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Malcolm Godden: **The Latin Commentary and the Old English text; authorship and kingship**

Symposium report, August 2006

The project has been working intensively on the relationship between the OE text and the Latin text and other sources, and especially on the use of the Latin glosses. This report outlines some of the preliminary indications arising from this work.[1]

Despite the implications in some passing modern comments, the OE text seems to be substantially longer than the Latin, partly through a tendency to expand allusions but more through a pattern of restating and clarifying the argument and occasionally developing new angles and arguments. But the treatment of the Latin text varies. Books 1 and 5 are heavily condensed: 2 of the 6 metres in Book 1 are omitted, and 3 of the 5 in Book 5, and much of the prose is considerably abbreviated. Books 2-4, on the other hand, are rendered quite fully, omitting only the first and last metres (2m1 and 4m7) and leaving out almost nothing of the Latin text, and there is much expansion and addition. As a result, Books 1 and 5 of the OE run to only about 60% and 70% respectively of the length of the Latin text, whereas Books 2, 3 and 4 all run to well over twice the length of the Latin. Books 1 and 5 are also very extensively recast, and in so far as the OE text follows the Latin in these books it changes the order of the material quite considerably.

Apart from the Latin text and the Latin commentary material, the text most frequently identifiable as a source is, perhaps surprisingly, the Bible, with seven actual quotations and one spurious one, plus an extended passage on the Tower of Babel which shows considerable familiarity with Biblical and exegetical tradition. None of the quotations is identified in the OE text as Biblical, though some are attributed to God, and only one of them is used by the Latin glosses. And the only Biblical quotation which modern commentators have agreed over in the Latin text is not recognised as one by the glossators or the translator.

The Latin commentary material, or glosses as I prefer to call them, is though a much more important factor. The old consensus that the OE translator used such material has been increasingly abandoned in recent years, following Wittig's article of 1981, but we have found numerous examples of striking parallels between the OE text and the glosses, especially in

[1] This work gratefully builds on the research of many others, including especially Nicole Discenza's *Fontes* entries ('The Sources of the Old English Boethius (Cameron B.9.3)', 2001, in *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: A Register of Written Sources Used by Anglo-Saxon Authors [CD-ROM Version 1.1]*, ed. Fontes Anglo-Saxonici Project (Oxford: Fontes Anglo-Saxonici Project, English Faculty, Oxford University, 2002) or *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register*, http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/), Paul Szarmach's various articles on particular issues in the Consolation, and Joe Wittig's pioneering work on the development and transmission of the Latin glosses (for full references to these articles, see the Boethius bibliography on our project web site at http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/boethius/BoethiusBibliography.html).

the proses, most of them not identified before, and they are increasingly tending to cluster in a small group of late English MSS of the Consolation.

I will give a few examples from just 2 small sections, proses 5 and 6 in Book 2 (none of them noted before, apparently, probably because they are from English MSS which were not examined by Schepss and Otten, who have done most work on this question).

1. In her discussion of wealth in Book 2 prose 5 Philosophia asks a simple rhetorical question: 'numquam tua faciet esse fortuna quae a te natura rerum fecit aliena' ('*surely fortune will not make yours what the nature of things has made alien to you*', 2p5.14). The OE paraphrases that but, characteristically, adds an answer:

> Wenst þu mæge seo wyrd þe gedon þæt þa ðing ðine agene sen þa ðe heora agene gecynd þe gedon fremde? Nese nese. Nis no ðe gecynde þætte þu hi age, ne him nis gebyrde þæt hi ðe folgien. Ac þa heofencundan þing ðe sint gecynde, næs þæs eorðlican. (Sedgefield 30.2-3)
>
> (*Do you think that fortune can make your own those things which their own natures make alien to you? No, no. It is not natural for you to have them nor is it proper for them to follow you. But the heavenly things are natural for you, not the earthly ones.*)

The final comment is identical with a gloss found at this point: 'quia non est naturale ut sint tua ista terrena. sed caelestia' ('*because it is not natural that those earthly things should be yours, but rather, heavenly things*'). The gloss appears in just three of the nearly 40 MSS so far examined, A, C4 and P9.[2]

2. A few sentences later, at 2p5.23, Philosophia offers a brief aphorism: 'uerumque illud est permultis eos indigere qui permulta possideant ...' ('*It is true that those who have much need much*'). Although she does not say so, this is an old saying, going back at least as far as the 2nd century AD with Aulus Gellius, Noctes Atticae 9.8: 'Verum est profecto, quod observato rerum usu sapientes viri dixere multis egere qui multa habeat'. A gloss found in several MSS identifies the aphorism as a proverb of Seneca, 'prouerbium Senecae' (MSS A C4 Ge F2 P7 P9 T). In paraphrasing the aphorism the OE identifies it as the old saying which was spoken long ago: 'Se ealda cwide is swiðe soð þe mon gefyrn cwæð, þæt ða micles beðurfon þe micel agan willað' (Sedgefield 31.20; '*the old saying which was spoken long ago is very true, that those who want to have much are in need of much*').

3. A few sentences further on, at 2p5.34, there is a similar but more complicated example. Philosophia comments on the carefree nature of poverty: 'tu igitur, qui nunc contum gladiumque sollicitus pertimescis, si uitae huius callem uacuus uiator intrasses coram latrone cantares' ('*you who now anxiously fear spear and sword, if you had entered on the journey of this life as an empty-handed traveller you would sing in the presence of the robber*'). This is an unattributed paraphrase of a line from Juvenal's *Satires* (10.22): 'cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator'. A gloss in several MSS points this out, quoting the relevant line in this form. In several other MSS (B Ma M1 P7 P9 T) the line is quoted in the form 'cantabit nudus coram latrone uiator', which seems not to occur in texts of the Satire itself. The OE version expands the passage and in doing so identifies the words as an old saying:

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[2] For the identity of these particular MSS see below. We have adopted the sigla for MSS of the *Consolatio* which Joseph Wittig developed many years ago, and listed in his article in *Anglo-Saxon England* 11; we have supplemented his list with some additional MSS.

> Se þe micele welan hæfð he him ondræt monigne feond. Gif he nane æhta næfde, ne þorfte he him nanne ondrædon. Gif þu nu wære wegferende and hæfdest micel gold on þe and þu þonne become on þeofsceole, þonne ne wendest þu þe þines [feores]. Gif þu þonne swelces nanwuht næfdest, þonne ne þorftest þu þe nanwuht ondrædan, ac meahtest þe gan singende þone ealdan cwide þe mon gefyrn sang, þæt se nacoda wegferend him nanwuht ne ondrede. Sedgefield 33.6)
> (*He who has much wealth dreads many an enemy. If he had no possessions, he would need to fear none. If now you were travelling and had much gold on you and you then fell among a band of robbers, then you would have no hope of your life. If you had no such thing, then you need fear nothing, but could walk singing the old saying which was sung of old, that the naked traveller fears nothing.*)

The phrase 'se nacoda wegferend' suggests familiarity with a gloss that quoted the line in the form nudus rather than vacuus. But the author may have seen the rarer gloss (found in A C4 Ge) which just says: 'prouerbium est: nudus uiator non est timendus (*for* timens?) quia nihil habet' ('*it is a proverb: the naked traveller is not fearful, because he has nothing*'). (Cf his use of the same phrase, 'se ealda cwide', to render *proverbium* in 2).

4. In 2 prose 6 Philosophia engages in a knotty argument about the nature of *dignitates* or political offices like the consulship, arguing that they cannot be good in themselves because they are often held by the worst kind of people. At 2p6.14 she concludes: 'ita cum pessimos plerumque dignitatibus fungi dubium non sit, illud etiam liquet natura sui bona non esse quae se pessimis haerere patiantur' ('*Therefore, since there is no doubt that the worst people are often associated with offices, it is also clear that the offices which allow themselves to be associated with the worst people are not good by their own nature*'). The first few lines of the OE simply paraphrase the Latin, but then expand the point:

> Nu þe is swiðe openlice gecyðed þæt þis andwearde rice and þas woruldgesælþa and þes anweald of heora agnum gecynde and heora agnes gewealdes nauht gode ne sient ne hiora selfra nanne anweald nabbað, nu hi willað clifian on þam wyrstan monnum and him geþafiað þæt hi bioð hiora hlafordas. Nis ðæs nu nan tweo þæt oft þa eallra forcuþestan men cumað to þam anwealde and to þam weorðscipe. Gif se anweald þonne of his agenre gecynde and his agenes gewealdes god wære ne underfenge he næfre þa yfelan ac þa godan. (Sedgefield 37.21).
> ('*Now it is very clearly revealed to you that this present kingdom/authority and these worldly joys and this power are not good of their own nature and by their own power and they do not have control over themselves, now that they are willing to cleave to the worst men and permit them to be their masters. There is no doubt that often the most wicked men come to power and honour. If power then was good of its own nature and by its own control it would not accept the evil but the good*.'

The final expansion is almost verbatim as a gloss found in MSS A C4 Ge P9: 'si per se esset bona saecularis dignitas numquam malos reciperet sed bonos' ('*if secular office was good in itself it would never accept the evil but only the good*').

5. About a page further on the OE version returns to this argument and develops the point further without drawing on the Latin text directly, but with an evident pleasure in word-play:

> Ac þar þar hi gode beoð þonne beoð hi þurh þæs godan monnes god gode þe him god mid wyrcð, and se bið þurh God god. Gif hine þonne yfel mon hæfð, þonne bið he

yfel þurh þæs monnes yfel þe him yfel mid deð and þurh deofel. (Sedgefield 38.24)
(*But where they [office and power] are good then they are good through the goodness of the good man who does good with them, and he is good through God. If then an evil man has it [power], then it is evil through the evil of the man who does evil with it, and through the devil*).

The wording is extremely close to that of a gloss to 2p6.14 which appears in MSS A C4 Ge P9:

Ideo per hoc ostenditur quia dignitas et potestas habes [*for* huius] saeculi mobilis et instabilis est. Nam si bonus eam habet bona quidem non per se sed per deum et bonitatem ab ea utentis. Si autem malus eam habet mala per malitiam ab ea utentis et diabolum.
('*And so through this it is shown that the office and power of this world is fleeting and unstable. For if the good man has it, it is good not through itself but through God and the goodness of the one who employs it. But if an evil man has it it is evil through the evilness of the one who employs it, and through the devil.*')

These examples seem to me to be telling evidence of the translator's familiarity with commentary material. They are quite different from his expansion of the allusive references to the story of Nero or Orpheus, which a translator might have been able to fill out in similar ways to the glosses from other sources. These glosses evidently originated as explanations or expansions of the argument of Boethius and it is very unlikely that the translator would have found the same points in other texts or come to such identical formulations independently.

The four MSS that consistently witness to the relevant glosses were all produced in England around the end of the 10thC, and are associated with Canterbury and Abingdon: Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus, M. 16.8, *olim* lat. 190 (= A); Cambridge, University Library, Kk 3.21 (= C4); a MS that was until recently Geneva (Cologny-Genève), Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, Cod. 175 (= Ge), but was sold to an unidentified collector at Sothebys London in 2005; and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 17814 (= P9). Much of their gloss material corresponds with what we find in Continental MSS but they tend to share a distinctive and substantial strand of glosses that is not in other MSS. What this connection with the OE Boethius suggests is that these MSS draw this distinctive strand of glosses at least in part from a MS of Boethius that was current in England a century earlier, in Alfred's time. There are three bits of evidence that help to confirm the origins of the distinctive strand of glossing in the C4 group:

1. The already established links between these MSS and the late ninth century insular glossing seen in MS Vatican Lat. 3363 (= V1). This is a copy of the text written in France in the early ninth century but then extensively glossed in an insular, probably Welsh or Cornish hand, at the end of the century and then further annotated by St Dunstan at Glastonbury around 940. Diane Bolton suggested back in 1978 that C4 and related MSS might have drawn glosses from V1, and our own evidence has extensively confirmed it.[3] These MSS drew a fair amount of their glosses, directly or indirectly, from V1 itself or something very much like

[3] See Diane K. Bolton, 'The Study of the Consolation of Philosophy in Anglo-Saxon England', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 44 (1977), 33-78 and Malcolm Godden, 'Alfred, Asser, and Boethius', in *Latin learning and English lore: studies in Anglo-Saxon literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe and Andy Orchard (Toronto, 2005), pp. 326-48.

it. The glosses that they take from V1 do not include anything that Alfred used, I think, or hardly anything, but do confirm that the C4 group were drawing on commentary material that had been available in the British Isles in the late ninth century and is for the most part not found in Continental MSS.

2. The curious scribal error in example 5 above. All four MSS read, absurdly, habes for huius. This is not an isolated error, because three of them have the same mistake in another gloss a few lines later. It must have originated in an earlier copy from which they all derive this gloss, and be the result of the scribe of that MS copying a gloss with the Continental abbreviation hs for huius and misinterpreting it as the early insular abbreviation hs for habes. That is likely to be the work of an insular scribe, and probably one working in the late ninth century or soon after, since the abbreviation seems not to be common thereafter.

3. A strange gloss in 2p7. In her discussion of fame, Philosophia points out that customs and conventions vary between nations and what is customary or praiseworthy in one country is often thought strange or disreputable in another. Most MSS offer some illustrations of this notion, pointing out that it used to be thought acceptable to marry one's mother, and the Scythians used to think it was all right to eat their parents. Others comment that the Jews think it is acceptable to marry a sister or brother. But the C4 group have something closer to home:

> discordant: ut sunt Scotti et habitatores Brittaniae in distantia uestimentorum .i. quod isti honore dignum iudicant alteri pro supplicio reputant. et mores quos isti laudant illis execrabiles sunt.
> ('*they differ, as do the Scotti and the inhabitants of Britannia in difference of clothing; that is, what those consider worthy of honour others think worthy of punishment, and the customs which those praise are deplorable to them*').

This is interesting and suggests a glossator familiar with the British Isles and interested in them, but it is tiresomely ambiguous. Does the glossator mean that the Scotti and the inhabitants of Britannia differ from each other in their dress, or that the Scotti and Britanni together differ from ordinary people who live elsewhere? Scotti probably means Irish but could mean Scots. The inhabitants of Britannia could mean all the people who live in Britain (who would of course include Scotti in this period), or specifically the people who live in the Britonnic speaking areas of Britain, or even Brittany. Certainty is impossible here, but if the continuation of the gloss, from quod isti onwards, is continuing the point about the Scotti and others rather than making a fresh comment on the Latin text, it seems likely that the Scotti and Britanni are being seen as one group who dress differently, and oddly, in comparison with the writer of the gloss (if they were being contrasted with each other one would perhaps expect them to be referred to as illi and hi rather than isti and alteri). And there is some reason to think that the inhabitants of Britannia might here be the Welsh. In the eleventh-century Encomium Emmae at 2.19 the author lists the kingdoms ruled over by Cnut: 'Cum autem rex Cnuto solum inprimis Danorum optineret regimen, quinque regnorum, scilicet Danomarchiae, Angliae, Britanniae, Scothiae, Nordwegae vendicato dominio, imperator extitit'[4] ('*When Cnut gained power over the Danes, he established himself as emperor of five kingdoms, that is, Denmark, Anglia, Britannia, Scotia and Norway*'). Clearly Britannia here is different from Anglia and Scotia; Campbell plausibly translates the five as Denmark,

[4] *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. Alistair Campbell, with a supplementary introduction by Simon Keynes, Camden Classic Reprints 4 (Cambridge, 1998).

England, Wales, Scotland and Norway. If then this is a comment on the odd dress of the Scots or Irish and the Welsh, that looks like the perspective of an Englishman, implying that the gloss was composed by an Englishman. At least, it testifies to a glossator familiar with the dress in different parts of Britain and taking a perspective distinct from that of Britonnic and Gaelic speaking areas.

Altogether, there is some evidence here that the distinctive strand of glossing in the C4 group which is not found in other MSS, and includes the glosses used by the OE Boethius, draws on a body of glosses that was developed in England, or at least in the British Isles, though partly from Continental precursors, and was in part at least in existence by the late ninth century.

Gradually we are accumulating a clearer picture of the unknown author of the OE version of Boethius, though perhaps getting no closer to his identity. Firstly, the author was evidently moderately learned and confident in his learning. He was able to cope with quite difficult bits of Boethius's argument, and to exploit the commentary material selectively to elaborate the argument, and to draw on knowledge of classical legend and natural history and the Bible to expand on the text. He was confident enough to recast Boethius's argument quite radically at times, and indeed to take issue with it. And it is increasingly clear that the differences from the Latin text which have been seen as mistakes in understanding are not that. The best example is the speech which Philosophia gives in the voice of Fortune in 2p2. The OE text goes to extraordinary lengths to adapt this to the voice of Wisdom, and critics have attributed this to a misunderstanding of the Latin. But that seems implausible: the Latin text is very clear at this point, the glosses emphasise that Philosophia is speaking in the voice of fortune, and the translator evidently knew what was going on since he does introduce a short speech by Wisdom in the voice of Fortune just a little later in the text. Similarly with his transformation of a passage on the Roman politician Decoratus into a sharply critical discussion of Theoderic, royal courts and royal favourites, commenting on the way Boethius was ousted from the king's circle because he wouldn't flatter him as his favourites did. This has again been called a misreading, but the evidence of glosses suggests that the translator knew exactly what he was doing.

As well as being learned and confident, the author was clearly fascinated with kings and courts, and adds a great deal of comment on them, but in a rather oppositional fashion. He develops as his main plot a conflict between a tyrannical king and a well-meaning and patriotic counsellor who is ousted from his court for refusing to flatter him and seeks to depose him with foreign help. The translator is particularly fond of negative pictures of kings. Most obviously in his references to Nero and Theoderic, but also in his references to Ulysses, as Susan Irvine showed long ago,[5] and in his negative accounts of displays of power and wealth and the relationship of kings with favourites. While working on the Orpheus metre the other day, I was struck by the way he identifies as kings all three of the figures who are tormented in Hell for their crimes: Ixion, Tantalus and Tityus.

We might then think of someone familiar with the courts of Wessex in the lifetime of Alfred or his successors, but not a king himself. And we should perhaps think of someone

[5] Susan Irvine, 'Ulysses and Circe in King Alfred's Boethius: a Classical Myth Transformed', in *Studies in English Language and Literature. 'Doubt Wisely': Papers in Honour of E. G. Stanley*, ed. M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (London and New York, 1996), pp. 387-401.

resembling all the commentators on Boethius whose work he read and expanded on. Few of these are known by name, but one such is St Dunstan. He knew the Latin Boethius well, and glossed the Vatican copy and compared it with others; he was familiar with both Continental and Celtic scholarship, and with classical literature, and of course the Bible; he was very familiar with royal courts and spent much of his early years in them, but was apparently twice ousted from court because of his penchant for criticism and because he antagonised other courtiers, and was later exiled after falling out with the king. Indeed there is a striking similarity between the picture of Boethius created by the OE author and the picture of Dunstan's early years created by the author of his life. I am not suggesting for a moment that Dunstan wrote the OE Boethius, but his profile fits the picture quite well. We know about him because he later became a key monastic reformer and archbishop of Canterbury; but there could easily be others with a similar profile whom we know nothing about. Authors' identities are perhaps an unnecessary distraction when interpreting a text, but if we want an author, it is someone like Dunstan that we should have in mind.