= Ormulum =

The Ormulum or Orrmulum is a twelfth @-@ century work of biblical exegesis , written by a monk named Orm (or Ormin) and consisting of just under 19 @,@ 000 lines of early Middle English verse . Because of the unique phonetic orthography adopted by its author , the work preserves many details of English pronunciation existing at a time when the language was in flux after the Norman conquest of England . Consequently , it is invaluable to philologists in tracing the development of the language .

After a preface and dedication , the work consists of homilies explicating the biblical texts set for the mass throughout the liturgical year ; it was intended to be consulted as the texts changed , and is agreed to be tedious and repetitive when read straight through . Only about a fifth of the promised material is in the single manuscript of the work to survive , which is in the Bodleian Library in Oxford .

Orm was concerned with priests ' ability to speak the vernacular , and developed an idiosyncratic spelling system to guide his readers in the pronunciation of the vowels . He used a strict poetic metre to ensure that readers know which syllables are to be stressed . Modern scholars use these two features to reconstruct Middle English as Orm spoke it (Burchfield 1987 , p . 280) .

= = Origins = =

Unusually for work of the period , the Ormulum is neither anonymous nor untitled . The author names himself at the end of the dedication :

At the start of the preface , the author identifies himself again , using a different spelling of his name , and gives the work a title :

The name " Orm " derives from Old Norse , meaning worm , serpent or dragon . With the suffix of " myn " for " man " (hence " Ormin ") , it was a common name throughout the Danelaw area of England . The meter probably dictated the choice between each of the two forms of the name . The title of the poem , " Ormulum " , is modeled after the Latin word speculum (" mirror ") (Matthew 2004 , p . 936) , so popular in the title of medieval Latin non @-@ fiction works that the term speculum literature is used for the genre .

The Danish name is not unexpected ; the language of the Ormulum , an East Midlands dialect , is stringently of the Danelaw (Bennett and Smithers 1982 , pp. 174 ? 75) . It includes numerous Old Norse phrases (particularly doublets , where an English and Old Norse term are co @-@ joined) , but there are very few Old French influences on Orm 's language (Bennett 1986 , p . 33) . Another ? likely previous ? East Midlands work , the Peterborough Chronicle , shows a great deal of French influence . The linguistic contrast between it and the work of Orm demonstrates both the sluggishness of the Norman influence in the formerly Danish areas of England and the assimilation of Old Norse features into early Middle English (Bennett 1986 , pp. 259 ? 63) .

According to the work 's dedication , Orm wrote it at the behest of Brother Walter , who was his brother both affterr þe flæshess kinde (biologically) and as a fellow canon of an Augustinian order (Matthew 2004 , p . 936) . With this information , and the evidence of the dialect of the text , it is possible to propose a place of origin with reasonable certainty . While some scholars , among them Henry Bradley , have regarded the likely origin as Elsham Priory in north Lincolnshire (Bennett and Smithers 1982 , pp. 174 ? 75) , as of the mid @-@ 1990s it became widely accepted that Orm wrote in the Bourne Abbey in Bourne , Lincolnshire (Treharne 2000 , p . 273) . Two additional pieces of evidence support this conjecture : firstly , Arrouaisian canons established the abbey in 1138 , and secondly , the work includes dedicatory prayers to Peter and Paul , the patrons of Bourne Abbey (Parkes 1983 , pp. 115 ? 27) . The Arrouaisian rule was largely that of Augustine , so that its houses often are loosely referred to as Augustinian (Jack , George , in Matthew and Harrison 2004 , pp. 936 ? 37 ; Parkes 1983 , pp. 115 ? 27) .

Scholars cannot pinpoint the exact date of composition . Orm wrote his book over a period of decades and the manuscript shows signs of multiple corrections through time (Burchfield 1987 , p . 280) . Since it is apparently an autograph , with two of the three hands in the text generally believed

by scholars to be Orm 's own , the date of the manuscript and the date of composition would have been the same . On the evidence of the third hand (that of a collaborator who entered the pericopes at the head of each homily) it is thought that the manuscript was finished circa 1180 , but Orm may have begun the work as early as 1150 (Parkes 1983 , pp. 115 ? 27) . The text has few topical references to specific events that could be used to identify the period of composition more precisely .

= = Manuscript = =

Only one copy of the Ormulum exists , as Bodleian Library MS Junius 1 (Burchfield 1987 , p . 280) . In its current state , the manuscript is incomplete : the book 's table of contents claims that there were 242 homilies , but only 32 remain (Matthew 2004 , p . 936) . It seems likely that the work was never finished on the scale planned when the table of contents was written , but much of the discrepancy was probably caused by the loss of gatherings from the manuscript . There is no doubt that such losses have occurred even in modern times , as the Dutch antiquarian Jan van Vliet , one of its seventeenth @-@ century owners , copied out passages that are not in the present text (Jack , George , in Matthew and Harrison 2004 , pp. 936 ? 37) . The amount of redaction in the text , plus the loss of possible gatherings , led J. A. W. Bennett to comment that " only about one fifth survives , and that in the ugliest of manuscripts " (Bennett 1986 , p . 30) .
The parchment used in the manuscript is of the lowest quality , and the text is written untidily , with an eye to economical use of space ; it is laid out in continuous lines like prose , with words and lines close together , and with various additions and corrections , new exegesis , and allegorical readings , crammed into the corners of the margins (as can be seen in the reproduction above) . Robert Burchfield argues that these indications " suggest that it was a ' workshop ' draft which the author intended to have recopied by a professional scribe " (Burchfield 1987 , p . 280) .
It seems curious that a text so obviously written with the expectation that it would be widely copied should exist in only one manuscript and that , apparently , a draft . Treharne has taken this as suggesting that it is not only modern readers who have found the work tedious (Treharne 2000 , p . 273) . Orm , however , says in the preface that he wishes Walter to remove any wording that he finds clumsy or incorrect (quoted in Bennett and Smithers 1982 , pp. 175 ? 76) .
The provenance of the manuscript before the seventeenth century is unclear . From a signature on the flyleaf we know that it was in van Vliet 's collection in 1659 . It was auctioned in 1666 , after his death , and probably was purchased by Franciscus Junius , from whose library it came to the Bodleian as part of the Junius donation (Holt 1878 , pp. liv ? lvi) .

= = Contents and style = =

The Ormulum consists of 18 @,@ 956 lines of metrical verse , explaining Christian teaching on each of the texts used in the mass throughout the church calendar (Treharne 2000 , p . 273) . As such , it is the first new homily cycle in English since the works of Ælfric of Eynsham (c . 990) . The motivation was to provide an accessible English text for the benefit of the less educated , which might include some clergy who found it difficult to understand the Latin of the Vulgate , and the parishioners who in most cases would not understand spoken Latin at all (Treharne 2000 , p . 273) .
Each homily begins with a paraphrase of a Gospel reading (important when the laity did not understand Latin) , followed by exegesis (Bennett and Smithers 1982 , pp. 174 ? 75) . The theological content is derivative ; Orm closely follows Bede 's exegesis of Luke , the Enarrationes in Matthoei , and the Glossa Ordinaria of the Bible . Thus , he reads each verse primarily allegorically rather than literally (Jack , George , in Matthew and Harrison 2004 , pp. 936 ? 37) . Rather than identify individual sources , Orm refers frequently to " ðe boc " and to the " holy book " (Bennett 1986 , p . 31) . Bennett has speculated that the Acts of the Apostles , Glossa Ordinaria , and Bede were bound together in a large Vulgate Bible in the abbey so that Orm truly was getting all of his material from a source that was , to him , a single book . (Bennett 1986 , p . 31) .

Although the sermons have been deemed " of little literary or theological value " (Burchfield 1987 , p . 280) and though Orm has been said to possess " only one rhetorical device " , that of repetition (Bennett 1986 , p . 32) , the Ormulum never was intended as a book in the modern sense , but rather as a companion to the liturgy . Priests would read , and congregations hear , only a day 's entry at a time . The tedium that many experience when attempting to read the Ormulum today would not exist for persons hearing only a single homily each day . Furthermore , although Orm 's poetry is , perhaps , subliterary , the homilies were meant for easy recitation or chanting , not for aesthetic appreciation ; everything from the overly strict meter to the orthography might function only to aid oratory (Bennett and Smithers 1982 , pp. 174 ? 75) .

Although earlier metrical homilies , such as those of Ælfric and Wulfstan , were based on the rules of Old English poetry , they took sufficient liberties with meter to be readable as prose . Orm does not follow their example . Rather , he adopts a " jog @-@ trot fifteener " for his rhythm , based on the Latin iambic septenarius , and writes continuously , neither dividing his work into stanzas nor rhyming his lines , again following Latin poetry (Bennett 1986 , p . 31) . The work is unusual in that no critic ever has stepped forward to defend it on literary grounds . Indeed , Orm was humble about his oeuvre : he admits in the preface that he frequently has padded the lines to fill out the meter , " to help those who read it " , and urges his brother Walter to edit the poetry to make it more meet (Treharne 2000 , pp. 274 ? 75) .

A brief sample may help to illustrate the style of the work . This passage explains the background to the Nativity :

= = Orthography = =

Rather than conspicuous literary merit , the chief scholarly value of the Ormulum derives from Orm 's idiosyncratic orthographical system (Treharne 2000 , p . 273) . He states that since he dislikes the way that people are mispronouncing English , he will spell words exactly as they are pronounced , and describes a system whereby vowel length and value are indicated unambiguously (Bennett 1986 , pp. 31 ? 32) .

Orm 's chief innovation was to employ doubled consonants to show that the preceding vowel is short and single consonants when the vowel is long (Treharne 2000 , p . 273) . For syllables that ended in vowels , he used accent marks to indicate length . In addition to this , he used two distinct letter forms for g , using the old yogh for [d ? ?] and [j] , and the new g for [?] (Jack , George , in Matthew and Harrison 2004 , pp. 936 ? 37) . His devotion to precise spelling was meticulous ; for example , having originally used eo and e inconsistently for words such as " beon " and " kneow , " which had been spelled with eo in Old English , at line 13 @,@ 000 he changed his mind and went back to change all eo spellings , replacing them solely with e alone (ben and knew) , to reflect the pronunciation (Matthew 2004 , p . 936 ; Jack , George , in Matthew and Harrison 2004 , pp. 936 ? 37) .

The combination of this system with the rigid meter , and the stress patterns this implies , provides enough information to reconstruct his pronunciation with some precision ; making the reasonable assumption that Orm 's pronunciation was in no way unusual , this permits scholars of history of English to develop an exceptionally precise snapshot of exactly how Middle English was pronounced in the Midlands in the second half of the twelfth century (Matthew 2004 , p . 936) .

= = Significance = =

Orm 's book has a number of innovations that make it valuable . As Bennett points out , Orm 's adaptation of a classical meter with fixed stress patterns anticipates future English poets , who would do much the same when encountering foreign language prosodies (Bennett 1986 , p . 31) . The Ormulum is also the only specimen of the homiletic tradition in England between Ælfric and the fourteenth century , as well as being the last example of the Old English verse homily . It also demonstrates what would become Received Standard English two centuries before Geoffrey Chaucer (Burchfield 1987 , p . 280) . Further , Orm was concerned with the laity . He sought to

make the Gospel comprehensible to the congregation , and he did this perhaps forty years before the Fourth Council of the Lateran of 1215 " spurred the clergy as a whole into action " (Bennett 1986 , p . 33) . At the same time , Orm 's idiosyncrasies and attempted orthographic reform make his work vital for understanding Middle English . The Ormulum is , with the Ancrene Wisse and the Ayenbite of Inwyt , one of the three crucial texts that have enabled philologists to document the transformation of Old English into Middle English (Burchfield 1987 , p . 280) .

= = Endnotes = =

 A. ^ Quotations are from Holt (1878) . The dedication and preface are both numbered separately from the main body of the poem .