

5-2015

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## Recommended Citation

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ON *THE PSALMS* AS A PRIMARY SOURCE FOR THE OLD ENGLISH *EXODUS*

AN HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR HONORS STUDIES  
IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

By

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May 2015

### *Introduction to the Arguments of this Thesis*

Though *Beowulf* has long held the position as the best known piece of Anglo-Saxon poetry, *Exodus* should by no means be left out of the collective literary consciousness of contemporary scholars due to its rich imagery and deep connection to the religious and social-cultural identity of the Anglo-Saxon people of the ninth and tenth century. This thesis will focus primarily on the sources and inspiration for the Old English poem *Exodus* and will argue that much of the poem is not as deeply rooted in non-biblical texts or pagan influences as many authors have claimed, but that it is rather grounded in the *Psalms*. My thesis will show that, though other sources are possible and even likely, the *Psalms* are the most important influence in terms of where imagery is taken from aside from the biblical *Exodus* narrative itself, specifically chapters eleven through fourteen. When possible, direct counter examples to previous claims of sources will be provided from the *Psalms* and other biblical texts to demonstrate that Christian sources for the poem are just as likely as pagan ones and that this poem is not a religiously confused text but, instead, a thoroughly Christian poem.

### *A Brief Summary of Exodus*

*Exodus* begins with the famous Old English “Hwæt” that is familiar to many as the opening word of *Beowulf*. One can actually see several parallels in the content of *Exodus* and the warrior-centric text of *Beowulf*, since both poems are from the same culture that celebrates the heroic warrior figure. The basic content of the poem in terms of plot, is a dramatic, poetic, retelling of the story of the biblical *Exodus* from the time the first born of Egypt are killed until the Israelites cross the Red Sea. However, the text deviates from the original

biblical narrative in many places and there are various explanations for these deviations that I will discuss.

For those unfamiliar with the biblical text of *Exodus*, Moses is an ethnically Israelite child who is floated down the Nile River in a basket by his mother after Pharaoh orders the killing of the Israelite children. Moses is found by the Pharaoh's daughter and raised as her own child and, therefore, as a prince. Yet, he has to flee into the desert after killing an Egyptian who was attacking an Israelite and, in his exile, God speaks to him through a bush that is burning but not consumed. God tells him to take his brother Aaron and go ask Pharaoh to let the Israelites go free. Because Pharaoh refuses to let the Israelites go free (partially due to the "hardening" of his heart by God); God sends a series of plagues to show his power and these, among others, include darkness and finally the death of every Egyptian first-born child (these are the two plagues most relevant to the text). This final plague is the earliest piece of the biblical *Exodus* narrative mentioned in the poem in detail.

Eventually, Pharaoh gives his consent for the Israelites to go and they begin their exodus by asking their Egyptian neighbors for jewelry and other valuables as God commands. After collecting their loot, the Israelites wander into the desert only to be pursued by the Egyptian army when Pharaoh changes his mind because God hardens his heart again. The frightened Israelites who have been led by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night do not know what to do, but Moses holds up his staff all night and the waters of the Red Sea are parted for the people to cross on dry land. However, the Egyptian army is swallowed by the sea's collapse upon following the Israelites into the sea.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Douay-Rheims Bible + Latin Vulgate," *drbo.org*, 2013, <http://www.drbo.org/drl/index.htm>: *Exodus* 11:1 – 14:31. hereafter cited as *DRB*

Though the story of the Israelite migration continues on at length in the biblical narrative, this is roughly where the author of *Exodus* concludes his telling. The basic plot structure is the same as the biblical one throughout. It is the minor details that vary. Depictions of warfare and warriors are both anachronistic in material content (the style of armor and weapons referenced) and unsuitable for the people described in some cases. In Pharaoh's army, for example, the weaponry is clearly described from an Anglo-Saxon perspective. The soldiers are described, "*eoferholt wegan*," (carrying boar-spears). Peter J. Lucas notes, citing Swanton, that *eoferholt* "is closely paralleled by *eoferspreo* "boar-spear" (*Beowulf* 1437)."<sup>2</sup> The depiction of the Israelites is far more like an Anglo-Saxon army than an assorted band of recent migrant ex-slaves. For example, Moses rallies the Israelites at the sea to stand against Pharaoh's army and "*beran beorht searo*," (bear bright armor).<sup>3</sup> As will be discussed in more detail, similar elements of metaphor and imagery, such as those above, are changed or added entirely to suit the stylistic desires and/or the allegorical implications of the author. The majority of authors argue that the tangents from the original narrative are mostly due to the author of *Exodus*'s cultural background or are borrowed from other books of the Bible or religious traditions. I will argue instead that many of the changes from the biblical text are actually inspired by passages from the Psalms and that there is no reason to believe that the poem contains any non-biblical sources at all. This argument will emphasize the fact that the piece is completely Christian in its ideological and textual origins and that any possible pagan influences are not necessitated by the text of the poem.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Lucas, *Exodus*, rev. ed. (Methuen's Old English Library, 1977; University of Exeter Press, 1994) p. 100 ln. 157 hereafter cited as *Exodus*; M. J. Swanton, "The Spearheads of the AS Settlements," (London: *Royal Archeological Institute*, 1973): 28 – 37.

<sup>3</sup>*Exodus*, p. 108, ln. 219.

In its use of poetic devices, *Exodus* fits the norms of Old English poetry. The poem is not rhymed but, rather, written in alliterative half-lines or two “hemistichs.” As one might deduce, the need for many variants of common words that start with different first letters to allow for flexibility in alliteration results in many different words used for the same concept, especially common subjects like “warrior.” More important to this thesis, many Old English created words take the form of a kenning. These are compound words that are often straightforward in their denotation but, in many cases, can have meanings that are more difficult to decipher. Most of the quotations I provide contain kennings but *heofonbeacen*, *heofoncandel*, *heofoncolum* (heaven-beacon, heaven-candle and heaven-column respectively) are all kennings for the pillar of fire which is one of the more common objects described by kennings in the poem. These examples also demonstrate the Anglo-Saxon poet’s desire for lexical variety described earlier.

*Exodus* as we see it today is composed of five hundred and ninety lines. Although, it is evident that there are lacunae (selections missing from the text) at folios 148, 149, 164, and 165 of the Junius manuscript and the poem probably consisted of about six leaves in all.<sup>4</sup> Lucas, in an introduction to the text, explains:

MS Junius 11 is one of the four great codices of Old English poetry and contains the unique texts of *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, and *Christ and Satan*. Since the edition by Junius (1655) the manuscript has been known as “the Cædmon manuscript” because

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<sup>4</sup>*Exodus*, p. 13-15

its contents partly match those upon which, according to Bede (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, iv, 24), Cædmon composed verses in Old English.<sup>5</sup>

MS Junius 11 is no longer attributed to Cædmon but regardless of the author's fame, or lack thereof, the text is a superb example of Anglo-Saxon poetry. What interests many scholars most about the manuscript is that, due to the presence of precisely left blank spaces and their comparable positioning with that of similar texts, the MS Junius 11 seems to have been designed to be an illuminated devotional text from the outset and not a text that was composed and then filled in with illustrations later.

### *Overview of Scholarship*

To begin, there are several authors that have taken the pains to translate the original text and publish editions that were consulted for this thesis. J.R.R. Tolkien composed his translation of *Exodus* and commentary as a part of a set of lectures for a specialist class. Though he never intended his work to be published, Joan Turville-Petre edited and published his translation and commentary in 1981. *The Old English Exodus* marks an intermediary stage of improvement upon Blackburn's 1907 critical edition, especially in regards to philological issues since Tolkien offers a brief analysis of about three hundred individual words and phrases in his commentary that offer extensive clarification to the text in places.<sup>6</sup> E. B. Irving's critical edition of *Exodus*, published in 1953, proved to be the next step in the progression of scholarship and was the only full critical edition published until Peter Lucas authored the critical edition that was most consulted for this thesis. Though Lucas's edition

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *O.E.E.* p. 33 – 85.

does not contain a line-by-line translation, it does have a supply of notes and references far more extensive than most, if not any, other text about *Exodus* that assist in translating the more complex lines.<sup>7</sup>

Among the many topics scholars have delved into within *Exodus*, linguistics, color imagery, anachronisms, sources for the text, and how all of the pieces relate back to Anglo-Saxon society are among the most prominent and will, therefore, be the focus of this introduction. It would be impossible to do justice to all of the work on the translation and linguistic parsing of *Exodus* by so many scholars in the space of an introduction.<sup>8</sup> However, enough research has been done specifically on the color green in *Exodus* to warrant attention. In fact, this topic is one of considerable interest to several scholars and is the subject of multiple essays. The discussions primarily center on the description of Moses's staff and the dry land the Israelites cross through the sea on as "green." For example, the reference to Moses staff is as follows:

*Hwæt ge nu eagam to on lociað,  
folca lefost, færwundra sum  
nu ic sylfa sloh ond theos swiðra hand  
grene tacne garsecges deop*<sup>9</sup>

What you now look upon with eyes,

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<sup>7</sup>*Exodus* p. 72-148

<sup>8</sup> *O.E.E.* p. 33-79; B. W. Wyly, "Figurative Diction in the Old English *Exodus*," (Cambridge: *UMI Dissertations Publishing*, 1997): Full Text; J. R. Hall, "Old English Saebeorg: Exodus 442a, Andreas 308a," *Papers on Language and Literature* 25 (1989): 127; Linda Ann Craker Nazareth, "Language as Theme in the Old English *Exodus* (1979): 1 – 203

<sup>9</sup> *Exodus*, p. 113 – 114, ln. 278 – 81.



Beloved people, a sudden miracle  
Now I myself have struck and this right hand  
Green token thick spear-wall

Hall and others go on to expound upon the parallels of style between the two images and their relevance to the larger stylistic norms as a whole. Authors have used these descriptions to attempt to form connections between the greenness of these items and texts outside of *Exodus*.<sup>10</sup> Though it is not my intention to focus on greenness, there is imagery of greenness in the Old Testament Israelite wandering narrative and the *Psalms* that could also have inspired this color choice. Moses's green staff could be explained as a reference to the budding of Aaron's staff in *Numbers*. Reminding the reader of *Numbers* 17, "*Sequenti die regressus invenit germinasse virgam Aaron in domo Levi: et turgentibus gemmis eruperant flores,*" (He returned on the following day, and found that the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi, was budded: and that the buds swelling it had bloomed blossoms). Placing this reference to the incident of Aaron's rod would make sense here because both are cases of God proving his presence and loyalty to the Israelites who are, in both cases, in a state of doubt. There is an explanation for the green ground that is even more closely tied to this thesis. A phrase from *Psalms* 22:2 "*In loco pascuae ibi me collocavit. Super aquam refectionis educavit me*" (He hath set me in a place of pasture. He hath brought me up, on the water of refreshment) uses pastures, (green, farmable, land), as an image of God's

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas N. Hall, "The Cross as Green Tree in the Vindicta Salvatoris and the Green Rod of Moses in Exodus," *English Studies: A Journal Of English Language And Literature* 72, no. 4 (1991): 297-307; Maxwell Luria, "Why Moses' Rod Is Green," *English Language Notes* 17 (1980): 161 – 163; John P. Hermann, "The Green Rod of Moses in the Old English Exodus," *English Language Notes* 12 (1975): 241-243.

sustaining grace throughout life.<sup>11</sup> Since it is likely that we are to receive *Exodus* as a poem about the journey of salvation and trust in God, Psalms 22 is a perfect connection to further this theme.

Many stylistic and thematic elements of Anglo-Saxon writing are somewhat uniform within the various texts. However, these norms sometimes lead to anachronism and this is especially true in *Exodus*. For example, the description of the Israelite soldiers reminds one of Byrhtnoð and his warriors locked in combat with Viking invaders instead of an early tribal people with Bronze Age technology, the Israelites are decked out in full Anglo-Saxon armor, bristling with spears, and led by the lion standard of Judah.<sup>12</sup> Later in the text, the Israelites are even described as sailors, though they cross the Red Sea on foot.<sup>13</sup> Several authors assert that the nomadic connection of the Anglo-Saxons to the sea is often inserted to serve as a metaphor for the journey to salvation. This is highlighted by the notion that the mast of a ship could be symbolic of a cross that one is following along the way.

The religious and social norms of Anglo-Saxon poetry extend even further, especially in regard to the concept of the comitatus.<sup>14</sup> The comitatus consisted of a tight-knit band of thanes that operated under the leadership of a lord. This union was the most highly valued in Anglo-Saxon society and the opposite state of being an exiled wanderer was the

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<sup>11</sup> DRB, *Psalms* 22:2, *Numbers* 17:8.

<sup>12</sup>Dee Dyas "Land and sea in the pilgrim life: The Seafarer and the Old English Exodus," *English Language Notes* 35, no. 2 (1997): 1 – 9; Mary V. Wallis, "A Study of the Sea in Old English Poetry," (Montreal: *McGill University*, 1981) p. 1 – 109; Antonina Harbus, "The Maritime Imagination and the Paradoxical Mind in Old English Poetry," (*Cambridge University Press*, 2010): 21 – 42.

<sup>13</sup>*Exodus*, p. 92 and 135, ln. 105 and 479.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Fulk and C.M. Cain, *A History of Old English Literature*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 1 – 5.

worst (one can see very easily how the wandering of the displaced Israelites would strike a chord with the Anglo-Saxons). Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson describe this cultural dynamic perfectly:

An heroic warrior brought up in this tradition would show a reckless disregard for his life. Whether he was doomed or not, courage was best, for the brave man could win *lof* while the coward might die before his time. This is the spirit that inspired the *comitatus*. While his lord lived, the warrior owed him loyalty unto death.<sup>15</sup>

Because of its deep cultural value, the *comitatus* was an easy choice when Anglo-Saxon priests needed a metaphor for the relationship of God and man. In their work *A History of Old English*, R.D. Fulk and C.M. Cain stress the importance of always looking for the interaction of Anglo-Saxon religious expectations that were formed by exegesis and biblical narrative source texts when reading Old English poetry.<sup>16</sup> This is due to the fact that the Anglo-Saxons merged popular exegesis and the source texts with much less care for keeping a distinction between the two compared to what one would find in contemporary Christian theology. Since there was such a direct connection between the exegesis found in direct commentary, homilies and liturgies in the minds of Anglo-Saxon priests, it is easy to see how New Testament theology seeps into the Old Testament narrative.

An example of the mixing of sources mentioned above can be seen in the seafaring imagery of *Exodus* in which the mast is theorized to represent the cross leading the travelers

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<sup>15</sup> Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition* (West Sussex: Wiley- Blackwell, 2012), 129 and 276 – 277.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Fulk and C.M. Cain, *A History of Old English Literature*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 114 – 115.

toward salvation over a baptismal sea.<sup>17</sup> The original narrative of the crossing of the Red Sea on dry land is given this amplification of significance by adding a sailing narrative not present in the Biblical text of *Exodus*. However, this kind of imagery is coupled with the *Exodus* narrative in the *Psalms* as I will explain later.

### *The Psalms as a Source for the Old English Exodus*

Contrary to what one might guess by flipping through the hundreds of pages dedicated to connecting *Exodus* to various sources, many of which are non-biblical, I propose that all of the unique imagery for the poem that is not in the biblical *Exodus* narrative can be found in the *Psalms*. This imagery can be seen primarily, from *Psalms* 104 – 106, though we will see connections to other psalms as well. In these sections, the psalmist expounds upon instances from the biblical *Genesis* and *Exodus* narratives in which God has shown mercy to the Israelites when they turn to him for help in order to establish a pattern of mercy that is assumed to still be in affect at the time of the psalm's composition. Though the references begin with Abraham, the focus is on the Israelites escape from Egypt.

Before committing fully to a study of the connection between the *Psalms* and *Exodus* or connections between the poem and any biblical text for that matter, it is important to understand how difficult it can be to discern between actual biblical texts, exegeses and homilies as a source for Anglo-Saxon texts. Marbury B. Ogle's commentary on the difficulty of narrowing down the sources of medieval texts is useful:

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<sup>17</sup> A. G. Brodeur, "A Study of Diction and Style in Three Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poems," in *Nordica et Anglica* ed. A. H. Orrick (1968): 97 – 114 at 109 – 113.

Since these quotations do appear in the liturgy of the church, or in other texts which were used in worship, such as sermons, homilies, Saint's Lives, it is not illogical to suppose that their source is to be found, not in any special type of Bible text, but in the liturgy.<sup>18</sup>

Separating actual biblical sources from one of these other forms of biblical narrative is a problem in many works including *Exodus*. This is especially true of Anglo-Saxon poetry because there was less imperative to draw such harsh lines between canonical and non-canonical biblical texts than one sees among contemporary western theologians. Fulk and Cain explain:<sup>19</sup>

The Bible was not for the Anglo-Saxons quite so determinate and discrete an object as we customarily take it for. Different versions were in circulation... Moreover, the line between authorized and apocryphal books was not drawn quite as it is now. The deuterocanonical books Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Judith, Tobit, and I-II Maccabees – which do not belong to the Hebrew Bible, and which generally form no part of Protestant bibles – were regarded by the Anglo-Saxons as canonical. In addition, some books that are now universally regarded as apocryphal, such as the Gospel of Nicodemus and the *Vindicta Salvatoris*, were copied in among canonical texts in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.

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<sup>18</sup> Marbury B. Ogle, "Biblical Text or Liturgy," *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 33 No. 3 (1940): 191 – 224 at 192.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Fulk and C.M. Cain, *A History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) p. 106.

For the purpose of my argument, the problem of separating different types of biblical texts is not a major issue. This is because I am only asserting that the original sources for imagery are derived from the *Psalms*. Whether those psalms were filtered through a homily or liturgy before making it to *Exodus* is not my primary concern in this case. In fact, it is likely that the psalms in this poem were in a liturgy at one point, since the Abraham and Isaac, and Noah passages are also referenced and these readings are sometimes paired in the liturgy.

One of the thematic elements that appears in both the Old English *Exodus* and Psalms 104 – 106 is the idea of darkness as an identifier for those outside of God’s grace. Beginning with the plague of darkness, Psalms 104 and 106 emphasize the fact that those outside of God’s grace will suffer for it. As the psalmist puts it, “*Misit tenebras, et obscuravit; et non exacerbavit sermones suos*” (He sent darkness, and made it obscure: and grieved not his words) and, paralleling the captive imagery of the Israelites before their liberation, “*Sedentes in tenebris et umbra mortis; victos, in mendicitate et ferro*” (Such as sat in darkness and in the shadow of death: bound in want and in iron). The imagery of bondage is echoed in verse fourteen but with the opposite assertion that those in God’s grace will be liberated just as the Israelites were: “*Et eduxit eos de tenebris et umbra mortis, et vincula eorum dirupit*” (And he brought them out of darkness, and the shadow of death; and broke their bonds in sunder).<sup>20</sup> The use of darkness as a signifier of oppression, loss and ostracism is not a novel idea by itself but it is relevant if the author chose this tool because they were pulling from this particular source. The book of *Exodus* only mentions darkness in the context of the plague and does not extend it metaphorically in the same way.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> DRB, *Psalms* 104:28, 106:10 and 14.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid; *Exodus* 10:21 – 24.

The Old English poem, however, makes it clear that the reader is to connect darkness and light with deeper implications as in the psalms. Reading through the poem, the concept of light as a symbol of God's presence, which either glorifies the Israelite warriors when they are obedient or corrects them when they are doubtful. For instance, the bright pillar of fire is said to "sceado swiðredon" (melt away shadows) and to repel the darkness, "neowle nightscuwan neah ne mihton" (the night sky could not come near).<sup>22</sup> The pillar of fire has created a sort of aura of protection around the Israelites that is both a shield and a prod to move them toward the promise land and the salvation it symbolizes. This dual relationship is another reason that the pillar is thought to be a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. These and other instances of light repelling darkness or things in the darkness outside of the fire-pillar's beam, including the color of the animals that are lying in wait to eat the Egyptian corpses, are made even more pronounced by the author continually referring to the brightness of the Israelite armor and, greatest of all, the giant pillar of flame that follows them constantly.

### *The Seafaring Imagery of the Old English Exodus*

One item that many might find most anachronistic about the Old English text is the insistence on seafaring imagery in a story about crossing a sea on dry land. Someone familiar with Anglo-Saxon culture is, of course, aware that seafaring is integral to the warrior life and a natural topic to shift to. Yet, there seems to be something more happening within this text than an Anglo-Saxon reverting to what he knows in terms of imagery in order to convey the unusual idea of giant pillars of fire and cloud.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Exodus*, p. 94, ln. 113b – 114.

<sup>23</sup> Roberta Frank "Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences have a Skaldic Tooth?," *Scandinavian Studies* vol. 59, No. 3 (1987): 338-355.

*hatum heofoncolum. Þær halig God  
wið færbryne folc gescylde,  
bælce oferbrædde byrnende heofon,  
halgan nette hatwendne lyft...*

*drihta gedrymost. Dægsceldes hleo  
wand ofer wolcnum: hæfde witig God  
sunnan siðfæt segle ofertolden,  
swa þa mæstrapas men ne cuðon,  
ne ða seglrode geseon meahton  
eorðbuende ealle cræfte,  
hu afæstnod wæs feldhusa mæst.<sup>24</sup>*

hot heaven-column. There holy God  
shielded against fire-burn,  
beam covered over and scorching of heaven,  
holy net of the hot sky...

most joyful troops. Protection of the Day-shield  
wound across the heavens: wise God had  
on their journey covered from the sun over with a sail

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<sup>24</sup> *Exodus*, p. 88-90, ln. 71 – 85.



so that the rigging men could not  
nor the sailyard could the earthdwellers see  
by any craft,  
how the tent mast was fastened.

The primary indicator that this description is not just pulled from standard norms of Anglo-Saxon composition is a possible parallel in the same psalms mentioned earlier. In *Psalms* 104, the psalmist describes the cloud as follows: “*Expandit nubem in tentorium, et ignem ut luceret nocte*” (He spread a cloud for their protection, and fire to give them light in the night).<sup>25</sup> Here we see the column of cloud forming a covering as described by the Old English text but this concept does not seem to be made apparent in the biblical *Exodus*. The fact that image of the pillar as a covering is not in the biblical *Exodus* but it is in the poem is largely to blame for the extensive work by scholars to try to explain the source of this image and this search has even branched into non-biblical texts or, grown into a highly complex theory that the covering is inserted to represent the tabernacle.<sup>26</sup> It is possible that this is also an intended association the poet had in mind, however, the *Psalms* offer a much more concise explanation for this image and require much less hypothesizing. The parallels between the description of the cloud in the *Psalms* and *Exodus* continue in *Psalms* 106 where seafaring imagery is added:

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<sup>25</sup> *DRB*, Psalm 104:39.

<sup>26</sup> Irving, E.B., “Exodus Retraced” in *Old English Studies in Honor of John C. Pope* ed. R.B. Burlin and E.B. Irving (1974), p. 206-207; Roberta Frank “Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences have a Skaldic Tooth?,” *Scandinavian Studies* vol. 59, No. 3 (1987): 338-355.

*Qui descendunt in mare navibus facientes opus in aquis multis ipsi viderunt opera Domini et mirabilia eius in profundo dixit et surrexit ventus tempestatis et elevavit gurgites eius ascendunt in caelum et descendunt in abyssos anima eorum in afflictione consumitur<sup>27</sup>*

They that go down to the sea in ships, doing business in the great waters: These have seen the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. He said the word, and there arose a storm of wind: and the waves thereof were lifted up. They mount up to the heavens, and they go down to the depths: their soul pined away with evils.

Just as we see in *Exodus*, the inclusion of seafaring imagery seems inserted without immediate connection to the narrative. Nevertheless, seafarers (as the Israelites are called repeatedly), the cloud as a covering, and sailing ships are included in both of these texts forming a parallel that seems too perfect for coincidence.

Roberta Frank posits another answer to the question of why seafaring imagery and the idea of the cloud as a covering seem to be formed with no connection to the narrative. She argues that the Anglo-Saxons had a “skaldic tooth”: a taste for Danish culture and art that influenced their daily lives including Anglo-Saxon poetic imagery.<sup>28</sup> Frank makes reference to letters from Alcuin and Ælfric (two religious leaders of the period) that rebuke Anglo-Saxons for adopting Danish hairstyles and leaving the customs of their fathers in

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<sup>27</sup> *DRB, Psalms* 106: 23 - 26

<sup>28</sup> Roberta Frank “Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences have a Skaldic Tooth?,” *Scandinavian Studies* vol. 59, No. 3 (1987): 350.

favor of those of the pagans. She also makes mention of art work that has “isolated details” of Skaldic imagery within dominantly Anglo-Saxon works. Citing Jónsson, Roberta Frank continues her argument in demonstrating that the metaphors surrounding the cloud covering seem to be quite similar to Norse descriptive metaphors:<sup>29</sup>

Some Skaldic Shield Kennings:

Bælc “board” (73)	<i>vígbolkr, viðris bolkr</i>
Net “net” (74)	<i>odnet, hjornet, geirnet</i>
Wolcen “cloud” (75)	<i>rógský, þundarský, Yggjar tjald</i>
Segl “sail” (81)	<i>rógsegl, Hlakkar segl, naglfara segl</i>
Feldhus “tent” (85)	<i>vígtjald, gunntjald, Yggjar tjald</i>

This useful comparison chart pairs comparable Norse metaphors with their equivalent from the Old English *Exodus*. As Neckel explains:<sup>30</sup>

To an audience familiar with the common shield-kenning type represented above by *Viðris bolkr* “Odin’s board,” *Þundarský* “Odin’s cloud,” and *Yggjar tjald* “Odin’s tent,” the Old English poets replacement of Odin with God (lines 71, 80) would have been pointed and unmistakable. The pillar of cloud, envisaged as a divine shield, supplants its counterpart in Norse mythology the sun god’s shield called *Svol* “the cooling” that kept the world from bursting into flame.

<sup>29</sup> Finnur Jónsson, “Edda Snorra Sturlusonar,” (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1931), 665; Finnur Jónsson, “Den Norsk- islandske” *Gyldendalske Boghandel*, (1912): 225.

<sup>30</sup> Gustav Neckel, *Edda I*, (C. Winter, 1927), 65.

This argument is fascinating. The parallels between the stylistic techniques of the English and Norse are well established, and it is possible that they are the primary reason for the type of metaphors present in this section. However, certain metaphorical leaps seem easy enough to make independently without needing to borrow from another culture. Not to mention, the argument would be far more convincing if an Old English translation of one of the Norse expressions in the second column above appeared in the text since these expressions contain overtly pagan imagery. Quite the opposite, none of the Old English expressions listed is necessarily religious at all; though one can impart significance to them based on context.

In the case of these metaphors, clouds do, in fact, function as a shield from the heat of the desert sun. Therefore, using metaphors that capture the idea of clouds as God's shields or tents is a logical step in imagery. Both Norse and Anglo-Saxon cultures were deeply rooted in warfare making the idea that weapon based imagery is only to be initially associated with one or the other preposterous. For example, Irving suggests that God's sword (*alde mece*) is likely taken from *Psalms 7:13*.<sup>31</sup> The one image that does pose more of a problem is the "net" of line seventy-four.<sup>32</sup> Christian imagery does not commonly invoke an image of a net as a symbol of protection, although, the net is a common image of salvation and evangelism in the Christian tradition. The most famous example is Jesus gathering his initial disciples by calling to a group of fishermen to cast their empty nets on the opposite side of the boat where they then bring in a full catch. Jesus tells them, "come ye after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men" establishing the image of the net and

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<sup>31</sup> E. B. Irving, "Exodus Retraced" in *Old English Studies in Honor of John C. Pope* ed. R.B. Burlin & E. B. Irving, (1974) pp. 203 – 223, p. 206; *Exodus*, p. 139, ln. 495.

<sup>32</sup> *Exodus*, 88.

fishing as metaphors for the salvific process.<sup>33</sup> The fact that this imposition of New Testament salvific imagery is intentionally applied by the author is demonstrated by the end of the text in a conclusion that is quite homiletic:

wile meagollice    modum tæcan,  
þæt we gesne ne syn    Godes þeodscipes,  
Metodes miltsa    He us ma onlyhð,  
nu us boceras    beteran secgað,  
lengran lyftwynna.    Ðis is læne dream...<sup>34</sup>

earnestly desire to teach the soul,  
that we do not lack God's fellowship,  
of the Lord's kindness He grants us more,  
now we writers better report,  
longer joy in heaven. This is a passing joy...

As one can see, the metaphor for salvation solidifies into a direct speech about how the Israelite experience of leaving Egypt is a form of salvation. Following this section directly is a lengthy discussion of final judgment to act as a foil for the benefits of salvation and to

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<sup>33</sup> *DRB, Mathew* 4:19.

<sup>34</sup> *Exodus*, p. 143 ln. 527 – 532.

more clearly confirm that the salvation mentioned in the passage above is by no means a purely physical one but, rather, a spiritual communion with God.

*The Connection of Ethiopia, the Biblical Exodus Narrative and the Psalms*

One piece of *Exodus* that has confused many translators and scholars is the reference to Cush, “*Sigelwara land*” (most likely the upper Nile region often translated “Ethiopia”).<sup>35</sup>

There is no connection between this people group explicitly stated in *Exodus* and the reason for its inclusion is obscure enough that Lucas even noted:

The land of the Ethiopians is not mentioned in Ex. [the Biblical narrative] nor anywhere else in connection with the exodus so far as is known. Its introduction here is probably largely a matter of literary convenience since it provides exactly the right kind of exotic setting in which to describe the cloud-cover which merges into the cloud pillar...<sup>36</sup>

Lucas believes that this piece of African geography is only inserted to add a little more novelty to the setting since, Lucas suggests, “*Sigelwara*, lit. “sun-dwellers,” is probably the result of popular etymology since traditions about the intense heat of Ethiopia were well-known.”<sup>37</sup> At most, the note posits that the reference is to set the stage for a later discussion of Moses’s wife’s ethnicity. Lucas seems quite certain that there is no connection between *Exodus* and outside sources.

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<sup>35</sup> *Exodus*, p. 87, ln. 69; *O.E.E.*, p. 42

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* p. 87

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*

However, a clear connection between the *Exodus* narrative and the psalms can be found on this point in *Psalms 67*:

*Venient legati ex Aegypto; Aethiopia praeveniet manus ejus Deo. Regna terrae, cantate Deo; psallite Domino; psallite Deo. Qui ascendit super caelum caeli, ad orientem: ecce dabit voci suae vocem virtutis. Date gloriam Deo super Israel; magnificentia ejus et virtus ejus in nubibus.*<sup>38</sup>

Ambassadors shall come out of Egypt: Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God. Sing to God, ye kingdoms of the earth: sing ye to the Lord: sing ye to God, who mounteth above the heaven of heavens, to the east. Behold he will give to his voice the voice of power: give ye glory to God for Israel, his magnificence, and his power is in the clouds.

Here we see “Ethiopia” (translated “Cush” in some more contemporary translations) referenced in a psalm that is heavily steeped in imagery from the *Exodus* narrative. Both in this psalm and in the poem, the Ethiopians are depicted as being conquered with the support of God’s power displayed in the pillar of fire. One can also see God’s power residing “in the clouds” in this psalm, reminding the reader of the pillar of cloud leading the Israelite wanderers as well as the image of the cloud pillar forming a covering and protecting the Israelites from the local peoples, including the Ethiopians. The connections to *Exodus* are even stronger earlier in this psalm where imagery such as,

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<sup>38</sup> DRB, *Psalms 67:32 – 35*.

*Deus, cum egredereris in conspectu populi tui, cum pertransires in deserto, Terra mota est, etenim caeli distillaverunt, a facie Dei Sinai, a facie Dei Israel.*<sup>39</sup>

O God, when thou didst go forth in the sight of thy people, when thou didst pass through the desert: The earth was moved, and the heavens dropped at the presence of the God of Sinai, at the presence of the God of Israel.

These verses from the same psalm explicitly reference the departure of the Israelites from Egypt escorted by the pillars of fire and cloud leaving no doubt to the connection. Further, the theme of *Psalms 67* as a whole is one of the salvific promise of God and fits in nicely with the Anglo-Saxon idea (mentioned above) that the Israelite journey is one of spiritual as well as physical salvation as emphasized by the ship's mast representing a cross and the travel through the sea as a figurative baptism. Though one can only guess the exact reason the "Exodus" poet might have used this psalm as a source, the uniqueness of the connection between Ethiopia/Cush and *Exodus* is enough by itself to make the use of this psalm a formidable contender among the potential sources for the poem.

Scholars have noted some further connections of imagery to that of the Psalms. Irving<sup>40</sup> notes that Psalms 105:18 bares some resemblance to *Exodus*: "*Et exarsit ignis in synagoga eorum, flamma combussit peccatores*" (And a fire was kindled in their

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<sup>39</sup> *DRB, Psalms 67: 8 – 9.*

<sup>40</sup> Irving, E.B., "Exodus Retraced" in *Old English Studies in Honor of John C. Pope* ed. R.B. Burlin and E.B. Irving (1974), 206-207.



congregation: the flame burned the wicked).<sup>41</sup> Irving posits that this language parallels the burning by the pillar of fire of the border peoples that threaten the Israelites:

...belegsan hweop  
in þam hereþreate,     hatan lige,  
þæt he on westenne     werod forbærnde<sup>42</sup>

... terror of fire  
in that army-troup, hot flames,  
that he in the wilderness burned the people with

Irving also provides a list of further connections in imagery between the *Exodus* narrative and the Psalms:

God's powerful right hand is mentioned in a dozen places; freeing of the (chained) prisoner is often described (e.g. Ps 106:14, 115:16, 145:7); Gods protective tent or *tabernaculum* (cf "*feldhusa mæst*," Exo 85) appears several times (e.g. Ps 26:5, 60:5). The metaphor of the *via*, the spiritual road or path (cf "*lifweg*," 104) is common: the psalmist begs God to lead him in *via aeterna*" (Ps 138:24), and pleads "*dirige me in semitam rectam*" (Ps 26:11), even though God's way may lead through unexpected places (*in mari via tua*,

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<sup>41</sup> *DRB, Psalms* 105:18.

<sup>42</sup> *Exodus*, p. 95, ln. 121b – 123.

*et semitae tuae in auis multis,”* Ps 76:20). But God has made roads known to Moses (Ps 102:7).

... the “*suðwind*” (289) as a manifestation of divine power appears in Psalm 77:26...<sup>43</sup>

This extensive list, though brief in explanation of each connection, is impressive in its quantity of connections and is likely the largest list of possible connections between *Exodus* and the Psalms produced thus far. These references are in addition to the description of the cloud as a covering, mentioned earlier, that was shown to be mirrored well in Psalm 104:

*Quoniam abscondit me in tabernaculo suo;  
in die malorum protexit me in abscondito tabernaculi sui.*

For he hath hidden me in his tabernacle;  
in the day of evils, he hath protected me in the secret place of his tabernacle.

*Inhabitabo in tabernaculo tuo in saecula;  
protegar in velamento alarum tuarum.*<sup>44</sup>

In thy tabernacle I shall dwell forever:  
I shall be protected under the covert of thy wings.

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<sup>43</sup>Irving, E.B., “Exodus Retraced” in *Old English Studies in Honor of John C. Pope* ed. R.B. Burlin and E.B. Irving (1974): 206 – 207.

<sup>44</sup> *DRB, Psalms* 26: 5, 60:5.

In both of these cases, we see images that resemble the idea of God providing a physical covering as a metaphor for spiritual or emotional protection, which is what many view the description in *Exodus* to be doing. Though one must admit that the similarity of language between these two psalms and the poem is much less clear than that of *Psalms* 104.

However, there are still a couple more connections to the *Psalms* to consider.

The remaining two intersections between the *Psalms* and *Exodus* are based in the phrasing of selected passages. Lucas points out that “*scean scirwerod*” [it (the pillar) shown brightly clad] of line 125 is, “Probably taken from Psalm 103:2, “*amictus lumine*” (cloaked in light), where it refers to the Lord. This allusion lends support to the suggestion that *he* refers to God represented in the form of the pillar.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, this piece being derived from the *Psalms* is not only possible because of similar phrasing but also clarifies the meaning of a section if one assumes the subject of the phrase is the same in both cases. Similarly, Helder compares “*rihte stræte*” in line 126 to the phrasing of Psalm 106, “*Et deduxit eos in viam rectam, ut irent in civitatem habitationis*” (And he led them into the right way: that they might go to a city of habitation).<sup>46</sup>

The parallel here is with “*viam rectum*” shares the meaning of “right way/road” with “*rihte stræte*.” The phrasing here does not reveal as much about the intent of the poet as the previous example but one can see how it could be once again tying into the recurring theme of the Israelite journey as a salvific one. Also, this is taken from the same psalm as the seafaring imagery discussed earlier and that is filled with images of the breaking of bonds that Irving pointed out as a commonly emphasized theme in the *Psalms*.

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<sup>45</sup> *Exodus*, p. 95, ln. 123.

<sup>46</sup> *DRB, Psalms* 106:7; W. Helder, “Etham and the Ethiopians in the Old English *Exodus*,” *Annuaire Mediaevale* xvi (1975): 5-23.

*Further Motivation for Using the Psalms as a Primary Source*

I have discussed the idea that the poem references the *Psalms* in order to enhance the allegory of the Israelite journey as a spiritual journey to salvation as a distinct possibility but thus far the argument has been largely self-contained within the poem. Fortunately, it is not the case that the only rationale for this argument is internal evidence. As Irving notes:

Bright's important article proposing the Holy Saturday or Easter Eve baptismal service as an important source for *Exodus* (the scriptural readings in this service not only containing the Red Sea narrative but also the stories of Noah's flood and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac) has received recent support...<sup>47</sup>

Being associated with either of these two liturgies is excellent outside support for the poem as a piece concerning baptism and salvation. The gathering together of Christians to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus is a tradition dating back to the first century. Holy Saturday is the first of the two liturgical celebrations relevant to this poem and is intended to be a time of reflection on the death of Christ the day before Easter Sunday. The darkness of this reflection transforms into a celebration of new life during the Easter Vigil (the second important liturgical moment for the poem), since the Easter Vigil reminds believers of the resurrection and fulfillment of the messianic prophesy. Part of the Easter vigil is the singing of the Exultet which links the resurrection with the Passover: the night

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<sup>47</sup> E.B. Irving, "Exodus Retraced" in *Old English Studies in Honor of John C. Pope* ed. R.B. Burlin & E.B. Irving, p. 206, 1974.

the first born of Israel were spared and, probably not coincidentally, the introductory portion of *Exodus*. Further, part of the Easter ceremony was to baptize new converts, which coincides nicely with the baptismal imagery of the Red Sea crossing.

Both liturgies from the previous articles are cooperative pieces in telling the story of the salvific process through the applied example of God's faithfulness to Israel in their time of slavery. These liturgies include the same biblical references and would therefore act as the rationale for the poet's choice of sources. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to tell for sure whether this means the poet wanted to present a retelling of the Biblical *Exodus* with the theme of salvation in mind and then pulled from his knowledge of the liturgy or whether the opposite is true and an exposition of the liturgy happened to be best achieved through the Biblical *Exodus* narrative. So, deciding which text is the original source might be difficult. Before concluding that the images of *Exodus* are taken from these liturgies, it is important to consider, that J. W. Bright came to a similar conclusion and was met with some resistance. Lucas comments that Bright's theory,

...falls far short of proof. All we can say is that, especially as the poem reflects a knowledge of the wording of the *Exultet* from the liturgy for Holy Saturday, the grouping of the readings in relation to the theme of the service may have provided a source of inspiration for the poem... Some investigators have tried to find a source for the poem in a specific form of the liturgy or parts of it, but these events too fall short of proof.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Exodus*, p. 60.

Therefore, the liturgy is a plausible inspiration for the poem and, even more likely, a source for the verse and format of the poem but is not, according to Lucas, in any way proven to be the sole inspiration for the poem. Even still, it is important to remember that the Anglo-Saxons did not draw these boundaries so clearly and would not have distinguished between very careful between the *Psalms*, liturgy, homily, or exegesis. Even though it is difficult to prove that *Exodus* is pulled entirely from the psalms we have discussed because of a certain liturgy remains unproven, however, we can be confident that the *Psalms* these liturgies are partially compiled from are source material for the poet.

### *Conclusion*

What has been posited throughout this thesis are several possible origins for the rich and often unusual imagery of the Biblical *Exodus*. Though scholars have made convincing arguments that point to these various texts as inspirations for the poet, it seems clear that the *Psalms* make up a more substantial portion of the connections between the poem and texts not from the biblical book of *Exodus* itself. These connections vary spatially, formally and thematically and give the impression that the poet was pulling inspiration from many parts of the Psalms and not just an isolated incidence. The purpose of this was likely to cause the reader or hearer to reimagine the Biblical *Exodus* narrative as a metaphor from the time of the old law for the salvation offered through the sacrificial death of Jesus. This may have been accomplished, at least in part, by reminding the reader of one or more liturgies that center on the same subject matter and overall salvific theme.

Further, though the other possible sources for the imagery and message of the text, such as pagan influences, could be true in addition to the relevance of the *Psalms*; it seems

unlikely that they are true instead of the *Psalms*. After weighing the evidence provided in this study, it seems clear that the *Psalms* are a co-primary source with a couple of other important texts at the very least but that they are more likely the most dominant source for the poem. The many places where imagery seems to have been directly taken from the *Psalms* also make an argument for the poem as a patchwork of Christian and pagan images less straightforward. Though it is possible that the poet was somehow influenced by Norse imagery, there is enough evidence here to show that available Christian imagery is enough by itself to furnish the scenes in the poem. The *Psalms*, though possibly filtered through the liturgy, are all the poet needed to develop the rich imagery of *Exodus*.

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