

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY IN OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

Mohinur Anvarbekovna

Student, Chirchik State Pedagogical University

munisaabdulloyeva074@gmail.com

Scientific adviser: **Tursuntosh Isroilova**

Teacher, Chirchik State Pedagogical University

isroilova.tursuntosh@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The importance of Christianity in Old English literature from the seventh to the eleventh centuries is examined in this article. Literary output changed from mostly oral pagan traditions to written works produced mostly in monastery scriptoria during the Christianization of Anglo-Saxon England. Christianity transformed Germanic culture's heroic ideals while also influencing literary themes, genres, symbolism, and linguistic forms. This article demonstrates how Christian ideology and worldview influenced narrative patterns, moral viewpoints, and the notion of heroism through an analysis of key literature such as Beowulf, The Dream of the Rood, Caedmon's Hymn, homiletic writings, and bible translations.

KEYWORDS: Old English literature, Christianity, Anglo-Saxon culture, heroic tradition, monastic writing, biblical translations, Christian symbolism

INTRODUCTION

The Anglo-Saxons' shift from polytheistic Germanic beliefs to Christianity is reflected in Old English literature, which was written between around 450 and 1100 CE. Early medieval England's intellectual and literary landscape was drastically altered by this theological change, which went beyond simple doctrinal changes. Christian missionaries brought literacy, the Latin alphabet, monastic education, and new writing styles, particularly following the Gregorian mission in 597 CE. As a result, Christian influence may be seen in nearly every Old English book that has survived, including laws, religious literature, poetry, and historical chronicles.

Anglo-Saxon culture depended on oral tradition, runic inscriptions, and heroic narratives prior to Christianization. The Latin alphabet and manuscript culture brought literacy with the conversion to Christianity. Monasteries like Winchester, Canterbury, and Wearmouth-Jarrow developed into significant intellectual hubs. It was in these scriptoria that the oldest English poems and prose texts were transcribed and preserved. Both religious and secular poetry were recorded by Christian monks, who frequently infused old Germanic material with Christian interpretation. Texts like *The Wanderer* and *Beowulf* would not have survived without monk scribes. Therefore, Christianity was a mechanism that allowed Old English literature to survive rather than just a theme. Old English poetry is famous for blending Germanic heroic culture with Christian morality. The heroic ethos - valor, loyalty, courage, and the pursuit of glory - was reinterpreted to support Christian values.

Beowulf, the greatest surviving Old English epic, exemplifies this synthesis. While its narrative contains pre-Christian stories and mythological elements, the poem is framed by a Christian narrator who interprets events through divine providence, moral judgment, and biblical comparisons. *Beowulf*'s strength is described as a gift from God; Grendel is called a descendant of Cain; and the final message emphasizes humility and the transience of earthly glory. This fusion created a uniquely Anglo-Saxon form of Christian heroism: the warrior who fights not only for earthly honor but also as a defender of divine order.

CONCLUSION

In the end, Old English literature's unique flavor came from Christianity. It gave Anglo-Saxon writers the cultural framework that shaped their understanding of the world in addition to stories and symbols. The great bulk of Old English literature and the intellectual underpinnings of medieval English culture would not have developed in its current forms without the impact of Christianity.

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