


5-2-2017

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Recommended Citation

Cudmore, Danielle (2017) "Preaching the Landscape in the Blickling Homilies," *Journal of Literary Onomastics*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 6. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/jlo/vol6/iss1/6>

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Preaching the Landscape in the *Blickling Homilies*

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THE OLD ENGLISH ANONYMOUS HOMILIES, typified by those in the Blickling and Vercelli homiliaries, might not be the first texts one would look to when seeking detailed descriptions of earthly places in Old English literature. Very few such homilies describe places in any detail at all.¹ Consequently, very little scholarly work has addressed the subject of place in these bodies of vernacular preaching, and next to none has focused attention primarily on the role of this topic. However, in two homilies in the Blickling homiliary (XI and XVI), locations on earth are described in considerable and notable detail.² The homilist uses descriptions of places to situate the audience in a historical moment through which they are able to experience the transcendent power of the divine. In addition, both places in homilies XI and XVI contain architectural structures (churches) that are products of coordinated divine creative power and human effort, and seem not to be separate from the mountains upon which they are built, but rather parts or extensions of them. These places then become embodiments of the interconnectedness of all creation and of the interplay between the divine and the earthly, as well as of past, present, and future times.

The Blickling homiliary is usually dated to the years around 971, which would place it firmly within the context of the Benedictine Reform, but it is possible that the homilies themselves were written earlier.³ There is some general agreement that the Blickling Homilies were intended for a wide audience that included (and perhaps was mainly composed of) the laity and that the homilies reflect, to an extent, “popular belief” of the late tenth or early eleventh centuries (Aronstam, 1977, 272).⁴ Among other things, Robin Aronstam (1997, 276) sees as evidence for this the focus on Christology, Mariology, and hagiography in which “the soteriological function of Christ is subordinated to the exemplary, not because the latter is more important, but because it requires a more definite human response.”⁵ Studies of performativity in relation to these homilies have discussed how the homilies, as “performative events” (Lees, 1999, 35), “form, reiterate, and alter the identities of their target audiences” (Swan, 2007, 177) during the event of preaching.⁶ Such preaching not only imparts exemplary moral lessons, but also helps the audience form a sense of community, both locally defined and emplaced within the Christian world. The event of preaching, set within the liturgical calendar, parallels the temporal events embodied by the places in the homilies.⁷ In this sense, the descriptions of place folded into these homilies also become “events” in

¹ A notable exception is Vercelli IX, which contains a detailed description the landscape of Hell. On this, see Wright (1994).

² These homilies are contained in Princeton University Library, MS. Scheide 71. See Willard (1960) for a facsimile. Unless otherwise noted, citation and translation are from Morris’s edition of the Blickling Homilies (1880).

³ For discussion of the manuscript, see Scragg (1985) and Toswell (2007). For dating, see Scragg (1985) and discussions in Clayton (2000, 167); Wilcox (2011, 99-100); Gatch (1965, 117 and n3).

⁴ For a more thorough discussion of “popular” religion see Jolly (1996), esp. ch. 1. Jolly sees popular religion as broadly encompassing Christian populations and as well as overlapping with learned, literary, and dogmatic “formal religion.”

⁵ For more on the possible audience of the homilies, see Gatch (1989), Clayton (2000), and Wilcox (2011).

⁶ See Lees (1999) and Swan (2004 and 2007).

⁷ The Blickling homiliary includes homilies from both the *Temporale* and *Sanctorale*. For a helpful

which the audience partakes.

“Place” is the usual modern English translation for Greek *topos* and Latin *locus*, and has had a long and contested history.⁸ Generally conceived here, place encloses, is delimited by, and is closely connected to “location” (geographical point).⁹ Place is temporal and historically derived, rather than given. As Fabienne Michelet (2006, 20) and Andrew Scheil (2013, 198) note, for the Anglo-Saxons both place and space express bounded concepts, unlike the infinite space of later medieval philosophy.¹⁰ Neither should be understood as pre-given, but in dialogue with a subject or subjects (Malpas, 1999, 5-6, 35). Such an understanding dissolves strict boundaries of the inner world of the subject and the outer world of place or space. According to Jeff Malpas (1999, 6), echoing the thought of Gaston Bachelard, “the stuff of our inner lives is thus to be found in the exterior spaces or places in which we dwell, while those same spaces and places are themselves incorporated ‘within’ us.”¹¹

As both the homilies discussed here contain places that involve a confluence of nature and architectural space, the related concept of landscape is worth discussing. Here, landscape is the embodied interaction of “nature” and “culture” in place; and it is impossible to view the two concepts as diametrically opposed, but rather as dynamic and interrelated.¹² In this sense, buildings, such as those in the places described in the Blickling homiliary, can be a part of landscape rather than excluded from it or viewed as impositions. Additionally, landscape, like place, depends not only on embodied experience but also on temporality (Ingold, 2000, 196, 201). Rather than viewing landscape as a material record, or as a vista,¹³ anthropologist Tim Ingold offers a “dwelling perspective” on place and landscape, which focuses on individuals and groups within an environment, instead of self-contained entities encountering the world “out there.”¹⁴ As John Wylie (2011, 311) explains, landscape “is neither a known and represented environment in or upon which meaningful human practice takes place, nor simply that practice itself. Landscape is both – both performative sensorium and site and source of cultural meaning and symbolism.”

explanation of the distinction between the *Temporale* and *Sanctorale*, see Lapidge (1996) on Ælfric, and a more thorough discussion of structure and origins in Dix (1945). Of the two homilies discussed here, Blickling XI belongs to the *Temporale* and XVI to the *Sanctorale*.

⁸ The most thorough study of historical interpretations of place is Casey (1997). For discussions of Anglo-Saxon conceptions of space and place see Michelet (2006) and Scheil (2013).

⁹ The most common Old English words for place, *stow* and *stede*, are both derived from the Indo-European root **sta-*, which means ‘to stand’ (Michelet, 2006, 19-20). By this reasoning, place is where one is.

¹⁰ For “infinite space,” see Casey (1997), ch. 5.

¹¹ For example, Andrew Scheil (2013, 201) demonstrates how emphasis on external places and spatial coordinates in the Old English *Andreas* not only differentiates the poem from its Latin antecedents but helps us to better understand “the poem’s construction of individual subjectivity as a dialectic between the spaces of the exterior world and the spaces of inner life, a coming into being located somewhere in the complex transactions between these two domains.”

¹² According to Kenneth Olwig (1994, 315): “culture, in the classical sense, was society’s way of participating via care (e.g. of the land) in a cyclical natural process in which the natural, in-born potentiality of society and its environment was made manifest.” Only in modernity, Olwig argues, did nature and landscape become synonymous with something “out there” (1993, 317-320).

¹³ See Wylie (2011) for a discussion of various treatments of landscape in twentieth-century thought. See Olwig (1994) for a somewhat different perspective on historical meanings of landscape.

¹⁴ In this, Ingold is indebted to Martin Heidegger’s concept of “dwelling” and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s ideas of embodiment and perception. See for example, the essays in Heidegger (1971) and Merleau-Ponty (1962). Cf. also Whitridge (2004, 243), who writes, “Landscapes are shaped by ongoing histories of place-making, the hybrid conjoining of heterogeneous semantic fields—imaginaries—with the material world.”

Landscapes, as places, exist because they can be experienced and interacted with, even if only as imaginative projections (Casey, 1997, 235). In his discussion of the temporality of the landscape, Ingold provides as a case study an example not from anthropology, but from art. Ingold suggests that the observer not look at Peter Bruegel the Elder's painting "The Harvesters" (1565) as simply a picture, but that we imagine ourselves within the world with its hills and valleys, paths and tracks, trees, corn, buildings, and people. To imagine oneself in this landscape is also to imagine oneself within a very specific moment in time (in an experiential sense even more than historical) (Ingold, 2000, 201-207). Malpas agrees that landscape, as a confluence of influences and interactions, is not solely spectatorial. Rather, we can only understand a depiction of a landscape if we first have some sense of that which it depicts, or some aspect of our own experience by which we can relate to it.¹⁵ He explains further that "what Ingold advances is not merely a claim about the nature of the 'lived' as opposed to the 'represented' landscape, but rather concerns the relation between the two" (Malpas, 2011, 11). Thus, in the case of the Blickling Homilies, the spoken "event" of the homily not only describes places and landscapes to the audience, but situates them within experiential realms.

Writing of the desert in the lives of the Coptic fathers, James Goehring (2003, 438) demonstrates how places and landscapes in such texts can allow readers to transcend "their own temporal limitations to communicate with the saints of the past and participate proleptically in the world to come." We might replace readers with "audience" in the case of the Blickling Homilies. The places and landscapes in homilies XI and XVI not only allow for the proleptic experience that Goehring describes, but affirm conventional Christian values and acts, such as faith, prayer, and bodily penance, and their importance for both this present world and that which awaits them. Couched in narrative terms and set in "recent" history, the events and places described in Blickling XI and XVI are intimately connected to the eschatological concerns of the rest of the homilies, for example, the narrative of the imminent but calendrically indiscernible doomsday, the salvific power of faith, and the relation of somatic experience to the soul's fate. As the homilist reminds us in Blickling XI, the places described in the homilies are exempla, which provide models for the audience in the place they themselves inhabit (Morris, 1880, 128). In the case of homilies XI and XVI, in the course of translation from Latin, the homilist has employed cues to help the audience experience and place themselves in the landscapes described. In some cases, the homilist alters, deletes, or adds information in ways that suggest the intent is to make the foreign places more comprehensible to the audience, balancing and conflating the local, the remote, and the cosmic.¹⁶

Blickling XI: Mount Olivet

Blickling XI, *on þa halgan þunres dæge*, recounts the Ascension of Christ from Mount Olivet in Jerusalem. The homily begins as an exegesis on the account of the Ascension found in Acts 1:6-11 and ties in apocalyptic themes, as Christ's ascension in a cloud prefigures his descent on Judgment Day. The section following the Ascension and list of eschatological tokens deals with the creation of the roles of apostles as witnesses at the Lord's ascension and the division of the world into twelve portions to which each one travels to proclaim Christ (Morris, 1880, 118-125). While the homilist treats the historical experience of Christ's Ascension and imminent descent as witnessed and to be witnessed, he also cautions that not only is the precise time of the latter unknown, but that the time

¹⁵ See also Merleau-Ponty (1964) on embodied perception and works of art.

¹⁶ Nicholas Howe (2001) argues that even "imagined" landscapes in Old English literature do little to strain the sense of what would be familiar to an audience.

of the end to each person's life is also unknown.¹⁷

The ambiguity of time, however, is contrasted by the precision of place. Here begins the description of Mount Olivet, the locus of Christ's Ascension. The homilist walks the audience through the site of Olivet, treating the description as revelatory, situating the audience both intellectually and somatically in the Church of Olivet. Throughout the homily the element of witness is important, and sight and witness are constantly referenced.¹⁸ Events take place before the "eyes of men" and the light of Mount Olivet becomes a literal force of spiritual illumination to those who witness it. As R. Dawson has shown, certain parts of the description are derived from Adamnán's *De Locis Sanctis*, which provides descriptions of the major sites in the Holy Land.¹⁹ The homily agrees with Adamnán in basic details, describing a round church with three vaulted porticos, and an open roof over the footsteps Christ imprinted at the Ascension, and illuminating lamps which cast their light broadly over the environs and into the hearts of observers (Morris, 1880, 124-129; Adamnán, I: XXII-XXIII, 65-9). Although the homilist adds some details concerning the adornment and size of the church and reorders some of the information, Dawson (1967, 131) concludes that this passage was written with some direct knowledge of Adamnán. Clearly, though, the homilist has not produced a rote translation, but has fully incorporated this description into the exegetical and apocalyptic material that characterizes the rest of the homily. Even more than Adamnán, the Blickling homilist stresses the historical importance of the place, saying of Christ's footprints:

Forlet he ure Drihten his þa halgan fet þær on þa eorþan besincan mannum to ecre gemynde, þa he æfter his þære halgan þrowunga his þa menniscan gecynd on heofenas lædon wolde, þonon he næfre onweg gewiten næs þurh his þa ecan godcundnesse ; & swa nuget on þære eorþan þa stoplas onaprycte syndon oþ þysne andweardan dæg, þurh þa heora onwallnesse & þurh manigfeald wundor þæs Scyppendes swa cuplice gecyþed is.

Our lord let his holy feet sink into the earth there for a perpetual remembrance to men, when that he after his holy passion would take his human nature into heaven, from whence, by reason of his eternal Godhead he has never departed; and so now those footsteps are still imprinted upon the earth until this present day, as is plainly manifest by their entirety, and by the manifold marvels of the Creator. (Morris, 1880, 126-127)

¹⁷ The homilist writes: *Uton gemunan hu uncuþ bið aghwylcum anum men his lifes tid, aghweþer ge ricum ge beanum, ge geongum ge ealdum, hwilce hwile hine wille Dribten her on worlde læten. Geseon we þæt oft swiðe manegum men færllice gelimpeþ þæt he hine wið þas world gedaleþ; forþon us is mycel dearf þæt we simle teolian on ælce tid þæt we syn gearwe, þonne ure Dribten ure hwylces neosian wille.* ("Let us remember how the term of life is unknown to each individual man both rich and poor, both to young and old, as also the time which the Lord will grant him here in the world. We see that very frequently to many a man it suddenly befalleth that He cuts him off from this world; wherefore it is very needful for us ever to strive at all times to be prepared, when our Lord will visit each of us") (Morris, 1880, 124-5). This seems to be a partial expansion of Acts of the Apostles 1:5: *dixit autem eis non est vestrum nosse tempora vel momenta quae Pater posuit in sua potestate* ("But he said to them: It is not for you to know the time of moments, which the Father has put in his power"). Latin from the Vulgate, English translations from the Douay-Rheims Bible.

¹⁸ For example: *Þæt hie ealle beora sylfra eagon oforsegon & beora earon geyrdon, þyses ealles hie sceoldon Dribtne gewita beon* ("What they had all seen with their own eyes, and heard with their own ears, of all this they were to be witnesses for our Lord") (Morris, 1880, 120-121). In describing the church on Olivet, the homilist says that *seo is nu get at þysne andweardan dæg mid manegum godcundum wuldrum swiþe geweordod for manna eagum* ("it is still at this present day very highly honored with many divine glories before the eyes of men") (Morris 1880: 124-125). The church is open in the center *þæt beora eagam aa se weg wære up to heofenum cuð to locienne* ("so that the way to heaven might be familiar to the eyes of men who come believingly to the place") (Morris, 1880, 125)

¹⁹ See Dawson (1967, 130-131).

Emphasis on the footsteps as plainly manifest (*cuplice gecyþed*) and intended for “perpetual remembrance” (*ecre gemynde*) renders historical events as phenomena to be experienced even in the present day. The uncertainty concerning the exact time of a person’s death, the world’s end, and the second coming is nevertheless situated in time by the detailed description of the locus of Christ’s ascent and its historicity. The physical place provides a concrete reminder of past events and a sign of those to come.

Additionally, the homily stresses the bodily presence of Christ at Olivet:

Swylce we leorniað, men, þæt þa men secgaþ þa þe þyder ferdon & eft hider coman þæt seo stow þe Drihten lichomlice nehst on stod her on middangearde, ær þon þe he þurh his mennisce gecynd in heofnas astige, - þæt seo is nu get æt þysne andweardan dæg mid manegum godcundum wuldrum swiþe healice gweorþod fore manna eagam.

We also learn (dearest) men, that those men say, who have gone thither and returned, that the spot whereon our Lord last stood in the body here in the world, before he ascended into the heavens in his human nature—that it is still at this present day very highly honored with many divine glories before the eyes of men.²⁰ (Morris, 1880, 124-125)

In this passage the homilist not only emphasizes that the report of this place comes from those who have gone “there” and returned “here,” but that Christ stood “here” on earth, subtly conflating the “there” of Olivet with the “here” of the audience.

Additionally, physical measurements are described in terms of the human body. According to the homilist, the enclosure built around Christ’s footsteps is “as high as a man’s breast” (*up oþ mannes breost heah*) (Morris, 1880, 126-127).²¹ On the western side of this enclosure “there is a moderate sized door, through which a man’s head and shoulders may enter, so that one may do obeisance to the footsteps, and kiss them” (*is þonne onwestan medmycel duru þæt mannes heafod ge þa sculdromagan in, þæt man mæg to þæm lastum onbnigan, & þa cyssan*) (Morris, 1880, 126-127). The detail that a man’s head and shoulders may fit through this door is not found in Adamnán. In the Old English it provides a concreteness whereby audience members might more easily visualize and perhaps even imagine themselves in such a place. This, in addition to the stress on the events and the mountain itself being experienced and perceived by or before the “eyes of men,” emphasizes the importance of the body as a means of perceiving and understanding the world in relation to itself and

²⁰ This emphasis on the bodily presence of Christ is not found in Adamnán. Other examples include: 1). *Seo is ufan open & unoferbrefed, forþon he ure Drihten wolde þæt þa men þe þyder mid geleafan coman & on þa halgan stowe sohton, þæt heora eagam aa se weg wære up to heofenum cup to locienne, þider hie witon þæt he Drihten mid lichoman astag.* (“But the great church which stands there in the midst is open above and unroofed, because our Lord would that to the eyes of those men who believingly came thither and visited the holy place, the way might always become familiar to look up to heaven, wither they knew the Lord had bodily ascended”) (Morris, 1880, 124-125, italics my own). 2). *Hie gemunap þa mycclan eaþmodnesse, & hu luflice he us ærest gesohte hider on middangeard on menniscne lichoman of his þæm bean beofonlican setle, hu eaþmod he for mannum was lichomlice* (“they recollect his great humility, and how willingly he first visited us here in the world, in a human body, and came from his exalted heavenly seat, and how humble he was in the body before men”) (Morris, 1880, 128-129). 3). *& þæt he on þære stowe nehst lichomlice on stod her on eorþan, ær he þa menniscan gecynd upon beofenas gelædde* (“and how he last stood bodily, here upon earth, on this holy place, ere he took his human nature into heaven”) (Morris, 1880, 128-129).

²¹ According to Adamnán (XXII), this structure is said to be as high as a man’s neck: *cuis alitudo usque ad cervicem haberi monstratur mensurata* (“the height of which has been demonstrated to measure up to the neck”) (translation my own).

strengthens the sense of emplacement in the homily.

The homily draws to a close by describing the lamps that shine from Olivet, in which the physical light of Olivet moves fluidly into metaphor for inner “illumination.”²² This light inspires the viewer to contemplate the bodily presence of Christ, which in turn inspires not only contrition but improved moral conduct thereafter. This is greatly expanded from the Latin of Adamnán, which says only that the light “pours into the hearts of the faithful who behold it greater eagerness for divine love and imbues them with a sense of awe coupled with great interior compunction” (. . . *divini amoris alacritatem credulorum respicientium cordibus infundit quendamque pauorem mentis cum ingenti interna compunctione incutit*) (Adamnán, I: XXIII, 66-67). The Old English passage creates a dialogue between the putative viewer and the place. The light of Olivet inspires an interior illumination which leads to contemplation of the physical event not only of Christ’s ascension but the entirety of his somatic existence and his return at the end of days. This in turn leads to individual spiritual contrition. The specific nature of the place also impresses God’s grace on heathens to the extent that they become believers. The homily expresses the dialogical nature of interior soul and exterior body, of physical perception and spiritual illumination.

The homilist concludes, saying:

Ond nu, men þa leofestan, þeah þe we nu þær andewealde ne syn æt þære halgan stowe þe ic nu sægde, þehhweþre we magon on þyssonum stowum, þe we nu on syndon, gode [&] medeme weorþan for urum Drihtne, gif we nu soþ & riht on urum life don willaþ, for þon æghwylc man, sy þær eorðan þær he sy, þuh gode dæda Gode lician sceal, & ælc man sceal his godan dæda ahebban, gif he sceal god & medeme weorþan. Ac uton teolian þæt us þas tida idle ne gewitan, þe he ure Drihten us to bote & to clænsunga urra dæda forgifen hafað.

And now dearest men, although we are not now at the holy place that I have just spoken of, nevertheless we may in these places in which we now are, become good and meet before our Lord if we now in our lifetime do what is true and right; because every man in whatever part of the earth he may be shall through good deeds please God, and each man shall exalt his good deeds if he shall become good and meet. But let us now strive that the season pass not away from us to no purpose, which our Lord has given us for amendment and for the cleansing of our deeds . . . (Morris, 1880, 128-131).

The homilist draws connections between the distant place of Olivet and the current location of the audience, saying that although they are not at that site and experiencing its light in person, they should still strive to be inspired by it and perform good deeds in the world. In this way, the homily performs the function of spreading the spiritual light visible from Mount Olivet. The detailed description of Olivet situates the congregation in a place of specific holiness, where Christ was bodily present and where pilgrims can experience his divinity with their own bodies. In the present time during which the homily is read aloud, the audience is reminded of Christ’s ascension, which prefigures his descent at the end of days, with all of these united in the site of Olivet. The homilist’s emphasis on the present in this passage, using the term *nu* (“now”) four times in one sentence, creates an additional temporal relationship to the present tense used to describe the church at Olivet and the spiritual effects of the light shining from it in the preceding passages, temporally linking disparate places. Mount Olivet is considered, then, in both its spatial and temporal aspects. The homilist both stresses the “there” of the site and the “here” of the audience, collapsing them into the “here” of Middle-Earth, equating the event of Ascension and the event of the homily through

²² See also Blickling II, *Dominica Prima in Quinquagesima* (Morris, 1880, 21-22). This passage may owe something to Augustine’s ideas on spiritual illumination in texts such as *De Magistro*. For an overview, see discussion in Zacher (2013, 75).

his description of Olivet, in which site time past, present, and future is immanent.

Blickling XVI: The Apparition of Saint Michael at Monte Gargano

Homily XVI,²³ which describes Saint Michael the Archangel's church in Monte Gargano, Italy, is even more striking in its description of place. The source for the apparition is given as the eighth or ninth century *De Apparitione S. Michaelis in Monte Gargano* (Bibliographica Hagiographica Latina 5948, printed in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*),²⁴ and refers to a so-called apparition of Michael in the sixth century at Monte Gargano.²⁵ Like Blickling XI, it is unique in the Old English homiletic corpus, and it similarly hinges on a description of a particular place. Though it is not as overtly connected to universal salvation history as XI, Blickling XVI develops its sense of place in a somewhat similar way and to a similar purpose as XI.

The Old English often follows the Latin version faithfully, with some portions expanded and fewer erased.²⁶ The homily begins when a bull, which scorns its herd and stations himself at the entrance to a cave, finds the site of the church. The bull's owner, Garganus, shoots a poison arrow at him, but the arrow turns back and kills the archer.²⁷ Shortly thereafter, the Archangel Michael appears to the bishop, assuring him that all has happened by his will, and that he is the guardian of the place.²⁸ The Old English version adds that Michael "loves the place" and has "chosen it above all others."²⁹ After this apparition, two doors appear in the mountainside, although they are unapproachable until men carve out a path to them.³⁰ The town then withstands attacks by heathens

²³ In Morris (1880), this homily is numbered as XVII, an error largely due to the fact that Morris XVI is not actually a stand-alone homily, but apparently part of Blickling IV (Willard, 1960, 38-42). Here, I will use the adapted numbering and refer to this homily as XVI.

²⁴ See Johnson (2005, 36-41) for a discussion of the Latin text and its history. Although unique as an Old English homily, Blickling XVI shares its source of BHL 5948 with the entry for May 8 in the Old English Martyrology and Ælfric's homily for September 29, "Dedicatio Ecclesiae Sancti Michaelis Archangeli," and moreover reflects traditions of Michael as a guardian and psychopomp popular in and beyond Anglo-Saxon England.

²⁵ Monte Gargano was a well-known pilgrimage site in the Middle Ages, and was reportedly visited by Charlemagne and Emperor Holy Roman Emperor Henry II (Callahan, 1985). Five English runic inscriptions at Monte Gargano dating from the late seventh to mid-ninth centuries, in addition to further inscriptions in Rome, suggest that legends and particular devotions of Michael related to Monte Gargano were known in England from the early eighth century on (Johnson, 2005, 36-37). On the political background to the cult of Michael among the Lombards, see Thacker (2000).

²⁶ These are mostly names of Italian places that might have had little meaning to an Anglo-Saxon audience (e.g., a church called Apodonia [3.24] or Mount Ziraptus [3.32]).

²⁷ Cf. Vercelli IV for the arrows of the devil being turned away by "spiritual armor." The arrows of the devil also appear in Blickling XIX and Vercelli IX. For a discussion of the Devil's arrows see Dendle (2001, 33-5 and 136 n 34).

²⁸ The Latin source text reads: *Locumque hunc in terra incolasque servare instituens, hoc volui probare inditio omnium quae ibi geruntur ipsiusque loci esse inspectorem atque custodem* ("Deciding to guard this place and its inhabitants in this country, I wished to demonstrate by this sign that I am (its) watchman and guardian") (L.37-9, translation my own).

²⁹ The homily reads: *Secgge ic þe nu eac þæt ic onsundrum þa stowe her on eorðan lufige, & ofer alle oðre ic hie geceas and eac gecyþe on eallum ðaem tacnum þe þar gelimpeð, þæt ic eom ðeare stowe on sundran scyppend and hyrde* ("I tell thee now that I especially love this place here on earth, and I have chosen it above all others, and will also show by all those tokens that befall there that I am especially the creator and guardian of that place" [Morris, 1880, 200-201]).

³⁰ The homily reads: *& þa gyt hi ne mihton ofer þæt scraf swa swað-hlype þar hi gongan, ardon hie gerymdon þone upgang & geworhton* ("And as yet they were not able to pass over the cave, as the path where they should go

with the help of the manifest archangel. After surveying the dead heathens,³¹ the Christians proceed to the church where they now see the indelible footsteps of a man impressed in the marble by the north door, which the people consider to be proof of Michael's succor. A church is built straightaway. The word "church" is used in the Old English (but not the Latin) earlier to describe the doors that appear after Michael's first manifestation, yet the church itself has not technically been built—only the landscape has been consecrated and the doors appear. The church becomes manifest with Michael's apparitions—that is, its structure is revealed as the narrative unfolds. It has already had a spiritual presence, but it is made physical by revelation (coinciding with the revelations of Michael) and by human work. The indelible footsteps cannot but call to mind the same footprints (*laetas*) left by Christ at Mount Olivet. Each serves as a *taken* (sign) of the physical and local manifestation of the divine.

To the east of the place, the locals and their bishop begin to set up another church, as well as altars to Peter, John the Baptist, and the Virgin Mary. The residents then send a query to the pope in Rome concerning the manner of consecration of the church on Monte Gargano. After the pope's response, Michael appears to the bishop for the third time, saying: *Nis eow þæs weorces þearf þæt ge ða ciricean halgian, forðon þe ic hie geworhte & ic hie gebalgode; ge þonne nu þyder ingongað & me atsondað, & geornlice mundbyrde gelyfað to ðære stowe, & hie genebge mid gebedum seceað* ("Ye need be under no anxiety to consecrate the church for I have made it and I have consecrated it. Now enter ye therein and wait for me, and believe me indeed to be the guardian of the place, and visit it often in prayers") (Morris, 1880, 204-207). This is followed by a detailed description of the church, which is, according to the homily, ugly on the outside (in both Latin and Old English). The church is built half in the manner of a cavern,

. . . nales æfter gewunan mennisces weorces þæt þa wagas wæron rihte, ac git swiðor on scræfes onlicnesse þæt wæs æteowed; & gelomlice ða stanas swa of oðrum clife stæðhlyplice ut sceoredon. Eac swylce se hrof wæs on mislicre heanesse; on sumre stowe he wæs þæt man mid his handa nealice geræcean mihte, in sumre eaþelice mid heafde gehrinan.

. . . not quite after the custom of men's work, so that the walls should be straight, but it appeared rather like a cavern; and frequently the stones as from a cliff steeply projected. The roof also was of various heights—in one place a man might hardly reach it with his hand and in another easily reach it with his head. (Morris, 1880, 206-7)

The exterior of the church and surrounding land are described thus:

Ðonne wæse se cnoll gecnawen swa hit nu cuð is, þæt se munt is mycel uteward; & he is styccemælum mid hsomige wuda oferwexen; sum mid grenum felda oferbræded. Ond þa æfter þon þe ðær wæron ða halgan lofsangas & mæssan gefyllede, hie ða mid mycclum gefean & blisse & mid þæs engles bletsunga eft hwyrfende wæron to heora husum. Se bisceop þa ðær gesette gode sangeras & mæssepreostas & manigfealdlice ciricean þegnas, þa þær seoððan dæghwamllice mid gelimplicre endebyrdnesse weorðode: næs hwedre nænig man þe þær æfre nihtes tidum dorste on þære ciricean cuman. Ac on dægred siþþan hit frumlyhte, hie þyder inwæron to ðæm lofsangum gesamnode. Þonne wæs þær eac of þæm ilcan stane þære ciricean hrofes on þa nordhealfe þæs weofodes swiþe wynsum ond hluttur wæta utflowende, þæt þa

was precipitous, before they had enlarged and completed the ascent" [Morris, 1880, 200-201].

³¹ A number of others from the routed horde have already converted because of the manifestation of God's angel. The author says then "it became manifest to all us Christians" (*Da us þa was gecyþed Cristenum leodum, se Godes engel þær cwom on fultum and on frofre . . .*) (Morris, 1880, 202-203), including the audience as witnesses to a specific event and tying this specific event into the experience of the Christian community at large. This is not in the Latin.

biggengan þe on ðære stowe stille wunodan.

The knoll was then known as it now is—the hill is large on the outside; and here and there it is overgrown with rimy wood; other parts are covered with green pasture. And after the holy psalms and masses were finished, they then with great joy and bliss, and with the angel's blessing, returned to their houses. The bishop then appointed them good singers and mass-priests, and manifold church ministers, who ever afterwards would daily in proper order carry on the worship. There was no man however who durst ever come into the church at night at that time. But at day break, after it had dawned, they assembled therein for psalmody. There was also from the same stone to the north-side of the altar a very pleasant and clear stream issuing and used by those who still dwelt in that place. (Morris, 1880, 206-209)

The liquid flowing from the spring reportedly has salubrious qualities and the site has become an attraction to pilgrims from the surrounding provinces.³² As in the Latin, the description of the features of the church are spliced with temporal events in the consecration thereof; in a sense, the physical place of the church is revealed to the audience in a manner that connects it intimately with time. Moreover, the church itself seems to gather together, rather than demarcate, natural and architectural spaces.

In this description, the Old English follows the Latin source closely except for a few points. For example, the knoll that forms the exterior of the church in the Old English is described as “known then as it now is” (*Donne was se cnoll gecnawen swa hit nu cuð is*). The hill/church is identified in a spatio-temporal moment that connects to the homily's audience, in the sense that the church is to be perceived and experienced by the Anglo-Saxon audience in the same way that it was by the Italian locals at the time of its founding.

The Latin describes the knoll as *partim cornea silva tegitur* (“partially covered by a dogwood forest”) (Waitz, 1878, 543 / 5.14). This has been changed to *hsomige wuda overweaxan* in Old English. Morris suggests that *hsomige* is a scribal error for *brimige*.³³ Should we accept that emendation, the outcome is potentially interesting, since it would appear to connect the landscape surrounding the church to the landscape in the *Visio Pauli* portion concluding the homily.

The Latin version of the homily ends with a quotation from Saint Paul: *quia angeli sunt administratores spiritus et in ministerium missi propter eos qui hereditatem capiunt salutis* (Waitz, 1878, 543 / 6.29-30).³⁴ In Blickling XVI a similar quote, attributed to Saint Paul, is given in Latin as well (*qui ad ministrum summis*). The Old English emphasizes the role of angels as participating in both the phenomenal and spiritual worlds. The homily then moves into one of the most famous and oft-quoted Blickling passages—a description of Hell, based on a translation of the *Visio Pauli* and famously analogous to the Grendelkin's mere in *Beowulf*.³⁵ However, less attention has been given to

³² On the scriptural precedent for this, see Ó Carragáin (1983).

³³ There is an Old English word for dogwood/cornea, which seems to be used primarily in Latin glossaries (DOE). Some species of dogwood are native to England and were common in old hedges (Rackham, 1986, 200). While it is possible the Latin *cornea* was still too obscure for the homilist, it seems just as likely that the change to *hsomige* [hrimige] *wuda overweaxan* was a deliberate attempt to create a more atmospheric landscape.

³⁴ This is derived from Hebrews 1.14: *Nonne omnes sunt administratorii spiritus, in ministerium missi propter eos, qui hereditatem capient salutis?*, “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them, who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?”

³⁵ See *Beowulf* (ll. 1410-1430). On the tradition of the *Visio Pauli*, see Wright (1994) and di Paolo Healey (1978). The general scholarly consensus seems to be that the *Beowulf*-poet and the Blickling homilist were working from a similar version of the *Visio*. This is cogently explained in Wright (1994, 132-136). On Blickling III and Vercelli IX as also partially deriving from the *Visio*, Wright (1994, 106-174) is particularly helpful. For a general discussion of the *Visio Pauli* in Anglo-Saxon England see (Heuchan, 2010, 145-177).

the place of the vision and its connection to the rest of the homily. The passage is as follows:

Swa Sanctus Paulus wæs geseonde on norðanweardne þisne middangeard, þær ealle wætero niðergewitað, & he þær geseah ofer ðæm wætere sumne harne stan; & wæron norð of ðæm stane awexene swiðe hrimige bearwas, & ðær wæron þystro-genipo, & under þæm stane wæs nicra eardung & wearga. & he geseah þæt on ðæm clife hangodan on ðæm is gean bearwum manige swearte saula be heora handum gebundne, & þa fynd þara on nicra onlicnesse heora gripende wæron, swa swa grædig wulf; & þæt wæter wæs sweart under þæm clife neoðan. & betuh þæm clife on ðæm wætre wæron swylce twelf mila, & ðonne ða twigo forburston þonne gewitan þa saula niðer þa þe on ðæm twigum hangodan, & him onfengon ða nicras. Dis ðonne wæron ða saula þa ðe her on worlde mid unrihte gefyrenode wæron, & ðæs noldan geswican ær heora lifes ende. Ac uton nu biddan Sanctus Michael geornlice þæt he ure saula gelæde on gefean, þær he moton blissan abuton ende on ecnesse.

As St. Paul was looking towards the northern region of the earth, from whence all waters pass down, he saw above the water a hoary stone; and north of the stone had grown woods very rimy. And there were dark mists; and under the stone was the dwelling place of monsters and execrable creatures. And he saw hanging on the cliff opposite to the woods, many black souls with their hands bound; and the devils in likeness of monsters were seizing them like greedy wolves; and the water under the cliff beneath was black. And between the cliff and the water there were about twelve miles, and when the twigs break, then down went the souls who hung on the twigs and the monsters seized them. These were the souls of those who in this world wickedly sinned and would not cease from it before their life's end. But let us now bid St. Michael earnestly to bring our souls into bliss, where they may rejoice without end in eternity (Morris, 1880, 208-211).

Although this might be considered a “stock description”,³⁶ it is nonetheless interesting that the *Visio Pauli* landscape is set up to reflect the physical landscape of the church at Monte Gargano. Both places are described as being overgrown with rimy woods (providing we accept Morris's emendation), and both refer to water flowing from cliffs, originating in both cases from the north. The water in the church has salubrious qualities, but the waters in the *Visio Pauli* are black and infested with monsters. Additionally, a distance of twelve miles is mentioned as both separating Seponto from Monte Gargano and the cliff from the surface of the water. What seems to hold these landscapes together is the role of angels as aids against foes and demons. As the audience shares in the moments of the church's revelation as a community, so also do they share in the vision of damnation. The juxtaposition as well as the striking similarities between these two places create a spatial and temporal nearness to the audience, and thus a sense of the possibility of either salvation or damnation for them. In tandem with each other, these landscapes become less important as stock descriptions, and more powerful as related experiential realms, mediated by both angels and, to a lesser extent, religious authorities.

That Michael was widely viewed as a warrior, psychopomp, and judge of the dead in England and Northern Europe is well documented,³⁷ to the extent that there are rune stones dedicated to him (McKinnell and Simek, 2004, 177-8). Michael exhibits these functions in Blickling XVI and other texts in the Blickling Homilies, in which he receives the soul of Mary and plays a

³⁶ See Tristram (1978, esp. 110-113).

³⁷ Johnson (2005) offers the fullest study of the popularity of Michael in Anglo-Saxon England, especially chapters 4 and 5. Johnson states that Michael's earliest role in England was probably that of psychopomp, citing evidence from homilies and the Gospel of Nicodemus. The earliest evidence of Michael's influence in England is found in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, in which Michael is associated with an oratory of St. John of Beverly and the miraculous healing of a dumb youth (Johnson, 2005, 73). In Bede, Michael is also associated with a specific place.

pivotal role at the end of days.³⁸ Evidence also suggests that the cult of Michael as a judge and psychopomp, while evident in England from earlier dates,³⁹ flourished particularly in England during the tenth and eleventh centuries (Callahan, 2003, 182), with its nearness to the turn of the millennium and the anxieties both socio-political and religious that accompanied it.⁴⁰ Daniel F. Callahan (2003) also points out the increased prominence of Michael's apocalyptic role and depictions of Michael as a dragon-slaying warrior at this time.⁴¹ He suggests that eschatological ideas as well as unstable social and political situations—particularly royal instability in the face of renewed Viking attacks—also contributed to such depictions of Michael. This was encouraged by—and partially attributable to—Benedictine monks who saw themselves as spiritual warriors fighting the devil (Callahan, 2003, 193).

In addition to his tutelary and martial roles, Michael is a mediator then between the physical and the spiritual, and “operates on both temporal and spatial planes” (Johnson, 2005, 10). Thus, it is unsurprising not only that he should feature so prominently in the Blickling Homilies, given their eschatological concerns, but also that his presence should link the two seemingly disparate parts of Blickling XVI.⁴² Michael's apparition, and perhaps also his interaction with the people of a specific community, suggests the “popular” nature of the homily, which connects preacher and audience to the sacred site of Monte Gargano and the landscape of hell in the *Visio Pauli* section. While Monte Gargano is an earthly landscape, it also has proleptic functions, as the community's penitential actions deliver them from the hands of their enemies and grant them access to the emergent sacred site with its salubrious attributes.⁴³ This contrasts with the description of Hell, the outcome for those who *her on worlde mid unrihte gefyrenode wæron & ðæs noldan geswican ar beora lifes ende* (“in this world wickedly sinned and would not cease from it before their life's end”) (Morris, 1880, 210-211). The homilist concludes immediately thereafter, saying *Ac uton nu biddan Sanctus Michael geornlice þæt he ure sanla gelade on gefean, þar hie mostan blissian abuton ende on ecnesse* (“But let us now bid St. Michael earnestly to bring our souls into bliss, where they may rejoice without end in eternity”) (Morris, 1880, 210-211). These two outcomes—damnation and salvation—exist in past, present, and future time: the present in which the preacher and his audience partake looks back to past events of both the apparition of Michael and the vision of Paul, and also contemplates future salvation or damnation, as seen through Paul's vision. This sense of time, as in Blickling XI, is expressed and made concrete through physical, and specifically, terrestrial, place.

³⁸ See for example, *Blickling* XIII (Morris, 1880, 141, 156-7) and VII (Morris, 1880, 94-5)

³⁹ Callahan (2003, 182) points out the role of Michael as messenger in the writings of Alcuin.

⁴⁰ See Callahan (2003, 182) on likely Irish origins of this cult. Roe (1976) discusses the cult in Ireland, particularly special places associated with Michael, and provides examples of devotional poetry.

⁴¹ In Revelation 12:7-9, John recounts how Michael defeats Satan and his legions, first exiling them from Heaven. As an original warrior against the forces of evil, Michael is also associated with the ongoing struggle set within history.

⁴² Callahan (2003, 195) observes that he plays a more prominent role in the vernacular homily than the Latin

⁴³ In addition, *Blickling* XVI pays attention to religious hierarchy, in which the bishop is the mediator between Michael and the people, and the community piously seeks advice from the Pope on matters of spiritual significance (Morris, 1880, 204-205). Despite the bishop's role as interpreter, the revelation of the church appears to the community, and the church becomes a site for pilgrims, thus turning the homily itself into something of a *tacen*, or sign. The experience of the sacred is something that must be mediated by religious authorities to the community, but ultimately must be experienced and contemplated by each person for the salvation of their individual souls.

Conclusion

In a discussion of the Old English homily VI/11 in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 343, composed for the Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ, Thomas J. Heffernan (2007, 64) explores the idea that “the power of human sin is so great that it could diminish the grandest moments of God’s creation, notably the sun and the moon.” This homily states that because of Adam and Eve’s sin, the sun, moon, and stars lose a portion of their brightness, a brightness they will regain after the end of days, demonstrating “a conjunct materiality shared between human and celestial creation” (Heffernan, 2007, 69). For the homilist, “the materiality, function, and ordering of the skyscape were part of a divine creation that is anthropocentric and answerable to the redemptive soteriology of medieval religious culture” (Heffernan, 2007, 64). While Heffernan focuses on the negative effects of human sin on creation,⁴⁴ Blickling XI and XVI seem to demonstrate the positive effects human actions, in conjunction with the divine, can have on creation. While it is pious human activity, particularly in Blickling XVI, that helps to transform the natural space into partially architectural space, the places themselves provide models for piety, ideally affecting the actions that the audience of the homily will take towards salvation. The places in the two homilies offer a model of the world in which the transient and earthly resonate in the cosmic and eternal and vice-versa, so that when thinking about and interacting with one of these realms, it is necessary to think of and interact with the other. This creates an understanding of a world in which elements are interconnected, relational, and reflective of one another.

In both cases, the overlapping of natural and built space in forming discrete places suggests the totality of God’s dominion and Christ’s divinity. The homilies’ emphases on physical places and corporeal experience not only stresses the spiritual need for bodily penance but affirms a mode of perceiving cosmic history through tangible, present places. Thus, it is possible to view these places as both historical and performative events which also have bearing on the present world of the audience, and the future world it will one day inhabit. Understanding the places and landscapes in the Blickling Homilies as temporal events helps us to see their role not only in the temporal cycle of the liturgy, but also in a group of homilies concerned with eschatology and the end of days, which, for all the audience knew, was imminent.⁴⁵

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⁴⁴ Heffernan gives as sources Pseudo-Isidore’s fifth chapter of *De Ordine Creaturum*, which itself is based on Romans 8:22: *Scimus enim quod omnis creatura ingemiscit, et parturit usque ad hoc* (“For we know that every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain until now”). This is of course a gloss on God’s injunction against Adam in Genesis 3:17: *maledicta terra in opere tuo* (“cursed is the earth in they work”) (Heffernan, 2007, 71-72). Heffernan (2007, 73-75) further examines the possible influence of Ambrose’s commentary of 2 Esdras in *De Bono Mortis* on this homily.

⁴⁵ I would like to thank Eliza Buhner-Kapit, Thomas D. Hill, William Sayers, and Samantha Zacher for providing helpful commentary on early drafts of this article.

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