

## The Land of Mermedonia in the Old English *Andreas*

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**Abstract** In the Old English poem *Andreas*, God sends St. Andrew on a mission of mercy to the land of the cannibalistic Mermedonians. Compared to its Greek, Latin, and Old English prose analogues, *Andreas* elaborates the monstrous customs of the Mermedonians and the geography of their land so as to systematically heighten the otherworldliness of Mermedonia. This emphatic distance between Mermedonia and the rest of humankind develops through the *Andreas*-poet's use of repetition, of intertextual echoes, and of episodic parallelism within the poem itself. Not only does the otherworldliness of Mermedonia heighten the impact of the country's eventual conversion to Christianity; paradoxically, it also turns Mermedonia into a theological microcosm of the whole world, undergoing its own abbreviated history of salvation.

**Keywords** *Andreas* · *Beowulf* · Cannibalism · Christianity · *Elðeodig* · Exile · Geography · *Harne stan* · Landscape · Mermedonia · Miracles · Otherworldly places

### The Land of Mermedonia in the Old English *Andreas*

Mermedonia is not a pleasant place: its inhabitants, being fond of strangers only in a culinary sense, habitually capture, blind, poison, bewitch, and eventually devour any visitors to Mermedonian shores. Of the several Old English texts that narrate the life

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of St. Andrew, only three tell of his sojourn in the land or city of Mermedonia. One is the poem *Andreas*, which appears in the Vercelli Book.<sup>1</sup> The other two are versions of a homily; a complete version appears in Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 198<sup>2</sup> and a fragmentary version appears in the Blickling codex (*Blickling Homily XIX*).<sup>3</sup> All three Old English texts are descendants of the very popular apocryphal narrative of St. Andrew's sojourn among the Mermedonians. Their closest analogues are the Greek *Praxeis Andreou kai Matheian eis ten polin ton anthropophagon* and the Latin Codex Casanatensis *Acta Andreae et Matthiae apud anthropophagos*.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Greek, Latin, and Old English prose analogues describe and decry the wicked customs of the Mermedonians, *Andreas* does this at much greater length and with much greater intensity. From the very beginning it emphasizes the Mermedonians' hostility to strangers, their monstrous eating habits, their alliance with the devil, even their geographical remoteness and isolation from the rest of the world. *Andreas* intensely and systematically represents the land of Mermedonia as a monstrous, otherworldly place, separated by custom and geography from the rest of the world. This carefully developed otherworldliness, this emphatic distance between Mermedonia and the rest of humankind, emerges through the *Andreas*-poet's use of repetition, of intertextual echoes, and of episodic parallelism. Not only does the otherworldliness of Mermedonia heighten the impact of the country's eventual conversion to Christianity; paradoxically, it also turns Mermedonia into a theological 'type' of the whole world, undergoing its own abbreviated history of salvation.

The most obvious monstrous characteristic of the Mermedonians is their cannibalism; both *Andreas* and its analogues introduce Mermedonia with reference to this cannibalism, but there are significant differences between its treatment. In *Casanatensis*, the Mermedonians are very systematic about their monstrous diet. They have developed specialized technology to process their victims' blood and to cook their flesh:

Devenit namque beati mathei in sortem provincie que dicitur mermedonia, in qua conmorabantur iniqui et pessimi viri, nichil aliud preter hominis carnem edebant, eosque sanguinibus bibebant. Habebantque clibanum in medio civitatis edificatum, insuper et lacus iusta eodem clibani. In quo lacu[s] homines interficiebant, ut sanguis illud ibi colligerent. Alioque lacu iusta ipsum lacum, in quo sanguis illud que in ipso priore laco spargentur, ... [textual

<sup>1</sup> Brooks (1961), cited from here on as *And*.

<sup>2</sup> Cassidy and Ringler (1971), cited from here on as LS 1.1.

<sup>3</sup> Morris (1874–80, repr. 1967), cited from here on as Blickling XIX.

<sup>4</sup> Of the Greek and Latin recensions of the St. Andrew apocrypha, the closest in content to *Andreas* and to the Old English homily are the Greek *Praxeis Andreou kai Matheian eis ten Polin ton Anthropophagon* (abbreviated as *Praxeis*) and the Latin *Acta Andreae et Matthiae apud anthropophagos* in the Codex Casanatensis (abbreviated as *Casanatensis*). As Alison Powell notes, scholars agree that neither of these two versions is the direct source of *Andreas*, but disagree as to which version is closest to the direct source (7–13.) Accordingly, as Powell suggests, I will treat *Praxeis*, *Casanatensis*, and the Old English homily "as analogues of *Andreas*, regarding no particular version as a substitute for a source" (13). For the standard side-by-side edition of the Greek and Latin texts, see the edition of Franz Blatt. For Modern English translations, see Robert Boenig. Henceforth I will refer to the Greek analogue as *Praxeis* and to the Latin analogue as *Casanatensis*. I will reference each of these by chapter, page, and line number in the Blatt edition.

lacuna] ... et quasi purgatus discurret, ... [textual lacuna] ... bibendum (*Casanatensis* cp. 1, p. 3, ll. 4–11).<sup>5</sup>

[And the province which is called Mermedonia fell to the blessed Matthew in the casting of lots, in which lived wicked and very bad men, who did not habitually eat anything other than human flesh, and habitually drank their blood. And they had a baking oven built in the middle of the city, and a large tub above and next to that same oven. In this large tub they used to kill people, so that they would be able to collect that blood there. There was another large tub next to this large tub, in which which that blood which was poured into the first tub ... would run about, purified ... to be drunk.]<sup>6</sup>

They also have a system for tracking their captives' best-before dates:

Et tenentes unusquisque tabula in manu sua, quas iniquissimi et crudeles carnifices, in eorum manibus dederant cum eos retrudebant, erat namque per singula tabula scriptum, numerum dierum triginta, et cotidie introiebant carnifices illi ad eos in eadem carcere, et tabulas illas scripturas contemplabantur. Ut quem per ipsam scripturam invenirent, iam expletis triginta diebus haberet reclusum, velut animalia ad saginandum, statim eiciebant eum qui triginta dies compleverant, et occidebant, atque iudicibus suis preparabant carnes eorum ad manducandum, et sanguis eorum ut potum ad bibendum (*Casanatensis* cp. 3, p. 37., ll. 11–18).

[And each [of the prisoners] held a tablet in his hand, which the evil and cruel murderers used to give them in their hands when they threw them in jail, and the number of thirty days was written on each tablet, and every day those murderers used to come into that same prison to them, and used to look at the inscribed tablets. Whomever they found by means of this writing to have completed the thirty days of being shut in, just like animals for slaughter, they used to throw out and kill straight away, and their judges used to prepare their flesh for eating and their blood as a potion for drinking.]

*Praxeis* features a similar food-processing and prisoner-tracking system in its version of Mermedonia (*Praxeis* cp. 3, p. 36, ll. 15–19).<sup>7</sup> The Old English homily omits any grisly food-processing details, simply stating that the wicked Mermedonians *hlaf ne æton ne wæter ne druncon, ac æton manna lichaman and heora blod druncon* ("neither ate bread nor drank water, but ate men's bodies and drank their blood," LS1.1 ll. 4–6).

In *Andreas*, the narrator also insists on Mermedonian cannibalism; but in the Old English poem, the Mermedonian eating practices are far more savage than in the three prose texts. They are described at first entirely in negative terms. Unlike the more sophisticated Mermedonians of *Praxeis* and *Casanatensis*, those in *Andreas*

<sup>5</sup> The redactor of the *Casanatensis* uses Latin grammar idiosyncratically. Note, in the present passage, *sanguis for sanguinem*. This is a feature of *Casanatensis* throughout.

<sup>6</sup> All translations from the Latin and Old English are my own. For the Greek *vita* of Andrew (*Praxeis*), I have consulted Boenig's translation.

<sup>7</sup> See Boenig (1991, p. 3 and p. 15) for a description of the tablets and the food-processing facility.

do not appear to process their food in any way; in fact, they even lack the most basic human foods, bread and water:

Næs þær hlafes wist  
werum on þam wonge, ne wæteres drync  
to bruconne, ah hie blod ond fel,  
fira flæschoman, feorrancumenra,  
ðegon geond þa þeode (*And* ll. 21b–24).

[There was no bread for men in that plain, nor a drink of water to enjoy; instead, they [the Mermedonians] consumed blood and skin, the flesh-covering of men, of those come from afar, from beyond that nation.]

*Casanatensis* also mentions that the Mermedonians have neither bread nor wine; *Praxeis* implies that they are unwilling to consume them, preferring human flesh instead. Boenig observes that the Mermedonians' diet in the Greek and Latin analogues is a figurative rejection of the Eucharist; in contrast, both the *Andreas*-poet and the homilist describe the Mermedonians as lacking bread and *water* rather than lacking bread and wine, a translation that reflects more closely the material culture of Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>8</sup> This change turns the absence of bread and water into a comment on the literal abnormality of the Mermedonians' diet rather than a symbolic indictment of their spiritual state.

Underscoring this abnormal diet even further, the *Andreas*-poet makes his Mermedonians' grisly consumption of human beings vivid through an anatomical view of the process, a view that invites the reader to imagine the Mermedonians eating their victims layer by anatomical layer—first the blood, then the skin, and then the underlying flesh. This detailed description of the Mermedonians' eating habits would have been especially monstrous to a Christian Anglo-Saxon audience, whose great religious writers—Bede, Alfred, Ælfric, and Wulfstan—insistently echo “commonplace biblical injunctions against drinking blood.”<sup>9</sup> Later in the poem, the Mermedonians' cannibalism reduces them to beasts, as the epithet *wælwulfas* (slaughter wolves) and the vivid description of their table manners suggest:

... swa hit wælwulfas awriten hæfdon  
þæt hie banhringas abrecan þohton,  
lungre tolsan lic ond sawle ... (*And* ll. 149–151).

[as the slaughter-wolves had arranged it, when they thought to break the bone-rings, quickly separate body and soul.]

The dense alliteration on ‘b’ and ‘r’ in the second line of the passage and on ‘l’ and ‘s’ in the third line onomatopoeically evokes the cracking of bone and slurping of raw meat.

As their appetite makes the Mermedonians sever strangers' souls from their bodies, it makes them sever family ties amongst themselves. When Andrew rescues

<sup>8</sup> Boenig (1991, p. xxxiii, p. 1).

<sup>9</sup> Orchard (2003, pp. 140–141).

the foreign captives, the Mermedonians turn on their own people, casting lots for one of them who will become food for the rest. When the lot falls on an old warrior, he offers up his innocent young son to die in his stead, in a reversal of the natural order (*Praxeis* and *Casanatensis* cp. 23, pp. 76–77; *And* ll. 1099–1111; the Old English homilies omit this episode). In *Praxeis*, the old warrior must involve the Mermedonian executioners' entire chain of command in the decision, and ends up offering both his son and his daughter as a snack for his fellow citizens. In *Casanatensis*, the scene is even more elaborate: the father offers up his son; the Mermedonians weigh the two; when the son proves lighter, the father offers up his daughter to make up the desired weight. In contrast, the Old English poet simplifies and speeds up the scene: there is only one child, and instead of navigating the chain of command or calculatingly weighing the child, the Mermedonians hungrily rush upon him *metes modgeomre* ("sad for [lack of] food," *And* l. 1113). As before, the *Andreas*-poet makes his Mermedonians fiercer, more savage, and less calculating than their counterparts in the Greek and Latin analogues; they resemble Grendel more than they resemble the sophisticated anthropophagi of *Praxeis* or *Casanatensis*.

Through grammatical parallelism and juxtaposition the poet equates the violent cannibalistic customs of the Mermedonians with their religious allegiance: *eal wæs þæt mearcland morðre bewunden, / feondes facne* ("that entire borderland was encompassed by violence, by the fiend's guile", *And* ll. 19–20). As John Casteen points out, the cannibalism of the Mermedonians is not just a monstrous practice, but a sign specifically of their separation from God; according to medieval exegetes, God punishes a people that forsakes Him by making it cannibalistic.<sup>10</sup> The Mermedonians' allegiance to the devil becomes apparent in other customs: they indulge in such idolatrous (*hæðengildum*) and devilish (*hellcræftum*) practices as casting lots to determine their next victim (*And* ll. 1099–1105).<sup>11</sup> The devil eventually appears as their advisor and liege-lord, both in *Andreas* and in the prose analogues; but the foreshadowing of this allegiance, which occurs only in the poem, delineates the spiritual conflict all the more clearly.

Geography demarcates Mermedonia from the rest of the world as sharply as its customs. The topographical terms that describe it—*igland* and *mearcland*—appear to contradict one another; one describes Mermedonia as an island, the other describes it as a border region. What they have in common, however, is the suggestion of otherworldliness. Oliver J. H. Grosz traces the operation of the first term: as he observes, the poem describes Mermedonia as an *igland* or *ealand* (*And* ll. 15, 28), though this detail appears neither in the Greek, nor the Latin, nor the Old English homily.<sup>12</sup> Considering the historical site of Mermedonia, which is a seacost

<sup>10</sup> Casteen (1978, pp. 74–78).

<sup>11</sup> In his sermon "On Auguries", Ælfric condemns magical practices, including pagan casting of lots. Whoever inquires into anything by magic, he states, *bið þam hæðenum gelic þe hleotað be him sylfum mid ðæs deofles cræfte þe hi forðeð on ecnysse* (is like the heathen who cast lots concerning themselves through the devil's art, which destroys them forever, Skeat ll. 75–6).

<sup>12</sup> Grosz (1970, p. 240).

rather than an island, critics have suggested that *igland* and *ealand* mean “land bordering on water” or “land beyond the water”.<sup>13</sup> As Grosz points out, however, *Andreas* is a poem, not a geographical treatise; it might make more sense to look for “artistic motives for the poet’s use of *igland* in its ordinary sense.” He then argues that the saints Matthew and Andrew are religious exiles, in the tradition described by Dorothy Whitelock. Accordingly, Mermedonia is an island

not because it is far across the sea, but more precisely because an island symbolizes the religious exile’s complete isolation from an outer world. Thus the poet of *Andreas* has introduced a psychological rather than a factually accurate geography. The island symbolically parallels Matthew’s physical incarceration as well as his spiritual isolation from the sinful, heathen world.<sup>14</sup>

But in the literal sense of the story, the saints are not isolated from the “sinful heathen world”; quite the opposite, they are immersed in an exceptionally sinful heathen world, which acts upon them and which they act upon. What they are isolated from is the implied *normal* world, its customs and its safety. The insularity of Mermedonia symbolically parallels the Mermedonians’ initial distance from the human norm and from God.

The second term, *mearcland*, works more subtly. In his edition of *Andreas*, Brooks glosses it as “a borderland, waste land lying outside cultivated areas”. This fits the Mermedonians’ culinary savagery, their lack of a civilization that would produce more ethically acceptable food. *Mearcland* also connotes otherworldly menace, as the use of borderlands in other Old English poems suggests: in *Guthlac A*, the word *mearcclond* describes the saint’s demon-ridden hermitage (l. 174); in *Beowulf*, borderlands are the stalking ground of Grendel, the *mære mearcstapa* (mighty wanderer of the borders, ll. 103, 1348).<sup>15</sup> As Manish Sharma points out, “[i]n their imagination, Old English poets seemed to assume a natural relation between evil, especially of the supernatural sort, and border-space.”<sup>16</sup>

The Mermedonians’ spiritual distance from the human norm is reinforced by the physical distance between Mermedonia and the rest of the world. The *Andreas*-poet frequently accentuates this impression of distance. Andrew initially objects to God’s command that he travel to Mermedonia, referring to the long journey twice in the same speech: *feorne weg* (“a long way,” l. 191), *wegas ofer widland* (“ways over the wide land,” l. 198). Later, God disguised as the ship’s captain tells Andrew that he has come a long way from Mermedonia (ll. 264–5). Again, during the storm at sea, God warns the missionaries that the journey to Mermedonia will be long and the land distant (ll. 420–424). Of all these references to distance, only one appears in one of the prose analogues: in the Old English homily, Andrew offers one brief

<sup>13</sup> One such critic, as Grosz points out, is Kenneth R. Brooks, “Old English EA and Related Words” (1952–3). *English and Germanic Studies*, 5 (1952–53), 28, note 77. Brooks’s view coincides with the argument of George Philip Krapp, “Notes on the *Andreas*” (January 1905), *Medieval Philology*, 2, 400.

<sup>14</sup> Grosz (1970, p. 242).

<sup>15</sup> Krapp and Dobbie (1936), hereafter cited as *Guthlac A* and *B*; Klaeber (1950), hereafter cited as *Beowulf*.

<sup>16</sup> Sharma (2002, p. 200).

objection to the length of the journey to Mermedonia: *se siþfæt is þyder to lang, and ic þone weg ne con* (the journey there is too long, and I do not know the way, LS1.1 ll. 45–6).

A description of the population also reinforces Mermedonia's foreignness. Newly arrived in Mermedonia, Andrew warns his disciples that they are about to undergo martyrdom in the homeland of the *ælmyrcna* (*And* l. 432). This *hapax legomenon* has been translated as either "Ethiopians" (literally, all-black people) or as "foreign borderers". J. R. Hall points out the problems with both translations.<sup>17</sup> Geography speaks against the first meaning: Ethiopia cannot be identified with Mermedonia, since the apostle Matthew was martyred in the former and escaped martyrdom in the latter, and since the latter conspicuously lacks the torrid climate of the former. Linguistic evidence speaks against the second meaning: "there is no recorded instance of \**meorce* 'borderers' of which *myrce* might be a variant spelling, [and] \**myrc* does not occur as a spelling of *mearc* 'border'."<sup>18</sup> Instead of these two meanings, Hall proposes that *ælmyrcna* be read as "the wholly dark" in a spiritual sense, a reading supported by the use of *myrce* as an indicator of evil throughout the poem. However, whether it indicates spiritual standing, geographical position, or skin colour, the saint's reference to the dangers of the land of the *ælmyrcna* is in agreement with the general strategy of distancing Mermedonia from the implied "normal world" of the text.

Unlike his Greek, Latin, and Old English prose analogues, the *Andreas*-poet fleshes out the physical geography of Mermedonia in evocative detail. Andreas's first view of the Mermedonian coast is grim and imposing:

Onwoc þa wiges heard, (wang sceawode),  
fore burggeatum. Beorgas steape,  
hleoðu hlifodon, ymbe harne stan  
tigelfagan trafu, torras stodon,  
windige weallas (*And* ll. 839–43).

[Then the war-hardened man woke up, looked at the place before the city gates. Steep hills, hollow hills towered. Around the grey stone stood tile-adorned buildings, towers, windy walls.]

While *Casanatensis* only mentions the city gate of Mermedonia, and while neither *Praxeis*, nor the Old English homilies refer to the setting at all,<sup>19</sup> the Old English poem describes an interesting juxtaposition of natural and urban features. Many of these topographical features seem to import literary connotations of danger, especially from *Beowulf*.<sup>20</sup> For instance, Margaret Gelling argues that *hlið* or

<sup>17</sup> Hall (1987, pp. 38–47).

<sup>18</sup> Hall (1987, p. 39).

<sup>19</sup> The parallel passages in the analogues are *Casanatensis* cp. 15, p. 63 ; *Praxeis* p. 62, cp. 15; LS1.1 ll. 96–97. Neither contains a comparable description of Andrew's first view of the city.

<sup>20</sup> I operate on the assumption that the *Andreas*-poet borrowed directly from *Beowulf*. For arguments in support of this point, based on the number and the extensive nature of verbal parallels between the two poems, see Alison M. Powell (2002) and Orchard (2003, pp. 163–166).



*hleodū*, usually translated as “slope”, actually has the specialized sense of “hill with a hollow”, a dangerous topographical feature:

A hill with a hollow provides dead ground, and this could be a lurking place for natural or supernatural enemies. In all instances in *Beowulf* the *-hlið*, *-hleodū* compounds have a menacing context.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, the noun phrases *beorgas steape*, *windige weallas*, and *harne stan* all occur in *Beowulf*, and all are in some way associated with danger. The *beorgas steape*, the steep cliffs, appear in the hero's first view of the Spear-Danes' coast, where he will face the Grendel family. The *windige weallas*, the windy walls, are Beowulf's first sight of land after the swimming contest with Breca and the battle with sea monsters. The third is the most interesting. Studying its occurrences in *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, and other Old English texts (including charters), William Cooke and Michael Swisher agree that the *harne stan* represents a traditional boundary marker.<sup>22</sup> However, in *Beowulf*, in *Andreas*, and in *Blickling XVI*, the *harne stan* marks specifically dangerous, otherworldly places—respectively the Grendel mere, various dragons' lairs, the land of Mermedonia, and hell. Accordingly, Swisher argues that it is a formulaic expression that marks a passage to a dangerous otherworldly space.<sup>23</sup> Overall, the intertextual echoes “import” an atmosphere of strangeness and danger into Andreas's (and the readers') first impression of Mermedonia's landscape.

A later description of the landscape of Mermedonia, the city streets and the countryside where Andrew suffers martyrdom, is also not paralleled in the prose analogues, and it also echoes *Beowulf*.<sup>24</sup> The streets of Mermedonia are *stanfage*, stone-adorned, like the path towards Heorot, and the buildings are *enta ærgeweorc*, the ancient work of giants, like the magical sword in the Grendel lair (*And* ll. 1229–1240; *Beowulf* ll. 320a, 1679a). Here the ancient splendours of the city, like the poet's use of heroic diction to describe the inhabitants, emphasize the violent savagery of the Mermedonians. They live in an artfully built city, but they have neither bread nor drinking water (*And* ll. 21b–24). They plan a great communal feast, to share their food as Hrothgar and his warriors might in Heorot, but there are people on the menu (*And* ll. 152–153). They rush into battle, like a valiant war-band, but their adversary is a boy whom they want to devour (*And* ll. 1116–1125). They possess a splendid ancient city, but they cannot enjoy the trappings of civilized life, treasure and gabled halls, because they have no people to eat (*And* ll. 1113–1114, 1158–1162). The familiar heroic language applied in such strange circumstances makes the monstrosity of the Mermedonians all the more evident.

In his discussion of imagined landscapes in Old English poetry, a discussion focused on the exilic landscapes of the *Wanderer* and of the *Wife's Lament*, and on

<sup>21</sup> Gelling (2002, p. 8).

<sup>22</sup> Cooke (2003, pp. 297–301); Swisher (2002, pp. 133–136).

<sup>23</sup> Swisher (2002, pp. 133–136).

<sup>24</sup> Orchard (2003, p. 166).



the monster mere of *Beowulf*, Nicholas Howe argues that the imagined landscapes are

means of representing the interior, existential crisis that occurs within heroic culture: that of the figure isolated from other human beings, with little if any hope of successfully changing his or her lot in this transitory world.<sup>25</sup>

Andreas is repeatedly a “figure isolated from other human beings” in his otherworldly place. He goes into the Mermedonian prison unaccompanied by any other people; his only helper is the Holy Spirit, who opens the prison door. Later, he dismisses his disciples and the rescued prisoner, and endures his capture and martyrdom alone. But in contrast to the elegiac landscapes, the otherworldly place where the saint finds himself hosts not an interior crisis, but external conflicts between the saint and the local population. The saint’s suffering and eventual victory transforms and sanctifies the otherworldly place.<sup>26</sup>

Andreas twice comes into conflict with the Mermedonians’ most monstrous cultural characteristic, their cannibalism: with divine help he deprives them of two potential meals, the foreign Christian prisoners and the sacrificial Mermedonian boy. After his second intervention, the devil leads a posse of warriors against him and orders his imprisonment and torture. As the Mermedonians imprison the saint, winter imprisons the land:

Snaw eorðan band  
wintergeworpum. Weder coledon  
heardum hægelscurum, swylce hrim ond forst,  
hare hildstapan, hæleða eðel  
lucon, leoda gesetu. Land wæron freorig  
cealdum cylegicelum, clang wæteres þrym  
ofer eastreamas, is brycgade  
blæce brimrade (*And* ll. 1255–62).

[Snow bound the earth in winter storms. The winds grew cold with hard showers of hail. Likewise, rime and frost, grey warriors, locked up the homeland of men, the habitations of the people. The land was frozen with cold icicles, the glory of the water clung over the streams, the ice bridged the black sea-road.]

But Andreas’s martyrdom literally transforms the landscape. After his passion is accomplished, the woods miraculously bloom where his blood has fallen:

Geseh he geblowene bearwas standan  
blædum gehrodene, swa he ær his blod aget (*And* ll. 1448–9).

[He saw blossoming woods stand, adorned with glory, where before he had shed his blood.]

<sup>25</sup> Howe (2002, p. 109).

<sup>26</sup> A similar pattern appears in the *Guthlac* poems, where the saint ventures into the strange liminal space of his marshy hermitage, all alone among the throngs of hostile demons who claim the swamps as their own territory. For further analysis of this pattern in *Guthlac* A, see Sharma (2002, pp. 185–200).

Alliteration on ‘b’, which encompasses the two verses, falls only on the words that describe either the reviving natural world or the saint’s blood (‘geblowene bearwas’, ‘blædum’, ‘blod’).

In the prose analogues, the miracle is a visionary experience, which seems to centre not so much on the landscape itself as on Andreas’s flesh and hair, torn away from him under torture. Its miraculous transformation into blooming trees is a literal fulfillment of God’s promise to his loyal servants that not even a lock of their hair will perish. In all the prose analogues, God himself describes the vision as “what [Andrew’s flesh and hair] has become”:

Hec cum intra se orasset beatus andreas, facta est vox domini sermo ebraico dicens ad eum. Amen dico tibi andreas, potest celum et terra transire, quam verbum meum sit vacuum. Nunc autem respice retrorsum, et vide caro tua, et capilli tui quid fiunt. Cum hoc respiceret beatus andreas, apparuerunt caro et capilli sui sicut arbores florentes et fructum afferentes (Casanatensis p. 87, cp. 28).

[When the blessed Andrew had prayed to himself, it happened that the voice of the Lord, speaking to him in Hebrew words, said: “Amen I say to you, Andrew, Heaven and earth can pass away before my word will be empty. Therefore look behind you now and see your flesh and hair, what they have become.” When the blessed Andrew looked back, his flesh and hairs appeared as trees blossoming and bearing fruit.]

The Old English homily is almost a word-for-word rendering of this Latin passage. There, too, God literally fulfills his promise, and St. Andrew, looking for his flesh and hair, sees *geblowen treow wæstm berende* (“blossoming trees bearing fruit,” LS1.1 ll. 251–6).

Conversely, the Old English poem focuses more on Andreas’s blood and the blossoming woods than on Andrew’s flesh and hair: God shows Andreas the miracle by telling him to look at the *blodige stige* (bloody path) left behind by his martyrdom (ll. 1441–2). To Ananya Jahanara Kabir, the image is “a glimpse of paradise”, of the temporary abode of good souls between death and Doomsday. She argues that the natural beauty of the blossoming woods suggests an ideal landscape in terms typical of Old English poetic technique for describing paradise, while its origin in Andreas’s blood recalls “Tertullian’s declaration that the doors of paradise can be unlocked only by the blood of martyrdom”.<sup>27</sup> However, the prose analogues and the context of the poem itself indicate another interpretation. The prose analogues describe the vision as the literal transformation of a physical object (the saint’s flesh and hair) rather than a glimpse of the afterlife. The poem itself also suggests that a momentary vision of paradise might be out of character at this point, for the following two reasons. First, as Kabir herself notes, where the *Andreas*-poet mentions the afterlife of the blessed, he does not make an explicit distinction between heaven and paradise; as well, he describes the afterlife of the blessed in abstract terms, not in terms of natural beauty.<sup>28</sup> Second, the miracle happens after

<sup>27</sup> Kabir (2001, p. 159).

<sup>28</sup> Kabir (2001, p. 159).

(and in contrast to) a vivid description of Mermedonia's physical landscape locked in wintry captivity. Given this context, it makes more sense to read the miracle in *Andreas* as a physical transformation of the natural landscape: rather than momentarily unlocking the gates of paradise, the martyr's blood returns life to the land.

Of course, these two interpretations of the blossoming wood need not be mutually exclusive, for the transformed earthly landscape functions here as a type of the heavenly or paradisaal landscape, towards which Andreas himself, functioning as a type of Christ, opens the way for the Mermedonians.<sup>29</sup> But the *Andreas*-poet has so consistently used the physical geography of Mermedonia as a sign of its alienation from God, that the miraculous transformation of this very geography is a poetically effective symbol of its inhabitants' spiritual redemption.

The flood which Andreas summons after his martyrdom effects an even profounder transformation. Typologically, the flood recalls both the biblical cataclysm and the sacrament of baptism.<sup>30</sup> As to the former, the Mermedonians are drowned, just like the monstrous antediluvians, with whom they share the monstrous practice of eating flesh with blood.<sup>31</sup> As to the latter, the Mermedonians literally enact the Pauline description of baptism:

consepulti ei in baptismo in quo et resurrexistis per fidem operationis Dei qui suscitavit illum a mortuis.

Buried with him in baptism, in whom also you are risen again by the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him up from the dead.<sup>32</sup>

Terrified by the flood, the Mermedonians convert to Christianity and confess the faith; as soon as they do this, Andreas banishes the flood waters and resurrects all but the most wicked of the dead. These are swallowed up by their own land, as they previously swallowed up other people.

The impression that Andreas's blood has brought spring to the land is strengthened by the flood. This is another correspondence with *Beowulf*, where the flood-motif is linked with the destruction of monsters. After Beowulf has killed the Grendels, the blade of the monstrous sword he used melts away like ice in the spring, *ðonne forstes bend fæder onlæteð, onwinded wælrapas* ("when the Father releases the bond of frost, unwinds the water-fetters", ll. 1609–10). Later, Hrothgar sees that the hilt of the monstrous sword is seen to be inscribed with *fyrngewinnes, suðþan flod ofsloh ... giganta cyn* ("the origin of ancient struggle, when the flood ... killed the race of giants", ll. 1689–90). On both of these occasions, a flood (be it that of spring or that of Genesis) is linked to the divinely mandated destruction of monsters. Even more striking is the fact that both the Grendel family and the *giganta kyn* who are their ancestors are guilty of monstrous eating. Bede,

<sup>29</sup> For an extensive summary of arguments in favour of biblical typology in *Andreas*—the saint as a 'type' of Christ, the flood as a "type" of baptism—see Bjork (1985, pp. 110–111).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Orchard (2003, p. 141).

<sup>32</sup> Colossians 2.12, Douay-Rheims Version.

for instance, points out that the wicked antediluvians *cum sanguine carnem comederent*, ate flesh together with blood.<sup>33</sup> In this they resemble the Mermedonians, whose way of life is also wiped out by a flood.

After the Mermedonians and their land emerge from the receding waters, Andreas guides the transformation of their customs and their land: the Mermedonians build and consecrate a church, forsake their old idolatrous altars, and consecrate a bishop (*And* ll.1633, 1646; ll. 1641–2; l.1649). As a result, the narrator's descriptive terms for their world are also transformed. Their land is no longer a remote and dangerous place; it becomes, instead, a *beorhtan byrig* ("a bright city," *And* l.1649), a *goldburg* ("city of gold," l. 1655), a *secdream ond sincgestreon* ("place of joy and treasure," l. 1656).

Eventually, Andreas guides the erstwhile monstrous Mermedonians on the path of faith towards their true homeland:

Lærde þa þa leode on geleafan weg,  
trymede torhtlice, tireadigra  
wenede to wuldre weorod unmaete,  
to þam halgan ham heofona rices,  
þær fæder ond sunu ond frofre gast  
in þrinnesse þrymme wealdeð  
in woruld worulda wuldorgestealda (*And* ll. 1680–86).

[Then he taught the people on the way of faith, strengthened them gloriously, guided an exceedingly great host of the blessed to blessedness, to the holy home of the kingdom of heaven, where Father and Son and Holy Spirit rule in the glory of the Trinity, for ever and ever, over the dwellings of glory.]

Anita R. Riedinger observes that the concept of "home" in Old English poetry appears "in a series of antitheses—as a part of reward and punishment, as a place of heaven and hell, of birth and death." These antitheses or conceptual reversals, she argues, reveal the "bi-polarity" of Old English poetic structure, an aspect that prevails throughout the corpus.<sup>34</sup> The hostile otherworldly place that Andreas travels to suggests a fourfold conceptual reversal of this kind. Most obviously, the otherworldly place and its monstrous inhabitants imply their opposite, a "normal world" in the text. Since Andreas is in Achaia when he complains that the land of Mermedonia is foreign to him and very far away, Achaia serves as a reference point, an implied standard for normality. It is the familiar place that Andreas leaves behind in the service of God. But although the "normal world" stands in antithesis to the strange and dangerous lands where the saint travels, it is not a true home in either poem. In *Andreas*, for good or ill, no earthly home is safe or lasting. The apostles have no fixed homeland, travelling over all the earth, as God commands. Foreigners find no safety in Mermedonia. The wicked Mermedonians and their ancient civilization are not safe either; they are swept away or transformed by the flood and the new religion.

<sup>33</sup> Orchard (2003, pp. 140–141).

<sup>34</sup> Riedinger (1995, p. 55).

Inset narratives and allusions amplify the theme of homelessness on earth. On the journey towards Mermedonia, Andreas recounts the miracles of Christ to the ship's captain. In the temple in Jerusalem, Christ calls on the statue of an angelic creature to declare His lineage to the Jews. The stone image immediately springs to life and testifies in His favour:

Ne dorste þa forhyrman hælendes bebod  
wundor fore weorodum, ac of wealle ahleop,  
frod fyrngeweorc, þæt he on foldan stod,  
stan fram stane. Stefn æfter cwom,  
hlud þurh heardne, hleoðor dynede,  
wordum wemde (*And* ll. 735–740).

[It did not dare to neglect the Saviour's command—a wonder before the people—but it leapt from the wall, the wise work of distant days, so that it stood on the ground, stone [parted] from stone. A voice came after, loud through the hard thing; speech resounded, was heard in words.]

The verses vividly depict the strangeness of the moment—the suddenness of the statue's movement, the unnatural separation of stone from stone, the flinty quality of the creature's voice, the surprising emergence of words. The miracle continues: not only does Christ command the statue away from its proper place, He sends it on a mission to call Abraham and his two sons out of their graves, as further witnesses. Just as the lifeless stone is not safe from God's call, neither are the dead in their graves; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob answer the divine summons in such a hurry that they leave their graves gaping open behind them: [*f*]orlætan moldern wunigean/ open eorðschraefu ("they forsook dwelling in their sepulchres, open holes in the earth," *And* ll. 802b).

Neither miracle convinces the High Priest in Jerusalem; he taunts Christ's followers that they are exiles, geographically and ideologically, obeying the teachings of a stranger instead of the customs of the land:

Hwæt, ge syndon earme ofer ealle menn!  
Wadað widlastas, weorn geferað  
earfoðsiða, ellþeodiges nu  
butan leodrihte larum hyrað ... (*And* ll. 676–82).

[Look, you are miserable above all men! [You] tread long roads, travel on many hard journeys, hear the teaching of a foreigner now, against the custom of the people ...]

The taunt of foreignness does not appear in either of the prose analogues: there, the high priest denies Jesus' divinity, and gets contradicted by the speaking statue (*Casanatensis* cp. 14, p. 59–61; *Praxeis* cp. 14, p. 58–60). Ironically, however, the taunt of exile is quite true in the poem: Christ's followers—be they apostles, former anthropophagi, living statues or dead prophets—have no abiding home on earth.

Frequent appearances of the word *elþeodig* and its cognates underscore this essential human homelessness. In fact, the *Andreas*-poet uses *elþeodig* and its cognates twelve times, by far the highest number of this word's occurrences in any

Old English prose or poetic text.<sup>35</sup> Used both as an adjective and as a noun, its primary meaning is “foreign, alien.”<sup>36</sup> It is part of the *Andreas*-poet’s strategy of distancing Mermedonia from the implied normal world: most of the time, the word refers either to the apostles and other strangers to Mermedonia (six times), or to the Mermedonians themselves, foreign to the apostles (four times).<sup>37</sup> However, figuratively, *elþeodig* describes the condition of mortal human beings: in the earthly world, they are foreigners, resident aliens in search of an eternal homeland.<sup>38</sup> As the poem’s insistence on the loss or the instability of homes suggests, the otherworldly land of Mermedonia becomes an expression of the transitory earthly world.

Home is elsewhere. Two other worlds—eternal ones—feature in the poem, in antithesis to one another. One is heaven, the place of wuldorgestealda (“dwellings of glory”, *And* l. 1684), the holy and eternal home of God, of the patriarchs, of the good angels, and of faithful Christians (*And* ll. 807–810, 829–30, 1680–6). The other, opposite world is hell, the devil’s habitation, the place of eternal captivity and exile. Andreas, taunted by the fiend, describes his condition:

þær ðu syððan a, susle gebunden,  
in wræc wunne, wuldres blunne,  
syððan ðu forhogedes heofoncyniges word.  
þær wæs yfles or, ende næfre  
þines wræces weorðeð (*And* ll. 1379–1383).

[There you have ever since [the Fall] been bound in torment, dwelt in exile, lost glory, since you despised the word of heaven’s king. That was the beginning of evil; the end of your exile will never come.]

The land of the Mermedonians is contested ground between these two extremes. At the beginning of the story Mermedonia, with its cannibalistic and idolatrous customs, explicitly belongs to the devil; by the end of the story, its inhabitants, led by Andrew, are on their way to heaven. Mermedonia is poised between these two spiritual opposites. Granted its own abbreviated history of salvation (a Passion, a baptismal flood), the land functions as a miniature representation of the entire human world, encompassed by sin but capable of receiving salvation.

To use a mathematical metaphor, the poem explores the concepts of “home” and “exile” along two perpendicularly intersecting axes. The first axis is that of limited and temporal reality, the human perspective. One end is the “normal world” of the

<sup>35</sup> The word “*elþeodig*” and its cognates appear twenty-six times in the Old English poetic corpus and a hundred times in the Old English prose corpus (“*elþeodig*”). Its frequency in *Andreas* accounts for almost half of the word’s occurrences in the entire Old English poetic corpus: the word and its cognates appear twelve times in *Andreas*, twenty-six times in Old English verse altogether, and four times in *Elene*, the poem boasting the next-highest frequency of this word.

<sup>36</sup> “*elþeodig*.” Dictionary of Old English in Electronic Form A–F (1996).

<sup>37</sup> There are two exceptions: once, “*elþeode*” is used in the sense of “nations”, when Christ tells Andrew that the Crucifixion will become known “on *elþeode*” (*And* 970); the other time, it is again used in the sense of foreigner, as the High Priest of Jerusalem disparages Jesus’ teachings as those of a foreigner (*And* 677). The second instance will be discussed below.

<sup>38</sup> “*elþeodig*.” Dictionary of Old English in Electronic Form A–F (1996).

text, the expressed or implied human homeland; the opposite end is the hostile otherworld, defined by its monstrous and supernatural elements. The second axis is that of eternal reality. One end is heaven, the one true and permanent homeland; the opposite end is hell, the state of ultimate exile. Initially, the saint travels away from his “normal world” and into a dangerous otherworldly place, choosing what looks like exile for the sake of his faith. But as he comes into conflict with the monstrous inhabitants and prevails over them, the saint measures the otherworldly place against eternity, separating out the demonic elements and sending them into their proper exile, but redeeming the human and natural aspects of this world and drawing it up towards its heavenly home.

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