Cædmon’s Hymn

anonymous

s.vii?

This poem is found added by scribes to the margins of various manuscripts of Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Book 4, chapter 24. Bede’s text is in Latin, but the scribes have added the poem in Old English.

1 Nu sculon herigean heofonrices weard
2 meotodes meahte and his modgeþanc,
3 weorc wuldorfaeder, swa he wundra gehwæs,
4 ece drihten, or onstealde.
5 He ærest sceop eorðan bearum
6 heofon to hrofe, halig scyppend;

1 sculon herigean modal plus infinitive; understood subject, we
2 meahte object of herigean
3 wundra gehwæs partitive genitive; gehwæs is a gen. prn.
4 ece adj.
5 bearum dat pl. is always -um
6 heofon object of sceop
to idiomatic, translate “as”
7 þa middangeard moncynnes weard,
8 ece drihten, æfter teode
9 firum foldan, frea ælmhltig.

7 [ba] conj. often trans as “then”
7 middangeard | Norse? lit. Middle-earth
8 teode | main verb

7 moncynnes weard | Variant of line 1a. Why has the heafonrices weard become the weard of moncynn?
8 ece drihten | Repetition of line 4a. What aesthetic effect does this have? Does the formula in a new context give it new meaning? If so, what?
8 æfter | We’ve experienced swa(3b), or(4a), ærest(5a), and þa(7a); now we have another temporal indicator. How does time work in this poem?
9 firum | Cædmon not only has many names for God, but many names for human beings: bearnum(5b), moncynn(7b), and firum(9a). Why? And what implication arises from shifting humanity to the a-verse?
9 frea | Refers to the OE head of a household, which included slaves and other dependents. Sometimes translated Lat principes, as in Tacitus, or dominus. Also alludes to a Norse god, Frey. Fertility god of the Vanir. Snorri Sturluson says Frey “governs rain and sunshine . . . and it is good to pray to him for prosperity and peace; he also looks after the wealth of men.” There is also the Vanir goddess, Freyja, sister of Frey, trollope and scamp.