

ÆLFRIC REFERS TO BISHOP POSSIDIUS (WITH THE SOURCE)

POSSIDIUS,¹ bishop of Calam² since AD 397 up to his death in an unknown date later than AD 437,³ also the writer of a Latin *Vita Sancti Augustini*⁴ and an *Indiculus* dating all the works of Augustine of Hippo,⁵ is an author whose textual presence in the literature of the AngloSaxons had deserved an intended entrance into the archives of *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture (SASLC)*, an ongoing project in the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton, USA.

However, Possidius's intended *SASLC* entry remains empty.⁶

This paper identifies both: a) one reference to Possidius in one of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*, and b) the fragment from Augustine of Hippo's *De Civitate Dei* which Ælfric seems to have used as a source.

¹ There is a Spanish biography of bishop Possidius introducing his own *Vita Sancti Augustini* in *Obras de San Agustín en edición bilingüe*, ed. V. Capánaga (Madrid, 1969), i.295-02. This document also includes references to other Latin editions of Possidius's *Vita Sancti Augustini*, several translations of this work into Italian, Spanish, Catalan, French, and German, as well as a few scholarly papers dealing with our bishop.

² Calama, a city in the ancient Roman province of Numidia, has been identified with present-day Guelme, in the north of Algeria.

³ It was in AD 437 when Genseric, leader of the Vandals from Spain invading the north of Africa, drew Possidius out of his episcopal see. (Capánaga, ed. 302).

⁴ The Latin text of this work is in V. Capánaga, ed. 303-65.

⁵ V. Capánaga, ed. 375-6.

⁶ F.M. Biggs, T.D. Hill, P.E. Szarmach, eds., with the assistance of K. Hammond, *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: A Trial Version* (New York, 1990) 233.

The homily where bishop Possidius is mentioned bears the following title: «UII. KALENDAS IANUARI. NATALE SANCTI STEPHANI PROTOMARTYRIS»,¹ largely rendered from *De Civitate Dei*² and different commonplaces from the New Testament.³

Forty Old English words shaping three sentences are the vehicle to the reference here described:

Eucharius hatte sum mæssepreost on pam lande þe is gehaāten hispania. se wæs Íearle geswenct mid langsumum broce. Ía gebrohte se biscop Possidius. sum Íing lytles of Íære foresādan cyrcan Íæs eadigan stephanes. and se preost purh þæt wearÍ gehæled.⁴

The Latin text seemingly used as a source is the following:

¹ *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series Text*, ed. M. Godden (EETS, 1979) 12-18.

² *Obras de San Agustín. Edición bilingüe*, ed. J. Morán (Madrid, 1965), xvii. 779. This volume contains the last ten books building up *De Civitate Dei*. Our present interest is centered upon Book 22, chapter 8, pp. 705-21.

³ On the one hand some biblical commonplaces are part of the translated text itself, as in 'Criste. accipe spiritum meum. ? æt is crist onfóh minne gast' (Godden ed., p. 13) = Facts 7: 59; some others, on the other hand, are part of Ælfric's final explanations, as in 'Mín drihten miltsa him nyton hí hwæt hí dop' (Godden, ed., p. 17) = Lk. 23: 34; 'Drihten min. ne sete pu him Íæs dæda to synne' (Godden ed., p. 17) = Facts 7: 60; '? æt Ía wyrigendan godes rice ne geagniaÍ' (Godden, ed., p. 17) = 1 Cor. 6: 9; 'lufiaÍ eowre fynd. doÍ pam tela Íe eow hátiaÍ' (Godden ed., p. 18) = Lk. 6: 27; 'gebbidaÍ for eowrum ehterum and tynendum. ? æt ge beon eowres fæder bearn se Íe on heofonum is' (Godden ed., p. 18) = Matt. 5: 44-45.

⁴ M. Godden ed., p. 12.

Eucharius est presbyter ex Hispania, Calamae habitat, veteri morbo calculi laborabat, per memoriam supradicti martyris, quam Possidius illo advexit episcopus, salvus factus est.¹

This fragment had been slightly enlarged by Ælfric's purpose to overcome cultural distances. The additions he carried out actually explain what *hispania* is, and provide both a) the hearer/reader with the necessary reference to *supradictus martyr*, and b) his text with an element absent from the Latin one (*cyrca* instead of *memoria*) but necessary to the new narrative coherence within the Old English homily. One omission observed (*Calamae habitat*) prevents the hearer/reader from sophisticated and unnecessary information. An alteration (*langsum broc* for *morbus calculi*) hides the precise hue of the Latin original.

The challenge now are MSS, booklists, quotations and citations to be identified.

Xavier Campos Vilanova
University Jaume I, Castelló

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¹ Augustine of Hippo's *De Civitate Dei* 22: 8, 12, ed. J. Morán (Madrid, 1965), xvii. 714-5.