It has been noted that there are Frankish and Anglo-Saxon texts in which the three days before Ascension are designated as the Major Litanies, a practice generally regarded as an inexplicable deviation from the established norm of designating 25 April as the Major Litany and the three days before Ascension as the Minor Litany. This article shows, however, that this contrastive terminology was not in use in the Anglo-Saxon and Frankish churches and that the pre-Ascension litany days — more firmly established than the Roman tradition of 25 April — were commonly designated as the Litaniae maiores in authoritative contexts.

There are two sets of Litany Days in the church’s year: one on 25 April, called the Major Litany, and one on the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday preceding Ascension Day, called the Minor Litanies.1 The Major Litany seems to have been introduced at an early date to counteract the ancient Robigalia festival, on which heathens held processions and made supplication to their gods. It has no connection with the Feast of St Mark, which is also celebrated on 25 April. The Minor Litanies, on the three days before Ascension, similarly involved processions, but according to tradition these were instituted by Mamertus, bishop of Vienne in the Rhône valley c. 461–75, when the city had been beset by a series of calamities. The primary concern of

1 Except for the comments on Old English terminology, the history and nomenclature as summarized in this paragraph is the established tradition as represented in the Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et liturgie, eds. F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, 15 vols. in 30 (Paris, 1907–53), ‘Litanies’, IX.2, cols. 1540–71 (esp. 1550–51, 1559), and ‘Rogations’, XIV.2, cols. 2459–61. See also the more recent survey: Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints, ed. M. Lapidge, Henry Bradshaw Society 106 (London, 1991), pp. 1–13.
these three days was expiation through fasting and repentance. The Greek word from which the Latin *litania* (and its incorrect but very common alternative spelling *letania*) was derived meant ‘supplication’ or ‘petition’. Various forms of supplicatory or litanic prayer were established early in the history of the church and are by no means confined to the Major and Minor Litanies; it is simply that the term was applied to these particular days because supplicatory prayer was one of their defining features. A common alternative name is ‘Rogation Days’, derived from the Latin *rogare*, ‘to ask’, ‘to petition’, used more commonly with reference to the three days before Ascension than the Litany Day of 25 April. In vernacular contexts the Anglo-Saxons usually employed the term *gangdag* (pl. *gangdagas*), literally ‘walking-day’, reflecting not the defining feature of supplicatory prayer but the visible marker of external processions, although *bendagas* or *gebeddagas*, ‘petition days’, ‘prayer days’, were possible alternatives. In origin the Major Litany is to be seen as a ritual of the church of Rome; it was well established by c. 598, when it is referred to for the first time in a Register of Gregory the Great. The spread of this tradition north of the Alps occurred, as will be seen below, within various reforming contexts of a ‘romanizing’ kind. The Minor Litanies, by contrast, are in origin a Gallican tradition; the practice was formalized by the Council of Orléans in 511 and was not approved for Roman usage until the time of Pope Leo III (795–816), who was firmly within the Carolingian sphere of influence.

The clarity with which the situation can thus be described is, however, not matched by the terminology and traditions of the Frankish and Anglo-Saxon churches which, in various and sometimes apparently inconsistent ways, are at odds with what has just been so straightforwardly outlined. As a result, whenever any of their variations from the recognised norm is noted, it is assumed that this must be an error, or that it is a localized ecclesiastical tradition which is divergent. As long ago as 1895, Tupper demonstrated that ‘the Major Litany, contrary to the Roman custom, was placed on the Gang-days by the Anglo-Saxons of the 10th Century’, which implies a divergence from established tradition, localized in time and place, a position reinforced by his later comment that ‘The Roman observance was by no means uncommon; with the exception of the 10th Century, it was the prevailing usage in the Saxon Church.’ The evidence that he brings forward, from a wide variety of texts, presents an apparently confusing picture, which in some

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particulars seems to have confused Tupper himself. Bazire and Cross, in their 1982 edition of eleven anonymous Old English rogationtide homilies, make it clear that these are texts for the penitential period at the beginning of the week in which Ascension Day occurs, even though the homilies with specific rubrics have the designation In letania maiore, or some variation of it. They note, too, that the Carolingian reformers Smaragdus and Hrabanus Maurus use In litania maiore for homilies which, by liturgical position and and by pericope, are for the Litany (or Rogation) Days preceding Ascension. Yet they do not investigate these anomalies and they make assumptions about nomenclature which are not supported by the textual evidence. Michael Lapidge, in his 1991 edition of Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints, sets out the established tradition of the Major and Minor Litanies without any reference to variations within the Anglo-Saxon (or Frankish) church, but in a later publication, where he analyses the sanctorale of the Anglo-Saxon homilist Ælfric, he notes that there are items in his Catholic Homilies which have a letania maior rubric, when they are clearly for the Litany or Rogation Days preceding Ascension. He concludes, therefore, that Ælfric was mistaken in his rubric. It is the purpose of this article to investigate the apparent anomalies which scholars have already identified in order to develop a clearer understanding of the nomenclature in use in the early Middle Ages, and thus to resolve some of the problems confronted by those who, working with the assumption that there are

3 He asserts, for example, that Byrhtferth ‘has doubtless the Major Litany in mind’ when stating that: ‘On morgen byd se forman gang-dæg. Æa dagas synt gehaten Letaniarum dies on grecisc and on lyden rogacionum and on englisc ben-dægas’ (p. 232), ‘In the morning [i.e. on the next day] is the first ‘gang-day’. Those days are called Letaniarum dies in Greek and Rogationum in Latin and petition-days in English’ (my translation). In fact, since this is a reference to a sequence of days (in the plural), Byrhtferth must have had in mind the three-day observance preceding Ascension, the Minor Litanies in current terminology. For further discussion of Byrhtferth, see below, pp. 226–7, where the text cited is that of Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion, eds. P.S. Baker and M. Lapidge, EETS SS 15 (Oxford, 1995).

4 Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies, ed. J. Bazire and J.E. Cross (Toronto, 1982). Their general discussion of the Major and Minor Litanies is on pp. xv–xxxii. However, as we shall see, they are mistaken in asserting (p. xvi) that the three-day observance (by which they mean the three days before Ascension) were called ‘the minor Rogations’. I also do not understand what they mean by the statement that ‘The title of litania major for the ritual of 25 April obviously stressed the non-Roman origin of the Rogationtide observances’ (p. xvi), unless it is a rather oblique way of stating that, when the three-day observance was introduced in Rome, the Roman observance of 25 April acquired the distinguishing title of ‘Major Litany’, by way of contrast with the Minor Litanies, supposedly so-called. But, as will be explained, contrastive terminology of this kind was not in use, and the initial adoption of maior within the Roman tradition made a distinction with other Roman observances, not with the Gallican.


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well defined and stable traditions of terminology and observance, encounter contradictory evidence in the medieval texts.

The vernacular homilist Ælfric is a useful starting point for this investigation because we know enough about his career, his intellectual position, and his source-texts to interpret the evidence provided by the Catholic Homilies and through them to gain access to the authority tradition on which he drew. He was a pupil of Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester, the most exacting of the tenth century reformers, and was himself a vigorous proponent of the reform. The two series of Catholic Homilies, issued between 989 and 994, are predominantly exegetical homilies, arranged in two parallel series according to the church’s year and issued from within the reformist, monastic context with the express intention of providing authoritative, orthodox models for preaching to the laity by secular priests, whose standards of orthodoxy and scholarship, in Ælfric’s view, left much to be desired.6 The First Series in this double collection, as preserved in Cambridge University Library, Gg. 3. 28, a manuscript very close to Ælfric himself,7 is prefaced by a Latin letter to Sigeric, archbishop of Canterbury, in which the orthodoxy of the collection is emphasized, and in which Ælfric carefully lays claim to the patristic and Carolingian tradition in which the homilies stand; in particular, he spells out that his collection draws on Augustine, Jerome, Bede, Gregory, Smaragdus and sometimes Haymo. Smaragdus, abbot of the monastery of S. Mihiel, was an associate of Benedict of Aniane and was a significant figure in the Carolingian reforms of the early ninth century; Haymo (whom we now recognize as

6 Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The First Series. Text, ed. P. Clemoes, EETS SS 17 (Oxford, 1997), and Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The Second Series. Text, ed. M. Godden, EETS SS 5 (Oxford, 1979). Reference will be to the editions of Clemoes and Godden, but corresponding reference will also be provided to the edition by Thorpe because it is this edition which is cited in so much of the fundamental scholarship on Ælfric: The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church, ed. B. Thorpe, 2 vols. (London, 1844–6). For the dating, see P.A.M. Clemoes, ‘The Chronology of Ælfric’s Works’, in The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in some Aspects of their History and Culture presented to Bruce Dickins, ed. P. Clemoes (London, 1959), pp. 213–47, at p. 244. Clemoes gives the date of 989 for the First Series and 992 for the Second. Godden, Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: Second Series, pp. xci–xciii, proposed 995 for the Second Series, within the framework of a supposition that Sigeric, archbishop of Canterbury, to whom copies of both series were sent with prefatory letters, was in office from 989–95. However, Sigeric’s dates are now generally accepted as being 990–4, so that Godden’s date of 995 for the Second Series is no longer tenable, although it does not necessarily invalidate c. 989 as the date for the First Series because, as Clemoes points out in ‘The Chronology’, p. 243, n. 2, the copy which was sent to Sigeric was not the earliest copy of this text. On Ælfric’s reformist stance in the Catholic Homilies, see my discussion in ‘Reform and Resistance: Preaching Styles in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, in J. Hamesse and X. Hermand (eds.), De l’homélie au sermon: histoire de la prédication médiévale (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1993), pp. 15–46, and also my 1996 Toller Lecture: ‘Translating the Tradition: Manuscripts, Models and Methodologies in the Composition of Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies’, Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester 79 (1997), pp. 43–65, and separately published.

7 See below, p. 217.
being Haymo of Auxerre) promoted the reforms, along with others of the school of Auxerre, in the middle of the ninth century; the homiletic writings of the four Church Fathers whom Ælfric names in the letter were, as modern scholarship has shown, mainly known to him through the very popular and widely circulating homiletic anthology of Paul the Deacon, which was produced at Charlemagne’s behest as a reforming text. Ælfric, in this polemical preface, establishes his orthodoxy and defines the authority tradition to which he belongs: it is patristic and at the same time Carolingian and reformist, for the Carolingian tradition which he promotes self-consciously reclaimed patristic exegetical orthodoxy, Smaragdus and Haymo just as much as Paul the Deacon, although unlike Paul the Deacon’s, their homiliaries were not straightforward anthologies of patristic homilies.

In both series of Catholic Homilies, Ælfric caters for a sequence of three days immediately before Ascension:

**CH I, xviii, ed. Clemoes, pp. 317–24 (Thorpe, hom. xviii, pp. 244–58).** *In letania maiore*

An account of the institution by Mamertus; the story of Jonah and the Ninevites; exegesis of the gospel lection, Luke XI. 5–13. The homily opens with reference to ‘these days’, in the plural.

**CH I, xix, ed. Clemoes, pp. 325–34 (Thorpe, hom. xix, pp. 258–74).** *Feria III De Dominica Oratione* [Feria III = Tuesday]

Exposition of the Lord’s Prayer.

**CH I, xx, ed. Clemoes, pp. 335–44 (Thorpe, hom. xx, pp. 274–94).** *Feria IIII De Fide Catholica* [Feria IIII = Wednesday]

General discussion on matters of catholic faith.

**CH I, xxi, ed. Clemoes, pp. 345–53 (Thorpe, hom. xxi, pp. 294–310).** *In Ascensione Domini*


**CH II, xix, ed. Godden, pp. 180–9 (Thorpe, hom. xxi, pp. 314–32).** *Feria secunda. Letania maiore* [Feria II = Monday]

Precepts on conduct aimed at various responsible groups in society.

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9 In Cambridge, Jesus College 15, from the first half of the eleventh century, the attribution to the pre-Ascension three-day observance is absolutely clear, the rubric being ‘Feria III on oðer gangdæg’, ‘Feria III, on the second Rogation Day’.

Rejection of the Visio Pauli as a ‘false composition’ and substitution of the vision of Fursey (from Bede’s Historia ecclesiastica). Both visions are eschatological.

CH II, xxi ed. Godden, pp. 199–205, (Thorpe, hom. xxiii, pp. 348–56 + hom. xxiv, pp. 356–8). Alia visio + Hortatorius Sermo de Efficacia Sanctae Missae (the latter treated by Godden as a sub-heading and as the rubric for a separate homily by Thorpe)

The vision of Drithelm (from Bede’s Historia ecclesiastica) and a story from Gregory’s Dialogi, constituting the Alia visio; the Story of the prisoner Ymma, whose chains were broken because his brother, a priest, sang masses for his soul (from Bede’s Historia ecclesiastica), constituting the Hortatorius Sermo de Efficacia Sanctae Missae.


In Letania Maiore. Feria IIII. [Feria IIII = Wednesday]

Exegesis of the gospel lection, John XVII. 1–11.

[No provision in CH II for Ascension Day.]

In the interests of completeness it should also be noted that Ælfric subsequently supplemented homily xxii in CH II with three short passages which are edited in Pope’s supplementary collection as homily xxv;¹⁰ and that there is a homily against vices and auguries in Ælfric’s Lives of Saints, with the rubric Sermo in laetania maiore (Skeat, hom. xvii).¹¹ This was also supplemented later, the additional text being edited by Pope as homily xxix.¹²

¹¹ Ælfric’s Lives of Saints, ed. Walter W. Skeat, EETS OS 76, 82, 94, 114 (London, 1881–1900; repr. as 2 vols., 1966), I, 364–82. The Major Litany rubric occurs in British Library, Cotton Julius E vii (the manuscript edited by Skeat as the closest to Ælfric’s original and the best extant text of the Lives of Saints collection). In Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 it is rubricated Sermo in letania maiore de epistola pauli et de auguriis, and in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 419 it is rubricated Sermo in letanie maiore uel quando volueris. In Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 302 the rubric is changed to Dominica IIIa. uel quando volueris, the third Sunday here being that in Advent. In Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 178 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 115 and 116 it is De auguriis. In Cambridge, University Library, II. I. 33 it is Epistola Pauli. The homily was not based on a lection and it dealt with a subject of perennial concern, so that, in common with some other homilies written expressly for the three days before Ascension, it was easily usable on other occasions. On the other hand, in CCCC 303 it is drawn into a full pre-Ascension provision; the other homilies being expressly designated pre-Ascension Litany homilies are from the First and Second Series, Vercelli Homily xix (a rogationtide homily), and homilies 2 and 4 as edited by Bazire and Cross in their Rogationtide collection. This suggests that it was seen as a pre-Ascension item, in common with other of Ælfric’s homilies which have the Major Litany rubric. For the edition of the Vercelli Homilies, see note 31 below.
¹² The Homilies of Ælfric, ed. Pope, pp. 786–98.
It is clear from the rubrics given to certain of these homilies that they are intended for a liturgical occasion known to Ælfric as the Major Litanies. This much is unambiguous, and given what we know of Ælfric’s scholarship and concern for both orthodoxy and accuracy, we must assume that he believed this was correct. One might be tempted to question the authority of the Catholic Homily rubrics, of course, because manuscript rubrics are not necessarily authorial or authoritative. But in this case they happen to be entirely reliable, since they are found in British Library, Royal 7 c. xii, the earliest extant copy of the First Series of the Catholic Homilies, which was prepared under Ælfric’s direct supervision and which includes corrections and alterations in his hand, and they are also found in Cambridge University Library, Gg. 3. 28, a manuscript of the First and Second Series which, as I have already noted, is very close indeed to Ælfric and which, as Godden puts it, was ‘either a product of Ælfric’s own scriptorium or a remarkably faithful copy of such a manuscript’.

Ælfric’s models for the Catholic Homilies were the homilists of the Carolingian reform and it is here that we find some authority both for his nomenclature and for his textual traditions. Smaragdus, as Bazire and Cross pointed out, has material with the rubric in litania majori, which is clearly intended for the period now known as the Minor Litanies or Rogation Days. This follows the provision for the fifth Sunday after Easter (rubricated as the Fourth Sunday after the Octave), thus placing it unambiguously in the week of Ascension, and it immediately precedes the material for Ascension itself. The form is unusual since it consists of three parts, the first two being exegeses of the Epistle of James V.16–20, and the third being exegesis of part of Luke XI.5–13. They are not rubricated for the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, but the division into three parts marked by internal headings at least suggests the possibility of tri-partite use over the three day period. Hrabanus Maurus, to whom Bazire and Cross also refer, places his letania maior material in precisely the same position, following the

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53 Ælfric’s First Series of Catholic Homilies (British Museum Royal 7 C.XII, fols 4–218, ed. N.E. Eliason and P. Clemoes, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile XIII (Copenhagen, 1966).


55 Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies, ed. Bazire and Cross, p.xvii. The form given by Bazire and Cross is in litania maiore, but it is in litania majori in the only edition of Smaragdus’ homiliary, which is that of J.-P. Migne in PL 102 (Paris, 1865), cols. 14–594, under the title Collectiones in epistolae et evangelia, although it is more commonly known as Expositio libri comitis. For the pre-Ascension Major Litany material. see cols. 303–7.
fifth Sunday after Easter and immediately before Ascension.¹⁶ His provision is as follows:

*Hom. XLII, PL 110: 223–4. In litania majore*
Exegesis of the epistle, James V.16–20

*Hom. XLIII, PL 110: 224–6. In eodem festo*
Exegesis of the gospel, Luke XI.5–13

*Hom. XLIV, PL 110: 226–9. In vigilia ascensionis domini*
Exegesis of the Epistle, Ephesians IV.7–13

*Hom. XLV, PL 110: 228–31. In eodem festo*
Exegesis of the gospel, John XVII.1–11

Note should also be taken of Haymo of Auxerre, as one of Ælfric’s declared authorities.¹⁷ His sequence likewise comes between the fifth Sunday after Easter and Ascension Day:

*Hom. XC, PL 118: 527–8. De litanis, id est de supplicationibus de exordio earum*
On the origins of the three-day fast, which is specified as being before Ascension. It is explicitly acknowledged as a Gallican custom and there is reference to the story of Mamertus of Vienne.

*Hom XCI, PL 118: 529–30. Feria secunda post Vocem jucunditatis, in litanis majoribus*
Exegesis of the epistle, James V.16–20

*Hom XCII, PL 118: 530–4. Feria secunda post Vocem jucunditatis, in litanis majoribus*
Exegesis of the gospel, Luke XI.5–13

*Hom XCIII, PL 118: 534–6. Feria tertia litiniarum, post Vocem jucunditatis*
Exegesis of the gospel, Matthew VII.1–11 [synoptic variant of Luke XI.5–13]

*Hom XCIV, PL 118: 536–40. Feria quarta litiniarum, in vigiliis ascensionis domini*
Exegesis of the gospel, John XVII.1–11

There is a stable tradition here in respect of the placing within the church’s year and the nomenclature employed, and there is considerable common ground in respect of the textual material. Furthermore, these


¹⁷ The only edition of Haymo’s *tempora* homiliary (wrongly attributed to Haymo of Halberstadt) is that of J.-P. Migne, in PL 118, cols. 9–746, under the title *Homiliae de tempore.*
homilists – and other products of the Carolingian reform who observed the same traditions\textsuperscript{18} – had conciliar authority for their practices: canon 33 of the Council of Mainz held in 813 refers to intercessory processions on three days according to previously established custom, and names this ritual as ‘laetania maior’:

‘Placuit nobis, ut laetania maior observanda sit a cunctis Christianis diebus tribus [sicut legendo reperimus, et sicut sancti patres nostri instituerunt, non equitando, nec preciosis vestibus induti, sed discalciati, cinere et cilicio induit, nisi in\textsuperscript{2}rmitatis impedient].’\textsuperscript{19}

This is unambiguous, but Vogel, not recognizing the practice within the Carolingian tradition of using \textit{Litania maior} for the Gallican observance, and approaching this canon from a perspective determined by the rigid terminology of later ecclesiastical tradition, pronounces that: Ce canon est obscur car il fait allusion à deux cérémonies différentes (a) à la \textit{litania maior}, c’est-à-dire celle du 25–3, propre à Rome et (b) à la \textit{litania tribus diebus}, c’est-à-dire aux trois jours des Rogations, observance propre aux églises des Gaules.\textsuperscript{20}

It is easy to overlook the corresponding negative evidence, but in this case, before moving on to consider a more ‘roman’ strand within the Carolingian reform, it is worth noting that the Council of Mainz makes no use of the term \textit{laetaniae minores}, and makes no reference to 25 April as a Litany Day. The same is true of Smaragdus, Hrabanus Maurus, Haymo, and the other reform homilists who share in this tradition.

By contrast, the homiliary of Paul the Deacon, at least in its original form, follows Roman practice, separating the Major Litany from Ascension by placing it between the Octave of Easter and the first Sunday after the Octave, a possible position for 25 April relative to the moveable feast of Easter in years when Easter Day fell at the earliest on 12 April and at

\textsuperscript{18} See, for example, the analysis of manuscript contents in H. Barré, \textit{Les homélaires carolingiens de l’école d’Auxerre}, Studi e Testi 225 (Vatican City: 1962).

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Concilia Aevi Karolini}, I, ed. A. Werminghoff, MGH, Legum Section III, Concilia (Hanover and Leipzig, 1906), p. 269. ‘It has seemed good to us that the Major Litany be observed by all Christians on three days [as we find in our reading, and as our holy fathers instituted, not in riding on horseback, nor clothed in precious garments, but with bare feet, clothed with ash and sackcloth, unless they are prevented by reason of infirmity]’ (my translation). The text as quoted is from Werminghoff’s MS 2, but I have used square brackets to indicate that part of the text where there is variation in the manuscript tradition. Werminghoff’s MS 4, from the tenth-century, has ‘in uno die, id est VII. Kal. Mai’ in place of ‘tribus diebus’. This ‘correction’ of the text in favour of the Roman observance may be seen as a reflex of the romanizing reformist tradition within Francia; equally, it may be one of the indications that the two observances were to some extent conflated or seen as interchangeable, as noted later in this article.

the latest on 17 April. Despite this, however, the textual traditions have some correspondence with those just examined:

**PD *17 Item in Letania maiore**

**PD *18 Item sermo beati Maximi episcopi de ieiunio**
Attributed to Maximus (and in some manuscripts to Augustine), but actually Pseudo-Augustine (Hom. 175, PL 39: 2079–80). On penitential fasting.

**PD *19 Item in letania maiore**

In this liturgical scheme the homily for the Vigil of the Ascension comes later as PD *25*, correctly following the fourth Sunday after the Octave of Easter. In common with other Carolingian homiliaries it is an exegesis of John XVII.1–11, in this case a homily which is in fact an extract from Augustine’s *Tractatus In Iohannis Evangelium*. There are no other provisions for the days immediately before Ascension.

There are several explanations which can be put forward for Paul’s commitment to the Roman tradition of 25 April as the Major Litany and for his avoidance of the pre-Ascension observance. Most importantly, it has to be remembered that he was active rather earlier than the homilists so far discussed, that his homiliary predates the Council of Mainz of 813, and that he drew up his anthology in the period of Charlemagne’s reforms when there was a drive to romanize the liturgy, following the earlier and not entirely successful attempts of Pippin. On a more practical level, since Paul was directed to return to the traditions of the

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Fathers, who were certainly not Gallican even if they were not uniformly Roman, he was faced with homiletic traditions which would generally not support a three-day pre-Ascension observance. Finally, his use of the letania maior nomenclature for 25 April may have been reinforced by personal experience, since he was a Lombard, familiar with the traditions of the Italian peninsula not least because of his time at Monte Cassino, whereas Smaragdus, Hrabanus Maurus, Haymo and the rest were direct heirs of the Gallican tradition and were active when some of these traditions were being readmitted to the official liturgy, notwithstanding the reforming tendency to romanize.22

One may well wonder what Ælfric would have made of these seeming contradictions, if we assume — as the textual evidence suggests — that he was in a position to consult simultaneously manuscripts of the homiliary of Paul the Deacon, Smaragdus and Haymo.23 On the one hand Smaragdus and Haymo observe the three days before Ascension but call them the Major Litanies; on the other, Paul the Deacon has Major Litany material but in a liturgical position which is clearly not in the same week as Ascension Day and which therefore has to be for 25 April. Yet in one way and another they all have at least three-fold provision and they all address at least Luke XI.5–6 as a gospel lection (extending to verse 13 in the case of Smaragdus and Haymo). However, the situation may not have been quite as confusing as it seems at first glance because it is possible that Ælfric’s copy of Paul the Deacon’s homiliary was adapted to the usage found in the other homiliaries so far discussed. We can deduce that his copy of Paul’s homiliary was augmented to some degree, for example with more of Gregory’s Homiliae in Evangelia,24 and we can reasonably assume that it was further modified in that the old (Roman) rubrics for the Sundays after Pentecost had been revised to conform to the more flexible system still in use today and which was already employed by Smaragdus and other reformers very soon after Paul the Deacon’s homiliary was issued.25 In this context, a relocation of Paul’s three Litany homilies to the days before Ascension with a consequential adjustment to the rubrics would not be inconceivable, and we are fortunate in having


25 Ibid., pp. 54–6.
some pre-1100 manuscripts from England which show that this was indeed done. Pembroke College, Cambridge 23 (s. xi, provenance Bury, Gneuss no. 129) has a pre-Ascension sequence which uses homilies from Paul the Deacon’s homiliary consecutively as follows:

PD *19 In laetania maiore
PD *17 Sermo beati maximi episcopi de ieiuniis ninivitarum
PD *25 In vigilia de ascensione dñ

Cambridge University Library, ii.2.19, fols. 1–216 (s. xi. ex., provenance Norwich, Gneuss no. 16) has a pre-Ascension sequence which replaces Paul’s rubrics with ones which specify the Monday and Tuesday (with the Vigil necessarily being Wednesday), although here, instead of In letania maiore, the manuscript has in rogationibus:

PD *17 Fr II in Rogationibus [=Monday]
PD *19 [no day specified; by implication also feria II]
PD *18 Fr III in Rogationibus [=Tuesday]
PD *25 In vigilia ase dñ [=Wednesday]

Durham Cathedral Library A. III. 29 (s. xi. ex., provenance Durham, Gneuss no. 222) has a slightly different collection of texts, but PD *17, *18, and *19 are relocated to the days immediately preceding Ascension and the three-day nature of this litany observance is spelled out in the rubric modifications, even though in letania maiore is still used:

PD *18 In Feria 2da, in Litania majore [=Monday]
[not in PD] In eadem die maioris letaniç
(On Luke XI.5ff.)

PD *17 Feria in letania maiore
PD *19 In eadem die
PD *130 Feria IIII in letania maiore [=Wednesday]
(Rubricated in PD as In Letania quando volueris, and identified as Sermo beati Iohannis de ieiunio Ninevitarum. A pseudo-Chrysostom homily.)

PD *25 In eadem Vigilia Ascensione


As with the other rubrics, those from Durham Cathedral Library, A. III. 29, are taken directly from the manuscript. It should be noted that there are errors in the rubrics as recorded in Thomas Rud, Codicum Manuscriptorum Ecclesiae Cathedralis Dunelmensis: Catalogus Classicus (Durham, 1825).
There is a further example in Worcester Cathedral F93. This is not in the Gneuss list, but is a companion volume to MS F92 (s. xi, Gneuss no. 763). In common with the manuscripts just analysed, it does not cater for 25 April as a Litany Day, but uses relocated homilies from Paul the Deacon’s collection for the three-day observance immediately preceding Ascension Day (here called *in rogationibus*):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript</th>
<th>Homily Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PD *17</td>
<td>Sermo sancti Augustini in rogationibus (Correctly, a homily of Maximus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD *19</td>
<td>Secundum Lucam (Bede’s exegesis of Luke XI.5–13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[not in PD]</td>
<td>Sermo in rogationibus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD *18</td>
<td>Fr. III. Sermo beatit Augustini Episcopi de ieiunio (Correctly, a homily of Maximus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD *25</td>
<td>Sermo beati Augustini episcopi in vigilia domini</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relocation of homilies from Paul the Deacon’s collection must be seen as a response to the dominant pressure of the Gallican/Frankish traditions, which the romanizing influences did not overcome, but there was no internal confusion within any given homily collection because, as already noted, neither the ninth century Carolingian homiliaries nor Ælfric acknowledge both Litany observances and when, in derivatives of Paul the Deacon’s homiliaries, homilies are moved to the days before Ascension, the Roman observance of 25 April is in consequence completely ignored. The relocation also creates no awkwardness in respect of subject-matter, since the focus in both Litany traditions is on petition and penitence, there is a common lection from Luke XI, and a common Old Testament example in the story of the Ninevites. Paul’s homiliary uses for 25 April a homily of Maximus concerning the Ninevites and he also alludes to this story in his Life of Gregory the Great when recounting how, at the time he became pope, Gregory established the ‘litania septiformi’ as an act of penitence for the Romans, who were threatened by a pestilence. However, he does not claim this by name to be the institution of the *Letania maior*, and in using Paul’s *vita* as his source for this part of his homily on Gregory the Great, Ælfric

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28 The most readily accessible text of Paul’s Life of Gregory is that printed by J.-P. Migne at the beginning of his edition of the complete works of Gregory, in PL 75 (Paris, 1902), cols. 41–60. The institution of the *litania septiformi* is described in cols. 45–7. There is a reference to the ‘triduana poenitentia’ of the Ninevites at cols. 47AB. This three-day duration is not biblical, and it is a strange elaboration in the context of the Roman one-day observance. It would be much easier to see it as a Gallican elaboration to align the story more precisely with the three-day observance preceding Ascension. For comment on this detail, see P.E. Szarmach, ‘Three versions of the Jonah story: an investigation of narrative technique in Old English homilies’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 1 (1972), 183–92, at p. 184. Gregory of Tours, no doubt on the basis of familiarity with the Gallican tradition, assumed that the Roman observance was itself ‘per triduum’: see below, n. 45.
similarly makes no connection by name with either of the Litany Day traditions, consequently avoiding any confusion. Yet there is no doubt that he was aware of the Roman as well as the Gallican/Frankish tradition because the source for his account of the institution of the Gallican feast by Mamertus of Vienne, included in CH I xviii, which functions under the rubric In letania maiore as the historical and biblical explanation of ‘these days’ before Ascension, was the De ecclesiasticis officiis of Amalarius of Metz, in which there is comment on the Roman Litany Day of 25 April, named as in letania maiore, as well as the pre-Ascension Gallican custom begun by Mamertus, which Amalarius admits is not practised by the whole Church. Ælfric must have read this, but does not muddy the waters by repeating it.

Ælfric’s practices were in harmony with the Old English homiletic tradition generally, even with regard to nomenclature. The corpus of non-Ælfrician vernacular homilies recognizes the days before Ascension, but not the one day observance of 25 April, and when there is a Latin rubric which specifies De letania or In letania, it is qualified by maiore; in rogationibus is used on one occasion, and gangdæg is used in vernacular rubrics. In Latin and Old English the spread of this observance over Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday is shown by the fact that several of the rubrics number the day (feria II, feria III, feria IIII, spel to forman gangdæge, spel to dam óðrum gangdæge, spel to þriddan


30 For the Old English homily, see Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: First Series, ed. Clemoes, pp. 317–24; The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church, I, ed. Thorpe, pp. 244–58. It begins ‘Pas dagas sind gehatene. letanie. Þ sind gebeddagas’, ‘These days are called Letaniae, that is, Prayer-Days’. Amalarius is identified as Ælfric’s source by Max Förster, ‘Über de Quellen von Ælfrics exegetischen Homiliae Catholicae’, Anglia 16 (1894), pp. 1–61, at pp. 48–9, § 126. For Amalarius’ discussion of the Major Litany traditions (under the title De liatnia majore), see De ecclesiasticis officiis, ed. J.-P. Migne, PL 105, cols. 1065–8. Amalarius also uses the term titania for the Gallican custom, though without a qualifying adjective. He distinguishes the two traditions quite carefully by historical origin, by date (for the Roman tradition) and liturgical position (for the Gallican), and by explaining that the Gallican tradition is a three-day observance in which fasting is a major feature, which is not true for the Roman observance.
gangdège, these last three being homilies XI, XII and XIII in the Vercelli Book). The evidence that these homilies provide for a generally established preaching tradition – and thus of observance – on the three days before Ascension in the Anglo-Saxon church is particularly striking because they stand as independent witnesses in that they are not products of the same reformist ecclesiastical culture as that of Ælfric. Ælfric’s own homilies for these three days were copied very many times, sometimes in an immediately Ælfrician context, sometimes alongside one or more of the anonymous homilies. The extant manuscripts show that care was commonly taken to provide a group of homilies for three successive days (or at least for more than one day); rubrics frequently specify feria II, III or IIII; where there is a sustained liturgical order these homilies occur immediately before the provision for Ascension; and when the letania rubric is used – as it commonly is – it is in letania maiore. Additionally, several of the Old English homilies refer to an observance of three days, or of days in the plural, and the copying of Ælfric’s homily xviii from the First Series of Catholic Homilies and Vercelli homily XIX, which both tell the story of Mamertus, means that the Gallican tradition was widely disseminated, in sharp contrast with the Roman tradition, which is either entirely ignored by the homilists, or glossed over as in the case of Ælfric’s homily on Gregory the Great.

31 The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts, ed. D.G. Scragg, EETS OS 300 (Oxford, 1992), pp. 217–36. Homilies XIX, XX and XXI in the same manuscript (pp. 310–65) are also for the three-day Litany observance preceding Ascension. For further comment, see D.G. Scragg, ‘An Old English Homilist of Archbishop Dunstan’s Day’, in Michael Korhammer (ed.), with Karl Reichl and Hans Sauer, Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of this Sixty-Fifth Birthday, (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 88–92. Homilies XIX, XX and XXI draw on a Latin homiliary of S. Pére de Chartres. J.E. Cross has edited the earliest complete survival, which is a Bury manuscript of the second half of the eleventh century: Cambridge Pembroke College MS 25: A Carolingian sermonary used by Anglo-Saxon Preachers, King’s College London Medieval Studies (London, 1987). There is a generous provision of five homilies for the three-day observance: see Cross, MS 25 pp. 33–4. For three of these the days are numbered feria ii, iii and iii (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday). The feria ii homily is rubricated Omelia in Rogatione, the feria iii homily is rubricated in Letania Maiore. The last two homilies in the group have no rubrics of this kind, but the penitential subjects make them appropriate. The five items are the only pieces between the Octave of Easter and the Ascension. On the differences between primarily exegetical and monastically based homiliaries on the one hand, and homiliaries such as that of S. Pére de Chartres, intended for the laity, on the other, see M. Clayton, ‘Homiliaries and Preaching in Anglo-Saxon England’. The rubrics for all the Old English Litany (Rogationtide) homilies, including later copies and adaptations, can be traced from the index of N.R. Ker, Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon (Oxford, 1957), p. 529; see also the introduction to Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies, eds. Bazire and Cross, especially pp. xvii–xx.

32 Homily 8 in Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies, eds. Bazire and Cross, which is an anonymous compilation, also tells the story of Mamertus, using Ælfric’s homily as its source at this point.
The frequency with which homilies for the three days before Ascension were copied into Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, even including those which were neither complete nor systematic in their liturgical provision, must in part result from the general utility of the subject matter, since the focus was on penitence, prayerful petition and basic instruction in the faith, so that these homilies could be exploited on occasions other than those for which they were written; it was a focus, moreover, which tended to erode the usual sharp distinction between Ælfric’s exegetical homilies on the one hand and the generally more moral homilies of the anonymous tradition on the other, so that subsequent preachers and copyists could move quite freely within the substantial corpus of available material.33 Even so, although some of these homilies, when copied, were not given a specific liturgical rubric and were thus available for general use, some even being rubricated quando volueris, most copies were liturgically rubricated, thus confirming the importance of the pre-Ascension Litany Days for the Anglo-Saxons. A further notable confirmation is provided by Byrhtferth of Ramsey who, in his Enchiridion, written c. 1010 x 1012, refers to the Litany Days in the plural and uses them as pivotal points in his lunar formulas for the temporale;34 in specifying that they cannot be before 27 April or after 31 May, he makes it clear that he has in mind the moveable observance of the Gallican tradition, and not the fixed date of 25 April, which is governed by the solar calendar:

Se mona on Gangdagum ne mæg beon iungra þonne an and twentig ne yldra þonne nigon and twentig.35

Gangdagas ne magon næfre beon ær .v.kalendas Mai ne æfter .ii. kalendas Iunii.36

33 Ælfric’s homilies for these days fit the general pattern, but they have a distinctive emphasis, nonetheless. There is a marked commitment to history, biblical texts, careful instruction in orthodox fundamentals, and an avoidance of the more popular and sensational apocryphal material (such as the Visio Pauli) in favour of exemplary visions drawn from Bede and Gregory.

34 Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion, eds. Baker and Lapidge. In addition to the quotations given here, there are further examples of Byrhtferth’s consistent usage at III.2.209, p. 152; III.2.247, p. 156; III.2.282, p. 158.

35 Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion, eds. Baker and Lapidge, III.1.146–7, p. 130: ‘The moon on Easter day cannot be younger than fifteen days or older than twenty-one.’ All translations of the Enchiridion text are those of Baker and Lapidge. It should be noted, however, that what they translate as ‘Rogation’ and ‘Rogation days’ is literally ‘walking [i.e. procession] days’ in Old English, and is invariably plural.

36 Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion, eds. Baker and Lapidge, III.1.152–3, p. 130: ‘The Rogation days cannot be before 27 Apr. or after 31 May.’
When writing in Latin Byrhtferth uses *rogationes*, not *letaniae*, as indeed do some of the homily rubricators both in Latin and Old English manuscripts; he later explains that *rogationum* is Latin, that *dies Letaniarum* is Greek, and that *bendagas* is the direct vernacular equivalent, recognizing that the usual Old English *gangdagas* is not a direct translation from the ecclesiastical languages:

> Syddan Aprilis mona byd geendod .xxix., man sceal fon on Maius monan, and æfter þam þe he byd uicessima, swa hwylc Sunnandæg swa þær bo gehendost, he geswutelæd borlice þæt þæs on morgen byð se forman Gangdæg. Þa dægæ synt gehaten Lentaniarum dies on Grecisc and on Lyden Rogationum and on Englicsc Bendagas.38

It will be noted, however, that his statements do not imply any potential source of confusion between one observance and another; the Litany Days are referred to without any defining adjective and the observance of 25 April is nowhere mentioned. It is also worth noting that there was never any possibility of confusion by coincidence of date since, as Byrhtferth correctly states, the pre-Ascension Litanies could not begin before 27 April at the earliest. In such years, when Easter fell on the earliest possible date of 22 March, the Roman observance of 25 April would be on the Saturday immediately preceding the Fifth Sunday after Easter, with the Gallican pre-Ascension observance beginning on the following Monday. The crucial point is that the Roman observance cannot come after the Fifth Sunday after Easter (or the Fourth Sunday after the Octave, as it is sometimes counted) – and indeed is commonly quite early in the sequence of paschal Sundays, given that Easter is usually later than 22 March and may be as late as 25 April – whereas the Gallican observance must come immediately after the Fifth Sunday after Easter because it is in the same week as Ascension.

The Gallican observance, which we have seen is attested earlier than the Roman one, was rapidly promoted. Sidonius Apollinaris, a pupil of

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37 *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, eds. Baker and Lapidge, III.1.177–82, p. 132: ‘A xvii. kalendas Mai terminus Rogationum querendus est per lunam .xx. From 15 Apr. the term of Rogation must be sought through the age of the moon, which must be twenty days old.’

38 *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, eds. Baker and Lapidge, III.2.235–9, p. 156: ‘After the moon of April is ended twenty-nine days old, one must begin the moon of May, and after it is twenty days old, whatever Sunday is nearest shows excellently that the next day after is the first Rogation day. Those days are called Letaniarum dies in Greek and Rogationum in Latin and prayer days in English’.

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Mamertus, referred to its institution in two of his letters; there was provision for the observance in the sermons of Caesarius, bishop of Arles 502–42; Gregory of Tours provided a brief account of its inception in his Liber historiarum; and, as already noted, the observance was formalized at the Council of Orléans in 511, where the Greek-derived term letanias was introduced alongside the Latin rogationes, which seems to have been more commonly used at this early date: ‘Rogationes, id est laetanias, ante ascensionem Domini ab omnibus ecclesiis placuit celebrari, ita ut praemissum triduanum ieiunium in Domenicae ascensionis festiuitate soluatur ...’ In the absence of any competing observance, there was no need for a defining adjective; rogationes or letanias was sufficient.

The origins of the Roman observance of 25 April are more obscure, but the traditional association is with Gregory the Great, who, as noted above in connection with the vita of Paul the Deacon, is said to have instituted a ‘sevenfold’ (septiformis) litany to avert divine wrath in the form of a plague at the time of his election to the papacy in 590. According to the traditional narrative, this occurred on a Wednesday, as recorded almost immediately by Gregory of Tours, although he is alone in stating that it was a three-day observance, no doubt under the influence of the already-established Gallican observance. Since 25 April was not a Wednesday in 590, it has to be assumed that the association with this date occurred later (although not necessarily that much later), or that there are more complex – and possibly older – origins for the

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40 Alcimi Ecdicii Aviti Veniensis Episcopi, ed. R. Peiper, MGH, AA VI (Berlin, 1893), pp. 108–12. There is also a ‘Sermo die I. Rogationum’, pp. 113–18, and extant extracts from sermons for ‘die II. Rogationum’, pp. 118–20, and ‘die III. Rogationum’, p. 120. These come immediately before Ascension.
41 Caesarii Arelatis Opera, I, 2, Sermones, ed. G. Morin, CCSL 104 (Turnhout, 1953), homily 208, pp. 832–4, and homily 209, pp. 834–7. These two homilies precede Ascension and both refer to an observance of three days.
42 Gregorii Turonensis Opera, Pars I: Historia Francorum, eds. W. Arndt and B. Krusch, MGH, SRM I (Hanover, 1883), Book II, chap. 34, pp. 97–8.
43 Concilia Galliae A. 511–A. 695, ed. C. de Clerq, CCSL 148A (Turnhout, 1963), canon 27, pp. 11–12: ‘It is agreed that Rogations, that is litanies, are to be celebrated by all churches before the Ascension of the Lord, so that the preceding three-day fast may be satisfied on the festival of the Lord’s Ascension’ (my translation). For further conciliar enactments in Tours and Lyons (567), Girone (517), Toledo (636) and Braga (572), see Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et ed liturgie, eds. Cabrol and Leclercq, XIV. 2, cols. 2459–60.
44 See above, p. 223–4.
45 Historia Francorum, eds. Arndt and Krusch, Book X, ch. 1, pp. 97–8. The detail that it is a three-day observance (‘per triduum’) is a comment of Gregory of Tours and is not in the historical account as reported by him. It is indicative of the way in which those already familiar with the longer-established Gallican observance could easily elide some of the distinction between them.
Roman observance than the Gregorian narrative acknowledges. It is clear, however, from one of Gregory’s letters, that the use of *letania maior* was established terminology by 591, and since the pre-Ascension observance was not adopted in Rome until the papacy of Leo III (795–816), it must be assumed that the adjective was used to distinguish the seven-fold litany (which came to be celebrated on 25 April) from the usual litanic processions leading to the Stational Mass or appointed for other occasions. When the apparently mutually contrastive terminology of *letania maior* (for 25 April) and *letaniae minores* (for the pre-Ascension observance) subsequently became customary, this was a rationalization after the event; the Gallican terminology did not originally include a defining (and by implication contrastive) adjective, and when, at a later date, we encounter a fuller form incorporating *maior*, this is either Roman nomenclature for the Roman custom (as with Paul the Deacon) or a use of the originally Roman nomenclature for the Gallican pre-Ascension Litany Days (as with many Frankish homilists and within the homily tradition of Anglo-Saxon England). I have not found any uses of *minores* in Francia or Anglo-Saxon England, even when the two observances begin to co-exist; if there is any emergent distinction, it is that *rogationes* is sometimes used for the pre-Ascension observance but not, it would seem, for the Litany of 25 April. An example is provided by the Council of Aachen in 836, where canon 22, reasserting the co-existence of the Roman and Gallican traditions, by contrast with the Council of Mainz, reserves *laetania maior* for the Roman and *rogationes* for the Gallican. Even so, although the observance of both is enjoined, it is clear that the Roman observance is the relative newcomer alongside what is obviously a very well established local custom. Comparisons can be drawn with the distinctions of familiarity and relative unfamiliarity in the earlier Council of Clovesho from Anglo-Saxon England, and also the treatment of the two observances in the *Old English Martyrology*, both of which are discussed below.

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47 Concilia Aevi Karolini, I, ed. A. Werminghoff, p. 710. In commenting on this canon, Vogel once again erroneously gives the date of 25 March for the Roman observance, and does so immediately after the text’s ‘VII kal. Maii’: ‘La réforme liturgique sous Charlemagne’, p. 220.

The picture that has emerged thus far illustrates the strength of the Gallican tradition in Carolingian Francia despite attempts to introduce Roman observance, the powerful influence of this tradition on the Anglo-Saxon homilists, and a practice of appropriating the term *in letania maiore* for the pre-Ascension observance, in which Ælfric is but one among many. Some complexities are evident, but no internal confusions. Further complexities become apparent if we investigate other forms of evidence. These are puzzling, but they suggest quite strongly that there were times when the two Litanies were conflated to some degree, which may account for the frequency with which one or the other was observed – but not so commonly both – and for the appropriation of the Roman terminology (*in letania maiore*) for the Gallican tradition.

The *Homilia in Rogationibus* by Avitus of Vienne is not a lection-based homily, but in drawing out the penitential and intercessory lessons from his account of Mamertus’ original *rogationes*, Avitus refers to the story of the Ninevites (Jonah 3), and quotes Matthew VII.7, Matthew VIII.25, 26, Matthew XXVIII.20, John XV.19, and I John I.8. In quoting Matthew VIII.25, from the Stilling of the Storm, Avitus remarks that this is from the day’s gospel lection. He was writing at a time when the lectionary was not standardized in the Western Church: the early Roman lectionary has the Stilling of the Storm (Matthew VIII.23–7) for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.49 The early Roman lectionary does, however, provide for the Major Litany (*In letania maiore ad S. petrum*), giving the date of 26 April (presumably a manuscript error for 25 April).50 There are two lections: Luke XI.5–13, and Matthew VII.1–11, which have some synoptic overlap. It will be noted immediately that the common ground of intercessory prayer leads in both traditions to a common biblical text, notwithstanding their independence and difference of date.

In the later standard Roman lectionary the *In letania maiore* lection, correctly dated 25 April, remains as Luke XI.5–13.51 Lenker’s recent analysis of gospel pericopes in early medieval manuscripts confirms Luke XI.5–13 as the Roman tradition for the Major Litany within the *sanctorale* (i.e. the fixed date of 25 April), but she notes that two of the manuscripts also have Luke VI.36–42.52 This has a substantial synoptic overlap with Matthew VII.1–11 which is, however, different from the overlap already noted between Matthew VII.1–11 and Luke XI.5–13. For

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50 Ibid., p. 11.
51 Ibid., p. 40.
the three days before Ascension, within the temporale, Lenker's manuscripts specify the following lections:\footnote{Ibid., p. 322.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday:</th>
<th>Matthew VII.1–11</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Matthew VII.7–</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Luke VI.36–</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Luke XI.5–13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday:</td>
<td>Matthew VII.7–12</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Matthew VII.7–14</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mark XI.22–5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Luke XI.5–13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday:</td>
<td>John XVII.1–11</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Vigil of Ascension)</td>
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If the lection for the Vigil of Ascension is left out of account as being preparatory for Ascension rather than a lection expressly for the Litany observance, it will be seen that the lectionary requirements are mainly met by using Luke XI.5–13, supplemented by synoptically related texts.\footnote{In the Old English Gospels in Cambridge University Library, MS II.2.11, Lenker’s MS A and included in her witnesses to the various lections, there are marginalia which identify lections for the pre-Ascension observance. The manuscript is a product of the Exeter scriptorium of the second-half of the eleventh-century, from the episcopate of Leofric, possibly English by birth, but educated in Lotharingia. The marginalia are as follows, with the vernacular comment as to use being followed by the Latin incipit: at Luke XI.5 ‘Dis sceal to gangdagon þege twegen iii’ dagas. Quis uestrum habebit amicum’ [in which iii is written above twegen]; at Matthew VII.7 ‘Dys godspel sceal to gangdagon. Petite et dabitur uobis querite et inuenietis’; at John XVII.1 ‘Dys godspel gehyrð on wodnesdag on þære gangwucan to þam uigilian. Subleuatis iesus oculis in celum dixit’. There is no doubt that these are references to the pre-Ascension Litany Days because there is the explicit reference to the Vigil of Ascension in the note to John XVII.1; there is explicit reference to a sequence of days in the note to Luke XI.5, gangdagon being a late Old English form of the dative plural gangdagum (cf. dat. sg. gangdege); and in the note to John XVII.1 there is a reference to gangwucan, ‘procession week’, appropriate for the extended pre-Ascension observance, but not for the one-day observance of 25 April. For the Old English texts, see The Old English Version of the Gospels, ed. R.M. Liuzza, EETS OS 304 (Oxford, 1994), pp. 125, 14 and 193 respectively.} The Lucan text is by far the commonest lection for Monday, perhaps because its structure as a parable makes it more attractive for preaching. The odd one out is the lection from Mark, which occurs in three eleventh-century manuscripts from Canterbury and one eleventh-century manuscript from Bury. What is striking is that the lection from Luke and the synoptically related lection from Matthew VII are the same as the lections for the Roman observance of 25 April. If Luke XI.5–13 was established as the lection for the Roman tradition at a fairly early date, with Matthew VII.1–11 as a synoptic alternative, and if – as the homily of Avitus suggests – the Gallican observance did not initially have the dedicated lection(s) subsequently associated with it, one might conjecture that, as the Gallican tradition developed, it either independently
came to use the rather obviously appropriate lections from Luke and Matthew (with which in part Avitus had already made a connection), or adopted the Roman *litania maior* lections while not adopting the observance except in situations where there was direct pressure to romanize. Whatever the route by which it was arrived at, the common ground in concept (penitence, intercession, and procession) is matched by common biblical material. On the one hand this could give rise to confusion if both observances were practised; on the other, by a process of conflation, it would tend to accommodate a transference of terminology such as we see in the homiletic tradition, hold back the development of rigidly contrastive terminology or practice, and provide a degree of passive resistance to the adoption of two observances which were virtually indistinguishable, except by date (sometimes only marginally) and duration.

The surviving information about the epistle lectionary is a rather simpler body of evidence, but that simplicity is itself an indication of the strength of the Gallican tradition, demonstrated by the practice of ascribing the rubric *in letania maiore* to an observance placed liturgically in the pre-Ascension position, following the Fifth Sunday after Easter (or the Fourth Sunday after the Octave). This is where it occurs in Frere’s ‘earlier series’, as represented by Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M. p. th. f. 68, a continental manuscript of the sixth century, with seventh and eighth century additions; in his ‘standard’ series, as represented by St Petersburg Codex Q.v.I No. 16, a tenth-century manuscript which was perhaps formerly at Corbie and later at S. Germain-des Prés; and in Alcuin’s lectionary, as represented by Paris Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds latin 9452. The Würzburg manuscript’s use of the Gallican position is surprising because its gospel lectionary, which is

55 Frere, Studies in Early Roman Liturgy: III. The Roman Epistle-Lectioary, p. 30. The manuscript is no. 945 in Gneuss, ‘A Preliminary List of Manuscripts Written or Owned in England up to 1100’.

56 Frere, Studies in Early Roman Liturgy: III. The Roman Epistle-Lectioary, p. 11, with comment on the manuscript on pp. 25–6. This is indubitably the Gallican observance: it comes between the Fourth Sunday after the Octave of Easter and the Vigil of the Ascension. Furthermore, the Fourth Sunday after the Octave is itself immediately preceded by the Epistle for the Feast of the Invention of the Cross, explicitly and correctly dated for 3 May, so that 25 April is out of the question, by date, as well as by position relative to moveable feasts.

57 Frere, Studies in Early Roman Liturgy: III. The Roman Epistle-Lectioary, p. 41. As Frere notes, this lectionary also has the additional provision of a lection from I Timothy II.1–7, found towards the end of the St Petersburg manuscript as one of a substantial group of lections for general use and special occasions. It is rubricated ‘In adventu iudicium’, but it is specifically about the need for responsible behaviour and the obligation to intercede on behalf of those in authority. The exploitation of the Day of Judgement theme in the context of the pre-Ascension Litany Days parallels what we have seen in the Old English homiletic corpus. In the light of Ælfric’s Second Series homily for the Monday of *Letania maior* (see above, p. 215) on the conduct expected of various responsible groups in society, it is also worth noting that the lection from Timothy in the St Petersburg manuscript is immediately followed
separate from the epistle lectionary, follows Roman practice with respect to the Major Litany.58 It is not so surprising that the standard series and the Alcuin lectionary use the Gallican position for in letania maiore, but they are valuable witnesses to the force of this tradition nonetheless because Alcuin was one of Charlemagne’s reformers at a time when the romanizing influence was strong, while the St Petersburg manuscript demonstrates the persistence of the tradition, comparable to what is found in homily collections. The in letania maiore epistle is James V.16–20. Amalarius recognizes the relevance of this for the Roman observance of 25 April, but with the implication that this epistle and Luke XI, from which he quotes as the gospel, were the lections that his Frankish audience would recognize as the ones for their Litany observance.59 It may well be that, as with the gospel lections, both traditions used the same epistle; if so, this would have accommodated the use of in letania maiore when, under the influence of the Gallican tradition, the one observance – for there is only one in each of these lectionaries – was placed liturgically in the pre-Ascension position.

Incipient conflation may also be the explanation for the otherwise puzzling juxtaposition of material in the Sacramentary of Gellone.60 This Sacramentary, assembled in an earlier redaction c. 760–70 as a fusion of two kinds of Roman sacramentary and reflecting the romanizing of the liturgy associated with Pippin III, places the litanies maior in an unambiguously Roman position in locating it between the Second and Third Sundays after Easter, and between the feasts of St George (23 April) and St Vitalis (28 April). Alongside it, however, – wrongly placed liturgically – are prayers for the Gallican Litany

by Isaiah V.8–26, rubricated ‘Contra iudices male agentes’, and Ezechiel XXXIV.2–14, rubricated ‘Contra episcopos male agentes’. Perhaps Ælfric was familiar with a lectionary or homiliary in which material dealing with these themes was already grouped under the Major Litany rubric. It is not at all clear whether G.G. Willis, A History of Early Roman Liturgy to the Death of Pope Gregory the Great, Henry Bradshaw Sociey, Subsidia I (London, 1994), pp. 101–2, thinks that Alcuin’s lectionary, in providing for Letania maior, was following the Roman or the Gallican custom. Since he does not seem to be aware that the Major Litany nomenclature was used for both traditions, and since he does not note that the Alcuin Lectionary has the observance following the fourth Sunday after the Octave of Easter (which makes it the Gallican custom), the implication of his comments seems to be that Alcuin’s Letania maior provision is for the same observance as that in, for example, the Hadriani or the Sacramentary of Padua. It was not. See further pp. 234–5 below. Willis’ confusion or lack of awareness that there is a problem, based on a modern assumption of what the early medieval terminological usage might signify, is an example of the problem that this article attempts to resolve. Yet, notwithstanding, Willis comments on p. 91 that the observance of 25 April was characteristically Roman and did not take root elsewhere.

58 It is MS Nd in Lenker’s list of lections for Litaniae maior in the sanctorale, Die westäachsische Evangelienversion und die Perikopenordnungen im angelsächsischen England, p. 356.
59 De ecclesiastis officitis, PL 105, cols. 1067–8.
observances. The first item in the sequence is identified not only by name, but also by date (25 April): ‘<VII> KL MĀI. LETANIA MAIORE AD SCM LAVTRENTIV’. The next five items are identified as follows:

ITEM ALIA MISSA
ITEM ÖR IN ALIO DIĘ VNDE SUPRA
ITEM ÖR AD MISSA IN SECODA DIĘ
ITEM ÖR IN TERTIA DIĘ VNDE SVPRA
ITEM ALIAS ÖR AD MISSA

For these, no differentiating terminology is used; by the repeated use of item, the sequence as a whole is presented as if it is governed by the initial letania maior identification. Yet whereas the first item is explicitly 25 April, the following sequence relates to a three-day observance, rather more personally penitential in tone and marked by fasting. This can only be the Gallican tradition, notwithstanding the Sacramentary’s romanizing commitment to the fixed date for the letania maior. Its incorporation in a romanizing text – albeit in association with the Roman date – is a striking testimony to the strength of this observance, but the evidence takes us even further than this, since the grouping of prayers for the two Litany observances and their accommodation under one identifying rubric, despite the inherent contradiction between the single day of 25 April and the three-day observance, suggests that they were seen as being so similar that they could be brought together.

Not surprisingly, some of the other texts from the periods of Frankish reform are more resolutely Roman. Ordo XXI of Andrieu’s Ordines Romani is a practical response from the end of the eighth century to the introduction of the observance of the Major Litany of 25 April under Pippin III, the Roman topographical indications for conducting the Litany procession around the various stationes in the city being edited out, so that the ordo becomes suitable for any bishop. In the romanizing Hadrianum, produced under Charlemagne, the laetania maior occurs in the Roman position (between the Second and Third

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61 Vogel, Medieval Liturgy, p. 128, n. 244, confuses the issue by commenting that ‘The Greater Litany did not yet imply the Gallican devotion of the 3 Rogation days (litaniae minores), whereas the Frankish Gelasians already included them.’ The reference then provided to pp. 133–6 of Dumas’ edition is an error. The correct reference is pp. 121–4. On the other hand, in listing the contents of the Sacramentary (p. 77), Vogel implicitly recognizes that there is sequential provision for the Roman and Gallican observances because he echoes the textual rubric in listing Litania maior and then refers to the following material as ‘Rogations’, his distinguishing term for the pre-Ascension observance, though not found in the Sacramentary rubrics.

Sundays after Easter and immediately before St Vitalis), and there is no reference to the Gallican tradition. The same is true of the Sacramentary of Padua; it has a seventh-century Roman prototype, but the extant manuscript was copied in the mid-ninth-century in a scriptorium of Lothar. At the same time, we should not forget that, even under Charlemagne’s influence, the Roman sacramentaries did not supplant the Gelasian ones but simply proliferated alongside them with both remaining in use, and that all surviving liturgical manuscripts are to some extent the result of a degree of cross-fertilization, the so-called Gallican sacramentaries being romanized to a greater or lesser extent, and the surviving ‘Roman’ sacramentaries being accessible only through Frankish transcriptions. Even so, despite this lack of purity, it is exceedingly unusual to find both Litany observances recognized in one text, and when this occurs, as in the Sacramentary of Gellone, the Gallican tradition is drawn into the orbit of the Roman. As in opposing contexts, where the Gallican tradition holds sway to the extent of determining the liturgical position, there is only one observance and in consequence no need for contrastive terminology; letania maior therefore serves for either occasion.

The Gallican observance seems to have reached Anglo-Saxon England at an early date. In his Historia ecclesiastica Bede records that as Augustine and his companions entered Canterbury they sang the antiphon ‘Deprecamur te, Domine’, which Colgrave and Mynors identify as an antiphon in use in the Gallican liturgy for the pre-Ascension Rogation ritual. They note that this observance was not practised in Rome at this time and so presume that Augustine may have become familiar with it on his journey through Gaul. However, this has recently been called into question by Ian Wood, who points out that the missionaries were passing through Gaul at the wrong time of year to witness or take part in the pre-Ascension ceremonies. Even so, if, as Wood suggests, it was Bede who put the antiphon into Augustine’s mouth as a text which was symbolically appropriate for the occasion, it witnesses to knowledge of the observance in England in Bede’s day, if

63 The contents are listed by Vogel, Medieval Liturgy, pp. 83–4.
64 For a discussion of this Sacramentary and its contents, see Vogel, Medieval Liturgy, pp. 92–7.
66 Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People, eds. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), p. 76 (book I, ch. 26). By contrast, Willis, A History of Early Roman Liturgy, p. 72, takes the view that: ‘it may well be that when St Augustine of Canterbury and his monks sang litanies as they approached the city of Canterbury, they were imitating a custom which they had learned in the stational liturgy of their native Rome’, thus not associating their practice with either of the designated Litany observances under discussion here.
not Augustine’s.68 There is further confirmation of this in Cuthbert’s account of Bede’s death, which took place on the day before Ascension, when ‘ambulauimus cum reliquis sanctorum, ut consuetudo illius diei poscebat’,69 which must be an allusion to the pre-Ascension Litany processions. Wood also observes that, outside the Historia ecclesiastica, the antiphon survives only in two antiphonals of the twelfth century. A Gallican origin is suggested by the fact that these are from St Denis and St Maur-les-Fossés, but if that is the case, the antiphon’s assignation to the pre-Ascension observance under the rubric of Litaniae Maiores demonstrates yet again that in Francia this term did not invariably (or even, perhaps, commonly) denote the Roman Major Litany of 25 April.

The evidence from Bede’s homilies has been interpreted as being at odds with this. Given the eclectic nature of the traditions at Wearmouth–Jarrow, there is no inherent difficulty about supposing that the Roman custom was known, and homily xiv in Bede’s second series of gospel homilies is rubricated in litaniis maioribus, which Hurst identifies as being Romano-Neapolitan use.70 But the evidence is not clear-cut. As noted above in connection with the lectionaries and the homily tradition,71 Luke XI.5–13 was also the dominant lection for the Gallican Litany observance, so that the biblical text does not, of itself, determine the tradition within which Bede was writing. Content similarly does not settle the matter, because there are no allusions to historical origins or to the specifics of the observance. It is also not a simple matter to interpret the liturgical position, because although Bede’s homilies are in the order of the church’s year, there are only twenty-five in each set, so that the provision is not comprehensive enough to eliminate all ambiguities in every case. However, against the Roman tradition and in favour of the Gallican is the fact that this Major Litany homily comes immediately before the homily for Ascension, and after a sequence of five post Pascha homilies.72

68 C. Cubitt, Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c. 650–c. 850 (Leicester, 1995), p. 130, takes the view that this detail is a later addition to the story of Augustine’s arrival, which may have originated in Canterbury.
69 Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People, eds. Colgrave and Mynors, ‘Epistola de obitu Bedae’, p. 584: ‘... we went in procession with the relics, as the custom of that day required’ (trans. of Colgrave and Mynors, p. 585). On the processing of relics in the pre-Ascension observance, see below, p. 242.
72 Lenker, Die westäischische Evangelienversion und die Perikopenordnungen im angelsächsischen England, pp. xxi and 322, treats Bede’s homily collection as not being Roman. Note that Lenker’s reference to Bede’s homily on p. 322 should read II.14, not II.15. That there are five
The reforming Council of Clovesho, which in 747 attempted to impose Roman usage on the English church, nevertheless acknowledged the existence of two traditions, one on 25 April ‘iuxta ritum Romanae ecclesiae: quae et Laetania maior apud eam vocatur’, and the other, specifically associated with fasting and the processing of relics, on the three days before Ascension, ‘secundum morem priorum nostrorum’. There are two points of interest here: one is that the Gallican observance, but not the Roman, was well established in England at this time; and the other is that laetania maior is used for 25 April but that the letaniae preceding Ascension are not correspondingly described as minores, even though Cubitt repeatedly refers to them as the Minor Litanies.

At the end of the tenth century, within the context of the Benedictine Reform, the Benedictional of Æthelwold had a series of three blessings leading up to Ascension:

- No. 85. In Laetania maiore
- No. 86. Alia ... de Ieiunio
- No. 87. Eve of Ascension

There is no question of these being a collection of blessings for 25 April because they follow immediately after the blessing for the Invention of the Holy Cross, celebrated on 3 May; there is also a reference to fasting, post Pascha homilies immediately preceding the homilies for the Major Litany and Ascension is suggestive but not of itself conclusive, since the rubrics do not enumerate Sundays after Easter and, as one might well expect at this date and in the eclectic context of Wearmouth-Jarrow, the lections do not correspond to either of Frere’s gospel series. The juxtaposition with Ascension is more telling, along with what we know from elsewhere of practices in Bede’s day.

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73 Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland, eds. A.W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1869–71), III, 369: ‘Litanies, that is Rogations, are performed on these days by the priest and all the people with great reverence, that is on 25 April according to the rite of the Roman church: which is called by them Laetania maior. And also according to the custom of our forefathers, the three days before the Ascension of the Lord into the heavens are honoured with a fast up to the ninth hour and with the celebration of masses and, the relics of the saints having been carried, all the people, with bended knee, humbly petition divine forgiveness for their sins.’ It is curious that the plural his diebus is used in connection with the Roman observance, which is specified in the same sentence as being on one day.

74 Cubitt, Anglo-Saxon Church Councils, in discussing the Council of Clovesho in chs. 4 and 5. On p. 143 she gives 25 May instead of 25 April as the date for the Major Litanies (Roman custom).

75 A. Prescott, ‘The Text of the Benedictional of St Æthelwold’, in B. Yorke (ed.), Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence, (Woodbridge, 1988), 119–47, at p. 130. No. 85, notwithstanding its liturgical position in the Benedictional, has a Gregorian source; no. 86, which refers to the fast, is Gallican; no. 87, for the Vigil of Ascension, is Gregorian.
which is a characteristic of the Gallican tradition. Yet the term used is *In Laetania maiore*, which also, by virtue of the *alia*, governs the following rubric, the one referring to the fast. The Sacramentary of Ratoldus, which Prescott argues is probably English rather than northern French as previously thought, may be the source of a group of benedictionals which includes Æthelwold’s, and it too caters for a three-day Major Litany observance, rubricated *In Litania Maiore, Die Secundo*, and *Die Tertio*.76 These three days immediately precede Ascension Day, but they are themselves preceded by the Fourth Sunday after Easter (there is no provision for the Fifth Sunday), so that there is a possible – but calendrically unsustainable – elision with the Roman *In Litania Maiore*, by date if not by observance, because 25 April (but not the Gallican three-day Litany) could come after the Fourth Sunday, though never in the same week as Ascension (i.e. after the Fifth Sunday, here not represented). The Benedictional of Æthelwold and the Sacramentary of Ratoldus marry Gallican (Gelasian) and Gregorian (Roman) material. Their treatment of the Litanies witnesses to this: the Gallican observance, not the Roman, is provided for, but under the Major Litany nomenclature. This is not at all surprising, given their strongly Frankish influence.

A strongly Frankish influence is indeed a feature of works which come out of the Anglo-Saxon Benedictine Reform. The Missal of Robert of Jumièges and the Winchcombe Sacramentary are cases in point, each providing further evidence of the dominance of the Gallican Litany observance, while yet displaying some signs of an erosion of the distinction between the Gallican and the Roman traditions. The Missal of Robert, produced at Winchester probably within the years 1013 x 1017, has three groups of prayers immediately preceding Ascension and following the Fourth Sunday after the Octave of Easter, which is the correct position for the Gallican observance but, as noted above, an impossibility for the Roman.77 Given the Frankish and Anglo-Saxon habit of using *letania maior* for at least the first of the three pre-Ascension days, if not for each in turn (except by implication through the use of *alia* or *item*), it is not surprising that this term is part of the rubric for the first of the sequence; the following groups are headed *item in alia die* and *in alia die*, followed by *in uigilia Ascensionis Domini*. What is surprising, however, unless one assumes a degree of conflation which overrides the limitation of liturgical chronology, is that the Major Litany rubric specifies the date of 25 April: ‘VII. KAL. MAI.

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76 Prescott, ‘The Text of the Benedictional of St Æthelwold’, p. 138 (nos. 82, 83 and 84), with comment on his Sacramentary particularly on pp. 135–42.
LAETANIA MAIORE’. At a minimum, as already noted, the first day of the Gallican observance must be two days after 25 April, a situation which arises when Easter is on the earliest date of 22 March; when Easter falls on the latest possible date, which is itself 25 April, the Gallican observance begins on 31 May. Wilson, in editing the Missal, assumed that here, as in certain other liturgical texts to which he refers, traditions were conflated, with the Gallican observance being catered for, but with the Roman nomenclature – and sometimes the specific Roman date – being preserved. The Winchcombe Sacramentary, perhaps written at Ramsey by a Winchcombe monk in the third quarter of the tenth century, and displaying strong Fleury connections, is another example. At first this seems like a straightforward instance of the Roman observance because there is only one set of provisions, not three, and 25 April is specified along with the use of the Major Litany nomenclature: ‘UII KL. MAI. IPSO DIE LETANIA MAIORE’. But appearances are deceptive, since the position, as in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, is Gallican: immediately before Ascension, and immediately after the Fourth Sunday after the Octave of Easter, which places it – impossibly for 25 April – unambiguously in the same week as Ascension and precisely where the Gallican observances belong.

The Missal of Robert of Jumièges and the Winchcombe Sacramentary begin with the church’s year as determined by the moveable feasts of the lunar calendar (the temporale) and then work through the feasts fixed by dates in the solar calendar (the sanctorale). The Roman Major Litany, being always on 25 April and therefore having a variable position relative to Easter and Ascension, properly belongs with the solar calendar material; for the Gallican observance it is the date which is variable, but the position relative to Easter and Ascension which is fixed, so that it properly belongs with the lunar calendar material. In both the Missal and the Sacramentary the Major Litany observance is included in the lunar calendar part (the temporale), as we also find in Frankish and Frankish-influenced homiliaries where temporale and sanctorale are arranged separately. The specification of the Roman fixed date is an anomaly, both because it does not make sense within an immediate context of relative dating, and because, in this context, it is the only
dated observance except for Christmas and the feasts counted from it which, in relating to Christ’s life, are conventionally in the temporale. However, the very fact that there are few feasts within the temporale with dates attached – and none in the vicinity of the Litany observance – means that the impossibility of the 25 April date is not glaringly obvious within the text. In practice, since it is clearly the moveable Gallican tradition which is referred to, the date in the rubric (which in any case was not part of the material as orally delivered) must have been glossed over as simply conventional.

By contrast, liturgical kalendars are organized according to the solar year. They can therefore accommodate observances determined by date, but cannot satisfactorily cope with the moveable feasts of the temporale. Within this context, the date of 25 April comes into its own. Fifteen of the nineteen English kalendars from before 1100 edited by Wormald give 25 April as the date for the letania maior, commonly also designated as St Mark’s day; one gives it as St Mark’s day but has letania maior added; there is only one kalendar which refers solely to St Mark; two were originally blank for 25 April, but in one case received the addition of St Mark and letania maior and in the other Mark alone.82 Not surprisingly, some of these kalendars make no reference at all to Easter or its related moveable feasts, but those which do so recognize what is in this context the ‘Easter problem’ by noting the latest possible date at 25 April (ultimum pascha) and sometimes also the first possible date at 22 March (primum pascha), although there is a dominant (but not invariable) tradition of entering the Resurrection at 27 March. When the Ascension is entered, it is almost always on 5 May, which is correct if Easter Day is on 27 March. The kalendars testify to the importance in the Anglo-Saxon church of an observance known as the letania maior, but its association with 25 April, despite appearances, may not be straightforward evidence for observance of the Roman custom. Firstly, if the kalendars are to be interpreted at face value as asserting the Roman observance and not the Gallican, they are at odds with other ecclesiastical evidence for the predominance of the Gallican in the Anglo-Saxon church, all the more so in that most of the kalendars are from the

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82 English Kalendars before A.D. 1100, ed. F. Wormald, Henry Bradshaw Society 72 (London, 1934; repr. Woodbridge, 1988). The fifteen original entries for letania maior on 25 April are pp. 5, 19, 33, 47, 75, 89, 103, 117, 131, 145, 173, 187, 201, 229, 243; on p. 159 there is an addition of letania maior to an existing entry for St Mark; the entry for St Mark alone is on p. 257; on p. 61 letania maior and Mark are additional entries; and on p. 215 Mark is added without letania maior.
later part of the period, when there is no doubt that the Gallican observance prevailed, commonly with the Major Litany nomenclature, following Frankish practice. Secondly, although most of the entries in the kalendars are indeed for fixed dates, users were repeatedly faced with conventional dates of 27 March and 5 May for the major moveable feasts of Easter and Ascension. In the case of Easter, this might be counter-balanced by a recording at other dates of some element of the range of possibilities, and by implication this of course then encompasses Ascension, although 5 May is generally noted as the date without explicit recognition of the variables. There is thus an element of conventional dating with regard to the moveable feasts and it would be for the user of the kalendar to make appropriate adjustments year by year. Since 25 April is conventionally attached to what is clearly the three-day Gallican observance in some liturgical manuscripts, as noted above, and since, in the kalendar, it is unavoidably the date which is the determiner, might it be that the measure of conflation which is evident elsewhere operated here also, and that 25 April – which certainly comes from the Roman tradition – was interpreted as a conventional date, which conveniently allowed the Major Litany to be recorded in the kalendars, but which was in fact interpreted as a prompt for the Gallican observance, moveable as were some other apparently fixed kalendar dates? It is an unprovable hypothesis, but it has the merit of harmonizing with the very strong evidence of Anglo-Saxon observance and nomenclature from outside the kalendars, where we also see some signs that 25 April was used conventionally; furthermore, it would have made no more demands on the users of the kalendars than the representation of Easter or Ascension.

The willingness of the Anglo-Saxons to cope with the inherent conflicts between the solar and lunar calendars, not least in the use of conventional dates for moveable feasts, is evident in the *Old English Martyrology* where, alongside the genuinely fixed dates of the *sanctorale*, Easter is recorded as 27 March and Ascension as 5 May, in common with the majority of the kalendars. For both dates, fixity is asserted, in statements which parallel those introducing the fixed feasts of the saints:

On ðone seofon ond twentegðan dæg þæs monðes bið se dæg on þone ure Drihten of deaðe aras ... 84

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83 See pp. 238–9.
On ðone ðíftan dæg þæs monðes bið se dæg þe ure Dryhten to heofonum astag ...

There is no reminder in the *Martyrology* of the range of variables for Easter or Ascension, but it is inconceivable that these could have been taken as other than conventional dates, in reality not fixed at all. Of course, in particular years the dates of Easter and Ascension are 27 March and 5 May respectively, but we should not imagine that the *Old English Martyrology* was intended to be consulted only at extensive intervals, any more than the kalendars. Indeed, there are manuscript witnesses to the *Martyrology*’s use from the late ninth to the early eleventh centuries, and yet, if we take 875–1025 as bracketing dates, the Easter cycle means that 27 March and 5 May occur as the dates for Easter and Ascension only seven times within that span of 150 years.

It is striking, by contrast, to find that the pre-Ascension litanies (‘letanias’), are accommodated within the *Old English Martyrology* with careful recognition of their moveable nature:

Ymb þas dagas utan, hwilum ær, hwilum æfter, þæs þry dagas on þæm Godes ciricum, ond Cristes folc mærslað Letanias, þæt is þonne bene ond relicgongas foran to Cristes uppastignesse ... .

This is unmistakeably the Gallican custom: apart from the reminder that it is a moveable feast with a three-day duration, there is reference to the processing of the relics of saints and to fasting, neither of which is characteristic of the Roman observance. The entry is relatively long and provides a detailed account of the observances in a way which clearly indicates that it was well established. There is no reference to its origins outside England.

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85 *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, ed. Kotzor, II, p. 84: ‘On the fifth day of the month is the day on which our Lord ascended to heaven.’

86 *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, ed. Kotzor, II, p. 80: ‘Round about these days, sometimes before, sometimes after, are the three days in the churches of God on which Christ’s people celebrate letanias, when there are prayers and procession of relics, before Christ’s ascension. In his edition of An Old English Martyrology, EETS OS 116 (London, 1890), George Herzfeld wrongly translates relicgongas as ‘visits of relics’, and uppastignes as ‘resurrection’. Herzfeld’s interpretation of relicgongas, with reference only to this text, is perpetuated in dictionaries, but the logic of the compound is that it is the relics which move, and it is very clear from continental and Anglo-Latin texts, as well as from Old English homilies, that the relics were carried in procession. See above, p. 236, and Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies, eds. Bazire and Cross, pp. xxii–xxiii, for references in their collection of anonymous homilies.
The Old English Martyrology is unusual in also recording the Roman observance of 25 April:

On ðone fif ond twentegðan dag ðæs monðes bið seo tid on Rome ond on callum Godes ciricum seo is nemned *Letania Maiora*, þæt is þonne micelra bena dag. \(^{87}\)

We have seen that texts organized according to the church’s year and intended for liturgical use do not usually note both observances, \(^{88}\) but the Martyrology, in doing so, maintains a very careful distinction between them. There is some distinction in terminology, the Roman being called *letania maiora* [sic], which is historically correct, and the Gallican bring called simply *letanias*; even so, it is not an adjectival contrast of ‘major’ and ‘minor’. The two entries also imply a difference in the degree of ‘ownership’, with the Gallican observance being presented at length as a thoroughly domesticated practice, and the observance of 25 April being presented as a custom of Rome, accepted in all churches of God, it is true, but described more briefly and in a less personal and exhortatory way, as if it is something that needs explanation for what it is, by contrast with the pre-Ascension entry, which reiterates how the observance is conducted and with what benefit to the individual soul. Above all, of course, there is the fundamental distinction that one is recognized as fixed by date, the other as moveable. The late-ninth-century origin of the Martyrology takes us to a period before the apparently Frankish-inspired conflation of the two observances had had an impact on terminology and, ultimately, on the use of 25 April as a conventional date for the Gallican observance; at the same time, it is an oblique testimony to the predominance of the Gallican tradition within the Anglo-Saxon liturgical year.

Further evidence of the predominance of the Gallican tradition is provided by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which is all the more valuable in that it is not an ecclesiastical document and so may be considered to appeal to widely disseminated rather than clerically specialized knowledge. The Chronicle sometimes uses the Roman system for specifying particular dates, sometimes the feast of a particular saint is given

\(^{87}\) *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, ed. Kotzor, II, p. 63 ‘On the twenty-fifth day of the month there is the festival in Rome and in all churches of God which is called *Letanis maiora*, when there is the day of great prayers.’

\(^{88}\) The contrast with reforming councils such as Clovesho and the Council of Aachen is instructive. In promoting the Roman tradition, these are also obliged to acknowledge the prior existence of the Gallican, but whatever the force or effectiveness of their prescriptions might be, they are simply stating what should be done. By contrast, materials organized for liturgical observance cater for what is actually done, and it is rare for these to accommodate two distinct observances.
(without the numerical date), and sometimes a prominent moveable feast, such as Easter or Whitsun when what is needed is simply an indication of the time of year. The Litany observance is also used as a chronological reference point, which itself confirms the importance of the observance within Anglo-Saxon England: *gangdagas, s.a. 892; gangdagum, s.a. 913, 921 and 1016.* The use of the plural shows that the reference is to the three-day pre-Ascension observance. The one exception is the C Chronicle for 1066, which specifies 24 April as the eve of the Major Litany and uses the historically correct Roman designation: ‘he [i.e. the comet] æt eowde ærest on þone æfen LETANIA MAIORA. þys .viii. kl MAI’. The Latin date is here coupled with the Latin nomenclature, by contrast with the more casual and wholly vernacular references to the *gangdagas.* There is, of course, no doubt that the Anglo-Saxons knew both traditions; the questions at issue are which observance they practised, how they named the Litanies – in particular those preceding Ascension – and whether there is any textual evidence for the use of ‘major’ and ‘minor’ as contrastive terms (or of the use of *minores* at all).

The final piece of evidence from Anglo-Saxon England is the Old English *Visio Leofrici,* the earl of Mercia who died in 1057. Leofric sees a vision of a great host of people, which is evoked for the readers/auditors by a comparison with the great crowd one sees at Litany time: ‘Pa geseah he swyþe mycele weorud swylce on gangdagan ...’ *Gangdagan* is the late Old English reduced form of the dative plural *gangdagum;* the reference must be to the Gallican observance, clearly popular enough to attract large crowds and sufficiently embedded in the Anglo-Saxon consciousness to provide this telling comparison.

A vernacular text cannot, of course, solve the problem of the Major/Minor Litany terminology; only Latin usages can do that. But Gatch’s discussion of the *Visio Leofrici* takes us back to the heart of the difficulty with which this exploration began: the extent to which terminology and distinctions of terminology are unjustifiably imposed on the early Middle Ages. Gatch is, of course, well aware of the existence of the Roman and Gallican customs, and he is careful to explain the Litany reference in the *Visio,* which he correctly identifies as being to the pre-Ascension observance. But he confuses the picture, probably because –

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90 *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel,* ed. Plummer, I, 194: ‘it first appeared on the eve of *Latania maiora,* that is April 24’.

91 A.S. Napier, ‘An Old English Vision of Leofric, Earl of Mercia’, *Transactions of the Philological Society* vol. no. (1907–10), 180–8, at p. 182: ‘Then he saw a very large crowd as on the Rogation days ...’

in common with others – he works backwards from the subsequently established distinctions. Thus, he states that: ‘Rogationtide, clearly established in England by the time of the death of Bede in 735 and the Council of Cloveshoe 747, was invariably called In litania maiore in the Latin rubrics to Old English homilies of the tenth and eleventh centuries.’ But in the explanatory footnote he asserts that ‘The usual designation on the Continent was In letania minore, ‘maiore’ being reserved for the litanies performed on 25 April’. As the evidence brought forward in this article demonstrates, neither part of this statement is correct: in letania maiore was indubitably used in Francia and Anglo-Saxon England within recognizably authoritative contexts for the Gallican observance (even though it was also known as the term for the Roman observance of 25 April); and I have not been able to discover any usages of in letania minore. Indeed, as I have pointed out above, the term ‘Minor Litany’ as a contrast to ‘Major Litany’ is a rationalization after the event, and later than the period under discussion. In any case, in most of the texts examined here there is only one observance (even when both were known) and there was thus no need for terminological contrast.

There are several lessons to be learnt from this. There was undoubtedly a degree of textual and terminological conflation between the Roman and Gallican traditions in Francia, which for the most part probably did not give rise to a confusion of observance because textual evidence suggests that it was common for only one to be practised; the Gallican observance remained dominant, despite the romanizing reforms of Pippin and Charlemagne; and the contrastive terminology of Major and Minor Litanies was not in operation. Romanizing influences are apparent in Anglo-Saxon England also, as for example in the Council of Clovesho, but in terms of texts, terminology and observance it was the Gallican/Frankish practices which prevailed, being introduced at an early date, and being powerfully reinforced by the Benedictine Reform. The Anglo-Saxons were therefore not mistaken in using Litaniae maiores and minores to refer to the three days before Ascension, since they were doing so in accordance with an established tradition, which was not confined to the Anglo-Saxon church or, indeed, to the restricted period of the tenth century; Ælfric, with his concern for orthodoxy, places himself, in this respect as in so many others, within an authoritative tradition. More generally, I hope I have shown that the imposition of anachronistic

93 Gatch, ‘Piety and Liturgy in the Old English Vision of Leofric’, p. 163. At pp. 164–5, n. 24, Gatch states that ‘The relationship of major and minor litanies and other calendrical matters were sorted out by F. Tupper Jr., ‘Anglo-Saxon Dgn-Mnl’, PMLA 10 (1895), 111–241, at pp. 229–33’, but this is called into question by the present study. For some particular comments on Tupper, see pp. 212–3 above, and note 3.
terminology means that inappropriate assumptions are brought to bear on medieval texts and culture which then hinder the appreciation of the complex realities. In this case the reality is that the situation was one of accommodation and compromise, neatly captured in a pseudo-Bedan homily which, under the rubric *De majori litania*, relates the stories of both Gregory the Great and Mamertus as if they are two institution narratives for the same observance.94

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94 *Vererabilis Bedae: Opera Omnia*, ed. J.-P. Migne, PL 94 (Paris, 1862, col. 499, pseudo-Bede homily 97. The purpose of the homily, under its Major Litany rubric, is to commend the practice of special penitential litanic observance. The two historical events are recognized as being distinct, but no relative or absolute dates for their liturgical observance are given; the Gregorian observance is simply referred to as ‘septem litanias’ and the Gallican as ‘tres dies rogationum’. They are cited on equal terms as authoritative, historical exempla for the practice being advocated. Bazire and Cross, whose interpretation of this homily is influenced by the later terminology of Major and Minor Litanies, and who do not recognize the degree of transference or conflation in the early Middle Ages, particularly with regard to nomenclature, attempt to draw distinctions by means of the current terms, in the process implying that the pre-Ascension observance was originally called the Minor Litanies, which was certainly not the case: *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies*, p. 11.

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