Early Medieval England and its Neighbours (2026), **52**, e6, 1–36
doi:10.1017/ean.2025.10007

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cædmon and Muḥammad Revisited

Richard North

English Department, University College London, United Kingdom
Email: richard.north@ucl.ac.uk

(Received 06 October 2024; revised 02 July 2025; accepted 17 September 2025)

Abstract

This essay revisits the hypothesis that Bede modelled his story of Cædmon on that of Muḥammad in CE 610. It is argued that the pilgrim Arculf, who visited Jerusalem in around 680, transmitted the Prophet's story to Abbot Adomnán in Iona in 683–6, and that Adomnán passed it to Bede with his *De locis sanctis* in Jarrow in 688. It is shown that Bede's knowledge of the religion that became Islam was limited and that his attitude towards 'Saracens' remained neutral until around 715, when the news about the Arabs' occupation of Seville, city of Isidore, would have reached him in Northumbria. Despite evidence for Bede's later hostility to the Arabs, my essay claims that he continued to regard Muḥammad's story as suitable because his reading of Acts and the Pauline epistles primed him to accept all vernacular languages, including Arabic, as a medium for the word of God.

Keywords: Cædmon; Muḥammad; Adomnán; Early Islam; Muʿāwiya I

Cædmon is celebrated as the old illiterate cowherd whom an angel commands to sing of Creation one night in a dream. Mostly he is studied for his *Hymn*, the oldest poem extant in English, but some have seen a likeness between his story and that of Muḥammad, a middle-aged illiterate herdsman whom the archangel Gabriel commands to recite the Lord's words on Creation one night in a dream. Bede (*c.* 673–735) tells Cædmon's story in his *Historia ecclesiastica* (iv.24), introducing it as a sequel to his long obituary of Abbess Hild of *Streanaeshealch* (later named Whitby), who dies on 17 November 680 (for 679) at the age of 66 (iv.23), having ruled this double Deiran monastery from its foundation in 657.[1]

[1] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 414–20 (iv.24 (22)), at 406. *HE* chapter numbers in parentheses represent modern numbering: see *HE* (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 326). My translations

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Unlike Hild, whom Bede implies but does not name as the abbess in this sequel, Cædmon is relatively unknown.[2] He is not in the *Vita sancti Gregorii Magni* ('Life of Gregory the Great'), which was written anonymously in Whitby between *c.* 704 and 714,[3] but his British name seems an unlikely invention,[4] and as one reader puts it, the narrative has 'sufficient individual variation and suggestion of further detail to afford guarantees of its authenticity'.[5] If Cædmon became a monk in Whitby, as Bede says, it is plausible that he declared his dream there at the earliest after the Synod of 664, when the abbess could have begun to collect the scholars who validate his miracle.[6] Muḥammad, on the other hand, is very well known. His first revelation is dated to 610 in the month of Ramaḍān on a hilltop outside Mecca. Acknowledging the likeness between them, my essay shall revisit and attempt to reinforce the old hypothesis that Bede based the miracle of Cædmon on this story of Muḥammad.

Cædmon and Muḥammad: a Comparison

Bede tells Cædmon's story as a postscript to Hild's, saying that one of the abbess' monks was 'frater quidam diuina gratia specialiter insignis' ('a certain brother specially marked by God's grace'). He says that this monk is known for the ability to compose poetry 'ex diuinis litteris' ('based on the holy scriptures').[7] Moreover, Cædmon does not compose his poems in Latin. Against the expectations of Northumbrian monastic learning, he learns of each desired subject 'per interpretes' ('through interpreters'), through mediators of God's word to man,[8] before turning out his delightful poems 'in sua, id est Anglorum' ('in his, that is to say, the English, language'). Bede thus saves the most surprising aspect of Cædmon for the end of his opening sentence. Nor does he quote 'Cædmon's *Hymn*' when

of the work will be based on theirs. E. G. Stanley, 'New Formulas for Old: *Cædmon's Hymn*', *Pagans and Christians: the Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. T. Hofstra, L. A. J. R. Houwen, and A. A. MacDonald, Germania Latina 2, Medievalia Groningana 16 (Groningen, 1995), 131–48, at 134–5 and n. 8. Biblical translations from Douay-Rheims (https://drbo.org/index.htm). Dates will be given in Common Era format unless otherwise indicated (the Islamic calendar (AH) begins with Muḥammad's migration to Medina in 622).

[2] For the suggestion that the abbess was Hild's successor Eanflæd and that Bede wishes to mislead us into taking Hild to be Cædmon's patron, see D. Dumville, '"Beowulf" and the Celtic World: the Uses of Evidence', *Traditio* 37 (1981), 109–60, at 148; D. Cronan, 'Cædmon's *Hymn*: Context and Dating', *ES* 91.8 (2010), 817–25; A. Orchard, *A Literary History of Old English Verse* (forthcoming).

[3] *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby: Text, Translation and Notes*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 45–9, at 47–8.

[4] K. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain: a Chronological Survey of the Brittonic Languages, First to Twelfth Century A.D.* (Edinburgh, 1953), p. 554 (from *Cadvan* (< **Catumandos*)).

[5] G. Shepherd, 'The Prophetic Cædmon', *RES*, ns 5.18 (1954), 113–22, at 120.

[6] Five of Hild's pupils became bishops: Bosa of York (678–86, 691–*c.* 706); Ætla, of Dorchester (s. vii[3]); Oftfor, of Worcester (691–after 693); St John (of Beverley), of Hexham (687–*c.* 706) and then (after Bosa) of York (c. 706–*c.* 714); and Wilfrid II, of York (*c.* 714–32, after St John). See Bede, *HE* iv. 23 (21) (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 408–10); https://pase.ac.uk/pase/.

[7] Bede, *HE* iv.24 (22) (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 414).

[8] R. Stanton, 'Linguistic Fragmentation and Redemption before King Alfred', *YES* 36.1 (2006), 12–26, at 18.

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the moment arrives, but offers instead a Latin paraphrase of this poem, whose original appears to survive with mostly minor variants usually in the margins of some twenty manuscripts of the *Historia ecclesiastica.* Although all Old English versions of the poem were copied after Bede's death in 735, two of them, as we shall see, may have had his sanction, being added within the following decade in his own Northumbrian dialect to Latin manuscripts of this work in or near his scriptorium in Wearmouth-Jarrow.[9]

In his second sentence Bede says that Cædmon's poems inspired many people to renounce the world and to think of the heavenly life. Other Englishmen, he says, composed religious poems after Cædmon, but their poems could never compare with his. Comparing Cædmon with St Paul on the road to Damascus, Bede says that 'ipse "non ab hominibus neque per hominem" institutus canendi artem didicit, sed diuinitus adiutus gratis canendi donum accepit'.[10] The incident to which Bede refers is St Paul's revelation before his Damascene conversion, when, as Saul, he was persecuting the early Christians. After a blinding light envelops him and a voice asks 'Quid me persequeris?' ('Why persecutest thou me?', Acts IX.4), Saul accepts the role of apostle and becomes 'Paul'. The quotation in Bede's sentence comes from the Letter to the Galatians I.1, in which St Paul declares himself commissioned by Jesus Christ and God the Father.[11] Again, in verses 11–16 of the same chapter, Paul tells the Galatians that the message they have heard him preach is the product of divine intervention: 'neque enim ego ab homine accepi illud, neque didici, sed per revelationem Iesu Christi'. The story is most fully told in Acts of the Apostles IX.3–9, with a variant account in Acts XXII.9. In this way, the Pauline words 'non ab hominibus neque per hominem' prepare us for a revelation in Whitby.

Cædmon's poems, which were consequently never frivolous but always elevated, says Bede, came from a man who had worked on Hild's estates as a labourer 'usque ad tempora prouectioris' ('to an age beyond man's middle years'). He never learned singing and in festive gatherings would get up and go back home when he saw the lyre being handed towards him. Leaving on one such occasion, says Bede, Cædmon goes to the cowbyre to take charge of the cattle, and falls asleep:

> adstitit ei quidam per somnium, eumque salutans ac suo appellans nomine 'Caedmon,' inquit, 'canta mihi aliquid.'
>
> At ille respondens: 'Nescio,' inquit, 'cantare; nam et ideo de conuiuio egressus huc secessi, quia cantare non poteram.'

[9] St Petersburg, National Library of Russia, lat. Q.v.I.18, 107r; and Cambridge, University Library, MS. Kk.5.16, 128v: both manuscripts datable to 736 × 746. See K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Orality and the Developing Text of Cædmon's *Hymn*', *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: Basic Readings*, ed. M. P. Richards (New York, 2001), pp. 221–50, at 234–7.

[10] 'He himself learned the art of poetry "not by men or through man", but he received the gift of song by the grace of divine aid', Bede, *HE* iv.24 (22) (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 414).

[11] 'For neither did I receive it of man, nor did I learn it; but by the revelation of Jesus Christ' (Gal. I.12). *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, ed. A. Colunga and L. Turrado, 7th edition (Madrid, 1985), p. 1128.

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> Rursum ille, qui cum eo loquebatur, 'Attamen,' ait, 'mihi cantare habes.'
>
> 'Quid,' inquit, 'debeo cantare?'
>
> Et ille, 'Canta,' inquit, 'principium creaturarum.'
>
> Quo accepto responso, statim ipse coepit cantare in laudem Dei conditoris uersus, quos numquam audierat.[12]

Bede gives the sense of this poem through a Latin version in prose:

> Nunc laudare debemus Auctorem regni caelestis, potentiam Creatoris et consilium illius, facta Patris gloriae: quomodo ille, cum sit aeternus Deus, omnium miraculorum auctor extitit, quo primo filiis hominum caelum pro culmine tecti, dehinc terram Custos humani generis omnipotens creauit.[13]

Having announced that this sense is unfaithful to the order of Cædmon's words, Bede regrets the impossibility of translating 'carmina, quamuis optime conposita' ('songs, even if excellently put together') from one language to another without some loss of ornament and weight.

When Cædmon awakes, he remembers all he has sung in his dream and soon adds 'plura in eundem modum' ('more in the same style'), all in praise of God. Taking this to his overseer, who brings him before the court of Abbess Hild, Cædmon 'iussus est, multis doctioribus uiris praesentibus, indicare somnium et dicere carmen, ut uniuersorum iudicio quid uel unde esset quod referebat probaretur'.[14] The scholars must be there to align his work with the scriptures, although their agreement that Cædmon's gift is divinely inspired also hints at an initial fear, in the words 'quid uel unde esset', of a demonic intervention. Either motive works against Daniel P. O'Donnell's conclusion that both Bede and the scholars who vetted Cædmon were 'more interested in Cædmon's ability as a poet than in the origins of his gift'.[15] Then the 'doctores' test him further by reading him 'quendam sacrae historiae siue doctrinae sermonem' ('a passage of sacred history or doctrine') which he must put

[12] 'There appeared to him in a dream someone greeting him and calling him by name. "Cædmon," he says, "sing something for me." But he, replying, says: "I don't know how to sing, and indeed, that is why I left the party, because I couldn't sing." Again, the one talking to him said: "Nevertheless, you have to sing for me." "What," he says, "must I sing?" And he: "Sing of the first created things." Taking this for his answer, immediately he began to sing in praise of God the Founder verses which he had never heard', Bede, *HE* iv.24 (22) (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 416).

[13] 'Now we must praise the Author of the kingdom of heaven, the power of the Creator and His counsel, the deeds of the Father of glory: how He, since He is the eternal God, has existed as the author of all marvels, and first created heaven as a roof-top for children of men, and then mankind's almighty Guardian created the earth', Bede, *HE* iv.24 (22) (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 416).

[14] 'was commanded to describe his dream and to recite his song in the presence of many of the more learned men, so that what he was relating and whence it came might be examined in the judgement of all', Bede, *HE* iv.24 (22) (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 418).

[15] D. P. O'Donnell, *Cædmon's Hymn: a Multimedia Study, Edition, and Archive* (Woodbridge, 2005), §§1.10, 2.46.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ean.2025.10007 Published online by Cambridge University Press

into verse. Cædmon accepts the task and returns the following morning with 'optimo carmine quod iubebatur conpositum' ('the requested passage composed in excellent verse'). Abbess Hild orders him to take monastic vows, to be received into the community of monks, and 'seriem sacrae historiae doceri' ('to be taught the whole course of sacred history'). Cædmon listens, learns and memorises; 'quasi mundum animal ruminando' ('like a clean animal chewing the cud'), he turns what he hears into the most melodious poetry; hearing this in turn, his teachers become his audience. In due course, Cædmon turns all sacred history into verse: effectively Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, as well as singing 'de aliis plurimis sacrae scripturae historiis' ('on many other stories from holy writ'); then Christ in the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and the Apocalypse; as well as lyrics 'de beneficiis et iudiciis' ('about divine mercies and judgements') with which to turn his audience from sin towards the love of good works.

Bede's sources for this story plausibly start with a rumour or legend from Whitby, to which he has added the allusion to St Paul from Galatians I.1. One other source that has been found is for Bede's metaphor of Cædmon's ruminating like a ritually clean beast. Initially this was traced to Leviticus XI.3 and Deuteronomy XIV.6.[16] However, the line appears to come from a description of the blind scholar Didymus of Alexandria, written by Rufinus of Aquileia as an addition to his translation of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (xi.7), completed before 395.[17] Rufinus, having been taught by Didymus between 371 and 375, says that his teacher perfectly memorised what he heard read to him and then, 'tanquam mundum animal ruminans cibum quem ceperat ex integro revocabat' ('like a clean animal chewing the cud, would bring back all the nourishment he had received').[18] This loan is made more plausible by the likelihood that Bede adopted Eusebius' ecclesiastical mode of history from reading Rufinus' translation.[19] The typology of Didymus also fits with St Paul, whose revelation on the road to Damascus transforms him while he is blind for three days (Acts IX.9).

Although no other source for Cædmon's story has been accepted, there are several Anglo-Saxon analogues, of which the most prominent is the eleventh-century story of St Dunstan being taught to sing an antiphon by an angel in a dream.[20] O'Donnell lists this and forty-four others from around the world.[21]

[16] Bede, *HE* iv.24 (22) (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 418, n. 1). *Biblia Sacra*, ed. Colunga and Turrado, p. 88 (Lev. XI.3: 'Omne quod habet divisam ungulam, et ruminat in pecoribus, comedetis'); p. 154 (Deut. XIV.6: 'Omne animal, quod in duas partes findit ungulam, et ruminat, comedetis'). On rumination through English translation, see A. Crépin, 'Bede and the Vernacular', *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Century of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. G. Bonner (London, 1976), pp. 170–192, at 179–81.

[17] J. M. Pizarro, 'Poetry as Rumination: the Model for Bede's Caedmon', *Neophilologus* 89 (2005), 469–72, at 470.

[18] Quoted in Pizarro, 'Poetry as Rumination', pp. 470–1 and n. 5.

[19] L. W. Barnard, 'Bede and Eusebius as Church Historians', *Famulus Christi*, ed. Bonner, pp. 106–124, at 121.

[20] Shepherd, 'The Prophetic Cædmon', pp. 113–16. *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom and M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2012), pp. 86–9 (*Vita s. Dunstani*, ch. 29.3).

[21] O'Donnell, *Cædmon's Hymn*, Note §E.1. D. P. O'Donnell, 'Material Differences: the Place of Cædmon's Hymn in the History of Anglo-Saxon Vernacular Poetry', *Cædmon's Hymn and Material*

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One analogue to which he devotes particular attention is the story of Muḥammad's first revelation outside Mecca in 610.[22] The surviving written evidence for this story is dated to more than a century after the Prophet's lifetime (*c.* 570–632). Details of his life may be inferred from the Qur'ān, whose text did not reach canonical form until the reign of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (685–705).[23] Otherwise the Prophet's life is known from hadiths (*aḥadīth*), oral narratives alleging chains of informants. Upon these uncertain sources, biographies were written which survived in other men's redactions from the mid-eighth century onwards.[24] The leading extant biography is contained in *The Life of the Prophet* (*as-sīrat an-nabawiyyah* السيرة النبوية), a work from the beginning of the ninth century, written by 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām (d. 833). This work incorporated an otherwise lost biography of the mid-eighth century by the scholar Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq (d. 767/8), *The Life of God's Messenger* (*sīrat rasūl allāh* سيرة رسول الله), also known as *The Book of the Campaigns* (*kitāb al-maghāzī* كتاب المغازي).[25] These and some later works on the Prophet organise his biography according to biblical typology and the Islamic theology of their day. Presently there is disagreement about how to read these later sources from the eighth to tenth centuries: between 'sanguine' scholars who accept them as true for the seventh century, 'traditionalists' who treat them as the basis for reconstructing Muḥammad's history in the absence of contemporary Arabic sources, and 'sceptics' who prefer the contemporary evidence of mostly non-Arabic origin which might throw light on how Muḥammad's new religion developed.[26] With these caveats in mind, let us continue with the story of the Prophet's first revelation, as told by Ibn Isḥāq, through the redaction of Ibn Hishām.

According to *The Life of God's Messenger*, Muḥammad was a herdsman around Mecca, about forty years old and married to his cousin the merchant Khadījah, also his employer. One evening in the month of Ramaḍān (around December) he retired to meditate on the slopes of Mt Hirā' just east of Mecca. In a cave near the summit, Muḥammad had a vision, which is reported in his alleged words:

> When it was the night on which God honoured him with his mission and showed mercy on His servants thereby, Gabriel brought him the command

Culture in the World of Bede: Six Essays, ed. A. Frantzen and J. Hines, Med. European Stud. 7 (Morgantown, WV, 2007), 15–50, at 16–17.

[22] O'Donnell, *Cædmon's Hymn*, pp. 34–9; 'Material Differences', pp. 22–7.

[23] S. Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an: a Historical-Critical Study* (Oakland, CA, 2022), pp. 54–5. R. G. Hoyland, *In God's Path: the Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 36–8 and 231–3.

[24] S. W. Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith: the Making of the Prophet of Islam* (Oakland, CA, 2020), pp. 209–11. M. Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 62–6.

[25] *The Life of Muhammad: a Translation of Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, trans. A. Guillaume (Oxford, 1955), pp. xiv–xli. C. Monette, 'A Mystery of Revelation: "Caedmon's Hymn" and the Qur'an 96: 1–5', *Comparative Islamic Stud.* 4.1–2 (2008), 149–64, at 151–2.

[26] F. M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Stud. in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 14 (Princeton, NJ, 1998), 35–62. J. Little, 'The New Historiography of Islamic Origins: a Review of Some Recent Trends in the Field', published 21 October, 2022, *Islamic Origins: Essays on History, Religion, and Politics*: https://islamicorigins.com/the-new-historiography-of-islamic-origins/.

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> of God. 'He came to me,' said the apostle of God, 'while I was asleep, with a coverlet of brocade whereon was some writing, and said, 'Read!'
> I said, 'What shall I read?'
> He pressed me with it so tightly that I thought it was death; then he let me go and said, 'Read!'
> I said, 'What shall I read?'
> He pressed me with it again so that I thought it was death; then he let me go and said 'Read!'
> I said, 'What shall I read?'
> He pressed me with it the third time so that I thought it was death and said 'Read!'
> I said, 'What then shall I read?'—and this I said only to deliver myself from him, lest he should do the same to me again.'[27]

Then the archangel declaimed lines which the illiterate Muḥammad 'read'. Having awakened and finding these lines, his first divine message, 'written on his heart', Muḥammad recites them the next day to Khadījah, who tells his story and the angel's words to her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a Christian. Waraqah approves them as divinely given and proclaims Muḥammad to be the prophet of his people. After Muḥammad's retreat is ended, Waraqah proclaims this to him also as he walks around the Kaaba.[28] The lines in question, quoted by Ibn Isḥāq, are preserved as the opening five verses of Sūrah 96 in the Qur'ān, where they go as follows:

1 اِقْرَاْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِیْ خَلَقَ
2 خَلَقَ الْاِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ
3 اِقْرَاْ وَرَبُّكَ الْاَكْرَمُۙ
4 الَّذِیْ عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِۙ
5 عَلَّمَ الْاِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ یَعْلَمْ

1. Read! In the name of your Lord who created:
2. He created man from a clinging form.
3. Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One
4. Who taught by the pen,
5. Who taught man what he did not know.[29]

This story can be called the '*iqra'* narrative', after the angel's imperative in the first and third verses.[30] The word *iqra'* is from the verb *qara'a*, 'to read, to recite', which shares a root with the noun *qur'ān*, for 'the act of reciting, or reading',

[27] *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 106.
[28] *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 107.
[29] Transliterated (initial vowels without hamza): '1. *iqra' bi-smi rabbik alladhi khalaqa 2. khalaq al-insāna min 'alaqin 3. iqra' warabbuk al-akramu 4. alladhi 'allama bi-l-qalami 5. 'allam al-insāna mā lam ya'lam.' The Qur'an: English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text*, ed. and trans. M. A. S. Haleem (Oxford, 2010), p. 598 (96.1–5).
[30] Anthony, *Muhammad and Empires of Faith*, p. 228.

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whence the name for the holy book of Islam.[31] The miracle of Muḥammad's first revelation is that he reads, despite being illiterate. It is worth recalling that blind Didymus, gifted with the ability to memorise despite being functionally illiterate in the 370s, provides the basis, through Rufinus, for Bede's image of Cædmon composing poems.[32]

This story of Muḥammad resembles Isaiah XXIX.11–12, in which Isaiah says that the Lord has stupefied His prophets, as if with wine:

11. Et erit vobis visio omnium
Sicut verba libri signati,
Quem cum dederint scienti litteras,
Dicent: Lege istum:
Et respondebit: Non possum, signatus est enim.
12. Et dabitur liber nescienti litteras,
Diceturque ei: Lege:
Et respondebit: Nescio litteras.[33]

It has been wondered if these verses, with the illiterate's refusal to read, might not have separately inspired the narratives of Muḥammad and Cædmon.[34] Isaiah's emphasis on reading as the recognition of signs lends credibility to the idea of its influence on Muḥammad, but less so where Bede is concerned, given that his speaker emphasises singing rather than recognising signs.

Nor do Isaiah's verses contain the narrative which is common to Muḥammad and Cædmon and which has first a refusal to comply, second a question about the subject, and third a recitation about the Creator. This common structure caught the eye of Francis P. Magoun Jr. more than seventy years ago, when he referred readers of Cædmon 'to the extraordinarily parallel but totally unrelated story of Mohammed's first revelation'.[35] And yet Magoun, despite outlining this story in a footnote with more detail than the space allows, seems reluctant to let the matter be pursued. Two decades later a stronger case for influence appeared in which G. A. Lester compared Cædmon's with eleven other stories of dream-vision inspiration, including the legends of Homer, Aeschylus, the *Heliand* poet, and St Dunstan.[36] Lester's comparative survey grades the Muḥammad resemblance with an overlap of 63 %, with fifteen narrative

[31] *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*, ed. E. M. Badawi and M. A. [S.] Haleem, Handbook of Oriental Studies Section 1: the Near and Middle East 85 (Leiden, 2008), 746 (*s.v. Qur'ān* 'the act of reciting, or reading'; *al-Qur'ān*).

[32] Pizarro, 'Poetry as Rumination', pp. 470–1.

[33] '11. And the vision of all shall be unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which when they shall deliver to one that is learned, they shall say: Read this: and he shall answer: I cannot, for it is sealed. 12. And the book shall be given to one that knoweth no letters, and it shall be said to him: Read: and he shall answer: I know no letters', *Biblia Sacra*, ed. Colunga and Turrado, p. 701.

[34] Anthony, *Muhammad and Empires of Faith*, p. 214.

[35] F. P. Magoun Jr., 'Bede's Story of Cædman: the Case History of an Anglo-Saxon Singer', *Speculum* 30 (1955), 49–63, at 58, n. 21.

[36] G. A. Lester, 'The Cædmon Story and its Analogues', *Neophilologus* 58 (1974), 225–37, at 228–9. O'Donnell, *Cædmon's Hymn*, Note §E.1.

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'essentials' in common out of twenty-four: each story is (1) set within a religious environment, with a protagonist who (2) tends animals, (3) is previously untrained in poetry, and (4) is asleep when (5) he receives a visit from a certain person, who (6) instructs him to sing or recite; when (7) the protagonist replies that he cannot sing or recite, (8) the instruction is repeated; when (9) the protagonist requests guidance as to what to sing, (10) he is told to celebrate God's Creation; having done so, (11) he recognises his gift as divine; (12) others recognise his gift as divine, whereupon (13) he begins to compose more pious and religious verse which is both (14) in his own language and (15) of the highest quality. In these last three respects, some continuity may also be observed whereby Cædmon's production of new biblical poems resembles Muḥammad's reception of a further 6,235 verses from the same source, Archangel Gabriel.

Lester also lists points of difference: (1) Cædmon is said to be advanced in years, whereas Muḥammad is around forty years old; (2) unlike Muḥammad, Cædmon is an outsider in his community, (3) is greeted by name, and (4) sings praise of God still in his sleep, (5) adding more verses on awakening; (6) unlike Muḥammad, Cædmon is tested the next day by scholars who wish to ascertain that his vision was not demonic; unlike Muḥammad, (7) Cædmon is then provided with new subject matter on which to compose, which (8) he produces after a day; and (9) Cædmon becomes a celebrated poet, whereas Muḥammad the next day is keen not to be called a poet.[37] Some of these differences are less apparent, however: as for (1), neither man is young when he receives his vision; as for (2), Cædmon, insofar as he takes part in a feast, belongs to his community; as for (6), although Muḥammad's vision is not tested, Khadījah's visit to her Christian cousin Waraqah the next day parallels Hild's recourse to the scholars of Whitby, as Sean W. Anthony has said.[38] If these revisions were added to the list of existing parallels, there would be an overlap of 75 %. In short, although neither percentage is set in stone, the visions of Cædmon and Muḥammad appear to be remarkably similar. Contextually, it is worth adding an implication of Muḥammad's homeland in the context of Bede's opening quotation of Galatians I.1, for St Paul, whose Damascene conversion prepares us for his story of Cædmon's dream, caps his own story of this experience in Galatians I.11–16 with the statement that 'neque veni Ierosolymam ad antecessores meos Apostolos: sed abii in Arabiam, et iterum reversus sum Damascum' (Galatians I.17).[39]

Since Lester, the idea of a loan is accepted by Katherine Scarfe Beckett and praised by Joaquín Martínez Pizarro, who calls Muḥammad's story the 'closest fit by far', but neither goes in for a discussion.[40] O'Donnell, who does, argues against a connection by dwelling on the differences.[41] Outside Anglo-Saxon studies,

[37] *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 106: 'Woe is me poet or possessed – Never shall Quraysh say this of me!'.

[38] *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 107. Anthony, *Muhammad and Empires of Faith*, p. 216.

[39] 'Neither went I to Jerusalem, to the apostles who were before me: but I went into Arabia, and again I returned to Damascus'. *Biblia Sacra*, ed. Colunga and Turrado, p. 1129.

[40] K. Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, CSASE 33 (Cambridge, 2003), 54. Pizarro, 'Poetry as Rumination', p. 472, n. 7.

[41] O'Donnell, *Cædmon's Hymn*, §2.11–15; 'Material Differences', pp. 24–7.

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Magoun's note on Muḥammad has been treated more favourably by Arabists and other specialists aligned with them. Nine years after Lester, but without appearing to have read him, Klaus von See responded to Magoun's misgivings with his own case for the influence of Muḥammad on Cædmon. Treating the latter's story as a fiction with which Bede wished to create an 'Initiations-Szene' for all northern vernacular biblical verse, von See hypothesised an oral transmission of the *iqra'* narrative to Northumbria through a meeting between Duke Eudo (or Odo) of Toulouse and his son-in-law, Governor 'Uthman ibn Naissa (Munuza) of Septimania, in a time of peace after the Arabs' conquest of Hispania in 711–20.[42] If true, this would mean that Bede heard a version of this narrative older than that which featured in Ibn Isḥāq's biography of the mid-eighth century. Von See disclosed his idea to a traditionalist on early written sources for Islam, Rudolf Sellheim, who responded by taking Cædmon as evidence that this narrative was known in 720s Toulouse.[43] A belief in this influence had in any case spread. Citing Lester fifteen years after his case for influence, but not von See, Zacharias Thundy wrote his own endorsement of this narrative as a source for the story of Cædmon's vision. Thundy theorises that Bede, treating Muḥammad's revelation as a Christian story, also 'gathered as much information about Islam as he could'.[44] Following von See and Sellheim, but without citing Lester or Thundy, the Arabist Gregor Schoeler used Cædmon again to claim that Ibn Isḥāq's *iqra'* narrative was decades older than his book.[45]

More recently, the Arabist Connell Monette, following Lester but without citing von See or Thundy, has carried out a more cautious comparison which acknowledges the high number of parallels, but which finds no explanation for the resemblance, despite the probability that these stories are 'somehow connected in the medieval Abrahamic tradition'.[46] However, not everyone is cautious. Without going into detail or citing any of these scholars, Abdul-Jabbar Jassim Mohammad treats Bede's use of Islam as 'undeniable', concluding simply that since Bede never admits his debt to the Qur'ān, 'it is possible to accuse him of plagiarism'.[47] Sean W. Anthony has considered this idea more carefully. Describing the resemblance between the stories as 'certainly remarkable, and even uncanny, not merely because of their chronological proximity', he adduces every possible analogue from European sources, as well as the aforesaid Isaiah

[42] K. von See, 'Cædmon und Muhammed', *ZDA* 112.4 (1983), 225–33, at 229 and 231–3. Accepted in D. Schürr, 'Cædmons *carmen* und Bedas Paraphrase', *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 85 (2025), 1–14, at 3. For what happened to Munuza, see Hoyland, *In God's Path*, p. 178.

[43] R. Sellheim, 'Muhammeds erstes Offenbarungserlebnis. Zum Problem mündlicher und schriftlicher Überlieferung im 1./7. und 2./8. Jahrhundert', *Jerusalem Stud. in Arabic and Islam* 10 (1987), 1–16.

[44] Z. P. Thundy, '*The Qur'ān*: Source or Analogue of Bede's Cædmon Story?', *Islamic Culture* 63 (1989), 105–10, at 109.

[45] G. Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds* (Berlin, 1996), pp. 60–1, n. 203.

[46] Monette, 'A Mystery of Revelation', pp. 161–2. See also A. Marsham, 'Bede, Ibn Isḥāq, and the Idols: Narratives of Conversion at Late Antique Edges', *Mélanges James Howard-Johnston*, ed. P. Booth and M. Whitby, Travaux et Mémoires 26 (Paris, 2022), 315–39, at 323, n. 29.

[47] A.-J. Jassim Mohammad, 'Bede's the Poet Caedmon and the Influence of Islam', *Buhuth Mustaqbaliya Scientific Jnl* 4.2 (2013), 61–70, at 66–9 (68, 69).

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XXIX.10–12.[48] Weighing up these, Anthony twice warms to an idea of an early English loan from Muḥammad, whereby Bede's story would have been a 'prestigious imitation', an early version of King Offa's imitation dinar.[49] Finally, however, he returns for his answer to 'a common well of narrative tropes, motifs, and archetypes that go far beyond biblical material'.[50] Like O'Donnell, he objects to any but an indirect possibility of influence, because the resemblance is imperfect and because there is no evidence of transmission.

That no one has hypothesised a route for this is probably because of the distance between Mecca and Northumbria and the lack of evidence for (the knowledge of) Islamic texts in or near Anglo-Saxon England in the century of Arab expansion after the Prophet's death in 632.[51] Nonetheless, the high number of parallels continues to invite further consideration of possible links in support of a loan from one story to the other, with the object of finding the most plausible route of transmission. Only three generations divide the two incidents on which these stories of Cædmon and Muḥammad are based, while the conversion histories of England and Arabia are surprisingly similar.[52] Had cowbyre and cave been somewhat closer in location, the high number of matching narrative motifs might have encouraged a more positive approach to the idea that Bede tells the story of Cædmon on the basis of an illiterate Arab herdsman reciting God's words on Creation for the benefit of a society keeping paganism at bay. This approach will be followed here. Before we go further, however, there are two theological problems to consider that constitute the greatest objections. One is a textual implication that Cædmon's *Hymn* represents the revealed word of God; the other is Bede's condemnation of the Arabs as heretics.

'Uersus, quos numquam audierat'

Since Bede initially refers to Paul's divine revelation, later he might imply the revealed word of God for Cædmon, who 'coepit cantare in laudem Dei conditoris uersus, quos numquam audierat' ('began to sing in praise of God the Founder verses which he had never heard').[53] The outcome of Cædmon's revelation, however, is to create Northumbrian poems according to a divine template.[54]

[48] Anthony, *Muhammad and Empires of Faith*, pp. 207 and 213–21.

[49] Anthony, *Muhammad and Empires of Faith*, p. 225. For the dinar, dated to 773/4 (AH 157), see S. Anwar and J. L. Bacharach, 'The Prestige of Muslim Coins: an Eighth-Century English Imitation of a Muslim Dinar', *Al-Abhath: Jnl of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of the Amer. Univ. of Beirut*, 58–59 (2010–11 [2013]), 13–20, at 13 (colour image, both sides) and 14: 'rather than stress the errors, highest praise is due to the Anglo-Saxon die-cutter who copied with great accuracy a script with which he most likely would not have been familiar'.

[50] Anthony, *Muhammad and Empires of Faith*, p. 217.

[51] Southern, *Western Views of Islam*, pp. 6–7, 15–16.

[52] Marsham, 'Narratives of Conversion at Late Antique Edges', pp. 316–23.

[53] Bede, *HE* iv.24 (22) (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 416–17).

[54] O'Donnell, *Cædmon's Hymn*, §2.15; 'Material Differences', p. 26. Most analogues are of poetic inspiration only. See also his *Cædmon's Hymn*, §E.1.

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It is likely, therefore, that Bede means Cædmon's words to be 'of God', rather than 'from God'. Despite the speaking angel in both stories, Gabriel on Mt Hīra' and apparently in Whitby, God's gift to the Northumbrian cowherd is confined to his new inspiration to compose vernacular poetry in Hild's double monastery apparently before her death in 679/80. Whereas the Arab herdsman recites the revealed word of God, as he does here and in all other Sūrahs of the Qur'ān, any notion that Cædmon did on one occasion likewise would entail a readjustment in Bede's salvation history sufficient to turn Cædmon's later programme into a movement of its own. Bede claims nothing of this sort or scale for the Northumbrian cowherd, so his words must be read differently.

The content of Cædmon's *Hymn* is learned and close to liturgy. Written in prose, its nine verse-lines were passed down over as many as four centuries in a manuscript transmission separate from the Latin text of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica.* The *Hymn* has thus survived in twenty-two manuscripts of which twenty have reached the present intact, both in Bede's Latin and in later West Saxon translations.[55] In the Latin context the poem was copied as a gloss in a margin or elsewhere in the manuscript; only in the Old English translations of the *Historia* was the poem part of the text, naturally without a version of Bede's paraphrase and without his apology for translating the words.[56] The poem's oldest versions survive near the Latin text of Cædmon's story in two manuscripts: in St Petersburg, National Library of Russia,[57] lat. Q.v.I.18, 107r; and in 128v of Cambridge, University Library, MS. Kk.5.16, otherwise known as the 'Moore Bede'. Both manuscripts are datable to 736 × 746 and appear to be close to Bede's scriptorium in Jarrow, but they differ in their placing of Cædmon's *Hymn.* The St Petersburg manuscript was copied by four scribes (ABCD) before 746 and appears to be close to Bede's finished draft, having only six errors in the Latin text.[58] Scribe D copied both the Latin of Bede's chapter in the regular format, two columns of twenty-seven lines per page, and the Northumbrian English text in a smaller hand (insular minuscule) in three prose lines spanning the foot of the page. With his word division being 'as scrupulous as in the Latin text', it seems likely that Scribe D supplied this poem as the original for Bede's Latin paraphrase.[59] The Moore Bede, copied at around the same time, differs from the St Petersburg *Historia* in having one scribe who copied the *Hymn* in prose lines near the end as a hurried addendum.[60] The St Petersburg Bede has the more careful text:

[55] O'Donnell, *Cædmon's Hymn*, §4.1–4. Stanley, 'New Formulas for Old', p. 131.

[56] O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Orality and Cædmon's *Hymn*', pp. 225–6 and 233–4.

[57] Formerly 'Leningrad, M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library'.

[58] O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Orality and Cædmon's *Hymn*', p. 235.

[59] O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Orality and Cædmon's *Hymn*', pp. 235–6, at 236.

[60] For a full-page facsimile of the St Petersburg Bede, 107r, see J. Roberts, *Guide to Scripts used in English Writings up to 1500* (London, 2005), pp. 18–20, at 19 (Plate 1, reduced to 85 %). Facsimiles are also given in K. S. Kiernan, 'Reading "Cædmon's Hymn" with Someone Else's Glosses', *Representations* 32 (1990), 157–74, at 160 (Fig. 1: Moore Bede, 128v) and 161 (Fig. 2: Leningrad [St Petersburg] Bede, fol. 107r).

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Nu scılun herga hefen rıcæs uard metudæs mehtı and hıs mod gıthanc uerc uuldur fadur suehe uundra
gı huæs ecı dryctın or astelıdæ he ærıst scop aeldubarnum hefen to hrofæ halıg sceppend
tha mıddıngard moncynnæs uard ecı dryctın æfter tıadæ fırum foldu frea all mehtıg.[61]

This addendum may be ordered into verse lines as follows, with a literal translation:

Nū scilun herga hefenricæs Uard,
Metudæs mehti and his mōdgithanc,
uerc Uuldurfadur, suē hē uundra gihuæs,
ēci Dryctin, ōr āstelidæ.
Hē ærist scōp aeldu barnum
hefen tō hrōfæ, hālig Sceppend.
Thā middingard moncynnæs Uard,
ēci Dryctin, æfter tīadæ
fīrum foldu, Frēa allmehtig.[62]

The opening statement that the works must praise their Creator differs from Bede's translation (*Nunc laudare debemus*) in which Cædmon exhorts himself and his audience to do the same. For this reason, the poem is less likely to be a back-translation from the Latin, as some have supposed.[63] Moreover, Bede's apology, 'Hic est sensus, non autem ordo ipse uerborum' ('This is the sense, but not itself the order of words'), probably shows his connection with the underlying original. This connection, in turn, might be read as evidence that he sanctioned the poems that were added so differently to two manuscripts of the *Historia* in the decade following his death.

As an early text, Cædmon's *Hymn* has been compared with the pre-Christian Germanic creation myths reflected in poems such as the Old Icelandic *Vǫluspá* and the Old High German *Wessobrunner Gebet*, with which it has vocabulary in common.[64] In light of these likenesses, the *Hymn* may be called traditional in its replication of formulas from preliterate Germanic verse, and yet

[61] Roberts, *Guide to Scripts*, p. 161. See also: https://caedmon.seenet.org/htm/transcription/l/index.html.

[62] 'Now the works of glory-Father must praise the Keeper of heaven-kingdom, Measurer's might and His heart's intention, inasmuch as He, everlasting Warlord, established a beginning for each wonder. He was the first, shaped for the children of men heaven as the roof, holy Shaping Power. Then the middle world did mankind's Keeper, everlasting Warlord, afterwards fashion as a landscape for men, Sacral King Almighty', *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse*, rev. ed. D. Whitelock, 15th edition (Oxford, 1967), p. 182.

[63] Why a forger would translate *Nunc laudare debemus* into a pronounless construction is asked with good reason in O'Donnell, 'Bede's Strategy in Paraphrasing', pp. 422–3. See also O'Donnell, *Cædmon's Hymn*, §B.1. The form *scylun* is treated as a variant of *we sculon* in Kiernan, 'Reading "Cædmon's Hymn"', p. 164.

[64] C. B. Hieatt, 'Cædmon in Context: Transforming the Formula', *JEGP* 84.4 (1985), 485–97, at 486–92.

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novel in the way it uses them. André Crépin put this rather strongly when he attributed 'the miracle in Caedmon's story' to his success in 'adapting ancient traditional themes and formulas to new revolutionary ideas'.[65] Eric Stanley supplied an illustration with *ēci dryctin* ('everlasting Warlord'), an apparently new formula used twice in relatively quick succession.[66] As *ēce dryhten* ('eternal Lord') in the corpus of later poetry, this formula became a cliché, or, as Stanley says, 'so common in Old English verse that we have almost lost our understanding of its full significance'.[67] Read literally, however, the formula reminds us, by combining eternity with the word for a military leader of low life-expectancy, that only the heavenly Lord lives forever. There is a certain freshness here with which the poem appears to vindicate Bede's implicit claim that Cædmon was the first to compose sacred verse in English.[68]

Nonetheless, Cædmon's *Hymn* is unlikely to be the first work that he composed, nor is it plausible that he composed his other English works in the order given by Bede, that of a pandect.[69] The metre of the *Nū scilun herga* opening of the *Hymn* has been judged as consistent with single-stressed opening half-lines in later Old English poems.[70] Bede's translation also reflects an ornamental sophistication in the Northumbrian, which, as he indicates in his apology, cannot be rendered in his Latin. Moreover, as Kevin Kiernan observes, Bede's translation leaves out three half-lines (6b, 8a, 9a).[71] Andy Orchard adds that Bede's translation falls into hexameters just here, in a poetic move which is interpreted by O'Donnell as Bede's way of compensating for the variation missing in his Latin.[72] At a deeper level in Cædmon's inherited poetics is the formula, which has been defined by one scholar as 'a group of words, one half-line in length, which shows evidence of being the direct product of a formulaic system'; and by another as 'one of a set of verses (or formulaic system) of a similar metrical type in which one main verbal element is constant'.[73] In the context of Cædmon's dream, the ability of poets

[65] Crépin, 'Bede and the Vernacular', p. 179.

[66] Stanley, 'New Formulas for Old', pp. 139–41.

[67] Stanley, 'New Formulas for Old', p. 140.

[68] An early date is argued through the Lord's other epithets in *Three Northumbrian Poems*, ed. A. H. Smith (Exeter, 1978), p. 15.

[69] Bede, *HE*, iv. 24 (22) (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 418–19).

[70] E. G. Stanley, 'Notes on Old English Poetry. I: Openings', *Leeds Stud. in Eng.*, ns 20 (1989), 319–41, at 319–21; 'New Formulas for Old', p. 133.

[71] Kiernan, 'Reading "Cædmon's Hymn"', p. 163.

[72] A. Orchard, 'Poetic Inspiration and Prosaic Translation: the Making of *Cædmon's Hymn*', *Studies in English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely': Papers in honour of E. G. Stanley*, ed. M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (London, 1996), pp. 402–22, at 413. D. P. O'Donnell, 'Bede's Strategy in Paraphrasing *Cædmon's Hymn*', *JEGP* 103.4 (2004), 417–32, at 423–7. According to Schürr ('Cædmons *carmen* und Bedas Paraphrase', pp. 5–10) Bede's translation is contrived to correct an unorthodox creation theology with roots in Roman paganism.

[73] D. K. Fry, 'Old English Formulas and Systems', *ES* 48 (1967), 193–204, at 204 (with italics removed). See also his 'Cædmon as a Formulaic Poet', *Forum for Mod. Lang. Stud.* 10 (1974), 227–47. J. D. Niles, 'Formula and Formulaic System in *Beowulf*', *Oral Traditional Literature: a Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord*, ed. J. M. Foley (Columbus, OH, 1981), pp. 394–415, at 399.

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to generate entirely new verse lines with each use of this metrical system may explain Bede's statement that he 'coepit cantare in laudem Dei conditoris uersus, quos numquam audierat'.[74] Treating these words as Bede's allusion to spontaneous oral formulaic composition is one way in which to dispel the theologically disturbing idea that Cædmon recites the revealed word of God. Indeed, it appears that Bede is himself aware of this risk, insofar as his opening is a way of removing Cædmon from it. With *Nunc laudare debemus* the cowherd exhorts himself and his audience to give praise, in contrast to the *Hymn*'s older opening *Nū scilun herga*, which is more like an angel's call for creatures to praise their Creator.[75] The latter construction is found in the three oldest English texts: in the St Petersburg Bede, in the Moore Bede, and in the earliest extant West Saxon translation of the *Historia* from the first third of the tenth century, in Oxford, Bodleian MS. Tanner 10.[76] It resembles the wording of Psalm CXIV:10, in which the Psalmist says 'Confiteantur tibi, Domine, omnia opera tua' ('Let all Thy works acknowledge Thee, O Lord').[77] This likeness is unambiguous, contrary to what O'Donnell implies in his objection to the parallels for the construction.[78] As Stanley shows, Cædmon's line comes close to St Augustine's gloss of the above psalm-verse as 'Laudent te opera omnia tua' ('Let all Thy works praise Thee').[79] There is yet another parallel in the *Benedicite* Canticle for Lauds on Sundays.[80] These are the most credible analogues for the Northumbrian composition in the St Petersburg and Moore Bedes, as well as for the West Saxon version in Bodleian MS. Tanner 10; and especially so, if the programme of Cædmon's alleged later compositions, as Bede represents it, is 'almost exactly in keeping with what was prescribed by Augustine for religious scholars and Latin poets'.[81] The learning in Cædmon's poem shows that it is unlikely to be the first work of an unlettered poet.[82] If Bede's aim in changing the opening construction was to hide the poet's learning, it must be said that thereby he would no longer be illustrating the miraculous aspect of this tale. A better explanation for Bede's *Nunc laudare*

[74] 'began to sing in praise of God the Founder verses which he had never heard', Bede, *HE*, iv.24 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 416–17).

[75] The plural subject *uerc Uuldurfadur* is likewise argued in: D. R. Howlett, 'The Theology of *Cædmon's Hymn*', *Leeds Stud. in Eng.*, ns 7 (1974), 1–12, at 7–8; C. J. E. Ball, 'Homonomy and Polysemy: a Problem for Lexicographers', *Problems of Old English Lexicography: Studies in Memory of Angus Cameron*, ed. A. Bammesberger, Eichstätter Beiträge 15 (Regensburg, 1985), 39–46, at 39–41; and B. Mitchell, '*Cædmon's Hymn*, Line 1: What is the Subject of *Scylun* and its Variants?', *Leeds Stud. in Eng.*, ns 16 (1985), 190–7, at 192–5.

[76] Stanley, 'New Formulas for Old', p. 133. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Orality and Cædmon's *Hymn*', p. 241.

[77] *Biblia Sacra*, ed. Colunga and Turrado, p. 578 (Ps. 144 (145): 10).

[78] O'Donnell, 'Bede's Strategy in Paraphrasing', p. 419, n. 5.

[79] Stanley, 'Openings', 320–1. *In Psalmum CXLIV Enarratio*', *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis Episcopi Enarrationes in Psalmos*, ed. J.-P. Migne, PL 36 (Paris, 1841), col. 1878 (verse 13).

[80] E. G. Stanley, 'An Anthology of 572 Lines of Old English Short Poems plus *The Battle of Maldon*', *N&Q* 247 (2002), 2–3, at 3.

[81] O'Donnell, 'Material Differences', p. 34.

[82] Cædmon's use of the Creed, the Psalms, and the pattern of the Trinity is argued in N. F. Blake, 'Cædmon's Hymn', *N&Q* 207, ns 9 (1962), 245, and in Howlett, 'Theology of *Cædmon's Hymn*', p. 8 and n. 7.

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debemus, besides its avoidance of angelic command, is that it anticipates Cædmon's audience the next day, the abbess and her scholars. By giving thus Cædmon, rather than the angel, control over what he recites, Bede distracts from the implication that his 'uersus' are God's words.

Bede on the 'Saracens' as Heretics

Secondly, it is highly unlikely that Bede would have modelled Cædmon on Muḥammad, if his idea of the latter conformed with Islam as we know it from the Qur'ān. Bede's understanding of Islam is hard to ascertain, although he ends by accusing the Arabs of heresy. Near the end of *Historia ecclesiastica* is a comment on the appearance of two comets (i.e. one comet with two tails) in 729 (for 728):

> Portabant autem facem ignis contra Aquilonem, quasi ad accendendum adclinem; apparebantque mense Ianuario, et duabus ferme septimanis permanebant. Quo tempore grauissima Sarracenorum lues Gallias misera caede uastabat, et ipsi non multo post in eadem prouincia dignas suae perfidiae poenas luebant. (v.23)[83]

Bede has already used the word *perfidia* ('treachery, heresy') on the Arian and Pelagian Christians in the early chapters of *Historia ecclesiastica* (i.8 and i.17).[84] There can be no doubt that he ended by condemning Islam as a sect in a similar way.

In the above passage, neither the name nor the date of the defeat which rewards the 'Saracens' for their heresy are specified, as if to a reader who knows current events. If, as seems unlikely, the above phrase 'quo tempore' covered the decade before 728, the passage might allude to the decisive Christian victory in which Duke Eudo of Aquitaine defeated and killed the *wālī* ('governor') of Arabic Spain (al-Andalus), al-Samḥ ibn Malik al-Khawlāni (719–21), in the battle of Toulouse in 721.[85] However, contemporaries believed that the Christian victory over the Arabs in Tours or Poitiers in 732 was more significant. In this year ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghafīqi, appointed governor of al-Andalus in 730, was killed in a skirmish with Charles Martel, the Austrasian palace mayor. As this setback for the Septimanian Arabs came only four years after the comet, Bede could have added this sentence to his *Historia* a year or two after he finished it

[83] 'They [i.e. the comets] had fiery torchlike trains which faced to the north as if poised to start a conflagration; they appeared in the month of January and stayed there for nearly two weeks. At this time a terrible plague of Saracens was ravaging Gaul with cruel bloodshed and not long afterwards they received in that province a punishment worthy of their heresy', Bede, *HE* v.23 (ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 556–7).

[84] Bede, *HE* i.8, i.17 (ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 36, 58). On the word, see A. Souter, *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 A.D.* (Oxford, 1949), p. 295 (*s.v.*). See also Tolan, '"A Wild Man": Saracens and Ishmaelites', p. 529.

[85] I. Meadows, 'The Arabs in Occitania', *Saudi Aramco World: Arab and Islamic Culture and Connections* 44.2 (1993), 24–9, at 26. R. Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal: a Political History of Al-Andalus* (London, 1996), pp. 21–2.

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in 731.[86] Apparently with the later defeat in mind, the passage plays rhetorically on 'lues' ('plague') and 'luebant' ('they received') in a way that points to some rejoicing by Bede.

Scholars differ over whether Bede was hostile to the Arabs from the beginning of his career. Katherine Scarfe Beckett sees little change over time, whereas J. M. Wallace-Hadrill and Calvin B. Kendall conclude that Bede's view of the Arabs, neutral at first, darkened as the impact of their armies on Christian communities became known to him.[87] Above, in what seems to be his final reference to the Arabs, Bede refers to them with the negative non-biblical name that was common to him and most other western Christians. The 'Saracen' name had passed from Arabic شرقيين *sharqiyyīn* ('easterners') or سارقين *sāriqīn* ('thieves', 'raiders') into Greek *Σαρακηνοί* and Latin *Sar(r)aceni* as a pejorative term for the Arabs.[88] Over time, *Sar(r)acenus* was etymologised according to the story of Ishmael in Genesis, in which Abram (later Abraham) begets a child on Hagar, handmaid of his childless wife Sarai (later Sarah). Sarai drives Hagar into the desert, but there an angel tells Hagar that her son will be named Ishmael, a wild man at odds with every man; and with all men, including his kinsmen, at odds with him (Gen. XVI.11–12). Hagar returns to give birth to Ishmael. When the boy is sixteen, Sarah gives birth to Isaac; on the day of his weaning, fearing for her son's inheritance, Sarah has Abraham drive Hagar and Ishmael into the desert (Gen. XXI.10–11). Muḥammad's genealogy is traced from Adam via Ishmael's firstborn son Nabīt in *The Life of God's Messenger*.[89] The descendants of Ishmael's twelve sons were the Ishmaelites, also known as 'Hagarenes'. Later the Ishmaelites or Hagarenes were identified with the 'Saracens', then all three names with the Arabs.[90]

Bede, though he lists 'Sarracenos' as the fourth of four named tribes in Arabia, appears to avoid the negative etymology of Church Fathers before him.[91] Their explanation, that the Ishmaelites called themselves *Saraceni* so as to claim descent from *Sarah*, may have begun with St Jerome (347–420); Archbishop Isidore of Seville (*c.* 560–636) spread this notion further in his *Etymologiae*: 'nunc corrupto nomine Saraceni, quasi a Sarra' ('now corruptly named "Saracens", as if from "Sarah"').[92] The 'would-be Sarah' etymology implies that the Arabs,

[86] So Bede, *HE* v.23 (ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 557, n. 5); Thundy, '*Qur'ān*: Source or Analogue?', p. 109; Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Islam*, pp. 123–4. For a discussion of this passage in relation to a *c.* 735 finishing date of Bede's *Historia*, see R. Shaw, *How, When and Why did Bede write his Ecclesiastical History?* (Abingdon, 2022), pp. 141–2.

[87] Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Islam*, pp. 123–39, at 129, 133 and 137. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Bede's Europe', *Bede and his World: the Jarrow Lectures*, ed. M. Lapidge, 2 vols. (Aldershot, 1994) I, 71–8, at 78–9. C. B. Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', *Bede and the Future*, ed. P. Darby and F. Wallis (London, 2014), pp. 93–114, at 103–12.

[88] I. Shahîd, *Rome and the Arabs: a Prolegomenon to the Study of Byzantium and the Arabs* (Washington, DC, 1984), pp. 124–31, at 125–6.

[89] *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 3–4.

[90] Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Islam*, pp. 90–4.

[91] *Bedae Venerabilis Opera, Pars II: Opera Exegetica 4: Expositio Actuum Apostolorum; Nomina Regionum atque Locorum De Actibus Apostolorum*, ed. M. L. W. Laistner, CCSL 121 (Turnhout, 1983), 31.

[92] *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1911), IX.ii.6. Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Islam*, pp. 95–7.

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disputing the story of Ishmael's illegitimate birth, claim supremacy over Isaac and his offspring. This etymology was almost certainly known to Bede, who read Isidore's *Etymologiae*, but he nowhere uses it.[93]

Bede's first impression of the Muslim religion was probably derived from a description of Jerusalem and Damascus in the reign of Muʿāwiya I (661–80), first caliph of the Umayyads. This was contained in *De locis sanctis* ('On the Holy Places'), an alleged pilgrim's diary written by Abbot Adomnán of Iona (679–704), probably in 683–86.[94] In three books, Adomnán's work purports to be based on the recollections of one Arculf, 'episcopus, gente Gallus' ('a bishop of Gaulish race'), concerning his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Alexandria, Constantinople and Rome. Contextually, Arculf's visit is dated very approximately to 680.[95] Adomnán brought this work with him to King Aldfrith of Northumbria on one of two visits in 686 and 688; on the second visit he also stayed with Abbot Ceolfrith in Jarrow.[96] Young Bede, probably having met the Gaelic abbot there and reading his work, abridged it in his own *De locis sanctis* in 702 × 709.[97] Bede gave his version the sheen of greater objectivity, removing reference to Arculf in all but two of Adomnán's eighty-nine instances of this name.[98] Many years later, perhaps in the late 720s, Bede quoted passages from his own adaptation, though calling it Adomnán's work, in the two chapters that follow his account of the abbot in *Historia ecclesiastica* (v.15–17).[99] According both to Adomnán in his preface and to Bede in the passage in his *Historia*, Arculf was blown off course to Britain on his way back to Gaul; after an indeterminate period in western Britain, he was taken in by the abbot in Ireland or Iona, to whom he told his story; most scholars assume that this was in the abbey on Iona. The reality of Arculf as a source will be discussed below.[100]

There are three places in the *De locis sanctis* of Adomnán and Bede where Muslims of the Holy Land are described. In one, Adomnán describes a mosque big

[93] Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', p. 96.

[94] *Adamnán's De Locis Sanctis*, ed. and trans. D. Meehan, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 3 (Dublin, 1958), 4–9.

[95] R. G. Hoyland and S. Waidler, 'Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* and the Seventh-Century Near East', *EHR* 129.539 (2014), 787–807, at 794. Other suggested dates are: ***c.* 639** or a little later, in D. Woods, 'Arculf's Luggage: the Sources for Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis*', *Ériu* 52 (2002), 25–52, at 40; **670**, in O. Grabar, with M. al-Asad, A. Audeh, and S. Nuseibeh, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), pp. 45–51; **679 × 682**, in *Adamnán's De Locis Sanctis*, ed. and trans. Meehan, p. 11, and A. Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage.* Leiden, 1995), p. 32; and **682**, in R. S. Humphreys, *Muʿawiya ibn Abi Sufyan: from Arabia to Empire* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2006), p. 13.

[96] R. Sharpe, 'Adomnán', *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge, S. Keynes, and D. Scragg (Oxford, 1999), p. 5.

[97] Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', p. 98.

[98] Hoyland and Waidler, 'Adomnán and the Seventh-Century Near East', p. 791. Eighty-six occurrences are counted in J. V. Tolan, 'Le pèlerin Arculfe et le roi Mavias: La circulation des informations à propos des "Sarrasins" aux VII^{e}–VIII^{e} siècles, de Jérusalem à Iona et Yarrow', *Passages. Déplacements des Hommes, Circulation des Textes et Identités dans l'Occident Médiéval*, ed. P. Henriet and J. Duclos (Toulouse, 2013), pp. 175–85, at 184.

[99] Bede, *HE* v.15–17 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 504–12).

[100] See pp. 27–8.

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enough for three thousand people in the lower city of Jerusalem, over the ruins of the Great Temple by the eastern city wall:

> nunc Saracini quadrangulam orationis domum, quam subrectis tabulis et magnis trabibus super quasdam ruinarum reliquias construentes uili fabricati sunt opere, ipsi frequentant.[101]

This description appears to have become confused in transmission. David Woods, taking Adomnán's account to be based on an Irish copy of a document of an 'Arnulf' who was now no longer there, suggests that the word *tabula* was mistranslated from Greek *στήλη* (*stēlē*) as 'column', and that the structure was supported by stonework.[102] Robert G. Hoyland and Sarah Waidler, though they take Arculf for the abbot's living informant, believe likewise that 'marble' was originally intended by *tabula*, which Adomnán, up on Iona, acclimatised as 'wood'.[103] As for the reference to Muslim construction, Lawrence Nees regards Adomnán's phrase *uili opere* ('of poor workmanship') as a slighting reference to Islam in a lost written source.[104] Bede, repeating the number of worshippers, follows Adomnán closely: 'Nunc ibi Saraceni quadratam domum subrectis tabulis et magnis trabibus super quasdam ruinarum reliquias uili opere construentes oratione frequentant'.[105] His re-use of *uili opere* has likewise been considered to refer to Islam as something 'in some manner deviant',[106] although there is no other evidence of hostility to Muslims in either account. If this phrase was Arculf's, it may indicate more simply that the structure, once standing in the compound of today's al-Aqṣā Mosque in Jerusalem, was unfinished or under repairs when Arculf saw it.

The construction of this mosque has been dated to the caliphate of Muʿāwiya I (661–80).[107] Both Adomnán and Bede introduce his reflex, *Mauuias rex*, in the context of a feud between two Jewish communities in the city which he finally resolves through a prayer to Jesus and then through a miracle. According to Adomnán, the shroud which had covered Jesus' head before his Resurrection was stolen from a church by a pious Jewish Christian who on his deathbed bequeathed it to one of two sons, asking them to choose between his wealth or the shroud (i.11). The brother who inherits his father's wealth soon spends it

[101] 'The Saracens now frequent a quadrangular prayer house which they built poorly by erecting upright boards and great beams on the same ruined remains', *Adamnán's De Locis Sanctis*, ed. and trans. Meehan, p. 42.

[102] Woods, 'Arculf's Luggage, p. 41.

[103] Hoyland and Waidler, 'Adomnán and the Seventh-Century Near East', p. 798.

[104] L. Nees, 'Insular Latin Sources, "Arculf", and Early Islamic Jerusalem', *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Essays on Medieval Europe in honor of Daniel F. Callahan*, ed. M. Frassetto, J. Hosler, and M. Gabriele, Stud. in the Hist. of Christian Traditions 174 (Leiden, 2014), 81–100, at 94.

[105] 'The Saracens now, building a square house of poor workmanship with upright planks and great beams over certain remains of the ruins, assemble there for prayer', *Bedae Venerabilis De Locis Sanctis*, ed. J. Fraipont, in *Itineraria et Alia Geographica*, ed. J. Fraipont, CCSL 175 (Turnhout, 1965), 249–80, at 251.

[106] Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', p. 98.

[107] Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, pp. 23–33, at 32–3.

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all, while the brother with the shroud becomes as rich as his father. From him it passes down five generations into the hands of Jewish unbelievers. Having learned of its whereabouts after an undisclosed interval of time, the Christian Jews of Jerusalem bring a case to get it back, appealing to King Mavias, who judges through a prayer to Jesus. Taking the shroud 'cum magna reuerentia' ('with great reverence'), the king orders a bonfire to be lit in a courtyard, goes up to this with the shroud, and addresses both parties as follows:

> Nunc Christus mundi Saluator, passus pro humano genere quo hoc quod nunc in sinu conteneo sudarium in sepulchro suum super caput habuit positum, inter uos de hoc eodem linteo contendentes per flammam iudicet ignis, ut sciamus cui parti horum duum exercituum contentiosorum hoc tale donum condonare dignetur.[108]

Then the king throws the shroud on the flames. The air currents waft it up and over to the Jewish Christians. One chapter later, Adomnán makes it clear that this cloth is kept in the church of St Mary built by the apostles on Mt Sion, along with another linen shroud reputedly woven by Mary herself (i.12).

Bede, retelling Adomnán's version of the story, compresses it in line with biblical typology, with the elder brother choosing the wealth and the younger the shroud: this is like Ishmael when he loses out to Isaac, who is the type for Israel and its Christian successors.[109] In the narrative present, the shroud is sought by Jewish Christians claiming to be heirs of Jesus, as opposed to Jews who retain their original faith. After long strife in court, Bede says:

> Mauuias Sarracenorum rex, qui nostra aetate fuit, iudex postulatur. Qui accensa grandi pyra Christum iudicem precatur, qui hoc pro suorum salute super caput habere dignaretur.[110]

Calvin B. Kendall, to whom this version of Adomnán's story is 'indicative of Bede's caution', translates *salus* in 'pro suorum salute' as 'benefit', as if Mavias considers the shroud to have no spiritual value.[111] Scarfe Beckett likewise assumes some bias on the part of Bede, acknowledging that 'benefit' is keeping with the tangible wealth which the Jewish Christians hope to receive.[112] However, the subjunctive in Bede's 'dignaretur' presents the clause with 'pro suorum salute', which acknowledges Jesus' gift of salvation to Christians, as an expression of King

[108] 'Now let Christ the Saviour of the world, who suffered for the human race and had this shroud, which I now hold in my arms, placed on his head in the sepulchre, judge between those of you disputing for this cloth by the fire's flame, so that we may know on which of these two retinues of disputants he will deign to bestow such a gift', *Adamnán's De Locis Sanctis*, ed. and trans. Meehan, pp. 54–5.

[109] Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', p. 99, n. 29.

[110] 'Mavias, who was king of the Saracens in our time, is called to act as judge. Lighting a great fire, he prays for a judgement to Christ, who had condescended to wear this over his head for the salvation of his [i.e. Christ's] people [i.e. humanity]', *Bedae De Locis Sanctis*, ed. Fraipont, p. 260.

[111] Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', p. 100.

[112] Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Islam*, p. 137.

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Mavias' words. This feature aligns Bede's meaning with Adomnán's, that the Muslim king calls Jesus 'mundi Saluator' ('Saviour of the world'). Bede seems merely to have condensed Mavias' given prayer to Jesus in order to put it into indirect speech. With Mavias presented in this way, Tolan is right to say that 'rien ne peut nous laisser soupçonner qui'il n'était pas chrétien'.[113]

The third reference to Muslims in both versions of *De locis sanctis* concerns the seat of Muʿāwiya's caliphate in Damascus. Presumably following Arculf, who may have been there before the caliph's death in 680, Adomnán says that this city is where

> Sarracinorum rex adeptus eius principatus regnat. Et in honore sancti Iohannis Baptistae ibidem grandis fundata eclesia est, et quaedam etiam Sarracinorum eclesia incredulorum et ipsa in eadem ciuitatem quam ipsi frequentant fabricata est.[114]

Adomnán's account contains no denunciation of Islam, nor does Bede add one of his own. Indeed he removes Adomnán's word 'incredulorum' ('unbelievers') and so represents Christians and Muslims as worshippers in parallel worlds, with each site of worship an *ecclesia*; moreover, Bede gives the caliph a greater agency than in Adomnán's account: 'Vbi dum christiani sancti baptistae Iohannis ecclesiam frequentant, Saracenorum rex cum sua sibi gente aliam instituit atque sacrauit'.[115] Mavias' faith is otherwise unspecified by Adomnán or Bede, but in connection with the caliph on whom he is based, John Tolan shares Kendall's belief that Bede, though ignorant of Islam, updated his biblical view of the 'Saracens' by showing in his version of *De locis sanctis* that some had once been converted to Christianity, that others were now spiritually close to it, and that Muʿāwiya and his Syrian Arabs, in particular, 'were Christian' or 'a people most favourably inclined towards Christianity'.[116]

In another early work, Bede continues to represent the caliph and his religion without bias. In his *Nomina locorum de actibus apostolorum* ('Names of places in the Acts of the Apostles'), written in 709 × 715, Bede says that Damascus 'nunc Sarracenorum metropolis esse perhibetur, unde et rex eorum Mauuias famosam in ea sibi suaeque genti basilicam dicauit', whereupon he cites the shrine of St John the Baptist as an 'ecclesia' (ix.2).[117] The difference between this and his

[113] 'Nothing would allow us to suspect that he was not a Christian', Tolan, 'Le pèlerin Arculfe et le roi Mavias', p. 185.

[114] 'The king of the Saracens, having obtained his principality, reigns over it. And in the same place a great church has been raised in honour of St John the Baptist, and in this city, too, a kind of church for unbelievers has also been constructed, by the Saracens, which they themselves attend', *Adamnán's De Locis Sanctis*, ed. and trans. Meehan, pp. 98–9.

[115] 'There, while Christians attend one church, of St John the Baptist, the king of the Saracens, for himself and for his people, has established and consecrated another', *Bedae De Locis Sanctis*, ed. Fraipont, p. 277.

[116] J. V. Tolan, '"A Wild Man, whose Hand will be against All": Saracens and Ishmaelites in Latin Ethnographical Traditions, from Jerome to Bede', *Visions of Community in the Poet-Roman World: the West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1100*, ed. W. Pohl, C. Gantner, and R. Payne (London, 2012), pp. 513–30, at 522–6 (p. 526). See also Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', p. 95.

[117] 'is now held to be the mother city of Saracens, whence their very king Mavias has dedicated a famous basilica there for himself and his people', *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum: Nomina Regionum atque Locorum*, ed. Laistner, p. 171. For the date, see Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Islam*, p. 126, n. 44.

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earlier account is that Bede's new term *basilica* denotes a church or public building of high status.[118] This Byzantine term appears to acknowledge the caliph as a king in the Umayyad mosque in Damascus.

In his *Expositio in actus apostolorum* ('Commentary on Acts of the Apostles'), completed a little after 709,[119] Bede seems to know that Muslims have no idols and that they congregate for worship on Fridays. The first detail emerges in his commentary on Stephen's defence to the priesthood in Jerusalem in Acts VII.42–43. Stephen, quoting from Amos V.25–27, which refers to the lapse below Mt Sinai, tells the priests in Acts VII.43 how the Israelites, forsaking the true God, carried the shrine of Moloch 'Et sidus dei vestri Rempham, | Figuras quas fecistis adorare eas'.[120] Glossing the star Rempham, Bede says 'Significat autem Luciferum cuius cultui Sarracenorum gens ob honorem Ueneris erat mancipata'.[121] For this note Bede used two works of Jerome. One was Jerome's commentary on Amos, which here says: 'id est luciferi, quem sarraceni hucusque uenerantur'.[122] The other was Jerome's *Vita s. Hilarionis* ('Life of St Hilarion', ch. 25), in which Lucifer is identified with the goddess Venus. Jerome says that Hilarion (a fourth-century anchorite) and his monks convert the Saracens of Elusa after arriving in this city 'eo forte die, quo universaria solemnitas omnem oppidi populum in templum Veneris congregaverat'.[123] Bede's commentary on Acts VII.43 modernises this story by moving Jerome's imputation of present-day 'Saracen' idolatry into the past.[124] Secondly, he alters Jerome's implication that today's Arabs worship the devil in the form of Venus: whereas Jerome says that the 'Saracens' 'colunt illam ob Luciferum' ('worship her on account of Lucifer'), Bede says that they worshipped 'Luciferum [...] ob honorem Ueneris' ('Lucifer in honour of Venus'). By this inversion, Bede remains focused on Rempham as a *sidus* and defines *Lucifer* as the morning star which at certain times is the planet Venus. In his *De temporum ratione* ('On the reckoning of time'), which he wrote in around 725 to enlarge on his *De temporibus* ('On times') of 703, Bede says that the gentiles named the weekdays after gods to whom they consecrated planets (ch. 8).[125] Since Venus' day is Friday, Bede's allusion to the ancient Arab cult of her planet in his commentary on Acts VII.43 may align this day with the Muslim day of congregation.

[118] Souter, *A Glossary of Later Latin*, p. 28 (*s.v.*).

[119] M. L. W. Laistner and H. H. King, *A Hand-List of Bede's Manuscripts* (Ithaca, NY, 1943), p. 20.

[120] 'and the star of your god Rempham, the images which you have made to adore them'. *Bedae Opera, Pars II: Opera Exegetica 4*, ed. Laistner, p. 36.

[121] 'Indeed, this signifies Lucifer, to whose cult the Saracen race was enslaved in honouring Venus', *Bedae Opera, Pars II: Opera Exegetica 4*, ed. Laistner, p. 36.

[122] 'This is Lucifer, whom the Saracens worship even to this day', *Commentarii in Prophetas Minores, I: Amos*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 76 (Turnhout, 1969), 211–348, at 296.

[123] 'by chance on the day when a general ceremony had gathered all the townsfolk into the temple of Venus', *Vita s. Hilarionis*, in *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Opera Omnia II*, ed. J.-P. Migne, PL 23 (Paris, 1888), col. 29–54, at 42.

[124] Tolan, '"A Wild Man": Saracens and Ishmaelites', p. 522.

[125] *Bede: the Reckoning of Time*, trans. F. Wallis, Translated Texts for Historians 29 (Liverpool, 1999), 32–3; see also pp. xv–xvi and n. 4.

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In his earlier works, in these ways, Bede alludes to the 'Saracen' religion with a neutrality bordering on tolerance. Nowhere does he use Isidore's 'would-be Sarah' etymology for *Saracenus*, which he would almost certainly have seen and which imputes to the Arabs an attempt to purloin the rights of a first-born son. In his *De locis sanctis*, written in *c.* 702 × 709, Bede reiterates the leniency towards Caliph Muʿāwiya that Adomnán appears to have passed on from Arculf, his source, as well as rendering their image of near-equivalence in the words with which he describes the Christian and Arab sites of worship in Damascus. He modernises Jerome's account of 'Saracen' religion, showing that the Arabs are no longer idolaters nor devil-worshippers, as well as implying that they have inherited Friday as their day of congregation from the pagan time. He is faithful to the Pauline doctrine that the Ishmaelites will be converted like all other gentiles.[126] Modern historians have attributed this hope to the Christian subjects of Muslim rulers in North Africa and the Near East in the later seventh century.[127]

From around 715 onwards, however, Bede's neutrality towards the Arabs appears to change. In two works of around this time Bede refers to the 'Saracens' as universally hated enemies of the church. First in his commentary *In Cantica Canticorum* ('On the Song of Songs'), finished about a year later,[128] Bede refers in this way to the descendants of Kedar, second son of Ishmael. First, he makes David into a type for Jesus. For the verse in which a bride calls herself as dark and beautiful as the tents of 'Cedar', or as the curtains of Solomon (I.4), Bede refers to David in his concealment from Saul in the wilderness of Paran in I Samuel (XXV.1) as a type for Jesus during the forty days in the desert before his mission. Bede then glosses the *Cedar* name with the story of Ishmael, Kedar's father, according to the angel's prophecy about Ishmael in Genesis XVI.12, that he will be a wild man, with his hand against all, and the hands of all against him. Of Ishmael here, Bede says:

> Cuius praesagii ueritatem et exosa omnibus hodie Sarracenorum qui ab eo orti sunt natio probat et psalmista angoribus obsessus adfirmat cum ait: *Habitaui cum habitantibus Cedar multum incola fuit anima mea cum his quo oderunt pacem eram pacificus.*[129]

[126] *In primam partem Samuhelis*, ed. Hurst, p. 231: 'ut etiam de ancillae filiis, id est de huic saeculo seruientibus populis, Christus ad libertatem uocaret hosque secundum Isaac promissionis efficeret filios' (i.e. David fled to Paran 'that Christ might call even the sons of the handmaid, that is, the people serving this worldly age, to liberty and make them sons of the promise according to Isaac').

[127] G. J. Reinink, 'Pseudo-Methodius: a Concept of History in Response of the Rise of Islam', *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East 1: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. Cameron and L. I. Conrad, Stud. in Late Antiquity and Early Islam (Princeton, NJ, 1992), 149–87, at 181–5. B. Flusin, 'Démons et Sarrasins: L'auteur et le propos des *Diègèmata Stèriktika* d'Anastase le Sinaïte', *Travaux et mémoires* 11 (1991), 381–409. S. H. Griffith, 'Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims', *Greek Orthodox Theol. Rev.* 32.4 (1987), 341–58, at 344–5. Tolan, 'Le pèlerin Arculfe et le roi Mavias', p. 183 and n. 15.

[128] H. W. Matis, *The Song of Songs in the Early Middle Ages*, Stud. in the Hist. of Christian Traditions 191 (Leiden, 2019), 27–29, at 27.

[129] 'The truth of the presage about him is proved today especially by the nation, hateful to all, of the Saracens, who are descended from him, and is affirmed by Psalmist when, weighed down by anguish, he says: *I have dwelt with the inhabitants of Kedar; long has my spirit been dwelling there; with those*

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Bede's next such reference to the 'Saracens' may be found in his commentary on I Samuel, *In primam partem Samuhelis*, which he finished by the summer of 716.[130] In this work he names the desert of Ishmael's exile 'Faran' ('Paran'), quoting the verses from Psalm CXIX: 5–7, in which the 'Psalmist', David, refers to his refuge with the Ishmaelites (in Meshech). David's words are said to express the complaint of Sarah's son Isaac, in a way which makes him a type for Israel, and consequently for Christendom itself:

> Cuius uicinitatem turbulentam horrescens filius liberae, id est populus spiritali gratia renouatus, queritur dicens, *Heu me quod incolatus meus prolongatus est, habitaui cum habitantibus Cedar*, et cetera usque ad finem psalmi quae Sarracenos specialiter aduersarios ecclesiae cunctos generaliter describunt.[131]

Bede ends with a use of Galatians IV.22–31, in which St Paul redefines Ishmael and Isaac as an allegory through their mothers: Hagar represents the covenant of today's Jerusalem, a city of the enslaved, whereas Sarah represents the covenant of heavenly Jerusalem, for the children of God's promise.[132]

Two more references confirm a change in Bede's attitude towards the Arabs. In his *Interpretatio nominum Hebraeorum* ('A reading of Hebrew names', possibly of 722 × 725), Bede offers an appropriate etymology, apparently based on Hebrew גר *ger* ('stranger'), for the Hagarene name: 'Arabum Agareni aduenae [sc. gentes]' ('of the Arabic *Hagarenes*, hostile [people]').[133] Probably after 716, Bede's quotation of the angel's prophecy about Ishmael in Genesis XVI.12 has been read as an acknowledgement of the present-day endurance of Christians under Muslim rule.[134] In this commentary on Genesis up to Isaac, *In principium Genesis usque ad natiuitatem Isaac*, Bede cites the angel's prophecy about Ishmael, that he will be a wild man, with the hand of all against him, pitching his tent in exile from all his brothers (Genesis XVI.12). His commentary first reflects antiquity:

> Significat semen eius habitaturum in eremo, id est Saracenos uagos, incertisque sedibus. Qui uniuersas gentes quibus desertum ex latere iungitur incursant, et expugnantur ab omnibus.

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who hate peace I sought peace', *In Cantica Canticorum*, in *Bedae Venerabilis Opera, Pars II: Opera Exegetica 2.B*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119.B (Turnhout, 1983), 195.

[130] Laistner and King, *Hand-List*, p. 65.

[131] 'Shuddering at his troubling proximity, the son of the freewoman, that is, the population renewed in spiritual grace, complains with the words: "*Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged! I have dwelt with the inhabitants of Kedar*", and so on until the end of the psalm with verses which describe particularly the Saracens and generally all the enemies of the church', *In primam partem Samuhelis*, in *Bedae Opera, Pars II: Opera Exegetica 2.B*, ed. Hurst, p. 231.

[132] *Biblia Sacra*, ed. Colunga and Turrado, p. 1131. *In primam partem Samuhelis*, ed. Hurst, p. 231. Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Islam*, pp. 130–1.

[133] *Interpretatio Nominum Hebraeorum*, in *Venerabilis Bedæ Opera Omnia, IV*, ed. J-P. Migne, PL 93 (Paris, 1862), col. 1101–1103, at 1102. Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Islam*, pp. 18–19.

[134] Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Islam*, pp. 131–2.

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Then he says:

> Sed haec antiquitus. Nunc autem in tantum manus eius contra omnes, et manus sunt omnium contra eum, ut Africam totam in longitudine sua ditione premant, sed et Asiae maximam partem, et Europae nonnullam omnibus exosi et contrarii teneant.[135]

Here he appears to update his older commentary with current events. Kendall refrains from connecting this addition with the Arab invasion of Hispania, which ran from 711 to 720, but it seems unlikely that Bede's animus is based on the Bible or on a memory of the Arab expansion a generation before his birth.[136]

The Arabs' early Mediterranean conquests (Damascus in 635, Jerusalem in 638, Alexandria in 642, and Cyrenaica in 642–45) were a memory transmitted to Bede through his connections with Canterbury, ultimately from Archbishop Theodore (*c.* 602–90) and Abbot Hadrian (*c.* 630–709). These men had once been refugees, from Antioch and North Africa respectively, and yet they had escaped at a relatively early age. Theodore had lived in Constantinople and Rome for more than thirty years before arriving in Canterbury in 669, whereas Hadrian, arriving there a year later, had lived in Italy for more than twenty years previously, having left Cyrenaica around a decade after the Arab invasion there.[137] The Canterbury biblical commentaries which derive from their lectures contain a note on Ishmael that may be personal: 'Sic fuit genus eius Saracenis, numquam cum omnibus pacem habentes sed semper contra aliquos certantes'.[138]

For those not affected, on the other hand, these conquests lay in the distant past.[139] Bede does not cite them in his historical references to the Arabs. In his account of universal history at the end of *De temporum ratione*, completed in 725, which covers the best part of six ages from the creation of the world, he (mis) dates the Arabs first for the year 4,639 (CE 687), when the 'Sarraceni' raid Sicily, returning with their spoils to Alexandria; then for 4,649 (CE 697), when Emperor Justinian II signs a treaty of peace with them for ten years, the 'Saracens' destroy Carthage, already having occupied the Roman province of Africa; and finally for 4,680 (CE 728), when they lay siege Constantinople for three years, 'donec ciuibus multa instantia ad Deum clamantibus plurimi eorum fame frigore pestilentia

[135] 'This means that his seed, that is the wandering Saracens, will dwell in the desert and in uncertain abodes. These people make inroads into all nations to whom the desert is adjacent on one side, and by all nations are they conquered. Anyway, that was true of antiquity. Now, however, his hand is so much against all, and all hands against him, that hateful and stubborn to all they force not only the whole length of Africa into their power but also hold the greatest part of Asia, with some part of Europe', *In Principium Genesis*, in *Bedae Venerabilis Opera, Pars II: Opera Exegetica 1: In Principium Genesis usque ad Nativitatem Isaac et Eiectionem Israhehis*, ed. C. W. Jones, CCSL 118.A (Turnhout, 1967), 201.

[136] Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', p. 103.

[137] Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Islam*, pp. 116–17.

[138] 'Thus his race was that of the Saracens, a race which is never at peace with anyone, but is always at war with someone', M. Lapidge, 'The Career of Archbishop Theodore', *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on his Life and Influence*, ed. M. Lapidge, CSASE 11 (Cambridge, 1995), 1–29, at 10.

[139] Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', pp. 98, 106.

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perirent ac sic pertaesi obsidionis abscederent'.[140] These Eastern Mediterranean events postdate the Arabs' earlier conquests as well as Muʿāwiya's death in Damascus in 680, but they do not accord with Bede's sweeping denunciation in his commentary on Genesis XVI.12.

Kendall rules out Hispania as the site of the new Ishmaelite occupation to which Bede refers in this commentary with 'Europae nonnullam [partem]', because Bede says nothing of its conquest by the Arabs either here in other commentaries, or in his universal history, or in the *Historia ecclesiastica.*[141] However, as the Arabs attacked but did not occupy Bulgaria, Sicily, or Sardinia in Bede's lifetime, regions which might be called European, Iberia becomes the referent by default. The twofold invasion of Hispania by Berbers and then Arabs in 711 would explain why Bede's commentaries from around 715 onwards represent the Arabs as hated enemies of the church. Although contemporary Arabic sources are lacking, 714 was the year in which ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Mūsā was appointed governor of the former Catholic Visigothic kingdom now known as al-Andalus, with his capital in Seville.[142] These upheavals were either too well-known for inscription, or Bede is too much in denial to record what for him was a disaster for the church.[143] The fact that Archbishop Isidore had superintended Seville, capital of Ibn Mūsā's new province, makes it unlikely that interested parties failed to carry the news to the libraries of Wearmouth-Jarrow. As we have seen, a familiarity with the Arab conquest of Hispania seems presumed and invoked in *Historia ecclesiastica* (v.23) by the reference to a defeat of Septimanian Arabs probably at Tours in 732. It seems no coincidence that, from a watershed contemporary with the founding of the first Muslim province in Hispania in 715–16, Bede's works begin to include asides on the Arabs as modern warmongers, persecutors of the church, and heretics.[144]

The upshot of this discussion is that in his works before the first political form of al-Andalus, Bede had little reason to be other than neutral in his attitude towards the 'Saracens', in their places of worship in Jerusalem and Damascus and especially in the account of 'King Mavias' that he adapted from Adomnán's *De locis sanctis.* Far from imputing *perfidia* ('heresy') to this near-contemporary reflex of Muʿāwiya, Bede preserves the aura of Christianity that was created by Adomnán in reminiscence of Arculf's impression. And as Bede would have met Adomnán personally in Wearmouth-Jarrow in 688, it is plausible that he learned more about Muʿāwiya and his religion, including Muḥammad, than he saw fit to add to this account.

[140] 'until most of them, with the citizens beseeching God with great vehemence, perished from hunger, cold, and plague, and thus exhausted by the siege they withdrew', *De Temporum Ratione*, in *Bedae Venerabilis Opera, Pars VI: Opera Didascalica 2: De Temporum Ratione Liber Chronica Maiora includens*, ed. and comm. Th. Mommsen, CCSL 123.B (Turnhout, 1977), 527–9, esp. 534. Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', p. 106.

[141] Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', p. 108. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Bede's Europe', pp. 77–8 and 82. Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Islam*, pp. 129–33, at 133.

[142] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, pp. 6–10 and 18–19. Hoyland, *In God's Path*, pp. 146–8.

[143] As it was for the *Mozarabic Chronicle* of 754: Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, p. 9.

[144] *Adamnán's De Locis Sanctis*, ed. and trans. D. Meehan, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 3 (Dublin, 1958), 4–9.

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Transmission of the *Iqra'* Narrative to Bede

An unwritten oral route of transmission cannot be proved. Nonetheless, it seems unlikely that Adomnán deposited his *De locis sanctis* in Jarrow in 688 without giving an accompanying verbal account of who Arculf was and what he said about the religion of Jerusalem's rulers. My argument is that Arculf's Christian guides or hosts in Jerusalem told him the story about Muḥammad, which Arculf would have told to Adomnán. Later, again in person rather than in writing, and within a decade of Arculf's visit to the Holy Land, Adomnán would have passed it on to Bede.

To begin the case for this transmission, it will be necessary to look more closely at Arculf. As no bishop by that name is known from other sources, some doubt has arisen about his reality in Iona as a pilgrim back from the Holy Land.[145] Thomas O'Loughlin, finding Arculf's word to be unreliable, suggests that he was named by Adomnán merely to add standing to an account based mostly on books in Iona's library, from a total of seventeen written sources, including some ten by Jerome, together with a further five other works.[146] O'Loughlin's comprehensive survey of sources has led him to define *De locis sanctis* as an exegesis.[147] David Woods suggests that Adomnán took Arculf's name from an Irish copy of a manuscript containing antisemitic miracle stories which 'Arnulf' had acquired with relics in Constantinople and which he had then saved from a rough voyage in the mid-seventh century. In Woods' view, this Gallic bishop was never in the Holy Land and the word 'rex' for 'Mavias' in Adomnán's story is a relic of Muʿāwiya's time as the governor of Syria (639–60).[148] Lawrence Nees, likewise reading Adomnán's work as an exegesis, follows O'Loughlin's theory to the extent of taking the abbot's description of the new mosque in Jerusalem to be based on a written source, even when none has been found. Nees will not attribute this or any other passage to Arculf as a living witness on the grounds that Adomnán's praise of Arculf's reliability must show that he is a fiction.[149]

Other scholars attribute a reality to Arculf and his pilgrimage in *De locis sanctis.* Ora Limor has provided a literary-historical context for accounts of pilgrims' travels, comparing this work of Adomnán's with the *Hodoeporicon* ('road diary') of Bishop Willibald (*c.* 700–787), which was written in the 780s by Willibald's young kinswoman, the nun Hugeburc, on the basis of his recollections of journeys to Palestine and Syria half a century earlier.[150] Willibald visited Jerusalem four times in 723–7, before settling in Monte Cassino in 729

[145] F. Chatillon, 'Arculfe a-t-il réellement existé?', *Revue du Moyen Âge Latin* 23 (1967), 134–8.

[146] T. O'Loughlin, 'Adomnán and Arculf: the Case of an Expert Witness', *Jnl of Med. Latin* 7 (1997), 127–46, at 137–40 and 142.

[147] T. O'Loughlin, 'The Exegetical Purpose of Adomnan's *De Locis Sanctis*', *CMCS* 24 (1992), 37–53; 'The library of Iona in the late Seventh Century: the Evidence from Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis*', *Ériu* 45 (1994), 33–52, at 38–41 and 47–51; and 'Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis*: a Textual Emendation and an Additional Source Identification', *Ériu* 48 (1997), 37–40.

[148] Woods, 'Arculf's Luggage', pp. 47–52.

[149] Nees, 'Insular Latin Sources', pp. 94–6. O'Loughlin, 'Exegetical Purpose', pp. 43–4.

[150] O. Limor, 'Pilgrims and Authors: Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* and Hugeburc's *Hodoeporicon Sancti Willibaldi*', *RB* 114.2 (2004), 253–75, at 262–5.

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and then Eichstätt in 741.[151] In comparison, it appears that Adomnán was senior to Arculf and would have used him chiefly to corroborate details which he had gleaned from many written sources. As Limor says, 'Arculf's voyage and his experiences in the holy places were of less interest to Adomnán than the places themselves'.[152] Hoyland and Waidler, similarly finding a space between Adomnán as Arculf's amanuensis and Arculf as Adomnán's fiction, argue that 'Adomnán blends what he can learn about these sites from his written sources with a more current description of the city and its sites obtained from someone who had recently visited it'.[153] Illuminating the context of Muslim rule in Jerusalem in around 680, when Arculf would have been there, they point out that the subjects of all the new Arab territories may have seen their Muslim lords as temporary, whose rule, even in the Near East, 'would not have been much in evidence'.[154]

No written source for the story of 'King Mavias' has been found.[155] According to Adomnán in his *De locis sanctis* (i, ch. 9), Arculf claims that he heard this from the Christian citizens of Jerusalem:

> De illo quoque sancrosanto Domini sudario, quod in sepulchro super caput ipsius fuerat positum, sancti Arculfi relatione cognouimus, qui illud propriis conspexit obtutibus, hanc, quam nunc craxamus, narrationem, quam totus Hierosolymitanus ueram esse protestatur populus; plurimorum namque testimonio fidelium Hierosolymitanorum ciuium hanc pronuntiationem sanctus Arculfus didicit, qui sic ipso intentius audiente saepius pronuntiarunt dicentes:[156]

Arculf's authorities will have included the hosts who put him up, caretakers in the churches, perhaps a guide through the city. With 'protestatur', these *fideles cives* are said to bear witness to the story of the shroud, as if the miracle were contested. Moreover, this word may also justify the claim that Mavias calls Jesus the 'mundi Saluator'.

Whether or not Muʿāwiya said this of Jesus in public is less important than an assumption in the citizens' report to Arculf that he was a Christian, or close to being one. As governor and caliph of Palestine and Syria for more than forty years, Muʿāwiya was a well-liked ruler among a predominantly Christian population. Most of Muʿāwiya's subjects were Greek-speaking Arab Christians, some of

[151] M. Lapidge, 'Willibald (*c.* 700–*c.* 787)', *Blackwell Encyclopaedia*, ed. Lapidge, Keynes, and Scragg, pp. 477–78, at 477. Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, pp. 222–8.

[152] Limor, 'Pilgrims and Authors', p. 269.

[153] Hoyland and Waidler, 'Adomnán and the Seventh-Century Near East', p. 792.

[154] Hoyland and Waidler, 'Adomnán and the Seventh-Century Near East', p. 794.

[155] None sought in O'Loughlin, 'Adomnán and Arculf', p. 142.

[156] 'This story too, to which we now give form about the shroud of the most holy Lord which was placed over his head in the sepulchre, is one we know having heard it related by the holy Arculf, who beheld it with his own gaze; one to which all people of Jerusalem bear witness as true; for it was the holy Arculf who learned this statement from the witness of very many faithful citizens of Jerusalem, who very often, while he listened intently, would state it to him speaking thus', *Adamnán's De Locis Sanctis*, ed. and trans. Meehan, pp. 52–3.

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whom had served the Byzantine emperor and now served him.[157] There was also a remigration of Jews in Muʿāwiya's reign,[158] whom Arculf's informants seem to have resented. Adomnán's story in *De locis sanctis* about the Jews who remain Jewish reflects an attitude that presents them, not the Muslims, as a menace to Christianity.[159]As governor, Muʿāwiya had married a Christian princess, the daughter of the chief of Kalb, and their son Yazīd married a Christian also, the daughter of the last Ghassanid Christian king.[160] When Muʿāwiya became caliph in 661, he prayed to Jesus at Golgotha and to Mary at her tomb in Gethsemane.[161] This was probably to please the Christian crowds who witnessed the homage of his Arab lords in this city, although to early Muslims Jerusalem was as holy as Mecca; prayers to Jesus and Mary are also Islamic devotions.[162] Some material evidence for Muʿāwiya's tolerance has been found with a coin dated to 663 and found at Hamat Gader near the Sea of Galilee, in which a Greek inscription to Muʿāwiya *āmir al-mūʾminīn* ('Commander of the Believers') is preceded by a cross.[163] Adomnán's account of an 'eclesia incredulorum' in Mavias' Damascus is supported by an Arabic record that Muʿāwiya asked the Damascene Christians for permission to use the eastern half of St John's church (presumably the courtyard) as a site for his new mosque; later, when he asked to extend this into the church, and they refused, he refrained from further action.[164] In 679, Muʿāwiya is also said to have restored the church of Hagia Sophia in Edessa, damaged by an earthquake.[165] Although he was not himself a Christian, he allowed Christians and Jews to worship as they pleased.[166]

[157] Hoyland, *In God's Path*, p. 130. Humphreys, *Muʿawiya*, pp. 102–4. H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: the Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*, 2nd edition (Harlow, 2004), p. 87.

[158] Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, pp. 112–14. R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, 1962), pp. 6–7.

[159] Tolan, 'Le pèlerin Arculfe et le roi Mavias', at pp. 175–6 and 180–3. Noted also by Woods ('Arculf's Luggage', p. 39), who, however, attributes the story not to Arculf but to a now-lost 'collection of anecdotes illustrating Jewish envy of, and disrespect towards, Christian relics'.

[160] Hoyland, *In God's Path*, pp. 131–2.

[161] A. Marsham, 'The Architecture of Allegiance in Early Islamic Late Antiquity: the Accession of Muʿāwiya in Jerusalem, ca. 661 CE', *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. A. Beihammer, S. Constantinou, and M. Parani, The Medieval Mediterranean 98 (Leiden, 2013), 87–114, at 87–9 and 101.

[162] Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, pp. 67–68, 111. The Qurʾān honours Mary (Maryam) as the virgin mother of Jesus (Sūrah 5:75, 19:16–35), who is himself honoured as the prophet of Muḥammad (Sūrah 61:1); Jesus ('Isā) is cited twenty-five times across ninety-three verses, not including many more references in less direct form. See *Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*, ed. Badawi and Haleem, pp. 881–2 (*s.v. al-Masīḥ* 'the anointed').

[163] C. Foss, 'Muʿāwiya's State', *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria: a Review of Current Debates*, ed. J. Haldon (London and New York, 2010), pp. 75–96, at 83.

[164] Hoyland and Waidler, 'Adomnán and the Seventh-Century Near East', p. 795. Hoyland, *In God's Path*, p. 131.

[165] R. G. Hoyland, 'Jacob of Edessa on Islam', *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in honour of Professor Han J. W. Drijvers*, ed. G. J. Reinink and A. C. Klugkist, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 89 (Leuven, 1999), 149–60, at 158–9.

[166] Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, p. 23.

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Related to the caliph's *laissez faire* is the question of his interest in Muḥammad. This is relevant to the transmission of the *iqra'* narrative, if it was the Christians of Jerusalem who told Arculf the story about Muʿāwiya with an unrepressed positive spin. Contemporary Muslims were divided about the strength of Muʿāwiya's belief. Because neither he nor his son Yazīd I (680–3) was related by blood to Muḥammad, his right to rule was questioned by Muslims outside Syria. From the Prophet's clan had come all Muʿāwiya's predecessors, Caliphs Abu Bakr (632–4), ʿUmar (634–44) and ʿUthman (644–56), whereas Muʿāwiya was related to Muḥammad by marriage. His sister, Umm Ḥabība, had been married to Muḥammad to seal the peace in 630, after six years of intermittent fighting in which the Prophet succeeded in taking Mecca from their idolatrous father, Abu Sufyān ibn Ḥarb of the Quraysh. After Muʿāwiya's clan converted, the Prophet made him a scribe of his revelations (one of eighteen scribes).[167] When Muḥammad died in 632, his followers rode northwards and Muʿāwiya rose through the ranks to become a commander in the Levantine campaign of 633–4 that resulted in Theodore's flight from around Antioch.[168]

In around 639, Caliph ʿUmar made Muʿāwiya the governor of Syria. When Caliph ʿUthman was assassinated by rebels in 656, Muʿāwiya sparked off the first *fitna* or Arab civil war by contesting the succession with the next in line, ʿAlī ibn abi Ṭalib, who was the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law. Five years later, Caliph ʿAlī was outmanoeuvred by Muʿāwiya and died at the hands of former allies, whereupon Muʿāwiya bribed Ḥasan, son of ʿAlī, to abdicate, so becoming caliph himself. Muʿāwiya then moved his capital away from Medina, which had been favoured since the time of the Prophet.[169] A contemporary Maronite (eastern Catholic) chronicle reports that 'he placed his throne in Damascus and refused to go to Muḥammad's throne'.[170] In 676 Muʿāwiya broke his agreement with Ḥasan by nominating his own son Yazīd to succeed him. Upon the death of Muʿāwiya four years later, Ḥasan's younger brother, Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, came north from Mecca to challenge Yazīd for the succession, but was ambushed and killed at the battle of Karbalā' on 10 October 680. By Ḥusayn's party, who became the Shi'as, and by the pietist Kharijites, as well as by the Abbasids nearly a century later, Muʿāwiya was accused of turning Muḥammad's covenant into an hereditary monarchy.[171] His son Yazīd broke with Muḥammad further by dating his coins from Year One of his reign, so abandoning the *hijra* calendar which starts with the Prophet's migration to Medina in 622.[172]

Muʿāwiya defined his religion in a public letter when he was governor of Syria. Besieging Constantinople in 651–2, he wrote to Emperor Constans II (641–68) with a challenge 'to deny that Jesus and turn to the Great God whom I

[167] Humphreys, *Mu'awiya*, pp. 7–9.
[168] Humphreys, *Mu'awiya*, pp. 19–22. Lapidge, 'Career of Archbishop Theodore', pp. 8–10.
[169] Hoyland, *In God's Path*, p. 129.
[170] R. G. Hoyland, 'The Earliest Christian Writings on Muhammad: an Appraisal', *The Biography of Muhammad: the Issue of the Sources*, ed. H. Motzki, Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts 32 (Leiden, MA, 2000), 276–97, at 282.
[171] Humphreys, *Mu'awiya*, pp. 2–7.
[172] Hoyland, *In God's Path*, p. 129.

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worship, the God of our father Abraham'.[173] This pious injunction contains no reference to Muḥammad. When he became caliph, Muʿāwiya called himself 'Deputy of God' (*khalīfat allāh* خليفة الله), not 'Deputy of the Messenger of God' (*khalīfat rasūl allāh* خليفة رسول الله), nor did he refer to Muḥammad or Islam in his public proclamations.[174] Some inscriptions confirm this independence from the Prophet. Not only does the coin with cross from Hamat Gader in 663 fail to mention Muḥammad alongside Muʿāwiya 'Commander of the Believers', but he is absent in an Arabic inscription to the caliph by a dam near Ta'if, not far from Mecca, dated to AH 58 (CE 677/8). This is probably the oldest Islamic inscription surviving. It attributes the dam to ʿAbdullāh Muʿāwiya, 'Commander of the Believers' (*āmīr al-mū'minīn* أمير المؤمنين), asking God to pardon him and strengthen him with victory.[175] Assigning this title to Muʿāwiya three times, the inscription makes no reference to the Prophet at all, despite the site's proximity to Mecca. In these ways, it appears that Muḥammad was no longer at the forefront of the caliph's religion when Arculf visited Jerusalem and Damascus in around 680, nor in any of the other years suggested.

The period, therefore, in which Arculf visited Jerusalem is one in which the story of Muḥammad on Mt Hirā' could circulate between Muslims and Christians without sensitivity or prohibition. Hoyland believes 'that Muslims did not initially see their faith as totally distinct from the other monotheistic confessions'.[176] Islam was not yet an institutionalised faith. Reading non-Muslim and Muslim sources, historians have interpreted a development in Muḥammad's religion from the seventh-century period of 'the believers' (*al-mū'minīn*) or 'the submitters' (*al-muslimūn*), warlords and pietists whose tenets variously overlapped with those of Jews and Christians, to a more uniform eighth-century confession in which all Muslims began to submit to God through the Qur'ān of His Messenger. Although there has been some argument about the role of faith as opposed to booty and prestige in the Arabs' motives for their rapid territorial gains after Muḥammad's death in 632, a broad consensus has emerged about a period of 'proto-Islam' from the 630s into the last two decades of the seventh century.[177] Not until after the second Arab civil war (680–92), late in the caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik (685–705), were the laws of Islam codified, the Qur'ān standardised, non-Muslims taxed as subordinate citizens and a double *shahādat* ('creed') instituted as an oath to one God and to Muḥammad as His Messenger.[178]

[173] *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, trans. by R. W. Thomson, comm. by J. Howard-Johnston, with T. Greenwood, Translated Texts for Historians 31 (Liverpool, 1999), 144. Hoyland, *In God's Path*, pp. 135–7 and Fig. 4.4. Humphreys, *Mu'awiya*, p. 22.

[174] P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge, 1986 [2003]), pp. 6–7. Hoyland, *In God's Path*, p. 139.

[175] G. C. Miles, 'Early Islamic Inscriptions near Ṭā'if in the Ḥijāz', *Jnl of Near Eastern Stud.* 7.4 (1948), 236–42, at 237.

[176] Hoyland, *In God's Path*, p. 135.

[177] R. G. Hoyland, review of F. M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* (2010), *Jnl of Middle Eastern Stud.* 44 (2012), 573–76, at 574–5.

[178] Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, pp. 43–69. F. M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), pp. 214–24. For the resulting Eastern Christian polemic, see Hoyland, 'Earliest Christian Writings on Muhammad', pp. 285–95.

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This is not the version of Islam that Arculf would have encountered or that Bede or anyone else in England could have heard of in the late 680s.

In the Near East, in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, there is evidence of widespread communication between the religions at the time Arculf visited Jerusalem and Damascus. Christian monks under Arab rule in these regions described Muḥammad relatively neutrally: Sebeos of Armenia, in the 660s, calls him a trader and reviver of monotheism; he was a lawgiver, to John bar Penkaye of Mesopotamia in 686/7, and to George the archdeacon of St Makarios, in Northern Egypt, in the 690s; to Jacob of Edessa, in the 690s, Muḥammad was a king; a century later he was acknowledged as a prophet to the Arabs by the Christian author of the Syriac *Zuqnin Chronicle*, written in the 780s.[179] Jacob of Edessa (*c.* 640–708), a Syriac scholar contemporary with Aldhelm (*c.* 639–709), reveals also some knowledge of Islam and the Qur'anic Jesus in his correspondence.[180] Likewise, Abbot Anastasius of St Catherine's on Mt Sinai in his *Hodegos* (or *Viae Dux* 'Lord of the Way'), a treatise against Monophysite Christians finished in 681, appears to show knowledge of the Qur'ān before it reached its first extant written form under Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik.[181] Probably through Byzantine condemnation, the Prophet goes unmentioned and unnamed in western Christian records before the eleventh century. This has led Kendall to state that 'the very existence of Muḥammad was unknown to Western Europeans in the eighth century'.[182] But absence of record does not mean ignorance of subject. Many Christians besides Arculf and Willibald returned to Western Europe from the Muslim-governed Holy Land in the eighth to tenth centuries.[183] If Arculf met a similarly informed clergy in Damascus or Jerusalem in around 680, they could have told him about the first revelation of Muḥammad.

Gifts of Different Graces: Arabic and English

So far we have seen how the Prophet's story may have been used as a model for Bede's story of the dream-vision visit of an angel who commands Cædmon to sing on Creation. The first objection to this idea, that the poem might be taken for the revealed word of God, has been addressed by reading Bede's statement on its novelty as his reflection on oral-formulaic verse. The second objection, that Bede saw Islam as a heresy, has been scaled back in keeping with the late seventh century as a period in which Islam did not yet subordinate the older Abrahamic religions and in which Bede, at least until he could have heard about the creation of al-Andalus in 714–15, would not have had the modern examples on which to base complaints about 'Saracens' persecuting Christians.

That Bede paraphrases Cædmon's *Hymn* in Latin, rather than quoting its Northumbrian original, is probably to be explained as his care for foreign readers who would not have understood the local vernacular. Another suggested reason

[179] Hoyland, 'Earliest Christian Writings on Muhammad', pp. 277–86.
[180] Hoyland, 'Jacob of Edessa on Islam', pp. 155–7.
[181] Griffith, 'Anastasios, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims', pp. 355–8.
[182] Kendall, 'Bede and Islam', p. 94.
[183] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, pp. 222–8.

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is that Bede was reluctant to reveal Cædmon's dependence on traditional diction, whether ludic or heroic.[184] The existence of profane English poetry in Cædmon's day is clear enough in Bede's statement that he 'nil unquam friuoli et superuacui poematis facere potuit, sed ea tantummodo, quae ad religionem pertinent, religiosam eius linguam decebant'.[185] Some caution about English secular verse appears likely also in the context of Bede's substitution of pagan with biblical Latin exempla in his rhetorical works.[186] This reason for not quoting the *Hymn* in Northumbrian would align with the larger aim of making the *Historia* suitable for readers outside England.

At any rate, there is no reason to suppose that Bede was shy of the English language, even if it remains doubtful he would have accepted this as a *lingua sacra* equal to Hebrew. The tradition of exalting the latter with Greek and Latin was founded on John XIX.20, in which Pilate orders the title 'King of the Jews' to be inscribed on the cross in all three languages. While Hebrew held its place among scholars as the world's first language beyond Noah and the fall of Babel, many books of the Old Testament were translated into Greek *koinē* in the third century BCE, as were the Gospels in the first century CE. By the time of St Augustine (354–430), Latin, the language of the Western Empire, was also in liturgical use.[187] After this, other gentile languages became acceptable. Three centuries later, in Bede's *Retractatio*, a technical revision of his *Expositio actuum apostolicorum* which M. L. W. Laistner dated very roughly to 725, Bede's advice to take plural Latin *tenebras* ('darkness') as a singular, on the evidence of the Greek word *σκότος*, leads to an interesting aside:

> Hoc autem ideo commemorandum putavi, ut sciret omnis quicumque haec de gente Anglorum legeret non sibi esse necesse propter Latinae linguae auctoritatem tenebras in suam loquelam pluraliter proferre.[188]

On this evidence, it appears that some Northumbrian clergy were dictating Old English interlinear glosses to the Bible in the 720s. Bede's own translations are recorded by his pupil Cuthbert, who writes that before his death on the eve of Ascension Day, on 26 May 735, Bede was working on two tasks:

> Id est a capite euangelii sancti Iohannis usque ad eum locum in quo dicitur 'Sed haec quid sunt inter tantos?' in nostram linguam ad utilitatem ecclesiae Dei conuertit, et de libris Rotarum Ysidori episcopi exceptiones quasdam,

[184] P. R. Orton, 'Cædmon and Christian Poetry', *NM* 84 (1983), 163–70, at 169.

[185] 'could never make any frivolous or vacuous poem, but only those that pertain to devotion or were fitting for his devout tongue', Bede, *HE* iv.24 (22) (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 414).

[186] Noted in O'Donnell, 'Bede's Strategy in Paraphrasing', pp. 428–9.

[187] I. M. Resnick, '*Lingua Dei*, *Lingua Hominis*: Sacred Language and Medieval Texts', *Viator* 21 (1990), 51–74, at 55–9, 66 and 73–4. Stanton, 'Linguistic Fragmentation', pp. 18–19.

[188] 'Still, I have thought this worth recording for the reason that any Englishman reading these things should know that there is no need for him, on the authority of the Latin language, to put *tenebras* into the plural in his own speech', *Bedae Venerabilis Expositio Actuum Apostolicorum et Retractatio*, ed. M. L. W. Laistner (Cambridge, MA, 1939), pp. xiii–xvii, at xv and xvii, and 100.

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dicens 'Nolo ut pueri mei mendacium legant, et in hoc post meum obitum sine fructu laborent.'[189]

The period in which Cuthbert says Bede was working on these translations, between Easter and Pentecost, corresponds with the seasonal liturgical use of Bede's first task, to translate the given section of St John's Gospel (I.1–6.9), probably through English interlinear glosses.[190] While the accompanying book by Isidore serves no liturgical purpose, the place of *exceptiones quasdam* as the object of *conuertit* includes it in the same likely interlinear project. The implication for Bede's final year is that Northumbrian English was beginning to come of age as a literary language.

In all this, however, Bede's view was pragmatic. Two months before his death, he wrote to Bishop Egbert of York, a former pupil, urging him to appoint more priests to teach liturgy. Some of these, he said, were going to be 'idiotas' ('illiterates') who knew the meaning of liturgy only through report in their own language. Of such men he writes that 'haec ipsa sua lingua discere, ac sedulo decantare facito'.[191] Bede adds that he has already lent his own translation of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer 'sacerdotibus idiotis' ('to illiterate priests').[192] In this way, it seems that he regarded English as an aid to the learning of Catholic doctrine in a time of declining Latinity.[193]

These measures have some bearing on what Bede thought of sacred poetry in the vernacular. Cuthbert says earlier in the same letter that Bede, on his deathbed, recited a five-line Northumbrian poem, the so-called 'Bede's Death-Song', about making a good end (and possibly Bede's own work). As Cuthbert says that this was 'In nostra quoque lingua, ut erat doctus in nostris carminibus',[194] it is clear that Bede knew Cædmon's other works, as well as the imitations of these to which he refers. His comment on the difficulty of translating English verse 'sine detrimento sui decoris ac dignitatis' ('without impairing its ornament and weight') thus appears to be founded on first-hand experience.[195] Knowing the verse of his native tradition, Bede could have found a work of Cædmon's with which to match the lines on Creation in an eastern narrative that he was using as

[189] 'That is, the Gospel of St John, which he was turning into our language for the use of God's church, from the beginning up to the place where it is said "But what are they among so many?", and certain excerpts from Bishop Isidore's book *On the Wonders of Nature*, while he was saying: "I don't want my boys reading falsehood or profitlessly labouring on this after I am gone"', *Epistola de obitu Bedae*, in *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 582–3.

[190] C. Rauer, review of M. P. Brown, *Bede and the Theory of Everything* (Chicago, 2023), *SELIM* 29 (2024), 142–45, at 144. Likely in view of the origin of the Mercian-Alfredian Bede, for which see S. M. Kuhn, 'Synonyms in the Old English Bede', *JEGP* 46 (1947), 168–76, at 174–5.

[191] 'You must make them both learn these things and chant them carefully in their language', *Epistola Bede ad Ecgbertum Episcopum*, in *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum etc.*, ed. C. Plummer, 2 vols. printed as one (Oxford, 1896, repr. 1946), pp. 405–23, at 408–9. Discussed in R. Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 56–7.

[192] For this traditional sense of *idiōtēs*, see Souter, *Glossary of Later Latin*, p. 181 (*s.v.*).

[193] DeGregorio, 'Literary Contexts: Cædmon's Hymn', pp. 52–9.

[194] 'in our language too, as he was trained in our songs', Bede, *HE*, *Epistola de obitu Bedae* (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 580).

[195] Bede, *HE* iv.24 (22) (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 416).

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his model. So would Bede have chosen an Old English verse opening to Genesis which he paraphrased in Latin, altering the initial construction in order to to give the exhortation to Cædmon. Then two of his fellow monks in Wearmouth-Jarrow, knowing the same or a similar poem, would have added it to the St Petersburg and Moore manuscripts of the *Historia ecclesiastica.* Later scribes, leaving the other works of 'Cædmon' uncopied, would have transcribed their versions of this extract in the same or similar position, encouraging their pupils to do the same. This is probably how 'Cædmon's *Hymn*' got a life of its own.

Bede's acceptance of English as a medium for the sacred was shaped by Pope Gregory I, for whom the tongues of fire in Pentecost, bestowing a knowledge of all languages, reversed the diffusion of Babel by giving the church a voice to each one of its diverse congregations; he was also influenced by Isidore's conclusion that God speaks to all men in their languages, as well as by Isidore's example, which is St Paul as God's mediator in I Corinthians XIII.1.[196] Bede responds to this missionary pragmatism in his commentary on the Pentecost in Acts II.4 in *Expositio actuum apostolorum* (a little after 709). The post-Babel diffusion of languages was no punishment, says Bede, but rather the means for the Holy Spirit to alight on all mankind:

> unitatem linguarum quam superbia Babylonis disperserat humilitas ecclesiae recolligit, spiritaliter autem uarietas linguarum dona uariarum significat gratiarum. Verum non incongrue spiritus sanctus intellegitur ideo primum linguarum donum dedisse hominibus, quibus humana sapientia forinsecus et discitur et docetur, ut ostenderet quam facile possit sapientes facere per sapientiam dei quae eis interna est.[197]

This doctrine of 'dona uariarum gratiarum' agrees with Bede's words on Cædmon, the man 'diuina gratia specialiter insignis' who 'diuinitus adiutus gratis canendi donum accepit', all through the English language.[198] If Bede based Cædmon's story on Muḥammad's, the premise would have been the same, but with Arabic, as the story of Pentecost allows: further into Acts, when the Holy Spirit descends on the initial twelve apostles, it is said that each man in a crowd of Jews from all nations, including 'Arabes', heard the servants of God speak in his own language.[199] Bede was thus primed to accept Muḥammad's language as a medium for the word of God.

[196] Stanton, 'Linguistic Fragmentation', pp. 14 (Gregory, *Homiliae in Evangelium* xxx.4), 19 (Isidore, *Etymologiae*, IX.i). *Isidori Etymologiae*, ed. Lindsay, IX.i.11–12, at IX.i.12.

[197] 'The humility of the church recoups that linguistic unity which the pride of Babylon had scattered, and yet spiritually the variety of languages signifies the gifts of different graces. Indeed it is not out of keeping with this that the Holy Spirit is understood to have given men the first gift of languages as the external means by which human wisdom is both learnt and taught, in order to show how easily it can make men wise through the wisdom of God that is internal to them', *Expositio actuum apostolorum*, in *Bedae Opera, Pars II: Opera Exegetica 4*, ed. Laistner, pp. 16–17.

[198] 'especially marked by God's grace'; 'received the gift of song by the grace of divine aid', Bede, *HE* iv.24 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 414). Stanton, 'Linguistic Fragmentation', p. 22.

[199] *Biblia Sacra*, ed. Colunga and Turrado, p. 1066 (Acts II.11).

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Conclusion

Bede's intention was doubtless to aid the reform of monasteries by stylising Cædmon as an exemplary monk from a glorious Northumbrian past.[200] Of interest here is that Cædmon composes a poem in Whitby in the late 660s (or even later) according to a divine template which inspires imitations across England in the vernacular. Cædmon's poem, with its huge potential to proselytise in Northumbrian, becomes a gift of grace for the illiterate English, and yet the story that contains it appears to be based on a most unexpected source, Archangel Gabriel's call to Muḥammad on a mountain near Mecca in 610. Despite the physical and ideological distance between the hills of Whitby and Western Arabia, Muḥammad's likeness to the cowherd far exceeds that of any other analogous figure, while no common source for their stories is yet established. My essay proposes that Bede heard the legend of Muḥammad from Abbot Adomnán, who would have heard it from Arculf, who would have learned it from a Christian in Jerusalem, all within a decade. Having seen an opportunity in this as yet unwritten eastern narrative, perhaps while or after he adapted Adomnán in the first decade of the eighth century, Bede would have based Cædmon's story on Muḥammad's, choosing a poem from his works to match 'Creation' as the Lord's first command to His Messenger. Nor would Bede have seen a heresy in Muḥammad if he wrote this story before the news about al-Andalus in 715. The likelihood, by his reference to Galatians, seems quite the opposite, that in the Prophet he saw a version of St Paul.

Acknowledgements. For their comments on earlier drafts, I would like to thank the journal's two anonymous readers and Francis Leneghan, Hameem Bin Sheik Alaudin, Soundous Menaa, and Yasir Qadhi.

[200] S. DeGregorio, 'Literary Contexts: Cædmon's Hymn as a Center of Bede's World', *Cædmon's Hymn and Material Culture*, ed. Frantzen and Hines, pp. 51–79, at 68–79 (77).

Cite this article: North, Richard. 2026. 'Cædmon and Muḥammad Revisited.' *Early Medieval England and its Neighbours* **52**, e6, 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1017/ean.2025.10007

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