

AVITUS: *CALMA* 1.562–63; *DACL* 15/2.3061–63; *DECL* pp 85–86; *DHGE* 5.1205–08; *DTC* 1.2639–44; *EEC* 1.105; *LMA* 1.1307–08; *LTK* 1.1320; *NCE* 1.1138; *ODCC* p 139.

Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus, like his father before him, was bishop of Vienne in Gaul (ca. 490–518). The “soul of Catholic Church life in the kingdom of the Arian Burgundians” (Altaner 1961 p 568), St Avitus was a powerful supporter of Catholic doctrine and the papacy and was much admired for his learning. Among his surviving works are three homilies and fragments of another thirty, some eighty letters, and two hexameter poems, **Carmina de spiritalis historiae gestis** and **Carmina de consolatoria castitatis laude**, which, written in traditional style, are easier to understand than his mannered prose (Shanzer and Wood 2003 pp 76–85).

Avitus is mentioned in the booklists of both **ALCUIN** (ML 1.12) and **ÆTHELWOLD** (ML 4.17); neither cites a specific work. In the Alcuin booklist he is named among Christian Latin poets, and Lapidge reasonably suggests that the reference is to *De gestis*, Avitus’s better known poem. (See also the entry on *De gestis* below.) The possibility should be left open, however, that the reference is instead to *De laude* or to both poems. In fact, some manuscripts follow the five books of *De gestis* with *De laude*, making the latter poem Book VI of a collection of poems by Avitus. (Peiper, *MGH AA* 6/2, and Chevalier 1890 follow this arrangement in their editions under the title *Poematum libri VI*.)

The reference to Avitus in the Æthelwold booklist is much more difficult to interpret. Lines 16–17 in Lapidge’s edition read, “Commentum Martiani / Alchimi Auiti.” Lapidge understands line 16 as a presumed reference to the commentary on Martianus Capella by Remigius of Auxerre. If this is correct, we would expect line 17 to refer, similarly, to a commentary on Avitus. But none is known to exist. If, on the other hand, we take “Commentum Martiani” as referring to a commentary attributed to Martianus, we would expect “[Commentum] Alchimi Auiti” to refer to a commentary by Avitus. Again, Avitus is not known to have written a commentary. There are, however, two barely possible explanations for such a reference. First, Æthelwold might have donated to Peterborough a commentary falsely ascribed to Avitus much as, according to Hariulphe’s chronicle, the monastery of Saint-Riquier in 831 is reported to have owned a manuscript containing *quaestiones super Pentateuchum* attributed to Avitus (*MGH AA* 6/2.lix). The second possibility is that the reference is somehow to *De gestis*. But what might lead someone to consider the poem a commentary? Avitus carefully selects the stories he takes from Genesis and Exodus, greatly embellishes them, and introduces many didactic passages; Kirkconnell (1952 p 505) estimates that “less than one-quarter of the total poem is a close paraphrase of the Old Testament.” The so-called digressions, although considered “unnecessary and wearying” by Duckett (1969 p 66), are at the heart of Avitus’s purpose; through them he establishes parallels between biblical events or imparts spiritual teaching — interprets and comments on the narrative.

Still, to regard *De gestis* as a commentary because of the running interpretation is to distort the meaning of *commentum*. It is more probable that there is an error at line 17 in the Æthelwold booklist, our sole copy of which dates from the mid-twelfth century, about 175 years after Æthelwold’s donation of the books to Peterborough. That line 17 of the booklist is imperfect is evident from the fact that the scribe separates “Alchimi” from “Auiti” by a raised point (Robertson 1956 p 72), the same punctuation used elsewhere in the list to separate one entry from another. (This is no casual scribal error but bears directly on the statement introducing the booklist that Æthelwold gave the monastery 21 books; as Robertson [p 327] notes, the proper rejoining of “Alchimi” to “Auiti” to make a single author reduces the number of books to 20.) Another peculiarity of line 17 is that the entry depends for its sense upon the previous one: to give “Alchimi Auiti” a head noun, “Commentum” must be supplied from “Commentum Martiani” in line 16. No other entry on the list is syntactically dependent on its predecessor; the only other instance in the list in which an author alone is named (as opposed to author and title or simply a title) occurs at line 19, where “Cilicius [for “Caecilius”?] Ciprianus” is given in the nominative. These facts — together with the fact that “[Commentum] Alchimi Auiti” does not suitably describe any known work composed by or about Avitus — suggest that somewhere in the line of scribal transmission a word has been dropped before “Alchimi Auiti.” (A good candidate would be “liber,” occurring on the list at lines 3, 18, and 21.) If so, the original reference is likely to have been to a manuscript containing the work for which Avitus was most celebrated, his verse: either *De laude* or *De gestis* or both poems. Books of Latin verse are cited twice elsewhere on the Æthelwold list: “Vita sancti Felicis metrica” (line 7) refers to *carmina* of

PAULINUS OF NOLA, and “Descidia Parisiace polis” (line 10) refers to a poem on the siege of Paris, **BELLA PARISIACAE URBIS**, by **ABBO OF SAINT-GERMAIN-DES-PRÉS**.

In his edition of Avitus, Peiper (*MGH AA 6/2.lxi*) asserts that the manuscript from which **ALDHELM** quoted verses of **CYPRIANUS GALLUS** for the metrical treatise included in his *Epistula ad Acircium* also contained the poetry of Avitus. Peiper offers no evidence beyond the fact that both Avitus in *De laude* 503–33, and Aldhelm in his metrical **DE VIRGINITATE** 1883–1924, celebrate Eugenia (see **ACTA SANCTORUM**). Again, Peiper (p 304) suggests that Avitus’s treatment of Enoch and Elijah in *De gestis* IV.178–84 influenced Aldhelm in *De virginitate* 273–75. The two passages are alike, however, only in each poet’s statement that Enoch and Elijah were taken up to paradise, and Aldhelm scholars have not endorsed Peiper’s suggestion. Similarly, Hammerich (1873 p 28; 1874 German translation p 40) cites an entry in Johann Hervagen’s 1563 edition of **BEDE**’s **MARTYROLOGIUM** (III.389) as evidence that Avitus was known to Bede. The Avitus material in the martyrology, however, has now been shown to be a later interpolation (Dubois and Renaud 1976 p 30).

Carmina de consolatoria castitatis laude [AVITVS.Carm.cons.cast.laud.]: *CPL* 996.
ed.: *MGH AA 6/2.274–94*.

MSS none.

Lists 1. ? Alcuin: ML 1.12.

2. ? Æthelwold: ML 4.17.

A-S Vers – Refs none.

Containing 666 lines, this poem, also known as *De virginitate* and dedicated to the nun Fuscina, the poet’s sister, argues for the superiority of the celibate over the married life. For possible references to it in the booklists and for general claims that it was known to **ALDHELM** and **BEDE**, see above.

The evidence becomes more intricate — although of mixed quality — in considering hexametrical echoes. In his edition of Aldhelm (*MGH AA 15*), Ehwald cites *De laude* twice in his apparatus: “spargentes semina” (402) for “dispergens semina” (**Carmina ecclesiastica** IV.ii.3); and “Mille nocendi artes” (512) for “mille nocendi / Artibus” (**Carmen de virginitate** 1867–68). Both parallels are inexact, and there is further reason to doubt the second. Peiper (*MGH AA 6/2.307*) notes that Avitus borrowed the phrase from **VERGIL**’s **AENEID** VII.338, a work Aldhelm is supposed to have known by heart.

Manitius (1886 p 579) gives two parallels between *De laude* and the poetry of Aldhelm: “morte resurgens” (267) and “surgens de morte” (**Carmina ecclesiastica** IV.vi.7); and “commercia vitam” (575) and “commercia vitae” (**Carmen de virginitate** 126). Orchard (1994 p 217) notes that the first parallel could be a conflation of two borrowings from **ARATOR** but suggests a closer source, *De laude* 223: “Praebuit exemplum surgens a morte redemptor.” It is notable that “redemptor” also ends the line in Aldhelm’s poem: “Dum chaos inferni surgens de morte redemptor” (**Carmina ecclesiastica** IV.vi.7). The second parallel noted by Manitius is not exclusive to the two poets. Orchard points out that “commercia vitae” occurs in **CYPRIANUS GALLUS** and **DRACONTIUS** as well as in Avitus. Manitius (1886 p 623) also offers a parallel between *De laude* and Bede’s metrical *Vita s. Cuthberti* (ed. Jaeger 1935, who cites Manitius for the parallel): “modulamine psalmos” (6) and “modulamine psalmi” (798). Despite syntactic differences, this parallel is close, and the metrical feet the phrases occupy are the same. Both Orchard’s parallel between *De laude* and **Carmina ecclesiastica** and Manitius’s parallel between *De laude* and Bede’s metrical *vita* are the right kind of evidence, but not much weight can be placed on one solid parallel in each case for Aldhelm’s or Bede’s knowledge of *De laude*.

Carmina de spiritalis historiae gestis [AVITVS.Carm.spirit.hist.gest.]: *CPL* 995; *ICL* 13599.
ed.: *MGH AA 6/2.201–74*.

MSS none.
 Lists 1. ? Alcuin: ML 1.12.
 2. ? Æthelwold: ML 4.17.
 A-S Vers – Refs none.

This poem, containing 2,552 lines, consists of five books: I *De initio mundi* (title varies), II *De originali peccato*, III *De sententia Dei*, IV *De diluvio mundi*, and V *De transitu maris rubri*. The first three books comprise a “paradise lost” and may have influenced Milton. (For a concise summary of evidence, see Nodes 1985 pp 7–10.) The fourth and fifth books comprise a “paradise regained,” as, for example, Avitus presents Noah’s flood and the crossing of the Red Sea as types of baptism. *De gestis* was fairly popular in the Middle Ages. It is mentioned frequently in monastic catalogues, and more than a dozen manuscripts of the ninth through eleventh centuries alone preserve the text in part or whole (Peiper, *MGH AA 6/2*.lii–lxxvi and 200; Chevalier 1890 pp xxxviii–lxiv); there is evidence that two of the ninth-century manuscripts were used as school texts (Nodes 1985 pp 10–11 and references). These details increase the likelihood, discussed in the headnote above, that it is to this work that the booklists refer. For general claims that it was known to **ALDHELM** and **BEDE**, also see above.

Manitius (1886 p 579) lists four parallels between Avitus’s *De gestis* and Aldhelm’s **CARMEN DE VIRGINITATE**, the first three of which are exact: “gramine tellus” (I.25: 1584); “pulcherrima virgo” (II.145: 2051); “tramite recto” (II.358: 846); and “albertem . . . columbam” (IV.579) and “albertes . . . columbas” (492). Of the four parallels, Campbell (1953 p 6) asserts that “only one, *gramine tellus* . . . is at all striking, and it is a variant of the common *gramine terrae* liable to arise independently.” Orchard (1994 p 217) considers the second and fourth parallels unpersuasive since the former is found in **OVID** and the latter in **CYPRIANUS GALLUS**. One may also question the third parallel in that “tramite recto” occurs in the **DE CONSOLATIONE PHILOSOPHIAE** of **BOETHIUS** (I. meter 7). Still, the fact that there are four close parallels suggests that Aldhelm may well have known *De gestis*.

Manitius (1886 p 623) gives three parallels between *De gestis* and Bede’s poetry. Two of the parallels, however, concern *De celebritate quatuor temporum* (*PL* 94.606–15), a hymn no longer ascribed to Bede (Laistner 1943 p 125). The third parallel from Manitius, “vestigia plantis,” is found in *De gestis* I.130 and Bede’s metrical **VITA S. CUTHBERTI** 868. The parallel is attenuated, however, by the fact that the phrase occurs in the **AENEID** XI.573. In his edition of Bede’s Cuthbert poem, Jaeger (1935) also offers a parallel: “It fragor in caelum,” Avitus IV, 485, and “it fragor astris,” Bede 323. Unlike Manitius’s parallel, Jaeger’s concerns words in different metrical positions, “it fragor” beginning the line in Avitus but appearing near the end of the line in Bede.

Scholars have argued that two Old English poems, *Genesis B* and *Exodus*, show the influence of *De gestis*. As *Genesis B*, however, is a translation of the **OLD SAXON GENESIS** (of which fewer than 340 lines survive, 25 corresponding to material in the Old English poem), any influence Avitus may have exerted upon the text points to knowledge of *De gestis* in northern Germany rather than England. The problem, however, has received much attention in Anglo-Saxon scholarship.

The first scholar to suggest Avitus as a source for *Genesis B* was Hammerich (1873 pp 28 and 155), who asserted that Avitus and **CÆDMON** (to whom he ascribes the verse in the *Junius Manuscript*, including *Genesis B*) similarly narrate Lucifer’s fall and assign a similar speech to the devil in the temptation of Adam and Eve. Two years later, Sievers (1875 pp 18–21) independently developed the argument, drawing upon Books I–III of *De gestis*. He conceded that *Genesis B* disagrees with the Latin narrative in major ways: in *Genesis B* a subordinate of Satan — not Satan himself — tempts Adam and Eve; the tempter claims to be God’s servant; he tempts Adam (unsuccessfully) before Eve; and it takes Eve, once fallen, a long time to persuade Adam to eat. To be weighed against the differences, Sievers argued, are major points of agreement. Avitus and the *Genesis B*-poet arrange the first part of the story similarly: after creating Adam and Eve, God encourages and admonishes them, and they are filled with obedience and joy; then the scene shifts to Lucifer, and we hear his defiant speech against God, see him exiled to hell, and witness his envy and hatred of humankind. Again, Sievers pointed out that in Avitus Satan rejoices aloud over the fallen couple and that in *Genesis B* the tempter similarly triumphs (although addressing Satan in hell rather than the couple); that in both poems Adam and Eve feel acute pain and sorrow after the Fall; and that as in Avitus the elements are described as revolting against humankind, in

Genesis B Adam details his fear of untamed nature. Ten Brink (1877 pp 106–07) echoed Sievers, calling Books II and III of Avitus the *Genesis B*-poet's main source, while acknowledging free departures from the Latin.

Hönncher (1885 pp 46–55) saw the differences between the two poems as so great as to suggest that the *Genesis B*-poet did not rely upon Avitus at all. In response to Sievers's point that the *Genesis B*-poet agrees with Avitus in narrating the creation of Adam and Eve before narrating Lucifer's fall, Hönncher questioned whether lines 235–45 — which describe God's command to the couple not to eat of a certain tree and the couple's humble response — really belong to *Genesis B* instead of to *Genesis A*, into which *Genesis B* was interpolated. (Here Hönncher stands alone, the consensus being that lines 235–45 do belong to *Genesis B*.) Hönncher also argued, more tellingly, that some parallels between Avitus and *Genesis B* (such as the pain and sorrow Adam and Eve feel after breaking God's command) result from the fact that each poet was relating the same basic story, that some parallels (such as Lucifer's three-line speech of rebellion in heaven in Avitus as against Lucifer's fourteen-line speech in *Genesis B*) vary widely in the number of lines allotted to the respective passages by each poet, and that some parallels (such as the revolt of the elements in Avitus and Adam's feeling of defenselessness in the face of hostile nature in *Genesis B*) are taken from quite dissimilar contexts.

Merrill and McClumpha (1890 p 164) endorsed Hönncher's findings, while Brooke (1892 pp 301–02), showing no knowledge of them, accepted Sievers's argument, as did Koegel (1894 pp 288c–88h). Siebs (1896 pp 138–39) contended that a passage from a Latin poem by Hilarius (see *CPPM* 2.2630) is a more likely source than Avitus for the lines in *Genesis B* in which Adam expresses fear of the elements. Abbetmeyer (1903 pp 23–24) called attention to Sievers's parallels but avoided referring to Avitus as a source for the poet; Behaghel (1903 p xxiii) asserted that no one to date had been able to show that the *Genesis B*-poet used any source other than Scripture; and Klaeber (1913 pp 50–51) cited some of Sievers's parallels but was noncommittal. Bradley (1920 pp 21–22) endorsed Sievers's argument when he called lines 235–45 in *Genesis B* “merely a rendering from a Latin poem by Alcimus Avitus” and found “slight reminiscences of Avitus throughout the poem,” noting in particular that the *Genesis B*-poet follows Avitus in the arrangement of events in the poem's first part. “But here,” said Bradley, “the resemblance ends.” Writing in a *Festschrift* dedicated to Sievers, Berthold (1925 pp 393–401) rejected Sievers's argument, maintaining, like Hönncher, that some of the supposed parallels are not close and that those that are can be explained by a common theological tradition or by the likelihood that two poets writing the same basic story would naturally imagine some details the same way.

In the next 35 years Sievers's argument did not fare well. Although Renwick and Orton (1939 p 201) claimed, “In addition to his biblical source, the poet derived ideas from a Latin poem by Alcimus Avitus,” they did not argue the point, and none of the editors of three editions of *Genesis B* published during the period supported the case for Avitus's influence. Krapp (*ASPR* I) does not mention Avitus in his edition; Timmer (1948 pp 46–47) declared against Avitus as a source for the poet; and Vickrey (1960 pp 68–69) discussed the question without passing judgment.

Evans (1963 pp 12–15), however, argued strongly for the influence of Avitus. Independent of Sievers, he pointed out many of the same parallels Sievers had, including the similarity in the arrangement of themes in the first part of each poem. Also like Sievers, Evans noted the similarity of the speech each poet gives the tempter in exulting over the Fall of Adam and Eve and of the speech each assigns the fallen Adam, who laments that God had created Eve as his partner. While admitting that the two poets narrate very different versions of the temptation, Evans nonetheless observed, “in both the serpent climbs the tree, in both it plucks the fruit before handing it to Eve, and in both the poet acts as a kind of chorus, reminding the reader that the fruit contained death” (compare Berthold 1925 pp 395–97). Schwab (1975 pp 27–82, *passim*) also pointed to similarities between Avitus and *Genesis B*. Besides the like arrangement of events in the first part of the poems, she stressed that both poets employ the theme of *nomen* and *res* — the contrast between the simple name for a concept or object (“death” or “fruit”) and its true reality.

Allen and Calder (1976 pp 3–5) found it “undeniable that Book II of Avitus's poem does describe Satan's defiance and unconquerable desire for revenge in a way remarkably like the description in *Genesis B* and, incidentally, in Milton's *Paradise Lost*,” yet they called the account in *De gestis* only “the closest of the admittedly distant analogues for *Genesis B*.” However, Pearsall (1977 pp 33–34) noted

“tantalizing echoes throughout *Genesis B* of Book II” of Avitus and cited three examples: lines 364b–68a, in which Satan laments that a creature made from earth should be raised above him and know heavenly joy (compare *De gestis* II.89–90); lines 403b–05, in which Satan resolves that, with heaven closed to him, it shall be closed as well for humankind (compare *De gestis* II.108–09); and lines 720–23a, in which Adam and Eve are said to swallow death with the fruit (compare *De gestis* II.232). Despite the echoes, Pearsall acknowledged significant differences between the two accounts.

Nodes (1985 pp 6–7) also noted major differences but, citing Sievers and Evans, was impressed as well by similarities, especially the declaration each poet gives Lucifer that he will build a throne higher in heaven, a parallel also observed by Molinari (1985–86 p 518). “It does indeed seem,” Nodes remarked of the *Genesis B*-poet, “that he knew the poem [of Avitus] and used some of its dramatic qualities, namely those which were suitable to his own purposes.” Lapidge (1986 p 8) flatly asserted, “*Genesis B* is very largely based on Alcimus Avitus.” On the other hand, Doane (1991 pp 98–99) contrasted the literary and theological conservatism of Avitus with the boldness of *Genesis B* and found few “exact parallels of detail and language.” Although citing Evans for important similarities between the two poems, Doane concluded that Evans “probably overestimates the direct influence of Latin poetry in general and of Avitus in particular on *Genesis B*.” He conceded, however, that “the elaborate speeches of defiance and envy by Satan [in Avitus] might have been general models” for the *Genesis B*-poet.

Hönncher and Berthold did well to highlight the differences between the version of the Fall in *De gestis* and that in *Genesis B* (a fact Sievers acknowledged from the start), in exposing the remoteness of some of his parallels, and in pointing out that others are commonplaces or may well be coincidental. Yet no scholar has cited a version of the Fall that comes nearly as close to the first three books of *De gestis* in matching the sequence of narrative elements in the first part of *Genesis B* or in sharing so many significant themes or details — noted by Sievers (1875), Bradley (1920), Evans (1963), Schwab (1975), Pearsall (1977), and Nodes (1985) — however differently implemented. Although probably few would join Lapidge in saying that *Genesis B* is largely based on Avitus, the overall evidence makes it more likely than not that the Latin poem influenced the Old Saxon poet.

Exodus, like *Genesis B*, has kindled controversy on the question of Avitus as a source. The first to advance the claim was Groth (1883 pp 17–18, 22, and 27), who asserted that the *Exodus*-poet — or, as he thought, an interpolator — drew upon *De transitu maris rubri*, the fifth book of *De gestis*, in describing the pillars of cloud and fire. Mürkens (1899 pp 68–77 passim) extended the argument to include parallels concerning Israel’s departure from Egypt, the size and character of Egypt’s army, Pharaoh’s planned attack upon Israel, the death of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, and the introduction to a speech or song of Moses. Blackburn (1907 p 34) gave qualified support to Mürkens, saying that most of his parallels are “mere words or phrases and not entirely certain, but our poet may be indebted to this source for his conception of the pillar of cloud as a defense from heat as well as a guide.” A year later Brandl (1908 p 1028) stated simply that, besides Scripture, the *Exodus*-poet used Avitus as a source.

Moore (1911–12 pp 83–100) criticized Mürkens’s argument in detail, rejecting each parallel as inaccurate or as a commonplace or as a coincidence arising from the fact that the two poets deal with the same subject. So devastating was Moore’s argument that practically every scholar who has given evidence of having read both Mürkens and Moore has accepted Moore’s conclusion: Kennedy (1943 p 177), Irving (1953 p 13), Lucas (1977 p 53), Ferguson (1977 pp 34–37), and Hauer (1978 p 39, but see also pp 246 and 252–53). A special case is Riggio (1972). Although aware of Moore’s essay (p 227), she neither confirmed nor denied his conclusion, her object being to compare the Latin and Old English poems as literary works. Riggio found similarities in the poets’ use of epic digressions and shifting perspective and in their treatment of the pillars of cloud and fire, but she claimed no more than that “a common exegetical tradition” underlies each work (pp. 251–60).

Not everyone read Moore. Those who show no knowledge of his essay include Sarrazin (1913 p 46), who declared that the *Exodus*-poet seems to have depended more on Avitus as a source than on the Book of Exodus; Imelmann (1920 pp 391–92 and 401), who referred to Avitus as a source for the *Exodus*-poet; and Pearsall (1977 p 35), who — without actually claiming that the Old English poet knew the Latin poem — remarked that the “richly decorative language” of *Exodus* “certainly suggests the influence of Book V” of Avitus.

Moore demonstrated that Mürkens had not made a convincing case for *De transitu* as a source for the *Exodus*-poet. Mürkens's case, however, was not very strong to begin with. In “*De transitu maris rubri* as a Source for Old English *Exodus*: A Reconsideration,” Hall (1987) refined four of Mürkens's parallels and added several more. According to Hall, four parallels between *De transitu* and *Exodus* are found in other works as well but not in Scripture: 1) the cloud-pillar as a defense against the sun's heat, 2) the explicit statement that the fire-pillar scattered the darkness, 3) the dusky complexion of the Egyptian army, and 4) the detail in the description of the Egyptians' sea-death that the water was full of weapons. *De transitu* and *Exodus* are the only accounts of the Red Sea crossing, Hall argued, in which ten other parallels occur. The parallels fall into various categories. Two parallels appear in quite different contexts in the poems: 1) reference to “mournful heaven” and 2) comparison of the number of Israelites to the multitude of sea-waves. Six parallels occur in the same context but are implemented somewhat differently by the two poets: 3) the Egyptians' eagerness to attack at night despite their plan to wait until dawn, 4) their forfeiting their choice to retreat once they had entered the sea, 5) the binding imagery used to describe their death by water, 6) the image of them as bleeding as they drown, 7) the image of the sword of punishment at the Red Sea, and 8) Pharaoh's discovery of God's greater might. Finally, two parallels — 9) Israel's rejoicing as it follows the cloud pillar and 10) the image of the Egyptians' spears as a forest — occur in the same context and are implemented essentially the same way by either poet. Hall admitted that differences in context and implementation among the parallels preclude any certainty that *De transitu* is a source for *Exodus* but found it reasonable to conclude that the Old English poet knew the Latin poem and “employed it as he did Scripture, borrowing images and themes and frequently refashioning them to tell an oft-told tale in a new way” (p A-59).

Speirs (1990) took note of Moore's and Hall's papers. Her purpose, however, was not to argue for or against *De transitu* as a source for *Exodus* but to explore stylistic and conceptual differences between the poems: “Although I, too, locate parallels, it is the contrast in the ways the ‘Christian Virgil’ and the Old English poet handle their material — more specifically, their descriptions of the pillars, of the rest-camp of the Israelites, and of the parting of the sea — that has something to tell us about the aesthetics and meaning of *Exodus*” (p 145). That *De transitu* can illuminate *Exodus* in various ways is clear from the studies of Riggio and Speirs. But whether the Old English poet knew Avitus remains controversial. *Exodus*, like *Genesis B*, resists the identification of sources, the most notable characteristic of original poets being originality.

Lapidge (1986 p 7, 2006b) demonstrated that Anglo-Saxon students studied Latin biblical epics, including Avitus's *De gestis*, as part of the monastic Latin curriculum. He argued that Anglo-Saxon poets used the Latin biblical epics as models for Anglo-Latin and Old English poetry. He specifically noted how *De gestis* and *Exodus* share parallel figural imagery of the Red Sea crossing and the drowning of the Egyptians (2006b pp 17–28) and the device of hypallage (2006a). Building on Lapidge's argument that Anglo-Saxon poets studied Latin biblical epics, Wilcox (2006) explored how the narrative structures and rhetorical devices in *Genesis A* and *Exodus* employ generic conventions of Christian Latin epics, noting particular parallels in characterizations, speeches, and ecphrases among *Genesis A*, *Exodus*, and *De gestis*. Wilcox argued that the Anglo-Saxon poets were motivated to produce their own vernacular biblical epics because they learned strategies of literary inculturation by studying Latin biblical epics. Wilcox demonstrated that Anglo-Saxon poets probably were influenced by multiple Latin biblical epics while simultaneously adapting the biblical narratives to appeal to Anglo-Saxon audiences and that these complex creative processes complicate unraveling precise verbal parallels, the most typical method of source study.

Scholars believing that Old English poets drew upon Avitus can, however, do better than they have. The need now is for truly comprehensive studies of Old English poetry in relation to *De gestis*. Shea (1997) has provided a complete translation of the Latin poem, which, for non-specialists, presents various difficulties, and scholars are well positioned to undertake comparative studies of breadth and detail. Shea's translation, however, tends to be free, and earlier, partial translations will still prove useful. The most important ones are by Schippers (1945; Book I, Dutch); Kirkconnell (1952; about two-fifths of Book I, three-fifths of Book II, and selected passages from Books III and V, English); Kuhnmuensch (1929; selected passages from Books I, II, and III, English); Allen and Calder (1976; more than two-thirds of Book II and the first 26 lines of Book III, English); Clément (1857; about half of Book I and from a

fifth to two-fifths of the other books, French); and Costanza (1971, about three-fifths of Books I and II and a quarter of the other books, Italian). An enlightening study of *De gestis* itself, including copious reference to previous scholarship, has been produced by Roberts (1978 pp 342–87; see also Roberts 1983 and 1985). There is need for a similar study of *De laude*.

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