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Revision of existing literary works is common in the Middle English period, and seems frequently to have been preferred to fresh composition. Like the successive copying of popular texts over a wide span of years, such revision raises questions about the conservatism of medieval taste, the concept of authorship, the continued ability to compose in particular styles, and the amount of literature actually in circulation. But revision further implies, at the very least, that the existing text was not to the reviser's purpose, and this is especially the case with religious verse, whose content was a vehicle for strongly-held opinions and universal concern. Thus objection might be taken to the inclusion or omission of a particular fact, story or doctrine; greater emphasis on certain aspects might be desired to suit personal inclination or a change in the religious climate; a more didactic intention might require additional explicitness; or inspiration may lead a writer to add more.

With these general observations in mind, I propose to discuss specific revisions in the late thirteenth-century South English Legendary (SEL). Constantly revised in the course of two hundred years, it spread to many different parts of the country and was, it seems, put to different uses by different people. Many of its saints' lives exist in more than one form, while the associated temporale narratives, unrestricted by calendrical limitations, and with a less stable place in the collection, were freely developed out of one another. The South English Nativity of Mary and Christ (NMC), one of the earliest temporale poems, exists in three versions: (a) the original; (b) an expanded form; and (c) an altered form based on (b). It was seemingly to remedy (a)'s narrative deficiencies that the (b) version was made, for it inserts several episodes omitted in (a) (principally the Conception and Birth of John the Baptist, and the Visitation), taking its extra material from another temporale poem, the Abridged Life of Christ, which is itself partly dependent on the (a) version. The principal innovation in (c) is to replace the Massacre of the Innocents with its own more dramatic account, thereafter omitting all subsequent material in favour of a concluding prayer to the Virgin.

NMC (a) is closely related to two other SEL Nativity poems, the Conception of Mary (CM), and its continuation, the Expanded Nativity (EN). These three well illustrate both the subtleties of Middle English revision and (as not infrequently happens) the
difficulty of distinguishing the original composition. In her article on the temporale narratives, Minnie E. Wells held that CM and EN (to which she referred together as the 'Concepcio Marie', although aware that two authors were involved) were the source of NMC (which, with its own later continuation, the Ministry and Passion, she referred to as the 'Long Life of Christ', thinking them to constitute a single poem). She did not, however, present any evidence for this conclusion beyond a misguided attempt, based on a corrupt manuscript, to show that "the text of the Long Life is less accurate than that of the Concepcio" (p. 332). Close examination in fact establishes that NMC (a) was written first, and that CM and EN were adapted from it.

The Nativity of Mary and Christ and the Conception of Mary

The 814-line NMC (a) describes the Nativity story from the marriage of Joachim and Anne as far as Christ among the Doctors in Jerusalem. CM, 280 lines long, begins with an 84-line prologue, after which 11. 85-280 follow NMC 7-192 so closely in taking events down to the end of Mary's Betrothal that there is virtually line-by-line correspondence between them. Usually the differences are merely of phrasing, CM showing more verbal economy, but on several occasions the texts diverge sufficiently to establish the version in NMC as the original.

(1) The first divergence occurs during Anne's grief at Joachim's disappearance after the rejection of his offering in the temple. NMC reads:

Gret deol made Anne at hom for hym, ne myhte no womman more; In an herber heo sat a day, wepinge wel sore. Heo wrong er honden and cryede on God, vnder a lorer tre, And as heo lokede ypward toward Ihesu Crist heo gan þeron yse A sparwe nest wip ȝonge brydde: 'Lord, þyn ore', heo sede, 'Eche þyn bote vs þou sendest ioye and eche þyn of is blede',

and CM:

Gret deol made his wif vor him, : no womman miȝte more. As heo was in morninge adai : wepinge wel sore & gan to wringe hire honde: : swete lord, heo sede, Eche þing þu ðeuest Joie : & eche þing of blede.

NMC's version corresponds to Chapter 2 of one of its principal sources (either direct or indirect), the apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew: "Et dum nimis fleret in viridiario domus suae, in oratione elevans oculos suos ad dominum vidit nidum passerum in arbore lauri, et emisit vocem cum gemitu ad dominum dicens: Domine deus omnipotens, qui omni creaturae donasti filios . . . me salam a benignitatis tuae dono excludis?" The author of CM seems to have omitted deliberately
all reference to the sparrows by joining the second half of NMC 61 to the first half of 59.

(2) A few lines later there is another divergence:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{po com an angel bere to hire: 'Ne doute pe noping', he seide,} \\
\text{For pat child pat pou on erpe schalt bere is al by Godes rede.'} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(67-8)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{po com pus an angel to hire; : doute pe no3t! he sede,} \\
\text{Icham pe angel bt habbe ibore : bifore god pi godhede;} \\
\text{A dou3ter pu schalt her bere : al bi godes rede,} \\
\text{Marie schal hire name beo, : pt holi lif schal lede.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(143-6) p. 72

As CM this time has the longer text, it at first looks as if NMC's author has left out two lines necessary to make the angel's message explicit, since this is the first time that Anne has heard that she will bear a child. But NMC again agrees with Pseudo-Matthew - "apparuit angelus domini dicens: Noli timere Anna, quoniam in consilio dei est germen tuus" (Tischendorf, p. 57) - whereas CM's version follows the apocryphal Gospel of the Birth of Mary, Chapter 4: "Ne timeas Anna, neque phantasma putes esse quod vides. Ego enim sum angelus ille qui preces et eleemosynas vestras obtuli in conspectu dei, et nunc missus sum ad vos ut annuntiem vobis nascituram filiam quae Maria vocata super omnes mulieres erit benedicta" (Tischendorf, p. 115). This abridgement of Pseudo-Matthew was adopted by Jacobus de Voragine as the basis of his chapter on the Nativity of the Virgin in the Legenda aurea, the version of the Birth of Mary that normally influenced Middle English verse narratives. Only when CM diverges from NMC do we find in either poem material from the Birth of Mary omitted by Jacobus, as here (for Jacobus gives no details of the content of the angel's message to Anne) and in two other passages discussed below. In this first case the author of CM may have found NMC 67-68 too elliptical.

(3) CM next has four lines on Mary's birthplace not in NMC:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{In ierliii heo was ibore : In hire fader house iwis} \\
\text{Biside be 3ate of iosaphat, : pt noube an abbei is} \\
\text{In honourance of s. anne : of blake nonnerie,} \\
\text{In pe stude per heo was bore : be swete maide marie.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(161-4) p. 74

These occur between NMC 82-83, immediately after Mary's birth, and relate information which, if present in his exemplar, a later writer would seem unlikely to leave out, but there is evidence that they have been added. Although Jerusalem is said by Pseudo-Matthew to be where Joachim lives (Tischendorf, p. 54), NMC 13 and the parallel CM 91 follow the Legenda aurea (Graesse, pp. 587, 589) in giving his home as Galilee, and later, after CM has ended, NMC 198 and 756-757 explicitly record that Mary was born in Nazareth. CM 161-165 are therefore probably an addition to the original narrative.
(4) The next divergence occurs during Mary's childhood in the temple:

Fort eue heo was panne in her bedes, wip word and ek wip pouhte;
panne cam an aungel eche day to hire fram heuene and mete er brouhte.
Lute [ober] mete me sey her ete, ac pat heo wan wip er honde
Among pore men heo deled it al, and lyuede by Godes sonde.

The second passage (CM) leaves out all reference to Mary's food,
but whether or not this was the author's intention in diverging
from NMC, CM 200 corresponds to the similarly general statement in
the Birth of Mary: "Quotidie namque ab angelis frequentabatur,
quotidie divina visione fruebatur, quae eam a malis omnibus
custodiebat et bonis omnibus redundare faciebat" (Tischendorf, p. 117).
NMC 117-120, on the other hand, agree with Chapter 6 of
Pseudo-Matthew (Tischendorf, pp. 63-64).

(5) Lines 223-236 provide the most clear-cut proof of alteration on
the part of the author of CM, for here the revision of NMC is carried
out without proper regard to the sense. When Mary reaches the
marriageable age of fourteen, the priests' dilemma about her future
is resolved by a heavenly voice which in NMC, as in the Legenda
aurea (Graesse, p. 589), without preliminaries gives instructions
for choosing her spouse:

In contrast, CM first has the voice explain this ritual in terms of
Isaiah's prophecy (xi. 1-2):

po com a uois to hem & sede: : þencheþ in isaie!
þt maide ches hire spouse : þoru his prophecie.
Nou sede isaye : þþ þer scholde springe
A þerde of Jessees more : of dauid þe kynge,
& aflour scholde springe : of bulke more also,
& þer vppe ali3te þe holi gost : & come so perto.

(223-8) p. 76
This agrees with Chapter 7 of the *Birth of Mary*, and in both this work and *CM* the voice gives no further instructions, but leaves the high priest and his fellows to decide what to do:

Her þoru þis men wuste: hou hi scholde on take.
Of dauies kunde he het eche man, : þt was wipppoute make
& of elde to habbe wif; þt ech of hem bere
A þerde to þe auter, : þt non vorbore nere;
& wuche þerde bigonne to blowe : & a coluer þer vppe
ibr03t,
þt he tok marie to spouse, : þt it nere bileued no3t.
(229-34) pp. 76, 78

Apart from changes necessary to make it fit the new speakers, this passage closely corresponds to *NMC* 143-148 quoted above. But then *CM* falls into error, prompted by *NMC*'s repetition in the high priest's mouth of the voice's instructions, a repetition unauthorized by the Latin sources:

Glad was þe bischop þo of þis tokenyng; sone he let crye þere,
þat alle þat were of Dauydis kynde a þerd to þe auter bere.
(149-50)

Forgetting the alterations of a few lines earlier, *CM* unthinkingly preserves this couplet of *NMC*'s, with the result that it makes the high priest give out the same order for the second time:

þe bischop was þo glad Inou3, : he let crie þere
Al þt were of dauies kunde : aþerde to þe auter bere.
(235-6) p. 78

(6) Finally, *CM* ends with a couplet (not in *NMC*) which lessens the harshness of *NMC*'s conclusion to its short discourse, after the Betrothal, on the three states of womanhood. To *NMC*'s:

Heo was mayde and wyf and wydewe; hose nys non of þe þre,
Bote heo come to amendement of hire may heo nou3t be,
(191-2)

it adds:

Ac napeles þer wippoute : me mai ifynde some,
Ac, þif god wole, hi mowe amend, : ar hi to depe come.
(279-80) p. 80

Its author clearly felt some rounding-off to be necessary.

Although the *CM* reviser's motives for introducing these half-dozen changes may be difficult to assess with certainty, the fundamental reason for his revision of *NMC*'s account of Mary's Conception, Childhood, and Betrothal into a separate poem is suggested by *CM*'s position in the manuscripts which preserve it. Whereas *NMC* is normally found outside the *SEL*'s cycle of saints' lives, *CM* occurs
in a calendrical position in two of the three manuscripts that pre-
serve it complete: in Ashmole 43 (ff. 208v-212r) it is placed for
8 December, the Feast of the Conception of the Virgin, and in Pepys
2344 (pp. 353-358) for 26 July, the Feast of St Anne. It would
seem that the reviser wished to provide an item of similar length
to most of the saints' lives to fill a gap in the calendrical
sequence. M.E. Wells (p. 330) suggested that CM was written for St
Anne's Day, but the Feast of the Conception is more likely, particu-
larly in view of the Advent theme of the poem's lengthy prologue.
This, which celebrates mankind's good fortune in Christ's Incarnation
and is set apart from normal SEL verse-style by its greater lyricism
and its use of internal rhyme, provides one final piece of evidence
for CM's indebtedness to NMC. Among the prophets who yearn in this
prologue for Christ's Advent is Simeon:

Him longede ek after is face : þe holi symeon,
& alle blisse him was bynome, : & ofte gradde before:
Louerd, wanne woltou come? : wenne woltou be ibore?
Wene 3e ic mowe dure? : wene 3e ic mowe ise? (56-9) p. 66

Lines 58-59 derive from two lines (587-588) of the passage in NMC on
Simeon, preceding the Purification:

So grete wil he hadde him to abyde þat whanne + any wis
man com,
For he hopede here of him tidinge esche he wolde ylome:
'Wenestou out þat he wole he ybore, and þat ich mowe him
ysë?
Wenestou out þat Y dure mowe fort he ybore be?' (585-8)

CM's author, it seems, has rewritten lines from a much later passage
in NMC's narrative, and fitted them into his discursive prologue.

The Expanded Nativity and the Nativity of Mary and Christ

EN, which runs to 897 lines in its principal manuscript, Egerton
1993 (ff. 30r-40r), begins with the Annunciation to Zacharias and,
like NMC (a), ends inconclusively, after the account of Christ
among the Doctors, with a sketch of the political situation in
Israel at the time of the Ministry. As the following analysis
indicates, it comprises chronologically-arranged versions of those
liturgical gospels containing the story of Christ's Nativity and
Infancy, alternated with passages borrowed or adapted from NMC 193-
814. There are, however, a good many lines from neither source
which, if not linking-passages, usually consist of additional
comment or information. The analysis shows as precisely as possible
the linear parallels between EN and NMC (a), but in the case of the
gospel paraphrases it has not for the present purpose seemed useful
to distinguish translation from supplementary matter. The bracketed
numbers in the left-hand column refer to the lineation in Horstmann's
edition.
1-46 (277-322) Annunciation to Zacharias : Luke i. 5-24
47-53 (323-329) Joseph and Mary's separation after the Betrothal : NMC 193-200
139-192 (415-468) Birth of John the Baptist : Luke i. 57-79
193-196 (469-472) Joseph's return to Nazareth : NMC 245-248
197-216 (473-492) Joseph's trouble about Mary : Matt. i. 18-25
253-372 (529-648) The Census, Journey to Bethlehem, Birth of Christ, Midwives, Shepherds : NMC, as follows:
  EN 253-262/NMC 325-334; EN 265-268/NMC 335-338;
  EN 273-286/NMC 343-356; EN 297-312/NMC 359-374;
405-438 (681-714) Death of the Sodomites, the Magi's departure for Judaea : NMC 457-490
479-550 (755-826) The Magi's journey, gifts, adoration, departure, and death : NMC, as follows:
  EN 479-506/NMC 491-518; EN 507-512/NMC 537-542;
  EN 517-524/NMC 543-550; EN 527-528/NMC 565-566;
  EN 529-531/NMC 555-558; EN 533-536/NMC 561-564
587-620 (863-896) Purification, Simeon : NMC, as follows:
  EN 587-588/NMC 567-568; EN 593-600/NMC 571-578;
  EN 605-616/NMC 581-592
633-652 (909-928) Their meaning : NMC, as follows
  EN 633-644/NMC 603-614
653-666 (929-942) Anna, and the return home : Luke ii. 36-40
667-710 (943-986) Herod's journey to Rome, and burning of the ships: NMC, as follows:
EN 671-702/NMC 617-646; EN 705-710/NMC 647-652


743-812 (1019-88) Herod's wickedness, Journey into and life in Egypt, Herod's death: NMC, as follows:
EN 743-744/NMC 663-664; EN 745-746/NMC 667-668;
EN 751-764/NMC 669-682; EN 765-780/NMC 717-732

813-826 (1089-102) Return from Egypt: Matt. ii. 19-23

827-830 (1103-06) Why Jesus was called 'of Nazareth': NMC 757-760

831-872 (1107-48) Christ among the Doctors: Luke ii. 40-52 (EN 831-860), but also NMC, as follows:
EN 849-850/NMC 785-786; EN 851-852/NMC 789-790;
EN 862-864/NMC 792-794; EN 867-870/NMC 765-768

873-897 (1149-73) The political situation in Israel: NMC, as follows:
EN 873-887/NMC 797-812

The main non-biblical narrative episodes in EN, but not NMC, are the death of the Magi, 537-550 (813-826); the Holy Family's life in Egypt, 781-790 (1057-66); and the death of Herod, 791-812 (1067-88).

At first EN makes only sporadic use of NMC, as, for example, of 11. 245-248. These are part of a longer passage that corresponds to Pseudo-Matthew, Chapter 10:

bo vr leudey boru be Holy Gost as je hereb mid childe was,
Iosep was euere in Bethleem and nuste nout of pis cas.
Aboute is nedes and is mester ney monbes he was pere;
In wynter he wente to is wif, as hit ful in be 3ere.
bo fond he is wyf myd childe grete: Lord, pat him was wo!
'Miscas,' he seyde, 'ichabbe ynu, bei ich nadde no mo.'
(245-50)

EN's author, having translated the Benedictus, inserts a couplet of his own (191-192), rewrites NMC 245-248 to fit the new context (193-196), and then (the repetitions revealing the break in continuity) embarks on the gospel version of Joseph's trouble:

Bileue now of sein Jon . and of Zakarie,
And telle we forp, as we bigonne, . of iosep and of marie!
In his owne contrey in bedleem . nige monpes iosep was,
After pat is wif wip childe, . he muste no3t of pe cas,
Aboute his mester and his nede, . to winnen him spense þere.
In winter he wende to is wif, . as hit fel in þe jere.
þo mari, ihs moder, . & iosep spoushed nome,
Heo was ifounde hire wombe fol, . ar heo to gadere come ... 
(191-8) pp. 86-7

From 1. 253 onwards, however, EN draws extensively on NMC.
The direction of the influence is not always obvious, for the
reviser does not simply borrow from or rephrase NMC, but alternately
expands and abridges it, with no little skill and care. An examination
of 253-372 will illustrate his procedure and achievements.

EN 253-262, 265-268, on the imperatorial census, correspond
exactly to NMC 325-338; but EN 263-264, 269-272, not in NMC, supply
further information on the tax which could seemingly have equally
been part of the original composition:

And vch peni þat me him sende . was worp oper tene
Of comune moneie þt was þo, . hauȝte habbe inow to spene.
(263-4) p. 89

Here was þe lond of Jude furst . vnder rome ibrouȝt,
To giue vche þer þider truage, . þat dere was seþe a bouȝt;
Vor heo þat weren vnder þe emperour . paynimes were echon,
And heo of Jude alle giwes, . here kuynde nas not on.
(269-72) pp. 89-90

However, the first addition (source material found, for example, in
Chapter 6 of the Legenda aurea (Graesse, p.40) ) is placed after
instead of before the aside of 261-262, which in NMC (333-334)
naturally concludes the discussion of the pence:

And napeles ic may it leue . þt he ne dude as wel for þanne
Vor þe loue of þe panes, . as to wite þe nombre of vche
manne.
(261-2) p. 89

EN 263-264 consequently read like an afterthought inserted by a later
writer.

NMC 339-342, Joseph summoned to Bethlehem, are not found in
EN, presumably because the matter has already been told in the pre­
ceding gospel paraphrase, but EN 273-286 correspond to NMC 343-356
which, unlike Luke, describe the Journey in detail. EN then adds a
further ten lines on the stable, material again found in the Legenda
aurea (Graesse, p. 41):

A mersorie hit was icleped; . amidde þe weie it was,
Side walles hit hedde to, . ac non helewuþer nas:
Hit was opene at eiper ende, . to gon yn al þat wolde.
Vor þe þing hit furst arered was, . þat hous of such folde:
þat men mȝte þe haliday . þer inne pleiȝe and wende
And sitte vor idelnesse . and driue þe day to ende,
And þat men mȝte þer inne go, . whanne it luper weder were,
And þat pore men þer inne leiȝe . þat wip outen yn were.
However, the first line adapts a phrase found in NMC 357 ("Amydde þe heye weye it stood"), while the last neatly picks up NMC 358: "Glad was Þosep and is wyf þat þei myhte þere byleue".

EN 297-312, a legendary amplification of the Birth of Christ, correspond to NMC 359-374, but the unique 313-326, reflections on Mary's miraculous and painless childbearing, proclaim themselves by both their content and style to be the work of a separate author. Especially noticeable is the rhetorical questioning of 315-318, lines distinguished by their gentle lyricism, sudden contemporary focus, and sense of personal concern:

Whar was as al þe nobleye, . þat fel to aquene,  
At akinges burʒtime, . whar was hit isene?  
Ladies and chamberleins, . scarlet to drawe and grene,  
To winden ynne þe þonge king? . al was lute, ich wene.  
(315-8) p. 91

The voice is not that of NMC, nor of the SEL in general.

The reviser then places NMC 377-378 (on St. Helena and the hay) before 375-376 (the ox and the ass), possibly to clear the ground for another addition, ten lines on the beasts' homage to Christ (331-340). NMC returns to this subject later (399-400), making the ox and ass the first of a series of miraculous witnesses of the Nativity (a section EN largely omits):

Of þe [miracle] of þe bestes þe habbeb iherd, of þe oxe and  
þe ass biforn:  
Hou þei kneleden aþen him þat hem made, þo he was ybore.  
(399-400)

This admitted repetition might be thought to cast doubt on NMC's originality, especially as EN 331-334 follow on easily from 329-330 (NMC 375-376):

Boþe þe ass and þe oxe, . þo me oure lord to hem brouȝte,  
Aþeþin him kneleden boþe . and honoureþen him þat hem  
wrouȝte.  
Now was þis awonder dede . and aþe kunde inow;  
Vor wel ichot þat oxen kunne . bet now drawe ate plow,  
And asses bere sackes . and corn aboute to bringe,  
þan to make meri gleo . and knele bi fore a kinge.  
(329-34) p. 92

But these contemporary reflections are again stylistically distinct, while EN's next, very short, couplet:

Vor, þe seþ wel, feþwþ bestþes . more bostor beþ,  
þan asþe oþer oþe, . as þe ofte iseþþ,  
(335-6)
looks to be a strained expansion of NMC 401: "Wel þe witeþ þat þe oxe and þe asse boystes bestes þeþ". EN 337-340, taking up the idea of NMC 402-404, are then again of a quality and immediacy unparalleled in the other poem:

How coupen heo here legges bowen , & here knen so to wende,  
To knele before a king? . who made hem so hende?  
Now weren hit wonder gleomen to, , who brouȝte hem such mod?  
Ac when we habbeþ al ido, , þat child ibore was god.  
(337-40) p. 92

EN 341-354 correspond to NMC 379-396, the story of the midwives, except for the omission of NMC 381-384, possibly because they contribute little to the narrative. Thereafter NMC begins its account of the witnesses, while EN adds eighteen more lines on the circumstances of the Nativity (355-372). The first six of these are derived from 11. 111-118 of the SEL's Anastasia,¹⁴ and vigorously refute the legend of the saint's presence at the Birth. The remaining twelve explain, on the lines of the Legenda aurea (Graesse, p. 45), why the shepherds were watching their flocks on midwinter's night; they serve to introduce the subsequent translation from Luke ii.

The remainder of EN could be similarly analyzed, but for reasons of space I shall concentrate on instances where manipulation of NMC seems undeniable. These range from the rewriting of single lines to selection from and rearrangement of a whole passage.

(1) NMC 555-558, on the Adoration of the Magi, read:

þei come in and founde þat swete bern myd is moder Marie,  
Ac Iosep ne founde þei nout leste þei þouhte folye  
- [þat þe] child hadde is sone ybe, and þat þe moder vncline were.  
þes þre kynges seten adoun on kne and here presauns him bere.  
(555-8)

EN borrows the first three of these lines as 529-531, but as the presentation of the gifts has already been described in its gospel translation (471-473), NMC 555 is twisted and 558 replaced by an expletive:

þat þe child hedde is sone ibeo, , & þat þe child hedde  
beo vnclene;  
Ne seiþen heo nouȝt bote god, , to mis þenche nouȝt ene.  
(531-2) p. 98

(2) Later, when he finds himself speaking for a second time of Simeon's desire to see Christ, the author of EN deliberately recasts NMC:
Answere he hadde of pe Holy Gost, þat he ne scholde neuer dyen
Ar he yseye our lord ybore on erpe wyp is eyen,

(589-90)

so that he can fit in an acknowledgement of the repetition:

Of þe holi gost he hedde onswere, . as we seide bi fore
þat he ne scholde neuer þene deþ poole, . ar he seide god ibore.

(613-4) p. 100

This refers back to 565-567 in the preceding gospel translation.

(3) A more complicated case, involving alteration of the couplet scheme, is NMC 641-646 (i.) and EN 695-702 (ii.). The subject is David's supposed prophecy of Herod's burning of the ships, Psalm xlviii. 4-7 (xlvii. 5-8):

(i.) þat kynges of erpe wondry scholde and oure lord iknowe nouht,
Ac whanne þei him yseye drede sore scholde [and] ystourbled be of here þouht,
And of anguyses [as] of a womman þat in trauayle of childe were,
And defouly wþ wel hasty red þe schipes of Tars þere.
þis was ysed by þe kyng Heroudes þat in angwisch was and drede,
And defoulede alle þe schipes of Tars wþ wel hasty rede.

(ii.) þat þe kingus here of erpe . to gadere beþ ibrouȝt
And wondreden, whanne heo seie oure lord, . & destorbed were in here þouȝt,
And also imeued ek, . and muche drede hem nome þere
And sor, as of awommon þat in traual of child were,
And deolfoliche þe schipes of thars . wþþ wel hasti breþe.
þis was seid bi eroudes, . as it miȝte wel eþe,
þat destourbed was and imeued, . & in anguise & in drede
Defoulede þe schipes of thars . wþþ wel hasti rede.

(641-6) (695-702) p. 103

It may look as if NMC has accidentally omitted EN 697, in consequence got its couplets out of joint, and recovered by combining EN 700-701 into one line, 645. But EN's version is unusually repetitious (especially in 697 and 701), and includes an ungrammatical line (699), a break of sense in mid-couplet (699-700), and a patent fill-in ("as it miȝte wel eþe", 700). Lines 695-699 are in fact closely based on the Vulgate: "Quoniam ecce reges terrae congregati sunt: convenerunt in unum. Ipsi videntes sic admirati sunt, conturbati sunt, commoti sunt: Tremor apprehendit eos. Ibi dolores ut parturientis, In spiritu vehementi conteres naves Tharsis".

Evidently unsatisfied with NMC's version, the author of EN returned to the Psalter for a more authentic account, but nevertheless preferred to adapt NMC rather than make a new translation. Awkwardly,
the result was five lines instead of the four of NMC's freer rendering. In order to get the couplets running correctly the reviser consequently expanded NMC 645 by inserting "as it miȝte wel epe/þat destourbed was and imeued" (700-701).

(4) Earlier, when NMC ends its section on the Purification at l. 616, having treated only half of Simeon's prophecies and Anna not at all, it seems as though EN preserves the more original text, for it carries on (as we should expect), to deal with the remainder of the episode as told by Luke. Overall, however, EN discusses the prophecies (Luke ii. 34-35) not in the biblical order of its earlier translation (623-632), as would be natural if it were indeed the original, but in the order imposed by NMC which selects only "Ecce positus est hic in ruinam, et in resurrectionem multorum in Israel" and "Et tuam ipsius animam pertransibit gladius" (NMC 601-616, EN 633-644). As a result, EN returns in 645-646 to the intervening "et in signum, cui contradicetur", and in 647-652 passes to the final dictum, "ut revelentur ex multis cordibus cogitationes". It then adds fourteen lines on Anna and on the Holy Family's return home, paraphrased from Luke ii. 36-40. Again, therefore, we see the reviser filling out the existing poem by drawing more material from the Bible.

(5) My final example comes from the passage on Christ among the Doctors where, as often, in NMC continuous narrative is interspersed with, and in EN the gospel story followed by, additional circumstantial explanation. Much of the extra-biblical matter in EN (861-872) is selected from NMC and rearranged, 862-864 corresponding to NMC 792-794, and 867-870 to the much earlier NMC 765-768. But what is more, even the preceding gospel translation borrows from NMC, as can be seen by comparing EN 849-852:

Sone, quap oure ledi, . what hastow vs ido?  
Wel sori we þe habbeb isouȝt, . þi fader and ic also.  
What is þat, quap þis opur, . þat ze me habbeb isouȝt?  
Neste þe þt in mi fader þing . i moste nede be brouȝt?  

(849-52) p. 107

with NMC 785-786 and 789-790:

'Leue sone', oure leuedy seyde, 'why hastou þus [vs] ydo?  
[Lo], we habbeb þe wel sori ysouhte, þi fader and ich also!'  
(Nou clepede heo Iosep is fader þat þe Iewes ne vnderȝete  
So sone þat he were Godes sone, for is resouns so grete.)  
'Leue moder', þat child sede, 'why habbeb þe me ysouht?  
Nuteþ þe nouht þat in my fader þing ich mote be nede  
ybrouht?'  

(785-90)

From NMC's thirty-four lines on the episode (763-796), the author of EN has selected and rearranged eleven.
Of all the correspondences between the two poems there is only one place where NMC would seem to preserve the less original reading. In EN the lines:

Ac þo þe þre kinges comen to bedleem, . as þis child lay 
þe sterre bi cam al to nouȝt, . Þt neuer eft me hire ne say

(527-8) p. 98

are placed, as expected, at the end of the passage on the star's marvellous properties and before the Adoration of the Magi. But in all the NMC manuscripts they are positioned out of context as ll. 565-566, after the final departure of the Magi and before the Purification. The likely explanation is that finding these lines wrongly positioned in his exemplar the author of EN reinstated them with his customary craftsmanship in their obvious place, although the possibility that at this point he may have been working from a more correct version of NMC than has been preserved cannot be discounted.

In conclusion, it is interesting to look more generally at EN's make-up. Its use of gospel translations sharply distinguishes it from both NMC and CM. In MS Egerton 1993 it directly follows CM as though part of the same poem, but while "And telle we forþ, as we bigonne, : of iosep and of marie!" (192) must refer to CM, I think it unlikely that one author wrote both. They are associated in no other manuscript, and CM was, as we have seen, seemingly revised from NMC for a particular purpose. Further, although gospel material is not available for filling out the story of Mary's early life, in view of my previous discussion I do not think that the author of EN would have left the first 200 lines of NMC so little changed as they are in CM. As it is, in continuing CM he makes virtually no use of NMC for over 250 lines, and in so doing ignores the apocryphal stories of Mary and the maidens, Mary at the well, Joseph's dispute with the maidens, and the trial of Mary and Joseph. Most of EN's first 250 lines are in fact taken up with biblical versions of events treated by NMC either only very sketchily or not at all: the Conception of John the Baptist, the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Birth of John. And later NMC makes no mention of either the Shepherds or the Circumcision. The (b) version of the poem, as mentioned earlier (p. 105), remedies this state of affairs by lifting material from the Abridged Life of Christ. The author of EN prefers to correct the disproportionately legendary bias of NMC by inserting a stiffening of gospel translations. I have suggested elsewhere that NMC may have been composed as a legendary supplement for an audience already familiar with the Gospel story. I suggest here that its more comprehensive revisions may have been written for a wider audience in whom less knowledge could be assumed.
NOTES

1 Printed in The Early South-English Legendary, ed. Carl Horstmann, EETS, OS 87 (1887); The South English Legendary, ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, EETS, OS 235, 236, 244 (1956-59).


5 Printed as one continuous poem, "Geburt Jesu", in Altenglische Legenden, ed. Carl Horstmann (Paderborn, 1875), pp. 64-109.

6 I quote NMC from my edition (see fn. 3), which is based on MS Stowe 949, ff. 88v-100v.

7 I quote CM from the text in MS Ashmole 43 which, with that in MS Egerton 1993, is printed by Horstmann in Altenglische Legenden pp. 64-81, to which I refer by page. My line-numbering, however, follows the slightly more complete text in the unprinted MS Pepys 2344, pp. 353-358.

8 Evangelia apocrypha, ed. Constantius Tischendorf, editio altera, (Leipzig, 1876), pp. 56-57.


10 In Egerton 1993 (ff. 27r-30r) it is grouped with other temporale narratives before the saints' lives, but in a fourth manuscript, Bodley 779 (ff. 271v-272v), an extract beginning with Mary's Birth is placed after Birinus (5 December). A fifth, the non-SEL MS Laud Misc. 622, contains only CM's prologue (f. 71r-v).

11 MS Bodley 779, ff. 22r-23v, includes an extract on the Birth of Christ.

12 Tabular lists of Latin sources for the combined 'Concepcio Marie' (CM/EN) were attempted by F. Holthausen, "Zu AE. und ME. Dichtungen, II", Anglia, 14 (1892), 317-318, and by M.E. Wells, The Structure and Development of the South English Legendary (New York University Ph.D. thesis, 1939), p. 40. Both are over-pedantic. Holthausen did not even consider the Legenda aurea, and neither he nor Miss Wells took into account the possibility of a Middle English source.

13 Altenglische Legenden, pp. 81-109, where the lines of CM and EN are numbered continuously. In quotations from EN, page references are to this edition.

14 The South English Legendary, EETS, OS 236, pp. 589-590.

15 Pickering, fn. 3, pp. 41-2.