

***De Civitate Dei* and Old English Homilies: Why Is Everything Falling Apart?**
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ENGL 3335
Ancient and Medieval Literature

De Civitate Dei (On the City of God)

- Rome sacked by Alaric the Visigoth in 410
- Augustine mentions the sack in several roughly contemporary sermons
- Volusianus, a Roman official, was in contact with Augustine and his friend Marcellinus regarding the Donatist heresy
 - V. had philosophical issues with some parts of Christian belief; also reported the belief of some Roman nobility that the new religion had weakened Rome and allowed it to be conquered; perhaps some classical pagans, but more so people who were culturally Roman and nominally Christian
- Earliest books of *De civ.* in circulation by about 413 or so; all 22 books published by about 426

Civitas

- *Cives* – citizen
- *Civitas* – citizenship, state; “city” in the sense of a city-state
 - More importantly, the social contract that held a group of *cives* together
- Augustine uses this sense of a worldly city (an orientation toward earthly things) in contrast to a unified church, the city of God (an orientation to the divine) – see *De civ.* II.21 (Cicero)

Homilies and Sermons

- *homily* - explication of the pericope (the appointed readings for the day)
- *sermon* - preaching on a specified topic, not the pericope

Wulfstan (d. 1023)

- Early history unclear - definitely a product of the Benedictine Reform
- Bishop of London 996-1002
- Archbishop of York 1002-23 and Worcester 1002-1016 (permissible to hold multiple sees at the time)
- From 1008 on, advised Æthelred II and the Danish King Canute
 - Helped write law codes for these kings
 - *Institutes of Polity* - a text on good government and social order, and relation of church and state
 - London, BL, Cotton Nero A.i – Autograph draft copy

Wulfstan’s religious writings

- A number of sermons, edited by Dorothy Bethurum (Oxford 1957)
- *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (the Sermon of Wolf to the English) - between 1009 and 1014
 - explains England’s social/political problems as divine punishment
 - Three main versions occur in 5 MSS
- *On the False Gods*

- *euhemeristic*- explains classical deities as human whose stories have been overinflated/exploited by the devil

The Vercelli Book

- Vercelli, Bibliotheca capitolare cxvii, s. x²
- southeast of England, possibly Canterbury
 - 23 homilies
 - Six religious poems (*Andreas, Fates of the Apostles, Dream of the Rood, Elene, Soul and Body I, Homiletic Fragment I*)
 - Fragment of prose *Life of St. Guthlac*
 - Possibly brought by an English monk on a trip to Rome, or by English pilgrims *en route* to Rome, or given to an Italian priest who had been in England - no one knows for sure how it ended up in Italy

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 343

- Sir Robert Cotton gave MS to Bodleian Library c. 1601; possibly from West Midlands or Hereford
- Official dating is s. xii² (second half of twelfth century)
 - Material from Ælfric's first and second series of *Catholic Homilies* plus several of his additional homilies and letters; various homilies in Latin and Old English; sermons by Wulfstan; Latin dialogues and treatises; *The Grave*