

Mateusz Fafinski  
Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut  
Freie Universität Berlin<sup>1</sup>

## Faraway, So Close: Liminal Thinking and the Use of Geography in Old English *Orosius*

**Słowa kluczowe:** wczesne średniowiecze; narratologia; historia uniwersalna; język staroangielski; peryferia.

**Keywords:** Early Middle Ages; narratology; Old English; periphery; universal history.

### Introduction. A Peripheral Duality<sup>2</sup>

The Old English *Orosius* is an early medieval adaptation of Paulus Orosius' *Historiae Adversum Paganos*. The exact date and place of creation of this text have been contested – notwithstanding its earlier association with King Alfred, it is now assumed to be slightly later in date, probably written early in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> This text can be seen as a work between two extremes. Mary Kate Hurley has brilliantly explicated the conflicted temporalities of the text and the fluctuating nature of its narrator. (Hurley, 2013) She writes about the two “nows” present in the text – the now of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the now of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. (Hurley, 2013, p. 405–406) These temporal planes (that for methodological ease and to stress their linguistic aspect I shall call *nunc* for the 5<sup>th</sup> and *nu* for the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries) constitute two extremities of its narrative. But those planes also intertwine and create a liminal space in which the demarcations are less sharp – a narrative twilight in which the periphery swells and gains new importance. The broader the periphery is

---

<sup>1</sup> Mateusz Fafinski, Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut, Freie Universität Berlin, Koserstr. 20, 14195 Berlin, mateusz.fafinski@fu-berlin.de, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1637-8174>.

<sup>2</sup> The author would like to thank Sarah Schlüssel and Jakob Riemenschneider for their helpful comments on the draft of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> See Godden 2011; arguments for a slightly earlier dating can be found in Bately 2014; as for the ‘Alfredian’ authorship of the text it has actually never been widely accepted and was thoroughly disproved in Liggins 1970.

the less defined it has to be – but also, it can contain much more meaning. The text gains through those divided temporalities a peripheral duality – it is stretched between two poles both chronologically and geographically. This duality makes the Old English *Orosius* an exercise in liminal thinking – a practice of defining the centre from the periphery. Looking at the text of the Old English *Orosius* through that lens, in hope of better understanding its motives, shall be the guiding research principle of this article.

In this paper, I will look at the Old English *Orosius* from a narrative point of view, and try to trace the shards of liminal thinking understood as a narrative practice. Through an analysis of the narrative strategies of the composite Adaptor<sup>4</sup> we will try to see the way in which this text was forged out of the periphery and how liminality, in its many forms, played a crucial role in the Adaptor's ideological programme. Finally, we shall see how the inclusion of the accounts of voyages by Ohthere and Wulfstan is not a mere afterthought but a plausible continuation of this programme.

Why is the Adaptor so concerned with the expansion of the periphery? My goal in this article is to show that the Old English *Orosius* exhibits a remarkable preoccupation with the liminal. Not just liminal in a narrow, geographical sense, but also liminal on a manuscript page and liminal in linguistic understanding. This is not a coincidence. To see this, a combined methodological approach needs to be applied, looking at the Old English *Orosius* both as a product of a broader narrative tradition and as a tool in the very current early medieval debates on periphery and universality. To achieve this, we need to use both historiographic methods – placing the work of the Adaptor in a broader context – as well as a narratological analysis of the text itself. Through this approach, we might be able to better understand the role of the liminal in the text of the Old English *Orosius*.

## The Textual Margin and a Geographical Periphery

The work of the Adaptor was possible thanks to a number of developments. The particular historical context in which the text has been created plays a crucial part. Maybe the most important of those developments (apart from the very existence of *Historiae adversum paganos* and

---

<sup>4</sup> The question of who was the author of Old English *Orosius* and in what context the work was created has been discussed and summarised by Godden (Godden, 2012), although no doubt it will attract further considerations. In this text I have decided to use the term “Adaptor”, as it stresses the curatorial practices embedded in the making of the text and the creative nature of their translation. We might not know the *name* or *names* of the Adaptor, but, as this article tries to show, we can actually say quite a lot about their motivations and practices. They are, therefore, anonymous only in the narrowest sense of the word.

the practice of Old English vernacular literature) is to be found before the work on the Old English text even commenced. The long tradition of glossing Orosius forms, upon close reading of the Old English *Orosius*, the key to its creation. As Godden has established, the Adaptor has probably worked from a copy of *Historiae* made somewhere on the Continent, perhaps in an East Francian milieu. (Godden, 2011) Therefore, they were part of a narrative community which had its own preoccupations and areas of focus. The glosses were of course connected, but not necessarily constrained, by the original goals and concerns of Orosius. The Adaptor, together with the Continental glossators, formed what we could call a narrative community – a group sharing similar narrative strategies that arose from their particular preoccupations and guided their writing. This community has pushed the periphery (both geographically and cognitively) further than Orosius had imagined or intended. The membership of that community gave the Adaptor a mediated access to classical works they could not have possessed in Britain. Some of the results of those strategies were incorporated in the body of the Old English text, thus re-centering them from the margins and putting the outcomes of liminal thinking at the very heart of their undertaking. From their perspective, the antique sources used to expand the original narrative of Orosius existed as a textual periphery – as glosses and marginalia – and by incorporating them inside the text of their adaptation, they bring them back to the centre. This narrative circle was preoccupied not only geographically but also textually with the same subjects as the peripheries of the Carolingian world – but understood, thanks to their textual interests, as an extension of Rome. This community (and the strategies that it developed) was very much an imagined one, driven by the shared experience of texts read and knowledge passed but very much composed of people who had no direct contact with each other (Anderson 2006, p. 6–7).

There are other reasons why the glossing tradition was important. Godden's theory that the source text of the Adaptor was a heavily glossed East Francian manuscript of *Historiae* might also help to explain the occasional Hungarians and Bulgarians appearing in the text – the “near Others” of the Carolingian world (OEO, p. 291). The geographical interests in those glosses might reflect the preoccupations of an unknown St Gall glossator (Lozovsky, 2006, p. 340–346). Those glosses are also, in turn, the results of the narrative community's remarkable preoccupations with a geographical periphery, looking over the liminal and through the porous membrane that simultaneously divided and connected the “inside” and the “outside” of the imperial worlds of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. “Insides” and “outsides” are, of course, relative and forced terms.

The text itself is characterised sometimes by an extreme fluidity of classifications. To see a glaring example, one needs to look no further than the Adaptor's description of "Germania", itself possibly also rooted in an East Frankish tradition (Godden, 2011, p. 316). That definition was extremely broad, encompassing land from the Don to the Rhine, but specifically excluded Britain<sup>5</sup> (OEO, 2016, p. 33). Geographical descriptors are constructed by the Adaptor within the narrative community, but with a relative ease and flexibility.

The Adaptor gained their knowledge from the margin and from the intertextual space, where the glosses are nesting – i.e. from a layout periphery. This connection should not surprise us, as the textual periphery and the practice of Old English translation are very closely intertwined. Enough to think here of the Leiden glossary and how the practice (and experience) of a commentary gloss linked the patristic and historical works of Late Antiquity (the *nunc*) with the vernacular *nu*. The particular interest of the Leiden glossary in Late Antiquity works is a great example of such practice<sup>6</sup> (Lapidge, 2008, p. 33). The periphery of a text forms the connective tissue of the narrative community – the Old English *Orosius* is quite literally born out of a textual fringe.

The fluid nature of both the text and form of Old English *Orosius* is perhaps its defining feature, obscured by just two complete surviving manuscript witnesses of the adaptation. The mouldable phase of the text of Old English *Orosius* lasts not only between the Late Roman Empire and the early medieval England (accommodating, so to speak, the textual criticism on the *Historiae*), but longer, into its manuscript receptions. It is possible that the accounts of Ohthere and Wulfstan's voyages to the East were added after the initial translation was completed, possibly at the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> Their addition could have been the final touch in the creation of the historiographical product that we read today. When, therefore, we speak of the authorship of the text, we need to keep in mind the essentially composite nature of the Adaptor. The creator persona of the Old English *Orosius* should be seen not as one trans-

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps worth mentioning here is that the trope of understanding Old English *Orosius* as a "Germanic" history is misleading. The notion of what the Adaptor and their contemporaries could understand as "Germanic" is difficult to express in modern terms. Moreover, the perceived affinity toward the Goths in the Old English narrative does not have to and, indeed, should not be seen in strict ethnic terms. Simply put, what we might interpret as "Germanic" is often our projection of modern misconceptions.

<sup>6</sup> Leiden glossary, as quite conclusively shown by (Lapidge, 2015) on the basis of manuscript evidence, was a through and through insular product.

<sup>7</sup> For Godden's arguments see: (OEO, p. 432). Valtonen is more cautious, pointing that the account might have been based on notes created "before, after or during the translation (Valtonen 2008, p. 272) also noting the lack of their stylistic adaptation (Valtonen 2008, p. 276).

lator but a community of interpreters that worked over an extended period of time.

This practice of continuous adaptation can help us to better understand the motivations of the Adaptor, as it did not end with the translation being finished. We need to look at the manuscript transmissions and the way the text was used and moulded afterwards. The inclusion of a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle C* after the Old English *Orosius* in the Cotton Tiberius B i.<sup>8</sup> serves as an example of this custom. This inclusion does not necessarily mean that the compiler of the manuscript understood Rome as fallen and England as its replacement (Discenza, 2017, p. 110). What it does suggest is a form of a narrative continuity between those two texts. This marvellous superposition of the two – which is just another argument for more manuscript-centred readings of medieval texts – should place *Englaland* as an extension of the Roman world in the eyes of the creators.<sup>9</sup>

In such reading, in which codicology is a part of the narrative as well, we can see the continuous adaptation of *Historiae* as a process close to the original purpose of Orosius, which can be summarised as follows: Rome is the empire that accepted Christianity. Even though it has many failings it is, in the Orosian sense of history, the fourth and final empire. What the Adaptor makes clear, especially in the geographical excursus, is that Rome's survival was possible because of its transformation. By mutating its meaning, adapting itself, and becoming an empire of an expanding periphery, Rome transcended its geographical borders. Far from being fallen – some scholars have suggested that the Adaptor saw Rome as collapsed (Harris, 2004, p. 93–100) – the empire lives on in its new form.<sup>10</sup> *Englaland* is an extension of this new form and it is visible not only in the textual but also in the manuscript layer.

The city of Rome may have decayed but it is simultaneously protected by “Christian faith” (OEO, 2016, p. 119). After all the Adaptor, in a curatorial decision, omitted the sack of Rome from their version and, as we shall see, replaced it with a narrative of repossessing the periphery. What

<sup>8</sup> Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe has conclusively proven, on the basis of a codicological analysis of the manuscript, that Cotton Tiberius B i. constituted a unit before Cotton acquired the manuscript in the sixteenth century and that it was the Chronicle text has been added to the Orosius text and not the other way round (O'Brien O'Keeffe, 1998, p. 139–143) The collators of the manuscripts are just as valid members of the narrative community of the Adaptor as the East Frankish glossators.

<sup>9</sup> England as a term of difficult applicability was very well laid out by (Discenza, 2017, p. 8–9). I prefer the term introduced by Nicolas Howe, *Englaland*, as it conveys the distance which divides our understanding of England from the England of *nu* (Howe, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> A slightly different interpretation has been proposed by (Leneghan, 2015) who, mostly on the basis of the Lauderdale manuscript, sees Old English Orosius as a West Saxon imperial history.

the city represented, with its decaying walls, has not been superseded but it has been transformed. Hence, in further curatorial intervention, Orosius' boastful and factually untrue (but narratively crucial) mentions of Christ being a Roman citizen (Orosius, 2010, p. 262) and of the ubiquity of Roman laws everywhere in the world (Orosius, 2010, p. 209) were removed. Those are untenable claims in the *nu*. The periphery of the world has shifted – it now includes a large liminal zone, where *Roman* has a different meaning. Thanks to this process of continuously adapting the liminal space, the extent of this world is much broader. It encompasses most of the known world, while for Orosius it was just a thin fringe.

The Adaptor's understanding of the acute sense of change in their world is visible in the language they used. The history remains common, but because of the shifted peripheries the world to which this history applies has to be described differently. The Mediterranean for example is no longer “the sea, which we call Our sea” – “mare hoc quod dicimus Nostrum” (Orosius, 2010, p. 37) but “Wendelsæ”<sup>11</sup> (OEO, 2016, p. 24). It is interesting to contrast those changes of geographical parlance with the retained use of the phrase “our ancestors” that opens both texts. The connection with Rome is, in a narrative sense, unbroken. But the world has transformed and the Adaptor is ready to acknowledge this. The changing geographical circumstances are not an argument against the continuation of Roman heritage. The Adaptor remains here a historian and uses that role to retain a function of a “cultural broker” (Reimitz 2014) between the worlds of the *nunc* and the *nu*.

## Liminal Thinking

Already the original text of *Historiae* looked with a certain sympathy on the events and peoples on the periphery of the Roman world (Merrills, 2005, p. 55). The inhabitants of the fringe were seen at times as peaceful and were even ever so slightly idealised for narrative purposes. The Adaptor was thus working with a text already geared towards the margins. In this respect, what they did is a continuation of the tradition set by the Late Antique historian.<sup>12</sup> But while Orosius' purpose was polemical, the

<sup>11</sup> On the meaning of “Wendelsæ” see (Kuhn, 1975, p. 28; Woodworth, 1891, p. 135); cognate to Old High German *wentilseo* it might mean the sea of the Vandals – in itself a great example of liminal thinking, where it is the periphery, or rather its inhabitants, that give the name to a central region.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, such geographical continuities have been put forward in the past and attempts have been made to trace shards of Late Antique geographical knowledge in the description of the *nu* periphery, see (Linderski, 1964).

purpose of the Adaptor was less defined. Imperial elements might have been at play – perhaps a form of West Saxon ideological narrative in the vernacular idiom (Leneghan, 2015, pp. 679–690). The Adaptor was less interested in showing the peaceful edge as a counterpoint to the warring centre, which seemed to have been the purpose of Orosius' sympathetic description. Instead, they show the periphery as a vital and necessary element of the world as a whole. It is less a matter of contrast and more of the understanding of totality. Nevertheless, the Adaptor took a strong cue from Orosius in making what appears in their peripheral vision as sharp and fully fledged as possible (Merrills, 2005, p. 98). They went even further than that – they made the margin much more fleshed out than the centre itself. The world of *nu* is a world where those two coexist on much more equal terms.

In the world of Old English *Orosius*, periphery is a crucial concept as it establishes the perimeter inside which history will happen. The very first sentence of the work puts periphery on the central stage:

Ure ylðran ealne þysne ymbhwyrft þyses middangeardes, cwæþ Orosius, swa swa Oceanus ymbligeþ utan, þone man garsegc hataþ [...]

Orosius said that our ancestors divided the whole expanse of this world into three parts, surrounded by the sea called Oceanus [...]. (OEO, p. 25)

The world is surrounded by Oceanus. The very place where this history is to unfold is defined by its periphery, by *garsegc*. For history to happen, it is necessary to delineate its stage. The word *garsegc* is able to contain many meanings (Bately, 1972, p. 48), but to start with the one that stresses its connotations with a boundary is striking. It is difficult not to see it as a conscious decision.

There is no preface at the beginning of Old English *Orosius*, which has been noted as an aberration, as it is often in the prefaces of Old English adaptations that a crucial ideological programme is laid out. (Discenza, 2002) We do not know if the original Adaptor intended a preface for the text, but the later copyists (who, as we have established, are co-creators of the narrative of Old English *Orosius*) left the text without one.

Skipping the preface and jumping straight into the geographical description of the world reinforces the notion that history is a spatial phenomenon, bound to the material *cosmos* where it happens. This notion of spatial history is already a very important feature of the *Historiae*, but for the Adaptor it takes centre stage. Regularly they put it as a main theme of their work, closely knit with the universal aspirations. But for the Adaptor, the geographical knowledge that underlines the writing of history was dynamic. When they described the limits of Europe, they

wrote “swa we hit firmest witan” – “as far as they are known” (OEO, 2016, p. 32–33), conveying that in their narrative, the nature of geographical knowledge is changing. It is interesting to contrast this with Orosius who readily acknowledged his own ignorance: “as far as I am able” (Orosius, 2010, p. 123), but perceived geographical knowledge more as a static phenomenon. For the Adaptor, the limits of what is known are expandable. This might be influenced by their experience of the peripheral and, as we shall see, might find its fullest expression in the account of the journey of Ohthere and Wulfstan. Moreover, this strategy made the geographical section into a section fulfilling the role normally taken by a preface. Here the liminal thinking ideological programme is laid out.

The Adaptor understood that their geographical knowledge had not only a different focus but also a larger scope than the one of Orosius himself. To what extent they put *Englaland* in the centre and the rest of the world in the periphery is debatable. What is clearer is that when describing the geography of the known world, the Adaptor busied themselves with the limits of the *Roman* world understood as the world known to the successors of Rome. This has a particular narrative and historiographical reasoning. In this narrative, *Englaland* is a conductor, an extension (maybe the most important one) of the Roman world. Through it, the limits of what is known can be pushed further. In the *nu*, with the inclusion of the Continental material, the narrative of the Old English *Orosius* becomes also a repository of the expanded geographical knowledge of the East Frankish glossators. The Adaptor understood well that the empire (Roman and Christian) is defined by its periphery, especially in the historical sense. The periphery, the liminal, is the only zone that has the potential to further its reach – a notion especially acute in Britain with its history of conversion.

The world between the *nunc* and *nu* has also evolved. Whether one can say that it also expanded is perhaps a more complicated question – it assumes a questionable notion of “discovery”. What we *can* say is that the focus shifted and what was and what was not in the zone of peripheral vision changed. The work of the Adaptor did not exist in isolation from those developments.

While the text of *Historiae* can be seen as a “universal history” because of its apparent scope, but it really is not, as suggested by Nuffelen. Not because it does not *pretend* to be, but because both their sources and their method of composition are narrower in scope (Nuffelen, 2012, p. 171–175). In other words, *Historiae* might be an attempt at writing a universal history, but ultimately does not fully deliver. The geographical universal digression of book I.2 has been rightly contextualised as actually rather



self-contained and small in proportion compared to the rest of the work (Merrills, 2005, p. 98; Nuffelen, 2012, p. 176).

The Adaptor adjusted those proportions. The geographical section is expanded, made into the opening of the whole text, and because other portions are abridged it gains a more prominent place. Through those changes they made another attempt at a universal history after all. The expansion of the known (or rather: described) world in the geographical section serves universalist purposes as well. Moving the periphery allows for an inclusion of a more diverse world. For the Adaptor, there was no contradiction between universality and a variety of experiences for the successors of Rome. This inner plurality that might baffle us when reading the text of Old English *Orosius* now is actually a “basis for unity” (Todorov, 2010, p. 174) undermining the narrative of common inheritance. The vernacular idiom is very much part of that plurality, as is the practice of translation.

It can be argued that such take on universal ambitions can only be maintained *because* the point of view of the narrative is placed in the periphery. Retaining liminal thinking does not mean being excluded from the centre. Similar to early medieval Irish history writers, the Adaptor saw themselves as fully integrated into the wider Christian and (post-) Roman world.<sup>13</sup> It is the liminal position and the use of liminal (in the geographical and textual sense) sources and preoccupations that allowed them to engage in the exercise of expanding the periphery. Far from being an expression of intellectual subservience towards the perceived Roman “centre”, the adaptation of *Orosius* into Old English is actually an embodiment of universal ambitions. In this it is reminiscent of the universalist practices of Bede (Moore, 2012). Those texts form postcards from the edge of the universalist world that *through* their position remain crucial for upholding its centre. In this case, it is from the periphery that the means of narrative production are controlled.

There is a keen understanding in the text that without the periphery this world cannot exist. The narrative of universal aspirations requires liminal spaces, and the Adaptor puts great effort into rewriting the geographical section. The resulting account shows very acutely how important the process of re-establishing the spatial strata for writing universal history is. There are many levels of the liminal in the geographical section of Old English *Orosius* – internal ones that order it, and external ones that define its reach.

---

<sup>13</sup> On Irish history writing as simultaneously peripheral in location and central in scope see (Mhaonaigh, 2017).

The Adaptor's ability to use geographical argumentation (drawn both from *nu* and from *nunc*) to make a historical point in their own *nu* is quite sophisticated. At the same time, their understanding of universality is different than that of Orosius – it encompasses for them the periphery as well. Another shot at universality as a concept in history is possible only by re-establishing the liminal, but this time *from* a liminal position – geographically and linguistically. The Adaptor, in a way, has achieved a more universal effect than Orosius by binding the meaning of universal and Roman in a looser way. Thus, the Adaptor could give the “core” – understood as Christianity – a vitality of an expanding periphery. It makes for a very urgent understanding of history as something happening in the *nu*, but at the same time is, essentially, part of the Roman *praxis*. By establishing what is known and dividing it from the unknown in the narrative the Adaptor followed the classical examples. Keeping the largely secular idiom of Orosius through the expanding periphery paradigm, the Adaptor wrote an *expanding* history. A remarkable feat.

Pointedly, the Old English *Orosius* does not end with the sack of Rome, but with a “dispersion into the peripheries”, an act quite potent in light of the expanding world from the geographical chapter at the beginning.

Sippon sæten þa Gotan þær on lande, sume be þæs casares willan, sume his unwillan; sume hi foran on Isnapiae, and þær gesætan, sume on Affrice.

Subsequently the Goths settled in that land, some at the emperor's wish, some against his will and some went to Spain and settled there, and some went to Africa. (OEO, pp. 414–415)

This ending is far from coincidental. Reluctant to depict the sack of Rome, the Adaptor nevertheless showed that the emperor's will is waning. But most importantly, the Goths went to the boundaries of what was Roman in the *nunc*. Orosius' preoccupation with Spain – given his roots – is understandable. But for the Adaptor, this was also a narrative method. Read with the geographical introduction in mind, it becomes an almost circular narrative device in which history morphs back into geography.

## Re-establishing the Periphery

The periphery is also an interface, a creative and fruitful one, both geographically and textually. The notion of the periphery as a porous membrane that allows the introduction of new impulses was not unknown to the Adaptor. The inclusion of the report on Northern and Eastern voyages is, in this respect, even if a later addition, far from being an

afterthought. In the narrative structure it balances the continental preoccupations about the liminal zone east of the Continental world with the liminal precinct of *Englaland* itself. Those two are subtly bound together through elements like the introduction of “Wisle land” (OEO, p. 35) before the actual account of the voyages. The account of Wulfstan is also connecting in its preoccupation and geographical scope – it seems to align more with the preoccupations of the Continental glossators. This puts the two peripheral zones together and interlocks them on a common ground of a geographical description. They become grounded in the tradition of Adaptor’s narrative community.

In the mind of the East Francian glossators, the liminal is not a sterile region. The same applies to the liminal of the Adaptor. It bustles with activity. Even when described as an uninhabited “weste land”, it is actually full of “fishers, fowlers and hunters” (OEO, p. 39). The periphery is there not to terrify with *horror vacui* but rather to show the expanse of the world. From a narrative point of view, the Adaptor made their purpose clear right away: Ohthere wants to “find out how far the country extended northward” (OEO, p. 37). What might seem to us as an inconsistency in the narrative is also a device, allowing for the dual character of the periphery to shine through.

This understanding – to be able to establish a periphery in the *nu* is to wield power – is striking. The periphery in the accounts of Ohthere and Wulfstan does not only expand the “known” world from the *Englaland* point of view. It also allows, through the establishment of a boundary, to establish the universal. The reports of the voyages are more than a mere curiosity. Nicole Guenther Discenza wrote about them as crucial in re-centering England (Discenza, 2017, p. 111). And although it is a valid and crucial interpretation, another one can be put forward: while Ohthere and Wulfstan<sup>14</sup> do retain their point of reference in the geographical strata of *Englaland*, their function in the historical narrative is different. Their report serves as a vehicle for re-establishing the periphery. And it is done with an almost Herodotian flair (even though the works of the Greek historian could not have been known to them<sup>15</sup>) and a realisation of their own limitations:

Fela spella him sædon þa Beormas ægþer ge of hiera agnum lande ge of þæm landum þe ymb hie utan wæron, ac he nyste hwæt þæs soþes wæs, for þæm he hit self ne geseah.

<sup>14</sup> If indeed they were two separate travelers, see (Cuesta and Silva, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Herodotus nevertheless circulated in what Bruce so aptly called “shards”, i.e. the stories from his works existed at the edge of the early medieval authors’ peripheral vision – in glosses, secondary accounts and (sometimes unattributed) fragments. See (Bruce, 2018).

The Biarmians told him lots of stories about their own country and about the territory around them, but he didn't know what the truth was since he hadn't seen it himself. (OEO, p. 39)

This liminal character of the reports is visible to the very conclusion. The accounts end with a description of a different kind of liminal experience – that of the funeral rites of the Ests. It is from there that we jump in the narrative almost straight back to Constantinople, one of the perceived centres of both the *nunc* of Orosius and the *nu* of the Adaptor. Thus, the accounts of the voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan, far from being mere curiosities, serve as one of the geographical founding blocks of writing history. Their actuality (existing in the *nu*) makes them crucial for presenting how the world had expanded since the *nunc* and how universal history is still a possibility.

## Conclusions

There is an almost cunning quality to the way in which the Old English *Orosius* makes use of the assets of the periphery. From the use of descriptions of the geographical fringe to set a stage for the writing of history as a universal activity, to the exploration of a layout periphery (in form of glosses) to connect with the resources of the past. But when we speak of the identity of the Adaptor, we actually need to speak of a whole composite tradition, a process and not a person. Even that process does not exist in isolation – it is a product of a particular narrative community, which influences the ways in which texts are read, written and adapted.

A process can only be captured in a plurality of approaches. Liminal thinking – a particular ideological programme underwriting the geographical portions of Old English *Orosius* – can be analysed only in a multilateral methodological landscape. By bringing the Adaptor's interest in the periphery to the fore we can appreciate the practice of early medieval translation and see it as a creative act. We can also see that the inclusion of the voyage reports of Ohthere and Wulfstan was driven by more than a mere curiosity – that it was part of a narrative strategy.

Through the employment of liminal thinking as a strategy the Adaptor occupies many functions: that of a curator of knowledge (which they re-center from the margins of the text into its body), that of a historian as a broker (through negotiating traditions of both *nunc* and *nu*), and also as a political writer (through using the re-establishing of the periphery as an argument for the placing of *Englaland* on the universal stage). Their collective nature – as part of a narrative community – does not obscure

their individual achievement: the text of the Old English *Orosius* that we read today.

The Old English *Orosius* is a fundamental work not in spite of its peripheral nature but *because* of its remarkable preoccupation with the liminal. Through liminal thinking, it remains close to its inspirations, sources and topics, and manages to bind together not only different temporalities but also different spaces.

## TAK DALEKO, TAK BLISKO: MYŚLENIE GRANICZNE A GEOGRAFIA W STAROANGIELSKIEJ WERSJI OROZJUSZA

(STRESZCZENIE)

W artykule podjęto próbę analizy roli peryferii w staroangielskiej wersji Orozjusza, skupiając się szczególnie na sposobach użycia geografii jako narzędzia w pisaniu historii we wczesnym średniowieczu. Poprzez analizę źródeł tekstu oraz praktyk kuratorskich użytych przy jego adaptacji została podkreślona kluczowa rola jego liminalnego charakteru oraz złożona natura autora. W ostatniej części fragment opisujący podróżę Ohthere i Wulfstana został przedstawiony jako przykład praktycznego zastosowania przeanalizowanych praktyk.

## FARAWAY, SO CLOSE: LIMINAL THINKING AND THE USE OF GEOGRAPHY IN OLD ENGLISH *OROSIUS*

(SUMMARY)

This article investigates the role of the periphery in the Old English *Orosius* with a particular focus on the use of geography as a device for writing history in the Early Middle Ages. By analyzing the sources and curatorial practices employed in the adaptation of the text, the crucial role of its liminal character is stressed, as well as the composite nature of its authorship. Finally, the excursus on the voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan is shown as a practical employment of the analyzed practices.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson Benedict R.O., 2006, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Verso, London.
- Bately Janet M., 1972, *The relationship between geographical information in the Old English Orosius and Latin texts other than Orosius*, *Anglo-Saxon England* 1, 45–62.
- Bately Janet M., 2014, “*The Old English Orosius*”, in: Discenza Nicole Guenther and Paul E. Szarmach (Eds.), *A Companion to Alfred the Great. Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition* 58, Leiden: Brill, 313–343.

- Bruce Scott G., 2018, *The Dark Age of Herodotus: Shards of a Fugitive History in Early Medieval Europe*. *Speculum* 94, 47–67.
- Cuesta Julia F., Silva Inmaculada S., 2000, *Ohthere and Wulfstan: One or Two Voyagers at the Court of King Alfred?* *Studia Neophilologica* 72, 18–23.
- Discenza Nicole Guenther, 2017, *Inhabited Spaces: Anglo-Saxon Constructions of Place.*, University of Toronto Press.
- Discenza Nicole Guenther, 2002, *The Old English Bede and the Construction of Anglo-Saxon Authority*, *Anglo-Saxon England* 31, 69–80.
- Godden Malcolm R., 2012, *The Old English Orosius and its Context: who wrote it, for whom, and why?* *Quaestio Insularis* 12, 1–30.
- Godden Malcolm R., 2011, *The Old English Orosius and its Sources*. *Anglia – Zeitschrift für englische Philologie* 129, 297–320.
- Harris Stephen, 2004, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, Routledge.
- Howe Nicolas, 2008, *Englaland and the postcolonial void*, in: *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography*, Yale University Press, New Haven, p. 75–100.
- Hurley Mary K., 2013, *Alfredian Temporalities: Time and Translation in the Old English Orosius*, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 112, 405–432.
- Kuhn Hans, 1975, *Dies und das zum Hildebrandslied*, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 104, 21–31.
- Lapidge Michael, 2015, *St Gallen and the “Leiden Glossary”*. *Anglia* 133, 624–655.
- Lapidge Michael, 2008, *The Anglo-Saxon library*, Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford.
- Leneghan Francis, 2015, *Translatio Imperii: The Old English Orosius and the Rise of Wessex*, *Anglia* 133, 656–705.
- Liggins Elizabeth M. 1970, *The Authorship of the Old English Orosius*. *Anglia* 88, 289–322.
- Linderski Jerzy, 1964, *Alfred the Great and the Tradition of Ancient Geography*, *Speculum* 39, 434–439.
- Lozovsky Natalia, 2006, *Roman Geography and Ethnography in the Carolingian Empire*, *Speculum* 81, 325–364.
- Merrills A.H., 2005, *History and geography in late antiquity*, Cambridge studies in medieval life and thought. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Mhaonaigh Mhaire N., 2017, *The Peripheral Centre: Writing History on the Western “Fringe.”* *Interfaces: A Journal of Medieval European Literatures* 59–84.
- Moore Michael E. Hoenicke, 2012, *Bede’s Devotion to Rome: The Periphery Defining the Center*, in: Lebecq Stéphane, Perrin Michel, Szerwiniak Olivier (Eds.), *Bède Le Vénérable : Entre Tradition et Postérité*, Histoire et Littérature Du Septentrion (IRHiS). Publications de l’Institut de recherches historiques du Septentrion, Lille, p. 199–208.
- Nuffelen Peter van, 2012, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History*, Oxford early Christian studies. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- O’Brien O’Keeffe K., 1998, *Reading the C-Text: the after-lives of London*, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. i, in: Pulsiano P., Treharne E.M. (Eds.), *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts and Their Heritage*, Ashgate, Aldershot, p. 137–160.

- OEO = Godden Malcolm R. (Tran.), 2016, *The Old English History of the World. An Anglo-Saxon Rewriting of Orosius*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 44, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts. (throughout: OEO)
- Orosius Paulus, 2010, *Seven books of history against the Pagans*, Translated texts for historians, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool.
- Reimitz H., 2014, *The Historian as Cultural Broker in the Late and Post-Roman West*, in: Wood Ian, Fischer A. (Eds.), *Western Perspectives on the Mediterranean: Cultural Transfer in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 400-800 AD*, Bloomsbury, London, 41–54.
- Todorov Tzvetan, 2010, *The fear of barbarians: beyond the clash of civilizations*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London.
- Valtonen I., 2008, *The North in the Old English Orosius: a geographical narrative in context*, Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique de Helsinki. Société Néophilologique, Helsinki.
- Woodworth Richard B., 1891, *Wendelsä*, Modern Language Notes 6, 135–136.

