WODEN AND *MAXIMS I*

By LEONARD NEIDORF

This paper reconsiders the passage in Maxims I *in which Woden is said to have constructed* wēos, *a word that can be understood to mean "idols" or "pagan shrines." It compares the passage to various euhemeristic narratives concerning Woden (or Óðinn) preserved by authors such as Ælfric, Æthelweard, Saxo Grammaticus, and Snorri Sturluson, and it argues that the* Maxims I *passage has more in common with ideas expressed in the later Scandinavian sources than in the earlier homiletic or insular historiographical sources. This exercise in comparative euhemerism suggests that the Woden passage in* Maxims I *is indebted to a narrative that resembled either the story of Óðinn's misadventure with an idol (preserved in* Gesta Danorum*) or the story of Óðinn as the builder of temples and founder of pagan religion (preserved in* Ynglinga saga*). In either case, it appears that a euhemeristic narrative of the sort preserved by Snorri and Saxo circulated centuries earlier in England. Toponymic evidence lends support to this conclusion, as place-names such as* Wōdnes dīc *and* Grīmes dīc *bear witness to the early circulation of otherwise unrecorded ideas about Woden as a supernatural builder. Finally, the presence of the Woden passage in* Maxims I *is viewed as a manifestation of the poem's indebtedness to the tradition of the wisdom contest, a genre associated with Óðinn in Old Norse sapiential literature.*

Woden, the Old English cognate of Óðinn, appears to have been the principal deity venerated in England by the pagan Anglian, Saxon, and Jutish aristocracies prior to their conversion to Christianity.[1] Following the conversion, Woden retained a position in royal genealogies, where he is listed as the ancestor of the kings of every Anglo-Saxon kingdom (excluding Essex), but his name is largely kept out of the extant poetic records.[2] Though literary traditions pertaining to Woden

[1] For recent studies of the material culture pertaining to the cult of Woden, see Alexandra Pesch, "Facing Faces: The Head Motif in Migration-Period Archaeology," *Medieval Archaeology* 61 (2017): 41–68; Neil Price and Paul Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin? Divine Role-Playing in the Age of Sutton Hoo," *European Journal of Archaeology* 17 (2014): 517–38; and Charlotte Behr, "The Origins of Kingship in Early Medieval Kent," *Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000): 25–52. The implications of the widespread iconographic evidence for the cult of Woden are corroborated by Woden's presence in place-names and royal genealogies, both of which associate Woden (and Woden alone) with the Anglian, Saxon, and Jutish regions of England. This point is well made in, for instance, Ronald Hutton, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy* (Oxford, 1991), 265–66. For an overview of the various forms of evidence for the cult of Woden in England, see Gale R. Owen, *Rites and Religions of the Anglo-Saxons* (Totowa, 1981), 8–22.

[2] On Woden's presence in royal genealogies, see esp. Kenneth Sisam, "Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 39 (1953): 287–348; and David N. Dumville, "The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies and Regnal Lists," *Anglo-Saxon England* 5

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might inform aspects of poems such as *Beowulf* and *Widsith*, there are only two poems that mention his name: *Maxims I* and the *Nine Herbs Charm*.[3] In the latter, Woden apparently retains his status as a divine figure in possession of supernatural powers to harm and to heal. After declaring the medicinal properties of nine herbs, this charm against poison and infection describes a scene in which Woden uses nine magical twigs, each one perhaps bearing a runic inscription corresponding to one of the nine herbs, to slay a serpent:

> Ðās VIIII magon wið nygon āttrum.
> Wyrm cōm snīcan, tōslāt hē man;
> ðā genam Wōden VIIII wuldortānas,
> slōh ðā þā nǣddran, þæt hēo on VIIII tōflēah.
> Þǣr geændade æppel and āttor,
> þæt hēo nǣfre ne wolde on hūs būgan. (lines 30–35)

> [These nine herbs have power against nine poisons. A serpent came crawling, it tore apart a person; then Woden took nine glory twigs, then struck the adder so that it fled away in nine. There apple and poison brought it about that it never wanted to enter a house.][4]

Woden's retention of supernatural powers in the *Nine Herbs Charm* is perhaps explained by the practical rather than ideological nature of the magico-medical tradition, where a great variety of supernatural agents are invoked in ecumenical efforts to cure patients of disease: other Old English charms reflect a worldview in

(1976): 23–50. There is a vast critical literature on the subject. For one relatively recent discussion that reviews much of this literature, see R. D. Fulk, "Myth in Historical Perspective: The Case of Pagan Deities in the Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies," in *Myth: A New Symposium*, ed. Gregory Schrempp and William Hansen (Bloomington, 2002), 225–39.

[3] On Woden and *Beowulf*, see the foundational remarks of H. M. Chadwick, *The Cult of Othin: An Essay in the Ancient Religion of the North* (London, 1899), 18, 38–39, and 50–54. For a recent discussion of Wodenic figures in *Beowulf*, see Edward Currie, "Political Ideals, Monstrous Counsel, and the Literary Imagination in *Beowulf*," in *Imagination and Fantasy in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Time: Projections, Dreams, Monsters, and Illusions*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin, 2020), 275–301. For arguments that Wodenic traditions have influenced *Widsith*, see Margaret Schlauch, "Wīdsīth, Víthförull, and Some Other Analogues," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 46 (1931): 969–87; and Leonard Neidorf, "Woden and *Widsith*," *English Studies* 103 (2022): 1–18.

[4] The texts of all Old English poems are cited throughout by line number from their editions in *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, 6 vols. (New York, 1931–1953). The translations provided throughout are cited from *Old English Shorter Poems, Volume II: Wisdom and Lyric*, ed. and trans. Robert E. Bjork (Cambridge, MA, 2014). The text and translation of *Solomon and Saturn II*, however, are cited from *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, ed. and trans. Daniel Anlezark (Cambridge, 2009). Macrons are silently inserted throughout. Line 32 of the *Nine Herbs Charm* is relineated, with the word *VIIII* moved to the on-verse, where meter requires it to be.

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which humans live alongside elves, dwarves, valkyries, witches, the Æsir, mother earth, and other malevolent or benevolent supernatural agents.[5] In *Maxims I*, however, Woden is deprived of his supernatural powers and demoted from genuine divinity to false god. The passage concerning Woden contrasts his vanity and powerlessness with the generosity and omnipotence of the true deity, here understood as the singular God of the Judeo-Christian tradition:

> Wōden worhte wēos, wuldor alwalda,
> rūme roderas; þæt is rīce god,
> sylf sōðcyning, sāwla nergend,
> sē ūs eal forgeaf þæt wē on lifgaþ,
> ond eft æt þām ende eallum wealdeð
> monna cynne. Þæt is meotud sylfa. (lines 132–37)

> [Woden made idols, the Almighty made heaven, the spacious skies; that is the powerful God, the true king himself, the savior of souls, who gave us all everything on which we live and again at the end will entirely rule the human race. That is the creator himself.]

The Woden passage in *Maxims I* is more transparent and less interesting than the Woden passage in the *Nine Herbs Charm*. Whereas the latter bears tantalizing witness to a complex set of pagan beliefs that were largely kept out of the written record, the former can be dismissed as the straightforward denunciation of a sententious ecclesiastic. As E. G. Stanley observes of the allusion to Woden in *Maxims I*: "It is not a mention that redounds to the glory of the god and gives little satisfaction to scholars eager to find the pagan world that was lost to Christendom."[6] Accordingly, an extensive critical literature has emerged in response to the Woden passage in the *Nine Herbs Charm*, whereas relatively little has been written about the pagan god's appearance in *Maxims I*, which has never been the subject of an independent study.[7] Editors of *Maxims I*

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[5] For discussion of the supernatural beings mentioned in the charms, see, for instance, Felix Grendon, "The Anglo-Saxon Charms," *Journal of American Folklore* 22 (1909): 105–237, at 110–23; J. H. G. Grattan and Charles Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine, Illustrated Specially from the Semi-Pagan Text "Lacnunga"* (London, 1952), 52–62; Marijane Osborn, "Archaic Magic of Wolf and Eagle in the Anglo-Saxon 'Wen Charm'," in *The Book of Nature and Humanity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David Hawkes and Richard G. Newhauser (Turnhout, 2013), 223–38; Thomas D. Hill, "The Rod of Protection and the Witches' Ride: Christian and Germanic Syncretism in Two Old English Metrical Charms," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 111 (2012): 145–68; and Stephen O. Glosecki, "Stranded Narrative: Myth, Metaphor, and the Metrical Charm," in *Myth in Early Northwest Europe*, ed. Stephen O. Glosecki (Tempe, 2007), 47–70.

[6] Eric Gerald Stanley, *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past: The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism and Anglo-Saxon Trial by Jury* (Woodbridge, 2000), 82.

[7] On Woden in the *Nine Herbs Charm*, see, for instance, Stephen O. Glosecki, "'Blow These Vipers From Me': Mythic Magic in *The Nine Herbs Charm*," in *Essays in Old,*

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generally treat the passage as one that requires no elucidation in their commentaries; studies of Anglo-Saxon paganism tend to acknowledge the existence of the passage, but rarely give it extended consideration; and studies of *Maxims I* likewise tend to pass over the Woden passage with minimal comment.[8] The present article aims to remedy this oversight and demonstrate that there is considerably more to the passage than initially meets the eye. It argues that the passage can shed light on both the structure of *Maxims I* and the ideas about Woden that circulated after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons.

The most salient insight into the passage that has emerged from the critical literature is that it possesses an intertextual relationship with a biblical commonplace that takes two distinct formulations: in Psalm 95:5, this commonplace is rendered as *quoniam omnes dii gentium daemonia at vero Dominus caelos fecit* ("For all the gods of the Gentiles are devils: but the Lord made the heavens"); in 1 Chronicles 16:26, it is rendered as *omnes enim dii populorum idola Dominus autem caelos fecit* ("For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens"); and in Jerome's psalter *iuxta Hebraeos*, the two formulations are merged, as *sculptilia* ("statues") replace *daemonia* ("devils") in its rendering of Psalm 95:5.[9] Joseph Strobl first called attention to this relationship and

Middle, Modern English and Old Icelandic: In Honor of Raymond P. Tripp Jr., ed. Loren C. Gruber, Meredith Crellin Gruber, and Gregory K. Jember (Lampeter, 2000), 91–123; Lászlo Sándor Chardonnens, "An Arithmetical Crux in the Woden Passage in the Old English *Nine Herbs Charm*," *Neophilologus* 93 (2009): 691–702; Karin Olsen, "The *Lacnunga* and its Sources: *The Nine Herbs Charm* and *Wið Færstice* Reconsidered," *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 55 (2007): 23–31; and Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr., "Hermes-Mercury and Woden-Odin as Inventors of Alphabets: A Neglected Parallel," in *Runes and Their Continental Background*, ed. Alfred Bammesberger (Heidelberg, 1991), 409–19. See also G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (Nijmegen, 1948), 186–95.

[8] The Woden passage receives minimal comment in, for example, the following editions of *Maxims I*: Carl T. Berkhout, "A Critical Edition of the Old English Gnomic Poems" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1975); *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English*, ed. and trans. T. A. Shippey (Cambridge, 1976); and *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, ed. Bernard J. Muir, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Exeter, 2000). For examples of the relatively brief discussion that the Woden passage in *Maxims I* generally merits in studies of Anglo-Saxon paganism, see Ernst Alfred Philippson, *Germanisches Heidentum bei den Angelsachsen* (Leipzig, 1929), 154; Owen, *Rites and Religions* (n. 1 above), 10; and Stephen Pollington, *The Elder Gods: Religion and the Supernatural in Early England* (Ely, 2011), 241. The passage does not appear to be discussed (or at least, it is not discussed at any length) in E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (New York, 1964); Brian Branston, *The Lost Gods of England* (London, 1974); or David Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (London, 1992).

[9] Biblical quotations are cited from *Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. Robert Weber and Roger Gryson, 5th ed. (Stuttgart, 2007); translations are from *The Holy Bible: Douay Version Translated from the Latin Vulgate (Douay, A.D. 1609: Rheims, A.D. 1582)* (London, 1963). On the relationship between these passages and *Maxims I*, see esp. Paul Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1999), 161–62; Richard North, *Heathen*

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pointed out that the same commonplace is quoted in a letter from Pope Bonifatius V to King Edwin, which Bede includes in his *Ecclesiastical History*.[10] Strobl, noting that the *Maxims I* poet's claim that "Woden *made* idols" (*Wōden worhte wēos*) differs from the biblical statement that false gods *are* idols, conjectures that the difference arose through a misunderstanding of the biblical passage, with the poet imagining *facere* ("to make") instead of *esse* ("to be") as the implied verb in the first clause.[11] Audrey Meaney, in a paper that aims to rebut an argument for the widespread influence of Wodenic tradition in Old English poetry, takes a position similar to that of Strobl: "Although the English poet has Woden making the idols, not as being one himself, this may be due to misunderstanding, or to the exigencies of alliteration. We cannot tell that he knew anything more of Woden than his name."[12] Paul Cavill, meanwhile, mentions the Woden passage as one of several in *Maxims I* that are loosely based on biblical sources. He remarks of the group: "These passages are not direct translations and they do not appear to me to be the work of poets collecting from books; the focus is rather on the ideas."[13] Following Cavill, the present article construes the Woden passage not as a faulty attempt to quote a biblical source, but as a paraphrase reflective of the poet's ideas, however idiosyncratic those ideas may be.

A similar approach is taken by Richard North in the most extensive discussion of the Woden passage to appear thus far. North begins his analysis by calling attention to a pertinent passage in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* in which Othinus receives an idol that was made in his image and "by a marvellous feat of workmanship even made it respond with a voice to human touch" (*etiam mira artis industria ad humanos tactus uocalem reddidit*).[14] He proceeds from there to cite an array of Old Norse passages in order to develop a complex interpretation of *Wōden worhte wēos* as an allusion to the god's ability to revivify dead kings in the afterlife. To give a sense of the complexity of North's interpretation, and to avoid misrepresenting the character of his argumentation, it is worthwhile to quote his concluding paragraph in its entirety:

Gods in Old English Literature (Cambridge, 1997), 88–89; and Philippson, *Germanisches Heidentum*, 154.

[10] Joseph Strobl, "Zur Spruchdichtung bei den Angelsachsen," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 31 (1887): 54–64.

[11] Strobl, "Zur Spruchdichtung," 59, writes: "Freilich muss der Dichter die Psalm-stelle entweder aus unsicherem Gedächtnis übersetzt oder sie misverstanden haben, da er *fecit* auch zum regierenden Verbum des ersten Satzes macht."

[12] A. L. Meaney, "Woden in England: A Reconsideration of the Evidence," *Folklore* 77 (1966): 105–15, at 110. Her paper is a response to J. S. Ryan, "Othin in England: Evidence from the Poetry for a Cult of Woden in Anglo-Saxon England," *Folklore* 74 (1963): 460–80.

[13] Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, 165.

[14] See North, *Heathen Gods*, 90; and Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, trans. Peter Fisher, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2015), 1:52–53.

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> Woden's role in *Woden worhte weos* may now be explained as follows. Two Valhǫll-demons named in an Old Norse-Icelandic source are the prototypical *einherjar* Sigmundr and Hermóðr, to whom Óðinn in their lifetimes gave weapons and coats of mail (*Hynd* 1– 2). In the riddle in *Háv* 49 both appear to be stylized as 'tree-men' or idols receiving armour from the speaker Óðinn. 'Tree-men' are further associated with funeral mounds in *Ragnars saga Loðbrókar* and in Óláfr Tryggvason's tale of Freyr in *Flateyjarbók*. In these sources and in *Þorleifs þáttr Jarlsskálds*, *Þorgarðr* and the other idols of Hákon Jarl appear to be late versions of the *herþarfi ásmegir* ('the kinsmen of the Æsir necessary to an army') that are said to fill the temples of Norway in Einarr's *Vellekla* (stanza 16). To the extent that Óðinn immortalizes dead warrior kings by regenerating them in Valhǫll, he is imagined as the father of such *ásmegir*, who, by living within Hákon Jarl's *vé*, count as minor gods (*vé* or *véar*) themselves. These uses of *vé* in *Hákonarmál* 17–18, *Vellekla* 16 and *Hyndluljóð* 1–2, together with the deification of Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri and King Eirik of Sweden, show the possibility of an indigenous Anglian Valhǫll in *Woden worhte weos*, in which, with witchcraft taught him by the Vanir, 'Woden made demons' out of dead kings on Anglian battlefields who then became his sons.[15]

North's argument is a fascinating product of enviable erudition, but the best that can be said about it is that it represents a vaguely possible, though not very probable, interpretation of the passage. Confronting his edifice of argumentation, one might wish to raise various minor objections about the interpretation of this or that passage, as well as some weightier objections, such as the fact that Old English *wēoh* never possesses the kinds of meanings that North discerns in attestations of Old Norse *vé*. Yet such minute engagement is rendered superfluous in view of the more fundamental reason why North's interpretation of *Wōden worhte wēos* cannot receive (and has never received) much credence from scholars seeking to explicate *Maxims I*: it requires one to believe that a passage manifestly condemning a pagan deity for his lack of supernatural powers actually contains an assertion of that pagan deity's supernatural powers. The notion that a passage contrasting a pagan god with the Christian god should contain a cryptic allusion to the pagan god's ability to resurrect the dead cannot be considered very plausible. Its claims on credence are further reduced, moreover, when it is recognized that there are simpler ways to elucidate the *Maxims I* poet's conception of Woden as a builder of *wēos*, which do far less violence to the basic sense of the passage in question.

Euhemerism

The most basic observation to be made about the Woden passage in *Maxims I* is that it appears to constitute a form of euhemerism. This theory, attributed to the Greek atheist Euhemerus of Messene (ca. 300 BCE), maintains that pagan deities originated as historical human beings who came to be worshipped by

[15] North, *Heathen Gods*, 110.

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other human beings. Adopted and developed by patristic authors such as Tertullian, Lactantius, Augustine of Hippo, and Isidore of Seville, euhemerism became a widespread, though not inevitable, mode of interpretation for Christian thinkers throughout the first millennium.[16] In the letter that Pope Bonifatius V wrote to King Edwin (ca. 620), mentioned above, a quotation of Psalm 95:5 (*omnes dii gentium daemonia*, *Dominus autem caelos fecit*) prompts no euhemeristic reflections on the pagan gods worshipped by Edwin. Bonifatius instead stresses the inanimate, artificial, and mutable character of the idols themselves:

> Quomodo enim iuuandi quemlibet possunt habere uirtutem hi qui ex corruptibili materia inferiorum etiam subpositorumque tibi manibus construuntur; quibus uidelicet artificium humanum adcommodans eis inanimatam membrorum similitudinem contulisti: qui, nisi a te motae fuerint, ambulare non poterunt, sed tamquam lapis in uno loco posita, ita constructi nihilque intellegentiae habentes ipsaque insensibilitate obruti nullam neque ledendi neque iuuandi facultatem adepti sunt? Qua ergo mentis deceptione eos deos, quibus uos ipsi imaginem corporis tradidistis, colentes sequimini, iudicio discreto repperire non possumus.

> [How can they have power to help anyone, when they are made from corruptible material by the hands of your own servants and subjects and, by means of such human art, you have provided them with the inanimate semblance of the human form? They cannot walk unless you move them, but are like a stone fixed in one place, and, being so constructed, have no understanding, are utterly insensible, and so have no power to harm or help. We cannot understand in any way how you can be so deluded as to worship and follow those gods to whom you yourselves have given the likeness of the human form.][17]

Though directed at a Northumbrian king who probably venerated Woden, the divine ancestor of all Anglian kings, Bonifatius's letter belongs to an intellectual tradition distinct from the one informing *Maxims I*. Whereas Bonifatius conceives of the pagan gods as mere figments of their worshippers' imagination, who are nothing more than inanimate sculptures, the *Maxims I* poet presents his audience with an animate Woden constructing the instruments of pagan worship. Unlike Bonifatius, the *Maxims I* poet clearly "euhemerise[s] Woden,

[16] See John Daniel Cooke, "Euhemerism: A Mediaeval Interpretation of Classical Paganism," *Speculum* 2 (1927): 396–410; Anthony Faulkes, "Descent from the Gods," *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11 (1982): 92–125; Gerd Wolfgang Weber, "Euhemerismus," in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 8*, ed. Heinrick Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 1994), 1–16; and David F. Johnson, "Euhemerisation versus Demonisation: The Pagan Gods and Ælfric's 'De falsis diis'," in *Pagans and Christians: The Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Tette Hofstra, L. A. J. R. Houwen, and A. A. MacDonald (Groningen, 1995), 35–69.

[17] *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 2.10, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, rev. ed. (Oxford, 1991), 170–71. On the date of Bonifatius's letter, see D. P. Kirby, "Bede and Northumbrian Chronology," *English Historical Review* 78 (1963): 514–27, at 522.

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making him seem merely human by contrasting him with God," as Philip A. Shaw notes.[18] Yet to say that the passage is euhemeristic is only to begin to elucidate it. Euhemerism took many distinct forms in medieval thought, and the euhemeristic narratives that developed around the pagan Germanic deities are both varied and inconsistent. It remains to determine the particular euhemeristic context out of which Woden as a builder of *wēos* is likeliest to have emerged.

Two distinct euhemeristic narratives concerning Woden are known to have circulated in Anglo-Saxon England. One of these narratives appears in texts inspired by Martin of Braga's *De correctione rusticorum*, such as Ælfric's *De falsis diis*, Wulfstan's revision of *De falsis diis*, and certain homiletic writings associated with Ælfric or Wulfstan.[19] The essence of what this tradition has to say about Woden is captured in the following passage from *De falsis diis*, in which Ælfric adapts Martin of Braga's discussion of Mercury:

> Sum man wæs gehāten Mercurius on līfe,
> sē wæs swīðe fācenfull and swicol on dǣdum,
> and lufode ēac stala and lēasbregdnyssa.
> Þone macodan þā hǣþenan him to mǣran gode,
> and æt wega gelǣtum him lāc offrodan,
> and tō hēagum beorgum him brōhtan onsæg[ed]nysse.
> Ðes god wæs [a]rwyrðe betwyx eallum hǣþenum,
> and hē is Ōðon gehāten ōðrum naman on Denisc. (lines 133–140)

> [A certain man was named Mercury in life. He was very deceitful and fraudulent in deeds, and also loved stealing and falsehoods. The heathens made him into an exalted god and offered him sacrifices at crossroads, and brought him sacrifices at high mountains. This god was honored among all heathens, and he is named another name, Odin, in Danish.][20]

There are several indications that the tradition represented by this passage is not the tradition out of which the euhemeristic passage in *Maxims I* emerged. One

[18] Philip A. Shaw, "Uses of Wodan: The Development of his Cult and of Medieval Literary Responses to It" (Ph.D. diss., University of Leeds, 2002), 166.

[19] On these texts and the tradition from which they emerge, see Diane Elizabeth Szurszewski, "Ælfric's *De Falsis Diis*: A Source-Analogue Study with Editions and Translations" (Chapel Hill, 1997); and Johnson, "Euhemerisation versus Demonisation." Ælfric's rendition is the probable source of the Old Norse sermon *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófsk*; on the relationship between them, see Arnold R. Taylor, "*Hauksbók* and Ælfric's *De falsis diis*," *Leeds Studies in English* 3 (1969): 101–109.

[20] The text is cited from *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. John C. Pope, 2 vols. (London, 1967–68), 2:684; the translation is cited from Szurszewski, "Ælfric's *De Falsis Diis*," 239. For Ælfric's source, see Martin of Braga, *De correctione rusticorum*, in *Martini Episcopi Bracarensi Opera Omnia*, ed. Claude W. Barlow (New Haven, 1950), 159–203.

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indication is that the vernacular name of the pagan deity in question is here given in the Scandinavian form *Óðon*, whereas *Maxims I* uses the Old English form *Wōden*. A chronological explanation likely accounts for this discrepancy: Ælfric composed at the end of the tenth century, at which time Woden posed no threat to the Christian establishment and Óðinn was actively worshipped by Scandinavian inhabitants of England, whereas *Maxims I* exhibits signs of composition closer to the period of the conversion, at which time Woden might still have received periodic veneration from backsliding Christians.[21] Furthermore, though the passage in *De falsis diis* describes Woden (or Óðinn) as "deceitful" (*facenfull*), it does not picture him creating the instruments or institutions of pagan worship; he is merely a prodigious criminal whom other heathens made into an exalted god (*Þone macodan þa hæþenan him to mæran gode*). Though influential and widely disseminated, the tradition stemming from *De correctione rusticorum* appears to represent neither a source for nor an analogue to the euhemeristic passage in *Maxims I*.

A distinct set of three euhemeristic passages pertaining to Woden are found in Æthelweard's *Chronicon*. By all appearances, these passages are not indebted to the *De correctione rusticorum* or any of its vernacular renderings. Instead, Æthelweard's passages appear to derive from an insular historiographical tradition and to be based on several different sources, as the inconsistent spelling of Woden's name in the three passages suggests. In one, Æthelweard writes that *Vuoddan* was a barbarian king who was posthumously deified and venerated: "And after his death the pagans, honouring him as a god with respect not fit to be mentioned, offered [him] sacrifice in order to have victory or be courageous" (*Quem post infanda dignitate ut deum honorantes, sacrificium obtulerunt pagani uictoriæ*

[21] On the poem's date, see Dennis Cronan, "Poetic Words, Conservatism, and the Dating of Old English Poetry," *Anglo-Saxon England* 33 (2004): 23–50; and Leonard Neidorf, "On the Dating and Authorship of *Maxims I*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 117 (2016): 137–53. It has also been argued that *Maxims I* is a tenth-century product of the Benedictine reform movement: Michael D. C. Drout, *How Tradition Works: A Meme-Based Cultural Poetics of the Anglo-Saxon Tenth Century* (Tempe, 2006), 287–92; Brian O'Camb, "Bishop Æthelwold and the Shaping of the Old English Exeter Maxims," *English Studies* 90 (2009): 253–73; and John D. Niles, *God's Exiles and English Verse: On the Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry* (Exeter, 2019), 102–106. The argument for tenth-century composition is, however, difficult to reconcile with the wide range of linguistic evidence that *Maxims I* is an archaic poem, including the presence of no fewer than six verses wherein scansion requires the substitution of seventh-century linguistic forms: *rūmheort bēon* (86b), *tō frēan hond* (90b), *wuldor alwalda* (132b), *morþorcwealm mæcga* (152a), *Māþþum ōþres weorð* (155b), and *Slōg his brōðor swǣsne* (196b). These verses, along with lexical archaisms — in *umbor* ("child," line 31a), *wlenco* ("bravado," line 60a), *eodor* ("lord," line 89a), and *heoru* ("sword," line 200b) — and an array of structurally required Anglian dialect forms, render the language of *Maxims I* distinct from that of poems securely dated to the tenth century. See Neidorf, "On the Dating and Authorship" for a full account of the linguistic evidence bearing on the date of *Maxims I*.

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causa siue uirtutis).[22] In another, Æthelweard writes of *Vuothen*, a former "king of a multitude of the barbarians" (*rex multitudinis barbarorum*), that "[t]he heathen northern peoples are overwhelmed in so great a seduction that they worship [him] as a god to the present day, that is to say the Danes, Norwegians and also the Svebi" (*In tanta etenim seductione oppressi aquilonales increduli ut deum colunt usque in hodiernam diem, viz. Dani, Northmanni quoque, et Sueui*).[23] In the third, Æthelweard writes of *Wothen*, "who was king of many nations, and whom some pagans now worship as a god" (*qui et rex multarum gentium, quem pagani nunc ut deum colunt aliqui*).[24] The three passages, exhibiting oscillation between English and Scandinavian forms of the deity's name, are probably indebted to multiple sources within the insular historiographical tradition that are no longer extant. Similar passages concerning the divine ancestor Geat appear in the *Historia Brittonum* and in Asser's *Vita Alfredi*. Geat is probably an alias of Woden, since Óðinn identifies the cognate form *Gautr* as one of his aliases in *Grímnismál* (stanza 54), and various other sources support their identification.[25] The *Historia Brittonum* records that Geat "as they say, was a son of a god, not actually of Almighty God . . . but of one of their idols which, blinded by the same demon, they worshiped for a god in the manner of pagans" (*ut aiunt, filius fuit dei, non ueri nec omnipotentis Dei . . . sed alicuius ex idolis eorum quem, ab ipso daemone caecati, more gentili pro deo colebant*).[26] Asser similarly writes in the *Vita Alfredi* of Geat "whom the pagans worshipped for a long time as a god" (*iamdudum pagani pro deo venerabantur*).[27] The passages from Æthelweard, Asser, and the *Historia Brittonum* indicate the currency of the euhemeristic mode of interpretation in early medieval England. They suggest that the *Maxims I* poet had several traditions available on which he could draw, but it does not appear that he drew on this historiographical tradition, which sticks to a rather minimalistic narrative about Woden or Geat as a human whom others

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[22] *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. and trans. A. Campbell (London, 1962), 7.

[23] *Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. Campbell, 9.

[24] *Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. Campbell, 18.

[25] On the connection between Óðinn (or Woden) and Gautr (or Geat), see Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Berlin, 1970), §§369, 372, and 403; Hermann Moisl, "Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies and Germanic Oral Tradition," *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981): 215–48, at 219–22; Fulk, "Myth in Historical Perspective" (n. 2 above), 232–33; Shaw, "Uses of Wodan" (n. 18 above), 179–80; and Pollington, *The Elder Gods* (n. 8 above), 202–204.

[26] The text is cited from *The Historia Brittonum, 3: The "Vatican" Recension*, ed. David N. Dumville (Cambridge, 1985), 82–83; the translation is cited from Fulk, "Myth in Historical Perspective" (n. 2 above), 232.

[27] The text is cited from Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, ed. William Henry Stevenson, rev. Dorothy Whitelock (Oxford, 1959), 3; the translation is cited from *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, ed. and trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (New York, 1983), 67.

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venerated as a god. Nowhere in this tradition is it suggested that Woden himself took an active role in constructing idols or instituting pagan worship.

Turning to Scandinavia, one finds euhemeristic narratives in which the Æsir are rather more involved in their deification. In Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, Óðinn and the other gods are imagined as human sorcerers who used their powers of sorcery to delude other humans into worshipping them. Euhemerism is evident in various passages in Saxo's work, though his general view is encapsulated in the following passage:

> Olim enim quidam magice artis imbuti, Thor uidelicet et Othinus aliique complures miranda prestigiorum machinatione callentes, obtentis simplicium animis diuinitatis sibi fastigium arrogare coeperunt. Quippe Noruagiam, Suetiam ac Daniam uanissime credulitatis laqueis circumuentas ad cultus sibi pendendi studium concitantes precipuo ludificationis sue contagio resperserunt. Adeo namque fallacie eorum effectus percrebuit, ut in ipsis ceteri quandam numinum potentiam uenerantes eosque deos uel deorum complices autumantes uenificiorum auctoribus solennia uota dependerent et errori sacrilego respectum sacris debitum exhiberent.
>
> [At one time certain individuals, initiated into the arts of sorcery, namely Thor, Odin, and a number of others who were skilled at conjuring up marvellous illusions, clouded the minds of simple men and began to appropriate the exalted rank of godhead. Norway, Sweden, and Denmark were ensnared in a groundless conviction, urged to a devoted worship of these frauds, and infected by the smirch of their gross imposture. The results of their deception spread, so that all other realms came to revere some kind of divine power in them, believing they were gods or the confederates of gods; they rendered solemn prayers to these magic-mongers and paid the respect to an impious heresy which should have gone to true religion.][28]

Saxo's characterization of Othinus as a sorcerer appears more relevant to *Maxims I* than the characterization of the god as either a prodigious criminal in the homiletic tradition or a barbarian king in the insular historiographical tradition. It is also significant that Saxo, as mentioned above, relates a narrative about Othinus and an idol. In this narrative, the Scandinavian kings pay respect to Othinus, whom they believe to be a god, by sending him an idol carved in his image and adorned with golden bracelets. The idol pleases Othinus, but his wife Frigga has other plans for it, and the following events then transpire:

> Ille tanta sui celebritate gauisus mittentium charitatem cupide exosculatus est. Cuius coniunx Frigga, quo cultior progredi posset, adcitis fabris aurum statue detrahendum curauit. Quibus Othinus suspendio consumptis statuam in crepidine collocauit, quam etiam mira artis industria ad humanos tactus uocalem reddidit. At nihilominus Frigga cultus sui nitorem diuinis mariti honoribus

[28] Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, ed. Friis-Jensen, trans. Fisher (n. 14 above), 1:378–81.

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anteponens uni familiarium se stupro subiecit, cuius ingenio simulacrum demolita aurum publice super stitioni consecratum ad priuati luxus instrumentum conuertit. Nec pensi duxit impudicitiam sectari, quo promptius auaritia frueretur. Indigna foemina, que numinis coniugio potiretur! Hoc loci quid aliud adiecerim quam tale numen hac coniuge dignum extitisse? Tanto quondam errore mortalium ludificabantur ingenia.

[Delighting in his high celebrity, Odin avidly greeted the donors' affection. His wife, Frigg, desiring to walk abroad more bedizened, brought in smiths to strip the statue of its gold. Odin had them hanged and then, setting the image on a plinth, by a marvellous feat of workmanship even made it respond with a voice to human touch. Nevertheless, subordinating her husband's divine honours to the splendour of her own apparel, Frigg submitted herself to the lust of one of her servants; by his cunning she had the effigy demolished and the gold which had been devoted to public idolatry she switched to her personal extravagance. This woman, unworthy of a deified consort, felt no scruples about pursuing unchastity, provided she could more speedily enjoy what she coveted! Need I add anything but to say that such a god deserved such a wife? Men's intelligence was once made ridiculous by extreme gullibility of this kind.][29]

It is possible that the *Maxims I* poet's conception of Woden as a builder of idols draws on the narrative tradition that informs Saxo's representation of Othinus as excessively fond of the idol made in his image. *Wōden worhte wēos* could allude to the god's reconstruction and animation of his idol before it was ultimately demolished. If so, then the passage in *Maxims I* would be particularly damning, as it would allude to a rather embarrassing illustration of Woden's lack of absolute sovereignty: God created the heavens, but Woden did not even have the capacity to protect his cherished idol from the machinations of his wife. One obstacle standing in the way of this possibility, however, is that Saxo's narrative has every appearance of being a euhemeristic distortion of an originally pagan mythological narrative, since similar narratives of domestic disputes between Óðinn and Frigg, preserved in sources such as the prose prologue to *Grímnismál* and Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*, likewise culminate in Frigg using her cunning to get the better of Óðinn.[30] Accordingly, if Saxo has euhemerized a previously pagan tale, it is doubtful that this tale should have centered on a golden idol of

[29] Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, ed. Friis-Jensen, trans. Fisher (n. 14 above), 1:52–53.

[30] See *The Poetic Edda, Volume III: Mythological Poems II*, ed. Ursula Dronke (Oxford, 2011), 125–26; and Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* 1.8, ed. Ludwig Bethmann and Georg Waitz, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum* 48 (Hannover, 1878), 58. Hilda Ellis Davidson provides perceptive commentary on the episode in Saxo Grammaticus, *The History of the Danes: Books I–IX*, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson, trans. Peter Fisher, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1979–80), 2:32; see also the discussion in Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, "Frigg," in *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings*, ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, and Anders Andrén (Turnhout, 2020), 1381–90.

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Óðinn rather than some other object. Yet if the euhemerized version of the narrative were itself traditional and in circulation prior to Saxo, then it would be a plausible source for *Maxims I* and it would lend the reference to Woden's construction of idols there an additional layer of meaning. The brief account of Othen in the *Annales Ryenses* also mentions that his worshippers constructed a "golden image of him" (*ymaginem eius auream*), but since it provides no details that are not found in Saxo's work, this allusion sheds no light on the tradition that might have circulated prior to Saxo.[31]

Three works attributed to Snorri Sturluson contain euhemeristic narratives in which the Æsir likewise play a more active role in their deification. In *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri expresses the idea that the Æsir were Asians, heroes of the Trojan war, who impressed those around them and encouraged others to believe they were gods. The latter work tells "about the Turks, how the people of Asia, known as Æsir, distorted the accounts of the events that took place in Troy so that the people of the country would believe that they were gods" (*frá tyrkjum, hvernig Asiamenn þeir er Æsir eru kallaðir fǫlsuðu frásagnir þær frá þeim tíðendum er gerðusk í troju till þess at landfólkit skyldi trúa þá guð vera*).[32] There is little in the euhemerism of *Gylfaginning* or *Skáldskaparmál* that appears directly relevant to the Woden passage in *Maxims I*. Considerably more relevant is the account of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga*, which, if it is rightly attributed to Snorri, must be based on sources and traditions that are distinct from those informing *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*.[33] In *Ynglinga saga*, the Æsir are again from Asia, but they are not identified as Trojans. Instead, we are told that Óðinn, in possession of magical powers, began his career as the ruler of Ásgarðr (said to be located in Asia) before traveling around, conquering other territories, and eventually being venerated throughout northern Europe. Much of this is paralleled elsewhere, but what makes *Ynglinga saga* unique and possibly the most relevant source to *Maxims I* is its depiction of Óðinn as the person who founded heathen religion and established its institutions. Óðinn is portrayed here as "a sort of archpagan," as Jacob Hobson recently put it.[34] Óðinn is

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[31] See *Annales Danici Medii Ævi*, ed. Ellen Jørgensen (Copenhagen, 1920), 64.

[32] The text is cited from Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols. (London, 1998), 1:5; the translation is cited from Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Anthony Faulkes (London, 1995), 65. See also Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed. (London, 2005), 3–6.

[33] On the question of Snorri's authorship of *Ynglinga saga*, see Patricia Pires Boulhosa, *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway: Medieval Sagas and Legal Texts* (Leiden, 2005), 6–21; and Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Snorri versus the Copyists: An Investigation of a Stylistic Trait in the Manuscript Traditions of *Egils saga*, *Heimskringla*, and the *Prosa Edda*," *Saga-Book* 38 (2014): 61–74.

[34] Jacob Hobson, "Euhemerism and the Veiling of History in Early Scandinavian Literature," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 116 (2017): 24–44, at 42. For another

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the master of various pagan skills pertaining to prophecy, shapeshifting, runes, "magic spells" (*galdrar*), and "black magic" (*seiðr*), and he disseminates his knowledge to others:

> En hann kenndi flestar íþróttir sínar blótgoðunum. Váru þeir næst honum um allan fróðleik ok fjǫlkynngi. Margir aðrir námu þó mikit af, ok hefir þaðan af dreifzk fjǫlkynngin víða ok haldizk lengi. En Óðin ok þá hǫfðingja tólf blótuðu menn ok kǫlluðu goð sín ok trúðu á lengi síðan.
>
> [And he taught most of his skills to his sacrificial priests. They were next to him in all lore and magic. And yet many others learned much of it, and from there heathendom spread widely and lasted for a long time. And people worshipped Óðinn and the twelve rulers and called them their gods and believed in them long afterwards.][35]

The notion that a euhemerized Óðinn was responsible for spreading pagan religion throughout the world resonates with the *Maxims I* poet's decision to contrast Woden with God and represent the former as a builder of idols. Given the *Maxims I* poet's interest in the origins of things, evident in the passage identifying Cain's murder of Abel as the origin of strife among humanity (lines 192–200), it might be reasonable to read *Wōden worhte wēos* as a comment on the origin of paganism, an explanation as to where the institution of idolatry came from. Another interpretive possibility is suggested in *Ynglinga saga* by the following passage, in which Óðinn is said to have built heathen temples in Sweden after winning control of the land from Gylfi:

> Óðinn tók sér bústað við Lǫginn, þar sem nú eru kallaðar fornu Sigtúnir, ok gerði þar mikit hof ok blót eptir siðvenju Ásanna. Hann eignaðisk þar lǫnd svá vítt sem hann lét heita Sigtúnir. Hann gaf bústaði hofgoðunum. Njǫrðr bjó í Nóatúnum, en Freyr at Uppsǫlum, Heimdallr at Himinbjǫrgum, Þórr á Þrúðvangi, Baldr á Breiðabliki. Ǫllum fekk hann þeim góða bólstaði.
>
> [Óðinn established his dwelling by Lǫgrinn at the place now called Old Sigtúnir, and built a large temple there and performed sacrifices according to the custom of the Æsir. He took possession of lands over the whole area that he gave the name Sigtúnir to. He gave dwelling places to the temple priests. Njǫrðr lived at Nóatún, Freyr at Uppsalir, Heimdallr at Himinbjǫrg, Þórr at Þrúðvangr, Baldr at Breiðablik. He provided them all with good residences.][36]

This passage has never been, to my knowledge, brought to bear on the Woden passage in *Maxims I*, yet it might provide the closest extant analogue to the

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insightful analysis of the euhemerization of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga*, see John Lindow, "Myth Read as History: Odin in Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga*," in *Myth: A New Symposium*, ed. Gregory Schrempp and William Hansen (Bloomington, 2002), 107–23.

[35] The text is cited from *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 3rd ed. (Reykjavik, 1979), 19–20; the translation is cited from *Heimskringla I: The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*, trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, 2011), 11.

[36] *Heimskringla*, ed. Aðalbjarnarson, 16; *Heimskringla I*, trans. Finlay and Faulkes, 1:9.

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poet's belief that *Wōden worhte wēos*. Old English *wēoh* has been consistently translated above as "idol," since that is the meaning it generally exhibits in poetry and prose, but the toponymic evidence, discussed below, indicates that *wēoh* could also mean "pagan shrine." Read with the latter meaning operative, *Wōden worhte wēos* would mean that Woden built places of pagan worship—a statement directly paralleled in the passage from *Ynglinga saga* cited above. It is also paralleled in *Vǫluspá* (stanza 7), though there it is the non-euhemerized Æsir who are said to have built "altars and temples" (*hǫrg oc hof*).[37] Only in *Ynglinga saga*, and possibly in *Maxims I*, is a euhemerized Óðinn or Woden singled out as the builder of pagan religious edifices.

The conclusion to which the foregoing discussion leads is that the Woden passage in *Maxims I* appears indebted to a euhemeristic narrative tradition that is most closely paralleled not in homiletic or historiographical sources from early medieval England, but rather in later Scandinavian sources such as *Ynglinga saga* and Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*. Given the probable antiquity of *Maxims I*, which has been considered an eighth-century composition, the aforementioned conclusion will surprise those who assume that the kind of euhemeristic narrative told by Snorri and Saxo did not exist before the twelfth century.[38] I would suggest, however, that it is not implausible to suppose that a comparable sort of euhemeristic narrative might have circulated in England centuries earlier. Missionaries propagating a euhemeristic view of the pagan gods could be responsible for developing such narratives and disseminating them to different Germanic peoples during their respective conversion processes. Furthermore, if Anglo-Saxon authors anticipated Snorri and Saxo in viewing Woden as a euhemerized king from Asia, that would explain why the figure of Saturn in the *Solomon and Saturn* texts, who has been considered a reflex of Woden, is characterized there as an eastern king; it would also explain why the supernaturally aged traveler in *Widsith*, whose name resembles certain aliases of Óðinn, boasts of wandering through the east (lines 82–84).[39] In view of the numerous

[37] Eddic poetry is cited throughout by stanza number from *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern, Volume 1, Text*, ed. Gustav Neckel, rev. Hans Kuhn, 5th ed. (Heidelberg, 1983). Translations provided throughout are cited from *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2014).

[38] On the question of the sources and origins of the so-called learned prehistory, to which these narratives are related, see Faulkes, "Descent from the Gods" (n. 16 above), 123–24; Hobson, "Euhemerism and the Veiling of History," 25–27; and Heinz Klingenberg, "Odin und die Seinen: Altisländischer Gelehrter Urgeschichte anderer Teil," *Alvíssmál* 2 (1993): 31–80. See also the foundational study of Andreas Heusler, *Die gelehrte Urgeschichte im altisländischen Schrifttum* (Berlin, 1908).

[39] For a suggestion that Saturn "is doubtless related to the Germanic god Woden ultimately," see C. L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature* (New York, 1967), 162; on Woden and *Widsith*, see Schlauch, "Wīdsīth, Víthförull, and Some Other Analogues" (n. 3 above); and Neidorf, "Woden and *Widsith*" (n. 3 above).

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connections between *Beowulf* and the *Gesta Danorum*, it is clear that there is nothing extraordinary about a narrative in Snorri or Saxo finding its only extant parallel in an Old English poem composed perhaps five centuries earlier.[40] And if an earlier form of their euhemeristic narratives were to have circulated on English soil, Snorri's manifest use of Anglo-Saxon genealogical sources in his prologue to the Prose Edda — evident, for instance, in the reference there to "Woden, whom we call Odin" (*Voden, þann kǫllum vér Óðin*) — indicates that written transmission from lost textual sources (in addition to oral transmission) could account for the later arrival of this material in Scandinavia.[41] To be clear, I am suggesting not that a narrative identical to those told by Snorri and Saxo existed in eighth-century England, but that there probably were comparable euhemeristic narratives, more fanciful than those preserved in the homiletic or insular historiographical sources, which associated Woden with the establishment of pagan religion and the construction of its places of worship. Toponymic evidence might bear further witness to the circulation of such narratives.

Toponymic Context

Two of the three words comprising the verse *Wōden worhte wēos* are established elements in the Old English toponymicon. *Wōden* has been identified as the first element of the following place-names: Wansdyke (Wiltshire; "Woden's Dyke"), Wednesbury (Staffordshire; "Woden's earthworks"), Wednesfield (Staffordshire; "Woden's field"), Wensley (Derbyshire; "Woden's grove"), *Woddesgeat* (Wiltshire; "Woden's gap"), *Wodnesbeorg* (Wiltshire; "Woden's mound"), *Wodnesdene* (Wiltshire; "Woden's valley"), *Wodnesfeld* (Essex; "Woden's field"), *Wodneslawe* (Bedfordshire; "Woden's mound"), and Woodnesborough (Kent; "Woden's mound").[42] *Wēoh*, meanwhile, has been identified as an element in no fewer

[40] For a sense of the numerous connections between *Beowulf* and Saxo's work, one need only to survey the passages from the *Gesta Danorum* included in *Beowulf and its Analogues*, trans. G. N. Garmonsway and Jacqueline Simpson (New York, 1971). See also Eduard Sievers, "*Béowulf* und Saxo," *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, philologisch-historische Klasse* 47 (1895): 175–92.

[41] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (n. 32 above), 5. On the influence of Old English written sources on Old Norse literature, see Faulkes, "Descent from the Gods" (n. 16 above), 99–100; Taylor, "*Hauksbók* and Ælfric's *De falsis diis*" (n. 19 above); Christopher Abram, "Anglo-Saxon Influence in the Old Norwegian Homily Book," *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 14 (2004): 1–35; and Kari Ellen Gade, "Ælfric in Iceland," in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills (Turnhout, 2007), 321–40. For a possible historical context for such influence, see Lesley Abrams, "The Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia," *Anglo-Saxon England* 24 (1995): 213–49.

[42] This list of *Wōden* place-names (Old English place-names are italicized, whereas those that remain in use in England are not) is cited from Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (n. 8

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than sixteen place-names, including Weeford (Staffordshire), Weedon (Northamptonshire), Whiligh (Sussex), Wye (Kent), Wyham (Lincolnshire), and Patchway (Sussex).[43] *Wōden* and *wēoh* are not combined in any extant English place-names, but their Scandinavian cognates are combined in place-names such as Danish *Othensvœ* (*Oddense*, *Oens*, *Vojens*, *Odense*, *Onsved*) and Swedish *Odensvi*.[44] The meaning of *wēoh* in place-names is not entirely clear. As F. M. Stenton observes of *wēoh*:

above), 11, which is in turn indebted to a series of earlier studies that aim to collect and refine the relevant names; see Bruce Dickins, "English Names and Old English Heathenism," *Essays and Studies* 19 (1934): 148–60; F. M. Stenton, "The Historical Bearing of Place-Name Studies: Anglo-Saxon Heathenism," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (1941): 1–24; Margaret Gelling, "Place-Names and Anglo-Saxon Paganism," *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 8 (1961): 7–25; and Margaret Gelling, "Further Thoughts on Pagan Place-Names," in *Place-Name Evidence for the Anglo-Saxon Invasion and Scandinavian Settlements: Eight Studies*, ed. Kenneth Cameron (Nottingham, 1975), 99–114. See also Sarah Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford, 2013), 172–73. Semple, in contrast to her predecessors, places great emphasis on the dates of the first written attestations of these names, which are not recorded before charters from the ninth century, tenth century, or later. Yet the date of first attestation provides only a *terminus ad quem* for the name's existence and sheds minimal light on when the name was coined. A substantial chronological gap between the coinage of a name and its first attestation is to be expected: see Margaret Gelling, *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England*, 2nd ed. (Chichester, 1988), 106–29, esp. at 124, where she discusses the case of Aughton ("Æffe's estate"), which is first recorded in 1346, yet must have been coined during the middle of the tenth century, when Æffe inherited the estate in question from Wulfgar, her husband, who bequeathed it to Æffe in a will composed in 931. For the earliest attestations of Aughton, see its entry in J. E. B. Gover, Allen Mawer, and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Wiltshire* (Cambridge, 1939). For a recent paper that furnishes additional examples of a demonstrable chronological gap between coinage and attestation, see Carole Hough, "The Migration of Old English to Scotland: Place-Name Evidence for Early Northumbrian Settlement in Berwickshire," in *Language on the Move Across Domains and Communities: Selected Papers from the 12th Triennial Forum for Research on the Languages of Scotland and Ulster, Glasgow 2018*, ed. Joanna Kopaczyk and Robert McColl Millar (Aberdeen, 2020), 231–50.

[43] The examples are cited from Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (n. 8 above), 7–10. For further discussion, see Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, 76–77; John Hines, "Religion: The Limits of Knowledge," in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century*, ed. John Hines (Woodbridge, 1997), 375–401, at 384–88; Audrey Meaney, "Pagan English Sanctuaries, Place-Names and Hundred Meeting Places," *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 8 (1995): 29–42; David Wilson, "A Note on OE *hearg* and *weoh* as Place-Name Elements Representing Different Types of Pagan Worship Sites," *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 4 (1985): 179–83; and Gelling, "Further Thoughts," 100–103.

[44] For a list of pertinent names, see Stefan Brink, "How Uniform was the Old Norse Religion?" in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills (Turnhout, 2007) 105–36, at 113 and 129–31. See also Kristian Hald, "The Cult of Odin in Danish Place-Names," in *Early English and Norse Studies: Presented to Hugh Smith in Honour of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed.

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> In literary texts, where the word is well recorded, it has the meaning "idol" or "image." In the general sense of "holy object," it passed into Christian usage in the compounds *wigbed* and *weofod*, "altar." But the uncompounded word always refers to some device of heathenism . . . In local names, it probably has the derivative sense of "shrine," or sacred precinct.[45]

Eilert Ekwall likewise concludes that as a place-name element, *wēoh* is to be understood as "holy place" or "heathen temple," a meaning shared with toponymic cognates such as Old Low German *wīh*, Old Norse *vé*, and Old Swedish *vī, vǣ*.[46] Since *wēoh* is the substantival reflex of a Proto-Germanic adjective that originally meant "holy" (as in Gothic *weihs*), the exclusive use of *wēoh* to mean "idol" in Old English literary texts must reflect processes of pejoration and semantic narrowing that took place after the conversion to Christianity.[47] The *Maxims I* poet clearly uses *wēoh* in a pejorative sense, but the toponymic associations of the verse render it plausible that *wēos* might here be used in the earlier and broader sense of "shrines" or "temples" rather than the later and narrower sense of "idols." The plausibility of such a reading increases in view of Dennis Cronan's demonstration that *Maxims I* exhibits various lexical and semantic archaisms.[48] Particularly relevant to the posited reading of *wēoh* is the poem's nonpejorative use of *wlenco* (line 60a) to mean "bravado" rather than "arrogance," the meaning it possesses in all of its other attestations (with the exception of certain attestations in *Beowulf*).[49] *Maxims I* thus appears to have been composed before processes of pejoration and narrowing, evident in much of the written record, had taken universal effect. Were the poet to have used *wēos* to mean "shrines" or "temples"

Arthur Browne and Peter Foote (London, 1963), 99–109, who notes that "The most striking fact in the Danish material is that compound elements of the *-vi* type – indicating, that is, a real cult centre with a temple building of some sort – are not only rare, but when they do occur, they are found practically only in combination with the name of a single god – Odin" (99). See also the important methodological discussion of Per Vikstrand, "Sacral Place-Names in Scandinavia," *Onoma* 37 (2002): 121–43, who critiques the preference for secular interpretations of these names and notes that "Sacral place-names seem to be a global phenomenon and . . . should be regarded as normal, anticipated and non-dramatic features of a toponymic landscape formed by human conceptions" (137).

[45] Stenton, "Historical Bearing of Place-Name Studies," 12.

[46] Eilert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th ed. (Oxford, 1960), 483, s.v. *wēoh*. On the heathen temple as an institution of Anglo-Saxon paganism, see John Blair, "Anglo-Saxon Pagan Shrines and their Prototypes," *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 8 (1995): 1–28.

[47] See Thomas L. Markey, "Germanic Terms for Cult and Temple," in *Studies for Einar Haugen: Presented by Friends and Colleagues*, ed. Evelyn Scherabon Firchow, Kaaren Grimstad, Nils Hasselmo and Wayne A. O'Neil (The Hague, 1972), 365–78, at 373–75.

[48] See Cronan, "Poetic Words" (n. 21 above), 30–35.

[49] See Cronan, "Poetic Words" (n. 21 above), 33–34; and Dennis Cronan, "Poetic Meanings in the Old English Poetic Vocabulary," *English Studies* 84 (2003): 397–425, at 400–401.

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rather than "idols," that would be consistent with the exceptional and archaic nature of the poem's language.

Further support for reading *Wōden worhte wēos* as a reference to Woden's construction of sites of pagan worship emerges from place-names such as Wansdyke (*Wōdnes dīc*), which appears to attribute the construction of this earthwork to Woden himself. Stenton construes the name Wansdyke as an indication that Woden "was regarded as the maker of the greatest linear fortification in southern Britain."[50] Additionally, the notion that "Woden is the only god to whom the Anglo-Saxon imagination attributed the making of dykes or banks" is corroborated by the various Grim's Ditch place-names that appear throughout England.[51] Surveying these names, Ekwall reaches the following conclusion:

> On the analogy of the two names *Wodnes dic* (Wansdyke) and Devil's Ditch I suppose Grim's Ditch contains the name of some particular being of superhuman strength, and that *Grim* is here a proper name, not a generic term for 'supernatural being' or the like. I venture to suggest that Grim's Ditch is exactly synonymous with *Wodnes dic* and that *Grim* is here a byname of *Woden*. In Scandinavian tradition *Grimr* is found as a by-name of *Oðinn*. *Grimr* is evidently identical with ON *grimr* 'a person who conceals his name', literally 'a masked person', and refers, like *Grimnir*, to Oðinn's well-known habit of appearing in disguise.[52]

Margaret Gelling accepts Ekwall's conclusion, writing that the "original connection between Grim and Woden must be regarded as established," though she questions "whether all the names in *Grims* referring to ditches and other prehistoric features were coined by pagan Anglo-Saxons" and suggests that some might rather be later Christian coinages.[53] It is difficult to determine when a place-name emerged and what exactly the motivations behind its naming were, but it

[50] Stenton, "Historical Bearing of Place-Name Studies" (n. 42 above), 20. For an alternative interpretation of the naming of Wansdyke, see Andrew Reynolds and Alex Langlands, "Social Identities on the Macro Scale: A Maximum View of Wansdyke," in *People and Space in the Middle Ages, 300–1300*, ed. Wendy Davies, Guy Halsall, and Andrew Reynolds (Turnhout, 2006), 13–44, who argue that Wansdyke is an eighth–century West Saxon construction, and offer the following conjecture, at 34, regarding its name: "The reference to Woden may have been connected with a desire to name the frontier after a heroic ancestor, deeply rooted in the familial traditions of the West Saxon royal house." The onomastic argument is unconvincing for reasons made clear in Leonard Neidorf, "Woden and the English Landscape: The Naming of Wansdyke Reconsidered," *Folklore* 133 (2022): 378–98. See also the trenchant criticisms of their argument in Erik Grigg, *Early Medieval Dykes (400 to 850 AD)* (Manchester, 2015), 207–209.

[51] Stenton, "Historical Bearing of Place-Name Studies" (n. 42 above), 20.

[52] Eilert Ekwall, "Grim's Ditch," in *Studia germanica tillägnade Ernst Albin Kock den 6 December 1934* (Lund, 1934), 41–44, at 43. On *Grímr* as an alias of Óðinn, see Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. Angela Hall (Cambridge, 1993), s.v. *Grímr*; and Pollington, *The Elder Gods* (n. 8 above), 205–206.

[53] Gelling, *Signposts to the Past* (n. 42 above), 150. See also Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric* (n. 42 above), 173–76; and Meaney, "Woden in England" (n. 12 above), 107–108.

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is reasonable to suppose that an originally pagan belief in Woden as a supernatural builder could persist into Christian times and then acquire a euhemeristic or even demonic dimension. Perhaps after Woden's name became taboo, the transmitters of toponymic folklore considered his alias *Grīm* to be a more suitable alternative. In any event, names such as *Wōdnes dīc* and *Grīmes dīc*, as well as names associating Woden with mounds such as *Wōdnes beorg* and *Wōdnes hlǣw*, appear to reflect the circulation at an early date of otherwise unrecorded narratives about Woden as an entity who left his mark on the landscape.[54] These narratives, which could not resemble anything found in the homiletic or insular historiographical tradition, might well have borne some similarity to those preserved in *Ynglinga saga*, where Óðinn the archpagan is responsible for building places of worship and establishing funerary rites for his worshippers.

Whether *Wōden worhte wēos* is understood to mean that Woden made idols or pagan shrines, the essential import of the passage remains unaltered. Either way, the passage implies that Woden was a false god and a vain human being, who merely made the instruments of his own worship, while the true God made the heavens. The difference of interpretation primarily affects our understanding of the literary context out of which the passage appears to have emerged, that is to say, whether it is more closely related to the story of Othinus and his idol in *Gesta Danorum* or the story of Óðinn as the builder of heathen temples in *Ynglinga saga*. Regardless, the *Maxims I* poet's conviction that Woden played an active role in the establishment of his cult appears to stem not from an erroneous rendering of a biblical commonplace, but from familiarity with an early euhemeristic narrative about Woden that was in circulation at the time of the poem's composition. This narrative, which might be related to the tradition of toponymic folklore concerning Woden, was perhaps an ancestor of the kinds of narratives related by Snorri and Saxo centuries later. The foregoing discussion has ultimately aimed to demonstrate that the Woden passage in *Maxims I*, long dismissed by critics as an uninteresting and sententious denunciation, is actually a valuable witness to the circulation of ideas about Woden that are otherwise unrecorded in English sources.

Structure

Having considered the possible sources and analogues of the Woden passage at length, it remains necessary to say something about the passage's place within *Maxims I*. It has been suggested above that if *Wōden worhte wēos* is read as a comment on the origin of idolatry, then its inclusion might reflect the common

[54] Hald, "Cult of Odin" (n. 44 above), 106, notes the existence of modern (seventeenth-century) folklore in Denmark and Sweden reflecting a belief that Odin lived in certain mountains.

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sapiential interest in the origins of things, which is likewise reflected in the passage on Cain as the initiator of human strife (lines 192–200). Other critics have explained the inclusion of the Woden passage as a result of the associative logic that apparently governs the poem's structure. Immediately prior to the Woden passage is a catalogue of statements about where things should be in a properly ordered world, which concludes with the following three lines:

> Scyld sceal cempan, sceaft rēafere,
> sceal brȳde bēag, bēc leornere,
> hūsl hālgum men, hǣþnum synne. (lines 129–31)

> [A shield must be with the warrior, a shaft with the raider, a ring must be with the bride, books with the student, the eucharist with the holy man, sins with the heathen.]

Mounting an argument for a "stream of consciousness" structure to *Maxims I*, R. MacGregor Dawson writes: "The suggestion from *hæþnum* is *Woden*, who wrought idols."[55] That is all that Dawson has to say about the transition: one line suggested the other. While the transition from the heathen to Woden is surely deliberate and not coincidental, Dawson's overall argument cannot be said to possess much explanatory power. To argue that the selection of material in *Maxims I* reflects the author's stream of consciousness is merely a less judgmental way of saying, as George Philip Krapp and Elliott van Kirk Dobbie did, that the poem has no genuine structure: "The entire text gives the impression of a mass of unrelated materials gathered from a number of sources, and assembled by the compiler more or less mechanically, with no attempt at selection or logical arrangement."[56] Without entirely dissenting from the views put forward by Dawson or Krapp and Dobbie, I would suggest that the inclusion of the Woden passage might reflect an intertextual relationship between *Maxims I* and the poetic tradition of the wisdom contest, as represented by works such as *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Alvíssmál*, and *Solomon and Saturn II*, as well as the encounter between Gestumblindi (Óðinn) and Heiðrekr in *Heiðreks saga*.[57]

The most salient reason to believe that *Maxims I* is in some way connected to the genre of the wisdom contest, despite the fact that the poem is not a dialogue

[55] R. MacGregor Dawson, "The Structure of the Old English Gnomic Poems," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 61 (1962): 14–22, at 19. See also Nigel F. Barley, "Structure in the Cotton Gnomes," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 78 (1977): 244–49.

[56] *The Exeter Book*, ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott van Kirk Dobbie (New York, 1936), xlvi–xlvii.

[57] On this tradition, see *The Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, ed. Robert J. Menner (New York, 1941), 57–58; John McKinnell, "The Paradox of *Vafþrúðnismál*," in *Essays on Eddic Poetry*, ed. Donata Kick and John D. Shafer (Toronto, 2014), 153–72; and *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, ed. and trans. Christopher Tolkien (London, 1960), xviii–xxi.

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between named speakers, is that it begins with an imperative demanding an unnamed interlocutor to question the speaker:

Frige mec frōdum wordum! Ne lǣt þīnne ferð onhǣlne,
dēgol þæt þū dēopost cunne! Nelle ic þē mīn dyrne gesecgan,
gif þū mē þīnne hygecræft hylest ond þīne heortan geþōhtas.
Glēawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan. (lines 1–4a)

[Ask me with wise words. Don't let your heart, what you know most profoundly, be hidden, concealed. I won't tell you my secret if you hide from me the power of your mind and the thoughts of your heart. The wise must exchange sayings.]

This opening creates an expectation that an exchange between sages is about to occur, but the expectation is disappointed, as there is no further use of the first person or the second person in the rest of the poem, where sapiential content is presented in a disembodied form. One way to explain the relationship between the opening and the rest of the poem would be to conjecture that *Maxims I* is, effectively, a compilation of passages from one or more wisdom contests, which have been brought together without any indication as to who originally spoke them. An objection that might be raised against this conjecture is that the passages comprising *Maxims I* do not seem to exist in a state of debate with each other. Yet it is clear from *Solomon and Saturn II* that the wisdom contest genre was not one in which the participants engaged in a rational or coherent debate. Rather, for much of the poem, each speaker simply volunteers evidence of his wisdom, as can be seen in the following exchange:

Saturnus cwæð:
"Nieht bið wedera ðīestrost, nēd bið wyrda heardost,
sorg bið swārost byrðen, slǣp bið dēaðe gelīcost."
Salomon cwæð:
"Lȳtle hwīle lēaf bēoð grēne;
ðonne hīe eft fealewiað, feallað on eorðan,
and forweorniað, weorðað tō dūste.
Swā ðonne gefeallað ðā ðe fyrena ǣr
lange lǣstað, lifiað him in māne,
hȳdað hēahgestrēon, healdað georne
on fæstenne fēondum tō willan,
and wēnað wanhogan ðæt hīe wille Wuldorcining,
ælmihtig God, ēce gehīran!" (lines 134–44)

[Saturn said: "Night is the darkest weather, need the hardest of fates, sorrow the most oppressive burden, sleep is most like death."
Solomon said: "Leaves are green for a short while, then later they fade, fall on the earth and decay, turn to dust. Just so, then, fall those who earlier persist for a long

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> time in their sins – they live in crime, they hide great treasures, they hold them eagerly in strongholds, to the delight of the enemies – and the fools expect that the King of glory, almighty God, will always listen to them!"]

The transition from one statement to the next is enigmatic rather than logical, not unlike the transitions between passages in *Maxims I*. As Robert J. Menner observes: "The allusions and indirection of Solomon lend that atmosphere of mystery dear to the heart of many an Old English poet."[58] Elsewhere in the poem, Solomon and Saturn are less debating than concurring with each other, as in their exchange of statements about the power of books, in which each speaker expresses a conviction in the ability of books to enlighten and fortify their users (lines 52–68). In addition to their exchange of vaguely connected statements, the interlocutors question each other. Saturn, for instance, asks about why there is human suffering, and Solomon answers him with an account of the fall of the angels (lines 265–97). This recalls the explanatory nature of the Cain passage in *Maxims I*. Other passages in *Maxims I* can likewise be read as the answers to questions about injustice and suffering, such as those on blindness and infant mortality, where it is explained that God can cure the blind if they merit it (lines 39b–44) and that God necessarily eliminates infants in order to avoid overpopulation (lines 29b–34). It would seem, then, that *Maxims I* contains answers that might be provided in a wisdom contest, but with both the questions and the questioners eliminated.[59] To put forward this interpretation is not to imply that *Maxims I* is in any sense a fragmentary poem or a product of multiple authorship; it is rather to suggest that one poet has digested sapiential material from the wisdom contest tradition and repackaged it into a nondialogical poetic form.[60] As Susan E. Deskis argues with respect to the reuse of proverbs, the poet "finds content in various places, then manipulates these various forms and contents into a coherent whole."[61]

When *Maxims I* is read in this way, the inclusion of the Woden passage makes greater sense, as it now appears to represent a Christian answer to a question posed by a pagan interlocutor about the relative powers of Woden and God.

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[58] *Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, ed. Menner, 58.

[59] Ursula Dronke offers a similar reading of *Hávamál*. She writes: "Many stanzas read as if they were the product of a party game: as if one of the company has to propose a thought or theme, and another is to complete it: seriously or humorously or ironically, just as he chooses." See *Poetic Edda, Volume III: Mythological Poems II*, ed. Dronke (n. 30 above), 36.

[60] Though *Maxims I* is sometimes regarded as three separate poems, there are reasons to regard it as a single poem; see Neidorf, "On the Dating and Authorship" (n. 21 above), 146–50.

[61] Susan E. Deskis, "Proverbs and Structure in *Maxims I.A*," *Studies in Philology* 110 (2013): 667–89, at 688. Though Deskis's argument for the reuse of proverbs differs from my own, it is certainly not incompatible with it, since proverbs could be used by speakers in a wisdom contest poem.

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The answer is sententious and dogmatic, similar to several of the answers of Solomon, the mouthpiece for Christian wisdom, who at one point abruptly denounces his pagan interlocutor's people for rejecting God's authority (lines 149–53). A question about the relative powers of Woden and God, moreover, would be paralleled in Saturn's question about whether fate (*wyrd*) or foreknowledge (*warnung*) is the more powerful entity (lines 247–57). Another advantage of the supposition that a wisdom contest between pagan and Christian interlocutors lies somewhere in the background to *Maxims I* is that it would help to explain the presence of the following passage:

> Dēop dēada wǣg dyrne bið lengest;
> holen sceal inǣled, yrfe gedǣled
> dēades monnes. Dōm biþ sēlast. (lines 78–80)

[The deep path of the dead will be secret longest; holly must be burned, the inheritance from a dead person divided. Fame is best.]

This passage has appeared out of place in *Maxims I*. Kemp Malone observes that the three lines amount to an assertion: "Fame is best because it alone remains to a man after death; his other possessions go to his heirs, and his very body is fed to the flames."[62] In his extensive analysis of this passage, Carleton Brown comments that "in the three lines here devoted to the theme of mortality, including the mention of the funeral pyre, Christian touches are notably absent."[63] Malone likewise remarks: "The presumption, here made, that cremation rather than inhumation will be the mode of burial marks the passage a relic of heathen times."[64] Beyond the reference to the funeral pyre, another reason to consider the passage something that might be spoken by a pagan sage in a wisdom poem is that an analogous passage happens to be spoken by Óðinn himself in *Hávamál*:

> Deyr fé, deyja frœndr,
> deyr sjálfr it sama;
> ec veit einn, at aldri deyr:
> dómr um dauðan hvern. (stanza 77)

[Cattle die, kinsmen die, the self must also die; I know one thing which never dies: the reputation of each dead man.]

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[62] Kemp Malone, "Notes on Gnomic Poem B of the Exeter Book," *Medium Ævum* 12 (1943): 65–67, at 66.

[63] Carleton Brown, "*Poculum Mortis* in Old English," *Speculum* 15 (1940): 389–99, at 398. For an update to Brown's reading, see Geoffrey Russom, "The Drink of Death in Old English and Germanic Literature," in *Germania: Comparative Studies in the Old Germanic Languages and Literatures*, ed. Daniel G. Calder and T. Craig Christy (Cambridge, 1988), 175–89.

[64] Malone, "Notes on Gnomic Poem B," 66.

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The sentiment is the same: the self and its attachments perish, but fame endures. The phraseology is similar too: in each passage, the same word for "fame" (Old English *dōm*, Old Norse *dōmr*) is collocated with the word "dead" (Old English *dēades*, Old Norse *dauðan*). In view of the widespread connection between Óðinn and the genre of wisdom literature in the extant Old Norse sources — Óðinn is a mouthpiece for encyclopedic knowledge in *Grímnismál*, a mouthpiece for gnomic wisdom in *Hávamál*, and a participant in wisdom contests in *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Heiðreks saga* — it is unlikely to be coincidental that Woden, rather than any of the other pagan deities, happens to be the one deity named and condemned in *Maxims I*.[65] If *Maxims I* were composed relatively close to the conversion period, then Woden was probably a prominent figure in the earlier sapiential tradition out of which the poem emerged. Woden might even have been the original speaker of the three lines on fame and mortality quoted above. In *Ynglinga saga*, we are told that Óðinn "ordained that all dead people must be burned and that their possessions should be laid on a pyre with them" (*Svá setti hann, at alla dauða menn skyldi brenna ok bera á bál með þeim eign þeira*).[66] The lines on death, fame, and the funeral pyre seem somewhat out of place in the context of *Maxims I*, but they would fit well in the mouth of Woden or a Wodenic speaker in an earlier wisdom poem.

I am not the first to suggest that the Woden passage was included in *Maxims I* because Woden might have been a dominant presence in the antecedent sapiential tradition. In a paper that identifies some striking parallels between *Maxims I* and *Hávamál* and argues for an association between the list form and the Odinic figure of the *þulr*, Elizabeth Jackson raises the following question concerning the composition of *Maxims I*: "Did an aura of paganism, indeed of a specific connection with Woden/Óðinn, still cling to these old lists?"[67] She answers this question by supposing that the Woden passage might have been included in *Maxims I* in order to counter this lingering pagan association: "It is as if the writer, by making his Christian allegiance explicit, is preempting any criticism that, through repetition of ancient lore, he might be condoning or even encouraging the cult of Woden."[68] Her reading, like mine, is more conjectural than the narrowly formalist readings put forward by Dawson and others, but I think her reading provides far greater insight into *Maxims I* than the banal supposition

[65] For a general interpretation of Óðinn as a god whose overarching activity is the acquisition and distribution of numinous knowledge, see Jens Peter Schjødt, "Óðinn," in *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings*, ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, and Anders Andrén (Turnhout, 2020), 1123–94.

[66] *Heimskringla*, ed. Aðalbjarnarson (n. 35 above), 20; and *Heimskringla I*, trans. Finlay and Faulkes (n. 35 above), 11.

[67] Elizabeth Jackson, "From the Seat of the *Þyle*? A Reading of *Maxims I*, Lines 138–40," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 99 (2000): 170–92, at 191.

[68] Jackson, "From the Seat of the *Þyle*," 191.

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that the Woden passage was included because Woden streamed to the front of the poet's consciousness after he mentioned a heathen. Some may consider it virtuous to analyze *Maxims I* solely in relation to itself and to assume that there is no meaningful connection between Old English wisdom poetry and the Old Norse sapiential tradition, where Óðinn is a central figure, but such narrowness of perspective seems grounded in little more than an obscurantist fear of violating intellectual taboos. If we are to elucidate *Maxims I* and not merely describe it, then it seems best to branch out from the one extant text and consider its relationship to other specimens of medieval Germanic sapiential literature, particularly to those which preserve examples of the wisdom contest genre.

In conclusion, when it is read in the context of euhemeristic narratives concerning Óðinn, the *Maxims I* poet's notion that *Wōden worhte wēos* appears to be neither an erroneous rendering of a biblical commonplace nor a thoughtless denunciation reflecting ignorance of the condemned deity. If *wēoh* is understood to mean "idol," then *Wōden worhte wēos* could constitute a stinging allusion to a story concerning Woden and a golden idol, preserved in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* and alluded to in the *Annales Ryenses*, which culminates (according to Saxo) in Frigg cuckolding her husband in order to have the idol destroyed. Alternatively, if *wēoh* is understood to mean "shrine" or "temple," the sense it possesses in place-names, then *Wōden worhte wēos* would appear connected to the narrative preserved in *Ynglinga saga*, in which Óðinn the archpagan builds temples, establishes the rituals of pagan religion, and disseminates the magical practices associated with it. In either case, the underlying notion that Woden played an active role in building the instruments with which he was worshipped suggests that euhemeristic narratives of the sort preserved by Snorri and Saxo probably circulated much earlier in England. The early existence of these narratives, which must have been livelier and more fantastical than the euhemeristic narratives related by Ælfric and Æthelweard, is likewise suggested by the toponymic evidence, where place-names such as *Wōdnes dīc* and *Grīmes dīc*, as well as *Wōdnes beorg* and *Wōdnes hlǣw*, appear to reflect unrecorded beliefs in Woden as a builder or inhabitant of ditches and mounds. Finally, it has been argued that the inclusion of the Woden passage in *Maxims I* is best explained in connection with the wisdom contest genre and the centrality of Óðinn in Old Norse wisdom literature. This paper has ultimately aimed to demonstrate that fuller consideration of *Wōden worhte wēos* can shed light on both the composition of *Maxims I* and the circulation of ideas about Woden in early medieval England.

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