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The Saints of the Crusader States: Legends of the Eastern Mediterranean in Anglo-French Vernacular Culture, 1135-1220

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in French and Francophone Studies

by

Cristina Politano

2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Saints of the Crusader States: Legends of the Eastern Mediterranean in Anglo-French Vernacular Culture, 1135-1220

by

Cristina Politano

Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Zrinka Stahuljak, Chair

A corpus of Anglo-French hagiography composed between 1135 and 1220 tells the lives of Biblical and Late Antique women with origins in the eastern Mediterranean: the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene who lived in Jerusalem, Margaret of Antioch, Catherine of Alexandria, and Mary of Egypt. These narratives circulated and gained a popular audience in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Normandy, England, and France. Hagiography scholars have focused on the ways in which vernacular portrayals of female saints reveal medieval ideas of gender; this study evaluates the extent to which ideology is indexed through both the gender and the geographical origin of the saints in question. It considers how the contexts of pilgrimage and crusade offer a new framework for the larger discussion of these texts. What is the nature of the link that twelfth-century Anglo-Norman hagiographers sought to establish with the wider, non-western world?

An inquiry into the provenance of these legends reveals that their underlying ideology often complicates or contradicts orthodox theological definitions of sainthood elaborated by twelfth-century Christian theologians. They maintain instead a connection to much earlier traditions developed in the southern and eastern Mediterranean. An examination of the departures from Latin source texts reveals the desire to appeal to the sensibilities of a vernacular audience composed of a nobility whose aspirations of conquest were increasingly trained on the lands of the southern and eastern Mediterranean.

Drawing on modern critical theory, as well as recent research in Mediterranean studies, *The Saints of the Crusader Saints* revisits the foundational moments of Anglo-French vernacular culture, in which distinctive modes of difference mediate definitions of sainthood. The legends of saintly women from the opposite shores of the Mediterranean participate in the ideological process that aimed for the Christian recovery of the Holy Land. By offering narratives that linked early Christian women with their medieval audience, hagiographers bolstered the claims of western Europe's feudal rulers who sought to position themselves as legitimate heirs to this land. Depictions of early Christian saints as ladies of the western European gentry appeal to the target readers and listeners as members of a feudal society eager to see their own nobility reflected in the heroines of sacred narratives. The members of this audience were equally ready to see themselves cast as the children of this sacred lineage, successors to a genealogy with direct roots in heaven.

The dissertation of Cristina Politano is approved.

Jean-Claude Carron

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2018

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the memory of Maria Carmella Magliaro and Louise Mary Politano.

" Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children—"

Deuteronomy 4:9

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- "Sharon Farmer, *The Silk Industries of Medieval Paris: Artisanal Migration, Technological Innovation, and Gendered Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2015)" in *Comitatus.* Volume 48, 2017.

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Introduction

The present study is devoted to French vernacular hagiography, focusing on the lives of five Early Christian saints whose cults enjoyed an extraordinary popularity in medieval France, Normandy, and Norman England. The primary texts in question span the length of the twelfth century: Wace's "Conception Nostre Dame," dated between 1135 and 1150, tells the life of the Virgin Mary, the mother of the Christian Savior; Wace's "Vie de sainte Marguerite," also dated between 1135 and 1150, relates the short life and gruesome martyrdom of the Late Antique Margaret of Antioch; Clemence of Barking's "Vie de sainte Catherine," dated between 1170 and 1200, likewise relates the life and martyrdom of a young Christian maiden from Alexandria; Guillaume le Clerc's "Vie de sainte Marie-Madeleine," dated between 1180 and 1238, elaborates the biblical account of Saint Mary Magdalene, and finally; the anonymous "La vie de sainte Marie l'egyptienne," dated to last quarter of the twelfth century, tells the life of a Late Antique ascetic saint, Mary the Egyptian.

These texts share several distinctive features: first and foremost, they relate the lives of legendary saints from the distant past whose lives are anchored in the southeastern Mediterranean. Notwithstanding temporal and geographical disparities, the cults of these saints gained a foothold and prospered in medieval France, Normandy, and Norman England. In the course of this study, I argue that the contexts of pilgrimage and crusade account for the sustained popularity of these saints, whose regions of origin represented the territorial aspirations of the main military campaigns waged throughout the course of the twelfth and early thirteenth century: the first, second, and third crusades. The patronage of legendary Early Christian figures such as the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, Saints Margaret of Antioch, Catherine of Alexandria, and Mary of

Egypt, provided an important discursive bridge that linked crusaders from Northwestern Europe with the lands that they sought to conquer overseas.

All of the texts in question, moreover, are copies or retellings of Latin originals, which were composed and circulated among the literate ecclesiology beginning in Late Antiquity. When adapted into vernacular verse, these poems adhere to stylistic and structural uniformity. Composed in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, they each address the saintly life and holy death of a saint, as well as her posthumous miracles and the translation of her body. The adaptations into vernacular verse contain significant departures from the source texts, and these departures emerge as significant elements of this study. This methodological approach assumes that the differences and variations between versions are not only significant, but also that they will act as a sort of emulsifier, allowing us to peel back the negative of ecclesiastic ideology, revealing a contact print of popular culture in medieval Normandy and Norman England.

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The term "hagiography" has been corrupted since the height of its production in the Middle Ages. Once used in earnest to describe the lives of saints, our modern usage has seen it reduced to a derogatory term that references the needless adulation of an undeserving individual. The excesses of the medieval genre are likely to blame for this corruption; episodes in hagiography that detail death-defying miracles and superhuman feats demand the unquestioning belief of their audience, straining credulity to its breaking point. Hagiography is an enemy to intellectual sophistication, and this sense of enmity is echoed in the historical reluctance of medieval literary scholars to seriously engage with hagiographic texts. In the French literary tradition, these texts have been

consigned an inferior position, beneath romance, epic, and other forms of poetry appearing in the vernacular, and remained in obscurity for centuries, largely ignored by the academic establishment. Critical editions of medieval hagiographic texts began emerging in the late nineteenth century, yet remained focused on philological questions. Even those first scholars who deigned engage with the content of hagiography included important caveats about its literary merits: they warned that these narratives are not particularly complex or inventive on the level of style, that their poetic form in octosyllabic verse is stylistically unremarkable, and that their reliance on the convenience of miracles renders them implausible, juvenile, and absurd.

Consider, for example, the claim that Saint Margaret of Antioch emerged from the stomach of a dragon that had swallowed her, an episode that is earnestly reported in an eighth-century Latin *Passio* on the saint, and readapted by the twelfth-century vernacular poet Wace. A century later, Jacob of Voragine, the author of a master compilation of hagiographic texts entitled *The Golden Legend,* would dismiss this episode as "ridiculous" and “apocryphal,” assuring his audience that a sign of the cross sufficed to slay the dragon, and no such mythical beast ever did in fact ingest the saint. This remark demonstrates that medieval hagiographers themselves remained skeptical of the truth claims of the genre and sought to court wider audiences by advancing competing claims to historical truth. Voragine's skepticism would echo through the centuries, and an Enlightenment spirit of rational inquiry would render his own work irrelevant. An attitude of tolerant condescension towards hagiography as the naïve and folkloric expression of an uneducated lay society persisted within the study of medieval literature until the 1970s. At this time, a series of studies emerged and endeavored to treat these texts as both subjects of narrative interest, as well as valuable low-culture artifacts with the potential to reveal undisclosed mental and social structures.

In the past few decades, literary and social historians alike have expressed acute interest in French vernacular hagiography, not only for their revelatory potential but also because they constitute the earliest writing in the French vernacular. Tabling the question of whether or not the context of hagiography reflects historical fact, the social historian František Graus, in *Volk Herrscher und Heiliger,* writes, "The legends are certainly not 'historical works' in the sense of the nineteenth century; they are rather 'literature,' and more particularly propaganda literature.'" Later Patrick Geary, in *Furta Sacra,* similarly asserts that hagiographic texts are by no means historically accurate. He cautions that these texts belong to a literary tradition which molded them both in content and form; when a chronicler writes of the posthumous glory of a saint, he is not bound by the feeble confines of an historian's rules.[1] The lives of remarkable men and women, lived in imitation of the life of Christ, remain useful documents regardless of their claims to truth; they shed light on a coherent set of values and ideals that can be named and assessed insofar as they reflect the social, cultural, and political transformations of their age.

In the course of the past fifty years, many scholars have assumed the task of examining medieval hagiography. The most common methodological approach has been to evaluate the extent to which vernacular hagiography departs from its Latin antecedents. Any changes observed between the Latin source and its vernacular adaptation are significant in that they reflect the transformations of the hero-ideal during the twelfth-century, which many regard as the threshold of modern subjectivity and individualism. The essays of Aron Gurevich, for example, have been instrumental in the effort to decode and take seriously popular mentalities during the Middle Ages.[2] Gurevich bases much of his socio-cultural critique on the hints of popular culture that vernacular

[1] Geary, *Furta Sacra,* 16.
[2] See, Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception,* trans. János M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

hagiography leaves behind. The work of Brigitte Cazelles, to cite an additional example, has been pioneering in the effort to decode and take seriously the vernacular lives of female saints.[3] Both of her monographs are focused on the extent to which twelfth- and thirteenth-century hagiography draws from elements related specifically to lay society-—fairytale, folklore, and romance, for example—in order to complicate and nuance the Latin ecclesiastic version of female sainthood. Other work still has focused—importantly, but also narrowly—on debates about the extent to which individual female agency is limited or advanced by the voices and actions of the saintly protagonists featured in hagiography.[4]

By examining the origins of these legends, I concur with the preponderance of hagiography scholarship, observing the underlying ideology of these texts often diametrically opposes orthodox theological definitions of sainthood elaborated by the ecclesiasts of twelfth-century Norman and Anglo-French Christendom. However, I depart from existing scholarship by suggesting that these texts maintaining a connection to much earlier traditions developed in the southern and eastern Mediterranean. I connect these texts to questions of alterity; how do the identities of these saints as outsiders facilitate their sanctity?

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[3] See Brigitte Cazelles and Phyllis Johnson, *Vain siècle guerpir: A Literary Approach to Sainthood through Old French Hagiography of the Twelfth Century* (University of North Carolina Press, 1979) and Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); See also Baudouin de Gaiffier, *Études critiques d'hagiographie et d'iconologie* (Société des Bollandistes, 1967), and Monique Goullet, *Ecriture et réécriture hagiographiques: essai sur les réécritures de vies de saints dans l'occident latin médiéval, viii-xiii s* (Brepols, 2005).

[4] See Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint* (Routledge, 2000); and Alison Goddard Elliott, "The Power of Discourse: Martyr's Passion and Old French Epic," in *Medievalia et Humanistica Cleveland, Ohio* 11 (1982): 39-60; Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Robert Mills, "Can the Virgin Martyr Speak?" in *Medieval Virginities,* ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih (University of Toronto Press, 2003).

Consider Wace's *Conception Nostre Dame.* The final episode of the text categorically rejects Judaism and casts Jews as the would-be desecrators of the Virgin Mary's body, ultimately dramatizing their conversion to Christianity and abandonment their own, false religion. This episode provides both explicit and implicit apologies for the triumph of Christianity over paganism, Judaism, and — throughout the text, I will argue — similar apologies for the triumph of Christianity over Islam. By providing a backstory that links twelfth-century Christian audiences with their forerunners in first-century Palestine, Wace is bolstering the claim advanced by Western Europe's feudal rulers who sought to position themselves as legitimate heirs to the Holy Land. Reading this text alongside the crusading context, departures from source texts reveal the desire to appeal to the sensibilities of a vernacular audience composed of noblemen whose aspirations of conquest were increasingly trained on the lands of the southern and eastern Mediterranean. Wace's depiction of the holy family as members of the gentry appeals to the target readers and listeners as members of a feudal society eager to see their own nobility reflected in the heroes and heroines of sacred narratives. They were equally eager to see themselves cast as the descendants of this sacred lineage, successors to a genealogy with direct roots in heaven.

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This study proceeds thematically, with each chapter dedicated to one or two saints. In the first chapter, I consider Wace's *Conception Nostre Dame,* one of the earliest texts in Old French vernacular. The poem tells the life of the Virgin Mary and enters into a dialogue with a host of contemporary political and theological debates: the nature of Saint Anne's conception of Mary, the nature of Mary's conception of Christ, and the question of Christ's Davidic origins. The first study

to consider the earliest origins of the cult of the Immaculate Conception alongside its political and theological context in twelfth-century Normandy and Norman England, this chapter demonstrates that the figure of the Virgin Mary was a malleable tool, strategically manipulated and instrumentalized to serve the political goals of the Norman and Angevin rulers who sought to expand their territory, northwards through the Anglo-Saxon isles and south and eastwards towards the highly-contentious conquest of the Holy Land. It also serves to complicate existing contemporary feminist scholarship on the evolution of the image of the Virgin Mary, which narrowly assigns twelfth-century ecclesiasts the role of the construction of this image.

The second chapter continues the inquiry into the twelfth-century lives of female saints, turning to Wace's *Vie de sainte Marguerite* and Clemence of Barking's *Vie de sainte Catherine.* My claim is that these texts, arising from cults borne north and west from their origins in the Mediterranean, foreground the intercessory powers of women from the south and east of the Mediterranean. Like Wace's *Conception Nostre Dame,* these texts perform two key tasks: first, they counter the ecclesiastic perspective on womanhood by offering a more complicated and nuanced version of female sainthood than their Latin sources, and; second, they seek to situate Anglo-Normans on a continuum that begins with the earliest Christian martyrs in order to establish the legitimacy of Western Europeans as inheritors of a tradition anchored in historically-contested territories of the Holy Land. Thus, the vernacularization of these texts is tied to the political and social framework of courting a wider percentage of the Western European population, and luring them into the fold of Christianity. More specifically, it is tied to the call to the conquest of the Holy Land through Crusade. The rewriting of these texts forges an ideological space that posits a privileged connection between their Anglo-Norman readership, increasingly female and lay, and the Late Antique virgin martyrs from the land across the Mediterranean.

I turn to the lives of Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Mary the Egyptian in chapter three. This chapter considers the body of the female saint when it is no longer intact; it examines the way that medieval scribes imagine the body of the sinner saint whose body has been corrupted by carnal lust, but who seeks redemption through asceticism, eremitism, and goes on to perform fertility miracles. The texts in question are Guillaume Le Clerc's *Romanz de sainte Marie Magdalene* and an anonymous *Vie de Marie l'égyptienne.* Again, I examine on the ways in which the vernacular tradition not only elevates women to a position of emulation and veneration, but also focuses specifically on women from across the Mediterranean — Palestine and Egypt — locations that are situated on crusader routes to the Holy Land and cities that were important outposts of the bourgeoning Christian empire in the East. As young women who convert to Christianity, both Mary's serve as convenient ideological vehicles for crusade apologetics. They assist in the socio-political project of the consolidation of Anglo-Norman identity as the righteous combatants in a war of religion. Though the translation of hagiography to vernacular does not hold up as crusade propaganda, this analysis demonstrates that its elements function like a proto-Gospel that creates a subliminal apology for conquest.

The fourth and final chapter of this study places these hagiographies in dialogue with modern feminist theory, arguing that medieval texts stand at the threshold of modern female subjectivity. My examination of twelfth- and thirteenth-century culture engages with the modern French theorists who locate the birth of individual subjectivity within the emergence of vernacular writing: Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Simone de Beauvoir, and Hélène Cixous. These writers maintain that the ideological program of clerical writers, invariably male, wields a hegemony over the foundational texts of Christendom. Their engagement with medieval culture has relied on the premise that constructed narratives of origins reflect the attempt to eliminate women from the

practice of public power. Writing mostly in the wake of the linguistic turn, these theorists are intimately concerned with the relation between symbolic, imaginary, and real systems of power. They thus construe the literary representation of foundational women during the Middle Ages, a transformative period in western culture, as underlying contemporary biological, discursive, and imaginary representations of women. I revisit these saintly figures of eastern Mediterranean origin in order to assess how the different facets of their identity complicate the claims of these modern theorists.

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Ultimately, this study seeks to revisit vernacular and conceptualize French vernacular hagiography as apocryphal writing: a reworking of the foundational mythology of Christianity that revises constructed narratives of origin in order to insert a diverse array of characters, post-hoc, into the Christian tradition. Vernacular hagiography is the iteration of a fundamentally unstable foundational mythology; it combines heterogeneous sources into narratives of origins retold and reshaped by its scribes. The crux of its literary and semiotic function harkens a mythic past, a point of origin. This past, viewed fleetingly in the lives of female saints articulated especially through the second half of the twelfth century, offers a reflection of humanity during an age of transformation: glimpses of the individual, emerging from the tension between the idealization of the female saint as an imitation of the figure Christ, and her immediacy as a recognizable figure, a member of the medieval French gentry accessible to petitioners seeking to benefit from her proximity to God.

CHAPTER ONE

Wace's *Conception Nostre Dame:* Our Lady on the Eve of the Second Crusade

Wace's *Conception Nostre Dame,* a twelfth-century Anglo-Norman life of the Virgin Mary (c.1135-1150) is one of the earliest texts written in Old French vernacular.[5] Long relegated to the status of Wace juvenilia, the poem is in fact a rich text that enters into a dialogue with a host of contemporary political and theological debates: the nature of Saint Anne's conception of Mary, the nature of Mary's conception of Christ, and the question of Christ's Davidic origins. The task of this chapter is to revisit Wace's *Conception Nostre Dame,* in order to examine the cultural and political context that called for the vernacularizing of religious literature.

The first study to consider the earliest origins of the cult of the Immaculate Conception alongside its political and theological context in twelfth-century Normandy and Norman England, this chapter demonstrates that the figure of the Virgin Mary was a malleable tool, strategically manipulated and instrumentalized to serve the political goals of the Norman and Angevin rulers who sought to expand their territory, northwards through the Anglo-Saxon isles and south and eastwards towards the highly-contentious conquest of the Holy Land. It also serves to complicate existing contemporary feminist scholarship on the evolution of the image of the Virgin Mary, which narrowly assigns twelfth-century ecclesiasts the role of the construction of this image.[6] In contrast, this study seeks to bear out and elaborate Patrick Geary's thesis in *Women at the*

[5] See *Wace, The Hagiographical Works: The* Conception Nostre Dame *and the Lives of St Margaret and St Nicholas*, eds. Jean Blacker, Glyn S. Burgess and Amy V. Ogden (Brill, 2013).

[6] See, in particular, Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Random House, 1976) and Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," In *The Portable Kristeva,* ed. and trans. Kelly Oliver (Columbia University Press, 2002).

Beginning: the fundamental mythology of the Christian tradition is a composite of disparate sources and voices. These sources combine to create a tradition that is ultimately unstable.[7] Accordingly, this analysis revolves around a close reading of three different moments in the life of the Virgin Mary that narrate or allude to those mysteries at the heart of Christian tradition: (1) the episode of Mary's conception, or the Immaculate Conception;[8] (2) the episode of the flowering rod,[9] and; (3) several excerpts staging the scene of Christ's Incarnation.[10]

Existing Wace criticism focuses predominantly on his longer, prose, historical works.[11] The criticism on his hagiographical works is lacking in comparison, due to a scholarly bias against religious literature during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, as well as the lingering sense that the poems themselves are not very good.[12] This judgment of the poem's quality is borne out in the dissemination of the text, evidenced by the manuscript tradition; different sections of the work were selectively translated, suggesting that the subject matter was received as a suitable template for adaptation, while the intrinsic qualities and artistic qualities were found

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[7] Patrick Geary, *Women at the Beginning: Origin Myths from the Amazons to the Virgin Mary* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

[8] See Blacker et al., 82-83, lines 564-566.

[9] *Ibid.,* 88-89, lines 707-770.

[10] *Ibid.,* 94-95, lines 853-856, and 104-105, lines 1036-1041.

[11] See F.H.M. Le Saux, *A Companion to Wace* (D.S. Brewer, 2005) as well as Gioia Paradisi, *Le passioini della storia: scrittura e memoria nell'opera di Wace* (Bagatto libri, 2002).

[12] G. Mancel and G.-S. Trébutien, the first modern editors of the *Conception,* wrote that Wace, "est loin d'avoir compris la poésie des traditions dont il s'inspirait" ("far from grasping the poetry of the traditions that inspired him"), see *L'Établissement de la fête de la Conception Nostre Dame dite la fête des Normands par Wace trouvère anglo-normand du XII siècle publié pour la première fois d'après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque du Roi,* ed. G. Mancel and G.-S. Trébutien (Caen, 1842), xlii. They also take Wace to task for those interminable enumerations, which they claim he privileges over the graceful stylistics of the original poetic forms.

wanting.[13] Yet Wace's text maintains symbolic importance. By revisiting the time of Christ in Anglo-Norman vernacular poetry, Wace's *Conception* serves as a testament to the possibility of written practices to enfranchise groups that did not previously have the power to participate in such discourse, which for centuries had remained the exclusive purview of Latinate ecclesiasts; his text pays tribute to the revenge of popular over learned religion.[14] Wace's status as a mediator between two groups—popular and ecclesiast, vernacular and Latinate—reinforces this theory. Wace, though educated in a cathedral school, obtained only minor orders and spent much of his life pursuing commissions as a poet.[15] He was a *clerc lisant* at the ecclesiastic court at the Bayeux Cathedral in Normandy by trade. Though the exact meaning of the term *clerc lisant* has been a matter of debate, it is generally accepted that he acted as a juridical clerk who translated Latin into vernacular for the benefit of non-Latinate listeners. As *clerc lisant* he is likely to have supplemented his administrative responsibilities with more lighthearted activities, such as the selection of saints' lives for public holidays and feast days.[16] The function of his professional capacity was echoed in his poetic work, with which he added to a growing corpus of Anglo-

[13] See Le Saux, *A Companion to Wace,* 34.

[14] See Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller,* trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), and Marielle Lamy, *L'immaculée conception: étapes et enjeux d'une controverse au Moyen Âge (XII-XV siècles)* (Institut d'études augustiniennes, 2000), 19.

[15] Wace lamented the life of the commission-based writer in one of his longer, historical works; the second part of his verse history *Le Roman de Rou* ends with the narrator asking for some sort of recompense: "Qui chante boivre doit ou prendre autre loier,/De son mestier se doit qui que peut avancier;/Volentiers preïst grace, quer de prendre a mestier.(4423-5)" "He who sings must drink or take some other reward./He who can should improve himself through his work;/He would gladly take bounty, for he needs it." See *Wace. The Roman de Rou,* trans. Glyn S. Burgess (St. Helier, 2002).

[16] See Le Saux, 4, and Jean-Guy Gouttebroze, "Entre les historiographes d'expression latine et les jongleurs, le clerc lisant," in *Le clerc au Moyen Age* (Aix-en-Provence, 1995), 215-230.

Norman hagiography, and expanded the audience for the lives of saintly models by offering versions accessible to a larger percentage of the Christian population.

The inspiration for the *Conception* is drawn from canonical, apocryphal, and doctrinal materials, as well as from popular lore. Educated in the cathedral schools, a clerk with access to the library of the cathedral at Bayeux, Wace was certainly familiar with the apocryphal tradition of Mary's birth and childhood. Referenced obliquely in the Gospels, the apocryphal tradition of Mary's birth and childhood gained steam in the second century and developed over the course of the following millennium. Patristic writers focused on Mary's role as mother of God and its consequences for Christological doctrine, issues that were subsequently developed by Carolingian writers who placed a greater emphasis upon the person of Mary and thereby contributed substantially to Mariological thinking.[17] During the Carolingian period, apocryphal narratives intended to supply missing details of her life proliferated. This increase in narrative detail fed and was fed in turn by doctrinal theorizing and theological debates, all leading to her increased presence in Christian ritual and devotion.

The identified sources for Wace's text are the Protoevangelium of James,[18] the Trinubium Annae (anonymous c.550-700),[19] the Gospels of Pseudo-Matthew (anonymous 600-625)[20] and

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[17] See Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England,* 23, ""From being little more than a necessary factor in the life of Christ, Mary had, by the Carolingian period, become a figure of importance in her own right."

[18] See *Le Protévangile de Jacques et ses remaniements latins,* ed. E. Amann (Paris, 1910), and E. Cothenet, "Marie dans les apocryphes," in *Maria,* ed. du Manoir, VI, 71-156, and "Le Protévangile de Jacques: origine, genre et signification d'un premier midrash chrétien sur la Nativité de Marie," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II 25, no. 6 (1988): 4252-69

[19] See *Trinubium Annae secundum redactionem servatam*, From MS Paris, Sainte-Geneviève 2787 (Brepols, 2011). On the question of authorship, see Baudouin de Gaiffier, "Le *Trinubium Annae:* Haymon d'Halberstadt ou Haymon d'Auxerre?" *Analecta Bollandiana* 9, no. 3-4 (1972): 289-298.

[20] See *Pseudo-Matthaei Evangelium: textus et commentarius*, ed. Jan Gijsel. In *Libri de nativitate mariae* (Brepols, 1997)

Pseudo-Melito (anonymous, eighth century),[21] and the De navitate Mariae (anonymous, late tenth century Carolingian).[22] Two contemporaneous texts, the *Tractatus de conceptione sanctae Mariae* by Eadmer of Canterbury in 1141[23] and the twelfth-century *Miraculum de conceptione sanctae Mariae* erroneously attributed to Saint Anselm of Canterbury[24] provide further source material. The content of these texts was common knowledge, but their manuscripts were difficult to find, thus the *Conception* presupposes the support of a very good library, and one with strong English connections as evinced by the final two texts in the aforementioned series.

The first French vernacular text of the life of the Virgin Mary, Wace's story bridges source material from the earliest centuries of Christianity with the doctrinal debates of his contemporaries. He translates and compiles Greek and Latin apocryphal sources to tell the Virgin's life, from her divinely-inspired conception by barren and elderly parents to her ascension into heaven. The poem is divided into five sections, each cobbled together from sections of different source texts.

Wace's sources for the *Conception* are identified above, yet his own text is no mere translation and compilation of existing material. In the process of translating the life of the Virgin,

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[21] See Constantin von Tischendorf, *Apocalypses apocryphae Mosis, Esdrae, Paili, Iohannis: item Mariae dormitio, additis Evangeliorum et actuum Apocryphorum supplementis* (H. Mendelssohn, 1866), 95-112, and M. Haibach-Reinisch, "Ein neuer 'Transitus Mariae' des Pseudo-Melito" in *Textkritische Ausgabe und Darlegung der Bedeutung dieser ursprünglichen Fassung für Apokryphenforschung und lateinische und deutsche Dichtung des Mittelalters* (Rome, 1962), 88-108, and J. K. Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation Based on M. R. James* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 708-14.

[22] See *Libellus de nativitate Sanctae Mariae: textus et commentarius,* ed. Rita Beyers, In *Libri de nativitate mariae* (Brepols, 1997).

[23] See Eadmer of Canterbury, *Tractatus de conceptione sanctae Mariae,* ed. Herbert Thurston and Thomas Slater (Herder, 1904). The earliest promulgator of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, this text contains the argument in its earliest form.

[24] Anselmis Cantuariensis. "Miraculum de conceptione sanctae Mariae," in *Patrologia Latina,* ed. J.P. Migne (Chadwyck-Healy, Inc. [1844-1855] 1996), 324-326.

he transformed it, extrapolating and selectively editing from his source text, and taking significant liberties with the content in order to strategically appeal to the laity that composed his audience. Aspects of the local liturgy promoted by the lay congregation and members of the minor orders, details that had not yet been officially sanctioned by theologians, were integrated into his narrative. What emerges is a composite text that merges traditional didactic materials with an early iteration of the spirit of folk culture, one that more readily embraced the biological processes of birth, death, sex, and decay that Bakhtin would identify in the late medieval/Renaissance style of François Rabelais.[25] Elements of Wace's text reveal that during the twelfth century, this spirit was either inchoate, or expressed in a form unpreserved in surviving documents. The process of setting this spirit into text in a language accessible to its audience—a process of "vernacular enfranchisement"—indeed had a significant effect on the course of Western Christianity for the centuries to follow. It laid the groundwork for the thirteenth-century flowering of lay spirituality, and for the textual practices that created a boom in participatory spirituality for the remainder of the Middle Ages.

Moreover, the *Conception* merits reappraisal as medieval literary criticism focuses increasingly on western European interaction with the eastern Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Other.[26] First, the *Conception* has its roots in Eastern Christian tradition. By tracing the origins of Wace's intellectual influences, it is possible to identify the origins of such texts in the Eastern liturgy, imported into northern Europe via the Greek and North African Mediterranean. Moreover,

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[25] See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* trans. Helene Iswolsky, intro. Krystyna Pomorska (The MIT Press, 1968)

[26] Following the 1978 publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 1978), literary critics have sought to apply orientalist critiques of western literature to the Middle Ages. See, Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

this inquiry reveals that the ideas that laid the groundwork for the Immaculate Conception were neither unique to the pre-Invasion Anglo-Saxon liturgy, nor were they carried into England by the Normans; rather, these ideas had gradually infiltrated both England and Normandy through the circulation of relics, pilgrim routes, and especially the movement of Benedictine monks from Southern Italy. Though it originated in southern Europe, the Benedictine order maintained strong, ideological ties to the desert tradition, traditions of eremitism and asceticism developed in Late Antique Palestine and Egypt, which they adopted and then exported North to England and Normandy. An examination of the origins of these legends reveals that their underlying ideology often diametrically opposes orthodox theological definitions of sainthood elaborated by the theologians of twelfth-century Norman Christendom, maintaining a connection to much earlier traditions developed in the southern and eastern Mediterranean.

How does the *Conception,* by dramatizing the earliest events of Christianity that took place in the Holy Land, create a discursive link with pilgrimage and crusade? How do the crusader, pilgrimage, and Mediterranean frameworks offer a new context for the discussion of this text? Its date of composition corresponds with the time period leading up to the Second Crusade (1147-1149); crusaders from the Kingdoms of France and England, as well as the Duchy of Normandy, joined forces and sought to reconquer the Crusader states in Jerusalem, Tripoli, and Antioch that had fallen under Western European Christianity's control following the First Crusade (1096-1099), including the County of Edessa, the northernmost, weakest, and most sparsely populated state. The European military adventure to recapture Edessa was largely a failure, but it gave rise to new definitions and expressions of western European identity, formed negatively through interaction with the Muslim Other, by their contact with the Seljuk Turks in the Byzantine Empire, the Moorish occupants in Iberia, the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt and the Levant, and also with western-

European dwelling Jews. These Jews who had for centuries resided in Western Europe began to experience renewed forms of persecution when their allegiance to Western Christendom came under question during the course of the Second Crusade.

French vernacular literature, since its inception and across genres, has historically performed the function of staging western Europeans as they grapple with questions of religious identity as they encounter and struggle to exact meaning from their interactions with dissimilar religious groups. Texts like the *Conception,* though they do not explicitly engage with the rhetoric of Crusade, provide a link with the call to pilgrimage to the Holy Land and to conquest of the Crusader States.[27] In twelfth-century Normandy and Norman England, hagiography performed the task of linking a medieval Christian audience with its forerunners from the earliest centuries of Christendom, accomplishing a chronological continuity between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, as well as a geographical continuity between the Holy Land and the territories in western Europe that compose modern-day France. Consequently, these texts function to establish the legitimacy of western Christians as heirs to the heroes, heroines, martyrs, ascetics, and prophets of a time closer to Christ, when communication flowed more openly between heaven and earth.

Thus, the conquest of the Holy Land was not only played out through military invasion and occupation of land in Palestine, but through textual conquest of the hearts and minds of Christian subjects, by establishing literary texts as ideological spaces that posit a privileged connection with figures such as the Virgin Mary and other martyrs from the Holy Land. The translation of these texts from Latin to vernacular emerge as the elements of crusade propaganda, and the rewriting of

[27] See Zrinka Stahuljak, "*La Vie de Saint Alexis* and the Alexis Quire in the Crusading Context," in *St. Albans and the Markyate Psalter: Seeing and Reading in Twelfth-Century England*, ed. Kristen Collins and Matthew Fisher (Medieval Institute Publications, 2017).

hagiography emerges as the attempt to articulate the elements of a proto-Gospel that create a subliminal apology for conquest through righteous war.

Ultimately, this chapter revisits Wace's *Conception* in order to re-conceptualize vernacular hagiography as apocryphal writing: a reworking of the foundational mythology of Christianity that revises constructed narratives of origin in order to insert a diverse array of characters, post-hoc, into the Christian tradition. In the process of rewriting the lives of foundational Christian figures, this text culls from a variety of canonical, non-canonical, and other sources, combining a variety of miscellaneous elements into a tradition that does not cohere because it is fundamentally unstable.[28] By interrogating the instability of the Marian tradition, we are able to unmask the role that Wace played in the effort to reclaim foundational narratives from the purview of ecclesiasts, and reconcile literary texts with the need to appeal to a changing vernacular audience.

The Conception Nostre Dame

Wace's *Conception Nostre Dame* is dated between 1135 and 1150.[29] It is believed to have been commissioned in the aftermath of the Feast of the Conception's incorporation into the liturgical cycle in England (1129) or in anticipation of its official adoption in Normandy (1145). The text is composed of five sections: the "Establishment," the "Conception," the "Transition," the "Story of the Three Mary's," and the "Ascension." The Establishment (lines 1-178), contains the frame story: Helsin the Abbot of Ramsey travels to Denmark on a diplomatic mission. On his return voyage, his ship is beset by a violent storm. Helsin calls to the Virgin Mary for help, and an angel appears

[28] See Patrick Geary, *Women at the Beginning*: *Origin Myths from the Amazons to the Virgin Mary.* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

[29] For a discussion of the controversy surrounding the text's dating, see Le Saux, *A Companion to Wace.*

and offers safe passage in return for the guarantee that Helsin will honor the Feast of the Virgin's Conception.

In the second section, the "Conception" (lines 179-1110), the narrator offers the back-story of the Feast of the Conception. This story transports the reader from medieval Normandy to first-century Palestine, dramatizing the relationship between the maternal grandparents of Jesus Christ and their conception of his mother, the Virgin Mary. Anna of Sepphoris and Joachim of Galilee are ashamed because they are shunned from their community for their inability to produce offspring. Joachim retreats to the desert to do penance among the shepherds. There, an angel appears to announce that he and his wife will bear a child called Mary. Anna is visited by the same angel who announces the same prophecy. Joachim returns to Jerusalem, embraces Anna at the city gates, and shortly after the pair return home, a child is conceived. Mary is born and handed over to the virgins of the temple, where she makes a vow of virginity and fidelity to God. At the age of fourteen, destined for marriage, Mary appeals to her vow and begs the priest to exempt her from marriage. The conflicted priest prays to God, and receives word from a heavenly voice that the savior will come from the root of Jesse, according to the prophecy of Isaiah. The priest assembles all the men from the lineage of David (son of Jesse) so that a sign - a sprouting rod - might reveal the man worthy of Mary's hand. The elderly Joseph attends the assembly and his rod, though initially hidden, flowers. Shortly after their marriage, an angel, Saint Gabriel, appears to Mary and announces her conception of the savior - she is impregnated by the angel's words. Joseph returns, observes Mary's pregnancy, and makes a plan to surreptitiously abandon her, when an angel appears and reveals the divine nature of the virgin birth. The narrator extols Mary as intercessor and savior of mankind.

The third, short section of the text, the "Transition" (lines 1111-34), contains a summary of the Conception, and an announcement of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. The fourth section, the "Story of the Three Mary's" (lines 1135-1292), contains a genealogical account of the three Mary's in the Gospels, a group including the Virgin Mary and her two half-sisters, daughters of Anna from different fathers whose sons were Christ's followers. This section also describes Mary's close relationship with John the Evangelist.

Finally, in the fifth section, the "Assumption," (lines 1293-1810), Mary announces her desire to be with her son. She climbs the Mount of Olives to speak to the Lord, and she requests that Saint John and the Apostles be present for her death and Assumption. They are miraculously transported to the site of her Assumption, Mount Zion, in a cloud. After her death, Mary's body is attacked by Jews who seek to burn her corpse. They are stricken with an illness and ultimately converted by the miracles that her body performs.

As the summary demonstrates, this text functioned to fill a growing demand for details on the life of the Virgin, whose cult among both the laity and the clergy grew exponentially in the course of the twelfth century.[30] Accordingly, this text plays a major role in shaping our understanding of the narration of sainthood in twelfth-century France. By setting into octosyllabic rhyming couplets the precise details of the foundational narrative of Christianity—of Christ's mother's birth and genealogical origins—Wace participates in the elaboration of a fiercely-debated Marian tradition, one whose details had the power to influence the discourse on a diverse range of

[30] Scholars have remarked on the twelfth-century rise of mariology and the corresponding manipulation of the Virgin's image: see *Marie: le culte de la vierge dans la société médiévale,* ed. Dominique Iogna-Prat, Eric Palazzo, and Daniel Russo, preface by Georges Duby (Beauchesne, 1996) Also Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex,* 153. Kristeva in "Stabat Mater" follows Warner, who attributes the feudal image of the Virgin Mary to the ideologues of twelfth-century France who dubbed her "Our Lady" and provided her with "patented letters of nobility."

subjects: from the genealogical details of Christ's descent from Davidic lineage to the process of divine conception as it occurred in the Immaculate Conception and the Incarnation.

Moreover, Wace's text categorically rejects Judaism and casts Jews as the would-be desecrators of the sacred virgin's corpse, ultimately dramatizing their conversion to Christianity and abandonment their own, false religion. It provides both explicit and implicit apologies for the triumph of Christianity over paganism, Judaism, and—though subtly, I will argue—Islam. By providing a back story that links twelfth-century Christian audiences with their forerunners in first-century Palestine, Wace is bolstering the claim advanced by Western Europe's feudal rulers who sought to position themselves as legitimate heirs to the Holy Land. Reading this text alongside the crusading context, Wace's departures from his source texts reveal his desire to appeal to the sensibilities of a vernacular audience: an audience composed of noblemen whose aspirations of conquest were increasingly trained on the lands of the southern and eastern Mediterranean. Wace's depiction of the holy family as members of the gentry appeals to the target readers and listeners as members of a feudal society eager to see their own nobility reflected in the heroes and heroines of sacred narratives. They were equally eager to see themselves cast as the descendants of this sacred lineage, successors to a genealogy with direct roots in heaven.

Additionally, this chapter addresses the goals set out in the introduction: the inquiry into the gender of the saints in question. The saints selected for this study have the dual outsider qualities of being both women and foreign. As the female saint par excellence, the Virgin Mary informs the definition of virtue that will be applied to all the female saints of Western Christendom. Wace's life of the Virgin Mary is indispensable as a point of departure because it offers a rare glimpse of the role that the maternal economy plays in stories that tell the origins of Christianity. By staging two different acts of conception in vernacular poetry, Wace offers a three-dimensional

portrait of the sacred woman as the biological mother of a human son, a portrait that expands upon the traditional Latinate ecclesiastic view of the mother as a source of nourishment but little more. Accordingly, this narrative speaks to the contemporary theoretical need to reconcile the biological certainty of motherhood as a point of origin with a variety of conflicting origin legends that offer inadequate representations of this certainty.

The Establishment

Wace's *Conception Nostre Dame* begins with a frame story that anchors the text firmly in the western European Middle Ages. He begins:

El nom Dé, qui nos doignt sa grace,
Oëz que nos dist maistre Gace:
En quel tens, coment et par qui
Fue comencié e establi,
Que la feste fu celebree,
Que conceüe e engendree
Fu ma dame sainte Marie.
Onques n'en fu parole oïe
Que a nul tens anceis fist on
Feste de sa conception,
Deci al tens le rei Guillalme
Qui par les Engleis et le realme
Par force e par bataille prist,
Viles, chastels, citez conquist.

> In the name of God - may he bestow his grace upon us -/Hear what Master Wace tells us,/At what time, how and through whom/It was begun and established/That the feast was celebrated,/On which my lady the Virgin Mary/Was conceived and begotten./It has never been reported/That at any earlier time there had been/A feast for her conception,/Until the time of King William,/Who captured the English and the kingdom/Through force and through battle.[31]

In this way, Wace begins the story of the origins of the Virgin Mary by explicitly linking the establishment of the feast with the Norman invasion of England in 1066 by William the Conqueror, "le rei Guillalme." By opening the story on a mention of the Norman Invasion and the theological and cultural heritage that this military effort introduced into England, Wace establishes that the story's subtext is spiritual and political conquest. He presents a convincing case for the evangelization of foreign lands through the introduction of saints' feasts.

Then, Wace goes on to narrate the dramatic storm at sea that warrants the Virgin Mary's intervention and results in the establishment of her feast. This dramatization of the story of Helsin, Abbot of Ramsey, is anchored in historical fact. Controversy remains over the author of the original tale that would serve as the source for Wace's frame narrative, and the confusion has been narrowed between the three principle champions of the cult of the Immaculate Conception in Post-Conquest England: Eadmer of Clare, Osbert of Clare, and Anselm of Edmundsbury (the nephew of Saint Anselm). Sources from the abbey of Ramsey relate how Ælfsige, a monk of Old Minster in Winchester who is reported to have died in 959 AD, was supposedly appointed abbot of the abbey of Saint Augustine's in 1061. As the acting abbot of Ramsey in 1062, he would have been sent to Denmark on a mission of peace, to quell disputes between the Norman King William and the Danes. The abbey's sources relate the same story of a visionary experience and rescue through divine intervention that is related in Wace's Establishment: a divine messenger appears to the abbot

[31] Blacker et al, 58-59.

and promises to deliver him from the violent storm that has beset his ship if the abbot vows to celebrate and observe the Feast of the Conception on December 8th. The error in the dating reveals that the tale's author allowed himself a century-long liberty between the life of the abbot Ælfsige and the setting of his own story, perhaps in order to impress the weight of time upon his audience and convey a sense of importance through history. The original tale that Wace is drawing from, then, is not historically accurate, but is nonetheless anchored in the legendary life of a figure from Winchester.

Then, the first section of Wace's poem, the Establishment, anchors his narrative in two closely-intertwined debates of eleventh- and twelfth-century theology, revealing his ideological sympathies (or the ideological sympathies of the text's patrons) and providing avenues for speculation concerning these patrons. The first debate pits promoters of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, or "immaculists," against detractors of the feast, or "maculists."[32] The former saw an opportunity to increase veneration of the Virgin Mary and to add dimension to her personality by providing her with an origin story and a sacred genealogy, while the latter saw the feast as an excess of Mariolatry as well as a heterodox celebration of the emphatically non-sacred processes of human conception. The second aspect of this debate pits the Norman conquerors who sought to impose their own liturgical and spiritual prerogatives by stamping out the pre-existing, local Anglo-Saxon forms of worship against promoters of the feast who saw in it a post-conquest opportunity to merge Anglo-Saxon and Norman liturgies through the promulgation of the feast. Each debate was tied to wider trends in the Anglo-Norman cultural and political realm: the attempt

[32] Anselm of Edmundsbury, Eadmer of Clare, and Osbert of Clare are the three primary champions of the Immaculate Conception in twelfth-century England. Bernard of Clairvaux is its primary opponent in France. Saint Anselm of Canterbury, the uncle of Anselm of Edmundsbury, opposed the theory but is often quoted as one of its strongholds due to the erroneous attribution of a twelfth-century manuscript to the saint, whereas it was later proven to have been written by Eadmer of Clare.

to force Anglo-Saxon clerics to acknowledge and submit to Norman superiority; the desire of ecclesiasts to balance Christ's likeness to man with his status in the Holy Trinity as the son of God, and; the desire to include a wider audience into the fold of Christianity by adopting a feudal framework to tell the genealogy of the holy family. By adding depth and nuance to the figures of Christ's immediate forerunners, Wace offered his vernacular version into the debate, and it would serve as a springboard for vernacular texts on the Immaculate Conception in the centuries to follow.

Though the lives of Christ's maternal grandparents Anna and Joachim were first articulated in the *Protoevangelium of James*, which is thought to have been composed in the course of the second century AD, the feast of the Immaculate Conception trickled gradually into Western Christianity over the course of the following millennia.[33] The feast of the Immaculate Conception was mostly recognized locally until its official promulgation by the Vatican, which did not occur until 1854. Images expressing the theological truth of the Immaculate Conception were first introduced into calendars and liturgical books, or into dedications to Our Lady of the Conception, by believers who wanted to express a particular devotion to her.[34]

During the period leading up to the polemic over the Immaculate Conception, the feast was confined to isolated centers scattered across Southern Britain and centers in modern day France

[33] See the Preface and Introduction to Part One of Mirella Levi D'Ancona's *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance* (Art Bulletin, 1957), in which Levi D'Ancona identifies the vague suggestions and formulations of theologians concerning the Immaculate Conception before the twelfth century, who alluded to the immaculacy of Mary without firm definition.

[34] See Thomas Buffer and Bruce Horner, "The Art of the Immaculate Conception" in *Marian Studies* 55, no. 1 (2004): 11.

including Normandy.[35] The manuscript, liturgical, and iconographic[36] evidence indicates that the Immaculate Conception originated in the eastern liturgy and traveled westward through the Mediterranean to Southern Italy. The first known mention of the Immaculate Conception in western Europe is contained in a ninth-century marble calendar in Naples, dated between 840 and 850 AD. The *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* identifies this calendar as the creation of Greek monks from Constantinople, where the feast had been celebrated since at least the beginning of the eighth century.[37] An additional example has been traced to the *Martyrology of Tallaght,* a ninth-century Irish martyrology whose liturgy follows the Coptic ritual. It is therefore presumed to have originated in Egypt.[38] Both examples support the hypothesis that the Immaculate Conception was an importation of a foreign liturgy and not an invention of western Christianity. However, the first example of a Southern Italian origin is supported by the historical northwestward migration of Southern Italian monks, and in particular, Benedictine monks who had longstanding historical ties with centers in England.[39]

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[35] See Levi D'Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception,* 11.

[36] The iconography of the Immaculate Conception is a thorny issue because the close connection between the Conception, the Presentation in the Temple, and the angelic annunciation of Mary's birth create a sense of ambiguity on both the textual and especially the visual level. Many artists fall back on the traditional representation of Mary's mother Anna, Late Medieval and Renaissance images including images of Anna and the Virgin with Christ child, see Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England,* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 87.

[37] See *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, 7.1* (Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1927), 987; note that the Naples calendar identifies the feast as the Conception of the Virgin whereas the feast in Constantinople is referred to as the Feast of Saint Anne.

[38] Levi D'Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception,* 12

[39] Among the English monastic houses, the Benedictines are known to have shown a preference and taken an interest in French vernacular literature and, beyond religious literature, *chanson de geste* and epic, genres with secular themes. See Paula Leverage, "Reading Hagiography in an Epic: The Liturgical Calendar in Girart De Roussillon," *Dalhousie French Studies* 82 (2008), 151, and Keith Busby, *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript* 2 (Rodopi, 2002), 753.

Though founded in Southern Italy, the Benedictine Rule evinces strong ties to Eastern Christianity. Saint Benedict of Nursia (c.480-550 AD) founded one of the earliest monastic centers in western Europe during the sixth century, in Subiaco and then in Monte Cassino, where he wrote the Benedictine Rule shortly before his death. The rule of Saint Benedict, revived and updated by Cistercians in the eleventh century, would dominate western European monastic communities until the rise of the Franciscans in the mid-thirteenth century. From its origins in Monte Cassino through its importation into Britain and France, Saint Benedict's rule borrowed heavily from and relied largely on authorities from the Judean Desert, Syria, and North Africa, including Saint Basil of Caesarea's Ascetic Rule, Saint Pachomius' coenobitism, and the anonymous Rule of the Master whose origins remains controversial.[40] Thus, from its origins the Benedictine rule claimed foundations that lay squarely in the "charismatic power" of the desert and a celebration of the institutions and cultures whose origins were in common with the Christianity of the East.[41]

The migration of Benedictine monks from Southern Italy to Southern England began at least in the sixth century, when the first Benedictine congregation was founded by Saint Augustine of Canterbury, soon after his arrival in England in 597. The monastic library founded there, the first of its kind in England, was founded at that time and gifted with various books including a Gregorian bible by none other than Pope Gregory the Great (540-604). The continuous relationship between the Benedictine congregation in Canterbury and its foundational centers in the Lazio

[40] See Cuthbert Butler, *Benedictine Monachism: Studies in Benedictine Life and Rule* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005) and; J. Daly Lowrie, *Benedictine Monasticism: Its Formation and Development through the Twelfth Century* (Sheed and Ward, 1965).

[41] See Conrad Leyser, "The Uses of the Desert in the Sixth-Century West," *Church History and Religious Culture* 86, no. 1-4 (2006), 113–134. Leyser presents a compelling argument against the preponderance of existing scholarship that identifies a "twilight of the desert" in Latin Christendom and effectively argues that, beginning with the Rule of Saint Benedict in 540, "desert talk" and reference to desert experiences remained a primary mode of establishing moral authority among the ideologues of western Christianity (see esp. 113-116).

region—in particular, in Monte Cassino, Naples, and Rome—explains the mode of entry of a foreign liturgy into England. Thus, from its origins in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception traces a path across the Mediterranean, from Constantinople or Greece to Monte Cassino, Naples, and Rome, and then North to the regions at issue in this study.

The same congregation of Benedictine monks who established a center in sixth-century Canterbury are thought to have traveled North to England again during the first half of the eleventh century. Their mission gained a foothold in New Minster, Winchester, in the Canterbury see, where the feast of the Immaculate Conception appears in pre-Conquest liturgical calendars. The first iconographic representation of a doctrine that would become the Immaculate Conception is in a Quinity in the Winchester *Officia*, from 1010-1020. Ernst Kantorowicz suggests that the iconography of the five-figure Trinity or "Quinity" presents an early Anglo-Saxon rendering of the Incarnation, and one that lays the groundwork for a doctrine that would spare Mary from original sin.[42] The same church in Winchester is responsible for the direct introduction of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception into Pre-Conquest England, the first evidence for which dates to 1060.[43] The evidence for the introduction of these feasts into the Anglo-Saxon liturgy is invariably accompanied by data—both historical and comparative—that combines to persuasively suggest sources in the southern and eastern Mediterranean.

[42] See Ernst H Kantorowicz, "The Quinity of Winchester," *The Art Bulletin*, 29, no. 2 (1947), 73–85, esp. 85. Kantorowicz identifies several possibility sources for the undeniably eastern influence of an iconography that represents the Virgin alongside an unidentified spirit.

[43] See Clayton, 42-43; Clayton also traces the feasts of Saint Catherine and Saint John Chrysostom to the indirect Greek influence of Greek Benedictine monks in Southern Italy. She further suggests Anglo-Saxon pilgrimage to Constantinople as a possible source and identifies the presence of the Greek monk Constantine at Malmesbury in 1030 as possible vessels of the liturgy, 44.

Notwithstanding its eleventh-century introduction into Britain, the feast of the Immaculate Conception in Anglo-Saxon England was only celebrated for a short time and saw a temporary eclipse after the Norman Conquest. The reasons for this may be more complex and nuanced than once believed. For much of the twentieth century, the historiographic tradition maintained that the invading Normans stifled all things Saxon and non-Roman, enforcing the use of their language and ideological programs, decimating the cults of local saints in favor of distinctly Norman forms of liturgy. Historians viewed the Norman Conquest as a conquest of Norman hierarchical subordination of a subject population that struggled for independence on both the secular and ecclesiastic level.[44] Interestingly, hagiography was uniquely positioned at the crossroads of this tension, as a genre or tool that could be strategically instrumentalized in service of the monarchy, or, on the other hand, transgressively, to challenge institutionalized authority and present it as an obstacle that the individual on his or her path to salvation must overcome.[45]

Art and literary historians have traditionally viewed the renewal of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception as the latter: the triumph of deeply-entrenched and resilient patterns of Anglo-Saxon worship against the stifling Norman censor. The seeds of the Immaculate Conception would have fallen on fertile Pre-Conquest soil, and directly after its abolition, calls for its reinstatement would have been accompanied by treatises demanding it.[46] Yet the question of how

[44] This "Stenton-Knowles" argument is borne out in two texts: Frank Merry Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Clarendon Press, 1943), and in particular page 664, and; David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England: A History of its Development from the Times of St. Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 943-1216,* 2nd edition (Cambridge University Press, 1963) and in particular pages 117-119. See also R.W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought, 1059-c.1130* (Cambridge University Press, 1963), especially pages 248-52.

[45] See Jane Zatta, "The 'Vie Seinte Osith': Hagiography and Politics in Anglo-Norman England," *Studies in Philology* 96, no. 4 (1999): 367–393, esp. page 369.

[46] See Levi D'Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception,* 12

the Normans viewed their position in England after the Norman conquest has been complicated in recent decades, and the thesis that they indiscriminately suppressed Anglo-Saxon forms of worship has evolved. Some historians observe that the silence from historical texts surrounding the Conquest indicates a sense of confusion, an inability to engage with contemporary events that is both characteristic of the medieval mind and exacerbated by the veritable paucity of texts that survive from the end of the eleventh century.[47] This confusion belies the absence of a coherent program, or of a globally-implemented program regarding the liturgy from the part of Norman conquerors like the one that Lanfranc is thought to have presented. More specifically, the question of how the Normans impacted the local cults of Anglo-Saxon saints has been revisited and complicated, especially by the work of Susan Ridyard, who demonstrates the ways that these cults remained largely untouched or were even adopted and encouraged by Normans ecclesiasts in order to cater to the spiritual needs of their Anglo-Saxon subjects.[48] This theory discredits the us-versus-them hypothesis sustained in existing scholarship on the Post-Conquest liturgy and provides nuance to the Cult of the Immaculate Conception debate, opening new possibilities and avenues in the search for Wace's patrons.

Moreover, one additional factor complicates the question of the origins of the Immaculate Conception. Although the clerics of the Norman Conquest demanded the Feast's abolition, features of the Feast had already infiltrated the French mainland through pilgrimage and trade routes between Southern Italy and Northern France, and some evidence survives to suggest that the feast

[47] See Monika Otter, "1066: The Moment of Transition in Two Narratives of the Norman Conquest." *Speculum* 74, no. 3 (1999), 565–586. Though Otter ultimately argues against this perspective, she provides an overview of its supporting sources on page 565.

[48] See Susan Ridyard, "Condigna veneratio: Post-Conquest Attitudes to the Saints of the Anglo-Saxons," *Anglo-Norman Studies 9* (1987), 179-206, and *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

had gained a foothold in pre-conquest Normandy as well. Anselm of Edmundsbury, for example, had traveled through Lyon and Rouen on his way to Rome. The earliest French liturgical books containing mention of this feast are found in these cities, a correlation that suggests that Anselm might have exacted an influence beyond his own see, in major cities in Normandy and France whose lay subjects were just as eager for details on the life of the Virgin Mary as those in Anglo-Saxon England are demonstrated to have been.[49]

The Scene at the Golden Gate

Having established the complicated path that the Feast of the Immaculate Conception traced into Normandy and Norman England, we now turn to re-examine Wace's text, beginning with an important scene from the apocryphal tradition. The dynamics of this excerpt reveal that he treads a careful line with regards to staging the "Golden Gate" scene, the scene of Anna and Joachim's meeting at the city gates, which results in the conception of the Virgin. The handful of couplets that he devotes to this scene constitute Wace's entry in dialogue with the dogmatic debate surrounding the precise nature of Mary's preservation from original sin. The first scene in question is the scene at the Golden Gate, Anna and Joachim's reunion. In telling this scene, Wace departs from his source texts from the apocryphal tradition, and these departures reveal his original contributions to the telling of the Immaculate Conception. This apocryphal scene, first set down into text in the Protevangelium of James, evolved considerably over the course of the Middle Ages in both its textual and iconographic forms.[50] Wace's language departs from the apocryphal

[49] See Levi D'Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception,* 12.

[50] For an analysis of this evolution, see Réjane Gay-Canton, "La Rencontre à la Porte dorée. Image, texte et contexte," *L'Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques. Revue électronique du CRH* 10 (2012). See also Frederick Biggs, "'Righteous People According to the Old Law': Aelfric on Anne and Joachim," *Apocrypha* 17 (2006): 151-177.

language and explicitly defies Clairvaux's proscription of the celebration of the carnal act involved in biological conception by subtly implying that such an act occurred between Anna and Joachim during this scene. Consider his narration of the events that lead the couple from the temple:

Anna ne s'est pas demoree,
En Jerusalem est alee.
Sun seignor issi encontra,
Cum li angeles li anunça.
As portes oires s'encontrerent,
Molt dolcement se saluerent.
A l'encontrer grant joie firent,
A Damnedé grace rendirent,
Al temple firent oreison,
Puis s'en aleren a maison.
Segurement ont atendu
Ce que par l'angele anuncié fu.

> "Anna did not delay;/She went to Jerusalem./In this way she met her husband,/Just as the angel had announced it to her./They met at the golden gates/And greeted each other very tenderly./When they met, they rejoiced greatly,/Gave thanks to the Lord God/And prayed in the temple;/Then they went to their house/And confidently awaited/What the angel had announced."[51]

In translation, these lines seem innocuous: the couple return to their house, and wait or expect with confidence that the angel deliver on his promise. A close philological examination of certain terms in their twelfth-century Anglo-Norman context reveal, however, that a multiplicity of meanings and narrative possibilities might be derived from this passage.

[51] Blacker et al., 82-83.

The Old French *maison* (probably a translation of the Norman original, *maisun:* remember that Wace wrote in Anglo-Norman but not one of these original manuscripts survives) contains several different denotations. The Godefroy Old French dictionary lists, aside from the modern "bâtiment destiné à servir d'habitation," two additional definitions, both indicated as deriving from the Norman and Breton regions. The first is a definition involving inheritable property, "toutes les terres et heritages," and the second definition relates to the nobility and its entourage, "gens attachés au service des grands personnages." Moreover, the Anglo-Norman dictionary lists two alternate denotations for Norman term *maisun* that make reference to the concept of kinship. In these contexts, *maisun* may refer to family as members of a household or to family as members of a lineage. Thus, both dictionaries provide additional context for a scene that seems straightforward in translation, but which may in fact play on the ambiguity of a term whose meaning was polyvalent and subject to interpretation during the period when Wace was using it.

This opens a myriad of possibilities into the meaning of the text. One cannot assume with certainty that Anna and Joachim are returning to the architectural dwelling of their house; rather, the scene at the Golden Gate is subject to the equivocality that the various denotations of the word suggest. Moreover, the term's etymological nuance situates us squarely in the debates concerning bloodline and lineage that raged during the feudal twelfth century in Normandy, England, and France. By using the term in the sense of "lineage" or "noble entourage," Wace may be suggesting that the angel's annunciation caused Anna and Joachim to return to their bloodline in search of the expectancy of the divinely-foretold infant, a suggestion that would be received by his audience as such in keeping with feudal society's obsession with bloodline and genealogy. Their return to the bloodline suggests a maculate version of the Conception, one in which Joachim and Anna's carnal

union is productive of the infant Mary, an immaculist position that would vindicate the feast while challenging Bernard of Clairvaux and his maculist stance.

One final, alternate definition of the Old French term *maisun* casts further nuance on the debate about Wace's version of the Immaculate Conception; this term was also used, in Anglo-Norman vernacular, to refer to Antique and Late Antique shrines or sanctuaries to pagan Gods.[52] Though the preferred term for such an edifice was *sanctuaire* or the popular *saintuaire,* a fourteenth-century translation of the fifth book of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, hands down this alternate usage.[53] The usage of the term in canonical book of the Bible refers to a silver shrine built to honor the goddess Diana. This opens an alternate reading of the text, one in which Anna and Joachim return to their home, which is in fact an architectural dwelling meant in the sense of a religious shrine, a sacred space where the scene of the Immaculate Conception is destined to occur. Within the narrative, Wace had already constructed Anna and Joachim as righteous and faithful practitioners of the Jewish faith,[54] but the conflation between Judaism and paganism is common to medieval Christian writing; the slippage between terms that refer to pre-Christian pagan religions and terms that refer to Judaism is characteristic of the twelfth-century privileging of Christianity as the centralized religion beside which all other religions were reduced,

[52] See "Edition and Study of a Section of an Anglo-Norman Translation of the Bible (14th Century): 'The Acts of the Apostles' in MSS B.N. fr. 1 and 9562, ed. N.E. Ratcliff, Dissertation, St Andrews, 1955.

[53] See Acts 19:24 "un hom, Demetrius par noun, une quilleur d'argent, fesaunt *maisouns* d'argent (Latin: aedes argenteas) a Diane" (emphasis mine). KJV translation: "For a certain *man* named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen."

[54] Though Wace's text will ultimately condemn and echo the twelfth-century political reality of the persecution of the Jews by casting Jews as the violent, attempted desecrators of the Virgin's body, this text also recognizes as virtuous and forgives those Jews who lived before the time of Christ, a position that was sanctioned in the Middle Ages as the doctrine of the Harrowing of Hell gained widespread acceptance and popularity.

marginalized, and often conflated. Therefore, the term *maison* may well be referring to a sacred shrine or temple where refuge might be sought or homage/sacrifice to the gods might be performed. The adverb *segurement* (also rendered as *seurement*) reinforces the sense of the sacred in the text, as it refers to their faith and piousness (meaning with certainty/confidently, in safety/without fear), and echoes contemporaneous usage in vernacular hagiography that characterizes the faith of the saint.[55]

This final, alternate reading of the term *maison* or *maisun* gives rise to a reading of the text in which the Immaculate Conception remains immaculate. After the annunciation by the angel, Anna and Joachim repair to a religious shrine to confidently await the fruition of the prophesy. No reference to the carnal act is implied.

In this way, Wace employs a term that allows him to demur and deftly maneuver around the need to explain precisely how the Immaculate Conception occurs. While he stops short of staging or alluding to the carnal scene, he allows the audience to infer what a return to the house for two parents attempting to conceive might entail. His plays on the polyvalence of an ambiguous term also offer the possibility that the couple repair to sacred site to allow for conception by means of divine intervention. Ultimately, Wace departs from his source texts by way of omission. He willfully avoids the painstaking explanations of miraculous means of divine impregnation that he later undertakes in order to convey the miracle of the Incarnation, suggesting instead that Mary's Conception, though foretold be an angel, was the result of very normal relations between a virtuous, unlucky, but otherwise unremarkable couple.

[55] For a contemporaneous usage of *seurement* in Old French hagiography, see *St. Modwenna,* ed. Alfred T. Baker and Alexander Bell (Johnson Reprint, 1967), line 3337, "Ço vus pramet seurement Devant Deu."

Just as the Doctrine of the Incarnation holds that Christ was born from a human mother but spared from the original sin to which mankind had been fated since his fall from Eden in Genesis, the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception attempted to assert by a similar logic that Mary, too, was spared in the womb from the original sin that beset mankind. Thus, the precise narration of this scene lies at the heart of the twelfth-century debate between the maculists and the immaculists: do Anna and Joachim join to conceive Mary in a carnal union inevitably marred by original sin that the sexual act implies, or does Mary's divinely-foretold conception occur through immaculate, supernatural means? As an immaculist, Wace sought to promote the Feast of the Immaculate Conception by offering Anna and Joachim's reunion at the Golden Gate as the incarnation of a divine spirit into flesh, patterned on Mary's Annunciation by the Angel Gabriel, an intervention that relied on faith rather than knowledge of biology and science.

The twelfth-century was a period that was particularly well-suited to receive this debate. Leading figures in cathedral schools across Europe, centered in France, in Paris, Cluny, and Chartres, saw the commingling of theology, philosophy, and natural science, and new forms of discourse aimed at gaining a broader understanding of man through his connections with the classical world and through his status an individual.[56] As the knowledge of Antiquity began to trickle into Western Europe through the translation of classical texts, a better understanding of anatomy was reached and biological definitions of conception, pregnancy, childbirth, and maternity were revisited. These evolving definitions became the focal points of both religious and secular literature.[57]

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[56] See M.D. Chenu, *Man, Nature and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West,* ed. and trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (University of Chicago Press, 1968), and Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Harvard University Press, 1971), and *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science* (Harvard University Press, 1924).

[57] For a study of the increased maternal and infancy imagery in twelfth-century secular literature, see Doris

From the earliest centuries of Christianity, church writers had struggled to invent a justification that would spare Christ from the inevitably of human sin while still maintaining his human qualities. Though, as has been demonstrated, aspects of the Immaculate Conception had entered the French and Norman liturgy prior to the Norman Invasion, the occasion for the commingling of dissimilar liturgies—Anglo-Saxon and Norman—in Post-Conquest England brought the debate over the Immaculate Conception to the fore. Eadmer of Canterbury was the first theologian to programmatically propose the feast of the Immaculate Conception, sustain its underlying doctrine as orthodoxy, and rally for its official instatement in the liturgy of the English church.

Eadmer's enthusiasm for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception came to a head in the twelfth century in the Kingdoms of England and France. The institution of the feast of the Immaculate Conception incurred the opposition of the leading intellectual figure of twelfth-century France, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), the most vocal maculist of his time. As the abbot of the Cistercian Abbey in Chartres, Clairvaux was positioned at the forefront of twelfth-century European intellectual life. Though Paris had cache as the cultural capital and the center where monarchical power would be concentrated in the decades to follow, Chartres, ninety kilometers to the southwest, contained the earliest and most illustrious cathedral schools and centers for medieval learning. Clairvaux, a skilled orator with a strong public profile, was headquartered in Chartres but traveled the European mainland on tours that highlighted his oratory prowess while they exacted a strong ideological influence on not only monastic but ecclesiastic and lay leaders across western Europe.

Desclais Berkvam, *Enfance et maternité dans la littérature française des XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Honoré Champion, 1981).

Notwithstanding his objection to the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Bernard of Clairvaux's devotion to the virgin is legendary, as is his instrumental role in popularizing the cult of the Virgin Mary in twelfth-century France.[58] Clairvaux led the company of Cistercian writers who are often credited with the twelfth-century discovery of the individual, and who also furthered the mariological cause by using explicitly maternal imagery to describe God and Christ, effectively causing a rhetorical slippage between the role of Christ and the role of his mother in soteriological theory.[59] He is equally famous for his claims of having received lactation from the black virgin statue in the cathedral of Chartres, claims which the contemporary historiographical tradition has explored as the point of departure for much of the ecstatic and fluid-based piety and instances of miracles that would proliferate in the centuries to follow.[60] Moreover, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs, which gloss the explicitly sexual imagery in this Old Testament book of the Bible as an allegory for the Christian soul's desire for God, display the rigor of an ecclesiast intent on cleansing the Scripture of any potentially erotic content, and effectively sanitizing the Christian tradition from sexually implicit undertones.[61]

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[58] See R. A. Dessi and M. Lamy, "Saint Bernard et les controverses mariales au Moyen Age," in *Vies et légendes de saint Bernard de Clairvaux. Création, diffusion, réception (XIXe-XXe siècles),* ed. Patrick Arabeyre, Jacques Berlioz and Philippe Poirrier, *Actes des Rencontres de Dijon, June 7-9, 1991 (1993).*

[59] See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (University of California Press, 1982), esp. "Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing," 113-159.

[60] See Patrick Arabeyre, "La lactation de saint Bernard (Chatillon-sur-Seine): données et problèmes," in *Vies et légendes de saint Bernard de Clairvaux, and* C. Dupeux, *"Saint Bernard dans l'iconographie médiévale: l'exemple de la lactation," in the same edition.*

[61] See Michael Casey, *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, no. 77 (Cistercian Publications, 1988), and *On the Song of Songs* 2, ed. Jean LeClercq (Cistercian Publications, 1976).

Of equal importance with Saint Bernard's cleansing of Christian worship is his dedication to the crusading cause, and in particular the energy and alacrity with which he advanced the call to the Second Crusade.[62] After news of the fall of Edessa to Imad al-Ding Zengi reached Europe in 1144, and the cluster of Crusader states nestled on the Eastern Mediterranean took this defeat as a demoralizing threat to their existence, Bernard of Clairvaux was personally commissioned, in 1145, by the new Pope Eugene III to preach the Second Crusade and gather forces for the Christian cause.[63] His sermons in Vézelay in March 1146 and in Speyer in December 1146 successfully recruited a vast army of men who set out for the East, including Louis VII of France (1120-1180) and emperor-elect Conrad III (1093-1152).

Bernard's motivations for preaching the call to the Second Crusade are intimately interwoven with his overarching desire to reform society, evinced in both his dedication to the Virgin and his commitment to glossing the Song of Songs. His vision for all men—secular, monastic, ecclesiast, lay—was focused on taming and sublimating the passions of the individual, and directing these passions toward the Augustinian goal of creating a city of God on Earth.[64] Though he objected on principal to warfare and homicide when committed as an excess of anger and aggression, Bernard saw the virtue of a just warfare, waged through a sense of sanity that

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[62] See Peter Raedts, "St Bernard of Clairvaux and Jerusalem," in *Studies in Church History. Subsidia* 10 (1994), 169-182, and John G Rowe, "The Origins of the Second Crusade: Pope Eugenius III, Bernard of Clairvaux and Louis VII of France," in *The Second Crusade and the Cistercians* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 1992), 79-89. and also Hans-Dietrich Kahl, "Crusade Eschatology as Seen by St. Bernard in the Years 1146 to 1148," in the same volume, 35-47.

[63]John R Sommerfeldt, "The Bernardine Reform and the Crusading Spirit," in *The Catholic Historical Review* 86, no. 4 (2000), 567–578, esp. page 568.

[64] See Sommerfeldt, "The Bernardine Reform," 570, and also Jean Leclercq, "Saint Bernard's Attitude Toward War," in *Studies in Medieval Cistercian History II,* ed. John Sommerfeldt 24 (Medieval Institute Publications, 1976), 1-39, and Thomas Renna, "Early Cistercian Attitudes Towards War in Historical Perspective," *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses,* 31 (1980): 119-129.

engages violence in the service of justice.[65] Bernard wrote Henry I, King of England, Duke of Normandy, possible patron and alleged acquaintance of Wace, in anticipation of the Second Crusade, a letter in which he sets out his ideals of just warfare.[66] The concept of a just war championed by Bernard of Clairvaux, in direct dialogue and correspondence with the royals who might have commissioned Wace's text, refers back to the possibility that the *Conception Nostre Dame* serves as a subliminal form of crusade propaganda. Though Wace and Clairvaux disagreed over the specifics on Mary's preservation from original sin, they each sought to develop her profile as a forerunner and direct ascendant of Northern European bloodlines. Each figure sought to return to first-century Palestine and establish chronological and geographical links with twelfth-century France and Normandy.

In keeping with his effort to advance the Crusading cause by offering a vision of a functioning society in which individuals sanely and judiciously sublimated their passions rather than indulging them, Bernard of Clairvaux objected to the establishment of the Feast of the Conception, citing several different reasons. Principally, he argued that since Mary was born from the union between a man and a woman, she was inevitably and incontrovertibly conceived in sin. The celebration of the Feast of the Conception, he argued, was tantamount to the celebration of the sexual union that the act of Conception entailed. This becomes, itself, a sinful and concupiscent act. Saint Bernard argued that the Doctrine of the Incarnation sufficed to spare Christ from the scourge of original sin. An inquiry into the details of Mary's Conception was not only orthodox but also heretical.

[65] See Sommerfeldt, "The Bernardine Reform," 570.

[66] See Epistle 138.

Bernard of Clairvaux's position on the Immaculate Conception contains many of the stakes of the arguments of contemporary feminism, as his vision of the Virgin Mary urges the repression of the biological facts of conception and motherhood in attempt to cleanse the archetypal Christian female. The result of Clairvaux's logic is the alienation of women—their mundane, biological processes—from the foundational texts of the Christian tradition, and the sanitization of the Scripture and the Liturgy through a glossing that seeks to reduce all heterogeneous elements to the pure, unadulterated orthodoxy presided over by the Latinate ecclesiasts. A fuller exploration of this idea will be pursued in Chapter Four.

Where is Wace situated among the ideological geography of the Immaculate Conception debate? And, were contemporary feminism to revisit this century by reviewing this text, how might their vision of this time period alter? By inscribing heterogeneous and "maculate" elements into his text, Wace is providing a rallying cry for the re-instatement of this feast in the liturgy, and thereby advancing an agenda that elevates Mary—an individual spared in the womb from original sin—to a status approaching Christ, and a foundational position in the framework of Christian tradition.

The uncertainty of the dating makes it impossible to determine whether the *Conception* was written with the explicit view to challenge Saint Bernard's position. On one hand, that heated participation in such a polemic would not befit the aspirations of a young *clerc lisant* whose literary ambitions were at the mercy of his ability to procure commissions from the nobility and the ecclesiology. On the other hand, his text seems to do just that. The final task of this chapter will be to determine the extent that Wace's text participates in this polemic. By turning to the actual content of the text and close-reading the passages concerned with conception, this analysis will pinpoint Wace's version of divine conception and his original contributions to the emerging

doctrine. This first vernacular text on the life of the Virgin is particularly important because it became the basis for further elaborations, sending shockwaves of a new mariology across western Christendom.

Ultimately, Wace walks a line: though he opposes Bernard of Clairvaux's liturgical program by daring to advance a narrative staging the divinely-preordained and miraculous and pure conception of Mary by Anna and Joachim, he doubles back on the hyperbole of his apocryphal sources. By lending nuance to the scene at the Golden Gate in which the clues to the mechanics of the Immaculate Conception are laid, Wace is effectively stitching together a legend befitting a twelfth-century sensibility, characterized by a new emphasis on emerging definitions of biology and on genealogical lineage recognizable to his new, vernacular audience.

The Scene of the Flowering Rod

Similar to the episode at the Golden Gate, the episode of the flowering rod within Wace's *Conception Nostre Dame* is of central importance to the analysis at hand. This episode dramatizes Joseph's selection through divine indication as the husband of the blessed Mary. The details of this scene contribute to the debate concerning the questions of Christ's Davidic origins and the place of women within Judeo-Christian sacred genealogy. Ultimately, Wace supports the image of Mary as a hinge around which Christ's prophesied origins revolved.

Turning to the text, we see that two principle scenes are concerned with the flowering rod: one in which the rod's sprouting is foretold,[67] and another in which the rod's sprouting is staged.[68] Wace stylistically dramatizes the scene. In his choice of what to narrate and the way that he narrates

[67] Blacker et al., 88-89. lines 707-726.

[68] *Ibid.,* 90-93, lines 751-770.

it, he is appealing to a new twelfth-century lay sensibility, and in particularly to a social order whose definitions of bloodline and genealogy were in the process of being determined. Although these scenes borrow from the *Conception* source texts, the precise nature of their implications for the writing of sacred genealogy changes in light of the twelfth-century feudal context, in which the concept of genealogy - its status as a cultural construct rather than as a biological reality grounded in the transmission of blood - began to replace kinship as the primary form of the continuation of lineage.[69]

The first scene is related after the young Virgin Mary expresses her refusal to marry and appeals to her vow of virginity that she made to God. The head priest, reluctant to set a precedent that would excuse future young maidens from marriage but equally reluctant to compel the girl to break her vow, prays to the Lord for guidance. The Lord responds to the head priest, quoting a prophecy from the Book of Isaiah and providing instructions on how to proceed:

E quant il lor priere firent,
Une voiz desur els oïrent
Qui dist: 'Gardez la profetie
Que pieça vos dist Ysaïe.
Ysaïe pieça vos dist
Sa profetie, vos promist:
De la raïz Jessé istra
Une verge qui florira.
La verge flor e fruit avra,

[69] See Georges Duby, *Le Chevalier, la femme et le prêtre: le mariage dans la France féodale,* (Hachette, 1981), and Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages: Translatio, Kinship, and Metaphor* (University Press of Florida, 2005), esp. the Introduction, "Genus Interruptus."

716 Sainz Espriz s'i reposera.'

Por la voiz qui lor anunça

Que une verge florira

Qui ert de la raïz Jessé

720 Unt li prodome porpensé

Que toz cels ferunt asembler

E en lor mains verges porter

Qui den lin Davit sunt venu,

724 Quar Jessé pere Davit fu,

E cil a feme avra Marie

En qui main la verge ert florie.

> And when they had finished their prayer,/ They heard a voice above them,/ Saying: 'Look to the prophecy/ That Isaiah made to you long ago./Long ago Isaiah told you/ His prophesy and promised you this:/ From the root of Jesse will issue/A rod that will sprout./ The rod will bear flowers and fruit/ And the Holy Ghost will repose within it.'/Through the voice, which announced to them/That a rod would sprout/That would be from the root of Jesse,/The worthy men decided/That they would gather together all those,/And place rods in their hands,/Who had come from the line of David,/For Jesse was David's father,/And the man would have Mary as his wife/In whose hand the rod sprouted.[70]

This excerpt stages the voice from heaven that instructs the priest to assemble all the bachelors from the Davidic line and place rods in their hands. The chosen husband's rod is fated to sprout. In these lines, Wace arranges a marriage competition scene that has much more in common with a secular text than with a religious text; although this is a religious and not a secular narrative, one

[70] Blacker et al, 90-91.

cannot help but hear echoes of secular, feudal topoi.[71] Thus, in addition to functioning as a convenience that provides an explanation for the dismissal of Mary's virginity vow, this scene participates in the medieval controversy concerning Mary's origins in the line of David.

The root or rod of Jesse is familiar in medieval iconography, and the prophesy in the Book of Isaiah is its primary textual source.[72] During the course of the twelfth century, the Tree of Jesse began to gain importance as an image of the ties of paternity that bound Christ the Savior to the heroes of the Old Testament.[73] By anchoring Christ in one of the foundational genealogies of Judeo-Christian mythology, theologians were able to situate Christ on a continuum that could be traced to its beginnings in Eden, one that was both visually and conceptually destined to end with Christ's birth and crucifixion, a non-generation genealogy represented by the reversal, in ascending order, of the structure of the tree. They were also able to reinforce the typological reading of the Bible, one in which the events and prophesies of the Old Testament were signs that point forward to the New Testament: David as a prefiguration of Christ, for example.[74]

The question of the source of Christ's Davidic origins is the main engine of controversy surrounding the Tree of Jesse. Does the biological transmission of kinship in the line of David follow from Joseph or from the Virgin Mary? This question is fraught with the contradictions that different layers of doctrinal elaboration have piled on the problem. The doctrine of the Incarnation

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[71] See Blacker, 39, also see Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular Against the Sacred* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), and Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[72] Isa. 11:1-2, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots; And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him."

[73] See Zrinka Stahuljak, "The Graft of the Woman (the Tree of Jesse)" in *Bloodless Genealogies,* 112.

[74] Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990).

and the attendant insistence on Mary's virginity depends on the fact that Joseph is not the biological father of Christ, giving rise to the theory that Mary is in fact the member of the Davidic line. In secular genealogy, medieval practice is exclusive of women, with the transmission of kinship moving between paternal sides.[75]

Yet it is clear that the Virgin Mary functions in the genealogical transmission of Christ's origins. Through the narrator of the tale makes reference to the prophesy of Isaiah, note that Wace treads cautiously, refraining from explicitly mentioning Mary's descent from the Davidic line. Blacker suggests, with regard to the importance he places on the matriarchal line, that Wace may have been programmatically proposing a secondary role for the patriarchal line, as in the case of the Norman and English versions of Harold and Williams negotiations before the Conquest.[76] On the other hand, he may well have been offering up both sides for the edification of the audience, providing them with the opportunity to reach their own conclusions.[77]

I am more sympathetic to the hypothesis that Wace was programmatically proposing a secondary role for the patriarchal line, inscribing Mary into a sacred genealogy that had no secular equivalent. Instead of explicitly elucidating the matter of the role of the maternal/paternal line, Wace relies on a complex series of images that metaphorically pass Joseph's Davidic origins to the Virgin, in whom the spiritual kinship will be made flesh. This scene is staged as Wace relays the scene in which Joseph's rod is revealed:

751 E quant il en la presse entra,
La verge que il tint muça.

[75] Stahuljak, 116.

[76] See Blacker et al, 50.

[77] *Ibid*., 52.

Li evesques partot garda,

Nules des verges n'i trova

Qui flor portast ne qui florist.

Deu depreia e Beus li dist: (756)

'Cil a sa verge trestornee

A qui la virgene ert mariëe.'

Aperceüz fu e repris

Josep si l'a hom avant mis. (760)

Sa verge leva si flori

E borjona e reverdi.

Une columbe de ciel vint

Sor la verge que Josep tint. (764)

Dunc li fu Marie donee,

E segun la lei eposee.

O li volsist o ne deignast,

O bel li fust o li pesast,

Li estuet la dame eposer,

Ne l'osa mie refuser.

When he entered the throng,/He kept the rod he was carrying out of sight./The bishop looked all round/And could not find any rod/That bore a flower or sprouted./He prayed to God and God said to him:/'The man has concealed his rod/To whom the virgin will be married.'/Joseph was noticed and admonished,/And he was brought forward./He raised his rod and it sprouted,/Came into bud and blossomed./A dove descended from heaven/On the rod that Joseph held./Then Mary was given to him/And married to him in accordance with the law./Whether

> he liked it or would not have agreed to it/Whether it pleased him or upset him,/He had to marry the lady/And did not dare refuse so.[78]

In this excerpt, the reluctant Joseph, an old widower with children older than Mary, enters the throng. In an exemplary gesture of humility, he hides his flowering rod, but God steps in an identifies Joseph as the righteous candidate to the bishop. The rod is finally revealed and a dove alights onto it when it is brought forward in full bloom.

At the level of the text, it is important to remark on the phonetic approximation between "rod" ("*verge*") and virgin ("*vierge*"). If the rod that Joseph carries to the throng is read as a metaphorical substitution for the Virgin Mary, as the phonetic pairing of the terms suggests, then Mary is indeed the hinge around which the question of Christ's Davidic origins turn. In the case, the tale supplants the Virgin as the fruit of the rod of Jesse and posits instead that the sacred patrilineage that links holy figures of the New Testament with the heroes of the Old Testament originated in Joseph and not in the Virgin. Christ's exemption from original sin relies on the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity, and thus excludes the possibility that Joseph was Christ's biological father. In fact, the bedrock of the Christian faith rests on the belief in Christ as the son of God. This produces confusion between God the father and Joseph the father.

But if Joseph's rod is read in its metaphorical capacity as the male member, which is miraculously productive of flowers, an obvious metaphor for female reproduction, a second reading emerges. The union between Joseph's member and the Virgin's fruit is sacredly sanctioned by the arrival of the dove, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, who alights on the rod as it flowers. The implicit sexual undertones of this episode, the presence of metaphorical devices, allude to a carnal scene without explicitly naming it. This second reading tells us that the scene stages a metaphorical

[78] Blacker et al., 90-93.

carnal union between man and women, meaning that Joseph relates to Mary in a carnal relation mediated by a metaphorical alliance.

Stahuljak in *Bloodless Genealogies* writes that, "with the end of blood genealogy...spiritual kinship is the metaphor that performs the 'moving across,' the 'translation,'" taken in its medieval context as *translatio* or metaphor.[79] Thus, Wace's scene engages a metaphor that balances two impulses in tension: the maintenance of the primacy of patrilineal structures and the subsequent exclusion of women from the genealogical line.[80] It alludes to the suggestion of a carnal union befitting the biological reality of conception through the carnal act.

This discussion leads us back to one of our original questions: does liturgy write theology or vice versa? Do ecclesiasts offer doctrine for the edification of their Christian subjects, or do they transform folk belief into doctrine for the benefit of their lay audience? Marielle Lamy engages with this issue, and with the way that the Immaculate Conception sheds a particular light on it. She writes that *Lex orandi, lex credendi,* an adage that is often evoked by historians of marian doctrine, often integrates a specific interpretation of the evolution of the doctrine on Mary's conception. The victory of "pious belief:" in other words, of the immaculist opinion, would be a victory of the Christian people over theologians blinded by their supposed knowledge, the revenge of popular religion over savant religion.[81]

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[79] Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies,* 125.

[80] See R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), esp. Chapter 7, "Heiresses and Dowagers: The Power of Women to Dispose."

[81] "*Lex orandi, lex credendi...*cet adage bien souvent évoqué par des historiens du dogme marial, recouvre souvent une interprétation particulière de l'évolution de la doctrine sur la question de la conception de Marie: la victoire de la 'pieuse croyance,' c'est-à-dire de l'opinion immaculiste, serait une victoire du peuple chrétien sur des théologiens aveuglés par leur prétendu savoir, une revanche de la religion populaire sur la religion savante," 19.

In this way, Wace's use of metaphor for the carnal act of conception gives rise to a radical claim: vernacular scribes make use of images from Old Testament prophesy and from the apocryphal tradition to endow their texts with real scenes of conception. Not only is this oppositional to the ideology of theologians, but it also successfully includes a vernacular audience into the fold of Christianity by embracing their need to see their lived experiences dramatized in the literature that tells their foundational narratives.

The Incarnation

Wace's staging of the Incarnation, unlike the Immaculate Conception and the episode of the flowering rod, at first seems devoid of all sexual content. Wace had far more numerous sources for this scene, and ones that would be well-known to his audience, since the Doctrine of the Incarnation has its sources in New Testament texts, and especially in the four Gospels, which were circulated widely during the course of the Middle Ages in Western Europe.[82] In keeping with the narrative in these sources, Mary in Wace's version is immediately impregnated with the celestial progeny by the words of the Angel Gabriel, who appears during the Annunciation:

853 En ce que Nostre Dame oï
De l'angele qui li dist issi,

[82] For an historical and exegetical study of the doctrine of the Incarnation in New Testament materials, see James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Westminster, 1980). For a concise survey of the Incarnation doctrine from Late Antiquity through the western European Middle Ages, see Margaret R Miles, *The Word Made Flesh: A History of Christian Thought* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), esp. Chapter Four, "The Voice of the Pages: Incarnation and Hierarchy in the Medieval West. For a detailed comparative study of the Incarnation teachings of handful of twelfth-century theologians, including Hugh of Saint Victor, Abelard, Lombard, and Gilbert Porreta, see Lauge Olaf Nielsen, *Theology and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century: A Study of Gilbert Porreta's Thinking and the Theological Expositions of the Doctrine of the Incarnation During the Period 1130-1180* 15 (E.J. Brill, 1982).

Fu elle sempres empreigniee

Dee la celestial ligniee.

Just as Our Lady had heard/From the angel, who spoke to her in this way,/She was immediately impregnated/With the celestial progeny[83]

As communicated in these lines, what in fact impregnates the Virgin is the word of the angel, a linguistic transmission of divinity into flesh. Wace's Incarnation scene would thus seem to participate in the heterodox discourse that seeks to elide the physical act of procreation and thus the biological fact of motherhood in representations of Christianity.

However, this claim is complicated by a different excerpt from Wace's text, one that explains the mechanics of the Incarnation and uses the conceit of a ray of sun through a window to metaphorically convey God's intervention in the Virgin's womb:

1036 Issi cum li solelz sun rai

Par la verrine met e trait

Qu'a la verrine mal ne fait,

Issi e molt plus sotilment

1040 Entra e issi chastement

En Nostre Dame li fiz Dé.

Just as the sun sends/And withdraws its ray through the window/Without harming the window,/In the same way, and much more subtly,/The son of God entered in this way,/And just as chastely, into Our Lady.[84]

Here in this passage, a metaphor of a ray of sun entering a window serves as a metaphor for Christ's Incarnation in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Although at first glance it seems as though Wace is sanitizing the foundational moments of Christianity by staging Christ's conception by the angel's

[83] Blacker et al., 95-97.
[84] Blacker et al., 101.

word, his explanation for the mechanics of this conception have much in common with antique, pagan iterations of similar phenomena. In particular, the explanation for the Virgin Birth in the cited lines borrows from at least two myths of antiquity, well-known and well-circulated in twelfth-century France and England: (1) Danae's impregnation by a golden shower, and; (2) the story of Phaëton, the sun of a solar father. Both tales were set into verse by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses,* and these texts would have been accessible to Wace through the course of his education. Though the study of Ovid's influence on various genres within the range of writings in twelfth-century France has been intensively developed in the past few decades, the study of the influence of Ovid's writing on vernacular hagiography is still underway. This chapter does not propose to perform a detailed inquiry into Ovidian influence on hagiographic myth.[85] Rather, I only propose to highlight the parallels between Wace's narration of Mary's conception of Christ and the antique sources that relate similar episodes within their foundational mythology. These antique sources anticipated and even provided the groundwork for Christian phenomena.

In *Metamorphoses,* Ovid relates the story of Danae, a young royal maiden who was inadvertently impregnated by the God Zeus.[86] He overcame her resistance by transforming into a ray of sun, entering her bedroom, and surprising and impregnating her with Perseus, a demi-God

[85] See, in particular, Birger Munk Olsen, *L'étude des auteurs classiques latins aux XIe et XIIe siècles* (Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1982), *Ovid in the Middle Ages,* ed. James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, and Kathryn L. McKinley (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Frank T. Coulson, *The Vulgate Commentary on Ovid's Metamorphoses: The Creation Myth and the Story of Orpheus, edited from Sélestat, Bibliothèque humaniste, MS. 92.* (Published for the Centre for Medieval Studies by the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1991); *Ovide Métamorphosé: Les Lecteurs Médiévaux d'Ovide,* ed. Laurence Harf-Lancner, Laurence Mathey-Maille, and Michelle Szkilnik (Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2009); Ralph J. Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling. Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid's* Ars Amatoria, Epistulae ex Ponto, *and* Epistulae Heroidum (Arbeo-Gesellschaft, 1986); *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middles Ages to the Twentieth Century,* ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge University Press, 1988) and; Kathryn L. McKinley, *Reading the Ovidian Heroine: "Metamorphoses" Commentaries, 1100-1618* (Brill, 2001).

[86] See Ovid, *The Metamorphoses,* trans. Allen Mandelbaum (Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), page.

hero whose coming was prophesied and fated to shift prevailing power structures. The prophesy of Perseus' divine conception, legendary feats, and ultimate downfall bears striking parallels with Christ's Passion story. Similarly, Ovid relates the story of Phaëton, a child of the sun whose hubristic and ill-fated chariot ride ended into catastrophe.[87] Phaëton's sacrificial fall, like Christ's crucifixion, would occasion the inward collapse of the cosmos, only to expand again after his return, an allusion to the Second Coming.[88] This mythological device of the sun or sunlight impregnating virgins and fathering children fated to shift the paradigm of human salvation through self-sacrifice is not an original one. It has led scholars, historians, and theologians to speculate over the course of two millennia that the doctrine of Christ's Incarnation might have its roots in pagan sources. In fact, the earliest Christian commentators remarked on the parallels between the Incarnation and the instances of gods made mortal in pagan etiology, and sought to either qualify, explain, or dismiss them.

As early as the second century, Justin Martyr (d. 165) scorned the parallel between the Virgin birth of Christ and the episodes of surreptitious conception by the pagan poets, calling such suggestions, "a travesty, a black mass, the work of the devil mocking the truth."[89] As demonstrated, pre-Christian narrative often resorts to the metamorphoses of Gods into animals, natural feature—rays of sun—in order to stage the deceitful impregnation of unwitting maidens by lascivious deities. In the earliest centuries of Christianity, it was necessary for apologists of the Virgin Birth to distinguish the foundational mythology of Christianity from that of its antecedents in order to

[87] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*.

[88] See Carl A.P. Ruck et al, *The Hidden World: Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes in European Fairytales* (Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 25.

[89] Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 36.

assert the legitimacy of their faith as the one that contained incontrovertible truth and promise of eternal redemption. Origen (d. 254), more measuredly, argued that God prepared the world for the greatest mystery of all, the incarnation of his son, with a sequence of beliefs and creeds elaborated by the poets and writers of antiquity, whose purpose was to foreshadow the virgin birth of Christ and make its acceptance easier.[90] He also explored a series of natural explanations for Virgin Birth, citing widely accepted medical phenomena of his era, including the "generation of snakes from corpses, bees from oxen, wasps from horses, beetles from donkeys, or worms from almost anything." On the shoulders of these early writers, medieval apologists for the Virgin Birth sought to dismiss pre-Christian antecedents or fashion them as the naive and incomplete trivialities that paled beside the truth-bearing doctrine of Mary's Perpetual Virginity, a unique feature of the Christian religion that would ultimately triumph.

The search to defend and accurately describe the mechanics of the Virgin Birth of Christ had its origins in the earliest centuries of Christianity. At the time of the *Conception's* composition, Wace was culling from a millennium's worth of explanations and justifications for the Incarnation, which he chose to poetically render using the image of a ray of sun through a window. This harkens earlier traditions and instances of divine conception, suggesting that Wace was not only familiar with these traditions, but sought to emulate them in his poetic work. With regards to the use of Ovid and other pagan antecedents as the sources for the imagery used in twelfth-century vernacular hagiography, the secondary literature is incomplete. It is likely that Wace's Latin education included the study of the *Metamorphoses,* but this influence cannot be defined. Nevertheless, the approximation between Wace's vernacular life of the Virgin Mary and pagan source material suggested by the excepted text from the Incarnation scene points to a fuller expression of

[90] Origen, "Contra Celsum," 1:32.

femininity from pre-Christian sources. It represents an example of resistance against the sanitization of the Christian tradition exacted hierarchically and handed down by ecclesiasts who were in a position to rid foundational stories of their aspects that alluded too strongly to biological processes in general, and especially those processes specific to women.

Questions of Patronage

Having established the ways in which Wace departs from his antecedents in order to offer a new version of the Immaculate Conception, the question of patronage emerges. Who commissioned this text, and how do the details of the above analysis shed light on possible patrons? The controversy surrounding this feast—its foundation, subsequent abolition, and eventual reinstatement in both the English and the Norman liturgies—is relevant to questions of patronage, particularly as they are related to questions of pilgrimage and crusade. Who commissioned this text, and what was the ideological goal of commissioning it? The patron of the text is unknown, but several scholars note that the purported date of the text and its underlying agenda suggest that the poem was commissioned by a non-royal in a position of authority who sought to promote the Feast of the Conception. It was certainly composed in Anglo-Norman, though the nine surviving manuscripts and sixteen fragments of the text survive in Old French dialects.[91] The multiplicity of these manuscripts and their dissemination across France suggest its wide circulation, indicating that whoever the patron might have been, that person or group of people must have been in a position to successfully promote the text.

[91] For a catalogue of the extant manuscripts, see Le Saux, 32-34.

The author, formerly known as "Robert" Wace,[92] was probably born during the first quarter of the twelfth century, and remained active until the mid 1170s, making his career an unusually long one.[93] He was born in Jersey, sent to school at Caen on the Norman mainland, and pursued further studies in the territories of the French King[94] before returning to Normandy and settling there. He received only minor orders, taught as a "master" at the Bayeux cathedral in Normandy, and received a prebend as a canon there by Henry II towards the end of his life, around 1166 or 1169. As mentioned, he served as a *clerc lisant,* a cryptic term for a function, he informs us, that allowed him to enter the ducal administration and brought him face-to-face with the Kings of England, including Henry I (1068-1135), Henry II (1133-1189), and Henry the Young King (1155-1183), with whom he claims personal acquaintance.[95]

Wace is most celebrated for his longer work, the *Roman de Brut,* a verse history of Britain which is a vernacularized version of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie*, covering the genealogical descent of the subjects of Britain, including legendary figures like King Arthur and Brutus of Troy. The subjects of Britain were a people newly conquered by the Norman King William in 1066, and the Normans sought through revisiting their genealogy to assert a common ancestry and legitimize their invasion and control. Wace also wrote the *Roman de Rou,* a verse

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[92] For the details of this erroneous attribution of the first name "Robert," based on textual misreading, see Hans-Erich Keller, "Le Mirage Robert Wace," *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 106 (1990): 465-6.

[93] For estimates of Wace's lifetime, see Gaston Paris's review of H. Andresen's edition of the *Roman de Rou, Romania* 9 (1880), esp. pages 594-5, as well as the introduction to volume 1 of *Le Roman de Rou de Wace,* ed. A.J. Holden (Paris, 1970-73), 15, and Le Saux, 1.

[94] "France" probably refers to Paris, i.e. Ile-de-France, but may equally refer to Chartres, see Le Saux, 3, and Burgess, *The Roman de Rou,* xvi-xivi.

[95] From the third part of the *Roman de Rou,* lines 179-184, "Treis reis Henriz vi e cunui/e clerc lisant en lur tens fui;/des Engleis furent rei tuit trei/e tuit trei furent duc e rei,/rei de Engleterre la guarnie/e duc furent de Normendie" "I saw and knew three king Henrys/in their time I was a *clerc lisant./*All three were kings of the English/and all three were dukes and kings/they were kings of England the Rich/and dukes of Normandy."

history of the Dukes of Normandy covering the genealogical descent of the Norman people from the Carolingian Rollo of Normandy. Several rare details on the life of Wace have been culled from lines in the *Roman de Rou,* in which he pauses from the narration to give a brief biographical sketch. One of the more corrupted of these passages suggests that Wace himself descended from ducal bloodlines. No evidence establishes that Wace was a member of the Norman nobility, but his avowed ties with the "Treis reis Henriz" indicates that he was sympathetic to the Norman kings.

Accordingly, Wace's project as a vernacular writer was tied to the political and cultural goals of the affirmation of the Norman right to rule. The genealogical pathways that he traces in his verse historical works demonstrate the rigor of an historian while they echo Biblical diagrams of Jesus' descent from Jesse and David, culling from the discourse of history, theology, and biblical exegesis. The etymological grammar of this formative period in Old French writing has been linked with the radical reorganization of the aristocratic family of the twelfth century around the notion of genealogy and, in particular, around certain linear institutions based in strict exogamy, restrictions of marriage, and the rule of primogeniture.[96] The obsession with genealogy in his verse historical works is anticipated in his earlier hagiographies, and especially in the *Conception,* in which questions of bloodlines, and especially the bloodline of the savior Christ, of Mary, and of Christ's non-biological father Joseph are examined.

Wace's frame narrative, which mentions the abbot Ælfsige but misdates him by a century, may be intended to reflect a different historical figure; it is the story of the Archbishop Stigand

[96] See R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 1983), esp. page 28. In his introduction, Bloch links Merlin's status as patron saint of letters in the Arthurian world with the embodiment of the powerful principle of writing in the French Middle Ages, making explicit reference to Merlin's person as fictionalized by Geoffroy of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini.* Interestingly, Wace used Geoffroy of Monmouth's text as a source for his *Roman de Brut,* but diminished Merlin's role as the deliverer of prophecies.

who was removed from his post following the Norman invasion.[97] This frame story provides the most compelling evidence for the possible patron and for the underlying ideological agenda of the text. In 1070, the Archbishop of Canterbury Stigand was deposed by papal legates, and the Norman Abbot Lanfranc (1005 or 1010-1089, sometimes referred to as Lanfranc of Pavia, Lanfranc of Bec, or Lanfranc of Canterbury) became the new archbishop of Canterbury.[98] A close collaborator and confidant of William of Normandy, Lanfranc was selected for his competence in canon law as well as his pre-Conquest support of both papal and ducal interests, a loyalty that he had demonstrated as prior of Bec (1045-1063) and then abbot of Saint-Étienne de Caen (c. 1063). When after the Norman conquest Lanfranc was promoted to archbishop of the Canterbury see, he found himself the spiritual ruler of all the British isles, a position that was implicitly recognized in the Irish and Scottish isles as well; he demanded an oath of obedience from the Bishop of York and exercised a hegemony over the law and liturgy of the newly-acquired Norman territories.[99] His principal work, in close collaboration with King William, was to reorganize the English church along the Norman model. As archbishop, he reformed the Canterbury calendar and according to the opinion of many scholars until relatively recently, abolished feasts particular to Anglo-Saxon saints. However, resistance to this idea in more recent scholarship, combined with the facts of Lanfranc's education and career, demonstrate, again, a more nuanced sense of the authority with which the Normans approached their Anglo-Saxon subjects.

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[97] Alternately, it has been proposed that the tale's Ælfsige is in fact the abbot Walchelin who fled to Denmark in 1070 when Stigand was deposed by the Norman clerics. Walchelin returned in 1080 and remained Abbey of Ramsey until his death in 1087. See Clayton, 47-50.

[98] For the leading biographies on Lanfranc see, in the order that they were written: A. J. Macdonald, *Lanfranc, A Study of his Life, Work & Writing* (Oxford University Press, 1926), Margaret Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec* (Clarendon Press, 1978), and; Herbert Edward John Cowdrey, *Lanfranc. Scholar, Monk, and Archbishop* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

[99] See Cowdrey, *Lanfranc,* esp. chapter eleven.

Lanfranc himself was a celebrated Italian jurist who renounced his secular career in order to become a Benedictine monk. He hailed from Pavia originally, so it is not off-base to assume that his loyalty to the Norman King William stemmed from political affiliation rather than a feeling of patriotism based in common identity. Moreover, Lanfranc's program was informed by his Benedictine education, thus he adhered to the same rules underlying the rhetoric of the "charismatic power" of desert as his forerunners who established themselves in Northern Europe several centuries earlier and may have been the earliest promoters of the feast. These facts might just as easily indicate a royal or ecclesiastic patron for Wace's text, promoters of the Feast of the Conception hailing from a wider variety of social and cultural strata that what has been formerly assumed. Traditionally, Wace criticism has assumed that political tensions surrounding the period of composition of the *Conception* indicate a non-royal patron. The cultural and historical context related above opens wider avenues for the patronage of the text, revealing a varied base of support for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, contrary to what has been formerly assumed.

Conclusion

The task of this chapter was to revisit Wace's *Conception Nostre Dame* alongside the cultural and political context that created the demand for the vernacularizing of religious literature. Our inquiry into the cultural and political context of the text's composition indicates a wider range of possibilities for the identification of a patron than previously believed. The popularity of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, which emerged from a variety of disparate corners—both Pre-Conquest and Post-Conquest, Norman and Anglo-Saxon, ecclesiast and lay—provides for a broader range of suppositions and avenues for speculation concerning a patron than existing Wace scholarship has allowed. This, in turn, leads us to presume that the text's function as a tool for

propaganda of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception was motivated by a variety of factors - the desire to include a larger percentage of the population into the fold of Christianity, the desire to promote a Feast with its origins in southern and eastern Mediterranean and in desert traditions, as well as the desire to legitimize as authentically Christian stories that took place and whose protagonists hailed from historically contested lands that were the object of crusaders' aspirations during the period when this text was composed.

Moreover, the episodes discussed offer a privileged gaze into a number of issues that continue to concern historians and literary historians of the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman period. First, they strongly suggest that local liturgy had the power to impact theology, and not vice-versa, as the preponderance of scholarship has historically maintained. This suggests the resilience and dynamism of a spirit of folk culture: the triumph of a popular over learned religion, a popular religion whose impact on vernacular literature would not be seriously studied until Bakhtin's mid-twentieth century inquiry into the influence of the carnivalesque on the literature of François Rabelais. One might attribute the heightened concern for and attention to the biological process of conception in Wace's text to the incidence of this folk culture, which more readily embraced the biological processes of birth, death, and decay, especially in comparison with the ecclesiastic culture, which sought to sanitize religious texts of these realities in order to better establish the parallel between the human and the divine.

This chapter also provides insight into the Norman, French, and English preoccupation with the desert tradition, and with early traditions of Christianity that originated in the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean. As this analysis demonstrates, the translation of religious texts from Latin to vernacular was accompanied by an attendant concern for forging a connection and staking a claim to historically-contested regions that represent the birthplace and the cradle of

monotheism: in the Levant, in Northern Africa, and especially in Palestine. Wace's choice to render Mary's origin story in the vernacular was neither incidental nor anodyne; by dramatizing this story that became foundational to the medieval Christian tradition, he participated in a brand of rhetoric that sought to establish the English, the French, and the Normans as descendants of the Holy Family, direct heirs to the Christian tradition and righteous inheritors of the territories that Second Crusaders unsuccessfully sought to regain.

Ultimately, this chapter revisited Wace's *Conception* in order to re-conceptualize vernacular hagiography as apocryphal writing: a reworking of the foundational mythology of Christianity that revises constructed narratives of origin in order to insert a diverse array of characters, post-hoc, into the Christian tradition. In the process of rewriting the lives of these women, these texts adapted a variety of sources, combining them into a fundamentally unstable narrative tradition. By interrogating the instability of this tradition, we are able to unmask the role that twelfth-century ideologues played in the effort to reclaim foundational figures from the purview of ecclesiasts and to reconcile literary texts with the need to appeal to a changing vernacular audience.

Wace's construction of the origin story of the Virgin Mary is of particular interest because the development of Mary's cult in twelfth-century Normandy would have a profound influence on its subsequent development throughout Western Europe in the centuries to follow. The writing of her body is the site of contestation, where debates over purity, virginity and the nature of the virtuous female Christian subject would be played out for an entire millennium. By interrogating the roots of Mary's purity and examining the roots of both the Immaculate Conception and the Incarnation in Wace's text, we gain a more nuanced understanding of the stakes of this debate as it played out in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER TWO

Margaret of Antioch and Catherine of Alexandria: Crusader State Patrons

Alongside the cult of the Virgin Mary, two additional cults of Late Antique female martyrs enjoyed widespread popularity during the course of the western European Middle Ages, and this popularity peaked over the course of the twelfth-century in Normandy and Norman England: these were the cult of Saint Margaret of Antioch and the cult of Saint Catherine of Alexandria. In contrast to the popular saints whose cults were indigenous to the European mainland, each of these saints hailed from a city on a route to Jerusalem: Antioch and Alexandria. Each city had political, commercial, and cultural significance for the crusading cause. Moreover, each saint became celebrated for her specificity as a woman, transformed over the course of the twelfth century to the patroness of birthing mothers (Margaret) and breastfeeding mothers (Catherine). Their cults were textually anchored in two vernacular lives at issue in this chapter: Wace's *Vie de sainte Marguerite* (1135-1140)[100] and Clemence of Barking's *Vie de sainte Catherine* (c. 1170-1200).[101]

These texts, arising from cults borne north and west from their origins in Antioch and Alexandria, foreground the intercessory powers of women from the south and east of the Mediterranean. Their profiles were imported into the western European liturgy and they became the patron saints of a variety of causes, acceding to the most powerful positions among the High Medieval pantheon. Considering the repeated emphasis on the origins of these women in Antioch

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[100] *Wace, The Hagiographical Works: The* Conception Nostre Dame *and the Lives of St Margaret and St Nicholas*, ed. Jean Blacker, Glyn S. Burgess and Amy V. Ogden (Brill, 2013), and Wace, *Vie de sainte Marguerite,* ed. Hans-Erich Keller (Niemeyer, 1990).

[101] See "Les vies de sainte Catherine d'Alexandrie," ed. E.C. Fawtier-Jones, *Romania* 58 (1932): 206-17, and *The Life of St. Catherine*, ed. William MacBain (Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1964).

and in Alexandria, the question arises: what work does the south-eastern Mediterranean patroness perform for the twelfth-century (Anglo-)Norman audience? The task of this chapter is to unwind the nexus of alterity and gender that threads through the twelfth-century vernacular hagiography on the lives of Saint Margaret of Antioch and Saint Catherine of Alexandria, and to determine the extent to which the texts establish their intercessory powers as a function of this alterity.

In order to do this, I first trace the genesis of their legends from Latin sources, and then situate the vernacular versions in their social, cultural, and geo-political contexts. This allows me to assess the precise way in which twelfth-century vernacular literature on the lives of saints reflects the changing social, cultural, and geo-political landscape, particularly as it concerns questions of gender, and the contexts of pilgrimage and crusade.

Like Wace's *Conception Nostre Dame,* the lives of Saint Margaret of Antioch and Saint Catherine of Alexandria perform two key tasks: (1) they counter the ecclesiastic perspective on womanhood by offering a more complicated and nuanced version of female sainthood than their Latin sources, and; (2) they seek to situate Anglo-Normans on a continuum that begins with the earliest Christian martyrs in order to establish the legitimacy of western Europeans as inheritors of a tradition anchored in historically-contested territories of the Holy Land. Thus, the vernacularization of these texts is tied to the political and social framework of including a wider percentage of the western European population into the fold of Christianity by providing patronesses that reflect their lived experiences. The rewriting of these texts is also tied to the call to the conquest of the Holy Land through Crusade, because it forges an ideological space that posits a privileged connection between the Anglo-Norman readership, increasingly female and lay, and the Late Antique virgin martyrs from the land across the Mediterranean.

The lives of Saint Margaret of Antioch and Saint Catherine of Alexandria are further united through the themes of virginity and martyrdom. In the insistence on their virginal purity, both lives resemble the life of the Virgin Mary and its elevation of virginity as the supreme Christian virtue.[102] The context of martyrdom, on the other hand, situates both figures within the framework of *imitatio Christi,* the imitation of Christ's passion that elevates the individual to sainthood by virtue of her likeness to Christ.[103] During the course of the last few decades, secondary literature on Saint Margaret and Saint Catherine has tended to focus on the gendered nature of their martyrdom.[104] Comparative literature on the lives of martyred virgin saints seeks to interpret these texts through the lens of misogyny.[105] Yet this torture paradoxically has an empowering function; bodily suffers allow the saint to participate in *imitatio Christi,* and to articulate power through

[102] See Maud Burnett McInerney, "Catherine and Margaret: Vernacular Virgins and the Golden Legend" in *Eloquent Virgins from Thecla to Joan of Arc* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2003): 165-193, and Jane Cartwright, "Dead Virgins: Feminine Sanctity in Medieval Wales" in *Medium Ævum* 71, no. 1 (2002): 1–28.

[103] The phenomenon of *imitatio Christi* is well-documented in saints' lives, especially by Brigitte Cazelles (see below).

[104] In *Lady as Saint* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), Brigitte Cazelles insists that hagiography is marked by gender distinction, one that "entails a treatment of the heroine's body that has no equivalent in the case of a holy hero," 81. Kathryn Gravdal, in *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) claims that in hagiography, torture scenes open up a licit space, permitting the audience to enjoy the sexual language and contemplate the naked female body. At the same time, these torture scenes place the blame for masculine desire on the seductive powers of the female body. Simon Gaunt, in *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) concurs, claiming that the universal subtext of female saints' lives is forced sex, in other words rape.

[105] Gail Ashton, in *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint* (Routledge, 2000) insists that the prevailing tendency in Old English hagiography is to make virgins "powerless mirror images of patriarchal assumption," "patriarchal dolls" who ventriloquize predominantly masculine concerns. Karen Winstead, in *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Cornell University Press, 1997) offers that hagiographies invite radical interpretations in specific contexts, but the desire to read a resistant subject into these texts amounts to wishful thinking, a rhetorical move that downplays their patriarchal context.

victimhood.[106] It allows medieval women to create meaning and exercise agency in the face of the unknown.[107] In the cases of Margaret and Catherine, the narratives of their lives and deaths provide spiritual context for the highly unpredictable experiences of childbirth and childrearing. Thus, torture and martyrdom reflect the lived experiences of medieval women who had to contend with difficult—potentially fatal—sufferings specific to their biology. The vernacular tradition elevates women to a position of emulation and veneration that is useful to laywomen seeking to make sense of these experiences within a Christian context.

In addition to examining these questions, the study ultimately seeks to assess the importance of martyrdom to the context of pilgrimage and crusade. Why is the female virgin martyr the ideal ideological vehicle to advance the expansion of Christianity in medieval Norman England and Normandy? What is it in particular about the telling of her violent torture and theatrically gruesome death that suits the project of Christianization? As mentioned, torture and martyrdom reflect the lived experiences of medieval women who had to contend with difficulty, potentially fatal processes specific to their biological gender, and the perils associated with childbirth and breastfeeding if not accomplished appropriately. In addition, martyrdom renders the female voice more powerful, imbuing it with moral authority.[108]

Finally, regarding both lives, I focus on the fact that the vernacular tradition not only elevates women to a position of emulation and veneration, but it focuses specifically on women

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[106] See Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (Columbia University Press, 2004).

[107] See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

[108] See Elizabeth Dolly Arvai Weber, *The Power of Speech: Models of Female Martyrdom in Medieval and Early Modern French Literature*, Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1994.

from across the Mediterranean: from Antioch and Alexandria, cities that are situated on crusader routes to the Holy Land and cities that were important outposts of the bourgeoning Christian empire in the East. As young noble women who resist the sexual advances of Roman officials and who assert the righteousness of their religion in the face of torture in the name of paganism, Margaret and Catherine serve as convenient ideological vehicles for crusade apologetics. They assist in the socio-political project of the consolidation of Anglo-Norman identity as the righteous combatants in a war of religion. Though the translation of hagiography to vernacular does not hold up as crusade propaganda, this analysis aims to demonstrate how its elements function like a proto-Gospel that creates a subliminal apology for conquest.

I begin by addressing Saint Margaret's cult, textually anchored in the twelfth-century vernacular poem by Wace. By addressing the divergences between the vernacular poem and its Latin source, I claim that Wace's text attributes Margaret a dimensionality that makes her recognizable to her new, vernacular audience, able to serve as the patron saint of women in labor. Similarly, in the second part of this chapter, I examine the cult of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, textually anchored in Clemence of Barking's late twelfth-century Anglo-Norman translation of an earlier Vulgate version of the poem. Clemence's inventions and omissions from her source text reveal a heightened concern for the biological specificity of women, this time as breast-feeding mothers. Like Wace through Saint Margaret, Clemence through Saint Catherine expands the intercessory powers of the virgin martyr saint in order to include a wider range of petitioners into the ambit of participatory lay spirituality. Her figure provides representation for a growing percentage of the literate population seeking spiritual comfort for their biologically specific predicaments.

Wace's *Vie de sainte Marguerite*

Wace's *Vie de sainte Margeurite* exists in several manuscripts.[109] Though Wace's life of Margaret purports to report an account of true events from the fourth century, no text from this period survives.[110] The earliest extant text telling the life of Saint Margaret is a Greek manuscript dated to the ninth century. This text, the *Passio a Theotimo* (BHG no. 1165) claims to be a composition by the monk Theotimus, an eyewitness account to the saint's martyrdom. The original version that it purports to draw from remains unknown.[111] Regarding the Latin manuscript tradition, this study considers two Latin translations of the ninth-century Greek *Passio* as the putative sources for Wace's vernacular version: BHL 5303 and 5306.

The same tale is common to both the Latin and vernacular lives of Saint Margaret. According to the legend, the young, beautiful Margaret is the daughter of a pagan priest in Antioch. Her father hates and disinherits her because she fervently worships the Christian God, as her foster mother, who raised her, instructed her to do. She spends her early life tending sheep in the countryside outside of Antioch. One day, a powerful Roman prefect named Olibrius spots Margaret in the fields and attempts to seduce her with the promise of earthly status and comfort. She rejects his offer of marriage and lays claim, instead, to her faith in a Christian God. Olibrius is incensed; he orders her tortured and imprisoned in a cell where she is visited by a dragon, which

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[109] For a detailed study of extant manuscripts, see David Clandfield, *Edition critique des versions anglo-normandes de la vie de Sainte Marguerite d'Antioche*, Dissertation, Université de Paris IV, 1976.

[110] See the final lines of Wace's poem: "E le cors prist Theodimus/En Antioche l'enterra/En un sarqueu que il truva./Cel Theodimus que je di/Marguerite vit et oï;/En la chartre la visita/E pain et eve li porta./Les oreisuns qu'ele diseit/Et les peines qu'ele sofreit/Il meïsmes mist en escrit, Ce que de li oï e vit" (lines 720-730). "Theodimus took the body/And buried it in Antioch,/In a tomb he found there./This Theodimus I am referring to/Saw and heard Margaret;/He visited her in prison/And brought her bread and water./The prayers she uttered/And the suffering she underwent/He himself put into writing/Everything he had heard and seen of her," Blacker et al., 218-221.

[111] Clayton and Magennis, 6.

swallows her. When she prays to God the wooden crucifix in her hand magically expands and the dragon is burst from within. She defends her faith at length to another demon who appears in the cell, and vanquishes him as well. In a final scene of torture at Olibrius' command, a dove descends, converting thousands of pagans in attendance. All of them are martyred for their newfound faith. Olibrius finally orders Margaret beheaded; the executioner hesitates but the young virgin insists that he kill her. A dove issues from her martyred body, which heals faithful supplicants. In keeping with the historically determined function of the virgin martyr, Margaret is proclaimed the patron saint to a host of vulnerable peoples, though the exact nature of these vulnerable people changes between the Latin and vernacular contexts.

Since the story summarized above is common to all Latin versions and the vernacular version in question, it is the variations between Wace's sources and Wace's own poem that will emerge as significant indicators of patterns of Christianization in the discussion at hand. Perhaps most importantly, in Wace's addition, Margaret is proclaimed the patron saint to women in childbirth.[112] This detail contributed considerably to the expansion of her cult in medieval France, and offered Margaret as a desirable figure of veneration and emulation. Ideologically, it welcomes a wider percentage of the population into the fold of Christian representation.

Stylistically, a comparison between BHL 5303 and 5306, and Wace's *Life of Saint Margaret* reveals the gap between clerical and lay culture. Margaret scholarship has consistently observed that the former texts are the definitive products of monastic civilization. These texts, and BHL 5306 in particular, are consciously patterned on the rhetorical and verbal structures of sacred

[112] See Jean-Pierre Albert, "La légende de sainte Marguerite: un mythe maïeutique?" *Razo, Cahiers du Centre d'Etudes Médiévales de l'Université de Nice* 8 (1988): 19-31.

writings, which provided the basis of monastic life.[113] Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis's study of BHL 5306 examines the direct discourse of Margaret's speeches in Latin, remarking on their combination of poetry and psalms and careful balancing of phrase and clause of the collectary.[114] They catalogue the allusions to particular psalms, generally influenced by the language of the psalter, whose phrases in litany-like sequence are reminiscent of these psalms.[115] Margaret's first speech is a tissue of psalm and other biblical quotations, recollections, and Biblical images of animals.[116] In her second prayer, Clayton and Maggenis demonstrate how Margaret expresses herself by means of reference to Psalms and by a constant flow of allusions to these verses and to the name of God.[117] Wace's vernacular, by contrast, is structurally simpler; he forgoes rhetorically or stylistically patterning her speeches on Biblical text in favor of the octosyllabic couplet, which restricts his range but makes his writing more accessible to a lay audience and easier to remember for spoken performances.

Though hagiologists diverge on their observations regarding the variations between Wace's text and his sources, they generally agree that the vernacularizing of the life of Margaret offers a model tailored to a new community of faithful, eager to see their own concerns reflected in the

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[113] See Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 25, and Hugh Magennis, "'Listen Now All and Understand': Adaptation of Hagiographical Material for Vernacular Audiences in the Old English Lives of St. Margaret," *Speculum* 71, no. 1 (1996): 27–42.

[114] See Clayton and Magennis, 25, and Theodor Wolpers, *Die englische Heiligenlegende des Mittelalters: Eine Formgeschichte des Legendenerzählens von der spätantiken lateinischen Tradition bis zur Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts* 10 (Walter de Gruyter, 1964).

[115] Clayton and Magennis., 25.

[116] See *Ibid.*, 31-32, and Jean Leclerq, *The Love of Learning and Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture,* trans. Catherine Misrahi (Fordham University Press, 1974), 79-83.

[117] See Clayton and Magennis, 33.

stories of their spiritual ancestors who hail from a time and a place closer to Christ. Blacker et al. maintain that, more dramatic than the Latin source, Wace's narrative voice departs from the Latin tradition in its emphasis of the realistic details of saint's life.[118] They argue that Wace's version makes the saint more human, God's presence more loving, and the narrative more coherent. It is the new emphasis on the relationships within the text and between the text and the audience that vernacularizes the material, "celebrating a community of faithful rather than reinforcing hierarchical distinctions."[119]

Le Saux concurs, adding that Wace eliminates the "judicial realism" of the *Passio* and substitutes a different narrative logic, one that stresses the saint's interior progression, making direct discourse more dramatic and less didactic.[120] Marilynn Desmond emphasizes Wace's efforts to turn type characters into individuals by alluding to their interior experiences.[121] Laurie Postelwate calls attention to the way that the vernacular version presents mystical, loving relationship between bridegroom and bride.[122] She suggests that this language of participatory spirituality would lead, in the centuries to come, to the flowering of lay movements such as Beguinage and to other devotional practices modeled on monastic life. These divergences between the Latin and the vernacular combine to present Wace as a self-conscious author, highly aware of the need to adapt ecclesiast-oriented materials to a vernacular audience.

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[118] See Blacker et al., 157.

[119] *Ibid*., 185.

[120] See Le Saux, 157.

[121] Source.

[122] See Laurie Postlewate, "Vernacular Hagiography and Lay Piety: Two Old French Adaptations of the Life of Saint Margaret of Antioch," in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography* (Binghamton, 1996), 115.

Margaret the Obscure

One curious detail about the prominence of the cult of Saint Margaret in Medieval France and Normandy is that there is no immediate reason why she should have been privileged over the other virgin martyr saints who appeared in the northern European liturgy, having been imported via the Roman Liturgy that Saint Augustine of Canterbury introduced into England at the end of the sixth century.[123] Though the cult of Saint Catherine of Alexandria experienced a similar rise to prominence, the cults of earlier virgin martyrs with a basis in the East never reached popularity that Margaret's cult enjoyed.[124] Which factors might have meaningfully influenced her high medieval popularity?

Unlike many of the Late Antique legendary saints who gained popularity in Europe during the early and high Middle Ages, Saint Margaret of Antioch's rise to prominence is difficult to trace, and is complicated by her conflation with Saint Marina, a saint from the eastern tradition whose defining feature was her male attire, which she donned in order to live secretly in a monastery for men.[125] These features never extended to Margaret, who is distinguished in her iconography by the presence of a dragon and the wooden cross she wields to vanquish the dragon who attempts to destroy her by ingesting her.

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[123] Examples of such saints include Agnes, Agatha, and Cecilia, for example. These legends were introduced into the Anglo-Saxon liturgy and subsequently spread around the region. See Christine Walsh, *The Cult of Saint Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe* (Ashgate, 2007), 98.

[124] Walsh, *The Cult of Saint Katherine,* 98.

[125] On questions of iconography, see Catherine Pearce, "The Cult of St Margaret of Antioch," *Feminist Theology* 6, no. 16 (1997): 70-85; on questions of reception and conflation with Marine, see Wendy R. Larson, "The Role of Patronage and Audience in the Cults of Sts. Margaret and Marina of Antioch" in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women, and Saints in Late Medieval Europe* (Routledge, 2002), 23-40.

Margaret's cult purports to date from the fourth century, but it wasn't until the sixth century that it moved west, where she appeared with different names (Margaret and Marina), with different places of origin (Antioch in Pisidia and Antioch on the Orontes), and on different feast dates.[126] Neither Margaret nor Marina is mentioned in the martyrology of Bede (c. 725-31), and in the Latin Martyrology of Hrabanis Maurus (c. 856) the two figures are conflated. Margaret's appearance in liturgical calendars in Northern France and in England in the ninth and tenth centuries is inconsistent, and her feast date is often interchanged with that of Saint Marina, indicating consistent and ongoing conflation between the two figures.[127] It is not until the late eleventh century, after the Norman conquest, that dedications to Margaret are found in England, and these are only as dependencies to French houses at first. This suggests that her cult was established more firmly on the continent and moved North with the Conquest.[128]

Further evidence, moreover, suggests that Margaret's cult, like the cult of the Immaculate Conception, originated in the eastern church and moved west to Italy, where it had gained a foothold in the centuries preceding its flowering in England and France. In Italy, her cult gained a foothold and developed distinctly western traits, and features that would ground her in the western Church such as Latin *Passio* and relics. Like the Virgin's cult of the Immaculate Conception, Margaret's cult can be traced to Normandy and Norman England through northward movement

[126] See Blacker et al., 158.

[127] For a full discussion of Marina/Margaret on early medieval liturgical calendars, see Clayton and Magennis, 74-5. For a discussion of her cult and iconography in Norman and Byzantine traditions, see Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Le cycle de sainte Marguerite d'Antioche à la cathédrale de Tournai et sa place dans la tradition romane et byzantine* (Académie Royale d'Archéologie de Belgique, 1992).

[128] Clayton and Magennis, 80. On Pre-Conquest Margaret, see Diana Webb, "St Margaret in Kent: Two Eleventh-Century Anecdotes," *Archaeologia Cantiana* (2002): 335-342.

from Rome, via pilgrim and trade routes, and through the circulation of Benedictine monks, on the European continent and through voyage by sea.[129] The relics of Margaret that began to surface in Norman England and Normandy during the second half of the eleventh century have been traced to San Pietro della Valle, a town near Lake Bolsena, in the modern-day province of Viterbo, in central Italy. They were translated there in 908, from an unspecified location in the East.[130] These relics include an unnamed bone of the martyr and a fragment of the wooden cross instrumental in her battle with the devil.[131]

The town of Lake Bolsena comes down as an important pilgrim stop that has been linked with the introduction of the cults of both Christina and Margaret in Pre-Conquest England.[132] Northern European pilgrims to Rome, once they had made the treacherous land voyage through the Alps or arrived by sea in Genoa, took either an easterly route or a westerly route South through the Italian peninsula. The westerly route traced a path down the coast through Bolsena. When Archbishop Sigeric went to room in 990 to receive his pallium, for example, his route took him through Bolsena.[133] In Matthew Paris's map of the westerly route through the Italian peninsula, Bolsena is indicated as a major stopping place on the route between Piacenza and Sutri.[134] The Icelandic Abbot Nikolas of Munkathvera in 1154 and the French King Philip Augustus on his

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[129] See V. Ortenberg, "Archbishop Sigeric's Journey to Rome in 990," *Anglo Saxon England* 19 (1990): 197-246.

[130] See Ortenberg, 201.

[131] See Clayton and Magennis, 82 and Ortenberg, 229.

[132] See Ortenberg, 201

[133] *Ibid.,* 211.

[134] See Debra J. Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages: Continuity and Change* (Boydell Press, 1998), 47-48: "Once across the Alps, there were several routes which could be followed..."

return trip from Jerusalem in 1191 are both reported as having taken this route.[135] Since Lake Bolsena figures prominently in Northern European pilgrim maps from Rome, a variety of promoters might be responsible for the movement of her cult.

The sum of this evidence suggests that the cult of Saint Margaret had its origins closer to the purported geographical location of its setting, and yet there is no evidence of a local cult of Saint Margaret in Antioch on the Orontes of Antioch of Pisidia, nor in the Principality of Antioch prior to the importation of the Norman cult. The absence of any such tradition raises the ongoing problematic and fragile distinction between apocryphal Christian myth and historical reality: had Antioch ever been the birthplace and the site of martyrdom of an historical fourth-century Margaret? Or, more appropriately to the purposes of this study, would the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman audience have been meant to believe in the historical reality of Margaret's existence? The presence of her relics in Norman churches beginning in the eleventh century reveals an affirmative answer to this question.

Once it was given a physical existence in the service of popular adoration in the form of a relic, the cult of Saint Margaret developed a textual existence for popular adoration in the form of a vernacular hagiography. Between 1135 and 1150, Wace penned the first vernacular life, rendering Margaret accessible to a wider Anglo-Norman audience. The details of Wace's life and education have been discussed in the previous chapter. It suffices to recall that he was a *clerc-lisant* at the Cathedral in Bayeux, an arbiter between two dissimilar cultural groups, the Latin

[135] See Erich Christian Werlauff, *Symbolae ad geographiam medii aevi, ex monumentis islandicis* (Librariae Gyldendalianae in commissis, 1821), 20, and Francis Pearce Magoun Jr, "The Italian Itinerary of Philip II (Phillippe Auguste) in the Year 1191," *Speculum* 17 (1942): 367-376, esp. page 369; also by the same author, "The Rome of Two Northern Pilgrims: Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury and Abbot Nikolaus of Munkathvera," *Harvard Theological Review* 33 (1940): 267-289; and "The Pilgrim Diary of Nikolaus of Munkathvera: The Road to Rome," *Medieval Studies* 6 (1944): 314-354.

ecclesiast and the vernacular lay. The question of how Wace adapted his text to appeal to a vernacular audience will be addressed in the sections that follow.

The Antioch Appeal

Turning to the content of Wace's text, the historic contexts of pilgrimage and crusade indicate that Margaret's city of birth, Antioch, facilitated her popularity in twelfth-century Normandy. Wace writes:

> De grant gent fu emparentee
>
> En Antioche dunt fu nee. 20
>
> Ses peres ert bien gentils om,
>
> Theodosïus aveit num.
>
> She was from a noble family/In Antioch, where she was born./Her father was a most noble man./And his name was Theodosius.[136]

Later, when questioned by Olybrius, she articulates this heritage in her own words:

> Quant devant lui fu amenee:
>
> 'De quelle gent,' dit il, 'fus nee?'
>
> Cele respont: 'De franche gent.
>
> D'Antioche sunt mi parent.' 132
>
> When she was brought before him, he said:/"Of what people were you born?" She replied: "Of a noble family;/My parents are from Antioch."[137]

By anchoring his heroin in the city of Antioch, Wace was invoking a multivalent term, one that carried great political, cultural, and spiritual significance in twelfth-century royal and ecclesiastic

[136] Blacker et al., page.

[137] *Ibid.,* 192-193.

circles, conjuring several different connotations that were current in Anglo-Norman discourse.[138] Semantically, "Antioch" carried weight for its history as an early center of Judaism and Christianity, although it might refer to three different geographic locations: Antioch of Pisidia, Antioch on the Orontes, or the Crusader State of Antioch. Antioch of Pisidia refers to a city located in the current-day lakes region of Turkey. In the Old Testament, it is the site of commemoration of the proto-martyrdom of the Maccabees.[139] In the New Testament, the city is referenced in several different books; it is where Paul the Apostle is reported to have traveled with Barnabas, and where he is said to have preached important sermons before he was eventually expelled.[140] A fourteenth-century Anglo-Norman Bible conserves references to this "Antioche" and testifies to the importance of the New Testament and in particular the Acts of the Apostles, its widespread dissemination in this place and at this time.[141]

These Biblical resonances testify to the medieval understanding of Antioch as a site that was linked with ancient instances of proto-martyrdom. It would also have been understood as an early mission city in the Roman Empire, and one that was resistant to early attempts at evangelism:

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[138] For a study of Antioch's portrait during the Norman and Byzantine periods, see Catherine Saliou, "Mesurer le paradis. Contribution au portrait d'Antioche aux époques romaine et protobyzantine," in *Mégapoles méditerranéennes*, *actes du colloque de Rome (1996),* ed. Cl. Nicolet, R. Ilbert, and J-Ch. Depaule (2000), 802-819.

[139] A chapel in Antioch was dedicated to the seven Maccabee brothers and their mother, who were tortured under Antiochus Epiphanes. Their martyrdom was revered both in Judaism and Christianity, cf. Julian Obermann, "The Sepulcher of the Maccabean Martyrs," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 50, no. 4 (1931): 250-265. Obermann explains at length why Antioch could not be the place where the relics were actually buried, but since it is where the trial took place, Jews and later Christians built a chapel for Maccabean martyrs there, as well as in Rome and Jerusalem. He adds that the martyrs' cult began to be acclaimed in Christianity more than in Judaism. I am grateful to Ani Honarchian for calling my attention to this source.

[140] See Acts of the Apostles 13:13-52, and 2 Timothy 3:11.

[141] Edition and Study (Mostly Linguistic) of a Section of an Anglo-Norman Translation of the Bible (14th Century): 'The Acts of the Apostles' in MSS B.N. fr. 1 and 9562, ed. N.E. Ratcliff, Dissertation, St Andrews, 1955.

a pagan city, perhaps, where Early Christians were at risk, an ideal setting for the martyrdom of an Early Christian virgin like Margaret. Pisidian Antioch waned in importance and by the sixth century AD it had lost its role as a strategic outpost and center of trade. Thus, by the Late Antique period, it had relinquished its status as a center at the crossroads of Mediterranean, Aegean, and Central Anatolian commerce and trade.

Antioch of the Orontes, or Syrian Antioch, on the other hand, was a point of radiation of the Early Christian Church; by the fourth and fifth centuries, it had become the cultural, political, and military capital of the Near East, as well as the focal point and cradle of Eastern Christianity.[142] Founded in 300 BC, Antioch was located on the Orontes River in modern-day Turkey, about thirty kilometers inland from the Mediterranean Sea. Conquered by the Rushidan Caliphate in 637, it was recaptured by the Byzantine Empire in 969, changed hands once more before the First Crusade, and was in the possession of the Seljuk Turks in 1084.[143] The Crusader's Siege of Antioch resulted in the Christian capture of the city in 1098. Subsequently, the First Crusade opened Antioch to western trade, reducing the importance of Constantinople as a great emporium and center of wares, and granting western traders access to overland trade with the Orient via the traditional silk route used since the days of the Roman Empire.[144]

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[142] See Charles R. Morey, "The Excavation of Antioch-on-the-Orontes," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 76, no. 5 (1936): 637–651, esp. page 643: "It discloses a city-plan which in its ensemble is the Roman, not the Hellenistic city, and indeed the objective of this expedition must ever by mainly the reconstruction of Antioch as Antioch the Great, the capital of the Near East in late antiquity, ranking with Rome, Constantinople, and Alexandria was one of the four metropoles of Diocletian's reorganized empire."

[143] See John Hugo Wolfgang Gideon Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford University Press, 1972) and Claude Cahen, *La Syrie du Nord à l'époque des croisades et la principauté franque d'Antioche* (Presses de l'Ifpo, 2014).

[144] See Gerald W. Day, "The Impact of the Third Crusade upon Trade with the Levant," *The International History Review* 3, no. 2 (1981): 159, and Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (Bloomsbury, 2015).

The participation of the Norman aristocracy in the Siege of Antioch, by the end of the twelfth century, had become legendary. Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy (c. 1051-1134), son of William the Conqueror (1028-1087), was a noted participant in the military effort. He was stationed at the western flank of the city wall during the nine-month siege, which culminated in the Battle of Antioch and the Muslim retreat. Robert's rivalry with his brother King Henry (c. 1068-1135), one of the three Henry's with whom Wace claimed personal acquaintance, would result in Normandy's absorption into England at Robert's death in 1134. Richard Curthose, Robert's son, was a prominent figure in the Anglo-Norman political landscape at the time of Wace's composition of the Life of Margaret. Thus, during the years when Wace was composing his *Vie de sainte Marguerite,* the reigning nobles had direct political and ideological ties to the city of Antioch. They might have been motivated to keep the legend of the successful siege alive in popular memory by commissioning the life of a Christian saint with ties to the city that their forerunners conquered.

At various points during the course of the twelfth century, the Principality of Antioch was a crusader state with its capital at Antioch on the Orontes, nestled between the County of Tripoli to the South, Edessa to the East, and the Principality of Armenian Cilicia to the Northwest, its western shores bordering the northeastern edge of the Mediterranean. Following the Christian Victory, Antioch was ruled by Bohemond I Prince of Taranto (c. 1054), who declared himself Prince in 1098 and reigned until his death in 1111. During the twelfth century, and especially during the period between the First and Second Crusades, the principality was settled by Italian Normans. The Principality of Antioch suffered territorial losses at its eastern border during the Second Crusade when Edessa was recaptured by the Seljuk Turks and ultimately fell under the protection of Byzantine Christianity. The sum of this military history creates a confused picture of

a highly-disputed territory that changed hands continually over the course of the twelfth century. This confusion must have played into the Anglo-Norman desire to anchor western Christianity in Antioch by championing a life of the saintly figure of Margaret.

Although Margaret's life is conspicuously devoid of any mention of crusade, Old French literature engages explicitly with the capture of Antioch. The Christian victory at Antioch during the First Crusade quickly became legendary and was celebrated in a twelfth-century *chanson de geste, La Chanson d'Antioche*.[145] This 9,000-line poem in Alexandrine stanzas was said to have been composed by an eyewitness to the siege, Richard le Pèlerin (Richard the Pilgrim), a North French or Flemish jongleur who began composing the poem on site; the oldest known version, however, is dated to 1180. There is nonetheless reason to believe that the text was circulated in lost or oral versions throughout the course of the twelfth century and that it contributed to the representation of the Holy Land in French vernacular culture.[146] The *Chanson* rendered Antioch a culturally salient location, a metonym for martyrdom, for the struggle of crusade, and for the victory of righteous Christian forces and their recapture of the Holy Land.[147] Margaret's title "of Antioch" imbued her figure and her cult with this importance, and provided a much-sought-after link between the Medieval Norman aristocracy and the fabled Late Antique aristocracy of Antioch.

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[145] For other versions of the siege, see Jean Flori, *Chroniqueurs et propagandistes: introduction critique aux sources de la première croisade* 98 (Droz, 2010). For the *chanson,* see Lewis AM Sumberg, *La Chanson d'Antioche: étude historique et littéraire, une chronique en vers français de la première croisade par le Pèlerin Richard* (Picard, 1968); Suzanne Duparc-Quioc, *La chanson d'Antioche* 1 (P. Geuthner, 1976), and; Robert Francis Cook. *Chanson d'Antioche, chanson de geste: Le Cycle de la Croisade est-il épique?* 2 (John Benjamins Publishing, 1980).

[146] See Pascal Péron, *Les croisés en Orient: la représentation de l'espace dans le cycle de la croisade* 86 (Honoré Champion, 2008).

[147] See John Kirtland Wright, *The Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades: A Study in the History of Medieval Science and Tradition in Western Europe* 15 (American Geographical Society, 1925).

Pearls on Crusade

Further semantic clues link the figure of Saint Margaret with the context of crusade. The opening lines of Wace's life of Saint Margaret liken Margaret to the etymological root of her name: a pearl. These introductory lines also provide a convenient introduction into Wace's approach to language, one in which words and names are laden with hidden meanings that reveal the truth of their material nature. The operative term in the passage below occurs in line thirteen, in which Wace makes a wordplay on Margaret's name, using the Anglo-Norman word *margerie* to compare her to a "pearl:"[148]

Assez fu gente et assez bele,
Marguerite ot num la pucele.
Ce m'est avid que par raisun
Dut ele bien aveir cel num,
Que bien resemble margerie
De sa belté et de sa vie:
Cum el fu geme precïuse,
Ancele Deu fu et espuse;
Voluntiers e bien le garda
Sa chasteé qu'el li voa.

The maiden was very noble and beautiful/And her name was Margaret./It appears to me that by right/She should have this name,/For she was just like a pearl/In her beauty and in her life./As she was a precious gem,/She was God's handmaiden and

[148] In placing particular emphasis on the whiteness of the pearl, the poem enacts an unapologetically Eurocentric view of feminine beauty.

> spouse;/Willingly and well did she preserve for him/Her chastity, which she pledged to him.[149]

The term *margerie* echoes the name *Marguerite* from line ten, drawing both aesthetic and moral parallels between Margaret and a pearl stone. In twelfth-century Norman England and Normandy, both *margerie* and *perle* were in usage as Anglo-Norman words for pearl, defined as any shelly concretion formed within a mollusk. *Perle,* however, could be used to describe any generic bead, whereas *margerie* was derived from the Latin *margarita,* itself a derivative of the Ancient Greek *margarítēs,* and was in usage in medieval Biblical and lapidary texts.[150] The choice of this more sophisticated term not only draws a linguistic parallel between the mollusk stone and the young maiden Margaret, but also brings with it associations from the Bible and from the medieval bestiary and lapidary traditions.

In referring to Margaret as a pearl, Wace is neither extrapolating nor inventing beyond his source text. The parallel between Margaret and the pearl is a direct translation of the Latin source, which places emphasis on Margaret's physical beauty and alludes to the rare and pleasing properties of the mollusk stone. Nor is he venturing beyond the tropes common to hagiography, considering that earlier vernacular lives such as the life of Saint Foy and the life of Saint Alexis compare their subjects with precious stones.[151] Nonetheless, the semiotic function of the pearl in

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[149] Blacker et al., 188-189.

[150] The Anglo-Norman dictionary lists five instances of biblical reference to pearls, each a variation of *margerie* (*margaries/margariz* being the principal variations), most notably Solomon 7685, "Ne volt geter les margeries entre les porcs."

[151] *La vie de saint Alexis: poème du XI siècle,* ed. Gaston de Paris (E. Champion, 1925), and Simon de Walsingham, *La vie de sainte Foy,* ed. and trans. Delbert W. Russell (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012).

medieval discourse invites an investigation into its changing symbolic role, and begs the question: what were the connotations of the pearl to the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman mind?

The presence of pearls in relics from the period give partial insight into the symbolic dimension of this stone. Historically, pearls had served a religious importance in terms of their ornamental role in clothing and paraphernalia related to regalia, as well as in manuscript and book decoration in western Europe, since the seventh century. These pearls, like the cult of Saint Margaret, were imported to the Christian West from an exotic East during Late Antiquity.[152] The Merovingian King Dagobert imported large, lustrous pearls from Persia and India in order to rival the rich costumes and decorations of oriental monarchs.[153] The use of gems for enriching regalia, vestments, and reliquaries in Europe advanced greatly during the Carolingian era, when artisans began using pearls in the bindings of missals and chronicles.[154] After the death of Charlemagne, the Normans pillaged palaces and churches and carried away plunder. Unanswered questions remain concerning the role of pearls in Norman decoration, vestments, sacred manuscripts, and regalia, but evidence suggests that these stolen gems played a role in the formation, on an aesthetic level, of the Norman identity and their claim to both religious and political legitimacy.[155]

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[152] Pearls of small size and fair luster were collected in rivers of Scotland, Ireland, and France, and in the headwaters of the Danube, but they were neither as beautiful nor as large as the eastern ones. See George Frederick Kunz and Charles Hugh Stevenson, *The Book of the Pearl: The History, Art, Science, and Industry of the Queen of Gems* (The Century Co. 1908), 17-18.

[153] See Kunz and Stevenson, *The Book of the Pearl,* 21. The link between sainthood and precious stones gained a foothold during Dagobert's reign, as his skillful jeweler Eligius (588-658) eventually became one of the most popular saints in Gaul (St. Eloi), 16.

[154] *Ibid*., 16-17. The most famous example is the Ashburnham manuscript of the Four Gospels, created between 896 and 899 by order of Emperor Arnulf of the Carolingian dynasty. All 98 pearls appear to be freshwater, obtained from the rivers of Europe.

[155] *Ibid*., 17-18.

Furthermore, the lapidary tradition plays a key role in linking the medicinal folk tradition with the symbol of the pearl. Lapidaries are texts that give information about the values and virtues of precious and semi-precious stones. A genre with roots in Antiquity, such texts proliferated during the Middle Ages, in conjunction with bestiaries and herbal encyclopedias, as ways of imbuing Christian logic and meaning on the natural world.[156] Traditionally, pearls do not rank high in the lapidary tradition, and this is because the pearl does not figure among the stones that form the heavenly city in the Book of Revelations.[157] The first verse lapidaries, the *De lapidibus preciosis* of Thomas of Cantimpré, and John Mandeville's *Lapidiare en francoys* (Lapidary in French) as well as the compiler of the Peterborough Lapidary grant pearls an elevated status.[158] Latin and lost vernacular lapidaries are thought to be among the sources for these texts, as are the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville, a major source for lapidaries and bestiaries in the Middle Ages.

These texts describe how the oyster produces pearls. At dawn the oyster takes in the rays of the stars, the moon, and the sun, and then swallows dew. The mysterious chemical process brought about by the fusion of these celestial rays with the pure morning dew produces the pearl. The moral allegory ascribed to the pearl by Philippe de Thaon is that the pearl represents Mary,

[156] See Valérie Gontero-Lauze, *Les pierres du Moyen Age: anthologie des lapidaires médiévaux* (Belles lettres, 2016), and Richard A. Beinert, *Windows on a Medieval World: Medieval Piety as Reflected in the Lapidary Literature of the Middle Ages*. M.A. Thesis: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2003, and Danièle James-Raoul, "L'Écriture des lapidaires français du Moyen Age," in *Pierre dans le monde médiéval.,* ed. Danièle James-Raoul and Claude Thomasset (2010), 101-132.

[157] See Francis Young, *A Medieval Book of Magical Stones: The Peterborough Lapidary* (Texts in Early Modern Magic, 2016), xvii and Tony Davenport, "Jewels and Jewellers in 'Pearl,'"*The Review of English Studies, New Series* 59, no. 241 (2008): 519.

[158] See Young, xvi. Cantimpré's text is contained in Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS. lat. 14429, Folio 117v. (Northern France ca. 1250-1260).

who received the word of God—the celestial rays—in the purity of her womb.[159] The peculiarity of the shell of the oyster, which opens and closes without a break, also signifies Mary, who conceived and gave birth in like manner. Thaon further indicates that drinking a mixture of pearl and dew will cure any disease, but cannot reverse death. From the ninth through the fourteenth century, popular tradition attributed gems, and especially pearls, with natural medicinal properties, on par with celestial bodies for the role they played in whimsical remedies. This knowledge is thought to be Arabic in origin.[160] Balms prepared from reducing precious gems to a fine powder were recommended for feminine illnesses and principally for anything concerning pregnancy, childbirth, and delivery.

Was this medical knowledge extant and in practice in twelfth-century Anglo-Norman society? And would the poet Wace have had access to this knowledge? The medical knowledge was compiled by the thirteenth-century Albert the Great, a scientist-monk born in Swabia, who borrowed natural remedies from Antiquity and transmitted his knowledge around medieval Europe from his headquarters in Place Maubert in Paris.[161] His work is echoed by Olivier de Serres (1539-1619), an agronomist from the Ardèche region, who compiled early traditions and had a profound influence on popular pharmacology.[162] The work of both writers advances the theory that the symbol of the pearl represented healing of female-specific maladies in the Middle Ages in Western

[159] See Philippe de Thaon, *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, ed. Joan Evans and Paul Studer (É. Champion, 1924), and by the same author, *Le Bestiaire De Philippe De Thaün: Texte Critique Pub. Avec Introduction, Notes Et Glossaire*, ed. Emmanuel Walberg (H. Möller, 1970).

[160] Kunz and Stevenson, 17. See Paula De Vos, "The 'Prince of Medicine': Yūḥannā Ibn Māsawayh and the Foundations of the Western Pharmaceutical Tradition," in *Isis* 104, no. 4 (2013): 667–712.

[161] See Pierre Ribon, *Guérisseurs et remèdes populaires dans la France ancienne: Vivarais, Cévennes* (Éditions Horvath, 1983), 40, and Albert le Grand, *Grand Albert et petit Albert* (Albin Michel, 1981).

[162] See Olivier de Serres., *Le Théâtre d'Agriculture et Mesnage des Champs* I (Dardelet, 1973).

Europe. Folk wisdom is echoed in the beliefs of the twelfth-century aristocracy, and in particular of those aristocrats destined for Crusade. In the twelfth century, returning crusaders spread a fondness for pearls in personal decoration, which they borrowed from their exposure to Moorish craftsmanship. Pearls were incorporated into western European vestments as a result of this contact with the East.

Moreover, pearls played a role on the crusading battlefield. Princes and nobles would carry these stones with them to battle, in order to always have their valuables in their possession. Just as midwives believed a compote of pearls could ail birth-related illness, crusaders attributed mysterious, curative powers to these stones and carried them to treat potential battle wounds.[163] In addition to their medical effects, stones like pearls had symbolic properties suited to warfare. Instruments of war were extremely sensitive to successive changes in taste and, in both their ornament and in their integral forms, they were ascribed mythical significance for the military prowess they bestowed on the bearer.[164] During the Middle Ages, battle weapons might be decorated with precious and semi-precious stones such as pearls in order to bestow a sense of power on the bearer.

By adapting the life of Saint Margaret, a text whose opening lines place special emphasis on the comparison between Margaret and a pearl, Wace positions Margaret as an intercessor for problems related to childbirth to a wider fold of the Anglo-Norman population. A product of the distant and exotic East, the pearl is also tied to Crusader history. Thus, Wace's semantic move invites parallel with both the lapidary and crusader contexts; ultimately, it provides insight into

[163] Kunz and Stevenson, 18-21.

[164] See James G. Mann, "The Influence of Art on Instruments of War," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 89, no. 4599 (1941): 742.

Margaret's appeal to a vernacular audience as an intercessor for women in labor, and as a patron of crusade.

Margaret as Solomon

Embedded in Wace's life of Saint Margaret is a layer of Biblical mythology that links the High Medieval hagiography with the context of crusade, primarily by linking Margaret with the Old Testament King Solomon. After Margaret vanquishes the dragon in her prison cell, another demon appears and explains his genealogy. He reveals that he and his kin were confined to a vessel by the Old Testament King Solomon, only later to be released by an invading army from Babylon:

> [Mais] un vaissel pren, si me lie
> Cum Salamuns fist en sa vie;
> Dedenz un vaissel nus enclost.
> Puis vint de Babiluine un ost
> Qui Jherusalem essilla
> E le vaissel trestut brisa;
> Truver quida argent et or
> Od alcun grant riche tresor.
> Quant nus de cel vaissel eissimes,
> Par tut le munt nus espandimes.
>
> But takes a vessel and tie me up,/As Solomon did in his lifetime; He enclosed us in a vessel./Then there came an army from Babylon/That destroyed Jerusalem/And shattered the vessel;/They expected to find silver and gold/Along with some huge amount of treasure./When we emerged from this vessel,/We spread out over the entire world.[165]

[165] Blacker et al., 209-210.

The operative terms in this quotation are "Salamuns," (Solomon, line 488), "Babiluine," (Babylon, line 490), and "Jherusalem" (Jerusalem, line 491). These references forge a thematic parallel between Saint Margaret and the Biblical/apocryphal tamer of demons and founder of the First Temple in Jerusalem, King Solomon.

The figure of King Solomon was a multivalent symbol throughout the course of the Middle Ages in Western Europe. His biography was a composite of sources assembled from historical books of the scripture (1 Kings), books of the scripture that were believed to have been written by him (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs), and centuries of apocryphal embellishment. He was associated with wisdom,[166] judgment,[167] the construction of the Temple at Jerusalem,[168] his marriage to the daughter of the Pharaoh,[169] and the composition of the aforementioned books of the scripture. The episode at issue here—the taming of the demons—is not included the Old Testament; it is rather interdependent Jewish, Islamic, and Christian apocryphal traditions that reference King Solomon's reputed power over demons.[170] It is interesting to note that the demon explicitly references Solomon's links with the city of Jerusalem, which conjures his construction of the Temple in Jerusalem (the First Temple), a sacred site and symbol of the Christian victory of the First Crusade.

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[166] 1 Kings 3:4-15.

[167] 1 Kings 3:16-28.

[168] 1 Kings 5-8.

[169] 1 Kings 9:16, 24.

[170] See Mishtooni Bose, "From Exegesis to Appropriation: The Medieval Solomon," *Medium Ævum* 65, no. 2 (1996), "The anointing of Solomon as king, his building of the Temple, and his association with the powers of exorcism resonated ubiquitously, durably, and far more powerfully throughout medieval ecclesiology and notions of kingship than the incidental subversions of his prowess in Latin and vernacular literature," 190.

Indeed, throughout most of the twelfth century, Solomon's Temple came to represent western Christianity's triumph over Muslim occupation of the Holy Land. In the wake of the First Crusade, the physical space of Jerusalem was transformed by Christians, who rendered memories associated with the city into monuments.[171] Biblical mythology was resurrected and existing structures were appropriated by crusading forces in order to bring Scriptural history to life. In 1099, the Holy Sepulcher complex was built on the western hill; when walking out of the Holy Sepulcher, one could see the destroyed Temple area with its pagan remains facing Herod's western wall, already associated with King Solomon.[172] The al-Aqsa mosque, constructed in the seventh century, was captured by the Crusaders in the same year and renamed the Temple of Solomon. This structure served as headquarters for the Knights Templar for most of the twelfth century, until the city fell to invading armies in 1187.[173] The figure of Solomon thus played a prominent role in the western European recapture of the city of Jerusalem, and in their desire to refashion this geographical space according to Judeo-Christian mythology. Solomon's name is tied with the foundational moments of the city of Jerusalem; parallels between Solomon and Margaret within the text invite the audience to consider Margaret a proto-Solomon, and her potential to plant roots in the Crusader States for the Christian cause.

Saint Margaret's iconography moreover reinforces her connection with King Solomon. When Margaret wields the cross to vanquish the dragon, she is inscribed in a sacred genealogy of

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[171] See Oleg Grabar, "Space and Holiness in Medieval Jerusalem," *Islamic Studies* 40, no. 3-4 (2001): 686-687.

[172] See Grabar, "Space and Holiness in Medieval Jerusalem," 690.

[173] When Saladin recaptured the city in 1187, he immediately set to restoring the space of the Al-Aqsa mosque, readying it for Friday prayers. See Lee Hancock, *Saladin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem: The Muslim Recapture the Holy Land in AD 1187* (Rosen Publishing Group, 2004).

heroes exalted for the role they played in casting out devils, a foundational act of Judeo-Christian mythology.[174] This gesture is uniquely suited to the iconography of crusade. In twelfth-century western Europe, the act of taking the cross was synonymous with the act of embarking on crusade; ecclesiasts bestowed crusaders with a symbol of the cross, a key element of Margaret's iconography.

In engaging with the discourse surrounding biblical and apocryphal traditions of King Solomon, Wace positions Margaret as the heir to the founding of sacred sites in Jerusalem; he connects Margaret with the Temple of Solomon, a symbol of one of the earliest Christian victories in the First Crusade. In this way, Saint Margaret's cult assumes crusader undertones, and becomes implicated in the call to preserve Jerusalem for Christendom.

The Dragon Episode

The final task of this half of the chapter is to revisit critical perspectives on the most prominent episode in the Margaret legend: the moment when the young saint is ingested by a dragon. Examining the episode in Wace's poem alongside its Latin sources, the inventions and departures from the source texts emerge as significant indicators of vernacular hagiography's function; was the purpose of these text to educate and initiate?

Scholars of hagiography have remained somewhat diffident regarding these texts' requirements for truth. Patrick Geary famously contends that when a chronicler writes of the posthumous glory of a saint, he is not bound by the feeble confines of an historian's rules.[175]

[174] Along with Saint Michael, the archangel who cast Lucifer from heaven, and Saint George of Lydda, a Late Antique saint whose battle with the dragon was legendary in the medieval West.
[175] Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 1978), 16.

Similarly, František Graus, in his seminal study *Volk Herrscher und Heiliger* asserts that hagiographical legends are certainly not "historical works" in the modern sense.[176] Rather, they are literature, and more specifically propaganda literature. We might thus view hagiographers as propagandists who manipulated legends to particular religious or political ends: in this instance, to bring a broader portion of the medieval Anglo-Norman population into the fold of Christianity. I aim to conclude by elaborating the function the miraculous elements of the dragon in Margaret's life, as they pose thorny problems for political and theological claims that rely on the assumption of historicity.

The first departure that lends us insight into these new preoccupations occurs at the moment of Margaret's ingestion by the dragon. Whereas, in the original Latin version, Margaret's consumption and miraculous emergence from the dragon are recounted in earnest, Wace's vernacular stages the episode as follows:

> Le diables la gule uvri,
>
> Tute **a bien prés** transgluti, 336
>
> Mais la croiz qu'ot faite de Crist
>
> Crut el dragun, crever le fist;
>
> Del dragun Marguerite issi
>
> Qui unques nul mal n'i senti. 340
>
> The devil opened its mouth/And **almost** swallowed her entirely/But the cross of Christ she had made/Grew within the dragon and caused it to burst/Margaret, who had not suffered any harm/Emerged from the dragon.[177]

[176] See František Graus, *Volk, herrscher und heiliger im Reich der Merowinger: Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit* (NČSAV, 1965).

[177] See Blacker et al., emphasis mine.

Certain commentators have called attention to the fact that Wace's language allows for the possibility that Margaret wasn't entirely swallowed. Jocelyn Price argues that, by repeating the phrase "a bien prés," (line 336) at the moment of ingestion, Wace captures elements of the drama that depends on the dragon's corporeal presence, but avoids claiming that the dragon actually swallows Margaret.[178] Similarly, Wace asserts that Margaret felt no pain and the dragon vanished, leaving no body.

This passage suggests that Wace was interpolating to appeal to his audience, walking a thin line between truth and illusion in order to avoid weighing in definitively on the corporality of demons, a topic that was hotly debated among theologians during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. He reveals himself as conscious of the need to reconcile the drama of the miracle in the source material with the contemporary demand for truth. The question that presents itself to our modern minds is, would Wace's medieval audience have taken this episode at face value? In other words, can the variations Wace's version reveal to us this element of the undisclosed mentalities of lay society: what are the limits of the miraculous? In which instances are the feats of legendary saints sanctioned as divinely-inspired truth and in which instances are they dismissed as juvenile artifice?

The Vatican weighed in definitively in 1968 when it officially declared Saint Margaret legendary and removed her Feast Day from the Roman Liturgical Calendar. But certain authorities earlier than this, and closer to Wace, had already indicated that Margaret's story bent credulity to its breaking point. In his thirteenth-century compendium of hagiography, *The Golden Legend,* Jacobus de Voragine retells Margaret's life, reporting that his sources consider the dragon episode

[178] See Jocelyn Price, "The Virgin and the Dragon: The Demonology of" Seinte Margarete,"" *Leeds Studies in English* 16 (1985): 337.

spurious and silly ("*apocryphum et frivolum*").[179] No such disclaimer is found in the chapter on Saint Michael or the chapter on Saint George, suggesting that it is the fact of her ingestion by and emergence from the dragon that is objectionable, and not the existence of the dragon it itself. The fact that the Golden Legend, one of the most widely-circulated texts in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, casts doubt on the reality of Margaret's dragon episode testifies to a sense of anxiety over the authenticity of these legends: balancing the desire to tell the miraculous with the need for historical truth.

The question of whether Wace's audience would have taken this episode at face value is complicated by how little is known about the mentalities of the popular classes that would have composed his readership. Modern notions of truth and illusion cannot be imposed on pre-modern societies. Aaron Gurevich, in his study of medieval popular culture, maintains that visions and dreams were by no means attributed to the order of the illusory.[180] Rather, they were considered intrusions of a higher reality into daily life. The border between this world and the next was considered permeable in both directions, but this does not mean that the medieval mind accepted everything indiscriminately, nor that medieval audiences were completely lacking in any critical sense. In fact, discriminating between miracles that were true and miracles that were false was a serious theological exercise.

The second instance at issue leads us away from the episode of the dragon and into a conversation about Margaret's dying prayer. Wace's addition the life is that Margaret is designated

[179] See Jacopus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea: vulgo historio Lombardica dicta ad optimorum librorum fida,* edited by Johann Georg Theodor Grässe (Librariae Arnoldianae, 1850).

[180] See Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception,* trans. János M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

the patron saint to women in childbirth.[181] Immediately prior to her execution, she articulates the following prayer:

> Ne seit ja nez en lur maisun
>
> Enfes se a dreit terme nun; 644
>
> Li enfes sains e entiers seit
>
> Naturalment si cum est deit.
>
> Se feme est en travail d'enfant
>
> E par besuing m'alt reclamant, 648
>
> Bels sire Deus, lor fai aïe
>
> E l'un e l'altre met a vie.
>
> May there never be born in their household/Any child, unless it is at full term./Let the child be haleand hearty/Naturally, as it should be./If a woman is in labour/And calls on me in her hour of need/Fair Lord God, give them help/And preserve both their lives.[182]

This addition contributed considerably to the expansion of her cult in medieval Normandy and Norman England and offered Margaret as a desirable figure of veneration and emulation. Ideologically, it welcomes a wider percentage of the population into the fold of Christian representation. It also leaves contemporary critics to resolve the paradox of how a patron saint of laboring women could be: not only a virgin, but one who adamantly resists all attempts to ensnare her into the system of procreation.

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[181] The link between Saint Margaret and birthing mothers certainly predates Wace's text; see Louis Carolus-Barré, "Un nouveau parchemin amulette et la légende de sainte Marguerite patronne des femmes en couches, communication du 30 mars 1979" in *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 123, no. 2 (1979): 256-275.

[182] Blacker et al, page.

In *Alone of All Her Sex,* Marina Warner writes of the Virgin's status as a remarkable woman, one whose exceptionality proves the rule; similarly, Margaret's repudiation of sex exalts her to a position of honor to the exclusion of all other women.[183] The historical development of Margaret's cult contributes to Christianity as a refined network of symbols in which femininity is focused, at once, on both the virginal and the maternal. In resolution of this paradox, much ink has been spilt to unlock the symbolism in the link between Margaret's dragon and her patronage of women in labor. While some scholars suggest that the dragon represents the mother's body, recalling popular traditions that represent the womb as a reptile,[184] others insists that such a reading would present a faulty logic for the patronage of child birthing, as it would sanction the destruction of the mother. Rather, the dragon must represent the dangers associated with child birth, a punishment for Eve's surrender to fleshly temptation as it is written in Genesis 3:16.[185] The logic of Margaret's role as patron saint of women in labor comes from the shared feminine experience of suffering. Margaret's life actively turns the experience of martyrdom to one of voluntary self-sacrifice by welcoming it. She thus serves as a model of how to sublimate suffering into culturally-sanctioned modes of behavior. Just as Margaret's embrace of physical torment facilitated her ascent into heaven, the laboring woman's pain should be seen as a path to salvation.

The foundational mythology of Christianity is the telling and retelling of the events of the Gospels and the early martyrs whose historicity is assumed and whose exemplary lives and feats

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[183] Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Random House, 1976).

[184] See Jean-Pierre Albert, "La légende de sainte Marguerite: un mythe maïeutique?" and Karen P. Smith, *Transforming Virgins: Margaret of Antioch, Snake Maidens and Medieval Mentalities*, Dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 2000.

[185] See Laurie Postlewate, "Vernacular Hagiography and Lay Piety: Two Old French Adaptations of the Life of Saint Margaret of Antioch." See too, Juliana Dresvina, "The Significance of the Demonic Episode in the Legend of St Margaret of Antioch," *Medium Aevum* 81, no. 2 (2012): 189-209.

are offered for veneration. The repeated retelling of these accounts grants profane figures the status of Gods and establish new values for popular emulation. In translation, this inherited material is reworked to specific thematic ends with a new emphases and new preoccupations. Therefore, texts like Wace's *Vie de sainte Marguerite* resolve the need to establish origin stories as much as they fulfill the imperative to establish new models for human behavior.

In her work on martyrdom in early Christianity, Elizabeth Castelli explains that mythmaking, in a Christian context involved from the beginning the imprinting of explicit theological claims upon the mainstream view of history.[186] This produces a metanarrative of a meaningful, usable past in which the question of "What really happened" becomes replaced by "What meanings are produced" and "What ideological impulses are satisfied." The work of telling and retelling martyrdom becomes tied to a broader Christian project of producing useable stories, regardless of their historicity.

The medieval hagiographies of early Christian martyrs are not concerned with historical accuracy; rather, they make both an ethical demand and lend legitimacy to other forms of power claims: to bring a broader portion of the medieval Anglo-Norman population into the fold of Christianity, or to implement the institution of the Norman liturgy on newly-acquired Anglo-Saxon territories that held fast to their own traditions and institutions. In the lives of virgin martyrs, truth and artifice are interwoven to fill a growing demand for the miraculous from a growing audience of lay society, eager to see its origins reflected in the foundational stories of the Christian tradition.

The Life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria

[186] See Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, esp. the introduction.

The late twelfth-century Anglo-Norman life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria by Clemence of Barking stages the martyrdom of a Late Antique noble virgin from Northern Africa.[187] Before her execution, Catherine pledges her intercessory powers to a host of vulnerable peoples: victims of illness, plague, famine, and inclement weather. After her decapitation, since white milk flows from her neck, and healing oil flows perpetually from her tomb, her patronage becomes adopted by a particular class of vulnerable people: wet-nurses and breastfeeding mothers.

How does the virgin martyr Catherine come to represent a source of intercession for pregnant and nursing petitioners in twelfth-century Anglo-Norman society? And, similarly, how does medieval culture reconcile the requirement for virginity in hagiographies such as Catherine's with the lived experiences of women as wives and mothers? This section of the chapter examines the relationship between maternity and martyrdom as mediated by the body of Saint Catherine in Clemence of Barking's hagiography, alongside the gradual slippage between the body of the saint and the body of the empress, a matron whose breasts are cruelly torn from her body as a punishment for her Christian faith. First, I assess the significance of the city of Alexandria in contemporaneous Anglo-Norman discourse. How do the discursive elements of this Egyptian metropolis on the southeastern shores of the Mediterranean tie in with elements of pilgrimage and crusade?

Then, I assess the overlap with metaphors of maternity in twelfth-century Anglo-Norman culture, as well as sociobiological data that might cast light on the precise nature of vulnerability for nursing women and mothers at this time. Ultimately, I seek to advance the argument that

[187] See Glynn S. Burgess and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "The Life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria" in *Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths: Two Exemplary Biographies for Anglo-Norman Women* (J. M. Dent, 1997), as well as *The Life of St. Catherine*, ed. William Macbain (Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1964), and "Les vies de sainte Catherine d'Alexandrie," ed. E.C. Fawtier-Jones, *Romania* 58 (1932): 206-17.

Clemence's vernacular translation reveals emergent patterns of veneration and emulation unique to the changing political, social and cultural context at the end of the twelfth century in Normandy and England. It allows us to speculate about the changing composition of the target audience and the attendant changes in literary culture, and in particular the uses of saints' lives, and their significance to laypeople as they are translated into the vernacular.

Manuscripts, Antecedents and Variations

Biographical information on the author, Clemence of Barking, is all but non-existent, and her identity can only be established because she reveals her name in the final lines of the poem.[188] It has been suggested that Clemence may also be the author of an anonymous life of Saint Edward the Confessor, issued from Barking abbey at the end of the twelfth century, but this has not been definitively established.

Information on Barking Abbey, on the other hand, abounds.[189] This abbey was the most important nunnery in post-Conquest England, established during the seventh century and dismantled in the sixteenth. During the last quarter of the twelfth century, the period when Clemence was translating Catherine's life, Barking was part of a network of royal, noble, and ecclesiastic connections that stretched from England to the Continent and beyond, and served the family lineage requirements of housing and educating young aristocratic women before

[188] "I who have translated her life am called Clemence by name. I am a nun of Barking, for love of which I took this work in hand," in Burgess and Wogan-Browne, "The Life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria," 43.

[189] On Barking Abbey, see Emily Mitchell, "Patrons and Politics at Twelfth-Century Barking Abbey," *Revue bénédictine* 113, no. 2 (2003): 347-364, and Anne Bagnall Yardley, "A Case Study in Benedictine Practices: Barking Abbey" in *Performing Piety* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 179-202. On Clemence within Barking Abbey, see Duncan Roberston, "Writing in the Textual Community: Clemence of Barking's Life of St. Catherine," *French Forum* 21, no. 1 (1996).

marriage.[190] But the social composition of female communities is much more varied than the representations offered by the churchmen responsible for them suggest.[191] The abbey was composed of heterogeneous members, including virgins, wives, and widows who entered and re-entered at different stages of their lives and for different reasons. Not all inhabitants would be consecrated virgins or professed religious, and not all would be permanent inhabitants. Female religious houses like Barking probably housed separated, divorced, abandoned, or widowed women, in addition to nuns who had taken a more traditional route. Moreover, the class composition of these houses was varied, the nuns spanning a wide range beyond the nobility, with overlap in class groups between landowners and mercantile and administrative elites.[192] Thus, Barking might have served the function of educating Norman, Angevin, and Anglo-Saxon elites, as well as women of the middle classes, who would have increasingly composed the readership for vernacular hagiography at the end of the twelfth century.

Although Clemence's work was meant to be read by the nuns, the life of Saint Catherine surely targeted an audience beyond Barking Abbey. Scholars have remarked on her evocative use of the word "lords" in direct speech, which indicates that she anticipated a noble or royal audience beyond Barking.[193] By writing in Anglo-Norman vernacular, and by directly addressing an audience with an aristocratic title, Clemence was targeting a group of elite nobles who wielded

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[190] See William Macbain, "The Literary Apprenticeship of Clemence of Barking," *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 9, no. 1 (1958): 3-22.

[191] See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture c. 1150-1300: Virginity and its Authorizations* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

[192] See Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture c. 1150-1300.*

[193] See Diane Auslander, "Clemence and Catherine: The *Life of St Catherine* in its Norman and Anglo-Norman Context" in *Barking Abbey and Medieval Literary Culture: Authorship and Authority in a Female Community,* ed. Jennifer Brown and Donna Alfano Bussell (York University Press, 2012), 164-182.

power in England. The manuscript evidence suggests that a mixed audience was expected to hear the life and that this is what in fact happened.

Clemence's life of Saint Catherine is contained in three manuscripts. The earliest dates from the final years of the twelfth century, and the date of composition has been determined between 1170 and 1199.[194] Clemence's text is the translation of a long Latin vulgate version that was composed in the mid-eleventh century. In the introduction, she also makes reference to an earlier vernacular version, which she claims to be updating. This version has not been identified, but her close adherence to the Vulgate indicates that this claim may be only rhetorical.

To summarize the legend: Catherine is a young Christian noblewoman in fourth-century Alexandria. Maxentius, the emperor of Alexandria, orders all the subjects in his empire to make sacrifices to the pagan Gods and Catherine refuses, arguing that these sacrifices contradict her Christian faith. Maxentius assembles the wisest men in the empire to dispute her faith in Christianity. In a series of lengthy speeches that articulate several of the most debated arguments in medieval Christian apologetics, Catherine converts the wise men, who are then martyred for their faith. She is imprisoned, and from her prison cell, she converts the emperor's wife, who is cruelly and gruesomely martyred for her faith. Finally, Maxentius orders Catherine herself decapitated, but not before she performs a series of miracles, including the supernatural destruction of the torture wheel that was created to dismember her. Her severed neck bleeds milk and her body, which exudes healing oil, is miraculously lifted to Mount Sinai by angels.

Clemence's life contains two notable variations from the Greek *Passio*. First, it omits Catherine's closing prayer that her body not be divided into relics. Relics of Catherine's body, including vials of healing oil collected from her bones in Mount Sinai, were in circulation in

[194] See Burgess and Wogan-Browne's introduction to the life of Saint Catherine.

twelfth-century Normandy and in Norman England.[195] A prayer of that nature would have contradicted one of the most celebrated features of her cult. Then, Clemence adds God's response to Catherine's prayer that God answer those who invoke her in their hour of need. In this way, she emphasizes Catherine's growing importance as a director interlocutor with the divine, and she also narrows her role an intercessor for breastfeeding mothers at this time.

Catherine's Alexandria

Clemence chooses to render into vernacular French the life of a Late Antique virgin martyr from the southeastern shores of the Mediterranean. The result is revelatory of the gaze that High Medieval writers cast on the centuries between the Fall of the Roman Empire and their own time.[196] Alexandria is introduced into the narrative as a center of learning, but also as a center of Christian persecution, where the wicked emperor Maxentius has been exiled, and where he continued to reign during the life of Catherine:

Si cume les estoires dient
Ki les anciens faiz desplient,
Qu'en Rume ot jadis empereur
Ki mult par ert de grant vigur.
Constantius out nun sun pere,
La bone Heleine fud sa mere.

[195] On Catherine's relics, see Robert Fawtier, "Les reliques rouennaises de Sainte Catherine d'Alexandrie," *Analecta Bollandiana* 41 (1923): 357-368.

[196] See Soazick Kerneis, "L'Antiquité Tardive Et Le Haut Moyen Âge," *Revue Historique De Droit Français Et Étranger (1922-)* 83, no. 1 (2005): 13–81, and Catherine Saliou, *Gaza dans l'antiquité tardive: archéologie, rhétorique et histoire: actes du colloque international de Poitiers, 6-7 Mai 2004* 2 (Helios Editrice, 2005).

Il meime ot nun Costentin;

A lui fud tut le regne alcin.

A saint' iglise pais dunad

Aprés les diz anz qu'il regnad. 60

Icist Maxentiun venqui

Ki sun regne out a tort saisi.

Vers Alisandre l'enchaça

U il .xxx. e cinc anz regna. 64

> "As we are told by the histories which set forth the events of the past, in Rome there was once an emperor of immense power. His father's name was Constantius and his mother was the good Helen. He himself bore the name Constantine, and the entire realm was under his sway. He granted peace to the holy church after reigning for ten years. It was he who defeated Maxentius, who had wrongfully seized power, making him flee as far as Alexandria, where he reigned for thirty-five years."[197]

Thus, Alexandria emerges as a satellite of the Roman empire, where Christianity, introduced by Emperor Constantine in Rome, has not yet found its home, and where Christians are routinely persecuted for their faith. The character Catherine enters the text amid this sense of chaos and moral confusion:

En Alisandre la cité,

U firent cest iniquité,

Maneit une jofne pulcele

Ki mult pas esteit noble e bele. 136

> "In the city of Alexandria, where they were carrying out this iniquity, there lived a young girl of high rank and great beauty."[198]

[197] Macbain, 2-3; Burgess and Wogan-Browne, 4, line 51.

[198] Macbain, 5; Burgess and Wogan-Browne, 4, line 133.

Catherine's beauty and noble birth is contrasted with the iniquity of the emperor who is compelling Christians to make sacrificed to the pagan Gods.

What would the Late Antique city of Alexandria have represented in the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman mind? First, Late Antique Alexandria—particularly in the first through the fifth centuries—was a cosmopolitan metropolis, a renowned center of learning for a diverse population of people who assembled there from across the Mediterranean. Over the course of the past few decades, the question of the demographic composition of Late Antique Alexandria has been the subject of scholarly inquiry, with particular emphasis on the changing balance of power between Jews, pagans, and Christians from the fourth through ninth centuries.[199] Alexandria rivaled, until it surpassed, the city of Athens as a center for pagan teaching in the Late Antique world. Teachers of pagan and Christian philosophy interacted closely for centuries, and Alexandria developed a tradition that mixed pagan and Christian approaches to teaching. Historically, this was done in order to avoid alienating Christians. For example, the school of the pagan teacher Ammonius Saccas (c. 175-242) catered to many Christian students including the early Christian scholar Origen (c. 184-253), who introduced students from the Platonic tradition to the study of the Bible.[200]

The fourth century was a turning point in the history of Alexandria, due to the martyrdom of Hypatia, a Christian mathematician who has been identified as the prototype for the medieval

[199] See Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). See also George Hinge and Jens A. Krasilnikoff eds., *Alexandria: A Cultural and Religious Melting Pot* (Aarhus University Press, 2009).

[200] See, Edward J. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (University of California Press, 2006) esp. Chapter 6, "Alexandrian Intellectual Life in the Roman Imperial Period" and Chapter 7, "The Shifting Sands of Fourth-Century Alexandrian Cultural Life."

Saint Catherine.[201] Hypatia's hagiography dramatizes an historical breaking point in the North African intellectual tradition, when the philosophically-inspired Christian schools were interrupted by the brutal murder of a learned Christian woman. Alexandria resumed its preeminence as a center of learning in the fifth century, when pagan and Christian teachers came back to teach, and were linked by a confraternity of laymen who moved between the Alexandrian schools and Christian in monasteries.[202] Thus, at the time when Clemence's narrative was set, Alexandria was a cosmopolitan city of learning, with a history of Christian martyrdom.

The Body, Divided

Having established the literary connotations of the city of Alexandria, we turn to the text and to the questions of bodily fragmentation that the text gives rise to. Regarding the genesis of the Catherine legend, the cult of Saint Catherine of Alexandria was textually anchored in an eleventh-century Latin miracle text. In addition to the longer Latin vulgate version of Catherine's life and the lost vernacular version that Clemence claims to be updating, this Latin version of the miracles of Saint Catherine was in circulation during the twelfth century. This miracle text was composed in eleventh-century Normandy and housed in a church along with Catherine's relics in Rouen.[203] It provides a translation narrative for one relic—a fragment of a finger bone from Catherine's

[201] See A. W. Richeson, "Hypatia of Alexandria," *National Mathematics Magazine* 15, no. 2 (1940): 74–82. For an overview of the life of Hypatia, see Marie Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria,* trans. F. Lyra (Harvard University Press, 1995) and Michael A. B. Deakin, *Hypatia of Alexandria: Mathematician and Martyr* (Prometheus Books, 2007).

[202] See Watts, *City and School,* Chapter 8, "Alexandrian Schools of the Fifth Century."

[203] See Christine Walsh, *The Cult of Saint Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe* (Ashgate, 2007), 98.

tomb—from Sinai to the Église de Mont-Saint-Trinité in Rouen.[204] According to the narrative, a monk named Simeon brought this bone fragment from Catherine's tomb in Sinai at the beginning of the eleventh century. This story is likely an invention born of the monastery's desire to acquire relics of a saint and thereby reestablish ties with a distant and ill-remembered past, allowing them to maintain dignity and importance in the present.[205] Stories like Simeon's abound in the eleventh century, and serve to explain the presence of relics that are either inauthentic or plundered. The uncomfortable and reluctant embrace of the relic trade by ecclesiasts is explored at length by Patrick Geary, who calls it a necessary evil in that it was an illicit activity that granted chapels prestige and pilgrim traffic.[206] The Norman cult of Saint Catherine of Alexandria actually predates the invention of Catherine's body in Sinai, and scholars generally agree that the Norman cult influenced the Sinai cult, and not the other way around. This casts further doubt on the plausibility of the Simeon tale.[207]

Nonetheless, this collection of miracles written to accompany the relics indicates two things of interests to the present study; first, during the eleventh century, the preponderance of visitors to Catherine's shrine were male, and not female.[208] Moreover, the text indicates that at this time, Catherine's Norman miracles were neither specific to breastfeeding, nor to women at all. In fact,

[204] See Walsh, *The Cult of Saint Katherine of Alexandria.* This translation narrative remains unverified.

[205] Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 1978), 69, 132.

[206] See Geary, *Furta Sacra.*

[207] See Walsh, *The Cult of Saint Katherine of Alexandria.*

[208] Walsh, 93.

the top three miracles involved cures for (male) sterility, blindness, and cancer.[209] This miracle text thus reveals that Catherine was a generic intercessor at the end of the eleventh century in Normandy and Norman England. This further indicates that Catherine's patronage, by the end of the twelfth century when Clemence was composing her hagiography, had been revisited and altered to include nursing mothers.

How does the virgin martyr Catherine come to represent a source of intercession for pregnant and nursing petitioners in twelfth-century Anglo-Norman society? And, how does medieval culture reconcile the requirement for virginity in hagiographies such as Catherine's with the lived experiences of women as wives and mothers? Within the hagiography, there is no textual evidence explicitly supporting Catherine's patronage for breastfeeding women. Turning to her prayer for intercession, we read that she explicitly mentions petitioners suffering from pain, grief, illness, plague, famine, and that she provides a request for fair winds, plenty in herds, fruit, and wheat.[210] The patronage of breastfeeding mothers emerges from a paradoxical reading of the poem: just as Catherine, destroyer of wheels, becomes the patron saint for wheelwrights so she becomes the patron saint for nursing women, although remains a childless virgin, celebrated for her virginity and for the conviction and vigor with which she rejects Maxentius' advances. It is the popular

[209] *Ibid.,* 89; curing miracles were attested for the following maladies: sterility (4); blindness (4); cancer (4); dementia (3); fever (2); trembling (1); facial paralysis (1); menstrual problems (1); toothache (1); unspecified illness (1).

[210] "Sire, pur tuz cels te requier,/Ki de m'aie avront mestier,/E ki pur tei tant m'amerunt,/Que t'aie par mei querrunt,/Sire, dune lor bone aie/E en lur mort e en lur vie,/E s'il unt dulur u angoisse,/Que par ta grace aidier lur poisse./Guard les, sire, d'aversitez/E de males enfermetez/De pestilence et de famine,/E bon orage lur destine./Sire, dun leur grant plenté/D'almaille et de fruit et de blé…" lines 2567-2580 (Macbain 81-82) . Lord, I beseech you, on behalf of all those who will need my help, and who for your sake will love me so much that they will seek your help through me, give them, lord, good help in their life and in their death and when they have pain or grief, so that through your grace I may be able to help them. Keep them, lord, from adversity and severe illness, and from plague and famine, and provide them with fair winds. Lord, give them plenty in their herds, their fruit and their wheat…" See Burgess and Wogan-Browne, 41.

imagination that reads an implicit rapport between Catherine's life and breastfeeding, and not Clemence.

On further fact that renders Clemence's life of Saint Catherine unique is that it dramatizes the relationship between the saint and a matron: the empress of Alexandria, Maxentius' wife, who remains unnamed throughout the text. The empress acts as a sort of double for the martyred saint; her martyrdom anticipates Catherine's and her body is even translated as Catherine's later is (although the emperor gives strict orders to leave her body to rot, his best friend and advisor gives her a proper burial). Moreover, the relationship between Catherine and the empress is mediated by divine intervention. Catherine appears to the empress in a dream and the saint crowns the royal woman. This event is then repeated in waking life. Catherine wins the empress over to Christianity and the empress intervenes and tries to condemn her husband's persecution of Christians. When the emperor realizes that his wife has converted to Christianity, he claims that he has no choice but to make an example of her by torturing and killing her:

Mes de ceo ne te joiras mie,
Ke ta peine seit par mort finie,
Kar ge te toudrai cest confort,
Que n'avera hastive mort. 2252
A tun oés sai peines nuveles;
Del piz t'estuerterai les mameles,
Pois te doins cungié de murir,
Si te grant ta mort esjoir. 2256

'...But you will certainly not have the pleasure of knowing that your torment will be ended by the sentence of death, for I shall deprive you of the comfort of a quick

death. For you I can devise new torments; I shall tear your breasts from your body before I give you leave to die and enjoy your death'.[211]

The removal of the empress's breasts has elicited commentary in recent decades, for the metaphorical values that they impart on the text. Scholars have called attention to the fact that breasts symbolize an extension of the biological birthing and mothering faculty. Maxentius' threat to excise his wife's breasts represent a metaphorical death of the emperor's own bloodline, a starvation of that bloodline through the removal of the source of food and life support. The parallelism between blood and milk is further reinforced by the medieval physiological belief that breast milk is processed blood.[212] This passage thus reveals the pathos of a power-hungry pagan whose stubborn insistence on his own power contradicts the laws of nature, and serves as a catalyst for the drama of the text. This threat also anticipates the most gruesome scene in the life, the empress's torture:

Hors de la vile dunc la meinent
E de li grever mult se peinent. 2304
A tant li percent les mameles,
Que mult aveit tendres et beles,
D'uns clos acerez aguissiez;
Pois li unt del piz esraciez. 2308
Par ces clous amunt la pendirent
Et son bel chief puis li tollirent.

They then led her outside the city and put a great deal of effort into torturing her. With nails of sharpened steel, they pierced her breasts, which were very soft and

[211] See Macbain, 71-72, and v. 2256 Burgess and Wogan-Browne, 36-7.

[212] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother,* 136.

> beautiful. Then they tore them out of her chest. They used these nails to hang her up and they cut off her beautiful head.[213]

In this way, the empress's breasts are mutilated before they are removed. The narrator's insistence on the beauty of her breasts elicits sympathy from the audience, who would certainly make the link between beautiful, soft breasts and the nurturing function of motherhood.

There is no lack of precedent for the mutilation of breasts in the tradition of penitential literature from the twelfth century. Visionary Latin texts such as the Visions of Alberic and Tundale stage the mutilation of adulterous women suspended above flames or bound to trees through holes in their transpierced breasts.[214] Other women are punished with snakes hanging from their breasts for refusing to breastfeed. At least on the level of the imaginary, the refusal or inability to breastfeed one's own offspring was punished with this type of *contrapasso*, an inversion or mimicry of the punishment for the crime. Lisa Bitel points to evidence of legal records that punished women for crimes against marriage and motherhood.[215] These sources remain silent on the nature of these crimes and their motivations, as well as the nature of their punishment. Nonetheless, they suggest a link between these gruesome images in visionary and hagiographic literature and the lived experiences of women who were unable or unwilling to breastfeed. Commentators suggest a link between the increase in sentimentalized maternal imagery, such as the nourishing and life-giving function of breasts of the Virgin Mary, and the growing emphasis on the role of the mother in twelfth-century France. In much the same way, a connection between metaphors for the punishment of failed maternity, and the lived experiences of twelfth-century

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[213] See Macbain, 73 and Burgess and Wogan-Browne, 37, 2297.

[214] See Juliette Bourdier, "Travels Through the Dark Realms of Medieval Clerical Fantasies: Sex and Erotica in the Infernal Testimony," *Comitatus* 48 (2017).

[215] See Lisa Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe, 400-1100* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

women as wives and mothers were played out in vernacular literature, increasingly aimed at a composite lay audience.

In terms of the lived experiences of breastfeeding mothers, many of the trails that might provide us with a reliable historiographic record of motherhood have gone cold. Our knowledge concerning the processes of biological motherhood in the western European Middle Ages is largely confined to physicians' recommendations on weaning. The pediatric knowledge in the Middle Ages still deferred to the writings of Late Antiquity. Medical knowledge about the early stages of life and of nursing was Greek and Arabic in origin, derived from the writings Paul of Aegina (650-690AD) and Avicenna (980-1036AD), who based their medical opinions about infant feeding on antiquity.[216] They both claim that weaning should take place gradually and slowly on food other than milk, consisting mainly of cereals.

Traditionally, historiography has underplayed the role of the nursing mother in the Middle Ages. David Herlihy in *Medieval Households* claims that the cult of the Virgin Mary, gaining power in the twelfth century, and the cult of the Infant Jesus exploited real attitudes towards children.[217] His study did much to disprove the historiographical claim that persisted until the middle of the twentieth century, that medieval parents ignored their children. In fact, archeological data suggests an intensive investment of medieval parents in their young children, based on their unfavorable chances of survival.

Two archeological studies on bone fragments exhumed from medieval cemeteries in Germany reveal this intensive parental investment. A team of German anthropologists sought to

[216] Source

[217] See David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Harvard University Press, 1985).

investigate the sociobiological causes of high mortality of small infants in preindustrial societies. In the first study of the relationship between weaning and infant mortality, a sample of children's bones was exhumed from the seventh-century German town of Weningumstadt, an agrarian society, limited access to fresh fruits and to milk substitutes.[218] Tests on children's skeletal remains demonstrate a high incidence of malnutrition symptoms and infectious disease on children who did not survive early childhood. Samples of bone demonstrate that weaning occurs between the ages of one and three, with the highest rates of morbidity at the age of four. With the completion of weaning, symptoms of malnutrition became prevalent among the skeletons, a combined lack of Vitamin C and iron hints at the unavailability of adequate dietary substitutes during weaning, leaving children vulnerable to infection.

The second study examined a sample of skeletons from Schleswig, northern Germany, whose coffins were dated to the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[219] Their study specifically targeted a group of 49 infants under the age of six. Trace analysis on bones indicated that in children over the age of two, their diet had changed from milk to vegetal foodstuff. Protein analysis on infant bones indicated that the infants in medieval Schleswig were not nourished on mother's milk alone, but on a mixture of cow's milk. At a time when no infant formula was available, children whose mothers died at birth, or who were unable to breastfeed their children for any reason, or children who were sick and unable to suck, had a very minor chance of survival.[220] Pathologies in small

[218] Dittmann, Karola, and Gisela Grupe. "Biochemical and Palaeopathological Investigations on Weaning and Infant Mortality in the Early Middle Ages," *Anthropologischer Anzeiger* 58, no. 4 (2000): 345–355.

[219] G. Hühne-Osterloh and G. Grupe. "Causes of Infant Mortality in the Middle Ages Revealed by Chemical and Palaeopathological Analyses of Skeletal Remains," *Zeitschrift Für Morphologie und Anthropologie* 77, no. 3 (1989): 247–258, especially page 254.

[220] *Ibid,* 253.

children indicate that weaning meant a high risk for illness or death. The evidence suggests empirical knowledge of the disadvantages of prolonged breastfeeding in the Middle Ages. The weaning period of two years was cut short, infants of two years were already weaned. The authors of the study speculate that this might be due to the fact that weaning was observed as a form of birth-control, suckling babies have a contraceptive effect.[221] The compromise of a stepwise weaning indicates an intensive parental investment in the child's health. Investigations on these medieval skeletons indicate that children who survive the risks of early childhood generally live to prosper and grow rather old.[222] These combined studies indicate that improper weaning might be hypothesized as the primary cause for symptoms leading to early childhood death.

These sociobiological studies cast light on the hagiographic literature. My initial assumption was that Catherine's intercession was requested to help mollify the pain of childbirth and the ensuing discomfort of breastfeeding. In fact, her intercession was likely needed for the successful navigation of a perilous time of childhood development. In light of the findings of these studies, the members of medieval society most vulnerable to infectious diseases emerge as children in the early stages of weaning, in the second half of the first year, whose success in transitioning to vegetal food determines their likelihood to survive between the ages of two and six. This in turn renders breastfeeding mothers vulnerable, since their failure to adequately breastfeed was criminalized, at least on the imaginary level, punished with mutilation, and this might indicate that such transgressions were punished in reality as well.

Breastfeeding women—be they biological mothers or wet-nurses—had to balance the desire to successfully wean their children with the knowledge that the transitions to mother's milk

[221] *Ibid.,* 255.

[222] *Ibid.,* 254

substitutes and vegetal foodstuffs posed a serious danger to their infants' survival. The popularity of a cult of a breastfeeding patron indicates a growing twelfth-century audience of women from the middle classes who had to contend with the dangers that accompanied childbirth, childrearing, and weaning.

Metaphors for lactation suggest an intimate dialogue with representations of Christ, as the wound in Christ's side has been variously construed as a breast, a symbol for the humanation of God, as well as for both suffering and fertility.[223] Milk is a polysemous metaphor for blood that allows female characters to participate meaningfully in *imitatio Christi,* while also embodying contradictory positions: virginity and motherhood, pain and redemption, the fact of death and the promise of eternal life. The liquid metaphors of martyrdom and healing in Clemence's life of Saint Catherine are prescient. Lactating or exuding curing fluids would become characteristic of the ecstatic piety of laywomen in the century to follow, in the France and in the Lowlands, and would become a key feature in contemporaneous hagiography.[224] The popularity of hagiographies like Catherine's was implicated in this shift in modes of female piety.

The purpose of this section of the study was to examine the changing appeal of Catherine of Alexandria's cult in twelfth-century Anglo-Normandy and Norman England, alongside the resonance with the contexts of pilgrimage and crusade. Close-readings of key moments in the text reveal that the appeal of her cult was augmented by metaphors of breasts and breastfeeding that occur throughout the narrative. The importance of these images has been read alongside the sociobiological studies that might cast light on the lived experiences of women in Anglo-Norman

[223] Bynum

[224] Bynum

society. On a metaphorical level, the text allows a composite audience to navigate the nexus of virginity, maternity, and martyrdom, using fluid imagery. Catherine's patronage of breastfeeding women is mediated through the martyrdom of her double, the empress, whose breasts are cruelly ripped from her body, and also through her own martyrdom, when her severed neck gushes milk and healing oils.

The mutilation of breasts also provides the opportunity to recall traditions of early Christianity, in which suffering for faith and adherence to the Christian God and lends legitimacy to the martyr's cause. Martyrdom has always been involved in the upending of power differentials, casting the suffering and the oppressed as the victor. By adapting tales of suffering and martyrdom from Late Antiquity, a time closer to the life of Christ, medieval writers were able to cast their holy heroes and heroines as Christlike prototypes, and anchor their narratives within the framework of *imitatio Christi,* the continual retelling of foundational stories that lie at the heart of Christian mythology. Vernacular hagiography ultimately performs a rewriting that mythology. Vernacular hagiographers like Clemence, presented with a semi-literate lay society vulnerable to textual authority, revisit early stories of the Christian tradition in search of saintly models whose faith and whose salvation are intimately bound up with the struggles of their audiences.

Moreover, Anglo-Norman hagiographers like Wace and Clemence sought to lay claim to the Holy Land by westernizing eastern saints from the distance past. The enduring desire to stake a political claim to the Principality of Antioch amidst the losses that it suffered during the Second Crusade explains Margaret and Catherine's popularity during this time period, and their selection among their Late Antique virgin martyr peers as an object of veneration. Without explicitly mentioning Crusade, both Wace and Clemence inscribe their texts with a series of symbols and terms that refer the audience back to the crusader context. The martyrdom of Late Antique virgin

heroines from Antioch and Alexandria resonates with the quest for political, cultural, and religious hegemony over the eastern Crusader States. In this way, the vernacularization of the lives of Margaret and Catherine is tied to the goal of including a wider percentage of the western European population into the fold of Christianity by promoting patronesses that reflect their lived experiences. These texts forge an ideological space that posits a privileged connection between the Anglo-Norman readership, increasingly female and lay, and the Late Antique virgin martyrs from the land on the southeastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. This, in turn, resonates with the call to the conquest of the Holy Land through Crusade. Though neither life holds up as crusade propaganda, Wace's poem contains elements that function like a proto-Gospel and creates a subliminal apology for conquest. Ultimately these stories can be viewed as apocryphal writing: a reworking of Christian foundational mythology that revisits narratives of origins in order to impose new meaning on the intervention of God in human affairs.

CHAPTER THREE

Across the Grecian Sea: Jerusalem, Egypt, and a Tale of Two Mary's

Having examined the lives of the Virgin Mary, Saint Margaret of Antioch, and Saint Catherine of Alexandria, this study continues an examination of the dialogue between medieval hagiography and the contexts of pilgrimage and crusade, focusing on explicit instances of trans-Mediterranean exchange. The context of trans-Mediterranean Sea travel makes an explicit appearance in two twelfth-century Anglo-Norman hagiographies that are further linked by the figure of the penitent sinner; Guillaume Le Clerc's *Romanz de sainte Marie Magdalene* (c. 1210-1240)[225] and an anonymous *Vie de Marie l'égyptienne* (c. final years of the twelfth century)[226] deepen our understanding of the contexts of pilgrimage and crusade, particularly as they relate to the transmission of sacred legends and spiritual knowledge across the medieval Mediterranean. Each text stages the overseas travel of a Biblical/legendary heroine, and asserts a privileged connection between France, the Holy Land, and cities on the route to the Holy Land that were the objects of conquest through crusade throughout the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Each text moreover derives from a tradition with deep roots in the eastern Mediterranean.

The lives of Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Mary the Egyptian are sister legends, joined by the profile of the sinner-saint who has known carnal pleasure and fallen from a state of grace, only to repent and reach a state of perfection; a conflation between the biblical Magdalene and the

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[225] See Guillaume Le Clerc de Normandie, *Le Romanz de sainte Marie Magdalene,* in *Verse Saints' Lives Written in the French of England,* ed. and trans. Delbert W. Russell (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012).

[226] See "La vie de sainte Marie l'Egyptienne," ed. Alfred T. Baker, *Revue des Langues Romanes* 59 (1916-17): 145-401, and *La vie de sainte Marie l'Egyptienne, versions en ancien et moyen français,* ed. Peter Florian Dembowski (Droz, 1976).

legendary Mary the Egyptian occurred during the early centuries of Christianity, rendering their cults and iconography interchangeable. Saint Mary Magdalene's gradual, apocryphal transformation from companion of Christ in the Bible to repentant prostitute and model for the redeemed sinner is a staple of contemporary discourse on women in the Bible. Saint Mary the Egyptian, on the other hand, has fallen into obscurity in the western church, though she continues to enjoy recognition in the eastern church. This chapter does not attempt to trace the evolution of either legend; rather, it examines the genesis of the French hagiographical texts from their Latin sources, then situates the vernacular versions in their social, cultural, and political contexts. In doing so, it examines (1) the western view of the East, and (2) the transmission of spiritual knowledge between the western Europe and the eastern Mediterranean.

Indeed, most important to the conversation at hand, the legends of Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Mary the Egyptian both engage with trans-Mediterranean Sea travel; the texts explicitly stage voyages across the Mediterranean Sea, and these voyages provide the opportunity for the exchange of identities: racial, ethnic, religious, even existential (as we shall see, the medieval Mediterranean was a space where the laws of life and death might be temporarily suspended). Mary Magdalene, one of the earliest evangelists, embarked with her entourage on a mission to mainland France where she preached and converted the Prince of Marseille. Saint Mary the Egyptian crossed the Mediterranean from Alexandria to Jerusalem, in pursuit of sexual pleasure; the spiritual awakening that she underwent in Jerusalem moved her to retreat to the desert, where she spent her life repenting. These heroines serve as models for a Anglo-Norman lay audience whose political and spiritual ambitions were increasingly trained on the land across the Mediterranean.

Sinner Saints

The preceding chapters have explored the role that virginity plays in the construction of medieval sainthood. The first chapter demonstrated that the figure of the Virgin Mary, prototype for female saints, was a site of contestation, and a number of twelfth-century ideologues sought to make claims about the precise nature of her purity and exemption from original sin in order to support their own theological positions. In the second chapter, it was demonstrated that the early Christian virgin martyr's body was carefully constructed during the Middle Ages as a similar site of contestation, where ideas about the precise nature of redemption and salvation were articulated. This third chapter considers the body of the female saint when it is no longer intact, after it has been corrupted by carnality. In other words, how do medieval scribes imagine the body of the sinner saint, who seeks redemption through asceticism, eremitism, and goes on to perform the working of fertility miracles?

Ultimately, the task of this chapter falls in line with that of the two preceding chapters: to treat twelfth- and thirteenth-century vernacular hagiography on the lives of Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Mary the Egyptian as apocryphal writing: a reworking of the earliest centuries of Christianity in order to revisit its foundational mythology, and to thereby impose new meaning on the intervention of God in human affairs. This new meaning is negotiated through the body of the sinner-saint, and her overseas voyages provoke commentary on the role of the Mediterranean Sea in the process of constructing new identities and, ultimately, in the process of attaining spiritual redemption.

Like the lives of the Virgin Mary, Margaret, and Catherine before them, these texts foreground the intercessory powers of women from the south and east of the Mediterranean. And like the texts discussed above, these texts perform two key tasks: (1) they counter the ecclesiastic

perspective on womanhood by offering a more complicated and nuanced version of female sainthood than their Latin sources, and; (2) they seek to situate Western Europeans on a continuum that begins with the earliest Christian martyrs. By appealing to and early tradition, they effectively establish the legitimacy of these Europeans as inheritors of a tradition anchored in historically-contested territories of the Holy Land. These texts explicitly engage with the overseas travel of the saint and maintain the importance of this travel to the process of transformation and formation of a new identity.

Penitent Typology

Why is the penitent, ascetic female saint the ideal ideological vehicle to advance the expansion of Christianity in medieval Norman England and Normandy? What is it in particular about the telling of her life that suits the project of Christianization? Both Mary Magdalene and Mary the Egyptian correspond with two separate archetypes: that of the hermit-saint and that of the traveler-saint, each defined by Brigitte Cazelles and Phyllis Johnson in their groundbreaking work on medieval saints' typology.[227] Cazelles and Johnson identify the common features among the hermit-saint: she bridges the ideological gap between Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages by elaborating the marginalized ideal offered by the desert fathers in Syriac. In lives which praise movement towards desertion, the 'desert' is represented by nature, poverty by privacy, and silence by romantic ecstasy.[228] The hagiographer christianizes the pagan features of rural solitude. Not related

[227] See Cazelles and Johnson, *Vain siècle guerpir*, *Vain siècle guerpir: A Literary Approach to Sainthood through Old French Hagiography of the Twelfth Century* (University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 59-83, 85-108, and also Ruth Mazo Karras, "Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1, no. 1 (1990): 3–32.

[228] Cazelles and Johnson, 62.

to a mere contempt of the world, the *fuga mundi* theme permits the hagiographer to describe in dynamic terms the heroine's internal journey.[229]

In reference to the traveller-saint, Cazelles and Johnson assert, "in accordance with the primitivistic tendencies of their time, the twelfth-century hagiographers choose among the many models of holy men those whose lives are dedicated to *peregrination* which brings about ordeals and adventures in profusion."[230] Describing the wonders of the Other World, hagiographers instruct and enrapture their audiences. Mary of Egypt's pilgrimage allows the hagiographer to allegorically describes the phenomenon of purification that accompanies flight from the world.[231] Passions do not apply notions of travel, the martyr remains static, the element of "occidentation" modifies holiness.[232]

How do these notions fit within the context of crusade? Saint Mary Magdalene's cult, textually anchored in the thirteenth-century vernacular poem by Guillaume Le Clerc, provides a key link between the medieval French aristocracy and the biblical heroine. Le Clerc's text was a key element in the emerging discourse that sought to paint the Holy Land as an object of western European conquest. By identifying and analyzing the divergences between the vernacular poem and its Latin source, I seek to demonstrate that Le Clerc's text explicitly endeavors to tie a biblical figure to the western European mainland. In Le Clerc's text, textual divergences from the Latin *Passio* attribute Mary Magdalene a dimensionality that makes her recognizable to her new,

[229] *Ibid.,* 83.

[230] *Ibid.,* 85.

[231] *Ibid.,* 93.

[232] *Ibid.,* 103.

vernacular audience, able to serve as an intercessory saint for the anxieties and concerns of the laity. I also seek to demonstrate that the connection to Mary Magdalene served the call to crusade.

Similarly, the second part of this chapter examines the cult of Saint Mary the Egyptian, textually anchored in an anonymous vernacular life from the end of the twelfth century. The inventions and omissions from the source text reveal a heightened concern for bridging the gap between the context of the Desert Fathers and that of the High Middle Ages. Like Le Clerc through Saint Mary Magdalene, this scribe through Mary the Egyptian expands the intercessory powers of the penitent ascetic female saint in order to welcome a wider range of petitioners into the ambit of participatory lay spirituality. He also offers a panorama of the Late Antique Holy Land that indicates a high medieval version of marian worship.

Finally, regarding both lives, I focus on the fact that the vernacular tradition not only elevates women to a position of emulation and veneration, but it focuses specifically on women from across the Mediterranean: from Syria and Egypt, locations that were situated on crusader routes to the Holy Land and that represented important outposts of the bourgeoning Christian empire in the East. I interrogate the extent of their alterity, and what role this alterity might have played in the ideological push to claim the Holy Land for western Europe. As young women who convert to Christianity, both Mary's serve as convenient ideological vehicles for crusade apologetics. They assist in the socio-political project of the consolidation of Anglo-Norman identity as the righteous combatants in a war of religion. Though the translation of hagiography to vernacular does not hold up as crusade propaganda, this analysis aims to demonstrate how its elements function like a proto-Gospel that creates a subliminal apology for conquest.

Mary Magdalene: The Manuscript Tradition

The *Romanz de sainte Marie Madeleine* by Guillaume Le Clerc de Normandie is the earliest known life of the Virgin Mary in vernacular verse, dated to 1210-1240. The text is extant in two manuscripts: MS Paris, BnF, fr. 19525, fols. 67ra-72va, and MS London, British Library, Additional 70513, fols. 50va-55va.[233] Little biographical information survives about Guillaume Le Clerc de Normandie, but the rare facts that do survive offer rare glimpses of insight into the life of a writer who wrote on commission with the support of noble patrons.[234] He probably lived most of his life in England and supported his family by writing religious didactic works for his patrons. When they are named, his patrons are from the dioceses of Coventry and Lichfield in England. His *Bestiaire divin* (c. 1210/11) was written for Radulphus, whom Delbert W. Russell has identified as possibly Ralph of Maidstone, treasurer of Lichfield in 1215, bishop of Hereford in 1234.[235] This text survives in twenty manuscript copies. He also wrote *Le Besant de Dieu* (c. 1226-7, patron unidentified), *La Vie de Tobie* (c. 1214-48, for William prior of Kenilworth in Arden in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield), and *Les treis moz* (c. 1224-38, for Alexander Stavensby, bishop of Lichfield and Coventry).

The sum of his output offers an image of Le Clerc as a financially motivated poet who answered to patrons with a wide variety of literary tastes. Biographical information that might shed light on the motivations of his patrons is lacking, however it is likely that this text on the life of a repentant sinner from the Bible was commissioned for political reasons. The preeminence of the

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[233] See Delbert W. Russell, *Le Romanz de sainte Marie Madeleine,* 66.

[234] See Tony Hunt, "William the Norman clerk (fl. 1210/11-1227x38)," sub-entry in "William the Clerk (fl. c. 1200-c. 1240)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), and A.-F. Labie-Leurquin, "Guillaume le Clerc de Normandie," in *Dictionnaire de la langue française,* ed. Emil Littré (Hachette, 1956), 628.

[235] See Russell*,* 66.

cult of Mary Magdalene around Vézelay Abbey in southern France made her cult an ideal vehicle for crusade apologetics. The Norman gentry living on the English mainland during the first quarter of the thirteenth century would certainly have been invested in boosting France's prestige by imagining the French mainland as the chosen destination for evangelizing by a preeminent figure from the Bible.

The *Romanz* of Saint Mary Magdalene

The plot of the *Romanz* is dominated by the story of the pilgrimage of the Prince of Marseille to the Holy Land. Significantly, mentions of the Magdalene—her status as a repentant sinner—are alluded to only briefly in passing, and her eremitical life in the desert is absent from the romance entirely. Short allusions to Mary's status as a redeemed sinner must have resonated with the vernacular audience, who were certainly familiar with her profile.[236] Representations of Mary Magdalene as a redeemed prostitute were widespread in western medieval Christendom, and layered with spiritual meaning that drew largely from the metaphors of repentance and redemption.[237] Her presence was established in the pre-conquest Anglo-Saxon liturgy, though her

[236] For an overview of the history of her cult, see Victor Saxer, *Le Culte de Marie Madeleine en occident, des origines à la fin du moyen âge.* Cahiers d'Archéologie et d'Histoire 3 (Publications de la Société des Fouilles Archéologiques et des Monuments Historiques de l'Yonne, 1959), Elisabeth Pinto-Mathieu, *Marie-Madeleine dans la littérature du Moyen Âge* (Beauchesne, 1997), and Olivier Collet and Sylviane Messerli, eds., *Vies médiévales de Marie-Madeleine,* in *Textes vernaculaires du Moyen Âge 3* (Brepols, 2008). See also Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalene: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

[237] For a study of the metaphorical uses of the figure of the Magdalene, see Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor* (Harper Collins, 1994). Though the most frequent metaphorical uses refer to her life of prostitution, Mary Magdalene has also been explored for her resonances with the Roman goddess Diana, see Marie Delcourt, "Le complexe de Diane dans l'hagiographie chrétienne," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* (1958): 1-33.

profile remained undeveloped.[238] Though absent from the Bible, the tradition that associated the Magdalene with prostitution developed during the patristic era and remained prevalent in western Christendom during the course of the Middle Ages.[239] Instead of referring explicitly to this tradition, Guillaume Le Clerc privileges the narration of a different story: a series of adventures that stage the Prince of Marseille's pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He mentions the saint only to reference the miracles wrought by the Magdalene that result in the Prince's conversion to Christianity and the ensuing conversion of Gaul.

The text begins when Mary Magdalene and her entourage depart on an apostolic mission to Marseille, where they meet rough conditions and are treated with indifference by the locals. They preach to convert the pagans, and are overheard by the wife of the Prince of Marseille, who is unsuccessfully praying to her pagan gods for a child. The Prince's wife is moved by the Magdalene's preaching and takes an interest in her God. Later that evening, Mary Magdalene appears to both the prince and his wife in a dream and admonishes them for neglecting God's saints. The prince and his wife offer Mary Magdalene and her entourage hospitality and pray that she intercede to give them a child, and shortly after the prince's wife conceives. The prince showers the Magdalene with gifts and praises, and vows to make a pilgrimage in the Holy Land to witness the truth about Jesus Christ. His wife insists on accompanying him. On their sea voyage to Acre, their ship is beset by a terrible storm that causes the mother to die of fright during childbirth. The frightened crew conspires to throw her body overboard, but the prince makes a deal and the captain

[238] For a concise study of Mary Magdalene's cult in Anglo-Saxon England, see Veronica Ortenberg, "Le culte de sainte Marie Madeleine dans l'Angleterre anglo-saxonne," *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen-Age* 104, no. 1 (1992): 13-35.

[239] Ruth Mazo Karras esteems Mary Magdalene the most popular saint in medieval Europe, after the virgin Mary.

allows him to lay her body to rest on a nearby island. The prince lays the body of the dead wife and the child, still alive, beneath a rock and continues his pilgrimage.

At this point, Mary Magdalene performs another miracle: she fills the dead woman's nipple with an everlasting supply of sweet milk that nourishes the child. The Magdalene also ensures the integrity of the wife's dead body, preserving it from vermin and rot. Finally, Mary Magdalene allows for the wife's soul to accompany the prince on his pilgrimage while her body lies dead but intact and productive of milk, nourishing the live infant on the deserted island. The soul of the wife accompanies the prince as he arrives in Syria, meets Saint Peter, and tours the sites of the Holy Land with Peter as his guide: the Holy Sepulcher, the temple of Solomon, Bethlehem, Calvary, and the river where Christ was baptized. At the end of two years, the pilgrim boards a return ship to Marseilles and God wills that this ship pass the island where his wife lay buried. He finds his child alive and prays to God and Mary Magdalene who restore the woman to life. The reunited family returns to Marseille where they are baptized and replace their pagan temples with Christian churches.

Though the story is titled *Le Romanz de sainte Marie Madeleine,* it does not primarily treat the life of the Magdalene, but rather a series of miracles she worked for the Prince of Marseille that result in his conversion to Christianity. The text thus functions less like a hagiography and more like a romance, detailing the episodic gestures of a male protagonists who undergoes life's vicissitudes and is ultimately redeemed at the conclusion of the narrative. Though the text draws elements and details from earlier Latin versions of the Life, the major narrative action was adapted from an episode in a Latin romance, *Apollonius of Tyre,* dating from the fifth and sixth centuries: a storm and death at sea during childbirth result in the forced abandonment of the seemingly dead

mother and child, who are later reunited with the husband.[240] Guillaume's treatment of the legend also uses another Latin source which focuses on the interrelations between the life of the saint and the pilgrimage of the Prince of Marseilles and his wife, the *Postquam Dominus*.[241] His acceptance of the outlines of this text is very significant in its context, but equally significant is his relative down-play of the fact of Gaul's conversion to Christianity, and his complete silence on the details of Mary's later-in-life eremitism, as well the translation of Mary's relics from Provence to Vézelay.

Narratives of Mary Magdalene's apostolic missions to the French mainland were well-established by the thirteenth century, and one must assume that these details were simply taken for granted by an audience sufficiently familiar with Mary's life. Yet Le Clerc's striking omission of the translation of her relics from Provence to Vézelay is significant in context, particularly considering the fact that this text became a central token of proof in Vézelay's claim to own the relics of Saint Mary Magdalene. The complete absence of any translation element indicates that the purpose of the text was not to account for Mary's relics in Vézelay; it was written, rather, with a completely separate and ideologically-driven purpose in mind.

One further peculiarity of the text is that Le Clerc's version downplays the eschatological elements present in the three hagiographies discussed above, pointing to the continuity of spiritual life in the hereafter. By staging the reunion of the royal family, the text upholds, rather, the feudal

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[240] For an early Latin version of the text, see "Vita s. Mariae Magdalenae" (BHL 5457: Postquam Dominus noster), on *Catalogus Codicum Hagiographicorum Latinorum [...] in Bibliotheca Nationali Parisiensi, 3:525-30. Subsidia hagiographica 2* (Société des Bollandistes, 1889-93). On the resonance between the miracle and the life of Mary Magdalene, see G. Huet, "Un miracle de Marie-Madeleine et le roman d'Apollonius de Tyr,'" *Revue De L'histoire Des Religions* 74, (1916): 249–255. For an English translation of and notes on the Latin source text, see Elizabeth Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations: Including the Text of the Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri with an English Translation* (D.S. Brewer, 1991).

[241] BHL 5457, the seventh *vita* in the listing is for Mary Magdalene. For the Latin text, see Paris BnF Latin, 803.

imperative of the continuity of aristocratic lineage through the propagation of the Prince's bloodline.[242] In staging the reunion of the Prince with his miraculously revived wife and child, the narrative reaffirms the resumption of secular, dynastic life on earth, not the birth of a saint into eternal life. Le Clerc's text thus diverges from the texts discussed above through the privileging of the recounting of the vicissitudes of life on earth, the induction of the living into the truth of Christian mysteries, and the community of Christian believers with a direct claim to the power of those mysteries.[243]

Finally, Le Clerc's text deviates from the formulaic hagiographic narrative by depicting a positive relationship between the Christian saint and the Pagan ruler. By establishing a reciprocal relationship (food and shelter for the saint in exchange for fertility for the Prince's wife), Le Clerc effectively reverses the standard conflict between saint and ruler. This conflict provides the narrative impetus for many medieval lives that sought to depict a time when Christianity was not dominant but persecuted, and when the test of faith was all the more meaningful because it carried the threat of violent death. When the prince and his wife discuss the apparition of Mary, and opt to heed her advice rather than to establish a confrontational rapport with the Christian saint, the traditional conflict between pagan and Christian observed in the lives of Saint Catherine of Alexandria and Saint Margaret of Antioch disappears from the narrative.[244] This peculiarity suggests that the writing of the pagan antagonists hinges on the pagan's alterity; indeed, the writing of religious conflict in western hagiography is a function of the pagan's ethnic/racial identity. When

[242] Such themes are not uncommon in Old French hagiography. See, for example, Nancy Vine Durling, "Hagiography and Lineage: The Example of the Old French 'Vie de Saint Alexis'," in *Romance Philology* 40 (1987): 451-69.

[243] Russell, 69

[244] *Ibid.,* 70

the pagan ruler is a native of western Europe, he is quick to shed his culturally and socially-determined beliefs and to attempt to have his wife conceive through praying to Mary Magdalene. Moreover, the metaphysical world conspires to facilitate this conversion; he has access to the Christian saints in his dreams, and he and he wife more readily accept and conform to Christian truths. Le Clerc's treatment of the Prince of Marseille stands in stark contrast to the treatment of the pagan rules of Alexandria and Antioch as written by Clemence of Barking and Wace. Maxentius and Olybrius are libidinous, lusting after the lady saints whose virginity is constructed as all the more strong and impermeable in contrast with this lust, intransigent in their rejection of Christianity and cruel in their punishment of the apostate. These pagans were never graced with dream-visits by saints, so the mysterious workings of the dream-world (meaning God) declined to intervene with them.[245] And they clung stubbornly to those culturally and socially-determined beliefs that provided the pretext for the violent torture and martyrdom of saints. The treatment of the pagan Gauls is kinder, softer, and more favorable than the treatment of pagan eastern rulers, which reveals that difference in religion (pagan/Christian) is not the only form of alterity that matters. It is no so much the pagan ruler that is constructed as the antagonist, but the *eastern* ruler, whose foreignness is the screen on which, in a proto-Orientalist fashion, negative characteristics are projected.[246]

[245] With the important exception of the empress in the Life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, who defied the Emperor to follow her dream and hold court with the imprisoned Saint Catherine. Her husband reacts to her conversion, of course, by brutally torturing and killing her.

[246] Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) presented a critique of the Western World's perceptions of the East and Arab people, but his commentary fails to take into account the wide variety of views and approached to the Christian East in the Middle Ages. See also Jean Richard, *La vogue de l'orient dans la littérature occidentale du moyen âge* (Société d'études médiévales, 1966), Jacques Le Goff, *L'occident médiéval et l'océan indien: un horizon onirique* (Leo S. Olschki, 1970). and Emil Dreesbach, *Der Orient in Der Altfranzösischen Kreuzzugslitteratur* (Druck v. A. Koenig in Guben, 1901).

The First Sea Voyage

Turning to the content of Le Clerc's text, the opening lines of the *Romanz* are of primary importance to the analysis at hand because they function to shorten a series of distances between two dissimilar contexts. These distances are multiple: geographical, chronological, and imaginary; ultimately, the Magdalene's apostolic mission in Gaul provides a trans-Mediterranean overview and links the time of Christ with feudal Europe. The incipit introduces the life in this manner:

> *Ici comence le romanz de sainte Marie Magdalene.*
>
> *Aprés ceo ke Nostre Seignor*
>
> *Jesu Crist, le voir Sauveor,*
>
> *Fu relevez de mort a vie,*
>
> *E si fu de la compaignie* 4
>
> *Parti e la sus monté*
>
> *A destre de la magesté,*
>
> *Li apostre se departirent*
>
> *Qui plusors teres cumvertirent.* 8
>
> Here begins the romance of Mary Magdalene/After our Lord/Jesus Christ, the true Savior/rose from death to life/and left his followers to go up to heaven/to sit on the right hand of God in majesty,/the Apostles dispersed/and converted people in many lands.[247]

In this way, these opening lines situate the audience directly in the Biblical context, grounding the narrative in the earliest years of the Christian era—the years directly following Christ's ascent into heaven—and in the foundational moments of the global evangelizing mission predestined for Christ's chosen followers in the episode of Pentecost. This opening offers a justification for the

[247] See Russell, *Le Romanz,* 187.

Magdalene's apostolic mission in France; before his death, rebirth, and ascent into heaven, Christ intended for his doctrine to spread throughout the world and convert many diverse peoples. He equipped his followers by providing them with the linguistic skills necessary to preach and convert in distant lands, undoing the discord and divide that had plagued humanity since the fall of the tower of Babel.

As these opening lines make reference to Christ's rebirth, they foreshadow those events in Le Clerc's narrative that highlight the power that Christian figures wield over life and death. By setting up the *imitatio Christi*—the ways in which the life of the saint mirrors the life of Christ—these lines provide the pretext for travel. Just as Christ left the Holy Land to reign beside his father in the hereafter, so too did the apostles disperse in order to spread the Gospel. It is important to note that in this version of history the Holy Land was willingly vacated by the adherents of Christianity. It was not conquered by an invading army; rather, these opening lines make it clear the necessity to proselytize and convert foreign lands moved the original Christians to leave.

Turning away from the canonical Biblical tale of the life of Christ and towards the new material that addresses figure of the Mary Magdalene, the narrative continues:

La gloriouse Magdaleine,
Ki de l'amur de Deu fu plaine,
Marthe sa suer e Lazarus
Qui suscité avoit Jesus, 12
E cil ke [ciu] out esté né
Que Deus avoit enluminé,
Dont maint jueu s'esmerveilla,
E la curteise Marcilla 16

Qui la bele parole dist

Quant ele benei Jesu Crist

E le ventre ki Le porta

E la mamele k'Il tetta,

E un deciple de grant pris

Ki fu un des deisante dis

Qui Maxi[min]us avoit nun -

Cil fu lur siste cumpaignun - ,

Al cungié Pierres s'en alerent.

La mer de Grece trespasserent

E ariverent a Marceille.

> Glorious Mary Magdalene, who was filled with the love of God, along with Martha, her sister, and Lazarus, whom Jesus has raised from the dead; and the man born blind whom Jesus had cured, to the amazement of many Jews; and the gracious Marcilla, who uttered the beautiful words of blessing on Jesus and on the womb which bore him and on the breast which succored him; along with their sixth companion, the esteemed disciple, Maximinus by name, one of the seventy - these six, along with other companions who believed in our Lord, took their leave of Saint Peter and, crossing the Grecian sea, landed at Marseille.[248]

The quoted text details the Magdalene's holy entourage and testifies to their first-hand proximity to the savior, Jesus Christ. It also offers the conflation between Mary Magdalene and another Biblical Mary, Mary of Bethany of the Martha-Mary sisterhood. Additionally, Mary Magdalene's departure for Marseille inscribes Le Clerc's text into the canonical Gospel through reference to a host of figures from the New Testament: Martha of Bethany,[249] Lazarus (raised from the dead by

[248] Russell, 187-188, lines 9-29.

[249] Luke 10:40. See too, Mary Ann Beavis, "Reconsidering Mary of Bethany," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2012): 281–297.

Jesus),[250] an anonymous blind man cured by Christ to the amazement of the Pharisees,[251] and Marcilla, the nameless figure who called out a blessing to Jesus in the crowd,[252] and who was apocryphally dubbed given this name.[253]

The presence of many of these figures alongside Mary Magdalene on her apostolic mission to Marseille foreshadow the themes at play in the Prince's story. Lazarus, raised from the dead by Jesus, prefigures Mary Magdalene's resurrection of the Prince's wife on the Mediterranean island. Lazarus, a name recognizable to the Christian audience, function as a metonymical invocation of Christ's power to mediate between the states of life and death. Similarly, Marcilla is associated with another theme at the heart of Le Clerc's story. Marcilla's impromptu blessing to Christ in the crowd directly referenced the breasts of Christ's mother Mary, as she cried out, "blessed are the breasts that gave you suck." This blessing is echoed in Le Clerc's narrative, as Mary Magdalene intervenes to sustain the Prince's child, and thus guarantee the continuation of his bloodline. Her presence thus prefigures the miraculous lactation of the dead Prince's wife, whose breasts were continually refilled with an abundance of nourishing milk for the duration of her child's stay on the island.

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[250] John 11. The cult of Saint Lazarus was widespread in the Middle Ages, and this figure was the subject of an Old French life. See Edward J Gallagher, “The ‘Visio Lazari,' the Cult, and the Old French Life of Saint Lazarus: An Overview,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 90, no. 3-4 (1989): 331–339.

[251] John 9:1

[252] Luke 11:27

[253] On Marcilla's name see Mary Ann Beavis, "Reconsidering Mary of Bethany," and Ton Hilhorst, "The Prestige of Hebrew in the Christian World of Late Antiquity and Middle Ages" in *Flores Florentino* (Brill, 2007): 777-802

The final apostle mentioned in the quoted text, Maximinus, is not a Biblical figure, but rather a figure named in apocryphal texts as the first bishop of Aix.[254] He was reported to have given communion to Mary Magdalene on her deathbed, at the site of the present village of Saint-Maximin, near Saint-Baume de Provence. Le Clerc's inclusion of the Bishop Maximinius is significant because it contradicts the claim that the Magdalene's true relics were interred in Vézelay. It suggests, rather, that the Magdalene was indeed laid to rest in Saint-Baume de Provence, and that this is where her relics would remain, notwithstanding a corrective translation story that Le Clerc never delivers. The passage commits another interesting revision by suggesting that Saint Maximinius was not a native of Gaul, a pagan converted to Chrisianity by the Magdalene, but rather a member of her entourage, originally from the Holy Land, who had made the journey across the Mediterranean and finished his life there. This is significant because it attributes the earliest French bishop with origins in the eastern Mediterranean, a step that anchors the French ecclesiology squarely in the eastern context. The institution of the French religious establishment, then, has its foundational roots in the Holy Land.

Ultimately, the quoted text attests to Le Clerc's textual intervention in the foundational moments of the Christian tradition. During the first half of the thirteenth century, Le Clerc was compelled to ground his contribution in the Christian canon by participating in the continual rewriting of the Passion story. To this end, he superimposed both new and traditional characters, with their identities adapted to resemble more closely the identity of the audience, on a recognizable Biblical pattern or story. Indeed, this theme is developed in the following lines, when Le Clerc details the cold reception of the evangelists in Gaul, turned away by the uncaring locals.

[254] See C. M. Girdlestone, "The Tradition of the Maries in Provence," *Blackfriars* 32, no. 378 (1951): 407–414.

The arduous journey, the lackluster welcome by the ignorant natives, the indigent status of the servants of God, all combine to echo Mary and Joseph's reception in Bethlehem, when they sought shelter but were consistently turned away by an unholy populous whose indifference reflected the fallen state of man and their emphatic need for the coming of the Christian savior. It also echoes the great reversal at the heart of the Gospels in the beatitudes, in which the poor shall be made rich and the lowly shall be placed on most high.

The final tercet of the quoted text describes the way in which Mary Magdalene and her entourage take leave of Saint Peter, who remains behind to act as the keeper of the Holy Land. The term that Le Clerc employs to express this moment, the Old French, Anglo-Norman "al cungié," implies that the leave that they took of Saint Peter was temporary, and that Mary and her entourage are destined to return. This reinforce the sense that the Holy Land is a territory that Christians ultimately claim as their own. Vacated willingly by a set of foundational characters who always planned to return, the earliest Christians emerge as the rightful inhabitants of the Holy Land, and their spiritual successors logically emerge as the heirs.

The fact that Le Clerc refers to the Mediterranean Sea as "La mer de Grèce" (the Sea of Greece) effectively anticipates the sweeping, geographical overview of the Mediterranean region that the text will continue to develop.[255] Their landing at Marseille situates this French mainland on a map with ancient Jerusalem. Le Clerc makes no effort to call Marseille by the name that the antique port city would have borne in the first century: Massalia.[256]

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[255] Christiane Villain-Gandossi, on the other hand, argues that the evocation of so many foreign countries serves only as ornamentation. See Christiane Villain-Gandossi, "La mer et la navigation maritime à travers quelques textes de la littérature française du XIIe," *Revue d'histoire Économique et Sociale* 47, no. 2 (1969): 150–192.

[256] For an overview of ancient Marseille before the Roman conquest, see Sophie Collin Bouffier, "Marseille Et La Gaule Méditerranéenne Avant La Conquête Romaine," *Pallas*, no. 80 (2009): 35–60. Pierre-Louis-Théophile-Georges Goyau, "Diocese of Marseilles (Massalia)," in *Catholic Encyclopedia,* ed. Charles

Overall, these introductory lines function to bring the thirteenth-century listener back in time to the Holy Land, and provide a feasible pretext for Mary Magdalene's presence on the French mainland. Le Clerc seamlessly weaves Biblical, apocryphal, and contemporary traditions of hagiographical knowledge in order to create a series of references that links the Biblical figures with the medieval audience and thereby constructs a genealogy. The pairing of Lazarus/Jesus (lines 11-12) foreshadows the climax of the romance, when Mary Magdalene causes the wife of the Prince of Marseille to be raised from the dead. They continue back to France to promote Christianity and form a community of believers.

The Second Sea Voyage

Trans-Mediterranean Sea travel is not limited to the apostles of Christ who journey westward from Palestine. The Prince of Marseilles and his wife decide to embark on an overseas journey to celebrate their conversion by visiting the holy sites and paying tribute to the savior Jesus Christ through first-hand witness to the mysteries of their newfound faith. In this way, they undertake what Guillaume Le Clerc refers to as the first pilgrimage. By describing the voyage to Jerusalem in this way, Le Clerc is anchoring his text in contemporary discourse on pilgrimage, a term used interchangeably to describe the military effort of crusade. He forges a link between the earliest Christian aristocracy and the movement between mainland France and the Holy Land.

Directly before the second sea voyage, a trip undertaken by the Prince of Marseille and his family from Marseille to Jerusalem, Mary Magdalene gifts the Prince of Marseille the first cross worn by a pilgrim:

Herbermann (Robert Appleton Company, 2013), and Michel Clerc, *Massalia: Histoire de Marseille dans l'antiquité, des origines à la fin de l'Empire romain d'Occident (476 après J.-C.)* 2. (J. Laffitte, 1999).

E la curteise Magdaleine

Li dona la croiz premeraine,

Ke unkes portast pelerin.

Sur s'espaul, ceo est la fin, 208

Lui mist une croiz a enseigne;

A Deu le comande, sil seigne.

La dame pur ceo le croiza,

Ke li malfé nel peust ja 212

Tempter ne faire repentir

De sun veage parfunir. vv 205-14

> And Mary Magdalene graciously/Gave him the first cross/Ever worn by a pilgrim./In short, she put a cross on his shoulder/As a sign,/And she commended him to God/And blessed him with the sign of the cross./She marked him with the cross/So that the devil could never/Tempt him, nor make him forsake/His pilgrimage.[257]

In his remarks on pilgrimage, it is clear that Guillaume Le Clerc is drawing from pilgrim's guides and incorporating contemporary knowledge of pilgrimage into his account that purports to date from the first century. By the beginning of the thirteenth century, at the time when Le Clerc was writing, pilgrimages from France and England to Jerusalem, Rome, and Compostela had become commonplace.[258] Manuals that described locations of pilgrimage and offered practical advice to prospective travelers were in circulation. Le Clerc draws on the rhetoric of pilgrimage to stage this encounter between the Prince and the Saint.

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[257] Russell, 191.

[258] See John Wilkinson, Joyce Hill and W.F. Ryan, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage 1099-1185*. Hakluyt Society, Second Series 167 (Hakluyt Society, 1988), and Nicole Chareyon, *Pèlerins de Jerusalem au Moyen Âge* (Imago, 2000).

This passage is instrumental in offering an origin story, or a sort of etiological narrative for the genesis of the crusading phenomenon. Le Clerc inscribes the foundational moments of one of the most prominent campaigns of medieval Latin Christendom squarely into the French context. Mary Magdalene puts the cross on the shoulder of the Prince, recites a prayer against the temptation for desertion, and effectively inaugurates the concerted military effort to assert western European control on the Holy Land. During the Middle Ages, the Pope would assume Mary's function of bestowing the cross on the initiated crusader. Interestingly, in both the hagiographical account by Le Clerb and in historical acts of crusade, the task of the pilgrimage, or crusade, is spiritually binding. Historically, the refusal to embark on crusade or the inability to adequately complete a crusade mission was punished with excommunication by the Pope. The Prince's adventure is not presented in terms of a military adventure, and yet it shares these features with the earliest crusades, whose objectives were emphatically militaristic.

Furthermore, Guillaume's *Romanz* incorporates the usefulness of texts like pilgrimage manuals, drawing on the practical considerations of pilgrims venturing off to distant lands. First, the Prince and his wife entrust their property to Mary Magdalene and her entourage before their departure, an important detail since the absence of a reigning ruler during the course of a pilgrimage could easily result in the usurpation of his throne by one of his brothers, heirs, or any other ambitious lord or pretender to the throne. This reinforces the sense that the text is invested in the continuity of earthly, secular lineage. The Prince has a special political interest in securing his sovereign power with a trusted confidante. This also testifies to the face that the Prince of Marseille holds Mary Magdalene and her entourage in extremely high regard. She has quickly risen to the ranks of proxy-royalty while the Prince himself is away on pilgrimage, and she is a counselor who can be trusted with the governance of the kingdom in the Prince's absence.

In the course of narrating the second sea voyage of the *Romanz,* Le Clerc engages with the nautical context, offering precise details about the nature of overseas travel and referencing geographical landmarks with great significance to the crusading cause:

Quant Dieus lor dona vent del nord 216

Eskiperent li marinier

E firent les veiles drescier,

E quant il furent al palacre,

Si s'en alerent dreit vers Acre 220

Le plus droit chemin k'il purent.

As soon as God granted them a wind from the north/The sailors embarked/And raised the sails./And when they reached the open sea,/They went straight to Acre/By the most direct route that the winds allowed. [259]

In this way, Le Clerc offers his audience a vivid rendering of the sea crossing, and his selection of specific nautical and geographical vocabulary brings this episode to life. The north wind carries the pilgrims straight to Acre, a city on the coastal plain region of Israel's Northern District, at the northernmost extremity of Haifa Bay. The chief port in the First Crusader's Kingdom of Jerusalem, Acre was, from the very beginning, a strategic link in the western European advance into the Middle East. It provided them, through the course of the twelfth century, with a political, cultural, and economic foothold in the region, offering coveted access to the Asiatic spice trade along the silk road. Acre was briefly conquered by Saladin in 1187 AD and remained in Muslim hands until it was unexpectedly besieged by Frankish forces in 1189. This siege was led by Guy of Lusignan (1150-1194), a Poitevin knight from the French duchy of Aquitaine who served as King of the

[259] Russell, 191. See John K. Wright, *The Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades: A Study in the History of Medieval Science and Tradition in Western Europe* (Dover Publications, 1965), and Christiane Villain-Gandossi, “La mer."

Crusader State of Jerusalem from 1186 to 1192. The siege, which was then in turn besieged by Saladin's armies, became a rallying point for the Third Crusade, and Richard I of England and Phillip II of France came to Guy's aid, definitively lifting the siege in 1191. In the wake of the lifted siege, Acre remained in western European hands for a full century, until 1291, when it was captured by Mamaluk forces. During the first quarter of the thirteenth century, at the time when Le Clerc's was composing his *Romanz*, Acre was firmly secured by western European Christian forces, though it would become the object of bitter rivalry between crusading factions over the course of the thirteenth century. Crusading texts, especially pilgrim manuals, emphasized the strategic importance of Acre as a fortified city with access to the coastline, the ideal locus of western European military might.

In short, Acre was an appropriate landing point for an overseas pilgrimage from Marseille. This same route between the western and eastern Mediterranean that was traveled by Mary Magdalene and her companions in the opening lines, although the Magdalene's departure city is not explicitly stated, perhaps because Jerusalem is not a port city and does not directly give on the "Grecian Sea." The Prince thus retraces Mary Magdalene's route, a gesture of "eternal return" wherein the ruler of France becomes contemporary with the Biblical age and retraces the steps of its mythical founders.[260] The vocabulary of maritime voyage lends particular weight to this episode; it contributes to the sense of adventure and threshold-crossing that allows for the interaction between heroes from radically different concepts (here, the Biblical Saint Peter and the apocryphal first-century Prince of Marseille). Christiane Villain-Gandossi's article on maritime vocabulary in twelfth-century French literature highlights the use of terms and phrases specific to the nautical context ("palacre," "eskiperent," "les veiles dresserent") and the way that these terms

[260] For an overview of the concept of "eternal return," see Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History,* trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton University Press, 1971).

conjure the unknown and give rise to the marvelous. Le Clerc's diction works in concert to enrapture his audience by giving rise to both the unknown marvels of a distant land, and the recognizable landmarks of Biblical lore.

Furthermore, during the length of the Prince's pilgrimage, pragmatic issues related to the undertaking of pilgrimage arise, and provide insight into the realities of the endeavor of thirteenth-century pilgrimage. The question of money is repeatedly raised; the Prince must pay off the captain and crew of the ship each time an impromptu stop is made to the island (first, to drop off his wife's corpse and later, to discover it again). Le Clerc also mentions that the Prince must pay his wife's return trip from the Mediterranean island home to Marseille, after her body has been resurrected from the dead (and he does so gladly). Yet this detail is not anodyne: it reveals the costly nature of overseas pilgrimage, suggests that such voyages may only be undertaken by the wealthy, and confirms that even among the wealthiest members of medieval society, pilgrimage remained a perilous enterprise.

Le Clerc's text thus serves as a keyhole onto trans-Mediterranean vistas for an entire stratum of the medieval population that lacked the means to travel. When the Prince reaches the Holy Land, Le Clerc enumerates the various holy sites that Saint Peter brings him to visit in and around Jerusalem. This list is expanded from the Latin version in order to include the Sepulcher, Solomon's temple, Bethlehem, the mount of Calvary, and the river Jordan. The addition of these holy sites in the vernacular speaks to the evangelizing overtones of the text. Each site has a specific history and creates a discursive link with the earliest moments of Christianity. The Prince is confirmed in his newfound Christianity and this inspires him to return to the French mainland with an evangelizing mission. Similarly, the spirit of the Prince's wife hovers unseen alongside the Prince and Saint Peter and serves as a device that allows the listener to engage with the journey of

the pilgrimage alongside the protagonists and observe the holy sites vicariously through the Prince's narration. Upon their return to Marseille, the Prince and his wife pay tribute to the mysteries of the Holy Land and the workings of the Christian faith performed through the power Mary Magdalene, resulting in a mass conversion to the Christian faith.

Delbert Russell, whose notes and translations accompany the most recent version of the *Romanz,* reads this text as a meditation on the need for an equal distribution of duties within marriage. He argues that although the pilgrimage ostensibly serves to confirm the protagonists' faith in a Christian God, the narrative also asserts that in marriage both wife and husband share their rights and duties equally in all spheres of human activity.[261] Russell considers that the abbot of Kenilworth might have commissioned Guillaume's life of the Magdalen with a view to intensifying relations between his monastery and its lay patrons, claiming that this text must have spoken eloquently on the subject of marriage to any lay audiences who heard it read aloud.

Though Russell presents a compelling theory for the patron of the text, he ultimately understates the role and the importance of the Magdalene as saint throughout the length of the plot: though the majority of the text addresses the Prince of Marseille, its narrative structure privileges the miracles of the Magdalene as the catalyzing narrative force. In my reading, the narrative remains firmly planted in the spiritual realm, indulging in descriptions of the miraculous in order to mystify, engage, and capture the interest of the audience, but ultimately subordinating the tale of the Prince of Marseille to the power of the Magdalene. Although the pilgrimage ostensibly serves to confirm the protagonists' faith in the powers of Christ, the narrative also asserts that Mary Magdalene's powers are equal if not greater than the powers of Christ. She not only revives the dead wife at the end of the narrative, but she also provides her dead body with an abundance of

[261] See *Le Romanz de sainte Marie Madeleine. Verse Saints' Lives Written in the French of England,* trans. Delbert W. Russell (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012).

breast milk that nourishes her child. The Magdalene's miracles recall the miracle of Saint Catherine:

La gloriuse Magdaleine
Esteit en tere e vive e saine,
Mes sa merite e sa priere
Ert devant Deu en tel maniere
Ke li emfes qui vif estoit
E que sis pierres li avoit
Comandé od bone creance
Trova par devine puissance
Duz let en la mamele morte
Dont il se saole e conforte -
Ceo est mult grant merveille a dire;
Mes jeo sai bien ke Nostre Sire
Pot par tut faire son plaisir.
Cil qui fist les ewes sailir
De la dure pierre al desert
Veant tut son poeple en apert
Pot bien faire ceo que jeo cunt.
Le cors garda que ert al mont
Qu'il ne seccha ne ne porri,
E si fu mielz l'enfant nurri
Que s'il eüst plusors nurrices,

Kar il ne quiert altres delices 444

Fors la mamele k'il tette,

Que n'iert trop grant ni petitette,

Mes a mesure plaine e bele.

> Glorious Magdalene remained alive and well on land, but her prayer and her worth were such in the sight of God that the infant, who was still living and whose father had commended him to her in good faith, through divine providence found in the mother's lifeless nipple sweet milk, of which the child drank his fill and was comforted. This is a very great miracle indeed, but I know that our Lord can do anything that pleases him. He who made water gush from the desert rock before the eyes of his people can certainly accomplish what I am recounting. He protected the body on the mountainside so that it did not wither or decompose, and the infant was better nourished than if he had had several wet-nurses, for he sought no pleasures other than the breast at which he suckled, which was neither too large nor too small, but suitably full and beautiful.[262]

Thus, she creates the conditions for her spirit to follow along with her husband and observe the Holy Sites in the company of Saint Peter. This trans-Mediterranean teleportation is without parallel in medieval hagiography; while saints may blur the line between the living and the dead, they are not known to revive the dead back into life. In this way, she surpasses the powers of Christ and revolutionizes the meaning of *imitatio Christi.*

The Crusader Context

The medieval Magdalen legend has its roots in the earliest centuries of Christianity and develops significantly in the context of crusader history. Before the composition of Guillaume Le Clerc's text, the figure of Mary Magdalene had already been firmly established as one of the most powerful of all saints in western European Christendom. Her cult and texts have a complex history. Her

[262] Russell, 95.

profile sprang from a conflation between three separate women from the New Testament. The synthesis between these figures has its roots in Late Antiquity; it was first made by Gregory the Great, and eventually confirmed by church fathers including Bede, Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Bonaventure.[263] The three women in question are Mary of Magdala, Mary of Bethany, and an unnamed repentant sinner who bathed Christ's feet in the Gospels. Mary of Magdala is a recurrent figure in the New Testament; Jesus cast out three devils from this Mary, she was present at the crucifixion, and she was also the first to see Jesus risen, having famously provoked jealously when she reported the news of the resurrection to his disciples. This figure was often confused with the eponymous Mary of Bethany, sister to Martha, who witnessed Lazarus risen from the dead. Mary of Bethany had anointed Christ's feet with perfume and this act was assimilated with the act of a third woman: an unnamed repentant sinner, whose sin was assumed to be prostitution and who bathed the feet of Jesus with her tears and anointed them with oil at the house of Simon the Pharisee in Bethany.[264] The gradual slippage between these three figures became dogma in the pens of the church fathers, who cast Mary Magdalene as a repentant prostitute in order to present a more appealing case for the evangelization of fallen women in Late Antiquity, and encourage women who did not correspond to the Christian ideal of virginity to nonetheless enter the fold of Christianity under the auspice of a repentant sinner saint, Mary Magdalene.

After her gradual transformation from companion of Christ to redeemed sinner, the most striking development of Mary Magdalene's cult was its appropriation from the Holy Land to Europe and the creation of a post-Gospel life for her in southern and central France. Motifs in

[263] See Victor Saxer, *Le Culte de Marie Madeleine.*

[264] References to Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany: Matthew 27:55-61, 26:6-13, 28:1-10; Mark 14:3-9, 15:40-41, 47, 16:1-11; Luke 7:36-50, 8:2, 10:38-42; 24:1-11; John 11:1-46, 12:1-8, 19:25, 20:1-18. Also see Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor.*

hagiography and iconography directly borrowed from the legend of Saint Mary the Egyptian reinforced that first layer—that of the penitential sinner—to her life.[265] As early as the ninth century, a period of eremitical penance in the desert preceding her death was added to her legend, in keeping with the ongoing and consistent conflation between her life and the life of Mary the Egyptian.[266] The question of the posthumous life of her relics was to become contentious, as various religious centers across southern and central French vied for the spiritual prestige that possession of her relics would bring.

The High Middle Ages marked a turning point in the history of these relics. During the course of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the western church followed the eastern tradition that placed her tomb in Ephesus, an ancient Greek city on the coast of Ionia, located in present-day Turkey. In the middle of the eleventh century, the French abbey Vézelay in Burgundy claimed to possess her tomb and quickly became prominent as the center of her cult. A papal bull from April 27th, 1050 by Leo IX made her one of the official patrons of the abbey, and another from March 1058 by Stephen IX sanctioned the abbey's claim to possess Magdalene's relics. These bulls made the southern French abbey a new center for the cult of Mary Magdalene, a center for pilgrimage in its own right, increasing its wealth and influence enormously.[267]

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[265] On the Magdalene's iconography, see Susan Haskins, "Mary Magdalene and the Burgundian Question," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 73 (2010): 99–135. On her cult, see Baudouin de Gaiffier, "Notes sur le culte de sainte Marie-Madeleine. A propos d'un livre récent," *Analecta Bollandiana* 78, no. 1-4 (1960): 161-168, and Louis-Marie-Olivier Duchesne, "La légende de sainte Marie-Madeleine" in *Annales du Midi* 5, no. 17 (1893).

[266] See Russel, 62, and my description of the life of Saint Mary the Egyptian below.

[267] See Saxer, 65-74, as well as Bernard Montagnes, "Le pèlerinage provençal à Marie-Madeleine au XV e" *Revue Des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 85, no. 4 (2001): 679–695.

Alongside its privileged relationship with the Magdalene, the role and importance of the abbey in Vézelay is intimately interwoven with the call to pilgrimage and crusade. It is described in a well-known pilgrim's guide that, although falsely attributed to Aimeri Picaud, nonetheless remained influential during the course of the High Middle Ages.[268] Bernard of Clairvaux selected Vézelay abbey as the site to preach the Second Crusade during Easter in 1146, in the presence of Louis VII and Eleanor of Aquitaine, among hundreds of other potential crusaders. These sermons would solder will of the western European forces to join and retake the Holy Land. A few decades later, in 1190, the effort to life the siege of Acre, the military adventure that would become the catalyst for the Third Crusade was launched from Vézelay. Armies led by Philip August II of France and Richard I "Lionheart" of England assembled before they crossed the sea for Acre. King Richard formerly took his crusader vows at this abbey before departing for his military campaign in the Holy Land.[269] The dual history of veneration of Mary Magdalene and the launching of crusade efforts combines to create an inextricable link between the two phenomena.

Moreover, Vézelay's ascendancy as the center of the Magdalene's cult significantly transformed this cult, causing her legend to acquire important additions. Mary Magdalene's apostolic mission to Provence was used to justify her presence in the south of France. A miracle story concerning the prince of Marseille was used to ground the legend in a western setting and to tie the Magdalene directly to the French aristocracy. An account of Mary Magdalene's holy death after a period of asceticism at an undisclosed site in near Aix-en-Provence, together with the translation of the relics from Provence to the Vézelay abbey in central France, explain the

[268] Picaud, *Guide du pèlerin de Saint Jacques.* The shrine to Mary Magdalene at Vézelay is described on pages 78-79.

[269] Pinto-Mathieu, x.

discovery of her relics at Vézelay. The first two of these additions made their way into Le Clerc's vernacular version. As mentioned, Le Clerc remained silent as to the whereabouts of her tomb, a detail that would prove important in the dénouement of the legend.

The ascendancy of Vézelay as a center for the veneration of Mary Magdalene was to be undone, due in part to the refinements of its own hagiographers. In December 1279, a group of monks at Saint-Maximin in Provence claimed to discover the previously unearthed tomb of Mary Magdalene in the crypt of their chapel, together with a certificate of authenticity. It was the Vézelay hagiographers who had introduced the site of Sainte-Baume in Provence as the place where Mary Magdalene had died, lending credence to this claim. Saint Maximin's status as companion and confessor of Mary Magdalene add further weight to the theory that her remains would have been interred in Provence. This caused the papacy to legitimize the claim of the monks at Saint-Maximin, which came to replace Vézelay as a center of pilgrimage during the fourteenth century. Le Clerc's silence on the whereabouts of the tomb add to the sense of uncertainty.

Conclusion

The evolution of the text, as it was translated from Latin into the vernacular, indicates that this hagiography was strategically developed to place great emphasis on the direct and inviolate link between a series of dissimilar contexts: the time of Christ and the Middle Ages, western Europe and Jerusalem, the French aristocracy and the earliest followers of Christ. The repeated journeys detail a series of contacts across the Mediterranean Sea, between its northernmost port of Marseille and the southeastern shores, and these contacts result in exchanges of identities that ultimately catalyze the Christian conversion of the entire nation of Gaul.

Le Clerc's text distinguishes itself from typical hagiography because it eschews discussion of the biography of Mary Magdalene and relies instead on the overwhelming popularity of the saint's cult to clue in the audience on the specifics of her life. Within Guillaume Le Clerc's *Romanz de sainte marie Madeleine*, the title figure is constructed as a composite of the miracles she performs. Close readings reveal that these miracles are intimately interconnected with the biological functions specific to women: fertility, the miraculous production of breastmilk, and when she finally does raise the woman from the dead, the continuation of secular, earthly power through the sustaining of the bloodline.

Mary the Egyptian

The life of Saint Mary the Egyptian is a sister legend to the life of Saint Mary Magdalene. Their stories share a common arc: the repentant sinner whose period of eremitism and asceticism in the desert has elevated her to a state of perfection. Their cults and iconographies, including the cloak of long, white hair that reaches their feet, is conflated throughout the medieval West. Mary the Egyptian, however, never took up the project of evangelizing; she finished her life in the desert, and the monk Zosimas served as the sole witness to her exemplary life and death. Her eremitism marked her as a saint, as did her abdication of the life of sin that she had selected for herself at the age of twelve. Indeed, the life of Saint Mary the Egyptian developed within the patristic context, emerging perhaps from the desire to create a feminized representation of the Desert Fathers. This plants the text firmly within the tradition outlined in the first chapter on the *Conception Nostre Dame,* a tradition aimed at reworking the foundational moments of Christianity in order to insert a diversity of women, ad-hoc, into a tradition that would ultimately remain unstable.[270]

[270] See Conrad Leyser, "The Uses of the Desert in the Sixth-Century West," *Church History and Religious Culture* 86, no. 1-4 (2006): 113–134.

Importantly, and in contrast to the Life of Mary Magdalene, the life of Saint Mary the Egyptian is not grounded in canonical Biblical text. Rather, it is the apocryphal creation of Late Antique/Early Christian hagiographers who sought to capture the "wild man" archetype in a female form. The earliest written version of the legend is unknown, and the seventh-century Greek text that serves as a standard against which later Latin and vernacular versions are measured. The text was strategically developed to place greater emphasis on the nobility of the saint in question, her elected life of concupiscence and prostitution, and her journey through the southeastern Mediterranean that results in her conversion.

The Manuscript Tradition

The earliest known version of the legend is a Greek text attributed to Sophronius, patriarch of Jerusalem and saint in the eastern orthodox church, who was born around 560 and who died in the year 638.[271] Saint Sophronius was an ascetic who turned from eremitism to coenobitism early in his career, traveling through the Middle East during the seventh century and paying witness to its transformations. During the final years of Sophronius' life, as Patriarch of Jerusalem, he witnessed Saracen armies under Umar ibn al-Kattab, a senior companion of the prophet Mohammed, seize control of Palestine. It was Sophronius who ceded Jerusalem to the caliph Umar in 637, but not before securing a treaty from the Saracen ruler, commonly referred to as Umar's Assurance, which granted religious and civil liberties to Christians in the region in exchange for a tribute.[272]

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[271] See Dembowski, 13. See too Sophronius, Saint Patriarch of Jerusalem, *Life of Our Holy Mother Mary of Egypt, 922 AD [i.e. 522 AD]. Commemorated April 1* (Saint Nectarios Press, 1992).

[272]For the text of Umar's Assurance, see Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In* (Hachette, 2010), 91-92. See also Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi. "Umar's Assurance of Safety to the People of Aelia (Jerusalem): A critical Analytical Study of the Historical Sources," *Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 47–49, and Oded Peri. *Christianity*

The patriarch Sophronius' interest in promoting the legend of Mary the Egyptian was doubtlessly influenced by his own period as an ascetic in Egypt (c. 580), which he completed before entering the monastery of Saint Theodosius in Bethlehem.[273] Sophronius spent much of his adult life preaching the volitional acts of Jesus.[274] A witness to the late sixth- and early seventh-century political and religious reinvention of the Holy Land, he oversaw the transition of Jerusalem from Christian to Muslim authority.[275] Thus, the original author of Mary the Egyptian's life was a monk who was familiar with both the geography of asceticism in Late Antique Egypt and with the monastic institutions in Palestine. We are confronted with the rare example of a medieval life that can be traced directly to its firsthand Late Antique sources. Since the model characters for Mary and Father Zosima do not seem to antedate the second half of the fifth century, Sophronius may have been removed from his subjects by a few short generations.[276] This fact speaks to the immediacy of the account.

The extant Latin manuscript on which the anonymous twelfth-century French version is patterned (Manuscript T) contains major ideological divergences from Sophronius' original Greek text. Whereas the Greek text is intellectual and privileges the narration of the life of Father Zosimas, the anonymous poet's insistence on role of the Virgin Mary in Mary the Egyptian's

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Under Islam in Jerusalem: The Question of the Holy Sites in Early Ottoman Times (Brill, 2001), and Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad, eds., *Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* 1 (Darwin Press, 1992).

[273] See Angelo Di Berardino, *Patrology: The Eastern Fathers from the Council of Chalcedon (451) to John of Damascus (750)*, trans. Adrian Walford (James Clarke & Co, 2008).

[274] See Sophronius, Saint Patriarch of Jerusalem, *Sophronius of Jerusalem and Seventh-Century Heresy: The Synodical Letter and Other Documents*, ed. Pauline Allen (Oxford University Press, 2009).

[275] See Kanan Makiya, *The Rock: A Tale of Seventh-Century Jerusalem* (Pantheon Books, 2001).

[276] See F. Delmas, "Remarques sur la vie de sainte Marie l'Égyptienne," *Revue des études byzantines* 4, no. 1 (1900): 35-42.

conversion, plants this text firmly in the realm of Marian literature.[277] This manuscript appears in Paris, BNF 23112, f. 334c-344a, in a collection of saints' lives in prose and in verse. It also contains part of a *Poème moral, le Livres de la morte* attributed to Helinand, the *Aventure au chevalier* in verse, and the *Miracles du clerc de Roem* in verse, attributed to Thibaut de Vornon. Mary the Egyptian's life figures at the end of the collection and is preceded by a version of the life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria. The explicit is dated 1200 while the manuscript's characters correspond more convincingly to the end of the thirteenth century.

Another manuscript containing the life of Saint Mary the Egyptian is housed in Oxford, at the Bodleian Library, Cononici, Misc. 74, f. 109r-120r. The manuscript also contains the *Vie de saint Alexis* (in Alexandrine verse), the *Poème moral,* and the lives of sainte Julienne, sainte Euphrosyne, and saint André. It is probably the earliest manuscript of the version in question, written at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Baker contends that the manuscript was written in a scriptorium attached to a religious establishment in the area of Liège, and more specifically at the Stavelot-Malmédy abbey.[278] This Benedictine abbey, founded at the end of the seventh century by Saint Remaclus, a monk from Luxeuil, was home to a large literary output.[279] Located at the edges of the Ardennes forest, the abbey's surroundings were described a feral region, one of "horror and solitary isolation which abounds with wild beasts."[280] These descriptions echo the asperities

[277] For an overview of the Marian echoes in the life of Mary the Egyptian, see Dembowski, 23. Ellen Swanberg also explores the semantic link between Mary the Egyptian and the Virgin Mary, see Ellen Swanberg, "'Oraisons' and Liaisons: Romanesque Didacticism in 'La Vie de sainte Marie l'Egyptienne,'" *Romance Notes* 23, no. 1 (1982): 71.

[278] See Baker, 183.

[279] See François Baix, *Étude sur l'abbaye et principauté de Stavelot-Malmédy* (Champion, 1924).

[280] See D. Meisser, "Stavelot," *in Dictionnaire géographique de la province de Liége* (L'Établissement Géographique, Faubourg de Flandre, 1831).

of the ascetic calling described in the life of Saint Mary the Egyptian. The abbey church, dedicated to Saint Benedict, maintained strong, ideological ties to the desert tradition in spite of its location in northeastern Belgium. The sum of these facts suggests that Mary the Egyptian was a desirable patroness for the abbey in question; Mary as a holy protagonist offered a profile befitting the plight of medieval monks living on the outskirts of civilization.

Later in the thirteenth century, the poet Rutebeuf would further popularize the life of Saint Mary the Egyptian by rendering her life in octosyllabic vernacular verse.[281] His additions, departures, and interpolations of the anonymous twelfth-century text remain significant in their context.[282] Best known for his *Miracle de Théophile,* in which he presents a dramatic telling of the mercy of the Virgin Mary, Rutebeuf's life of Saint Mary the Egyptian conserves the Marian undertones of the anonymous antecedent at issue in this study.[283]

Summary of the Life

The vernacular French life of Saint Mary the Egyptian begins with a meditation on the nature of sin and God's forgiveness: God's mercy is so great that no sin cannot be forgiven. After this short didactic introduction, the narration launches into the background story of Mary the Egyptian. She is born and baptized a noblewoman in Egypt but leads a debauched life in her youth and decides to become a prostitute. Her parents beg her to change her ways and appeal to her high birth, tempting her with a rich husband if she repents her life of prostitution. She rejects this offer and

[281] Rutebeuf, *Le miracle de Théophile*, trans. Roger Dubuis (H. Champion, 1978).

[282] See Suzanne Nash, "Rutebeuf's Contribution to the Saint Mary the Egyptian Legend," *The French Review* 44, no. 4 (1971): 695–705.

[283] See Rutebeuf, *Le miracle de Théophile*, trans. Roger Dubuis (H. Champion, 1978).

leaves for Alexandria to pursue a path of debauchery, not out of a desire for money, the narrator specifies, but purely because she enjoys it. She spends seventeen years as a prostitute in Alexandria until one day a ship bound for Jerusalem arrives in the port, and she trades the enjoyment of her body for passage to the Holy City. In Jerusalem, during the Feast of the Assumption, she tries to enter a church but finds herself mysteriously unable to cross the threshold of the door. When she realizes that her sins are preventing her from entering, she appeals to the Virgin Mary to allow her to enter; this prayer contains a succinct summary of high medieval marian doctrine and provides thematic links between the lives of the sainted Mary's.[284] Mary the Egyptian is reborn into a state of purity and virginity that is ascribed to the Virgin Mother. God forgives her, and she is able to enter the temple. He expiates her sins and instructs her to go to Saint John's monastery, then continue past the river Jordan where she will spend the remainder of her days in penance. She follows his will and remains in the desert for forty years, surviving off of two loaves of bread, grazing on desert herbs and subsisting off of the heavenly manna that the angels bring her in her isolation.

At this point, the narration about the life of Mary the Egyptian breaks off and the narrator takes up the story of Zosimas, a devout monk living in a monastery on the outskirts of the Egyptian desert. The first encounter between Zosimas and Mary is described as the encounter between an unsuspecting monk and a feral, possibly dangerous beast. In a moment that echoes the self-consciousness of Adam and Eve before God, Mary recognizes her own nakedness when she meets the monk and asks him to lend her his blanket. They bless each other. Zosimas intuits Mary's holiness and asks her to rejoin the world, but Mary insists that she must remain in the desert for the rest of her days. She invites Zosimas to return in one year to the spot where they first

[284] See Baker, lines 409-536

encountered one another, and he returns with some lentils: she eats three of them, and this constitutes the first food that she had eaten in forty years. She dies the following day, and Zosimas finds her uncorrupted body in the same site, one year later. He is unable to bury her, but a lion from the desert appears and helps to dig her grave. Zosimas returns to the monastery and relates her story to the monks, commending her exemplary life of asceticism.

Meretrix Mary

The first and most obvious departure of this text from the canon of Old French texts on female saints' lives is the extraordinary emphasis on Mary's sexuality.[285] In fact, the theme of the *meretrix,* or the sinful woman had been developed in a handful of lives since the invention of vernacular verse, including the life of Mary Magdalene, the life of Saint Afra, the life of Mary, Abraham's niece.[286] These hagiographies present a sort of paradox for Christian teachings that rely almost exclusively on virginity in representations of sainted woman. How does a tradition with such a stubborn insistence on the virtue of virginity tolerate the elevation to sainthood of a prostitute who reveled in sexual pleasure?

The introduction's meditation on the nature of sin and forgiveness provides a lens into the economy of virtue in the text. These introductory lines remind the readers that God's mercy and forgiveness are extended to the most sinful among them:

Tout cil qui le volront amer

Et por s'amor moi escouter

[285] See Ruth Mazo Karras, "Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1, no. 1 (1990): 3–32.

[286] See Karras, 4

De ma dame sainte Marie

L'Egyptien orront la vie. 12

Car che saichent tout pecheor

334d *Ki forfait sont au Creator*

Que nus pekiés n'est si pesant

Ne si horrible ne si grans 16

Dont Dex ne fache vrai pardon

Par foi et par confession

A ciax qui prendent penitance.[287]

> All those who want to love Him/And for love him of listen to me/Of my Lady Saint Mary/The Egyptian, hear her life./For, know that for any sinner/Who gives themselves to the Creator/That no sin is so heavy/Nor so horrible nor so great/That God will not make true pardon/Through faith and through confession/To those who make penance.[288]

In this way, Mary's sinfulness holds a mirror to God's grace. The very abject nature of her fallen state allows the hagiographer to articulate, by contrast, the bountifulness of divine forgiveness. The sharp divide between the vice of carnal sin and the darkness of eternal damnation is brought into relief by the mercy of God, who pardons even the most errant among us provided that we confess and express remorse for the sins we have committed. The passage even suggests that the most wayward of his children are the most beloved by God, echoing Christ's parable of the prodigal son, another topos at play in medieval hagiographical literature. Furthermore, the conversion topos

[287] See Dembowski, 33

[288] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

links the life of Mary the Egyptian with the life of another exemplary figure from Late Antiquity, Saint Augustine.[289]

By depicting Mary the Egyptian as a fallen sinner who has a spiritual awakening on the threshold of her adult life, and who is reborn in her newfound adherence to Christianity, the author is drawing on an important hagiographical trope, inscribing Mary within the tradition of the desert fathers. The desert father par excellence, Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, authored *The Confessions,* an autobiographical work that circulated widely in the Middle Ages and detailed his rejection of earthly pursuits and pleasures, as well as his conversion to Christianity at the age of 31. The prototypical Augustinian conversion is held up as a standard for the arc of the saintly life throughout the course of the Middle Ages.[290] The path that Saint Augustine's own life traced is likened to the journey of the soul as it ascends from a position to sin to one of grace and knowledge of God.[291]

The lesson of Saint Augustine is echoed in the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman life of Saint Mary the Egyptian; in the course of the narrator's meditation on the nature of sin and forgiveness, the sinner is instructed to confirm her desire to repent: "Lors si dist il: "Je me repens."[292] This oath of repentance reinforces Mary the Egyptian's link with the conversion of the desert fathers like

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[289] See B. Blumenkranz, "La parabole de l'enfant prodigue chez saint Augustin et saint Cesaire d'Arles," *Vigiliae Christianae* 2, no. 2 (1948): 102–105.

[290] For the source text on Augstine's conversion, see Saint Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine,* trans. Edward B. Pusey (Modern Library, 1999); for studies on the Augustinian conversion in High and Late Medieval literature, see Eric L. Saak, "'Ex Vita Patrum Formatur Vita Fratrum': The Appropriation of the Desert Fathers in the Augustinian Monasticism of the Later Middle Ages," *Church History and Religious Culture* 86, no. 1-4 (2006): 191–228, and Sara Danièle Bélanger-Michaud, "Affect et dramatisation dans l'écriture de la conversion : L'exemplarité du récit augustinien," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 47, no. 1 (2014): 161–177.

[291] See Mariette Canévet, "Les 'Confessions' de saint Augustin : Un voyage spirituel," *Revue Des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 87, no. 3 (2003): 549–556.

[292] line 40.

Saint Augustine of Hippo, who overcame his own sexuality in order to follow the righteous path. Consider that Mary is a noble Christian, and these facets of her identity are inventions of the vernacular version, whose scribe sought to render the Greek text recognizable to the French audience, and to render the protagonist more relatable to the average listener. This link builds a bridge between the medieval Anglo-Norman audience, eager to see its own members reflected in spiritual stories and hagiographies like the one at hand, and the earliest Christian tradition that elevated repentant sinners and held a mirror to their lives, emphasizing the redemptive value of conversion at a later point in life.

The River Jordan

While the life of Saint Mary the Egyptian contains interesting departures from the Anglo-Norman hagiographic typology of the penitent saint, it also performs a second task central to the analysis at hand; this text provides a geographical overview of important Biblical markers in the Late Antique Holy Land. In the course of presenting the reader with a series of references that conjure the foundational moments in the Christian tradition, this text immerses the reader in a southeastern Mediterranean panorama that links Biblical past with the crusading present. Central to this project is the role of the River Jordan, the body of water where Mary anoints herself and is born again into her Christian faith. This river provides a series of discursive links that ground the text in a tradition that would have been recognizable to its audience.

The narrator relates how Mary proceeds to the river Jordan to begin her eremitical life of penance:

Au flun Jourdain en va Marie,

Le nuit i prist herbegerie.

Bien prés del mostier Saint Jehan,

Sor le rive del flun Jordan, 572

Se herbega sans nul ati,

Un de ses pains menga demi,

Bu de l'iaue saintefiie.

Quant en ot but, molt par fu lie, 576

Sen chief leva de le pure onde,

De tous ses pechiés devint monde.[293]

> Mary went to the river Jordan/And took refuge at night there./Right near Saint John's monastery/On the banks of the River Jordan,/she took refuge without any clothing/She ate one half of a loaf of bread/And drank the holy water./As soon as she drank it/She lifted her head from the pure waves,/And was relieved of all her worldly sins.

The choice of the Jordan River as the site of Mary's self-anointing is significant. A body of water with great historical, political, and spiritual resonance, it grounds Mary in a variety of discourses and traditions, all of which emphasize the processes of conversion and redemption.

The Jordan River, which still exists and is still called by the same name, flows North to South, from the Sea of Galilee into the Dead Sea. It separates Israel and the West Bank (to the West) from Jordan and the greater Middle East landmass (to the East). The river has a major significance in both the Old and New Testaments, in which it is described as a locus of miracles and transformation. In 2 Kings 5:14, the prophet Elisha uses the water of the Jordan River to heal Namaan's leprosy; in 2 Kings 6:6 he is said to have miraculously conjured an axe head that had been thrown in the water of this river. In the New Testament, the Jordan River takes on a new

[293] page.

context as it becomes the site that John the Baptist selects for baptism unto repentance.[294] The river of the canonical Christian Gospels thus evolves into a center of conversion and redemption, a locus of spiritual activity where sinners are reborn and received into the Christian faith, and where their sins are wiped clean from their souls. The twelfth-century scribe's reference to the river thus creates a link with the discourse of baptism and with the concept of redemption; Jesus himself received baptism there, and he later performed many baptisms along the Jordan.[295] During the twelfth century, the rite of baptism, crucial for salvation, marked membership in the Christian community and the assumption of its attendant obligations.[296] Baptism created an oath, which compelled the individual to Christianity not merely for the sake of their own soul, but for the health and defense of the Christian community. This rite of initiation into the Christian faith was central in the enforcement of ideological communities and was wielded as a weapon by crusaders who sought to homogenize the communities they conquered.[297]

In the anonymous twelfth-century life of Mary the Egyptian, it is Mary herself who performs the baptism, a self-anointing with no parallel in Biblical, apocryphal, or contemporary spiritual literature. She alone is the witness to her repentance, which is received and confirmed by God when he cleanses her of her many sins. Her consumption of the water of the river and the loaf

[294] See Matthew 3:5-6, Mark 1:5, Luke 3:3, and John 1:28.

[295] Matthew 3:13, Mark 1:9, Luke 3:21, 4.1 and John 1:29-36.

[296] See Norman Tanner and Sethina Watson, "Least of the Laity: The Minimum Requirements for a Medieval Christian," *Journal of Medieval History* 32, no. 4 (2006): 395.

[297] For a general overview of the ritual of baptism in the Middle Ages, see Harriet M. Sonne de Torrens and Miguel A. Torrens, eds., *The Visual Culture of Baptism in the Middle Ages: Essays on Medieval Fonts, Settings, and Beliefs* (Ashgate Publishing, 2013). For a study of the concept of baptism at the time of the crusades, see John V. Tolan, "Le Baptême Du Roi « Païen » Dans Les Épopées De La Croisade," *Revue de l'histoire des Religions* 217, no. 4 (2000): 707–731.

of bread holds additional initiatory resonances, as it mirrors the sacrament of communion. The loaf of bread as the body of Christ symbolic of Mary the Egyptian's willful induction into the community of believers. The fact that she spends forty years in the desert fasting mirrors the Biblical episode commonly referred to as the Temptatin of Christ, the forty-day period in which Christ wandered through the Judean desert, fasting, and undergoing temptations with the devil.[298] Sexual temptation is not among the temptations mentioned in the canonical Gospel accounts, but the stories are nonetheless linked through the messianic overtones. The successful completion of this period of fasting in the desert allowed Christ to return and complete his ministry in Galilee; Mary's own time in the desert allows her to complete her own penance and assume her own ministry as a sainted figure among all God's saints in heaven.

The fact that these initiatory gestures are made at Saint John's monastery is equally compelling and relevant to the overview of sacred geography that the hagiography provides. Saint John's monastery was as a locus of spiritual knowledge and the headquarters of Late Antique desert saints, such as Saint Paul and Saint Anthony of Egypt, who braved the harsh asperities of the Judean desert climate in search of pure asceticism.[299] Saint Mary the Egyptian is thus anchored in a tradition that valorizes the resistance of sexual temptation as a supreme virtue (as per the life of

[298] Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:2-13, and Luke 4:1-13. For an overview of Mary the Egyptian's likeness to Christ, see Brigitte Cazelles, “Modèle Ou Mirage: Marie L'Egyptienne,” *The French Review* 53, no. 1 (1979): 13–22.

[299] For an overview of the monastic community in the Judean desert, see Graham Gould, "The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community," *Theological Studies* 55, no. 2 (1994): 386; for an historical overview of Saint John's monastery in Late Antiquity, see John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314-631* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

Saint Anthony of Egypt), and the rejection of worldly comforts and affects in favor of isolation and the pursuit of spiritual perfection in the desert.[300]

The Body, Transformed

The Life of Saint Mary the Egyptian contains additional departures from the hagiographical tradition; the text places great emphasis on the transformation of Mary's physical body, a fact that challenges the adherence to piety and circumspection that tradition hagiography observes when it addresses the bodies of women. Following her self-anointing in the River Jordan, emphasis is placed on the physical changes that her body undergoes, and these changes mirror her spiritual development. The way that Mary the Egyptian's body is described also has great significance for the question of alterity in medieval literature. How are the bodies of foreign saints treated in twelfth-century Anglo-Norman hagiographic texts? And similarly, how are the bodies of women from the southeastern Mediterranean construed, and how do these descriptions differ from those of their peers?

First, regarding the physical description of her body: from the beginning of the poem, Mary's body receives undue attention, as it is presented as the object of use and exchange among men. A turning point occurs after Mary's self-baptism. The narrator devotes many lines of the poem to the transformation of Mary's body when she enters the desert to repent for her life of sin.[301] The narrator indicates that she becomes like a beast when her bread is used up, grazing on the desert herbs for the first ten years of her penitential life. For the following thirty years, the

[300] A chapel to Saint Mary the Egyptian was erected in the bed of the Jordan at the end of the nineteenth century. See F-M Abel, "Exploration du sud-est de la vallée du Jourdain (Suite et fin)" *Revue Biblique (1892-1940)* 41, no. 2 (1932): 240. Abel describes a more ancient structure that provides the foundation for this chapel and suggests its origins.

[301] lines 621-622.

angels bring her food from heaven. The description of Mary the Egyptian after forty years in the desert places specific emphasis on the physical changes to her body. Importantly, the changes are described from the perspective of the monk, whose gaze construes and interprets the sight of Mary's nakedness before him:

De Marie vit le figure,

Apertement sans couverture 840

Environ li estoit se crine,

Tant blance conme flor d'espine.

Li blanc cavel et li delgiés

Li avaloient dusc'as piés; 844

El n'avoit altre vestement,

Quant ce li soslevoit le vent,

Dessous paroit le char bruslee

Del soleil et de le gelee. 848

He saw Marie's figure/Openly without cover/And her hair was/Most white as a thorn flower/Her white hair/Enveloped her down to her feet;/She had no other covering,/And when the wind rose,/Her skin burned by/The sun and the frost/Appeared beneath it.

These five octosyllabic couplets tell the initial encounter between Mary and Zosimas, a moment of mutual recognition and spiritual exchange that heralds the end of Mary's life in the desert.[302] As mentioned, this moment echoes the seminal scene from Genesis, in which Adam and Eve

[302] Though the encounter between Mary and Zossimas remains confined within the realm of the spiritual, its antecedents are identifiably romantic. Ellen Swanberg suggests that the relationship between Mary and Zossimas, inaugurated by this recognition scene echoes the convention of the *roman courtois.* See Swanberg, "Oraisons' and Liaisons," 68-69.

recognize their own nakedness, after having ingested the illicit fruit from the true of knowledge.[303] Mary the Egyptian, reduced (or perhaps evelated) to a savage state of innocence after decades of isolation in the desert, recognizes her own nakedness after the gaze of the monk Zosimas falls on her body and renders her conscious of the animal-like state to which she has descended. This episode recalls the innocence of animals and their special powers in medieval thought. The bestiary tradition testifies to the special godliness of certain animals, so Mary the Egyptian's animality can be read as a continuation of that line of thought.[304] Some animals like the greyhound were even sainted during the Middle Ages.[305]

As the excerpted text indicates, Mary the Egyptian's period of penitence in the desert results in physical changes to her body. She develops the cloak of long, white hair that becomes part of her iconography. Her skin, once described as white in keeping with twelfth-century Anglo-Norman beauty ideals, has been darkened by exposure to the elements in the desert.[306] These details testify to the exchange of identities that the desert facilitates. The lack of sexuality in the description of her body is also notable. Mary the Egyptian has shed her conscience and her body is no longer a conduit of sinful desire.

The southeastern Mediterranean origins of the saint allows the author of this life to permit his heroine a sexual license that local saints are almost without exception categorically denied.

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[303] Genesis 3:6.

[304] See Sarah Kay, *Animal Skins and their Reading Self in Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), and Peggy McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast: Sovereignty and Animality in Medieval France* (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[305] See Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le saint lévrier: Guinefort, guérisseur d'enfants depuis le XIIIe siècle* (Flammarion, 1979).

[306] Chiara Frugoni, "L'iconographie de la femme au cours des Xe-XIIe siècles," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 20, no. 78 (1977): 183-184.

Ruth Mazo Karras demonstrates that, among the penitent saints that gained popularity in medieval Europe, most were from faraway lands and their lives were set in the distant past. Even Saint Afra of Ausburg was attributed Cypriot roots, a touch of that pagan and exotic flavor that accounted for her life as a prostitute, and those who told her story in the Middle Ages believed she was a follower, priestess, or servant of Venus.[307] Yet notwithstanding this fact, Karras convincingly argues that Afra's past as a prostitute was handled with a comparably greater degree of tact. In her analysis of the life of Saint Afra, Ruth Mazo Karras attributes the softer treatment of the medieval author to the fact that Afra's story was set in a more familiar world. "The audience could entertain exotic fantasies about the brothels of Alexandria or Antioch but could more easily envision the mundanity of those of Ausburg."[308]

The paradox of alterity is that setting the story in a far-off setting contradictorily enhances its verisimilitude. "Dans l'esprit de leurs auteurs, le récit gagne ainsi en vraisemblance auprès du public, par le seul fait qu'il se passe loin des lieux que celui-ci connaît. Ceux qui seraient choqués d'une rencontre entre Huon de Bordeaux et Auberon aux environs de Paris, trouveront tout naturel que le jeune héros soit secouru par le roi de *faerie* devant Babylone."[309] The desert fathers who wrote the lives of the desert saints were much stricter in their asceticism than anyone in the medieval West.

The Desert Tradition

[307] Karras, "Holy Harlots," 15

[308] *Ibid.,* 16.

[309] Villain-Gandossi, 161.

One of the rare scholars to examine the twelfth-century life of Saint Mary the Egyptian is F. Delmas, who explored the resonance of the desert tradition in this text over a century ago.[310] Examining the geographical overview that the medieval hagiography provides, Delmas insists that the framework for Mary the Egyptian's life is borrowed from the typology of Saint Paul the Hermit and Cyrille de Scythopolis.[311] He describes his own travels through the trans-Jordanian landscape in order to bring his eyewitness experience to bear against the medieval hagiography:

> "J'ai visité bien souvent la contrée transjordane, plus souvent sans doute que l'auteur de la *Vie,* et ses indications topographiques m'ont toujours paru de vraies impossibilités. Le Jourdain franchi, on aborde une jolie plaine bien arrosée, bien cultivée, sillonnée jadis de nombreuses voies romaines et couverte de bourgs et de villages. La ville de Livias s'élevait dans cette oasis. Au delà, se dressent les monts Abarum qui servent d'épaulement à l'immense plateau de Moab et de l'Idumée, terre fertile, très peuplée, ainsi que l'attestent les ruines sans nombre des citées et des métrocomies qui jalonnent les routes nationales.
>
> Plus loin encore, derrière le chapelet de camps et de forteresses qui s'égrène sur les frontières de l'Empire, s'étend à perte de vue le désert sans eau et toujours inexploré qui relie, à travers une mer de montagnes et de collines dénudées, les terres de la Palestine à celles de la Chaldée. Quelques tribus de Bédouins pillards osent seules s'y aventurer. Est-ce dans ce désert qu'habitait Marie l'Egyptienne?
>
> I have often visited the land that the Jordan river crosses, doubtlessly more often than the author of this *Life,* and his topographical directions have always seemed like real impossibilities. Once you cross the Jordan, you come to a pretty, irrigated, fertile plain that was once crossed by numerous Roman roads and covered with towns and villages. The city of Livias rose in this oasis. Beyond it rose the Abarum mountains, which served as the shoulders of the immense plateau of Moab and the Idumaea, fertile land, very populous, as the countless ruins of cities and metrocomes that punctuate the national highways attest.
>
> Further still, behind the string of camps and fortresses that is spread across the borders of the empire, the waterless and still-unexplored desert stretches to the horizon, and unites, through a sea of mountains and barren hills, the lands of Palestine with those of Chaldea. Only a few tribes of pillager Bedouins dare venture there. Was it in this desert where Mary the Egyptian lived?[312]

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[310] See F. Delmas, "Remarques sur la vie de sainte Marie l'Égyptienne," *Revue des études byzantines* 4, no. 1 (1900): 35-42.

[311] See Delmas, "Remarques," 39.

[312] Delmas, "Remarques," 40-41. All translations are mine.

Delmas casts doubt on the verisimilitude of the hagiographer's account, referencing the geographical features that stretch between the Jordan River and the hostile asperities of the Judean desert. In discussing the likelihood of this account, Delmas has fallen into the trap laid by Mary the Egyptian's hagiographer. He has layered his own contemporary preconceptions about the Israel desert geography over that of the hagiographical account.

Conclusion

The narration of the life of Saint Mary Magdalene and the life of Saint Mary the Egyptian explicitly dialogue with trans-Mediterranean sea travel, and with the geography of the eastern Mediterranean. In doing so, they present a panorama of the Biblical and Late Antique Mediterranean as a fluid place of exchange, where racial, ethnic and religious identities are traded, and the possibility for conversion is realized.

In the *Romanz* of Mary Magdalene, Guillaume Le Clerc gives voice to a trans-Mediterranean connection and posits a privileged connection between the inhabitants of the lands that would come to be France and the characters from the Bible who were first-hand witnesses to the life and miracles of Jesus Christ. His text was forged from a variety of apocryphal, but also secular and contemporary, sources that appeal to the sensibilities of a vernacular audience eager to see their own institutions reflected in the sacred tales. He reveals himself as aware of balancing the desire for novelty, wonder, and initiation into sacred mysteries through the telling of divine miracles, with the desire for familiarity, a sense of the recognizable that renders overseas adventures less foreign, more accessible to the mentalities of people who would never journey beyond their own context.

The *Romanz* is complicit in the call to Crusade through the many layers of historical context that ground the figure of Mary Magdalene in Vezelay, an historical location where the crusades were preached and where leading figures of the twelfth-century nobility and ecclesiology sought to exhort their people to take back the sacred land that had produced their savior. The life of Saint Mary the Egyptian similarly dialogues with these contexts.

Thus, the vernacularization of these texts is tied to the political and social framework of including a wider percentage of the Western European population into the fold of Christianity, and in particular into the call to the conquest of the Holy Land through Crusade. The rewriting of these texts forges an ideological space that posits a privileged connection between their Anglo-Norman readership, increasingly female and lay, and the Late Antique penitent, ascetic saints from the land across the Mediterranean.

CHAPTER FOUR

Contemporary Critical Theory and the Vernacular Hagiographic Tradition

This study has examined a series of twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts about the lives of legendary female saints with origins in the southeastern Mediterranean, interrogating their meaning to audiences in medieval France, Normandy, and Norman England. By situating the composition of these stories in their historical contexts, we have observed that these texts form a spiritual link between the medieval French audience and the earliest Christian legends, reinforcing the discourse that aimed for the conquest (or "recovery") of the Holy Land. By close-reading selected passages from each text, we have seen that these stories are adapted versions of their Latin originals that have been enriched by popular elements. In many instances, vernacular scribes have taken license with the Latin tradition in order to incorporate unorthodox elements, adapted from diverse sources, into their hagiographical texts. Now, this study shifts focus from the twelfth century to the twentieth century, in order to consider the importance of these observations vis-à-vis the modern theoretical tradition.

The purpose of this inquiry is twofold. First, I seek to determine the extent to which modern, post-structuralist appeals to the "medieval" are valid, particularly in the light of the discussions from the preceding three chapters. Then, I endeavor to evaluate the implications for modern feminist theories, should these appeals to the "medieval" prove inaccurate or incomplete. As I will demonstrate below, the modern post-structuralist tradition, and in particular the vein of feminist theory that was born out of post-structuralism, anchors much of its analysis in a specific understanding of the western Middle Ages, one that merits revision in the context of the vernacular lives of crusader state saints.

Recent studies have devoted much attention to the dialogue between the cultural and intellectual heritage of the Middle Ages and modern critical theory, and in particular to the allure that female sainthood, martyrdom, and mysticism holds for the leading theorists of post-modernity. Three studies in particular lay a foundation for the present discussion by providing a framework for the critical methodology and terminology that I will use in this study. The first is Andrew Cole's *The Birth of Theory,* which traces the modern obsession with identity and difference to Hegel's dialectic. Hegelian dialectics, as Cole demonstrates, abandon contemporary methods of systematic philosophy in favor of a methodology that has much more in common with medieval dialectics. Cole demonstrates the ways in which the underlying spirit of modern critical theory bears stronger similarities with the theological traditions of the Middle Ages than with the philosophical traditions of the intervening centuries.[313] Next, Amy Hollywood's *Sensible Ecstasy* examines the debt that modern critical theorists owe to the overwhelmingly female phenomenon of mysticism that flourished in France and in the Lowlands during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[314] Hollywood asks what work the medieval mystic performs for the secular, twentieth-century intellectual, and illustrates how medieval mystic experiences become the sites of competing interpretations and claims to authority. Finally, Françoise Meltzer's *For Fear of the Fire* questions why modern secular theorists are drawn to medieval saints and martyrs.[315] She uses the story of Joan of Arc (and the fascination it holds for so many modern thinkers) to illustrate how the post-structuralist appeal to the medieval is rooted in a nostalgia for pre-Cartesian notions of

[313] See Andrew Cole, *The Birth of Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 2014).

[314] See Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference and the Demands of History* (University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[315] See Françoise Meltzer, *For Fear of the Fire: Joan of Arc and the Limits of Subjectivity* (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

embodiment, and in an attraction to supernatural elements that one would expect for these theorists, at least outwardly, to reject.

These three aforementioned studies lay the groundwork for the dialogue between the post-structuralist and medieval traditions. They introduce the critical framework that allows us to examine the modern intellectual's engagement with the "medieval." With these studies in mind, the present chapter turns to the hagiographic tradition in order to evaluate the extent to which modern critical theory appeals, both explicitly and implicitly, to the foundational mythology of Christianity as it is articulated in the lives of female saints. Specifically, the final task of this dissertation is to revisit modern critical theory regarding the genesis of ideology on the subjugation of women, and the role of these medieval hagiographical texts in the creation of this ideology. What role does the medieval saint play in the orientation of modern feminist theory?

Many of the most prominent feminist scholars who emerged from the Parisian schools that pioneered post-modern and post-structuralist thought sought to identify and expose the masculinist ideology of western society. To this end, they engaged with the intellectual culture of the Middle Ages in order to locate the origins of this ideology at two specific watershed moments in French cultural history: (1) the emergence of the earliest vernacular writing, broadly construed as the inaugural moment of the French imaginary and traced to a ninth-century hagiography of a female saint in vernacular verse, and; (2) the foment of religious ideas brought about by the Gregorian reform and articulated during the course of the twelfth century.[316] Medieval hagiographical texts are deeply intertwined with both of these contexts and merit revision in the context of the theory in question.

[316] For the earliest French vernacular hagiography, see the Sequence (or Canticle) of Saint Eulalia, Roger Berger and Annette Brasseur, *Les séquences de Sainte Eulalie* (Droz, 2004). For further studies on the dating, see James C. Atkinson, "Eulalia's 'Element' or Maximian's?" *Studies in Philology* 65, no. 4 (1968): 599–611. On the Gregorian reform, see source.

One aspect of this revision involves an inquiry into the forms of historical writing on which post-structuralist theorists based their understanding of the Middle Ages. Over the course of the past half century, social and literary historians have challenged the quality and the accuracy of knowledge produced by prevailing forms of narrative history.[317] Scholars have remained relatively silent on the consequences of this challenge for the post-structuralist tradition, and yet these ideas and innovations have profound implications for the understanding of the "medieval" that lies at the heart of post-structuralist feminist theory.

It is my contention that, in the course of rejecting the "logocentrism" and, more specifically, the "phallocentrism" of narrative history, post-structuralist feminist theorists appeal to new historical narratives that rely on the very form that they claim to reject. Thus, the task of this chapter is not only to identify the dialogue between medieval sainthood and modern intellectual theory, but also to explore the misconceptions and paradoxes at the heart of the post-structuralist feminist understanding of the Middle Ages. Ultimately, this chapter aims to demonstrate that the visions of the Middle Ages of three of the leading figures of the post-structuralist feminist moment — Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixous — combine to suggest that the intellectual culture of the Middle Ages offered no more than a monolithic set of ideas that served as an echo chamber for the "hegemonic negative images of the feminine" derived from patristic thought.[318] The close readings performed in this study demonstrate that the intellectual culture of the Middle Ages offered a far more heterogeneous and nuanced set of perspectives on women, on female sexuality, and on the sacred female body than heretofore suggested.

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[317] See Hayden V. White, "The Burden of History," *History and Theory* 5, no. 2 (1966): 111–134.

[318] See R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), 8.

Finally, this chapter aims to interrogate why the contexts of pilgrimage and crusade are absent from the modern theoretical tradition, especially since these contexts facilitate interaction with the religious, ethnic, and racial other and give rise to new avenues for discussions about the way that the ideology of gender is constructed in these texts. This chapter will thus consider one underdetermined aspect of medieval sainthood: the alterity of the saints in question and the implications of this alterity for the claims of modern critical theory tradition. By considering the origins of each saint in a region of the southeastern Mediterranean, questions of alterity emerge and pose a further challenge to the positionalities of the aforementioned feminist theorists, who focus too narrowly on issues of female subjugation without taking into account the full social and political context of crusade, pilgrimage, and interaction with the Other.

Ultimately, my contention in this chapter aims to reach beyond the field of medieval hagiography studies and dialogue with some of the most contemporary problematics of intersectional feminism. When a religious, racial, or ethnic Other is identified in a literary text, it lessens the marginalization of women, whose otherness is mitigated by her membership in an ethnic, religious, or otherwise socially-constructed in-group. Given that each text appropriates and sanitizes the alterity of the saint in question, how does this distinction enter into dialogue with, and ultimately challenge the conceptual framework of the claims of modern critical theorists who view gender as the single standard against which difference is measured?

The Challenge of Narrative History

The questions and hypotheses advanced in this study are intimately interwoven with the dialogue between twelfth-century hagiographical writing and modern critical theory, and specifically with a series of claims advanced by French feminist intellectuals who appeal to the medieval tradition

in order to validate their own positionalities: Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva (though I also refer to the work of Simone de Beauvoir as important foundational material for the aforementioned theorists). In the analysis that follows, I refer to these intellectuals as "post-structuralist," a term that many of them might reject as a descriptor of their own thought. The group of writers sampled here may in fact differ more than they agree, but they converge in their critique of structuralist systems of knowledge. Their mode of thought is distinguished through the deconstruction of those binary oppositions that are thought to create hierarchies from conceptual opposites: rational vs. emotional, speech vs. writing, and, most importantly to the analysis at hand, male vs. female. Post-structuralist writers often appeal to history in order to demonstrate how certain concepts have changed over time, and how the "dominant" relation in a hierarchy has in fact proven dependent on its "subservient" counterpart.[319] For the post-structuralist feminist thinker, masculinist notions of objectivity are eschewed, and knowledge is viewed as a construct of power differentials, the "male" relation having historically dominated over the "female." Narratives of history can neither be relied upon for historical accuracy, nor for their status as artefacts capable of revealing undisclosed cultural information, because they are masculinist — logocentric and phallocentric — and therefore they function to occlude woman in her biological specificity from the nexus of words and images that compose the western imaginary.

Another identifying aspect of post-structuralist thought is its adherence to semiotics as articulated in Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics.*[320] This seminal work from

[319] See Réda Bensmaïa, "Poststructuralism" in *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century Thought* (Columbia University Press, 2005), 92-93.

[320] See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale,* ed. C. Bally, A. Sechehaye, and A. Riedlinger (Payot, 1916); For the English translation, see *Course in General Linguistics,* trans. W. Baskin (Fontana/Collins, 1977).

the first quarter of the twentieth century advocates for a view of language as a system that is ultimately unable to express the reality that contains it. Saussure theorizes a gap between the signifier and the signified of any given word, and this gap renders language impotent, and reality inaccessible. By adopting Saussure's approach to language, post-structuralist theorists are able to throw the entire project of historical narrative into question, as the words used to describe any given historical period remain relative to our own modern context, and thus only serve to render the past ever opaquer.

Finally, and most importantly, a unifying thread that runs through the whole of post-structuralism in general, and through the writing of the three feminist theorists in particular, is the location of the birth of individual female subjectivity within the emergence of medieval vernacular writing. Luce Irigaray identifies this moment as the "ground-zero," or the inaugural moment of modern notions of female subjectivity within the framework of institutions unique to feudalism and to the ecclesiastic hierarchy of the Christianity of the French Middle Ages.[321] Hélène Cixous articulates her theory of feminine writing, *écriture féminine*, using an emphasis on fluid discharge and affective language of ecstasy that is patterned on Christian mysticism.[322] Her seminal essay, *Le Rire de la Méduse,* recommends a radical project of mythical revisionism meant to overturn masculinist assumptions of female nature rooted in the Christian Middle Ages.[323] Julia Kristeva emphasizes the importance of both religious and socio-political framework of the Middle Ages in the development of modern notions of femininity, tracing the contemporary subjugation of women

[321] See Lucy Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Editions de Minuit, 1974).

[322] See Hélène Cixous, "Sorties," in *New French Feminisms,* ed. E. Marks and I. de Courtivron (University of Massachusettes Press, 1980).

[323] See Hélène Cixous, *Le Rire de la Méduse et autres ironies* (Galilée, 1975).

to patristic misogyny, actualized in twelfth-century (mis)representations of the Virgin Mary, which she identifies as Christianity's sanitized iteration of the pagan feminine divinity.[324]

Taken as a group, all three theorists assume that the twelfth-century invention of vernacular writing corresponds with the rise of a consolidated French "imaginary" — a nexus of ideas, words, and symbols to which the modern own tradition is heir. All three theorists moreover assume that the Middle Ages cast their dark shadow on the predicament of modern women in Western Europe. Their writings probe the earliest moments of French writing for incipient moments of resistance to this subjugation. And yet the entire corpus of medieval hagiography, with its unruly, popularly-enfranchised elements, is overlooked in favor of an examination that cherry-picks moments of ecclesiastic misogyny and holds them up as a standard against which the Middle Ages are measured.

Notwithstanding the potent discursive potential that each of these three theorists introduced into modern feminist thought, the problem of narrative history looms large. Though the spirit of post-structuralism reacts against traditional approaches to historical disciplines, its adherents are still heir to the knowledge that was produced using structuralist methods. When literary theorists in the 1960s and 1970s turned towards the Middle Ages, they were confined by the narratives of history that preceded them. As mentioned, the narrative strategies of nineteenth-century medieval historiography have been identified and their suitability as a means of conveying historical fact has been challenged,[325] and though several decades have elapsed since this challenge has been

[324] See Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater" in *The Portable Kristeva,* ed. Kelly Oliver (Columbia University Press, 2002).

[325] Most notably by Hayden White. See Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

offered, little scholarly work has been done to apply a critique of nineteenth-century historiography to the heirs of this knowledge, specifically, the theorists of post-structuralism.[326]

When scholars do identify the link between post-structuralism and narrative history, they often comment on the role that one particular figure played in shaping modern conceptions of the Middle Ages: Jules Michelet (1798-1894), French historian and man of letters who pioneered the study of the Middle Ages in nineteenth-century France.[327] Michelet's *Histoire de France,* referred to fondly as the *tableau de France,* is the prime example of a nineteenth-century historical narrative whose stakes lie beyond the discipline of history.[328] A sweeping nineteen-volume study beginning in the year 1AD and proceeding chronologically, Michelet's narrative strategies have remained unparalleled in terms of their appeal to the modern French imagination, as well as in terms of their influence on the modern understanding of French history. They have also been critiqued for their formal similarities to fiction, and some have even had the unique impact that Victor Hugo's coincidental publication of *Notre Dame de Paris* might have had on the history's approach.[329] Even the nickname, the *tableau de France,* communicates the sense that a concern for the aesthetic appeal of the text must have equaled, if not surpassed the Michelet's concern for its historical accuracy. Accordingly, this scholarship must be understood in its historical context, as narrative that (1) owed much both formally and thematically to the nineteenth-century novel, and that (2) functioned in service of a nationalist discourse that sought to exalt French national history over other Western European histories competing for a claim to historical primacy.

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[326] With the important exception of Hans Kellner, see, "Narrativity in History: Post-Structuralism and Since," *History and Theory* 26, no. 4, (1987): 1–29.

[327] See Roland Barthes, *Michelet* (Éditions de Seuil, 1954)

[328] See Jules Michelet. *Histoire de France* (Hachette, 1833-67).

[329] See Kellner, "Narrativity in History," 19.

Indeed, medieval historiography caught its stride during a long century when the French nation was endeavoring to assert its cultural and political dominance both within Europe and overseas. Catering to this nationalistic discourse, Michelet's medieval historiography was geared towards the project of painting the Middle Ages as an inchoate phase in the lifecycle of the unparalleled empire that the French Republic was destined to become.[330] It was not until the opening decades of the twentieth century that historians would offer a corrective to this reductive view, imagining the millennium between 500 and 1500 AD as a period of productive continuity rather than a lull between two important epochs of human history.[331]

Notwithstanding the early twentieth-century push to extend history beyond major names and events, much of twentieth-century cultural analysis of the Middle Ages was informed by the nineteenth-century scholarship that placed especial emphasis on the profiles of major royal and ecclesiastic players. As such, these historical texts largely elided the role that women played in the formation of the French Republic. In this respect, the work of Michelet emerges as an important exception to this trend as he sought to determine and explore the roles of women throughout French history. And yet, though he included women in his studies, he unquestionable cast them in an essentialized light. It is generally accepted, for example, that Michelet's *La Sorcière,* a work of literary, historical, and anthropological inquiry, constitutes a "radical presentation of the

[330] For a nuanced discussion of the precise nature of nineteenth-century medieval historiography, see Zrinka Stahuljak, *Pornographic Archeology, Medicine, Medievalism, and the Invention of the French Nation* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

[331] In France, for example, the *Annales* school spent the interwar period devoted to giving voice to the culture and mindset (*mentalités*) of the medieval peasant, a movement intended as a corrective to episodic "event" history that placed exclusive emphasis on major royal and ecclesiastic players. See in particular the paradigm-shifting work of Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Harvard University Press, 1971 (1927)). For work most illustrative of the *Annales* school, see Marc Bloch, *La Société féodale: la formation des liens de dépendance* (Albin Michel, 1939).

problematics of [nineteenth-century] historiography."[332] Divided into two long tomes, the first book of *La Sorcière* addresses the ways in which the medieval church and society established their repressive economy over women and usurped the voice and agency of the witch, forcing out the popular elements of oral history in favor of the written word. Michelet posits an Ur-text, a cut between historical object and its vestigial documents that only survives in the metaphorical invocation of the witch. He claims to perform such an invocation in his historical work, by entering the body of the witch and "[reporting] graphically how she feels."[333] These reports share much in common with the reports of the violent lives and gruesome martyrdoms of the legendary women whose stories are immortalized in the hagiographies of seven centuries earlier.

In fact, Michelet engages explicitly with the corpus of Old French hagiography, and anchors his own text in the cultural trappings of medieval sainthood. In engaging with the myth of *la sorcière,* his texts enter into explicit dialogue with the legendary aspects of sainthood by evoking the figures of *The Golden Legend.* Michelet posits a fable or folk origin for once-fertile legends that have been sterilized through the act of continual copying and recopying by monks. Linda Orr observes, "The metaphor accompanying this fable illustrates that the monk's rendition of the legend will never resemble the original; monuments of culture will never have any connection with what was natural."[334] In other words, Michelet was a post-structuralist Marxist *avant-l'heure*, an early contender in the struggle for the revenge of the popular class over the learned with a deep distrust for hierarchical systems of knowledge. In defense of this hypothesis, Orr calls attention to

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[332] See Linda Orr, "A Sort of History: Michelet's *La Sorcière,*" *Yale French Studies*, no. 59, (1980), 119 and for the source text, see Jules Michelet, *La sorcière: édition originale publiée avec notes et variantes par Lucian Refort* (M. Didier, 1957).

[333] See Orr, "A Sort of History," 124.

[334] *Ibid.,* 122.

Michelet's "popular book," begun in 1851, titled *La Légende d'or de la démocratie,* an attempt to rewrite the canonical saints' lives from a popularly-enfranchised perspective. This ambitious work was to remain unfinished, unpublished at the time of Michelet's death. Towards the end of his life, Michelet seems to have become divorced from the rigorous standards of the historical discipline. In the second book of *La Sorcière*, for example, he surrenders all notions of historical accuracy and seriously jeopardizes the truth claims in his work when he falsifies documents in order to reinforce his polemical stance in defense of women.[335]

Given his narrative strategies that border on the fictional, his mistrust of written language, and his glorification of the unknown potential that lay dormant in the bodies women, it is not difficult to see why post-structuralist feminist theorists came to vindicate Jules Michelet as the father of modern historiography, and why they borrowed heavily from his conception of the Middle Ages. At the apex of critical theory, Michelet was being revived by theorists at the forefront of French intellectual life, perhaps most notably by Roland Bathes, who began his career with a biography of Michelet, and then later triumphed the "modernity" of Michelet in an article from 1974.[336] His vindication of Michelet's work celebrates the nineteenth-century historian's Freudian and Marxian currents *avant la lettre*. Importantly, Barthes hails Michelet for his rejection of enlightenment values and for his insistence, instead, on an "untold" current of history, one that resides in the deconstruction of the binary opposition between "mind" and "body," privileging the latter. "Michelet dévoile ce que l'on pourrait appeler *le sensuel* de l'histoire," writes Barthes, foregoing "Reason" with a capital "R" in favor of an ethnology of France, a network of carnal

[335] See *New French Feminisms, An Anthology,* ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle Decourtivron (University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 175.

[336] See Roland Barthes, "Modernité de Michelet [with Discussion]," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 74, no. 5 (1974): 803–809.

behaviors and mythological representations.[337] The leading French theorists of the 1960s and 1970s celebrated Michelet's triumph of folklore and folklore theory, in addition to his "triumph of the soul of France," which stood in contrast to the rigidity of Cartesian philosophers who valued only timeless truths attained through reason.[338] One aspect of Michelet's oeuvre remains particularly relevant to the analysis at hand: his tendency to essentialize women for their transcendent and ethereal qualities. Post-structuralist feminists, and in particular Hélène Cixous, would replicate this tendency in their own theoretical positionalities, reclaiming the magical elements of the female body and repurposing them toward political ends.[339] This study turns now to those positionalities in order to better examine their dialogue with the hagiographic tradition, beginning with the work of Simone de Beauvoir, whose writing was influential for the post-structuralists.

Sainthood and Mysticism According to Simone de Beauvoir

Often hailed as the mother of French feminist thought, Simone de Beauvoir first published her landmark philosophical study of women in western culture, *Le Deuxième sexe,* in 1949.[340] During the first half of the twentieth century, engagement with the foundational moments of the French literary tradition in the production of gendered ideology occupied the leading figures of French

[337] See Barthes, "Modernité de Michelet," 803.

[338] See Charles Rearick, "Symbol, Legend, and History: Michelet as Folklorist-Historian," *French Historical Studies* 7, no. 1 (1971): 75.

[339] The question of the Michelet's defense of women is a contentious topic, as *La Sorcière* is preoccupied with violence against women, and yet this work has also become assimilated by French feminist writers including Cixous, most notably in her seminal essay, *Le Rire de la Méduse et autres ironies* (Galilée, 1975).

[340] Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe* (Gallimard, 1949). Cited here are the English translations, from *The Second Sex,* trans. H.M. Parshley (Vintage Books, 1989).

intellectual life, and Beauvoir found herself in the center of the discussion. Reaching back into the Middle Ages in order to ground her analysis of the modern predicament, she devoted a full chapter of *The Second Sex* to the figure of the medieval mystic ("The Mystic.") Mysticism is the belief that concealed truths are revealed through spiritual contemplation and ecstasy; the historical figures of mystics are intimately implicated with the representations of legendary saints in medieval hagiography. Following the twelfth-century invention of vernacular hagiography, lay spirituality spread across thirteenth-century Europe, hand in hand with the rise of the mystic phenomenon. Simone de Beauvoir observed that mysticism occupied a prominent position among the various ways that Western European women, heirs to the medieval Christian tradition, engage with the world. She treated the role of the mystic in her seminal non-fiction work that sought to unravel the social, cultural, and biological processes by which the "second sex" has historically been made subjugated.

Beauvoir's chapter on "The Mystic" follows "The Narcissist" and "The Woman in Love," yet reads more like an elaboration of these two themes rather than a distinct category in its own right. Beauvoir opts for a psychological-historical approach, arguing that the role of the mystic has historically proven to be the dramatization of a denied or thwarted love affair with God: "Love has been assigned to woman as her supreme vocation, and when she directs it toward a man, she is seeking God in him; but if human love is denied to her by circumstances, if she is disappointed or over particular, she may choose to adore divinity in the person of God himself."[341] The mystic, then, is not driven by lofty spiritual objectives but by romantic love. Furthermore, Simone de Beauvoir identifies in this project of divinity-adoration a motive that ultimately refers back to the

[341] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 703.

woman in question: “Woman seeks in divine love first of all what the *amoureuse* seeks in that of man: the exaltation of her narcissism; this sovereign gaze fixed attentively, amorously upon her is a miraculous godsend."[342] Here, the bodily affectivity and the visions of God that become the focus of later feminist theories on the essentialized nature of femininity are dismissed as vanity, the failure of a project that was initiated in bad faith.

Beauvoir does concede, however, that mysticism can function in service of a larger purpose. Women of action like Joan of Arc and Saint Theresa have paroxysms and visions of the divine offer images of the vocational paths that lead them to actively intervene in a society where they want to see improvement. They pursue their goals in a logical order, and the fruits of their labor justify their claims to its divine origin. In true existentialist fashion, Beauvoir insists that this liberty can only be authentically employed by projecting positive action onto human society.[343] The legendary female saints at issue in this study would fall into this typology. The visions of virgin martyrs like Saint Margaret and Saint Catherine moved them to stand up to their pagan oppressors and assert their faith in a Christian God; on the other hand, their language that vindicates bodily pain and suffering as a token of their faith in God, the *sponsa Christi* theme which caused them to articulate their love for Christ along the pattern of romantic love, laid the groundwork for later mystics to follow.

Simone de Beauvoir's commentary on mysticism is an instance of a major intellectual figure from the first half of the twentieth century seeking to address the phenomenon of female sainthood and female mysticism in order to trace the genesis of an ideology that had historically

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[342] *Ibid*., 707.

[343] *Ibid.* 712. For a detailed exploration of Beauvoir's positionalities, see Amy Hollywood, “Beauvoir, Irigaray, and the Mystical,” *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 (1994): 158–185.

functioned to subordinate women and keep them in a state of disempowerment. Beauvoir is the first modern feminist theorist to target the phenomenon of mysticism critically, and it is significant that her view of the mystic is much less forgiving than that of later feminists who vindicate this figure as a vehicle of pure and autonomous female subjectivity. Unlike the poststructuralist thinkers who followed her, Simone de Beauvoir does not blame abstract, historically-determined power differentials for the failure of the mystic project. Instead, she takes the individual mystic to task for the factors motivating her divine visions, and evaluates the success of mysticism using a results-oriented approach that values speech as a function of the betterment it effects on the society around it. Perhaps most importantly, Simone de Beauvoir does not see the rise of female subjectivity as an end in itself, a sufficient means to insert women into cultural dialogue and cast off the yoke of female subjugation. She evaluates the actions contingent on that speech, and the results of these actions on the wider society — the extent to which the mystic orients her divine visions towards engagement in positive social change.

In her article on Beauvoir's mysticism, Amy Hollywood claims that Beauvoir "grudgingly values the agency achieved by some female mystics," but that ultimately "Beauvoir's explicit atheism and her existential ethic thwart her ability to explain the source of the women mystic's autonomy and subjectivity."[344] I find this claim unconvincing, in that Beauvoir's explicit atheism and existential ethic in fact give the only compelling explanation of the source of the women mystic's autonomy and subjectivity. Autonomy and subjectivity are produced by concrete action. Hollywood's essential misreading of Beauvoir is that, she claims that Beauvoir bypasses "the text," and in doing so she gives lie to her position that the writings and teachings of female mystics are their primary modes of action in the world. Yet this is untrue, and it is the heritage of post-

[344] Hollywood, "Beauvoir, Irigaray, and the Mystical," 159.

structuralist modes of thinking that view writing as the ultimate form of engagement with the outside world. Beauvoir does not see writing and teaching as a primary mode of action, she sees *activity* as action.

Hollywood ultimately dismisses Beauvoir's engagement with mysticism in post-structuralist fashion, by identifying the series of binary oppositions that create hierarchies, and placing Beauvoir on the "wrong" side of them. Hollywood argues: "In this strong form, Beauvoir's ethic clearly maintains and reinforces the entire series of dualistic hierarchies upon which male privilege has traditionally rested: male/female, reason/unreason, culture/nature, subject/object, mind/body, self/other, transcendence/immanence. The problem for women is not to disrupt this series of hierarchies, but rather to reposition themselves on the side of men."[345] In this view, Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena emerge as masculine figures, contrasted with the liberating vindication of a feminine body in the words of Angela of Foligno and Madame Guyon. Simone de Beauvoir's feminism emerges as the mere parroting of masculinist hegemonic structures that only serve to strengthen the subjugation of women. This is the viewpoint that post-structuralists were reacting to, they saw Beauvoir's feminism as insubstantial to bring about the radical social change they wanted. Her view of the "medieval" was too nuanced.

Post-Structuralist Theory: Lacan, Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva

The rise of critical theory, and in particular of poststructuralist feminist theory, oriented many of the leading French thinkers during the second half of the twentieth century towards a different evaluation of the function of speech and its potential for bringing about political and social change.. They valued words and images as symbols imbued with the possibility to create powerful

[345] *Ibid.,* 166.

representations of reality on a psycho-social level. Literary theory based in psychoanalysis proliferated in Parisian circles. Theorists like Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray, based in Parisian schools, developed their ideas in response, and often in reaction, to the theories of Sigmund Freud and in particular to the interpretation of Freud's writings as articulated by Jacques Lacan. Specifically, many of the ideas advanced in Jacques Lacan's seminars laid the groundwork for the engagement of these feminist theorists, many of whom attended these seminars and studied under Lacan.[346]

Lacan's interventions in psychoanalysis were heavily grounded in word play and in reference to the western literary tradition. His engagement with the medieval tradition is twofold in terms of the relevance to this study. First, Lacan identified the symbolic conventions at play in the tradition of courtly love poetry developed during the Western European Middle Ages as a particularly formative element of contemporary culture: the bedrock of the French cultural psyche. Lacan places particular emphasis on the terms, gestures, and gender dynamics at play in the rhetoric of courtly love, which he believed was decisive for the formation of modern notions of subjectivity.[347] The central claim at work in his psychoanalytic theory holds that courtly codes of behavior organize modern man's sentimental attachments. In other words, the elusive laws at play within a wide range of human relationships might be decoded and understood in terms of the medieval courtly tradition.

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[346] Collected in a twenty-volume series, see Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Seuil, 1991 (1973)).

[347] For a detailed exploration of Lacan's dialogue with courtly love, see Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions*: *The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century* (Stanford University Press, 2001), Introduction esp. pages 26-27. Kay argues that Lacan's theory engages with questions of fantasy, desire, loss, trauma, subject that make up the substance of medieval texts and help shape our relation to them.

Then, Lacan engaged at length with the medieval tradition of mysticism, which he explored through the concept of feminine *jouissance*, a loaded term that translates literally as "orgasm," but that also came to take on a variety of different meanings within the lexicon of French critical theory. In Book 20 of *Encore*, a series of lectures from 1972-73, Lacan defines *jouissance* in opposition to Freud's pleasure principle.[348] It is defined as a transgressive sense of enjoyment that goes beyond pleasure, to a liminal space that borders on suffering. Lacan concedes that there is a feminine *jouissance*, yet he insists that we are unable to know anything about it. He cites one of the seminal representations of mysticism in the western tradition — Bernini's statue of Saint Teresa of Avila in Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome — to illustrate the link between divine visions and carnal sexuality. "You only need to go to Rome and see the statue to know that she's coming," he famously quips, adding that it is impossible to know what she's getting off on, for no one can know anything about female *jouissance*, and least of all women themselves.[349] In this way, Lacan's estimation of mysticism echoes that first version of mysticism elaborated by Simone de Beauvoir: an attempt at gaining individual liberty that is endeavored in bad faith and ultimately fated to fail. In fact, Amy Hollywood claims that Lacan is directly responding to Beauvoir's devaluation of psychoanalysis and to her reading of the character of mysticism as something that prevents women from achieving parity with men. Both Lacan and Beauvoir base their estimation of mysticism on the series of dualistic hierarchies where masculinist hegemony has traditionally prevailed.

[348] See *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan,* livre 20. See too Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge,* trans. Bruce Fink (W.W. Norton, 1998).

[349] See *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan,* livre 20.

Setting aside the question of whether or not women can attain knowledge of their own *jouissance* for now, Lacan's remarks have had this important impact on the post-structuralist feminist tradition: they offer the groundwork for a theory of the interdependence of sexual climax, ecstatic religious experience, and the historical openings of possibilities for women to speak and act in a public way. Post-structuralist feminist theorists, including Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva, would carry the torch of this analysis in their own theoretical writings, especially in order to refute Lacan's (and Beauvoir's) claims about the frustrated nature of the mystic experience, claiming it for the feminist cause.

Hélène Cixous was a student of Lacan; she acceded to the top ranks of feminist literary theory, following the publication of her doctoral thesis, a post-structuralist reading of the works of James Joyce, in 1968.[350] In the span of the following decade, Cixous would move on to articulate and refine her theory of *écriture féminine,* in which she confronts the history of writing, denouncing this history as inextricable linked with logocentrism, the history of reason, a form of authority that has excluded women from participation.[351] Instead of adopting logocentric and phallocentric forms of writing and reason, forms that have privileged male determinateness and occluded female indeterminateness, Cixous advocates for women to embrace and create new forms of writing and reason, and to radically reject, restructure, and rethink the rules of grammar and logic in the process. This radical restructuring of language involves a consideration of the "feminine body and female difference in language and text."[352] Accordingly, Cixous emphasizes

[350] See Hélène Cixous, *L'Exil de James Joyce, ou l'Art du remplacement* (B. Grasset, 1968).

[351] See Cixous, *Sorties,* 249.

[352] See Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (Virago, 1986), 249.

the corporeal experience unique to womanhood and its attendant effects on feminine writing. Cixous sought to locate a space that would allow women to speak autonomously. Kellner articulates the stakes of her undertaking: "The problem confronted for Hélène Cixous is how to speak, to find a voice within a discourse of reason and representation which has not only failed generally to speak of woman, but has more generally repressed the possibility of speaking as a woman from our imaginations."[353] Cixous product was thus aimed at restructuring not only language, but the French cultural imaginary, and she engaged with the formative moments of this imaginary in order to effect this change.

Cixous' theory of *écriture féminine* intimately dialogues with the context of medieval vernacular hagiography, particularly given the emphasis on the female body as a locus of writing. The female saint and the female mystic experience their bodies as a site of struggle. They speak the body directly, as Cixous urges modern feminist writers to do, and in the process, they push beyond binary power differentials.[354] Cixous' *écriture feminine* has even been theorized as a type of mysticism, as her essays take narrative forms that border on poetry and prose, transgressing the space carved for literary criticism by the male academy and taking charge on a feminine discourse through a language that privileges affectivity and emotionality.[355]

Luce Irigaray joins the chorus of post-structuralist feminist writers in their examination of the mystic phenomenon. In *Speculum de l'autre femme*, Luce Irigaray's 1974 work of feminist

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[353] See Hans Kellner, "Narrativity in History: Post-Structuralism and Since," *History and Theory* 26, no. 4 (1987): 1–29.

[354] See Anna Antonopoulos, "Writing the Mystic Body: Sexuality and Textuality in the Écriture-Féminine of Saint Catherine of Genoa," *Hypatia* 6, no. 3 (1991): 185–207.

[355] See Anu Aneja, "The Mystic Aspect of L'Écriture Féminine: Hélène Cixous' Vivre L'Orange," *Qui Parle* 3, no. 1 (1989):189–201, and Martin McQuillan, "The Girl Who Steps Along, or, 10 Steps on the Ladder to Reading Cixous," *Oxford Literary Review* 24 (2002): 43–6.

psychoanalysis, Irigaray writes that mystical discourse is the only place in Western history where woman speaks and acts in a public way.[356] Not only does the female mystic transgress the Pauline stricture on woman's speech, she re-appropriates a masculine role to cast herself as subject within it; her ultimate goal, writes Irigaray, is to rewrite the Passion, fashioning herself as Christ.

One particular section in Irigaray's *Speculum,* entitled "Le Mysterique," might be read as a response to the versions of mysticism advanced by both Beauvoir and Lacan. In it, Irigaray celebrates the forms of mysticism that Beauvoir denounced as vanity and that Lacan dismissed as misunderstanding. Irigaray's reading of Christian mysticism is the first attempt to articulate a "sensible transcendental," a transcendence mediated by the feminine body.[357] She labors consistently throughout her writings to uncover what she calls the "feminine imaginary," the repressed underside of masculine subjectivity and rationality, while demonstrating the ways in which uncovering a new imaginary might radically decenter this subjectivity. The feminine imaginary is twofold: the female emerges as the muted material support for male identity, and also as the possibility for new subjectivity grounded in another relationship to language.[358] In this way, mysticism and hysteria (as the play on words of the title section indicates) take their place as the spaces within Western culture where the feminine imaginary has displayed itself. Women have privileged access to the unconscious, which historically has been feminized.

For access to public speech, the medieval mystic relied on the sanction of clerical elites. In many cases, illiteracy or ignorance of Latin made her dependent on these clerics for transcription of her voice. Therefore, she moved and spoke within a masculinist framework, and her primary

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[356] See Irigaray, *Speculum.*

[357] See Hollywood, "Beauvoir, Irigaray, and the Mystical," 160.

[358] *Ibid.*, 168.

meaning was altered as her voice was negotiated through institutions that wield binary power differentials. This constitutes a censure with an ideological investment in bridling women's speech. How then to distinguish between the true mystical voice and the apparent language that is handed down in the surviving texts?

Like Cixous's experimentations with *écriture féminine,* Irigaray's strategy is to mime rather than to cite mystical texts. Just as the female mystic must rely on means of communication that are indirect, or even secondary, for the transmission of her message, Irigaray's writings eschew clarity and opt instead for an opaque style. "While they may seem to be the site of female autonomy, texts are always implicated in the masculinity of the speaking subject."[359] In this way, Irigaray is responding to Saussure's claim about the nature of language, concurring that the mystic experience cannot be rendered in words, words are insufficient to describe the interaction with the divine. At the same time, Irigaray is responding to Lacan's infamous claim in *Encore,* that woman cannot name what she wants. Irigaray underlines the coincidence between the mystery of feminine desire and the unspeakability of the mystic's God.[360] In her later works, and especially in *On Belief,* Irigaray insists that the Christian mystical tradition inadequately disrupts the hom(m)osexual economy of Western patriarchy and cannot create or make room for a new female imaginary.[361] Irigaray rejects both its solely masculine God and its sacrificial nature. She calls for an alternative to sacrifice as the grounds for the community and for female images of the divine, reflections of

[359] *Ibid.*, 169.

[360] *Ibid.,* 170.

[361] See Luce Irigaray, *La Croyance même* (Galilée, 1983).

the good which lies within women and women's bodies.[362] As Hollywood rightly identifies, the texts written by women mystics are replete with some feminized avatars of the divine.

In this way, the writings of twentieth-century French feminist intellectuals fixed on the medieval mystic's speech as a site of female subjectivity, a site where the masculine distinctions between action and contemplation, emotion and reason, and body and soul were subverted. Irigaray leads a host of twentieth-century intellectuals in their fascination with mystical writing, and its importance for the European cultural consciousness. The discourse arising from their reflections is gendered, insisting on mysticism's ability to render the female subject visible and audible in a context where she is forcefully effaced, and systematically silenced.

The writings of Julia Kristeva shed further light on the importance of sainthood and the mystic experience to twentieth-century critical theory. Another student of Lacan, Julia Kristeva focused her post-Freudian critiques on the psychosexual importance of *jouissance,* which she alternately defined as sexual pleasure, and as the evacuation of desire through the pursuit of a creative enterprise. With her cohort of feminist theorists, Kristeva approaches the twelfth century in terms of its importance for the development feminine subjectivity, which she traces to the maternal archetype of the Virgin Mary.[363] Kristeva draws heavily from *Alone of All Her Sex,* Marina Warner's study of the image of the Virgin Mary in Western culture, which traces the systematic development of the Virgin's image, arguing that she was gradually and purposefully rewritten to diminish and not increase her likeness to the female condition.[364] Her freedom from

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[362] Hollywood, "Beavoir, Irigaray, and the Mystical," 173.

[363] For a detailed exploration of this dynamic, see Finn E. Sinclair's introduction to *Milk & Blood: Gender and Genealogy in the 'Chanson de Geste'* (Peter Lang, 2003), esp. pages 27-31.

[364] See Marine Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Random House, 1976).

sex, painful delivery, age, death, and sin exalt her over ordinary women and show them up as inferior. Warner places particular emphasis on the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, asserting, "it remains ironical that the mother who brought forth virginally and without pain should be invoked in sympathy [for childbirth]."[365] This paradox has likewise been highlighted by scholars who treat the lives of Saint Margaret of Antioch and Saint Catherine of Alexandria, virgin martyrs whose cults have been culturally constructed around allaying the risks associated with childbirth and breastfeeding, respectively. The figure of the virgin martyr saint, according to Kristeva and Warner, ultimately alienates mortal women who are at the mercy of their own biology. In their view, Christianity emerges as a complex system of oppression and repression, fine-tuned at the height of the Middle Ages, aimed at controlling women and her sexuality.

Thus, task of this feminism's engagement with medieval culture, especially literature and iconography, has relied on the premise that constructed narratives of origins reflect the attempt to eliminate women from the practice of public power. The theorists in question in this study, writing in the wake of the linguistic turn, are intimately concerned with the relation between symbolic, imaginary, and real systems of power. They construe the literary representation of foundational women during the twelfth century, a transformative period in the development of western culture, as underlying biological, discursive, and imaginary representations of women in contemporary western thought. The theories that they draw from their understanding of the written and visual culture of the Middle Ages is substantially challenged by the case of the saints of the crusader states.

The Saints of the Crusader States and the Critical Tradition

[365] See Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex,* 275.

Having provided the context for the positionalities of the major figures in the dialogue between modern critical theory and the Middle Ages, we now turn to their relevance to the findings in the preceding chapters: how do the theories of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva dialogue with the lives of the Virgin Mary, Saints Margaret and Catherine, and Saints Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt? The primary texts at issue in this study complicate the logic that underlies the post-structuralist feminist claims outlined above. They point to and suggest new possible avenues for a contemporary feminism that appeals to medieval attitudes regarding women, relying on a nuanced understanding of those attitudes. This study now turns to the hagiographies in order to address the intertextual dialogue between the primary texts and the post-structural feminist tradition.

Chapter One demonstrated that Wace's *Conception Nostre Dame* was a composite text, compiled from a variety of biblical and apocryphal sources, stitched together in service of the institution of a Marian feast, and, ultimately, of forging a spiritual link between the medieval French and Biblical contexts in the service of advancing the call to crusade. Educated layman like Wace, figures who have access to opposing traditions (ecclesiast and lay, Latin and vernacular) emerge as active agents in the rewriting of foundational mythology, adapting traditional stories to new audiences and revisiting important details of these stories in the process. The first chapter further demonstrated that the details of the life of the Virgin Mary were contentious topics during the course of the twelfth-century, battle grounds for advancing ideological causes. It considered the episode at the Golden Gate alongside the claim that the western literary tradition, rooted in twelfth-century sacred texts, performed a sanitization of the maternal body and ultimately upheld hegemonic patristic narratives.

In my analysis, I demonstrated that Wace's departures from his source texts support the thesis that vernacular texts from twelfth-century Western Christendom did *not* perform a

repression of the maternal body. Rather, through these departures, Wace attempted to narrate a sanitization of this body that was only ever partially achieved. Wace's interventions demonstrate the ability of the vernacular scribe to tow a line, between the sanitization of the female archetype from antique sources, and a fuller, pre-Christian expression of feminine divinity. This reading challenges the modern feminist claim that ecclesiasts held a strict monopoly on the production of cultural images, and therefore on the underlying ideology that such images had the power to convey. Not only do vernacular texts *not* elide carnality, they tend to imply it in the case of Anne and Joachim, and sanction it, even, in order to provide a compelling explanation for the mechanics of the Virgin Mary's birth.

An additional episode—the episode of the flowering rod, in which divine will caused Joseph's staff to miraculously produce flowers to indicate God's choice of Joseph for Christ's mortal father—further challenges the idea that Christianity performed a sanitization of the maternal body. If the flowering rod is read metaphorically, as the Rod of Jesse that was prophesied to produce the savior, the imagery gives rise to a discourse on fertility that defies the ecclesiastic proscription on carnality. By redirecting sexuality through the symbol of the flowering rod, Wace, the vernacular author, intends an explicitly carnal relation between mother and son, at the expense of patriarchal continuity.

The implications of this observation for the tradition of post-structuralist feminist theory are significant. It is the assumption of virginal purity and the complete absence of carnal allusion in the medieval tradition that modern feminists identify in their writings. Yet, contrary to the way that many contemporary feminist writers frame the problematic, there is no consensus from the church fathers on the question of Mary's perpetual virginity. From its origins, this question was controversial, and the patristic view remained split. Late Antique and Medieval Christian writers

feared that the idea of the Virgin's perfection bordered dangerously on dualist apologetics, which threatened to affirm the inferiority of the human condition and open the door to forms of heresy, such as Catharism that would dominate the 13th-century.[366] In *Alone of All Her Sex* Marina Warner tracks the official position on Mary's virginity. Apocryphal alterations and doctrinal interventions gradually transformed and elevated the image of the Virgin Mary, from a peripheral figure referenced several short times in the canonical Gospels, to a veritable member of Christianity's pantheon. Beginning in the second-century AD, the earliest surviving apocryphal text on the Virgin Mary, the *Protevangelium of James,* slightly modifies the scene of the Annunciation, adapting the dialogue between the Virgin Mary and the angel in order to eschew ambiguity. Historians note how the *Protevangelium's* modification situates the arrival of the midwife after the birth, signaling that Mary didn't need help giving birth.[367]

This modification is significant because it indicates that Mary escaped the ancient curse against Eve and her descendants when she was banished from paradise in Genesis 3:16. Over the course of the following centuries, doctrinal intervention significantly expanded the scope of Mary's virginity, but not without pockets of resistance. Warner demonstrates the ways that Origen in Alexandria and Tertullian in Africa hesitated to endorse the idea of virginity *in partu* because, in their struggle against gnosticism, both writers sought to affirm the fullness of the human condition that the doctrine of painless birth jeopardized. In this way, the doctrine of perpetual virginity remained contentious throughout the course of Late Antiquity, as many church fathers desired to preserve the biological details of parturition that rendered Mary uniquely and unequivocally

[366] Warner, 245.

[367] See Marielle Lamy, *L'immaculée conception: étapes et enjeux d'une controverse au Moyen Âge (XII-XV siècles)* (Institut d'études augustiniennes, 2000), esp. pages 25-27, and Lily C. Vuong, *Gender and Purity in the Protevangelium of James* (Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

human. Then, in 649, at the Fourth Lateran Council, the decision was made to doctrinally reinforce the belief that Mary remained a virgin not only *ante partum,* but also *in partu* and *post partum:* in other words, she was a perpetual virgin who gave birth seamlessly, spared from labor and birth pains and removed from the fulness of the human condition.

In a series of essays written between 1974-1980, Kristeva theorizes that Christianity performs a sanitization of pagan origin legends, a devaluation or denial of the female body through the elision of the carnal scene and the denial of female *jouissance*.[368] She elaborates the Virgin Mary's function, that was historically developed as a symbol that represses the maternal body from the symbolic order in order to ensure her exclusion from it.[369] Basing her critique on an essay by Freud,[370] she asserts that monotheism represses the ideology of women and mothers in agrarian, maternal-divinity worshipping societies. With Warner, Kristeva conceives of the image of the Virgin Mary, her systematic development that advertised her perpetual virginity and thereby repressed her biological reality as "an instrument of asceticism and female subjugation."[371]

Whatever challenges he may obliquely pose to ecclesiasts elsewhere, Wace himself is unambiguous on the matter of Mary's perpetual virginity, repeatedly insisting in two separate places that Mary was a virgin before and after childbirth, and also during her entire time on earth:

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[368] See "Stabat Mater," "On Chinese Women," and "Women's Time" in *The Portable Kristeva,* ed. Kelly Oliver (Columbia University Press, 2002).

[369] See, Kristeva, esp. *The Portable Kristeva.*

[370] See Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism,* trans. Katherine Jones (Knopf, 1949 [1939]), and Julia Kristeva, "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini" in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* ed. Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, 1980). See too Michel de Certeau, *Histoire et psychanalyse entre science et fiction,* ed. Luce Girard (Gallimard, 1987).

[371] See Warner, 49.

"E virgine apres e virgine avant/E virgine alaiteras enfant";[372] "En terre en sa virginité,/Virgene conçut e enpreigna,/Virgene porta, virgene enfanta,/Virgene alaita, virgene norri,/Virgene remest, virgene vesqui,/E vergine en terre conversa."[373] However, just as the Late Antique tradition was divided on the question of Mary's perpetual virginity, Wace's contemporaries were not in agreement on this point. The medieval tradition contradicted itself, and several of the most prominent texts of the twelfth century were ambiguous on this question, scattered with representations of archetypal female figures engaged in painful birth, and suggesting a more nuanced version of female divinity, one that has more in common with humanity than the prevailing commentary suggests. This question appears as one of the most compelling avenues for investigating the dialogue between post-structuralist feminist theory and vernacular hagiography, particularly that hagiography which stages the lives, deaths, and posthumous miracles of virgin saints related to motherhood and childbirth.

Similarly, *La vie de sainte Marguerite* by Wace and *La vie de sainte Catherine* by Clemence of Barking give rise to an equally complex and heterogeneous discourse on the female body, one that refutes the notion that medieval texts elide biological processes specific to women. Modern feminist theory does not explicitly appeal to the medieval textual tradition associated with the cults of Saint Margaret of Antioch and Saint Catherine of Alexandria; yet the direct speech of these saints in the twelfth-century poem serves as an example of the earliest instance of female subjectivity in the French vernacular tradition.

Consider the moments of torture, and ultimate martyrdom, in Wace's *Vie de sainte Marguerite.* Margaret's voice, textually inscribed in Wace's twelfth-century poem, intimately

[372] Blacker, lines 845-6.

[373] Blacker, lines 1043-7.

dialogues with modern feminist theory concerning the unique nature of the female body and the way that it gives rise to new and inventive forms of speech. Pierced by sharp sticks, beaten raw, Margaret articulates her bodily suffering, her evisceration, and her joy at her death by decapitation, and these descriptions have a tremendous impact on the modes of affective piety that characterized the flowering of thirteenth-century lay spirituality in France and in the Low Lands. They set the tone for discourses of mysticism in the centuries to follow.

Although the post-structuralist feminist theorists remain silent on Margaret's and Catherine's specific roles in the inauguration of female subjectivity, literary scholars of the Middle Ages have commented on the way that these legendary characters, and in particular Margaret of Antioch, influenced historical figures. Though she does not mention Margaret or Catherine by name, Caroline Walker Bynum argues that the Gregorian reform in the late eleventh century resulted in an increase in clerical control, as well as an increased separation between cleric and lay. She links the somatism of early female spirituality to vocabulary of love and feeling in the vernacular, available to women.[374] Brigitte Cazelles identifies Margaret as a prototype of the virgin-martyr lady-saints whose textual traditions paved the way for new forms of piety in thirteenth century France.[375] Diane Mockridge similarly identifies the commonalities between Wace's *Vie de sainte Marguerite* and the emergence of a new form of spirituality patterned on a growing concern for individualism associated with the twelfth-century Renaissance.[376] Significantly, Laurie Postlewate

[374] See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (Zone Books, 1991), 198.

[375] Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

[376] See, too, Mockridge, Diane Lois, *From Christ's Soldier to his Bride: Changes in the Portrayal of Women Saints in Medieval Hagiography,* Dissertation, Duke University, 1984.

argues that the participatory lay spirituality evinced in Margaret's prayer for the salvation of child-birthing mothers would lead, in the following century, to the Beguine movement and to other devotional practices modeled on monastic life.[377]

Saint Margaret's and Saint Catherine's speech, inscribed in Wace's and Clemence's texts, thus become key elements in an authoritative discourse that is cited in the speech and texts of later medieval women who sought to establish spiritual authority. When Luce Irigaray attempted to construct a genealogy of female subjectivity, she located the first instance of autonomous female speech in the voice of the mystic, claiming that the mystic bypasses hierarchical structures and derives the authority to act and speak in a public way directly from God. Yet, as the examples of Margaret and Catherine demonstrate, a latent structure underlies the practices of the medieval mystic, grounded in the representation of the voices and the bodies of saints. Therefore, the mystic's practice is not a point of departure, an event-horizon for autonomous female speech; rather, it is citational, performative, and refers directly back to the discourse inaugurated by saintly figures like Saint Margaret and Saint Catherine.

The form of lay spirituality that followed from vernacular hagiography gave rise to the mysticism that Irigaray identifies as constitutive of the earliest moments of female speech, and to the experimental forms of language, whose spirit Cixous would vindicate in her articulation of *écriture féminine.* If we allow, as I argued in the first half of the second chapter, that the lives of Saint Margaret and Saint Catherine function according to the Marian model, we can also consider Kristeva's "Stabat Mater" relevant to the present inquiry; like the image of the Virgin Mary, representations of Margaret and Catherine were historically developed to lessen their likeness to

[377] See Laurie Postlewate, "Vernacular Hagiography and Lay Piety: Two Old French Adaptations of the Life of Saint Margaret of Antioch," in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography* (Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1996).

the human condition. Meanwhile, paradoxically, they are invoked as the patron saints of mothers in childbirth and nursing mothers. How do we untangle the web of complex and at times contradicting views of the female body that arise from Margaret's legend?

Throughout the course of the 1990s, secondary literature on the lives of Saint Margaret and Saint Catherine focused uniquely and in my view too narrowly on the allegorical enactment of rape that each young woman undergoes through her brutal torture and evisceration at the hands of her pagan oppressor.[378] The tendency to view female saints as ventriloquized bodies as vessels for patriarchal ideology bereft of their own agency was popularized by Brigitte Cazelles, the first scholar to exhaustively address the unique questions raised by representations of the female saint in Old French hagiography. In *Lady as Saint,* Cazelles insists that hagiography is marked by gender distinction, one that "entails a treatment of the heroine's body that has no equivalent in the case of a holy hero."[379] She points to instances of exposure, disrobing and dismemberment within each legend, claiming that they combine to form an idealized portrait of female sanctity, one that results in the dispersion and eradication of the heroine. This critique is echoed in writing that treats Saint Margaret specifically. Kathryn Gravdal claims that in Wace's *Marguerite*, torture scenes open up a licit space, permitting the audience to enjoy the sexual language and contemplate the naked female body.[380] At the same time, these torture scenes place the blame for masculine desire on the

[378] See Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Pennsylvania University Press, 1991).

[379] Cazelles, *Lady as Saint,* 81.

[380] See Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens.*

seductive powers of the female character. Simon Gaunt concurs, claiming that the universal subtext of female saints' lives is forced sex, in other words rape.[381]

Critical literature regarding the corpus of Old English hagiography echoes the critiques of the French case. Gail Ashton insists that the prevailing tendency in Old English hagiography is to make virgins "powerless mirror images of patriarchal assumption," "patriarchal dolls" who ventriloquize predominantly masculine concerns.[382] She relies on Irigaray's notions of mimesis and textual fissure to demonstrate how the dialogue between saint and pagan tormentor is split. Nonetheless, she claims that it is possible to discover the speaking "I" of marginalized, vulnerable women beneath layers of patriarchal discourse.[383] Karen Winstead offers that hagiographies invite radical interpretations in specific contexts, but the desire to read a resistant subject into these texts amounts to wishful thinking, a rhetorical move that downplays their patriarchal context.[384]

In both the Old English and Old French corpuses of hagiography, modern critics pose similar questions: in what voices do female virgin martyrs speak - their own, those of their authors or readers, or voices continuous with the language of their oppressors? For many of these scholars, the speaker and listener of female saints' lives, incontrovertibly male, become one and silence the authentic female voice. Female characters, like women writers, are locked into male texts. As such, they are pawns in the construct of an authoritative male discourse on language, desire, history, and

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[381] See Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[382] See Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint* (Routledge, 2000).

[383] *Ibid.,* 194.

[384] Karen Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England.* (Cornell University Press, 1997).

the proper place of women in society. The female saint is not the subject of her own autonomous discourse: rather, the heroine is an object fabricated by male discourse as it interprets desire and history in a way that supports the conventional view of the world order.

Yet other critics maintain that the voice of the virgin martyr may be represented by the modern hagiographic scholar. Robert Mills argues that martyrdom constitutes a succinct attempt to negotiate the conflict between victimization and empowerment that appears to characterize the female saint's condition.[385] Mills offers as theoretical framework a body of postcolonial writings that attempt to assess role of women's desire, agency, and subject status. He claims that, like the immolated Sati in Spivak's seminal essay, the identity of the female saint is an effect of discourse, rather than a clearly identifiable, self-evident reality.[386] Her discursive formation is predicated on the opportunities afforded by her iconic death. Yet the possibility remains, as other critics argue, that death renders martyrs emblematically silenced subjects. Mills counters that the martyr's death does not put an end to her voice; rather, the act of silencing endows her speech with permanence and authority.[387]

I am inclined to argue, with Robert Mills, that the hagiographic scholar cannot understand the suffering and death of saintly identities as products of subjective closure. Martyrdom and virginity should not be considered stable subject positions accomplished through death and silence. To the contrary, the suffering and sacrifice of female saints must be seen as products of process and continuation. Martyrdom and virginity are ongoing activities, performances that transcend the

[385] See Robert Mills, "Can the Virgin Martyr Speak?" in *Medieval Virginities,* ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih (University of Toronto Press, 2003).

[386] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind Morris (Columbia University Press, 2010), 21-78.

[387] See Mills, 195.

limits of subjectivity and serve to create meaning of foundational, cosmological significance. Questions of female agency, as they've been formulated by feminist criticism, invite interpretative paralysis, along with the risk that scholars ventriloquize modern concerns about feminism and subjectivity, when they make the virgin martyr speak. This type of criticism does not produce readings that are politically valuable or "gender-positive;" rather, it points to the difficulties and the hermeneutical stalemates that arise from imagining saints as sovereign, speaking subjects. It is more appropriate to imagine what appears to be a speaking "I" as, in fact, a nexus of multiplicity, a site of heteroglossia which gives rise to a body of competing discourses.

Furthermore, the prevailing critical tendency does not take into account the tenuous nature of patriarchy in twelfth- and thirteenth-century France, a time of transition between Latin and vernacular cultures, between feudalist and monarchical regimes, a time when the religious needs of the Middle Ages were trying to reconcile themselves with the knowledge of antiquity. As a result, these hagiographic legends function as ideological vessels for a new, imagined order of society, as much as attempts to create a cosmogony that dramatizes the triumph of a Christian God, cobbled together from pagan elements, in contradictory and often paradoxical ways. It is this heterogeneity in the literature of the Middle Ages, and in lives of legends of saints from the eastern Mediterranean in particular, that poses the most compelling challenge to the post-structuralist feminist theory at issue in this study.

Moreover, the life of Saint Catherine by Clemence of Barking is the text in this study that poses the most formidable challenge to the second-wave, post-structuralist feminist paradigm, particularly regarding the claim that patristic misogyny ingrained in medieval religious writing. As we saw in the discussion of Saint Margaret, Old English and Old French corpuses of hagiography move modern critics to pose questions and voice critiques about female authorship

and female agency and pose the question: in what voices do female virgin martyrs speak? The writer of female saints' lives is assumed to be male, and his maleness is seen as an obstacle to the authentic female voice. According to this perspective, Saint Catherine is not the subject of her own autonomous language, desire, history; rather, she is an object fabricated by this discourse as it interprets desire and history. As we learned in the second half of the second chapter, the twelfth-century life of Saint Catherine was not written by a man. It was written by Clemence of Barking a woman and nun who considerably adapted and improved the text for an audience that probably consisted almost exclusively of women. The hegemonic of patristic narratives is interrupted by writers like Clemence of Barking, who are conveniently ignored by feminist theorists seeking to paint the culture of the Middle Ages as a male-dominated monolith.

Finally, regarding the primary texts at issue in this study, the medieval legends of Saints Mary Magdalene and Mary the Egyptian pose the most formidable challenge to the post-structuralist feminist tradition. Each legend tells the life of a sexually active woman who enjoys the pleasures of the flesh—reformed prostitutes whose sexual exploits, in the case of Mary the Egyptian, are explicitly staged throughout the text. And yet notwithstanding their carnality, each woman still accedes to a position of sainthood, overcoming the patristic proscription against carnal relations and the hegemonic narratives of the feminine that cast

The implications of this observation for the tradition of post-structuralist feminist theory are significant. It is the assumption of virginal purity and the complete absence of carnal allusion in the medieval tradition that modern feminists identify in their writings. Yet, contrary to the way that many contemporary feminist writers frame the problematic, referenced to sacred women who once were sexual abound. In the *Romanz de sainte Marie Madeleine,* Le Clerc stages the life and miracles of Mary Magdalene, only once obliquely referencing her status as a former prostitute and

sinner. Her former sexuality is echoed in the miracle she produces, when she causes the corpse of the Prince's wife to lactate and provide for her infant child. In the Legend of Saint Mary the Egyptian, the protagonist continues to unabashedly enjoy sexual pleasure and pursues the life of prostitution until this pleasure causes her to be seen as an outcast in the eyes of God. Mary the Egyptian is not learned, and yet she becomes a spiritual authority. Devoid of the gruesome martyrdom of Saints Margaret and Catherine, absent the performative spirituality, she becomes an ascetic saint in the footsteps of the Desert Fathers, Saint Anthony of Egypt and Saint Augustine her models.

The medieval cults of these two saints stand in stark counterbalance to those supposed "hegemonic negative images of the feminine" derived from patristic thought. Close readings of these two texts demonstrate that the written culture of the Middle Ages offered a far more heterogeneous and nuanced set of perspectives on women, on female sexuality, and on the sacred female body than heretofore suggested. Again, these readings challenge the modern feminist claim that ecclesiasts held a strict monopoly on the production of cultural images, and therefore on the underlying ideology that such images had the power to convey. Not only do vernacular texts *not* elide carnality, they imply it in the case of Mary Magdalene, and actively stage it in the case of Mary the Egyptian, and sometimes even sanction the lives of sexual promiscuity that allowed fallen women to perform a dramatic reversal of their lifestyles.

Finally, the question of race and ethnic origin of the saints in question necessarily rises in texts that involve sacred women who have openly indulged their sexuality. When a religious, racial, or ethnic Other is identified in a literary text, it lessens the marginalization of women, whose otherness is mitigated by her membership in an ethnic, religious, or otherwise socially-constructed in-group. Given that each text appropriates and sanitizes the alterity of the saint in question, this

distinction complicates the conceptual framework of the claims of modern critical theorists who view gender as the single standard against which difference is measured. Chronological and geographic difference elevates women like Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt to a mythical status. Their status as outsiders from a different time period allow them a measure of freedom to navigate complex issues for medieval audiences, increasingly vernacular and lay, who sought to see their own lives reflected in narratives of sacred history.

Conclusion

The post-structuralist feminist approach to the "medieval" adopts as a framework a variety of points of departure that fail to hold up under closer scrutiny of medieval text. This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the shortcomings of critical theory vis-à-vis a selection of twelfth- and thirteenth-century hagiography on the lives of crusader state saints. Consider the life of the Virgin Mary: though Wace takes care to insist on the Virgin Mary's purity and exalt virginity as the most supreme virtue, virgin birth, in fact, is metaphorically betrayed. The carnal scene between Joseph and Mary is not elided but a metaphorical veil is cast over the sexual encounter through the sprouting of Joseph's rod and poses a challenge to the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity. In view of this, Kristeva's socio-historic explanation for the evolution of the representation of female divinity errs because it ignores the role of vernacular scribes who write hagiography but are not necessarily associated with the ideology on the ecclesiasts (an ideology, we have seen, which is neither monolithic nor uniform).

In *Women at the Beginning,* a short text by the historian Patrick Geary, Geary contends that literary texts that eliminate or circumscribe women as foundational in constructed narratives of origins are less a reflection of women's lack of power than they are a reflection of the "paradoxes

of masculine ideologies that are forced to contend with the massive contradictions of lived experience."[388] In this sense, details of Wace's text reveal a tug-of-war between monastic culture and a growing popular element coming into its own in the twelfth century, the struggle to reconcile long-held truths about the status of the Virgin elaborated by an insular class of celibate ecclesiasts with the demands of an audience eager to see its own experiences reflected in the foundational mythology of Christianity.[389] Later in the same text Patrick Geary argues that the elaboration of the Christian origin legend and the place of the Virgin Mary within it are radically discontinuous, that miscellaneous and contradictory materials were reworked and recombined as fundamental elements of an instable and inadequate Marian tradition. A careful examination of hagiographic texts gives rise to the disparate elements and their discontinuity as symptoms of competing ideologies.

As this study sought to demonstrate and at least partially amend, the modern critical theory's engagement with representations of female sanctity from the Middle Ages merits revision, particularly considering the nature of the claims advanced by leading feminist theorists. Roland Barthes argues that history is mythologized by its subservience to "irresistible" narrativity. An attempt to reject this strategy of telling history has only resulted in additional, questionable forms of narrativity being layered over the old ones.

In the end, images of medieval sainthood are not points of departure; they are the products of texts that have been subjected to various staged of reframing and reformulating. Female saints

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[388] See Patrick Geary, *Women at the Beginning: Origin Myths from the Amazons to the Virgin Mary.* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 5-6.

[389] For evidence of this popular element, see again, Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception,* trans. János M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge University Press, 1988), as well as Carl Ruck et al., *The Hidden World: Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes in European Fairytales* (NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007).

ought not to be seen as the earliest instances of the speaking subject. Rather, they should be read as unstable archetypes, cobbled together from competing traditions and malleable. Critical theory written during the second half of the twentieth century, originating from Freudian and Lacanian circles, misrepresents the medieval saint and mystic as a point of departure. Therefore, there is no foundational mythology, only a series of contradictory textual representations that are strategically developed in order to serve short-sighted political and cultural goals. Sometimes these representations outlive their uses and become stubbornly imprinted on the cultural landscape. Ultimately, the primary texts at issue in this study demonstrate that, in reality, the elaboration of foundational origin legends cannot be viewed as straightforward attempts to eliminate women from symbolic systems of representation. They are, instead, attempts to reconcile disparate sources in the service of telling a story that suits the exigencies of twelfth-century spiritual and political conquest.

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