slowly. As Lapidge has said (2006), “no one, I think, has attempted to read Old English verse in light of the school curriculum which all Old English poets must have studied.”<sup>49</sup> That is one of the purposes of this book, and given the obvious learning and Latinity of the authors of *Genesis A* and *Exodus*, for example, it is reasonable to expect that features of the earlier genre inspired writers in the emerging vernacular tradition, especially since both of those poems appear to have been written early in the period, when knowledge of the biblical epics flourished and found new life in the Anglo-Latin verses of Aldhelm, Bede, and Alcuin. Yet the question of any relationship between the two traditions has been muted for the better part of a century, due primarily to a single disagreement.

46 See further Rigg and Wieland, “A Canterbury Classbook of the Mid-Eleventh Century (The ‘Cambridge Songs’ Manuscript),” 113–30; Lapidge, “The Study of Latin Texts,” 99–165; Wieland, “The Glossed Manuscript,” 153–73; Page, “On the Feasibility of a Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Glosses,” 77–95; “Interpreting Interpretation,” 59–71; and *Latin Glosses on Arator and Prudentius*.

47 See further Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England*, 51.

48 Wright, “The *Hisperica Famina* and Caelius Sedulius,” 61–76; see also “Arator’s Use of Caelius Sedulius: A Re-Examination,” 51–64; and “Imitation of the Poems of Paulinus of Nola in Early Anglo-Latin Verse,” 134–51.

49 Lapidge, “Versifying the Bible,” 27.

In 1883, Ernst Groth suggested a potential source for the Old English *Exodus* in the *Historia spiritalis* of Avitus,<sup>50</sup> and his view was supported by Mürkens (1899),<sup>51</sup> Brandl (1901–9),<sup>52</sup> and Blackburn (1907).<sup>53</sup> In 1911, however, Samuel Moore published an article, “On the Sources of the Old-English *Exodus*,” which challenged that view and argued that every supposed parallel between the poems could be dismissed without much difficulty.<sup>54</sup> He concluded,

It would not be difficult to show that the differences between these two poems are more remarkable than the resemblances; that the *De transitu Maris Rubri* is notable for the fact that large parts of the narrative are given from the point of view of the Egyptians, whereas in the *Exodus* the narrative point of view is that of the Hebrew army, or of the poet himself; that Avitus portrays the situation of the Egyptians and Pharaoh with considerable sympathy, whereas to the Old-English poet they are always God’s enemies; that Avitus represents the Hebrews as leaving Egypt before dawn, in the moon-light, but that the Old-English poet represents them as leaving by daylight; that in Avitus the pillar first appeared in the evening as a pillar of fire, and that according to the English poet it first appeared as a column of cloud; that in the Latin poem the pillar seems to appear at the first encampment of the Israelites, whereas in the English poem it appears at the third encampment, at Etham: but such an examination would require more space than can be given to it here. The burden of proof is upon those who assert that Avitus is the source of the Old-English poem, and I believe that this burden has not been lifted.<sup>55</sup>

The result of Moore’s article was the end of this particular debate and effectively of any further discussion of the biblical epics as potential sources for any poem in the English genre. But many of Moore’s arguments themselves can be challenged, as Lapidge has shown, and even if one accepts the differences above, anyone familiar with the Latin genre will recognize the obvious kinship between *Exodus* and numerous poems in the Latin tradition, many of which share the English author’s interest in

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50 Groth, *Composition und Alter der altenglischen Exodus*, 17.

51 Mürkens, *Untersuchungen über das altenglische Exoduslied*.

52 Brandl, “Englische Literatur,” in Hermann Paul, ed., *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*, 2nd edn. (Strasbourg 1901–9), vol. 2.

53 Blackburn, *Exodus and Daniel*.

54 Moore, “On the Sources of the Old-English *Exodus*,” 83–108.

55 Ibid., 99–100.

heroic dramatization and baptismal imagery. The same interests can be found, for example, in the poetry of Cyprianus, Sedulius, and Arator, not to mention Prudentius.<sup>56</sup> So there is good reason to reconsider the relationship of Latin biblical epic to Old English biblical verse, but because of the general silence of scholars over the last century, my approach to this question in chapter 8 must proceed without much of a scholarly framework, which is why I have relied on the approaches of late antique scholars.<sup>57</sup>

Otherwise, the scholarship on the Old English poems affords the best entrance into the vernacular tradition, especially the editions of the poems. A.N. Doane's two editions of *Genesis A* (1978) and *B* (1991), including a recent revision of the former (2013), provide essential introductions and commentaries on the texts (but see Wright, "*ad Litteram*").<sup>58</sup> The same is true for the editions of *Exodus* by E.B. Irving (1953), Peter Lucas (1977), and J.R.R. Tolkien (1981).<sup>59</sup> Paul Remley's *Old English Biblical Verse: Studies in Genesis, Exodus and Daniel* (1996) offers the most comprehensive survey of the English genre, and Remley provides essential context for the sources and interpretation of these texts.<sup>60</sup> Individual articles are too numerous to count, but preliminary introductions to the genre can be found in *The Poems of MS Junius 11* (2002), edited by Roy Liuzza, and *Old English Literature and the Old Testament* (2012), edited by Michael Fox and Manish Sharma.<sup>61</sup>

56 On this point see the early article by Bright, "The Relation of the Caedmonian *Exodus* to the Liturgy," 97–103; and Cross and Tucker, "Allegorical Traditions and the Old English *Exodus*," 122–7.

57 A notable exception is the recent article of Miranda Wilcox, "Creating the Cloud-Tent-Ship Conceit in *Exodus*," which links this image to the *Historia apostolica* of Arator among other works.

58 See further Doane, ed. *Genesis A: A New Edition*; this edition has been revised for the ACMRS; and *The Saxon Genesis: An Edition of the West Saxon Genesis B and the Old Saxon Vatican Genesis*. See, however, Wright, "*Genesis A ad Litteram*," 121–71.

59 See further Irving, ed., *The Old English Exodus*; and Lucas, ed., *Exodus*; Tolkien and Turville-Petre, eds., *The Old English Exodus*.

60 See further Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse*.

61 See further Liuzza, ed., *The Poems of MS Junius 11*; Fox and Sharma, eds., *Old English Literature and the Old Testament*. See also Shepherd, "Scriptural Poetry," 1–36; Greenfield and Calder, eds., *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, 206–26; Godden, "Biblical Literature: The Old Testament," 206–26; Lawton, "Englishing the Bible," 454–82; Herbison, "The Idea of the 'Christian Epic'," 342–69; Fulk and Cain, eds., *A History of Old English Literature*, 106–19; and Fowler, *The Bible in Early English Literature*, 79–124.



## Approach of This Book

My own approach to the Latin and vernacular traditions of biblical versification is based on the work of late antique scholars who have examined the sources of this literature and who have worked to promote the individual achievement of each author. For example, Carl Springer (*The Gospel as Epic*) compares several accounts of the wedding at Cana in the poetry of Juvencus, Sedulius, Prudentius and Dracontius, and in doing so demonstrates what features of each are common or unique.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, although on a smaller scale, Roger Green considers several descriptions of storms in the poetry of Juvencus, Sedulius and Arator, and in the process he highlights various similarities and differences among the three renditions.<sup>63</sup> My own approach is similar but much broader in scope. Specifically, each chapter aims, as far as possible, to treat similar episodes in each text, in order to show how different poets approach the same scenes, the purpose being to highlight what is common or unusual in each poem and in the context of the wider genre. As far as I know, no one has attempted to address the genre as a whole in this way or to consider how the three traditions of late antique, Anglo-Latin, and Old English poetry relate to one another.<sup>64</sup> It is my hope that this book will help students and scholars of the Anglo-Saxon period appreciate better the various ways in which this tradition of writing can enlighten our understanding of Anglo-Saxon literature.

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62 See further Springer, *Gospel as Epic in Late Antiquity*, 121–7.

63 See further Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament*, 333–7.

64 A possible exception is the study by Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*, which to some extent gauges the progress of Old Testament biblical verse from Latin to the vernacular.

## Chapter Two

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### Juvenius' *Euangeliorum Libri Quattuor* (c. 330 CE)

Ergo age! sanctificus adsit mihi carminis auctor  
Spiritus, et puro mentem riget amne canentis  
Dulcis Iordanis, ut Christo digna loquamur.

[So, come, Holy Spirit! Be the author of my song, and dip my heart into the pure streams of sweet-singing Jordan, that I may speak things worthy of Christ.]

– Juvenius, *Euangeliorum libri IV* (praef. 25–7)

The Latin tradition of biblical epic begins with the Spanish priest and poet, Juvenius, who wrote a four-book rendition of the Gospels entitled *Euangeliorum libri quattuor* (*Four Books of the Gospels*, hereafter *Euangeliorum libri*) some time around 330 CE.<sup>1</sup> This 3211-line poem is all that remains of the author's work, and although Jerome attests to other compositions "pertaining to the order of the sacraments" (see below) none of these has survived.<sup>2</sup> The standard text of the poem remains that of Johann Huemer (1891), and in it we find neatly assembled what little we know of the author's life and literary activities. Jerome's endorsement of

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1 The standard text is that of Huemer, ed., *Gai Vetti Aquilini Iuueni Euangeliorum Libri Quattuor*, CSEL 24. The date of the poem is based on Jerome's reference to Juvenius in his *Chronicon* under the years 329/330. Hence Huemer, v–vi (329/330 CE); Roberts, *Biblical Epic*, 74 (329/330 CE); Green, *Latin Epics*, 7 (329 CE); and Herzog, "Juvenius," in *Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike* 5, 331–6, at 332 (after 325 but before 329/330).

2 For the flexible sense of the phrase, *ad sacramentorum ordinem*, see further Green, *Latin Epics*, 3–4.

Juvencus in *De uiris illustribus* (*On Famous Men*) is the earliest and most frequently cited source of information:<sup>3</sup>

Iuuenus, nobilissimi generis Hispanus, presbyter, quattuor euangelia hexametris uersibus paene ad uerbum transferens quattuor libros composuit, et nonnulla eodem metro ad sacramentorum ordinem pertinentia. Floruit sub Constantino principe.

[Juvencus, a Spanish priest of noblest birth, translating the four Gospels almost word-for-word into hexameter verse, composed four books and many other things in the same metre pertaining to the order of the sacraments. He flourished under the reign of emperor Constantine.]

– *De uiris illustribus* (Ch. 84)<sup>4</sup>

The “very noble birth” of Juvencus (*nobilissimi generis*) must account for the education and learning that are so apparent in his poem, but little else is known about the author’s life except that Gaius Vettius Aquilinus Juvencus may have been related to the consul Vettius Aquilinus (286 CE) and that he may have been from Elvira, Spain.<sup>5</sup> The more immediately relevant point is Jerome’s statement that Juvencus follows the Bible *paene ad uerbum* (“almost word-for-word”), which suggests a close paraphrase of the Gospels. Scholars have debated the meaning of this phrase, but it is fair to say that *Euangeliorum libri* is a faithful following of the Bible in the eyes of Jerome and the many later poets who emulate the work in approbation of its merit.<sup>6</sup> For them, Juvencus is important, precisely because he takes many of the first steps in the genre, and through careful, conservative choices, he all but validates it in the eyes of the Church. As Deproost says, “L’audace de ce premier projet épique Chrétien, où le prêtre Juvencus héroïse d’emblée la figure centrale du christianisme, a légitimé par avance les futures épopées bibliques qui se succéderont, nombreuses, jusqu’à la

3 See Huemer, *Euangeliorum Libri*, v–viii, for a list of early references to Juvencus. See also Green, *Latin Epics*, 1–9; and Sandnes, *Gospel According to Homer and Vergil*, 50–3.

4 Richardson, ed., *De Viris Illustribus*; also Migne, *PL* vol. 23, col. 691.

5 See further Green, *Latin Epics*, 2 and 8–9.

6 For debates on the meaning of the phrase, *paene ad uerbum*, see further *ibid.*, 43–7; Green, “Exegesis by Stealth,” 67–8; Colombi, “*Paene ad uerbum*,” 9–36; Roberts, *Biblical Epic*, 75–6; Fontaine, *Naissance*, 70.

fin de l'antiquité."<sup>7</sup> More than that, Juvenius does not just legitimize the biblical epics to come; he shows all Christian poets how best to make pious use of pagan literature.<sup>8</sup>

Jerome sets the composition of *Euangeliorum libri* within the reign of emperor Constantine ("Floruit sub Constantino principe"), who ruled from 306 to 337 CE, and Juvenius dedicates his work to him at the end of his poem (4.802–12). There he showers Constantine with praise as *terrae regnator apertae* ("ruler of the wide world," 4.407), but says nothing else about his reasons for the dedication.<sup>9</sup> We may suppose that Constantine's conversion had something to do with it and also his subsequent endorsement of Christianity, which opened the way for poems like *Euangeliorum libri*.<sup>10</sup>

### Classical Background

The style and diction of *Euangeliorum libri* attest to the author's education and indebtedness to earlier classical writers. Herzog cites Vergil, Ovid, Statius, and Lucan as major influences, among whom Vergil reigns supreme.<sup>11</sup> Ninety-two per cent of the vocabulary in Book 1 of *Euangeliorum libri* is Vergilian in origin, and the *apparatus fontium* of Huemer's edition confirms the poet's deep indebtedness to the *Aeneid*.<sup>12</sup> Huemer lists nearly 300 echoes of Vergil in his edition, the bulk of which (I count 237) point to the *Aeneid*.<sup>13</sup> Thirty-nine echoes of the *Georgics* suggest Juvenius also knew that work well, while a handful of references to the *Eclogues* (perhaps a dozen) fill out the list. Other poets are cited less frequently. Ovid is listed only twenty-three times in Huemer's edition; Statius, twelve; Lucan, three.<sup>14</sup> These findings demand closer scrutiny, but even if most of the

7 "The audacity of this first Christian-epic project, in which the priest Juvenius heroizes the central figure of Christianity from the beginning, legitimizing in advance the many future biblical epics to come, to the end of antiquity." Deproost, "*Ficta et Facta*," 101–21, at 112.

8 See Roberts, *Biblical Epic*, 74 in note 1 above.

9 See Green, *Latin Epics*, 3–6, who discusses this passage at length. I have adopted his translation of the phrase *terrae regnator apertae* ("ruler of the wide world").

10 See further Fontaine, *Naissance*, 19; Mora-Lebrun, *L'Enéide médiévale*, 68.

11 See further Herzog, "Juvenius," 333.

12 Roberts, "Vergil and Gospels," 50; Borrell, *Las palabras de Virgilio en Juvenio*, 20–2.

13 Allusions to the *Aeneid* are distributed across the four books as follows: 1 (45), 2 (64), 3 (56), 4 (72).

14 Lucan, 1.129, 2.105 (*Ev.* 1.8), 5.331 (*Ev.* 2.315).

Vergilian echoes are discovered to be doubtful, the overall impression will remain: Vergil exerts the single, greatest influence over the language and style of *Euangeliorum libri*.<sup>15</sup>

Dactylic hexameter, the so-called heroic metre, provides *Euangeliorum libri* with its epic framework, and Juvencus is "a purist in the treatment of prosody."<sup>16</sup> He is a skilled imitator of Vergil and favours the spondee (– –) in imitation of the weighted grandeur of the *Aeneid*.<sup>17</sup> To the metre Juvencus adds a host of epic-resounding diction to enhance the essential story of the Bible. The preface abounds with allusions to the fame and glory of epic poets (*famam laudesque poetae*, 8), to Homer and Vergil, and to the deeds of ancient men (*ueterum gestis hominum*, 16), which Juvencus says are nothing next to the "life-giving deeds of Christ" (*Christi uitalia gesta*, 19). The preface also introduces "the hero," who enters the scene in a flame-streaming blaze of glory ("cum flammiumma descendet nube coruscans / Iudex, altithroni genitoris gloria, Christus," 23–4).<sup>18</sup> Later in Book 1, the storm that rocks the Sea of Galilee (2.25–32) rings with echoes of Vergil's tempests in the *Aeneid*, while the star that leads the Magi to the crèche in Book 1 (1.243–51) is based on the comet in Book 2 of the *Aeneid* (2.692–8). When Jesus later warns the people of the pains of Hell (1.759), that vision is a memory of Tartarus (*Aen.* 6.288). At the Crucifixion, the mob mocks Jesus as "the venerable offspring of the Thunderer" (*suboles ueneranda Tonantis*, 4.672), as a man playing god. These and countless other evocations of classical literature draw the action of the poem into the heroic past where, ironically, there is no battle, no conceited death-scene speeches, and no pantheon. There is just the one protagonist, and he is both hero and deity.

15 For a fuller discussion of the "epic" nature of *Euangeliorum libri* see further Green, *Latin Epics*, 50–71.

16 Hatfield, *A Study of Juvencus*, 35. Note that there is a general lack of elision in *Euangeliorum libri*, which becomes increasingly common in later Latin verse. Juvencus only elides 105 times in the first 500 lines of his poem, for example, while Vergil does so 232 times in Book 1 of the *Aeneid*. See further Taft, *Study of Juvencus*, 35. See also Longpré, "Aspects de métrique et de prosodie," 128–38; and Longpré, "Traitement de l'élision chez le poète Cyprianus Gallus," 63–77.

17 Taft makes this observation in *Study of Juvencus*, 37–8; but see also Longpré, "Aspects de métrique," 128–38, and Duckworth, *Vergil and Classical Hexameter Poetry*, who notes the prevalence of spondees in the poetry of Vergil and Juvencus.

18 For a list of other words unique to Juvencus, see further Hatfield, *A Study of Juvencus*, 47. For the question of contrast, see further Green, *Latin Epics*, 86.

## Biblical Context

Juvencus is conservative in response to the Bible, but *paene ad uersum* (“almost to the verse”) would be a better assessment of his style than *paene ad uerbum*. We do not know the precise biblical source of *Euangeliorum libri*, which must have been one of the Old Latin versions of the Bible that Jerome’s Vulgate gradually replaced.<sup>19</sup> It is also unclear whether Juvencus’ source was from the “European” or “African” branch of the *Vetus*, although the “European” text appears to be closer. Following Green, therefore, I have used it in the analyses below.

Jerome’s comment that Juvencus follows the Bible *paene ad uerbum* implies a close rendition of the Gospels, and it is fair to call the author conservative in response to the biblical text, especially in light of the later work of Sedulius, Avitus, and Arator. Still, Juvencus adapts much of what he adopts. Economy of style is a hallmark of his approach, “in the sense of not saying something twice, or not elaborating a point [in the Bible] that is sufficiently clear.”<sup>20</sup> Michael Roberts uses the rhetorical term, *abbreviation*, whereby “the paraphrast hoped to achieve the quality of *brevitas*,” and *percussio*, “a summarizing style that reduces to a bare minimum outline the events to be described.”<sup>21</sup> Whatever the term, economy or abbreviation, Green and Roberts agree that Juvencus condenses the language of the Gospels appreciably, although as Green puts it, “some kind of addition, often combined with adaptation, is pervasive, and an integral part of his method.”<sup>22</sup>

19 Both versions, “European” and “African,” appear in Jülicher, ed., *Itala: Das neue Testament*, 4 vols. For a brief summary of the nature of the “Old Latin” Bible, see further Everson, “The *Vetus Latina* and the Vulgate of the Book of Genesis,” 519–36; Gribomont, “Les plus anciennes traductions latines,” in *Le monde latin antique et la Bible*, 43–65; Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, 145–8. Also, for Green’s discussions of Juvencus’ biblical source, see “Approaching Christian Epic: The Preface of Juvencus,” 203–22 at 204–6; Green, “Birth and Transfiguration,” 135–71 at 137. For a general discussion of Juvencus’ relationship to the Bible, see further Green, *Latin Epics*, 15–134; also Hilhorst, “The Cleansing of the Temple,” 61–76; and Fraïse and Michaud, “Pendant ce temps, à la poupe, Jésus goûtait au sommeil,” 193–218.

20 See Green, *Latin Epics*, 31–3, but also 25, 35, 79, 108; see also Green, “Some Gospel Episodes,” 141; and Green, “Exegesis by Stealth,” 70.

21 Roberts, *Biblical Epic*, 108–10, 115, 164, 183, 206. For *percussio* see 115–16 and 167. For other discussions of abbreviation in biblical epic, see further Nodes, *Doctrine and Exegesis in Biblical Latin Poetry*, 84; Roberts, *The Jeweled Style*, 10; Poinssotte, *Juvencus et Israël*, 28–9 and 31; C. Dermott-Small, “Rhetoric and Exegesis in Sedulius’ *Carmen paschale*,” 223–44, at 224.

22 Green, *Latin Epics*, 36–7.

Juvencus also adds to the biblical narrative in meaningful ways, incorporating adjectives to facilitate the construction of his hexameters, and these “play a major role in what has been called the *Emotionalisierung* or *Psychologisierung* of his narratives,” terms used by Fichtner, Flieger, and Thraede, to describe the emotional or psychological intensification of the poetry, which is meant to elicit a stronger response from the reader.<sup>23</sup>

With respect to the four Gospels, Juvencus follows Matthew primarily but makes brief excursions into Mark, Luke, and John, expending about two-and-a-half lines of poetry for each verse of the Bible. In the process, he works to conceal his own voice, a virtue of epic decorum, which means that explicit exegetical commentary in the poem is rare.<sup>24</sup> Generally, Juvencus is more concerned with “*historia*, the literal sense of the Gospels, not allegory or interpretation,”<sup>25</sup> but several commentaries published over the past twenty years have also shown that the addition of a significant word may intimate deeper meaning.<sup>26</sup> In short, the nature of the relationship between *Euangeliorum libri* and the Bible is still evolving.

## The Preface (1–27)

The opening of *Euangeliorum libri* is unusual in view of the whole, since it represents an uncommonly spirited response for Juvencus to the conventions of classical epic.<sup>27</sup> He is not normally given to such outpourings, but Juvencus is out to make a strong impression in these first lines and to show that Christ's life and deeds are worthy of epic treatment. For this reason and calling on conventional themes of immortality, fame, and the praise-worthy deeds of men, Juvencus aims to justify his versification of the Bible in the context of his classical-epic predecessors. Invoking Homer, Vergil, and the epic muse, Juvencus betrays a fondness for the sweetness of epic song (*dulcedo*), and he acknowledges the achievements of classical poets, and yet only to a point.<sup>28</sup> For Juvencus, as much for later biblical versifiers, the core values of epic are incompatible with those of Christianity,

23 See further Green, “Some Gospel Episodes,” 141; also Flieger, *Interpretationen zum Bibeldichter Iuvencus*; Fichtner, *Taufe und Versuchung*; Thraed, “Iuvencus,” 881–906.

24 Green describes the relationship between Juvencus and the Gospels in *Latin Epics*, 37.

25 Roberts, *Biblical Epic*, 75.

26 See further Green's review of *Christus, Nikodemus und die Samaritanerin bei Juvencus*, in *Classical Review* 55.1 (2005), 163–4, at 163.

27 See further Green, *Latin Epics*, 16; and Kirsch, *Die lateinische Verseepik*, 85–92.

28 See Roberts, *Biblical Epic*, 73; Mora-Lebrun, *L'Enéide médiévale*, 55.

and so they must be adapted for a Christian audience or abandoned altogether (*praeef.* 1–27):<sup>29</sup>

Inmortale nihil mundi conpage tenetur,  
 Non orbis, non regna hominum, non aurea Roma,  
 Non mare, non tellus, non ignea sidera caeli.  
 Nam statuit genitor rerum inreuocabile tempus,  
 Quo cunctum torrens rapiat flamma ultima mundum. 5  
 Sed tamen innumeros homines sublimia facta  
 Et uirtutis honos in tempora longa frequentant,  
 Adcumulant quorum famam laudesque poetae.  
 Hos celsi cantus, Smyrnae de fonte fluentes,  
 Illos Minciadae celebrat dulcedo Maronis. 10  
 Nec minor ipsorum discurrit gloria uatum,  
 Quae manet aeternae similis, dum saecula uolabunt  
 Et uertigo poli terras atque aequora circum  
 Aethera sidereum iusso moderamine uoluet.  
 Quod si tam longam meruerunt carmina famam, 15  
 Quae ueterum gestis hominum mendacia nectunt,  
 Nobis certa fides aeternae in saecula laudis  
 Immortale decus tribuet meritumque rependet.  
 Nam mihi carmen erit Christi uitalia gesta,  
 Diuinum populis falsi sine crimine donum. 20  
 Nec metus, ut mundi rapiant incendia secum  
 Hoc opus; hoc etenim forsitan me subtrahet igni  
 Tunc, cum flammiuoma descendet nube coruscans  
 Iudex, altithroni genitoris gloria, Christus.  
 Ergo age! sanctificus adsit mihi carminis auctor 25  
 Spiritus, et puro mentem riget amne canentis  
 Dulcis Jordanis, ut Christo digna loquamur.

29 The preface to *Euangeliorum libri* is the most frequently discussed passage of the poem. I will not treat every study associated with the opening, but instead offer a selection of more recent work. Canali, *Aquilino Giovenco*, 10–17 (comments are those of Santorelli); Green, *Latin Epics*, 15–23; Green, “Preface of Juvenius” 203–22; Roberts, “Vergil and the Gospels” 47–61; Gärtner, “Die Musen im Dienste Christi,” 424–46; Carruba, “The Preface to Juvenius’ Biblical Epic,” 303–12; Evenepoel, “The Place of Poetry in Latin Christianity,” 35–60, esp. 45–6; Ziolkowsky, “Classical Influences on Medieval Latin Views of Poetic Inspiration,” 15–38, esp. 23–4; Costanza, “Da Giovenco a Sedulio,” 253–86; van der Nat, “Die Praefatio,” 249–57. Witke, *Numen Litterarum*, 199–202.