Lidia Francesca Oliva

SOME REMARKS ON THE LEXICON
OF *MUSPILLI*

This study considers an aspect of *Muspilli* which, despite the numerous studies on the text, was often overlooked and never extensively analysed: its lexicon. In this article I shall focus on three particularly interesting nouns, OHG *hilfa*, *mord* and *muspilli*, and on their meaning in this Old High German eschatological text. Unlike OHG *muspilli*, the occurrences of OHG *hilfa* and *mord* were never closely examined: as I hope to demonstrate, the interpretation which has generally been given to them is not exactly accurate. As for OHG *muspilli*, on the other hand, many before me have tried to trace back its etymology and have debated its meaning. As I will argue in the article, though, one hypothesis was never given enough attention by the scholarship, leading to what might be an incorrect interpretation of the term which could, indeed, not mean 'end of the world'.

In his 1971 essay on the language of *Muspilli*, Rolf Bergmann concluded his analysis by stating that "diese Probleme bedürfen gewiß noch einer genaueren Prüfung, wobei insbesondere an eine ausführliche Wortschatzuntersuchung des Textes zu denken ist".[1] Having conducted the analysis Bergmann had advocated,[2] we can confirm that the scholar was, in fact, right, and that this type of analysis allowed for a better understanding of some passages of the Old High German text. Not unexpectedly, given the complex history of the text, some aspects seem to still remain obscure but, as we shall here demonstrate, a close look at *Muspilli* and at its lexicon proved that some terms, in particular, were often misinterpreted. Unquestionably, while some terms employed by the *Muspilli* author received much attention – e.g. *mûspilli*,[3]

[1] Bergmann 1971, 316.
[2] See Oliva 2023.
[3] The literature on the noun is extensive. For an overview of the meanings and etymologies which have been suggested, see Laur 1987, Jeske 2006, Oliva 2023, 377-382.

uueroltrehtuuîso[4] – some others have been overlooked because of their seemingly straightforward meaning. This was the case, for example, for two of the words we shall here analyse.

1. *Hilfa*

This *nomen actionis* derives from the strong verb *helfan*, which is common to all Germanic languages and goes back to Common Germanic *$*\chi elpe/a$-*.[5] While the verb is widely attested in the Old High German corpus, the noun counts fewer occurrences, but can be found in the largest religious works (in the translation of the *Regula Benedicti*, in the *Murbacher Hymnen*, in Otfrid's *Evangelienbuch*, in Williram von Ebersberg's *Hoheliedkommentar*), in Notker and in glosses.[6] In general, the meaning of the noun seems to pose no difficulties, but a closer look at the two lines in which OHG *hilfa* is employed in *Muspilli* (line 17, "hus in himile, / dar quimit imo hilfa kinuok",[7] and 27, "daz ist rehto paluuic dink, // daz der man haret ze gote / enti imo hilfa niquimit"[8]) highlights the difference between the two occurrences and necessarily calls for a reinterpretation of the term in line 17.

Let us begin with line 27. In the passage the author expresses their pity for those who have sinned during their life and will therefore have to "prinnan in pehhe":[9] these people will call out to God, but His *hilfa* will not come. It is clear that the help these sinners need is firstly help out of the flames, and then the help of God's remission of sins. Of this kind of help we also read in the Gospels, in the passage in which the rich man sees Lazarus

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[4] The compound was analysed by Kolb 1962 and, more recently, by Gottzmann 2002.

[5] See Lloyd *et al.* (henceforth referred to as EWA) IV, 2009, 932.

[6] About the noun in glosses, see Schützeichel, IV, 2004, 256-258.

[7] All *Muspilli* lines in this article will be quoted, if not otherwise specified, from Steinmeyer's edition (1916, 66-73); (there he will get enough *hilfa*). All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

[8] (It is a truly terrible thing that he invokes God and no help comes to him).

[9] Line 26a (burn in pitch).

and Abraham from the depths of hell and asks Abraham to have Lazarus come down and give him a drop of water.[10] The help he asks for is, as in *Muspilli*, material: the rich man begs for (momentary) relief from his pain, but cannot be helped. On the other side, Lazarus, in Heaven, is *gifluobrit* (Lat. *consolatur*), because he suffered during his earthly life, and can now enjoy eternal peace. This help is something people in hell may never receive: their punishment is the consequence of their conduct and, as the *Muspilli* author writes, they will have to endure the terrible experience of praying for help without any possibility of getting it.

Different is, on the other hand, the *hilfa* in line 17. The complexity of the interpretation of the noun here is evident in the modern translations of the text:

> Ein Haus im Himmel, der hat hohes Genügen;[11]
>
> posto in cielo, sovrabbonda di aiuti;[12]
>
> casa in cielo, gli viene allora aiuto a sufficienza;[13]
>
> dimora in cielo, gli perviene aiuto a sufficienza;[14]

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[10] An Old High German translation of the passage can be found in *Tatian* 107, 2 (translating Luke 16, 22): "Uuárd thô gitân, thaz arstárp ther betalâri inti uuas gitragan fon éngilon in barm Abrahâmes. Arstarp ouh ther ôtago inti uuard bigraban in helliu. Ûfheuenti sîniu ougûn, mit thíu her uúas in uuîzin, gisah Abrahâman rûmana inti Lazarum in sînemo bárme. Inti her ruofenti quad: fater Abrahâm, milti mír inti senti Lazarum, thaz her duncô thaz lezzistâ teil sînes fingares in uuazzar, thaz her gicuole mîna zungûn, uuanta ih quilu in thesemo lóuge", Sievers 1872, 208 (So it happened that the beggar died and was taken by angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried in hell. Raising his eyes because he was in torment, he saw Abraham from afar, and Lazarus in his bosom. And, wailing, he said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue, for I suffer in this flame).

[11] Vetter 1872, 102.

[12] Leesthal 1943, 26.

[13] Lupi, Schwab 1963, 91.

[14] Manganella 1966, 75.

> ein Haus im Himmel, für den wird gut gesorgt;[15]
> ein Haus im Himmel, dem ist da gänzlich geholfen;[16]
> ein Haus im Himmel, dann wird ihm genug der Hilfe zuteil;[17]
> – a home in heaven – then help shall come to him in fullness;[18]
> ein Haus im Himmel, dort wird ihm genug Hilfe zuteil;[19]
> una casa in Cielo, là gli giunge sufficiente conforto.[20]

The variety of translation choices highlights the fundamental problem of the line: can "help" in its modern sense render the meaning which the author was trying to convey? Is help what souls in Heaven receive? On one side, we might think that the author could have used the same noun in lines 17 and 27 to underline the difference between the damned, doomed to receive no help, and the good, who shall have *hilfa kinuok*. There might be, however, another reason why they employed the term – which would not necessarily exclude the other: OHG *hilfa* can be used to indicate God's grace. This meaning of the term is not registered in Old High German dictionaries,[21] but is assigned by Kelle[22] to its occurrence in Otfrid I, 28, 5: "thaz sị uns thiu wíntworfa / in themo úrdeile hélfa, // iz únsih mit giwélti / ni firwáe unz in énti".[23] According to the AWB, the noun is here used "in Funktionsverbgefügen (FVG), wobei es vor allem um die Hilfe, den Beistand durch Gott geht"[24], while Kelle, as already said, more concisely translates it as "Gnade"[25]. Otfrid refers, in the line, to

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[15] Haug 1977, 37.

[16] Janota 1999, 31.

[17] Müller 2007, 203.

[18] Hintz 2016, 211.

[19] Kraß 2022, 238.

[20] Di Venosa 2023, 83.

[21] See AWB IV, 905-909 and Schützeichel 2012, 147.

[22] See Kelle 1881, 268.

[23] I, 28, 5-6, Erdmann, Wolff 1973, 53 (may [His] winnowing-fan be merciful to us during the Judgment, and may He never blow us away with His strength).

[24] AWB IV, 905.

[25] See Kelle 1881, 268.

the *ventilabrum* with which, according to Luke 3, 17,[26] God shall separate the wheat from the chaff on Judgment Day: as in many other passages,[27] the author prays that the Judge will be merciful, granting *helfa* to everyone.

The one in the *Evangelienbuch* is not the only case in which God's *helfa* is prayed for in such a context. In a passage from the Old English *Juliana*, for example, Cynewulf asks his audience to pray God for him, so that He may be graceful to the author upon his Judgment:

> […] Bidde ic monna gehwone
> gumena cynnes,   þe þis gied wræce,
> þæt he mec neodful   bi noman minum
> gemyne modig   ond Meotud bidde
> þæt me heofona helm   helpe gefremme,
> meahta waldend,   on þam miclan dæge.[28]

The expression *helpe gefremman* is also used in a similar context in *Christ I*, which reads:

> […]   Forþon we, nergend, þe
> biddað geornlice   breostgehygdum
> þæt þu hrædlice   helpe gefremme
> wergum wreccan.[29]

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[26] The passage reads: "cuius ventilabrum in manu eius | et purgabit aream suam | et congregabit triticum in horreum suum", Beriger *et al.* 2018, V, 294.

[27] See Thelen 1989, 199.

[28] Lines 718b-723, Bjork 2013, 126 (I pray everyone / of the human race, earnest and noble-minded, / who recites this poem will remember / me by name and pray the Lord / that he, the protector of the heavens, / the wielder of powers, will help me in that great day), translation by Bjork 2013, 127.

[29] Lines 261b-264a, Krapp, Dobbie 1936, 10 (therefore, Saviour, we eagerly pray to you in our innermost thoughts, that you may quickly help us, weary exiles).

In both cases the authors pray for God's help on Judgment Day, i.e. for His grace, which shall allow them to enter God's reign. The use of the noun for 'help' to indicate God's grace is also attested in Old Saxon. With this meaning the noun can be found in passages which are similar to the *Muspilli* one, as the following:

> […] endi sân aftar sprac
> allaro barno *bezt*,   quað that man bedon scoldi
> *up* te them alomahtigon gode   endi *im ênum thionon*
> suuîðo thiolico   thegnos managa,
> heliðos aftar is huldi: 'thar is thiu helpa gelang
> manno gehuuilicun'.[30]

Here, as in *Muspilli*, *helpa* is what people shall receive in Heaven. As also noticed by Ohly-Steimer, the noun indicates, in this occurrence, "die wahre göttliche Gnade, die zum Guten führt, im Gegensatz zu den vom Teufel versprochenen verderblichen Gütern […]. Die durch das aktive *helpa* bezeichnete vorzüglich wirkende Gnade Gottes ist in der *huldi godes* eingeschlossen".[31] Similar is a passage from *Juliana* in which the Saint encourages the sinful to praise the Lord, promising them *frōfor*[32] and stating that in Heaven there will be *help* forever everlastingly:

> He is þæs wyrðe,   þæt hine wer-þeode
> ond eal engla cynn   up on roderum
> hergen, heah-mægen,   þær is help gelong
> ece to ealdre,   þam þe agan sceal.[33]

[30] *Heliand*, lines 1108b-1113a, Behaghel, Taeger 1996, 45 (and soon after the best of sons spoke, [and] said that one should pray to the almighty God and very humbly serve Him alone, the many thanes, people hoping for grace: 'there *help* will reach every person').

[31] Ohly-Steimer 1956, 99.

[32] See line 639. The meanings provided by the DOE *s.v.* (last accessed on January 7th, 2024) for the noun are 'consolation, comfort'.

[33] Lines 643-646, Bjork 2013, 120 (he is worthy that the nations of men and / all the race of angels up in the firmament / should praise him, the high

In the brief description of Heaven made by the *Guthlac* poet, too, *help* is something one shall receive in God's reign:

> Þær ge gnornende
> deað sceolon dreogan,   ond ic dreama wyn
> agan mid englum   in þam uplican
> rodera rice,   þær is ryht cyning,
> help ond hælu   hæleþa cynne,
> duguð ond drohtað.[34]

Interestingly, in the passage, of which only the final section is here quoted, the poet contrasts the pains of Hell to the joys of Paradise, much as the *Muspilli* author. As noticed by Ohly-Steimer, the alliterative formula *help ond healu* in line 683 is particularly effective to describe what awaits those who deserve a place in Heaven: "noch stärker ist die Bedeutung 'Gnade' in der Formel *help and hælu* […], die zu einer Schilderung der Freuden des Jenseits im Gegensatz zu den Schrecken der Hölle dient".[35]

There is no doubt that the range of meanings of OS *helpa* and OE *help* is much wider than the one we understand under 'help'. According to Ohly-Steimer, this is to be ascribed to the *Heliand* poet, too, who "das ebenfalls dem alten poetischen Wortschatz angehörige, aber an keine bestimmte sphäre gebundene *helpa*, angeregt durch 'auxilium' u.ä. in der lateinischen Gnadenterminologie, häufig gebraucht und damit seinen Geltungsbereich erweitert".[36] The scholar's analysis[37] proved that the noun can be

power, where help is / present for ever and ever for the one who will have it), translation by Bjork 2013, 121.

[34] Lines 679b-684a, Krapp, Dobbie 1936, 68-69 (there you, mourning, shall endure death, and I [shall] have the bliss of joys among the angels up in the kingdom of Heaven, where the true king is, *help* and salvation for mankind, company and community).

[35] Ohly-Steimer 1956, 110, footnote 3. The expression can also be found in *Guthlac*, line 890.

[36] *Ibid.*, 111.

[37] See Steimer 1943 and Ohly-Steimer 1956.

employed with the meaning 'grace' in different contexts, often to vary other terms of the *Gnadenterminologie*,[38] although *variatio* is not the only reason for the use of this noun. As seen, in all three of the passages quoted above, *help* indicates the state of grace that awaits the blessed, all that is furthest and most different from the punishments reserved for the damned. This evidence, together with the use of the noun made by Otfrid in I, 28, 5, opens up the possibility for a more accurate interpretation of OHG *hilfa* in *Muspilli* 17, which should, in our opinion, be understood as meaning 'grace'.

Hilfa kinuok and *hilfa ni quimit* express two diametrically opposed concepts: on the one hand sufficiency of *hilfa*, on the other its total absence. In the light of what has been observed above, therefore, one could exclude that this lexical choice was accidental: it might, indeed, be the result of a desire to emphasise once again, by playing on the double meaning of the term, the difference between Heaven and Hell, the two opposite fates, one full of grace, the other without any, which are incumbent on righteous and sinners respectively.

2. *Mord*

The Old High German noun *mord* goes back to the Indo-European root **mer-*, which is widely attested with the meaning 'to die' and can be found, for example, in the Italian verb *morire*.[39] The meaning of the term is, unsurprisingly, mostly unambiguous in Germanic languages, in all of which it indicates a murder. Interestingly, though, *mord* designates a particular kind of homicide: unlike OHG *slahta* and *manslahta*, *mord* is used to refer to a secret, premeditated murder. As Ilkow pointed out, "während unsere Rechtssprache unter "Mord" im Gegensatz zu "Totschlag"

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[38] On this lexical field, see Wahmann 1937.

[39] See EWA VI, 2017, 554-556. A previous meaning of the root, 'disappear', can be found in Hittite *merta*: "außeranatolisch [hat] eine Bed.verengung von ‚verschwinden' über ‚hinschwinden' zu ‚sterben' stattgefunden, wobei die neue Bed. die alte gänzlich verdrängt hat", EWA VI, 2017, 556.

jede vorbedachte Menschentötung versteht, kommt dem altgerm. Rechtsbegriff noch das Merkmal der Heimlichkeit hinzu".[40] The secrecy implied by this crime is well attested in the *Edictum Rothari*, which article XIV states that *mord* ('murder') is to be punished by payment of a fine (*wergeld*):

> De morth. Si quis homicidium in absconse penetraverit in barone libero aut servo vel ancilla, et unus fuerit aut duo tantum, qui ipsum homicidium fecerint, noningentos solidos conponat. Si vero plures fuerint, si ingenuus, qualiter in angargathungi, ipsum homicidium conponat; si servus aut libertus, conponat ipsum, ut adpraetiatus fuerit. Et si expolia de ipso mortuo tulerit, id est plodraub, conponat octugenta solidos.[41]

The sentence to be served for committing this offence could also be death, as regulated by the Frisian laws ("morth motma mith morthe kela bi liuda kere").[42] In Cnut's laws, too, while *slahta* ('manslaughter') could be atoned for, *morð* is considered an unatonable (*botleas*) crime: "husbryce 7 bærnet 7 open þyfð 7 æbaére morð 7 hlafordswyce æfter woruldlage is botleas".[43] The meaning of the noun in law texts is unequivocal and is still preserved in Modern German *Mord* which, unlike *Totschlag*, is characterised by an element of premeditation.

Other than in *Muspilli*, OHG *mord* is attested twice in glosses, as interpretamentum of Lat. *mortaudus* and *strages*,[44] once

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[40] Ilkow 1968, 313. See also Brunner II, 1892, 627 ("Mord hiefs die Tötung, die absichtlich als eine heimliche geschah"), Munske 1973, 46-47, DRW online *s.v.* (last accessed on June 11th, 2024), EWA VI, 2017, 553.

[41] Azzara, Gasparri 2005, 18.

[42] Art. XVI, Richthofen 1840, 26 (murder shall be punished with murder according to the law of the people).

[43] II Cnut, art. 64, Liebermann I, 1903, 352 (burglary and arson and open theft and proven homicide and treason of worldly law are unatonable). See also Grimm J., Grimm W. XII, 1885, 2530: "[mord] bezeichnete die heimliche vorbedachte tötung, im gegensatze zum offenen totschlag (ahd. slahta, manslahta), dieses ein sühnbares, jenes ein todeswürdiges verbrechen".

[44] In Straßburg Universitätsbibliothek, C. V. 6, p. 160, 6 (see Steinmeyer,

in the *Lorscher Beichte* ("ih giu […] mordes inti manslahta"),[45] and once in the *Evangelienbuch*. Otfrid employs the noun to refer to the massacre of the innocents narrated in Matthew 2, 16 and writes: "iz ni habent lívola / noh iz ni lesent scribara, // thaz júngera wórolti / sulih mórd wurti".[46] In all of these occurrences, OHG *mord* is undoubtedly employed with the meaning 'murder'. This meaning is also the one which has generally been assigned to the occurrence of the noun in *Muspilli*:[47] this interpretation, though, does not take into account the context in which the noun is used. The *Muspilli* passage in question reads:

> dar scal denne hant sprehhan,   houpit sagen,
> allero lido uuelihc   unzi in den luzigun uinger,
> uuaz er untar desen mannun   mordes kifrumita.
> dar niist eo so listic man,   der dar iouuiht arliugan megi,
> daz er kitarnan megi   tato dehheina (lines 91-95).[48]

As already pointed out, *mord* in line 93 of the text has almost always been interpreted as meaning 'murder'. This is easily observable in translations of the line:

Sievers 1882, II, 352,38) and Bern Burgerbibliothek, Cod. 723, fol. 140*v*, 16, see Schützeichel VI, 2004, 430.

[45] Steinmeyer 1916, 323, 5-8.

[46] I, 20, 23-24, Erdmann, Wolff 1973, 42 (books do not have it, nor do writers read it, that in the young world such a *mord* was committed). In the *Heliand* passage in which the same episode can be found, the term employed to refer to the massacre is OS *menuuerk* (line 753). About the similarities between the two passages, see Kartschoke 1975, 320-325. About the massacre in *Heliand* specifically, see Kartschoke 1975, 210-213, Gantert 1998, 130-132, Albert 2014, 223-226.

[47] See AWB VI, 802 and the translations of the text quoted below.

[48] (Then the hand shall speak, the head say, every body part up to the little finger, what sins he committed among people. No one will be clever enough to manage to lie about anything, to conceal any deed, so that it does not get revealed to God, unless he has not prevented it with almsgiving or has atoned his sins by fasting).

was es unter dieser Menschheit Mordes vollgebracht hat;[49]

quali assassinii egli abbia commesso fra gli uomini;[50]
dirà ciò che di nefando commise tra la gente;[51]
dirà ciò che tra la gente egli commise di male;[52]
was er unter den Menschen hier an Mordtat getan hat;[53]
was er unter den Menschen hier / an Mordtat getan hat;[54]
was er unter den Menschen / an Mordtaten ausgeführt hat;[55]
what deeds of murder one has committed among men;[56]
was er unter den Menschen an Morden verübt hat;[57]
Quale omicidio egli commise tra gli uomini.[58]

If *mord* was, indeed, intended as 'murder', though, we would have to assume that every single person presenting themselves before God on Judgment Day had a sin of murder to confess and be punished for. The same applies to Reiffenstein's interpretation of the term, which he understands as '*Blutrache*':

der Sühnevertrag ist die eine Möglichkeit, die Rechtsordnung wiederherzustellen, die Rache ist die andere. Die Kirche zwar hat die Rache immer abgelehnt; wenn der Rachetotschlag im Heliand und im Muspilli mord genannt wird, schimpfliche Tötung – erheblich verwerflicher als die manslaht, der offene Totschlag–, so bestätigt sich wieder, daß von germanisierender Aufweichung

[49] Vetter 1872, 104.
[50] Leesthal 1943, 28.
[51] Lupi, Schwab 1963, 95.
[52] Manganella 1966, 79.
[53] Haug 1977, 52.
[54] Janota 1999, 41.
[55] Müller 2007, 207.
[56] Hintz 2016, 228.
[57] Kraß 2022, 240.
[58] Di Venosa 2023, 93. The translator's choice (it. *omicidio*) is based on Hintz's (2016, 228) interpretation of the passage: "in accord with Germanic judicial custom, the corpse of the murder victim or part of the corpse – the hand or head – could be brought before court as an accusation of murder".

des Christentums auch in Stabreimgedichten keine Rede sein kann. In unserem Zusammenhang ist vor allem wichtig, daß mit der Warnung vor der Blutrache wieder das adlige Publikum unmittelbar angesprochen ist.[59]

For the occurrence of *mord* in *Muspilli* this interpretation would also pose another problem: as Reiffenstain remarks, "Unfreie hatten weder Anspruch auf Wergeld noch auf Rache";[60] the use of *mord* in this acceptation would imply, therefore, that the *Muspilli* author, who always underlines that everyone is equal before God and that everyone will have to attend the Judgment, would here only address an aristocratic audience, which would seem unusual for them. The meaning '*Blutrache*', moreover, is never attested for OHG *mord*, nor for its cognates in other Germanic languages.

In order to make better sense of the *Muspilli* line, it can be useful to look at the occurrences of OS *morth*, in particular at one in *Genesis B* in which the noun is used to refer to what Tiefenbach defines a 'mortal sin':

> *Sum* heo hire *on* handum bær,   sum hire æt heortan læg,
>
> æppel unsælga,   þone hire ær forbead
>
> drihtna drihten,   deaðbeames ofet
>
> and þæt word acwæð   wuldres aldor
>
> þæt þæt micle morð   menn ne þorfton.[61]

In relation to this occurrence, J. and W. Grimm had already noticed that *mord* "konnte in den alten sprache […] in den sinn eines capitalverbrechens überhaupt umschlagen".[62] And, in fact, the passage

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[59] Reiffenstein 1966, 13.

[60] *Ibid*.

[61] Lines 636-640, Doane 1991, 223 (one she brought in her hands, one lay on her heart, the ill-fated apple which the lord of lords had before forbidden, the fruit of the tree of death, and that commandment the lord of miracles proclaimed so that people would not need the mortal sin).

[62] Grimm, Grimm XII, 1885, 2530. See also col. 2534, "die ältere nhd. sprache kennt bisweilen noch, wie die alte, wie namentlich oft auch das

is about Eve, who just picked the apples from the forbidden tree (*deaðbeam*) which God had told the progenitors not to touch so that humankind would not need the *micle morð*. It appears perfectly clear that the syntagm refers to the original sin – which caused humans to have to leave the Garden of Eden and to have to die –, which was passed down to humankind by Adam and Eve. The expression occurs again a few lines later, in a verse which is almost identical to line 640: "on þæt micle morð / men forweorpan".[63] In this case the subject is not God, but the devil, who is determined to force humankind into the *micle morð* i.e., the original sin.

The fact that the noun was, on some occasions, used to refer to a misdeed was also noticed by Ilkow, who highlighted that "*mord* kann durch Verallgemeinerung die Bedeutung 'schweres Verbrechen' entwickeln".[64] The example provided is *Heliand* 1495: "*ne iro mâgskepi sô mikil, / ef he ina an morð spenit, // bêdid baluuuerco*",[65] an excerpt from a speech made by Christ to his disciples. In the passage Christ warns them of the dangers of following friends, if they drive them towards sin, underlining that their friendship is not that great if one leads the other to *morð*; the noun is then varied, in the following line, by *baluuuerco*, 'sin, misdeed',[66] which is employed with the verb *bêdian*, a synonym of *spanan*.

Interestingly, the meaning 'very evil deed', 'mortal wrong' is also extant for OE *morð*. This is attested in Ælfric's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi Regis*, which reads:

> swa þæt se halga wer hi wundorlice geband .
>
> ælcne swa he stod strutigende mid tole .
>
> þæt heora nan ne mihte þæt morð gefremman.[67]

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mnl., mord in der allgemeineren bedeutung eines hauptfrevels, schweren verbrechens".

[63] Line 691, Doane 1991, 223 ([the devil] forced men into the mortal sin).

[64] Ilkow 1968, 313.

[65] Lines 1495-1496b, Behaghel, Taeger 1996, 59 (their friendship is not that great if one induces another to sin, urges him to [commit] misdeeds).

[66] See Tiefenbach 2010, 19.

[67] Lines 207-209, Skeat 1900, II, 328 (so the holy man wondrously bound

The passage leaves no room for doubt about the meaning of the term. The entity of the *morð* is clarified a few lines before the noun is used: Ælfric is telling the story of a group of thieves who tried to steal the treasure of the Saint but were unsuccessful in their 'evil deed' (*morð*) because the 'holy man' (*halga wer*) bound them.[68] It is therefore evident that, though not particularly frequent, the meaning 'evil deed' is attested both for OE *morð* and OS *morth*. It is with this meaning, I argue, that OHG *mord* is employed by the *Muspilli* author.

In order to understand the meaning of OHG *mord* in our line it might be useful to look at the verb with which it is used, *gifrummen*, which is also attested in Old Saxon and Old English. The *Heliand* poet employs the Old Saxon verb *gifrummian* quite a few times. In line 84 the verb occurs with the noun *mên* 'crime, misdeed, evil deed, sin, perjury';[69] in line 1716 it is employed with *firinuuerk* 'sin, evil deed',[70] while in line 2680 the poet pairs it with *tiono* 'evil deed, wrong, crime, harm'.[71] The Old English

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them, each while they stood stiffly with a tool, so that none of them could perform that evil deed).

[68] Toller 1921, 642 assigns the same meaning, 'very evil deed' to the occurrence of OE *morð* in the translation of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, III, 5 (Hecht 1900, 186), in which, though, the noun renders Lat. *homicidium* and refers to the (unsuccessful) murder of bishop Sabino at the hands of an ambitious archdeacon who had bribed the bishop's servant to poison him.

[69] Tiefenbach 2010, 266. The passage reads: "ni uueldun derƀeas uuiht // under mancunnie, / mênes gifrummean, // ne *saca ne sundea", lines 83b-85a, Behaghel, Taeger 1996, 10 (they did not want to perform among people any evil thing, nor crime nor sin).

[70] Tiefenbach 2010, 93. The passage reads: "endi haƀad im selbo mêr // firinuuerco gefrumid", lines 1715b-1716a, Behaghel, Taeger 1996, 66 (and he himself did more evil). See also the *Saxon Genesis* 256, "sundiga liudi // firinuuerk fremmian", Doane 1991, 248 ([they heard] sinful people perform sins).

[71] Tiefenbach 2010, 394. The passage reads: "uuisse that imu ni mahtun / menniscono barn, // bi theru godcundi / Iudeo liudi // êr is tîdiun uuiht / teonon gifrummien, // lêðaro gilêsto", lines 2678-2681a, Behaghel, Taeger 1996, 99 (he [Christ] knew that, because of his godliness, the sons of men could do him no harm before his time, no evil actions).

verb counts more occurrences, approximately 550.[72] Among its meanings, the DOE lists that of 'committing, perpetrating a sin/crime'[73] when used with nouns such as *firene*, *gylt*, *synne* and 'to commit a deadly sin'[74] when employed with OE *heafodgylt* and *heafodleahter*. With OE *firene* the verb is used, for example, in *Beowulf*, in an epithet used to describe Grendel: "ða þæt onfunde / sē þe fela ǣror // mōdes myrðe / manna cynne, // fyrene gefremede / – hē fāg wið God – // þæt him se līchoma / lǣstan nolde".[75] The verb is also used with another interesting term, *morþor*[76] 'murder, mortal sin, great wickedness';[77] this is the case, for example, in *Judith*, when, soon after the death of Holofernes, the protagonist refers to him as the one who "þe us monna mǣst / morðra gefremede".[78] Both in Old Saxon and in Old English, therefore, the verb can be used with nouns indicating a sin or crime. The same applies to OHG *gifrummen*,[79] which in *Muspilli* occurs in

[72] See DOE *s.v.* (last accessed on January 10th, 2024).

[73] *Ibid*.

[74] *Ibid*.

[75] Lines 809-812, Wrenn 1958, 116 (then he found out, he who had already committed many crimes against the mind of mankind – in enmity with God – that the body would not do him a service).

[76] OE *morþor* derives from Common Germ. **murþra-* (which had the same meaning as Common Germ. **murþa-*), but how these two roots came to be is disputed. According to the EWA VI, 2017, 554, there are two possibilities: either **murþra-* is original and **murþa-* derives from it, or there are two different underlying constructions.

[77] For these and other meanings of the term, see Bosworth, Toller 1964, 698.

[78] Line 181, Timmer 1966, 26 (the one of all men who brought about for us the most slaughters). The meaning of the verb *gefremman* much depends on the noun it is used with. As seen, it can be paired with nouns indicating something negative, but it is also often used in a positive acceptation. In *Beowulf*, for example, Wiglaf praises the dead hero saying that he "forðām hē manna mǣst / mǣrða gefremede" (line 2645, Wrenn 1958, 164), (for he, more than anyone, has brought about the most glorious deeds). The similarity between the *Judith* and the *Beowulf* lines, according to Orchard 2020: 45, "is ear-catching indeed, and is one of a number of parallels which suggest that the *Judith*-poet may have borrowed directly (and ironically) from the longer poem with which it now shares a manuscript-context".

[79] The verb is quite frequent in the Old High German, mostly in glosses, see

lines 70, here with OHG *upil* 'Sünde, Untat':[80] ("der [the devil] hapet in ruouu / rahono uueliha, // daz der man er enti sid / upiles kifrumita"),[81] and 93. Another occurrence of the verb with a noun indicating a sin can be found in the *Süddeutscher [Münchener] Beichte*, in which it is used with OHG *sunda*, "so wirdih hiute bihtich […] aller miner sunden, die ich ie gefrumete",[82] but also in the *Lorscher Beichte*, in which the verb is employed with the expression *uuidar gotes uuillen*, "thes alles inti anderes manages, thes ih uuidar gotes uuillen gifrumita".[83] In all of these examples OHG *gifrummen* (as OS *gifrummian* and OE *gefremman*) is paired with a noun – or an expression – for 'sin' to convey the meaning 'to commit a sin'; interestingly, instead, the verb never occurs with a term indicating a murder.[84]

AWB III, 1304ff.

[80] See Schützeichel 2012, 346.

[81] Lines 69-70 (he keeps track of every evil that a person has, sooner or later, done).

[82] Steinmeyer 1916, 347, 46-54 (so I confess today all of the sins I ever committed). See also the *Würzburger Beichte*, "mina suntan, de ih gifrumita" (*ibid*., 317, 33-34), the *Benediktbeurer Beichte II*, "aller dere sunton, die ih ie gefrumeto" (*ibid*., 336, 8; see also 336, 10), the *Benediktbeurer Beichte I*, "ich gihe […] aller miner sunteno, die ich ie gefrumete" (*ibid*., 339, 22-24; see also 339, 27), the *Sangaller Beichte I*, "hich gio […] allero minero súndeno, thio hich in uuerelte keteta alde gefrúmeta" (*ibid*., 340, 1-3), the *Sangaller Beichte II*, "so pigí ih dem allemahtigen got […] aller miner sunton, der îh ie gedahte oder gefrumete" (*ibid*., 344, 1-2), the *Benediktbeurer Beichte III*, "aller der sunde, die ich ie gefrumte" (*ibid*., 358, 50).

[83] *Ibid*., 324, 35-36. See also the *Bruchstück einer Beichte*, "des alles enti anderes manages, des ih uuidar gotes uuillun gifrumita […] so ih es gihukke", *ibid*., 326, 18 (so I think of everything that I did against God's will).

[84] This was possible in Old English, though OE *gefremman* does not occur frequently with OE *morð* 'murder' and its synonyms. An example can be found in Ælfric's first Old English letter to Wulfstan, in which the abbot of Eynsham wrote that clerics should not be implicated in a person's death, not even if the person had committed manslaughter or murder: "we ne moton beon ymbe mannes deaðe. Þeah he manslaga beo oþþe morð gefremede oþþe mycel þeofman […] Ac tæcean þa læwedan men him lif oþþe deað", Fehr 1914, 140. On this passage, see Marafioti 2008, 44-45. On the history of episcopal involvement in the administration of justice, see Uhalde 2007. The presence

The use of OHG *gifrummen* with a noun for 'sin' is, as we have seen, most frequent in confessions and, although *Muspilli* is certainly not a *Beichte*, the passage in which *mord gifrummen* is found is concerned with revealing one's sins to God. In this respect, it is interesting to look at the other terms employed by the author to refer to what should be revealed:

> dar scal denne hant sprehhan,   houpit sagen,
> allero lido uuelihc   unzi in den luzigun uinger,
> uuaz er untar desen mannun   **mordes** kifrumita.
> dar niist eo so listic man,   der dar **iouuiht** arliugan megi,
> daz er kitarnan megi   **tato** dehheina (lines 91-95).[85]

Other than *mord*, the *Muspilli* author employs the indefinite pronoun *iouuiht* and *tat*, a noun which can refer to any (deplorable, in this case) action. Both terms are broad-ranging and do not indicate a single sin, in accordance with the rest of the text, in which no specific sin is ever mentioned.[86] Considering this and all of the above, OHG *mord* in line 93 of *Muspilli* cannot reasonably be interpreted as 'murder'. The choice of this term might have been influenced by two factors: on one side, alliteration; on the other, according to Brunner, its intrinsic secrecy:

> Die alte Sprache beschränkt übrigens den Ausdruck Mord nicht auf die heimliche Tötung, sondern braucht ihn auch für andere heimliche Verbrechen. So wird die heimliche, die nächtliche Brandstiftung als Mordbrand, Mordnachtbrand bezeichnet. Schlechtweg die heimliche, die verborgene Missethat ist gemeint, wenn eine althochdeutsche Darstellung des jüngsten Gerichtes bei diesem kundbar werden läſst, was Mordes man unter den Menschen vollbracht habe.[87]

and role of bishops in hundred courts was regulated by article 5 of III Eadgar (Liebermann I, 1903, 202).

[85] Emphasis added. See the translation in footnote 47.

[86] The author does mention bribery (*miatun intfahan*, line 72), but in a different context.

[87] Brunner 1892, II, 629.

Besides the possible reasons which might have led the author to employ this term, though, what is crucial is that OHG *mord* does not, in this occurrence, mean 'murder', but shall be assigned the more general meaning of 'sin', 'sinful action': one's body shall reveal to God every sin a person committed in their life.

3. *Muspilli*

The noun which gave *Muspilli* its title is undoubtedly one of the most enigmatic terms of the text. Its first editor, Schmeller, had already labelled the noun as a "merkwürdige[r], bisher weder aus der isländischen noch altsächsischen Form genügend erklärbare Ausdruck"[88] and, though many have tried to explain it, both its meaning and its etymology remain unclear: "was *Muspilli* etymologisch bedeutet, weiß ich nicht, und ich habe wenig Hoffnung, daß von der Etymologie her einmal die Erleuchtung kommen wird".[89] It was because of this inscrutability that OHG *muspilli* was generally assigned a meaning ('end of the world' or 'Judgment Day')[90] largely based on the occurrences of its Old Saxon cognate. Unfortunately, we cannot account for the occurrences of the noun in other linguistic areas here, but all of these have been thoroughly analysed in the past.[91] We shall, however, highlight two points: the exact meaning of OS *mūdspelli* is not clear from the *Heliand* passages in which it occurs, as Haubrichs also noticed, "auch in Variationsgefüge der ‚Heliand'-Passagen wird nicht hinreichend klar, ob *mūdspelli* den Gerichtstag, das Weltende oder den Weltenrichter meint";[92] the Old Norse word

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[88] Schmeller 1832, 23.

[89] Mohr 1977, 12.

[90] See AWB VI, 933, 'Weltende durch Feuer, Jüngstes Gericht' and Schützeichel 2012, 231 'Jüngstes Gericht (?)'.

[91] Among the main contributions, see Braune 1915, 430-431, Ilkow 1968, 318-320 about the meaning of OS *mūdspelli* and Finger 1977, 122-148, Krogmann 1933 and 1953 on the occurrences of ON *múspell*. An overview was recently provided by Di Venosa 2023, 41-49.

[92] Haubrichs 1995, 320.

Múspell, instead, indicates either the southern region of fire or, when personified, the 'undergangens volder'.[93] Of course, it would be preposterous to assign any of the two meanings held by the Old Norse noun to OHG *muspilli*. Having cleared these two fundamental points, I would like to offer my contribution to the interpretation of the Old High German term, starting not from its etymology, but from the context in which it occurs. I argue, in fact, that looking at where and how it is used (line 57, "dar nimac denne mak andremo / helfan uora demo muspille"),[94] might help to shed light on the meaning of this noun.

In his famous essay on *Muspilli*, Herbert Kolb rejected the meaning which is still often assigned to the noun, 'end of the world'. This, he argued, would involve the end of every being, making it impossible for a relative to help another:

> wäre mit dem Wort *muspille* der Weltuntergang gemeint, so würde die Aussage dieser Zeile eigentlich recht matt, beinahe ohne Sinn sein. Denn der Untergang der Welt bedeutet ja den Untergang auch jedes Einzelnen und schließt die Möglichkeit aus, daß ein Mensch dem anderen und also auch ein Verwandter dem anderen davor helfen könnte.[95]

Besides this consideration, there is another reason why the meaning 'end of the world' does not seem possible for the Old High German noun. The line presents us with the motif, common in eschatological literature, which Lendinara called 'no aid from kin':[96] creating an antithesis between earthly and heavenly law, authors underline that "at the Judgment Day, no man will receive aid from those – relatives or friends – who, in his lifetime, would

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[93] See Jónsson 1931, 415.

[94] Line 57 (there a relative will not be able to help another before the muspilli).

[95] Kolb 1964, 4. See also Grau 1908, 241: "[d]aß ein Bruder dem andern vor dem Weltbrand hilft, hat […] an sich gar keinen Sinn".

[96] See Lendinara 2002, 67.

have come to his aid in case of need".[97] In the numerous texts in which the motif is found, the impossibility to help or receive help always applies to the Judgment, not to the end of the world. Considering this evidence, too, the possibility that OHG *muspilli* means 'end of the world' may be ruled out.

An interesting input about the possible meaning of the noun was given by Willy Krogmann who, analysing the elements forming the noun and looking at passages from the *Bible*, concluded that OHG *muspilli* is a noun for Christ the Judge. According to the scholar, *mûd* is 'mouth',[98] while the second element of the compound derives from **-spalliaz*:[99] OHG *muspilli* should therefore mean 'Mundverderber, Mundtöter': "er ist derjenige, qui ore occidit. Ae. *spillan* und noch mehr die entsprechenden Bedeutungen des nhd. *spellen*, schweiz. *verspellen* 'verderben', ne. *spell* 'to empty (a sail) of wind' fordern nachdrücklich diese Bestimmung".[100] This *Mundtöter* should be Christ, as the scholar clarified later: "als „Mundtöter" wurde Christus bezeichnet, weil er nach der Darstellung der Bibel die Verlorenen mit der Waffe seines Mundes schlägt".[101] This interpretation, which was never accepted by the scholarship, is possible on the basis of a careful textual analysis, as we here hope to demonstrate.

The nouns used by the *Muspilli* author to refer to the Judgment are the following: *ding*, *mahal*, *rihtunga*, *stuatago* and *suona*.[102] We shall here only take into account the cases in which the author writes that everyone shall come to the Judgment:

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[97] See Lendinara 2002, 67.

[98] This was already maintained by Detter 1896, 108, Skutsch-Dorff 1903, 7, Hagen 1904, 4.

[99] See Krogmann 1934, 154.

[100] See Krogmann 1934, 154.

[101] Krogmann 1957, 104.

[102] About the terms in *Muspilli*, see Oliva 2023. On the nouns for 'Judgment Day' in Old High German, see Schnerrer 1963 and Freudenthal 1949, 54-99.

ni allero manno uuelih ze demo mahale sculi [queman, EN] (line 34);[103]

pidiu ist demo manne so guot, denner ze demo mahale quimit (line 63);[104]

denne nidarf er sorgen, denne er ze deru suonu quimit (line 65):[105]

daz er iz allaz kisaget, denne er ze deru suonu quimit (line 71);[106]

dara quimit ze deru rihtungu so uilo dia dar ar resti arstent (line 89);[107]

*d*enne*r* ze d*eru suonu quimit* (line 99a).[108]

It is immediately evident that there is one element which is common to all these lines: the use of the preposition *ze* with the noun indicating the Judgment. This, of course, is partially determined by the use of the verb *queman*, which is also employed in every line quoted above, but the use of *ze* + a noun for 'Judgment' or 'Judgment Day' is common in Old High German (e.g., "ia der de sinan fillol leran farsumit, za suonutagin redia urgepan scal").[109] The element of motion towards the Judgment is very present in our text and seems to characterise every mention of the Day of Judgment: there is no case in which the author writes that someone is *at* the Judgment. There are, however, two lines in which they explain what shall happen when a person is undergoing Judgment; the terms used here, though, are not those for 'Judgment', but rather words for 'king' i.e., nouns to indicate God

[103] (None of the people who have [to go] to the Judgment).

[104] (Thus, it is good for a person, when they come to the Judgment, [that] they judge everything correctly).

[105] (Then they do not need to worry when they come to the Judgment).

[106] (So that they may say everything when they come to the Judgment).

[107] (So many will come to the Judgment who raise from the dead).

[108] Line 99a, Braune, Ebbinghaus 1994[17], 89 (when they come to the Judgment). Steinmeyer 1916 omits the line. On other editorial choices, see Santoro 2022, 32.

[109] *Exhortatio ad plebem christianam*, Steinmeyer 1916, 50, 38-40 (the one who neglects to teach their godson shall be held accountable [for it] on Judgment Day).

the Judge (OHG *rihhe* and *khuning*). In both cases, the author uses the preposition *fora* to specify the person's position in relation to God:

> dar scal er uora demo rihhe   az rahhu stantan
> pi daz er in uuerolti   kiuuerkot hapeta;[110]
> dar niist eo so listic man,   der dar iouuiht arliugan megi,
> daz er kitarnan megi   tato dehheina,
> niz al fora demo khuninge   kichundit uuerde.[111]

The syntagm *uora demo muspille* is undeniably more similar to these than to the occurrences of the nouns for 'Judgment': the preposition *fora* is, in fact, commonly used with nouns indicating God, or in expressions meaning 'before God's eyes' or 'before God's angels' (e.g. "daz ih fora dinem augom unskamenti si",[112] "giueho ist in himile fora gotes engilun"[113]).

The interpretation of the line is certainly complex both because of the uncertain meaning of OHG *muspilli* and because of *fora*, which can be a local, temporal, or causal preposition. The AWB maintains that the *fora* in our line is a causal preposition which, together with the verb *helfan*, should come to mean 'schützen, behüten, retten, helfen vor'.[114] In most of the other occurrences cited by the AWB under this meaning, the preposition *fora* is used with a noun indicating a danger or something from which one might want to be defended, such as an enemy ("*turris fortitudinis a facie inimici*. Starch túrre bist dû mir fore demo fiende")[115] or

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[110] Lines 35-36 (there, before the Judge, he shall be held accountable for what he did in the world).

[111] Lines 94-96 (there no one will ever be clever enough to be able to lie on anything, to hide any deed: everything will be made manifest to the King).

[112] *Altbayrische Beichte*, Steinmeyer 1916, 309, 8-9 (that before your eyes I am not ashamed). For other examples, see AWB III, 1140.

[113] *Tatian* 96, 6, Sievers 1872, 193 (there is joy in Heaven before God's angels).

[114] See AWB III, 1142.

[115] Notker's translation of *Psalm 60*, 4, Tax 1981, II, 207 (you are, for me, a

fire ("fóre demo fiure skírmdi").[116] This interpretation of the preposition would, therefore, only be fitting if we were to understand OHG *muspilli* as meaning 'end of the world', which, as we have seen, we do not.

In the other two occurrences of the preposition in *Muspilli*, this is used with nouns indicating God (OHG *rîhhi* and *khuning*). Furthermore, Old High German generally uses *in* + a noun for 'judgment' to render Lat. *in iudicio*. Considering, moreover, that the *Muspilli* author never writes of somebody being 'at' the Judgment, but twice of someone being 'in front of' (*fora*) the Judge, it might be possible to reconsider the meaning of the noun. Krogmann[117] and, after him, Haubrichs, have already maintained that OHG *muspilli* shall be understood as a noun for Christ:

> das Wort [ist] entweder als nomen actionis „Mundverderben, -zerstörung" bzw. als nomen agentis „Mundverderber" aufzufassen […]. Es wäre damit Kenning für Christus oder das Weltgericht, jedesmal mit Bezug auf 2. Thessalonicher 2, 1ff., wo Christus den Widersacher (Antichrist) mit einem Hauch seines Mundes (nach Rabanus „durch sein Wort") tötet, und Apokalypse 19, 11ff. (vgl. 1, 16; Epheser 6, 17; Hebräer 4, 12), wo Christus den Pseudopropheten der Endzeit (und damit den Antichrist) und sein Heer durch ein aus seinem Munde hervorhegendes Schwert umbringt.[118]

What has been observed above is, in my opinion, a further argument to support Krogmann's and Haubrich's thesis. It does therefore not seem implausible to understand OHG *muspilli* as a noun for Christ: no relative will be able to help another before the Judge.

strong tower in the presence of enemies).

[116] Notker's translation of Capella's *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, King 1979, 99-100 (protected from the fire).

[117] See Krogmann 1953, 106.

[118] Haubrichs 1995, 321.

4. *Conclusions*

Those presented here are some of the results of a larger analysis carried out on the entire lexicon of *Muspilli*. The three examples hopefully proved that Bergmann was indeed right in advocating such a work: the close look at the meaning of crucial words showed that a (re)interpretation of some terms is necessary to make better sense of the text, as was the case for OHG *hilfa* and *mord*. With respect to OHG *muspilli*, arguably one of the most complex Old High German words, on the other hand, we were hopefully able to demonstrate that, if on one side searching for its etymology is crucial, looking at how it is employed and in which context is also relevant to its interpretation.

Many of the questions which have long plagued *Muspilli* scholars surely remain unanswered. What we hope to have managed, nonetheless, is to have shed light on some unclear passages of the text.

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