Reading The Past: Ruins And Historical Writing In England, 800-1400

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Reading The Past: Ruins And Historical Writing In England, 800-1400

Abstract
This dissertation is the first systematic study of medieval English literary representations of ruins. The limited scholarship on this subject has until now read medieval depictions of ruins as verifying first-hand accounts of the distant past, thus implying that medieval writers saw the material world as a legible source of historical information. However, this dissertation demonstrates that literary representations of ruins in medieval historical literature are most often drawn from earlier literary sources. This reliance upon the written word conveys a debt to what writers read, not what they saw. Ultimately, I argue that medieval literary depiction of ruin serves as a literary device to highlight the importance of the written word in the transmission of history. In the face of the crumbling monuments around them, authors looked to literature to preserve their historical memory. The introduction lays out the scholarship on literary representation of ruins, and examines why a full-length study of medieval representation of the ruins of antiquity has not appeared until now. The first chapter examines literary representations of ruins around the time of King Alfred, focusing on the Old English Orosius and its translation of ruin from late antique Rome to Anglo-Saxon England. The second chapter looks at the Passio Sancti Albani (c. 1167) and its use of classical allusion in its denial of the material ruin as a site of historical knowledge. The third chapter examines the early-thirteenth-century Narracio de mirabilibus urbis Romae, until now considered to be a proto-humanist guidebook to Roman antiquities, and demonstrates how the text quotes Lucan and Hildebert of Lavardin to trouble the notion that the physical world offers an unmediated experience of the past. The fourth chapter turns to Ranulph Higden's Polychronicon and the alliterative poem St. Erkenwald to show how fourteenth-century writers appealed to literature, not the material object, to know and represent the past. Finally, the coda looks beyond the Middle Ages to the ways in which the Early Modern English antiquaries Matthew Parker and John Leland betrayed their debt to medieval conceptions of historical narrative.

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READING THE PAST:
RUINS AND HISTORICAL WRITING IN ENGLAND, 800-1400

Anna Johnson Lyman

A DISSERTATION
in
English

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READING THE PAST: RUINS AND HISTORICAL WRITING IN ENGLAND, 800-1400

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2020

Anna Lynne Johnson Lyman
To Joshua and Jane,

And

In memory of Oliver Thomas Yousefi, 7/26/19-7/29/19
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my life has brought me more joy than I ever imagined, and at the end of the day she reminds me of what really matters.

*Non nisi Te, Domine.*
ABSTRACT

READING THE PAST: RUINS AND HISTORICAL WRITING IN ENGLAND, 800-1400

Anna Johnson Lyman
Rita Copeland
Emily Steiner

This dissertation is the first systematic study of medieval English literary representations of ruins. The limited scholarship on this subject has until now read medieval depictions of ruins as verifying first-hand accounts of the distant past, thus implying that medieval writers saw the material world as a legible source of historical information. However, this dissertation demonstrates that literary representations of ruins in medieval historical literature are most often drawn from earlier literary sources. This reliance upon the written word conveys a debt to what writers read, not what they saw. Ultimately, I argue that medieval literary depiction of ruin serves as a literary device to highlight the importance of the written word in the transmission of history. In the face of the crumbling monuments around them, authors looked to literature to preserve their historical memory. The introduction lays out the scholarship on literary representation of ruins, and examines why a full-length study of medieval representation of the ruins of antiquity has not appeared until now. The first chapter examines literary representations of ruins around the time of King Alfred, focusing on the Old English Orosius and its translation of ruin
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Introduction

The Ruin and the Past in Medieval England

“Ruin may make historians.”
-Margaret Aston

(1) Ways of Looking at a Ruin

In his 1188 travels through Wales, Gerald of Wales (c. 1146-c.1223) and his companions come to the ancient Roman town of Caerleon. Its very name betrays its Roman origins, as a variant of Caer Legionum—City of Legions. Obviously impressed by the sight of these ruins, Gerald writes:

Erat autem haec urbs antiqua et authentica, et a Romanis olim coctilbus muris egregie constructa. Videas hic multa pristinae nobilitatis adhuc vestigia; palatia immensa, aureis olim tectorum fastigis Romanos fastus imitantia, eo quod a Romanis principibus primo constructa, et aedificiis egregiis illustrata fuissent; turrim giganteam, thermas insignes, templorum reliquias, et loca theatralia; egregiis muris partim adhuc exstantibus omnia clausa. Reperies ubique, tam intra murorum ambitum quam extra, aedifici subterranea, aquarum ductus, hypogeosque meatus. Et quod inter alia notabile censui, stuphas undique videas miro artificio consortas; lateralibus quibusdam et praeangustis spiraculi viis occulte calorem exhalantibus.

[Caerleon is of unquestioned antiquity. It was constructed with great care by the Romans, the walls being built of brick. You can still see many vestiges of its one-time splendour. There are immense palaces, which, with the gilded gables of their roofs, once rivalled the magnificence of ancient Rome. They were set up in the first place by some of the most eminent men of the Roman state, and they were therefore embellished with every architectural conceit. There is a lofty tower, and beside it remarkable hot baths, the remains of temples and an amphitheatre. All this is enclosed within impressive walls, parts of which still remain standing. Wherever you look, both within and without the circuit of these walls, you can see constructions dug deep into the earth, conduits for water, underground passages and air-vents. Most remarkable of all to my mind are the stoves, which once

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transmitted heat through narrow pipes inserted in the side-walls and which are built with extraordinary skill.)

For Gerald, Caerleon, a Roman-built city on the edges of empire, outshines the Eternal City itself. Caerleon and its ruined splendor stand to demonstrate the power of Rome on its imperial fringes, and these ruins provide Gerald with an opportunity to see the architectural and engineering marvels of ancient Rome right in his birthplace.

Yet the very next story in the *Itinerarium* suggests that Gerald is aware that the monuments themselves are liable to be misinterpreted. While in Caerleon, he encounters a man named Meilyr who understands the occult and evil spirits.

Whenever anyone told a lie in his presence, Meilyr was immediately aware of it, for he saw a demon dancing and exulting on the liar’s tongue. Although he was completely illiterate, if he looked at a book which was incorrect, which contained some false statement, or which aimed at deceiving the reader, he immediately put his finger on the offending passage. If you asked him how he knew this, he said that a devil first pointed out the place with its finger.

Meilyr’s ability to see evil spirits alerts him to truth and falsehood. The crowning example of his discernment comes when Meilyr is tormented by demons:

Contigit aliquando, spiritibus immundis nimes eitem insultantibus, ut Evangelium Johannis ejus in gremio poneretur: qui statim tanquam aves evolantes, omnes penitus evanuerunt. Quo sublato postmodum, et Historia Britonum a Galfrido Arthuro tractata, experiendi causa, loco ejusdam subrogata, non solum corpori ipsius toti, sed etiam libro superposito, longe solito crebris et taediosius insederunt.

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3 *Itinerarium* I.v, p. 58; *Journey* p. 117.
When he was harassed beyond endurance by these unclean spirits, Saint John’s Gospel was placed on his lap, and then they all vanished immediately, flying away like so many birds. If the Gospel were afterwards removed and the "History of the Kings of Britain" by Geoffrey of Monmouth put there in its place, just to see what would happen, the demons would alight all over his body, and on the book, too, staying there longer than usual and being even more demanding.]

Here, Gerald fiercely critiques Geoffrey of Monmouth’s account of British history by claiming that the contents of the Historia Regum Brittaniae caused Meilyr’s demonic torment. Gerald explicitly states here that everything in the HRB is a lie, which would include Geoffrey’s claim that Caerleon was founded by British kings, not Roman legions.

In the HRB, Geoffrey of Monmouth made Caerleon a British city by attributing its foundation to the British king Belinus. After repairing many destroyed cities, “[Belinus] built one on the river Usk near the mouth of the Severn, which became the metropolitan city of Demetia and for a long time was known as Caerusk; after the Roman legions came, it was called instead Caerleon, taking its name from the Roman legions that used to winter there.” Instead of the eminent Roman statesmen building Caerleon, the illustrious British king built it. Its legionary name is explained by mere Roman habitation, not Roman origin. Thus the building of Caerleon aligns neatly with Geoffrey’s narrative project of creating a glorious mythic British past by denying the Roman origins of monuments on the landscape.

When Geoffrey credits the building of stone monuments to a British king, he seems to be working consciously against cultural tradition of insular historiography, familiar to Geoffrey through his sources Gildas and Bede. Gildas and Bede represent the

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6 Geoffrey does this elsewhere in the HRB when he says that Ebraucus built York (II.27, p. 34), King Bladud built the baths in the city of Bath (II.31-35), and Belinus built a network of roads across Britain (III.39).
tradition that Gerald himself upholds in his own Romanizing view of Caerleon. While these traditional histories recognize the Roman origins of the stonework on the landscape, Geoffrey, in attributing baths and roads to British kings, consciously subverts accepted historical tradition in his cultural history of architecture. In doing so, he implies that these structures need an accompanying written text to explain their historical significance. How is one to know where that strange ruined building came from if one has no prior knowledge of the history of the place? The building itself cannot speak. It conveys no legible historical information on its own. Geoffrey’s playful misinterpretations of Roman ruins highlight the enigmatic nature of the ruin and its inability to convey historical knowledge. Gerald responds to Geoffrey’s claim that the ruins were British by unapologetically stating their Roman origin, and then claiming that the book that said the ruins were British, not Roman, was full of demonic lies. Gerald’s and Geoffrey’s different accounts of the same ruins highlight the ruin as a site of anxiety about historical knowledge and narrative.

These dueling interpretations trouble a reading of the ruin in literature as a stable sign of historical information. It is easy to read the ruins in medieval literature, especially historical literature, as simple statements of fact, and many archaeologists have looked to medieval textual references to ruins as just that. Yet what happens when we look for

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7 When writing about the fall of Rome, Bede commemorates the Roman legacy in Britain by mentioning the stone markers of empire left upon the landscape: “The Romans had occupied the country south of the earthwork, which, as I have said, Severus built across the island, as cities, forts, bridges, and paved roads bear witness to this day[…].” (EH I.11). Bede implies that the stone itself that marks the English landscape “bear witness” to Roman invasion, conquest, and colonization, further emphasizes the importance of stone monuments and building, as well as explicitly naming Severus as the builder of these roads.

8 Robert Rouse, in a postcolonial reading of Geoffrey’s and Gerald’s accounts of the ruins of Caerleon, reads them in light of Gerald’s wish for Wales to be someday free of Angevin rule (“Reading Ruins: Arthurian Caerleon and the Untimely Architecture of History” Arthuriana 23.1 [2013]: 40-51).

9 In fact, many times medieval historical writings have been used by archaeologists to fill in the gaps in historical information, or to corroborate their archaeological findings: for example, Tyler Bell references Bede’s description of the reuse of Roman churches (The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England. Oxford: Archaeopress (2005), p. 28), and Tim Eaton references the
textual traces in these depictions? In other words, what is the literary quality of the ruin?

For example, William of Malmesbury reveals a textual, classicizing impulse behind his seemingly “antiquarian” practice of describing Roman ruins. In the *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (c. 1120s), he describes the Roman ruins in Carlisle:

In aliquibus tamen parietum ruinis, qui semiruti remansere, uideas mira Romanorum artifitia: ut est in Lugubalia ciuitate triclinium lapideis fornicibus concameratum, quod nulla umquam tempestatum contumelia, quin etiam nec appositis ex industria lignis et succensis, ualuit labefactari. Cumbreland uocatur regio, et Cumbr uocantur homines, scripturaque legitur in fronte triclinii "Marii uictorie." Quod quid sit hesito, nisi forte pars Cimbrorum olim his locis insederit cum fuissent a Mario Italia pulsi. Sane tota lingua Nordanhimbrorum, et maxime in Eboraco, sua inconditum stridet ut nichil nos australes intelligere possimus. Quod propter uiciniam barbararum gentium et propter remotionem regum quondam Anglorum modo Normannorum contigit, qui magis ad austrum quam ad aquilonem diuersati noscuntur.

[In some of the ruined buildings, though, whose walls were not completely destroyed, you may see remarkable Roman work: for example, at Carlisle a *triclinium* vaulted in stone that no violence of the elements, or even the intentional setting alight of timbers piled up against it, has succeeded in destroying. The district is called Cumberland, and its inhabitants Cumbrians. On the front of the structure one can read the inscription "To the victory of Marius." I am doubtful what this means; it may be that some of the Cimbri settled of old in these parts after being driven from Italy by Marius. Of course, the whole language of the Northumbrians, particularly in York, is so inharmonious and uncouth that we southerners can make nothing of it. This is the result of the barbarians being so near, and the kings, once English, now Norman, so far away; for they, as is well known, spend more time in the south than in the north.]

Antonia Gransden has read this passage, and others like it in William’s corpus of work, to signify his reliance on visual historical evidence, which she sees as a “merit” of his historiographical practice. With this mindset, the medieval historian’s description of

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ruin becomes a sign of his proto-empiricism, and thus the modern critic can fashion the medieval historian into his own likeness. Recently though, William Kynan-Wilson has read this passage from the *GPA* not merely as evidence of William’s archaeological impulse, but also as a sign of his Latinity and classicism—for example, Kynan-Wilson points out that William’s use of the word *triclinium* in his description of the architecture suggests the influence of classical literary sources such as Suetonius or Livy. As Kynan-Wilson suggests, William’s description of the ruins here is as much influenced by what he *read* as by what he *saw*. William’s depiction of the Roman ruins here is less an impartial judgment of historical fact based on the archaeological record than a classicizing interpretation of the architectural record based on his encounter with the textual record. For William, just as for Geoffrey and Gerald, the ruin does not speak for itself—it requires a written interpretation, which in turn is mediated by literature.

The examples of William, Geoffrey, and Gerald raise questions about how ruins have hitherto been understood in medieval literature. What if these references to the built world of previous centuries were not just pure archaeological observation, but further evidence of what writers read? Were these descriptions impartial observations, or conscious decisions to privilege classicizing narratives in their own literary endeavors? Was the ruin in the Middle Ages an archaeological artifact or an opportunity for literary study and imagination? Does the ruin *demonstrate* continuity, or is it the writings of historians that *create* continuity? In this dissertation, I explore the ways in which literature is the grounds on which Britain’s cultural identity as an inheritor of the Roman

historian sees may be as significant as what he reads (the story of Julius Caesar, William writes, it to be read in annals and seen in the ruins of ancient buildings).”

imperium is built. Most medieval literary depictions of ruin appear alongside emulation or translation of classical and patristic Latin literature—thus, the literary classics form an interpretive framework with which to understand material ruin, and a textual means by which to create a cultural continuity from Rome to medieval Britain. Medieval literary depiction of ruin does not describe historical continuity, but rather creates it. Ultimately, I argue that the ruin serves as a literary device to highlight the importance of the written word in the transmission of human memory and history. In the face of the crumbling monuments around them, authors looked to literature to preserve their historical memory.

**Roman Architecture in Medieval Britain**

These crumbling monuments of the past were ubiquitous for the medieval observer. From the first invasion of Julius Caesar in 55 BCE, to the arrival of imperial Roman rule under Claudius in 43 CE, to the Roman withdrawal in 410 CE, the Romans left physical traces of their occupation on the island of Britain. In the early Anglo-Saxon period, many of these architectural ruins still stood. There is ample archaeological research that shows the extent to which Roman ruins survived in medieval England. Sometimes, these structures were left *in situ*— Tim Eaton writes of just one example: “The preservation of the Roman temple on Scargill Moor near the fort at Bowes in Yorkshire, which was found to contain several altars, one still in an upright position, offers a tantalising glimpse of the ritual landscape that medieval communities may have

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13 I use the Latin word *imperium* (“empire”) because it encapsulates the medieval idea of Roman imperial power, as well as the medieval historiographical concept of *translatio imperii*, or, the “transference of rule.” This idea was developed from Orosius, the late antique author of the *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*, whose historiographical framework traced the movement of power from east to west across time. Orosius was one of the most influential writers on medieval writers, and thus I use terminology borrowed from *translatio imperii* to distill medieval British attitudes towards Roman rule and empire.
encountered.”14 What would a medieval person have thought when he looked at this ritual structure? Would he have recognized it as Roman?

For a literate monk, at least, this answer was most likely “yes.” Stones from Roman structures were commonly reused in new, oftentimes religious, contexts in the early Middle Ages. Sometimes Roman stones were transformed into new structures, such as baptismal fonts fashioned from Roman columns. Inscriptions found on the stones themselves offered a glimpse into its history: one such Roman stone was used to form part of a cross at Bede’s monastery of St. Paul’s at Jarrow. Its inscription, originally in Latin but translated here, reads:

> Son of all the deified emperors, the Emperor Caesar Trajan Hadrian Augustus, after the necessity of keeping the empire within its limits had been laid upon him by divine precept…thrice consul…after the barbarians had been dispersed, and the province of Britain had been recovered, he added a frontier-line between either shore of the Ocean for 80 miles. The army of the province built this defense-work under the charge of Aulus Platorius Nepos, emperor’s pro praetorian legate.15

These words, etched on stone, praise and commemorate the expansion of the Roman empire. For the monk who could read Latin, this inscription would have been legible and intelligible, and thus he could know that this stone had originally been part of a structure built during the Roman occupation. Additionally, its prominence as part of a cross demonstrates what David Stocker has termed “iconic reuse” of Roman stone: that is, reuse of Roman materials that demonstrates some type of significance beyond simple convenience or ignorance.16 In this example from Jarrow, the Christian cross has

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14 Eaton 70.
15 Ibid. 128.
16 Stocker describes an example of this iconic reuse in the use of a Roman column as a baptismal font in Shropshire Abbey: “It would be naively patronizing to think that the medieval mind would not have perceived the symbolic significance of the transportation and
overcome the secular empire, and now the “barbarians” native to England have become obedient servants to God and his kingdom, now signified by the authority of the Roman church.

For the early English reader, Christendom was still centered in Rome, and emulation of Rome abounded in both literature and architecture. In the seventh century, Wilfrid brought Roman masons to build Hexham Abbey, using Roman techniques and style, so that William of Malmesbury praised the church as making evident the former glories of Rome.\textsuperscript{17} Catherine Karkov has written of Wearmouth-Jarrow’s architectural “insistent romanitas.”\textsuperscript{18} In the south, Peterborough Abbey owned the ruins of the nearby ancient Roman fort of Dubroviae, and used them in construction of the abbey itself. Hugh of Candidus wrote that the monks of Peterborough at the time of Sexwulf “were striving to build no commonplace structure, but a second Rome, or a daughter of Rome in England.”\textsuperscript{19} The importance of the emulation of Rome was clearly present in architecture, and this emulation was accompanied by literary endeavors to do the same. It is these literary works that I examine in this dissertation.

\textbf{The Ruins and the Critics}

‘conversion’ of this fragment from a pagan building at Virconium to its Christian successor, for refashioning as a font—one of the symbolic corner-stones of the Christian liturgy.” “\textit{Fons et Origo}: The symbolic death, burial, and resurrection of English font stones.” \textit{Church Archaeology} 1 (1997): 17-25 (quote p. 22).

\textsuperscript{17} ‘Ibi edification minaci altitudine murorum erecta et diuersis anfractibus per coeles circumducta mirabile quantum expoliuit, arbitratu quidem multa proprio, sed et cementatorum quos ex Roma spes munificentia anfractibus. Ferebatque tunc in populo celebre, scriptisque etiam est inditum, nusquam citra Alpes tale esse edificium. Nunc qui Romae ueniunt idem allegant, ut qui Haugustaldensem fabricam uident ambitionem Romanam se imaginary iurent: adeo tot temporum et bellorum uinificentiae uenustatem edificitis non tulere.’ [Here he constructed buildings of remarkable polish, with menacingly high walls and rings around by various winding ways, [joined] by spiral staircases. Much was the product of his own judgment, but he also learned from stonemasons who had been lured from Rome by hope of generous reward. It was a popular saying in those days, and one that found its way into writing too, that this side the Alps there was no building like it. People coming from Rome nowadays say the same; when they see the manner in which Hexham is built, they swear it gives them a mental picture of the best Roman work, so true it is that the harm caused by time and war has not detracted from the beauty of the place.] \textit{Gesta Pontificum Anglorum.} Eds. and trans. Michael Winterbottom and Rodney Thomson. Vol. I. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007. Book III.117.


\textsuperscript{19} Qtd. in Eaton 128.
In its focus on literary representation of the ruins of Rome, this dissertation intervenes in two scholarly conversations, that of literary representations of ruins and that of *romanitas*. Scholarship on Roman ruins in medieval England has hitherto been confined to the disciplines of archaeology and art history, with the occasional article from a scholar of literature. As such, there is a significant lack of scholarship that focuses on medieval British *literary* representations of Roman ruins, and that examines how medieval writers used them in their literary-historical narratives. There are, of course, a few exceptions. Jennifer Summit argues that medieval literary encounters with the ruins of classical Rome serve to define the city’s temporal identity as a medieval Christian city. William Kynan-Wilson has written about William of Malmesbury’s depiction of Roman ruins as textual evidences of his classicism and Latinity, as opposed to a solely archaeological significance. Nicholas Howe spends a few chapters in *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England* (2008) examining how early English authors viewed Roman ruins in their own landscape, coming to the conclusion that the architectural remains provide material evidence of continuity for medieval authors. While not engaging specifically with ruins as such, most recently David Benson has examined late medieval

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English poetic representations of Rome, asking the question “how did Middle English poets imagine the city of ancient Rome?”

My project asks a similar, if more pointed, question—how do representations of ruins in English historical writing illuminate our understanding of the medieval imagination of Rome and the past? Were the ruins they encountered material evidence of continuity, as Howe argues, or did their ruined state threaten claims to continuity? The ruin, I contend, by its very being as an edifice from the past bearing the scars of the ravages of time, represents an absence of historical knowledge and thus demands an interpretation. This dissertation is about the texts that see, represent, and respond to these gaps in historical knowledge. In the end, these texts demonstrate that despite the tantalizing appeal of the ruin as a repository of history, the ruin ultimately fails. The ruin does not speak for itself, but rather requires a story—historia—to accompany it.

Despite the multiple examples of medieval English meditation on ruins, most sustained studies of literary representation of ruins examine later periods—ruins as reminders of the Catholic past after the Reformation, symbols of English nationalist history in the eighteenth century, and so forth. Within literary studies, my project is the first sustained study to examine the medieval literature of ruin. Yet why has the medieval literary depiction of ruin been ignored? I would argue that the embrace of narratives of

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25 Benson 1.
26 For more on historia as a concept in the Middle Ages, see the collection of essays *Historia: The Concept and Genre in the Middle Ages*. Eds. Tumas Lehtonen and Paivi Mehtonen. Helsinki: Societas Scientarum Fennica, 2000.
rupture and discontinuity that emerged in the early modern period is precisely the reason why the medieval concept of ruin has not yet been examined closely. Thomas Greene summarizes the conscious break with history that Renaissance writers desired:

The will of renaissance cultures was to distinguish themselves diacritically from their immediate past. The renaissance, if it did nothing else that was new, chose to open a polemic against what it called the Dark Ages. The ubiquitous imagery of disinterment, resurrection, and renascence needed a death and burial to justify itself; without the myth of medieval entombment, its imagery, which is to say its self-understanding, had no force […] The creation of this myth [of medieval entombment] was not a superficial occurrence. It expressed a belief in change and loss, change from the immediate past and loss of a remote, prestigious past that might nonetheless be resuscitated.28

What we now call the Middle Ages became the sacrifice on the pyre of Renaissance self-fashioning. The whole reason it is “middle” is because the humanists engaged in what Greene calls the “death and burial” of an entire epoch after the classical period. For Greene, the archaeological metaphor is at the very heart of the periodization of the Renaissance as “other” from the preceding epoch. Thus perhaps it is no wonder to us that the interest in ruins has been carefully examined in Renaissance poetry, but not in the “entombed” Middle Ages. Often, in fact, it was the ruins of the Middle Ages that inspired the ruin art of the early modern period—the most obvious example being the “bare, ruin’d choirs” of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 73. The Middle Ages became a ruin in and of itself, an enigmatic foreign object standing between the present and the classical past, instead of a period that theorized and thought about ruins of earlier times.

Because of this willed act of discontinuity, the Early Modern period is often hailed as the birth of the genre of writing about ruins. Andrew Hui, in his philological

study of ruins in Renaissance poetry, goes so far as to hail the period as a “Ruin-
naissance.” He writes,

The ruins are still there in the Roman Forum because they are the invention of the
Renaissance. The Renaissance was, if I may say so, the Ruin-naissance, the birth
of the ruin as a distinct category of cultural discourse that became an inspirational
force in the poetic imagination, artistic expression, and historical inquiry of
fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe [...] The ruin functions as a privileged
cipher or master topos that marks the rupture between the world of the humanists
and the world of antiquity.29

The ruin, in this narrative, stands as a sign of historical passage of time and the ravages of
the medieval period on the classical period. In a way, the Middle Ages themselves are
seen as an aggressor, having destroyed Roman buildings ruins and used their stones for
the building of churches and other structures.

Contrasting the Renaissance view of historical change with the medieval, Thomas
Greene writes that “history betrayed a rupture, whereas medieval historiographies tended
to stress continuities.”30 While writers of the Early Modern period saw ruins of the
Middle Ages as an image of their welcome break with the medieval past, and celebrated
them as such, the medieval writer viewing architectural ruins sought a different approach
to mitigate the breaks that the ruins represented. Instead of embracing rupture, medieval
writers turned to literary sources to mend the historical discontinuity they witnessed in
the material world. The quintessential example of English ruin poetry is of course the Old
English poem The Ruin, in which the narrator shudders at the sight of the work of giants
slowly being transformed into a monument melded with the natural world, a stark
reminder of the fleeting glory of man. But throughout the medieval English corpus, there

29 Hui 1-2.
30 Greene, 30.
are countless more examples of writers representing ruin and musing on its significance in human memory and history. Understood in the two critical contexts, that of literary representations of ruin and medieval understandings of romanitas, this dissertation demonstrates how the physical ruin implied historical change, and thus presented a threat to a medieval idea of continuous history and inheritor of romanitas. Through their writing and their reading of previous literatures (historiography as well as classical literature), medieval thinkers used the ruin as a space to meditate upon historical change and thus highlight the irreplaceable role of literature in a correct interpretation of and understanding of history.

Medieval writers, compilers, and translators did this through their appeal to classical texts that also meditate upon ruins (like the author of the Passio Sancti Albani using Lucan to meditate upon the ruins near his own abbey) and their collation of numerous historical sources to arrive at the correct interpretation of the ruin (like Ranulph Higden’s description of ruins from literary sources in the Polychronicon). This dissertation examines the methods that medieval writers used to address historical discontinuity and lack of historical information through their literary representations of ruins. All of the texts I examine in some sense represent the past. Thus, I use the term “historical writing” to describe the sources I work with in this dissertation. It is a capacious term on purpose—I examine historiography (the Old English Orosius, Ranulph Higden’s Polychronicon), travel guides (Magister Gregorius’ Narracio Mirabilibus Urbis Romae), and hagiography (William of St. Alban’s Passio Sancti Albani and the Middle

English alliterative poem *St. Erkenwald*. All of these texts, however generically disparate, somehow represent and interpret the past.

I also examine texts in both English and Latin because of their equal impact on English literary culture. The Latin texts I examine had far-reaching effects on vernacular literary culture—for instance, Trevisa’s translation of Higden’s *Polychronicon*, and John Lydgate’s use of William’s *Passio Sancti Albani* for his own Middle English *Life of Ss. Alban and Amphibal*. One might argue that as background material alone, these texts had an impact on English literary culture. Yet, I would argue that these Latin sources are worth studying in their own right. As Thomas Bestul has written,

> Critics have rarely sought to engage the meaning of those Latin texts they cite, nor have they often granted them the same complexity and status of the vernacular work they are held to explain […] Latin literature is frequently cited as important to the understanding of vernacular texts, but in most cases always as a more or less unproblematic background that is rarely brought into the foreground for examination in its own right.  

The Latin texts I examine, from the *Polychronicon* to the *Narracio Mirabilibus Urbis Romae*, are crucial texts on their own, and it is important to treat them as texts worthy of study to more fully understand the literary culture of England in the Middle Ages.

As a final note, while I examine the literary representation and references to stones, often found in the ruins, this dissertation is not about stone as a concept, or medieval theories about natural properties of stone. It is specifically the ruin—designed by human architects, shaped by human hands—that I focus on in this project in order to understand how medieval authors, writers, and compilers understood the material remains

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of their forebears, represented by the buildings they constructed and left behind. Because of this focus, I also do not explore the copious amount of medieval material on stones themselves, like lapidaries or scientific manuals. It is not necessarily the stone itself that matters for the medieval observer of the ruin, but rather the human component of building and the inhuman effect of time on the structures.

In my first chapter, “Romanitas from Ruin: The Old English Orosius and Early English Literary Culture,” I examine representations of ruins in England at the turn of the tenth century. At this time, anxiety over the loss of Latin learning following the Viking raids on monasteries beginning in the eighth century manifested itself in the Alfredian translation projects of patristic and late antique Latin works into Old English: Gregory the Great’s *Cura Pastoralis*, Augustine’s *Soliloquies*, Boethius’ *De consolatio philosophiae*, and Orosius’ *Historiarum Adversus Paganos Libri Septem*. Many of the late antique authors whose works were translated at this time originally wrote around the time of the sack of Rome in the fifth century, giving their early English audience a point of connection to antiquity in the wake of their own disappearing books and ways of life. The Old English *Orosius*, through its depiction of ruin, acknowledges historical connections between late imperial Rome and early England, and expands upon the Latin original’s themes of ruin and memory. Examining the role of the ruin in this period of English literary history demonstrates how translators and compilers used patristic Latin, Anglo-Latin, and Old English poetry to create historical narrative that emphasized England’s romanitas.

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The second chapter, “The Passio Sancti Albani and the Translation of Ruin in Twelfth-Century Saint Albans,” turns to post-Conquest England and focuses on William of St. Albans’ *Passio Sancti Albani* (c. 1167). This text begins with the fictional claim that it is a Latin translation of an ancient English source. The narrator of this fictional English source then claims that his sources are both the ruined Roman city of Verulamium, where the narrator found carvings of Alban’s martyrdom on the city walls, and oral tradition. William’s text, through its depiction of ruin as both a historical and narrative source, certainly seems to attribute a kind of authority to the ruin. Yet, since the narrative contained in this fictional English source is ultimately preserved in the written word and not the crumbling ruin, the text ultimately acknowledges that the ruin alone cannot be relied upon to convey meaning: it must be accompanied and ultimately even replaced by the written record to preserve memory for posterity. The *Passio*, through its classical allusions to Virgil and Lucan, furthers the link between Roman architectural ruin and the literature of classical antiquity. These specific allusions suggest that the view of the ruin as inscrutable without a proper textual interlocutor is one gleaned from classical Latin literature and manifested in the Anglo-Latin literature of the twelfth century.

Chapter Three, “The Textual Ruins of Rome in the *Narracio Mirabilibus Urbis Romae*” examines classical textual traces in twelfth-century depiction of ruins of Rome, this time in Master Gregory’s *Narracio Mirabilibus Urbis Romae*, which was best known in England by its inclusion in Ranulph Higden’s *Polychronicon*. The *Narracio* has long been read as a proto-humanist guidebook to Rome that was uninfluenced by literary depictions, and instead a first-hand account of the marvels of pagan antiquity. This
chapter, by specifically focusing on the text’s allusions to Lucan and Hildebert of Lavardin (1056-1133), demonstrates how Gregory used literary sources in his description of Roman antiquities. These literary allusions, in the end, show how for Master Gregory, the physical world offers no unmediated vision of the past, and literary mediations are in fact the way to present a coherent and relatable vision of antiquity.

Chapter Four, “St. Erkenwald and Higden’s Polychronicon: History from the Ruins” reexamines the fourteenth-century alliterative poem St. Erkenwald in light of Higden’s universal history the Polychronicon. The poem’s representation of the past, exemplified by the characters of both Erkenwald and the pagan judge, demonstrates an understanding of historical memory influenced by Higden’s historiographical practice. By looking at both the poem’s manuscript context and its content, I demonstrate how the Erkenwald-poet was influenced by the Polychronicon. Higden’s depiction of ruins in the Polychronicon highlights the necessity of textual record for understanding material remains, and this view of history and materiality in turn informs St. Erkenwald’s rejection of the possibility that the material object can speak for itself.

Finally, the coda, “The Historians and the Antiquaries: Ruins and Historical Narrative in Early Modern England” looks beyond the medieval period to examine some of the ways in which English antiquaries collected and disseminated the materials they found in ecclesiastical ruins after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. There is a reason that scholarship on literary depiction of ruins has found an abundance of material in Early Modern England—after the Dissolution, these new ruins that now dotted the English landscape left a lasting impact on the collective English consciousness. I examine the research of Matthew Parker, Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, and John Leland,
Tudor antiquary, to explore the ways in which these two men relied on medieval models of textuality and historiography in addressing the rupture represented by the ruin of the monasteries.

Taken together, these chapters demonstrate the ways in which medieval historical texts describe and interpret the ruin: the site of historical rupture, the object that refuses to be fully known, the mute stone that requires a written story to understand it. This understanding of the ruin is profoundly unmodern, and instead shares a similarity with Greco-Roman experiences of the past. Commenting on Cicero, James Ker and Christoph Pieper write,

> It is not only the content of the past (‘the past itself’) that counts. Of equal importance is the form in which it is remembered. If the act of commemorating is conducted well through art, literature, or ritual, it grants aesthetic pleasure both to its author and to his public. In fact, a great deal of the fascination with the past lies in the fact that it can be molded not only according to the political and social norms of those who live later but also to meet their tastes. One may even go a step further and ask: Would an unmediated, ‘authentic’ past be appealing at all? Would that not be an unsettling prospect, as compared with the pleasurable and no-risk option of evaluating the past from the same vantage permitted by artistic transformation?³⁵

The past itself, in this project represented by the ruin, is not enough. In the face of the ruins around them, medieval writers, through their own interactions with other texts, created historical texts of their own to remedy the lack of knowledge that the ruin heralded, and to represent history anew.

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Chapter One

*Romanitas* from Ruin: The Old English *Orosius* and Early English Literary Culture

In the opening to the seventh- or eighth-century Anglo-Latin *Liber monstrorum*, the author addresses his potential skeptics, who doubt the wonders he is about to describe. He writes:

Pontio namque tenebroso hoc opus aequipero, quod probandi si sint uera an instructa mendacio, nullus patet accesus eaque per orbem terrarum aurato sermone miri rumorus fama dispergebat, quorum maximam partem philosophorum et poetarum scriptura demonstrat, quae semper mendacia nutrit

[For I compare this task with the dark sea, since there is no clear way of testing whether that rumor which has spread throughout the world with the gilded speech of marvelous report is true or steeped in lies; of which things the writings of the poets and philosophers, which always foster lies, expound the greatest part.]

The author laments that philosophers and poets, through their craft, have manipulated their accounts of the “real world” to embellish the true report. Their gilded speech creates something out of nothing, whereas what he claims he will do is only tell the truth. The author of the *Liber* then relies on a ruin metaphor to describe the experience of reading the works of these poets and philosophers:

Quaedam tantum in ipsis mirabilibus uera esse creundtur, et sunt innumerabilia quae si quis ad exploranda pennis volare potuisset et ita rumoroso sermone tamen fecta probaret, ubi nunc urbs aurea et gemmis aspersa litora dicuntur, ibi lapideam aut nullam urbem et scopulosa cerneret.

[Only some things in the marvels themselves are believed to be true, and there are countless things which if anyone could take winged flight to explore, they would prove that although they should be concocted in speech and rumor, where now

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there is said to lie a golden city and gem-strewn shores, one would see there rocks and a stony city, if at all]37

Poets and philosophers, through their craft, provide the descriptions of glory of cities constructed solely through their own imagination and creation. For the author of the Liber Monstrorum, then, the ruined city represents the physical world, and for better or worse the work of the poet and philosopher is to create a shining, coherent narrative from its crumbled stones.

While the Liber monstrorum ostensibly portrays poets’ and philosophers’ work in a negative light, its concerns with the discrepancy between truth and reality demonstrate the ability of the written word to transform and mediate the physical world. Ruins, in particular, can be represented and rebuilt in the written text so that they can convey something different than an observer may witness in the world. Old English and Anglo-Latin literary culture provides numerous examples of literary representation of and meditation upon ruins: from the patristic texts that they read to the poetry they wrote, early English readers and writers had ruins on their minds. While Kathryn Hume in 1976 cautioned against reading a “ruin motif” into the creation of Old English poetry,38 I would like to argue that we can in fact read a ruin motif in the later Old English corpus of poetry and translations of Latin texts, specifically in response to the architectural and cultural devastation of the Viking raids beginning in the late eighth century. In that context, the ruins of Rome in the wake of the barbarians in the writings of late antique authors from Augustine to Prudentius provided early English readers with a model to understand ruins in their midst. This understanding, informed by classical tradition,

37 Orchard, pp. 265-7.
helped them to understand their own place in history and Christendom. These literary meditations of architectural ruin give the authors, compilers, and translators an opportunity to highlight their literary practice of creating coherent, historical narrative in the face of physical decay and destruction. This chapter will provide an overview of Anglo-Saxon encounters with literary representation of ruins, and then examine late ninth- and early-tenth century depictions of ruins in translations of Latin texts, focusing particularly on the Old English paraphrase of Orosius’s *Historiarum adversum paganos libri septem*. The Old English version’s depiction of the ruins of Babylon highlights the usefulness of the ruin as a marker of historical time, as well as demonstrates the ways in which the narrator engaged with other English texts and their representations of ruin. For the *Orosius* narrator, the ruin is not something just to be described, but rather it is a literary feature that highlights the role of literature in the transmission of history from Rome to England, from late antiquity to his contemporary moment.

**Alfred and Augustine: Later Anglo-Saxon Attitudes towards Cultural Decline**

The time of King Alfred (c. 840s-899) in England was especially concerned with ruin, both material and cultural. In his preface to his translation of Gregory the Great’s *Cura Pastoralis*, Alfred laments the destruction of monasteries as sites of learning, and the general decline of knowledge, especially Latin learning, in England:

> Ða ic ða ðís eall gemunde, þa gemunde ic eac hu ic geseah, ærþæmþe hit eall forheregod wære ond forbærned, hu þa cirican giond eall Angelkynn stodon màoma ond boca gefylda, ond eac micel menigu Godes ðeowa ond þa swiðe lytle fœrme ðara boca wiston, forþæmþe hie híora nan wuht ongietan ne meahton, forþæmþe hie næron on híora ægen geðeode awritene. Swelce híæwæden: Ûre ieldran, ða þe ðas stowa ær híoldon, hie lufedon wisdom ond ðúðh ðone hí begeaton welan ond us læfðon. Her mon mæg giet gesion híora swáð, ac we him ne cunnun æferspyriagean, forðæm we habbað nu ægðer forlæten ge þone welan ge þone wisdom, forðæmðe we noldon to ðæm spore mid ure mode onlutan.
[When I considered all this I remembered also how I saw, before it had been all ravaged and burnt, how the churches throughout the whole of England stood filled with treasures and books, and there was also a great multitude of God’s servants, but they had very little knowledge of the books, for they could not understand anything of them, because they were not written in their own language. As if they had said: “Our forefathers, who formerly held these places, loved wisdom, and through it they obtained wealth and bequeathed it to us. In this we can still see their tracks, but we cannot follow them, and therefore we have lost both the wealth and the wisdom, because we would not incline out hearts after their example.”]39

The ravaging and burning of churches is the historical context for Alfred’s lament, but interestingly this is not his main complaint. Even before the physical destruction of books and the monasteries that housed them, those same books were of no use because the monks could not read Latin. Alfred ventriloquizes these monks, who upon seeing the books, understand that their forebears must have prized learning, but they themselves cannot follow in their sweæd because of their own lack of knowledge. Here, Alfred implies that the loss of physical texts, which occurred during the Viking invasions, was not the beginning of the tragedy that was the loss of learning during this time in English history, but rather the tragedy began with the decay of Latin that had happened even before the physical destruction.40

Alfred’s attitude is reminiscent of late antique patristic descriptions of ruins. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) provides us with a clear picture of the kind of late antique attitude towards ruins that Anglo-Saxon readers encountered in their intellectual formations. His De Civitate Dei contra paganos is a prime text for considering the

40 Helmut Gneuss also notes this pre-conquest decay, as opposed to numerous scholars who have read the decay of learning and catastrophic violence as simultaneous events (see “King Alfred and the History of Anglo-Saxon Libraries,” in Modes of Interpretation in Old English Literature, ed. Phyllis Rugg Brown, Georgia Ronan Crampton, and Fred C. Robinson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986, 29-49).
attitudes of early Christians towards ruin, particularly the ruins of Rome. Written in the early fifth century, amidst the onslaught of barbarian invasions of Rome, De civitate frequently mentions the physical destruction of Rome and other cities such as Babylon and Troy, in Augustine’s attempt to defend Christianity against those who claimed that Christianity was to be blamed for the Visigothic sack of Rome. In the following passage, Augustine directly compares moral ruin and physical ruin:

Romam quippe partam ueterum auctamque laboribus foediorem stantem fecerant quam ruentem, quando quidem in ruina eius lapides et ligna, in istorum autem uita omnia non murorum, sed morum munimenta atque ornamenta ceciderunt, cum funestioribus eorum corda cupiditatibus quam ignibus tecta illius urbis arderent.

[for, thanks to them, the Rome that was conceived and built by the labours of the men of old fell further while she stood than ever she has fallen in her ruin. For in that ruin there fell only stones and wood; whereas by these men’s lives were overthrown, not her walls, but her moral defences and adornments. More fatal than the flames which consumed the city’s houses were the lusts that burned in their hearts.] (II.2)

Here, Augustine uses paranomasia with the phrase non murorum, sed morum to directly contrast physical and moral decay. The current ruin of the Rome’s walls, according to Augustine, is not as tragic as the moral ruin of the profligacy of Roman forebears. Later on, in Book II, Augustine expands on this idea, claiming that physical ruin is the next logical step from (and a just punishment for) the earlier moral decline:

Nunc ago de labe morum, quibus primum paulatim decoloratus, deinde torrentis modo praecipitatis tanta quamvis integris tectis moenibusque facto est ruina rei publicae, ut magna auctores eorum eam tunc amissam non dubient dicere. Recte

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41 For a recent study of De civitate and Augustine’s attitude towards the sack of Rome, see Gillian Clark “Imperium and the City of God: Augustine on Church and Empire,” Studies in Church History 54 (Church and Empire, June 2018): 46-70. For a general introduction to De civitate, see the collection of essays edited by James Wetzel: Augustine’s City of God: A Critical Guide (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

autem abscesserant ut amitteretur omnes adyis arisque relictis di, si eorum de bona vita atque iustitia civitas praecpta contemperat.

[For the time being, I am concerned with the collapse of those moral standards which, corrupted little by little at first, then tumbled pell-mell like a torrent until, though the houses and city walls remained intact, the commonwealth was so ruined that even its own most eminent authors do not hesitate to say it was lost. To be sure, if they had given precepts concerning the good life and justice to the city and the city had ignored them, all the gods would then have been right to give Rome up for lost, ‘forsaking shrine and altar.’] (II. 22)\(^\text{43}\)

Again, Augustine emphasizes that the ruin of the city began not with barbarian invasion and plundering of Rome, but rather with the moral decay of its own citizens. Augustine further discusses the ruin of cities in Book XVIII, when he talks about the destruction of Troy and Babylon, and compares the rise of these cities with the rise of Rome, implicitly then comparing their decline with the decline of Rome. He also compares Rome and Israel, in discussing the destruction of the temple, and then gestures towards the building of the Church as the true rebuilding of the temple. He quotes the Old Testament prophet Amos as a prophecy of the Christian church replacing the Jewish temple:

In illa die, inquit, resuscitabo tabernaculum Daud, quod cecidit, et reaedificabo, quae ceciderunt eius, et destructa eius resuscitabo et reaedificabo ea sicut dies saeculi; ita ut exquirant me residui hominum et omnes gentes, in quibus invocatum est nomen meum super eos, dicit Dominus faciens haec.

[In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and build up the breaches thereof: and I will raise up his ruins, and will build them up again as in the days of old: that the residue of men may inquire for me, and all the nations upon whom my name is invoked, says the Lord that doeth this.] (XVIII.28)\(^\text{44}\)

\(^{43}\) McCracken 230; Dyson 81-2.
Augustine works across time and space, using the idea of ruins, to then make the claim that the Church is the true way to supersede the transience of the world. While some of his contemporaries argued that Christianity was the cause of the rubble in Rome, Augustine instead argues that the beginning of the ruin of Rome was can be found in its moral decline before the physical destruction of the city itself, and the destruction of the city was inevitable after the moral decline of pagan Rome. He then also uses his idea of ruin in the context of Israel and the destruction of the temple, by then claiming that the actual rebuilding of the temple is the construction of the Church. Thus, in Augustine’s view, the Church is the answer to physical ruin—the physical sign of the everlasting kingdom of God. And crucially, rebuilding is important to this theory, as his citing of Amos demonstrates. It is improper to leave the rubble; instead, Christians ought to “raise up the ruins” so that God’s name may be proclaimed and glorified in the world.

Augustine’s theory of ruin, as a spiritual, moral, and physical decline, would not have been unknown in Anglo-Saxon England. The *De civitate Dei* is extant in four Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, either in full or excerpts. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 173, fols. 57-83 (second half of the eighth century) contains Sedulius’ letters to Macedonius, *Carmen Paschale*, an epigram of Damasus, and *De civitate Dei* XVIII.23 (Augustine’s chapter on the sibylline prophecies) along with three versions of the Sibylline prophecies. Durham, Cathedral Library B. II.22 contains *De Civitate Dei* with the *Retratatio*, along with Lanfranc’s notes on the *De civitate* and a Latin translation of the Timaeus. Oxford, Bodleian Library Bodley 691 (S.C. 2740) is an eleventh or twelfth century copy of the *De Civitate* along with *Retractatio* II. Xliii (provenance Exeter).
Finally, Windsor Castle, Royal Library Jackson Collection 16 is a ninth-century copy of the *De Civitate*, probably from Saint-Amand. These four manuscripts indicate that the *De civitate* at least had some kind of appeal throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, and it is preserved in its entirety in three manuscripts (only the Cambridge manuscript is excerpted). Of course, these are only the manuscripts of the *De civitate*—there are dozens of others manuscripts of Augustine’s work in Anglo-Saxon England, including his *De excidio Urbis Romae* (Cambridge, University Library Kk.1.23, fols. 67-135, a miscellany of patristic authors), and, perhaps more significantly, his *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (extant in fifteen manuscripts), which again would narrate his views on ruin as expressed in the psalms.\(^45\)

In his preface to his translation of *Cura Pastoralis*, Alfred engages in the same rhetoric of decay and destruction in late ninth-century in England that Augustine does in his works on Rome. For Augustine, it was the decline in virtue amongst the Romans before the barbarian invasions that led to the city being reduced to ruins; for Alfred, it is the decline in Latinity and literacy that occurred before the Viking attacks of the ninth century that led to the stagnation of literary and ecclesiastical culture and destruction of

\(^45\) See the Psalms (Vulgate numbering) 9:5-6: “Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever. O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end: and thou hast destroyed cities; their memorial is perished with them.” Also 73:3-8: “Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary. Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs. A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees. But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers. They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground. They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land.” The psalms were incredibly important in the shaping of the Benedictine life and mind: after the Benedictine reforms of the tenth century, we know that monks and nuns were reciting the entire 150-psalm book over the course of a week, and then would continue this cycle week in and week out (see Helen Appleton, “The Psalms in Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman England,” *English Studies* 98 (2017): 1). For more on the psalms in Anglo-Saxon England, see George H. Brown, “The Psalms as Foundations of Anglo-Saxon Learning” in *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the Middle Ages* ed. Nancy van Deusen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), pp. 1-24. For the ways in which the OE metrical psalter was used to further internalize the psalms, see Francis Leneghan “Making the Psalter Sing: The Old English Metrical Psalms, Rhythm, and Ruminatio” in *The Psalms and Medieval England: From the Conversion to the Reformation* ed. Tamara Atkin and Francis Leneghan (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017), pp. 173-197.
the monasteries. This parallel points to a type of cultural understanding of ruin that Anglo-Saxon writers might have picked up from the late antique authors like Augustine that they had studied in their early education.

Besides Augustine, another source of cultural discourse surrounding ruins were the writings of late antique Christian poets. Probably all Anglo-Saxon readers had encountered at least one of these poets in their schooling: Juvenecus, Avitus, Arator, Sedulius, and Prudentius. The influence that these poets had on English literature was substantial: Janie Steen has argued that while Anglo-Saxon writers may not have been consciously employing rhetorical figures to their writings from rhetorical manuals, they imitated rhetorical strategies that they had found in these late antique poets. A key image often found in these late antique poets is the ruined building, especially in relation to Rome. By looking at some of these late antique examples we can see the type of intellectual formation that Anglo-Saxon students and writers had and how it might have influenced their own literary depictions of ruins.

Juvenecus’ Euangelia is extant in six Anglo-Saxon mss. (Gneuss and Lapidge 7, 12, 87, 489, 540, 903). Right from the beginning, Juvenecus asserts the transience of Rome:

Immortale nihil mundi canpage tenetur,
Non orbis, non regna hominum, non aurea Roma,
Non mare, non tellus, non igean sidera caeli.
Nam statuit genitor rerum irreucable tempus,
Quo cunctum torrens rapiat flamma ultima mundum.

Gneuss suggests that perhaps Alfred is using a literary topos of decline and learning to engage in propaganda in his preface ('King Alfred and Anglo-Saxon Libraries, 38-39)—this would further the suggestion that perhaps he is getting this topos from a cultural idea of ruin and its relation to the culture at large.


As Ad Putter points out, Juvencus’ Rome is not Virgil’s aeterna Rome, but aurea Rome. The eschatological tone reminds his readers that all things, no matter how long they have lasted, will eventually be destroyed. The ruins of Rome, in the city of Rome itself and in its colony of Britannia, could have served as reminders for Anglo-Saxon readers of Juvencus of the transience of Rome, and thus giving them a tangible reminder that the city is not Virgil’s eternal city, but Juvencus’ golden one instead.

The early sixth-century poet Arator, in contrast, imbues Rome with supernatural grace to protect its architecture. Arator’s De actibus apostolorum is extant in eight Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, and this biblical epic has a few key moments of explicit theorizing of ruin, monuments, and rebuilding, especially in regards to the city of Rome and the Church. At the end of Book I, Arator addresses Rome:

His solidata fides, his est tibi, Roma, catenis
Perpetuata salus; harum circumdata nexu
Libera semper eris. Quid enim non uincula praestent
Quae tetigit qui cuncta potest absoluere? Cuius
Haec inuicta manu uel religiosa triumph
Moenia non ullo penitus quatientur ab hoste
Claudit iter bellis, qui portam pandit in astris.

[For you, o Rome! Faith has been made firm, salvation everlasting, by these
chains [of Peter]; enclosed in their embrace, you will always be free; for what
may the chains not furnish which he who can loosen all things has touched? By
his power, these walls, unconquerable and even sacred in their triumph, will not
be shaken deeply by any foe. He who opens the gate in heaven closes the way to
wars.]

A key part of this declaration is the acknowledgment of the walls’ unshakeable nature,
but only because of the blessing of God. Because of Christian salvation, even the walls
are “sacred”—the architecture of the city has been redeemed and imbued with
supernatural power. Yet, the architecture is not intrinsically powerful—it is only through
its association with Peter and thus with God that it is unconquerable. This passage in
particular circulated independently of the full De actibus apostolorum in Anglo-Saxon
England, appearing as the first text in the late ninth or early tenth century collection of
inscriptions in Urbana, University of Illinois MS. 128. The excerption demonstrates that
late antique poetic descriptions of architecture seemed to have a resonance outside of
original context, and this resonance resulted in its legibility and ability for excerption that
was taken advantage of in the Anglo-Saxon period. This excerption is particularly
interesting the context of the late ninth and early tenth centuries for this study, further
indicating that depiction of architecture and repudiation of ruin was key to this particular
period’s literary development.

1988. 56.
53 Luitpold Wallach transcribes the text as it appears in Urbana MS 128, and further discusses the manuscript in “The Urbana Anglo-
Elsewhere in the *De actibus apostolorum*, Arator also theorizes the connection between right belief, right speech, and architectural and monumental construction. In response to Paul’s evangelization, Demetrius, an idol-maker, gives a rousing speech to the citizens of Ephesus and encourages them to take up arms against the apostles:

Non pudet, o socii, nostram cecidisse Dianam,  
Quam mundi suspexit honor? Mortalibus ultra  
Quae speranda salus, si non per saecula possunt  
Fine carere dei? Quae nunc simulacra sacellis,  
Quae poterunt dare tura focis? Quos aduena Paulus  
Territat et quicquid gerimus pro nomine diuum  
Muta metalla uocat, quorum discedit ab urbe  
Religio pulsique fugam petiere Penates.  
Hei mihi, iam uideo subitis lapsura ruinis  
Condita fana diu, temple quoque nobilis aedem  
In cineres stragemque dari!

Does it not make you ashamed, comrades, that our Diana has fallen, whom the praise of the world has esteemed? What salvation is to be hoped for any longer by mortals, if the gods cannot be without end through the ages? What statues will [men] no be able to give to their shrines, what incense to altar fires? The foreigner Paul terrifies them [the gods] and calls whatever we make in the name of the gods dumb metal; their religion departs from the city, and the rejected Penates have sought flight. Alas for me! Already I see the holy places founded long ago about to collapse with a sudden fall, the sanctuary of the famous temple also being brought to ashes and ruin.\(^5^4\)

Demetrius’ speech highlights the transience of material idols and their temples, and makes the point that if the physical objects themselves have fallen and been destroyed, then the gods will abandon the city and its people (this passage is reminiscent of the passage from Augustine where he references Virgil, saying that the gods have sought flight). The crucial tragedy here is precipitated by the departure of the gods, after whose

\(^5^4\) *Historia Apostolica* II. 693-703; Schrader 79.
flight the temples and holy places cannot stand. Thus, Demetrius relies on description of abandonment and ruin to incite anger and violence in the people.

In his exposition of Demetrius’ speech, Arator acknowledges the pagan’s eloquence, and goes on to equate eloquence and the art of building:

Praescia uerba moment, quod apostolus ipse reuelat.
Corde salus credentis erit, confession uoce.
Sacrilego res una fuit: Demestrius aedes
Conditit argento, cuius facundia mouit
Hos animos, ut norma porbet sine iudice sensu
Numina uana coli nec de uirtute uenire
Pectoris istud opus, cui pars haec sola dicatur,
Quae rationis inops nudam serit ore loquelam.

[The prophetic words teach us what the Apostle himself reveals, that we are temples if all sins withdraw [from us]. Salvation will be in the heart of the believer, confession in his voice. To the sacrilegious man there was only one thing [eloquence]: Demetrius, whose eloquence moved these minds, built temples from silver [alone], so that the rule demonstrates that the false gods are worshipped without the understanding as judge, and that this undertaking does not come from the best faculty of the heart; this part alone [eloquence] is assigned to him which, wanting in reason, sows mere speech from the mouth.]55

Demetrius, a temple-builder, is also eloquent and able to rouse his fellow citizens through his speech. Yet, Arator notes, this is all he can do: he cannot build lasting temples on earth, and he cannot build lasting temples in his fellow man’s heart. Arator equates “mere speech” and mere construction, whereas what is necessary for lasting structures and spirituality is supernatural reason. Here it is useful to compare Arator’s description of Paul with that of Demetrius: “Habitacula Paulus/Dum terrena leuat, docet ut caelestia condat/Factaque saepe manu nunc construit atra uerbo [When Paul raises up earthly habitations, he teaches that he establishes heavenly ones, and having often built with his

55 Historia Apostolica II. 745-753; Schrader 80.
hand, he now constructs palaces with his word.\textsuperscript{56} Verbal eloquence is empty without spiritual truth, Arator teaches his reader through the analogy of architectural construction. At the end of the poem, after Arator has relied on the book of Acts for his material, Arator leaves the book of Acts as his source. The very sentence where Richard Schrader notes this movement is “venit ad excelsae sublimia culmina Romae [(Paul) came to the lofty pinnacles of exalted Rome.]”\textsuperscript{57} This sentence marks the shift from Scripture to Roman authority, thereby imbuing Rome with a spiritual authority, furthermore grounded in architecture, through his description of the arrival as “to the pinnacles of lofty Rome.” This phrasing emphasizes the urban architecture—the physicality of the city through architectural description, not just an abstract concept. When Peter becomes head of the church, Arator further describes Rome in terms of its architecture:

Petrus in ecclesiae surrexit corpore princeps,
Haec turrita caput mundi circumtulit oris;
Conueniunt maiora sibi, speculentur ut omnes
Terrarum dominae fundata cacumina sedes

[Peter rose to be the leader of the body of the church, turret-crowned, she [Rome] surrounded her head with the regions of the world; the greater things gathered to her, so that all the [episcopal] sees might observe the secure heights of the mistress of the world].\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{56} Historia Apostolica II. 566-8; Schrader 75. See also 1 Corinthians 3:10-17, which speaks of the individual Christian as a temple of God. Mary Carruthers uses this “wise master-builder” passage to discuss how church fathers, exegetes, and rhetoricians thought about scriptural interpretation and exegesis in \textit{The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 18-19. For more on Paul as a builder, cf. Venantius Fortunatus, in his poem on the relics contained in the cathedral of Bishop Felix, when he writes: “Hic petra firma manens, ille architectus habetur:/surgit in his templum, quo placet ara Deo ” [“Peter is the firm-founded rock, while Paul acts as the architect; on these rise a church, where is an altar pleasing to God.”] (Carm. 3.7, ed. and trans. Michael Roberts, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, 2017, p. 146-7).

\textsuperscript{57} Historia Apostolica II. 1218; Schrader, 93 n. 92.

\textsuperscript{58} Historia Apostolica II. 1225-8; Schrader 93.
Rome and her *turrita caput* have become symbols now of the church’s universality, just as imperial Rome had gathered all the regions of the world together so that the church, superseding the empire, now has these regions as episcopal sees.

Prudentius is yet another late antique poet who had a pervasive presence in Anglo-Saxon England. It is Prudentius’ prolific poetic oeuvre that can perhaps provide us the most varied examples of a literary, philosophical, and theological preoccupation with ruin and rebuilding. Throughout his works, he consistently references the destruction of cities, especially in reference to Rome, and, like Augustine and Arator, contrasts earthly building with heavenly building. In *Apotheosis*, after declaring God’s triumph over the earthly power of Rome and Rome’s subsequent submission to God, he writes:

*Destructone iacent Solomonia saxa metallo*  
*Aedificata manu? Iacet illud nobile templum*  
*Cur iacet? Artificis quia dextra solubilis illud*  
*Caementum struxit resolubile; iure solutum est*  
*Et iacet, in nihilum quoniam redit omne politum.*  
*Quod fieri recipit, recipit quandoque perire.*  
*Si nostrum contra quod sit vis discere templum,*  
*Est illud quod nemo opifex fabriliter aptans*  
*Conposuit, quod nulla abies pinusve dolata*  
*Texuit, excise quod numquam marmore crevit;*  
*Cuius onus nullis fultum sublime columnis*  
*Fornice curvato tenui super arte pependit,*  
*Sed Verbo factum Domini; non voce Sonora,*  
*Sed Verbo, quod semper erta. Verbum caro factum est.*  
*Hoc templum aeternum est, hoc finem non habet, hoc tu*  
*Expugnare volens flagris, cruce, felle petisti.*

[Do not Solomon’s stones, that were built up by hand, lie in ruins, his metal-work destroyed? That famous temple lies in ruins. And why? Because it was a craftsman’s perishable hand that framed that perishable work of stone. Justly it has perished and now lies in ruins, since every work of art turns again to nothingness; that which admits of being made is bound one day to perish. If on the other hand thou wouldst learn what our temple is, it is one that no workman built up piece by piece with the skill of his craft, no fabric of hewn fir or pine, nor ever rose out of quarried marble. It is one whose mass does not rest high up on...}
pillars, supported with delicate skill on curving arches. It is made from the Word of the Lord; not his loud-sounding voice, but his Word, which ever lived. The Word was made flesh. This is the temple that is everlasting and without end; this is the temple that thou hast attacked, seeking to take with it scourge and cross and gall.\footnote{Apotheosis II. 512-527. All quotations from Prudentius come from the Loeb two-volume edition of Prudentius’ works, ed. and trans. H.J. Thomson. Cambridge, MA, 1949.}

Here, Prudentius compares destruction of powerful cities such as Rome with Solomon’s Temple and its ruin. Prudentius acknowledges that of course the temple is in ruins, because it is a man-made object of perishable stone. All art is subject to this fate (“in nihilum quoniam redit omne politum”). \textit{Politum} is the perfect passive participle of \textit{polire}, meaning “to smooth, to polish,” a form used by Cicero and ancient authors to refer to refined speech (for example, in \textit{Brutus} “ornata oratio et polita” [95,326]). While Prudentius’ Anglo-Saxon audiences might not have caught the rhetorical reference here, Prudentius himself must have been well aware of the context in which he was using this word, foreshadowing his impending theological point: only the Word, that is, Christ, is eternal. The Word that became flesh, the temple of Christ’s body, although beaten and crucified, is the only thing that can escape ruin. Prudentius is careful to contrast \textit{verbo} and \textit{voce}—it is explicitly not \textit{voce sonora} of God that is eternal, but the \textit{verbum caro factum est} of John 1. This of course, is interesting, given the emphasis placed on voice by Cicero in \textit{De oratore} (especially Book One), and thus perhaps at least a lip service to the rejection of Roman style. It is not \textit{style} that lasts, but \textit{substance}, according to Prudentius, and specifically the substance of Christ. This formulation also recalls Arator’s speech of Demetrius the idol-and temple-maker: his style was good, but because he did not have the substance of Christ, it cannot last.
Prudentius more specifically addresses Rome in *Contra Orationem Symmachi*, where he responds to the pagan Symmachus’ request that the temple of Victory be restored to the Senate house. In it, he depicts Theodosius looking down on the city of the seven hills after pagan worship was restored to Rome, and addresses the city as *fida parens*. The city has been darkened by pagan temples, her jewels and gold stained by pagan worship. Instead, Theodosius tells Rome to reject earthly things that can decay and instead look to the eternal heavens:

[I counsel thee, lift thy face on high above the air of earth and leave the stormy elements beneath thy feet. The whole world is subject to thee. This is the ordinance of God himself, by whose will it is that thou hast lordship and dost rule the world and in thy might dost plant thy foot on all things mortal. It becomes thee not as a queen to lower thine eyes and gaze upon the perishable earth, looking about for majesty in the low parts of creation, over which thou thyself dost stand superior. I shall not suffer thee, while I am thy leader, to hold to old idle notions, nor to worship decayed monstrosities of gods. If it is stone, it perishes with age or cracks under the stroke of a light blow; if it is plaster covered with sheets of pliant metal, the cement proves treacherous and gaps gradually appear; if the smoothing file has given the shape of a statue to plates of bronze,
then either the hollow frame droops to one side with the pressure of the weight, or a scurfy rust eats into the image and wastes it, piercing it with many a hole.\[^{60}\]

While Theodosius seems to exhort Rome to reject earthly elements, since as such they are perishable, it also seems that he acknowledges that there is a way to use transient materials for redeemed purposes. He says that he will not allow Romans to worship the pagan gods, and then in great detail enumerates the effects of time and decay on physical materials erected to the worship of these gods. Yet before this, he declares that it is God’s will that Rome brings all things on earth under subjection to herself—which, one might also infer, would include the statues, monuments, and remnants of pagan Roman religion. Here, Prudentius does not condemn the architecture itself—in fact, the infrastructure put in place by the pagan Roman empire can be redeemed to become a conduit for Christianity. Rather, his detailed description of ruin and decay applies to those structures which pagans worship, in comparison with the eternal God.

I will end this section with a final example from Prudentius, from his Liber Peristephanon, a poetic collection of the martyrdoms of early Christian saints. This work provides much material for thinking about monumental memory because of the narrator’s encounters with tombs, epitaphs, and memorial churches of these various saints. The text’s portrayal of the primacy of Rome has been examined by Michael Roberts, in his study of the poetic depiction of the city’s civic traditions and physical space.\[^{61}\] Yet for my purposes, I would like to consider a passage from Liber Peristephanon X, the martyrdom of Romanus. After the loquacious Romanus has been killed by the Romans (at one point

\[^{60}\] Contra orationem Symmachi, ll. 425-441.
his tormentor, tiring of the saint’s speech even under duress, desires the saint’s
verbiositas to be destroyed [l. 551]), the governor gleefully records all the gruesome
details of his death. Even here, we see Prudentius drawing a parallel between the material
decay of texts and ruins, and the eternity of texts and bodies:

Gesta intimasse cuncta fertur principi
Praefectus addens ordinem voluminum
Seriemque tantae digerens tragödiae;
Laetatus omne crimen in fasces refert
Suum tyrannus chartulis vivacibus.
Illas sed actas conficit diutina,
Fuligo fuscat, pulvis obducit situ,
Carpit senectus aut ruinis obruit
Inscripta Christo pagina immortalia est,
Nec obsolescit ullus in caelis apex.

[They say the governor reported all the facts to the emperor, with a series of scrolls in
which he laid out in order all the details of this great tragic drama, the oppressor
cheerfully entering all his own wickedness in packets of records on sheets that were
meant to last. But those the long passage of time destroys, they are blackened with
grime or covered with dust where they lie undisturbed, old age tatters them or buries
them under ruins; whereas the page that Christ has written upon is deathless and in
heaven not a letter fades away]62

Here, Prudentius obsesses over the written word in its material form. The governor does
not just consult one volumen to tell the emperor, but rather a whole series (seriem) of
them, emphasizing the sheer number. On these sheets the governor has recorded all of his
own crimes, thinking they are his virtues. The sheets, previously referred to as voluminis,
are now referred to as chartulis—little scraps of paper, like memos. Yet despite the
diminutive suffix, these chartulis are in fasces—literally “in bundles,” from the singular
fascis, but the imperial connotation of the plural fasces is undeniable, especially since this
knowledge transaction is taking place between a governor and an emperor of Rome.

62 Peristephanon X ll. 1111-1120.
Earlier in the section, in lines 142-146, Romanus rhetorically asks his tormentors if the trappings of earthly power all fade, including the *fasces* (l. 143). Prudentius’ reference, then, to the material text as *fasces* is no accident—he aligns the corruption of the text with the corruption of the government.

At first Prudentius describes these bundles as *vivacibus*, he immediately makes clear that the claim to longevity for a manuscript is tenuous. For of course a manuscript can’t claim eternity: time will destroy it, nature will deface it, and crumbling buildings will hide it. This leads Prudentius to conclude that the only book that is lasting is the book of Christ, written in heaven. After this conclusion, he goes on to describe the angel detailing Romanus’ martyrdom in the heavenly book: not only does the angel describe the exact dimensions and locations (even the exact amount of blood lost) of Romanus’ wounds, but he also draws pictures.

Here, Prudentius describes not the ruin of buildings but of manuscripts. Yet they are still linked: the forgotten manuscripts will be obscured by the architectural *ruinis*. Their fates are intimately connected. Architectural ruins exist not just in their own sphere, but also affect literary and cultural production, based on what manuscripts are available. Here we might think of the rubble of monasteries attacked by the Vikings, and the manuscripts that were destroyed of obscured by this destruction. Yet Prudentius’ view of literary inheritance cannot be so bleak—after all, he does indeed write his poetry down, in the hopes that posterity will be able to benefit from it.63 Despite the claims of literature to be a vehicle for historical knowledge, the written word always exists with the anxiety

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63 Robert Levine details how Prudentius’ success is on the terms of his rhetorical prowess, giving many examples from the *Liber* of the saints’ positive invocation of graphic (that is, writing) metaphors in their deaths (for example, Cassian’s students carving his flesh with letters just as he made them write on their wax tablets in the school room). See “Prudentius’ Romanus: The Rhetorician as Hero, Martyr, Satirist, Saint.” *Rhetorica* 11.1 (Winter 1991), pp. 5-38.
that its physical vehicle could crumble with age, burn in destructive flames, or lie hidden beneath stone rubble. This is the kind of anxiety we see in Anglo-Saxon authors dealing with the destruction of the monasteries by Viking raids—such as Alcuin’s *De clade Lindisfarensis* or Alfred’s preface to *Cura Pastoralis*. In fact, the Alfredian translation project uses descriptions of architectural ruin to fashion a Christian English kingdom that sees itself, in its reaction to barbarian invasion, as an heir to the late Roman empire.

**The Old English *Orosius*: Babylon, Rome, and Ruin**

We find a particularly pertinent insight into the Anglo-Saxon perception of ruin in the Old English version of Orosius’ *Historiarum adversum paganos libri septimi*. Orosius was a fifth century cleric from modern-day Spain or Portugal, who wrote his *Historia* in light of the sack of Rome and the claims that Christianity had caused the empire to fall into ruin. Thus the *Historia* has the same aim as Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*. In fact, the *Historia* was written at the request of Augustine of Hippo, to provide a more historiographical approach to the effects of the barbarian invasions. Orosius’ text provides a comprehensive history of the world seen through a particular historical moment—that is, the ruin of the Roman empire by barbarian invasions, particularly the Gothic sack of Rome in 410. This particular context is what might have made Orosius an appealing choice for translation in ninth- or tenth-century in England, in the wake of the Viking invasions. Perhaps, then, it should not be surprising that the Old English *Orosius*

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66 Gassman, 619.
(compiled sometime between 870-930)\textsuperscript{67} provides us with perhaps one of the most telling descriptions of an Anglo-Saxon theory of ruin and its relationship to Rome, via the depiction of Babylon in Book II. The narrator describes the physical founding of the city, first started by the giant (\textit{ent}) Nimrod, continued by Ninus, and finished by Semiramis:

Seo burh \textit{wæs} getimbrad on fildum lande and on \textit{swiðe} emnum, and heo \textit{wæs} \textit{swiðe} fæger on to locianne. And heo is \textit{swiðe} rihte feowerscyte. And \textit{hæs} wealles mycelness and \textit{fæstnyss} is ungelyfedlic to seegenne; \textit{hæt is}, \textit{hæt he is} L \textit{elna} brad and II hund \textit{elna} heah, and his ymbgang is hundseofantig mila and seofe\textit{ðan} dæl anre mile. And he is geworht of tigelan and of eortyrewan, and ymbutan \textit{þone} weall is seo \textit{mæste} dic, on \textit{þam} is yrende se ungefoglicosta stream. And \textit{wiputan} \textit{þam} dice is geworht twegra \textit{elna} heah weall, and bufan \textit{þam} maran wealle ofer eallne \textit{þone} ymbgong he is mid stænenum wighusum beworht.

[The city was built on very flat level land and was a beautiful sight. It is an exact square. The thickness and strength of the wall is incredible: it is fifty ells thick and two hundred ells high, and the circumference is seventy miles and one seventh. It is made of bricks and bitumen, and outside the wall there is an enormous ditch, in which a vast river runs. Outside the ditch there is a wall two ells high, and on top of the large wall throughout the circuit it is furnished with turrets of stone.\textsuperscript{68}]

This passage’s tense switch highlights the departure of the aesthetic glory of the city, attached to worldly imperial prowess, yet the departure of aesthetic glory does not mean that a city has to be totally demolished. The ruins left behind testify to the history of the once glorious city in the present, even though its present state is not something to be admired. The city \textit{wæs} beautiful, implying that now it is not. Yet the subsequent depictions of the city are in the present: how large the city \textit{is}, what shape it \textit{is}, how tall the walls \textit{are}, what it is made of, et cetera. The ruins, while not beautiful, still stand as a

\textsuperscript{67} Francis Leneghan points to a composition date sometime around 930, because of the relevance he sees in the translator’s choices in the context of Edward and Aethelstan’s reigns in Wessex (see “\textit{Translatio Imperii}: The Old English orisons and the Rise of Wessex,” \textit{Anglia} 133.4 [2015], 656-705).

witness to the present about the former appearance of the city. But crucially, the city is not beautiful in its current ruined state, in opposition to a more Romantic idea of the aesthetics of the ruined building.

The above passage is generally faithful to the Latin text, thus showing little deviation from its original depiction of a ruined city. It is the next section of the Old English text where the narrator drastically expands upon this theme. The Latin simply states, “et tamen magna illa Babylon, illa prima post reparationem humani generis condita, nunc paene etiam minima mora uicta capta subuersa est [The great Babylon, however, the first city to be founded after the restoration of the human race, was at that time captured and overthrown with hardly any delay].” The Old English, in contrast, sees the ruined Babylon speaking prosopopoeically:

Seo ylce burh Babilonia, seo þe mæst wæs and ærest ealra burga, seo is nu læst and westast. Nu seo burh swylc is, þe ær wæs eallra weorca fæstast and wundorlicost and mærast, gelice and heo wære to bysne asteald eallum middanearde, and eac swylce heo sylf sprecende sy to eallum mancynne, and cweðe: ‘Nu ic þuss gehroren eom and aweg gewiten, hwæt, ge magon on me ongitan and oncnawan þæt ge nanuht mid eow nabbit aþæt ne stranges þætte þurhwunian mæge.’

[That same city of Babylon, which was the first and greatest of cities, is now the smallest and most desolate. That city, which was once the strongest and most marvelous and most famous of all buildings, is now as it were set down as an example to the whole world, as if it was itself addressing all mankind with these words: “Now that I have fallen in ruins like this and passed away, behold, you can learn from me that you have nothing lasting or strong that can survive.”] (II.4.8)

69 “Haec campi planicie undique conspicua, natura loci laetissima, castrorum facie moenibus paribus per quadrum disposita. murorum eius uix credibilis relatu firmitas et magnitudo, id est latitude cubitorum quinquaginta, altitudine quater tanta. ceterum ambitus eius quadringentis octoginta stadiis circumuenitur. murus coctili latere atque interfuso bitumine conpactus, fossa extrinsecus late patens a fronte murorum centum portae aereae. ipsa autem latitudo in consummatione pinnarum utroque latere habitaculis defensorum aeque dispositis, media intercapedine sui citas quadrigas capit. domus intrinsecus quattuergeminae habituationis minaci proceritate mirabilis.” (II.6-8-10). Latin text of Orosius from Pauli Orosii Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri Vii ; Accedit Eiusdem Liber Apologeticus. K. Zangemeister. (Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum 5). Vienna: C. Geroldi, 1882.


71 Godden, Orosius, 119.
Janet Bately proposes that the *Orosius* narrator interprets the Latin *confirmat* at the end of the passage to mean that the city itself could speak, while Malcolm Godden argues that the narrator “was interested in producing a lively and effective series of stories from ancient history, not a mere digest of Orosius.” This passage is an example of Godden’s belief that the *Orosius* narrator had a firm grasp on Orosius’ style of historical narrative, and retold that narrative in an engaging way, and his diversions from the text are not a result of incompetence, as some have alleged. Recently, Tristan Major has examined this passage from the Old English *Orosius* in his study of the tower of Babel in Anglo-Saxon literature, but I would like to further the examination of this small but fruitful passage to examine it in light of an Anglo-Saxon understanding of ruin and *Romanitas*. In fact, this passage can be seen as crucial to an understanding of the Anglo-Saxon adaptation of late Roman historiography in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. I would argue that this depiction of ruin is key to understanding this cultural moment, and more broadly late Old English historiographical practice.

In this short passage that extends an even shorter Latin original, the translator has employed numerous generic styles to expound upon an idea of ruin that is not overtly present in the Latin. First, the historical *exemplum*: the history of Babylon stands as an example of earthly transience. The physical remnants of the city stand as this important reminder of this truth, yet, the English audience of the *Orosius*, and even the *Orosius*
narrator himself, encounters the physical site through a work of history, thus, a written medium. This implies that while physical ruins contain within themselves multiple temporalities (that of the past, the ruined present, and the imagined future audience), it is only through reading the written record that one knows the detailed specifics of the place. The reader of the Orosius only knows that Babylon was founded by a giant, built by a king and queen, and conquered by a Persian king if they read or hear the words of history. This is why a personified Babylon speaks: although ruins can seem to speak for themselves (after all, Babylon is characterized and eac swylce heo sylf), they are still interpreted and depicted by writers who use language to convey their rhetorical narratives.76

Babylon’s short speech shifts the tone of the passage from that of a historical exemplum, and thus a type of historiographical rhetoric, to one more elegiac: “Nu ic þuss gehroren eom and aweg gewiten, hwæt, ge magon on me ongitan and oncnawan þæt ge nanuht mid eow nabbað fæstes ne stranges þætte þurhwunian mæge.” The ruins of Babylon speak like the poet of Beowulf (“Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum…”) or of Andreas (“Hwæt, we gefrunan on fyrdagum”), beckoning its audience to listen to a story. The elegiac tone of the city’s speech further emphasizes the translator’s skill in rendering Orosius’s text legible and engaging. The ruins themselves are the spellum and the scop, vibrantly showing the reader a concrete example of the destruction that Orosius so commonly narrates throughout the Historia.

76 Roy Liuzza, in his article that links the Anglo-Saxon reception of the Tower of Babel with the so-called “ruin motif,” notes that Latin elegiac tradition saw ruins as a site for contemplation of transience, while patristic and medieval exegesis of Babel saw it as a site for warning against pride, which would lead to confusion. This argument highlights that there are inherently different ways to interpret a ruin, depending on the context, and thus some sort of explanatory language must be necessary if a writer includes a ruin in his or her work. “The Tower of Babel: The Wanderer and the Ruins of History.” Studies in the Literary Imagination. 36.1 (Spring 2003), 1-35.
The personified Babylon’s use of the word gehrorene calls to mind two other instances of the word in Old English literature—one in poetry, one in prose translation. These two contexts both emphasize the relevance of Roman ruins in early England. The first is, of course, *The Ruin:* “Hrofas sind gehrorene, hreorge torras” [The roofs are ruined, the high towers] (l. 3). 77 Most scholars agree that the poem depicts some sort of Roman ruin in England, from Bath to Chester to Hadrian’s Wall to Caerleon-on-Usk. In reality, given the ubiquity of Roman ruins in Anglo-Saxon England, it is difficult to determine a precise geographical location for the poem, and my point here is not to advocate for one interpretation over another. The vagueness of the poem suggests to us that it does not have to refer to a specific Roman site, but can rather be read as an extended reflection on Roman ruins in the abstract, through a detailed description of a particular example of ruin. Anne Thompson Lee has suggestively argued that the *Ruin-* poet might have worked from a continental Latin tradition of *encomium urbis* and elegy, quoting extensively from such poems that bear a remarkable similarity to the Old English description. 78 Such an influence might suggest, then, that *The Ruin* is not necessarily a written preservation of a physical space, but rather a vernacular preservation of a Latin literary tradition. In other words, the *Ruin* is not a literary representation of a specific


ruin, but rather a poetic meditation on literary history. Roman ruins, then, not only refer to material on the landscape, but also to classical literary texts. This might be especially pertinent in the ninth century, in the wake of the severe decline in Latin learning, and the subsequent Viking attacks, as Alfred describes and scholars such as Lapidge have detailed. Could, then, a poem like The Ruin provide us with some clue as to what Latin poetry was available at the time, but did not survive? Does the Ruin perhaps indicate that sometimes architectural ruins could also come to stand in for anxiety over a material loss and decay of a different kind—that of the written word? The Ruin’s inclusion in the tenth-century Exeter Book, along with other poems such as The Wanderer and The Seafarer also suggests a late ninth and early tenth century interest in architectural imagery, as Bernard Muir notes that architectural imagery could be considered one of the unifying themes of the book as a whole. The question of authorial intent aside, whether or not the poets of these poems meant to describe a specific ruin, is immaterial when we see that no matter the original context, these poems were anthologized around the same time that other writers were translating Latin texts that also theorize what ruin, history, and Rome have to do with each other.

Yet The Ruin also reminds us of the horror of the ruin, something that the Orosius compiler draws out by describing the former, intact city of Babylon as a beautiful city, and emphasizing the current desolate nature of the ruined city. Scholarship on The Ruin has not yet focused on just how unsettling ruins are. Some of this stems from the

translation of the first line: *Wraetlic is thes weall-stan.* Irina Dumitrescu has demonstrated how the common translation of this line, as “wondrous” or “elegant,” misses the whole semantic field of the word in the rest of Old English literature. Dumitrescu reminds us that *wraetlic* can also connote horror or dismay. As Dumitrescu writes, “To see *wraetlic* as a wholly positive term, however, is both to modernize the medieval and to ignore the nuances of its use in Old English poetry.” Ruin, in other words, is not pretty.

But ruin can also provide material for cultural transmission and translation. The historiographical instance of *gehrorene* occurs in the Old English Bede, when Etheldreda’s followers seek a new coffin for her body. Ely had no stones, so their search takes them to Grantchester, where

> Þa cwomon heo to sumre ceastre gehroorenre noht feor Þonon, seo is on Englisc Grantacester geceged. And heo sona gemeton bi Þære ceastre wallum Þruh of hwitum stane fægere geworhte, and seo wæs swilce eac gerisenlice gehleodad mid gelice stane. Þa ongeton heo sona, Þæt heora ærende wæs and heora siðfæt from Drihtne seolfum gehradod and gesyndgad; and heo Þæs Gode Þanc sægdon. And Þa Þruh to Þæm mynstre gelæddon.

[Then they came to a ruined town, not far distant, called in English Grantchester. And they immediately found by the walls of the town a fair coffin wrought of white stone, furnished with a very proper lid also of similar material. Then at once they perceived, that their errand and journey were promoted and prospered by the Lord himself; and they thanked God for it, and brought the coffin to the monastery.]

Here, presumably, they come upon the remains of a Roman city, described as *gehrorene*, indicated by the reference to city walls, the name itself including a variant of the Latin

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81 This discussion comes from Dumitrescu’s chapter on Andreas and pedagogy in her book, *The Experience of Education in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 126-128 (quotation from p. 126). This observation comes in Dumitrescu’s chapter about recollection in pedagogy in Andreas, where she discusses the poem in conversation with Boethius. Even more provocative then, would be to consider the next half-line of *The Ruin, wyrd gebræcon*, as we think of the utter despondency of Boethius at the blows of fate (*wyrd* in the Old English Boethius). What Boethius conveys in the *Consolatio*, and what comes across in the Old English version as well, is the capricious and destructive nature of *wyrd*. *Wyrd* is not something that one would stand and admire in its aesthetic glory.

castra, and the intricately crafted coffin. Their search for a suitable resting place for Etheldreda culminates in the ruins of Rome on their island. That they stumble upon such a perfect coffin is ascribed to providence—of course, it has been provided by God himself, for the resting place of his faithful servant. Here, Bede’s translator portrays the ruins of the Roman world in Britain as something worthy of translation from a place of ruin to a place of legibility—from the ruins of empire to the intactness of an uncorrupted English saint’s body. In the moment when the sepulcher returns to the monastery and the body of the saint is placed into it, the piece of the imperial Roman material world melds with the Christian English world to create an identity based upon both Romanitas and cristendom. For Bede, especially, in his glorification of the Roman church in his specifically English context, Etheldreda’s new resting place is the apotheosis of his project. While in the Latin, this episode is immediately followed by Bede’s elegiac poem in praise of Etheldreda, a sort of poetic encapsulation of the embrace of Latin Roman verse form and a rejection of pagan classical material, the poem is excised from the Old English translation. Moreover, the chapter that contains the poem this is the only chapter excised from Book IV in the Old English translation. While perhaps one could make the argument that translating elegiac Latin verse into English might be above the translator’s ability, or just not a priority of the translation of the historical material, one might also make the argument that the translator might have seen the English saint in a Roman coffin as analogous to the poem and its form and content.

Besides these instances, descriptions of ruins abound in Old English poetry and prose—from the wall *wyrmlicum fah* in the *Wanderer*, to the spoliated Roman column in the Mermedonian prison in *Andreas*, described as *enta geweorc*. P.J. Frankis suggests that this last phrase evolved from a Norse concept of the works of giants to the meaning often ascribed to it, as a signifier for the works of the Romans. Frankis looks to the texts of the Alfredian program, especially the Old English *Orosius*, and its depiction of ruins, and suggests that the English ruin may draw its inspiration from literary depictions of Roman and Babylonian ruin, and concludes that “*The Wanderer* may be the work of a man brought up on the great texts of the Alfredian educational reform.”

If Frankis is correct, then an in-depth analysis of the Alfredian texts might shed some light on our understanding of the poetic corpus, and here we turn back to the Old English *Orosius*.

From the passage quoted above, where the ruins of Babylon speak, it might seem that the *Orosius* narrator implies that ruins themselves have the power to convey meaning outside of the written or spoken word. After all, the physical sight of the ruins is directly compared to speech, suggesting that inert, nonverbal physical matter might have similar capabilities of the conveying of meaning to the written source. Yet the only way in which the audience of Babylon’s speech could know the full history of the city, and how it fell from greatness, is from *reading* a history—in this case, the Old English *Orosius*. The only reason the English audience of the Old English *Orosius* even “sees” the example of Babylon is through the written word. They cannot *physically* see Babylon, and the literal ruins cannot speak to them, since they are in England, half a world away from those

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86 Ibid. 267.
crumbling walls. Babylon speaks to them through a late antique Latin universal history, adapted into Old English. Thus, the description of ruins reminds the reader of the importance of the preservation, dissemination, and accessibility of the written word. How else would the exemplum of the ruined Babylon speak to an Anglo-Saxon audience?

While this passage clearly demonstrates the ruin’s role in emphasizing the need for written history, how is Babylon important to a theory of Roman ruin? After all, the ruin of Rome, not Babylon, is the kind of ruin that the Anglo-Saxons were most familiar with. The Anglo-Saxons lived with the ghosts of imperial and early Christian Rome. As more and more archaeological studies and surveys are conducted, the evidence for Anglo-Saxon reuse of Roman spolia and the Anglo-Saxon use of Roman structures simply continues to grow. For example, Bede’s home of Wearmouth-Jarrow was full of Roman stonework. Most of the stone at Wearmouth was from nearby Roman sites. 87 Not only were individual stones used to construct Anglo-Saxon religious buildings, but sometimes whole Roman architectural features were lifted from their original contexts and used in new, ecclesiastical contexts. One example would be of a Roman doorjamb used as a doorway in Wearmouth. This wholesale use implies that Anglo-Saxon builders were not simply taking any random stones they could find—they were carefully choosing already intact architectural features to place into new contexts. Turner, Semple, and Turner, in their overview of Wearmouth-Jarrow, write, “We can perhaps envisage Roman ruins being scouted for suitable features by technically proficient teams or individuals,” 88 which paints a lovely picture of Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical contractors surveying Roman

88 Turner, Semple, Turner, 150.
forts and bickering over which door frame to take. In addition to reclaiming extant
doorjambs and stones with inscriptions, Anglo-Saxon church architects also seemed to
(quite literally) convert pagan stone structures into new, Christian ones. The most
obvious and prevalent example of this architectural redemption is the Anglo-Saxon reuse
of Roman altars, often as part of the doorway for churches and abbeys. Other objects
were also reused, such as a Roman column drum that was transformed into a baptismal
font at Shropshire Abbey—significant because of the font’s prime significance in the
liturgical life of the church, and in the life of a Christian.

While the Tyneside may have been one of the most heavily Romanized areas in
Britain, containing literally tons of Roman stones, Roman ruins dominated the landscape
in southern locations as well. One example is Canterbury—a site that holds special
significance as the site of St. Augustine’s mission to the English, as well as the
intellectual community there during the time of Theodore and Hadrian. Nicholas Brooks
suggests that perhaps there was a small contingent of British Christians still at Canterbury
in the seventh century, and this is perhaps how Bertha and Liudhard knew that St.
Martin’s had been a Roman church. Yet of course, Durovernum Cantiacorum had
decayed by the Anglo-Saxon period. Brooks writes, “Its walls formed a shell about its
ruined buildings, its streets were becoming irrevocably lost. There were churches still
standing and capable of repair […]” One wonders, though, what would have been the
effect of living in the ruins of a previous empire on the population, especially with such

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89 Eaton 104-5.
90 As David Stocker writes: “It would be naively patronizing to think that the medieval mind would not have perceived the symbolic
significance of the transportation and ‘conversion’ of this fragment from a pagan building at Virconium to its Christian successor, for
refashioning as a font—one of the symbolic corner-stones of the Christian liturgy.” From “Fons et origo: The symbolic death, burial,
and resurrection of English font stones” in Church Archaeology 1, 17-25, p. 22.
91 Ibid. 20-21.
92 Ibid. 22.
imposing ruins on the landscape. In Canterbury, the Romans had left behind not just temples and walls, but a huge amphitheatre. The theatre was discovered during excavations that took place following World War II. The theatre seems to have been constructed in two periods: one perhaps during the reign of Agricola, and the remodeled version from c. 210-220. The remodel was gigantic: the remodeled theatre could seat 7,000 people. It is presumed that the theatre wasn’t entirely built over until after the Norman Conquest, around 1200, so presumably it dominated the English landscape for centuries in the medieval period. Pieces of late Saxon pottery were found in one of the corridors, suggesting perhaps that that particular area of the theatre was used as a dwelling during that period.\textsuperscript{93} Furthermore, the medieval street plan (which had entirely abandoned the Roman plan) saw most roads leading in the direction of the theatre, implying some sort of continuous use for any manner of public event during the Anglo-Saxon period.\textsuperscript{94}

The example of reuse of the amphitheatre is a more unique example of the numerous examples of Anglo-Saxon reuse of Roman structures. The \textit{magnum opus} of the archaeological exploration of the medieval fate of Roman structures is Tyler Bell’s \textit{The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England} (Archaeopress, 2005). In it, he explores the prolific evidence for early English religious reuse of specifically pagan Roman structures. The most common type of reuse is rural Roman structures, such as villas, that were converted to churches.\textsuperscript{95} The type of information that we have been able to glean from archaeological surveys of medieval spaces has only exploded in the

\textsuperscript{94} Nicholas Brooks \textit{The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597-1066}. Leicester: Leicester UP, 1984. 25
\textsuperscript{95} Bell 104.
past eighty years—it has only been since the 1940s that archaeologists have considered
the post-Roman use of imperially constructed towns and buildings. Thus, as Bell notes,
the study of churches on Roman sites is “still in its infancy.”

Yet even in its “infancy,” this intersectional field of Roman and medieval
archaeology has produced some tantalizing evidence for the kinds of daily interactions
some medieval people might have had with the material culture of imperial Rome. The
sheer numbers of Anglo-Saxon pilgrims to the city of Rome might suggest that it was not
only the Roman remains in England that influenced English conceptions of ruins, but also
the ruins and spolia of Rome itself and of other continental cities and towns along the
way. Bell writes, “it is not untoward to suggest that the reuse of Roman buildings in
Rome would not have escaped the devout notice of these English pilgrims, nor of the
Roman administrators sent to oversee the growth of the new English church.” Early
Anglo-Saxon pilgrims such as Benedict Biscop and Bishop Wilfrid travelled to Rome to
correct and establish right religious practice in England. Beginning in the eighth
century, English kings and queens began a precedent of royal pilgrimage to Rome—often
never to return. In the eighth century alone, we see Caedwalla, Cenred, Offa, Ine, Bishop
Fort and Queen Frithogyth, and Sigrid journeying to Rome. King Alfred visited Rome
as a child, and Rosemary Cramp notes that it was during Alfred’s reign that we see the

96 Bell 14.
97 Ibid. 106.
98 For a detailed look at early English pilgrimages to Rome and their interactions with the city, see Veronica Ortenberg, The English
Church and the Continent in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Cultural, Artistic and Spiritual Exchanges (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 1992); and the collection of essays in England and Rome in the Early Middle Ages: Pilgrimage, Art, and Politics, ed. Francesca
Tinti (Brepols, 2014).
99 Bell 37.
100 For Bede’s account of Benedict Biscop, see Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow, ed. and trans. Christopher Grocock and I.N. Wood.
Northumberland 3 (1974) 27-37. 34.
rise of domestic stone structures in Anglo-Saxon England when she writes, “could it not have been that not only the ceremony, but the buildings of Rome impressed his childlike mind, so that he made an effort to recreate something of the classical heritage of his people.”\textsuperscript{102} By the tenth century we see Archbishop Sigeric’s journey to Rome, along with his description of his travels and the sightseeing he did in the city.\textsuperscript{103} It was not just ecclesiastical Rome that Sigeric might have noticed, however: the ruins of imperial Rome were also on full display at this point. Veronica Ortenberg writes that for Sigeric, “it would have been difficult to ignore such remains in the tenth century, when both the aristocratic factions and their German Imperial enemies in Rome were exalting the Roman glory and past.”\textsuperscript{104}

With this architectural background in mind, we might then return to the Old English \textit{Orosius} to examine how the author makes the jump from the ruins of Babylon to the ruins of Rome. A further addition to Book II in the Old English Orosius draws the parallel between the two cities explicitly, and can perhaps provide us with some more answers about not only a theory of ruin, but also a perception of \textit{romanitas} in Anglo-Saxon England. After he records the attack of Cyrus on Babylon, Orosius chides the Romans for debating the cause of the downfall of their city: “et nostri incircumspecta anxietate causantur, si potentissimae illae quondam Romanae reipublicae moles nunc magis inbecillitate propriae senectutis quam alienis concussae uiribus contremescunt” [And the people of our time are looking round in unreflecting distress and asking whether the once-mighty foundations of the Roman state are tottering not from the blows of

\textsuperscript{102} Cramp 35.
\textsuperscript{103} For more on Sigeric, see Veronica Ortenberg, “Archbishop Sigeric’s Journey to Rome” \textit{Anglo-Saxon England} 19: 1990 197-246.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. 201-202.
foreign foes, but rather from the weakness of its old age]. Peter van Nuffelen notes that this statement addresses those who refuse to acknowledge the fact that Rome only still stands due to God’s merciful allowance via Christianity—if Rome had still been pagan, it would have fallen a long time ago, like Babylon. It is worth noting here that Orosius’ terms emphasize the power structures, not the architecture: it is the republic that is tottering, not the walls.

The Anglo-Saxon translator of Orosius, however, couches the decay of Rome in architectural terms as well as governmental, while specifically emphasizing the role of Christianity in its longevity:

Ond nu ure Cristene Roma bespryçð þæt hyre wealles for ealdunge brosnian, nalæs na forþam þe hio mid forhergunge swa gebysmerad wäre swa Babylonia wæs. Ac heo for hyre cristendome nugyt is gescyld, þæt ægðer ge heo sylf ge hyre anweald is ma hreosende for ealldome þonne of æniges cyninges niede

[And now our Christian city of Rome complains that its walls are decaying from age, not because it has been humbled by assault as Babylon was. It is still protected by its Christian faith so that both the city itself and its power are decaying more from age than from the attack of any king.]

The Christian city of Rome still stands, because the faith of the people prevents it from incurring divine wrath and punishment. Thus, if the walls are decaying, it is because of age and not violence. Here we might also think of Arator’s address to Rome in Book I of the De actibus, quoted above but repeated here:

“For you, o Rome! Faith has been made firm, salvation everlasting, by these chains [of Peter]; enclosed in their embrace, you will always be free; for what may the chains not furnish which he who can loosen all things has touched? By

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105 Orosius II.6.14; trans. Fear 85.
107 Godden Orosius, 119.
his power, these walls, unconquerable and even sacred in their triumph, will not be shaken deeply by any foe. He who opens the gate in heaven closes the way to wars.”

Perhaps the translator of the Old English *Orosius* had Arator, a common author included in the school curriculum in Anglo-Saxon England, in mind when he added the detail about the walls of Rome to this passage. These two passages share key themes: a focus on the walls of the city, an emphasis on the Christian faith, and the denial of the possibility of destructive conquest of the city. Arator’s passage, then, leaves room for the gradual decay of a city, but not for violent destruction, which the passage in the Old English *Orosius* makes explicit. The Latin original makes no mention of walls whatsoever, just the reference to the *Romanae rei publicae*. The Old English latches onto the idea of government with *anweald*, a frequent word in the *Orosius* that is mostly used to refer to *potestas*, but also to *regnum* or *imperium*, as Francis Leneghan points out.

Yet, in this passage, while Roman civic *anweald* is on the decline, the city itself is supported by *cristendom*. In fact, *cristendom* stands in contrast to *anweald*, as an answer to the problem of cultural decline. Stephen J. Harris argues that the Old English Orosius presents *cristendom* as a way of creating English culture in the context of the Alfredian translation project, especially in the OEO: “The ninth century *World History* was concerned to see Rome as the birthplace of Christendom, the community to which both Alaric and Alfred belonged.”

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108 Schrader 56.
109 Francis Leneghan, “Translatio Imperii: The Old English Orosius and the Rise of Wessex,” *Anglia* 133.4 (2015), 656-705, at 678-679. Leneghan uses this observation to argue for the text’s investment in the ideas of power and authority, especially as power is translated from one empire to another in a Carolingian and West Saxon context.
Yet, while Harris maintains that placing the birth of Christendom in Rome allows a ninth-century English audience to distance themselves from Rome, and thus make the Old English *Orosius* less Rome-centric, the text of this passage from Book II still maintains a connection with Rome—yet this connection is with the baptized, Christianized Rome instead of the imperial Rome. In this section, the compiler maintains the first person plural pronouns of the Latin original: it is not just the city of Rome, *Roma*, but *ure Cristene Roma*. Mary Kate Hurley addresses the composite temporalities in the Old English *Orosius* by specifically looking at the *cwaeth Orosius* construction in the text, which creates a separate narrator from the historical Paulus Orosius. This function serves to create a shared textual identity between ninth century Anglo-Saxons and the original Roman audience. Hurley writes that the *cwaeth Orosius* construction most often appears in

the moment where the text draws the most attention to itself as a translation. It does so by invoking the author-figure to claim words Paulus Orosius could never have said. The *cwaeth Orosius* thus allows the text to stage the intermingling of two times: Orosius’ Rome, which had not yet fallen, and Alfred’s England. The result is a composite conception of Anglo-Saxon identity within the translated text.112

The ruins of Babylon passage in Book II, with its explicit reference to the city of Rome, would be a perfect contender for a *cwaeth Orosius* moment, according to Hurley’s argument. As Harris points out, the passage about the walls of Rome falling from age contrasts with the Latin: “The Latin asks whether Rome suffers, but cannot assert like the Old English that Rome is indeed *hreosende* (falling).”113 Five hundred years have passed

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113 Harris “Alfredian World History,” 500.
from Orosius’ history to the Old English paraphrase, during which time the city of Rome, and its architecture across the former empire, have most certainly seen the effects of age. In the Old English *Orosius*, the author can now say that the walls themselves of Rome are crumbling, perhaps much like a reader might imagine the walls of Babylon had decayed. So why include the detail about the walls at all, if just earlier the history had mentioned the desolation of ruins, and the symbolic nature of ruins as the transience of the world and the judgment of God?

The ruin is a way to acknowledge the passage of time, from Paulus Orosius to the narrator of the Old English *Orosius*. The narrator acknowledges the historical time lapse from the moment of invention to the moment of translation, and he does so through references to architecture. One way of indicating the passage of time could be through a reference to the effects of time on the built environment. And so, this tiny detail further emphasizes the multiple temporalities and the shift in outlook from the original to the translation. In this moment, the translator explicitly demonstrates a departure from the original, yet does it without the *cwaeth Orosius* construction. This is precisely the moment that one might expect a *cwaeth Orosius* moment, following Hurley’s argument that the *cwaeth Orosius* construction serves to highlight the status of the Old English *Orosius* as a translation and adaptation of a Roman historiographical work for an Anglo-Saxon audience, especially in the passages where the translator diverts considerably from the original.

However, looking closely, this section from Book II is not entirely without a *cwaeth* construction altogether: Babylon’s speech, unique to the Old English *Orosius*, is introduced thus: “Nu seo burh swylc is, þe ær wæs eallra weorca fæstast and
wundorlicost and mærast, gelice and heo wære to bysne asteald eallum middanearde, and eac swylce heo sylf sprecende sy to eallum mancynne, and cweðe” [That city, which was once the strongest and most marvelous and most famous of all buildings, is now as it were set down as an example to the whole world, as if it was itself addressing all mankind with these words]. In this passage, it is not cwaeth Orosius, but cwethe Babilonia. The ruins of Babylon speak as a testament to the inevitability of destruction, in a similar manner to the authorial figure of Orosius in the Old English Orosius. This choice demonstrates an astute reading of the rhetorical moves of the Historia, for, as Peter van Nuffelen notes, Orosius heavily relies on exempla in order to demonstrate the past’s relevance to the present. Here, the Orosius narrator draws on this historiographical model from elsewhere in the original to create his own exemplum, using the architectural material from the original along with invented speech to create something new. In the Old English Orosius, the narrator takes the raw material of the Latin original, particularly the use of exempla, then creates his own exemplum to add to his own paraphrase, thus creating his unique Old English version of a Roman history, by thoroughly engaging with both Old English and Latin literary culture. Description of ruins, then, is not so much a simple description of an aesthetic object, but rather a complex engagement with previous literary traditions and use of them in the writer’s own present context.

If the exemplum is the Latin contribution to this authorial addition, then the rhetorical and pedagogical tool of architecture and ruin is the Old English translator’s contribution to the passage. As demonstrated above, the original Latin does not include a

114 Van Nuffelen, 63.
description of architectural ruin or the admonition from the personified Babylon. The original Latin also does not include a description of the city of Rome’s architectural decay either, just a lament for the destruction of the rei publicae, while the Old English Orosius mentions the walls crumbling with age. In this passage, the narrator demonstrates an understanding of architectural ruin as a source of pedagogical and symbolic importance: the physical ruin itself reminds the viewer of its violent demise, the sin of pride, and the folly of believing that anything earthly will last forever. The violent destruction of the city is the worst possible fate—here we might think of Old English poetic works, especially The Wanderer. The ruins, the enta geweorc lamented in this poem are categorically the result of war and violence. For example: Stondeth nu on laste leofre duguthe/Weal wundrum heah, wyrmlicum fah./Eorlas fornoman asca thrythe [Now stands in the track of those honorable loved ones/A wall wondrous high, ornamented with serpents./The host of ash spears consumed the earls]. The wall now stands where the warrior had in battle, until violent destruction fell ed the human and left the stone. The Wanderer presents its ruin mainly as the physical reminder of the battle that was the downfall of its inhabitants. The Ruin presents the ruin as a composite creation: the poet juxtaposes decay from age and destruction from violence, often even in the same line (for example, Scearde scur-beorge scorene, gedrorene,/Ældo undereotone [The storm-shelter hacked with cuts has fallen,/eaten away with age], ll. 5-6a). Still, for the Ruin-poet, it seems apparent that the driving force behind the decay on account of age is originally from the violent destruction of the building, its inhabitants, and subsequently

116 Ibid. The Ruin, ll. 5-6a.
Yet these examples from Old English poetry do not necessarily indicate that an interest in ruins is a native insular tradition. Chris Abrams has argued for the Latin influence on the poet of *The Ruin*, looking especially to texts such as *De excidio Thuringiae* and Aldhelm’s *Carmen de virginitate*. In the end, Abrams argues, *The Ruin* exemplifies a particularly Anglo-Saxon preoccupation with ruins that bridges Old English and Anglo-Latin literature. He writes: “the use made of ruin imagery by Aldhelm and the author of *The Ruin* constitutes a motif by itself, a motif which represents a shared attitude toward the Roman past […]”

In fact, the passages from Aldhelm that Abram quotes in his analysis of *The Ruin* can also illuminate the Old English *Orosius*. If the state of Latin learning in England had reached the abysmal state that Alfred claims in his preface to the translation of *Cura Pastoralis*, then the translator of the *Orosius* would not have been able to work from the same kinds of classical Latin sources that Orosius himself mentions. And yet, Janet Bately proposes a long list of classical sources that the translator of the Old English *Orosius* was working from, a list including Sallust, Livy, Ovid, Pliny the Elder, Lactantius, Servius, Eutropius, Jerome, Bede, Augustine, Isidore, among others. In addition to classical sources, we might also consider what insular Latin sources the Old English *Orosius* narrator might have had access to. If there is a shared view of the Roman

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118 Bately 1980, lxii. In contrast, Malcolm Godden, the most recent editor and translator of the Old English *Orosius*, challenges Bately’s claims based upon the evidence that Latin learning was in serious decline in the ninth century, and the translator of the Old English *Orosius*, which was completed sometime between 870 and 930, would not have been able to read or even have access to some of the sources on Bately’s list. Instead, Godden proposes that the translator of the Old English *Orosius* heavily relied upon a glossed copy of Orosius from the eastern Frankish kingdom, most likely dating from the late ninth century. However, as Godden points out, although many glossaries from Anglo-Saxon England were derived from Orosius, no glossed Latin copy of Orosius survives from before the Conquest. Godden, “The Old English *Orosius* and its Sources,” *Anglia* 129.3 (2011), 297-320.
past from Aldhelm to The Ruin, then perhaps there is something then that it can tell us about the Orosius narrator’s view of ruin and the Roman past. But shared ideas do not just magically materialize—they are conveyed through pedagogy and the written word. Perhaps the Orosius narrator is drawing from knowledge of Aldhelm and/or the Old English poetic tradition in his unique focus on the exemplum of ruins. Abram quotes passages from Aldhelm’s Carmen de virginitate, specifically from the life of St. Sylvester, that demonstrate Aldhelm’s interest in architectural imagery. The following passage is significant, when Sylvester interprets Emperor Constantine’s dream for him:

Femina, quam torua crevisti luce vetustam,  
Quae tibi horrebat multum squalente senecta,  
Urbs est, quam vulgo Bizanti nomine dicunt:  
Constantinopolis post haec vocitetur in aevum!  
Nomine nempe tuo gestat per saecla triumphos;  
In qua murorum praecelsa cacumina quondam  
Nunc prostrata solo veterescunt arce ruenti;  
Moenia marcescunt et propugnacula nutant,  
Quae quassat caries et frangit fessa vetustas.

[The woman, whom you thought was old in grim appearance, who disgusted you so much by her decrepit senility, is the city which men commonly call by the name of Byzantium: henceforth let it be called Constantinople for all time. Indeed, in your name it will perform triumphs throughout all ages. In this city the once lofty heights have grown old and now, fallen from their eminence, they lie strewn on the ground. The walls decay and the battlements totter – decay shatters these things and infirm old age destroys them.]\(^{119}\)

Abram points out that Aldhelm’s inclusion of the depiction of architecture and ruin is a departure from his source material, because such descriptions are not included in the sources for St. Sylvester that Aldhelm most likely worked from.\(^ {120}\) After Sylvester’s interpretation of the dream, he instructs Constantine to plow furrows for a rectangular

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\(^ {120}\) Abram 35.
city and renew the walls of Byzantium, now to be called Constantinople. The language he uses about the construction of Byzantium emphasizes the Roman-style architecture:

“having erected lofty towers of a fortress, you shall renew the walls of the building with red brick. In it your offspring will reign and that of your grandchildren—as the numerous offspring of your fathers have reigned—their offspring and the fathers of their fathers will be gathered in it.”

Red brick was a common Roman building material, and one that heralded Anglo-Saxon reuse of Roman stone. Aldhelm makes sure to mention the red brick in Sylvester’s mandate to rebuild Constantinople, thus emphasizing the Romanness of the rebuilding project, even though it is at Constantinople and not the city of Rome itself. This *romanitas* is only keeping in line with Aldhelm’s description of Constantine as the “Augustan” king earlier in the passage, again emphasizing Constantine’s right to the *imperium* through the Western Roman line. Sylvester ends his explanation of Constantine’s dream with the promise of a continuing lineage, and the city’s continued existence for generations to come, even after the walls had been shattered by age and decay.

In the section most explicitly about ruin, Aldhelm uses verbal tense to emphasize the creative and rhetorical purpose of the ruin. First, Sylvester says that Constantinople “will” be a great city, and will accomplish many things. From this sentence he immediately moves to a present that is tinged with the past: for temporally, ruins exist in the present, as in the verb tense that Aldhelm uses, but they physically bear the events of the past through decrepitude. The pastness of the ruin encourages Constantine to rebuild,

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121 Lapidge and Rosier, 117.
122 For example, the Anglo-Saxon church of All Saints’ at Brixworth reused Roman bricks in its construction. See David Parsons and Diana Sutherland, *The Anglo-Saxon Church of All Saints, Brixworth, Northamptonshire: Survey, Excavation, and Analysis, 1972-2010*. Oxford: Oxbow, 2013, pp. 153-4.
so that future generations will have a place to rule, so that the past does not completely overwhelm and destroy the present, leaving nothing to the future. For this is what a ruin, unattended, creates: not just the destruction of the past, but the destruction of the future— for those who come afterwards will then have no physical markers by which to remember the past.

The prose *De virginitate* makes the Roman connection even more explicit in Sylvester’s speech when he interprets the dream:

‘The decrepit old woman is this city in which you are staying, called Byzantium, whose walls are now wasted away because of their age, and nearly all its fortifications have collapsed. Mount, therefore, that horse of yours, on which you sat when you were baptized, in white linen, in the city of Rome, and (on which) you toured the shrines of the apostle and martyrs; and sitting on him take up your ensign which is decorated with the sign of Christ in gold and jewels. Holding this ensign in your right hand, release the reins of your horse so that he may go wherever the angel of God shall lead him; and you drag the point of your ensign fixed in the earth in such a way that it makes a path by its passage; along this path you shall have walls constructed and (so) shall resuscitate this veteran and nearly dead city into (the likeness of) a young lady; and you shall name her with your own name so that you make her the queen of all cities. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be glorious in it, and there shall be in it temples of God built in honor of all the saints; and your sons after you and sons of your sons shall reign in it.’

In this passage, while Aldhelm is not as specific about the building materials as he was in the poem, he makes the explicit connection between Rome and Constantinople through references to Constantine’s prior conversion. In order to rejuvenate the city, Sylvester says, Constantine must mount the same horse that he did when he was baptized in Rome and toured the monuments and shrines of the city to then lay out the new foundations of Byzantium. In this way, the story implies that Constantine is almost building

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Constantinople from the foundation of Roman Christendom. This Christendom, then, will protect the new revived city of Constantinople from falling into ruin, as its forerunner Byzantium had done before it.

The trope of woman-as-ruined-city in both the prose and verse De virginitate foreshadows the personified Babylon in the Old English Orosius. In Constantine’s dream, the old woman is described as little, and the city of Babylon in the Orosius is described as the smallest of kingdoms. The former city of Babylon was strong, implying that it is now very weak, and the old woman in Constantine’s dream is so weak she can barely stand. In the passage where the Orosius narrator compares Rome and Babylon, he emphasizes that the walls of Rome are falling from age, just as Byzantium’s moenia were destroyed by vetustas in the De virginitate. This is especially interesting to note, since the Orosius narrator added the detail about the walls to the Latin original, as discussed above. Could perhaps he have been influenced in his depiction of ruins by an early Anglo-Latin writer like Aldhelm?

It is not entirely outside the realm of possibility that the works of Aldhelm played a part in the Orosius narrator’s intellectual formation. At least three manuscripts of Aldhelm’s Carmen de virginitate were in England in the late ninth or early tenth centuries, one in verse and two in prose. London, British Library Royal 7 D. XXIV fols. 82-168 is a copy of the prose De Laude Virginitate from the early tenth century, with an uncertain origin, but perhaps Wessex. This manuscript includes mid-tenth century glosses, demonstrating at least some kind of engagement with the text either at the time of or soon after the translation of the Old English Orosius. New Haven, Yale Beinecke
401+401A contains a fragment of the prose *De virginitate* from possibly the ninth century, with glosses from the tenth century—additions that indicate interest in the text around the time of the Old English *Orosius*. Localizing this manuscript has been difficult, with E.A. Lowe stating that some parts of the manuscript resemble Mercia charters, the possibility of a Worcester origin, but also, perhaps most convincingly, an origin at Canterbury. Finally, Oxford, Bodleian Rawlinson C. 697 contains a copy of the poetic *De virginitate*, most likely dating from the third quarter of the ninth century from northeastern France, and most likely in England (perhaps Glastonbury) by the mid tenth century.

These three manuscripts suggest that by the middle of the tenth century, the works of Aldhelm were beginning to be rediscovered in Anglo-Saxon England. This is about the time of the Old English *Orosius*, and it is not outside of the realm of possibility that the *Orosius* translator might have had access to one of these manuscripts or one like them at some point in his or her career, most especially BL Royal 7, which has a credible provenance in Wessex, the centre of the Alfredian translation project. Particularly, the similarities between the city-as-female-ruin passages in both Book II of the Old English *Orosius* and Aldhelm’s *De virginitate* raise the question of whether or not Aldhelm’s work might have influenced the *Orosius* translator in his intellectual formation.

This intellectual influence also suggests that an Anglo-Saxon literary representation of ruin tied together literary, historiographical, and cultural threads during the Alfredian era. If indeed the *Orosius* translator was inspired by Aldhelm in his

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125 Lapidge and Gneuss 473, 857, and 661 respectively.
addition of the ruined Babylon passage, then it would demonstrate that the translator’s own work is not simply translating, or paraphrasing, a work of late antique historiography, but giving the work a specifically English element as well. Imitation of Aldhelm would point to a debt on the part of the translator to an earlier Anglo-Latin literary and cultural heritage. This kind of reclaiming of an earlier English Latinity, woven into the translation of a Roman Latinity, also performs the cultural work of a literary revival after the decline of learning and the destruction of monasteries that Alfred laments in the preface to the translation of the *Cura Pastoralis*. The inclusion of the ruin motif, if from an Old English poetic source, or from an earlier Anglo-Latin author, is a kind of spoliation that takes something old and rebuilds it into something new, with a renewed cultural significance. It unites both Roman and early English culture by inserting an Anglo-Saxon topos into an English translation of a Roman work of historiography.

To bring it back to architecture, this kind of culture-building mimics what Alfred accomplished in his *burh* projects in the ninth century—a sort of historical background against which we might understand the literature of the late ninth and early tenth centuries. Many of the *burhs* were built on ancient Roman sites, especially those cities whose walls were still in relatively good condition. These restored Roman sites included Bath, Chichester, Exeter, Portchester, Winchester, and London.\footnote{Abels and Morillo, “A Lying Legacy? A Preliminary Discussion of Images of Antiquity and Altered Reality in Medieval Military History,” in *Journal of Medieval Military History*, vol. III, eds. Kelly Devries and Clifford J. Rogers (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2005), pp. 1-13, p. 8.} London especially gives us an idea of how Alfred engaged with Roman ruins in his building and fortification projects: when he arrived in 886, a *wic* had sprung up on the outskirts of the deserted Roman walled city. Alfred eventually moved from this *wic* into the deserted
Roman town, thus transferring the locus of the city from an Anglo-Saxon foundation to a Roman one. Abels and Morillo contend that this move by Alfred does not indicate a type of continuity from Roman Britain to Alfred’s Wessex. They write that

the reoccupation and refurbishment of deserted Roman walled towns had less to do with a memory of Rome than with the pragmatic realization that these sites were strategically well sited, since they were lined up with the Roman road system that was still the major conduit of transportation in ninth-century Wessex, and possessed the remnants of formidable defenses.\(^\text{127}\)

They point out that Alfred did not rebuild the Roman stone walls, but rather employed earthwork defenses, and also did not make use of the Roman street plans, and so, therefore, was not trying to emphasize continuity with Rome but was rather making the best practical decision for defensive purposes.\(^\text{128}\)

Yet, while perhaps the sites were not chosen specifically for their Romanitas, Alfred and his circle were not completely unaware of the significance that even a decision made for pragmatic purposes could hold, especially when viewed in light of the literary output of Alfred’s program. While Abels and Morillo make a convincing case for the discontinuity between the Roman towns and the Anglo-Saxon burhs, this argument does not preclude the significance of the Roman-ness of the spaces. In fact, the discontinuity exactly parallels Alfred’s despondency over the state of Latinity in the ninth century, and his subsequent “recovery” of important late antique Latin texts through translation. Unlike earlier English writers and poets, who saw the continuity between Rome and England as evidence by the early reuse of Roman stone in Anglo-Saxon

\(^{127}\) Abels and Morillo, 8.  
\(^{128}\) Ibid. 9-10.
churches, Alfred and his contemporaries had seen the desolation of Roman sites and of Latin learning, both imperial and ecclesiastical, effected by both Viking invaders and monastic sloth. The Roman city at London had not been continually occupied, and was probably _wraetlic_ in its destruction and disuse. Thus, the Roman spaces encountered by those at the end of the ninth century were indeed ruinous, and not continuous. At least, they were until Alfred came along to refurbish these old Roman towns and attempt to mend the discontinuity. One might even imagine that the _Ruin_-poet could have been inspired to create his work from the state of these desolate towns at the end of the ninth century, before Alfred’s reconstruction projects.

Thus it should be no surprise to us that just as Alfred’s program sought to rejuvenate old Roman sites in the service of a new English kingdom, so too did the literary efforts and output of the translation program repurpose Roman literary materials in the service of a new English literary moment. It is no accident that two of the texts that came out of the translation project, Orosius’ *Historiarum adversum paganos libri septimi* and Boethius’ *Consolatio de Philosophiae*, were both written around the Gothic sack of Rome in 410, a moment of crisis for the Romans in the wake of barbarian invasion. The historical moment of the _Consolatio_, crucially, is highlighted in its Old English translation, through the inclusion of an original meter that describes the historical context of Boethius. This expansion on the historical moment of Boethius also includes a description of then ruin and destruction of the city in the wake of Alaric and Raedgota’s crossing of the Alps:

Da wæs Romana rice gewunnen,
Abrocen burga cyst; beadurincum wæs
Rom gerymed. Rædgot and Aleric
Foron on ðæt fæsten; fleah casere
mid þam æþelingum ut on Crecas.
Ne meahte þa seo wealaf wige forstandan
Goton mid guðe; giomonna gestrion
Sealdon unwillum eþelweardas,
Halige aðas; wæs gehwæðeres waa.

[Then the kingdom of the Romans was conquered; the finest of cities sacked; Rome was opened up to the warriors. Raedgota and Alaric went into the stronghold; the emperor fled with the princes away to the Greeks. Then the survivors could not withstand the Goths in war, in battle; the guardians of the homeland reluctantly gave up their ancestors’ treasure and holy oaths: it was an affliction in both respects.] (C text, Metre 1)\(^{129}\)

The translator of the Old English Boethius\(^ {130}\) sets the scene for the entire *Consolatio* with the historical background of the sack of Rome, thereby using destruction and ruin to introduce this major philosophical work of late antiquity. The *Consolatio*, to readers of the Old English version, is borne out of ruin and destruction,\(^ {131}\) and thus able to speak to a society recovering from the shock and cultural loss of the Viking invasions. With monasteries and manuscripts destroyed, Alfred’s *burhs* and the Alfredian translation projects looked to create continuity in the face of rupture. Eighth- and ninth-century literature, with its key themes of ruin and destruction, sought to provide a literary encounter with previous literary traditions, both classical and English that were in danger


\(^ {131}\) The editors and translators of the OE Boethius, Susan Irvine and Malcolm Godden, note that the metres in the prosimetric Boethius that most significantly expand on the prose source are Metre 1, the historical background, and Metre 9, which describes Nero’s burning of Rome and the transitory nature of earthly power (Godden and Irvine, 95.) It is interesting to consider, then, that these metres which most deviate from the prose source (and, I might add, the Latin original) use the image of ruins as starting points and additions to the original material, suggesting that ruins played a role in the literary and cultural imagination of the late ninth and early tenth centuries.
of receding from memory. The ruin considers what is lost, and how literature might preserve what is in danger of being forgotten.

In the Alfredian program, this concern manifests itself through both architectural and literary means. After the Conquest, with the rupture and discontinuity that it wrought on the landscape of England, one monastic institution sought to retain its Roman and early English heritage through its identification with its patron saint: Saint Alban. It is now to the twelfth century St. Albans that we turn.
Chapter Two

The *Passio Sancti Albani* and the Translation of Ruin in Twelfth-Century Saint Albans

While Old English literature relied on late antique and patristic writers for a theory of ruins, in the twelfth century writers looked more to classical authorities such as Virgil and Lucan. In this chapter, I examine a twelfth-century hagiography, the *Passio Sancti Albani* by William of St. Albans. This text claims to be a translation of an Old English text, which itself was inspired by its narrator gazing upon ancient ruins. Through these narrative constructs and his use of classical allusion, William addresses the historical discontinuities from St. Alban’s Roman moment, to Anglo-Saxon England, and finally to William’s own twelfth-century St. Albans. Through form and content, in the end his text privileges the Latin written text as the primary vehicle for institutional and devotional history.

The Vanishing Object: Saint Albans and Ruins in the Twelfth Century

In the twelfth century, St. Albans claimed a long history of engagement with and interest in the Roman ruins around the monastery. In the twelfth-century *Gesta Abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani*, a chronicle of the monastery at St. Albans, we find a particularly striking episode of a historical Anglo-Saxon encounter with Roman ruins.\(^\text{132}\)

\(^{132}\) The most commonly known version of the chronicle is the one of Thomas Walsingham from the fourteenth century, printed in the rolls series by Henry Riley in 1867. Walsingham’s text was an amplification of Matthew Paris’ text from the mid-thirteenth century, which was apparently based on an “ancient roll” of Bartholomew the clerk, according to a note at the top of the London, British Library MS Cotton Nero D.i manuscript copy of Paris’ chronicle. Thus, it is by layers of textual variants and versions that we try to understand the historical moment of any single episode in the *Gesta Abbatum*. For more on the text of the *Gesta Abbatum*, see Mark Hagger, “The *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*: litigation and history at St. Albans,” in *Historical Research* 81(213), 2008, 373-398, where he argues that the *Gesta* is a fabrication in order to compete with the claims of Ely and Lincoln, and that many parts were written by Adam the Cellarer or Bartholomew in the 1170s or 1180s.
The Anglo-Saxon abbots of St. Albans, in order to obtain Roman stone for their building projects, plunder the nearby ancient city of Verulamium. Specifically, Abbot Ealdred in the tenth century began to destroy what was left of the Roman city, the ruins of which had reportedly become a haven for thieves and prostitutes. It is during this demolition project that the workmen destroy an ancient palace in the middle of the city. The workmen marvel at the ruins they themselves created, and in doing so find a cavity in the wall that holds a collection of ancient books. One of these books was a strange volume, which was little devastated by the long lapse of time. Neither the letters nor the language of this book were then recognized, because of its antiquity. Nevertheless, it had an elegant form, and plain letters; the epigrams and headings, encircled with golden letters, glittered. Oak planks, with silk ties, preserved its original strength and seemliness in great part.

While no lengthy description is given to the palace, the chronicler is keen to record the details of the book in its material form: its clear script, the golden decoration, its strong binding, and elegant ties. Unable to read the strange writing, the workmen nevertheless can tell that the book is something marvelous.

To discover the contents of the tantalizingly opaque text, they summon an elderly priest who can understand the ancient language. This priest, Unwona, was able to read the work and translate it for those present. Not only does he translate this wondrous

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133 In addition to the Roman paraphernalia and the books, he also found an abandoned dragon’s lair: “vestigia tamen aeterna habitationis serpentinae dereliquens” GA, 25.

134 GA 26. All text from the GA is from Henry Thomas Riley ed., Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani, Rolls Series 28, Part 4. Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1867. All translations of the GA are my own.

135 “For it was written in such writing as was accustomed in the time in which the citizens of Werlameester lived, and in the language of the ancient Britons, which at the time they then used; there were nevertheless some in Latin, but this work was not one of these.”
book, but he also translates more of the vernacular books that were found alongside it.

The Gesta records:

However, in the first book, that is to say, the larger one which we previously mentioned, he found written the History concerning Saint Alban, Protomartyr of the English, whom the church in present days reads about from his legend; to whom the eminent teacher Bede bears witness, differing in no way [from the legend]. But in the other books found here and there, the aforementioned reader discovered the invocations and rites of the idolatrous citizens of Warlamcester. In these he found one that was specifically for Phoebus, the god of the sun, whom they invoked and worshipped; [this book] can be considered carefully alongside the History of Saint Alban, if the diligent reader would comprehend it. However in an inferior book were [the rites of] Mercury, called “Woden” in English (for which the fourth day of the week is named), who was evidently the god of merchants; for the citizens and those of the same county were all merchants and brokers, because of the city’s ships, and the place’s favorable site (approximately only one day’s distance from London).

[In primo autem libro, scilicet, majori, cujus prius fecimus mentionem, scriptam invenit Historiam de Sancto Albanno, Anglorum Protomartyre, quam ecclesia diebus hodiernis recitat legendo; cui perhibet egregius doctor Beda testimonium, in nullis discrepando. In aliis vero libris, passim inventis, reperit lector praedictus invocationes et ritus idolatrarum civium Warlamcestrensium; in quibus comperit quod specialiter Phoebum, deum solis, invocaverunt et colerunt; quod perpendi potest per Historiam Sancti Albani, si eam sedulus lector intelligat. Secundario vero Mercurium, “Woden” Anglice apellatum, (a quo quartus dies septimanae intitulatu), deum, videlicet, mercatorum: quia cives et compatriotae, propter navigium civitatis, et commodum loci situm, per unam dietam tantum a Londoniis distantem, fere omnes negotiatores et institores fuerunt.]  

In this passage, the chronicler shows a keen perception for the remains of the Roman town through the description of the books: while the books themselves are most likely a fictional device, archaeological evidence has demonstrated that the cults of Apollo (Phoebus) and Mercury were well-established in Roman Verulamium. The chronicler also notes the easy transference of religious meaning between ages, by suggesting that

[Erat enim littera qualis scribi solet tempore quo cives Werlamecestram inhabitabant, et idioma antiquorum Britonum, quo tunc temporis utebantur; aliqua tamen in Latino, sed hiis non opus erat];” GA 26.

136 GA 26.
one could read the story of Apollo analogously to that of Alban, thus “redeeming” the pagan myth through the lens of Christian martyrdom, and thereby acknowledging the benefit of pagan literature even to the Christian reader.

However, even though the twelfth-century *Gesta* author remarks that reading the pagan texts could be useful, the Anglo-Saxon abbot in the narrative commands the idolatrous books to be destroyed, and only the book containing the history of Alban to be restored to the book chest. The abbot also decrees that Unwona’s translation be written down, not just spoken:

And as the aforementioned priest read that book, in which that skillfully constructed [narrative] was written in the ancient English, or British, language, Abbot Eadmer caused [the book] to be faithfully and carefully translated by the wiser brothers in the convent, and the fuller versions to be taught in public preaching. However, when the history had been written in Latin so that, as it has been said, it might be known by more [people], the primitive and original copy—which was said to be marvelous—fell destroyed, suddenly and irreparably turned back into dust.

[Et sicut praedictus presbyter illam antiquo Anglico, vel Britannico, idiomate conscriptam, in quo peritus exstitit, legerat, Abbas iste Eadmarus per prudentiores fratum in Conventu fecit fiderliter ac diligenter exponi, et plenius in publico praedicando edoceri. Cum autem conscripta historia in Latine pluribus, ut jam dictum est, innotuisset, exemplar primitivum ac originale,—quod mirum est dictum,—irrestaurabiliter in pulverem subito redactum, cecidit annullatum]138

The *Gesta Abbatum* presents the ancient language ambiguously, as either English or British, and in so doing, “situate[s] the ancient volume in both ancient Britain and Anglo-Saxon England.”139 The ambiguity of the language allows the *Gesta Abbatum* to acknowledge the possibility for either language to have held the knowledge of Alban.

Yet, once this material is translated into Latin, the vernacular is no longer needed for this

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immediate knowledge, and the original documents crumble. Here, the *Gesta Abbatum* dramatizes the loss of codices due to age in terms of their utility and potential—a text must survive until it has fulfilled its purpose, namely, to convey a forgotten narrative to a new generation. Then, and only then, does it disappear. Once transformed into written Latin, then the exemplar can, as in this case, crumble to dust. Thus, this episode dramatically enacts the Roman rhetorical concept of translation as Rita Copeland describes it: “as a rhetorical act, literary translation seeks to erase the cultural gap from which it emerges by contesting and displacing the source and substituting itself.” The disintegration of the manuscript after a Latin copy has been made makes visible this displacement and substitution—now there is no longer the marked difference between the ancient vernacular and the contemporary Latin, because the original manuscript is literally gone. The fact that this all happens in the setting of a ruined Roman town that is being destroyed by Anglo-Saxon workmen who are trying to rebuild their monastery out of Roman stones only highlights the intellectual connection between literature, translation, and ruin that seemed to have been present in the minds of twelfth-century writers such as the author of the *Gesta Abbatum*.

While the spontaneous pulverization of vernacular texts is an extreme example of ruin and decay, there is another example of this link between translation, literature, and ruins at St. Albans. Around 1167, William of St. Albans wrote his *Passio Sancti Albani*, a text that claims to be a Latin translation of an early Saxon Christian convert’s Old English account of Alban gleaned from the material and oral evidence from a

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disintegrating Roman town. Scholarship on this text has been modest: Sara Harris gives a brief reading of the Passio in her chapter on the Gesta Abbatum of Saint Albans as another example of the twelfth-century presentation of a vernacular text.\textsuperscript{141} Monika Otter reads the Passio alongside the Gesta Abbatum as a literary dramatization of the work of a historian dealing with historical transmission as well as historical loss, with the historian’s job as an archaeologist being to “dig up” the past.\textsuperscript{142} Thomas O’Donnell, in his unpublished dissertation, explores the Romanitas of the text, and suggests that Alban’s Roman identity “reshape[s] the usual terms of an institutional history” by appealing to a cultural genealogy that links Alban to twelfth-century Saint Albans, not a genealogical or a territorial link.\textsuperscript{143} Thomas O’Donnell and Margaret Lamont translate the text, with a brief introduction, in Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Thelma Fenster’s translation of Matthew Paris’ Life of Saint Alban.\textsuperscript{144} While scholarship has examined this text in the terms of fact and fiction—is William’s claim of translation true or not?—I instead question why William invents this fiction at all. In my reading here, I suggest that through William of St. Albans’ sophisticated layering of temporal narrative, the depiction of ruin serves as a metaphor for the process of literary translation and adaptation across linguistic and temporal barriers. William’s elaborate narrative structure, employing three temporalities, along with the motif of translatio from a vernacular text, along with key classical allusions, together dramatize the concept of translation and cultural memory in the twelfth century in the text. Beginning with Roman ruins, and appealing to the

\textsuperscript{141} Harris, 51-52.
\textsuperscript{144} O’Donnell and Lamont’s introduction and translation are found on pp. 133-165 of Wogan-Browne and Fenster, The Life of Saint Alban by Matthew Paris, with the Passion of Saint Alban by William of St. Albans (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2010).
authority of Old English, the *Passio* eventually displaces its early English source with a classicized account of a Roman saint to reflect the classical and ecclesiastical *Romanitas* of twelfth-century St. Albans. The *Passio*, then, as a written text, demonstrates the inability of the material world alone to convey historical knowledge, and instead through its very existence as well as its literary allusions demonstrate the primacy of written narrative in historical consciousness. For William of St. Albans, neither ruins nor old vernacular texts are enough. Rather, Latin narratives of the past provide a guide to understanding history. After examining the historical background and context of the production of this text, I turn to the text itself to read its representation of material ruin, and finally to show how William’s representation of the material ruins demonstrates his text’s indebtedness to literary forms in its perception of the past.

**Twelfth-Century Saint Albans in Architecture and Art**

Before looking at the text itself, first we must acquaint ourselves with the cultural environment of St. Albans in the twelfth century. Looking at both the textual and the archaeological record, it is clear that both Roman and Anglo-Saxon culture were integral to the creation of a twelfth-century monastic community at Saint Albans. On the archaeological side, it has been suggested that Saint Albans/Verulamium is the only site in Britain with “true” continuity in Christian devotional practice from Roman to medieval times, though others places claimed perceived continuity.\(^{145}\) Before the Norman Conquest, there was a monastery built with primarily Roman stone on the hill across the river Ver from the ancient Roman town. This hill was supposedly the site of Alban’s martyrdom. Rosalind Niblett, in her book about the history of Verulamium from Rome to

the present day, emphasizes the role of the Anglo-Saxon monastery in the destruction of
Roman Verulamium, citing many scholars who have argued from the archaeological
evidence that there was still a thriving town on the Roman spot in the early Saxon era. In
the tenth century, Saxons were still living in the *propugnaculum*, the original Roman-era
town.\(^{146}\) The tenth century also saw the enlargement of the monastery that led to the
destruction of most of the original Roman city, as corroborated by the excerpts from the
*Gesta Abbatum* above, in order to use the *spolia* in their constructions.\(^{147}\) These pre-
Conquest monastic buildings were in a large part replaced by the Norman building
project of 1077-1088, an endeavor which also famously used a great deal of Roman

But these Norman buildings did not just use Roman stone from Verulamium, thereby
doubling down on their identity as an imperial and ecclesiastical heir of Rome: they also
modeled some of their architectural work on the Anglo-Saxon designs they found in
place. Martin Thurlby points out that the use of rectangular crossing piers instead of
square plans shows a reliance on Anglo-Saxon, and not just Norman, architectural design.
He also suggests that there is some re-used Anglo-Saxon material in the Norman
churches at St. Albans, such as the baluster shafts of the triforia.\(^{149}\) The architectural use
of Anglo-Saxon features could then correlate with the twelfth century interest in the
language of the Anglo-Saxons in their own Latin literary and historiographical

\(^{146}\) Niblett, 8.
\(^{147}\) Ibid. 8.
\(^{148}\) See Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjolbye-Biddle, “The Origins of St. Albans Abbey: Romano-British Cemetery and Anglo-Saxon
Monastery,” in *Alban and St. Albans: Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art, and Archaeology*, ed. Martin Henig and Phillip Lindley
\(^{149}\) Thurlby, Martin: “The Anglo-Saxon Tradition in Post-Conquest Architecture and Sculpture.” *The Long Twelfth-Century View of
production.

Indeed, manuscript production itself at Saint Albans seems to have continued Anglo-Saxon traditions, at least for a while. Francis Wormald has pointed to a few examples of Anglo-Saxon illumination style continuing into the 1120s. Richard Pfaff argues that Aelfric’s Old English homilies inspired some late twelfth century stained glass windows. Manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon chronicle still continued to be used in historical chronicles at least to Roger Wendover in St. Albans in the thirteenth century.

The copious amounts of glossing in twelfth century manuscripts containing Old English suggests that these manuscripts continued to have a marked cultural influence during this heavily Latinate era of English literary production. Furthermore, it wasn’t just Old English manuscripts that supplied “English” material for post-Conquest scribes: Anglo-Saxon manuscripts of Latin texts also served as exemplars for post-Conquest copies. One such example is from St. Albans itself, bringing us back to the scope of this present study: British Library, Cotton Titus D. xvi fols. 1-36, from the first half of the twelfth century. This copy of the late antique epic Psychomachia by Prudentius bears many similarities to pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon illuminated manuscripts of this common pedagogical text. It is possible that an Anglo-Saxon illustrated manuscript of Prudentius’ Psychomachia came to St. Albans at some point after the Conquest, as an exemplar for

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153 Attested to by many scholars, see especially *Rewriting Old English in the Twelfth Century.* The conception that Old English died out in the period after 1066 has been refuted by many scholars, such as those in the aforementioned book as well as individual studies. Elaine Treharne has argued for the use of English as a method of resistance (*Living Through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020-1220*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012) and Mark Faulkner has pointed out numerous examples of Old English manuscripts being used well into the twelfth century (Faulkner, Mark Jonathan. “The Use of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts, 1066-1200.” *St. John’s College, Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 2008*). Faulkner in particular has focused on the ways in which Old English is used for continuity, and not for disruption. Specifically, Faulkner rejects Treharne’s thesis that Old English was actively suppressed in post-Conquest England, and instead points out numerous examples of readers of Old English into the twelfth century.
154 Faulkner 120.
the illustrated copy of this copy of the *Psychomachia* produced at St. Albans circa. 1120. The twelfth-century glosses in Cambridge, Corpus Christi MS 23, an illustrated Anglo-Saxon copy of the *Psychomachia*, make it clear that the pre-Conquest manuscripts of the *Psychomachia* were still used and consulted in Anglo-Norman England. While the texts just described are all in Latin, this fact simply reminds us that Old English documents, such as charters, were not the only means through which Anglo-Normans engaged with the Anglo-Saxon past—it was also through the continual use of Latin pedagogical and liturgical texts.

Yet St. Albans did not quite have the rich legacy of pre-Conquest, Benedictine reform-era texts to be found at other religious houses, such as Canterbury or Worcester, despite the important example of the illustrated *Psychomachia*. In fact, it is a well-attested fact that pre-Conquest St. Albans lacked Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, and was not very well-endowed in general. The one definitive pre-Conquest manuscript is New York, Pierpoint Morgan 926, which includes three hymns to St. Alban and a rhymed office for St. Albans. Yet Rodney Thomson acknowledges that perhaps there were more books at St. Albans than we realize. For example, we have no evidence of what manuscripts of late antique poets might have been at St. Albans, but Ralph of Dunstable mentions Sedulius, Arator, Prosper, and Prudentius by name in beginning his metrical version of William’s Latin *Passio*. It would thus follow that Ralph had access to them

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155 For more on this manuscript, see C.M. Kauffman, *Romanesque Manuscripts 1066-1190* (London: 1975).
156 Julia Crick discusses St. Albans’ endowments in her essay “Offa, Aelfric, and the Refoundation of St. Albans,” where she argues that there was very little in the way of endowment for the institution, but that there was perhaps some sort of ancient endowment in pre-refoundation St. Albans, in *Alban and St. Albans: Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art, and Archaeology*, ed. Martin Henig and Phillip Lindley (Leeds: The British Archaeological Association: Conference Transactions XXIV, 2001), 78-84.
158 Rodney Thomson *Manuscripts from St Albans Abbey 1066-1235*. Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982. 10. For more on Ralph of Dunstable, see the coda to this chapter.
somewhere, at some time, and given our knowledge that our access to any manuscript from the medieval period is happy coincidence, one can imagine that the pedagogical library of twelfth century Saint Albans contained more books than Thomson’s meticulous book list shows.¹⁵⁹

However, the information gleaned from Morgan 926 can be instructive in understanding the development of the monastic literary culture at St. Albans. Thomson, based upon his paleographical study of Morgan 926, declares that because of the subpar scribal hand and the exclusively liturgical and hagiographical material, pre-Conquest materials from St. Albans were primarily for personal devotional use.¹⁶⁰ Hartzell sees the compilation of material in Morgan 926 as a response to the Norman destruction of pre-Conquest sources.¹⁶¹ Indeed, both Hartzell and Thomson emphasize heavily the fact that twelfth century St. Albans had all but lost its early English heritage by the twelfth century, from destruction or decay.¹⁶² One way we can see the shift in liturgical practice and focus is through comparisons of Morgan 926 and a twelfth century office of St. Alban, now in London British Library Royal 2 A.x 12. Of the three hymns to St. Alban found in Morgan 926, only the first (‘Aecclesia prosapies’) is found in the BL manuscript, and even then is has been changed a bit to reflect the more universal, rather than specifically English, context of St. Albans.¹⁶³ Additionally, while Morgan 926

¹⁵⁹ For example, there are four poems of Fortunatus at the beginning of Bodleian Library Bodley 331 (first quarter of the thirteenth century, most likely Saint Albans), whose specifics of inclusion R.W. Hunt argued showed that the poems must have been copied from a complete manuscript of Fortunatus. See R.W. Hunt, “Manuscript evidence for the knowledge of the poems of Venantius Fortunatus in late Anglo-Saxon England.” Anglo-Saxon England 8 (1979). 279-295, esp. 284-5.
¹⁶⁰ Thomson Manuscripts from St. Albans Abbey 9. He writes: “They give no hints of an organized scriptorium, in any of the accepted senses of that term; they are scarcely communal books at all. Nonetheless their contents relate to some of the most central and venerable constituents of the abbey’s spiritual life, with historical roots in late Roman Britain, in the aftermath of the Augustinian mission, in the Dunstanian revival and in reformed continental monasticism.”
¹⁶² Thomson Manuscripts from St. Albans Abbey 18.
¹⁶³ Ibid. 9. The line from Morgan 926 Qui gente natus Anglicana has been changed to Qui fide plenus catholica.
includes eight lessons, straight from Bede, the twelfth century BL manuscript has expanded the material to consist of twelve lessons.\textsuperscript{164} Thomson and Hartzell’s comparison of the hymns and the office from Morgan 926 and BL Royal A.2.x suggests that perhaps the twelfth century monks relied upon Morgan 926 in their creation of a new, updated office for the life of the monastery. Hartzell concludes by arguing that Morgan 926 was a type of historical compilation:

\begin{quote}
Items such as those found in Morgan 926 are the stuff of which history is made: not the history of the time they were written as presented by modern historians, but the history of the immediate past as written by men such as William of Malmesbury or Henry of Huntington. These form a working collection, something we should now call part of a reference library. For this reason, Morgan 926 was probably as important to those twelfth-century monks of St. Albans who exhibited a historical bent as it is to us in the 1970s. It reflected the glorious not-so-distant past of a distinguished English monastery.\textsuperscript{165}
\end{quote}

Hartzell here builds upon Francis Wormald’s earlier assertion that the material in Morgan 926 “is the beginning of what was to produce ultimately Matthew Paris and the \textit{Gesta Abbatum}. ”\textsuperscript{166} Hartzell and Wormald both propose that the liturgical, private devotional compilation was actually a predecessor to the kind of historiographical work that St. Albans became known for later in the medieval period. Thus, the liturgical and devotional material in Morgan 926 might have also influenced twelfth-century writers such as William to recreate pre-Conquest materials, inspired by their connection to the material manuscript of their abbey’s pre-Conquest past.

Aside from art and literature, it would be remiss to not discuss briefly the ecclesiastical politics of St. Albans, which influenced literary production dramatically. In the twelfth century, St. Albans had a veritable cottage industry dedicated to proving their

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Hartzell 34.}
\footnote{Ibid 47-8.}
\footnote{Wormald, qtd. in Hartzell, 48.}
\end{footnotes}
claims to antiquity. The monks of Ely had claimed that the relics of Alban were actually at their monastery, and the monks of St. Albans, because of their lack of pre-Conquest manuscripts, felt the pressure to verify their holdings, through means truthful or somewhat less so. With that in mind, the English vernacular was crucial to their claim to antiquity, and thus the kinds of ecclesiastical support they needed could partially be obtained by the appeal to its authority. However, as Pamela Taylor has pointed out, the saint who made the town famous and gave it its name’s identity as a Roman saint was crucial for getting support from the Normans and the pope.

And for St. Albans, the twelfth century was just the right time to obtain favor from Rome. Right before the composition of the Passio around 1167, an auspicious historical event occurred: the reign of the first (and since then, only) English pope, Adrian IV. Born Nicholas Breakspear, near St. Albans, he held the papal office from 1154-1159. He had a special devotion to his place of origin, as well as its native saint Alban, and thus the power and influence of the monastery grew in the twelfth century due to special attention from the pope. In his first papal bull, Incomprehensibilis (1156), he declared St. Albans “free from all episcopal subjection, both those living in the body of the monastery and those dwelling in cells or in the care of vills, so that hereafter it has no bishop, except the Roman pontiff, and beyond this, many other noble privileges, so that

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167 Mark Hagger argues that the Gesta Abbatum is a fabrication in order to bolster St. Albans’ authority in the 12th century. Sara Harris writes of the forgeries at St. Albans: “from the late tenth century onwards, the extant charters which demonstrated St. Alban’s title to its contemporary holdings were felt to be insufficient. Noticing that the documents of previous generations had decayed, been destroyed, or simply never been written, the monks decided to supplement the archive with their own creations” (Linguistic Past, 53). For more on the importance of Anglo-Saxon charters, see Scott Thompson Smith, Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2012). For St. Albans’ charters specifically, see Julia Crick, The Charters of St. Albans (London: British Academy & OUP, 2007).

no other monastery compared in privileges to that of the church of St. Albans.”¹⁶⁹ One year later, in *Religiosam vita*, Adrian declared the abbot of St. Albans to be first among the English abbots, and also granted permission for him to wear pontifical insignia.¹⁷⁰ In 1163, Robert de Gorron became the first abbot of St. Albans to celebrate the mass in all seven episcopal insignia: staff, ring, gloves, tunic, dalmatic, sandals, and mitre.¹⁷¹ The historical and ecclesiastical climate at St. Albans just leading up to William’s work was one of expanded ecclesiastical authority and direct links to Rome itself, culminating with St. Albans’ own native son on the chair of St. Peter. The desire to link St. Albans definitively to Rome therefore could be undeniable, and a view of St. Albans as a miniature English Rome might soon follow.

**Passio Sancti Albani: Romanitas and Old English in St. Albans**

It is this historical context, of the emulation of Roman and early English forms as well as increased authority given to Saint Albans by Rome itself, that leads us back to William’s *Passio Sancti Albani*. Little is known of our author’s life, aside from his residence at the monastery of St. Albans in the twelfth century. His *Passio* was written around 1167 at the request of Abbot Simon. The *Passio* is currently known to be extant in seven manuscripts:

- London, BL Cotton MS Nero C VII, ff. 2-9
- Dublin, Trinity College MS 177 [E.I.40] (13th c.)
- London, BL MS Cotton Claudius E. IV (14th c.)
- London, BL MS. Add. 62777 (14th c., prov. St. Albans)
- Oxford, Magdalen College MS. Lat. 53 (c. 1200, prov. St. Albans)

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 727.
¹⁷¹ Ibid. 727.
Of these, Rodney Thomson believes that Oxford, Magdalen College MS. Lat. 53 is contemporary with William himself. London, British Library MS Cotton Faustina B.IV is another early manuscript. The earlier manuscripts contain the prologue, while later manuscripts leave out the prologue, therefore erasing the triple temporality (Roman, Saxon, Anglo-Norman) of the original text. This triple temporality, it seems, is a specifically twelfth-century investment.

The text as it appears in the early manuscripts begins with a dedicatory preface to Abbot Simon and a claim to ancient authority as William writes that he translated an ancient English book at the behest of this abbot:

Cum liber Anglico sermone conscriptus, Passionem beati Martyris Albani continens, ad nostram notitiam pervenisset; ut eum verbis Latinis exprimerem, praecepistis. Ego vero vobis non obedire nefas existimans, dicto parui: non tamen ex aliqua praesumptione, sed ne contemni jubeantis auctoritas videretur. Quod opus nomini vestro credidi consecrandum, non inveniens cui magis oris mei primitias offerrem, quam Domini Sacerdoti. Si quid minus Latine forte sonuerit apud doctas aures; interpretem novum obedientiae, quae viribus plerumque majora praesumit, excusabit. Sciendum autem quod huic opera beati Clerici nomen adjecerim: quod non in libro, quem transfero, sed in historia, quam Gaufridus Arturus de Britannico in Latinum se vertisse testator, inveni. Sed ne verborum prolixitas hominis displiceat occupato: restat nunc, qualiter auctor operis s/fui Praefationem dirigat, audiatur.

[When a book written in the English language and containing the Passion of the blessed martyr Alban came to our attention, you commanded me to translate it into Latin. Thinking it truly a crime not to obey you, I complied with your word, not, however, out of any arrogance, but rather so that I would not be seen to disregard your authority. I believed this work ought to be consecrated to your name, since I found no one to whom I might better offer the first fruits of my mouth than the priest of the Lord. But if anything should sound less than Latin to your learned ears, excuse a translator new to an obedience that regularly takes for granted things beyond his power. It should be noted, moreover, that I have added
to this work the name of the blessed priest, which I did not find in the book I am translating but in the history that Geoffrey Arthur claims to have translated from the ancient British tongue into Latin. But lest my prolixity displease a busy man, it now remains to hear how my author composed the preface of his work.)

While the author of the *Gesta Abbatum*, at the moment of Unwona’s translation of the ancient book, demonstrates ambivalence about its identity as British or English, William very clearly identifies his source as English. He does this by simply saying so, but also by mentioning Geoffrey of Monmouth’s translation of his British book. William draws the parallel between himself and Geoffrey, both as translators, but explicitly denies the possibility of his book being British by unequivocally stating that his source was English, while Geoffrey’s was British. The Englishness of the text is also understandable when considering Simon’s own identity as an Englishman. Abbot Simon was a remarkable abbot in the history of St. Albans, with very close ties to the abbey throughout his life: he was English, not Norman, and was educated at St. Albans. The *Gesta Abbatum* portrays Simon as a man who loved books, and who worked hard to advance the status of books and learning during his abbotship. Simon kept a painted cupboard full of books, and also repaired the ageing scriptorium at St. Albans. Thomson notes that Paris’ use of the verb *reparauit* denotes literal repair, an actual building project and not a figurative rebuilding of a declining scribal practice, and thus Simon is the first to repair the scriptorium that was built by the first Norman abbot Paul. Perhaps it is in this repaired scriptorium that

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173 The reference to Geoffrey also highlights William’s role as a compilator—while he claims to translate, he also grafts new information into the story as he sees fit.

174 Thomson *Manuscripts at St. Albans Abbey* 53.
William writes these words, conscious of his own role as creator of this new text in a room rebuilt from ruin.

The adjective “new” then of course begs the question: is the Passio really a translation of an English book, or is this a fictional narrative trope? Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Thelma Fenster take this reference as a testament to the status of English as a method of contact with the past, and not necessarily as a statement of fact. Thomas O’Donnell has written that it is logical to assume that the Saxon convert’s narrative is a fictional device, since there is no Old English life of St. Alban that corresponds to William’s Saxon narrators’ account, and draws the parallel between William’s Passio and Geoffrey of Monmouth’s History of the Kings of Britain through the claim of translation from an old book. However, if he is indeed using an invented conceit, which it is most likely for reasons I will show later, it is intriguing to consider why. Perhaps this demonstrates an anxiety over St. Albans’ lack of pre-Conquest texts, if that really was the case, and a desire to compensate and instead imagine what an Old English life of St Alban might look like.

With this in mind, it is intriguing that his imaginary Anglo-Saxon hagiography is intimately connected with Rome and Roman ruins. We read in the Saxon narrator’s opening:


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176 O’Donnell 189.
capitalem. Haec inter cetera multorum relatione cognovi, qualiter vir sanctus fontem in vertice montis orando produxerit; ut inimicis siti laborantibus, & jam de vita desperantibus, aquarum beneficio subveniret. Omnem rei seriem diligenter inquisivi, didici, & (ne lateret posteris) in hunc modum stylo memoriaeque mandare cura.

[The former citizens of Verulamium, in order to make known their hearts’ exaltation at the suffering of blessed Alban, left behind engravings on their city walls. I found these carvings long afterward on the same walls, now ruinous and decaying. And I saw the crumbled battlements, heavy with age, under whose walks the blessed Alban suffered painful bodily torments. I saw filled thick with trees the place where the unvanquished martyr long ago endured death for Christ’s sake. These things, among others, I learned by the report of many: how the holy man’s prayer brought forth a spring on the mountaintop, so that with its beneficial waters he could relieve his enemies, who had been tortured by thirst and were despairing of life. I have thus sought out, learned, and taken pains to commit the whole course of events to writing and to memory lest it remain hidden from posterity.]

The introduction of a separate narrator introduces another temporal layer, bringing the total temporality tally to three: that of the twelfth-century William, in writing his preface; that of the Saxon narrator in the ruined Roman town; and that of Roman Alban himself. While William claims to recover the past in the English text, his English source claims to recover the past from the ruins of the ancient walls of Roman Verulamium. This parallelism might seem to highlight the similar work of the translator and the amateur archaeologist in creating historical narrative for the benefit of posterity, as Monika Otter argues. The unnamed Saxon narrator was inspired to compose his text by seeing the physical remains of Verulamium, the physical site of Alban’s torture and miracles, his own account thus imbuing the ruins with narrative significance. Yet while the ruins might incite historical questioning, the ruins cannot convey historical narrative on their own.

177 Acta Sanctorum 149; O’Donnell and Lamont 139-140.
178 Otter, Inventiones, 50-51.
The ruined state of the city, furthermore, threatens the legibility of the story, and so the narrator feels compelled to write the narrative down for future generations. In a similar way, William (under the direction of Simon) is compelled to translate into Latin the English account so that the narrative will remain legible for future readers. The imaginary Anglo-Saxon account would presumably have been thick with unfamiliar words, heavy with the archaic grammatical constructions, ancient scripts, and crumbled vellum, if William had had the chance to see an actual manuscript from pre-Conquest England. In the world of the text, for both William and his anonymous English narrator, the account of St. Alban must be rescued from material ruin of two kinds.

The ruined walls are the Saxon narrator’s first encounter with material ruin. It is unclear from the text if the depictions on the walls are pictorial or graphic—some manuscripts have sculpum, others scripturam. The earliest manuscript, Oxford Magdalen College MS. Lat. 53, has sculptum here, suggesting perhaps that it is not actual textual writing that the narrator finds, but rather pictorial carvings. These ruined walls of Verulamium are of particular interest to the narrator—and they themselves, like William’s text as a whole, exist in three temporalities. They are jam ruinosis [are ruinous], implying a ruin from the past; they are ad ruinam inclinati...
ruin], implying future ruin; and *moenia praevetustate jam labi* [the walls are now falling on account of old age], indicating decay happening in the narrator’s present moment. Thus, the ruined state of the walls threatens legibility at multiple levels: because of the decay, the memory of Alban has been almost forgotten, and if the present decay continues without any mitigation, then future generations will not know Alban’s story.

It is here that the narrator steps in to rescue the narrative from material ruin, implying the need for written record to both explain and preserve historical information. His depiction of his process of discovering historical narrative evokes a classical literary figure and his own interaction with the ruins of a distant past: Caesar in the ruins of Troy in Book IX of Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*. Lucan was ubiquitous in twelfth-century Anglo-Latin literature: as Alfred Hiatt writes, “If there was a golden age of Lucan in medieval England, it was the twelfth century.”

While there is no Lucan manuscript definitively attached to twelfth-century St. Albans, Oxford Bodleian, MS Laud. Lat. 67 (late twelfth century, St. Albans) contains a short commentary on the *Bellum civile*, thus implying that there was knowledge of it at twelfth-century St. Albans, especially since it was such a popular school text throughout the Middle Ages.

At the end of Book IX of the *Bellum civile*, Caesar goes to Troy to pay tribute to the gods of Troy, and thus his ancestors: but, as many who have read this passage argue, the scene where he encounters the ruins themselves reveals his inability to understand them:

*Circumit exustae nomen memorabile Troiae*

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183 Hiatt fn. 17, p. 222.

Magnaque Phoebi quaerit vestigia muri.
Iam silvae steriles eu putres robore trunci
Assarcai pressere domos et templa deorum
Iam lassa radice tenant, ac tota teguntur
Pergama dumetis: etiam periere ruinae.
Aspicit Hesiones scopulos silvaeque latentes
Anchisae thalamus; quo iudex sederit antro,
Unde puer raptus caelo, quo vertice Nais
Luxerit Oenone: nullum est sine nomine saxum.
Inscius in sicco serpentem pulvere rivum
Transierat, qui Xanthus erat. Securus in alto
Gramine ponebat gressus; Phryx incola manes
Hectoreos calcare vetat. Discussa iacebant
Saxa nec ullius faciem servantia sacri:
‘Herceas’ monstrator ait ‘non respicis aras?’

[‘He walked round the burnt city of Troy, now only a famous name, and searched
for the mighty remains of the wall that Apollo raised. Now barren woods and
rotting tree-trunks grow over the palace of Assaracus, and their worn-out roots
clutch the temples of the gods, and Pergama is covered over with thorn-brakes:
the very ruins have been destroyed. He sees Hesione’s rock and the secret
marriage-chamber of Anchises in the wood; the cave in which Paris sat as umpire,
and the spot from which the boy was carried off to the sky; he sees the peak on
which the Naiad Oenone lamented. A legend clings to every stone. The stream
trickling through the dry dust, which he crossed without knowing it, was the
Xanthus. When he stepped carelessly over the rank grass, the native bade him not
to walk over the body of Hector. When scattered stones, preserving no appearance
of sanctity, lay before them, the guide asked: ‘Do you mean to pass over the altar
of Zeus Herceos?’]^{185}

Caesar doesn’t understand the ruins he encounters—he rambles through the crumbling
town, overgrown with trees, similar to the brief description of Veruamium by the Saxon
narrator. For Caesar, *etiam periere ruinae*—even the ruins have come to nothing, making
it difficult to assign to them meaning. In order to give the ruins the correct stories, Caesar
must listen to the native and the guide, who remind him that where he steps is Hector’s
grave, or Zeus’ altar. Without these verbal reminders from these unnamed figures, Caesar

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would not be able to make sense of the stones, which “preserv[e] no appearance of sanctity,” even though the poem clearly reminds us that *nullum est sine nomine saxum*—no stone is without a name.

It is at this moment that Lucan the poet steps in, in order to relate the work of the poet in constructing narrative from historical fragments to the work of the unnamed guides in Caesar’s Trojan walking tour:

> O sacer et magnus vatum labor! Omnia fato Eripis et populis donas mortalibus aevum. Invidia sacrae, Caesar, ne tangere famae; Nam, si quid Latiiis fas est promittere Musis, Quantum Zmyrnaei durabunt vatis honores, Venturi me teque legent; Pharsalia nostra Vivet, et a nullo tenebris damnabimur aevo.

[How mighty, how sacred the poet’s task! He snatches all things from destruction and gives to mortal men immortality. Be not jealous, Caesar, of those whom fame has consecrated; for, if it is permissible for the Latin muses to promise aught, then, as long as the fame of Smyrna’s bard endures, posterity shall read my verse and your deeds; our Pharsalia shall live on, and no age will ever doom us to oblivion.]\(^{186}\)

Lucan likens his work as a poet to that of the guide in Troy: rescuing the story of the ruined places from oblivion (*tenebris*). Without the poet’s work of assigning meaning to the fragments of history, future generations would be at a loss for knowledge and story (*historia*). History, for Lucan, is a ruin—meaningless and liable to be forgotten without someone to verbally remind the viewer of its significance.

This passage theorizes the same kinds of themes and issues that appear in William’s Saxon narrator’s introduction: the ruined city, city walls, arboreal overgrowth, oral testimony. Just as Caesar obtains his information about the city and its heroes and

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\(^{186}\) Lucan BC, ll. 980–6, pp. 579–580.
holy places from unnamed guides, so does the unnamed narrator receive more details about St. Alban from local oral testimony. There are also topographical parallels: Caesar sees the mountain where Paris’ first wife mourned his departure, just as the narrator sees the summit of the mountain of Alban’s martyrdom; and Caesar steps over the once-great Xanthus without recognizing its former greatness, while the narrator sees the place of the small fountain that bubbled at Alban’s feet after he dried up the once-great Ver. Finally, Caesar claims he will rebuild the walls of Troy to create a Roman Troy. Similarly, William’s Saxon narrator rebuilds the walls of Alban’s Verulamium, so to speak, through his narrative account, making an English Verulamium—St. Albans itself. William recognizes, like Lucan, the role of the writer in preserving historical memory, and the indispensable part that poets and historians play in the transmission of narrative and the interpretation of history for the Caesars of the world.

While Lucan plays a key role in William’s classicism, Virgilian echoes also appear in the Passio. Towards the end of the text, after Alban’s death, William subtly invokes Virgil in the angelic worship at Alban’s tomb. William describes the angelic hymn: “noctem totam in hymnis & laudibus deducebant. Inter cetera vero quae caneabant, vox ista frequentis est audita: Albanus vir egregius, martyr extat gloriosus.” Thomas O’Donnell uses this line to argue that the inclusion of liturgical and hymnic devotion supersedes the citizens’ identity as political entities, thus making the connection between the former citizens and their liturgical practice and the twelfth-century monks of St. Albans and their own devotion more seamless. O’Donnell cannot find an exact parallel

187 Lucan BC IX.998-999: “restitutam populos; grata vice moenia reddent/Audonidae Phrygibus, Romanaque Pergama surgent.”
188 Acta Sanctorum 155.
189 O’Donnell, 200.
to the hymn that the angels sing, which is unusual as there were at least three hymns to Alban contained in what is now Morgan 926, and a few in the twelfth-century office based upon it. Instead of using hymns from the devotional material at St. Albans, William instead creates his own version of the angelic hymn, containing echoes of Virgil’s *Aeneid* when Anchises prophesies the future of Aeneas’ lineage. Virgil describes Silvius Aeneas as follows: *Silvius Aeneas, pariter pietate vel armis/egregius, si umquam regnandem acceperit Albam* [Silvius Aeneas, equal to you in honor and arms, if he will ever accept the Alban throne].

The hymn, assumedly invented by William, uses the same epithet, *egregius*, used by Virgil to reference Silvius Aeneas, who sits on the Alban throne. The Latin is *albam*, a word that shares a visual similarity on the page to the name Alban. The hymn the angels sing at the tomb of Alban is Virgilian in lexical choice, further suggesting the Roman parallels between Alban and the founders of Rome—Alban as the founder and first son of the Christian, Romanesque St. Albans, just as Silvius Aeneas is the first son of the Augustan, imperial Rome in the Virgilian world.

Outside of the *Aeneid*, through, it is interesting to consider the late Roman imperial use of the term *vir egregius*, especially in inscriptions. About the third century (the proposed time of the historical Alban), the term *vir egregius* was used to designate the procurator, the imperial governor of a minor province in the Roman empire, typically in inscriptions. In this context, the angels call Alban the procurator of Britain, he whom God has given to safeguard the people of Britain until more emissaries from Rome come

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190 These hymns are printed in K.D. Hartzell, 49-51.
191 *Aeneid* 6.769-770.
to preach the gospel again (the Augustinian mission). Furthermore, the fact that it commonly appeared on inscriptions is also interesting, considering the amount of inscriptions we know survived from Roman Britain into the Middle Ages through church architecture.\footnote{For more on inscriptions and epithets, see James Chidester Egbert, \textit{Introduction to the Study of Latin Inscriptions}, New York, American Book Company, 1896, esp. p. 176-7. For more on Roman inscriptions in medieval England, see material from Tyler Bell, \textit{The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England} (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005).} Whether this hymn is a conscious echo of Virgil and the Trojan foretelling of the Roman future applied to the Roman saint foretelling the coming of Roman obedience in England through the Augustinian mission or the Roman office of \textit{procurator} is unclear, but the fact is that these echoes further William’s depiction of Alban as a Roman saint. Alban’s Roman identity is crucial to this narrative, and an identity that William emphasizes in the text through literary and imperial terminology, perhaps encountered through either the codex or the reused Roman stone.

After the account of Alban’s passion, the unnamed Saxon ends with his future plans for his work and a meditation on the fate of knowledge:

\begin{quote}
Haec & alia multa, quae divina pietas noluit hominibus occultare, diligenter litteris commendavi. Benedictus Deus. Decessit omnis ille coetus infidelium, qui in B. Albanum mortis quondam tulere sententiam, nec jam de eis multum tractant homines aut loquuntur: Albani memoria non delebitur, sed eius laudabile meritum, si quid mea carmina possunt, longe lateque per orbem diffundetur.

[These things and many others that God’s mercy did not want hidden from mankind I have carefully put into writing. Blessed be God. That whole company of infidels that once imposed a sentence of death on the blessed Alban has departed, and men no longer think or talk much about them. The memory of Alban will not be rubbed away; rather, his praiseworthy merit—if my songs can do anything—will be spread far and wide through the world.]
\end{quote}

The narrator appeals to the codex’s ability to transcend geographic boundaries, in ways that architectural ruin and local witness cannot. Because of the narrator’s painstaking
work of creating a literary artifact, “the memory of Alban will not be destroyed, but his praiseworthy merit, if my songs can do anything, will be spread far and wide though the world.” The narrator not only explicitly states that now Alban’s story can be read in far-off lands throughout the world, but also quotes the ubiquitous poet Virgil in this very proclamation. This quotation “*si quid mea carmina possunt*” is found in Book IX of the *Aeneid*, right after the deaths of Nisus and Euryalus. Cynthia J. Bannon, in her brief analysis of this line, notes that this phrase uneasily points out that then the memory of Nisus and Euryalus is solely carried on by poetry—and that poetry’s capacity to carry the memory of these two men also carries with it the reminder that if poetry fails, then memory fails as well,\(^{194}\) again reminding us of Lucan’s appeal to the sacred task of the poet after Caesar walks through Troy. Throughout late antiquity and the Middle Ages, the knowledge of at least aspects of Virgil’s poetry was widespread and indelibly imprinted on the minds of students: Augustine writes in the *De civitate Dei* that Virgil was taught to young boys so that the great poet’s words “*non facile obliuione possit aboleri*” (I. iii). By the Middle Ages, Virgil’s words were “embedded so deeply in literary culture that even when not read directly, they were often encountered indirectly through quotation and references in other texts.”\(^{195}\) Virgil’s ubiquity by this point in literary history reminds us again of Augustine’s comment on Virgil. The *Passio* narrator’s language about the memory of Alban is remarkably similar to that of Augustine is speaking of the impact of Virgil on the minds of young students: they teach them at such an impressionable age so that it “will not easily be destroyed into oblivion,” just as the narrator hopes that his own


work in creating a literary account of Alban will prevent the loss of memory. Here William gives his Saxon narrator the persona of the Roman poet, in the hope that his words will be like those of the Roman poet as experienced throughout time: not easily forgotten for those who encounter them. This relationship is not just to the ecclesiastical present of Rome during the Anglo-Saxon period, but rather also to the classical literary past via the Virgilian allusion. Yet even more striking is the fact that this Virgilian allusion, in the literary world that William imagines, is being written in English, implying (even if subconsciously) a literary history where Latin and English words meld together to create a hybrid literary culture.

It is also crucial to the narrative that the Saxon narrator will set out for Rome after he has finished his literary endeavor. The narrator thus brings his account full circle back to Rome. He began with Roman ruins, and told the historical narrative of a Roman saint, but then in the end he goes to Rome itself, so that his words and life may be examined:

Romam autem proficiscar, ut illic gentilitatis errore deposito, & lavacro regenerationis adepto, veniam merear astequi delictorum: libellum quoque istum, qui habetur in minibus, afferam examini Romanorum; ut si quid in eo secus quam debuit forte prolatum fuerit, hoc per eos dignetur in melius commutare Dominus jesus Christus, qui vivit & regnat Deus per omnia secula seculorum. Amen.

[I however will set out for Rome, so that I might merit forgiveness for my sins once I have put aside pagan error there and received the water of renewal. And I will carry this little book in my hands to be examined by the Romans, so that anything in it that happens to be improper may be exposed. May our Lord Jesus Christ deign to change it for the better through them: He is God, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.]¹⁹⁶

Thomas O’Donnell notes that in the *Passio*, Alban is consistently portrayed as Roman,

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¹⁹⁶ Acta Sanctorum, 159; O’Donnell and Lamont 159-160.
not British or English. \textsuperscript{197} The use of Roman ruins at the forefront further emphasizes the role of Rome in the survival and continuation of the story of Alban for future generations. The physical presence of Rome, whether in architecture or geography, is the origin and the destination of this story. By the end of the \textit{Passio}, the conception of Rome as a pagan epicenter of persecution has disappeared and its new identity as the site of holy pilgrimage has replaced it. On a minor scale, Verulamium itself has also followed this trajectory: once a city on the fringes of empire following orders for persecution, it then became a site of pilgrimage on account of its Roman martyr, enacting the same kind of urban transformation in England that happened in late antique Rome. Furthermore, the translation of the city’s name in historical record, from Verulamium to St. Albans, substitutes its former identity as imperial persecutor and embraces a new identity as a shrine to a Roman saint. The Saxon narrator, himself converted by his encounter with the fragments of Alban’s story, is not immune to the draw of Rome, for he says that he will take his little book to Rome, and there he will receive the holy waters of baptism.

William and other inhabitants of St. Albans in the twelfth century encounter an imperial Roman city that has crumbled and dissolved, a city that has already been unearthed by their Anglo-Saxon predecessors. The Roman remains have been incorporated into the present buildings, but the excavation of the original material has already occurred in recent history, recorded by the \textit{Gesta Abbatum}. Thus, William’s reliance on a Saxon narrator for the \textit{passio} gestures towards a perceived need for an intermediary to go back to a point in history where the materiality of the past was more visible and tangible, even if it was decaying.

\textsuperscript{197} O’Donnell, 186.
William and his narrator are literary parallels to each other, and William’s relationship to his own act of literary production and his narrator’s can be read as analogues. The narrator of the Old English text is inspired to create his text by gazing upon the ruin of Verulamium, a distinctively Roman town. Yet instead of representing what he sees in its imperial decrepitude, as a Romantic poet might have done, he seeks out people who know about Alban and his story so that he may write a complete narrative account of it, in effect to rebuild it in textual form from the architectural ruin. Like Caesar in the ruins of Troy, both the Saxon narrator and William need the help of oral testimony and the Old English account, respectively, to make narrative sense of the ruins. Ruins might be a source of inspiration, but they are not a source of inspiration to simply describe but rather to rebuild. And not just rebuild, but to incorporate old elements with new elements to reflect shifting identities and new communal dynamics. The authorial figure William takes the building material of the narrative of Alban from his Old English source, just as his Anglo-Saxon narrator takes the building material of his narrative from Roman ruins. These similar narrative strategies draw a parallel between the reuse of Roman spolia in an architectural context, and the use of old books in the literary culture of twelfth-century Saint Albans. These acts of translation displace the previous source: the Saxon narrator no longer has to worry about the ruin of the town: if it disappears, his work can stand in its place. His book ensures the survival of historical narrative in the more stable vessel of the written word, rather than in crumbling and incomprehensible stone. William’s depiction of encountering ruins, with its Lucanian echoes, also demonstrates the centrality of literature itself in understanding and encountering ruin. The encounter with the ruin is not an unmediated aesthetic gaze—rather, it is an encounter
uses literary texts to answer questions about the material object’s origin and function. In this way, William’s text presents Latin literature as the only way to mend historical discontinuity, and remedy historical ignorance. Through his little book, the story of Alban lives on, and gives Saint Albans its claim to historical and devotional significance.

**Coda: Ralph of Dunstable, Twelfth-Century Classicism, and Anglo-Latin Literature**

The claim that the memory of Alban will live on proved to be true in the English Middle Ages: William’s *Passio Sancti Albani* was an indispensable source of Alban’s life throughout the rest of the medieval period in England. Soon after William’s original composition, Ralph of Dunstable translated the *Passio* into Latin elegiacs, and Matthew Paris relied on it for his Anglo-Norman *La Vie de Seint Auban*. In the fifteenth century it was the source for Alban in the *Gilte Legend* as well as for John Lydgate’s lives of Alban and Amphibal. But it is to Ralph of Dunstable’s poem we turn briefly, at the end of this chapter, in order to consider the impact of William’s text in literary production and culture at twelfth-century St. Albans—and to perhaps consider the ruins of our own knowledge of medieval booklists. Rodney Thomson sensibly proposed looking at the literary production of twelfth-century St. Albans to get a better sense of what was read at the monastery at the time:198 as my reading of William’s *Passio* suggests, the material of Virgil’s *Aeneid* seems to have been pervasive, whether through original or commentative forms. Additionally, Lucan seems to have been known: not hard to imagine, given his pervasiveness in twelfth-century England. By turning to Ralph of Dunstable, we can also

198 Thomson *Manuscripts from St. Albans Abbey*, 6.
see how he employs tropes from another classical school text from the Middle Ages:

Statius’ *Achilleid*. However, Ralph’s poem is hardly accessible, and points to the general need for editions and translations of twelfth-century Latin texts to more fully understand English literary culture of the twelfth century.

Not much is known about Ralph’s identity or life: A.G. Rigg suggests that the ‘doctor Radulphus’ to whom Alexander Neckham sent his nephew for instruction in poetry is Ralph of Dunstable. Ralph’s poem is epic in scale: composed of two books of 1360 lines each, all in elegiac couplets. Rigg calls it a “miniature biblical epic” for its inclusion of long accounts of the creation, fall, and redemption.¹⁹⁹ The metrical *Vita* can be found in four manuscripts:

1) London, British Museum, MS Cotton Julius D.iii part II (c. 1200)
2) London, British Library, MS Cotton Claudius E.iv, ff. 47-58 (15th c.)
3) Dublin, Trinity College MS 177, ff. 3-28v (13th c.)
4) Cambridge, Caius and Gonville College MS 230, ff. 172ff (incomplete, 15th c.)²⁰⁰

There is no edition or translation of this text, aside from a transcription of the prologue which was printed in T.D. Hardy’s *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials Relating to the Early History of Great Britain, Vol. I*. I have included his transcription here, along with my translation:

Albani celebrem caelo terrisque triumphum  
Ruminat inculto carmine Clio rudis  
Ardua res poscit pectus studiumque Maronis:  
Non Maro sum, fatoer, sed neque Codrus ego.  
Non acie mentis, non artis luceo cultu;  
Ut metrice martyr martyris esse queam.

Martyris interpres, me martyris esse poetam,
Tu Gulielme, mihi dux stimulusque fles:
Quem de barbarie veteri novitiate Latina
Evolvis versu me recitare volens.
Qui cupis Amphibalib fortis sublime trophaeum,
Quod socias prosa, me sociare metro;
Allegans quod eos fidei schola faedare primo,
Et tunc consori nectat honore polus.
Me plus discipulo doctorem carmine pulsat
Jungere quod jungat, me tibi pignus idem.
Hoc me compellit ad quod petis et magis urget
Quolibet imperio, quod pius orat amor.
Sis, igitur, clipeus plus auso paupere vena
Aeacide Chiron; non mihi tendo chelyn.

[I sing the triumph of Alban in the heaven and earth,
Uncultivated Clio ruminates in unpolished song.
This difficult thing demands the mind and zeal of a Virgil:
I am not Virgil, I confess, but I am also not Codrus.
Not with steel of mind, not with splendor of art do I shine;
But through verse I am able to be the martyr of martyrs.
Translator of the martyr, and the poet of the martyr.
You, William, leader and goad for me, weep:
That from the old foreign tongue to the new Latin
You turned, I, wishing to call it forth again into verse.
You who long for a lofty memorial of the strong Amphibalus,
Selecting that school that makes a treaty with the first faith,
And then bind to the kindred pole with honor.
The doctor will beat out the song for the student:
To join that which joins, I make the same pledge to you.
This compels me to that which you sought, and greater urges me
Towards whatever realm, to what dutiful love seeks.
May you, Chiron, be therefore a shield and channel for poor
Achilles in this venture: I do not strive for a harp for myself.]\(^{201}\)

Ralph’s prologue, an homage to William, states his purpose to transform William’s account into verse, but in the process also provides the reader with a better sense of

Ralph’s intellectual formation and training. While at the beginning he makes no claims to being Virgil, or even Codrus, thereby suggesting familiarity with the shadowy poet-figure from Virgil’s fifth and seventh eclogues, Ralph invokes another mythical pairing at the end of his prologue, shedding further light on his literary background. This relationship is that of Chiron and Achilles. Chiron, according to legend, was a wise centaur, learned in medicine, who taught Achilles. Their relationship is explored most fully in Latin literature in Statius’ *Achilleid*.

We are first introduced to Chiron in the first two hundred lines of Book I of the *Achilleid*, when Thetis seeks him out in his dwelling in a mountain, *pars exhausta manu, partem sua ruperat aetas* [part was excavated by human hand, part its own age had ruptured].202 Chiron’s dwelling is itself like a ruin, an environment partly carved by human hands, partly destroyed by time. In this passage, Chiron stands in contrast to the savage and bloodthirsty company of centaurs, of which he was not part. Rather, he is learned in the healing arts, and when he is not healing someone he is inclined “monstrare lyra veteres heroas alumno” [to limn with his lyre the heroes of old for his pupil].203 Later, Chiron brings out his lyre to soothe Thetis, of which Statius writes: “elicit extremo chelyn et solantia curas/fila movet leviterque expertas pollice chordas/dat puero. Canit ille libens immania laudum/semina[…]” [At last he draws out his lyre, moving the care-comforting strings, and after making light trial of them with his thumb hands them to the

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203 Ibid. I. 118.
boy. Willingly he sings mighty seeds of glory]. In these lines, Chiron the first artist then hands off the chelyn to Achilles, who goes on to sing of the heroes himself.

Ralph’s invocation of Chiron and Achilles here suggests that William is his Chiron, preparing the harp for Achilles: but invoking the modesty topos, Ralph refuses the chelyn, deferring to his master. Ralph uses the same word for harp in this line that also includes the reference to Chiron and Achilles (by the name Aecidae, as he is commonly known throughout the Achilleid) that Statius used in this episode in Book I: chelyn. These similarities suggest that Ralph had knowledge of Statius, and that he brought in invocations of the poet to his own poetic reworking of William’s hagiography of an English saint. Ralph, through his versification and classical imagery, works English history into a classical narrative form, thus taking the material of English history and giving it the Roman form of heroic poetry. Ralph’s obvious allusion to Statius’ Achilleid simply affirms that the Achilleid was part of his own literary formation, and was so second-nature that it becomes an unheralded allusion in the prologue to his own magnum opus.205

The eminent expert on literary culture at twelfth-century St. Albans, Rodney Thomson, suggested back in 1985 that the way to discover more about the books of St. Albans was to study the literature produced there.206 Yet, he writes of William’s Passio,

It is not a work of much interest, but upon its original version was based another which can at least claim some literary merit. This is the metrical Passio written by a certain Ralph of Dunstable, fundamentally no more than a versification of

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204 Achilleid I. 186-188a
206 Thomson Manuscripts of St. Albans Abbey, 6.
William’s prose *Passio*, but with a good deal of expansion of a rhetorical and imaginative nature.\(^{207}\)

Yet, as Thomas O’Donnell’s Virgilian readings, and my own Virgilian and Lucanian analyses demonstrate, William possessed a keen awareness of literary convention, and a sensitivity to the rhetoric of Roman translation. William’s subtle classicism could easily be missed by a cursory reader, but sustained engagement with the text proves fruitful for an understanding of William’s familiarity with and employment of classical texts. My readings of the *Passio* aim to do the work that Thomson proposes necessary for the understanding of classicism and book history in the twelfth century.

A study of Ralph’s metrical *Passio* would also prove fruitful in the study of the classics at St. Albans, as his preface alone suggests knowledge of Virgil’s *Eclogues* (either first hand or through commentary) and Statius’ *Achilleid*. However, as mentioned earlier, no edition of the metrical *Passio* has appeared Thomson referenced it in the 1980s. One can go through A.G. Rigg’s *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature: 1066-1422* and see just how many Latin epic poems there are of the twelfth century that have not been edited or translated. When one compares this to the many, many editions of Anglo-Latin historiographical works, not to mention the Old and Middle English poetry and prose, it makes one wonder if a renewed focus on the Anglo-Latin literature of the period might also prove useful to understanding the literary culture of the time, work that can be more easily done with access to texts and translations. We have read Anglo-Latin historical chronicle as literature and assessed the works of William of Malmesbury and Matthew Paris for their literary merits, but not the Anglo-Latin poets of the same age. In

\(^{207}\) Ibid. 67.
these poets lie vast riches of classical allusion and literary influence, just waiting to be discovered once they are accessible.

Shortly after William of St. Albans and Ralph of Dunstable wrote, another text was copied into an English miscellany that simultaneously describes ruin and uses classical literature to do so. The next chapter focuses on the *Narracio Mirabilibus Urbis Romae*, by a certain Magister Gregorius. Instead of English ruin, this text examines the ruin of the city of Rome itself through a literary lens. Like William, Master Gregory relies on Lucan’s descriptions of ruins in the *Bellum Civile*, and by doing so implies the impossibility of an unmediated physical experience of the past.
Chapter Three

The Textual Ruins of Rome in the Narracio Mirabilibus Urbis Romae

Since the 1920s, twelfth-century interest in pagan antiquities has been treated as evidence of nascent humanism. In 1982 Herbert Bloch claimed that late eleventh-century archaeological interest in ancient Rome was a sign that Charles Haskins’ idea of the twelfth century renaissance actually began forty years earlier than previously asserted— in other words, Bloch saw interest in the archaeological record as a key feature of renaissance and humanist inquiry.\footnote{Herbert Bloch, “The New Fascination with Ancient Rome,” in Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century, ” eds. Robert Benson, Giles Constable, Carol Diana Lanham (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982), pp. 615-636. See also Charles Homer Haskins, The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1927).}

In an essay, Bloch gave many examples of medieval first-hand encounters with the architectural remains of ancient Rome, including John of Salisbury’s description of the arch of Constantine. John writes this in the introduction to the Polieraticus:

Triumphal arches advance the glory of illustrious men whenever inscriptions explain for what cause and for whom they have been erected. It is only because of the inscription on a triumphal arch that the onlooker recognizes that Constantine (who was of British stock) is proclaimed liberator of his country and founder of peace. No one would ever be illuminated by perpetual glory unless he himself or someone else had written.\footnote{John of Salisbury, Polieraticus: of the frivolities of courtiers and the footsteps of philosophers, Cary Nederman, ed. and trans. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, Cambridge UP 1990. John’s parenthetical statement about Constantine’s heritage again reiterates his use of textual sources to interpret the arch, since the only sources that claim a British ancestry are of course textual.}

\footnote{Bloch 632.}

Bloch noted that the phrases liberator urbis and fundatori quietes from this passage are actually inscribed on Constantine’s Arch itself, an inclusion that emphasizes John’s firsthand witness to the physical objects themselves.\footnote{Bloch 632.}
Yet only to point out firsthand witness of Roman monuments leaves out the main point of John’s passage. John’s point here is not that architectural remains have a special importance or meaning— in fact, he specifically points to language as the only vehicle for the transmission of knowledge. He says that without inscriptions, the arch would be meaningless—it is only with the inscription that the arch can tell of the glory of the one for whom it was erected. The rest of the introduction of the Policraticus highlights not the archaeological, but the written record:

The pursuit of letters is especially fruitful because it excludes all annoyances stemming from differences of time and place, it draws friends into each other’s presence, and it abolishes the situation in which things worth knowing are not experienced. […] Arts would have perished, laws would have disappeared, faith and all religious duties whatsoever would have shat-tered, and even the correct use of eloquence would have declined, save that divine compassion granted to mortals the use of letters as a remedy for human infirmity. […] Who would know of Alexander or Caesar, or would respect the Stoics or the Peripatetics, unless they had been distinguished by the memorials of writers? Whoever would have followed the footsteps of the cherished apostles and prophets, unless they had been consecrated for posterity in the Holy Scriptures?211

For John, literature is the reason anything can be known at all. It is only after this passage in exuberant praise of letters that John includes the example of the arch. The arch itself is actually an argument against inherent meaning in architectural remains, and not a desire to treat the ruin as important through its own merit, for the arch is only legible because of the writing found on it. Taken as a whole, John’s introduction is not an apologia for the value of ancient remains in and of themselves, but rather evidence of the need for written language.

In this chapter, I examine a frequently mentioned, but less frequently examined, text on the pagan marvels of Rome from the twelfth or early thirteenth century known as

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211 John of Salisbury 3.
the *Narracio mirabilibus urbis romae* by a certain Magister Gregorius. Scholars since 1917 have focused on the text’s treatment of pagan Roman monuments, noting the almost complete lack of any description of Christian Rome and concluding that the author had a “secular humanist” mindset and was interested in “antiquities for antiquities sake.”  

Thus, over the past century much of the scholarship on the text has tried to prove that Gregory really *did* visit the places he describes, often by meticulously trying to verify the identities of the sites in the text.  

Rushforth writes that Gregory’s “position is one of independence, and his object is different, viz., to describe what he saw from his own observation, supplemented by information given by the best instructed local authorities,” thus classifying Gregory’s text as mainly descriptive, derived from his own experience with the monuments, with some local guides’ interpretations by way of supplement. Maurizio Campanelli more pointedly argues for Gregory’s high view of the material object when he writes, “Master Gregory treats the monuments as if they were self-sufficient sources, which can portray fundamental events in Roman history.”

However, William Kynan-Wilson has recently argued that the *Narracio* is a literary satire of papal documents representing Rome by showing the ways in which Gregory reworks material from various textual sources, particularly the earlier *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*.

Like Kynan-Wilson, I resist the desire to read the *Narracio* as an earnest, admiring

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214 Rushforth 14-15.


depiction of pagan Rome, and also like him I recognize the importance of the *Mirabilia* tradition to the construction of the *Narracio*. Yet my goal in this chapter is not to show how Gregory used the *Mirabilia* or other papal documents to create a parodic vision of Rome, for Kynan-Wilson has already done that. Instead, I focus on Gregory’s overall presentation of his work as *literary*, not merely descriptive. Gregory’s text demonstrates a view of ruin as a space for literature to interpret history, instead of the ruin as a self-evident object with inherent significance. Gregory’s use of Lucan and Hildebert of Lavardin, in particular, conveys to the reader an unsettling image of ruined Rome, one that resists nostalgia and instead warns of the destructive forces of civil discord.

The *Narracio* and its Textual History

In the introduction to his edition of the *Narracio*, John Osborne gives a *terminus post quem* for the text between 1099 and 1118, the time of Hildebert of Lavardin’s composition of his poem *Roma para tibi nihil*, which Gregory quotes in his text. Osborne’s *terminus ante quem* is the 1340s, since Ranulph Higden extensively quotes the *Narracio* in his description of Rome in the *Polychronicon*. Originally, the *Narracio* was only known in the context of the *Polychronicon* (Higden lists ‘Gregorius, de Mirabilibus Romae’ in his list of sources in Book I of the *Polychronicon*), but in the early twentieth century M.R. James found a more complete copy of the *Narracio* in a manuscript at St. Catharine’s College, Cambridge (MS E IV 96) and published an edition.

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217 Osborne 12. Rushforth believes, from the *Narracio* ‘s description of the Temple of Minerva as a storehouse for the cardinals, that Gregory’s journey to Rome was in the beginning of the thirteenth century (Rushforth 17).


Despite such interest in the work, the author and geographic origin of the *Narracio* remain tantalizingly mysterious. In Chapter 25, when Gregory describes the triumphal arch of Fabricius, he writes:

> Set in quorum honore fuissent condite nondum potui cognoscere, at cum favente deo in ** ex hac peregrinacione rediero, denuo que nunc ambigua sunt et que penitus latent adhuc maiori mora et exercitatio indagacione perscrutabor et perscrutata gratanter amicis partibor.

[I have not managed to discover in whose honor they were raised, but when, if it pleases God, I return to [blank] from the journey, I shall take the time to investigate more diligently those things which are at the moment unclear or obscure; and I shall gladly share this research with my friends.]

As we shall examine more deeply later, this aside demonstrates the role of the written word in Gregory’s account, reminding the reader of the importance of literacy in understanding the past. Unfortunately for us, he has not specified his place of return.

Despite this uncertainty, scholars have operated under the assumption that the *Narracio* was written in England. The only manuscript copies of it are to be found in two manuscripts.

222 All Latin quotations are from Huygens (1970) and all English translations are from Osborne (1987). Huygens, 26; Osborne, 32.
223 The editions and translations since James have followed his assumption that there is a word missing from this section, and that the missing word would supply a clue to where Gregory would return (James, 541 and Osborne’s translation). James summarily dismisses the possibility that the *in* could be read as *inde*, based upon reading the sentence as a whole, but I think it could be very likely that Gregory never even mentioned his location and the inclusion of a “blank” in subsequent editions simply enhances the mysterious quality of the narrator instead of acknowledging that the information was not “lost,” it was just never there in the first place.
English contexts: Cambridge, St. Catharine’s College Cambridge MS 3, and the copies of Higden’s *Polychronicon*. There has been much debate over the identity of Magister Gregorius: Max Manitius in 1931 placed him in Canterbury in the milieu of Thomas à Becket,\(^\text{224}\) while five years later Josiah Russell identified him as an employee of Otto of Tonengo, a papal legate from England to Rome who was in England from 1237-1241. A patent roll names a certain Gregory, the legate’s chancellor, as the recipient of an annual pension in Norfolk on May 8 1238. Furthermore, the “dominus Thomas” mentioned in Gregory’s prologue could be Thomas de Blandeville, bishop of Norfolk from 1226-1236.\(^\text{225}\) Osborne gives more credence to Russell’s theory, suggesting that perhaps Gregory could have met Otto on his first trip to England in 1225, and that the position was created then, thus allowing Gregory to have composed the work during the bishopric of Thomas (since Otto wasn’t in England for an extended period until a year after Thomas’ death).\(^\text{226}\)

While it is difficult to ascertain the origin of this text, we can observe how it was received in England in the century following its composition. It is significant that the only two manuscript evidences of it are in historiographical contexts: the *Polychronicon*, historiography *par excellence*, and the St. Catharine’s College manuscript, a miscellany of Latin texts about classical civilization, history, and topography. This manuscript is written in a “good clear English hand.”\(^\text{227}\) James lists the other contents of the manuscripts as follows:\(^\text{228}\)

\(^{224}\) Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, (Munich: Beck, 1931) 3:248
\(^{226}\) Osborne 14-15.
\(^{227}\) James, “Manuscripts” 10.
\(^{228}\) James, “Magister Gregorius” 532.
This thirteenth-century manuscript gives us a small glimpse of the types of texts that may have appeared alongside the Narracio when it first circulated. The first textual context is the historical romance tradition of Alexander—one third of the manuscript is dedicated to material of the Alexander romance tradition. The specific text of the Historia included, the so-called Zacher epitome of Julius Valerius, was an incredibly popular source for the Alexander legend in the High Middle Ages, and served as a source for the Anglo-Norman romanceur Thomas de Kent as well as for Vincent de Beauvais. The second context is topographical material gleaned from historiographical sources, both English (Henry of Huntingdon) and continental (the Peregrinatio antiochiae). The Peregrinatio antiochiae, in particular, bears striking similarities in transmission and scholarly reception to the Narracio. Narrating the journey of Pope Urban to Antioch, and the events of the first crusade, the Peregrinatio was known only through fragments in the Gesta Francorum for centuries. It wasn’t until the discovery of the St. Catharine’s College manuscript that scholars discovered the text in its fuller form, that is, the Peregrinatio antiochiae. Like

229 This text is the “Zacher epitome” of Julius Valerius, a heavily abbreviated version of the original. George Cary notes that it seems likely that the abridgement was supposed to accompany the Epistula, which provide some of the missing material, and in the manuscript tradition the two appear together often (The Medieval Alexander [Cambridge, 1956, p. 25]. For the edition of the text of this epitome, see J. Zacher, ed., Julii Valerii Epitome (Halle, 1867).

230 For more on this text of the first crusade, see Samu Niskanen, “The origins of the Gesta Francorum and two related texts: their textual and literary character,” Sacris Erudiri: Journal of Late Antique and Medieval Christianity 51(2012), pp. 287-316. Niskanen especially focuses on the St. Catharine’s MS as an example of the fuller text of the Peregrinatio, until its discovery then known only fragmentarily in the Gesta Francorum.

231 Cary 25.
the *Peregrinatio*, the *Narracio* was known only in textual fragments through the *Polychronicon* until M.R. James’s discovery of the text in the St. Catharine’s manuscript. Both texts demonstrate the integration of source texts into historiographical writing, and the historical conditions that may lead to a fragmentary encounter with past literatures until the “complete” text is discovered. Like ruins themselves, they provided material for the “building” of new historiographical texts, allowing postmedieval readers to see the fragmentary remains of an earlier text worked into a new one.

Despite the numerous scholarly editions of the *Narracio* listed above, the text has enjoyed relatively little scholarly attention on its own terms. It shows up as a brief reference in scholarship on the Latin *Mirabilia* tradition,\(^{232}\) but few articles have been solely devoted to the text itself. One is Alberto Daniel Anunziato’s study of the *Narracio* as a transitional text between medieval and Renaissance views of ruins, thus focusing on the text as a conduit of information on how people thought about Roman ruins.\(^ {233}\) Another is William Kynan-Wilson’s examination of the text both as a representation of the material remnants of empire but also, and more importantly, as a literary artifact in itself that is a satirical response to papal documents.\(^ {234}\) Kynan-Wilson works against the previous scholarly focus on “what Gregory saw, rather than what he read,”\(^ {235}\) and instead focuses on how Gregory “misreads” the pagan city of Rome in a satiric fashion. As Kynan-Wilson’s article meticulously demonstrates, the *Narracio* is heavily reliant upon

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\(^{235}\) Ibid. 353. While the previous scholarship insisted that any similarity between the *Mirabilia* and the *Narracio* was coincidental, Kynan-Wilson instead shows how the *Narracio* self-consciously subverts the *Mirabilia*. 
the earlier *Mirabilia de urbis Romae* by Canon Benedict, who also wrote the *Ordo Romanus* detailing papal processions throughout the city of Rome.236

*“From Ruin Raised:” Literary Christian Rome in the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae***

Here it would be useful to include a brief background of the *Mirabilia*, a text that influenced the *Narracio* in various ways, to illuminate the contemporary tradition of writing about Rome from which the *Narracio* arose. Written by Canon Benedict around 1140, the *Mirabilia* was composed at a time of great papal interest in the material remains of Rome.237 Stefano Riccioni writes that the *Mirabilia* is “a cultural mirror and political manifesto of church ideology, reflecting the inheritance of Gregorian reform,” and that the itinerary presented in the text demonstrates the precedence of Christian over pagan Rome.238 Indeed, the *Mirabilia* closely tracks the transition from pagan imperial Rome to Christian ecclesiastical Rome through the transformation of Roman structures and sites. The *Mirabilia* begins with the tower of Babel and the confusion of languages—after this event, “all the noble men of the whole earth, with their wives and children, came together to dwell here [i.e. near Rome].”239 This opening offers a vision of the Roman past that essentially places the city’s origin in the period of the earlier Old Testament scriptures, almost back to the beginning of time. By framing Rome’s origins in this way, Benedict shows how almost from the beginning of human history, Rome was an answer to fragmentation and chaos.

236 Kynan-Wilson 361-4.
237 Ibid. p. 349.
As evidenced by this opening, the *Mirabilia* also includes narrative legends of Rome, not just descriptions of places. In fact, it is clear that the stories from the *Mirabilia* are dependent on prior knowledge, and not a simple description of the monuments as they stood. Consistently, Benedict seeks to find images of the Church or Christianity prefigured in pagan antiquities—for example, he describes the Dioscuri (statues in Rome of Castor and Pollux) as statues of the philosophers Praxites and Phidias, and interprets the woman between them surrounded by serpents with a shell in front of her as the Church.\(^{240}\) This interpretation removes inherent meaning or intention from a work of art of monument and places the interpretative onus on the viewer. The statue does not have an inherent meaning—the pagan sculptors’ intentions to represent Castor and Pollux does not take precedence. Rather, meaning is in the eye of the beholder.

Even common landmark names are not dogma: Benedict writes “At the Lateran there is a certain bronze horse called Constantine’s Horse, but it is not so. Whoever will know the truth, let him read it here.”\(^{241}\) Even if most know it as Constantine’s Horse, Benedict instead offers a different origin story, and this origin story is firmly placed in the context of the written word: he indicates this by advising the reader to seek truth and “let him read it here.” In this way, Benedict firmly places himself in a tradition of a written Rome, not simply a physical Rome that is evident to the casual viewer. Benedict himself often invokes classical authors such as Ovid when writing of the origin and pagan traditions of old Roman temples.\(^{242}\) Benedict himself participates in the rewriting of ancient Rome while building upon the literary remains of Rome gleaned from classical texts.

\(^{240}\) Ibid. 19.  
\(^{241}\) Ibid. 19.  
\(^{242}\) See especially in the *Mirabilia* the examples of Castel Sant Angelo (38), and the temple of Janus (41)
Crucially, though, the interplay between narrative and material ruins is fluid and complex. The transformation of architecture, and the narrative surrounding it, has the potential to transform not just local physical space, but general liturgical time. This temporal transformation is most evident when Benedict discusses the rededication of the Pantheon during the papacy of Boniface IV. After receiving permission from the emperor to transform the temple into a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary,

The pope with the whole Roman people on the Calends of November dedicated the temple and ordained that on that day the Roman pontiff should sing mass there, and the people should take the body and blood of Our Lord as they did on Christmas. On the same day all the saints with their mother Mary, ever-virgin, and the heavenly spirits should have a festival, and throughout the churches of the world the dead would have a sacrifice for the ransom of their souls. This event highlights three crucial aspects of the Roman rededication of pagan temples. The first is that the transformation of material space imposes an indelible mark on liturgical time. It is the redemption of a building that precipitates a church feast, and in this way the material effects the temporal. The second is that it demonstrates that what happens in Rome happens throughout the world: Rome is the leader, urbi et orbi, so the kind of understanding of pagan ruins that occurs in Rome can be translated elsewhere. We see this of course in Pope Gregory’s letters to Augustine of Canterbury, in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*, where he encourages Augustine to rededicate pagan temples to the worship of God. The third and final aspect is that the rededication of physical space and its liturgical significance ensures that throughout the world souls are saved. The temporal, material actions also impact individuals in eternity, thus elevating this transformation to the highest level *outside* of space and time. The transformation of the Pantheon and the

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243 *Mirabilia* 22-3.
effects of its rededication are at the crux of Benedict’s project in the *Mirabilia*: to show the triumph of Christian Rome over pagan Rome.

At the very end of the *Mirabilia*, Benedict advances the cause of literature in the preservation of spatial memory, and the transformation that it undergoes:

> These and more temples and palaces of emperors, consuls, senators, and prefects were inside this Roman city in the time of the heathen, as we have read in old chronicles, have seen with our own eyes, and have heard the ancient men tell of. In writing we have tried as well as we could to bring back to the human memory how great was their beauty in gold, silver, brass, ivory, and precious stones.  

First, Benedict privileges the written word over personal experience of ancient buildings by mentioning both old chronicles and the testimony of ancient men alongside the eyewitness testimony of the present observer. It is not the eyewitness account alone that can convey meaning, it must be accompanied by written testimony, and in this case the appeal to written testimony is twice reiterated. Benedict emphasizes writing by mentioning his own writing, and how through his efforts the fading material glory of Rome can be revived in the mind of the reader. Gold, silver, brass, ivory, and precious stones are transitory, and the written word can outlast them and play a crucial role in making sense of the material ruin. In short, Benedict’s literary efforts participate in the inscription on the Temple of Bellona, originally a temple dedicated to the early Roman goddess of war, which read: “Old Rome was I, now new Rome shall be praised;/I bear my head aloft, from ruin raised.”

Benedict explicitly chronicles the shift in material significance of the ruins of Rome, from pagan temples to Christian churches so that by understanding the pagan past of the city as well as the new Christian significance, the

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244 Ibid. 46.
reader can fully understand and appreciate the transformation. Without an understanding or knowledge of the ruins’ origins, the viewer cannot appreciate the current significance of the monuments as redeemed Christian sites. Understanding Benedict’s account as a reflection of what Catherine Edwards calls “written Rome,” we can now move to the Narracio to see how Master Gregory creates his own “written Rome” through his use of classical texts.

**The Narracio and Textual Traces**

Scholars have long argued for the decidedly secular nature of the Narracio compared with the Mirabilia—unlike Benedict, Gregory pays little attention to the Christianization of the city and its monuments, instead focusing on pagan antiquities as such. Throughout the Narracio, Gregory uses quotations from various classical sources when describing the ruins of Rome. For example, when describing the palaces of Rome, Gregory mentions the seven thrones, saying they were “etiam solia mire artis et altitudinis sileo, unde, ut aiunt, Ovidius inquit: ‘Regia Solis erat sublimibus alta columnnis./Clara micante auro flammaisque ymitante piropo’ [skillfully constructed at great height, about which, they say, Ovid wrote: ‘The palace of the Sun towered on lofty columns, made bright by gleaming gold and flame-like bronze.’]. The most commonly quoted author in the Narracio, however, is Lucan: Osborne identifies five quotations from Lucan in the Narracio. Besides the direct quotations, Gregory

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246 Catherine Edwards, *Writing Rome*. Edwards contrasts “written Romes” and “material Romes” on page 2 of her book, but explores the idea of how literature creates different “Romes” throughout.

247 Osborne, 5-6. Osborne writes that the Narracio contains “never the slightest suggestion that contemporary or ‘Christian’ Rome is of much interest” (8). Rushforth writes, “One of the most striking things about [Gregory] is the almost purely secular and antiquarian nature of his interest in Rome” (17).

248 Huygens 23; Osborne 29. In Osborne’s note he identifies the quotation as from Metamorphoses 2.1-2.

249 According to Osborne, Virgil comes in at four (though one quotation is disputed), Ovid at three, Isidore at one, and Hildebert of Lavardin at one (see the notes in his translation of the Narracio).
explicitly says that he relies on textual support for his narrative. When discussing triumphal columns, he writes:

Set in quorum honore fuissent condite nondum potui cognoscere, at cum favente deo in ** ex hac peregrinacione rediero, denuo que nunc ambigua sunt et que penitus latent adhuc maiori mora et exercitatioi indagacione perscrutabor et perscrutata gratanter amicis partibor.

[I have not yet managed to discover in whose honour they were raised, but when, if it pleases God, I return to [blank] from the journey, I shall take the time to investigate more diligently those things which are at the moment unclear or obscure: and I shall gladly share this research with my friends.] 250

Here, Gregory openly acknowledges the role that texts play in the narrative, and the possibility that when he returns from Rome he will find more information in written sources in his homeland than he had when he was in the city. The city itself, as represented in the *Mirabilia* tradition, is a palimpsest representing centuries of building and social change—for example, while you might see the Pantheon, you would see it not as the Pantheon but as the church dedicated to St. Mary and all the martyrs. The only way of encountering the ancient city as the ancient city, then, is through the literature of the ancient city, making Gregory’s almost exclusive use of classical sources key to his text’s depiction of pagan Rome.

Gregory’s use of literary allusion is perhaps most complex and least explored in the opening of the *Narracio*. Quoting extensively from Lucan, and less so but no less importantly from Hildebert of Lavardin, Master Gregory immediately sets not just a physical but also a literary stage for his description of Roman ruins and monuments:

*Incipit narracio de mirabilibus urbis Rome que vel arte magica vel humano labore sunt condita.*

250 Huygens 26; Osborne 32.
Vehemencius igitus admirandam censeo tocius urbis inspectionem, ubi tanta seges turrium, tot edificia palatiorum, quo nulli hominum contigit enumerare. Quam cum primo a latere montis alonge vidissem, stupefactam mentem meam illud Cesarianum subiit, quod quondam victis Gallis cum Alpes supervolaret inquid, magne *miratus*

"*Menia Rome:*
Tene, deum sedes, non ullo Marte coacti
Deseruere viri? Pro qua pugnabitur urbe?
Dii melius," et cetera.

Paulo post: *Ignave manus liquere urbem, capacem turbe humani generis, si coiret, et Romam invocans, instar summi numinis eam appellat. Cuius incomprehensiblem decorum diu admirans deo apud me gratias egi, qui magnus in universa terra ibi opera hominum inestimabili decore mirificavit. Nam licet tota Romae ruat, nil tamen integrum sibi potest equiperari; unde quidam sic ait:*

*Par tibi, Roma, nichil, cum sis prope tota ruina: Fracta docere potes, integra quanta fores.*

Cuius ruina, ut arbitror, docet evidenter cuncta temporalia proxime ruitura, presertim cum capud omnium temporalium Roma tantum cotidie languescit et labitur.\(^{251}\)

[Here begins the account of the wonders of the city of Rome, which have been fashioned either by magic craft or by human labour. I strongly recommend the wonderful panorama of the whole city. There is so great a forest of towers, and so many palatial buildings, that no one has counted them. When I saw it for the first time, at a distance from the slope of the hill, my mind was struck by those words which Julius Caesar uttered after he had conquered the Gauls, flown across the Alps, and was greatly ‘admiring…the walls of Rome: Home of the gods, have men abandoned you without a fight?/What city will they then defend? Heaven be thanked…” and so on. And a little later: ‘The city which could have held the throng of assembled humanity was abandoned by a cowardly hand,’ and invoking the name of Rome, he called it ‘the image of the highest divinity.’ After I had spent some time admiring this stunningly picturesque sight, I thanked God, mighty throughout the entire world, who had here rendered the works of man wondrously and indescribably beautiful. For although Rome lies in ruins, nothing intact can be compared to this. And thus someone has said: ‘Rome, although you are almost a total ruin, you have no equal;/Shattered you teach us, whole how greatly you would speak!’ I believe this ruin teaches us clearly that all temporal things will soon pass away, especially as Rome, the epitome of earthly glory, languishes and declines so much every day.]\(^{252}\)

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\(^{251}\) Huygens 29-30.

\(^{252}\) Osborne 17-19.
Immediately, Gregory plunges his readers into the realm of story by stating that this is a *narratio*—an account. Instead of being simply “the wonders of the city of Rome,” the text is instead presented as a narrative of encounters with the city.

In his first encounter with Rome, as he arrives, Gregory describes the view of the city from a hill.²⁵³ In a move that Kynan-Wilson calls parodic, Gregory claims that there are so many towers that no one had ever counted them—which is blatantly ridiculous, since there is a whole genre of counting and quantifying structures in Rome.²⁵⁴ Yet it also echoes Caesar’s initial return to Rome at the very beginning of Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, in Book I when Caesar sees a vision of Rome as a weeping woman who addresses him with *turrigero canos effundens vertice crines* (I.187), emphasizing even in prosopopeia the prominence of towers in Rome’s aspect.

It is not only in vague allusion that Lucan makes an appearance in this opening—Gregory directly quotes Lucan three times in this passage. With these quotations occurring so quickly and at such a prominent point in the text, Gregory immediately sets a Lucanian tone. Gregory the narrator turns to Lucan to describe his own impressions of the city by directly quoting from Caesar’s return to Rome in the third book of the *Bellum Civile*: “….moenia Romae/Tene, deum sedes, nonullo Marte coacti/Deseruere viri? Pro qua pugnabitur urbe?/Di melius…” [the walls of Rome, his mother city: ‘Were you, the abode of gods, abandoned by men whom no stress of war compelled? What city then will

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²⁵³ Anunziatio speculates that the hill could be Monte Mario (north of the Vatican) or Monte Albano (as it was in Lucan), 10.
²⁵⁴ Kynan-Wilson notes this method of quantifying Rome, starting with Pliny the Elder in the *Naturalis historia* (355) and noting that measurements of Rome were used in many Anglo-Latin texts such as Gerald of Wales’ *Speculum ecclesiae* (359).
find arms to strike a blow for her? Heaven be thanked...]

Lucan had described this abandonment of Rome in greater detail in Book One of the *Bellum Civile*. When the people of Rome heard that Caesar was coming, in a rush they abandoned the city:

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Sic urbe relict
In bellum fuitur. Nullum iam languidus aevo
Evaluit revocare parens coniunxve maritum
Fletibus, aut patrii, dubiae dum vota salutis
Conciperent, tenuere lares; nec limine quisquam
Haesit, et extremo tunc forsitan urbis amatae
Plenus abit visu; ruit inreovabile volgus.
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[Thus Rome is abandoned, and flight is the preparation for war. No aged father had the power to keep back his son, nor weeping wife her husband; none was detained by the ancestral gods of his household, till he could frame a prayer for preservation from danger; none lingered on his threshold ere he departed, to satiate his eyes with the sight of the city he loved and might never see again. Nothing could keep back the wild rush of the people.]

The Rome Caesar arrives at is abandoned by its citizens, in their fear of Caesar himself. The Rome that Gregory would have encountered was famously described by William of Malmesbury as a ghost town, filled with more churches and relics of saints than living inhabitants, a scarcity which provides an interesting parallel to Gregory’s opening invoking Lucan’s empty Rome upon Caesar’s return. In both cases, the city is a shell of what it once was.

Gregory goes on to quote from Book I, from a passage that shows how the scarcity of citizens led to Caesar’s act of treason:

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Urbem populis victisque frequentem
Gentibus et generis, coet si turba, capacem
Humani facilem venture Caesare praedam
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256 Ibid. I. 503b-509.
Ignavae liquere manus.²⁵⁸
[Rome that was crowded with citizens and conquered peoples, Rome that could contain the human race assembled, was left by coward hands an easy prey to invading Caesar]

Here Lucan describes the city that had been renowned for unity—the city that could hold in itself all the peoples of the known world—as one unable to protect itself, and ultimately emptied of the people that made it powerful and unique. Rome can conquer, it can bring in people from outside (a point emphasized by the opening of the Mirabilia Urbis Romae) but when one of its own threatens it, there is nowhere to go but to leave, highlighting the destructive power of civil war. Lucan contrasts the crowd’s reaction to the threat posed to discipline by the Roman soldier on campaign:

 Cum pressus ab hoste
  Clauditur externis miles Romanus in oris,
  Effugit exiguo nocturna percular vallo,
  Et subitus rapi munitum caespitits agger
  Praebet secures intra tentoria somnos:
  Tu tantum audito bellorum nomine, Roma,
  Desereris; nox una tuis non credita muris.

[When the Roman soldier is closely besieged by the foeman in a distant land, he defies the perils of the night behind a slender palisade; hastily he throws up the sods, and the protection of his mound lets him sleep untroubled in his tent. But Rome is abandoned as soon as the word ‘war’ is heard; her walls are no safeguard for a single night.]²⁵⁹

Here Lucan presents a difference between the soldier on the offensive far from home and the reaction to a threat at home itself—it is easy for the soldier to feel secure with his military strategies far from home, but when such a mindset is required within the walls of Rome, these defenses crumble. The citizens’ inability to protect themselves from internal threat also results from their growing softness: in Book I of the Bellum Civile, Lucan first

²⁵⁸ Lucan BC I. 511-514.
²⁵⁹ Lucan BC I. 514-520.
describes the decline of the Roman people: their luxury, corruption, extreme
expansionism, bribery, and propensity for political upheaval.\textsuperscript{260} The Roman citizens’
abandonment of Rome as a result of a decline in the republican ideals of character and
mores also calls to mind Augustine of Hippo’s contention that Rome was always in
decline, not just when the city was overrun by foreign invaders:

\begin{quote}
Romam quippe partam ueterum auctamque laboribus foediorem stantem fecerant
quam ruentem, quando quidem in ruina eius lapides et ligna, in istorum autem uita
omnia non murorum, sed morum munimenta atque ornamenta ceciderunt, cum
funestioribus eorum corda cupiditatibus quam ignibus tecta illius urbis arderent.

[For, thanks to them, the Rome that was conceived and built by the labours of the
men of old fell further while she stood than ever she has fallen in her ruin. For in
that ruin there fell only stones and wood; whereas by these men’s lives were
overthrown, not her walls, but her moral defences and adornments. More fatal
than the flames which consumed the city’s houses were the lusts that burned in
their hearts.] (II.2)\textsuperscript{261}
\end{quote}

Augustine here links architectural decline with moral corruption through his play on non
murorum, sed morum: not walls, but character. In a similar way Lucan gives Gregory a
context for architectural ruin through his choice of quotations that deal with the state of
the city at the time of Caesar’s arrival. Gregory’s references to Lucan are not knee-jerk
quotations about civil war, but rather carefully chosen to set a specific tone and agenda.
Through this Lucanian context, Gregory undermines the notion of any earlier period as
being “glory days” far removed from the present, an attitude which would also critique
unqualified lament for a glorious pagan antique past, as some have read Gregory’s

\textsuperscript{260} Ibid. 1.158-182.
Lucan’s apocalyptic descriptions of Rome, from a weeping woman to a city stripped of her people, reject a message of eventual decline and fall from the antique to the medieval periods, instead emphasizing that chaos can happen at any time under the right (or in this case, wrong) conditions.

The theme that seems to be key for Gregory’s use of Lucan is the destructive effect of civil unrest on places, people, and history—the *contemptus mundi* theme of the *lectura Lucani* of the Middle Ages. Lucan, and Gregory following him, use ruin as a representation of this view. After his famous opening lamenting civil war, Lucan describes the appearance of a ravaged city, giving material shape to abstract ideas:

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At nunc semiruitis pendent quod moenia tectis
Urbibus Italiae lapisque ingentia muris
Saxa iacent nulloque domus custode tenentur
Rares et antiquis habitator in urbis errat,
Horrida quod dumis multosque inarata per annos
Hesperia est desuntque manus poscentibus arvis,
Non tu, Pyrrhe ferox, nec tantis cladibus auctor
Poenus erit; nulli penitus descendere ferro
Contigit, alta sedent civilis volnera dextae.
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[But, if now in Italian cities the houses are half-demolished and the walls tottering, and the mighty stones of moulderling dwellings cumber the ground; if the houses are secured by the presence of no guard, and a mere handful of inhabitants wander over the site of ancient cities; if Italy bristles with thorn-brakes, and her soil lies unploughed year after year, and the fields call in vain for hands to till them—these great disasters are not due to Proud Pyrrhus or the Carthaginian; no other sword has been able to pierce so deep; the strokes of a kindred hand are driven home.]²⁶⁴

Here Lucan offers Gregory a striking parallel to his own day, describing the ruin of Rome and the desolation of the few who wander the ancient city. It has been estimated that the

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²⁶² For example, Osborne and Rushforth.
²⁶⁴ Lucan BC I.24-32.
population of twelfth- and early thirteenth- century Rome hovered between 30,000 and 35,000 people in a city that once housed a million—leaving much of the city abandoned as pastureland and as stretches of ruins. Gregory’s arrival in Rome might have made him think of these lines from Lucan, since he was obviously intimately familiar with the Bellum Civile. This context and its emotional valence would be quite different than an awed admiration of the beauty of the ancient city—rather, when viewed in the light of Lucan, it conveys a sinister undertone of the cyclical nature of history and its destructive forces. Particularly, Lucan’s depictions of ruins elsewhere in the Bellum Civile never associate beauty with ruins—ruins are sinister reminders of the inevitability of decline and loss of memory. The most concrete example of this is in Book 9, when Caesar wanders the ruins of Troy, where etiam periere ruinae, and Caesar does not understand the significance of sacred places because he can’t interpret the ruins for himself. This episode is meant to be unsettling—a reminder that everything material perishes, and that even human memory can fail.

For the literary character encountering ruins, then, the effect is unsettling because he or she cannot understand the ruin in the moment, and descriptions of ruin are concrete reminders of destruction and turmoil. Yet for the author, ruins provide an opportunity for the elevation of his craft. After Caesar’s walking tour of Trojan ruins, Lucan the poet breaks in to proclaim the importance of language in remembering story:

O sacer et magnus vatuum labor! Omnia fato

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266 See the analysis of this passage in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.
Eripis et populis donas mortalibus aevum. 
Invidia sacrae, Caesar, ne tangere famae; 
Nam, si quid Latiiis fas est promittere Musis, 
Quantum Zymraei durabunt vatis honores, 
Venturi me teque legent; Pharsalia nostra 
Vivet, et a nullo tenebris damnabimur aevo.

[How mighty, how sacred the poet’s task! He snatches all things from destruction and gives to mortal men immortality. Be not jealous, Caesar, of those whom fame has consecrated; for, if it is permissible for the Latin muses to promise aught, then, as long as the fame of Smyrna’s bard endures, posterity shall read my verse and your deeds; our Pharsalia shall live on, and no age will ever doom us to oblivion.]\textsuperscript{267}

This passage provides the literary context of ruins that Gregory would have been familiar with via the \textit{Bellum Civile}. This context privileges the author and his work with knowledge, and thus elevates the importance of their craft because they alone can imbue physical objects with meaning with their own interpretations. Without the author/interpreter, the viewer would bumble along like Caesar, stepping on ancient graves and passing by significant places. So Gregory uses Lucan, and other classical authors, to contextualize the monuments of Rome, and by doing so also becomes a textual resource for any other person wanting to encounter the ruins of Rome.

After invoking the chaos of Rome’s history of civil strife via Lucan, Gregory turns to a more contemporary writer to describe Rome’s current ruined state: Hildebert of Lavardin, bishop of le Mans, then archbishop of Tours until his death in 1125. Gregory quotes the first two lines from his famous poem, Poem 36 in A.B. Scott’s numbering.\textsuperscript{268} This poem is often hailed as a unique depiction of Roman ruins in the medieval period.

\textsuperscript{267} Lucan BC, IX II. 980-6. 

Cuius ruina, ut arbitror, docet evidentem cuncta temporalia proxime ruitora, presertim cum capud omnium temporalium Roma tantum cotidie languescit et labitur [I believe this ruin teaches us clearly that all temporal things will soon pass away, especially as Rome, the epitome of earthly glory, languishes and declines so much every day].\footnote{Huygens 12; Osborne 18.} 271

At face value, this passage would seem to follow a teleology of the founding of a glorious Rome, followed by its decline, and the subsequent admiration of the ruins rediscovered. Yet what happens when we read Hildebert in the context of the earlier Lucan quotations? Bruce Gibson has argued that the Narracio’s juxtaposition of Lucan and Hildebert at the beginning demonstrates a keen reading of Hildebert’s use of Lucan in his poems on Rome:

For Hildebert, as we have seen, and as Magister Gregorius’ response to Hildebert suggests, Rome’s enduring monuments are both textual and physical: even his statement of his poetic incapacity to do more than simply say Roma\emph{ fuit} (36.20) in describing the city’s ruined condition turns out to be a demonstration of the continuing power of texts from the classical past.\footnote{Huygens 12; Osborne 18-19.} 272

For Gibson, the connection of the two authors, one classical, one medieval, shows Gregory’s aptitude at understanding the use of Lucan in Hildebert, and in turn shows his own adept inclusion of Hildebert in his own literary work.

Yet Gregory’s inclusion of Lucan also unsettles Hildebert’s reading of Rome’s progressive decline into ruin. The inclusion of civil unrest and war implicitly questions Hildebert’s assumption that Rome was ever “whole” to begin with. Hildebert claims that ruined Rome, in its broken incompleteness, teaches a greater lesson than it did when *integra*. Yet through his inclusion of Lucan alongside Hildebert in this brief opening, with all of the textual associations of unrest and ruin that come alongside it, Gregory demonstrates that even in its antiquity Rome experienced upheaval and chaos. While perhaps this chaos did not result in immediate architectural ruin, architectural ruin looms large as a result of civil unrest and moral decline. Reading Hildebert in conjunction with Lucan encourages the reader to resist the idea that the pagan past is something that can be recovered through an encounter with physical ruins in a controlled way—rather, that an antique past is something that can be spontaneously, sometimes unwillingly reenacted, and that these parallels can be recognized as such through literature. Around the time of Gregory, John of Salisbury used the *Bellum Civile* extensively to critique schism within the church in the twelfth century, adapting the Lucanian phrase “war worse than civil” to claim that schism, and the war of priests, was worse than secular civil war. With all of the unrest in Rome in the twelfth century, from the ecclesiastical infighting and schism that John of Salisbury condemned to the governmental unrest caused by the civil revolts

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of Romans against the pope in 1143 and 1144, the period before Gregory wrote was one ripe for literature that identified with the civil unrest that permeates the *Bellum Civile*.

Gregory’s extensive use of Lucan, and its echoes throughout his own work on the ruins of Rome, suggests that he sees parallels between his own historical era and that of Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*. The *Bellum Civile* is, as David Quint writes, “the epic of the lost Roman republic.” As such, it is the epic of the lost, the transitory, the ruined. Gregory’s use of Lucan in his introduction to his work on Roman ruins shows a profound understanding of the whole of the *Bellum Civile* and its emphasis on the losing side of history. Hildebert, on the other hand, represents the triumph of Christian Rome as it overtakes ruined imperial Rome, even in his elegiac lament for the Roman glory of centuries past. By quoting Lucan alongside Hildebert, Gregory questions this triumphalist vision of Christian Rome, and even the nostalgic lament for the glories of past Rome. Far from extolling or enshrining a vision of Roman antiquity through description of monuments themselves, the *Narracio* instead draws on a Lucanian literary tradition that resists the notion that ruins themselves can convey any meaning at all, and even when interpreted, that the interpretation is one of a single glory lost. After all, is it the Rome of Augustan glory, or the Rome of Lucanian apocalypse? Perhaps most menacingly of all, this juxtaposition suggests that without proper restraint, even ecclesiastical Rome could succumb to the same forces of discord that the Roman republic did in Lucan’s literary

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world. Indeed, around the time that Gregory composed the *Narracio*, the Avignon papacy arose, creating two rival papacies that were to last until 1415.

As this chapter has shown, the *Narracio* offered a vision of Rome to its reader that demonstrated a keen engagement with classical literary texts. In turn, it became a source text itself for one of the most widespread descriptions of Rome in fourteenth-century England: Ranulph Higden’s *Polychronicon*. In the next chapter, we turn to Higden’s representations of ruins in England and examine how these moments condense Higden’s vision of written texts as a remedy for lost knowledge, and how subsequently the alliterative poem *St. Erkenwald* draws upon these ideas in its poetic depiction of confronting gaps in the historical record.
Chapter Four

St. Erkenwald and Higden’s Polychronicon: History among the Ruins

In August 1352, Edward III summoned Ranulph Higden, a Benedictine monk of St. Werburgh’s in Chester, to appear at court. The summons requested that Higden was to bring all of his chronicles to consult for a particular matter to be explained to him once he arrived. What that matter was we do not know, but the fact that he was summoned with chronicles in tow suggests that Higden was respected across Britain both for his knowledge of chronicles in general and for his own prolific writing in the chronicle genre, the Polychronicon. The text of the summons distinguishes between Higden’s general familiarity with chronicles by citing the cronicis custodia vestra, suggesting that Higden was in charge of the library of St. Werburgh’s and would thus have chronicles in his care, and the cronicis vestris, most likely referring to his own magnum opus, the Polychronicon. Peter Brown suggests that the meeting might have had something to do with the mythical history of Britain, given that Edward III began a revival of Arthurian myth, complete with the establishment of the Order of the Garter in 1348. Brown implies here that Higden was considered an expert on the mythical history of Britain, and would be a particularly valuable resource for anything pertaining to the British past.

276 The text is the Close Roll of Edward III for August 8, 1352, printed in J.G. Edwards “Ranulph, Monk of Chester,” English Historical Review XLVII (1932) p. 94.
278 Brown, 103.
The picture of Higden with his sheets upon sheets of vellum, consulting them in Westminster to shed light on a mythical British past brings to mind another scene from fourteenth-century literature: the scholars consulting their chronicles for seven days to discover the identity of the pagan British judge in the alliterative poem *St. Erkenwald*. Upon discovery of a perfectly preserved body in the ruins of St. Paul’s, the Anglo-Saxons of the poem are at a loss to read the body and its significance. No one remembers him, so he cannot be recently dead, but they lament “we haue oure librarie laitid thes longe seuen dayes/Bot one cronicle of this kynge con we neuer fynde.” The clerks look at their chronicles for seven days; the *Polychronicon* has seven books. The clerks spend these days combing their records for any mention of the British past of the judge; the *Polychronicon*, with its inclusion of the mythical history of Britain, contains precisely the kind of fantastic material that the historical Anglo-Saxon clerks lacked. This coincidence is suggestive of a deeper connection between *St. Erkenwald* and Higden that this chapter will go on to demonstrate.

While some scholars have read *St. Erkenwald* in the context of history and historiography, none have read it in the context of its geographic and textual historiographical connections: both Higden’s *Polychronicon* as well as the *Polychronicon*-inspired texts that surround *Erkenwald* in its manuscript, the fifteenth-century Cheshire manuscript London, British Library Harley 2250. This manuscript

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contains texts such as the *Stanzaic Life of Christ* that are heavily indebted to the
*Polychronicon*, and this manuscript proximity suggests the possibility of reading *St. Erkenwald* in the same literary orbit as the great historical text. In addition to this shared geographic and literary context, thematically the *Polychronicon* and *St. Erkenwald* ask similar questions, such as how we can know history and what is the role of the interpreter in gaining historical knowledge. In the *Polychronicon*, Higden often uses the image of ruins in order to convey the importance of the historian in filling in interpretative gaps in historical narrative, a theme that *St. Erkenwald* then picks up in poetry. By writing the story of Saint Erkenwald, a miracle story not found in any of the Latin *miracula* of the saint, or even in the *Polychronicon*, the poet himself adds to historical record, filling in the gaps of the history of Anglo-Saxon England just as the pagan judge fills in the gaps of the records of pre-Anglo-Saxon London with his oral testimony. In the end, through the judge’s historical speech, which draws on material found in the *Polychronicon*, *St. Erkenwald* demonstrates the unique ability of written sources to convey knowledge of the distant past. By reading the ruins in Higden and in *Erkenwald*, we can observe the emerging role of the historian in shaping late medieval understandings of history, and the primacy of text, not objects, in the creation of historical narrative.

**Higden and the Ruins of Historiography**

Ranulph Higden, a monk of the Benedictine abbey of St. Werburgh’s in Chester, took his vows around the year 1299.\(^{281}\) He began the *Polychronicon* in the 1320s while at

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\(^{281}\) For more on Higden, see Babington’s introduction to the Rolls Series edition of the *Polychronicon*, ix-lxxii.
St. Werburgh’s, at the request of some fellow monks, and continued to work on it until his death in the 1363. There are three versions of the text: the first version, covering events until 1327; the second version (the most popular—surviving in at least seventy manuscripts) goes until 1340; and the third version extends until 1360. In its three different forms, the text survives in at least 147 manuscripts from the medieval period. Its immense popularity meant that Higden’s *Polychronicon* provided historical information to a large collection of readers and writers in late medieval England, from Lollards to historians to poets. This pervasive presence in late medieval literary culture suggests that the focus, style, and content of the *Polychronicon* would then have a ripple effect outwards onto texts across genres, including, for our purposes here, *St. Erkenwald*. This is also particularly key when considering Erkenwald’s preoccupation with pre-Christian Britain, and Higden’s own “extensive attention to pre-Christian culture.”

According to Higden, in order to know anything about previous time periods, access to written record is critical. At the very beginning of the *Polychronicon* Higden underscores the importance of historical writing for the edification and memory of man. In a timeless appeal to the decline of learning, he laments the lack of historical knowledge among his peers, and offers the *Polychronicon* as a remedy (*remedium*). It is the particular nature of the *written* word where this remedy lies:


[I praye, who schulde nowe emperours, wonder of philosofres, other folwe the apostles, but hir noble dedes and hir wonder werkes were i-write in stories and so i-kept in mynde? Who schulde knowe Lucilium, but Seneca in his pistles hadde i-write his dedes? Writinge of poetes is more worthy to preisyng of emperoures than al the welthe of this worlde, and riches that they welde while they were alyue. For storie is wytnesse of tyme, mynde of lyf, messager of eldnesse; story weldeth passing doynges, storie putteth forth hire professoures. Dedes that wolde be lost storie ruleth; dedes that wolde flee out of mynde, storye clepeth agen; dedes that wolde deie, storye kepeth hem euermore.]

Higden here privileges the written word over *divitiae* (meaning riches or wealth, thus implying the physical objects, monuments, and buildings that money can buy) as a legible source of history. Buildings constructed during the reign of emperors can crumble into dust, while the writings of poets preserve the memory of these emperors for posterity. Higden’s own written record, to remedy the ignorance of the present age, thus relies on previous written record, and Higden meticulously and copiously lists all of his written sources in his preface. For Higden, written history can capture and carry on what the material riches and wealth of the world cannot.

Higden’s emphasis on the written word is particularly illuminated in the moments in the *Polychronicon* when he describes ancient ruins. Specifically, Higden’s

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287 His particular list is comprehensive and diverse from classical authors such as Pliny to late antique writers such as Augustine and Orosius, to specifically British and English authorities such as Bede, William of Malmesbury, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Gerald of Wales. See Poly. pp. 20-26.
representations of ruined structures serve as microcosms of his historiographical vision in the Polychronicon. By giving detailed accounts of ruined structures and the narrative histories associated with them, he demonstrates the importance of historiographical enterprise: for without written history, who would know what these physical monuments were or where they came from? While earlier medieval historians might have presented depictions of ruined structures as evidence of a certain position or idea on the surface, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth’s claim that the ruins of Bath were built by the British king Bladud to demonstrate British imperium alongside that of Rome,288 or William of Malmesbury’s assertion that Carlisle is home to Roman ruins, thus emphasizing Roman presence in England,289 Higden exposes the instability of the ruin’s inherent significance through his own textual historiographical practice. By presenting multiple interpretations of the ruined structure, he highlights the instability of historical knowledge that is based upon the material object alone. He gestures towards the need for written narrative to provide an authoritative history, and in doing so, he further exalts the work of the historian in the face of illegible monuments. While other historians use the ruin to make bold claims about political and national continuities, Higden demonstrates the illegibility of the built world. Through his representation of ruin, Higden denies the possibility of anything other than the written word being “history.”290

288 Geoffrey of Monmouth, Historia Regum Britanniae, II.31-35.
290 In this way, then, Higden is a good example of historia as Joachim Knape has written about. In his essay “Historia, Textuality, and the Episteme in the Middle Ages,” (Historia: The Concept and Genre in the Middle Ages. Eds. Tumas Lehtonen and Paivi Mehtonen. Helsinki: Societas Scientarium Fennica, 2000, 11-27), Joachim Knape makes the point that the medieval concept of historia, influenced by Cicero and other classical authors, was quite different from our modern concept of “history.” Knape furthermore identifies medieval history as a social archive and memory, achieved through linguistic/written (not archaeological) sources, reliance upon authorities, and collation of sources (18). Knape specifically mentions that archaeological evidence is not history for the medieval historian, since history occurs primarily in the realm of narrative and language.
The first of these instances is Higden’s description of the ruins of Bath. He writes that William of Malmesbury claims that Julius Caesar built the baths:

In hac urbe calidarum balnearum latex emergens auctorem Julium Caesarem habere creditor. Ranulphus. Sed Gaufridus Monemutensis in us Britannico libro asserit regem Bladud hujus rei fuisse auctorem. Foran Willelmus, qui Britannicum labrum non viderat, ista ex aliorum relatu aut ex propria conjectura, sicut et quaedam alia, minus scrispit exquisite. Proinde videtur magis verisimile quod licet rex Bladud hane urbem contruxerit, non propter hoc ipse aut Julius haec calida balnea construxerit; immo quod aqua originalis transiens per venas sulphureas, quibus naturaliter calificata ebulliat, in urbe illa fervidas scaturigines per loca varia, ubi scabredines et putredines saepe purgantur.

Andy Galloway calls this passage “a virtual summa of historiography from the twelfth century to the late Middle Ages,” on account of the sheer number and variety of interpretations of the baths presented in this short passage. Higden presents first William of Malmesbury’s explanation for the origin of the baths, and then adds his own interpretation gleaned from a reading of Geoffrey of Monmouth and natural sciences.

Yet, as Galloway also points out, his knowledge of the hot baths comes from Saint Basil via Bede, not just from personal observation and deduction. In this moment, the three greats of medieval historical writing William of Malmesbury, Geoffrey of Monmouth,

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293 Ibid. 52-3.
and Bede all come together to shape Higden’s historical analysis. Yet this written
historical “summa,” as Galloway puts it, is rooted in the material world. The depiction of
physical space gives opportunity for Higden to demonstrate the multiplicity of historical
interpretation based on a single object, and finally for him to come to a conclusion based
upon the writings of his predecessors, not the thing itself. Each individual text, based
upon the object, cannot truly represent the thing. Only multiple interpretations from
textual sources considered together can lead to a right understanding.

Higden again casts doubt upon William of Malmesbury’s Roman vision of the
British past in the Carlisle of classical antiquity. In the *Gesta Pontificum Angorum,*
William describes an old Roman building with an inscription, and Higden reproduces this
passage in the *Polychronicon:*

> In qua urbe manet adhuc ex lapideis fornicensibus triclinium concameratum, quod
nulla unquam tempestatum contumelia aut ignium flamma valuit labefactare. In
vicina quoque plaga apud Cumberlond legitur adhuc in fronte triclinii sic
inscriptum Marii victoriae. Quod quid sit haesito, nisi forsan pars Cumborum
olim his locis insederit, cum fuissent a Mario consule Italia pulsi. Ranulphus. Sed
probabilis videtur, quod ibi fiatmenio de Mario rege Britonum filio Arvigari,
qui illis in locis Rodricum regem Pictorum devicerat, sicut testatur Gaufridus in
suo Britannico libro, quem Willelmus Malmbeuriensis nusquam viderat.

[In this citee is a thre chambrd hous I-made of font stones, that myght neuere be
destroyed with tempest of wedir nother with brennyng of fuyre. Also in the
contray fast by in Westmerlond, in the front of a thre chambrd place, is I-write in
this manere, *Marii victoriae.* What this writinge is to mene, som dele I doute; but
it were so that som of the Combres leie there sometyme, whan the consul Marius
had I-putte hem out of Itali. R. But it semeth more probable, that that is i-write in
mind of Marius, kyng of Britons, that was Aruigarus his sone. This Marius
ouvercome in that place Rodryk, kyng of Pictes, so seith Gaufridus in his Brittische
booke. William Malmesbury seih neuer that book.]

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[294](Poly. II. 70-71.)
Here again, Higden presents William’s view of history that privileges Rome, since the seemingly indestructible ruins were erected in honor of the Roman consul Marius. Higden then adds his own commentary, saying that the imposing edifice was not likely built for a Roman consul, but rather for the British king. Why does Higden think that it was probably not a Roman ruin? Why does he privilege the British story over the Roman? Most likely on account of location—because of Carlisle’s northern location, it would seem plausible that the victory of Marius, who defeated the Picts, would be commemorated there. In this interpretation, Higden privileges a local reading versus a universal one—he picks the story of the native Britons over that of the expanding Romans. Yet underlying the issue of probability is the second issue of source material. Since William did not see Geoffrey of Monmouth’s British book, of course his materials would have been Roman and thus skewed towards a Roman vision of classical antiquity. According to Higden, William did not have the advantage of access to alternative written sources, and only had the physical object itself on which to base his interpretation. Since Higden had the benefit of also seeing Geoffrey of Monmouth’s translation of the British book, he believes he can have a fuller picture of what happened and use his own judgment to decide what the proper interpretation of the ruins and their inscription should be. Just as in the case of Bath, Higden takes the writings of his predecessors, provides multiple interpretations, and then offers his own hybrid interpretation.

In the cases of both Bath and Carlisle, as well as Caerleon later on, Higden seems to privilege the interpretation of British foundation over Roman foundation, which

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Poly. II. 74-75: Urbs haec authentica, ac per Romanos muris coctilibus circumdata, ubi multa adhuc pristinae nobilitatis apparent vestigia; palatia scilicet immensa, turris gigantic, thermae insignias, templorum partim extantibus pene clausa; et tam intra quam extra.
would suggest a preference for British myth over Roman imperium. Yet, when it comes to Chester, he changes course. Higden at first embraces illegibility, for he says the founder of the city is unknown. But eventually he suggests a Roman origin: “cuius fundator ignoratur. Nam inuenti fundamenta lapidum enormium videtur potius Romano seu giganto labore, quam Brittanico sudore fundata exitisse.” In a phrase that clearly echoes the Anglo-Saxon descriptions of the Roman ruins as enta geweorc, Higden precludes the possibility of British origin based upon the physical appearance of the stones themselves. It is only in the absence of textual source material, without knowing any origin story for the city, that it appears that Higden turns to ruins and their appearance to make his own judgment of their history.

Yet implicitly Higden still privileges the written word by his inclusion of classical inscriptions in his account. These inscriptions are in an intelligible language, Latin, that provides the reader (Higden himself) with relevant information. From the historical accounts, Higden describes Chester as a place from which Julius Caesar sent out soldiers to Ireland, and from which Claudius Caesar sent out troops to win the Orcades. Chester is not seen as a place that is conquered by Rome, but rather one that was founded by Rome and used as a springboard to bring the rest of the area under Roman imperial

296 Trevisa translates: “The foundour of this citee is vnknowe, for who that seeth the foundementis of the grete stones wold rather wene that it were Romayns work, other work of geauntes, than work I made by settynge of Bretouns.” Poly. II. 78-9.
297 Poly. II. 78-9. This inclusion of islands is also interesting when one considers the twelfth-century De laude Cestrie, written by Lucian, also a monk of St. Werburgh’s. In this text, Lucian compares Chester and Rome via their shared patronage of St. Peter. Lucian discusses the Donation of Constantine in relation to England, and compares St. Peter’s privileges in Rome to the support of the Isle of Augustine in Chester (Doran 317-8). What Doran also notes is that in the twelfth century, St. Werburgh’s had a daughter house in Ireland that had no official dependence on Chester (318). The connection here of the Roman emperors conquering islands, and St. Werburgh’s connection to religious houses on islands, is striking here.
subjection. Roman Chester was then ravaged by the Danes, and subsequently rebuilt by the Anglo-Saxon queen Aethelflaed,\textsuperscript{298} thus implying a direct lineage from Rome to Anglo-Saxon England. After his description of the city’s history, Higden then goes on to describe the traces of the distant past written in the city’s landscape:

\begin{quote}
\textit{sunt viae subterraneae, lapideo opere mirabiliter testudinatae, triclinia concamerata, insculpti lapides pergandes antiquorum nomina praeferentes. Numismata quoque, Julii Caesaris aliorumque illustrium inscripitione insignita, alicando sunt effossa.}
\end{quote}

[In this citee beeth weirs under erthe, with vawtes of stoonwerk wonderliche I-wrought, thre chambers workes, greet stoones I-graued with olde men names there ynne. There is also Julius Cesar his money wonderliche in stones I-graued, and othere noble mens also with the writynge aboute.]\textsuperscript{299}

Even through the Danish destruction and the Anglo-Saxon rebuilding, the traces of Roman Chester still remain to Higden’s day, as he describes the antiquities of the city in the present tense. The men of antiquity survive through the inscriptions on the stone—even when he extols the ancient ruin, the written word via inscriptions still carries great weight.

Perhaps it is these inscriptions that help Higden to differentiate between Roman stonework and Anglo-Saxon stonework, which he does in the poem in praise of Chester following his prose description. The poem begins,

\begin{quote}
\textit{Cestra de castro nomen quasi Castria sumpsit,}
\textit{Incertum cujus hanc manus ediderit.}
\textit{Haec Legecestria tunc est dicta, vel Urbs Legionum,}
\textit{Anglis et Cambris nunc manet urbs celebris.}
\textit{In muris pendent lapides velut Herculis actus,}
\textit{Agger et augeur tutior ut maneat.}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{298} Ibid. 78.
\textsuperscript{299} Ibid. 78-81.
This poem proclaims the uncertainty of the town’s origins, yet by saying it was named *de castro*, literally, “from a fort/military encampment,” Higden recalls his earlier description of the city’s origins as a military base for Roman forces.

Higden represents the layered Roman and Anglo-Saxon history of the city through stone when he writes “In muris pendent lapides velut Herculis actus./Agger et augetur tutior ut maneat./Saxula Saxonica superextant addita magnis.” First, while earlier he had noted that the origins of the city were unknown, he likens the placement of the great foundation stones to a Greco-Roman figure, bringing to mind his earlier discussions of Roman emperors’ use of Chester in antiquity. Second, he notes that it is *saxula saxonica* that have been added to the great stones of antiquity already in place—the small Saxon stones *superextant*, are prominent above the earlier foundation. Higden’s depiction of the layered work of architectural building, from one civilization to the other, tracks with his historiographical thrust that makes Chester a Roman, Anglo-Saxon town, and

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300 Poly. II. 82-3.
effectively erases a British past. Privileging a Roman foundation narrative for Chester
would put Higden in the tradition of comparing Chester and Rome, prominent in the
twelfth-century *De laude Cestrie* by Lucian, a monk of St. Werburgh’s. Lucian compares
Rome and Chester:

> There [Rome] inscribing the statutes of the law, here [Chester] relieving us from
> the groans of our labour. There as the advocate of the disputations of litigants,
> here of the sweet praises of lovers. The clamouring obstructions of the Romans,
> but the loving affection of the English. The destination of the business of the
> peoples of the whole world, entreaties and prayers from the hearts of the humble
> and pious.301

In this passage, Lucian uses Chester as a symbol for all of England’s religion, which is
more focused on piety and not the business of running a worldwide church. England’s
location, far from Rome, allows it to be a place of respite, but through the patronage of
Peter allows it to be compared to the Holy City. Contemporary annotations in the
manuscript focus on Lucian’s references to Rome, and one such annotation makes clear
that Saint Peter cherished Chester perhaps even more than Rome itself: the note says “In
Rome, authority, in Chester, care.”302 Perhaps drawing on these depictions of Chester that
were written centuries earlier in his own monastery, Higden uses his own depiction of the
physical space of Chester to exemplify the Roman origin, not British, of his city, and thus
show why and how Chester, on the edge of the world and England itself, could be
compared to Rome. It is from this specific Cheshire historical and geographic context that
the sole manuscript testament of *St. Erkenwald* originates. To this manuscript we now
turn.

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302 Doran, 317. These annotations, Doran points out, indicates that the interest in Rome and its comparison to Chester was an interest shared by more people than just Lucian.
While the sheer pervasiveness of the *Polychronicon* in medieval England would be enough to suggest an influence on *St. Erkenwald*, the poem’s only manuscript testament, BL MS Harley 2250, includes other texts specifically influenced by the *Polychronicon*. These literary connections put *St. Erkenwald* not just thematically but materially in the orbit of literature influenced by the *Polychronicon*. While the scholarly criticism on *St. Erkenwald* throughout the majority of the twentieth century has read the poem in light of other alliterative poetry, most notably the works of the *Pearl*-poet, reading the poem in the context of its manuscript can illuminate the text in new ways. Specifically, its manuscript context places it in the specific geographic location of Cheshire, in close proximity to the birthplace of the *Polychronicon*, a text that served as the primary vehicle for historical information in late medieval England. The other texts in Harley 2250 collected alongside *St. Erkenwald* show a debt to the *Polychronicon*, a choice that suggests that *Erkenwald* and the *Polychronicon* were received and understood in a similar context. *Erkenwald*, a poem so invested in historical knowledge and difference, would have used the *Polychronicon* as a source for historical knowledge and context.

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303 The first editor of the poem, Henry Savage, claimed that the Gawain poet was its author (see H.L. Savage, *St. Erkenwald*, New Haven, Yale Studies in English, LXXII, 1926). For a summary of the scholarly consensus before 1965 on the authorship of St. Erkenwald, see Larry Benson, “The Authorship of St. Erkenwald,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 64.3 (1965), pp. 393-5. Benson disputes the claim that the Gawain-poet was also responsible for St. Erkenwald through linguistic and verse analysis, yet still analyzes the text within the broader context of alliterative verse. In 2006, Marie Borroff argued again for single authorship, addressing Benson’s 1965 article in detail (see “Narrative Artistry in *St. Erkenwald* and the Gawain-group: The Case for Common Authorship Reconsidered” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 28 (2006): 41-76). But in general, since 1965, the consensus has remained that the *Erkenwald*-poet is a separate poet from the *Gawain*-poet.

304 The prime examples here would be Benson’s and Borroff’s articles mentioned above.
Harley 2250 is a Latin and English religious miscellany, written on paper in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. St. Erkenwald’s most recent editor, Clifford Peterson, places the manuscript geographically in the Northwich hundred in Cheshire. Presently the manuscript has two foliations—the first spanning ff. 1-87 (St. Erkenwald is found on ff. 72v-75v), and the second ff. 88-111. The current first page of the manuscript was not always the first page—it became detached during the second foliation and was bound into the manuscript backwards to become ff. 44-45. Thus, the current first page is listed as folio 2. Clifford Peterson gives a detailed list of the materials found alongside Erkenwald in the manuscript, which includes other saints’ lives, various lines of religious verse in Latin and English, and basic theological information for instruction. The following table has the contents of the manuscripts. I have followed Clifford Peterson’s numbering of the contents, and in so doing also note where his numbering differs from the Harleian Catalogue. Unless noted, all items are in the same hand throughout.

2. (HC # 19) ff. 48r-49v. De Sancto Martino, English couplets. Peterson identifies this text as a shortened version of the SEL version of the life of St. Martin.
3. F. 49v. Five Latin lines, in different hand than the rest of the MS.
4. F. 49 v. Single Latin line in a different hand than Item 3 and rest of MS: “hodierno die meam” and an indecipherable word.
5. F. 49v. Six English lines in different hand than Items 3, 4, and rest of MS: “Iohannes Crisostomes & thu teere that art mekely lettyn in orysoun thy myght ys so grete that goys in/to hede veen vp to goddis trone…”
6. F. 49 v. Two lines in English, copy of preceding lines in different hand than Items 3, 4, 5, 6, and rest of MS.

305 For a discussion of the dating of the manuscript, see Peterson 8-11.
306 See Peterson’s discussion on the manuscript’s geographic origin based on dialect, pp. 23-26.
307 Peterson 1-2.
308 The list of contents of the MS can be found in Peterson’s introduction, pp. 3-6.
309 Peterson 3.
7. (HC#20) ff. 50r-64v. Abridged *Speculum Christiani*, Latin and English quatrains.
8. (HC #21) ff.64r-68r. *Themata Dominicalia*. Also known as the *De Dominicis*, a work accompanying *Dieta Salutis*, both attributed to St. Bonaventure.
9. (HC#22) ff.68r-72r col.1. The *tabula* of the *Dieta Salutis*.
10. f. 72r col. 2. Short pieces on articles of faith, seven sacraments, ten commandments, seven deadly sins, seven works of corporal mercy, and seven works of spiritual mercy. Latin.
11. f. 72r col. 2. 17 unidentified Latin lines.
13. (HC # 24) ff. 75v-76v. *De Sancto Iohannes Baptistia*. English rhymed verse. Peterson says its is from the *South English Legendary*, but Newhauser and Bolton have argued that it is a hybrid text comprised of various sources in addition to the *SEL*.
15. (HC #26) f. 77v. *De Sancto Iuliano Confessore*. English rhymed verse. From SEL.
16. (HC #27) ff. 77v-78v. *De Sancto Iuliano Hospite*. English rhymed verse. SEL.
17. (HC #28) ff. 79r-80v. *De Cruce*. English rhymed verse. SEL.
18. (HC # 29) ff. 80v-81r. *Inuencio Sancte Crucis*. English rhymed verse, SEL.
19. (HC #30) ff. 81r-81v. *Saynt quyriak*. English rhymed verse. SEL.
20. (HC #31) ff. 81v-83r. *Saynt Elene*. English rhymed verse. SEL.
21. (HC #32) ff. 83r-83v. *Exaltacio Sancte crucis*. English rhymed verse. SEL.
22. (HC 33) f. 83v. Three lines of English prose on the distance from earth to heaven, in a different hand than the rest of the MS.
23. (HC #34) f. 83v. Three lines of English prose in another hand than 19 above.
24. (HC #35) f. 84r-84v. Sermon for Corpus Christi Day. English, from John Mirk’s *Festial*.
25. f. 84v col. 2. Eight lines of English verse in a different hand.
26. f. 84v col. 2. Seven faded lines in different ink.
29. f. 86r col.2. *Narracio* on the destruction of Jerusalem. English, from Mirk’s *Festial*.
30. (HC #38) f. 86v col. 1-86v col.2. Miracle of St. Andrew from Mirk’s *Festial*. English.

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310 Peterson 4
Peterson lists three more items found in the remainder of the manuscript, but they were added later in the second foliation, and thus for the present study are not relevant to the production of the portion of the manuscript that contains *St. Erkenwald*.\(^{313}\)

Of the contents of the manuscript, three sections emerge to illuminate the literary context of *St. Erkenwald*: the *Stanzaic Life of Christ*, the selection of modified *South English Legendary* saints’ lives, and material from Mirk’s *Festial*. The *Stanzaic Life of Christ*, with its significant reliance upon Higden’s *Polychronicon* as well as its shared origin in Chester, demonstrates the literary milieu in which *St. Erkenwald* circulated. The selection of saints’ lives and material from Mirk’s *Festial*—both their form and content—give us a clearer picture of how *Saint Erkenwald* was read and received in a vernacular, orthodox context soon after its composition. Taken as a whole, reading *Erkenwald* in its historiographical and religious context shows how the poem exemplifies a historiographical practice influenced by the *Polychronicon* as well as orthodox vernacular teaching.

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313 In its contents, Harley 2250 looks strikingly similar to another fifteenth century manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Greaves 54. It is another parchment manuscript, noted for its usefulness, and its contents are quite similar to Harley 2250: the *Speculum Christiani*, part of the *Gesta Romanorum*, selections from Mirk’s *Festial*. For more on this manuscript, see Alan Fletcher, “Some Unnoticed Sermons from John Mirk’s Festial,” *Speculum* 55.3 (1980), pp. 514-522, esp. p. 520. When considered with other manuscripts that have similar contents, the homiletic and instructional qualities of Harley 2250 are undeniable, which takes us out of the alliterative poetic context in which *St. Erkenwald* is usually considered.

314 For these items, see Peterson 6.
The *Stanzaic Life of Christ*, compiled at Ranulph Higden’s monastery of St. Werburgh’s in Chester sometime in the fourteenth century,\(^{315}\) uses Higden’s *Polychronicon* as a main source, along with the *Legenda Aurea*.\(^{316}\) Harley 2250 is one of three manuscripts of the text: the other manuscripts are London, British Library MSS Harley 3909 and Additional 38666 (the *SLC* is found ff. 5r-173v).\(^{317}\) Harley 2250 is generally considered to be deficient because it is missing the first portion of the poem.\(^{318}\) However, Foster notes that some passages from the *SLC* in Harley 2250 indicate that the Harley 2250 scribe might have actually been working from the original exemplar of the text, while the scribes of Additional 38666 and Harley 3909 were not.\(^{319}\) The compiler of the *SLC* began his work upon a request for a vernacular source for the life of Christ:

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A worthy wyght wyllynad at me
Sertayn thyngus for to showe,
That in Latyn wrytun saw he,
In English tonge, for to knowe.\(^{320}\)
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This passage presents seeing and understanding as separate, even if related, events: the man who asks for the translation *sees* the original Latin text itself, but cannot *understand* what is in it. Thus, even thought he “saw” the text, he still needs a guide to “showe” him the passage. Seeing, as an action on the part of an individual, is not enough. Someone must guide him, using words and terms he understands, so that he may truly “knowe.” The poetry of the lines emphasizes this connection by rhyming “showe” and “knowe.” The other rhyming pair is “me” and “he,” with “me” and “showe” in a couplet, and “he”

\(^{316}\) Foster xiv.
\(^{317}\) For more on the manuscripts, see Foster’s introduction, x-xiv.
\(^{318}\) Foster xii.
\(^{319}\) Ibid. xiii.
\(^{320}\) *SLC* ll. 9-12
and “knowe” in a couplet, thus giving the inquirer and the compiler a relationship through the exchange of knowledge. Strangely, the inquirer sees the Latin and knows he wants it translated, would not make sense if he were a layman completely unable to read Latin. Perhaps he was someone who had some knowledge of Latin, but was unable to really get the sense of the language in the Latin and needed an English version to help his understanding.

In a move similar to Higden in the *Polychronicon*, the SLC compiler says that he will state the name of each of his authorities for his material, “that clerkus shal not after say/these newe fables wrote a fonne.” The compiler draws from many sources to create his text, the two principal sources being the *Polychronicon* and the *Legenda Aurea*. However, these two texts are not mentioned at all in the *Stanzaic Life of Christ*, while the compiler cites many others, ranging from sources such as Eutropius, Bede, Martinus Polonus, and Petrus Comestor. Instead of explicit citation, the *Stanzaic Life of Christ* imitates the *Polychronicon* structurally, as it is organized around the ages of the world. The SLC silently draws source quotations from authorities from the pages of the *Polychronicon*, and it shares an emphasis on narrative and fact. For a work allegedly about the life of Christ, the author expands his scope outside of the Christ’s

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321 Foster reads the layman as completely illiterate in Latin; see Foster xvii.
322 SLC II. 31-32.
323 Foster xx.
324 Ibid.
325 Foster II. 685, where he is cited as a source for a miracle at the Nativity.
326 SLC II. 5597-5608, where he cites Bede’s characterization of Jews as having “stone hearts.” Also II. 2281-2304, for the description of Jesus’s humanity in poverty and subjection to the law.
327 Foster II. 481-556 where he cites Martinus Polonus’ description of the *Salvatio Romae*.
328 SLC II. 417-414 where he cites the *Historia Scholastica* for the age of Mary and the emperor’s reign at the time of Christ’s birth. James Morey says that the compiler encounters the *Historia* via the *Polychronicon* in *Book and Verse: A Guide to Middle English Biblical Literature* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 147 n. 11.
329 Morey, 256.
330 David Mills writes that the SLC “stylistically…makes no concessions to the emotional responses of the readers. […] [it] offers a plain style that deals primarily in narrative and exposition and holds the audience at a contemplative distance from the account.” In *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1998), 47.
temporal life on earth to show how the events of Christ’s life impact liturgical as well as historical time. This is clearly evident in the feast days of the church that directly correlate with events from Christ’s life, such as his birth, death, and resurrection, but also how in the SLC events in Christ’s early life foreshadow events in his later life, such as linking Epiphany with Christ turning water to wine. These events in Christ’s life then affect future feasts of the church so that people throughout the ages can partake in the sacred moment, despite temporal or geographical distance from the original event. The SLC, by focusing on the life of Christ and then demonstrating its effect and relationship to other historical events, demonstrates the redemption of time, history, and ultimately historical narrative itself through the incarnation—the entrance of God, a being outside of human time, into world history through a physical body.

This idea of the redemption of time and history allows the author to incorporate material that would not seem immediately pertinent to the life of Christ, and some of this material is gleaned directly from the Polychronicon. Most obviously out of place would be the inclusion of Ovid’s exile (SLC ll. 5193-5216), which the SLC compiler takes from the Polychronicon, IV.316. In the SLC, Ovid’s exile comes after a description of Ember days, and a brief overview of the reign of the Roman emperor Octavian (reigned 27 BC to 14 AD). The connection to the previous material on the Ember days might be penitence, as the SLC describes Ovid’s writing of another book during his exile to atone

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331 SLC l. 5351.
for the “wikket werke” (referring to the *Ars Amatoria*), which merited his exile.

According to both the *SLC* and the *Polychronicon*, the book caused widespread debauchery among Roman women, and both Higden and the compiler of the *SLC* also refer to Ovid’s alleged affair with the empress. During his exile, out of his contrition, he wrote another book to atone for his earlier sins. The compiler of the *SLC* writes,

> Therfore another book he made  
> Was callet of suche loue remedy,  
> To amonde that he done had  
> And teche wymmen to wayue that ny,  
> In whiche book these verses setts he,  
> That byny[t]h[e] arn writen her  
> In Latyn, as ye wel moun se,  
> That semet he ruet his doyng der:  
> *Naso minus prudens artem dum tradit amandi,*  
> *Doctrina pretium triste magister habet.*

The quotation from Ovid in the *SLC*, quoted directly from the *Polychronicon*, is in turn quoted from Ovid’s *Epistulae ex Ponto* II.10 (ll. 15-16), Ovid’s poetic letters from exile which were each addressed to various friends (II.10 is addressed to the poet Macer.)

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333 *SLC* l. 5195.  
334 Ibid. ll. 5209-5216.  
335 While the *Polychronicon* explicitly names the *Ex Ponto* as the source for the quotation ("Unde et ipse in libris suis de Ponto sic ait. *Versus.* 'Naso minus prudens artem dum tradit amandi./Doctrinae pretium triste magister habet.'"), the *SLC* instead attributes it to the book that “was callet of suche loue remedy,” or, in Latin, the *Remedia Amoris*. In this passage, the *SLC* compiler also perpetuates the common medieval understanding that the *Remedia Amoris* was an act of contrition for the *Ars Amatoria*.  
336 For more on Ovidian manuscripts in medieval England, see Kathryn McKinley, “Manuscripts of Ovid in England 1100-1500,” *English Manuscript Studies* 7 (1998): 41-85 where she catalogues 17 copies of *Ex Ponto* particularly, the second most after the *Metamorphoses* (43). She also notes the rise in Ovidian manuscripts in England during the thirteenth century, when many Benedictine monasteries begin recording copies of Ovid (47). According to her catalogue, there is no Ovidian manuscript that can be definitively placed at St. Werburgh’s, but seeing the Benedictine collection of Ovidiana in the time before Higden and the direct quotation (as well as numerous other Ovidian citations throughout the *Polychronicon*), it is safe to assume that Higden was working with an Ovidian manuscript at St. Werburgh’s, Chester, in the fourteenth century. For more on Ovid in the monastic context, see James Clark, “Ovid in the Monasteries: The Evidence from Late Medieval England” in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, eds. James Clark, Frank Coulson, Kathryn McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011, pp. 177-196). For more on Ovid’s *Ex Ponto*, see Luigi Galasso’s chapter in *A Companion to Ovid*, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World, ed. Peter Knox (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 194-206.
In a work that claims to be a translation of Latin so that the common man may understand, at this precise moment the compiler of the SLC fails in his duty by not translating the lines from Ovid. Effectively, this decision leaves some of the information veiled to the reader who cannot read Latin. One could speculate on the practical reasons why the quotation might not be translated: perhaps the compiler just didn’t think it pertinent to his work to translate a few lines of ancient Roman poetry; perhaps he was just tired of translating and wanted to lessen his workload; perhaps he might have assumed those who would be interested in Ovidian verse could already read it. Whatever the case, in this moment the text reveals the vestiges of a foreign literature for the reader who does not know Latin—a reader who can see but not understand, like the person who requested the whole translation in the first place. The inclusion of the untranslated lines of poetry gestures towards a whole corpus of classical Roman literature foreign to the reader; spolia, if you will, from an earlier literary era that has been encountered in a newer literary work, first the Polychronicon and then the Stanzaic Life of Christ. The object, the two lines of poetry crystallized in their original form, is put on display for the reader, allowing him or her to appreciate the cultural artifact even in their incomprehension of it.

The second selection of excerpts that Harley 2250 is from John Mirk’s Festial and Instructions for Parish Priests (items 24 and 27-34 in Peterson). The Festial, compiled by the Augustinian canon John Mirk in the 1380s or 1390s, gathers sermons and narraciones of various saints and church feasts, covering the full liturgical calendar. This text was a resource for parish priests to provide clear, persuasive instruction in the

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vernacular. Judging from the extant manuscript copies of the complete collection (twenty-six) and manuscripts containing extracted sermons (twelve, one of which is Harley 2250), it was wildly popular in the late Middle Ages, and has been described as a “homiletic ‘bestseller’” by one scholar.  

The collection is also exceptionally orthodox, and it is thought to have been written to counter some of the Lollard preaching of the fourteenth century.

The selections from the *Festial* in Harley 2250 only highlight its value as a repository of orthodoxy, and indicate that the compiler of the manuscript had orthodox teaching in mind when choosing material for his manuscript. The sermon for Corpus Christi Day, by virtue alone of being a sermon on the Eucharist, demonstrates its commitment to orthodox teaching on the sacraments and materiality. Yet the Corpus Christi sermon also is the point in the *Festial* where Mirk specifically mentions Lollards, and mounts an attack on their opposition to images in worship: “And therfor roodes and othyr ymages ben necessary in holy chirch, whateuer thes Lollardes sayn; for yf that made ben profitable, goode holy faders that haue be tofore vs wold haue don hem out of holy chirch mony a yere gon.” The inclusion of this sermon, with its specific denunciation of Lollardy, in Harley 2250 would support readings of *Erkenwald* that read the poem in its form and content as exceptionally orthodox. The poem *St. Erkenwald*

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339 See Susan Powell’s introduction to her edition of the text, *John Mirk’s Festial* (London: EETS, 2011) for an overview. Alan Fletcher has also argued that Lollardy provided an impetus for Mirk’s writings, which came from “a need to help arm the Church against what he saw as a spiritual threat” (“Mirk and the Lollards,” *Medium Aevum* 56.2 [1987], pp. 217-224, quotation p. 218). Fletcher points out that the Lollards are the only heretical group mentioned by name in the collection (218).


itself also gestures towards a historical proof text for the veracity of the sermon’s statement on church fathers: Augustine and Erkenwald both hurled pagan idols out of pagan temples, so why would they not hurl out images and statues of saints if they were also idolatrous? The scholars working on St. Erkenwald’s theological orthodoxy have looked at the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist to make their arguments, but it also appears that the argument for orthodoxy can be found in the setting of the story in the rededication of pagan temples and the redemption of the material world.

The third section of the manuscript is the collection of saints’ lives in the middle of the manuscript, where we find St. Erkenwald. Most of these lives are based on the South English Legendary, a thirteenth-century vernacular collection of saints’ lives, devotional material, and instruction spanning the whole Christian year. The opening of the SEL heavily emphasizes England’s participation in Christendom:

Nou bloweth the niwe frut, that late bygan to springe,
That to is kunde eritage munkunne schal bringe;
This nywe frut of wan ich speke is oure Cristendom,
That late was an eorthe ysouwe, & later forth it come.

Here, the author places emphasis on “oure” Christendom, highlighting the specific inheritance that England has in the universal spiritual economy. The inclusion of native English saints further emphasizes England’s participation in Christendom: saints such as

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For the textual tradition of the SEL, see Manfred Gorlach, The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary (Leeds Texts and Monographs, ns 6: University of Leeds, 1974).

Kenelm,\textsuperscript{344} Alban, Thomas of Canterbury, Edward the Confessor, Cuthbert, and others. So too does the poem \textit{St. Erkenwald} emphasize Christendom, with the word being found in the second line: “At London in Englonde noght fulle longe sythen--/Sythen Crist suffride on crosse and Cristendome stablyde.”\textsuperscript{345}

The \textit{SEL} also contains the lives of Augustine (Austin) of Canterbury and Gregory the Great, two historical figures who, while not native to England, were key to the narrative of the flourishing of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England. Whatley writes, “Although salvation comes to them from afar, it seems to emanate as much from within, from the intrinsic character and worth of king and people, as from without, which accords with Gregory’s vision of Anglo-Saxon England as an earthly paradise.”\textsuperscript{346} The lives of the native saints, as well as those who brought Christianity to them, play an important role in the \textit{SEL}, and suggest that perhaps \textit{St. Erkenwald} was considered to be of such similar genre and style as the \textit{SEL} lives so that it was included in a selection of saints’ lives from the \textit{SEL}.

To sum up, each of the three major literary contexts found in Harley 2250 individually illuminates an aspect of \textit{St. Erkenwald} and gives us a clearer picture of how it was received in late medieval England. One, the \textit{SLC} demonstrates that \textit{Erkenwald} was at least read alongside other texts that heavily relied on Higden’s \textit{Polychronicon}, suggesting the merits of reading \textit{Erkenwald} in that historiographical context. Two, the

\textsuperscript{344} See especially the \textit{Life of Saint Kenelm}, about which Lesley Johnson and Jocelyn-Wogan Browne write: “The narrative thus traces the ecclesiastical and communicative networks of post-Conquest England internally and as they extend to Rome and God, locating English history within Christendom, and making West Midland regional and topographical detail part of English history and part of the sacred geography presided over by Rome” “National, world, and women’s history” in \textit{The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature}, ed. David Wallace, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P, pp. 92-121, quote p. 105. The opening of the \textit{Life of St. Kenelm} is a description of England that Robert of Gloucester then uses in his \textit{Chronicle}.

\textsuperscript{345} \textit{Erkenwald} ll.1-2.

selections from Mirk emphasize *Erkenwald’s* vernacular orthodoxy. And three, the SEL selections give us a poetic, stylistic context for *Erkenwald* that is different from that of the *Gawain*-group, a context that emphasizes English Christendom and conversion in historical-poetic terms. An Anglo-Saxon saint battling heathendom, in the tradition of his Roman forebears, would be prime source material for the imagined conversion of an early inhabitant of Britain. To this Anglo-Saxon saint, the historical figure of Erkenwald, we now turn.

**Historical Sources for Saint Erkenwald**

Erkenwald (d. 693) was the bishop of London from 675-693. He was appointed a bishop by Archbishop Theodore, after a turbulent time in Christian London’s history: Christianity was only just beginning to flourish again, after the expulsion of the former bishop and the clergy from the city in 616 by the pagan successors of earlier Christian kings. The earliest mention of Erkenwald in a historiographical context is by Bede in Book IV of the *Ecclesiastical History*. Here, Bede describes the saint’s holiness, and remarks that even to the days of Bede wood chips from the litter that carried him while he was sick could heal infirmities. Additionally, Bede records that Erkenwald founded two religious houses: Chertsey, for himself, and Barking, for his sister Ethelburga. It was to these institutions that Erkenwald dedicated much of his time: he obtained land and resources for them, not St. Paul’s, during his bishopric. Eventually, upon his death

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349 Ibid. 87. It was a tradition at Chertsey and Barking that Erkenwald went to Rome c. 678, for there is a charter from Pope Agatho to Chertsey that is believed authentic (110). This authentic charter was the basis for the fake charter of St. Paul’s (This is discussed in the same volume, pp. 75-76)
Erkenwald was buried at St. Paul’s, but only after a struggle between the city and the abbeys as to where his body should rest.  

Because of Erkenwald’s shrine at the cathedral, St. Paul’s played an important role in the development of the cult of Erkenwald in late Anglo-Saxon and post-Conquest England. St. Paul’s had a turbulent history of destruction in the tenth and eleventh centuries: it was burned in the fire of 962, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and again in 1087. It was after the fire of 1087, so it is said, that Bishop Maurice of London revived the cult of Erkenwald. The story goes that Maurice and Walkelin, the bishop of Winchester, were walking through the ruined cathedral to survey the damage three days after the fire when they discovered Erkenwald’s shrine untouched. The miraculous nature of its preservation was used to advocate for Erkenwald’s sanctity in the context of the cathedral. Gordon Whatley suggests that it was at this time that the Latin *Vita Sancti Erkenwaldi* was commissioned and written, as new Norman tastes influenced the writing of devotional literature and the construction of the cathedral.

Besides the *Vita*, the collection of miracles known as the *Miracula Sancti Erkenwaldi* appeared in the twelfth century. Attributed to the canon Arcoid, this account of nineteen posthumous miracles attributed to Erkenwald appeared sometime between 1134-1141, a critical time in London’s ecclesiastical history when London was

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350 In the *Vita Sancti Erkenwaldi*, ed. Gordon Whatley (*The Saint of London: The Life and Miracles of St. Erkenwald*, Binghamton NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 58 [1989] p. 356. Erkenwald’s tomb at St. Paul’s is interesting in the context of the poem, since in the poem it is not Erkenwald but a pagan judge whose tomb is at the cathedral. This is reminiscent of the a practice like Pope Innocent III being buried in the sarcophagus of the emperor Hadrian—burial places are the ultimate redemption of pagan spaces.

351 Kelly 111.

352 Whatley “Heathens and Saints,” 23.

353 First identified by Beryl Smalley, “Gilbertus Universalis, Bishop of London (1128-34), and the Problem of the ‘Glossa Ordinaria,’” *Recherches de theologie ancienne et medievale* 7 (1934). In the MSE, Arcoid identifies himself as the nephew of Gilbert the Universal, bishop of London from January 1128 to August 1134.
without a bishop.\textsuperscript{354} Arcoid’s collection of Erkenwald’s \textit{miracula} thus allows Erkenwald to become a pivotal character in twelfth-century ecclesiastical London—while there was no bishop to guide the city, it could look back to an earlier Anglo-Saxon bishop as their interim spiritual head.\textsuperscript{355} Because of the importance of Erkenwald to Arcoid’s contemporary St. Paul’s and London, the Erkenwald of the \textit{Miracula} is always performing miracles from his grave for contemporary residents of and visitors to London. Arcoid’s stories are not about the seventh-century Erkenwald, and the miracles he performed while he was living, like previous accounts of the saint had done. Instead, the \textit{Miracula} exists specifically to advance the cause of Erkenwald’s sanctity in twelfth-century London. Because of the rise of papal power in the twelfth century, especially as it pertained to canonization of saints, local communities needed to prove the veracity of their local saints’ holiness. Erkenwald’s posthumous miracle collections do just that, in a time when such narratives were increasingly more important to the flourishing of individual communities who had dedicated themselves to a particular local saint.\textsuperscript{356}

The \textit{Vita Sancti Erkenwaldi} and the \textit{Miracula Sancti Erkenwaldi} became key sources for information about and devotion to Erkenwald in the Middle Ages. Gordon Whatley even traces some motifs and themes from these two texts to the Middle English \textit{St. Erkenwald}.\textsuperscript{357} Yet even the \textit{Vita} and \textit{Miracula} do not contain all of the source material for the poem. In fact, the miracle of reanimating a pagan judge in \textit{St. Erkenwald} is not to

\textsuperscript{354} Whatley, \textit{Saint of London}, 36.
\textsuperscript{355} Miracle Seven, in particular, notes that the curing of a man from France occurred while there was no bishop of London. The VSE and Arcoid’s composition of miracle texts for Erkenwald gesture towards a desire for more textual sources for the life of Erkenwald in the twelfth century. I am grateful to David Wallace for pointing out to me that this desire might have been especially strong because unlike monastic foundations such as Westminster, St. Paul’s, as a secular cathedral, did not have the monastic historiographical tradition to support their historical claims.
\textsuperscript{357} Whatley, \textit{The Saint of London}, 68.
be found in any historical or devotional sources for the bishop’s life. The only mention of Erkenwald in the Polychronicon, for example, appears in the history of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England, when Higden describes Erkenwald’s founding of Chertsey and Barking. Yet the poem’s engagement with historical knowledge and memory on a theoretical level, I suggest, displays the poem’s debt to the Polychronicon and its view of history.

Augustine’s Art

The poem St. Erkenwald begins with the historical Erkenwald and his particular historical setting in English Christendom: “At London in Englonde noght fulle longe sythen—/Sythen Crist suffride on crosse and Cristendome stablyde—/Ther was a byschop in that burghe, blessyd and sacryd:/Saynt Erkenwolde as I hope that holy mon hatte.”359 The narrative of the saint pauses to recount a brief history of Christianity in Britain, beginning with the pagan Hengest, and then introducing Augustine of Canterbury—two hundred years of political and ecclesiastical history compressed into fourteen lines. This narrative scheme immediately places Erkenwald in a particular context that is deep in history.

Despite its historical focus, the opening scene, which describes the re-consecration of temples alongside the conversion of the people, blurs the passage of time. This narrative choice makes it difficult to understand what historical events happen for which historical bishop. But what this strategy does achieve is demonstrate the interconnectedness of the Roman and English Christian history of London:

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358 Poly. v. 6 p. 124.
359 Erkenwald ll. 1-4.
Saynt Erkenwalde as I hope that holy mon hatte.  
In his tyme in that toun the temple alder-grattyst  
Was drawen doun, that one dole, to dedifie new,  
For hit hethen had bene in Hengyst dawes  
That the Saxones unsaght haden sende hyder  
Thai bete oute the Bretons and brought hom into Wales  
And peruertyd alle the pepul that in that place dwellide.  

The long sentence that introduces the subject of the short poem does not limit itself to Erkenwald. It goes back in time in order to describe the history of the building that he is renovating and reestablishing. The heathenism of the Saxons and their temple that preceded Erkenwald’s bishopric are introduced only after Erkenwald has been established as the one who will destroy it and built it anew.

Yet, the poem goes back in historical time to introduce Augustine of Canterbury as one who destroyed pagan temples and converted the Saxons. England’s paganism holds the people and their buildings captive until Augustine and the Gregorian mission, described by the poet:

Til Saynt Austyn into Sandewiche was sende fro the pope;  
Then prechyd he here the pure faythe and plantyd the trouthe  
And conuertyd alle the communates to Cristendame newe.  
He turnyd temples that tyme that temyd to the deuelle  
And clansyd hom in Cristes nome and kyrkes hom called;  
He hurlyd owt hor ydols and hade hym in sayntes  
And chaungit cheuely hor nomes and chargit hom better.

Here, the conversion of buildings and people are closely linked. The poet imagines what had happened when Christian missionaries carried out the suggestions from Pope Gregory, in the letter to Abbot Mellitus (Augustine’s contemporary) that Bede records in the Ecclesiastical History:

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360 Erkenwald. ll. 4-10
361 Ibid. 12-18.
Therefore, when by God’s help you reach our most reverend brother, Bishop Augustine, we wish you to inform him that we have been giving careful thought to the affairs of the English, and have come to the conclusion that the temples of the idols among that people should on no account be destroyed. The idols are to be destroyed, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up in them, and relics deposited there. For if these temples are well-built, they must be purified from the worship of demons and dedicated to the service of the true God.362

Bede records that Pope Gregory goes on to write that the locations of pagan temples are key, because the people are already used to their location, and may keep coming even after the buildings have been converted, and thus then the people can be converted.

Bede’s account of the Christianization of temples is a key source for understanding this process in the late antique/early Christian period. Yet there are many more literary encounters with the Christianization of pagan, classical Rome. Higden himself spends a lot of time on Pope Gregory in the Polychronicon, describing how he cast down idols in the city of Rome itself, and also how he sent the mission to the English.363 But probably the most famous example of the transformation of pagan space is the Mirabilia Urbis Romae, a twelfth-century topographical description of Rome, most likely written by the canon Benedict, who was attached to St. Peter’s in Rome.364 Throughout the narrative, the reader views classical Rome through the lens of Christian Rome—new churches now serve as landmarks for where old temples or administrative offices were. For example, when talking about the Vatican, Benedict writes:

Within the palace of Nero is the temple of Apollo, which is called Santa Petronilla, before which is the Basilica of the Vatican, adorned with marvelous mosaics and a ceiling of gold and glass. It is called the Vatican because in that

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362 Bede, EH I.30.
364 For more on this text, see Chapter 3 in this dissertation.
place the Vates, or priests, sang their offices before Apollo’s temple. All that part of Saint Peter’s Church is, therefore, called the Vatican.\footnote{Mirabilia Urbis Romae, 33.} The buildings here are all described in the present tense—the city is a palimpsest where layers of historical memory are seen and remembered. St. Peter’s is simultaneously St. Peter’s and the Temple of Apollo, and the practices of priests in pagan Rome give Christian Rome the name of its most important landmark: the Vatican.

The co-existing spatial histories, as presented in Bede and pilgrim guides to Rome, allow Erkenwald’s London to participate in a similar kind of Christianization as the Holy City itself. Yet in the fourteenth-century poem set in England, as opposed to the twelfth-century guidebook to Rome, the coexistence is not so peaceful. St. Augustine swiftly overthrows the pagan idols, and renames each temple after a Christian saint in the present tense, while the pagan deity remains decisively in the past:

\begin{quote}
Chaungit cheuely hor nomes and chargit hom better: 
That ere was of Appollyn is now of Saynt Petre, 
Mahoun to Sayn Margrete othir to Maudelayne; 
The synagoge of the Sonne was sett to oure Lady, 
Jubiter and Jono to Jhesus othir to James.\footnote{Erkenwald ll. 19-22.}
\end{quote}

There is no description of the temple of Jupiter peacefully coexisting with the church of Jesus—the conversion of the buildings doesn’t leave as much room for pagan history as narrative accounts of medieval Rome do.

While the conversion of temples in the poem describes Augustine’s work, not Erkenwald’s, the poet draws parallels between the Roman missionary and the Anglo-Saxon bishop by implying that the two men are involved in the same kind of missionary activity though separated by a century. Augustine’s architectural and demographic
conversions happen in the past: “hurlyd,” “chaungit,” “was,” “prechyd,”—these verbs emphasize the past-ness of the event. Yet after the description of the highest temple of the devil in London, and all the rest of the pagan temples in England, the narrative switches to the present tense: “Now of this Augustynes art is Erkenwolde bishop.” ³⁶⁷ The narrator focuses on switching the emphasis of the story back to Erkenwald, after having made a brief historical digression to explain the Christian context of the city, and linking the two men by their evangelizing work.

The word “art” in the line has been interpreted in different ways. In his edition of 1922, Israel Gollancz glossed the word in its traditional sense of discipline, such as the seven liberal arts. Henry Savage’s edition of 1926, however, glossed the word as “province, or diocese.” Clifford Peterson presents both of these alternatives, and ultimately agrees with Savage: “The line certainly makes more sense with Erkenwald as the bishop of a province rather than of a theology.” ³⁶⁸ Yet, as even Peterson acknowledges, Augustine was in Canterbury (even if he was meant to go to London). Erkenwald wasn’t technically a successor to Augustine in his district, but he was successor to him in practice, which is what the poem is all about: the re-consecration of temples and the conversion of pagans. This is what the poem, through excavation and recovery, allows Erkenwald to do: convert pagans, like his Roman predecessors. The “art,” of tearing down and reconstructing and rededicating temples, is what links these two men in the poem itself: Erkenwald, at least, was known in late medieval liturgical

³⁶⁷ Erkenwald l. 33.
³⁶⁸ For Peterson’s summary of the different interpretations of the word, see Peterson p. 89, n.33. Peterson also notes that Gollancz’s line of thinking must have been Celtic versus Roman theology and/or practice, and this reference marks Erkenwald as successor to Roman versus native British Christianity.
contexts as a builder. The readings from Barking Abbey for his feast day emphasize both his role as a builder and an evangelist:

Ecce sacerdos magnus qui in uita sua curauit gentem suam; et liberauit illiam a perdicione; qui suffulsit domum; et in diebus suis corroborauit templum. Qui praeualit amplificare ciuitatem; qui adeptus est gloriam in conuersione gentis. [Behold the great priest, who in his lifetime cared for his people and delivered them from perdition, who repaired the house and fortified the temple in his days, who strengthened and extended the city, who gained glory in the conversion of the people.]

Erkenwald’s identity as a preserver and builder of holy places was strong in late medieval England, and it is this identity that the poem *St. Erkenwald* emphasizes.

In the poem, a lengthy description of the process of tearing down and rebuilding follows the identification of Erkenwald as an inheritor of Augustine. This passage teems with activity, with masons and workmen digging in the dirt, and these men eventually come upon the “meruayle” of the tomb. The point of their work is to find the original foundation of the building: “Mony grubber in grete the grounde for to seche/That the fundament on fyrst shuld the fote halde.” They are finding the original foundation so that they can put their new structural pilings on it as they rebuild the church. Now, it is unclear in the poem under what auspices they are looking for the foundations—are they looking for the foundations of the old pagan temple? Or the more recent Christian church? It would seem that it might be the Christian church, since the new project is called the New Werke, an obvious reference to the New Werke of the fourteenth century.

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369 From J.B.L. Tolhurst, *The Ordinale and Customary of the Benedictine Nuns of Barking Abbey*. London: The Henry Bradshaw Society, 1927-8, 2:223. Whatley also points out that this was the reading for Erkenwald’s feast day in St. Paul’s too by the fourteenth century (“Heathens and Saints,” 355).
370 *Erkenwald* ll. 41-42.
that rebuilt St. Paul’s Cathedral. The poetic descriptions of destruction and construction represents the medieval history of St. Paul’s, as the cathedral was a site of continual destruction and construction throughout the Middle Ages. It is even possible that the Anglo-Saxon St. Paul’s was built on the site of Roman buildings, as archaeological excavations have uncovered mosaics and hypocausts near the site. Excavations in the seventeenth century also uncovered Roman crematory remains under the west side of St. Paul’s. The medieval St. Paul’s, in the continual digging and building of the Middle Ages, continually revealed traces of previous inhabitants and their buildings. What the medieval workmen thought when they encountered these objects of the past in unknown to us, but St. Erkenwald dramatizes the finding of ancient ruin and rubble in their quest to find the “fundament on fyrst.”

It is at the moment of digging and searching that historiography breaks into the poem: “And as thai makkyde and mynyde a meruayle thai founden/As yet in crafty cronicles is kydde the memories,/For as thai dyght and dalfe so depe into the erthe/Thai founden fourmyt on a flore a ferly faire tombe.” The first mention of chronicles in the poem happens just at the moment of archaeological discovery and reconstruction, and this choice is no accident. The act of rededicating the church means both rescuing and destroying—looking for old stones to build with, but tearing down existing structures in order to build a new one. This is emphasized by the work of the mason and the grubbers in the preceding lines: the masons are making (‘makkyde’) and the grubbers are finding
Furthermore, the linguistic similarities between ‘makkyde’ and ‘kydde’ draws a parallel between the work of the masons and the work of the chroniclers. One uses stones from historical places to build a new creation, and the other uses selections from old chronicles to make new chronicles.

Nowhere is the use of multiple chronicles to make a new chronicle more apparent than in Higden’s historiographical practice, where he explicitly labels his sources, but then adds his own interpretation of things and events, which as we have seen above is especially apparent in his description of ruins and cities. For the Erkenwald poet, the moment of interaction with the ruins of history is the moment that he uses textual narrative to verify his account. This rhetorical move links the architectural record and the textual record, yet in this case linking them does not equate them. If architecture and text were the same thing, then only one would be required. If history can be solely understood through material objects, then a reference to chronicles would be unnecessary. But, because the architectural record necessarily needs narrative in order to be legible, the poet mentions chronicles at this exact moment, in a move reflecting Higden’s historiographical practice of continually citing and synthesizing previous historical accounts.

Despite the poem’s invocation of “crafty cronecles,” the account of the pagan judge’s miraculous salvation is not to be found anywhere but St. Erkenwald itself. Thus, the chronicles cannot substantiate the miracle. It is at this moment that the poet swoops in with a reference to historiography, even if the claim is not true, to provide a textual legitimization for the miraculous account, even if the claim of legitimacy is not true. The appeal to a written source, even when false, implies the necessity of textual accounts and
suggests the possibility of gaps in the textual record. How, then, ought one to account for these historical gaps? The poem’s famous scene of the people’s complete lack of knowledge about the judge raises this question of how to account for historical knowledge that cannot be substantiated by written text. The canon tells Erkenwald and the assembled crowd,

‘Lo, lords,’ quoth that lede, ‘suche a lyche here is has layn loken here on loghe how longe is vnknawen, and yet his colour and his clothe has caght no defaute, ne his lire ne the lome that he is layde inne, ther is no lede opon lyfe of so longe age that may mene in his mynde that suche a mon regnyd ne nothir his nome ne his note nourne of one speche. Quether mony porer in this place is putte into grave That merkid is in oure martilage his mynde for euer, And we haue oure librarie laitid thes longe seuen dayes Bot one cronicle of this kynge con we neuer fynde. He has non layne here so longe, to loke hit by kynde, To malte so out of memorie bot meruayle hit were.’

Here, not oral history, not church records, and not even chronicles can be relied upon in the quest for historical knowledge. No one is old enough to remember this man, and they can find no record of him in any of the written records available to them. Neither letters nor libraries can help the Anglo-Saxons of the poem discover anything about the strange tomb and miraculously preserved body inside of it. The only thing left to them is the illegible material object—a ruin, of sorts:

Thai founden fourmyt on a flore a ferly faire toumbe. Hit was a throghe of thykke ston thryuandly hewen, Wyt gargeles garnysht aboute alle of gray marbre. The sperle of the spelunke that sparde hit o-lofte Was metely made of the marbre and menskefully planede.

375 Erkenwald ll. 146-158. 376 Erkenwald ll. 46-50
The marvelous tomb resists easy interpretation: the inclusion of gargoyles might make it seem like a Gothic cathedral, the marble makes it seem like a Roman tomb. Even written language, the runes on the tomb, can become an unintelligible object, as evidenced by the passage when both lay and learned men alike marvel at this writing:

And the bordure enbelecit wyt bryght golde lettres,  
Bot roynyshe were the resones that ther on row stoden.  
Fulle verray were the vigures ther auisyde hom mony,  
Bot alle muset hit to mouthe and quat hit mene shhulde:  
Mony clerkes in that clos wyt crownes ful brode  
Ther besiet hom a-boute noght to brynge hom in wordes.

Unlike the broken stones left behind by the workmen, from both Augustine’s time in the past and Erkenwald’s in the present, the letters themselves are “fulle verray,” that is, completely whole and intact. Writing contains and conveys history, but even the physical writing itself is not always comprehensible and a translation or explanation is needed. While the aporia in the written record and the turn to the description of the material object might suggest the ability of the physical object to convey historical information, the historicity of the judge’s speech, and its sources in historiography, eventually demonstrates the necessity of written sources to convey history.

377 Mention of gargoyles is very rare in Middle English literature: the Middle English Dictionary cites eleven quotations, most of which are actually come from descriptions of architecture, and not necessarily literature. The two literary quotations are from St. Erkenwald, and from John Lydgate’s later Troy Book, when he is describing the city of Troy.

378 References to marble sarcophagi appear in classical literature, such as Dido’s speech before her death in Ovid’s Heroides when she dictates the verses that should be carved “in tumuli marmore” (VII.227). For a study of Roman carved marble sarcophagi, see Paul Zanker and Bjorn C. Ewald, Living with Myths: The Imagery of Roman Sarcophagi. Trans. Julia Slater. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, in which they trace the development of elaborately carved marble sarcophagi beginning in the second century CE.

379 What could have been meant by runic letters to the fourteenth century author? There are a few examples of inscriptions in Greek and runic characters in England, so it is possible that the author could have been referring to these. In the churchyard of St. Paul’s itself, workmen in 1852 found human remains near a stone with runic markings. It is also possible that this stone, in addition to others, could have been used in the rebuilding of the Romanesque cathedral in 1087, making it even more stable and visible in the medieval period. For more on this stone, see David Stocker, “A Late Anglo-Saxon Graveyard at St. Pauls,” St Paul’s Cathedral before Wren. Ed. John Schofield. Swindon: English Heritage, 254-65. Besides what we would call runic engravings, Greek might also have been described as “roynysshe,” and there are examples of Greek inscriptions from the Roman period throughout England. One such example was found in 1851 in Chester, on the west side of Northgate Street (Francis Haverfield, Catalogue of the Roman Inscribed and Sculptured Stones in the Grovesnor Museum. Chester: Chester and North Wales Archaeological and Historic Society, 1900. p. 21). The description of runic writing on the tomb may in fact reflect a first-hand encounter with strange inscriptions in the landscape, and demonstrate sometimes even the illegibility of written language.

380 Erkenwald ll. 51-56.
Erkenwald, the Judge, and Sources of History

In *St. Erkenwald*, it is not until Erkenwald performs his miraculous reanimating act of prayer—a divine response to the uncanny nature of the incorrupt pagan judge’s body—that the Anglo-Saxons are able to discover his history and rescue it from illegibility. Scholars have written pages upon pages about the moment that Erkenwald reanimates the judge’s body, and the implications of the method and the literary sources that the poet could have used, especially in regard to its similarity to the legend in which Pope Gregory saves the emperor Trajan posthumously when remembering the emperor’s virtue. Scholars have pointed out similarities between the story of *St. Erkenwald* and various versions of the Gregory/Trajan myth: *Jacopo della Lana’s commentary on Dante,* *Dante himself,* *Vincent of Beauvais,* *William Langland’s* *Piers Plowman,* *the Whitby life of Gregory the Great,* *the Legenda Aurea,* *and John of Salisbury.* The myth also appears in Higden’s *Polychronicon*, the full story once, and a reference to it another time in the text. As Emily Steiner says of *St. Erkenwald*, “the poet’s goal is to translate the Gregory/Trajan story—a miracle of Rome—to Anglo-Saxon England; in doing so, he shows how England, through the continuous use of sites like St.

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382 Whatley, “Heathens and Saints,” 334-335.
383 Ibid. 336.
384 Ibid. 340.
387 Morse, *St. Erkenwald* 25-30.
Paul’s, is a place of exceptional salvations." Just as earlier in the poem, when the poet links Augustine and Erkenwald by their similar consecrating and rebuilding of sacred spaces, the very narrative structure of the Gregory/Trajan allusion links Erkenwald with Gregory and his ecclesiastical context.

Yet the judge of St. Erkenwald is different from Trajan in all versions of the story in that he is physically reanimated in the presence of Erkenwald, as well as many others. He also gives a long speech that explains his own history, and that of his historical era, for the witnesses. In the Gregory/Trajan legend, Gregory already knows the story of Trajan and there is no need for further historical information. The judge’s speech in the poem is full of historical information that the onlookers had not known before he speaks. This information appears in chronicles circulating the later Middle Ages that were not around at the time of the historical Erkenwald, like the Polychronicon. This historical speech shows how the continual updating to the written historical record makes previously unintelligible objects comprehensible in the longer context of history.

When the judge gives his oral testimony, he provides exact details of his life to give his audience his proper historical context:

After that Brutus this birghe had buggid on fyrste,
Noght bot fife hundred yere ther aghcene wonyt
Before that kynned your Criste by Cristen accounte
A thousande yere and thritty mo and yet threne aght.
I was of heire and of oyer in the New Troie
In the regne of the riche kynde that rewlit us then,
The bolde Breton Ser Belyn, Ser Berynge was his brothire.
Mony one was the busmare boden hom bitwene


390 In the history of the city of Rome, however, Gregory was also well known for his destruction of idols and statues: there are numerous references in the Mirabilia to remnants of statues that had been destroyed by Gregory.
For hor wrakeful were quil hot wrathe lastyd.
Then was I iuge here enjoynyd in gentil lawe (ll. 207-216)

The judge gives the exact years that he was alive, along with the king during his tenure as judge, as well as the political climate of the kingdom. He gives the date he was alive after Brutus founded New Troy, and also the date he was alive in relation to Christ’s life—both a secular and sacred measure of time. Crucially, the judge was alive at the time of Belyn, or Belinus, who was a key figure in the architectural myths of Geoffrey of Monmouth. As we will remember, it was Belinus who founded the British Caerleon, as Higden writes in the *Polychronicon*. Belinus, along with his brother Brennius, besieged and conquered Rome during Belinus’ reign. Thus, in the mythical historiography, the pagan judge comes at a time where British and Roman civilizations meet.

The judge’s account of his own life, and his just execution of laws, also is reminiscent of another British king, Dunwallo Molimicius, an account of whom Higden includes in the chapter before he discusses Belin and Brennius:


[tyme Donwallo Molimicius, that was the duke’s sone of Cornwaile, bygan to reignee among [the] Britouns; and whanne the kynges were i-slawe of Engelond, of Wales, and of Scotlond, he regned allone in the ilond, and made hym a dyademe and a corone of gold, and made [certayne] lawes that beeth i-cleped Molimicius his lawes, the whiche lawes afterward Gildas torne into Latyn, and afterward kyng Aluredes made hem to be torned out of Latyn into Englissche. And whanne this Molimicius hadde i-regned fourty yere he deide, and was i-
buried by the temple of Acord, in the citee Trinouantum, that is Londoun. This is he that yaf priueliche and fredom to temples, to plowes, to cities, and to weies that beeth therto.]\textsuperscript{393}

There are superficial similarities between the judge of \textit{St. Erkenwald} and Dunwallo Molumitius—similarities that would suggest an influence via Higden, and not directly from Geoffrey of Monmouth. Some of the similarities are in both Geoffrey and Higden: the golden crown that Dunwallo and the judge wear, tenure in power for forty years, and, most significantly, burial in a pagan temple in London, or Trinovantum/New Troy. The Trojan connection is significant, because in his speech to Erkenwald the judge refers to London as Troy three times in the nine lines when he discusses the honor conferred on him upon his death:

\begin{quote}
And for I was ryghtwis and reken and redy of the laghe
Quen I deghed for dul denyed alle Troye.
Alle menyd my dethe, the more and the lasse
And thus to bounty my body thai buriet in golde,
Cladden me for the curtest that courte couthe then holde,
In mantel for the mekest and monlokest on benche,
Gurden me for the gouernor and graythist of Troie,
Furrid me for the finest of faithe me wytinne.
For the honour of myn honeste of heighest emprise
Thai coronyd me the kidde kynge of kene iustises
Ther euer wos tronyd in Troye, other trowid euer shulde,
And for I rewarded euer right thai right me the septre.\textsuperscript{394}
\end{quote}

While it is clear in the poem that during his life the judge was simply a judge, not a king or even a knight, the judge’s eventual accession as a king after his death and his focus on law also is reminiscent of Dunwallo, who became a king later on in life through his merit, not though heritage. \textit{St. Erkenwald’s} portrayal of the judge’ journey to renown suggests that these echoes come from Higden, not from Geoffrey. In the \textit{HRB}, Dunwallo is clearly

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{393} Poly. III.lv P. 246-7.
\textsuperscript{394} Erkenwald ll. 245-256.
\end{footnotes}
the son of the king of Cornwall, whereas in Higden he is the son of the duke of Cornwall, and eventually becomes the king over the course of his life. The judge in *St. Erkenwald*, interestingly, becomes a judge under a “duke noble,”\textsuperscript{395} not the king Belin, and in this capacity the judge helped make “this place was putte al-togeder,”\textsuperscript{396} a possible reference to Dunwallo’s work of uniting the kingdoms of Britain under his rule. Higden’s portrayal of Dunwallo also emphasizes Dunwallo’s capacity as a lawgiver. While Geoffrey of Monmouth says that he established laws called the Molmutine laws, which were still *celebrantur inter Anglos*,\textsuperscript{397} his emphasis is decidedly non-textual, and only comes in passing. Higden, on the other hand, pays close attention to the mode of transmission of the laws throughout time: these laws were composed by Dunwallo, written down and preserved in Latin by Gildas, and translated into English by Alfred. And, while the judge does emphasize that he was not indeed a king, his speech about what happened to him after his death admits that the people declared him a king after his death. The focus on the judge, his authority to rule, and his execution of the law, treated in detail by many scholars,\textsuperscript{398} makes sense when considered in the broader British context that the judge’s speech invites the reader into, and a British context that is tinted with a Higdonean rather than Galfridian lens. While the judge is not a one-for-one depiction of any quasi-historical figure from any sort of chronicle, as a character he stands in for British mythical history, especially with his detailed historical details of the time of his life and his continued reference to London as Troy. He participates in the tradition of mythical

\textsuperscript{395} *Erkenwald* l. 227.
\textsuperscript{396} Ibid. l. 228.
\textsuperscript{397} *HRB* II p. 47.
\textsuperscript{398} For example, Thorlac Turville-Petre argues that the *Erkenwald*-poet demonstrates an easy familiarity with legal language, and uses it in his description of the judge’s rulings in “*St. Erkenwald and the Judicial Oath*,” *Notes and Queries* 55.1 (2008), 19-21.
British history, initially popularized by Geoffrey of Monmouth, but brought to new heights of popularity by Higden in the *Polychronicon* (and to further accessibility eventually through Trevisa’s translation of it).

The judge and his oral testimony, only accessible through divine intervention through a saint stand in for the lack of chronicles and written record that one would ordinarily look to in order to find information on past events in antiquity. Erkenwald’s supernatural act of supplication helps to decode the unintelligible past (evidenced by the material objects of the judge’s tomb, body, and clothes) and make it accessible to his Anglo-Saxon contemporaries—in a similar way to the author of the poem who makes the distant Anglo-Saxon past of Erkenwald decipherable for his fourteenth-century audience, a tale that is not found in any chronicle they have. Erkenwald’s religious practice, and his exercising of his clerical duties does not just save souls—it also symbolically relates and then redeems history.

The *Erkenwald*-poet, then, by writing down this miracle story of many layers of history, engages in exactly the kind of *historia*-making, even if fictional, that Higden praises at the beginning of his magnum opus:


[I praye, who schulde now knowe emperours, wonder of philosofres, other folwe the apostles, but hir noble dedes and hir wonder werkes were i-write in stories and so i-kept in mynde? Who schulde knowe Lucilium, but Seneca in his pistles hadde}
i-write his dedes? Writinge of poetes is more worthy to preisyng of emperoures than al the welthe of this worlde, and riches that they welde while they were alyue. For storie is wytnesse of tyme, mynde of lyf, messager of eldnesse; story weldeth passing doynges, storie putteth forth hire professoures. Dedes that wolde be lost storie ruleth; dedes that wolde flee out of mynde, storye clepeth agen; dedes that wolde deie, storye kepeth hem euermore.

The physical object cannot speak for itself and proclaim its own significance, even if it lasts for centuries, like the Roman stones in the *Polychronicon*, or the mysterious tomb and body in *St. Erkenwald*. The existence of the poem *St. Erkenwald*, like chronicles, reveals the singular importance of the written word in the transmission of historical information. The judge might speak for himself, but in the world of the poem his body, the material object, dissolves into dust. In the end, his narrative is perpetuated only through the words of the poem itself.

\[399\text{ Poly. 4-7.}\]
Coda

The Historians and the Antiquaries: Ruins and Historical Narrative in Early Modern England

As we have seen in the pages of this dissertation, ruins, in their impermanence and mystery, turned the medieval observer to literature in order to discover the past. The ruins of Rome and early England inspired them to read and create literary artifacts in the face of material destruction or decay. But what happened when the intact ecclesiastical buildings, in which these medieval writers lived and worked in, themselves became ruins of a not-so-distant past? In Early Modern England, the ruin was a particularly poignant, ever-present image after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. From 1536-1540, a series of legal and administrative actions on the part of Henry VIII expelled monks and nuns from their religious houses, seized monastic lands, and forcefully destroyed religious buildings and imagery. This violent destruction was often thoughtful and planned—going for parts of the building that would prevent future rebuilding efforts, for example. Such efforts to destroy these buildings were not the work of a single day. Skilled workmen spent several weeks, or even months, demolishing and ultimately rendering these buildings unusable—Chertsey Abbey, for instance, took three months to disassemble.400

This landscape of swift and cataclysmic ruin permeated the English sense of history. Margaret Aston writes,

The spectacle of physical loss, which already in the 1530s motivated antiquarian researches, was thereafter a continuous element in the English countryside. The landscape held a series of signposts to the destroyed monastic era, and they led to nostalgia and poetry, as well as to antiquarianism and history. From this time on, the ruins of the monasteries entered into English consciousness of the past. \(^\text{401}\)

The image of loss etched onto the landscape indeed seemed to spur the interest of those curious about the not-so-distant past, which had been seemingly pushed farther into the recesses of memory through swift and stern destruction. The sheer number of ecclesiastical ruins in the wake of the Dissolution profoundly colored English historical writing and antiquarianism. As Aston remarks, “Henry VIII’s monastic ruins proved formative as well as evocative, because they stood for a thousand years of English history, shut off and largely destroyed.” \(^\text{402}\) In other words, the Middle Ages themselves became a ruin to be examined, wondered at, and deciphered. It is the ruination of the Middle Ages that Kenneth Clark claimed was responsible for the advent of antiquarianism: “Antiquarians appeared long before Gothic architecture had fallen into general disfavour. Perhaps they owe their origin to the Reformation, for they saw monasteries destroyed and libraries dispersed, and were moved to perpetuate their vanishing glories.” \(^\text{403}\)

But what are antiquarians? And did they only appear after the Reformation? Scholarship on medieval historiography will often describe a certain interest or textual choice of the author as “antiquarian,” presumably to distinguish it from a typical “medieval” historiographical interest. Ordinarily, a choice that would be deemed “antiquarian” would be some description of a ruin, architecture, or ancient objects in

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\(^{401}\) Aston 232. For more on antiquarian reactions to the Dissolution, see pp. 232-38 of that article.  
\(^{402}\) Ibid. 255.  
medieval writing. In Antonia Gransden’s *Historical Writing in England*, Gervase of Tilbury had a “strongly antiquarian trend in his thought” because of his desire to demonstrate control of ancient land.\(^{404}\) The anonymous historian monk of Bury, by virtue of desiring to know more about their abbey’s origins and architecture, “sometimes had a genuine antiquarian curiosity.”\(^{405}\) When the Ramsey chronicler wrote about a vanished building, his interest in the vanished traces of the past “indicates that… he was not writing for sightseers, but primarily as an antiquarian.”\(^{406}\) Because of his landscape and topographical descriptions, “Nennius had an antiquarian interest in the countryside.”\(^{407}\) William Kynan-Wilson describes the “remarkable antiquarianism” of the medieval description of Rome, the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*. In Gregory’s *Narracio*, playing on the *Mirabilia*, Kynan-Wilson writes that “the author of the *Narracio* takes the idea of being an antiquarian to its extremes through the figure of Gregory; he ridicules those who are overly interested in pagan deities and too willing to accept the first story that they hear.”\(^{408}\) Yet what is an antiquarian, and how is one different from a historian? Were there antiquarians in the Middle Ages?

This question is difficult to answer, partly because the definition of antiquarian itself is nebulous. In Elizabethan England, the antiquarian William Camden declared that his goal was “to restore antiquity to Britaine, and Britain to his antiquity,”\(^{409}\) implying that Britain’s history had undergone a loss, and an act of recovery was necessary, placing

\(^{404}\) Gransden 229.
\(^{405}\) Ibid. 335.
\(^{406}\) Ibid. 253.
\(^{407}\) Ibid. 9.
\(^{408}\) Kynan-Wilson, 363.
the antiquary in the position of recovering lost knowledge. In 1950, Arnaldo Momigliano
wrote that the antiquarian is a “student of the past who is not quite a historian.” As such,
the antiquarian doesn’t follow chronological narrative, and instead describes and collects
things he sees and reads. For Momigliano, antiquarians did not engage in literary
pursuits—antiquarian endeavors are essentially a non-literary genre, in contrast to
history, which is a literary genre. Yet subsequent scholarly descriptions of antiquarians
acknowledge the role of literary reconstruction in the antiquarian’s endeavor, and thus the
role that imagination played in their writings. Peter Miller writes that “one of the
antiquary’s tools that has, generally, been less appreciated is imagination. No attempt to
reconstruct the past […] was possible without the capacity to envision the broken and
fragmentary made whole again. It is this act of imagination that lies at the heart of the
antiquary’s reconstructive ambition.” Angus Vine also acknowledges the role of
imagination in antiquarian writings, when he describes antiquarianism as a “dynamic,
recuperative, restrictive response to the past. And for this reason it was also an essentially
imaginative response to the past.” Stephen Bann emphasizes the importance of the
material and physical remnants of the past for the antiquarian project when he uses
Nietzsche’s conception of the antiquarian as one, in Bann’s words, whose “experience of
the past is…modeled directly on sensory experience.”

Elsewhere, Vine also defines antiquarianism as “a form of curiosity about the past.” (18) Another capacious definition of the
antiquarian can be found in Megan Cook’s The Poet and the Antiquaries: Chaucerian Scholarship and the Rise of Literary History, 1532-1635 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), when she writes that antiquarians had “professional or abiding
interest in the details of the English past,” and that the antiquarian was interested in the past for the past’s sake (5).
The antiquarian’s emphasis on the material object is perhaps most thoroughly examined in Rosemary Sweet’s *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. She emphasizes what came to be seen as a key feature of antiquarianism: the reliance on material objects in historical inquiry. She writes that there was a strong resistance within the antiquarian tradition to the idea that antiquities should be subordinated to the elaboration of some ulterior argument. In their abhorrence of system and theory, and in their emphasis upon allowing the antiquities to ‘speak for themselves,’ they foreshadowed many aspects of the modern pursuit of historical objectivity.\(^{414}\)

Sweet also makes the claim that eighteenth-century antiquarians, in their reliance upon material objects instead of textual record, sets the stage for nineteenth-century empiricism.\(^{415}\) Antiquarians particularly eschewed typical histories:

> The literary materials upon which the historian conventionally depended were easily shown to be suspect; the testimony of coins, inscriptions or statues, however, could not be forged or tampered with in the same way. The value of a history could now be judged by the quantity of public documents, inscriptions and coins examined by the historian.\(^{416}\)

While Sweet’s work focuses specifically on the eighteenth century, her description of the antiquarian as someone who relies on the material remains to discover history could also easily describe earlier antiquarians. For example, the sixteenth-century poet Daniel Rogers lamented the gaps in the textual histories of Britain, and the loss of classical Roman histories of Britain. According to Vine, Rogers “asserts that these textual gaps can nevertheless be filled by coins, marbles, and monuments. Where authors are silent, he

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\(^{415}\) Ibid. xvi.

\(^{416}\) Ibid. 2.
writes, coins often speak.”

For Rogers, the object is capable of filling in the textual gaps. Thus, Rogers’ antiquarianism displays a perspective that diverges sharply from that of the medieval author. Medieval writers and compilers, in their continual appeal to literary sources, do not exhibit antiquarian tendencies as antiquarianism has been traditionally understood.

But if medieval writers were not necessarily antiquarians, we must also consider that some Early Modern “antiquarians” might not necessarily have been antiquarians as traditionally understood either. I will now briefly examine two early modern antiquaries, John Leland (c. 1530-1552) and Archbishop Matthew Parker (1504-1575). Both were active in collecting manuscripts and examining libraries during and after the Dissolution, and the main setting for their work was the ruin of libraries and monasteries. While both men looked to material objects for their historical knowledge, their projects were also influenced by an intense desire to produce coherent historical narratives. With this emphasis on creating a continual historical narrative in the face of the historical and ecclesiastical break with Rome and the creation of the Anglican Church, men like Parker and Leland actually modeled their historical efforts on the medieval historiographical texts that they searched for and preserved. While it has been argued that antiquarians and early modern historians consciously modeled their methods on classical sources, the examples of Parker and Leland demonstrate that they were also closely reading medieval histories. Their conscious shaping of the materials they found indicates a continuity in the

\[\text{Vine } 32.\]
\[\text{For example, Joseph Levine has stated that the antiquarian enterprise as a whole in Early Modern England was primarily influenced by classical texts, and he “suggest[s] that the methods that they employed and developed throughout the period took continual sustenance from classical scholarship and learning” in } \text{Humanism and History: Origins of Early Modern English Historiography} \text{(Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987), 13.}\]
practice of history from the medieval to the Early Modern period in form, if not in content.

In the sixteenth-century, Matthew Parker, once personal priest to Anne Boleyn and later Archbishop of Canterbury, collected ancient English manuscripts by the hundreds in order to bolster the new Anglican Church’s claims to an autonomous history apart from Rome. His project aimed to show that the Anglican Church was not a break, but a continuation of a pure English religion. Parker’s work could be summarized by this ideological assertion of John Foxe in 1571: “the religion presently taught and professed in the Church…is no new reformation of things lately begonne, which were not before, but rather a reduction of the Church to the Pristine state of olde conformitie, which once it had, and almost lost by discontinuance of a fewe later yeares.” Parker and his circle aimed to prove this “olde conformitie” through their collection and study of medieval English manuscripts. A 1568 broadsheet from the Privy Council gave Parker the authority to collect medieval manuscripts, described as “auncient recordes or monuments” and “monuments of antiquitie” to aid him in his project. Crucially, this project relies upon destruction and ruin—these manuscripts were scattered because of Henry VIII’s Dissolution of the Monasteries. In all, Parker amassed more than five hundred manuscripts over his lifetime, most while he was Archbishop of Canterbury. While the collection contains material in many languages, genres, time periods, and

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420 Discussed by Butler, p. 155.
styles, the particular interest of Matthew Parker and his circle was to show the English church’s pure origins before its subsequent late medieval corruption. Part of this effort was to demonstrate continuity across a perceived rupture, in order to give the new national church authority and credibility. As Emily Butler writes, Parker and his circle needed to emphasize the temporal divide because of the creation of the new church, but also wanted to emphasize continuity: “[the] need to both emphasize and bridge rupture frames an innovative reimagining of the medieval past within the antiquarian milieu of the sixteenth century.”

Butler has argued that Parker and his circle emulated the medieval reading and scribal practices that they encountered in the texts they collected, especially in the typeface that they used in their printed editions of texts. These typefaces, meant to imitate Anglo-Saxon style letters, constitute what Butler calls the presentation of the texts in their “ancient” and “monumental” forms.

The presentation of ancient materials in a consciously old-looking medium was one way that the physical form of the text helped Parker and his circle advance their cause of continuity. Yet the texts themselves and the historiographical practice that they encountered in the manuscripts also impacted the way that Parker and his circle wrote their histories. Matthew Parker himself wrote a history of the English church, *De Antiquitate Britannicae Ecclesiae*, which is also an account of the seventy archbishops of Canterbury. By virtue alone of including all of the previous archbishops, including himself (avowedly not a Roman Catholic) Parker betrays no sense of rupture or change. As Diarmaid MacCulloch writes, Parker’s history “would have given little hint to the

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422 Butler, “Recollecting” 146.
423 Ibid. 157.
uninitiated reader that the Reformation had ever happened. Rather than a simple collection of facts, manuscripts, or antiquities, Parker and his circle consciously and carefully curated the materials they obtained from history in order to advance their argument for continuity instead of outright rupture. For example, although Parker obtained copies of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, in English and Latin, Parker’s circle paid more attention to the linguistic aspect of the Old English Bede, and used the Latin exemplars as aids to learning the Old English. Bede’s Roman sympathies, and emphasis on the Roman church’s role in the Christianization of England, would obviously not serve Parker’s purposes. If an antiquarian does not believe, as Sweet writes, that “antiquities should be subordinated to the elaboration of some ulterior argument,” then Parker looks like less like an antiquarian and more like a medieval historian in his effort to “mend the broken chain of our history,” in the words of William of Malmesbury. All of Parker’s collecting was meant to show a continuity in the English Church that was not dependent on the primacy of Rome: the early Church in England was in fact a pure, uncorrupted version of English Christianity that the increasing influence of Rome defiled.

Another early modern antiquarian was John Leland, the Tudor antiquary who wrote of his journeys through England observing antiquities and finding manuscripts in

426 See Cambridge, Corpus Christi MS 359, a thirteenth-century manuscript containing Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum, De natura rerum*, and Abbot Cuthbert of Wearmouth-Jarrow’s *De obitu Bedae*. On f.73r, there is an Anglo-Saxon passage in a sixteenth-century hand, which the catalogue suggests indicates that Parker and his circle used these later Latin texts in their study of Old English.
427 Sweet, xvi.
429 One example is Parker’s use and misuse of Aelfric, as Aaron J. Kleist has shown in “Matther Parker’s Manipulation (?) of Aelfric of Eynsham,” in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 105.2 (April 2006), 312-327, summarized thus “Parker cited Aelfric as an authority in a way both scrupulously accurate and strikingly out of context” (313). Another example is Matthew Parker’s deduction that the Greek manuscripts in his collection belonged to the early Anglo-Saxon Archbishop of Canterbury, which is refuted and discussed in Christopher de Hamel, “Archbishop Matthew Parker and his Imaginary Library of Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury,” *Lambeth Palace Library Annual Review* 2002 (London, 2003), 62-6.
the 1530s and 1540s.430 His interest in his travels, while focusing on antiquities like coins and stones, ultimately found their meaning in *textual* sources, which has led some scholars to disparage his true “antiquarian” efforts.431 Leland’s obvious penchant for textual material is recorded when he describes his encounter with the library at Glastonbury:

I betook myself at once to the library (which is not open to all comers) in order to turn over the relics of venerable antiquity, of which the number there is not easily matched anywhere else in Britain. Indeed, I had hardly crossed the threshold when the mere sight of the ancient books left me awestruck, stupefied in fact, and because of this I stood hesitating a little while. Then, having saluted the *genius loci*, I spent some days searching through all the bookcases with the greatest curiosity.432

While Leland’s initial reaction is to mark the beauty of the physical space of the library, he then does not hesitate to spend days examining the texts themselves for his research.

It was this textual research that informed Leland’s antiquarian endeavors. Like those of Parker, Leland’s projects also had a more polemical bent than simply a collecting of old things. Angus Vine has argued that Leland’s written works had a goal of “forg[ing] a new and authoritative history, which bulwarked English traditions, asserted English autonomy, and defended both from Continental attacks.”433 Leland might have felt extra pressure, for instance, to verify Arthurian legend, because of the Tudors’ political use of the Arthurian legend.434 Upon his accession to the throne after defeating Richard III at Bosworth, Henry VII attempted to legitimize his claim by forging a

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431 Joan Evans writes that Leland’s work was “entirely and narrowly documentary,” in *A History of the Society of Antiquaries* (p. 3) thus casting doubt disparagingly on Leland and others like him as antiquarians. Angus Vine has since argued that Leland did in fact use material evidence in his work (*In Defiance of Time*, 23), yet the point remains that perhaps early antiquarians were more influenced by their medieval predecessors than either they or the scholars working on them have wanted to admit.
432 Leland, *De viribus illustribus*, qtd. Carley 266.
433 Vine 25.
connection to Arthur because of his Welsh heritage. He even named his oldest son Arthur, in hopes that England would once again have a King Arthur. Henry VIII, despite being Henry and not Arthur, still clung to the Arthurian connection. Yet the veracity of the historical Arthur had been sharply called into question by Polydore Vergil, who dismissed King Arthur as nothing but a fantasy.\textsuperscript{435} This dismissal threatened the English monarch’s royal dynastic claims, and in doing so threatened his claims as head of the new, fragile English church following the Act of Supremacy in 1534. Thus Leland’s intellectual stakes are high—his is not simply a desire to explore England’s antiquities, but a need to create a coherent, convincing narrative of the antiquity and veracity of British history to justify the present political and religious environment.

What Parker and Leland had in common was their zeal for collecting and examining medieval English manuscripts. Leland, in his quest for the historical Arthur, cites Gildas, Geoffrey of Monmouth, William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, Matthew Paris, and Ranulf Higden, among many others.\textsuperscript{436} Parker collected manuscripts of most of these same historians, along with theologians, poets, and exegetes.\textsuperscript{437} In their reading of medieval historiography, they must have noticed the medieval historiographical bent towards continuity, not rupture, which aligned with their own ideas of the goals of the English Reformation. This Reformation was not a break, but a continuation of the pure English church, enabled by a monarch who claimed an Arthurian connection, thus providing dynastic connection to the British past. Parker and Leland, as

\textsuperscript{435} See James P. Carley, “Polydore Vergil and John Leland on King Arthur: The Battle of the Books,” \textit{Interpretations} 15.2 (1984), 86-100. Carley also notes that besides Leland, other patriotic Englishmen attacked Polydore Vergil for his refusal to acknowledge Arthur. For example, in the \textit{Acts and Monumentes}, John Foxe alleges that after looking through manuscripts, Vergil chose the material best suited for his purposes and then burned the ones that didn’t, and for this deserves eternal punishment in hell (92). In this reading Foxe then displaces some of the blame for the destruction of the Dissolution from Henry VIII onto the Catholic, Italian Polydore.

\textsuperscript{436} Carley “Battle of the Books” 89.

\textsuperscript{437} Parker’s list of books is found in the Parker Register, Cambridge, Trinity Hall MS 29.
antiquarians, were as much influenced by narratives of continuity that they read as by a desire to preserve the physical manuscripts they collected. Their antiquarianism, thus, is profoundly medieval in style, while reformist in substance.

Despite the ruined monasteries and churches around them, early modern English antiquaries such as Parker and Leland sought to emphasize the continuity from the medieval past in order to legitimize their own historical claims. Instead of embracing discontinuity, they sought literary evidence for a continuous chain of events up to their present day by picking and choosing their literary sources. Like the medieval historians they collected and read, these antiquarians sought to mend the break they had witnessed in the ruin of the Middle Ages.
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