The Southern Version of Cursor Mundi, Vol. V

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APPENDIX C

The Finding of the True Cross (ll. 21347–21846)

For some reason the southern redactor of CM omitted these lines from his work, despite his having mentioned the burial of the cross at ll. 16913–22. The omission is difficult to account for. Certainly the story is lively enough, and it appears in CM’s source, the Trad. anon., as the conclusion to the History of the Cross Wood, all the rest of which the redactor has kept. This is a somewhat unusual ending for cross wood stories, however, most of which end with the Passion, and the redactor might have omitted it in favour of the more customary conclusion. He might more probably have eliminated it on the grounds that it belonged to secular history, for he similarly excluded the story of William the Conqueror’s institution of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Accidental loss in the exemplar seems the least likely reason for the omission, as the poem breaks off and starts up again so neatly at the end of proper narrative divisions.


The CM poet has combined two versions of the story. Lines 21383–402, an abridged version of the battle at the Milvian Bridge and Constantine’s conversion, come from Jacobus de Voragine, Legenda aurea (Graesse, pp. 303–11). Lines 21407–800, with some variations and omissions, are taken from Trad. anon. An edition of this work appeared in 1985, and references to it are made by line number to Julia C. Szirmai, La bible anonyme du ms. Paris BN f. fr. 763. Comparisons are made in her notes with the source of most medieval versions, the Acta apocrypha [De S. Juda Quiriaco] in the Acta Sanctorum maii tomus primus, pp. 439ff.

21347–600 These lines are found only in CFG. They would presumably have occurred also on the missing leaves of E.

21356–78 This is expanded from Trad. anon. 8321–30.

21371 The CM dates this event 200 years after Christ’s death. The Acta Quiriaci, p. 445 D. places it in the year 233, and Leg. aur., p. 303, says more than 200 years after Christ’s death. Trad. anon. says simply longuement (8327). Gradon, pp. 15–22, has some apposite comments on the date, and cf. Leopold Kretzenbacher,
Kreuzholzlegenden zwischen Byzanz und dem Abendland, p. 5, who dates the finding to 3 May 320 (!).

21379–406 Trad. anonym. omits the story of Constantine's conversion. The CM poet probably takes it from Leg. aur., pp. 305–6, although a few details of the scene seem to come from the Acta Quiriaci.

21382–84 The CM poet is vague about the details of the battle. Leg. aur. places it on the Danube, as does the Acta Quiriaci.

21385 Both Leg. aur. and Acta Quiriaci specify that the increasing size of the barbarian army made Constantine afraid: ... barbarorum crescente multitudine et jam fluviun transunet Constantinus nimio terrore conctutur (Leg. aur., p. 305); Videas autem, quia multitudo esset innumerabilis, contristatus est et timuit usque ad mortem (Acta Quiriaci, p. 445 E).

21387–402 Leg. aur., p. 305. Cf. Pouzet p. 37, who has an extensive note on whether Constantine saw the cross by dream vision or direct vision.

21397 "even." Possibly "even" translates similitudinem: Qui coelesti visione conformatus similitudinem crucis fecit (Leg. aur., p. 305). Acta Quiriaci, p. 445 f., also has similitudinem crucis. Cf. MED s.v. even (adj.) sense 12 and s.v. evenen (v.) sense 5.

21407–13 Trad. anonym. 8331–36. CM omits Constantine's baptism, about which Leg. aur., pp. 305–6, gives several conflicting reports.

21413 The messengers Benciras and Ansiers are called Bensillas and Amphire in Trad. anonym. 8335. At 8422, however, the second name appears as Anfire. In Trad. anonym.'s probable source, Li romans de Dolopathos, the name is Anfire, and in the analogous Roman des sept sages it is Aussire. The various versions appear to derive from scribal confusion of f and s, and of the minims for m, n, and u. For discussion of the source and analogue, see Szirmai, n. to 8335, and p. 69.

21416–64 Trad. anonym. 8360–457. The origins of this story of the pound of flesh have been well explored because of its appearance in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice. L. Toulmin Smith, "On the Bond Story in the Merchant of Venice," pp. 181–89, first pointed out the connection of this section of CM with Shakespeare. Szirmai, pp. 68–69, discusses the similarities between the Trad. anonym.'s version of the story and the only other extant European version which predates it, that in the Dolopathos, written in the twelfth century by Johannes de Alta Silva and translated about 1210 into French by one Herbert as Li Romans de Dolopathos.

Trad. anonym. and CM are the only works which connect this story with the finding of the cross. The author of Trad. anonym. penalizes the Jew for his anger, and the penalty forces him to discover the cross. The CM poet repeats all this, but also gives at the end the more common version of the finding of the cross by Judas/Quiriacus.

21423 The sum is 100 sous in Trad. anonym. 8370, centum argenti marcas in Dolopathos.

21425 F's word "couenand" may preserve the original form of the line. Cf. Trad. anonym. 8375: Qu'il en fauroit de covenant.

21432 "beleue" translates abandoner, Trad. anonym. 8381.

21436–38 These lines have no equivalent in Trad. anonym., where the text is somewhat defective at this point (8386–89).

21443 In Trad. anonym. 8389 only Bensillas speaks.

21447 F's "vs" translates Trad. anonym.'s nos, 8394, CG's "me" is an error.

21452 CG's readings translate Trad. anonym.'s dou il doit ouvrer, 8400. Pouzet p. 43 elaborates this observation with further analysis of Trad. anonym. 8398–402.

21453 CG's "de laue" is not mentioned in Trad. anonym., but the definite article in et lou nes devant, 8401, may have caused confusion. Pouzet p. 43 thinks such confusion unlikely.
F's lines are not in Trad. anon.

CG's "maugre" and F's "maugrefe" attempt to translate Trad. anon.'s maldite, 8418.

C's "anfrer" may reflect an original confused rendering by the poet of Trad. anon.'s frere Anfire, 8422. Pouzet p. 44 reads anster in C; his extensive note, p. 45, further elaborates the various explanations for the confusion.

Trad. anon.'s 8437 is defective in the only remaining manuscript. The editor conjecturally emends the line, but there is no mention of the Jew losing his tongue. Perhaps the original rhyme word was laingue.

Trad. anon. 8455 gives the time as Trois jors antiers et une nuit, logically impossible. Pouzet p. 47 suggests that OF jors may be taken to mean a 24-hour day.

Trad. anon. 8457 says that he will be hanged on the third day: Vous seres au tier jor pendus. Pouzet p. 47 explores Trad. anon.'s probable sources and analogues for further clarification.

CG's readings follow Trad. anon., more or less, but F has changed the lines completely.

Trad. anon. does not go into detail about the finding of the cross. The CM seems here to revert to Leg. aur., p. 308, but the sign to Judas in Leg. aur. and Acta Quiriaci, p. 447 B, is a sweet smell, not an earthquake as here, 21524. Cf., however, the OE homily in Bodden, II. 204–6, where the earth trembles: biofode eal seo stow, as well as exuding a sweet odour: se swetesta staenc ealra deowurbesta wyrtgemanga. See also Honorius Augustodunensis, Speculum ecclesiae, "De inventione sancte crucis," PL CLXXII 948: locus contremuit, fumus thymiamaatis de terra ascendit.

The figure of 20 feet is xx passus in Leg. aur., p. 308, and passus viginti in Acta Quiriaci, p. 447 C. G's tuenti fadim may perhaps represent an attempt to cope with the Roman measure, the passus.

The lines are authentic, translating Trad. anon. 8518–19, although they are omitted from F.

Not in Trad. anon.

The CM poet omits Trad. anon. 8538–47, the Jew's speech.

The correct reading is CG's constantinopil, not F's costentine. Cf. Trad. anon. 8560.

F's line appears to be authentic, translating Trad. anon. 8562, La croix prant iiij. pars en fit.

These lines appear only in F, where they seem to be scribal rather than authentic. Trad. anon. does not mention again what happened to two of the pieces of the cross.

F continues to renumber the pieces of the cross to make the distribution clear, but Trad. anon., like CG, mentions only L'une ... Et l'autre ... (8564, 8566).

E's text begins here.

See Szirmai, n. to 8582–91, for analogues.

C's mande = maundy = Trad. anon.'s jor de la Cene (8577).

Trad. anon. 8591 reads cite instead of CM's contre.

Trad. anon. 8592–8884, a long interpolation on the symbolic attributes of the cross, which CM abbreviates.

ECG's mani translates Trad. anon.'s plusor, 8596. F's man is an error.

Not in Trad. anon.

An allusion to the cross wood being grown from seeds taken from the Tree of Life. Cf. Trad. anon. 7756–59.
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21659 G's tre is an error for ECF's cry. Cf. Trad. anon.'s clamor, 8620.
21668 The CM poet omits Trad. anon. 8630–59, dealing with the nudity of Noah and
the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph as they prefigure the cross. 21672
suggests that the CM poet does not want to repeat these stories which he has already
told in recounting the events of Genesis.
21682 The CM poet omits Trad. anon. 8672–75, dealing with further feats of Moses.
21694 Voice is taken directly from Trad. anon. 8683, vois, which Szirmai glosses as
autorité, pouvoir.
21695 The CM poet omits Trad. anon. 8684–91, with further details about Moses and
Amalek.
21702 The CM poet omits Trad. anon. 8700–3, the story of Helias and the woman
gathering wood to bake bread, 3 Reg. 17: 9–16.
21706 Trad. anon. 8706–23 are omitted here. They tell the story of Heliseus and the
son of the Sunamite woman, 4 Reg. 4: 18–37.
21711–18 Loosely based on Trad. anon. 8728–38.
21715 E's stane is an error.
21728 Not in Trad. anon.
21732 Trad. anon. 8749–8840 goes on to explain why mankind had to be ransomed.
gun-fanun is taken from Trad. anon. 8740, where it is spelled confenonx.
21740 Trad. anon. 8847–52, dealing with the two parts of the cross and the two laws,
are omitted here.
21743–44 Trad. anon. 8853 says that the cross has En . iij. fuz et en . iij. bras.
21754 E's vi is an error for vii, the total of the four elements of the body and the three
strengths of the soul.
21756–57 This theme is more extensively elaborated in Trad. anon. 8847–64.
21775 ECF's smele translates odour, Trad. anon. 8883. G's mell is an error.
21777–80 Trad. anon. 8885–8910.
21788 EC's of drist is correct, translating Trad. anon. 8894, Vers Deu.
21789 All manuscripts of CM read three years, while Trad. anon. 8895 says four.
21797–98 Trad. anon. says that only one nail is at St. Denis. The CM poet omits Trad.
on. 8905, which gives almost the only clue to the identity of the French author:
Je l'ai vu et baisé. He must, therefore, have belonged to or visited St. Denis. For
a discussion of the authorship of Trad. anon. see Szirmai, pp. 16–17.
21801–8 The CM poet, having finished the cross story from Trad. anon., refers to ano-
other version, presumably that in Leg. aur. or in one of the MS of the Acta Quiriaci.
Pouzet p. 73 disagrees here and offers a more elaborate interpretation.
21809–12 Leg. aur. p. 309.
21816 E's reading is closest to the original, provided me is taken as a possessive ad-
dj ective and Judas (i.e., Judas Iscariot) as the object of the preposition, gain. Cf.
Judae meo contraria operatus es, Leg. aur. p. 309. F reworks this and the following
lines completely.
21821–22 The lines, although omitted from F, translate Leg. aur. p. 309: per illum reg-
numah in populo, per te jam expellar a regno.
21829–30 Leg. aur. names the tyrant as Julian the Apostate who later tortures and kills
Quiriacus. However, a marginal note in C identifies the tyrant as Antichrist.
21835 C's me is an error for he, translating Leg. aur. p. 309: Christus te damnet in
abyssum ignis aeterni.
21837–46 The CM poet's prayer, not in the sources.