

Hebrew Words and English Identity in Educational Texts of Ælfric and Byrhtferth

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Language and identity are intimately connected; the relationship of speakers to their native language is often influenced by their experiences with a second language. The relationship of Anglo-Saxons to their native tongue as well as their adopted language, Latin, has long been studied.¹ The Greek language, while not widely known, certainly loomed large in the Anglo-Saxon imagination, having been brought to the island by Theodore and Hadrian and used as a source of erudite vocabulary among a variety of Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics.² This study considers Hebrew, a language which most learned Anglo-Saxons knew about but had even less first-hand experience with.³ Examining the particular triangulation of English, Latin, and Hebrew – respectively native, acquired, and distant languages – throws into relief Anglo-Saxons’ attitudes towards language and appreciation of language difference. Both Ælfric of Eynsham and Byrhtferth of Ramsey wrote educational texts which reveal their senses of linguistic identity

1 Gneuss, “*Anglicae linguae interpretatio*” and “Study of Language in Anglo-Saxon England”; Dekker, “Pentecost and Linguistic Self-Consciousness”; Godden, “Literary Language.”

2 Gneuss, “*Anglicae linguae interpretatio*,” 118–23; Lapidge, “School of Theodore and Hadrian”; Bischoff and Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries*; Bodden, “Evidence for Knowledge of Greek.” The Venerable Bede also seems to have taught himself enough Greek to read the Acts of the Apostles; see Laistner, “Library of the Venerable Bede,” 257; Dionisotti, “Bede, Grammars, and Greek”; Lynch, “Venerable Bede’s Knowledge of Greek.”

3 Keefer and Burrows, “Hebrew and the *Hebraicum*”; Fleming, “*Jesus, That Is hælend.*”

and particular interest in Hebrew. They discuss Hebrew at times when it is not immediately germane to their topic and leave their readers with the impression that they themselves could read Hebrew. These contemporary late Anglo-Saxon authors wrote texts in English which had otherwise been exclusively written in Latin: a Latin grammar and a commentary on computus.⁴ Both of these texts are bilingual to a certain extent, and both of them engage with the idea of Hebrew on more than one occasion, but the effect of this engagement is quite different. Ælfric uses Hebrew within his Latin *Grammar* to connect his English-speaking students to a continuum of languages projecting back in time: English, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He shares his knowledge of Hebrew to help his students appreciate their own place in the history of Christianity as well as to appreciate the individuality of all languages. Byrhtferth likewise draws connections among English and the scriptural languages and, at times, projects an image similar to Ælfric's, connecting English through time to the languages of salvation history which preceded it. But Byrhtferth more often uses his linguistic skill – with Latin as well as Hebrew – to alienate at least some of his audience. He uses his advanced knowledge of languages to separate himself and those like him – namely Benedictine monks – from those readers who can only identify with English.

Both Ælfric and Byrhtferth grasp after Hebrew and in many ways embrace it; if not actually flaunting, they display their knowledge of Hebrew as if it were the most natural skill in the world. Neither of them thinks there is anything unusual about discussing Hebrew. Many educated Anglo-Saxons knew quite a bit about Hebrew, much of which can be traced back to the writings of the Venerable Bede, himself a champion of Jerome's insistence of the importance of Hebrew.⁵ While there is no evidence to suggest any Anglo-Saxons actually read Hebrew, they were aware of the role of Hebrew in the textual history of salvation, and use that understanding to frame their appreciation of the role of translation in scriptural history. This is most clearly articulated in King Alfred's famous Preface to the *Pastoral Care*, where, lamenting the ignorance of Latin in his kingdom, he remembers that the Greeks had already translated the Bible from Hebrew, the Latins from Greek and Hebrew, and others had already translated

4 Zupitza, ed., *Ælfrics Grammatik*; Baker and Lapidge, ed., *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*.

5 Fleming, "Jesus, That Is *hælend*," 28–36.

important texts from Latin to vernaculars.⁶ Ælfric and Byrhtferth work from a similar mindset, but with different results. Ælfric uses Latin and Hebrew as a means of including his students in a wider tradition of language. Especially in his discussion of interjections in his *Grammar*, he shows that some of the difficulties his students might have with Latin are ameliorated with reference to Hebrew; that is, stepping back to see the big picture helps make the differences between English and Latin seem less significant. Byrhtferth also draws Hebrew, English, and Latin together to a certain extent, by framing the place of English in linguistic scriptural history, but more often uses Hebrew as a means of exclusion to demonstrate his own linguistic superiority.

Ælfric of Eynsham is famous for his dedication to orthodoxy and clarity; he devoted his life to making the truths of the faith accessible to as wide an audience as possible.⁷ This was primarily accomplished through his many homilies, translations, and adaptations of Latin texts.⁸ But he was also a teacher, willing to use anything in his power to make his material intelligible to his audience.⁹ Certainly this is the case in his *Excerptiones de Prisciano Anglice*, or *Grammar*, which was one of the most popular English texts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, surviving in fourteen manuscripts.¹⁰ This text holds the special distinction of being the first grammar of the Latin language written in any language besides Latin. As Ælfric explains in his Latin preface, his *Grammar* is a translation of an abbreviation of Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae*, a surviving text which allows for careful source study revealing those sections that Ælfric has expanded or diminished.¹¹ Scholars have been most interested to follow up Ælfric's claim that his *Grammar* can be used to study Latin or

6 "Ða gemunde ic hu sio æ wæs ærest on Ebreisc geðiode funden, & eft, ða hie Creacas geliornodon, ða wendon hie hie on hiora agen geðiode ealle, & eac ealle oðre bec. & eft Lædenware swæ same, siððan hie hie geliornodon, hie hie wendon ealla ðurh wise wealhstodas on hiora agen geðiode. Ond eac ealla oðræ Cristnæ ðioda sumne dæl hiora on hiora agen geðiode wendon" (Sweet, ed., *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version*, 1:5–7).

7 Wilcox, ed., *Ælfric's Prefaces*, esp. 15–22.

8 Hill, "Ælfric: His Life and Works."

9 Hall, "Ælfric as Pedagogue."

10 Menzer, "Ælfric's English *Grammar*," 106; Hill, "Ælfric's Grammatical Triad."

11 Porter, ed., *Excerptiones de Prisciano*.

English grammar.¹² In conjunction with this, many have been struck by the text's distinctive Englishness, zeroing in on Ælfric's English tangents, or what Vivien Law calls "strong local colouring of the vocabulary and examples."¹³ Ælfric exhibits his identity as an Anglo-Saxon and as a monk while providing his students with examples they can more readily relate to, replacing the model nouns found in his source, *Roma*, *Tiberis*, *urbs*, and *flumen*, with the Anglo-Saxon *Eadgarus*, *Adelwoldus*, *rex*, and *episcopus*.¹⁴ He entirely displaces his source's discussion of Roman patronymics with details of how family names are formed in English, such as the *Pendingas* derived from *Penda* and *Cwicelmingas* from *Cwicelm*.¹⁵ Under the names of peoples, he includes *anglus*: "englisc," alongside *graecus*: "grecisc," and *romanus*: "romanisc," and for place names he gives *lundoniensis*: "lundenisc" and *wiltuniensis*: "wiltunisc."¹⁶ With these changes, Ælfric bolsters the status of English: details of English grammar are just as important as Latin ones or, in the case of patronymics, more important for his audience.

Hand in hand with "Englishing" is Ælfric's desire to Christianize his source: he makes a fifth-century pagan text more appropriate and relevant for tenth-century Christian monks and novices. An obvious example is when he changes *Pius Aeneas* to *Pius David rex*, supplanting Priscian's sense of Roman identity with his own sense of Judeo-Christian identity. A trickier example is when he replaces the example of a first declension masculine noun *poeta* with *citharista*, "cither-player," or as he translates it into Old English, *hearpere*, "a harper."¹⁷ Scholars have taken this as an example of Ælfric inserting a distinctly Anglo-Saxon image into the text.¹⁸ We can picture the harper, or *scop*, sitting in the middle of an Anglo-Saxon hall,

12 "In isto libello potestis utramque linguam uidelicet latinam et anglicam, uestrae teneritudini inserere interim, usque quo ad perfectiora perueniatis studia ... Ne cwede ic na for ði, þæt ðeos boc mæge micclum to lare fremian, ac heo byð swa ðeah sum angn to ægðrum gereorde, gif heo hwam licað" (Zupitza, ed., *Ælfrics Grammatik*, 1–3). See Menzer, "Ælfric's English Grammar"; Gretsche, "Ælfric, Language, and Winchester," 120–1.

13 Law, "Anglo-Saxon England," 56; Hall, "Ælfric as Pedagogue," 198, similarly refers to Ælfric's "home-grown" examples.

14 Zupitza, ed., *Ælfrics Grammatik*, 8; Law, "Anglo-Saxon England," 56.

15 Zupitza, ed., *Ælfrics Grammatik*, 14–15.

16 *Ibid.*, 13.

17 *Ibid.*, 21.

18 See, e.g., Law, "Anglo-Saxon England," 57, "The prominent place given *citharista* ... reflects the importance of the *hearpere* in Anglo-Saxon society."

ready to recite *Beowulf* – or something like it – to his mead-drinking audience. Or maybe not. In the writing of a monk who changed “Aeneas” to “David,” who is the more likely harper: the *Beowulf*-poet, or King David, the psalmist?

In any event, through tracking these changes in his translation, we can begin to piece together a bit of Ælfric’s sense of identity. Based on his presentation of Latin and English, the identity which emerges, not surprisingly, is one of a literate English Christian monk: exactly what Ælfric is. But he is also someone who is interested in language and languages. He reintroduces the image of a “harper” when he augments his source’s list of adverbs derived from adjectives.

Ða ðe habbað langne *e*, syndon *DIRIVATIVA*: *clarus* beorht and of ðam *clare* beorhtlice oððe beorhte; *pulcher* wlitig, *pulchre citharizat* fægere he hearpað; *faber* smið, *affabre* cræftlice; *anglus* englis, *anglice* on englis; *latinus* leden, *latine* and *latialiter* on leden; *graecus* grecisc, *graece* on grecisc; *ebraicus* and *ebraeus* ebreisc, *ebraice* on ebreisc.¹⁹

[Those with a long *e* are derivatives: *clarus* bright and from it *clare* brightly *pulcher* beautiful *pulchre citharizat* he harps beautifully; *faber* smith, *affabre* skillfully; *anglus* English, *anglice* in English; *latinus* Latin, *latine* and *latialiter* in Latin; *graecus* Greek, *graece* in Greek; *ebraicus* and *ebraeus* Hebrew, *ebraice* in Hebrew.]

The list of language adjectives and adverbs has no parallel in his source material; however, these four languages – English, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew – frequently show up together in the corpus of Ælfric’s writings. When Ælfric’s mind drifts towards language, we find the languages that are on Ælfric’s mind: his own English, his target language Latin, and the scriptural languages Greek and Hebrew. As in Alfred’s preface, these languages represent the historical tradition of scriptural translation, from Moses right down to Ælfric’s own day. When juxtaposed like this, they identify the English language and the English people as part of the Christian tradition.

The question of language and identity is even more to the fore in Ælfric’s consideration of interjections, the eighth and final part of speech treated in his *Grammar*. This section reveals much about Ælfric’s understanding of

19 Zupitza, ed., *Ælfrics Grammatik*, 235.

language and interjections' connection to linguistic identity. In discussing interjections – one of the most primal forms of communication, having only one quality, namely *getacnung* or “signification” – Ælfric demonstrates the interconnectivity of certain languages while at the same time revealing the fundamental individuality of every language. And he concludes his entire *Grammar* clearly focused on the English language.

From a strictly grammatical point of view, interjections are quite simple; they have no inflectional morphology and often do not even make it into the pages of modern Latin textbooks.²⁰ It is little surprise that they show up at the very end of medieval Latin grammars. Conceptually, however, interjections are fascinating.

Interiectio is an dæl ledenspræce getaceniende þæs modes gewilnunge mid ungesceapenre stemne. *INTERIECTIO* mæg beon gecweden betwuxalegednys on englisc, forþan ðe he lið betwux wordum and geopenað þæs modes styrunge mid behyddre stemne. An þing he hæfþ: *SIGNIFICATIO*, þæt is getacnung, forðan ðe he getacnað hwilon ðæs modes blisse, hwilon sarnysse, hwilon wundrunge and gehwæt.²¹

[The interjection is a part of Latin-speech signifying the desire of the mind in an unformed utterance. Interjection can be called “between-laid-ness” in English, because it lies between words and reveals the mind’s feeling with an inarticulate [literally, “concealed”] voice. It has one thing: *Significatio*, that is signification, because it signifies sometimes the bliss of the mind, sometimes sorrow, sometimes astonishment and so forth.]

The externalization of emotional states which interjections represent seems to transcend individual languages, and Ælfric’s discussion quickly reveals the slipperiness of interjections.²² Like his *Grammar* itself, interjections can move between languages, “*hui* man cwep on leden and ealswa on englisc: huig, hu færst ðu” (One says *hui* in Latin as well as in English:

20 Sauer, “Interjection, Emotion, Grammar, and Literature,” “Ælfric and Emotion,” and “How the Anglo-Saxons Expressed Their Emotions”; Hiltunen, “*Eala, geferan and gode wyrbitan*”; Cassidy, “Anglo-Saxon Interjection.”

21 Zupitza, ed., *Ælfrics Grammatik*, 277–8.

22 Derolez, “Those Things Are Difficult to Express,” 472–3.

huig, how do you do?).²³ Latin and English also share the onomatopoeias *baba* and *hebe*, “forðan ðe hi beoð hliche geclypode” (because they are exclaimed [while] laughing).²⁴ Although Ælfric doesn’t explicitly say as much, there seems to be something fundamentally human about the sounds of certain emotions, in any language. However, sometimes interjections suggest the exact opposite: some interjections are specific to a single language and thus utterly defy translation. Instead of offering an English or Latin equivalent, Ælfric can only suggest the emotional state which certain interjections “betoken” or imply: “Pes *heu* and *ei* getacnað wanunge ... *la* getacnað yrsunge, *e* gebicnað forsewennysse” (*heu* and *ei* show wailing ... *la* shows anger, *e* indicates contempt).²⁵ Again, showing his relative independence from his immediate source, he greatly expands its discussion of Latin *vae* – which only shows up in a list in the source – but is of course so very popular in the Bible.²⁶

The linguistic peculiarities of interjections interest Ælfric so much that in the middle of his examples, he returns to its definition, “Pes dæl *INTERIECTIO* hæfð wordes fremminge, þeah ðe he færlice geclypod beo, and he hæfð swa fela stemna, swa he hæfð getacnunga, and hi ne magon ealle beon on englisc awende” (The part of speech interjection has the effect of a verb, though it is uttered quickly, and it has as many sounds as it has meanings, and they all cannot be translated into English), before introducing further biblical examples, which naturally have no place in his pagan source.²⁷

Vah getacnað gebysmrunge, and *racha* getacnað æbylignysse oððe yrre. *uah* and *racha* sind ebreisce *INTERIECTIONES*, and ælc þeod hæfð synderlice *INTERIECTIONES*, ac hi ne magon naht eade to oðrum gereorde beon awende.²⁸

[*Vah* denotes scorn and *racha* denotes indignation or anger. *Vah* and *racha* are Hebrew interjections and each people has separate interjections, but they cannot easily be translated into another language.]

23 Zupitza, ed., *Ælfrics Grammatik*, 278.

24 Ibid., 279.

25 Ibid., 278, 280.

26 Ibid., 278–9; Hall, “Ælfric as Pedagogue,” 200.

27 Zupitza, ed., *Ælfrics Grammatik*, 279.

28 Ibid., 279.

Ælfric includes these Hebrew words as additional examples to make the *Grammar* more accessible to his English students. He knows that these Hebrew words, like the English patronymics above, will be readily recognizable to his monastic students. Although they were likely familiar from their scriptural usage, his students may not have realized that they were Hebrew. Ælfric, following in the footsteps of Bede and ultimately Jerome, regularly takes pains to point out the language of origin of Hebrew words. Ælfric gets both of these words from the New Testament; *racha* appears in Matthew 5:22, “ego autem dico uobis quia omnis qui irascitur fratri suo reus erit iudicio qui autem dixerit fratri suo *racha* reus erit concilio qui autem dixerit fatue reus erit gehennae ignis” (But I say to you, that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, *Raca*, shall be in danger of the council. And whosoever shall say, Thou Fool, shall be in danger of hell fire). *Racha* is one of the dozen or so Aramaic words preserved in the New Testament, most of which are attributed to Jesus (medieval writers do not generally distinguish between Hebrew and Aramaic). Its root seems to mean something like “empty” and it is generally understood as a term of abuse. Most medieval commentators follow Jerome in noting that it means *uanus* or *inanis* – though Eucherius of Lyon notes that the implication might be “without a brain” – or, like Ælfric, follow Augustine in simply stressing that it expresses indignation.²⁹

Ælfric’s second Hebrew interjection is probably not Hebrew or Aramaic. Although *uae* (“woe,” a noun or interjection) appears over one hundred times in the Vulgate, *vah* appears only three or four times: twice in the Old Testament (Job 39:25; Is. 44:16, where it translates the Hebrew *āāç*), and once each in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, in the mouths of those mocking Jesus on the cross, “et praetereuntes blasphemabant eum mouentes capita sua et dicentes *ua* qui destruit templum et in tribus diebus aedificat” (And they that passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads, and saying: Vah, thou that destroyest the temple of God, and in three days buildest it up again).³⁰ *Vah* here translates the Greek text’s *οὐά*; Lewis and Short list *vah* as the Latin equivalent of *οὐά*, having been used in Latin since at least the time

29 Thiel, *Grundlagen und Gestalt*, 388–9.

30 Mark 15:29. Mt. 27:40: “et dicentes [uah] qui destruit templum et in triduo illud reaedificat salua temet ipsum si Filius Dei es descende de cruce”; *uah* is printed as a variant reading in Weber, ed., *Biblia Sacra*.

of Plautus.³¹ Excepting the possibility of some intermediary source, it is likely Ælfric erroneously deduced that this word is Hebrew from its context. Used in a manner similar to *racha*, it appears just a few verses before Jesus calls out in Aramaic on the cross, “Heli Heli lema sabacthani.”³² Even though Ælfric is “wrong” about Hebrew in this instance, his discussion shows us where his mind is. As in the examples of adverbs above, when Ælfric thinks of languages, he naturally thinks of English and Latin but is just as likely to think of Greek and Hebrew, a group of languages always on the tip of his tongue – not because there is anything magical or mysterious about them, but because these are the languages of greatest importance in the textual history of scripture. Ælfric feels that awareness of even Hebrew is appropriate for all sorts of learners: even beginners, like the target audience of his *Grammar* – despite the fact that knowing about Hebrew interjections does not really help one learn to read Latin.

The second half of his comment also enlightens ideas of language and identity: “each people have separate interjections, but they cannot easily be translated into another language.”³³ He reiterates the difficulty of translating interjections to justify his not providing translations for the Hebrew interjections *racha* and *vah*, following the example of the Gospels, which do not translate these words. This idea of the “untranslatable” words in scripture – especially interjections – is also found in Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*:

hebreia verba non interpretata saepe inueniamus in libris ... quae in usum alterius linguae per interpretationem transire non possint. Et hoc maxime interiectionibus accidit, quae verba motum animi significant potius quam sententiae conceptae ullam particulam. Nam et haec duo talia esse perhibentur; dicunt enim *racha* indignantis esse vocem, *osanna* laetantis.³⁴

[We often find Hebrew words untranslated in the texts ... which just cannot be translated into the idioms of another language. This is especially true of

31 Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, s.v., “*vab*”; Sauer, “Ælfric and Emotion,” 46.

32 Mark 15:34; Mt. 27:46.

33 As Gretsich notes generally on Ælfric’s accomplishment in the *Grammar*, “Ælfric’s metalinguistic reflections on the relationship between Latin and English ... are the first metalinguistic reflections to survive from, and on, any European vernacular” (“Ælfric, Language and Winchester,” 119).

34 Green, ed., *Augustine: De Doctrina Christiana*, 73.

interjections, which signify emotion, rather than an element of clearly conceived meaning; two such words, it is said, are *racha*, a word expressing anger, and *osanna*, a word expressing joy.]

Some Hebrew words simply cannot be translated. Immediately after this comment, Ælfric lists more Latin interjections, and rather than translate them, gives their “signification” or their sense: “*la* getacnað yrsunge, *e* gebicnað forsewennysse, *euge* gebicnað blisse and bysmrunge” (*la* denotes anger, *e* indicates contempt, and *euge* indicates joy or derision), and he seemingly concludes his discussion of interjections with a translation of his source’s final point, “Ealle hi sind *INTERIECTIONES*, ac heora sweg byð hwilon gescyrt and hwilon gelengced be ðæs modes styrunge” (All of these are interjections and their accent is sometimes shortened and sometimes lengthened, depending on the agitation of the mind).³⁵ But then he makes one more comment before the end of his entire *Grammar*, “*Afæstla* and *hilabi* and *wella*well and ðyllice oðre sindon englisce *INTERIECTIONES*. Finiunt Partes Anglice” (*Afæstla* and *hilabi* and *wella*well and other such words are English interjections. The *Parts [of Speech]* in English concludes).³⁶ Ælfric ends his Latin *Grammar* with seemingly superfluous information about English, which deserves attention: for one, these words are very odd.³⁷ Although Ælfric just throws them out there like the most natural examples of English, these words do not occur anywhere else in the corpus of Old English texts, which is an excellent reminder of the depth of our modern ignorance about Old English – especially spoken, colloquial Old English.³⁸ But for his Anglo-Saxon students, these words must have been very familiar; Ælfric allows them to stand for English, and this is how he chooses to end his Latin *Grammar*: with English. This final section of his *Grammar* offers insight into Ælfric’s understanding of languages; they each have their own identity, and in this way, the English that his monastic students grew up speaking is not unlike the learned Latin they endeavour to learn, or even like the Hebrew spoken by Jesus himself.

35 Zupitza, ed., *Ælfrics Grammatik*, 280.

36 Ibid.

37 Sauer, “Ælfric and Emotion,” 47.

38 Sauer notes that “Ælfric’s *Grammar* is one of the rare witnesses (or even the only one) of some interjections which were perhaps frequent in spoken Old English. Thus we find traces of colloquial speech in a grammar” (“How the Anglo-Saxons Expressed Their Emotions,” 173).

Byrhtferth of Ramsey, Ælfric's contemporary, shared a similar realistic conception of Hebrew as evidenced in his instructional text, his *Enchiridion*. While Ælfric's vernacular *Grammar* of the English language was genuinely innovative, Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion* is truly unique. In essence, it is a bilingual – English and Latin – commentary on computus: the texts which help one reconcile the Roman solar calendar with the Hebrew lunar calendar in order to determine the date of Easter and other moveable feasts.³⁹ Computus texts, like grammars, were otherwise exclusively written in Latin. However, Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion* is far from a simple translation of a computus; like many computus manuscripts, it is a compendium of useful knowledge, much of which bears little or no connection to the reckoning of time.⁴⁰ Nor can its complex intertwining of languages and registers within those languages be simply defined as either vernacular or bilingual. The overall structure gives the impression of being a bilingual text, with a passage in Latin followed by a more or less straightforward translation into Old English. However, some of the sections are written exclusively in Latin, and others are only in English. And, unlike Ælfric's *Grammar*, which is clearly aimed at introductory students of Latin, Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion* is intended for at least two distinct audiences: a clerical – but non-monastic – audience, which is primarily addressed in English, and a more learned audience of monks, who are instructed in Latin as well as English. Also unlike Ælfric's *Grammar*, the popularity of the *Enchiridion* is very difficult to assess; it survives in only one more or less complete copy.⁴¹

Rebecca Stephenson has convincingly delineated the multiple audiences of the *Enchiridion* and Byrhtferth's explicit concern with linguistic identity, showing how he endeavours to project monastic self-definition, which was necessary because of the lack of clear distinction between monastic and secular clergy in the late tenth century.⁴² Byrhtferth accomplishes this through the use of different languages and different registers of these languages. The Latin sections of the *Enchiridion*, and especially those sections written in more difficult, “hermeneutic” Latin, “encoded in

39 Wallis, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, xviii–xxxiv.

40 Wallis, “Background Essay” (accessed April 6, 2012).

41 Baker and Lapidge, eds., *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, cxv–cxxiv.

42 Stephenson, “Scapegoating the Secular Clergy.”

linguistic terms the division between monks and clerics.”⁴³ He mocks the secular clergy in these Latin sections and bemoans the necessity of having to translate each of the Latin sections on their behalf. Byrhtferth uses the secular clergy as a “scapegoat,” a caricature of lazy ecclesiastics in order to highlight the diligence and intelligence of the Benedictine monks. However, even some sections which are written entirely in English, such as the explanation of Latin figures of speech, discussed below, demand a thorough understanding of Latin to make any sense: “Both the untranslated Latin and the technical vocabulary of grammar indicate that this passage was written in English for a reader who had a fairly extensive knowledge of Latin, but who could understand some concepts better when explicated in English.”⁴⁴ The spectre of the stupid cleric authorizes the translation of the text into English, which could then of course be read by monks as well as clerics. And monks alone, naturally, benefit from those sections written exclusively in English which nevertheless deal with complex Latin subjects, like schemes and tropes. Byrhtferth’s use of Hebrew mirrors this dichotomy of the *Enchiridion* on the whole. He discusses Hebrew in the most straightforward English sections aimed at as wide an audience as possible in a way similar to Ælfric, connecting English to the global tradition of languages and biblical translation in particular. However, Byrhtferth also uses Hebrew in some of the most difficult sections of his text, which are intended exclusively for his fellow learned Benedictine monks. In these, Hebrew knowledge becomes another element in his specialized move to create a distinct monastic, intellectually superior identity.

Like Ælfric, Byrhtferth introduces a realistic conception of Hebrew in his most accessible sections – those sections which are translated into English and which would have been easily intelligible to both monks and secular clergy. For example, since Hebrew language and customs are central to the computus, Byrhtferth provides a summary of the Passover story – beginning with a gloss of the Hebrew word *Pascha* – in straightforward English. Like Ælfric, Bede, and Jerome, Byrhtferth uses the etymology of a proper Hebrew noun as a springboard for interpretation in

43 Ibid., 107. On hermeneutic Latin see Lapidge, “Hermeneutic Style,” and his edition of *Byrhtferth of Ramsey: Lives*, xlv–lxv. Stephenson succinctly defines it as “a kind of Latin prose that affects an elevated register through importing poetic conventions into prose” (112).

44 Stephenson, “Scapegoating the Secular Clergy,” 119.

English: “*Pasca* ys Ebreisc nama, and he getacnað **oferfæreld**. God ælmihtig **ferde** on Egiptena lande, hi sleande and alysende Israela bearn” (Pasch is a Hebrew noun, and it means “passage.” God almighty passed into the land of the Egyptians, slaying them and freeing the children of Israel).⁴⁵ Like these authors, Byrhtferth can get carried away in his enthusiasm for sharing etymologies. Byrhtferth translates Exodus 12:1–11, which gives Yahweh’s orders to Moses concerning the preparation of the Paschal meal, ending “*Est enim phase, id est transitus Domini*: hyt is witodlice Godes **færeld**” (It is *phase*, that is, the passing of the Lord: it is truly God’s passage).⁴⁶ He begins his explication of the passage with yet another Hebrew etymology:

Vton nu, la arwurðan gebroðro, us gegearwian þis lamb to etanne. We synt Abrahames bearn, and eac Israeles his sunu sunu bearn we synt getealde. Israel ys gereht on Lyden *uidens Deum* and on Englisc God geseonde.⁴⁷

[O reverend brothers, let us now prepare to eat this lamb. We are the children of Abraham, and we are also considered the children of Israel, the son of his son. Israel means *uidens Deum* in Latin and “seeing God” in English.]

The first etymology – that of *Pasca* or *phase* – is immediately relevant and necessary for a proper understanding of the passage. The latter (of “Israel”) is seemingly tangential – he has to really stretch to make it from Moses to Abraham to Israel – but reveals Byrhtferth’s enthusiasm for Hebrew information in itself. Byrhtferth simply must share this information; Hebrew etymologies are useful information even for the most basic learners, in straightforward English.

In addition, since the whole purpose of the computus is to reconcile the Hebrew lunar year with the Roman solar year, the names and correspondences of the Hebrew months are essential information. In his *Enchiridion*, Byrhtferth includes a chart originally found in Bede’s *De temporum ratione* showing the Hebrew, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman month names, as

45 Baker and Lapidge, eds., *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, 122–3. On comparable use of etymologies in Ælfric, see Hill, “Ælfric’s Use of Etymologies,” 35–44; Fleming, “*Jesus*, That Is *hælend*,” 37–44.

46 Baker and Lapidge, eds., *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, 122–3.

47 Ibid.

well as the pre-Christian Old English month names.⁴⁸ In a later, more miscellaneous, section of the *Enchiridion*, Byrhtferth provides a similarly practical series of alphabets: English, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.⁴⁹ Like Ælfric's list of adverbs, these situate the English language in some impressive company, graphically demonstrating the continuity from the Old Testament to Byrhtferth's England.

Byrhtferth also uses his knowledge of Hebrew to demonstrate his own learning in both Latin and English sections of the *Enchiridion* that would have been comprehensible only to his advanced monastic students. In addition to Hebrew serving as part of the common inheritance of all Christians, Byrhtferth also uses it as part of his highly specialized linguistic toolkit, which helps create a sense of identity with his fellow learned monks by alienating the less educated clerks. At times, he uses it in such a specialized manner that it is hard to say if any of his contemporaries ever picked up on what he was doing.

In part 3 of the *Enchiridion*, Byrhtferth translates into English Bede's *De schematibus et tropis* – a handbook of rhetorical devices which Bede had composed to provide a school text, replacing the pagan quotations found in pre-Christian handbooks with biblical quotations. Bede's text had been glossed by Remigius, and some of Byrhtferth's translation decisions strongly suggest that he was using such a glossed version.⁵⁰ Ironically, for a teacher like Byrhtferth who regularly chides the ignorance and laziness of students – especially for their lack of understanding Latin – he makes the mistake of reading only the first element of a word's definition. Following Bede, Byrhtferth mentions the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as examples of “mixed” compositions; then, following Remigius's gloss, he provides etymologies for the titles of Homer's works: “Ilias, þæt beoð gewyn, and Odissia beoð gedwyld, swa Omerus on þære bec recð” (*Ilias* means strife, and *Odyssey* means wandering, as Homer tells in that book).⁵¹ As Lapidge and Baker note, Byrhtferth was probably looking at the Remigian commentary which explains that “ILIAS: **subuersiones** Troiae and ODYSSIA

48 Ibid., 24. On Bede's original lists of months, see Wallis, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 285–7.

49 Baker and Lapidge, eds., *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, 186–8; commentary on 334–5.

See also Wallis, “2. Computus Related Materials: 11. Runic, Cryptographic and Exotic Alphabets,” in her *The Calendar and the Cloister* (accessed April 6, 2012).

50 Baker and Lapidge, eds., *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, lxxxii; Kendall, ed., *Bede: De arte metrica*, 148.

51 Baker and Lapidge, eds., *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, 162–3.

id est **errores** Vlixis” (ILIAD: the destruction of Troy and ODYSSEY: that is the wanderings of Ulysses).⁵² Byrhtferth has erroneously extracted only the first half of each gloss, leaving out the actual root of the word he defines, rendering his definition of each term almost laughable.

For the most part, Byrhtferth’s translation of Bede’s work provides illustrative quotations for a variety of rhetorical devices which would have been comprehensible to a monastic student. Although this section is written in English, it requires a substantial understanding of Latin, without which none of the examples would make sense. As Stephenson shows, this is one section where the idea of an incompetent clerical readership authorizes English translation which in fact will benefit only Byrhtferth’s monastic students.⁵³ His example of paronomasia is indicative of the difficulty of this section, even in English.

Fægere þis hiw geglengde Isaias se witega þa he þus giddiende cwæð: *Expectati ut faceret iudicium, et ecce iniquitas; et iustitiam, et ecce clamor.* Þas word swyðe fægere geþwærlæcað on Ebreiscre spræce, swa we þæt her willað þam rædere geswutelian. *Iudicium* on Lyden and on Englisc dom and on Ebreisc *mesaphaat*; *iustitia* on Lyden and on Englisc *rihtwisnys* and on Ebreisc *sadaca*; *iniquitas* on Lyden on Englisc ys gecweden unrihtwisnys and on Ebreisc *mesaphaa*; *clamor* on Lyden on Englisc ys hludnys and on Ebreisc ys gereht *suaca*. Fægere he gemetegode þæra namena gelicnyssa. *Iudicium* he genemde *mesaphaat*, and *iniquitas* *mesaphaa*, and *iustitia* *sadaca*, and *clamor* *suaca*.⁵⁴

[Isaiah the prophet elegantly adorned this figure [paronomasia] when he said in his song, “I looked that he should do judgment, and behold iniquity; and justice, and behold an outcry.” These words correspond very elegantly in the Hebrew language, as we will here explain to the reader. *Iudicium* in Latin is judgment in English and *mesaphaat* in Hebrew; *iustitia* in Latin is called righteousness in English and *sadaca* in Hebrew; *iniquitas* in Latin is called iniquity in English and *mesaphaa* in Hebrew; *clamor* in Latin is loudness in English and is called *suaca* in Hebrew. He elegantly regulated the resemblances among these nouns. He called justice *mesaphaat*, and iniquity *mesapha*, and righteousness *sadaca*, and outcry *suaca*.]

⁵² Ibid., 328–9.

⁵³ Stephenson, “Scapegoating the Secular Clergy,” 119.

⁵⁴ Baker and Lapidge, eds., *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, 166–7.

There are a number of interesting things at play here; the most obvious, of course, is that Byrhtferth is casually throwing around Hebrew words in the middle of an English text – perhaps giving his audience the impression that he could deal with the Hebrew text of the Bible. Of course he could not; he has lifted this from Bede, who – also not really knowing Hebrew – ultimately got the information from Jerome.⁵⁵ Byrhtferth goes out of his way to make the Hebrew, and his use of Hebrew, more central to the passage, using the word *ebraisc* five times compared with just once in Bede. He also more forcefully insists on the beauty of this example: “Fægere þis hiw ... Þas word swyðe fægere ... Fægere he gemetegode.” Byrhtferth may just be overly enthusiastic about this example, but he may also be attempting to refute another reader who was less impressed. In Remigius’s commentary on *De schematibus et tropis* – which almost certainly accompanied Byrhtferth’s copy of Bede – we find this scholion:

Super haec non accurrit figura, id est paranomasia apud Hebraeos quia paene idem sunt in sono, apud Latinos uero nec sensu nec litteratura.⁵⁶

[The figure, that is paronomasia, doesn’t occur with these words because in Hebrew they barely sound the same, but in Latin neither the sense nor the spelling works.]

Remigius is right: in many ways it is not a very good example of paronomasia, especially if we are looking for unambiguous clarity in an educational text. Bede himself seems to have gotten carried away here, bringing in Hebrew based on his own enthusiastic interest in Hebrew and thorough knowledge of Jerome’s commentaries. This example is a bit abstruse and would not be particularly helpful for students trying to learn the application of rhetorical devices in Latin. But if they have something else on their minds, like talking about Hebrew for its own sake or as a means of demonstrating one’s own brilliance, it is an excellent example. Byrhtferth, like Bede, enjoys the engagement with Hebrew for its own sake and sees the value in being able to connect his advanced students directly to the Hebrew past. More subtly, this passage could be seen to bolster the status of English by showing how even the Latin translation of scripture is deficient. Readers

55 See Kendall, ed., *Bede: De arte metrica*, 147–8; the immediate source for Bede is Jerome: Adriaen, ed., *S. Hieronymi in Esaiam*, 68.

56 Kendall, ed., *Bede: De arte metrica*, 140.

need to return all the way to the original Hebrew to appreciate the word-play here, which one might as well do in English as in Latin.

Byrhtferth also turns to Hebrew for some of his most purposefully difficult passages in the whole *Enchiridion*. The final major section of the *Enchiridion* is for advanced Latin-reading students only. He begins with a long section on the meanings of numbers, or arithmology. This section is one of Byrhtferth's most original and innovative as he attempts to provide, for the first time, a Christian handbook of number symbolism.⁵⁷ It is the most difficult section of the *Enchiridion*, written entirely in dense, flowery, hermeneutic Latin. Although this section begins with a fairly extensive English gloss, this is rather quickly reduced to a trickle of Latin glosses and ceases altogether less than halfway through. As Stephenson argues, Byrhtferth uses a section like this to highlight the learning of the monks in contrast to the secular clerics who cannot even read it. And while Byrhtferth will happily share his knowledge of Hebrew with a general audience, he is also able to employ it in some of the showiest moments in the whole text. His introduction to the number eight is typical of his style in this section.

Post septenarium exsurget regali potentia fretus ipse octonarius. Ipse enim uerus est octonarius, qui crimina tulit mundi. Ipse primus, ipse octauus, ipse ultimus. Ipse sic erit ultimus ut sit perpetuus. Ipse angelica uisitatione festiuus, et redemptoris aduentu sacratissimus; ipse resurrectione saluatoris sabbatissimus; ipse aduentu paracliti celeberrimus; et, peracto iudicio, cum fuerit celum nouum et terra noua ipse erit, ut prephati sumus, sempiternus.⁵⁸

[After the number seven, the number eight arises, sustained by royal might. For he is the true eight, who "taketh away the sins of the world." He is first, he is eighth, he is last. It will be the last that it may be everlasting. It is celebrated by an angelic visitation, and it is sanctified by the saviour's advent; it is most Sabbath through the saviour's resurrection; it is most renowned through the advent of the Holy Ghost; and, as we have said, it will be eternal following the day of judgment, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth.]

Although the syntax of this particular passage is not very difficult, it exhibits a number of the characteristics of Byrhtferth's Latin, such as polysyllabic

57 Baker and Lapidge, eds., *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, lxxiii.

58 Ibid., 212–13.

names for numbers, anaphora (“ipse ... ipse ... ipse ...”), Greek-influenced spelling (“prephati”), and seemingly unnecessary superlatives (“sabbatissimus,” “celeberrimus”).⁵⁹ Of course he is discussing God here, so a superlative is not completely out of place, but I would draw particular attention to the first of them, “sabbatissimus,” which appears to be a coinage of Byrhtferth himself. While Grecisms are standard, if not *de rigueur*, in hermeneutic Latin, this new coinage of Byrhtferth’s is a Hebraism, formed on the Latin from the Hebrew loanword *sabbat*. This is the only case of such a Hebrew-based neologism I am aware of in the body of Anglo-Latin texts. Furthermore, like the Hebrew-based example of paronomasia above, the educational value of this new word is dubious. What, exactly, would “most Sabbath” mean? As Lapidge has suggested, Byrhtferth seems to have been attracted to polysyllabicity for its own sake; this word additionally takes the conventions of hermeneutic Latin a step further to include Hebrew.⁶⁰

His most extraordinary employment of Hebrew, however, occurs slightly earlier in this section and exemplifies how Byrhtferth uses his learning to draw a line between the *cognoscenti* monks and the rest of his audience. After concluding a lengthy section on the number four, Byrhtferth provides the following transition sentence: “De quaternario Galileam faciamus ad quinarium” (From four let us make a Galilee to five). This seemingly nonsensical sentence is only rendered intelligible by a gloss which explains “Galileam id est transmigrationem.”⁶¹ Byrhtferth has attempted to make the Hebrew proper noun *Galilee* stand in place of its etymology, extending the reach of erudite vocabulary to include Hebrew proper nouns. Of course, Byrhtferth is not unique in his knowledge of these interpretations. As I have discussed before, Hebrew etymologies of proper nouns were a popular source of exegetical material since the time of Jerome and before.⁶² Gregory the Great uses them in his homilies, as does Bede, and Ælfric, all with great enthusiasm. The difference is that these authors use Hebrew etymologies in order to aid in the explication of biblical texts in which a given Hebrew word appears. But this is not what Byrhtferth is doing at all – he is trying something new: turning to Jerome’s definitions of Hebrew names as fodder for his vocabulary. Again, I know

59 See Lapidge, ed., *Byrhtferth of Ramsey: Lives*, xliiv–lxv.

60 Lapidge, ed., *Byrhtferth of Ramsey: Lives*, xlvi–xlvii.

61 Baker and Lapidge, eds., *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, 203.

62 Fleming, “*Jesus, That Is helend*,” 26–8.

of no other author turning to Jerome's etymologies for vocabulary, especially for something as mundane as this. He returns to his Hebraism again at the conclusion of the section on arithmology. Having explained fifty, he declares further,

Fiat, precor, Galilea (id est transmigratio) de morte ad uitam, de corruptione ad incorruptionem; de pena ad gloriam <licet> nobis transire: quasi quinquagenarium relinquentes assumere mereamur sexagenarium uel epinicion, quod nomen palmam siue triumphum possumus appellare. De sexagesimo et septuagesimo et octuagesimo necnon et nonagesimo, supersedimus hoc in loco sermocinari, ne forte <perturbemus> audientes.⁶³

[Let there be, I pray, a Galilee (that is a crossing), from death to life, from corruption to purity; it is fitting for us to proceed from suffering to glory – as if, abandoning fifty, we deserve to acquire the sixty or the *epinicion*, which we render “palm” or “triumph.” We omit to discuss the numbers sixty, seventy, eighty and ninety at this point, lest we aggravate our audience.]

Byrhtferth was so pleased with his first attempt at using a Hebrew proper noun in running prose that he tried it out again, here with rhetorical flourish for the conclusion to his discussion of numbers. Byrhtferth suggests a way of making simple prose almost into a cipher, which would only be understood by those who had access to the exegetical tradition of Jerome and Bede. Byrhtferth apparently came up with this idea late in his production of the *Enchiridion* and does not develop it further. One does not get the sense that he was confident that his readership would understand what he was doing – both times he uses it, the word *Galilee* is explained in glosses which may very well have been written by Byrhtferth himself. But he has done something truly innovative here; he is trying, as it were, to speak a little Hebrew.⁶⁴ He has moved beyond the conventions of his fellow learned Benedictines who relied on Greek-Latin glossaries for their arcane vocabulary. For Hebrew, the only such available lists were Jerome's lists of proper nouns, and Byrhtferth has, at least with this one word, tried to use it. Of course, we have no evidence that anyone ever followed his innovation, but such is the case for the entirety of Byrhtferth's eclectic text.

63 Baker and Lapidge, eds., *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, 226–7.

64 Cf. Fleming, “*Rex regum*,” 242–50.

If we cannot speak to the lasting influence of Byrhtferth, we can speak of what he represents: he is emblematic, in many ways, of Anglo-Saxon intellectual attitudes towards Hebrew – a language never forgotten or perceived as utterly unattainable. Rather Byrhtferth, like many of his countrymen, makes Hebrew palpable and tangible by sharing the months' names, the alphabet, and the superfluous etymologies; at the same time, Hebrew serves to reaffirm his and his fellow monks' sense of intellectual superiority. Ælfric, too, feels that Hebrew is close: it is a language which can be known, to a certain extent at least, and should be known by all Christians because of its historical importance in the transmission of scripture. But Ælfric never uses it to alienate his audience, rather to raise his audience up by showing them some of the Hebrew they already know: New Testament words like *racha* and *vah*. Furthermore, Ælfric's discussion of Hebrew interjections authorizes him to widen the scope of his *Grammar* to discuss not only Latin but languages generally, and in doing so is able to place English on an international historical stage.