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“Their Souls Will Shine Seven Times Brighter Than the Sun”:
An Eschatological Motif and Its Permutations in Old English Literature

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0. *Introduction*

Early English eschatology is notoriously fond of motifs structured around numbers: the Three Utterances of the Soul, the Three Hosts of Doomsday, the Four Kinds of Death, the Five Likenesses of Hell, the Seven Joys of Heaven, the Seven Pains of Hell, the Fifteen Signs of Doomsday, and so forth. Most of these enumerative motifs are relatively fixed and consistent and have been carefully studied.¹ They occur repeatedly in Old English and early Irish and Latin texts under Insular influence. But one such motif defined by number that has not been closely examined is the one I propose to talk about in this essay, not so much a single motif as a cluster of interrelated motifs that are united by their fixation on an image multiplied by a factor of seven. There are lots and lots of these motifs, more than I have space to talk about here, but in what follows I will offer a summary overview by distinguishing five main permutations (and a number of derivative variants), and in some cases I will identify key factors in their origins and development.

1. *When the soul of a righteous man parts from its body it is seven times brighter than the sun, and when the soul of a wicked man parts from its body it is seven times blacker than a raven*

It is a commonplace in early medieval soul-and-body sermons that good souls are white and wicked souls are black, and this is especially the case in sermons that make use of what has come to be known as the Three Utterances of the Soul exemplum.² The Three Utterances exemplum in Old English, Latin, and early Irish literature was first studied in detail by Rudolph Willard, who showed that most versions of this exemplum state that the demons who lead a wicked soul to hell are as black as coal (or as a raven or an Ethiopian), whereas the angels who guide a just soul to heaven are as bright as the sun (or as white as snow or wool) (Willard 1935, 31-149). The Latin version in Paris, BnF, lat. 2628 (s. xi, Fécamp), for instance, warns of two angelic armies that confront the souls, one a *hostis niger et ethiopus*, the other a *hostis in uestibus albis sicut lana alba aut nix* (Willard 1935, 38).³ The Old English version in Bazire-Cross Homily IX (HomS 31) tells of two angels who meet the departing souls: *oðer bið Godes encgel, se bið swa whit swa snaw; oðer bið deofles encgel, se bið swa sweart swa hræfen oððe Silharewa* (Bazire and

¹ The most comprehensive study of the “enumerative style” in early English, Irish, and Latin literature is Wright 1993, who provides copious examples and bibliography on particular enumerations. On the Seven Pains of Hell see now Pelle 2011. On the Fifteen Signs of Doomsday see Hawk 2018. On the Four Modes of Sin, an enumerative motif in Latin, Old English, and Old Norse, see Hill 2020. This essay has benefitted greatly from the generous comments, additional examples, and references provided by two anonymous readers for this volume, to whom I offer my warmest thanks.

² For the most recent and up-to-date scholarship on the Three Utterances exemplum, see Wright 2014, 2015, and 2021, 55-56 n. 69, who has catalogued over fifty examples in manuscripts from the eighth to the fifteenth century.

³ “a black and Ethiopian army”; “an army in white robes like white wool or snow.” This Latin sermon was first published by Dudley 1911, 164-65. The snow-white garments recall the image of the transfigured Christ (Matt. 17:2; cf. Mark 9:2), *vestimenta autem eius facta sunt alba sicut nix* (“and his garments became white as snow”), as well as the appearance of the angel at Christ’s sepulchre (Matt. 28:3), *vestimentum eius sicut nix* (“his garments like snow”). In the vision of Daniel (Dan. 7:9), the Ancient of Days is seated upon a throne, *vestimentum eius quasi nix candidum* (“his garment as white as snow”).

Cross [1982] 1989, 121, lines 10-12).⁴ By contrast, the version in Luiselli Fadda Homily I asserts that when a sinful soul (not the demon) parts from its body it is seven times blacker than a raven, whereas a righteous soul (not the good angel) upon leaving its body is seven times brighter than the sun:

Hit gelimpeð þanne þæs synfullan mannes saul gæð of his lichaman, ðonne bið heo seofon siðum sweartre ðonne se hræfen. [...] Ond þanne bið ðæs halgan mannes saul, witudlice, þanne heo of ðam lichaman gangeð. Seofon siðum heo bið beorhtre þanne sunne (Luiselli Fadda 1977, 19, lines 169-70, 179-81).⁵

In their foundational discussion of the Latin background of the Old English Three Utterances exemplum, Mary Wack and Charles D. Wright first drew attention to an abbreviated version of this exemplum in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 28135, a ninth-century collection of Hiberno-Latin materials from Freising, which includes precisely this statement about the colours of the souls as they exit the body: *Anima hominis peccatoris cum exierit de corpore septies nigrior erit quam coruus*. [...] *Anima autem hominis sequitur; cum exierit de corpore septiens splendor erit quam sol* (Wack and Wright 1991, 189-90).⁶ To judge from the more commonly occurring versions of this exemplum in Latin, Old English, and Irish, which describe the colours not of the souls but of the demons and angels that accompany them, it appears that in Luiselli Fadda I and the Latin exemplum in Clm 28135, the opposing descriptions have simply shifted from the demons and angels to the souls in their charge and the colours have intensified sevenfold. These are not isolated examples, however, for a third occurs in a florilegium of moral extracts in an early ninth-century manuscript written at Fulda or Lorsch, now Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 556. This exemplum occurs within the context of a set of three triads, the second and third of which set out to name the three worst and three best things:

Et tres sunt in hoc mundo deteriora omni malo: anima peccatoris, quae nigrior est coruo in septimo; et maligni demones qui eam adducunt; et infernus, cui dicitur [*leg. ducitur*]. [...] Tres sunt in hoc mundo meliora omni bono: anima sancti in septimo sole specior [*leg. speci<osi>or*]; et sancti angeli qui eam in sinu suo suspiciunt [*leg. suscipiunt*]; et paradus cui dicitur [*leg. ducitur*] (Maioli 1963, 219-20; cited by Wack and Wright 1991, 197).⁷

⁴ “one is God’s angel, which is as white as snow; the other is the devil’s angel, which is as black as a raven or an Ethiopian.” This passage is also printed by Willard 1935, 38-40.

⁵ “It happens when the soul of a sinful man passes from its body, then it is seven times blacker than a raven. [...] And then there is the soul of a holy man; indeed, when it passes from its body it is seven times brighter than the sun.” Compare the earlier partial edition and fuller discussion by Willard 1935, 39, 49. On the colour of the souls, see Willard 1935, 77-81; Teresi 2000, 106-07; Ritari 2013, 138-39; and Wright 2015, 54, 56. For examples of blessed souls whiter than snow and wicked souls blacker than a raven in Latin *Joca monachorum* dialogues, see Daly and Suchier 1939, 121 (no. 55), 127 (nos. 21, 22); and Suchier 1955, 37 (nos. 82, 83), 127 (nos. 48, 49).

⁶ “The soul of a sinful man when it exits its body will be seven times blacker than a raven. [...] The soul of a [blessed] man then follows; when it exits its body it will be seven times more brilliant than the sun.” On this manuscript, see Wright 2014, 113 and 131-32 (his ms. 12). An additional witness to the Latin source of this passage in Luiselli Fadda I has since been published by Wright 2015, 52-60, from Engelberg, Stiftsbibliothek 44 (s. xiii¹), fol. 105v.

⁷ “And there are three things in this world that are worse than any evil: the soul of a sinner, which is seven times blacker than a raven, and the malignant demons that conduct it, and hell, to which it is led. [...] There are three things in this world that are better than any good: the soul of a saint shining seven times more splendidly than the sun, and the holy angels that bear it, and paradise, to which it is led.” A further example of a soul seven times blacker than a raven appears in another sermon printed by Maioli 1963, 222, lines 39-40.

There is also the strange case of the Old English sermon *Be heofonwarum and be helwarum* (HomS 5), which apparently inherited a version of the Three Utterances exemplum but mangles it almost beyond recognition, with the result that the coal-black demons and the angels shining brighter than the sun fight seven times over the good and bad souls on Doomsday:

ure Drihten us eac tocymð mid fif þusend engla forþi he wile ure stal gehyran þe we sculan astellan beforan þam fif þusendan helle deofla. Ure teð sprecað 7 seo tunge swygað. 7 oþer þara weroda bið swa sweart swa col, 7 oðer bið beorhtre þonne sunne. 7 hi þonne seofan siþan feohtað him betweenan embe þa godan sawle 7 þa yfelan (Teresi 2002, 226, lines 10-16).⁸

Of the several versions of the Three Utterances exemplum in Insular or Insular-related texts, three are thus in agreement in describing the colours of the souls and in multiplying those colours sevenfold. The first (Luiselli Fadda I) is in Old English, and the second and third (in Clm 28135 and Pal. lat. 556) were both written in southern Germany and are preserved within collections of materials compiled from sources that circulated in England and Ireland.

This particular form of the sevenfold motif (and its non-sevenfold variants) thus appear to have been cultivated in Insular circles in England and Ireland and on the Continent, but how are we to explain the sevenfold intensification of the colours? I would speculate that this detail originated somewhere within the large body of Marian Assumption apocrypha represented by the following passage from a seventh-century Greek sermon on the Dormition of the Virgin Mary by John of Thessalonica (*BHG* 1144a-c; *CANT* 103; *CPG* 7924a). Here the context is not the immediate judgement of good and bad souls as they exit the body but the delivery of Mary's soul into the hands of the archangel Michael upon her dormition:

Ἡμεῖς δὲ οἱ ἀπόστολοι ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν ψυχὴν Μαρίας παραδιδομένην εἰς χεῖρας Μιχαὴλ, πεπληρωμένην πᾶσι μέλεσι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, χωρὶς μόνου τοῦ σχήματος τῆς θηλείας καὶ τοῦ ἄρρενος, μηδενὸς ἄλλου ἐν αὐτῇ ὄντος εἰ μὴ ὁμοίωτος παντὸς τοῦ σώματος καὶ λευκότητος τοῦ ἡλίου ἑπταπλασίως (Jugie 1926, 396-97).⁹

John of Thessalonica's sermon is a seventh-century revision of a lost fifth-century Greek apocryphon on the dormition and assumption of Mary and as such figures into a large family of Marian assumption apocrypha, most of which contain some version of this image. Whereas the Greek recensions generally claim that Mary's soul was seven times brighter than the sun,¹⁰ however, the texts in the Latin tradition are at odds with one

⁸ "Our Lord will also come to us with five thousand angels because he will wish to hear our confession that we must recount before the five thousand devils of hell. Our teeth will speak and the tongue will be silent, and one of those hosts will be as black as coal, and the other will be brighter than the sun, and they will then fight between themselves seven times over the good soul and the evil (one)."

⁹ "The Apostles looked on as the soul of Mary was given into the hands of Michael, filled out with all the members of a human being, except for the form of female and male, but with nothing else in it except the likeness of the whole body and a brilliance seven times greater than the sun" (Daley 1998, 63). For discussion of this sermon, see Rivière 1936, 22; Capelle 1940 and 1949, 27; Clayton 1986, 33; and Clayton 1998, 61-63.

¹⁰ The seven times brighter than the sun image can be traced back to the sixth-century Greek R Recension of the *Transitus Mariae* (*BHG* 1056d; *CANT* 102), in which Mary's soul has *une clarté sept fois plus grande que celle du soleil* (Wenger 1955, 233; "a clarity seven times greater than that of the sun").

another on this point, most claiming simply that her soul was as white as snow.¹¹ In one particular Latin recension of the Marian assumption apocryphon known as *Transitus W* (*BHL* 5352b-n; *CANT* 114),¹² this image is amplified so that Mary's soul is seven times whiter than snow: *Et sic suscepit animam eius dominus, et tradidit eam sancto angelo Michahel, exceptis omnibus membris, nihil in se habens nisi tantummodo similitudinem hominis et candorem septies tantum quantum niuis est* (Wilmart 1933c, 344).¹³ This seven times whiter than snow image has in turn been incorporated into the tenth-century Old English assumption homily known as *Blickling Homily XIII* (LS 20), which, as Mary Clayton has shown, represents a fusion of the two recensions of Marian *Transitus* apocrypha known as *Transitus B*² (*BHL* 5251-52a) and *Transitus W*. Here Christ enters Mary's house amid a great company of angels, blesses her, and delivers her soul to the archangel Michael, which occasions some commentary by St Peter on the remarkable brightness of her soul:

& þa onfeng ure Drihten hire saule & he hie þa sealde Sancte Michahele þæm heahengle, & he onfeng hire saule mid ealra his leoma eaþmodnesse & næfde heo noht on hire buton þæt án þæt heo hæfde mennisce onlicnesse; & heo hæfde seofon siþum beorhtran saule þonne snaw. & þa frægn Petrus urne Drihten & wæs cweþende, "Hwylc is of ús Drihten þæt hæbbe swa hwite saule swa þeos halige Marie?" Þa cwæþ ure Drihten to Petre & to eallum þæm mannum þe þær wæron, "Þisse halgan Marian saul biþ a gewuldrod mid Gode, & heo biþ aþwægen mid þæm halgan þweale. & oþre apostolas beoþ sende beforan hire bære, mid þy þe heo biþ gongende of lichoman." & hie ne gemetton nane swa hwite saule swa þære eadigan Marian wæs, forþon heo lufode ma þeostro for hire synnum & heo wæs á þeh gehealden fram hire synnum; & hie gesawon ealle þæt seo eadige Marie hæfde swa hwite saule swa snaw (Morris [1874-80] 1967, 147, lines 13-27).¹⁴

Transitus W is not the most widely distributed recension of this apocryphon, but it survives in a dozen manuscripts from the eighth century onward and was especially well

¹¹ On the snow image in early versions of the *Transitus* apocrypha, see Wenger 1955, 83. In the *Transitus of Pseudo-Melito* (*Transitus B*²), a version known to Bede that was probably taken to southern Germany by English missionaries, when Mary sends forth her spirit, *Viderunt autem apostoli animam eius tanti candoris esse, ut nulla mortalium lingua digne possit effari; uincebat enim omnem candorem niuis et uniuersa metalla argenti radians magni luminis claritate* (Clayton 1998, 338; "But the apostles saw her soul, and it was of such whiteness that no tongue of mortal men can worthily express it, for it excelled all whiteness of snow and of all metal and silver that shines with great brightness of light").

¹² *Transitus W* is assigned the siglum L2 within the catalogue of recensions by Esbroeck 1981, 267. It is designated Recensio S in *BHL* 5352b; and it is assigned the siglum L4 by Mimouni 1995, 257-99. See further Clayton 2007b.

¹³ "And thus the Lord received her soul and conveyed it to the holy angel Michael without any of its members, having nothing in her but the semblance of a human form and a whiteness seven times that of snow."

¹⁴ "And then our Lord received her soul, and he then gave it to St Michael the archangel, and he received her soul with the prostration of all his limbs. And she had nothing upon her save only a human form, and she had a soul seven times brighter than snow. And then St Peter asked our Lord, saying, 'Who is there of us, Lord, who has a soul as white as this holy Mary?' Then our Lord said to Peter and to all those who were present, 'This holy Mary's soul will forever be glorified by God, and she will be washed with the holy absolution, and the other apostles will be sent before her bier when she departs from her body.' And they found no soul as white as the holy Mary's was because she loved darkness more for her sins, and she was nevertheless preserved from her sins. And they all saw that the blessed Mary had a soul as white as snow." A second, more complete witness to this homily (LS 20.1) in CCC 198 (this part s. xi², prov. Worcester by s. xiii), fols. 350^r-359^r, is ed. and trans. by Clayton 1998, 246-72. The corresponding passage, at 258, likewise says that Mary had *seofon siðum breohtran saule ðonne snaw* ("a soul seven times brighter than snow").

known in medieval Spain and the British Isles.¹⁵ A copy appears in the late-eleventh or early-twelfth-century homiliary in Cambridge, Pembroke College 25, fols. 113^v-117^v, from Bury St Edmunds,¹⁶ and it was this recension as well that gave rise to the Old Irish dormition text known as the *Udhacht Mhuire* (*The Testament of Mary*), which describes the assumption of Mary's soul in similar terms:

Ó thairnic trá do Muiri na briatra-sin do ráda do-chuaid a spirat bethad aisti 7 ro gab an slánici in anmain idir a dá láim 7 tuc co huasal anórach leis é. Et at-rachtadur arcaingil nime uili uimpi 7 at-chonncadur na hapstail amail sin hí aga tócbáil leo dona hainglib 7 is amlaid do-conncas dóib hí co ndeilb 7 co ndénam duine uirri 7 robo gili fo sécht hé ná snechta (Breatnach 2019, 322-23).¹⁷

Outside of Marian assumption apocrypha, the only other instance in Old English of a departing soul that is seven times brighter than snow appears in the entry for 15 June in the ninth-century *Old English Martyrology*, which recounts the death and ascension of the child martyr St Vitus and his tutor and foster-father, St Modestus. After a series of adventures in Lucania, in southern Italy, the two saints meet their end when an angel conducts them to a river and their dove-like souls are witnessed ascending to heaven:

Ac Godes engel hine [St Vitus] þa gelædde ond his festerfæder mid hine, Sanctum Modestum, on þæs flodes neaweste se is cweden Siler. Ðær gesegon Cristne men heora sawle fleogan to heofonum swa swa culfran, ond hi wæron seofon siðum hwittran þonne snaw (Rauer 2013, 116).¹⁸

The source of this entry in the *Old English Martyrology* is an unedited Latin *passio* of St Vitus (*BHL* 8712), two copies of which are preserved in the Worcester and Salisbury recensions of the Cotton-Corpus Legendary,¹⁹ and while the printed version of the *passio* of St Vitus (*BHL* 8711) in the *Acta Sanctorum* says simply that the souls of Vitus and Modestus flew to heaven in the likeness of doves that were whiter than snow (*in*

¹⁵ On the textual history of *Transitus W*, see Mimouni 1995, 281-86, and Clayton 1998, 69-83.

¹⁶ The Pembroke 25 sermon (Clayton 1998, 328-33), says only of Mary's soul that it was *niue candidiorem* (*ibid.*, 331; "whiter than snow"). The sources and contents of this manuscript are discussed by Hall 2021. On the reception of *Transitus W* in early medieval England, see Clayton 2007b.

¹⁷ "When Mary moreover had finished saying those words, her vital spirit departed from her, and the Saviour took her soul between his two hands and brought it nobly and honourably with him. And all the archangels of heaven arose around her, and the apostles saw her in that manner being raised up by the angels, and the way in which she was seen by them was with a human shape and form and she was seven times brighter than snow." Willard compares this passage to the parallel account in John of Thessalonica (1937, 357-58). See also Seymour 1921-22, 37. The Hiberno-Latin apocryphon *De morte Marie* (*BHL* 5352p; ed. and trans. Flahive 2019) from Dublin, Trinity College Library, 667 (F. 5. 3) (s. xv²), pp. 143-44, preserves the same image: *Tunc dominus suscepit animam beate Marie et tradidit eam Michaeli archangelo et uidebat animam eius habentem similitudinem hominis et erat candidior niue septuplum* ("Then the Lord took the soul of the Blessed Mary and gave it to the archangel Michael, and he saw her soul had a human likeness and was seven times whiter than snow"; *ibid.*, 368-69). This latter text is not listed by Mimouni 1995 in his inventory of *Transitus* texts. For its relation to other Marian ascension apocrypha, see Colker 1991, II, 1144-45. As pointed out by Donahue (1942, 64 n. 50), the Irish version of this apocryphon in the *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum* describes Mary's soul as *robo gili fa seacht i na'n grian* ("seven times brighter than the sun"), in agreement with John of Thessalonica (see Breatnach 2019, 267).

¹⁸ "But God's angel then led him and his fosterfather, St Modestus, with him to the vicinity of a river which is called Siler [i.e. Sele]. There some Christians saw their souls fly to heaven like doves, and they were seven times whiter than snow" (Rauer 2013, 117).

¹⁹ The source of this entry was first identified by Cross 1982, 58-62. Cross was evidently then unaware of the copies of this *passio* in the two recensions of the Cotton-Corpus Legendary, but their existence is noted by Jackson and Lapidge 1996, 138, and by Whatley 2001, 474-75.

similitudine columbarum nive candidiores),²⁰ the versions in the Cotton-Corpus Legendary both agree with the *Old English Martyrology* in asserting that their souls were like doves that were seven times whiter than snow (*Visę sunt autem animę eorum sicut columbę septies candidę tamquam nix*).²¹

Of course the depiction of a saintly soul as “white as snow” is not at all uncommon in medieval and ancient near-eastern literature,²² and the image of a saint’s soul ascending to heaven in the form of a dove that is as white as snow or whiter than snow occurs with some regularity in medieval saints’ lives, including those for Anstrude, Eulalia, Quintin, and Scholastica.²³ If these can be taken as representative of an established hagiographic convention, then the version of the *passio* of St Vitus known to the compilers of both the *Old English Martyrology* and the Cotton-Corpus Legendary appears to be original in introducing the qualifying numerical detail “seven times brighter than snow” into the story of Vitus’s ascension. Wherever *BHL* 8712 originated, the inspiration for this innovative detail is likely to have been the scene in the W Recension of the *Transitus Mariae* in which Mary’s soul ascends to heaven seven times brighter than snow, although as I will later suggest this is not the only possibility. The descriptions of the good and bad souls in the Three Utterances exemplum shining seven times brighter than the sun or seven times blacker than a raven likewise have a complex pedigree that will become clearer after digging a little deeper into apocryphal literature, beginning with a tradition concerning the appearance of Christ at Doomsday.

2. When Christ appears at Doomsday he will be seven times brighter than the sun

Two early New Testament apocrypha assert that when Christ appears at Doomsday he will be seven times brighter than the sun. The first is the *Apocalypse of Peter* (*BHG* 1487; *CANT* 317), which was probably composed in Greek during the first half of the second century, although today it survives complete only in Ethiopic.²⁴ Its opening chapter relates Christ’s prophecy to Peter concerning the Second Coming:

²⁰ Socii Bollandiani, eds., *Passio SS. Viti, Modesti, Crescentiae* 17, *Acta Sanctorum*, Iunii II (Antwerp, 1698), 1025: *Et his dictis, beatae sanctorum animae, sacris egressae corporibus, in similitudine columbarum nive candidiores* (“And with these words, the blessed souls of the saints departed from their holy bodies in the likeness of doves whiter than snow”).

²¹ London, BL, Cotton Nero E. I, Part 2 (s. xi^{3/4}, Worcester), fol. 29^va10-11; and Salisbury, Cathedral Library, 222 (s. xi^{ex}, Salisbury), fol. 6^v22-23. *BHL* 8712 is unpublished. As Cross notes (1982, 62), this image is paralleled in the copies of *BHL* 8712 in Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 412 (s. ix¹ or ix^{med}, prob. NE Italy), fol. 120^f (*septies candide quam nivis*); and Montpellier, Bibliothèque de l’Université (École de Médecine), H 156 (s. ix^m), fol. 153^r (*septies nives candidiores*).

²² For instance, the Coptic *Life of St Pachomius* (*BHO* 824) relates that the parting soul of a holy man is “beautiful to see and white as snow” (Veilleux 1980, 106). The entry for Paul the Hermit in the *Old English Martyrology* says that St Antony saw the soul of St Paul *swa hwite swa snaww* ascending to heaven (Rauer 2013, 46).

²³ Examples are collected by Brewer 1884, 109, 458-60; Maury 1896, 270-73; Weicker 1902, 26-27; Dudley 1911, 173; Leclercq 1903, cols. 1485-88; Sühling 1930, 110-91; Loomis 1948, 66, 180 n. 131; Thompson 1955-58, no. E732.1 (“Soul in form of dove”); Courcelle 1972, cols. 29-65; Kemp 1972, cols. 138-43; Mengis 1987, cols. 1572-77; and Gattiker and Gattiker 1989, 352-54. For the depiction of the soul of St Benignus as a *snawhwit culfre* (“snow-white dove”), see Rauer 2013, 210-11. For Anstrude, see Levison 1913, 75. For the examples of St Scholastica, St Foy, St Marcellinus and St Peter, and a Flemish clerk named Stephen, whose souls all ascend to heaven in the form of a dove, see Stouck 1999, 199, 325, 381, 549. Souls as birds in the Old Norse poem *Sólarljóð*, in the monk of Wenlock’s vision as reported by Boniface, and in other medieval texts including (arguably) an Old English riddle are discussed by Pulsiano and Wolf 1991. The Platonic roots of this image and their connections to Jewish eschatology are examined by Aptowitz 1925, 150-68.

²⁴ Daley writes that the *Apocalypse of Peter* was “probably composed about 135 in Syria” (1991, 7). Bauckham argues that it is a work of Palestinian Jewish Christianity composed during the Bar Kokhba

For the coming of the Son of God shall not be plain; but as the lightning that shines from the east to the west, so will I come upon the clouds of heaven with a great host in my majesty; with my cross going before my face will I come in my majesty; shining seven times brighter than the sun will I come in my majesty with all my saints, my angels. And my Father shall set a crown upon my head, that I may judge the quick and the dead and recompense every man according to his works (Elliott [1993] 2009, 600).

The *Apocalypse of Peter* is the earliest Christian document to provide a detailed description of heaven and hell and exercised a powerful influence on later works of Christian eschatology, including the *Sibylline Oracles*, the *Apocalypse of Paul*, and the *Apocalypse of Thomas* (James 1911, 369-75, 380-83; Bauckham 1998, 256; Jakab 2003). On this particular detail, it also appears to have made its mark on the *Epistle of the Apostles* (CANT 22), an apocryphon probably from the third quarter of the second century that survives today in a fifth-century Latin fragment from Bobbio that must have been known in the Latin West (Bick 1908).²⁵ The corresponding passage in the *Epistle of the Apostles* 16 situates Christ's prophecy within a revelation made to all the apostles shortly after his resurrection:

And we said to him, "O Lord, great is this that you say and reveal to us. In what kind of power and form are you about to come?" And he said to us, "Truly I say to you, I will come as the sun which bursts forth; thus will I, shining seven times brighter than it in glory, while I am carried on the wings of the clouds in splendour with my cross going before me, come to the earth to judge the living and the dead" (Elliott [1993] 2009, 565-66; cf. Watson 2020, 53).

The similarities between these two passages were first noted by M. R. James, who suggested that the *Epistle of the Apostles* was probably indebted to the *Apocalypse of Peter* for its account of Christ's parousia (James 1924, 490 n. 1).²⁶ Regardless of how these two apocrypha both came to employ the same image of Christ at Doomsday shining seven times brighter than the sun, this detail seems not to have been taken up by many patristic writers, but a close parallel appears, of all places, in the sprawling thirteenth-century Norse collection of Marian legends and miracle tales known as *Maríu saga*, which includes a short prophetic account of Christ's Second Coming that reads: *Pat er sögn heilagra ritninga, at dómr enn efzti, sá er dróttinn skal dæma um allt mannkyn, skal þar vera í loptinu uppi yfir dalinum Josaphat [...] Hann skal vera .vii. lutum biartari en sól* (Unger 1871, I, 52, lines 8-10, 26-27).²⁷ This passage from *Maríu saga* has no known

revolt of AD 132-135 (1998, 160-258). Bremmer accepts the general scholarly consensus "that it must date from the last decades of the first half of the second century AD" (2009, 301).

²⁵ On the date of the *Epistle*, which survives in Coptic and Ethiopic translations going back to a lost Greek original, see Watson 2020, 8-10. Daley writes that the *Epistle of the Apostles* "seems to have been composed in a Jewish Christian community in Asia Minor about 160" (1988, 7). My thanks to Brandon Hawk and Charles D. Wright for keeping me up to date on scholarship on the *Epistle of the Apostles*.

²⁶ The connections between these passages in the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Epistle of the Apostles* are discussed by Hills, who makes no determination about whether one text influenced the other ([1990] 2008, 101-2, 104, 110). For additional passages in the *Apocalypse of Peter* that are now recognised as having influenced the *Epistle of the Apostles*, see Bauckham 1988, 148, and Jakab 2003, 175-76.

²⁷ "There is a report in sacred writings that at the Last Judgement, when the Lord will judge all mankind, he will be in the air above the valley of Josaphat [...] He will be seven times brighter than the sun." On the traditional idea that at Doomsday Christ will appear in the Valley of J[eh]osaphat, see Hall 1994, 81-85. Najork connects this detail in *Maríu saga* with the passage in Honorius, *Elucidarium* 3.79 cited below (p. 000 and n. 000) which says that at Judgement the bodies of the saints (not the risen Christ) will be seven times brighter than the sun and swifter than the soul, but the correspondence is not exact (2014, 142).

source, but given the rarity and specificity of this image, one has to consider the possibility that it depends on an unidentified Latin intermediary that is ultimately based on either the *Apocalypse of Peter* or the *Epistle of the Apostles*, which were evidently responsible for providing the originary expressions of this idea.

Subtle variations on this “Christ at Doomsday” permutation of the motif occur in a handful of other texts. In the fourth-century Greek *Acts of Philip* (BHG 1516-24; CANT 250.I) 2.15, the apostle Philip has a contentious encounter with the Jewish high priest of Jerusalem, Ananias, who declares Philip a magician and sorcerer for having spread lies about Jesus that threaten to undo the pagans and the Jews. When Ananias accuses Philip of trying to turn the Jews away from the laws of their fathers, Philip calls out to God and asks him to send Christ to Jerusalem to reprimand the Jews for their incredulity: ἔτι δὲ ταῦτα βοῶντος τοῦ Φιλίππου ἐξαίφνης ἠνεώχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ ἐφάνη ὁ Ἰησοῦς κατελθὼν ἐν τιμιωτάῃ δόξῃ καὶ ἀστραπῇ, καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἑπταπλάσιον λάμπων ὑπὲρ τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ τὰ ἰμάτια αὐτοῦ λευκότερα χιόνος (Bovon, Bouvier, and Amsler 1999, 61).²⁸ The setting is not Judgement Day, but the description of Christ in heaven in the presence of lightning sounds suspiciously like a derivative of the scene in the *Apocalypse of Peter*.

In the Middle Irish *Vision of Adomnán*, Adomnán’s soul is transported by angels to heaven on the feast of John the Baptist, where he views the brilliance of Christ’s face shining seven times brighter than the sun: *Dia mbé nech oca sírféad imme anair 7 aníar anes 7 atúaid, fo-géba do cech leith a aigid n-airegda soillsithir fo secht oltas grian* (Carey 2019, 68).²⁹ The vision takes place in the timeless interim before Doomsday, not at the end of time, but the text later adds that Adomnán’s vision is *céitimthúsa cecha anma iar techt a curp* (Carey 2019, 86),³⁰ and that after Adomnán returned to his body he preached what he had learned from his vision for the rest of his life.

In the Old Russian *Descent of the Virgin into Hell*, the Virgin Mary descends to hell to witness the torments of the damned and is told that the darkness of hell will be dispelled only by the advent of Christ:

And the Holy Virgin said, “Let the darkness be dispersed that I may see the torment.”
And the angels who watched over the torment answered, “We have been enjoined not to let them see light until the coming of your blessed Son, who is brighter than seven suns” (Zenkovsky 1963, 123).

The anticipated coming of Christ into hell can easily be understood as a typological antecedent of Christ’s anticipated Second Coming at Doomsday, and again the image seems to recall the image first introduced by the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Epistle of the Apostles*.

3. At Doomsday the bodies of the blessed will shine seven times brighter than the sun

In the two manuscripts containing the complete Ethiopic text of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the apocalypse itself forms part of a larger work entitled *The Second Coming of Christ and the Resurrection of the Dead*, in which Peter, adopting the voice of God, addresses Clement and declares: “[The Son] will at His coming raise the dead at the sound of His

²⁸ “When Philip called out these words, the heavens suddenly opened, and Jesus appeared, descending in magnificent glory in the midst of lightning, and his face shone seven times brighter than the sun and his raiment was as white as snow.”

²⁹ “If anyone should gaze at him for a long time from all sides, from the east and from the west, from the south and from the north, he would find his noble face on every side, seven times brighter than the sun” (Carey 2019, 69).

³⁰ “the first experiences of every soul after going out of the body” (Carey 2019, 89).

word, and will make my righteous ones shine seven times more than the sun, and will make their crowns shine like the crystal, and like the rainbow in the time of rain” (James 1911, 365, adapted by Elliott [1993] 2009, 612).³¹ This transfer of the sevenfold illumination from Christ at Doomsday to the blessed souls at Doomsday is not the first attestation of this image, however, since an even earlier one appears in the Slavonic Apocalypse of *2 Enoch* 66:7, an apocalypse of the late-first century AD, which declares: “How happy are the righteous who shall escape the Lord’s great judgement; for they will be made to shine seven times brighter than the sun. For in that age everything is estimated sevenfold — light and darkness and food and enjoyment and misery and paradise and tortures” (trans. F. I. Andersen in Charlesworth [1983-85] 2011, I, 194).³²

The biblical basis for this claim is Christ’s teaching in Matt. 13:43 that “the just will shine as the sun in the kingdom of their father,” with support from Judg. 5:31, “Let them that love thee shine as the sun shineth in his rising”; Dan. 12:3, “But [at the end of time] they that are learned shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that instruct many to justice, as stars for all eternity”; and *4 Ezra* 7:97, “The sixth order [of righteous souls before Judgement], when it is shown to them how their face is to shine like the sun, and how they are to be made like the light of the stars, being incorruptible from then on” (trans. B. M. Metzger in Charlesworth [1983-85] 2011, I, 540).³³ With the shining amplified sevenfold, this image becomes repeated in a variety of Insular and Insular-related texts including a homily on John 14:1-2 in the tenth-century *Catechesis Celtica*, where the verse from Matt. 13 is modified to include the number seven:

Inde dixit [the apostle John]: “*Post haec uidi et ecce turba multa quam denumerare nemo poterat ex omni gente et tribu, populis et linguis, stantes coram sede et palmae in manibus, et clamabant uoce magna: ‘Salus Deo nostro qui sedit super thronum et agno’*” [Rev. 7:9-10]. Vnusquisque autem de ipsis sic fulget ut sol, sicut scriptum est: *Tunc iusti fulgebunt sicut sol in regno Patris eorum* [Matt. 13:43], sed septuplo solem quam uidemus praecellens (Wilmart 1933b, 69-70, lines 138-44, with some minor editing).³⁴

A passage from the Coptic *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* likewise shows that the verse from Matt. 13 was subject to editing to incorporate the number seven: “Then all the righteous rejoiced and were glad, and they ascribed blessing to God, saying, ‘All the righteous shall shine in the kingdom of their Father seven times brighter than the sun’” (Budge 1913, 200). The same idea appears in the twelfth-century English sermon known as Trinity Homily XXVIII, where Christ’s return at Doomsday will be preceded by a cleansing fire that will leave the righteous shining seven times brighter than the sun:

Fur berneð þe eorðe and al þat beð þar inne. oðer þar uppe. and clenseð alle bileffule men of alle þe sunnes þe hie hadden forleten. oðer bet. oðer bigunnen to beten. and makeð hem seuefealde brihtere þane þe sunne also þe boc seið. *Fulgebunt iusti septies cplendidius* [sic] *quam sol*. Ðe rihtwise shulle ben seuefeald brihtere þane þe

³¹ The Ethiopic text is edited by Grébaud 1910.

³² See the comments by Orlov, who interprets the “sevenfold nature of the final age inhabited by humanity” in terms of “the familiar cluster of the sevenfold patterns permeating the anthropogony of the Slavonic apocalypse” (2014, 42, 41).

³³ Additional ancient texts that refer to the souls of the righteous shining like the sun or the stars at the end of time are discussed by Stone 1990, 244-45.

³⁴ “Then he said: ‘After that I saw and behold a great multitude which no one could count from every nation and tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and palms in their hands, and they called out with a great voice: *Salvation to our God, who sits upon the throne, and to the lamb*. And each one of them shone like the sun, as it is written: *Then shall the just shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father*, yet surpassing the sun that we see sevenfold.’”

sunne. and elles naren hie naht bicumeliche to wunien in heuene (Morris [1868] 1988, 170).³⁵

The early thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse* 6.7 reports that at the resurrection on Judgement Day the mortal garment which we inherited from Adam will be torn asunder and we will receive a new garment, *þe fel undeadlich þet i þe neowe ariste schal schine seouewald brihtre þen þe sunne* (Millett 2005-06, I, 137, lines 220-21).³⁶ And the fifteenth-century Middle English Chester Play “The Prophets and Antichrist” asserts that at Judgement Day *They that shall be saued, shall be as bright / as seven tymes the Sonne is light* (Matthews [1916] 1968, 389, lines 41-42).³⁷ But the most impressive witness to this idea is surely Aquinas’s comment in the *Summa Theologica, Supplementum*, Q. 91, art. 3:

Sed post resurrectionem, quando lux lunae augebitur secundum rei veritatem, non erit alicubi nox super terram, sed solum in centro terrae, ubi erit infernus; quia tunc, ut dicitur, luna lucebit quantum lucet nunc sol; sol autem in septuplum plus quam nunc; corpora autem beatorum septies magis sole, quamvis hoc non sit aliqua auctoritate vel ratione probatum.³⁸

Aquinas’s view of what he acknowledges to be an unfounded but popularly held belief here takes on a cosmological perspective involving the nature of the sun and moon at the end of time, and this steers us in the direction of a permutation of the sevenfold motif that sits at the very heart of early Insular eschatology, with abundant examples in Old and Middle English, Irish, and Anglo-Latin. This is the idea that from the moment of Creation to the Fall of Adam and Eve, the sun and moon were seven times brighter than they are now, and at Doomsday they will be restored to their original sevenfold brightness.

4. *At Creation the sun was seven times brighter than it is now, and at Doomsday it will regain its original sevenfold brightness*

The biblical authority for this idea is Isa. 30:26, which states that at an uncertain time in the future when the Lord will come to heal his people, “the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days.”³⁹

³⁵ “Fire shall burn the earth and all that is therein or thereupon and shall cleanse all believing men of all the sins that they had renounced or repented of or commenced to repent of, and shall make them sevenfold brighter than the sun, as the book saith, *Fulgubunt iusti septies splendidius quam sol*. The righteous shall be sevenfold brighter than the sun, and else would they not be fitting to dwell in heaven” (Morris [1868] 1988, 171).

³⁶ “the immortal skin that in the new resurrection will shine seven times brighter than the sun” (Millett 2009, 137).

³⁷ I learned of this example from Stephen Pelle. A statement to this effect in the Middle English *Castel of Love*, a translation of Robert Grosseteste’s *Château d’amour*, is cited by Os 1932, 163.

³⁸ “But after the resurrection, when the light of the moon will be increased in very truth, there will be night nowhere on earth but only in the center of the earth, where hell will be, because then, as it is said, the moon will shine as brightly as the sun does now, the sun seven times as much as now, and the bodies of the blessed will shine seven times brighter than the sun, although there is no authority or reason to prove this” (De Rubeis and Billuart 1927, V, 725). For discussion see McDanell and Lang 1988, 83. Aquinas’s comment is echoed by Albertus Magnus, who writes in his *Commentarii in quartum librum Sententiarum*, Dist. 48E, art. 8, that *Homines autem in septuplum plusquam sol in illis diebus, scilicet post iudicium* (Borgnet 1890-99, XXX, 662, col. 1, line 7; “In those days, that is after Judgement, men will be seven times brighter than the sun”).

³⁹ This idea is echoed in a section of the Ethiopic Apocalypse of *I Enoch* devoted to a cosmological and astrological account of the heavenly luminaries, an account intended to aid calendrical reckoning. In this context the angel Uriel explains to Enoch that in the present reality of earthly experience (not in some

The context of this prophecy in Isaiah is not a discussion of Doomsday as it was understood by medieval Christians but an apocalyptic vision of God’s punishment of his enemies and the ensuing restoration of peace and order among the Israelites. But medieval exegetes routinely took this verse as a prophecy of Judgement Day and as a gloss on the nature of the heavenly bodies at Creation. A concise expression of this idea is recorded in the ninth-century *Old English Martyrology* under the entry for 21 March, on the fourth day of Creation:

On ðone an ond twentegðan dæg bið se feorða worolde dæg. On ðæm dæge God gesette on heofones rodor sunnan ond monan. Ða wæs seo sunne seofon siðum beorhtre ðonne heo nu is, ond se mona hæfde ða ða beorhtnesse þe seo sunne nu hafað. Ac þa Adam ond Eua on neorxnawonge gesyngodan, ða wæs þæm tunglum gewonad heora beorhtnes, ond hi næfdon na siððan butan þone sefoðan dæl heora leohtes. Ac on domesdæge, þonne ure Drihten edniwað ealle gesceafte, ond eall mænnisc cynn eft ariseð, ond hi næfre ma ne gesyngiað, þonne scineð seo sunne seofon siðum beorhtre ðonne heo nu do, ond heo næfre on setl gangeþ. Ond se mona scineð swa swa nu seo sunne deþ, ond he næfre ma wonað ne ne weaxeð, ac he standeð a on his endebyrdnesse, þenden þa tunglu her lyhtaþ on ðysse deadlican worolde (Rauer 2013, 68).⁴⁰

A somewhat fuller account appears in Irvine Homily VI on the Transfiguration (HomU 2), where the mention of Christ’s countenance shining like the sun at the Transfiguration prompts the homilist to recall the verse from Matt. 13 about the just shining like the sun in their father’s kingdom. This in turn leads the homilist to remark on the reason for the diminished brightness of the sun and moon today:

Leofe men, ær þam þe ðe æreste men Adam and Eua agulten and Gode wreðædon on neorxnawo[n]gæ, ær þan þa tunglæn, sunne and monæ hæfdæn mucele mare beorhtnesse þenne heo nu habbeð; ac syðæn heo gylten þurh unhersumnesse, and God heom weorp of þam mucele murhðe on þisse deapelic lif hider on middæneard, þa sceolden þa (t)unglæ þæs wite þrowiæn, for þam ðe heo þare menniscen cunde onfon sceoldon, and heo þa for þon worden heoræ beorhtnes muceles dæles benumene. Hit ilimpð þeah on þissere weorlde endunge on domes dæg, þæt God gyfð heom æft heoræ fulle brihtnesse. Þenne underfehð þe mone þare sunne

otherworldly realm or at some future or eschatological time), the sun and moon are now of equal size, but the light of the sun is “sevenfold brighter than that of the moon” (*I Enoch* 72:37, trans. E. Isaac in Charlesworth [1983-85] 2011, I, 52). Later in that same work (*I Enoch* 91:16), a similar idea is adapted for an eschatological context, where in a dire apocalyptic prophecy, Enoch reveals that at the moment of the eternal Judgement, “[t]he first heaven shall depart and pass away; a new heaven shall appear; and all the powers of heaven shall shine forever sevenfold” (Charlesworth, I, 73). Compare the apocalyptic prophecy in the *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer* 51: “In the Future to Come, the Holy One, blessed be He, will renew the vessels of light and enhance their light sevenfold, like the light of the Seven Days, as it says, ‘And the light of the moon shall become like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall become sevenfold, as the light of seven days’” (Friedlander 1916, 412). The idea occurs yet again in an otherworldly context in the Slavonic Apocalypse of *2 Enoch* 11:2, where Enoch is conveyed bodily to the fourth heaven, where he observes: “And I saw that the sun has a light seven times greater than the moon” (trans. F. I. Andersen in Charlesworth [1983-85] 2011, I, 120); see Geller 2010, 38.

⁴⁰ “On the twenty-first day is the fourth day of the world. On that day God positioned the sun and the moon in the heavenly sky. The sun then was seven times brighter than it is now, and the moon had the brightness that the sun has now. And when Adam and Eve sinned in paradise, the brightness of the heavenly bodies was then dimmed, and since then they have only had one seventh of their former brightness. And on Doomsday, when our Lord will renew all of creation, and all humankind will be resurrected and they will sin no more, the sun will then shine seven times brighter than it does now, and it will never set. And the moon will shine like the sun does now, and it will never after that wax and wane, but it will always remain in its place, for as long as the heavenly bodies shine here in this mortal world” (Rauer 2013, 69).

brihtnesse, and þeo sunne [bið] seofen siðe brihtre þenne heo nu is (Irvine 1993, 169, lines 80-90).⁴¹

The main source for these two passages was first identified by J. E. Cross (1972 and 1981, 185-86) as the chapter on the sun and the moon in the seventh-century Hiberno-Latin *Liber de ordine creaturarum*, where the verse from Isa. 30 gets built up into a complex philosophical statement about the animation of the sun and moon. A portion of that chapter is reproduced below, but by way of introduction, I should first explain that in order to understand this passage in the *Liber de ordine*, it will be useful to recall that throughout Antiquity and for much of the Middle Ages there was a widespread belief that the stars and planets were endowed with souls (Dales 1980; Scott 1994; Smyth 1996, 173-75).⁴² Aristotle held that the stars are living, sentient beings whose motion through the heavens is partly voluntary, and the souls that embody them occupy the position of intermediate semi-divine beings above the rank of humans but beneath that of the highest deity (Scott 1994, 35-37). Similar beliefs were expressed by Zeno and the Stoics, who thought that astral souls and the souls of humans are both composed of ether and that the hot, dry nature of the soul is what forces it to ascend to heaven when it leaves the body (Scott 1994, 43-45). Plato was likewise influenced by the ancient pagan idea that human souls are born inside stars, with which they share a common physical materiality, and that good souls who are able to overcome the weight of their passions are able to return to their native stars after death. In his account of the creation of the heavens in the *Timaeus*, Plato writes that after the divine creator placed the planets in their orbits and created the fixed and wandering stars, he set about to complete the material universe by populating it with a hierarchy of gods and mortal beings. To fashion the latter, he first blended the universal soul in a great bowl and distributed it among the stars, from which each individual astral soul would then be able to descend to earth and assume human form: “And when He had compounded the whole [universal soul] he divided it into souls equal in number to the stars, and each several soul He assigned to one star, and setting them each as it were in a chariot. He showed them the nature of the Universe, and declared unto them the laws of destiny” (Bury 1929, 91).⁴³ These laws of destiny, Plato writes, include the fact that once each individual soul reaches earth, depending on how well it is able to master human passion and live justly, it will be permitted to return to its star of origin after death: “And he that has lived his appointed time well shall return again to his abode in his native star, and shall gain a life that is blessed and congenial” (Bury 1929, 91-93). In early English and Irish literature, a vestige of this Platonic idea can still be seen in the Adam Octipartite myth in the *Evernew Tongue* and elsewhere, which in some versions teaches that Adam’s body was fashioned from various elements, including astral matter, and that even Adam’s name derives from the stars.⁴⁴

⁴¹ “Beloved men, before the first people Adam and Eve sinned and angered God in paradise, before that, the stars and sun and moon had much more brightness than they do now, but after they had sinned through their disobedience and God cast them forth from that great bliss into this deadly life here in the world, the stars had to suffer punishment for it, because they had to experience their human condition, and therefore were deprived of a great part of their brightness. However, it shall come to pass at the end of this world, on the day of Judgement, that God will restore them to their complete brightness. Then the moon shall receive the brightness of the sun, and the sun shall be seven times brighter than it is now.”

⁴² For related folk-beliefs concerning souls in the form of stars or departed souls that ascend into the heavens to become stars, see Thompson 1955-58, nos. A761 (“Ascent to stars”) and E741.1 (“Soul in form of star”).

⁴³ This idea has had an impressive longevity, as witnessed, for instance, by Wordsworth’s “Sonnet” of 1817, which begins: “The Stars are Mansions built by Nature’s hand, / And, haply, there the spirits of the blest / Live, clothed in radiance, their immortal vest” (Ketcham 1989, 242, lines 1-3). For other literary expressions of this idea, from Vergil and Dante to Shakespeare and beyond, see Allen 1963, 26-27.

⁴⁴ The version of the Microcosmic Adam myth in the *Evernew Tongue* 13 asserts that the human body is composed, among other things, of *adbar di gréin 7 rennuib nimhe oulcena; conid ed do-gni lien 7 soillse i*

When this complex set of ancient beliefs eventually fell into the hands of early Christian writers, it naturally gave way to the idea that since astral souls and human souls are made from the same ethereal substance, and since human souls are capable of sin, it follows that the stars are likewise subject to sin. Origen, who was the first Christian thinker to discuss the physical composition of the stars and who has sometimes been accused of operating on the verge of astral mysticism, explains in his first homily on Genesis that it is a sign of their greatness that humans were created on an equal footing with the sun, moon, and stars and that redeemed humanity has been honoured with the promise that at the end of time it will shine like the sun and moon (Heine 1982, 63). The claim one occasionally encounters in early Insular literature that the souls of the righteous will “shine after death”⁴⁵ is thus not simply a reflex of the idea that good souls go to heaven and heaven is a bright and shiny place, but instead a recollection of precisely this ancient belief that after death the righteous soul begins to radiate light as it once again assumes its original astral form. Clement of Alexandria writes that after the resurrection, “the righteous all return to the same unity, where in different ways they will be ‘gleaming like the sun’ or rather in the sun” (Scott 1994, 108). The process is especially clear in the Irish *Vision of Adomnán*, in which the blessed souls traveling through the seven heavens must pass through the flaming fiery stream before the doorway of the second heaven, where *Abersetus danó aingel ingaire 7 forcoiméta int srotha-sin. Is é in sruth-sin derbus 7 niges anmanna na nóem din chutrumma chinad nos lenann co rroichet comglaine 7 comsollse fri étrochta rétlann* (Carey 2019, 78).⁴⁶ The medieval Christian inheritance of these beliefs includes the more familiar doctrine that demons (including Lucifer) are stars that have fallen through sin, and that they accordingly need to be redeemed (Scott 1994, 139, 141). Ambrose and Jerome both assert that the heavenly luminaries share in mankind’s fallen state and that they have consequently been deprived of the brilliant luminescence which they originally possessed before the Fall of Adam and Eve (Smyth 1996, 173 and n. 228).⁴⁷

suilibh doine (“material from the sun and the stars of heaven also; so that is what makes the brightness and the light in people’s eyes”; Carey 2009, 117). Two manuscripts of the Slavonic Apocalypse of Enoch (2 *Enoch*) 30:8 likewise derive Adam’s “eyes from the sun” (Charlesworth [1983-85] 2011, I, 151 n. h). For other early Insular variants on this theme, with full bibliography, see Cross and Hill 1982, 67-70, and Wasserstein 1988. On the derivation of Adam’s name from the stars, see Wright 2018, 942, 975-76, 983, 989, and 991-92, with further references. It is difficult to know just how far back beliefs in astral animism may have existed in the British Isles, but for the fascinating thesis that the inhabitants of prehistoric Britain identified stars as the spirits of their deceased ancestors, and that Neolithic monuments such as the long barrows at Wayland’s Smithy and West Kennet in Wessex were designed to permit the observation of certain stars rising or setting above the barrow’s entrance as if leaving or entering the tomb, see North 1996, 46, 277, 525-27.

⁴⁵ In Vercelli Homily VIII (HomS 3), Christ invites the blessed souls to follow him to heaven and promises them that *ge ðonne scinaþ swa biorhte swa sunne þonne hio æfre on midne dæg fægerost scineð 7 biorhtost* (Scragg 1992, 147, lines 91-93; “you will then shine as brightly as the sun whenever it shines most beautifully and most brightly at midday”). According to the Leabhar Breac *Betha Coluim Cille* (§ 65), the spiritual perfection of St Columba will at last be fully revealed at Judgement Day, *in tan taitnigfes amal gréin nemthruálnide a chuirp 7 a anma* (“when the incorruptibility of his body and soul will shine like the sun”; Herbert 1988, 243, 265). A ninth-century sermon for All Saints, pseudo-Augustine, *Sermo* 209, that circulated in several eleventh-century English homiliaries speaks of the beauties of heaven where the blessed will eventually congregate, *ubi sancti fulgebunt ut stellae in perpetuas aeternitates* (PL 39, col. 2136; “where the saints will shine like the stars for all eternity”).

⁴⁶ “Abersetus, then, is the angel who tends and watches over that stream. It is that stream which assays the souls of the righteous, and cleanses them from the amount of guilt which adheres to them, so that they attain to the same purity and brightness as the radiance of the stars” (Carey 2019, 79).

⁴⁷ The Greek-Slavonic apocalypse of 3 *Baruch* 9:7 goes even further in claiming that God dimmed the moon’s light as a punishment for providing Satan with light in Eden, thereby facilitating the Fall: “And during the transgression of the first Adam, she [the moon] gave light to Samael [*scil.* Satan] when he took the serpent as a garment, and did not hide, but on the contrary, waxed. And God was angered with her, and

Although most of the later Latin Fathers seem to have been largely uninterested in these questions concerning the animation of the heavens, the Platonic teachings on the subject filtered down into seventh-century Ireland with surprising clarity and are lucidly expressed in the chapter on the sun and the moon in the *Liber de ordine creaturarum* 5.2-7, which teaches that the sun and moon are indeed animate, intelligent beings that were created for the express purpose of serving man and that now share in the punishment for the Fall:

Sol ergo et luna duo luminaria in firmamento caeli constituta, unum quod est maius ut praeesset diei, secundum quod minus est statutum ut praeesset nocti [Gen. 1:14-18]; sed non eandem sui splendoris lucem quam cum in principio creata sunt habuerunt nunc per omne sui ministerii tempus dierum ac noctium decursionibus conseruant. Haec enim, dum humanis usibus ministrare a deo creatore destinata sunt, cum homines inculpabiliter uixissent et sub creatoris quo conditi sunt lege perseuerassent, etiam sui luminis plenitudine decorata ministrabant; cum uero homines, quibus in ministerio sociata primitus rutulabant, propter transgressionem deiecti paradisi beatitudinem amiserunt, ipsa quoque luminaria, quamuis non sua culpa, sui luminis detrimenta non sine suo dolore pertulerunt, sicut apostolus Paulus contestatur dicens: *quia omnis creatura congemiscit et dolet usque adhuc* [Rom. 8:22]. Sed quia per redemptoris aduentum humano generi pristinae beatitudinis in melius restauratio promittitur, etiam creatura suum antiquum decorem acceptura non dubitatur; unde propheta de sole specialiter et luna inlustratus spiritali fame inquit: *et erit in die illa cum ceciderint turres, erit lux lunae sicut lux solis et lux solis septemplex motabitur in lucem septem dierum cum alligauerit dominus uulnus populi sui et percussuram plagae eius sanauerit* [Isa. 30:25-26]. Cum enim factum fuerit *caelum nouum et terra noua et non fuerint in memoria priora* [Isa. 65:17] quae corruptioni seruiunt, et peccati uulnus et percussuram plagae mortis in corporibus resurrectorum dominus sanauerit, et superbi spiritus ex inperio quod arripuerant depositi fuerint, tunc lux lunae in lucem solis motabitur et lux solis restaurabitur in lucem septem dierum quibus conditus fuerat, hoc est, in septuplum suum lumen restaurabitur. Nihil enim restauratur nisi quod amissum est aut corruptum. Quod igitur sol amisit et luna, hoc rursus accipiet; ex quo apparet septimam nunc sui luminis partem luminaria retinere quam septemplex resument quando, sicut per Abacuc spiritus sanctus pro futuris praeterita ponens, ut prophetis mos est, inquit: *eleuabitur sol in ortu suo et luna stabit in ordine suo* [Hab. 3:11]. Cessante namque motabilitate humani status cui seruiunt, et sui cursus motabilitas cessabit; quod enim inquit: *eleuabitur sol in ortu suo*, hoc indicat quod nunquam inclinabitur in occasu suo, et in eo quod dicit: *luna stabit in ordine suo*, hoc insinuat quod motationes incrementi et detrimenti sui iterum non patietur, sed in suo ordine semper stabit. Hoc autem erit *quando* — ut apostolus loquitur — *ipsa creatura liberabitur a seruitute corruptionis in libertatem gloriae filiorum dei* [Rom. 8:21]; cum enim sancti pro mercede sui laboris, quo deo seruiuerunt, inmotati fuerint et fulserint *sicut sol iustitiae, cuius in pennis est sanitas* [Mal. 4:2], tunc et ipsi corporeo huic soli pro mercede sui ministerii quo seruituti corruptionis subiecta est, in septuplum sui fulgoris rutulatio restituetur” (Díaz y Díaz 1972, 112-16, lines 10-53).⁴⁸

diminished her and shortened her days” (trans. H. E. Gaylord, Jr. in Charlesworth [1983-85] 2011, I, 673). For Jewish teachings that God diminished the moon’s light for its insolence in questioning God’s motives at Creation and that, after the moon persisted in questioning, God punished the moon by increasing the sun’s light sevenfold, see Ginzberg 1913-38, I, 24.

⁴⁸ “For the sun and the moon are two great luminaries set in the firmament of heaven, the greater one to rule over the day, the second smaller one to rule over the night (Gen. 1:14-18). But they do not now retain throughout the duration of their ministry of days and nights, that same splendid light they possessed when created in the beginning. These two were intended by God the Creator to minister to the needs of man, and so long as men lived untainted by sin and obeyed with great constancy the law of the Creator by whom they came to be, they remained adorned with the fullness of their light as they performed this service. But when

This chapter of the *De ordine* gives an unusually thorough explanation of the rationale behind the restored sevenfold brightness of the luminaries at the end of time, and its impact on the development of Insular eschatology is evident in both the *Old English Martyrology* and Irvine Homily VI. Both of these passages can ultimately be traced to the chapter on the sun and the moon in the *De ordine*, but in both cases there must be another source-text intervening between the *De ordine* and the Old English homily and the *Martyrology* entry since as Irvine has persuasively demonstrated, each text contains information that is lacking in the other but that is also found in the *De ordine*, and “there are sufficiently close resemblances between the two Old English texts to suggest that they stem from a source closer to both than” to the *De ordine* (Irvine 1993, 152-54).⁴⁹

This doctrine concerning the restored sevenfold luminescence of the sun and the moon at Doomsday was embraced by so many early English and Irish authors that it seems to have been accepted as the equivalent of biblical truth. I offer just a few examples,

men — for whom they were glowing as colleagues in this ministry — lost their state of happiness on being cast out of Paradise for their disobedience, the luminaries themselves — though through no fault of their own — endured a loss of brightness, and this not without suffering on their part. The apostle Paul testifies to this when he says: ‘For we know that every creature groans and suffers pain, even till now’ (Rom. 8:22). But because through the coming of the Redeemer restoration into a state better than its original happiness has been promised to the human race, it cannot be doubted that creation itself will receive its former beauty. Thus, with special reference to the sun and to the moon, the inspired Prophet says in spiritual speech: ‘And it shall be in that day when the towers shall fall, the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be changed sevenfold into the light of seven days, when the Lord shall bind up the wound of his people, and heal the injury from his blow’ (Isa. 30:25-26). When ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ shall be made ‘and the former things’ which were subject to corruption ‘shall not be in remembrance’ (Isa. 65:17), and the Lord has healed the wound of sin and the injury from the blow of death in the bodies of those resurrected, and the proud spirits will have been deposed from the rule they seized, then the light of the moon will be changed into the light of the sun and the light of the sun will be restored to the light of the seven days when it was created, that is, into seven times its present brightness. For nothing is restored except what was lost or corrupted. The sun and the moon will thus receive again that which they had lost. From which it is manifest that the luminaries now retain the seventh part of their brightness, which they will recover sevenfold when, as the Holy Spirit says through Habacuc, setting past events for future ones as is customary for prophets: ‘the sun shall be raised in its rising and the moon shall stand in its proper state’ (cf. Hab. 3:11). With the end of the mutability of the human condition which they served, the mutability of their course will also cease; for when it is said: ‘the sun shall be raised in its rising,’ this shows that it will never decline in its setting, and when it is said: ‘the moon shall stand in its proper state,’ this suggests that it will no longer endure the changes of its increase and decrease, but will always remain in its proper state. This will be — as the Apostle says — ‘when creation itself shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:21), for when the saints will have been transformed as the reward for their labour with which they served God, and will shine ‘like the sun of justice, in whose rays there is health’ (Mal. 4:2), then the brightness of its glow will be restored sevenfold to the corporeal sun itself, in recompense for its service through which it was subjected to the servitude of corruption” (Smyth 2011, 174-76).

⁴⁹ I suspect that this chapter of the *De ordine* may have been influenced by a passage in Jerome’s commentary *In Amos 2.5* that reads: *Transformat autem Deus omnia, quando de terrenis facit caelestia, et homines angelorum donat similitudine; quando luna solis fulgore rutilabit, et sol habebit lumen septuplum, quando animalis, et infirmus et corruptibilis homo transformatur in spiritalem et robustum et in incorruptum mutans gloriam, non naturam; quando intelligentes fulgebunt sicut splendor firmamenti, et implebitur quod scriptum est: “Alia gloria solis, alia gloria lunae, alia gloria stellarum. Stella enim a stella differt in claritate, sic et resurrectio mortuorum”* (1 Cor. 15:41-42) (Adriaen 1969, 282, lines 321-30; “And God transforms all things when he makes heavenly things from earthly and gives unto men the similitude of angels, when the moon will turn red with the brilliance of the sun and the sun will have a sevenfold light, when the bestial and weak and corruptible man is transformed into a spiritual and robust and incorrupt, exchanging nature for glory, when their intelligences will shine like the glory of the firmament, and what is written will be fulfilled: ‘One is the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, another the glory of the stars. One star differs from another in its brilliance. So also is the resurrection of the dead’ [1 Cor. 15:41-42]).”

among the earliest of which is Bede's hymn *De Enoch et Haeliae*, a harrowing account of the Last Judgement that includes a description of the transformation of the heavenly luminaries, with a clear echo of Isa. 30:26:

Tum lunae globus modernis absolutus motibus
splendebit fulgens Olimpo solis aestiui ut iubar
in perennis die sabbati.
At sol ipse luce flagrans ardebit septemplici,
lucebit septem dierum mundum inlustrans lampade
in perennis die sabbati (Lapidge 2019, 436-38).⁵⁰

Likewise, Byrhtferth of Ramsey's gloss to chapter 43 of Bede's *De temporum ratione*:

Suspiremus itaque ad illam ardentius vitam aeterna pace beatissimam, quando *erit lux lunae sicut lux solis, et lux solis septempliciter, sicut lux septem dierum*. Esaias: *Et erit lux lunae sicut lux solis, et lux solis septempliciter, sicut lux septem dierum* [Isa. 30:26]. [...] In die autem iudicii determinato illo examine, cum fuerint omnes reprobi una cum diabolo in inferno conclusi, sustollet se Dominus Jesus pariter cum corpore suo, quod sunt omnes electi in coelum, et tunc mutuabit sibi luna splendorem solis, et sol septempliciter lucebit quam modo, sicut lux septem dierum, hoc est multipliciter, et recipiet lumen et splendorem solis, quem amisit peccante primo homine (PL 90, col. 479BC).⁵¹

Ælfric invokes this idea on three separate occasions. In his First Series homily for the second Sunday in Advent (ÆCHom I, 40) he takes up Christ's prophecy in Luke 21:25-33 regarding the signs that will presage the end of the world — “There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars” — and observes that such signs are already coming to pass in the form of contemporary astronomical phenomena such as eclipses and the volatile behaviors of stars that suddenly appear and disappear. At the end of time, he writes, these aberrant celestial phenomena will cease when heaven and earth are transformed from their present imperfect state to a perfected one: *hi beoð awende of þam hiwe þe hi nu on wuniað, to beteran hiwe* (Clemoes 1997, 529, lines 158-59).⁵² As a result of their purification, *ðonne bið seo sunne be seofonfealdan beorhtre þonne heo nu sy. 7 se mona hæfð þære sunnan leoht*” (530, lines 163-65).⁵³ This point is echoed in a later sermon for the octave of Pentecost (Pope Homily XI; ÆHom 11), where Ælfric again explains that the purification of the earth at the end of time will be accompanied by a sevenfold increase in the brightness of the sun and moon:

for ðan ðe þes middanéard bið mid þam brádan fýre

⁵⁰ “Then the globe of the moon, released from its present motions, will shine refulgent from heaven like the brilliance of the summer sun, *on the Day of the eternal Sabbath*. But the shining sun itself will burn with sevenfold light; it will shine illuminating the world with its lantern of seven days, *on the Day of the eternal Sabbath*” (Lapidge 2019, 437-39).

⁵¹ “So we long more ardently for that most blessed life of eternal peace, *when the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days*. Isaiah: *And the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days*. [...] For at that certain examination on the Day of Judgement, when all the condemned will have been confined in hell together with the devil, the Lord Jesus shall raise himself up together with his body, which are all the elect in heaven, and then the moon will transform itself into the radiance of the sun, and the sun will shine seven times brighter than it does now, like the light of seven days, that is many times over, and [the moon] will receive the light and radiance of the sun, which it lost when the first man sinned.” On Byrhtferth's authorship of this gloss, see Lapidge 2007.

⁵² “They will be transformed from the state in which they now exist to a better state.”

⁵³ “Then the sun will be seven times brighter than it is now, and the moon will have the light of the sun.”

ðe on Cristes tocyme cymð swa færlice
 eall geedníwod, and éac seo sunne
 and se móna soðlice be seofanfealdum beoð
 beorhtran þonne hi nú syndon, be þan ðe us secgað bec (Pope 1967-68, I, 443-44,
 lines 511-15).⁵⁴

In both of these passages the emphasis is on the idea of purification, but a more thorough explanation of this event in Ælfric's *De falsis diis* (Pope Homily XXI; ÆHom 22) makes it clear that the sevenfold brightness of the sun and moon will constitute a restoration of their original state:

Eac swylce seo sunne, and soðlice se móna
 wurdon benæmde heora wynsuman beorhtnysse
 æfter Adames gylte, na be agenum gewyrhtum.
 Be seofonfealdan wæs seo sunne þa beorhtre
 ærþam se mann agylte, and se mona hæfde
 þære sunnan beorhtnysse, swa swa heo scinð nu ús.
 Hi sceolan eft swapeah æfter Domes-dæge habban
 be fullan heora beorhtnysse, be þam þe hy gesceapene wæran;
 and se mona ne ealdað æfter þam dæge,
 ac bið ansund scinende, swa swa seo [sunne] deð nú (Pope 1967-68, II, 679-80, lines
 56-65).⁵⁵

The Old Irish *Cáin Domnaig* (*The Law of Sunday*) proposes that *I n-domnach athnuigfithir in uli dúl i n-deilb bus áille 7 bus ferr oldás, amail dorónta ina cét-oirecc, intan mbete renna nime amail éscái 7 éscái amail gréin 7 grían amail sollsi secht samlathi, feib bóí isin cétna sollsi do gréin .i. ria n-imarbus Ádaim* (O'Keeffe 1905, 200-01).⁵⁶ The Middle Irish poem *Gnímratha in Šeseadh Lai Láin* (*The Works of the Sixth Day*) extends the diminution of the sun's and moon's light after the Fall to other phenomena as well. After the expulsion of Adam from paradise, the poet explains:

32. Seachtmhadh a solsi i ngren nglain,
 ise [a]nni ro-fás de sin,
 seachtmhadh a theasa maille,
 craebh dhorcha dhar gnuis esgi.
33. Seachtmhadh toraidh for fidh
 ised ro-fás don mhoirchin,
 seachtmhadh a bindi i nguth gle,
 seachtmhadh a nirt in nirt in duine.
34. Seachtmadh ndelbhi for duine.
 uii[m]adh balaidh for luibhe,
 secht[m]adh bhlais for toradh dhe,

⁵⁴ "For with that immense fire that will appear at Christ's Coming, this world will be utterly renewed, and also the sun and moon will indeed be seven times brighter than they are now, so books tell us."

⁵⁵ "And likewise the sun and truly the moon were deprived of their pleasing brightness after Adam's offence, not because of their own deeds. The sun was then brighter by sevenfold before the man sinned, and the moon had the brightness of the sun, just as it [the sun] shines on us now. However, after Doomsday, they will have their full brightness with which they were created, and the moon will not grow old after that day but will be shining undiminished, just as the sun does now."

⁵⁶ "On Sunday there shall be a renewal of every element in a form fairer and better than at present, as they were made at the first Creation, when the stars of Heaven will be as the moon, and the moon as the sun, and the sun as the light of seven summer days, as it was in the first sun's light, even before Adam's sin." The *Liber de ordine creaturarum* was first proposed as a source for this passage by Whitelock 1982, 64.

uii[m]ad toraidh i fairrge (Carney 1969, 154-55, 161).⁵⁷

The third book of Honorius's *Elucidarium*, written in England shortly before the year 1100, consists of a dialogue between a *magister* and *discipulus* on matters of fundamental Christian doctrine, especially of an eschatological nature. It features an elaborate account of Antichrist, the general resurrection, Judgement Day, and eternal beatitude. At one point the *discipulus* asks his *magister* what will happen to the earth after Judgement is rendered and whether it will be destroyed. The *magister* replies:

Faciet Dominus *caelum novum et terram novam* [cf. Isa. 65:17]. Denique caelum, sol, luna, stellae, aquae, quae nunc festinant cursu irretardabili quasi cupientes in meliorem statum immutari, tunc fixa stabiliter manebunt et quieta et immutabili glorificatione immutata. Nam caelum gloriam solis induet; sol septempliciter plus quam nunc lucebit, ut dicitur: *Sol habebit lumen septem dierum* [cf. Isa. 30:26]. Luna et stellae vestientur ineffabili splendore (Lefèvre 1954, 462-63).⁵⁸

The *discipulus* then asks *At dic qualia corpora habebunt sancti?* To which the *magister* replies: *Septies quam sol splendidiora et prae animo agilia* (*ibid.*, 463).⁵⁹

The transformation of the sun and moon and even the planets and stars is also described in the Middle English *Pricke of Conscience*:

þan sal alle þe werld, in alle partys
Seme als it war a paradys.
þe planetes and þe sternes ilkane
Sal shyne brighter þan ever þai shane;
þe son sal be, als som clerkes demes,
Seven sythe brighter þan it now semes,
For it sal be als bright als it first was,
Byfor ar Adam did trespas.
þe mone sal be als bright and clere,
Als þe son es now þat shynes here (Hanna and Wood 2013, 175, lines 6351-60).⁶⁰

Other examples of this idea could be cited,⁶¹ but one further permutation of the sevenfold motif as well as several radical reformulations deserve attention before I attempt to draw some conclusions.

⁵⁷ “(32) One seventh of its light in the clear sun, that is what developed from that, together with one seventh of its heat, a dark branch over the face of the moon. (33) One seventh of fruit on a tree, that is what resulted from the great sin, one seventh of its sweetness in a clear voice, one seventh of his strength in man. (34) One seventh of shapeliness on man, one seventh of fragrance in plants, one seventh of savour in fruit from it (the transgression): one seventh of produce in the sea.” Carney dates the poem “not very distant from the year 1000” (1969, 149).

⁵⁸ “The Lord will make a new heaven and a new earth. And then heaven, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the waters that now hasten on their unstoppable course as if yearning to be altered to a better state, shall then remain permanently fixed and at rest and shall be transformed by their immutable glorification. For heaven will assume the glory of the sun; the sun will shine seven times brighter than it does now, as it is said: The sun will have the light of seven days. The moon and the stars will be adorned with ineffable splendour.”

⁵⁹ “But tell me what kind of bodies the saints will have.” “Seven times brighter than the sun and swifter than the soul.”

⁶⁰ As Hanna and Wood note in their commentary to these lines (2013, 341), the “detail that the sun will shine seven times brighter than now” is taken from Hugh Ripelin of Strasbourg’s *Compendium theologicæ veritatis* 7.28.

⁶¹ For an example in the *Revelation of Matthew about the End Times*, a rare Latin apocalyptic text which Stephen Pelle suspects may have been written between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, see Pelle 2019, 132, 135, where we are told that following the reign of Antichrist, *Tunc sol sepcies fulgebit clarius quam*

5. *In the interim paradise the sun shines seven times brighter than it does here on earth*

This permutation involving a relocation of the “seven times brighter than the sun” motif to a paradisaical context occurs, so far as I know, only in Old English and Old Norse. It appears in both versions of the English *Prose Phoenix* and in their Norse counterpart, which is thought to be based on a lost Old English version, all deriving from a lost Latin original of English origin, itself based on the Latin poem *De phoenice* attributed to Lactantius.⁶² The eleventh-century English text in CCC 198 (HomU 17.1) explains that: *Paradisus is uprihte on eastewearde ðysse worulde. Nis þær ne mete ne hungor, ne þær niht næfre necymeð, ac á simble dæg. Sunne þær scineð seofanfealdlucor and beorhtlicor ðone her deð* (Cook 1919, 128-32).⁶³ The parallel passage in London, BL, Cotton Vespasian D. xiv (HomU 17.2) reads: *Neorxenewange is upprihte on eastewearde þisse wurlde. Nis þær ne hete ne hunger; ne þær niht nefre ne byð, ac simble dæg. Sunne þær scineð seofen siðe brihtlycor þone on þissen earde* (Warner 1917, 146, line 33-147, line 1).⁶⁴ The Norse version reads: *Þar [in Paradise] er hvorki hatr ne hungur, ok allðri er þar nött ne myrkr, helldr er hinn sami dagr avallt, ok skinn sol þar vii hlutum biartari en i þessum heim, þviat þar kemr vid aull birti himintungla* (Kålund 1908, 4, lines 14-18).⁶⁵ In all three cases, paradise is located neither in heaven nor on earth but somewhere in the east between heaven and earth, forty fathoms higher than the height of Noah’s flood. Ananya Kabir has interpreted this peculiar location of paradise as “an attempt to mediate between the usual celestial location of the interim paradise, and the terrestrial location of the phoenix’s abode” and as an eclectic amalgam of borrowings from multiple traditions, including the *locus amoenus* and the “green landscapes of Old English poetry” (Kabir 2001, 173, 175). As we see here, that impulse to adapt and modify eschatological convention extends as well to the relocation of the sevenfold brightness of the sun from heaven at the end of time to the interim paradise.

6. *Some further permutations*

To sum up thus far, what we find is a loose configuration of eschatological motifs which share a common rhetorical structure built around the image of something shining seven times brighter than something else (usually but not always the sun) but which demonstrate an impressive degree of malleability and susceptibility to reformulation. The adaptability of the motif seems to have encouraged experimentation, and it should not surprise us that additional permutations can still be discovered. To illustrate the open-endedness of this form, I here call attention to several additional examples that don’t quite fit into the

ante solebat (“Then the sun will shine seven times brighter than it used to”). A search of the phrase *sol septempliciter lucebit* in the online database *Corpus Corporum: Repositorium operum Latinorum apud universitatem Turicensem* (<<http://www.mlat.uzh.ch/MLS/>>) yielded 21 hits in the writings of authors from the eighth to the fourteenth century, all discussing the restoration of the sun’s sevenfold light at the end of time (retrieved 15 September 2021).

⁶² The scholarship is summarized by Frankis 2016, 81-90, who argues that “the ON text that underlies the extant [Norse] versions was translated from an OE original in England” (*ibid.*, 83-84).

⁶³ “Paradise is directly overhead in the eastern part of this world. There is neither food nor hunger there, nor does night ever come there, but always eternal day. The sun shines seven times more and brighter than it does here.”

⁶⁴ “Paradise is directly overhead in the eastern part of this world. There is neither hatred nor hunger there, nor is there ever night, but eternal day. The sun shines seven times brighter than it does here.”

⁶⁵ “There [in Paradise] there is never hatred nor hunger, and night does not darken, rather it is always day, and the sun shines there seven times brighter than in this world, because it comes there with all the brightness of the stars of heaven.” A second copy of this Old Norse version of the *Prose Phoenix* (in AM 764 4^o) is unedited: see Frankis 2016, 82.

categories surveyed thus far, either because some other number is substituted for the number seven or because the motif is applied to a new and unusual context.

I begin with the unique Latin fragment of the apocryphal *I Enoch* 106 printed by M. R. James from London, BL, Royal 5. E. XIII (s. ix, Brittany, prov. Worcester by s. x), in which Lamech and his wife give birth to a son, Noah, whose appearance is so striking and unusual that Lamech first takes him to be an angel. Whereas the Ethiopic original says that the boy's eyes "glowed like the sun" and his hair was "as white as wool," the Latin fragment — and apparently *only* the Latin fragment — declares twice that his *oculi sunt sicut radi solis, capilli autem eius candidiores in septies niue* (James 1893, 148).⁶⁶

A passage from a lost Jewish apocalypse of the first century BC or first century AD known as the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* (CANT 345) is quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.11.77, who says that in the *Apocalypse*, the prophet Zephaniah was transported to the fifth heaven: "And I saw angels who are called 'lords,' and the diadem was set upon them in the Holy Spirit, and the throne of each of them was sevenfold more (brilliant) than the light of the rising sun" (trans. O. S. Wintermute in Charlesworth [1983-85] 2011, I, 508).⁶⁷

One of the Thanksgiving Hymns from Cave 1 at Qumran, *IQHodayot*^a 15.23-24, includes the pious declaration: "You, my God, have saved my life, and lifted my horn up high. I am radiant with sevenfold light, in the light which you prepared for your glory" (García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1999, 179).

In the *Questions of Bartholomew* (BHG 228; CANT 63) 4:57, Satan recounts his fall to the apostle Bartholomew, explaining that when he and his fellow angels were cast out of heaven, they lay upon the earth senseless for forty years, until Satan finally awoke "when the sun shone forth seven times brighter than fire" (Elliott [1993] 2009, 665).

In the Coptic Gnostic *Apocalypse of Paul* (CANT 323) 5.22.27-30, an early (second-century?) text from Nag Hammadi not related to the Greek apocalypse by the same name, the apostle Paul ascends through multiple heavens until he encounters a hostile figure in the seventh heaven identified only as an "old man" seated on a throne, and "[His throne], which is in the seventh heaven, [was] brighter than the sun by [seven] times" (trans. George W. MacRae and William R. Murdock in Robinson 1996, 259).⁶⁸

During his famous otherworldly tour in the Greek *Apocalypse of Paul* (BHG 1460; CANT 325) 21-22, the apostle Paul is escorted through various heavens by an angel until they cross the ocean that separates the heavens from earth and they encounter a great light that illuminates the land of promise:

And suddenly I [St Paul] went out of heaven, and I understood that it is the light of heaven which lightens all the earth. For the land there is seven times brighter than silver. [...] And I looked around upon that land, and I saw a river flowing with milk and honey, and there were trees planted by the bank of that river, full of fruit; moreover, each single tree bore twelve fruits in the year, having various and diverse fruits; and I saw the created things which are in that place and all the work of God,

⁶⁶ "[Noah's] eyes are like the rays of the sun, and his hair seven times whiter than snow." Compare the English translation of the corresponding passage in the Ethiopic *I Enoch* 106 by E. Isaac in Charlesworth [1983-85] 2011, I, 86. The passage recalls Rev. 1:14: *caput autem eius et capilli erant candidi tamquam lana alba tamquam nix, et oculi eius velut flamma ignis* ("and his head and his hairs were white, as white wool and as snow, and his eyes were like a flame of fire").

⁶⁷ On this passage see James 1920, 72; Sparks 1984, 917; and J. Edward Wright 2000, 156.

⁶⁸ Kaler translates this damaged passage as: "[I saw] an old ma[n...] | [...] the light [...] | [...] white [...] | [...] in the seventh heaven, | [sh]ining [seven] times more than the sun" (2006, 24 and 189). He explains that "[a]lthough this section is lacunous, the association of brightness, whiteness and a light seven times that of the sun with the old man is clearly indebted to the portrayal of God in the apocalyptic tradition" (30).

and I saw there palms of twenty cubits, but others of ten cubits; and that land was seven times brighter than silver (Elliott [1993] 2009, 628-29).⁶⁹

The Coptic *Book of the Resurrection of Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle* (CANT 80) tells how Bartholomew receives a vision of God in heaven and sees that “the thongs of the sandals which were on the feet of the Father shone brighter than the sun and the moon twice seven times” (Budge 1913, 197).

An apocryphal epistle known as the *Anaphora Pilati* (BHG 779xI-xII; CANT 50) which claims to have been written by Pontius Pilate to Caesar Augustus in Rome recounts the miracles performed by Christ and the wonders that occurred at his crucifixion. At the moment of Christ’s death, Pilate explains, the world went dark, the moon turned to blood, the temple was swallowed up by the earth, the dead rose from their graves, “[a]nd on the evening of the first day of the week there was a sound out of the heaven, so that the heaven became enlightened sevenfold more than all the days” (Walker 1870, 226).

In the Greek apocryphal *Narrative of Joseph of Arimathea* (BHG 779r; CANT 76), Joseph requests the body of Christ from Pilate and lays it in his tomb. The next evening, the risen Christ then appears to Joseph along with the thief who had been crucified with him, here named Demas, who had been granted to visit the earthly paradise after his death. Demas gives Jesus a letter that had been written by the cherubim guarding paradise, and the letter describes the fear and awe of the cherubim at beholding the blinding light emanating from the nail marks in Demas’s hands and feet:

When we saw the mark of the nails on the robber that was crucified with you and the light of the letters of your Godhead, the fire [of the flaming sword with which the cherubim were guarding paradise] was quenched, being unable to bear the light of the mark, and we were in great fear and crouched down. For we heard that the maker of heaven and earth and all creation had come to dwell in the lower parts of the earth for the sake of Adam the first-created. For we beheld the spotless cross, with the robber flashing with light and shining with seven times the light of the sun, and trembling came on us (Elliott [1993] 2009, 221).

The medieval Armenian *Questions of St. Gregory* includes a dialogue between St Gregory and an angel, who explains the process of conveying a righteous soul to heaven after death, a process that involves leading the soul upwards along seven steps to the supernal Jerusalem. At the fifth step the soul “shines with God’s light.” At the sixth “the righteous one shines seven-fold more than the sun.” Upon reaching the throne of God “the righteous is more resplendant than the sun” and is “adorned with Adamic light” (Stone 2018, 163, 165).

The ninth- or tenth-century Georgian *Life of St Nino* (BHO 811) provides an account of the missionary St Nino who converted the pagan Queen Nana and King Mirian III of Iberia to Christianity in the early fourth century. After the Iberians are baptised, a miraculous tree is discovered that gives off a sweet-smelling perfume and remains green and flourishing long after it is cut down. St Nino has a cross fashioned from this tree and sets it upon a hill, where a series of miracles then occurs. As a pillar of light in the shape of a cross descends upon it, “[t]hey saw another wonder of the cross: how a fire stood upon it, seven times brighter than the sun. It rested there like a spark from a furnace, and the angels of God ascended and descended” (Wardrop 1903, 49).

In the tenth-century Byzantine *Life of St Andrew the Fool* by Nikephoros of Constantinople (BHG 115z), when the holy man St Andrew dies, his pupil Epiphanius witnesses his soul ascending to heaven:

⁶⁹ See Silverstein and Hilhorst 1997, 116; Kabir 2001, 20-21; and Rosenstiehl 2014, 273.

That night when the blessed man [St Andrew] passed away, just before daybreak, Epiphanius, standing on the balcony on the east side of his room, saw the soul of the holy man ascending towards the heights of the heavens, sending out a light seven times brighter than that of the sun, and gleaming divinely (Rydén 1995, II, 425).

A spurious account of the miracles performed by St Jerome on his deathbed (*BHL* 3867) written probably in the twelfth century tells that Jerome's death was accompanied by some remarkable celestial phenomena witnessed by the monks attending him. At the appointed hour, an incredible symphony fills the air about Jerome's house. Then: *Stupefacti illico omnes illi elevantes oculos, coelum totum, aethera et omnia quae eorum continentur ambitu, quadam viderunt luce septies solis luce praeclariore clarescere: ex qua omnia odorum aromata erumpebant.*⁷⁰

In the Ethiopic *Vision of Mary*, Mary relates her visit to heaven and hell to John, the son of Zebedee, and a form of the sevenfold motif appears in her description of heaven five times:

And then my Son showed me [the risen Mary] a white land, which shone seven times more brightly than the sun, and moon, and stars; and the whole of it was decorated with gold and silver. [...] And then He carried me onwards to that river, and He made me cross the river in a ship of gold, and He brought me into a house, which was white and was shining with a light which was seven times brighter than the light of the sun, moon, and stars. [...] and I saw there also a shining city whereof the brightness was seven times greater than that of the sun. [...] And when He had said these things He took me and carried me up to the Heavenly Jerusalem. And I saw there a sanctuary of light, and a pavilion of light, and a tent covered over with fire. And I saw there a man, and he shone with a light seven times brighter than that of the sun. And in his hand he held an instrument of music with strings and a lyre. [...] And then He took me up and carried me on to the city, and brought me to the City of God. And He showed me a shining city which was built in the form of the flower of a rose, whereof the boundary and the end [i.e. extent] and the riches cannot be known. And its splendour was seven times more than that of the heavens (Budge 1933, 258-65).

In its elaborate account of the geography of the land of punishments in hell, the Middle Irish *Vision of Adomnán* 49 explains that *Atá danó múr teined fri tir inna pian anall. Adúathmairiu 7 acairbiu é fo secht oltas tir inna pian fession* (Carey 2019, 100).⁷¹

The ninth- or tenth-century Book of Lismore recension of the *Evernew Tongue* is especially remarkable for combining hyperbolic formulations of permutations 2, 3, and 4 together in a single sentence describing the brightness of Christ's face at Doomsday:

Ata di etrachtu 7 ane 7 soilse a gnuisi, in tan astoidet .ix. ngraid nimhe, 7 bas etrachtu cach aingel dib fo shect oldas in grian, 7 as-toidet anmann inna noeb fon noincosmailius, 7 in tan bas giliu in grian fo .uiii. oldaas innossa, soillsighfid tairsibsin uile etrachtu gnuisi ind Righ mair ro gni cach nduil, co foruaisligder aingle 7 renna nime 7 ammand inna noeb soilse in Coimded, ocus amal foruaisliges soilsi gréne 7 a hetrachtu renda aili (Carey 2009, 221).⁷²

⁷⁰ Pseudo-Augustine, *Epistola de magnificentiis beati Hieronymi* (PL 22, col. 286): "In that instant, they were all amazed and raising their eyes they saw the whole of heaven, the sky, and everything contained within their compass shining with a certain light seven times more brilliant than the light of the sun, from which all sorts of fragrant odors burst forth."

⁷¹ "There is, then, a wall of fire over against the land of punishments on the far side. It is seven times more horrible and more harsh than the land of punishments itself" (Carey 2019, 101).

⁷² "Such is the radiance and splendour and brilliance of his face that when the nine heavenly orders shine forth, and every angel of them is seven times brighter than the sun; and when the souls of the saints shine

An early Middle English sermon on the Lord's Day (Lambeth Homily XIV) declares Sunday to be seven times brighter than the sun:

Muchel man ach to wurpen þis halie dei þat is sunnen dei icleoped. for hit is godes agen dei. All oðer dages of þe wike beoð to þreldome to þis dei. þis dei is þet halie dei, þet blescede dei, þe blisfulle dei, þe murie dei, þe dei seouensiþe brictere þene þe sunne, þe formeste dei þet eauer giete was isegen buen eorðe (Morris [1868] 1988, 138).⁷³

The Christmas sermon in the Old Norwegian Homily Book, from the first quarter of the twelfth century, describes the billowing fires of hell as seven times hotter than the hottest fire on earth: *Ok þæim er ætlat hælviti með dioflum, þar er óp ok gratr ok hungur ok þorste ok svælgjande ældr .vii. lutum hæitare en á veroldo mege hinn hæitasta gera* (Indrebø 1931, 33/34-34/1).⁷⁴

The Irish *Airdena inna Cóic Lá nDéc ria mBráth* (*The Fifteen Tokens of Doomsday*) explains that:

Oir ceithri teinnti fil ann 7 secht tes gach teinedh dibh naroili, amal isbert aroile
 ecnaidhi .i. teine talman 7 teine gealain 7 teine bratha 7 teine ifrind.
 Secht tes teinedh talman tais
 a[n] teine ghealain gealbrais,
 secht tes teinedh bratha brais

forth with the same semblance; and when the sun is seven times brighter than it is now — the radiance of the face of the great King who made every created thing will outshine them all, so that the brightness of the Lord will surpass the angels and the stars of heaven and the souls of the saints just as the sun's brightness and radiance surpass the other stars" (Carey 2009, 223). Earlier in the Lismore recension there are two further permutations of this motif. The first occurs on Easter eve when at the blinding appearance of the apostle Philip on the summit of Mount Zion, "That bright sunlike blaze was turning upon itself too fast for the eye to follow; for it was seven times brighter than the sun" (*ibid.*, 109). The second comes in the description of the icy cold third heaven, which is "seven times colder than snow" (*ibid.*, 133). This latter detail is also preserved in the second recension (Nic Énri and Mac Niocaill 1971, 18-19). The Lismore recension also declares that if the risen Christ were to make known the full extent of his wrath, the torments in hell "would be seven times worse than they are; for it is the wrath of God that seethes in the hells" (Carey 2009, 219). The version in Rennes, Bibliothèque Municipale, 598/15489 includes the apparently unique detail that the stream of torments on the island of punishments "is seven times hotter than fire" (Carey 2009, 303).

⁷³ "Greatly ought we to honour this holy day that is called Sunday, for it is God's own day. All other days of the week are subservient to this day. This day is the holy day, the blessed day, the blissful day, the pleasant day, the day seven times brighter than the sun, the first day that ever yet was seen on earth" (Morris [1868] 1988, 139). In his unpublished study "An Edition of the Latin Source of Lambeth Homily XIV," Stephen Pelle identifies the Latin source of this homily, which also declares Sunday to be seven times brighter than the sun (*dies splendidior sole septies*), as well as a Middle High German sermon that does likewise (*Der suntak ist [...] Schoner wen dy sunne sebenstunt*).

⁷⁴ "And for them is intended hell-torment among the demons, where there is weeping and lamentation and hunger and thirst and consuming flame seven times hotter than the hottest [fire one] can generate on earth." David Johnson discusses this passage as a rare Old Norse example of a numerically based "Horrors of Hell" motif which he has otherwise found exclusively in early English and Irish literature (1993, 427). Compare the OE sermon *Be heofonwarum and be helwarum* (HomS 5), which warns that hellfire is nine times hotter than the fire of Doomsday: *nigon syþan hattre þonne domes dægges fyr* (Teresi 2002, 228, lines 55-56). Wright suggests that this detail probably "derives from the Gnostic sources of the Seven Heavens apocryphon," citing a passage from the Gnostic apocryphon *Pistis Sophia*, where "the fire of Amenti is nine times hotter than the earthly fire; the fire in the great Chaos is nine times hotter than in Amenti; the fire in the judgments of the rulers who are in the way of the midst is nine times hotter than that in the great Chaos; and, finally, the fire in the dragon of outer darkness is seventy times hotter than the fire of the rulers" (1993, 220).

a[n] teine ifrinn amhnais (Stokes 1907, 314).⁷⁵

According to the eleventh-century Old Bulgarian *Narration of the Holy Prophet Isaiah about the Years to Come and the Kings and the Antichrist*, at the end of time God will send Enoch and Elijah to fight Antichrist. He will then set the earth on fire and will send four great winds to scatter the dust: “And the earth will become flat like paper and more beautiful than this world and seven times whiter” (Tăpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 2011, 214).⁷⁶

The Old English sermon in the margins of CCCC 41 (this part *s. xi*¹–*xi*^{med}, prob. S. England, prov. Exeter by *s. xi*^{3/4}) that combines a translation of the *Apocalypse of Thomas* and the *Seven Heavens Apocryphon* (HomU 12.1-3) declares that at Creation the sun shone a hundred times brighter than it does now and that at the end of time the saints in heaven will shine brighter than the sun:

Ac þær on-foð ða halegan þem fægeran wuldor-beacne þæs ecan rices. 7 þonne scinað fægrur, þonne sunne æfre dyde oððe þa dyde, þa hio beorhtost wæs, þæt wæs, þa hio ærest ge-worht wæs. Ða hio wæs hundteontegum siðum beorhtre þonne hio nu sie. Ac hio of-teah hire leoman 7 leohtes þridan dæles, ða se Scippend ealles middan-geardes on rode hangude, þæs leohtes 7 þæs leoman 7 þære fægernisse (Förster 1955, 18-19).⁷⁷

According to Epiphanius of Salamis’s *Panarion* 48.10.3, the second-century prophet Montanus is reputed to have taught that at the end of time “the righteous shall shine a hundredfold brighter than the sun; and the least of you that are saved, an hundredfold brighter than the moon” (Williams 1994, 15).

The ninth-century Coptic *Martyrdom of Paësi and Thekla* tells how an angel carried the holy Paësi aloft into heaven and showed him “the city of the pure ones, which was of gold and precious stones, shining more than the sun a thousand times” (Evelyn-White 1926, 118). Similarly, the Coptic *Encomium of St Michael the Archangel* by Eustathius of Trake (*BHO* 765) features a scene in which the Devil, disguised as an archangel, appears to Euphemia, wife of the governor Aristarchus, and tells her: “I have come from God Almighty, and I have seen that the prayers which thou hast made this day have come up before God and they are a thousand times brighter than the sun” (Budge 1894, 92*).

A couple of early Coptic texts employ the number ten thousand rather than seven (or a hundred or a thousand) in describing an image that is brighter than the sun, probably under the influence of Sir. 23:19: “the eyes of the Lord are ten thousand times brighter than the sun” (Metzger 1977, 158). First, the Coptic *Homily on the Dormition of the Virgin* (*BHO* 671; *CANT* 135 copt.; *CPG* 7153) by Archbishop Theodosius of Alexandria († 566 or 567) reports that after the death of Jesus, the apostles Peter and John visit the Virgin Mary one day and find her looking very sad. When asked what is troubling her, she replies: “It happened to me this night that when I had ceased making my little office,

⁷⁵ “For there are four fires there, and seven (times greater is) the heat of each of them than (that of) another: as said a certain sage, namely, fire of earth, fire of lightning, fire of Doom, and fire of Hell: “Seven (times greater than) the heat of the fire of the soft earth (is) the fire of bright-quick lightning. Seven (times greater than) the heat of the fire of ready Doom (is) the fire of cruel Hell” (Stokes 1907, 315).

⁷⁶ An Old Church Slavonic version of this text that includes precisely this same statement is printed (in German translation) by Petkov 2016, 421.

⁷⁷ “But there [in the heavenly Jerusalem] the saints will receive that beautiful crown of glory of the eternal kingdom, and then they will shine more beautifully than the sun ever did or than it did when it was at its brightest, which was when it was first created, when it was a hundred times brighter than it is now. But it withdrew a third part of its radiance and light when the Creator of the entire world hung on the Cross — [a third] of the light and radiance and beauty.”

I slumbered for a little while; and I saw a beautiful youth about thirty years of age, ten thousand times brighter than the sun” (Robinson 1896, 93-95). The beautiful youth is of course the risen Christ.⁷⁸

On the other hand, in the Coptic *Homily on the Dormition of the Virgin* attributed to Evodius of Rome (*BHO* 666; *CANT* 134 copt.) it is not Christ but Mary who is associated with this image. After Mary’s death, Christ appears to his mourning disciples and sends for Mary to return from heaven to comfort them. The disciples declare: “Straightaway we looked, and saw a great chariot of light. It came and stayed in our midst, Cherubim drawing it, the holy Virgin Mary sitting upon it, and shining ten thousand times more than the sun and the moon” (Robinson 1896, 64).⁷⁹

And a passage from the *Prose Solomon and Saturn Pater Noster Dialogue* that has been characterized as one of “the most fantastic descriptive passages in all of Old English literature” (Wright 1993, 249) raises the multiplying number to twelve thousand in its description of the eyes of the Pater Noster:

Ond his [the Pater Noster’s] eagan sindon .xii. ðusendum siða beorhtran ðonne ealles middangeardes eorðe, ðeah ðe hio sie mid ðæra beorhtestan lilian blostmum ofbræded, ond æghwylc blostman leaf hæbbe .xii. sunnan, ond æghwylc blostma hæbbe .xii. monan, ond æghwylc mona sie sinderlice .xii. ðusendum siða beorhtra ðonne he ieo wæs ær Abeles slege (Anlezark 2009, 74, lines 56-61).⁸⁰

7. Conclusions

As we have seen, the concept of a light seven times brighter than the sun is at least as old as the biblical book of Isaiah, which includes the prophecy that “the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days” (Isa. 30:26). This verse is echoed in the “sevenfold light” of one of the Thanksgiving Hymns of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and it was likely the inspiration for the scenes in the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Epistle of the Apostles* where Christ appears at Doomsday shining seven times brighter than the sun (Permutation 2). That verse from Isaiah was also the ultimate inspiration for the scene in the sixth-century Greek R Recension of the *Transitus Mariae* in which the soul of the Virgin Mary ascends to heaven shining seven times brighter than the sun, and this *Transitus* text in turn (I would conjecture) is the probable origin of the image in the Latin and Old English Three Utterances exempla in which a blessed soul parts from its body shining seven times brighter than the sun (Permutation 1). The parting-of-the-soul scene in the Three Utterances exempla introduces a clever new twist to the sevenfold image by pairing it with a negative counterpart to yield the image of a damned soul seven times blacker than a raven and by grafting both of these images onto a scene of individual judgement taken ultimately from the *Visio Pauli*. As a number-based construct, the Three Utterances episode in Luiselli Fadda I can be understood as a double double triad (three utterances each by a good and bad soul mirrored by three utterances each by a good and bad angel)

⁷⁸ This sermon is edited with a French translation by Chaîne 1933-34. See the discussions by Bellet 1951 and Shoemaker 2002, 62.

⁷⁹ On the date of this text (pre-mid-sixth century?) and its relation to other Coptic homilies on the Dormition, see Shoemaker 1999 and 2002, 60. Shoemaker’s 1999 English translation is reproduced in Shoemaker 2002, 397-407.

⁸⁰ “And his eyes are twelve thousand times brighter than all the orb of middle-earth — even if it were spread over with the brightest lily blossoms, and each blossom’s leaf have twelve suns, and each blossom have twelve moons, and each moon be individually twelve thousand times brighter than it was before Abel’s murder” (Anlezark 2009, 75).

accompanied by a double inverse sevenfold amplification that takes place at the doubling of the individual into body and soul at death.

The family of Greek *Transitus* apocrypha represented by the R Recension and John of Thessalonica's sermon on the Dormition lies behind all the medieval Latin *Transitus* apocrypha, but a recension of the Latin *Transitus* best known in early medieval England (Recension W) substitutes "seven times whiter than snow" for "seven times brighter than the sun," and this image (I would again conjecture) is the origin of the image of the soul of St Vitus in the *Old English Martyrology* ascending to heaven seven times whiter than snow.

Meanwhile the depiction of the bodies of the blessed at Doomsday shining seven times brighter than the sun in the *Catechesis Celtica* and elsewhere (Permutation 3) is arguably modeled on Christ's appearance at Doomsday shining seven times brighter than the sun in Permutation 2, which would put the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Epistle of the Apostles* in the background of both these permutations, both set at Doomsday.

The enormously influential idea that at Creation the sun was seven times brighter than it is now and that at Doomsday it will be restored to its original sevenfold brightness (Permutation 4) owes its popularity in large measure to the seventh-century Hiberno-Latin *Liber de ordine creaturarum*, a synthesis of early medieval theology, cosmology, eschatology, natural science, and Platonic teachings concerning the animation of the heavens that was well known in England from the time of Bede onward. It is repeated in several Old English and Anglo-Latin texts including Bede's apocalyptic hymn *De Enoch et Haeliae*, the *Old English Martyrology*, Byrhtferth's commentary on Bede's *De temporum ratione*, three homilies by Ælfric, Honorius's *Elucidarium*, and Irvine Homily VI. Of all the permutations under discussion here, this one appears to have had the greatest impact on medieval eschatology generally and was even acknowledged, albeit with scepticism, by Aquinas.

Permutations 1-4 are all situated either at the moment of an individual's death or at (Creation and) Doomsday and are concerned with questions of eschatological time. By contrast, the relatively rare notion that in the interim paradise, located far in the east way up in the sky, the sun shines seven times brighter than it does here on earth (Permutation 5) is implicitly placed between death and universal Judgement and is presented as a curiosity of otherworldly geographical lore. This idea appears to have originated in England and survives only in Old English and Old Norse. Its ultimate inspiration is again Isa. 30:26, but by the eleventh century, when the earliest Old English prose *Phoenix* text was written, literary references to something shining seven times brighter than something else were so varied and widespread in apocrypha, sermons, saints' lives, and cosmological treatises that pinning down a specific immediate source or influence may not be possible.

In fact, the claims I've made so far about the individual histories of these images are in some cases probably grossly oversimplified since they don't take into account the incalculable number of lost or undiscovered ancient and medieval texts that incorporate some version of a sevenfold motif and that may have played a role in transmitting and reshaping it. They are also probably grossly oversimplified in that they presume direct lines of transmission and inheritance from one specific text to another, whereas there is no reason not to think that some are products of *sui generis* invention. I've claimed, for example, that the image of the soul of St Vitus ascending to heaven seven times whiter than snow in the *Old English Martyrology* is likely indebted to the W Recension of the *Transitus Mariae*, which says exactly the same thing about the soul of the Virgin Mary. But a writer of some imagination who was familiar with eschatological conventions could easily yoke together the commonplace image of a blessed soul as white as snow with the

fluid concept of something shining seven times brighter than something else and arrive at the same result.

A distinction worth making here is that while what I have been referring to loosely as “the sevenfold motif” is a numerical formulation, a motif based on number, it is not an enumerative one since it doesn’t enumerate or list anything. The formal structure of enumerative motifs such as the Three Hosts of Doomsday (heaven-dwellers, earth-dwellers, and hell-dwellers) or the Seven Joys of Heaven (life without death, youth without old age, light without darkness, joy without sorrow, peace without discord, free will without injury, and a kingdom without change, or some such sequence) requires consistency in number and a list or enumeration of constituent elements (which need not be consistent in content from one attestation of the motif to the next). The sevenfold motif requires only a subject multiplied by a factor of seven, a comparative quality such as brightness or whiteness, and a thing to which the subject is compared, but beyond that it has no further restrictions or requirements. A dominant subset of the sevenfold motif, inspired ultimately by Isa. 30:26, involves something shining seven times brighter than the sun, but the open-ended form allows anything to be the subject multiplied by seven and anything to serve as the comparandum. This is why in the examples cited above under “Further Permutations” there are subjects as diverse as the thrones of angels, the thongs of God’s sandals, the souls of the righteous, the nail marks in the hands and feet of the thief crucified with Christ, the ascending soul of St Andrew the Fool, heaven itself, and even Sunday which are all said to shine seven times brighter than the sun. It is also why we find examples in which the hair of the infant Noah is seven times whiter than snow, the sun shines seven times brighter than fire, the fires of hell are seven times hotter than the hottest fires on earth, the icy cold third heaven is seven times colder than snow, and one of the celestial realms toured by St Paul is seven times brighter than silver. The formula is infinitely flexible and adaptable. It also conveys authority because it preserves an element of biblical diction, and this combination of adaptability and an aura of biblical authority goes far towards explaining the long life and frequent occurrence of this extended family of motifs, which in their various permutations exercised such a prominent role in medieval eschatology.

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