

**WONDER, DERISION, AND FEAR:  
THE USES OF DOUBT IN ANGLO-SAXON SAINTS' LIVES**

DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the narrative depiction and uses of incidents of doubt in Anglo-Saxon hagiography. Considered against Michael Goodich's findings about the hagiographic use of doubt in the later Middle Ages, Anglo-Saxon hagiography shows a much wider range both in the ways doubt is depicted and the purposes for which it is deployed. Anglo-Saxon hagiography has examples of not one, but four broad types of doubt: questions about the saint, accusations against the saint that sow doubt in the minds of others, self-doubt on the part of the saint, and postmortem doubt which derides the saint's sanctity and assumes the saint is powerless to act.

Unlike the examples Goodich cites, not all hagiographies treat doubt as sinful. Some doubt merely results from a lack of understanding, the misleading of others, or a need for further information. When doubt is sinful it stems from a wide variety of motives. Furthermore, not all sinful doubt is punished; some hagiographers treat doubt much more leniently than others.

Anglo-Saxon hagiographers had several patristic sources available to them which offered incidents upon which a theology of doubt could have been modeled, but they did not settle on one. It was not that the hagiographers of this period were uninterested in the issue of doubt. Quite the opposite. They wrote in the period leading up to the establishment of the canonization process, one in which doubts about a saint's sanctity could not be automatically answered by pointing to the approval of Rome. When canonization became a formal process, subject to the central control of Rome, doubt was,

in a sense, institutionalized as a part of the canonization process. Prior to this, written accounts were fast becoming essential to canonization, but were not yet part of a formal process. A written document was a way of creating and solidifying the memory of the saint so that the memory (and hence the veneration) of a saint would not be lost to forgetfulness or to the doubts of others. To write doubt was, to one degree or another, to risk writing against the cult's success because it introduced into the text the very thing the text was intended to allay.

Considered against their historic contexts, the moments in which hagiographers chose to use doubt and the ways in which they chose to portray it show a high correspondence between the concerns, agendas and pressures under which the hagiographer wrote and the way in which doubt is treated in the hagiography. Several hagiographers introduce or reproduce doubting incidents in ways which address threats to the cult of their saint. Other hagiographers, Bede and Ælfric, use incidents of doubt to model virtues or characteristics which they wish to spread through the English people. This reminds us that, despite hagiography's investment in the universal and eternal, each hagiography was still directly bound to the concerns and issues of the time and place in which it was written. Those hagiographers who take the narrative risk of using doubt reveal those pressures and concerns under which they wrote.

Dedicated to my parents,  
Regina Moore Adams and Philip Joseph Adams  
Thank you.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CH I</i>	<i>Ælfric, The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church, The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric</i>
<i>Beowulf</i>	Howell D. Chickering, ed. and trans., <i>Beowulf: A Dual-language Edition</i>
<i>HE</i>	Bede, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Historia</i>	Anonymous, <i>Historia de Sancto Cuthberto</i>
<i>Libellus</i>	Symeon of Durham, <i>Libellus de exordio atque procursu istius, hoc est Dunhelmensis, ecclesie</i>
<i>LS</i>	Skeat, <i>Ælfric's Lives of the Saints</i>
<i>MC</i>	Anonymous, <i>Capitula de miraculis et translationibus Sancti Cuthberti</i>
<i>MO</i>	Eadmer, <i>Miracula Sancti Oswaldi</i>
<i>OEG</i>	Anonymous, <i>Old English Life of Guthlac</i>
<i>VA</i>	Eadmer, <i>Vita Anselmi</i>
<i>VÆ(W)</i>	Wulfstan of Winchester, <i>Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi</i>
<i>VÆ(Æ)</i>	Ælfric, <i>Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi</i>
<i>VCA</i>	Anonymous, <i>Vita Sancti Cuthberti</i>
<i>VC(Æ)</i>	Ælfric, <i>Vita Sancti Cuthberti, Catholic Homilies II</i>
<i>VCM</i>	Bede, <i>Vita Sancti Cuthberti metrica</i>
<i>VCP</i>	Bede, <i>Vita Sancti Cuthberti prosaica</i>
<i>VD(B)</i>	B., <i>Vita Sancti Dunstani</i>



<i>VD(E)</i>	Eadmer, <i>Vita Sancti Dunstani</i>
<i>VD(O)</i>	Osbern, <i>Vita Sancti Dunstani</i>
<i>VD(W)</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Vita Dunstani</i>
<i>VG</i>	Felix, <i>Vita Sancti Guthlaci</i>
<i>VO(Æ)</i>	Ælfric, <i>Vita Sancti Oswaldi</i>
<i>VO(B)</i>	Byrhtferth, <i>Vita Oswaldi archiepiscopi Eboracensis</i>
<i>VOdonis</i>	Eadmer, <i>Vita Sancti Odonis</i>
<i>VW(W)</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Vita Wulfstani</i>

Latin quotations from the Bible are taken from *Biblia sacra vulgata*, found at <http://www.drbo.org/lvb>. Where the specific Latin wording of a Biblical story is not at issue, the reader is referred to the *Online Douay-Rheims Bible* found at <http://www.scriptours.com/bible/>.

In quotations from Latin sources, I have substituted *v* for consonantal *u* throughout.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: WHY DOUBT?

This dissertation examines the ways in which Anglo-Saxon hagiographies narrate incidents of doubt directed at a saint and the ways in which these incidents are used to further the hagiographies' purposes. Incidents of doubt violate a basic hagiographic paradigm by admitting into the narrative, however briefly or carefully, the possibility that the saint might not be self-evidently holy and, worse, that he might not be holy at all. As Barbara Yorke, among others, has pointed out, "one of [hagiographies'] main functions was to promote the cult."<sup>1</sup> This promotion of the saint could mean writing a hagiography so that a saint had a written record which could document his sanctity and be distributed or read to potential devotees. It could mean writing a new version of a previous hagiography in order to publicize the saint with a more appealing text or one updated to include new miracles. In either case, this promotion's basic goal was to increase veneration of the saint in the hearers' worship practices and draw devotees to his shrine by showing that the saint was holy and therefore deserving of this veneration. This raises the question of *why*, in a genre focused on proving a saint's sanctity, the writer would choose to insert a moment which raises the possibility that the saint was not holy.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Yorke, "Introduction," *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. Barbara Yorke (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1988) 1.

In his article “Miracles and Disbelief in the Later Middle Ages,” Michael Goodich argues that hagiography treats doubt or skepticism towards a saint as uniformly sinful and that it is always met with miraculous punishment.<sup>2</sup> He classes the expression of doubt as a type of blasphemy and details the ways in which the miraculous punishments suffered by those who “speak against the saint” mimic those administered by the civil power for blasphemy. Written in 1988, Goodich’s article remains the only published work in English to address directly the question of how hagiography treats those who express doubt about or cast doubt on a saint. However, there are several factors which prevent Goodich’s conclusions from being applicable to the hagiography written in Anglo-Saxon England. Apart from the separation in time and place (Goodich’s material is all late medieval and continental), the Anglo-Saxon record shows much greater diversity in the ways saints are doubted and in its treatment of doubt in saints. Those who question whether or not a man deserves the title of saint do so from a variety of motives. There are those who deliberately slander a saint and those who are foolishly, but innocently, deceived by these slanders. There are those who mock or doubt a saint after his death, believing him to be powerless to act, regardless of how holy he may have been in life. And perhaps most intriguingly, there are saints who question themselves and must be corrected. Goodich’s examples are all taken from *Lives* of saints with established cults, while many of the Anglo-Saxon examples come from the initiatory *Life* of a cult. Some of the examples Goodich cites involve doubts about the efficacy of saints in

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Goodich, “Miracles and Disbelief in the Late Middle Ages,” *Mediaevistik* 1 (1988): 23-38.

general; his study does not distinguish between these doubters and ones who, while believing in saints, wonder about a particular saint. All the examples I have found in Anglo-Saxon hagiography involve doubt about a particular saint, not doubt in the efficacy of saints in general. Furthermore, all the rebuttal miracles which Goodich cites are punitive. The doubter suffers and often dies for his doubt. This is not the case with over half the saints considered in this dissertation; some doubters are punished, some are threatened with punishment, but most rebuttal miracles involve a rebuke without punishment and some do not rebuke to the doubter at all. Goodich argues that late medieval hagiography expresses a consistent theology of doubt. However, in Anglo-Saxon hagiography, there is at least as much variation in the treatment of doubt as there is uniformity.

Goodich argues that these doubting stories all have a uniform goal, which is to preserve social unity by providing exemplars for how one ought to behave toward the saints.<sup>3</sup> He argues that protecting the individual saint's cult is at best a secondary concern of these incidents. Goodich's examples reiterate the same lesson over and over again. However, in the Anglo-Saxon period, incidents of doubt are deployed for a wide variety of reasons. Different hagiographers use doubt for different purposes. Even when a hagiographer is reproducing an incident of doubt taken from his sources, subtle changes are made in the way the incident is narrated, which alter the point and focus of the story. Incidents are often exemplary; that is, they offer a model for behavior. In many cases this

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<sup>3</sup> Goodich 23.

is done precisely to establish a new saint's cult or to protect an existing cult from real historical forces which threatened it. Felix's *Vita Guthlaci*, for example, uses doubt to attract powerful royal patrons to the saint's new cult. In other cases, doubt is also used to promote some larger project which the hagiographer was pursuing. We see this in Ælfric's *Vita Cuthberti*; by the time Ælfric wrote about Cuthbert, the saint's cult was large, well known, and not in any danger of being forgotten. Ælfric uses the same incident of doubt deployed by two previous authors, but he reshapes the incident to be a warning against sloth, fitting it into his larger project of providing homilies to the English people. Far from all meaning the same thing, Anglo-Saxon hagiographies use doubt for a wide variety of purposes.

Goodich also argues that he has identified the way in which hagiography uses doubt in the later Middle Ages. However, doubt in Anglo-Saxon hagiography occurs in ways which are more complex and variable than the doubt described in Goodich's work. I do not contest Goodich's claims as they apply to the time and place which he describes. Rather, I argue that the flexibility of doubt in Anglo-Saxon hagiography allows these hagiographers to use it to model doubting behavior in a variety of ways as it applies to the particular pressures facing the cult as a hagiography was written, or the particular projects or agendas of the hagiographer. Rather than simply adding one more miracle to the saint's repertoire or modeling a universal standard for doubt, Anglo-Saxon hagiography's use of doubt reveals and responds to those pressures, agendas and concerns surrounding the production of individual hagiographies.

This is not to say that every hagiographer who wrote under pressures used an incident of doubt as an anodyne against those pressures. If that were the case there would likely be dozens of these incidents littering the hagiographic record and their frequency would have been remarked on as a primary feature of hagiography. Nor does this study claim that the incidents of doubt considered here are the sole or even primary narrative strategy of the works in which they appear. The conclusion of this study is that the narrative constructions of these incidents shows doubt being deployed as a flexible narrative strategy to meet individual hagiographers' specific purposes, rather than as a consistent theology of doubt. The variation in use and presentation of doubt often shows strong correspondence to the pressures under which the hagiographies were written or to some larger, personal concern of the hagiographer. While one can hardly claim to read the exact intentions of early medieval hagiographers, the confluence of historical facts and textual evidence suggests that these narrative moments of doubt are directly relevant to the circumstances under which the narrative was written. In many instances, the problem the saint faces from the doubter(s) is made relevant to a contemporary problem facing the saint's cult. In others, the incident has been reshaped to suit the needs of the hagiographer or to fit with some larger project of his own. These instances of doubt are worth investigation as individual incidents, because they reveal some of the many ways in which the universally-minded genre of hagiography could be used to respond to highly localized and temporal factors surrounding the writing of each particular text.

There are certain broad characteristics in the use of doubt that pertain to all but one of the incidents of doubt that I have found in Anglo-Saxon hagiography. Whether the doubt directed at the saint comes from an outside observer or from the saint himself, whether it is wholly malicious or entirely innocent in its intent, one factor is consistent. Doubt must be met with a demonstration of power. The one exception is Lanfranc's question to Anselm as to whether Elphege's death counted as martyrdom. Lanfranc is convinced by Anselm's arguments alone. Aside from this example, neither the testimony of witnesses nor the visible holiness of the saint's deeds is enough to answer doubt on its own. No doubt is assuaged, no calumny is answered, and no mocker is silenced without some demonstration of miraculous power. While not all rebuttals to the expressions of doubt surveyed in this dissertation involve punitive miracles, all involve miracles which show an extraordinary degree of control over the physical world. These are more than visions of the saint; they involve demonstrations of power. Power is the only necessary and sufficient answer to doubt in the saints.

Those hagiographies that allow moments of doubt to exist in the narrative do so in order to address and neutralize specific threats to their saint's cult or community which existed at the time of writing. Thus, doubt is more a tool than a topic of the hagiographies. When doubt appears in hagiographies, it is not the topic under discussion. Indeed, the last thing the hagiographies wish to do is to flesh out and explore the realm of doubt or to allow it room. Doubt in hagiography is always assuaged; it allows, for a moment or two, a crack in the narrative certainty in order to reassert the saint's sanctity,

to fasten down the saint's claims to power, and to protect those associated with him. This explains why a miraculous demonstration of power is always an element in the saint's vindication in the face of doubt. Especially in situations in which the writer was responding to perceived threats to himself or his community, the rebuttal to the doubt must demonstrate the active power of the saint to protect himself and those associated with him, as well as God's active interest in doing the same.

### **The Larger Context**

At its most basic level, to promote a saint is to publicize the saint's deeds so that the saint will be properly venerated at both a public and private devotional level. The benefits of this to saint and devotee are reciprocal; the saint receives his due honor as he is remembered in prayer and credited for his miracles, and the devotee is edified by the act of praying virtuously, by meditating on the saint as a model, and by acquiring an intercessor who might be persuaded to help the devotee in times of need. Thus the primary role of a hagiography is to promote the saint, that is, to create a written record which will establish the saint's sanctity by documentation and which can then be read privately or publicly and circulated to other locations beyond the saint's immediate home so that old devotees can be reinforced and new devotees can be created. The materials I am looking at come from an era before canonization was established as a centralized, formal, critical process under the authority of Rome. When these *Lives* were written, all that was required for someone to be recognized as a saint was "a well publicized



translation and a well-circulated [hagiography].”<sup>4</sup> As John Blair has demonstrated in “A Saint for Every Minster,” a saint could be acclaimed and venerated in one place without ever being heard of anywhere else.<sup>5</sup> These highly localized and undocumented saints had virtually no chance of long term veneration. Their cults died easily and rapidly as local memory changed. Producing a hagiography was the mechanism against forgetfulness and skepticism. To write about the saint was to establish the saint. At the same time, the existence of a hagiography did not ensure that a saint’s cult would last; Æthelwold’s cult had two hagiographies, one by Wulfstan, another by Ælfric, and his cult now survives only as an academic memory. A hagiography needed to do more than exist; it had to be convincing.

After a saint’s cult was initially declared by the creation of a *vita* and a translation, there were various reasons for rewriting the saint’s *vita*. The first *vita* might need updating as new miracles were performed. Changing tastes in literature might urge a community to seek a new writer who could produce a more readable or more artistic or more convincing text. Demands from outside readers for clearer or better or simply newer documentation might prompt a new version of a saint’s life. Later writers might also rewrite a saint’s life to foreground the particular lessons in sanctity, such as Adelard’s highly selective set of lections on Saint Dunstan or Ælfric’s condensed saints’ *Lives*.

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Lapidge, “Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher,” *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. Barbara Yorke (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell P, 1988) 113.

<sup>5</sup> John Blair, “A Saint for Every Minster? Local Cults in Anglo-Saxon England,” *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 455-463.

Changing liturgical practices in the Anglo-Norman period which altered the balance of calendars and, in the process, raised questions about who should be venerated and to what degree, produced a massive outpouring of new hagiographies, both for saints not yet written about and saints already established but under question. Controversies over church rights and property ownership could also prompt new writing. Hagiographies were produced to prove that specific properties belonged to a saint's community because they were part of the saint's patrimony. Hagiographies were also produced to remind the reader of the saint's power to punish those who offended him, so that the saint was not only the legal owner of the property in question but its active defender.

In one sense, if a saint was remembered anywhere by anyone, he had a successful cult. On the other end of the scale were the universal saints, those known and venerated by the whole church everywhere. The apostles, the Virgin Mary, and some of the early saints such as Martin of Tours and Anthony fall into this category. For the vast middle ground of saints, however, success constituted achieving recognition and attracting devotees beyond the saint's immediate community. A more successful saint was one who had done miracles enough and been publicized widely enough that people beyond his local community sought his help in prayer and pilgrimage and that other churches added the saint to their calendar. The more this happened, the more power there was in invoking the saint's name.

Saints had the power to drive out demons, to heal the sick, to intervene with God on behalf of the penitent, and to punish those who hurt their devotees. As Eleanor

Duckett writes, “in this *Life* [the saint] is a truly formidable being, of power far beyond the frailty of common man. He is a man of God set apart from his fellows by Divine destiny.”<sup>6</sup> Hagiography was the mechanism by which it could be ensured that people would go on knowing about a saint. In this way, the success of a cult might be measured in the number of people calling on or imitating its saint more than any other.

On the other hand, there is a great deal of pragmatic, worldly value in being associated with a powerful saint, and this too can be a measure of cult’s success. Pilgrims brought money to the shrine, and they took away more stories about the saint, spreading his cult further. In addition to the sometimes immense revenues generated by flocks of pilgrims, a church with a successful relic cult enjoyed an enhanced prestige and the explicit protection of its particular saint against outside threats.<sup>7</sup> Individual churches, sees and monastic houses contended with each other over land rights, hierarchical authority and jurisdiction, as well as periodically clashing with the local lay population over the same issues. To have a saint implicitly, or even better explicitly, taking one’s side was to have one’s claims of power and authority legitimized. For instance, Cnut was canonized in Denmark in part because the Danish clergy “needed a patron saint to offer immediate security against lay reprisals for the famine [...] and in the long term they needed him as a

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<sup>6</sup> Eleanor Shipley Duckett, *The Wandering Saints of the Early Middle Ages* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1964) 15.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1994). See the section titled “Negotiating,” especially the chapter “Living with Conflicts in Stateless France: A Typology of Conflict Management Mechanism, 1050-1200,” 95-162.

guarantor of their own corporate position in society.”<sup>8</sup> Wulfstan’s cult, established in the early to mid-twelfth century, became the ground on which King John later argued for his right to appoint bishops. He maintained his position on both the existence of written evidence (the saint’s *vita*) and his appeals to the ongoing patronage of the saint.<sup>9</sup> The number of pilgrims coming to a shrine, the amount of land kept by a cult community, the degree to which invoking a saint’s name or precedent lent authority to a statement, the degree of attention given a saint in a liturgical calendar and the number of calendars to include the saint: all of these were measures of how successful a saint’s cult was. Less tangible measures, such as the degree of sincerity with which people prayed or the amount of spiritual benefit they received from thinking about the saint, are beyond our reckoning.

It is easy to read these invocations as cynical powerplays and, given human nature, some of them probably were. However, the relationship between power and piety is not that simple when dealing with saints. As Peter Brown reminds us, the power and beauty of the saints’ churches with their immense, beautiful liturgical displays were reminders of the saints’ own power and beauty. These worldly displays of power reiterated the order and beauty of God’s creation and the role played by the saints in maintaining that order: “they were majestic assertions of true order and rightful

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<sup>8</sup> H.E.J. Cowdrey, “The Gregorian Reform in the Anglo-Norman Lands and in Scandinavia,” *Studi Medievali*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 34 (1993): 321-352, rpt. in *Popes and Church Reform in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000) 334.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Draper, “King John and St. Wulfstan,” *Journal of Medieval History* 10 (1984): 41-50 and Emma Mason, “St. Wulfstan’s Staff: A Legend and its Uses,” *Medium Ævum* 53 (1984): 157-179.

possession in a harsh and disorderly world.”<sup>10</sup> Barbara Rosenwein’s study of donations to Cluny in the tenth and eleventh centuries points out that association with a saint through land donation could express a host of complex motives including affection for the saint, reinforcement of social and familial ties through assignment of property, acquisition of merit, service to God, and a need to define rights and status.<sup>11</sup> Given the immense importance of the saints to the spiritual and social stability of the early medieval world, the ways in which narratives about saints treated doubt expressed by or about saints seems particularly important. To write that the saint’s sanctity was doubtful introduces the possibility of the reader’s sharing that doubt. As we will see below, some types of doubt offer more narrative risk than others. At bottom, the risk is that if a saint is doubttable, then belief in the saint is optional or, worse, unwise. If hearers of the saint’s life do not believe that the saint is holy enough to warrant their veneration, there is no cult and the saint will be abandoned and forgotten.

Patristic and continental sources to which Anglo-Saxon hagiographers had access provide a number of differing exemplars and models for how to deploy doubt in hagiography. Certain patristic and early continental sources laid out grounds for legitimate doubt. Other foundational texts provide examples of false saints, some of whom are then exposed by the real saint. In addition to providing evidence that

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981) 112.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny’s Property, 909-1049* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1989).

pretenders to sanctity did exist, these hagiographies might have provided material for a theology of doubt, laying out models for how and when doubt can be expressed.

Athanasius's *Life of St. Anthony* was widely available throughout the Anglo-Saxon period; most Anglo-Saxon hagiographies contain at least one element which can be linked to it. The translation of the *Life* by Evagrius was taught at the Canterbury school after 670 by Hadrian and Theodore. Most likely, the prestige and influence of this school helped disseminate this work as a model for many Anglo-Latin hagiographers.<sup>12</sup> The *Life of St. Anthony*'s greatest influence was in its providing a model for eremitic monasticism. However, the *Life*, by stressing that hermits must be on their guard against demons masquerading as angels and holy men, also opens up the possibility of doubting whether a reputed saint is legitimate. Anthony, in the long homily that is the centerpiece of the work, instructs his disciples in how to discern between demonic and angelic messengers. He assures them, "there is need of much prayer and of discipline, that when a man has received through the Spirit the gift of discerning spirits, he may have power to recognize their characteristics [...] for their villainies and the changes in their plots are many."<sup>13</sup> Anthony then offers a long description of the deceptive forms used by demons,

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Lapidge and Rosalind Love, "The Latin Hagiography of England and Wales (600-1550)," *Hagiographies: International History of the Latin and Vernacular Hagiographical Literature in the West from its Origins to 1550*, vol. 3, gen. ed. Guy Philippart, Corpus Christianorum (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994) 208-209.

<sup>13</sup> Athanasius, *Vita s. Antonii*, *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. Ellershaw, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2.4 (New York: np, 1957. 202) *Medieval Sourcebook: Athanasius of Alexandria*, Nov. 1998, *Internet Medieval Source Book*, ed. Paul Halsall, 24 Mar. 2004, <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/vita-antony.html>>.

including “the appearance of monks and feign[ing] the speech of holy men.”<sup>14</sup> This passage was widely available to Anglo-Saxon hagiographers from the late seventh century on and influenced many Anglo-Saxon hagiographies, including Felix’s *Life of Guthlac* which appears in this dissertation. However, while nearly everything else in Anthony’s *Life* is exploited by later hagiographers, his teaching on demons is not used as a rationale for or a defense of questions that arise about Anglo-Saxon saints, even in Felix’s *Vita Guthlaci*, which leans heavily on the *Life of Anthony* for its model and in which an incident of doubt appears.

Sulpicius Severus’s *Life of St. Martin of Tours* was also a foundational model for Anglo-Saxon hagiographers, and it provides two incidents that serve as warnings against false saints. In one instance, Saint Martin finds a martyr’s shrine whose devotees are sincere but vague about the details of their saint’s life and martyrdom. Martin miraculously demonstrates that the shrine is built on the grave of a murderer, not a martyr, and the cult is ended. Martin treats the matter cautiously, neither refusing to believe in the saint nor fully assenting: “Martin did not lightly give credence to uncertainties” and “he felt grave doubts of conscience, seeing that no settled and certain tradition had come down to them.”<sup>15</sup> His own sanctity is demonstrated by his being the only person who can hear the voice of the ghost denying its own sanctity. Martin uses the

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<sup>14</sup> Athanasius 203.

<sup>15</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini, Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints’ Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas F.X. Noble and Thomas Head (University Park, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995) 14. The Latin text is quoted throughout this dissertation from *Vie de saint Martin*, ed. and trans. Jacques Fontaine, Sources Chrétiennes 133, Série de Textes Monastiques d’Occident 22 (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1967).

opportunity to preach to the people against being trapped by “false and superstitious belief.”<sup>16</sup> Later, Anatolius, one of Martin’s own brethren, begins building his own cult of personality in opposition to Martin’s authority until there is a division within the monastery. The young man is hailed as a living saint and he proclaims himself a prophet. Martin refuses to contend with him, but his superior perception, guided by the Holy Spirit, dispels the illusion that has deceived the other monks. In Sulpicius’s rendering, Martin’s cautious skepticism and ability to see through illusions of holiness mark him as the true saint.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Sulpicius warns the reader, “we can infer from this that, with the false prophets of this kind about, the coming of the Antichrist is at hand.”<sup>18</sup> Like Anthony’s *Life*, Martin’s provides readers and hagiographers with strong grounds both for skepticism toward new saints and for the establishment of a paradigm for exposure of false saints.

Both Gregory the Great and Gregory of Tours offer examples of true saints being derided or questioned by observers. In the *Life* of Gregory the Great, Gregory’s gift of relic clothes is greeted as an insult until he gets blood from the rags to demonstrate that they are genuine relics with real power.<sup>19</sup> He also relates the case of Abbot Equitius who was condemned by the Pope for preaching without a license until God sends the Pope a “terrifying vision.” Peter, Gregory’s interlocutor in the *Dialogues*, wonders how a Pope

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<sup>16</sup> Sulpicius Severus 15.

<sup>17</sup> Sulpicius Severus 24-25.

<sup>18</sup> Sulpicius Severus 24-25.

<sup>19</sup> Bertram Colgrave, ed. and trans., *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby* (Lawrence KS: U of Kansas P, 1968; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 109.



could be wrong about a saint, and Gregory's reply is that even David, who was a prophet, was misled, so it is no surprise that more ordinary men can also be mistaken about the servants of God.<sup>20</sup> The challenges to these saints are not presented as sinful, but based in ignorance or confusion. The works of Gregory, Sulpicius, and Athanasius were frequently used as models by the most prominent hagiographers of the Anglo-Saxon period. Loomis has argued that Bede used Gregory the Great's work "as a touchstone of authenticity" in making his choices about which materials to include in the *Historia ecclesiastica*.<sup>21</sup>

Gregory of Tours's *Liber in gloria martyrum* recounts a challenge to Saint Benignus after his death and the growth of his veneration among the local populace.<sup>22</sup> Gregory of Tours also relates how Saint Nicetius was treated disrespectfully by his enemy and successor Priscus. His "most dastardly act [...] was to give away Nicetius's vestment (*casubla*) to one of his deacons, who used it as a common cloak or bed covering," made socks from the hood, and died for his disrespect.<sup>23</sup> However, none of these models for expressing and dealing with doubt became the definite paradigm for narrative treatment of doubt.

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<sup>20</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, trans. Odo John Zimmerman, Fathers of the Church 39 (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1959) 24.

<sup>21</sup> C. Grant Loomis, "The Miracle Traditions of the Venerable Bede," *Speculum* 21 (1946): 418, qtd. in William McCready, *Miracles and the Venerable Bede*, Studies and Texts 18 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1994) 7.

<sup>22</sup> Ian Wood, "Constructing Cults in Early Medieval France: Local Saints and Churches in Burgundy and the Auvergne 400-1000," *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 161.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Thacker, "The Making of a Local Saint," *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 67.

Though Anglo-Saxon hagiographers did not develop a single theology of doubt from these sources, they did show a high awareness of the potential for skepticism. The writings of Aldhelm, Ælfric, and Bede show a willingness to express their own doubts, not about saints themselves, but about the textual tradition, particularly when that skepticism could be based on an appeal to Scripture or other patristic writers. They thus draw a line between doubt directed at saints and doubt directed at the fallible work of later men. At the same time, this awareness of the fallibility of hagiographic writing displays itself in the rhetorical pleas for credence and assertions of reliability which pepper Anglo-Saxon and many other hagiographies.

Sainthood and saint-making were ongoing processes in England and on the continent during the Anglo-Saxon period, providing examples not only that saints still existed but also that false saints could emerge. The martyr Boniface came out of this period, but so did the pseudo-saint Aldbert:<sup>24</sup>

If Boniface had undoubtedly read too many martyr passions, his *bête noire*, Aldbert (a priest on the make) illustrates in counterpoint to him the impact of saintly norms upon less exalted would-be saints. Aldbert set up his own cult,

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<sup>24</sup> Alan Thacker, “*Loca Sanctorum*: The Significance of Place in the Study of the Saints,” *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 29. See also Alan Thacker, “Monks, Preaching and Pastoral Care in Early Anglo-Saxon England,” *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. John Blair and Richard Sharpe, *Studies in the Early History of Britain* (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1992) 169.

dedicating oratories to himself, calling upon the people to pray “that the merits of St. Aldbert will help us,” and distributing his own fingernails and hair as relics.<sup>25</sup>

The contrasting cases of Aldbert and Boniface demonstrate that becoming a saint was an active pursuit; Boniface sought martyrdom, Aldbert sought acclaim. Not every purported saint was one.

In the prose *De virginitate*, Aldhelm specifically rejects certain parts of the apocrypha dealing with the Apostle John as unreliable, though he never questions John’s sanctity. “He dismisses ‘the common tradition of the Hebrews’ [...] contrasting ‘the unclear traditions of the Pharisees’ to the ‘lucid statement of Holy Scripture.’”<sup>26</sup>

Aldhelm found grounds in the *De libris recipiendis et non recipiendis*<sup>27</sup> for rejection of the apocrypha. Aldhelm argued that canon law limited what believers were required to accept:

But divine law prohibits followers of the Catholic faith from believing more than the measure of canonical law promulgates, and the teaching of the Orthodox Fathers in decretal writings has sanctioned the total denial and complete destruction of other dangerous works of apocrypha.<sup>28</sup>

However, Aldhelm did not wholly abandon their use; much of his description of John’s miracles comes from apocryphal sources. As Casiday argues, Aldhelm “considered

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<sup>25</sup> Catherine Cubitt, “Memory and Narrative in the Cult of Early Anglo-Saxon Saints,” *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 38.

<sup>26</sup> A.M.C. Casiday, “St Aldhelm on Apocrypha,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 55 (2004): 148.

<sup>27</sup> Ernst von Dobschutz, *Das Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1912).

<sup>28</sup> Casiday 151-152.

apocryphal writings to be merely ambivalent, not necessarily bad; and [...] he reserved for himself considerable discretion in determining which apocrypha are acceptable and which are not.”<sup>29</sup> In doing so, Aldhelm modeled a certain type of skepticism, one not directed at the saint but at those who made latter-day reports about the saint.

Augustine’s commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, though less widely known than the *Lives* of saints Anthony and Martin, provided Ælfric with his own rationale for doubting an incident reported in the *Acta Thomae*. Augustine wrote that Christians are permitted to disbelieve the apocryphal *Acta Thomae* because it was a work written to promote the heresies of the Manicheans.<sup>30</sup> Ælfric repeats this in his preface to the *Passio Thomae*, which he includes in his *Catholic Homilies*, citing it as a source of his hesitation to translate the work and writing that “it is permitted us to disbelieve” that Saint Thomas cursed a man who had slapped him, since this would be an unchristian act of revenge.<sup>31</sup> As Frederick Biggs has shown, Ælfric misread Augustine’s rejection of the entire book as a rejection of this passage only.<sup>32</sup> Still, Ælfric’s reasons for doubting the passage provide a basis on which readers might doubt other accounts, namely that a particular act did not fit the character of a saint. As a corollary to this, one who performed unsaintly deeds would, naturally, not qualify as a saint and could legitimately be doubted. However,

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<sup>29</sup> Casiday 147.

<sup>30</sup> Augustine, *De sermone Domini in monte libri duo*, ed. A. Mutzenbecher, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 35 (Brepols: Turnhout, 1967) 75.

<sup>31</sup> Ælfric, *Ælfric’s Lives of the Saints, Being a Set of Sermons on Saints’ Days Formerly Observed by the English Church*, 2 vols, ed. Walter W. Skeat, Early English Text Society o.s. 76, 82, 94, and 114 (London, 1881-1900) rpt. in 2 vols (London: Oxford UP, 1966) 399. Hereafter, Skeat, *LS*.

<sup>32</sup> Frederick M. Biggs, “Ælfric’s Comments about the *Passio Thomae*,” *Notes and Queries* n.s. 52 (2005): 5-8.

Ælfric does not explicitly apply this principle to any of his saints' *Lives* and, even in the case of the *Passio Thomae*, includes the questionable incident by mentioning it and then translating it in another, later work, rather than erasing it from the record.

Godden has argued that Ælfric is simply protesting in bad faith to cover his deliberate departure from Augustine: "It looks suspiciously as if the citation of Augustine is a cover for a rather different mode of assessing legends and a very different conclusion."<sup>33</sup> However, Frederick Biggs disagrees, arguing that Ælfric made an honest misreading of Augustine's criticism of the *Acta Thomae*. Biggs concludes, "this case suggests that, at least when treating the apostles, Ælfric was quicker to assume a local corruption in a text than to consider an entire work likely to have been written to support heretical beliefs."<sup>34</sup> I think Biggs comes closer to the mark. Ælfric's grounds for rejecting the incident are that it makes the saint less holy. The purpose of hagiography is to demonstrate the holiness of the saint, which the *Acta Thomae* do. If Ælfric were to reject the entire *Acta Thomae* he would be rejecting all of the information provided about the saint except that found in scriptures. The scriptures establish Thomas as an apostle, but offer no miracles done by the saint, leaving the faithful with virtually no textual record. Because Thomas was an apostle, he must have been a saint. Therefore, he must have done what saints do. Given these presuppositions, Ælfric would probably have been extremely hesitant to reject a textual record of these miracles. The record might have

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<sup>33</sup> Malcolm Godden, "Ælfric's Saints' Lives and the Problem of Miracles," *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 16 (1985): 83-100, rpt. in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, ed. Paul Szarmach (New York: Garland, 2000) 287-309 at 296.

<sup>34</sup> Biggs 8.

been corrupted, but it must have been reliable over all, because as a whole it fit with his concept of reality. In criticizing the apocrypha, Aldhelm and Ælfric were not deliberately departing from the patristic tradition or introducing new doubt; they could point to Scriptural and patristic grounds for their doubt.

Bede, writing shortly after Aldhelm and before Ælfric, wrestled both with the question of how to evaluate his source material and with the plausibility of miracles. McCready argues that Bede “regards disbelief in the face of such wonders as irrational, and doesn’t shrink from likening the disbelievers themselves to beasts more than humans.”<sup>35</sup> McCready goes on to argue that Bede treated belief in miracles as a moral obligation:

For both Bede and his intended audience, unbelief was an ethical issue, not an intellectual one. It was the product of moral failure, evidence of a deformed or defective will [...] and so it is to be countered with a moral rather than a scientific challenge.<sup>36</sup>

However, this does not mean that Bede was unaware of scientific or rational assessments of probability. In the *Historia ecclesiastica*, for example, in his description of Queen Æthelthryth, Bede shows some anxiety that skeptical readers may doubt that she could have maintained her virginity through two marriages. Bede assures skeptics that such steadfastness was entirely possible for Æthelthryth, though it would be difficult for

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<sup>35</sup> McCready 56.

<sup>36</sup> McCready 72, citing Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 88.

ordinary readers to believe or to do.<sup>37</sup> Pauline Thompson has argued that Bede's assertion is not wholly ahistorical and it might have been possible for the Queen to remain chaste in marriage.<sup>38</sup> This rather misses Bede's point. His concern for skeptics and his comparison of the queen to the Roman virgin martyrs lays down the principle that one may not disbelieve just because something is implausible. Bede's passage acknowledges that a two-time wife is unlikely to be a virgin, but maintains that Æthelthryth, like her Roman predecessors, was preserved because of her great sanctity and the protective intervention of God. Æthelthryth's implausible virginity is a sign of her sanctity both because it shows her more than ordinary dedication and because it is quasi-miraculous. The moral necessity of, and the miraculous precedents for, her virginity are what make it believable, despite the sexual norms of marriage.

Both in his treatment of contemporary miracles and biblical miracles, Bede displays a sort of circular logic. He admits the possibility of false miracles done through demonic influence and pseudo-prophets, but offers no examples of pseudo-saints, as Gregory of Tours did.<sup>39</sup> Bede treats belief in reported miracles as a moral requirement and calls miracles the *insignia virtutum*<sup>40</sup> of the saints, a necessary, though not sufficient mark of sanctity. "Despite his acknowledgement that miracles can be performed by evil

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<sup>37</sup> Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969) 4.19, 390-396. Hereafter, *HE*.

<sup>38</sup> Pauline Thompson, "St Æthelthryth: the Making of History from Hagiography," *Studies in English Language and Literature: "Doubt Wisely," Papers in Honour of E.G. Stanley*, ed. M.J. Toswell and E.M. Tyler (London: Routledge P, 1996) 475-492.

<sup>39</sup> McCready 135.

<sup>40</sup> McCready 146.

men of all sorts, he even speaks as if they can be taken as proof of sanctity.”<sup>41</sup> Bede’s only real concession to practical skepticism is his reliance on the testimony of witnesses, though he places the emphasis on their good moral character rather than on his having firsthand accounts.<sup>42</sup> So, while Bede acknowledges the possibility of false saints and false reports about saints, he opens only the slightest crack by which readers might admit doubt in contemporary reports of a new saint or new miracles. In the process he adds a heavy moral burden for readers to believe even reports that strike them as unlikely or implausible, rather than risk displaying a sinful unwillingness to believe God’s work.

Bede’s approach to hagiographic accounts exemplifies what Heffernan has called “an interpretive circularity in the composition and reception of these texts.”<sup>43</sup> Heffernan describes the process by which text and tradition create and reiterate each other:

First the text extends the idea that its subject is holy and worthy of veneration by the faithful and second the text, as the documentary source of the saint’s life, receives approbation from the community as a source of great wisdom. In its participation in the tradition, the text is canonized by the tradition and thereafter becomes part of the appropriating force of the tradition.<sup>44</sup>

As Alexandra Hennessey Olsen argues, “virtually all hagiographies [...] interject an assurance of the veracity of the story into the middle of the narrative and by doing so

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<sup>41</sup> McCready 152.

<sup>42</sup> McCready 70.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989) 16.

<sup>44</sup> Heffernan 16.



make us [...] the witnesses who can guarantee the truth of the story.”<sup>45</sup> This circular relationship between text and credibility may help to explain the high degree of anxiety over readers’ credulity displayed in hagiographic texts. “Many more [hagiographers], beginning with Athanasius, author of the *Life of St. Anthony the Great*, ask [readers] not to disbelieve, although this is in fact a sign that they should do so.”<sup>46</sup> Rhetorical assertions of reliability and rebukes to incredulity raise the question of credibility. As Paul Hayward argues, “the many discrepancies [in hagiography] between ideal and reality can not be ignored, not least because the arguments contained in the sources reveal that the participants were themselves struggling to cope with the problems they caused.”<sup>47</sup> In a very real sense, hagiographies are caught in an interpretive loop whereby the rhetoric of the narrative makes its own claims to reliability the proofs of reliability.

In hagiographic narrative, the narrative voice frequently breaks through with protestations of credibility, asserting the reliability of the text’s sources and the author’s own commitment to reporting only verified truth. These assertions are often made at the expense of a text’s predecessors, even when those predecessors are the current text’s primary (or only) source of information. Hagiographers did not always adopt “a collective narrative voice,” but set themselves against previous writers, presenting their

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<sup>45</sup> Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, *Guthlac of Croyland: A Study of Heroic Hagiography* (Washington DC: UP of America Inc, 1981) 15.

<sup>46</sup> Lennart Ryden, “Communicating Holiness,” *East and West: Modes of Communication*, ed. Evangelos Chrysos and Ian Wood, *The Transformation of the Roman World 5* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 83.

<sup>47</sup> Paul A. Hayward, “Demystifying the Role of Sanctity in Western Christendom,” *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. James Howard-Johnston and Paul Anthony Hayward (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 141.

texts as far more reliable than previous ones.<sup>48</sup> William of Malmesbury, for instance, writes, “we have found that the old *Lives* lack polish, and the new [*Lives* lack] reliability.”<sup>49</sup> William is quite verbose on the subject of what he has rejected from his immediate predecessor Osbern in writing the *Life of St. Dunstan*. At the same time, William founds the credibility of his own text on English and Latin sources which he “found in an ancient chest,” and claims that “from these I would find the truth reflected as though from a mirror.”<sup>50</sup> William shows in high relief a characteristic present throughout Anglo-Saxon hagiography. Hagiographers often base their text’s credibility on the the claim that every detail has been “received from and attested to by trustworthy men; remaining silent would be better than stating what is false.”<sup>51</sup> Medieval hagiographers applied not only this standard, but also the appearance of meeting this standard, to their works, even those which were brand new. Thus Sulpicius Severus can write, “who can doubt in these circumstances?”<sup>52</sup> and William of Malmesbury, hundreds of years later, can write, “Anyone who does not believe [these witnesses’] words is offending against religion.”<sup>53</sup> At the same time, these same authors fuel potential doubt

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<sup>48</sup> McCready 72.

<sup>49</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Vita Sancti Dunstani*, in *William of Malmesbury: Saints’ Lives: Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus, and Indract*, ed. Michael Winterbottom and Rodney M. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2002) 166-167. Hereafter, VD(W). “Antiquis enim sermonum gratiam, recentibus integritatem fidei deesse deprehendimus.”

<sup>50</sup> VD(W) 233 and 169.

<sup>51</sup> Eddius Stephanus, qtd. in McCready 156.

<sup>52</sup> Sulpicius Severus 8.

<sup>53</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Vita Wulfstani*, in *William of Malmesbury: Saints’ Lives: Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract*, ed. Michael Winterbottom and Rodney M. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2002) 155. Hereafter, VW(W).

on the part of readers with their protests that previous versions are unreliable and with their expressed decisions to leave out elements which they find unreliable.

Finally, we should remember that doubt over a saint's validity occurred throughout the Middle Ages, not just at a textual level but also at a material level, in controversies over whether collections of bones belonged to a saint. This controversy expressed itself in two different questions. First, collections of bones found in churches were tested to discover if their owner had been a saint. Some of these bones were simply anonymous piles of bones whose history had been lost, while others belonged to purported saints whose claims to sanctity were being challenged. The investigations by the Norman prelates under Lanfranc, though they often centered on the question of documentary evidence, also involved such relic testing.<sup>54</sup> The pressure upon an existing cult created by such investigations formed part of the impetus for the writers Osbern and Eadmer, who repeatedly dealt with those who doubted saints Dunstan and Oda in their texts.<sup>55</sup> Neither writer describes Norman challenges to the bones of the saint in these *Lives*. Rather, they narrate incidents from the saints' lives on earth in which the saints' sanctity was challenged. These incidents then stand as warnings to later challengers. Eadmer and Osbern were also the two who discovered the bones of Saint Ouen when they went hunting through Canterbury church to discover if there were more

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<sup>54</sup> Susan Ridyard, "*Condigna Veneratio*: Post-Conquest Attitudes toward the Saints of the Anglo-Saxons," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 9 (1986): 179-206.

<sup>55</sup> Jay Rubenstein, "Liturgy Against History: the Competing Visions of Lanfranc and Eadmer of Canterbury," *Speculum* 74 (1999): 279-309.

unrecognized saints in their church.<sup>56</sup> These two examples show that questions and doubts about a saint's relics in this period could as easily raise the status of a saint as they could degrade it.

Second, bones which were presented as the relics of a given saint were challenged by others as false relics of a real saint. The question above asks if the person in question was a saint. This second question takes as given that the saint was a saint and then asks which physical objects rightly belong to the saint. These controversies could be tenaciously longlived. The question of where Oswald's head lies is still open to debate.<sup>57</sup> Goscelin, an Anglo-Norman hagiographer, involved himself in the controversy over the bones of Saint Mildthryth by writing the *Libellus contra inanes Sancti virginis Mildrethe usurpatores*. Moreover, "As late as 1502 the canons of St. Osgyth's priory in Essex indignantly suppressed the cult of St. Osgyth at Aylesbury," arguing that only they possessed the correct skeleton.<sup>58</sup> Such accusations were designed to cast doubt on the authenticity of the relics at the rival site, but not on the sanctity of the saint in question. Indeed, such accusations were founded in the belief that the saint being fought over was a real saint and that therefore there was real value in identifying and owning the true

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<sup>56</sup> Andrew J. Turner and Bernard J. Muir, ed. and trans., *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2006) xvi.

<sup>57</sup> Richard N. Bailey, "St Oswald's Heads," *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge, Paul Watkins Medieval Studies 14 (Stamford, CT: Paul Watkins, 1995) 195-209.

<sup>58</sup> Blair, "A Saint for Every Minster?" 466, citing C. Hohler, "St Osgyth and Aylesbury," *Records of Buckinghamshire* 18 (1966) 61-72. Cf. R.P. Hagerty, "The Buckinghamshire Saints Reconsidered 2: St Osgyth and St. Edith of Aylesbury," *Records of Buckinghamshire* 29 (1987): 125-148.

relics.<sup>59</sup> The eleventh-century controversy in which Goscelin found himself was only one of many that developed in the escalating desire for relics which led to Guibert of Nogent's writing the *De pignoribus sanctorum* in the late twelfth century. Although Guibert's work falls outside the period of time considered in this study, it shows an increased concern with the excesses associated with relic production and creation and a growing concern in the church to validate relics rather than just accept them at face value.<sup>60</sup> This dissertation is concerned with the narrative treatment of doubt rather than with polemical writing such as Guibert's. However, such writing does serve as a reminder that hagiographers wrote their narratives about the saints in the context of real veneration and real challenges. Narratives about the saints formed an essential part of their veneration, but not the only part.<sup>61</sup>

All this must have left readers of the time wondering just what to believe. Especially in a period without formal canonization processes, how did one tell an emerging saint from a fraud? How should one read accounts from authors such as Bede, Felix, Ælfric, Osbern, William of Malmesbury and the host of anonymous writers who protest that they have discarded the ridiculous and incredible from their work, but sternly warn readers not to reject accounts of a saint's life because the reader finds them

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<sup>59</sup> Paul A. Hayward, "The *Miracula inventionis beate Mylburge virginis* Attributed to 'the lord Ato, cardinal bishop of Ostia,'" *English Historical Review* 114 (1999): 543-573.

<sup>60</sup> Laura L. Avishai, "Guibert of Nogent's *De pignoribus sanctorum* : Concepts of Sanctity in the Twelfth Century," MA thesis, Ohio State University, 1990 and Colin Morris, "A Critique of Popular Religion: Guibert of Nogent on *The Relics of the Saints*," *Popular Belief and Practice*, ed. C.J. Cuming and Derek Baker, *Studies in Church History* 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972) 55-60.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Lapidge, "The Saintly Life in Anglo-Saxon England," *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 243-263.

ridiculous or incredible? How should the reader tell someone who worked miracles by God's power from someone who performed miracles by the Devil's power? Is one ever allowed to question someone's (even one's own) saintliness? If so, how may one ask these questions? These questions have no single answer in hagiographies of the period. Rather than developing a single and unambiguous treatment of doubt which Goodich describes, the hagiographies model and re-model doubt in a wide variety of ways to meet the particular needs of the moment.

## **Methodology**

My approach to the material in this dissertation is based on two principles. First, narratives may be treated as having a type of rhetoric. Despite hagiography's claim to and investment in a high degree of universality, each individual hagiographic narrative can be treated as having its own individual rhetoric, so that when multiple texts about a single saint exist, it is useful to treat them not as having a single message about the saint (or any other matter), but as individual texts with individual agendas and rhetorics. The comparison between one author's and another's narration of the same incident reveals the subtle ways that even brief narratives can be constructed to direct the reader and the ways in which succeeding authors reconstruct the significance of the same incident.

Hagiography is particularly ripe for the "narrative as rhetoric" approach because it has an openly persuasive nature which pervades the narrative. As James Phelan argues, it

is present in the narrative form itself, not just in the explicitly hortatory or homiletic moments:

Narrative [is] a distinctive and powerful means for an author to communicate knowledge, feelings, values, and beliefs to an audience: indeed, viewing narrative as having the purpose of communicating knowledge, feelings, values, and beliefs is viewing narrative as rhetoric.<sup>62</sup>

Most hagiography is narrative. Thus we can compare Phelan's statement above with Thomas Heffernan's argument:

It seems clear that even if medieval biography had never been influenced by classical rhetoric, the medieval biographer's teleological scheme of redemption would eventually have led him to locate history within the purview of rhetoric, since the belief in redemption was contingent upon prescriptive formulae which regulated behavior. In short, the medieval historian's craft gave considerable attention to the art of persuasion.<sup>63</sup>

Since hagiography accomplishes its persuasive/communicative work through narrative, i.e. telling a story in a specific way, it is appropriate to speak in terms of the rhetoric of hagiographic narrative.

Heffernan has further argued that "the genre [of hagiography] has until recently fallen through the net of scholarly research, avoided by the [...] literary historians

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<sup>62</sup> James Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric: Techniques, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1996) 18.

<sup>63</sup> Heffernan 29.

because saints' lives are rarely works of art."<sup>64</sup> Recent scholarship has devoted more and more time to hagiography, spurred, in part, by Heffernan's own work. However, his comment about the lack of "art" in hagiography points to a key problem which literary studies have had with hagiography. As Townsend puts it, "the homogeneity of saints' lives – from Sulpicius Severus to Capgrave, renders it difficult to do full justice to the creativity of hagiographers and the individuality of the texts they produced."<sup>65</sup> This is where Phelan's idea of the rhetoric of narrative becomes especially useful, because it takes the focus off questions about how artistically "creative" a hagiography is or fails to be. The question of whether or not the means used by a specific hagiographer are unique or creative by twenty-first-century standards becomes moot. My approach in this dissertation is similar to that taken by E. Gordon Whatley's examination of the omission of episodes in two Old English prose saints' lives. He writes that "precisely because these texts are so close to their Latin models, their relatively infrequent instances of divergence from those models seem to me particularly intriguing and puzzling."<sup>66</sup> As Whatley points out, the rarity of these moments makes the divergence stand out as significant when it happens. The very incongruity of these moments makes them noteworthy. This leaves us free to investigate what persuasive work these moments in the narrative seek to accomplish and how they do that. As Benedicta Ward writes about

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<sup>64</sup> Heffernan 17.

<sup>65</sup> David Townsend, "Anglo-Latin Hagiography and the Norman Transition," *Exemplaria: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 3.2 (1991): 387.

<sup>66</sup> E. Gordon Whatley, "Lost in Translation: Omission of Episodes in Some Old English Prose Saints' Legends," *Anglo-Saxon England* 26 (1997): 192.



Cuthbert's hagiographers, "these men were neither fools nor liars, but men of intelligence and literary competence. [...] They chose small pictures from his life, and presented them with a great wealth of interpretation."<sup>67</sup> While the honesty of hagiographers is a separately disputable issue, even those who take a much more cynical position than Ward's agree on the persuasive nature of hagiographic narrative. Hayward argues, "the many discrepancies between ideal and reality can not be ignored. [...] It is difficult therefore to avoid the conclusion that the cult was fraudulent to some degree, even if it was as much a matter of self-deception as the seduction of others."<sup>68</sup> If one is writing narrative to deceive oneself into believing in a saint, or to seduce others into the same belief, one is writing to persuade via narrative. Whether one takes Ward's view or Hayward's or one in between, the question becomes how the rhetoric of any given narrative tries to persuade its reader and why.

Second, this individual narrative rhetoric is more easily highlighted when successive texts are considered in their particular historical contexts. It has become a habit of many modern scholars to assert that the spiritual agendas and dependence on imitation tropes in hagiography need not prevent us from getting at the truth of a saint's life:

Inevitably they [the *Lives* of Æthelwold] are selective, as one of their main functions was to promote the cult of Æthelwold. [...] Fortunately, we can also

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<sup>67</sup> Benedicta Ward, "The Spirituality of St. Cuthbert," *St. Cuthbert, His Cult, and His Community to AD 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (Rochester, NY: Boydell P, 1989) 67.

<sup>68</sup> Hayward, "Demystifying the Role of Sanctity" 141.

study Æthelwold through the numerous charters and other administrative documents which were produced by his monasteries [...] as well as through the art and architecture of his foundations.<sup>69</sup>

Of course, it is sometimes necessary in scholarship to set aside one question in pursuit of another. However, I wish to remain with the central question raised by Yorke's first observation. This dissertation is concerned not with determining if any given event occurred but with how the events are depicted and deployed in narratives about the saint. As Jay Rubenstein has argued, "we should not criticise [hagiographers] for distorting the past; we should not even phrase the matter in these terms. Medieval writers in general saw the past as a living creature, conforming readily to their present needs."<sup>70</sup> This is not to imply that any given incident in this study did or did not actually happen, but that it is only considered here for the narrative treatment which it is given by one or more authors. Since the "main function" of hagiographies is to promote their saint's cult, how does the use of doubt as it appears in a particular hagiography promote a particular saint in the time and place in which it was written? And what, if anything, does this narrative treatment say about the doubt being used?

As several scholars of hagiography have remarked, hagiography is not just a way of remembering a saint, but of remembering in a way that suits the particular needs of the moment: "Remembering is a creative activity in which the past is constantly updated

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<sup>69</sup> Yorke, "Introduction" 1.

<sup>70</sup> Jay Rubenstein, "The Life and Writings of Osbern of Canterbury," *Canterbury and the Norman Conquest: Churches, Saints and Scholars, 1066-1109*, ed. Richard Eales and Richard Sharpe (London: Hambledon P, 1995) 40.

according to the requirement of the present.”<sup>71</sup> This important characteristic of memory, particularly memory collected and constructed on the page, points us to the distinctly this-worldly aspects of hagiography. Both Ann Williams and David Rollason have cautioned us against making too much of these aspects and mistakenly treating hagiographies as here-and-now political treatises:

The *Vita Wulfstani* stands in the tradition of English hagiography which goes back to the *Vitae* of the tenth-century reformers, and the observations of David Rollason on these works should be kept in mind: “political events and the worldly careers of saints are not what the *Lives* are primarily trying to describe and to use them in this way is as it were to cut across the grain.”<sup>72</sup>

While I agree with Williams’s and Rollason’s caution, we must set their observations against the fact that each writer did write in a particular context, which must have influenced, however subtly, his writing. Even the relatively isolated Bede was aware of the world beyond his doors and many of the writers considered in this dissertation were far more directly involved with the church and secular politics of their day. As Patrick Geary has argued, “Historians cannot avoid dealing with the formal literary tradition of the hagiographic texts with which they work.”<sup>73</sup> He goes on to say that “second and

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<sup>71</sup> Cubitt, “Memory and Narrative” 31.

<sup>72</sup> Ann Williams, “The Cunning of the Dove: Wulfstan and the Politics of Accommodation,” *St Wulfstan and His World*, ed. Julia Barrow and Nicholas Brooks, Studies in Early Medieval Britain 4 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 24, quoting David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 168.

<sup>73</sup> Patrick Geary, “Saints, Scholars, and Society: The Elusive Goal,” *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. Sandro Sticca, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 141 (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies SUNY at Binghamton, 1996) 5.

equally important, literary scholars cannot ignore [the] propagandistic nature of this literature. *Hagiography has an essential political dimension that escapes the intertextuality of the literary dimension*”<sup>74</sup> (emphasis mine). I think Geary’s idea should be taken further. We should deal with the formal literary tradition, but doing so is not inherently at odds with a consideration of how that tradition responds to the politics that surrounded a given work’s creation. Doubting incidents are one way we see Anglo-Saxon hagiography not escaping intertextuality but using it in distinctly here-and-now ways.

In this dissertation I have gathered all the incidents of doubt about Anglo-Saxon saints which I have been able to find. One result of this is that several of the saints considered here are dealt with in multiple texts and some saints appear in more than one chapter. A second result is that I have chosen to extend my date parameters past the 1066 Norman Conquest into the early 1100s. The latest text considered in this dissertation is William of Malmesbury’s *Vita Wulfstani*, written in 1130. Though written in the generation after the Conquest, the text is distinctively Anglo-Saxon in several key features. The author, William, identifies himself as both Anglo-Saxon and Norman, desiring his audience not to reject him on the grounds of either identity. His subject is Bishop Wulfstan, an Anglo-Saxon bishop who retained his office after the Conquest. Finally, William presents his Latin text as a translation of a work written by an Anglo-Saxon monk who chose to write in Old English rather than Latin or Norman French.

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<sup>74</sup> Geary 5.

Excluded from the scope of this study are Continental sources, which no doubt would show their own interesting patterns of use and exclusion of incidents of doubt, but which can be more manageably dealt with in a separate study that might make comparisons between these results and those. Additionally, this dissertation leaves for a later study a reconsideration of the material in Goodich's article "Miracles and Disbelief in the Later Middle Ages."

## **Chapter Summaries<sup>75</sup>**

My chapters present four broad categories of doubt: questions, accusations, self-doubt, and postmortem derision. Grouping incidents of doubt in this way allows me to underscore the highly individual use to which each succeeding hagiographer puts the particular incident or incidents which he uses. The organization of incidents by broad types of doubt rather than by saint is not the only organizational strategy which would serve this study. However, it does offer some advantages. First, it demonstrates that there are different types of doubt. The pattern identified by Goodich is present, but only as one of several. Second, it underscores the individuality of the incidents even within the categories themselves. There is a variety in the presentation of doubts which shows the individual hagiographer at work. Finally, arranging incidents of doubt by type highlights the overlapping edges of the types. Some questions carry a tone of accusation.

Accusations can lead to questions in the minds of those who hear them. Saints can doubt

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<sup>75</sup> Throughout this dissertation I have used the translations provided by the hagiographies' editors whenever these were available. All translations are those of the editions' editors unless specifically marked as mine.

themselves, raising the question of where the line lies between humility and faithless doubt. Thus the four broad types of doubt which I have identified are presented here as an organizational pattern, not as inviolable categories.

Some of the hagiographies considered in this dissertation contain more than one type of doubting incident. In order to distinguish between the different uses to which a particular doubting incident is put in a hagiography, I examine multiple versions of the same incident as it is used in or excluded from successive rewritings of each saint's life. For example, St. Dunstan's *Life* occurs in five different recensions during this period. Two of these choose not to include the moments in which he is accused of witchcraft. The three versions which do include the incident all retain the basic story, but each one recreates the incident's meaning through subtle changes in emphasis and imagery.

In the chapter, "Questions: Are You a Saint?" I examine moments in which people raise questions about the saint's reputation for holiness. St. Cuthbert is spied on by a fellow monk who is suspicious of Cuthbert's nighttime prayer vigils. Guthlac's reputation as a saint is questioned by a man who claims to have seen false saints in Ireland, and thus to be expert in discerning between real and fake holy men. Finally, the sheriff of Nottingham's wife sets up a miracle test to determine if Bishop Wulfstan's reputation is deserved.

In the chapter, "Accusations: He's No Saint!" I examine moments in which a saint is deliberately and falsely accused of doing evil by those who find his holiness a threat to their power, authority, or comfort. In the *Lives* of St. Dunstan, the saint is twice

accused of witchcraft and thrown out of court. In the course of his pastoral duties, Bishop Wulfstan is accused, first by a cleric and then by a layman, of being self-seeking.

The chapter, “Self-Doubt: I’m Not That Holy,” considers moments in which saints doubt themselves enough that they hesitate to perform as saints. St. Æthelwold is poisoned by a set of clerics who resent the Benedictine reforms he is enacting. Feeling that he is dying, Æthelwold rebukes himself for lack of faith in Christ’s promises of immunity to poison. St. Dunstan is gripped with fear that he will fail in reforming the monasteries and hesitates to trust the heavenly messenger who promises him that he will not fail. Bishop Wulfstan refuses to heal a man with scrofula, despite divine indications that he should do so, because he considers such a miracle beyond him.

The chapter “Postmortem Derision: He Wasn’t That Holy” examines incidents in which the saint is refused acknowledgement after his or her death. Bishop Oda’s successor dances on the bishop’s tomb, calling him a wicked old man and rejoicing that Oda is finally dead. In King Oswald’s *Life*, the saint’s bones are refused admission by Bardney monastery because King Oswald had conquered them. On the day of his elevation, Bishop Oswald is derided by a neighboring abbot who whispers to his men that Oswald did not deserve such honors. Finally, in Symeon’s *History of Durham*, Cuthbert is mocked by the Viking Onlafbald who has seized the territory.

Together these chapters demonstrate how various Anglo-Saxon authors used incidents of doubt in highly individual and specific ways to address the agendas and

pressures under which they wrote, and to ward off what they perceived as specific threats against themselves and the saint's cult.



## CHAPTER 2

### QUESTIONS: ARE YOU A SAINT?

In this chapter I examine incidents in which an observer wonders about the sanctity of a saint or his actions. These incidents are marked by ambiguity about the saint's sanctity. Two incidents question whether or not the saint is engaged in evil rather than good, while one merely questions whether or not the saint's reputation is inflated. The incidents discussed in this chapter are drawn from the *Lives* of Saints Cuthbert, Guthlac, Anselm, and Wulfstan. St. Cuthbert is followed by a monk who questions what the saint is doing when he leaves the monastery late at night. St. Guthlac is visited by a cleric who boasts that he will judge whether Guthlac is a false saint or a true one. In the *Life of St. Anselm*, St. Elphege's status as a martyr is questioned by Lanfranc. St. Wulfstan is given hospitality by a woman who has heard of him but wants proof of his holiness. In each of these incidents, the saint has already gained a reputation that precedes him and the questioner has heard of the saint but is not fully convinced. Each questioner is decisively answered so that the question is not left open, and all but one of these answers involve a miracle. However, none is dramatically punished for his questions. Two questioners are rebuked for sin, one is made to look foolish for asking, and the woman who questions Wulfstan is blessed for the faith she has demonstrated.

Including incidents in which a saint's sanctity is questioned raises in the reader's own mind the possibility of questioning the saints in general, and the individual saint in particular. Furthermore, each saint's life considered here has a wealth of other miracles, some more dramatic and exciting than the questioning incidents, which verify the saint's sanctity. This then raises the question of why the hagiographers examined in this chapter included these doubting incidents and what these incidents say about doubt. These questions become particularly pressing when one considers that five of the nine texts included in this chapter were the initiatory hagiographies for their cult. In large part, the success of the saint's cult rested on them. I argue that, taken within their historical contexts, each of these incidents offers opportunities which were particularly useful to the hagiographer in his individual time and circumstances.

Each of these *Lives* presents doubt in ways that have different spiritual implications. The *Lives* of Cuthbert all mark out questioning doubt as sinful, but they do so in different ways. The anonymous *Vita Cuthberti* validates and models Irish ascetic practices of worship without linking them to the Irish in order to validate Cuthbert's claims to sanctity. The *Vita Sancti Cuthberti metrica* and the *Vita Sancti Cuthberti prosaica* together use the incident to make Cuthbert a model of the combination between contemplative and pastor which Bede advanced throughout his other work. Ælfric's version of the incident turns it into an admonition against sloth, in which the saint's virtuous night-time activity contrasts with his doubter's idle curiosity. Guthlac's *Lives* also treat doubt as sinful, but only when it is pridefully expressed; the questioners who

merely ask are not chastised, but the questioner Wigfrith is publicly shamed for presuming to judge a saint. The *Vita Anselmi* avoids treating questions about a saint's sanctity as sinful. Instead, it treats questions as a sign that one lacks spiritual insight, simultaneously encouraging questions, if they are asked with the intent of understanding and honoring a saint correctly, but making questions undesirable admissions of spiritual ignorance. Finally, of all the *Lives* in this chapter, only the *Vita Wulfstani* treats questions as having a truly positive spiritual dimension. The questions and the test posed by the sheriff's wife are presented as faithful and appropriate reliance upon God for answers to a rational dilemma. In responding to their differing circumstances, each of the authors in this chapter presents his readers with distinctly different spiritual models to follow.

### **The Anonymous *Vita Sancti Cuthberti***

The four earliest *Lives*, the anonymous *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, Bede's *Vita Sancti Cuthberti metrica* and *Vita Sancti Cuthberti prosaica*, and Ælfric's *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, all include the otter incident, the first incident of doubt in Anglo-Saxon hagiography which can be described as a moment of questioning. Cuthbert, while making a pastoral visit to the dual monastery at Coldingham, maintains his habit of going out to pray alone, at night, in the ocean. One night he is followed by a monk of the house who wishes to know what the saint is doing. When Cuthbert comes out of the ocean, two otters come out of the water and dry his feet with their fur. Seeing this, the monk is struck by terrible fear

and trembling. The next day he begs Cuthbert's forgiveness for watching him. Cuthbert promises to forgive him if the monk will himself keep quiet. This incident is most commonly discussed as an animal miracle and the presence of the monk is disregarded. However, as Benedicta Ward points out, "there is a third otter" – the spying monk.<sup>76</sup> The monk who follows Cuthbert is more than just a witness; his choice to follow Cuthbert, to spy on him, can be read as doubt about the saint's actions, a questioning of whether or not Cuthbert's habits of life were legitimate for a saint.

Of the Cuthbert texts extant from the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman period only the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, tentatively datable to the late eleventh century, does not include the story of the sea creatures and the spying monk, being primarily concerned with the patrimony of Durham.<sup>77</sup> That four of the five available sources on Cuthbert kept the incident testifies to its importance in the minds of successive authors, although what element in it made the incident most attractive or useful to them is a question for debate. The early, widespread, and lasting success of Cuthbert's cult in England and beyond would seem to make it a poor candidate for my contention that the incident of doubt which appears in the *Lives* of Cuthbert reflects pressures acting on the saint's cult. However, the details of the otter incident's presentation in successive texts show it to be relevant to the pressures under which the text was written.

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<sup>76</sup> Ward, "The Spirituality of St Cuthbert" 72.

<sup>77</sup> Ted Johnson South, ed., *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto: A History of Saint Cuthbert and a Record of His Patrimony*, Anglo-Saxon Texts 3 (Rochester NY: D.S. Brewer, 2002) 14. Hereafter, *Historia*.

Written between 699 and 705 AD, twelve or more years after Cuthbert's death,<sup>78</sup> the anonymous *Vita Sancti Cuthberti* was the first hagiography of Cuthbert and the first life written for an Anglo-Saxon saint. Cuthbert's cult was given a strong and clearly deliberate start. The *VCA* was written at the prompting of Bishop Eadfrith and the rest of the Lindisfarne community.<sup>79</sup> Cuthbert's translation around the same time was an elaborate process based on Gaulish episcopal elevation practices,<sup>80</sup> and the composition of the *vita* provided the documentation in a planned campaign to establish Cuthbert's cult. The amount of publicity and public display associated with Cuthbert's translation and the circulation of his *vita* demonstrate that Lindisfarne was attempting to make Cuthbert the center of a large and well-known cult that would attract veneration from beyond the immediate community. All of this represented not only the beginning of one cult but also a trend in insular hagiography. "Anglo-Saxon England was taking over the leadership in insular Latin biography from the Irish and kept it until around 750. This is the particular significance of the first life of St. Cuthbert for the history of Latin

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<sup>78</sup> Bertram Colgrave, ed. and trans., *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1940) 13.

<sup>79</sup> Clare Stancliffe, "Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary," *St. Cuthbert, His Cult, and His Community to AD 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1989) 24.

<sup>80</sup> Alan Thacker, "Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert," *St. Cuthbert, His Cult, and His Community to AD 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1989) 103-124.

literature.”<sup>81</sup> The start of Cuthbert’s cult at this moment shows the Anglo-Saxon writers taking a place in hagiography not only comparable to, but also separate from, the Irish.

Cuthbert’s placement in a large, rich, and well-connected monastery, along with his personal ties to Northumbrian royalty, must all have contributed to the success of his cult.<sup>82</sup> However, there were factors working against the establishment of his cult, most notably Cuthbert’s ties to the Irish. Lindisfarne was an Ionan establishment, and Cuthbert’s religious life was more than tinged with Irish influence. The synod of Whitby in 664 had established Roman practice over Irish in the matter of Easter, but it had not put an end to the controversy or the bad blood between Irish and Anglo-Saxon churches. As Stancliffe argues, “In 700 the debt [of Cuthbert and Lindisfarne to Ireland] could not be [...] acknowledged. Even then, however, Cuthbert was being portrayed as the product of Celtic and Roman traditions.”<sup>83</sup> Beyond the anti-Irish atmosphere in the Northumbrian church in general, Wilfrid, Cuthbert’s turbulent successor, was adamantly anti-Irish. His party presented a specific challenge to Cuthbert’s incipient cult: “More pressing, because nearer home, were the views of those, like Wilfrid’s party, who saw adherents of Irish practices in tonsure and the dating of Easter as schismatics, with whom no communion

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<sup>81</sup> Walter Berschin, “*Opus deliberatum ac perfectum*: Why Did the Venerable Bede Write a Second Prose Life of St Cuthbert?,” *St. Cuthbert, His Cult, and His Community to AD 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1989) 95.

<sup>82</sup> Thacker, “Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert” 103-124. On Lindisfarne’s ties to other monasteries and ability to establish of daughter houses see H.H.E. Craster, “The Patrimony of St. Cuthbert,” *English Historical Review* 69 (1954): 179-80 and Æthelwulf, *De abbatibus*, ed. Alistair Campbell (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1967) 11 and 59.

<sup>83</sup> Stancliffe, “Pastor and Solitary,” 24.

was possible.”<sup>84</sup> Cuthbert had been tonsured in the Irish manner. Janet Backhouse points out that Cuthbert is the only English saint of this period whose life contains animal miracles such as the otter incident and that “their relationship to the tradition found in [...] the biographies of some of the Irish saints is undeniable.”<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the otter incident reiterates Cuthbert’s ties to the Irish by its parallels to what McCready calls “a strikingly similar episode” in Adomnan’s *Life of St. Columba*.<sup>86</sup> In that case, Columba tells the brothers at Iona that he wishes to go out alone to pray and sternly warns them not to follow him: “But a certain brother, a cunning spy, going by another way, took up a position secretly on the top of a little hill that overlooks that plain, wishing to detect the cause of that solitary expedition of the blessed man.”<sup>87</sup> The *VCA* shows its debt to this incident in the *Life* of Adomnan not only by the similarity of the incidents but also by describing the spying monk with the same word, *explorator*. Finally, the otter incident shows Cuthbert engaged in the identifiably Irish activity of singing psalms late at night, while mortifying the body in cold water.<sup>88</sup> Cuthbert’s life offered much to commend him as the prototypical Anglo-Saxon saint, but his Irishness was a distinct drawback.

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<sup>84</sup> Stancliffe, “Pastor and Solitary” 22.

<sup>85</sup> Janet Backhouse, “Birds, Beasts and Initials in Lindisfarne’s Gospel Books,” *St. Cuthbert, His Cult, and His Community to AD 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1989) 168.

<sup>86</sup> McCready 170.

<sup>87</sup> Adomnan, *Adomnan’s Life of Columba*, ed. Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1991) 204: “Sed frater quidam callidus explorator alia via in cuiusdam monticelli cacumine, qui eidem supereminet campulo, se occulte conlocat, videlicet illius causam solitariae beati egresionis viri explorare cupiens.”

<sup>88</sup> Michael Herity, “Early Irish Hermitages in the Light of the *Lives* of Cuthbert,” *St. Cuthbert, His Cult, and His Community to AD 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1989) 53; Gerald Bonner, “Saint Cuthbert – Soul Friend,” *Cuthbert: Saint and Patron*,

One possible strategy to mitigate this might have been to stress Cuthbert as a bishop saint rather than an ascetic one. Unfortunately, Cuthbert's successor Wilfrid had made the role of bishop less a proof of sanctity. Wilfrid's turbulence had called into question his own sanctity; Thacker tactfully says, "Wilfrid's career [...] was much more difficult to accommodate to the classic exemplars" than Cuthbert's.<sup>89</sup> In doing so, Wilfrid may have made Cuthbert look better by contrast in the memories of those who knew them, but he also lowered the prestige of the bishopric, making it more difficult to promote Cuthbert as an episcopal saint. Furthermore, Wilfrid himself was not a proponent of Cuthbert's cult. Instead he regarded Cuthbert as a usurper who had taken the bishopric from one of Wilfrid's own disciples in 684.<sup>90</sup> Cuthbert's Irishness and Wilfrid's opposition both represented genuine obstacles to Cuthbert's being recognized as a saint, let alone becoming the focus of a large cult center.

Other scholars have noted the ways in which the *VCA* responds to these pressures. Clare Stancliffe has pointed out that the *VCA* involves deliberate lies about Cuthbert's early life:

It is significant that around 700 the early "Ionan" phase of Cuthbert's life was seemingly still too compromising for the author of the anonymous *Life*: for instance he insists that Cuthbert was first tonsured at Ripon [...] and that he was

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ed. David Rollason (Durham, UK: Dean and Chapter of Durham, 1987) 32, rpt. in *Church and Faith in the Patristic Tradition: Augustine, Pelagianism, and Early Christian Northumbria*, Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996) IX 32.

<sup>89</sup> Thacker, "Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert" 117.

<sup>90</sup> Walter Goffart, "The *Historia Ecclesiastica*: Bede's Agenda and Ours," *Haskins Society Journal* 2 (1990): 38.



given the Petrine (rather than the Irish) tonsure. He surely knew that this was a rewriting of history.<sup>91</sup>

Goffart also sees the *VCA* as deliberately responding to the difficulties created by Wilfrid and his party. He writes, “the anxieties of the anonymous *Life* are plain. [...] The anonymous *Life* sought to carve out a fortified position for St. Cuthbert, a bastion within which his cult could endure amidst the Wilfridian ascendancy of the early 700s.”<sup>92</sup>

It is the combination of these two factors – the anti-Irish trend of the early 700s and Wilfrid’s opposition – that makes the anonymous author’s inclusion of the otter incident productive. Cuthbert’s asceticism, Irish though it was, provides an antidote to Wilfrid’s mark on the Lindisfarne community. In his asceticism, his reluctance to take office, and his friendship with royalty, Cuthbert “represented a notable contrast to Wilfrid who had so consistently and strenuously defended his own in the face of violent royal opposition.”<sup>93</sup> The “writing for the time” which Thacker identifies in the anonymous’s *vita* is directly and essentially linked to the cult’s promotion; by positioning Cuthbert as a different kind of saint and a different kind of bishop than Wilfrid, the anonymous author is not only positing a different model for the episcopacy, but also strongly presenting Cuthbert as a self-effacing saint whose patronage in heaven and whose cult on earth would promote peace and stability, rather than strife and division. The effectiveness of this model is visible in the imitation it spawned. As Thacker points out, Wilfrid’s own

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<sup>91</sup> Stancliffe, “Pastor and Solitary” 22-23.

<sup>92</sup> Goffart, “The *Historia Ecclesiastica*” 38.

<sup>93</sup> Thacker, “Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert” 117.

*Life* takes its pattern from the anonymous *Life*: “By his use of the anonymous *Life*, [Wilfrid’s biographer] was making a bid to take over the most potent (probably the only) native model and asserting that his hero was every whit as true a saint as Cuthbert.”<sup>94</sup>

Thacker puts his finger on two important factors here. First, demonstrating the saint’s holiness in written form, despite the other rich trappings Lindisfarne could provide in the form of an elaborate translation, was still vital to the establishment of the cult. Second, the anonymous author’s stress on Cuthbert’s asceticism must owe something to the need to provide Cuthbert with better qualifications for sainthood than just his role as a bishop.

At the same time, using the otter incident presents Cuthbert’s asceticism in a way that rebuts those readers who might have regarded such practices as suspect. By including the otter incident, the anonymous author places a skeptical witness in the scene, whose unvoiced but visible questioning of Cuthbert’s actions is decisively rebuked by a revelation from heaven. The narrator stresses that the monk’s investigation is an unacceptable failure to recognize Cuthbert’s sanctity when given the opportunity. The narrator describes the monk’s actions in this way: “When a certain cleric of the community found this out, he began to follow him from a distance to test him, wishing to know what he did with himself at night.”<sup>95</sup> Cuthbert uses the same gerund (*temptando*) when the cleric later begs his pardon. He asks, “have you approached nearer to me, to test

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<sup>94</sup> Thacker, “Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert” 117.

<sup>95</sup> Bertram Colgrave ed. and trans., *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede’s Prose Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 80-1. Hereafter, VCA: “A quodam clerico familie, qui incipiebat occulte de longinquo obsequi eum temptando, scire volens quomodo vitam nocturnam transegeret.”

me, than you should have done?”<sup>96</sup> This inflected gerund *temptando* emphasizes the inappropriateness of the cleric’s action. He is not simply testing, in the sense of a neutral empirical investigation, but offering the saint the opportunity to be caught in some wickedness.<sup>97</sup> One gathers that the monk harbored vague suspicions of Cuthbert; perhaps he was in communion with demons or involved in an illicit tryst, both activities associated with darkness and solitude. The monk’s questions impugned Cuthbert’s sanctity and thus they are unacceptable.

The exact light in which we should read this use of the word “test” is shown in the final sentence of the chapter when the monk uses it to describe his actions:

After Cuthbert’s death, he told many brethren how the animals ministered to the saint, just as we read in the Old Testament that the lions ministered to Daniel, and related how Cuthbert, to his amazement, had seen him with his spiritual eyes, when he was lying hidden and testing him, just as Peter detected Ananias and Sapphira when they were tempting the Holy Spirit.<sup>98</sup>

The structure of the sentence indicates that the narrator is reporting how the monk described his own spying and what biblical analogies he used. Thus, it is not the narrator but the monk himself who directly compares himself to Darius, the king who persecuted

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<sup>96</sup> Colgrave, *VCA* 80-1f: “Numquid proprius adpropinquasti mihi temptando quam debuisti?”

<sup>97</sup> s.v. *temptare*, J.H. Baxter, Charles Johnson, and Phyllis Abrahams, *Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources* (London: Oxford UP, 1934) and P.W. Glare, *The Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1996).

<sup>98</sup> Colgrave, *VCA* 82-3: “Post vero obitum eius multis fratribus narrans servitionem animalium, sicut leones in veteri legimus Danihelo servire, et quod spiritalibus oculis latitantem eum et probantem, sicut viderat Petrus Annaniam et Saphiram spiritum sanctum temptantem, mirabiliter defamavit.” cf. Daniel 6 and Acts 5: 1-11.

the prophet Daniel, and Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the Apostle Paul. This strengthens the force of the comparison, since it is part of the monk's confession. In the process of testifying for the saint, the monk testifies against himself. He calls his own actions *probantem*, testing in the sense of proving the quality of an object.<sup>99</sup> However, the monk describes Ananias's and Sapphira's deliberate lies to the apostle Paul as *temptantem*: tempting the Holy Spirit. If Cuthbert is analogous here to the Apostle Paul, that puts the monk in the role of Ananias and Sapphira. However, the verb choice elevates Cuthbert to the place of the Holy Spirit, since it was he, not the apostle, whom Ananias and Sapphira are accused of tempting. Cuthbert is thus exonerated by the person who set out to question him and the questioner is rebuked as having unworthy motives. By including this incident in the *vita*, the anonymous has cleverly placed large biblical signposts around Cuthbert, warning the reader not to question his sanctity, lest the reader share the fate of Ananias and Sapphira. By making Cuthbert's ascetic practice an occasion of doubt, the *VCA* vindicates Cuthbert's Irishness and sets Cuthbert apart from Wilfrid in a positive way.

***Bede's Vita Sancti Cuthberti prosaica and Vita Sancti Cuthberti metrica as opera geminata***

Almost immediately after the *VCA* was written, Bede wrote not one, but two more *Lives* of St. Cuthbert. Bede's *Vita Cuthberti metrica* (*VCM*) was written around 705, and

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<sup>99</sup> s.v. *probare*, Glare and Baxter.

his *Vita Cuthberti prosaica* (*VCP*) was written between 710 and 720.<sup>100</sup> Although the works were not written simultaneously, Berschin notes that Michael Lapidge has argued persuasively that these works ought to be read as *opera geminata*, twinned works, designed to be read as companion pieces.<sup>101</sup> The gap in time between them becomes less an argument for reading them separately when one considers that the copy we have now of the *VCM* is a revision of Bede's earlier version found in the Bibliothèque Municipale, Besançon, MS 186:

It is not clear when the work of revision was done; but it is reasonable to think that when – in the light of Cuthbert's growing cult – Bede was at work on his prose *Life of Cuthbert*, his fresh consultation of the anonymous *Life* caused him to look again at his earlier poem.<sup>102</sup>

The dovetailing of themes between the *VCM* and *VCP* further supports this approach. I argue that though Bede's commission to write them may have come from motives of rivalry between Cuthbert's and Wilfrid's cults, Bede's own presentation of the otter incident is focused on his lifelong concern with combining the roles of pastor and contemplative. Bede's treatment of the otter incident doesn't reflect a specific pressure on the cult. Instead, Bede uses it to model his ideal of the monk as both pastor and solitary.

Certainly, there is evidence that the Lindisfarne community perceived Wilfrid's growing cult as a rival to Cuthbert's. Lutterkort argues that Bede attempts to show

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<sup>100</sup> Colgrave VCA 16.

<sup>101</sup> Berschin 95-102.

<sup>102</sup> Michael Lapidge, "Bede's Metrical *Vita S. Cuthberti*," *St. Cuthbert, His Cult, and His Community to AD 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1989) 87.

Cuthbert as the equal of any other saint, including continental ones.<sup>103</sup> Thacker has also argued that Bede's first motive in writing may well have been to shore up Lindisfarne's position against rival cults, particularly Wilfrid's, by providing a fresh presentation of Cuthbert's miracles.<sup>104</sup> As Thacker describes it, "Cuthbert's cult developed within a time of great strife within the Northumbrian ecclesiastical establishment and this helps to explain both the quality and abundance of Cuthbertine hagiography."<sup>105</sup> Goffart agrees with this perspective, arguing "a Wilfrid-centered vision of the past was surely dominant in Northumbria in the years just before and after the great man's death."<sup>106</sup> The growth of Wilfrid's cult may well have been a strong motive for the Lindisfarne community to seek a metrical *Life* to complement their anonymous prose *Life* and so reinforce Cuthbert's growing cult. However, Wilfrid's *vita* was written by Eddius Stephanus shortly after Wilfrid's death in 709. This puts its composition after Bede had first written the *VCM*, though he may have been rewriting it along with the *VCP* at this point.

A great deal has been made in the past about Bede's personal antipathy to Wilfrid as a motive for his writing, although recent scholarship indicates that this motive has been exaggerated.<sup>107</sup> Whether or not Bede had a personal dislike of Wilfrid that

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<sup>103</sup> Karl Lutterkort, "Beda Hagiographicus: Meaning and Function of Miracle Stories in the *Vita Cuthberti* and the *Historia ecclesiastica*," *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk and Northumbrian*, ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald, Mediaevalia Groningana (Gronigen: Egbert Forsten, 1996) 94.

<sup>104</sup> Thacker, "Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert" 117.

<sup>105</sup> Thacker, "Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert" 122.

<sup>106</sup> Goffart, "The *Historia Ecclesiastica*" 37.

<sup>107</sup> D.P. Kirby, "Bede, Eddius Stephanus and 'The Life of Wilfrid,'" *English Historical Review* 98 (1983): 101-114. Thacker does point out that while Wilfrid's party may have proved a minimal threat to Bede in hindsight, at the time that he wrote, Bede may still have believed that Wilfrid's men had accused him of heresy; see Thacker, "Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert" 121.

motivated his decision to write a new *Life* for Lindisfarne, he had a positive agenda of his own that found a suitable subject in Cuthbert, and we see this in his use of the otter incident. Thacker argues that “Bede’s [...] presentation of Cuthbert reflects above all else his desire to link Northumbria’s leading saint with the reforming ideals formulated in his biblical commentaries.”<sup>108</sup> Elsewhere, Thacker writes, “Cuthbert is presented as an exemplary monk, ascetic and bishop, fulfilling in these roles all the requirements of a Bedan *rector*, *doctor*, and *praedicator*.”<sup>109</sup> Central to this agenda was Bede’s desire “to stress that this union of the active and contemplative lives was successful. Gregory’s own admission that his pastoral responsibilities interfered with his contemplative life is dismissed.”<sup>110</sup> The otter incident helps Bede demonstrate this ideal in action. The saint is on a pastoral visit to Coldingham, yet performing his contemplative duties alone. The monk who follows him provides Cuthbert an opportunity to minister to the monk even in the act of solitary contemplation, modeling Bede’s ideal.

In the *VCM*, Bede’s narrative pares down the narrative details of events to an almost lyric level; that is, he reduces the narrative element to its bare minimum, leaving the reader with a series of exemplary images on which to meditate. As Paul Cavill has argued, “for Bede the focus in the metrical *Life* was on vision itself.”<sup>111</sup> Lapidge agrees,

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<sup>108</sup> Thacker, “Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert” 121.

<sup>109</sup> Thacker, “Bede’s Ideal of Reform,” *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough and Roger Collins (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) 140.

<sup>110</sup> Thacker, “Bede’s Ideal of Reform” 143.

<sup>111</sup> Paul Cavill, “Some Dynamics of Story-Telling: Animals in the Early Lives of St. Cuthbert,” *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 43 (1999): 16.

writing “the focus here is on the figural meaning of the event, not the event itself.”<sup>112</sup>

Lapidge specifically cites the otter incident as a primary example of this narrative condensing to the point that the event is more lyric than story. Bede has removed the details of place and time, as well as the reasons for Cuthbert’s visit to Coldingham: “Bede was simply not interested in the narrative potential of the story. [...] It is part of Bede’s purpose to remove the episodes of Cuthbert’s life from the temporal and the local and to situate them in a timeless, placeless framework.”<sup>113</sup> This ought to tell us about Bede’s intentions for the *VCM*; this is not a popularly accessible narrative, easily heard by a lay audience to introduce them to the cult. This is a work much more suitable for the individual monastic, already involved with St. Cuthbert, to deepen his private meditations. Lapidge argues that “Bede’s poem was intended as a meditation on the life and significance of Cuthbert. Such meditation ideally involves deep concentration.”<sup>114</sup> Cuthbert is thus presented as a universal model to fix one’s spiritual eyes upon; rather than a story, there is an image of a man in contemplative prayer.

Where I depart from Lapidge’s assessment of this scene is in his treatment of the watching monk. Lapidge argues that the monk becomes narratively irrelevant, mere background to the image of Cuthbert on his knees: “The potential narrative of the follower’s action is immobilized and frozen into the single noun *comes* [companion].”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Lapidge, “Bede’s Metrical *Vita S. Cuthberti*” 89 -90.

<sup>113</sup> Lapidge, “Bede’s Metrical *Vita S. Cuthberti*” 91.

<sup>114</sup> Lapidge, “Bede’s Metrical *Vita S. Cuthberti*” 90.

<sup>115</sup> Lapidge, “Bede’s Metrical *Vita S. Cuthberti*” 92.



I argue that in changing the following monk from a spy to a companion, Bede makes him into a foil for Cuthbert. Both men are on their knees, but for contrasting reasons. The narrative gives us the image of two supplicants, one voluntary and the other forced down by fear. Cuthbert “went out to the sea and, with his knees fixed on the shore, the humble petitioner held out both palms to the stars.”<sup>116</sup> Cuthbert begins on his knees and is rewarded with the ministrations of the two otters. Compare this to the spying monk who does not go to his knees until after he sees the sea animals come out in response to Cuthbert:

As his companion saw these things, he was struck through the heart with trembling. Hidden, he dragged himself half alive into the curve of a cave. But when the returning day drove away the shadows of the night, sick he went before the prophet, humbly begging and fallen to his knees; he begged him to commit his earnest entreaty to the Lord, that he might bring to an end the grievous burden which he had suddenly come under in the night.<sup>117</sup>

The contrast between saint and sinner is stark. Both are humbled; both go to their knees in petition. However, because Cuthbert bends the knee to God willingly, he ends by standing over the monk as the object of his petition. In contrast, the monk begins arrogantly and ends as a humble petitioner. He must be pushed or violently struck –

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<sup>116</sup> Werner Jaeger, *Bedas metrische Vita Sancti Cuthberti* (Leipzig: Mayer and Müller, 1935) 75. Hereafter, *VCM*: “Egreditur ponto genibusque in litore fixis / expandit geminas supplex ad sidera palmas” (translation mine).

<sup>117</sup> *VCM* 235 – 240: “Haec comes ut vidit percussus corda pavore / semianimem curvo flatum trahit abditus antro. / At revoluta dies noctis cum pelleret umbras / Aeger adest vati, supplex genibusque volutus / Se poscit domino prece commendare profusa, / Inciderit maestam subito quod pondere noctem.”

literalizing the metaphor – before he goes to his knees. Rather than being background to Cuthbert, the spying monk is an essential witness and contrast to the saint.

The lesson is clear that if one begins as humble petitioner, one earns glory. The solitary Cuthbert is transformed into a figure of awe and fear by his contemplative prayer; he becomes the one who raises his companion to his feet. However, beginning arrogantly will lead to one's being humbled. Bede compresses the role of the follower, moving away from the issue of his motives and any language of tempting or testing Cuthbert. In the *VCM* the monk's primary function is to be an awed witness and a respondent to the saint's radiance, which is the last image given in the incident: "And now a prophetic power, derived from the starry summit of heaven, illuminates his shining heart with its brilliant radiance."<sup>118</sup> The literal radiance of the starry pre-dawn sky is transmuted into the spiritual radiance of the saint, so that the reader sees the saint as literally shining. Whatever doubts or questions led the monk there in the first place become irrelevant. His significance to the *VCM* is the contrast he presents to the saint.

From a Bedan perspective, the great danger that the otter story presents is not so much that Cuthbert might be questioned by the other monk, but that Cuthbert's ascetic excursions could be perceived as at odds with the virtue of *stabilitas* which formed an essential part of Bede's own reform agenda. Thacker argues that "Bede, it is clear, wanted Cuthbert to be seen as the ideal monk and pastor."<sup>119</sup> Being out of bed in the middle of the night with no clear permission might work against this image of Cuthbert

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<sup>118</sup> Translated in Lapidge, "Bede's Metrical *Vita S. Cuthberti*" 91.

<sup>119</sup> Thacker, "Bede's Ideal of Reform" 140.

as an exemplar of the regular life. As Thacker points out, one of the few incidents that Bede cut from the *VCA* is Cuthbert's sailing away from Melrose to be a hermit without permission, "probably because he was conscious that such behaviour consorted ill with the Benedictine virtue of *stabilitas*."<sup>120</sup> The other incident allows Bede to show Cuthbert combining solitary, contemplative behavior with communal and pastoral life. After he has prayed, "he forthwith returned home and sang the canonical hymns with the brethren at the appointed hour."<sup>121</sup> Cuthbert's nocturnal prayers deprive him of sleep, but they do not make him late for the morning office.

In the *VCP*, the location of the otter incident and Cuthbert's reason for being there are foregrounded so that Cuthbert in the same incident is presented as acting pastorally to the spy. This is not in contrast to the *VCM*'s presentation of him as contemplative, but a complement to it. The narrator begins the chapter with Cuthbert's invitation to Coldingham in order to establish that Cuthbert was not at Coldingham for his own enjoyment, but for the good of others:

There was a nun, a mother of the handmaidens of Christ, called Æbbe, who ruled over the monastery situated in a place called Coldingham, a woman honoured among all as well for her piety as for her noble birth, for she was own sister to

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<sup>120</sup> Thacker, "Bede's Ideal of Reform" 140.

<sup>121</sup> Bertram Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 188. Hereafter, *VCP*: "Ipse quoque mox domum reversus, canonicos cum fratribus ymnos hora competente complevit."

King Oswiu. She sent to the man of God asking that he would deign to visit her and her monastery for the sake of exhorting them.<sup>122</sup>

Had Cuthbert been wandering up and down for his own sake, he would have been violating his role as monk under authority. However, since Æbbe has invited him for the specific purpose of edifying others, his trip is an act of generosity. Furthermore, the narrative is careful to assert that Cuthbert's deeds were in agreement with his preaching: "So he came to the place and remained there some days and opened up to them all the path of righteousness about which he preached, as much by his deeds as by his words."<sup>123</sup> This makes Cuthbert's ministry effective and justified, since he not only speaks the truth, but also models it.

This continuity between Cuthbert's words and his deeds provides the connection between his preaching and his solitary prayers. They are not distractions from his work as pastor: rather, they enhance and enable his pastoral work, presenting Cuthbert as a model pastor as well as a model contemplative. Paul Cavill has argued that "through Bede's adjustment of the biblical references the focus of the story has shifted. [...] In the prose *Life*, it is almost entirely on Cuthbert and the revelation of his Christ-likeness, while the otters and the spy fade into the background."<sup>124</sup> As with the *VCM*, I argue that the

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<sup>122</sup> *VCP* 188: "Erat sanctimonialis femina et mater ancillarum Christi nomine Ebbae, regens monasterium quod situm est in loco quem Coludi urbem nuncupant religione pariter et nobilitate cunctis honorabilis. Nanque erat soror uterina regis Oswiu. Haec ad virum Dei mittens, rogavit ut se suumque monasterium gratia exhortationis invisere dignaretur."

<sup>123</sup> *VCP* 188: "Venit igitur ad locum, diesque aliquot ibi permanens, viam iusticiae quam precabatur omnibus actu pariter et sermone pandebat."

<sup>124</sup> Cavill 16.

presence of the spy is made essential to the moment. He is not just a convenient narrative device for explaining how the story ever got out; he is a necessary recipient of Cuthbert's *imitatio Christi* in which Cuthbert, the solitary contemplative, offers pastoral comfort to the cold and fearful monk.

Understanding Bede's use of the contrast between one monk and the other, the spy and the contemplative, explains Bede's decision to abandon the scriptural references of the *VCA* and the *VCM*. In the *VCM*, Bede specifies that Cuthbert is like Christ in his injunction to the blind men that they keep silent about what occurred.<sup>125</sup> However, the final image of the scene is of Cuthbert haloed and shining with the light of the stars, an image found nowhere in the healing of the blind men. Instead it is the image of Christ, his face shining with glory, as he is seen in the Transfiguration.<sup>126</sup> In the *VCP* Bede makes explicit that Cuthbert is, in this moment, acting as Christ did in the Transfiguration. Cuthbert tells the monk not to tell anyone what he has seen: "in this command he followed the example of Him who, when He showed the glory of His majesty to the disciples on the mount, said: 'Tell the vision to no man until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead.'"<sup>127</sup> Benedicta Ward points out the continuity between this moment in the *Vita Sancti Cuthberti prosaica* and Bede's biblical commentaries:

In his commentary on the Transfiguration, Bede restated the patristic

understanding of this moment of vision as the second epiphany of Christ [...] The

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<sup>125</sup> *VCM* 80.

<sup>126</sup> Matthew 17:1-6, *Douay-Rheims Bible*.

<sup>127</sup> *VCP* 190-191: "In quo nimirum praecepto eius secutus est exemplum, qui discipulis in monte gloriam suae maiestatis ostendens ait, *Nemini dixeritis visionem, donec filius hominis a mortuis resurgat.*"

“vision” seen on the shore of the North Sea centuries later was for Bede the same epiphany of God, by water and by light. [...] He [the monk] had not been watching a man on the shore with his pets; he had seen the face of Christ in a man so transfigured in prayer that the right order of creation was in him restored.<sup>128</sup>

However, this shift in scriptural reference is not merely a move up the ladder of *imitatio*, from apostle to Christ. Rather, Bede has chosen a moment in which Christ, like Cuthbert, is functioning as both contemplative and active pastor. Christ has withdrawn from the crowds to a remote place, as he did periodically, but taken a select few apostles with him. In the Transfiguration, the shining light of Christ’s glory transforms his features and reveals his holiness to the apostles who are both awed and frightened by this sight of his true nature. Likewise, the following monk, whom Bede called Cuthbert’s “companion” in the *VCM*, is awed and terrified before the transformed Cuthbert, whose face shines with the glory of the stars. In the Transfiguration, Christ is both withdrawn into contemplation in a remote place and actively ministering to his apostles by allowing them to see his communion with God and the prophets. The trembling monk who kneels before Cuthbert reinforces the Transfigurational parallels of the scene, taking the place of the apostles who are overcome with fear and awe at the sight of Christ and are at the same time edified by having witnessed true holiness in action. Read as a companion to the *VCM*, Bede’s *VCP* offers the reader a model of the combined pastoral and contemplative virtues he expounds throughout his writing.

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<sup>128</sup> Ward, “The Spirituality of St. Cuthbert” 72.

### ***Ælfric's Vita Sancti Cuthberti***

Three hundred years after Bede, Ælfric included Cuthbert's *vita* in his *Catholic Homilies*, finished about 994 or 995.<sup>129</sup> Like his predecessors, Ælfric included the otter incident. At the end of the incident he writes, "many wonders were worked through Cuthbert, but we will for brevity's sake to let some go lest you think this narrative is too long."<sup>130</sup> The "too many wonders to recount" trope is, of course, a commonplace in hagiographic narratives of all lengths, but in this case Ælfric is not being disingenuous. He has greatly shortened Bede's narrative, to which he refers in the introduction, excerpting only a few of the miracles available for him to report and relating them in a clipped style that avoids giving any of the geographic contexts or scenic detail found in the previous *Lives*. In the process he has reconceived the narrative yet again.

In Ælfric's treatment, the otter incident is no longer a story about doubt, but a warning against sloth. Jonathan Wilcox calls Ælfric's work "a remarkably extensive and well-informed commentary on the Christian story, on the individual's responsibility to society, and on ethics and morality," and his reconstruction of the otter incident fits it into this project.<sup>131</sup> Sloth is one of Ælfric's frequent themes in the *Homilies*. Robert

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<sup>129</sup> Skeat, *LS* xxvi.

<sup>130</sup> Ælfric, *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. Malcolm Godden, Early English Text Society, s.s. 5 (London: Oxford UP, 1979) 84. Hereafter, *VC(Æ)*. "Fela wundra wurdon geworhte ðurh ðone halgan Cuðberht, ac we wyllað for sceortnysse sume forsuwian, ðy læs ðe ðeos racu eow to lang ðince."

<sup>131</sup> Jonathan Wilcox, "Ælfric in Dorset and the Landscape of Pastoral Care," *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Francesca Tinti, Anglo-Saxon Studies 6 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 2005) 52.

DiNapoli's *Index of Theme and Image to the Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church* lists fourteen separate places in which the homiletic sources address the sin of sloth; four of these, nearly thirty percent, are Ælfric's work.<sup>132</sup>

As previous versions of the story do, Ælfric's narrative treats the monk's decision to follow Cuthbert as unambiguously negative. The monk desires to know what Cuthbert is doing out of bed at night and so follows him out to the ocean. Ælfric's description of how the monk followed Cuthbert is the first indication of how we should read his action: "with slow stalking he followed his footsteps."<sup>133</sup> The alliteration here is a technique Ælfric uses extensively, but its effect in this line is to draw the reader's attention to how the monk is following Cuthbert, not just that he is doing it. The monk stalks the saint as if Cuthbert were his prey. Ælfric's only other use of the verb is to describe Hinguar, who "suddenly, like a wolf stalked over the land and slew the people, men and women, and witless children, and shamefully tormented the innocent Christians."<sup>134</sup> I do not think Ælfric is making an explicit comparison here, but he has chosen language that strips any moral ambiguity from the monk's action. There is no doubting that Ælfric considered the monk's spying to be sinful.

Furthermore, unlike previous writers, Ælfric explicitly categorizes the monk's sin. The monk's desire to know what Cuthbert is doing is labeled as curiosity, which betrays

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<sup>132</sup> Robert DiNapoli, *An Index of Theme and Image to the Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: Comprising the Homilies of Ælfric, Wulfstan, and the Blickling and Vercelli Codices* (Frithgarth, UK: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1995).

<sup>133</sup> VC(Æ) 83: "Mid sleaccrē stalcunge his fotswaðum filigde."

<sup>134</sup> Skeat, LS 316: "Færlice swa swa wulf on lande bestalcode, and þa leode sloh weras and wif, and þa ungewittigan cild, and to bysmore tucode þa bilewitan Cristenan."



an underlying slothfulness.<sup>135</sup> The monk, when confronted by Cuthbert, confesses to curiosity as the sin for which he needs forgiveness: “the monk, greatly frightened, [...was] begging that he [Cuthbert] would his put to flight his whole ailment, and have fatherly mercy on his curiosity.”<sup>136</sup> And it is the guilt of curiosity which Cuthbert forgives: “then Cuthbert [...] forgave the guilt of his curious journey.”<sup>137</sup> In Ælfrician vocabulary, curiosity is frequently marked as sinful. In his mid-Lent sermon enumerating the seven deadly sins, Ælfric says that curiosity is one of the results of sloth: “sloth or slackness [...] produces idleness and lethargy, sexual intercourse and worldliness, roving and curiosity.”<sup>138</sup> In another sermon he offers an allegory of the five senses as servants who do not come when their lord bids them because they are wandering. He concludes, “through curiosity and restlessness they are squandered on folly; immoderate curiosity is [a] grievous sin.”<sup>139</sup> Curiosity which leads one away from one’s appointed task or place is a sin. The monk who follows Cuthbert is out of bed at night, not for prayer as Cuthbert is, but because of curiosity. Therefore, he is committing the sin of sloth.

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<sup>135</sup> s.v. *fyrwitnysse*, J.R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: Fourth Edition with a Supplement by Herbert D. Meritt* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1894) rpt. Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching 14 (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2000); Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, ed., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London: Oxford UP, 1898); Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, and Antonette diPaolo Healey, *Dictionary of Old English* (Toronto: For the Dictionary of Old English Project, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto by the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986-).

<sup>136</sup> *VC(Æ)* 82: “Se munuc micclum afyrht...biddende þæt he his adl eallunge afligde, and his fyrwitnysse fæderlice miltsoðe.”

<sup>137</sup> *VC(Æ)* 83: “Cuðberhtus ða [...] his fyrwites ganges gylt forgeaf.”

<sup>138</sup> Godden, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The Second Series* 125: “asolcennys oððe æmelnys [...] he acenð idelnysse. and slapolnysse. gemagnysse. and wordlunge. worunge. and fyrwitnysse.”

<sup>139</sup> Godden, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The Second Series* 125: “se ðe þurh fyrwitnysse. and unstilnysse hi aspent on unnyt; hefigtyme leahter. is ungefoh fyrwitnys.”

Ælfric does refer to curiosity twice in a positive sense, but in each of these the curiosity is for information which is directly relevant to the inquirer. In “The Healing of the King’s Son,” the king returns home “with great curiosity” or “eagerness” to see how his ill son is doing.<sup>140</sup> In *De temporibus anni*, Ælfric notes that one may satisfy curiosity about the coming weather by observing the sun and sky.<sup>141</sup> Acceptable curiosity is seeking relevant and useful information. It is not a simple desire to know, that is, to satisfy the curiosity for its own sake, as with the monk who follows Cuthbert. Lest there be any question that the monk’s curiosity is not a useful act, but a fall into sin, Cuthbert calls it “your error.”<sup>142</sup> This is not a minor mistake; *gedwyld* is also the word used for heresy and a *dwildman* is a heretic.<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, the monk’s stalking is *sleaccre*, from *slæc* or *sleac*: “slack, remiss, lax, sluggish, indolent, languid,”<sup>144</sup> which is the direct root of the modern word *slack*: “Of persons: Lacking in energy or diligence; inclined to be lazy or idle; remiss, careless; negligent or lax in regard to one’s duties.”<sup>145</sup> The monk’s indulgence of his curiosity directly contrasts with the saint who used his unoccupied hours in prayer and self denial. The monk’s action was not motivated by zeal for God’s

<sup>140</sup> Ælfric, “The Healing of the King’s Son,” Homily No. 1 in *Old English Homilies from MS. Bodley 343*, ed. Susan Irvine, Early English Text Society o.s. 302 (London: Oxford UP, 1993) 24: “ða mid fyrwynysse sonæ.

<sup>141</sup> Ælfric, *De temporibus anni*, *Ælfric’s De temporibus anni*, ed. Heinrich Henel, Early English Text Society, o.s. 213 (London: Oxford UP, 1942) 64: “Men magon swa ðeah . þa ðe fyrwite beoð cepan be his bleo . 7 be ðære sunnan . oððe þæs roderes . hwilc weder toweard bið.”

<sup>142</sup> Ælfric, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church. The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric. In the Original Anglo-Saxon, with an English Version*, vol. 1, ed. Benjamin Thorpe (London: The Ælfric Society, 1844, rpt. New York: Johnson Reprint Co, 1971) 138: “ðinum gedwyld.” Hereafter, *CHI*.

<sup>143</sup> s.v. *dwildman*, Clark Hall; Bosworth and Toller; and Cameron, et al.

<sup>144</sup> s.v. *slæc* Clark Hall; Bosworth and Toller.

<sup>145</sup> s.v. *slack*, J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, ed. *Oxford English Dictionary* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989).

glory or the purity of his people. Rather, it was motivated by a sneaking curiosity – the kind which expends more energy finding out others’ deeds than doing good oneself. Thus Ælfric’s narrative is not about doubt in a saint’s sanctity, but about questioning things which are none of one’s business.

It is possible, but not necessary, that Ælfric conceived of this as a story for monks. One of the Vercelli homilies cites sloth as a particular besetting sin of monks.<sup>146</sup> Evagrius and Cassian both dealt extensively with the vice of *acedia* as a vice to which ascetics were especially subject.<sup>147</sup> Ælfric certainly would have been familiar with this view of sloth, and it could have motivated his decision to include the otter incident in the *Catholic Homilies*. As Helen Gittos points out, “the profile that emerges from Ælfric’s pastoral letters [is] of avaricious, lazy, and drunken priests.”<sup>148</sup> Since the slothful person is a monk, the specific application of the incident to monastics could hardly be mistaken.

However, narrowing his audience to a monastic one is not necessary to see the usefulness of the otter incident to Ælfric’s pastoral project. Indeed, the benefit of the otter incident is that sloth is a sin which is not limited to monks in its application. If Ælfric, concerned as he was for the reform of monasteries, was also concerned to reach a

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<sup>146</sup> Donald G. Scragg, ed. *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, Early English Text Society o.s. 300 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) 20.

<sup>147</sup> Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1967). See also Ranier Jehl, “*Acedia* and Burnout Syndrome: from an Occupational Vice of the Early Monks to a Psychological Concept in Secularized Professional Life,” trans. Andrea Nemeth-Newhauser, *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Newhauser, *Papers in Mediaeval Studies* 18 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005) 455-476.

<sup>148</sup> Helen Gittos, “Is There Any Evidence for the Liturgy of Parish Churches in Late Anglo-Saxon England? The Red Book of Darley and the Status of Old English,” *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Francesca Tinti, *Anglo-Saxon Studies* 6 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 2005) 65.

lay audience with his homilies, the otter incident would also suit that purpose. Wilcox argues that Ælfric envisioned, and had, a mixed audience of laity, clerics, and monastics for his homilies.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, even the *Regularis concordia*, a specifically monastic text, “assumes a regular presence of lay people at mass, and the sizes of the churches built or rebuilt as a result of the reform confirm that they were intended for large congregations and not just for monastic communities.”<sup>150</sup> Cuthbert’s encounter with the spying monk provided Ælfric with an excellent tool in his larger project, since it was specifically applicable to monks, but Ælfric’s use of it also has a warning against sloth which was thoroughly appropriate to a much wider audience.

### **Felix’s *Vita Guthlaci***

Felix’s *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* has been described as “the one historical work which has come down from the ancient Mercian kingdom,”<sup>151</sup> and as having a “florid rhetoric.”<sup>152</sup> However, this in no way diminishes its place as a carefully wrought literary work, one that draws on a wide variety of hagiographic sources in order to demonstrate that Guthlac is a saint. Charles W. Jones says, “Felix is no fumbling amateur,” and argues that the *vita* “follows a plot structure more clearly than any other saint’s life of the

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<sup>149</sup> Wilcox 62.

<sup>150</sup> Francesca Tinti, “Introduction,” *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Francesca Tinti, Anglo-Saxon Studies 6 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 2005) 7.

<sup>151</sup> F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1971) 178.

<sup>152</sup> Charles W. Goodwin, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Life of St. Guthlac, Hermit of Crowland* (London: John Russell Smith, 1848) iv. Hereafter, *OEG*.

period.”<sup>153</sup> The *Vita Guthlaci* draws on a wide variety of hagiographic works: Bede’s *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*,<sup>154</sup> Sulpicius Severus’s *Vita Sancti Martini*,<sup>155</sup> the *Vita Columbanae* by Jonas,<sup>156</sup> Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica*,<sup>157</sup> the *Vita Benedicti* in Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues*,<sup>158</sup> the apocryphal gospel of the Apostle Bartholomew,<sup>159</sup> and Evagrius’s translation of the *Vita Antonii*.<sup>160</sup> Audrey Meaney calls the *Vita Guthlaci* “a complex and fascinating piece of work” which “appears to contain several interwoven elements.”<sup>161</sup> At the end of her careful comparison between the *Vita Guthlaci* and the *Lives* of St. Cuthbert and St. Saba, she concludes, “I have endeavoured, in this discussion, to sort out the different kinds of trees in the wood, by means of comparison with earlier saints’ *Lives*, but I suspect that there may be many as yet undetected hybrids.”<sup>162</sup> I argue that the incident of doubt in the *Vita Guthlaci* is an example of further hybrids. It represents a blending of the Antonian teaching on doubt with parallels to secular poetry. The text does

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<sup>153</sup> Charles W. Jones, ed. and trans., *Saints’ Lives and Chronicles in Early England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1947) 85-6.

<sup>154</sup> Jane Roberts, “Hagiography and Literature: The Case of Guthlac of Crowland,” *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr, Studies in the Early History of Europe (London: Leicester UP, 2001) 70.

<sup>155</sup> Audrey L. Meaney, “Felix’s Life of St. Guthlac: Hagiography and/or Truth,” *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 90 (2001): 29-48.

<sup>156</sup> Alan Thacker, “Social and Continental Background to Early Anglo-Saxon Hagiography,” diss. Oxford, 1977, cited in Meaney 30.

<sup>157</sup> Thacker, “Social and Continental Background,” cited in Meaney 30.

<sup>158</sup> Meaney 43.

<sup>159</sup> Graham Jones, “Ghostly Mentor, Teacher of Mysteries: Bartholomew, Guthlac and the Apostle’s Cult in Early Medieval England,” *Medieval Monastic Education*, ed. George Ferzoco and Carolyn Meussig (London: Leicester UP, 2000) 136-152.

<sup>160</sup> Anthony’s *Life* was available to hagiographers such as Felix via Evagrius of Antioch’s Latin translation, written in 374. Benjamin P. Kurtz, *From St. Anthony to St. Guthlac: A Study in Biography*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology 12.2 (Berkeley: U of California P, 1926) 103 n.4.

<sup>161</sup> Meaney 44.

<sup>162</sup> Meaney 44-45.

this in order to model doubt, while warning off those who might doubt arrogantly, in a way that would have appealed to the *Vita Guthlaci*'s secular audience.

In the *Vita Guthlaci*, some men on their way to see the saint wonder amongst themselves whether Guthlac's miracle-working power is godly or demonic. One of them, Wigfrith, claims that he will be able to tell based on his prior experience. There are significant parallels between Wigfrith in the *Vita Guthlaci* and Unferth in *Beowulf*. I am not prepared to suggest that Felix had direct access to the text of *Beowulf* or that Unferth is the direct model for Wigfrith. I am suggesting that Felix is drawing on the same poetic elements that were available to the author of *Beowulf*. Thus, the parallels between Wigfrith and Unferth are instructive in understanding how Wigfrith functions in the narrative.

What warrant do we have for comparing elements in an eighth-century Latin prose hagiography with an Old English poetic narrative of dubious age? Are the similarities between Unferth and Wigfrith more than just coincidence? The evidence for a broadly defined pan-Germanic literary culture in which Felix participated suggests that Wigfrith's and Unferth's similarities are more than coincidence, and there is ample evidence of shared literary characteristics and themes in which Felix's work participates.

In "The Germanic Context of the Unferþ Episode," Carol Clover has demonstrated the major characteristics of flyting in "Eddic poetry, Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, the *þættir*, the major saga classes (including historical texts), and skaldic poetry," as well as the ways in which Unferth's exchange with Beowulf fits those

characteristics.<sup>163</sup> Several of what Clover calls the commonplaces of flyting apply to Wigfrith's encounter with Guthlac: the setting at a feast hall; male/male contenders; the structure of "Claim, Defense, and Counterclaim" which Felix frames as a claim, defense, and repentance; and "the most striking characteristic of flytings: they argue interpretations, not facts"; that is, the "preliminary incident" is not disputed as a historical event, but its interpretation as being shameful or glorious is disputed.<sup>164</sup> Wigfrith doesn't dispute that Guthlac has performed miracles, but he does question whether this is a sign of sanctity or demonic power. Clover has also noted that the Exeter Book poem *Vainglory* has a "striking parallel [...] which suggests the existence in English social life of something very much like a hall flyting."<sup>165</sup> That this flyting description occurs in a homiletic setting also lends credence to the idea that we can reasonably look for overlaps between Anglo-Saxon hagiography and more secular poetry.

I agree with Clover's hesitance to accept one particular interpretation of *pyle* because the evidence is contradictory. There are three major streams of thought on the subject. The first is that *pyle* was a sort of court jester or entertainer, a non-warrior figure licensed by virtue of his position to speak scathingly and rudely in ways that warriors within the hall would not.<sup>166</sup> The second is that the *pyle* is a special category of warrior, a type of king's champion who stands between Hrothgar and Beowulf and issues the

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<sup>163</sup> Carol Clover, "The Germanic Context of the Unferþ Episode," *Speculum* 55 (1980): 445.

<sup>164</sup> Clover 447, 449, 452, and 458.

<sup>165</sup> Clover 448.

<sup>166</sup> James L. Rosier, "Design for Treachery: The Unferth Intrigue," *PMLA* 77 (1962): 1-7. See also Robert Bjork, "Unferth in the Hermeneutic Circle: A Reappraisal of James L. Rosier's Design for Treachery," *Papers on Language and Literature* 16 (1980): 133-141.

potentially insulting challenges which allow Hrothgar to see Beowulf investigated without himself being insulting to his guest.<sup>167</sup> The third view, intriguing but less widely accepted, is that a *pyle* is a sort of pagan priest, one who uses words rather than swords as weapons and who sees Beowulf's promise to destroy Grendel as a challenge to his own magical prowess.<sup>168</sup> Enright has argued that the *pyle* function can be further identified from Irish depictions of royal warbands and argues that this is evidence for its existence in poetry and reality.<sup>169</sup> The common thread in all of these is that the *pyle* is clearly a figure who uses words to challenge, which lends credence to idea that Unferth is a "flyting provocateur"<sup>170</sup> and furthermore, so is Wigfrith.

The other connections between Old English poetic narratives and Felix's *Vita Guthlaci* further support the idea that there were identifiable overlaps and influences between the two. Felix's work was clearly read by more than one writer who was literate in both Old English and Latin. His work was translated into four different Old English texts: two prose and two poetic works. The heroic-poetic characteristics of the poems *Guthlac A* and *B* have been noted by, among others, Catherine Clarke, Jane Roberts, and Cynthia Cornell.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> R.D. Fulk, "Unferth and His Name," *Modern Philology* 85 (1987): 113-127 and J.D.A. Ogilvy, "Unferth: Foil to Beowulf?" *PMLA* 79 (1964): 370-375.

<sup>168</sup> Ida Masters Hollowell, "Unferth the *Pyle* in Beowulf," *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976): 239-265.

<sup>169</sup> Michael J. Enright, "The Warband Context of the Unferth Episode," *Speculum* 73 (1998): 302.

<sup>170</sup> Clover 468.

<sup>171</sup> Catherine Clarke, "Envelope Pattern and the *locus amoenus* in Old English Verse," *Notes and Queries* n.s. 50 (2003): 263-264; Jane Roberts, "Hagiography and Literature" 82 and "*Guthlac A*: Sources and Source Hunting," *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane*, ed. Edward D. Kennedy, Ronald Waldron, and Joseph S. Wittig (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1988) 1-18; Cynthia Cornell, "Sources and Structure of *Guthlac A*," *Old English Newsletter* 14 (1981): 31.



However, Alexandra Olsen has also argued that the influence flowed in the opposite direction; Old English poetic narrative provided techniques and motifs for Anglo-Saxon Latin writers. She points to Felix's use of a fenland infested with demons as a combination of the patristic desert with the monster-inhabited waters which show up in *Beowulf*, *Grettir's Saga*, and other heroic narratives.<sup>172</sup> Graham Jones has taken a similar position about Felix's *Vita Guthlaci*, arguing that Felix uses the motif of the patron Bartholomew, conqueror of demons and co-opter of pagan sites, to treat Guthlac as a co-opter of pagan sites (using a mound as a hermitage) and literary images (fens with monsters in them, burial mounds, warrior bands) to Christian use at both a literal and symbolic level.<sup>173</sup> Finally, Gernot Wieland has also argued that Felix's Latin shows the influence of elements identified in Old English verse as signs of orality, suggesting that Felix wrote out of an Old English oral culture, the same one that has been identified in the Guthlac poems, *Andreas* and *Beowulf*.<sup>174</sup> Their arguments for traffic between Latinate, hagiographic literature and Germanic, pagan literature show that, as George Hardin Brown argues, "the power of the native poetry from the pagan heroic past with its enormous hold on the Anglo-Saxon spirit was miraculously redirected into a new spiritual life."<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, "Old English Poetry and Latin Prose: The Reverse Context," *Classica et Medievalia* 34 (1983): 273-282.

<sup>173</sup> G. Jones 136-152.

<sup>174</sup> Gernot R. Wieland, "Aures lectores: Orality and Literacy in Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 7 (1997): 168-177.

<sup>175</sup> George Hardin Brown, "Old English Verse as a Medium for Christian Theology," *Modes of Interpretation in Old English Literature: Essays in Honour of Stanley B. Greenfield*, ed. Phyllis Rugg Brown, Georgia Ronan Crampton, and Fred C. Robinson (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1986) 16.

There are seven distinct parallels between Unferth and Wigfrith. First, both confrontations between protagonist and challenger involve the presence of witnesses. Unferth expresses his challenge in the assembly of the king's hall, not privately to Beowulf or the king. Wigfrith speaks openly to the bishop's retinue, not privately to the bishop. In this parallel, there is also a notable difference between the two moments; Wigfrith does not speak his doubts openly to Guthlac and it is not clear in the narrative if the bishop hears him or not. This means that Guthlac's rebuttal to Wigfrith isn't part of a verbal battle as Unferth and Beowulf's exchange is. Instead, the placement of Wigfrith's boast allows Guthlac's response to be miraculous; the saint discerned from a distance that Wigfrith had offered to judge him. This departure from the Unferth pattern creates a miracle in the pattern of the Desert Fathers, for whom "miracles of clairvoyance" were a frequent type.<sup>176</sup> Second, both Unferth and Wigfrith are servants of a higher ranked person who has already expressed a desire to honor the hero/saint. Unferth is called "Hrothgar's pyle" and described as sitting at Hrothgar's feet when Hrothgar welcomes Beowulf.<sup>177</sup> Wigfrith also holds an office. He is the *vir librarius* in Bishop Headda's household,<sup>178</sup> and the bishop's journey is motivated by a desire to ordain Guthlac as a priest. Third, both confrontations take place in a feast setting. Beowulf and Unferth argue

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<sup>176</sup> Benedicta Ward, "Introduction," *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Norman Russell (London: Cistercian Publication, 1981) 39-46.

<sup>177</sup> Howell D. Chickering, ed. and trans., *Beowulf: A Dual-language Edition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977) ll. 500, 1165b-1166a, and 1465b. Hereafter, *Beowulf*.

<sup>178</sup> Felix, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1956) 142. Hereafter, *VG*.

in the king's hall, in front of the drinking warriors. Guthlac waits until his ordination feast to confront Wigfrith.

Fourth, both Unferth and Wigfrith are concerned about their reputations. Unferth is jealous of Beowulf's reputation because it threatens to diminish his own: "the journey of Beowulf, /the brave seafarer, caused him chagrin, /for he would not grant that any other man under the heavens might ever care more for famous deeds than he himself."<sup>179</sup> Likewise, Wigfrith's characterization of himself also demonstrates a desire to be honored. He describes himself as a frequent companion of holy men and bases his promise to judge Guthlac on his wide experience in the world:

For he said he had lived amongst the Irish, and there had seen false hermits and pretenders of various religions. [...] He said that there were others there who were followers of the true religion [...] whom he had been accustomed to speak with frequently, to see and often to visit. From his experience of these he promised that he could judge the religion of others.<sup>180</sup>

Fifth, both Unferth and Wigfrith express concern that the person they are challenging is a fake who has claimed a reputation he does not deserve. Unferth begins his attack on Beowulf as a question about his identity, as a mechanism to argue that Beowulf has erred by making boasts he couldn't fulfill: "Are you the same Beowulf who challenged

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<sup>179</sup> *Beowulf*, ll. 501b-505b: "Wæs him Beowulfes sið, /modges mere-faran, micel æfþunca /forþon þe he ne upe þæt ænig oðer man /æfre mærdða þon ma middan-geardes /gehedde under heofenum þonne he sylfa."

<sup>180</sup> *VG* 142-144: "Dicebat enim inter Scottorum se populos habitasse et illic pseudo-anachoritas diversarum religionum simulatores vidisse.[...] Alios quoque illic fuisse narrabat verae religionis cultores [...] quos ille crebro adloqui, videre frequentareque solebat; ex quorum experientia aliorum religionem discernere se potuisse promittebat."

Breca?”<sup>181</sup> In the same way, Wigfrith’s response to his companions implies that Guthlac may also be a self-promoting fake, one of the “false hermits and pretenders of various religions,” which he has seen.<sup>182</sup> Sixth, both Unferth and Wigfrith are forced to acknowledge the superiority of the person they challenged in a way that diminishes their own reputations. When Unferth gave Beowulf the sword, the narrative tells us he “lost fame for that, /his name for valor.”<sup>183</sup> Wigfrith is forced to publicly confess that he sinned: “Wigfrith was amazed at this and, immediately rising, he prostrated himself with utter abandonment upon the ground and humbly prayed for pardon, confessing that he had sinned.”<sup>184</sup> Seventh, in their confrontations with the person they challenged, both Unferth and Wigfrith are also forced to admit that they have not fulfilled their own boasts. Unferth has not protected the king from Grendel, and Wigfrith has not judged Guthlac.

Beyond the narrative parallels between Unferth and Wigfrith, one other element in *Beowulf* lends weight to the idea that Felix is drawing on narrative patterns available in the culture. Unferth is described in categorical terms. He is called “Unferth þyle” and “Hroþgares þyle.”<sup>185</sup> Although the precise meaning of the term is highly contested, it is clearly being used as a categorical term. That is, a *þyle* is a category of person or office or character or position which Unferth fills. As such, it is not unreasonable to think that the

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<sup>181</sup> *Beowulf*, l. 506: “Eart þu se Beowulf, se þe wið Breca wunne?”

<sup>182</sup> VG 142: “pseudo-anachoritas diversarum religionum simulatores.”

<sup>183</sup> *Beowulf*, ll. 1470b-1471a: “þær he dome forleas, ellen-mærðum.”

<sup>184</sup> VG 146-147: “Wigfrithus vero, hæc miratus, confestim exsurgens, se totum solo tota mente prosternit, supplexque veniam precatus, sese peccasse fatetur.”

<sup>185</sup> *Beowulf* ll. 1165b and 1456b.

narrative patterns associated with this category might have been recognizable to Anglo-Saxon audiences who were familiar with heroic poetry. Felix is integrating this category with the patterns of the hagiography of the Desert Fathers in order to rebut Wigfrith's doubt and attract a secular audience.

As previous scholars have noted, Athanasius's work, through Evagrius's translation, closely influenced Felix's construction of the *Vita Guthlaci*.<sup>186</sup> Anthony and the other Desert Fathers provide the pattern for Guthlac's life in the fens and, most famously, his battles with the demons which inhabit waste places. However, as was noted in the introduction to this dissertation, by stressing that hermits must be on their guard against demons masquerading as angels and holy men, the *Vita Antonii* opens up space in which others might question Guthlac himself. Guthlac's own experiences, related earlier to the reader, confirm Anthony's warning that not all pretenses to holiness are genuine. Two demons appear to Guthlac in human form and offer to instruct Guthlac how to fast in the manner of Moses, Elijah, and Christ. The saint is not fooled, of course.<sup>187</sup> Felix's text implicitly and explicitly sanctions the kind of questioning of holy appearances in which Headda's retinue engages. It is therefore not surprising that Wigfrith and his companions should be concerned, as Anthony was, not to be deceived by reports of miraculous power or holiness. Given this situation, one might expect that doubters would be lauded or at least not rebuked for promising to exercise the discernment Anthony calls

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<sup>186</sup> VG 17, 189 n.; Colgrave, *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert*, 351; Cubitt, "Memory and Narrative" 55; Kurtz 119ff.

<sup>187</sup> VG 99-100.

for. Indeed, none of the doubters is rebuked except Wigfrith. He, alone of all those who expressed doubts, is challenged by the saint and forced to publicly confess his sin and attest to Guthlac's holiness.

What distinguishes Wigfrith from his companions may not be his questions, which his companions share, but the *superbia* with which he approaches the saint.

Thomas Hill has argued that excessive pride is already a theme of the *VG*, in that the sin the demons are tempting Guthlac to when they urge excessive fasting is *superbia*:

“Guthlac however, recognizes this advice as temptation to *superbia*, refuses the suggestion, and, to underscore his point, immediately begins to eat his daily ration.”<sup>188</sup>

Wigfrith's own *superbia*, his confidence in his own skills and knowledge, leads him from asking questions to making boasts that set him up as a contender with the saint:

Others gave vent to their doubts concerning the source of the power by which he performed those miracles. But Wigfrith promised that, if once he saw him [Guthlac], he would be able to discern and know whether he was a follower of the divine religion or a pretender to false sanctity.<sup>189</sup>

Wigfrith is marked as different from the others by the *autem*, the “but” or “however,” which marks the contrast between him and his companions. His form of speech also marks him as belonging to a separate category of doubter; his companions raise

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<sup>188</sup> Thomas D. Hill, “Drawing the Demon's Sting: A Note on a Traditional Motif in Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*,” *Notes and Queries* n.s. 23 (1976): 388.

<sup>189</sup> *VG* 142-143: “Alii in cuius virtute miracula illa quæ faciebat dubitantes erumpebant. Wigfrith autem se posse discernere et scire, utrum divinæ religionis cultor esset aut pseudo-sanctitatis simulator [...] pollicebatur.”

questions, while Wigfrith makes assertions of fact. He is further demarcated by his reference to self. His promise to answer their questions is founded in his own experience:

For he said he had lived amongst the Irish, and there had seen false hermits and pretenders of various religions, whom he found able to predict the future and to perform other miracles, but he knew not by what power. He said that there were others there who were followers of the true religion and abounded in many signs and miracles, whom he had been accustomed to speak with frequently, to see and often to visit. From his experience of these he promised that he could judge the religion of others.<sup>190</sup>

His companions' discussion centers on the saint; they examine his reputation and question the source of his power. Wigfrith directs the discussion to himself and his own experience of saints, emphasizing his close companionship with the holy. Wigfrith is using an opportunity of genuine doubt to bolster his own reputation. His claim becomes a boast, more focused on self-aggrandizement than on the search for the truth. That he speaks scornfully, rather than humbly, is also evident in the hissing alliteration of the Latin; Guthlac may be a *pseudo-sanctitatis simulator*.<sup>191</sup> The term Wigfrith uses is particularly worth noting, since it is Felix's own coinage. The author is not relying on a

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<sup>190</sup> VG 142-144: "Dicebat enim inter Scottorum se populos habitasse et illic pseudo-anachoritas diversarum religionum simulatores vidisse, quos praedicere future et virtutes alias facere, quocumque numine nesciens conperit. Alios quoque illic fuisse narrabat verae religionis cultores signis virtutibusque plurimis pollentes, quos ille crebro adloqui, videre frequentareque solebat; ex quorum experientia aliorum religionem discernere se potuisse promittebat."

<sup>191</sup> VG 142.

commonplace, but has indeed created precisely the word he wishes to use.<sup>192</sup> By framing Wigfrith's skepticism in language that sounds prideful, the narrator undermines Wigfrith's character. The audience is being directed not to sympathize but to look for his pride's downfall.

The pride that lies under Wigfrith's questioning is also laid bare by the contrast between verbs of discernment and judgment in the two dialogues. Unlike his companions, who only raised questions about the saint's reputation, Wigfrith proposed to judge for himself beyond his proper authority: "he promised that he could judge the religion of others."<sup>193</sup> The verb here is *discernere*, indicating that Wigfrith proposes to settle the question through his own insight or a rational process. However, when Guthlac confronts Wigfrith, he says, "Brother Wigfrith, what do you now think of the cleric whom yesterday you promised to judge?"<sup>194</sup> The verb Guthlac uses is *iudicare*, literally, to judge in a legal and authoritative sense.<sup>195</sup> By choosing this verb Guthlac redefines Wigfrith's actions. He was not just seeking the truth, but preparing to render judgment. The pride with which he approaches Guthlac sets Wigfrith apart from his companions.

The implications of the Antonian sanctioning of doubt about those who present themselves as holy men are a danger to a fledgling saint's cult. Why should Felix's own readers not ask the same questions and express the same doubts about the saint as

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<sup>192</sup> VG 16.

<sup>193</sup> VG 142-3: "Aliorum religionem discernere se potuisse promittebat."

<sup>194</sup> VG 144-5: "O frater Wigfrith, quomodo tibi nunc videtur ille clericus, de quo hesterno die iudicare promisisti?"

<sup>195</sup> s.v. *iudicare*, Lewis and Short; J.F. Niermeyer and C. van de Kieft, ed. *Mediae Latinitatis lexicon minus*, revised ed., 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2002).



Headda's retinue did? Such skepticism could prevent the cult from thriving, perhaps depriving it of powerful patrons who remained unconvinced that Guthlac was a saint that they ought to cultivate. By presenting Wigfrith as the voice of doubt/challenge to the saint in a mode that his audience would recognize as part of a tradition of challenge and rebuttal, Felix copes with the implications of the Antonian warning about simulated holy men as they apply to Guthlac. If we read Wigfrith as a *pyle*, we see that he provides a mechanism to both verbalize doubt and to answer it. Furthermore, he does so in a way that reinforces Guthlac as a heroic figure, as one still in touch with the language and modes of power which were recognizable and appealing to a royal and secular audience. In order to understand the potential value of this narrative strategy,<sup>196</sup> we must recognize the audience for which Felix wrote. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Guthlac died in 714.<sup>197</sup> Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* was written sometime between 730 and 740.<sup>198</sup> According to the prologue, Felix wrote at the request of King Ælfwald of East Anglia, but there are reasons to believe that Felix was also writing for King Æthelbald of Mercia. Felix is often identified as an East Anglian, because he wrote the *Vita Guthlaci*

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<sup>196</sup> To all appearances Felix's *vita* was successful in initiating Guthlac's cult and promoting him as an important Anglo-Saxon saint. Peter Lucas calls Guthlac's cult "second among the cults of early Anglian saints only to Cuthbert's." Peter J. Lucas, "Easter, the Death of St. Guthlac and the Liturgy for Holy Saturday in Felix's *Vita* and the Old English *Guthlac B*," *Medium Ævum* 61 (1992): 1. Felix wrote in the early eighth century and Guthlac was still a figure of active interest to the English church well into the twelfth century. His bones were translated August 23, 1136, according to a twelfth-century ms seen at Crowland by John Leland just before the monasteries were broken up. The manuscript is still extant, Douai, Public Library MS 852. The Harley Roll, Roundell XVIII, provides evidence that Guthlac's tomb was moved to an even more elevated spot above the high altar sometime after 1196. Roberts, "Hagiography and Literature" 72. Without Felix's initial text, Guthlac's might never have been established on such a firm footing that it lasted so long and was so widely known.

<sup>197</sup> M.J. Swanton, ed. and trans. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>198</sup> Colgrave, "Introduction" 15, 19 and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature 600-899* (London: Hambledon P, 1996).

for King Ælfwald of East Anglia. However, Jane Roberts demonstrates that Ælfwald was probably a close relative of Ecgburh, abbess of the Mercian monastery of Repton. In the *Vita Guthlaci*, Ecgburh receives more attention than Ælfthryth, who was the abbess while Guthlac was there. Roberts concludes, “thus, despite the dedication of the *vita* to an East Anglian king, the impetus for the writing of the life of Guthlac probably came from Repton, a Mercian religious foundation and for a time the burial place of Mercian kings.”<sup>199</sup> Guthlac was a Mercian saint, but Felix makes the connection between Guthlac and himself by claiming that Ælfwald’s aunt Ecgburh, abbess of Repton, sent gifts to Guthlac.<sup>200</sup> The king of Mercia during this period was Æthelbald, who ruled from 715 to 757. Despite Felix’s claim that he loves Ælfwald above any royal person, Æthelbald is given far more attention and praise than the text’s dedicatee. Whatley notes that “although dedicated to Ælfwald, king of East Anglia, the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* is highly complimentary to Æthelbald, the powerful king of Mercia.”<sup>201</sup> Æthelbald is the most prominent recipient of a postmortem miracle from Guthlac, and the *VG* identifies him as a friend to the saint.<sup>202</sup> Æthelbald was also the builder of Guthlac’s shrine.<sup>203</sup> Felix’s *Vita Guthlaci* compliments Felix’s own king but clearly is currying the favor of Æthelbald as well.

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<sup>199</sup> Roberts, “Hagiography and Literature” 70.

<sup>200</sup> Whitelock has argued that Ecgburh was more likely an abbess in some East Anglian abbey, rather than being at Repton in Mercia. Dorothy Whitelock, “The Pre-Viking Age Church in East Anglia,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 1 (1972): 15 n. 8.

<sup>201</sup> Whatley, “Lost in Translation” 192.

<sup>202</sup> Meaney 44.

<sup>203</sup> G. Jones 137.

Certainly Æthelbald was in a position to be an attractive patron to Guthlac's incipient cult. He had that useful combination of real power and a real need for saintly patronage as he struggled to maintain and expand that power. Mercian dominance began again in the reign of Æthelbald and, except for a short period of West Saxon control from 829-830, lasted until the mid-ninth century.<sup>204</sup> Gareth Williams argues that it was during this period that military activity and obligation moved from the type of marauding raids that typified Guthlac's early life to a more unified and organized defensive force that signaled a centralization of power under the king: "the development of military obligations on bookland apparently took place in Mercia under Æthelbald and Offa, at the height of the Mercian supremacy." At the same time, Williams notes, "the probability that Æthelbald and Offa thought it necessary to introduce new systems of defense does emphasize that Mercia's pre-eminence in the eighth century did not go unchallenged."<sup>205</sup> Indeed, Williams argues that "reading the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, it is easy to get the impression of almost continual warfare throughout Anglo-Saxon history, not least in Mercia during the eighth and ninth centuries."<sup>206</sup> He points out that, among other conflicts in the era, neighboring kingdoms were brought under Æthelbald and Offa's rule.<sup>207</sup> Æthelbald was in the process of building a stable kingdom in an unstable time

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<sup>204</sup> Robert Cowie, "Mercian London," *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr, Studies in the Early History of Europe (London: Leicester UP, 2001) 195.

<sup>205</sup> Gareth Williams, "Military Institutions and Royal Power," *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr, Studies in the Early History of Europe (London: Leicester UP, 2001) 300.

<sup>206</sup> G. Williams 295.

<sup>207</sup> G. Williams 295.

and place. Comparing Æthelbald's Mercia to Charlemagne's Francia, Janet Nelson argues that the Mercian kings had to create a stable kingdom from nothing, because they lacked the institutions of imperial Rome which might have provided greater stability.<sup>208</sup> Citing the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the *Annales Cambriae*, Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, the ordinance concerning the Dunsæte, and William of Malmesbury's account of Athelstan, as well as the archaeological evidence of hoards and sculpted stones, David Hill argues that "from these various sources can be constructed a picture of warfare and disturbance on the frontier for lengthy periods of time in the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries."<sup>209</sup> He further argues that "Æthelbald's reign must mark the attempt of the Mercians to make permanent settlements within the lands of the Welsh."<sup>210</sup> While Æthelbald remained a powerful king, the continual warfare in which he engaged to stabilize and expand his kingdom could certainly have used a powerful patron in heaven.

Æthelbald's sometimes troubled relationship with the church may also have made him more open to promoting Guthlac's cult, since he might have benefited from the sanction which being identified as the royal patron of a powerful new saint would have given him. Æthelbald seems to have clashed with the church over the extent to which he could exercise authority over monastic establishments: "It [was] possibly an attempt to curb [...] abuse of clerical privilege in Mercia that made Æthelbald the target of a series

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<sup>208</sup> Janet L. Nelson, "Carolingian Contacts," *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr, Studies in the Early History of Europe (London: Leicester UP, 2001) 127-126.

<sup>209</sup> David Hill, "Mercians: The Dwellers on the Boundary," *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr, Studies in the Early History of Europe (London: Leicester UP, 2001) 173.

<sup>210</sup> D. Hill 178.

of letters from Bishop Boniface in 747, in which he is accused of unheard-of oppression of churchmen within his lands.”<sup>211</sup> Boniface also rebuked Æthelbald for fornication with nuns and failure to take a wife rather than a concubine.<sup>212</sup> Felix’s presentation of Æthelbald as having the saint’s oracular favor and being a founding patron of the saint’s cult may have as much (or more) to do with the need to show the saint in favor with a powerful temporal ruler and to imply the connection between that ruler’s power and the saint’s favor than it had to do with Æthelbald’s actual relationship to the church as a whole.

At the same time, it is clear that if Æthelbald needed Guthlac, it is just as likely that Felix knew Guthlac needed Æthelbald if his cult were to survive. Nelson argues that “in Mercia [...] the Church remained relatively poor, dependent on the aristocracy as much as on kings.”<sup>213</sup> Felix wrote the initial hagiography, the first documentary evidence for Guthlac’s sanctity; the encouragement and material support of a powerful, neighboring king could have meant the difference between a successful, lasting cult and one which never moved beyond the memories of those who had known Guthlac, dying out within a generation. Furthermore, the English church was in the midst of the Easter schism in which both sides called into question the sanctity of the others’ spiritual leaders, including their saints: “In the period 670-768 Christianity came to divide Britons from English, no longer as pagan versus Christian, as in the sixth century, but as two

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<sup>211</sup> G. Williams 301.

<sup>212</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Documents, c. 500-1042*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 1 (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979) 816-822.

<sup>213</sup> Nelson 128.

Churches that refused communion with one another on the grounds of heresy.”<sup>214</sup> It is not a coincidence that Wigfrith names the Irish as the people among whom he has seen both real saints and false ones. A secular audience might have been unaware of the Antonian warnings against false holy men, but they would not have been unaware of the possibility that those hailed as saints in one part of the church might not be recognized as such by others in the church.

Graham Jones and Alexandra Olsen<sup>215</sup> have both argued that the primary audience for Felix’s *VG* was not a secular audience, but a monastic one. However, Jones acknowledges that Felix addresses the *Vita Guthlaci* to King Ælfwald: “it is clear that it was composed for audiences which heard the story every year on Guthlac’s feast day.”<sup>216</sup> Certainly it would be foolish to assert that Felix was writing to an audience that excluded monastic readers. Perhaps, despite the amount of attention he pays to Æthelbald, a monastic audience was the primary audience for which Felix wrote. However, this does not diminish the significance of Wigfrith or the possibility that he would have been recognized as a *pyle* figure by Felix’s audience because the divide between secular and monastic is not easily made in this period, as David Parsons has persuasively argued:

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<sup>214</sup> T.M. Charles-Edwards, “Wales and Mercia, 613-918,” *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr, Studies in the Early History of Europe (London: Leicester UP, 2001) 96.

<sup>215</sup> Olsen, *Guthlac of Croyland* 6-7. See also Zacharias Thundyl, *Covenant in Anglo-Saxon Thought: The Influence of the Bible, Church Fathers, and Germanic Tradition on Anglo-Saxon Laws, History, and the Poems The Battle of Maldon and Guthlac* (Madras: The Macmillan Co. of India, 1972). In support of her claim, Olsen cites an unpublished dissertation by Cynthia Post and an unpublished article by Thomas Post. I have not been able to review these works.

<sup>216</sup> G. Jones 137. On monastic audiences for this *Life* see also Olsen, *Guthlac of Croyland* 6-7.

It may not, however, be appropriate to seek to distinguish between high status domestic sites and monasteries [...] The picture Bede paints of houses which were scarcely monastic in the strict sense of the word leads one to wonder whether there was any noticeable difference in the material culture of a “lax” monastery and that of a totally secular aristocratic family home.<sup>217</sup>

Parsons also cites the nuns’ rebellion at Poitiers, described by Gregory of Tours, as evidence that “some religious at least expected to find their normal high-status creature comforts in the confines of a monastic house.”<sup>218</sup> The close investment of high-status people in the monasteries of the period means that there was bound to be a mingling of cultures between the court and the cloister. This is even more likely when one considers that during this period the role of king and monastic were not utterly divided. In the early eighth century, deposed or retired Anglo-Saxon kings often retreated to monasteries.<sup>219</sup> Certainly, Felix had a monastic audience. However, this is not the same as saying that he did not have an audience steeped in the heroic-poetic tradition and capable of recognizing it at work in Felix’s *Vita Guthlaci*.

That this audience could have been interested in the kind of heroic narrative found in *Beowulf* is demonstrated by the integration of parallel elements with Anglo-Saxon life.

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<sup>217</sup> David Parsons, “The Mercian Church: Archaeology and Topography,” *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr, Studies in the Early History of Europe (London: Leicester UP, 2001) 62.

<sup>218</sup> Parsons 63.

<sup>219</sup> Edel Bhreathnach, “Abbesses, Minor Dynasties and Kings in *clericatu*: Perspectives of Ireland, 700-850,” *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr, Studies in the Early History of Europe (London: Leicester UP, 2001) 121.

The famous question, “Quid enim Hinioldus cum Christo?” i.e. “What has Ingeld to do with Christ?” is found in a letter written by Alcuin in 797. Donald Bullough has demonstrated that this letter was not written to Hygbald of Lindisfarne, as was previously thought, but most likely to Bishop Unnuona of Leicester, and that his audience was not monastic.<sup>220</sup> However, Bullough has also convincingly demonstrated the letter was directed to a church community and that the letter was written to address a Mercian audience, such as the one for which Felix was writing.<sup>221</sup> Bullough concludes that he does not know why Alcuin wrote this particular admonition against “pagan songs,” though he suggests that they may have been used as part of hospitality to royal messengers and that, if this were the case, it was a custom left over from the days of Offa.<sup>222</sup> Furthermore, the boar images associated with arms and armor in *Beowulf* show up in real Anglo-Saxon artifacts, commingled with Christian symbols. Writing about a series of barrows excavated in the Peak District of Derbyshire and Staffordshire, Parsons notes, “several of the barrows have yielded material of a Christian or semi-Christian nature.”<sup>223</sup> He points out the man’s grave at Benty Grange which contained a helmet with a boar crest and a silver Latin cross on the nasal, as well as a leather cup with silver crosses on it. Parsons argues that “the helmet is a significant ‘transitional’ piece: there is no attempt to conceal the symbol of the new religion, but the traditional boar, with its background of pagan

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<sup>220</sup> Donald A. Bullough, “What has Ingeld to with Lindisfarne?” *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1993): 103-109.

<sup>221</sup> Bullough 115-120.

<sup>222</sup> Bullough 121-122.

<sup>223</sup> Parsons 52. For more on the contents of these barrows see A. Ozanne, “The Peak Dwellers,” *Medieval Archaeology* 7 (1963): 15-52 and Leslie Webster and Janet Backhouse, ed. *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture AD 600-900* (London: British Museum P, 1991).



animal rites, is equally if not more prominent.”<sup>224</sup> Guthlac’s own home at Crowland is another such fusion; the site he chose contains both barrows and other mounds “that had been of ritual significance in the past.”<sup>225</sup> Finally, the ancestral names claimed by the Mercian nobility of the eighth century also show that they valued associations with a heroic past.<sup>226</sup> Citing passages from the *Vita Guthlaci*, as well as Bede and Gildas, Barbara Yorke notes that “by the end of the eighth century the Mercians were claiming that their ancestors included traditional Germanic heroes.”<sup>227</sup> These heroes include Woden and three people (Eomer, Offa, and Garmund) named in *Beowulf*.<sup>228</sup> Yorke further argues that these names were used because “Offa, Wærmund and their associates were denizens of that shadowy heroic Germanic world that Mercians and Anglians sought to evoke through the imagery of their metalwork in the sixth century.”<sup>229</sup> Given the evocation of the Germanic heroic figures, along with their associations of power and success, in the name giving and metal work of both Mercia and East Anglia during these centuries, it is hardly surprising that Felix would have been eager to evoke these same images and associations in his own work in order to appeal to a Mercian noble audience, particularly the royal house.

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<sup>224</sup> Parsons 53.

<sup>225</sup> D. Stocker, “The Early Church in Lincolnshire: A Study of Sites and their Significance,” *Pre-Viking Lindsey*, ed. A. Vince (Lincoln: City of Lincoln Archaeology Unit, 1993) 101-106.

<sup>226</sup> Barbara Yorke, “The Origins of Mercia,” *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr, Studies in the Early History of Europe (London: Leicester UP, 2001) 15.

<sup>227</sup> Yorke, “The Origins of Mercia” 15.

<sup>228</sup> Yorke, “The Origins of Mercia” 15-16.

<sup>229</sup> Yorke, “The Origins of Mercia” 17.

Graham Jones's argument about the connection between Bartholomew and Guthlac, and its application to a monastic audience, supports my argument that we can productively read Wigfrith as a figure drawn, at least in part, from heroic poetry, which would have been both recognizable and appealing to Felix's intended audiences. Jones has argued that "the text's overall theme is the value of the monastic life as a means of fighting for Christ."<sup>230</sup> Jones further argues, "in choosing Bartholomew as a mentor, Guthlac was [...] engaging in a programme of religious appropriation,"<sup>231</sup> because "Bartholomew was a role model also for appropriators of non-Christian places of religious activity and missionaries."<sup>232</sup> Jones goes on to detail how Guthlac's patronage by Bartholomew marks him as saint given to appropriating/co-opting pagan sites and mysteries for use by Christianity, both defeating and absorbing their power. Jones has demonstrated that a quite high number of church dedications to Bartholomew and Guthlac took place on sites whose names indicate that the location was formerly dedication to pagan religious figures, particularly Thor and Woden.<sup>233</sup> From this he argues that Guthlac's role as defeater of demons and co-opter of pagan sites was being communicated by this choice of church locations. It is hardly surprising then that as part of this program Felix himself should have co-opted a heroic trope in his portrayal of Guthlac as a soldier of Christ and given Guthlac an encounter with a Beowulfian *pyle*.

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<sup>230</sup> G. Jones 137.

<sup>231</sup> G. Jones 142.

<sup>232</sup> G. Jones 148.

<sup>233</sup> G. Jones 142-149. See in particular Figures 11.1 and 11.2.

### **The Anonymous *Old English Life of Guthlac***

Following Felix's *VG* there are four Old English works describing Guthlac's life. Two are prose translations of Felix's work, the anonymous *Old English Life* and *Homily*, and the other two are the much more famous poems *Guthlac A* and *B*.<sup>234</sup> Of the four Old English works on Guthlac, only the *OEG* includes the doubting incident from Felix's original. Both Colgrave and Goodwin agree that the *OEG* is difficult to date.<sup>235</sup> Jane Roberts has argued that the *OEG* and the *Homily* are derived from an intermediary translation of Felix's *VG*:

The two extant texts, the *OEG* contained in Cotton Vespasian D.xxi, fols. 18-40, and the *Homily* which is the final item in the Vercelli Book, derive ultimately from the same original translation, as was surmised already by the *OEG*'s earlier editor, C.W. Goodwin, in 1848.<sup>236</sup>

She adds, "the date of the original translation of the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* into Old English can not be established."<sup>237</sup> The original translation, and therefore the *OEG*, must have been produced between Felix's writing in the early to mid-eighth century and the Vercelli book's production c. 975.<sup>238</sup> This still leaves a window of over two hundred years in

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<sup>234</sup> The *Old English Life of Guthlac* appears in Bodleian Library, Laud Miscellany 509 and British Museum, Cotton Vespasian D. xxi, ff. 18-40. The edition used in this dissertation is Goodwin's. The *Homily* appears in Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare CXVII and in Scragg's modern edition. *Guthlac A* and *B* appear in Exeter, Cathedral Library 3501 and in George Philip Krapp and Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie, ed., *The Exeter Book*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 3 (New York: Columbia UP, 1936) 69-88.

<sup>235</sup> *VG* 19.

<sup>236</sup> Jane Roberts, "The Old English Prose Translations of Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*," *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: SUNY P, 1986) 363.

<sup>237</sup> Roberts, "The Old English Prose Translations" 365.

<sup>238</sup> Roberts, "The Old English Prose Translations" 366.

which the *OEG* might have been written. Scherer has argued that the *OEG* is datable to the same period as *Judith*, and Roberts agrees that this is plausible.<sup>239</sup> Echoing Goodwin's assertion in the introduction to his edition that "the style is not that of Ælfric, to whom it has been groundlessly ascribed,"<sup>240</sup> Roberts argues that, although the text of the *OEG* was originally grouped with the writings of "Ælfric and his circle," it should not be read as having a late West Saxon origin, and may date from much earlier.<sup>241</sup> Eric Stanley has also said that the *OEG* "bears distinct West Mercian traits."<sup>242</sup> From the non-West-Saxon linguistic traits in the *OEG* and the *Homily*, Roberts concludes that "the prose Guthlac texts allow us to deduce that Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* was chosen early for translation into English, perhaps even at a time when, according to Alfred, energies were being concentrated on " 'sumæ bec, ða ðe niedbeðearfosta sien eallum monnum to wiotonne.' "<sup>243</sup> In a later work, Roberts declares categorically that the *OEG* was translated in Mercia during the age of Alfred.<sup>244</sup>

None of this greatly narrows the window within which the *OEG* may have been written. Given the wide range of time in which the *OEG* could have been written, it is impossible to argue that it responds to some particular local pressure or the translator-

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<sup>239</sup> Gunter Scherer, *Zur Geographie und Chronologie des angelsächsischen Wortschatzes, im Anschluss an Bischof Waerferths Übergangszeit (1000-1150)* (Göttingen: G. Uschmann, 1913) 5 and Roberts, "The Old English Prose Translations" 366.

<sup>240</sup> Goodwin, *OEG* iv.

<sup>241</sup> Roberts, "The Old English Prose Translations" 366.

<sup>242</sup> Eric G. Stanley, rev. of *The Life of St. Chad*, ed. R. Vleeskruyer, *English and Germanic Studies* 6 (1957): 117.

<sup>243</sup> Roberts, "The Old English Prose Translations" 366: "certain books, which are most necessary for all men to know."

<sup>244</sup> Roberts, "Hagiography and Literature" 76.

writer's particular agenda. However, a close reading of the text is still possible. This reading shows us that the Wigfrith incident has been subtly altered in tone and emphasis to even more closely censure Wigfrith and remove space for doubt.

The *OEG* has not always been treated as a meaningfully crafted text. Its first editor, Charles Goodwin, considered it a rather poor translation: "The writer often paraphrases rather than translates, and in truth sometimes quite mistakes the sense of the original."<sup>245</sup> However, these paraphrases and departures from the sense of the original are arguably not errors, but choices. The translator has made deliberate changes to the text, carefully choosing his language and material. Colgrave, in his introduction to Felix's *VG*, writes, "Old English scholars [...] have hardly done justice to the unusual skill of the translator, or the importance of the piece in the development of translation technique during the Anglo-Saxon period."<sup>246</sup> Roberts also argues that the language of the Old English translation shows a consistency and grace of style which indicate deliberate alteration: "Gonser's comparisons of the Old English texts with one another and with the [Felix] *vita* shows that words, phrases and even sentences have disappeared. [...] Careful revision of a rather old fashioned text has taken place."<sup>247</sup> Gordon Whatley has argued that Old English translations of Anglo-Latin hagiography should be read as intentional literary constructions of their own, rather than simply translation. He considers the *OEG*

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<sup>245</sup> Goodwin, *OEG* iv.

<sup>246</sup> *VG* 19.

<sup>247</sup> Roberts, "The Old English Prose Translations" 369-379. See also E. Gordon Whatley's "Lost in Translation" 187-208 for a discussion of interventionist translation technique in the eighth through tenth centuries with specific reference to the *Old English Guthlac*.

an example of Anglo-Saxon translation which gives the appearance of being just a literal translation, but is actually a careful recrafting of the text.<sup>248</sup> Whatley concludes that the omissions and other alterations to the Latin source texts are not errors, but calculated reformulations of the text for the Old English author's purposes,<sup>249</sup> and that "these cuts may have been efforts to eliminate material in the Latin *vita* that might have seemed redundant, repetitious or frivolous to the translator."<sup>250</sup> By implication then, what is left in was chosen for inclusion by the author, who did not see fit to excise the Wigfrith episode, but must have also found it useful. This means that it is worth considering the anonymous translator-author's treatment of the doubting incident because it is not simply a copy of Felix's words, but a deliberate narrative choice. This reinforces my argument that the material treated in these texts, even when it appears simple on the surface, is the result of careful textual construction which should not be lightly passed over.

What has not been changed from the *Vita Guthlaci* to the *Old English Guthlac* is the basic outline of events. Bishop Headda, acting on divine impulse, goes to speak with Guthlac and takes his retinue with him. On the journey the retinue recounts Guthlac's miracles and wonders what power, divine or demonic, enables him to perform them. Wigfrith declares that he "will be able to find out if he is a cultivator of divine piety."<sup>251</sup> During their conversation, Headda begs Guthlac to accept ordination and he accepts.

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<sup>248</sup> Whatley, "Lost in Translation" 189.

<sup>249</sup> Whatley, "Lost in Translation" 193-194.

<sup>250</sup> Whatley, "Lost in Translation" 194.

<sup>251</sup> Goodwin, *OEG* 70-71: "Ic mæg cwæð he cunnian and gewitan hwæðer he biþ bigencga þære godcundan æfæstnysse" (translations from the *OEG* are mine).

During the ordination feast, Guthlac asks Wigfrith what he thinks now and Wigfrith confesses his fault. The basic focus of events and Wigfrith's role in them has not changed. Likewise, the Antonian roots of Guthlac's life have not been diminished, nor has the saint's temptation by two devils who offer to teach him holiness been removed.

What have changed are several smaller details of the narrative that serve to further denigrate Wigfrith and demonstrate that his proposal to judge the saint was foolishness. The Old English translator describes Wigfrith in more deliberately ironic terms; rather than being the *vir librarius*, a term that describes a function, he is described by his attributes. He is "a certain learned man," and "the wise man."<sup>252</sup> Uncoupled from a function within the bishop's household or record of deeds that would justify these descriptions, and combined with the results of his boast, these descriptors ring hollow. They are ironic rather than laudatory. Furthermore, the description of Wigfrith as a "wise man" is positioned in a way that implies that the term is not the narrator's opinion but Wigfrith's assessment of himself in contrast to his companions:

Then they began to say many things about the holy man and said many things about his wonders [...] Some then spoke doubtingly about [Guthlac's] life and said that they did not know whether he worked these things in God's might or through the devil's craft. While they said these things amongst themselves, then the wise man spoke to them.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Goodwin, *OEG* 70-71: "sumne man gelæredne" and "se witega."

<sup>253</sup> Goodwin, *OEG* 70: "Ða ongunnon hi fela þinga be þam halgan were spreca and fela þinga be his wundrum sædon. [...] Sume hi þonne twiendlice be his life spræcon, and þæt cwædon þæt hi nyston

In this context the term “wise man” (*witega*) is doubly ironic because the word may also mean prophet, or “one who has knowledge from a superhuman source,” but it is Headda who acts on impulse from heaven, and Guthlac who speaks wisely and prophetically from *witedomes cræft*.<sup>254</sup> Wigfrith participates in neither of these signs of sanctity. While his companions realize the limit of their own understanding and admit that they don’t know, Wigfrith promises to enlighten them: “‘I am able,’ he said, ‘to test and know whether he is a practicer of godly piety [...] I may understand how this man’s life is disposed.’”<sup>255</sup> In the end Wigfrith is the one who needs to be told. He relies on his own understanding, not the “gift of God” from which Guthlac derives his insight.<sup>256</sup>

The narrative is tightened by being presented as one chapter, rather than two. There is also a change in the form of the headings, consistent with several others in the *OEG*, in which Felix’s synoptic headings are shortened to topical ones. Felix’s *VG* labels the doubting incident in two consecutive chapters, “how by the spirit of foresight he repeated to Wigfrith the words which he had uttered when absent” and “how he received the office of priest from Bishop Headda.”<sup>257</sup> The *OEG* simply calls the chapter, “about the holy bishop Saint Headda.”<sup>258</sup> The contrast between Wigfrith and his master is also increased; the *OEG* calls Headda *halga*, “holy,” and designates him as a saint, while the

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hwæðer he on Godes mihte þa þing worhte, þe þurh deofles cræft. Ða þa hi þas þing þus heom betweenon spræcon, þa cwæþ se witega to heom.”

<sup>254</sup> s.v. *witega*, Clark Hall; Bosworth and Toller.

<sup>255</sup> Goodwin, *OEG* 70, 72: “Ic mæg, cwæð he, cunnian and gewitan hwæþer he biþ bigengca þære godcundan æfæstnysse. [...] Ic mæg ongitan hu gerad þises mannes lif ys.”

<sup>256</sup> Goodwin, *OEG* 70: “Godes gife.”

<sup>257</sup> Goodwin, *OEG* 142-145: “qualiter Wigfritho verba, quae illo absente promebat, providentiae sibi renarravit,” and “quomodo ab episcopo Headda officium sacerdotale acceperit.”

<sup>258</sup> Goodwin, *OEG* 70-71: “be þam halgan biscope Sce Headda.”



VG merely identifies him as a bishop.<sup>259</sup> This serves to further discredit Wigfrith, since his proposal to judge Guthlac now flies in the face of a decision by his own bishop whose sanctity he already had opportunity to trust.

The narrative also reduces the opportunity for the audience to conclude that there are false saints, by cutting Wigfrith's boast in half. He claims that he has spent time with many holy men who performed miracles through God's power, but not that he has seen any false saints or bogus miracle workers.<sup>260</sup> The end result of these changes is to increase the degree to which the text discredits Wigfrith and delegitimizes his actions.

### **Eadmer's *Vita Anselmi***

In the *Vita Anselmi*, Eadmer records that Lanfranc consulted Anselm about the validity of Saint Elphege's martyrdom. This questioning of an Anglo-Saxon saint by a Norman prelate and the saint's defense by another Norman prelate do not characterize the questioner as sinful in the way that the *Lives* of Cuthbert and Guthlac did. However, the text does gently criticize the questioning as showing a lack of insight into the nature of martyrdom.

The question of why Eadmer included the incident in his *Vita Anselmi* must take into account that Eadmer was writing a hagiography of Anselm, not Elphege, and so the inclusion of the incident should be understood not only in terms of how it serves Elphege's cult, but also how it serves Anselm's. Considering the incident in this way

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<sup>259</sup> Goodwin, *OEG* 70-71.

<sup>260</sup> Goodwin, *OEG* 70-73.

sends the reader back to the circumstances under which the text was written. The most likely answer seems to be that the question, if not the exact dialogue recorded, really occurred and that Eadmer includes it because by doing so he can add to the textual support for Elphege while displaying Anselm's wisdom.

The *Vita Anselmi* was the first *vita* written for Anselm, so its circulation was the principal mechanism for establishing his cult. Eadmer began writing notes on Anselm after he met him in 1079 and wrote the *Vita Anselmi* shortly after Anselm's death in 1109, though he continued making changes to it until 1125.<sup>261</sup> Southern argues, "the book was written in the first place for private reading and edification, and when it first appeared in the world it still seems to have had this intention," but Southern also notes that Eadmer's later revisions show that in later years he was increasingly interested in the book being used in public devotion.<sup>262</sup> Southern has shown that requests for copies were earlier and more frequent on the Continent than in England, indicating that Anselm's cult was more popular and more widely circulated on the Continent.<sup>263</sup>

Anselm does not seem to have had any extraordinary enemies or factors that worked against his cult. In life, he had a wide circle of friends and students: "at Canterbury, Anselm, Lanfranc's successor, was rich in such friendships, which included such elder statesmen of the papal reform as Pope Urban II, Abbot Hugh of Cluny, and

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<sup>261</sup> Eadmer, *The Life of Saint Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. R.W. Southern, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1979) ix and xii. Hereafter, *VA*.

<sup>262</sup> *VA* xi, xii and xxvii.

<sup>263</sup> *VA* x and Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought 1059 – c.1130* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1963) 229-231.

Archbishop Hugh of Lyons.”<sup>264</sup> At the same time, Anselm had not always endeared himself to everyone. While he may have been a particular confidante of William the Conqueror,<sup>265</sup> Anselm ran afoul of William Rufus and Henry I, and was exiled from England three times because of his position on lay investiture and papal authority.<sup>266</sup> At Bec, Anselm was involved in a long-term and highly tendentious controversy over the type of profession which an abbot ought to offer his bishop.<sup>267</sup> He was accused of scheming for the archbishopric of Canterbury.<sup>268</sup> At Canterbury, after Anselm’s death, many accused Anselm of having done too little to protect the Cathedral’s privileges:

They contrasted him, much to his disadvantage, with Lanfranc both as a manager of their estates and as an advocate of their primacy. These considerations no doubt had an adverse effect on any claim to saintliness which which might otherwise have been entertained.<sup>269</sup>

In writing the *Vita Anselmi*, Eadmer would have known that he had to prove Anselm’s sanctity.

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<sup>264</sup> H.E.J. Cowdrey, “Lanfranc, the Papacy, and the See of Canterbury,” *Lanfranco di Pavia e l’Europa del secolo XI nel IX centenario della morte (1089-1989): atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Pavia, Almo Collegio Borromeo, 21-24 settembre 1989)*, ed. G. D’Onofrio, Italia sacra 51 (Rome: Herder, 1993) 439-500, rpt. in *Popes and Church Reform in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century*, Variorum Collected Studies (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000) 477.

<sup>265</sup> Walter Fröhlich, “St. Anselm’s Special Relationship with William the Conqueror,” *Anglo-Norman Studies* 10 (1987): 101-110.

<sup>266</sup> Cowdrey, “The Gregorian Reform” 349. See also Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer* 122-180 and C. Warren Hollister, “St. Anselm on Lay Investiture,” *Anglo-Norman Studies* 10 (1987): 158.

<sup>267</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, “From Bec to Canterbury: Anselm and Monastic Privilege,” *Anselm Studies* 1 (1983): 23-44, rpt. in *Piety, Power and History in Medieval England and Normandy*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) VIII: 23-44.

<sup>268</sup> Chibnall, “From Bec to Canterbury” 39.

<sup>269</sup> Southern, “Introduction” xi.

The conversation between Lanfranc and Anselm offers one opportunity for Eadmer to do this, particularly because it probably happened. If so, it might have been recalled by other contemporaries of the saint. Lanfranc and other Norman prelates had engaged in a project of investigation and interrogation of Anglo-Saxon saints. Elphege had been one of the saints whose relics were moved, interrogated, and replaced, and the record of his piety was quite thin: “As Sir Richard Southern has observed, [...] almost nothing was known at Canterbury about Elphege except that the Danes had murdered him.”<sup>270</sup> Anselm had participated in at least one of these investigations. He is reported as having been the witness who confirmed the validity of St. Neot’s bones.<sup>271</sup> If this confirmation process was not always a comfortable one, Anselm’s involvement in it seems to have led to his adopting a number of English saints at Bec including Elphege.<sup>272</sup> From this, it seems likely that Anselm would have been one of the people Lanfranc consulted with his questions and that Anselm would have been inclined to give an answer favorable to the saint being questioned.

Furthermore, Anselm’s answer to Lanfranc echoes the language of a treatise that he wrote on love and justice. Anselm’s reason for perceiving Elphege as a martyr are that Elphege died for justice, which is the same as dying for truth, which is essentially the

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<sup>270</sup> Rubenstein, “The Life and Writings of Osbern of Canterbury” 35.

<sup>271</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, “The Relations of Saint Anselm with the English Dependencies of the Abbey of Bec, 1079-1093,” *Spicilegium Beccense* 1 (1959): 521-530, rpt. in *Piety, Power and History in Medieval England and Normandy*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) IX: 525.

<sup>272</sup> T.A. Heslop, “The Canterbury Calendars and the Norman Conquest,” *Canterbury and the Norman Conquest: Churches, Saints and Scholars, 1066-1109*, ed. Richard Eales and Richard Sharpe (London: Hambledon P, 1995) 65 and Chibnall, “The Relations of Saint Anselm” 528.

same as dying for Christ.<sup>273</sup> As Southern points out in his edition of the *Vita Anselmi*, “It contains the germ of Anselm’s philosophical treatise *De veritate* written c. 1086, which defined the scope of *rectitudo* under its twin forms of *veritas* and *iustitia*.”<sup>274</sup> It is possible that the movement of ideas occurred in the opposite direction; Eadmer may have put these reasons in Anselm’s mouth because he had heard them developed in Anselm’s other work and they suited the situation. In either case, we know from Anselm’s writing that he did hold this position, whether or not we can confirm that he applied it specifically to Elphege.

Lanfranc’s process of investigation may well have left Eadmer uneasy about the position of Elphege, along with other Anglo-Saxon saints, in the Canterbury calendar. Although this investigative process was over by the time Eadmer wrote the *Vita Anselmi* and Elphege had been re-interred, Eadmer left evidence in his other writing that the process had left a deep impression on him. He mentions witnessing the disinterment of Elphege, Dunstan and Wilfrid several times in different texts.<sup>275</sup> As Turner and Muir argue, “the subsequent treatment of these relics, some of the most prestigious possessions of the pre-Conquest church, suggests an initial apathetic attitude of the Norman hierarchy towards the ancient traditions of their newly acquired monastery.”<sup>276</sup> Rubenstein has further argued that while Eadmer had no personal animosity against Lanfranc, he did

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<sup>273</sup> VA 53.

<sup>274</sup> VA 53, n. 1.

<sup>275</sup> Eadmer, *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald*, ed. and trans. Andrew J. Turner and Bernard J. Muir, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2006) xii.

<sup>276</sup> Turner and Muir xii.

regard Lanfranc as a threat to the proper veneration of Anglo-Saxon saints: “both Osbern and Eadmer respected and admired Lanfranc, [...] but both writers agreed that Lanfranc was more than a little cavalier toward established English customs.”<sup>277</sup> Turner and Muir also note that a lack of open indignation is not always a trustworthy indication of contentment:

In Eadmer’s own account of Lanfranc’s administration of Christ Church there is no suggestion that the archbishop and other Norman appointees felt anything but reverential awe towards Dunstan, but this is in keeping with the rhetorical strategy of the work, which aims at proving the sanctity of the saint while emphasizing unity and continuity within the church.<sup>278</sup>

Whatever his thinking about Lanfranc’s own actions, we know that Eadmer was quite conscious of a loss of prestige among English churchmen beyond the walls of Canterbury. Henry I had appointed entirely Norman abbots to the exclusion of Anglo-Saxon candidates: “Henry’s action provoked an unusually forthright outburst from Eadmer who attributed it to the king’s fundamental hatred of the English, and concluded his diatribe with the gloomy statement that the times were evil.”<sup>279</sup> Eadmer’s analysis of the king’s motives and the times are particularly telling. They indicate that Eadmer saw Henry’s actions as typical of the times, rather than being solely the result of personal prejudice.

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<sup>277</sup> Rubenstein, “Liturgy against History” 282.

<sup>278</sup> Turner and Muir xiv-xv.

<sup>279</sup> Turner and Muir xxiv-xxv.

Furthermore, indications from his early life are that Eadmer was a particularly close devotee of the Anglo-Saxon saints associated with Christ Church. Eadmer had been an oblate of the church. As a youngster, he had participated in the masses held over Dunstan's tomb by the older English monks, though he may have been discouraged from doing so by the master of novices.<sup>280</sup> This may well have given him a particular motive for taking another opportunity to boost Elphege's cult, not only as an Anglo-Saxon saint, but also as a Canterbury saint.

Though the conversation between Lanfranc and Anselm may really have happened, Eadmer is not merely reporting it, he is using it to strengthen the reputations of both saints. The narrative makes clear that Anselm was wiser in this matter than Lanfranc. It also bolsters Elphege's cult by criticizing Lanfranc, narrowing the range of the question, and modeling the treatment Elphege ought to receive. Eadmer begins his praise of Anselm in his comparison to Lanfranc: "There was nobody at that time who excelled Lanfranc in authority and breadth of learning, or Anselm in holiness and knowledge of God."<sup>281</sup> Lanfranc is not denigrated, but Anselm has the better and more saintly qualities. Lanfranc is also called "somewhat green" as an Englishman.<sup>282</sup> Southern notes that this is a different phrase than the one Lanfranc used when he

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<sup>280</sup> Richard Sharpe, "The Setting of St. Augustine's Translation, 1091," *Canterbury and the Norman Conquest: Churches, Saints and Scholars, 1066-1109*, ed. Richard Eales and Richard Sharpe (London: Hambledon P, 1995) 4-5.

<sup>281</sup> VA 50-51: "Non erat eo tempore ullus qui aut Lanfranco in auctoritate vel multiplici rerum sapientia, aut Anselmo praestaret in sanctitate vel Dei sapientia."

<sup>282</sup> VA 50: "quasi rudis Anglus."

described himself as a “new Englishman.”<sup>283</sup> Lanfranc is consulting Anselm because he can’t discern the right answer himself: “Thus, talking as a recent citizen of England, he briefly outlined the case and submitted it to Anselm.”<sup>284</sup> Lanfranc’s response puts him in the position of a student being taught by his teacher: “I acknowledge – I approve and deeply respect the subtlety and insight of your mind [...] I have been instructed by your solid argument.”<sup>285</sup> By placing such praise of Anselm in Lanfranc’s mouth, Eadmer adds to his credibility and puts Anselm at a higher level than even the Archbishop Lanfranc. The incident is not a flashy or miraculous one, but it does display Anselm’s wisdom. It shows him as a friend to other saints and a guide to those needing spiritual insight.

In addition to the work the incident does on behalf of Anselm, it bolsters Elphege’s cult against doubts which may have been lingering. First, Eadmer presents Lanfranc’s question as solely concerned with the degree of Elphege’s sanctity, not its reality. Lanfranc says of the English saints, “I cannot help having doubts about the quality of their sanctity.”<sup>286</sup> Specifically, Lanfranc questions Elphege’s status as a martyr:

He was called Elphege, a good man certainly, and in his day archbishop of this place. This man they not only number among the saints, but even among the

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<sup>283</sup> VA 50, n. 3: “novus Anglus.”

<sup>284</sup> VA 52: “Et quidem ille sicuti novus Angliae civis haec summatim perstringens Anselmo proposuit.”

<sup>285</sup> VA 53: “Fateor [...] subtilem perspicaciam et perspicacem subtilitatem ingenii tui [...] firmaque ratione tua edoctus.”

<sup>286</sup> VA 51: “De sanctitatis eorum merito animum a dubietate flectere nequeo.”



martyrs, although they do not deny that he was killed, not for professing the name of Christ, but because he refused to buy himself off with money.<sup>287</sup>

Lanfranc freely professes Elphege's general goodness, but he wonders about the meaning of his death. Cowdrey has argued that the evidence "points to no radical hostility or even scepticism on [Lanfranc's] part, but only a desire to be sure about how they [Dunstan and Elphege] should be commemorated."<sup>288</sup> Cowdrey reminds the reader that saints are ranked, with martyrs receiving higher honors than virgins, and concludes that when Lanfranc expressed his concern "de sanctitatis eorum merito," he was expressing "doubts about the quality (not the fact) of their sanctity."<sup>289</sup> In other words, the text implies that no one is questioning whether or not Elphege was a saint; the only question is exactly where he goes in the rank of saints. The possibility that Elphege could have been degraded in his ranking is not desirable if one regards him as a martyr, but Eadmer's framing of the question reduces the degree of skepticism and thus the degree of threat which the question poses.

Also, Eadmer shows the person asking the question as lacking insight, so that the question is not evidence that Elphege's claims to sanctity are shaky but that anyone who has to ask doesn't really understand martyrdom or the historical record. Anselm says, "now Saint Elphege as truly suffered for justice as Saint John did for truth. So why

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<sup>287</sup> VA 51: "Ælfegus nomine, vir bonus quidem, et suo tempore gradui archiepiscopatus praesidens ibidem. Hunc non modo inter sanctos verum et inter martires numerant, licet eum non pro confessione nominis Christi, sed quia pecunia se redimere noluit occisum non negent."

<sup>288</sup> H.E.J. Cowdrey, *Lanfranc: Scholar, Monk and Archbishop* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) 179.

<sup>289</sup> Cowdrey, *Lanfranc* 180.

should anyone have more doubt about the true and holy martyrdom of the one than of the other, since a similar cause led both of them to suffer death?”<sup>290</sup> John’s martyrdom is unassailable; if Elphege’s death is comparable, then to question his martyrdom seems foolish. Lanfranc’s question stems from a simplistic understanding of martyrdom.

Finally, Eadmer uses the narrative voice to augment Anselm’s philosophical proof with historical proof of Elphege’s sanctity. Before Anselm replies to Lanfranc, the narrator breaks in to correct Lanfranc’s account of the martyrdom: “If, however, we look at the matter historically, we see that this was not the only cause of Saint Elphege’s death, but that there was another and more fundamental one.”<sup>291</sup> He argues that Elphege preached the gospel to the people burning Canterbury and tried to convert them, “and it was for this that they seized him and put him to death with cruel torture.”<sup>292</sup> Philosophical considerations aside, Elphege was preaching Christ to the people who killed him. Because the Vikings killed him instead of being converted, his preaching of Christ was the cause of his death. If Anselm’s somewhat more abstract explanation did not convince the reader, then the narrator’s own correction of the historical record should.

By including Lanfranc’s questions about Elphege in the *Vita Anselmi*, Eadmer took the opportunity to present a probably genuine incident in such a way as to bolster the cults of both Anselm and Elphege and present both Anselm and Elphege as models of

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<sup>290</sup> VA 53: “Beatus vero Ælfegus aequè pro iustitia, ut beatus Johannes passus est pro veritate. Cur ergo magis de unius quam de alterius vero sanctoque martyrio quisquam ambigat, cum par causa in mortis perpeffione utrunque detineat?”

<sup>291</sup> VA 52: “At tamen causam necis beati Ælfegi historialiter intuentes, videmus non illam solam, sed aliam fuisse ista antiquiorem.”

<sup>292</sup> VA 52: “ab eis captus, et crudeli est examinatione occisus.”

sanctity. Anselm's cult was only just beginning; the *Vita Anselmi* is Eadmer's attempt to create and shape the cult so that his mentor would be duly venerated. At the same time, he uses the incident to revisit and rebut any questions about Elphege that might have lingered after the Norman period of investigation.

### **William of Malmesbury's *Vita Wulfstani***

The last incident of doubt to be examined in this chapter occurs in the *Vita Wulfstani* by William of Malmesbury. The Worcester Cathedral community commissioned the hagiography from William of Malmesbury to commemorate their former bishop St. Wulfstan.<sup>293</sup> Winterbottom and Thomson call it a bit difficult to date, but are able to narrow the date of composition to between February 1126 and the end of 1128.<sup>294</sup> The hagiography which William produced is riddled with doubting incidents of multiple types.

There is the possibility that the incidents discussed in this and the following chapters were still circulating in living memory among the monks of Worcester. Wulfstan died in 1095 – just over thirty years before William wrote his hagiography. Monastic records show that some monks served in the Worcester community for over

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<sup>293</sup> Michael Winterbottom and Rodney M. Thomson, ed., *William of Malmesbury: Saints' Lives: Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2002) 8.

<sup>294</sup> Winterbottom and Thomson xiv.

forty years.<sup>295</sup> Assuming that they are not pious fictions, if there were monks still living who remembered these incidents or had heard them from others who had witnessed them, it would have been important for William to acknowledge these memories and pin down their significance in writing, rather than leaving the memories to circulate as possible counterexamples to the official memory of Wulfstan's sanctity. As Nicholas Brooks so gracefully puts it, "what we have in the *Vita Wulfstani* is an exercise in constructed memory, serving the needs of the early twelfth-century community at Worcester."<sup>296</sup>

In this chapter, I discuss the incident in which Wulfstan's reputation is tested by a sheriff's wife. In following chapters I examine incidents in which Wulfstan is accused of pride and gluttony, and one in which he fails to believe he can perform a miracle when he has the promise of heaven that he should do so.<sup>297</sup> Even more remarkable, the *Vita Wulfstani* treats the doubt of the sheriff's wife as legitimate and allowable. This makes the *vita* quite different from the others within the category of questioners. I argue that William's *Vita Wulfstani* shows a high level of concern with doubts about Wulfstan. By depicting an incident of questioning that validates the questioner while punishing incidents of accusation, the *Vita Wulfstani* attempts to placate an Anglo-Norman audience

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<sup>295</sup> Julia Barrow, "The Community of Worcester, 961-c.1100," *St. Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. Nicholas Brooks and Catherine Cubitt (London: Leicester UP, 1996) 87 n. 12, citing Ivor Atkins, "The Church at Worcester from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, pt 2," *Antiquaries Journal* 20 (1940): 1-38.

<sup>296</sup> Nicholas Brooks, "Introduction: How Do We Know About St Wulfstan?" *St Wulfstan and His World*, ed. Julia Barrow and Nicholas Brooks, *Studies in Early Medieval Britain* 4 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 6.

<sup>297</sup> These latter two incidents are discussed in the chapters on accusation and self-doubt, respectively.

liable to have a high degree of skepticism about the Anglo-Saxon saint because of his Anglo-Saxonness and his association with Stigand, his discredited predecessor.<sup>298</sup>

Through the narrative treatment of the incident, William essentially argues that doubt is God's way of providing opportunities for miraculous proof so that all others may more easily believe in Wulfstan. By doing this he offers more evidence for Wulfstan's sanctity without berating those who might ask similar questions. The saint is tested by the sheriff's wife while on a journey to York. His servants are sent ahead into Nottingham to find hospitality for the night and are taken in by the sheriff's wife. However, she is not certain that Wulfstan deserves the reputation for sanctity which he has earned and so sets up a miraculous test. Since the river has been barren of fish, she sends her servants out to catch salmon for the saint's dinner, reasoning that if Wulfstan is truly a saint, God will answer her doubt and provide the fish. Naturally, the servants catch not one but five large salmon. A second confirmatory miracle occurs when Wulfstan miraculously divines that the servants have stolen two of the fish and lied to their mistress about how many they caught. The sheriff's wife immediately praises Wulfstan and tells him all about her test. However, she is not rebuked as the Coldingham monk and Wigfrith were. Writing about William of Malmesbury's historical work, Robert Stein asserts that he shows a desire to eschew the political:

His narrative strategies of recuperation, organized as they are along the lines of private life, are of course, prepolitical. But they are, more interestingly, also

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<sup>298</sup> Wulfstan's connections to Stigand and the suspicion this cast on him are more directly relevant to the accusation incidents discussed in the chapter on accusations and so they will be discussed in detail there.

postpolitical: coincident with the emergence of the possibility and necessity of writing secular history there arises the simultaneous desire to escape once and for all from historicity, [...] the longing for a transcendental home or the transformation in fantasy of diversity into an imaginary whole.<sup>299</sup>

No matter how much William might have longed for the transcendent, there were reasons in recent political history which made attention to doubts about Wulfstan particularly worth addressing in his hagiography. The “imaginary whole” Stein describes is figured in the *Vita Wulfstani* in the way that the Norman woman’s questions about the Anglo-Saxon Wulfstan are made an occasion of the saint’s vindication and greater unity between the questioner and the one questioned.

William’s *Vita Wulfstani* was not the first *vita* written for Wulfstan, but it was arguably the one which ensured his cult’s survival. William wrote using a previous *vita*, now lost, by the monk Coleman, who had written in Old English. John Crook argues that Coleman’s work was unsuited for addressing an audience beyond Wulfstan’s original community:

Coleman’s *Life* [...] seems to have been written in order to demonstrate Wulfstan’s suitability as a saint, albeit at a local level. [...] It is interesting to enquire whether Wulfstan’s cult would have developed so successfully if William

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<sup>299</sup> Robert M. Stein, “Making History English; Cultural Identity and Historical Explanation in William of Malmesbury and Layamon’s *Brut*,” *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1998) 114.

of Malmesbury had not been invited by Prior Warin (c. 1124-c.1143) to translate Coleman's *Life of Wulfstan* into Latin.<sup>300</sup>

The need for a translation from the Old English vernacular into Latin for a still highly Latinate and now Anglo-Norman audience highlights one factor of the politics surrounding hagiography in England during this period. As Nicholas Brooks points out, by the time of Wulfstan's death "all the ruling class spoke French; Wulfstan was a relic from an Anglo-Saxon past."<sup>301</sup> Andy Orchard agrees, calling Coleman's choice to write in Old English "self-consciously anachronistic,"<sup>302</sup> and describing his decision as a combination of "piety and nationalistic spite."<sup>303</sup> Orchard argues that "Warin's determination to translate the *Life* into Latin less than a generation after its composition was essentially designed to ensure its survival."<sup>304</sup> By the time William came to write or translate Wulfstan's *Life* some 29 to 45 years after Wulfstan's death, Coleman's work would have been even more outdated and limited in its ability to either reach or appeal to a wide or influential audience.

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<sup>300</sup> John Crook, "The Physical Setting of the Cult of St Wulfstan," *St Wulfstan and His World*, ed. Julia Barrow and Nicholas Brooks, Studies in Early Medieval Britain 4 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 201-202.

<sup>301</sup> Brooks, "Introduction: How Do We Know About St Wulfstan?" 2.

<sup>302</sup> Andy Orchard, "Parallel Lives: Wulfstan, William, Coleman and Christ," *St Wulfstan and His World*, ed. Julia Barrow and Nicholas Brooks, Studies in Early Medieval Britain 4 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 40. Orchard attributes the anti-Norman elements in the text to him, rather than William. We must give William the credit due both to his skill as a writer and to his ability to alter his source material which he demonstrated in other writings. William's text is a reflection of what he chose to present to his readers, particularly the narratorial editorializing which he might easily have cut along with the other verbiage eliminated under the rubric of reducing Coleman's prolixity without altering the basic story material with which he was working. At the same time, Orchard's argument provides a strong reminder that William was not constructing the narrative of Wulfstan's life from the beginning, nor was he working at a remove so remote that he might do whatever he liked with his source material.

<sup>303</sup> A. Orchard 4.

<sup>304</sup> A. Orchard 4.

Given the audience for which William wrote, he may well have decided to address doubt directly and frequently because doubts about his subject were inevitable. By the early twelfth century most high prelates were Norman and the monasteries were filling with monks of mixed Norman and Anglo-Saxon descent. There had already been a great deal of exchange and mingling between Norman and Anglo-Saxon, so that what might genuinely be called an Anglo-Norman culture was emerging, though it was not without its remaining conflicts between native and foreign, Saxon and Norman.<sup>305</sup> Wulfstan was an Anglo-Saxon saint who had been closely associated with Harold Godwinson before his death, and yet was one of the very few prelates to retain his position after the Norman invasion. Brooks argues, “It was William’s intention to reconcile the English majority to their Norman or French rulers on the one hand and to encourage those rulers to accept an English past on the other. William’s *Life of Wulfstan* [...] fitted into this larger enterprise.”<sup>306</sup> Wulfstan’s Anglo-Saxonness, at the very least, did not increase the chances for his cult’s survival because it did not endear him to the new Norman prelates. His encounter with the sheriff’s wife is likely an acknowledgement of this fact, as Nicholas Brooks has argued:

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<sup>305</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England: 1066-1166* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987 and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) and Hugh M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity 1066-c.1220* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003). (Note that Thomas especially cautions against too easy a use of the term Anglo-Norman: “We are quite happy to throw about Anglo-Norman [...] and other hyphenations with abandon. All these terms are, of course, fudges, and perhaps medieval writers were generally less comfortable with fudging [...] In any case, because writers of the time did not normally think in terms of Anglo-Norman identity, their conceptualization of the process was different from, and in a certain respect somewhat more limited than, ours.” 73)

<sup>306</sup> Brooks, “Introduction: How Do We Know about St Wulfstan?” 4.



We may perhaps presume that the unnamed wife of the sheriff of Nottingham [...] was also a French-speaker. If so, this story seems to confirm that Wulfstan's reputation as a holy man was received reluctantly after 1066 in Norman households. That at least may have been Coleman's perception.<sup>307</sup>

Emma Mason also agrees that the sheriff was probably a Norman: "After the crisis in the early years of William I's reign, most English sheriffs were replaced by Normans."<sup>308</sup> This puts the incident in a particularly difficult space because William must negotiate the tension between fully confirming Wulfstan's sanctity without appearing to be writing an anti-Norman episode.

William accomplishes this by making the wife an example of faithful doubt and by converting her doubt itself into proof that Wulfstan is a saint. There is no question that the woman does doubt Wulfstan's reputation. Like the Bishop's party in the *Vita Guthlaci*, the sheriff's wife has heard of the saint but is not satisfied by the report: "To such reports she had neither altogether denied credence nor completely assented. So she was in a state of doubt."<sup>309</sup> Like Wigfrith's companions, her doubts come from a desire not to be deceived by ungodliness masquerading as holiness. Unlike Wigfrith and his companions, she is not prepared to distinguish between a divine and a demonic miracle. She is simply concerned that Wulfstan's reputation is inflated: "she accordingly interviewed the advance party, and made careful enquiries, adjuring them in the name of

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<sup>307</sup> Brooks, "Introduction: How Do We Know about St Wulfstan?" 8.

<sup>308</sup> Emma Mason, *St Wulfstan c.1008-1095* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990) 234.

<sup>309</sup> VW(W) 102-3: "Referentibus illa nec fidem prorsus abnuerat nec penitus accommodaverat. Nutabat ergo sententiae incerto."

God to free her from her conundrum: Did Wulfstan's piety correspond with reports of it?"<sup>310</sup> However, none of this leads to her being rebuked. The narrator is at pains to tell us that she is a "woman of good deeds" who receives the servants of the bishop with willing hospitality.<sup>311</sup> Her questions are not founded in pride, rebellion, or even hyper-suspicion. Instead, they show a zeal for the truth. She makes diligent efforts to find an answer: "She accordingly interviewed the advance party, and made careful enquiries, adjuring them in the name of God to free her from her conundrum."<sup>312</sup> In other words, she proceeds to investigate the story in a concerted and eager manner, because she wants to know the truth.

In describing the wife's doubts, the narrative establishes that her indecision has a legitimate basis. The narrator concedes that it would be difficult to make a determination in such a case. He calls her concerns a "dubietatis [...] nodum," a "knot of doubt" and "hoc ambiguo," "this ambiguity or uncertainty."<sup>313</sup> When questioned, the servants give careful answers, indicating that they, too, are concerned that the woman not be deceived: "Frewinus responded to her questioning with that which was true and moderate, so that he might neither suppress things nor elevate them beyond believing."<sup>314</sup> The care with which Frewinus answers the sheriff's wife shows that he does not take her concerns

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<sup>310</sup> VW(W) 102-3: "Quapropter precursores verbis adorsa sedulo explorat, sollicite per nomen Dei adiurat: liberarent eam hoc ambiguo, an religio episcopo famae conveniret suae."

<sup>311</sup> VW(W) 102: "bone actionis femina."

<sup>312</sup> VW(W) 102: "Quapropter precursores verbis adorsa sedulo explorat, sollicite per nomen Dei adiurat."

<sup>313</sup> VW(W) 104, 102.

<sup>314</sup> VW(W) 102: "Respondit percunctanti Frewinus, quod erat veritatis, quod moderationis ut nec rem deprimeret, nec ulterius fide atolleret."

lightly. The reasonableness of her doubt is clear. There is potential for deceit here and for inaccurate reporting.

When report proves insufficient for the sheriff's wife, she sets up a test of the saint, and here, if anywhere, we might expect to find her condemned. She is presenting a deliberate challenge to stories she has heard, an opportunity for the bishop to fail. However, the sheriff's wife is never described in terms of the verb *temptare* as was the monk who followed Cuthbert, nor is she rebuked as was Wigfrith who promised to judge the saint. Rather, William treats her behavior as an act of faith which shows her reliance on God, rather than herself. She pursues her fish-test "so that a solution might be drawn from heaven."<sup>315</sup> Her thought process is focused on God's mercy rather than her own ingenuity: "her knotty problem would be solved in His mercy by Him who once had reassured doubting Thomas by showing him the scars of His wounds."<sup>316</sup> Far from being a boast or trap set for the saint, her test is depicted as a call for God to glorify himself through his servant.

Although William does not call the woman's actions sinful, she is being compared to the Apostle called the Doubter. In order to make this a positive association rather than a negative one, William departs from the dominant, Augustinian reading of Thomas's doubts and draws on Bede's interpretation instead. Augustine's commentary on the Gospel of John urges his readers not to be like Thomas, who required a sign, or,

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<sup>315</sup> VW(W) 102-3: "ut eius solutionem de caelo attraheret."

<sup>316</sup> VW(W) 104-5: "Dubietatis ergo nodum ille pro misericordia sua sibi solueret, qui quondam cicatrice vulnerum Thomae firmasset ambiguum."

worse, the Galileans, who saw many signs and did not believe, but to be like the Samaritans, who heard without seeing signs and believed anyway.<sup>317</sup> He reiterates this point in his *Tractates on John* where he is careful to emphasize the ultimate point of the passage: “whether it was by gazing only, or also by touching that he saw and believed, what follows rather proclaims and commends the faith of the Gentiles: ‘Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.’”<sup>318</sup> Of the patristic and early medieval writers who commented on the Thomas incident in John, Augustine’s was the most widely influential.<sup>319</sup> As Michael Gorman points out, “By the year 800, if not perhaps well before, it was possible to read and study most of the major works of Augustine in epitomes or abbreviated versions, including [...] the *Tractatus in evangelium Iohannis*,”<sup>320</sup> so it is reasonable to think that William of Malmesbury would have been familiar with Augustine’s position on the subject. The anonymous author of the Hiberno-Latin commentary on John found in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 997, fols. 67r-87v., copied ca. 790-800 and most likely produced under Bishop Virgilius of Salzburg, comments on the physicality of Jesus’s presence and notes that touching him as well as seeing him meant that the apostles could not fail to believe. He argues that the

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<sup>317</sup> Augustine, “Tractatus 16,” *In Iohannis Evangelium tractatus CXXIV, Aurellii Augustini opera pars viii*, ed. D. Radbodus Willems, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 36 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954) 167.

<sup>318</sup> Augustine, “Tractate 121 on John 20:10-29,” *Tractates on the Gospel of John: 112-124*, trans. John W. Rettig, The Fathers of the Church 92 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America P, 1995) 61.

<sup>319</sup> Neither John Scot nor Epiphanius discusses the Thomas episode in their commentaries. For a survey of early medieval biblical commentaries and Augustine’s influence on them see Michael M. Gorman, *Biblical Commentaries from the Early Middle Ages*, *Millenio Medievale* 32 (Florence: SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2002). See especially chapter 12, “The Oldest Epitome of Augustine’s *Tractatus in Evangelium Iohannis* and Commentaries on the Gospel of John in the Early Middle Ages,” 435-475.

<sup>320</sup> Gorman 438. Gorman does not say this availability extended specifically to England, but he does not indicate that it did not.

multitude of miracles which Jesus performed after his resurrection were to cleanse them completely from *languorem*, “faintness or feebleness.”<sup>321</sup> While he does not draw an explicit application from this statement, the implication is clear that the need for such signs indicates a feebleness of faith. Furthermore, Ælfric, in the *Catholic Homilies*, praises the occasion of Thomas’s doubt, but not the doubt itself. The doubt is not a virtue in the apostle, but God’s providential use of one man’s weakness for the reinforcing of others’ faith: “of greater benefit to us was his doubt than the faith of the other apostles; for when he was brought to belief by that touching, doubt was thereby taken from us.”<sup>322</sup> Ælfric, like Augustine, is careful not to let Thomas’s actions become a pattern for his audience; he reminds them that the greater blessing is reserved to those who have yet to see Christ in the body.

However, Bede’s homily on the Ascension, in which he discusses Thomas’s doubt, provides William with an approach that justifies the woman’s course of action:

We who have the heavenly promises, [and] are commanded to painstakingly offer supplication to receive them should all come together to pray, and should persist in prayer, and should entreat the Lord with single-minded devotion. And *we must not doubt that our benevolent Maker will deign to lend us a hearing if we pray in this way*, and to pour forth the grace of his Spirit into our hearts. [And *we must not doubt*] that he will cause our eyes also to be blessed, although not in the same

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<sup>321</sup> Anonymous, *Commentarium in Iohannem e codice Vindobonense latino 997*, in *Scriptores Hiberniae Minores*, ed. Joseph Kelly, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 108C (Turnhout: Brepols, 1974) 103-131.

<sup>322</sup> Ælfric, *CH I* 234-5: “Mare us fremode his tweonung þonne ðæra oðra apostola geleaffulnys; forðan ðaða he wæs gebroht to geleafan mid ðære grapunge, þa wearð seo twynung þurh þæt us ætbroden.”

way as those of the apostles who merited to see the Lord when he was sojourning in the world.<sup>323</sup> (emphases mine)

In this passage, Bede seems to be explicitly promising miraculous signs to those who believe and request them. He treats Thomas's experience as a merited blessing rather than a rebuke and refutation of unbelief. Bede provides the rationale for the woman's test and Wulfstan's failure to rebuke her. If she had not merited a sign she would not have received one. Thus, the dual miracle demonstrates God's approval of Wulfstan in a way that tactfully addresses the doubts of an Anglo-Norman audience. The audience is encouraged not to doubt, because they have seen doubt assuaged in the narrative, but they are not antagonized in the process.

## Conclusion

The *Lives* of Cuthbert, Guthlac and Wulfstan are separated from one another by time, location, and, in one case, by language. Taken together they offer too few examples of doubting incidents to form a theology of doubt. That is, there is no continuum or developing depiction of doubt such that one can conclude that Anglo-Saxon hagiography as a whole was engaged with the question of how to handle doubts about emerging saints. Taken as examples of the genre, each of these *Lives* displays a strong grasp of hagiography's generic conventions. However, this use of hagiographic tropes should not mask the ways in which the hagiographies respond to the particular circumstances under

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<sup>323</sup> Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels: Book Two, Lent to the Dedication of the Church*, trans. Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst, Cistercian Studies Series 111 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991) 142.

which they were written. Their use of incidents of doubt in which the saint's sanctity is questioned highlights these authors' responses to their historical context. Each narrative shapes its presentation of the doubt in subtly individual ways to to strengthen the saint's cult and instruct their readers in Christian behavior.

## CHAPTER 3

### ACCUSATIONS: HE'S NO SAINT

In contrast to the previous chapter, this chapter examines incidents in which enemies of the saint deliberately create doubt about a saint's sanctity. Dunstan and Wulfstan are both accused of evil. The hearers are misled into sinful acts by these accusations. The late Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman *Lives* of Dunstan and Wulfstan in which these incidents appear were written by men who each found their own lives, their communities, or their saint threatened in very specific, localized ways by the upheavals of their eras. Although these particular threats were to greater or lesser degrees part of the larger changes taking place in England (the tenth-century Benedictine reform, the Norman invasion, the subsequent church reform), the writers' uses of Dunstan's and Wulfstan's stories show concern not so much for the larger theory or questions of reform and national identity as for the particular and immediate difficulties these changes caused to the writers' own communities or selves.

Shortly after Dunstan's death in 988, the writer known by his initial B. wrote a *Life* of Dunstan which included two incidents in which the saint is accused of evil and suffers as a result. Including B.'s work, there were five Latin *Lives* written between 988 and the middle of the Anglo-Norman period. (Lapidge and Winterbottom have speculated that there was also an Old English *Life* which has been lost.) After B., Osbern



and William of Malmesbury rewrote the *Life* of Dunstan, each time expanding and complicating these incidents of accusation. The two works on Dunstan from the same period which are not discussed in this chapter do not show this attention to the incidents of accusation. Adelard's work is not a *Life*, that is, a narrative of the saint's life, since it selects key moments from B.'s *Life* and presents them as a series of liturgical lections. It leaves out entirely the incidents which are discussed in this chapter. This suggests that Adelard did not see the accusations against Dunstan as useful to his purposes. Eadmer's work does deal with the incidents of accusation, but his treatment of them is a nearly word-for-word repetition of Osbern's work, which suggests that either he was repeating his source uncritically, or its form already suited his purposes.

For Wulfstan there is only one extant *Life*. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Coleman's Old English *Life* of Wulfstan is now lost.<sup>324</sup> William of Malmesbury's *Life* of Wulfstan not only includes the questioning incident discussed above, but includes two occasions in which the saint is accused of evil.

Faced with threats to themselves or their communities, these writers used Dunstan and Wulfstan to emphasize three things. First, although the events remain the same, each narrative puts its own spin on the story in order to demonstrate, in ways relevant to the writer's own situation, that the saint was innocent. B. emphasizes Dunstan's quietness,

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<sup>324</sup> John Crook does express some hope that Coleman's work might yet be recoverable: "Coleman's *Life* appears to be one of the documents sent to Rome during the canonization process [for St. Wulfstan]: the actual document may yet be at the Vatican." Crook bases this idea on the mention of a "vita ipsius ante centum annos Anglicana lingua conscripta" in the May 14, 1203 papal bull which canonized Wulfstan; see Crook 202 and n. 70. See Reginald R. Darlington, ed. *The Vita Wulfstani of William of Malmesbury*, Camden Society 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 40 (London: The Royal Historical Society, 1928) 149.

his refusal to engage in conflict for his own sake, even when attacked. Osbern emphasizes the sovereignty of God, treating the accusations against Dunstan as mechanisms in God's larger plan to glorify himself and his saint. William of Malmesbury binds two separate incidents of accusation together to demonstrate that Dunstan's public vindication may take some time, but that it is inevitable. In the *Life* of Wulfstan, William reiterates through two incidents that it is the motive behind Wulfstan's actions and the product of those actions which vindicate him, even when those actions bring him into conflict with monastic regulation. He is a truer monk, in motive and result, than those who accuse him of wrongdoing. These choices of emphasis speak directly to the difficulties or controversies in which each writer was involved as he wrote.

Second, however different their defenses of the saint, each writer returns, in his treatment of the saint's accusers, to the issues of power. B. compares the accusers to raving beasts and Osbern compares them to besiegers, while William of Malmesbury eschews metaphor and simply calls them evil. Each author takes the moments in which the saint is accused of evil and demonstrates that the accusers are always motivated only by envy of the saint's power and authority, and that the accusers' ultimate goal is the enhancement of their own power, authority, and convenience at the saint's expense. The accusations against the saint are never well-intentioned mistakes. Accusers are not, as questioners sometimes are, simply people whose weaker faith leads them to doubt the

saint's sanctity.<sup>325</sup> Rather, accusers are men who actively seek to frustrate or discredit a saint's good work because they perceive the saint as a threat. Their spiritual state is steeped in sin and closely aligned with the plans of the devil. The writer or community with which the saint is identified thus indicts their own critics as being like those who attacked the saint.

Within the narratives, the conflict of power and authority is directly between the saint and the accusers. Dunstan's accusers are men of the king's court and Glastonbury who envy the saint's holiness, itself a source of power, and the honor he receives at Court. Wulfstan's accusers want to usurp the attention the saint receives from the crowds of lay people who come to hear him. Both Dunstan and Wulfstan, in the narrative moment in which they are accused, have the authority of the offices they have been given, as well as the authority they claim from scripture for the life they lead. Dunstan temporarily loses his place at court and Wulfstan's warrant to preach is challenged, but each of these challenges is trumped by the saint's reliance on scripture as the source of his ultimate authority to do what he deems best. Neither saint displays a great deal of power in his own defense; God displays his protective power on the saint's behalf. The narratives strongly imply that nothing has changed now that the saint is dead. The saint has not become less holy or less pleasing to God and now has even more direct access to God, who has already demonstrated his willingness to punish those who fail to honor the saint.

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<sup>325</sup> See the chapter on questioners.

Finally, in contrast to the accusers, those who listen to the accusations against the saint are treated differently than those who speak the accusations. By identifying a third class of people who are innocent of evil intentions but still in danger of sinning, the writers offers a tactful middle ground by which the authors can warn their audience about the spiritual dangers of believing ill of a saint without accusing their audience of having evil intentions. The undecided reader or potential accuser may see himself in the same position as the hearers in the narrative – free from an evil will but liable to sin if he chooses the wrong side. B. extends his metaphor of the accusers as insane animals to show that the king who listens to them is in danger, literally and figuratively, of being carried off to destruction by insane animals. Osbern, returning to his theme of sovereign power, marks the kings who listen to the accusers as men under siege, too weak in themselves to resist the assault of evil. One of them is saved, but only when he despairs of himself and earthly powers and throws himself on God's mercy. William of Malmesbury, in both the *Lives* of Dunstan and Wulfstan, treats the lay auditors of accusation as ignorant and fickle, easily swayed by evil men, but willing to do good when it is clearly presented to them. The hearers must grapple with doubt about the saint as they decide whether or not to believe the accusations. The *Lives* of Dunstan and Wulfstan treat these hearers as temporarily infected by the accusers' lies, because the hearers are variously weak in character, understanding, or faith. They are depicted not as sources of evil, but as vulnerable targets for it. These characters stand as warning figures for those who might act without malice, yet still be seduced into doing evil by believing false

accusations. While these warnings may have first been directed at those who specifically challenged the saints' cults, they offer a general model for how one ought to respond to those who slander a saint.

### **B.'s *Vita Dunstani***

B. wrote the *Vita Sancti Dunstani*<sup>326</sup> between 995 and 1005.<sup>327</sup> Of the three authors whose work is examined in this chapter, we know the least about B.; even his full name is unknown to us. However, from what we do know or can reasonably infer, it is clear that in the 990s B. was having significant difficulties and that those difficulties find parallels in the *VD(B)*. In the prologue, B. describes himself as “the most foreign of all priests and a worthless native of the Saxon race.”<sup>328</sup> Both Stenton and Stubbs have argued that B. was a Saxon from the continent, living in England.<sup>329</sup> Lapidge, on the other hand, identifies B. as an Anglo-Saxon living in France, most likely at Liège.<sup>330</sup> Either identification would explain B.'s description of himself as a foreigner, the most outside of outsiders. We also know that B. considered himself in need of patronage, not once, but repeatedly. He writes to Dunstan, describing himself as “completely bound up

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<sup>326</sup> B., *Vita Sancti Dunstani auctore B., Memorials of St. Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series 63 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1874. Wiesbaden: Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1965) 3-52. Hereafter, *VD(B)*.

<sup>327</sup> Michael Lapidge, “B. and the *Vita S. Dunstani*,” *St. Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult*, ed. Nigel Ramsay, Margaret Sparks, and Tim Tatton-Brown (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1992) 247. Lapidge adds that he is inclined to believe B.'s *Vita Dunstani* was written at the end rather than the beginning of this period.

<sup>328</sup> *VD(B)* 3: “omnium extimus sacerdotum B vilisque Saxonum indigena” (translation here is Lapidge's from “B. and the *Vita S. Dunstani*” 247).

<sup>329</sup> Stubbs xiv; Stenton 455.

<sup>330</sup> Lapidge, “B. and the *Vita S. Dunstani*” 247-260.

with the chains of exile,” and reminds him that “when I was devoid of consolation, I received your patronage [...] I was received by you as an adoptive son [...] you raised me up from the mire.”<sup>331</sup> Lapidge argues that B. had been a member of Dunstan’s retinue until c. 960 and may well be one of the deacons who witnessed a charter with Dunstan.<sup>332</sup> That some years later he was pleading with the same Dunstan for a place in his house indicates that B. had lost his former place and come down in the world since that time. In c. 980-988, B. wrote to Æthelgar, bishop of Selsey, asking for patronage and lamenting that his former patron, Ebracher of Liège, had recently died.<sup>333</sup> B. wrote a third time to Archbishop Ælfric, presenting him with the *Vita Dunstani* and “making one final appeal for episcopal patronage in England.”<sup>334</sup>

Lapidge argues that B. was a canon who had taken minor orders at Glastonbury, where he encountered Dunstan.<sup>335</sup> From 960 to 990, life at some monasteries became increasingly difficult for canons in England, as one of the characteristics of the Benedictine reform in England was the expulsion or conversion of secular clerics in favor

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<sup>331</sup> *VD(B)* 374-5, cited in Lapidge, “B. and the *Vita S. Dunstani*” 247. : “exilii catenulis admodum retitus,” and “Velud filius propemodum adoptionis beneficio susceptus [...] muneribus ditasti et de stercore erexisti.”

<sup>332</sup> Lapidge, “B. and the *Vita S. Dunstani*” 259. If this is the same B. then his full name is Byrthelm. Gretsch also accepts Lapidge’s identification of B.; Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 25 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 354 and 382. See also Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1984) 245-6.

<sup>333</sup> Lapidge, “B. and the *Vita S. Dunstani*” 251.

<sup>334</sup> Lapidge, “B. and the *Vita S. Dunstani*” 258.

<sup>335</sup> Lapidge, “B. and the *Vita S. Dunstani*” 27-8.

of monastics.<sup>336</sup> This may explain why B.'s pleas for patronage fell on deaf ears, as his addressees were increasingly pro-reform and pro-monastic. Dunstan is now considered one of the prime movers of the Benedictine reform, though not the most hostile toward clerks. In this period Æthelwold also was actively expelling clerics or demanding that they take monastic vows. As both Kenneth Sisam and Joyce Hill have argued, the influential Ælfric of Eynsham was also a dedicated Benedictine reformer. Only a decade or so after B. wrote to Archbishop Ælfric of Selsey for help, Ælfric of Eynsham wrote the *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, primarily basing his instructions to them on the *Regularis concordia*.<sup>337</sup> Joyce Hill points out, "In commissioning Ælfric to write their pastoral letters, Wulfsgie and Wulfstan were drawing upon the resources of the monastic reform and in particular were choosing [...] a man who was a determined advocate of it."<sup>338</sup> Sisam argues that Ælfric was a more vigorous reformer than even Wulfsgie.<sup>339</sup> Benedictinism was becoming a significant force in the English church as B. wrote, and this meant that he was writing to an increasingly unsympathetic audience.

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<sup>336</sup> See 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*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1963); D.H. Farmer, "The Progress of the Monastic Revival," *Tenth-Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millenium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis concordia*, ed. David Parsons (London: Philmore P, 1975) 10-19; Patrick Wormald, "Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts," *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. Barbara Yorke (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1988) 13-42 and Barbara Yorke, "Æthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century," *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. Barbara Yorke (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1988) 65-88; Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations*.

<sup>337</sup> Christopher A. Jones, *Ælfric's Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 24 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998).

<sup>338</sup> Joyce Hill, "Monastic Reform and the Secular Church: Ælfric's Pastoral Letters in Context," *England in the Eleventh Century*, ed. Carola Hicks, Harlaxton Medieval Studies 2 (Stamford, CT: Paul Watkins, 1992) 105.

<sup>339</sup> Kenneth Sisam, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1953) 169.

Julia Barrow has shown that the process of the Benedictine Reform in England was not as rapid or as drastic as later monastic writing made it appear, though it was still highly influential. She argues that “Benedictine cathedral chapters accounted for only a small minority of English cathedral communities as late as the 1070s, [but] they dominated through their wealth and their cultural influence.”<sup>340</sup> In B.’s time there was still interest, primarily at Winchester, in regularizing the life of canons rather than simply forcing them into the Benedictine mold.<sup>341</sup> John Blair has also pointed out that Æthelwold’s writing and that of later Benedictine communities exaggerated the extent of the change which took place in the monasteries and the degree to which the kings suppressed the clerics.<sup>342</sup> He points out that Dunstan, to whom B. had initially appealed, was not so adamant as Æthelwold about replacing clerics with monks.<sup>343</sup> Nicola Robertson has gone further in arguing that Dunstan’s role in Benedictine reform may be entirely fictional and that Dunstan may simply have been an exemplary bishop, not a reformer.<sup>344</sup> It is clear that previous interpretations of the extent and severity of the expulsion of canons have been exaggerated by the biased accounts of the inheritors of the reform who wished to show it as a uniform and triumphant process.

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<sup>340</sup> Julia Barrow, “English Cathedral Communities and Reform in the Late Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” *Anglo-Norman Durham: 1093-1193*, ed. David Rollason, Margaret Harvey, and Michael Prestwich (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1994) 34.

<sup>341</sup> Barrow, “English Cathedral Communities” 39.

<sup>342</sup> John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 350-354.

<sup>343</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* 352.

<sup>344</sup> Nicola Robertson, “Dunstan and Monastic Reform: Tenth-Century Fact or Twelfth-Century Fiction?” *Anglo-Norman Studies* 28 (2006): 153-167.



At the same time, it was Wulfsige, “Dunstan’s protege,” who installed Benedictine monks at Sherborne in 993.<sup>345</sup> B.’s letters appealing for patronage show that he felt himself to be in real need and unjustly abandoned, just as Dunstan had been when he was expelled from Athelstan’s and Edmund’s courts. In the *Vita Dunstani*, B. returns to the images of exile and mire and applies them to Saint Dunstan, portraying the saint as one who had been unjustly exiled and had once needed to be literally pulled from the mire into which evil men had thrown him.<sup>346</sup> It seems from these circumstances that writing the *Vita Dunstani* was not only an attempt to honor a man B. had known personally, but was also part of an ongoing campaign to find a much-needed patron.

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that, of all the *Lives* written about Dunstan, the *VD(B)* is the least concerned with Dunstan as a monastic reformer: “B. is almost wholly preoccupied with the figure which Dunstan cut in the outside world, and has noticeably little to say about his hero’s doings among the monks who were – or should have been – his immediate and principal care.”<sup>347</sup> B. is interested in Dunstan not as a reformer, but as a good man unjustly slandered. Comparing Dunstan to his contemporary, Bruno the Archbishop of Cologne, David Rollason points out that “both were concerned with the royal court and their careers were essentially based there: both

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<sup>345</sup> Barrow, “English Cathedral Communities” 36

<sup>346</sup> *VD(B)* 374-5, cited in Michael Lapidge, “B. and the *Vita S. Dunstani*” 255.

<sup>347</sup> Alan Thacker, “Cults at Canterbury: Relics and Reform under Dunstan and his Successors,” *St. Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult*, ed. Nigel Ramsay, Margaret Sparks and Tim Tatton-Brown (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1992) 223 referring to Stubbs 5-36, n15.

were concerned with monastic reform.”<sup>348</sup> In the *VD(B)* these two features of Dunstan’s life do not conflict; they interlock. Dunstan’s intimacy with God is described as the result of his study while at Glastonbury and at Athelstan’s court, before he became a monk.<sup>349</sup> As Rollason puts it, “The effect of all these stories is to emphasize the connection between the saint and king.”<sup>350</sup> In the *VD(B)* it is Dunstan’s dedicated grasp of Scripture that enables him to serve King Edmund. He is chosen for service by Edmund because of his exemplary life<sup>351</sup> and does not resist because, “being more mindful of the precept of the Lord, he hurried to render to the king that which was the king’s and to God that which was God’s.”<sup>352</sup> Dunstan is not corrupted by his time at court; he governs his life by “the law of both the contemplative and the active life,” constantly meditating on Scripture.<sup>353</sup> However, this brings him into conflict with some of the men at Edmund’s court because they do not love his virtuous life.<sup>354</sup>

Several scholars, noting the frequent difficulties of his life, have characterized Dunstan as a quarrelsome figure who sought trouble. Michael Lapidge argues: “B.’s *Vita Dunstani* [...] reveals to us a Dunstan far different from the kindly elder statesman

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<sup>348</sup> David Rollason, “The Concept of Sanctity in the Early Lives of St Dunstan,” *St. Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult*, ed. Nigel Ramsay, Margaret Sparks and Tim Tatton-Brown (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1992) 262.

<sup>349</sup> *VD(B)* 11.

<sup>350</sup> Rollason, “The Concept of Sanctity in the Early Lives of St Dunstan” 271.

<sup>351</sup> *VD(B)* 21: “Sublimitas beatum Dunstanum, qui vitae probabilis et linguae extiterat eruditae, conspectibus ejus adesse praecepit, ut etiam ipse inter regios proceres et palatinos principes annumeraretur electus.”

<sup>352</sup> *VD(B)* 22: “Memor potius Domini praecepti, quae regis erant regi, quae autem Dei Deo reddere festinavit.”

<sup>353</sup> *VD(B)* 23: “legis videlicet et theoricae necnon et practicae vitae.”

<sup>354</sup> *VD(B)* 22.

normally portrayed by modern scholarship. [...] Dunstan was clearly a difficult and eccentric character.”<sup>355</sup> Although Dunstan does in some sense make himself “difficult” later in life (living an exemplary life at Edmund’s court and interrupting a king’s flirtation among other things), B. stresses that Dunstan was leading a peaceful life of study when he was first attacked. It is envy which attracts the accusations of witchcraft and the beating. Thacker also notes the difficulties which Dunstan suffered: “Several stories show him in conflict with kings or the court. [...] All this suggests a forceful character.”<sup>356</sup> Thacker is right that the stories do strongly suggest Dunstan’s impact on those around him and the frequency of conflict in his life. He fights with the devil, with his kinsman, and with three kings.

However, I argue that B. portrays Dunstan as a man of peace. The saint does not engage in conflicts with the men of the court; he attracts some of them by the goodness of his life. B. especially stresses that Dunstan did not seek quarrels with his kinsmen, and when he did answer them it was with Scripture.<sup>357</sup> The beating Dunstan received and the accusation of witchcraft which preceded it were because of the praise his talents were winning, not because Dunstan made himself prominent or chastised those around him. B. specifies that when Dunstan was first slandered he was devoting his time to Scripture:

Thus he controlled his way of life so that, as often as he examined the books of divine Scripture, God spoke with him; as often moreover as he was released from

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<sup>355</sup> Michael Lapidge, “B. and the *Vita S. Dunstani*” 247-8.

<sup>356</sup> Thacker, “Cults at Canterbury” 223.

<sup>357</sup> *VD(B)*11: “Huic autem morbo mendacii beatus tyro semper Christum opposuit, Qui omnia antequam fiant novit.” Translations for the *VD(B)* are mine unless otherwise noted.

secular cares and delighted with leisure for prayer, he seemed himself to speak with God.<sup>358</sup>

B. portrays Dunstan as a good man who has been slandered without provocation other than his own goodness; the slander itself is evidence of Dunstan's holiness. Dunstan sought neither recognition nor conflict. Both are simply the natural results of his holiness, which is readily displayed in his court life as in his later monasticism.

B. goes to some pains to establish that the accusations of witchcraft against Dunstan are an entirely malicious pretense on the part of men who chose to hate the saint. B. stresses that Dunstan's accusers are those in a position to know him best and who most ought to feel loyalty to him. He describes the accusers as "some of his own companions and the palace folk, and especially some of his own kinsman."<sup>359</sup> Dunstan's accusers are his own companions (*sodales*) and kinsmen (*consanguinei*). *Sodales* here implies both a peer group and the men with whom he shared his daily studies at Glastonbury – in other words, men who knew his habits intimately. Despite their knowledge of his good life, these men accuse Dunstan of witchcraft: "they said that from respectable books and clever men he had learned utterly fruitless verses that availed nothing for the salvation of souls, but rather belonged to pagan antiquity, and that he was busying himself with the

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<sup>358</sup> VD(B) 11: "Ita vero vitæ suæ studium cohercebat, ut quotiescumque divinæ Scripturæ libros scrutaretur Deus cum eo pariter loqueretur; quoties autem curis sæcularibus solutus, orationum otis mulcebatur, ipse cum Domino pariter videretur fari." Translation is from Whitelock, *English Historical Documents* 827.

<sup>359</sup> VD(B) 11: "nonnulli proprium sodalium et palatinorum, tum quam maxime vero consanguineorum suorum."

foolish trifles of histrionic performances.”<sup>360</sup> The other accusers, his kinsmen, would presumably have been men who had known Dunstan from birth and thus would be more than familiar with his character and the miracles attendant on his childhood.<sup>361</sup> Unlike the questioners discussed in the chapter above, who must encounter the saint for the first time, Dunstan’s accusers have had long and close contact with him. They have more than adequate reasons to understand that his studies are in pursuit of holiness.

The narrative repeatedly refers to the internal state of the accusers, emphasizing that they are motivated by envy. They are not men who have momentarily fallen into one particular sin. Instead, they are being consumed by sin so that they lose the rational and creative faculties that mark them as human, becoming destructive and animalistic:

They envied his wholesome acts; with stinging tongues of serpents and the bites of cruel teeth they strove, like shaggy goats, to gnaw away and defame the vine and shoot of the holy vineyard as it grew toward the kingdom of heaven, namely blessed Dunstan as he waxed [strong] in Christ.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> *VD(B)* 11: “Dicentes illum ex libris salutaribus et viris peritis, non saluti animarum profutura sed avitae gentilitatis vanissima didicisse carmina, et <histriarum> frivolas colere incantationum naenias.” In place of Stubbs’s *historiarum*, I adopt the reading *histriarum* reported in his apparatus from manuscript B (London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra B. 13). This change and the translation were suggested by Dr. Christopher Jones.

<sup>361</sup> B. opens his *vita* with a description of the conversion of the English by Augustine, rather than the pre-natal miracle found in later lives of Dunstan. However, he does describe two childhood miracles of the saint: a vision of new buildings at Glastonbury and a miraculous healing in which the young Dunstan, delirious with fever, sleepwalks into a locked church and is found healthy and asleep, curled up between the two church wardens the next morning. *VD(B)* 8.

<sup>362</sup> *VD(B)* 11: “Salutiferis actibus ejus invidebant, sanctae vine vitem palmitemque ad coelestia regna tendentem beatum videlicet Dunstanum in Christo pollentem, linguis acutis serpentium morsibusque dirorum dentium, ut hirci setigeri, rodere vel praedicere conati sunt.” Translation of these lines was suggested by Dr. Christopher Jones.

They show a conscious desire to destroy what is good. Dunstan's attackers are not only likened to goats and serpents, but also to dogs. They are described as "barking against him like dogs."<sup>363</sup> In describing the accusers' motives, B. mingles the language of deliberate sin with the language of insanity, so that the two are presented as a single mental-spiritual state:

Those men, persevering in their malicious machinations, accused with a certain false calumny before the king him whom, *if they were of sane minds*, they would have loved singularly. Then as *the madness of [their] impiety grew*, seizing the innocent man by all four limbs like a patient sheep, with his hands and feet held, they threw him into a filthy bog, and thus in the madness of their rage, in order to render Dunstan even more contemptible, they trampled him [...] in order to humiliate [him] in that stinking wallow according to their wicked purpose.<sup>364</sup>

(emphasis mine)

By linking the accusers' actions with insanity, B. shows the depth of the evil they do and how completely it controls them.

However, their insanity does not free them from blame for their actions. They are insane because they have chosen to deform their will by binding it to evil, not because

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<sup>363</sup> VD(B) 12: "canibus contra se latrantibus."

<sup>364</sup> VD(B) 12: "Ipsi vero in machinamento malitiæ perseverantes, criminati sunt illum falsa quadam objectione coram rege, quem si sanæ mentis essent unice dilexissent. Deinde atrocissima impietatis prævaléscente rabie, rapiéntes insontem quadrifidis membris velut ovem patientem, manibusque ac pedibus restrictum, projecerunt in lutulenta palustrium loca, et ut eum in furoris sui dementia contemptibiliorem efficerent, pedibus superimprimebant; quousque secundum voluntatis eorum malitiam in fœtenti volutabro dehonestarent."

their will has been taken away from them by illness. They have chosen to be insane.<sup>365</sup> B. likens them to the persecutors of Christ described in the psalms: “those who sought to do me harm spoke emptiness, and all day long they meditated on harm.”<sup>366</sup> Their words may be considered emptiness (*vanitas*) because they are lies, thus empty of truth, but also because they are crazy, empty of rational sense. This empty speech of the accusers stems directly from their meditations on how to harm the saint, which is indeed an empty enterprise. When he climbs out of the pond, Dunstan compares his persecutors to the literal dogs who treated him with more kindness than his human attackers:

Oh savage insanity of my kinsmen, changed from humane love to canine savagery! For the wagging tail of these naturally irrational dogs has shown me the love of humanity; but kindred, forgetful of their humanity, have beset me with the severity of attacking dogs; thus perverse in their order, each one has changed his right way to that of another.<sup>367</sup>

Their will as a whole has been so corrupted by sin that they are insane, less rational than naturally irrational dogs. There is something fundamentally unwell with their souls.

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<sup>365</sup> For a fuller examination of medieval attitudes toward the connection between insanity, sin, and animalistic behavior, see Stephen Harper, *Insanity, Individuals and Society in Late-Medieval English Literature: The Subject of Madness*, Studies in Medieval Literature 26 (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen P, 2003); Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000); Penelope B. R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1974).

<sup>366</sup> VD(B) 11-12: “Qui quærebant mihi mala locuti sunt vanitates, et dolos tota die meditabantur,” quoting Ps. 38:12.

<sup>367</sup> VD(B) 13: “O saeva propinquorum meorum vesania, in caninam saevitiam de dilectionis humanitate mutata! Nam inrationabilis canum natura humanitatis mihi dilectionem cauda blandienti exhibuit; propinquitas vero humanitatis oblita, canum mihi infestantium severitatem inseruit; sic improbus ordo amborum in utrisque mutavit justam viam.”

Though the devil is never mentioned in these passages, his likeness is present throughout. Elsewhere in Dunstan's life, the devil is a frequent tempter of the saint, and he often adopts animal forms in order to frighten or tempt the saint. Dunstan's accusers have not taken on the physical form of animals, but they have adopted the likeness of animals in their affect. Their culpability is all the clearer because the devil is not made directly present in the accusations against Dunstan. The men who slander Dunstan are not being controlled by the devil – they are adopting his ends and so becoming like him.

While the first episode of accusation focuses on the souls of the accusers, the second episode focuses on the spiritual state of their audience. Although the *VD(B)* offers numerous miracles to confirm God's favor toward Dunstan, none of them are made manifest to his accusers; even Athelstan is never reconciled to Dunstan. Of Dunstan's persecutors, only King Edmund repents and is reconciled to Dunstan. He is ready for repentance because he was deceived into doing evil, rather than choosing it with open eyes. After Athelstan's death, Dunstan is restored to favor with Edmund, Athelstan's brother and successor. Now a grown man rather than a young scholar, Dunstan exercises significant influence over the king and some members of his guard, which excites more jealousy: "however some, on the contrary, being blinded in their darkened minds, joined together in their vanity's bitterest hatred to curse this man most beloved by God, and to envy his prosperity to the point of death."<sup>368</sup> Here, the lie Dunstan's enemies concoct is not specified, nor does B. further explore the mental-spiritual state of these enemies.

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<sup>368</sup> *VD(B)* 23: "Perplures autem e contrario, nebulosis mentibus obducti, cœpere eundem Dei virum amarissimo odio vanitatis detestari, et prosperitatibus ipsius morte tenus invidere."



Instead, he focuses the reader's attention on the king's response to the lies and his eventual repentance. B. makes clear that while Edmund is at fault for believing the lies, he is not in the same spiritual state as the accusers: "that they might contaminate the king himself with their own infection of sin, and cause him to believe their lies; immediately, as first he was taught by evil men, being moved by great rage, he ordered Dunstan stripped of his rank and deprived of all his honors."<sup>369</sup> It is clear from this that the king is not the source of the infection; he was taught to do evil, rather than teaching it to others.

That the king's judgment is infected with a curable error, while those who choose to harm the saint are bent on destruction, is apparent from the contrast in corroborating miracles. The first miracle is witnessed by the reader via the page, but the accusers do not see it. The second miracle is given to Edmund and the reader, but is not witnessed by the accusers. In this way, the text distinguishes between those who need to be cured from infection via a miracle, and those who are not offered the chance of a cure because they have deliberately chosen evil. In the case of the men who drove him from Athelstan's court, B. specifies that they were gone and Dunstan had moved some distance away before the miracle occurred: "these same men retreating, he, barely getting up from the fen waters, as if covered in pitch, decided to go to one of his friends, who lived about a mile from there."<sup>370</sup> It is at this distance that Dunstan is met by the dogs. The second

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<sup>369</sup> *VD(B)* 23: "ut ipsum regem infectum vitiis ipsorum attaminarent, et credulum fallaciis eorum efficerent; qui continuo, ut prius fuerat ab iniquis instructus, magno furore permotus, jussit eum ablata dignitate etiam omni honore privari."

<sup>370</sup> *VD(B)* 12: "Illis autem recedentibus vix ipse e palude fluminis quasi depicatus surrexit; et ad quendam amicorum, uno inde distantem milario, ut ibi se ablueret, venire disposuit."

miracle repeats this pattern; the reader witnesses the miracle, but Dunstan's enemies don't. After Dunstan is expelled from Edmund's court, the king's horse runs away from him while he is hunting a stag. He sees the stag and his dogs run over a cliff in front of him, but he is unable to rein in his horse until he realizes that this must be divine punishment for his treatment of Dunstan. That Edmund has sinned, but not from a will to evil, is shown both by the fact that he has an opportunity to repent and that he takes it:

All hope of life lost, he commended his soul into God's hand, yet saying within himself, "I give you thanks, Most High, because I am not mindful of having offended anyone in the these days, except only Dunstan, and this I will amend, reconciling to him with a ready will, if my life is spared." At this word, by the merits of the blessed man, the horse stopped.<sup>371</sup>

Edmund comes, both physically and spiritually, to the edge of the cliff, but he does not plunge over it. By listening to Dunstan's accusers, Edmund has almost become like them, a self-destructive animal like his dogs, the stag, and the horse, but has retained the essential human capacity to repent. Dunstan's accusers, on the other hand, neither repent nor are they given a second chance to do so. When Edmund has his near accident he is hunting with his men, some of whom may be Dunstan's accusers: "soon thereafter the king was riding, on another day on which he, together with his men, was enjoying the

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<sup>371</sup> *VD(B)* 24: "Omni spe vitæ ablata in manus Dei sui animam commendavit, dicens tamen intra se, 'Gratias Tibi ago, Altissime, quod me non memini aliquem his diebus læsisse, nisi solum Dunstanum, et hoc prompta voluntate et vita servata reconcilians sibi emendabo.' Ad quod dictum, beati viri meritis, restitit equus."

hunt.”<sup>372</sup> However, when his horse runs away after the stag there is no mention of his men coming to the king’s aid or being beside him on the cliff. In essence, they have already made that choice by witnessing the saint in action and choosing to attack him. Dunstan’s accusers have made themselves into insane animals, debasing themselves in the same way as the devil (as B. portrays him), who chooses the guise of animals to tempt the saint and who also lacks the capacity to repent.<sup>373</sup> Both the absolute condemnation of accusers and King Edmund’s close call reinforce B.’s subtext. He, like Dunstan, is cut off from former companions and patrons. Those who reject him as unworthy must either be given over to their own evil or run away with by the corrupt accusations of others.

If Lapidge’s identification of B. is correct, then part of the time which B. had spent in Dunstan’s company had been spent in a secular court. B. had been involved in witnessing royal charters with Dunstan. As a cleric who had assisted in secular, or semi-secular work, B. had reason to present Dunstan as someone who ably served God in a secular setting and was persecuted for it. By implication, B. too has suffered the same fate; he has been sent away and denied patronage, not because he deserved such treatment but because good men attract the envy of evil men. B.’s narrative implies that if a saint such as Dunstan could be exiled and restored, then perhaps B. also deserved restoration from his exile.

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<sup>372</sup> *VD(B)* 23: “Ibat itaque rex mox altera die quo se una cum suis more solito jocundaretur venabulo.”

<sup>373</sup> See in particular *VD(B)* 26-27. I think much more could be said about B.’s theology of the human soul and his use of animal imagery, but to develop it much further here would distract from the point of the chapter. See “Beasts, Men and Fallen Angels: Labile Human Nature in the *Vita Sancti Dunstani*,” unpublished paper by Sarah Adams, delivered at the ACLA Annual Meeting, Princeton University, 2006.

### Osbern's *Vita Dunstani*

Osbern followed B. approximately seventy-five to a hundred years later, writing the *Vita Sancti Dunstani*<sup>374</sup> during the later pontificate of Lanfranc, or just after, between 1080 and 1094.<sup>375</sup> By this time the work of the Benedictine reformers was well established and new reforms were ongoing under the Norman prelates. In contrasting the emphasis of Osbern's *Vita Sancti Dunstani* with B.'s *Vita Sancti Dunstani*, Jay Rubenstein argues that these Norman effects are reflected in the *VD(O)*:

This Life leaves the reader in no doubt that Dunstan was the guiding spirit and the driving force behind the monastic reform. [...] Perhaps its significant [sic] seemed more certain with a century of hindsight than it had initially to B. and Adelard, who were content to emphasise Dunstan's sanctity through his visions, his artistic skill and his sufferings at the king's court in the name of principle.<sup>376</sup>

While I agree that the profound changes which England experienced during this period affected Osbern's work, I disagree with Rubenstein's reading of how they are reflected in the *VD(O)*. Osbern does not drop or minimize Dunstan's "visions, his artistic skill" or, most important, "his suffering at the king's court." Instead, the *vita* frames them as part

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<sup>374</sup> Osbern, *Vita Sancti Dunstani auctore Osberno, Memorials of St. Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series 63 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1874, rpt. Wiesbaden: Kraus Reprint Ltd, 1965) 69-161. Hereafter, *VD(O)*.

<sup>375</sup> Stubbs xxxi; Nigel Ramsay and Margaret Sparks, "The Cult of St. Dunstan at Christ Church, Canterbury," *St. Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult*, ed. Nigel Ramsay, Margaret Sparks and Tim Tatton-Brown (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1992) 315.

<sup>376</sup> Rubenstein, "The Life and Writings of Osbern of Canterbury" 39.

of the process of monastic and national reform that brought him into as much contact, and conflict, with secular rulers as with churchmen. Writing Dunstan's hagiography in the early years after the Norman Conquest, Osbern had quite immediate reasons to develop, and perhaps even identify with, the moments of persecution in the saint's life:

Within a few years of the Norman Conquest the Cathedral community at Canterbury suffered a double shock: the church was destroyed by fire (1067), and the community was reduced to order by Lanfranc and the Norman monks whom he brought with him. The precentor, Osbern, was later to refer to the disasters 'seen in our own times,' and Lanfranc evidently found Osbern recalcitrant.<sup>377</sup>

Dunstan's life provided Osbern with material to comment on his own community's difficulties, presenting Dunstan as a stand-in for the community as a whole, unjustly treated as being in need of correction. Those who bring reform must, at least implicitly, bring accusation of wrongdoing with them. The sense of being unjustly accused must work both ways in such a situation, with both the cathedral community and the newcomers seeing the others as difficult, dangerous, and wrong, and with both sides calling God to witness their innocence.

When Osbern wrote his own *Vita Sancti Dunstani* he was not working to establish a new cult. However, as a member of the Christ Church community, he had adequate reason to perceive Dunstan's cult as being threatened. Previous scholarly opinion held that numerous Anglo-Saxon saints were "purged" from the calendars of English churches

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<sup>377</sup> Ramsay and Sparks 313. Osbern's comment can be found in Stubbs 117.

by Norman churchmen who regarded them as barbarians and of dubious authenticity. The principal argument for this view was Edmund Bishop and Aidan Gasquet's work with Anglo-Saxon calendars. Bishop and Gasquet argued that the calendars showed that Dunstan, among others, had been removed from the calendar at Christ Church.<sup>378</sup> David Knowles, in *The Monastic Order in England*, described the disrespect shown to Anglo-Saxon saints as one of the causes of resentment between Norman abbots and the monks over whom they were placed.<sup>379</sup> Among modern scholars, Knowles's view has been widely shared by such scholars as Southern, Stenton, Gibson, Barlow, Rollason, and Klukas.<sup>380</sup>

More recent work has challenged the view that Anglo-Norman prelates, particularly Lanfranc, "purged" Anglo-Saxon saints from the calendars. Pfaff has demonstrated that London, British Library, MS Arundel 155, on which much of Bishop's argument rested, was written between 1012 and 1023 and is therefore not evidence of Lanfranc's work.<sup>381</sup> Furthermore, the Bosworth Psalter (London, British Library, Additional MS 37517) has been shown to be from St. Augustine's rather than Christ

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<sup>378</sup> Edmund Bishop and Aidan Gasquet, *The Bosworth Psalter: An Account of a Manuscript Formerly Belonging to O. Turville-Petre, Esq., of Bosworth Hall, Now Addit. MS. 37517 at the British Museum* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1908).

<sup>379</sup> David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* 118-119.

<sup>380</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer* 243; Stenton 664; Margaret Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1978) 171-3; Frank Barlow, *The English Church 1066-1154: A History of the Later Anglo-Saxon Church* (London: Longman P, 1979) 191; David Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: A Study of Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1982) 59; A.W. Klukas, "The Architectural Implications of the *Decreta Lanfranci*," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 6 (1984): 136-171.

<sup>381</sup> R.W. Pfaff, "Lanfranc's Supposed Purge of the Anglo-Saxon Calendar," *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Karl Leyser*, ed. T. Reuter (London: Hambledon P, 1992) 89-102.

Church at Canterbury.<sup>382</sup> This has led to a reassessment of the degree to which Lanfranc challenged, removed, or degraded the cult of Anglo-Saxon saints, especially Dunstan and Elphege. Susan Ridyard's essay entitled "*Condigna Veneratio*" best articulates this newer position, arguing that Norman investigation and questioning of English saints was neither nationalistic hostility nor skepticism but a process of adopting and adapting English saints to Norman practice and usage:

It is commonly believed that Norman skepticism of the English saints was a direct product of the well-attested absence or inadequacy of English hagiography, and hence that the widespread production of saints' Lives and Miracles after the Conquest is to be understood as an attempt to convince the Normans that the English saints were worthy of veneration. I would suggest that [...] the inspiration for post-Conquest hagiography lay elsewhere. It lay with the Norman churchmen who perceived the usefulness of English saints.<sup>383</sup>

More recently, H.E. Cowdrey has argued that Lanfranc's adjustments to the Christ Church calendar, along with his relocation of Dunstan and others' bones within the cathedral, were not part of Norman scorn for Anglo-Saxons or their saints: "the brevity of the calendar in [Bodleian Library] MS Addit[ional] C. 260 tends to confirm that Lanfranc

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<sup>382</sup> Nicholas Orchard, "The Bosworth Psalter and the St. Augustine's Missal," *Canterbury and the Norman Conquest: Churches, Saints and Scholars, 1066-1109*, ed. Richard Eales and Richard Sharpe (London: Hambledon P, 1995) 87-94.

<sup>383</sup> Ridyard, "*Condigna Veneratio*" 205. See also David Rollason, *Saints and Relics* and Margaret Gibson, "The Normans and the Angevins, 1070-1220" *A History of Canterbury Cathedral*, ed. Patrick Collinson, Nigel Ramsay, and Margaret Sparks (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) 38-68 in which they realign their earlier positions.

curtailed the observances of Christ Church. Nevertheless, the evidence is strong that he did so with no special prejudice against English saints.”<sup>384</sup> Cowdrey argues that the Normans’ questioning of local cult practices and testing of relics were part of an authentication process designed to bring stability to the English church.<sup>385</sup> He further argues that “there is no positive trace of a cessation of the feasts of Dunstan, Elphege or major English saints.”<sup>386</sup> This position remains the prevalent one at the moment.

On the other hand, even within this revised scholarly position there is evidence to show that Dunstan’s cult was not fully secure in the years after the Conquest. Cowdrey admits, “Lanfranc’s Constitutions for Canterbury make no mention whatsoever of Dunstan even among the feast of the third rank.”<sup>387</sup> Ramsay and Sparks hold that Dunstan’s cult was under specific threat in this omission: “this was not just part of a blanket objection to all Old English saints – Lanfranc even encouraged Osbern to write a biography of St. Elphege [...] – and it must be seen as at any rate an initial opposition to Dunstan *ipse*.”<sup>388</sup> Cowdrey perceives this silence as due to Norman brevity rather than hostility, but concedes that there was curtailment of the Christ Church calendar<sup>389</sup> and that “there is some evidence for a post-Conquest discontinuance of external visits to Dunstan’s resting place.”<sup>390</sup> As Christopher Jones and T.D. Kozachek have demonstrated,

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<sup>384</sup> Cowdrey, *Lanfranc* 177.

<sup>385</sup> Cowdrey, *Lanfranc* 178

<sup>386</sup> Cowdrey, *Lanfranc* 179.

<sup>387</sup> Ramsay and Sparks 313-14.

<sup>388</sup> Ramsay and Sparks 313-14.

<sup>389</sup> Cowdrey, *Lanfranc* 177.

<sup>390</sup> Cowdrey, *Lanfranc* 179.



significant liturgical changes took place at Christ Church “under the direct supervision of Lanfranc.”<sup>391</sup> These changes favored continental rather than Anglo-Saxon patterns: “as with his monastic constitutions so with his calendar, Lanfranc did not follow pre-Conquest English usage, but looked across the Channel for his models.”<sup>392</sup> Christelow argues that the Anglo-Normans may well have “sought not to refine existing institutions, but to define them,”<sup>393</sup> but this does not mean that their efforts were always welcomed by those over whom they ruled.

Furthermore, during Lanfranc’s episcopate numerous saints’ bones in England were exhumed and put to the ordeal in order to authenticate them.<sup>394</sup> Dunstan’s relics were relocated to an anonymous spot within the cathedral among the bones of other, not particularly saintly, former bishops for some time before Lanfranc finally decided to lay them in a place of significant honor.<sup>395</sup> Cowdrey may well be right when he argues that the process of questioning and testing which these saints underwent was undertaken “not in order to discredit but to accredit them.”<sup>396</sup> However, this is a fine line to walk and one which must necessarily involve the possibility that the saint could be discredited.

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<sup>391</sup> Christopher A. Jones, “The Chrism Mass in Later Anglo-Saxon England,” *The Liturgy of the Late Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. Helen Gittos and M. Bradford Bedingfield, Henry Bradshaw Society Subsidia 5 (London: Boydell P, 2005) 119; T.D. Kozachek, “The Repertory of Chant for Dedicating Churches in the Middle Ages: Music, Liturgy, and Ritual,” diss., Harvard University, 1995, 334.

<sup>392</sup> Cowdrey, *Lanfranc* 177.

<sup>393</sup> Stephanie M. Christelow, “Chancellors and Curial Bishops: Ecclesiastical Promotions and Power in Anglo-Norman England,” *Anglo-Norman Studies* 22 (2000): 69.

<sup>394</sup> See for example the *Vita Wistani* in William D. Macray, *Chronicon abbatiae de Evesham*, Rolls Series 29 (London: Longman, Roberts and Green, 1863) 335.

<sup>395</sup> Cowdrey, *Lanfranc* 106 and 182 for a discussion of the multiple locations, including the period in which Dunstan’s location is undocumented. See also Ramsay and Sparks 314.

<sup>396</sup> Cowdrey, *Lanfranc* 178.

It is hard to imagine that an Anglo-Saxon monk in Osbern's position, seeing his community's most prominent saint's bones removed from their place and their history questioned, no matter how gently, could have not perceived these acts as impugning his saint. As Jay Rubenstein has argued, we should differentiate between the attitudes with which the Normans asked the questions and how hagiographers such as Osbern perceived the questions.<sup>397</sup> The spate of hagiographical writing which came out of Christ Church during and shortly after Lanfranc's episcopate likely has as *one* of its sources Lanfranc's interest in establishing documentary evidence for the saints and practices of the church:

It almost seems as if some of the Christ Church monks in the century following the conquest wished to show that England had things of value (vernacular chronicles and gospels, with all that these imply for civilization) that were unparalleled in Normandy or indeed anywhere else in Western Christendom.<sup>398</sup>

To this we can certainly add Osbern's work: "His work in celebrating English saints marks him as a member of the Christ Church party asserting the values of Anglo-Saxon civilisation."<sup>399</sup> Cowdrey also admits "there was pressure upon Norman churchmen to be sure of [the saints'] authenticity, especially when the saints concerned were hitherto unfamiliar to them [...] and when there was a dearth of hagiographical literature."<sup>400</sup> While this pressure may not have been driven by hostility, it necessarily expressed skepticism

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<sup>397</sup> Rubenstein, "Liturgy against History" 282.

<sup>398</sup> John Frankis, "Sidelights on Post-Conquest Canterbury: Towards a Context for an Old Norse Runic Charm (DR 419)," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 44 (2000): 8.

<sup>399</sup> Frankis 17. For similar sentiments see also Ann Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1995).

<sup>400</sup> Cowdrey, *Lanfranc* 178.

about the validity of Anglo-Saxon saints. While earlier assessments exaggerated the degree to which calendars were altered under Lanfranc and gave too much weight to supposed nationalistic animosity as a motivating force, there was still ample reason for Osbern to have perceived Dunstan's cult to be under threat or, if one accepts a later date of composition,<sup>401</sup> to have been threatened before finally being solidly reestablished.

The idea that Osbern either perceived Lanfranc's changes as an attack on Dunstan's sanctity or perceived in it the threat of future attacks is supported by the fact that his *Vita Dunstani* makes much of the two incidents in which Dunstan is accused of evil, but makes no mention at all of any postmortem questioning of the saint. Osbern's work clearly does not wish to open the door to those who might reduce the saint's honor, even temporarily or conditionally. Rather than taking the approach of William of Malmesbury in his treatment of the sheriff's wife, Osbern's *Vita Dunstani* treats doubt in Dunstan as a mistake, brought on by listening to evil men.

Osbern's version of Dunstan's persecution at Athelstan's court moves away from a psychological description of the slanderers to focus on the devil as the driving force behind the slander. In doing so, Osbern reframes the story as one not about a conflict between the saint and the world, but as a conflict between God and the devil, played out in conflict between each one's servants. Given the circumstances under which he was writing, Osbern's decision to develop the satanic influence at work in those who opposed Dunstan and to stress their inevitable frustration is hardly surprising. By highlighting

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<sup>401</sup> Cowdrey, *Lanfranc* 183.

these aspects of Dunstan's persecution at Athelstan's court and Edmund's, Osbern offered a strong warning to anyone else who might diminish the saint's reputation and, by implication, offered a defense of his own cathedral community as keepers of the saint's memory. In the *VD(O)*, Dunstan is accepted at Athelstan's court while he studies at Glastonbury and quickly becomes a favorite of the king for his character and his skill on the harp. Dunstan becomes widely known for his multiple artistic skills and his holy way of life.<sup>402</sup> "Therefore, the devil, set on fire by rage because he observed that the young man was supported by such holy beginnings, attempted to bring him into the envy of others."<sup>403</sup> We are told that the envy and slander against Dunstan are not merely wickedness but the direct result of the devil's instigation. The jealousy of Dunstan's slanderers is mentioned once more, but again the phrasing makes the enviers merely instruments in the central struggle: "and so, [the devil] enflames the goads of envy, the workers of evil, who by a false lie, damage the reputation of the young man with the king."<sup>404</sup> We are only told who the attackers are when Dunstan laments after he is beaten by them: "Oh savage insanity of my kinsmen," comparing the kinsmen to the dogs who treat him well.<sup>405</sup> This comparison between the kinsmen and dogs is the only portion of this incident which returns to B.'s portrayal of the attack on Dunstan as willed insanity and is, in fact, a direct quotation; Osbern has lifted Dunstan's lament almost

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<sup>402</sup> *VD(O)* 80-81.

<sup>403</sup> *VD(O)* 81: "Accensus ergo furore diabolus, quod tam sanctis principiis juvenem niti conspiceret, in invidiam aliquorum eum conatus est adducere."

<sup>404</sup> *VD(O)* 81: "Inflammat itaque invidentiæ stimulos, operarios iniquitatis, qui conficto mendacio opinionem juvenis apud regem lædant."

<sup>405</sup> *VD(O)* 81: "O saeva propinquorum meorum vesania."

verbatim from B.'s version. Ultimately, Osbern depicts the slandering of Dunstan not as a struggle between human agents, but as a struggle between the devil and God, both working through human means.

In doing so, Osbern stresses that just as the unnamed and undescribed men who slander Dunstan are unknowingly serving the devil, the devil's persecution of Dunstan is unwittingly serving God's purposes. The vindication and increased glory of the saint is inevitable. The devil does not know "his evil will to be serving God, to the perfecting of God's good will in the man whom God predestined to reign and rejoice together with him."<sup>406</sup> This is not an equal struggle; even the devil's attacks on God are part of God's sovereign purpose. The nature of the men who cast doubt on Dunstan is not a concern of this narrative because they are not the ultimate source of the slander, nor are their concerns the ultimate point of the story. The personalities of the players in this narrative are subsumed into the working out of God's plan. By aligning the antagonists and the protagonist so clearly with the devil and God, respectively, Osbern points the reader to the vindication of Dunstan and those allied with him, such as Osbern himself and the Canterbury community. Men who oppose Dunstan are simply tools of the devil, destined for frustration. In the end, they only increase the glory of those they attack. It is not hard to see how this might have been a comforting position for the people of Christ Church if they perceived their saint to be under attack. Furthermore, it sets up a warning for those who might question the saint, to examine the source of their questions.

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<sup>406</sup> *VD(O)* 81: "ignorans malam voluntatem suam Deo famulari, ad perficiendam Dei bonam voluntatem in homine, quem ad conregnandum et congaudendum ipse praeordinaverat."

Osbern prepares the reader for this approach to the story by prefacing it with an incident which foreshadows Dunstan's persecution. In B.'s version the harp which sings on its own for Dunstan is a sign of divine favor, but it is not connected to the coming persecution. By using the harp's song as a prophecy of difficulty to come, Osbern reinforces his theme of God's sovereignty and the ongoing struggle between God and the devil. Immediately before the devil incites slander against Dunstan, we are told that the saint was invited to the house of a certain religious woman to draw a pattern for a priest's stole for her. While he is working, Dunstan hangs his harp on the wall beside him and it begins to play an antiphon on its own: "the souls of the saints rejoice in heaven, who have followed in the footsteps of Christ, and, because for love of him they poured out their blood, therefore with Christ they will rejoice in eternity."<sup>407</sup> That the saint's harp should play alone is in itself a miracle, of course. In addition, its choice of song reminds both Dunstan and the reader that the foundation of the holy life is the *imitatio Christi* and that there is no more direct imitation of Christ than to be martyred for his sake. The other people in the house do not understand what is happening, but Dunstan correctly interprets the message of the harp as a prophetic warning and promise:

But, by means of the purest perception of his utterly pure heart, directing his thoughts to that heavenly music, he understands himself to be warned, that he must lay hold of harder ways, that he should follow Christ's own footsteps more

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<sup>407</sup> *VD(O)* 80: "Gaudent in cœlis animæ sanctorum qui Christi vestigia sunt secuti, et quia pro Ejus amore sanguinem suum fuderunt, ideo cum Christo gaudebunt in æternum."

closely, that he ought not fear the pouring out of his own blood, if he wishes to possess the kingdom of God and eternal life.<sup>408</sup>

Thus, the miracle of the harp acts as a pre-vindication of Dunstan, adding credence to Osbern's assertion that all this happened because God had predestined Dunstan for Christ-like suffering at the hands of unjust accusers: "but these great things are yours, O Christ, which you willed to be worked in your Dunstan and to be proclaimed to men through our ministry."<sup>409</sup> There is a subtle authorial self-reference here in the use of "our ministry," lest the reader miss the point that the choice between honoring or persecuting the saint is still ongoing and that Osbern has clearly chosen the correct side. The harp's song forms a frame around the attack on Dunstan as the narrator concludes: "therefore, he understood this to be the origin of the struggle of which the divine harp warned him not long ago."<sup>410</sup> By framing Dunstan's fall from grace at Athelstan's court as foreordained for the purpose of glorifying Dunstan, Osbern argues that rejection of Dunstan is proof of his sanctity. The human details are stripped away to highlight the divine narrative which drives the story; Dunstan is living out the old pattern that those who follow Christ's footsteps attract the slander of evil men.

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<sup>408</sup> *VD(O)* 80: "At ille mundissimo mundissimi cordis intuitu coelestem illum musicum intendens, admoneri se intelliget, ut vias duriores arripiat, ut Christi vestigia proprius sequatur, ut sanguinis sui effusionem non metuat, si Dei regnum et vitam delectat habere aeternam."

<sup>409</sup> *VD(O)* 81: "sed Tua hæc sunt, Christe, magnalia, quæ in Tuo Dunstano operari et per nostrum ministerium prædicari hominibus voluisti."

<sup>410</sup> *VD(O)* 81: "Intellexit ergo hoc esse principium certaminis ad quod illum divinus nuper citharædus præmonuit."

Like B., Osbern retains King Edmund's miraculous near miss at Cheddar Gorge in order to emphasize the difference between the malicious accusers who slandered Dunstan and the king who foolishly believed them. The narrator differentiates between the will of the king and Dunstan's accusers: "the king, however, showing more favor to deceitful men than was fitting, ordered Dunstan to be deprived of his property and of royal favor and to be ejected from court."<sup>411</sup> Though what he does is not right, the king is foolishly deceived and not consciously choosing evil. When restoring Dunstan, Edmund himself maintains the distinction between his will and the will of the accusers. He says to Dunstan, "I admit, most holy of men, what evil I committed against you; not, by my faith, because I willed it, but because by the worst men I was driven to do it."<sup>412</sup> The king was deceived and so acted wrongly. His will, however, was not set on evil. In emphasizing the difference between the will of the king and the accusers, Osbern offers something of an olive branch to people like Lanfranc who might have called Dunstan into question. Lanfranc had literally removed Dunstan from his place in Christ Church, before restoring him to a better one. If the king's removal and restoration of Dunstan can be read as a figure for Dunstan's later treatment, then Osbern is depicting such treatment as dangerously misguided, but not intentionally evil. Osbern's text warns against such treatment without absolutely damning those who do (or did) such things.

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<sup>411</sup> *VD(O)* 90-1: "Rex autem plus honesto falsis favorem attribuens, Dunstanum et rebus et regia gratia privatum curia proturbari jubet."

<sup>412</sup> *VD(O)* 91-2: "Agnosco, virorum sanctissime, quid in te commiserim mali; non per fidem meam quod ego voluerim, sed quod a pessimis ego hominibus coactus id fecerim."



While keeping the contrast between the malicious accusers and the repentant king strong, Osbern expands the penitent prayer of the king and the narratorial commentary. It vividly dramatizes the danger the king has gotten himself into by listening to malicious accusers. It also reinforces his theme of God's sovereignty. Not only do Edmund's dogs and horse run away with him, as in B.'s version, but also his reins break so that the king is completely without resources to save himself. The narrator emphasizes both the king's helplessness and his awareness of it: "entirely despairing of himself, trusting nothing apart from the mercy of God, he begged for help from heaven."<sup>413</sup> His prayer is presented as direct dialogue, increasing its immediacy for the reader over B.'s narratorial reporting that the king repented. In the *VD(O)*, Edmund prays at length:

Lord God Almighty, who, though you are high over all, look upon the lowly and perceive the exalted from afar, be present now not to a king, but to a man, just like other mortal men, who stands upon the supreme danger of death, nor remember the injuries wrought by me against your faithful Dunstan; because if you will snatch me according to his merits from this present death, as long as I live, you will own me as one devoted to your name and a praiser of him [Dunstan].<sup>414</sup>

Edmund here focuses as much on his submission to God as on his sin against the saint.

Thus the two issues are linked in Edmund's repentance; his rejection of Dunstan

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<sup>413</sup> *VD(O)* 91: "Omnino de se diffidens, de Dei vero misericordia nonnihil confidens, coeleste auxilium implorat."

<sup>414</sup> *VD(O)* 91: "Deus Rex omnipotens Qui, cum sis super omnia excelsus, humilia respicis et alta semper a longe cognoscis, adesto nunc non regi sed homini caeteris mortalibus simili, inque supremo mortis periculo consistenti; nec reminiscaris injuriarum fidei Tuo Dunstano per me illatarum; quoniam si me ipsius meritis a praesenti morte eripueris, quoad vivam, devotum me Tui nominis et illius laudatorem habebis."

displayed an arrogant lack of humility before God's rule. This incident ends with the king not only appointing Dunstan to Glastonbury, but also promising him immense authority.<sup>415</sup> Writing for the monks of Canterbury, who must have felt more than a little dispossessed themselves in the face of the Norman Conquest, and whose saint had been threatened by Lanfranc, this promise of restoration with deep repentance must have offered both consolation to Dunstan's devotees and a warning to his challengers.

### **William of Malmesbury's *Vita Dunstani***

The circumstances under which William of Malmesbury wrote the *Vita Dunstani* were quite different than those of B. and Osbern. He suffered no apparent difficulties from Norman monastic policies, nor lack of patronage. William was a lifelong Benedictine monk – David Knowles lists him as one of the “great names of Anglo-Norman monasticism [who were] whilom children of the cloister.”<sup>416</sup> William was also precentor of his house. Describing this position, Knowles writes that this “office, though it came to have an administrative side, was chiefly concerned with liturgical and literary matters [...] in the early years of reorganization he sometimes had charge of the growing library, as had William of Malmesbury.”<sup>417</sup> He had a job suited to his talents and apparently his desires; in 1142 William was offered the abbacy of Malmesbury and

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<sup>415</sup> *VD(O)* 92: “Sit disponendis in palatio rebus libera tibi semper facultas; sit in toto Anglorum imperio iudicandi inter virum et proximum ejus summa potestas.”

<sup>416</sup> Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* 420.

<sup>417</sup> Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* 428. For William's own description of the collection at Malmesbury see his *De gestis pontificum* (Rolls Series 52) 431-2.

refused it.<sup>418</sup> Thomson writes, “In his scholarly and literary achievements William is, on the one hand, unique and outstanding, on the other, representative of the concerns, traditions, virtues, and limitations of Benedictine monasticism.”<sup>419</sup> It seems that William was well suited to his place in history; certainly his hagiography was not an attempt to change his own position.

As discussed in the chapter on questions, William was an Anglo-Norman, a product of both Anglo-Saxon and Norman church culture. His treatment of the sheriff’s wife’s questions shows him passing over an opportunity to demonize the Normans. Hugh Thomas argues that William himself consistently framed English history and hagiography as conflict not between Anglo-Saxon and Norman but between barbarian-pagan and civilized-Christian. William, he argues, “saw barbarism as a historical phenomenon that a people could pass beyond, rather than as some kind of innate and unalterable characteristic.”<sup>420</sup> Thus in William’s writing both the English and the Normans are condemned for greed, lust, power mongering, destruction, ignorance, and declines in piety at different moments in their histories, and praised for learning and virtue at others.

The conflict which William had to negotiate in writing the *Vita Dunstani* was rather different from those with which B. and Osbern dealt. William was a professional hagiographer and the *Vita Dunstani* was done on commission for Abbot Hugh of Blois

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<sup>418</sup> Rodney M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 2003) 6.

<sup>419</sup> Thomson, *William of Malmesbury* 8.

<sup>420</sup> Thomas 260.

for Glastonbury. William's *Vita Dunstani* was written ca. 1129 - 1130.<sup>421</sup> At this point, Glastonbury was attempting to recover from its loss of land, money, and prestige after the Conquest. Michael Costen has demonstrated that the monastery's fortunes were at low ebb when Dunstan was made abbot, but that it had obtained substantial new holdings from royal and noble patrons up until the time of the Norman Conquest.<sup>422</sup> As David Knowles puts it, "Glastonbury, at the time of *Domesday*, had been the wealthiest abbey in England," but "its history since the Conquest had been but a record of misfortune."<sup>423</sup> It is clear that William's commission to write the *VD(W)* was part of a larger campaign to reconstitute Glastonbury's fortunes, in part by restoring the abbey's reputation for holiness in the past and present.<sup>424</sup> William was a confrater of Glastonbury; he thanks Glastonbury profusely in his writing for their help with his historical research, and it is possible that his unusually classical education had been obtained there as well.<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Winterbottom and Thomson xiv-v. Stubbs places the *VD(W)* after 1120, but does not narrow the date further. xxxv.

<sup>422</sup> Michael Costen, "Dunstan, Glastonbury and the Economy of Somerset in the Tenth Century," *St. Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult*, ed. Nigel Ramsay, Margaret Sparks and Tim Tatton-Brown (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1992) 25-44. See also R. Fleming, "Monastic Lands and England's Defense in the Viking Age," *English Historical Review* 100 (1985): 247-265 and Antonia Gransden, "Legends and Traditions Concerning the Origins of Bury St. Edmunds," *English Historical Review* 100 (1985): 1-24, both detailing the types of predation to which Glastonbury and other ninth-century monasteries would have been subject.

<sup>423</sup> David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* 180. See also the table at 702.

<sup>424</sup> John Scott, ed. and trans., *The Early History of Glastonbury: An Edition, Translation and Study of William of Malmesbury's De antiquitate Glastonie ecclesie* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1981) 1 and Antonia Gransden, "The Growth of the Glastonbury Traditions and Legends in the Twelfth Century," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 (1976): 337-58. See also William's own introduction to the *VD(W)* in Stubbs 250-53.

<sup>425</sup> Scott 4; Thomson, *William of Malmesbury* 5. Marjorie Chibnall, reviewing the first edition of Thomson's work in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 39 (1988): 463, suggested that Canterbury could also have been the place for William's education and Thomson concedes this possibility as well in his second edition, p5 n. 12.

However, Glastonbury's need for its own hagiography of Dunstan conflicted with another of William's loyalties. Glastonbury was engaged in a long running dispute with Canterbury over which church actually possessed the bones of St. Dunstan. Eadmer, of Canterbury, who had written a strong letter to Glastonbury denouncing their claim to hold the body, was personally known to and highly admired by William.<sup>426</sup> Furthermore, William was indebted to Canterbury for help in his historical research: "The fact is that [William's] commission to write [the *VD(W)*] put him in a most embarrassing position: he had to satisfy Glastonbury, and yet he surely had no desire to attack Eadmer or his community."<sup>427</sup> Winterbottom and Thomson argue that this dilemma explains William's decision to criticize Osbern's *Life* of Dunstan for historical inaccuracy, rather than Eadmer's *Life*, which makes the same claims as Osbern's. "[Osbern] is scornful of the Latinity of B., and yet drew largely on B.'s work [...] William of Malmesbury, who visited Canterbury, relied on Osbern for his biography, and his only real criticism of Osbern's work was on the grounds of his ignorance of Glastonbury's history."<sup>428</sup> Since Osbern had already been attacked by Eadmer, William's own criticism would not seem like a betrayal of the Canterbury community, but would at least partially satisfy Glastonbury.

His divided loyalties, combined with his caution as a historian, kept William from definitively confirming Glastonbury's claims to Dunstan's bones, though he never

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<sup>426</sup> Thomson, *William of Malmesbury* 71, 73.

<sup>427</sup> Winterbottom and Thomson xxii.

<sup>428</sup> Ramsay and Sparks 315. See also Rubenstein, "The Life and Writings of Osbern of Canterbury" 38.

explicitly denies it either. Instead, he negotiates the space between denial and confirmation throughout the *Vita Dunstani* by applying his rhetorical skills, along with his understanding of history as context for the present. “William approached his classical readings as a ‘professional’ historian. He liked to date his authors, in relation to one another, and to major events and rulers.”<sup>429</sup> Rodney Thomson speaks of the past as a legacy in William’s mind, a thing to be “recover[ed] and promot[ed]” for its own sake, but also for its striking relevance to contemporary events.<sup>430</sup> He further argues that, “[William’s] interest in Greco-Roman antiquity [...] is central to [his] scholarship [...] *it provides a key (if we add biblical and patristic antiquity as well, the key) to [his] thinking about [his] contemporary world*”<sup>431</sup> (emphasis mine). William’s use of the past as context for the present is apparent not only in his application of the classical past to the English present but also in the application of the recent past to the present. This historical approach is as much at work in his hagiographies as in his more explicitly historical writing. As Thomson and Winterbottom have both separately demonstrated, William brought his strong Latinity and wide classical reading to bear in his hagiographic writing.<sup>432</sup> Elsewhere, Winterbottom, citing William’s treatment of the incident at Cheddar in the *Vita Dunstani* as an example of William’s skill with the Latin language

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<sup>429</sup> Rodney M. Thomson, “John of Salisbury and William of Malmesbury: Currents in Twelfth-Century Humanism,” *The World of John of Salisbury*, ed. Michael Wilks, Studies in Church History Subsidia 3 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984, 1994) 120.

<sup>430</sup> Thomson, “John of Salisbury” 122.

<sup>431</sup> Thomson, “John of Salisbury” 117.

<sup>432</sup> Rodney M. Thomson, “Satire, Irony and Humour in William of Malmesbury,” *Rhetoric and Renewal in the Latin West 1100-11540: Essays in Honour of John O. Ward*, ed. Constant J. Mews, Cary J. Nederman, and Rodney M. Thomson, Disputatio 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003) 129-148.

and classical rhetoric, writes, “I could spend the rest of this paper on the literary allusions here; and they are certainly part of the *sal Romanus* [...] though thoroughly Christian, it is told in more or less timeless Latin.”<sup>433</sup> The sophisticated application of this classical knowledge in William’s hagiographies demonstrates that the situation to which they spoke was significant enough to merit the full use of the tools afforded by classical rhetoric and content. “For William antiquity was [...] a source of models and exempla applicable to contemporary situations.”<sup>434</sup> Thus we see in the *Vita Dunstani* the application, by classical rhetorical means, of tenth-century events to twelfth-century concerns.

In the *Vita Dunstani*, William did not claim that Glastonbury was the final resting place for Dunstan’s relics. In doing so, he avoided contradicting Eadmer, Canterbury, and his own probable opinion on the matter. At the same time he gave Glastonbury a *Life* which subtly hints that though Dunstan’s bones may be exiled from their proper home, i.e. Glastonbury, the saint’s exile cannot be permanent. William achieves this by knitting three separate events – the miraculous harp, the first accusation, and the second accusation – into a single, cohesive plot arc. None of Dunstan’s previous hagiographers made explicit links between these three events.<sup>435</sup> William reorganizes the elements

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<sup>433</sup> Michael Winterbottom, “The Language of William of Malmesbury,” *Rhetoric and Renewal in the Latin West 1100-11540: Essays in Honour of John O. Ward*, ed. Constant J. Mews, Cary J. Nederman, and Rodney M. Thomson, Disputatio 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003) 144.

<sup>434</sup> Thomson, “John of Salisbury” 119; see also Rodney M. Thomson, “William of Malmesbury as Historian and Man of Letters,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 29 (1978): 402-7.

<sup>435</sup> The possible exception to this is the lost life of Dunstan in Old English which Winterbottom and Thomson label Eng. and to which William may have had access. However, it is unlikely that Eng. used this

found in B.'s and Osbern's versions into a single narrative of accusation which is interrupted by time, rather than leaving the pieces as three separate stories. Together these pieces signal that any trouble or alienation Dunstan might suffer, such as contests over his final resting place, are certain to be resolved in a way that redounds to the saint's glory.

William moves the position of the harp incident so that the harp's song is not only a prophetic warning of the accusation to come, but also a mechanism for the accusation of witchcraft. This signals that the accusations are all one narrative arc within the larger story. While Dunstan is visiting a woman named Æthelwynn, a harp hanging on her wall plays by itself. Dunstan's visit to Æthelwynn's house is presented as an interlude during his time at Athelstan's court so that both the women who witness it and the rest of the court are aware of the harp's playing. Dunstan's enemies are already at work before the harp plays, "alleging that [Dunstan] relied on black arts to win the king's regard."<sup>436</sup> When they heard the harp, "they contrived to make a mark of divine favour into a proof of madness [...] The sowers of calumny brought the story to the ears of the courtiers, representing it as an instance of Dunstan's evil arts."<sup>437</sup> What was in Osbern's text an unrelated miracle is now part of the accusation sequence.

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narrative strategy only to have it ignored by all other hagiographers but William; see Winterbottom and Thomson xviii-xix.

<sup>436</sup> *VD(W)* 180: "dicebant eum maleficis artibus niti, proindeque gratiam regalem mercari."

<sup>437</sup> *VD(W)* 180-182: "donec rem divinae dignitationis in argumentum concinnarent furoris [...] Namque sutores calumniarum rem quasi Dunstani malefitium curiae auribus intulerunt."



William's narrative further uses the harp's playing to mark both accusations as part of God's process for honoring Dunstan. In doing so he models how one ought to respond to events one doesn't understand and reminds the reader that setbacks in the saint's veneration are also providential. Dunstan's accusers are contrasted with two sets of people: the women at Æthelwynn's house, where the harp plays, and the kings Athelstan and Edmund. The spiritual state of the two groups is apparent in their response to it: "this seemed, as indeed it was, wonderful to the others, especially the women who chattered a cheerful response. But Dunstan was more perceptive."<sup>438</sup> Winterbottom and Thomson note that the chattering of the women is also specifically used to refer to women in William's *Gesta regum*.<sup>439</sup> The women fail to grasp the significance of the event. They receive no special insight from the miracle, but they do at least recognize a miracle as such and respond positively. Their spiritual understanding may be weaker than Dunstan's (he recognizes it as a warning to persevere in trouble) but they do not respond with hostility. Like the women who marvel though they don't understand, one ought to treat a good thing as such, even if one doesn't understand its full significance. The women who do not fully understand the harp's significance, but who welcome its playing and Dunstan's presence, exemplify the alternative response available to the courtiers. They could have responded faithfully, even if they did not recognize what the harp signified. Those who make evil of good, as the courtiers did, expose their own antipathy to God's work.

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<sup>438</sup> *VD(W)* 182: "Mirum id, ut erat, videri ceteris et maxime mulierculis, laeto plausu gannientibus."

<sup>439</sup> Winterbottom and Thomson 33, n. 4.

The two kings who are deceived into rejecting Dunstan demonstrate both the difficulty of resisting people set on evil and that this difficulty is ultimately no excuse. When Dunstan is accused of using witchcraft to make his harp play, “rumor spread and everyone looked askance at the young man.”<sup>440</sup> Clearly, rumors are highly effective and difficult to resist. The narrative describes Athelstan as “hemmed in,” so that he “withdrew his favor from Dunstan.”<sup>441</sup> Later, Edmund is described in terms with the same connotations. Not only the saint, but also the kings are under attack by the accusers: “they laid siege to the king and brought him over to their way of thinking.”<sup>442</sup> However, the kings, especially Edmund, are not exonerated by the ferocity of the attacks on them. When Edmund banishes Dunstan the narrator calls it “a stupid and wanton act, for nothing is worse than to wage war with a one-time intimate.”<sup>443</sup> Edmund brought Dunstan to court because of their former friendship and because he knew that he needed the guidance of the saint’s more mature wisdom. Indeed, Edmund’s decision to repent on the cliff edge is described as retention of clear thinking: “he kept his nerve in the crisis, and thought rationally.”<sup>444</sup> Edmund knew enough to know that he should not have turned against Dunstan. Like the women, the kings here stand as a warning to those who might find themselves caught between saints and their detractors. They are weak and the attack is fierce. Still, they know enough to honor the saint, despite the accusers.

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<sup>440</sup> *VD(W)* 182: “Serpis rumor ab unis in alteros, omnesque lividis obtutibus adolescentem aspitiebant.”

<sup>441</sup> *VD(W)* 182: “et regis aures obsedit et animos a Dunstano putavit.”

<sup>442</sup> *VD(W)* 200: “Regem temptantes in eandem traducunt sententiam.”

<sup>443</sup> *VD(W)* 200: “stulte prorsus et proterve, quia nichil turpius est quam si cum eo bellum geras quocum familiariter vixeras.”

<sup>444</sup> *VD(W)* 202: “Non tamen ille in tanto periculo sui oblitus, sensatas cogitationes volebat animo.”

Finally, William uses Dunstan's restoration by Edmund and vindication from both incidents of accusation to make clear that the innocent will always be publicly vindicated, even if that vindication is delayed for a significant period of time. In B.'s and Osbern's work, Edmund is aware that his brother esteemed Dunstan, but there is no mention that Edmund and Dunstan had interacted personally. In William's version, when Edmund invites Dunstan to his court, he is motivated by previous friendship:

He had not forgotten the friendship he had formed with him in his brother's time, and he well remembered his good sense in counsel, his eloquence, and his firmness in action [...] he thought it senseless not to share his new power with one whom he had admitted to his intimacy of old.<sup>445</sup>

The narrative also makes clear that the anger Dunstan arouses is not from a new source: "he aroused fires of anger that had for some time been damped down."<sup>446</sup> Their motives and their mechanisms are also the same as before, reinforcing the reader's sense that this is not a new episode, but a continuation of a previous one: "they did not hesitate to abuse him in public or slander him privately, if it had the effect of hurting him. Madness provided weapons; anger found what it could invent, envy dug up what it could gnaw on."<sup>447</sup> This eliminates the sense left in the previous versions that there is no closure to what happens to Dunstan at Athelstan's court. Dunstan's public vindication and his

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<sup>445</sup> *VD(W)* 198: "Non enim exciderat animo amicitia tempore fratris cum eodem viro federata. Herebant menti prudentia in consilio, facundia in verbo, constantia in facto [...] citra rationem putavit nisi cum eo participaret potestatem novam cui veterem communicaverat amicitiam."

<sup>446</sup> *VD(W)* 198: "Ignes irarum quondam sopitos exsuscitavit."

<sup>447</sup> *VW(W)* 198: "Ad nocumentum ergo eius nec temperabant palam convitio nec clam maledicto. Furor arma ministrat: invenit ira quod confingat, exculpit livor quod arrodat."

enemies' failure are long delayed, but they are not denied to the saint or the reader. By bringing the two episodes of persecution at a king's court together, William emphasizes that vindication from all accusation will eventually come for men like Dunstan. It is not difficult to see this as offering the Glastonbury community a consolation in their struggle with Christ Church. If they are falsely accused on behalf of the saint, will they not also be vindicated, even if this vindication comes after a long period of time?

### **William of Malmesbury's *Vita Wulfstani***

The sheriff of Nottingham's wife's questions are not the only doubt in the *VW(W)*. Indeed, Wulfstan is the only saint discussed in this dissertation to appear in three out of four chapters. While the saint's gentle response to the wife and God's answer to her prayers may seem to offer an open license to doubt the saint, the *VW(W)* also warns off those who might cast doubt on Wulfstan through accusations. Unlike the accusers in Dunstan's life, Wulfstan's accusers are not just discredited; they suffer for their attacks on the saint. The *Vita Wulfstani* makes clear that accusations against Wulfstan must have evil motives and that they will be punished. William's concern to make this point may have been motivated by Wulfstan's connection to the excommunicated Archbishop Stigand. During Lanfranc's archiepiscopate, Wulfstan of Worcester (later St. Wulfstan) was one of several bishops required to make professions of obedience to Lanfranc

because they had been previously consecrated by Stigand.<sup>448</sup> William would have been well aware of the significance of this profession; Wulfstan was not only being asked to affirm his loyalty to his Archbishop, but to clear himself of the charges of heresy associated with Stigand. Stigand had been designated a “*mali caput*, a divider of the church,” by Pope Alexander, labeling him with the same language used for the Cadalan schismatics.<sup>449</sup> Cowdrey describes Alexander’s writ of summons to Wulfstan and the other bishops as reiterating the English’s church’s “particularly close relationship to the Roman church.” However, it is difficult not to see the potential threat in these words: “Although the Roman church should be vigilant to correct all Christians, it is especially concerned to examine *your* customs and way of life, and to renew by diligent visitation the Christian religion in which it at first instructed you”<sup>450</sup> (emphasis mine). William briefly mentions the Stigand controversy in the *Vita Wulfstani* and dismisses it as “irrelevant” to Wulfstan’s accession to the bishopric. Indeed, he makes it sound as if there was no contact between Wulfstan and Stigand.<sup>451</sup> However, there are two incidents in the text in which Wulfstan is charged with wrongdoing and miraculously vindicated. Beyond reiterating the principle that accusations against a saint must be founded in an evil will, Wulfstan’s connection with Stigand gave William a very immediate reason to mark Wulfstan as unimpeachable.

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<sup>448</sup> Cowdrey, “Lanfranc, the Papacy, and the See of Canterbury” 457.

<sup>449</sup> Cowdrey, “Lanfranc, the Papacy, and the See of Canterbury” 451.

<sup>450</sup> Quoted without citation in Cowdrey, “Lanfranc, the Papacy, and the See of Canterbury” 452.

<sup>451</sup> Michael Winterbottom and Rodney M. Thomson, *Saints’ Lives* 47-49. For William’s other description of Stigand and Wulfstan’s connection see *The Deeds of the Bishops of England (Gesta pontificum Anglorum)*, trans. David Preest (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 2002) especially 28, 168.

It would be interesting and useful if we could compare William of Malmesbury's *VD(W)* to Coleman's *Life* of Wulfstan, which William claimed as his source, especially since "William's description of what he was doing as (effectively) 'translation' must be taken with a grain of salt, given the freedom with which he customarily treated what he pronounced to be verbatim citations of earlier texts."<sup>452</sup> Such a comparison would, among other things, demonstrate how the two authors dealt with the accusations leveled against the saint by a fellow monk named Winrich and an unnamed young man. Both accuse Wulfstan of being self-serving, of indulging his own desires at the expense of his duty. Winrich accuses Wulfstan of exceeding his authority and usurping the role of a bishop while still a monk. The young layman accuses Wulfstan of sloth and gluttony. What complicates both these incidents is that, as in Stigand's real-life case, each one making the accusation has some reasonable grounds for believing his own accusation. They are not, like Dunstan's accusers, concocting deliberate lies. At the same time, the saint *is* vindicated and both accusers receive harsh rebuke from the narrator as well as miraculous punishments. The narrative makes clear that at bottom they are the same as Dunstan's accusers. They are motivated by their own glory, power, and comfort. Wulfstan's work threatens that and so they attack him.

The first accusation against Wulfstan is particularly dangerous to the saint, because it has some basis in canon law. While a priest, but before being made bishop,

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<sup>452</sup> Winterbottom and Thomson xvi. Cf. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*. For a scholarly position which argues that a great deal can be learned or extrapolated about Coleman's text from William's see A. Orchard 39-58.

Wulfstan begins preaching to the people. Winrich, his critic, asserts that only a bishop had authority to preach: “a monk’s role was silence in the cloister, not assaulting the ears of the people with sermons as melodramatic as the gestures that accompanied them. Such behaviour looked more like canvassing for office than the performance of a religious duty.”<sup>453</sup> The tone of this accusation sounds petty but, as Winterbottom and Thomson point out, it has a basis in orthodoxy:

Only ordained priests should preach, not monks or laity [...] Although the “normative” Anglo-Saxon texts generally assign the duty of preaching to bishops and mass-priests alike, the Constitutions of Oda [...] and I Cnut 26 [...] only treat bishops, so Winrich, though a foreigner, may have been invoking a strict interpretation current in pre-Conquest England. Martin Brett informs us that he knows of no relevant texts which actually encourage monks to preach.<sup>454</sup>

Winrich’s complaint, then, is not whole cloth falsehood. At the same time, there is a contradiction in the regulatory texts; some limit the role of preacher to bishops, but some allow mass-priests to preach. As William makes clear, Wulfstan had been ordained a mass-priest before he began preaching. Furthermore, there is some hagiographic precedent for unlicensed preaching. Abbot Equitius of Valeria, whose hagiography appears in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, was given a commission from heaven to preach, and when he was questioned by the Roman clergy, the messengers sent to rebuke

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<sup>453</sup> VW(W) 36-7: “Monacho silentium et claustrum competere, non pompatico gestu et sermone populi auribus insultare. Videri ergo magis alicuius ambitum dignitatis quam executionem pietatis.”

<sup>454</sup> VW(W) 36, n3.

him were overcome with holy terror.<sup>455</sup> Thacker writes that “as his authority for these activities he alleged a personal vocation, and when he was condemned as an unlicensed preacher his claims were miraculously vindicated.”<sup>456</sup> A monastic audience would have been well aware of this controversy. As Winterbottom and Thomson go on to point out, “The issue [of monastic preaching] was, however, to become a lively one in the twelfth century.”<sup>457</sup> It, along with the question of monastic property ownership, was a particular feature of the changes being negotiated in the Anglo-Norman church. Winrich’s accusation cannot be easily dismissed by the audience as a lie because it stems from an ongoing controversy in William of Malmesbury’s own era. In vindicating Wulfstan, William of Malmesbury takes a side in the controversy, presenting Wulfstan’s preaching as demonstrably in line with the will of God.

The most obvious demonstration within the text that Winrich’s complaint is not a legitimate rebuke, but a false accusation, is that God vindicates his saint and forces the accuser to beg for forgiveness: “when [Winrich] had settled down to sleep, he found himself rapt in his mind before the tribunal of an unknown judge.”<sup>458</sup> That this tribunal is the triune God himself is established by the use of the singular subject and predicate in the next sentence: “the judge rebuked him sternly for upbraiding His servant the day

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<sup>455</sup> Gregory 19-24.

<sup>456</sup> Thacker, “Bede’s Ideal of Reform” 133.

<sup>457</sup> VW(W) 36, n3.

<sup>458</sup> VW(W) 36-7: “Cum enim ad quietem composuisset membra in lecto, ad tribunal iudicis ignoti raptus est animo.”



before for the good he did by his sermons.”<sup>459</sup> This is the ultimate trump card in the hagiographic repertoire; God himself has appeared to defend his saint. It is telling that the judge is “unknown” to Winrich, implying that he does not know God. Having no excuse, Winrich must lie on the floor and is beaten with rods so severely that when called back by the tribunal for more questioning, he promises to encourage Wulfstan to preach more:

The urgency of his predicament would have made him say anything, and he swore by all that is holy that he would make no more objections, but would go out of his way to encourage Wulfstan and others to preach; only let the judge in His mercy prolong his life and save him from this extreme anguish.<sup>460</sup>

Though the narrator tells us that Winrich was “rapt in the spirit” for this experience, it is clear that he genuinely experienced his punishment in the body. The next morning he bears on his back the visible marks of the rods. His pain is only relieved when he confesses to the prior and receives Wulfstan’s blessing. While in Dunstan’s *Lives* the accusers are left to the eternal consequences of their sins, in the *VW(W)* punishment for accusers comes swiftly. There is a warning here not only of future damnation, but also of the immediate wrath of God against those who oppose Wulfstan and this type of work.

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<sup>459</sup> *VW(W)* 36-7: “Ab eo itaque gravi severitate increpatus cur servum suum pridie de bono predicationis obiurgasset.”

<sup>460</sup> *VW(W)* 38-9: “Ille, cui nichil illius temporis necessitas non extorqueret, per quicquid sanctum est deieravit [sic] se non modo ultra non prohibiturum sed etiam ultro ad predicationem et eum et alios impulsurum: tantum sibi miseratio iudicis vitam prorogaret in posterum, ut illius evaderet angoris articulum.”

But William does not rely on the miracle alone to vindicate Wulfstan. Beyond retelling the miracle, the narrative justifies Wulfstan through his motives and the result of his work. The *VW(W)* shows that Wulfstan has more properly fulfilled the role of monk than Winrich has. The narrator asserts that Wulfstan acted “in all modesty [...] shrouded in a cloak of humility.”<sup>461</sup> Like Equitius, Wulfstan’s personal humility adds weight to his claim that he had a divine obligation, not a personal agenda, to preach. However, it is not enough to demonstrate that Wulfstan did not violate the monastic rule in order to gain power and glory. The narrative must demonstrate that Wulfstan’s preaching was actually a fulfillment of a monk’s role and that it served the purposes of God. Before the accusation is voiced, the narrative describes the circumstances that led to Wulfstan’s preaching: “Wulfstan noticed that the people were drifting away from good behaviour because they were short of sermons.”<sup>462</sup> In other words, the churchmen who should have been preaching were neglecting their duty. The failure of men like Winrich to preach was leading to sin among the people; if Wulfstan had remained silent he too would have been complicit in the populace’s sin. This is Wulfstan’s own defense when he is confronted by Winrich: “nothing was more acceptable to God than the summoning of an errant people back to the way of truth; and he would not give up. If he came to hear of anything more acceptable to Christ he would do it at once.”<sup>463</sup> This is not an argument from subjectivity, but an appeal to a standard that Wulfstan, Winrich, and the

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<sup>461</sup> *VW(W)* 36: “hoc summa modestia [...] sub humilitatis latebra.”

<sup>462</sup> *VW(W)* 34: “Animadvertens enim penuria predicationis populum a bonis moribus diffluere.”

<sup>463</sup> *VW(W)* 36: “Nichil esse magis Deo gratum quam populum pessimeuntem in viam veritatis revocare, ideoque non se omissum. Sin aliud quod gratius esset Christo addiscere posset, incunctanter facturum.”

hagiography's audience are bound to acknowledge, that God desires purity among his people. Given that the purity of the church was the underlying justification for the late eleventh- and twelfth-century reforms, it would have been difficult for readers to side with Winrich against Wulfstan on this matter.

Furthermore, Wulfstan's preaching is effective in curbing sin, a *de facto* proof that it was good: "You might have thought that the words he proclaimed to the common people from his high pulpit were thunder from the innermost shrines of apostles and prophets; thunderclaps they were to wicked men, but refreshing showers of rain to the elect."<sup>464</sup> The trope of comparing the saint's words to those of the apostles and prophets is particularly useful to William here. It lends Wulfstan an authority to defy established practices because it recalls the multiple examples from both the Old and New Testaments when prophets and apostles were rebuked for preaching and teaching.<sup>465</sup> The metaphor of rain from Wulfstan watering the elect recalls the Apostle Paul's assertion of humility about his own evangelism: "I have planted, Apollos watered: but God gave the increase."<sup>466</sup> Wulfstan is watering the people and God is giving the work a rich harvest. Therefore, God must approve of Wulfstan's work. Clearly, Wulfstan is following in the apostle's footsteps, and, like the apostle, he is not appropriating undue authority to himself, but simply working and trusting God for the outcome.

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<sup>464</sup> VW(W) 34-36: "Putares ex evangelicis et prophetis aditis verba intonare quae ille ex alto stationis plebi pronuntiabat, adeo ut tonitrua fulminabant in improbos, adeo imbres irrigabant electos."

<sup>465</sup> Consider, for example, the prophets Jeremiah, Elijah and Elisha, the apostles at Pentecost, and, of course, Christ.

<sup>466</sup> I Corinthians 3:6, *Douay-Rheims Bible*.

Interestingly, the first thing we learn about Winrich is that he is foreign, “a monk from overseas.”<sup>467</sup> Winterbottom and Thomson point out that the name is German.<sup>468</sup> Winrich’s origins may simply be a historical fact, but the inclusion here of his story may also be a subtle dig at foreign churchmen who were critical of native saints and church practices. Certainly, the narrative works to undermine Winrich by exposing him as a hypocrite whose true concern is for himself, not the monastic rule. Wulfstan’s sermons were “thunderclaps [...] to wicked men, but refreshing showers of rain to the elect.”<sup>469</sup> The choice of the word “elect” in the metaphor above begins the narrative’s second strategy for discrediting Wulfstan’s accuser. If Wulfstan’s words are refreshing to the elect, those who find them displeasing are, by implication, not elect. As Emma Mason argues, “the writer considered that in moral terms there was little difference between neglecting the Holy Scriptures in order to read the frivolous works of the heathen, and acting so as to prevent the Scriptures themselves from being preached.”<sup>470</sup> Winrich’s rejection of it shows him to be at odds with God’s will. Winrich’s accusation is a smokescreen for his own jealousy. The narrator tells us, “though [Wulfstan] desired to stay hidden, he was found out and carped at by Envy.”<sup>471</sup> The narrative describes Winrich’s good qualities, but cleverly undermines them with a series of “if” clauses,

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<sup>467</sup> VW(W) 36: “transmarinae nationis monachus.”

<sup>468</sup> VW(W) 36, n. 2.

<sup>469</sup> VW(W) 34-36: “adeo ut tonitrua fulminabant in improbos, adeo imbres irrigabant electos.”

<sup>470</sup> Mason, *St. Wulfstan* 69. Mason also argues that this explains the rather odd comparison between Jerome and Winrich which closes the incident, since Jerome, even though he was a hero of the church for his translation of Scripture, had first been chastised for his neglect of it.

<sup>471</sup> VW(W) 36: “Veruntamen ita latere volentem invenit et carpsit invidia.”

exposing his merits as merely superficial and worldly. He was “very learned, if you considered his flow of eloquence; a very sensible person, if you considered his astuteness in worldly matters; smooth and therefore acceptable and agreeable to people, if you considered the polish of his manners.”<sup>472</sup> The building sarcasm of the “if” is even more strongly emphasized in the Latin, which places the *si* at the beginning of each clause. It is not surprising that Winrich is jealous; all the skills which he has cultivated are designed to do what Wulfstan has been doing with great success. Winrich is the one who desires acclaim and public notice; his criticism of Wulfstan is not genuinely founded in the monastic rule, but in his own envy. He has cultivated learning, eloquence, and smooth, agreeable manners, but Wulfstan has the audience and the acclaim. Winrich’s critique of Wulfstan’s style as “melodramatic” is irrelevant to the monastic rule at issue; it, along with his accusation that Wulfstan is working for promotion, reveals his own frustrated ambitions.

Not only his motives, but also his behavior, expose Winrich’s accusation against Wulfstan as baseless. The manner in which he accuses Wulfstan demonstrates that the purity of God’s people is not Winrich’s real concern. If it were, Winrich himself would be a purer man. Besides the worldliness of Winrich’s good qualities, there are his bad qualities. The narrator tells us directly that he has a bad temper. It is clear that he is also a complainer and a gossip: “this man made a habit of constantly caviling at the holy

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<sup>472</sup> VW(W) 36: “si ad litteram spectes eruditissimus, si ad copiam facundiae dicendi validus, si ad calliditatem seculi prudentissimus, si ad morum elegantiam pulchre compositus perindeque hominibus acceptus et carus.”

man's preaching. [...] In the end he did not just say things like this behind Wulfstan's back."<sup>473</sup> Clearly, he has been talking behind Wulfstan's back for some time, spreading dissension among the other monks in the monastery. When he finally confronts Wulfstan, he is not privately asking Wulfstan to repent, but simply losing his temper: "one day, heated by a more bitter attack of bile than usual, he flung [the accusations] in Wulfstan's face."<sup>474</sup> Wulfstan's work resulted in good. Winrich, in contrast, undermines the peace and stability of the monastery with gossip and quarrelling. It is Winrich, not Wulfstan, who constitutes a real threat to the monastic rule under which they live.

The second incident in which Wulfstan is accused of wrongdoing involves a young layman and an even more public venue. In this incident the pattern of vindication for the saint, exposure of the accuser's sin and admonition to the audience, is almost overshadowed by the accuser's direct attack on God. While confirming a group of children at Gloucester, Wulfstan is persuaded to break for lunch in the refectory. A young man in the crowd mocks the bishop for "filling his belly with the monks" and performs a mock anointing: "he snatched up some mud, and smeared the forehead of the nearest baby, murmuring an obscene incantation over it."<sup>475</sup> The young man has impugned the saint's motives in stopping for lunch and has mocked the good work Wulfstan came to do by confirming the children. Much more important, he has debased

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<sup>473</sup> VW(W) 36: "Idem alias et ira prefervidus ad succensendum quod displiceret torquente livore accomodus. Is de predicatione Sancti multa cavillari solitus quaedam ad hanc sententiam exsequebatur. [...] Haec ille non iam tantum a tergo."

<sup>474</sup> VW(W) 36: "Etiam quadam die amariore bile succensus in os obiectavit Wlstanu."

<sup>475</sup> VW(W) 88-9: "Cum monachis ventrem implet suum [...] luto arrepto frontem proximi infantis illiens obscena murmuravit verba."

the sacrament itself, substituting profane things, the mud and obscene words, for sacred ones, the oil of chrism and words of Scripture. The crowd is highly amused, but “vengeance from heaven was at hand, for God resented the mock made of His gift and of the obedience shown by His servant.”<sup>476</sup> More blatantly than in any of the other narratives discussed here, to attack a saint is to despise God. God has given the people baptism. Wulfstan has given his obedience to God. Neither is to be despised. Winrich recovers from his punishment and is restored. However, the young man dies shortly after confessing his sin. Though Winrich worked against God’s servant, he did not directly mock God or encourage others to do so. The young man, however, allowed his accusation against Wulfstan to become blasphemy against God by his misuse of the sacraments. Thus he merits a much more severe punishment than Winrich.

William identifies attacking God’s servants with mocking God to the point that little further justification of Wulfstan seems necessary, but he does offer it. William stresses that Wulfstan’s usual practice was to eat nothing until the work was done:

It was a matter for general wonder that, when eight priests carrying the chrism in turn gave in to fatigue, he kept going without tiring. Such exertions he did not notice, in his love for God; his mind did not yield to old age, but came away victorious as his body failed.<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> VW(W) 88-9: “Caelestis tamen ultio non defuit, quae et donum suum et famuli obsequium derisum indigne tulit.”

<sup>477</sup> VW(W) 87: “Stupori erat omnibus quod, octo plerumque clericis qui crismatorium ferrent vicissim fatigationi succumbentibus, ipse indefessus persisteret. Fallebat nimirum tantos labores amor Dei, ut mens senectuti non cederet sed labente corpore victrix evaderet.”

William is careful to point out that when Wulfstan left his work for lunch on this occasion, it was a one-time break from his pattern, and that he yielded only to the “urgent request of the venerable Abbot Serlo.”<sup>478</sup> Serlo’s reasons for stopping are both pastoral and pragmatic; a break would allow Wulfstan to care for his health, give the others time to line up the children for a more efficient processing, and would “avoid giving the impression that he was spurning something dear to the hearts of devoted servants of God, to whose wishes even the Lord Jesus would sometimes grant a gracious assent.”<sup>479</sup> With such inducements Wulfstan is fully justified in his decision to go in. Indeed, to refuse would be a refusal to imitate Christ. In conceding to Abbot Serlo, Wulfstan demonstrates, as he did in his confrontation with Winrich, that he is a monk among monks, as it were. Wulfstan holds himself to an even higher standard of monastic service and self-denial, though he graciously gives in to the needs of others.

As in B.’s *Vita Dunstani*, the narrative links the evil at work in the young man and the idea of insanity as a dangerous disruption of society. As Mary Lynn Rampolla argues, in the *Vita Wulfstani*, madness also seems to be a metaphor for the disintegration of society. The young man who mocked Wulfstan overturns the social order by urging his fellow citizens to criticize their bishop and mock the sacraments.<sup>480</sup> Rampolla points out that the other lunatics in the same work are also threats to a peaceful social order –

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<sup>478</sup> VW(W) 87: “venerabilis abbatis Serlonis precibus devictus.”

<sup>479</sup> VW(W) 87: “ne videretur aspernari quod servorum Dei vellet devotio, quorum voluntati nonnumquam ipse Dominus Iesus placido se indulgeret assensu.”

<sup>480</sup> Mary Lynn Rampolla, “‘A Mirror of Sanctity’: Madness as Metaphor in the *Vita Wulfstani*,” *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. Sandro Sticca, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 141 (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies SUNY at Binghamton, 1996) 104.



maintainers of vendetta, thieves, and resisters of Wulfstan's authority. The identification between an attack on the saint and an attack on the stability of society is clear. The young man has involved the congregation in his blasphemy. The narrator calls their actions madness: "the madness went further, and the stupid action was taken up with a shout of 'Bind this one's forehead, he's been signed.'"<sup>481</sup> He is also called "the lunatic."<sup>482</sup> But when the young man begins to rave, froth, and beat his head against the wall, it is the result of the devil taking control of him: "no doubt he [i.e. the Devil] who had stirred up the youth's emotions within him now dictated his external movements."<sup>483</sup> There is a direct connection between the accusation against the saint, the blasphemy, and demonic suggestion; the youth's subsequent insanity is not simply punishment for his sin, but the full exposure of it as sin, since both the madman and the sinner have lost their reason and been reduced to animalistic behavior: "the insanity with which he is subsequently stricken is thus both an appropriate punishment and the concrete embodiment of his own actions."<sup>484</sup> The crowd is only separated from this insanity by God's making the insanity manifest as such in the body of the youth:

Soon the boy responsible for the presumptuous behaviour began to rave in front of them all [...] the wretch began to toss his hair about, grimace and batter his

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<sup>481</sup> VW(W) 88: "Processit in ulteriora vesania, tali clamore fatuum factum prosecuta: 'Frontem isti ligate, consignatus est!'"

<sup>482</sup> VW(W) 88: "sevientem"

<sup>483</sup> VW(W) 88: "Illo proculdubio movente sensus exterius ad cuius nutum interiores iuvenis exagitarat affectus."

<sup>484</sup> Rampolla, "A Mirror of Sanctity" 104.

head against a wall. The mob applauded the miracle, praised God in the highest and drove the lunatic from the scene.<sup>485</sup>

The young man was not forced to sin by the devil, but as in the *VD(O)*, he is doing the devil's work, opening himself to his control. In essence, God releases the young man to his true master. The narrative sets up the boy's death in a way that simultaneously reinforces Wulfstan's sanctity and power while emphasizing the severity of the boy's crime. This young man does not confess as Winrich did; he is only saved from drowning in a cesspit by his relatives who pull him out. When Wulfstan is told of the incident, "he grieved as much for the boy's punishment as for his sin," demonstrating his compassion for the sinner.<sup>486</sup> His power, along with the severity of God's disapproval, is shown when Wulfstan sends the boy his blessing: "After he had sent a blessing the patient immediately regained his wits; but a few days later, I suppose because of what he had done or undergone, he completed his allotted span."<sup>487</sup> The boy's return to sanity demonstrates Wulfstan's authority and spiritual power, while his death reinforces the depth of his sin. Peter Brown has argued that "the drama of exorcism was not merely a drama of authority: it was a drama of reintegration."<sup>488</sup> The warning to the reader is clear;

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<sup>485</sup> *VW(W)* 88-9: "Mox enim auctor arrogantiae palam omnibus furere cepit. [...] Ita miser crinem rotare, rictus torquere, ad maceriam caput impingere. Plaudit plebs miraculo, et sullata in altum laude sevientem eliminat loco."

<sup>486</sup> *VW(W)* 88: "His ad aures episcopi delatis, doluit ille tam pro iuvenis culpa quam pro pena."

<sup>487</sup> *VW(W)* 88: "Et benedictione quidem missa statim patiens resipuit; sed credo pro his quae furens egerat vel toleraverat aliquantis post diebus fati munu explevit."

<sup>488</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* 112.

those who do the devil's work risk being turned over to his complete control. The result will be madness, ostracism, and eventually death.

Having entirely avoided discussing the audience for Winrich's accusation, William, when dealing with lay people rather than the community of Worcester itself, is unrelenting in his scorn for their weakness. Though they are not decided on evil there is no apparent natural inclination to good in them either. He describes them as "the mob of children" waiting to be signed.<sup>489</sup> As soon as the monks leave the scene, "the crowd in the cemetery gossiped mightily, saying whatever came in to their heads."<sup>490</sup> Clearly they don't need the influence of the young man to already be straying from pious action. When he begins blaspheming they assent to it easily. There is a strong affirmation of Wulfstan's, and by extension, the contemporary Worcester community's concern for pastoral care. It only takes the length of a monastic lunch break for the laity to move from sacrament to venial gossip to mortal blasphemy. The terms "fickle" and "sheep without a shepherd" appear nowhere in this passage, but they are hardly needed to reinforce the narrative's point. The people are just as ready to follow the anti-Wulfstan as they are to follow the real Wulfstan. They need the guidance of the saint and, more generally, the church authorities as a whole.

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<sup>489</sup> VW(W) 87: "puerorum turba."

<sup>490</sup> VW(W) 89: "Vulgus in cimiterio multa inter se serere, nunc hoc nunc illud quod in buccam venisset dicere."

## Conclusion

From these examples it is possible to see how particular writers used these incidents to address the localized difficulties that they faced. By exploiting the identification between the saint and themselves, or the community for which they wrote, the hagiographers imply their own future vindication. They indict the motives of their own accusers by linking persecution of the saint to an evil will. They also warn those in the middle ground not to side with the accusers, both with positive examples such as Edmund's escape from death, and with indictments of the weakness of those who heed accusations, such as the fickle crowd which encouraged the young man. There are clear borrowings between the three *Lives* of Dunstan, as Whitelock notes.<sup>491</sup> However, these borrowings show careful selection rather than wholesale reproduction. The ways in which the accusations against Dunstan are narrated reveal variations in detail and style which create real differences in the significance given each succeeding narration of the same story. In the same way, William shapes Wulfstan's *vita* to eliminate possible lingering doubts about his sanctity because of his past associations. Working within these broad areas, B., Osbern, and William of Malmesbury each redrew the familiar saints' lives to create an emphasis and significance which best suited the needs of the moment. The subtle ways in which the successive authors reformulated the same story demonstrate their ongoing effort to handle the varying conflicts that they or their communities faced.

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<sup>491</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, "The Appointment of Dunstan as Archbishop of Canterbury," *Otium et Negotium: Studies in Onomatology and Library Science Presented to Olof von Feilitzen*, ed. Folke Sandgren (Stockholm: Kungliga Biblioteket, 1973) 232-247, rpt. in *History, Law and Literature in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Century England*, Collected Studies Series (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981) 238.

## CHAPTER 4

### SELF-DOUBT: I'M NOT THAT HOLY

This chapter looks at incidents of self-doubt by the saints themselves. The chapters above have considered the treatment of doubt from people other than the saint. But what if the doubt is self-generated? Such doubt is qualitatively different than the types of doubt considered above, because it cannot be dismissed as sinful. If the doubt is valid, the saint reveals his weakness. If the doubt is sinful, the saint reveals that he is sinning. In either case, the implications of a saint's self-doubt are that the saint may be too weak or not holy enough. Each of the self-doubting incidents considered here reopens the question of how this particular incident in this particular *vita* promotes the saint's cult, and how its promotional benefits outweigh its potentially undermining effects, because it risks working against the saint even more than doubts generated by observers of the saint.

In the *Life* of Æthelwold, the saint must rebuke himself for a lack of faith before he can be miraculously cured of poisoning. In the two *Lives* of Dunstan, the saint requires a miracle before he will believe a heavenly messenger's assurance that he, Dunstan, will receive the rewards of a saint in heaven. Finally, in the *Life* of Wulfstan, the saint refuses to perform a healing, even though the petitioner has been divinely directed to seek healing from Wulfstan. Examining these incidents in the lives of

Æthelwold, Dunstan, and Wulfstan points the reader back to an awareness of the circumstances under which each particular hagiography was composed. It also reveals the writer at work by highlighting how the text mitigates, explains, or exploits the undermining elements in the incident. Rather than presenting these incidents as examples of human weakness which make the saint all the more personable and accessible to the reader, these texts downplay the potential for weakness in the saint and stress the saint's triumph and miraculous power.

### **Wulfstan's and Ælfric's *Vitae Æthelwoldi***

In the late tenth-century hagiography *The Life of St. Æthelwold*, by Wulfstan the Cantor, St. Æthelwold is deliberately poisoned by clerics who are angry that he has been replacing them with monks: "the envy of the clerics caused the bishop [Æthelwold] to be given poison to drink when he was dining with guests in his own hall and showing them every kindness."<sup>492</sup> Æthelwold withdraws to his room alone and struggles with the poison and, worse, with the crisis of faith which it causes. He feels that he is dying and bitterly rebukes himself for lacking the faith to overcome the poison. This presents the saint to the reader as someone who lacked sufficient faith to meet a challenge. I argue that Wulfstan takes the risk of including Æthelwold's self-rebuke because the specific historical pressures under which he wrote have forced his hand. Wulfstan shapes the

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<sup>492</sup> Wulfstan of Winchester, *The Life of St. Æthelwold*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1991) 34-5: "Ex invidia clericorum datum est episcopo venenum bibere in aula sua cum hospitibus prandenti omnemque eis humanitatem exhibenti." Hereafter, *VÆ(W)*. All translations from the *VÆ(W)* are Lapidge's and Winterbottom's.

poisoning incident to address the very real enemies of Æthelwold who were still active after the saint's death. Wulfstan wrote so soon after Æthelwold's death that he had to exploit, rather than leave out, critical details which may well still have been circulating in the memory of those who had known Æthelwold. In doing so, Wulfstan makes a moment of crisis into more than just a miracle on behalf of the saint; it becomes an exoneration of the entire Benedictine project.

Written in 996 A.D., only twelve years after Æthelwold's death, Wulfstan's *Life of St. Æthelwold* is the first hagiography written about Æthelwold, and it signals the beginning of his cult. It is a simple but essential truism: when Æthelwold's biographers wrote, "their subject was Æthelwold's career as monk bishop and reformer, and their aim was to *prove* Æthelwold's sanctity"<sup>493</sup> (emphasis mine). Particularly at the beginning of a cult, the writer cannot assume that his audience accepts his subject as holy. If the hagiography fails to convince readers of this point and entice pilgrims to the saint's cult, then the cult will fail and saint will be forgotten.

Church life in this period was a nearly continual struggle between cleric and monastic, papal and local authorities, royal and ecclesiastical powers. The successful establishment of a saint's cult was not only a matter of appropriately honoring a saint (no small matter in itself), but of obtaining the significant practical advantages offered by saintly patronage. Æthelwold's own cult began as the Benedictine Reform was continuing in England, and "tenth-century reform was everywhere entwined with the cult

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<sup>493</sup> Yorke, "Æthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century" 65.

of the Church's local heroes.”<sup>494</sup> Individual churches, bishoprics, and monastic houses contended with each other over land rights, hierarchical authority, and jurisdiction as well as periodically clashing with the local lay population over the same issues. In the process, they competed to establish themselves as cult sites. Æthelwold himself established, for his students and successors, a pattern of closely guarding the saints' interests by guarding the interests of foundations with which they were associated, and vice versa. Promoting a saint's cult was a matter of mutually assured success; both the saint and the promoting institution benefited:

At Æthelwold's foundations the relics of earlier English saints were recovered and their cults revived. The cults of Swithun at Winchester and Æthelthryth at Ely were particularly important, and the miracles they performed were seen as sanctioning Æthelwold's actions.<sup>495</sup>

Flocks of pilgrims coming to a saint's shrine generated revenues in tithes and offerings. Saints were protective patrons, not only of the particular individuals who prayed to them, but of their own shrine community. This period led to what Antonia Gransden has called “institutional history:” “a type of saint's life [...] in which the text is characterized by ‘the author's anxiety to define the rights and possessions of the saint's see or monastery.’”<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> P. Wormald, “Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts” 26.

<sup>495</sup> Yorke, “Introduction” 5.

<sup>496</sup> Ted Johnson South, “Changing Images of Sainthood: St. Cuthbert in the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*,” *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. Sandro Sticca, Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies 141 (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies SUNY at Binghamton, 1996) 84, citing Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to 1307* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1974) 305-322.



Though the *Life of Æthelwold* is not an “institutional history,” it was written in the same environment. A church with a successful saint’s cult enjoyed enhanced prestige and the explicit protection of their particular saint against outside threats.

As Wulfstan wrote about Æthelwold, he would have been well aware of how useful Æthelwold’s own cult would be to the interests of the monastery that possessed Æthelwold’s bones. He also would have been aware of two factors working against Æthelwold’s cult. First, Æthelwold was one of that triad of bishops who headed the Benedictine Reform in England.<sup>497</sup> Although the Benedictine Reform was largely an accomplished fact by the time Wulfstan wrote, it was neither finished nor universally supported. For Æthelwold’s cult to succeed, Benedictinism had to succeed as well: “It was after Æthelwold’s appointment as bishop of Winchester that the major period of monastic reform began [...] and it was Æthelwold who wrote the *Regularis Concordia* and played the major role in the Winchester council.”<sup>498</sup> While many people loved Æthelwold for this work, many others hated him. Æthelwold’s own position on the expulsion of clerics had been much stricter than that of most other monastic reformers,<sup>499</sup> which increased the need for Wulfstan to legitimize and justify Æthelwold’s particular approach to reforms through his *vita*. It is not surprising then that Wulfstan would seize

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<sup>497</sup> For a brief summary of Æthelwold’s life and work see Yorke, “Introduction” 13-42.

<sup>498</sup> Yorke, “Introduction” 10.

<sup>499</sup> P. Sawyer, “Charters of the Reform Movement: The Worcester Archive,” *Tenth-Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis concordia*, ed. David Parsons (London: Phillimore P, 1975) 84-93 and Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury* 251-3.

on an incident which asserts the identity between Æthelwold and the Benedictine project so that both are justified simultaneously.

Second, Æthelwold had worked successfully to acquire huge tracts of land for his monasteries, using the names of previous saints to do this. In the process he had acquired enemies in the church and among the laity, particularly the noblemen who lost land to him or found themselves forced to pay rent to the church:

As guardian of the saints' interests, Æthelwold sought to recover the lands which had been granted to the Old Minster and Ely in the pre-Alfredian period [...]

Æthelwold relentlessly pursued his aims through law-suits, land transfers and purchase, and if his houses did not possess suitable charters from their foundation period for the lands to which they claimed title, new charters were constructed in which the history of the house was carefully rehearsed.<sup>500</sup>

This was the era of large scale charter forgery, and Æthelwold's houses were among the leading producers of such charters. Æthelwold's pursuit of lands did not always earn him or his houses the friendship of the nobles, and after his death this lingering resentment, as well as attempts to undo what Æthelwold had gained, would have been apparent to Wulfstan as he wrote Æthelwold's *vita*.<sup>501</sup> Wulfstan would have been well aware of how useful establishing Æthelwold's own cult would be to the interests of the houses he left behind. This may explain why, despite being a protégé of Æthelwold's, Wulfstan did not

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<sup>500</sup> Yorke, "Introduction" 5.

<sup>501</sup> D.J.V. Fisher, "The Anti-Monastic Reaction in the Reign of Edward the Martyr," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 10 (1950-2): 254-270 and E. John, "War and Society in the Tenth Century: the Maldon Campaign," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 27 (1977): 173-95.

write his *vita* in the hermeneutic style, “a rather ostentatious style which delighted in obscure construction and rarefied vocabulary,” perhaps indicating his intention of reaching as wide an audience as possible with his work.<sup>502</sup> Possibly, Wulfstan was even concerned to reach the nobility directly, being aware that there might well have been lingering hostility among them after Æthelwold’s death:

The hostility which Æthelwold’s course of action [of land acquisition] had provoked among the nobility is revealed by those “dispossessed” secular owners who either reclaimed their property in part or strove to obtain more favourable compensation during the anti-monastic reaction after Eadger’s death.<sup>503</sup>

A *vita* which could only be readily understood by the very best of Latin readers would spread a smaller net for adherents of the saint’s cult. Wulfstan’s work, on the other hand, is easily readable, a text designed to be accessible.

It is not hard to see how the poisoning incident could work against Æthelwold. When Æthelwold is poisoned, the poison “crept through all his limbs, threatening immediate death.”<sup>504</sup> Feeling sick, Æthelwold withdraws to his bed without telling anyone he is sick. This in itself is a problem. The saint should not be dying secretly, succumbing to poison. Saints are supposed to die surrounded by witnesses who can later testify to the power and glory the saint displayed as he died. As Æthelwold feels himself

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<sup>502</sup> Yorke, “Introduction” 8.

<sup>503</sup> Mechthild Gretsch, “The Benedictine Rule in Old English: A Document of Bishop Æthelwold’s Reform Politics,” *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Michael Korhammer (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1992) 136.

<sup>504</sup> *VÆ(W)* 34-5: “serpsitque venenum per omnia membra eius, iam instantem minitans sibi mortem.”

dying he rebukes himself for inadequate faith: “He eventually took thought and began to reproach himself, saying to his heart: Now where is your faith? Where are the thoughts of your understanding?”<sup>505</sup> Æthelwold considers his susceptibility to the poison a sign that his trust in God is insufficient. He tells himself, “Is not Christ’s promise in the gospel true and trustworthy: ‘And if believers drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them’?”<sup>506</sup> His reasoning has a clear basis in Mark 16:18, which says, “these signs shall follow them that believe in my name. [...] If they shall drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them.”<sup>507</sup> Æthelwold reasons that if he is now dying from poison, it cannot be because God’s promises are false or inapplicable but because Æthelwold must not be enough of a believer for the promise to be fulfilled in him. Finally, the text offers the image of Æthelwold’s faith as a fire which needs rekindling. After he rebukes himself, the narrator tells us, “the faith kindled by these and similar words overcame all the deadly draught he had taken.”<sup>508</sup> The participle *accensa* is aptly translated as “kindled” since it contains both the metaphor of fire and the sense of “increased” or “roused up.”<sup>509</sup> The saint’s faith must be roused or increased in order to burn off the poison. That Æthelwold has to struggle to do this reveals that his faith was not already sufficient.

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<sup>505</sup> *VÆ(W)* 34-35: “At ille tandem recogitans coepit exprobrare semet ipsum, dixitque ad animum suum: ‘Ubi est modo fides tua? Ubi sunt cogitationes sensus tui?’ ”

<sup>506</sup> *VÆ(W)* 34-35: “Nonne verba Christi vera sunt et fidelia, quibus in evangelio pollicetur dicens: ‘Et si mortiferum quid biberint credentes, non eis nocebit?’ ”

<sup>507</sup> Mark 16:17-18, *Biblia sacra vulgata*: “Signa autem eos qui crediderint haec sequentur in nomine meo. [...] Et si mortiferum quid biberint non eos nocebit.”

<sup>508</sup> *VÆ(W)* 34-5: “His et huiusmodi verbis accensa fides in eo omnem letiferum haustum quem biberat extinxit.”

<sup>509</sup> s.v. *accendo*, D.R. Howlett, T. Christchev and C. White, *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (Oxford: Oxford UP, for the British Academy, 2003); Glare.

Æthelwold's struggle with the poison could be read as doing as much to hurt his image as a saint as it does to promote it. However, a closer look shows that there are multiple factors in this narrative presentation which exploit both generic tropes of hagiography and the historical context of this particular hagiography in order to solidly establish Æthelwold's cult.

First, Æthelwold's poisoning results in a miracle. Details of a saint's daily holiness are important to a hagiography, but miracles are the essential proof of his sainthood. There is no saint who does not perform miracles. Æthelwold's rebuke to himself reveals the weakness from which he starts, but it is also a rousing mini-sermon that results in his faith rising to miraculous heights. In the process it carries the reader along as the suspense builds to a triumphant conclusion. Æthelwold concludes his rebuke to himself by saying, "He who spoke these words [Christ] is surely here in his godhead, even if he is absent in the body. He without a doubt, he can rid you of this virulent poison, for he can always do all."<sup>510</sup> In the text's original Latin, Æthelwold uses a series of negative rhetorical questions in order to move his logic forward and build up his faith. He first directs himself to the words of Christ: "Nonne verba Christi vera?" "Are not the words of Christ true?" He then directs himself to the person of Christ: "Nonne ipse qui haec loquitur?" "Is not Christ who spoke these things here?"<sup>511</sup> These are homiletic tactics meant to get a "yes and amen" from the audience. In his last sentence, Æthelwold

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<sup>510</sup> *VÆ(W)* 34-5: "Nonne ipse qui haec loquitur praesens est divinitate, licet absens sit corpore? Ipse procul dubio, ipse hoc veneni virus in te evacuare potest qui semper omnia potest."

<sup>511</sup> *VÆ(W)* 34.

moves from the rhetorical questions to an explicit statement of the answer which the questions have already implied: “He without a doubt, he can rid you of this virulent poison, for he can always do all.”<sup>512</sup> Æthelwold asks a rhetorical question to address a weakness. He cites relevant scripture. He asks a second rhetorical question to address the weakness. He then supplies the answer explicitly to make it active in the audience after the audience has already seen it coming and is now ready to assent with the speaker. Strictly speaking, Æthelwold is the audience addressed in his own internal dialogue. However, the readers of the *Life of Æthelwold* are also the audience for this sermon. By “hearing” Æthelwold’s conversation with himself, the readers hear a sermon on active faith that clearly shows the saint living up to his own standard, a standard few readers would claim to meet. Æthelwold is clearly shown to be a saint because, ultimately, he is able to perform a miracle by the power of his own faith.

Furthermore, in the genre of hagiography, imitation of previous models is a central form of proof. The holier one is the more one imitates Christ. Therefore, all saints are very similar to one another because they all imitate the same model. By including St. Æthelwold’s triumph over poison, Wulfstan has demonstrated that Æthelwold is just like the earlier and very well-known saints Benedict and Martin.

Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues* describes an incident in which the priest Florentius attempts to poison Saint Benedict that has several parallels to Æthelwold’s poisoning. Florentius’s motives are similar to those of Æthelwold’s enemies. He is “envious as the

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<sup>512</sup> *VÆ(W)* 34.

wicked always are of the holiness in others which they are not striving to acquire themselves.”<sup>513</sup> Florentius is unwilling to adopt the Benedictine life, and he is infuriated by those who do.<sup>514</sup> Also like Æthelwold’s enemies, Florentius resorts to poisoning the saint: “He decided to poison a loaf of bread and sent it to the servant of God as though it was a sign of Christian fellowship.” The use of a friendly meal as a mechanism for delivering the poison is also echoed in the *Vita Æthelwoldi*.

However, the saint’s response to the poison is significantly different and points up the oddity of Æthelwold’s struggle. Benedict is not actually poisoned: “Though aware of the deadly poison it contained, Benedict thanked him for the gift.”<sup>515</sup> Unlike Æthelwold, Benedict is miraculously able to discern the poison before he eats. Instead of eating the loaf, Benedict commands a raven to take the poisoned bread far away where no one will be harmed by it. There is no wavering or fear on his part, no need to rekindle his faith. He exhorts the raven not to be afraid and he mourns for his enemy, but he shows no anxiety over his own health, either spiritual or physical.

As Lapidge and Winterbottom also argue, Æthelwold’s poisoning is based on an episode in chapter six of Sulpicius Severus’s *Life of St. Martin* in which Martin is poisoned and miraculously recovers.<sup>516</sup> Undoubtedly, there is a link between the *Life of Martin* and the *Life of Æthelwold*. The *Life of St. Martin* was one of the most commonly

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<sup>513</sup> Gregory 70.

<sup>514</sup> Gregory 70.

<sup>515</sup> Gregory 71

<sup>516</sup> *VÆ(W)* 35, n. 3. Note, however, that the apocrypha of the Apostle John also have an incident in which the saint survives poison. See Casiday 148.

used models for Anglo-Saxon hagiography and we know that Wulfstan had access to a copy of it.<sup>517</sup> The usefulness of including a miracle in which Æthelwold imitated his predecessor Benedict, while also recapitulating a miracle of St. Martin's, would certainly explain the decision to include the poisoning in the *VÆ(W)*.

However, this does not, on its own, explain why Wulfstan would choose to present Æthelwold's poisoning and faith crisis in the ways he did. Wulfstan's narrative has done significantly more with the passage than reproduce a generic model. It has taken the poisoning and expanded it in detail, significance, and specificity in order to address the historical circumstances working against Æthelwold's cult. The poisoning in the *Life of St. Martin* is very brief, contains no direct attack on the saint, and does not specify the parts of scripture which Martin uses in his prayers for help. Martin poisons himself by accident: "he lived for some time on roots, and during this period he made a meal of hellebore, a plant that they say is dangerous."<sup>518</sup> If there is any malicious agency in this moment it is that of the devil who had sometime earlier promised Martin, "Wherever you go [...] and whatever you attempt, you will have the devil against you."<sup>519</sup> Still, nothing in the incident itself marks the devil as being actively involved in Martin's

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<sup>517</sup> *VÆ(W)* cv.

<sup>518</sup> Frederick Russell Hoare, ed. and trans., "The Life of St. Martin, Bishop of Tours," *The Western Fathers: Being the Lives of SS. Martin of Tours, Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo, Honoratus of Arles, and Germanus of Auxerre* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954) 10-44; rpt. in Thomas Noble and Thomas Head, ed., "The Life of Saint Martin of Tours," *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995) 10. Sulpicius Severus 266: "Hic aliquandiu radicibus vixit herbarum. Quo tempore helleborum, venenatum, ut ferunt, gramen, in cibum sumpsit."

<sup>519</sup> Noble and Head 10. Sulpicius Severus 264: "Quocumque ieris vel quaecumque temptaveris, diabolus tibi adversabitur."



choice of salad. Likewise, the agency by which the poison is defeated is not given the specific development that Æthelwold's narrative offers. Martin "met the threatening danger with prayer and at once the pain vanished."<sup>520</sup> By adding details about the motives for the assault, as well as the means of defense, Wulfstan has made Æthelwold's poisoning by the clerics a referendum on the Benedictine project, adding apostolic authority and Christ's blessing not just to Æthelwold himself, but specifically to his monastic reforms.

A demonstration that Æthelwold's particular deeds in pursuit of Benedictinism fit the eternal patterns of the *imitatio Christi*, as repeated in the lives of the apostles and all the succeeding saints, was essential to the successful promotion of Æthelwold's cult. Through the poisoning incident, Wulfstan accomplishes this by identifying the particulars of Benedictinism with the eternal and universal work of the apostles. The circumstances under which Æthelwold is poisoned and Æthelwold's internal dialogue as he struggles to overcome the poison draw clear links among Æthelwold, Benedictine monasticism, and God's explicit promises of protection. The promise to which Æthelwold clings is given by Christ in the Great Commission:

At length he [Christ] appeared to the eleven as they were at table: and he upbraided them with their incredulity and hardness of heart, because they did not believe them who had seen him after he was risen again. And he said to them: Go ye into the whole world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that

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<sup>520</sup> Noble and Head 10. Sulpicius Severus 266: "imminens periculum oratione repulit statimque omnis dolor fugatus est."

believeth and is baptized, shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned. And these signs shall follow them that believe: [...] They shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.<sup>521</sup>

The similarities between this passage and the circumstances of Æthelwold's poisoning go beyond the mention of poison. Æthelwold is poisoned at dinner, surrounded by what are essentially his disciples: "Many flocked there [to the Old Minster] to serve God, old men who had been professed, novices, and child oblates. [...] He was dining with guests in his own hall and showing them every kindness."<sup>522</sup> Christ is speaking to the eleven remaining apostles "as they were at table."<sup>523</sup> Æthelwold is poisoned by the corrupt and hedonistic clerics who envy his success and power; Christ's crucifixion was set in motion by the Pharisees who feared that Christ's power was diminishing theirs. Finally, Christ promises immunity to poison, among other miraculous abilities, not just as a protection to his people, but as a sign which marks those who believe. By citing Mark 16 as the specific operative promise that saves Æthelwold from the poison given him by the unreformed clerics, the hagiography makes Æthelwold's work to establish Benedictine monasticism and drive out the clerics a direct fulfillment of the Great Commission and proof that Æthelwold's work was on a par with that of the apostles.

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<sup>521</sup> *Biblia sacra vulgata*, Mark 16: 14-18: "Novissime recumbentibus illis undecim apparuit et exprobravit incredulitatem illorum et duritiam cordis quia his qui viderant eum resurrexisse non crediderant. Et dixit eis euntes in mundum universum praedicate evangelium omni creaturae. Qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit salvus erit qui vero non crediderit condemnabitur. Signa autem eos qui crediderint haec sequentur [...] serpentes tollent et si mortiferum quid biberint non eos nocebit."

<sup>522</sup> *VÆ(W)* 34-35: "multi illuc ad Dei famulatum senes conversi, iuvenes adducti et parvuli oblato confluunt, [...] in aula sua cum hospitibus prandenti omnemque eis humanitatem exhibenti."

<sup>523</sup> Mark 16: 14, *Douay-Rheims Bible*.

The poisoning is the culmination of Wulfstan's narrative's characterization of the clerics whom Æthelwold has been driving out. In the passages leading up to Æthelwold's poisoning, the narrative has several times characterized the clerics as equivalent to unbelievers, not those with insufficient faith, but those with no faith at all. They are not just lacking in *fides*, they are not even *credentes*. They are called "detestable blasphemers against God."<sup>524</sup> Wulfstan depicts the clerics as condemning themselves by their own worship. On the Saturday at the start of Lent, Æthelwold's monks hear the clerics chant the communion antiphon:

"Serve ye the Lord with fear, and rejoice unto him with trembling: embrace discipline, lest ye perish from the just way," as if to say: "*We* have not wished to serve God or keep his discipline: but *you* must do so, lest like us you perish from the way which opens the kingdom of heaven to those who preserve justice."<sup>525</sup>

Lest the significance of this passage not be clear enough, Osgar, one of Æthelwold's closest followers, exhorts the other monks to go in and expel the clerics, "so that 'when [God's] wrath is kindled in a short time' we may deserve to share with those of whom the psalm goes on to say: 'Blessed are all they who put their trust in him.'"<sup>526</sup> Finally, the three clerics who do eventually accept monasticism rather than expulsion are described as having "bowed their necks to Christ's yoke," as if, by accepting Benedictine

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<sup>524</sup> *VÆ(W)* 30-31: "detestandos blasphematores Dei."

<sup>525</sup> *VÆ(W)* 30-33: " 'Servite Domino in timore, et exultate ei cum tremore, apprehendite disciplinam, ne pereatis de via iusta,' quasi dicerent: 'Nos noluimus Deo servire nec disciplinam eius servare; vos saltem facite, ne sicut nos pereatis de via quae custodientibus iustitiam regna facit aperiri caelestia.' "

<sup>526</sup> *VÆ(W)* 32-33: "ut cum exarserit in brevi ira eius mereamur esse participes illorum de quibus subiungitur 'beati omnes qui confidunt in eo.' "

monasticism, they had converted to Christianity.<sup>527</sup> The narrative of events leading up to the poisoning thus makes clear that the clerics are not just Christians who have fallen into “shameful practices.”<sup>528</sup> They have rejected Christ. They are the ones being referred to in Mark 16 who will be condemned and will suffer Christ’s wrath for rejecting the gospel. Conversely, by surviving the poison in these circumstances, while calling on that specific promise, Æthelwold vindicates not only himself but the entire project of English Benedictine monasticism. Wulfstan may have taken the idea of the saint surviving poison from Sulpicius Severus’s *Life of St. Martin*, but he has expanded and shaped it to be not only a recognizably generic *imitatio*, but one which speaks directly to the controversies surrounding Æthelwold during his life.

However, this alone does not completely answer the question of why Æthelwold is portrayed as having a crisis of faith. Why would Wulfstan not simply remove the self-rebuke from the passage, leaving only the other elements, which work so well in Æthelwold’s favor, so that there would be no struggle between faith and doubt in the saint himself? The only other life of Æthelwold which includes the moment of self-rebuke is the *Life of St. Æthelwold* by Ælfric, written ca. 1006, only ten years after Wulfstan wrote his *Life of Æthelwold*. Like Wulfstan, Ælfric was a pupil of Æthelwold’s at the Winchester school, and he began writing within Wulfstan’s own lifetime. These facts, along with an examination of what Ælfric did with Wulfstan’s material, may well answer the question as it applies to both writers.

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<sup>527</sup> *VÆ(W)* 32-33: “Christi iugo colla subdiderunt.”

<sup>528</sup> *VÆ(W)* 34-35. “pristinis frui potuissent flagitiis.”

Scholars have disagreed whether Ælfric's work is an abbreviation of Wulfstan's or if Wulfstan's is an expansion of Ælfric's. Winterbottom and Lapidge make a convincing argument that Ælfric followed Wulfstan. They base their argument on the exact matches between Ælfric's and Wulfstan's language. Ælfric's account is only one hundred thirty-eight words long. Of those words, only fifteen are not found in the *VÆ(W)*, and all of those that do appear are in the same order as they are in Wulfstan's work. Winterbottom and Lapidge argue that it would have been much simpler for these parallels to have been preserved if Ælfric had simply excised Wulfstan's language than if Wulfstan had been writing new sentences around Ælfric's brevity:

Ælfric need have done no more than draw a red pencil (so to speak) through the words in Wulfstan's text which he regarded as superfluous [...]. Since this is the procedure followed by Ælfric in his other works of abbreviation, the most economical explanation is that Ælfric's *Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi* is an abbreviation of Wulfstan's *Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi*.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> *VÆ(W)* cliii. Their argument now appears to be the most widely accepted position on which text came first. Writing three years before publication of the critical edition of the *Vita Æthelwoldi*, Barbara Yorke wrote, "Most recent commentators have been inclined to give priority to Ælfric, and to see Wulfstan's Life as a slightly later expansion of Ælfric's work. However, Michael Lapidge's detailed evaluation of the work of the two authors leads him to the opposite conclusion and he reinforces the view of D.J.V. Fisher that it is Wulfstan's work which was the original composition [...] It seems likely, once Dr. Lapidge's full arguments are available in print, that this will be the view that will prevail" ("Introduction" 1-2). More recently, Andy Orchard has also expressed his agreement with this position, writing "Gransden, followed by Mason, assumes that it is Ælfric's version of the *Vita Æthelwoldi* that has been borrowed, but there is no evidence that Ælfric's version circulated at all widely, and only a single manuscript survives. Much more influential [...] is the earlier, longer and more ornate version, which Ælfric clearly shortened and simplified, by another of Æthelwold's students, Wulfstan of Winchester," 51. For a summation of the opposing sides of the argument see Helmut Gneuss, rev. of *Three Lives of English Saints*, ed. Michael Winterbottom, *Notes and Queries*, n. s. 20 (1973): 479-80.

If Ælfric's work is a redaction of Wulfstan's, questions remain about what Ælfric chose to keep, what he removed, and how this alters the narrative. In cutting Wulfstan's work down to less than half its original length, Ælfric chose to retain the poisoning incident and Æthelwold's crisis of faith. In Ælfric's version, Æthelwold says to himself, "Now where is your faith? Where are the words of Christ in which he said, 'and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them?'"<sup>530</sup> This is the sum of the internal dialogue in Ælfric's narrative. The incident then concludes with these straightforward words: "The faith kindled in him by these and similar words extinguished the deadly draught which he had drunk, and he rose, departing to the hall happily enough, returning no evil to his [poisoner]."<sup>531</sup> Ælfric also retains the setting and the motive for the poisoning; Æthelwold is "in his own hall, in which he dined with guests," and he is given the poison "from the envy of the clerics."<sup>532</sup> In short, Ælfric's narrative is an abridged, not a revised, version of Wulfstan's work. It retains all the essential points of the first narrative without adding any new direction of its own.

Wulfstan and Ælfric both wrote for the Winchester community and had essentially the same experiences of Æthelwold on which to draw. Given these

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<sup>530</sup> Ælfric, *The Life of St. Æthelwold*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1991) 75: "Ubi est modo fides tua? Ubi sunt verba Christi quibus dicebat, 'et si mortiferum quid biberint, non eis nocebit?'" Hereafter, *VÆ(Æ)*.

<sup>531</sup> *VÆ(Æ)* 75: "His et huiusmodi verbis accensa fides in eo extinxit letiferum haustum quem bibebat, et maturius surrexit, abiens ad aulam satis hilaris, nil mali venefico reddens suo."

<sup>532</sup> *VÆ(Æ)* 75: "in sua aula, in qua cum hospitibus prandebat," and "ex invidia clericorum." (All translations from the *VÆ(Æ)* are mine. However, since the text is so similar to that of the *VÆ(W)* my translation has been influenced by Lapidge and Winterbottom's translation of that text.)

circumstances, Ælfric's and Wulfstan's narrative choices suggest two things. First, as Andy Orchard points out, the *Vita Æthelwoldi* is relatively lacking in miracles:

Many of those of Æthelwold's miracles that are depicted are posthumous, and the main focus of marvelous material falls on a very limited series of five chapters (chapters 32-6), each of which depicts a wonder which, by hagiographical standards, seems rather low-key.<sup>533</sup>

In listing the miracles he means, Orchard neglects to mention the poisoning, but his point remains significant. Writing shortly after Æthelwold's death, Wulfstan and Ælfric could hardly afford to leave out a miracle, particularly one with such rich potential, when they did not have a large body of previous material from which to pick and choose.

Second, Ælfric's choices suggest that Wulfstan's audience accepted his approach to the narrative; Ælfric did not need to restructure the narrative in order to give the event a new meaning. This suggests that Æthelwold's rebuke to himself may have been a matter of historical record, remembered by those who knew him as he told it to them. (Certainly, Michael Lapidge believes that Æthelwold deliberately related the miracles of his life to Wulfstan, among others, in order to lay the groundwork for his future cult.)<sup>534</sup> Wulfstan's and Ælfric's primary audience was the population of the monasteries founded by Æthelwold, that is, people who either had known him or had heard of him from those who did. Setting aside the theological debate over the reality of miracles, it is not at all implausible that Æthelwold could have suffered an attack of gastritis, felt he was dying,

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<sup>533</sup> A. Orchard 52.

<sup>534</sup> Lapidge, "Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher" 114.

survived, and retold the story of his survival, including the self-rebuke, which as he told it would express appropriate humility about his own role in the event while giving appropriate credit to God. Æthelwold's confidantes, and those to whom they passed on the story, would therefore have expected the saint's self-criticism to be retained in the *vita* as an essential feature of the story. Writing about Wulfstan, Nicholas Brooks says, "what we have [...] is an exercise in constructed memory."<sup>535</sup> Wulfstan and Ælfric would have had little choice but to exploit, rather than omit, the saint's own admission of weak faith, while later works, written for those who didn't know the saint, were free to leave out Æthelwold's moment of crisis.

### **Osbern's *Vita Dunstani***

Four of the five early lives of Dunstan include an event in which he is given miraculous foreknowledge of the death of a fellow monk, but the *vita* by Osbern, written between 1080 and 1094,<sup>536</sup> and the *vita* by Eadmer, written before 1116,<sup>537</sup> expand the story into a narrative that allows the reader to see the saint as needing reassurance for himself. While Osbern's work makes Dunstan's need for reassurance the central issue of the incident, Eadmer's version minimizes the saint's doubt, working to overshadow it by refocusing the incident away from the possibility of the saint's doubting.

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<sup>535</sup> Brooks, "Introduction: How Do We Know About St Wulfstan?" 6.

<sup>536</sup> Stubbs xxxi; Ramsay and Sparks, "The Cult of St Dunstan at Christ Church" 315.

<sup>537</sup> Eadmer, *Vita Sancti Dunstani auctore Eadmero, Memorials of St. Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series 63 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1874. Rpt. Wiesbaden: Kraus Reprint Ltd, 1965) lxvii. Hereafter, *VD(E)*.



As discussed above, Osbern was not writing to establish a new cult. Dunstan was already on the calendar of Christ Church when the Normans arrived.<sup>538</sup> Although Dunstan's place was secure by the end of Lanfranc's life, Dunstan's cult was not initially given full and immediate acceptance under Lanfranc. Like a number of other English saints, Dunstan underwent a period of investigation by the Norman prelates.<sup>539</sup> Furthermore, Jay Rubenstein has detailed several possible reasons for Osbern feeling a very personal devotion to Dunstan's cult, which may well have increased his interest in solidifying Dunstan's position.<sup>540</sup>

Why, then, would Osbern risk making Dunstan seem weak in his belief by showing him hesitate to believe a heavenly messenger? I argue that Osbern does so because presenting Dunstan's self-doubt as an outgrowth of others' doubt of him speaks to Osbern's own contemporaries who had threatened or had failed to fully honor Dunstan's cult. The means by which Dunstan is reassured offers his detractors yet more proof of his status as a saint by demonstrating that God is actively honoring the saint. Osbern has taken a very brief miracle present in earlier works, Dunstan's miraculous foreknowledge of another's death, and used it to reinforce the theme presented in the two incidents of accusation which bookend Dunstan's own moment of self-doubt.

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<sup>538</sup> Francis Wormald, ed., *English Kalendars Before A.D. 1100*, Henry Bradshaw Society Series 72 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1934). See also Michael Lapidge, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints*, Henry Bradshaw Society Series 106 (London: Boydell P for the Henry Bradshaw Society, 1991).

<sup>539</sup> Cowdrey, *Lanfranc* 175-184. For a fuller discussion of the situation see the chapter on accusations above.

<sup>540</sup> Rubenstein, "The Life and Writings of Osbern of Canterbury" 27-40.

In this incident, Dunstan is pictured praying that God will reinforce his faith by showing him the glory given to the righteous: “the saint then [...] prayed to the Lord that the glory of the righteous would be shown to him, so that he, who believed in it well through faith, would cherish it more sweetly once it were known through a manifestation.”<sup>541</sup> Dunstan attests in his prayer that he believes in the glorification promised to the righteous. At the same time, he is essentially asking for a sign which will increase his faith and enable him to cherish it as he should.

His prayer comes between two incidents in which he is persecuted rather than honored for his righteousness. In the first, he has been expelled from Athelstan’s court under accusations of wrongdoing, and the second after this involves his acceptance to, slander at, and expulsion from Edmund’s court. The incident of the saint’s own doubt is thus framed by the doubts and accusations of others. Following his expulsion from Athelstan’s court, he has been founding monasteries, and the work is difficult: “which monasteries [...] thus through his hard work were increased so that crowds of many monks were in each and every one of them.”<sup>542</sup> Stubbs’s edition of the *VD(O)* puts this information at the end of the section detailing Ælfgifu’s death and separates it from Dunstan’s prayer with a section break. The *exinde*, “then,” which begins the first sentence of the new section makes this a logical editorial choice since the word can signal

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<sup>541</sup> *VD(O)* 89: “Exinde sanctus [...] deprecatus est Dominum ostendi sibi gloriam justorum, ut qui eam per fidem bene creditam haberet, per manifestationem cognitam dulcius amaret.” (This translation was suggested by Dr. Christopher Jones.)

<sup>542</sup> *VD(O)* 89: “quae monasteria [...] per ejus industriam sic aucta sunt, ut singulis complurium monachorum turbae inessent.”

an advance in time.<sup>543</sup> However, it need not signal a leap to a new event but advancement within the event which is ongoing. Thus, Dunstan's prayer for reinforcement comes as part of his monastic foundation work and while he is between the persecution suffered under Athelstan and before the persecution about to be suffered at Edmund's court. His need for reinforcement is related to the difficulties he is facing in his work.

In response to Dunstan's prayer, God sends a young man who, by his appearance, his words, and a miracle, makes manifest "the glory of the righteous," which Dunstan has prayed to see. Although the youth does not accuse Dunstan of doubting, he strongly hints that the problem with which Dunstan struggles is self-doubt brought on by the doubt of others. The young man is a friend of Dunstan's who has died and apparently gone to heaven: "a youth, distinguished by his looks, whom as a boy still living, [Dunstan] had long ago known when he himself was a boy, and whom he had always loved with holy affection."<sup>544</sup> Dunstan's visitor discusses the joys of eternal life, the suffering of the present age, the lies of demons, the malice of men, and the rewards of heaven.<sup>545</sup> In the process, the youth assures Dunstan that he will experience all these things, both the present suffering and the future glory, because he is one of God's saints.

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<sup>543</sup> s.v. *exinde*, S.A. Handford and Mary Herberg, ed., *Latin-English English-Latin Dictionary* (Berlin: Langenscheidt KG, 2003).

<sup>544</sup> *VD(O)* 89: "juvenis, decore insignis, quem puerum olim in corpore ipse puer noverat et sancta semper familiaritate dilexerat." (This translation was suggested by Dr. Christopher Jones.)

<sup>545</sup> *VD(O)* 89: "Referens ea quae sunt aeternae vitae gaudia, illum vero in hoc saeculo plura passurum, daemonum insidias, malignitates hominum; post omnia haec ad summos gradus perventurum, multa hominum millia Deo lucraturum, cumque iis coeli regna scansurum."

The youth gives every sign that he is genuinely from heaven and should be believed. He literally leads Dunstan toward the church, rather than away from it. The youth is indeed *decore insignis*; he has every sign of being from heaven in both his appearance and his behavior. Furthermore, the content of his speech is such that Dunstan could give assent to it as a rebuke to the devil. There is no spiritual danger for Dunstan in agreeing that there is eternal joy in heaven, for instance.

The difficulty in this incident is that not only does Dunstan need to ask God for a sign to reinforce his faith, but he then hesitates to believe the youth's message that Dunstan is himself one of the righteous who will enjoy future glory in heaven. Dunstan's response to the heavenly message is not instant assent: "he, because of caution, had not given assent to the [youth] as he spoke."<sup>546</sup> The narrative's language is itself cautious here. It does not accuse Dunstan of doubt, but it specifies that he hesitated to respond to the youth. The degree of Dunstan's hesitation is apparent from the forcefulness of the young man's response; he seizes Dunstan by the arm, dragging him along into the church. The heavenly youth introduces the word "doubt" into the story. He says, "so that no doubt may attack [or beset] you in your believing in these things which you have heard, before three days a certain priest will be buried here, who is not yet sick."<sup>547</sup> The phrasing "so that no doubt may attack you" is particularly rich in meaning. Dunstan has been attacked by the doubts and accusations of others in the past and will be again in the

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<sup>546</sup> *VD(O)* 89: "Ille propter cautelam dicenti assensum non dedisset."

<sup>547</sup> *VD(O)* 89: "Ut nulla te credendis hiis [sic] quae audisti dubietas attingat, ante triduum presbyter quidam hic sepelietur, qui nondum infirmatur."

next section. In the context of his hesitation, the phrase cannot help but be taken to also refer to the possibility of Dunstan himself experiencing doubt of a type which is not productive caution, but destructive reluctance to believe. The youth does not say that Dunstan *is* doubting. He frames the promised miracle as a preventative against doubt. Still, he has made explicit the danger that Dunstan does or will doubt, both by introducing the word itself and then by presenting the coming death as a sign explicitly targeted to Dunstan's doubt.

Likewise, Dunstan's announcement of his vision shows the possibility that he has failed to believe a heavenly messenger, because he doubts the content of the message. Dunstan calls in the chapter in order to tell them about the miracle: "rising up from prayer in the early morning, however, Dunstan, having called together the clerics, came to the place."<sup>548</sup> Though Dunstan's announcement is not immediate, since he finishes his night prayers, the early morning announcement shows no hesitation or delay. He makes fully public the message that was given to him in the night. At the same time, he does not announce that a monk's death will happen. Rather, he phrases the prediction as a conditional, "if those things which were shown to me in the night are true,"<sup>549</sup> which leaves open the possibility that they are not. Finally, Dunstan announces the youth's message, but he does not affirm it as true until the very end: "Concerning the glory of everlasting life that was revealed and promised to him, he grows [lit. is made]

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<sup>548</sup> *VD(O)* 89: "Exsurgens autem mane ab oratione Dunstanus, convocatis in unum clericis ad locum venit."

<sup>549</sup> *VD(O)* 89: "si vera sunt quae mihi nocturno tempore ostensa sunt."

exceedingly happy.”<sup>550</sup> It is only when the confirmation miracle occurs that Dunstan’s feelings show that he accepts the assurances about his saintly status which he has been given.

Furthermore, the *VD(O)* offers the reader a vindication miracle which draws a clear line between the responses of those who trust in the message and those who do not. The priest who dies is as much a model of faith for the Canterbury community as Dunstan himself, because he shows a quicker and more certain assent to the promise even than Dunstan. He goes to the spot Dunstan marked and says, “when God orders me to depart from the body, I beg that you bury my remains in this place.”<sup>551</sup> Note that he says *cum*, “when,” not *si*, “if,” as Dunstan did. He treats his death as a certainty. It might be possible to read this language as a challenge to the promise, claiming the spot because he expects it to remain unfilled. But two things in his request show that this is not the case. First, he speaks of death in terms of obedience to God’s commands – “when God orders me to depart” – showing submission rather than challenge to the promise. Second, the monk makes a petition for the spot; he does not say, “bury me here when I die.” Rather he begs that they will inter him there, as if it were an honor to be the one in whom the promise is fulfilled. His framing of the request shows a faithful and self-sacrificial approach; he not only expects the vindicating miracle to occur, but he also hopes to be included in it.

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<sup>550</sup> *VD(O)* 90: “Ipse autem de ostensa ac promissa sibi aeternae vitae gloria laetissimus efficitur.” (This translation was suggested by Dr. Christopher Jones.)

<sup>551</sup> *VD(O)* 89: “Cum me Deus e corpore migrare jusserit hoc in loco meas precor reliquias sepelire.”

Finally, the narrative reinforces Dunstan's position by returning to the language of Dunstan's own prayer: "all of which they had seen, after this, to be true and manifest."<sup>552</sup> Dunstan had asked for a manifestation of glory, and now the monks admit amongst themselves that the miracles have been made manifest. God has given his saint exactly what he prayed for. However, the monks themselves cannot know this. Dunstan's prayer is known only to himself, God, and the reader of the text. Thus the use of "manifest" has depths available only to Dunstan and the reader; the narrative's choice of language has put Dunstan in a position to understand the significance of the miracle more than anyone around him. The monks see that Dunstan was a conduit for a miracle. Dunstan, along with the reader, must know that he was given a miracle that both exceeded his expectations and matched his petition in its exact language. Although a saint's foreknowledge of another's death is a frequent trope in hagiography, this narrative's presentation makes it a miracle tailored precisely to this saint in this moment. The narrative makes clear that the heavenly youth was sent by God to Dunstan as a special favor to his saint, but that Dunstan required not just the messenger, but a miraculous sign in order to trust that the message was true.

Two aspects of this passage especially help to explain why Osbern took the risk of implying weakness on the saint's part. First, it is placed between two incidents of accusation being made against Dunstan, thus suggesting that the fault lies in his detractors as much as in the saint himself. Second, the text pays close attention to other

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<sup>552</sup> *VD(O)* 90: "quae omnia post haec vera ipsi et manifesta vidissent."

people's reaction to Dunstan. Taken together, these aspects construct Dunstan's weakness as an illustration of the harm that the failure to appreciate his holiness can do. When the other monks witnessed the miracle, "a great amazement surrounded all of them therefore, because that same man had foretold such wondrous things with respect to their time, place and the person involved, all of which they had seen, after this, to be true and manifest."<sup>553</sup> First, the narrative uses a word for their amazement whose connotations imply that the monks were stunned, but not in a good way; their response is not immediate hallelujahs, but open-mouthed amazement. Second, they are surprised not only at the specificity of the miracle, but also "because that same man," Dunstan, was the one to make a miraculous prediction to them. His role in the miracle has clearly shaken their previous estimation of him.

I think this can be read as a subtle comment on the situation of Christ Church in Osbern's own day. The lack of respect implied on the part of Dunstan's contemporaries indicts the lack of devotion which threatened Dunstan's cult at Christ Church. Osbern argues by implication that if the Normans, and Lanfranc in particular, diminish the status of the saint, they not only dishonor the saint himself, but also hinder the godly work which ought to be accomplished through honoring the saint's memory.

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<sup>553</sup> *VD(O)* 90: "Stupor ingens circumdedit omnes propterea quod idem vir tam mira de loco, tempore, ac persona praedixisset; quae omnia post haec vera ipsi et manifesta vidissent."



### Eadmer's *Vita Dunstani*

Eadmer, writing his own *Vita Sancti Dunstani* before 1116,<sup>554</sup> has preserved the encounter between the saint and the youth, in which the youth predicts a death within three days as a sign that Dunstan will suffer much in life and attain a heavenly reward. Eadmer's most immediate source is the *VD(O)*.<sup>555</sup> However, Eadmer's narrative eliminates nearly all of the elements that indicate a crisis of doubt on the saint's part, except for the offer of reassurance by the youth. Even this has been rephrased so that it downplays the implications of doubt and focuses on the certainty of God's promises. The reworking done by Eadmer's narrative is all the more notable because elsewhere Eadmer does not hesitate to lift large sections almost verbatim from his sources, such as Dunstan's expulsion from Athelstan's court in the *VD(B)*. The reworking of the scene between Dunstan and the youth draws the reader's attention away from the question of doubt to the certainty of heavenly reward for the faithful, particularly for those who love and are loved by Saint Dunstan. The narrative decision to downplay, rather than exploit, the possibility of a saint needing reassurance reminds the reader of how careful a hagiographer must be when dealing with the subject of a saint's doubt. Eadmer's narrative, even while using Osbern's account as a clear exemplar, moves away from the doubt, eliding it for a treatment of the incident that promotes the saint's cult without introducing the possibility of weakness or faltering faith in the saint. Eadmer's decision

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<sup>554</sup> Eadmer, *Vita Sancti Dunstani* lxvii. Hereafter, *VD(E)*.

<sup>555</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England* 129; Turner and Muir lxx. Turner and Muir point out that Eadmer also acknowledges B.'s *Vita Dunstani*, Adelard's *Vita Dunstani*, and Wulfstan of Winchester's *Vita Æthelwoldi*, as well as conversations with Nicholas of Worcester and the monks at Christ Church.

to alter the incident in this way highlights the discomfort and risk involved in Osbern's presentation of Dunstan's moment of doubt.

First, Eadmer's narrative changes the context of the incident. Dunstan is still in prayer late at night when the youth appears; however, Eadmer's narrative removes the references to Dunstan's monastic building program and changes the subject of his prayers so that the context and theme of the incident become the afterlife of those the saint has loved. Immediately preceding the incident, the narrative relates the death of Ælfifu, a holy woman who was personally fond of Dunstan and left him her estate so that he could continue his work.<sup>556</sup> Having just lost his patroness and friend, Dunstan is seen meditating on his parents' deaths. Ælfifu's own death offered ample proof of her heavenly destination; when she was in her last illness, Dunstan saw the Holy Spirit descend to Ælfifu in the form of a dove.<sup>557</sup> Following this, Dunstan is given a vision of his parents among the heavenly choirs.<sup>558</sup> Dunstan is meditating on the reality of this fact when the youth appears. The youth himself is another person in Dunstan's life who was both well loved and has since died. Dunstan is "strenuously"<sup>559</sup> meditating on heaven when the youth appears. This draws the reader's attention to the number of loved ones that Dunstan has lost to death and that all of them are clearly now in heaven. This changes the context of Dunstan's conversation with the youth. Instead of taking place when he is meditating on his attempts to establish monasteries, the conversation takes

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<sup>556</sup> *VD(E)* 72-73.

<sup>557</sup> *VD(E)* 72-73.

<sup>558</sup> *VD(E)* 74-75.

<sup>559</sup> *VD(E)* 76-77: "vehementissime."

place while he is meditating on his hope for the afterlife. The list of loved ones that Dunstan has lost reinforces the saint's holiness somewhat by reminding the reader of one type of suffering he has endured. However, for a medieval audience the loss of parents, a patroness, and even a youthful friend would not have been extraordinary suffering – hardly martyrdom in life. What most stands out about this list of the deceased and thus most reinforces the saint's cult is that they are all undoubtedly in heaven. Being among those the saint loved and who loved him would seem to be a strong indicator for hope of heaven. This provides the reader with a clear and specific motive for pursuing the saint's favor.

Second, the *VD(E)* rephrases the youth's promise to Dunstan so that it offers a stronger picture of Dunstan's belief. He tells Dunstan, "so that you can be completely assured about those things that you have just now heard, I tell you that before three days have passed a certain priest will be buried in this place, even though he has not yet been seized by any bodily sickness."<sup>560</sup> The phrase "so that you can be completely assured" is the only indicator in this telling that Dunstan might be hesitant in his faith, namely that Dunstan is not already completely certain. Eadmer cannot entirely remove the implications of this phrase, but it still provides a more confident image of the saint than Osbern's does. Other images of Dunstan within the incident also portray him as a strong, active pursuer of heaven, rather than doubtful or in need of reassurance. Dunstan is praying *vehementissime*, "strenuously," or even "ardently," when the youth appears. His

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<sup>560</sup> *VD(E)* 76-77: "Ut de iis quae audisti omnino certus existas, hoc in loco ante triduum presbiter unus sepelietur qui nondum aliqua corporis infirmitate tenetur."

prayers are strong, passionate things, a highly desirable trait in a saint, especially if one is a supplicant of said saint. The youth's first words to Dunstan are reassurance not to be afraid,<sup>561</sup> which might seem to undermine the image of Dunstan as a strong and fearless saint, except that they are the same words spoken by angelic messengers to Abraham, Zacharias, the Virgin Mary, and the shepherds at Christ's birth.<sup>562</sup> Any undermining the youth's reassurance might do is countered by the *imitatio* factor. Finally, Dunstan's announcement to the clerics is no longer a conditional statement. He simply declares that in three days a priest will die and be buried in the indicated spot: "in the morning Dunstan led the clergy to that place and informed them what of he had heard about the priest who would be buried there."<sup>563</sup> There is some ambiguity in these words, since they do not make clear whether Dunstan simply declared, "this will happen," or he explained "this is what I was told will happen." The second option leaves some room for the speaker to distance himself from the statement by making it someone else's claim. However, both options are stronger expressions of confidence than Dunstan's caveat in the *VD(O)*. While the *VD(O)* makes Dunstan's self-doubt and his precarious situation with other men the crux of the story, the *VD(E)* downplays Dunstan's doubt, pushing it to the back of the story as much as possible in order to present a more confident saint.

Eadmer chose to significantly reframe and reformulate Osbern's approach to this incident. Subsequent writers of Dunstan's life cut the incident entirely, returning it to its

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<sup>561</sup> *VD(E)* 76-77: "tunc ille hominem ne timeret oratus."

<sup>562</sup> Genesis 15:1; Luke 1:13; Luke 1:30; Luke 2:10, *Douay-Rheims Bible*.

<sup>563</sup> *VD(E)* 76-77: "Mane facto clericos ad locum Dunstanus ducit, et eis quid de presbitero inibi sepeliendo audierit edicit."

earlier, briefer form, in which Dunstan simply has foreknowledge of the death. No uncomfortable questions are asked, and there is no need on the saint's part for reassurance. Eadmer's decision to reduce the possibility of Dunstan's doubt renders the incident a less subtle, but also a less dangerous moment in the saint's hagiography, making the risks Osbern ran in order to make his point all the clearer.

### **William of Malmesbury's *Vita Wulfstani***

There are two Wulfstans in this chapter, one author and one subject. Wulfstan Cantor, discussed above, wrote the *Vita Æthelwoldi*. St. Wulfstan appears as the subject of William of Malmesbury's *Vita Wulfstani*.<sup>564</sup> In this *vita*, Wulfstan heals a pauper of scrofula. However, he does so in a manner that calls into question his own faith in God and his graciousness to one of the most wretched of supplicants, both of which run directly counter to the promotion of a saint's cult. Nicholas Brooks reminds us that the *Vita Wulfstani*: "was written to show that Wulfstan had been a saint, not in order to record the events of his life or to explain his behaviour. It was therefore only concerned with those episodes which could be understood as showing him closely in touch with God."<sup>565</sup> Thus, the healing of this pauper becomes an episode that requires the hagiographer to perform some interesting narrative acrobatics in order explain, mitigate, or in some other way contextualize the saint's behavior in order to show just how closely in touch with God his subject was.

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<sup>564</sup> Hereafter, VW(W)

<sup>565</sup> Brooks, "Introduction: How Do We Know about St Wulfstan?" 6.

To recount the incident briefly, a pauper afflicted with the king's evil, that is, scrofula, approaches the saint through his steward, asking for a cure.<sup>566</sup> Wulfstan vehemently refuses to attempt the miracle. Beyond ordering his priest Æthelmær to see to the pauper's physical needs, the saint says nothing more about the man. Æthelmær, troubled by the saint's refusal and the pauper's horrible suffering, "extorts" a miracle from Wulfstan by secretly taking the water used to wash his hands in mass and adding it to the pauper's bath water. When the pauper emerges from the bath, he is completely cured. Both Wulfstan's ungracious refusal to even see the pauper and his refusal to attempt the miracle when he has cured others before are troubling. Emma Mason suggests that a distinction may be drawn between miracles of physical healing and mental healing to explain why Wulfstan immediately responds to the madmen's need but not the pauper's: "Wulfstan willingly acted as mediator in cases of mental illness, where the underlying spiritual malaise fell within his proper sphere."<sup>567</sup> Mason cites the two incidents I've described. However, it is simply not an adequate assessment to say that caring for the pauper was out of Wulfstan's proper sphere. Earlier in the narrative, the narrator said that Wulfstan always made it a practice to pray whenever he heard of a sick person, not merely a demoniac or mentally ill person. Furthermore, although the water

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<sup>566</sup> Although the king's evil is generally identified as scrofula, the editors of the *VW(W)* have translated it as leprosy. I have kept the wording of their translation, but will refer to the disease throughout my text as scrofula. For a history of the king's evil and the disagreement over how to translate the term that has sometimes resulted see Jacques LeGoff, "Le mal royal au moyen âge: du roi malade au roi guérisseur," *Mediaevistik* 1 (1988): 101-109; P.T. Stone, "A Brief History of the King's Evil," *The Ricardian: Journal of the Richard III Society* 6 (1982): 14-16; and Frank Barlow, "The King's Evil," *English Historical Review* 95 (1980): 3-27.

<sup>567</sup> Mason, *St Wulfstan* 174.

used as mechanism for the cure is Wulfstan's, the enactor of the cure is Æthelmær.

Mason argues that "readers of this story would understand that the cure had been effected by the combined faith of these three men [the pauper, Arthur the steward who first listens to the beggar, and Æthelmær] in Wulfstan's innate powers as a mediator of healing."<sup>568</sup> Perhaps so, but this still leaves us with the problem of Wulfstan's own behavior and the troubling question – from a potential supplicant's point of view – of what good there might be in trusting in a saint who could, but might choose not to, heal a person, when there were other, more accommodating saints available.

The easiest explanation for why a writer of William's skill would include an incident like this in one of his hagiographies is that fidelity to his source material and Prior Warin's commission constrained him. In his introduction, William claims both motives: "As you wished, I have kept to [Coleman's] narrative, in no way disturbing the order of events or falsifying the facts."<sup>569</sup> Since Coleman's work is lost to modern scholars, this explanation is terribly convenient. The awkward or discomforting elements of the text can be attributed to an earlier, less skillful writer, and the rest attributed to William. For example, Andy Orchard attributes the anti-Norman elements in the text to Coleman, rather than William.<sup>570</sup> It is possible that this is true. William may have kept material that he might rather have excised. But the claim to be adhering scrupulously to one's sources and not one's own ingenuity is a standard hagiographic trope that cannot be

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<sup>568</sup> Mason, *St Wulfstan* 180.

<sup>569</sup> VW(W) 11: "Huius ego ut voluistis insistens scriptis nichil turbavi de rerum ordine, nichil corrupti de gestorum veritate."

<sup>570</sup> A. Orchard 40.

taken at face value. Furthermore, it begs the question of what the incident of the pauper was doing in Coleman's own work. Why would Coleman, Wulfstan's contemporary and devotee, include something in his text which might have undermined the establishment of the saint's cult? There is no good reason to argue that whatever is puzzling or troubling in the *VW(W)* is Coleman's remnant and that whatever works to mitigate these problems is William's work. To do so is simply to make Coleman into William's scapegoat.

Furthermore, several major concerns which can be identified in the work as a whole (loss of property, loss of traditional monastic practice to new customs, integration of Anglo-Saxon and Norman culture, and the power struggles involved with that integration) are all pertinent both to Coleman's experience in the years immediately following Wulfstan's death and to William's own concerns as they are demonstrated in other works. As Mary Lynn Rampolla argues, "the Worcester monks' corporate identity had been tied to their patron saint, their estates, and their traditional values and practices."<sup>571</sup> Rampolla treats the content of the *Vita Wulfstani* as Coleman's, rather than William of Malmesbury's, and so does not explore what his motives, as distinct from Coleman's, might have been. However, the triad of factors making up the Worcester community's corporate identity remains valid if the hagiography is considered from either point of view. The key piece of this triad is Wulfstan, because the active and continuing power of the saint acted as the guarantor of the Worcester community's rights

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<sup>571</sup> Rampolla, "A Mirror of Sanctity" 104-105.



and privileges in land, while his demonstrated sanctity validated the continuation of Worcester's ancient practices.

That both of these threats – loss of land and loss of traditional practice – are a concern of the *vita* is readily apparent. The *vita* goes into significant detail about Thomas of York's attempts to acquire Worcester land, and the text repeatedly asserts Wulfstan's insistence, both before and after the Conquest, that the English were vulnerable to God's judgment because they had abandoned the holier practices of their forefathers and become decadent.<sup>572</sup> As has been discussed in earlier chapters, Wulfstan, by reason of his capacity to survive peaceably with his new Norman overlords, both temporal and spiritual, while maintaining much of the old Anglo-Saxon liturgical practices, as well as by the sheer longevity that allowed him to outlive eight kings, was the perfect bridge between Anglo-Saxon and Norman culture, and a figure highly suited to William's project to reconcile and integrate Anglo-Saxon with Norman for the promotion and betterment of both: "by the time that he translated the *Life* of Wulfstan, the 'French' heads of the major monasteries were promoting the cults of their English saints, as a means of defending the rights and furthering the interests of their churches."<sup>573</sup> The relation of Norman and Anglo-Norman prelates to their Anglo-Saxon saints was rather more complex than this statement makes it, but Mason does put her finger on a significant point. The successful promotion of a local saint could provide both spiritual and historical weight to the immediate disputes – over land, over authority, over liturgical

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<sup>572</sup> See, for instance, his campaign against long hair on men, *VW(W)* 59.

<sup>573</sup> Mason, *St Wulfstan* 197.

practice – in which the major church centers were almost constantly embroiled with the king, with the pope, and with each other. Furthermore, Benedictine houses like Worcester found their management of their outside affairs impinged upon by diocesan bishops. The Order of Canons also threatened monks' authority outside their immediate precincts, while "new ascetic orders [...] attracted public esteem at the expense of the Benedictines."<sup>574</sup> In his own lifetime Wulfstan had been a useful source in disputes over land and authority:

Wulfstan's pronouncement on "the rights exercised by your excellent predecessor Stigand" upheld Anselm's claim to consecrate churches outside the diocese of Canterbury. [...] His longevity increasingly underlined the fact that he was a living embodiment of the values of an earlier generation. Once the newcomers in church and state were established in office, they would want to enhance their authority by drawing on the best of the older traditions.<sup>575</sup>

By the time William of Malmesbury was writing, the Normans were no longer newcomers, but Wulfstan remained useful as a figure on whose authority and protection claims could be based.

If William had good reason to want to see Wulfstan's cult succeed, Coleman had reasons that were just as compelling. Mason points out that, "It was [...] sometime during the reign of Samson – a secular priest, married, foreign, and without respect for the ancient ties of Worcester to Oswald and Westbury – that Coleman wrote the *Vita*

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<sup>574</sup> Mason, *St Wulfstan* 218.

<sup>575</sup> Mason, *St Wulfstan* 230.

*Wulfstani*. ”<sup>576</sup> Wulfstan’s success as a cult figure would have served as a safeguard against Samson and successors like him. Although both Oswald and Dunstan were still established and well-known saints in Coleman’s day and in William’s, neither was sufficient to fully protect Worcester. A more immediate and more immediately present saint was needed to bolster Worcester, and Wulfstan, who had closely identified himself with Oswald and Dunstan, was an ideal candidate: “If the portrait of the saint which emerges is a timeless ‘mirror of sanctity,’ if Wulfstan is, indeed, a ‘type,’ he is also [...] a saint for his own times, for Wulfstan provides the solution to the problems raised throughout the *Vita*. ”<sup>577</sup> These circumstance and the rhetorical needs they present make even more urgent the question of why the hagiographer (either Wulfstan or Coleman, or both) would include an incident that, in William’s presentation of it, would require significant hedging to mitigate its undermining features.

Furthermore, we must give William the credit due both to his skill as a writer and to his ability to alter his source material, which he demonstrated in other writings. Regardless of what exactly came from Coleman, the *VW(W)*’s text is what William *chose* to present to his readers. At the same time, Orchard provides a strong reminder that William was not constructing the narrative of Wulfstan’s life from scratch, nor was he working at a remove so remote that he might do whatever he liked with his source material. He could not, for example, entirely eliminate such a striking and potent miracle as the healing of a man with scrofula. The *VW(W)* is “the last layer in a complicated

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<sup>576</sup> Mason, *St Wulfstan* 108.

<sup>577</sup> Rampolla, “A Mirror of Sanctity” 112.

sequence, behind which can be dimly perceived Coleman, and Nicholas, and Wulfstan, and a whole community of saints.”<sup>578</sup> William’s text shows the difficulty of the material with which he was presented in his source text, the pressures of the hagiographic tradition, and the dexterity with which he dealt with them all.

The narrative uses this incident to promote Wulfstan’s cult in several obvious ways. First, there is the greatness of the miracle. The narrative goes to great lengths to establish the extremely pitiable state of the beggar. He is a “pauper” who sits “among others begging for their daily alms,”<sup>579</sup> but he is worse off than the other beggars because of his “appalling disease.”<sup>580</sup> The narrative shows the man on the brink of death: “poor fellow, quite apart from his neediness, what they call the king’s evil had crept up on him, so infecting all his limbs with its slow wasting that you would have said he did not have a real body at all, but was carried around in a living corpse.”<sup>581</sup> He “dripped all over with festering pus” and “he did not talk so much as wail tunelessly.”<sup>582</sup> The beggar suffers not just from poverty and physical illness, but from the horror of other people who cannot stand his presence; even the bishop’s steward Arthur “more than once turned away.”<sup>583</sup> The beggar is a man suffering in every conceivable way. Only a miracle of significant power, and thus a saint of significant power, could possibly help a man in such a

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<sup>578</sup> A. Orchard 57.

<sup>579</sup> VW(W) 74-75: “pauper [...] inter alios cotidianam stipem capientes.”

<sup>580</sup> VW(W) 74-75: “infanda valitudine.”

<sup>581</sup> VW(W) 74-75: “Miser, cui preter egestatis incommodum morbus irrepserat quem regium vocant, et in ita lenta tabe omnes artus infecerat ut non diceret eum vero uti corpore sed vivo circumferri cadavere.”

<sup>582</sup> VW(W) 74-75: “totus virulenta stillabat sanie” and “non [...] loqui sed raucum ululare.”

<sup>583</sup> VW(W) 74-75: “non semel refugit.”

situation. Wulfstan himself points this out when he refuses to try a cure: “indeed, he said it was not for him to attempt any miracle, let alone one so great as this.”<sup>584</sup> That Wulfstan does nevertheless cure the beggar is a strong testimony to Wulfstan’s power against a particularly dreadful disease.

Second, that Wulfstan does the miracle unconsciously only enhances his power the more. Since Wulfstan has refused to perform the miracle, he is tricked into doing so by the priest Æthelmær:

He made use of the water with which Wulfstan had washed those holy hands after mass. The priest gave this to the servant I have mentioned and told him to pour it into the patient’s bath. In went the leper, a horrid sight with his spotty skin. But miraculously the swollen boils went down, the deadly poison drained away, and, in a word, his whole skin was rejuvenated and became as clear as a child’s.<sup>585</sup>

This, it must be admitted, is a remarkable miracle and a testimony to how holy Wulfstan is. Even his wash water (albeit water used in a sacred purpose) is efficacious. The trope being used here is clear. The saint’s body is itself a sacred object and so what comes in contact with it is able to acquire and carry away some of that sanctity and its associated power.<sup>586</sup>

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<sup>584</sup> VW(W) 74-75: “Quin immo non suum esse respondit ullum, presertim tantum, attemptare miraculum.”

<sup>585</sup> VW(W) 76-77: “Eius fuit occasio aqua qua post missam sanctas diluerat manus. Hanc presbiter ministro supradicto datam iussit infundi balneo egroti. Lavit leprosus visu horridus, carne maculosus. Sed mirum in modum continuo pustularum tumor desedit, letiferum virus effluxit, et (ne plura) omnis caro in puerilem puritatem refluivit.”

<sup>586</sup> One example is found in the life of Wulfstan itself. The servant of a rich man is cured of an illness by being given water in which Wulfstan has steeped a coin struck from (or possibly by) the spear that pierced Christ’s side. VW(W) 81, cf. 80 n1.

Third, the narrative promotes Wulfstan's cult by demonstrating Wulfstan's great humility. He cannot be accused of being self-promoting, since he did not seek to perform the miracle. Humility, particularly in regard to publicizing one's miracles is, of course, a trope of many saints' lives. For example, "gentle Gerald [of Aurillac] was reduced to apoplexy when his men boasted of his miracles, while Odo [of Cluny] gave the credit for his own miracles to St. Martin. Such reticence is a hagiographical *topos*."<sup>587</sup> Beyond this, humility and self-denial are virtues which this text has a particular motive to highlight in Wulfstan. In a previous incident, discussed in above, Wulfstan has already been accused of pomposity and self-aggrandizement because he preached before being made a bishop.<sup>588</sup> His reluctance to seek a miracle out of a sense of his own unworthiness fits with his behaviour on being made a bishop. He was very bitter about being forced to take the bishopric, seeing it as a "burden."<sup>589</sup> The narrative makes clear that it is not the effort Wulfstan feared, but his own weakness:

But there is no doubt at all that the holy man's breast sweated in a titanic conflict, love and fear equally balanced, and pulling him now one way, now the other: fear that he might fail under an unaccustomed load, love prompting him not to appear to be opposing the orders and the authority of so many prestigious persons and the devoted piety of the people. The unworthier he seemed in his own eyes, the more persistent the cries of the rest; and the fact that he felt trepidation in approaching

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<sup>587</sup> P. Wormald, "Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts" 20.

<sup>588</sup> VW(W) 36-39.

<sup>589</sup> VW(W) 49: "onus."

the job seemed proof of his being likely to do it with prudence; only a fool would rush headlong into something without knowing the trouble it would involve.<sup>590</sup>

This extreme reluctance to accept the office is a standard response in episcopal hagiography. As Emma Mason points out, “it was a contention that a candidate for a bishopric should express his unworthiness: *noli episcopari*: ‘I don’t want to be made a bishop’ [sic].”<sup>591</sup> Both Wulfstan’s hesitation to accept the bishopric and his motives for doing so demonstrate his great humility and self-denial, which are consistent with one of the themes of the *VW(W)*. As Richard Gameson points out, asceticism is a central theme in the *Vita Wulfstani*.<sup>592</sup> It is narratively consistent then that the same humility would prevent him from seeking such a phenomenal miracle as a cure for scrofula, especially scrofula in such an advanced stage. The unconscious miracle allows him to perform something marvelous without at all diminishing that humility.

Finally, there is the imitation of a previous saint, one particularly acknowledged by the English as paradigmatic figure. A miracle that recalls one of Cuthbert’s more notable cures is just too good to pass over, even if it presents some difficulties in the telling. As Andy Orchard points out, “what is striking about the *Vita Wulfstani* is not so much that it closely resembles the *vitae* of other saints, but rather that such parallels have

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<sup>590</sup> *VW(W)* 49: “Nec vero dubitandum est ingenti sanctum pectus sudasse conflictu, dum in eo aequas partes facerent et huc illucque raptarent hinc amor inde timor, iste ne sub insueto labaret onere, ille ne tot probabilium virorum imperiosae auctoritati et populorum religiosae devotioni videretur resultare.”

<sup>591</sup> Mason, *St Wulfstan* 82.

<sup>592</sup> Richard Gameson, “St. Wulfstan, the Library of Worcester and the Spirituality of the Medieval Book,” *St Wulfstan and His World*, ed. Julia N. Barrow and N.P. Brooks, Studies in Early Medieval Britain 4 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 87.

been so self-consciously exploited and sustained.”<sup>593</sup> Cuthbert performs a cure of king’s evil that involves washing the body of the afflicted man, a description of the beggar’s disgusting scabbiness, his subsequent hair re-growth along with the regeneration of his skin, and the saint’s particular concern that the wretched beggar be treated gently. This is clearly one of the major reasons to include this story. The *imitatio* is too good to pass up,<sup>594</sup> particularly for a writer such as William, who fully exploited every opportunity for drawing connections between his subjects and previous holy men:

The *Vita Wulfstani*, composed by an author who, as we have seen, was well versed in hagiography and its conventions, presents at the heart of the *Vita Wulfstani*, an uninterrupted list of over 20 such miracles [...] Healing, punishment, prophecy, provision and spiritual visitation are all included in largely self-contained batches, in what is almost a motif-index of hagiography.<sup>595</sup>

As Richard Gameson says in his survey of the Worcester library, “it is worth noting that [hagiographies] are the sorts of works which Wulfstan’s biographer specified that the saint like to read.”<sup>596</sup> Gameson also specifies that Ælfric’s *Catholic Homilies I* are found in a homiliary from Wulfstan’s time at Worcester (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 114).<sup>597</sup> Gameson argues that “it is possible that familiarity with this text moulded

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<sup>593</sup> A. Orchard 51.

<sup>594</sup> Note that Cuthbert was among the saints being venerated on the Worcester calendar at the time William was doing his research and writing there. See F. Wormald nos. 16-18.

<sup>595</sup> A. Orchard 52-53.

<sup>596</sup> Gameson, “St. Wulfstan, the Library of Worcester” 67. For the passage in the VW(W) to which Gameson is referring see VW(W) 116-117.

<sup>597</sup> Richard Gameson, “Ælfric and the Perception of Script and Picture in Anglo-Saxon England,” *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 5 (1992): 85-101.



Wulfstan's recounting of his youthful experience or Coleman's or even William of Malmesbury's written record of it."<sup>598</sup> In other words, Wulfstan's hagiographers' use of Cuthbert is not a coincidence. Emma Mason agrees that "elements from the lives of St. Cuthbert and St. Columba perhaps also influenced the selection and presentation of material in Wulfstan's biography," as well as having a direct influence on Wulfstan himself.<sup>599</sup> Both William as a widely read churchman and Coleman as a product of Wulfstan's own regime would have realized the usefulness of writing a *vita* with clear ties to previous hagiography. Cuthbert was a widely recognized and venerated saint; imitation of him would carry more weight with an audience than imitation of a more obscure predecessor.

While the incident of the beggar with the king's evil is a powerful testimony to Wulfstan's status as a saint, it also presents troubling elements that work against the saint's cult. His power is not undermined, but his faith and faithfulness are challenged to such a degree that the narrative later offers "do-over" miracles that give the saint the opportunity to re-enact elements of the beggar's healing in ways that rebut the criticisms which might be leveled at the saint based on his treatment of the beggar.

First, the greater the beggar's need, the less excusable is Wulfstan's refusal. Not only is the beggar suffering terribly in the body, he is also a man desperately in need of ordinary human contact. Having done such an effective job of portraying a man to move the reader's pity, the narrative makes Wulfstan's refusal seem harsh and compassionless.

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<sup>598</sup> Gameson, "St. Wulfstan, the Library of Worcester" 82.

<sup>599</sup> Mason, *St Wulfstan* 209.

Wulfstan does direct his servant to feed and clothe the beggar, but he does not offer to pray for the man, nor does he go to speak to him in person. The text sets up a comparison between Wulfstan and Æthelmær by saying that Æthelmær had “second place for holiness after Wulfstan himself.”<sup>600</sup> This statement implies that Wulfstan has the first place for holiness. This makes Wulfstan’s refusal of the beggar all the more troubling, because it is the runner-up in holiness who enables the miracle to take place, and he does so by contradicting the wishes of the one who is first in holiness.

Worse, Wulfstan’s response displays a lack of faith in himself that shades into a lack of faith in God and entails a refusal to respond to the direct prompting of heaven. The beggar has come to Kempsey all the way from Kent, a journey of nearly two hundred miles, specifically to seek Wulfstan. Wulfstan’s rationale for refusing to attempt the miracle is humility, but to think primarily of himself at such a moment sounds self-centered rather than humble. Wulfstan is the bishop of Worcester; who better to ask God for a miracle?<sup>601</sup> Furthermore, he has already performed multiple miracles. He has saved a workman, who fell from some scaffolding,<sup>602</sup> and the monk Æthelric, who was dying.<sup>603</sup> Wulfstan has prophesied numerous events, including the fall of England to the Normans.<sup>604</sup> And the narrative tells us, “God had deigned to confer on the holy man the grace of miracles, so that like the fathers of old he was remarkable for driving away

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<sup>600</sup> VW(W) 74-75: “sanctitatis post Wlstanum profecto palma cessisset.”

<sup>601</sup> VW(W) 45.

<sup>602</sup> VW(W) 41.

<sup>603</sup> VW(W) 55.

<sup>604</sup> VW(W) 55 and 65 ff.

illness.”<sup>605</sup> This assertion is followed by the stories of three demon exorcisms which he performs without hesitation. Since humility has never prevented him from attempting dramatic miracles before, asking “who am I to ask for a miracle?” in response to this beggar sounds either delusional or disingenuous.

The two incidents immediately preceding the matter of the beggar involve Wulfstan voluntarily asking God to heal men. One is demon-possessed and the other is insane. Wulfstan’s reaction to the second man is particularly telling in its contrast to his treatment of the beggar:

As Wulfstan was going to bed, the plight of the man was reported by loud complaints from his staff. The priest *did not waste a second, but as ever told everyone to do what piety suggested: pray for the patient* and say the Lord’s Prayer. *For it was his habit, the moment he heard of a death or an illness, wherever he was and whatever the hour, to instruct those present to pray, either that the dead man should rest in peace or that the sick man should recover from his infirmity.*<sup>606</sup> (emphasis mine)

Wulfstan’s own pious habits tell against him, as does the notable success with which his prayers for the sick were met. For him to turn away the beggar with the king’s evil

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<sup>605</sup> VW(W) 69-70: “Contulerat divina dignatio virtutum gratiam Sancto, ut more priscorum patrum in depellendis valitudinibus esset egregius.”

<sup>606</sup> VW(W) 72-75: “Iam ergo discumbenti hominis miseria est nuntiata, magna servientium querimonia. Sacerdos nichil moratus pro more suo cunctis pietatis indixit offitium pro patiente preces fundere et ‘Pater noster’ dicere. Hoc enim consuetudinis sibi asciverat ut, quocumque loco, quacumque hora excessum alicuius audierit vel incommodum, statim presentes moneret orare vel ut defunctus in pace quiesceret vel egrotus infirmitatem evaderet.”

stands out as an aberration. Although the refusal is a mechanism to allow a demonstration of Wulfstan's extraordinary sanctity by a demonstration of his power, as I've described above, the refusal also argues against that same sanctity, so that the claim of humility seems flimsy and contrived.

Consider, in contrast, the later *vita* of Godric of Finchale. After twenty years as a solitary, Godric is asked to bring to life a dead child. Here, too, the saint recoils from the requested miracle. He flees from the child's parents, who have brought her corpse to him. However, when the parents leave the child's body behind, Godric spends two days and three nights begging God for the child's life, and on the third day she is revived.<sup>607</sup> Though, like Wulfstan, Godric shrank from attempting such an immense miracle, he does ultimately attempt it out of consideration for the grieving parents and their child. His humility is maintained by extracting a promise from the parents to keep the miracle silent during his lifetime.

Furthermore, Wulfstan's question has already been answered by the beggar's reason for coming to Kempsey. The beggar tells Arthur, the steward, that "he had three times been told in a vivid dream to look to the revered bishop for a hope of a cure, and that was why he had come; he begged Arthur in God's name to tell his master this."<sup>608</sup>

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<sup>607</sup> Reginald of Durham, *Libellus de vita et miraculis Sancti Godrici heremita de Finchale*, ed. J. Stevenson, Surtees Society 20 (London, 1847) 73. See also Susan J. Ridyard, "Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse Revisited: The Case of Godric of Finchale," *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, ed. Richard Gameson and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 237.

<sup>608</sup> VW(W) 74-75: "Ter manifesto conventum somnio ut spe sanitatis venerabili se presentaret episcopo; hac gratia venisse. Ut haec domino insinuaret, per Deum orare."

Since there is no indication in the narrative that Arthur failed to convey this aspect of the message, there is no reason to think that Wulfstan acted without full information. Having been told that a man has been sent three visions to seek him and then refusing to even see or pray for the man, Wulfstan looks callous, no matter how much he justifies his actions by arguments of humility.

In the miracle that precedes the beggar's, when the insane messenger is cured by Wulfstan's prayers, the narrator comments, "wonderful the mercy of Christ, remarkable the grace of the man!"<sup>609</sup> But Wulfstan's behavior toward the beggar shows him acting gracelessly. Even the reception he gives the steward who brings the message reinforces the implication that Wulfstan acted gracelessly in this moment. Winterbottom and Thomson's translation reads, "the servant handed on the message, but had an unfriendly reception."<sup>610</sup> Wulfstan's refusal ignores the prompting of heaven. The beggar "had three times been told in a vivid dream to look to the revered bishop for a hope of a cure."<sup>611</sup> Yet, "the pauper's message would have been in vain if the thoughtful priest Æthelmær had not intervened."<sup>612</sup> It is the care of the priest, "Eilmeri presbiteri [...] sollicitudo," not the saint which accomplishes the miracle. This is quite an indictment of Wulfstan's actions. The beggar has clearly been given a vision to seek the saint; it is not just his trust in Wulfstan, but the direction of heaven that is being thwarted here. Wulfstan almost

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<sup>609</sup> VW(W) 74-75: "Miranda clementia Christi, predicanda gratia viri!"

<sup>610</sup> VW(W) 74-75: "Suggestit minister postulata, sed non grate ab eo auditus est."

<sup>611</sup> VW(W) 74-75: "Ter manifesto conventum somnio ut spe sanitatis venerabili se presentaret episcopo."

<sup>612</sup> VW(W) 74-75: "Ita cassa fuisset suggestio, nisi Eilmeri presbiteri successisset sollicitudo."

makes both the beggar's long journey from Kent and God's work on his behalf of no account.

Andy Orchard is cautious in his language, but he calls it "most curious, perhaps, in such a self-consciously hagiographical context, [...] the extent to which Wulfstan acts unwittingly, or even against his will."<sup>613</sup> He also calls it "a little sinister" that "the cure, for which he is neither present nor physically involved, has to be extorted from him by guile."<sup>614</sup> Orchard attributes these factors to Coleman's own desire to appear important in the text, though this motive could only apply to the blind beggar's healing, not the pauper's. Still, Orchard has hit a significant element of the narrative and perhaps the one that most works against Wulfstan and the promotion of his cult. It is Æthelmær, not Wulfstan, who acts thoughtfully and faithfully. This is the final factor in the story that works to undermine the obvious point of the miracle. Æthelmær seems more holy, more gracious, more faithful than his superior, who is the subject of the narrative. The narrative tries to set him back in his place behind Wulfstan, saying that Æthelmær "made his sanctity burdensome by the sternness of his character,"<sup>615</sup> but the only sternness seen in this incident is Wulfstan's. Æthelmær not only fed the beggar at Wulfstan's direction, he "gave the sick man a lodging, comforting and coddling him."<sup>616</sup> Æthelmær does more than merely give alms and walk away. He is the one who expends the effort to see the beggar cured: "What is more, he contrived a way of obtaining surreptitiously from the

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<sup>613</sup> A. Orchard 53.

<sup>614</sup> A. Orchard 53-54.

<sup>615</sup> VW(W) 74-77: "eam severitate gravasset."

<sup>616</sup> VW(W) 76-77: "hospitio pio blanditiarum delinibat obsequio."

bishop a miracle he could not extort openly.”<sup>617</sup> Æthelmær takes the water with which Wulfstan washes his hands after mass and has it poured into the beggar’s bath water, upon which “his whole skin was rejuvenated and became as clear as a child’s.”<sup>618</sup> The miracle is Wulfstan’s, but it is Æthelmær who seeks and obtains it.

This is the central irony of this incident. In telling a story about the great power and sanctity of the saint, whose living body is already a holy object and whose humility is so great that he will not expose himself to the risk of praise from men, the narrative has also told a story which can be read as an exposure of a moment in which Wulfstan was unfaithful and ungracious. The cult-promoting elements within the narrative are not sufficient to erase or cover the negatives of the story. William of Malmesbury chose to retain a powerful and viscerally moving miracle while working to mitigate the elements within it that work against the saint. But it is a difficult narrative to stitch together, and in places the seams and stuffing show.

These counter-elements in the story, the things that work against Wulfstan’s cult, explain the narrative placement of the miracles which follow. After the beggar is cured, William of Malmesbury’s text relates six miracles: one miraculous rescue and five healings. Each reiterates elements of the beggar’s story in such a way that the objections to Wulfstan (selfish humility, lack of pity, lack of response to heavenly messages, failure to pray when he should) that could be raised from the beggar’s incident are rebutted.

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<sup>617</sup> VW(W) 76-77: “Commentus est etiam quomodo episcopo miraculum quod palam extorquere non posset furtim surriperet.”

<sup>618</sup> VW(W) 76-77: “omnis caro in puerilem puritatem refluuit.”

First, Wulfstan demonstrates that his faith is stronger than that of those around him. On a trip to London, Wulfstan stays in a building with a weak roof, which begins to collapse as the bishop's party is leaving in the morning. Everyone in the party immediately rushes out, only to realize that they have left their bishop inside. They demonstrate their own lack of faith and self-sacrifice by shouting to him to come out quickly, "for no one was willing to purchase Wulfstan's safety at the price of risk to himself, or thought of going inside to bring him out."<sup>619</sup> Wulfstan, on the other hand, shows both sturdy faith and a willingness to sacrifice himself for even non-human creatures: "But he was unperturbed by the horror of the situation, and went so far as to shout at them; 'O ye of little faith, do you think I am going to be crushed?' And he refused to take a step out of the house until he saw the animals loaded and moving on."<sup>620</sup> Lest the reader think that Wulfstan was just a good estimator of the building's strength, the narrative specifies that "it was a wonderful and fine miracle that while the holy man was inside the house delayed its collapse, but that it succumbed to its weakness the moment he came out."<sup>621</sup> In a moment of real danger, Wulfstan shows that his faith in

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<sup>619</sup> VW(W) 76-77: "Nemo enim, periculo suo salutem illius mercari volens, ut eum educeret intrare presumebat."

<sup>620</sup> VW(W) 76-77: "Sed ille tanti discriminis immanitate constantior ultro etiam clamoribus arguebat: 'Modicae fidei, putatis quod me ruina opprimat?' dixit, nec priusquam animalia sarcinis impositis promoveri vidisset pedem domo extulit." There are multiple places in the Scriptures in which Christ rebukes his disciples for their lack of faith. Winterbottom and Thomson supply Matt 16: 8, in which Christ says, "Why do you think within yourselves, O ye of little faith, for that you have no bread?" as the biblical source for Wulfstan's "Oh ye of little faith." However, if there is a single verse which has a more specific narrative parallel to Wulfstan's rebuke it is Matthew 14: 31, when Jesus physically saves Peter from drowning and then rebukes him, "O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?" *Douay-Rheims Bible*.

<sup>621</sup> VW(W) 78-79: "Miro prorsus et pulchro signo, ut Sancto intus posito domus casum suum suspenderet, eo vero egresso continuo debilitati cederet!"



God's providence is decisively stronger than that of others, even the good men of his own household.

Following this episode, there are five healing miracles in a row that all reiterate elements of the beggar's healing. William's narrative makes explicit that the building miracle and the healing miracles are grouped together because of their relationship to each other rather than reasons of chronology. In his transition from the story of the collapsing building, William comments on the arrangement of the text: "it is at this point that Coleman places a miracle that took place in the same vill [Wycombe], years later but more impressive; he thought it appropriate to bring together on the same page events that though separated in time were equal in importance."<sup>622</sup> William of Malmesbury credits, or blames, Coleman for this grouping, but he has clearly chosen to retain it and follow its example in the placement of the five healings which follow. This explanation of the grouping only explicitly addresses the building collapse and the first healing, which both take place in Wycombe, but the transitions that introduce the following healings show that they are also grouped for thematic reasons. Rather than using transitions that indicate movement forward in time from one event to another, the narrative introduces each event as a stand-alone moment, sequential only in the text. The sentences that begin each miracle either claim a relationship based on similarity rather than chronology or make no explicit connection at all. The second healing – of the blind man – begins, "on one

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<sup>622</sup> VW(W) 78-79: "Hic ponit miraculum Colemanus in eadem exhibitum villa, annis quidem posterius sed veneratione grandius. Contexendas ergo res putavit communione paginae quae licet dissiderent tempore congruerent dignitate."

occasion Wulfstan was on his way from Worcester to a vill.”<sup>623</sup> Next, the healing of the nun Gunnhild begins, “he performed a very similar miracle at Wilton.”<sup>624</sup> After that comes the healing of a Frenchman met along the road. It also opens with language that makes clear that the significance of this event does not depend on when it took place:

King William had introduced a custom that his successors for some time complied with but afterwards allowed to lapse. Three times a year the great men would all come to court, to deal with vital business affecting the realm, and at the same time to see the king in his pomp, how he went crowned with his jeweled diadem. *It is not relevant here to describe the places and times when the court was held.* But it was bound by this custom that Wulfstan once came hurrying to Winchester before Easter. (emphasis mine)<sup>625</sup>

Finally, the healing of Segild, a middle-class woman of Droitwich,<sup>626</sup> begins, “there is a town belonging to the diocese of Worcester long known as Droitwich, where, remarkably enough, sweet water lakes produce salt for public consumption.”<sup>627</sup> The salt production of the region is entirely beside the point of the miracle which takes place in Droitwich, and it serves mainly to locate the miracle in a place rather than in a time relative to the other

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<sup>623</sup> VW(W) 80-81: “a Wigornia in villam quadam vice viam carpebat.”

<sup>624</sup> VW(W) 80-81: “Huic miraculo illud proxima similitudine accedit, quod Wiltoniae fecit.”

<sup>625</sup> VW(W) 82-83: “Rex Willelmus consuetudinem induxerat quam successores aliquandiu tritam postmodum consensere permisere. Ea erat ut ter in anno cuncti optimates ad curiam convenirent de necessariis regni tractaturi, simulque visuri regis insigne, quo modo iret gemmato fastigiatus diademate. Loca et tempora curiae dicere non est presentis materiae. Huius igitur moris necessitate vir sanctus astrictus Wintoniam ante Paschale maturabat.”

<sup>626</sup> VW(W) 84-85. She and her husband were neither too high nor too low and they “lived the middling way of life” (*mediocriter victitabat*).

<sup>627</sup> VW(W) 84-85: “Vicus Wigornensi diocesi attinet Wic ab antiquo dictus, ubi, quod mirum sit dicere, de dulcibus stagnis confitiuntur salinae publicae.”

events. Thus the reader is shown that the five healings are grouped and linked by their narrative parallels, not chronology.

Having established that it is not chronology which has grouped these miracles in the text, let us consider how each individual healing reiterates key elements of the beggar's healing and, in the process, rebuts objections which might be raised against Wulfstan from that miracle. First, there is the healing at Wycombe of Swertlin's wife's maid. Like the beggar, this petitioner speaks to a servant of the bishop, rather than Wulfstan himself, because her circumstances deny her direct access to the saint himself: "Then the mother of the house, being inhibited from striking up a conversation with the bishop because of her sex and her respect for him, told her tale of woe to Coleman."<sup>628</sup> Like Æthelmær, Coleman takes the initiative to offer the afflicted person water touched by Wulfstan, in this case water that he had blessed for a church dedication that day.<sup>629</sup> However, when Coleman conveys this request to Wulfstan, the saint responds positively. Wulfstan sends the woman water in which a coin, struck from the spear which pierced Christ on the cross, has been steeped, "for he had found this had cured many in the past."<sup>630</sup> There is no affective language to describe the tenor of his response, as there is in the case of the beggar, but clearly there is no hesitation that could be construed as a lack of pity. At the same time, the use of a religious object of undisputed holiness and efficacy mitigates against the possible charge that Wulfstan is not following his pattern of

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<sup>628</sup> VW(W) 78-79: "Tum mater familias, quoniam sexus sui verecundia et episcopi reverentia inhiheret cum eo colloquium serere, Colemanini auribus dolorem suum exponit."

<sup>629</sup> VW(W) 78-79.

<sup>630</sup> VW(W) 78-79: "salubrem antea fuisse multis expertus."

humble hesitation to ask for a miracle. Furthermore, it is the water sent by Wulfstan's explicit order which cures the maid. Thus, the honor of the miracle is unambiguously Wulfstan's rather than being split between the saint and his servant as it was in the case of the beggar.

Next, there is the blind man who meets Wulfstan on the road from Worcester. This petitioner is seen by the saint, as Wulfstan spots him shouting from the side of the road as the saint's party is traveling, but again, the petition is spoken to a servant; the blind man "attached himself to Coleman as he rode along, and poured out his woes to him."<sup>631</sup> Like the beggar, the blind man specifically asks "in God's name" and, again like the beggar, has come to Wulfstan specifically because "*he had been shown in a dream* that Wulfstan could if he wished restore the sight of his eyes"<sup>632</sup> (emphasis mine). As with the beggar, Wulfstan's humility prevents him from agreeing at first: "Wulfstan was long reluctant, with many an objection that he was not worthy to do miracles."<sup>633</sup> However, in this case he is not "unfriendly,"<sup>634</sup> and he accedes to Coleman's request because of his "pious violence."<sup>635</sup> Wulfstan is thus able to retain his humble stance without being seen to turn away one who is clearly wretched and without being (potentially) less holy than his own uncanonized servant.

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<sup>631</sup> VW(W) 80-81: "equitanti se adiungens Colemanno calamitates ingerit suas."

<sup>632</sup> VW(W) 80-81: "Oraret pro Deo" and "Manifesta sibi somnii visione ostensum quod oculis lumen refundere posset si vellet."

<sup>633</sup> VW(W) 80-81: "Refugit ille diu multumque causatus non esse meriti sui miracula facere."

<sup>634</sup> VW(W) 74-75: "non grate."

<sup>635</sup> VW(W) 80-81: "pie violentus." Since *pie* is an adverb and *violentus* is an adjective, a closer translation would be that the man is "piously violent" in his approach to the saint.

Furthermore, the psalm that Wulfstan sings over the blind man is particularly apropos, both for the blind man's request and Wulfstan's own position. William of Malmesbury clearly expected his audience to recognize the psalm, *Ad te levavi*.<sup>636</sup> Psalm 24 (25 in modern Bibles) is too long to quote in its entirety here, but it repeatedly expresses the desire for God's mercy and the hope that God will not shame one who has petitioned him for help. The blind man's need for help is obvious as is his supplicant position. But Wulfstan, too, is a supplicant for the specific miracle to take place. Also, having declared his own unworthiness many times in the *vita*, with the language of this particular psalm he can make a large request of God without predicating it on his own holiness. Wulfstan has not chosen one of the psalms that call for God to vindicate a holy servant's righteousness, but one which asks for mercy on a sinful petitioner:

To thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul. In thee, O my God, I put my trust; let me not be ashamed. Neither let my enemies laugh at me: for none of them that wait on thee shall be confounded. Let all them be confounded that act unjust things without cause. Shew, O Lord, thy ways to me, and teach me thy paths. Direct me in thy truth, and teach me; for thou art God my Saviour; and on thee have I waited all the day long [...] My eyes are ever towards the Lord: for he shall pluck my feet out of the snare. [...] Look thou upon me, and have mercy on me; for I am alone and poor. The troubles of my heart are multiplied: deliver me from my necessities. See my abjection and my labour; and forgive me all my sins.

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<sup>636</sup> VW(W) 80-81.

Consider my enemies for they are multiplied, and have hated me with an unjust hatred. Keep thou my soul, and deliver me: I shall not be ashamed, for I have hoped in thee.<sup>637</sup>

Wulfstan thus finds a way to ask for a miracle without contradicting his earlier claims that he is not worthy to ask for one.

The third healing involves Gunnhild, a nun and the daughter of King Harold I, who is afflicted with a tumor growing over her eyes so that she can barely see. This is the briefest miracle in this particular grouping, but even here there are clear parallels with the story of the beggar. In this instance Wulfstan is able to demonstrate his graciousness to others by the friendly condescension with which he treats the nuns at Wilton: “the nuns greeted him with much pleasure, and he took his seat in a large group of them.”<sup>638</sup> He is clearly capable of feeling pity as well; he is “moved [...] to the depth of his being by the woman’s wretched plight.”<sup>639</sup> There is no hint of distance or indifference in his behavior. Wulfstan also takes more initiative to effect a cure in this case, reacting as soon as he hears about Gunnhild’s disease: “her complaint was notified to the bishop, and he ordered her to be brought in.”<sup>640</sup> Here there is no protest over his own unworthiness, but the narrative does provide a rationale for why he would attempt a miracle in this case: “he thought he owed a debt to her father’s memory, and he showed her the mercy appropriate

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<sup>637</sup> Ps. 24 (Vulgate 23):1-5 and 15-20, *Douay-Rheims Bible*.

<sup>638</sup> VW(W) 80-81: “Frequenti sanctimonialium exceptus laetitia inter eas assedit.”

<sup>639</sup> VW(W) 82-81: “totis pro miseria mulieris visceribus turbatus.”

<sup>640</sup> VW(W) 82-83: “Hinc querimonia delata pontifici iussa est adduci.”

to his virtues.”<sup>641</sup> To modern American ears, it may sound like another strike against Wulfstan that the daughter of a king receives more immediate consideration than a scabby pauper, but in its historical context it clearly indicates an appropriately virtuous response on Wulfstan’s part. He makes a concession to her need for the sake of a debt and for the sake of mercy.

The fourth healing miracle emphasizes the abject misery of the sick man, so that Wulfstan has an opportunity to respond to one who is every bit as pitiable as the beggar was. On the way to Winchester before Easter, the saint’s party finds a Frenchman<sup>642</sup> lying in the road, “being wracked by severe internal pains that made him roll from side to side, just like a snake twisting itself in varying coils. He was uttering piteous wails, and he saddened the very air with his lamentations.”<sup>643</sup> The emphasis on the man’s vocal, but nonverbal, expression of pain particularly recalls the beggar, who “did not so much talk as wail tunelessly” and spoke “in a low murmur scarcely to be understood.”<sup>644</sup> The narrative makes clear that Wulfstan is particularly moved by the Frenchman’s plight. The rest of the party offers sympathy, but has nothing more to give the man. Wulfstan, however, is both prompt and effective in his response, demonstrating his mercy and his power: “hearing the voice of a man in such pain and apparently on the point of death, he

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<sup>641</sup> VW(W) 82-83: “Nam et memoriae paternae nonnichil deferendum arbitratus dignam virtutibus suis misericordiam exhibuit.”

<sup>642</sup> VW(W) 82-83: “homo natalibus Francus.”

<sup>643</sup> VW(W) 82-83: “quem interna viscerum exagitabant tormenta. Volutabant eum in diversum immensi dolores, sicut anguis varios se torquet in orbis. Iactabat eiulatus flebiles et plangoribus ipsum constrictabat et verberabat aerem.”

<sup>644</sup> VW(W) 75.

hastily dismounted.”<sup>645</sup> Here the saint shows no hesitation at all in the face of another’s suffering. Further, his response covers the man’s total needs, offering both physical and spiritual help: “his charity revived the man with a drink, but his prayers were beating at the doors of heaven.”<sup>646</sup> Unlike his response to the beggar, Wulfstan’s treatment of the sick Frenchman shows a more than cursory and more than temporal expression of almsgiving.

Wulfstan also responds differently to the petitioner’s expression of faith in him. The Frenchman has heard of Wulfstan since his name “was not unknown among the French,”<sup>647</sup> and “hearing [Wulfstan’s name] he at once summoned up the strength to demand a blessing with all the emphasis at his command.”<sup>648</sup> As in the case of the blind man, this request gives a narrative opportunity for Wulfstan to re-perform his response to the beggar’s petition in such a way that he demonstrates a faithful response to another’s faith. “What it had taken faith to ask was not difficult to obtain.”<sup>649</sup> Wulfstan can no longer be accused of refusing the promptings of heaven.

Finally, the healing of Segild, a pious middle-class woman, returns to imitating the life of Cuthbert for a demonstration of Wulfstan’s efficacy and willingness to help

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<sup>645</sup> VW(W) 82-83: “Is ubi vocem dolentis et paulo minus ut videbatur animam agentis accepit, mox equo descendit.”

<sup>646</sup> VW(W) 82-84: “Caritas enim refocillabat eum poculo, sed pulsabat caelum oratio.”

<sup>647</sup> The phrasing here might be implying that it’s not just distance, but culture that makes it notable that Wulfstan is known among the French. Nicholas Brooks evidently thinks so too: “the unique (but unnamed) Frenchman who successfully sought the bishop’s cure [...] provides an occasion for an acid comment that Wulfstan’s name ‘was not unknown among the French.’ ” Brooks, “Introduction: How Do We Know about St Wulfstan?” 7.

<sup>648</sup> VW(W) 82-83: “continuo vires resumpsit, et quantis poterat animae conatibus benedictionem efflagitavit.”

<sup>649</sup> VW(W) 82-83: “Nec fuit impetratu difficile quod fuerat fidei postulasse.”



and of God's concern that Wulfstan be well-known as a saint. As in Cuthbert's life, the petitioner is a middle-class woman who is overcome with extreme pain through her entire body, who wears out her resources seeking doctors' help, and who is finally cured by the physical application of a letter from the saint to her body. Cuthbert is not specifically mentioned in the incident, but the parallels are strong enough that they would be recognizable to an English audience familiar with Cuthbert's life. This final healing miracle contains no language describing Wulfstan's affective response to her petition, but it does contain many other parallels with the story of the beggar which rebut the objections which might arise from that previous miracle.

Like the beggar, Segild is from humble circumstances and suffering terrible bodily pain. Her illness was "the sort that attacks not just a single limb but the whole body, leaving all the joints as though in knots. Every day the affliction grew worse, and the woman became confined to her bed."<sup>650</sup> She is middle-class, rather than a pauper as the beggar is, but extreme poverty is coming as a result of her illness: "all this time, she, like her husband, had been spending excessive sums in trying to get help from doctors."<sup>651</sup> By the time she turns to Wulfstan, "for a long time their savings had been getting low."<sup>652</sup> The connection between poverty and illness is clear in both stories. The beggar had no work and could barely get alms because his disease made even charitable

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<sup>650</sup> VW(W) 84-85: "morbus qui non solum unum membrum sed etiam omnes artus premeret, qui omnes articulos nodositate quadam constringeret. Accrevit in dies auctor labes, et mulierem grabato [sic] invexit."

<sup>651</sup> VW(W) 84-85: "ipsa interim, nec minus maritus, medicorum opem immodicis sumptibus sollicitabant."

<sup>652</sup> VW(W) 84-85: "iamque multo tempore in penum congesta defecerant."

people turn away from him. Segild has a husband to provide for her and at least begins with some savings, but she cannot work either, being “confined to her bed,” and the cost of doctors is exhausting her family’s finances.

The image of a woman who has worn out her finances seeking help from doctors before she seeks the saint’s help is, of course, a powerful one in pointing the reader to rely on heaven rather than on man. It also provides a parallel to the biblical story of the woman afflicted with bleeding for twelve years who was cured by touching the hem of Christ’s robe, which allows the narrative to make Wulfstan an explicit type of Christ. Segild’s doctors have proved useless: “they practised their art and were sedulous in their treatment; what they could not do they made up for with promises.”<sup>653</sup> The bleeding woman had also “suffered many things from many physicians; and had spent all that she had, and was nothing the better, but rather worse.”<sup>654</sup> Like the bleeding woman, Segild seeks Christ’s help because she has given up on other help: “despairing of human aid, [she] had recourse to the help of Christ.”<sup>655</sup> In the case of the bleeding woman, she is cured by physical contact with the hem of Christ’s robe. Segild is cured by touching Wulfstan’s letter. The letter contains the name of Christ, but it is Wulfstan’s. Thus Wulfstan is made to act as a direct imitator of Christ which offers a powerful inducement to readers to seek Wulfstan in their own petitions.

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<sup>653</sup> VW(W) 84-85: “Illi sedulo instare, arti suae non deesse; quod minus possent facto, promissi supplere, commeatum deliberandi sepius frustrati.”

<sup>654</sup> Mark 5: 25-34, cf. Luke 8:42-48; Matthew 9:20-22, *Douay-Rheims Bible*.

<sup>655</sup> VW(W) 84-85: “Cum illa humana ope desperata ad Christi fugit suffragia.”

Another strong parallel between the stories of the beggar and Segild is that both use intermediaries to convey the sick person's petition to the saint and to deliver the mechanism of healing. Arthur the steward brought the beggar's request to Wulfstan, and Æthelmær the priest brought the water to the beggar. Segild's petition is conveyed to Wulfstan via her son who is in Wulfstan's *curia*. The letter from Wulfstan is carried to Segild by the deacon Freowine. However, in Segild's case, the narrative makes clear that the miracle is wholly Wulfstan's. Freowine is a good enough man, "then a deacon but later a monk, a very reliable man of constant good humor,"<sup>656</sup> but not a competitor in holiness with Wulfstan. He is merely a messenger, sent by the bishop's direction, not a co-petitioner on Segild's behalf and certainly not one who has to "extort" the miracle from Wulfstan.<sup>657</sup> Wulfstan writes the letter; Wulfstan sends it; the miracle is entirely his.

Lastly, the narrative makes even clearer than in the story of the beggar that these events (both the illness and the direction toward Wulfstan as the curative saint) were orchestrated by God's providence, to which Wulfstan responds faithfully. The narrator specifically tells the reader that doctors are prevented from curing the woman "by heavenly providence, which foresaw that this was a task for its favourite, the bishop."<sup>658</sup> Furthermore, the woman decides to seek Wulfstan not just as an act of desperation when doctors fail, but because she is given a vision telling her to seek Wulfstan: "for God

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<sup>656</sup> VW(W) 84-85: "tunc diaconum postea monachum, virum magnae fidutiae constantisque laetitiae."

<sup>657</sup> VW(W) 75.

<sup>658</sup> VW(W) 84-85: "caelestis providentia, huiusmodi opus antistitis sui fore speculata."

inspired a plan, showing her in a vision that she would be granted relief if she was found worthy to receive a letter from Bishop Wulfstan.”<sup>659</sup> Wulfstan sends the letter with no mention of delay or hesitation in the narrative. Further, the language is remarkably direct, with no ambiguity or hedging in its language that might indicate wavering or doubt on Wulfstan’s part. The letter simply says, “May Jesus Christ cure you, Segild.”<sup>660</sup> Thus Wulfstan is shown responding faithfully to the will of heaven rather than refusing one who has been given three visions to seek him, as happened with the beggar.

Other reasons to include the miracle of the beggar with the king’s evil and to “cope” with it, rather than excluding it entirely, lie in the historical context of hagiographical writing and reading at Worcester under Wulfstan and the VW(W)’s roots in Coleman’s lost *Life*. Since there is no known extant copy of Coleman’s *Life*, any discussion of what William chose to do with his source material must proceed cautiously. At the same time, there is ample evidence that the monk Coleman did exist, that he did write a *Life* at the injunction of prior Nicholas, and that William can be trusted when he claims that he drew heavily on events as they are described in Coleman’s *Life*. Besides the use William made of it, Coleman’s work was used by John of Worcester in composing his *Chronicle*.<sup>661</sup> Ker was the first to identify marginal comments in Worcester manuscripts from this era signed “Cbplfmbn” as being from the author of

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<sup>659</sup> VW(W) 84-85: “Affuit enim Deus ipsius inspirator consilii, ostenditque per visum quod liberaretur incommodo si litteras suspicere mereretur a Wlstando episcopo.”

<sup>660</sup> VW(W) 84-85: “Sanet te Iesus Christus, Segild.”

<sup>661</sup> John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester* vol. 3, ed. Reginald R. Darlington and P. McGurk, trans. Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1995) 134.

William's source text, and the later work of McIntyre, Hill, Stoneman, and Jackson has increased the number of notes identified with Coleman.<sup>662</sup>

William describes his work as a translation of Coleman's work, rather than a revision. This assertion cannot be taken at face value, both because it is a standard hagiographical trope, and because William himself tells us in multiple places that he has cut out what he considered Coleman's excess wordiness, somewhat revised the structure of the work to balance chapters between books I and II, and put in additional miracles recounted to him by Nicholas.<sup>663</sup> Still, this leaves us with the certainty that large portions of William's text must reflect the content of Coleman's work, and therefore William may well have been faced with material which he might not have put in himself if he had felt that he had a choice. Andy Orchard argues that William "seems to have been quite faithful to Prior Warin's injunction that in rendering Coleman's *Life* he should follow the essential contents of the text closely, without changing the order of events or altering the narrative."<sup>664</sup> Orchard cites instances in which William seems less than pleased with his source material and stresses that "it is important to note that it is not the miracles themselves that appear to have been edited, simply the overindulgent manner of their

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<sup>662</sup> N.R. Ker, "Old English Notes Signed 'Coleman,'" *Medium Ævum* 18 (1949): 29-31 and N.R. Ker, *Books, Collectors and Libraries: Studies in the Medieval Heritage*, ed. A.G. Watson (London: Hambledon P, 1985) 27-30. See also E. McIntyre, "Early Twelfth-Century Worcester Cathedral Priory, with Especial Reference to the Manuscripts There," diss. Oxford U, 1978; Joyce Hill, "Ælfric's 'Silent Days,'" *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 16 (1985): 118-131; W.P. Stoneman, "Another Old English Note Signed 'Coleman,'" *Medium Ævum*, 56 (1987): 78-82; Peter Jackson, "The *Vitas patrum* in Eleventh-Century Worcester," *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the 1990 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Carola Hicks (Stamford, CT: Paul Watkins P, 1992) 119-134.

<sup>663</sup> For a complete list of the passages in which Wulfstan refers to either Coleman or Nicholas see Brooks, "Introduction: How Do We Know about St Wulfstan?" 5, n. 20.

<sup>664</sup> A. Orchard 45.

telling.”<sup>665</sup> Nicholas Brooks agrees with Orchard’s assessment: “the bulk of what we have rings true as a faithful but more literary rendering into Latin of an Old English *Life* which must itself have been written between Wulfstan’s death in 1095 and that of Coleman in 1113.”<sup>666</sup> Still, that “more literary rendering” leaves a significant space in which William might have (and clearly did) manipulate the story to give it a narrative presentation which best suited his purposes. Wulfstan’s refusal to attempt the healing of the man may stand as one example of such material in which the essential features of a story could not be changed, but William could alter the material’s narrative presentation so as to make, what was to him, a better picture of the saint.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the moments of hesitation or of weakness of faith seen in the *Lives* of Æthelwold and Wulfstan are exceptional departures from the normal mode of portraying a saint’s miracles. Though the incidents considered here are presented in their hagiographies as part of the evidence for the saint’s sanctity, they allow the reader to see the saint weak, doubting, or hesitant. In doing so, they reveal the writer at work in the text, because the reader is all the more aware of the mechanisms by which the particular text works to present a particular incident in order to bolster the saint’s reputation in ways which are often bounded and constrained by the historical context in which the hagiography was written.

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<sup>665</sup> A. Orchard 46.

<sup>666</sup> Brooks, “Introduction: How Do We Know about St Wulfstan?” 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### POSTMORTEM DERISION: HE WASN'T THAT HOLY

This final chapter examines incidents of doubt which come closest to following the pattern identified by Michael Goodich. The dead saint's power and/or sanctity are derided, and the derision is miraculously rebutted. Even here, however, the Anglo-Saxon material shows significant variance from Goodich's pattern. Not all the miracles are punitive, nor are they all framed simply as exempla against blasphemy. Some incidents of doubt, such as Onlafald's mockery of Cuthbert, are clearly blasphemous and result in instant punishment. As Ælfric's treatment of the monks at Bardney shows, not every expression of doubt is motivated by willful sin, nor is every such expression, even those that are sinful, met by punishment. The abbot who questions Archbishop Oswald's translation, though motivated by jealousy, is not punished, but instead he is shown a healing miracle so that he may repent. While the incidents of doubt do model appropriate behavior toward the saint, several of them accomplish other work as well.

What remains constant among each of these saints' *Lives* is that in each case the narrative must assert that the saint, while no longer active in the body, is functionally not dead, but very much alive and capable of acting in the temporal realm. Proof of power is treated as equivalent to proof of sanctity. Indeed, the narratives examined here stress that

the saints' powers increase, rather than decrease, after the saints have died. Like Christ, in their deaths they are glorified and raised spiritually, if not yet bodily, to a greater life and hence a greater glory and power. Far from being removed from their communities, in death the saints have become even more potent, more capable of defending themselves and those who rely on them for protection.

This assertion of the saint's power is then presented in the context of the individual work's particular concerns or agenda. Linking the very temporal matters of kingship or property ownership to the theology of eternal life may seem overly materialistic, but, in fact, it reiterates an essential principal of sainthood theology. A dead saint is not really dead. His life in heaven is an enhancement of his earthly life, not a replacement for it. A saint remains both physically and spiritually present in the world because his bones remain as tangible links between him and those who venerate him. This is why relics are sometimes called *pignora*, that is, pledges, tokens or assurances.<sup>667</sup> The saint's new life in heaven does not, in any sense, end his life on earth. Thus, Bede can treat a dead king as a king for all the English and the Durham community can present the long dead Cuthbert as the undying landlord of his community's property. Since the death of the body has not severed the saint's connection with the world of the living, he can still exercise temporal authority, as well as displaying the type of spiritual authority which allows him to perform miracles.

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<sup>667</sup> Guibert of Nogent, "On Saints and Their Relics," *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, ed. Thomas Head, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities 1942 (New York: Garland, 2000) 399-428.



### Eadmer's *Vita Odonis*

Eadmer's *Vita Sancti Odonis* is the only extant *vita* dedicated solely to Oda. However, the saint is mentioned favorably in three *Lives* of St. Dunstan and he is described as a saint in Byrhtferth's *Vita Oswaldi archiepiscopi Eboracensis*.<sup>668</sup> Several of the *Lives* of Dunstan also mention the death of Ælfsige, Oda's successor, and point to it as the providential means for Dunstan to have received the archbishopric. However, Byrhtferth's text claims that Ælfsige (called Ælfsin in this one text) died because he mocked Oda at Oda's tomb. Eadmer's text then takes this incident and expands it from one miracle to three in order to create a dramatic conclusion for his own *Vita Odonis*.

Byrhtferth's *Vita Oswaldi* presents Oda as evidence for Oswald's sanctity by repeating a common trope of hagiography: namely that those who are holy come from holy antecedents.<sup>669</sup> The incident in which Oda is reviled as evil by his successor Ælfsin is part of this chain of logic. Oda is Oswald's uncle. Ælfsin's outburst at Oda's tomb raises the question of Oda's sanctity and the resulting miracle answers the question of just how holy the man had been. Byrhtferth can then point to this incident as evidence for Oswald's sanctity and treat it as a warning against reviling the saints, including Oswald, without ever saying that anyone questioned Oswald's own sanctity.

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<sup>668</sup> Byrhtferth was identified as the author of the *Vita Oswaldi archiepiscopi Eboracensis* in Michael Lapidge's article "Byrhtferth of Ramsey and the Early Sections of the *Historia Regum* attributed to Symeon of Durham," *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1982): 97-122.

<sup>669</sup> Byrhtferth, *Vita Oswaldi archiepiscopi Eboracensis: The Historians of the Church of York and Its Archbishops*, ed. James Raine, Rolls Series 71 (London: Her Majesty's Stationers Office, 1879; London: Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1965) 408. Hereafter, *VO(B)*.

The text describes Oda's career in detail: "if you desire to know [Oswald's] family, let one be brought forth who was exalted from out of the multitude of Christ's flock, namely Archbishop Oda of Canterbury, who is known to be [Oswald's] uncle."<sup>670</sup> The *Vita Oswaldi* does more than simply claim that Oswald is descended from another saint; it offers numerous examples of Oda's sanctity in his action and his miracles, comparing him to the Apostles and David. The text calls him "the most blessed"<sup>671</sup> and "saint."<sup>672</sup> It assures the reader that, on his death, Oda was taken to heaven "in which he perpetually rejoices with the saints assembled in the stars."<sup>673</sup> Although Oda is not being given his own text here, he is clearly being presented as a saint in his own right in order to bolster Archbishop Oswald's claims to sainthood.

The *VO(B)* presents Ælfsin's attack on the saint as a demonstration that Oda does indeed live on past his death. The text says that "after [Oda's] passing, [Ælfsin] rose up against God's servant whom he supposed to be no longer living; but He who is the life, the truth and the way of the Saints, revealed from on high that His bishop was living with Him."<sup>674</sup> Ælfsin went to Oda's tomb one day and "stood over the over the tomb of the man of God [...] saying, 'Bishop, behold you lie prostrate, and I enjoy the right of triumph. So long as you lived I did not deserve [the bishopric]; now that you are dead I

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<sup>670</sup> *VO(B)* 401: "Si genus agnoscere desideras, introducatur unus elatus a grege Christi ex plurimis, Oda scilicet archiepiscopus civitatis Cantiae, qui ejus dinoscitur esse patruus." (Translations from the *VO(B)* are mine.)

<sup>671</sup> *VO(B)* 403: "beatissimi."

<sup>672</sup> *VO(B)* 410: "sancti."

<sup>673</sup> *VO(B)* 408: "quo perpetualiter gaudet cum Sanctis glomeratus in astris."

<sup>674</sup> *VO(B)* 408: "Contra famulum Dei surrexit post obitum, quem autumabat esse defunctum; sed Ille, Qui est vita, veritas, et via Sanctorum, demonstravit caelitus quod Suus cum Eo viveret episcopus."

have received [it].”<sup>675</sup> Ælfsin’s assertion may seem like a simple statement of fact, but Ælfsin’s actions demonstrate that he is not just noting the death of Oda’s body, but denying Oda’s sanctity by denying that Oda has a continuing life with God. Both the narrator and Ælfsin’s words focus on the fact of Oda’s death as a loss of power to continue acting, not just a transition from earth to heaven.

The text rebuts Ælfsin’s claims by showing Oda’s power to physically re-appear and act in the temporal realm. The marginal notes in Raine’s edition summarize the incident as “Odo appears in a dream to priest.”<sup>676</sup> However, the text paints a picture of the saint waking the priest from his sleep:

On a certain night at an unseasonable hour, [...] the ever watchful Oda, vested in an alb, came to a certain priest, to whom he spoke thus: “Do you sleep or do you watch?” To whom the priest said, “I slept, venerable father, but, since you have come here I wake.”<sup>677</sup>

The monk was asleep, but his conversation with Oda shows a return to wakefulness, not a continuation in sleep and dreams. The text thus presents Oda as physically present in the world, not just as buried relics, but as an active body. Oda’s instructions further emphasize his physical presence by ordering the priest to ask Ælfsin “why he despised

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<sup>675</sup> *VO(B)* 408: “Staret supra sepulcrum viri Dei [...] dicens, ‘Episcopo, ecce prostratus jaces, et ego fruar jura triumphii. Te vivente non merui, te obeunte percepi.’ ”

<sup>676</sup> *VO(B)* 408.

<sup>677</sup> *VO(B)* 408: “In eadem nocte intempestivo tempore [...] advenit pervigil Oda, podere vestitus, ad quendam presbyterum; cui sic allocutus est; ‘Dormis an vigilas?’ Cui sacerdos ait, ‘Dormivi, pater venerande, sed, te veniente vigilo.’ ”

me with words yesterday, and struck [me] with his staff.”<sup>678</sup> Ælfsin did not strike just the tomb, but the saint. Oda also demonstrates that he, more than Ælfsin, has the power to punish those who offend him. He tells the priest, “if you want the prosperity of your most sweet life which you maintain, recite to your bishop these things that you have heard with your ears.”<sup>679</sup> Finally, Oda warns Ælfsin that he has lost his office as bishop: “because yesterday you dishonored me in word and in deed, I predict that you will cross the sea, you will manage to ascend the mountains, but you will never sit in the Apostolic seat.”<sup>680</sup> Oda is not only not dead, he is still acting as the archbishop of Canterbury, issuing orders, checking that the vigils are carried out and rebuking Ælfsin for his failure to venerate a saint.

Although previous texts, particularly the *VO(B)*, treated Oda as a saint, Eadmer seems to have invented the appellation “Oda se gode” and attributed its use to Dunstan.<sup>681</sup> Oda may have been among the Anglo-Saxon saints venerated in Christ Church, Canterbury, before the Conquest, but he had no stand-alone hagiography until Eadmer decided to write his *vita*. This means that Eadmer’s *Vita Sancti Odonis* is either the start of Oda’s cult or an attempt to preserve and promote a small, informal cult by inserting it into the textual record as a stand-alone text. The decision to write a *Life* of Oda is in line with Eadmer’s own devotional interests and a resurgence of hagiographic activity during

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<sup>678</sup> *VO(B)* 409: “Cur me despexit verbo hesterno die, et percussit baculo.”

<sup>679</sup> *VO(B)* 409: “Si dulcissimae vitae tuae quam retines prosperitatem desideras, haec quae tuis auribus hausisti, tuo episcopo edicito.”

<sup>680</sup> *VO(B)* 409: “Quia hesterno die despexisti me in verbo et opere, praedico tibi quia mare transfretabis, montes ascendere valebis, sed nequamquam in Apostolica sede sedebis.”

<sup>681</sup> *VD(E)* 203.

this period.<sup>682</sup> As Turner and Muir have shown, Eadmer used Byrhtferth's *Vita Oswaldi* for his own *Vita Oswaldi* and the *Vita Odonis*.<sup>683</sup> One of these borrowings is the incident at Oda's tomb. Eadmer takes an incident of doubt from the *VO(B)* and makes it a crescendo of confirmatory miracles with which to close the *Vita Sancti Odonis*.

Eadmer borrows the substance of Ælfsin's rude words at the tomb and Oda's use of a priest as messenger to Ælfsin for the *Vita Odonis*. He even borrows a physical detail; the *VO(B)* says that when Oda disappears from the priest's sight, "his countenance retained the colors of the rose."<sup>684</sup> The *Vita Odonis* describes Oda as appearing milky white and rose colored. At the same time, Eadmer's text greatly expands Byrhtferth's narrative, adding more dialogue and delving deeper into Ælfsige's motives. Byrhtferth's text confirms that Ælfsin died, but Eadmer's describes Ælfsige's death in exact detail and draws out the lesson from it. Eadmer also adds another miracle to the sequence as one more confirmation that Oda is a living saint who ought to be venerated.

In choosing his postmortem miracle, Eadmer reveals the pressures under which he wrote. While the miracles attendant on Ælfsige's death incorporate elements recognizable to any student of hagiography (the postmortem message from the saint, the appearance to another recognized holy man during mass, the image of the dove), Eadmer has chosen a set of miracles which directly addresses the fear that the saint might not be

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<sup>682</sup> Turner and Muir xvi.

<sup>683</sup> Eadmer of Canterbury, *Vita Sancti Odonis, Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald*, ed. and trans. Andrew J. Turner and Bernard J. Muir, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2006) cvii. Hereafter, *VOdonis*.

<sup>684</sup> *VO(B)* 409: "effigiem retinens rosei coloris."

given appropriate reverence. Eadmer was a contemporary, a fellow hagiographer, and a probable friend of Osbern at Christ Church, Canterbury. It was Eadmer who accompanied Osbern on the relic hunt which revealed the bones of St. Ouen in the cathedral.<sup>685</sup> There is no indication that he personally clashed with the Norman prelates as Osbern may have done. Indeed, Eadmer was the close personal friend and advisor of Anselm for many years.<sup>686</sup> However, as is discussed in the chapter on questions above, Eadmer also experienced the Lanfrancian investigations into the cults of Dunstan and other prominent Anglo-Saxon saints, which provided the context for Osbern's *Vita Sancti Dunstani*, and he may well have perceived them as threatening, or at least insufficiently reverent, toward his church's saints.

Under these circumstances, Eadmer's motives for writing Oda's hagiography are readily apparent. Given his own devotional inclinations and the pressure of Lanfranc's investigations, Eadmer quite reasonably must have felt that Oda's semi-formal veneration required a documentary text of its own in order to enhance the saint's veneration and to move it out of the gray area which it inhabited into the more solid and secure position of a cult with a clear written testimony. He manipulates the details of Ælfsige's death to great lengths in order to put the capstone on this project.

Eadmer's portrayal of Ælfsige goes so far in demonizing him that it is almost parodic, but it drives home the point that denying Oda's sanctity could only come from an evil impulse. Ælfsige acquired the archbishopric through simony "by giving money to

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<sup>685</sup> Turner and Muir xvi.

<sup>686</sup> Turner and Muir xvii – xix.

the princes who were of leading rank in the palace of King Edgar.”<sup>687</sup> Eadmer not only tells the reader that Ælfsige was ambitious for the archbishopric (with “a great lust of seizing the archbishopric”),<sup>688</sup> but Ælfsige even admits it himself before Oda’s tomb, saying that he “long desired” the position.<sup>689</sup> Ælfsige is “frenzied” and “inflamed by idiotic madness” when he addresses Oda’s tomb, and to punctuate his statements he uses his crosier to strike the tomb.<sup>690</sup> However, it is not just Ælfsige’s general character deficiencies that bring about his death, but his specific hostility toward Oda. On the day of his ordination, Ælfsige goes to Oda’s tomb and reviles the saint in front of the assembled celebrants:

Behold, you old fool, you are dead and lie rotting beneath the earth and I, at my whim, shall triumph over you in power. While you were alive I was not able to become archbishop of the English people; now that you are dead I have been made just that, as I have long desired to be. And so, wicked and shriveled old man, you shall get no thanks from me since, if you could have lived any longer, you would not have wished to yield either to me or to anyone else the share of the honour held by you.<sup>691</sup>

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<sup>687</sup> *Vodonis* 32-33: “data pecunia principibus qui primi erant in palatio Edgari.” This accusation may have some basis in fact. Turner and Muir note that Ælfsige was a “constant presence at the court of Eadwig,” *Vodonis* 32, n. 46. See also Ann Williams, “Princeps Merciorum gentis: The Family, Career and Connections of Ælfhere, Ealdorman of Mercia, 956-83,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1982): 143-72 and Yorke, “Ælthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century” 65-88.

<sup>688</sup> *Vodonis* 32-33: “magna ad rapiendum sacerdotium cupiditate.”

<sup>689</sup> *Vodonis* 32-33: “concuupivi” [sic].

<sup>690</sup> *Vodonis* 32-33: “furialibus” and “stulto furore.”

<sup>691</sup> *Vodonis* 32-33: “Inepte, ecce tu mortuus es, et sub tellure putridus iaces, et ego cum voluero de te potenter triumphabo. Te vivente, summus Anglorum pontifex esse nequivi; te obeunte, idipsum factus sum

To modern ears Ælfsige's raving may seem very much like that of a villain in a Saturday morning cartoon explaining his plan for world domination, but it makes clear where his sin lies. Ælfsige is greedy, violent, and ambitious, and he accuses Oda of sharing these sinful attitudes. Furthermore, he explicitly refuses to show Oda any reverence or gratitude. His skepticism about Oda's sanctity is also revealed by his temerity. Even when Ælfsige is warned of his impending punishment, he refuses to acknowledge Oda, "considering his words to be of little importance and calling them an absurd threat."<sup>692</sup> Particularly telling in a hagiography, Ælfsige also asserts that Oda is not only dead, but also rotting (*putridus*). Since an incorrupt body is a frequent hallmark of sainthood, he is reiterating his denial that Oda is a saint.

Eadmer refutes Ælfsige with not one, but three miracles. First, Oda comes to an unnamed watchman in a vision and predicts Ælfsige's death, demonstrating that the saint is indeed alive and well in heaven and not disconnected from earthly affairs. His appearance in the vision contradicts Ælfsige's statement that the saint is rotting; Oda appears "with milk-white face and a robe of rosy colour."<sup>693</sup> The watchman who delivers Oda's message describes the saint as being "radiant like an angel of God."<sup>694</sup> Oda asserts twice that he is still alive, though no longer in the flesh. He says, "I have not died, but live for my king, almighty God," and he describes himself as "now living in the heavenly

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iuxta quod olim esse concuipivi [sic]. Et inde, male ac decrepiti senex, nullas gratias habeas, quia si ultra vivere potuisses, nec michi nec ulli vel participium habitus honoris tui concedere voluisses."

<sup>692</sup> *VOdonis* 34-35: "parvi pendens ea quae audierat verba ineptae, ut dicebat, comminationis."

<sup>693</sup> *VOdonis* 32-33: "vultum lacteum habens, vestimentum vero rosei coloris."

<sup>694</sup> *VOdonis* 34-35: "speciosus ut angelus Dei."



kingdom.”<sup>695</sup> Oda also demonstrates his close relationship with God by being able to predict the future:

Because you reproached me yesterday with insulting words and struck my tomb with your crosier, I predict to you that you will sail across the sea and ascend the Alps, but you will never attain the pallium of the patriarchate of the holy church of Canterbury, nor will you ever sit on its apostolic throne.<sup>696</sup>

Oda also makes clear that his power to influence worldly events has not ended with his earthly life. He affirms that he did indeed prevent Ælfsige from obtaining power during his lifetime and that he will continue to do so: “just as you were unable to attain the archbishopric of Canterbury because of me while I was still living in the flesh, so too because of me [...] you will shortly lose the honour you have seized.”<sup>697</sup> Though Oda affirms God’s power by describing Ælfsige as “bishop elect, though not chosen by God,”<sup>698</sup> he makes his own instrumentality clear. The movement in the Latin from “causa mei” to the even stronger phrase “per me,” which could be better translated as “through me,” makes clear that Oda is not just relaying a message about God’s will; Oda himself is directly preventing Ælfsige from having the office he desired.

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<sup>695</sup> *VOdonis* 32-33: “Non sum mortuus, sed vivo regi meo, omnipotenti Deo,” and “me in caelesti nunc regno viventem.”

<sup>696</sup> *VOdonis* 32-33: “Quoniam hesterno die verbis michi derisoriis exprobasti, baculo tuo sepulchrum meum percussisti, praedico tibi quia mare transfretabis, Alpes ascendes, sed nequaquam pallium patriarchatus sanctae Dorobernensis aecclesiae obtinebis, nec unquam in apostolica eius sede sedebis.”

<sup>697</sup> *VOdonis* 32-33: “Sicut tu causa mei adhuc in carne viventis non evaluisti ad archiepiscopatum Cantuariensem pervenire, ita per me [...] invasum honorem in proximo perdes.”

<sup>698</sup> *VOdonis* 32-33: “ad electum, sed non a Deo.”

Note also that Oda does not explicitly predict Ælfsige's death; rather, Oda foresees the frustration of his plans and the loss of his power. The proof of Oda's sanctity lies in his demonstration of greater power than his attacker. Finally, Oda demonstrates that he is more powerful than the sitting bishop by being able to command the servants of the church. Oda not only speaks to the watchman, but he also gives him orders to deliver a message to Ælfsige, as if Oda were still the bishop and in a position to direct the servants of the church. The watchman hesitates at first to deliver the message because he fears Ælfsige, but Oda appears a second and third time, finally threatening to punish the man if he does not deliver the message. After this, the man decides he fears Oda more than Ælfsige and delivers the message. Oda has already begun to remove Ælfsige from power by subverting his servants.

The second miracle is Ælfsige's death. Ælfsige freezes to death in the Alps even though he makes every effort to warm up, including killing the horses and sticking his feet in their guts. The relevance of this punishment to Eadmer's contemporary audience is highlighted by Oda's descriptions of Canterbury. It is the "holy church" that holds the "apostolic throne." Those holding these things at the time in which Eadmer wrote might also be removed and stripped of their power if they did not treat Canterbury and its saints, particularly Oda, with the honor they deserved. Furthermore, Eadmer makes it a short step from dishonoring Canterbury's saint(s) to dishonoring God: "but when there was no cessation of the divine anger which was torturing him, he impiously blasphemed the majesty of the Lord and thus breathed out his polluted soul there in the midst of the

snow.”<sup>699</sup> Ælfsige’s turn to cursing God appears as a logical final step after having cursed Oda. His attitude toward Oda was no indictment of the saint, but an expression of his own underlying impiety.

Third, Eadmer follows Ælfsige’s death with a miracle which depicts Dunstan, one of Christ Church’s most prominent saints, in a subordinate position to Oda. By doing so, Eadmer not only adds one more postmortem miracle to Oda’s hagiography, but also positions Oda as a patriarch of the church. On Pentecost, Dunstan celebrates mass:

The Holy Spirit, who had appeared above him in the shape of a dove, turned away towards the southern side of the altar after the sacrifice had been consumed, to where venerable Oda lay buried, and rested above his tomb with many people looking on.<sup>700</sup>

This event is not presented as a rejection of Dunstan, but it does offer the possibility of seeing Oda as more highly honored than Dunstan, since the Spirit moved from Dunstan to Oda and remained for some time over his tomb. Even the powerful Dunstan, by this point the archbishop of Canterbury, regarded the event with “awe.”<sup>701</sup> In this incident, Oda acquires two epithets that reinforce this interpretation. Eadmer calls the saint “father Oda”<sup>702</sup> and says that it is this incident which prompts Dunstan to begin calling the saint

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<sup>699</sup> *VOdonis* 34-35: “sed non cessante qui illum cruciabat divino furore, Domini maiestatem impius blasphemavit, et sic pollutum spiritum suum in mediis nivibus exhalavit.”

<sup>700</sup> *VOdonis* 36-37: “Spiritus Sanctus qui super ipsum in specie columbae apparuit, consumpto sacrificio, in australem altaris partem ubi venerabilis Odo tumultus iacebat divertit, et super tumbam eius multis intuentibus requievit.”

<sup>701</sup> *VOdonis* 36-37: “reverentia.”

<sup>702</sup> *VOdonis* 36-37: “patris Odonis.”

“Oda se gode.”<sup>703</sup> Furthermore, after the appearance of the dove, Dunstan never passed Oda’s tomb without genuflecting.<sup>704</sup> Dunstan’s demonstrated reverence not only shows his own difference from Ælfsige, but it also sets a standard of behavior for Eadmer’s readers. Thus the closing image of the *Vita Sancti Odonis* is of one powerful prelate kneeling before the tomb of another. Dunstan’s own sanctity and power are enhanced by the honor he shows Oda, offering the reader a positive example and motivation to contrast with Ælfsige’s negative one. Given Eadmer’s audience this image is a particularly well chosen one; it offers the audience not only a warning, but also a model for the use of archiepiscopal power.

### **Bede’s Account of Oswald King and Martyr**

There are two accounts of the Bardney monks’ discourteous refusal to accept Oswald’s bones at their monastery. The first is found in Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica*, which offers the first narrative of King Oswald life.<sup>705</sup> The second is in Ælfric’s *Vita Sancti Oswaldi*.<sup>706</sup> In the first case, Bede’s motives for including mockery of the saint are readily apparent, since the Bardney monks’ objection to Oswald makes explicit a problem inherent in presenting Oswald as a saint. Ælfric’s use of the incident is perhaps more obscure.

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<sup>703</sup> *VOdonis* 36-37.

<sup>704</sup> *VOdonis* 36-37.

<sup>705</sup> In order to avoid confusing this saint with the later saint, Bishop Oswald, I will refer to the first saint Oswald as King Oswald throughout this chapter.

<sup>706</sup> Hereafter, the *VO(Æ)*.

As Bede presents it, it is not hard to believe that the monk's refusal of King Oswald really happened:

The inmates did not receive them [the bones] gladly. They knew that Oswald was a saint, but nevertheless, because he belonged to another kingdom and had once conquered them, they pursued him even when dead with their former hatred. So it came about that the relics remained outside all night with only a large tent erected over the carriage in which the bones rested.<sup>707</sup>

It would hardly be surprising if the people of Lindsey, even its monks, were less than interested in venerating a foreign conqueror, and a fairly recent one at that. As Clare Stancliffe argues, Lindsey “felt the hated onus of Northumbrian demands for tribute [...] acutely [...] because of their immediate proximity, just south of the Humber.”<sup>708</sup> This would provide a simple and obvious motive for Bede's inclusion of the incident; Bede was a historian, and might therefore have been willing to include factual information that didn't fit his portrayal of Oswald as a saint. However, this suggestion overlooks two things. First, Bede “was selective in what he chose to say: he wrote with a didactic purpose.”<sup>709</sup> Bede was a historian, but one with an agenda to shape English culture and

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<sup>707</sup> *HE* 247: “Noluerunt ea, qui eum noverant, tamen qui erant in monasterio, libenter excipere, quia etsi sanctum eum noverant, tamen quia de alia provincia ortus fuerat et super eos regnum acceperat, veteranis eum odiis etiam mortuum insequabantur. Unde factum est, ut ipsa nocte reliquiae allatae foris permanerent, tentorio tantum maiore supra carrum, in quo inerant, extenso.”

<sup>708</sup> Clare Stancliffe, “Where was Oswald Killed?” *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge, Paul Watkins Medieval Studies 14 (Stamford, CT: Paul Watkins, 1995) 94.

<sup>709</sup> Clare Stancliffe, “Oswald, ‘Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians,’ ” *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge, Paul Watkins Medieval Studies 14 (Stamford, CT: Paul Watkins, 1995) 35.

identity. As Clare Stancliffe puts it, “he will, then, have been careful in what he chose to say about Oswald: and, equally so, in what he chose not to say.”<sup>710</sup> Bede did not just report, he chose what to report and how.

Furthermore, although Oswald’s cult was already active in several places before Bede wrote, Bede’s presentation of Oswald as a saint-king was a new thing in English hagiographical writing and therefore something which had to be carefully constructed:

The interest of Bede’s picture of Oswald as both active king and saint is that it is unusual, if not unique, for its time. There was no Life of a saint-king for Bede to draw ideas from, no clear exemplar. [...] To present the sanctity of someone who had lived as a king so Christianly that he should be honoured as a saint was to enter a minefield.<sup>711</sup>

Bede’s decision to include the Bardney incident must have been because he believed that it directly supported his purposes in portraying King Oswald as a saint-king.

By making explicit the Bardney monks’ objections to King Oswald, Bede addresses one of the larger themes in the *Ecclesiastical History*, namely his desire to encourage a pan-English identity founded on the church. Mechthild Gretsch argues that “the newly forged ‘Kingdom of the English’ needed pan-English saints to form what in

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<sup>710</sup> Stancliffe, “Most Holy King” 35.

<sup>711</sup> Stancliffe, “Most Holy King” 41- 42.

modern jargon would be called ‘a corporate identity.’”<sup>712</sup> However, Gretsch points out that Oswald was not an easy sell for the role of pan-English saint:

Cuthbert, not having been actively involved in contemporary politics, had a better potential to be developed into such a truly pan-English saint than (say) kings Oswald of Northumbria or Edmund of East Anglia, both of whom were firmly rooted in the history of their respective peoples.<sup>713</sup>

Certainly, Cuthbert did achieve that status, but King Oswald too achieved a pan-English sainthood, and Bede’s depiction of him deserves a great deal of the credit for this: “not only does he call Oswald *sanctissimus*, *Christianissimus*, and a *miles Christi*, he also includes [...] several other Oswald miracles,”<sup>714</sup> including the incident at Bardney. As John Corbett puts it, “the function of the saint as patron which has been so clearly demonstrated in the case of St. Martin is also evident in Bede’s accounts of King Oswald and St. Cuthbert, as we have seen.”<sup>715</sup> Clearly Bede’s project met with real success. As Thacker points out, by the late eighth century “Oswald’s reputation was less closely bound up with contemporary political events.”<sup>716</sup> This may have been largely attributable to Bede’s efforts on Oswald’s behalf.

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<sup>712</sup> Mechthild Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 34 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) 96.

<sup>713</sup> Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints* 96.

<sup>714</sup> Stancliffe, “Most Holy King” 41.

<sup>715</sup> John Corbett, “Two Early Anglo-Saxon Holy Men: Oswald and Cuthbert,” *The Anglo-Saxons: Synthesis and Achievement*, ed. J. Douglas Woods and David A. E. Pelteret (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1985) 75.

<sup>716</sup> Alan Thacker, “*Membra Disjecta*: The Division of the Body and the Diffusion of the Cult,” *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge, Paul Watkins Medieval Studies 14 (Stamford, CT: Paul Watkins, 1995) 113.

The particulars of the Bardney narrative not only confirm King Oswald as a saint, they also lead the reader toward an understanding of him as a pan-English saint, a patron of all the English. First, there is the monks' internal acknowledgement of King Oswald's holiness: "they knew that Oswald was a saint."<sup>717</sup> Regardless of their feelings about him, they cannot deny that he is a saint. Logically, they and the reader know what reception the saint ought to be given. Second, Bede uses tropes drawn from Exodus to mark Oswald as a heavenly king over the whole nation: "all through the night a column of light stretched from the carriage right up to heaven and was visible in almost every part of the kingdom of Lindsey."<sup>718</sup> This column of light must, of course, remind the reader of the pillar of fire which settled each night over the tabernacle during the Israelites' sojourn in the wilderness.<sup>719</sup> The tabernacle housing Oswald's bones is a literal tent housing a coffer, just as the biblical Ark of the Covenant was housed in a tent. Furthermore, the lid of the Ark was called the Mercy Seat.<sup>720</sup> Oswald's bones in their coffer are presented to the reader as an Ark for the English. Such a miracle powerfully conveys the necessity of regarding Oswald as a heavenly king and as one to whom petitioners may, indeed must, look for guidance and mercy. The column of light which illuminates not only the area around the monastery but also all of Lindsey implies that King Oswald, formerly a conqueror, has now become a light for the people of Lindsey, not just for his home

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<sup>717</sup> *HE* 247: "Sanctum eum noverant."

<sup>718</sup> *HE* 247: "Nam tota ea nocte columna lucis a carro illo ad caelum usque porrecta omnibus paene eiusdem Lindissae provinciae locis conspicua stabat."

<sup>719</sup> Exodus 13, *Douay-Rheims Bible*..

<sup>720</sup> Exodus 25, *Douay-Rheims Bible*.



country of Northumbria. By answering the monks' doubt with highly recognizable images which identify Oswald with Yahweh as he led the Israelites in the wilderness, Bede provides a metaphor for what King Oswald can and will do for the English.

That the monks come to understand this is made clear in the manner in which they enshrine King Oswald. Not only do they go through the normal steps of translation, washing the bones and placing them in a special location within the church, but also, "in order that the royal saint might be perpetually remembered, they placed above the tomb his banner of gold and purple."<sup>721</sup> The sign of Oswald as a king, the royal banner which had flown over his troops in battle, including, no doubt, the battles in which he had conquered Lindsey, becomes the particular sign erected by the monks to ensure King Oswald's eternal veneration. Clearly they have accepted him as a king-saint, rather than merely accepting him as a saint despite his kingship. By making King Oswald acceptable to Lindsey, Bede eloquently delocalizes King Oswald, removing him from his identity as simply King of the Northumbrians and making him a king and saint for the English as a whole.

### ***Ælfric's Vita Oswaldi***

When Ælfric took up his hagiographic project, he included Oswald, working from Bede's text. Annemieke Jansen has argued that "Ælfric does not really add anything new to Bede's material but [...] by rearranging it Ælfric adapts the material to suit his own

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<sup>721</sup> HE 247: "Et ut regia viri sancti persona memoriam haberet aeternam, vexillum eius super tumbam auro et purpura compositum apposuerunt."

purpose, namely the further sanctification of Oswald.”<sup>722</sup> There is more going on here than “further sanctification,” something that arguably King Oswald did not need by the time Ælfric wrote. Ælfric draws on Bede’s account, including the incident at Bardney: “Ælfric’s work was based upon extracts taken from the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, together with an episode from Bede’s prose *Life of Cuthbert*, condensed and rearranged in the final, Old English, text.”<sup>723</sup> However, by stripping many of the Bedan details and introducing two more of his own, Ælfric makes something rather different out of the narrative. J.E. Cross argues that Oswald’s deeds “are part of a history of the English Church, [...] but by slight omissions and minor changes of Bede’s record, Oswald becomes more a saint, less a secular king in Ælfric’s sermon.”<sup>724</sup> Ælfric’s account de-emphasizes King Oswald’s earthly and royal relationship to Bardney. In doing so, it demonstrates two things. First, it shows that King Oswald’s place as a saint was already reasonably secure, since Ælfric could re-write the incident as an example of doubt in the saint’s sanctity, unlike Bede, who had felt the need to specify that King Oswald was already known to be a saint, even by those rejecting him. Thacker writes, “what it does demonstrate is the saint’s high standing in reformed circles and the fact that his martyrial status required neither discussion nor proof.”<sup>725</sup> For Ælfric there was no need to explain

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<sup>722</sup> Annemieke Jansen, “Bede and the Legends of St Oswald,” *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk and Northumbrian*, ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald, Mediaevalia Groningana (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1996) 169.

<sup>723</sup> Thacker, “*Membra Disjecta*” 125.

<sup>724</sup> J.E. Cross, “Oswald and Byrhtnoth,” *English Studies* 46 (1965): 93-109.

<sup>725</sup> Thacker, “*Membra Disjecta*” 125.

or qualify the Bardney monks' refusal of King Oswald. His place as a saint was already secure enough that their refusal did not threaten it.

Second, by removing the narrative's interest in the relationship between King Oswald's earthly rule and his reception at Bardney, by downplaying Oswald as a king of a particular place, Ælfric's narrative re-focuses the story on the theme of belief:

For Ælfric, as a second-generation monk intimately involved in the Benedictine revival of the tenth-century, monasticism [...] naturally provides an ideal, but for the lay folk belief in God is far more important than are details of differing religious practice. Indeed his discourse makes the concept of belief a key motif throughout the life [...] suggesting at the level of hypersignification that belief connects rather than divides different Churches within Anglo-Saxon Christianity.<sup>726</sup>

Ælfric provides some geo-political detail, but it is all aimed at stripping away conflict between believers across borders: "[Oswald's] brother's daughter afterward became Queen of Mercia, and asked for his bones and brought them to Lindsey, to Bardney Minster, which she greatly loved."<sup>727</sup> There is no hint of bad blood or implied conquest in bringing the bones to Bardney; it is a mark of the Queen's favor. Furthermore, Ælfric removes any mention of the king's banner and refers throughout to King Oswald as "the

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<sup>726</sup> Ruth Waterhouse, "Discourse and Hypersignification in Two of Ælfric's Saints' Lives," *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and their Contexts*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach, SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (Albany: SUNY P, 1996) 337.

<sup>727</sup> *VO(Æ)* 137: "His broðor dohtor eft siððan on myrcan wearð cwen and geaxode his ban and gebrohte hi to lindesige to bardanige mynstre þe heo micclum lufode."

saint,”<sup>728</sup> never as the king or as royal. Finally, Ælfric explicitly re-frames the monks’ motives. They refuse King Oswald “because of human error,” rather than lingering resentment.<sup>729</sup> This neat phrasing allows Ælfric to remove the motive given by Bede without explicitly contradicting him. Ælfric comes closer to contradicting Bede in his description of the miracle. Whereas Bede specified that the monks knew King Oswald was a saint, Ælfric says that “then God showed that he was a holy Saint,”<sup>730</sup> demonstrating that the point of contention was the monks’ disbelief in King Oswald as a saint. Thacker believes that Ælfric’s *VO(Æ)* was aimed at a monastic audience and so cannot indicate the popularity of the cult as a wider phenomenon.<sup>731</sup> However, I think Waterhouse’s point is correct. Ælfric strips away the explanatory information given by Bede so that the incident becomes one of unbelief versus belief. The question Ælfric’s narrative raises is, did the monks of Bardney believe? By raising the question Ælfric stresses the importance of belief in the saint; a belief and veneration in response to the narrative of a saint’s life are themselves virtuous, and they ought to be cultivated. This ties the *Vita Oswaldi* to the larger theme of Ælfric’s project – that the audience may hear the story and so believe.

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<sup>728</sup> *VO(Æ)* 137-139: “þone sanct.”

<sup>729</sup> *VO(Æ)* 137: “for menniscum gedwylde.”

<sup>730</sup> *VO(Æ)* 137: “Ða god geswutelode þæt he halig sanct wæs.”

<sup>731</sup> Thacker, “*Membra Disjecta*” 125.

### Eadmer's *Miracula Oswaldi*

There are three early *Lives* of Archbishop Oswald. The first, by Byrhtferth, was written within ten years after Oswald's death in 992, probably "between 997 and 1002."<sup>732</sup> Byrhtferth's text does not include the incident in which Oswald is doubted, because it takes place at the saint's elevation, which is not part of the text. This is generally taken as evidence that Byrhtferth wrote his *Vita Oswaldi* between 997 and 1002, before the elevation took place.<sup>733</sup> One other, lost *Life* of Oswald was written by Folcard of St-Bertin, an administrator at Thorney in Cambridgeshire ca 1068 to 1084: "the historian Orderic Vitalis (1075-c.1143) records how he wrote 'charming histories,' since lost, about Oswald and other English saints, which were to be sung or recited."<sup>734</sup> Whether Folcard included the doubt which occurred at the saint's elevation is not known. Eadmer's *Vita Sancti Oswaldi* and the accompanying *Miracula Sancti Oswaldi*, "appear to have been written together,"<sup>735</sup> and were written between 1095 and 1116, most probably after the fire of 1113 at Worcester Cathedral.<sup>736</sup>

In the *Miracula Sancti Oswaldi* the saint's elevation is described as taking place with great celebration and large crowds, but it is also an occasion of doubt: "even as many broke out in fitting songs of praise to God, so too, many who had unbelieving

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<sup>732</sup> Michael Lapidge, "Byrhtferth and Oswald," *St. Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. Nicholas Brooks and Catherine Cubitt (London: Leicester UP, 1996) 65.

<sup>733</sup> Lapidge, "Byrhtferth and Oswald" 65 and Alan Thacker, "Saint-Making and Relic Collecting by Oswald and His Communities," *St. Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. Nicholas Brooks and Catherine Cubitt (London: Leicester UP, 1996) 256.

<sup>734</sup> Turner and Muir cvii, citing Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, 6 vols., ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford P, 1968-80) vi.150.

<sup>735</sup> Turner and Muir cvi.

<sup>736</sup> Turner and Muir cvi-cvii. See also Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer* 368.

minds disparaged the holy merits of the holy man.”<sup>737</sup> In particular, one abbot views the elevation skeptically:

[He] was smitten by this lack of faith. For concluding that no holiness of any sort had radiated from Oswald on account of which he should rightly be held in such regard, he conveyed this with certain hostile nods and words to those whom he thought would be his supporters in this matter.<sup>738</sup>

About this Thacker comments, “the ceremony was accompanied by miracles which, according to Eadmer, effectively quelled the doubts of at least one of the abbots present as to Oswald’s worthiness for such honours.”<sup>739</sup> A leper is brought in and immediately healed by being set down next to the saint’s bier. Thacker offers no further comment on this, but the doubt and the miraculous rebuttal are the issue here – otherwise, why insert mention of someone’s doubt into a litany of attendant miracles? The leper’s healing is presented in the narrative as a rebuttal to the abbot, but those bringing him in have no knowledge of the abbot’s whispering. The doubt of the abbot and other onlookers is hardly a necessary device for introducing the healing of a leper. So, why should Eadmer have chosen to include the doubt at all?

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<sup>737</sup> Eadmer, *Miracula Sancti Oswaldi, Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald*, ed. and trans. Andrew J. Turner and Bernard J. Muir (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2006) 302-303: “Ad quod sicut nonnulli in laudem Dei dignis concentibus eruperunt, ita plerique infida mente sanctis meritis sancti viri detraxerunt.” Hereafter, *MO*.

<sup>738</sup> *MO* 302-303: “Abbatem quendam infidelitas ipsa percussit. Opinatus enim nil in pontifice sanctitatis enituisse unde tantus honor illi merito debuisset haberi, sinistris quibusdam nutibus et verbis id eis, quos in hoc sibi fautores fore putabat, depromebat.”

<sup>739</sup> Thacker, “Saint-Making” 263.

I argue that Eadmer's choice here stems from two motives. First, there is his continued concern to protect Anglo-Saxon saints from denigration by post-Conquest readers, which I have discussed above. Second, the incident speaks to the intense rivalry between churches which flourished in this period. As Antonia Gransden has demonstrated, churches frequently invoked the power of their saint as a protection against rival institutions who sought to reduce or co-opt their property or privileges. This conflict was not unique to Worcester, and Worcester, like many other churches facing the same conflict, used hagiography to support their practices: "the monks of the early twelfth century clearly looked to their past to legitimize their beliefs and reaffirm their sense of identity in a period of controversy."<sup>740</sup> To protect the saint and to protect the cathedral were essentially the same proposition: "all these saints [including Oswald] seem to have been regarded as embodying the *personæ* of their monasteries."<sup>741</sup> St. Mary's, Oswald's church, was engaged in at least one such rivalry. The competition for attendees between St. Mary's church and the older St Peter's church in Worcester is a theme of Eadmer's *Vita Sancti Oswaldi*. As a neighbor who derides Oswald and his church, the abbot who sneers at Oswald can be read as representing the conflict between St. Mary's and St. Peter's. However, St. Peter's was a clerical institution, and an abbot holds a monastic office. Thus, while the abbot's denigration of Oswald is applicable to the trouble

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<sup>740</sup> Mary Lynn Rampolla, " 'A Pious Legend': St. Oswald and the Foundation of Worcester Cathedral Priory," *Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages*, ed. W.F.H. Nicholaisen, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 112 (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies SUNY at Binghamton, 1995) 210.

<sup>741</sup> Crook 199.

between St. Mary's and St. Peter's, it should not be seen as addressing that situation exclusively. Eadmer's introduction to the *Miracula* makes clear that he is not concerned only with St. Peter's. In the introduction, the narrator frets that immediately after a good man's death, those who disagreed with him can say all manner of evil things about him and make his good deeds seem bad.<sup>742</sup> The narrator concludes that these things happen so that God will have an occasion to glorify himself and the saint by a display of power. Thus, in the *MO*, Oswald is presented as a saint who is persecuted by his neighbor and vindicated by a miraculous display of power.

An important factor in this is Eadmer's positioning of the powerful witnesses to the elevation as Oswald's detractors, while asserting that Oswald was well loved by the common people. In the *Vita Sancti Oswaldi*, "Eadmer, unlike Byrhtferth, stressed the coexistence of St. Peter's and St. Mary's to demonstrate the superiority of the latter; the services held by the monks were more attractive to the laity, who thought them 'more seemly' than those of the clerks."<sup>743</sup> Eadmer cites this as an example of how Oswald won over the people to Benedictine monasticism and triumphed over the clerks by gradually winning away their audience: "Like Coleman, Eadmer paints a negative picture of the secular clergy, who are recalcitrant, hardening their hearts against Oswald's pleas for reform, and who initially 'despised' the monks."<sup>744</sup> Eadmer's narrative equates this with despising the saint. The *MO* specifies that "the bishops, abbots, men in religious orders,

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<sup>742</sup> *MO* 290-291.

<sup>743</sup> Barrow, "The Community of Worcester" 96.

<sup>744</sup> Rampolla, "A Pious Legend" 201, citing *VOswaldi* 25.



and the noblest individuals among God's people assembled",<sup>745</sup> by invitation for the elevation. However, many others, particularly commoners, came to see the elevation simply because they desired to see Oswald and because they expected miracles from him:

Rumour [of the elevation] outstripped the messengers, and on the day not just those who were invited, but a countless multitude of other people flocked there as well. May these few words concerning the lesser ranks of the church suffice for now. [...] A huge crowd of men and women gathered around the tomb, not all with the same expectations. For some were simply waiting for the translation of the holy body, while others were looking also for the healing of their own bodies, which were afflicted by a variety of illnesses.<sup>746</sup>

The crowd's expectations demonstrate their familiarity with and their trust in hagiography in general and Oswald in particular. Some have come just to see a saint's body moved, but others have come hoping to be the recipients of the healing miracles which are a staple of translation narratives. Read as a historical event, the crowd's presence demonstrates that they believed in the active presence of saints among them and they believed that Oswald was one such saint who could free them from their physical suffering. Read as a narrative event, the crowd's presence reiterates Oswald's participation in a hagiographic pattern by which people who come to saints for help

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<sup>745</sup> *MO* 300-301: "Episcopi, abbates, religiosi ordinis viri, et sullimes in populo Dei personae coeunt."

<sup>746</sup> *MO* 300-303: "Nuncios fama praecurrit: ad diem non ii tantum qui invitantur, sed aliorum inestimabilis hominum numerositas currit. Et hoc de mediocribus aeclesiae membris dictum interim accipiatur. [...] Interea circa tumulum praesens erat multa turba virorum ac feminarum, nec una erat expectatio omnium. Quidam enim solam sacri corporis translationem, quidam et suorum corporum quae diversis infirmitatibus laborabant praestolabantur curationem."

receive tangible benefits that motivate and reinforce their spiritual worship of God and their veneration of the saint.

While Eadmer does not slight the higher ranking people, he does stress the importance of Oswald being acclaimed by a wide audience of common people. While the abbot and some others doubt, “no one from among the commoners was among these men.”<sup>747</sup> The simple faith of the same people who had chosen St. Mary’s over other churches is rewarded by two healing miracles. Rather than choosing a commoner and a layman, such as the youth who mocked Wulfstan, Eadmer specifies that it was an abbot who doubted that Oswald deserved such honors. By doing so, Eadmer continues the theme established in the *Vita Sancti Oswaldi* that the opposition to Oswald came from within the church, particularly from those who found their own power and influence threatened by Oswald. However, those Oswald served, that is, the people who came to St. Mary’s for mass and to Oswald’s tomb for healing, had no doubts as to the saint’s merits.

Eadmer drives home this point by describing the factors motivating the abbot’s skepticism. The abbot has a “lack of faith,” and is motivated by “treachery.”<sup>748</sup> The bishop and monks who observed the abbot’s behavior “lamented that so malign a devil had had such power that with his prompting so abominable a rumour could arise

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<sup>747</sup> *MO* 302-303: “Nec in his de vulgo fuit.”

<sup>748</sup> *MO* 302-303: “infidelitas” and “perfidiam.”

concerning such a holy matter, what is more, even in the heart of an abbot.”<sup>749</sup> When the leper is healed, the abbot and his followers repent in tears and ascribe their doubt to “the sin of disbelief.”<sup>750</sup> There is no question that such doubts might have an honest motive, as they had with the sheriff’s wife who tested Wulfstan, or spring from anything but the promptings of the devil.

It is also significant that the confirmatory miracle which occurs in response to the abbot’s doubt is a positive miracle; it produces a concrete benefit, rather than hurting someone. Furthermore, it is a miracle which brings back the doubters and incorporates them into the body of believers, rather than killing or marking them as outsiders as a warning to those within the body of believers. This is in keeping with the general Benedictine habit of attempting to convert, rather than just drive out, their opponents. It also aligns with Eadmer’s contention in the prologue that good men are sometimes slandered by their rivals, but that God constructs these situations in order to glorify himself, vindicate his saint, and edify the body of believers.<sup>751</sup> Eadmer has constructed the incident at the translation in such a way as to stress that Oswald is a giver of benefits, one to whom needy petitioners can look with hope.

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<sup>749</sup> *MO* 302-303: “Ingemuere simul tantum potuisse malignum diabolum, ut eius instinctu de re tam sacra nasceretur et in corde abbatis tam execrabilis fama.”

<sup>750</sup> *MO* 304-305: “culpa incredulitatis.”

<sup>751</sup> *MO* 290-293.

**The Anonymous *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* with Symeon's *Miracula Cuthberti*  
and the *Libellus de exordio***

After Bede, there was a long hiatus in works written by or about St. Cuthbert's community. However, beginning in the late tenth century and escalating after the Norman Conquest, new works were created, chronicling the community's life during and after the period of Viking invasions. A theme running through most of these works is the retention and protection of the community's physical property. Although these works present themselves as narratives of the saint, they treat the saint not so much as a person for imitation, but a figure of power which can be deployed against threats. This is particularly evident in the incident of doubt in which Onlafbald, a Viking, declares that Cuthbert is dead and powerless to protect Cuthbert's people from his rapacity. Unlike other doubters examined in this dissertation, Onlafbald is not interested in distinctions of holiness or the proper application of the term saint. His sole interest is in the question of power; namely, do the Christian God and his confessor Cuthbert have the power to prevent Onlafbald from doing what he likes with Cuthbert's people and property. Introduced in the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* and repeated in the *Capitula de miraculis et translationibus Sancti Cuthberti* and the *Libellus de exordio et procursu istius, hoc est Dunhelmensis ecclesie*, this incident went on to become a staple of the later Cuthbert tradition. The consistent treatment of the incident in all three texts demonstrates that while the advent of the Normans may well have added to fears about losing property,

these fears had become part of the community's character and were ongoing in its life.<sup>752</sup>

Property protection became a continuing theme of hagiographic works produced in Durham; the three texts that contain the Onlafald incident all use it to warn off those who might threaten the property of the community.

Certainly, the Vikings themselves were no longer a present threat when these works were written. Furthermore, recent studies have suggested that the Vikings had never been so pressing a threat to Cuthbert's community as later histories made them out to be: "During the period of Scandinavian attacks and settlement, the patrimony of the Church of St. Cuthbert grew substantially and the Community moved *towards* and not away from the centres of Scandinavian power."<sup>753</sup> Although the community wandered for several years after Lindisfarne was burned, the period of wandering did not seem to harm Cuthbert's reputation in a way that might have left lingering anxieties and skepticism for later authors to address. By the time these works were written, Cuthbert's cult was old and firmly established in England. It was during the Viking invasions that

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<sup>752</sup> It is important to remember that Cuthbert's community's increased historical and hagiographic output during this period happened against a background of general concern on the part of churches in England to produce written documentation for their ownership of property. This led to the widespread burst of cartulary writing, produced from memory, notes in books already own by the churches, and, in some cases, outright forgery. For a discussion of this process see Julia Barrow's "The Chronology of Forgery Production at Worcester from c. 1000 to the Early Twelfth Century," *St Wulfstan and His World*, ed. Julia Barrow and Nicholas Brooks, *Studies in Medieval Britain* 4 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. 105-122) 105-122; Francesca Tinti, "From Episcopal Conception to Monastic Compilation: Hemming's Cartulary in Context," *Early Medieval Europe* 11 (2002): 233-261; David Bates, "The Forged Charters of William the Conqueror and Bishop William of St. Calais," *Anglo-Norman Durham: 1093-1193*, ed. David Rollason, Margaret Harvey, and Michael Prestwich (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1994) 111-124; and Nicholas Brooks, "Church, Crown, and Community: Public Work and Seigneurial Responsibilities at Rochester Bridge," *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Karl Leyser*, ed. Timothy Reuter (London: Hambledon P, 1992) 1-20.

<sup>753</sup> William M. Aird, *St. Cuthbert and the Normans: The Church of Durham, 1071-1153*, *Studies in the History of Medieval Religion* 14 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1998) 24.

Alcuin wrote to Æthelred of Northumbria and to Bishop Hygbald, lamenting that even so great a saint as Cuthbert was not able to save the English people. Alcuin names Cuthbert as the ultimate Anglo-Saxon saint, the saint to whom England should look if all other saints fail, and he attributes this “failure” not to a lack of power on Cuthbert’s part, but to God’s judgment overriding Cuthbert’s protection.<sup>754</sup> In practical terms, under Bishop Cuthbert (900-915), the one who remonstrated with Onlafbald, the community’s patrimony “had continued to expand.”<sup>755</sup> It was not the Vikings who represented the real threat to Durham. The usefulness of the Vikings is that they are automatically other and evil. Onlafbald is literally demonic. In the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, he is twice called “this son of the devil.”<sup>756</sup> He has a “diabolical heart” and his ultimate destination is Hell.<sup>757</sup> The three narratives use the unambiguously evil Viking as a figure through which to demonize those who threaten the saint’s patrimony in the present day.

Traditionally dated to ca. 945, the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* was one of the first works written after the long dry period.<sup>758</sup> The *Historia* includes a significant amount of new material about the saint which has no known source. Included in this material is Onlafbald’s derision of Cuthbert.<sup>759</sup> Although apparently written in the mid-tenth century, the *Historia* fits the model of late-eleventh-century hagiography described

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<sup>754</sup> Whitelock, *English Historical Documents* I, no. 193, 775-7 and *English Historical Documents* I, no. 194, 778-9.

<sup>755</sup> Aird 37.

<sup>756</sup> South, *Historia* 61 and 63: “filius diaboli.”

<sup>757</sup> South, *Historia* 63: “diabolicum eius cor.”

<sup>758</sup> Craster, “The Patrimony of St. Cuthbert” 179-180.

<sup>759</sup> South, *Historia* 5.

by Antonia Gransden. The “institutional histories” of this period, as Gransden terms them, show an overwhelming concern to protect and assert a community’s property rights via narrative accounts of the property’s acquisition and the saint’s defense of it. Gransden cites the *Historia* as an example of this pattern, though she also accepts the early dating of the text.<sup>760</sup> Although the *Historia* presents itself as a narrative about Cuthbert, it is structured as a series of loosely connected incidents after Cuthbert’s death, most of which pertain to the community’s travels and their property rights, and “more specifically on the land-holdings that anchor the community’s temporal power and identity.”<sup>761</sup> Indeed, the *Historia* is more a series of virtually unconnected narratives interspersed with property lists than it is a single cohesive narrative.

Furthermore, the *Historia* offers numerous incidents, including that of Onlafald’s doubt, which have no other known source. Ted South argues that “in almost every case we are left wondering whether [the author] is simply adjusting to the demands of his narrative and giving his audience a reasonable explanation” for the community’s property claims, rather than working from any sort of historical record.<sup>762</sup> It is entirely possible that this and other episodes were simply invented to justify the community’s ownership claims. For modern readers, knowing this creates a constant and heightened awareness that the author is not just reproducing facts, but is creating a narrative to

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<sup>760</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England* 69, 76-7, and 88.

<sup>761</sup> South, *Historia* 2.

<sup>762</sup> South, *Historia* 11.

achieve a specific end. Thus we can inquire how the narrative is constructed to achieve that end.

The new incident of doubt which the *Historia* introduces into the Cuthbert tradition highlights this overwhelming concern for present property ownership. The *Historia* tells us that during the period of Viking invasions, the conqueror Rægnald “divided the estates of St. Cuthbert” between two of his warriors, Scula and Onlafbald.<sup>763</sup> This division offers the narrative an opportunity to enumerate what property Cuthbert owned, and so the reader is carefully told that Scula received the land “from the township which is called Castle Eden as far as Billingham. The other part, however, from Castle Eden as far as the river Wear,” went to Onlafbald.<sup>764</sup> This opening of the incident focuses the reader’s attention on the Vikings as property thieves. Onlafbald’s violence and paganism are introduced later in the narrative, but Onlafbald’s first sin is that he has taken property from Cuthbert’s community.

The narrative further demonstrates that its primary concern is with threats to the community’s property, rather than threats to Cuthbert’s veneration, by depersonalizing the saint. Cuthbert is more a mechanism of the text than a personality in it. Onlafbald is an enemy of Cuthbert only in the most generic way; he has no malice against Cuthbert in particular: “this son of the devil was an enemy, in whatever ways he was able, of God

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<sup>763</sup> South, *Historia* 61: “divisit villas sancti Cuthberti.”

<sup>764</sup> South, *Historia* 61: “a villa quae vocatur Iodene usque ad Billingham. Alteram vero partem dedit cuidam qui vocabatur Onalafball [sic], a Iodene usque ad fluvium Weorram.”



and St. Cuthbert.”<sup>765</sup> When Onlafbald enters the church, he does so because he is possessed, not in response to any specific motive or event: “thus one day, while filled with an unclean spirit, he entered the church of the holy confessor in a rage.”<sup>766</sup> Likewise, the narrative awkwardness, which South noted, shows in the transitions.<sup>767</sup> From this description of Onlafbald as generally evil, there is no transition to his verbal attack on St. Cuthbert except the laconic *itaque*, “thus.” When Onlafbald enters the church uttering threats and declaring that Cuthbert is powerless against Thor and Odin, the community’s reaction is described, not Cuthbert’s: “the bishop and the whole community knelt before God and St. Cuthbert and begged from them vengeance for these threats.”<sup>768</sup> The collocation, repeated twice, of “God and St. Cuthbert” further effaces Cuthbert. His name is used incantationally, rather than personally. Cuthbert becomes a tool of power to be used against the community’s enemies, rather than a person who needs a text to protect him.

All of this serves the central purpose of the text, which is to warn away anyone who might doubt the power of Cuthbert’s community to defend itself. Onlafbald explicitly frames his challenge to the community as a contest of power: “what can this dead man Cuthbert, whose threats are mentioned every day, do to me? I swear by my

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<sup>765</sup> South, *Historia* 61: “Et hic filius diaboli inimicus fuit quibuscunque modis potuit Deo et sancto Cuthberto.”

<sup>766</sup> South, *Historia* 63-5: “Quadam itaque die cum plenus inundo spiritu, cum furore intrasset ecclesiam beati confessoris.”

<sup>767</sup> South, *Historia* 2.

<sup>768</sup> South, *Historia* 63: “Episcopus et tota congregatio genua flecterent ante Deum et sanctum Cuthbertum et harum minarum vindictam [...] ab eis expeterent.”

powerful gods Thor and Odin that from this hour I will be the bitterest enemy to you all.”<sup>769</sup> Onlafald’s statement denies that Cuthbert has any power in this life. It also implies that the community is powerless to defend itself; the threats that Onlafald refers to must have been made by the community on Cuthbert’s behalf. Onlafald perceives the situation not as a theological debate but as a clash of powers. Likewise, the punishment he suffers focuses the reader on the power of the community to deploy the saint’s power against any threats. Onlafald’s punishment is presented as soon as it is requested:

When the bishop and the whole congregation knelt, [...] that son of the devil turned away with great arrogance and disdain, intending to leave. But just when he had placed one foot over the threshold, he felt as if an iron bar was fixed deeply into the other foot. With this pain transfixing his diabolical heart, he fell and the devil thrust his sinful soul into Hell.<sup>770</sup>

Onlafald barely has time to register that he is being punished. The narrative shows no interest in persuading or converting him. The point of the event is to demonstrate that Cuthbert’s community is not to be threatened, because the saint has power to punish not only the body, but also the soul.

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<sup>769</sup> South, *Historia* 63: “‘Quid,’ inquit, ‘in me potest homo iste mortuus Cuthbertus cuius minae cotidie opponuntur? Iuro per meos potentes deos Thor et Othan, quod ab hac hora inimicissimus ero omnibus vobis.’”

<sup>770</sup> South, *Historia* 63: “Cumque episcopus et tota congregatio genua flecterent [...] conversus ille filius diaboli cum magna superbia et indignatione voluit egredi. Sed cum alterum pedem posuisset iam extra limen, sensit quasi ferrum in altero pede sibi altius infixum. Quo dolore diabolicum eius cor transfigente corruit, suamque peccatricem animam diabolus in infernum trusit.”

It is less certain what pressures, real or perceived, prompted this concern for property because the dating of the *Historia* is uncertain. The traditional dating of the text laid out by J.H. Hinde and Edmund Craster places it in the mid-tenth century.<sup>771</sup> This was a time of great prosperity for the community and thus, presumably, freedom from pressure to defend Cuthbert's patrimony: "The continued growth of their patrimony and the decline of royal authority made the monks of St. Cuthbert a formidable political and economic force in the region."<sup>772</sup> William Kapelle has called Cuthbert's community "the most powerful body of men in the North" before the Conquest.<sup>773</sup> One possible explanation is that this successful acquisition could not have resulted from a casual attitude toward property. Property was the means and the measure of the Cuthbertine community's power. It was also the thing that other powerful people, particularly the Northumbrian and Scottish lords, most desired from them:

The ninth and tenth centuries [...] saw an overall expansion of the Patrimony of St. Cuthbert, but this period also brought severe challenges for the community.

The first of these came not from the Vikings, but from rival factions within Northumbria challenging for the throne.<sup>774</sup>

Furthermore, South has also argued that "the expansion of West Saxon hegemony and the monastic reformation begun by St. Dunstan might have appeared to threaten the

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<sup>771</sup> Craster, "The Patrimony of St. Cuthbert" 177-199.

<sup>772</sup> South, *Historia* 3.

<sup>773</sup> William Kapelle, *The Norman Conquest of the North: The Region and its Transformation, 1000-1135* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1979) 31.

<sup>774</sup> William M. Aird, *St. Cuthbert and the Normans: the Church of Durham, 1071-1153*, Studies in the History of Medieval Religion (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1998) 24.

community's power and its patrimony."<sup>775</sup> Cuthbert's community had a long tradition of actively pursuing property, and the creation of a narrative to defend this property would fit the community's pattern.

On the other hand, South has also made a strong textual argument for considering a post-Conquest composition date. He concludes, "I am [...] hesitant to accept the traditional date of production in the mid-tenth century, and am open to the possibility that the *Historia* is a product of the mid to late eleventh century."<sup>776</sup> In addition to the paleographic evidence, South points to the ways in which the *Historia* fits Gransden's category of late-eleventh-century institutional histories. He also points to the cluster of similar texts which were produced at Durham in the late eleventh century: "Given the relative silence of the late Saxon period, the first half-century after the Norman Conquest saw the production of a remarkable number of historical and hagiographical texts at Durham."<sup>777</sup> The *Historia* might easily have been produced for same reasons as the Durham *Cronica monasterii*, the *Miracula Sancti Cuthberti*, the *Libellus de exordio et procursu istius, hoc est Dunhelmensis, ecclesie*, and the *Annales Lindisfarnenses et Dunelmenses*, all written in the late eleventh century. South argues, "the anxiety Gransden describes is presumably explained by the desire to confirm or reassert traditional claims to property in the wake of the political upheaval and territorial

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<sup>775</sup> South, *Historia* 3.

<sup>776</sup> South, *Historia* 36.

<sup>777</sup> South, *Historia* 8.

confiscations which accompanied the Norman Conquest.”<sup>778</sup> It is telling that this ambiguity in dating the *Historia* cannot be resolved by determining a point where the community was particularly threatened. Property was power and the competition for power was continual.

The second text in which the Onlafald incident occurs is the *Capitula de miraculis et translationibus Sancti Cuthberti*, which also shows the same concern with property retention. Thomas Arnold attributed the *Miracula* to Symeon of Durham who wrote the *Libellus de exordio*.<sup>779</sup> However, David Rollason disagrees: “nothing is known of [the *Miracula*’s] authorship, apart from what can be derived from [its] subject matter, which indicates clearly that [its] authors were monks of Durham.”<sup>780</sup> Rollason dates the first seven incidents in the *Miracula* as being written “between 1083 and 1104.”<sup>781</sup> This means that the Onlafald incident most likely appeared in the *Miracula* before it was used in Symeon’s *Libellus*.

For the most part, the *Miracula*’s writer expands on the *Historia*’s work with an increased level of visual detail and more complex sentence structures. The incident begins by telling the reader that Bishop Cutheard “energetically embellished” Durham, with “St. Cuthbert himself particularly protecting and evidently helping,” during the

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<sup>778</sup> South, *Historia* 14.

<sup>779</sup> Thomas Arnold, ed., *Historia ecclesiae Dunelmensis: eadem historia deducta, incerto auctore, usque ad A.D. MCXLIV. Sequuntur varii tractatus, in quibus de sancto Cuthberto et Dunelmo agitur. Epistola Symeonis de archiepiscopis eboraci*. Vol. 1. Rolls Series 75 (London: Longman and Co., 1882) xxviii.

<sup>780</sup> Symeon of Durham, *Libellus de exordio atque procursu istius hoc est Dunhelmensis ecclesie*, ed. and trans. David Rollason, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2007) lxxvi. Hereafter, *Libellus*.

<sup>781</sup> *Libellus* lxxv.

period of Viking attacks.<sup>782</sup> By way of contrast, Rægnald, Scula, and Onlafbald occupy Cuthbert's lands driving out their betters.<sup>783</sup> These men are not like Cutheard and Cuthbert:

[They] were cruel and barbarous; both were participants in the worship of demons, both were ignorant of true religion and their own good, both flaunted titles of temporal power, and, being blind in their hearts, they hastened toward such sorrows of interminable misery and the torments of eternal torture. Of such people it is threatened in Scripture, saying "The powerful powerfully suffer tortures."<sup>784</sup>

The writer also adds an admission of Cuthbert's power by Onlafbald, although he makes clear that the admission is not an act of repentance, but a confession under torture. Confession of sanctity is proof that Cuthbert has power because the confession is extracted from Onlafbald by force.<sup>785</sup> It does the Viking no spiritual good, though it does serve as a timely warning to those present and to later hearers of the story. These changes do not remove the concern with property protection. The narrative contrasts the

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<sup>782</sup> Thomas Arnold, ed., *Capitula de miraculis et translationibus Sancti Cuthberti. Historia ecclesiae Dunelmensis: eadem historia deducta, incerto auctore, usque ad A.D. MCXLIV. Sequuntur varii tractatus, in quibus de sancto Cuthberto et Dunelmo agitur. Epistola Symeonis de archiepiscopis eboraci*. Vol. 1. Rolls Series 75 (London: Longman and Co., 1882) 238: "sancto tamen Cuthberto se specialiter vindicante atque evidenter adjuvante [...] strenue decoravit." (Hereafter, Arnold, *MC*. All translations from the *MC* are mine unless otherwise noted.)

<sup>783</sup> Arnold, *MC* 238: "meliores."

<sup>784</sup> Arnold, *MC* 238: "Ambos crudeles et barbari, ambo daemoniorum cultibus mancipati, ambo verae religionis et propriae salutis ignari, temporalis potentiae nomen affectabant, atque ad interminabilis miseriae lamenta aeternique cruciatus tormenta caeco corde festinabant. Talibus enim sacra comminatur Scriptura dicens, 'Potentes potenter tormenta patiuntur.' "

<sup>785</sup> Cf. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* 108-111, on *potentia*, in which he argues that the confrontation between the possessed and the saint mimics the patterns of the late Roman *quaestio* in which confessions were extracted under torture.

Viking's desire for temporal power won by the sword with Cuthbert's more efficacious spiritual power.

Again, the stress is on property infringement as a crime against the saint. The reader is told that both are "extremely barbarous and cruel,"<sup>786</sup> Onlafald is "monstrous in many ways and crueler" than Scula, "utterly inhumane,"<sup>787</sup> and having "a wild-beast-like spirit, [...] like an untamable brute."<sup>788</sup> The sole example and culminating proof of these charges is that Onlafald seizes a farm which belongs to the bishop.<sup>789</sup> The bishop's rebuke likewise links demonic worship with attacks on church property: "I beg you that you put away the hardness of your stubborn spirit and, by abandoning your worship of demons, that you acknowledge the Creator, and also that you not refuse to cease from the lawless infringement upon church property."<sup>790</sup> The ultimate proof of Onlafald's wickedness is the way in which he treats the saint's property. The changes the *Miracula*'s author makes are not a shift in emphasis or a redeployment of the same story for a different purpose. Rather, they are an intensification of the *Historia*'s original point; those who presume to threaten Durham's property do so at their peril.

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<sup>786</sup> Arnold, *MC* 238: "ambo fuissent barbari et crudeles."

<sup>787</sup> Arnold, *MC* 239: "immaniolem multo atque crudeliorem, ac prorsus inhumanum."

<sup>788</sup> Arnold, *MC* 239: "ferinum eius animum [...] indomabilis bellua."

<sup>789</sup> Arnold, *MC* 240.

<sup>790</sup> Arnold, *MC* 239: "Tantum quaeso pertinacis animi deponas rigorem, atque abdicato daemonum cultu tuum recognoscas Creatorem; necnon et ab illicita rerum pervasione ecclesiasticarum jam te cohibere non renuas."

Finally, there is Symeon of Durham's<sup>791</sup> *Libellus de exordio et procursu istius, hoc est Dunhelmensis, ecclesie*, written between 1104 and 1115.<sup>792</sup> As in the two previous versions, the basic significance of this event is quite clear; no one should doubt that the saint has continuing power to protect his people. Symeon's decision to include this event does, on the other hand, raise the question of why he felt the warning was necessary. Symeon does not simply repeat elements because they are found in previous works. As A.J. Piper argues, "Symeon felt the need to repeat very little of the available material on Cuthbert's life and only included what seemed apposite to his purpose."<sup>793</sup> What made the inclusion of the Onlafald incident suitable for Symeon's purposes? As in the previous two works, Onlafald is useful to Symeon's narrative not primarily as a skeptic, but as a dispossessor. Symeon's concern with skepticism against the saint is secondary to his concern with threats to the community's property by Durham's immediate neighbors. Piper has argued that the primary audience for Symeon's *Libellus* was the people of Durham Cathedral's own congregation.<sup>794</sup> However, the framing of this story to address the dispute over the York tribute and "all the others" who might be making claims on Cuthbert's property shows that Symeon's *Libellus* is not only an

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<sup>791</sup> Symeon is the named author of the text. However, Rollason notes that, "one man, presumably Prior Turgot, commissioned the work, and others, no doubt led by Symeon, compiled it. It was thus a team effort," *Libellus* xliv.

<sup>792</sup> *Libellus* xlii.

<sup>793</sup> A.J. Piper, "The First Generation of Durham Monks and the Cult of St Cuthbert," *St. Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to AD 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell P, 1989) 439.

<sup>794</sup> Piper 438.



exhortation to the monastic community, but also a signpost to outsiders, warning of the dangers inherent in vexing the saint by impinging on his property.

Unlike the previous two texts, Symeon identifies a specific threat to the community and attaches it to the Onlafbald incident. The narrative is introduced as an explanation of why the men of York extract a certain tax from Cuthbert's lands in order to offset their own royal taxes. The narrative tells us that Scula, one of the two lieutenants of Rægnald along with Onlafbald, "inflicted heavy and intolerable tributes on the unfortunate inhabitants."<sup>795</sup> The narrative tells us that these tributes have become the basis of the men of York's claim: "for this reason even today, the people of York attempt to impose a mulct of money on that part of the land of St. Cuthbert which Scula possessed equivalent to whatever sum in royal tax they are compelled to pay."<sup>796</sup> Symeon's narrative goes on to explain that their reasoning is invalid: "thus they deem to be law what was done tyrannically by a heathen who was fighting not for the legitimate king of the English but for one who was a barbarian, a foreigner, and the enemy of the king of the English."<sup>797</sup> The narrative also attributes Durham's successful resistance to Cuthbert: "with St. Cuthbert resisting them, however, they have not hitherto been able to introduce this bad custom, although they worked hard to do so."<sup>798</sup> The narrative not

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<sup>795</sup> *Libellus* 130-131: "Miseros indigenas gravibus tributis et intolerabilibus afflixit."

<sup>796</sup> *Libellus* 130-131: "Unde usque hodie Eboracenses quotiens tributum regale solvere coguntur, ei parti terre sancti Cuthberti, quam Scula possederat, in levamentum sui multam pecunie imponere nituntur."

<sup>797</sup> *Libellus* 130-131: "Scilicet legem deputant, quod paganus per tirannidem fecerat, qui non legitimo regi Anglorum, sed barbaro et alienigene et regis Anglorum hosti militabat."

<sup>798</sup> *Libellus* 130-131: "Nec tamen quamvis multum in hoc laboraverint, pravam consuetudinem huc usque sancto Cuthberto resistente introducere potuerunt."

only foregrounds property as a concern, but it also sets up a contemporary example of Cuthbert's power to protect his people.

This is immediately followed by Onlafald's story, which functions as a warning example of what happens to those who try to defy the saint and take his property.

Symeon contrasts Scula, the source of the illegitimate tax, with Onlafald, "the manner of whose destruction showed all how much more savage and cruel he was than his colleague."<sup>799</sup> He is described as "molesting the bishop, community, and people of St. Cuthbert with many injuries, and was persistently expropriating estates belonging by right to the bishopric."<sup>800</sup> As in earlier narratives, Onlafald's only specific crime is that he has impinged on the bishop's property rights. Indeed, it is the loss of the property, not the unnamed cruelties against the region's people, which prompts the bishop to speak up. The bishop says, "I beseech you to moderate the hardness of your stubborn mind, and to refrain from the illicit annexation of church property."<sup>801</sup> Once again, the mockery of Cuthbert and his vindication are not the central subject of the narrative. Instead, they are a mechanism by which predators are warned away from Durham's properties. The narrative is interested in Onlafald's earlier defiance of Cuthbert because it parallels the men of York's present day defiance of Cuthbert as represented by the community at Durham.

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<sup>799</sup> *Libellus* 130-131: "qui multo quam socius eius immaniolem et crudeliorem se in sui perniciem omnibus exhibebat."

<sup>800</sup> *Libellus* 132-133: "multis sepe injuriis episcopum, congregationem atque populum sancti Cuthberti molestaret, prediaque ad episcopium jure attinentia sibi pertinaciter usurparet."

<sup>801</sup> *Libellus* 132-133: "Queso [...] pertinacis animi rigorem deponas, et ab illicita rerum pervasione ecclesiasticarum iam te cohibeas."

With Onlafald's torturous death, Symeon's narrative brings the reader back to the conflict with York and the assertion of Cuthbert's power. As in the previous versions, Onlafald is unable to move into or out of the church: "he was fixed as if by a nail through each foot and, unable to go out of to come back in, he remained there immobile."<sup>802</sup> After a long time, Onlafald "acknowledged publicly the sanctity of the most blessed confessor, and thus he was compelled to give up his impious soul in that same place."<sup>803</sup> Onlafald has claimed that Cuthbert was powerless, but, under torture, he confesses that Cuthbert was holy. This is not a non-sequitur. Rather, the two are the same thing; the saint's power stems directly from his holiness and his holiness is displayed in his power over a servant of the devil. Lest the contemporary application be lost on the reader, the narrative specifies that not only did Onlafald die as a result of his impiety, but also "all the others were terrified by this example, and presumed no more to misappropriate in any way lands or anything else which belonged by right to the church."<sup>804</sup> Clearly, extorting land or money from Cuthbert's people is guaranteed to fail.

Given when Symeon wrote, and the anxieties of other writers in this period, it is tempting to attribute the Onlafald incident to Symeon's concern over the advent of the Normans and fears that Cuthbert, like some other Anglo-Saxon saints, might come under scrutiny from Norman prelates or that the community itself might come under attack for

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<sup>802</sup> *Libellus* 132-133: "Iam alterum intra limen alterum extra pedem posuerat, et ibi tanquam clavis per utrumque pedem confixus nec egredi nec regredi valebat, sed immobilis ibi prorsus manebat."

<sup>803</sup> *Libellus* 132-133: "Beatissimi confessoris sanctitatem palam confitebatur, sicque impiam animam eodem in loco reddere compellebatur."

<sup>804</sup> *Libellus* 132-133: "Quo exemplo alii omnes conterriti, neque terras neque aliud quid quod ecclesie iure competeat, quoquomodo ulterius pervadere presumebant."

being insufficiently monastic. However, Symeon's work shows little evidence that he found the pressure of Norman rule oppressive or that there was a clash of Norman and Anglo-Saxon identities in Durham. Neither the Norman presence nor the change to Benedictinism were felt as "an abrupt catastrophe."<sup>805</sup>

Indeed, there is some reason to believe that William I had more cause for anxiety over Durham than Durham had reason to worry over William I. The Northumbrians, the Scandinavians, and West Saxons had all previously found it beneficial to make gifts to Cuthbert in order to cultivate the saint's and the community's friendship: "the problem for William the Conqueror and those whom he and his sons appointed to govern the north of England was how to exercise effective control in the region without provoking the sort of reaction which had destroyed Tosti's power."<sup>806</sup> The north in general, including Durham, had submitted to William I by Christmas 1066.<sup>807</sup> William's arrival apparently had no damaging effect on Durham Cathedral: "in Durham and the lands of the Patrimony of St. Cuthbert the Conqueror's authority was already recognised and there was no attempt to remove the bishop."<sup>808</sup> The Normans seem not to have offered much threat to Cuthbert's people, nor to have been perceived as being one: "the Church of St. Cuthbert and the *Haliwerfolc* offered no resistance to the Normans and their appointees."<sup>809</sup> According to the *Libellus*, William did send a force north to attack the

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<sup>805</sup> Aird 141.

<sup>806</sup> Aird 59.

<sup>807</sup> Aird 64.

<sup>808</sup> Aird 67

<sup>809</sup> Aird 67.

area after the massacre of Earl Robert and his men, but the community was protected by a thick fog, and it was one of the Normans who correctly interpreted it as the work of Cuthbert.<sup>810</sup> In Symeon's account, when the monk Æthelwine stole from the treasury of Cuthbert, it was a Norman who caught him and imprisoned him for the theft.<sup>811</sup> In the *Libellus*, Normans are as likely as Anglo-Saxons to be proponents of Cuthbert.

Two events in the *Libellus* have been interpreted as signaling conflict between the Durham Cathedral community and the Normans. In the *Libellus*, William I makes a visit to Cuthbert's shrine and refuses to believe that Cuthbert's body is present. William is struck down and flees the place, "only drawing rein when he reached the river Tees, the boundary of the Patrimony of St. Cuthbert, and therefore the limit of the saint's spiritual power."<sup>812</sup> The same thing happens to Ralph, the royal tax gatherer.<sup>813</sup> Neither incident displays skepticism about the saint, just an incursion into his territory. Indeed William's rudeness to the community challenges their position as holders of the body, not Cuthbert's sanctity. Aird argues, convincingly, that "it is likely that the account in the *Libellus* was once again more a product of the situation at Durham in the early twelfth century than an accurate record of the king's encounter with the Community."<sup>814</sup> It is important to note that in the earlier *Cronica monasterii Dunelmensis* the king is remembered as approaching *reverently*, and asking to hear the life of Cuthbert recounted.

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<sup>810</sup> Aird 74.

<sup>811</sup> *Libellus* 171-173.

<sup>812</sup> Aird 88.

<sup>813</sup> *Libellus* 107.

<sup>814</sup> Aird 89.

The *Cronica* says that he gave rich gifts and confirmed the Community in its property and privileges.<sup>815</sup> Aird argues that “The miracle stories warned William I’s successors to respect the privileges of the church and to temper the exercise of their authority in the see.”<sup>816</sup> It is unlikely that anxiety over the Norman skepticism would have *increased* from the time of the *Cronica* to the *Libellus*, especially since “Archbishop Lanfranc seems to have had an influential role in the establishment of the Benedictine convent at Durham and [...] the archbishop and William of St. Calais worked together on the reform of the Church of St. Cuthbert.”<sup>817</sup> Symeon’s goal was to promote this reform, not react against it. If Symeon was concerned with Norman incursions it was not Lanfranc’s skepticism, but the king’s taxes which caused the anxiety. From the attempts by the people of York to recoup their own taxes from Durham, to the king’s rude tax gatherer, the *Libellus* is adamant that any attempt to remove goods or property from the community will result in punishment.

When the congregation of Cuthbert at Durham was replaced by monks in 1083, “the change in the cathedral’s personnel was more nearly complete than on any other occasion in its history [...] the situation placed upon them a special obligation to show themselves worthy servants of the cult.”<sup>818</sup> Included in this obligation was the implicit threat that if they were not worthy guardians, this would form a basis for their dispossession by other powers, primarily the surrounding Northumbrian lords, eager for a

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<sup>815</sup> H.H.E. Craster, “The Red Book of Durham,” *English Historical Review* 40 (1925): 528.

<sup>816</sup> Aird 89.

<sup>817</sup> Aird 127.

<sup>818</sup> Piper 437.

piece of the vast lands already possessed by the Durham community. Aird, among others, has argued that Symeon's agenda and motive in writing his *Libellus* were to promote and justify the monastic community's Benedictinism and their disinheritance of the previous, non-monastic *congregatio Sancti Cuthberti*: "Symeon was writing with a specific purpose in mind and that was to justify the events of 1083, the dissolution of the *congregatio Sancti Cuthberti* and the introduction of Benedictine monks."<sup>819</sup>

However, this concern brings the text back to the problem of protecting the vast properties owned by the bishop and community of Durham. The dispossession which took place in the transition to Benedictinism involved significant transfers of land rights and renewed questions about how to identify what belonged to Durham Cathedral, to its community, and to its bishop:

Although the concern for the spiritual welfare and sexual continence of those who ministered in the Church of St. Cuthbert probably played a part in the development of the ban on women [...] the impetus came from the need to wrest control of the church's estates from the hereditary *congregatio*. The women whom the members of the *congregatio* had married were the agents of proprietary stability.<sup>820</sup>

The process of making the transition to a monastic community required redrawing the lines of property ownership by the bishop and the community so that their proprietary rights were not dependent on a marital system. As Aird points out, Symeon's work

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<sup>819</sup> Aird 4.

<sup>820</sup> Aird 126.

expends a great deal of energy defining exactly who, bishop or congregation, controls what land.<sup>821</sup> Having just dispossessed their predecessors, it is not surprising that the monastic congregation should have been particularly conscious of threats to their property when they commissioned Symeon's work.

At the same time, as has been discussed above, the concern with property retention was not new to the Durham community. This was the era of "institutional histories," works whose primary aim was not to create or expand the cult of a saint, but to enumerate the holdings of a particular community and to deploy the saint's presence and power in defense of those holdings. Control of property was a central source of safety, stability, and influence for Cuthbert's community. Aird argues that it was the ownership of property that gave the community its real power:

It was through the possession of great landed wealth that the Community of St. Cuthbert was able to play more than a merely passive role in Northumbrian affairs. [...] Whether it was in its dealings with the early Northumbrian kings, the Scandinavian rulers of York, or the comital dynasty of Bamburgh, the leaders of the Church of St. Cuthbert had something tangible with which to bargain, rather than mere promises of intercession with God or threats of spiritual anathema which would have been of limited effect in dealing with pagan enemies such as the Scandinavians.<sup>822</sup>

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<sup>821</sup> Aird 142-183.

<sup>822</sup> Aird 11.



Aird may be wrong to argue that the force of temporal power outweighed threats of the saint's wrath. However, the continual reiteration of property rights found in the *Historia*, the *Miracula* and the *Libellus*, as well as numerous other documents written for Durham in this period, show that property acquisition and retention had become a central concern for Cuthbert's people and one to which they devoted a great deal of energy. In the process, honoring the saint's sanctity became as much a means to an end as it was an end in itself.

## **Conclusion**

As we have seen from these examples, the postmortem doubt directed at saints rests on a different base than the doubts expressed about the saints during their lifetime. Here the doubt is expressed as a refusal to give the saint due honor. In each of these cases the concern is with power. Because the saint is dead, an onlooker concludes that the saint no longer has power and therefore can be treated with less respect and honor. In Oda's case, the conflict is quite personal; his rival Ælfsige rejoices to have finally gotten Oda's office and sees it as a victory over the saint's thwarting of his ambitions. With King Oswald, the conflict is national; the monks of Bardney, having been conquered by the saint during his life as king, resent his presence in their monastery. They do not wish to be conquered a second time by becoming home to his relics. The conflict of power in Bishop Oswald's case is somewhat more understated, but nonetheless present. It is a nearby abbot, invited in with many others, who resents the honors given to the saint and,

with the men of his own household, wonders if Bishop Oswald deserves them. The implication of rivalry lies under his mutterings, especially when seen in contrast to the joyful acclaim of the commoners – those who have something to gain, rather than lose – through the presence of the saint in their midst. Oswald's demonstration of his power to heal rewards their acclaim and silences his critics. Finally, Cuthbert's confrontation with the pagan Vikings roundly warns any other, more contemporary predators away from the Durham Cathedral community. While the narratives vary widely in the degree of blame they ascribe to the doubter and the method of rebuke used, one element remains constant. The denigration of the saint's sanctity is founded on an assurance that he is powerless in death. The rebuttal to this assumption is always some demonstration of power. Power is proof of sanctity.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

This dissertation has examined the narrative depiction and uses of incidents of doubt in Anglo-Saxon hagiography. Considered against Michael Goodich's findings about the hagiographic use of doubt in the later Middle Ages, Anglo-Saxon hagiography shows a much wider range both in the ways doubt is depicted and the purposes for which it is deployed. Anglo-Saxon hagiography has examples of not one, but four broad types of doubt: questions about the saint, accusations against the saint that sow doubt in the minds of others, self-doubt on the part of the saint, and postmortem doubt which derides the saint's sanctity and assumes the saint is powerless to act.

Unlike the examples Goodich cites, not all hagiographies treat doubt as sinful. Some doubt merely results from a lack of understanding, the misleading of others, or a need for further information. When doubt is sinful it stems from a wide variety of motives. Furthermore, not all sinful doubt is punished; some hagiographers treat doubt much more leniently than others.

Anglo-Saxon hagiographers had several patristic sources available to them which offered incidents upon which a theology of doubt could have been modeled, but they did not settle on one. Instead, they modeled doubt in shifting ways that reflect an unsettled theology of doubt which remained flexible and responsive to the pressures and concerns

informing the individual writer. It was not that the hagiographers of this period were uninterested in the issue of doubt. Quite the opposite. They wrote in the period leading up to the establishment of the canonization process, one in which doubts about a saint's sanctity could not be automatically answered by pointing to the approval of Rome.<sup>823</sup> When canonization became a formal process, subject to the central control of Rome, doubt was, in a sense, institutionalized as a part of the canonization process. Prior to this, written accounts were fast becoming essential to canonization, but were not yet part of a formal process. A written document was a way of creating and solidifying the memory of the saint so that the memory (and hence the veneration) of a saint would not be lost to forgetfulness or to the doubts of others. To write doubt was, to one degree or another, to risk writing against the cult's success because it introduced into the text the very thing the text was intended to allay.

Considered against their historic contexts, the moments in which hagiographers chose to use doubt and the ways in which they chose to portray it show a high correspondence between the concerns, agendas and pressures under which the hagiographer wrote and the way in which doubt is treated in the hagiography. Several hagiographers introduce or reproduce doubting incidents in ways which address threats to the cult of their saint. Other hagiographers, Bede and Ælfric, use incidents of doubt to model virtues or characteristics which they wish to spread through the English people. This reminds us that, despite hagiography's investment in the universal and eternal, each

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<sup>823</sup> Blair 463.

hagiography was still directly bound to the concerns and issues of the time and place in which it was written. Those hagiographers who take the narrative risk of using doubt reveal those pressures and concerns under which they wrote.

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