

Illustrations of damnation in late Anglo-Saxon manuscripts

SARAH SEMPLE

'Many tribulations and hardships shall arise in this world before its end, and they are heralds of the eternal perdition to evil men, who shall afterwards suffer eternally in the black hell for their sins.' These words, composed by Ælfric in the last decade of the tenth century,¹ reflect a preoccupation in the late Anglo-Saxon Church with perdition and the infernal punishments that awaited sinners and heathens. Perhaps stimulated in part by anxiety at the approach of the millennium,² both Ælfric and Wulfstan (archbishop of York, 1002–23) show an overt concern with the continuation of paganism and the evil deeds of mankind in their sermons and homilies. Their works stress the terrible judgement that awaited sinners and heathens and the infernal torment to follow.³ The Viking raids and incursions, during the late eighth to ninth and late tenth centuries, partially inspired the great anxiety apparent in the late Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical leadership. Not only were these events perceived as divine punishment for a lack of religious devotion and fervour in the English people,⁴ but the arrival of Scandinavian settlers in the late ninth century may have reintroduced pagan practice and belief into England.⁵

Around the turn of the first millennium, during this period of great political and religious tumult, one of the most important Anglo-Saxon illustrated manuscripts was produced at Christ Church, Canterbury: the Harley 603

¹ From Ælfric's preface to the first series of his Catholic Homilies: *English Historical Documents* c. 500–1042, ed. D. Whitelock, 2nd ed. (London, 1979), p. 924, no. 239 (a).

² P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 451–3.

³ 'let us often consider the great judgement to which we all must come and save ourselves from the surging fire of hell torment': *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, ed. D. Whitelock (London, 1939); also Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, pp. 928–34, no. 240.

⁴ 'If . . . the leaders and the ordained teachers pay no heed . . . but think about worldly matters and heed not God's command nor his worship, God will manifest to them their contempt of him either by famine or pestilence . . . How was it then . . . when men overthrew monasteries and held God's services in scorn, but that pestilence and famine came to us, and afterwards a heathen army held us to scorn?', *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W. W. Skeat, 4 vols., EETS 76, 82, 94, 114 (Oxford, 1881–1900) I, 292; also Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, p. 297, no. 239f.

⁵ Wulfstan's fervent stance against heathenism may have resulted from direct experience with Vikings in Northern England: see K. Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England* (London, 1996), p. 78.

Psalter. The manuscript includes scenes portraying a uniquely late Anglo-Saxon vision of hell and damnation, a perception of eternal torment which, it will be argued, arose through a combination of three influences: political practice, Christian teaching and local folk belief.

THE HARLEY PSALTER

London, British Library, Harley 603, 'one of the greatest glories of Anglo-Saxon art',⁶ is the earliest of three English copies of the Utrecht Psalter; a Carolingian masterpiece composed in the early ninth century at Hautvilliers near Reims.⁷ The Utrecht Psalter was in England by the end of the tenth century and had a profound impact on the development of Anglo-Saxon drawing.⁸

Francis Wormald's view that the Harley Psalter manuscript was made at Christ Church, Canterbury,⁹ has been upheld by recent works, and Noel's codicological analysis enabled him to suggest a detailed chronology for the composition of the manuscript (Table 1).¹⁰

Date	Scribes	Artists
c. 1010–20 between	1, D2	A, B, C, D2, F E, I, J
c. 1020–40	Eadui	
c. 1073–6		G
c. 1100–50		H

Table 1. The composition of the Harley Psalter.

The artist-scribe, D2, has been identified with the scribe of London, British Library, Stowe Charter 35 (S905: AD1002–1003), while the hand of the later contributor Eadui Basan has been identified in several manuscripts and documents associated with Christ Church. These links are not only crucial to the dating of the manuscript, but strongly support the identification of Christ Church, Canterbury, as the place of production 'not only in the sense that it was made there but also in the sense that it was made by members of that community'.¹¹

The Illustrations

The visual success of the illustrations of the Harley Psalter has been ascribed to the 'enormous variety in design' and the 'scintillating liveliness' in

⁶ W. Noel, *The Harley Psalter* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 2.

⁷ E. Temple, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts 900–1066* (London, 1976), pp. 81–3.

⁸ F. Wormald, *English Drawings of the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1952), p. 21.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 44. ¹⁰ Noel, *Harley Psalter*, pp. 121–40. ¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 149.

its compositions.¹² The figures and landscape are charged with a kinetic energy imparting a sense of activity and urgency. The Utrecht illustrations have the same vivacity, the same agitated impressionism,¹³ yet the scenes within the Harley Psalter, swelling with crowds and activity, are more tumultuous breaking out of the frame and overlapping the text (69v). The ethereal rendition of the figures in Harley 603, clothed in 'fluttering draperies', lift the viewer away from the naturalistic world.¹⁴

Previous commentaries have focused on the figurative portrayal within Harley 603, viewing the treatment of landscape as inferior to that of its exemplar. The landscape is deemed to have lost the 'illusionism' apparent in the Utrecht compositions, reducing it to a 'kaleidoscopic pattern of fluttering lines of different colours'.¹⁵ The use by all but one of the four artists of the coloured-line technique fashionable at Christ Church, Canterbury, produced the visually dramatic surface pattern and decorative effects seen in the Harley 603 illustrations. The use of this technique also changed the systematic task of producing a copy of the Utrecht Psalter into an undertaking of much greater complexity.¹⁶

Exploration of how the compositions of the Harley artists deviated from those of the Utrecht Psalter has formed the basis of several excellent studies. Carver used Harley 603 to examine whether contemporary Anglo-Saxon artefacts and building styles were represented in late Anglo-Saxon manuscript illustration.¹⁷ He concluded that hand A was the most innovative of the copyists, extending his realistic tendencies beyond artefacts and adding to and modifying the natural world.¹⁸ Artist A also gave a more explicit reality to his demons by adding talons, claws, breasts and genitalia: 'There is something tentative about these transformations which suggests that the illustrator's imagination was fired by the drama of the underworld and wished to realise its terrors more completely and explicitly. His demons were made more fearful to behold and more terrible to suffer under.'¹⁹ Noel's commentary goes further, suggesting that A revelled in the artistic possibilities of the larger space he had at his disposal, altering spatial relationships and adding the landscape in last, uniting figures and buildings and creating new relationships between them. His landscapes were full of naturalistic images and identifiable wildlife and bore very little resemblance to those in Utrecht.²⁰

¹² Wormald, *English Drawings*, pp. 27–8. ¹³ Noel, *Harley Psalter*, p. 11.

¹⁴ Wormald, *English Drawings*, pp. 27–8 and 31. ¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 31.

¹⁶ R. Gameson, *The Role of Art in the Late Anglo-Saxon Church* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 12–13.

¹⁷ M. Carver, 'Contemporary Artefacts Illustrated in Late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts', *Archaeologia* 108 (1986), 117–45. ¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 132.

¹⁹ D. Tselos, 'English Manuscript Illustration and the Utrecht Psalter', *Art Bull.* 41 (1959), 137–49, at 139. ²⁰ For full discussion, see Noel, *Harley Psalter*, pp. 50–9.

These commentaries on the innovations within Harley 603 all note improvements, additions and alterations which artists A–D2 made to their compositions copied from the Utrecht Psalter (artist B is acknowledged as the most successful copyist). The Harley 603 illustrations represent some of the most spatial and recessive depictions of landscape found in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, reflecting their source, the Utrecht Psalter compositions, and a more pronounced interest in landscape portrayal.²¹ Wormald suggested that landscape portrayal within Harley 603 reflected a growing English tradition, and compared it with an earlier illustration, from London, British Library, Add. 24199 (Prudentius, *Psychomachia*). The latter manuscript contains illustrated scenes where ‘the figures are confined by the frame but are not spatially limited by it’.²² In these compositions, the landscape, although primitively portrayed, breaks out from the limits of the frame.

The portrayal of landscape by artist F is particularly important. F was working after the text had been written and re-creation of the illustrations from the Carolingian exemplar was thus frequently rendered impossible.²³ Judith Duffey concluded that F’s unusual and inventive drawings contained references to royal, political and monastic life and were of great importance to historians.²⁴ Carver noted that his work fell into two groups: in one set, though not copying Utrecht, the artist was still using its visual vocabulary, in the other he was more original and displayed a greater fondness for naturalistic portrayal.²⁵ Whilst Noel points out that all the Harley artists made modifications to the Utrecht compositions, he agreed with the general premise of previous discussions: that artists A–D2 followed Utrecht closely, whereas F deviated radically, composing wholly new illustrations.²⁶ The remarkable innovations of artist F included a method of depicting landscape that bears more relation to the English tradition identified by Wormald than to the Utrecht Psalter.

Thus the illustrations in Harley 603 are not simply copies from the Carolingian exemplar: each artist introduced changes and improvements – above all artist F. This article focuses on his illustrations. The motifs and themes to be considered are hell and hell-mouths, sinners and torment. To demonstrate the singularity of artist F’s portrayal of such subject matter, it is necessary to set out first the treatment of hell and damnation in the Utrecht Psalter compositions and to show the adherence of artists A–D2 to these continental motifs and images. Four images from the Utrecht Psalter have been selected for discussion. These images are repeated throughout the Carolingian

²¹ Gameson, *Role of Art*, pp. 176–7.

²² Wormald, *English Drawings*, p. 28.

²³ Noel, *Harley Psalter*, pp. 76–7.

²⁴ J. E. Duffey, ‘The Inventive Group of Illustrations in the Harley Psalter’, unpubl. PhD dissertation, Univ. of Berkeley, CA.

²⁵ Carver, ‘Contemporary Artefacts’, p. 132.

²⁶ Noel, *Harley Psalter*, pp. 85–7.

manuscript and form the basis for the portrayal of hell and damnation in the Harley Psalter compositions by artists A–D2.

HELL AT REIMS

A depiction of a fiery, flaming lake occurs four times in the Utrecht Psalter.²⁷ The image on 9r is a representative example. In reference to Ps. XVIII.5–6, 'The sorrows of death surround me',²⁸ sinners are depicted in torment within a fiery lake also containing a monstrous head. In the corresponding composition from Harley 603 (9r), artist A reproduced the motif from Utrecht with very little change. The use of the 'fiery pit or lake' and the 'Hades head' within the Utrecht Psalter illustrations is in accordance with the classical tradition out of which these infernal motifs developed.²⁹ The depiction of hell or the opening to hell as a furnace/oven represented by 11v in the Utrecht Psalter and motivated by the words of Ps. XXI, occurs several times in the Carolingian manuscript.³⁰ It is replicated in Harley 603 with little if any addition or change (11v). The most evocative renditions of the mouth of hell in the Utrecht Psalter depict great, yawning maws or passages into the earth, filled with crowds of crushed and agitated human forms, herded down to the underworld by a series of terrible demons (19v, 20r and 23r). Artist B in Harley 603 (23r) reproduced these images with great accuracy. Finally, the most frequent treatment of the subject and arguably the most important – comprises open pits or hollows in the landscape. These contain writhing forms of the damned hardly distinguishable from the multiple sinewy coils of fat serpents and dark, infernal flames (3v and 59r). Monstrous heads and forms are also occasionally included (59r). Artist A of Harley 603 reproduced the motif with some accuracy (3v) while modifying the landscape setting. Artist F repeatedly deployed a much-modified form of this motif while discarding other elements of Utrecht's iconography, suggesting the motif had a particular appeal to him.

ANGLO-SAXON HELL

The most innovative treatment of hell and damnation in Harley 603 is found within the work of artist F, and can be classified into two groups of minor and major innovations.

²⁷ Fols. 3r, 9r, 14v and 16v.

²⁸ All excerpts from the psalms used in this paper are taken from the 1956 Douay version of The Holy Bible trans. from the Latin Vulgate. They do not represent a direct translation from the text of either the Utrecht or Harley Psalter. They are included to indicate broadly to the reader the subject matter of the text relevant to each illustration under discussion.

²⁹ Tselos, 'English MS Illustration', p. 139 and *idem*, *The Sources of the Utrecht Psalter Miniatures* (Minneapolis, MN, 1955), pl. 23.

³⁰ Fol. 11v illustrates Ps. XXI.9: 'Thou shalt make them as an oven of fire, in the time of thy anger: the Lord shall trouble them in his wrath; and fire shall devour them.'

Minor differences

The compositions of artist F do not reproduce the yawning maws and passages to the underworld filled with hordes of sinners found within the Carolingian manuscript. Instead his scenes depict small rocky openings and earth-covered pits containing single figures or small figurative groups (71v and 72r). The illustration on 64v includes a feature best described as a chimney or vent. The bulbous and surreal landscapes of F are pocked with these dark marks (68v and 72r), some of which are clearly fissures, vents or chimneys into the earth (65r), from which smoke or steam sometimes issues (68v: see pl. VI).³¹ On 73r (pl. VII), a demon torments a man within a cleft or rocky opening, whereas in 65r, a demon is hooking a man, intending to drag him into a pit in the earth depicted beneath a fissure. Stylized holes or rocky openings are a common feature of F's work (73r). These hell 'mouths' or pits are more simplified and stylized than those presented in the Utrecht Psalter. The chimneys or vents convey a feeling of multiple access points to hell, emphasizing the concept that hell and torment were literally immediately below one's feet. Fol. 73r (pl. VII) relates to Ps. CXLIII.3, 'For the enemy hath persecuted my soul: he hath brought down my life to the earth. He hath made me to dwell in darkness as those that have been dead of old.' The composition reflects the text, portraying hell as a tomb or grave-like space within the ground.

Major differences

Three of artist F's illustrations include the iconographic features noted above and also use a much modified form of the hollow hill motif seen on 59r of the Utrecht Psalter.³² On 71v (pl. VIII) a rise of earth contains a stylized, rocky fissure, open at the summit, in which a man is surrounded by hot coals and is

³¹ Wormald commented on this technique, but did not readily identify what was being portrayed. He noted 'dark round patches at the top of some of the hummocks' in an illustration on the flyleaf of London, British Library, Royal 15.A.XVI and noted a marked similarity to artistic details in the later part of Harley 603. The former is a ninth- to tenth-century manuscript of probable continental origin with a drawing on the flyleaf showing an elaborate, towered building. The drawing was augmented in the sixteenth century; however, Wormald ascribes the original parts, including the rocky landscape with dark patches, to c. 1025–50 (Wormald, *English Drawings*, pp. 44–5). A thirteenth-century press-mark shows that the manuscript belonged to St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, and it is assumed that this drawing was added in one of the two Canterbury houses (Temple, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, p. 102, no. 85). In consideration of the fact that these vents or chimneys in Harley 603, are confined solely to the work of artist F (not E, as stated by Temple, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, p. 102), and in view of the date range suggested by Wormald and the provenance of the manuscript, perhaps this flyleaf illustration should also be considered as the work of artist F.

³² This agrees with Carver's comment that artist F was not copying the Utrecht but did use the continental manuscript's vocabulary of images (Carver, 'Contemporary Artefacts', p. 132).

tormented by an angel. Hell is clearly shown as a space inside a hill or mound. The scene lacks the Hades head and the serpents from 59r of the Utrecht Psalter and depicts, with stunning visual impact, the agony of a single man. Referring to Ps. CXL.10, 'Burning coals shall fall upon them; thou wilt cast them down into the fire: in miseries they shall not be able to stand', the image is a literal illustration of the psalm, using a hole or rocky opening within a hill to represent hell.

A similar layout can be seen on 72r (pl. IX): a stylized hill or mound with chimneys or vents. The opening or pit to the right of the knoll is clearly drawn to relate to the farthest vent or chimney, demonstrating the hollowness of the knoll. In both illustrations it is clear that artist F was portraying hell as a self-contained pit of torment, not an entry point to hell such as that exemplified by the hell-mouths in the Utrecht Psalter. Fol. 72r contains an unusual image to the right of centre: a small group of seated figures are framed by the outline of the hill or mound. Close inspection shows the adults all have severed feet, the feet depicted in minute detail below each figure's legs (pl. IX). This unusual illustration refers to Ps. CXL.6-7, 'their judges falling upon the rock have been swallowed up. They shall hear my words, for they have prevailed: as when the thickness of the earth is broken upon the ground: our bones are scattered by the side of hell'. In 67r (pl. X) the illustration follows the words of Ps. CXXIX.4-5: 'The Lord who is just will cut the necks of sinners: let them be confounded and turned back that hate Sion.' The composition depicts a mound or hill motif without a rocky fissure or opening. Artist F has included four decapitated bodies, two prostrate, one bent forwards and one bent backwards. The heads are bleeding and separate from the bodies. In both 72r and 67r the illustrations are entirely different from those in the Utrecht.

An important question in relation to the images on 72r and 67r is whether the amputees and decapitated bodies are contained within, or are respectively sitting and lying on the mounds. It was previously assumed that these unfortunates were exterior to the mound.³³ However, if 72r (pl. IX) is studied closely, it can be seen that the group of amputees is depicted in a much lighter or ethereal manner, as the angels have been throughout. The hard and dark frame of the mound certainly encompasses them. The figure to the left holds up a child, apparently to one of the vents. A strong argument can also be made for the decapitates being contained within the mound or hill. All the bodies are contained within the dark frame of the mound, and the head to the far left is depicted within a small pit dug into the body of the hill.

These three illustrations from Harley 603 are entirely innovative, bearing no relation to the relevant Utrecht folios and all three may incorporate elements

³³ T. H. Ohlgren, *Insular and Illuminated Manuscripts: an Iconographic Catalogue* (London, 1986), pp. 99 (no. 169) and 113.

of late Anglo-Saxon secular practice and popular belief. Artists F and E were noted by Duffey for portraying what she suspected were aspects of kingship and late Anglo-Saxon royal political practice.³⁴ The illustrations of artist F can be argued to show responsiveness to his contemporary world.

Amputations of hands and feet are prescribed in the laws for theft³⁵ and, from the reign of Æthelstan, for minting false coin.³⁶ Six examples of the amputation of legs or feet are known from identified Anglo-Saxon execution cemeteries: Wor Barrow (Dorset), Guildown (Surrey) (two examples), Roche Court Down (Wiltshire), Walkington Wold (Yorkshire, East Riding) and Bokerley Dyke (Wiltshire).³⁷ Decapitation is prescribed as a punishment for theft in the laws of Edgar and Æthelred,³⁸ and general failure to uphold the law in the laws of Æthelred.³⁹ In the laws of Cnut a slave found guilty in the ordeal '... shall not be able to make any amends except by his head'.⁴⁰ Out of nineteen known execution cemeteries a total of ninety-three possible examples of decapitation are known. From the eighty-one certain examples fourteen had the head rotated by the neck, thirty-four lacked heads and in thirty-three cases the head was interred with the body but away from the neck area.⁴¹ The burial of single heads or groups of heads in pits, possibly after display on stakes, is known from six sites.⁴² Remarkably, ten examples are known where corpses were found bent forwards or backwards. This is thought to represent the burial of a victim killed by strangulation or by decapitation whilst kneeling in the grave.⁴³

The combined weight of the documentary and archaeological evidence thus strongly suggests that artist F was portraying contemporary Anglo-Saxon judicial practice. Perhaps more remarkable, it appears that he was also accurately portraying the common landscape context for execution burial. Twelve out of nineteen identified execution cemeteries are associated with mounds.⁴⁴ Although some of these, such as Stockbridge Down (Hampshire), may be deliberate contemporary constructions, seven at least are prehistoric.⁴⁵ Dunstable, Five Knolls (Bedfordshire) (fig. 4) illustrates the focal character of

³⁴ Duffey, 'Inventive Illustrations', p. 107.

³⁵ F. L. Attenborough, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge, 1922), p. 34 (I 18); *ibid.* p. 35 (Alf 6); A. J. Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I* (Cambridge, 1925), pp. 137–8 (II c 30.4).

³⁶ Attenborough, *Laws*, p. 113 (II AS 14.1); Robertson *Laws of the Kings*, p. 48 (IV Ath 5.3); Robertson, *Laws of the Kings*, pp. 137–8 (II c 8.1 and 8.2).

³⁷ A. Reynolds, 'Anglo-Saxon Law in the Landscape', unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of London (1998), pp. 168–9.

³⁸ Robertson, *Laws of the Kings*, p. 5 (IV Edg 11); Robertson *Laws of the Kings*, p. 48 (II Ath 4.1).

³⁹ Robertson, *Laws of the Kings* (I Ath 1.6). ⁴⁰ Robertson, *Laws of the Kings* (II c 32.1).

⁴¹ Reynolds, 'Law in the Landscape', p. 162. ⁴² *Ibid.* p. 163.

⁴³ See burial 17, Roche Court Down; Reynolds, 'Law in the Landscape', p. 159.

⁴⁴ Reynolds, *ibid.* p. 176.

⁴⁵ N. G. Hill, 'Excavations on Stockbridge Down, 1935–36', *Proc. Hamp. F. C.* 13 (1937), 247–59.

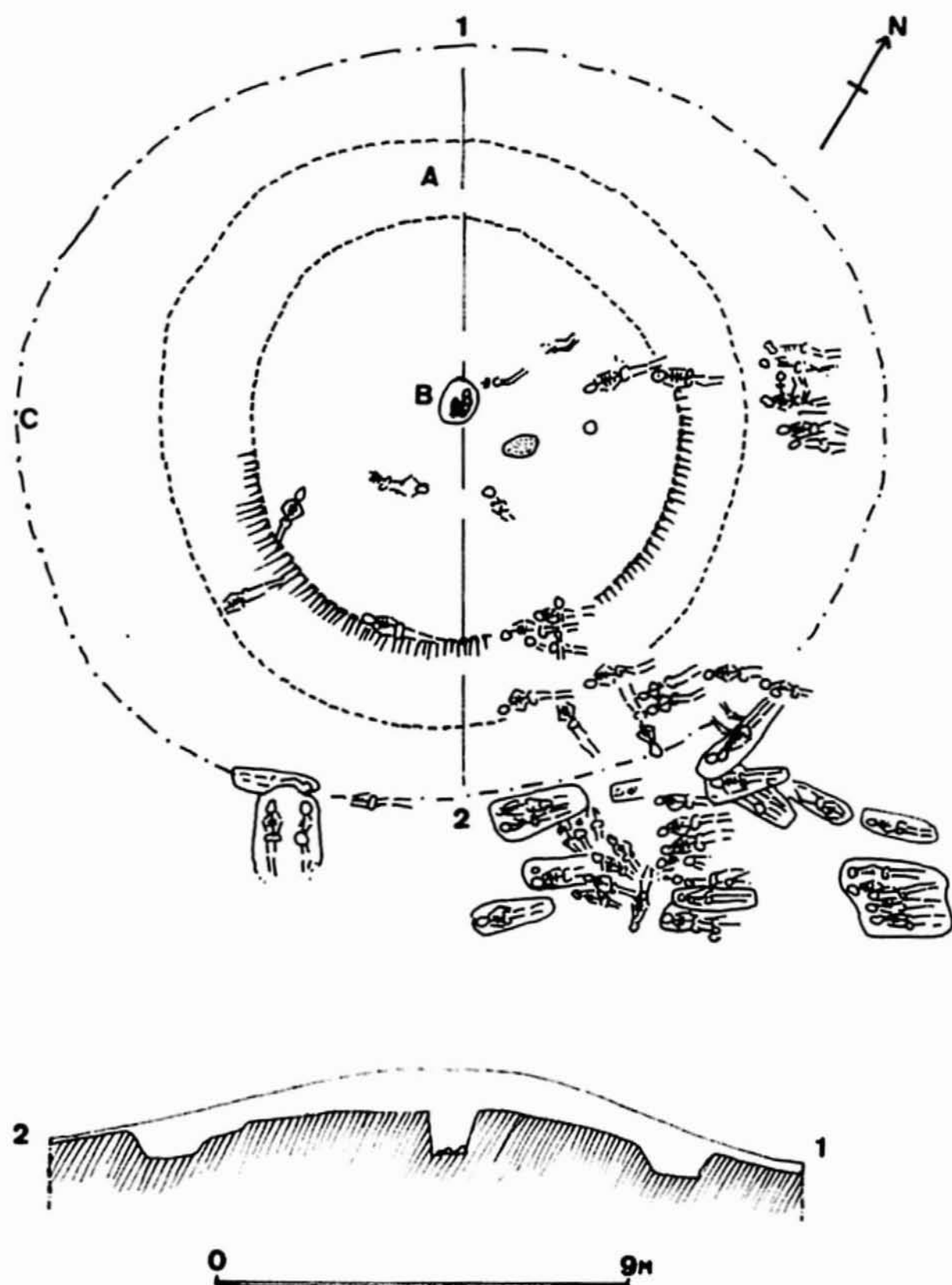


Fig. 4. Dunstable Five Knolls, Bedfordshire: an Anglo-Saxon execution cemetery focused on a Bronze Age round barrow. After Dunning and Wheeler, 'Barrow at Dunstable', fig. 1.

the barrow in these cemeteries, with victims interred both around and within the bronze-age mound.⁴⁶ At South Acre (Norfolk) the burials included a body bent backward (pl. XI), whilst the burials at Roche Court Down included individuals who had suffered amputations.⁴⁷

These six illustrations in the Harley 603 Psalter, it can be argued, exemplify a distinctly Anglo-Saxon version of hell and damnation, different from that portrayed in the Utrecht Psalter. It comprises a living-dead existence, trapped within the earth, often within a hollow beneath a hill or mound, tormented by demons. These hell pits are set within a landscape full of vents and smoking fissures, depicting multiple access points to the underworld. This topographical rendition conveyed the warning that hell was much closer to the reader than he might suspect. The portrayal of single figures or small groups creates a much more personalized image of hell than the massive, indistinguishable hordes of the damned found in the compositions of the Utrecht Psalter. The images of suffering have more impact when they contain one or two figures whose punishment is depicted in livid detail (71v and 67r). It seems clear that artist F reflected the Anglo-Saxon judicial system in his illustrations, using the punishments inflicted on criminals to represent the torment of the damned. The landscape, within which artist F sets the tormented and damned souls, reflects the contemporary practices regarding the disposal of the bodies of executed criminals. By depicting hell as holes, pits or clefts beneath mounds, F was developing the motifs found in the Utrecht Psalter representing hell and hell's mouth, creating illustrations that conveyed the contemporary practice of interring criminals, suicides, unbaptized and other sinners in prehistoric and later barrows.

Evidence has been identified in late Anglo-Saxon prose and poetic sources for the existence of fearful, superstitious belief regarding prehistoric and later barrows.⁴⁸ Documentary sources, including place-names, indicate that barrows were associated with a range of supernatural and demonic entities including monsters, hags, elves and ghosts.⁴⁹ It has been argued that this late superstition developed out of surviving pagan beliefs that regarded the afterlife as a 'quasi-physical' existence in the ground of the grave.⁵⁰ It has also been suggested that

⁴⁶ G. C. Dunning and R. E. M. Wheeler, 'A Barrow at Dunstable, Bedfordshire', *ArchJ* 88 (1931), 193–217.

⁴⁷ South Acre: J. J. Wymer, *Barrow Excavations in Norfolk, 1984–88*, East Anglian Archaeol. 77 (Dereham, 1996); Roche Court Down: J. F. S. Stone, 'Interments on Roche Court Down, Winterslow', *Wiltshire Archaeol. Nat. Hist. Mag.* 45 (1932), 568–82.

⁴⁸ S. Semple, 'A Fear of the Past: the Place of the Prehistoric Burial Mound in the Ideology of middle and later Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeol.* 30.1 (1998), 109–26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 109–15.

⁵⁰ Semple, *ibid.* p. 113; see also B. Griffiths, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Magic* (Norfolk, 1996), pp. 26–7.

Illustrations of damnation in late Anglo-Saxon manuscripts

folk belief and superstition regarding the barrow may have influenced its use for judicial purposes,⁵¹ and that its use for judicial purposes may in turn have enhanced and perpetuated late Anglo-Saxon popular beliefs surrounding this monument type.⁵²

The action of interring criminals at such sites is suspected to have had two purposes. First, it would have served as a physical sign of the alienation of these people from society: they were outcast from sanctified places of burial. Secondly, employing a landscape context associated with malevolent supernatural beasts, dragons and demons, and presumably the restless ghosts of the previously executed victims, might have been intended to enhance and prolong the victim's torment.

A FURTHER EXAMPLE

A remarkable late Anglo-Saxon illustration in London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. v may add support to the argument that a uniquely Anglo-Saxon perception of hell was portrayed in some late Anglo-Saxon manuscript art, and that it was rooted in local popular belief and contemporary judicial practice. Within the large composite volume Cotton Tiberius B. v is a section known as 'Marvels of the East', comprising thirty-eight framed drawings of fabulous people, monsters and wonders, illustrating a Latin text with Old English translation.⁵³ The most recent work has favoured a date towards the end of the eleventh century.⁵⁴

The Marvels of the East includes a full-page composition, 87v (pl. XII), depicting Mambres at the mouth of hell. This powerful image, with no direct continental parallel, contains all the motifs employed by artist F in Harley 603. The picture shows Mambres and Jannes, the magicians of the Pharaoh, who confront Moses (Ex. VII.11–VIII.19).⁵⁵ They are not named in Exodus but are identified in II Timothy III.8.⁵⁶ Biggs and Hall argue that a fragmentary excerpt of text, included at the end of the 'Marvels of the East' with the illustration (see below), shows that the tradition had some currency in late Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical circles. They further suggest that the excerpt was added to create

⁵¹ A. Reynolds, 'The Definition and Ideology of Anglo-Saxon Execution Sites and Cemeteries', *Death and Burial in Medieval Europe*, ed. G. de Boe and F. Verhaeghe (Zelik, 1997) II, 33–41.

⁵² Semple, 'A Fear of the Past', p. 123; an example of a superstitious place-name connected with a site, revealed through excavation as a location of ninth-century deviant burial, is Ailey Hill (Yorkshire, North Riding), (*Elueshor*: 'elf barrow'): see R. Hall and M. Whyman, 'Settlement and Monasticism at Ripon, N. Yorks. C7th–C11th AD', *MA* 40 (1996), 62–150.

⁵³ Temple, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, pp. 104–5.

⁵⁴ P. McGurk and A. Knock, 'The Marvels of the East', *An Eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon Illustrated Miscellany*, ed. P. McGurk, EEMF 21 (Copenhagen, 1983), 109.

⁵⁵ F. Biggs and T. Hall, 'Traditions concerning Jannes and Mambres in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 25 (1996), 69–89, at 69. ⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 69.

a suitably climactic end to the encyclopaedic 'Marvels', and that it may possibly have been composed in England.⁵⁷ Here we read,

Mambres opened the magical books of his brother Jannes; he performed necromancy and brought up from the netherworld his brother's shade. The soul of Jannes said in response, I your brother did not die unjustly, but indeed justly, and the judgement will go against me, since I was more clever than all the clever magicians, and opposed to the two brothers, Moses and Aaron, who performed great signs and wonders. As a result I died and was brought from among [the living] to the netherworld where there is great burning and the pit of perdition, whence no ascent is possible. Now then brother Mambres, make sure you do good in your life to your children and friends; for in the netherworld no good exists, only gloom and darkness. After you will have died and have come to the netherworld, among the dead, your abode will be two cubits wide and four cubits long.⁵⁸

A couple of themes in the excerpt concord with Anglo-Saxon preoccupations. Mambres is described as a *magus* and he performs necromancy, raising his brother from hell. Practices involving speaking to or even raising the dead are mentioned in later Anglo-Saxon laws and other sources, most notably Ælfric: 'Witches still go to cross-roads and to heathen burials with their delusive magic and call to the devil; and he comes to them in the likeness of the man who is buried there, as if he arise from death.'⁵⁹ Towards the end of the piece hell is described as a dark, confined and narrow place among the dead, analogous to the unusual late Anglo-Saxon conception of hell: a quasi-physical existence, trapped in the place of burial, tormented by supernatural monsters. Indeed, Ælfric's comment is further evidence that people believed the dead were still accessible at heathen burial places.⁶⁰

The accompanying illustration on 87v (pl. XII) uses a large mound or hill with an internal opening or chamber to represent hell. Inside are serpents and the bodies of the damned and emerging is Jannes, resplendently green and hairy. Although similarities have been noted between this illustration and the

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 69–74; they note on p. 89 that the Anglo-Saxons were interested in the texts and the traditions of the Apocrypha and furthermore, that although this portion of the Latin version of the apocryphal account of Jannes and Mambres was preserved and translated, there is no reason to conclude that more of the work was known, or any further work specifically about the brothers.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 71, n. 5 (after M. Förster, 'Das lateinisch-altenglische Fragment der Apokryphe von Jannes und Mambres', *ASNSL* 108 (1902), 15–23).

⁵⁹ *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection*, ed. J. C. Pope, 2 vols., EETS OS 259–60 (London, 1967–8) I, 167–8; II, 796; translation from A. Meaney, 'Ælfric and Idolatry', *Jnl. Religious Hist.* 13 (1984), 119–28.

⁶⁰ OE *beapan byrigels* is used many times in the Old English bounds attached to Anglo-Saxon land charters. It has been shown to refer to late Anglo-Saxon execution cemeteries: see A. Reynolds, 'Burials, Boundaries and Charters in Anglo-Saxon England: a Reassessment', *Burial in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. S. Lucy and A. Reynolds (London, 2002), pp. 171–94.

Illustrations of damnation in late Anglo-Saxon manuscripts

design of the mouth of Hell in the Utrecht Psalter, the image is regarded as a particularly English confection.⁶¹ The imagery is similar to that used to depict hell and torment by artist F in Harley 603. In the *Marvels of the East* composition, there is no reference to the contemporary judicial processes; however, the portrayal of a monster inhabiting an underground chamber or cavern, perhaps in a barrow, is illustrative of the Anglo-Saxon folk beliefs regarding landscape already discussed. Although no exemplar has been identified for this image, it is possible to propose that a detail from the Utrecht Psalter influenced the composition and also F's work, for 53v of the Carolingian manuscript includes the image of a monster reaching out from a fissure or hole. Yet if this was the source, the artist of Cotton Tiberius B.V, 87v, like F, has radically modified the motif. Once again the words of the accompanying text have encouraged the artist to respond to his contemporary world depicting hell with motifs from popular belief and practice rather than in the traditional continental manner set out in the Utrecht Psalter.

CONCLUSIONS

Evidence has been presented for the existence of a uniquely Anglo-Saxon portrayal of hell and damnation, found in a small group of illustrations of the tenth and eleventh centuries. This comprised a striking rendition of landscape including chimneys and vents, rocky holes, pits and mounds concealing pits or chambers, within which torment is presented in a detailed, personal way. Both the general setting and points of detail seem to reflect late Anglo-Saxon judicial process and popular belief. This Anglo-Saxon vision of hell and damnation combines Christian tenets and popular beliefs.⁶²

Strong arguments have been put forward for the existence of widespread superstitious beliefs regarding barrows and it has been suggested that they may have stemmed from pre-Christian beliefs regarding the afterlife, specifically the concept of the dead inhabiting the place of burial.⁶³ The church may have initiated the metamorphosis of these spirits into the monsters, elves, dragons and ghosts of the late prose and literary sources. The need to remove pre/non-Christian cult sites could have led to a demonizing of pagan ancestral sites and their supposed supernatural inhabitants, whence ultimately their use to evoke

⁶¹ McGurk and Knock, 'Marvels', p. 99.

⁶² Tselos, 'English MS Illustration', p. 139. Tselos has suggested artist A's innovations in Harley 603 included a more explicit and real rendition of demons than the Utrecht Psalter. Jolly, *Popular Religion*, pp. 136–7, argues that the medieval conception of demons reflected not only Christian ideas of evil but also Germanic views of spiritual agency, citing 66r from the Canterbury or Eadwine Psalter (Cambridge, Trinity College R. 17. 1, c. 1150). Both commentaries are supportive of the ideas put forward in this article, that the treatment of hell by Anglo-Saxon artists often involved graphic and innovative detail using motifs from common belief or practice. ⁶³ Semple, 'A Fear of the Past', pp. 113–23.

hell in the images discussed in this article. Be that as it may, the transformation of ancient barrows into places associated with heathenism and evil took place physically through their appropriation as locations for execution and for the interment of executed criminals and others perceived as outcast from the Christian community.⁶⁴ The vehicle for this process was the emergence of a structured judicial system that exploited the late Anglo-Saxon landscape.⁶⁵ Barrows or linear earthworks, chosen for their position on hundred boundaries and their commanding views, occupied topographical locations that both reinforced the alienation of the criminal from society and allowed the executions to act as powerful warnings against breaking the law.⁶⁶ The use of such barrows for this purpose reflected – or initiated – the folk-associations of barrows with evil, wrongdoers, heathens, ghosts and malevolent spirits and monsters.

Assuming that this analysis is correct, these popular beliefs and judicial practices were then reflected in ecclesiastical culture, in the Harley 603 Psalter. Karen Jolly notes, 'We lose sight of the fact that the authors of literate records were not just using popular folklore as part of some propaganda for the church, but they lived in folk culture just as much as the popular participants did because folkways were part of a shared culture.'⁶⁷ We know that two of the scribes who worked on Harley 603 also wrote legal documents. Artist scribe D2 has been identified as the scribe of BL Stowe Charter 35, composed in AD 1002 or 1003 (S 905), and Eadui Basan as the scribe of BL Stowe Charter 38, composed in AD 1018 (S950).⁶⁸ Although neither scribe's work has been central to this paper, it is worth observing that individuals like D2 were involved both in executing illustrations involving landscapes, and in producing documents that included descriptions of estate boundaries incorporating many landscape elements.⁶⁹ The boundary clauses attached to charters frequently record not only landscape features with supernatural associations⁷⁰ but also locations where judicial practice was taking place.⁷¹ It is impossible to say whether scribes ever visited estates to record the boundaries, or merely tran-

⁶⁴ Such as suicides or the unbaptized; see Reynolds, 'Law in the Landscape', pp. 112–13.

⁶⁵ A. Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England: Life and Landscape* (Stroud, 1999), p. 80 (fig. 26).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 108. ⁶⁷ Jolly, *Popular Religion*, p. 23.

⁶⁸ Noel, *Harley Psalter*, pp. 136 (S 905) and 137 (S 950).

⁶⁹ D. Hooke, *Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England* (Leicester, 1998), p. 87, notes that by the tenth and eleventh centuries some boundary clauses were brimming with topographical detail.

⁷⁰ S 138 (BCS 264), a grant of land at *Seuctan blaw* or *Fenntun* with Horwood (Bucks.) possibly dating to c. 792, identified with Shucklow (1799) in Gt/Lt Horwood (Bucks.); see *PNBucks* (69–70). OE *seucca*: 'goblin or demon', OE *blaw*: 'barrow or hill'.

⁷¹ S 647 grant of land at Stanton (St Bernard) (Wilts.). English bounds include OE *wearg rod*: 'criminal's cross or gallows'. The site is located on the parish boundary of Stanton St Bernard, on the hundred boundary of Swanborough and on East Wandsdyke (OE *wodnes dic*: ASC 597) the large linear earthwork of uncertain date crossing North Wiltshire.

Illustrations of damnation in late Anglo-Saxon manuscripts

scribed them from the descriptions of local officials, but the connection reminds us that illustrators and authors of literate records came into contact with landscape-related folk-culture.

The introduction to this article considered the ecclesiastical climate of the period. Churchmen such as Ælfric and Wulfstan were deeply concerned with popular pagan practice. In a period when Judgement was thought to be imminent, they both used confrontational approaches, describing and criticizing popular practice. The illustrations in the Harley Psalter by artist F are part of the same tradition, using images from the contemporary world to reinforce the message of the biblical text.

The illustrations discussed in this article can therefore be seen to reflect three areas of Anglo-Saxon society: the secular world of judicial process, the ecclesiastical world, and the folk-culture of popular beliefs and practices regarding landscape. The unique portrayal of hell and damnation in artist F's illustrations, and in the remarkable composition from Cotton Tiberius B. v, apparently represent common beliefs and practices prevalent in Anglo-Saxon England at the time. The result was a highly defined late Anglo-Saxon conception of landscape, within which the damned had both a physical and a metaphysical place.⁷²

⁷² I would like to thank Dr John Blair, Dr Richard Gameson, Dr Andrew Reynolds and Dr Catherine Karkov for their helpful comments during the preparation of this article.