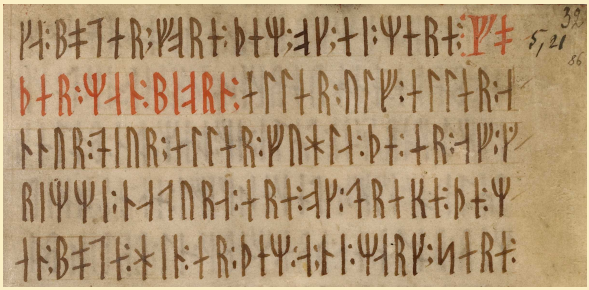
XXIII Seminario avanzato
in Filologia germanica

LE RUNE II:
FONTI DOCUMENTARIE SCANDINAVE, CONTINENTALI E INSULARI



a cura di
ROBERTO ROSSELLI DEL TURCO

Volume pubblicato con il contributo del Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici dell'Università degli Studi di Torino e dell'Associazione Italiana di Filologia Germanica (AIFG)





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PREMESSA

Questo volume raccoglie le lezioni e comunicazioni presentate nel corso del XXIII Seminario Avanzato in Filologia Germanica, svoltosi a Torino dall'11 al 13 settembre 2023. L'edizione di quest'anno è stata dedicata allo studio della genesi, dell'evoluzione e dell'uso delle iscrizioni runiche nelle tradizioni germaniche tardo-antiche e medievali ("Le Rune II: fonti documentarie scandinave, continentali e insulari"), uno dei temi di maggiore complessità e di più spiccato interesse negli studi dedicati alla tradizione epigrafica, scrittoria e letteraria germanica e all'interno di un più ampio spettro storico-culturale che include numerose regioni dell'Europa settentrionale, continentale e insulare. Questa edizione ha continuato idealmente il dibattito sulle rune già inaugurato in occasione del IX Seminario, tenutosi nel 2009, analizzando in chiave sincronica e diacronica il loro uso nei più diversi contesti documentari e studiando i loro risvolti linguistici, poetici e sociali in un vasto raggio geografico e temporale.

Le lezioni sono state tenute da docenti di varie Università italiane (Alessandro Zironi, Bologna; Carla Cucina, Macerata; Concetta Giliberto, Palermo; Gabriele Cocco, Bergamo) e da tre ospiti internazionali (Bianca Patria, Universitetet i Oslo; Michelle Waldispühl, Göteborgs universitet; Alessandro Palumbo, Universitetet i Oslo), in maniera tale da presentare una varietà di punti di vista e di interessi di ricerca diversi. La discussione che ha fatto seguito alle lezioni è stata, come sempre, molto vivace e tale da favorire uno scambio di idee e nuove prospettive di ricerca fra tutti i partecipanti.

Il Seminario si è dunque confermato quale importante occasione di incontro grazie anche alla numerosa partecipazione di giovani studiosi provenienti da varie Università italiane (Bergamo, Bologna, Cosenza, Perugia, Roma, Salerno, Torino, Udine) e una straniera (Basilea). Come da tradizione, inoltre, gli iscritti hanno potuto esporre i risultati delle proprie ricerche nella consueta sessione a loro dedicata ("I giovani

studiosi presentano le loro ricerche"), in modo da potersi confrontare con i colleghi e i docenti sugli argomenti più diversi delle loro ricerche.

Il successo di questa edizione è senza dubbio dovuto alla passione con cui docenti e discenti si sono incontrati per discutere di Filologia Germanica, per questo motivo non possiamo che esprimere la gratitudine più sentita nei loro confronti. Grazie anche all'Associazione Italiana di Filologia Germanica e al Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici dell'Università di Torino, che con il loro generoso supporto hanno permesso di realizzare anche questa edizione del Seminario. Un ringraziamento particolare, infine, a Carla Falluomini per il suo aiuto, e a Raffaele Cioffi e Dario Bullitta che hanno curato l'organizzazione pratica del Seminario.

Roberto Rosselli Del Turco

INDICE

Premessa
Roberto Rosselli Del Turco V

Lezioni

Alessandro Zironi
Le rune nei manoscritti di età carolingia 3

Michelle Waldispühl
Writing Runes – How and why? Sociolinguistic Approaches to South Germanic Runic 33

Alessandro Palumbo
Fenomeni di bilinguismo e bigrafismo nell'epigrafia medievale scandinava 63

Bianca Patria
Fonti runiche per lo studio dello sviluppo della metrica nordica 97

Carla Cucina
Ciclo della vita, famiglia e società nelle iscrizioni runiche scandinave 147

Concetta Giliberto
The *Westeremden B* Runic Inscription In Its North Sea Context 215

Gabriele Cocco
Cynewulf: Poetic Arcana Signed in Runes 241

Comunicazioni

Jasmine Bria
La tradizione arturiana nel *brut* in prosa 293

Alessandra Rossella
Nuove fonti accessorie per AM 655 XII-XIII 4to e AM 310 4to 311

Programma 329

Elenco dei partecipanti 331

Gabriele Cocco

CYNEWULF: POETIC ARCANA SIGNED IN RUNES

1. From memory to Holy Writ: the recasting of oral tradition into textuality

The conversion of the Early English to Christianity arose less as a change of creed than as an epistemic rupture of enduring magnitude. Beyond the formal adoption of a new creed and its attendant liturgical and moral structures, this transition marked the rise of a profound synthesis between two ideological systems (Opland 1980, 88): on the one side the heroic, kin-based ancient Germanic culture, and on the other the universalising theology of (Roman) Catholicism.[1] From this conflu-

[1] Early English Catholicism and monasticism were constituted by two heterogeneous matrices. In the South, the work of evangelisation was initiated by the envoys dispatched from Rome by Pope Gregory the Great (†604) through Augustine – later Saint Augustine of Canterbury (†604) – whose establishment in Kent enabled the progressive diffusion into adjacent realms (Yorke 1992, 28; Stenton 1950, 32). In the North, by contrast, the initiative had already been undertaken first by the Celtic missionaries from Iona, later joined by the second Roman mission, likewise commissioned by Gregory, which implanted the Benedictine *traditio* through the ministry of Paulinus – later Saint Paulinus of York (†644); see Mayr-Harting 1991, 66-68. The intersection of these two spiritual economies – each embodying its own disciplinary, ascetic, and theological configuration – proved at once a principle of enrichment and a source of tension, culminating in the Synod of Whitby (664), which affirmed the uncontested authority of Roman Catholicism and prompted the withdrawal of the Irish monks to Iona and its sister houses, where they kept pursuing their distinctive theological vision and a rigorously ascetic–anchoritic form of monastic life (Cubitt 1995, 63-65). The rift between

ence there emerged a hybrid matrix that engendered a distinctly mode of literary production – one that retained the mnemonic patterns and mythic textures of the Germanic past while reconfiguring them within the written frameworks of Latin Christendom (Fulk - Cain 2013, 25-28).[2] What at length crystallised was a literary civilisation that, just within a few centuries, stood as a beacon of erudition across early medieval Western Europe.

In pre-Conquest England, Christian writings came to occupy a position of prominence: they brought forth a milieu centred on the sacred word,[3] with some veiled resonances of the ancient ethos. The shift from the paradigm of the secular to the religious epos was effected through the reworking of themes, culminating in a Christian poetics wherein the figure of the *miles Christi* appears to resonate with some of the traits of the Germanic hero. Early scholarship maintained that "the Old English bard, equipped with all the poetic subjects, styles and techniques of the *scop* of the Heroic Age, applied his profession to the great field of Biblical narrative" (Anderson 1966, 111).[4] As critical discourse has evolved, it

the Roman and Irish monks was soon repaired through the foundation in Kent of the school of Theodore and Hadrian: there, the study of biblical commentaries became a catalyst for renewed concord with Rome, nourished by the famed intellectual ardour of the Celtic ascetics (Bischoff – Lapidge 1994, 25-30, 172-189).

[2] Pàroli (1984) offers a comprehensive account of the genesis and unfolding of Old English literature, together with the Christian vision that informed its cultural environment – encompassing the Alfredian *renovatio* together with the English Benedictine Reform of the tenth century.

[3] On the rise and centrality of the gospel message in the fabric of communal life, see Raw 1991, 228.

[4] Hill's essay proved seminal in this respect; though addressing *Andreas* specifically, Hill argues that Old English Christian literature cannot be reduced to the claim that all poets portrayed Christian figures in "terms belonging to the ideals of a warrior society"; rather, its martial idiom is rooted not in the Germanic heroic epos but in the Latin biblical figure of the *miles Christi*, firmly embedded in pre-Conquest England and not "by the inherited traditions of the Germanic heroic world" (Hill 1981, 57-74, esp. 73-74).

has gradually transcended the conception of Christian poetry as a mere conflation of the Germanic and the Latin traditions. Instead, scholarship has largely confined itself to affinities, overlooking the principle of *imitatio* by which Old English poets engaged with the *auctores* of Late Antique biblical poetry (McBrine 2017, 3-13, 210-212).[5] Current criticism holds that the allusions to biblical and patristic texts, the intricate weaving of Latin and Germanic elements, and the many internal cross-references "speak to one another in a polyphonic conversation regardless of their possible sources, antecedents or parallels out with the codex" (Niles 2019, 72). Christian literature in Early Medieval England thus gave rise to what John Niles calls a "Monastic poetics [that] is thus a hybrid poetics, based on Latinate and Germanic models yet striving to achieve expansive new forms of expression in the medium of Old English alliterative verse", whose chief purpose, as he continues, "was to glorify God" (2019, 5).

On the authority of the Venerable Bede, the Christian lyric-poietic impulse in pre-Conquest England finds its genesis in a dream. *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* IV.24 recounts an event of surprising significance, which took place at the monastery of Streonæshalch (modern-day Whitby) during the abbacy of Saint Hilda. An unlettered lay-brother was miraculously transformed: after a divine vision, Cædmon was endowed with the gift of composing *carmina religioni et pietati apta* ('godly and religious songs'); the heavenly messenger enjoined him to sing about the *principium creaturarum* ('beginning of created things').[6] Upon awakening, Cædmon recited a nine-line poem (*Cæd-*

[5] It is now generally acknowledged that Old English literature need not be regarded as "a meeting point for the clashing worlds of 'Christian' and 'Germanic' culture"; far more effective is the image invoked by Angerer, that of an "entangled thematic strands, which in individual texts are made to overlap at different points and to different effects depending on their audiences and their literary cultures" (2021, 92).

[6] Both the text and the translation of the Venerable Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* are here cited from the Oxford Medieval Texts series (Colgrave – Mynors 1964, 414-415).

mon's Hymn) to praise God, the mighty Creator of the world.[7] Bede elucidates the interplay of traditions, interweaving the oral dimension of poetry – both in its compositional and performative aspects – with a Christian *visio* and a sacred theme. The episode is notable not only for the wondrous inspiration itself, but also for the incongruity between the divine gift and the humble vessel chosen to receive it (Thornbury 2014, 5-8). Cædmon, after all, was a cowherd, illiterate and unversed in poetry, so uneasy with communal song that whenever the harp was passed around and his turn approached, he would rather withdraw. Old English *Maxims I* 169-171 corroborates this form of entertainment and attests to the high esteem for poetic skill in Early English society:[8]

> Longað þonne þy læs þe him con leoþa worn,
> oþþe mid hondum con hearpan gretan;
> hafaþ him his gliwes giefe, þe him god sealde. (Krapp/van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 162)
>
> The one who knows many songs / or knows how to greet the harp with hands longs less, / and has the gift of music inside, which God gave. (Bjork 2014, 78)

The passage seals the value of poetic memory not as a form of social ornament but as a divine endowment – an apprehension that closely mirrors the logic underlying Cædmon's narrative.[9]

[7] The transmission of *Cædmon's Hymn* highlights the character of Early English literacy. Latin and Old English cues shaped distinct expectations, while Old English verse remained open to formulaic elements drawn from oral performance. Writing did not automatically fix the poem; instead, its literate reception preserved oral features such as variation and repetition (Hines 2007, 191-198, 204-209, 220). *Cædmon's Hymn* exemplifies the interplay between textual literacy and the enduring force of orality in Early Medieval England (O'Brien O'Keeffe 1990, 23-27, 33-37, 42-46).

[8] All poems are here cited according to the titles and line numbering of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*; translations follow those contained in the volumes issued by *The Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library*, unless otherwise noted.

[9] Though articulated within distinct cultural systems, both the Venerable Bede's ac-

Besides, *Historia ecclesiastica* IV.24 relates that, after his vision, Cædmon was admitted to the cloistered life and instructed in Holy Writ, so that he might shape his divinely bestowed gift into verse in accordance with the Old English alliterative measure. Bede's telling signals a *terminus post quem* for the emergence of poetic vocation within the newly Christianised Early English (O'Brien O'Keeffe 1987, 1-7, 15-20): Cædmon underwent an innermost conversion – from unlettered herdsman to inspired poet. Thus, *Cædmon's Hymn* defines a threshold that illustrates the transition from oral and mnemonic circulation to the written preservation on parchment in the *scriptorium*. As Bede notes, after Cædmon *alii post illum in gente Anglorum religiosa poemata facere temptabant* ('after him other Englishmen attempted to compose religious poems'; Colgrave – Mynors 1964, 414-415). Indeed, *Cædmon's Hymn* marks the beginning of a heritage that would eventually yield the glories of Insular poetry, thus inaugurating a long-standing poetic production. At the dawn of Early Medieval English studies, at first scholars sought to attribute to (the figure of) Cædmon a number of poetic reworkings of Old Testament books – among them *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, and *Christ and Satan*. Thenceforth arose the necessity of postulating the existence of a Cædmonian school (Malone 1950, 60-69). Yet modern criticism has ruled out their attribution to the lyric craft of a single poet – least of all to Cædmon himself or to any identifiable *schola*. The Biblical poems – specifically those preserved in Ms. Junius 11 – are now approached as discrete compositions, and the field has been sig-

count and the pre-Christian lore preserved in *Maxims I* testify to a *donum canendi* as a gift conferred from above – an inspired faculty rather than an acquired craft. This endowment, however, is more than a mere token of divine favour: it heralds the advent of a new, heaven-sent sensibility, one that finds resonant expression in the words of Psalm 39:4, *et dedit in ore meo canticum novum, laudem Deo nostro; videbunt multi et timebunt et sperabunt in Domino*. The motif of the *canticum novum* enjoys broad currency across the Old Testament tradition, recurring in a sylloge of passages – among them Psalms 33:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9, 149:1, and Isaiah 42:10. All Bible books and verses are quoted from the *Vulgate* (Weber – Gryson 2007).

nificantly enriched by stylistic and lexical inquiries, which have indeed brought to light certain affinities among these works.[10]

Poetry in the early phase was almost without exception anonymous; a *scop* was rather a compiler (Thornbury 2014, 11-35). Yet Bede breaks with the prevailing anonymity by foregrounding a poet in connection with *Cædmon's Hymn* (O' Donnell 2005, 1-28; Edwards 2017, 5, 7-8). Old English literature has preserved only a handful of poets' names, in both Latin and the vernacular.[11] Cynewulf stands foremost among them. The extant corpus attributed to him comprises four poems – *Christ II* and *Juliana* (Exeter Book), *Elene* and *The Fates of the Apostles* (Vercelli Book) – each ending with runes that might reveal a signature spelling the anthroponym Cyn(e)wulf. As with Cædmon, scholars have sought to extend Cynewulf's authorship to other neo-Testamentary works (*Andreas*, *Christ I* and *Christ III*, *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Phoenix*, *The Physiologus*), leading to the notion of a Cynewulfian circle (Malone 1950, 70-77), a matter that will be reconsidered in what follows.

[10] For a broader overview of the poems in Junius 11, see the collection of essays in Liuzza 2002. For a wider contextual reading, within the codicological and cultural framework, Kears's recent volume highlights how Junius 11 is a communal creation, driven by the poems' own generative energy. Kears suggests a holistic reading, as a single vast composition, where Old English poetic techniques operate not only within individual texts but also across them. Each poem echoes the others, forging a dense web of intertextual and inter-visual dialogue. Text and image interact bidirectionally, inviting perpetual rereading. Junius 11 ultimately emerges as an attempt to reconstruct through Old English poetry the entire history of salvation (Kears 2023, 1-33, 197-207).

[11] In the course of time, the author likewise comes into view as a distinct individuality, inscribed with a name and invested with a personal history (Pàroli 1984, 412). Besides Cædmon and Cynewulf (and their much-debated historical existence), the corpus of named poets from Early Medieval England is exceedingly small, comprising Æthelwald, Æthelwulf, Aldhelm, Bede, Boniface, Frithegode, Lull, and Wulfstan, whose works, in turn, reveal their indebtedness to Latin Christian poets such as Arator, Caelius Sedulius, Juvencus, and Venantius Fortunatus; see Raby 1997, 140-153, esp.142.

This study engages with the enduring "Cynewulfian question" by focusing on the putative art of the runic signatures appended to *Christ II*, *Elene*, *Juliana*, and *The Fates of the Apostles*. Varied in form, yet united in their evocation of the name Cynewulf, the inscriptions reveal the epigraphic potential of runes within a Christian poetic framework. The discussion proceeds to examine the poet's widely disputed historical identity, the shaping of the Cynewulfian canon, and the possibility that the signature functioned as a strategy posited in terms of authorial self-fashioning – at once a literary device to arrest the reader's attention, an expression of personal concerns, and a gesture that purposely engages the audience in the act of decipherment, echoing the hermeneutic tradition of riddling in Old English poetry.[12]

2. ᚴᚢᚾᛖᚹᚢᛚᚠ: a cryptic anthroponym enshrined within a cluster of runes

Centuries after both the Exeter Book and the Vercelli Book were last consulted, a riddle bequeathed by a poet rose once more from the shadows of the past, to challenge and enthral the reader anew. In his critical edition *Andreas und Elene* (1840), Jacob Grimm noted that, at fol. 133r of the Vercelli Book, if taken together, the runes ᚴᚢᚾᛖᚹᚢᛚᚠ occurring in *Elene* 1257-1268 (1256b-1270a) disclose the name *CYNEWULF*. Yet Grimm did not pursue the matter any further (1840, 167). In that very year, John Kemble discerned that the runic characters interwoven in those lines formed the cipher of a purposeful enigma. Upon his discovery, he remarked that "taking the runes out of context, using them in one word, they supplied [me] with the name CYNEWULF, undoubtedly no other than the author of the poems" (1840, 360-364, esp. 361). Kemble later detected the same anthroponym twice more in the Exeter Book, in

[12] Some issues concerning Cynewulf's identity and the signed poems, viewed specifically through the lens of *The Fates of the Apostles*, have already been addressed in an earlier publication of mine (Cocco 2019, 13-20, 21-23).

the runes contained in the final part of both *Christ II* (19v) and in *Juliana* (fol. 76r).

Half a century on, Arthur Napier identified another runic occurrence of the name *Cynewulf* at fol. 54v of the Vercelli Book, at the end of *The Fates of the Apostles* (1889, 66-69, esp. 70) – though examination is rather complicated by the damage to fol. 54r. These four poems are conventionally referred to as the signed poems, and Cynewulf as the name of the poet to whom their composition is attributed. Across the four attestations, the position of the runes is not consistent: *Elene* and *Juliana* retain the spelling (*CYNEWULF*),[13] whereas in *Christ II* the rune ᛗ (*eoh*) is absent (*CYNWULF*). In addition to this absence, in *The Fates of the Apostles*, the runes appear in an irregular cluster, emerging in the sequence ᚠᚹᚢᛚᚳᚣ (*FWULCYN*).[14] The table below outlines the issues addressed so far:

POEM	**MANUSCRIPT**	**RUNIC SIGNATURE**
Christ II (797-807a)	Exeter Book, fol. 19v	ᚳᚣᚾᚹᚢᛚᚠ (*CYNWULF*)
Elene (1256b-1270a)	Vercelli Book, fol. 133r	ᚳᚣᚾᛖᚹᚢᛚᚠ (*CYNEWULF*)
Juliana (703b-709a)	Exeter Book, fol. 76r	ᚳᚣᚾ (*CYN*); ᛖᚹᚢ (*EWU*); ᚢᚠ (*LF*)
Fates of the Apostles (98b-105a)	Vercelli Book, fol. 54r	ᚠᚹᚢᛚᚳᚣᚾ (*FWULCYN*)

(*Table 1. Poems, Manuscripts, Runes*)

[13] Beyond the difficulties already discerned, *Juliana* diverges from the other signed poems, the runes set out in three distinct triplets: ᚳᚣᚾ (*CYN*); ᛖᚹᚢ (*EWU*); ᚢᚠ (*LF*); see Elliott 1953b, 198.

[14] With the exception of the damage on fol. 54r of the Vercelli Book, where *The Fates of the Apostles* is penned, the parchment consistently records the runic characters clearly and distinctly, each one set off by a mid-line dot placed before and after the letter in each of the signed poems – both in the Exeter Book and in the Vercelli Book, see Symons 2016, 90. For the runic signature in *Elene* and *Christ II*, see Elliott 1953a, 49-57; for *Juliana* and *The Fates of the Apostles*, see Elliott 1953b, 193-204. As to the omission of ᛗ (*eoh*) in *Christ II* and *The Fates of the Apostles*, see Sisam 1932, 4-5, 17.

The difficulties surrounding the anthroponym *Cynewulf* in the four signed poems are compounded by the fact that runes do not always bear a single, unequivocal meaning. Runes may operate either as signs denoting their own names, and thus deciphering them is relatively straightforward: under the acrophonic principle, runic characters can be read according to their phonetic value.[15] Far more complex, however, is the task of interpreting the individual runes and the semantic force they assume within each poem – as both symbols to be read as words within the text and characters employed homophonically to represent words merged into the poetic context (Gleason 1992, 19).

Some runes prove more problematic than others within their respective traditions. In the case of the *fuþorc* – the runic alphabet used in *Early Medieval England* – several characters remain open to interpretation. The chief Old English witness is the *Rune Poem*, recording the runes thus:[16]

RUNE	OLD ENGLISH	TRANSLATION
ᚳ	*cēn*	'torch'
ᚱ	*ȳr*	'bow'
ᚾ	*nȳd*	'need'
ᛖ	*e(o)h*	'steed'
ᚹ	*wȳnn*	'joy'
ᚢ	*ūr*	'aurochs'
ᛚ	*lagu*	'water'
ᚠ	*feoh*	'wealth'

(*Table 2. Old English Runes*)

[15] Literature on runology has grown into a substantial body of work. Among the more recent contributions – each engaging with and extending earlier discussions – some address the acrophonic principle and the issues discussed so far, notably Antonsen 2010, 1-9; see also Barnes 2012, 37-39, and Simon 2024, 47.

[16] For the text of the *Rune Poem*, see van Kirk Dobbie 1942, 28-30; for the translation, see Halsall 1981, 86-93. With regard to the English runes, among the numerous studies one may refer to the collection of essays in Bammesberger 1991, to the precise historical and cultural contextualization offered by Elliott (1989[2]) and Page (1999², 1-115), and, for the role of the *Rune Poem* – straddling both material culture and the literary corpus – to Halsall 1981, 86-93.

Despite the semantic value indicated by the *Rune Poem*, within the individual compositions the runes may assume different meanings, on which no ultimate consensus has been reached. Charles Kennedy stands among the earliest scholars to have addressed this issue, having produced a substantial volume that included translations of both the signed poems and those attributed to Cynewulf (*Andreas*, *Christ I* and *Christ III*, *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Phoenix*). Faced with the challenges confronting any translator, Kennedy underscored the difficulty of assigning a single reading to the runes in the poems marked with the signature of Cynewulf (1910, 7-9). Owing to their relatively frequent occurrence in the Old English literary corpus, ᚾ (*nȳd*), ᛗ (*eoh*), ᚹ (*wȳnn*), ᛚ (*lagu*), and ᚠ (*feoh*) entail fewer interpretative challenges than ᚳ (*cēn*), ᛦ (*ȳr*), and ᚢ (*ūr*) – which appear less often and whose semantic value remains more uncertain and contested.[17]

Regardless, within Cynewulf's acrostics, the runes must be read in constant dialogue with the narrative texture of the lines in which they surface. The notion that the poet treated them uniformly across *Christ II*, *Elene*, *Juliana*, and *The Fates of the Apostles* fails to account for their nuance. The difficulty is somewhat sharpened by the fact that the translation of each runic signature may yield challenging, even puzzling, renderings that disrupt the narrative flow. In the words of Raymond Page, "*Christ II* suffers from the same troubles as the *Fates of the Apostles* and *Elene* in that some of the rune-names, as we know or interpret them, will not fit the verse they are embedded in" (1999[2], 195). Yet it is precisely this very friction – between the resistance of the runes to seamless integration and the poet's determination to weave them into the fabric of his verse – that has compelled critics to see in *CYNEWULF* a deliberate poetics of signature. Accordingly, Dolores Warwick Frese has noted, "Cynewulf constructs four different signatures, each spelling out his

[17] As to the use of the runes and their meaning in Cynewulf's signature in the signed poems, see Bjork 2013, viii–xi. With regard to the employment of runic characters within manuscripts and literary contexts – such as in the signed poems or the *Riddles* in the Exeter Book – see Giliberto 2009, 46-54.

name. In each instance, his choice of poetic encroachment for the runes seems to grow out of his poetic concern in the poem he is singing" (1996, 324).

The textual evidence of the four compositions reveals a poet intent on drawing the reader's attention to the runes and inviting the solution of the underlying riddle. The runic-signature literary device is not Cynewulf's invention but part of the intellectual games of his time; yet, alongside the pleasure of decipherment, it also serves a deeper purpose: Cynewulf "clearly wanted his name to be deciphered, to be remembered in prayer and intercession, and to achieve this he had to make runic passages intelligible, the runes themselves unequivocal" (DiNapoli 2005, 156-157; Elliott 1991, 243). This layered dynamic shows that Cynewulf sometimes insists on having his name known, as he implores the reader to pray for his safe return to God and acknowledges that he will stand before the Eternal Judge at Doomsday. In these moments, the poet seeks spiritual companionship at a profoundly dramatic juncture (Thornbury 2014, 120-128, 134-135). A brief consideration of the runes in the poems attributed to Cynewulf's signature will follow, serving to elucidate the concerns raised by Warwick Frese and Page.[18] Preceding this, however, is an attempt to ascribe a historical face to the literary voice that seems to have taken pleasure in concealing itself within the riddle of the runes.

3. Cynewulf: from literary voice to historical figure

The transition from the literary to the historical dimension remains unresolved. Although various hypotheses grounded in codicological and

[18] Among the substantial body of studies on the poet's runic signature, reference may be made to the precise and comprehensive chapter "Cynewulf's Signatures and the Materiality of the Letter", where Symons shows that Cynewulf's runic signatures, rather than serving simply to preserve the poet's name, function as literary devices that foreground the material nature of writing and the necessity of its correct interpretation (2016, 85-120).

cultural evidence have been advanced, no historical profile can be securely attributed to the poet Cynewulf – if indeed he ever possessed a verifiable identity. A common view among scholars is that "the most definite information which we have about Cynewulf is from his own lips," in *Elene* 1237-1270 (Kennedy 1971, 202), and these lines were once taken as autobiographical (Holthausen 1905, xii). Noting *medohealle* "meadhall" and *æplede gold* "embossed gold" in *Elene* 1258a-1259a and the *First Riddle*,[19] Wülker (1878, 496) imagined a young Cynewulf as a wandering minstrel who later in life turned from sin to God's knowledge and gift of poetry (*Elene* 1239-1240, 1249-1250).[20] Scholars now regard the autobiographical readings of *Elene* as untenable. Several historical figures have been proposed as possible identities for the poet, among them:

- Cynewulf (†783), bishop in Lindisfarne from 740 to 780 (Trautmann 1895, 93-95; Brown 1903, 308-314),[21] or somebody born in Northumbria between 720 and 730 (ten Brink 1895, 143-144).[22]
- Cynulf, a presbyter of Dunwich, who attended the Synod of Clovesho in 803; Dunwich's theological school may have given him access to Christian texts (Cook 1900, lxxiii–lxxiv; Anderson 1996, 125).
- Cenwulf (or Cynwulf) of Mercia, a contemporary of Saint Aldhelm (†709), abbot of Malmesbury and later Bishop of Sherborne (Grimm 1840, l–lii).
- Cynewulf, the father of Cyneweard, bishop of Wells, who in 975 either died or was possibly exiled (Earle 1884, 228).

[19] Early scholars read the elegy *Wulf and Eadwacer* as a riddle, calling it *The First Riddle* for its resemblance to those in the Exeter Book, see Greenfield 1966, 164, and Greenfield/Calder 1986, 291-292.

[20] For criticism over Wülker's views, see Brown 1907, 220.

[21] Anderson and Schilling (2000, 31-32) have recently espoused Trautmann's views.

[22] Though supported by Sievers (1891, 10) and other early scholars, ten Brink's views were rejected by Kent, "ten Brink and Rieger have attempted to show that he was by birth a Northumbrian. This they will establish by proving that the proper form of the name is *Cœnewulf*, not *Cynewulf*. Their proof is no wise conclusive" (1889, 4).

- Cenwulf (Kenwulphus) of Winchester (†1006), abbot of Peterborough, was known as a poet in Latin and Old English, though his works are now lost (Kemble 1840, 362).[23]

Scholars tried to date the poet's works from the runic spellings. Eduard Sievers, using the *Northumbrian Genealogies* (London, BL, Ms. Vespasian B.vi), held that *Cynewulf* derived from the earlier *Cyniwulf*, reflecting the mid-eighth-century lowering of *–i* to *–e*.[24] By contrast, after his study of the *Lindisfarne Liber Vitae* – a community prayer book dated to ca. 830-840 – Kenneth Sisam observed that the manuscript "has over a hundred examples of the spelling *Cyni-* and no single instance of *Cyne-*," thereby placing Cynewulf in the ninth century (Sisam 1953, 4, 6-7; Calder 1981, 15-18). Palaeographical evidence led Sisam to locate the *Northumbrian Genealogies* in Lichfield, Mercia's ecclesiastical centre (1953, 134).[25] By analysing vowel lowering in the *Liber Vitae*, Storms dated the shift to the late seventh century (1965, 104-110, n. 20). Amos identified the same feature in the *Book of Cerne* (ca. 820-840) and placed Cynewulf's works between the eighth and tenth centuries (Amos 1980, 103-105).

The origin of Cynewulf – like that of the historical figure himself – has long been disputed, concerning both his regional background and his dialect. At first scholars pointed to Northumbria, while others left open the possibility of Mercia; Edith Wardale claimed he "was certainly Anglian".[26] Still, a Northumbrian origin has been considered exceed-

[23] Grimm voiced doubts about this view (Wiley 1971, 203), and Sievers argued that Cynewulf and Cenwulf cannot be treated as variants of the same name (1891, 20). Later critics also noted that the period proposed by Kemble for Cynewulf's lifetime is much later than the poet's actual date (Kennedy 1910, 13)

[24] The form *Cynwulf* reflects the loss of *–e* before glottal fricative, alveolar trill, alveolar approximant, voiced labiovelar, or sibilant alveolar fricative.

[25] Conner questioned Sisam's claim that the Guthlac poems were wholly Mercian, noting that the appearance of the name *Guthlac* in the Leofric Missal (ca. 930) makes such exclusivity unlikely (Conner 1996, 25-26).

[26] For an overview of early scholarly views on Mercia and Northumbria, and on Wardale's position regarding Anglia, see Wardale 1935, 151.

ingly improbable (Gradon 1977[2], 14). Kent argued for a West Saxon background, since the manuscripts are in West Saxon and lack linguistic evidence for Northumbria (1889, 4).[27] Yet this reflects the habit of linking a poet to the provenance of the codex. Referring to *Elene*, Pamela Gradon observed that, despite its southern transmission, the text is "a late West Saxon copy of a West Mercian original through an early West Saxon intermediary" (Gradon 1977[2], 15).[28] On numismatic grounds, Robert Fulk argued that "the change *Cyniwulf* > *Cynewulf* must have taken place in the middle of the eighth century south of the Humber, and – about a century later – north of it. If Cynewulf had been a Mercian (or, in a Southern, unlikely as that seems), he cannot have been writing earlier than ca. 750, and if he was a Northumbrian, no earlier than ca. 850" (1996, 16).

The leonine rhymes in *Elene* 1240-1247 and *Christ II* 591-94 support the view that Cynewulf was Mercian, complementing the vowel-lowering theory (Gradon 1977[2], 13-14). Hidden or corrupted in the Southern codex, a sequence of *ante litteram* rhymes must have existed in the Anglian exemplar, as suggested by the West Saxon rendering of Anglian forms in *Elene*. For Patrick Conner (1996, 24), this combination of rhyming evidence and dialectal transmission may suggest composition under Mercian rule in the early ninth century.[29] Well known among eleventh-century poets, Cynewulf's rhyming passages are likely first attested in his signed works, for "a late dating of rhyme generally cannot be said to date these four poems" (Conner 1996, 35).

[27] This reasoning, though, merely assumes that a poet's origin must coincide with the script or provenance of the surviving codex, rather than considering the possibility of earlier transmission or copying across regions, see Fulk 2014, 32-34.

[28] Accordingly, Sisam observed that the Vercelli Book (late tenth century) preserves West Saxon passages corresponding to the northern-dialect fragment of *The Dream of the Rood* on the Ruthwell Cross, Dumfriesshire (eighth century), a comparison that reveals similar complexity (1953, 122).

[29] Macrae-Gibson suggested that Cynewulf was the initiator of near-rhymes in Old English poetry (1983, 19).

Conner framed the linguistic problem within a cultural context, examining the sources underlying the signed poems for which we have historical traceability. In the case of *The Fates of the Apostles*, it has been argued that, among the various martyrologies available to Cynewulf, the poet also drew on *Usuardus' Martyrology* (ca. 875). This work was formally dedicated to Emperor Charles the Bald (823-877). As the *menologium* could only have left continental Europe and reached the British Isles in the first half of the tenth century, it "thus justifying a terminus a quo for Cynewulf's work of about a century later than generally has heretofore been assumed, and placing it in the midst of aesthetic and religious issues of the tenth century (Conner 1996, 47).

Cynewulf's provenance and chronology remain unresolved despite the studies undertaken so far, and all reconstructions to date can only be regarded as provisional hypotheses. Jacqueline Stodnick has even argued that Cynewulf is better understood as a modern-day myth than as a historical Early English person, maintaining that no definitive profile can ever be attached to the poet of the signed poems in the Exeter Book and the Vercelli Book (Stodnick 1997, 25-29). Even so, philological, linguistic, and stylistic inquiries into Cynewulf continue to play a central role in Old English studies. As Fulk remarked, notwithstanding the runic signatures, the stylistic correspondences, and the shared literary genre, the perception of Cynewulf as both compiler and poet of all four signed works requires reconsideration. What emerges, rather, is the need to speak of a Cynewulfian canon instead of a Cynewulfian authorship (Conner 1996, 9). In light of these considerations, critical consensus inclines less toward the notion of a single author and more toward the idea of a Cynewulfian canon rather than a Cynewulfian authorship. This issue will be resumed and further integrated in §4.5 and §5.

4. Of runes and eschatology

Cynewulf crowns the conclusion of his poems with a vivid meditation upon the primacy of virtuous Christian living. The burden of sin lies heavily upon the poet in *Elene* 1242b-1244, lamented before the revelation of the Holy Cross (Gradon 1977, 71, n. 1243a); yet in *Christ II*

792-793a, *The Fates of the Apostles* 89b, and *Juliana* 709-711a, the note struck is one of contrition for trespasses committed. Invocation of the Holy Writ emerges as a recurring motif in Cynewulf's poetry, where it functions as the fountain of divine wisdom and the gateway to salvation. *Christ II* 785b reads *us secgað bec* 'books tell us', and the poet there denounces his past failure to comply with God's law: *þe ic ne heold teala þæt me hælend min / on bocum bibead* ('because I did not hold well what my savior commanded me in books', ll. 792-793a),[30] and in *Elene* 1254b the same theme recurs with *on bocum* 'in books', and again with *on gewritum* 'in writings' (1255b).[31] The poet reflects unceasingly upon the mortality of his fleshly frame, and ever exhorts his readers to set their gaze upon the eternal kingdom of God.

Each of the signed poems, at its conclusion and in close proximity to the runic sequence, articulates a distinct and deliberate theme. Cynewulf's deployment of the runes is fraught with difficulty; the canonical exegesis grounded in the *Rune Poem* is frequently of scant utility. The subject is vast, and critical work on it has been abundant. This section seeks to isolate the principal points of tension, namely those instances in which the meaning implied by Cynewulf's runes departs from the "ordinary sense" recorded in the *Rune Poem*.[32] Conversely, the primary ob-

[30] Krapp/van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 25; Bjork 2013, 27. Analysing the role of the pot in the community, Thornbury addresses Cynewulf and his articulation of the companionship of books (2014, 128-133).

[31] Krapp 1932, 101; Bjork 2013, 231. As regards *on gewritum*, see also *Elene* 826b, *Exodus* 520b, *The Panther* 14b, *The Phoenix* 31b and *Metrical Psalm 86* 13a. Another formula for "Holy Writ" occurs in *The Fates of the Apostles* 63b, *þurg halige bec* 'through holy books' and in *Elene* 364b, 670b, 852; and as *ðurh halga bec* in the *Metrical Epilogue to the Pastoral Care* 11a; see Orchard 2003, 99, n. 11.

[32] As previously noted, the translations are drawn from Bjork 2013. In his edition of *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf*, Bjork preserves the runes within the modern English translation without rendering them directly, discussing their interpretation instead in the endnotes. To ensure a more inclusive discussion and to reflect the range of critical perspectives, I will examine the most divergent readings in the commentary on each of the four runic signature passages in Cynewulf's poems, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the scholarly debate.

jective of this essay remains the discernment of the literary–exegetical interplay between the text and the runic characters therein.

4.1. Christ II *797-807a*

The eschatological vision articulated in *Christ II* stands forth in all its dreadful weight, both emotional and theological. Cynewulf is aware of his falling short of perfection (ll. 792-793a); this avowal constitutes the grave prelude to a dramatic tableau at lines 797-807a:

> þonne ᚳ cwacað, gehyreð cyning mæðlan,
> rodera ryhtend, sprecan reþe word
> þam þe him ær in worulde wace hyrdon,
> þendan ᚫ ond ᚦ yþast meahtan
> frofre findan. þær sceal forht monig
> on þam wongstede werig bidan
> hwæt him æfter dædum deman wille
> wraþra wita. Biþ se ᚹ scæcen
> eorþan frætwa. ᚾ wæs longe
> ᛚ flodum bilocen, lifwynna dæl,
> ᚠ on foldan. (Krapp – van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 25)

> Then ᚳ will quake, will hear the king speak, / the ruler of the heavens utter stern words / to those who feebly obeyed him in the world, / while ᚫ ond ᚦ could most easily / find comfort. Many, afraid and accursed, must wait there in that place to hear what horrible / punishments he will assign them according to their deeds. / The ᚹ of the treasures of earth / will have fled. ᚾ share of life-joys was long / shut in by the ᛚ-streams, / our ᚠ on earth. (Bjork 2013, 27).

The rune ᚳ stands for ‘torch’ (*cēn*), but in *Christ II* it proves difficult to interpret. The Old English *Rune Poem* describes ᚳ as something familiar to every living being through its shining flame, it most often gives its light indoors, in the halls where princes rest in comfort. Halsall suggests to read *þonne* ᚳ *cwacað* (797a) “then torch will tremble” (1981,179). Ralph Elliott inclines toward the meaning of “torch” (1953a, 54-56), and so too does Robert Bjork (2013, 245). There is, however, a parallel interpretation that foregrounds a more anthropic dimension, on the

grounds that the image of the torch fails to yield a coherent sense within the utterance. In this view, ᚳ is to be read as *cēne* (‘brave’, ‘daring’), in reference to a man (Derolez 1954, 159; Muir, II, 2000, 410).[33] Such a reading underscores that on so dreadful a day as that of Judgment, not even the boldest of men could stand firm.

Equally intricate is the interpretation of ᚣ (*ȳr*), generally understood as ‘bow’. On this basis, the pairing of ᚣ (*ȳr*) and ᚾ (*nȳd*) is left with the conventional sense of ‘bow’ and ‘need’. Yet the first rune, when read through the lens of the *Rune Poem*, presents no small difficulty; indeed, already the earliest scholars, beginning with Benjamin Thorpe, rendered it as “misery” (1842, 50). The rune ᚢ (ūr) may denote both ‘aurochs’ and ‘our’ (*ūr*[*e*]) – a reading supported by Pieter Cosijn (1890, 57), Israel Gollancz (1892, 181-182) and as well as by Kenneth Sisam (1932, 27) on account of the homophony between the two forms, and corroborated by the *fuþorc* penned in London, British Library, Ms. Cotton Domitian A.ix, p. 31,[34] where ᚢ (*ūr*) is rendered with the Latin adjective *noster* (Page 1999², 192). Within the semantic field of masculine potency – already suggested for ᚳ (*cēne*, ‘brave’, ‘daring’) – Ralph Elliott reaffirms the reading given in the *Rune Poem*, appealing to the notion of virile strength that man may acquire through association with the animal itself, the parallel being drawn between the beast’s physical power and human prowess (1989², 66-67).

It is thus within this dialectic of terror and consolation that Cynewulf’s eschatological vision must be situated. For although the poem lingers on the dread imminence of Doom that overshadows sinful mankind, Cynewulf is quick to affirm that, despite man’s fallen condi-

[33] Such a reading of ᚳ is based on the spelling *coen* for *cēne* in the runic alphabet glossed in a twelfth-century computistical miscellany compiled at Thorney Abbey, Cambridgeshire, now preserved at Oxford, St John’s College, Ms. 17, fol. 5v.

[34] It should be noted, however, that the glossing of this manuscript may well have been the work of a Renaissance antiquary of the Elizabethan period; see Sisam 1932, 18.

tion, salvation is not foreclosed. If one attends with sensitivity to *gæstes þearfe* ('the need of the spirit', l. 816b) and if *gif hine God scildeþ* ('If God […] shields him or her', l. 781a),[35] divine grace may yet intervene. Such assurance finds its vivid counterpart in the Old Testament eschaton, where the prophet solemnly declares that those who sincerely repent will be found spotless when *dies veniet succensa quasi caminus, et erunt omnes superbi et omnes facientes impietatem stipula, et inflammabit eos dies veniens* (Malachi 4:1).

The eschatological framework casts the rune ᛚ (*lagu*, 'water') as an emblem evocative of the *peregrinatio animae* – theme profoundly woven into the elegiac texture of the Exeter Book (Niles 2019, 60, 98), and repeatedly revisited by Cynewulf himself, most notably in the final movement of *The Fates of the Apostles*. The renewed focus on the theme of the Final Judgment takes shape as a spiritual voyage, figured as a vessel navigating the perilous swells of the *mare vitae*.[36] To sail aright, the soul, in the *navicula Christi*,[37] must orient her course unwaveringly toward the celestial harbour – a patristic figuration of God's Kingdom.[38]

[35] See Krapp/van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 24-25; Bjork 2013, 26-27. For the formula *gæstes þearfe* in *Christ II* 707a and in *Gifts of Men* 86b, see Cook 1900, 166, nn. 815, 820.

[36] See Pulsiano 1983, 3-4, 7-8 and Hill 1994, 289-292. This motif of the sea of life is present both in *Juliana* 673b-675a (Anderson 1983, 99-100; Hennessey Olsen 1984, 84) and in *Elene* 225-255 (Zacher 2002, 357-359).

[37] As to the allegory of the soul as a vessel, steered by Christ at the helm and seafaring across the stormy waves of sin, a possible source might be found in Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* LVI on Doomsday (Morin 1953, 249). For the symbolic interpretation of both sea and ship – together with its sources and analogues – see Cucina (2008, 185-203, 203-216).

[38] The motif is deeply embedded in patristic exegesis. Clement of Alexandria describes the divine λόγος guiding the vessel and the πνεῦμα to the heavenly harbour (*Protrepticus* xii, 118.4, ll. 26-27), and in *Quis dives* (viii, 5, ll. 13-14) casting anchor before Christ; see Stählin (1905, 83) and Stählin (1909, 165), respectively. Among the Latin Fathers, Lactantius taught that Christ disclosed to humankind the *portus salutis* (*Divinae institutiones* vi, 24, ll. 1-4); see Brandt (1890, 573). Though composed in

At the close of *Christ II*, the poet amplifies the maritime allegory of salvation, casting the soul as a vessel voyaging across the tossing-high billows of the sea of life:[39] *Utan us to þære hyðe hyht staþelian, / ða us gerymde rodera waldend, / halge on heahþu* ('Let us fix our hope in that harbor, which for us the Ruler of the skies, holy in the heights', ll. 864-866a).[40] Before the runic signature, at lines 749-750, Cynewulf prepares his reader to renounce the vanities of this world in order to prepare for the life to come; hence, he exhorts to righteous Christian living: *þæt we to þam hyhstan hrofe gestigan / halgum weorcum, þær is hyht ond blis* ('so that we may ascend to the highest summit through holy works, where there is hope and bliss').[41] The eschatological mystery comes to fulfilment not through the weakness of human striving but through the triumph of Christ alone: eternal beatitude depends wholly upon his merits – the one whom the poet so vividly recalls that *he to heofonum astag* ('ascended to heaven', l. 866b).

4.2. Elene *1256b-1270a*

Eternal life is granted only through the atonement of Christ. Among the recurring themes of early Christian literature is the quest for the Holy Cross, whether expressed through its discovery (*Elene*) or its adoration (*The Dream of the Rood*). The *inventio Crucis* achieved by Saint He-

Greek, Clement's works may well have circulated in Early Medieval England at the time of Adrian and Theodore (Lapidge 2006, 177).

[39] The same motif resurfaces in *The Meters of Boethius* 21.10-15, where the voyage of the soul across perilous waters is figured with striking clarity. The hope articulated there, no less than in *Christ II* 850-866, must be understood not in isolation but as part of a wider exegetical tradition. Indeed, it constitutes a reworking – and in many respects a theological amplification – of Gregory the Great's *Homilia* XXIX.11 (PL 76, col. 1219); as to this intertextual resonance, see Clemoes 1995, 240-241.

[40] See Krapp/van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 27; Bjork 2013, 31.

[41] See Krapp/van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 24; Bjork 2013, 23. See *hyht* ('hope') in Stanley 2008, 7-8. The theme of heavenly bliss likewise appears in *The Dream of the Rood* 139-140a, 141b; for its sources and analogues, see Swanton 2000, 138, nn. 139-141.

lena – mother of Emperor Constantine the Great – together with reflections on the centrality of the Cross as the supreme sign of redemption, forms the core of *Elene* (Gradon 1958, 15-22). At line 1235, with the *finit*, the poem opens its fifteenth fitt, initiating a new movement: the poet's shift from narrative to personal confession. Cynewulf recognises that he only attained the knowledge of the fullness of salvation in his old age: *Nysse ic gearwe / be ðære rode riht* ('I did not clearly know the truth about the cross', ll. 1239-1240).[42] Yet he admits to having been endowed with a divine gift, as God *breostlocan onwand, / leoðucræft onleac* ('loosened my breast-hoard, unlocked the craft of poetry', ll. 1249-1250).[43]

After these lines of spiritual recognition, Cynewulf voices anew to the reader, imparting a further message – a pronouncement inscribed within the runic signature at lines 1256b-1270a:

> A wæs secg oð ðæt
> cnyssed cearwelmum, ᚳ drusende,
> þeah he in medohealle maðmas þege,
> æplede gold. ᚾ gnornode
> ᚾ gefera, nearusorge dreah,
> enge rune, þær him ᛗ fore
> milpaðas mæt, modig þrægde
> wirum gewlenced. ᚹ is geswiðrad,
> gomen æfter gearum, geogoð is gecyrred,
> ald onmedla. ᚢ wæs geara
> geogoðhades glæm. Nu synt geardagas
> æfter fyrstmearce forð gewitene,
> lifwynne geliden, swa ᚩ toglideð,
> flodas gefysde. ᚹ æghwam bið
> læne under lyfte; (Krapp 1932, 101)

[42] Krapp 1932, 100; Bjork 2013, 299. For a more comprehensive analysis of Cynewulf's late recognition of the salvific truth of the Cross and his process of conversion, see Bailey 2016, 587-589.

[43] Krapp 1932, 100; Bjork 2013, 299.

> […] Always until that point / the man was tossed with surging cares, ᴋ sinking, / even though he received treasures, embossed / gold, in the meadhall. ᚲ grieved / ᛇ, a companion, endured affliction, / a cruel mystery, where before him ᚼ / measured the milestoned roads, ran proud, / adorned with filigree. ᛗ is diminished, / and game, with the years; youth is changed, / old pomp. ᚹ was once / the radiance of youth. Now the days of old, / after the appointed interval, have departed, / the joy of life gone, just as ᛚ, the hastening flood, / glides away. For everyone under the sky ᚠ is / fleeting; (Bjork 2013, 231)

The sequence raises no significant interpretative issues: ᚼ (*nȳd*), ᛗ (*eoh*), ᚹ (*wȳnn*), ᛚ (*lagu*), and ᚠ (*feoh*) can be readily referred to their reading recorded in the *Rune Poem*.

In this runic sequence, ᚲ (*cēn*) bears the sense of ‘torch’; Cynewulf’s use of the term foreshadows the images of fire and devastation associated with the eschatological vision of Doom,[44] with which he brings *Elene* to its dramatic close.[45] As to ᛇ (*ȳr*), Ferdinand Holthausen departed from the received reading ‘bow’, taking it instead to mean “Horn” (1912, 175-177), thus bringing into proximity *Elene* 1259a and *The Fates of the Apostles* 103a. Yet Cynewulf, declaring himself to be in old age and in the shadow of death, appears to live a contemplative life. In this light, construing the rune as ‘bow’ – as in the *Rune Poem* – serves to evoke his youth, when he might have been devoted to martial exercise or the pursuit of hunting. In parallel with *Christ II* 805b, so in this passage in *Elene*, ᚢ (*ūr*) is to be rendered with ‘our’, following Israel Gollancz (1892, 181-182) and Kenneth Sisam (1932, 27), whereas John Kemble suggested “of old” (1856, 363). Pamela Gradon has argued that, just as in the case of ᚠ (*feoh*), which admits a double meaning both as

[44] Although marginal to the established interpretation of ᚲ (*cēn*) as ‘torch’, Gradon conjectured that “*cen* might have been taken to equal *cyn* as *wen* equals *wyn*” (1977, 72).

[45] With regard to the rendering of the rune ᚲ as prefiguring images of fire associated with the Last Judgment, see Elliott 1953a, 54-56.

'wealth' and as 'cattle',[46] ᚢ (*ūr*) may likewise be construed as signifying either 'aurochs' or the possessive adjective 'our', "having the advantage of fitting *Fates* 101 and *Christ* 805, also" (1977, 73).

After the reflections of the runic sequence, Cynewulf turns to an eschatological climax. He urges his audience to contemplate the end of life (Gardner 1970, 65-69, 71-73), the vanity of earthly things, the advent of Christ as eternal Judge, and the ultimate destinies that follow – damnation for the wicked and bliss for the blessed. The imagery is defined by two aspects: a juridical dimension, in which the Judge returns with his host of angels to pronounce judgment, and the pronouncement of the sentence itself. Although the fates of the damned and the blessed will diverge, both must pass through the baptism of fire.[47] The accursed will know the flames of hell in all their manifold forms.[48] That same fire will not punish the blessed; it will be God's refining fire, purging them of mortality and tempering them, *swa smæte gold / þæt in wylme bið womma gehwylces / þurh ofnes fyr eall geclænsod / amered ond gemylted* ('like smelted gold that in the surging flame is cleansed from all stain through the fire of the furnace, refined and melted', ll. 1310b-1312a).[49]

Cynewulf's apocalyptic force vividly resonates with Malachi's words of warning on divine retribution, *et sedebit conflans et emundans argentum et purgabit filios Levi et colabit eos quasi aurum et quasi ar-*

[46] It should be noted, however, that in her note on *Elene* 1269b, Gradon writes "the f-rune is *feoh* 'property'" (1977, 74).

[47] The motif of the refining fire recurs in Daniel 7:10, Wisdom 3:5-9, and Matthew 3:11. For an extended account of its patristic exegesis and theological reception, see Edsman 1940, 1-15, 87-93, 136-137.

[48] As to the meditative eschatological pace in Cynewulf's epilogue to *Elene*, see Éamonn Ó Carragáin 2001, 189.

[49] Krapp 1932, 102; Bjork 2013, 233. The motif of the Last Judgment attains its expression in *Christ II* 797-814 and *Juliana* 695-716, where the poet's vision culminates in a portrayal of ultimate retribution and eternal reward; see Bosse/Hinton 1990, 279-293 and n. 66 below.

gentum (Malachi 3:3). Hence *Elene* exalts those true and faithful who enter into the rest of the Lord, *yrfes brucaþ / wuldorcyninges / to widan feore* ('enjoy the heritage of the king of glory forever', ll. 1320-1321).[50] Notwithstanding the detailed portrayal of the Last Judgment (ll. 1277-1319) and the revelation of the name ᚣᚢᚾᛁᚠᛁᚱᛊ, the poet seeks no intercessory prayer, neither to his readers nor to the spiritual heroine whom he has praised in song. In lines 1277-1321 Cynewulf speaks of mankind in general terms and there is no grammatical shift to the first-person pronoun *ic* (Elliott 1991, 242). In the ultimate reckoning, the poem would scarcely appear to bring to its close the course of life with the fear of the righteous man who seeks final grace or entrusts himself to heavenly mercy.

4.3. Juliana *703b-709a*

At the culmination of a searing narrative of obedience unto God, borne steadfastly through the dread persecutions of Diocletian and set forth as witness to the inviolable constancy of the Christian faith, Cynewulf solemnly commemorates Juliana's burial and remembrance. Yet, in a sudden and arresting turn, he breaks into the first person with a fervent plea: *Is me þearf micel / þæt seo halge me helpe gefremme* ('For me there is a great need that the saint should give me help', 695b-696a).[51] The poet then laments the sundering from those most dear, while contemplating the peril of his soul, destined to leave the body and set forth upon an uncharted *transitus*,[52] bearing the weight of former deeds (Her-

[50] Krapp 1932, 102; Bjork 2013, 235. On the lexical level, "fire" and "flame" recur with striking density in the closing lines. One may consider *ældes leoma* ('full light of the fire', 1294a); *fȳr* ('fire'), in *fyres feng* ('embrace of the fire', 1287a), *ofnes fyr* ('fire of the furnace', 1311a), and *domes fyr* ('fire of judgement', 1314b); (2) *glēd* ('fire-coal', 1302a); (3) *tiōnlēg*, 'destroying flame' (1279b); (4) *wylm* ('surging fire', 1297b, 1310a), or in the compound *heaðuwylm* ('fierce flame', 1305a); see Elliott 1953a, 54-56, and Lupi 1993, 61.

[51] Krapp/van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 132; Bjork 2013, 125. As regards Cynewulf's evocation of the intimate and affectionate union of body and soul, see Lockett 2011, 27.

[52] The separation of the mortal body from the spirit also occurs in *The Fates of the*

mann 1984, 272-278). In this meditation, the awareness of loss expands into the universal plight of the flock of souls, summoned to stand before the tribunal of the *Rex tremendae maiestatis* (703b-709a):

> Geomor hweorfeð
> ᚳ ᛗ ond ᚾ. Cyning biþ reþe,
> sigora syllend, þonne synnum fah
> ᛖ ᚹ ond ᚢ acle bidað
> hwæt him æfter dædum deman wille
> lifes to leane. ᛚ ᚠ beofað,
> seomað sorgcearig. (Krapp – van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 133)
>
> Mournful, ᚳ ᛗ and ᚾ will depart. The king, the giver of victories, will be harsh when, stained with sins, ᛖ ᚹ and ᚢ terrified await what he wishes to decree for them as a reward for their lives according to their deeds. ᛚ, ᚠ wretched will shake and tremble. (Bjork 2013, 125)

In a distinctive configuration when set against the other signed poems, the employment of runes in *Juliana* assumes the form of three discrete groups: ᚳᛗᚾ, ᛖᚹᚢ, and ᛚᚠ. Interpretive traditions diverge: one construes each cluster as the cipher of an individual lexical item, while another maintains that – taken as a whole – the runes spell out *CYNEWULF*. Read in sequence for their phonetic value alone, the clusters unfold into three distinct lexical forms – *CYN*, *EWU* and *LF* – that

Apostles 94. The motifs of *timor mortis* and of the soul's unrest after death find broad attestation in Old English literature, with *Soul and Body I* and *II* (1-5a) providing their most vivid expression. The theme likewise appears in the Old High German *Muspilli* 1-3, *…sin tac piqueme, daz er touuan scal*. / *uuanta sar so sih diu sela in den sind arhevit*, / *enti si den lihhamun likkan lazzit* ('his day will come when he must die. Once the soul soars on a journey and leaves behind the body in the ground'); see Braune/Ebbinghaus 1969, 86; the translation is mine. By contrast, Bridges 1984, 111-12 and Hermann 1984, 263-281 discuss the opposition between the soul's dwelling before and after its separation from the body.

integrate into the texture of the lines, both metrically and semantically, as well as with respect to alliteration.

Within the rune groups, Moritz Trautmann was the first to discern lexical value: ᚳᛘᚹ (*cyn*, 'race, people') and ᛖᚠᚢ, a Northumbrian plural form of *e*[*o*]*we* 'sheep' (1898, 47-48). On this assumption, editors corrected the manuscript *fah* (l. 705b) into the plural *fa*.[53] Kenneth Sisam called this interpretation into question, rejecting the reading 'sheep', insisting that the proper meaning of *ewu* is more precisely 'female sheep' (1932, 318). Rosemary Woolf expressed reservations about this interpretation, contending that either Cynewulf used the word in a way that weakened and obscured the signature lines, or else employed the runes in a fashion otherwise unknown in Old English literature (1977, 10-11).[54] Turning to the final cluster, Trautmann interprets ᛚᚠ as the compound *lic-fæt* 'body' (1898, 47). Frederick Tupper objected that *lic* and *fæt* are unrelated to runes or to the sense of other runic passages, and thus yield nothing. The context would suggest the compound *lago-feoh*, supported by *feoh* ('property') in his understanding of the runic sections in *Christ II* and *Elene* (1912, 136). And Ralph Elliott, instead, suggested "watery estate (earth)", *lagu-feoh* (1953a, 200-202).[55]

Woolf highlighted what she considered as flaws in previous interpretations, while leaving the matter in doubt: although the poet's usage

[53] If the rune group is read as *Cynewulf*, the emendation is unnecessary. The plural inflections of *acle* (l. 706b), *bidað* (l. 706b), *beofaþ* (l. 708b), and *seomað* (l. 709a) mark a shift in number, plausibly explained by the poet's or scribe's initial conception of the runes as a collective whole and their later treatment as separate letters, see Tupper 1912, 254, and Woolf 1977, 9-10, 54.

[54] According to Woolf, this was not the only way Cynewulf could have divided his name into rune groups. Spelt *Cynwulf*, the name divides naturally into two elements which, given the possibility of using *wulf* for the devil (cf. *Riddles*, ed. Tupper, note to *Riddle* 90), might readily have been incorporated into a sentence referring to the Last Judgment (1977, 10-11, n. 3).

[55] For a survey of the interpretative stratification advanced by critics with respect to the runic cluster ᛚᚠ, see Grimaldi 1983, 49.

in the other three signed poems does provide – at least in principle – plausible a priori grounds for seeking an alternative to Cynewulf's name in the runic groups, it remains – at least in this context – uncertain whether such reasoning by analogy is illuminating or misleading (1977, 11).

The closing of *Juliana* 229b-731 parallels that of *The Fates of the Apostles* 115-117 in its twin appeals – for intercession to the source of sanctity to which the poem is dedicated, and for prayer from its addressees. Hence, Cynewulf entreats Saint Juliana's intercession twice in close succession – flanking the runic signature and investing it with particular weight, *þæt seo halge me helpe gefremme* ('that the saint should give me help', l. 696) and *Þonne arna biþearf, / þæt me seo halge wið þone hyhstan cyning / geþingige* ('Therefore I will have need of favors for the saint to intercede for me with the highest king', 715b-717a).[56] Within the framework of *Juliana*, in light of critical reflections on the runic clusters, alongside its eschatological dimension, this disputed passage might be taken to suggest a purport such as: 'the man Cyn' /'mankind' departs, like every 'sheep' (of the flock of the House of Israel); he/they must stand before the *Rex tremendae maiestatis* – who is also the Good Shepherd (*Bonus pastor animam suam dat pro ovibus suis*, John 10:11) – and bear witness on Judgment Day,[57] when even the floodwaters do tremble before *Deo et Christo Iesu, qui iudicaturus est vivos ac mortuos, et adventum ipsius et regnum eius* (1 Timothy 4:1).

Cynewulf appears sorely burdened by the prospect of Eternal Judgment; beyond his entreaty to Saint Juliana and his appeal for the prayers of all who will read his poem, he culminates in imploring the forgiveness

[56] Krapp/van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 133; Bjork 2013, 127. With regard to the request for prayers and intercession directed to both the saint and the poem's addressees, see Thornbury 2014, 126-128.

[57] On *Juliana* and the motif of Doom, see St-Jacques 1980, 134-137, whilst on Cynewulf's eschatology in the Exeter Book and wider corpus of Old English literature, see Brooks 2023, 1-15.

of the 'God of hosts' (*mægna god*, l. 729b). Such a disquiet evokes the image of a mortal soul labouring to work out its salvation in awe.[58] The poignancy of the appeal is that of one who – likely late in the faith – turns to seek godly mercy. In the concluding reflections, this matter will once more be weighed in relation to the possible chronological horizon of the signed poems.

4.4. The Fates of the Apostles *98b-105a*

After celebrating the heroic death of the Apostles in the defence of the faith while preaching the Gospel,[59] unto the uttermost part of the earth – in accordance with Christ's mandate –,[60] in *The Fates of the Apostles* 87 Cynewulf brings his celebration of the Twelve to a halt in order to embark upon an eschatological meditation.[61] Before and after the runic signature, Cynewulf twice calls upon *beorn se ðe lufige þysses giddes*

[58] Frantzen (2007, 112, 118 n. 51) discussed the passages that concern the plea for forgiveness and their likely resonances within penitential literature. For God's supplication in *Juliana* 729b-731, see Calder 1973, 370.

[59] The motif of Christ as the hero *par excellence* and of the saints as didactic *exempla vitae* to emulate was widespread in Old English literature and in its reworkings from Latin hagiography; see Clarke 2009, 71-72, and Albertson 1967, 20, respectively.

[60] The foundational witness of the New Testament lies in the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, and Luke 24:47 articulate Christ's mandate, enjoining the disciples to proclaim the Gospel universally – *usque ad ultimum terræ* (Acts 1:8). Heirs to the Benedictine missionary spirit of Saint Augustine of Canterbury and Saint Paulinus of York, the early English themselves, as fervent Christians, set out on missions to the Continent, ministering to their Frankish and Frisian brethren who, even in the age of Charlemagne, had yet to be fully incorporated into Christendom, see the chapter "Apostles of Germany" in Hindle 2006, 120-149. Besides, as to the reception of the preaching of the Gospel in the Old English Christian literary corpus, see Garde 1991, 141-142.

[61] Given the consequential placement at fol. 545 and the similarity of the apostolic matter, early critics believed that *The Fates of the Apostles* was a continuation of *Andreas*. As to the independence of Cynewulf's signed poem, see Krapp (1906, xxxvii–xlvii) and Howlett (1975, 395-389).

begang ('whosoever takes pleasure in the content of this poem', ll. 88b-89a).[62] Thereafter he enjoins *se ðe hine lysteð leoðgiddunga* ('whoever delights in poetic songs', l. 97)[63] to unravel the riddle of the runes at lines 98b-105a, averring that whoever discerns its meaning will thereby be bound in solemn duty to commend him to God:

> ᚠ þær on ende standeþ,
> eorlas þæs on eorðan brucaþ. Ne moton hie awa ætsomne,
> woruldwunigende; ᚹ sceal gedreosan,
> ᚢ on eðle, æfter tohreosan
> læne lices frætewa, efne swa ᛁ toglideð.
> Þonne ᚳ ond ᛗ cræftes neosað
> nihtes nearowe, on him ᛏ ligeð,
> cyninges þeodom. (Krapp 1932, 54)

> ᚠ stands at the end; men enjoy that on earth. But they cannot always be together, dwelling in the world. ᚹ must pass away, ᚢ in the native land; after that the transitory adornments of the body will disperse, even as the ᛁ vanishes when ᚳ and ᛗ exercise strength with labor in the night; ᛏ lies upon them, the service of the king. (Bjork 2013, 137)

Unlike the other signed poems, the runic sequence appears in a jumbled order, yielding the series ᚠᚹᚢᛚᚳᛁᚾ (*FWULCYN*) which unveils the name Cynwulf (Symons 2016, 92). Scholars have long debated the reasons behind such a choice, ranging from a young and inexperienced *scop* to a literary device designed to intensify the complexity of the signature.[64] Even though no definitive conclusion has been reached, the dis-

[62] Krapp 1932, 53; Bjork 2013, 137. Per l'occorrenza di questa formula e della sua variazione *mann se ðe lufige / þisses galdres begang* (ll. 107b-108a), see Howlett 1975, 385-387.

[63] Krapp 1932, 53; Bjork 2013, 137.

[64] Gleason (1992, 19-32) offered an exegetical analysis of the runic passage. The discussion will return to this in the examination of the individual runes of the signature.

junction of the runic sequence heightens the interpretive difficulty in comparison with the other poems.

There is scholarly consensus on the meaning of ᚠ (*feoh*), 'wealth'. Eduard Sievers did not translate the designation of the rune, leaving the letter embedded in the rendering of the text at lines 98b-99a, "An dessen ende steht ein *feoh*. Des *feoh* bedienen sich die menschen hier auf erden" (1891, 10); Moritz Trautmann did likewise (1898, 54). For Stanley Greenfield and Daniel Calder (1986, 166), "It is clear there is a pun on the F-rune. It 'stands last', the poet says, indicating that F is the last letter of his anagrammatic name and that, while it outlasts man, wealth is ephemeral". Accordingly, Raymond Gleason gave a spiritual reading of *feoh* (1992, 23). Thence, the rune ᚠ could be intended as "pelf", alluding to the transitory nature of perishable riches in contrast to the heavenly treasure: *si vis perfectus esse vade vende quae habes et da pauperibus et habebis thesaurum in caelo et veni sequere me* (Matthew 19:21). Carl Maier had originally reckoned ᚹ as *wa* (Muinzer 1957, 576-578), an impossible reading. Arthur Napier interpreted it as *wyn* ("joy", 1889, 71-72).[65]

Scholars have long debated over ᚢ, which the *Rune Poem* renders as *ūr* 'aurochs'. Such a reading, however, is not appropriate in any of Cynewulf's signed poems. Cosijn (1890, 57), followed by Gollancz (1892, 181-82), based his argument on the previously discussed *fuþorc* attested in London, British Library, Ms. Cotton Domitian A.ix, p. 31, where ᚢ (*ūr*) is glossed with the Latin adjective *noster*.[66] Following René Derolez's interpretation of the *Rune Poem* (1954, 20), Kenneth Brooks (1961, 124-25) argued against Cosijn's position, noting that although

For the poet's choice of employing the dislocated order ᚠᚹᚢᛚᚳᚤᚾ (*FWULCYN*) in the sequence that constitutes the name Cynwulf, see Giliberto 2009, 53.

[65] This reading has been accepted by several scholars, among them Cosijn 1890, 59, Sievers 1891, 3-4, and Gollancz 1892, 78, whereas Trautmann interpreted it as *wela*, "riches" (1898, 52).

[66] See n. 49 above.

the *Rune Poem* in its original form may have been almost contemporaneous with Cynewulf, the stanza on *ūr* must derive from a much older tradition; Ralph Elliott (1964, 64) reached the same conclusion. For Gleason, ᚢ means "courage", set in relation to the courage demonstrated by the Apostles (1992, 27). The most convincing interpretation, though, is to read ᚢ as the possessive pronoun *ūr*, referring back to *wyn*.[67] Critics consistently understand ᚹ as "water, sea, lake", as in the other signed poems.

Treating ᚳ and ᛇ as separate runes, Sievers inserted *ond* between them for metrical reasons (1891, 10). In the *Rune Poem* ᚳ (*cēn*) and ᛇ (*ȳr*) are rendered respectively as "torch" and "bow" (or "yew tree" – if one considers the *Icelandic Runic Poem*.[68] Ferdinand Holthausen proposed "Horn" for *ȳr* in all the signed poems except *Juliana* (1910, 175). As for ᛇ, Brooks suggested that the rune-name *ȳr* might signify some sharp instrument; it "represented comparatively late development, being the front mutation of *u*; as the name *ūr* existed for the U-rune"; he understood the name *ȳr* just as "a mechanical formation like the Y-rune itself, which consisted of the U-rune with a subscript I-rune joined to it" (1961, 126).[69] In the manuscript the rune ᚾ (*nȳd*), 'need', is illegible due to the damage caused by the reagent. Trautmann understood *nȳd* (nominative) as "distress", linking it to the verb *ligeð* – or rather *legeð*, according to his emendation (1898, 54). Edgar Palomé suggested a relation between the letter ᚾ and meteorological terminology in the *Rune Poem* (1991,

[67] In relation to further readings of the rune ᚢ, Trautmann (1898, 52) advanced *unne* ("permission"). The lines ᚢ *wæs geara* / *geogoðhades glæm* (*Elene* 1066b-1067a) and ᚢ *wæs longe* / ᚹ *flodum bilocen* (*Christ II* 805-806) prompted Sievers (1881, 7) to interpret *ūr* as a synonym of *feoh*. However, as Krapp pointed out, no instance of *ūr* meaning "wealth" is attested in Old English (1932, 168).

[68] Derolez argued that such an interpretation must be rejected (1954, 394).

[69] In the exploration of some possible additional readings of the rune ᚳ, Sisam concluded that Cynewulf "had to give these letter-names some function in the sentence: when *cēn* and *ȳr* stand alone, or form part of a group of runes, the single letter or group stands for the whole name Cynewulf, as in the *Juliana* signature" (1932, 23).

426). Brooks, by contrast, argued that "these lines refer not merely to the service due to God, but also to the universal compulsion imposed by death" (1966, 126). As in *Juliana* 729b-731, in *The Fates of the Apostles* 115-117, Cynewulf invokes God's blessing to be readmitted into his presence and,[70] at the same time, he asks the intercession of the Twelve he has sung about. Cynewulf resumes speaking in the first person, articulating his anxieties about the soul's posthumous journey, the *transitus* (ll. 109a-110b, 111-112a),[71] undertaken in quest of a celestial guerdon – namely, admission to the presence of God and eternal habitation in the Heavenly Kingdom.

Cynewulf longs for the celestial abode promised by Christ, *in domo Patris mei mansiones multae sunt* (John 14:2). This pursuit appears in the *langne ham, eardwic uncuð* 'long-lasting home, unknown dwelling' (92b-93a), later termed *wic uncuð* 'unknown habitations' (112b).[72] The soul's *peregrinatio* is figured as the quest for a spiritual mansion, *Ic sceall feor heonan*, / *an elles forð, eardes neosan* ('I must go far from here, alone on the way forth, seek a dwelling', ll. 109b-110); parallels occur in *The Seafarer*, where the exile motif turns into the hope and search for the heavenly *patria*, culminating in lines 117-122a.[73]

[70] Such a plea is expressed as *to gode cleopigan* ('call to God') in *The Fates of the Apostles* 115b; it also appears as *to gode clopian* in *Andreas* 1398b and *Juliana* 271b, and as *to gode cleopode* in *Elene* 1099b.

[71] McBrine 2009, 298-302 has widely analysed the journey motif in the poems of the Vercelli Book. With regard to the soul's journey, or *transitus*, *The Fates of the Apostles* contains a number of theological and liturgical allusions that connect it with the major antiphons and responsories of the death liturgy, turning the poem into a kind of Old English rewriting of a litany in the *Agenda mortuorum*, see Cocco 2019, 37-52, 53-67 and n. 87 below.

[72] Krapp 1932, 54; Bjork 2013, 137, 139. The poem concludes with other variations on the theme of the unknown, heavenly mansions promised to the faithful in the Kingdom of God: *eardes* 'dwelling' (l. 110b), *eard ond eðel* 'dwelling and the land' (l. 113a), *botles* 'dwelling' (117a), *hames in hehðo* 'home in the highest' (l. 118a); there is also an occurrence at the opening of the poem: *beorhtne boldwelan* 'bright happy home (l. 33a); on this matter, see Riedinger (1995, 51).

[73] Krapp 1932, 54; Bjork 2013, 137. In *The Seafarer* 117-122a the soul's *transitus*

Cynewulf's vision attains its consummation in the contemplation of divine glory within the mansions of the Kingdom of God, *þær is hihta mæst,* / *þær cyning engla clænum gildeð* / *lean unhwilen* ('there the greatest of hopes is, where the king of angels grants to the pure timeless reward', 118b-120a).[74]

4.5. Poems formerly ascribed to Cynewulf

Transmitted as ᚳᚤᚾ[ᛖ]ᚹᚢᛚᚠ (*CYN*[*E*]*WULF*) or ᚠᚹᚢᛚᚳᚤᚾ (*FWULCYN*), the vexed question behind Cynewulf's runic signature has long posed an abiding challenge to scholarship. Yet of equal – if not indeed greater – consequence is the parallel problem of attribution: the persistent attempt to enlarge the canon of the poet so as to encompass the anonymous corpus, the attribution of non-signed poems to Cynewulf thus assigning to him "the authorship of the Vercelli and Exeter Codices" (Kemble 1840, 362).[75] The view once prevailed that, together with *Christ II, Elene*, *Juliana*, and *The Fates of the Apostles,* a still broader range of poems – among them *Andreas*, *The Dream of the Rood*, the so-called *First Riddle*, *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, *The Harrowing of Hell*, *The Phœnix*, *The Physiologus*, and even some elegies – rightly belonged to the canon of Cynewulf.[76] Then scholars drew a demarcation between the four signed

to the heavenly *patria* is directed toward the attainment of eternal salvation and the enjoyment of the celestial bliss therein; see Magennis 2007, 304, 307, 316-318. There are parallels between the imagery of *wanderlust* and the quest for a heavenly home in both *The Seafarer* and *The Fates of the Apostles*; see Campbell 1973, 235-247.

[74] Krapp 1932, 54; Bjork 2013, 137, 139.

[75] Following Kemble's views, Cook noted, "We accordingly have five poems, the authorship of which must be attributed to this scholarly versifier. Among others that are ascribed to him, with more or less probability, are the 'Riddles', 'Guthlac', 'Phœnix' and the 'Dream of the Rood' […] the affinities of the 'Fata Apostolorum', as determined by his means, are not strikingly dissimilar to those of the 'Judith', and so far, my hypothesis is confirmed that the latter poem emanated from Cynewulfian school" (1889, 4).

[76] For further discussion of the broader conception of Cynewulf's authorship – and of the many additional compositions once included alongside the signed poems – see, among others, Kent 1889, 4, and Anderson 1966^2, 126.

poems and those deemed spurious; the latter were habitually designated as "Cynewulfian Poems," or else subsumed under the rubric of a "Cynewulfian school or tradition".

In the early stages of Old English studies there was a tendency to pursue *Parallelstellen Studien*;[77] critics intended to "establish chains of borrowing and literary influence" (Shippey 1972, 87). Later critical inquiry has shown that such an approach is unproductive in establishing a poet's authorship across a wider corpus of poems, even when marked by a *sui generis* style and diction.[78] As Earl Anderson observed (1983, 22), "no evidence exists for Cynewulf's influence, direct or indirect, on any other poet […] this outpouring of Christian poetry was not the result of a revolutionary discovery […] rather, what one would expect to occur in the Christianised culture of Anglo-Saxon England".[79]

When Marguerite-Marie Dubois published *Les éléments latins dans la poésie religieuse de Cynewulf* (1913), she underscored the poet's marked propensity to adapt Latin expressions to the idiom of Old English, "lorsque les expressions courantes lui semblent insuffisantes, Cynewulf n'hésite d'ailleurs pas à en créer de nouvelles, mais ces néologismes restent toujours fidèles à l'esprit de la langue" (1913, 161).[80] In the wake of Dubois's contribution, further investigations turned to the

[77] Sarrazin offered a detailed account of the *Parallelstellen* of *The Fates of the Apostles* within the Old English corpus (1892, 186-192); see also Cook 1889, 4-8.

[78] Although focusing primarily on the Old English *Genesis*, for the conceptual architecture, see Merrill/McClumpha 1890, 164-169, ff.

[79] At the dawn of Early English studies, Mather Jr. offered a cogent account of the spurious works of Cynewulf, discussing the reasons why such compositions could not be ascribed to the poet (1892, 203-210).

[80] With regard to the *analogues* and *sources* of rhetorical figures in Latin Christian poetry as reflected both in Cynewulf's poems and in Old English lyric, Heinzel (1875, 1-54) raised the initial questions, followed – among the many – by the reflections of Kennedy (1971, 206), and Anderson (1983, 24). The first monograph devoted to the stylistic influences of the Latin poets on Cynewulf's Christian verse is that of Dubois (1913), to which Jehle's doctoral dissertation subsequently added further insights (1973, 3-15; 47-49).

formulaic structure of Cynewulf's verse. Claes Schaar undertook a thorough examination of the entire corpus in light of Eduard Sievers's system of verse types. Schaar's survey of previous studies on the "enormous literature on the various Cynewulf's questions […] concerned with the style, chiefly discuss the vocabulary and the phraseology of the texts" provides a concise account of the critical tradition (1949, 97-98).

Despite Dubois's pioneering *Les éléments latins dans la poésie religieuse de Cynewulf*, Diamond proved that – despite the Latin influence – Cynewulf's poems were all "composed in the traditional formulaic verse" (1959, 228).[81] Following Daniel Calder's *Cynewulf* (1981), scholarship has increasingly turned to lexical and stylistic analysis. Alongside the studies already considered in the foregoing analysis, Joseph Wine's *Figurative Language in Cynewulf: Defining Aspects of a Poetic Style* (1990) illuminates the poet's predilection for figuration as the matrix of his stylistic identity. Alexandra Hennessey Olsen's *Speech, Song, and Poetic Craft: The Artistry of the Cynewulf Canon* (1984) underlines the interplay of orality, artistry, and tradition in shaping Cynewulf's poetic voice. Andy Orchard's essay "Both Style and Substance: The Case of Cynewulf" (2003) has pressed the case for an integrated appreciation of form and content.[82]

The sole composition that eludes such schemata is *Guthlac B*. In the volume *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf* (2013), Robert Bjork nonetheless places it within the constellation of Cynewulf's works. Although it lacks the runic signature that distinguishes *Christ II, Elene, Juliana,* and *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Guthlac B* stands in conspicuous proximity to the signed poems: "For metrical, stylistic, and thematic reasons, some maintain that *Guthlac B*, the ending of which is lost and con-

[81] Diamond's reflections proved fruitful in Watts's monograph, which gathered further evidence in support of Cynewulf's adherence to the stylistic patterns of the traditional alliterative formulaic verse (1969, 144).

[82] Orchard's study of lexical and stylistic parallels – particularly with *Andreas* and *Guthlac B* – showed that, despite the many similarities with *Andreas*, *Guthlac B* aligns more closely with the signed poems (2003, 294-297, esp. 272-273).

ceivably a runic signature along with it, may also be Cynewulf's composition" (Bjork 2013, xi).[83]

5. Cynewulf's arcana: from authorship to canon

Cynewulf's poetic craft operates within an eschatological horizon – its very forms shaped by the pervasive anxiety of mortality and the inescapability of divine Judgment (Bosse – Hinton 1990, 279-285, 289-291). Far from functioning as mere ornamental signatures, the runes erupt as semiotic fissures – markers of guilt, penitence, and the desperate need for intercession – through which the poet reconfigures the act of self-naming into a theology of confession. The end of *Christ II* stages the allegory of the *navicula animae* struggling across the billowing *mare vitae* toward the *portus salutis* – encapsulating both the peril of existence and the yearning for safe anchorage. In *Elene*, the crushing weight of sin renders earthly life a veil, always on the verge of annihilation before the divine verdict. *Juliana* radicalises the act of self-inscription – the runic acrostic collapsing into a direct supplication to the audience itself. In *The Fates of the Apostles*, death is certain, judgment inexorable, and only intercessory prayer may suspend despair with the faint promise of redemption. Though the poems delineate a systematic theological poetics in which the poet's deployment of runes converges with apocalyptic tropology and penitential discourse, they thereby transform literary self-inscription into existential confession (Warwick Frese 1996, 324). This penitential inflection – however pervasive across the four signed poems – cannot by itself constitute a decisive criterion of attribution, nor can it settle the issue of Cynewulf's authorship of *Christ II*, *Elene*, *Juliana*, and *The Fates of the Apostles*.

[83] On the possible presence of Cynewulf's runic signature in the missing section of *Guthlac B*, suggested by its stylistic affinities with the signed poems, see Sisam (1953, 134), Roberts (1979, 60-62), and Fulk (1996, 5).

The question of attributional chronology within the signed corpus inscribed with runic characters that disclose the name Cynewulf has long occupied the field of Early English studies, yet it remains unresolved. Attempts to chart a stylistic progression within Cynewulf's signed corpus are intrinsically unstable, hindered both by the paucity of objective criteria and by the unfounded assumption that the poetic trajectory of a *scop* must unfold along a linear crescendo. In his prescient and ever timely insight, Daniel Calder commented, "impressions on the 'goodness' or 'ineptness' of one poem over another certainly do not provide adequate criteria" and aesthetic judgments have proven insufficient for establishing sequence (1981, 21). Critical discourse has sought to recalibrate the debate within broader hermeneutic frameworks, privileging not the relative sequence of individual poems but the corpus in its entirety and the problem of authorial self-fashioning. What should rather be pursued is a reappraisal – and, where necessary, dismissal – of scholarly designations liable to channel the reader's approach in ways that diminish rather than illuminate our understanding of the poems.

The 'autobiographical' passages – if such they may be – concluding each poem ought to be taken less as forthright self-disclosure than as rhetorical constructions of textual persona. On these grounds, as well as in view of the linguistic and stylistic evidence of the signed poems, no secure order of composition for *Christ II*, *Elene*, *Juliana*, and *The Fates of the Apostles* can be posited. Early critics have tended to elevate *Christ II* and *Elene* as the culmination of Cynewulf's mature artistry, situating them in old age; indeed, in *Elene* 1242b-1250a the poet recalls his "conversion" as *gamelum to geoce* ('comfort in old age', 1246a). Despite the personal note, as Ralph Elliott has observed, "to deduce from this that *Elene* was Cynewulf's last poem, written in his old age, is to read more into the passage than seems warranted" (1991, 241).[84] By contrast, *Juliana* has been read either as the first work or as symptomatic of decline,

[84] For a detailed treatment of this question, and of the view of *Elene* as a mature composition belonging to the poet's later years, see Bjork 1985, 90-109.

while *The Fates of the Apostles* was dismissed as "minor poetry with no literary merit",[85] regardless of its placement at the beginning or end of the canon.[86]

With regard to *The Fates of the Apostles*, there must be a reason if "Cynewulf should have taken the trouble to add his name to so slight a poem and […] it is not improbable that Cynewulf attached a higher value to the poem than the modern reader is inclined to do" (Krapp 1932, xxxvi).The force of the poet's plea is revealed in its address to readers who delight in his song, "Like the movement of the litanies, the progression of *Fates* depends upon the repetitive pattern, a ritual formula that partakes of incarnation, of prayer and of ceremony" (Calder 1991, 221). The petitions, far from ornamental, generate the liturgical architecture that structures the work's meaning. The poet endows the epilogue of *The Fates of the Apostles* his own fear of death. The Twelve are celebrated for their heroic deeds and invoked as guides to the divine presence, becoming the poet's solace in the most precarious hour of his mortal existence. Were chronology the decisive criterion, then in this perspective – through a funerary-liturgical lens – *The Fates of the Apostles* may be read as Cynewulf's *commendatio animae*: a final testament uttered at the threshold of eternity.[87]

[85] Brooks 1961, xxxi. For a fuller account of the negative assessments that have shaped the critical reception of the poem, see Boren 1969, 115.

[86] Scholarly debate has generated a sustained and vigorous discussion; see Schaar 1949, 34, 259-61; Elliott 1953b, 298, 305; and Woolf 1977^2, 7.

[87] Building on Calder's reflections (1975, 219-244) on the Latin Martyrologies and the Litany of the Saints, this study of death liturgy and *The Fates of the Apostles* argues that, in the poem's closing movement, Cynewulf transforms his Christian-heroic celebration of the Twelve into a poetic *commendatio animae*, modeled on Roman funeral rites in which the Apostles serve as intercessors of the litany. The responsory *Subvenite sancti Dei*, its continuation *Suscipiat te Christus*, and the antiphon *Chorus angelorum* from the *Missa pro defunctis* – all attested in early English sacramentaries and missals – frame the text as a funerary prayer in verse, with the Apostles invoked as mediators at the hour of death. In this way, the poem becomes a personal liturgical rite, recasting apostolic commemoration as a supplication for the poet's *transitus*; see Cocco 2019, 37-67 and n. 71 above.

A reading that grounds authorship solely in the presence of the runic signature proves insufficient as a methodological foundation for questions of authorship; rather, it has revealed – as in the case of the stylistic affinities between *Guthlac B* and the signed poems – that even this composition might once have been considered part of Cynewulf's works. As discussed above, however, studies of lexis, style, and collocation disclose a textual landscape that is markedly different. This issue was addressed by Satyendra Kumar Das, who argued that Cynewulf's authorship applies only to the signed poems; yet Sharon Butler demonstrated that this claim was mistaken (1982, 15-23, esp. 16-17). Daniel Donoghue, in turn, carried out a close analysis of auxiliary verbs in the signed poems and concluded that *Juliana* and *Elene* diverge in significant ways from *Christ II* and *The Fates of the Apostles*, thereby suggesting a different author for the former. Yet an approach grounded in percentages of auxiliary verbs within Cynewulf's signed poems can scarcely serve as an adequate method for so brief a composition as *The Fates of the Apostles*. Finally, Robert Fulk argued that – despite the runic signature, the striking stylistic affinities, and the shared literary genre – the image of Cynewulf as compiler and "creator" of all four signed poems cannot be sustained. In this sense, the claim of authorship has dissolved into the recognition of a Cynewulfian canon (1996, 3-10, esp. 9).

Certainty about Cynewulf is scarce; so far what endures are questions that proliferate rather than resolve. The runic signature discloses a name but not a historical person, nor does it provide a milieu within which to situate him with linguistic or diachronic exactness. The signed poems cannot be taken at face value for their supposed autobiographical content, which proves less a window onto lived experience than a potentially misleading construct. Cynewulf may indeed have been an individual whose identity lies outside even the range of figures hitherto postulated by scholarship. Linguistic analysis, for its part, yields only approximate – though immensely valuable – coordinates, setting the broadest *termini post quem* and *ante quem*. The most authoritative and concrete assessment remains that of Robert Bjork: "the language of Cynewulf's works is not seemingly archaic as that of some other works,

such as *Beowulf*, nor as innovative as that of works of the late tenth century, such as *The Battle of Maldon*" (2013, x).

Cynewulf's runes enshrine not the certainty of a life, but a riddle that lingers beyond our grasp – hidden arcana that summon the labour of linguistic, philological, and cultural inquiry, and that might someday – through the unveiling of manuscripts still concealed – disclose what now remains veiled.

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