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BLICKLING HOMILY XIII RECONSIDERED

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Blickling Homily XIII is a confused and confusing apocryphal account of the assumption of the Virgin Mary.¹ It has, however, been admirably elucidated by Rudolph Willard in a series of articles, and he has shown that it is a combination of two Latin assumption apocrypha:² *Transitus C*, which contains a relatively brief account of Mary's assumption, and a second text, which was as yet undiscovered and which was, he suggested, related to two other extant apocrypha, *Transitus B* and *Transitus E*. The motive for combining these two texts was, he thought, the desire for a fuller account of the actual assumption. In this article, I should like to show what this undiscovered source for the second section of Blickling XIII is and to re-examine the nature of the two sources and the reasons for their combination in the Old English homily. The Old English text was clearly composed by someone barely competent in Latin and it may have been further confused by subsequent miscopying and alteration, but behind it is visible a complex and intriguing textual history, which repays detailed study. Before going on to consider the Old English text and its sources, however, a brief sketch of the history of Marian assumption apocrypha is necessary.

The last mention of Mary in the Bible is in the Acts of the Apostles i 14, where she is described praying with the apostles, and there is no reference to her death. By the end of the fourth century, however, the question of her death and the possibility of her assumption was being discussed: Epiphanius (*ob.* 403) declared that "I do not decide, nor say that she remained immortal; nor either will I vouch that she died".³ This uncertainty, though, was not a feature of the apocrypha and by the fifth century at the latest we begin to find apocryphal accounts of Mary's death and assumption. These narratives have an extremely complicated textual history, existing in many different languages and offering widely differing descriptions of the circumstances surrounding Mary's departure from the world. It seems likely that the earliest apocryphal narratives issued from the mention of Mary in the Acts of the Apostles and that they were deeply influenced by the apocryphal *Acta*, such as the *Acts of John*, which described the assumption of John the Evangelist.⁴ The apostles probably had an even larger role in the earliest accounts than they do in the surviving ones. Traces of this can be seen in *Transitus B*, for example, in the arguments between John and Peter on the question of the palm-branch and, especially, in the concluding section where the apostles are asked by Christ to decide on the fate of Mary's

body and Mary is ignored while attention is concentrated on their decision.

In the West there are two main textual families of Marian apocrypha. One of these, found in Syriac and Coptic, in a Greek version which is ascribed to John the Evangelist and in a Latin version known as *Transitus D*, describes how Mary's incorruptible body was borne to paradise and there, enveloped in a great light and emitting a sweet fragrance, was worshipped by choirs of saints while her soul was assumed into heaven.⁵ The second, known as the R family, originally affirmed the full resurrection of Mary's body, its reuniting with her soul and their joint assumption into heaven.⁶ In these texts Mary dies, her soul is taken to heaven and her body is laid in a sepulchre. Christ comes three days later and either takes the body with him to heaven, where it is reunited with the soul or, bringing with him Mary's soul, he reunites it with the body at the sepulchre before bearing Mary back with him to heaven. As the R family only is of importance in a consideration of the Anglo-Saxon texts, I shall concentrate on it here.

The European source of this group of texts appears to be a lost Greek text of the fifth century, closely related to the Syriac fragments published by Wright from fifth-century manuscripts.⁷ This lost source gave rise to a shortened version R, intended for liturgical reading,⁸ and to the rendering by John of Thessalonica (610-49) which exists in two versions, *T* and *T*¹.⁹ It was also the source of a Latin translation, now lost, which can be partly reconstructed.¹⁰ In turn this Latin text was the source of a shortened version A, composed some time between the seventh century and the ninth century, from which the manuscript dates.¹¹ The same lost translation was also the source of the narrative known to Gregory of Tours (c.540-94) of which he gives a summary in his *Miraculorum Libri*,¹² and of another lost version which seems to have been the ancestor of *Transitus C*, of the version in the Colbert manuscript published by Capelle,¹³ and of Pseudo-Melito (*Transitus B*). This last purports in its prologue to be an orthodox correction of an account given by the heretic Leucius and it exists in two versions, *Transitus B*¹ and *B*².¹⁴ Of these, *Transitus B*² is thought by its editor to be the older, as its treatment of the source is governed by more narrowly dogmatic motives than that of the more style-conscious *B*¹. *Transitus B*² probably dates from the fifth century, so it is evident that the apocryphal texts passed through several stages of revision within a very short period. The only other well-known apocryphon, *Transitus A*,¹⁵ was thought by Tischendorf to be the oldest text, as he knew neither *Transitus B*² nor *C*, but it is now recognized as a late composite account.

The ultimate source of this family has been shown by Wenger to have, without any doubt, asserted the corporal assumption of Mary.¹⁶ Many orthodox theologians, however, evinced great reserve in treating of the fate of Mary's body, being unwilling to accept an account which lacked biblical authority. Their reserve also exerted an influence over the transmitters of the apocryphal accounts, and several versions have widely varying endings, some of which describe only the assumption of Mary's soul and avoid an explicit statement

of whether or not her body and soul were reunited. John of Thessalonica, for example, followed his source as far as its account of the resurrection of her body, but stopped short of recounting this. Similarly, the Latin manuscripts of *Transitus C* vary greatly at this point. The version of *Transitus C* in the eleventh-century English manuscript, Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 25, for example, omits the description of the angels replacing Mary's soul in her body and ends "et sic iussit angelis tolli corpus Mariae, nescientibus apostolis ubi transtulerunt illud" ["and so he commanded the angels to raise up Mary's body, without the apostles knowing where they brought it"], followed by quotations from the liturgy for the feast of the assumption.¹⁷ Whoever was responsible for the transmission of this text, therefore, chose to leave the question of the resurrection of Mary's body completely open. The apocryphal texts as a group were handled with great freedom by scribes, seemingly being expanded and abbreviated at will.

The source of the first section of the Blickling homily is a version of *Transitus C* which does not correspond in all details to any one Latin version yet discovered. Its ending, it is clear, had been revised to eliminate the resurrection of Mary's body. The original ending of *Transitus C* reads:

Et adtulerunt angeli animam sanctae Mariae et
posuerunt eam in corpore ipsius, iubente domino
nostro Iesu Christo, et habebit gloriam ibi in
sempiterna saecula saeculorum.¹⁸

[And the angels carried Mary's soul and placed
it in her body, at the command of Our Lord Jesus
Christ, and she will have glory there for ever
and ever.]

In three of Wilmart's manuscripts of *Transitus C*, the G, M and P manuscripts, Mary's soul and body are not reunited, but her body is merely placed in paradise "et est ibi, glorificans deum cum omnibus electis suis"¹⁹ ["and it is there, glorifying God with all his elect"]. Taking into account the characteristic distortions of the Blickling translator, it is clear from the last sentence of the first section of the Blickling text that its source followed the ending in these three manuscripts:

Drihten bead þam wolcnum þæt hie eodan on neorxna
wang & þær asetton þære eadigan Marian sawle; &
on neorxna wange biþ a wuldor mid Gode & mid
eallum his gecorenum soþlice.²⁰

[The Lord commanded the clouds to go to paradise
and set down there the soul of the blessed Mary;
and truly in paradise there is always glory with
God and with all his chosen ones.]

As well as failing to affirm the full corporal assumption in its conclusion, the source of the first part of Blickling XIII shows signs of having been revised throughout to eliminate references to the assumption of Mary's body and these revisions can

almost all be paralleled in some of Wilmart's manuscripts. In the opening paragraph of the Old English, for example, the angel announces to Mary:

Aris þu Maria & onfoh þissum palmtwige þe ic þe nu brohte, for þan þu bist soþlice ær þrim dagum genumen of þinum lichoman, & ealle drihtnes apostolas beop sende þe to bebyrgenne.²¹

[Arise, Mary, and receive this palm-branch which I have now brought you, because, truly, before three days have passed you will be taken from the body and all the apostles of the Lord will be sent to bury you.]

Transitus C reads here:

Maria, exsurge et accipe palmam quam nunc tibi detuli, quoniam post tres dies adsumenda es. Et ecce ego mittam omnes apostolos ad te sepeliendam, ut uideant gloriam tuam quam acceptura es.²²

[Mary, rise up and receive the palm which I have now brought you, since you are to be assumed after three days. And behold I shall send all the apostles to bury you, that they may see your glory which you are about to receive.]

"Adsumenda" and the final clause of the Latin together imply the assumption of Mary's body and soul, but the final clause is missing from one of Wilmart's ninth-century manuscripts, G. When Mary shows John her preparations for her death, the Old English again has nothing to correspond to the comment that the angel "eius adsumptionem ei prae-dixerat"²³ ["had foretold her assumption to him"], also missing from two of Wilmart's manuscripts, M and T, but has instead "heo him ateowde ealle hire medomnesse", which is difficult to explain in the context (Willard tentatively suggests "she showed him all her things fitting for the occasion").²⁴ The source followed by the Blickling translator had, therefore, been revised in its ending and in some details to avoid an affirmation of Mary's corporal assumption. This revision was not perfect; Christ's speech to Mary's body, after he has taken her soul, reassures it that it will not be abandoned. Although this is not completely incompatible with the revised ending, it is obviously better suited to the original conclusion of *Transitus C*.

The manuscript followed by the Old English translator had also been abridged, a feature not unusual in manuscripts intended for liturgical use. When, for example, Mary calls together her relations and announces to them her coming death, she makes, in the Latin version, a long speech about the angels of good and evil.²⁵ This speech is omitted from the Old English, and it must already have been missing from the source which the translator was following, as it is also omitted from two of Wilmart's manuscripts, F and G. Similarly, when Christ has announced to Peter that he will be with him to the end of the world, Peter makes another lengthy speech on

the theme of true virginity and this is omitted completely from the Old English, the omission corresponding to that in four of Wilmart's manuscripts, B, G, P and R.²⁶ It is also lacking in the version of *Transitus C* in Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 25, which was not collated by Wilmart. Of all the Latin manuscripts, Wilmart's G, St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 732, from the ninth century, seems to be the closest to the Blickling homily, although the source of the Old English text was clearly different in some details.

The first part of Blickling XIII, then, followed this abridged, variant version of *Transitus C*, in which Mary's body, having been transferred to paradise, remained separate from her soul, which is assumed into heaven. To this was added part of another apocryphon, *Transitus B*, in which the corporal assumption is described in great detail. It is possible that the Old English author found the two texts already joined in his source. The version of the assumption narrative in the Colbert manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 2672), for example, combines the beginning and end of *Transitus B* with another related version. The clumsy manner in which the two texts are joined in Blickling XIII suggests, however, that the Old English author was responsible: the lack of skill with which the transition from one text to another is managed is very much in keeping with the many other faults of the homily. In the added text the question of Mary's body is given considerable prominence: Christ asks the apostles what should befall it and, when they request its resurrection, he addresses it directly, raising it up as "mines wuldres eardung"²⁷ ["dwelling of my glory"]. It is evident from the Old English text that the question of Mary's corporal assumption preoccupied the translator and it was this, I believe, which led him to add part of *Transitus B* on to his main source, which had omitted the resurrection of Mary's body. The motive behind the addition seems to have been the desire to reaffirm the assumption of the resurrected body and soul, rather than the desire for greater narrative fullness, as Willard suggested.²⁸

Willard was the first to realize the composite nature of the Blickling text, but when he wrote only Tischendorf's text of *Transitus B* was available. In order to explain the source of the second part of the Blickling homily, therefore, Willard had to draw on Tischendorf's text and on what he termed *Transitus E*, a variant of *Transitus B* found in Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS Lat. 58, as well as noting some parallels with the Old English assumption narrative in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 41.²⁹ He concluded that the Blickling translator either used two sources for the second part of the narrative (*Transitus B* and *E*) or that he had access to a text not yet fully identified. The publication of a second version of *Transitus B*, namely *B*², by Haibach-Reinisch, allows us to see that the latter is the case, and it is clear from a comparison with Blickling XIII that this is the source for the second part of the homily. *Transitus B*² is also the source for the assumption homily in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 41, which is a very faithful translation from the Latin.

The Blickling assumption text has few virtues as a translation and Willard attributes its garbled nature to a faulty Latin original,

the poor Latinity of the translator and later efforts at improvement by an emendator (who, however, remains conjectural). He has discussed the various sections of the text in a series of articles: the page missing from the Blickling manuscript and supplied from the text of the same homily in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 198;³⁰ the passage in which John describes how he was brought to Jerusalem;³¹ the final part of the assumption narrative, which is translated from *Transitus B*;³² and the concluding translation of the *Magnificat*.³³ In the remainder of this article I should like first to supplement Willard's work on the sources of the homily and then to discuss in particular the section translated from *Transitus B*², as much of what Willard had to say about this part of the text is, understandably, incorrect.

The Old English version opens with an account of the angel's appearance to Mary, after which she climbs Mount Olivet with a palm-branch which the angel brought to her. The description does not correspond to anything in Wilmart's manuscripts of *Transitus C*, but the text used by the Old English author must have had something similar to the reading at the parallel point in *Transitus B*², or he himself may have supplied it from the version of *Transitus B*² which he used later in the homily:

Palma autem illa fulgebat nimia luce; et erat quidem
virga illius viriditati consimilis, sed folia illius
ut stella matutina radio claritatis fulgebant.³⁴

[For that palm was shining with a very great light;
and indeed the branch of it was likewise green, but
its leaves shone like the morning star with a ray
of brightness.]

þæt wæs soþlice swiþe scinende palmtwig & hit wæs
þa swa leoht swa se mergenlica steorra, þe heo þær
onfeng of þæs engles handa.³⁵

[That was truly a very shining palm-branch which
she received from the angel's hand and it was then
as bright as the morning star.]

In the next sentence, the translator has understandably experienced considerable difficulty with one of the confused and cryptic vestiges of older detail preserved in *Transitus C*. In the source of *Transitus C* the trees on Mount Olivet bow to Mary and this episode is preserved in John of Thessalonica's assumption homily:

Et quand elle fut sur le mont, celui-ci exulta tout
entier avec les arbres qui s'y trouvaient, en telle
sorte que les arbres inclinaient leur cime et
adoraient.³⁶

[And when she was on the mountain, it rejoiced with
all the trees which were on it, in that the trees
bowed down their tops and adored.]

In *Transitus C* there is merely a relic of this: "exultauit Maria cum magno gaudio, una cum omnibus qui ibidem erant"³⁷ ["Mary exulted with

great joy, together with all who were in the same place"]. The Old English translator has connected the second clause of this sentence with the next sentence ("Angelus autem qui uenerat ad eam ascendit in caelis cum magno lumine" ["But the angel who had come to her ascended into the heavens with a great light"]), thus creating an audience not present in the Latin: "& ealle þa þe þær wæron hie gesawon þæt se engel þe ær com to hire astah on heofenas mid myclum leohte"³⁸ ["And all who were there saw that the angel who had previously come to her ascended into the heavens with a great light"]. In the source Mary, having returned to her house, then prays alone to God, but the translator converts this into a dialogue; as Willard observes:

in the Blickling Homilies . . . whenever there is a long speech and particularly if this speech contains a quotation from something said previously, the translator is sure to lose his way, to re-interpret the matter, and to make a conversation or narrative account out of direct speech.³⁹

In her prayer Mary quotes the promise made to her by Christ and this is attributed in the Old English to the angel, although he has just been shown departing to heaven.

The Old English continues with the arrival of John, and Mary's speech to him, but a page is missing from the Blickling manuscript at this point. Willard has printed the CCC 198 text and discussed it in detail, reconstructing from Wilmart's variants the type of reading which must have been in the translator's source, and showing how he confounded his initial confusion on the meaning of this passage.⁴⁰ The translator, here and elsewhere, totally fails to recognize biblical allusions, such as that to the crucifixion in this sentence. Failures in comprehension, however, do not deter him from attempting to make some sense out of each clause in the source, even if this be the opposite sense to that of the Latin.

Such confusions are typical of the entire Old English homily, but some of the translator's misunderstandings are revealing about his own attitude towards the text. When, for example, the apostles are conveyed by clouds to Mary's home, "uidentes se inuicem, admirantes salutauerunt"⁴¹ ["seeing each other, they greeted each other in surprise"], but the translator has confused the syntax and has transformed this into: "hie gesawon be him tweonum þæt heo wæs gewuldrod & hie þa haletton on hie"⁴² ["then they saw amongst themselves(?) that she was glorified and they greeted her"]. As the apostles have not yet seen Mary, this is nonsense, but the translator obviously already knew the outline of the narrative and was eager to come to what for him must have been the main point, Mary's glorification. Again, John's account of how he was brought to Mary's house from where he had been preaching is turned into narrative and speeches by other characters, and the translator seems to have thought that "me" and "me hic" were abbreviations for "Maria" and "Michahel".⁴³ John's description,

Subito descendit nubes in eodem loco ubi erant

congregati populi audientes uerbum dei. Subito circumdedit me nubes [omitted in MSS F, G, M and I] et rapuit me de medio eorum, uidentibus omnibus qui ibidem erant, et adtulit me hic, et statim percussi ostium . . .⁴⁴

[Suddenly a cloud descended in that same place where the people were assembled, listening to the word of God. Suddenly a cloud enclosed me and seized me from their midst, in the sight of all who were there, and brought me here, and immediately I struck the door. . .]

seems to have been understood as the beginning of the assumption proper, as the Old English reads:

þa semninga astag mycel wolcen on þa ilcan stowe on þære þe we wæron gesamnode, þær we geherdan Godes word, & þa sǣmninga þa embsealdon ealle þa apostolas þa halgan Marian, & hie gegripan on hire middel. & þa gesawon hie & ealle þa þe þær wæron, þæt se eadiga Michael genam & þa slog on þæs huses duru.⁴⁵

[And then suddenly a great cloud descended in that same place in which we were gathered, where we heard the word of God, and then suddenly all the apostles surrounded the holy Mary and they gripped her waist. And they, and all who were there, saw that the blessed Michael brought and then struck on the door of the house.]

On the next page, Mary asks the apostles to tell her how they were brought to her and, in the Latin,

Sic omnes apostoli exposuerunt quemadmodum unusquisque de locis suis ubi praedicabant diuina praeceptione fuerunt rapti et ibidem sunt depositi.⁴⁶

[So all the apostles explained how every single one had been snatched by divine precept from the places where they were preaching and were set down in that place.]

In the Old English, this becomes:

swa anra gehwylc þara apostola biþ geseted to his synderlicre stowe þæt he bodige his godcundnesse & hire geeacnunge. & þa apostolas tugon hie up & hie gesetton on þam fægran neorxna wange.⁴⁷
[and so each of the apostles is appointed to his separate place that he may proclaim his divinity and her conception. And the apostles pulled her up and placed her in the beautiful paradise.]

The translator has here understood "exposuerunt" literally rather than figuratively, "bodige" is obviously "praedicabant", and

"diuina", instead of being taken as an adjective, becomes "godcundnesse" and is preceded by a "his" which must refer to Christ. "Praeceptione" seems to have been confused with "conceptione", resulting in "hire geeacnung". In the last clause the translator perhaps took "ibidem" as a reference back to his "godcundnesse" and introduced paradise to make explicit the idea that the apostles placed Mary with Christ. On each of these occasions the translator seems to have been misled partly by his own desire to relate the actual assumption.

When Christ comes to claim Mary's soul, there is another vestige of an older text which had been preserved in *Transitus C* and which obviously confused the translator. In *Transitus C* Mary's soul is described as "exceptis omnibus membris"⁴⁸ ["with no sign of her limbs"], a phrase which is explicable only by reference to other texts of the same family. These show that what is meant is that Mary's soul had a human form but without sexual differentiation, as in, for example, John of Thessalonica:

Elle était complète, avec tous les membres humains, mais n'ayant figure ni d'homme ni de femme, n'ayant rien autre que ressemblance du corps entier, avec un éclat sept fois égal à celui du soleil.⁴⁹
 [She was entire, with all human limbs, but having the shape neither of a man nor of a woman, having nothing but a resemblance to the entire body, with a brilliance seven times brighter than the sun.]

The Old English translator has transferred the description to Michael and has rendered the clause "mid ealra his leoma eapmodnesse"⁵⁰ ["with the humility of all his limbs"].

After the account of the Jews' attempt to steal it, the taking of Mary's body is briefly described in *Transitus C*. It is altered in the Blickling text to accommodate the second assumption narrative and Mary's soul is taken for the second time. The translator also has not realized that "ipsi suscepti sunt in nubibus"⁵¹ ["they are received into the clouds"] refers to the apostles being taken up into the clouds and this, too, becomes a repetition of the reception of Mary's soul: "ond þonne þære sawle onfeng on wolcnum"⁵² ["and then he received the soul into the clouds"].

Willard has examined the rest of the homily, which is based on *Transitus B*, in great detail, but without a knowledge of *Transitus B*².⁵³ The Old English text is in the main a faithful translation of *Transitus B*², with the usual limitations of this homily. Willard's reliance on *Transitus B*¹ and *Transitus E* occasionally causes him to accuse the translator unjustly: for example, "Ær ic was sendeð fram minum Fæder to þam þæt ic sceolde gefyllan mine þa halgan þrowunge"⁵⁴ ["Previously I was sent by my father in order that I might fulfil my holy passion"] is not a disastrous attempt to render "antequam ascenderem ad patrem meum" ["before I could ascend to my father"], but a mediocre effort at "antequam ego missum a Patre passionis sacramenta complerem"⁵⁵ ["before I, having been sent from the father, fulfilled the sacrament of the passion"].

The translator's singular incapacity in biblical matters is further evident in his bewildered rendering of a passage ultimately dependent on Matthew xix 28, and no reader could guess from the Old English that Christ was impressing on the apostles the power with which he had endowed them.⁵⁶

Christ then asks the apostles what he should do with Mary's body and their reply is clearly translated, although the fact that the translator did not recognize that the last clause "tecum eam deduceres laetantem in caelum"⁵⁷ ["you will lead her with you rejoicing into heaven"] was part of the apostles' speech means that they request only Mary's resurrection, not her assumption. The translator thought instead that it was a description of Christ's emotions and rendered it: "& þa raþe wæs Drihten blissiende on heofenas"⁵⁸ ["and immediately the Lord rejoiced in the heavens"]. Willard attempted to reconstruct the next sentence from the Latin sources known to him, but it is clearly (apart from the addition of Gabriel) a translation of *Transitus B*²:

Statimque iubente Domino accedens Michael archangelus,
presentavit animam sanctae Mariae coram Domino.⁵⁹
[Immediately approaching at the command of the Lord,
Michael the archangel presented the soul of St Mary
before God.]

þa hraþe beað Drihten Gabriele þæm heahengle þæt he
wylede þone stan fram þære byrgenne duru. Ond þa
Michael se heahengel geondweardode þære eadigan
Marian sawle beforan Drihtne.⁶⁰

[And then immediately the Lord commanded Gabriel
the archangel to roll away the stone from the door
of the sepulchre. And then the archangel Michael
presented the soul of the blessed Mary before God.]

Christ's speech to Mary is correctly translated, apart from a mis-reading of *coitum* as *cor tuum*:

Surge, proxima mea, columba mea, tabernaculum
gloriae, vasculum vitae, templum caeleste; et
dum non sensisti labem delicti per coitum, non
patiaris resolutionem corporis in sepulchro.⁶¹
[Arise, my nearest one, my dove, tabernacle of
glory, vessel of life, heavenly temple; and since
you have never experienced a blemish of offence
through coition, you will not suffer the dis-
solution of the body in the grave.]

Aris þu, min seo nehste & min culufre & mines
wuldres eardung, & forþon þe þu eart lifes fat,
& þu eart þæt heofenlice templ, & næron nænige
leathras gefylde on þinre heortan, & þu ne þrowast
nænige þrowunge on þinum lichoman.⁶²
[Arise, my nearest one and my dove and tabernacle
of my glory, and because you are the vessel of life

and you are the heavenly temple and no vices were felt(?) in your heart, and you will endure no suffering in your body.]

The translator has again muddled Mary's speech of thanks:

Non ego condignas gratias possum rependere tibi, omnipotens Domine, quem totus mundus plene non praeualet laudare; et tamen sit nomen tuum, Deus Israel, benedictum et superexaltatum cum Patre et Spiritu Sancto in saecula.⁶³

[I cannot pay back to you the very worthy favours, omnipotent God, whom all the world does not suffice to praise fully and yet may your name, God of Israel, be blessed and exalted with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.]

Min Drihten, ne mæg ic ealle þa gife forþbringan þe þu me forgeafe for þinum naman, & hweþre hi ne magon ealle þine bletsunge gefyllan. & þu eart Israhela God & þu eart ahafen mid þinum Fæder & mid þinum þy Halgan Gaste on worlða world.⁶⁴

[My Lord, I cannot produce all the gifts which you gave me in (?) your name and nevertheless they cannot equal the sum of (?) all your blessings. And you are the God of Israel and you are exalted with your Father and with your Holy Spirit for ever and ever.]

In the next sentence, it is not, however, necessary to postulate confusion between *recessit* and *recepit*, as Willard does,⁶⁵ to explain "þa ahof Drihten hie up" ["then the Lord raised her up"], since this translates "Elevans eam" ["raising her"], not "dominus recessit" ["the Lord departed"]. Again, "& Drihten cwæp to þæm englum, 'Singað nu & onfop minre meder on neorxna wonge'"⁶⁶ ["and the Lord said to the angels 'Sing now and receive my mother into paradise'"] may not be a particularly able rendering of "Et haec dicens Dominus, cum canentibus angelis et matre sua receptus est in paradiso"⁶⁷ ["And saying this the Lord, with angels singing and together with his mother, was received into paradise"], but it corresponds more closely to this than to the equivalent passage in *Transitus B*¹. The translator's already evident unfortunate inability to render "apostoli autem in virtute Christi rapti in nubibus, depositi sunt unusquisque in sorte praedicationis suae"⁶⁸ ["but the apostles, having been seized up into the clouds by the power of Christ, were put down, each in the place allotted for his preaching"] results in Mary being yet again assumed, or rather impelled, into heaven:

þa apostolas on heora mægene hofan Marian lichoman up mid wolcnum & hine þa asetton on neorxna wanges gefean.⁶⁹

[and the apostles in their might raised up the body of Mary with the clouds and set it in the joys of

paradise.]

The homily ends with a translation of the *Magnificat*, "somewhat farsed by blending with the Beatitudes",⁷⁰ which has no parallel in the sources.

In Blickling XIII, then, we have a combination of two separate assumption apocrypha, clumsily carried out. The motive behind the joining seems to have been the wish to assert the full resurrection and assumption of the Virgin's body. In thus combining the two works, the Blickling translator effectively disguised the important contrast between his version of *Transitus C*, which had been carefully and prudently modified to avoid asserting the resurrection of Mary's body, and *Transitus B²*, which fully described that event. The same interest in the assumption is evident in some of the mistakes in the Old English text, which spring from the translator's eagerness to describe the assumption, which he anticipates and repeats. His stance on what was, in this period, a much-debated theological issue is particularly interesting as an example of a clear contrast to the anti-apocryphal warnings of such orthodox theologians as Ælfric.⁷¹

NOTES

- 1 *The Blickling Homilies*, ed. R. Morris, EETS OS 58, 63, 73 (1874-80) pp.136-59.
- 2 "On Blickling Homily XIII: the Assumption of the Virgin", *RES* 12 (1936) pp.1-17; "The two accounts of the Assumption in Blickling Homily XIII", *RES* 14 (1938) pp.1-19.
- 3 Translated in T. Livius, *The Blessed Virgin in the Fathers of the First Six Centuries* (London, 1893) p.343.
- 4 See B. Capelle, "La tradition orientale de l'assomption d'après un ouvrage récent", *Revue Bénédictine* 40 (1958) pp.173-86.
- 5 For a translation of this Greek text, see *The Apocryphal New Testament*, ed. M.R. James (Oxford, 1924) pp.201-9. The Latin *Transitus D* is in *Analecta Reginensia*, ed. A. Wilmart, *Studi e Testi* 59 (1933) pp.357-62.
- 6 For this textual family, see especially A. Wenger, *L'Assomption de la Très Sainte Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du vi^e au x^e siècle*, *Archives de l'Orient Chrétien* 5 (Paris, 1955).
- 7 W. Wright, *Contributions to the Apocryphal Literature of the New Testament* (London, 1865).
- 8 Summarized by Wenger, *L'Assomption de la Très Sainte Vierge*, pp.31-58.
- 9 *Iohannis Archiepiscopus Thessalonicensis sermo de dormitione b. Mariae Virginis*, ed. M. Jugie, *Patrologia Orientalis* 19 (Paris, 1926) pp.375-431.
- 10 This Latin translation can be reconstructed from the variants in the M manuscript of *Transitus C*, collated by Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, pp. 325-57.
- 11 Ed. Wenger, *L'Assomption de la Très Sainte Vierge*, pp.245-56.
- 12 Gregory of Tours, *Miraculorum Libri*, ed. J.P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 71 (Paris, 1849) col. 708.
- 13 B. Capelle, "Vestiges grecs et latins d'un antique 'Transitus de la Vierge'", *Analecta Bollandiana* 67 (1949) pp.21-48.
- 14 *Transitus B¹* has been edited by C. Tischendorf, *Apocalypses Apocryphae* (Leipzig, 1866) pp.124-36, and *Transitus B²* by M. Haibach-Reinisch, *Ein neuer "Transitus Mariae" des Pseudo-Melito* (Rome, 1962).
- 15 Ed. Tischendorf, *Apocalypses Apocryphae*, pp.113-23.
- 16 Wenger, *L'Assomption de la Très Sainte Vierge*, p.66.
- 17 Quoted by H. Barré, *Les Homéliers Carolingiens de l'Ecole d'Auxerre*, *Studi e Testi* 225 (Rome, 1962) p.22. Translations from Latin are mine unless otherwise stated.

- 18 Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, ch.50.
- 19 Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, ch.50.
- 20 Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.155. Translations from Old English are again mine throughout.
- 21 Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.137.
- 22 Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, ch.1.
- 23 Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, ch.9.
- 24 Willard, "On Blickling Homily XIII: the Assumption of the Virgin", p.10. See p.14 for an attempt to explain "medomnesse".
- 25 Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, ch.5.
- 26 Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, ch.21.
- 27 Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.157.
- 28 Willard, "The two accounts of the Assumption in Blickling Homily XIII", p.5.
- 29 Willard, "The two accounts of the Assumption in Blickling Homily XIII".
- 30 Willard, "On Blickling Homily XIII: the Assumption of the Virgin".
- 31 "La Ville d'Agathe? Note sur le *Transitus Mariae C*", *Echos d'Orient* 38 (1939) pp.346-54.
- 32 Willard, "The two accounts of the Assumption in Blickling Homily XIII".
- 33 "An Old English Magnificat", *Studies in English* (University of Texas, 1940) pp.5-28.
- 34 Haibach-Reinisch, *Ein neuer "Transitus Mariae"*, p.68.
- 35 Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.137.
- 36 Quoted and translated into French by Capelle, "La tradition orientale de l'Assomption", p.25.
- 37 Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, ch.3.
- 38 Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.139.
- 39 "The Testament of Mary: the Irish account of the death of the Virgin", *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 9 (1937) p.347.
- 40 "On Blickling Homily XIII: the Assumption of the Virgin", pp.11-17.

- ⁴¹ Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, ch.11.
- ⁴² Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.139.
- ⁴³ Willard, "La Ville d'Agathe? Note sur le *Transitus Mariae C*", p.350; this seems a more probable explanation of what lies behind the Old English text than that offered by M. Kay Nellis, "Misplaced passages in 'Blickling Homily XIII'", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 81 (1980) pp.399-402, which involves postulating that the original homilist left gaps in the text, together with rough drafts of the missing passages, which were then wrongly inserted by a reviser.
- ⁴⁴ Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, ch.14.
- ⁴⁵ Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.141.
- ⁴⁶ Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, ch.16.
- ⁴⁷ Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.143.
- ⁴⁸ Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, ch.26.
- ⁴⁹ Capelle, "La tradition orientale de l'Assomption", p.27.
- ⁵⁰ Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.147.
- ⁵¹ Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, ch.49.
- ⁵² Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.155.
- ⁵³ "The two accounts of the Assumption in Blickling Homily XIII".
- ⁵⁴ Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.155.
- ⁵⁵ Haibach-Reinisch, *Ein neuer "Transitus Mariae"*, p.84.
- ⁵⁶ Willard, "The two accounts of the Assumption in Blickling Homily XIII", p.12, n.6.
- ⁵⁷ Haibach-Reinisch, *Ein neuer "Transitus Mariae"*, p.85.
- ⁵⁸ Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.157.
- ⁵⁹ Haibach-Reinisch, *Ein neuer "Transitus Mariae"*, p.85.
- ⁶⁰ Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.157.
- ⁶¹ Haibach-Reinisch, *Ein neuer "Transitus Mariae"*, pp.85-6.
- ⁶² Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.157.
- ⁶³ Haibach-Reinisch, *Ein neuer "Transitus Mariae"*, p.86.

- 64 Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.157.
- 65 "The two accounts of the Assumption in Blickling Homily XIII", p.18, n.1.
- 66 Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.157.
- 67 Haibach-Reinisch, *Ein neuer "Transitus Mariae"*, p.87.
- 68 Haibach-Reinisch, *Ein neuer "Transitus Mariae"*, p.87.
- 69 Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, p.157.
- 70 Willard, "An Old English Magnificat", p.5.
- 71 See, for example, the Assumption homilies in *Catholic Homilies I and II: The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. B. Thorpe (London, 1844) I, pp.436-55; *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The Second Series. Text*, ed. M. Godden, EETS SS 5 (1979) pp.255-9.