Christianity: an imperialist and opportunist religion of Roman origin

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Abstract:

In the decades after Jesus's death, the Apostle Paul wrote many letters that are now part of the New Testament of the Christian Bible. Paul was a Roman citizen and sent these letters to small communities of Christians living throughout the Roman Empire. The letters show us that Paul and his fellow Christians were still figuring out exactly what being a Christian meant. Issues related to the exact relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and between Christianity and the Roman government, were prominent topics of discussion.

Keywords: roman, origin, christinaity

Judaism had received the status of a legal religion in the Roman Empire with formal protections. Although Christianity developed out of Jewish traditions, it had no such legal protections. Christians were occasionally persecuted—formally punished—for their beliefs during the first two centuries CE. But the Roman state's official position was generally to ignore Christians unless they clearly challenged imperial authority.

Rome becomes Christian

In 313 CE, the emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which granted Christianity—as well as most other religions—legal status. While this was an important development in the history of Christianity, it was not a total replacement of traditional Roman beliefs with Christianity.

In 325, Constantine called the Council of Nicaea, which was a gathering of Christian leaders to determine the formal—or orthodox—beliefs of Christianity. The result of this council was the Nicene Creed, which laid out the agreed upon beliefs of the council.

In 380 CE, the emperor Theodosius issued the Edict of Thessalonica, which made Christianity, specifically Nicene Christianity, the official religion of the Roman Empire. Most other Christian sects were deemed heretical, lost their legal status, and had their properties confiscated by the Roman state.

Stop and consider: How did the Roman Empire shape early Christianity?

Conclusion

The Roman Empire did not become Christianized overnight. Roman religious beliefs changed slowly over time. At the time the Western Roman Empire fell in 476 CE, Christianity was still spreading. It is also important to remember that Christianity itself did not appear suddenly or fully-formed. Christianity grew out of Jewish traditions and was shaped by Roman cultural and political structures for several centuries.

To take one lasting example, the head of the Roman Catholic Church—the Pope—takes his title from the old Roman office of pontifex maximus—the high priest. Roman culture was not wholly replaced, but was often repurposed as it came into contact with other peoples and cultures.

Christianity was deeply influenced by both Judaism and Roman cultural institutions. We can't fully understand the development of the Christian religion without putting it into these contexts! The earliest date proposed for the score is 66-70: during the first Jewish war against Rome, the Christian Jews of Jerusalem leave Judea and take refuge in Pella, a city of Perea (Eusebius of Caesarea, Ecclesiastical History III 5, 3). Yet Judeo-Christianity remains alive in Judea beyond 70, among Ebionites and Nazarites. Is it then necessary to remember the years 85-100, when Samuel the Little writes at the request of Gamaliel II the twelfth "blessing" of the Birkat ha-minim, - in fact a curse in which are cursed minims, heretics. But the term minim does not explicitly refer to Christian Jews, who will be referred to as such only later, in the fourth century, when will be introduced into the curse the term of Noçerim, which can be likened to "Nazarite". Even if the minims are Christian Jews, they are considered as internal enemies, and not external, belonging to another religion. Should we locate the score towards 135, which sees the end of the second Jewish war? This is the moment when Justin dialogues with Rabbi Tryphon: he recognizes the Jewish roots of Christianity, but at the same time the Christian and the rabbi leave each other on a statement of failure. Yet the theology of Justin's logos is considered characteristic of certain Jewish currents by Daniel Boyarin, Border Lines, 2004 (French translation) The score of Judaism and Christianity, Paris, 2011). Moreover, in Apology, Christianity is a barbaric wisdom, like Judaism. A date after Justin? For twenty years, the question has stirred many Anglo-American historians of the Parting of the Ways. The existence of positive interactions between Jews and Christians well after 135 leads them to propose the Council of Nicaea in 325 (Alan Crown), or even the estab-

lishment of Christianity as a state religion by Theodosius I in 380 (see some Contributors to AH Becker's book, AY Reed, The Ways That Never Parted, Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, Minneapolis (MN), 2003). In fact, Judaism is not reduced to the Sages; the synagogues are all controlled by the rabbis; Positive contacts existed around the synagogues as well as churches. However, positive interactions should not be overly solicited: in the time of Leo the Great, in the fifth century, the Christians of Rome adopted the fast of Yom Kippur; can we say that Judaism and Christianity are not then separated? And interactions are attested much later, for example in the eleventh century, when editors of Esther's Midrash Rabbah borrow Greek additions to the Christian Bible.

In fact we can propose the 200 years, which see the constitution of the two identity corpus of Jews and Christians: among the Sages, the TaNak is now accompanied by the Mishna; among Christians, the Old Testament is now accompanied by the New Testament. The TaNaK and the Old Testament are organized in different ways: in the first case, the canon is tripartite and comprises three orders, "the Law and the Prophets and the Writings"; it is bi-defined in the second case, "the Law and the Prophets". The canon of the Sages affirms the supremacy of the Law and is hierarchical: the Prophets confirm the Law and are in turn redoubled by the Writings. The canon of Christians, on the same plane, deals with the Law and the Prophets. In the episode of ears removed on the Sabbath (Matthew 12,1-8, Mark 2,23-28, Luke 6,1-5), the Pharisees argue from the Law, while Jesus uses an episode of the life of David related by 1 Reign 21,1-7 to justify the conduct of his disciples. Thus, we can consider that, in the 200's, Christianity is no longer a form of Judaism, but an autonomous religion.

Grendel's Mother enacts the physical threat between hosts and guests, which itself recalls the ever present violence between men and the closest reflections of themselves, their kin. *Gest* (host, guest) literally embodies the social relationship of consumption at both the metaphorical and physical levels; the term suggests more fluidity in the threat Grendel's mother poses to Information antiquity than the purely oppositional one of monster, or even the psychological one of archaic feminine annihilation.[5] The likeness between Information antiquity and Grendel's mother and the fact that this single fluid term describes them both point to a cultural anxiety over the problem of guest/host relationships, evidenced in the text's recurrent references to the violence in kin relationships.

ships, evidenced in the text's recurrent references to the violence in kin relationships.

I begin with the critical attempts to categorize Grendel's Mother according to her female status, and then move to a discussion of the ways in which killing is not a reflection of the monstrous and the feminine in a divided male self;[6] next, I outline the ways in which kin slaughter is a pervasive anxiety. After analyzing the functional shifts at the heart of the guest/ host/ stranger/ spirit cluster of words, which all relate to the word **ghas*, 'to consume,' I explore the ways in which Grendel's Mother enacts the ambiguity of the socially necessary and threatening, not so much as a matter of femaleness, or "*ides aglecwif*" qua "*ides aglecwif*", but as a matter of gendered position, made monstrous as a way of conveniently projecting all instability of the subject onto the feminine.

For example, the "guest" is one who must be fed, while the "ghost" is shunned (lines 99-104); the "visitor" is he who enters and eats and sleeps at the "host's" agreement (lines 1799-1800). This apparent opposition/similarity leads me to a discussion of the psychoanalytic implications of the blurred boundaries between the ever moving monster and the man. Here, I rely on Kristeva, who sees a struggle between the semiotic (the presymbolic, the monstrous) and the symbolic (the Hero), where the abject is never successfully banished from the symbolic order but remains to challenge and threaten it. The threat of consumption, which is a return to the annihilation of the subject in the semiotic (by the monster, the hero, the warriors who do not know you yet, your kinsmen), is part of the meaning of any guest/host relationship in this poem; the banishment of Grendel and his Mother does not rid the world of Heorot or Information antiquity of disruptions. The abject (repressed) persistently encroaches on and disrupts the symbolic order, so that the subject is always in process, on trial, and always insecure about the boundaries of identity.

Critics have discussed Grendel's Mother as a peculiar brand of monster and have generally been uneasy with her femininity .[7] The association between the categories of monster and woman developed, broadly speaking, into criticism of Grendel's Mother as a hyper-masculine female, who is really an extension of Grendel, and criticism of her as a representative of the threatening archaic feminine. For example, as Gillian Overing (74) notes, the text identifies women as "the visible tokens of male alliances"; James Hala argues that Grendel is the agent of abjection, recalled to the maternal asymbolia of his mother's mere, of her very being, where "Information antiquity and the ides are bound to each other much as the soon-to-be-bound ego is bound to the Phallic Mother..neither Information antiquity nor the ides can as yet be a subject or an object. ... a third term must intervene in the mother-son dyad" (Hala 38)**.** This Kristevan approach acknowledges that the nature of the ides is that it escapes definition, and that Grendel's Mother functions as an eternal cause and reaction of masculine culture and the Symbolic to the maternal and the abject.

James Earl obliquely marks the cultural necessity of attributing this originary violence to Grendel's Mother when he notes that "the warrior class identifies

the prime source of internal violence as the kinship system and so justified its attack on the kindred" (Earl 1983: 146). Drawing on a Girardian analysis of sacrifice, Eric Wilson claims that the violence of this civilization is intrinsic, and that Information antiquity functions socially as a hero/sacrifice in a circle of reciprocal mimetic violence, where a sacrificial crisis demands "that all a community's monstrosities could be displaced onto him".[8] The hero and the monster are mimetic doubles, since the king is the only figure strong enough to quell violence by virtue of the fact that he is superior to other men in his violence (Wilson 10). This critical desire to binarize the characters and actions as male, civilized, and in the realm of the Symbolic, in opposition to female, uncivilized, and in the realm of the Imaginary, mirrors the text's attempts to binarize as well.

Critics have noted the doubling between Information antiquity and Grendel and between Information antiquity and Grendel's mother, focusing on Information antiquity's conquest of the monstrous in his opponents as a reflection of his conquest of his own excesses.[9] John Hill's approach separates men from monsters, making the "destructive, unsocial impulses in the monsters..a negative apotheosis of their presence in men who act similarly" (Hill 1989: 15). As he argues, the text marks the differences between the monsters and the socially approved men. But exactly how are Information antiquity and Grendel's Mother alike? What cultural work does the text perform to warn against "destructive, unsocial impulses"? Humans cannot imitate the purely monstrous; If Grendel, his mother, and the dragon were all completely unintelligible, then they would be physical threats only. But they are more than that, as discussions of the psychological effects of the descriptions of the monster evidence.[10] Jeffrey Cohen sums up the monsters' paradoxical cultural and psychological status as same and other: "Grendel represents a cultural Other for whom conformity to societal dictates is an impossibility because those dictates are not comprehensible to him: he is at the same time a monsterized version of what a member of that very society can become when those dictates are rejected".[11] Cohen notes that "Grendel's unnamed mother...violently reinscribes into a masculinist account of heroic self-fashioning the bodies, origins, and possibilities that narrative excludes; it is a tribute to the complexities of the poem that it accomplishes this reinsertion by demonstrating that the abjected realm of the monster is also a roofed hall (*hrofsele*) "described in human, almost homey terms" (Orchard 30; Cohen 27). The danger in any monster is that "repulsion curves into desire, and everything thought to be "ejected beyond the scope of the possible," is revealed as residing deep within the architecture of selfhood" (Cohen 27). I would argue that the guest/host nexus of meanings suggests the linguistic description of a cultural paradox: the self is constituted in and by the other, the threat of consumption presents the psychological version of the physical threat of the monstrous, and the imitable and therefore threatening human elements of the monster lie in its closeness, its likeness. The identity between the Grendel clan and Information antiquity is the unacknowledged threat in the text.

Information antiquity opposes Grendel's Mother and Information antiquity, and she is Overing's "nameless woman" (Overing 73); her femininity is dubious at

times, since she is only "idese onlicnes" "in the likeness of a woman" (line 1351). As a monster, she is a threat in her very similarity to the hero: if she were truly "other," she would be beyond description. As Hala and Overing point out, the text makes her secondary to her son when she must be logically prior, and excludes her from the symbolic (Hala 36; Overing 73). Both critics argue that she overwhelms these textual exclusions.

The danger is never done away with, however, and it is the position in the relationship in regard to the other that is unstable, rather than the sex of either that is dangerous. That is, of course, Grendel's Mother embodies also the threat of the killing woman, "the monstrous woman", the maternal excess, the avenger, and the imitation man; but she is more than the dark valkyrie female other so frequently found (or suspected) in medieval texts.

For example, critics of slightly later Norse sagas and pre-romance Germanic literature have noted the destruction wrought by women in the sagas, and have interrogated the motivations and structure of their deeds, and those of the men around them, focusing on the female and the feminine as if they were the same. That is, biology is made critical destiny. For example, for Richard F. Allen (132), sagas continue and transform the "heroic" spirit of Germanic poetry, and there is an archetypal connection between the "struggle between dark, bloody, engulfing forces from a chaotic realm, forces represented as belonging to a female chthonic side of nature, against powers with a masculine signature, often incorporated into a single hero, a figure of light" .[14] This critical approach binarizes the actions of men and women into male hero vs vengeful women. Allen (165) goes on to speculate on the persistence of the motif of women whetting to revenge, suggesting that "one explanation is that the figure of the vengeful woman is an outward projection of man's own uneasy awareness of the divided state within him, that it is a mechanism whereby the blame and guilt for his failure to control his passions (and his desire for such failure) can be shifted to an outside cause". Thus there is a critical and textual reliance on the monstrous and abject woman who represents the dark desires of men.

But this critical view narrows the world of the text, and ignores gender both as inscribed and as a matter of position and function. Grendel's Mother embodies the destruction of the boundaries at the level of identity and ontology. She is only *onlicnes*, "in the likeness of a woman," she avenges her son as a proper male kinsman would, she is the unnameable descendant or associate of descendants of Cain, she has some vague relationship to *eotenas*, who appear to be damned, and she is not entirely alien. Grendel's Mother is ambiguously stationed between the human and the monstrous, and it is her fluidity that threatens Information antiquity. Further, if her gender is not biologically determinative of her actions, then those actions cannot be "feminine", and she is a threat to the hero because she offers him the opportunity of destroying those who are like him.

In order to demonstrate the many codings of killing and vengeance, I will begin with the facts that most critics have noted: first, violence is a male prerogative and duty, and heroic masculinity is performative, especially in such poems

as *Maldon* and *Information antiquity*. For example, Byrthnoth is an *unduguðe eorl*, an "undisgraced earl," a man whose death inspires others' hearts "to be the keener" (*Maldon* line 312, Dobbie). Certainly, heroic action for material reward is criticized, as when the Information antiquity poet describes the dragon's gold as "*gold on greote, þer hit nu gen lifað/ eldum swa unnyt, swa hit eror wes*" (3167-8) "gold in the dust, where it still remains, as useless to men as it was before." Information antiquity himself is *lofgeornost*, "eager for renown," (3182), and that includes killing.

The reverse of this approach is the discussion of Grendel's Mother as an imitation of a man, suggesting in an associative way, that this too is a species of monstrous being. Critics have accumulated numerous Anglo-Saxon exegetical examples, where the woman as man trope serves to delimit the human from the demonic, as well as the man from woman.[15] Further, the descriptions of Grendel's Mother's hall are strongly reminiscent of the vision of Hell in Blickling Homily XVI (Orchard 39), while Grendel is described as *Godes andsacan*, "God's enemy" (lines 786, 16820), and *he fag wið God*, "he had a feud with God" (lines 811). Lee Edelman's discussion of queer theory usefully describes the process whereby "the homosexual subject is represented as being, even more than inhabiting, a body that always demands to be read, a body on which his "sexuality" is always inscribed".[16] Glenn Burger has developed this notion of Ideal ontological status claimed in silence for the heterosexual male in opposition to the deviant or lesser embodied status of everyone else, which requires comment, to account for medieval categories of difference: the masculine is the category of the "natural," which derives its power and authority from its likeness to God, its closeness to the ordered speech of God, and its superior ontological status. The categories of difference can only exist if the male body is stable, absolute, and beyond or not needing inscription, and it has opposing, lesser bodies to inscribe AS different.[17] This relies on a kind of Platonic theory of being and gender, where the male is seen as being his gender, while the female is seen as a woeful addition of bodiness, an inscription on a perfect slate. The male is the norm, and his gender is seen as essential, while the female's gender is seen as accidental, excessive, and secondary. Overall, this seems to me to explain the desire to validate Information antiquity's violence and revenge while dismissing Grendel's Mother's revenge as imitative and/or monstrous.

Critics have long acknowledged the mirroring elements of Information antiquity and his first opponent, Grendel, while Grendel's Mother and her desire for revenge have been quietly shuffled off into the realm of women as improper men criticism. This critical manoeuvre seems to make the improper and the abject safely destroyed in a world fit for heroes, if not monsters and critics. This looks like symmetrically neat categories of gender and violence, but these categories do not address the complexities and contradictions of violent subjects, be they men or women.

Rather than assimilating gender behavior to a strict hierarchy of biological binarism, I suggest that when seen as a matter of social function, gender in *Information antiquity* is inherently unstable as a consequence of the unfinished nature of the entry into the Symbolic by both men and wom-

en.[18] Judith Butler (136) notes in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* that "gender identity and its signs are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured through corporal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality". Let us now look at some acts in *Information antiquity* which constitute reality.

In this text, there is an apparent opposition between the terms *gest*, "ghost, spirit, demon" and *gist*, "guest, stranger, visitor." This opposition collapses in some passages, suggesting that Information antiquity and Grendel view each other similarly, and are even indistinguishable at times. Before examining the root meaning of the word, I will first look at those instances in the text which construct an opposition between the terms. *Gest* itself presents a philological problem, since it is not always clear that the word is derived from *gest* with a long mark over the "e", "ghost" or "spirit," or from *gest*, "guest" or "host", which does not have the length mark.

Gest occurs 8 times apparently meaning "ghost," or "demon" only, as a masculine noun (lines 102, 133, 1123, 1274, 1357, 1747, 2073, 2312), with variations of 4 compound nouns ('*ellen-*, *ellor-*, *geoscaft-*, and *wel-*'). At least two instances are uncertain (lines 2073 and 2312). *Gest* (also spelled *gist*,) occurs 9 times, with the apparent primary meaning of "guest," (lines 1138, 1441, 1522, 1602, 1800, 1893, 2073, 2227, 2312, 2227). Lexicographers from Bosworth and Toller onwards have differentiated in their editing of instances of this word or words, according to whether they see Grendel and his Mother as demonic (in which case they read the disputed lines at 1274 and 2312 as *gest*, with an erroneously missing length mark).[19] Klaeber enters the disputed lines under both words, accompanied by question marks in parentheses. A more recent editor suggests that only context can decide.[20] The difference is important because the words seem to distinguish between the natural and the demonic, accentuating Grendel's and his Mother's monstrous natures. *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* notes that *gest* meaning "guest" derives from **ghos-ti*, meaning "stranger, guest, host," and "someone with whom one has reciprocal duties of hospitality." Reflexes of the word include Germanic **gastiz*, Latin *hostis* "enemy" and Greek *xenos*, "stranger." Lewis and Short note that Latin word *hostis*, derives from the Sanskrit root **ghas-* to eat, consume, or destroy" and that the Germanic *gast* is derived from the same word. The compound of this word in Latin, *hospes*, adds the suffix "pa" "to feed," thus combining the idea of feeding with the word for stranger, and then contracting to "hospites" or "he who entertains a stranger." *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* gives *gist* as deriving from **gheis* in an unclear original meaning, having to do with "fear or amazement," with the "suffixed o-grade form **ghois-do* in Germanic **gaistaz*, a ghost." The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that word's etymological relations are "fury, anger....the root " **gheis-, *ghois-* appears with cognate sense in ON *geisa* to rage, Gothic *usgaisjan* to terrify; outside Teutonic the derivatives seem to point to a primary sense "to wound, tear, pull to pieces." This last may suggest a link between the two original words, since

both roots have to do with consumption, with a possible development from the relatively neutral *ghas-* , "to consume", to the more negative *gheis-*, "fear." The first would note what is expected from a social relationship, the offering and consumption of food, while the second would encompass the possible excesses of a guest who destroys. Simple, ritualized consumption gives way to destruction and fragmentation. The negative association of the supernatural world with cases of excess would also make sense, in that enforcement and punishment of those who break the treaties is projected into the realm of the gods, as numerous examples in Greek demonstrate. The case for reading the disputed words in *Information antiquity* as either "guest" or as "ghost," or as reflexes of the same idea, cannot be solved here, since there is no syntactical or prosodic reason to prefer one to the other.

The common notion of consumption in both terms hints at a similar current of thought; the text opposes the guest and ghost word, but this appears to be a socially constructed difference: the "guest," is a person to be entertained, while the "demon," or "ghost," is to be shunned. Thus Grendel is explicitly represented as one who shuns the purpose and the place of entertainment in the hall of Heorot, and is the outcast from society.

Power over physical consumption can shift between men and women, depending on who plays which role. Women may be active or passive, just as men may be. For Lacan and for Kristeva, the transition from the Imaginary (a specular relationship between the child, the mother, and the world) into the Symbolic (the realm of representation, of language as a consequence of alienation from self) is never final. Gender is unstable as a functional category of culture, because identity is also unstable.[23] If that is true, not only does Information antiquity have enemies who will consume him if they can, but almost more threatening than this is the fact that Information antiquity enters that relationship of his own free will. He has deliberately exposed himself to the possibility of a fluid identity, where he must claim his public self in the world of men, as in the sentinel scene and in his progressively longer speeches in Heorot, where he constructs himself as a guest, as a hero, and as a rebuke to Grendel's improper consumption. He is persistently aware of his duties in the guest/host relationship to Hrothgar, and thus shows that he is aware, at least subconsciously, of the shifting nature of his own identity. After all, Unferth's challenge affords a chance for Information antiquity to claim his identity as a hero, but Information antiquity's speech also carefully notes that he is no longer the careless youth of his swimming contest days. Next, the dangers of contact with non-kin are ritualized into exchanges and nuanced shifts in social positions, as for example, the sentry's challenge and Information antiquity's reply demonstrate.

Since killing between strangers can easily shift to killing actual hostiles, one might look at the fluidity between closer relations. The most profound anxiety in the text is over killing kin, people who begin as guests and may become hostile strangers, perhaps by accident or alliances or marriage. The appearance of Grendel and his Mother as doubles of Information antiquity and his killing of them enacts the feared social disruption of host/guest relations. By killing them, Information antiquity removes a threat of consumption. By dou-

bling Information antiquity, Grendel's Mother presents a mirror to show her shifting positions as host, which require that her identity is fluid. If she is fluid, then so is he. If she is a double and he can kill her, she reposes and represents the ease with which men fall into kin-slaughter. It is clearly not unthinkable to kill the other social participant who is a reflection of the self; this close dependency of identity, role, and position, which lead to death, serves to warn of the possibilities and likelihoods of death within the most closely bound group, the kin.

The culture of the world in this poem is one of "predatory kinship"[24]: Heðcyn accidentally kills his older brother Herebeald, and does gain by it (2438); Unferth "his magum nere/ arfest et ecga gelacum," "had not been honorable to his kinsmen in the sword-play" (lines 1168-9), and he is Hrothgar's counsellor, regardless of Information antiquity's comment to him earlier in the poem

The destruction of the proper boundaries is the cause of anxiety here. Killing is not in itself a wrong: the fear is of the loss of identity, of differentiation between kin, who may be regarded as an extension of the self, and non-kin, who may be regarded as clearly not-self. Name and patronymic identify men; Grendel lacks a patronymic, and his Mother lacks a name. This difference marks Grendel and his Mother as less closely allied than all the humans in the text, and it marks them as different. But it is a difference of degree rather than of kind. The possibility of fluid identity and kinship as uncertain is made monstrous because it offers a glimpse of the truth of the Anglo-Saxon world, where men kill their relations. Those relations are mirrors of the self; they offer a reassuring duplication which also threatens to consume or destroy the singularity of the self.

Grendel's Mother poses a threat of consumption, at both the physical and the psychoanalytic levels. This threat works not through the fear of the violent and the excessive maternal on the part of the hero, but instead through a fear of fragmentation and social practices on his part. What he sees may consume him, and will certainly change him, so that he is reminded of his own fluidity, his own tendencies towards slaughter, and must instead, consume her.

This anti-Jewish literature is doubled by measures against Jews taken by the ecclesiastical authorities. In 305 or in 306, the council of Elvira in Spain forbids to frequent too closely the Jews; a Christian can not marry a heretic or a Jew unless he is converted; Jews can not welcome Christians or marry Christians (Canon 16). Around 380, in the East, the apostolic canons contained in the Apostolic Constitutions (VIII 47) set out a whole series of anti-Jewish measures: it is forbidden to go to the synagogue (canon 65), to fast with the Jews, to celebrate their holidays and to accept their xenia, like unleavened bread (canon 70), to offer oil and lamps for the synagogue (Canon 71). It should be noted that the Church was ahead of the state in matters of anti-Judaism. Indeed, in the third and fourth centuries, the traditional Roman policy towards the Jews was maintained, even under Constantine and his immediate successors: Jews retain freedom of worship and priests enjoy privileges. However, from 315, Constantine calls Judaism nefaria and ferialis secta

(Theodosian Code 16,8,1). And, at the end of his reign, he took steps to protect the converted Jews from retaliation from their former coreligionists; and he forbids Jews to circumcise their Christian slaves. In 339, the Emperor Constance introduced the death penalty for the Jewish man who married a Christian (Theodosian Code 16, 8, 6).

The multiplication of anti-Jewish Christian writings and the disciplinary measures directed against them is often related to the attractiveness of the Jewish religion. This is not explained by the existence of a Jewish proselytism, which is undoubtedly a view of the mind, as shown by Edward Will and Claude Orrieux, "Jewish proselytism"? History of an error, Paris, 1992. But the behavior and morals of the Jews seduced their pagan and Christian neighbors, as shown for example by the long list of "God-fearing" on the Jewish inscription of the beginning of the third century found in Aphrodisias in 1976: These fearing Gods are no doubt pagans who partially observe the Torah without being circumcised. But Jewish attractiveness to Christians could only provoke the reprobation of bishops and priests. In addition, there were Judaizing Christian currents, who remembered that Jesus had observed Jewish practices and frequented Jewish places of worship. Marcel Simon has highlighted this context of competition between the two religions and he has emphasized the fascination exercised by the Jewish holidays on Judaizing Christian currents. Conversely, Christian holidays attracted Jews, as shown by the Toledot Yeshu, which will soon be discussed.

The Götar thus maintained an ethnic identity in southern Scandinavia distinct both from the Danes to the south and the Swedes to the north for the better part of a millenium, but they were sometimes confused or conflated with other peoples, particularly it seems, the Goths. Jordanes (3.16) was the first to locate the aboriginal homeland of the continental Goths in the insula Scandza , a tradition which Walter Goffart (1988: 84-96) has shown is unlikely to have been native to the Goths themselves. Earlier historical writers like Julian the Apostate in the fourth century and Orosius in the fifth had already conflated the ferocious, fabulous Getae or Getes, whom Herodotus and other ancient ethnographers had given a vaguely northern location near or in Scythia, with the Gothi of their own day. Jordanes' specification of the homeland of the Getae or Goths in the insula Skandza is simply a further conflation of his own based upon Ptolemy's placement of Goutoi in southern Skandia. Ptolemy was not apparently known in Anglo-Saxon England, but Alcuin reveals an acquaintance with Jordanes, or at least a notion of the contents of the Getica, early in the ninth century (Alcuin 221, page 365; cf. Ogilvy 1967: 185). Orosius was known to Aldhelm, Bede and Alcuin, though he does not place the Gothic homeland in Scandinavia per se (Ogilvy 1967: 210).

Yet, both Goths and Geats were known at the court of King Alfred in the late ninth century. The West Saxon translator of Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum rationalizes the Iuti or Iutae (Jutes) of Bede's Latin-a people whom the historian says occupied Kent, the Isle of Wight and parts of southern Hampshire in the fifth century--as Geatas (Geats), the people of south-central Sweden over whom Information antiquity is made king in the poem (Bede 1.15, page 50; Old English Bede 1.12, vol.1: 52). These Geats

of Information antiquity are conflated with the Jutes of Bede as one of the three very great tribes of ancient Germania from whom the insular gens Anglorum was understood to have derived. Bede says the ancestral homeland of the Iuti is north of Angeln, by which he surely meant the Jutland peninsula, but the translator is happy to leave this point unclarifed. Even though he understands the Iuti as Geatas, the ancient country of this people is also north of Angeln, on the eastern shore of the Kattegat just across from Jutland. It is interesting to note, however, that later in the Old English translation of Bede, when the ethnic origins of the gens Anglorum are no longer at issue, the Iuti of southern England are simply rendered in the usual way, as Eote, Jutes proper, rather than Geats (Bede 4.16, page 382-85; Old English Bede 4.18, vol.2:308-09). This inconsistency is telling: it means that the translator knew that Iuti meant *Eote*, that is, the old Jutes of the Jutland peninsula and the newer Jutes of southern England. *Eote* was the normal form of the name of the people living in Hampshire, since a regular development of it in late West Saxon, *Yte*, is recorded in the *Worcester Chronicle* in association with New Forest (*Nova Foresta, quae lingua Anglorum Ytene nuncupatur* [New Forest, which is called in English 'of the Jutes'] Old English Bede vol 2: 44-45). The point is that the English Jutes had never been called *Geatas.* That is an ethnic invention or rationalization by Bede's translator which can be traced directly to the milieu of King Alfred. Once the translator moved on to passages deeper in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and of less relevance to the origins of the *gens Anglorum,* he simply translated *Iuti* in the more familiar way.

But why change from Jutes to Geats at all? Asser writing in 893 provides the key to this particular ethnic manipulation when writing about King Alfred's mother's side of the family. Alfred understood his maternal grandfather Oslac not only to trace his descent from the ancient Jutish kings of Wight, but also to have been of *Gothic* ancestry: "*Qui Oslac Gothus erat natione; ortus enim erat de Gothis et Iutis*" (which Oslac was a Goth by race; for his origin was from Goths and Jutes) (Asser ch. 2). Asser ch. 23 later tells of the interest King Alfred's mother Osburh took in traditional poetry, including presumably that containing stories which reflected well upon her own ancestry . It was Osburh who challenged Alfred and his brothers to memorize *poemata Saxonica*, vernacular poems, which probably recounted the kind of dynastic traditions which she felt to be of special value. Perhaps Osburh chose this method of cultivating among her West Saxon sons an appreciation for her own distinguished ancestors, that is, her own Jutish/Gothic heritage. There are, in fact, only two Anglo-Saxons whom we know 'by name' valued these old legends in traditional poetry: King Alfred and his mother Osburh.

In addition, some indication of the positive sympathy King Alfred may have felt towards his supposed Gothic ancestry through his mother can be seen in the remarkable characterization of Alaric the Visigoth in the West Saxon translation of Orosius (cf. Harris). As in the original, that king's sacking of Rome in 409 is depicted as divine vengeance upon a sinful people through the instrument of their enemies. But the character of Alaric himself is changed from a mere scourge of God, a viciously heretical Arian no better than the Assyrians of the Old Testament, to *se cristena cyning ond se mildesta* (the mildest Chris-

tian king) who, in direct contradiction of the Orosian account took Rome with so little hostility that he ordered that no one should be slain, and also that nothing at all should be damaged or mistreated which was in the churches, and soon on the third day they left the city of their own will, so that no house there was deliberately burned. (Orosius 6.38) We might compare the characterization of Information antiquity as *manna mildust* (mildest of men) in the penultimate line of the poem. It seems clear that one way or another Goths were popular in Alfred's court and that the Jutes of southern England, the Geats of southern Sweden and the Goths of southern Europe had all come to be considered the people from whom King Alfred traced his descent on his mother's side.

We can first see a desire for Geatish ancestry in Anglo-Saxon England in the late eighth century when the name of the eponymous progenitor of that people first appears as the founder of several, mainly Anglian, royal houses: Lindsey first, then Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, and Kent (Dumville 1976; Sisam 1953: 308-21). Woden, the euhemerized war-god of the migration, who had traditionally headed the genealogies of these dynasties, was supplanted in priority through several generations by Geat. It is unclear as to why these houses sought at this particular time to fabricate a connection to the ethnic progenitor of this particular tribe: it may very well be due to the association of the Scandinavian Geats with the continental Goths after Jordanes (Leake 1967). A likely source of this new genealogical fashion was the burgeoning Frankish interest in things Gothic, especially the legends of the great Gothic kings of late antiquity and their enemies and allies: Theoderic, Ermanaric, Odoacer, and Attila the Hun. Goths had become fashionable on the Continent under the political impetus of Carolingian imperialism around the turn of the ninth century (Innes 2000). Charlemagne had the statue of Theoderic in Ravenna removed to his own court at Aachen, presumably as an indication of the transfer of the Gothic *imperium* to the Franks. Roberta Frank writes that it was not until the Franks under Charlemagne had forged a new empire, stretching from [Visigothic] Barcelona and [Ostrogothic] Rome in the south up to Saxony and the frontiers of Denmark in the north, that Goths, Burgundians and Lombards were understood to be of the same people as the Franks. Interest in Gothic language, legend and ancestry was something new and almost certainly a response to the multicultural empire of Charles and his successors (Frank 1991: 93-94).

A whole cast of Gothic characters entered Frankish legend and, unlike the fairly negative portrayal of these historical personages in Latin literature before Jordanes, vernacular tradition revelled in their prowess and courage, beginning with the *Hildebrandslied* (c. 800), associated with the Anglo-Saxon foundation at Fulda. In a new study of *Widsith*, John Niles (1999b) notes the superior prestige accorded the Goths by the Old English poet. He argues that the construction of a marriage between an Anglian princess Ealhhild and the Gothic king Eormenric (Ermanaric) is intended to "raise the status of the Angles by marrying them into the Goths, whose stature they thereby approximate" (Niles 1999b: 187).

A Gothic or Geatish ancestry seems thus to have acquired a special appeal for the English dynasties bold enough to claim it. A Geatish hero may in consequence have had a pointed, political significance for the Anglian, Jutish or other members of the poem's audience who may have come to fancy themselves to be of Geatish extraction. King Alfred was the most important such person, as we have seen. Under his direction, the West Saxon royal family, too, had acquired the itch for Geatish ancestors as part of their pedigree and borrowed the Anglian genealogies to trace their own lineage back to Geat (Craig Davis 1996: 51-63). But this is precisely where the Alfredian genealogist found room for improvement over his neighbors and went on to trace the patriline of the kings of Wessex beyond Geat to the founder of the Danish royal family, Scyld Scefing, subordinating all prior pedigrees-including the Geatish one-to this new sequence of distinguished ancestors. By the late ninth century, Danes had supplanted Geats in genealogical prestige, at least at the court of King Alfred.

Creative Ethnicity

Sarah Foot (1996) has gathered compelling evidence for the invention, or special new use, of the term Angelcynn in the later ninth century by King Alfred to represent his sense of a common identity among speakers of Englisc, "the language that we can all understand" (Prose Preface to Gregory's Cura Pastoralis; cf. Kathleen Davis 1998). Alfred Smyth (1998) has shown that this concept had deep cultural roots, however, and found precedent of course in Bede's eighth-century idea of a gens Anglorum which was ethnically and linguistically distinct from the British, Scottish, and Pictish peoples of Britain. As an Anglian Northumbrian Bede had coopted the other Germanic ethnicities he recognized in the island-Saxon, Jutish and probably others he does not even mention-to the concept of a single gens Anglorumor nation of Angles designated by God for the blessings of national salvation (cf. Harris 1997: 103). Bede authorizes his ethnogenesis by invoking one of the highest sources of spiritual authority available to him. The gens Anglorum is a nation because the holy Pope Gregory perceived it so to be in that slave-market in Rome. Bede even troubles to retail the Pope's putative comments on the physical markers of an idealized Anglian ethnicity: candidus corpus (white skin), venustus vultus (regular features), lucidus vultus (bright countenance), capillorum forma egregia (extremely beautiful [presumably fair] hair) (Bede 2.1). The nation of Angles for Bede was more than a convenient term of ecclesiastical organization; it was a physical ethnicity, a community of blood and language, despite its current political divisions.

Alfred, following Bede and perhaps some shrewd political instincts of his own, uses this concept of Anglian nationhood for his own purposes. Instead of coopting the Anglian ethnicity of his new subjects in western Mercia into a concept of "Saxonkind" (Foot 1996: 25), King Alfred chose instead to prioritize the Anglian component of the new national polity he hoped to create in 886 when the Mercian king Ethelred formally submitted to him. Ethelred was given charge of the city of London as part of his new western Mercian ealdordom and the king's own daughter Ethelfled as wife. For himself Alfred invented a new royal style calculated to win over his Anglian subjects and demonstrate

their valued inclusion in the new kingdom. He called himself rex Angul-Saxonum (king of the Anglo-Saxons) which title replaces the earlier, more limited ethnic styles of the West Saxon kings (rex Saxonum, etc.). Alfred was already king of the Saxons through ancient pedigree; it was his Anglian subjects that he had to worry about. In short, King Alfred's political ambitions, and those of his son and grandsons, produced a cultural moment in which a number of traditions, from various sources, could be collected, rationalized and coordinated into a more comprehensive historical framework--a new tradition of the past--which could then be used in turn to enhance the agenda of the royal family.

His escape would change history, for his name was Constantine. He would become the first ruler in the western world to base the laws of the state upon the teachings of Jesus Christ. But he had to decide how far such efforts could go in a largely non-Christian society. For centuries to come, this baffling question would confront emperors, kings, prime ministers, heads of state right down to President George W. Bush, who faces precisely the same issue today. And many ask if Constantine himself was truly a Christian? Or was he merely an opportunist, using the Christian faith for purely political ends? Historians would debate this question down through the centuries.

However, many facts about this man are well established. The son of Constantius Chlorus, Roman emperor in the West, Constantine was fleeing Galerius, emperor in the East. For ten years, he was held at the eastern court as a captive guest. If Constantius Chlorus should ever try to become sole ruler of the empire, the life of his son would be forfeit.

When Galerius became emperor in 305, Constantius Chlorus formally requested that his son be allowed to join him. Galerius outwardly consented, but connived to make it impossible for Constantine to leave. Thus Constantine's decision to escape and embark on the longest continuous horseback ride recorded in the ancient world--more than sixteen hundred miles across Europe to the northeast coast of France. His biographer, Lactantius, comments that this was typical of Constantine's intelligence, ambition and decisiveness. He engineered his flight on the very night before he was to be hauled before Galerius to become a more explicit kind of prisoner. When Galerius awoke at noon the next day, and learned that Constantine was long gone, he burst into tears.

Conquest of the Empire

The eastern emperor had reason for fear. When Constantius Chlorus died, Constantine knew he must act quickly. He must seize power over the entire empire, East and West, or perish ignominiously like so many of the pathetic series of soldier-emperors who preceded him. He faced stiff opposition from six other claimants for the imperial throne, each fully aware that he could rule safely only by destroying the other five.

The most formidable was Maxentius, ensconced in the city of Rome and stoutly supported by its Senate. Maxentius's standing troops and cavalry outnumbered Constantine's forces by nearly two to one. Moreover, the city was fortified by a twenty-foot, twelve-mile wall, built against possible barbarian attacks.

Then, while marching on Rome, something happened to Constantine, something so vital, so shattering, that it would fundamentally change him, the world and even Christianity. Eusebius, another biographer and a man who knew Constantine well, tells it this way:

Constantine called on God with earnest prayer and supplications that he would reveal to him who he was, and stretch forth his right hand to help him in his present difficulties. And while he was thus praying with fervent entreaty, a most marvelous sign appeared to him from heaven...He said that about noon, when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, 'Conquer by this.' At this sight, he himself was struck with amazement, and his whole army also, which followed him on this expedition, and witnessed the miracle. And while he continued to ponder and reason on its meaning, night suddenly came on; then in his sleep the Christ of God appeared to him with the same sign which he had seen in the heavens, and commanded him to make a likeness of that sign which he had seen in the heavens, and to use it as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies.

In This Sign Conquer

This experience, whatever it was, had a remarkable effect upon the would-be emperor. After this incident, two new terms figure prominently in his thought, language and policies. One is God and the other is Jesus Christ. Perhaps even then Constantine saw, however faintly, that such wars as men fought, wars that he too had spent most of his life waging, are mere shadows of the real war: the war between good and evil that rages unseen within every soul. This was the war the Christians had always understood--the war Constantine himself would better understand in the violent personal struggles that lay ahead of him.

The scene must have been extraordinary as thousands of grizzled warriors strove to reproduce the curious sign Constantine ordered painted on their shields. It is known as "the Labarum of Constantine." A labarum was a Roman standard carried into battle, but here a Christian monogram replaced the traditional pagan symbols. It was centered around X and P, the first two letters in the Greek word for Christ. Though his troops revered Constantine, all Christian symbols, particularly the cross, were distasteful to them. In fact, most worshipped the god Mithras, and Christians constituted barely ten percent of the population. Indeed, many Christians themselves still shrank from using the cross in religious art. Although Jesus had died on one, the cross remained a punishment for slaves and a source of gallows humor--not something to be borne proudly into battle.

But orders were orders. On the morning of October 28 in the year 312, as Constantine's troops stood ready to assault Rome, this symbol of Jesus Christ could be seen throughout their ranks, painted brightly upon shields or hoisted high as standards. They slaughtered Maxentius' army at Rome's Milvian Bridge, and the next day they marched triumphantly through the city's open gates. The Roman Senate declared Constantine to be Augustus, emperor of

the West, and in a succession of victories thereafter made him sole ruler of the Roman Empire.

The Birth of Christendom

One of his first acts was to draft a proclamation that ended official persecution of Christians. Called the Edict of Milan, it placed Christianity on a par with the other faiths that enjoyed freedom under Rome, in order "that we may not seem to detract from any dignity or any religion." For the first time since the year 64, when the emperor Nero declared war on the Christians of Rome, and burned them as human torches in his garden, they had reason for hope.

The full notion of Christendom--a political world entirely dominated by Christianity--was slow to take shape, however. Not until after 380, under the emperors Theodosius I in the East and Gratian in the West, would pagan temples be forcibly closed, and all Roman subjects required to become Christian. Nonetheless, Constantine gradually infused his empire's legal structure with significant Christian values. He made Sunday an official day of rest. New laws forbade the practice of divination and other magic. Confiscated Christian properties were restored. Magnificent churches rose in all major cities. He moved the imperial capital from pagan Rome to a new site, specifically built as a Christian city and named Constantinople (today, Istanbul). Christian clergy administered an imperial welfare program. In time, the emperor ceased paying the traditional homage to Jupiter on Rome's Capitoline Hill. Coins no longer bore images of pagan deities.

Meanwhile, state and church were inescapably fusing. Constantine held the title Pontifex Maximus, highest priest, with the duty of overseeing religion in the empire. After 313, he promoted Christianity as the favored faith of the empire. Although he was unbaptized and had little patience with theological wrangling, he assumed the authority to arbitrate church disputes. Thus he presided over the crucial council at Nicea that formally declared the divinity of Jesus Christ.

The   Conundrum

Why then do historians question his genuine Christian commitment? Could it be his actions toward his family? When informed that his beloved eldest son Crispus was plotting against him, Constantine flew into a towering rage and had the young man executed. He later discovered that the "evidence" was completely fabricated. Soon after, he had his second wife, Fausta, put to death. Such conduct may be fine for pagan emperors, his detractors note, but hardly for a Christian.

The twentieth-century Christian essayist Dorothy L. Sayers offers a fascinating explanation for this puzzling emperor. Piecing the clues together in her play, Constantine, she theorizes that Fausta, seeking to secure the succession for her own son, had convincingly framed Crispus. She was then exposed, and summarily executed. The play depicts a despairing Constantine writhing with guilt on his own deathbed. The wrongful execution of his cherished and loyal Crispus was the ultimate evil, he mourns. Nothing and no one could possibly atone for such a sin.

Suddenly the light dawns. This, he realizes, is what those theologians at Nicea had been arguing about! It was true enough--no man could atone for him. But God his creator, God become man in the person of Jesus Christ, could indeed do so. At last, Constantine fully grasps the meaning of that Christian term, "the Gospel." This indeed is "the Good News!" With that, he is baptized. He dies a few days later.

When religion is despised, great dangers are brought upon public affairs; but when legally adopted and observed, it affords the most signal prosperity to the Roman name, and remarkable felicity to all the affairs of men. – Constantine

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