THE BIBLE IN *FONTES ANGLO-SAXONICI*

D.G. SCRAGG
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE,
UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

The project *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* is subtitled *A Register of Written Sources Used by Authors in Anglo-Saxon England.* Since the ultimate and pre-eminent written source for any writer in the medieval period was the Bible, detailed analysis of the use of Scripture is of the greatest importance to the project. It is the purpose of this brief essay to show the way in which uses made of the Bible are recorded in *Fontes* and to give some indication of the value that the information collected will have for future generations of scholars.

The project was established in 1984 to identify and list in a database register precise details of all written sources incorporated, quoted, translated or adapted anywhere in English or Latin texts which were written, or which are likely to have been written, in Anglo-Saxon England, including those by foreign authors. Also included are English or Latin works which were written abroad certainly or arguably by Anglo-Saxons or by foreigners who were drawing on materials which they had obtained, or were likely to have obtained, in Anglo-Saxon England. Clearly it is a very large task, and for it the project’s directors have enlisted the help of a team of Anglo-Saxonists throughout the world who are contributing their specialist knowledge of individual texts. Since 1988 the database has expanded steadily.¹

The pursuit of written sources has been an established academic procedure in Anglo-Saxon studies for well over a century, but the terminology employed has frequently differed from writer to writer, even to the extent that the term ‘source’ itself has been used in different senses. One of the first objects of *Fontes* is to clarify and regularize the source-hunter’s system of referencing. Two necessary terms adopted by the Register are immediate source, defined as the work in which the material took the form in which it was used for the text being sourced, and antecedent source, defined as a work which was drawn on, whether immediately or not, by the

¹ A list of the texts sourced each year since 1988 is included in the annual bibliography in the periodical *Anglo-Saxon England*. For details of the history, management structure and database organization of the project, see my ‘An introduction to *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*’, *Old English Newsletter*, 26.3 (1993), B.1–8.
author of an immediate source. In the majority of cases, the citing of an immediate source for a text or part of a text is sufficient to constitute the whole of the entry for that text or part-text in the Register, without reference to any known antecedent source, because the primary objective is to establish the books used by Anglo-Saxon writers rather than to trace the history of western European thought. Only when no immediate source can be identified are the antecedent sources to be cited. But an exception to this rule applies in the case of the Bible. Contributors to the Register have been asked to note all quotations from or paraphrases of the Bible, marking them either as an immediate source—in other words not taken over from another source or taken over from another source but altered in a way that shows independent knowledge of Scripture—or as an antecedent source, that is, taken over from another source without a change that shows such independent knowledge. Only biblical echoes, as too numerous to be recorded, are excluded. When the Register is complete, it will therefore contain an index of all quotations from and paraphrases of the Bible which are recorded in Old English and Anglo-Latin literature.

Because the text of the Bible was far from fixed in the early Middle Ages, contributors are asked to make further, more precise, identifications in respect of the biblical citations that they note. Any Vulgate readings that do not accord with those of Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem, ed. R. Weber, 2nd edn (Stuttgart: Deutsches Bibelgesellschaft, 1975), but which can be shown to agree with another known version of the Bible and are sufficiently substantial departures to help identify the author's biblical text, must be noted, as must the use of the Old Latin version. If the text is the Psalter, the contributor is asked to note whether the version is Roman, Gallican or iuxta Hebraeos whenever the distinction can be made.

Although considerable progress has been made since 1988 in entering data onto the Fontes database, the project is still in its infancy. Nonetheless, the database has been programmed from the beginning to provide comprehensive indexes, and these can already be used to provide comparative data from the texts entered. As the body of data grows, the more useful the indexes will become. This is particularly important in the case of the Bible, because not only authors but also copyists throughout the period might be expected to have a knowledge of the Bible, at the very least from its use in the liturgy. (One of the offshoots of the Fontes project has been the compiling of a bibliography of the liturgy in Anglo-Latin manuscripts, amounting to 700 entries,2 a statistic which gives some

2 The bibliography, part of a projected complete bibliography of Anglo-Latin writings, was compiled by Alicia Correa with the help of a Leverhulme grant. It is held on disc at the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge.
idea of the significance of the liturgy, if any were needed.) Since the biblical text was so fluid, authors working with patristic and Carolingian sources and scribes copying texts would frequently find biblical readings at variance with those with which they themselves were familiar, and this might lead them to alter such readings. I shall devote the rest of this piece to showing how such alterations can be proved in two Old English texts which I have recently edited.

My first instance of scribes’ awareness of different biblical traditions may be seen in a Latin biblical tag quoted in Vercelli homily V:

Data est mihi omnes potestas in celo (= cælo) et in terra (Matthew 28:18). ³

Three manuscript copies of this homily have survived: (1) Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare CXVII (the Vercelli Book), dated to the beginning of the last quarter of the tenth century; (2) Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 340, dated circa 1000; (3) Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 198, dated in the first half of the eleventh century. Only in the first of these is the citation as I have printed it. In the other two omnes appears as omnis. Omnis is the Vulgate reading, but omnes is a variant reading recorded elsewhere. It is the reading, for example, of a number of early bibles, including two of British provenance which are glossed in Old English, the Lindisfarne Gospels (late seventh century) and the Rushworth or Macregol Gospels (Irish, early ninth century). Close examination of the textual affinities of the three surviving copies of Vercelli homily V shows that the Vercelli version is a better witness to the original form of the homily, the other two being drawn from a common archetype which represented a partially revised version. ⁴ It would appear that the author of Vercelli homily V (or his source) knew the non-Vulgate form of this biblical text (a version perhaps current in England at an early period), and that the reviser of the homily whose version appears in Bodley 340 and Corpus 198 recognized that the reading was non-standard for his day and regularized it. This single example may offer one tiny clue to a particular biblical tradition in the Anglo-Saxon period, but when the Register’s indexes are complete, so that we can see where and in what form this biblical verse appears throughout the period, we may know much more. And that further knowledge may not be confined to the history of the Bible. It may tell us something of the date and provenance of Vercelli homily V in its earliest form.

In this example, it has been assumed that a copyist, faced with a familiar biblical phrase in an unfamiliar form, ‘corrected’ the

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⁴ See Ibid., 108.
reading. Such an assumption is based on the proven interference of copying scribes in the transmission of quotations from the Bible in homiletic material. For a complex example, I turn to Vercelli homily III, transmitted in the same manuscripts as the homily just discussed. All three copies, plus two others, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 162 (early eleventh century) and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343 (twelfth century), have the Latin tag:

Beatus ille seruus quem . . .

followed by what purports to be an English translation:

Eadige beoð þa þeowas . . .

The Latin is from Matthew 24:26, but the English is a translation of the similar (but plural) Luke 12:37:

Beati serui illi quos.

Bodley 340 contains a large number of marginal and interlinear alterations made by a Rochester scribe in the middle of the eleventh century, including two to the Beatus tag which have produced the mixed form:

Beatus illi seruus quos. 5

It so happens that Vercelli homily III is a fairly slavish translation of an extant Latin homily, so that we have the opportunity to see that the source also has the Luke reading. Whoever translated the Latin homily was right in providing an English translation of Luke, and it was presumably not he who wrote in the Latin of Matthew. This is not simply a case of mistranslation. Early in the transmission of the piece (before the copying of all five surviving manuscripts) someone disturbed the biblical reading, either by adding the Latin of Matthew or, more likely in view of the pattern of the rest of the homily, by altering the existing Luke reading in Latin to that of Matthew, perhaps because this was one that was more familiar to him, or perhaps because he misunderstood abbreviations in the Latin and expanded them to the wrong reading. And finally in the alterations in Bodley 340 we have clear evidence of an eleventh-century reader’s awareness of the discrepancy that he found between the Latin and English versions.

Such examples are fairly widespread in the homiletic tradition, and they show how easily common biblical phrases might be altered

5 For details see The Vercelli Homilies, 77, ll.71 ff., and note.
by copying scribes. It is worth observing that the survival of five copies of any text from the pre-Conquest period is rare. Had only a single copy survived, especially one that was a fair copy of the final blended version of Bodley 340, we should be even more baffled than we are now by the sequence of events that had produced such a reading. It is alterations by such ‘thinking’ copyists, who recognized discrepancies in the texts that they copied and tried to improve them, rather than errors made by mechanical scribes, that give us our greatest insights into knowledge of the Bible in the period.

The foundation of scholarship on biblical quotations in Old English literature was laid almost a hundred years ago by Albert Cook, and there has been little advance on his work since.⁶ Now the Fontes register is using modern technology to build a considerably more sophisticated bank of detailed information, so that scholars in the twenty-first century will have a far greater knowledge than hitherto of the Bible in Anglo-Saxon England. Much work remains to be done on the register, but a most satisfactory start has been made. It is hoped, for example, that all surviving vernacular homilies (numbering some hundreds of items) and a large part of the corpus of Anglo-Latin verse will be sourced by 1996. By the end of the century, scholars will have a significant new research resource on which to draw.
