4. Rome away from Rome: India, Rome, and England in Ælfric's 'Life of St Thomas'

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England and Rome

No individual place loomed larger in the early medieval English imagination than Rome. The eternal city, the source of both English Christianity and early medieval English dreams of empire, was ever-present in English texts and culture. It was from Rome, after all, that the pallium, papal decrees, and the Augustinian mission were carried over to English shores; from Roman foundations that many walled English towns such as Winchester were built; and from Rome that England would inherit the secular power, learning, and cultural achievements of the Roman empire via *translatio studii et imperii*.[1] Yet despite Rome's importance and

[1] A wealth of previous scholarship has sought to explore the close connection between England and Rome, and to highlight a sense of 'special relationship' between the two that endured over the centuries. For the eighth century, see Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth* Century, pp. 15–44; in the ninth century see Pengelley, 'Rome in Ninth-Century Anglo-Saxon England'; in the tenth and eleventh centuries see Ortenberg, *English Church and the Continent in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*, pp. 127–97. For the Anglo-Roman relationship more generally, see Howe, 'Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England' and Tinti, 'Introduction'. For the pallium see Matthews, *The Road to Rome*, pp. 67–69; Tinti, 'The Archiepiscopal Pallium in Late Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 307–42. For Roman walls and foundations in the early English landscape see Bintley, *Settlements and Strongholds in Early Medieval England* and Atherton, *Making of England*, p. 40. For *translatio imperii* and *studii*, see Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, pp. 28–9. For the resonances of these concepts in early medieval England, see Irvine, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Idea of Rome in Alfredian Literature', pp. 63–78. For the concept of *translatio imperii* in the ASC, see Leneghan, '*Translatio Imperii*: The Old English *Orosius* and the Rise of Wessex', pp. 664–66. For Rome's role in the art and

constant presence in English thought, there was a considerable geographical and cultural distance between the two places. Whilst Rome stood at the centre of Christendom, England was frequently depicted as peripheral by Classical sources, and this sense of a marginalized England persisted throughout the early medieval period in the works of English writers and cartographers.[2] This chapter examines the way that Ælfric of Eynsham, one of the most prolific writers and teachers of the tenth century, navigated the distance between his homeland and Rome in his *Life of St Thomas*.[3]

In his works, Ælfric often remarked on England's position at the geographic periphery, and on the fact that this peripheral location made it difficult for the English to replicate the practices of their Continental Christian counterparts. In his homily *On the Prayer of Moses* (part of the *Lives of Saints*) he describes England as being 'on uteweardan þære eorðan bradnysse' (at the extremity of the earth's surface, l. 107), and suggests that consequently, the English cannot fast as easily as those who live 'tomiddes, on mægenfæstenum eardum' (in the middle [of the earth], in strong countries, l. 108).[4] Similarly, in his *Letter to the monks of Eynsham*, he mentions that monks may adjust their psalm recitals from the continental model in the summer, since the nights are shorter than in Italy: 'nos in Bryttannia degentes, breuiores noctes habentes estate Beneuentanis' (we who dwell in Britain, having shorter nights in the summer than those in Benevento).[5] For Ælfric, England's

architecture of Early Medieval England, see Hawkes, 'Design and Decoration: Re-visualizing Rome in Anglo-Saxon Sculpture', pp. 203–21; Ó Carragáin, 'The Periphery Rethinks the Centre: Inculturation, 'Roman' Liturgy and the Ruthwell Cross', pp. 63–83; Ó Carragáin, *The City of Rome and the World of Bede*. See also the chapters by Leneghan, Appleton and Ellis in this volume.

[2] On the way that this was portrayed in maps, see Michelet, 'Centrality, Marginality and Distance: Britain's Changing Location on the Map of the World'; Bridges, 'Of Myths and Maps: The Anglo-Saxon Cosmographer's Europe'; Appleton, 'The Northern World of the Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi*'. See also Appleton in this volume. On the difficulties of travel between England and Rome, see Matthews, *The Road to Rome*; Pelteret, 'Not All Roads Lead to Rome'. On the cultural difference between England and Rome, and the sense of England as peripheral, see Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces*, pp. 67–68; Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, pp. 27–45.

[3] For a summary of Ælfric's life and works, see Hill, 'Ælfric: His Life and Works'.

[4] All references to the *Lives of Saints* in this chapter are taken from *The Old English Lives of Saints*. Translations are my own.

[5] *Ælfric's Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, p. 138. For the relationship between England and Benevento, see Anlezark in this volume. Ælfric also refers to the difference in night length in his *De Temporibus Anni*, where he

geographical location not only positions the country at a physical remove from Rome, but also at a cultural distance, since certain aspects of Christian praxis were observed differently between the two places. These differences between English and Roman Christianity were clearly a source of some anxiety for Ælfric, and he is keen to assure his vernacular audiences that England and its Christianity are deserving of a place on the world stage.[6] He reassures his readers and listeners that their history is a venerable one, telling them that 'nis Angel-cynn bedæled Drihtnes halgena' (the English people are not deprived of the Lord's saints, *Life of Edmund* l. 247), and that 'þa ða þis ig-land wæs wunigende on sibbe […] ure word sprang wide geond þas eorðan' (when this island was living in peace […] our fame sprang widely across this earth, *On the Prayer of Moses*, ll. 148–51).[7] Yet even these assurances acknowledge that England, as an *ig-land*, exists on the periphery, and that, owing to this fact, the country might be expected not to benefit from the same relationship with the saints as places closer to the centre.

In his *Life of St Thomas*, a translation of the Latin *Passio S. Thomae* contained within the *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric confronts the challenged relationship between centre and periphery.[8] In the *Life*, the apostle Thomas builds a palace 'on Romansice wisan' (in the Roman style, ll. 39 and 79) in India, a place on the distant periphery of the early medieval

notes that 'on Italia, þæt is Romana rice, hæfð se dæg fiftyne tida. On Engla lande hæfð se lengsta dæg seofontyne tida' (in Italy, which is the kingdom of the Romans, that [longest] day has fifteen hours. In England the longest day has seventeen hours, ll. 268–69) *Ælfric's De Temporibus Anni*, pp. 86–88.

[6] On Ælfric's monastic and lay audiences for the *Lives of Saints*, see Cubitt, 'Ælfric's Lay Patrons'; Wilcox, 'The Audience of Ælfric's Lives of Saints and the Face of Cotton Caligula A XIV, fols 93–130'; Gulley, *The Displacement of the Body in Ælfric's Virgin Martyr Lives*, pp. 7–8.

[7] The phrase 'nis […] bedæled' ('not deprived') has been subject to widely varying interpretations in recent scholarship. See, for example, Fell, 'Saint Æðelþryð', p. 18; McKinney, 'Creating a Gens Anglorum', pp. 209–10; Hurley, 'Communities in Translation', pp. 60–61.

[8] The *Passio S. Thomae* (BHL 8136) was identified as the source material for the *Life of St Thomas* by Loomis, 'Further sources of Ælfric's Saints' lives'. See also Zettel, 'Ælfric's Hagiographic sources and the Latin Legendary Preserved in BL MS Cotton Nero E I + CCCC MS 9 and other manuscripts', pp. 259–62. The print edition closest to the version that Ælfric would have consulted in his version of the Cotton-Corpus Legendary is found in Mombritius, *Sanctuarium seu vitae sanctorum*, pp. 606–14. Page and line numbers given in this chapter correspond to Mombritius' edition. Quotes have been checked against the Cotton-Corpus versions in Hereford, Cathedral Library MS P 7 VI and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 354 for variant readings.

English world-view.[9] Through alterations that he made to his source material, Ælfric encourages his audiences to view India as a marginal and extremely foreign place, and as such emphasizes the country's distance from the Roman Christianity that Thomas is seeking to recreate there. By showing that the Roman palace has the power to transform the Indian landscape into a place of devout Christian sanctity, Ælfric demonstrates that the values and cultural heritage of places at the centre can be shared and replicated even on the edges of the world. In doing so, he uses India to explore the difficulties of mimicking Rome's practices in England.

The parallel that Ælfric draws between England and India relies on the sense that both were 'on uteweardan'. To some extent, the view of India as a place on the extreme geographic and cultural periphery already existed within the early medieval English textual tradition.[10] Texts such as the *Wonders of the East* and *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle* established the Easternmost parts of the known world as being full of strange creatures and exoticized wealth.[11] Such extreme strangeness, however, would have been contrary to Ælfric's purposes. He states in the Latin preface to the *Lives of Saints* that he wishes to present the text in a manner that is easily understood, and aligns the clarity of the text with its usefulness and instructiveness to its audience: 'diligenter curavimus vertere simplici et aperta locutione quatinus proficiat audientibus' (we have taken care to translate in a simple and clear style so that it will benefit listeners).[12] Though he is here referring to legibility of vernacular language and style, he was also concerned with clarity of content, and anything open to misinterpretation would have rendered a text un-useful in Ælfric's eyes in the same way that unclear language might have. As Malcolm Godden and Scott DeGregorio have noted, Ælfric

[9] Busbee, 'The Idea of India in Early Medieval England'. For the relationship between India and England, see the chapter by Anlezark, in this volume. For the literary depictions of India, see Thomson, also in this volume.
[10] Busbee, 'The Idea of India in Early Medieval England'.
[11] See the discussions of cynocephali and *Wonders of the East* by Simon Thomson in this volume.
[12] *Old English Lives of Saints*, vol. I, p. 4.

was concerned with the ideas of believability and authenticity, and consistently sought to combat the idea of *gedwyld* (error).[13] Within this framework, it would not have been suitable for Ælfric to include the strange monsters and miraculous happenings found in other Old English texts about distant places.

Instead, Ælfric utilizes subtle methods in order to convey the sense that the *Life of St Thomas* exists on the edge of the world. To this end, there are three main ways that he makes India seem foreign or strange to his audience: 1) the Latin preface; 2) the use of rare or unusual vocabulary; and 3) the admission of untranslatability. This chapter will demonstrate how each of these three aspects worked to highlight India's marginality, before exploring how Ælfric represented Thomas' productive recreation of Rome in such a peripheral place, and suggesting that this episode seeks to assure an early medieval English audience that their distance from Rome did not render their relationship with Roman Christianity any less powerful.

India as a place of periphery

Ælfric first alerts his audiences to the foreignness of the *Life of St Thomas*' setting through the text's preface, which not only represents a Latin disruption in an otherwise vernacular text, but also invokes the world of monsters through referencing a dog carrying a human hand. In this preface, Ælfric bemoans the fact that his patron, Æthelweard, has requested a vernacular version of the Latin Saint Thomas, and states his reasons for hesitating to translate this text in the past, namely that Augustine has renounced the text as apocryphal on the basis of an episode concerning 'niger canis' (a black dog). Though there is a Latin preface to the

[13] Godden, 'Ælfric's Saints' Lives and the Problem of Miracles'; DeGregorio, 'Ælfric, Gedwyld, and Vernacular Hagiography: Sanctity and Spirituality in the Old English Lives of SS Peter and Paul'.

Lives of Saints as a whole, the prefaces to individual items are always in the vernacular, and there are no other sustained pieces of Latin within the collection. The length and style of this preface set it apart from the rest of the *Lives of Saints*, and merit its quotation here in full:

> Dubitabam diu transferre anglice passionem sancti Thomae apostoli ex quibusdam causis, et maxime eo quod Augustinus magnus abnegat de illo pincerno cuius manum niger canis in convivium portare deberet. Cui narration, ipse Augustinus his verbis contradicens scripsit: "Cui scripturae licet nobis non credere, non enim est in Catholico canone. Illi, tamen, eam et legunt et tamquam incorruptissimam uerissimamque honorant qui adversus corporales vindictas quae sunt in Veteri Testamento, nescio qua cecitate, acerrime seaviunt quo animo et qua distributione temporum factae sint omnino nescientes." Et, ideo, volo hoc praetermittere et caetera interpretari quae in eius passione habentur, sicut Æþelwerdus, venerabilis dux, obnixe nos praecatus est.
>
> (Ælfric, *Thomas*, preface)

> [For a long while I was in doubt about translating the Passion of St Thomas the apostle into English, for various reasons, particularly because the great Augustine rejects the story concerning a cupbearer whose hand a black dog is said to have carried to a feast. In contradicting this story, Augustine himself wrote, in these words: 'we are allowed to disbelieve this narrative, for it is not in the Catholic canon. Nevertheless, there are those who both read and respect it as being most uncorrupted and true, and are very bitterly opposed to the bodily punishments described in the Old Testament — owing to I know not what kind of blindness — because they are wholly

> ignorant of the spirit in which these were inflicted, and of the dispensations of different times.' And therefore I wish to pass over that part, and to translate the other matters which are contained in his Passion, just as the venerable lord Æthelweard persistently requested me to.]

When the *Life of St Thomas* is considered in isolation, it is easy to consider this prologue as simply a characteristic feature of Ælfric's translation practice. Many of his other works have prefaces, often centered on discussions of translation.[14] Yet within the context of the *Lives of Saints*, only four of the other lives (*Agnes*, *George*, *Martin*, and *Edmund*) include any kind of text that might be considered a 'preface'. These are usually very short and discuss the sources of the text in some way. For example, the *Life of St George* contains a four-line preface in which Ælfric complains of apocryphal tales of the saint, and announces that 'nu wille we eow secgan þæt soð is be ðam | þæt heora gedwyld ne derige digellice ænigum' (now we will tell you what is true about him, so that their error may not secretly harm anyone, ll. 3–4). Further, while these other prefaces occasionally reference Ælfric's translation practice, they never mention specific episodes that will be omitted in the way that the preface to the *Life of St Thomas* does. Within the *Lives of Saints* Ælfric frequently removes aspects of his Latin texts that he deemed problematic, but he usually does so silently. When he does alert his audience to his shortening of the text, he does so vaguely, usually by suggesting that he is removing information for the sake of brevity.[15]

By contrast, in the prologue to the *Life of St Thomas*, Ælfric specifies that the problematic aspect was the incident in which a dog brought a cupbearer's hand to a wedding

[14] Ælfric's discussions of translation are explored in Stanton, 'Rhetoric and Translation in Ælfric's Prefaces'.
[15] See, for example, his *Life of Maurus*, in which he alerts his audience to his abbreviation of the text by declaring of the saints' miracles that 'sume þære we secgað her sume we forsuwiað' (some of these [miracles] we will tell here, some we will pass over silently, l. 50)

feast. Further, he misrepresents Augustine in order to do so: though Ælfric claims to be quoting Augustine, he is in fact misrepresenting his argument, which is that the entire life of Thomas, not only the dog episode, is apocryphal.[16] The 'niger canis' carrying the severed hand evokes the same kind of strange horror and danger found in the wild animals and monstrous races of the *Liber Monstrorum*, *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, and the *Wonders of the East*.[17] The reference to 'corporales vindictas' (bodily punishments), is also evocative of these texts, whose focus is often on the (in)human body and its potential for monstrosity.[18] Moreover, by quoting Augustine's statement that the passion of Thomas 'non […] est in Catholico canone' (is not in the Catholic canon), Ælfric aligns the *Life of St Thomas* with ideas of textual marginality and distance from the Christian centre. The preface, then, works as a sort of apophasis, in which, by specifically mentioning the episode that he disagrees with and refuses to translate, and emphasizing its apocryphal nature, Ælfric alerts his audience to the potential for strange happenings within the Indian landscape that they are about to experience.

Once the narrative has begun, Ælfric continues to suggest that the *Life of St Thomas* is one concerned with foreign or strange material through the use of rare vocabulary, much of which is concentrated at the beginning of the text. When Thomas is called to go to India, Christ promises the apostle the 'wuldor-beage martyrdomes' (the glorious crown of martyrdom, l. 14), translating the Latin term *corona*, which Ælfric more usually translates as *cynehelm*.[19] Milfull and Gretsch suggest that *cynehelm* and *wuldorbeah*, both 'Winchester words', held different connotations: *cynehelm* denoted physical crowns, whilst *wuldorbeah* was used for more metaphorical ones. However, in the *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric frequently uses

[16] Fred Biggs, 'Ælfric's Comments About the Passio Thomae'; Godden, 'Ælfric's Saints' Lives and the Problem of Miracles'.
[17] See Thomson in this volume.
[18] For the bodily focus of *Wonders of the East*, see Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality*, pp. 27–65. See also Miyashiro, 'Monstrosity and Ethnography in Medieval Europe: Britain, France, Iceland'.
[19] The other two instances are in *The Forty Soldiers*, ll. 127–28, and the *Life of Cecilia*, l. 264.

cynehelm to describe the spiritual crown of martyrdom, and uses *wuldorbeah* only three times.[20] As such, his choice of *wuldorbeah* in the *Life of St Thomas* and elsewhere ought to be considered a stylistic choice as much as a connotative one. The infrequent usage of *wuldorbeah* throughout the *Lives of Saints* makes it unfamiliar to Ælfric's audiences, and so further encourages the sense that Thomas will experience unusual things in India. Similarly, when the Indian steward, Abbanes, asks Thomas to come to India to build a palace, Ælfric uses the rare compound *cyne-botl* (palace, l. 80) to translate the Latin word *palatium*. The term *cyne-botl* only appears twice in the Old English corpus: once in the *Life of St Thomas* and once in Ælfric's *Glossary*. Ælfric more usually translates *palatium* as *gebytlu* (which is the term he uses in all eight of the other instances within the *Life of St Thomas*), or as *botl*.[21] Ælfric places this rare word emphatically at the very end of Abbanes' address to Thomas, which comprises the first piece of direct speech made by an Indian person in the entirety of the *Lives of Saints*. This speech also includes the rare adjective *gecwemlic*, which occurs only fourteen times across the extant corpus, predominantly in glosses.[22] In including rare terms in Abbanes' direct speech, Ælfric presents Indian speech as foreign and unusual to an English audience. Though the effect of these rare terms is minimal in isolation, together they contribute to a pattern of unusual diction at the opening of the text, and heighten the sense that the *Life of St Thomas* is set apart from the rest of the collection.

Bringing Rome to the Periphery

[20] See, for example, 'kyne-helm martirdomes' (glorious crown of martyrdom, *Life of St Thomas* l. 279) or 'wuldorfullan cyne-helm heora martyrdomes' (the glorious crown of their martyrdom, *Life of Vincent* l. 43).
[21] Ælfric translates *palatium* as *gebytlu* in the *Life of St Thomas* ll. 60, 80, 84, 126, 129, 163, 174, and 176. For Ælfric's translations of *botl* for *palatium*, see for example 'ðæs cynincges botl' (the king's palace, *Book of Kings*, l. 172) or 'þam heofenlican botle' (the heavenly palace, l. 162) in his homily for the Assumption in his *Catholic Homilies* I.
[22] 'on stane cunnon and gecwemlice on treowe' (skillful with stone and pleasing with wood, l. 26). The adverbial form, *gecwemlice*, is also rare, recorded in only twelve extant instances. Data taken from the *DOE Corpus*.

Ælfric's Latin preface to the *Life of St Thomas* and the inclusion of unusual vocabulary, then, work to present India as a foreign, peripheral place, distinct from other locations within the *Lives of Saints*. Yet despite this extreme geographical distance from the Christian centre, in the *Life of St Thomas*, India becomes the home of a Roman-style palace. This building serves as the focal point for Thomas' missionary activity: it is through the palace that the Indian king is converted, that his brother is resurrected from the dead, and that his people turn to Christianity. Through this episode, Ælfric shows that the power of Rome could successfully be recreated even in the most remote parts of the world. In doing so, he encouraged reflection on England's relationship with Rome, suggesting that despite the distance between the two places, England could nonetheless share Rome's imperial and Christian achievements. Moreover, he demonstrated that Rome could be at once strange and familiar, and emphasised England's unique and paradoxical relationship with the eternal city.

The depiction of Roman architecture in the *Life of St Thomas* celebrates Roman cultural achievement and demonstrates its power to enhance Christian faith. The description of the palace clearly held great significance for Ælfric, since he removes the entire preceding episode about the chaste marriage of Dionysius and Pelagia, found in his Latin source.[23] This is particularly striking given Ælfric's usual reformist interest in chaste marriage on display elsewhere in the *Lives of Saints* and the *Catholic Homilies*.[24] Through the removal of the Dionysius and Pelagia episode, Ælfric's account places greater emphasis on the episode of the Roman-style building — planning and erecting the palace becomes Thomas' first narrated act once he reaches India, and as such represents the first moment of his missionary effort. Ælfric describes the Roman palace at great length:

[23] *Passio Thomae*, 606.48–608.9.
[24] This interest has been noted by Upchurch, 'For Pastoral Care and Political Gain: Ælfric of Eynsham's Preaching on Marital Celibacy'; and Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 4, 9.

and Thomas eode metende mid anre mete-gyrde þone stede
and cwæð þæt he wolde wyrcan þa healle
ærest on eastdæle and þa oþre gebytlu
bæftan þære healle bæðhus and kycenan
and winterhus and sumorhus and wynsume buras
twelf hus togædere mid godum bigelsum
ac swylc weorc nis gewunelic to wyrcenne on englalande
and for-þy we ne secgað swutellice heora naman
(Ælfric, *Thomas*, ll. 82–89)

[And Thomas went about measuring the site with a measuring rod, and said that he intended to build the hall first on the east side, and the other buildings behind the hall: the bath-house and kitchen, and winter house and summer house, and beautiful chambers, twelve buildings altogether, with good arches. But it is not customary to make such buildings in England, and therefore we will not say their names clearly.]

Here, Ælfric presents Rome's material culture as both distant and close to his audience. In particular, his use of vocabulary to describe the Roman palace balances familiarity with strangeness. The palace is described with an abundance of compounds that are unusual or otherwise unattested, but which bring together common, well-known elements, highlighting the ways in which the building is both foreign and recognisable to an English audience. Ælfric uses a wealth of terms that are found in three or fewer instances across the extant corpus of Old English Literature: *mete-gyrde* (measuring stick); *sumor-hus* (summer house); *winter-hus* (winter house); and *bæð-hus* (bath-house). However, all of these compounds build upon common lexis: the word *hus*, for example, has over 2000 attestations, and *gyrd* over

400. Moreover, the concepts that these compounds describe were not unknown to English audiences. Measuring rods or perches, which were most often described as *gyrd*, were commonplace in Medieval England, and would constitute a familiar tool for building surveillance.[25] Similarly, the idea of a complex comprised of buildings for different purposes or utilised at different times of year would be familiar to English monastic and high-status audiences alike.[26] Ælfric, then, depicts the buildings of the palace in terms that reflect the way that Rome was at once foreign and recognisable to his audiences, bringing common ideas and root words into relatively unusual compounds.

The word *bigels* (arch) is unusual, and was not part of the standard Old English architectural lexis.[27] The term is attested in eighteen extant instances, four of which are Ælfrician, and the remaining fourteen of which are in glossaries, where *bigels* is used to gloss the Latin *arcus* or *fornix*. More commonly, these Latin lemmata are glossed with the Old English *boga* or *hrof*, which are comparatively more common terms compared to *bigels*. Ælfric's use of this term usually describes abundant, fetishized, non-European material wealth. For example, in his *De falsis diiis* (a text which is included alongside the *Lives of Saints* in MS Cotton Julius E VII) the term is used to describe an idol of the Egyptian god Serapis, 'ænlice geworht | of ælcum antimbre þe of eorþan cymð' (beautifully made from each material that comes from the earth, l. 527–28), which is 'betwux þam bigelsum gefæstnod' (fastened between the arches, l. 534). Similarly, in his homily on Simon and Jude, Ælfric describes how Xerxes built a church to house the bodies of the apostles in Babylon, 'and beworhte ða bigelsas mid gyldenum læfrum' (and decorated the arches with gold plates).[28] His word choice in the *Life of St Thomas*, then, gestures to the idea of the palace's

[25] Blair, 'Grid-planning in Anglo-Saxon Settlements: the Short Perch and the Four Perch Module', pp. 19–20.
[26] See Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 365–72, 400–401; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 203.
[27] The term *bigels* is absent from Biggam's consideration of Old English vocabulary used for building work ('Grund to Hrof').
[28] 'The Passion of Simon and Jude', *Catholic Homilies* II.

tempering of foreignness and familiarity by utilising a term that is both strange (owing to its relatively infrequent use in Old English Literature) and recognisable (since Ælfric repeatedly uses the term to describe non-European wealth in his works).

Ælfric draws attention to the relative unfamiliarity of his vocabulary choices and of the palace itself with his statement that the Roman palace is untranslatable: 'swylc weorc nis gewunelic to wyrcenne on Englalande, | and forþy we ne secgað swutellice heora naman' (it is not customary to make such buildings in England, and therefore we will not say their names clearly, ll. 88–89). This admission of translation difficulty is unusual within the *Lives of Saints*. It is in stark contrast to, for example, Ælfric's translation of the *Chair of Saint Peter*, where he states that 'nu synd sume men þe nyton hwæt se nama getacnað: | *cathedra* is gereht "bisceop-stol" on Englisc' (now, since there are some men who do not know what the name signifies: *cathedra* means 'bishop's throne' in English, ll. 3–4). Similarly, in his *Life of Agatha*, Ælfric writes that the volcano is full of 'sulphore, þæt is swæfel on Englisc' (*sulphore*, that is 'sulphur' in English, l. 219). The only other instance when he references an untranslatable concept within the *Lives of Saints* is the description of an elephant in *The Maccabees*, where he notes that 'sumum men wile þincan syllic þis to gehyrenne | forþan þe ylpas ne common næfre on Englalande' (some men will think this strange to hear, because elephants have never come to England, ll. 565–66). However, this is immediately followed by an explanation, drawing upon Ambrose's *Hexameron* and Isidore's *Etymologiae*.[29] Indeed, Ælfric explains what an elephant is in great detail: how it is 'ormæte nyten, mare þonne sum hus' (an enormous animal, larger than a house, l. 567), that it 'næfre ne lið' (never lies down, l. 569), and that it lives 'þreo hund geara' (three hundred years, l. 571). Indeed, the explanation is so detailed that Ælfric even informs his audiences of the gestation period for an elephant, 'feower and twentig monða gæð seo modor mid folan' (the mother is with foal

[29] These sources are identified in Cross, 'The Elephant to Alfred, Ælfric, Aldhelm and Others'.

for twenty-four months, l. 570). He ensures that his audience knows what he is referring to, even though it is likely to be foreign to them. Further, as Edward Christie notes, Ælfric removes all of the more fantastic lore that his sources contain, and expresses only the material that he considers will be believable to his audience.[30] By contrast, the Roman-style buildings of Saint Thomas are left a mystery, and Ælfric's comment that 'swylc weorc nis gewunelic to wyrcenne on Englalande' increases rather than diminishes the strangeness of these buildings to an English audience.

Ælfric, then, is adapting Roman architecture for his audiences, synthesising familiar and strange aspects in much the same way that Ó Carragáin notes that Early Medieval English and Irish ecclesiastics selectively adapted Roman ceremonies and liturgy for their respective audiences.[31] In this, Ælfric was perhaps reflecting on the real variance between English and Roman customs. For example, whereas Roman royal palaces were primarily built from stone, there is no evidence, save for one mysterious description in Asser's 'Deeds of Alfred', that stone-built royal vills were ever constructed in pre-conquest England.[32] Yet monumental stone buildings were not unfamiliar to the Early Medieval English, whose landscape was filled with Roman stone remains and whose churches were often constructed of stone.[33] By employing unusual yet ultimately recognisable terms to describe the architecture of the palace and also emphasizing the untranslatability of Roman architecture, Ælfric balances the real tension between foreignness and familiarity that underlined the English relation to Roman practices.

Moreover, Ælfric emphasises that, despite its potential to sometimes appear unfamiliar or confusing, Rome's material culture merited his audience's attention. The anonymous *Passio S. Thomae*, which Ælfric used as his source, includes the names of each of

[30] Christie, 'The Idea of an Elephant', pp. 469–70.
[31] Ó Carragáin, 'Roman' Liturgy and the Ruthwell Cross', esp. pp. 63–65.
[32] Blair, *Building*, pp. 84–86.
[33] Bintley, *Settlements*, pp. 44–62; Godfrey, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 362–65.

the twelve buildings, including the *epicaustoria*, the *hippodromos*, and the *gymnasium*.[34] Whilst Ælfric omits some of these buildings from his account, he nonetheless retains a significant amount of information about the construction of the palace. Patrizia Lendinara describes this passage as 'quite simplified' from the Latin, particularly owing to the repetition of *gebytle*.[35] However, this description is unusually extensive for Ælfric: elsewhere in the *Lives of Saints*, he omits almost all the information about Roman geography and buildings found in his sources, whilst here he depicts Roman architecture closely. It has often been noted that Ælfric aspired to *brevitas* in his translations and aimed to present clear teaching material by streamlining his Latin sources both stylistically and narratively.[36] This retention of detail, then, indicates not only an interest in Roman architecture but also a desire to describe it to his audiences, and suggests that Ælfric considered the stylistic aspects of Rome to carry didactic value.

The sense that Roman materiality could contribute to Christian teaching was not unique to Ælfric. The careful recitation of the aspects of the Roman palace is in some ways reminiscent of Roman stational liturgy as found in Early Medieval England, in which familiarity with the major feast days of the Church went hand-in-hand with familiarity with the material city of Rome, its shrines and basilicas.[37] Similarly Bede, in his praise of Benedict Biscop, notes that the gifts that Benedict brought back from Rome 'non ad ornamentum solummodo ecclesiae uerum et ad instructionem intuentium proponerentur aduexit uidilicet ut qui per litterarum lectionem non possent opera domini et saluatoris nostri per ipsarum contuitum discerent imaginum' (are displayed not simply to ornament the church, but also for the instruction of viewers, so that those who cannot learn the works of our Lord and Saviour

[34] *Passio Thomae*, 608.14–17.
[35] Lendinara, 'Minimal Collections of Glosses: The Twelve Rooms of Thomas' Palace', p. 196.
[36] See, for example, Whatley, 'Lost in Translation'; Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 144–71, esp. 163–66; Nichols, 'Ælfric and the Brief Style'.
[37] On the stational liturgy see Ó Carragáin, *The City of Rome*, pp. 9–15.

through letters may do so by looking at the images, *Hom*. 1.13.12).[38] In the same way, Roman materiality, for Ælfric, is symbolic of Roman practices more broadly, and a vital teaching tool.

Indeed, Ælfric uses the palace's materiality to demonstrate the value of replicating Roman practices in places on the periphery. A key force in Gad and Gundophorus' conversions Thomas' palace from angels of God. Ælfric's account emphasizes the important role played by this image of Rome:

> "Min sawl wæs gelæd soþlice to heofonum
> þurh Godes englas, and ic þær geseah
> þa mæran gebytlu þe Thomas þe worhte
> on þære gelicnysse þe he hit gelogode her,
> mid gym-stanum gefrætewod, fægere geond eall.
> Mid þam þe ic sceawode þa scinendan gebytlu.
> þa sædon me þa englas: 'Þis synd þa gebytla
> þe Thomas getimbrode þinum breðer on eorðan'"
> (Ælfric, *Thomas*, ll. 124–31)
>
> ["My soul was truly led to heaven by God's angels, and I saw there the glorious buildings that Thomas made for you, in the likeness of how he made it here, adorned with gemstones, beautiful everywhere. While I was examining the shining buildings, the angels said to me: 'These are the buildings which Thomas built for your brother on earth'"]

[38] Bede, *Opera homiletica*, p. 93.

Upon hearing about this vision, Gad's brother Gundoforus is also converted: 'þa gesohte Gundoforus þone Godes apostol | biddende miltsunge his misdæda georne' (then Gundoforus sought God's apostle, asking earnestly for mercy for his sins, ll. 152–53). Owing to Ælfric's omission of the previous episodes in the Latin *passio*, the conversion of India more generally also seems to hinge on the Roman palace. When rumour of Thomas spreads 'geond þæt land wide', it is claimed that the apostle 'mihte gehælan mid his handa hrepunge | deafe and blinde and þa deadan aræran' (could, with the touch of his hands, heal the deaf and the blind and raise the dead, ll. 186–87). However, in Ælfric's account, the apostle has performed none of these miracles — his only recorded act in India is the construction of Gundophorus' palace. In the vernacular translation, then, Roman material culture takes centre-stage in Thomas' conversion efforts, and prompts widespread Christianity across India.

Ælfric presents the palace's materiality as central to its power as a tool of conversion. The wonder of the material palace is highlighted through Ælfric's ornamental prose style, in which the chiastic alliteration of '**g**ym-stanum ge**f**rætewod, **f**ægere **g**eond eall' and insistent repetition of *gebytlu* centres the physical aspect of the palace. In Ælfric's account, this physicality is shared between the angelic version of the palace and its real counterpart. The Latin text revels in the description of the palace's gemstones, but clearly demarcates the difference between the vision and the reality. Gad describes how he saw a palace just like the one built by Thomas, 'sed tota fabrica ex lapidibus smaragdinis et hiacynthinis et prasinis et albis instructa est intus et foris' (but it was totally made from emerald jewels and jacinths and onyxs and white precious stones inside and out, 608.39–40). Though Ælfric removes the reference to specific jewels, he does not translate the word *sed* (but), suggesting that the real palace is also 'mid gym-stanum gefrætewod', and thereby representing Roman material culture as being equally wonderous as Gad's dream vision.

Moreover, Ælfric does not criticize the material wealth conveyed by the 'scinendan gebytlu'. Writing in context of the late-tenth century, in which the landowning aristocracy aided the establishment and maintenance of monastic communities, and working under the patronage of two such wealthy men, Æthelweard and Æthelmær, Ælfric did not always entirely condemn wealth.[39] However, he was keen to distinguish between riches used for spiritual betterment and those used for personal greed.[40] Within the *Lives of Saints*, the word *gymstan* is often linked to this greed mentality, and to the unfavorable aspects of materialism. In the *Life of Æthelthryth*, for example, the saint decries the toxic nature of her previously materialistic life: 'þonne me nu þis geswel scynð for golde | and þæs hata bryne for healicum gym-stanum' (when this tumor now shines for me in the place of gold, and this hot burning for precious gemstones, ll. 59–60). Ælfric also warns against the harmful nature of riches in the *Life of Chrysanthus and Daria*, where Ælfric describes Daria attempting to lure Chrysanthus to heathenism. She appears 'geglenged mid golde, to þam cnihte, | and scinendum gym-stanum swilce sun-beam færlice' (to the young man, adored with gold and brightly shining gemstones like a sunbeam, ll. 89–90). In both these instances, Ælfric denounces physical wealth, suggesting that it is inferior to spiritual wealth and actively harmful to both the body and soul. However, in the *Life of St Thomas*, Ælfric does not attach negative connotations to the dream vision of Thomas' palace. Thomas encourages Gundophorus and Gad to donate their material goods to the poor, and states that 'magon eowre æhta yrnan eow ætforan, | and hi ne magon folgian on forð-siðe eow' (your possessions can go before you, and they will not follow you after death, ll. 179–80), but the gem-stone embellished palace itself is never subject to direct criticism. Rather, its materiality is presented as a reflection of its spiritual glory, and the wonder that it evokes allows it to

[39] Godden, 'Money, Power and Morality in Late Anglo-Saxon England'. For Ælfric's patrons, see Cubitt, 'Ælfric's Lay Patrons'.
[40] Gulley, *The Displacement of the Body in Ælfric's Virgin Martyr Lives*, pp. 55–57.

become an effective tool of conversion, just as Rome's monumental materiality was effective in strengthening the faith of its Early Medieval English viewers.[41]

Ælfric perhaps presented the palace in such material terms not only because it leads to spiritual ends, but also because it occurred in India. India was a place which a vernacular audience already associated with exoticized wealth through texts like *Wonders of the East*, which portrays distant places as being filled with rich material resources such as gold and jewels.[42] This trope was specifically linked to India on the so-called Cotton map, discussed by Helen Appleton elsewhere in this volume, where India has within its boundaries the 'mons aureus' (mountain of gold).[43] In India, then, such things are expected for an early medieval English audience. The gemstone-studded palace of the *Life of St Thomas* is part of an existing textual tradition, and so does not seem as out of place or questionable as it might have been in the *Life* of an insular or continental saint. In having the most extensive description of Roman material culture in the whole *Lives of Saints* in a life set in India, Ælfric was able to foster a sense of wonder at Rome's rich heritage without contradicting his teaching regarding materialistic and spiritual wealth.

Further, Ælfric's interest in the material aspect of the palace is entrenched in the idea of imperial Rome. Earl Anderson has read Ælfric's architectural descriptions in the *Life of St Thomas* as primarily symbolic, writing that 'Thomas's architectural skill symbolizes his mission to build "cristes getimbrunge" in India', but notes that Ælfric's comparison of Roman and English architecture also reveals an appreciation for Roman building.[44] Indeed, when compared with its Latin source, it becomes clear that Ælfric's text demonstrates a particular interest in the workmanship itself, and in the idea of Roman authority. This is visible in the way that he shifts the emphasis of the Latin source in his translation. For

[41] See, for example, Ó Carragáin's exploration of the Ruthwell Cross, *The City of Rome*, pp. 31–34.
[42] On this text, see the chapter by Simon Thomson in this volume.
[43] BL, Cotton Tiberius B V, fol. 56^{v}.
[44] Anderson, 'The Uncarpentered World of Old English Poetry', p. 70.

example, in the Latin text, the palace's orientation takes on symbolic significance, with Thomas saying that 'ianuas in isto loco disponam ab ortu solis ingressum' (in this place I will place doors according to the entry of the rising sun, 608.14). The *passio* conveys a symbolic importance of the palace's orientation that relies upon the rising sun, reflecting the entry of the risen Christ, and the light of Christianity, to India through the palace. This reflects the juxtaposition of mission and craftmanship in Thomas' earlier statement that 'facio exhedras et fenestras ut domus lumen numquam deficiat' (I make halls and windows so that light of the house never diminishes, 606.38), translated by Ælfric as 'þa egðyrle macige þe alteowe beoð | þæt þam huse ne bið wana þæs healican leohtes' (I will make windows that will be well-finished, so that the house will not lack the heavenly light, ll. 57–58).

By contrast, the phrase that Ælfric uses to describe the palace's orientation, 'he wolde wyrcan þa healle ærest on eastdæle' (he intended to build the hall first on the east side), suggests precise workmanship, and the importance of correct placement. The symbolic meaning is no longer explicit here. Instead, Ælfric's text seems to celebrate the orderly nature of the Roman construction, made with a 'mete-gyrde', with all of its buildings set in their correct place ('on eastdæle') and order ('ærest', 'bæftan'). The careful manner of Thomas' work is further highlighted by the repetition of the verb 'metan' ('to measure') in the collocation of 'metende' with 'mete-gyrde', which emphasizes the importance of measurement and precise construction. This styling is absent from the Latin text, which gives: 'Thomas autem appraehendens harundinem coepit metiri' (Thomas then, grasping a reed, began to measure, 608.13). Thomas' positioning of each of the different Roman-style buildings re-enacts the Roman stational system, which Ó Carragáin suggests celebrated the unity of the Church on a microcosmic scale.[45] Clemoes has argued that Ælfric's prose style

[45] Ó Carragáin, *The City of Rome*, pp. 26–27.

was intended to mirror cosmic order.[46] Here, then, we see this desire manifested not only in Ælfric's use of alliteration or rhythmical prose, but also in his translation practice: in his choice of omissions; reworkings; and re-emphasis of a Latin text.

The most extensive description of Roman architecture in the entire *Lives of Saints*, then, is one that presents it as a cultural achievement because of its well-ordered craftsmanship. This draws upon the image of imperial Rome, a political and cultural power against whose authority the rest of Christendom can be ordered. In the Old English *Orosius*, time is ordered by Rome, with each chapter opening by setting the year it concerns against either 'ær ðam þe Romeburh getimbred wæs' (before the city of Rome was built) or 'æfter ðam þe Romeburh getimbred wæs' (after the city of Rome was built).[47] Rome is used as a structuring device, in order to make sense of the chronology of the rest of Christendom. Ælfric's presentation of the Roman method of construction may be seen to operate in a similar way, in that it uses Rome as an authoritative means of creating order. In Ælfric's *Thomas*, Rome's power, its ability to seem wondrous to its audience and to convey authority, stem from its orderliness of craftsmanship. To Ælfric, a Benedictine, this orderly construction no doubt granted a sense of prestige to the Roman palace, since the *Regula Benedicti* stresses the importance of orderliness within the monastery — 'ælc endebyrdnes on mynstre sceal beon gehealden and gefadod be heora gecyrrednesse and be lifes geearnunge' (every rank in the minster must be observed and arranged by their [time of] turning [to the monastic life] and by their life's merit, LXIII) — and the correct layout of the monastery itself — 'se sylfa geatweard sceal cytan habban wið þæt geat, þæt þa cuman, þe mynster geseceað, simle gearone hæbban and andwyrde þæra ærenda underfo' (this porter himself must have a cell close to the gate, so that those who come seeking the minster may always find someone

[46] Clemoes, *Rhythm and Cosmic Order in Old English Christian Literature*, pp. 16–21.
[47] *The Old English History of the World*.

ready, and receive answers to their questions, LXVI).[48] As such, Ælfric's presentation of Thomas' palace as being carefully organized may be seen as a sort of model for Christian architecture and lifestyle more generally. By focusing on the craftsmanship rather than the symbolic potential of the passage, he employs the image of imperial Rome to teach the importance of order to his English vernacular audiences, both monastic and lay.[49]

That this episode occurs in India allows Ælfric to demonstrate the didactic potential of Rome and its culture, whilst also acknowledging its potential foreignness to an English Christian milieu. Though the palace is a source of great conversion and a testament to imperial achievement, it is nonetheless acknowledged by Ælfric as 'nis gewunelic' (not customary). The palace is as untranslatable and strange to an English audience as it is to the Indian landscape in which it finds itself reconstructed. Yet because this episode takes place in India, a place whose foreignness Ælfric is at pains to stress through his vocabulary and preface, this untranslatability does not emphasize England itself as a place of periphery. In the *Life of St Thomas*, then, India becomes a place where Ælfric can acknowledge the difficulties of following Roman customs in a far-away place, without distancing his readers from the city that was so foundational to English religious practice and political ambitions.

Conclusion

When compared to other descriptions of India in the Old English corpus, the markers of strangeness used by Ælfric in his *Life of St Thomas* are admittedly subtle. There are no monstrous races, and the fetishized wealth presented in the Latin *Passio* is largely minimized. However, this speaks to Ælfric's desire to create a text that was ultimately believable for his

[48] Schröer, ed., *Die angelsächsichen Prosabearbeitungen der Benediktinerregel*, pp. 112–13, 126.
[49] Gatch and Wilcox both note that vernacular texts were used alongside Latin ones in some monastic houses, and that the *Lives of Saints* may have been used in monastic contexts as well as lay ones: Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 41; Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces*, p. 50.

English readers. Adam Miyashiro suggests that the *Wonders of the East*, with its array of depictions of monstrosity according to the Plinian model, 'establishes a template for imagining peripheral communities in Africa and India'.[50] The India of Ælfric's *Life of St Thomas* belongs to a very different genre, and so expresses this sense of the 'peripheral' in a different way. Within the *Lives of Saints*, marvels are saintly miracles, not monstrous races or strange sights.[51] However, India's distance from early medieval England and from the Christian centre are nonetheless made apparent. Ælfric strikes a balance between the strange and the foreign by inserting a Latin preface, employing commonplace nouns in rarely occurring compounds, and depicting exoticized wealth. In doing so, he establishes an expectation of India as somehow esoteric without compromising the didactic power of the text.

Through this foreignization of India, we see Ælfric reflecting on England's similarly peripheral position. In the palace-building episode, Ælfric suggests to his audiences that just as Rome can be physically recreated on Indian soil, so too can the city's authority and practices be recreated in tenth-century England. In Ælfric's version of the *Life of St Thomas*, the Roman palace episode becomes a parable about reconciling England's physical and temporal distance from Rome with a religious practice that takes Rome as its centre. Busbee sees the *Life of St Thomas* as a text which 'offers particular insights into Anglo-Saxon anxieties about India'.[52] However, as this chapter has argued, Ælfric uses the palace-building narrative as a place to express and assuage anxieties not only about India, but also about Rome and his native England. By presenting India as distant, esoteric, and yet still very much part of a community of Christianity, strongly linked to Rome, Ælfric encourages his audience

[50] Miyashiro, 'Monstrosity and Ethnography in Medieval Europe: Britain, France, Iceland', pp. 41–44.
[51] Even the saintly miracles themselves sometimes provide a problem. As Malcolm Godden has demonstrated, Ælfric shows a clear concern that his hagiography should distinguish between true and false stories, and that he should include nothing too spectacular: 'Ælfric's Saints' Lives and the Problem of Miracles', pp. 87–88.
[52] Bradshaw Busbee, 'A Paradise Full of Monsters', p. 60.

to celebrate and reflect upon their own Roman past whilst also acknowledging their separation from it. Through this, he demonstrates the potential for peripheral places to enjoy a close relationship with central ones. That the Roman building is so untranslatable is in many ways an open acknowledgement that England is set aside from Rome: it might still follow the Roman psalter, or enjoy the hagiography of Roman martyrs, but it is *not* Rome.

The *Life of St Thomas* is the final item in the *Lives of Saints* as it stands in its main manuscript witness, Cotton MS Julius E VII.[53] Indeed, the date of Saint Thomas' death, December 21st, marks his feast as the last major feast before Christmas in the Western *sanctorale*. It stands, then, at the periphery of the collection. Its position on the edge, in placement and content, made it an ideal vessel for Ælfric to reflect on England's own perceived peripheral position in the world, and to close his collection with the reminder that tenth-century England was not the remote island portrayed by classical sources, but a part of a global Christian community.[54]

[53] BL MS Cotton Julius E VII (Ker §162) is the closest extant manuscript to the *Lives of Saints* as originally compiled by Ælfric, both in terms of its date (s. xi^{in}) and its content, although it had already seen some anonymous interpolations by this stage. See Kleist, *Chonology and Canon*, pp. 235–36. It has provided the basis for both Skeat's and Clayton and Mullins' editions of the *Lives of Saints*. The *Life of St Thomas* occupies ff. 224^{v}–230^{r}, after which the manuscript includes two other Latin works, *Interrogationes Sigewulfi in Genesin* and *De falsis diis*, which, although both by Ælfric, are unrelated to the *Lives of Saints*.

[54] I am grateful to Francis Leneghan, Siân Grønlie, and Caroline Batten for their helpful comments on this chapter.

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