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A Key to Ælfric's Standard Old English

Mechthild Gretsch

Most Anglo-Saxon scholars are agreed that a written standard in the vernacular, standardized in the representation of inflexional endings and stressed vowels on the basis of the Late West Saxon dialect, came into existence in the late tenth century and that, though Ælfric was one of the principal proponents of 'Standard Old English', this type of standard was pervasive in all sorts of texts throughout the eleventh century and from all regions of England.¹ For a study of Ælfric's language and style, his two series of *Catholic Homilies* have always taken pride of place among his extensive writings: they constitute a very large text corpus;² they have been available in print for more than 150 years, and, most importantly, in an edition based on a very reliable manuscript;³ and we may assume that Ælfric revised the text of his homilies over a considerable number of years, and that such revisions included details of language and style. The implication of this last point is that Ælfric remained in control over the production of at least some of the manuscripts of the *Catholic Homilies*, as opposed to his other major collection, the *Lives of Saints*, over which he seems to have lost control astonishingly soon.⁴

Study of the *Catholic Homilies* in all their aspects took a quantum leap forward with the completion, in 2000, of the three-volume edition by Peter Clemoes and Malcolm Godden, which includes extensive introductions to the texts of the two series and a massive commentary volume.⁵ For an analysis of Ælfric's linguistic usage, which is my concern here, it is, for example, of utmost importance that such investigation can now be undertaken with the help of the meticulously detailed information on the textual relationships of the manuscripts which is provided in the introductions to the two text volumes. This information, obtained from a full collation of all the manuscripts by the two editors, enables us for the first time to identify with some confidence manuscripts that bear the stamp of authorial revisions, and to distinguish more clearly than ever the various stages

of such revisions.⁶ Nevertheless, it has to be borne in mind that (as always in the textcritical evaluation of possible authorial revisions of linguistic details) it may be difficult to distinguish between alterations for which Ælfric was responsible and those made by scribes and correctors – a problem of which one of the editors, Malcolm Godden, has reminded us in a recent article.⁷

In the preface to his Commentary volume, Godden also remarks that an analysis of the language of the text was already excluded from the original plan of the edition, for various reasons, not least because 'another lengthy volume, and many more years would be needed to do justice to the language'⁸. But, in spite of this modest disclaimer, much valuable information on the language can be found in the edition: in the glossary of the Commentary volume, which records the number of attestations and most of the spelling variants of a given lemma, as they occur in the two base manuscripts, A and K; and in the text volumes, which contain lengthy sections on the nature of Ælfric's revisions, providing many examples for them.⁹ It should also be noted that important observations on the language of Ælfric's supplementary homilies, as transmitted in eleventh- and twelfth-century manuscripts (where they are often combined with items from the *Catholic Homilies*), are found in John Pope's introduction to his edition of these homilies.¹⁰

What is not discussed in any detail in the Clemoes-Godden edition (nor in Pope's edition), is the representation in the manuscripts of stressed vowels and inflexional morphology, and how we are to evaluate the manuscript evidence in this respect. Also, for the sake of the readability of the apparatus criticus, variant forms belonging to these categories are not normally recorded there. But as a full collation of all the homilies underlies the new edition, complete inventories of such variant readings do exist. They exist in the form of handwritten dossiers, compiled many years ago by Peter Clemoes for *CH I* and Malcolm Godden for *CH II*, and meticulously recording for each homily every variant reading that is found in the manuscripts. We at Göttingen are deeply grateful to Malcolm Godden for making available for our project on Standard Old English a considerable number of these precious dossiers, despite the rather brittle state they are in.¹¹

At present, we are in the course of collecting from these dossiers, and classifying, the material pertaining to inflexional morphology. In a first stage all variants in a given homily concerning the inflexion of nouns, adjectives, pronouns and verbs are extracted and identified, e.g. for nouns, case, gender and declension is supplied, and verbs are classified according to person, number, mood, tense and

verb class. In a second stage, forms in the same homily for which no variants exist are extracted and classified in the same fashion. By eventually comparing the two sets of data, it is hoped that relevant information may be gleaned on Ælfric's usage with regard to inflexional morphology and on its reception by eleventh-century scribes. How standardized and how stable was Ælfric's spelling of the inflexional endings of nouns, adjectives and verbs, and of pronouns and their cases? Can he be shown to have revised his spellings in the course of his work on the *Catholic Homilies*? How faithfully did the scribes adhere to his spellings? Are scribal variants (if they may be identified as such, in distinction to authorial revisions) of a haphazard nature or are patterns beginning to emerge, patterns which might indicate that Ælfric's system of spelling was being tentatively replaced by a different system or systems? In what follows, I shall briefly explore how such questions might be answered. For this I shall concentrate on an analysis of one of the homilies, randomly selected to serve as a specimen for an evaluation of the data. Such evaluation would be the third stage in our work with the Clemons-Godden dossiers. The preliminary character of an analysis based on only one of the homilies scarcely needs stressing. But I believe that even this small corpus will allow us to glimpse at least some tentative answers to the aforementioned questions – answers which would then have to be confirmed by a large-scale evaluation of the collected data.¹²

The homily chosen for my analysis is *CH* I.23 'Dominica secunda post pentecosten'.¹³ It is preserved in the following late-tenth- to twelfth-century manuscripts:¹⁴

- A London, BL, Royal 7 C. XII (preserves text only up to l. 145; ll. 146-210 (end) are lost)
- B Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343
- C Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303
- D Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 340 and 342
- E Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 198
- F Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 162
- H London, BL, Cotton Vitellius C. v
- K Cambridge, University Library, Gg. 3. 28
- Q Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 188
- U Cambridge, Trinity College B. 15. 34

The textual relationships of these manuscripts and the stage of authorial revision to which they belong have been comprehensively discussed by Clemoes and Godden in their introductions, and there is no need to rehearse their arguments and conclusions here.¹⁵ For our purpose, where the degree of closeness of a manuscript to Ælfric's scriptorium matters, it is sufficient to recall that A (containing the First Series only) is thought to be a fair copy of Ælfric's draft of the First Series, made before he sent the Series to Archbishop Sigeric.¹⁶ A has about one thousand alterations, many of them pertaining to linguistic details. A substantial number of these were apparently made by Ælfric himself.¹⁷ DEF represent the stage of a first authorial revision of the First Series, as it was sent to the archbishop. Interestingly, DEF are also thought to represent a textual tradition which developed outside Ælfric's influence, in the Southeast.¹⁸ K (the only manuscript containing a complete set of the two series) is the best representative of the second stage of authorial revisions of the First Series. As Clemoes put it: 'We may think of this codex, with its highly pure and accurate text, as representing the definitive type of the homiletic products of Ælfric's scriptorium during a period after Sigeric had been sent his copy of each of the Series and before Ælfric had composed further homilies'¹⁹. H (in the part which contains *CH* I.23) belongs to the same stage of revision as K,²⁰ and Q and U are witnesses to later stages of authorial revision, characterized by augmentation and rearrangement of the texts.²¹ Finally, it should be noted that we have excluded from the collection of data for our project the twelfth-century manuscripts B and C, since it is obvious from the drastically increased number of variants they present that, by the twelfth century, standardization was beginning to dissolve.

INFLEXIONAL MORPHOLOGY IN CH I.23

Nouns

I begin my specimen survey with an analysis of the inflexions of nouns.

(i) a-declension

For the fifty occurrences of masculine nouns of this declension, no variants can be found in any of the manuscripts. The endings of the various cases are all in accordance with the regular endings as recorded in Old English grammars. Among the fifty-nine occurrences of neuter nouns of the a-declension, only one

form has a textual variant: the acc. pl. of *bebod* is *beboda* in AKHQDU, but *bebodu* in EF. Originally, the nom. and acc. pl. of two-syllable neuter nouns ended in *-u* or took no ending.²² However, for both cases, *-a* appears to have been Ælfric's regular ending.²³ This may be confirmed here, not only by A and K presenting this ending, but also by the nom. pl. *tintrega*, occurring in all manuscripts. All the other attestations of neuter nouns show the regular endings as recorded in the grammars.

(ii) *ō-declension*

There are ninety-nine attestations of feminine nouns belonging to the *ō*-declension, among which textual variants are found somewhat more frequently. All the variants are, however, restricted to nouns with three suffixes: 1. *-ung*, 2. *-ðu*, *-ð*, *-t* (Germ. **-iþo*), 3. *-nys*. Interestingly, these are precisely the nouns within the *ō*-declension for which the grammars record the greatest number of variation in their inflexional endings.²⁴

The nouns with *-ung* (nineteen attestations) present two forms with variants:

acc. sg. *gaffetunge* AKHDEF; *gaffetunga* QU

acc. pl. *bodunga* AKHQ; *bodunge* DEFU

In both cases A and K preserve the regular West Saxon ending.²⁵

The forms with the suffix Germ. **-iþo* occur eighteen times, with variants on five occasions:

nom. sg. *uncyst* AKHQDEF; (the regular form); *uncyste* U

mægenleast KHQDEFU; *mægenleaste* A

Here A, the manuscript which was corrected by Ælfric himself presents an irregular ending.

gen. sg. *yrmðe* AKHQDFU (the regular form); *yrmða* E²⁶

acc. sg. *yrmðe* KHQEU (A deficient here); *yrmðe* altered to

yrmða D, *yrmða* F

Note that for the further four occurrences of the acc. sg. of this noun *all* the manuscripts have correct *yrmðe*.

acc. sg. *gesælðe* AHQDEU; *gesælðæ* K (obviously an error);

gesælða F

With this suffix again, with the exception of *mægenleaste* in A and the erroneous *gesælðæ* in K, the manuscripts closest to Ælfric present the correct ending. *Mægenleaste* may or may not belong to the fairly numerous grammatical forms in A revealing Ælfric's uncertainty about the correct inflexions of some words. The evidence from one homily is too slender to be firm on this point (but see below).

The substitution of *-a* for *-e* in F (and D) occurs too sporadically to suspect a tendency here.

There are twenty-seven occurrences of nouns with the suffix *-nys*, with variants on four occasions:

nom. sg. *upahefednys* AKHQEFU (the regular form);

upahefednysse D

menniscnys KQEFU (A deficient here; H illegible);

menniscnysse D

acc. sg. *oferflowednysse* KHQDEFU (the regular form);

oferflowednyssa A

acc. pl. *angsumnyssa* KHU (the regular form); *angsumnysse*

altered to *angsumnyssa* AQF;

angsumnysse DE

Was Ælfric at the A-stage uncertain about the inflexion of nouns with this suffix? The correction in A in one instance may suggest this much, but such suspicion would have to be corroborated by further evidence. It would also have to be corroborated by further evidence whether D shows a tendency to use *-e* as the ending for all cases of nouns with *-nys*. Note, however that on the further six occurrences of the nom. sg., D, in accordance with all other manuscripts, has *-nys*.

In sum, eleven forms with variants from a total of ninety-nine attestations for nouns of the \bar{o} -declension reveal only a moderate inclination towards substituting inflexional endings in the various manuscripts. The exclusive concentration of the variants on nouns with three suffixes are, however, a clear indication that these subgroups of the \bar{o} -declension were rather unstable in their inflexion; and the fact that irregular forms for these nouns occur also in A may suggest that this situation also reflected on Ælfric's usage, at least at an early stage.

Only a few words need to be said about the remaining declensions. The most important fact about them is that, as with the *a*-declension, scarcely any variants are found for their nouns. Thus, there are twenty-four occurrences of nouns originally belonging to the *i*-declension,²⁷ and sixty-four occurrences of nouns of the weak (*n*-)declension. Among these eighty-eight attestations only four variants occur, and they are restricted to U, which has twice *-an* for regular *-um* in the dative plural and once each *-ene* for *-ena* and *-ana* for *-ena* in the genitive plural. Three of the variants²⁸ may be attributed to the Late Old English tendency to express the reduction of inflexional syllables in writing and might therefore be reckoned among deviations from a standardization which avoids such expression.

All the other occurrences of these nouns (i.e. the remaining eighty-four) show the regular forms in all manuscripts.²⁹

Adjectives

There are fifty-three attestations of adjectives showing strong declension: twenty-seven masculine, ten neuter, sixteen feminine. No variants are found among them. Apart from three irregularities, occurring in all manuscripts, the adjectives present the regular inflexional endings. Of the weak declension, forty-two adjectives occur: thirty masculine, four neuter, eight feminine. For two adjectives variant readings occur (once in D and once in DEU), and in two further instances an originally variant reading in one manuscript (Q) has been corrected to conform with the other manuscripts.

Before looking at the irregularities and variants, it is important to note that with this grammatical category, too, there is a high degree of consistency in usage and of uniformity among the manuscripts. Two of the irregularities in the strong declension concern the use of the strong form of the adjective after the possessive *his*, where the weak declension would have been expected (once in the gen. sg. fem.: 'his agenre alysednysse' (94) and once in the acc. sg. fem.: 'his agene sawle' (36)). This is an irregularity which Ælfric already attempted to eliminate from his texts in the course of his corrections made in A.³⁰ We may therefore be reasonably certain that the two readings (faithfully preserved by all the manuscripts) may be traced back to him.

The third irregular form, presented by all manuscripts, is also of a type which has been associated with Ælfric himself: in the dat. sg. masc. the strong ending *-um* is used after the definite article, where weak *-an* would be expected ('fram þam manfullum heape' (108)). As John Pope has noted, in the dat. sg. masc. and neuter, strong *-um* is used 'rather frequently' even 'in the earliest Ælfric manuscripts and may be attributable to the author'.³¹ As all manuscripts have *-um*, this irregular form again probably goes back to Ælfric. But it was not the form he normally used: in the further six instances of an expected weak dat. sg. masc./neuter, regular *-an* occurs, either in all manuscripts or in those most closely associated with Ælfric. Interestingly, the two variants, plus the two variants that have been eliminated by correction in Q, all concern the endings *-um* and *-an* appearing after the definite article, and three of them concern the dative: once, D has *-um* for the weak dat. sg. neuter; once DEU have *-an* for the weak dat. pl.

fem. (where *-um* would be expected); once the weak dat. sg. masc. has been corrected from *-um* to *-an* in Q, and, also in Q, once the weak acc. pl. masc. is altered from *-um* to *-an*. If anything, this evidence goes to show that the scribes were even more confused about these two inflexional endings (*-um* and *-an*) than was Ælfric. This makes the overall careful preservation of Ælfric's spellings for the two endings by most of the scribes all the more remarkable.³²

Pronouns

Space permits only a brief synopsis of the forms of the various types of pronouns; but even from this brief examination of our specimen homily some interesting results emerge. Moreover, we are fortunate in that, for pronouns, we are in a position to check the forms in individual homilies against those given in Godden's glossary for the pronouns in A and K. Godden records variant forms and also indicates the number of attestations for variant forms that occur only rarely in the two manuscripts. We are therefore on relatively firm ground with regard to the forms of pronouns for which Ælfric apparently allowed some variation. Thus, a glance at the glossary reveals that Ælfric's usage (as attested in A and K) allows very little variation within the forms of the personal and possessive pronouns, and that all the forms in *CH I.23* (as they uniformly occur in most of the manuscripts) are in accordance with his standard usage. Variant readings for these pronouns are restricted to a small number of forms, and they occur, with very few exceptions, in two manuscripts only: H and U.

The following forms are in question: The possessive pronoun *his* occurs fifty times in this form in AKQDEFU; H preserves this form on nine occasions, but has *hys* in forty-one instances. The acc. sg. masc. *hine* has ten attestations in this form in AKQDEFU; H retains the form once, but otherwise has *hyne* (on one occasion it is joined by F). There are four attestations of the nom. sg. neuter *hit* in the other manuscripts, against four attestations of *hyt* in H.

So, in H, *i* is systematically replaced by *y* in some forms of the personal and possessive pronouns with original *i*, but not in all such forms: the nom. and acc. pl., *hi*, remain unchanged, as do the dat. sg. and pl., *him*. It is clear that by substituting *y* for *i* in *his*, *hit* and *hine*, the scribe was following a norm (and one that differed from Ælfric's usage), but why his norm did not pertain to *hi* and *him*, we cannot say. Curiously, the other manuscript showing variant readings in the form of the personal pronouns, U, replaces *i* by *y* in precisely the forms which

were left untouched by H: of the thirty-two attestations of the nom. and acc. pl., always in the form of *hi* in AKHQDEF, U retains *hi* on nine occasions; it has *hy* three times, and *hi* altered to *hy* nineteen times.³³ The ten attestations of the dat. sg. masc. occur invariably as *him* in all manuscripts, but of the four attestations of *him* as dat. pl., U retains *him* on one occasion only (and probably because it construed the form as singular). On the remaining three occasions U has *him*, altered to *hym*.³⁴

So again, a normative tendency (different from Ælfric's usage and from that of the scribe of H) can easily be detected in U, but again, we cannot say why it was restricted only to specific forms of the pronoun with original *i*. What we can say with confidence, however, is that the systematic replacements of *i* by *y* in H and U do not indicate any difference in pronunciation in comparison with the Ælfrician forms. It is precisely the restriction of the substitution of *y* for *i* to some, but not all, of the forms with original *i*, and their mutual exclusiveness in the two manuscripts, which reveals that these substitutions are attempts to standardize the spelling of the pronouns, regardless of their pronunciation.³⁵

In light of these moderate attempts to replace Ælfrician norms, it is noteworthy that scarcely any variants are found among the numerous attestations of forms of the definite article. The few variants that do occur in individual manuscripts are most economically explained as simple errors or as influenced by the immediate context. For the forms of the demonstrative pronoun *þes* 'this' with original *i*, *þises*, *þisre* etc., Ælfric himself appears to have admitted some variation between *i* and *y*, according to Godden's glossary and also according to the forms in CH I.23, where forms with *i* and *y* appear in A and K. Interestingly, in these forms neither H nor U show a tendency to standardize in the direction of *y*. Interestingly too, Ælfric's admittance of *i* and *y* is reflected in all the manuscripts: they show forms with *i* or *y* in various groupings and no pattern emerges from their groupings.

Verbs

We may form some impression of the nature and degree of Ælfric's standardization with regard to verb conjugation, and of how his standardization has been preserved in the manuscripts, by looking briefly at those verb forms in CH I.23 which are notorious for their unstable inflexional endings in Old English texts in general. The relevant forms are: the infinitive, the plural present

subjunctive, the plural preterite indicative and the plural preterite subjunctive. It should be noted in passing that scarcely any variants occur in the homily for verb forms other than these.

Among the nineteen occurrences of the infinitive of uncontracted verbs, the ending in all manuscripts is almost invariably *-an* (*-ian* in weak verbs II), the regular ending for this verb form. Only on one occasion and only in one manuscript (E) *-on* is found. There is more variation with the pl. pres. subj., where the regular ending would be *-en* (*-ien* for weak verbs II). Among the six occurrences of this verb form we find once *-on* in all manuscripts and twice *-ian*, equally in all manuscripts.³⁶ For the remaining three instances we have the following variants and groupings: 1. *-on* AHQU, *-en* F, *-an* KDE; 2. *-on* AHQFU, *-en* DE, *-an* K; 3. *-ian* AKHDE, *-ien* F; *-ion* QU. For Ælfric's usage this seems to suggest that at first (at the A stage) he admitted both *-on* and *-an*, but that, beginning with the revision in K (and perhaps even at the intermediate stage, represented by D), he preferred *-an* and tended to replace earlier *-on*. But of course this impression would need to be tested against the evidence of all the other homilies.

By comparison with the pl. pres. subj., there is little variation in the endings of the pl. pret. indic. and the pl. pret. subj. The original ending for the pl. pret. indic. was *-on*, and with the eleven occurrences of the form, *-on* is found in eight instances in all manuscripts. On three occasions *-an* occurs in a single manuscript each (E, Q and U respectively), but here, too, the other manuscripts have *-on*. In the pl. pret. subj. the original ending was *-en*, but in the three attestations of the verb form in *CH* I.23 the ending appears as *-on*, and no variant is found in any of the manuscripts.

Although the preliminary character of my investigation must again be stressed, a pattern may perhaps be seen to emerge for the four verb forms we have been reviewing: the inflexional ending of the infinitive is *-an*, that of the pl. pret. indic. and subj. *-on*, and that of the pl. pres. subj. is either *-on* or *-an*, with perhaps a preference for *-an* in revised stages of the text. This distribution of the spellings of the four inflexional endings very possibly goes back to Ælfric, and in the case of three of them, the scribes of the various manuscripts saw little occasion to alter his system. Increased scribal variation in the case of the fourth ending, that of the pl. pres. subj., seems to reflect the process of Ælfric's own hesitations and deliberations on how this ending should be represented in writing. In any event, it is clear that accumulating and evaluating sufficient material for the four inflexional endings, usually labelled as 'unstable', would merit close scholarly

attention. Should the suspicion raised by the analysis of the four endings in *CH* I.23 be confirmed – if only to some extent – by a large-scale investigation of the relevant forms in the other homilies, we would have precious evidence for the high level of sophistication which Ælfric's attempts to standardize his native language had reached.³⁷

CONCLUSION

There can scarcely be any doubt that Ælfric aimed at standardizing Old English in its written form. This has been a long-standing notion among Ælfric scholars, and ample evidence for Ælfric's endeavours in this respect may be gleaned even from the sifting of the material for only one aspect – inflexional morphology – in only one of his *Catholic Homilies*. But this sifting of the evidence from one homily has also revealed that, in order to be on firmer ground concerning the details of Ælfric's standardization, much work still needs to be done by way of large-scale collecting and evaluating of data. In the present article I have tried to highlight one of the ways in which such collecting and evaluating could be done.

With regard to the questions posed above which might be answered by a full evaluation of the Clemoes-Godden dossiers, the evidence of just our homily strongly suggests that, although usually the spelling of a morphological item remains stable throughout the *Catholic Homilies*, in some cases Ælfric indeed seems to have admitted a moderate number of spelling variants (for example with some forms of the personal pronouns), and that in some other cases he seems to have developed his eventually fairly stable spelling only after a period of hesitation and experimentation. Judging from the evidence we have sifted, this occurred most notably with the declension of adjectives after the definite article and the possessive, and (perhaps) the system of spelling devised for four notoriously unstable verb forms. I shall return to both in a moment.

The question of how to distinguish in a manuscript between authorial revisions and scribal variants will often remain difficult to decide; only those instances where no more than one or two manuscripts offer a variant are relatively straightforward. From our evidence it would appear that in cases where A and K disagree and/or where Ælfric seems to have decided on the spelling for a morphological item only after some hesitation, not only do the manuscripts side in various groupings with either A or K (which might be attributed solely to their

respective textual affiliations), but the scribes also tend to introduce their own variants, as in the case of, again, the four verb endings.

The important question of competing spelling systems for morphological items, which may show up in some manuscripts, can unambiguously be answered in the affirmative by the systematic replacement of the Ælfrician spellings for certain pronouns in two different ways by two manuscripts, as noted above. This point needs further examination, but the important implication of it would be that what Ælfric wrote was not 'Standard Old English' *per se*, but 'Ælfric's Standard Old English', and that this existed side by side with other standards, though perhaps none as systematic as his was.³⁸

I return in conclusion briefly to the verbal endings we have examined and to the strong forms of adjectives after possessives and the definite article. At first glance, the use of the wrong declension of an adjective appears to be a blunder which we would hesitate to attribute to Ælfric. But the irregularity occurs in the manuscripts most closely associated with him, and he can be shown to have corrected erroneous forms of adjectives in A, as we have seen. Moreover, Bruce Mitchell rather firmly denies the existence in Old English of the patterns 'Demonstrative/possessive + strong form of adj. + noun', which some earlier scholars had assumed. What few cases there are in Old English texts, he would attribute to *-um/-an* confusion in the dative, though he has to admit that wrong strong forms can also be found with other cases (two even appearing – after the possessive – in our slender corpus).³⁹

If the pattern did not exist, was Ælfric, then, incapable of declining an adjective correctly? The answer (at least for the confusion in the dative) probably lies in the fact that for him and his contemporaries the strong dative *-um* and the weak dative *-an* were not distinguished in their pronunciation. Therefore, initially he may not have cared too much about distinguishing both systematically in writing. But apparently he had second thoughts about this, as is testified by his corrections of many of the wrong forms. Such demonstrable endeavour to distinguish in spelling between forms that were no longer distinguished in the spoken language may perhaps permit us to be more confident that Ælfric indeed attempted to devise a system for the spelling of the four verb forms, as I suggested above. It is almost certain that the inflexional endings of the infinitive, the pres. pl. subj., the pret. pl. indic. and subj. (*-an*, *-en*, *-on* and *-en* respectively) had coalesced in a phonetic form /ən/ by the time Ælfric wrote.⁴⁰ Whether a contemporary native speaker, even one like Ælfric, with a keen interest in the details of linguistic structure, could have had precise knowledge of the original

pronunciations of these endings is not certain. Such knowledge might have been derived either from older native speakers or, perhaps more likely, from late-ninth- or early-tenth-century manuscripts. But even a glance at, say, the Alfredian manuscripts will reveal that they already present a substantial number of variant forms for the endings in question. It is also noteworthy that Ælfric seems to have avoided *-en*, the original ending for two of the verb forms, preferring *-on* and *-an* instead. This, in combination with the linguistic situation prevailing during his lifetime, may suggest that what was foremost in his mind when he devised his spellings of the four forms was primarily the achievement of some sort of standardization. Standardizing the historically correct form can, for him, have been only a secondary concern, if a concern at all. By the same token, it was inevitable that inconsistencies should remain (here as elsewhere) given the size of the *Catholic Homilies*, and given the probability that his system of spelling the four endings developed only in the course of his work on the *Homilies*. That the scribes should adhere to his system rather faithfully is no indication that Ælfric's standardization in this respect was generally adopted. It might indicate, however, that, as opposed to the situation with the personal pronouns, there was no competing tendency to standardize the four verb endings in their graphic representation; consequently, they copied out – no doubt with a due amount of scribal error – what they found in their exemplars. Faithful copying by the various scribes might perhaps also indicate that, for whatever reasons, scribes generally tended to preserve Ælfric's spellings more carefully than that of other texts; a point which, again, would have to be clarified.⁴¹

Ælfric and Standard Old English: an enormous amount of work needs to be done, and many more questions than the few I have mooted here will need to be solved. But as with Ælfric's sources, into the exploration of which an immense amount of scholarly endeavour has gone over the past decades (not least by the honorand of this Festschrift), yielding comprehensive and enduring results, the amount of work put into an exploration of Ælfric's linguistic standard and 'Standard Old English' in general will amply repay. Its results will enable us and future generations of scholars to control an aspect of intellectual activity in Anglo-Saxon England which had no parallel anywhere in Early Medieval Europe.

NOTES

¹ For assigning the rise of Standard Old English to a late-tenth-century ambience, see C. L. Wrenn, 'Standard Old English', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, (1933), 65-88; H. Gneuss, 'The Origin of Standard Old English and Æthelwold's School at Winchester', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 1 (1972), 63-83; repr. with additions in his *Language and History in Early England* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), no. I; and M. Gretsch, 'Winchester Vocabulary and Standard Old English: the Vernacular in Late Anglo-Saxon England', The T. N. Toller Memorial Lecture, 2000, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 83 (2001), 41-87. The general acceptance and prevalence of Standard Old English in the eleventh century have been expressed most succinctly by Kenneth Sisam: 'the early eleventh century was the period in which West Saxon was recognized all over England as the official and literary language': K. Sisam, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 153.

² Malcolm Godden has calculated that the *Catholic Homilies* amount to 'some twelve per cent of the extant corpus of prose and verse in Old English': M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS, s.s. 18 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. v.

³ See *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici or Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by B. Thorpe, 2 vols (London: Ælfric Society, 1844-46); for the manuscript, Cambridge, University Library, Gg. 3. 28 (K) see discussion below.

⁴ The single surviving manuscript of the *Lives* which is fairly complete, London, BL, Cotton Julius E. vii, written s. xiⁱⁿ, somewhere in South England, includes four saints' Lives not by Ælfric (an addition to the collection which he would have very much objected to), and the manuscript presents pronounced peculiarities of spelling: on these, see most comprehensively *Ælfric: Lives of Three English Saints*, ed. by G. I. Needham (London: Methuen, 1966), pp. 6-11; see also M. Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun*, Winchester Studies, 4.ii (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), pp. 581-82, and M. Gretsch, 'In Search of Standard Old English', in *Bookmarks from the Past: Studies in Early English Language and Literature in Honour of Helmut Gneuss*, ed. by L. Kornexl and U. Lenker (Frankfurt: Lang, 2003), pp. 33-67 (pp. 45-55).

⁵ *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series: Text*, ed. by P. Clemoes, EETS, s.s. 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) [hereafter *CH I*, ed. by Clemoes]. *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series: Text*, ed. by M. Godden, EETS, s.s. 5 (London: Oxford University Press for the EETS, 1979) [hereafter *CH II*, ed. by Godden]; M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary* [hereafter Godden, *Commentary*].

⁶ Kenneth Sisam, in a series of groundbreaking articles (first printed in the early 1930s and reprinted in a revised version in his *Studies*) was the first to moot, in any detail, the question of successive stages of authorial revisions, but had concluded that 'the problem is one for an editor with full collations': 'MSS Bodley 340 and 342: Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*', in his *Studies in the History of Old English Literature*, pp. 148-98 (p. 165) [orig. publ. in *RES*, 7-9 (1931-33)]. Characteristically, many of his findings are now confirmed by the full collations made for the new edition.

⁷ See M. Godden, 'Ælfric as Grammarian: The Evidence of his *Catholic Homilies*', in *Early Medieval English: Texts and Interpretations. Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg*, ed. by E. Treharne and S. Rosser (Tempe, AZ: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), pp. 13-29 (p. 16).

⁸ Godden, *Commentary*, p. v.

⁹ See *CH I*, ed. by Clemoes, pp. 125-35 (the alterations made in A are also classified by Clemoes in *Ælfric's First Series of Catholic Homilies (British Museum Royal 7. C. XII, fols. 4-218)*, ed. by N. Eliason and P. Clemoes, EEMF, 13 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1966), p. 33, nn. 10-18); and *CH II*, ed. by Godden, pp. lxxviii-lxxxvi. Godden also discusses some important aspects of Ælfric's revisions, such as changes in the use of cases after prepositions, in the declension and gender of nouns, or in the mood of verbs in subordinate clauses, in his recent article, 'Ælfric as Grammarian'.

¹⁰ See *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. by J. C. Pope, 2 vols., EETS, o.s. 259-60 (London: Oxford University Press for the EETS, 1967-68) I, 177-85, and cf. the section on the manuscripts, pp. 6-91, *passim*.

¹¹ On this project, see Gretsich, 'In Search of Standard Old English'.

¹² I should like to thank Dominik Kuhn, who, in the course of his work for the project, extracted and classified the material on which my evaluation is based.

¹³ *CH I*, ed. by Clemoes, pp. 365-70.

¹⁴ I use the sigla devised by Clemoes and Pope, and ever since in general use by Ælfric scholars. For the date and origin and/or provenance of the manuscripts I refer the reader to Clemoes's and Godden's introductions to their respective volumes.

¹⁵ See *CH I*, ed. by Clemoes, pp. 64-168 and *CH II*, ed. by Godden, pp. xx-xciv. As the Second Series was completed after the First Series, both differ with regard to the stage of revision in which they occur in a manuscript. We are concerned here with the revisions of the First Series.

¹⁶ See *CH I*, ed. by Clemoes, pp. 65-66.

¹⁷ For the alterations, see above, n. 9.

¹⁸ Cf. *CH I*, ed. by Clemoes, pp. 67-68 and *CH II*, ed. by Godden, pp. xxv-xxxiii.

¹⁹ CH I, ed. by Clemons, p. 69; cf. also Sisam: 'the best single source of the *Catholic Homilies*' (*Studies*, p. 165) and Godden: 'either a product of Ælfric's own scriptorium or a remarkably faithful copy of such a manuscript' (CH II, ed. by Godden, p. xliii).

²⁰ Cf. CH I, ed. by Clemons, pp. 98 and 105-09.

²¹ Cf. CH I, ed. by Clemons, pp. 83-89.

²² See K. Brunner, *Altenglische Grammatik: Nach der angelsächsischen Grammatik von Eduard Sievers*, 3rd edn (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1965) [hereafter SB], § 243 and A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959) [hereafter Campbell], § 574.3-4.

²³ See Pope, *Homilies*, I, 183 and Gretsch, 'In Search of Standard Old English', p. 49.

²⁴ See SB, §§ 255.1, 3 and 258, n. 1, and Campbell, §§ 590.6, 8 and 592d.

²⁵ Note that *bodunge* (l. 119) could have been construed as singular by DEFU: *-e* would then be the regular ending.

²⁶ Note that *yrmda* in E might be due to the immediate context: 'þæra manfulra yrmða' (110).

²⁷ By the end of the tenth century, the nouns of the *i*-declension had largely coalesced with the *a*- and *ō*-declensions; all the forms attested in our homily show the regular endings of these two declensions.

²⁸ *-ana* for *-ena* may simply be an error.

²⁹ For the variants *lufon* AKHQ and *lufan* DEFU (dat. sg. of *lufu*), see the glossaries in Godden, *Commentary* and Pope, *Homilies*, II, 885.

³⁰ See CH I, ed. by Clemons, p. 128, n. 10.

³¹ Pope, *Homilies*, I, 184.

³² For the irregular use of the strong declension of adjectives, see also below.

³³ On one occasion U has the form *heo*, which was probably prompted by the immediate context: *hi forseod > heo forseod*.

³⁴ Note that D has twice *hiom* for the dat. pl., with superscript *o*.

³⁵ Note that H (but not U) substitutes *y* for *i* with some regularity in other morphological forms as well, such as *ys*, *nys*, *byð*, *wylle*.

³⁶ Note that in the conjugation of weak verbs II, I ignore K's tendency to represent the suffix of this class as *-ig-*, against A's preference for simple *-i-*. Thus, in one of the two instances listed above as *-ian*, K has *-igan*. It is clear that *-ig-* has the status of a spelling variant (with no reflex in pronunciation) but, interestingly, a spelling variant which Ælfric himself seems to have decided to prefer in the course of his second systematic revision of the First Series, as represented in K.

³⁷ For these verb endings, see also below.

³⁸ To my knowledge, the possibility of the existence of more than one literary standard was first alluded to by John Pope: *Homilies*, I, 181 and 182.

³⁹ See B. Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) 1, 58-60 (§§ 118-22). Perhaps we need to distinguish here between the strong dative after the definite article and strong adjectives after possessives: 'his agenre alysednysse' and 'his agene sawle', occurring in all manuscripts of *CH* I.23 (discussed above), can scarcely be attributed to *-um/-an* confusion. On the other hand, the strong declension of adjectives after possessives is normal in Modern German, and it was an alternative to the weak declension in Middle High German: see H. Paul, *Mittelhochdeutsche Grammatik*, 24th edn, rev. by P. Wiehl and S. Grosse (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998), p. 358 (§ 391). Could it, therefore, have been an alternative pattern in Old English as well? A pattern which Ælfric eventually chose to reject?

⁴⁰ For the merger of the vowels in these endings, see SB, § 44, n. 7 and Campbell, §§ 377-79.

⁴¹ This suspicion might be fed by the work of a mid-eleventh-century corrector at Rochester, to whom Don Scragg has drawn attention (and whose work was comprehensively analysed in Neil Ker's unpublished doctoral dissertation). He systematically corrected grammatical forms in the homilies in D, but made significantly fewer alterations to Ælfric's homilies than to the pre-Ælfrician ones contained in the manuscript. Interestingly, he also seems to have made his corrections with some kind of spelling norm in his mind, a norm which differed from Ælfric's standard; see D. G. Scragg, 'Spelling Variations in Eleventh-Century English', in *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the 1990 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by C. Hicks (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1992), pp. 347-54 (pp. 353-54), with reference to Ker's dissertation.