



Defining paganism in the Carolingian world

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Generations of scholars have looked for evidence of 'paganism' in continental sources from the eighth and ninth centuries. This paper surveys some of the key problems in defining and conceptualizing the available literary evidence for such a project. Part one argues for a return to the sources to help escape the intellectual baggage created by discussions of 'pan-Germanic paganism', interpretatio Romana and, more recently, folk practices. From the perspective of the sources' producers, paganism needs to be understood as a category of difference employed to provide a better definition of Christianity itself. In part two this line of thought is pursued through a brief study of the ways in which classical learning framed not only Carolingian attitudes to paganism, but also related strategies of moralizing.

What did paganism mean to the Christians of the Carolingian world?¹ The Frankish expansion of the eighth century had pushed the frontiers of Christendom back far beyond its old Roman horizons, forcing encounters with unfamiliar pagan cultures. Mission and conquest proceeded hand in hand, although not always comfortably, until the

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¹ On Germanic paganism in the period in question, see *The Pagan Middle Ages*, ed. L. Milis (Woodbridge, 1998); L.E. von Padberg, 'Christen und Heiden. Zur Sicht des Heidentums in ausgewählter angelsachsen und fränkischer Überlieferung des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts', in *Iconologia Sacra: Mythos, Bildkunst und Dichtung in der Religions- und Sozialgeschichte Alteuropas. Festschrift für Karl Hauck zum 75. Geburtstag*, eds Hagen Keller and Nikolaus Staubach, *Arbeiten zur Frühmittelalterforschung* 23 (Berlin, 1994), pp. 291–312; I. Wood, 'Pagan Religion and Superstition East of the Rhine from the Fifth to the Ninth Centuries', in G. Ausenda (ed.), *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 253–79; J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 17–36. Karl Hauck has also worked on the subject – e.g. *Goldbrakteaten aus Sievern: Spätantike Amulett-Bilder der 'Dania Saxonica' und die Sachsen-'origo' bei Widukind von Corvey*, *Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften* 1 (Munich, 1970) – but consideration of his particular approach falls outside the primarily literary scope of this essay.

changing priorities of the ninth century curtailed both processes.² In the new Christian order of the Carolingians there was, unsurprisingly, little place for things that could be considered ‘pagan’. Nevertheless, there were a variety of non-Christian cultures which influenced the Franks from within, from the communities incorporated into the Frankish *imperium* with only the most superficial Christianization, to the works of the ancient Roman and Greek poets which played an important part in the Carolingian Renaissance. An important question remains as to what extent the education and horizons of Carolingian writers shaped attitudes towards paganisms. Did any amount of experience of non-Christian practices have authority, or did the authority of the church Fathers always supersede it when it came to characterizing paganism? While we are increasingly adept at identifying the literary tropes of paganism in hagiography or the decrees of councils, the wider cultural logic of those references is often less well appreciated. This paper will first survey some of the preconceptions we bring to studies of paganism in the eighth and ninth centuries, and then explore some of the more abstract assumptions of writers under the Carolingians who sought to characterize and/or condemn non-Christian practices. Central to the study will be the notion that we need to understand the act of defining a belief structure before we can even start to understand its content.

Defining medieval paganism

Defining paganism in any context is fraught with difficulties. For the Germanic world in particular, there are often insurmountable problems for even establishing what we know about non-Christian beliefs.³ The very word ‘paganism’, as we are often reminded, is derived from an artificial distinction drawn in the early days of Christianity between the ‘civilized’ religion of the city and the rustic non-Christian beliefs of the countryside.⁴ ‘Paganism’ was a general characterization of Christianity’s perceived antitheses rather than a specific set of beliefs. Monotheists could, on occasion, be branded *pagani* if a writer sought to characterize

² A. Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe: Kaiser, Könige und Päpste als geistliche Patrone in der abendländische Missionsgeschichte*, Arbeiten zur Frühmittelalterforschung 15 (Berlin, 1984); H. Löwe, ‘Pirmin, Willibrord und Bonifatius. Ihre Bedeutung für die Missionsgeschichte ihrer Zeit’, *Settimane* 14 (1967), pp. 217–61.

³ R. Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe: From Paganism to Christianity 371–1386* (London, 1997), pp. 3–4; Wood, ‘Pagan Religion’, pp. 253–5.

⁴ C.E. Fell, ‘Paganism in *Beowulf*: A Semantic Fairy-Tale’, in T. Hofstra, L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald (eds), *Pagans and Christians: The Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional German Cultures in Early Medieval Europe* (Groningen, 1995), pp. 9–34, at p. 13.

a subject as simply non-Christian.⁵ Generally, however, the word referred to the polytheisms of the Greco-Roman world and the people beyond old Roman *limes*, as well as certain practices condemned in the Bible (although in Jerome's Vulgate at least, the word *paganiam* was never used). The fight between Christianity and pagan cultures in the early Middle Ages was, in a nice phrase of Peter Brown's, 'a battle for the imaginative control of the *mundus*'.⁶ Within the Frankish lands the battle for infrastructure had largely been won, leaving a fight for the understanding of the interaction between the worldly and the divine. 'Paganisms' were thus not so much coherent rival religions to the Franks, as the antithesis of Christian practice itself.

The idea that there was a coherent body of pagan beliefs which could be described as 'Germanic' is itself a problem. Following the lead of recent debates on ethnogenesis, we might now want to avoid perceiving either a stable group of 'Germanic' peoples or an unchanging pan-Germanic culture belonging to them.⁷ These are in many respects categories created by external writers, often working in Latin, observing languages, cultures and a place (*Germania*) quite different to their own, even if the same categories were later adopted by the people to whom they referred.⁸ One cannot assume there was really such homogeneity that thirteenth-century stories about Scandinavian paganism could be used to 'fill-in' evidence for sixth-century Anglo-Saxon beliefs.⁹ We must be careful not to forget the importance of change and local practice.¹⁰ Nor is it certain that there was widespread belief in a common Germanic

⁵ For example the *Sarraceni pagani* in Hygeburg, *Vita Willibaldi*, c. 4, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *MGH Scriptores* 15.1 (Hanover, 1887), pp. 86–106, at p. 94. More usually there is no comment, or something like *gentiles de gente Mauritanorum* in the *Annales Fuldenses*, s.a. 883, ed. F. Kurze, *MGH SRG* 7 (Hanover, 1891), p. 110. Often parallels are drawn between the Northmen and the Saracens, e.g. Notker, *Gesta Karoli* II.12, ed. H. Haefele, *MGH SRG*, ns 12 (Berlin, 1958), p. 70.

⁶ P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (2nd edn. Oxford, 2002), p. 146.

⁷ For problems and approaches see W. Pohl, *Die Germanen*, Enzyklopädie deutscher Geschichte 57 (Munich, 2000), pp. 45–65. More generally on ethnogenesis see Herwig Wolfram, 'Origo et religio: Ethnic Traditions and Literature in Early Medieval Texts', *EME* 3 (1994), pp. 19–38 and the essays in A. Gillet (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 4 (Turnhout, 2002).

⁸ Note most famously Bede's circumlocution in *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* V.9, eds B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), p. 476 which credits the Britons with identifying certain groups as 'Garmani', before listing inhabitants of *Germania* not all of whom are 'Germanic'. Boniface was more certain of the existence of *Germani*: see *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, nos. 30, 33, 38, 50, 75, 76, 86, ed. M. Tangl, *MGH Epistolae Selectae* 1 (Berlin, 1916), pp. 54, 57, 63, 81, 157, 159, 192.

⁹ Fell, 'Paganism in *Beowulf*', pp. 16–20, justly targeting in particular J. Niles, 'Pagan Survivals and Popular Belief', in M. Godden and M. Lapidge (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 126–41 and H. Mayr-Harting's otherwise excellent *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (London, 1991), pp. 22–30.

¹⁰ Wood, 'Pagan Religion', pp. 262–3.

pantheon of gods like Woden and Thor. These famous representatives of pre-Christian Germanic culture were certainly known to early medieval writers but, as we shall see, it is rarely possible to move from the written sources to the societies allegedly described. The whole issue is complicated further by traditions of *interpretatio Romana*, from Caesar and Tacitus to Ælfric of Eynesham, in which elements of Germanic paganism are described as essentially the same as Roman paganisms but with different names.¹¹ Most written evidence for Germanic beliefs is 'Romanized' from the start. Often we are left dealing with imaginative portrayals of what 'Germanic paganisms' are perceived to be, rather than empirical investigations into what they were.

Paganisms are now defined by scholars in a number of fields as being closely related to, but ultimately distinct from, folk practices and superstitions.¹² The labels may at times be problematical because they maintain moralizing connotations of *rusticitas*, but they have grown in usage nevertheless. Folk practices are often characterized as long-standing rituals or superstitions that have persisted in a community's activities without necessarily being part of an ongoing commitment to religious beliefs. They are residually pagan, but more significant in principle for their perceived social functions.¹³ From a Christian perspective, folk practices were sacrilegious and thus real paganisms; there was little space for multiple categories of religious belief.¹⁴ 'Quid enim Hinieldus cum Christo?' ('What has Ingeld to do with Christ?'), was Alcuin's famous challenge to the monks of a Mercian monastery who, rumour

¹¹ Tacitus, *Germania*, c. 43, ed. M. Winterbottom and R.M. Ogilvie, *Cornelii Taciti Opera Minora* (Oxford, 1975), p. 59; Julius Caesar, *The Gallic War* VI.17, ed. and trans. H.J. Edwards (Cambridge, MA, 1952), p. 340. Caesar also makes the comment that Germanic religion was different because they only believed what they could see and had failed to import gods: *The Gallic War* VI.21, pp. 344–7. *Old English Glosses in the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary*, l. 663, ed. J.D. Pfeifer (Oxford, 1974), p. 35 (*mars martis tiig*). Ælfric, *De falsis diis*, ed. J.C. Pope, EETS OS 260 (Oxford, 1968), pp. 676–712, at pp. 684–6. For examples of works that emphasize the essential stability of mythological structures across Indo-European cultures, see G. Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée*, 3 vols (Paris, 1968–73); C. Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (New York, 1995).

¹² D. Harmening, *Superstitio. Überlieferungs- und theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur kirchlich-theologischen Aberglaubensliteratur des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1979); R.A. Markus, 'From Caesarius to Boniface: Christianity and Paganism in Gaul', in J. Fontaine and J.N. Hillgarth (eds), *The Seventh Century: Changes and Continuity* (London, 1992), pp. 154–68; V.J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ, 1990); A.J. Murray, 'Missionaries and Magic in Dark-Age Europe', in L.J. Little and B.H. Rosenwein (eds), *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 92–104, esp. at p. 101; Fell, 'Paganism in *Beowulf*', p. 33.

¹³ P.E. Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache and other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (New York, 2004), pp. 181–2.

¹⁴ Harmening, *Superstitio* p. 63; J.M.H. Smith, 'Religion and Lay Society', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History II: c.700–c.900* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 654–88, at p. 655. On the issue of sacrifice in the early eighth century, see now M. Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg: Zur politischen Dimension eines Rechtsbegriff* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 2005).

had it, still entertained themselves with stories of *reges paganorum*, some perhaps familiar to us through *Beowulf* and other poems.¹⁵ Secularity was no excuse as far as strict-minded clerics were concerned, even if society in general was more relaxed about making distinctions.¹⁶ Alcuin's letter serves to highlight an important problem with 'folk beliefs': is the problem the poor education of the monks or simply the context of the act of reading? Charlemagne enjoyed *barbara et antiquissima carmina* about kings and war as much as anybody and could still lecture Alcuin about the *mala fama* which surrounded the canonical order at Tours.¹⁷ What mattered was the right kind of culture for the right occasion in the right place.

The most famous example of Carolingians attempting to define popular non-Christian religion is the weather magic condemned by Archbishop Agobard of Lyons. Agobard was a Spaniard – a conspicuous outsider in the Frankish north – educated at the court of Charlemagne and frequently embroiled in controversy.¹⁸ As archbishop of Lyons, he once had fraudsters from *Magonia* ('Magic Land', from the word *magia*) arrested after they had taken payment from villagers to stop thunder and hail.¹⁹ It is the challenge to scripture that upset Agobard most: 'so much stupidity has already oppressed the wretched world that Christians now believe things so absurd that no one ever before could persuade the pagans to believe them, even though these pagans were ignorant of the Creator of all things'.²⁰ Here folk practices are reduced to ignorance and stupidity, with paganism highlighted as positively civilized by comparison. One is reminded of Salvian's comment in the fifth century that it was worse for the Goths to be heretics than pagan because if they heard the word of God then they had no excuse to be so wrong.²¹ The case of *Magonia* is a stark reminder of how alien Christianity still was in much of Europe compared to older traditions. When faced

¹⁵ Alcuin, *Alcuini Epistolae*, no. 124, ed. E. Dümmler, *MGH Epistolae* 4 (Berlin, 1895), p. 183. On this letter see the important study D.A. Bullough, 'What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne?', *ASE* 22 (1993), pp. 93–126 and now also M. Garrison, 'Quid Hinieldus cum Christo', in K. O'Brien O'Keefe and A. Orchard (eds), *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, 2 vols (Toronto, 2005), I, pp. 237–59.

¹⁶ In general on this problem see Smith, 'Religion and Lay Society'.

¹⁷ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 29, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH SRG* 25 (Hanover, 1911), p. 33; Charlemagne, *Alcuini Epistolae*, no. 247, ed. Dümmler, p. 400.

¹⁸ On Agobard's career, see E. Boschof, *Erzbischof Agobard von Lyon*, Kölner historische Abhandlungen 17 (Cologne and Vienna, 1969).

¹⁹ Boschof, *Erzbischof Agobard*, pp. 170–6; Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, pp. 455–6; Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, pp. 169–88.

²⁰ Agobard, *Liber contra insulsam vulgi opinionem de grandine et tonitruis*, c. 15, *PL* 104, col. 158B: 'Tanta iam stultitia oppressit miserum mundum, ut nunc sic absurde res credentur a Christianis, quales nunquam antea ad credendum poterat quisquam suadere paganis creatorem omnium ignorantibus.'

²¹ Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei* V.2, ed. F. Pauly, *CSEL* 8 (Vienna, 1883), p. 102.

with extreme conditions – hailstorms could decimate a year's harvest – communities needed to find people to blame, ways to cope psychologically, and it was not yet sure that Christianity provided all the necessary answers.²² Agobard was little kinder about Christians who became overexcited by suggestions of the miraculous; for him, the issue was not what 'folk beliefs' were but what they were not, namely the vigorous version of Christianity sanctioned by the archbishop.²³ Sometimes definitions of non-Christian practice were more clearly about defining the parameters of Christianity itself.

The issue of bilateral definition has been brought into focus by Robert Markus's argument that, from the early eighth century on, legislators were less tolerant of folk beliefs and pagan survivals.²⁴ This was signalled famously in the *Indiculus superstitionem*, shown by Alain Dierkens to pertain to the concerns of the circle of St Boniface at the *Concilium Germanicum* (742) and Council of Les Éstignes (743).²⁵ It contains references to a peculiar mix of practices like sacrifices made at saints' shrines. Peter Brown declared the source recently to prove that paganism had ceased to exist as a credible problem – the battle now was against poor religious education.²⁶ Interpreting the *Indiculus* may depend on whether we prefer to see it as pertaining to a pagan frontier or somewhere like Mainz. But Timothy Reuter remarked that reform and mission were part of the same project in the eighth century, so we can perhaps see in the *Indiculus* an attempt to reshape a society while looking in a number of different directions all at once.²⁷ Boniface saw the problem paganism posed as being intimately linked to sacrilege because he feared congregations were bringing non-Christian practices into church services.²⁸ But given Boniface's penchant for quoting authorities like Caesarius of Arles when he discusses the subject (although he mistook his work for that of St Augustine), it often reads as if these are the fears of someone who knows what the threats are to the church precisely because he has read about them.²⁹ Missionary work and the experience of paganism

²² Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, p. 187.

²³ Agobard, *Epistola ad Batholomaeum de quorundam inlusionem signorum*, PL 104, cols. 179A–186A.

²⁴ Markus, 'From Caesarius to Boniface'; *idem*, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 207–11.

²⁵ *Die Briefe*, no. 56, ed. Tangl, pp. 98–102; A. Dierkens, 'Superstitions, christianisme et paganisme à la fin de l'époque mérovingienne – A propos de l'*Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*', in H. Hasquin (ed.), *Magie, sorcellerie, parapsychologie* (Brussels, 1984), pp. 9–26. See also now Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg*, pp. 435–502.

²⁶ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, p. 426.

²⁷ T. Reuter, 'Saint Boniface and Europe', in T. Reuter (ed.), *The Greatest Englishman: Essays on St Boniface and the Church at Crediton* (Exeter, 1980), pp. 69–94, at pp. 79–80.

²⁸ Markus, 'From Caesarius to Boniface', p. 165; Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg*, pp. 407–10.

²⁹ Boniface, *Die Briefe*, no. 50, ed. Tangl, p. 84.

does not set the agenda because at every turn Boniface and his correspondents communicate in clichés and verbal borrowings.

There are signs that Boniface and his circle looked beyond written authorities on paganism to engage some ideas on the ground. Evidence of local practices intrude into the *Indiculus* and the *Concilium Germanicum* in the form of four vernacular words: *dadsisas* (a funeral rite), *nimidas* (a rite of the woods), *nodfyr* (fire made by rubbing sticks) and *yrias* (a pagan course).³⁰ Alone they are not much with which to (re)construct anything resembling a pagan belief structure. Some hope is offered by an accompanying baptismal formula in a Germanic dialect that urges the rejection of ‘Thor and Woden and Saxnot and all their evil companions’.³¹ But when placed alongside mentions of Jupiter and Mercury in the *Indiculus*, we are left with the impression of either a strange hybrid world of religion or a lack of understanding on behalf of the Christian writers or compilers. Where we might want to draw a distinction between folk beliefs and paganism, the circles of people like Boniface did not. Boniface’s attacks on paganism, like his challenge to the heretics Aldebert and Clemens, were more about characterizing otherness in order to reinforce ‘correct’ Christian practice.³²

Many discussions of paganisms and folk practices assume that it is possible on some level to reconstruct certain aspects of non-Christian belief structures through Frankish Christian sources. But hopes of understanding the practical ‘reality’ of paganism have for some given way to the enterprise of studying the intellectual horizons of people writing about non-Christian belief under the Carolingians. Here Ian Wood, for example, has helped to disentangle some of the hagiographic fictions and autobiographical experiences that shaped accounts of paganism.³³ In central and southern Germany, the kind of paganism saints encountered in their hagiographies was often little more than a trope. Willibald’s Boniface and Hygeburg’s Wynnebald were projected as fighting against a catalogue of auguries, auspices and incantations almost straight out of

³⁰ *Indiculus superstitionem et paganiarum*, ed. G.H. Pertz, *MGH Leges* 1 (Hanover, 1835), pp. 19–20.

³¹ Ed. Pertz, p. 19: ‘. . . Thunaer ende Woden ende Saxnote ende allem them unholdum the hira genotas’. The *Indiculus* and the Saxon Baptismal Formula are found together only in the Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 577, fols 6v–7r (Mainz (?), s. ix’).

³² Von Padberg, ‘Christen und Heiden’, p. 294. On Boniface versus Aldebert and Clemens, see N. Zeddies, ‘Bonifatius und zwei nützliche Rebellen: die Häretiker Aldebert und Clemens’, in M.T. Fögen (ed.), *Ordnung und Aufruhr im Mittelalter: Historische und juristische Studien zur Rebellion* (Frankfurt, 1995), pp. 217–63.

³³ I. Wood, ‘Christians and Pagans in Ninth-Century Scandinavia’, in P.H. Sawyer, B. Sawyer and I. Wood (eds), *The Christianization of Scandinavia* (Alingsås, 1987), pp. 36–67; *idem*, ‘Pagans and Holy Men, 600–800’, in P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (eds), *Irland und die Christenheit* (Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 347–61; *idem*, ‘Pagan Religion’. On the Christian lack of interest in describing paganism accurately see also von Padberg, ‘Christen und Heiden’.

the lists compiled in 742–3.³⁴ On the real pagan frontiers, unsurprisingly, we find more distinct character, such as the god Fosite venerated ‘in confinio Fresorum et Danorum’, according to Alcuin’s *Vita Willibrordi*.³⁵ Distinctive detail, however, is always supported in the narrative by a tapestry of hagiographical models and literary allusions. Appeals to authenticity on the grounds that Willibrord and Alcuin were related are not helpful because there is rarely any actual evidence for the transmission of the information in question, nor any easy way to deal with the subsequent stylization of the information in the source. In the end, even Fosite may be nothing more than a name around which Alcuin devised a hagiographical episode.³⁶

Paganism has been characterized as something more akin to an attitude than a belief system, at least for the Roman world.³⁷ There was a pronounced openness that saw cults from different regions spread across the empire. The rise in popularity of a monotheism such as Christianity thus often created untidy situations in which religious beliefs blended. An important model for this process, borrowed from anthropology, is ‘enculturation’, in which conversion is seen as an initial confrontation between religious systems that gives way to a dialectic.³⁸ An early eccentric example is Emperor Julian the Apostate’s (361–3) attempts to model a Neoplatonic form of paganism on Christian morals and infrastructure, which Julian hoped would challenge Christianity on the very grounds which made it popular; in this case, however, the effort was a disaster.³⁹ More successful pagan adoptions of Christian elements might include King Raedwald of East Anglia’s use of pagan and Christian altars, and the willingness of ninth-century Swedes at Birka to include Christ amongst their gods.⁴⁰ Christianity was also changed by missionary

³⁴ Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, ed. W. Levison, *MGH SRG* 57 (Hanover, 1905), p. 31; Hygeburg, *Vita Wynnebaldis*, c. 7, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *MGH Scriptores* 15.1 (Hanover, 1887), pp. 106–17, at p. 111.

³⁵ Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi*, c. 10, ed. W. Levison, *MGH SRM* (Hanover, 1919), pp. 113–41, at p. 124.

³⁶ The story was also imitated as a hagiographical episode: see Alfrid, *Vita Liudgeri* I. 22, ed. W. Diekamp, *Die Vitae Sancti Liudgeri*, *Die Geschichtsquellen des Bistums Münster* (Münster, 1881), pp. 1–53, at pp. 26–7.

³⁷ J.J. O’Donnell, ‘The Demise of Paganism’, *Traditio* 35 (1979), pp. 45–88.

³⁸ For an early medievalist’s view of enculturation, see M. Richter, ‘Practical Aspects of the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons’, in P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (eds), *Irland und die Christenheit* (Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 362–76.

³⁹ For example, Julian, *Letters*, no. 22, ed. and trans. W.C. Wright, *Works of Emperor Julian*, vol. III (London, 1953), pp. 67–73; Robert Browning, *The Emperor Julian* (London, 1975), pp. 167–82. Browning may have exaggerated the extent to which Julian modelled his ideas on Christianity – see P. Brown, ‘The Last Pagan Emperor: Robert Browning’s *The Emperor Julian*’, in his *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), pp. 83–102, at pp. 96–9 – but the letter remains an explicit statement that there was some influence.

⁴⁰ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 190; Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii*, c. 26, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH SRG* 55 (Hanover, 1884), pp. 13–79, at pp. 56–7.

activity; even where it was victorious, it still adapted to circumstance.⁴¹ James Russell's thesis concerning the 'Germanization' of Christianity is a good, if flawed, example of how we might focus on religious transformation.⁴² Here is something one can maybe identify in Carolingian productions such as the Old Saxon *Heliand*, which famously transposed Germanic morals and expectations into the story of the Gospels.⁴³ But, as Hippolyte Delehaye argued a century ago with regard to saints' cults, the theological and moral aspects of popular Christianity often protect its integrity from the intrusion of 'pagan' elements.⁴⁴ The incorporation of new elements into Christianity did not make it harder for most people – at least the legislators – to distinguish between good and unacceptable practice.

Attempts to define the traces of 'paganism' in Carolingian sources in general seem to face two problems. First, replacing the crude pagan-Christian division with a more plausible spectrum of folk beliefs and superstitions still runs against source material that conceptualizes things more simply. The intrusion of secularity or old traditions into the Christian *Weltbild* was rarely welcomed by those with the power to comment on such processes. This leads to the second problem: most descriptions of paganism are inexorably linked to the creation or refinement of a Christian *Weltbild* that employed a range of alterity motifs to help to reaffirm core values. The decisive factor was the limits of the imagination, not the situation on the ground. With that in mind, the second part of this paper will deliberately focus on some of the more 'imaginative' Carolingian characterizations of paganism, as a way through which to understand paganism as part of a wider set of cultural discourses.

Imagined paganisms under the Carolingians

One lesson from analysing missionary hagiography is that often we are reading elaborate imaginings of paganism.⁴⁵ In order to understand

⁴¹ Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, pp. 160–92.

⁴² J.C. Russell, *The Germanization of Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (Oxford, 1994). There have been many criticisms of Russell's thesis, for example C. Cusack, *Conversion Among the Germanic Peoples* (London, 1998), p. 21.

⁴³ *The Heliand: The Old Saxon Gospel*, trans. G.R. Murphy (Oxford, 1992).

⁴⁴ H. Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, trans. D. Attwater, 4th edn (Dublin, 1998), pp. 126–7. For a correction, see P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 4–5. See on a related theme Fell, 'Paganism in *Beowulf*', p. 16.

⁴⁵ There are perhaps valuable lessons to be learnt when studying 'Germanic paganism' with the debates on ethnogenesis and 'Germanic identity', on which see A. Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 4 (Turnhout, 2002).

these imaginings better, it is worth building up an impression of how the education and reading of Carolingian writers shaped their pre-conceptions. It is here that we need to examine the overlap between attitudes to Germanic paganism and Roman or Greek paganism. The authority of the written word – especially in Latin and Greek – gave the works of ancient authors such as Virgil a curious status because they were at the same time pagan in content and civilized in form. Such things are important both because of the literary interests developed during the Carolingian Renaissance and because Frankish paganism had itself often been sketched by observers using Latin reference points.⁴⁶ Gregory of Tours, for example, reported Clovis's gods as Saturn, Jupiter, Mars and Mercury, quoting Virgil's *Aeneid* as he did so.⁴⁷ Again, modern inclination has been to translate out, eliciting comments such as Wallace-Hadrill's that if the Franks did not worship Woden, then they worshipped 'a god remarkably like him'.⁴⁸ This kind of comment is only justifiable – and we would not want to dismiss it out of hand – if we can delineate some sense of how and why Frankish 'Germanic' culture was reinterpreted in the first place. If there was a tendency among Carolingian writers to appeal to books and to talk in clichés, it is away from Germanic paganism that we might find many of the models employed to conceptualize it.

The development of a classicizing impulse was not just a matter of borrowing structures from 'classical' texts. Willibald's *Vita Bonifatii* (Mainz, 755x769) provides a good example. Boniface's set-piece confrontation of paganism in Hesse famously occurred when he chopped down the sacred oak tree at Geismar.⁴⁹ Willibald notes that the oak was 'called the Oak of Jupiter in the language of the ancient pagans (*prisca pagana*)'.⁵⁰ This has been translated by modern historians as the Oak of Thor or Donar, with the exception of Wallace-Hadrill whose 'Oak of

⁴⁶ On the Carolingian Renaissance, see R. McKitterick (ed.), *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge, 1994); J. Contreni, 'The Carolingian Renaissance: Education and Literary Culture', in McKitterick (ed.), *New Cambridge Medieval History, II*, pp. 709–57.

⁴⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Libri historiarum decem* II.29, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM I* (Hanover, 1937), p. 74.

⁴⁸ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, p. 22. The problem of whether Gregory is 'really' referring to Germanic gods is compounded by Clovis's behaviour as a 'Romanized Germanic king' (on which see W.M. Daly, 'Clovis: How Barbaric, How Pagan?', *Speculum* 69 (1994), pp. 619–64).

⁴⁹ Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, ed. Levison, p. 31. For a recent analysis of such confrontations, see L.E. von Padberg, *Die Inszenierung religiöser Konfrontation*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 51 (Stuttgart, 2003).

⁵⁰ Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 6, ed. Levison, p. 31: '[robor] qui prisco paganorum vocabulo appellatur robor Iobis'. Compare also the supposed cult of Diana in Würzburg described in the Bonifatian-influenced *Passio Kiliani major*, c. 8, ed. H. Canisius, *Acta Sanctorum*, Jul. 2 (Brussels, 1721), p. 616.

Woden' rather underlines the arbitrary nature of such translations.⁵¹ Just because the oak was in a Germanic context geographically, did Willibald mean 'a god like Thor or Woden'? That there was a shrine at Geismar of some significance is under little doubt;⁵² it is the literary context that concerns us. In Boniface's own *Ars grammatica* he used the word *priscus* to distinguish between old pagan Latin (*priscorum consuetudines*) and the contemporary 'urban' forms (*moderna urbanitas*) he preferred himself.⁵³ Willibald's statement thus possibly carries with it a value judgement against paganism read wider as either Latin or Germanic – it is, literally, neither urban nor civilized nor modern. The example is complicated by another of Willibald's possible sources: Aldhelm of Malmesbury's retelling of the story of St Martin of Tours in *De virginitate*. St Martin challenging a local cult centred on a pine tree provides a clear, if uneven, parallel with Boniface.⁵⁴ Aldhelm used the story to comment on the destruction of *delubra priscorum paganorum* – a phrase very much Aldhelm's rather than Sulpicius Severus's and seemingly employed to amplify the contrast between 'old' paganism and 'new' Christianity.⁵⁵ In one short phrase, Willibald had provided a nod to a wider literary tradition of struggle in which the challenge against pagan shrines took place.

Bonifatian *interpretatio Romana* was not just a literary in-game, but also part of the way the Frankish authorities viewed paganism in the world. References to Mercury and Jupiter in the *Indiculus superstitionem* alone suggest that it helped to frame their thoughts when it came to the formulation of policy.⁵⁶ Boniface's councils are partly echoed by Charlemagne's *Admonitio generalis* of 789, in which the usual assortment of auguries and shrines at trees, rocks and springs were condemned in

⁵¹ Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford, 1947), p. 75; Theodor Schieffer, *Wifrid-Bonifatius und die christliche Grundlegung Europas*, 2nd edn (Darmstadt, 1972), p. 148; Lutz E. von Padberg, *Mission und Christianisierung. Formen und Folgen bei Angelsachsen und Franken im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1995), p. 98; Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, p. 421; Marco Mostert, *754: Bonifatius bij Dokkum vermoord* (Hilversum, 1999), p. 50; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, p. 152.

⁵² D. Parsons, 'Sites and Monuments of the Anglo-Saxon Mission in Central Germany', *Archaeological Journal* 140 (1983), pp. 280–321, at p. 286 and p. 292. N. Wand, *Die Bûrburg bei Fritzlar. Burg – 'Oppidum' – Bischofssitz in Karolingischer Zeit*, Kasserler Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte 4 (Marburg, 1974), pp. 42–3.

⁵³ Boniface, *Ars grammatica*, pref., ed. G.J. Gebauer and B. Löfstedt, CCSL 133b (Turnhout, 1980), p. 10.

⁵⁴ R.M. Price, 'The Holy Man and Christianization from the Apocryphal Apostles to St Stephen of Perm', in J. Howard-Johnston and P.A. Hayward, *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 215–38, at pp. 221–2.

⁵⁵ Aldhelm, *De virginitate prosa*, c. 26, ed. R. Ehwald, *MGH AA 15* (Hanover, 1913), p. 262.

⁵⁶ *Indiculus superstitionem*, ed. Pertz, p. 19.

a list derived from a long tradition stretching back to the sermons of Caesarius of Arles (d. 542).⁵⁷ Although Roman gods are absent from the list, the author of a sermon of c.800 – based on one of the *Admonitio's* regulations on preaching – combined the ideas of Boniface and Charlemagne in his condemnation of ‘rocks, springs or trees of Jupiter or Mercury or other gods of the pagans, who are all demons’, again with a nod to the writings of Caesarius.⁵⁸ The sermon is closely related to the near-contemporary Pseudo-Bonifatian sermon no. 6, which employs the same turn of phrase.⁵⁹ The two sermons by their very nature were intended to engage a public, more likely in the context of encouraging better Christian behaviour rather than missionary work.⁶⁰ Questions then arise about how the intended audiences in Germany would interpret such a patchwork of literary borrowings and classical references. Are we to imagine a public engaged in ‘Germanic cultures’ able to translate Latin, or preachers making cultural translations as they go, or some other state of affairs? It is impossible to say. Robert Markus argued that ‘the significance of the inherited written tradition may be just this: that it enables its users to elicit something from the situation which has previously been perhaps only half discerned, if at all’ – in other words, it helps to identify and condemn practices of dubious status within Christianity. While this is sound in itself, the question of the audience’s capacity for cultural translation needs further consideration.

⁵⁷ *Admonitio generalis*, c. 65, ed. A. Boretius, *MGH Capitularia I* (Hanover, 1883), pp. 53–62, at pp. 58–9: ‘Item habemus in lege Domini mandatum: “non auguriamini”; et in deuteronomio: “nemo sit qui ariolos sciscitetur vel somnia observet vel ad auguria intendat” . . . Item de arboribus vel petris vel fontibus, ubi aliqui stulti luminaria vel alias observationes faciunt, omnino mandamus . . . ubicumque inveniatur, tollatur et distruatur . . .’. Caesarius, *Sermones*, no. 13, ed. G. Morin, *CCSL* 103–4 (Turnhout, 1953), pp. 66–7: ‘Cum ergo duplicia bona possimus in ecclesia invenire, quare per praecentatores, per fontes et abores et diabolica fylactetaria, per caraios aut aruspicia et divinos vel sortilogos multiplicia sibi mala miseri homines conantur inferere?’. There are similar concerns in Caesarius, *Sermones*, no. 53, pp. 233–5. On the tradition see Harming, *Superstitio*, pp. 49–53.

⁵⁸ The *Musterpredigt* is ed. G. Maioli di S. Teresa, ‘Ramenta patristica I: Il florilegio Pseudoaugustiniano palatino’, *Ephemerides Carmeliticae* 14 (1963), pp. 195–241, at pp. 238–41. Quotation p. 239: ‘. . . immolant super petras sive ad fontes sive ad arbores deo Iove vel Mercurio vel aliis deis paganorum, que omnia demonia sunt’. On its relationship to Bonifatian sources see Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg*, p. 608. For Caesarius’s condemnation of Roman gods see *Sermones*, no. 52, ed. Morin, pp. 230–1 and no. 193, ed. Morin, p. 785. On Carolingian sermons in general see T.L. Amos, ‘Preaching and the Sermon in the Carolingian World’, in T. Amos, E.A. Green and B.M. Kienzle, *De ore Domini: Preacher and World in the Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1989), pp. 41–60.

⁵⁹ Pseudo-Bonifatius, *Sermones*, no. 6, *PL* 89, col. 855B–C. On the Pseudo-Bonifatius see von Padberg, *Inszenierung*, pp. 195–202 (drawing in part on unpublished work by Rob Meens), and Amos, ‘Preaching’, p. 48.

⁶⁰ Compare on the sermons Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg*, p. 609 and von Padberg, *Inszenierung*, pp. 198–9.

The *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* (c.792) offers one rare example when the Carolingian court addressed part of the world effectively still outside Christianity with legislation against paganism.⁶¹ Military campaigns and missionary works in Saxony were drawn-out affairs which peaked with short-lived and unpopular efforts to enforce hegemony through conversion in the 790s, a move enshrined in the *Capitulatio*.⁶² Yitzhak Hen has recently argued that the legislation owed much to the Islamic idea of *jihad* and the Pact of Umar because of its harsh punishments for alternative religious behaviour.⁶³ Even if that were the case, the definitions of non-Christian activities are familiar from earlier traditions. Despite in 772 having actually destroyed the Saxon sacred tree the Irminsul, in the *Capitulatio* Charlemagne condemned worship at trees and springs, along with *sortes* and divination, in terms still drawn from the Caesarian tradition.⁶⁴ Another feverish chapter condemns the 'pagan belief' (*mores paganorum*) in cannibal witches (*strigae*), although the best evidence for such a belief is the Franks' own *Pactus legis Salicae* rather than anything distinctively 'Saxon'.⁶⁵ More generally the rhetoric of paganism in the capitulary is used to contrast an assortment of practices and affiliations with the Frankish behaviour Charlemagne's court wished to promote. When it is decreed that no one is to conspire with *pagani* against *Christiani*, it is clear that the *Christiani* are really the Franks and their allies; likewise when burial practices like cremation are condemned, it is in order to enforce a common Frankish culture.⁶⁶ The *Capitulatio* may have included tougher penalties for pagan activity, but it ultimately fell back into the same pattern of imposing imagined paganisms on a situation in order to delineate the parameters of acceptable behaviour.

Further into the realms of art and literature, 'real' paganisms were often described in even more imaginative Greco-Roman terms. Returning to Boniface for a moment, a good example is provided by the mid-ninth-century *Vita altera Bonifatii*, written in Utrecht by an unknown priest

⁶¹ *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, ed. A. Boretius, *MGH Capitularia* 1 (Hanover, 1883), pp. 68–71.

⁶² L.E. von Padberg, 'Die Diskussion missionarischer Programme zur Zeit Karls der Großen', in P. Godman, J. Jarnut and P. Johanek (eds), *Am Vorabend der Kaiser Krönung* (Berlin, 2002), pp. 125–43; B. Effros, 'De partibus Saxoniae and the Regulation of Mortuary Custom: A Carolingian Campaign of Christianization or the Suppression of Saxon Identity?', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 75 (1997), pp. 267–86.

⁶³ Y. Hen, 'Charlemagne's Jihad', *Viator* 37 (2006), pp. 33–51. The channel of transmission is argued to have been Theodulf of Orléans, a Visigoth at Charlemagne's court.

⁶⁴ *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, c. 21, ed. Boretius, p. 69. For the destruction of the Irminsul, *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 772, ed. F. Kurze, *MGH SRG* 6 (Hanover, 1895), pp. 34–4.

⁶⁵ *Pactus legis Salicae* LXIV.3, ed. K.A. Eckhardt (Hanover, 1962), p. 231.

⁶⁶ Effros, 'De partibus Saxoniae'.

of St Martin's church.⁶⁷ Here Boniface was cast as a heroic figure fighting paganism personified by classical creatures:

And beforehand certain [locals] cultivated their groves and temples of demons and ghosts. But Boniface, carrying by hand a divine scythe, banished totally all of the fauns and satyrs, which many pagans called gods of the woods; similarly, he persuaded the dryads and dell-nymphs and other sorcerers of trifling divine portents to abandon all the Christians . . . This man (full of the spirit of God) constructed a famous monastery and excellent churches, as well as altars suitable for divine sacrifice, in the places from which the above-mentioned vanities were expelled; and there he decided to invoke the name of the God of Life, where the idol of death had long been cherished by the people.⁶⁸

That this is a 'surreal fantasy' with a narrative strategy is patently obvious.⁶⁹ Boniface is less a historical figure and more a cultural icon, heroically combating non-Christian otherness. One parallel can perhaps be made with Jerome's *Vita Pauli*, in which St Anthony encountered fauns and satyrs. Anthony was shocked to discover that the Alexandrians worshipped monsters, even while some of the monsters themselves – including fauns and satyrs – worshipped Christ.⁷⁰ For the Presbyter Ultraiectensis who wrote the *Vita altera*, however, these were creatures of the forest cast within the kind of pastoral imagery conjured up by Virgil's *Georgics*, not urban Alexandria and its surrounding desert. The

⁶⁷ *Vita altera Bonifatii*, ed. W. Levison, *MGH SRG* 57 (Hanover, 1905), pp. 62–78. On the problem of the text's transmission see Levison's comments, pp. LII–LIII. The suggestion that Bishop Fredericus of Utrecht (d. 825) wrote the text was raised in J. Romein, 'Wie is de "Presbyter Ultraiectensis"?', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 44 (1929), pp. 373–81, but it has not found wide acceptance. Some people prefer to see the text as at least the editorial product of Bishop Radbod of Utrecht, for example most recently W.S. von Egmond, 'Misgivings about Miracles in Carolingian Hagiography from Utrecht', in K.E. Olsen, A. Harbus and T. Hofstra (eds), *Miracles and the Miraculous in Medieval Germanic Literature* (Leuven, 2004), pp. 69–79.

⁶⁸ *Vita altera Bonifatii*, c. 8, ed. Levison, p. 68: 'Et illi quidem antea in suis lucis ac delubris larvas lemuresque coluerant; sed Bonifacius, falcem manu tenens divinam, omnes faunos et sathryos, quos nonnulli paganorum silvestres deos appellant, funditus extirpavit. Similiter autem et driades napeasque et cetera huiusmodi magis portentosa quam numina christianis omnibus nauci pendere persuasit . . . Vir iste spiritu Dei plenus in locis, a quibus supradictas vanitates expulerat, ilico monasteria inclita et basilicas eximias, altaria quoque divinis sacrificiis apta contruxit ibique invocari statuit nomen Dei viri, ubi mortua ydola ab indigenis eatenus colebantur.'

⁶⁹ B. Friesen, 'Answers and Echoes: The *Libellus Responionem* and the Hagiography of North-Western Mission', *EME* 14 (2006), pp. 153–72, at p. 170.

⁷⁰ Jerome, *Vita Pauli*, cc. 7–8. For recent analysis of this incident, see P.C. Miller, 'Jerome's Centaur: A Hyper-Icon of the Desert', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4:2 (1996), pp. 209–33 and A.H. Merrills, 'Monks, Monsters, and Barbarians: Re-Defining the African Periphery in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12:2 (2004), pp. 217–44.

textual worlds of Jerome and Virgil had come together in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, a text of which the author of the *Vita altera Bonifatii* was clearly fond, judging by borrowings and imitations.⁷¹ The influence of Isidore on Bonifantian ideas should not be underestimated. Willibald had also turned to Isidore when searching for a way to conceptualize the programme of *Concilium Germanicum* and its relatives.⁷² Isidore's encyclopaedia offered information useful for the interpretation of fights against heretics and pagans. If one wanted to find out about paganism, the *Etymologiae* offered a handy guide.

Images of Greco-Roman creatures in forests could have a moral function in the art of the Christian Frankish world. Cynocephali, satyrs and a menagerie of other creatures from Isidore's *Etymologiae* can be found in a ninth-century ivory panel – now Paris, Musée de Louvre, OA 9064 – which depicts the Garden of Eden.⁷³ The scene depicts Adam and Eve in the top register, with Eve being tempted by the serpent. Below, two registers of semi-human creatures dance around looking upwards, anticipating the imminent fall, while below them four more layers of creatures including deer, elephants and a gryphon play, some also looking upwards. The work was possibly once part of a diptych used to adorn a Bible.⁷⁴ In that context, it is intriguing to see the public presentation of a garden full of non-biblical imagery. While references to monsters are not to be construed as simply allusions to pagan traditions – as Jerome's centaur proves – it does extend the cultural clash with otherness.⁷⁵ What messages about the place of classical pagan culture did this send out to the congregation of the church that used the panel? Are monsters to be implicated in the Fall? Or, more disappointingly, does the panel simply tell us about artistic fashion? It has an affinity with the panels from Florence and the Musée Cluny, which depict more unambiguously pagan or antique images possibly derived from Virgil's *Eclogues*.⁷⁶ Manuscript illustrations in Tours in the ninth century displayed an interest in representing mythological creatures, and the panel likely

⁷¹ Isidore, *Etymologiae* XI.3.22–3, ed. J.O. Reta and M.-A.M. Casquero (Madrid, 2004), p. 882. For Isidorian borrowings and imitation: *Vita altera Bonifatii*, cc. 6, 19, 21, ed. Levison, pp. 66, 75, 77, and also c. 4, p. 65, for an allusion to Isidore's *Sententiae*.

⁷² Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 8, ed. Levison, pp. 41–2.

⁷³ A. Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser VIII.–XI. Jahrhundert* (Berlin and Oxford, 1969), no. 158. On the context see L. Nees, *A Tainted Mantle: Hercules and the Classical Tradition at the Carolingian Court* (Philadelphia, 1991), pp. 219–34.

⁷⁴ On the uses of ivories, see Nees, 'Art and Architecture', pp. 831–2.

⁷⁵ For a warning about equating monsters with paganism, see Fell, 'Paganism in *Beowulf*', p. 21.

⁷⁶ Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen*, nos. 155–7. W.F. Volbach, 'Sculpture and Applied Art', in J. Hubert, J. Porcher and W.F. Volbach, *Carolingian Art*, trans. J. Emmons, S. Gilbert and R. Allen (London, 1970), pp. 206–61, at pp. 238–9.

comes from that tradition.⁷⁷ From an art historical perspective, it shows the developing influence of the *Physiologus*, a fourth-century Greek text that promoted illustration as an occasion to moralize rather than merely to represent.⁷⁸ The significance of such illustrations is that they (re)created a visual language for paganism using antique motifs which could then stand juxtaposed with the fall of man.

Representations of paradise on imagined frontiers naturally had a key place in impressing congregations. The influence of insular decorations are of particular importance, for example in the 'Tassilo style'.⁷⁹ Examples of this include the binding of Boniface's 'Victor Codex'.⁸⁰ Iconographies of paradise, Egon Wamers argued, were used by missionaries to impress the heathen.⁸¹ Certainly Daniel of Winchester impressed on Boniface the need to tell heathens that the forests of Germania were much poorer than the Christian lands to the south.⁸² Here we are reminded of the metaphorical landscape in which missions engaged with the pagans. Boniface, to Daniel, was a *vox clamantis in deserto*. Words like *eremus* and *vastum* litter descriptions of Hesse, Thuringia and Bavaria in missionary *vitae*, in order to pave the way for a transformation of the landscape through the introduction of a rigorous Christian life.⁸³ Moreover these (pagan) wastelands are often woodlands to be cleared and transformed, as the foundation stories of Fulda and Heidenheim make clear; the use of the physical environment had a key role to play in religious transformation.⁸⁴ These are not only literal descriptions but ones which

⁷⁷ R. Hinks, *Carolingian Art* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1962), pp. 153–4. J. Porcher, 'Book Painting', in Hubert, Porcher and Volbach, *Carolingian Art*, pp. 71–203, at pp. 124–39.

⁷⁸ *Physiologus*, ed. F. Sbordone (Hildesheim, 1976). The text was the major influence on medieval bestiaries.

⁷⁹ E. Wamers, 'Insular Art in Carolingian Europe: The Reception of Old Ideas in a New Empire', in R.M. Spearman and J. Higgitt (eds), *The Age of Migrating Ideas: Early Medieval Art in Northern Britain and Ireland* (Stroud, 1993), pp. 35–44.

⁸⁰ D.M. Wilson, 'An Anglo-Saxon Book-Binding at Fulda (Codex Bonifatianus I)', *The Antiquaries Journal* 41 (1961), pp. 199–217.

⁸¹ Wamers, 'Insular Art', p. 38.

⁸² Boniface, *Die Briefe*, no. 23, ed. Tangl, p. 38 and p. 40.

⁸³ Eigil, *Vita Sturmii*, cc. 4–10, ed. P. Engelbert, *Die Vita Sturmii des Eigil von Fulda. Literarkritisch-historische Untersuchung und Edition*, Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission für Hessen und Waldeck 29 (Marburg, 1968), pp. 134–43; Hygeburg, *Vita Wynnebaldis*, c. 7, ed. Holder-Egger, p. III; Liudger, *Vita Gregorii*, c. 5, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *MGH Scriptores* 15.1, pp. 63–79, at p. 72; Ermenrich, *Sermo Sualonis*, cc. 2–4, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *MGH Scriptores* 15.1 (Hanover, 1887), pp. 156–63, at pp. 157–8. M.-E. Brunet, 'Fulda als Kloster in eremo. Zentrale Quellen über die Gründung im Spiegel der hagiographischen Tradition', in *Kloster Fulda in der Welt der Karolinger und Ottonen*, ed. Gangolf Schrimpf, Fuldaer Studien 7 (Frankfurt, 1996), pp. 59–78; C. Wickham, 'European Forests in the Early Middle Ages: Landscape and Land Clearance', in his *Land and Power: Studies in Italian and European Social History, 400–1200* (London, 1994), pp. 155–99, at pp. 156–8. For an important survey of attitudes to the desert, see A. Guillaumont, 'La conception du désert chez les moines d'Égypte', *Revue d'histoire des religions* 188 (1975), pp. 2–21.

⁸⁴ Liudger, *Vita Gregorii*, c. 5, ed. Holder-Egger, p. 72; Hygeburg, *Vita Wynnebaldis*, c. 7, ed. Holder-Egger, p. III.

lend themselves to further lessons. But it makes sense of things like the *Vita altera Bonifatii* and the Louvre ivory if we perceive an intimate relationship between paganism and the conversion of forest regions, in the imaginations of people worried about paganism in general. Here, the *dei silvestres* are an integral part of conceptualizing a changing forestry world, not just an exercise in literary game-playing.

The implication of visual cultures within pagan-Christian interactions is significant in the context of Carolingian theology. Boniface's own and related writings place an emphasis on the written and spoken word, exemplified by Boniface's request for a copy of the epistles of St Peter written in gold to place *ante oculos carnalium* during preaching.⁸⁵ Using images to teach was a thorny issue. Pope Gregory the Great famously wrote to Bishop Serenus of Marseille in 600 disappointed in his image breaking, urging the bishop to use images to educate.⁸⁶ He argued that 'in [the image], the ignorant see what they should follow and the illiterate read the same. Thus a picture serves as a lecture, especially for the gentiles'.⁸⁷ At Charlemagne's court, Theodulf of Orléans accepted this point in the aborted official response to the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, which the Franks mistakenly believed had condoned the veneration of images.⁸⁸ Amongst the many things that troubled Theodulf about images was that they lent themselves too easily to the representation of pagan stories. He listed a variety of Greco-Roman stories that, he argued, help to prove that paintings could be counted amongst things that went against scripture (while perhaps also showing that Theodulf rather enjoyed them).⁸⁹ The worry that unfettered artistic licence ran close to pagan practice is further evidence of the need to build up contrasts to define what Christianity *was* under the Carolingians.

Book IV of the *Opus Caroli* contains a further argument that sheds light on attitudes to what paganism was. The chapter in question concerns the argument that 'those who say images of icons are similar to images of demons accuse Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samuel and

⁸⁵ *Die Briefe*, no. 35, ed. Tangl, p. 60.

⁸⁶ Gregory, *Registrum* XI.10, ed. P. Ewald and L.M. Hartmann, *MGH Epistolae* 2 (Berlin, 1899), pp. 269–72.

⁸⁷ Gregory, *Registrum* XI.10, ed. Ewald and Hartmann, p. 270: 'in ipsa ignorantes vident, quod sequi debeant, in ipsa legunt qui litteras nesciunt; unde praecipue gentibus pro lectione pictura est'.

⁸⁸ *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum* III.23, ed. A. Freeman, *MGH Concilia* II, Supp. 1 (Hanover, 1998), pp. 440–7. A. Freeman, 'Scripture and Images in the *Libri Carolini*', *Settimane* 41 (1994), pp. 163–88, at pp. 170–4. More generally see Freeman's collected essays, *Theodulf of Orléans: Charlemagne's Spokesman Against the Second Council of Nicaea* (Aldershot, 2003), and T.F.X. Noble, 'Tradition and Learning in Search of Theology: The *Libri Carolini*', in R. Sullivan (ed.), *The Gentle Voices of Teachers: Aspects of Learning in the Carolingian Age* (Columbus, OH, 1995), pp. 227–60.

⁸⁹ *Opus Caroli* III.23, ed. Freeman, pp. 442–6. See Nees, *A Tainted Mantle*.

David of offering pagan sacrifices of God'.⁹⁰ To counter, the author (possibly not Theodulf at this point) turned to Isidore's account of the Greek origins of pagan worship in which people were deceived by demons as they sought solace from loss.⁹¹ The Franks certainly did not want to condemn the example of the Old Testament patriarchs and the author defended each in turn. But the key part of the argument for us is this:

[T]hey did not offer God pagan sacrifices, but divine service, because when they offered their sacrifices, neither had the pagans been named after the *pagus* of Athens, nor, so it is said, had the city of the Athenians been built, nor had [King] Cecrops delivered the institutions of sacrificial offerings and ceremonial altars and the pronouncements of gentile demons.⁹²

Here the *Opus Caroli* follows Isidore, who had written that paganism literally originated (*exoriri*) from the *pagus* outside Athens.⁹³ The perception of origins is important when it comes to defining the nature of a cultural system or identity. The court's Isidorian definition of paganism precluded seeing non-Greek paganisms so early in history (with the possible benefit of blaming paganism on the enemy). In the writings of Theodulf's contemporary Paul the Deacon, the same ideas had implications for defining Germanic paganism: Paul, who certainly knew the *Etymologiae*, commented early in the *Historia Langobardorum* that the Lombard god Wotan was actually the much older god Mercury who came from Greece, not Germania.⁹⁴ It was not just *interpretatio Romana* (or *Graeca*) or the uncritical reception of a literary tradition: Paul, like Theodulf, took what he had read in Isidore seriously and adjusted his understanding of 'Germanic' paganisms accordingly when trying to formulate key origin myths.

Writers at ninth-century Fulda present further evidence that Carolingian writers adapted the authority of old texts in their battle for

⁹⁰ *Opus Caroli* IV.18, ed. Freeman, pp. 531–4.

⁹¹ Isidore, *Etymologiae* VIII.11.3–5, eds Reta and Casquero, pp. 708–10.

⁹² *Opus Caroli* IV.18, ed. Freeman, p. 534: 'Non enim illi offerebant Deo sacrificia pagana, sed mysteriis plena, quia necdum a pagis Atheniensium pagani nuncupabantur, quando iam ab illis Deo sacrificium offerebatur et, ut ita dixerim, necdum Athenarum urbs condita erat nec Cecrops offerendorum sacrificiorum institutiones et ararum erectiones et daemonum appellationes gentilibus tradiderat.'

⁹³ Isidore, *Etymologiae* VIII.10.1, eds Reta and Casquero, p. 708. See also Caesarius's argument in his *Sermones*, no. 193, ed. Morin, p. 785.

⁹⁴ Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* I.9, ed. L. Bethmann and G. Waitz, *MGH Scriptores rerum Langobardorum* I (Hanover, 1878), pp. 45–187, at p. 53: 'Wotan sane, quem adiecta littera Godan dixerunt, ipse est qui apud Romanos Mercurius dicitur et ab universis Germaniae gentibus ut deus adoratur; qui non circa haec tempora, sed longe antea, nec in Germania, sed in Graecia fuisse prohibetur.'

imaginative control of the *mundus*. Hrabanus Maurus copied the sections on paganism in the *Etymologiae* for Emperor Louis the Pious in his *De rerum natura*, making them part of a book on philosophy, poetry and pagan beliefs.⁹⁵ He also turned his mind to the magic arts in a separate treatise, but omitted Isidore's references to Mercury raising the dead as part of a strategy to illustrate that all magic was an illusion.⁹⁶ Like Agobard, he was anxious to assert that it was God and his laws alone that controlled nature.⁹⁷ Meanwhile Rudolf of Fulda, Hrabanus's pupil, used borrowings from Tacitus's *Germania* to frame the beliefs of the Saxons in his *Translatio s. Alexandri*.⁹⁸ Rudolf adapts a substantial section of text to include information on the social customs of the Saxons and also to note that Mercury was their principal god.⁹⁹ It is well known that Tacitus wrote, not as an ethnographer, but rather as a *Zeitkritiker*.¹⁰⁰ The noble and otherworldly savages of the north held a mirror up to Roman society's loose sexual morals, inhospitality and general lasciviousness, debauchery and violence. St Boniface had used a similar technique when chastising King Æthelbald of Mercia, contrasting the king's taste for seducing nuns with the chastity of Old Saxons and Wends.¹⁰¹ Whether Rudolf appreciated the moralizing undertones is by no means entirely clear in his use of Tacitus except that he was addressing Duke Waltbert – a descendant of one of the Saxon leaders who fought Charlemagne – and praising the Saxons for having put their pagan cultures behind them. Still, the educational rationale of the Fulda school under Hrabanus Maurus and Rudolf valued authority and repetition above all else, and in Tacitus Rudolf had a genuine Latin authority he could repeat.

Out of this intellectual milieu came one of the most curious ninth-century writers to tackle paganism: Ermanrich of Ellwangen. Unfortunately for Ermanrich, his writings have gone down in history as amongst the worst of the Carolingian period, his Latin described as 'inept', and his sources 'from the dustbins of Fulda'.¹⁰² He deserves attention, however, as someone who gave serious thought to the pagan heritage in his early

⁹⁵ Hrabanus Maurus, *De rerum naturis* XV.3–4, *PL* III, cols 9A–614B, at cols 425B–436B.

⁹⁶ Hrabanus Maurus, *De magicis artibus*, *PL* 110, cols 1095A–1110A; Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, pp. 54–5.

⁹⁷ Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, p. 174.

⁹⁸ Rudolf, *Translatio s. Alexandri*, ed. G.H. Pertz, *MGH Scriptores* II (Hanover, 1829), pp. 674–81.

⁹⁹ Rudolf, *Translatio s. Alexandri*, c. 2, ed. Pertz, p. 675.

¹⁰⁰ J. Rives, *Tacitus: Germania* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 61–4. On the text's reception see F. Haverfield, 'Tacitus During the Late Roman Period and the Middle Ages', *Journal of Roman Studies* 6 (1916), pp. 196–201.

¹⁰¹ Boniface, *Die Briefe*, no. 73, ed. Tangl, p. 150.

¹⁰² For a survey of the criticisms of Ermenrich see F.M. Casaretto, 'L'Epistola ad Grimaldum abbatem di Ermenrico di Ellwangen: identità e destinazione, scopo, tipologia redazionale', *Studi medievali*, 3rd ser. 38 (1997), pp. 647–77, at pp. 647–9.

days, before being appointed to the bishopric of Passau and given the tricky task of challenging the Byzantine missions of Cyril and Methodius to the Slavs.¹⁰³ His most accessible work is the *Sermo Sualonis* (or *Vita Soli*), written about a supposed disciple of St Boniface's who had had a hermitage at Solnhofen, near Heidenheim. The *Sermo Sualonis* exhibits a slightly uncomfortable attitude to paganism.¹⁰⁴ It begins with an attack on the fictions of 'pagan panegyrics' and celebrated instead the destruction of temples (*delubra*) in Egypt.¹⁰⁵ Why read the *inutiles fabulae* of Virgil and Homer when you could be contemplating Heaven, he asks. He goes on to emphasize that the triumph of Christianity is not a matter of fiction but of truth (*non ficta sed veraciter facta*). Were too many of his contemporaries reading the classics? It perhaps does not matter. The most historically spurious of all the *vitae* about the Anglo-Saxon missions had opened with its claim to truth: Ermenrich admitted he knew nothing historical about Sualo – he knew no more than the identity of the hermitage – but he could provide his audience in Fulda with spiritual truths. Ermenrich was not interested in imagining pagans in his sermon beyond painting the broadest pictures of the Anglo-Saxon missions bringing light to Bavaria (a play on Sualo's byname 'Solus').

Ermenrich continued his discussion of 'truth' in his lengthy letter to Abbot Grimald of St Gall – a text that could itself be considered a rather eccentric entry into the genre of encyclopaedia.¹⁰⁶ He wrote about a variety of topics of grammar and philosophy, but of interest to us here is his chapter on the pagan gods.¹⁰⁷ His principal theme was love and anger amongst the gods. He complains for a start about single-parentage amongst the gods, more specifically Jupiter begetting Minerva, and Juno Vulcan, by themselves. There are maybe echoes here of Daniel of Winchester, who advised Boniface to ask pagans difficult questions about gods and goddesses begetting more gods and goddesses.¹⁰⁸ Ermenrich then goes on to recite the story of Juno's imprisonment of Io under the watchful gaze of Argus. Then there are the Trojan wars, narrated by Virgil's *falsa fabella*. More stories fly past; more concerns about gods begetting gods. Ermenrich then turns to Virgil's account of bees – a popular and influential simile, particularly in Aldhelmian circles, for

¹⁰³ H. Löwe, 'Ermenrich von Passau, Gegner Methodius. Versuch eines Persönlichkeitsbildes', *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde* 126 (1986), pp. 221–41. On the *Sermo Sualonis*, see most recently L. Coon, 'Historical Fact and Exegetical Fiction in the Carolingian *Vita s. Sualonis*', *Church History* 72:1 (2003), pp. 1–24.

¹⁰⁴ Coon, 'Historical Fact', pp. 21–2.

¹⁰⁵ Ermenrich, *Vita Sualonis*, pref., ed. Holder-Egger, p. 157.

¹⁰⁶ Ermenrich, *Epistola ad Grimaldum*, ed. E. Dümmler, *MGH Epistolae* 5 (Berlin, 1899), pp. 536–79.

¹⁰⁷ Ermenrich, *Epistola ad Grimaldum*, cc. 24–5, ed. Dümmler, pp. 561–3.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel, *Die Briefe*, no. 23, ed. Tangl, p. 39.

asexual reproduction and monastic life serving God.¹⁰⁹ Then there is Cybele, a sex goddess to whom lions (and bees) are sacred, who turns Atalanta and Hippomenes into lions after they had sex in a temple. From Pliny he had read that lions and leopards interbred, but he considered this to be false too. Ermenrich ends by declaring ‘all these [things] and other figments of the gentile poets are false and sterile, as can be weighed up by anyone who holds the catholic faith’.¹¹⁰ Ultimately, Ermenrich continues, labouring the point, they are simply not true (*non sunt vera*). What the pagan poets provided for him was a focus for his artistry and learning, and a handy reminder that Christians ought not take anything outside of scripture seriously.

On the missionary frontiers of the ninth century themselves, the expectations born of education brought different tensions. Viking Scandinavia still had real pagans, and ones whose raiding seemed to threaten Christendom.¹¹¹ Rimbart of Hamburg-Bremen, the missionary heir to the work of the ‘apostle of the north’ St Anskar, mixed practical experience, literary motifs, and an educated imagination to create a lively image of the pagan edges of the known world.¹¹² He had experienced this world through years working as Anskar’s assistant in Denmark and Sweden, and had continued such work in Denmark until ill health curtailed his activities.¹¹³ His characterizations of Swedish pagan practices sound in part much like those in the Bonifatian tradition, with its *cultura idolorum* and *sortes*.¹¹⁴ But he also provides a vivid account of two town meetings in Birka at which the relative merits of Christianity and pagan beliefs were discussed.¹¹⁵ Paganism here seems to include the possibility of adding ancestors to the ‘pantheon of gods’, a (possibly cynical) appreciation of the geographical limits of worship with different gods for Scandinavia and Frankia, and a strong emphasis on the material benefits of worship. Rimbart’s story has fascinated historians because it is qualitatively unlike most sources for the period. For every moment

¹⁰⁹ A. Casiday, ‘St Aldhelm’s Bees (*De virginitate prosa* cc. IV–VI): Some Observations on a Literary Tradition’, *ASE* 33 (2004), pp. 1–22.

¹¹⁰ Ermenrich, *Epistola ad Grimaldum*, ed. Dümmler, p. 563: ‘Sed haec omnia et cetera aliorum poetarum gentilium figmenta quam falsa sint et sterilia, facile perpendit quisquis catholicam fidem tenet.’

¹¹¹ S. Coupland, ‘The Rod of God’s Wrath or the People of God’s Wrath? The Carolingians’ Theology of the Viking Invasions’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42 (1991), pp. 535–54; I. Wood, ‘Christians and Pagans’; *idem*, *The Missionary Life: Saints and Evangelisation of Europe 400–1050* (Harlow, 2001).

¹¹² Wood, ‘Christians and Pagans’.

¹¹³ *Vita Rimbarti*, c. 21, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH SRG* 55 (Hanover, 1884), pp. 81–100, at p. 97; Palmer, ‘Rimbart’s *Vita Anskarii* and Scandinavian Mission in the Ninth Century’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55:2 (2004), pp. 235–56, at p. 238.

¹¹⁴ Rimbart, *Vita Anskarii*, cc. 19, 26–7, 30, ed. Waitz, pp. 42–43, p. 57 and p. 61.

¹¹⁵ Rimbart, *Vita Anskarii*, cc. 19, ed. Waitz, pp. 42 and 26–7, pp. 55–9.

in which pagans are lambasted for their belief in devils, there is an appreciation of non-Christian concerns and even a couple of speeches made by pagans justifying their beliefs. There was every reason for Rimbert to be realistic about the northern missionfield because he was writing to encourage others to help him, providing potential missionaries with a model.¹¹⁶ We therefore have a certain affected take on paganism that is shaped by both hagiographical convention, Christian polemic, and practical experience.

The issue we face is how to deal with the enmeshing of experience and imagination. In practice it is misguided to sieve the writings of someone like Rimbert to extract the realities underneath. The very experience of reality is always preconditioned, even if it is preconditioned by 'common sense'. To what extent do we imagine that hagiography, polemic and experience were separate in Rimbert's psychology? A letter from his friend Ratramnus of Corbie is possibly revealing.

The abbot was responding to Rimbert's difficulties in deciding whether *cynocephali*, dog-headed creatures, were men in need of mission or mere beasts.¹¹⁷ *Cynocephali* had been a stock part of 'what lay beyond the known world' since Herodotus in the fifth century BC, and they had been relocated on several occasions in response to moving frontiers and the *a fortiori* absence of dog-headed men each time.¹¹⁸ In Hedeby, however, there were real *cynocephali*, or at least Danes with dog masks.¹¹⁹ Rimbert offered Ratramnus an ethnographic account of the creatures' social habits and Ratramnus constructed the argument that, if they displayed reason, then they must have rational souls and need mission. Predictably, the core of the abbot's logic came from passages he had read in Isidore's *Etymologiae* about monsters among each race of humans.¹²⁰ But juxtaposed with Ermenrich's arguments about truth, Ratramnus's concern with reason is striking as part of the conceptualization of non-Christian otherness. This is why we must treat the *cynocephali* alongside paganism – they are part of the same continuum of constructions elaborately erected to

¹¹⁶ Palmer, 'Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii*', pp. 246–8.

¹¹⁷ Rimbert, *Epistolae variorum inde a saeculo nono medio usque ad mortem Karoli II imperatoris collectae*, no. 12, ed. E. Perels, *MGH Epistolae* 6 (Berlin, 1925), pp. 155–7.

¹¹⁸ J. Romm, 'Belief and Other Worlds: Ktesias and the Founding of the "Indian Wonders"', in George S. Slusser and Eric S. Rabkin (eds), *Mindscapes: The Geographies of Imagined Worlds* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL, 1989), pp. 121–35; C. Lacouteux, 'Les Cynocéphales: Étude d'une tradition tératologique de l'Antiquité au XIIe siècle', *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 24 (1981), pp. 117–28.

¹¹⁹ I. Hägg, *Die Textilfunden aus dem Hefen von Haithabu*, Ausgrabungen in Haithabu 20 (Neumünster, 1984), pp. 69–72. See also the description of the Northmen as *cynocephali* in Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II.13, ed. Haefele, p. 76, and the comments of Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 251–3.

¹²⁰ Isidore, *Etymologiae* XI.3.12–28, eds Reta and Casquero, pp. 880–2.

make sense of that which did not lend itself to the Christian ‘centre’. For Ratramnus and probably Rimbert, encyclopaedic and literary traditions were an integral part of their understanding of the practical world around them.

Literary traditions about *cynocephali* had an eschatological significance that also resonated with ideas of mission. The seventh-century Pseudo-Methodius commentary on Revelations had a distinct, if not even, impact on the thought of Carolingian writers.¹²¹ One story told of how Alexander the Great had banished many monstrous races to the north, including *cynocephali*, with the warning that they would one day return.¹²² In Carolingian Bavaria, the satirical *Cosmographie* of Aethicus Ister made extensive use of the tradition and cast the *cynocephali* as traders from distant islands.¹²³ While this may not have been a source for Ratramnus or Rimbert, it is symptomatic of the influence of eschatological thought on conceptualizations of the north triggered by the viking attacks on Christendom.¹²⁴ Ratramnus refers to traditions about Alexander and monsters in his letter, drawing on Isidore, although there is no clear eschatological interest.¹²⁵ Rimbert’s own conceptualization of mission, on the other hand, developed a fine line between mission *ad extremum terrae* and the temporal end of the earth, blending geographical and apocalyptic thought.¹²⁶ As a boy, Rimbert wrote, Anskar had been inspired by a vision of the saints in Heaven, who sat ‘as it is written in Apocalypse [Revelation IV.4]’.¹²⁷ There are few biblical references in the

¹²¹ Wolfram Brandes, “Tempora periculosa sunt”: Eschatologisches im Vorfeld der Kaiserkrönung Karls des Grossen’, in R. Brendt (ed.), *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794: Kristallisationspunkt karolingischer Kultur*, Quellen und Abhandlungen zur mittelhochdeutschen Kirchengeschichte 80 (Mainz, 1997), pp. 49–79; Johannes Heil, “Nos nescientes de hoc velle manere” – “We Wish to Remain Ignorant About This”: Timeless End, or Approaches to Reconceptualising Eschatology after AD 800 (AM 6000)”, *Traditio* 55 (2000), pp. 73–103.

¹²² Pseudo-Methodius, c. 8, ed. E. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen* (Halle, 1898), pp. 59–96, at p. 75. Some early versions of the text do not include the story of Alexander but do maintain the prophecy about punishment from the north: see the (plausibly) St Gall version edited in O. Prinz, ‘Eine frühe abendländische Aktualisierung der lateinischen Übersetzung des Pseudo-Methodios’, *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 41 (1985), pp. 1–23, at pp. 6–17.

¹²³ Aethicus Ister, *Cosmographie*, ed. O. Prinz, *Quellen zur Gesitagesgeschichte des Mittelalters* 14 (1993), pp. 114–15 (on *cynocephali*) and pp. 137–41 (on Alexander). See I. Wood, ‘Aethicus Ister: An Exercise in Difference’, in W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds), *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter* (Vienna, 2000), pp. 197–208, at pp. 203–4.

¹²⁴ Coupland, ‘The Rod of God’s Wrath’; Wood, *The Missionary Life*, p. 134. We might want to bracket this together with the fulfilment of Jeremiah 1.14 feared by Alcuin (*Epistolae*, no. 19, ed. Dümmler, p. 55) and others. See also Haimo of Auxerre, *Expositio in Apocalypsin*, PL 117, cols 938–1220, at col. 996C and *idem*, *In epistolam II ad Thessalonicenses*, PL 117, cols 777–84, at cols 779D–780A, which, while not explicitly about Vikings, demonstrate a contemporary interest in pagans – with classical gods – within the fulfilment of apocalyptic scripture.

¹²⁵ Isidore, *Etymologiae* XI.3.5, eds Reta and Casquero, p. 878.

¹²⁶ Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 133–4.

¹²⁷ Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii*, c. 3, ed. Waitz, p. 22.

Vita Anskarii, so Rimbert's direct citation of Revelation here suggests an important role in his overall literary strategy. Sanctity could itself be tied to eschatological concerns, as Bede had done in describing the saints in the seventh age of the world; to become a saint at the end of the geographical and temporal world was to carry considerable symbolic power. A later vision, this time of Adalhard of Corbie quoting apocalyptic prophecies from Isaiah, was interpreted by Anskar as a promise of martyrdom and thus genuine sainthood.¹²⁸ Rimbert's hagiographical, eschatological and missionary interests intersected to create another northern missionfield pregnant with allegory, this time more pressingly prophetic. Pagans were central to the plot, but only as a device to drive forward the overarching message of judgement and salvation.

Conclusion

The expansion of Christendom under the Carolingians prompted encounters with real pagans, but it does not seem to have led to any efforts to understand the religions of the north. The source material offers standardized formulations of pagan practices, often creating a conflation between what modern scholars might call pagan and folk superstition. Often these are dressed up in Latin terms that have traditionally lent themselves well to being translated into 'Germanic' equivalents, although it is dangerous to expect a close degree of fit in all circumstances. Religious syncretism is an entirely plausible phenomenon for eighth- and ninth-century Germany, but it is necessary to question whether this is the same thing the sources are attempting to describe. The intrusion of Latin frames of reference into descriptions of paganism brings with it broader cultural significance. Disparate figures such as Boniface, Theodulf of Orléans and Ermanrich of Ellwangen employed readings and arguments about paganism with predominantly moralizing intent, seeking to illuminate those qualities within Christendom they wished to promote and those they wished to reject. The principal target of description is not paganism in any form, but rather the imaginative *mundus* of strict forms of Christianity. The more fantastical the portrayal of pagan frontiers – particularly with fauns, satyrs and *cynocephali* – the more dramatic the underlying cultural contrasts. To define paganism in the Carolingian world was to define otherness, and by extension to promote ideal forms of Christendom.

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¹²⁸ Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii*, c. 25, ed. Waitz, p. 55.