

A Tranquil Mind

Introduction

Medieval source references can be challenging to follow up. Sometimes the only citation given is “as books say”; sometimes the fact that a line within an OE text is in Latin is the only clue given. Biblical quotations were often assumed knowledge and needed no source reference, but where references to a biblical book (such as the Psalms) or an author (such as “the Apostle,” i.e. St Paul) are given, these are often overly broad (as in [10] below) and occasionally mistaken. The situation becomes hairier still where the source is not biblical, as many early medieval works were falsely attributed to one of the Church Fathers or Doctors of the Church; we now refer to such shadow authors as Pseudo-Augustine, Pseudo-Isidore, and so on, but medieval authors made no such distinction.

The sentiment here relayed is attributed to an author (Augustine) and a work or genre (the *cwidboc*). Though a rare compound, *cwidboc* is understood to refer to a book of *sententiae*, i.e. proverbs or pithy utterances. Fortunately, a book of sentences attributed to Augustine survives by the hand of Prosper of Aquitaine (c. 390–c. 455), a contemporary and follower of Augustine’s and as such a fairly reliable source on the authorship of these utterances. Sentence 26 among his *Sententiae ex Augustino delibatae* is a close match to the content here relayed, and so we may be confident that we have found our match.

The search for sources of OE texts may often be aided by the consultation of the *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici database*.

Manuscript

London, British Library, MS Vespasian D. xiv, fols. 74v–75r (s. xii med.)

Text

(1) Augustinus sæde on his cwidbocan þæt nan mann ne mihte asmeagan Godes æ, (2) and his bebodan fullice healden, (3) bute se þe smylte mod hæfde, (4) and frig ælcere gedrefednysse. (5) He sæde þeh þæt þære wæren swyðe feawe oððe nan, þe swa frig wære.

(6) Cwæð þeh þæt nan ne scolde beon swa idel þæt he betwux þan bisegan þyssere¹ wurlde sum þing ne ongunne leornigen beo his frigidomes mæðe, (7) and ælc mann eall alæte swa swa he mæst muge unnytte embhogen, (8) and geæmtige hine to Godes þeowdome, (9) forþan þe God forgelt ælcen mænn beo his dæden, (10) swa swa he sylf cwæð on his godspelle.

(Sententiae 26: “Mandata dei scrutari, nisi quieta mens, non potest. Ut ergo religiosum exerceatur studium, abigenda sunt iurgia malignorum.”)

¹MS þysser.