

SATURN'S SCYTHE: A NOTE ON SOLOMON AND SATURN I, LINE 109A

NOTES AND QUERIES

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In the Old English verse text *Solomon and Saturn I*, the character of King Solomon describes a fictional battle in which the letters of the Pater Noster prayer are anthropomorphized as warriors and attack the devil.¹ Many of the letters wield specific weapons: 'R' carries a *flint*, 'flint' rock (l. 100); Q and U carry *leoht speru*, *lange sceaftas*, 'light-spears, long shafts' (l. 120); F and M also have *scearp speru*, 'sharp spears' (l. 128) but also *earhfare* 'a flight of arrows' (l. 129). What exactly N and O are carrying (l. 109a, *sweopan of siðe*) is a matter for debate; they sit in a passage 'which has been much emended due to manuscript damage and because of difficulty with interpretation'.²

Donne hine forcinnad̃ *by* *erican* getuinnas,
 . N . <ond . F . *s* <am>od, *by* *swæðer* *by* *geð*
sweopan of siðe; *by* *swað* hwile
fremdne flaeschoman; *by* *ne* bemurneð.

Then the church twins, N and O together, repudiate him; both of them bring affliction through a scythe/journey; they torment the strange body for a while, he will not care for life. (*Solomon and Saturn I*, 107–10, emphases added)³

Heide Estes translates line 109a as 'affliction through a scythe', while Daniel Anlezark translates the half-line as 'a scourge from the journey' and J. M Kemble posits 'a sweep from his journey'.⁴ So while 'sweopan' can be read literally or metaphorically (either as a whip or as an affliction), *siðe* can be read as either a journey or a scythe.⁵

Some light can be shed on this crux by turning to one of the major Latin source texts for the poem, Isidore's *Etymologiae*.⁶ Isidore's euhemerized depiction of the pagan god Saturn (see especially *Etymologiae*, VIII.xi.29–33, XVI.xviii.3–4) has been identified with the Saturn of the *Dialogues*, and his account of Asian regions (*Etymologiae*, XIV.ii–v) has been connected with Saturn's wanderings in the poems.⁷ To these correspondences I would add one more note. Isidore describes an object in the hand of Saturn (*Etymologiae*, VIII.xi.32), as follows:

Falcem tenet, inquit, propter agriculturam significandam, vel propter annos et tempora, quod in se redeant, vel propter sapientiam, quod intus acuta sit.

He holds a scythe, they say, to signify agriculture, or to signify years and seasons, because they turn back on themselves, or to signify wisdom, because it is sharpened inside.⁸

The Old English poet, familiar with the *Etymologiae* and their characterization of Saturn, has most likely drawn on Isidore's symbolic scythe in line 109a. In Isidore's text, Saturn himself holds the scythe, which represents wisdom. However, it is appropriate that in *Solomon and Saturn I* the scythe is wielded by the letters of the Pater Noster, for Saturn reveals that the Pater Noster prayer is the only wisdom that can satisfy his intellectual curiosity:⁹

<S>ille ic þe ealle *by* *Dauides*,
 þeoden I<s>raela *by* *punda*
 smætes goldes *by* *mine suna twelfe*,
 gif þu mec gebringest *by* *ic si gebrydded*

ðurh þæs cantices cwyde, gesemesð mec mid soðe
 gesemesð mec mid soðe
 I will give everything to you, son of David,
 King of Israel, thirty pounds
 of refined gold and my twelve sons,
 if you lead me so that I am overawed
 by utterance of the canticle, Christ's line,
 satisfy me with truth. (*Solomon and Saturn I*, 13–18b)¹⁰

This demand for satisfaction is the site of another allusion to the *Etymologiae*: Anlezark argues that *gesemesð* (l. 18b) is a pun on Isidore's description of Saturn as *saturetur annis*, 'sated with years' (*Etymologiae*, VIII.ix.29).¹¹

The scythe of line 109a evokes the fabled wisdom of Isidore's Saturn, and recontextualizes that wisdom within Christian prayer.¹² However, 'scythe' is not the only possible reading of *siðe*, and the divergent translations of this word represent more than a point of editorial difference: both 'scythe' and 'journey' are viable readings that speak to one another. Read as 'journey' the word is equally intrinsic to the identity of Saturn in the *Dialogues*, a wanderer who is introduced in both verse texts with an account of his travels across Europe, North Africa, and Asia (*Solomon and Saturn I*, 1–4; *Solomon and Saturn II*, 7–23).¹³ Inflected by the influence of the *Etymologies*, and wielded by the warrior-letters of the Pater Noster, the word *siðe* represents both the journey undertaken by Saturn and the sharp knowledge which is the object of that journey. Journeying and the attainment of wisdom are coupled together, a process we also witness in the vernacular verse account of another wanderer's travels, who reflects on his learning *sundur æt rune*.¹⁴

1. *Solomon and Saturn I* is listed with a small group of vernacular verse and prose texts in Cambridge, Christ College 422, known collectively as *The Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* (henceforth, the *Dialogues*).

2. Heide Estes, 'A Note on *Solomon and Saturn I*, Lines 108A', *N&Q* lv (2008), 260–2, at 260. N.B., as Estes also notes, that the letter O has been supplied by Menner.

3. All text of *Solomon and Saturn* is from Daniel Anlezark (ed.), *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* (Woodbridge, 2009). Translations in this note are my own unless otherwise stated. This translation includes both 'scythe' and 'journey' as possible translations of *siðe*; see below for full discussion. N.B. that singular *bemurned* in line 110b is translated as plural by Kemble.

4. Menner, 'A Note', 260; Anlezark, *Dialogues*, 68–9, 108. Here, Anlezark suggests that it may be the *gepalmtwi-gude* Pater Noster (*Solomon and Saturn I*, 39) which is the 'scourge', pointing to the *flagella: tuig*, on which see further Kenneth Sisam, Review of 'The Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn' edited by Robert J. Menner', *Medium Ævum* xiii (1944), 28–36; A. S. Napier (ed.), *Old English Glosses* (Oxford, 1900), 218. J. M. Kemble, *The Dialogue of Salomon and Saturnus* (London, 1948), 141. Robert Faerber translates the line into French as *chacune apporte avec elle des fouets* ('they each bring whips with them') (*Salomon et Saturne: Quatre dialogues en vieil-anglais* (Turnhout, 1995), 99.) Friedrich Wild translates the line into German as (*Es bringt jeder Peitschen von der Fahrt*, 'They each bring whips from the journey') (*Salomon und Saturn* (Vienna, 1964), 14).

5. Both the 'literal' and 'figurative' definitions of *sweopan* are recorded in the *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*: 'swipu', Joseph Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, eds. Thomas Northcote Toller et al. Comp. Sean Christ and Ondřej Tichý (2010), <http://www.bosworthtoller.com/029845> > (accessed 3 Dec. 2017).

6. On the influence of the *Etymologiae* in the *Dialogues*, see for example, Anlezark, 29–30, 119–20, 129; Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'The Geographic List of *Solomon and Saturn II*', *Anglo-Saxon England* xx (1991) [AQ6]; Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song* (Cambridge, 1990), 50–2. For a recent overview of literary contexts and sources for the *Dialogues*, see Anlezark, 12–41. See further, Menner, Introduction; O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Geographic List', 123–41; O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, 50–2; Patrick P. O'Neill, 'On the Date, Provenance and Relationship of the 'Solomon and Saturn' Dialogue', *Anglo-Saxon England* xxvi (1997), 139–68; Jonathan Wilcox, 'Eating Books: The

Consumption of Learning in the Old English Poetic *Solomon and Saturn*', *Anglo-Saxon England* (1991) 115–18; Thomas D. Hill, 'Saturn's Time Riddle: An Insular Latin Analogue for *Solomon and Saturn II*', *RES* xxxix (1988), 273–6; Frederick B. Jonassen, 'The Pater Noster Letters in the Poetic "Solomon and Saturn"', *The Modern Language Review* lxxxiii (1988), 1–9; John P. Hermann, 'The Pater Noster Battle Sequence in *Solomon and Saturn* and the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* lxxvii (1976), 206–10; Erik Wade, 'Language, Letters and Augustinian Origins in the Old English Poetic *Solomon and Saturn I*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* cxvii (2018), 160–84.

7. On the identification of the Old English Saturn with the Saturn of the *Etymologies*, see Anlezark, *Dialogues*, 32 and 100–1. On Asian geography in the *Etymologiae*, see O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Geographic List', 132. Isidore's *Etymologiae* survives as volumes, books and excerpts in twenty-two manuscripts written or owned in Anglo-Saxon England, according to Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto, 2014), 916.

8. Latin text from W. M. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum, Libri XX* (Oxford, 1911).

9. Following the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, 'sapientiam' can be interpreted broadly as 'reason' or 'wisdom', but also more specifically as '(spiritual or divine) wisdom' ('sapientia', *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources Online* (Turnhout, 2015)).

10. Text from Anlezark, *Dialogues*, 60. Translation is my own, following Anlezark's reading of *gesemesð* as 'satisfy'.

11. Anlezark, *Dialogues*, 100. *Etymologiae* text and translation here is from Anlezark.

12. On the *Dialogues*' representation of the superiority of Christian and English wisdom, see further Kathryn Powell, 'Orientalist Fantasy in the Poetic Dialogues of *Solomon and Saturn*', *Anglo-Saxon England* xxxiv (2005) 117–43.

13. On the disordered account of Saturn's travels, see O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Geographic List'.

14. *The Wanderer*, line 111b ('apart in private counsel'). Text from George Philip Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie (eds.), *The Exeter Book*, ASPR III (New York, 1936), 137.

AUTHOR QUERIES

Query: AQ1: Please check all author names and affiliations. Please check that author surnames have been identified by a pink background in the PDF version, and by green text in the html proofing tool version (if applicable). This is to ensure that forenames and surnames have been correctly tagged for online indexing.

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Query: AQ5: Please check the reference for clarity and correctness. Also, note that the URL provided here is not accessible.

Author Response: Corrected, see comment in text

Query: AQ6: Please provide the page range.

Author Response: 123 - 141

COMMENTS

C1 Author: OTHER TEXTS;

C2 Author: ;

C3 Author: Missing bracket after 'sapienta';

C4 Author: æghwæðer --> æghwæðer (NB special character, æ);

C5 Author: Half line spacing required here (about 5 spacebar spaces);

C6 Author: Half line spacing required here (about 5 spacebar spaces);

C7 Author: Half line spacing required here (about 5 spacebar spaces);

C8 Author: Half line spacing required here (about 5 spacebar spaces);

C9 Author: This is not an F, but a rune (ᚠ). It should be followed by a space before the full stop. So:< and . F . O . >;

C10 Author: flæschoman(NB special character, æ);

C11 Author: 'sweopan' --> <i>sweopan</i>;

C12 Author: Half-line spacing needed here, about 5 spacebar spaces;

C13 Author: Half-line spacing needed here, about 5 spacebar spaces;

C14 Author: Half-line spacing needed here, about 5 spacebar spaces;

C15 Author: Half-line spacing needed here, about 5 spacebar spaces;

C16 Author: Half-line spacing needed here, about 5 spacebar spaces;

C17 Author: This shouldn't be highlighted, but I can't see how to undo it, apologies!;

C18 Author: Change comma to a full stop;

C19 Author: known --> These are known;

C20 Author: Before full stop, insert:" and include a second verse text known as <i>Solomon and Saturn II</i>.";

C21 Author: both --> both of the <i>Dialogues</i>;

C22 Author: possile --> possible;

C23 Author: Menner --> the editor;

C24 Author: Full stop after Kemble;

C25 Author: Insert sentence:"Quotations from lines 1-29 are taken from Anlezark's edition of the text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41, and quotations from line 30 onwards are taken from Anlezark's edition of the text in Cambridge, Corpus Christ College 422.";

C26 Author: <i>gepalmtwigude </i>--> <i>gepalmtwigede </i>;

C27 Author: Solomon and Saturn II --> <i>Solomon and Saturn II</i>;

C28 Author: Solomon and Saturn --> <i>Solomon and Saturn</i>;

C29 Author: Psychomachia --> <i>Psychomachia </i>;

C30 Author: delete space between M and full stop;

C31 Author: Should there also be an opening bracket here?;

C32 Author: The Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn --> <i>The poetical dialogues of Solomon and Saturn</i><i></i>(NB italics and two capitals change);