The Lindisfarne Gospels: Aldred’s Gloss
For God and St Cuthbert and All the Saints Together Who are in the Island

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This chapter is about the interlinear glosses in the Lindisfarne Gospels and especially the slightly more expansive explanations in the margins, all added in the later tenth century by Aldred of Chester-le-Street. He concentrated on the words of the glosses, which his glosses in his Northumbrian dialect render one by one. His work reveals a devout mind, striving to present learnedly the often polysynthetic richness of the word of God for those whose Latinity was less good than his. The textual examples have been selected, without thought of how they may hang together, to illustrate the wealth of the glossator’s intellectual relationship with the Vulgate – material that is not easy for modern readers, and often humbling.

1 Those Who Made the Lindisfarne Gospels

Aldred, the scribe who wrote the glosses in Old Northumbrian, the dialect of Old English that was spoken by the Anglo-Saxons in this part of the Island about a thousand years ago, wrote the colophon at the end of the Gospel of St John. My title quotes from its opening words:

For God and St Cuthbert and All the Saints Together Who are in the Island

The red begins with þæt in John 5.10. On the nature of the red ink and its possible implications see Andrew Beeby, Richard Gameson, Catherine Nicholson and Anthony Parker, Ch. 11 in this volume.

The ’e’ stands for uel, the bar being in fact a ‘u’ or ‘v’ imposed on the final letter of uel.

Aldred eft-alesenis. It matters: God’s word mattered to Aldred.

The following is the colophon (fol. 259r):3

† EADfrīð bispoc/īo Lindisfearnensis æcclesiae: he ðis boc aurat æt fruma, Gode & Sancte Cuðberhte & allum ðæm hælgum gimenelicæ ða ðæ in eolonde sint. & Ædfrith Lindisfearnæolæinga bisc hit uta giðryde & gibelde sua he uel cuðæ. & Billfrīð se oncræ: he gismioðade ða gihrino ðaðe utan on sint, & hit gihrinade mið golde & mið gimnum, æc mið suþlire of gylded faconleas feh. & Aldred, p’sb’i indig nus et misserrim’ mið Godes fulu’tæ & Sancti Cuðberhtes, hit of glossæde on Englisc, & hine gihamadi mið ðæm ðrīm ðælum: Matheus dæl Gode & Sancte Cuðberhtæ, Marc’ dæl ðæm bïsc’, & Lucas dæl ðæm hiorode & æhtæ ða seolæ & Gode & Sancti Cuðberhtæ, þætte he harbebe onðfong ðerh Godes milsæ on heofnum, seel & sibb on eorðo, forðgeong & giðyngo, uisdom & snyttræ ðerh Sancti Cuðberhtes eargunga. †Eadfrith, Oeðiluald, Billfrīð, Aldred, hoc Euange’ D’o & Cuðberhto construxerunt l ornauerunt.

[†Eadfrith, Bishop of Lindisfarne Church, at first wrote this book for God and for St Cuthbert and for

3 Cod. Lind., ii, ii, text 10. My translation does not follow that in the aforementioned facsimile edition exactly, but is heavily indebted to it. The punctuation, word division, and other manuscript details of the text, though important, have been modified to some extent. All quotations are as in The Four Gospels in Anglo-Saxon, Northumbrian and Old Mercian Versions, ed. W.W. Skeat, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1871–7), though sometimes modified to bring them into better conformity with the manuscript. There is no phonological difference between pointed ‘v’ and ‘u’, and I follow Skeat in using ‘v’, which is like not distinguishing the two forms of ‘s’, long s and round s in medieval and early modern scripts, and in printing up to the nineteenth century as well as even later in arty printing. I retain, as did Skeat, ‘v’ for wynn, though not phonologically distinct from consonantal ‘u’.

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all the saints together who [? = whose relics] are in the Island. And Æthelwald, Bishop of the Lindisfarne Islanders, pressed it on the outside and covered it over, as he well knew how to. And Billfrith, the anchorite, forged the ornaments which are on the outside and adorned it with gold and with jewels and also with gilded-over silver – (?)sinlessly-obtained property. And Aldred, unworthy priest, the lowest, glossed it between the lines in English with God's help and St Cuthbert's. And by its three parts he established his home: the part of Matthew (and its preliminaries) for God and St Cuthbert, the part of Mark (and its preliminaries) for the Bishop, the part of Luke (and its preliminaries) for the Community plus eight ores of silver for his induction, and the part of St John (and its preliminaries) for himself \(\text{that is, for his soul/plus four ores of silver for God and St Cuthbert, so that he may have admission into heaven; on earth happiness and peace, success and advancement through the merits of St Cuthbert, wisdom and discernment.}^5\) Aldred made, or, as the case may be, embellished this Gospel Book for God and Cuthbert.]

In the margin of fol. 259r Aldred gives further details about himself, that his father was called Ælfred and that his mother was a good woman, *Alfredi natus Aldredus ucor, bona mulieris ḍ.ī til w/' filius eximius loquor, 'I am named Aldred son of Alfred, I am called the excellent son of a good woman \(\text{that is, of a good woman/'}.^4

2 Aldred of Chester-le-Street, and Away among the West Saxons

Aldred, the glossator, entered the community of St Cuthbert, and when he refers to 'success and advancement' he may be referring to his own advancement, perhaps recent, for he gives his title as *p'fast*, that is, 'provost', when we meet him in the other book glossed by him between the lines, the 'Durham Ritual' as it has been called, or 'The Durham Collector' as it is now more appropriately called.\(^5\) His community was that of Chester-le-Street, and the Bishop of that ecclesiastical establishment was Ælfsige from 968 to 990. Exact dating of the glosses in the Lindisfarne Gospels and in the Durham Collector is not possible. Aldred did not use red ink when he began the Gospel glosses, and the Collector glosses are in red ink. That has given approximate dates of 950–970 for the Gospels and about 970 for the Collector.\(^6\)

For the Durham Collector Ælfsige is of importance; in the colophon, in which Aldred describes himself as *p'fast*, he gives details about where he was when he wrote the colophon in the glossed book:

Besiðan Wudigan Gaete æt Aclee on Westeasxonum on Laurentius Massan daegi on Wodnes daegi Ælfsige ḍæm biscope in his getelde, Aldred se p'fast ḍæs fewer collectæ on fíf næht aldne mona ar undeorne awrat.

[To the south of Woodyate(s) at Oakley, among the West Saxons, on the Feast-Day of St Laurence (10 August), Wednesday, the Provost Aldred wrote for Bishop Ælfsige in his tent these four collects, before Tierce, the moon being five nights old.]

We shall never know why the Provost was with the Bishop when he wrote the colophon.\(^7\) By road it is about 335

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4 A.S.C. Ross (*Cod. Lind.*, 11, ii, 10, and 'Prolegomena to an Edition of the Old English Gloss to the Lindisfarne Gospels', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 42 (1943), 309–21 at 321) gives details about this marginal note, and why it is probably wrong to interpret 'i. til' explaining *bonæ mulieris* as a personal name ('Tilwinn, supposedly the name of Aldred’s mother'), rather than as *til w'[f]’ ‘good woman’.


7 Cf. *Durham Collector*, ed. Corrêa, pp. 120–1. There may have been some connection between Wessex, the kings of the West-Saxons, and the Community of St Cuthbert at various times in the tenth