

Three Basic Concepts for Early Medieval English Religions

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	3
1.A.Substantive Content.....	3
1.B.Formatting.....	3
Chapter 2: Metod.....	4
2.A.Existing Dictionary Definitions Are Inadequate.....	4
2.B.This Paper Uses One of the Four Spellings of the Focal Word.....	4
2.C.It Is a Native Heathen Religious Term, Borrowed into Native Catholicism.....	5
2.D. The Term Denotes a Theological Role, Not a Specific Wight.....	5
2.E.Grammar, Etymology, and Foreign Analogies Also Suggest a Role.....	6
2.E.1.Old English Grammar.....	6
2.E.2.Foreign Analogies.....	6
2.F. The Word Generally Denotes an Ultimate Controller.....	6
2.F.1.A Controller Who Is Not Outranked.....	7
2.F.2.A Role for One Deity at a Time.....	7
2.G.“Highest-Ranking Controller” as the Only Definition.....	7
2.G.1.Where the Alternative Is “Allotter of Fate” or “Dispenser of Death”.....	7
2.G.2.Where the Alternative Is “Dealer of Death”.....	8
2.G.3.Where the Alternative Is “the Lord” or “Fate”.....	9
2.G.4.Where the Alternative is “Creator”.....	10
2.H. Further Selections Illustrate the Versatile Applicability of the Role.....	11
2.H.1.Where the Role Is Attributed to Jesus Christ and Yahweh.....	11
2.H.2.Where the Role Is Attributed to Wyrð.....	11
2.H.3.Where the Role Is Attributed to Yahweh or Wóden.....	12
2.H.3.a.Manuscript Context.....	12
2.H.3.b.A Previous Translation to Build Upon.....	12
2.H.3.c.Some Criticism of the Previous Translation.....	13
2.H.3.c.1)Considering the Passage as a Whole.....	13
2.H.3.c.2)Considering Christian Lore.....	13
2.H.3.c.3)Considering Semantics.....	13
2.H.3.d.Revised Translations.....	15
2.I.Catholics Used “Metod” Because of Mixed Religion.....	15
2.J.English Heathenism Fits the Contrasting Theologies Model.....	16
2.K.Aren’t There Exceptions?.....	16
2.L.This Allows a Slightly More Thorough Picture of Old English Culture.....	17
2.L.1.The Definition of “Metod”.....	17

2.L.2.Implications for English Religions.....	17
2.M.References.....	17
Chapter 3: Os.....	20
3.A.Introduction.....	20
3.B.Spelling and Pronunciation.....	20
3.C.Existing Confusion.....	20
3.D.Positive Connotation.....	21
3.D.1.Use in Personal Names.....	21
3.D.2.Use in the Old English Rune Poem.....	21
3.D.3.Non-Use in For a Sudden Stitch.....	22
3.E.Specific Referents.....	23
3.E.1.Two Things That an Os Is Not.....	23
3.E.1.a.It Is Not “Mouth”	23
3.E.1.a.1)Halsall’s Case.....	23
3.E.1.a.2)Is the Poem Catholic?.....	23
3.E.1.a.3)Could “Os” Be a Body Part?.....	23
3.E.1.a.4)Is “Os” a Latin Word?.....	24
3.E.1.b.It Is Not “God” nor “Deity”	24
3.E.1.b.1)Personal Names.....	24
3.E.1.b.2)Etymology.....	24
3.E.2.Os Is a Psychological Characteristic.....	25
3.E.3.“Os” Is English-Pagan.....	25
3.E.3.a.The Word Was Native to England.....	26
3.E.3.b.It Denoted a Concept of Divine Kinship.....	26
3.E.3.c.The Concept Was Heathen.....	26
3.F.Conclusion.....	27
3.F.1.The Definition of “Os”	27
3.F.2.Implications for Native Heathenism.....	27
3.F.3.Implications for Native Catholicism.....	27
3.G.References.....	27
Chapter 4: Drohtian.....	30
4.A.The Dictionaries.....	30
4.B.Detailed Examples.....	30
4.B.1.Conscious Lifestyle Conduct.....	30
4.B.2.Not Merely “Dwell” nor “Reside”	31
4.B.3.Other Specimens.....	31
4.C.Conclusions.....	31
4.D.References.....	31
Chapter 5: Conclusions.....	33
5.A.The Three Concepts.....	33
5.B.The Fit among Them.....	33
5.C. Implications for English Religion.....	33
5.C.1.Native Heathenism.....	33
5.C.2.English Catholicism.....	34
5.D.References.....	34

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.A. Substantive Content

This essay is part of a large project to study the *Old English Rune Poem*, and the objective here is to illuminate part of the cultural background in which the poem emerged, showing some details of how the initial audience of the poem differed fundamentally from the audience in modern industrial cultures.

This book's primary linguistic focus is on translation into Modern English, because the large project supports a translation of the poem into Modern English, although I include very brief mentions of translations into other languages.

Specifically, this book examines three words in Old English that represent concepts that have been lost or are not as easily spoken of in Modern English, for these words are clues to fundamental differences between the culture which produced the *Old English Rune Poem* and the cultures in which it is read today. Two of those words, "metod" and "os" refer to concepts that are missing in at least some modern industrial cultures. Moreover, "metod" and "os", are in the poem and therefore need to be defined merely to translate the poem. The other word, "drohtian" provides a clue to uses the poem had for its initial audience.

For each of the three words, we will refine definitions found in dictionaries that translate Old English words. The definitions and their implications are fully explicated in later chapters, but they can be briefly introduced here. "Metod" denotes the role for a controller not to be overruled. "Os" is a psychological trait that links humans to at least some deities and is a factor in enlightenment. The verb "drohtian" and related nouns refer to enlightened self-conduct.

We will learn some interesting fundamentals of the native English Catholicism and Heathenism. Because the literature studied here was produced under Catholic supremacy and because the Heathens produced very little literature in England, this study works backward to the era of Heathen supremacy from an analysis of later literature. We will see how early medieval English Catholicism differed from other versions of Catholicism. We will also see how the three concepts fit together in a coherent Heathen system, which emphasized personal discipline and conduct over liturgy, facilities, and other exoteric aspects of religion.

1.B. Formatting

This booklet has five levels of headings to aid navigation in electronic formats and to allow citations of specific locations without reference to pagination. The arrangement is useful for citations because the document is available in three formats. The EPUB format has no pagination, and the display-friendly and print-friendly PDF formats are paginated differently due to differences in font size, page size, and the more detailed table of contents in the print-friendly edition.

Hence, one can quote passages by citing heading numbers. For example, formatting of this book is discussed here in 1.B and you will find a use of "metod" in *Menologium* discussed in 2.G.1.

Chapter 2: Metod

Examinations of etymology, analogous evidence from Greek and Norse religion, and uses of use of “metod” in early medieval poetry reveal that “metod” denotes the role of a controller who is not outranked by any other but is not micro-managing nor determining every event. Other definitions seem to fit particular contexts, but this definition fits the range of contexts generally, and it is therefore likely to be how native speakers of Old English understood the word.

In turn, this definition implies a Catholicism of the place and time, and it enlightens us regarding English Heathenism. Of course, a study of a word should begin by examining existing dictionary definitions, so the first section is a brief critique of them.

Then three basic issues are dealt with. The first is how to spell the focal word, then whether the word represents a concept that is native to early medieval England, and finally whether the word represents a wight or a role.

After those matters are resolved, we can proceed to examine the nature of the role. Selected examples show that although there are contexts in which “Creator”, “Dispenser of Fate”, or some other definiens fits well, a single definition satisfactorily fits those contexts and others in general. Other examples illustrate the versatility of the concept, in that it could be applied to any high deity or perhaps to a non-sentient factor.

2.A. Existing Dictionary Definitions Are Inadequate

Currently-available dictionary definitions are not always helpful, and they seem to puzzle some talented translators.

Bosworth and Toller list the word in their 1898 and 1921 volumes, but imply that it is untranslatable, although they discuss the word at length and show many examples of its use. In their 1898 volume, Bosworth and Toller speculate that in Heathen times, “metod” meant fate, destiny, or outcome, but if that were the case we would surely not have a sentient agent referred to as “metod” in Christian times, and we would have instances of “metod” as an outcome in the surviving corpus of Old English.

Other dictionaries give us definitions. Clark Hall (1960) has fate, creator, God, or Christ. Köbler (2014) defines the word as fate, Creator, or God (Schicksal, Schöpfer...Gott). Sweet (1896) defines sé metod as “fate, God [metan]”, which implies that he was not confused about “God” but intended to indicate a god of fate and failed to catch an error of composition. There are several other dictionaries of Old English offering definitions of “metod”, but they are for specific contexts or specialized audiences, they seem dependent on the Clark Hall edition of 1916, or they have become obsolescent (Bessinger 1960; Halsall 1981: Glossary; Johnson 1927; Osborn and Longland 1982: Glossary; Somner, 1659; University of Texas Linguistics Research Center, n. d.).

However, it is clear from contexts that “metod” was not understood as an exact synonym for “God” or “Christ”, for it was intended to highlight some aspect of a Christian god. Usually, the word indicated the irresistible aspect of a member of the Trinity in determining an outcome of an event.

Because none of those dictionaries gives us a definiens that can be applied generally, and it is not surprising that translators of Old English poetry sometimes avoid the word in apparent desperation, as we shall see later in this essay.

2.B. This Paper Uses One of the Four Spellings of the Focal Word

The word is spelled four ways in the surviving corpus of Old English literature: metod, meotud, meotod, and metud. (I did not find subtle nuances in meaning for the various spellings.) The substantive issues are difficult enough without using all four spellings.

Using the 1998 edition of the corpus supplied by the Dictionary of Old English project, I found that the most common spelling is “metod”, so that is the only spelling used in this paper, except for literal quotations.

Some side matters might be interesting. “Metod” is in 47% of the instances and 44% of the documents. Also, manuscripts are not internally consistent with their spelling. For example: *Beowulf* has two spellings, and *The Metrical Calendar (Menologium)* has three of the four spellings.

An aside on method might be interesting. I decided that the 2009 edition of the corpus would not materially change my conclusions, and I found that preparing the new edition for searches using Super Text Search is a task that is too laborious to be rushed into. I found 3045 non-duplicative documents in the 1998 edition (and one redundant document), and the 2009 edition has 3060 files for the Old English documents, having a mere 15 additional (less important) documents. The

problems with the 2009 edition include the use of Campbell shorthand instead of more descriptive document names in the document files and the use of file names that are unrelated to contents. I am not sure why the project uses letter substitutions like “ð” for eth, for the actual letters are available in common fonts, and the substitutions complicate text searches. Using Microsoft’s Visual Basic for Applications, I already resolved similar issues and others that I found in the 1998 edition’s 77 files.

Now let us turn to more substantive issues.

2.C. It Is a Native Heathen Religious Term, Borrowed into Native Catholicism

The term “metod” is definitely of Anglo-Saxon Heathen origin and was significant in Heathen theology and ritual.

The word is obviously religious, for Catholics used it to describe the Father or the Son of the Holy Trinity. Where it does not denote some aspect of an Abrahamic deity, it occurs in religious-philosophical contexts. Examples of this are shown below.

We know that the word is of English Heathen origin, because we have no glossary data to support a modern definition. This means that there is no corresponding Latin word in the literature that the early medieval English Catholics studied (Lindsay 1921; Sobala 2001). Therefore, Catholic intellectuals did not import the idea into Old English literature from standard denominational sources or from “the classics”.

We would rationally expect to find that English Catholic intellectuals were obliged to explain their theology in terms widely understood by the natives, especially because many of them were natives. Hence, “metod” must have been widely understood by the early medieval English.

We know that the word was emotionally evocative because it only appears in poetry, and a word will be poetic diction only if it has substantial emotional “punch” and fits easily into patterns of traditional prosody. This is because poetic formulas and vocabulary are typically used to make oral transmission more memorable and enjoyable by making statements more vivid and interesting than they would otherwise be (Kalantzis and Cope n. d.; Ong 2002: 38). (This is discussed again below, in analyses of examples.)

Therefore, we can reasonably infer that that the concept “metod” represents was deeply embedded in Anglo-Saxon culture prior to Catholic supremacy and was emotionally, important. Therefore, we can also infer that native Heathens used “metod” frequently in prayers which were expressed in poetry and song.

When we examine the nature of the role, we will see more evidence that the term is English-Heathen.

For now, we have answers to two questions: why there is no explicit theodicy in Old English and why “metod” was not calqued into church Latin. The answer is that (A) to the extent that a Christian orthodox deity is the metod, there is no need for a theodicy because by definition the metod leaves room for human freedom, and (B) the concept of metod is English and importing it into international Christianity (in Latin) would take some effort at explanation and would risk accusations of heresy.

2.D. The Term Denotes a Theological Role, Not a Specific Wight

Catholic use of “metod” is a clue that the word denotes a role, and a consideration of grammatical differences between Modern English and Old English reinforces the clue.

We can also reasonably infer from Catholic uses of “metod” that the term denotes a role, and is not the name of a Heathen wight. It is well known that Christians customarily deny the divinity of other religion’s wights, and that they assiduously avoid saying that Yahweh or their Trinity is Zeus, Jupiter, Minerva, or any other non-Christian deity. Therefore, early medieval English Catholics surely would not have written that any member of their Trinity was a Heathen god or goddess, and yet two members of that Trinity are commonly associated with “metod”.

Let us make a grammatical consideration. To persons accustomed to Modern English, Modern German, Arabic, or Spanish (and possibly other languages), instances of “metod” often look like it is the name of a being. This is partly because writers of Old English did not always use the definite article in places where writers and speakers of some modern languages use it. In Modern English (and other languages), we customarily use an article or a possessive pronoun to indicate a role as opposed to a formal title or personal name. Writers of Old English did not feel a need to do that.

Thus, our idea of “the metod” could sometimes be expressed in Old English by simply writing “metod”. Examples of this appear later, in examinations of specific instances of “metod”.

In addition, a role label can sometimes be used as if it were a proper noun. Readers with extensive English-speaking backgrounds know from personal experience that Modern English has role labels that are used as if they were names of

persons or formal titles of occupations. For example, children commonly refer to their mothers as “Mommy” or “Mom” but also use the same word to refer to the role of mother. When used as a formal title, “Mommy” or “Mom” might or might not have a definite article or possessive pronoun, but either way it would make sense to the hearer or reader as indicating a role. (The same can be said of “Mutti” in Modern German.)

Therefore, when translating a passage containing the focal word, the translator would often be wise to insert a definite article before “metod” or the expression used to translate that word.

2.E. Grammar, Etymology, and Foreign Analogies Also Suggest a Role

Although grammar and etymology can be misleading as to the definitions of words (Stanfield 2001: 1-3), they provide an interesting place to look for hints.

In this case, clues from Old English grammar, etymology, and foreign analogies suggest that we have a word whose meaning is vaguely related to its etymology but that indicates an actor of a certain type, an actor who metes outcomes.

2.E.1. Old English Grammar

The word looks like the past-participle form of the class 2 weak verb “metan”, used as a noun (Mitchell and Robinson 1994: 46-50). Based on that consideration, we might suspect that native speakers of Old English might have understood it as meaning “allotted”. I formerly thought that to be the case when I erroneously explained the metod as a mindless being who determined wyrd for each person (Stanfield 2012: 292, 365-368, 591).

However, further examination of the language suggests that speakers of Old English were unlikely to have understood “allotted” when “metod” was used. This is because there are several important nouns in Old English that look like past participles but are obviously not.

A pertinent example is “wealhstod”. “Wealhstod” is the past participle of wealhstan, and it therefore looks like “interpreted” rather than “translator”, but native speakers of Old English would have understood the word as indicating a role.

2.E.2. Foreign Analogies

The Greek Allotters (Moirai) are an important analogy. Their name looks like the plural of moira (portion, share, allotment). However, the ancient Greeks would not have understood their name to mean things that are allotted, for they are the active wights who mete fates to people. The work of the Moirai is described in detail in Platon’s book *Governance* and different versions are in other primary sources (Aldington 1930; Allan 1997b: 106-107; Bloom 1991: 297-303; Frazier 1921a: 64-65, 90-93; Graves 1960; Shorey 1935: 490-521; in *Governance*, the Stephanus locations are 614b-621d). (I don’t see any point in Latinizing Platon’s name to “Plato” nor in mistranslating the title of a book advocating absolute monarchy as “The Republic”).

Turning to Old Norse, the actual use of “metod” might resemble the use of the Old Norse cognate “mjötuðr” (dispenser, meter, judge), which is related to the noun “mjot” (right measure), as shown by dictionaries of Old Norse (Cleasby et al 1957; Zöega 1910). If Cleasby et al are right, then a “mjötuðr” who is a dispenser or determiner of fate has a role resembling the role of the Allotters in Greek religion plus a label for that role that resembles the label in ancient Greek.

However, I examined a few instances of “mjötuðr” in the Prose and Poetic Eddas and found them not always implying a wight or a role. Moreover, in some contexts where the mjötuðr is a wight or a role, a translator avoids rendering the word, apparently finding the dictionary definition baffling. For example, compare Larrington’s (1996) translation with Neckel’s (1936a) edition of Sigurðarkviða, strophe 71.

In short, the case of “mjötuðr” is complicated, and a separate study of that word is needed.

At this stage in the analysis, we encounter a temptation to digress into speculation on Indo-European religion and cultural diffusion regarding fate or theology. However, present purposes do not require explaining how common ideas about fate or theology occur, so let us sidestep that interesting issue and move on.

What we can conclude at this point is that “metod” as a word is analogous to the ancient Greek “moirai”, and we naturally suspect that the roles are more or less similar.

2.F. The Word Generally Denotes an Ultimate Controller

In this section, I state the definition of “metod” in full detail, and the supporting discussion is in subsequent sections.

2.F.1. A Controller Who Is Not Outranked

The Old English word “metod” denotes the role of the highest-ranking controller.

Let us discard biases many of us have from the Neoplatonism and orthodox Christianity that are embedded in Occidental culture. This is not necessarily the role of the ultimate creator and it is not necessarily a job wherein a busybody noses into every detail of every phenomenon, constantly making adjustments. A controller of the highest rank can set up processes using existing materials and circumstances, simply intervene at the termination of a series of events of a certain type, or intervene at random.

It is a role that can be assigned to a deity named Our Father, Son of Man, the Lord, Wóden, Ing, or someone else, for it does not have to be that wight’s only specialist role.

As the label of a role, the word is not the proper name of any deity and it is not necessarily the only role performed by any deity.

The focal word seems to represent an idea that has been practically lost from English-speaking cultures, for modern English lacks a simple term that corresponds to the notion of “metod”. The loss of the idea causes a problem in translating, for the translator must often resort to prose translation to get space for the rendition of “metod”, post a footnote, or rely on the reader’s prior knowledge.

2.F.2. A Role for One Deity at a Time

One might be tempted to speculate that there are two ways to understand the metod role in Old English religions, but the term is not that ambiguous. Let us examine the two alternatives.

On the one hand, it could have been understood as part of the job of being a high deity as contrasted with the work of elves, natural-spring goddesses, saints, and so on. In other words, one might speculate that a few high deities of the native Heathen pantheon were of the same rank, and everyone at that level could be a controller who is not outranked.

On the other hand, the Anglo-Saxons could have seen it as a role that can be fulfilled only by one deity at a time. This corresponds with a henotheistic view.

The way early medieval English Catholic intellectuals used “metod” does not give us a firm clue in this regard.

On initial inspection, Anglo-Saxon Catholic literature appears to be a clue that the metod role is a characteristic of the highest rank of deity. They had three “persons” as one high god, and they indiscriminately attributed this role to two of those “persons” but not to any of their saints. Catholic lore in general does not explicitly state that the Father and Son are higher than the Holy Ghost, but we could infer that relationship from various Old English and other orthodox Christian literature.

But the limitation of that inference is that Trinitarians in general conflate the Father and Son and explicitly claim that they are one deity. So it is possible that Catholics writing Old English understood the metod role as one that can be exercised by only one deity at a time.

Fortunately, we do have a clue in one of the passages quoted in the next section, where the metod is a controller of the diurnal cycle. It is very unlikely that more than one independent party could control the alternation of night and day with reliable results.

Therefore, the henotheistic view, with the metod being only one god or goddess at a time, must have prevailed in the native Heathenism.

2.G. “Highest-Ranking Controller” as the Only Definition

This section includes sample instances showing that the controller idea is a plausible definition because it fits a broad range of circumstances in which native speakers of Old English used “metod”. We will examine in detail four specimens of “metod” to get a vivid picture of how the definition presented in this essay fits where translators are tempted to use other interpretations to fit the specific context. Thus, we will see how dictionary makers could infer some of the definitions they offer but how “highest-ranking controller” is the definition that generally works.

And by the way, we will also see instances implying that existing dictionary definitions of “metod” have left talented translators puzzled into paralysis, so that they merely avoided the word.

2.G.1. Where the Alternative Is “Allotter of Fate” or “Dispenser of Death”

In the first example, the metod role is acknowledged but not explicitly attributed to anyone nor to any impersonal phenomenon. This specimen comes from *The Metrical Calendar*, also known as *Menologium*. In verses 169b-173a, we have a passage indicating the anniversary of Apostle Matthew's death (Karasawa 2015: 82-83):

...Ðænne dægena worn
ymbe þreotyne þegn unforcuð,
godspelles gleaw, gast onsende
Matheus his to methodscafte
in ecne gefean.

Sometimes it helps to start with a reasonable translation and see how it can be improved. Karasawa translates this as:

Then after a number of days, after thirteen days, the reputable thegn skilled in (writing) the gospel, Matthew, sent out his spirit, at the appointed destiny, into the eternal joy.

In this context, “methodscafte” denotes the ultimate controller’s dispensation that determines Matthew's fate (fate in the sense of his time to die).

Notice that Karasawa’s translation avoids directly addressing the idea of the metod. Perhaps he consulted a dictionary and decided that it did not make sense.

This is clearly an instance where “metod” is intended to denote an active agent — the allotter of fate — not fate per se, although here “metod” does not clearly refer to any specific deity or impersonal force as the ultimate dispenser of final outcomes. Of course, since the manuscript in question is a Catholic calendar listing saints’ holidays, we may infer that the metod role is played by the Father or the Son. The role was attributed to both by native speakers of Old English, as we will see in a later quotation from this same source.

Although “Allotter of Fate” or “Dispenser of Death” would fit this context more exactly than “the highest-ranking controller”, the latter fits this specific context well enough and also generally fits other contexts in which we find the focal word.

Also, although Karasawa decided to show us the original composer’s clumsiness, the more technically-inclined students of the document can see those mistakes in the original. (The Old English author seems to have valued prosodic alliteration rules over intelligibility.) Let us make a smoother rendition. And by the way, we can leave out the idea of writing, which is not in the original.

Here is an improved prose translation:

After about thirteen days, Matthew, the sinless servant of god who was filled with the gospels' wisdom, released his spirit into eternal rejoicing, in accordance with the ultimate controller’s dispensation.

2.G.2. Where the Alternative Is “Dealer of Death”

In the next example, the role of metod is clearly attributed to Yahweh, and “dealer of death” would work as a translation, but “highest-ranking controller” also makes sense and is consistent with uses of “metod” in other contexts generally.

This usage is in *The Endowments of Men*, (also called *Gifts of Men*) half-lines 3b through 4b (Gollancz 1895: 292-293). This is a small slice of the poem’s 113 lines, which carry the general message that every man has some God-given talent or capability which is useful to himself and to others. (The poem mentions specifically men’s occupations but no specifically women’s; it is not politically correct. The title should be *Gifts to Men*, not “of men”, for they are gifts from the Christian high god.)

The poem starts by saying that many are the gifts bestowed on mankind by Yahweh.

...swa her weoruda god
meotud meahtrum swið mommon dælep

Again, let us use a reasonable translation to start with. Gollancz translates the passage thus:

...as here the God of hosts,
the Lord strong in might, dealeth and distributeth to mortals

The translation can be improved by looking closely for the poet's intent as we decide how to translate "meotud".

This passage is faithful to Biblical tradition in verse 3b and then departs into the local-national idiom in the next verse.

The passage is faithful to Biblical tradition in the poet's use of "weoruda god" (armies' god). Yahweh Tseboath (armies' Yahweh) is a Hebrew kenning found in the Bible (Spangler 2011: 10-11, 526-529). It is usually rendered in Modern English as "Lord of Hosts". Ironically, in each Biblical instance, it seems that the war-god aspect of Yahweh is prayerfully invoked to provide comfort and safety in the midst of turmoil or hardship. An example in the Bible is in Psalm 46 (Alter 2007a). Here in *Endowments of Men*, we see the same irony echoed in Old English, where the armies' god is described as the generous giver of many wonderful and varied human talents. (The role of irony in religious poetry or mystical meditation, fascinating though the topic may be, is beyond the scope of the present study, so we move on.)

Immediately after "the armies' god", the poet added the parenthetical "the mighty metod" to describe Yahweh Tseboath in terms of native lore.

The question is: how is the armies' god explained in the parenthetical half-line? Obviously, "meotud meahum swið" is not simply a circumlocution for "Yahweh", so the half-line must express some role that Yahweh fulfills and does not merely say "the Lord". If the metod is the allotter of fate in the sense of a dealer of death, then the parenthetical half-line would be a pretty tight fit into the context, emphasizing Yahweh as one deals out death to achieve destructive victory.

However, the idea of a controller of the highest divine rank, while not a restatement of the notion of a god of violent victory, does not contradict the idea of Yahweh as a war god nor cancel out the Biblical irony the poet intended. Also, the ultimate-controller idea is consistent with uses of "metod" in other contexts generally.

Clearly, the Anglo-Saxon poet inserted a version of the stock phrase "mighty metod" to enhance the traditional prosodic structure of his or her composition and to employ the emotional power of the native expression alongside the imported Abrahamic expression. (Later in this essay, I will show another example of a poet inserting a stock expression where it is not necessary for substantive meaning but makes an emotionally more powerful poetic expression.)

Here is a smoother rendition of the passage in *Endowments of Men* regarding the gifts of talent:

which here (on Earth) the armies' god, the powerful controller of the highest rank, deals out to humans...

2.G.3. Where the Alternative Is "the Lord" or "Fate"

Next, an example from *The Wanderer* shows a context where translator might be tempted to use "death", "determiner of death" or "the Lord", but "the highest-ranking controller" is the best local fit that also fits other contexts. These are verses 1a-5a (Mitchell and Robinson 1994: 268-275).

Oft him ánhaga áre gebíðað
metudes miltse þeah þe hé módcearig
geond laguláde lange sceolde
hréran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ,
wadan wraeclásta.

This is literally how Diamond (1970: 150-151) translates the passage into prose:

Often the solitary dweller awaits favor for himself, the mercy of the Lord, although he, anxious in spirit, has long been obliged to stir with his hand (i.e., row?) the ice-cold (lit frost-cold) sea over the path of the waters, to travel the paths of exile.

Like many translators, Diamond elected to render "metod" in this passage as a familiar modern Christian expression ("the Lord"), apparently under the assumption that early medieval Catholicism was not influenced by non-Christian religious philosophy. His translation makes sense only if we accept that assumption and look no further for a meaning of "metod" that fits other contexts or that expresses some nuance the poet might have intended.

For this example, let us also consider another translation. Craig Williamson (2017) was apparently well aware that he did not know what "metod" means, for he simply avoided the word in his attempt at a poetic rendition:

Often the wanderer walks alone,
Waits for mercy, longs for grace,
Stirs the ice-cold sea with hand and oars —
Heart-sick, endures an exile's road —
A hard traveler.

If we were to follow a dictionary and translate "metod" here as "fate" (in the sense of death), the wanderer would long

for death's mercy as an end to his suffering.

However, while death would bring release from the unemployed mercenary's misery, it is clear from other passages in the poem that the wanderer is longing for a job as a housecarl.

Hence, "highest-ranking controller" is the most fitting interpretation in this context.

Fully understanding the poet's intent and rendering it in Modern English is a challenge regarding another expression in this passage. I am interpreting "hréran mid hondum" as referring to the wanderer moving by his own wearisome work, and since most readers do not row boats any significant distance on open sea, I omit the direct implication of rowing. That is because I expect that a mental image of a recreational fisherman rowing a short distance in a calm lake will distract some readers from the idea of physical discomfort that the poet was trying to express. For example, you can see that both of the translators I quote here were distracted and confused by "hréran mid hondum".

It is not clear why the other translators rendered "anhaga" as "dweller" or "wanderer", for it refers to solitude, not to staying put nor moving about. The poet's intent in the first few lines is to depict the focal person as a human derelict.

Hence, a more satisfactory rendition of the passage is this prose:

Often a lone person experiences for himself the mercy of the highest-ranking controller, although he had to long traverse in sorrowful mood and with tiresome effort the distant, ice-cold seaways — the paths of exiles.

2.G.4. Where the Alternative is "Creator"

Next, let us consider a selection in which the notions of violence, determining death, or of fate are definitely out of the question, the twenty-fourth stanza of the *Old English Rune Poem*. This is a context in which the metod role is apparently attributed to Yahweh. In this context, we are tempted to render the focal word as "Creator", so this example shows where the dictionary writers get the impression that "metod" denotes the idea of ultimate creator. This example also illustrates the problem with translating "metod" into Modern English while trying to preserve the poetic feel of the original.

All students of the *Old English Rune Poem* accept this edition, which comes from Kemble's 1840 publication:

dæg byþ drihtnes sond déore mannum;
mære metodes léoht myrgþ and tóhiht
eadgum and earmum eallum brice

This is Dickens' (1915) beautiful translation into prose:

(day), the glorious light of the Creator, is sent by the Lord;
it is beloved of men, a source of hope and happiness to rich and poor, and of service to all.

Dickens put "the Lord" where "metod" is in the original and put his translation of "metod" where "drihten" is in the original, and that is quite acceptable given his point of view on what the stanza says.

However, his translation of "metod" fits this context quite well but clashes with other contexts where the word appears.

His use of "Creator" refers to daylight as a gift from Yahweh (or the Father or the Word) in the story of Genesis, which is clearly implied in the stanza when viewed from an orthodox Christian viewpoint. One could also contend that by the late 900's CE, when the *Old English Rune Poem* was composed (Halsall 1981: 20-23, 26-32), the meaning of "metod" had expanded to include the role of ultimate creator or that the native religion always had a role of ultimate creator that evolved from the notion of an allotter of fate.

However, we have seen that in other contexts the metod is doing just the opposite of creating.

Moreover, an ultimate controller gives light as a consequence of controlling the alternation of day and night, and "highest-ranking controller" generally fits other contexts in which we find the focal word.

Therefore, a more accurate prose translation is:

Day is a gift from the Lord and dear it is to mankind! The highest-ranking controller's marvelous light gives happiness and hope, and is of benefit to rich and poor alike.

Although one can still understand the stanza as Christian, it now appears to be Christian in an early medieval English Catholic style — a more plausible appearance. Also, if "the Lord" is some other male deity than the Father, Son, or Yahweh, we have a Heathen stanza.

Another point to observe is that making a poetic translation is much easier if we do not translate the focal word along with the rest of a passage in which it appears. Following is a rendition with roughly traditional rhythm and alliteration, which would be damaged by translating "metod":

Day is a gift from the Lord, of mankind dearly beloved!

The metod's glorious light brings gladness and hope
to prosp'rous and poor folks alike. To every person a boon!

However, the catch is that if the translator cannot assume that his or her readers know what "metod" means, a separate explanation is necessary.

2.H. Further Selections Illustrate the Versatile Applicability of the Role

So far, we have seen that Catholic intellectuals attributed the role of metod as if it were not the name of a Heathen god or goddess, and we have seen an instance where the role was not explicitly attributed to anyone or anything in particular.

Let us now examine instances where the role was attributed to the Father, the Son, wyrd, and Wóden, for this will strengthen our confidence that "metod" denoted a role, not a specific deity.

2.H.1. Where the Role Is Attributed to Jesus Christ and Yahweh

In the *Metrical Calendar (Menologium)*, both Jesus Christ and the Father are "metod". For example, line 86b refers to Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary as "meotud on galgan" (metod on the gallows), and line 129b refers to Jesus Christ as "sunu meotudes", or son of the metod (Karasawa 2015).

Against this example, one could object that Trinitarians conflate the Father and Son and sometimes appear to opine that all their terms for members of the Trinity are completely indistinct as to definition, despite efforts by at least a few theologians to precisely define terms for members of the Trinitarian god. Conflation of Father and Son in Trinitarianism is based mostly on the Gospel of John (Ehrman 2014).

However, the two examples cited here imply that Father and Son are distinct wights in the theology of *Menologium's* author or authors.

2.H.2. Where the Role Is Attributed to Wyrd

The metod role is attributed to wyrd in *Beowulf*, verses 2524b-2527a (Alexander's 1995 edition), when Beowulf states his decision to proceed into combat and take his chances against a dragon.

... Nell ic beorges weard
oferfléon fótes trem, ac unc furður sceal
weorðan æt wealle, swá unc wyrd getéoð
Metod (sic) manna gehwaes.

(The depiction of courage and heroism is quite stirring, but let us get back to work.)
Chickering (1977) translates this as:

Not one foot will I retreat
From the barrow-keeper, but here by the wall
It must go between us as fate decides,
the Lord, for each man.

Notice that Chickering inserted "the" before "barrow's keeper" to show that the term denotes a role, not a proper name. That was necessary in Modern English but not in Old English.

However, he made the mistake of using "The Lord" as a paraphrase of "fate". Chickering appears to have chosen "the Lord" because he could not make any contextual sense of "metod" after consulting an existing dictionary, or because he thought it bad composition to say that fate (wyrd) is the fate (metod) of each person. He certainly did not choose "the Lord" to make poetry that sounds good to Modern English speakers.

We must inquire of the poet's intent behind his use of the parenthetical half-line mentioning the metod.

This passage invokes the emotional force of two pre-Christian English legacy concepts, wyrd and metod, and the concept of metod is used to explain wyrd.

For now, let us leave aside the question of whether the grammatically feminine "wyrd" denotes a goddess or an immediate circumstance with causes not visible (Stanfield 1997b; 2000c; 2012, Appendix E). We can simply notice that in

this context an impersonal fact of life will do just fine, although elsewhere “metod” is used of deities. (It is because of this passage, that we need to avoid specifying in our definition that the metod is necessarily a deity.)

Certainly, the poet’s intent was for the expression “metod of each person” to explain that wyrd determines outcomes of each person’s choices, at least in certain critical instances. Therefore, a translation as “allotter of fate” would fit the context well, but “ultimate controller” also works and is generally consistent with other uses of the focal word.

Chickering’s decision to translate the possessive “of each person” in verse 2527a as “for each person” can be justified grammatically (Mitchell and Robinson 1994: 105-106). One could argue that if “metod” actually denoted the Father or Jesus Christ, then “of each person” is a better translation, but “metod” is not Old English for “the Lord” anyway.

Thus, a more accurate representation of the poet's intent is this:

Not one footstep will I retreat from the barrow's guardian, but from now on what happens at the wall shall be as wyrd, the highest-ranking controller for each person, determines.

2.H.3. Where the Role Is Attributed to Yahweh or Wóden

The passage in Maxims 1, Section B, lines 61-67, is a prayer of invocation, and it is particularly interesting because it ambiguously attributes the highest-ranking-controller role to Yahweh or Wóden, depending on the hearer’s bias.

Regardless of the bias applied to interpreting this passage, here “metod” denotes the role of ultimate controller, and translations such as “Creator” or “Dispenser of Fate” do not fit the context so well.

The reader might be skeptical that the prayer hid a dual meaning, for I am implying that the ambiguity was evident to at least some early medieval English persons — the two meanings were hidden in plain sight. The ambiguity that I assert does not require variation of the pattern of intonation, pacing, or loudness used in recitation or reading aloud to produce different versions of meaning.

Actually, a large proportion of the original audience loved that sort of thing. Recall that we have collections of riddles from early medieval England, implying a certain pleasure in ambiguity and in resolving puzzles (Bitterli 2009; Mackie 1934: chapter 29; Morgan 1992). Notice also that much early medieval English visual art has the observer finding human or animal figures or isolated body parts obscured in elaborate designs. Moreover, Anglo-Saxon non-human figures were usually not anatomically correct representations of specific species but instead required for full appreciation that the observer figure out the ideas represented by the figures (Dickinson 2002; Dickinson 2005: 117-125, 134, 150; Thompson 2017).

And by the way, recognizing the appreciation for ambiguity and the invitation to figure things out helps us understand the *Old English Rune Poem* as literature inviting us to find implied content at various levels of meaning.

2.H.3.a. Manuscript Context

The prayer of invocation was placed incongruously just after a long string of statements such as “a scholar has books”, “a soldier has a shield”, or “a Heathen has sins”. The placement implies that just as we can be certain of those many things, we can be sure of the following religious statement.

Following is Mackie’s (1934) edition, where he has line numbers 131-137. Some features of his edition look like typos, but they are not. He shows us that the second half-line (132b or 62b) terminates with a raised dot. He also shows that last line terminates with “: 7” (full colon plus an “and” sign), although it is the last line in the section of poetry.

Woden worhte weos, wuldor alwalda,
rume roderas (þæt) is rice god ·
sylf soðcýning sawla nergend
se us eal forgeaf þæt we on lifgaþ
(ond) eft æt þam ende eallum wealdeð
monna cynne. þæt is meotud sylfa : 7

The editor is indirectly notifying us of some of his decisions. Mackie informs us that the original manuscript has unspecified damage where he has “(þæt)” and “(ond)”. I caution the reader that the original might have had “he” and “then” in those locations. Also, the copyist might have made a correction to cross out “ond” in the last line, where the extra syllable is inconsistent with the rhythmical patterns of the other lines in this passage and is not grammatically necessary, although for Modern English speakers, it makes a smooth compound sentence out of what would otherwise look like two short sentences. We do not know if the “and” sign indicates related content or invites the reader to move to the next section of (unrelated) poetry.

2.H.3.b. A Previous Translation to Build Upon

The passage has a vague similarity to what we now call Psalm 96, especially the version in the Paris Psalter (where it is Psalm 95), and that impression probably lead to Rodrigues' (1993) translation:

Wóden wrought idols, the Almighty glory,
the spacious skies. That is a mighty God,
the very King of truth, the Savior of souls.
He gave us all that we live by
and in the end will rule again
all mankind. He is the Creator himself.

In this translation, the passage contrasts Wóden with Yahweh, belittles Wóden as creator of mere idols, praises Yahweh as the mighty creator of the heavens and social mores, and promises that Yahweh will rule after Judgment Day. As a praise invocation, it is in a broad genre with most of the Book of Psalms.

2.H.3.c. Some Criticism of the Previous Translation

Before making a revised translation to show what “metod” is in this context, let us examine what we have, considering the passage as a whole, orthodox Christian lore, and certain semantical matters.

2.H.3.c.1) Considering the Passage as a Whole

The idea conveyed in the prayer as a whole and especially in the last half-line is obviously that the god in question will return as ruler of all because that god is in control, not because he is the ultimate creator of the awesome heavens. Therefore, Rodrigues' translation of “metod” as “Creator” reflects an erroneous interpretation of the prayer as a whole.

So again we see a context in which “highest-ranking controller” fits well in this specific context and is generally consistent with other uses of “metod”, while other translations do not fit well.

I cannot resist offering a performance note. Apparently “þæt” in the last half-line implies the grammatically neuter Old English noun “god”, as in “the god” or “that god”. Perhaps the copyist missed a word. If so, then the speaker would best put a brief pause after “cynne” and again a one-count pause after “that god is”, then speak the last four syllables more softly and slowly than the rest to make the listeners lean forward and be drawn into excitement. Sometimes, that technique can make the hairs on the back of a listener's neck stand up. That technique makes, in effect, three half-lines but is much better performance than droning the whole last line in a monotone. Also, performing this way brings due emphasis on the last line, which gives the most important part of the prayer.

2.H.3.c.2) Considering Christian Lore

It is interesting to compare the prayer with Biblical lore that might have been available to the poet. In some ways, this passage is analogous to the Psalm we now call 96, so let us use that as a point of comparison.

In one sense the Old English prayer is a substantial deviation from Psalm 96, for that psalm does not say that Yahweh was forced out or neglected and “will rule again”. Although verses 12-13 of the psalm say that he will judge, the psalm as a whole says he rules now. Although Judgment Day and eternal salvation were major aspects of English Catholicism when the prayer was composed, the notions of Judgment Day and eternal salvation are not part of Psalms (Alter 2007: 33, especially Psalm 96).

Further comparison with Psalm 96 also helps us to see that “wrought idols” is not what the poet intended by “wrohte weos”. Modern English translations of Psalm 96 do not say that a god made idols; they say that deities of non-Jewish nations are merely idols, not real deities; and the original Hebrew literally refers to “ungods” or false deities, not to idols made by deities (Alter 2007: Psalm 96; Spangler 2011, Psalm 96). The Old English translation of the Psalm in question that was available to early medieval English Christians was probably more like that of the Paris Psalter than like our modern renditions. In the Paris Psalter, the psalm is Psalm 95 (Jebson 1994). That version also does not include a statement about a god making idols. Instead, it says that the Heathen gods are war devils (hildedeoful). I have never encountered a statement elsewhere that deities make idols. Actually, the idea is something of a stretch, unless one is in favor of idol use and wants to say that a holy goddess or god miraculously gave us a particular idol as something especially sacred. If one wanted to say that people are worshipping idols instead of the deities they represent, or that idols are mere stone or wood objects unconnected to deities, then one would say the idols are made by human fools, not by a deity.

In the next passage, we will examine semantical clues to see what the original poet did mean by “wrohte weos”.

Meantime, the Paris Psalter version of the psalm does have themes in common with the invocation in Exeter Maxims. It explicitly says that the Lord (drihten) made the extensive heavens (heofonas þænne), that he is an awesome god above all the others, and yes, it admits that there are other deities.

2.H.3.c.3) Considering Semantics

Now let us turn from Catholic lore to semantics, for we will need to re-translate the first line and edit a later half-line to translate the prayer insightfully.

In the first half-line, using “wrought” as a translation of “worhte” makes a pleasing alliteration with “Wóden”, but we have seen that “wrought” is not plausible. The meanings of “wyrcean” include producing an effect or exerting influence, and the poet surely intended to say that deities can influence objects people make, for example by blessing them.

And what did the god in question bless?

“Weos” is the accusative plural form of “wéoh”, and “wéoh” is an adjective (“holy”) used as a noun to indicate holy objects in general – venues, specific locations, altars, etc. Notice that in Modern English, we sometimes use an adjective as a noun – an example is “epidural”. Examples of this are also in the Old English Genesis verse 51b (where “hygelease” denotes “foolish ones”) and in verse 53a (where sé mera denotes “the famous one”). And by the way, those examples sandwich a use of “metod” to emphasize the inevitability of Yahweh’s power – as the ultimate controller – to overcome rebellious angels (Jebson 1994; Hostetter 2018).

Now let us look at the semantic details regarding “wéoh”. The Clark Hall (1960) and Bosworth-Toller (1898; 1921) dictionaries tell us that this is one noun with three spellings and pronunciations (wíg, wíh, and wéoh). That one word (in all three forms) represents two separate sets of ideas: one related to military combat and one to religion. Consider how the word is used in compounds regarding religion. Those dictionaries tell us that a wéohsteall is the place where an altar or a choir is located in a church, a wíglere is a diviner, wígwearþung is “idol” (sacred object) worship, and so on. Certainly, a Christian wéoh-location is not the place for a Pagan idol in a Catholic church, with a choir or Catholic altar put there instead. Rather, it is a special holy spot. Obviously, a wíglere is not an adviser to idols but rather a holy adviser, and as an augur the wíglere would be reading omens as messages from a deity or deities and passing that news on to his or her audience. Also, wíg-worship is holy or holy-object worship, but likely not idol worship, partly because most idol users claim to worship deities, not sculptures. You can see the same implication in other compounds listed in the two dictionaries.

Likewise, Sproston (2011) shows us that many early medieval place names included a form of wéoh as the initial element in a compound. He infers that the word denoted “holy” regardless of what objects might or might not be present in the venue.

In a few instances where a stand-alone “wíh”, “wíg”, or “wéoh” refers to a Pagan idol, the best definition that fits the local context *and* others is “holy object”, not “idol”.

We can go further than semantic details. Archaeological and textual evidence implies that among the Heathen English, idol use was rare, and among the Proto-Germanic speakers in general, idol use was considered blasphemous (Foster 2007-2008; Semple 2010; Stenton 1971: 150; Mattingly and Hanford 1970: Tactus’ *Germania*, chapter 9; Owen 1985: 41-45; Walker 2010).

Thus, even a Heathen wéohsteall would probably not have been a place for an idol.

Therefore, let us simply stipulate that a wéoh is not necessarily an idol as opposed to a venue or an altar, but that it is necessarily holy.

Now the first half-line makes more sense, for we see that “worhte weos” here implies that someone is charging holy objects or places with divine energy.

In the next half-line, the Old English has “wuldor” as a strong-ending modifier to the noun “alwalda” – literally “god glorious”.

Hence, we can improve on Rodrigues’ interpretation that the Almighty wrought glory.

Even so, this is a place where thin concealment occurs, for “Glorious Almighty” sounds like a typical Christian circumlocution or kenning for Yahweh, and yet it might also refer to a Heathen deity.

By the way, voice manipulation is not a clue to whether “Glorious Almighty” in verse 61b is or is not a parenthetical phrase referring to Wóden. This is because the praise is pronounced with emphasis, to imply gloriousness. Hence, it is not spoken or sung sotto voce, as parenthetical phrases are usually enunciated.

Thus, the first three verses can be understood in either or both of two alternative meanings, depending on whether the hearer thinks verse 61b names a new subject or is a typical parenthetical phrase referring to the subject in line 61a. The Christian can hear that Wóden only blessed locations or equipment but that Yahweh blessed the extensive skies. The person of Heathen religion can hear that Wóden blessed holy things including the spacious skies. The person of mixed religion who likes ambiguous art and is not hindered by religious bias, can have fun and religion simultaneously.

Three verses later, there is “sylv soðcyning” (self truth-king), which is a copyist’s mistake.

Rodriguez (1993), Mackie (1934) and Williamson (2014) simply skip over “sylv” in their translations, apparently because it does not make sense to them.

However, we can plausibly infer that the medieval copyist erred and should have written “sylfsoð cyning” – self-truth king. The corrected expression makes sense, because it implies that someone was a patron deity of knowing oneself.

Our difficulty here is that the idea of Yahweh as a patron deity of self-knowledge is not a common emphasis in orthodox exoteric Abrahamic religions. This expression could imply a type of non-orthodox Christianity (Brakke 2015; Johnson 2008: lecture 14), but the ruling Christian denomination in England was orthodox, and orthodox Christianity seems to hold that it is holier to deny oneself than to know oneself, for self-denial is necessary to be united with the divine (Johnson 2008: lecture 23; Underhill 1930: 10, 157-159).

However, if we accept that God (the Father, Son, or Trinity) is a patron deity of everything that is not explicitly a sin, then it is not too far a stretch (although it is a stretch) to apply “self-truth king” to that god.

Moreover, the expression “soul’s savior” in the next half-line is a paraphrase in the traditional manner if we have “self-truth king” in verse 63a. The line would then imply that a person with true knowledge of himself or herself is a saner person or may more easily avoid Christian sin, depending on the hearer’s bias.

An alternative emendation is “sylfa soðcyning” – himself the truth-king – but the poet probably did not intend to say that the Trinity or a member of the Trinity was himself the king of truth. “Sylfa soðcyning” would make sense by itself but “sylfa” as an independent word conflicts artistically with the occurrence of “sylfa” in the last half-line of the prayer. Moreover, “himself the truth-king” makes for a shallower meaning for the prayer, because it does not impart meaningful information about the nature of the deity in question. It merely asserts the speaker’s faith.

Hence, we can confidently edit half-line 63a to “sylfsoð cyning”.

2.H.3.d. Revised Translations

So now we can have two interpretations of the same prayer of invocation, which each makes theological sense in its own perspective – two meanings hidden in plain sight.

An early medieval English Catholic interpretation attributes the metod role according to orthodox Christian theology:

Wóden only charged venues with holiness whereas a member of the Trinity blessed the entire sky and is therefore the superior deity. Moreover, the Trinity, or a member of the Trinity, is the key to knowing oneself, living righteously, and having eternal salvation. And when the Son of Man comes to judge all, then the Father (or Jesus Christ) will rule a heavenly kingdom on Earth, for that god is the highest-ranking controller.

A Heathen interpretation attributes the metod role differently:

Wóden, the glorious all-ruler, affected sacred things and the spacious skies. He is the powerful deity, the self-truth king and souls’ savior, who gave us all that we live by. At the end he will again rule all human-kind. That god is the ultimate controller himself!

The Heathen interpretation is relatively alien in modern cultures and needs some explanation.

It asserts that Wóden, who charges things and places with holy energy or divine presence, is the patron god of knowing the truth about one’s self and therefore a god of a healthy mind. In that sense, he is the soul’s savior. This interpretation alludes to the idea that self-knowledge is a key to self-control, and the patron god of self-control is the highest-ranking controller.

Also, this god of wisdom gave us all the basic ground rules according to which wise people live (not necessarily the extra rules perpetrated by professional religious executives and intellectuals supported by the government).

And finally, the suppression of the Wóden cult is only temporary, for that god will come back to rule all, not merely the English.

An additional detail that would have been readily apparent to early medieval English persons is also interesting. The expression “rume roderas” alludes to the fact that, unlike Catholic venues at the time Maxims I was composed, most of the traditional English Heathen venues had been outdoors, under the spacious sky (Foster 2007-2008; Semple 2010; Owen 1985: 41-45).

This result further strengthens the inference that “metod” denoted a role that was not always attributed to the same god or goddess, and that it was not a deity’s name. And, of course, this is another instance where “highest-ranking controller” is the concept that “metod” clearly denotes.

2.I. Catholics Used “Metod” Because of Mixed Religion

One more point is worth noting, because it helps us understand the context in which early medieval English Christian intellectuals wrote. Namely, people in early medieval England still thought it natural for folks to be cognizant of the metod, because they had not simply forgotten their Heathen-era vocabulary when the English states were converted.

This firms our understanding of the native English Catholicism, for it had to be explained in terms such as “metod” and “wyrd”, which expressed concepts that were deeply ingrained in early medieval English culture. The matter is made all the more vivid because of the prayer we found in Exeter Maxims. It shows that somewhere in England, a literate person was so deeply and sincerely committed to one of the native non-Christian cults that he or she put into writing a prayer of invocation, a prayer which was evidence of criminal conduct at the time. And this writing was very probably for the instruction of other literate adherents of the same cult.

2.J. English Heathenism Fits the Contrasting Theologies Model

One could object that all this implies that in native English Heathenism, the highest-ranking controller could be Eorðe, Wóden, Púnor, the Mothers, or any other party in the list of English high deities, and that implies a very disunited and incoherent religion with contradictory and mutually exclusive theologies.

Actually, incoherence is a common feature of religions. The topic of contradictory theologies is large enough for a few chapters in a book (Stanfield 2014: chapters 1,2, 4-7), so for now let us do what is sometimes done in mathematics textbooks: the reader can prove to himself or herself that this is plausible. Look around in your own society. Where the religion is mainly Christian, do the Trinitarian and Unitarian Christians worship the same god, or do they just say they do? Readers in predominately Buddhist societies live among people who exclusively praise and supplicate Gautama Buddha, Buddhists who are atheists, and Buddhists who worship the Green Tara or other deities. Readers in other contexts also can see for themselves fundamental theological contrasts in whatever religion prevails in their society.

I call the idea you are exploring the contrasting theologies model, and it is an important deviation from the normal idea that all religions — especially religions in other societies than one’s own — are theologically unitary. The unitary model is usually not explicitly stated nor justified; it is simply taken for granted.

2.K. Aren’t There Exceptions?

One could argue that surely the dictionary makers are not so far off the mark as to miss it every time; surely somewhere is an instance where “controller-not-to-be-overruled” simply does not fit the context.

For example, see Old English Genesis, half-lines 119b-123a, which is in the context of a Creation story. In that passage, a final outcome or regulation of a continuous sequence is not in question. Would not “Creator” be the only reasonable fit there?

The passage in question relates a part of the Creation story where Ruach Elohim (Spirit of Gods) hovered over water and caused light to shine on dry ground and the deep sea (Spangler, 2011: Genesis 1:1-3).

But of course, Old English poets sometimes stretch things a bit to fit in an expression to achieve lyrical effect, traditional alliteration, and traditional rhythm, if the sense of the inserted expression is not a glaring contradiction to the sense of the passage. That is the case in the passage in question, where the metod is mentioned in half-lines 121b-122a along with other ideas which are not necessary to tell the story. The extraneous half-lines were added strictly for their striking emotional beauty for a native Christian audience and for their prosodic beauty for speakers of Old English.

This is Jebson’s (1994) edition of half-lines 119b-123a:

...Ða wæs wuldortorht
hefonweardes gast ofer holm boren
miclum spedum. Metod engla heht,
lifes brytta, leoht forð cuman
ofer rumne grund.

Here it is in Modern English prose:

Then the gloriously bright heaven-ruler’s spirit bore over the water with great power. The ultimate controller,

praised by angels as the giver of life, made light come forth over the spacious ground.

The original story does not have angels, the metod praised by angels, nor any biological life, so a rendition truer to the original would delete verses 121b-122a, and it would be translated into Modern English as:

Then the wonderfully bright heaven-ruler's spirit bore over the water with great power and made light come forth over the spacious ground.

But the catch is that the truer Old English representation would lack alliteration in two lines (without a lot more editing effort). Worse yet, it would also miss the stirring emotional appeals of angels' praise and of the invocation of the top-ranked controller and bestower of life.

Therefore, the author inserted a couple of extra lines of extraneous material. He or she did a pretty good job, but the composition does not mean that "metod" denotes "Creator".

In short: I do not think there is an exception in the surviving corpus of Old English.

2.L. This Allows a Slightly More Thorough Picture of Old English Culture

2.L.1. The Definition of "Metod"

We now have a Modern English definiens for "metod" that makes sense generally, for it fits the full variety of contexts where the word is found. This definition is complex because there is no Modern English equivalent.

It starts with the expression "highest-ranking controller", denoting a controller that is not outranked or overruled by another, and explanations follow. The metod does not directly determine every detail of every structure or event. The role could be attributed to different deities in their own cults or to an impersonal factor. The label could be used as if it were a proper name. We do not know to what extent the controller consciously intervened in details as opposed to setting up processes. The metod does not prevent conscious life-style commitments, whether well or mistakenly made, nor did the metod prevent lack of conscious self-control. We can infer that from Christian adoption of the term, for orthodox Christian theology required (and still requires) that neither the Father nor the Son prevents individual human responsibility.

The metod might or might not be an ultimate creator.

2.L.2. Implications for English Religions

We have gained insights into native English religions. The local-national Catholicism imported basic Heathen terms because they represented concepts that were taken for granted as valid by Anglo-Saxons generally. In turn, that made a distinctive English Catholicism, influenced by a distinctive English Heathenism. Also, the native English Heathen religion included at least two cults with mutually exclusive ideas about who or what performed the metod role.

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Chapter 3: Os

3.A. Introduction

“Os” is an important clue to early medieval English popular philosophy and religion. It does not have a simple equivalent in Modern English, but for speakers of Old English, it facilitated talking and thinking about something like a drive state that operated with regard to higher mental functions.

This Old English word (A) denotes a family trait uniting deities and mankind, (B) helps distinguish English Heathenism from English Catholicism, and (C) is a significant clue to the native Heathen theology or theologies.

In the rest of this chapter, we will proceed through five steps. First, an issue with pronunciation will be handled. Following that, the state of the existing lore is reviewed. Next, I show that the word has strongly positive connotations. The fourth step indicates specifically what the word did and did not denote for native speakers of Old English. The conclusion includes some implications for the native religions.

This chapter is a revision of my 2014 essay on os, without the emphasis on the Eorðe cult but coming to a similar conclusion (Stanfield 2014: Chapter 12).

3.B. Spelling and Pronunciation

The word appears as the initial in element plenty of personal names, but as a standalone item, it survives only in a strophe of the Old English Rune Poem, and we have only one spelling “os”.

But even with only one spelling, pronunciation is not an obvious matter.

It seems logical to pronounce the word like “Oz”. Should not our inferred pronunciation of the Old English word be like that in the modern English names Osgood or Osborn?

Yet, most students of the OERP indicate that os is pronounced with a long “o” (as in “dose”) following Campbell (1959: 50-52). Hence they spell the focal word “ós”, “ōs”, or “ôs” when they edit primary-source documents to show pronunciation. Campbell’s argument is that the sound in question started out as æ, evolved from that into á, and then into a long “o” and now in Modern English we have the short “o”. His case is well-reasoned and based on thorough research which we have to admire, but we have a straighter — and hence more defensible — path from the Proto-Germanic (short) “a” represented in ansuz to the (short) “o” that we hear in the modern “Oswald” (Stanfield 2012, chapter 4).

Therefore, let us pronounce the focal word as it looks to us in Modern English, so that “word of os” rhymes with “Wizard of Oz”.

3.C. Existing Confusion

The confusion in the professional literature regarding this word is remarkable. Moreover, philologists who express an opinion on this matter often do not offer a persuasive case. Instead, they neither offer a detailed justification nor cite an analysis by someone else; they merely give us a bare assertion. Sometimes when they cite an analysis by someone else, they appear not to have read it.

Many students are deceived when they read Page’s (1999: 68) statement that “most scholars accept ‘god’ as the primary meaning” of os, with Wóden or “the great god” as a possible alternate. But in the same paragraph, Page says that most translators of The Old English Rune Poem agree that the name of the fourth rune is a Latin word for mouth.

Actually, scholars commonly offer ambiguous definitions of the focal word. Although Page cites Dickens as supporting the “mouth” interpretation, Dickens (1915: 13-14) renders the word with a question mark, not the word “mouth”. In a footnote on translating the word, Dickens concludes that either god or mouth “would be equally appropriate”. Grienberger (1921: 207) contends on etymological grounds that the word must mean “god” but in the same paragraph he says it specifically indicates Óðin — using the Norse god’s name. Likewise, Bray chooses both “god” and “Odin” (Plowright 2002: 58). Jones (1967: 10, 89-90) initially translates the word into “mouth” but later in the same work argues instead in support of “god”. Slade (2002: footnote 21) gives three translations (mouth, god, and Wóden) but suggests that “os” descended from the Proto-Germanic word “ansuz”, which he claims is usually translated as ‘breath’ or ‘spirit’. Previously, Stanfield made a case that os is a behavioral syndrome or “the principle of divinity” — certainly a step in the right direction — but

also that it refers to an otherwise un-named high deity (Stanfield 1996d; 2012: chapter 4). In Bosworth's and Toller's 1898 volume, they render "os" as "mind" on page 225 (in the definition of eadness) and as "divinity, god" on page 768 (in their definition of os).

About half the published translators of the *Old English Rune Poem* translate the word as if it were Latin for "mouth". "Mouth" is favored by Kemble (1848: 30), Halsall (1981: 109-111), Osborn and Longland (1982: 7, 30-31), Shippey (1972: 80-81; 135), Thorsson (1987: 94), and Juszczuk (1998). The catch is that Halsall admits that she is "borrowing the false definition 'mouth' for my translation...."

Only a few works contend unambiguously that "god" is the correct translation (Cleasby et al, 1874: definition of Old Norse "Ass"; Pollington, 1995: 46; Thorsson, 1993: 19). Some scholars contend that os must surely denote "god" because it is cognate with one or two Old Norse words (áss or óss), and that "os" and the one or two Old Norse words are descended from the Proto-Germanic word "ansuz". Arguments in support of this assertion are rare and are accompanied by self-contradictions. Some of the "deity" advocates show their confusion by also claiming that os is etymologically related to Old Norse "óss" in the sense of estuary (for example, Jones 1967: 89; see also Cleasby et al 1874; Zoëga 1910). But if os meant the same as óss in that sense, we would have to seriously consider "river mouth is the ultimate source of all human speech" as a translation of the first line in the *Old English Rune Poem's* fourth strophe.

Some translators of the *Old English Rune Poem* wisely do not translate the word. For example, Swain Wódening (1995b) simply accepts the word as untranslatable, rather than participate in the existing confusion.

3.D. Positive Connotation

This section shows that "os" has strongly positive connotations because it was commonly used by parents (in compound words) to name their children, and because it denotes something highly thought of in the only context where it appears as a standalone word. This section also refutes the notion that "os" appears in a context giving an unfavorable connotation.

The idea that "os" denoted something highly desirable is important, because it supports the subsequent inference that os indicates kinship with a deity or with deities.

3.D.1. Use in Personal Names

Old English naming conventions tell us that "os" denoted something highly regarded and that it was not exclusively associated with a gender role (See Barber 1903; Bardsley 1884; Bartholomew 1997; Bosworth and Toller 1898; Branston 1974: 38-45; Dickens 1915; Dobbie 1942: 154; Garmonsway 1972; Hall 1985: 37; Hanks and Hodges 1988; Osborn and Longland 1982: 30; Phillips 1994; Sherley-Price and Latham 1968; Stanfield, 2014: 245-246.)

In general, people do not name their dearly beloved newborns "ugly", "stupid", or "venal". Instead they tend to glorify their new offspring, and the focal word was the first element in many names of females and males.

Consider "os-" in women's names. King Alfred's mother was named Osburg (Os City or Os Fortress). Queen Osþryþ (Os Power) ruled in Mercia in late 600's. A queen of Northumbria in the 700's was named Osgifu (Os Gift). Saint Osyð's name (Os Flood, Os Sea, or Os-Flows-Forth) implies a wish or expectation that a baby girl would grow up to manifest plenty of os.

Following are some of the men's' names in Old English literature: Oslác (Os Gift), Oswine (Os Friend), Oswy (Os Holiness), Osgód (Os Good or Os Benefit), and Osmund (Os-Power or Os-Hand). The following are also found: Osfrið (Os Peace), Osric (Os Power), Osræd (Os Counsel). There was a Saint Oswald (Os Power or Os Protector) who was King of Northumbria in the 600's and another Saint Oswald was an English Bishop in the 900's. The inscription on the famous York Coppergate helmet shows the personal name Oshere (Os Magnificence or Os Dignity).

Many os- names have survived into the present. The modern surname Osbold implies Os Confidence or Os-Bold. The modern surname Oswell implies that in early medieval times at least one mom and dad named their baby something like Os-Flows-Forth (an analog of the feminine Osyð).

3.D.2. Use in the Old English Rune Poem

The fourth strophe of the *Old English Rune Poem* is the only place where the word has a textual context to examine (Stanfield 2012: Chapter 4 and Addendum to Chapter 4). Following is the strophe, first in Old English and then in Modern English.

Os byþ ordfruma álcra spráce
 Wisdomes wraþu and wítana frófur
 And eorla gehwam eadnys and tohiht

Os is the source of every language,
and wisdom's pillar, and counselors' comfort,
and to all patricians -- contentment and hope.

Clearly, this context shows that the word denotes something highly thought of. Later, we will examine this strophe in more detail to find clues to just what that is.

3.D.3. Non-Use in For a Sudden Stitch

One of the arguments that “os” means “god” depends on a passage in the healing spell, *For a Sudden Stitch* (Grienberger 1921: 207; Jones 1967: 10, 89-90; Rodrigues 1993: 36-38, 142-143; Slade 2002). We must consider that argument here, because that the “god” idea in *For a Sudden Stitch* carries a negative connotation.

The magic spell in question is administered along with medicines to alleviate or cure a sudden shot of pain (a “stitch”). The healer recites poetic lines to the effect that the “little spear” is commanded to leave, and that the medicine will have effect regardless of the (undetermined) supernatural cause of the patient's shooting pain.

The word in that spell, “ésa”, is a genitive plural that does denote spirit beings of some kind.

Following is Slade's (2002) edition of the passage. I put the focal word and its translation in bold to make them easier to find in this long quotation.

Gif ðu wære on fell scoten oððe wære on flæsc scoten
oððe wære on blod scoten, oððe wære on ban scoten,
oððe wære on lið scoten, næfre ne sy ðin lif atæsed;
gif hit wære **esa** gescot oððe hit wære ylfa gescot
oððe hit wære hægtessan gescot, nu ic wille ðin helpan.
Ðis ðe to bote **esa** gescotes, ðis ðe to bote ylfa gescotes,
ðis ðe to bote hægtessan gescotes; ic ðin wille helpan.

Here is a rendition in Modern English:

If you were shot in the skin
or were shot in muscle
or were shot in blood
or were shot in bone,
your life will not be threatened.

If you were shot by esses
or were shot by elves
or were shot by witches,
now I will help you.

This is your remedy for esses' shot;
this is your remedy for elves' shot;
this is your remedy for witches' shot.
Now I will help you!

“Os” is simply not there, for scholars are mistaking the genitive plural of “és” for the genitive plural of “os” (Stanfield 2014: 251).

As Bosworth and Toller (1898: 768) point out in their definition of “os”, “osa” is more logical as the genitive plural of “os”, and “ésa” would be more reasonable as the genitive plural of “és”.

But Bosworth and Toller failed to define “és” in their dictionary. Perhaps that is because they overlooked the existence of “és-” / “éas-” / “ése-” in place names. Place-name evidence shows that “és” is one word with three forms in the nominative case.

Four place names including “és”, “ése”, or “éase” can be traced to early medieval times: Easebourne, Easole, Easewrithe Hundred, and Eisey (Bartholomew 1997; Darby 1997: 36; Institute for Name Studies, n.d.; Mills 2012; Powell-Smith et al, n.d.; Sproston, 2011; Stanfield 2014: 285; Wilson 1992: 12, 21; Staveley n.d.). All those names indicate former Heathen religious venues.

For present purposes, we do not need to figure out exactly what kind of wight an és was. It is possible that an és was a species of spirit being distinct from elves or high deities, such as a spring goddess or a thicket demon.

What is important here is that the unpleasant és beings in *For A Sudden Stitch* are not denoted by “os”.

3.E. Specific Referents

The evidence supports the inference that the word denoted a native Heathen psychological concept of a higher mental trait that was considered divine. However, to understand what native speakers of Old English meant by “os”, it is necessary to strip away some misconceptions.

3.E.1. Two Things That an Os Is Not

Let us get rid of the notions that the focal word referenced a body part or a deity.

3.E.1.a. It Is Not “Mouth”

We have only one serious argument that “os” is the Latin word for “mouth”, so that is the argument dealt with here.

3.E.1.a.1) Halsall’s Case

The best case that “os” denotes “mouth” is offered by Maureen Halsall, despite her ironic admission that it is a “false definition” (1981: 109-111). Halsall contends that the focal word is Latin for “mouth” because she believes the entire *Old English Rune Poem* to be Christian literature written by a monk, for she assumes that only monks wrote in early medieval England. Surely a Catholic monk would not praise a Pagan deity, she opines. Moreover, strophe number four (quoted above) shows that os is the source of all speech. Therefore, the rune name in the *OERP*’s fourth strophe must be a Latin name for a body part. Besides, the public was no longer familiar with the Old English word, and no one would understand it.

She does not have a strongly logical argument, but at least is it an argument. Let us take a closer look at it.

3.E.1.a.2) Is the Poem Catholic?

We have three reasons to reject the assertion that the poem is Catholic. (1) It shows a generally unfavorable view of the Lord. (2) It ignores Catholic saints and the very significant Christian doctrine of salvation. (3) It explicitly rejects life after death. Any one of those three would be decisive by itself.

If you read the poem closely, you will see that it seems to euphemistically mention the Trinity, or a member of the Trinity, now and then at the lowest level of meaning, but the poem is mostly pretty light or ambivalent on praise for him. If the drihten in the first strophe is Yahweh or Jesus Christ, he would punish you for not handing out cash plentifully; no consideration is given to your circumstance. In the twelfth stanza, at best “Holy Heaven’s King” will not obstruct the soil from bringing forth bright fruits. In the twentieth stanza, the Lord wills delightful companions to die. It is true that in the twenty-fourth stanza day is said to be sent by the/a Lord. However, any male deity can be called “lord”. We could easily say that the Christian policy of circumlocution regarding the Father and the Son makes possible an ambiguously Heathen stanza that would not necessarily get the author or authors convicted of a crime. In sharp contrast, Tír is faithful to high nobles at the metaphorical level of meaning in the seventeenth stanza, and Ing is a hero well thought of by seasoned warriors at the literal level in the twenty-second stanza (Stanfield, 2012).

We also see that the poem does not mention, allude to, nor quote from the Bible, and it contains no hint of a savior god, Mary, one of the Saints Oswald, nor any other character in English Catholic lore except the Father or Son — if the ambiguous term “lord” is a circumlocution for one of their names (Stanfield, 2012). A Unitarian and very strictly monotheistic Christianity would make the poem non-Catholic, but other Heathen references are clues.

And finally, consider the poem’s twenty-ninth strophe, “Éar”. At the lowest level of meaning, it complains that death is complete and final. This is in strong contrast with Christian dogma, which implies that the truly righteous will be better off after they are dead.

Hence, we have no reason to be surprised if we find in that poem a Heathen philosophical concept.

3.E.1.a.3) Could “Os” Be a Body Part?

Another important consideration is that we have no reason to believe that “os” must be a body part; the opposite is the case.

Obviously, the source of every speech and each language is psychological, not physical: it is skill and motivation. The mouth is a means of speaking, as are lungs and other body parts. Are the lungs the source of speech or language? How about the tongue? Hand signals can be used instead of human vocal equipment if necessary. A literate person can use language by silently writing.

So regardless of whether one opines the poem to represent some kind of Abrahamic, Heathen, or mixed religion, the focal word cannot denote “mouth” anyway (Stanfield, 2014: 247-248).

3.E.1.a.4) Is “Os” a Latin Word?

A Latin word for “mouth” is not a plausible name for a rune stave. One reason is the absurdity that one letter in the traditional Old English alphabet had a name not in the native language. We also have the equally absurd notion that a Latin word for “mouth” would be more familiar to the audience than were the Old English names of runes. It is also not credible that the people forgot the word “os”, for people are commonly quite well aware of the lore of their own names and the names they give their darling infants. And finally, Ms. Halsall unintentionally implies that people gave their darling babies degrading or silly names like Mouth-City, Mouth-Gift, Mouth-Magnificence, and Mouth-Protector. Surely native speakers of Old English would not name their newborn girl *Osyð* if it meant to them Mouth-Flood or Mouth-Flows-Forth (Vomit).

3.E.1.b. It Is Not “God” nor “Deity”

We have already ruled out the notion that “os” denotes “god” or “deity” insofar as the argument is based on *For a Sudden Stitch*.

Here, I show other evidence that “os” is neither a deity's proper name nor a category such as “god” or “deity”. We will consider evidence from personal names and then turn to etymological considerations.

3.E.1.b.1) Personal Names

Personal-name evidence implies that “os” is not a deity's name, nor is it “god” or “deity”.

It is unlikely that “Os-” names included the name of a specific deity, because otherwise deity names are rare in Old English names. We have only three or four instances of an early medieval English person with a specific deity's name as a component of his or her name. One instance is the name of Abbot Eosterwine (Easter-Friend) (Giles 1845: *Bede's Lives of the Holy Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, chapters 7-9), and there is mention of a nun named Frígyð (Frige-Flows-Forth or Love-Flood, referring to a goddess and an emotion) in book 4, chapter 23 of Bede's *History of the English Church and People* (Sherely-Price and Latham 1968: 249-250). Ingwald (Ing-Power) is also mentioned (Sherely-Price and Latham 1968: 331, Bede's *History*, 5.23). The other instance is in the legend of the founding of Minster-in-Thanel, which includes a character named Thunor (Blair 2005: 144).

It is also unlikely that “os” denoted a category of wight. We know it is not “god” (male deity) because it appears in women's names.

The category of deity does seem to appear in personal names. The Old English “god” is grammatically neuter, and the corpus records names like Godwine and Godwyne (God-Friend), Godgifu (God-Gift), and Godmund (God-Hand). It is unlikely that in such instances, “god” is a euphemism for the Trinity or a member of the Trinity, for we do not also find other variants of circumlocution for Catholic deities, such as Hælendwine (Savior-Friend), Drihtengifu (Lord-Gift), and so forth. Indeed, it is quite possible that the examples cited have “good” (which is spelled the same as “god” in Old English). It is plausible that parents would name babies Good-Friend, Good-Gift, and Good-Hand.

Moreover, it is unlikely that an entire category of Heathen wight is the source of speech or language, as we have noted that os is in the *Old English Rune Poem*. Common knowledge of myth and discursive theologies informs us that talents and behavioral inclinations are blessings from specific deities, not from broad categories. Intentions and conscious actions are attributed to wights, not to categories.

3.E.1.b.2) Etymology

In this passage, I show that we cannot reliably infer the definition of a name based merely on etymological considerations, and we must give precedence to other evidence. Because of the popularity and confusion of the etymological argument, an aside on the matter is worth taking.

Following are a few examples where firmly known definitions of words contradict inferences that would be drawn from etymological analysis. Some of the examples come from Stanfield's (2001: 2-3) study of the English goddess Eostre, where he refutes the assertion that Eostre was a goddess of the direction east and things associated with “east”, a fallacy based entirely on misguided etymological argument.

The Modern English adjective “virtual” derives from the Latin noun “veritas”. The Latin noun means “truth, truthfulness, real life, reality, honesty”. In sharp contrast, “virtual” means “almost or very similar to” — in other words, not quite true (Traupman 1966; Glare 1976; Houghton-Mifflin 1993). Consider “virtual reality”, which is fake.

“Hierarchy” is ultimately derived from the Greek words hieros (holy) and arkho (I rule). If the etymological derivation were all one knew about the Modern English word, one would opine that hierarchy = theocracy instead of hierarchy = set of administrative ranks.

The Modern English “technology” derives from ancient Greek words for “skill” and “the study of”. However, the Modern English word practically always refers to equipment, to substances such as plastics or drugs, or to computer programs. On rare occasions “technology” may also refer to methods of working. It never denotes the study of skills.

In Old English, “nerian” is a verb meaning to save, protect, liberate, or rescue. This word is etymologically related to

the Modern German “nähren”, which means to nourish. Both words denote acts to provide help or support, but help or support in different ways. Therefore, if you were to infer the meaning of one of these words from the meaning of the other, you would be deceived.

You would never figure out what modern gyms and gymnastics are from etymology. People not aware of how workouts in our gyms differ from those in the originals might try to tell you that the ancient Greeks did gymnastics in a gymnasium. For example Atsma’s (2000-2017c) essay on Hermes misleadingly mentions “gymnastic games” and male bodies shaped by “gymnastic exercise” in ancient Greece. The modern English “gymnasium” is based on the Greek words indicating “naked” (Liddell et al 1940), and in ancient Greek culture a gymnasium was a place to exercise nude. Platon causally mentioned this in a passage on equal rights and equal obligation for men and women (Bloom, 1991: 130-131, *Governance*, 4.451d & following — I don’t see any point in Latinizing Platon’s name to “Plato” nor in mistranslating the title of a book advocating monarchy as “The Republic”). Actually, the ancient Greeks in a gymnasium did not do exercises using pommel horse, horizontal bar, parallel bars, uneven bars, or still rings. They ran, lifted weights, swam, wrestled, and did other non-gymnastic exercises. The activity called gymnastics in Modern English was invented in the 1700’s and 1800’s CE, and it came into its current form in the 1950’s CE (See the scholastic site, “<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/history-gymnastics-ancient-greece-modern-times/>; or the Gymnastics HQ web site, “<http://gymnasticshq.com/history-of-gymnastics/>”, or the English-language site of the Federation Internationale de Gymnastique “<http://www.fig-gymnastics.com/site/site/search?q=history>”).

The Modern English “decimate” is derived from the Latin *decimare*, meaning to take or offer a tenth of some collection of objects. In Roman military practice, to decimate a unit meant to execute one-tenth of its members, chosen by lot. Obviously, that is not the level of destruction denoted by the Modern English word.

I could give many other examples, but surely this is enough to make the point.

3.E.2. Os Is a Psychological Characteristic

By now, we know that os is very positive but very probably not a deity’s proper name and certainly not a body part. So what is it?

Our most important clue to what os denotes is the *Old English Rune Poem*, where strophe number four implies that it underlies some higher mental functions. Here, we are interested in the stanza only at its lowest level of meaning. Although the stanzas of the OERP were not intended to define the rune-stave names (they express philosophy at the higher levels of meaning), this stanza has enough clues to be useful in our search for the meaning of the focal word (Stanfield 2012: Chapter 4 and Addendum to Chapter 4).

To avoid making the reader page back and forth, here is my Modern English translation again. It is very close to an exact version of the Old English, except that the poetry is not quite up to the original quality:

Os is the source of every language,
and wisdom’s pillar, and counselors’ comfort,
and to all patricians -- contentment and hope.

If os is a fundamental cause of all complex human languages (or of speech), a pillar of wisdom, and a comfort to and mood-lifter for the wise and noble; then it is the cause of an urge to inform and to learn by exchanging shrewd thoughts and knowledge with others.

Therefore, it is like the drives that we know from modern psychology, for it motivates action that can lead to states of psychological satisfaction without an external stimulus to cause behavior. It is also like a drive in that it is an internal state and not directly observable to the naked eye. However, unlike thirst, hunger, or sex, it is not directly based on the organism’s biological state.

Also like a drive, the effect of os is conditioned by human conscious intent and self-discipline. In other words, whatever the strength and purity of os in a person, what makes it a source of contentment and hope is matter of personal proclivity.

This is to say that os is enjoyed much more if one is aware of it and trying to make it more manifest in one’s life — if one is among the witenas and eorlas, or the counselors and patricians in this translation.

In the poem the categories of witenas, eorlas, and æðelingas are metaphors for persons with the noble intent to be enlightened. A clue in this strophe is that it does not make sense otherwise. Obviously, it is not simply being rich, skilled with weapons, or politically powerful that makes the source of language “contentment and hope”.

3.E.3. “Os” Is English-Pagan

We can reasonably infer that os represented a native English Heathen concept based on the following criteria. First, the word was native to the Old English language, not an import from Latin lore. Second, it was friendly to the native religion but not to orthodox Christian dogma.

In addition, we will find a clue to how the concept fit into the native Heathen religion, for it seems to represent a

family trait shared by at least one high deity and the human children of the deity or deities.

3.E.3.a. The Word Was Native to England

We can infer that it was not imported by Christians from a Mediterranean culture, partly because it was not used to gloss a Latin term (Bosworth and Toller 1898; 1921), and because Catholic intellectuals avoided using the word as a stand-alone.

Another clue is that it is common in personal names, and therefore people must have been familiar with it prior to Christian supremacy in England. Also, Anglo-Saxon parents did not commonly give infants foreign-language names in Heathen times nor later during the years before the Norman conquest of England.

Yet another clue that the word was familiar to speakers of Old English in Heathen times is the various lists of rune staves and rune names, which show the focal word as the name of a runic letter (Halsall 1981: 109; Page 1999: 61; Van Renterghem 2014: 90-96). We know that the names of runic letters generally were familiar words in Old English, because rune staves were used as abbreviations for rune names (Pollington 1995: chapter 3).

3.E.3.b. It Denoted a Concept of Divine Kinship

In a society that does not strictly separate religion from secular philosophy or separate philosophy from science, os can easily be seen as the family trait that defines or at least partially describes kinship between mankind and at least one deity, possibly with all deities.

Let us see how that can be. Each person has mental functions or components that people share with lower animals, and each person also has functions or components which define the higher aspect of human minds. For present purposes, we need not specify lists of functions in the two categories, but complex human language is not a lower-animal function. Os is therefore a common trait of beings who are mentally more developed than — and therefore fundamentally different from — dumb animals.

Now note that in religions generally, deities try to communicate with people and with each other by using words, omens, and dreams; and deity worship would be impossible without the urge for communication between people and deities. Also, prayer is commonly offered wordfully, and religious literature includes many accounts of verbal communication from deities in the hearer's native language. Surely native speakers of Old English would have held such common elements of theology.

Hence, the way people commonly understand deities, it is quite plausible that the native English Heathenism understood at least the high deities as having os.

If os sets mankind and deities apart from lower animals, then it is at least part of the divine aspect of mankind. Therefore, it is a family trait making people kin with deities. In support of this inference, recall that “os” had very positive connotations, and that the early medieval English commonly referred to mankind as Earth's children, even in Christian prayer (for example, see Caedmon's Hymn in Slade 2005). In turn, this suggests that all people are characteristically spiritual relatives of the Earth deity.

There are analogies to the family-trait idea in religions which are more thoroughly documented than is English polytheism. This very principle was posited at length by Platon's speakers in *Governance* and *Timaios*. The spiritual substance of Neoplatonic souls and deities is present in varying degrees of strength and purity, correlated with a being's place in the sacred hierarchy, and it can be cultivated or allowed to atrophy (Stanfield 2014: 46-47). Another analogy is kwoth in native Nuer religion, although kwoth is shared only by spiritual wights, not by persons. The kwoth of Nuer theology is present in varying degrees of strength and purity in spiritual wights, with a great spirit at the top of the pantheon having the ultimate strength and purity of kwoth (Evans-Pritchard 1956). A third analogy is Gnostic, for the Gnostics held that each person has a share of the divine mentality, and we will have eternal salvation through Jesus Christ when we become aware of the divinity within and cultivate it (Brakke 2015: lectures 4 and 6).

The notion of kinship in this sense can be explained by analogy to modern ideas of biology. There is a genus of wight having os as its defining characteristic, and it has two species, deities and people, who share that characteristic. However, unlike biological classification, the native English idea of kinship with the divine very probably included an idea of parental action, as in “we are the children of the Earth”.

3.E.3.c. The Concept Was Heathen

Was there a doctrinal reason for early medieval Catholic intellectuals to avoid “os”, and is it a clue to defining the focal word? The answer to those questions will reinforce our inference that os is a trait linking humans with deities in native English Heathen religion.

Somehow, “os” must have denoted a concept directly opposed to an important Catholic doctrine. Otherwise, it would be puzzling that Catholic intellectuals avoided the word in their writing, for the idea in Genesis that people were created in divine image would seem to almost beg to be explained in terms of os.

Actually, the idea of kinship with the divine as evinced by a family trait made “os” a term to avoid in Catholic literature.

The reason is that the idea of human kinship with a god conflicts with orthodox Christian doctrine explaining the divinity of Jesus Christ. Ancient Mediterranean ideas about divinity in general are somewhat complicated, but early Christianity developed an orthodoxy which held that only the Son could be divine and human (Ehrman 2014). Orthodox Christianity holds that we cannot all be even partly divine and partly human, for then we would be sons and daughters of Yahweh, and we would all be gods and goddesses.

Quotations from the Bible support that doctrine. For example, in John 3:16, we read that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is a sign of love, because Jesus Christ is God's only son. Also, 1 John 3:1 says that God loves us *as if* we were really his children.

In other words, we are not kin of the Father. Actually, the very idea of a holy family trait seems foreign to orthodox Christianity, for Christian literature avoids explicitly discussing the possibility that the Son and the Father share a family trait, although they are both God.

Therefore, we can infer that Catholic intellectuals avoided the word "os" to explain their religion, despite people being "in the image of", because it implies that we are kin of at least one high deity in the native Heathen theology (see also Stanfield 2014: 256-259).

3.F. Conclusion

3.F.1. The Definition of "Os"

So now we have a clearer but more elaborate definition for "os". It is drive-like, an underlying human tendency related to learning, shrewdness, and communication. It motivates complex communication that can lead to states of psychological satisfaction. As a drive-like factor that causes exercise and enjoyment of higher mental functions or components, os is divine, and therefore it is a common family trait linking people to deities. It is subject to conscious development; therefore, each person could have a different degree of os at different times.

3.F.2. Implications for Native Heathenism

The fact that speakers of Old English developed a simple word for the concept represented by "os" implies that they found occasion to talk about the concept a lot. Therefore, the concept was probably important to their culture in general and to the native religion.

Emphasis on os fits quite well into a religion which emphasizes esoteric work, as opposed to exoteric work, such as pageantry and maintenance of stone buildings and idols. Progressive mysticism is the use of mystical work to advance maturation after adulthood (Stanfield 2012: 8-10, Appendix F). The concept of os fits into progressive mysticism, because strengthening one's os can be part of work to become an ever more effective and happier member of society. On the other hand, consideration of os does not fit well into esoteric work in which one retires from social life and productive work (Smith 1991: 53-54) or in which one becomes a hermit.

Therefore, as compared with early medieval Catholicism, the native Heathenism must have been balanced more toward its esoteric side and less toward its exoteric side, and more balanced toward well-adjusted living in normal society and less toward seceding from normal society.

Also, the extended family relationship must have been an important aspect of Heathen theology. We are not children of the Earth merely because we accidentally reside here (Stanfield 2014: 255-256).

3.F.3. Implications for Native Catholicism

The attraction to teaching, learning, and communication implied by having "os" in the Old English vocabulary might have influenced the minster movement, despite Catholic intellectuals avoiding the idea in their manuscripts. Early medieval English minsters were not hermitages, instead they were located near civilian settlements, and they sometimes caused commercial settlements to grow in adjacent districts (Blair 2005: chapter 5; Foot 2006: 120-121). As is well known, at least the more resourceful minsters also produced and copied books (Foot 2006: 226-232), although these conditions also existed elsewhere.

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Chapter 4: Drohtian

A major value of the native Heathen religion was proper lifestyle conduct. This inference is based in part on vocabulary. The Anglo-Saxons had a word for self-conscious, self-controlled lifestyle conduct, and the contrast between their language and Modern English (which lacks such a term), implies that they were more interested in or (at least more inclined to systematically talk and think about) the concept that word represents.

The word in question is drohtian, often spelled with a medial n, as drohtnian. For convenience, the present analysis will use the simpler spelling except for quotations of primary sources.

This chapter begins by considering how dictionaries deal with the focal word and proposes a corrected definition, then it examines illustrative examples in support of that definition, and finally it draws out implications for native culture prior to and during Christian supremacy.

4.A. The Dictionaries

Several dictionaries recognize that drohtian denotes self-conscious, self-controlled lifestyle conduct, but they also attribute other meanings. For example, the 1898 volume of the Bosworth-Toller dictionary mentions conversation, condition, and merely dwelling, as well as more on-the-mark definitions. Clark Hall's (1960) work, which uses his 1916 definitions of drohtian and related terms, omits the idea of merely dwelling, but still includes definiens that omit the idea of self control, such as merely to live. Johnson's (1927) work is based on her 1917 draft, and has much more emphasis on self-control, but she also includes as definitions one's condition of life or simply one's condition. *The Dictionary of Old English A-G* gives us five definitions and many sub-definitions. Three of the five explicitly include the idea of self-conscious lifestyle choice and self-control, and only two are incorrect. Their incorrect definitions are generally refuted by their supporting examples, such as their definition of "dwell in a place", which is accompanied by examples in which the idea of location is external to drohtian. Finally, Köbler's 2014 work still has a definiens of merely living, alongside his definiens of conducting a life (leben, Leben führen).

In short, dictionaries have yet to be freed of the notion that "drohtian" can refer to passive existence.

4.B. Detailed Examples

Because the study of drohtian does not have to struggle against dictionary and translator errors to the extent that the studies of metod and os do, there are only two examples in this section, one to illustrate how speakers of Old English used "drohtian" and one to illustrate what the word did not mean to them.

4.B.1. Conscious Lifestyle Conduct

The first example has two uses of drohtian to refer to self-chosen lifestyle conduct.

This is from the Old English version of the Rule of Chrodegang, rule 37 (Napier 1916: 47). The book, sometimes called the Benedictine Rule, is a set of rules about life-style conduct in a minster. This specific rule is about handling rivalry between "God's servants" (monks, nuns, or priests) in a commune. (By the way, this particular rule is not in my modern copy of the *The Holy Rule of Saint Benedict* — Verheyen 1949).

First is the Old English in Napier's edition, then my translation. The elipsis indicates that I omitted part of the rule as presented by Napier. I put the focal words and their translations in bold to make them easier to find in this long quotation.

"7 gif hwilce leahtras beon fundene, ofþriccan þa, 7 don steore þam þe þa gefremedon, ealswa se apostol cwæð, 7 beon swilce þæt swa raðe swa þa leahtras upp aspringon, þæt hi þa toweorpen, & to faere selran **drohtnunge** ælcne tihton, for þan hit is awriten, 'Ge þe Drihten lufiað, ascuniað yfel.'...Soðlice se lufað his sawle wel, se þe hine sylfne gehylt, 7 oðre to bisne godre **drohtnunge** mid wordum & worcum tihð.

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And if someone tries to cause injury, prevent that and restrain those who would act like that, just as the apostle said we should. Behave so that they cast aside whatever wrath the injury arouses, and persuade each to a course of better **life conduct**, because it is written that "You who love the Lord shun evil."...Truly the person who loves his soul well practices self-restraint and persuades others by example of good **lifestyle self-conduct** in word and deed.

Much of Old English Catholic literature is quite powerful, and this emotionally evocative advice regarding comradeship and colleagueship can give one pause, but we must make it brief and get back to work.

4.B.2. Not Merely “Dwell” nor “Reside”

This example shows that the word was not understood to denote merely dwelling nor residing.

This specimen is cited in *The Dictionary of Old English A-G*, in support of their definition “to live, dwell” passively. The primary source is an Old English translation of Bede’s Latin quotation of correspondence between Saint Augustine, the chief of the initial mission to convert the English, and his Pope in Rome. The response, which I omitted, deals both with lifestyle self-conduct and with logistical and administrative issues.

My source is Miller’s (1890a 64-65) edition. First the Old English, and then my translation (aided by Miller’s).

Ærest bi biscopum, hu hy heora geferum drohtian & lifgan sculon?

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First, regarding the bishops, how should they conduct themselves and live with their associates?

The question clearly specifies two related topics, self-conduct and living arrangements.

4.B.3. Other Specimens

It was the examples offered in support of incorrect definitions in *The Dictionary of Old English A-G* that lead me to realize what “drohtian” and related nouns really meant to native speakers of Old English. After getting clues from the Dictionary of Old English project, I re-studied the data in Bosworth-Toller. For example, examining the data in Bosworth and Toller’s 1898 volume lead me to realize that the definiens of “conversation” was an error. An Old English translator decided that the Latin “conversatione” in a Latin passage referred, not to merely exchanging words, but to a conscious, life-style decision of which persons to associate with closely (Traupman, 1966). Therefore, the Anglo-Saxon translator used “drohtung” to translate that “conversatione”.

Hence, if the reader desires more examples than offered here, they are readily available in the two most scholarly dictionaries, although they can be found in other sources also.

4.C. Conclusions

So we have another Old English word which does not have a simplex Modern English word that we can use as an adequate and precise definition. In turn, this gives us a clue to differences between modern industrial cultures and the lifeways of early medieval English under both Heathen and Catholic supremacy.

If the Anglo-Saxons developed a simple word for self-conscious, self-controlled lifestyle conduct, they must have found reason to think and talk about the topic. And apparently, they found lots of reason to talk and think about it during a very long time. For example, consider that for about ten to twelve years in America the hippie lifestyle was much discussed in the print and moving-picture media, and yet the Modern English language did not develop a convenient, precise way to express the idea of conducting ones self in a consciously chosen lifestyle.

And so we may reasonably infer that the English Heathen philosophy was concerned in general with conscious self-control, not necessarily just in petty matters, but in the general conduct of one’s life. Also, “drohtian” and related nouns seem to carry an assumption of at least an attempt to achieve proper conduct.

We can see how the popularity of this concern would have contributed to the proliferation of minsters in the first two centuries of Catholic supremacy (Blair 2005: 79-80, 149-153), for many Christians opined that to thoroughly practice their religion, one must carry out a conscious commitment to a way of life not possible in normal society. Although the minster idea is not the same as the Heathen lifestyle commitment in normal society, the two commitments have similar need of the word “drohtian” and its close relatives.

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Chapter 5: Conclusions

In this book, we considered three Old English words that lack Modern English equivalents and that were fundamental to the native Heathen religion and influential to the native expression of Catholicism. They have also been difficult for modern scholars to define.

5.A. The Three Concepts

“Metod” denotes the top-rank controller, and that concept was compatible with the medieval Catholic notion of a supreme god in that it allows (but might not require) an All-Father or All-Mother, and in that it leaves room for individual human responsibility. In the native Heathen religion, no deity monopolized the metod role in all cults. We do not know at this point whether the native Heathenism had an ultimate creator in any of its theologies.

The word “os” also represents a concept that was embedded in the English Heathen culture. It denotes a psychological trait that is at least one aspect of kinship of people with one or more deities. Os motivates communication to exchange learning, improve shrewdness, and live well in normal society. Each person has some os and can develop and enjoy that trait. Os was not compatible with orthodox Christian theology, for it is divine and links mankind one or more deities in a kinship relation.

“Drohtian” and related nouns referred to the conscious self-conduct of one’s lifestyle, and that concept carried an implication of at least an attempt to achieve proper conduct. Apparently, exerting conscious self-control to conduct a high-quality life was a major goal of the native Heathen religion.

5.B. The Fit among Them

Considering all three concepts together strengthens our confidence in the analyses of each, for they fit together into a coherent system that is consistent with progressive mysticism. The drohtend (person conducting his/her life) makes some choices, and the metod makes some. The metod influences the sequence of events by determining outcomes of specific events, but neither the drohtend nor the metod completely determines an entire færeld (the course of a life). On his/her part, the drohtend exercises and cultivates os to succeed in conducting a more enlightened lifestyle than would otherwise be the case, doing the best he or she can under existing circumstances.

5.C. Implications for English Religion

Because the literature studied here was produced under Catholic supremacy, we have learned some interesting fundamentals of both religions.

5.C.1. Native Heathenism

Together, knowledge of these three basic concepts gives a more fundamental and profound understanding of the native Heathen religion than merely going through a list of deities or considering how Norse myths might inform us about English non-Christian religion.

A major implication of this study is that the native Heathen religion emphasized personal fundamentals of religion more, and exoteric or public practice less, than what one might have expected. By “personal fundamentals of religion”, I mean progressive mysticism, the use of mystical exercises to enhance individual maturation, ecstasy, comfort, and a well-adjusted life (Stanfield 2012: 8-10).

The prayer of invocation analyzed above, which implied that Wóden was regarded as a patron god of mental hyper-health, shows how this system probably fit into the theology of at least a Wóden cult in the native Heathen religion.

This analysis also helps clarify our understanding of the background from which the *Old English Rune Poem* emerged, for the poem came from a mostly Heathen background (Stanfield 2012).

5.C.2. English Catholicism

Early medieval English Catholicism became a native manifestation of the international Christian movement. It used native concepts to discuss religious doctrine and mythology, and it developed a version of Christian orthodoxy which reflected English habits of thought while being true to Christianity.

English Catholic intellectuals could easily accept the idea of an ultimate controller who did not interfere with human freedom to make behavioral decisions, because the method does not prevent nor compel wrongdoing.

Although the concept of *os* does not fit well into Christian orthodox doctrine regarding Jesus Christ's divinity, the concept of *drohtian* fit comfortably into a system that claimed to require conscious lifestyle choices so that one could be right with the Father who is in Heaven, and it fit especially well into the ideology that justified the minster movement.

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