

The Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England

B.EP.301

Term:	Winter 2019/2020	Instructor:	P. S. Langeslag
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Module credits:	6 (including lecture course)	Office hours:	Tue 11–12
Prerequisites:	B.EP.204	E-mail:	planges@uni-goettingen.de

Course Description

For all the importance of the New Testament to the liturgy and salvation history, the text of the Old Testament was clearly of great interest to the pre-Conquest English. It is the stories of the Hebrew Bible, more so than the gospels, that survive in imposing works of alliterative verse. Ælfric of Eynsham, the period's most productive homilist, frequently turned to Old Testament narrative as well, despite strong reservations about disclosing this difficult material to the general public. In this course, we will seek to discover what drew early English authors and preachers to the Old Testament.

To this end, we will brush up on patriarchal commentaries and Scripture itself, but above all we will translate a range of excerpts from Old English prose and verse inspired by the narratives of the Hebrew–Aramaic Bible. Navigating homilies, commentaries, and verse retellings, we will address such matters as typology, heroism, foundation myths, and gender, while adducing manuscripts, illustrations, and liturgy. Students will gain a familiarity with Old Testament narrative and its medieval exegesis, but above all they will develop an insight into the minds and imaginations of early English clerics and poets who saw a market for these texts.

Assessment

Written exam (90 minutes), covering the lecture course as well as this seminar.

Required Texts and Resources

Texts for this course will be made available on StudIP.

As part of this course, students are expected to familiarize themselves with the most influential passages of the Old Testament. You may use any leading translation, provided it contains the apocryphal or deuterocanonical books, such as Judith. Anyone looking to purchase an anglophone Bible of their own may want to consider the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* for its extensive notes. Also deserving of special mention is the nineteenth-century Douay-Rheims translation: though it doesn't read as well as current translations, it is the most recent English translation based not on the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek but on the Vulgate Latin Bible that was in widespread use in the Middle Ages. You can find a scan of a citable print edition at archive.org; for casual consultation, you may use one of its web incarnations, such as catholicbible.online, or one of the mobile apps. The leading edition of the Latin Vulgate itself is the "Stuttgart Bible," available in the [Theologicum Library](http://TheologicumLibrary) or online:

Weber, Robert, ed. *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*. 5th ed. rev. by Roger Gryson. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007. <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de>.

Students are advised to refresh their memory of the following passages and books:

Gn 1–2	Creation	Ex 3–4	Moses and the burning bush
Gn 3	Fall of Man	Ex 3–12	Ten plagues of Egypt
Gn 4	Killing of Abel	Ex 12	Passover and Exodus
Gn 6–8	Noah's Flood	Ex 14	Crossing of the Red Sea
Gn 11	Tower of Babel	Ex 20	Ten Commandments
Gn 12–21	Abraham and Sarah	Jo 6	Fall of Jericho
Gn 18–19	Sodom and Gomorrah	Jgs 13–16	Samson and Delilah
Gn 19	Lot	1 Kgs 3	Solomon and the newborn baby
Gn 22	Abraham and Isaac	Jdt	Judith
Gn 27	Isaac's blessing of Jacob	Jb	Job
Gn 37–45	Joseph	Jon	Jonah
		Dn	Daniel

Key: *Dn* Daniel; *Gn* Genesis; *Ex* Exodus; *Jb* Job; *Jdt* Judith; *Jgs* Judges; *Jn* John; *Jo* Joshua; *Jon* Jonah; *1 Kgs* 1 Kings.
 NB 1 Kings is called 3 Kings in any Bible that counts four books of Kings.

Schedule

Wk	Date	Topic	Readings
1	22 Oct	Concepts & Language Refresher	
2	29 Oct	Translation & Mediacy	Ælfric, "Prefatio to Genesis," ll. 1–46 (ed. Marsden); Wilcox, "A Reluctant Translator"
3	5 Nov	Patristics & Typology	Gregory, <i>Dialogues</i> (excerpt; trans. Zimmerman); Napier 1 down to p. 3 l. 11; Ohly, "Vom geistigen Sinn des Wortes im Mittelalter," at least pp. 1–19; <i>or</i> Ohly, "Spiritual Sense," at least pp. 1–12
4	12 Nov	Religious Prose	Napier 1 from p. 3 l. 11 to end; Anderson, "The Old Testament Homily"
5	19 Nov	Creation	Gn 1–2; Jn 11–5; Augustine, <i>The City of God</i> (excerpt; trans. Wiesen); Ælfric, <i>Hexameron</i> (trans. Norman); Riddle 66 (ed. Krapp and Dobbie)
6	26 Nov	The Fall of Angels and Man	Gn 3; <i>Genesis B</i> (i.e. ll. 235–851, trans. Anlezark); <i>Beowulf</i> ll. 74–114 (ed. Mitchell and Robinson)
7	3 Dec	<i>Quid Hinieldus cum Christo?</i> (What does Ingeld have to do with Christ?)	Gn 14; <i>Genesis A</i> ll. 1960–2017 (ed. Anlezark); Zacher, "Preface"; Horowitz, "Beowulf, Samson, David and Christ"
8	10 Dec	<i>Exodus</i>	Ex 3–12; <i>Exodus</i> ll. 41b–85 (eds. Tolkien and Turville-Petre); Remley, <i>Biblical Verse</i> , 168–175
9	17 Dec	The Crossing of the Red Sea	Ex 13–14; <i>Exodus</i> ll. 98–141, 446–462
10	7 Jan	<i>Daniel</i>	Dn 1–5; <i>Daniel</i> ll. 495–573 (ed. Farrell)
11	14 Jan	Apocrypha	Jdt 1–13; <i>Judith</i> ll. 7b–54a (ed. Griffith)
12	21 Jan	Formulae & Conventions	Jdt 14–16; <i>Judith</i> ll. 54b–111a
13	28 Jan	Wrap-Up	(<i>Judith</i>); Godden, "Old Testament"
14	7 Feb	EXAM	

Reading Questions

In your weekly readings, please take notes on anything worth discussing, with special attention to the following questions.

· *Ælfric, Preface to Genesis:*

- What can we deduce from the fact that Ælfric's patron already has the second half of Genesis in his possession? What might Ælfric have thought when he read this?
- What dangers of translation does Ælfric outline? Can you think of anything in modern life where direct access brings with it analogous dangers?
- What is the role of priests in Ælfric's argument?

· **Wilcox:**

- What explanations have been adduced for the apparent fact that Ælfric continued to translate Old Testament content despite repeated vows he would no longer do so? What is Wilcox's explanation?

· **Gregory and Napier 1:**

- What can you say about the format in which Gregory writes? Have you seen it anywhere else?
- Can you think of any possible literary sources or connections of the dungeon simile?
- What threefold division of Creation does Gregory introduce? What does this say about his world view? Can you name any traditions that take a radically different view of creation?
- How does the translator modify the simile of the dungeon? What effect does this have?

· **Ohly:**

- How does Ohly understand Richard of St-Victor's assertion that "not only words, but things too are significative"?
- What is the role of the seven liberal arts (i.e. the curriculum of the high Middle Ages) in the interpretation of the spiritual senses of things?
- How is it possible for the same thing to have both positive and negative meaning?
- What three spiritual senses were distinguished, and how are they defined? What example does Ohly adduce to explain the four senses of Scripture?

· **Anderson:**

- What does it mean that Gatch "stipulated a liturgical context" for Ælfric's Old Testament homilies? And what does it mean that the texts discussed in Anderson's essay are "non-liturgical" (121)?
- What, then, was the purpose of these "non-liturgical narrative pieces" according to Anderson?
- What does it mean that early English translators of Old Testament narrative saw fit to downplay or omit episodes embarrassing its protagonists?
- What do lists of royal genealogy suggest about the relevance of Old Testament narrative?
- What political message does Anderson see in Ælfric's treatment of the Books of Samuel and Kings?
- What narrative strategy is served by the omission of Deborah from Ælfric's adaptation of the Book of Judges?
- If Ælfric omitted two of the women in Samson's life from his retelling of the Book of Judges, why did he keep Delilah?

· **Augustine:**

- Why does Augustine need to explain the origin of angels? How does he solve this question?
- What difficulty does he see with the proposition that the angels who were to fall were initially perfectly happy? How does he resolve this?

· *Ælfric, Hexameron:*

- At what time of year does Ælfric (or his source, St Basil) say the world was created? How do you imagine theologians arrived at this conclusion?
- When are Lucifer and his associates cast out of heaven? What logical relationship does Ælfric (or St Basil) see between this event and the creation of humankind?
- Explain the paradox in the assertion that the creation of the world was "ever from the beginning in [God's] everlasting design."
- What case does Ælfric (St Basil) make against life on earth being pleasant enough? Could you have come up with a stronger case arguing the same position?

- **Riddle 66:**
 - Can you solve this riddle?
 - Who might have written riddles like this one, and with what audiences in mind?
- **Genesis B:**
 - How would you describe Lucifer/Satan as a literary character? Can you think of other works of literature that depict him in this way? Can you think of other literary characters of similar personalities?
 - Do you feel the poet blames Eve more or less than is done in the biblical account?
 - The poem may be read in its manuscript context at <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/p/d5e3a9fc-abaa-4649-ae48-be207ce8da15> (or run a web search for “caedmon manuscript digital bodleian”), pp. 13–40 (images 21–48). Study the illustrations accompanying the text and make a note of at least one thing that strikes you as worth observing or discussing in class.
- **Beowulf:**
 - To what typological readings does the creation of the hall Heorot lend itself?
 - Who is *se þe cūðe* (l. 90b), who are the *drihtguman* (l. 99), and who is *ān* (l. 100)?
 - What theological argument does the poet advance in lines 106–114?
- **Genesis A:**
 - Who are the four kings from the north and the five kings from the south? What associations would these geographical references have had in early medieval England? Do we know when this poem was composed? How does the date of the poem inform our understanding of ll. 1976–1981?
 - Underline any words that you feel contribute to the poet’s particular take on the biblical episode. How would you describe their adaptation compared to the biblical account?
- **Zacher:**
 - What explanations have been adduced for an identification of the early English with the Israelites?
 - How does Zacher’s understanding of this identification differ from that of other scholars, such as Howe?
 - What makes early English depictions of ancient Israel ambivalent?
- **Horowitz:**
 - What close similarities does the author find between Samson and Beowulf?
 - What connects Beowulf with David?
- **Exodus:**
 - Line 58 (“enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad”) also occurs in *Beowulf*. What do you suppose we can infer from this fact?
 - What divine aid do the fleeing nation receive in the biblical account? How is this changed in the poem? Why might that be?
 - In l. 105, the Israelites are referred to as *sæmen* “sailors.” Why are they called this here, and what connotations did such words come to carry in the course of the Old English period? When was *Exodus* composed, and how does its dating inform our reading of descriptions of this kind?
- **Remley:**
 - What is the connection between the Exodus narrative and baptism?
 - What two other Old Testament narratives does the Old English verse *Exodus* interpolate, and why?
 - What does Remley propose about the sources of the poem?
- **Daniel:**
 - What associations do trees have in any traditional cultures with which you may be familiar?
 - What is the point of Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation?
- **Judith:**
 - How would you describe the opening scene (ll. 7b–34)?
 - How would you describe Judith and her role in the narrative? Choose at least three adjectives.
- **Godden:**
 - What reasons does Godden believe the early English may have had to identify with the Israelites? Which ones do you find the most compelling, and why?

- After reading Godden and our other readings this term, how would you describe the function(s) of the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament) for early English religious communities?
- What did early medieval scholars understand to be the function of the tree of knowledge of good and evil?
- How do medieval works the likes of *Beowulf* explain the existence of monsters?
- Why would early English lawmakers look to the Old Testament to justify their work?

Diversity Statement

This course is run with the understanding that students bring a variety of backgrounds into the classroom in such domains as socioeconomics, appearance, culture, religion, disability, gender, age, family situation, and sexual identity. With different backgrounds come different needs. If you feel your needs or those of a fellow student require special attention or are being compromised, please feel free to make this known to me by whatever channel seems most appropriate. (For more serious concerns, the Department, Faculty, and University each have their own points of contact as well.) I will treat all requests seriously and with confidentiality, and will seek to make accommodations within my abilities and reason. At the same time, you too owe it to your fellow students to treat them with respect regardless of their background, identity, and identity expression.

Course Readings

- Anderson, Rachel. "The Old Testament Homily: Ælfric as Biblical Translator." In *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice, and Appropriation*, edited by Aaron J. Kleist, 121–42. *Studies in the Early Middle Ages* 17. Turnhout: Brepols, 2007.
- Anlezark, Daniel, ed. and trans. "Daniel." In *Narratives*, 247–299.
- , ed. and trans. "Exodus." In *Narratives*, 205–245.
- , ed. and trans. "Genesis." In *Narratives*, 1–203.
- Farrell, R. T., ed. *"Daniel" and "Azarias."* London: Methuen, 1974.
- Godden, Malcolm. "Biblical Literature: Old Testament." In *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, edited by Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, 206–25. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Griffith, Mark, ed. *Judith*. Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997.
- Horowitz, Sylvia Huntley. "Beowulf, Samson, David and Christ." *Studies in Medieval Culture* 12 (1978): 17–23.
- Krapp, George Philip, and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds. "66." In *The Exeter Book*, 230–231. Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 3. 1936. [Provided as an excerpt handout.]
- Marsden, Richard. "Prefatio to Genesis." In *Heptateuch*, vol. 1: *Introduction and Text*, 3–7.
- Mitchell, Bruce, and Fred C. Robinson, eds. *Beowulf: An Edition with Relevant Shorter Texts*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998.
- Napier, Arthur, ed. "I." In *Wulfstan*, 1–5. *Sammlung englischer Denkmäler* 4. Berlin: Weidmann, 1883.
- Norman, Henry W., ed. and trans. *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Hexameron of St. Basil*. 2nd ed. London: John Russell Smith, 1849. [Read pp. 1–19, odd pages.]
- Ohly, Friedrich. "On the Spiritual Sense of the Word in the Middle Ages." In *Sensus Spiritualis: Studies in Medieval Significs and the Philology of Culture*, 1–30. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005. [Or read the German original.]
- . "Vom geistigen Sinn des Wortes im Mittelalter." *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, no. 89 (1958–1959): 1–23. [Or read the English translation. NB that only the English article provides translations of Latin quotations.]
- Remley, Paul G. "Exodus and the Liturgy of Baptism." In *Biblical Verse*, 168–230.
- Tolkien, J. R. R., and Joan Turville-Petre, eds. *The Old English "Exodus."* Oxford: Clarendon, 1981.
- Wiesen, David S., ed. and trans. *Saint Augustine: The City of God Against the Pagans*. Vol. 3. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988. [Read pp. 457–483, odd pages.]

- Wilcox, Jonathan. "A Reluctant Translator in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Maccabees." *Enarratio* 2 (1993): 1–18.
- Zacher, Samantha. "Preface: Becoming the Chosen People." In *Rewriting the Old Testament*, x–xix.
- Zimmerman, Odo John, trans. *Saint Gregory the Great: Dialogues*. New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950. [Read pp. 189–192.]

Containing Volumes and Further Reading

- Anlezark, Daniel, ed. and trans. *Old Testament Narratives*. Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Doane, A. N., ed. *Genesis A: A New Edition*. Rev. ed. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013.
- , ed. *The Saxon Genesis: An Edition of the West Saxon "Genesis B" and the "Old Saxon Vatican Genesis"*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.
- Fox, Michael, and Manish Sharma, eds. *Old English Literature and the Old Testament*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012.
- Fulk, R. D., and Christopher M. Cain. "Biblical Literature." In *A History of Old English Literature*, 2nd ed., 157–76. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- Hall, J. R. "Old English *Exodus* and the Sea of Contradiction." *Mediaevalia* 9 (1983): 25–44.
- . "The Old English Epic of Redemption: The Theological Unity of MS Junius 11." *Traditio* 32 (1976): 185–208.
- Hill, Thomas D. "The Fall of Angels and Man in the Old English *Genesis B*." In *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, edited by Lewis A. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese, 279–90. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975.
- Howe, Nicholas. *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Karkov, Catherine. *Text and Picture in Anglo-Saxon England: Narrative Strategies in the Junius 11 Manuscript*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Lucas, Peter J., ed. *Exodus*. London: Methuen, 1977.
- Marsden, Richard. "The Bible in English in the Middle Ages." In *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, edited by Susan Boynton and Diane J. Reilly, 272–95. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- . *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de veteri testamento et novo*. Vol. 1: *Introduction and Text*. Early English Text Society 330. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- . *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England*. Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 15. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Orchard, Andy. "Conspicuous Heroism: Abraham, Prudentius, and the Old English Verse *Genesis*." In *Heroes and Heroines in Medieval English Literature: a Festschrift Presented to André Crépin on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, edited by Leo Carruthers, 45–58. Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: Brewer, 1994.
- Raith, Josef. "Ælfric's Share in the Old English Pentateuch." *Review of English Studies* n.s. 3, no. 12 (October 1952): 305–14.
- Remley, Paul G. *Old English Biblical Verse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Wood, Ian. "Who Are the Philistines? Bede's Reading of Old Testament Peoples." In *The Resources of the Past in Early Medieval Europe*, edited by Clemens Gantner, Rosamond McKitterick, and Sven Meeder, 172–187. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Zacher, Samantha. *Rewriting the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon Verse: Becoming the Chosen People*. New Directions in Religion and Literature. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.