

The Tree in the Works of Saint Augustine

Tree (*arbor*) occurs 978 times in Augustine's works¹). *Lignum* is an equally common synonym for tree, though this synonym is also often used in the sense of wood (usually dead) in its raw or reworked (tooled) state. (See "wood" below). Cognates of *arbor* with their occurrences are: *arbustum*/*arbustus* (20), *arbuscula* (3) and *arbustum* (1).

The Tree in Manichean Belief

For at least nine years, beginning from the age of nineteen (Conf. 4, 1), Augustine was a devout Manichee. It is therefore important, as background, to appreciate that sect's strong beliefs about trees and their role in the Manichees' myth of the universal conflict between the Kingdom of Light and the powers of Darkness²). Much of the divine light element had become separated from its Kingdom and was scattered through the hostile material world. For various reasons the Manichees believed that trees were important in concentrating this scattered light and in aiding its return to its own Kingdom.

Regarding the primal role of trees in their mythology, one account has it that the bodies of animals came originally from trees³). Trees themselves were supposedly sprung from the semen of the Archons, or evil demons of darkness. Sexually excited by an apparition involving members of the opposite sex, the part of their ejected semen which fell upon the land grew into trees⁴). Given the supposedly light-rich nature of semen⁵), it follows that trees (and indeed all vegetation) were considered by the Manichees to be rich in the light element⁶).

Again, for the Manichees sexual copulation was considered evil in

¹) The author is indebted to the *Augustinus Lexikon* for the material upon which such word-counts are based.

²) *mor.* 2, 36-37; *haer.* 46.

³) *c. Faust.* 6, 8; 21, 12; *haer.* 46. See also P. ALFARIC, *Les écritures manichéennes I* (1918) 41; F. DECRET, *Aspects du Manichéisme dans l'Afrique romaine* (Paris 1970) 248-9.

⁴) *nat. b.* 44; *c. Faust.* 20, 6; *haer.* 46; F.C. BURKITT, *The Religion of the Manichees* (Cambridge 1925) 28-29; F. CUMONT, *Recherches sur le Manichéisme I* (Bruxelles 1908) 54-68; G. WIDENGREN (tr. C. Kessler), *Mani and Manichaeism* (1965) 56-58.

⁵) *nat. b.* 45; *haer.* 46; WIDENGREN (*op. cit.*) 58.

⁶) *en Ps.* 140, 12; WIDENGREN (*op. cit.*) 66.

that it sought to imprison more of the light element (the soul) in the darkness of matter (the body)⁷). Therefore all flesh was polluted and evil. On the other hand, it was generally believed in the ancient world that, unlike animals, trees did not reproduce by sexual copulation⁸). Therefore the Manichees believed that trees (and all vegetative life) represented a purer form of life than that of animals (including man)⁹).

Since trees contained concentrations of the divinity, or the scattered light element (soul), the Manichees believed that they could perceive and suffer. Therefore it was considered sinful to harm trees in any way, as such harm disturbed and pained the divinity that they contained¹⁰). Even the plucking of fruit from a tree was sinful, and Augustine himself confessed how, when a young Manichee, he had believed that a fig wept when it was plucked, and its mother, the tree, also shed milky white tears¹¹). By way of example therefore, for a Manichee it was preferable to let a starving man die, rather than pluck a piece of fruit from a neighbouring tree in order to save his life¹²).

Another aspect of the prohibition against plucking fruit was the Manichean belief that the earth brought forth fruit under the power of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, what was hanging on every tree in the form of fruit was the mortal Jesus (*Jesus patabilis*)¹³). The Manichees also believed that this fruit should be eaten by their priests (the *electi*) who claimed the power of separating the light element from the dark dregs of matter with which it was mixed. The light so separated was believed to be breathed out by the elect and resumed its voyage back to the Kingdom of Light beyond the sun¹⁴). The elect, who were themself-

⁷) *mor.* 2, 65-66; *c. Faust.* 6, 8; *haer.* 46.

⁸) *mor.* 2, 49.

⁹) *mor.* 2, 49 & 60. In Augustine's case, this would probably have been part of the reason for his prohibition against the worshipping of trees in *uera rel.* 109.

¹⁰) *mor.* 2, 54-59; *quant. an.* 71; *exp. prop. Rom.* 53; *c. Faust.* 6, 4; *haer.* 46; *en. Ps.* 140, 12. See also *The Cologne Mani Codex* (P. Colon. inv. nr. 4780) "Concerning the Origin of his Body", ed. & tr. by R. CAMERON & AUGUSTINE J. DEWEY (Missoula 1979) 11-13. The ultimate sin was of course the killing of a tree. This was not so bizarre a belief when seen against the myths and legends of the time. See the pioneering work of J.G. FRAZER, *The Golden Bough* II (1911) chapters 9-13 and 20-21, as also A. HENRICH, "Thou Shalt not Kill a Tree; Greek, Manichean and Indian Tales" *Bull. Amer. Soc. Papyrologists* 16 (1979) 85-108.

¹¹) *conf.* 3, 18. Cf. *en. Ps.* 140, 12.

¹²) *mor.* 2, 58; *en. Ps.* 140, 12.

¹³) *c. Faust.* 20, 2 & 11; BURKITT (*op. cit.*) 31; F. DECRET, *L'Afrique manichéenne (IV^e-V^e siècles): Étude historique et doctrinale* (Paris 1978) vol. I 271 n.83; WIDENGREN (*op. cit.*) 66.

¹⁴) *mor.* 2, 15, 52 & 61; *conf.* 3, 10; *c. Faust.* 20, 2; *nat. b.* 45; *haer.* 46; *en. Ps.* 140, 12. See also F. DECRET, *L'Afrique manichéenne &c.* (previously cited) I 131.

ves prohibited from plucking fruit and so disturbing the divinity, could accept the fruit so harvested by the Manichean laity (the hearers, or *auditores*) and would pray for the forgiveness of the sins of those who had originally plucked the fruit¹⁵). Finally, on the topic of trees and the Manichees, there is the important subject of the good tree and the evil tree, treated below.

Augustine's Non-Biblical Tree Symbolism

Most of Augustine's tree symbolism is biblical in origin. However, his writings also contain some examples of what may be termed a non-biblical tree symbolism.

Augustine's earliest extant writings date from just after his conversion to Catholicism in 386. It is peculiar to those writings that the tree is often featured as an example in treatments of various philosophical problems¹⁶). Also belonging to the early writings is the strange opinion that the time numbers (*temporales numeri*) of a tree must precede its place numbers (*locales numeri*)¹⁷). Part of the reason for this opinion seems to have been Augustine's fascination with numbers. Because they are fixed in the earth, trees (and other plants), though they are alive, are not to be classified with other living things which move about on land or in water¹⁸).

Throughout his writings various allusions suggest that Augustine was sensitive to the beauty and grandeur of trees¹⁹). On the other hand, and possibly in reaction to his former Manichean background (see above), he expressly denies that the life of trees can be superior to human life²⁰). In several places Augustine sees the wild woods with their trees and thorny bushes as symbols of sinfulness and passion²¹). More specifically, from the use of the rare verb *silvescere* in Conf. 2, 1, Augustine seems there to associate wild wooded vegetation with sexual

¹⁵) *conf.* 4, 1; *c. Faust.* 2, 5; 6, 8; *haer.* 46. Cf. BURKITT (*op. cit.*) 45-47 and WIDENGREN (*op. cit.*) 97.

¹⁶) Of perception and identity: *c. acad.* 2, 25, 27 & 28; *ord.* 2, 48; *sol.* 1, 28 & 29; 2, 3 & 10; of divine providence: *ord.* 1, 11, 12 & 14; and of the essentials of justice: *quant. an.* 5. Also, compare the role of the tree in *c. acad.* 2, 25 with that in Plato's *Phaedrus* 230a.

¹⁷) *mus.* 6, 57. Cf. *uera rel.* 79.

¹⁸) *Gn. litt.* 2, 13. See also Plato's *Timaeus* 27a-c.

¹⁹) *c. acad.* 2, 25; *conf.* 5, 7; *Gn. litt.* 5, 23; *Io. eu. tr.* 40, 8; *en. Ps.* 110, 4.

²⁰) *mus.* 6, 8 & 15. Cf. *uera rel.* 1, 18.

²¹) *en. Ps.* 103, 3, 18; s. 89, 1.

sin, in contrast to cultivated gardens which are sites of grace²²). Ironically enough, in later life, an ungrateful correspondent accused Augustine of giving advice which was like a twisted and knotted tree, not only containing nothing straightforward but also puzzling the eye of the beholder²³).

The development of an entire large tree from one small seed was of particular significance to Augustine. Everything which is later found in the grown tree was initially contained in the original seed, though in an invisible manner²⁴). It seems that this realization was part of the basis of Augustine's theory of creation. From the example of the small seed and the large tree eventually produced from it, it seems that he reasoned that likewise everything that later came into visible prominence in the created world was originally contained in an invisible manner in the world which God first created²⁵). This kind of thinking also helps explain Augustine's picture of the world as an immense tree containing many things²⁶). The human race is also compared to a tree always covered with leaves, even though some (like people) are always dying off and being replaced by others²⁷).

The Trees of Paradise

In general, the trees of Paradise (Gn. 2, 9), as towering above the earth, signified spiritual joys separated from earthly desires²⁸). Adam's duties in Paradise (Gn. 2, 15) included the care and cultivation of its trees²⁹). In particular, the two trees of Paradise of Gn. 2, 9 were of lasting interest to Augustine, who refers to them as the Tree of Life (*arbor/lignum vitae*) and the Tree of Knowledge (*arbor/lignum scientiae*).

²²) *conf.* 10, 56; *bapt.* 5, 38. See also L. FERRARI, "Symbols of Sinfulness in Book II of Augustine's Confessions" *Augustinian Studies* (*Augn. Studs.*) 2 (1971) 93-104 and "The Barren Field in Augustine's Confessions" *Augn. Studs.* 8 (1977) 55-70.

²³) *ep.* 241, 1.

²⁴) *uera rel.* 79; *ep.* 102, 5; 137, 8; *s.* 294, 15.

²⁵) In general, beginning with the Stoics, this realization seems to be at the basis of the theory of *rationales seminales*. For works on this much-discussed topic in Augustine see the *Fichier Augustinien*, Matières, vol. 2, 66-68 and its Premier Supplément, 385. *Gn. c. Man.* 1, 11; *Gn. litt.* 5, 23; *trin.* 3, 13.

²⁶) *Gn. litt.* 8, 9; *Io. eu. tr.* 95, 4; *s.* 81, 3.

²⁷) *en. Ps.* 101, 2; *s.* 51, 23.

²⁸) *Gn. c. Man.* 2, 12. Cf. *ciu.* 13, 21.

²⁹) *Gn. c. Mn.* 2, 20; *c. Cresc.* 2, 26; *Gn. litt.* 8, 9 & 10. Compare with Plato's *Statesman* 272a.

Both are extensively described³⁰⁾ and are truly physical trees, but are also of spiritual significance³¹⁾.

The Tree of Life is not intrinsically evil³²⁾ and is the source of physical immortality³³⁾. Christ, as the Tree of Life, is in spiritual Paradise³⁴⁾. The Tree of Life also symbolizes the Cross through which eternal life may be recovered³⁵⁾. Other meanings are not thereby excluded³⁶⁾. The true believer can return to the Tree of Life by bearing the troubles of this world and by that fullness of knowledge which is charity³⁷⁾. Not only was the Tree of Life not poisonous but it also bestowed immortality on those who continually ate of its fruit³⁸⁾. Adam and Eve, once banished from the Garden of Paradise, were thereby deprived of that fruit of immortality and so were destined to die (Gn. 3, 22-23)³⁹⁾.

The second tree of Gn. 2, 9, the Tree of Knowledge, like all the trees of Paradise, was good⁴⁰⁾. In that God forbade Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge⁴¹⁾, it became the medium through which they were subject to Him. So in eating of that medium, they showed that they wanted to become equal to God⁴²⁾. Adam's presumption⁴³⁾, in tasting of the fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, unleashed concupiscence⁴⁴⁾. Accordingly, from that disobedience man came to experience good and evil (Gn. 3, 3-7), whence the name: "arbor scientiae dignoscendi boni et mali"⁴⁵⁾.

³⁰⁾ Gn. c. Man. 2, 12, 22-24 & 34-36; pecc. mer. 2, 35.

³¹⁾ Gn. litt. 6, 21; 7, 16; 8, 5 & 6; ciu. 13, 21; c. adu. leg. 1, 26.

³²⁾ uera rel. 38; c. Iul. 4, 63.

³³⁾ Gn. c. Man. 2, 12; Gn. litt. 8, 5; ciu. 13, 23; c. adu. leg. 1, 24-26; c. Iul. imp. 6, 30. See also J. DANIELOU (tr. D. ATTWATER), *Primitive Christian Symbols* (London 1964) ch. 2 "The Vine and the Tree of Life", and E.O. JAMES, *The Tree of Life; An Archaeological Study* (Leiden) 1966, as also, H.G. LEDER, "Arbor Scientiae; Die Tradition vom paradiesischen Apfelbaum", *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 52 (1961) 156-189.

³⁴⁾ Gn. litt. 8, 5; c. adu. leg. 1, 26. See also *Apc.* 2, 7; 22, 2, 14 & 19.

³⁵⁾ Gn. c. Man. 2, 34.

³⁶⁾ ciu. 20, 26.

³⁷⁾ Gn. c. Man. 2, 35 & 36. Cf. (*ibid.*) 2, 41.

³⁸⁾ ciu. 13, 20; c. adu. leg. 1, 24.

³⁹⁾ nat. b. 34-35; Gn. litt. 8, 6-9; c. adu. leg. 1, 24-26; en. Ps. 70, 2, 7.

⁴⁰⁾ nat. b. 34; Gn. litt. 8, 6.

⁴¹⁾ Gn. litt. 8, 13.

⁴²⁾ Gn. c. Man. 2, 22 & 38.

⁴³⁾ Gn. litt. 11, 1 & 30, 40-42; Io. eu. tr. 79, 2.

⁴⁴⁾ trin. 12, 17; Gn. litt. 11, 31; ciu. 13, 13; 14, 17.

⁴⁵⁾ nat. b. 35; Gn. litt. 8, 15 & 16; ciu. 14, 17; en. Ps. 70, 2, 7.

The Good Tree and the Evil Tree

Also of interest to Augustine, both in preaching and in three separate controversies, was the parable of the good tree and the evil (or barren) tree (Mt. 7, 16-20; 12, 33-35; Lc. 6, 43-44)⁴⁶). They are treated at length in two separate sermons⁴⁷). Elsewhere they are seen as symbols of good and evil wills rooted respectively in charity and concupiscence⁴⁸). Accordingly, in the *Confessions*, a kind of moral polarization can be seen between what can be interpreted as the tree of sin (the pear tree of Conf. 2, 9ff.) and the tree of salvation (the fig tree of Conf. 8, 28)⁴⁹).

The good tree (the good will) produces good fruit (good deeds), while the evil tree (the evil will) produces bad fruit (evil deeds)⁵⁰). Just as the good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, so too, good fruits cannot be forthcoming from the evil tree⁵¹). Also, it is impossible that the good tree bring forth no fruit at all. Its very sterility would identify it as evil⁵²). Following Mt. 7, 16 & 20 therefore, from their fruits the natures of the trees are known as either good or evil⁵³).

The true believer is the good tree, growing in God's garden (the Church) and bearing abundant fruits⁵⁴). In time, Christ as God, will come looking for such fruits⁵⁵). Sometimes the planter and the waterer of I Cor. 3, 6-9 are included in the metaphor⁵⁶). Though the good tree and the evil tree may seem the same under certain circumstances⁵⁷), their fates are vastly different⁵⁸). The evil tree is sometimes seen as the

⁴⁶) See also M. SIMONETTI, "Matteo 7, 17-18 (e Luca 6, 43) dagli gnostici ad Agostino", *Augustinianum* 16 (1976) 271-290.

⁴⁷) s. 72 and s. 89. See also P.-P. VERBRAKEN, "Le sermon LXXII de saint Augustin sur l'arbre et son fruit" *Forma futuri. Studi in onore del Cardinale Michele Pellegrino* (Torino 1975) 796-805.

⁴⁸) *gr. et pecc. or.* 1, 19-21.

⁴⁹) L. FERRARI, "The Pear-Theft in Augustine's *Confessions*" *Revue des Études Augustiniennes (REA)* 16 (1970) 233-242 and "The Arboreal Polarisation in Augustine's *Confessions*" *REA* 25 (1979) 35-46.

⁵⁰) *c. adu. leg.* 1, 47 & 49; *c. Iul.* 6, 38; *ench.* 15; *spec.* 25; s. 74, 4; 137, 13.

⁵¹) *c. Iul.* 4, 30-32; *spec.* 25; s. *Lambot* 5.

⁵²) *c. Iul.* 4, 22 & 33; *ench.* 16.

⁵³) *c. Iul. imp.* 5, 21; s. 74, 4; s. *ex coll. Guelferbytana* 32, 1.

⁵⁴) *ep.* 268, 3; *c. Faust.* 13, 8.

⁵⁵) s. 77, 7; 89, 1-4.

⁵⁶) *Io. eu. tr.* 26, 7; *en. Ps.* 66, 3; s. 37, 14.

⁵⁷) s. 36, 4; 361, 10; s. *Morin* 12, 1.

⁵⁸) *Io. eu. tr.* 28, 11.

unbelieving Jews⁵⁹) and sometimes as the cursed barren fig tree of Mt. 21, 19⁶⁰). Attempts to save the barren tree (Lc. 13, 6-9) are described in silvicultural metaphors⁶¹). In accordance with the Bible (Mt. 3, 10; 7, 19; Lc. 3, 9; Io. 15, 6), every tree that is persistently evil will eventually be cut down and cast into the fire⁶²).

Excluding his many references to the two trees of Paradise, Augustine tends to see almost all other trees as ultimately reducing to one or other of the above two categories of the good and evil trees. Thus, the fruitful tree growing by the waters (Ps. 1, 3) is interpreted as Christ. The waters symbolize the sinful multitudes which are absorbed through the roots (the discipline of Christ) and transformed into fruits⁶³). Again, the wild trees of the woods symbolize the pagans outside the Church (God's garden), because they cannot bear fruits, and in this regard are inferior even to brushwood⁶⁴). Likewise, the wild woods of the pagan world were set on fire by the fervour of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost (Act. 2)⁶⁵). Interestingly enough, Augustine's vocabulary often links the word for bush (*frutex*) with the devil⁶⁶).

In the first of the above-mentioned three controversies involving the good and evil trees, early in Augustine's writings, the Manichees are depicted as claiming that the two trees represented the good and evil primal natures that they believed permeated all material creation⁶⁷). Against this claim, Augustine held that the two trees represented the wills of the just and the unjust persons⁶⁸) and that it was up to the individual to choose between being the one or the other⁶⁹). Augustine

⁵⁹) *c. Faust.* 12, 35; *c.* 89, 1-2; 98, 3.

⁶⁰) *cons. eu.* 2, 131; *s.* 75, 5; 89, 2.

⁶¹) *en. Ps.* 49, 7 & 11; 66, 3; 79, 13; *s.* 11, 1; 72, 2 & 3; 110, 1; 254, 3; *s. Morin* 13, 1.

⁶²) *c. Faust.* 12, 35; *cons. eu.* 2, 26; *c. adu. leg.* 1, 32; *Io. eu. tr.* 28, 11; *en. Ps.* 49, 7; *s.* 11, 1; 36, 4; *s. Wilmar* 3, 3.

⁶³) *en. Ps.* 1, 3.

⁶⁴) *en. Ps.* 30, 2, 2, 6; 95, 13 & 14.

⁶⁵) *en. Ps.* 30, 2, 3, 9.

⁶⁶) *nupt. et conc.* 1, 26; *c. Iul.* 6, 58; *c. Iul. imp.* 1, 109; 2, 32, 45, 71, 105, 122 & 199; 5, 25 & 30.

⁶⁷) *c. Fort.* 14, 21 & 22; *s. dom. m.* 2, 78-82; *c. Fel.* 2, 2. See also: F. DECRET, *L'Afrique manichéenne* &c. (cited above) I 295; L. FERRARI, "The Arboreal Polarisation..." (cited above) p.40; H.J. POLOTSKY u. Alexander BÖHLIG (eds.), *Manichäische Handschriften der Staatlichen Museen Berlin*, Band I, *Kephalaia*, Kap. II, "Über das Gleichnis vom Baume" 16-22.

⁶⁸) *c. Adim.* 26; *c. Iul.* 1, 38.

⁶⁹) *c. Fel.* 2, 2-4.

claimed that the Manichees misunderstood the parable because of their false notion of evil as a substance, when it was really a lack of goodness⁷⁰).

Regarding the second controversy, from about 400 onwards, the Donatists claimed that the parable of the two trees substantiated their arguments against the sanctity of sacraments (particularly baptism) dispensed by sinful ministers. They reasoned that if the tree (the minister of the sacrament) were evil, then the fruit (the recipient of the sacrament) would receive evil⁷¹). Against this, Augustine argued that the sacraments justify, not from the minister, but from God through Christ, so that the claim of the Donatists was void⁷²). In one place Augustine argues from I Cor. 3, 6 & 7, that regardless of who planted the tree and who watered it, it is God through Christ who gives the growth, not whoever happens to administer the sacrament⁷³). Augustine also adduced the baptism of Christ by John as a counter-example to the Donatists' claim that the minister was the source of the justification deriving from baptism⁷⁴). It was obviously repugnant that John could have been a source of grace to Christ.

The third controversy concerned the Pelagians. They used the parable of the two trees to attack Augustine's position that because of Adam's Original Sin, the human will was intrinsically perverted, and all mankind became subject to concupiscence, so that even babes born of holy matrimony were guilty (and therefore evil) before God⁷⁵). The Pelagians argued that if the tree (matrimony) were good, then the fruit (the babe) must also be good and therefore devoid of guilt. Augustine claimed that not matrimony, but the Original Sin of Adam, was the cause of the babe's inherited guilt, so that the analogy did not apply⁷⁶).

Tree Parts

Regarding next the principal parts of the tree, fruit (*fructus*), with close to 2000 occurrences, is the most commonly encountered word,

⁷⁰) *c. Iul.* 1, 38-46.

⁷¹) *c. litt. Pet.* 2, 12 & 14; 3, 53 & 64; *c. Cresc.* 3, 14; *c. Iul. imp.* 5, 21.

⁷²) *c. litt. Pet.* 1, 9; 2, 12 & 13; 3, 53-58 & 64; *c. Cresc.* 3, 14; *s.* 292, 5-7; *c. Iul. imp.* 5, 23, 24 & 26. See also L. FERRARI, "The Arboreal Polarisation..." (cited above) p. 41.

⁷³) *c. litt. Pet.* 3, 64-65.

⁷⁴) *s.* 292, 5-7.

⁷⁵) *conf.* 1, 11-12; *c. Iul.* 3, 55-56.

⁷⁶) *nupt. et conc.* 2, 41-44 & 48; *c. Iul.* 1, 39 & 40; *c. Iul. imp.* 5, 21-26.

mostly in a metaphorical sense. Of the much smaller number of references explicitly relevant to the present context, many are concerned with the topic of the good tree and the evil tree treated above. Again, Augustine sometimes compares knowledge to the soul as the fruit to its tree⁷⁷), or words to deeds as leaves to the fruit of the tree⁷⁸). There are also some interesting interpretations of the fruitfulness of the trees of Paradise⁷⁹). In many ways, the fruitful tree is seen as the true believer⁸⁰). Also, barren trees (*infructuosae arbores*) appeared in Paradise because of the sin of Adam and Eve⁸¹). Likewise, those barren trees in God's garden are like the persons in the Church who are devoid of the fruit of good works⁸²). *Pomum* is a much less common word for fruit, being found just over 100 times. On several occasions it is used in regard to the Manichean belief about the sinful nature of the act of plucking fruit from trees (see above).

Root (*radix*) occurs over 600 times, mostly in vaguely vegetative metaphors such as the common allusions to greed (*avaritia/cupiditas*) as the root of all evils (I Tim. 6, 19)⁸³). With explicit relation to trees, the word is found in several of the passages devoted to the good and evil trees (see above)⁸⁴). By contrast, it follows that *charitas* is the root of the faith and good works of that fruit-bearing tree which is the true believer⁸⁵). The Jewish faith is also seen as the root (*radix*) of the Christian Church in the context of the metaphor of the engrafted olive (Rm. 11, 17-24). (See under "olive" below). Again, the hidden character of the tree root is used as the basis of various metaphors pertaining to the concealed faith of the true believer⁸⁶).

Branch (*ramus*) is found nearly 200 times, mostly in regard to the engrafted olive metaphor (see "olive" below). Another common usage is in regard to the Donatists. The Catholic Church is seen as a great tree spreading its branches throughout the world. The Donatists are

⁷⁷) *lib. arb.* 3, 65.

⁷⁸) *Io. eu. tr.* 6, 19; s. 77, 7; 98, 3.

⁷⁹) *Gn. c. Man.* 1, 19 and *ciu.* 13, 21.

⁸⁰) *en. Ps.* 34, 2, 2-4; 48, 2, 3; s. 37, 14-29; 47, 25.

⁸¹) *Gn. c. Man.* 1, 19.

⁸²) *Ibid.*

⁸³) *mor.* 1, 35 & 36 c. *Fort.* 21. *Gn. litt.* 11, 15; *en. Ps.* 118, 11; s. 85, 6; s. 177, 1, 2 & 9; *Io. ep. tr.* 8, 6.

⁸⁴) *gr. et pecc. or.* 1, 19-21.

⁸⁵) *en. Ps.* 9, 15; 32, 1, 3; 36, 3, 8 & 9; 48, 2, 3; s. 72, 4.

⁸⁶) *Io. eu. tr.* 40, 8; *en. Ps.* 36, 1, 3; 51, 12; 102, 25; 148, 16; s. 117, 17.

like a branch broken off that tree and their fate is sealed accordingly⁸⁷). Finally, root, trunk and branches of the tree are used to illustrate the mystery of the Trinity⁸⁸). As "wood" is said with equal truth of the previous three parts of the tree, so "God" is said equally of the three Persons of the Trinity.

Leaf (*folium*) occurs about 160 times, mostly in the plural. Many allusions are in the context of biblical episodes considered elsewhere in this article. Chief among such episodes is that of Jesus and the barren fig tree (see below under "fig"), and the events consequent upon the theft of the forbidden fruit, when Adam and Eve covered their private parts with fig leaves (Gn. 3, 7), which accordingly signify a certain spiritual itching⁸⁹). Finally, Augustine shows an enduring interest in leaves as manifesting a divine providence that extends down to the smallest details of creation⁹⁰).

Wood

Lignum (meaning wood as a material), like tree, is used in the philosophical examples of Augustine's early writings⁹¹). His later works often endow the word with religious symbolism. In association with hay and straw (the *lignum, fenum et stipula* of I Cor. 3, 12), wood symbolizes worldliness⁹²). Damp wood can also possess a negative connotation⁹³). Another negative association of wood is with regard to the curse on whoever hangs upon wood (the *qui pendet in ligno* of Dt. 21, 23). This curse is explained in regard to Christ in various places⁹⁴).

Mostly however, the symbolic role of wood is very positive, due to Christ's conquest of sin through his death upon the Cross. For Augustine, Christ is therefore unique among kings in that he rules, not by

⁸⁷) *c. Cresc.* 2, 42 (where Cyprian is quoted); 4, 73 to 75; *Emer.* 7 & 12; *c. Gaud.* 2, 2 & 3; 2, 14; *ep.* 185, 32, 44 & 50.

⁸⁸) *f. et symb.* 17.

⁸⁹) *Gn. c. Man.* 2, 23. Cf. Vinzenz BUCHHEIT, "Augustinus unter dem Feigenbaum (zu Conf. VIII)", *Vigiliae Christianae* 22 (1968) 257-271, especially sections II and III. See also footnote 139.

⁹⁰) *ord.* 1, 7 & 11-14; *lib. arb.* 3, 66; *mus.* 6, 58; *conf.* 7, 8; *ep.* 166, 13; 186, 22.

⁹¹) *sol.* 2, 8 & 20; *quant. an.* 5; *Gn. c. Man.* 1, 10.

⁹²) *f. et op.* 1, 24-27; *ciu.* 21, 21 & 26; *ench.* 68; *Dulc. qu.* 1, 3-6 & 11-12; *en. Ps.* 6, 3; 29, 2, 9; 80, 20 & 21; 103, 3, 5; 118, 25, 3; s. 362, 9.

⁹³) *agon.* 18.

⁹⁴) *c. Adim.* 21; *Gal. exp.* 22; *c. Faust.* 14, 1-8 & 12; 20, 11; *c. Fel.* 2, 10 & 11.

iron, but by wood⁹⁵). Inasmuch as it floats on water (this world)⁹⁶), wood symbolizes the salvific power of the Church and can transport the true believer to the heavenly homeland⁹⁷). This power of wood over water extends even to sweetening it⁹⁸).

Wooden Artefacts

Of the many wooden artefacts of the ancient world, considerations must be restricted to those of principal importance to Augustine's symbology, and particularly in relation to water. By reason both of its excised condition and also of its round, cross-sectional shape, the rod of God (*uirga Dei*) can be seen as an intermediary between the trees of the forest and the squared lumber (*ligna quadrata*) made for construction. This rod has many forms in the Bible, and therefore in Augustine's symbology. The more important of these forms will be considered next.

First, the word *uirga* is used in several metaphorical senses. Thus, in the present temporary order of this world, there seems to be another power stronger than that of the rod of God. This is the rule of sinners (*uirga peccatorum*) over the just⁹⁹). But God's rule of power (*uirga uirtutis*) will prevail and dominate His enemies¹⁰⁰). The straight rod of God (*uirga directionis*) guides crooked humanity towards the eternal Kingdom¹⁰¹). An essential instrument of this education is the rod of mankind (*uirga uirorum*) by which God scourges humanity, especially those whom He has chosen as His elect (II Rg. 7, 14-15; Hbr. 12, 5-7)¹⁰²). *Baculum* is a much less common word for the same instrument of punishment¹⁰³).

⁹⁵) *diu. qu.* 69, 9; *en. Ps.* 54, 12; 95, 11.

⁹⁶) H. RONDET, "Le symbolisme de la mer chez saint Augustin", *Augustinus Magister* II (Paris 1954) 691-701.

⁹⁷) *conf.* 1, 25; *c. Faust.* 12, 35 & 38; *cat. rud.* 32, 34 & 53; *Io. eu. tr.* 2, 2 & 4; *en. Ps.* 103, 4, 4 & 5; 125, 2; *s.* 75, 2. Compare with *beata u.* 1-4 and Plato's *Phaedo* 85c-d.

⁹⁸) *c. Faust.* 12, 30; *ciu.* 10, 8; *qu. hept.* 2, 57. The inspiration for this notion seems to have been Ex. 15, 25.

⁹⁹) *en. Ps.* 142, 7 & 8.

¹⁰⁰) *en. Ps.* 109, 11.

¹⁰¹) *ciu.* 17, 16-17; *en. Ps.* 44, 17 & 18.

¹⁰²) *ciu.* 17, 8 & 9; *en. Ps.* 73, 8; 88, 2, 2 & 3; 94, 13; *s.* 55, 4-5. These represent only the principal occurrences. The scourging God is a significant theme of Augustine's writings. See L. FERRARI, "The Boyhood Beatings of Augustine" *Augn. Studs.* 5 (1974) 1-14.

¹⁰³) *conf.* 6, 9; *c. litt. Pet.* 2, 109; *ep.* 185, 21; *en. Ps.* 22, 4 & 5.

In a literal sense, *uirga* occurs as an instrument of many miraculous transformations in the Bible. In most cases, Augustine imputes some symbolic meaning to the rod, as can be seen by inspecting the contexts of the various references. In Gn. 30, 41, Jacob used variously streaked white rods to produce striped, speckled and spotted lambs¹⁰⁴). The rod of Moses when struck against a rock, in accordance with the instructions of God, produced much-needed water (Ex. 17, 5-6)¹⁰⁵, while on another occasion (Ex. 14, 15-16 & 21-25), the same rod was used to cause the parting of the Red Sea¹⁰⁶). Finally in the Old Testament, there was the angel of God with the rod by which it ignited the meat and cakes of Gideon (Idc. 6, 21)¹⁰⁷). Many of these various miracles are briefly summarized by Augustine in Ciu. 10, 8. Augustine also uses a general metaphor to encompass all the miraculous rods in the Old Testament when he uses the expression *uirga hereditatis*. This not only stands for the rod of inheritance of the Jews, but it also signifies the Jews themselves¹⁰⁸). Finally, the one occasion in the New Testament where Augustine devotes some space to elucidating the symbolism of the rod, is in regard to Christ's instructions to his disciples to journey abroad with only a rod for assistance (Mt. 6, 8)¹⁰⁹).

Regarding the artefacts made from squared lumber, the uncultivated trees of the forest (the pagans)¹¹⁰) are transformed into tooled wood (the holy ones) fit for God's construction¹¹¹) by the art of the carpenter who knows how to judge woods (souls)¹¹²). Since carpentry aims to produce straight beams, a crooked piece of wood represents a perverse heart¹¹³). Likewise too, the straight wooden ruler of Monica's dream (Conf. 3, 19) possesses religious symbolism¹¹⁴).

¹⁰⁴) *trin.* 3, 15; *loc. hept.* 2, 15, 21, 32, 34; *qu. hept.* 2, 19-21; *en Ps.* 73, 5; *s.* 6, 6 & 7; *s. Frangipane* 1, 3.

¹⁰⁵) *qu. hept.* 2, 64-65; 4, 19; *s.* 352, 3 & 4. Cf. Paul van MOORSEL, "Il miracolo della roccia nella letteratura e nell'arte paleocristiana", *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 40 (1964) 221-251.

¹⁰⁶) *qu. hept.* 2, 53.

¹⁰⁷) *doctr. chr.* 4, 46.

¹⁰⁸) *en. Ps.* 73, 5.

¹⁰⁹) *cons. eu.* 2, 71-74.

¹¹⁰) *en. Ps.* 30, 2, 2, 6; 95, 13 & 14.

¹¹¹) *c. Faust.* 12, 18 & 19.

¹¹²) *Io. ep. tr.* 8, 10; *en. Ps.* 45, 3.

¹¹³) *en. Ps.* 31, 2, 25; 44, 17; 146, 7. See also the negative connotation of the wooden pots of 2 Tim. 2, 20-21 in: *c. ep. Par.* 3, 25; *bapt.* 3, 26; 4, 18; *c. Cresc.* 2, 43 & 48; *c. Gaud.* 2, 3 & 14.

¹¹⁴) L. FERRARI, "Monica on the Wooden Ruler (Conf. 3, 11, 19)" *Augn. Studs.* 6 (1975) 193-205.

The great wooden artefact of the Old Testament with a special relation to water was the ark (*arca*) of Noah (Gn. 6, 11 ff.). It variously represents Christ, the Cross, or the Church¹¹⁵). The tooled timbers of the ark, in various ways represent the holy ones in the Church¹¹⁶). It is noteworthy that another important ark of the Old Testament was the Ark of the Covenant (the *arca testamenti/testimonii* of Ex. 37, 1 ff.) which is a symbol of the presence of God in the prayerful heart¹¹⁷). In yet a third meaning of *arca*, Augustine often castigates those who have full money boxes (*arcae*), but empty consciences¹¹⁸).

Many of the New Testament episodes involving wood as boats also possess a strong symbolism for Augustine. Thus, the boat in which Christ was sleeping (Mt. 8, 23-27; Mc. 4, 36-41; Lc. 8, 22-25) represents the heart of the believer¹¹⁹). Likewise, there is the episode of Christ walking on the water towards the boat (Mt. 14, 24-27; Mc. 6, 47-52; Io. 6, 16-21) which Augustine interprets as the Church¹²⁰). Yet another boat of symbolic significance for Augustine is that with the miraculous draught of fishes (Lc. 5, 3-11), where the boat is seen as the new preaching of the Gospel through the Church¹²¹). Moreover, a second boat was called to assist the first one (Lc. 5, 7). Here, Augustine sees the two boats as symbolizing the Jews and the Gentiles¹²²). Finally on boats, there are various allusions to the boats (*naves*) of the Manichean myths¹²³).

Another wooden artefact of importance is the door (*ianua*), deriving from Christ's picture of himself as the door to the sheepfold (Io. 10, 7-10)¹²⁴). References to door in Augustine's works also derive from another biblical source, which is Christ's invitation to the seekers of salvation to knock at the door (Mt. 7, 7; Lc. 11, 9)¹²⁵).

¹¹⁵) *c. Faust.* 12, 14-18; *cat. rud.* 53; *bapt.* 5, 39; *ciu.* 15, 26; *ep. cath.* 9; *Io. eu. tr.* 120, 2; *en. Ps.* 8, 13; 103, 3, 2; *s.* 264, 5; 361, 21.

¹¹⁶) *c. Faust.* 12, 18 & 19; *ciu.* 15, 26; *Io. eu. tr.* 6, 19; *s.* 264, 5; *ep.* 164, 16.

¹¹⁷) *diu. qu. Simpl.* 2, 4; *ciu.* 10, 17.

¹¹⁸) *s.* 18, 3; 21, 7 & 8; 72, 5; 105, 13; 344, 4; 389, 3; *s. Frangipane* 1, 14; *s. Lambot* 4.

¹¹⁹) *Io. eu. tr.* 49, 19; *en. Ps.* 9, 29; 25, 2, 4; 34, 1, 3; 45, 5; 90, 2, 11; 147, 3; *s.* 38, 10; 81, 8; 361, 7 & 8.

¹²⁰) *Io. eu. tr.* 25, 5; *s.* 75, 1-10.

¹²¹) *qu. eu.* 2, 1 & 2; *s.* 250, 2.

¹²²) *Io. eu. tr.* 122, 7; *s.* 248, 2; 249, 2; 252, 3; *s. ex coll. Guelferbytana* 15, 1; *s. Wilmart* 13, 2.

¹²³) *c. Faust.* 20, 6, 11 & 21; *nat. b.* 44; *haer.* 46.

¹²⁴) *Io. eu. tr.* 20, 6; 45, 2 & 5; 57, 2 & 4; *en. Ps.* 86, 3 & 4; 90, 1, 1; 95, 3; 103, 3, 22; 103, 4, 10; *s.* 137, 3-5.

¹²⁵) *sol.* 1, 3 & 5; *s. dom. m.* 2, 71-73; *spec.* 25 & 27; *Io. eu. tr.* 2, 9; 15, 6 & 13; 57,

Kinds of Trees

Regarding the different kinds of trees, the olive is easily the most common. The cultivated olive (*olea, oliva*) and the wild olive (*oleaster*) are together mentioned some 360 times. One reason is the importance of the olive in antiquity for both food and oil. In addition, most of the references arise in connection with Paul's comparison of the Gentiles to the Jews as the wild olive grafted onto the cultivated variety (Rm. 11, 17-24). These verses are variously explained on many occasions, and often at considerable length¹²⁶). Another noteworthy biblical source of references is the episode of the dove returning to the ark bearing an olive branch, seen as a symbol of peace (Gn. 8, 11)¹²⁷). There are the odd occasions where Augustine sees a particular symbolism in the olive, or its oil¹²⁸). Finally, Augustine's metaphor of the olive press¹²⁹) has had a considerable influence on the philosophy of history¹³⁰).

The palm (*palma*) is found some 123 times, mostly as the proverbial palm of victory and usually in regard to some oratorical competition, whether real or imagined¹³¹). Most of the other references concern the prize which is the celestial call of God (*palma supernae uocationis Dei*) of Phil. 3, 14¹³²). Accordingly, and also from the comparison of Ps. 91, 13, the flourishing palm tree is seen as a symbol of the righteous man¹³³). Other uses are for the palm of martyrdom¹³⁴) and for the enormous white-robed multitude all bearing palm branches (Apc. 7, 9)¹³⁵).

The fig (*figus*) occurs 70 times, sometimes being mentioned as an item of diet, particularly in regard to the Manichees¹³⁶). Fig is also

1, 2 & 4; *en. Ps.* 33, 1, 1; 33, 1, 4; 74, 11; 118, 14, 2; *s.* 61, 1, 4, 6, & 7; 80, 2; 91, 3; 145, 1; 389, 1 & 2; *s.* *Mai* 26, 1, 3 & 4; *s.* *Morin* 16, 1-3; *s.* *Wilmart* 12, 2 & 7; *s.* *Lambert* 1, 1 & 2.

¹²⁶) *c. Faust.* 9, 2; 26, 3; *nupt. et conc.* 1, 21 & 37; 2, 58; *c. adu. leg.* 2, 4 & 6; *ep.* 194, 44; *Io. eu. tr.* 16, 4-6; *en. Ps.* 72, 1 & 2; 94, 7; 134, 7; *s.* 77, 12; 201, 2; 218, 7; 342, 4; *s.* *Denis* 19, 9.

¹²⁷) *doctr. chr.* 2, 24; *c. Faust.* 12, 20; *loc. hept.* 1, 24; *Io. eu. tr.* 6, 20; *en. Ps.* 127, 1 & 13.

¹²⁸) *nupt. et conc.* 2, 58; *Io. eu. tr.* 6, 20; 33, 3.

¹²⁹) *en. Ps.* 80, 1; 83, 1; 136, 9.

¹³⁰) K. LÖWITH (tr. H. KESTING), *Meaning in History; Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago & London 1949).

¹³¹) *c. acad.* 3, 17; *conf.* 6, 26; 11, 39; *ciu.* 2, 14; 6, 5; 13, 7.

¹³²) *diu. qu.* 61, 7; *en. Ps.* 38, 6; 38, 8; 38, 14; *s.* 341, 14; 362, 4.

¹³³) *en. Ps.* 91, 13.

¹³⁴) *s.* 335, 2; *s.* *Wilmart* 21.

¹³⁵) *c. Cresc.* 3, 75; *s.* *Caes. eccl.* 5; *ep.* 93, 30.

¹³⁶) *mor.* 2, 41, 43 & 57; *conf.* 3, 18.

used in the context of the good and evil trees (see above) when Christ asked if men gathered grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles (Mt. 7, 16; Lc. 6, 44)¹³⁷). Various allusions concern the barren fig tree of Mt. 21, 19-20 and Mc. 11, 12-14 & 20-21¹³⁸). The fact that Adam and Eve covered their private parts with fig leaves after sinning (Gn. 3, 7) receives attention on numerous occasions¹³⁹). From this, Augustine sees the fig tree as symbolizing fallen humanity¹⁴⁰).

The significance that Augustine imputes to the fig leaves of Gn. 3, 7 provides a particular interpretation of Christ's supernatural "seeing" of Nathanael beneath the fig tree (Jn. 1, 45-50). Accordingly, Augustine interprets Nathanael's condition as representing humanity under the sentence of concupiscence resulting from the theft of the forbidden fruit (Gn. 3, 6)¹⁴¹). In addition, the episode of Nathanael beneath the fig tree seems to have been the source of inspiration for the obtrusive detail of the fig tree in the conversion-scene of Conf. 8, 28¹⁴²).

The cedar (*cedrus*) is found 70 times and is used in various ways, either as symbolizing the proud due for a fall, or else the nobles of the current age¹⁴³. From the comparison of Ps. 91, 13, the just man is also compared to the flourishing cedars of Lebanon¹⁴⁴). The mustard tree (or seed) (*sinapis*) occurs just over two dozen times. Mostly it refers to faith which though it is as small as a mustard seed, can nevertheless move mountains (Mt. 17, 20)¹⁴⁵, or (less often) trees (Lc. 17, 6)¹⁴⁶). The large size of the mustard tree compared with the smallness of its seed (Mt. 13, 31ff.; Mc. 4, 31ff.; Lc. 13, 19ff.) is featured in several places¹⁴⁷). Finally, the small hot seed of the tree is also seen as a symbol of humble fervent faith¹⁴⁸).

¹³⁷) *s. dom. m.* 2, 78; *spec.* 25 & 27; *c. Iul. imp.* 5, 21; *s.* 46, 22; 74, 4; 137, 13; *Io. ep. tr.* 3, 8.

¹³⁸) *cons. eu.* 2, 130-132; *en. Ps.* 31, 2 & 9; 138, 18; *s.* 89, 1-5; 110, 1.

¹³⁹) *cons. eu.* 2, 130-131; *nupt. et conc.* 1, 7; 2, 17 & 52; *c. ep. Pel.* 1, 31; *c. Iul.* 2, 16-17; 4, 58-59; 5, 5 & 25; *Io. eu. tr.* 7, 20-22; *ep.* 243, 10; *s.* 69, 4; 122, 1; *s. Morin* 13, 1. See also footnote 89.

¹⁴⁰) *s.* 110, 1; 122, 1; *s. Morin* 13, 1.

¹⁴¹) *qu. eu.* 1, 39; *en. Ps.* 31, 9; 32, 2, 2, 19; 44, 20; *s.* 69, 4; 90, 5; 174, 4.

¹⁴²) V. BUCHHEIT, *art. cit.*, (see footnote 89); P. COURCELLE, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin* (Paris 1968) 193.

¹⁴³) *en. Ps.* 79, 9; 91, 13-14; 103, 1, 18; 103, 3, 16-18.

¹⁴⁴) *en. Ps.* 91, 13.

¹⁴⁵) *q. eu.* 1, 22; 2, 39; *spir. et litt.* 63; *c. Gaud.* 2, 6; *Io. eu. tr.* 40, 8; 121, 3; *en. Ps.* 45, 6; *s.* 246, 3; *s. Wilmart* 14.

¹⁴⁶) *q. eu.* 2, 39.

¹⁴⁷) *en. Ps.* 68, 1, 1; *s.* 363, 3; *s. Wilmart* 14.

¹⁴⁸) *s.* 77, 12; 246, 3; *s. Morin* 6, 1; *s. Wilmart* 14.

As to the remaining trees, of those which occur about a dozen times each, the willow (*salix*) is found only in the commentary on Psalm 136, where it symbolizes the barren tree (see above). The sycamore (*sycamorus*) is found repeatedly in sermon 174, 3, in relation to the episode of Zacchaeus (Lc. 19, 1-5)¹⁴⁹), where it symbolizes the wood upon which Christ hung. The oak (*quercus/ilex*) does not seem to possess a special symbolism. While the pear tree (*pirus*) occurs only three times in Augustine's works, the famous pear theft of Conf. 2, 9-18 has received considerable attention from Augustinian scholars¹⁵⁰) and others¹⁵¹). The myrtle (*myrtus*) and the cyprus (*cyparissus*) are only mentioned a few times each.

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SUMMARY

As a former Manichee, Augustine had believed in the importance of trees in the supposed salvation of light from this world. After his conversion to Christianity, his writings show that he was sensitive to the beauty and grandeur of trees, even to the extent of their influencing his images of the world, its origin, and its inhabitants. Understandably, most of his interest in trees came to focus on the trees in the Bible. The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge (Gn. 2, 9), as well as the good

¹⁴⁹) See also s. 25, 8; 113, 3.

¹⁵⁰) P. COURCELLE ("Le jeune Augustin, second Catalina" *Revue des Études Anciennes* 73 (1971) 141-150) provides a persuasive literary source of the event. See also L. FERRARI, "The Pear-Theft in Augustine's Confessions" *REA* 16 (1970) 233-242 and "The Arboreal Polarisation in Augustine's Confessions" *REA* 25 (1979) 35-46; J. FRUYTIER "Gods Licht in het kwaad" *Bijdragen* 17 (1956) 220-229; W. MANN, "The Theft of the Pears" *Apeiron* & c. 12 (1978) 51-58; G. SCERBO, "Il furto di Sant' Agostino" *Nuova Rivista Pedagogica* 2 (1952) 29-41. A summary of early scholarly opinions is to be found in P. SCHÄFER, *Das Schuldbewusstsein in den Confessiones des heiligen Augustinus* (Würzburg 1930) 32-36. See also E. VISCHER, "Eine anstössige Stelle in Augustins Konfessionen" *Harnack-Ehrung* (Leipzig 1921) 183-194.

¹⁵¹) F. NIETZSCHE, *Briefwechsel mit Franz Overbeck* (Leipzig 1916) 85 and B. RUSSELL *A History of Western Philosophy* &c. (London 1946) 364-365.

tree and the evil tree (Mt. 7, 16-20; 12, 33-35; Lc. 6, 43-44) became important components of his biblical exegesis and defence of orthodoxy. The various parts of the tree are also features in his symbology. Because of Christ's salvific death on the Cross, tooled wood had very positive connotations for Augustine, and consequently various wooded artefacts in the Bible are rich in symbolism for him. Finally, about half a dozen different kinds of trees are possessed of symbolic significance for Augustine.