

SAPIENTIA ET FORTITUDO
IN THE ANGLO-SAXON EPIC HEROES
AND IN ÆLFRIC'S ENGLISH SAINTS

SAPIENTIA ET FORTITUDO. CONCEPT.

In his study on *sapientia et fortitudo* in *Beowulf*, R. E. Kaske¹ mentions E. R. Curtius's sketch of the development of this "formula" in the Graeco-Latin-Christian tradition.² After suggesting its supposed origin in Homer and further adaptation by Virgil, E. R. Curtius points out its subsequent fossilization and decline to a rhetorical topos:

(...) expressing sometimes a combination of the two heroic virtues in a single hero, sometimes a separation of them anticipating the later tragedy of "Rodlanz est proz ed Oliviers est sages" (Roland is brave and Oliver is wise).³

¹ Vid. R. E. Kaske: "Sapientia et Fortitudo as the Controlling Theme of *Beowulf*" in L. E. Nicholson (ed). *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1966, pp. 269-310. Reprinted from *Studies in Philology* 55, 1958, pp. 423-457.

² Vid. E. R. Curtius: *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, A. Francke AG Verlag, Bern, 1948. Trans. W. R. Trask. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. New York, Pantheon Books, 1953. Rpr. 1973.

³ R. E. Kaske: op. cit. p. 270.

Several references are then enumerated of the various appearances of both terms in the literature previous to the composition of *Beowulf* that presumably suggested the theme for this poem. But we have to point out that this topic has received only incidental attention in *Beowulf* studies.¹ Thus both words are cited by Statius; in *Dares and Dictys*; in Fulgentius Mythographus's interpretation of the opening line of the *Aeneid*; in a poem of Alcuin, and in other Carolingian pieces as can be found in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*.²

However, E. R. Curtius's reference that, according to R. E. Kaske, may have been most present in the *Beowulf*-poet's mind is contained in the *Etymologiae* of St. Isidore of Seville: *Heroicum enim carmen dictum, quod eo virorum fortium res et facta narrantur. Nam heroes appellantur viri quasi aerii et caelo digni propter sapientiam et fortitudinem*.³

A brief analysis of the content of both virtues will result in a better understanding of their close relationship and mutual dependence. We can justify in this way the reasons why we have considered *sapientia et fortitudo* as a concept used to characterize the epic and Christian heroes⁴. We shall try to show in this paper how this concept is also present in Ælfric's lives of English saints, namely: St. Edmund, St. Oswald, St. Alban, St. Swithun and St. Æthelthryth. In this way we intend to give one more reason for the considera-

¹ Vid. E. Otto: *Typische Motive in den weltlichen Epos der Angelsachsen*. Berlin, 1902. F. Klaeber: "Die christlichen Elemente im Beowulf, III" *Anglia* XXXV(1912). M. E. Goldsmith: *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf*. The Athlone Press. London, 1970. pp. 217-19, 222, and more recently J. D. Niles *Beowulf: The Poem and its Tradition*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Mass. 1983, pp. 224-34.

² Vid R. E. Kaske. op. cit. p. 269.

³ W. M. Lindsay (ed). *Isidore of Seville. Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*. Oxford, 1911. Bk I, 39, 9; also VIII, 11, 98; X, 2.

⁴ This concept is frequent in many of the Old English religious-heroic poems, as for example in *Andreas* 624-5, 919, 1495-7, 1577-9; *Guthlac* 156-8, 184, 1109; *Judith* 145-6, 333-4; *Juliana* 431-2, 547-51; *Elene* 934-5; *Genesis* 1151-2; *Exodus* 12-4; *Daniel* 666.

tion of characterization techniques in these five saints similar or analogous to the models provided by the epic heroes, as far as this epic "formula" is concerned.

As R. E. Kaske suggests,¹ alongside many other critics,² the Christian elements that can be noticed in Anglo-Saxon epic literature, especially the heroes' wisdom and fortitude have a clear origin in the Christian Patristics of the preceding centuries³ and, particularly, in St. Augustine's writings. It is natural to think so, owing to the enormous influence that this Father of the Church exerted on the development of Western Christian philosophy and theology throughout the Middle Ages until St. Thomas Aquinas.⁴ The latter in turn echoes Augustinian thought by compiling and systematizing the former's prolific work, and not infrequently explaining those matters of little clarity or doubtful interpretation.

¹ *Vid. ibid.* p. 280 (and especially, notes 24 and 25).

² *Cf.*, among others, L. L. Schücking: "The ideal of kingship in *Beowulf*," in L. E. Nicholson (ed.): *op. cit.*, pp. 35-49; Reprinted from *Modern Humanities Research Association Bulletin* III, 1929, pp. 143-154; M. Padgett Hamilton: "The Religious Principle in *Beowulf*," in L. E. Nicholson (ed.): *op. cit.*, pp. 105-35 reprinted from *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 61, 1946, pp. 309-331; more recently Ph. B. Rollinson "The Influence of Christian Doctrine and Exegesis on Old English Poetry: An Estimate of the Current State of Scholarship." *ASE* 2(1973)276-80; D. Berkeley "Some Misapprehensions of Christian Typology in Recent Literary Scholarship." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 18(1978)10-11.

³ On Patristics' influence on Old English *vid.* M. E. Goldsmith *op. cit.*; D. W. Robertson "The Doctrine of Charity in Mediaeval Literary Gardens: A Topical Approach Through Symbolism and Allegory" *Speculum* XXVI(1951); and M. W. Bloomfield "Patristics and Old English Literature: Notes on Some Poems." *Comparative Literature* 14(1962)1-21.

⁴ On St. Augustine's influence on Christian thought throughout the Middle Ages, *vid.* H. Rondet: *La gracia de Cristo*, Herder, Barcelona, 1966; on p. 110 he states: "En adelante, la historia de la teología de la gracia en Occidente, no será mas que una historia de la interpretación del agustinismo. "With respect to the recapitulation and developments of the Augustinian doctrine carried out by St. Thomas Aquinas, *vid.* J. I. Saranyana: *Historia de la Filosofía Medieval*, Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, 1985, especially pp. 66-7 and 216 ff.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the works of St. Augustine were known by English ecclesiastics during the Old English period, and that they were present in the poets' minds at the time of portraying their characters as wise and brave, judicious and courageous.¹

Wisdom is defined by St Augustine in three different ways that somehow complement each other. The first one is: *Sapientia est via recta, quae ad veritatem ducit.*²

The second definition establishes a relationship between wisdom and happiness: *Sapientiam rerum humanarum divinarumque scientiam dicamus, sed earum quae ad beatam vitam pertineant.*³

Finally, this sentence is completed and explained:

Sapientiam mihi videtur esse rerum divinarumque, quae ad beatam vitam pertineant, non scientia solum, sed etiam diligens inquisitio. Quam descriptionem si partiri velis, prima pers quae scientiam tenet, Dei est; haec autem quae inquisitione contenta est, hominis. Illa igitur Deus, hac autem homo beatus est.⁴

From the patristic point of view, wisdom, by means of which we are wise, is a participation of divine wisdom.⁵ It is considered as a science that inquires into causes and first principles, judges and orders everything. Focusing

¹ Vid B. F. Huppé: *Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine's Influence on Old English Poetry*. SUNY Press. Albany 1959.

² St Augustine: *Contra Academicos*, V, 14. The edition consulted was the one published by Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, (BAC) Madrid, 1951.

³ *Ibid.*, VIII, 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Vid. St Augustine: *De Libero Arbitrio*, II, 17, 46 (the edition used was the one published by Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 1951): Quamobrem quantacumque bona quamvis magna, quamvis minima, nisi ex Deo esse non possunt. Cf. *Beowulf*, ll. 1724-7 where wisdom is also considered as a gift of God.

specifically on the concept of wisdom that here concerns us, wisdom in human affairs is called prudence. Prudence is subordinated to wisdom, that is to say, the former exerts its function on those things known and ordered by the latter. Prudence deals with those things through which happiness is reached, whereas wisdom deals with the object of happiness. The connection between wisdom and prudence and the achievement of happiness may, therefore, be inferred, as well as how the latter one depends on the exercise of the former ones. As St Augustine states: *Nemo enim beatus est, nisi summo bono, quod in ea veritate, quam sapientiam vocamus, cernitur et tenetur.*¹ The wise man is, according to this Father of the Church, the one who seeks after and inquires into the truth -God is the Truth- during his life. He is happy while his search lasts and his reward is the possession of what he has desired and, as St Augustine says, *et extremo die vitae ad id quod concupivit adipiscendum reperiatur paratus, fruaturque merito divina beatitudine, qui humana sit ante perfructus.*²

For this reason, the prudence of the wise man is the best defence against wrongdoing; it is lost whenever the mind ignores the truth and the will does not pursue the righteousness of the action to which the reason moves it. But the wisdom of the prudent man increases whenever his actions are fair and righteous.³ In this sense, St Augustine asks himself what makes a man pass from good to evil.⁴ The answer is none other than pride: *Initium omnis peccati superbia, et initium superbiae hominis apostatare a Deo.*⁵ It is this sin, the beginning of any behaviour against God, together with a *malevolentis-*

¹ St. Augustine: *De Libero Arbitrio*, II, 9, 25.

² St. Augustine: *Contra Academicos*, VIII, 23.

³ Cf. R. E. Kaske: op. cit. p. 280, and also St. Augustine: *De Libero Arbitrio*, III, 24, 72-3.

⁴ St. Augustine: *De Libero Arbitrio*, III, 25, 76.

⁵ *Eccle.* 10, 14-15.

sima invidia, that makes man lose the gift of wisdom and, as a result, depraves him.

Fortitude has to do with the existence of evil. Fighting evil either by resisting or by attacking it -*sustinendo et aggrediendo* - is the concern of fortitude which, as St Augustine points out, is an "unquestionable witness" of the presence of evil.¹ This virtue is, therefore, a passionate movement moderated by the will which is, in turn, informed by reason. It leads the courageous man to obtain the *arduous good*, refraining the fear of evil that may oppose him and moderating an excessive audacity or rashness. The *bonum arduum* at which fortitude aims as its proper goal requires the courageous man's disposition to be able to receive a wound, that is, any sort of aggression against his will, or in other words, anything that upsets and oppresses or is somehow negative and painful.

It can certainly be said that the most radical wound is death as J. Pieper suggests:

De este modo la fortaleza está siempre referida a la muerte, a la que ni un instante cesa de mirar cara a cara. Ser fuertes es, en el fondo, estar dispuesto a morir. O dicho con más exactitud: estar dispuesto a caer, si por caer entendemos morir en el combate.²

For this reason, the proper and supreme act of Christian fortitude is martyrdom.³

¹ Cf. St. Augustine: *Civitas Dei*, 19, 4; the edition consulted was published by Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, (BAC). Madrid, 1977.

² J. Pieper: *Justicia y Fortaleza*, Rialp, Madrid, 1968, p. 201.

³ Cf. *ibid.* pp. 202-8. *Vid.* also M. Prümmer: *Manuale Theologiae Moralis*, 2nd vol., Herder, Barcelona, 1961, paragraph 622: Cum igitur sustinere sit principalis actus fortitudinis, facile intelligitur, actum martyrii esse excellentissimum actum fortitudinis, quia martyres christiani fortissime sustinuerunt dolorissimam mortem propter amorem Dei.

Going on with the analysis of the definition of this virtue that has been mentioned above, we consider it interesting, because of the study of this characteristic in Ælfric's English saints that we shall do later, to point out the fact that to be brave is not the same as not to be frightened. In other words, fortitude as a virtue is incompatible with a certain kind of absence of fear: the intrepidity of the one who estimates reality wrongly. On the contrary, fortitude entails the brave man's fear of evil, because what characterizes its nature is not the ignorance of fear, but the decision of to not permit that fear to prevent the achievement of good or even the promotion of evil.¹ Thus the martyr faces death, not because he despises his own life or loves it little, but because he will not allow the fear of transient evils to make him abandon the supreme good: the love of God, in this case. From all that has been said so far, it could be asserted that only the one that behaves honestly resisting what is painful or harmful is actually brave.

Facing what opposes us may be carried out in two ways: resisting and attacking; and as said before the principle act of fortitude is not attacking but resisting. This is so because it is much more difficult to restrain fear, which impels us to act in one direction or another, than to moderate such an impulse, since danger leads to fear and to repress its moderation. In other words, to resist implies a long period of time, and it is more arduous to stand firm against evil for a long time than to attack it suddenly. Finally, remains to be shown the interdependence of both virtues, wisdom (prudence) and fortitude, to justify in this way the reason why *sapientia et fortitudo* has been considered as just one characteristic of the epic and Christian heroes. J. Pieper declares this mutual relationship in a definite way:

La prudencia y la justicia preceden a la fortaleza. Y ello no significa ni más ni menos que lo siguiente: sin prudencia y sin justicia no se da la fortaleza; sólo aquel que sea prudente y justo puede además

¹ Cf. J. Pieper: *op. cit.* pp. 224-5.

ser valiente; y es de todo punto imposible ser realmente valiente si antes no se es prudente y justo. Tampoco será posible, en consecuencia, hablar de la esencia de la fortaleza, si no se tiene a la vista la relación a la prudencia implicada por dicha virtud (...) Sólo el prudente puede ser valiente. La fortaleza sin prudencia no es fortaleza.¹

He also gives us the clue that allows us to appreciate the explanation of the previous statements:

La prudencia tiene dos rostros. El uno -que es cognoscitivo y "mensurado"- está vuelto a la realidad; el otro -que es resolutivo, preceptivo y "mensurante"- mira al querer y al obrar. En el primero se refleja la verdad de las cosas reales; en el segundo se hace visible la norma del obrar. Es de advertir que la relación que dice la prudencia a la realidad antecede por naturaleza a la relación que este ámbito dice a la acción. La prudencia "traduce", conociendo y dirigiendo, la verdad de lo real en la bondad del operar humano (...) La fortaleza es así fortaleza en la medida en que es "informada" por la prudencia.²

In other words, the double aspect of prudence consists, firstly, in an objective knowledge of reality, that is, in the apprehension of truth (wisdom) and it is consequently said that prudence is measured by the real world. Sec-

¹ *Ibid.* p. 213.

² *Ibid.* pp. 217-8. *Vid.* also A. Millán Puelles: *Fundamentos de Filosofía*, Rialp, Madrid, 1962, pp. 661-2: after defining fortitude and enumerating the virtues attached to it (integral parts of fortitude), namely: trustfulness, magnanimity, magnificence, patience and perseverance, this author says: "Todas estas virtudes son, por supuesto, tales en cuanto regidas o determinadas por la prudencia, la cual distingue al confiado del temerario, al magnánimo del ambicioso, al paciente del pusilánime, al perseverante del obstinado, etc. "

only, it provides the right proportion of the human will and conduct; in this sense, prudence measures the human actions directed to the combat for achieving good, even at the expense of the risks it may involve (fortitude). It is obvious that the first thing that is demanded from the man who acts is to possess a knowledge of reality; this must be a *guiding knowledge* aimed at the election of the way of acting that is the most convenient to the goal of the action intended. This guiding knowledge constitutes the essence of prudence. It is in this sense that J. Pieper considers that prudence informs fortitude: the brave man will hardly risk his peacefulness and even his life in securing good and resisting or attacking evil, if he does not have a knowledge of what good he must exert himself to obtain, and what evil he must oppose and which means he has to use in order to get the former and reject the latter. Actual fortitude entails, therefore, a right and real evaluation of things, not only those that one risks, but also those that one hopes to protect or possess.¹

This close unity of both virtues in a single human being is already outlined by St Augustine. He states that every wise man is brave and that he fears neither physical death nor pains.² He also adds that the wise man's actions are moderated by the virtue and the law of the divine wisdom.³ Wisdom and fortitude are likewise noticeable at the moment of martyrdom which constitutes, as said above, the highest expression of the exercise of fortitude

¹ Vid. J. Pieper: *op. cit.* p. 220: "Aquella jactancia griega a la que Pericles dio expresión en las nobles sentencias de su discurso en memoria de los caídos, encerraba también una verdad que es propia de la sabiduría cristiana: "porque tal es nuestra condición: afrontar libremente los más grandes riesgos, después de haber pensado mucho lo que hay que hacer. Para otros, en cambio, el valor es solamente hijo de la ignorancia, mientras el pensamiento es padre de la cobardía." (Tucidides: *Guerra del Peloponeso*, libro 2). "

² St Augustine: *De Beata Vita* (the edition published by Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 1950 was used): *Omnis namque sapiens fortis est; nullus autem fortis aliquid metuit. Non igitur metuit sapiens aut mortem corporis aut dolores.*

³ *Ibid.* (...) *id est ut quidquid agit non agat nisi es virtutis quodam praescripto et divina lege sapientiae, quae nullo ab eo pacto eripi possunt.*

by which the martyr desists from the good of preserving his own life for a superior good: the eternal bliss: *Honoramus sane memorias eorum tanquam sanctorum hominum Dei, qui usque ad mortem corporum suorum pro veritate certarunt, ut innotesceret vera religio.*¹

SAPIENTIA ET FORTITUDO IN THE EPIC HEROES

This formula *Sapientia et Fortitudo* for describing the epic heroes appears abundantly in the Anglo-Saxon epic literature, and Kaske claims that in *Beowulf* the poet used this concept with a high degree of consciousness as the controlling theme of his narrative.² But J. D. Niles pointed out:

Perhaps we have gone wrong, however, by assuming that the poem has a controlling theme. Is there a controlling theme for the CANTERBURY TALES, Wordsworth's PRELUDE, or Pound's CANTOS? Can a major literary work have a controlling subject, or, lacking even this, a controlling author, but not controlling theme?³

Niles, however, suggests that "*the twofold theme of Sapientia et Fortitudo is therefore present in the poem.*"⁴ This topic can be seen when the poet of *Beowulf* introduces King Hrothgar's speech by conferring on him the quality of a wise man: *Tha se wisa spraec / sunu Healfdenes. ll. 1698b-9a;*⁵ (Then the wise man, the son of Healfdene (Hrothgar) spoke), in fact, in *Be-*

¹ St Augustine: *Civitas Dei*, VIII, 27, 1.

² Kaske: "Beowulf" in *Critical Approaches to Six Major English Works*. ed. R. M. Lumiansky and Herschel Baker Philadelphia: University Press. 1968, pp. 18-31.

³ J. Niles. *op. cit.* 1983 pp. 225.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 302.

⁵ All references to *Beowulf* and the religious epic poems are from *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. 6 vols. eds. G. P. Krapp and E. v K. Dobbie. New York 1931-53.

owulf, words and compounds related with the formula “*Sapientia et Fortitudo*” are numerous.¹

Certain heroes, Beowulf, Hrothgar, Wulfgar..., are described as “modsefa”, F. Robinson commenting on this word says: *a meaning for the compound which combined the senses “wisdom” and “courage” (sapientia et fortitudo) would not be inappropriate.*²

Perhaps the admiration of the Latin historian Tacitus for the natural concatenation of both virtues in the audacious Barbarian warriors of the lands known as Germania³ has something to do with their further literary development in the Germanic epic poems. In any case, what is evident is the large number of passages where heroes are shown as brave and courageous, indefatigable fighters for the sake of their people and who never retreat when combatting evil. However, this bravery is neither blind courage nor the rashness of the one who underestimates danger, nor even contempt for those precautions that are taken by whoever seeks victory but that are forgotten by whoever fears nothing because loses nothing. The Anglo-Saxon epic hero is, on the contrary, prudent and this means, above all, that he keeps his eyes open to reality and he makes use of common sense. For example, before the fight against Grendel, Beowulf watches carefully the criminal movements of the hellish creature he must defeat and then he springs on to it at the right moment. Again Beowulf displays his prudence when he realizes the difficulty of the struggle against the dragon and he orders, as a wise precaution, that an iron shield should be forged to hold back the fire thrown by his enemy.

¹ This quality of the wise king applied to Beowulf and the Danish king appears in other passages of the poem: *snotor hæleth* (l. 190b), *snotor guma* (l. 1384a), *snot(t)ra fengel* (ll. 1475a and 2156a), *se snotera (snottra)* (ll. 1313b and 1786b); he is also referred to as *frod* (ll. 279a, 1306b, 1724a and 2114a) and *thone wisan (se wisa)* (l. 1318a and the text quoted).

² Trans: All this physical strength you govern restrainedly with wisdom. ll. 1705-6.

³ *Vid.* Tacitus: *Germania*, VI, 6. The edition consulted was published by The Loeb Classical Library, Heinemann, London, 1970.

And as L. L. Schücking says, the hero performs these demands of prudence, namely: to order present matters, to foresee the future once and to record the past once “in an exemplary fashion as his arrangements and speeches indicate.”¹

On the other hand, gravity of speech is an important part of the hero's prudence and as A. Brodeur suggests “speech illustrates the hero's wisdom and political insight.”² Beowulf, for example, is designated on many occasions as *se wisa*,³ and this wisdom is manifested in extraordinary oratorical qualities (*wis wordcwida*); and to be gifted as an orator is always well-becoming to a Germanic king.⁴ The poet's threefold distinction between bodily strength, mental wisdom, and wise speech, goes back to good medieval precedent, for example Bede's reference in *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 12 to those who *in omni verbo et opere et cogitatione perfecti sunt*. Whoever is wise and prudent, in addition to being a good orator, can also teach others the knowledge he already possesses. This is the case of the deserted vassal in *The Wanderer* that yearns to return to the teaching, *larcwidum*,⁵ of his lord.

Hrothgar is also lavish in giving advise, sometimes slipping into a sermon-like style that refers us to ecclesiastical sources.⁶ It is, however, this kind of speeches that gives us information about the conception of life that the epic hero has, and they prepare us for the moment when he will face death. Accordingly, the numerous maxims appearing in the speeches of the

¹ L. L. Schücking: *op. cit.* p. 47.

² A. G. Brodeur. *The Art of Beowulf*. University of California Press. Berkeley. 1959. p. 178.

³ *Vid. Beowulf*, ll. 1318, 1400 and 1698.

⁴ *Cf.* L. L. Schücking: *op. cit.* in L. E. Nicholson (ed.): *op. cit.* p. 42.

⁵ *The Wanderer*, l. 38 (the edition consulted was R. F. Leslie: *The Wanderer*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1985).

⁶ *Vid. Beowulf*, (Hrothgar's sermon) ll. 1700-84.

characters in *Beowulf* serve the purpose of supplying a particular conception of the Germanic epic world as E. Tuttle Hansen says:

The number, range and structural and thematic importance of the gnomic sayings in *Beowulf* suggest that aphoristic didacticism is embraced by the epic for a serious and pervasive purpose: the speaker's extensive and emphatic display of his gnomic repertoire - akin (...) to Hrothgar's display of his parental wisdom in the "sermon"- affords him an authoritative, generalizing (and inherently pessimistic) voice with which to establish the epic's prevailing attitude towards the nature and meaning of the human experience it narrates.¹

The Danish king's sayings show his view of reality and the profundity with which he judges the anxieties and sorrowful events of any sort that are habitual companions of man on earth. Take as an example the following discourse of Hrothgar:

eft sona bith

thæt thec adl oththe ecg eafothes getwæfeth
oththe fyres feng, oththe flodes wylm
oththe gripe mecес, oththe gares fliht
oththe atol ylдо, oththe eagena bearhtm
forsiteth ond forsworceth. Semninga bith
thaet thec, dryhtguma, death oferswytheth.²

¹ E. Tuttle Hansen: "Hrothgar's "sermon" in *Beowulf* as parental wisdom, *Anglo-Saxon England* 10(1982), pp. 55-6.

² *Beowulf*, ll. 1761-8. It is worth quoting J. R. R. Tolkien's comparison between this passage of *Beowulf* and lines 66 to 71 of *The Seafarer* (J. R. R. Tolkien: "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," *Proceedings of the British Accademy* 22(1936), pp. 245-95 in L. E. Nicholson (ed.): *op. cit.*, pp. 92-3): *The Seafarer* says: "ic gelyfe no /

Beowulf also shows in his speeches an expert knowledge of the vital experience of man and, particularly, of the Germanic epic hero. As M. Goldsmith says “The evidence in my opinion shows the Beowulf’s wisdom manifests itself in speeches rather than in actions.”¹ He expresses this wisdom, like Hrothgar, by using a formulaic or sentential language. For instance, about the aim of heroic deeds, he says:

Selre bith æghwæm,
thæt he his freond wrece thonne he fela murne.
Ure æghwylc sceal ende gebidan
worolde lifes; wyrce se the mote
domes aer deathe; thæt bith drihtguman
unlifgendum æfter selest.² ll. 1384b-9.

With regard to the matter that is being dealt with here, it is interesting to quote E. Tuttle Hansen’s comment on this last passage as it draws a relationship between Beowulf’s wisdom and fortitude and king Hrothgar’s:

The hero’s words reminds us not only that he embodies what is the “better” and “best” course of action for all brave men to choose, in the light of human mortality, but also that Beowulf

thæt him eorhwellan ece stondath. / Simle threora sum thinga gehwylce / ær his tiddege to tweon weortheth: / adl oththe ylde oth the ecghete / frægum from weardum feorh oththringeth. “ (I do not believe that material riches will last eternally for him. One of three things will ever become a matter of uncertainty for any man before his last day, ill-health or old age or the sword’s hostile violence will crush the life from the doomed man in his heedlessness).

¹ M. Goldsmith. *op. cit.* p. 220.

² Trans. It is a finer thing in any man that he should avenge his friend than that he should unduly mourn. Each one of us must live in expectation of an end of life in this world: let him who can gain good repute before death, that is the finest thing thereafter for the lifeless man. ll. 1384b-9.

himself is not simply a symbol of youthful *fortitudo* in contrast to Hrothgar's *sapientia*. Even in his youth Beowulf understands and can authoritatively articulate the heroic principles that motivate his actions throughout the poem.¹

Beowulf is the first example, according to L. L. Schücking, of a design of a personality turned towards the ideal of *sobrietas* or *mensura*.² The hero is presented as uniting in a certain ideal manner pride with modesty, devotion to God with self-confidence, daring with caution, the desire of riches but without being greedy; he is also pious, thankful and reverent towards the elderly. These characteristics, at least some of them, also appear embodied in other Anglo-Saxon heroes. Byrhtnoth in *The Battle of Maldon*, for example, hurls himself into the fight furiously after having kept a moment before an attitude of restraint at the Vikings' attacks.³

It certainly cannot be thought in these cases that there may exist any sort of contradiction in the heroes, or a vital duality resulting from a split personality. On the contrary, virtue reaches its optimal point in a happy medium;⁴ its right position is halfway between its opposite vices: the blindness of the ignorant and the vanity of the conceited, which have nothing to do with the true prudence of the wise man; the cowardice of the pusillanimous and the temerity of the presumptuous, which fail to act according to the true fortitude of the brave man.

In *The Battle of Maldon* different passages highlight this epic theme from several points of view. Firstly, and recalling what was mentioned about the double aspect in which fortitude may be carried out, the Saxon leader Byrht-

¹ E. Tuttle Hansen: *op. cit.* p. 57.

² Cf. L. L. Schücking: *op. cit.* pp. 46-7.

³ *Vid. The Battle of Maldon*, l. 138 (the edition consulted was D. G. Scragg.: *The Battle of Maldon*, Manchester University Press. Manchester 1991(1981).

⁴ On the classic sentence *in medio virtus*, *vid.* A. Millán Puelles: *op. cit.* pp. 658-9.

noth prepares his men for the battle by showing them the most suitable way of resisting the enemies' assaults and exhorting them with wise advice to repel firmly the attack. A summary of this part of the poem, extending to line 129, is line 127: *Stodon stædefæste, stihte hi Byrhtnoth*. (They stood steadfast, Byrhtnoth was in command of them) Then the chieftain himself steps forth to the hand-to-hand fight and dies praising God while incessantly addressing his troops with words of exhortation.¹ We have to point out, however, that Byrhtnoth's *ofermod* (pride) has worried many readers and critics such as J. R. R. Tolkien,² and more recently D. Scragg who maintains an adverse judgement and have argued that Byrhtnoth is not a wise hero: "Tolkien was undoubtedly right in regarding the term as pejorative";³ but others have argued that *ofermod* in a heroic context has an older meaning such as "great courage" a virtue essential to noble rulers.⁴

Secondly, Leofsunu, Dunnere, Offa and the other loyal comrades of the fallen chieftain, following his example, spring bravely to the fight after having encouraged their fellow warriors with words that are a reminder of their thankfulness for the large number of presents received from their lord, of their loyalty, and a call to wipe away the offence caused by the loss of their leader. It is worth mentioning part of the brief discourse of Byrhtwold because of its lapidary character, which is another way of expressing the common lore of a people:

Hige sceal the heardra, heorte the cenre
mod sceal the mare, the ure maegen lytlath
Her lith ure ealdor eall forheawen,

¹ A. Bravo. "Prayer as a Literary Device in the Battle of Maldon and in the Poem of the Cid." *SELIM* 2(1992) pp. 31-47.

² J. R. R. Tolkien. - "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm's Son." *Essays and Studies* 6(1953) pp. 1-18.

³ D. Scragg. *op. cit.* p. 187.

⁴ G. Clark. "The Battle of Maldon, A Heroic Poem." *Speculum* 43(1968) pp. 52-71.

god on greote. A maeg gnornian
se the nu fram this wigplegan wendan thenceth.¹ ll. 312-16.

It is worth pointing out, in contrast with the two previous paragraphs, how the concept of *sapientia et fortitudo* deteriorates in the behaviour of those characters in the poem that subordinate the good at which the battle is aimed (either fame for victory or expulsion of the invaders) to particular interests, such as the preservation of their own lives in the case of the deserters and the desire for gold in the case of the Vikings. The poet significantly does not concede the use of speech to any of the traitors that leave the battle-field. He simply mentions their names: Godric and his two brothers, Godwine and Godwig, the three of them Odda's sons. Lines 186-7 describe this hurried desertion in which Godric rides away on the steed that had belonged to his lord. It is possible to interpret this episode as an inadvertence due to his haste to get away, or as an irony highlighting Godric's ingratitude to Byrhtnoth, or even as a conscious theft resulting from his greediness. In any case, it is obvious that the behaviour of these warriors is not in line with the ideal of a wise and brave man, apart from the fact that they breach the obligation of loyalty imposed by their lord's generosity. The result is the division of the troops because of the confusion caused by such a cowardly attitude of a part of them.

The Viking pirates in turn fight moved by a desire of loot; thus, for instance, they offer peace in return of a tribute (ll. 29 ff.); a warrior approaches the dying Byrhtnoth to snatch his valuable objects (ll. 159 ff.) They are daring and fierce to do evil and, consequently, their speeches contain words full of arrogance, such as the Viking messenger's, or they plot tricks to advance

¹ Trans. "Most courageously he enjoined the warriors, resolution must be the tougher, hearts the keener, courage must be the more as our strength grows less. Here lies our lord all hacked down, the good man in the dirt. He who now thinks of getting out of this fighting will have cause to regret it for ever. "

positions when realizing the determination of the Saxons who defend the bridge.

Such attitudes of the epic hero's enemies, opposite to the ideal of wisdom and fortitude, are not surprising. The poet seems to intend to establish a comparison between antithetic traits. When the true good that the wise and brave king seeks, such as peace, his subjects' welfare and, in short, the *ordinata concordia* L. L. Schücking talks about,¹ is overlooked, then it is quite easy to fall into the small-mindedness of the one who seeks after particular goals that are far from the common good, such as the desire of riches, origin not infrequently of the introduction in man's heart of the sin of pride. Pride is in turn, as said earlier, the cause of the loss of wisdom as it makes the wise man grow vain and, consequently, it deviates the brave man's efforts towards wicked purposes.

In connection with this, it seems interesting to quote H. D. Chickering's comments on Beowulf's pride:

To his mind, the important values are courage and strength. Yet, when the dragon's ravages begin, Beowulf's first thought is that somehow he has transgressed "against the old law" (2330). As far as scholars can determine, this phrase refers to "natural law."²

Later on, considering Hrothgar's speech on the misfortunes that the sin of pride brings to man, he comments:

Hrothgar's sermon is a long speech, placed in a commanding position in the poem. It crowns Beowulf's adventures in Denmark by cautioning him about the future. For these reasons, it raises ques-

¹ Cf. L. L. Schücking: *op. cit.* p. 41.

² H. D. Chickering: *Beowulf: A Dual-Language Edition*, Anchor Books, New York, 1989, p. 272.

tions of interpretation that affect our whole view of the poem. Beowulf himself is as silent as the poet and makes no answer to Hrothgar's warning. Do we dare conclude then that Beowulf succumbs to pride in the dragon fight? Does he set too great a value on earthly goods in seeking the dragon's hoard?¹

These questions, however, could be answered negatively, in our opinion, by quoting J. R. R. Tolkien: "*The supreme quality of the old heroes, their valour, was their special endowment by God, and such could be admired and praised*",² as well as L. L. Schücking: "*Beowulf, who kills the dragon, is the good shepherd who perishes in protecting his flock.*"³

R. E. Kaske pointed out that *sapientia et fortitudo* can be considered as a single theme common to epic heroes and, sometimes, it is manifested separately in two different characters, but complementing each other, as in the case of Roland and Oliver in the *Chanson of Roland*. It also seems suitable now to state that in *The Battle of Maldon* cunning and cowardice, as the opposites of wisdom and fortitude, appear separately in two types of characters, but somehow related to each other. Cunning is manifested in the pirates' boastful and deceitful words, whereas cowardice is the main quality of the deserters.

This would not be a complete study of the Anglo-Saxon epic heroes' wisdom and fortitude if we did not mention other factors that impel heroes to wield their weapons and fight heroically against their opponents, in this way showing off their bravery and physical strength.

On the one hand, Hrothgar is found to be a king, Germanic and Christian at the same time. He is perhaps one of the most pious epic characters as shown by his typically Christian speeches on the vices to be rejected and the

¹ *Ibid.* pp. 276-7.

² J. R. R. Tolkien: *op. cit.* (1966) p. 100.

³ L. L. Schücking: *op. cit.* p. 40.

virtues to be practised by the good king, as well as by his frequent words of praise to God, for instance, his gratitude to God when considering Beowulf as a deliverer expressly sent by the Almighty. We should also remember Byrhtnoth's prayer to God before falling dead in Maldon; and there are a number of phrases in both poems that point to the belief in an afterlife in which God will judge men according to their acts.

On the other hand, not all the motives constituting the knowledge that moves these characters to act are Christian principles of an Augustinian or Boethian kind, but they belong to the common set of ethic values that shape the social code of the Anglo-Saxon peoples and which Tacitus had already described in his *Germania* at the end of the first century.

In this sense, it may be noticed throughout Old English literature an obvious amalgam of Christian and Germanic elements.¹ Thus, for instance, Beowulf trusts his own physical strength as much as the divine grace and the cause of his victories over Grendel and its mother is a combination of both factors (*vid.* ll. 967-8, 1056-7, 1270-4, 1553-6). Moreover, the use of this mighty strength serves what seems to be the final objective of his acts and the reason why he undertakes heroic enterprises: to win fame among men as the last line of the poem clearly states: *leodum lithost ond lof-geornost.* (the most kindly to his people and the most eager for fame) This Germanic characteristic is also disclosed in the hero's reply to Hrothgar's noble warrior Unferth, who in turn feels envy because he has found someone whose deeds are more famous than his.

The firmly rooted concept of loyalty within the Germanic *comitatus* about which Tacitus talks in chapter XIII of his *Germania*, plays as well an important role in the conduct of epic heroes. This trait consists in the establishment of a bond between lord and vassals, by means of which the former

¹ J. Niles. "Pagan survivals and popular belief" in M. Godden and M. Lapidge eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1991. p. 141.

commits himself to hand in valuable objects generously to his intimate circle of warriors and these ones give him in return their unquestioning fidelity which may even lead them to give up their own lives.

This Germanic ethic of loyalty is complemented by another no less important obligation: the revenge for the death of the lord or of any other member of the same kin. Both obligations may occasionally be in conflict as in the Finnsburh episode in *Beowulf*; sometimes the crime must remain unpunished either because it has been committed within the same family, as in the case of Herebeald, king Hrethel's elder son, or because it has been a legal death as it is the case of the old man that mourns for his son executed on the gallows and which serves Beowulf to exemplify the sorrow for the loss of the beloved ones (*vid.* ll. 2435-70).

There are numerous examples of loyalty to the leader of the people in the epic poems. Suffice it to quote the words of exhortation pronounced by the faithful followers of Byrhtnoth before rushing to the fight in order to revenge their lord's death in Maldon, as well as their contempt for those who cowardly deserted the battlefield forgetting the presents liberally given to them by Byrhtnoth in the hall.¹ And also the spiteful comment made by Beowulf's comrade Wiglaf when he becomes aware of the flight of the other warriors who accompanied the old king to the unfortunate encounter with the dragon (*vid.* ll. 2864-91); eventually he exclaims: *Death bith sella eorla gehwylcum thonne edwit-if*.²

All these characteristics: search for fame, loyalty, revenge, are a main part of the social ethic code of the Germanic peoples and, consequently, of the Anglo-Saxons. Together with the Christian beliefs also shared by the epic

¹ F. Robinson. "God, Death and Loyalty in The Battle of Maldon" in M. Salu et R. T. Farrel eds. *J. R. R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca. 1979. pp. 76-98. See also R. Woolf "The Ideal of men dying with their lord" *ASE* 5(1976) pp. 63-81.

² Trans. Death is a better thing for any man than a lifetime of scorn. *Beowulf*, ll. 2890b-1.

hero they provide a more definite outline of the whole knowledge and ways of viewing reality which impels these characters to act in one or another direction in order to achieve those aims that they consider as good. To get them they will spare no sufferings and will never retreat when facing pain or fear to lose their lives. The profile of *sapientia et fortitudo* is, therefore, more clearly shaped as a theme characterizing the epic hero's personality when alive and also before death.

SAPIENTIA ET FORTITUDO IN ÆLFRIC'S ENGLISH SAINTS

Three of the English saints whose lives are told by Ælfric are martyrs, namely: St Alban, St Oswald and St Edmund. Martyrdom, as mentioned earlier, means the highest expression of Christian wisdom and fortitude. To the Christian hero it is in the Christian faith that the source of good is found, as it is a participation of God, Supreme Good. This conviction, taken as norm of conduct, leads him to subordinate everything else, even his own life, to the defence of the spiritual good of his people when this is menaced. It is at this moment that the martyr's fortitude comes into effect and, sheltered by his trust in God's power, he does not hesitate in confronting death for the sake of their subjects (in the case of St Alban in order to save the priest hidden in his home).

This is not, however, the only reason that invites a saint to accept death. The peace of the nation threatened or invaded by cruel enemies, the punishment or disapproval of injustice and loyalty to his own vassals, as in *Beowulf* and in the *Battle of Maldon*, are a part of the set of motives that in turn permit an analogous approach of the martyr to the epic hero. This fact allows to discover occasionally characterization techniques in Ælfric similar to the epic poets'.

Firstly, a similarity can be observed in the manner of presenting the heroes' enemies. The introduction, for example, of the emperor Diocletian in

the *Passio Sancti Albani*, as the instigator of the persecution against Christians, implies the description of the danger that St Alban has to face, highlighting and anticipating, at the same time, his bravery. His loyalty to the fugitive priest, who converts him to the faith in Christ, leads him to give himself up to an unusually bloodthirsty opponent:

Sum hæthen casere wæs gehaten Dioclitianus se wæs to casere
gecoren theahthe he cwealmbære wære æfter Cristes
acennednyss twam hund gearum and syx and hundeahtatigum
ofer ealne middaneard and he rixode twentig geara rethe cwellere
swa that he acwealde and acwellan het ealle tha cristenan the he
ofaxian mihte and forbærnde cyrcan and berypte tha
unscæththigan and theos arleasa ehtnyss unablinndlice eode
ofer ealne middaneard ealles tyngear oth thæt heo to Engla lande
eac swylce becom and thær fela acwealde tha the on Criste
gelyfdon.¹

This extract brings to mind other similar ones in *Beowulf*, such as those describing the murderous cruelty of Grendel (ll. 710-3) and its mother (ll. 1258-65), as well as the devastating power of the dragon (ll. 2312-21). Diocletian and the three monsters are featured as enemies of men and *Godes andsaca*.

In connection with this fact, it is possible to interpret these passages as a struggle between the forces of evil and good in whose ranks the *reprobate*

¹ All references to Ælfric's lives of English saints in Old English are based on W. W. Skeat: *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, Early English Text Society, 2vols. Oxford University Press, London, 1966. Trans. There was a heathen emperor named Diocletian who was chosen to be emperor over all the earth, though he was a destroyer of men, two hundred and eighty six years after Christ's incarnation, and he reigned twenty years, a cruel murderer, so that he killed, and bade kill, at the Christians whom he could find out, and burned churches, and robbed the innocent, and this impious persecution spread unceasingly over all the earth fully ten years until it came also even to England, and there killed many who believed in Christ. vol. I, p. 414.

and the *just* take part respectively.¹ Used as characterization techniques, all these fragments, included Ælfric's, enhance the moral value and physical strength of heroes, who have to confront enemies against which, and according to their destructive qualities and potency, other men's efforts have failed (cf. *Beowulf*, ll. 750-4).

References similar to the ones mentioned, although not so long, to the wickedness of the rivals of Ælfric's saints can be found in the lives of king Oswald and king Edmund. In the former, the author presents the cruel pagan leader Cadwalla as a murderer and outrageous persecutor of the Northumbrians. After the battle that will put an end to his misdeeds, the cause of Cadwalla's depravation is explained: pride, *thonne modigan Cedwallan*, (the proud Cadwalla) through which *the wende thæt him ne mihte nam werod withstandan*.² (Who thought that no army could withstand him).

This vice is, as said earlier, the origin of man's deviation from true wisdom. Against it Hrothgar speaks (*Beowulf*, ll. 1700-84) using formulae inspired by Latin Patristics, above all Augustinian, because it causes man's heart to grow vain, which in the epic, and now in the hagiography, brings about bloody acts. So it is confirmed by Hrothgar in the above-mentioned speech where he comments on Heremod's lamentable behaviour (ll. 1709-21).

Therefore, the contrast is evident between the attitude of the pagan characters and the Christian heroes that Ælfric presents. On the one hand, the former lack the true wisdom that originates in the knowledge of the faith in Christ and, as a result, they are proud and use their energies in acts of cruelty to men and in persecuting God by eliminating His servants. On the other hand, St Alban's and St Oswald's wisdom and fortitude is rooted in the knowledge of the Christian doctrine and in the confidence in the divine power. Only in this way can the courage, they display before their fierce enemies, be understood. This faith in Christ makes St Alban be dauntless: *ac*

¹ Cf. M. Padgett Hamilton: *op. cit.* pp. 133-4.

² W. W. Skeat: *op. cit.* vol. II, p. 126.

*Albanus næs afyrht for his feondlicum threowracan for than the he wæs ymbygyrd mid Godes wæpnum.*¹ The same can be said of St Oswald: *Oswold him com to and him cenlice withfeaht mid lytlum werode ac his geleafa hine getrymde and Crist him gefylste to his feonda slege.*² As a wise man of irreproachable to the narration of his *vita* and *passio*: *Eadmun se eadiga, East-engla cynincg, wæs snotor and wurthfull and wurthode symble mid æthelum theawum thone ælmihtigan God.*³ Ælfric insists that the wisdom of the saint is rooted in the obserbance of the faith: *wæs symble gemyndig thære sotham lare* (was always mindful of the true doctrine); and expresses in a homiletic tone which the support of faith is: humility: *Gif thu eart to heafodmen geset ne ahefe thu the, ac beo betwux mannum swa swa an man of him.*⁴ Then he enumerates the fruits accompanying this virtue; they can be summed up in the king's solicitude for his people: *He wæs cystig wædlum and wydewum swa swa fæder and mid welwillendnysse and tham rethum styrde.*⁵ The above-mentioned Augustinian thesis are, therefore, confirmed by these passages of St Edmund's life and even completed with the comment that draws a dividing line between the presentation of his happy reign and the introduction of the peace-breaking event: *and gesæliglice leofode on sothan geleafan* (and lived happily in the true faith).

¹ Trans. but Alban was not offrighted by his fiendly threats because he was girded about with God's weapons. *Ibid.* vol. I, p. 416.

² Trans. Oswald came to him and fought boldly against him with a little army, but his faith strengthened him and Christ helped him to the slaughter of his enemies. *Ibid.* vol. II, p. 126.

³ Trans. Edmund the blessed, king of the East Angles, was wise and honourable, and ever glorified, by his excellent conduct, Almighty God. *Ibid.* p. 314.

⁴ Trans. If you are made a chief man, exalt not yourself, but be among men as one of them. *Ibid.* p. 314.

⁵ Trans. He was bountiful to the poor and to widows even like a father, and with benignity guided his people ever to righteousness, and controlled the violent. *Ibid.* pp. 314-6.

The abrupt change that takes place in the content of the narration immediately after the mentioned passages, as well as the introduction of the new characters that will cause the king-martyr's death, produce a deliberate contrast meant to attract the reader's or listener's attention towards the utterly opposite behaviour of those who lack the wisdom and fortitude animating the righteous life of the main character of the narration. It will serve to present a dichotomy similar to that established between Hrothgar's above-mentioned discourse against Heremod's misconduct and the qualities of the wise ruler, or between the desertion from Maldon and the faithful self-denial of Byrhtnoth's comrades.

The Viking pirates, Hingwar and Hubba, also show the notes of cruelty and impiety that have just been indicated. The custom of plundering and murdering, *hergiende and sleande wide geond land swa swa heora gewuna is*,¹ is differently practised by each of them. Hubba raids Northumbria and we are insisted on his cruelty. As to Hingwar, he invades St Edmund's kingdom; he is said to murder men, women and children, not even Christians can get away from his criminal impetus. His thirst for blood is compared to that of a wolf prowling in search of a prey: *swa swa wulf on lande bestalcode and tha leode sloh*.²

The menacing speech addressed to King Edmund by the Viking leader's messenger shows that the main reason that impel Hingwar to carry out such atrocities is the undue desire for riches, which is the cause of sin, particularly the sin of pride, as mentioned earlier: *Nu het he the dælan thine digelan goldhordas and thinra yldrena gestreon ardlice with hine*.³

The Danish chieftain's pride is manifested in the arrogant threats with which he intends to intimidate the king and in the excessive confidence he

¹ Trans. Harrying and slaying widely over the land as their custom is. *ibid.* p. 316.

² Trans. Like a wolf stalked over the land and slew the people. *Ibid.* p. 316.

³ Trans. Now he commandeth thee to divide thy secret treasures and thine ancestors' wealth quickly with him. *Ibid.* p. 318.

seems to have in his own warfare capacity; the messenger goes on to say: and thu beo his undercynig gif thu cucu beon wylt for than the thu næfst tha mihte thæt thu mage him withstandan.¹

A summery of all the crimes committed by both Viking leaders, Hingwar and Hubba, seems to be contained in the descriptive stroke characterizing them as *geanlæhte thurh deofol*, (associated by the devil) which simultaneously diagnoses the cause of their persistent depravation.

Ælfric wishes to make clear that the origin of man's depravation has to be situated in the sin of pride, the leading exponents of which is Satan. Accordingly, we find similar references in the descriptions of the monsters that disturb the peace in *Beowulf*.² However, St Edmund's *sapientia et fortitudo* is again perceived in his reaction to the previous provocation of the Danish envoy. Firstly, we can talk about the wise king who adopts the prudent decision of asking his bishop for advise about the most appropriate manner of replying to Hingwar:³ *Hwæt tha Eadmund clypode ænne bisceop, the him tha gehendost wæs and with hine smeade hu he tham rethan Hinguare andwyr-*

¹ Trans. And thou shalt be his underking, if thou desire to live because thou hast not the power that thou mayst withstand him. *Ibid.* p. 318.

² An enumeration of the epithets applied to the two water-monsters in *Beowulf*, and their connotations in relation to Satan and his followers, can be found in M. Padgett Hamilton: op. cit. pp. 123 ff. An interpretation is made in this same paper, quoting St Gregory the Great: *Moralia*, Book 4, Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, Oxford, 1845, p. 196, about the Biblical convention which makes no distinction between earthly and otherworld servants of the devil: *Now as this same Saviour of us is one Person with the assembly of the good, for He himself is the Head of the Body and we are all the Body of the Head; so our old enemy is one person with the whole company of the damned (...) And so it is meet that all that is said (...) of our old enemy should be applied to his body, i. e. to all wicked persons.* “

³ A thorough study on the Christian virtue of prudence can be found in J. Pieper: *Prudencia y templanza*, Rialp, Madrid, 1969, pp. 39-109. Vid. especially pp. 55, 63-65 where thoughtlessness and lack of deliberation in decisions are considered as contrary to this virtue, and pp. 104-7 where asking for advise is analysed as an integral part of prudence.

dan sceolde.¹ Secondly, once St Edmund has reflected on the matter and made up his mind, Ælfric introduces his reply to the bishop emphasizing the king's bravery: *Tha cwæth Eadmund cyning swa swa he ful cene wæs*² This superlative, *ful cene*, marks in turn a sharp contrast not only with Hingwar's dreadful threats, but also with the frightened bishop's irresolute resignation: *Tha forhtode se bisceop for tham færlican gelimpe, and for thæs cyninges life, and cwæth thæt him ræd thuhte thæt he to tham gebuge the him bead Hingwar*.³ The contrast is also made between the king's decision and the bishop's exhortation to surrender: *Eala thu leofa cyning thin folc lith ofslægen, and thu næfst thone fultum thæt thu feohtan mæge, and thas flotmen cumath, and he cucenne gebindath, butan thu mid fleame thinum feore gebeorge, oth the thu the swa gebeorge thæt thu buge to him*.⁴ Then the king addresses the messenger in the following terms that again insist on the hero's fortitude and courage: *Næs me naefre gewunelic thæt ic worhte fleames, ac ic wolde swithor sweltan gif ic thorfie for minum agenum earde*.⁵

All these texts from the life of St Edmund show with vigorous quick strokes the essential components taking part in this character's trait of wisdom and fortitude. In short, we are in the presence of a wise and prudent king, pious to God and benign to his people, just with wrongdoers at the same time as liberal with the needy, to the extent of being considered as a father to his subjects.

¹ Trans. So then king Edmund called a bishop who was handiest to him, and consulted with him how he should answer the savage Hingwar. Op. cit. vol. 2. p. 318.

² Trans. Then said Edmund the king, full brave as he was. *Ibid.* p. 318.

³ Trans. Then the bishop feared for this terrible misfortune and for the king's life, and said that it seemed best to him that he should submit to that which Hingwar bade him. *Ibid.* p. 318.

⁴ Trans. Alas, thou dear king thy people lie slain, and thou has not sufficient forces with which thou mayest fight and these seamen will come and will bind thee alive unless thou save thy life by means of flight, or thus save thyself by yielding to him. *Ibid.* p. 318.

⁵ Trans. It was never my custom to take to flight, but I would rather die, if I must, for my own land. *Ibid.* p. 320.

L. L. Schücking talks of the fatherly quality as well-becoming to the royal dignity and as characteristic of the ideal monarch. In particular, and because of its similarity to the description of St Edmund (*swa swa faether*), I quote this paragraph of his:

Attila's benevolence toward his associates, the "anxious love" with which he as *paterfamilias* assists hostages and treats them like his own sons, so that Walther may address him as "best of fathers" -all of this agrees entirely with the basic character of the ideal king, which is now satisfactorily known to us and which one cannot designate otherwise than by the word "fatherly".¹

The confidence in God's power and the loyalty to his nation are the premises of such fortitude as to permit him not to hesitate at the moment of giving up his life for the sake of those he has served. As we can see, the parallelism between Ælfric's English saints and the Anglo-Saxon epic heroes is manifest in some of these characteristics.

Little can be said about St Swithun's *sapientia et fortitudo*. In the case of this bishop, Ælfric himself complains repeatedly about the neglect of those who lived around him and did not leave a written record of his life. Nevertheless, it is possible to pick out some information about his wisdom, considered as the set of values he defends and as shaping a way of understanding reality. The miraculous deeds he works and the admonitions he pronounces in different visions will provide some hints of what this characteristic was like when he was alive, because as Ælfric says: *ac God hæfth swa theah his lif geswutelod mid swutelum wundrum and syllicum tacnum*.²

¹ L. L. Schücking: op. cit. p. 45; vid. also pp. 39 and 46.

² Trans. But God hath nevertheless brought his life to life to light by manifest miracles and wondrous signs. Op. cit. vol. 1, p. 442.

St Swithun seems to value the loyalty of those subject to authority. So it is gathered from the message he makes known to the blacksmith in a vision. Briefly, St Swithun asks the blacksmith to express the monk Eadsige and some other monks, who had been expelled from the monastery of Winchester, due to their ill-behaviour, by Bishop Athelwold, his desire that they will give up their proud attitude and return to the obedience of their superiors: *Tha onscunode se eadsige athelwold thone bisceop and ealle tha munecas the on tham mynstre wæron, for thære utdraefe the he gedyde with hi, and nolde gehyran thæs halgan bebod (...) He gebeah swa theah binnan twam gearum to tham ylcan mynstre and munuc wearth thurh God.*¹

It is worth pointing out in this episode a certain reminiscence of that aspect of the Germanic social ethic code that is present in the epic poems, by means of which the warrior's loyalty and the leader's generosity are closely related. The handing out of valuable presents, either weapons or precious metals, was one of the chief motives that stimulated the faithfulness of the members of the *comitatus* to their leader. St Swithun also appears to want to reward the loyalty of the monks by giving them a huge treasure like the one they will find once they have opened his tomb.

This loyalty and its natural concomitant, the lord's solicitude for his vassal, is rewarded by St Swithun by conceding the favour of the cure of the dying servant after having listened to his lord's prayer in which a promise of a better loyalty to God is made if the miracle is performed: *Eala thu halga Swithun, bide thone hælend, thæt he lif forgife thysum licgendum cnihte,*

¹ Trans. At that time this Eadsige shunned bishop Athelwold and all the monks who were in the minster because of the ejection that he had made regarding them, and would not obey the saint's command, though the saint was of wordly kindred to him. He retreated however within two years to that same monastery, and became a monk through (the grace) of God. *Ibid.* p. 446.

and ic beo thæs the geleaffulra tham lifigendan Gode, eallum minum dagum gif he deth this thurh the.¹

The holy bishop, like in the case of the epic heroes, also wishes fame. As he himself says to the blacksmith in the above-mentioned vision, his remains have to be translated into the church since it has been granted to bishop Athelwold *thæt ic on his timan beo mannum geswutelod*.²

In the light of these words, the episode of the hidden treasure in his tomb could be interpreted as a new element that will help to spread his fame. In addition, the innumerable miracles he works also serve this purpose. Thus St Swithun's message to a certain man to warn the lazy monks of Winchester not to interrupt their singing of the *Te Deum* in his honour, ends with a promise to perform so many miracles: *thæt nan man ne mæg gemunan on life thæt ænig man gesawe swylce wundra ahwær*.³

If, as we have seen so far, the *sapientia et fortitudo* of the previous four Ælfric's saints can be understood as completely shaped by the Christian teachings on the heroic exercise of these virtues, although somewhat tinged with a slight epic hue that allows to compare them with the heroes of the Old English epic poems, in the case of St Æthelthryth we can now observe different circumstances that should be taken into account.

On the one hand, we do not find in this holy woman any of the traits that adorn the female characters in epic poems such as *Beowulf* and *Widsith*: for example, Wealhtheow and Alhilda, respectively. Both are characterized as collaborators in pacifying rival nations (Alhilda is designated *fæltre*

¹ Trans. Oh thou holy Swithun, pray to Jesus that He may grant life to this sick servant and I will be for this the faithfuller to the living God all my days if He does this through thee. *Ibid.* p. 462.

² Trans. That in his time I should be made known to men. *Ibid.* p. 444.

³ Trans. That no man shall be able to remember in his lifetime that anyone hath seen such miracles anywhere. *Ibid.* p. 456. Throughout the narration of the life of this holy bishop there are frequent references to the innumerable miracles done through his intercession, vid. pp. 440, 450, 464, 466-8. in W. W. Skeat: op. cit. vol. I.

freothuwebban), and as generous in handing out presents. However, neither of these qualities is noticed in the life of St Æthelthryth, unless her two successive marriages to the alderman Tondbyrht and to king Ecfred have served pacifying purposes between opposed families, which the text does not say explicitly.¹

St Æthelthryth can be considered as an example of wisdom and fortitude that fully coincides with the evangelic model that extols the excellence of celibate over marriage. With regard to this subject, Aldhelm's massive treatise *De Virginitate*, a work dedicated to Abbess Hildelith and her nuns, was well known in Anglo-Saxon period. St Æthelthryth's fortitude is placed accordingly in the preservation of her own virginity during both marriages and in her disposition to take the veil, thus choosing the divine wisdom which makes her give up all worldly goods in order to devote herself to the service of God and the care of her sisters of religion:

Tha lyfde hire se cynincg theah the hit embe lang wære thæs the
heo gewilnode, and wilfrid bisceop tha hi gehadode to mynecene,
and heo syththan on mynstre wunode sume twelf monath swa, and
heo syththan wearth gehahod eft to abudissan on elig mynstre,
ofer manega mynecena, and heo hi modorlice heold mid godum
gebysnungum to tham gastlican life.²

In the same way as Hrothgar or St Edmund were assigned the *fatherly* quality, because of the advice and warnings on how to lead an honest life,

¹ Cf. *Beowulf*, ll. 1160-1231; Widsith, ll. 56 and 97-102. (K. Malone ed. *Widsith*, Rosenkilde and Bagger, Copenhagen, 1962).

² Trans. Then the king permitted her, though it was rather long (first) to do that which she desired, and then bishop Wilfrid gave her the nun's veil, and she lived afterwards in a convent (at Coldingham) about twelve months, and she was then again instituted as abbess in the monastery of Ely, and (set) over many nuns, whom she trained as a mother by her good example in the religious life. *Ibid.* p. 434.

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and because of the exercise of charity towards subjects, respectively, St Æthelthryth also partakes of the *motherly* trait (*modorlice*) since she instructed her sisters with a good example. As a matter of fact, wisdom qualifies for teaching the knowledge one possesses and it also establishes in the wise person a certain fatherhood (or motherhood) over those who are taught.

In sum, the formula *sapientia et fortitudo*, as a mediaeval rhetorical topos expressing a combination of two heroic virtues, was adapted to the English saints whose lives are told by Ælfric, namely St Alban, St Oswald, St Edmund, St. Swithin and St Æthelthryth; all these saints were born in England and they lived in a Germanic context, except St Alban; therefore, they were described by Ælfric with certain Germanic characteristics and heroic virtues, in many cases analogous to the models provided by the epic hero in Old English literature.

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