The Devils in the Details:

How important were demons in creating Anglo-Saxon saints?

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Felix's *Life of Guthlac* is a text about a saint, but it is also a text about demons. Most of the central chapters of the text are intimately concerned with Guthlac's struggles against either demons, devils, Satan, monsters, or some other antagonistic spiritual force. Indeed, out of chapters 29 to 42, seven are devoted to direct conflicts with demons, two recount the exorcism of demoniacs, four describe the nuisances of "creatures of the air," and one relates an assassin's failed attempt on the saint's life—an assassin whom Guthlac claims has been deceived by an evil spirit.[1] Anglo-Saxon saints' lives were not the first to dwell on notions of the demonic: one needs look no further than the likes of Saints Antony and Martin to see that demons had found a foothold in the Christian textual tradition long before their appearance in Felix's *Life of Guthlac*.[2] More generally, Peter Dendle has argued that, in the minds of many early-medieval Christians, 'Pagans, heretics, and apostates [were] all, a priori, under the influence of the devil and his minions.'[3] Yet as the cult of saints developed out of its late antique roots and into the Anglo-Saxon world of Guthlac's time, so too did the literary treatment of demonic beings. The fame of the saints and the infamy of their demonic adversaries closely paralleled one another as both grew within the textual traditions of the Christian West. Antony's demons may have formed the model from which monks like Felix drew much of their inspiration, but the demons that permeated the lives of Guthlac and other insular saints of the seventh century onward were tailored to help these saints fit into an Anglo-Saxon world.

Demons (or, more accurately, saints' interactions with demons) were central to the creation of Anglo-Saxon saints because they helped to alleviate an anxiety with which early-medieval English monks were quite concerned: the Church's struggle to exert influence across an expansive, semi-pagan landscape. Geographically and ideologically, a lot of ground lay between the diffuse countryside and the orthodox, catholic Church. Saints offered one possible bridge for this gap. The Anglo-Saxon saints portrayed in early texts like the *vitae* of Cuthbert and Guthlac, as well as similarly-inspired Irish saints such as the Patrick of Muirchu's *Vita*, were holy men who dovetailed with non-orthodox traditions in ways that the church could often fail to do. They were powerful and at times otherworldly, but they were also personal and fundamentally human. These characteristics helped them to connect the countryside to the

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[1] Felix, *Life of St. Guthlac,* XXIX-XLII, in B. Colgrave (ed. and trans.) *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 95-122.

[2] The stories of early medieval holy men like Antony were crucial to the formulation of Anglo-Saxon notions of the demonic. Many tropes found in the demons of early Anglo-Saxon saints could trace their roots to the lives of Antony and other early saints. Felix the monk, author of the *Life of St. Guthlac*, was familiar with Bede and his *Life of St. Cuthbert*, Aldhelm's writings, Sulpicius Severus' *Life of St. Martin*, Jerome's *Life of St. Paul*, Athanasius' *Life of St. Antony*, and Gregory the Great's *Life of St. Benedict*, and had some familiarity with Vergil. B. Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac* (Cambridge, 1956), p. 16.

[3] P. Dendle, *Demon Possession in Anglo-Saxon England* (Kalamazoo, 2014), p. 23. Dendle's book is largely concerned with debates about the neurological nature of possession that are not relevant to this paper, but the importance that he gives demons (and their possessions) to the creation of identity is very useful for exploring demon's relation to the creation of saints: 'The body and mind of the "possessed" thus became contested sites for the ongoing development of conceptual models regarding identity, sites which challenged healers to demonstrate medical efficacy and church representatives to assert spiritual authority.' Ibid., p. 85.

catholic Church as they healed the sick, proved Christ's supremacy over pagan religions, mediated between heaven and earth, and modelled proper Christian lives.

Diabolic creatures gave Anglo-Saxon saints a convenient body of adversaries against which to show their authority and better fulfil the expectations held of them as holy Christian individuals. Demonic possession's peculiar dual nature as both a physical and spiritual ailment required special treatment—treatments with which saints became inextricably linked. Demons could make the invisible visible by embodying spiritual warfare through sickness and torment, allowing conflicts between saints and demons to present the inhabitants of the Anglo-Saxon countryside with practical models for some of the more mystical of Christian concepts (such as sin). Furthermore, the connection of demons with pagan deities helped to refigure pagan traditions into a Christian framework. This helped saints to take on the mantle of protective entities by linking themselves with pre-Christian traditions for warding off evil and ill-health, allowing saints to blunt the edge of the Church's strictures against pagan charms and incantations. Finally, the placing of demons within the tales of the saints fleshed out the spiritual and social hierarchies that monks were anxious to clarify in the early medieval period. Saints' abilities to triumph over demonic adversaries, even when distant or deceased, gave these holy individuals an ever-present relevance to Anglo-Saxon communities that otherwise had few connections to the church culture espoused by England's monasteries. David Brakke, exploring the relationship between demons and the monks of early Christianity, has argued that 'neither [the demon nor the monk] can be understood apart from the other as they developed over the course of the fourth and early fifth centuries in Christian Egypt. During this period the new religious identity of the Christian monk—in Greek, the *monachos*, "single one"—was invented.'[4] The same is true for the saints and demons of the Anglo-Saxon world. They developed parallel to one another, and the interplay between them would deeply affect their adaptation from the early core of Christianity into the north-western corner of Western Christendom.

In order to recognize the specifics of how demons influenced the creation of Anglo-Saxon saints, a preliminary question must be addressed: what exactly were these Anglo-Saxon demons, and where did they come from? This question is tricky to answer conclusively, because the early medieval period saw a wide range of models being adopted for constructing demons and the demonic. By the time the anonymous monk of Lindisfarne began to write his *Life of St. Cuthbert* in the early 700s, he had quite a few centuries of literary precedent to influence his representation of the demons with which Cuthbert interacted. "Unclean spirits" had inhabited the pages of Christian literary culture since the first gospel texts were written. Jesus had cast them from demoniacs.[5] Many of Jesus' disciples continued to do so in his name as they spread throughout the Mediterranean in the first century after Christ.[6] Even before the emergence of devils plural in Christian texts, *the* devil had prowled the books of the Old Testament as Satan,

[4] D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (London, 2006), p. 5.

[5] See J. Dunn and G. Twelftree, 'Demon-Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament' *Churchman*, vol.94, no.3 (1980), pp. 210-25, esp. their discussion of 'Jesus the Exorcist', pp. 211-15, as well as G. Twelftree's more detailed work, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Historical Jesus* (Tübingen, 1992).

[6] Matthew 7:22, Mark 16:17, and Luke 10:17.

the Serpent, and the Prince of the Air.[7] Demons and devils were woven into the Christian mythos long before Anglo-Saxon writers like the anonymous monks ever picked up their pens.

In biblical narratives, demons were often discussed in the context of exorcisms and miraculous healings. Throughout the gospels, the two miracles that Jesus most commonly displayed were those of casting out demons and healing the sick. Luke recorded that Jesus claimed these acts were central to his mission: 'At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.'"'[8] There are five specific encounters with demoniacs in the gospel texts, as well as many general statements about how Jesus 'cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.'[9] This early connection between healing and exorcising is perhaps one reason for the paucity of demonic appearances in the lives of the earliest martyr saints. These saints rarely healed anyone; if anything, they were the recipients of divine healing, as they recovered between their various tortures.[10] Anglo-Saxon saints, on the other hand, came to be inextricably linked to healing.

The development of Anglo-Saxon saints' identities as healers was partially shaped by popular attributions of various ailments to demonic meddling. As Richard Raiswell and Peter Dendle have shown from a variety of Anglo-Saxon medical writings, there was rarely a hard-line distinction between "demonic" ailments and those of 'worms, the sudden stabbing or internal pains they dubbed elf-shot, or other putative pathogens: at some level, all can be construed as external assaults and forms of the "devil's tribulations" (*deofles costunga*).'[11] Some illnesses were more likely than others to be cast in a demonic light, particularly those that modern medicine would label as epileptic.[12] Yet no maladies were intrinsically demonic, as any could be framed in a demonic context. Asser's *Life of King Alfred* offers one high-profile example of this framework. Describing Alfred's sickness on his wedding day, Asser wrote: 'Many, to be sure, alleged that [the illness] had happened of the people around him; others, through the ill-will of the devil, who is always envious of good men; others, that it was the result of some unfamiliar kind of fever; still others thought that it was due to the piles.'[13] Depending on who you asked, Alfred's sickness could have been anything from fever to Satan. The mysterious "elf-shot" that appears in most Anglo-Saxon medical texts was similarly vague in its exact causes and effects. In the early Anglo-Saxon period, sudden-onset diseases were 'characterized as a shot by

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[7] Examples include 1 Kings 22:19-23, Psalm 95:5, Isaiah 65:3, and from the intertestamental period, Jubilees 1:11, 20, 1 Enoch 19:1, 54:6, 99:7. J. Dunn and G. Twelftree, 'Demon-Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament', pp. 215-6

[8] Luke 13:31-2.

[9] Mark 1:34.

[10] See C. Moss's *Ancient Christian Martyrdoms: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven, 2012) and *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford, 2010). For a comparative exploration of the lack of demons in the Gospel of John, cf. R. Piper, 'Satan, Demons, and the Absence of Exorcisms in the Fourth Gospel' in D. Horrel and C. Tuckett (eds.) *Christology, Controversy, and Community: New Testament Essays in Honour of David R. Catchpole* (Boston, 2000), pp. 253-78.

[11] R. Raiswell and P. Dendle, 'Demon Possession in Anglo-Saxon and Early Modern England: Continuity and Evolution in Social Context' *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 47, no. 4 (Oct. 2008), p. 741.

[12] P. Dendle, 'Lupines, Manganese, and Devil-Sickness: An Anglo-Saxon Medical Response to Epilepsy' *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 75, no. 1 (Spring 2001), p. 1.

[13] Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ch.74, in S. Keynes and M. Lapidge (ed. and trans.) *Alfred the Great* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 89.

something supernatural—the old gods, elves, or a *hægtesse* (perhaps originally a tutelary goddess)—all of which were degraded in concept, often to devils, after the coming of Christianity.'[14] Demons were bundled with elves, dwarves, and other instigators if ill-health, all of whom could be blamed for a wide range of ailments. In other words, when Anglo-Saxon texts labelled someone's suffering as the result of a demon, they often could have attributed it to fever, worms, elf-shot, or madness just as easily and understandably, for these diagnoses were commonly accepted and often predated notions of possession in the Anglo-Saxon world. Nevertheless, the lives of the Anglo-Saxon saints contain frequent references to maladies specifically attributed to demons. The author of the anonymous *Life of Cuthbert* gave many specific descriptions of the saint's healings of demoniacs, also making the more general remark that: 'in many places, people afflicted with demons have declared that the demons deserted them for his [Cuthbert's] sake and would never possess them again.'[15] Saints, like Jesus, could heal physical as well as spiritual maladies. Why did the casting out of demons become popular in the representation of the Anglo-Saxon saints?

One reason lies in the liminal link that demons could forge between physical ailments and spiritual burdens. To the inhabitants of early-medieval England, many Christian beliefs were tied to traditions that developed hundreds of years in the past and thousands of miles away. Ideas such as original sin, or Christian conceptions of good and evil, were not always immediately relevant or relatable for inhabitants of the Anglo-Saxon countryside.[16] Disease, on the other hand, was a universal fact of life. Demons became convenient scapegoats for Christianity's encroachment into pagan lands because of the versatile shapes their varied forms could take. A wife suffering from seizures, a son afflicted by elf-sickness, a husband on the brink of death—all could be attributed to demons, and thus refigured into a Christian spiritual context. Christianity's claim that all men and women were grieved by original sin was given more immediacy when connected to the physical and visible sufferings inflicted upon sinful humans by demons.[17]

Anglo-Saxon saints could, by defeating demons, therefore become not only healers and protectors of the body, but also healers and protectors of the soul. In Felix's account, one of the first struggles that Guthlac faced upon moving to the wilderness was the "poisoned arrow" of despair with which Satan shot him. The saint suffered both physically and mentally, sweating as he curled up in despair. There are many similarities here to the sudden-onset "elf-shots" of Anglo-Saxon medical tradition,[18] but Guthlac's struggle was not represented as a physical one alone. Instead, after Saint Bartholomew appeared and helped Guthlac to gird himself up against that 'ancient foe of the human race' [antiquus hostis prolis humanae], Guthlac became impervious to Satan's shots, having broken the devil's weapon of despair [desperationis arma

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[14] A. Meaney, 'The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness' in S. Campbell, B. Hall, and D. Klausner (eds.) *Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture* (Toronto, 1992), p. 18. cf. *Lacnunga* 134: 'If it be shot of the old gods, or it be the shot of elves or it be the shot of a *hægtesse*, now I will help you' and *Lacnunga* 29: 'This is the holy drink against elfin influence and all afflictions of the devil.' Ibid., trans. A. Meaney.

[15] Monk of Lindisfarne, *Life of St. Cuthbert*, IV.xviii, in B. Colgrave (ed. and trans.) *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life* (Cambridge: 1940), p. 139.

[16] H. Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England* (Surrey, 2013), p. 101.

[17] N. Vos, 'Demons Without and Within: The Representation of Demons, the Saints, and the Soul in Early Christian Lives, Letters and Sayings' in N. Vos and W. Otten (eds.) *Demons and the Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 159-82.

[18] A. Meaney, 'The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness', p. 16.

[…] infracta].[19] In this framework, diseases, like temptations of sin and despair, could be construed as demonic assaults against which the intervention of the saints was an effective form of defence. Individuals struck by infirmity, epilepsy, or "elf-shot" could still label themselves (or be labelled by others) as merely sick, but many were instead represented as victims of the spiritual warfare that demons waged against mankind. In this way, the healing power of Anglo-Saxon saints was framed as the power to move men and women not simply from sickness to health, but also from evil to good, and from sin to redemption.[20]

Another identity with which demons came to be known in late antiquity was that of the pagan deity. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians used pagan sacrificial food as an example of this connection: 'What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.'[21] Paul made two points that would be of central importance to the representation of demons in later Anglo-Saxon saints' lives. He claimed that pagan deities were demons rather than gods of equal standing with the Christian God, but he did not attempt to explain away their existence or claim that they were imaginary. Demons were real, and they could be mistaken for gods by careless or ill-informed humans. The late antique period's flourishing exegetical tradition further developed upon the theme of pagan deities as demons, leading to Anglo-Saxon renditions of the concept as illustrated in Ælfric's *De Falsis* as well as in the works of Bede, Boniface, and others.[22] Gregory the Great described how, in Cassino, 'the ignorant country people still worshiped Apollo as their pagan ancestors had done, and went on offering superstitious and idolatrous sacrifices in groves dedicated to various demons.'[23] Ælfric did not apply the same typology to all pagan gods at all times (he claimed that some were demons, others simply evil men), though he summarized them all as such: 'They are not gods, but are cruel devils, deceivers of souls and originators of sin, who bring their worshippers into the broad fire of hellish tribulation, from which they can never return.'[24]

The identification of demons with pagan gods was important for the creation of Anglo-Saxon saints because it allowed these saints' victories over demons to more clearly represent Christianity's authority over pagan culture. Muirchu's *Life of St. Patrick* gives an important glimpse into the process by which demons and pagan deities could be interpolated within the monastic culture that produced the written lives of the Anglo-Saxon saints.[25] When Patrick

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[19] Felix, *Life of St. Guthlac*, XXIX, p. 95.

[20] G. van Oyen has pointed to Luke 11:20 as evidence of how Jesus' role as an exorcist similarly clarified the dichotomy between the kingdoms of good and evil ('But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you'). Jesus' exorcisms were one model from which early-medieval notions developed that saints' healing miracles (including those of possessions) were signs of Christ's salvific power. G. van Oyen, 'Demons and Exorcisms in the Gospel of Mark' in N. Vos and W. Otten (eds.) *Demons and the Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity* (Leiden, 2011), p. 100.

[21] 1 Corinthians 10:19-21.

[22] P. Dendle, *Demon Possession in Anglo-Saxon England,* p. 23.

[23] Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, II, in O.J. Zimmerman (ed. and trans.) *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 39 (Washington, D.C., 1983), p. 74.

[24] Ælfric, *De Falsis*, trans. P. Baker, in John C. Pope (ed.) *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, vol. 2 (London 1968) pp. 667-724.

[25] Muirchu's *Life of St. Patrick* was probably unknown to most Anglo-Saxon hagiographers, so direct ties should not be hastily drawn between the text and the likes of Felix's *Life of St. Guthlac*. That being said, thematic

arrived at the court of king Loegaire of Tara, the saint faced up against a wizard who invoked demons in order to make his magic. Despite this wizard's ability to bring shadows down upon the land [post invocates demonivus induxit magus densissimas tenebras super terram in signum], Patrick was easily able to dismiss the haze through Christ's power, and thwart the wizard's demonic invocations at every turn.[26] Muirchu did not attempt to disprove that the wizard's pagan practices held any power. Rather, he emphasized that Christ's power (through Patrick) was greater than the pagan gods' power (through the wizard). The victories of saints over such demons allowed the church to take a stance that was antagonistic to pagan religion without fully denying all aspects of its nature.

Felix's *Life of St. Guthlac* gives another example of how demons could help to situate saints within a complex spiritual hierarchy. When Guthlac banished Satan from his presence in the wilderness, he addressed him as one 'who once attempted to liken yourself to the eternal God.'[27] Guthlac did not claim that Satan holds no power, but rather that he is not powerful enough to be an equal to God. Satan and other devils occupy an interesting place in the Anglo-Saxon spiritual hierarchy. They do hold some power, though it is lesser to that which the saints can wield in God's name. The exact status of demons and other spiritual beings was a divisive topic for debate in the Anglo-Saxon church, or at least amongst the monks whose writings survive. Discussing such debates, Richard Sowerby has traced the rise and fall of angelic beings in the Anglo-Saxon community's perception of the spiritual world.[28] In doing so, he gives an interesting parallel to the part that demons played in the creation of Anglo-Saxon saints. As saints slowly replaced angels as the messengers between heaven and earth, 'the changing status of saints and angels is best understood not in terms of functional replacement, as one type of intercessor gradually accrued the characteristics and duties of the other, but rather as a symptom of developments within the genre of hagiography itself. Those developments centred around one crucial concern: how to prove sanctity?'[29] Reformulation of where demons and the devil fit into the Anglo-Saxon spiritual order was never conclusively accomplished. By placing saints in conversation with Satan and his minions, the authors of the saints' lives could ask questions about the authority exerted by saints over spiritual beings, including the gods of pagan traditions.

One method for clarifying the powers that saints had over demons (and thereby clarifying the power that God had over pagan religions) was to break down the types of influence that demons could exert. Bede, in his *Life of Cuthbert*, drew some distinctions between different demonic powers. Partway through his narration of Cuthbert's miracles, he paused to remark: 'Seeing that we have shown above how the same venerable Cuthbert had power against the illusory deceits of the devil [adversum simulaticias diaboli fraudes], now we will also show what power he had also against his undisguised and open fury.'[30] Felix, drawing from Bede's earlier work, made a similar distinction. When describing the wide variety of demonic conflicts from

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similarities between Muirchu's and later Anglo-Saxon authors' hagiographies are worth highlighting, as they reveal some of the finer details of how insular monastic influences could formulate saints in reference to demonic adversaries.

[26] Muirchu, *Life of St. Patrick*, XX, in A.B.E. Hood (ed. and trans) *St. Patrick: His Writings and Muirchu's Life* (London, 1978), p. 71 (Latin), p. 92 (English).

[27] Felix, *Life of St. Guthlac*, XXXVI, p. 115.

[28] R. Sowerby, *Angels in Early Medieval England* (Oxford, 2016).

[29] Ibid., p. 153.

[30] Bede, *Life of St. Cuthbert*, XIV, in B. Colgrave (ed. and trans.) *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life* (Cambridge, 1940), p.203-4.

which Guthlac had emerged victorious, Felix interjected: 'Since we have explained above how strong this same venerable Guthlac was against those snares of the devil which were real and open [adversus veras apertasque diabolicas insidias], we will now also show how he prevailed against the feigned deceits of the evil spirits [adversus simulaticias malignorum spirituum fraudes].'[31] In both of these instances, the authors claimed that saints could prevail over both true perils and cunning deceits. Breaking down demonic influences into these two categories was important for the creation of Anglo-Saxon saints because it clarified how saints could repudiate some aspects of non-Christian culture (such as the "illusory deceits" of pagan beliefs) while also recognizing and overcoming what struggles could not be dismissed outright (such as the ubiquity of suffering and disease).

Demons' "illusory deceits," their temptations and their tricks, could be caught and then ignored by anyone who was an educated and attentive Christian. When devils tried to convince Guthlac to fast like the Desert Fathers, the saint saw through their wiles, quoting scripture to prove that there was no good or godly reason for him to abstain from food at that time.[32] When Cuthbert warned some countrymen that the devil was about to show them an illusion, many still fell for the devil's trap and were convinced that a house was burning down in their haste to protect their belongings.[33] Upon Patrick's return to Ireland, his former pagan master gave in to the devil's prompting (instinctu diabuli) and killed himself before Patrick could arrive to convert him.[34] All of these instances of demonic meddling were, to greater or lesser extent, "illusory deceits." Their dismissal only really required a lack of action in the face of temptation: do not fast without reason, do not run outside in fear, and do not kill yourself. These demonic powers, though they could certainly make a good tale, did not expose much about the nature of the saints beyond their general education, composure, and (in the case of the illusory fires) limited prescience.

The other category that Bede and Felix highlighted—the "real and open" powers of demons—were the instances in which saints truly needed to act out in power, and by doing so cement their identities as influential and holy soldiers of Christ. These demonic powers could not simply be ignored. Possessions fall into this category: in none of the Anglo-Saxon saints' lives do we hear of any individual who could cast out their own demon simply by shunning its temptations. In some instances, the power of a saint was specifically required: the author of the anonymous life of Cuthbert describes how, when one priest Tydi of Lindisfarne failed to expel the demon from a young boy, Cuthbert's holy remains were able to succeed in the task.[35] Bede, when describing the same event, expanded upon the story to describe how 'the holy martyrs of God would not grant him [Tydi] the cure that was sought, in order that they might show what a high place Cuthbert held amongst them.'[36] Some demonic maladies required the special power of a saint for a cure, unlike minor temptations which any man or woman could conceivably fend off by their own power. According to Ælfric, by the later Anglo-Saxon period the church would

[31] Felix, *Life of St. Guthlac*, XXXVI, p. 115.
[32] Ibid., XXX, p. 99.
[33] Monk of Lindisfarne, *Life of St. Cuthbert*, II.vi, p. 87.
[34] Muirchu, *Life of St. Patrick*, XII, p. 67 (Latin), p. 87 (English).
[35] Monk of Lindisfarne, *Life of St. Cuthbert*, IV.xv, p.133.
[36] Bede, *Life of St. Cuthbert*, XLI, p.289.

appoint specific men to the role of exorcist, or *halsigend*, who could cast out demons using the saints' powers—a role to which Martin of Tours was ordained.[37]

Demons also provided Anglo-Saxon saints with spiritual adversaries against whom to test their mettle. As the anonymous author of the *Life of Gregory* explained, 'Miracles are granted for the destruction of the idols of unbelieving pagans, or sometimes to confirm the weak faith of believers; most of all, they are granted to those who instruct the pagans, and so, the more gloriously and frequently they are manifested in those lands, the more convincing they become as teachers.'[38] Though the author of this life was referring to all miracles performed by the saints, his words ring especially true for the Anglo-Saxon saints' martial victories over demons. In order "gloriously and frequently" to manifest God's power to pagan or semi-pagan audiences, the saints' miraculous victories over demonic adversaries framed them as warriors on the good side of a vast spiritual battlefield—one in which hordes of demons formed the main opposition. In discussing trends of the monstrous in hagiographical thought, Samantha Riches has highlighted the role of violent combat as 'a convenient way of expressing good in opposition to evil, and good necessarily triumphing.'[39] This was true of Anglo-Saxon saints' combat against demons, as the martial nature of these fights held particular importance to the contemporaries of these saints.

Felix used Guthlac's conflict to show how Anglo-Saxon saints could be holy warriors *par excellence.* Guthlac's skirmishes with—and abduction by—the demons of the wilderness forms the longest, and certainly the most colourful, description of demonic powers in any Anglo-Saxon saint's life. Beyond its poetic details, two aspects of this text stand out: the degree to which Guthlac is framed as a soldier of Christ, and the degree to which even Guthlac must lean on the power of saintly defences. Felix recognized that, in order to truly fit into the martial culture of Anglo-Saxon England, Guthlac needed to be a warrior. From the beginning of the *Life*, Felix took pains to describe how the young Guthlac 'remembered the valiant deeds of heroes of old,'[40] and how a major turning point in his life came when he "contemplated the wretched deaths and the shameful ends of the ancient kings of his race in the course of the past ages."[41] Even the saint's name itself, "Guthlac," stemmed from the English *guth* and *lac*, which Felix argued were synonymous with the Latin *belli munus* (the reward of war) because 'by warring against vices he was to receive the reward of eternal bliss.'[42] Before setting out on his saintly life, Guthlac stood at a crossroad between continuing his life as a pagan warrior or withdrawing behind the walls of a Christian monastery. But Felix recounts that Guthlac took a third path: that of the warrior saint. When first settling into his solitary dwelling amongst the demons of the wilderness, Guthlac prepared himself as any good warrior would: 'girding himself with spiritual arms against the wiles of the foul foe, he took the shield of faith, the breastplate of hope, the helmet of chastity, the bow of patience, the arrows of psalmody, making himself strong for the fight. So great in fact was his confidence that, despising the foe, he hurled himself against the torrid troops of

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[37] A. Meaney, 'The Devil Can Seriously Damage Your Health: Reflections on Anglo-Saxon Demonology,' in R. Raiswell and P. Dendle (eds.) *The Devil in Society in Premodern Europe* (Toronto: 2012), p. 88.

[38] Monk of Whitby, *Life of Gregory*, IV, in B. Colgrave (ed. and trans.) *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great, by an Anonymous Monk* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 79.

[39] S. Riches, 'Encountering the Monstrous: Saints and Dragons in Medieval Thought,' in B. Bildhaur and R. Mills (eds.), *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (Cornwall, 2003), p. 197.

[40] Felix, *Life of St. Guthlac*, XVI, p.81.

[41] Ibid., XVIII, p. 83.

[42] Ibid., X, p.79.

Tartarus.'[43] Demons presented an accessible motif for constructing Guthlac as an Anglo-Saxon warrior when, without his demonic enemies, he would simply have been a lone man withdrawing into the wild.

As for the demons, they represented a force as large and vicious as any Anglo-Saxon warrior could ever hope to defeat: 'they covered the whole space beneath the heavens with their dusky clouds. For they were ferocious in appearance, terrible in shape with great heads, long necks, thin faces, yellow complexions, filthy beards, shaggy ears, wild foreheads, fierce eyes, foul mouths, horses' teeth, throats vomiting flames, [and many more descriptors]. They filled almost the whole intervening space between earth and heaven with their discordant bellowings.'[44] Guthlac responded stoically to the torments of these creatures, even when they threatened to cast him into hell. Despite his strength, Guthlac was not able to disperse the demons himself, and merely resisted them until St. Bartholomew descended from heaven and scattered his foes.[45] The elder saint delivering the young warrior from suffering gives the *Life* an internally consistent example of the role that Guthlac could now play in the lives of other Anglo-Saxon warriors: as a protective guardian. When Bartholomew departed, the last two remaining demons said to Guthlac: 'We mourn for our strength which has been everywhere broken by you, and we bewail our lack of power against your strength; for we dare not touch you nor even approach you.'[46] Demons formed the major tribulation of Guthlac's life in the wilderness, and they allowed him to be represented as an outpost of protection—a solitary warrior who held back spiritual foes from overwhelming the rest of England. As Thomas Hill argued, 'In the time of Christ a *legio* of devils—6,666 according to Ælfric's computation of a legion's numerical strength—was available to torment one individual sinner. Now, however, according to the authorities who cite this motif, the ranks of demons are greatly defeated because they so often have been defeated by such men as Guthlac and his fellow *milites Christi*.'[47] The saint's victories reveal not only his ability to fend of demons from himself and his immediate peers, but also his lasting impact on all future generations of Christians.

Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert* does not devote nearly as much space to Cuthbert's combat against demons, but it definitely does make some attempts to use demons as a foil for the saint's martial prowess. In the process of choosing Farne for his retreat, Cuthbert first dwelled in a 'certain place in the outer precincts of the monastery' for a time, but 'when he had fought there in solitude for some time with the invisible enemy [cum hoste inuisibili […] certaret], by prayer and fasting, he sought a place of combat farther and more remote from mankind, aiming at greater things.'[48] These attempts to paint Anglo-Saxon saints as warriors pushed back against earlier shifts away from the military representation of holy men. David Brakke, discussing the monks of late antiquity, suggested that 'the monk perhaps did not lose his identity as a combatant, but he increasingly became also an introspective penitent and a more influential model for the ordinary Christian. Demons continued to tempt and frighten the monks of the

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[43] Ibid., XXVII, p. 91. There are many biblical echoes in these motifs of Christian soldiers and the armor of God; for a thorough discussion of their relevance to Guthlac's contemporaries, see A. Hennessey, *Guthlac of Croyland: A Study of Heroic Hagiography* (Washington, D.C., 1981).

[44] Felix, *Life of St. Guthlac*, XXXI, p. 103.

[45] Ibid., XXXII, p. 107.

[46] Ibid., XXXIII, p. 107.

[47] T. Hill, 'Drawing the Demon's Sting: A Note on a Traditional Motif in Felix's "Vita Sancti Guthlaci"' *Notes and Queries* (September, 1976), p. 390.

[48] Bede, *Life of St. Cuthbert*, XVII, p. 215.

medieval West.'[49] Bede portrayed Cuthbert as introspective and penitent at times, but not in ways that detracted from his soldierly mindset—Cuthbert sought his demons out, instead of waiting for them to come to him. The holy man of Anglo-Saxon England mirrored the warrior-nature of Christ shown in the *Dream of the Rood* more than he carried forward the desert monk's focus on spiritual internalization. Jesus, as represented through the cross' speech in the *Dream*, was a brave hero who enthusiastically and actively sought out his self-sacrifice:

'I saw the Lord of the world
Boldly rushing to climb upon me
And I could neither bend, nor break
The word of God.
[…] The young hero, God Himself, threw off His garments,
Determined and brave. Proud in the sight of men he mounted
The meanest of gallows, to make men's souls eternally free.'[50]

Cuthbert may not have had any human foes against whom to "boldly rush," but his demonic adversaries offered hagiographer an alternative connection to the heroic warrior typologies that circulated amongst his Anglo-Saxon contemporaries.

At the extreme end of this militaristic representation lies King Loegaire of Tara's response to Patrick's saintly power. After the previously mentioned competition in which Patrick defeated the king's wizard at performing miracles, the king responded plainly: 'It is better for me to believe than to die.'[51] Whether Patrick would have killed the king should he have refused to convert is unknowable, but the fact remains that Muirchu wished to cast Patrick in a formidable light. By defeating demons, as Patrick had done against the wizard, saints could take on the mantle of power that had previously resided with the pagan deities they interpolated with demons. As David Brakke has argued of the holy man, 'He disrupts the practice of traditional religion and then provides the services that it had offered—mediation in conflict, healing of diseases, ensuring agricultural prosperity and the like. A key factor in the monk's ability to perform this role was his reputation as an opponent of the demons—that is, of the gods of traditional religion.'[52] Patrick's defeat of pagan wizards not only showed the supremacy of his own god, but also allowed him to step into the roles previously occupied by pagan religious practices. As Marilyn Dunn has explained of Cuthbert's declaration that the Northumbrians should pray to God and not their own gods, 'The uncertainty voiced by the Northumbrian countrymen at the removal of the old rites (*veteras culturas*) was ultimately focused on the outcome of those rituals: the guaranteeing of a good harvest and the survival and prosperity of the community.'[53] Where saints could prove their power over pre-existing rituals, they could also take on the importance that had previously dwelt in those rituals.

In an Anglo-Saxon context, by defeating demons a saint could became a quasi-wizard, replacing incantations with prayers and idols with holy relics. Since pagan practices were connotated with demonic inspiration, devils were often the defining feature between those

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[49] D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p. 246.
[50] *The Dream of the Rood*, 33-41, in B. Raffel (ed. and trans.) *Poems from the Old English* (1964), p. 40.
[51] Muirchu, *Life of St. Patrick*, XXI, p. 92.
[52] D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p. 214.
[53] M. Dunn, *The Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons c. 579-c.700: Discourses of Life, Death, and Afterlife* (London, 2009), p. 146.

apotropaic practices that the church approve of and those it did not. Bede, describing his countrymen's responses to times of troubles, wrote: 'For many of [the neighbours] profaned the faith they held by wicked deeds, and some of them also at the time of the plague, forgetting the sacred mysteries of the faith into which they had been initiated, took the delusive cures of idolatry, as though by incantations or amulets or any other mysteries of devilish art [alia quaelibet demoniacae artis], they could ward off a blow sent by God the creator.'[54] However, when saints replaced the demons that purportedly lay behind these "incantations and amulets," such practices became acceptable and even praiseworthy. Despite the seeming similarity in situation, Abbess Ælfflæd, depicted by Bede as a model for proper Christian living, once lamented during a time of need: 'Would that I had something belonging to my Cuthbert! I know well and believingly trust in God that I should speedily be healed.'[55] Bede found no hypocrisy between his condemnation of some physical charms and his admiration of the relics of Cuthbert.

Though Bede's two judgements may seem incompatible, or at least inconsistent, they make perfect sense within the context of the Anglo-Saxon church's relative lack of specific strictures governing which charms/relics/incantations/prayers were "good" and which were "bad."[56] One of the few determining factors was whether a given practice could trace its roots to demonic or saintly inspiration. As Valerie Flint has argued, early-medieval demons were useful for 'illuminating that in the old magic which was decisively to be cast out, those of its practitioners who needed special treatment, and that within the Christian dispensation which called out for a compensatory form of magic.'[57] In an Anglo-Saxon context, demons allowed saints to better illuminate unacceptable pagan practices (by condemning the worship of other gods/demons), save the souls of pagan practitioners (by exorcising demoniacs and showing Christ's superiority over pagan deities), and replace pagan traditions with Christian counterparts (by showing the superiority of relics and prayers over charms and incantations). As Bede's stories about countryside charms and Cuthbert's relics reveal, the presence of demons became a litmus test for classifying a practice as an act of faith or a regression to pagan practice. Protective charms from demonized pagan deities were frowned upon by the Church, and yet some of these charms survived in different form into the eleventh century as a result of their saintly overhaul: 'I beseech them all with grateful heart that there be a protection over my head, Matthew my helmet, Mark my coat of mail, renowned, famous of life, Luke my sword, sharp and bright-edged, John my shield, (and) a wondrously adorned spear the Seraphim.'[58] By becoming the scapegoats for the unacceptable facets of pagan rituals (e.g. the worship of other gods), demons allowed saints to better assume those facets of pre-Christian magic that were conducive to their image: those of healing, protection, power, and familiarity.

Replacing pagan apotropaic rituals, fitting into Anglo-Saxon warrior traditions, merging with medical practices—demons helped saints to filter into a wide range of pre-Christian and semi-pagan grounds in which the orthodox church had struggled to maintain a foothold. Peter Dendle, in describing Cuthbert's remote exorcism of a woman's demon, argued that 'The

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[54] Bede, *Life of St. Cuthbert*, IX, p. 185.

[55] Ibid., XXIII, p. 233.

[56] E. Bozóky, 'Saints, Legends, and Charms,' in F. Sautman, D. Conchado, and G. di Scipio (eds.) *Telling Tales: Medieval Narratives and the Folk Tradition* (London: 1998), p. 180.

[57] V. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 1991), p. 108.

[58] 'Journey Charm', in B. Griffiths (ed. and trans.) *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Magic* (1996), p. 202.

concern in this episode is to establish the authority of the holy man in the countryside.'[59] Dendle represents the demon in Cuthbert's account as a merely narrative function—that the focus of this passage lies in the remote aspect of the exorcism, not in the demonic nature of the possession. The establishment of remote Christian authority was indeed one of the most practical aspects of possession accounts for the Anglo-Saxon account, but these accounts were so powerful because the saints were defeating demons. Even when the church was far away, demons could be close at hand, and with them the figure of the delivering warrior-saint. The fact that Felix described a remote exorcism, and not just a remote healing, is emblematic of the importance that demons had in disseminating notions of saintly power throughout the countryside.

Notions of Christian uniformity were important to the monks who wrote these saints' lives, and demons helped to set up saints as models for that uniformity. To the late-antique monk, 'Antony's demons operate[d] as products, agents, and symbols of the diversity and separation that resulted from the fall, as opposed to the uniformity and unity in which the monk originated and to which he sees to return.'[60] Anglo-Saxon demons similarly represented diversity and separation, and by conquering them the saint could seek to draw the Christian fold closer together. Especially in Felix's *Life of Guthlac*, the saint's victories in spiritual warfare were directly tied to his power over the land.[61] Contact relics were another example of the ability of saints' authority to stretch over long distances, and these relics could reach through time as well as space.[62] At the touch of Saint Æthelthryth's linen cloths, ten years after her death, 'devils were expelled from the bodies of those who were possessed by them.'[63] The church's desire to use saints as a means to trans-geographic and trans-temporal authority was expedited by the role that demons played in the lives of the saints, as saints' abilities to remotely (and posthumously) protect Christian men and women gave them relevance to communities both far and wide.

Brought together, the ways in which demons could shape the creation of Anglo-Saxon saints were both varied and abundant. Countless factors influenced the representations of the saints, but demons were central to many of the facets of sanctity that had particularly adapted to thrive in the Anglo-Saxon world. In their introduction to *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, Bettina Bildhaur and Robert Mills adopt the stance that 'Monsters […] are not meaning*less* but meaning-*laden*; the monstrous is constitutive, producing the contours of both bodies that matter (humans, Christians, saints, historical figures, gendered subjects and Christ) and those that do not.'[64] Demons were one such constitutive factor in the formation of Anglo-Saxon saints. They could fit into pre-existing frameworks for medical ailments, giving otherwise mundane and daily maladies a connection to saints and their spiritual healing. They could stand in for pagan gods in order to situate pre-Christian deities into the spiritual hierarchy in which God reigned supreme. They could provide the reclusive saint with spiritual enemies against whom to wage war, and thereby further cement the holy man as a protector of mankind. In all of these circumstances, demons served as a foil to the godliness of the saints. As Augustine outlined in his *Enchiridion* and *The*

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[59] P. Dendle, *Demon Possession in Anglo-Saxon England,* p. 153.

[60] D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p. 17.

[61] D. Johnson, 'Spiritual Combat and the Land of Canaan in *Guthlac A*' in Virginia Blanton and Helene Scheck (eds.) *Intertexts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Paul E. Szarmach* (Turnhout, 2008), p. 308.

[62] P. Dendle, *Demon Possession in Anglo-Saxon England*., 158 & 166.

[63] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, IV.xix, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1979), p. 397.

[64] B. Bildhaur and R. Mills, 'Introduction: Conceptualizing the Monstrous,' in B. Bildhaur and R. Mills (eds.), *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (Cornwall, 2003), p. 2.

City of God, evil served to make good appear pleasing and right to the human observer.[65] Demons, as functional personifications of evil, allowed Anglo-Saxon saints to become better personifications of good.

Demons did not manage to shape the Anglo-Saxon saints without emerging changed themselves. As Sophie Lunn-Rockliffe asked at the end of her discussion of visual representations of demons, 'How can we explain the seismic shift in the imagination and conjuration of demons' habits and appearances which produced anthropomorphic demons in exorcism scenes, such as those of the Murano diptych and Rabbula Gospels?'[66] The demon of early Christianity, who remains largely invisible in the demoniac before vanishing post-exorcism, is quite a different beast from the hordes of monstrous beings that carry Guthlac to the gates of hell. Tracing this progression is a task for another paper, but it seems likely that, just as demons played a major role in creating the Anglo-Saxon saints, saints played a major role in the creation of Anglo-Saxon demons.

'They enjoyed peace—which was permitted to them for a little while. That hidden place stood in the thoughts of the Lord, idle and uninhabited, far from the law of hereditary land; it awaited the claim of a better shepherd.'[67] Thus the author of the *Guthlac A* poem described the lives of the demons of the wilderness prior to Guthlac's arrival and the breaking-open of their barrow homes. In some ways, the microcosm of Guthlac's wilderness can be read to represent the whole of the Anglo-Saxon countryside. The catholic church of the early middle ages had struggled to grasp the hearts and minds of a largely pagan landscape spreading "far from the law of hereditary land," and so many individuals lived on "for a little while" in their pre-Christian ways until the "claim of a better shepherd" should arrive. The Anglo-Saxon countryside was by no means as teleologically destined to Christian conversion as Guthlac's and other saints' hagiographers implied, and yet the development of the Anglo-Saxon saint was indeed a key factor in Christianity's eventual success in spreading across the pagan landscape. The Anglo-Saxon saint was a demon-fighter—a demoniac-healer—a wizard-usurper. His breaking open of barrows and breaking open of pagan traditions was inextricably linked to his relationship with demons. Demons were not simply black-and-white adversaries whose evil natures foiled the good natures of the saints (though that did form some part of their image). As Alaric Hall has written about *Guthlac A*, the poem is 'a text about *becoming* an ideal Christian rather than about *being* an ideal Christian.'[68] Demons were necessary for the creation of Anglo-Saxon saints because the notion of an "Anglo-Saxon saint" needed concrete clarification. Where should one draw the line between encroaching Christian traditions and pre-existing pagan identities? How could one individual—the saint—be both an exemplar for Christian orthodoxy and a familiar figure for pagan audiences? The answer to both of these questions lay, at least in part, in the saints' interactions with demons. Demons were clarifiers and personifiers. They personified ailments, the healing of which helped saints to develop their roles as healers. They gave life to the notions of sin and evil that Christianity applied to the human psyche. They embodied the role

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[65] R. Raiswell, 'Introduction: Conceptualizing the Devil in Society,' in R. Raiswell and P. Dendle (eds.) *The Devil in Society in Premodern Europe* (Toronto: 2012), p. 47.

[66] S. Lunn-Rockliffe, 'Visualizing the Demonic: The Gadarene Exorcism in Early Christian Art and Literature,' in R. Raiswell and P. Dendle (eds.) *The Devil in Society in Premodern Europe* (Toronto: 2012), p. 454.

[67] *Guthlac A*, 214-17, trans. Alaric Hall, 'Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity: Tradition, Innovation and Saint Guthlac' in D. Strickland and G. Dickson (eds.) *Images of Medieval Sanctity: Essays in honour of Gary Dickson* (Boston, 2007), p. 215.

[68] Alaric Hall, 'Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity', p. 231.

to which pagan deities had been relegated within the Christian spiritual hierarchy, helping to establish saints as powerful and authoritative representatives of the kingdom of God. They clarified the difference between good and bad apotropaic practices, allowing saints to take on the familiarity and power of pre-existing charms and prayers. In short, demons were the sicknesses saints healed, the gods saints cast down, and the traditions saints inverted. Guthlac simply would not have been Guthlac were it not for his demonic adversaries—demons played too vital a role in the creation of his image and legacy. The same can be said for the development of many other Anglo-Saxon cults, though Guthlac's demons are most remarkable for the breadth and depth of their textual presence. Devils gave the saints lives greater detail, and in doing so helped to solidify and personalize developing early-medieval notions of sanctity. Their influences were legion, and as such they offer historians a valuable window into the ecclesiastic pressures and societal expectations that shaped the creation of Anglo-Saxon saints.

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