

Transitional Holiness in the Twelfth Century:  
The Social and Spiritual Identity of  
*Domina* Christina of Markyate

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## Abstract

This thesis reassesses the evidence for the English woman of spirit, Christina of Markyate, as a case-study for transitions in sanctity and spirituality during the twelfth century. It highlights the lack of appropriate vocabulary and models available in the 1130s and 1140s to make sense of the new manifestations of holiness that Christina embodies. By using three distinct but overlapping discourses to structure the study – social networks in religious life, sanctity and spirituality – it reflects on how the stakeholders in Christina’s texts negotiated their positions in relation to these discourses and throws light on a context of rapid discourse shift.

The first section, ‘The Lady Christina: Texts and Contexts’, locates Christina, her texts, and her religious foundation at Markyate in their immediate and extended social networks. It shows that she had regional fame during her lifetime but that this was not sustained after her death. Her story is intimately tied up with the Abbey of St Albans, whose interest in their own domestic saints caused its revival in the later middle ages. Although charismatic in her own right, Christina was principally a successful institution builder and prioress, whose main concerns were domestic, rather than carving out a new kind of role for religious women in England. The second section, ‘Saint Christina: Sanctity and Learning’ addresses whether it is possible to consider Christina a saint, and what sanctity might involve when the traditional trappings of cult are missing. Christina fell between older and newer ideas about holiness, which resulted in the disrupted use of models to shape her story. Her saintly credentials were her virginity and visions, and in seeking to have these recorded Christina strategically performed and recast her external behaviour within recognisable modes of holiness. It is also possible to identify ways that Christina moved beyond existing constructions of identity and found a feminine voice in the performances of her ‘sartorial body’. The third section, ‘*Ancilla Christi*: Visions and Community’ looks in detail at Christina’s spirituality, using her visions to critique the separation of elite and popular modes of numinous encounter by taking her out of her primary social networks and identifying a comparative framework in contemporary trends in Western visionary culture. Visions flourish within particular domestic contexts and disciplines, and Christina enables us to glimpse a sub-culture of visionary experience in twelfth-century England, which rarely shows up in sources and is given little authority in the dominant narratives.

The question of what ‘success’ might mean in these three discourses, forms a background theme to the investigation. It is used as a route into what was valued, what was normative, and what was recognisable, in the contemporary fields where Christina enjoyed networks and status, rather than as an objective measurement tool. A variety of sources and theoretical approaches are used to contextualise the fourteenth-century redactions of her *vita* in order to yield twelfth-century meanings. The main redaction, found in John of Tynemouth’s legendary of British saints, is a disrupted text full of hagiographic elements that can be opened up to multiple readings because of its historical situation and competing agendas. Overall this thesis concludes that Christina and many of the people with whom she came into contact recognised her visions as a mark of divine favour, and that in a climate where the primary category for receiving such distinction was sainthood, Christina was cast, not especially successfully, as a saint.

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(Anglican) Feast of St Alban, 2008.

## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Contents .....	v
Abbreviations .....	viii
Introduction.....	1
I.    Introducing Christina.....	2
II.   Historiography.....	5
III.  Problematising Christina.....	12
IV.  ‘Truth Content’: Christina the Person v. Christina the Text.....	16
V.   Approaches.....	21
<b>PART 1: THE LADY CHRISTINA: TEXTS AND CONTEXTS.....</b>	<b>26</b>
1.  Social Networks in the Narrative Sources.....	30
I.    Writing the <i>Life</i> I – The Original <i>Vita</i> .....	31
I.I  Dating the <i>Vita</i> – Political Dynamics in the Reign of King Stephen.....	33
I.II Textual Fissures and Omissions.....	37
II.   The Manuscript Evidence.....	39
II.I  John of Tynemouth, <i>Sanctilogium</i> .....	39
II.II Nicholas Roscarrock, <i>Lives of the Saints</i> .....	41
II.III Thomas Walsingham, <i>De Fundatione et Meritis Monasterii</i> .....	42
II.IV <i>Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani</i> .....	44
II.V  William of Malmesbury, <i>De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum</i> .....	46
II.VI The Hildesheim Psalter.....	48
III.   A Twelfth-Century Story in Fourteenth-Century Texts?.....	49
IV.   Christina’s Social Networks.....	52
V.    Two <i>Familiae</i> .....	60
2.  Monastic Networks and the Priory at Markyate.....	65
I.    Christina in the Discourse of (New) Monasticism.....	66
I.I  Charisma.....	67
I.II Eremitic or Coenobitic?.....	71
I.III Prioress.....	73
II.   St Trinitas Markyate.....	77
II.I  From Hermitage to Priory.....	78
II.II Relationships with the Wider Monastic Community.....	85
III.  Abbey of St Albans.....	89
III.I The Social Identity of Abbot Geoffrey.....	93
IV.   The Political Context.....	97
Conclusions.....	100

<b>PART 2: SAINT CHRISTINA: SANCTITY AND HOLINESS</b> .....	102
3. Negotiating the Discourse of Sanctity.....	106
I. Manifesting Saintliness.....	108
I.I Cultic Evidence For Christina.....	109
I.II A ‘Lost’ Saint?.....	111
II. Writing the <i>Life</i> II – Competing Agendas.....	113
III. The Problem of Saintly Typology.....	116
III.I Gender.....	117
III.II Visions.....	118
IV. The <i>Vita</i> in Cultic Context.....	120
IV.I: St Albans and Saints’ Cults in Anglo-Norman England.....	122
IV.II Aldegund and Christina: No Ordinary Saints.....	125
V. Writing Holiness: A Transitional Text.....	128
V.I Disrupting the Discourse.....	131
VI. A Problem of Brand Management.....	135
4. Autohagiography and Holy Performance.....	138
I. Writing the <i>Life</i> III: Performing Sainthood.....	139
I.I Exterior Performance and Interior Holiness.....	140
I.II Auto-hagiography.....	144
I.II Negotiating Recollection.....	146
II. Texts and Self-Textualisation.....	149
II.I The Hildesheim Psalter.....	152
II.II Saints’ Lives.....	155
III. Clothing and the Saintly Body.....	159
III.I Fabricating a Holy Identity.....	161
III.II Weaving a Speaking Self?.....	166
Conclusions.....	171
<b>PART 3: ANCILLA CHRISTI: VISIONS AND COMMUNITY</b> .....	173
5. Ineffably Sweet Communings?.....	177
I. The Debate over Mysticism.....	178
I.I Categorising Experience: Medieval Thought.....	181
I.II Categorising Experience: Modern Thought.....	184
I.III Beyond Phenomenology.....	187
II. Writing the <i>Life</i> IV: Managing Christina’s Visions.....	191
II.I Visionary Modes and Spiritual Maturation.....	197
III. Some Key Themes.....	205
III.I Mariology.....	205

	III.II Christology.....	210
	III.III Trinity.....	212
IV.	Affective Piety and Visionary Praxis.....	218
	I.I Images, Visions and the Hildesheim Psalter.....	222
	I.II Teachers, Authority and Monastic Learning.....	226
V.	Visionary Communities and Visionary Individuals.....	230
VI.	Domestic Visions: A Twelfth Century English Subculture.....	242
	Conclusions.....	254
	CONCLUSION: Spiritual Success in a Transitional Context.....	256
	I. Reviewing the Christina Thesis.....	256
	II. Directions for Future Research.....	260
	III. A Failed Saint or a Failed Text: Is There a Holywoman in this <i>Life</i> .....	262
	WORKS CITED.....	264

## Abbreviations

<i>AASS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur...</i> ed. Jean Bollandus and others (Antwerp, 1643- )
<i>ANS</i>	<i>Anglo Norman Studies: Proceedings of the Battle Conference</i> (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1979- )
BL	British Library
<i>CCCM</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis</i> (Turnhout: Brepols, 1966- )
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i> (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953- )
<i>CRR</i>	<i>Curia Regis Rolls of the Reigns of Richard I and John</i> , 7 vols (London: HMSO, 1922-1935)
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 1864- )
CUP	Cambridge University Press
<i>Distant Echoes</i>	<i>Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women vol 1</i> , ed. John Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publication, 1984)
<i>EEA</i>	<i>English Episcopal Acta</i>
EETS	Early English Text Society
Fanous and Leyser	Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, eds., <i>Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Holy Woman</i> (London: Routledge, 2005)
<i>GA</i>	<i>Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani, a Thomas Walsingham</i> , ed. H.T. Riley, 3 vols (RS 28, 1867-1868)
Gibbs	<i>Early Charters of the Cathedral Church of St Paul, London</i> , ed. Marion Gibbs (Camden, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Series, 58: 1939)
Gregory, <i>Dialogues</i>	Gregory the Great, <i>Dialogues</i> , ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, Sources Chrétiennes, 206 (Paris: Cerf, 1978-80)
Knowles and Hadcock	David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, <i>Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales</i> (London: Longman, 1971)
LRS	Lincoln Records Society
<i>Life</i>	C.H. Talbot, ed. and trans., <i>The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Recluse</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959; reprinted, Toronto: University of Toronto Press for the Medieval Academy of America, 1998)
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
<i>Monasticon</i>	William Dugdale, <i>Monasticon Anglicanum</i> , ed. J. Caley, and others, 6 vols (London, 1815-1830)

MUP	Manchester University Press
OUP	Oxford University Press
Pächt, <i>AP</i>	Otto Pächt, C. R. Dodwell and Francis Wormald, <i>The St. Albans Psalter (Albani Psalter)</i> (London: Warburg Institute, 1960)
<i>Peaceweavers</i>	<i>Peaceweavers: Medieval Religious Women, vol 2</i> , ed. John Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987)
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Cursus Completus: Series Latina</i> , ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 221 vols (Paris, 1844-1864)
<i>RB</i>	<i>The Rule of St Benedict in Latin and English with Notes</i> , ed. Timothy Fray (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1981)
<i>RRAN</i>	<i>Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum 1066-1154</i> , ed. H. W. C. Davis and others, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913-1969)
RS	London: Rolls Series
<i>SCH</i>	<i>Studies in Church History</i> (Oxford: Blackwell for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 1964- )
Thomson, <i>Manuscripts</i>	Rodney Thomson, <i>Manuscripts from St Albans Abbey 1066-1235 I: Text</i> (Tasmania: Brewer, 1982)
UCP	University of Chicago Press
UPP	University of Pennsylvania Press
<i>VCH</i>	<i>Victoria County Histories of England</i>
<i>Warw. Fines</i>	<i>Warwickshire Feet of Fines: Volume 1, 7 Ric.1 – 12 Ed.1</i> , ed. Ethel Stokes and Frederick Wellstood (Dugdale Society, 11: 1932)

## Introduction

Mid-afternoon in a hermitage in north Hertfordshire an elderly hermit sat down to his daily meal. On enquiring of his servants about an unexpected visitor who arrived before daybreak he suddenly called for the table to be cleared and retired to his chapel for many days, weeping and fasting. The hermit was named Roger, the place a wood on the way to Dunstable, the date around 1115, and the grief over a vanished young woman whom he had refused to help leave her forced marriage for the religious life. We might imagine Roger's relief on discovering that the teenager had not fallen into the snares of some worthless young man but was hiding in the care of one of his own charges, the anchoress Alfwen, who was more convinced of Christina's good intentions. Roger quickly came to esteem Christina's spiritual worth, but her success in the estimations of others has been rather more deferred. After making a small impact on her own times through friends' enthusiasm for her visionary powers, Christina of Markyate vanishes from record until the middle of the fourteenth century. With two redactions from a no longer extant twelfth-century *vita* copied into St Albans documents during the celebrated abbacy of Thomas de la Mare, interest in her perhaps revived there in the later Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless Christina's biggest period of success has undoubtedly been amongst modern scholars intrigued by her unconventional *vita*, which was made widely accessible through C. H. Talbot's painstaking transcription of the badly damaged Tiberius manuscript in 1959. The recently published volume of essays on Christina, edited by Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser designates her "a twelfth-century holy woman".<sup>2</sup> This thesis interrogates aspects of that description, addressing how 'twelfth century' was Christina. To what extent were her experiences grounded in her times? More importantly how can the safe term 'holy woman' be unpacked both in the context of her spiritual environs and in terms of recent thinking about medieval women's voices and experiences? In particular was Christina a 'holy woman' in the twelfth century: to what extent was there recognition or rejection of her sanctity both during and following her life at Markyate?

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<sup>1</sup> In order to minimise confusion the original and now lost twelfth-century account will be referred to as the *vita*, whilst the redaction found at the end of John of Tynemouth's *Sanctilogium Angliae, Walliae, Scotiae et Hiberniae* in BL Cotton MS Tiberius E.i, published as *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Recluse*, ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot (Oxford: OUP, 1959; Revised and reprinted in Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching, University of Toronto Press, 2001), will be referred to as the *Life*. Chapter numbers have been silently entered as per Talbot's transcription in the gaps left for numeration in the Tiberius manuscript. The briefer redaction found in Thomas Walsingham's BL, Cotton MS Claudius E.iv, published as *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani, a Thomas Walsingham*, ed. H. T. Riley, 3 vols (RS 28, 1867), 1, will be referred to as the *Gesta Abbatum (GA)* account.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, eds., *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Holy Woman* (London: Routledge, 2005).

## I. Introducing Christina

Christina is unique as a twelfth-century religious Englishwoman in having commanded sufficient high regard amongst some of her contemporaries for a Latin *vita* about her to be commissioned.<sup>3</sup> The original of this lost *vita* was kept for many years at the Markyate priory which grew out of her informal community, and was probably the direct source for both of the extant fourteenth-century abbreviations. The wealth of personal detail found in the *vita* shows it to have been written by someone closely acquainted with Christina and her family and friends.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless the evidence relating to her is scant in comparison to some of her contemporary continental holy women.<sup>5</sup> We have little access to her own words, and both surviving versions of her *vita* break off in the early 1140s, many years before she died. There is also the celebrated and elaborate Hildesheim (St Albans) Psalter that partially reflects Christina's learning experience, but that is at least as much about Abbot Geoffrey's expectations of her as about Christina's lived spirituality.<sup>6</sup> The last years of her life are attested only briefly, in two charters and a short passage in the St Albans domestic history the *Gesta Abbatum Monasteri Sancti Albani* concerning the landholdings of the priory at Markyate. Christina's story has been pieced back together by scholars, with the most foundational and sophisticated of this work done by Talbot in the process of producing the edited edition from British Library MS Cotton Tiberius E.i.<sup>7</sup> It is the story as told in this redaction that has achieved

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<sup>3</sup> The only other life written of a near contemporary woman is the Life of Margaret of Scotland d.1093, written c.1104-7 by Turgot, Prior of Durham and Bishop of St Andrews, under the patronage of her daughter Edith-Matilda Queen of Henry I. *De Sancta Margarita, Scotiae Regina*, AASS, 10<sup>th</sup> June, vol. 2, pp. 316-335. See also the translation by W. M. Metcalfe in *Ancient Lives of Scottish Saints* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1895), pp. 297-321. Lois Huneycutt has argued that this life was intended as a teaching tool for Edith-Matilda rather than a hagiographical account as such, 'The Idea of the Perfect Princess: The Life of St Margaret in the Reign of Matilda II (1100-1118)', *ANS*, 12 (1990), 81-97.

<sup>4</sup> For example the Writer relates an instance of Christina's clairvoyance during a shared meal, *Life* ch. 83, p. 190. See also Rachel Koopmans 'Dining at Markyate with Lady Christina', in Fanous and Leyser, pp. 143-159.

<sup>5</sup> In comparison to Elisabeth of Schönau, Hildegard of Bingen, or even the indefatigable Heloise, Abbess of the Paraclete - though all of their writings were mediated through scribes - Christina is far less accessible to the medievalist. Eileen Power observes the remarkable lack of gifted individual women or female houses in England in comparison to Germany in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, *Medieval English Nunneries c.1275-1535* (Cambridge: CUP, 1922), pp. 238-240.

<sup>6</sup> Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1 has traditionally been known as the 'St Albans Psalter'. In order to consider questions of identity construction this thesis calls it the Hildesheim Psalter.

<sup>7</sup> Talbot, 'Introduction', *Life*, pp. 1-33. See also Michael Winterbottom, 'The Life of Christina of Markyate', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 105 (1987), 281-287 for minor corrections to Talbot's transcription. Two contemporary reviews of Talbot added to the body of knowledge about Christina: Giles Constable, *Speculum*, 35 (1960), 483-487 and P. Grosjean, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 78 (1960), 197-206. A revised edition of Talbot's translation was sadly published too late to be consulted in detail for this thesis, Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, eds., *The Life of Christina of Markyate* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), and another transcription from the Tiberius manuscript with French translation by Paulette L'Hermite-Lecerq and A. M. Legras is currently in preparation.

sufficient fame to be extensively summarised in books and university course documents. Though widely known, there is value in recounting its major details at the start of a study that is considerably reliant upon it.

The *Life* tells the struggles of Theodora, an Anglo-Saxon noblewoman from Huntingdon, to resist marriage by fleeing to the protection of local hermits. Changing her name to Christina, she herself becomes a hermit and later, as the community of women that has built up around her gained a more official status, a prioress and the close confidante of Abbot Geoffrey of St Albans. The *Life* seems to fall into three parts, although it has no actual chapter divisions designated. The first opens with a prophetic sign of Christina's prodigious holiness in the form of a dove sent to her pregnant mother Beatrix. It briefly recounts Theodora's pious childhood and her friendship with the elderly Canon Sueno who supports her precocious vow of virginity. Then enters the villainous Ranulf Flambard, Bishop of Durham - a family friend, former lover of Christina's aunt and would-be seducer of Christina. Despite his gifts of beautiful fabrics, Christina spurns this former Royal Justiciar, who vengefully arranges for her to be married to a pusillanimous young nobleman named Burthred. Christina's parents use bribery and coercion to try to persuade their daughter to accept this betrothal and ultimately trick her into getting married. During this time Christina is comforted by a series of visions of the Queen of Heaven, although these seem to make no difference to her material circumstances. Despite her parents' efforts to encourage her to frivolity by showing her off at the Guild Merchant's feast Christina continues to refuse to compromise her virginity, so to complete the marriage her parents engineer three unsuccessful attempts to get Burthred to rape her. Her angry father even temporarily casts his daughter almost naked from the house when his efforts to force her to marry fail. After a lengthy process of court hearings in which the validity of Christina's marriage is tried by the bishops of Durham and Lincoln, Autti's bribes bring him the legal victory and the disappointed Christina plans her escape. With the help of a recluse named Eadwin, she flees on horseback in a long passage fraught with the tensions of disguise and discovery, to the protection of the Anglo-Saxon anchoress Alfwen.

The second section of the story relates Christina's time in the cells of the anchoress and then of Roger the hermit, who seems to have been involved in her spiritual training in contemplative meditation. Christina changes her beautiful clothes for rough ones, as befits the religious life. Her time as a recluse is then marked by demonic tormenting and visionary comfort, including encounters with Christ and Mary who confirm her vocation. Nevertheless, after Roger dies, continued persecution from the Bishop of

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Lincoln prevents Christina from directly inheriting the Markyate cell, and she is sent by the Archbishop of York to the protection of a cleric of high social standing. Both Christina and the cleric are tempted to lust and their spiritual relationship breaks down. Though he is chastened by a vision of the Magdalene, Christina is only released from temptation once she has returned to Roger's cell - by a vision of the Christ-child whom she can both physically see and feel, and who passes through the barrier of her flesh to be internally encountered. At this juncture is Christina's only recorded miracle (healing a woman with dropsy) which leads into an account of Christina's own illnesses and her cure by the Queen of Heaven. This section closes by dispelling Christina's doubts about her virginity when angels bring her a white crown sent by Christ to his bride.

In the final part of the narrative Christina meets Abbot Geoffrey of St Albans and she ceases to take centre stage as his spiritual maturation becomes the dominant story. Christina's clairvoyant, visionary and prophetic powers are now employed mainly for the comfort and protection of the Abbot and they share some parallel visions. Christina's visions are instrumental in Geoffrey being prevented on three occasions from travelling to Rome on court business, and her intimate involvement in his life generates much opposition and derision from detractors. The Life breaks off after a series of encounters between Christina and the mysterious pilgrim-Christ, whom she sees crowned in the St Albans choir but who vanishes from the Markyate church. Incomplete, with at least one page lost in the 1731 Ashburnham fire, it ends mid sentence after a series of anecdotes that display Christina's clairvoyant powers, with Christina interceding for and reproving Abbot Geoffrey.

This story is replete with hagiographic devices but, as I will argue, the narrative is disjointed and disrupted by its historical situation and competing agendas, opening it up to a variety of readings. On questions of time and location this study works within the parameters that current scholarship has placed around Christina's life. It takes the view that Christina was born at the close of the eleventh century, and that she broadly followed the life-story suggested by Talbot.<sup>8</sup> The Hildesheim Psalter, given to Christina and kept at Markyate, records her obit on 8<sup>th</sup> December, confirming that Christina did not travel away but died in her community. Her death must have fallen between 1155 when Henry II's piperolls record a royal grant to the "*domina Christine*",<sup>9</sup> and 1188 to 1198, when her successor 'B' is noted in litigation documents.<sup>10</sup> Our protagonist did not

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<sup>8</sup> Talbot, 'Introduction', pp. 13-15.

<sup>9</sup> "*Et in blado quod Rex dedit Dominae Christinae de Bosco Ls*", see *The Great Rolls of the Pipe 2-4 Henry II*, ed. J. Hunter (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1844), p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> *EEA 17: Coventry and Litchfield*, ed. M. J. Franklin (London: British Academy, 1998), no. 43.

live a peculiarly (and unremarked upon) long life, and the Prioress Christina who signed British Library Cotton Charter xi.36 relating to the demise of minor lands in Warwickshire in the time of Richard I must have been the third prioress of Markyate.<sup>11</sup>

## II. Historiography

Christina has recently emerged as a dynamic new figure on the scholarly landscape of historical, literary and art criticism. Talbot's translation brought her *Life* into the scholarship on subjects including the family, marriage and religious life, but current debate has also begun to feature her more prominently in the study of medieval women's spirituality. In 2003 the digitisation of the Hildesheim Psalter, led by Jane Geddes, completed the corpus of major works connected to Christina in critical edition format.<sup>12</sup> This was the springboard for an important interdisciplinary conference at St Albans that summer on Christina and the psalter, and the associated volume of essays edited by Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser published in 2005.

The most important contribution to the field has undoubtedly been Rachel Koopmans' seminal study of the evidence for Christina and St Albans, which she bases on the unfinished state of all the accounts of Christina's story.<sup>13</sup> Koopmans has convincingly redated the writing of the original *vita* to the 1140s under the patronage of Abbot Geoffrey de Gorron of St Albans, rather than under his nephew Abbot Robert in the 1160s, a dating initially rejected by Talbot because the *Life* spoke "so unrestrainedly of Geoffrey's shortcomings".<sup>14</sup> This means that the *vita* was being composed when Christina was only in middle age, at the very height of her career as prioress of Markyate and confidante of the Abbot. Koopmans constructed a persuasive case for the abandonment of the incomplete *vita* project amid factional infighting following Geoffrey's death in 1146, when Christina was deemed something of a liability to the St Albans community.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This is a correction to the Markyate entry in David Knowles and C. N. L. Brooke, eds., *The Heads of Religious Houses: England and Wales 940-1216* (Cambridge: CUP, 1972), p. 215. It also seems possible that the two Isabelles may have had short reigns of office in the early thirteenth century following the second Christina and preceding prioress Joan; this would fit with the charter evidence in Gibbs, no. 154. See also Gibbs, nos. 155, 161 and 236.

<sup>12</sup> <[www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter.html](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter.html)> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008]. All page numbering will use this digital edition. Most of the psalter miniatures have also been published in Jane Geddes, *The St Albans Psalter: A Book for Christina of Markyate* (London: British Library, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Rachel Koopmans, 'The Conclusion of Christina of Markyate's Vita', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51 (2000), 663-698.

<sup>14</sup> Talbot, 'Introduction', p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Sally Thompson had previously suggested a similar earlier dating, *Women Religious: The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 17-18. Jean Leclercq had also dated it to 1145-1155, 'Christina of Markyate: A Witness to Solitude and Solidarity', in *A Leaf From the Great Tree of God:*

Left deliberately unfinished, it is a work in progress: unpolished, abandoned and, most notably, strangely unlike a saint's life. Extensive re-dating has also been key to the considerable volume of recent work on the composition of the Hildesheim Psalter.<sup>16</sup> As early 1895 Adolf Goldschmitt associated it with Christina from the *Gesta Abbatum* account,<sup>17</sup> and since the detailed Warburg Institute study by Otto Pächt and others, academic consensus has agreed that this codex was finally compiled for her as a gift from Abbot Geoffrey. Increasingly studies are identifying it as "The Psalter of Christina of Markyate" and codicological debates revolve around possible connections between the psalter and the *Life*. Some parallel incidents have been identified, with recent work exploring which components of the psalter were deliberately designed or compiled for Christina's use.<sup>18</sup> It seems that the psalter was not conceived of as a whole but was diverted to, or created in parts for, Markyate as part of the ongoing and developing relationship between Christina and Abbot Geoffrey.<sup>19</sup> Madeline Caviness and Kristine Haney have argued that the psalter texts demonstrate a masculine, St Albans discourse of monastic reform,<sup>20</sup> but more recently Geddes has shown that the illustrations shift to a more positive view of women after the text was redirected to Christina's use.<sup>21</sup> This shift was perhaps marked by the addition of a pasted-on initial to psalm 105, portraying Christina introducing Abbot Geoffrey and the monks of St Albans to Christ, which is often called the "Christina initial" in modern scholarship.<sup>22</sup>

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*Essays in Honour of Ritamary Bradley*, ed. Margot King (Toronto: Peregrina, 1994), p. 173. The history of the *Life* has recently been reviewed by Iole Turco, 'De S. Theodora, virgine, que et Christina dicitur: Questioni irrisolte e possibili letture della *Vita* di Cristina di Markyate', *Schede Medievali*, 42 (2004), 165-185.

<sup>16</sup> The Hildesheim Psalter contains the first French Alexis legend and so is also at the heart of a considerable body of literature scholarship that does not bear directly on this study. For some review of this scholarship see Tony Hunt, 'The *Life* of St Alexis, 475-1125', in Fanous and Leyser, pp. 217-228.

<sup>17</sup> Adolf Goldschmidt, *Der Albani-Psalter in Hildesheim und seine Beziehung zur Symbolischen Kirchenskulptur des XII. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Siemens, 1895), pp. 29-37.

<sup>18</sup> The name was first suggested by Ursula Nilgen in 'Psalter der Christina von Markyate (sogenannter Albani-Psalter) in Diözesan-Museum Hildesheim', in *Der Schatz von St Godehard* (Hildesheim, Diözesan-Museum: Bernward, 1988), cat. no. 69, pp. 152-164, but has been widely adopted. See for example the recent work of Morgan Powell, 'Making the Psalter of Christina of Markyate (The St Albans Psalter)', *Viator*, 36 (2005), pp. 293-335, and 'The Visual, The Visionary and Her Viewer: Media and Presence in the Psalter of Christina of Markyate (St Albans Psalter)', *Word and Image*, 22 (2006), 340-362.

<sup>19</sup> See Jane Geddes 'The Debate: Developing Theories and Observations About the Psalter' <[www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/essays/debate.shtml](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/essays/debate.shtml)> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008] for a clear summary of this work up to 2003, and Peter Kidd's 'nimble cousin' to the Psalter site for more recent developments <<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/peter.kidd20/albani/bibliog.htm>> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008].

<sup>20</sup> Madeline Caviness, 'Anchoress, Abbess and Queen: Donors and Patrons or Intercessors and Matrons?', in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. June Hall McCash (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 105-154. Kristine Haney, 'The St Albans Psalter and the New Spiritual Ideals of the Twelfth Century', *Viator*, 28 (1997), 145-173.

<sup>21</sup> Jane Geddes, 'The St Albans Psalter: The Abbot and the Anchoress', in Fanous and Leyser, pp. 200-202.

<sup>22</sup> See for example Geddes, 'The Abbot and the Anchoress', pp. 198-200. That the initial was added to focus Christina's attention on her intercessory responsibilities has widely replaced Larry Ayres position that a monk

Several major themes of debate can be drawn out of the work that has focused primarily on the *Life*. Discussions of its authorship and audience have tended to orientate towards the question of why the *vita* was written at all. The problem of 'why' is the *Life*, naturally correlates with the perhaps even trickier question of 'what' it is. Despite being a Latin account of a woman's personal and spiritual maturation, which we encounter primarily through a late redaction appended to a legendary of saints' lives, it is far from obvious that this is straight 'hagiography'. Samuel Fanous and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne have picked out technologies used by the Writer to cast Christina into existing patterns of female sanctity, especially the virgin-martyr narrative, with Wogan-Browne contending that the presence of generic "body-ripping" motifs do not necessarily make them historically untrue.<sup>23</sup> However Shari Horner has shown how the absence of narrative justification for the traditional cross-dressing motifs used in the *Life* throws into question the plausibility of the hagiographic project.<sup>24</sup> Other discussions on medieval genre, including the ongoing debate surrounding the relationship between hagiography and romance, have informed some of the thinking on the nature of *Life*, as have the dramatic activities and interests of Abbot Geoffrey which slip over into the psalter.<sup>25</sup> An ill-sustained case has even been made for the *Life* as a doctrinal text on the monastic practice of solitude.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, studies of twelfth century individualism have tended to read the *Life* alongside texts such as Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* to highlight how the period held subjective interiority in tension with an enthusiasm for exteriorising structures.<sup>27</sup> These readings, however, are really just more specialised approaches to the big question that divides Christina scholars: to what extent can the *Life* be seen as an accurate account of Christina's lived experiences and views? Almost all commentators have to position their work somewhere along the axis from a highly

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leading Christina posthumously to Christ is being shown, 'The Role of an Angevin Style in English Romanesque Painting', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 37 (1974), 193-223, esp. pp. 214-217.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Fanous, 'Christina of Markyate and the Double Crown', in Fanous and Leyser, pp. 53-78. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' Lives And the Female Reader', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 27 (1991), 314-331.

<sup>24</sup> Shari Horner, *The Discourse of Enclosure: Representing Women in Old English Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 173-186.

<sup>25</sup> Attention was first drawn to the common motifs between the *Life* and vernacular drama by C.H. Talbot, 'Christina of Markyate: A Monastic Narrative of the Twelfth Century', *Essays and Studies* (1962), 13-26. Douglas Gray has looked at likenesses to other kinds of texts, although he flags up the realism of the story without taking a position on its authenticity, 'Christina of Markyate', in *Literature and Gender: Essays for Jasodhara Bagchi*, ed. Supriya Chaudhuri and Sajni Mukherji (New Dehli: Orient Longman, 2002), pp. 30-49, and 'Christina of Markyate: The Literary Background', in Fanous and Leyser, pp. 12-24. Neil Cartlidge's analysis in the same volume take a more rigorous epistemological stance on the material, 'The Unknown Pilgrim: Drama and Romance in the *Life of Christina of Markyate*', in Fanous and Leyser, pp. 53-79.

<sup>26</sup> Leclercq, 'Christina of Markyate', pp. 173-181.

<sup>27</sup> For example Robert Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 17-32.

autobiographical account largely told to the Writer by Christina herself, through to a near entirely fictitious one driven by the Writer's own interests and agenda.

One route round the problem is to bracket out the question of how 'true' her story is, and instead read the *Life* purely as a literary critic.<sup>28</sup> This is certainly the approach that Neil Cartlidge advocates in his sophisticated study of the interplay of literary symbols in the *Life*.<sup>29</sup> He is harshly critical of what he sees as "biological fallacy" in Margaret Hostetler's study of the Writer's manipulation of spaces, although in practice both scholars take a similar position on the creative role of the Writer.<sup>30</sup> Hence Cordelia Beatie discusses the way that Christina is constructed as gendered male or female at different points, Nancy Partner explores the thwarted desires of the characters, and Lynnea Brumbaugh-Walter takes a feminist stance on the synergistic power of the gaze as it operates in the story.<sup>31</sup>

Where Christina's texts *are* used to inform the reconstruction of twelfth century practice, marriage<sup>32</sup> and religious life<sup>33</sup> have proved to be themes that can be sustained through a

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Heffernan advocates this approach to all texts that he dubs "sacred biography". He eschews the term hagiography because the implication of pious fiction undermines the dynamism and creativity of the belief community in which the writers and texts operate, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), see esp. pp.15-22.

<sup>29</sup> Cartlidge, 'The Unknown Pilgrim', p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Hostetler, 'Designing Religious Women: Privacy and Exposure in the *Life of Christina of Markyate* and *Ancrene Wisse*', *Medievalia*, 22 (1999), 201-231. Cartlidge, 'Unknown Pilgrim', p. 79. Hostetler begins her paper by talking about how the Writer is writing *to an audience* (n.2), but ultimately looks at Christina's negotiation of visionary spaces without making it clear whether she is talking about Christina the person or the literary character.

<sup>31</sup> Cordelia Beatie, 'Gender and Femininity in Medieval England' and Nancy Partner, 'The Hidden Self: Psychoanalysis and the Textual Unconscious' both in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. Nancy Partner (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), pp. 153-171, and pp. 42-66. Lynnea Brumbaugh-Walter, "'The Grace of that Mutual Glance": Reciprocal Gazing and Unholy Voyeurism in *The Life of Christina of Markyate*', *Medieval Perspectives*, 11 (1996), 74-95.

<sup>32</sup> On Christina and marriage in general see Christopher Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 144-148; Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100-1300* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 106-118; Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 155-167. More in depth studies of Christina and marriage are Robert Stanton, 'Marriage, Socialisation and Domestic Violence in the *Life of Christina of Markyate*', in *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, ed. Eve Salisbury and others (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), esp. pp. 253-255, and Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq, 'Enfance et mariage d'une jeune Anglaise au début du XIIe siècle: Christina de Markyate', in *Les âges de la vie au Moyen Age*, ed. Henri Dubois and Michel Zink (Paris: l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1992), pp. 151-169.

<sup>33</sup> On the transition of Markyate from hermitage to priory see Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq, 'Incertitudes et contingences aux origines des monastères féminins: l'exemple Anglais de Markyate', in *Robert D'Arbrissel et la vie religieuse dans l'ouest de la France*, ed. Jacques Dalarun (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 121-138, which takes a less cautious and more successful approach to the evidence than her earlier work in 'De L'ermitage au monastère, genèse d'une institution: Un exemple anglais de la première moitié du XIIe siècle', in *Histoire et Société: Mélanges offerts à Georges Duby*, ed. Charles de la Roncière and others, 4 vols (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1992), III, pp. 49-59. Also the comparative studies by Sharon Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth Century England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), esp. pp. 27-50; and Sally Thompson, *Women*

strong body of comparative material. Histories of these areas have tended to take the *Life* as broadly factual on the relevant details, largely because they are remarkable and there is no hagiographic merit in their disguise. Some of the most interesting work overlaps the two themes, for example Thomas Head's detailed analysis of the relationship between secular marriage and *sponsa Christi*.<sup>34</sup> Assigning definitive classification to Christina's lifestyles has proved elusive. Although she is routinely read into an anchoritic context akin to Eva of St Bertin or the sister recipients of *Ancrene Riwe*, the extent to which a discourse of enclosure has been anachronistically overwritten onto her experiences forms an important exception to readings of the *Life* as factually reliable.<sup>35</sup> Some of the earliest work to take Christina's texts seriously came from scholars of Anglo-Norman political culture.<sup>36</sup> Both Frank Barlow and more recently Henrietta Leyser resist the idea that the *Life* might contain "even a whisper of sedition against Norman Lordship",<sup>37</sup> and her family provided R. I. Moore with an interesting case-study for the assimilation of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman society.<sup>38</sup>

Her possession of one of the most elaborate extant books from the twelfth century has made Christina an important source on the question of female literacy and book ownership. Whilst Alexandra Barrett sees the St Albans psalter as evidence for a higher level of female monastic Latinity than has been allowed since Eileen Power's negative

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*Religious* esp. pp. 16-28, 57-61 and 205, which situate Markyate in the wider context of female religious life in England. The best, and most accurate, work on the relationship between St Albans, its interest in *cura moniale*, and Christina's religious career is Stephanie Hollis and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'St Albans and Women's Monasticism: Lives and Their Foundations in Christina's World', in Fanous and Leyser, pp. 25-52.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Head, 'The Marriages of Christina of Markyate', *Viator*, 21 (1990) 75-101, revised in Fanous and Leyser, pp. 116-137.

<sup>35</sup> E. A. Jones addresses this tension, 'Christina of Markyate and the Hermits and Anchorites of England', in Fanous and Leyser, pp. 229-53. Amongst others, Janet Burton associates Christina with famous recluses, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain 1000-1300* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp. 87-91. Joanna Huntington makes a plausible case for the *Life* advocating coenobitism as a higher form of 'right' life, '*Nam et ipsa derelinquens seculum: Christina of Markyate – A Twelfth-Century Recluse?*' (unpublished master's thesis, University of York, 2000). Christopher Cannon's study of Christina's subjectivity, on the other hand, does not address the 'truth' of Christina's enclosure, 'Enclosure', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), pp. 109-123.

<sup>36</sup> For example, the *Life* is taken as a reliable source for the second Lateran Council in *Councils and Synods with other Documents relating to the English Church*, ed. D. Whitelock and others, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), I part II, pp. 779-781.

<sup>37</sup> Frank Barlow, *The English Church 1066-1154* (London: Longman, 1979), p. 204. Henrietta Leyser, 'Christina of Markyate: The Introduction', in Fanous and Leyser, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> R. I. Moore, 'Ranulf Flambard and Christina of Markyate', in *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, ed. Richard Gameson and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford: OUP, 2001), pp. 231-235, reprinted in Fanous and Leyser, pp. 138-142.

assessment,<sup>39</sup> and Michael Clanchy discusses Christina as not only tri-lingual but also able to ‘read’ devotional images;<sup>40</sup> Bella Millett believes she should be placed “at the mid-point of the hierarchy of literacy”,<sup>41</sup> and Jane Geddes suggests that the Psalter is in fact designed as a teaching aid to help improve Christina’s reading of Latin and French.<sup>42</sup>

Any casual reader coming newly to the text of Christina’s *Life* is likely to be struck by two driving themes: Christina’s sexuality and relationships with men, and her visions. The first of these themes has received considerably more scholarly attention than the second. Although most scholars agree that the reality of her relationship with Abbot Geoffrey was chaste, Christina’s story has been interpreted as embodying a critical moment in the discourse of romantic love.<sup>43</sup> Her virginity and resisting of sexual temptation has been variously read as a twelfth-century shift in the expectations of female sanctity,<sup>44</sup> a rhetorical construction of self-conquest to push the Benedictine reform agenda,<sup>45</sup> and a deliberate social criticism of noble life.<sup>46</sup>

Clarissa Atkinson has pointed out that although Christina’s vow of virginity gave her some minimal protection at the start of her career, she was ultimately reliant on her personal charisma to utilise that virgin identity in carving her path to authority.<sup>47</sup> The men who held responsibility for her spiritual direction, from Sueno to Roger through Archbishop Thurstan’s friend, the Lustful Cleric, to Geoffrey, were more or less intimate with her through her visions. Dyan Elliott and Caroline Walker Bynum have both shown how these relationships are set up in the text to tell a story of spiritual ascent, but find

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<sup>39</sup> Alexandra Barratt, ‘Small Latin? The Post-Conquest Learning of English Religious Women’, in *Anglo-Latin and its Heritage: Essays in Honour of A.G. Rigg on his 64<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. Siân Echard and Gernot Wieland (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), pp. 51-66. Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, pp. 237-284.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 192-196.

<sup>41</sup> Bella Millett, ‘Women in No Man’s Land: English Recluses and the Development of Vernacular Literature in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries’ in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150-1500*, ed. Carol Meale, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 86-103.

<sup>42</sup> Geddes, ‘The Abbot and the anchoress’, pp. 202-204.

<sup>43</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, ‘Friendship and Love in the Lives of Two Twelfth-Century English Saints’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 14 (1988), 305-320, and C. Stephen Jaeger, ‘The Loves of Christina of Markyate’, in *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*, (Philadelphia: UPP, 1999), pp. 174-183, revised in Fanous and Leyser, pp. 99-115.

<sup>44</sup> Kathryn Kelsey Staples and Ruth Mazo Karras, ‘Christina’s Tempting: Sexual Desire and Women’s Sanctity’, in Fanous and Leyser, pp. 184-196.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Renna, ‘Virginity in the *Life* of Christina of Markyate and Aelred of Rievaulx’s *Rule*’, *American Benedictine Review*, 36 (1985), 79-92. This interesting thesis would be strengthened by a clear evidence base.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Stanton, ‘Marriage, Socialization and Domestic Violence’, pp. 242-271.

<sup>47</sup> Clarissa Atkinson, ‘Authority, Virtue and Vocation: The Implications of Gender in Two Twelfth-Century English Lives’, in *Religion, Text and Society in Medieval Spain and Northern Europe: Essays in Honor of J. N. Hill*, ed. Thomas Burman and others (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2002), pp. 169-182.

the tale sufficiently fissured to read in alternative narratives of Christina's spirituality.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps because scholars have become timid in identifying any voices in the *Life* except the Writer, little effort has been made to open up the fissures in the *Life* to think about how Christina might have been constructing herself as a saint, or even where she fits in the contemporary discourses of sainthood. Thomas Head notes in passing that a putative saint and their hagiographer cast the performance of sanctity in different models, thus shaping new models for new saintly generations; but only Magdalena Carrasco's study of Christina's deliberate identification with and performance of the model of the Magdalene follows this idea through.<sup>49</sup>

Neglect of such an important aspect of the *Life* is unfortunate because visions comprise the structural framework onto which the rest of Christina's *Life* is hung - a textual strategy that is at odds with contemporary hagiographic conventions. Perhaps because the *Life* has proved informative in so many research fields, the value of these visions has frequently been discarded by scholars who, like Christopher Brooke, see Christina as "given to romancing".<sup>50</sup> Only a handful of scholars have made any sustained attempt to look at Christina as a visionary. The study by Christopher Holdsworth in 1978 precedes the vast bulk of research on medieval women of spirit, but identifies a number of subsequently widely neglected key points. In particular he indicates the importance of her visions and dreams as giving her reassurance "straight from the sanctuary", explaining and authenticating her choices and experiences.<sup>51</sup> In 1986 Elizabeth Petroff developed a typology of women's visionary experience from a large sample of sources, including Christina's *Life*.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, in terms of Christina at a time of change in visionary experience, François Boespflug has done an interesting study on her so-called vision of the Trinity and Peter Dinzelbacher used Christina as a key example in his reassessment of the nature of mysticism as centred on the personhood of Jesus.<sup>53</sup> In the

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<sup>48</sup> Dyan Elliott, 'Alternative Intimacies: Men, Women and Spiritual Direction in the Twelfth Century', in Fanous and Leyser, pp. 160-183. Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality', in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), pp. 27-52.

<sup>49</sup> Head, 'Marriages', p. 122. Magdalena Carrasco, 'The Imagery of the Madelen in Christina of Markyate's Psalter (The St Albans Psalter)', *Gesta*, 37 (1999), 67-80.

<sup>50</sup> Rosalind Brooke and Christopher Brooke, *Popular Religion In the Middle Ages: Western Europe 1000-1300* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), p. 111.

<sup>51</sup> Christopher Holdsworth, 'Christina of Markyate', in *Medieval Women, SCH*, 1 (1978), 185-204, citation p. 199. See also his 'Visions and Visionaries in the Middle Ages', *History*, 48 (1963), 141-153.

<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), pp. 3-59, esp. pp. 5-20. See also her 'Women and Mysticism in the Medieval World', in *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), pp. 3-24.

<sup>53</sup> François Boespflug, 'La Vision de la Trinité de Christine de Markyate et le Psautier de Saint-Alban', *Micrologus*, 6 (1998), 95-111. Peter Dinzelbacher, 'The Beginnings of Mysticism Experienced in Twelfth Century England', in *The*

last couple of years two important papers have taken up the problem of interpreting and classifying medieval supernatural experiences with regards to Christina. The brief review of Christina's visions in Barbara Newman's article 'What Did it Mean to say "I Saw"?' concurs with my argument that they are cultivated through monastic praxis and generative of visionary subcultures;<sup>54</sup> and Henrietta Leyser's close reading of Christina takes her visions in a different direction, locating them (and, through them, twelfth-century England) within the discourse of emerging Continental 'mysticism'.<sup>55</sup>

### III. Problematising Christina

This thesis attempts to rectify the current absence of a sustained monograph looking at Christina in context through different academic lenses, in order to demonstrate how they are mutually informative in making sense not only of Christina but also her spiritual milieu. It seeks to make a contribution to the big questions in Christina studies: 'Who is Christina?', 'What is this text, her *Life*?', 'Where can she be placed?'.<sup>56</sup> By highlighting the context of paradigmatic change in the early twelfth century, it draws attention to the lack of appropriate existing vocabulary and models to make sense of the new manifestations of holiness that Christina embodied. Taking three distinct but overlapping discourses - (social networks in) religious life, sanctity and spirituality - it uses them to reflect both on how the stakeholders in Christina's texts negotiated their positions in relation to these discourses, and, through the case-study of Christina, to throw light on a context of rapid discourse shift.<sup>57</sup>

I began from two diametrically opposed questions on Christina's relative 'fame' and 'success'. Why did Christina attract so *little* cultic attention given the rare existence of a *vita* to celebrate her, written in one of the premier pilgrimage centres and most politically influential abbeys in Britain? Conversely, why did Christina attract so *much*

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*Medieval Mystical Tradition in England IV*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987), pp. 111-131. Dinzelbacher also makes related points in 'Nascita e funzione della Santita Mistica alla fine del Medioevo Centrale', in *Les Fonctions des Saints dans le Monde Occidental* (Rome: l'Ecole Franciase de Rome, 1991), pp. 489-506.

<sup>54</sup> Barbara Newman, 'What Did it Mean to Say "I Saw"?: The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture', *Speculum*, 80 (2005), 20-22.

<sup>55</sup> Henrietta Leyser, 'Christina: the Mystic of Markyate', unpublished paper delivered at the University of York, November 2006. I am grateful to Simon Ditchfield at the University of York for inviting me to attend this paper, which has significantly influenced my own ideas about contemporary English spirituality.

<sup>56</sup> Henrietta Leyser has also identified these problems as gaps in current scholarship, 'Introduction', pp. 1-11.

<sup>57</sup> The discourses of sexuality and virginity are deliberately considered only in so far as they intersect with these discourses, as a large body of valuable scholarship already unpacks them, including Clarissa Atkinson, 'Precious Balsam in a Fragile Glass: The Ideology of Virginity in the Later Middle Ages', *Journal of Family History*, 8 (1983), 131-143; Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985); and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture: Virginity and Its Authorizations* (Oxford: OUP, 2001).

attention in her own lifetime as to cause her unusual *vita* to be commissioned, given that she was only one of a whole network of recluses in propinquity to St Albans that already had figures with a reputation for holiness and visions? Unfortunately, trying to identify criteria for measuring this 'success' in spiritual terms lies in the realms of the length of a piece of string. In a twelfth century context it is reasonable to see Christina as a less 'successful' saint than Thomas Becket with his prodigiously thaumaturgical shrine, or less 'successful' holy woman than the papally endorsed Hildegard of Bingen. But deciding how she should be rated against a figure such as Robert of Bethune whose weeping, disciplines, meditations on the passion and post death miracles were still not enough for him to be regarded as a saint, despite his *vita* and popular fame, cannot be much more than a subjective decision.<sup>58</sup> Even without meaningful criteria for measuring her 'success', any assessment of Christina's charismatic persona, abilities and reputation should still take account of the auspiciousness of her circumstances (connected to the well attested social networks emanating from the abbey of St Albans), contemporary expectations of female spirituality and the horizons of visionary culture.

It would be difficult to over-emphasise the extent of change in social life and religious practice in the early twelfth century. It was a time of changing models of marriage, an explosion in the popularity of coenobitic life, and fluctuating ideals of holiness, alongside a shift from primarily oral to primarily literate culture. Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman identities were not yet substantially integrated, but the Conquest improved social and economic opportunities for at least some noblewomen.<sup>59</sup> The reformation of the twelfth century briefly gave new opportunities for women in religious life, although this was dramatically curtailed by the Gregorian reform movement which withdrew sacred authority into its (male) hierarchy.<sup>60</sup> The canonisation of saints was not

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<sup>58</sup> See William of Wycombe, 'Life of Robert de Bethune', in *Anglia Sacra*, ed. by Henry Wharton, 2 vols (London, Richard Chiswell, 1691), II, pp. 295-321 and the translation by B. J. Parkinson, 'The Life of Robert de Bethune by William de Wycombe: Translation with Introduction and Notes' (unpublished master's thesis, Oxford University, 1951), pp. 100-240.

<sup>59</sup> Scholarship on the integration of Anglo-Saxon and Norman identities is extensive; the most important recent contributor to the debate is Hugh Thomas, who has argued that the middling kinds, rather than the aristocracy or peasantry, were critical to effecting assimilation by the reign of Henry III, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity 1066-c.1220* (Oxford: OUP, 2003). Pauline Stafford's classic article 'Women and the Norman Conquest' *ANS*, 6<sup>th</sup> ser., 4 (1994), 221-249, debunked the golden age myth for Anglo-Saxon women. Her case has recently been consolidated by the work of Susan Johns, for example *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm* (Manchester: MUP, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> On the loss of women's status as a result of the impact of Gregorian Reform see Janet Nelson, 'Women and the Word in the Earlier Middle Ages', *Women in the Church, SCH*, 27 (1991), 76-78. However Conrad Leyser has argued that contemporary misogynistic texts are intellectual tools for use by male religious specialists rather than a reflection of social reality, 'Custom, Truth, and Gender in Eleventh-Century Reform', *Gender and the Christian Tradition, SCH*, 34 (1998), 75-91. Classic articles on this as a period of religious decline and curtailed opportunities for women are Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, 'Sanctity and Power: The Dual Pursuit of Medieval Women', in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston:

finally deferred to the papacy until 1199, but the period saw popular un-ratified worship increasingly brought under control.<sup>61</sup> Concurrently there was a shift in models of sanctity from veneration of only long-dead or apocryphal saints to according cults to recently dead, or even still living, potential saints. Stemming from the work of St Anselm at the turn of the century and then of the canons of St Victor in the 1130s and 1140s, spirituality turned to models of the human Christ, Mariology, and affective and image driven piety, with commentaries on the Song of Songs forming a substantial body of theological writing. This opened up a space for personalised devotional practice that was not curtailed and redirected into church-mediated liturgy until the end of the century. In terms of mystical and visionary experience Dinzelbacher identifies a critical shift from male visionaries receiving a single sudden, lengthy, literal and life-changing vision of the otherworlds to female visionaries whose already pious life was strengthened by a number of shorter allegorical visions of heaven and Christ.<sup>62</sup>

Christina was, critically, positioned at the turning point of these changes. In the discourse of religious life Christina flourished at the high point of new encratic forms and their underpinning vocabulary between 1100 and 1160. Christina's personal charisma was routinised as she moved from an eremitic life to being a community prioress, which in turn causes her to vanish from contemporary record as she fell out of fashion amongst her spiritual patrons at the Abbey of St Albans. In the discourse of sanctity she fits with contemporary models of living sainthood, (for example Aelred of Rievaulx), with contemporary hermit saints (for example Godric of Finchale and Wulftric of Haselbury), and even with the renewed enthusiasm for virgin-martyr stories in England. But the mould of putative saint that Christina believed herself to be, and that attract to her a 'client base' in the South East, was at the point of change. A similar, if much more influential, manifestation of holiness can be found in the German visionary Elisabeth of Schönau, but her revelations only began in 1152 and were unknown in England before 1175, considerably later than the flourishing of Christina's spirituality between the 1120s and 1140s.<sup>63</sup> Therefore Christina and the stakeholders in her story only had older discourses with which to make sense of her. The result is a shaping of her sanctity using pre-existing models that often lack a narrative justification. In the discourse of female spirituality Christina belongs in the vanguard of the flowering of the

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Houghton Mifflin, 1977), and Jo Ann McNamara, 'Victims of Progress: Women and the Twelfth Century', in *Female Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Karen Glente and Lise Winther-Jensen (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1989), pp. 26-37.

<sup>61</sup> For example the 1102 Council of Westminster found it necessary to rule against the treating of bodies or water springs as holy without episcopal permission, *Councils and Synods*, I part II, pp. 668-694, canon 27, p. 678.

<sup>62</sup> See Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1981).

<sup>63</sup> See Anne Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau: A Twelfth Century Visionary* (Philadelphia: UPP, 1992), p. 25, and Ruth Dean, 'Elisabeth, Abbess of Schönau and Roger of Ford', *Modern Philology*, 41 (1944), 209-220.

thirteenth and fourteenth century women of spirit. The visions of these women inspired self-penned accounts, as well as attracting the attentions of male mentors and hagiographers. Here again Christina and her stakeholders lacked a framework for her experiences, and as such they throw light on modern debates about the use of the term 'mysticism'. Although Christina deserves to be considered in the kinds of volumes that have articles on the Beguines of Liège and Turnhout, the Tertiaries of Umbria, and the German house of Helfta, there is also a largely neglected contemporary discourse in England where her visions also had currency. An underlying culture of 'domestic visions' - that is visions which related purely to local and personal decisions and helped to resolve them - is glimpsed through monastic documents such as the visions of Ailsi recorded by his grandson Peter, Prior of Holy Trinity Aldgate.<sup>64</sup> Because of the transitory attention paid to these visions it is difficult to allocate distinctive features or a coherent discourse to the English situation. Their frequency, however, suggests a relative normality, and so despite not having otherworld visions like most renowned English lay visionaries, Christina's holiness was not completely unrecognisable to a contemporary monastic audience. The inconsistent level of confidence in the Writer's reporting of Christina's visions in her *Life* reflects the relative familiarity or foreignness of what she was doing. She was on a spiritual cusp and can equally be read into the preceding or subsequent spiritual cultures.

The transitional nature of her spirituality means that at first reading Christina's *Life* seems too sensory, too tactile and visual to be a saint's *vita*. It fissures to expose the workings of its construction, a project in process to build a living woman into a realizable saint. Raising the relationship between the (auto)biographical and the hagiographical modes of the *Life*, Samuel Fanous has commented on Christina scholarship that "the author's robust claims to authenticity, supported by the text's highly autobiographical flavour, have generally been accepted at face value. Scholars have tended to follow Talbot's lead in discounting the significance of the text's patently hagiographic qualities, thereby discouraging the search for less obvious ones".<sup>65</sup> I will be arguing for a reading of the textual construction process that holds in tension these two interpretive modes, contending that Christina was involved in a discursive process that constructed her as a

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<sup>64</sup> Peter of Cornwall, *Liber Revelationum*, London, Lambeth Palace, MS 51, fol. 23ra-28rb, printed in Robert Easting and Richard Sharpe, 'Peter of Cornwall: The Visions of Ailsi and his Sons', *Mediaevistik*, 1 (1988), 207-262, and Peter Hull and Richard Sharpe, 'Peter of Cornwall and Launceston', *Cornish Studies*, 13 (1986), 6-53, unless otherwise noted all references will be to the Hull and Sharpe edition.

<sup>65</sup> Fanous, 'Double Crown', p. 53.

saint, not only in her literary body but also in her lived body.<sup>66</sup> That is, alongside participating in the writing of the *vita* that distilled her experiences into a saintly corpus, Christina appropriated the models that she knew of saintliness, both to make sense of her life and as paradigms to be performed. Aware of her own unusual powers, Christina deliberately set out to fulfil the requirements of the saintly paradigm as she understood it. This process is more visible in the narration of Christina than for other living female saints because she is historically positioned at a liminal moment in the social construction and performance of sanctity and spirituality.

#### IV. Truth Content: Christina the Person v. Christina the Text

Since this study explores the construction of spiritual identity on the one hand, and the context in which this construction was meaningful on the other, it must take a clear position on what can be understood as ‘true’ in light of scholarship after the ‘linguistic turn’. The kinds of questions that it is possible to ask of the sources are determined by whether it is actually possible to separate the historical lived experience of Christina as an individual with agency, from the narrative and imaginary protagonist of the *Life*. There are two layers to this problem of Christina the person as distinct from Christina the text. Firstly the relationship between hagiography and history, and secondly what Gabrielle Spiegel has called the “semiotic challenge”.<sup>67</sup> Whether the events really happen, and if so to what extent, are therefore different questions from whether the construction of the story is solely the artifice of the Writer or whether Christina, alongside other voices and viewpoints, was active in the creation of her *vita*.

There has been a backlash in Christina studies against seeing the “vigour of expression and an economy of words” as marking stories that only Christina herself could have related to the Writer.<sup>68</sup> Other scholars are accusing this position of mistakenly assigning her “to the canon of history on the basis of a text designed to project her into the canon of saints”.<sup>69</sup> The recent genesis of this debate has prevented the striking similarity to the

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<sup>66</sup> Although my work is greatly indebted to that of Rachel Koopmans, I ultimately think it is possible to go beyond her argument that “the *vita* needs to be read as the Writer’s creation, not Christina’s[...] think of him as acting like a portrait painter, sketching out an image of Christina to his liking”, ‘Dining’, p. 143.

<sup>67</sup> Gabrielle Spiegel, ‘History, Historicism and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages’, *Speculum*, 65 (1990), 59-86.

<sup>68</sup> Talbot, ‘Introduction’, p. 6. Scholars who have accepted Talbot’s thesis include Holdsworth, ‘Christina of Markyate’, p. 195 and Petroff, *Visionary Literature*, p. 137.

<sup>69</sup> Fanous, ‘Double Crown’, p. 70. His views are shared by Cartlidge, ‘Unknown Pilgrim’, p. 79, Stanton, ‘Domestic Violence’, pp. 261-262, Karras, ‘Friendship and Love’, p. 313.

famous dispute between Peter Dinzelbacher and Siegfried Ringler over the reality of visionary experiences in hagiographic literature from yet being noted.<sup>70</sup> Where Ringler believed their didactic designs make literary and generic contexts the only legitimate object of study, Dinzelbacher contended that real-life events can be found in the holy practices, despite textual inaccuracies and fictions, and that verification of evidence was important to contemporary elites just as it is to modern scholars. A middle path allows for texts to include 'true' accounts, (for example, in the very first paragraph the Writer tells us that Beatrix reported her pregnant self as receiving a sign of divine favour, "*sicut ipsa michi retulit*"),<sup>71</sup> but that these are impossible to distinguish from the interpretation of the Writer.<sup>72</sup> In practice, however, the absence of clear strategies for separating these has resulted in the Writer being privileged as creative author in research.

The argument for rejecting the *Life* as a historical source for Christina must be predicated on an assumption that it can be contrasted with 'factual' sources. Felice Lifshitz confronts this claim of historiography to privileged knowledge, arguing that it is instead really privileging secular and political *subjects*.<sup>73</sup> She suggests that the textual separation of the political from the sacred was taking place around the same time as the writing of the *Life*, and that from around 1150 "the saint was also displaced by[...] the state, as the true subject of historiography".<sup>74</sup> Here, then, is another transition that must be woven into the interpretation of the *Life*. It is positioned at the earliest point in the medieval west that the 'factual' can even be contemplated as distinct from the 'hagiographical', and even pay some attention to the secular state politics of 'history'.

The accumulation of detail and 'shoehorning' in of hagiographic topoi means that the *Life* does not actually read like a saint's life properly constructed. It is disjointed, with the 'earthly' repeatedly breaking through the 'spiritual'. Actions are not given their proper spiritual reasoning, or if they are it is done with obvious artifice and not sustained, so Beatrix's portentous visiting dove is rendered meaningless by her

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<sup>70</sup> See Frank Tobin, 'Henry Suso and Elsbeth Stigel: Was the *Vita* a Cooperative Effort?', in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine Mooney (Philadelphia: UPP, 1999), pp. 125-128 for a clear outline of this debate. Tobin positions himself in the middle, observing that "to state categorically that one can draw no conclusions from the text about a connection to historical events is a violation of one's own principle, for, in saying this, one is drawing a conclusion that goes beyond the text", p. 128.

<sup>71</sup> *Life*, ch. 1, p. 34.

<sup>72</sup> This is broadly the position taken by Elkins, *Holy Women*, p. 28, Head, 'Marriages', p. 76 and Brooke, *Popular Religion*, p. 111. On the general problem Richard Kieckhefer argues that it is impossible to establish the extent to which a saint is living out a model of sainthood, so the fruitful field of enquiry must be the discourses in which the author operates, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: UCP, 1984), p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> Felice Lifschitz, 'Beyond Positivism and Genre: "Hagiographical" Texts as Historical Narrative', *Viator*, 24 (1994), 95-113.

<sup>74</sup> Lifschitz, 'Positivism', p. 106.

subsequent persecution of her pious daughter.<sup>75</sup> Artlessness is not in itself, however, a powerful argument for historicity. Ruth Morse argues that for writers of sanctity “elaboration, ‘fictitious elements’, were only clearly wrong when they became a distraction”.<sup>76</sup> Verifying local details, such as explaining the colloquialism “*in ollam candidi dimittentur lapilli*”,<sup>77</sup> might be what Roland Barthes calls “the effect of the real”: features which are included to give additional conviction to the Writer’s fabrication.<sup>78</sup> On these grounds Elizabeth Clark has influentially argued that Melania the Younger is absent from her *vita*, that she is simply a tool for her brother Gregory of Nyssa to “think with”.<sup>79</sup> Her provocative position on the absence of women from the male authored texts that ostensibly tell their story can be taken too far. Clark’s argument comes from studying what Gabrielle Spiegel has called the “social logic” of the text, and we need to ask whether in Christina’s own time and place she is being used for agenda that necessarily completely occlude her from the *Life*.<sup>80</sup>

With so many of Christina’s stakeholders apparently contributing material to the Writer whilst Christina was still alive, active and reasonably well known, only a certain degree of pious fiction would be possible, and her story must have been at least plausible to a wider twelfth-century readership.<sup>81</sup> The Writer may well have invented details such as what Christina was reading in the early days of her confinement, but it seems pragmatic to assume that she was indeed at Alfwen’s – indeed to have left out this sojourn would have been tidier (but perhaps not so much like romance?) – since her location was known in the vicinity. Circumstantial evidence that appears in the *Life* such as names and approximate dates provide a kind of historical cross-reference, but it is still weak on detail. The extensive writings of Hildegard of Bingen include detailed personal analysis of how she received her revelations and even Christine of Stommeln wrote letters that can be compared to the spirituality in her *vita*, but for Christina we are only able to guess at how a text in her own voice might have read. Seeking agency for Christina,

<sup>75</sup> *Life*, ch. 1, p. 34, and ch. 23, pp. 72-74.

<sup>76</sup> Ruth Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation and Reality* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), p. 139.

<sup>77</sup> *Life*, ch. 63, p. 146.

<sup>78</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘The Reality Effect’, in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), pp. 141-148.

<sup>79</sup> Elizabeth Clark, ‘The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the “Linguistic Turn”’, *Church History*, 67 (1998), 1-31, esp. pp. 18-30. David Brakke has sought a route out of this reality effect by arguing that discourse can materialise its effects; but his argument only allows that similar situation might exist, it does not challenge the authorial voice, ‘The Lady Appears: Materialisations of “Woman” in Early Monastic Literature’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 33 (2003), 387-402.

<sup>80</sup> Spiegel, ‘Social Logic’, p. 77.

<sup>81</sup> See Wogan-Browne, ‘Saints’ Lives and the Female Reader’, p. 315, and Susan Millinger, ‘Humility and Power: Anglo-Saxon Nuns in Anglo-Norman Hagiography’, in *Distant Echoes*, p. 117.

particularly when it comes to her visions, presents the same kinds of problems as reading other male authored *vitae* for Beguines such as Marie of Oignies or Yvette of Huy. It is certainly possible to read through the fissures to see the Writer massaging the chronology of events to make Christina's choice of St Albans appear much earlier than her consecration, or to see Christina refusing to relinquish ownership of some of her visionary experiences. Theoretical tools that point to these gaps should be the recourse of Christina scholars, rather than beating a reactionary retreat from using the *Life* as a historical source for want of more secure evidence of 'what really happened'.

To address the second of the questions, the "semiotic challenge": conferring all the imaginative credit onto the Writer would accord him an impossible level of conscious control over the meanings in his 'speech acts'. An accumulating body of theory from Ferdinand de Saussure to Jacques Derrida has shown the multiplication (*supplement*) of unintended, uncontrollable, interconnected, additional meanings borne by signifiers which undermine any possibility of stabilising 'intended' meanings.<sup>82</sup> We find this happening in the *Life* when Christina offers a *denarius* in vow of her virginity. In appropriating the symbolism of a betrothal dowry promise,<sup>83</sup> Christina disrupts any holy reading of her marriage to Christ by claiming agency through a parody of patriarchal modes of exchange. 'Purchasing' herself using a coin from her father's treasury, she undermines the discourse of women's sexuality, and therefore value, as tied to male economics by giving the smallest and least significant denomination of money which proves more effective than the large bribes used by men to try to 'buy' her back.<sup>84</sup> Gail Ashton, building on the work of Luce Irigaray, has encouraged scholars to read this kind of mimesis into texts as a technology to expose the fissured nature of the authoritative male voice in hagiography. By performing the gendered saintly ideal to excess, she suggests, the female saint can appropriate, and so disrupt, the very role she is playing.<sup>85</sup>

Useful though deconstructionist tools will prove to be, taken to their logical conclusion they collapse contexts into the material reality of texts, until the past becomes simply an imaginary effect which makes the study of history impossible. The subjectivities of the past must be allowed agency in their historically situated experiences. Without such a premise we cannot begin to locate Christina at a point of change, or identify the

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<sup>82</sup> This is not to overlook that medieval reading strategies from Cassian onwards also actively looked for different meanings - historical, tropological, allegorical and anagogical - in their texts.

<sup>83</sup> See Head, 'Marriages', in Fanous and Leyser, p. 120.

<sup>84</sup> *Life*, ch. 4, p. 40.

<sup>85</sup> Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint* (London: Routledge, 2000). Luce Irigaray, 'The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine', in *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 68-85.

challenges faced by those who were seeking to make sense of her unusual qualities.<sup>86</sup> Discourse analysis seeks to understand the continually negotiation of the boundaries of what it is possible to think, say, or experience about socially constructed ideas. Discourses are both constructed from and construct individual performances within networks of power. Sainthood, for example, is a concept that only exists because people tacitly agree to act as if it exists. Its epistemological reality then generates an ontological reality in individual performances of sainthood, which in turn re-appropriate and so modify the idea. This negotiated performance can be purely a written textual practice (as was done at St Albans with the many renditions of the *Life of St Alban*), but in the case of a living person is also an embodied performance. Repetitions are constrained by the taboo power of regulatory norms (for example the modesty topos found in women's visionary writings), but as each instance of performance is dependent on its time, place and audience, the possibility of what Derrida calls a "counterfeit signature" enables the idea of the saint to be mocked, challenged, or changed.<sup>87</sup>

How categories of identity are created is at the very heart of the historical project.<sup>88</sup> The problem of whether the *Life* is a literary construction or a factual account is therefore asking the wrong question of the text. Instead what is going on is a negotiation process, where the accounts of different voices are being shaped into an existing pious framework, and where the locus of power is de-centred in a "horizon of expectations".<sup>89</sup> These influence Christina's embodied 'writing' or performance of her life and the meaning that the readers (including the Writer) give to these 'situated performances' of everyday practice. Social constructivist or symbolic interactionist ideas offer an interpretation of her social behaviour functioning as a symbolic text that can be 'read'.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> The feminist debate on approaching the 'real' has generated too vast a literature to review here. Alison Wylie gives an overview of some of the issues in 'Reasoning about Ourselves : Feminist Methodology in The Social Sciences', in *Women and Reason*, ed. E. Harvery and K. Okruhik (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 225-244. Amongst the attempts to rescue an inter-subjective model of knowledge from eternal relativity, Miranda Fricker has made a convincing case for a feminist coherentism, recommending the revival of empirical facts, external to experience, as providing an anchor on what can be believed. She does, however, observe that this regulatory power weakens as it moves towards the centre of the belief system, 'Knowledge as Construct: Theorising the Role of Gender in Knowledge', in *Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology*, ed. Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 95-109.

<sup>87</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Signature, Event, Context', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: UCP, 1982), pp. 307-330. Judith Butler's model of gender along these lines informs other kinds of subjectivity performances, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), esp. pp. 93-199.

<sup>88</sup> "History is about[...] how the subjective and collective meanings of women and men as categories of identity have been created", Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: 1988), p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> See Leah Shopkov, *History and Community: Norman Historical Writing in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), p. 279.

<sup>90</sup> The work of Erving Goffman and Clifford Geertz has proved particularly informative for this study, see Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1969), and Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Hutchison, 1975).

The “discovery of the individual” in the twelfth century places Christina at yet another transition: a time when a new consciousness of personal identity and destiny was held in tension with an enthusiasm for creating and associating the self with structured models of identity. Christina, recognising her visions as making her special and unique, deliberately (though not always successfully) engaged in an external ‘brand management’ to this effect; her sense of self was both the cause and the effect of her valorising the symbolic meanings which formed the methodology of medieval narrative, and that placed her subjective self in a greater divine narrative. Christina was therefore both portrayed by, and herself performing, the models of sainthood that she had available to her.<sup>91</sup>

Any record is a practice of *recollecting* the past; and how people recollect the past depends on what they expect to find there. Apart from the barest of empirical details, all texts inform on the meanings given to action, not the action itself. Even without the additional challenges of genre and deflection of voices in the evidence for Christina, the limitations of memory produce a partial and intertextual reconstruction, reliant on “fictive devices”,<sup>92</sup> and without stable meaning. Alistair Thomson’s felicitous phrase “memory as a battlefield” identifies the multiple possibilities of different, even contradictory, accounts of subjectivity in the past that can be held in tension as people position themselves against, rather than simply absorb, a number of discourses.<sup>93</sup> For example, when the *vita* was redacted for the *Gesta Abbatum* all references to Mary, no longer as central a marker of female spirituality as her son, were omitted. Likewise we must assume the original *vita* is the intersubjective positionings of Christina against contemporary discourses, in which she has only some discursive influence.

## V. Approaches

This route into the *Life* risks the accusation routinely levelled at Geertzian anthropology that the experiences of the past have ceased to be the subject of investigation.<sup>94</sup> It is an

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<sup>91</sup> Ruth Morse’s discussion of the truth content in Christina’s *Life* takes a position similar to my own, arguing that “Christina and her reporter must have seen her own life according to the experience of other women known through their reading. She tried, in her life, to imitate, not *art* but the way of perfection offered by historical, sacred report. The written *Life* is thus a literary construct which attempts to convey a true report of something modelled on other literary constructs”, *Truth and Convention*, pp. 125-178, citation p. 151.

<sup>92</sup> Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography* (Manchester: MUP, 1992), p. 62.

<sup>93</sup> Alistair Thomson, ‘Memory as a Battlefield: Personal and Political Investments in the National Military Past’, *The Oral History Review*, 22 (1995), 55-73.

<sup>94</sup> See for example Volker Gottowik, ‘Who’s Afraid of “Teutonic Professors”? The Hermeneutic Tradition in German Ethnology’, *Anthropology Today*, 13 (1997), 3-4, and Speigel, ‘Social Logic’, pp. 64-66. In the additional charge of “interpretive violence”, all historical study must surely be implicated.

epistemological challenge that is countered by the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who has been critical of methods in the humanities which aspire to recover some 'true' past, when all understanding is interpretation.<sup>95</sup> By reading Christina's *Life* as fissured we read and 'read in' multiple interpretations of Christina. This study deliberately draws on a range of theoretical tools that seek to open up a gap between text and context, without finally viewing any of them as holding privileged access to meaning. Nancy Caciola identifies a real problem with scholarship that invests heavily in the internal vantage point of women's personal spiritual development, arguing that this approach has given Medieval women of spirit a profile of cultic veneration that it is unclear they actually possessed during their career.<sup>96</sup> By placing an internal (subjective meaning of spiritual practice) alongside an external (perceptions of her in a community context) reading of Christina's experiences I seek to avoid this slip, addressing Christina's dubious cultic status as a construct that places her clearly in a time of changing attitudes to holiness.

*Mirabile dictu*, the structure of this thesis can be read as either three or two sections, parallelling the *Life* which splits either into three (based on the activities of Christina: her childhood and marriage; her temptations living with the hermits and Lustful Cleric; her life at Markyate and Abbot Geoffrey), or into two (before and after the vision in which she is crowned with inviolate virginity). The three sections - 'The Lady Christina', 'Saint Christina' and 'Ancilla Christi' – approach the material with different research questions and methodologies, whilst the perspective pivots in the middle offering two approaches, first look at Christina and then looking with her.

The first section, 'The Lady Christina: Texts and Contexts', asks 'who' is Christina? It sets out to collate and assess all the evidence for Christina in order to position her in the discourse of religious life, primarily employing tools drawn from anthropology. The wider political culture of Anglo-Norman England provides the backdrop, and sometimes the setting, for her career. Chapter one, 'Social Networks in the Narrative Sources', argues that the bulk of narrative evidence for her which dates to the late fourteenth century forms a revival of interest in her mentor Roger. It then employs social network theory to locate Christina's position (rather than interpretations of her character) in contemporary religious and secular society. In chapter two, 'Monastic Networks and the Priory at Markyate', Max Weber's model of religious charisma is used to explore Christina's 'institutional' powers. Anthropologists have modelled the dynamics of religion in overlapping dichotomies, which tend to pick up on procedural, formulaic,

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<sup>95</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edn (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

<sup>96</sup> Nancy Caciola, 'Mystics, Demons and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42 (2000), 268-306.

religious structures on the one hand and spontaneous, emotional, countercultures that bypass existing structures on the other. Through its process of regularisation the house at Markyate, which proves to be both the realisation and the curtailing of Christina's charismatic aspirations, is set in concentric social networks of patronage and monastic connections. The section concludes that Christina's reputation in South East England was real, but not long sustained.

The second section, 'Saint Christina: Sanctity and Learning' asks 'what' is Christina? Specifically it addresses the problem of her dubious cultic status and situates her in constructions of holiness. Chapter three, 'Negotiating the Discourse of Sanctity', considers the nature of sainthood as it has been understood by historians. It locates the existing saintly paradigms available to provide models for Christina in twelfth-century England. The existing discourses are demonstrated to be inadequate provision for 'reading' her, which proved problematic not only for those in the St Albans community trying to lay claim to her powers, but also for Christina herself. The disruptive newness of her holiness has more in common with the lives of later continental women like the beguines, whose visionary spirituality did not aspire to a traditional cultic model of sainthood. At this juncture the perspective shifts from the challenges faced by the Writer to Christina's own agency, and chapter four, 'Autohagiography and Holy Performance, reviews the relationship between her internal experiences and their external performance. Christina was seeking to have her visions written down and 'became' a saint as she reflected on, and positioned, her own story. Taking a layered approach to the search for Christina's voice in the *Life*, it seeks her first-hand stories as she told them to the Writer, considers how she strategically cast these stories into the modes of sanctity with which she was familiar, and offers a route out of male dictated identities through the role played by Christina's 'sartorial body'. The key arguments of this section are that Christina's sanctity is manifested through her virginity and her visions and performed at a time of paradigm shift, and that Christina's personal relationship with her literary construction is more intimate than is being given credit in current scholarship.

The third section, 'Ancilla Christi: Visions and Community' asks 'where' can Christina be placed? Having now established that her visions are central to the construction of the literary and embodied Christina, they are explored in light of current work on numinous encounters from a variety of disciplines. Chapter five, 'Ineffably Sweet Communings', takes its title from Talbot's translation of one of Christina's visions, "*sed secretis, sed dulcibus, sed indicibilibus cum Deo*".<sup>97</sup> It identifies problems in the existing formulations of 'mysticism', arguing against using detailed criteria for what is

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<sup>97</sup> *Life*, ch. 79, p. 180.

and is not mysticism and for the spectrum-like nature of revelations. Protagonists of visions rarely had the same degree of interest in the phenomenology of their visions as their audiences, and a more useful model which thinks in terms of encounter is proposed. Christina's visions are reviewed and some of their core themes discussed, in order to seek an explanation for her unusual temporal, geographic and gendered position as a woman of spirit. Her spiritual development is placed into the context of devotional tools and the teachers who mentored this journey. Particularly in a monastic context a single visionary could be at the heart of a visionary community, as was Christina. The psychoanalytic model of personal boundaries proposed by Ernest Hartmann offers a way to reconcile these communities with the evidence that not all religious women undertaking devotional visualisations were actually having visions. Finally some of the distinctions often made between elite and popular visionary culture are brought into question by looking at how visions provided a means of reconciling domestic affairs at all levels. Ultimately it finds that the truism that England had no real part in continental mystical culture until the fourteenth century has overlooked widespread references to visions, and that the real question relates to the obscurity of their reporting.

Finally it is necessary to pass some brief notes on the terminology used in this thesis. One of the most serious challenges in looking at Christina through a highly theoretical methodology is in identifying a neutral vocabulary to describe the technical distinctions under discussion. Such terms need to avoid the pitfalls of being too specific and so insufficiently inclusive or over debated (for example 'mysticism'), or of being impractical and cumbersome to use. Later medieval women who had ecstatic, rapturous, visionary, locutionary, prescient, oneirocritical or a host of other paranormal experiences form one of the core bodies of examples used in the disagreement over the word 'mystical'. To identify them collectively as 'contemplative women', though correct, does not adequately distinguish them from the ordinary nuns who spent their lives in contemplation, and carries inappropriate modern connotations of reticent inactivity. Grace Jantzen has provided the evocative but neutral term 'women of spirit' which circumvents these problems.<sup>98</sup> In chapter five I argue the case for retaining the word 'visions' as a collective noun for all such experiences, and use it as such throughout. I use the word 'story' to cast together Christina's lived experience and its restagings by Christina herself through her performance of identities, by people who knew or heard about her, and by the processes of writing it down both in the *vita* and the psalter. I also distinguish between her '*Life*', the Tiberius text, and her 'life' in its common sense of

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<sup>98</sup> Grace Jantzen, "'Cry Out and Write': Mysticism and the Struggle for Authority", in *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), from p. 157.

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lived experience. One of my key contentions is the plurality of voices and mixed agenda that stand behind this 'story', as an extended social network the margins of which it is probably not even possible to identify. The term 'stakeholders' seems to accommodate the varying levels of this investment. In light of the influential work of Barthes which shows that our readings change the meanings of a text, and because I am looking at the creation of Christina as a negotiated process, I have eschewed the term 'author' in favour of 'Writer' of the *Life*.<sup>99</sup> The greatest difficulty falls in finding a way to clearly distinguish between the many Christinas: Christina the person who actually lived, Christina the living person's own perception of who Christina is, Christina in the perception of her contemporaries, Christina the literary character written in the *Life* etc. Without resorting to the inelegant 'Christina one' and 'Christina two' I have had to fall back on 'Christina herself' or 'Christina's own view' for the historical Christina, 'Christina in the *Life*' for her literary construction, and the clumsy phrases for in between.

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<sup>99</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142-148.

## PART 1:

### The Lady Christina: Texts and Contexts

To look at how the people who knew, or knew of, Christina identified her, it is first necessary to explore her situation within the networks of these stakeholders. Deciding whether she was a highly-connected ‘hub’ enjoying both the charisma and the contacts to have extensive influence,<sup>1</sup> or simply an adjunct to the affairs of St Albans, enables a more nuanced understanding of her identity. Existing attempts to find the ‘real’ Christina have not taken into sufficient account the full range of sources about her to answer this kind of question. By compiling and assessing all the evidence relating to Christina and her discernible circle, juxtaposing narrative sources with evidence for how Markyate fits into wider social and religious culture, this section pieces together the extent of Christina’s contemporary influence, and perhaps something of her personality as well. Before embarking on such a reading it is important to have a clear idea of the value and problems in the extant texts about Christina, few of which are contemporary with her. Her story was revived at St Albans in the fourteenth century, so the first question to address is how accurately her early *vita* has been transmitted, and how the sources themselves form a network of interests.

The social identity of an individual is their geographically determined position within social networks, and is fashioned through blood and kinship ties, social and economic class, and relationships of power and influence.<sup>2</sup> It reflects not their personality but rather where they are within their framework of contacts. Social identity determines how an individual manages their social networks, the pressures they can exert and those exerted on them, and what support and patronage they are able to mobilise. Social networks, then, are partially predetermined by the positioning of the individual, involving personal and group associations with persons and groups that have further associations, which spreads the network outwards in a ripple effect.

Social networks form a framework in which institutional associations can create personal relationships and vice versa. Hence Roger’s institutional bond with St Albans brought the Abbey into the social network of Christina, with whom Roger had a personal mentoring relationship. This in turn enabled Christina to form personal

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<sup>1</sup> This language is borrowed from scale-free networks, see Guido Caldarelli, *Scale-Free Networks: Complex Webs in Nature and Technology* (Oxford: OUP, 2007). These form a background to my thinking but are not actively used in this mapping of Christina.

<sup>2</sup> The literature on social networks is extensive, see John Scott, *Social Network Analysis: A Handbook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Newberry Park CA: Sage, 2000). Useful recent historical work includes Charles Tilly, *Identities, Boundaries and Social Ties* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2006), which shows how the social transactions of individuals compound into identities; Emilia Jamrozak, *Rievaulx Abbey and its Social Context 1132-1300: Memory, Locality and Networks* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), which traces the bonds of the English Cistercian house; and more generally Gerd Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Early Medieval Europe*, trans. Christopher Carroll (Cambridge: CUP, 2004).

networks within that institutional association. Christina's fame in her lifetime encompassed several south-eastern counties, including Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire, and the capital city, with friends at the London Cluniac house of Bermondsey as well as Markyate's jurisdictional superiors, the canons of St Paul's. Christina's *Life* further imprints her in more elevated social place than is probably accurate, making audacious claims for her personal connections with some of the most significant ecclesiastics in England and abroad, and for her ability to alter the course of negotiations between the papal curia and the royal crown. As with all aspects of Christina's text this is not simply a fabrication, but a management of identity.

The early twelfth century was a period of transformation in the religious orders and Christina's path from recluse to the leader of an unofficial and then an official religious house resonates with the new encratic models springing up throughout Europe. Christina's identity was shaped primarily through the religious houses of St Albans and Markyate. Her literary heritage is inextricably bound up with the Abbey of St Albans and the networks of Abbot Geoffrey, whilst her role as prioress and foundress of Markyate, though largely neglected in the narrative sources, affects her ongoing legacy as a holy woman. Christina's sphere of influence rendered her not only a spiritual dynamo for St Albans Abbey, but also a potential holy woman with a secular and ecclesiastical network and local celebrity status. However some of the bonds in Christina's social networks were two-edged swords, and she experienced vilification as well as adoration for her charisma and special friendship with St Albans.

Christina's power and influence might best be thought of as 'domestic', emanating principally from the *domus* or home.<sup>3</sup> This is not a private sphere, indeed it confounds the split between public and private, but it is one which localises her importance and identity. The unusual degree of secularity in what are ultimately spiritual texts, largely show Christina to have made no clear distinction herself between her lay and religious identities, although the men around her did. By applying tools developed from religious anthropology, notably those influenced by Max Weber's work on the qualities of charisma in individuals and institutions, it is also possible to consider how Christina derived influence from the spontaneous and non-institutionalised aspects of her identity. This influence spread as she gained in confidence and her liminal religious identity combined with her visions gave her a level of charisma that drew a following, but it was ultimately routinised and neutralised through the regularisation of Markyate and the waning enthusiasm of St Albans.

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<sup>3</sup> Felicity Riddy has called for a reevaluation of the 'domestic' as it relates to the lives and opportunities of medieval women in her review article 'Nunneries, Communities and the Reevaluation of Domesticity', *Gender and History*, 12 (2000), 755-762.

Christina's celebrity was localised and specific, she did not become a great national figure like Wulfric of Haselbury or Godric of Finchale, but she did have the ear and patronage of the greatest Benedictine house in England, which gave her access to kinds of recognition unavailable to other holy women. Overall then, this section is an analysis both of Christina's position and her power from both the perspective of the 'real' Christina and her textual construction.

## Chapter 1.

### Social Networks in the Narrative Sources

“My task” the Writer of the *Life* claims, “is to describe quite simply the simple life of the virgin”, “[m]eum est simplicem virginis vitam simpliciter describere”.<sup>1</sup> This formulaic and rather disingenuous pointer is the only direct statement left to the modern scholar that actively flags up an agenda for the original *vita*. A cursory glance over the *Life* exposes a rather more complicated story where family, monastic and national politics alter its course.

More is known about Christina’s youth and early adult life, related in narrative sources, than about virtually any other English woman of the period, and certainly far more than any other woman of her social class. The majority of these are derived from the now lost *vita*, and although Christina is implicitly mentioned by William of Malmesbury in his *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, she is conspicuous by her absence from most other contemporary histories. To seek an impression of the lived performances behind these source we must go beyond the Talbot edition of Christina’s *Life* and look at what Walter Pohl has called the “textual archaeology” of her story.<sup>2</sup> This means looking for the ways in which the Writer imposed narrative coherence on the original *vita*, (holding in tension the element of the story that are predicated on Christina’s “symbolic being”, with the disruptive power of fact to “subvert fiction”),<sup>3</sup> and for the layers of meaning created by variant redactions in their manuscript context. It is only by looking at the content, provenance and relationships between the fourteenth-century manuscripts that we can both acknowledge their historically situated meanings, and yet yield something of the original twelfth-century context to which they refer. Christina’s story was revived as part of a wider interest in domestic saints, including the hermits Roger and Sigar, at St Albans during the abbacy of Thomas de la Mare (1349-1396).<sup>4</sup> Her *vita* not only filled in some details on Roger, it also provided the abbey with another saint whose holiness was far more

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, ch. 69, p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Pohl, ‘History in Fragments: Montecassino’s Politics of Memory’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 10 (2001), 343-374, citation p. 349.

<sup>3</sup> Morse, *Truth and Convention*, p. 128, and Pohl, ‘History’, p. 347.

<sup>4</sup> On this revival see James Clark, *A Monastic Renaissance at St Albans: Thomas Walsingham and His Circle c.1350-1440* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), pp. 154-140.

recognisable in this later period, which produced works of English mysticism including Julian of Norwich's *Showings of Divine Love*,<sup>5</sup> than it had been in Christina's own day.

The context for Christina's story and her 'sainthood' comprised the interests and attitudes of her stakeholders. A broad-brush picture of her position within secular and ecclesiastical networks reveals that she was reasonably well connected in the South East of England. However the social spectrum that the sources parade is partially a shaped literary realism to position and so celebrate her. This may be as much the case for who Christina knew as for her saintly activities. The Writer seems to have played up her level of social influence in order to offset the effect of the views of her detractors. Perhaps surprisingly, given Christina's troubled relationship with her father in particular, we will find that Christina ultimately belonged in and identified with the networks and social practices of her extended family.

### I. Writing the *Life* I – The Original *Vita*

The original *vita* - from the creation of which all claims for Christina's holiness stem - existed probably only in one manuscript, and was kept at the Markyate Priory until at least the end of the fourteenth century when Walsingham directed interested readers of his chronicle to there.<sup>6</sup> It probably had a prologue but, given that it was a work abandoned, may not have been a fair copy. Lack of information obscures when the *vita* arrived at Markyate from the St Albans scriptorium. The last datable events recorded fall around 1140 and it seems probable that it was moved soon after this, around the time of the consecration of the house in 1145 or after the death of Geoffrey the following year. However it might equally have remained at St Albans until the instruction of Geoffrey's nephew Abbot Robert in the 1150s or 1160s. There is no reason to doubt the scholarly consensus that its Writer was an observant St Albans monk, with a reasonable knowledge of the monastic classics and perhaps a role in the growing house scriptorium. He was also part of the circle that recognised Christina as saintly and interpreted her behaviour as such.<sup>7</sup> The horizons of the story, viewed so determinedly from the abbey, make it unfeasible that the Writer was part of Christina's transitional encratic community,<sup>8</sup> and equally given the second hand way that the *Life* writes of Geoffrey he must only be a contributor and not the compiler of the text. But

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<sup>5</sup> *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and a Revelation of Love*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jaqueline Jenkins (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> *GA*, I, p. 105.

<sup>7</sup> See Koopmans, 'Dining', pp. 144-147.

<sup>8</sup> As suggested by Sally Thompson, *Women Religious*, p. 19.

despite being written at a time described by John Blair as “a remarkable boom in inventive hagiography”,<sup>9</sup> the available evidence suggests that there was very little original composition coming out of the St Albans scriptorium in the 1140s, giving us few other clues on his identity. Talbot speculated that he was the “most observant monk”, “*strenuum[...] indicas monarchum*”, from Autti’s household;<sup>10</sup> but the Writer refuses to name this monk under instruction, not from modesty, suggesting the two should not be conflated. If this second monk was Christina’s brother Gregory, who said mass at Markyate and could have been her confessor, his death during the narrative further militates against authorship.<sup>11</sup> Names of contemporary St Albans monks gleaned from the *Gesta Abbatum*, the Hildesheim Psalter calendar, the 1145 Markyate foundation charter, and the later St Albans *Liber Benefactorum*, give no further clues, and so the Writer remains an anonymous, if insistent, voice in the story.

It is only possible to surmise the extent of the voices contributing stories to the composition of the *vita* from the textual evidence in the *Life*. The origins of a story has most bearing on this study when it forms a critical moment in the construction of Christina’s sainthood, or when it relates to her visions. The Writer explicitly draws attention to Christina as his source for Roger’s insensibility to his demonically ignited cowl, and of her own spiritual coronation.<sup>12</sup> The only other direct ascription is to Christina’s mother who, as already noted, recounts her *enceinte* visiting dove. Some of the other stories can only have been collected from their participants, but these stories may not have been at first hand. For example the first detailed account of Christina’s clairvoyance was passed from Margaret to Geoffrey, and might, like a considerable quantity of the last third of the *Life*, have been gleaned from Geoffrey by the Writer.<sup>13</sup> The Writer only had access to those stakeholders that were around St Albans at the time of writing. This means that the passages about powerful ecclesiastics, including Thurstan of York’s friend the Lustful Cleric, are all second hand. There is not even any reason to suppose that he consulted Sueno, Fredebertus, Eadwin or Alfwen - all important in Christina’s early story – or Roger who died fifteen to twenty years before he began writing. Their stories must have been told primarily by Christina and

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<sup>9</sup> John Blair, ‘A Saint for Every Minster?’, in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p. 476.

<sup>10</sup> Talbot, ‘Introduction’, p. 11 and *Life*, ch. 26, p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> It would be interesting to know who instructed the Writer to silence: perhaps it was Christina seeking to wrest her story back from the St Albans discourse that was being created about her, or perhaps the monk was yet another figure who wished to remain anonymous. If the latter then either Christina had a great deal of sway over her family and over St Albans, or the early connection with the abbey (presented in the *Life* as an exciting pilgrimage) was more established than it appears.

<sup>12</sup> *Life*, ch. 40, p. 104 and ch. 52, p. 128.

<sup>13</sup> *Life*, ch. 59, pp. 140-142.

expanded on by the Writer in accordance with his expectations of sanctity. The Writer did have access to those of Christina's kin whose adequate piety had earned them entry to her circle, "*secura namque carnalium erat amoris parentum nisi quos aut morum honestas aut ingenitus aliquis probitatis commendaret conatus*".<sup>14</sup> Therefore through her brother Gregory, sister Margaret and perhaps her childhood friend Helisen he had a number of routes into Christina's early marriage trials as well as insights for his lengthy discussion of her family circumstances.<sup>15</sup> The community at Markyate would presumably have been eager to provide evidence of their mistress's charisma, which they were routinely called on to corroborate.<sup>16</sup> He also had the monks of St Albans, for example the sub-prior Alexander who witnessed one of Christina's more enigmatic prescient experiences of Geoffrey and the un-named monk bearing the story of Simon of Bermondsey.<sup>17</sup> However the assortment of views that informed the *vita* ranged from devotion to outright hostility towards Christina's sanctity, particularly amongst the brothers of his own house. Because of his location the Writer probably knew more about the detractors at St Albans and in the wider secular locality, who form a backdrop to the last section of the *Life*, than he did about some of the key characters. His personal witness of the years shortly preceding the composition of her *vita* also impacts on the strategies used to manage her story.

The Writer himself was inexperienced, as is suggested by the lack of other surviving compositions from St Albans and his maladroit handling of literary models. The *Life* seems sufficiently preoccupied with Abbot Geoffrey, and Christina's intercessory powers on his behalf, to make it unlikely that he was not the patron of the work. Therefore if, as the linguistic evidence suggests, the *vita* was written as a continuous piece, it must have been written between the last dateable event in 1139-40 and Geoffrey's death in 1146. It is these last events that comprise perhaps the most curious passage of the *Life*, and, I believe, enable a fairly precise dating of it.

### I.I Dating the *Vita* :

#### Political Dynamics in the Reign of King Stephen.

Dropped unceremoniously between comfortably religious motifs – the pious death of Christina's brother and a description of her ecstasies – is a lengthy recounting of the high politics of England in 1136 to 1140. It relates three abortive trips by Abbot

<sup>14</sup> *Life*, ch. 70, p. 158.

<sup>15</sup> *Life*, ch. 20, pp. 66-68.

<sup>16</sup> For example *Life*, ch. 6, p. 144 and ch. 67, pp. 152-154.

<sup>17</sup> *Life*, ch. 64, pp. 148-50 and ch. 77, p. 176.

Geoffrey to the papal curia on behalf of King Stephen.<sup>18</sup> Stephen's troubled reign (1135-1154) sent many deputations to Rome, a dangerous trip both because of the travail of the journey and the risk of arriving or returning with unwelcome news. According to the *Life*, Geoffrey was first chosen for an Embassy to confirm Stephen's election in 1136.<sup>19</sup> This journey is curious, not only because there is no corroborating evidence that such an expedition was necessary,<sup>20</sup> but also because the *Life* identifies both the trip and the reasons attending it as grievous, "[m]estum iter. Sed itineris mestior causa".<sup>21</sup> That Christina, in Nicholas Roscarrock's apt summary was "seeming not to approve the King's title" may reflect Christina's own Anglo-Saxon preferences against the Norman king or the political views of the Writer,<sup>22</sup> just as the later St Albans writer Matthew Paris unabashedly expressed his views on the court,<sup>23</sup> but in this period of limited literary creativity at the St Albans scriptorium it seems most likely that the passage reflects the general political leanings of the Abbey of St Albans. By establishing at what time St Albans held anti-King Stephen views it should be possible to narrow down when the *Life* was written.

Despite the political storms of the civil war, Stephen did not lose widespread support until 1148 when it became clear that the succession would not go to his son.<sup>24</sup> If Talbot's later dating of the original *vita* were correct it would certainly coincide with general anti-King Stephen feeling in the 1150s and 1160s.<sup>25</sup> In that case perhaps the *vita* was precipitated by Abbot Robert's concerted campaign in the 1150s to obtain

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<sup>18</sup> *Life*, ch. 71-74, pp. 160-170.

<sup>19</sup> A particular curiosity of this first trip is the emphasis that Geoffrey is to go to the Roman pope, "*Papam romanum Innocentium II*", at a time when Innocent II was in France and the anti-pope Anacletus II held Rome. Since England acknowledged Innocent, perhaps this is a deliberate barb by the Writer, see *Life*, ch. 71, p. 160.

<sup>20</sup> There is considerable debate regarding this first intended deputation to Rome. The case between King Stephen and Empress Matilda was certainly heard by Pope Innocent II, but whether he considered the case one or twice, and whether in 1136 or 1139 at the Second Lateran Council (which Geoffrey was also supposed to attend) remains unresolved. The pope certainly heard some details of the case in 1136 as Richard of Hexham preserves his letter of approval confirming Stephen's election, for which a collection delegation may have been sent, *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett, 4 vols (RS 82, 1884-1890), III, pp. 147-148. On the case between the cousins J. H. Round classically argued for the earlier date, *Geoffrey de Mandeville: A Study of the Anarchy* (London: Longmans, 1892), pp. 260-261, but general opinion leans towards the latter, see for example Christopher Holdsworth, 'The Church', in *The Anarchy of Stephen's Reign*, ed. Edmund King (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 209-211. David Crouch has recently returned to the possibility that a delegation might have been planned for the earlier date, *The Reign of King Stephen 1135-1154* (Harlow: Longmans, 2000), pp. 45-48.

<sup>21</sup> *Life*, ch. 71, p. 160.

<sup>22</sup> Roscarrock, printed in Carl Horstman, *Nova Legenda Angliae*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 536.

<sup>23</sup> See Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c.550 to c.1307* (London: Routledge, 1974), pp. 365-379.

<sup>24</sup> See Kieth Stringer, *The Reign of Stephen: Kingship, Warfare and Government in Twelfth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1993), esp. pp. 41-48.

<sup>25</sup> Talbot, 'Introduction', pp. 9-10.

liberty for St Albans from episcopal jurisdiction. This operation strategically highlighted the Anglo-Saxon heritage of the house, so rather than Christina being a liability to the quest for papal privileges, as Koopmans suggests,<sup>26</sup> this may have seemed a good time to boost their cause by writing the *vita* of their local saintly Anglo-Saxon intercessor.<sup>27</sup> Especially so since by placing herself under the protection of the hermit Roger Christina had, with divine approbation, also exempted herself from the authority of the enraged Bishop of Lincoln.<sup>28</sup> Certainly the *Gesta Abbatum* notes that on his 1155 trip to collect privileges from Rome, Robert took embroidered mitres and slippers made by Christina of such high craftship, *operis mirifici*, that they were said to be the only gifts accepted by Adrian IV.<sup>29</sup> In the same year the pipe rolls show that Henry II gave a gift of fifty pounds in grain to “*domina Christina de bosco*”. Rather than a handout to help the ailing priory of Markyate,<sup>30</sup> this gift looks like a personal one to Christina in recognition of her work – probably informed through the political Abbot.

Clearly then, caution must be exercised before the outright rejection of a later dating of the *vita*, since Christina could have been alive during its composition at either date. However there does seem to be a stronger motivational case for it having been commissioned by Abbot Geoffrey in a period of concentrated patronage on behalf of Markyate to secure its official status in 1145. For this to be correct, St Albans would need contemporaneously to have been holding strong political views against King Stephen. King Stephen stayed at St Albans on four occasions during his reign. At the first of these he held the controversial court of September 1143, where he broke both the oaths he had recently sworn in London as well as the right of sanctuary, through his arrest of Geoffrey de Mandeville. The *Gesta Abbatum* is surprisingly silent on a scandal that incurred the censure of even Stephen’s most supportive chroniclers. Of

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<sup>26</sup> Koopmans, ‘Conclusion’, p. 685.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Stanton also suggests that monastic anti-episcopal criticism is built into the *Life*, ‘Domestic Violence’, p. 236. On St Albans prolonged struggle for independence from Lincoln see Jane Sayers, ‘Papal Privileges for St Albans Abbey and its Dependencies’, in *The Study of Medieval Records: Essays in Honour of Kathleen Major*, ed. D. A. Bullough and R. L. Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 57-85, and Julia Crick, ‘Liberty and Fraternity: Creating and Defending the Liberty of St Albans’, in *Expectations of the Law in the Middle Ages*, ed. Anthony Musson (Suffolk: Boydell, 2001), pp. 91-103.

<sup>28</sup> Although as a monk of St Albans Roger was still under episcopal jurisdiction, in William of Malmesbury’s account (discussed below) Robert Bloet was unable to act against him, perhaps because disciplinary authority rested with his Abbot.

<sup>29</sup> *GA*, I, p. 127. Despite being refused membership of the St Albans community, after his elevation Nicholas Breakspear was generous to the house, see Brenda Bolton, ‘St Albans’ Loyal Son’, in *Adrian IV: The English Pope (1154-1159)*, ed. Brenda Bolton and Anne Duggan (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 75-103.

<sup>30</sup> For example Thompson has argued that it is not possible to infer from the piperoll evidence that Christina was still alive in 1155, *Women Religious*, p. 18.

the other visits, two (May 1146 and summer 1151)<sup>31</sup> related to the consecration of the Abbot and the third (1148) confirmed Battle Abbey's exemption from the authority of the bishop of Chichester.<sup>32</sup> Stephen may additionally have visited in 1154 when he gave permission for the hated royal castle at Kingsbury, in the Liberty of St Albans, to be destroyed.<sup>33</sup> This is not an extensive number of visits but it does seem that the abbots following Geoffrey were on favourable terms with Stephen. Additionally, early relations were tense between the Abbey and King Stephen's Angevin opponents and successors, as Henry II sought to challenge the liberties of the Abbey.<sup>34</sup>

The events of 1143, however, had doubtless soured immediate relations with Stephen. There is further evidence that in the early 1140s St Albans held Angevin proclivities, since in June 1141 the Empress Matilda used the abbey as a final base in her negotiations with London.<sup>35</sup> John of Worcester claims that the Empress was received at the house in great honour and celebration, "*proficiscitur inde cum exultatione magna et gaudio, et in monasterio Sancti albani cum processionali suscipitur honore, et jubilo*".<sup>36</sup> Her reception, therefore, does not seem to have been extorted by threats of violence. Defection from Stephen was not without consequences, although it is unclear whether June 1141 or September 1143 was the catalyst for Stephen's core of loyal nobles to furiously descend, intent on incinerating the town of St Albans, only to be bought off by Abbot Geoffrey with the gold and silver melted down from his new altar to St Alban.<sup>37</sup> It would seem that in the early 1140s the Abbey of St Albans at least temporarily went over to the Empress and the subsequent actions of King Stephen jeopardised the already unstable relations between the Abbey and the Crown. The situation by 1143 may have occasioned an irate monk to write that the election of the

<sup>31</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Maiora*, ed. H.R. Luard, 7 vols (RS 57, 1872-1884), II, pp. 178 and 187, and *RRAN*, III, nos. 179, 488 and 938.

<sup>32</sup> *The Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, ed. and trans. Eleanor Searle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 152.

<sup>33</sup> Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of The English People*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), bk. x, ch. 38; Gervase of Canterbury, *Opera Historica*, ed. William Stubbs, 2 vols (RS 73, 1879-1880), I, p. 157. L. F. Rushbrooke Williams believes Stephen visited St Albans, *History of the Abbey of St Albans* (London: Longmans, 1917), p. 67, but the editors of the *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum* suggest that 1151 was Stephen's last visit there, III, p. xliii.

<sup>34</sup> Dr James Clark kindly pointed these later problems out to me, *Pers. Corr.* June 2005.

<sup>35</sup> The Empress issued two charters at St Albans (*RRAN*, III, 392 and 497), both styling herself *Imperatrix* rather than *Domina Anglorum*, suggesting a date before April 1141. However the only practical occasion for her to have visited St Albans is on the way to London, when presumably she stayed in the queen's hall that Abbot Geoffrey had thoughtfully built, *GA*, I, p. 79.

<sup>36</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, ed. and trans. Patrick McGurk, 3 vols (Oxford: OUP, 1995), III, p. 294. On the composition of this chronicle see Martin Brett, 'John of Worcester and his Contemporaries', in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern*, ed. R. H. C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 101-126.

<sup>37</sup> *GA*, I, pp. 93-94.

King was grievous. Although this does not conclusively support Koopmans' date for the *vita*, it certainly strengthens and refines her case: the *vita* was probably written between June 1141 and 1145-6, and most likely after 1143. Such a dating helps to explain some of the discrepancies passed down into the *Life*.

## I.II Textual Fissures and Omissions

"The best virgin", as Jocelyn Wogan-Browne has aphoristically pointed out, "is always a dead virgin".<sup>38</sup> Christina is both 'not dead' in the sense that her story was abandoned at the height of her pastoral relationship with family and friends, and in the absence of any sustained pious commemoration of her. It is not necessary to subscribe to a programme of her deliberate expunction from record,<sup>39</sup> or her departure from Markyate,<sup>40</sup> to make sense of this silence: Christina simply fell out of vogue once Geoffrey, who was the focus of her later visionary powers, died. It is even possible that, like another visionary Christina of Stommeln (d.1312) and her correspondent and biographer Peter of Dacia, Christina's revelations and supernatural experiences essentially ceased after the death of her patron. Her chaotic youth had settled down to the responsibilities of leading a recognised convent (for which duties a skill for clairvoyance would no doubt come in handy, but was not strictly required), and so, like her namesake, Christina's public sainthood softly evaporated.<sup>41</sup> By the time she was co-operating with Abbot Robert, Christina was a less fashionable, and so less controversial, celebrity.

Not only was the *vita* left incomplete, but it is also clear that the Writer reordered some events for literary effect, perhaps including events occurring after 1140.<sup>42</sup> For example Christina's sister Margaret is described as being "of blessed memory", "*sororem beate memorie virginem*", when she was called on to witness one of

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<sup>38</sup> Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Chaste Bodies: Frames and Experiences' in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: MUP, 1994), pp. 24-42, citation p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Koopmans, 'Conclusion', p. 37.

<sup>40</sup> Roscarrock, *Nova Legenda*, pp. 536-537.

<sup>41</sup> *De B. Christinae Stumbelesii*, *AASS*, 22<sup>nd</sup> June, vol. 5, pp. 231-387, which includes their correspondence as well as Peter of Dacia's *vita*. On Christina of Stommeln see John Coakley, *Men, Women and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 89-110 and Aviad Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: UCP, 1992), pp. 71-98, including notes on problems with the published editions p. 51, n. 25.

<sup>42</sup> On the possible inclusion of later events see also Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 17-18. On the altering of events as they relate to the visions, see also below, p.196.

Christina's prophetic turns,<sup>43</sup> but she is subsequently alive both to attend her brother's funeral and meet the mysterious pilgrim.<sup>44</sup> Either the pilgrim narrative has been significantly chronologically moved, or the last events in the *Life* precede Margaret's death, which necessarily also precedes the composition of the *vita*. Certainly the event must post-date the building of the Markyate church, but this was probably in regular use before its consecration in 1145.<sup>45</sup> It is an interesting indication of the extent to which the *Life* was shaped around a St Albans agenda which minimised the role of women other than Christina, that the story of her brother Gregory's death is extended, whilst that of the sister to whom she was close is not told at all. Equally Christina's profession is related disjointedly in the *Life*, with her plans to profess at St Albans and crowning by angels which confirms her choice predating her first meeting Geoffrey, but her vows postdating it.<sup>46</sup> These, like Geoffrey's apparent two bouts of near-fatal illness,<sup>47</sup> expose the extent to which the narrative of the *vita* was still a work in progress when it was abandoned.

Accessing these original fissures is made difficult by the abbreviations of the available versions.<sup>48</sup> We know that the Tiberius *Life* omits a chapter around ch. 67-68 relating Geoffrey's involvement in fabricating Markyate's buildings, since it is recorded in the Claudius *Gesta Abbatum* which Koopmans has shown to be otherwise syntactically and chronologically almost identical to the *Life*.<sup>49</sup> Talbot has drawn attention to the singular appearance of a Thomas who was supposed to have been earlier mentioned,<sup>50</sup> and the omission of part of the text relating to Geoffrey's illness.<sup>51</sup> The *Life* also fails to deliver on a promised account of Christina's cured maladies.<sup>52</sup> Importantly for this study, it is impossible to tell if visions or miracles have been omitted, although this

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<sup>43</sup> *Life*, ch. 67, p. 154. Talbot's identification of "M." as Margaret seems incontrovertible. The incident is also included in the *Gesta Abbatum*, although it does not mention that Margaret is dead. Perhaps the inverse lack of such an epithet corroborates that Geoffrey is alive.

<sup>44</sup> *Life*, ch. 70, p. 161 and ch. 80, p. 182.

<sup>45</sup> Thompson argues that the use of the word *monasterium* implies that regular services were being held at the community, *Women Religious*, p. 17. *Life*, ch. 78, p. 178.

<sup>46</sup> *Life*, ch. 5, p. 126; ch. 52, p. 128; and ch. 62, p. 146.

<sup>47</sup> *Life*, ch. 59, p. 140 and ch. 63, p. 146.

<sup>48</sup> Whilst it is possible that things were added to the story in Christina's *Life* as well as left out, this seems unlikely. The broad drive and order of the narrative is corroborated by the *Gesta Abbatum* and the Tiberius redactor would have had to rewrite large sections to maintain consistency of writing style.

<sup>49</sup> *GA*, I, p. 103. The *Life* merely says Geoffrey "*providet domui et dispositor efficitur agendorum*", ch. 68, p. 154. Koopmans, 'Conclusion', pp. 670-671.

<sup>50</sup> *Life*, ch. 71, p. 162, Talbot, 'Introduction', p. 5. Perhaps the same Thomas whose obit is noted on 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct in the Hildesheim Psalter, p. 12.

<sup>51</sup> *Life*, ch. 59, p. 140.

<sup>52</sup> *Life*, ch. 50, p. 124.

seems unlikely given the assiduousness with which the Tiberius reports such events and the clear parallel with those told in the *Gesta Abbatum*. Because all the extant accounts of Christina's story are abridged, all interpretations must remain conditional on what cannot be known and what is omitted as well as what is 'true'. It is worth reviewing the manuscript evidence in this light, before turning to look at the stakeholders that populate her story.

## II. The Manuscript Evidence

### II.I John of Tynemouth, *Sanctilogium* (BL Cotton MS Tiberius Ei)

The most extensive and complete source for Christina is in the fire-damaged master copy of John of Tynemouth's *Sanctilogium Angliae, Walliae, Scotiae, et Hiberniae*. Although a chronicler and monk of St Albans, not much is known about John. Carl Horstman surmises that he was vicar at Tynemouth by 1315 and probably simultaneously a member of St Albans' rich and politically important Tynemouth priory.<sup>53</sup> Around the 1320's he travelled extensively though England and Wales extrapolating hagiography from monastic libraries in an effort to create a comprehensive insular *Legendarium*.<sup>54</sup> John's skill lay more in compilation than composition, and he is not picked out for attention by Thomas Walsingham in his list of St Albans' eminent writers.<sup>55</sup> The Tiberius manuscript, for which John explicitly claims a lack of agenda,<sup>56</sup> was probably made under John's personal supervision, sometimes even noting differences in the accounts he consulted. It is an extensive collection with over 156 *vitae* and *narrationes* of a large number of English and Welsh saints, with a rather less complete selection of Irish and a few of the most obvious Scottish luminaries. These include many socially and ecclesiastically powerful figures from the conversion to the thirteenth century, with a scattering of ninth-century hermit saints. Female saints are represented by only twenty-eight *vitae*, of which twenty-four are abbesses. All the twelfth-century saints included are male religious founders and recluse holy-men, who reflect something of the explosion in religious options during

<sup>53</sup> Horstman, 'Introduction' in *Nova Legenda*, p. xxxvi. I rely on Horstman's research for much of the information on John of Tynemouth.

<sup>54</sup> Noted in the *vitae* is his use of the libraries at Ely, Canterbury, London, Glastonbury, Hereford and in Wales.

<sup>55</sup> BL, Cotton MS Claudius E.iv, from fol. 331b. John's *Historia Aurea* also comprises mostly of excerpts. An original *Life of St Alban* is ascribed to him, but is now lost, see Peter Newcome, *The History of the Ancient and Royal Foundation Called the Abbey of St Albans* (London: Nichols, 1793), p. 401.

<sup>56</sup> "Ego vero in prescriptis et dubiis, et in sequentibus non nullis, auctoritatem discutiendi et diffiniendi mihi non presume, sed tamquam relator simplex", *Nova Legenda*, p. 290.

Christina's own lifetime. The work was popular, although all subsequent revisions present the *vitae* in alphabetical rather than John's intended calendar order. Christina's *Life* is tagged onto the end of the Tiberius manuscript, after four other mis-placed saints (the *vitae* of Finan, Eata, Walburga and Ythamar),<sup>57</sup> and in a different hand.<sup>58</sup>

If Horstman is correct that John was amongst the two-thirds of the St Albans community who perished in the 1348-9 plague, during which trauma his name disappeared, then the Tiberius manuscript was substantially finished by the second quarter of the fourteenth century. The manuscript bore a now lost inscription,<sup>59</sup> indicating that it was amongst the books given in 1366 by Abbot Thomas de la Mare to St Albans nearby dependent Priory of Redbourn, a cell used for the recreation of St Albans brethren.<sup>60</sup> Rather than Christina's *Life* being appended merely as an after-thought by John with his "eye for curiosities",<sup>61</sup> I suggest that her inclusion was an important addition on the occasion of the manuscript being given to Redbourn. Under de la Mare's direction there was a renewed enthusiasm at St Albans in the 1360s and 1370s for 'domestic' saints and the *vitae* of Saints Alban and Amphibulus and the two Offas were expanded and revised. This was not only a top-down policy from the abbot (who must surely have commissioned the inscription drawing attention to the value of the legendary as spiritual instruction in the recognition of virtue); but also a wider spiritual climate at the abbey, with exuberant marginalia being added to saints' lives that had a St Albans resonance.<sup>62</sup>

Christina's *Life* tells the story not only of the local holy woman, but also of visionaries amongst the St Albans house, in particular the hermit Roger whose shrine was revered in the Abbey church. Since the *vita* was kept at Markyate, within easy reach of the Abbey, the abbreviator probably had less stringent time constraints on his copying than

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<sup>57</sup> It is unclear why these saints (three bishops and a virgin abbess) are appended to the end of the manuscript. Although Eata and Walburga feature in the St Albans relic list (BL, Cotton MS Claudius E.iv, fol. 349), none were important in the liturgical life of the Abbey or its dependent priory at Redbourne.

<sup>58</sup> The change of hand was identified by Koopmans, 'Conclusion', p. 696.

<sup>59</sup> "*Hunc librum dedit Dompnus Thomas de la Mare Abbas monasterii Sti. Albani Anglorum] prothomartiris, Deo et Ecclesias beati Amphibali de Redburne; ut fratres ibidem in cursu existentes per eius lecturam poterint celestibus instructi, et per Sanctorum exempla virtutibus insigniri*". The inscription was copied in full by Fr. Augustine Baker in 1637, in Oxford, Jesus College MS 77, fol. 64r. See also Talbot, 'Introduction', p. 1, n.2.

<sup>60</sup> Clark suggests that it was intended as half of a matching pair with Guido de Castris' collection (BL, Royal MS 13.D.ix), *Monastic Renaissance*, p. 90. A further list of de la Mare's gifts to the dependency is found in the 1380 *Liber Benefactorum*, BL, Cotton MS Nero D.vii, fol. 22r-v. For a comparable relationship between an Abbey and its dependency see M. R. V. Heale, 'Veneration and Renovation at a Small Norfolk Priory: St Leonard's, Norwich in the Later Middle Ages', *Historical Research*, 76 (2003), 431-449.

<sup>61</sup> Koopmans 'Conclusion', p. 697.

<sup>62</sup> Clark, *Monastic Renaissance*, p. 138.

had the rest of John's compilation.<sup>63</sup> It is therefore curious that all details of Christina's transition from solitary to prioress are omitted. Given that the common touchstone of the abbacies of Geoffrey, under whom it was written, and de la Mare, under whom it was redacted, was their interest in regularising religious life – indeed this was the purpose of the gift to Redbourne – it seems unlikely that only Christina's eremitism appealed to contemporary St Albans. It is, however, of interest that the Abbey was involved in a lengthy legal wrangle in the 1360's with the priory of Markyate over rents for lands given to Markyate by Abbots Geoffrey and Robert de Gorham, so whilst its pious founder was in fashion, her foundation was definitely not.<sup>64</sup>

## II.II Nicholas Roscarrock, *Lives of the Saints* (Cambridge Addit MS 3041)

Later editions of the *Sanctilogium* did not include Christina; perhaps she cut too local a figure, or the lack of ending to her story was too compromising. The only extant copy made before the fire damage in 1731 is a seventeenth-century summary by the ardent and persecuted Counter-Reformationary and antiquarian Nicholas Roscarrock for his *Lives of the English Saints*.<sup>65</sup> Roscarrock notes de la Mare's inscription, and confirms that the story was left incomplete.<sup>66</sup> Some major flaws in the order and details of Roscarrock's text, not least that he routinely confuses Abbot Geoffrey with Abbot Robert, render it a problematic source.<sup>67</sup> Roscarrock also confuses the protagonist with Christina Mirabilis (1150-1224), whose life passed with a similar lack of clear religious status as Christina's early years, causing him to believe that the whole story belonged to the later rather than the early twelfth century. Whilst this might explain his 'correction' of the Gorham abbots, it does not explain why he also reports some of Christina's visions out of order. Evidently his scrupulous concern over according

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<sup>63</sup> Given that it forms a late addition to the *Sanctilogium* project we cannot assume that the same editing conventions were used in the *Life* as for the rest of the collection.

<sup>64</sup> See *GA*, III, pp. 87-92.

<sup>65</sup> On Roscarrock see A. L. Rouse, 'Nicholas Roscarrock and his *Lives of the Saints*', in *Studies in Social Life: A Tribute to G. M. Trevelyan*, ed. J. H. Plumb (London: Longmans, 1955), pp. 3-31, and Nicholas Orme, *Nicholas Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints: Cornwall and Devon*, (Devon and Cornwall Records Society, NS 32, 1992), 1-31.

<sup>66</sup> Horstman used Roscarrock's account, because of the then unreadability of the Tiberius, and corrects the latter's confusion of John of Tynemouth with John Capgrave, *Nova Legenda*, pp. 532-537.

<sup>67</sup> Another early modern confusion of abbots is found in John Leland's *Collectanea* who mistakes Roger for Geoffrey: "prior S Trin de Bosco (moniales) juxta Markgate [bedf.] Rogerus abbas S. Albani primus fundator. Modernus fundator Decanus S. Pauli London", see *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii de Rebus Britannicis Collectanea*, ed. Thomas Hearne, 6 vols (London: Richardson, 1770), I, p. 83.

sanctity and locality did not stretch to a consistent reliability for detail.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, Roscarrock's expansive reading means he can give clues to a number of possible saintly peers for Christina from St Albans, including Roger, Sigar, Adam the Cellarer and the slightly later Abbot John (1195-1214). His account of Roger is unique in being pieced together from several sources, rather than being lifted wholesale from Christina's story. He notes both Matthew Paris's *Chronica Maiora* account of Henry III's visit and gifts to the tomb,<sup>69</sup> and a St Albans Register indicating that a tablet hung over the tomb of Roger and Sigar "in which their miraculous life is written, and in the life of Abb. Jefferie who lived then".<sup>70</sup> Evidently the lives of these St Albans saints were once better accounted for than they are now.

### II.III Thomas Walsingham, *De Fundatione et Meritis Monasterii*

(BL Cotton MS Claudius E.iv.)

Another St Albans document from de la Mare's abbacy contributes to this impression that Roger and Sigar were important 'domestic' saints. In the short *De Fundatione et Meritis Monasterii Sancti Albani*, Thomas Walsingham set about celebrating the most significant and meritorious figures amongst St Albans and its monks.<sup>71</sup> Walsingham explains that the purpose of the document was as a brief account for the benefit and teaching of young monks, "ut noscant posterī quanta sit eleemosyna, quam laude digna cura, juvenes in coenobiis alere, nutrire, docere, et moribus informare".<sup>72</sup> A plausible case has been made by James Clark for this being the motivation behind Walsingham's entire Claudius manuscript compilation, as a "conspectus of community life at St Albans[...] to address newcomers to the religious life".<sup>73</sup> The text is compiled from several sources,<sup>74</sup> and appears to have been written in two bursts of enthusiasm. The first gives an account up to the late-twelfth century before it breaks off, but when Walsingham returned to his project again he went straight to his own contemporaries. It is highly selective, and many abbots (including Geoffrey) do not get a write-up,

<sup>68</sup> See for example his entries on the seventh century monk Owen (fol. 345r) and on Robert of Bethune (fol. 374v-377r) whose lack of canonisation is flagged up, and St Aldegund (fol. 29r) whose Englishness he correctly queries.

<sup>69</sup> Paris, *Chronica Maiora*, II, p. 617.

<sup>70</sup> Some St Albans registers were lost in the Ashburnham fire. The "life of Abb. Jefferie" is most likely the *Gesta Abbatum* interpolation, but it seems that the tablet was additional to the inscription that can still be found carved above Roger and Sigar's tomb in the Abbey.

<sup>71</sup> Published as Thomas Walsingham, 'De Fundatione et Meritis Monasterii Sancti Albani' in *Annales Monasterii S. Albani a Johanne Amundesham Monacho*, ed. H. T. Riley, 2 vols (RS 28, 1871), II, appendix E, pp. 296-306.

<sup>72</sup> Walsingham, 'De Fundatione', p. 305.

<sup>73</sup> Clark, *Monastic Renaissance*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>74</sup> Notably Walsingham cites William of Malmesbury and John of Salisbury, 'De Fundatione', pp. 298-299.

though considerable attention is given to St Albans writers and chroniclers. Walsingham also devotes a whole paragraph each to Saints Roger and Sigar: more space than to virtually any other of the luminaries.

His accounts of the two solitaries do not contain anything more than is found in the *Gesta Abbatum*, and this must either have been his source or - assuming Walsingham is the *Gesta Abbatum* interpolator - he employed the same sources for both documents. Where the *Gesta Abbatum* substantially edits Christina's role in the story, here the account of Roger neglects to mention her altogether; only Roger is celebrated for his prophecy, miracles and rapt contemplation. It is not unreasonable to assume with Koopmans that there was a distinct lack of sources to cater for the cults of Roger and Sigar,<sup>75</sup> and it was perhaps an expedient use of resources, rather than a deliberate snub to Christina, that her *vita* was plundered for a document about the Abbey monks. The monastic cult of Roger appears to have closely followed his death in 1122/3, indeed he may even have been deemed a 'living saint'. The *Life* informs us that he was buried in the abbey, and by the time Matthew Paris writes the *Gesta Abbatum*, he is referred to as *Sancti Rogeri Heremitaie* and his tomb used as a known landmark.<sup>76</sup>

Another important figure celebrated at length in the document is Adam the Cellarer, an eminent figure at the abbey during the reigns of King's Stephen and Henry II. Adam had been accorded by Abbot Warin (1185-95) celebration of his death as if he were an abbot,<sup>77</sup> and his benefits to the house are recorded in Walsingham's *Liber Benefactorum* under the list of abbots after those of Simon (1166-83).<sup>78</sup> By Walsingham's time Adam was popularly venerated and we learn that his tomb was visited for miracles and fever cures.<sup>79</sup> It was the now lost roll of this Adam the Cellarer, written by his clerk Bartholomew, which formed the backbone of Matthew Paris's *Gesta Abbatum* up until the later twelfth century; and the very same roll gave the bad write-up of Abbot Geoffrey's generosity to Christina's priory at Markyate. The *De Fundatione et Meritis Monasterii* shows that the kinds of stories that 'made it' for a fourteenth-century St Albans audience tapped into the contemporary enthusiasm for shrine miracles, which meant that Christina remained a problematic figure for

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<sup>75</sup> Koopmans, 'Conclusion', p. 673.

<sup>76</sup> *GA*, I, p. 184. It is unclear if this reference during the abbacy of Simon formed part of Adam the Cellarer's original roll. If it did then Roger's sanctity was assured amongst his brethren within only a couple of decades of his death.

<sup>77</sup> *GA*, I, p. 206.

<sup>78</sup> Cotton MS Nero D.vii, fol. 16v.

<sup>79</sup> Walsingham, 'De Fundatione', p. 304, has the dust from his tomb curing fevers, though Roscarrock saw a register that instead ascribed this miraculous power to Adam's sandals, Cambridge Addit. MS 3041, fol. 7v.

veneration despite renewed enthusiasm, because of her lack of a grave. In contrast Roger, Sigar and Adam had tombs that became foci for popular as well as monastic piety. This fourteenth-century zeal for miracles rather than visions is also reflected in the *Gesta Abbatum* interpolation, which tunes events also found in the *Life* to amplify their miraculous potential.

#### II.IV *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*

(BL Cotton MSS Nero D.i, Claudius E.iv, Addit. 62777)

The second fourteenth-century account of Christina, found interpolated into St Albans' expansive domestic chronicle, is considerably more abbreviated than that in the Tiberius *Sanctilogium*. Like the Tiberius it is redacted from the original *vita*,<sup>80</sup> but its agenda and selection are quite different. Preferring 'practical' miracles, it omits almost all Christina's early life and the majority of her visions, focusing instead almost equally on her spiritual relationships with Roger and Geoffrey. In particular it maximises Roger's role in the story, shifting his combat with a devil to the beginning of the interpolation to redirect attention for the episode to Roger rather than Christina,<sup>81</sup> and drawing attention to his friendship with Thurstan Archbishop of York.<sup>82</sup>

The *Gesta Abbatum* has a complex codicology, and the authorship of various sections has prompted much scholarship.<sup>83</sup> Mark Hagger has recently argued that it was Adam the Cellarer (fl. c.1140- c.1180), rather than Mathew Paris in the 1240s, who set the underlying structure and programme of the project, with the specific agenda of enhancing St Albans' independent status and minimising the claims of Ely, Lincoln and Canterbury.<sup>84</sup> Certainly he was sufficiently unhappy with Abbot Geoffrey's alienation of tithes to Markyate without the consent of the Abbey to not even mention Christina

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<sup>80</sup> *GA*, I, p. 105.

<sup>81</sup> *GA*, I, p. 98.

<sup>82</sup> *GA*, I, p. 100. It seems more likely, although not possible to confirm, that this was absent from the original *vita* text and added into the *Gesta Abbatum*, rather than that the Tiberius *Life* redactor omitted it.

<sup>83</sup> The basis of this work, which has been widely accepted with minor alterations, is the corpus of Vivian Galbraith: 'The *Historia Aurea* of John, Vicar of Tynemouth, and the Sources of the St Albans Chronicle (1327-1377)', in *Essays in History Presented to Reginald Lane Poole*, ed. H. W. C. Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), pp. 279-298; 'Thomas Walsingham and the St Albans Chronicle, 1272-1422', *English Historical Review*, 47 (1932), 12-30; and *The St Albans Chronicle 1406-1420* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937). The most useful recent work is James Clark, 'Thomas Walsingham Reconsidered: Books and Learning at Late-Medieval St Albans', *Speculum*, 77 (2002), 832-860.

<sup>84</sup> Mark Hagger, 'The *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*: Litigation and History at St Albans', *Institute of Historical Research: OnlineEarly* (2007), forthcoming in *Historical Research* (2008).

by name.<sup>85</sup> His scathing comments were incorporated into Paris's autograph manuscript Cotton Nero D.i., which arranged the material into abbacies and continued it up to 1255.<sup>86</sup> Along with Paris mentioning Christina's embroidered gifts for Adrian IV,<sup>87</sup> these are the only notice given to Markyate in any of the extant continuations of the chronicle until Walsingham's manuscript, Claudius E.iv. That Paris did not seek out any further details suggests the intimate connection between St Albans and the Markyate priory was in abeyance by the mid-thirteenth century.

Intermittent continuations of the chronicle during the Abbacy of Roger (1263-90), and again in the first half of the fourteenth century, were brought together in the major revised edition BL MS Add. 62777.<sup>88</sup> Telling the narrative from its mythical foundation by King Offa to the first year of the abbacy of Hugh Eversden (1307-27), this manuscript was probably written during the revival of historical writing during the early abbacy of Thomas de la Mare.<sup>89</sup> Christina and the house at Markyate are entirely missing. Perhaps in revising the account of the de Gorhams the author felt her help in securing papal indulgences ill-matched with being the recipient of Geoffrey's profligacy and so chose to omit both: the mitres and slippers are mentioned as beautiful and welcomed gifts but Christina is not credited as their manufacturer.<sup>90</sup>

The interpolated redaction from Christina's *vita* is only found in Thomas Walsingham's collection Cotton MS Claudius E.iv, which extensively copies the Paris Nero and Add. 62777 accounts and continues them down to 1381. Koopmans believes the interpolation of Christina's story to have been the work of one of the anonymous continuators in response to the visit of Henry III to embellish the tomb of Roger and Sigar in 1257.<sup>91</sup> However this relies on a lost revision of Matthew Paris (for which there is no evidence), from which the writer of Add. 62777 chose to deviate despite the positive account the story gives of St Albans. It seems much more likely that Walsingham, writing less than thirty years after Add. 62777, added the story.<sup>92</sup> The

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<sup>85</sup> GA, I, p. 95.

<sup>86</sup> Antonia Grandsden suggests that this mirrored his arrangement of the *Chronica Maiora*, but using abbacies rather than year divisions. *Historical Writing in England*, I, pp. 274-275.

<sup>87</sup> Cotton MS Nero D.i, fol. 48vb.

<sup>88</sup> All of the extant continuations are anonymous, although Galbraith believes the last to be the work of the next St Albans chronicler after Paris, William Rishanger. Galbraith, *St Albans Chronicle*, p. xxxii.

<sup>89</sup> James Clark dates BL, Additional MS 62777 to the third quarter of the fourteenth century under the direct commission of the abbot. 'Walsingham Reconsidered', p. 844.

<sup>90</sup> Addit. MS 62777, fol. 108v.

<sup>91</sup> Koopmans, 'Conclusion', pp. 673-674.

<sup>92</sup> James Clark cogently argues that since Walsingham breaks off the *Gesta Abbatum* in 1381 this part of the manuscript was copied shortly after he had completed the *Liber Benefactorum*, BL, Cotton MS Nero D.viii;

composite Claudius volume is marked by contemporary enthusiasm at St Albans for local spiritual heroics. It includes the reproduction of two late twelfth-century *vitae Albani* and a unique collection of miracle stories for Saints Alban and Amphibulus probably composed by Walsingham, as well as the 'De Fundatione' redacted from Christina's *Life*. Walsingham's compositions and compilations are extensive and it seems unnecessary to posit a lost and anonymous document when he had every reason to revive the Christina story.

## II.V William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*

Regrettably none of the extant accounts of Christina are contemporary documents. She is not even noticed by Henry of Huntingdon despite his interest in the Abbey of St Albans and his witnessing not only the original land grant for Markyate, but possibly also her father's gift to Ramsey Abbey.<sup>93</sup> Henry's *Historia Anglorum*, which includes an account of Wulfric of Haselbury's pious asceticism, was substantially complete by 1140, before either the *vitae* of Christina or of her contemporary Wulfric existed.<sup>94</sup> Either the Archdeacon deliberately omitted Christina as an expression of loyalty to Robert Bloet and the Bishops of Lincoln or because of his stern disapproval of uncanonical behaviour, or the stories of her sanctity had not spread as Wulfric's had.

Christina does, however, play a supporting-cast role William of Malmesbury's *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum* (completed 1125). Malmesbury's account of her nemesis Bishop Robert Bloet is a passage with a curious textual transmission, undergoing multiple revisions in Malmesbury's later years. In its first recension Malmesbury gives an extremely damning account of Bloet, which is erased in some manuscripts, and in later revisions the most offensive parts - including the account of Bloet's exchange with the hermit Roger - are altogether removed. Why such prudence was required of the Benedictine historian and hagiographer is unclear; perhaps Hamilton is correct to ascribe it to self-moderation of youthful sarcasm.<sup>95</sup> The passage is a very rare

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however other parts cannot have existed before the early 1390s, since they includes a miracle story occurring in 1393. *Monastic Renaissance*, p. 106.

<sup>93</sup> BL, Cotton MS charters xi.6 and *Cartularium Monasterii De Rameseia*, ed., W. H. Hart, 3 vols (RS 79, 1886), I, p. 138. On the problems with the identification of this charter see Talbot, 'Introduction', p. 11.

<sup>94</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, bk. ix, ch. 54. Diana Greenway has established that the six different versions of Henry's chronicle were completed in 1129 (1&2), 1138 (3), 1146 (4), 1149 (5) and 1154 (6), *Historia Anglorum*, p. lxvi.

<sup>95</sup> See 'Preface', in William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum: Libre Quinque*, ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton (RS 52, 1870), p. xv. There is no correlation in dates between the revised *Gesta Pontificum* and Koopmans' suggestion that factions at St Albans sought to erase Christina from record after the death of Abbot Geoffrey in 1146, so this cannot be the reason for Malmesbury's edits.

contemporary reference to Roger, and it singles out both his asceticism and his prophetic powers as they are employed against the bishop. Roger predicts Bloet's death during an altercation over the hermit's harbouring of a virgin who had fled her husband; in response Bloet accuses Roger of an insolence only protected by his monastic status.<sup>96</sup> Pitiably for the enthusiastic collectors of stories about Roger, the copy of Malmesbury's *Gesta Pontificum* held by the St Albans library is one of the late redactions that omit this incident, and it is therefore not picked up in any of the texts commemorating Roger or Christina.<sup>97</sup>

The story is particularly interesting as it throws into relief a key discrepancy in Christina's *Life*. Despite being portrayed as terrified of being discovered with the hermits, the very people Christina was hiding from know exactly where she is.<sup>98</sup> The first place her parents look is amongst the recluses of Huntingdon, and her husband Burthred firstly suspects that she will be with Roger and then with Alfwen.<sup>99</sup> Her accomplice Loric is rapidly found and killed, and Burthred comes straight to Roger's cell after a terrifying vision of Mary commanding him to release Christina.<sup>100</sup> The *Life* says that Roger planned not to speak with Christina when she moved in, "[n]on tamen consensit ipse videre faciem illius vel loqui cum ea sed per Acioent", so that Alfwen could have no reason to accuse him before the Bishop for causing dissension, "que non haberet apud episcopum excusacionem que accusabat [eum ut] dissidii reum".<sup>101</sup> Presumably this caution was either because Alfwen might tell Bloet of Christina's location, or because Bloet already knew and dissension would give him the pretext to have Christina taken away. That Christina was unable to stay at Markyate after Roger's death for fear of the bishop strongly suggests it was Roger's position that had protected her on land that was under Bloet's episcopal jurisdiction.

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<sup>96</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. Michael Winterbottom and others, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), bk. iv, ch. 177.7β, p. 476, (this edition will be used throughout unless otherwise noted).

<sup>97</sup> On the manuscript revisions, including the St Albans manuscript, London, BL, Royal MS 13.D.v, see Hamilton, 'Preface', *De Gestis Pontificum*, pp. xx-xxvi and Winterbottom, 'Introduction', *Gesta Pontificum*, pp. xi-xxv.

<sup>98</sup> *Life*, ch. 39, p. 104.

<sup>99</sup> *Life*, ch. 34, p. 94.

<sup>100</sup> *Life*, ch. 36, p. 96 and ch. 42, p. 108.

<sup>101</sup> *Life*, ch. 38, p. 100.

## II.VI The Hildesheim Psalter (Dombibliothek MS St Godehard 1)

The most illuminating and tangible contemporary text is the beautiful Hildesheim Psalter, originally made for St Albans and diverted by Abbot Geoffrey for Christina's use. Although not a narrative source, the psalter is a key piece of evidence for Christina's social positioning and contains material written personally for her, so should be considered here.

The volume is a complex composition. A luxury piece fit for a queen, it includes a Calendar that combines commemorations from Ramsey and St Albans with obits for Christina's family and friends;<sup>102</sup> forty full page miniatures illustrating the life of Christ including one of the legend of St Martin;<sup>103</sup> a quire of mixed texts including a life of St Alexis, the letter of Pope Gregory on the use of images written in Latin and French, three miniatures of the Emmaus story and a 'psychomachia' on spiritual battle; the psalter proper; canticles and creed; a litany taken from St Albans with some additions (notably including some women whose sanctity was marked by escaping unwanted male attentions); a selection of prayers;<sup>104</sup> and a final diptych of the martyrdom of St Albans and David and his musicians.

How it came to be owned by a "vagrant recluse"<sup>105</sup> has generated extensive debate around its composition, which was in stages with several different scribes involved.<sup>106</sup> Morgan Powell has radically revised existing assumptions that the Alexis quire was a late addition in the 1130s or 1140s to a volume primarily fabricated c.1120 to 1130. Following Ursula Nilgen's lead he shows that secondary stitch holes indicate sections which began as additions to the psalter Christina already owned, in particular the Alexis quire which contains Geoffrey's autograph writings for her and the kalendar that

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<sup>102</sup> Except the detailed obit for Roger, these were all added in one hand sometime after Christina's death in the later-twelfth century. The death of her sister and fellow nun Margaret is as remarkably absent from the Psalter as it is from the *Lié*.

<sup>103</sup> Although amongst the first to exist for private meditation rather than liturgical use, the Hildesheim cycle has close connections with similar work in other psalters, T. H. Heslop, 'Recycling Picture Cycles: The Case of Christina's Psalter', Paper delivered at the Christina of Markyate and the St Albans Psalter Conference, 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug 2003, St Albans. A colour facsimile and discussion of the cycle is found in Geddes, *St Albans Psalter*, pp. 19-66.

<sup>104</sup> A detached page of collects from the volume is held in the Schnütgen Museum, Cologne. See Pächt et al, *Psalter*, p. viii.

<sup>105</sup> Powell, 'Making the Psalter', p. 297.

<sup>106</sup> For a summary of scholarship on the Hildesheim Psalter to 2005, see Jane Geddes, 'The Debate', <<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/essays/debate.shtml>> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008].

connects Christina to her home neighbourhood.<sup>107</sup> Powell identifies the Alexis quire as “the distilled and materialized results” of conversations between the abbot and the holy woman and the “preconception” for making the psalter.<sup>108</sup> The miniature cycle and the Alexis illustrations must have been made shortly after c.1124 when Geoffrey and Christina met, since the Alexis Master was working at St Albans in the 1120s. Powell demonstrates from the later hand of the outer bifolio that the psalter was not collated with the other Hildesheim texts until the late-1130s or early-1140s. His work corroborates the contention of this thesis that Christina performed sanctity according to the models she knew, in a symbiotic relationship between her literal and her literary *corpora*. Not only did Geoffrey arrange for some of her visions to be illustrated in the psalter, but meditation on the psalter informed her visionary experiences.<sup>109</sup>

It is important to contextualise the manufacture of the Hildesheim Psalter within the wider production of St Albans’ scriptorium. For example sometime between 1152 and 1170 they made a less elaborate but still elite psalter for Matilda de Bailleul, Abbess of Wherwell, with the kalendar and litany being adapted for her Flemish origins from a St Albans base.<sup>110</sup> Like Christina’s psalter this was a personal rather than an institutional gift, and it too remained as a convent possession after Matilda’s death. What is remarkable about the personalisation of the Hildesheim Psalter is a question of degree and personal contact between Christina and Geoffrey. It was not a move that was alien to the productions of the house – hence perhaps why it was the rebuilding of Markyate after fire rather than this expensive gift that irked Adam the Cellarer so much.

### III. A Twelfth-Century Story in Fourteenth-Century Texts?

Evidently then, Christina’s story is problematic even before it is problematised. All the texts from which it is gleaned reflect and create situated agenda that de-centre the holy woman in favour of one or other of her St Albans male intimates, Roger and Geoffrey. Moreover the Tiberius and Claudius *vita* redactions not only need to be read conjointly and intertextually, their historical position also alters the understanding of sainthood in the story. By the fourteenth century, vision-literature was well established on the continent and at home; the holy women of Liège had attracted the attentions and

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<sup>107</sup> *Life*, ch. 37, p. 98. Powell, ‘Making the Psalter’, pp. 300-304. Powell’s codicological thesis is the most convincing, but he does not explain why the psalter and miniature cycle made originally for St Albans were of suitable dimensions to be incorporated alongside other sections designed for Christina’s existing psalter.

<sup>108</sup> Powell, ‘Making the Psalter’, pp. 308 and 301.

<sup>109</sup> See the discussion of visionary praxis below pp. 222-226.

<sup>110</sup> Cambridge, St Johns College MS 68. Other illustrated psalters were made for the convents of Littlemore and Shaftsbury, see Thomson, *Manuscripts*, pp. 34-38 and 56-60.

approbation of no less pertinent a figure than Matthew Paris,<sup>111</sup> and Richard Rolle was popular reading at the Abbey.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless the importance of miracles as the primary attestation of holiness was considerably more pronounced in the fourteenth century than it had been in the twelfth, which is reflected in the selection of charismatic events picked out for record in the Claudius *Gesta Abbatum*. Conversely the socio-political climate affects the construction of the texts. Scornful marginalia in the 1366 Tiberius manuscript notes beside Geoffrey's contumacy, "*more Normannorum*", following the custom of the Normans.<sup>113</sup> The anonymous monk's contempt is understandable in the context of the political crises and military defeats England was then suffering after the revival of hostilities with France in 1369. By 1381, however, the contemporary threat to the Abbey was coming from St Alban's own townspeople who had done violence to the abbey possessions.<sup>114</sup> Consequently it is Christina's protection of the monastery that underlies Walsingham's selection and interpretation of events. When she shields Geoffrey from travel in the Claudius *Gesta Abbatum* it is to the great convenience to the monastery, "*ad magnum tam monasterii sui commodum*", with no mention of the dangerous political situation found in the Tiberius *Life*.<sup>115</sup>

Despite the ambiguity introduced by fourteenth-century meanings, it is still reasonable to seek a twelfth-century account in these sources. Although the Tiberius omits material from the original *vita*, the Claudius confirms the authenticity of its original tone and phrasing. Moreover the Tiberius redactor does not revise the awkward descriptions of manifestations of holiness that were unfamiliar to the original Writer but well established by the fourteenth century. Christina is a much more familiar, *safer* holy woman by the fourteenth century and the redactor also therefore had limited reason to edit out visions that were normal signs of holiness. It is therefore possible to accept the Tiberius *Life* as a secure, though admittedly abridged, twelfth-century text.

The survival and revival of interest in this twelfth-century *vita* during the abbacy of Thomas de la Mare makes sense in the light of enthusiasm for Roger, Siger, and Adam the Cellarer as potentially saintly figures from the same period, who nevertheless lack

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<sup>111</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Maiora*, IV, p. 278.

<sup>112</sup> Sometime after 1420 St Albans obtained a copy of Rolle's commentary on the psalter (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley MS 467) which inspired much enthusiastic monastic marginal annotation, see Clark, *Monastic Renaissance*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>113</sup> Cotton MS Tiberius E.i, fol. 159v.

<sup>114</sup> *GA*, III, from pp. 285. On Thomas Walsingham and the Peasants Revolt see John Taylor and Wendy Childs, 'Introduction', *The St Albans Chronicle: The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), pp. lxxxv-xcii.

<sup>115</sup> *GA*, I, p. 104.

*vita* evidence of their own. Although attention was not specifically focused on Christina, her *vita* had a more accessible, and therefore appreciable, hagiographic format.<sup>116</sup> Walsingham's repeated use of the *vita* suggests that the stories demonstrating Roger's holiness did not extend much beyond it; if the tablet over his tomb contained any other evidence of his alleged many miracles, "*multorum miraculorum patratore fuit*", then it was lost by the 1180s.<sup>117</sup> Presumably another text informed Walsingham of Siger's nightly repairs from Northawe and powers over the birds, since he was not resident at the abbey.<sup>118</sup> Adam the Cellarer's grave, on the other hand, was a popular and tangible thaumaturgic relic in Walsingham's own time. At St Albans' dependent priory in Tynemouth a Danish recluse Henry of Coquet (d.c.1129) was an important saint who had made it into John of Tynemouth's collection; but flight from arranged marriages must not have been a motif that Walsingham valued since he did not call upon the story despite its echoes with that of Christina. Earlier, Matthew Paris had accorded revelations to the ascetic Abbot John, including the prophecy of his own death and antiphonal singing with angels;<sup>119</sup> but again the similarity between this miracle and Leofric and Acio in Christina's *Life* failed to engage Walsingham's attention, who records neither event.<sup>120</sup> If their visionary Abbot was not of particular interest to the Abbey, however, their martyred founder St Alban and his supposed helpmeet Amphibalus certainly were.<sup>121</sup> In Christina's time Alban's legend was emerging into a clearly visible cult: Abbot Geoffrey's great project was his elaborate shrine and translation in 1129,<sup>122</sup> and in c.1167-1178 the monk William produced the first in-house *Passio* of the two saints which was soon versified and had miracles collections appended. Ralph of Dunstable's versification (c.1195-1214) was incorporated by Walsingham into the Claudius compendium, and earned him a mention for industry in the 'De Fundatione'.<sup>123</sup> If Roger was the impetus for the

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<sup>116</sup> My interpretation contrasts with the more absolute position taken by Rachel Koopmans who argues the fourteenth century evidence "focused as it is on Roger and Siger, is far from a renewal of serious interest in Christina", 'Conclusion', p. 696.

<sup>117</sup> Walsingham, 'De Fundatione', p. 302.

<sup>118</sup> It is unlikely that he was one of the hermits living with Roger, as Roscarrock suggests (Camb, Addit. MS 3041, fol. 399r), but he may have been under Roger's spiritual direction.

<sup>119</sup> *GA*, I, pp. 249 and 230-231.

<sup>120</sup> *Life*, ch. 38, pp. 98-100.

<sup>121</sup> On the early history of the cult, relics and texts of St Alban see Wilhelm Levison, 'St Albans and St Albans', *Antiquity*, 15 (1941), 337-359. For the ongoing centrality of their patron saint at St Albans abbey into the later middle ages see James Clark, 'The St Albans Monks and the Cult of Alban: The Later Medieval Texts', in *Alban and St Albans; Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art and Archaeology*, ed. Martin Henig and Phillip Lindley (Leeds: The British Archaeological Association: 2001), pp. 218-230.

<sup>122</sup> *GA*, I, pp. 83-88

<sup>123</sup> Cotton MS Claudius E.iv, fols. 47-58v, and 'De Fundatione', p. 304.

fourteenth-century reproductions and salvaging of Christina's story it was as part of a wider interest, and the provenance of these sources show that Christina was never anything more than a local saint and intercessor at St Albans.

#### IV. Christina's Social Networks

The narrative sources show that Christina built up a web of associates which changed in kind and degree of influence as the positioning of her social identity changed. These included ongoing close family (kinship) attachment, ties to a network of English recluses in the surrounding counties, the women of her own community, friends in other religious houses, and the support of some of the greatest ecclesiastics in the land. What they do not indicate is that she was venerated in the town attached to the Abbey of St Albans or amongst the local laity in general. The individuals who populate the *Life* take on brightest colour where they relate to Christina's domestic sphere and fade where they are powerful prelates who give Christina prestigious contacts.

Christina belonged to a close family from the old Anglo-Saxon urban elite whom the Anglo-Norman lordship tried to get 'on-side'. Her parents were important figures at the merchants' guild, and Christina was known personally to the town reeve and citizens.<sup>124</sup> The significant position of her father, at least in Christina's eyes (as we must assume she related the story of her escape) is expressed most emotively in her shame at the demeaning status of her servant-companion Loric during her flight, "*[a]d quod verbum etsi Christina verecundaretur et obstupesceret tum quia indignum ut Aucti filia reperiretur in campo cum tali puero*".<sup>125</sup> Christina was particularly fond of her aunt who aided her flight from Huntingdon,<sup>126</sup> and Alveva has an obit in the Hildesheim Psalter despite her relations with Ranulf Flambard being the beginnings of Christina's trials.<sup>127</sup> After the early persecution of her parents, Autti and Beatrix, Christina was eventually reconciled with them, offering them some kind of refuge in later years.<sup>128</sup> Her siblings Margaret, Gregory and Matilda form key parts of the cast for Christina's clairvoyant powers,<sup>129</sup> and she is credited with having been instrumental in several

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<sup>124</sup> *Life*, ch. 32, p. 88.

<sup>125</sup> *Life*, ch. 31, p. 86.

<sup>126</sup> *Life*, ch. 32, p. 88.

<sup>127</sup> *Life*, ch. 5, p. 40. Hildesheim Psalter, p. 3, obit on 24<sup>th</sup> January.

<sup>128</sup> *Life*, ch. 20, p. 68.

<sup>129</sup> The names of Autti (of Danish extraction) and Beatrix's children present a curious problem on the question of myth-making. Margaret, Matilda and Christina form a royal and pseudo-saintly Anglo-Norman trio (St Margaret of Scotland and her daughters), yet this cannot reflect a new trend for giving Anglo-Saxon children Norman names,

members of the Huntingdon household taking the habit.<sup>130</sup> Christina therefore does not appear to have severed her links with Huntingdon; indeed her family became integrated into her mature life, although they are rarely in the foreground of the text.

Amongst Christina's early friends was Canon Sueno, an elderly Augustinian from the local Priory of St Mary who acted as a spiritual mentor through Christina's childhood.<sup>131</sup> The prior Fredebert and his canons were also known to the family and Autti uses them to arbitrate between himself and his daughter.<sup>132</sup> Thus although Christina is portrayed as having hankered for the Benedictine life since her earliest youth, she nevertheless had ongoing interaction with Augustinian canons, which is also reflected in the witnesses to the charters founding her priory at Markyate.<sup>133</sup> She had a further religious supporter in her father's chaplain who intervened on her behalf with the other key figure from Huntingdon, Christina's well-meaning but feeble husband Burthred.<sup>134</sup> Burthred was a decent local lad, sufficiently noble to own several properties and build another, but the low social status of his two brothers caused Roger to question their suitability as sponsors when Burthred finally came to have his marriage to Christina annulled.<sup>135</sup> The *Life* carefully records the annulment witnesses, lest any doubt be cast on Archbishop Thursan's subsequent ratification, but all except the Markyate community were local priests of no particularly prestigious social standing.<sup>136</sup> Overall the picture is of a girl who was a 'known face' in the secular sphere of Huntingdon town and retained some links with it after she left. Christina was able to mobilise support from the same networks of family and ecclesiastical houses which included other members who opposed her.

When Christina left Huntingdon she became part of a hermit network that spread across several counties.<sup>137</sup> The profusion of hermits in the twelfth century was

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as Christina was baptised Theodora. Margaret and their brother Gregory might have taken the names in religion, but this neither explains Matilda nor their fifth sibling Symon of Huntingdon, a layman who witnessed the Markyate foundation charter. A conclusive answer to this question would substantially alter Christina studies. More generally on spiritual relationships between siblings see Fiona Griffiths, 'Siblings and the Sexes within the Medieval Religious Life', *Church History*, 77 (2008), 26-53.

<sup>130</sup> For example the unnamed monk, *Life*, ch. 26, p. 78. She is also implicated in the choices of Margaret, Gregory and Helisen.

<sup>131</sup> *Life*, ch. 3, pp. 36-38.

<sup>132</sup> *Life*, ch. 15-19, pp. 58-66.

<sup>133</sup> BL, Cotton MSS charters xi.8 and xi.6. These are in edited in several places including facsimiles in Pächt, *AP*, plates 172 and 169, and transcriptions in Gibbs, nos. 154 and 156 and *Monasticon*, III, p. 372 nos. VI and VII.

<sup>134</sup> *Life*, ch. 21, p. 68.

<sup>135</sup> *Life*, ch. 8, p. 46 and ch. 42, p. 108.

<sup>136</sup> *Life*, ch. 42, p. 108.

<sup>137</sup> On these hermit-networks see Jones 'Hermits and Anchorites of England'.

remarkable; the contemporary ascetic Peter Damian observed that “it seemed as if the whole world would be turned into a hermitage”.<sup>138</sup> Henry Mayr-Harting has shown that the social role of the hermit was diverse and included arbitration both within communities and between rulers and ruled.<sup>139</sup> The Anglo-Saxon hermits of the area were important to the social and religious rhythms of Christina’s family life. Her parents made regular visits to the local hermit Godwin, and it is to the hermits that her family first go looking for her. Christina directly approached Eadwin of Higney for help, but he feared her parents and so was unable to hide her, “*quod ipse propter parentes eius ausus non fuit*”.<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless he located a number of possible hiding options, from which Christina chose the venerable Alfwen at Flamstead who was loved by Roger for her holiness, “*Rogero valde dilectam propter sanctitatem suam*”.<sup>141</sup> Perhaps Eadwin had raised her hopes regarding his kinsman Roger before he set out, only to be sent away for trying to destroy marriages, or perhaps her choice was affected by the Writer in his shaping of Christina into a ‘St Albans’ holy-woman. Certainly Elkins creates a false social distancing when she suggests that Christina’s choice to flee to the hermits and anchorites was “outside the structures of her parent’s society”.<sup>142</sup> In fact they were very much part of the structures of her parents’ society, although it was not what they wanted for their gifted daughter. Christina’s relationship with Alfwen was a close friendship; she was received with joy, protected and mentored, and Alfwen was able to verify the visionary abilities of her young charge.<sup>143</sup> Even this first anchorhold contained a small community who witnessed Alfwen telling Christina about her parents plans to find and kill Loric, “*et ceperunt amici super hoc contristar*”.<sup>144</sup> Christina’s first experience of religious life then was under the direction of an astute and perhaps formidable woman, who gave Christina a model of informal female spiritual authority which she reflected back in her later relationships.

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<sup>138</sup> “*Tantus namque in sancti viri pectore faciendi fructus ardor incanduerat, ut effectis numquam contentus, dum alia faceret, ad facienda mox alia properaret: adeo ut putaretur totum mundum in heremum velle convertere et monachio ordini omnem populi multitudinem sotiare*”. Peter Damian, *Vita Beati Romualdi*, ed. G. Tabacco, (Rome: Nella Sede dell’Istituto Palazzo Borromini, 1957). Citation from Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism: A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe, 1000-1150* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 2.

<sup>139</sup> Henry Mayr-Harting, ‘Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse’, *History*, 60 (1975), 337-352. See also Susan Ridyard, ‘Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse Revisited: the case of Godric of Finchale’, in *Belief and Culture*, pp. 236-250.

<sup>140</sup> *Life*, ch. 29, p. 82.

<sup>141</sup> *Life*, ch. 31, p. 86.

<sup>142</sup> Elkins, *Holy Women*, p. 32.

<sup>143</sup> *Life*, ch. 34, p. 92 and ch. 36, p. 96.

<sup>144</sup> *Life*, ch. 36, p. 96.

The account of these two years at Flamstead is terse because the *Life* is framed to prevent any other women from playing a significant part in Christina's spiritual journey. Geoffrey de Gorham acceded to the abbacy of St Albans in 1119, around the time that Christina moved to Roger's cell. Since Geoffrey's predecessor Richard d'Albini had been related to Robert Bloet, Christina's presence at Markyate would previously have placed Roger in an invidious position, and perhaps the transfer of power was a trigger for her move.<sup>145</sup> Markyate, like Flamstead, was a small community with five other hermits and additional servants. Although Christina is supposed to have suffered near solitary confinement she came to know at least Acio well, and his obit is commemorated in the Hildesheim Psalter.<sup>146</sup> Roger provided the initial link between Christina and St Albans, where he was a deacon, which flourished into Christina's subsequent friendship with the monk Alvered some years before she got to know the abbot.<sup>147</sup> In addition Roger was in a position of authority over a number of religious and secular persons in the neighbourhood, some of whom, such as Godescalc, Christina got to know.<sup>148</sup> The transition of Markyate from hermitage to foundation was one of gradual change, and it is possible that members of the male hermitage stayed on for some years. The *Life* makes no further reference to the hermit network once Christina has returned from her time in exile and Markyate begins to emerge as a female priory. This disappearance is both a deliberate rhetorical strategy by the Writer to emphasise Christina's ties to St Albans, and a reflection of her attention being reoriented towards her own burgeoning community and her beloved Geoffrey.

The women of the priory of Markyate form the supporting cast in the second half of Christina's saintly portrait. They are a visionary community around her, both experiencing visions and witnessing and verifying her charismatic abilities. Christina held these *puellae*, with whom she spent most of her adult life, in great affection, although she was also a tough mistress who did not tolerate insubordination.<sup>149</sup> During the indeterminate years of Markyate's foundation, and perhaps afterwards, the religious women both travelled and received visitors. By maintaining kinship ties the

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<sup>145</sup> Roger probably held a level of pastoral authority over Alfwen and could instruct her. Since Alfwen objected to Christina being moved there is no reason to assume this happened because of disagreement between the women or Alfwen's death. For these ideas see Talbot, 'Introduction', p. 19, and *Butler's Lives of the Saints: December*, revised by Kathleen Jones, (Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 2000), pp. 53-56.

<sup>146</sup> See *Life*, ch. 39, pp. 102-4 and ch. 38, p. 100. Hildesheim Psalter, p. 5, 31<sup>st</sup> March. Henrietta Leyser points out that in contrast to the *Life* the *Gesta Abbatum* locates Christina in a small shed near to the hermitage, presumably because of the normative power of female enclosure by the fourteenth century, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-1500* (London: Phoenix, 1995), p. 201.

<sup>147</sup> *Life*, ch. 56, p. 134.

<sup>148</sup> *Life*, ch. 43, p. 112.

<sup>149</sup> See for example *Life*, ch. 82-83, pp. 188-190.

*puellae* created a secular social network in neighbouring counties, but the absence of any large-scale donations to the priory suggest that these families were of the middling-kind or lower.<sup>150</sup> Christina also had friends and associates at religious houses in the surrounding counties and the capital, and her holy reputation attracted interest from traditional Benedictine monasteries and Augustinian canons, rather than the new monastic orders.<sup>151</sup> The *Life* devotes a long passage to a vision received by the Cluniac Simon, a leading member of the house of Bermondsey near London, who received spiritual outpourings through his familiarity with Christina.<sup>152</sup> This personal friendship between the ascetic sacrist and the virgin facilitated an institutional association between the two houses, with a Gervase, monk of Bermondsey witnessing the Markyate foundation charter. The nonchalant introduction of Simon into the narrative suggests that Christina had other monastic friends not identified in the *Life*, and which perhaps did not originate in the Markyate-St Albans bond. There is certainly a glaring absence of association with the canons of St Pauls', on whose land she lived. Perhaps her close personal relationship with the Abbey of St Albans militated against any great intimacy with her landlords, who were certainly slow and legalistic in their dealings with her. Also not visible in the *vita* redactions are the associations that must have existed with other female houses in the vicinity which were close to the concerns of Abbot Geoffrey. In particular the nunnery at Sopwell which emerged from the same charismatic hermit-leadership as Markyate is not mentioned, although Alveva, the first prioress of Sopwell, has an obit in the St Albans psalter, suggesting that there was a close bond of institutional and/or personal friendship.<sup>153</sup>

Obviously Christina's social identity is formed in the narrative sources primarily through her relationship with Abbot Geoffrey of St Albans, a figure of national influence both through his relatives and as a court player in his own right. Koopmans believes that the *vita* deliberately suppressed Christina's close relationships with other religious houses and the anchoritic network in order to promote this one.<sup>154</sup> Jane Geddes recently suggested that Christina and Abbot Geoffrey met at Roger's funeral in 1122, but it is more likely that Talbot's original dating of c.1124 is correct, given that Archbishop Thurstan of York rather than Abbot Geoffrey arranged protection for Christina after Roger's death, and an existing acquaintance would surely have caused

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<sup>150</sup> *Life*, ch. 59, p. 140. This damaged passage relates Christina's sister Margaret visiting the mother of another *puella* in Westminster.

<sup>151</sup> All the monastic witnesses to the foundation charters for Markyate and all of Christina's religious contacts in the *Life*, excepting the hermits, are from Benedictine or Augustinian houses.

<sup>152</sup> *Life*, ch. 77, p. 174-176.

<sup>153</sup> Hildesheim Psalter, p. 5, 20<sup>th</sup> March.

<sup>154</sup> Koopmans, 'Conclusion' and 'Dining'.

Geoffrey's first message to Christina to be less abrupt.<sup>155</sup> Christina's relationship with the wider St Albans abbey community was divided. The *vir religiosus* Evisandus was a particular friend of both the Abbot and the holy woman, and is perhaps identifiable as the Evianus who appears to stroke Christina's face during her raptures.<sup>156</sup> However the Writer accuses her detractors of a jealous incapacity to reach the spiritual heights of their more inspired colleagues who visited Markyate with relatively free regularity.<sup>157</sup>

As an intercessor and charismatic leader the prioress focused her attentions on aid which fostered existing coenobitic ties, and certainly is not shown to have gone out of her way to be helpful to her secular environs. In this sense Christina is firmly rooted in an Anglo-Saxon monastic model of sanctity which featured miracles dominated by visions and individual cures, rather than practical aid to a peasantry troubled by weather and harvest.<sup>158</sup> Christina's only healing miracle cures a girl sent to her from Canterbury by a vision of St Margaret,<sup>159</sup> suggesting that her secular fame encompassed a number of counties. However the incident is also noteworthy for Christina's hearty protestations, exceeding those of a modesty topos, which show that she did not see her saintly abilities as freely available to ordinary locals. Perhaps Christina was ultimately less successful in gaining veneration than her mentor Roger because she avoided fostering bonds with the secular world in which she was geographically situated.

The *Life* also situates Christina as having a social identity amongst the bishops and ecclesiastical elite of her day. Both Christina and Abbot Geoffrey are said to have been known and praised in many parts of England before their friendship caused gossip.<sup>160</sup> But whilst other evidence demonstrates that Geoffrey moved in court circles, Christina's reputation is aggrandised by magnifying quite prosaic encounters with powerful figures into an impression of a woman with more social impact than the evidence of her other social networks supports. A review of the powerful ecclesiastics linked with Christina is necessarily impressionistic and uncertain, but a case can be

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<sup>155</sup> Jane Geddes, 'The Personalities' <[www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/essays/personalities.shtml](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/essays/personalities.shtml)> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008], and Talbot, 'Introduction' p. 15. The passage could be a double bluff to discredit the archbishop by according him the blame for Christina's trials whilst away from Markyate, since Geoffrey and St Albans supported William of Corbeil in the York election dispute. Ultimately however the incident works out to Christina's spiritual benefit, so this seems unlikely. In her recent book Geddes returns to Talbot's original dating, *St Albans Psalter*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>156</sup> *Life*, ch. 66, p. 152 and ch. 75, p. 170.

<sup>157</sup> *Life*, ch. 64, pp. 148-150.

<sup>158</sup> See Catherine Cubitt, 'Universal and Local Saints in Anglo-Saxon England' in *Local Saints and Local Churches*, pp. 423-454, esp. p. 429.

<sup>159</sup> *Life*, chs. 46-47, pp. 118-120.

<sup>160</sup> *Life*, ch. 76, p. 174.

constructed for the Writer of the *Life* not so much inventing her encounters with the great and the good, as stretching the extent of their significance for her social identity.

Christina's first episcopal encounter was not a good one, with the Bishop of Durham setting his sights on her and then arranging her hated marriage. Although R. I. Moore has demonstrated the longstanding relationship between Ranulf Flambard and Christina's aunt which formed the background to his designs on Christina to be a plausible example of Anglo-Norman integration into English elites, Christina does not seem to benefit from the connection.<sup>161</sup> She had cousins at royal and episcopal courts and one was prebendary of the cathedral chapter of St Paul, but none appear to have been intimate with, or helpful to, her.<sup>162</sup> Flambard quickly became a stock villain in a variety of sources, and the *Life* perhaps exaggerates his persecutions of Christina in this vein. Flambard did not die until 1128, by which time Christina had been exiled from and returned to Markyate and was considering consecration, but it is the bishop of Lincoln, not Durham, who retained an active interest in the virgin. In Robert Bloet's need to ensure the smooth running of his morally dubious bribe-driven administration, this may have been more for show than an actual pursuit of a woman whose location, as has been seen, he long knew. The interview between Eadwin and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Ralph d'Escures, was a probably a formal one. The Archbishop is ascribed an emotive speech actively supporting Christina's flight from her marriage, which alters the tenor of the result of an audience in which Eadwin was basically informing on Robert Bloet to his superior.<sup>163</sup>

The considerable support and interest in Christina shown by Archbishop Thurstan of York is curious, since Christina was not under his archdiocesan jurisdiction. Contemporary relations between Thurstan and St Albans must have been tense: at the very beginning of Geoffrey's abbacy Thurstan had opposed the house regarding jurisdiction of the valuable priory of Tynemouth and then in 1125 Geoffrey was amongst the pro-Canterbury delegates to the papal curia in the primacy debate with York.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless the *Gesta Abbatum* interpolation describes Thurstan as the

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<sup>161</sup> Moore, 'Ranulf Flambard and Christina of Markyate'. Most work on intermarriage between Anglo-Saxon women and Anglo-Norman men has focused on questions of Norman power and assimilation rather than the Anglo-Saxon interests, see Cecily Clark, 'Women in England after 1066: The Factual Evidence', in *Words, Names and History: Selected Writings of Cecily Clark*, ed. Peter Jackson (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), pp. 58-73, Eleanor Searle, 'Women and the Legitimization of Succession at the Norman Conquest', *ANS*, 3 (1980), 159-170, and Thomas, *English and Normans*, pp. 138-160.

<sup>162</sup> For Flambard's relations see Frank Barlow, *William Rufus* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 202.

<sup>163</sup> *Life*, ch. 30, p. 84.

<sup>164</sup> *Hugh the Chantor: The History of the Church of York, 1066-1127*, ed. and trans. Charles Johnson (London: Thomas Nelson, 1961), p. 122.

devoted friend and admirer of Roger, “*amator et fautor castorum studiorum, et Rogero, propter sanctitatem suam, fidus et devotus amicus*”.<sup>165</sup> Roger seems to have been able to act with a considerable degree of independence from his abbey, sufficiently so that Thompson and Koopmans both cast doubt on his actual status as a monk there.<sup>166</sup> Therefore perhaps this friendship has more plausibility than at first seems possible and such a pre-existing bond clarifies why Roger might have approached him for help. If Roger was already venerated in his lifetime as a possible saint, then perhaps Thurstan also felt some obligation to help. Certainly, as Paulette L’Hermite-Leclercq points out, in the early 1120’s Christina did not have any official religious status, and unable to turn to the usual hierarchical structures she and Roger had to look further afield for support.<sup>167</sup> Nevertheless Christina’s social identity was in quite a different league to other religious women to whom Thurstan offered practical help, for example he had recently escorted Adela, daughter of William the Conqueror, to Marcigny to take the veil. We might suspect that rather than Thurstan’s suggestions of the elite houses at St Clement’s York, Marcigny and Fontevrault for Christina’s residence reflecting his “breadth of vision”,<sup>168</sup> they perhaps evince the imaginative powers of the Writer. Thurstan provided Christina with a safe place to hide on the petitioning of Roger, but probably not the ongoing support that the *Life* implies. Although he finally sorted out her convoluted matrimonial affairs, this was probably because her case had become too high profile for it to be dealt with by the archdiaconal courts. The visits to Christina from unspecified heads of celebrated and geographically scattered houses wishing to take her away is so lacking in specificity that, from a writer eager to amplify any connections that improved Christina’s apparent sphere of influence, they are surely hyperbole.<sup>169</sup>

The final bishop who shows interest in Christina in the *Life* is Alexander of Lincoln, but on close inspection this support is simply the appropriate and necessary involvement of a good and conscientious bishop.<sup>170</sup> Alexander had a close involvement with the Abbey of St Albans, where he was amongst the elite audience

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<sup>165</sup> *GA*, I, p. 100. It is possible, however, that this sentence is an embellishment to the original *vita* by Walsingham to augment the saintly Roger’s reputation.

<sup>166</sup> Thompson, *Women Religious*, p. 19 and Koopmans ‘Dining’, p. 152.

<sup>167</sup> L’Hermite-Leclercq, ‘Incertitudes et Contingences’, p. 132.

<sup>168</sup> Donald Nicholl, *Thurstan, Archbishop of York (1114-1140)* (York: Stonegate, 1964), p. 198.

<sup>169</sup> *Life* ch. 50, pp. 124-126.

<sup>170</sup> See A. G. Dyson, ‘The Monastic Patronage of Bishop Alexander of Lincoln’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 26 (1975), 1-24, (which should be used with caution), and Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order c.1130-c.1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), esp. pp. 83-86 for a discussion of Alexander’s support of religious women through the Gilbertine order. Golding makes a convincing case Alexander’s patronage extending little further than that of a “conscientious diocesan”.

that attended the dedication of the Abbey in 1115 and the relic translation in 1129,<sup>171</sup> and where he was involved in arranging provision for Sopwell in 1140.<sup>172</sup> It is therefore noteworthy that he, like his sycophantic archdeacon Henry of Huntingdon, does not appear to have been especially struck by Christina's sanctity. Thus what seems to be a text full of outrageous claims for intimacy with the big players of the realm sitting uncomfortably with Christina's absence from other records, turns out to be simply a favourable interpretation of a quite plausible set of links that would by no means require her to be a big player herself. There is no evidence that Christina commanded a royal interest, despite King Stephen getting involved in the Alchinus controversy that followed Geoffrey's death, and despite her interventions on Geoffrey's behalf in his dealings with King Stephen. Christina's patron and devotee Abbot Geoffrey does not seem to have passed his enthusiasm for the virgin on to any figures of the court sphere.

Christina, then, is more of a 'local' figure than her *Life* would like to make her out to be. That is to say, her reputation and credibility were debated and significant in Huntingdonshire and the areas of the South East linked to St Albans. Her involvement in the politics of the day, as will be explored further in the next chapter, whilst not to be discounted, did not place her in a position of influence at the highest levels.

## V. Two *Familiae*

It has been established that Christina's story was strategically revived in the fourteenth century because it was a uniquely informative source that met a contemporary demand at St Albans. Looking at her social identity and position she is found to be only locally, or at best regionally, famous with fewer socially elevated contacts than the Writer would have us believe. It is valuable to move these contexts on to think about the expectations in terms of identity performance that her status commanded, as a preliminary stage in considering how Christina negotiated her position in relationship to dominant discourses.

Christina spent the first thirty to thirty-five years of her life with a very nebulous status. Confusion over whether or not she was married was compounded by the informality of her religious position with no apparent steady income such as would be attached to a

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<sup>171</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, bk. ix, ch. 2.

<sup>172</sup> *GA*, I, pp. 81-82.

private or monastically funded hermitage.<sup>173</sup> Onto this ambiguity the Writer imposes the two oppositional yet complementary modes of womanhood that inscribe and control female saints into stable sacred forms: 'ideal noble woman' and 'ideal holy woman'.<sup>174</sup> Christina certainly operated in these two distinct yet overlapping fields: whilst the *Lifé* is a special pleading for her racy past, it is evident that she nonetheless carried the skills and attitudes – what Pierre Bourdieu identifies as *habitus* – of her secular status into her religious life.<sup>175</sup> This is not a novel observation on female sainthood; the great abbesses of the Anglo-Saxon period were honoured specifically for bringing their experience and connections as royal or noble ladies to bear on their position within the abbey.<sup>176</sup> Albeit that Christina is quite rightly read in the context of twelfth-century individualism, making choices based on her internal motivations, she equally fits within Penelope Johnson's contemporary paradigm of the female monastic self belonging to two interconnected families – her kin and her faith community – which determined the framework of opportunities available to them.<sup>177</sup> Christina's background is less elevated than earlier abbess-saints and she understood her vocation using an image-based spirituality that drew heavily on her secular experience, a subject that will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four.<sup>178</sup> It is of interest that the majority of references (in charters etc) to Christina designate her *domina*, not *priorissa* and her lay status even takes precedence over her religious identity in her obit, despite the Hildesheim Psalter remaining in the hands of her spiritual community.<sup>179</sup> Christina's conflation, and so disruption, of the symbolic capital of her

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<sup>173</sup> See Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 182-186.

<sup>174</sup> These two modes are discussed at length by Gail Ashton in *The Generation of Identity*.

<sup>175</sup> Pierre Bourdieu identifies the kinds of social arenas underlying the concentric spheres of power in which Christina operates as *fields*. These fields of social play comprise of their stakeholders, whose place is confirmed by the act of their performance. They are defined by the struggle for the symbolic capital that conveys power in that field. Individual stakeholders develop perceptions and attitudes regarding the field (*habitus*), which are subjective positions informed partly by the underlying *doxa*, or embedded and unquestioned assumptions about the stakes involved in the struggles of the field. Bourdieu's model suffers from viewing field analysis on the grand scale, but he does emphasise that practices are pre-consciously socialised, opening up the possibility of localised and situated fields. Bourdieu's ideas are diffused through his work. For a clear summary see David Swartz, 'Bridging the Study of Culture and Religion: Bourdieu's Political Economy of Symbolic Power', *Sociology of Religion*, 57 (1996), 71-85.

<sup>176</sup> See Veronica Ortenberg, 'Virgin Queens: Abbesses and Power in Early Anglo-Saxon England,' in *Belief and Culture*, pp. 59-68, and Pauline Stafford, 'Powerful Women in the Early Middle Ages: Queens and Abbesses', in *The Medieval World*, ed. Peter Linehan and Janet Nelson (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 398-415.

<sup>177</sup> Penelope Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: UCP, 1991). See also Gilchrist who argues that monastic women laid claim to their secluded status by modelling themselves on the *familiae* of noble castellan women. *Gender and Material Culture*, pp. 163-169.

<sup>178</sup> Thomas Heffernan notes the "disproportionate number of words and metaphors drawn from or related to things physical, domestic and interior" in biographies of female sanctity, *Sacred Biography*, p. 234.

<sup>179</sup> Hildesheim Psalter, p. 14, 8<sup>th</sup> December.

noble, recluse and later monastic fields – for example the employment of mis-recognition central to gift-giving practices<sup>180</sup> – merits being explored in more detail than is possible here. Some brief comments on her marriage will give a preliminary idea of how these sites of struggle for resources and rank are not simply literary tools controlled by the Writer.

Marriage under parental pressure was a real problem for later medieval holy women, (for example Marie of Oignies), whose temperament made them a valuable commodity.<sup>181</sup> This is written into their *vitae* using the established saintly motifs of existing hagiography, in particular the plot devices of early virgin martyr *passiones* which provided a universally recognisable prism through which to manage what must, at least in some cases, have been a very real human story.<sup>182</sup> The conflict with male authority in the *passio* neutralises the compromising effect that such an assertion of female religious identity could otherwise have had both on her ‘recognisable’ holiness and on acceptable social order. In this context where there is both literary and social approbation of Christina’s own preferences, the refusal of which may not reflect positively on her family, her father’s remonstrance that her life of poverty would bring the whole of the nobility into disrepute, “*mendicitas illius universe nobilitati erit notabile dedecus*”, is especially curious.<sup>183</sup> Is it simply a literary trope to compound the impression of Autti as ‘pagan’ persecutor, or a meaningful comment on contemporary social structures? Further, why is such a loaded word, *mendicitas*, employed of a young woman seeking only to join a monastery?

Autti and Beatrix allowed two of their children, Margaret and Gregory, to enter religious houses without the persecutions imposed on their eldest daughter.<sup>184</sup> In their situated context they were a devout couple,<sup>185</sup> but Christina’s personal qualities made her a valuable resource that would have advanced the cultural capital of their whole

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<sup>180</sup> Compare for example *Life*, ch. 21, p. 70, in which Autti bribes the bishop of Lincoln, with ch. 32, p. 88 in which Christina is loved and helped by her aunt because of the presents she has given her, presumably from the coffers of her father.

<sup>181</sup> Jacques of Vitry, *Vita Mariæ Oigniacensis*, *AASS*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June, vol. 5, pp. 545-572; bk. I, ch. 12, p. 550. See also the translation by Margot King in *The Life of Marie d’Oignies* (Toronto: Peregrina Press, 1993). I deliberately use ‘holy women’ rather than women of spirit because it is probable that some women in this situation did not have the sophisticated visions that brought Christina and Marie into the textual record.

<sup>182</sup> See Wogan-Browne, ‘Saints’ Lives and the Female Reader’, pp. 315-322. The problems of finding suitable hagiographic models for Christina are discussed in chapter four below.

<sup>183</sup> *Life*, ch. 15, p. 58

<sup>184</sup> *Life*, ch. 9, p. 48.

<sup>185</sup> On the pious practices of the laity see Hugh Thomas, ‘Lay Piety in England from 1066 to 1215’, *ANS*, 29 (2006), 178-192.

family through a marriage arranged by one of the most powerful figures in the land.<sup>186</sup> Not only that, but they also hope for grandchildren as intelligent, prudent and capable who, the reader is left to assume, would also make advantageous marriages.<sup>187</sup> The financial considerations which make her family seem irreligious, were a pressing matter after the conquest for a Anglo-Danish aristocracy seeking ways to re-establish themselves through good connections. Rhetoric which draws the reader's notice to tensions between Christina's secular and religious identities (for example her offer to undergo trial by ordeal),<sup>188</sup> is a misdirection: in practice the tensions lay in the social changes of the period. The lament that Christina was intending to undertake an absolute poverty which did not exist before the mendicant movements of the thirteenth century, suggests an ambivalent response to the rapidly expansion of religious foundations at the time.<sup>189</sup>

Notably it was her parents, not her husband, who would not let Christina take up the religious life. Likewise it was not Christina's relationship with Roger that caused sexual scandal – her peer Eva of St Bertin and the recluse Hervé were admired for just such a living arrangement – rather, his harbouring of a runaway wife was the problem.<sup>190</sup> Moore has suggested that Christina reinterpreted social capital from the hopes and expectations of her parents (situated in a field of English bourgeoisie and seeking social advancement through the dispositions of ideal secular womanhood of their daughter) to the influential role that a recluse could play in mediating between communities.<sup>191</sup> However, we have already seen that Christina was weak at working alongside the lay community; instead her extra-institutional *spiritual* capital (her asceticism and revelations) operates in a restricted production within her two 'families', which themselves change in terms of actors and hierarchy as her religious status is consolidated.<sup>192</sup> Christina as 'ideal noble woman' was a commodity for exchange

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<sup>186</sup> *Life*, ch. 20, pp. 66-68. Stanton also notes this as social rather than sexual threat to Christina's religious goals, 'Domestic Violence', p. 244.

<sup>187</sup> *Life*, ch. 20, p. 68.

<sup>188</sup> *Life*, ch. 17, p. 62. On the ordeal in England see Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: the Medieval Judicial Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), esp. pp. 62-69.

<sup>189</sup> It is possible that John of Tynemouth modified the vocabulary of these phrases, looking backwards from his fourteenth century vantage. Certainly, as the next chapter shows, it is unlikely that this is a reference to Christina seeking the asceticism of an eremitic rather than a coenobitic life.

<sup>190</sup> On this see also Elliott, 'Spiritual Direction', pp. 164-170. On Eva and Hervey see André Wilmart, 'Eve et Goscelin', *Revue Bénédictine*, 46 (1934), 414-438, and 50 (1938), 42-83, and the introduction and notes in Goscelin of St Bertin, *The Book of Encouragement and Consolation*, trans. Monika Otter (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004).

<sup>191</sup> Moore, 'Ranulf Flambard', pp. 140-141.

<sup>192</sup> Bradford Verter develops the idea of spiritual capital, manifest in embodied, objectified and institutionalised states, as a solution to Bourdieu's closed system of religious capital restricted to institutionalised structures,

amongst men to buy social capital, Christina as 'ideal holy' was a place where men including Sueno, Abbot Geoffrey, and Simon of Bermondsey, could retreat from the world for spiritual rejuvenation. When she escapes men it is with the aid of a divine Father, the holy family is substituted for her own family. However in an alternative narrative of continuity which I hope to unfold over the next few chapters, Christina herself does not make this distinction between her worldly and holy roles, nor are the powerful male voices the same as her own. The space in which Christina perceives her relationship to Christ, through visions, is a continuity of the domestic world, and the roles she takes on are a continuity of those of bride, daughter, sister, mother, that she might expect to hold in the world. Only for the men in the text are specific spiritual experiences turning points: for Christina they are continuations of who she is and where she is going. Moreover the business skills that would have made her a noble matron were exactly those needed to be a successful prioress; they are mutually convertible forms of power.

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'Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu', *Sociological Theory*, 21 (2003), 150-174. Christina's revelations are a 'positional good', they do not have any absolute value but give her comparative rank through God talking directly to her.

## Chapter 2.

### Monastic Networks and the Priory at Markyate

As a poised but impressionable young woman of around fourteen or fifteen, a family visit to the magnificent Abbey of St Albans inspired the pious Theodora to confirm a vow of virginity which she had been long debating with her Augustinian mentor, Sueno.<sup>1</sup> Within a very few years she was struggling to defend this pledge against the matrimonial efforts of her family.<sup>2</sup> At the height of her struggles she dreamt of entering a beautiful church with other women in preparation for Mass.<sup>3</sup> Placing herself in vassalship to the seated Empress in the church ultimately secured for her the hermitage site where she had lived with Roger, and where she established the Benedictine priory that at last fulfilled her teenage ambitions. The story, as it is cast in the *Life*, sets up the priory at Markyate as the fruition of all Christina's spiritual ambitions at the same time as it obscures that foundation in favour of the Writer's own house at St Albans.

The house at Markyate was considerably more important to Christina's identity than is recognised in the *Life* or in some modern scholarship.<sup>4</sup> Since renewed interest in her during the late fourteenth century was an indirect result of research into her hermit mentor Roger, the routinisation of Markyate from male hermitage to female priory should be taken seriously in exploring Christina's putative sanctity. Christina's public prophetic career was relatively short-lived: as male intervention gave her the religious respectability that her dubious married-virgin-recluse position exposed to question, it also curtailed the liminal position from which she held a public proto-saintly voice. Although she inspired and transformed her followers, Christina did not make any permanent impact on contemporary expectations of female leadership, and ultimately she took onboard the Benedictine *doxa* of the responsibilities of a prioress. It is no coincidence that Christina does not re-emerge in the St Albans source records until new models of holiness are well established.

Although Markyate was a very modest community in comparison to its ancient and wealthy early mentor St Albans, it was a more successful *nunnery* than might be expected from its low profile amongst later medieval female houses. It is a mistake to subsume the

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, ch. 4, pp. 38-40.

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, ch. 7, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Life*, ch. 24-25, pp. 74-76.

<sup>4</sup> I use Markyate to designate the religious community living in the locale through its regularisation, although the majority of extant sources refer to the community as 'de Bosco' or by its consecration of 'sancte trinitatis'.

history of the house at Markyate into that of St Albans, but inevitably the age and status of the latter meant that its concerns and interests had an impact on Markyate and its social networks. Just as it is not possible to make sense of Christina's spiritual identity without situating her in her own house, so the culture, concerns and networks of the prestigious abbey simultaneously facilitated and dictated to that identity. Additionally, the volatile political climate, which continued to affect Christina's choices long after she escaped her marriage, was a field in which St Albans was a significant player. The Writer was conscious of this climate, and affairs of state are given a central position in the relationship between Christina and Geoffrey. Ecclesiastical affairs and episcopal power also form an important backdrop to her story. These fields in which Christina operates - from her own as community leader, to her community, to the powerful and influential abbey of St Albans and the wider political climate - overlap. This chapter primarily uses "documents of practice"<sup>5</sup> to untangle them, and in doing so confirms the conclusions drawn in the preceding de-construction of the narrative sources. It demonstrates that Christina really only held regional celebrity and establishes a platform to go on to consider the *habitus* of sanctity amongst her stakeholders.

### I. Christina in the Discourse of (New) Monasticism

The transformation of religious life and attitudes and the proliferation of new forms that marked c.1100 to 1160 was one of the most radical in the social history of Christianity, and has been aptly dubbed by Giles Constable as the 'reformation of the twelfth century'.<sup>6</sup> It brought together with a new intensity existing rhetorical themes of solitude, poverty, the purity of the Rule, the imitation of Christ, the apostolic life, pilgrimage and exile. The symbolic capital of these anxieties was wealth, or rather the rejection of wealth as a token of worldly embroilment. Christina's story, like that of Robert of Arbrissel (c.1055-1107) or Stephen of Grandmont (c.1052-1124), is one of a series of exiles and confrontations which exteriorise her internal struggle, confronting the monsters of personal guilt in Burthred and the Lustful Cleric who threaten her active virginity.<sup>7</sup> Her ascetic years with Alfwen and Roger are a renunciation of worldly engagement. But alongside the "crisis of prosperity" traditional Benedictine life continued to flourish until well into the 1130s.<sup>8</sup> It

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<sup>5</sup> This useful term was coined by Penelope Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> *Life*, ch. 24, p. 76 and ch. 44, p. 116.

<sup>8</sup> See the debate between Jean Leclercq, 'The Monastic Crisis of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', in *Cluniac Monasticism in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. Noreen Hunt (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 217-237, and John Van Engen, 'The "Crisis of Cenobitism" Reconsidered: Benedictine Monasticism in the Years 1050-1150', *Speculum*, 61 (1986), 269-304.

is this life that the St Albans Writer shares in and sees as most admirable in the *Life*, and which ultimately shaped Christina's own concept of religious identity.

The discourse of monastic life is by very definition a *collective* production of ritual meaning in which group performance of the *Opus Dei* stages a vocational identity. Both Roberta Gilchrist and Penelope Johnson have argued that for the ordinary nun, individual and gender identity were subsumed into collective, familial, identity.<sup>9</sup> However, the structures of the cloister could also be the setting for a highly personal spirituality. Christina's German contemporary Elisabeth of Schönau experienced ecstatic visions that were nevertheless explicitly grounded in the rhythms of the Benedictine liturgical life of her community.<sup>10</sup> Religious anthropologists identify two sets of dynamics as distinctive stages in the cycle of religious practice, which Harvey Whitehouse has calls the 'doctrinal' mode, (which is structured, liturgical, codified and hierarchical) and the 'imagistic' mode, (which is spontaneous, episodic, revelatory and personal).<sup>11</sup> Critical use of this sort of tool, examples of which can be found in the work of Max Weber on charisma and Victor Turner on liminality, can inform scholars working on medieval religious life.<sup>12</sup> The models cannot be adopted wholesale, since in practice the proposed discrete clusters of features demonstrably overlap. As lenses for studying Christina their beguiling simplicity forces us to consider how the transition is made from one dynamic to the other, and specifically how the move from eremitic to coenobitic life is performed.

## I.I Charisma

There is a dialectic within any cultural field between those who reproduce and transmit established bodies of knowledge – within the medieval Church the priesthood and other orthodox ecclesiastical structures – and those who invent new forms, the heterodoxy of which ultimately either becomes accepted as orthodoxy or rejected as heretical.<sup>13</sup> The emergence of the new religious orders was led by individuals whose authority derived

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, and Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*.

<sup>10</sup> For the corpus of Elisabeth's visions see F. W. E. Roth, ed., *Die Visionen der hl. Elisabeth und die Schriften der Aebte Ekbert und Emecho von Schönau* (Brünn: Verlag der Studien aus dem Benedictiner-und Cistercienser-Orden, 1884). See also the translation by Anne Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000). Unless otherwise noted all future references will be to this translation.

<sup>11</sup> Harvey Whitehouse describes these as 'attractor positions', *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 2004). For a sustained critique of Whitehouse's two modes theory using medieval Women of Spirit as a test-case see Anne Clark, 'Testing the Two Modes Theory: Christian Practice in the Later Middle Ages', in *Theorizing Religions Past: Archaeology, History and Cognition*, ed. Harvey Whitehouse (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 2004), pp. 125-142.

<sup>12</sup> See for example Bynum, *Fragmentation*, pp. 27-78.

<sup>13</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art: gènese et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992), p. 289.

from their personal divine calling. This calling was recognised by their followers as extraordinary and was 'proved' by ongoing testing and baffling successes. It is these relational qualities that Max Weber identifies as marking the charismatic prophet.<sup>14</sup> Although Christina never achieved the authority of a Bernard of Clairvaux, she operated within the same parameters: she was a figure with the personal qualities of the prophet who was nonetheless at a stage in the life-cycle of charisma that was shifting away from the innovative and transformative individual to the structures of office, *amtscharisma*.<sup>15</sup>

Michael Toth has shown the process by which radical movements shift to an authority based on office, is often associated with not one but two charismatic leaders; the second rising to leadership from amongst the charismatic band after the dramatic death of the first, with a new vision for consolidating the group and institutionalising celebration of the first leader.<sup>16</sup> This model of "double charisma", like that of Jesus and Peter, can be seen in Roger and Christina. Roger was the first inhabitant of Markyate and his charisma attracted a notable following to place themselves under his pastoral care, "*[m]onachorum quoque innumera multitudo sub istis pastoribus floruit*".<sup>17</sup> He was particularly celebrated for his resistance of the devil, compassion for the afflicted and spirit of contemplation and prophecy.<sup>18</sup> Roger was what Weber distinguishes as an 'exemplary' prophet, that is one whose "personal example demonstrates to others the way of salvation...recommending to them the same path as he himself traversed".<sup>19</sup> The lay and recluse communities that he mentored (for example, Godscalc of Caddington and the women at Eywood) gave Roger their personal devotion because of his non-remunerative "gratuitous service" of his spiritual gifts to their benefit.<sup>20</sup> In this sense Roger was the original charismatic personality at Markyate; his bonds with the formal structures at St Albans were weak and he did not seek to establish any such structures at the hermitage where his authority was based on his personal power, not on the Benedictine Rule. Charisma can be passed on from one individual to another by designation and ritual means,<sup>21</sup> and when he passed Markyate on to Christina, in an exchange confirmed by prophetic vision, Roger seems to have expected her to take on his charismatic mantle. Just as Roger had received the land

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<sup>14</sup> Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building: Selected Papers*, ed. S.N. Eisenstadt (Chicago: UCP, 1968), pp. 253-293.

<sup>15</sup> See Weber, 'Charismatic Authority and its Routinization' in *On Charisma*, pp. 48-65.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Toth, 'Towards a Theory of the Routinization of Charisma', *Rocky Mountain Social Science Journal*, 9 (1972), 93-98.

<sup>17</sup> 'De Fundatione', p. 302.

<sup>18</sup> *Lié*, ch. 28, p. 82 and *GA*, I, p. 97.

<sup>19</sup> Weber, *On Charisma*, p. 263.

<sup>20</sup> Weber *On Charisma*, p. 255. *Lié*, ch. 43, p. 112.

<sup>21</sup> Weber, *On Charisma*, pp. 54-57.

through the guidance of angels, so Christina sees her own mentor, the Queen of Heaven, intervening in her inheritance of the place.<sup>22</sup> Roger's charismatic power extended to Christina's protection which the hermits under his care were unable to offer her. Moreover that she had to leave after Roger's death and hide in various places demonstrates that she was not initially seen as bearing the same marks of divine call by the same group of followers.

One of the problems with Weber's model is that it tends towards a static description of the appearance of charisma. It does not seek to explain why the prophet self-identifies as holding a unique calling. Nor does it demonstrate why a duty of obedience is necessarily generated amongst the prophet's followers, simply as a consequence of the followers' belief in that calling and in the success of the prophet at supernatural tests.<sup>23</sup> Christina seemingly held charismatic prophetic authority in her own right, but this unstable property was generated through a process of social construction. Although she believed herself to be remarkable – indeed perhaps saintly – this belief was dialectically created over a number of years, first with a small number of intimates and then in ever widening circles as her confidence in her powers grew.<sup>24</sup> It is important to observe that the validation of Christina's charismatic authority is distinct from, although discursively related to, the validation of her virginity. When the Virgin Mary appears to Christina in the vision noted at the start of this chapter she performs two spatially located actions.<sup>25</sup> First, in the Church, the celestial Empress gives Christina a twig from her branch offering, sharing in the responsibility for safeguarding her virginity. Then in an upper chamber, the Empress lies down in Christina's lap, turns to face her and confirms Christina's chosen status and divine calling by promising her future celestial residence with the biblical Judith.<sup>26</sup> Not all the people involved in confirming Christina's right to virginity were also devotees of her charismatic leadership. Sueno and Fredebertus only take on board the implications of the first half of this vision and, like the archbishops of Canterbury and York, condone her encratic choice whilst projecting onto her a model of monastic obedience. Anneke Mulder-Bakker has shown that eremitic women's knowledge – and

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<sup>22</sup> *Life*, ch. 28, p. 80 and ch. 42, pp. 108-110.

<sup>23</sup> For a further critique and suggested solution to Weber's model see Stephen Turner, 'Charisma Reconsidered', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 3 (2003), 5-26.

<sup>24</sup> For a similar Weberian reading of the social construction of Hildegard of Bingen's prophetic status see Barbara Finlay, 'The Origins of Charisma as Process: A Case Study of Hildegard of Bingen', *Symbolic Interaction*, 25 (2002), 537-554.

<sup>25</sup> *Life*, ch. 24-25, pp. 74-76.

<sup>26</sup> Roberta Gilchrist has demonstrated the symbolic importance to religious women of the upper room occupied by Christ's male and female followers in Acts 1.13-14, *Gender and Material Culture*, p. 116.

with it authority - was learnt from and passed on to other women in the first instance.<sup>27</sup> Alfwen's community had recognised her visionary abilities, but it was not until Christina returned to Markyate, 'proved' her powers in healing a woman, and attracted a community of *puellae* around her that she can be deemed charismatic in the Weberian sense. It must be borne in mind that there were many years between Christina receiving her first revelations and her feeling able to assume an authoritative voice on the affairs of St Albans and the Crown.

Prophets have authority because they are recognised as having authority, rather than through holding any practical power enforcement tools. They appear at times of social, and especially financial, shift, as was the case between 1050 and 1200 when Western Europe was moving from a gift to a market economy.<sup>28</sup> This was a period of wandering ascetics like Bernard of Tiron (1046-1116), Bruno of Cologne (c.1030-1101) and Norbert of Xanten (c.1080-1143), seeking a new Egypt in hermit foundations.<sup>29</sup> These foundations attracted and retained considerable followings because their leaders addressed, defined and rationalised the undifferentiated danger that was being presented by economic and population expansion.<sup>30</sup> Their example challenged what was possible in religious life and provided new models and boundaries for good behaviour and the correct relationships between the lay, religious and heavenly spheres. New orders grew out of these foundations which both enabled the pious newly-monied to confront and reinvent themselves, and provided world-ordering justifications for the new circumstances of the period.<sup>31</sup> Christina likewise transformed what was spiritually possible for her followers, for example the great outpourings of the Holy Spirit experienced by Simon of Bermondsey, "*utpote cuius familiaritatis dulcedine sepius in se sancti spiritus perfusioem senserat gratiam*".<sup>32</sup> She also addressed contemporary *doxa* about the roles available to men and women, transforming her followers expectations of how a married woman from her social stratum could make lifestyle choices based on personal revelation. Witnessed

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<sup>27</sup> Anneke Mulder-Bakker, 'The Metamorphosis of Women: Transmission of Knowledge and the Problems of Gender', *Gender and History*, 12 (2000), 642-664.

<sup>28</sup> See Lester Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (London: Paul Elek, 1978), and Andrew Roach, *The Devil's World: Heresy and Society 1100-1300* (Harlow: Longmans, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> On the origins of monasticism see Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> See Turner, 'Charisma Reconsidered'.

<sup>31</sup> See Weber, *On Charisma*, p. 267, and Pierre Bourdieu, 'Legitimation and Structured Interests in Weber's Sociology of Religion', in *Max Weber: Rationality and Modernity*, ed. Scott Lash and Sam Whimster (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), pp. 119-135. Scholarship on the role of ascetic holy men amongst emerging upwardly mobile communities largely derives inspiration from the pioneering work of Peter Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 61 (1971), 80-101.

<sup>32</sup> *Life*, ch. 77, p. 174.

by her *puellae*, Abbot Geoffrey, and a wider monastic circle of followers, Christina's divination always proved correct, which consolidated their belief in her and therefore in the new opportunities that contact with Christina offered to them.

### I.II Eremite or Coenobite?

By 1145 Christina's youthful spiritual career aspirations had finally come to fruition: she was a consecrated nun and the prioress of a growing community with episcopal blessing and some degree of financial security. Classifying Christina is difficult and E. A. Jones wisely cautions against seeing her as unique in her roles "as solitary, visionary and monastic founder".<sup>33</sup> The *Life* has tended to excite comparisons with eremitic texts,<sup>34</sup> and Christina's spiritually formative years in the cells of Alfwen and Roger did open her up to the possibility of a wider range of spiritual options. Ultimately, however, Christina chose community life, and was at the helm of a community founded around her for most of her adult years. Her belated profession (Talbot suggests c.1131) was a commitment to Benedictine monasticism;<sup>35</sup> and since she attracted some patronage to the community as it underwent regularisation, it is likely that she was the manager of these estates. So Christina, rather than the charismatic figure in the establishment of the house, was in some ways the institution builder. Likewise, her more impressive contemporary St Bernard took on a pre-established but fledgling community that had originally grown up around Robert of Mosleme and brought his personal charisma to bear on the charisma that he held by virtue of office. For Henrietta Leyser's 'new hermits' the adoption of rules was not the pragmatic abandonment of an ideal, but the fulfilment of one in the search for new forms that marked the early twelfth century - it was "not an end but a beginning".<sup>36</sup>

Glib distinctions between the two lifestyles, the eremitic and the coenobitic, are unhelpfully reductive when considering English women's religious career options.

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<sup>33</sup> Jones, 'The Hermits and Anchorites of England', p. 237.

<sup>34</sup> See for example Mayr-Harting, 'Functions'; Hostetler, 'Designing Religious Women'; Renna, 'Virginity in the *Life*'; and C. H. Talbot, 'Godric of Finchale and Christina of Markyate', in *Pre-Reformation English Spirituality*, ed. James Walsh (New York: Fordham University Press, 1965), pp. 39-55.

<sup>35</sup> Talbot, 'Introduction', p. 15. Alexander, who consecrated her, was Bishop of Lincoln 1123 to 1148. Geoffrey must have recovered from the fever that afflicted him in the fourth year of her profession before he was called to the royal court in 1136. Therefore her consecration must have been between 1123 and 1132, and a later date seems most plausible. Most female foundations before c.1130-1135 were nominally Benedictine, see Knowles and Hadcock, pp. 251-252. Despite the prohibitions of the Second Lateran Council, some new foundations in the 1130s and 1140s (for example Clerkenwell) seem to have held Benedictine and Augustinian identities in tension, see Elkins, *Holy Women*, pp. 65-69. There is no evidence that Markyate did so, and it is definitively described as Benedictine in the fifteenth century episcopal visitations of Repingdon and Alnwick, for example *The Register of Bishop Philip Repingdon, 1405-1419*, ed. Margaret Archer (LRS, 74: 1982), no. 39.

<sup>36</sup> See Leyser, *Hermits*, pp. 3 and 22.

Alongside well established houses living under the Benedictine Rule, a range of vocational options flourished which did not clearly differentiate between gendered lifestyles and levels of enclosure as they would by the later Middle Ages.<sup>37</sup> In the transitional context of the early twelfth century informal hermit-like arrangements were undertaken by women such as Godric of Finchale's sister Burchwine and Christina, though these subsequently disappear from the English religious landscape to be replaced with the regular life.<sup>38</sup> Formally and permanently enclosed anchoresses did continue to flourish in England long after the lifestyle became rare on the continent, but it is clear that Christina did not embrace this option.<sup>39</sup> When regular life was undertaken, the Benedictine Rule proved to be awkwardly gendered. Heloise, Christina's French contemporary, raised a range of points that were inappropriate for female practice in her request for a rule from Abelard,<sup>40</sup> and Felice Lifschitz has demonstrated that conceiving of a female head of house as a 'female father' left such a woman without the practical tools of *amtscharisma* held by their male peers.<sup>41</sup> In practice religious women like Christina were pragmatically situated;<sup>42</sup> they used institutional structures as they became available and developed a spiritual life that cannot be neatly tied to their institutional status.<sup>43</sup> It is worth remarking that Markyate appears in most legal records before the fourteenth century as "de Bosco" (of the wood) or "de la Celle" (of the cell), a reminder that its eremitic origins had left a permanent mark on the identity of the foundation.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See Jones, 'Hermits and Anchorites of England', pp. 234-236. For pre-conquest options see Sarah Foot, *Veiled Women I: The Disappearance of Nuns from Anglo-Saxon England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1988). Roberta Gilchrist proposes a helpful four-fold post-conquest typography of alternative religious life, *Gender and Material Culture*, pp. 170-187.

<sup>38</sup> See Ann Warren, 'The Nun as Anchoress: England 1100-1500', in *Distant Echoes*, pp. 197-212.

<sup>39</sup> Christina is only once described as *inclusa*, whilst immured in a make-shift cupboard under Roger's direction. *Life*, ch. 39, p. 102. On the English anchoritic life see Ann Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>40</sup> Heloise to Abelard, Letter 5, in 'The Letter of Heloise on Religious Life and Abelard's First Reply', ed. J. T. Muckle, *Mediaeval Studies*, 17 (1955), 240-281, letter on pp. 241-253. See also the translation of the letters by Betty Radice, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (London: Penguin, 1974).

<sup>41</sup> Felice Lifshitz, 'Is Mother Superior? Towards a History of Feminine *Amtscharisma*', in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 117-138.

<sup>42</sup> Hence the debated status of the 'Cistercian' nuns, see Sally Thompson, 'The Problem of the Cistercian Nuns in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', in *Medieval Women: Essays Dedicated and Presented to Prof Rosalind M. T. Hill, SCH, subsidia* 1 (1978), 227-252.

<sup>43</sup> For example a holy woman's lifestyle does not guarantee the kinds of revelations they might receive, see Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), p. 266. See also Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives*, p. 249.

<sup>44</sup> For example see *Warw. Fines*, nos. 116, 290 and 438 for variants on 'la Cella'. See *Warw. Fines*, nos. 719 and 725; *CRR*, v, p. 102 and *Rotuli Hugonis de Welles*, ed. F. N. Davis, (LRS, 3: 1914), pp. 9, 11 and 13 for variants on 'de bosco'.

In some senses then, religious women were liminal in regular as well as in solitary life.<sup>45</sup> Turner's interpretation of Benedictine life as "normative *communitas*" - in which the spontaneous, unstructured and undifferentiated community found at the liminal point in social dramas is made permanent - betrays a limited familiarity with the pragmatic and hierarchical medieval orders.<sup>46</sup> For Christina some *communitas* functions of the recluse, for example relieving Geoffrey of the anxieties of travel, did continue alongside her monastic negotiations for land and connections after her profession. Her choices were often spontaneous, based on visionary experiences, but the visions of her *puellae* indicate that she did not have total control of the spiritual imagination of the community.<sup>47</sup> Inversely, at all points in Christina's story, including her liminal years between being a secular married daughter and prioress of a community, there was a clear hierarchy in terms of teaching and responsibility. It is one of the great paradoxes of the *Life* that Christina's virtues and relationships are modelled on the Benedictine Rule yet it takes almost no account of her leadership of the Markyate community. Weber observes that women are often included in the early, prophetic, stages of religious change, only to be dominated and excluded when it is routinised.<sup>48</sup> Geoffrey's interventions at Markyate never actually successfully dominated the house - the Writer was forced to justify at great length the spiritual reasons for Christina's delay in taking her vows, and it remained an independent priory - but his enthusiasm for regularity certainly encouraged the transition to legalisation, property ownership and administrative structures. Unfortunately for Christina, where St Bernard's transitional position as regulator consolidated his sainthood, buying into coenobitic institutionalisation may have been her cultic downfall. Although there was no model for the saintly female recluse, only the female monastic, the uncertainty evident in the *Life* over how to classify her neither fully ploughed an established saintly furrow nor cut new ground. The result was more of a foundation legend than a new kind of English female saint.

### I.III Prioress

A foundress must be a charismatic figure, but she must also have qualities which lend themselves to community leadership. Janet Burton has demonstrated that "the position of prioress, even of a small and poor house, may have been one that was sought after and far

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<sup>45</sup> On the liminality of the solitary life see Anneke Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 174-175, and Warren, *Anchorites*, from p. 95.

<sup>46</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Gruyter, 1969), pp. 131-165.

<sup>47</sup> *Life*, ch. 49, p. 124.

<sup>48</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fichoff (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 104.

from insignificant.<sup>49</sup> Looking back on his famous construction of the late antique “holy man” Peter Brown has encouraged scholarship to move beyond the “utter externality” of thinking only about what religious charismatics *did* and think instead about what collective representations of pious behaviour were shared between them and their followers.<sup>50</sup> The Rule of St Benedict is very clear about the personal qualities that will make a community leader effective in office. He is to be learned in divine law, chaste, temperate and merciful, he should be moderate, prudent and loving in the care and disciplining of his community and he must not be excitable, anxious, extreme, obstinate, jealous or over suspicious. Importantly he must be a stickler for upholding the rule, “*et praecipue ut praesentem regulam in omnibus conservet*”.<sup>51</sup> St Benedict’s model ensures that personal charisma is not necessary as it is replaced by *amtscharisma*, and actively discourages the spontaneous and irregular qualities of the prophet. It is difficult to see the extent to which this model was assimilated into the small nunneries that proliferated in the early twelfth century Anglo-Norman realm. The Rule is silent on many of the problems that prioresses had to negotiate, in particular their relationship with men who held ecclesiastical authority over them. There is also surprisingly little literature correcting this gap, since almost all contemporary instruction assumed that the woman would be living a solitary life.<sup>52</sup> Two major exceptions stand out from this neglect:<sup>53</sup> the letters of Peter Abelard to Heloise, prioress of the Paraclete (c.1130s), and of Osbert of Clare to Adelidis, Abbess of Barking (c.1156-7).<sup>54</sup> Another model was provided by revival of interest in abbess *vitae* which were popular inclusions in legendaries belonging to religious and secular women.<sup>55</sup> It is evident from the limited accounts that remain in mortuary rolls and cartularies, that the variable importance placed on the virgin identity and the practical administrative skills of the prioress found in these models were mirrored in nuns’ own expectations of their leaders.

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<sup>49</sup> Janet Burton, ‘Cloistered Women and Male Authority: Power and Authority in Yorkshire Nunneries in the Later Middle Ages’, in *Thirteenth Century England X*, ed. Michael Prestwich and others (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp. 155-166, esp. p. 156.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Brown, ‘The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971-1997’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 6 (1998), 370-374.

<sup>51</sup> *RB*, ch. 64.

<sup>52</sup> See Barbara Newman, ‘Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century’, in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: UPP, 1995), pp. 34-45.

<sup>53</sup> A number of other writings exist as instruction for ordinary nuns, including other letters by Osbert of Clare and by Peter the Venerable. Although outside the Anglo-Norman realm, it is also worth noting the writings of Hildegard of Bingen and Herrad of Hohenbourg’s for their own communities.

<sup>54</sup> Abelard to Heloise, Letter 7, in ‘Abelard’s Rule for Religious Women’, ed. T. P. McLaughlin, *Mediaeval Studies*, 18 (1956), 241-292. *The Letters of Osbert of Clare*, ed. E. W. Williams (London: OUP, 1929), no. 42.

<sup>55</sup> See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives*, esp. pp. 189-222.

Virginity was an important cultural ideal *for* women religious as well as about them, and one which was not restricted to physical dimensions. Although it was crucially important for nunneries to be seen to preserve chastity, as reflected in the 1170 Gilbertine controversy over the pregnant nun of Watton, virginity was also a status to be achieved, not a condition for religious life, and indeed was seen by some male founders as a barrier to promotion. Robert of Arbrissel was looking for experienced women with managerial skills to lead Fontevrault and, like Abelard, spoke vehemently against appointing prioresses with no background in household management.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless the hagiographic picture of the abbess which included the spirited defence of their virginity - or at least grudging consent to the marital debt - was adopted by Agnes of Hedingham as evidence of her predecessor Lucy's admirable leadership because of her seven-times resistance of married relations.<sup>57</sup> Fervour in controlling their own bodies, as Lucy does with Job-like mortification, was evidence of their qualification to control their monastic *familia*, and Abelard likens vigilance over one to the other.<sup>58</sup> Christina's ascetic hermit years were therefore her qualification for leading Markyate.

As mothers of their communities, prioresses were to set an example through the holiness of their life, conversation and their learning. Abelard offers Heloise a typology for her leadership that emphasises the imbalance in required virtue, and therefore the clear social gap, between the prioress and her community. Male-authored literature on the contemporary cult of monastic friendship never crossed over from brotherhood to sisterhood.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless it is clear from the commemorations of Abbess Matilda of Sainte-Trinité Caen (d.1113), Abbess Petronilla of Fontevrault (1115-1149), and Abbess Matilda de Bailleul of Wherwell (d.1226) in the mortuary roll and necrology of the respective houses, that a very real affection existed between prioresses and the communities who grieved for their loss.<sup>60</sup> Even where they were answerable to male supervision, the prioress was the focus for the stability of her community and was expected to be their source of strength in adversity. In abbess *vitae* the female head of

<sup>56</sup> Andreas of Fontevraud, 'Second Life of Robert of Arbrissel', in *Robert of Arbrissel: A Medieval Religious Life*, ed. Bruce Venarde (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), pp. 22-67; ch. 5, p. 28. Abelard to Heloise, Letter 7, p. 252, "*Unde non mediocriter miramur quomodo perniciose haec in ecclesia consuetudo inolevit ut quae virgines sunt potius quam quae viros cognoverunt ad hoc eligantur et frequenter juniors senioribus praeficiantur*".

<sup>57</sup> BL, Egerton MS 2849, printed in *Monasticon*, IV, 436-7.

<sup>58</sup> Abelard to Heloise, Letter 7, pp. 253-257 on the election and qualities of an abbess.

<sup>59</sup> Newman, 'Flaws in the Golden Bowl', pp. 35-36.

<sup>60</sup> For Matilda see *Rouleaux des Mortes du IXe au XVe siècle recueillis et publiés pour la Société de L'Histoire de France*, ed. Léopold Deslisle, (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1866), pp. 177-279; for Petronilla, "incomparabilis et irrecuperabilis mater nostra" see the seventeenth-century copy of the Fontevrault cartulary, Angers, Archives départementales de Maine-et-Loire, 101 H, 225 bis, p. 242, cited in Venarde, 'Praesidentes Negotiis', p. 198; for Matilda see the poem written by her successor Euphemia in *Les Manuscrits Latins du Ve au XIIIe siècle conservés à la Bibliothèque Impériale de Saint-Petersbourg*, ed. Antonio Staerk (St Petersburg: Franz Krois, 1910), p. 275.

house was presented with some *exempla* of how to responsibly relate to their individual nuns. St Modwenna, whose *vita* Jocelyn Wogan-Browne describes as “an ambitious professional *speculum* for any aspirant abbesses and foundresses”,<sup>61</sup> discerned the hindering of her community by a nun secretly carrying illicit food.<sup>62</sup> There is no reason to suppose that Christina had seen Geoffrey of Burton’s recently written narrative, so the parallel of this story with her correcting Godit’s use of forbidden chervil gives an insight into the contemporary discourse of convent relations.<sup>63</sup>

A valuable body of scholarship has demonstrated that prioresses met their communities’ need for astute, pragmatic and capable resource administration and maintenance of social ties, particularly with their secular *familia*.<sup>64</sup> Where Abelard proscribed worldly breeding and an aspiration to office from the abbess, in practice these were valuable community assets. In structure and preoccupation the small female priory had much in common with secular gentry life, and household management formed the bulk of a prioress’ job. For example we learn from Osbert of Clare and the nuns at Wherwell that hospitality and almsgiving, the patronage of a secular lady, were important personal qualities in an abbess.<sup>65</sup> The skills that would have brought Christina’s family to fortune – her prudence, efficiency, moral integrity and beauty – enabled her to run a successful monastic instead of a secular household.<sup>66</sup> A unique insight into what a convent admired in their leaders is found in the house cartulary for the Abbey of Wherwell which describe two of their of abbesses, Matilda (d. after 1208) and Euphemia (d.1257). Matilda and Euphemia expanded the house estates, books, relics, vestments and numbers, and Euphemia undertook a building programme of epic proportions.<sup>67</sup> In contrast to the models held up

<sup>61</sup> Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives*, p. 207.

<sup>62</sup> Geoffrey of Burton, *Life and Miracles of St Modwenna*, trans. and ed. Robert Bartlett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), ch. 24, pp. 98-102. Modwenna also used her visionary powers to gently but firmly exposed the possession of a pair of slippers as private property by a newly arrived novice, ch. 31, pp. 126-128, and returned shortly after her death to correct the beginnings of a breakdown in monastic discipline over the burial of her corpse, ch. 39, pp. 164-166.

<sup>63</sup> *Life*, ch.83, p. 190.

<sup>64</sup> For example see John Nichols, ‘The Internal Organization of English Cistercian Nunneries’, *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cisterciensis*, 30 (1979), 23-40; Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996); Bruce Venarde, ‘*Praesidentes Negotiis*: Abbesses as Managers in Twelfth-Century France’, in *Portraits of Medieval and Renaissance Living: Essays in Memory of David Herlihy*, ed. Samuel Cohn Jr. and Steven Epstein, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 189-206; Kimberly Curran, ‘Religious Women and Their Communities in Late Medieval Scotland’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2005), pp. 174-225; and Valerie Spear, *Leadership in Medieval Nunneries* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2005).

<sup>65</sup> Osbert of Clare, *Letters*, no. 42, p. 154 on the hospitality shown to him by Adelidis of Barking, and *Cartulary of Wherwell*, BL, MS Egerton 2104, fol. 44r on the charity and hospitality of Euphemia of Wherwell, see also translation in *VCH, Hants*, II, pp.132-133.

<sup>66</sup> *Life*, ch. 20, p. 66.

<sup>67</sup> The account of Matilda and Euphemia is found in the Wherwell cartulary Egerton MS 2104, fol. 43r-44v.

to them in male writings, the virtues of female leadership celebrated by the nuns themselves turn almost exclusively on the external management of the community not on the personal holiness of the Abbess. They are reminiscent of the criteria that the St Albans *Gesta Abbatum* deemed important enough to record about their male abbots. Ultimately Christina's position as beloved mistress, "*dilecta domina*",<sup>68</sup> of her community must have stood in this gap between theory and practice in contemporary female religious leadership, where her saintly credentials as virgin and prophet became of less operative value than her household skills.

## II. St Trinitas Markyate

The foundation of the house at Markyate and the charisma, spirituality and debatable sanctity of Christina should be read as one story. Their success is interdependent, as is their social positioning and networking. The scarcity of evidence about the Markyate community is far from unusual for non-elite, post-conquest, women's foundations, and in the absence of any surviving cartulary piecing together its story inevitably involves conjecture.<sup>69</sup> Despite this, in comparison to many of the small priories that were undergoing a period of rapid foundation in England,<sup>70</sup> the information that we have for the foundation at Markyate is relatively profuse. What emerges from combining the narrative sources with appearances of the priory in legal records is that, in terms of finance, statures and connections, Markyate was very much a community of its time. It fits into Roberta Gilchrist's model of post-conquest nunneries built on poor quality liminal land away from settlements with modest home farm resources, which neither effectively practiced land reclamation nor were used for any significant economic activity.<sup>71</sup> The buildings and landholdings they acquired around foundation in the twelfth century continued to be their main resources, but these donations, significantly, were primarily in cash rents preventing them from achieving the self-sufficiency enjoined by the Benedictine Rule.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *Life*, ch. 67, p. 154.

<sup>69</sup> On the scarcity of extant sources see Sally Thompson, 'Why English Nunneries Had No History: A Study of the Problems of the English Nunneries founded after the Conquest', in *Distant Echoes*, pp. 131-150. The prevailing prejudice against post-conquest nunneries as either impossible to study (e.g. David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, 3 vols (Cambridge: CUP, 1948-1959) esp. II, p. viii), or as poor, mismanaged and corrupt (e.g. Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*) has been corrected in more recent years by a range of solid scholarship, including the work of Janet Burton, Sharon Elkins, Roberta Gilchrist, Penelope Johnson, Sally Thompson and Bruce Venarde cited elsewhere in this chapter.

<sup>70</sup> See Bruce Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England 890-1215* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 89-132.

<sup>71</sup> Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, pp. 65-73 and 82-91. Christina's embroidery skills may also have been a modest source of income, and she may have secured some kind of regular alms, on which see Warren *Anchorites*, pp. 44-46.

<sup>72</sup> *RB*, ch. 66, see also Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, pp. 121, 73 and 90.

## II.I From Hermitage to Priory

Where a religious house was not founded outright but evolved from a hermitage, the process of development was often piecemeal and prolonged, with a lengthy gap between foundation and the dedication of its monastic church.<sup>73</sup> Though England supported an unusually high level of sustained solitary life, accounts of solitaries forming gradually into communities in the twelfth-century are sufficiently common for the story of Markyate to be read as part of a dominant discourse of foundation.<sup>74</sup> For example both Crabhouse in Norfolk and Kilburn in Middlesex grew up gradually, with the death of the early founders leading to greater regularisation.<sup>75</sup> The canonesses at Kilburn form a particularly interesting comparison to Markyate not only because the semi-formal life of three *puellae* under the direction of a male hermit Godwyn became regularised under the authority of Westminster Abbey after his death,<sup>76</sup> but also because its provisions and episcopal exemption stem from the enthusiasm of Prior Osbert of Clare, a correspondent of Abbot Geoffrey of St Albans. Although Christina is uniquely known as a 'professional' visionary, in a number of other male and female houses visionary experiences contributed to their regularisation as happened at Markyate. Examples include the prestigious nunneries of Godstow (fd. c.1138), where the pious noblewoman Edith heard a voice instructing her to build a convent for 24 gentlewomen,<sup>77</sup> and earlier Wherwell (fd. 986) where King Edgar's widow Ælfrudis was chastised into penance for the murder of her first husband.<sup>78</sup> Likewise St Bartholomew appeared to Rahere, a minstrel at the court of King Henry I who was undertaking penitent pilgrimage to Rome, ordering him to build the church which quickly became the priory and associated hospital of St Bartholomew's Smithfield (fd. 1123).<sup>79</sup> Of course the domestic cartularies and records of religious houses were political and rhetorical documents, and such pious stories were included for situated

<sup>73</sup> See Thompson, *Women Religious*, esp. from p. 15, and Alison Binns, *Dedications of Monastic Houses in England and Wales 1066-1216* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989), pp. 4-9. This hiatus is common in the new monastic orders see Leyser, *Hermits*, pp. 2 and 29-37.

<sup>74</sup> Hollis and Wogan-Browne describe the successful British solitary as the nucleus of a convent as "a major genre of *Gründungsaga*", 'St Albans and Women's Monasticism', p. 39.

<sup>75</sup> The fourteenth century register for Crabhouse, BL, Additional MS 4733, fol. 1-54, includes a French verse account of this foundation, which began with a community growing up around an anchoress, Lena, and after a number of disasters became regularised through the assistance of a lay patron and a house of canons in c.1180. Other regular houses which grew out of eremitic origins in the period include Thetford in Norfolk and Ankerwyte in Buckinghamshire.

<sup>76</sup> On Kilburn see *The Letters and Charters of Gilbert Foliot*, ed. Adrian Morey and C. N. L. Brooke (Cambridge, CUP, 1967), no. 463, and Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>77</sup> *The English Register of Godstow Nunnery near Oxford*, ed. Andrew Clark, (EETS, 129, 130 & 142: 1911), pp. 26-27.

<sup>78</sup> Fourteenth-century cartulary of Wherwell, Egerton MS 2104, fol. 43r-v.

<sup>79</sup> *The Book of the Foundation of St Bartholomew's Church in London*, ed. Norman Moore, (EETS, 163: 1923), pp. 5-9. See also Knowles and Hadcock, p. 165.

reasons.<sup>80</sup> Rahere's influence with the king, for example, earned him not only gossip but assaults on his life from detractors, a situation resonating with Christina's own. This does not, however, compromise the usefulness of the evidence for exploring how visions were an integral part of contemporary monastic culture.

The fledgling female community at Markyate must have started with the buildings and resources that had been sufficient to have originally accommodated six male hermits plus servants. Despite the efforts of several scholars, no new evidence has emerged to confirm how Roger was originally permitted to reside on land belonging to the canons of St Paul's or how he was financed.<sup>81</sup> The Cainhoe branch of the d'Albini family, whose patronage was a mainstay of the house of St Albans, was already supporting the community growing up at Sopwell under Roger's direction during the abbacy of their kinsman Richard (1097-1119) and it might reasonably be supposed that the Markyate hermitage was therefore also sustained by the support networks around the Abbey of St Albans.<sup>82</sup> Roger was sufficiently prestigious in the local community that he probably also attracted *ad hoc* personal patronage to himself rather than to Markyate.<sup>83</sup> Between 1123, when Christina returned to the hermitage, and 1145, when Abbot Geoffrey intervened to secure charter conformation for the location and financing of the house from St Pauls, these facilities and structures gradually changed.

The personal friendship between Christina and Abbot Geoffrey, which determined the future directions her life would take, probably started only a couple of years after she returned from exile to Markyate. At this time Christina was able to send a male companion to the abbot, suggesting that an informal mixed community was living there.<sup>84</sup> We cannot know how authority was exercised in this community, whether a Turnerian *communitas* prevailed or Christina or one of the male hermits held nominal leadership. Because the Writer modified the chronology of Christina's story it is difficult to establish how quickly the male-female balance changed as she attracted more women to Markyate,

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<sup>80</sup> See Penelope Johnson, 'Pious Legends and Historical Realities: The Foundations of La Trinité de Vendôme, Bonport and Holyrood', *Revue Benedictine*, 91 (1981), 184-193.

<sup>81</sup> Caddington (assessed at five hides and valued at 40s – down from 100s *TRE*) belonged to St Pauls in Domesday, *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation*, ed. Ann Williams and G. Martin (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 567.

<sup>82</sup> See the grant of Henry d'Albini and his wife Cecilia, whose daughter Cecilia joined the community, in *Registro Abbatiae Sancti Albani*, BL, Cotton MS Tiberius E.vi, fol. 204, printed *Monasticon*, III, p. 365, no. II, "dant in manerio de Cotes duas hidas terrae sanctae Mariae, et cellulae illius prope santum Albanum videlicet, illi cellulae quam frater Rogerus solitarius prius instauravit". Roger's position in these networks leans against his position as a monk of St Albans being simply an elaborate piece of revisionism by the Writer of Christina's *vita*.

<sup>83</sup> On this kind of patronage see Jones, 'Hermits and Anchorites of England', pp. 232-233.

<sup>84</sup> *Life*, ch. 56, p. 136. This arrangement should not be confused with formal 'double houses', or the presence of men in women's communities specifically to say mass or as a *custos*.

"*iam enim crescente fama Christine crescebat numerus puellarum*".<sup>85</sup> We do, however, know the identity of some of the early female community members. Christina's sister Margaret must have joined by the mid-1130s, and perhaps as early as the 1120's if Geoffrey's first period of illness, which she witnessed, preceded Christina's profession.<sup>86</sup> The Tiberius manuscript is disrupted at this point, so her companion 'Ada' could be the Adelisa commemorated in the Hildesheim Psalter obits. Another Norman *puella* commemorated in the psalter, "*Matilda monialis de Marzellis*", is uniquely given a toponymic, and so perhaps Markyate had a sufficiently dynamic identity to have attracted members from as distant as Mazellis, modern day Mezeaux, near Poitiers in France.<sup>87</sup> The maiden who had a vision of Mary curing Christina was also an early member of the community, perhaps unnamed to neutralise competition for Christina's revelatory powers in contrast to the unfortunate Godit who is the foil for it.<sup>88</sup> Two female religious who were close to, but perhaps not members of Markyate, were Christina's childhood friend Helisen,<sup>89</sup> and Abbot Geoffrey's relative Lettice, who is the only person in the *Life* described as *sanctamonalis* and was either a member of, or a regular visitor to, the community.<sup>90</sup>

By the time that Abbot Geoffrey took it upon himself to build the house at Markyate (probably in the early 1130s tied up with Christina making her monastic profession), the community was either already, or then became, composed entirely of sisters.<sup>91</sup> Janet Burton has pointed out that the easy relationship between men and women in religious life was being frowned upon by this period,<sup>92</sup> and all later references to Christina's relationship with her community (for example Geoffrey's visits or the appearance of a

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<sup>85</sup> *Life*, ch. 61, p. 144.

<sup>86</sup> *Life*, ch. 59, p. 140.

<sup>87</sup> Hugh III, Lord of Lusignan, confirmed the grant of a church here to the abbey of Saint Cyprien in 1116, *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Saint-Cyprien de Poitiers*, ed. Louis Rédet (Poitiers, 1874), p.52. See also Sidney Painter, 'The Lords of Lusignan in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', *Speculum*, 32 (1957), p. 28, and Armand Désiré, *Recherches sur Les Vigeries et sur Les Origines de la Féodalité, en Poitou* (Poitiers, 1839), p. 61. The location of Marzellis remains obscure, but this suggestion seems the most currently plausible. Wormald also draws attention to a 'Matilda anachorita' in the St Albans confraternity list, *St Albans Psalter*, p. 29.

<sup>88</sup> *Life*, ch. 49, p. 124 and ch. 83, p. 190.

<sup>89</sup> *Life*, ch. 7, p. 44.

<sup>90</sup> *Life*, ch. 67, p. 152. The Tiberius manuscript has Lettice as Geoffrey's sister and a nun elsewhere, whilst, less plausibly, the *Gesta Abbatum* has her as Christina's sister and a resident at Markyate. In the *Life*, the Writer says of Lettice, "*erat autem et ipsa sanctimonialem ducens vitam*", suggesting that whilst Christina's community are not expressly called nuns they were deemed as such by the Writer.

<sup>91</sup> "*locum monialium de Markyate construxit a fundamentis, dans eidem loco redditus atque decimas in diversis locis, ad sustentationem Christinae, suae dilectricis, et sororum congregatarum ibidem, ad militandum sub regimine, doctrinaque, Christinae*", *GA*, I, p. 103. Not too much should be made of the word 'monialium' here, since the *Gesta Abbatum* operates within later medieval ideas of female religious life.

<sup>92</sup> Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders*, p. 87.

headless devil) indicate that it is all women.<sup>93</sup> Abbot Geoffrey's enthusiastic, if informal, efforts to move the cell away from uncontrolled irregularity included the donation of tithes in Cassio and Watford contemporaneous with his building programme.<sup>94</sup> Although the *Life* is an unreliable source on contemporary buildings,<sup>95</sup> comparisons with other nunneries suggests it is probable that Christina did have her own chamber for Margaret to visit within a complex of precinct and outer court structures, and that a fire in the wooden kitchens might have necessitated an entire second rebuild by the generous Abbot.<sup>96</sup> Contrary to some suggestions, there was never a formal relationship between St Albans and Markyate; but gift giving is always a strategy in the creation and maintenance of social relationships and networks through obligations of reciprocity,<sup>97</sup> and Christina's prayers and intercessions were exchanged for Geoffrey's material support.<sup>98</sup> Fluid movement of personnel between the two houses also met the need for Christina and her *puellae* to regularly hear mass, which was outsourced to St Albans in the move from a mixed to single sex community.<sup>99</sup>

The *Life* claims that it was Geoffrey, not Christina, who was in charge of all the material dealings, for example the securing of lands, for Markyate, "*providet domui et dispositio efficitur agendorum*".<sup>100</sup> However, between 1123 and c.1130 Christina must have managed to find funds to support herself and her growing community. The earliest lay patronage of Markyate pre-dates Abbot Geoffrey's provisions, in the form of the advowson for the parish church of Saints Peter and Paul, Kingsbury in Warwickshire given by the first Osbert de Arden (d. c.1130).<sup>101</sup> The de Ardens were descended from Thurkill of

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<sup>93</sup> *Life*, ch. 61, p. 144 and ch. 78, p. 178.

<sup>94</sup> *GA*, I, p. 95.

<sup>95</sup> For example Richard Plant has pointed out that Christina having her own room alone is a literary device to highlight her spiritual isolation rather than a reflection of medieval lifestyles, 'Romanesque Architecture in Christina's World', unpublished paper delivered at *Christina of Markyate and the St Albans Psalter: An Interdisciplinary Conference*, August 2003.

<sup>96</sup> *Life*, ch. 59, p. 142 and ch. 82, p. 190 where Christina is "*sedens in alia domo*" from Godit. See also *GA*, I, p. 103. For comparisons see Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, pp. 117-120.

<sup>97</sup> See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>98</sup> See *Life*, ch. 68, p. 154.

<sup>99</sup> See *Life*, ch. 61, p. 144; ch. 68, p. 154; and ch. 70, p. 158. In later years Markyate was famously resistant to their freedom of movement being curtailed, throwing Pope Boniface VIII's *Periculoso* bull at the unlucky Bishop Dalderby of Lincoln, see Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 154.

<sup>100</sup> *Life*, ch. 68, p. 154.

<sup>101</sup> This grant, which was confirmed by his immediate heirs, resulted in a legal struggle in the early thirteenth century between his successors and Markyate, after his granddaughter Amicia married into the Bracebrigg line who then laid claim to the advowson, *CRR*, V, Trinity 10 John, pp. 241-242. In 1214 the case was taken to the royal court and the nuns presented a number of confirmatory episcopal and archepiscopal charters starting from before 1164, *CRR*, VII, Hilary 15 John, pp. 102-104. The first Osbert de Arden (Thurkill's son by his second wife Leveruna, not his grandson

Warwick, a wealthy Anglo-Danish landholder whose kinsmen were something of a Warwickshire dynasty and who had taken well to the new Norman regime being amongst the first to follow their custom of taking a surname.<sup>102</sup> Over the next century or so family members from several branches of the family bestowed, and sometimes contested, parish spiritualities on Markyate.<sup>103</sup> Emma Cownie succinctly summarises the fluctuating meaning of this kind of gift as “in essence, both a spiritual and a social contract, whose terms varied according to the status of the donor and the value of the donation.”<sup>104</sup> Situated within a few miles of each other, these properties in Hemelingford Hundred, along with Abbot Geoffrey’s gifts, became some of the most valuable Markyate possessions. What is less clear is why Osbert made the original donation. Perhaps the Anglo-Danish family was distantly related to, or neighbours of, Christina’s own kin. Alternatively one of her early *puellae* may have come from the family, although when the advowson was disputed in 1214 the nuns produced extensive evidence for their case, but mentioned no sister in their congregation. The third option is that the fortunes of Markyate continued to be tied closely to St Albans social networks after Roger’s death, since the de Ardens were close neighbours and sometimes tenants of the d’Albini family down the Mowbray line.<sup>105</sup>

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through his first marriage as Katherine Keats-Rohan mistakenly suggests, *Domesday Descendents: A Prosopography of Persons Occurring in English Documents 1066-1166* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), p. 289), is found witnessing Earl David’s *Inquisitio* in the See of Glasgow in 1116, *Registrum Episcopatus Glasguensis: Munimenta Ecclesiae Metropolitanæ Glasguensis a sede restauratâ saeculo ineunte XII ad reformatam religionem*, (Maitland Club, 61: 1843), p. 5, no. 1; and issuing charter from the time of Henry I, BL, Cotton MS charter xxii.3, which is witnessed by his son Osbert, *Facsimilies of Royal and Other Charters in the British Museum*, ed. George Warner and Henry Ellis (London, 1903), no. 12. It is unclear whether the Osbert who appears in 1130 in the Pipe Rolls for 31 Henry I (printed in F.M. Stenton, *The First Century of English Feudalism, 1066-1166* (London: Clarendon Press, 1932), no. 39) is the first Osbert or his son, who took over responsibility for his fathers lands around this time.

<sup>102</sup> The first Osbert is also the earliest known English example of a knight who enjoyed the fashionable tournament circuit, and had one of his vassals carry his painted lances to them, *Facsimilies*, no. 12. On the earlier history of the family see Ann Williams, ‘A Vice-Comital Family in Pre-Conquest Warwickshire’, *ANS*, 11 (1988), 279-295. On Thurkill see William Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*, revised William Thomas (London: Osborn and Longman, 1730), p. 924.

<sup>103</sup> Markyate acquired the advowsons to a number of small village churches in the parish of Coleshill, including Lea Marston, Over Whitacre, Neather Whitacre, and Kington in the neighbouring parish of Bickenhill, (see *Warw. Feet*, I, nos. 116, 290, 438, 719, 725 and 949) from members of the de Clinton, de la Launde and le Notte families, all descended from branches of the extended de Arden family; on the later history of whom see Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire*.

<sup>104</sup> Emma Cownie, *Religious Patronage in Anglo-Norman England 1066 to 1135* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), p. 157.

<sup>105</sup> The lordship of the lands of Hampton were held by the de Ardens who descended from Thurkill’s first wife, in grant from Roger de Mowbray (d. 1188), who was the nephew of Abbot Richard of St Albans and so from a cadet branch of the d’Albini family. In the late twelfth-century two charters (BL, Cotton MSS charters xi.36 and xxx.5) leased the hamlets of Diddington and Kinwalsey from the prioresses of Markyate to members of the de Arden family, and it seems most likely that the lands were originally granted by that family, rather than by their elevated lords as *VCH Warwickshire*, IV, p.83 suggests. The social networks of the de Arden family additionally took in the Canons of St Paul’s and the Priory of Bermondsey, (see Keats-Rohan, *Domesday Descendents*, p. 290), both connected to Markyate.

The vassals of a great family were supporting the lesser branches of a monastic network where their lords supported the great house. Nonetheless these lesser branches could be still significant players in their own right. Despite periods of dire poverty and scandal from the later thirteenth century onwards,<sup>106</sup> Markyate held considerable wealth in the 1291 papal *Taxatio*,<sup>107</sup> by which time it had two concentrated areas of valuable assets, as well as more scattered resources in several counties. The Warwickshire parishes of Kingsbury, Coleshill, Bickenhill and Hampton-in-Arden formed one locus, and a variety of temporalities and spiritualities within about a fifteen mile radius around the priory formed the other. A number of important studies have shown that between 1050 and 1150 the focus of gifts to religious houses shifted from the act of giving to the value of the gift, blurring the distinction between creating social bonds and commercial activity.<sup>108</sup> For Markyate the demesne lands that Christina secured from St Paul's in 1145 were a financial rather than a spiritual transaction. Markyate paid an annual quit-rent of three shillings, plus six shillings for further land in Caddington, and all future prioresses were to be ordained by, and swear fealty to, the canons. Similarly, despite her friendship with Abbot Robert of St Albans, when he extended Geoffrey's gifts around Watford a few miles south of their demesne it was a business deal in which the nuns had to pay a yearly rent of twenty-two marks.<sup>109</sup> Early on Markyate also presented to three livings just north of their demesne, Streatley, Sundon and High Gobion, although unfortunately these spiritualities are only recorded in the Lincoln Episcopal Registers which start with Hugh of Wells in 1209.<sup>110</sup> Sitting at the edge of Shillington, the church at the market town of High Gobion is particularly suggestive – could it even be the church where Christina first pledged her virginity?<sup>111</sup> If Talbot is correct in identifying her father's influence in charters relating to the nearby church then Christina's family seem to have had possessions in the area. These

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<sup>106</sup> On controversies and poverty of the house see the episcopal visitations of William Gray in 1433 and William Alnwick in 1442 in *Visitations of Religious Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln*, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson (*Canterbury and York Society*, 17: 1915), pp. 81-86, and (*Canterbury and York Society*, 33: 1927), pp. 228-231. Also *Rolls and Register of Bishop Oliver Sutton* ed. Rosalind Hill (LRS, 52: 1958), p. 40 and (LRS, 64: 1969), p. 16; and Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, esp. pp. 210, 332, 450, and 488.

<sup>107</sup> The spiritualities alone came to an annual income of around 30 pounds, considerably more than those of the royally endowed Godstow which came to only eight marks (I am grateful to Jeff Denton for his help in using this database, *Pers. Corr.* May 2007). The *taxatio* is currently being digitised by the University of Sheffield <<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/taxatio/>> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008], but the complete edition currently remains *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae auctoritate P. Nicolai IV c.1291*, ed. T Astel and others (London: Record Commission, 1802).

<sup>108</sup> See the review article by Arnoud-Jan Bijsterveld, 'The Medieval Gift as Agent of Social Bonding and Political Power: A Comparative Approach', in *Medieval Transformations: Text, Power and Gifts in Context*, ed. Esther Cohen and Mayke de Jong (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 124-156.

<sup>109</sup> See *GA*, III, pp. 88-91.

<sup>110</sup> The first mentions are: Streatley, 1278, *Rotuli Richardi Gravesend*, ed. F. N. Davis (LRS, 20: 1925), p. 212; Sundon, 1225, and High Gobion, 1223, both in *Rotuli Hughonis de Welles*, ed. F. N. Davis (LRS, 9: 1914), pp. 9 and 13.

<sup>111</sup> *Life*, ch. 4, p. 40.

lands might therefore reflect the reconciliation between daughter and family as well as the importance of kinship in the subsidising of new foundations.<sup>112</sup> Certainly these livings do not seem to have been held by any of the great magnates and so must either represent gentry interest in the house comparable with the findings of Marilyn Oliva,<sup>113</sup> or Markyate's ongoing economic relationship with the powerful landholdings of St Albans.

By the dissolution the priory was worth around £115, placing it in the richest quarter of the 132 houses assessed by the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*.<sup>114</sup> The most valuable of these assets remained centred in the hundreds of Hemlingford and Flitt where Christina's prioress successors consolidated her early patronage. Christina certainly determined the successful future of Markyate by situating it in fruitful networks emanating from the Abbey of St Albans, yet the level of funds that she brought to the house were not so impressive as to mirror the boast in her *Life* that she was renowned for holiness throughout the land.<sup>115</sup> As foundress of Markyate we would expect that here if anywhere Christina's saintly memory would have been remembered, invoked and exploited, but again she does not seem to have continued to guide her house from beyond the grave. Whilst the unusual late twelfth-century convent seal depicting a seated Christ with book in hand could be a reference to Christina's pilgrim visions, the association is tentative since her overall spirituality seems to have been more Mariological than Christological.<sup>116</sup> More convincing is the case against her memory being useful to the community, since in their later legal wranglings Markyate routinely produced various legal documents but no evidence of Christina's relics. Overall, Markyate was a medium sized, financially and socially successful house, but it did not become a cultic centre and nor did it see itself as one.

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<sup>112</sup> See *Cartularium monasterii de Rameseia*, ed. W. H. Hart and others, 3 vols (RS 79, 1884-93), I, p. 138 and Talbot, 'Introduction', p. 11.

<sup>113</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England: Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350-1540* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998).

<sup>114</sup> See tables of income in David Bell, *What Nuns Read: Books and Libraries in Medieval English Nunneries* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995), p. 11. The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* valued the priory at £114 16s 1d, although the Crown bailiffs at the dissolution valued it at £155 5s 10¾d, see *Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. H. VIII auctoritate Regis Institutus*, ed. J. Caley and J. Hunter, 6 vols (London: Record Commission, 1810-34), IV, pp. 209-210 and *VCH Beds*, I, (1904), p. 360.

<sup>115</sup> *Life*, ch. 50, pp. 124-126 and ch. 76, p. 174.

<sup>116</sup> Cotton MS charter xi.36. For a discussion of the importance of medieval seals see Brigitte Bedok Rezak, 'Seals and Sigillography, Western Europe', in *Dictionary of The Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph Strayer and others, 13 vols (New York: Scribner, 1988), IV, pp. 123-131. Limited work has been done on the seals of female religious houses, of which the best is Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, pp. 143-149.

## II.II Relationships with the Wider Monastic Community

St Albans had a “whole system of satellites”,<sup>117</sup> but Markyate (unlike Sopwell) was not actually one of them; it did not share in St Albans liberties, and remained directly under episcopal jurisdiction. This did not prevent the two houses continuing to have practical bonds in landholding and perhaps in the provision of scribes for the nunnery. It is possible that the Markyate prioress Alice Gobion, whose fraught dealings with the Dunstable Friars in 1259 were deemed important enough to be recorded in St Albans’ domestic chronicle, was from the same family that gave St Albans its abbatial successor to Geoffrey, Ralph Gobion.<sup>118</sup> It certainly seems likely that both the abbot and the prioress came from the High Gobion area, where Markyate held presentation to the local church. Even if Koopmans is correct that the community was ‘dropped’ by St Albans during their leadership crisis, the hiatus was brief and relations between Markyate and her neighbour were quickly resumed.<sup>119</sup> Certainly they were more intimate than Markyate was with its distant landlords at St Paul’s, who did not engage in the daily affairs of the priory and allowed them to manage their own legal affairs and appoint *custos* on their own behalf.<sup>120</sup>

An autonomous Benedictine foundation is by its very nature responsible for its own assets and discipline, and answerable only to its bishop. Nevertheless the informal links between houses of closely connected interests gave a context of potential mutual support – or litigious acrimony – through which ideas, texts and news passed. The area around Markyate boasted a remarkably large number of priories of modest means. Located on the border between Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, within a few miles were the nunneries of Flamstead (fd. 1150), Sopwell (fd. 1140), St Mary de Pré (fd. 1194), and St Margaret’s Ivinghoe (fd. > 1129) and the monasteries of Redbourn (fd. 1178) and Beaulieu (fd. 1140-1146). Apart from Ivinghoe (founded and then left in poverty by William Giffard Bishop of Winchester) these houses formed an ongoing network of personal associations underpinned by hermit Roger’s pastoral responsibilities or their connection to St Albans. For example the two houses which emerged from Christina’s reclusive mentors, Roger and

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<sup>117</sup> Knowles and Hadcock, pp. 16-17.

<sup>118</sup> *GA*, I, p. 387.

<sup>119</sup> Koopmans, ‘Conclusion’, pp. 685-694. *VCH Herts*, II, p. 155 suggests that there might even have been later gifts/rents from St Albans since in 1299 the Manors of Titburst and Kendals in Dacorum Hundred was held of the prioress of Markyate under the lordship of St Albans.

<sup>120</sup> See *Warw. Feet*, I, no. 116 for a nun Katherine representing the prioress. See *Rolls and Register of Bishop Oliver Sutton* (LRS, 48: 1954), pp. 161-162 for use of *custos* by the priory in 1291. On prioress appointed officials see Curran, ‘Medieval Religious Women in Their Communities in Scotland’, pp. 197-198.

Alfwen, continued to co-operate with the professions of nuns from Markyate and Flamstead being received together by the bishop of Lincoln into the fifteenth century.<sup>121</sup>

The early history of Sopwell and Markyate are intimately connected, and to an extent parallel each other. As eremitic followers of Roger's charismatic leadership both houses attracted some patronage from families belonging to the extended networks of St Albans abbey before they had been officially founded as priories. Both came under Abbot Geoffrey's regularising zeal in the early 1140s, when the women then living a semi-regular life in the St Albans almonry were perhaps incorporated to Sopwell.<sup>122</sup> Relief from this burden would certainly explain why Adam the Cellarer felt the priory to have been one of Geoffrey's great successes.<sup>123</sup> Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, whose credentials as a promoter of female vocations are also confirmed in his patronage of the first Gilbertine daughter-house at Haverholme,<sup>124</sup> confirmed, and perhaps consecrated, the foundation of both houses.<sup>125</sup> This shared history probably explains why many scholars have confused the two houses,<sup>126</sup> but their bond was one of friendship only and Sopwell remained a daughter-house, if not always a contented one, of St Albans.<sup>127</sup> St Albans owned Sopwell's demesne lands,<sup>128</sup> appointed its prioress, provided it with rules<sup>129</sup> and *custos*,<sup>130</sup> and received gifts which maintained the bond between the houses.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>121</sup> *Register of Philip Repingdon 1405-1409*, ed. Margaret Archer, (LRS, 57: 1963), p. 146. St Giles in the Wood Flamstead was founded by Roger de Tosny. Although not a direct regularisation of the eremitic community around Alfwen, her presence in the area must have influenced its location. The hermit saint to whom it is dedicated received special devotion both from women and at the St Albans community where Abbot Geoffrey solemnised the feast. See Binns, *Dedications*, p. 30 and *GA*, I, p. 93.

<sup>122</sup> *GA*, I, pp. 11 and 59.

<sup>123</sup> *GA*, I, pp. 80-82.

<sup>124</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, ed. and trans. Raymond Foreville and Gillian Keir (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), pp. 38-39. See also Dyson, 'Monastic Patronage', pp. 14-24 and Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>125</sup> See ordinances for Sopwell in *GA*, I, p. 82 and confirmation charter for Markyate, Gibbs, *Early Charters*, no. 156.

<sup>126</sup> See for example Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives*, p. 30, n. 42; Clark, *Monastic Renaissance*, p. 14; Dyson 'Monastic Patronage', p. 18.

<sup>127</sup> In c.1330 the convent were thwarted in their attempt to appoint their own prioress by the St Albans prior, see *GA*, II, p. 212.

<sup>128</sup> *GA*, I, p. 53.

<sup>129</sup> Abbots Geoffrey de Gorrion (1119-1146), Michael of Mentmore (1336-1349) and Thomas de la Mare (1349-1396) all imposed regulations on Sopwell, see *GA*, I, pp. 81-82, *Monasticon*, III, p. 365-6 no. VII and *GA*, II, p. 519. See also Tony Hunt, ed. 'Anglo-Norman Rules for the Priories of St Mary de Pre and Sopwell' in *De Mot en Mot: Aspects of Medieval Linguistics: Essays in Honour of William Rothwell*, ed. Stewart Gregory and D. A. Trotter (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 93-104.

<sup>130</sup> *GA*, II, p. 519.

<sup>131</sup> In the 1380 *Liber Benefactorum* prioresses Agnes and Letitia respective gave three copes to, and embroidered the vestments of, St Albans, see Cotton MS Nero D.vii, fol. 104v. For other connections between St Albans and Sopwell see *VCH, Herts*, IV, pp.422-426.

Not very far distant from Markyate were more prestigious convents including Godstow and Elstow, also under Lincoln's episcopal jurisdiction, and Clerkenwell, a lay foundation on the road to London with extensive patronage and even a rare example of a papal bull in favour of a nunnery in 1182. There are no records suggesting that Markyate enjoyed a particular relationship with these elevated nunneries, and Christina's charismatic reputation does not seem to have circulated amongst them. It is unlikely that Markyate even participated in the friendship between the Abbeys of Wherwell and St Albans, despite the male monastery producing a similar psalter for Wherwell's prioress. Rodney Thomson has pointed out that the calendar entries for Christina and for Alexis, both important feasts at Markyate, are erased in the Wherwell psalter because they held no cultic meaning at that house.<sup>132</sup>

The unusual St Albans evidence relating to Christina is not restricted to narrative and liturgical sources. The two charters from 1145 which established the priory – the first a concession of land by St Paul's, London, and the second a confirmation of this grant and consecration of the priory church by Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln<sup>133</sup> – are remarkable partly for their survival.<sup>134</sup> As with the other sources these are St Albans documents and they introduce another link in Christina's possible anonymous devotees from the domestic scriptorium, since the same hand that recorded Bishop Alexander's dedication of the church also added it to the Hildesheim Psalter, along with the feast of St Margaret.<sup>135</sup> Although Alexander of Lincoln consecrated Christina there is no reason for the head of the largest diocese in the kingdom, and man of personal social distinction, to have held an actual interest in her story as a consequence. David Smith has pointed out the importance of obtaining a bishop's confirmation in safeguarding early donations to monasteries, which were often the subject of confusion and uncertainty,<sup>136</sup> and to that extent this seems to be a conventional charter. At the consecration of the altar Dean Ralph of St Paul's and two other members of the community confirmed the land at Caddington, and most of the witness-list reflects the prominent figures in the diocese of Lincoln.<sup>137</sup> Three of the

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<sup>132</sup> Leningrad, Public Library MS Q.v.I.62, see Thomson, *Manuscripts*, p. 37. Koopmans interprets the erasure differently, as evidence that St Albans deliberately obliterated possible cultic connections with Christina, 'Conclusion', pp. 664-665.

<sup>133</sup> Cotton MS charters xi.6 and xi.8 respectively.

<sup>134</sup> There is no record of a cartulary for Markyate and these are two of only four St Albans charters which survive in the original see Thomson, *Manuscripts*, p. 4.

<sup>135</sup> Thomson, *Manuscripts*, p. 29.

<sup>136</sup> David Smith 'Preface' in *EEA 1: Lincoln 1067-1185* (London: British Academy, 1980), p. xlvii.

<sup>137</sup> The complete witness list for charter xi.8 reads: "*Patricius episcopus de Limerich, Aleelmus decanus ecclesiae sanctae Mariae Linconiae, Henricus archidiaconus de Huntendone, Nicholaus archidiaconus de Bedeford, David archidiaconus de Buchingham, Rogers de Dalmeri canonicus, et Petrus canonicus, et Reinaldus simplex canonicus et Radulfus de Munemue, et Gaufridus abbas sancti Albani cum priore et pluribus monachis eiusdem ecclesiae et*

bishop's archdeacons were with him along with the Dean of St Mary's Lincoln, four canons and the Bishop of Limerick, who seems to have been just passing through.<sup>138</sup>

From considering the other witnesses to the two charters, it is possible to piece together some of the houses that might have had an interest in Christina or whom she might have known. A longer and more pertinent witness list is appended to the Markyate foundation charter from St Paul's which confirms the demesne and local woodland to the monastery.<sup>139</sup> It is striking that where Christina's spiritual contacts are not dependent priories of St Albans they are almost all Augustinian rather than Benedictine. Only three witnesses testify to both charters: Abbot Geoffrey, whose presence as the chief witness to the St Paul's grant perhaps indicates how the dynamics of power over the grant had operated; the Master of St Julian's Hospital, a local dependent female priory established by Abbot Geoffrey; and Robert the Augustinian prior of the south London house of Merton. Christina's family had been intimately connected to the canons of Huntingdon in whose precinct we learn they buried their dead.<sup>140</sup> Since the first brothers at Merton came from among the canons at Huntingdon in c.1114-1117 it seems quite possible that Christina had family ties, or even personal friendships, with those at London.<sup>141</sup> The Cluniac monk Gervase, as the sole exception to the Augustinian/St Albans identification, comes from the London house of Bermondsey where Christina also had personal friends.<sup>142</sup> Although not a witness to her own foundation charter, Christina's interests were clearly being represented by more than just her brother Simon of Huntingdon. The Dean of St Paul's had brought with him secular staff and archdeacons as representatives of his bishop as well as members of his house. What is less clear is whether the other Augustinian priors from the diocese of London are witnessing for St Paul's or for St Albans (with whose representatives they are grouped). The Benedictine Abbey of Colchester was a powerful monastery founded shortly after the conquest which, like St Albans, was

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*Rodbertus prior de Meretone, et Reinaldus canonicus eiusdem ecclesiae, et Ilbertus magister informorum sancti Iuliani et multi alii tam clerici qua laici*".

<sup>138</sup> The un-titled witness Ralph of Monmouth was a Lincoln canon of unidentified prebendry, see *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1066-1300*, ed. Diana Greenway, 10 vols (London: Institute for Historical Research, 1977), III, p. 136. Keats-Rohan doubts that Bishop Patrick ever actually ruled the Irish See, *Domesday Descendants*, p. 824.

<sup>139</sup> The complete witness list for charter xi.6 reads: "*Gaufridus abbas sancti Albani, Hugo abbas Colecestrie, Normannus prior sancta Trinitatis, Iohannes prior sancti Botulfi Colecestriae, Robertus prior de Meretona, et Robertus subprior, Thomas prior sancti Bartholomaei, Germanus prior de Bellovidere, Thomas monachus, Roger sacristes, Milo monachus, Osgotus monachus, Gervasius monachus de Bermundesei, magister Walterus, Ilbertus magister infirmorum, Alvedus de Wathemstede, Rogerus de Crocheslei, Gaufridus de Gorham, Symon de Hundenduna, Willielmus de Claedona, Radulfus decanus sancti Pauli, Willielmus archidiaconus, Richardus de Belmeis archidiaconus, Alwaldus laus canonicus, Theodoricus, Gaufridus constabularius, magister Herrnicus, Valterus, Odo, Gaufridus et Robertus fratres, Hubertus, Randulfus, Hugo nepos decan*".

<sup>140</sup> *Life*, ch. 14, p. 58.

<sup>141</sup> See Knowles and Hadcock, p. 166.

<sup>142</sup> *Life*, ch. 77, p. 174.

connected through its abbots to the Canterbury-Bec nexus.<sup>143</sup> Its neighbour, St Botulf's Colchester was amongst the first Augustinian houses in England and colonised Holy Trinity Aldegate whose witness, the first prior Norman, was a charismatic whose discipline attracted the patronage of both King Stephen and Matilda. Finally, the priory of St Bartholomew's (founded by the above noted vision of Rahere) makes it clear that all these witnesses were from important but geographically local houses. Although we should avoid reading too much into charter testimony, Christina seems from this list to be connected with some of the most important male religious houses of the reign of King Stephen. If her charismatic reputation was exciting monastic interest across the South-East, however, it does not seem to have lasted as none of these houses subsequently remained intimate with Markyate.

By the time Christina died, Markyate was a settled community with a clear identity as an independent Benedictine priory and only nominal obligations to the canons of St Paul's. It is possible to chart the financial, cultic, patronage and network status of a female house, but much harder to trace the spiritual and intellectual position of the majority nunneries, which did not enjoy resources at the level of Barking or Wilton. It is therefore hard to establish whether Markyate gained in repute because of its charismatic foundress, but the silence of the source material is suggestive. An abbess saint's duties to her community were as much in her post-mortem appearances and patronage as in her leadership when alive. If Christina had been a successful cultic figure with miracle-working relics held by her foundation, then Markyate would have had a good chance of becoming very eminent. Instead in her later years Christina was simply a good prioress, albeit a spiritually advanced one, and although her remarkable visionary powers were accepted by her *puellae* as enhancing the general personal qualities of their leader,<sup>144</sup> it was St Albans, not Markyate, that sought to channel and exploit them.

### III. The Abbey of St Albans

Virtually all documents relating to Christina – the *vita*, the psalter and even the charters – are of St Albans provenance, and the patronage and enthusiasm of Abbot Geoffrey provided the momentum to establish Christina and her community. Christina's sphere of influence is textually part of the networks of St Albans, and the abbey forms the battleground for the tussle over the direction of her charismatic powers.

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<sup>143</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, 940-1216*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: CUP, 1949), pp. 129 and 186.

<sup>144</sup> For example, *Life*, ch. 67, p. 154.

During the reign of Henry I, the abbey of St Albans emerged as the foremost Benedictine house in England, a position that - by dint of its longevity, landholdings, royal influence and unusual episcopal exemption - it defended into the late middle ages when it presided over the general and provincial chapters of the black monks.<sup>145</sup> Its high rank was based less on its wealth than its impressive social networks. Although the personnel had been overhauled at the conquest, resulting amongst other things in some rethinking of the abbey kalendar, it had retained almost all of its land and prestige.<sup>146</sup> It was also one of the premier pilgrimage sites in England, with a strong and ongoing sense of its independent spiritual identity, which spanned the conquest.<sup>147</sup> When Geoffrey took up his abbacy he succeeded Paul, (an Italian relative of Lanfranc and former monk of Bec) and Richard d'Albini (an intimate at the royal court). Under their guidance the abbey church had been rebuilt and rededicated, a project which Geoffrey energetically advanced by translating Alban's relics in 1129 to a specially commissioned and elaborate gold shrine.<sup>148</sup> This translation, which Christina and her *puellae* perhaps attended, gave St Albans the focal point for much of its later claim to greatness, notably under Abbot Thomas de la Mare.<sup>149</sup>

If Geoffrey did not attract vast new resources for St Albans from the court elite, as had his predecessors, he was a good manager of existing ones.<sup>150</sup> Christopher Holdsworth has established that that long term family allegiances and local politics, rather than affiliations

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<sup>145</sup> On the prestigious position of St Albans see Knowles, *Monastic Order*, pp.186-188 and Clark, *Monastic Renaissance*, pp. 10-12.

<sup>146</sup> Marjorie Chibnall has argued that monasteries' willingness to accommodate Norman knights on their estates was the key to the survival of their endowments at the Conquest, *Anglo-Norman England 1066-1166* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 23-24. A lot of valuable work has been done on the Abbey of St Albans. Histories covering a wide timespan include the antiquarian work found in Dugdale's *Monasticon*, II, pp. 177-255, and Peter Newcome, *History of the Ancient and Royal Foundation*. The early research of L. F. Rushbrook Williams, *History of the Abbey*, includes a detailed look at the finances of the Abbey. Collections of papers include *Alban and St Albans*, ed. Martin Henig and Phillip Lindley, and *Cathedral and City: St Albans Ancient and Modern*, ed. R. Runcie (London: Lee Cooper, 1977). Monographs on specific periods in the history of the house include Vivian Galbraith, *The Abbey of St Albans from 1300 to the Dissolution of the Monasteries: The Stanhope Essay* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1911); Michelle Still, *The Abbot and the Rule: Religious Life at St Albans, 1290-1349* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); and, more relevant to the time period of this study, Clark, *Monastic Renaissance*. A longitudinal study of the town is forthcoming by Mark Freeman, *St Albans: A History* (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2008).

<sup>147</sup> On pilgrimage in England, another subject covered by a substantial body of scholarship, see first Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon & London, 2000). Ronald Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London: Dent & Sons, 1977) looks at the subject from the perspective of the pilgrims, whilst the practicalities and value of pilgrimage for the communities who own the shrines is studied by Ben Neilson, *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998). A recent compendium of essays, although for a later period, covers a range of interesting ground, Colin Morris and Peter Roberts, eds., *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002).

<sup>148</sup> *GA*, I, pp. 85-86.

<sup>149</sup> See Clark, *Monastic Renaissance*, pp.38-39.

<sup>150</sup> See *GA*, I, pp. 78-88 and *Liber Benefactorum*, Cotton MS Nero D.vii, fol. 14v-15r for Geoffrey's administration of St Albans lands. On the gentrification of patronage to the house see also Cownie, *Religious Patronage*, pp. 94-96.

in the civil war, determined the relationships between patrons and religious houses, and the flirtation between St Albans and the Angevin party did not prevent the pro-Stephen d'Albini family continuing their generosity to the house and its dependents.<sup>151</sup> Geoffrey extended this network of dependents in the 1140s adding small local houses, some with eremitic origins, to the existing flourishing priories. The influence of St Albans over wider English life continued to be felt with monks being recruited to several influential abbeys including Eynsham, Croyland and Westminster. Abbot Geoffrey's personal enrichment of the Abbey chattels reflected his own liturgical enthusiasm, and the *Gesta Abbatum* effuses over gem-encrusted ornaments and vestments,<sup>152</sup> whilst the rather shorter list of books are also for divine service.<sup>153</sup> Several fine copes which he endowed to the house were burned by his (more bookish) successor to extract these precious metals.<sup>154</sup> This, admittedly practical, move indicates a very different mentality in Abbot Ralph which perhaps prevented him from sharing friendship with Christina as had Abbot Geoffrey.

As well as being the premier abbey in England, St Albans must be credited with having one of the most productive *scriptoria*. Geoffrey reorganised the funding, first allocated by Abbot Paul, to provide for three permanent scribes, and Rodney Thomson has demonstrated in his seminal analysis of the remaining library that it both trained scribes in the 'house style' and attracted travelling artists and master craftsmen.<sup>155</sup> The majority of the books produced were *ex libris* liturgical, classical or patristic texts, but from the 1120s books were also being produced for export to the dependant cells and beyond, both as gifts and transactions. Most interestingly for this study it is apparent that there was contemporary interest at St Albans in very new, speculative, theology. Under Abbot Richard, when the St Albans links with the Canterbury-Bec nexus were still strong, the library held controversial collections of writings by Anselm, and subsequently the work of the Parisian canons of St Victor was rapidly assimilated into the domestic collection.<sup>156</sup> If interest in such elevated mystical theorising places the St Albans monks rather out of Christina's league, then the copy of Peter Damian's (c. 1007-1072) *Laus Eremiticæ*

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<sup>151</sup> Holdsworth 'The Church', pp. 217-228.

<sup>152</sup> *GA*, I, p. 93.

<sup>153</sup> *GA*, I, p. 94.

<sup>154</sup> In the late-eleventh and early-twelfth centuries Peter Damian and other church reformers were encouraging monastic houses to spend their treasures in order to recover church lands, so perhaps Abbot Ralph was showing himself to be in tune with continental reform trends, see David Herlihy, 'Treasure Hoards in the Italian Economy', *Economic History Review*, 10 (1957), 1-14.

<sup>155</sup> Thomson, *Manuscripts*, esp. pp. 20-43.

<sup>156</sup> See Thomson, *Manuscripts*, pp. 15 and 41. R. W. Hunt has pointed out the unusual later correspondence between Abbot Simon (1166-1183) and the Abbey of St Victor, 'The Library of the Abbey of St Albans', in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. M. B. Parkes and Andrew Watson (London: Scholar, 1978), p. 253.

*Vitae*,<sup>157</sup> made at the start of Geoffrey's office, with its emphasis on purity, may neatly bookend his intellectual engagement with new spirituality.<sup>158</sup> The appearance of their patron saint to several monks at his translation further corroborates the impression that this traditional and grand abbey was open to the changing spiritual currents of the early twelfth century.<sup>159</sup>

As we shall see, Abbot Geoffrey was not as exclusive in his attentions to Christina as the *Life* suggests. Therefore one of the things that makes the *vita* most remarkable is that it does not come from a scriptorium flush with creative enthusiasm for generating new texts of their own, and that the Writer was not used to composition. There are some hints that scholarship at St Albans did go a little beyond the beautiful copying of others' manuscripts. For example, a few years after the *Life* was written, a St Albans monk, Nicholas, engaged in the nuanced contemporary debate raging on the topic of the immaculate conception, composing a treatise against St Bernard and writing letters to Peter de Celle, Abbot of Saint Rémi.<sup>160</sup> Adam the Cellarer was creating his domestic account at the end of Geoffrey's abbacy, and c.1146 another monk compiled one of the letter collections popular in contemporary monastic circles.<sup>161</sup> This is not, however, a considerable body of authorship, and the only other remaining original works were probably composed by Abbot Geoffrey himself. Geoffrey composed several pieces in the Hildesheim Psalter for Christina including rubrics to the psalm illuminations, an introduction to the Alexis story and a discourse on spiritual warfare. Additionally Thomson believes that Geoffrey may have been the author of a collection of verse prepared as a gift for Canterbury.<sup>162</sup> Obviously given the volume of lost material it would be rash to suggest that there were no other authors at St Albans; nevertheless for such an elaborate *vita* to be composed with little other evidence of original work is striking. Christina's charisma must have impressed and persuaded a good proportion of the monks that she was indeed a saint, and specifically a saint for the Abbey of St Albans.

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<sup>157</sup> Peter Damian, 'Laus Eremiticae Vitae', in *Opusculum Undecimum, Liber Qui Appellatur, Dominus Vobiscum*, PL 145:213-252, cols. 246-251. See also the translation by Patricia McNulty in *St Peter Damian: Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life* (London: Faber, 1959), pp. 74-81. This text is chapter nineteen of Damian's eleventh treatise *Dominum Vobiscum*, but often circulated independently, see Susanna Barsella, 'Boccaccio, Petrarch and Peter Damian: Two Models of the Humanist Intellectual', *Modern Language Notes*, 121 (2006), 16-48.

<sup>158</sup> Thomson, *Manuscripts*, cat. no. 58.

<sup>159</sup> *GA*, I, p.86

<sup>160</sup> See C. H. Talbot, 'Nicholas of St Alban and St Bernard', *Revue Bénédictine*, 64 (1954), 83-117, and *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. Julian Haseldine (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp. 578-627.

<sup>161</sup> *Analecta Dublinensia: Three Medieval Latin Texts in the Library of Trinity College Dublin*, ed. Marvin Colker (Cambridge Mass: Medieval Academy of America, 1975).

<sup>162</sup> Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 375, Thomson, *Manuscripts*, pp. 42-43. The collection includes three poems on St Aelfege, two on St Alban and a versified Passion of St Katherine.

### III.I The Social Identity of Abbot Geoffrey

The personal friendship between Christina and Abbot Geoffrey dominates the last third of the *Life* and formed a continuous bond between the Abbey and Markyate for around twenty years. This friendship seems to have made no distinction between the personal and the political: Christina's visionary life was re-orientated towards Geoffrey, through which she monitored his activities within and outwith his monastery. Grace Jantzen has pointed out that prevailing models of mysticism which see it as purely an intense personal experience fail to acknowledge the reality and importance of these kinds of political and social dynamics.<sup>163</sup> Although clearly a popular and reforming abbot who was serious and effective about the responsibilities of his office, Geoffrey himself was not a charismatic in the Weberian sense. When he did experience personal divine calling this was mediated through his relationship with Christina and did not impact on the exercise of his authority through his abbatial office.

Abbot Geoffrey was remembered by his own community in the *Gesta Abbatum* as on friendly and peaceable terms with his monastic brothers,<sup>164</sup> a generous protector of the Abbey and the poor,<sup>165</sup> a promoter of regularised religious observance and the cult of St Katherine,<sup>166</sup> and the energetic patron of an elaborate shrine for St Alban.<sup>167</sup> Overall he was deemed to have been a successful abbot except, interestingly, in his enthusiasm for the fledgling Markyate community and his inappropriate management of the lands in the Manor of Westwick.<sup>168</sup> He was not explicitly accused of causing nepotistic detriment to the Abbey, as was his powerful predecessor,<sup>169</sup> but there was nevertheless something of a de Gorham dynasty at St Albans and its lands and dependencies.<sup>170</sup> Exploiting the

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<sup>163</sup> Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, pp. 1-26.

<sup>164</sup> "*Hic, semper filiorum et fratrum suorum spiritualium paci et quieti prospiciens, eisque semper cum vultus serenitate tribuendo, simul alacriter et pacifice fecit cohabitare*", *GA*, I, p. 73.

<sup>165</sup> See *GA*, I, pp. 73-76 and 93-94 for financial provisions and papal indulgences to the Abbey. *GA*, I, pp. 76 and 82 for compassion for the poor.

<sup>166</sup> Amongst the new feasts added to the St Albans calendar under Abbot Geoffrey was the feast of the Immaculate Conception, which was being revived by many of the important Benedictine houses and was being debated by some of the greatest monastic minds of the period, see *GA*, I, p. 93. Geoffrey's devotion to St Katherine inadvertently caused him to take the cowl, *GA*, I, p. 73, and alms on St Katherine's feastday were instituted in his memory under Abbot Warin (1183-95), *GA*, I, p. 207.

<sup>167</sup> *GA*, I, pp. 80, 82-88 and 92.

<sup>168</sup> *GA*, I, p. 95. All the references in this paragraph are found in the mid-thirteenth century Matthew Paris manuscript Cotton Nero D.i, as well as the later Thomas Walsingham manuscript Cotton Claudius E.iv.

<sup>169</sup> *GA*, I, p. 71.

<sup>170</sup> A Radulfus de Gorham witnesses the charter of Robert d'Albini in favour of Sopwell (BL, Cotton MS Tiberius E.vi, vol 2, fol. 204), whilst the Gaufridus de Gorham who witnesses the Markyate foundation charter was probably one of Geoffrey's secular relatives. Other members of the de Gorham family appear at the priory of Tynemouth. For a family

political instability of the times Geoffrey made himself useful to his family, building a hall and illegally perpetuating a life-time only grant of lands in the manor of Westwick to his brother-in-law.<sup>171</sup> An irate marginal note in Matthew Paris's autograph version of the *Gesta Abbatum* accuses Geoffrey of acting without the consent of, and detrimentally to, the abbey (the very misdeed that first caused Christina to make contact with him),<sup>172</sup> suggesting that he had additional Norman dependants enjoying his munificence.<sup>173</sup> Geoffrey's relationship with Christina's foundation was understood by all parties as part of a personal rather than an institutional network, and Markyate may possibly have had ongoing connections with the wider de Gorham family. For example the family lands that became known as Gorhambury included the manor of Market Oak, which was part of the possessions of Markyate and may have been granted by the Abbot.<sup>174</sup>

A second account of Geoffrey, written just after his sudden and unexpected death, found in the anonymous letter collection noted above and seemingly written by an admiring St Albans monk, credits Geoffrey with enriching the Abbey, supporting religious persons and the poor, and such capable care of his monks as to prevent any rumours or complaints coming from the house.<sup>175</sup> The last is clearly rhetorical, since Christina's *Life* could almost have been written with the specific purpose of quietening the gossip emanating from the abbey, and the letter-writer goes on to acknowledge that Geoffrey had been "harassed in his lifetime by those who owed him loyalty", "*in vita pro benefactis a fidem sibi debentibus est lacesitus iniuriis*".<sup>176</sup> These letters give a wider picture of Geoffrey's patronage of individual religious vocations than is found in the *Life*, indicating that he supported twenty-four anchorites whose prayers cleansed him from a predilection to greed. Since Roger seems to have been responsible for a wide hermit network such a number is not impossible, but it does suggest that the letter-writer did not share the same enthusiasm for, or knowledge of, Christina as the Writer of the *Life*, as he does not single out her intercessory powers.

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tree of the period see Daniel Power, *The Norman Frontier in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), p. 502.

<sup>171</sup> *GA*, I, p. 95. For a discussion of these St Albans lands see Barbara Chapman, *The Leverstock Green Chronicle*, <<http://www.bacchronicle.homestead.com>> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008].

<sup>172</sup> *Life*, ch. 55-56, p. 134.

<sup>173</sup> Cotton MS Nero D.i, printed in *GA*, I, pp. 95-96.

<sup>174</sup> Barbara Chapman surmises this to be the most logical conclusion given the later history of the lands, but no evidence is currently available to confirm the hypothesis, *Pers. Corr.* September 2006.

<sup>175</sup> *Analecta Dublinensia*, Letter IX, pp. 106-8. The composite volume, including texts in a twelfth-century English hand, merits more scholarly interrogation. In particular the letters describing Abbot Geoffrey and the chaos at St Albans following his death are preceded by the letters and verses of Hildebert and his school, who may have been an early patron of the Abbot.

<sup>176</sup> *Analecta Dublinensia*, Letter X, p. 108.

Described in the *Life* as *nobilis et potens*,<sup>177</sup> Geoffrey moved in elite and worldly circles cutting an important public figure in both the secular and ecclesiastical sphere of mid-twelfth century England and Normandy.<sup>178</sup> His illustrious kin are blamed for encouraging arrogance, (*"insolescere"*), in the Abbot, necessitating Christina's visionary intervention.<sup>179</sup> He was related to the de Lucy brothers: Richard, the rising star of King Stephen's court, and Walter, who stayed at St Albans under Geoffrey's hospitality for several years before becoming the celebrated Abbot of Battle.<sup>180</sup> The abbeys of St Albans and Battle were linked both by this kinship and by a common interest in obtaining episcopal exemption, and Abbot Walter came to St Albans in 1148 to get arbitration from King Stephen in a dispute with the Bishop of Chichester.<sup>181</sup> Although Geoffrey is not as visible in the political records as his famous kinsmen, and seems to have been on the edges of the court circle, he was an active abbot, known personally at the royal and papal courts. He witnessed royal charters during the reigns of both Henry I and Stephen,<sup>182</sup> and was with Henry I in 1125 in Rouen before travelling on to Rome.<sup>183</sup>

Geoffrey was also a valuable arbitrator and friend of other religious houses. From a branch family of Norman nobility in Maine, his early teaching career may have brought him to the notice of Hildebert of Le Mans and so secured an invitation to be master at the abbey grammar school, from the powerful Richard d'Albini, Abbot of St Albans.<sup>184</sup> If so, the connection is additionally interesting given Hildebert's own active support and guidance of religious women.<sup>185</sup> On the theme of *cura monialium* Geoffrey's friendship with Osbert of Clare, Prior and then Abbot of Westminster, corroborates the impression that Geoffrey fostered connections with similarly minded ecclesiastics. In addition to his

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<sup>177</sup> *Life*, ch. 55, p. 134.

<sup>178</sup> In Normandy the de Gorham's were benefactors of the Abbey of Savigny and the priory of L'Abbayette and associates of the de Mayenne family who were related by marriage to William de Bellême. Geoffrey's immediate relatives were also connected to Mont-Saint-Michel See K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, ed., *The Cartulary of the Abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel* (Donnington: Shaun Tyas, 2006), no. 45 and notes pp. 241-242.

<sup>179</sup> *Life*, ch. 55, p. 134.

<sup>180</sup> *Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, p. 72.

<sup>181</sup> *Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, pp. 76-78.

<sup>182</sup> *RRAN*, II, (temp. Henry I), St Albans received a general confirmation in 1119 (no. 1203), and Abbot Geoffrey witnessed notifications of the restoration of Malmesbury church to St Mary's Salisbury (no. 1715); of a royal grant to St. Mary's Rievaulx (no. 1740); and of Ralph Mandauit's appointment as abbot of Athelney (no. 1426), (in the last he is erroneously named William). *RRAN*, III, (temp. Stephen), Geoffrey is found on a general confirmation to Shewsbury Abbey (no. 819) and a forged charter for the liberties of Westminster (no. 928).

<sup>183</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle E*, in *English Historical Documents*, ed. and trans. David Douglas and G. W. Greenaway, 12 vols (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953), II, p. 192 and *RRAN*, II, 1426.

<sup>184</sup> The connection is suggested by Rodney Thomson in *Manuscripts*, p. 20. For school provisions at St Albans, although focusing mainly on the later period, see Clark, *Monastic Renaissance*, pp. 75-78.

<sup>185</sup> For example his letter to Athalisa the recluse, Letter 21, *PL*, 171:196b.

involvement in the founding of Kilburn nunnery, Osbert wrote letters of direction to various women including his nieces and their Abbess at Barking Abbey.<sup>186</sup> He also wrote to Geoffrey in 1140, versifying his admiration for the Abbot and requesting help for the straitened finances of Westminster Abbey.<sup>187</sup> Westminster's abbot was Gervase, son of King Stephen, whom both prior Osbert and the house at St Albans held in considerable contempt,<sup>188</sup> and this friendship adds to the case for anti-Stephen feeling at St Albans in the early 1140s. Acts of religious foundation were as often to make political gestures as pious ones, and we can speculate that Abbot Geoffrey's remarkable absence from the consecration of Godstow nunnery in 1138 by Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, attended and patronised by the King and Queen and the prestigious abbacies of Westminster and Abingdon, may have been a deliberate expression of this political affiliation.<sup>189</sup>

With a network that took in such a range of important houses we must inevitably observe how limited were Geoffrey's interventions on Markyate's behalf. Only his immediate family connections showed any interest in the house, with his nephew, also Geoffrey, amongst the secular witnesses to its foundation. Perhaps Abbot Geoffrey's death in the year after Markyate was consecrated precluded the nunnery from making full use of his social network. Alternatively his conflicting ideas about the foundation may have affected their fortunes, and we are reminded of Abelard's candid admission that his personal management of Heloise's community was motivated as much by his desire that they would revere him as concern for their needs, "*[h]oc ego saepe apud me pertractando, quantum mihi liceret, sororibus illis providere, et earum curam agere disposueram; et quo me amplius revererentur, corporali quoque praesentia eis invigilare*".<sup>190</sup> Geoffrey wanted Christina as his special intercessor and enjoyed what was remarkable about her but, like Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, he did not resist his conviction that the common life, with its attendant norms-governed and pragmatic structures, was best for religious women. In the end the spiritual friendship between the Abbot and the holy woman may not have been quite as exclusive, or as mutually beneficial, as the Writer would have us believe.

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<sup>186</sup> Osbert of Clare, *Letters*, nos. 21, 22, and 42. Although a considerable body of work has been done on the relationship between men and women regarding the question of *cura monialium*, the relationships between the male directors have yet to receive any sustained scholarly attention. Constant Mews touches on the subject with regards to the late eleventh and twelfth centuries in 'Negotiating the Boundaries of Gender in Religious Life: Robert of Arbrissel and Hersende, Abelard and Heloise', *Viator*, 37 (2006), 113-148.

<sup>187</sup> Osbert of Clare, *Letters*, no. 32. Osbert also placed Geoffrey as one of the principal witnesses when forging a charter of general liberties from King Stephen in 1138, *RRAN*, III, no 928.

<sup>188</sup> *GA*, I, p. 133.

<sup>189</sup> See 'The Dedication of the Church of Godstowe' in *English Register of Godstow Nunnery*, pp. 28-29. See also *Monasticon*, IV, pp. 362-363 and 369-367.

<sup>190</sup> Peter Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum*, ed. J. T. Muckle, *Medieval Studies*, 12 (1950), pp. 163-211, citation p. 209.

#### IV. The Political Context

It is not uncommon for saints' lives to give accounts of royal doings, and meddling in politics was in some ways *expected* of medieval saintly eremites. England in particular took political prophecy very seriously; the visits of Kings Henry I and Stephen to Wulfric of Haselbury were influential in bringing the hermit into vogue as a prophet, and Henry II was guided and chastised by the hermit-monk Hamon of Savigny. Several of Christina's saintly peers including Godric of Finchale, Gilbert of Sempringham and Wulfric of Haselbury made prophecies relating to the royal succession,<sup>191</sup> and like Christina Godric offered advice to those going to court.<sup>192</sup> Despite all this, Christina's visionary interventions in Geoffrey's travel plans form a jarring interlude in the narrative, with an over concentration of detail and an absence of clear motive. Since the agenda of the *Life* as a whole is evidently not political in a national sense, this must reflect the Writer's lack of appropriate models with which to shape Christina's charisma. The Writer drew on what he knew, and being a monk of St Albans the texts he knew well included history and political saints.<sup>193</sup> Nevertheless the question remains whether Christina was really politically active through her bond with St Albans.

Recent scholarship has reassessed the traditionally negative view of the relationship between the church in England and King Stephen, arguing that despite his lack of prominent control this was a period of cooperation through mutual commitment to the system of government.<sup>194</sup> The angry comments of the Writer on the grievousness of his election should not be read backwards onto circumstances before Stephen's arrest of the bishops, when ecclesiastics like Geoffrey did suffer divided loyalties between their church and court identities. Christina's own reasons for preventing Geoffrey going on the first two trips are obscure: perhaps, just as Walsingham smoothed over the political anger found in the *Life*, it was indeed *sui commodum*, to her comfort, that he remained at home.<sup>195</sup> Stephen himself was conventionally pious and several of the religious houses which he

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<sup>191</sup> On political prophesy see Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), pp. 38-48.

<sup>192</sup> The weighty and codicologically complex lives of St Godric, of which the most important is Reginald of Durham's account, is in pressing need of a new edition and analysis. The project is currently being undertaken by Margaret Coombe as a thesis for Oxford University. The current standard edition is *Libellus de vita et miraculis S. Godrici, heremitaie de Finchale*, ed. J. Stevenson, (*Surtees Society*, 20: 1847), see esp. ch. 159, pp. 302-304.

<sup>193</sup> Tracing the saints lives known at St Albans is difficult, but one known compilation made before 1119 includes Saints Dunstan, Alexis, Alban, John the Almoner and Birinus, all of whom were active in secular or ecclesiastical affairs, see Thomson, *Manuscripts*, cat. no. 64.

<sup>194</sup> See Crouch, *Reign of King Stephen*, pp. 95-319 and Stephen Marritt, 'King Stephen and the Bishops', *ANS*, 24 (2002), 129-144.

<sup>195</sup> *GA*, I, p. 104.

patronised, including Holy Trinity Aldegate<sup>196</sup> and Bermondsey<sup>197</sup> do form part of Christina's wider social network. The story of Bishop Robert Bloet's altercation with hermit Roger, recorded by William of Malmesbury, hints that Christina may have become symbolically, if not personally, important at a higher level regarding her disputed marriage. The enthusiasm of the King and Queen for recluses did not, however, extend to Christina.<sup>198</sup> Nor is it obvious that Christina herself was seeking such elevated influence. She may have been a politically astute woman in her own right; certainly her involvement in Geoffrey's court life got her accused of being "a dreamer", "*sompniatrix*", "a seducer of souls", "*animorum translatrix*", and "a worldly-wise business woman", "*secularium agendorum prudenta procuratrix*".<sup>199</sup> However her own political concerns centred on the protection of her chaste pledge, and the courts which concerned her were episcopal. The social construction of her charisma was situated in a restricted network which took in her beloved friend Geoffrey but not the elevated circles in which he moved.

Negotiating and challenging episcopal control was in itself no mean task. For the Weberian prophet this is a much more important field than secular politics, since prophetic authority is predicated on holding apposite qualities to those of the church hierarchy. Charisma relies firstly on the self-belief of the prophet as divinely chosen, which then equips them to bypass existing structures and rules. Christina believed herself to have suffered persecution from the bishops of Durham and then Lincoln, and the well-meaning intercessions in her cause from the archbishops of Canterbury and York had provided only theoretical rather than practical help. Subjection to bishops was a fluctuating asset for nunneries, with the guaranteed patronage offset by the loss of autonomy.<sup>200</sup> For a community like Markyate before it was put on a formal footing in 1145 the responsibilities of the bishop over the house were unclear, and it is evident from the *Life* that this was a cause of anxiety for Christina. Such a preoccupation spilt over into Christina's visionary life, and pivotal to her spiritual career was a vision in which she was crowned by angels, a motif widely used to represent the heavenly rewards for virginity.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> The subprior Ralph of Holy Trinity Aldegate was confessor to Queen Matilda and the infant children of the royal couple were buried there in 1137.

<sup>197</sup> Queen Matilda's mother was buried at Bermondsey and the generous patronage of King Stephen and Queen Matilda extended to their obtaining Bermondsey monks to colonise their dynastic foundation at Faversham in 1148.

<sup>198</sup> For example Queen Matilda gave land to build a cell at Faversham for an eremitical nun called Helmid. *RRAN*, II, no. 157.

<sup>199</sup> *Life*, ch. 76, p. 172.

<sup>200</sup> See Elkins, *Holy Women*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>201</sup> See for example Osbert of Clare's letter to his niece Cecilia, Letters, no. 22, p. 91: "*in illa enim superni imperatoris aula erunt paranymphe tui angeli, cives dei, ut te ad Regis introducant cubiculum, et investiant purpura et bysso coloribus intinctis, sanctorum praerogativa meritorum: virginitas vero tua quae in sacris nuptiis nescit dispendium castitatis, diademate coronata radiabit aureo*".

Christina's crown, however, boasted a pair of preposterously large lappets like a bishop's mitre, "[a] parte posterior pendebant albe due tanquam vitte instar episcopalis mitre descendentes usque ad renes eius".<sup>202</sup> Just as later medieval women who had visions focusing on the intimate power of the host were not claiming to be priests in practice, arguably neither was Christina claiming to actually be a bishop. What she was perhaps laying claim to was the direct intercession of Christ which by-passes episcopal approbation. Eucharistic piety allow later women to "assume through their visions the priestly role they could not hold in real life",<sup>203</sup> and Christina facing a similar challenge with a different level of ecclesiastic, and was similarly given direct access to the divine. Her fabulously worked crown confirms the lack of violation that was under doubt as a direct result of episcopal behaviour, and enabled her to undertake her subsequent roles as both intercessor and prioress.

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<sup>202</sup> *Life*, ch. 52, p. 128.

<sup>203</sup> Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Introduction' in *The Writings of Margaret of Oingt* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), p. 14. See also Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century', in *Fragmentation*, pp. 119-150.

## The Lady Christina: Texts and Contexts

### Conclusions

When Christina is placed into her social and economic context her texts and experience demonstrate her to be of a regional importance and repute primarily because her story was taken up by elements of the St Albans network. Written c.1141-1145 her *vita* reflects the contemporary political concerns of the great abbey as well as indicating its openness to the affective spirituality of the period. The relationship between Christina's foundation at Markyate and the Abbey of St Albans never completely broke down, despite the absence of any formal ties between the two houses, and her story was revived in the late fourteenth century because of interest at the abbey in its domestic saints. The redactions available to modern scholarship have been edited from the original, but they retain the confused use of hagiographic structure and topoi of the original inexperienced Writer.

Christina's own identity was situated in the assumptions and expectations of her position in two *familiae*, her kin and religious community. This does not undermine her remarkable spirituality and visions, rather it provides a framework from which to explain subsequent medieval female spirituality which also appropriated the gendered tools of sexual identity in the flourishing of nativity piety and bridal mysticism. Her original ambition was coenobitic and reading through the fissures in her texts it is clear that the common life was intrinsic to her self-understanding. Her story, in common with the explosion in contemporary religious life, is one of regularisation. Christina's own charisma attracted followers and some patronage to the fledgling Markyate cell, but, like her textual corpus, much of the finance for the community was obtained because of her personal bond to the Benedictine abbey. In the absence of posthumous community management, this relationship with St Albans seems to have been the most valuable asset that Christina bequeathed to Markyate.

The exact extent of Christina's celebrity is not clear cut. A reputation for holiness certainly could be a passport to influence at the highest levels for women in other parts of contemporary Western Europe. St Albans was a powerful institution, and by dabbling in its politics then Christina was by connection operating at the highest level in the land. The house at Markyate does seem to have been particularly special to Abbot Geoffrey, despite his other connections to religious women. Adam the Cellarer complained voraciously about his abbot's patronage of the nunnery and the de Gorham kin patronised Markyate over other foundations in Geoffrey's network. Christina also had friends in, and connections with, some of the important abbeys in the South East of England. On the other hand Christina herself was not attracting either the high level attention that these

monasteries commanded or the patronage that might go with it. The evidence of the *Life* suggests that her own political concerns remained tied to personal rather than national affairs. Her status as a visionary, which is of lasting interest to modern scholars and was of interest to her and her more immediate social network, did not gain her a national reputation as it did for some of her male eremitic contemporaries. Christina's charisma, then, was not deliberately curtailed, but it did fade into the background as the threat to her religious vocation subsided.

## PART 2:

### Saint Christina: Sanctity and Learning

Christina's elevation to the company of saints by public acclaim now seems to be unstoppable. The recent revision of Butler's *Lives of the Saints* includes her feast on December 5<sup>th</sup>,<sup>1</sup> borrowing heavily from her long established place in Farmer's *Oxford Dictionary of the Saints*.<sup>2</sup> This belated popular cult is far from universally accepted though: Robert Bartlett has rejected her as a living saint on the slenderness of the evidence,<sup>3</sup> and scholarly publications analysing her sources have shied away from any descriptor more definitive than 'holy woman'. Nevertheless since Christina's *Life* has been grouped with other saint's lives, both in the fourteenth century and in modern collections, it must be taken seriously as 'hagiography' from the perspective of her readers. It is therefore worth revisiting the strategies that it employs, and the circumstances of its composition, in order to address whether Christina herself can be plausibly understood as a saint.

Sainthood is an unstable concept: who becomes a saint, and when they become one, is a negotiated, performed, political, gendered and diachronic process. It is the public acknowledgement of holiness, *sanctitas*, rather than holiness itself that brings a saint into social existence. The criteria against which an attribution of sainthood is measured are situated in specific times and places. Although bishops and popes held the power to authorise the practices of cult which perform - and so create - the saint, in practice it was personal, familial and institutional veneration that determined the rise or fall of a saint's career. We have seen that Christina's fame was localised through her connections with St Albans, and the limited remaining evidence indicates that this was also the case for recognition of her cult. Rather than being a popular saint known for her healing miracles, Christina's claim to sanctity rested on her flight from marriage and her visions: criteria that were most likely to be interpreted as saintly within a monastic setting.

Christina was an even more controversial figure in her own time than she is amongst modern scholars. Her *vita* sought to create a controlled authorised position on her, as well as making a bid for her sanctity. Because it was composed whilst Christina and most of her stakeholders were still alive, the Writer had to harmonize existing saintly models with a plausible rendition of contemporary memories and experiences of Christina herself. To explore this tension between the textual discourses of sainthood and the oral memories of Christina it is necessary to look at the stories of sainthood

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<sup>1</sup> Butler's *Lives of the Saints: December*, revised Kathleen Jones, pp. 53-56.

<sup>2</sup> David Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (Oxford: OUP, 2003), pp. 104-105.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Bartlett, *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075-1225* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 461.

that were known by her stakeholders and the extent to which these can be mapped in the *Life*. What emerges is the limited availability of appropriate saintly models for Christina. Further, where a congruous exemplar did exist in the life of St Aldegund of Maubeuge, which was circulating in local monastic networks, it was not actively used to construct Christina's *vita*. The result is a text that overlays the grand narratives from patristic models onto intransigent material gleaned from a number of sources, in order to direct attention away from the many ways in which Christina was not actually very saintly.<sup>4</sup>

Traditional sainthood relied on external performances of holiness to manifest inward saintliness, but later women of spirit were venerated for their inward devotional lives which gave them extraordinary access to God through visions and prophecies. In the twelfth century external measures for testing internal spirits had not yet developed, and so both Christina and her Writer struggled to propose convincing reasons for her to be accepted as holy, especially in the absence of overt humility on her part.

Strongly dissenting from the view that Christina's voice is comprehensively silenced,<sup>5</sup> this section seeks to demonstrate that instead we can, "listen hopefully, certain of catching genuine echoes" of Christina herself in the performances in the *Life*.<sup>6</sup> To do this a number of theoretical tools are used, as and where they prove useful. The symbolic interactionist, and post-structural, performance theories of Ervin Goffman and Judith Butler respectively, and the feminist theory of Luce Irigaray, underpin the exploration of Christina's textual and bodily *corpus*.<sup>7</sup> Christina was actively involved in the bid for her own recognition as holy. She created an internal identity as an effect of her external behaviour: she was 'being' a saint, and the *Life* should be understood as a deliberate recasting of self as saint - as autohagiography. Christina sought to have her visions recorded and the very inadequacy of the language describing them testifies towards their authenticity. We can also see the influence of her own reading and knowledge of texts, separate from the Writer's, in her story. Additionally Christina

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<sup>4</sup> On the imposition of grand narratives see also Caroline Walker Bynum 'Women's Stories and Women's Symbols', p. 42.

<sup>5</sup> For this view see for example Elisabeth Bos, 'Patterns of Male-Female Religious Friendships and Their Influence on the Construction of the Literary Identities of Medieval Women', in *Worshipping Women: Misogyny and Mysticism in the Middle Age*, ed. John Ward and Francesca Bussey (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1997), pp. 283-350, esp. p. 320.

<sup>6</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Foreword' in *Gendered Voices*, p. xi.

<sup>7</sup> Although the work of Butler and Irigaray fundamentally disagrees on the *possibility* of (gendered) subjectivity, both advocate strategies of active resistance to the dominant power structures which fabricate false female identity through bodily practices/performances. See for example Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 416-422, and Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 133-242.

mimetically appropriated the liminal space of her female body fabricating a feminine textual voice for herself on its surface, which she made out of textiles. This produces “a story of very *undecisive* change”<sup>8</sup> - which can be read alongside, or instead of, the crisis-driven narrative - in which the presence and absence of the clothed body weaves a kind of non-linear *écriture féminine*.

Hagiography imposes a self on woman defined only in relation to men. The power of the female saint is appropriated by men, as Geoffrey does to Christina. However, a careful reading can expose the conflicting technologies being employed by a variety of ‘interested’ stakeholders: situated practices that actively construct Christina’s holy identity, including some of her own. Overall this section assesses the ramifications of constructing female sanctity at a time of shifting expectations, and the challenge of locating Christina in discourses that have few appropriate comparisons.

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<sup>8</sup> Bynum, ‘Women’s Stories and Women’s Symbols’, p. 42.

## Chapter 3.

### Negotiating the Discourse of Sanctity

The fourteenth-century Tiberius account of Christina begins “*De S. Theodora, virgine, quae et Christina dicitur*” – ‘Of S Theodora, A virgin, who is also called Christina’. Since it is in a legendary of saints, regardless of how the *Life* got there, we may surmise that it is functioning as the *vita* of a saint.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Christina is cast as a specific *kind* of saint – a virgin. The saint bears an immutable message, standing in the gap between God and people;<sup>2</sup> but their intercession is nonetheless a product of what is deemed extraordinary in their age. By the fourteenth century the construction of saints had undergone a number of changes from their early medieval counterparts. During the early twelfth century when Christina’s *vita* was being composed, episcopal translation still pronounced on sanctity and did not differentiate between *sancti* and *beati*.<sup>3</sup> By the time we encounter Christina in the *vita* redactions the latter term more properly belonged to the non-canonised who were not to be awarded public cult. When the *Gesta Abbatum* introduces her as “Blessed Christina, a maid born in Huntingdon”, “*Beata Christina, virgo de Hontyngdon oriunda*”, the choice of language indicates only a local veneration.

In the *Gesta Abbatum*, c.1381, her title is less definitively saintly than the Tiberius composition of fifteen years earlier, c.1366, but it is actually in this account by Thomas Walsingham that sharpest relief is cast on Christina as a medieval saint. The saint was, perhaps above all, an intercessor with the divine for their devotees, and so when wishing to avoid his travelling duties for the crown the *Gesta Abbatum* tells us that Geoffrey approached Christina. He prayed to Christina and Christina prayed to Christ, “*orat Christinam, et Christina Christum*”, and once again the labour of the journey was miraculously alleviated, “*et iterum miraculose labor itineris relaxatur*”.<sup>4</sup> Walsingham moves Christina from engaging in intercessory prayer and prophetic visions for St Albans to being herself the *recipient* of prayer pleading for her intercession. In doing so he also gives a clue about how she was cast in the twelfth century by the *vita* Writer. Walsingham indicates that more can be found on the incident mentioned in the

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<sup>1</sup> Horstman suggests that John of Tynemouth distinguished between *Sanctus* or *Servus Dei* and *Vir Dei* for canonised versus popular saints. He notes that no differentiation is made between *Sanctus* and *Beatus*, although by this time there was a technical differentiation to use, *Nova Legenda*, p. xiv.

<sup>2</sup> On the saint as intersecting the human and the divine see Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, pp. 38-71.

<sup>3</sup> Canonical norms were being formulated, but did not yet control sanctity, see André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), esp. pp. 22-32 and 85-103.

<sup>4</sup> *GA*, I, p. 104. The parallel description of the incident in the *Life* runs “*Orat supplicat instat ut pro cause magnitudine Deum propencius interpellet*”, *Life*, ch. 73, p. 168.

Markyate-owned “*Vita Sanctae Christinae*”: presumably a variant on the title originally given by the Writer to his text, and imitated more closely in the Tiberius than the *Gesta Abbatum* designation.

It seems that some of the St Albans community thought Christina to be a fledgling saint but, in view of the taciturnity of the sources regarding any cultic practice, what this meant to them requires reflection. Prophetic powers were well established as a possible skill of the saint but were not necessary to sainthood; however Christina’s claims to holiness derived primarily from her visions. Certainly she was at times ascetic and a leader and protector of her community, but both she and her followers identified her unique charisma as deriving, in ecstasies and prophecies, from her communing with the numinous.<sup>5</sup> In the construction of medieval saints the truism that a writer must be writing a message already known to his readers in order to be understood, has unusual potency. It is this normative power of saintly discourses that makes Christina’s story so plausible: the poor fit between her story and existing models expose the newness and unfamiliarity of her claim to authority. The discourses are not only used to construct Christina, they also provide the criteria that caused her stakeholders to locate her as a saint in the first place. Christina’s uncertain sanctity therefore depends substantially on the definition of sanctity being used, that is, what her stakeholders think a saint is, at a time when cultic norms were undergoing change.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For example *Life*, ch. 65, p. 150. On my use of the word numinous see below pp. 189-190.

<sup>6</sup> In recent decades the value, and volume, of saints’ lives have pressed themselves on medieval scholars. The most prominent representatives of this work have broadly taken three approaches, firstly seeking cultural types and ideals within statistical patterns from a vast compendia of materials, for example Michael Goodich, *Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1982); Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society c.500-1100* (Chicago: UCP, 1998); Pierre-André Sigal, *L’Homme Et Le Miracle dans La France Médiévale (F-XII<sup>e</sup> Siècle)* (Paris: Cerf, 1985); Vauchez, *Sainthood*; and Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Christendom 1000-1700* (Chicago: UCP, 1982). Methodological criticism has plagued these studies, see for example Kleinberg, *Prophets in their Own Country*, pp. 10-16. Secondly scholars have looked for the unique and distinctive in the representations of individual saints, largely through collections of papers including Mooney, ed., *Gendered Voices*; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell, eds., *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); and Anneke Mulder-Bakker, *The Invention of Saintliness* (London: Routledge, 2002). Thirdly there are studies that have looked qualitatively at the saints and their function in a place or age for example Sharon Farmer, *Communities of St Martin: Legend and Ritual in Medieval Tours* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991); Thomas Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orléans, 800-1200* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990); Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls*; Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1982); Simon Yarrow, *Saints and Their Communities: Miracle Stories in Twelfth Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006); Thacker and Sharpe, eds., *Local Saints and Local Churches*; and John Kitchen, *Saints’ Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography* (Oxford: OUP, 1998). The last of these has been heavily criticised by other gender historians, see for example Katherine Lewis, ‘Gender and Sanctity in the Middle Ages’, *Gender and History*, 12 (2000), 735-744. Some collections of papers include all three approaches, demonstrating the complementary value of approaching the cult of saints from different methodological perspectives, for example Paul Szarmach, ed., *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints’ Lives and Their Contexts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

## I. Manifesting Sainthood

In 1178 St Amphibalus vouchsafed the location of his bones to a peasant Robert and was welcomed into the relic collection at St Albans without question.<sup>7</sup> Theologically a saint is a saint whether or not they are identified as one but, as can be seen from this pious fraud, in practice saints only exist socially if they are recognised by a portion of the faithful. The recognition of sanctity is a complex negotiation between typological expectation and any individual iteration of sanctity, which conforms to, and simultaneously shifts, the discourses with which it interacts. The saint has to be “extraordinarily human”,<sup>8</sup> both the same as and yet utterly beyond what the ordinary believer could aspire to be.<sup>9</sup> It is this dynamic tension that the *Life* ascribes to Christina through the eyes of her greatest promoter Abbot Geoffrey, who venerated the virgin and embraced the divine within her, often visiting her with great devotion, “*veneratur ille virginem et [in ea] divinum quid solito amplius in eadem ampliicitur: frequentabat etiam ab hinc multa cum devocione*”.<sup>10</sup> The medieval saint was both a symbol for and a bridge over the gap between the known world and the unknowable God. In adding the ‘Christina Initial’ to psalm 105 of the Hildesheim Psalter Abbot Geoffrey was not only instructing Christina in the role she should be playing for St Albans,<sup>11</sup> he was also honouring her *potential* sainthood.

For a saint to exist they need to be located in the memory and identity of their community, and must be understood to exist for the benefit of that community in order to be promoted.<sup>12</sup> Whilst officially the saint was only a conduit for, rather than a participant in, divine power, in the celebration of their feasts, reverence of their relics and deals struck for their action on specific problems, this distinction was blurred and sometimes discarded.<sup>13</sup> A spate of miracles at a tomb would prove its efficacy and bolster the reputation of its saint. Even as the balance of anticipated response to the saint shifted over the twelfth century from primarily veneration to a plausible model for

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<sup>7</sup> *GA*, I, pp. 192-193.

<sup>8</sup> Holdsworth, ‘Visions and Visionaries’, p. 152.

<sup>9</sup> See Richard Kieckhefer and George Bond, *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions* (Berkeley: UCP, 1988), p. viii.

<sup>10</sup> *Life*, ch. 60, p. 142.

<sup>11</sup> See Geddes, *St Albans Psalter*, pp. 95-96, who also notes the similarity of the gesture to a late eleventh-century illustration of St Radegund, see fig. 2, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> See Pierre Delooy, *Sociologie et Canonisations* (Liège: Nijhoff, 1969), pp. 5-25.

<sup>13</sup> G. van der Leeuw argues that in practice the saint is to be differentiated from other religious archetypes because they form the source of, rather than a channel for, power, see *Religion In Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*, trans. J. E. Turner, 2 vols (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 236-239.

imitation,<sup>14</sup> and the balance of saints from the long-dead to ‘living’ saints,<sup>15</sup> the demand for relics did not abate. The living body of St Francis (1181/2-1226) was “a virtual relic”,<sup>16</sup> and even the beguine Marie of Oignies (c.1177-1213) had her teeth and fingers hoarded by important ecclesiastics.<sup>17</sup> Christina’s body had relic potential whilst she was still alive: touching it give her *puellae* protection from demons, and the undergarments that she manufactured for Abbot Geoffrey and then gave away had potential protective power.<sup>18</sup> If the lack of post-mortem fulfilment of this potential certainly compromises Christina’s saintly status, the doctrine of the assumption of Mary, which was gaining ground in the twelfth century, gave any promoter of Christina ample confidence that stories and texts could be as potent as bones in cultic recognition. Pierre-André Sigal has demonstrated that sainthood is a fluctuating prize;<sup>19</sup> cults rise and fall and obtain different levels of popular acclaim and clerical approval.<sup>20</sup> It has already been seen that Christina re-emerges in fourteenth century St Albans as a saint through the relic of her text, and there are a range of pieces of evidence from the later Middle Ages that merit further investigation in light of this.

### I.I Cultic Evidence for Christina

Allusions to any possible post-mortem cult for Christina are few, and those that do remain are conjectural. The most important of these allusions are kalendar entries for 5<sup>th</sup> December, which mirror the Hildesheim Psalter obit for “*Christina prima prioressa de bosco*”. Seven thirteenth- and fourteenth-century kalendar entries, mainly from Saint-Corneille near Le Mans (and so also near the patrimony of the de Gorham family) and not far from Paris, memorialise “In England, St Christina Virgin and Abbess”, “*In Anglia, Sanctae Christinae Virginis, et Abbatissae*”, on this date.<sup>21</sup> We know that in the late

<sup>14</sup> André Vauchez, ‘Saints admirables et saints imitables: les fonctions de l’hagiographie on-elle change aux derniers siècles du Moyen Age?’ in *Saints, Prophètes et Visionnaires: Le Pouvoir Surnaturel au Moyen Age* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999), pp. 56-66.

<sup>15</sup> André Vauchez argues the shift towards cults of the recently dead happens from around 1150, *Sainthood*, pp. 105-107. However, with the *vitae* of figures as prestigious as St Anselm (d.1109) being started in their own lifetime, Thomas Head’s dating of the shift to ‘living’ sainthood towards the end of the eleventh century is more appropriate, see *Hagiography*, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Head, *Hagiography*, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis, Supplementum, AASS*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June, vol 5, pp. 572-581; chs. 14-15, p. 580.

<sup>18</sup> *Life*, ch. 78, p. 178 and ch. 71, pp. 162-164.

<sup>19</sup> See Sigal, *L’Homme*.

<sup>20</sup> For this definition of a cult see Vauchez, *Sainthood*, p. 142.

<sup>21</sup> See *Catalogus Codicum Hagiographicorum Latinorum Antiquorum Saeculo XVI qui Asservatur Bibliotheca Nationali Parisiensis* (Brussels, 1889-1893), III, p. 727. Grosjean has shown that attributions of the feast to Christina of Romsey, sister of St Margaret of Scotland, are probably spurious, although he offers no additional proof for his

twelfth century St Albans was in touch with intellectual and theological currents on the continent, exchanging ideas and texts with the Paris schools and abbeys,<sup>22</sup> and it is therefore possible that Christina may have enjoyed short-lived liturgical commemoration around Paris at that time. A much later reference to a Christina on 5<sup>th</sup> December, found in John Wilson's 1608 *English Martyrologe* and published at St Omer in Flanders during a fashion for writing martyrologies amongst exiled Catholics, commemorates the sister of queen and saint Margaret of Scotland.<sup>23</sup> If this is a case of mistaken identity, Christina's story would have had to pass first through an unlikely and convoluted transmission via the bonds that St Albans held with Matilda de Bailleul, Abbess of Wherwell, whose family patrimony was close to St Omer.

In contrast to these continental references there is no evidence, beyond the St Albans narrative sources, of any commemoration of Christina in England. A late fifteenth-century painted rood-screen in the parish church at Gateley, Essex, of Mary and the "maid of Redbourne" has previously been identified by David Farmer as depicting Christina.<sup>24</sup> Christina's cult remained tied to the St Albans network and neither of its Essex daughter-houses, Binham and Wymondham, was geographically close to Gateley. If the screen formed part of the late-medieval interest in Christina at St Albans there would be no reason to associate her memory with the location of a copy of her *Life* rather than the Abbey, and indeed other scholars currently working on these screens do not deem the association to be obvious.<sup>25</sup>

The most likely place for English cultic remembrance of Christina was as guardian to her community at Markyate, but without any additional kalendars surviving we cannot

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theory that the date was a group-feast for Roger, Sigar and Christina, 'The Life of Christina of Markyate', p. 201. Pre-conquest English kalendars occasionally indicate the feast of a St Christina on days other than that of the virgin-martyr on 24<sup>th</sup> July. Notably Sherbourne and Worcester have a feast on 5<sup>th</sup> October and uniquely Sherbourne also celebrated *Sancti Pauli Felicis et Sancte Cristine virginis* on 5<sup>th</sup> December, see Francis Wormald, *English Kalendars Before 1100*, (*Henry Bradshaw Society*, 72: 1934) p. 195 and D. N. Dumville, *Liturgy and the Ecclesiastical History of Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), p. 74. Since this feast is anomalous in English practice, and phrased so differently from the Paris kalendars, it need not compromise the identification of these later entries with Christina of Markyate.

<sup>22</sup> St Alban's prior, Warin, arranged for his brother and nephew to study at St Victor, c.1167-1183, *PL*, 196:1227-1230, and Abbot John (1195-1214) had previously become a master in Paris "*hic in juventute scholarum Parisiensium frequentator assiduus ad electorum consortium magistrorum meruit attingere*", *GA*, I, p. 217. See also Knowles, *Monastic Order*, p. 310 and 502-3.

<sup>23</sup> *The English Martyrologe Conteyning A Summary of the Lives of the glorious and renowned Saintes of the three Kingdomes, England Scotland and Ireland*, by a Catholicke Priest, (St Omer, 1608), p. 334. Another Christina (d. 1092), found on 26<sup>th</sup> July and noted as a visionary, thaumaturge and spouse of Christ, is presumably a local saint.

<sup>24</sup> Farmer, *Dictionary of Saints*, p. 105. The screen attracted at least three bequests, see Ann Eljenholm Nichols, *The Early Art of Norfolk: A Subject List of Extant and Lost Art* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), p. 223.

<sup>25</sup> I am grateful to Tom Muckley, Canon Jeremy Haselock and Simon Knott for their help in finding information about this image, *Pers. Corr.* July 2005.

know how or even whether they recognised the feastday of their foundress. The evidence from silence suggests lack of a continuing *saintly* cult; there is no remaining grave mentioned when the *Gesta Abbatum* draws attention to the *vita*, and Markyate did not become a pilgrimage site. The Bridgettine house of Syon, whose library records are the best for any English nunnery, recruited its first permanent prioress from Markyate in 1415; but Christina's *vita* was not introduced into Syon's library or liturgical practices as part of the foundation heritage for the new Abbey.<sup>26</sup> Another Markyate manuscript, the Hildesheim Psalter, spent time with the exiled English Congregation of Benedictines at Lamspring, so Julia Bolton Holloway may be correct in suggesting that Christina's story was known by the exiled nuns at Cambrai through their study of contemplative texts from the Robert Cotton library, but the textual transmission is not provable.<sup>27</sup>

There are, therefore, possible traces of cultic remembrance of Christina through the her social networks emanating from St Albans, perhaps around Le Mans and perhaps in Paris, although probably not in Spanish Flanders. Christina's fame had also spread to Canterbury, and her only healing miracle was of a Canterbury woman;<sup>28</sup> yet St Albans' close links with Christ Church Canterbury did not result in the adoption of her cult at the house. The traces rest more upon supposition than evidence, and if any do prove convincing evidence of a lasting cult for Christina it will remain a patchy and parochial interest, which shows that her uneven reputation during her lifetime was certainly not tidied up after her death. She therefore lacked the trappings of sainthood that would make a simple job of weighing up the *Life* and confirm her cultic status.

### I.II A 'Lost' Saint?

There was a real, if unquantifiable, difference between the role of universal saints, such as the apostles and early martyrs, and that of local saints.<sup>29</sup> Local saints, as we must understand Christina to be, were the more at risk of fluctuating or unsuccessful cults. Benedicta Ward has shown that individuals whose sanctity was assured by almost identical circumstances and miracles could have quite different levels of continuing

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<sup>26</sup> I am grateful to M. Anna Maria O.Ss.S. of Syon Abbey for help on this point, *Pers. Corr.* June 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Julia Bolton Holloway, 'A Cell of Self Knowledge: The Pilgrim Within' (2005), <<http://www.umilta.net/cell.html>> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008].

<sup>28</sup> *Life*, chs. 46-47, pp. 118-120.

<sup>29</sup> Historians are still searching for a nuanced way to indicate the layers of cultic practice which depend on the social group(s) who forms the devotional core of a cult, and to distinguish between 'universal' and 'local' saints. The problem is compounded by the special protection afforded by universal saints to specific dedicated churches or holders of their relics. See Vauchez, *Sainthood*, pp. 141-144, Goodich, *Vita Perfecta*, p. 25, Head, *Hagiography*, p. 3, n. 5.

success. She identifies three determining factors for the outcome of potential sanctity: having a biographer devoted to promoting the saint's posthumous qualities and miracles, a local connection with the place of the cult, and political conditions.<sup>30</sup> It has already been suggested that interest in Christina at St Albans tailed off after the leadership of the community ceased to give it clear direction. Admittedly the relationship between Markyate and St Albans continued in terms of landholdings and perhaps membership (for example the Gobion family), but political circumstances at St Albans in the 1150s and 1160s did not require another dead saint. Notwithstanding the ongoing quarrel with Ely over who had the 'real' bones of the proto-martyr, St Albans was already an important pilgrimage centre which suffered no real challenge until 1170 with the appearance of the Becket cult at Canterbury. The abbey had a symbiotic relationship with other nearby shrines,<sup>31</sup> and shortly before the Conquest the road from London to St Albans had been cleared by Abbot Leofstan to ensure safe passage for pilgrims.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps the best evidence that Markyate held a fringe position in St Albans' social networks is found in the abbey's response to the Canterbury challenge. Rather than paralleling Becket by celebrating the miraculous abilities of their own recently-dead saint, Christina, they chose to bolster existing cultic practice and 'rediscovered' the relics of St Amphibalus, the martyred companion of St Alban himself.<sup>33</sup>

The relic veneration, posthumous miracles, liturgical, artistic and material commemoration which form the traditional process of saint-making did not happen for Christina. However her lack of cultic 'success' was not simply the outcome of political circumstances at St Albans, it also reflects the restrictive way that cults are sometimes understood in current scholarship.<sup>34</sup> Christina should not simply be dismissed as having a failed cult, and therefore of being a failed saint. A distinction can be made between the holiness of the saint whilst they lived, and their miraculous intercessions after their death. Whilst posthumous healing miracles were of central importance to popular relic cults,<sup>35</sup> the lived holiness of the saint was more important to monastic cults. This holiness provided narratives that could subsequently be recast in textual and extra-textual forms to meet the grand or local political needs of the time. When Christina's

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<sup>30</sup> Ward, *Miracles*, p. 128.

<sup>31</sup> On shrines not functioning competitively see Webb, *Pilgrimage*, p. 82.

<sup>32</sup> *GA*, I, p. 39.

<sup>33</sup> It is, of course, possible that Christina did not participate in the spate of relic-miracles in the 1170s because she was still alive and prioress of Markyate.

<sup>34</sup> For example Michael Goodich's requirement of two independent contemporary attestations to distinguish between living miracle-workers and 'saints', *Vita Perfecta*, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> On popular sanctity having its own distinctive identity see Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), pp. 39-77.

texts were revived at St Albans in the fourteenth century it was to meet a cultic demand. Furthermore, before any shaping of Christina's experiences into the narratives associated with sainthood happened, her story and credentials must have been interpreted as bearing the stamp of sanctity for the association to have been made at all. It is to this question of writing down her saintliness whilst still alive that we now turn.

## II. Writing the *Life* II – Competing Agendas

The challenges in identifying meaning in Christina's *Life* are tied up in situating it in a medieval taxonomy of texts and their associated meanings. To this end three important factors are worth reiterating: firstly that the *vita* is a Latin monastic work, secondly that the Writer is engaging with Christina as a 'living text', and thirdly that the dating of the *vita*, in the early-1140s, is remarkably early in comparison to the pivotal developments in twelfth-century literature. Medieval writing about saints came in many guises and the plausibility of distinguishing hagiography from other kinds of biography, and in particular romance, has been questioned by recent scholarship,<sup>36</sup> since miraculous ascetic penance and pious heroism form the content of many texts. If an account of sainthood is specifically indicated by the protagonist being Christ-like, (in which context we might note the reason given in *Life* for Christina's change of name),<sup>37</sup> it is far from a consistent marker distinguishing between texts. Rather than viewing genre as a static system, current thinking argues that it is the process of classification by which texts are *used*.<sup>38</sup> As with any iteration of cult, writing a *vita* is primarily an exercise in creating sanctity. It forms one reading in a process of "making up people",<sup>39</sup> by conferring identities which function as yardsticks for measuring behaviour. However, in the apparatus of cult, a monastic *vita* is rarely the first piece to be produced. St Frideswide (d. 727), for example (whose unusual appearance in the Hildesheim Psalter suggests that

<sup>36</sup> The old Bollandist definition restricted hagiography exclusively to "writings inspired by devotion to the saints and intended to promote it", see Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography*, trans. V. M. Crawford (London: Longmans Green, 1907), p. 1. This has been largely rejected as preventing nuanced interpretation of the wider strategies of interacting with the saints. There is no widespread agreement on how to use the term; the most extreme position has recently been taken by Anneke Mulder-Bakker who argues that it includes "every source that says something about a saint" ('Introduction' in *The Invention of Saintliness*, p. 13), but majority practice uses Thomas Head's definition of "the broad range of literature produced for the cult of saints" (*Hagiography*, p. 14). Thomas Heffernan's preference for the term "sacred biography" has been adopted in some quarters (*Sacred Biography*, p. 16). On the relationship between hagiography and romance see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Bet...to...rede on holy sayntes lyves': Romance and Hagiography Again' in *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. Carol Meale (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 83-97, and M. Dominica Legge, 'Anglo-Norman Hagiography and the Romances', *Medievalia et Humanista*, 6 (1978), 41-49.

<sup>37</sup> *Life*, ch. 13, p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> See John Swales, *Genre Analysis* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 46 and Stephen Neale, 'Questions of Genre', in *Approaches to Media: A Reader*, ed. Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Chris Newbold (London: Arnold, 1995), pp. 460-472.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Brown, 'The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity', *Representations*, 2 (1983), 1-25, citation p. 1.

her lengthy struggle to defend her monastic vocation against suitors found resonance with Christina) performed shrine miracles and received litany mentions long before her twelfth-century *vitae* were composed.<sup>40</sup> It is therefore worth revisiting why Christina's *vita* was written at all.

A number of scholars follow Talbot's assessment that the *vita* was "intended primarily as a work of edification for the nuns",<sup>41</sup> yet there seems little reason in the 1140s to have written a didactic text for them about a woman still living in their midst. Others contend that Christina's powers were being claimed for the St Albans community,<sup>42</sup> although there is no agreement on whether this suggests a criticism of the lack of contemplative spirit amongst the Writer's fellow monks,<sup>43</sup> or a boasting of the efficacy of discipline at St Albans in their planting of the Markyate house.<sup>44</sup> Rather than ascribe it to an intended audience it is more useful to think of the *vita* as the outcome of a negotiation of sainthood.

Where the *vita* of a patristic or early medieval saint emerged from a historically contingent negotiation between oral and written traditions of an individual saint and the paradigmatic 'Saint',<sup>45</sup> with a recently dead or living saint like Christina the force of multiple oral accounts had much greater potency, and the writing of a *vita* was largely an exercise in trying to bring ideological closure to the questionability of her holiness. Writing the *vita* of a living saint has implications for the saint and for their hagiographer. Sainthood is not a divinely ordained status like priesthood or kingship that 'comes with the job', it is a situated performance that depends on other people interpreting the would-be saint's behaviour as evidence of sanctity. Since audience interpretation is negotiated and situated, saintly performance must visibly manifest the divine meta-narrative *and* meet local tastes in the saintly. The saint must be saintly, but their hagiographer must make them plausible.<sup>46</sup> Christina's Writer could not narrate her in such a way as to contradict what was known by an audience of her personal acquaintances. The Writer's problem was not a unique one; saints are for a time and

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<sup>40</sup> For a brief summary of early evidence for her cult see John Blair 'A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints' in *Local Saints*, p. 536; on her healing miracle post translation in 1180 see Ward, *Miracles*, pp. 82-88.

<sup>41</sup> Talbot, 'Introduction', p. 3. His position is adopted by Barratt, 'Small Latin?', p. 56; Carasco, 'Imagery of the Madelen', p. 68; Hostetler, 'Designing Religious Women', p. 205; and Fanous 'Double Crown', p. 70.

<sup>42</sup> Koopmans, 'Dining', p. 148.

<sup>43</sup> Renna, 'Virginity', p. 83.

<sup>44</sup> Mayr-Harting, 'Functions', p. 338.

<sup>45</sup> For an example of the process see Evelyn Birge Vitz, 'From the Oral to the Written in Medieval and Renaissance Saints Lives', in *Images of Saintliness*, pp. 97-114.

<sup>46</sup> For a study of how sanctity is an arbitrated process see Kleinburg, *Prophets*, pp. 21-39 and his 'Proving Sanctity: Selection and Authentication of Saints in the Later Middle Ages', *Viator*, 20 (1989), 183-205.

place, and the fit between new models of sanctity and existing expectations could be difficult.<sup>47</sup> Views on Christina were highly variable, and her married state gave her a particularly compromising back-story. The Writer addressed himself to the negative murmurings of sceptical detractors, describing the Markyate community as “*puellae*” instead of “*mulieres*” to combat questions about their maidenhood, and demonstrating that misadventures befall Christina’s doubters in saintly miracles of vengeance.<sup>48</sup> Although Christina was not at serious risk of being deemed heterodox, the Writer needed to prove her recognisably a saint in order to protect his abbot’s reputation in particular, and Christina and her supporters in general.

There are two additional stakeholders whose role in the commissioning of the *vita* provides a proactive as well as a reactive motivation, and who have not yet been seriously considered. Bishop Alexander of Lincoln ultimately held the power to adjudicate on the question of Christina’s sanctity and so perhaps the *vita*, written immediately before the consecration of Markyate, was being composed partly with him in mind. The second neglected person is the potential saint herself. Christina seems to have gone out of her way both to bolster her supporters and reprimand her detractors,<sup>49</sup> goals which match with the Writer’s own. More importantly, Christina as well as Geoffrey and the Writer recognised her own visionary experience as new, spiritually significant and worthy of record. Her visions and ecstatic devotion are part of the embryonic development of female ‘mysticism’, but early twelfth-century England lacked the strategies of expression that developed soon afterwards, especially in Flanders and Northern Germany, to describe them. In different circumstances perhaps she would not have been sufficiently unique to merit a personal *vita*; for example only seventy-five years later the similar visionary experiences of another nun Christina were subsumed into Caesarius of Heisterbach’s hugely popular Cistercian compendium of visions.<sup>50</sup> As it was, the Writer’s role in shaping Christina depended heavily on her own self-positioning alongside the external performances of internal saintly virtues. Whether or not she was happy with the result, is another matter.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> For other examples of this problem see Victoria Gunn, ‘Bede and the Martyrdom of St Oswald’, in *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, *SCH*, 30 (1993), 57-66; and Stuart Airlie, ‘The Anxiety of Sanctity: St Gerald of Aurillac and his Maker’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 43 (1992), 372-395.

<sup>48</sup> *Life* ch. 75, p. 172. Also ch. 53, p. 130; ch. 64, pp. 148-150; and ch. 76-77, pp. 172-176.

<sup>49</sup> See for example *Life*, ch. 77, p. 174-176.

<sup>50</sup> *Caesarii Heisterbacensis monachi ordinis Cisterciensis Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. Joseph Strange, 2 vols (Cologne, 1851). See also the translation by H. von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 1929).

<sup>51</sup> Rachel Koopmans argues that she was not, see ‘Dining’, p. 157.

Rather than a clever manipulation of events that gives a coherent symbolic narrative of the manifestation of the divine,<sup>52</sup> the Writer brought what monastic training he possessed in scriptural exegesis to a task which required him to accommodate a number of conflicting agenda. He had to combat the accusations of Christina's detractors, demonstrate her to be a virgin and for her protection of that virginity to be of saintly proportions, record her visions, direct her story to focus on his own abbey at St Albans, and, alongside all this, fit Christina into a model that his audience would recognise as constituting a saint. He lacked a "well-judged standard" against which to measure Christina's visions,<sup>53</sup> but was obliged to place them at the heart of his writing. The Writer's creativity extends to the unusual role of a black monk at the forefront of new spirituality, but he was not systematically successful in the process of recording and reconciling the experiences of the audience of Christina's sainthood, and in resolving their grounds and goals for his account being written.

### III. The Problem of Typology

Christina was written as a saint because that was the only gauge of holiness available to her stakeholders for a woman, and definitely for a woman with an unsatisfactory sexual past. The stories of saints are formulated as ideal cultural types because the divine meta-narrative transcends the individual saint and because certain sorts of charismatic behaviour are the constituent elements of sainthood.<sup>54</sup> So, for example, precocious childhood piety is found in the narratives of female saints from Radegund's sixth-century games of church with her companions, to the endless genuflections of the fourteenth century Catherine of Siena.<sup>55</sup> Christina's youthful mortification, conversations with Jesus and fascination with religious life are motifs taken from the discourse of female sanctity, but they are also signs by which a holy woman could be identified.<sup>56</sup> How her stakeholders conceived the saintly, and therefore the prisms through which they viewed

<sup>52</sup> See Cartlidge, 'Unknown Pilgrim', pp. 83-84.

<sup>53</sup> Holdsworth, 'Christina', p. 200.

<sup>54</sup> Amongst the attempts to create a general typology of the essential components of Christian sainthood Richard Kieckhefer's model is the most successful. He identifies the moral elements of asceticism, contemplation and action and the extraordinary manifestations of power in miracles and visions, see 'Imitators of Christ: Sainthood in the Christian Tradition', in *Sainthood: Its Manifestations*, p. 12.

<sup>55</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Sanctae Radegundis*, MGH, *Auctores Antiquissimi*, 4.2, pp. 38-49, ch. 2, pp. 38-39, see also the translation by Jo Ann McNamara and John Halborg, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), pp. 60-105. Raymond of Capua, *De S. Catharina Senensi, Virgine de Peonitentia S. Dominici*, AASS 30<sup>th</sup> April, vol. 3, pp. 861-967, ch. 2, pp. 872-875, see also the translation by George Lamb, *The Life of St Catherin of Siena by Blessed Raymond of Capua* (London: Harvill, 1960).

<sup>56</sup> See Rosalynn Voaden and Stephanie Volf, 'Visions of My Youth: Representations of the Childhood of Medieval Visionaries', *Gender and History*, 12 (2000), 665-684, where this is contrasted to the conversion that marks male sanctity. See also Bynum, 'Women's Stories', pp. 27-52.

Christina's holiness, depended on the models of sanctity available to them.<sup>57</sup> Identifying suitable models must have presented them with challenges in view of the limited availability of female or of visionary saints.

### III.I Gender

Saints are largely gleaned from amongst religious leadership, so women form a numerical minority of the company, and in the early twelfth century female sanctity existed in limited models.<sup>58</sup> The privileging of the intact/attacked body as the distinctive marker of female narrative subjectivity distinguishes female from male holiness.<sup>59</sup> There were accounts of the patristic martyrs and virgin-martyrs, of the desert mothers and of the early medieval Merovingian and Anglo-Saxon abbesses. The desert mother might be a repentant harlot (the popular Mary of Egypt) or a cross-dressed monk fleeing marriage (Euphrosyne, Pelegia, or an appropriate parallel to Christina, her namesake Theodora of Alexandria). Some other early medieval female saints lived as hermits rather than leading monastic communities, in imitation of the desert tradition. Nevertheless the problems faced by Christina's Writer were similar to those experienced by Carolingian writers of female saints' lives, in that all these models originated in the distant past.<sup>60</sup> Even Goscelin of St Bertin's later eleventh-century lives of the abbesses of Ely and Barking looked back to saints from earlier centuries, and their manuscripts circulated mainly through the social networks of these houses.<sup>61</sup>

Even with the limited scope for new female saints in the twelfth century, England was exceptional in its all-male company. The earliest collections of the miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary were written and circulated in England where her cult blossomed, and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception found some of its keenest exponents in English monasteries. Set against this unachievable cultic ideal, female sanctity was

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<sup>57</sup> For a summary of changing models of sanctity see André Vauchez, 'The Saint', in *The Medieval World*, ed. Jacques Le Goff (London: Collins and Brown, 1990), pp. 313-355.

<sup>58</sup> See Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, 'Sexism and the Celestial Gynaecium - from 500 to 1200', *Journal of Medieval History*, 4 (1978), 117-133.

<sup>59</sup> See Shari Horner, 'Textual/Sexual Violence: The Old English *Juliana* and the Anglo-Saxon Female Reader', in *The Discourse of Enclosure*, pp. 101-131.

<sup>60</sup> See Julia M. H. Smith, 'The Problem of Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe c.780-920', *Past and Present*, 146 (1995), 3-37.

<sup>61</sup> The only manuscripts of Goscelin's lives not to be held by Ely or Barking were a number of copies of his *vita S. Mildrethae* from St Augustine's Canterbury who owned her relics; see Richard Gameson, *The Manuscripts of Early Norman England c. 1066-1130* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), cat. nos. 414, 438 and 452. On Goscelin's lives see *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, ed. Rosalind Love (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Millinger 'Humility and Power'; and C. H. Talbot, 'Introduction', in 'The Liber Confortatorius of Goscelin of Saint Bertin', *Analecta Monastica*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 37 (1955), 2-25.

especially unsuccessful, and there were few English women contemporary with Christina who attracted cultic attention. Turgot's *vita* of Margaret of Scotland was written at the end of the eleventh century, but Margaret was a royal saint in a tradition to which Christina could not belong. Twelfth-century English saints were primarily abbots, bishops and male founders of female houses such as Gilbert of Sempringham, plus a number of Anglo-Danish hermits.<sup>62</sup> In a pre-canonisation context where sanctity was locally controlled without formal criteria, Robert of Bethune could be regarded as a 'saint-like' bishop,<sup>63</sup> but there were no similar roles for women. If Christina's peers were monastic foundresses and prioresses like Matilda of Wherwell or Ela of Lacock (of whom a lost *vita* may have been written),<sup>64</sup> then it is notable that they did not cut a saintly impression on the Anglo-Norman literary landscape.

### III. II Visions

Visions and prophecies form one of the dominant modes of monastic miracle and, as Catherine Cubitt has shown, Anglo-Saxon discourses of sanctity placed great value on literate monastic culture in order to demonstrate that "their subjects could rank with the model saints of the late Roman Empire".<sup>65</sup> Therefore Christina could aspire to be a saint even though she had only a single healing miracle to her credit, (although the Writer is careful to cast that one within the ritual pattern for *in vita* miracles).<sup>66</sup> Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, amongst the widest read of monastic texts, gave plentiful examples of the visions and prophecies of holy people.<sup>67</sup> The appearance of white robed angels and

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<sup>62</sup> See the table provided by Robert Bartlett, *England*, pp. 460-463. Also his 'The Hagiography of Angevin England', in *Thirteenth Century England V*, ed. Peter Coss and S. D. Lloyd (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993), pp. 37-52. Popular cults also grew up in England around child martyrs, see Vauchez, *Sainthood*, p. 155.

<sup>63</sup> I employ this term in a similar way to Judith Bennett's profile of "lesbian-like" for women choosing to live in woman-centred monastic environments – that is that the performance of a role with similar abstract criteria does not provide it with that identity in its contemporary context, see "'Lesbian-like' and the Social History of Lesbianism", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 9 (2000), 1–24.

<sup>64</sup> See Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives*, p. 193. Ela's vision of her son's death was recorded by Matthew Paris.

<sup>65</sup> Cubitt, 'Universal and Local Saints', in *Local Saints and Local Churches*, p. 429.

<sup>66</sup> *Life*, ch. 47, p. 120. R. I. Moore establishes a typology for lifetime miracles that are found amongst saints from the mid-ninth to mid-twelfth centuries, see 'Between Sanctity and Superstition: Saints and their Miracles in an Age of Revolution', in *The Work of Jacques Le Goff and the Challenges of Medieval History*, ed. Miri Rubin (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), pp. 55-70.

<sup>67</sup> Gregory argues that true saintliness lies in acts of virtue not miracles, *Dialogues*, bk. I, ch. 12, but in practice extensive evidence for miracles as the outward evidence of saintliness fills the *Dialogues*. For different views on the debate over how much of this popular account is authentic Gregory see Francis Clark, 'The Authenticity of the Gregorian Dialogues: A Reopening of the Question', in *Grégoire le Grand*, ed. Jacques Fontaines and others (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1986), pp. 429-443; Marilyn Dunn, 'Reading the Dialogues', *Studia Patristica*, 39 (2006), 355-360; and Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

heavenly voices tied the stories of monastic saints back to the *passio* of the early church, and on back to the crucifixion.<sup>68</sup> As a saint in the monastic Anglo-Saxon tradition, the combination of Christina's visionary skills and a spirited defence of her virginity compensated for her questionable charity, self-sacrifice and other saintly qualities.<sup>69</sup>

The validity of visions as monastic miracles was not, however, enough to give real help to the Writer in his composition. Living on the edge between Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman ideas about the holy he lacked recent models of female sanctity, but more importantly he had little contemporary material to draw on for constructing a primarily visionary saint.<sup>70</sup> Other *vitae* recently written in England did not have a similar inextricable bond between sanctity and visions; where, for example, Ailred of Rievaulx is caught up in ecstasies or visited by night-time prophetic apparitions they only corroborate Walter Daniel's argument for his master's sanctity, they do not create it.<sup>71</sup> Once again the parallel with the problems faced by Carolingian writers is striking, since amongst the few ninth-century female saints were a number of visionaries. Luitberga, recluse of Wendhausen (d. 880) suffered the teasing of malignant spirits, familiar from the temptations experienced by the desert saints, but was also given the gift of prophecy which enabled her to build up a mutually supportive relationship with her Bishop Hemmo similar to that between Christina and Geoffrey.<sup>72</sup> Hathumoda, abbess of Gandersheim (d. 874), received a variety of apparitions, locutions and symbolic dreams of herself and her community, which her brother and hagiographer, Agius of Corvey, struggled to explain. She had a rapture "stripped of her body and yet corporeal", *et corpore exuta, tamen corporea*, the reality of which – like the tears on Christina's pillow after her first vision of Mary – was 'proven' by her waking with the words on her lips

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<sup>68</sup> See Ward, *Miracles*, pp. 169 and 192-200. For a breakdown of the frequency of different kinds of living and posthumous miracles for eleventh- and twelfth-century saints see Sigal, *L'Homme*, pp. 288-293.

<sup>69</sup> Mark Glasser identifies marriage like Christina's as potentially "a threat to the saint's basis for existence", but he fails to observe that resisting conjugal relations could also be the *grounds* for a saintly identity, see 'Marriage in Medieval Hagiography', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 4 (1981), 3-34, esp. p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> Henry of Coquet was the only visionary hermit saint from the period to pre-decease the writing of Christina's *vita*.

<sup>71</sup> Walter Daniel, *The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx by Walter Daniel*, ed. F. M. Powicke (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1950), p. 4 and 35.

<sup>72</sup> "Propetiae quidem spiritu a Deo remuneratam eam esse, multis in futurum eventibus claruit [...] cum et pontifex eius dignae memoriae Hemmo, summae sanctitatis atque eriditionis vir, ad cuius diocesi morabatur, cum ea sermicinado multis eam sermonibus instructam aedificatamque reliquens, et quibusque eam corporalibus necessariis adiuvatam, clementer paterno saepissime visitabat affectu". *Ex Vita Sanctae Liutbirgae, MGH Scriptores*, 4, ch. 35, pp. 158-164. See also translation by Jo Ann McNamara, *Life of St Luitburga*, in *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*, ed. Paul Halsall (1997), <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/liutberga.html>> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008].

mirroring those of the chorus with whom she had been singing in the vision.<sup>73</sup> Hathumoda's particular devotion to St Martin causes him to splendidly appear to her and protect her sisters in a vision of a flaming field.<sup>74</sup> She is even more enigmatic about the nature of her visionary experiences than Christina, whose coyness is more than once noted by the Writer, and refused to report a "secret vision of such beauty, splendor and sweetness", "[visio...] *tantae pulchritudinis, tanti splendoris et tantae suavitatis*", to anyone but her sister or mother.<sup>75</sup> Agius, like Christina's Writer evidently lacked interpretive tools for these kinds of experiences but recognised them as indicative of sanctity, emphasising their frequency and uniqueness amongst her claustal family.

Neither *vita* of these markedly different visionaries circulated in England. They do, however, illustrate the longer history of the zeal to understand, mixed with problems of interpretation, later encountered in medieval pairings of a female saint and male collaborator. The most widely read monastic text indicating that visions could form a constitutive element of female holiness is the first-person narrative of the early martyr St Perpetua. Just as Christina requested confirmation of her inviolate virginity from Mary, St Perpetua requested visions, intentional and specific in content, to confirm her status in the arena. Christina's Writer, who utilised structures and motifs of other patristic virgin-martyrs, drew no attention to this likeness. It may not have seemed an appropriate comparison since Perpetua's were otherworld visions and intimately tied to her martyrdom, qualitatively different to Christina's visionary repertoire, and since Perpetua was married with young children he may have wished to avoid casting extra doubt on Christina's virgin status. Given these difficulties in finding paradigms for Christina's sanctity, and since ultimately the multiple agendas behind the *vita* were brought together by the craft of the Writer, we need to look at the liturgical practices, relic collection, scriptorium productions and texts made available through bonds with other religious houses to enquire into which saints populated the imagination at St Albans.<sup>76</sup>

#### IV. The *Vita* in Cultic Context

Christina flourished at a time when hagiographical writing was undergoing a deliberate and self-conscious revival in England. John Blair has shown that Anglo-Saxon cults were

<sup>73</sup> "*Simul cum eis psalleret, expergefactam evigilasse se, et adhuc eudem versiculum vigilantem in ore habuisse*". Agius, *Vita et obitus Hathumodae*, MGH, *Scriptores*, 4, pp. 165-177, citation ch. 12, p. 170. I am grateful to Frederick Paxton for allowing me to use his unpublished translation of this life, the translations are his throughout.

<sup>74</sup> Agius, *Vita S. Hathumodae*, ch. 13, p. 171.

<sup>75</sup> Agius, *Vita S. Hathumodae*, ch. 16-17, p. 172.

<sup>76</sup> On saints known at St Albans see also Fanous, 'Double Crown', pp. 96-97, and Hollis and Wogan-Browne, 'St Albans and Women's Monasticism', pp. 26-28.

profuse and highly localised with “only a rather hazy line between the respect due to an honoured head or founder and the veneration due to a saint”.<sup>77</sup> Following the Conquest, monasteries began to equip the cults of their patron saints with strategically written records which stressed the antiquity of their reverence and laid claim to the temporal possessions of the house.<sup>78</sup> Disrespect shown towards English cults was one of the most voiced grievances against the new Norman religious hierarchy, and at St Albans Abbot Paul had come under particular fire for his contempt.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, after Lanfranc’s famous reconciliation to the authenticity of the English martyr St Elphege,<sup>80</sup> conquerors as well as conquered set about cultivating the legitimacy of their English claims through association with insular saints.<sup>81</sup> Beginning with the works of Eadmer, a spate of ‘professional’ hagiographers produced new lives and miracle collections in Latin, English and Anglo-Norman French, although the majority of hagiographic literature continued to emerge from, and for the use of, monastic communities.

A standard ‘form’ for the *vita* was established from the late fourth century, after the establishment of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire, when martyrdom - so critical to the imitation of Christ - was substituted by self-imposed asceticism. Three popular monastic texts, doubtless owned by the St Albans library, constitute the key models for saints’ lives. Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria’s *Life of St Anthony* was an account of the first desert hermit; Gregory the Great’s *Life and Miracles of St Benedict* related the writer of the most influential monastic rule; and Sulpicius Severus’s *Life of St Martin* told the story of the first western monk-bishop which became the model for numerous later *vitae*.<sup>82</sup> St Martin was gaining in importance in Anglo-Norman England, and his unusually situated miniature in the Hildesheim Psalter, set between doubting Thomas and the ascension, places him at the heart of ideas at St Albans about *imitatio Christi*.<sup>83</sup> That Sulpicius began his account whilst Martin was still alive must have given Christina’s Writer some reassurance that his account had irreproachable precedent.

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<sup>77</sup> Blair, ‘A Saint for Every Minster?’, p. 474.

<sup>78</sup> See Paul Antony Haywood, ‘Translation Narratives in Post Conquest Hagiography and English Resistance to the Norman Conquest’, *ANS*, 21 (1999), 67-93, and Janet Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders*, pp. 194-200.

<sup>79</sup> *GA*, I, p. 62.

<sup>80</sup> Eadmer, *Life of St Anselm Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. R. W. Southern (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962), pp. 50-54.

<sup>81</sup> See Susan Ridyard, ‘*Condigna Veneratio*: Post-Conquest Attitudes to the Saints of the Anglo-Saxons’, *ANS*, 9 (1986), 179-206. For a case study of this process see Barbara Abou-El-Haj, ‘St Cuthbert: The Post-Conquest Appropriation of an Anglo-Saxon Cult’, in *Holy Men and Holy Women*, pp. 177-206.

<sup>82</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), Gregory, *Dialogues*, bk. II, Sulpicius Severus, *Vita S Martini*, ed. Jacques Fontanes, *Sources Chrétiennes*, 133 (Paris: Cerf, 1969).

<sup>83</sup> Hildesheim Psalter, p. 53.

From the eighth century onwards instead of circulating as individual texts, *vitae* tended to be grouped together into legendaries, often arranged around the liturgical year. The principal pre-Conquest collections are the works of Aelfric of Eynsham (d.c.1010), whose *Lives of the Saints* included six virgin-martyrs (Agatha, Agnes, Cecilia, Eugenia, Lucy and Petronilla) and the twice-married chaste English abbess Aethelthryth of Ely, whose wonderworking shrine placed her cult at the forefront of insular popularity.<sup>84</sup> In England the first of the large multivolume cycles is the eleventh-century Cotton-Corpus legendary, a French compilation with an English manuscript circulation, an early version of which was used by Aelfric. The female saints in this are almost exclusively the virgin-martyrs of the universal Church, and correspond with many of the feasts later celebrated in monastic kalendars from houses in the St Albans network.<sup>85</sup> Additional pre-conquest lives of two cross-dressing desert mothers, Mary of Egypt and Euphrosyne, of the virgin-martyr Margaret and of the seventh-century abbess of Nunminster Mildred complete this broad-brush impression of the female saints populating the Anglo-Saxon devotional life in which Christina grew up.<sup>86</sup>

#### IV.I St Albans and Saints' Cults in Anglo-Norman England

Virgin-martyr *passiones* experienced a well documented revival in the post-Gregorian reform climate of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and formed the overwhelming focus of cultic practice. In a comparison of English monastic kalendars from houses in St Albans network, (including Markyate, Wherwell, Canterbury Christ Church, and through the relationship with Christ Church also St Augustine's Canterbury and the alien Bec priory at St Neot's Huntingdon) all the universally celebrated female saints are from the third century, and only Saints Scholastica and Praxedis were not virgin-martyrs.<sup>87</sup> St Albans also held relics of many of these early female martyrs, including Julitta mother of

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<sup>84</sup> See E. Gordon Whatley, 'An introduction to the Study of Old English Prose Hagiography: Sources and Resources', in *Holy Men and Holy Women*, pp. 4-7. On the cult of St Aethelthryth see Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St Aethelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

<sup>85</sup> Genoveva, Agnes, Brigid, Agatha, Iuliana, Perpetua and Felicitas, Praxedis, Sabina, Euphemia, Cecilia, Lucy and Christina. See Peter Jackson and Michael Lapidge, 'The Contents of the Cotton-Corpus Legendary' in *Holy Men and Holy Women*, pp. 131-146.

<sup>86</sup> See D. G. Scragg, 'The Corpus of Anonymous Lives and Their Manuscript Contexts', in *Holy Men and Holy Women*, pp. 209-230.

<sup>87</sup> Female saints in all the kalendars are Prisca, Agnes (with octave), Emerantiana, Agatha, Scolastica, Perpetua and Felicitas, Margaret, Praxedis, Cecilia and Katherine. Other virgin-martyrs in most of the kalendars are Eufemia and Fidis, absent from one of the St Albans kalendars, and Sabine, absent in Christina's Hildesheim kalendar. The manuscripts being compared are the Hildesheim Psalter, converted for Christina; BL, Egerton MS 3721 and Royal MS 2.A.x, both produced for and at St Albans in the mid-twelfth century; Cambridge, St Johns College MS 68, made at St Albans for Wherwell; and the kalendars for Christ Church, St Augustine's and St Neots published in Francis Wormald, *English Benedictine Kalendars after AD 1100* (Henry Bradshaw Society, 81, 1946).

Cyricus whose feast was celebrated in all the kalendars.<sup>88</sup> The two extant relic-lists which show this are both late-fourteenth century, and probably reflect a much extended collection, but they indicate a perpetuation of interest in these saints. The enthusiasm for virgin-martyrs amongst women as well as men in England is shown by texts such as the Katherine group,<sup>89</sup> and the literature of spiritual direction for women suggests that Christina was not alone in assimilating the popular St Cecilia to her own situation.<sup>90</sup>

Whilst amongst female saints the abbess Aethelthryth was widely commemorated on the one hand, and the martyrs Anastasia and Petronilla and desert hermit Mary of Egypt appear in limited kalendars on the other;<sup>91</sup> it was usually veneration of the cults of abbesses that were subject to local veneration. Some Anglo-Saxon virgin foundresses did come to prominence over the twelfth century with at least four lives being written in the vicinity of London for St Osyth of Chich in Essex,<sup>92</sup> and others for Saints Aethelthryth of Ely, Modwenna of Burton-on-Trent and Frideswide of Oxford.<sup>93</sup> Others remained more localised but later increased in popularity through assimilation into the early South English Legendary, for example St Ethelburga who features only in the kalendar of Christ Church but whose "*pulvere carnis*" (dust of her flesh) formed part of the St Albans relic collection by the fourteenth century.<sup>94</sup> The lives of Merovingian royal saints also had some currency in England, with St Balthild, the English-born wife of Clovis II and benefactor of religious houses connected to the family of St Aethelthryth, appearing in two litanies made by St Albans, for Christina of Markyate and Matilda of Wherwell respectively. St Radegund of Poitiers, who was "for many centuries one of the most popular holy women in the European lands where the Franks put their stamp",<sup>95</sup> had

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<sup>88</sup> Cotton MS Claudius E.iv, fol. 349 (printed in *Monasticon*, II, pp. 234-236 and *GA*, III, pp. 539-545), and BL, Royal MS 13 E.ix, fol. 116.

<sup>89</sup> Scholarship on the Katherine group, and its associated West Midlands Middle English devotional material is extensive; Bella Millett has reviewed this work up to 1996 in *Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English Literature*, vol.2: *Ancrene Wisse, The Katherine Group, and the Wooing Group* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996), pp. 5-47, and has been at the forefront of more recent work.

<sup>90</sup> *Life*, ch. 10, p. 50. See also below pp. 149-150 and 157-158.

<sup>91</sup> Of the kalendars discussed above all three saints are found in the extensive St Augustine kalendar but additionally Anastasia is only commemorated in the St Alban's Egerton MS 3721, Petronilla in the Wherwell St Johns MS 68, and Mary of Egypt in the Christ Church kalendar.

<sup>92</sup> See Denis Bethell, 'The Lives of St Osyth of Essex and St Osyth of Aylesbury', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 88 (1970), 75-127.

<sup>93</sup> On the importance of these abbesses as part of the corpus of female saints see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Queens, Virgins and Mothers: Hagiographic Representations of the Abbess and her Powers in Twelfth and Thirteenth Century Britain', in *Women and Sovereignty*, ed. Louise Olga Fradenburg (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp. 14-35.

<sup>94</sup> See *Monasticon*, II, p. 235.

<sup>95</sup> Charlotte Allen, 'The Holy Feminine: Catherine of Siena and eight other related books', *First Things*, 98 (Dec 1999), 37-44, citation p. 39.

chapel and nunnery dedications in England by the 1130s.<sup>96</sup> She too was commemorated in both the Hildesheim and Wherwell litanies and Jane Geddes has recently drawn attention to similar patterns in the lives of Radegund and Christina.<sup>97</sup>

The comparison with Radegund is an interesting one, firstly because she was deemed to be a saint with intercessory powers whilst she was still alive, and secondly in the two quite different accounts of her *vita* that were written. The first account was by the spiritually reforming bishop, Venantius Fortunatus, who wrote about her as a living saint; and the second by the Poitiers' nun Baudonivia who supplied an account of her death and posthumous miracles.<sup>98</sup> Fortunatus downplays Radegund's story, focusing instead on her clothing, fasting and lenten disciplines, work, acts of piety and charity, and healing miracles, and so it is the later, female authored, account which most closely mirrors Christina's *Life* of a marriage fled, hiding in a cell from a husband who keeps threatening to claim her, and ongoing involvement in family politics from afar. Bearing in mind that hagiography was read out to the community as monastic 'romance', it is perhaps understandable why, like Baudonivia, Christina's Writer was more comfortable with a pacy narrative.

There is no surviving legendary, or even many saints' lives, directly linked to St Albans burgeoning library from which we can establish the stories known well by the Writer and monks there. By the middle of the twelfth century the only accounts of female saints found in texts from the St Albans scriptoria are of the virgin-martyrs Saints Faith and Katherine of Alexandria, the latter of which was a *vita* created for Christ Church Canterbury.<sup>99</sup> It is highly unlikely that no legendaries were owned by the house, and given the extensive number of books copied directly from Canterbury exemplars under Abbots Geoffrey and his successor Ralph, it is reasonable to suppose that St Albans owned copies of the legends now found in related sets owned by Canterbury Christ

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<sup>96</sup> The Benedictine convent of St Mary and St Radegund, Cambridge (later Jesus College) was founded c.1130 and a chapel in St Mary's Priory, Usk, was founded pre 1135. See *Monasticon*, IV, pp. 215-218 and A. G. Mein, 'St Mary's Priory Church, Usk: Some Recent Work and Some New Theories', *Monmouthshire Antiquary*, 16 (2000), 55-72.

<sup>97</sup> Geddes matches "the forced marriage and persistent private devotion; abstinence at feasts; struggles at the marriage bed; abandonment of luxurious clothes; and finally becoming a recluse amid considerable opposition, sitting in her cell with book in hand.", of the two women, *St Albans Psalter*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>98</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Sanctae Radegundis*, and Baudonivia, *Vita Sanctae Radegundis*, *MGH Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum*, 2, pp. 377-395.

<sup>99</sup> See Thomson, *Manuscripts*, cat. nos. 25 and 73. Thomson also notes a sacramentary fragment of German origin at St Albans, cat. no. 55. On the cult of St Faith see Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, *Writing Faith: Text, Sign, and History in the Miracles of Sainte Foy* (Chicago: UCP, 1999); and on St Katherine, Christine Walsh, 'The Role of the Normans in the Development of the Cult of St Katherine', in *St Katherine of Alexandria: Texts and Contexts in Western Medieval Europe*, ed. Jacqueline Jenkins and Katherine Lewis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 19-35.

Church, St Augustine's and Rochester.<sup>100</sup> In particular, Christ Church owned a seven volume *passionale*, written before 1128 and partially preserved in Canterbury Cathedral MS Lit. E.42, which provides an insight into the kinds of *vita* that had a more immediate influence on the Writer.<sup>101</sup> The collection includes several unusual female saints and remarkably few conventional ones. Whilst Agnes, Perpetua and Felicitas were amongst the most popular female saints, the stories of some less common martyrs - Marius, Martha, Audifax and Abacuc; Dorethea and Theophilus; Felix and Regula; Lucia and Geminianus - are also told. Two Merovingian royals - Queen Balthild, noted above as included in litanies produced at St Albans, and St Gertrude, daughter of Pippin the Elder and Abbess of Nivelles - were included,<sup>102</sup> as was St Walburga (d. 779), an English abbess and member of St Boniface's mission to the Germans, whose relics St Albans certainly owned by the fourteenth century. Most interesting for the study of Christina, however, is the inclusion of a life of St Aldegund, Abbess of Maubeuge whose visions dominated her spiritual life and claim to sanctity. This unusual saint seems to have impinged on the imaginative landscape of St Albans as her feast is also celebrated in the kalendar that St Albans made for Wherwell.

#### IV.II Aldegund and Christina: No Ordinary Saints

When Isabel Moreira observes that "despite the external conventionality of her monastic milieu, there was nothing conventional in Aldegund's frequent visions, nor in the apparent fidelity and attention to detail with which they were recorded",<sup>103</sup> she could just as easily substitute Christina, living in another time and place, for the seventh-century abbess. Like Christina, Aldegund retold some of her visions after many years of reflection, and they are populated by symbolism both from other saints' lives, (including

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<sup>100</sup> I am grateful to Tessa Webber for help on this point, *Pers. Corr.* April 2006.

<sup>101</sup> See N. R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, 5 vols (Oxford: OUP, 1969-2002), II, from p. 289. Another related mid-twelfth century volume BL, Arundel MS 169 is of uncertain location and its female saints are almost entirely virgin-martyrs (Christina, Fides and Spes, Margaret, Mary Magdene, Rufina and Secunda). Of the two non-martyrs Praxedis was common to the kalendars in this monastic network, but the seventh-century Amalburga is of more interest, being one of the uncommon female saints added to the Hildesheim Psalter, perhaps at Christina's own request.

<sup>102</sup> It is worth noting that visions in the life of Aldegund link Maubeuge with Nivelles, for example lights and celestial singing are experienced at Nivelles on Aldegund's death, *Vita S Aldegundis*, in *Acta Sanctorum Belgii*, ed. Joseph Ghesquier and Cornillon Smet, 6 vols (Brussels, 1783-1794), IV, pp. 315-326; ch. 29, pp. 323-324. See also the comments by McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women*, p. 236.

<sup>103</sup> Isabel Moreira, *Dreams, Visions and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 202.

angels as figures in white and maidens sent by the Blessed Virgin),<sup>104</sup> and from her domestic life in elite building and garments. For both holy women, saintly self-fashioning through visions was sometimes intertextual with the religious art that they knew, and both received their visions primarily for their own comfort, conveying reassurance of their status as chosen and their pending reward.

Eschewal of marriage dominated the early visions of both women, and although Aldegund did not suffer the same parental pressure to force her to marry as did Christina, her sister Waldetrude (who had married but converted her husband to the religious life) expressed concern that continued residence with their mother at home might break her resolution for the virginal life, as it did for Christina.<sup>105</sup> Aldegund may also have lived an informal consecrated life with some female companions before she entered the Maubeuge monastery, much as Christina did before the consecration of Markyate. Like Christina, fasts, prayers and tears are downplayed in Aldegund's *vita*, and although living in community is the steady subtext to the activities of both women, this aspect of their lives is hardly dwelt upon except when the visions of their maidens interact with the holy women.<sup>106</sup> Apart from those shared with their respective biological sisters, all joint visions occur when the saint is sick. Aldegund's are most remarkable since they place her in the sacerdotal role of the priest administering Mass, a motif not otherwise found until the texts of later medieval women of spirit.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, on the question of the Mass Christina is the more conservative of the two women: on her sickbed she is cared for by the Blessed Virgin, and takes part in the sacrament only by being transported to witness the services at St Albans rather than playing an active role herself.<sup>108</sup>

There is nothing in either text of the eroticism found in later bridal mysticism; instead for both Christina and Aldegund intimacy with the bridegroom Christ is almost entirely bound up in the crowns they respectively receive. Christina's was presented to her by angels sent from Christ in an entirely in-body experience. Its magnificent construction

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<sup>104</sup> *Vita S. Aldegundis*, ch. 10, p. 319. Compare to, for example the vision of Musa in Gregory, *Dialogues*, bk. IV, ch. 18.

<sup>105</sup> *Vita S. Aldegundis*, ch. 4, p. 316. *Life*, ch. 7, p. 46.

<sup>106</sup> The second edition of the *Vita S. Aldegundis* adds two paragraphs at the end emphasising her motherhood and foundation of the community and the ongoing miraculous power of her tomb, transforming it into more of a foundation legend for her nuns, see McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women*, pp. 253-254.

<sup>107</sup> *Vita S. Aldegundis*, ch. 25, p.203, and the interpolation to ch. 17, on which see McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women*, p.248. Both incidents are also shared with a man who gives legitimacy to her controversial positioning. On Aldegund's anachronistic spirituality see Dinzelbacher, *Visions und Visionsliteratur*, p. 230.

<sup>108</sup> *Life*, ch. 49, p. 124, and ch. 80, pp. 184-186. See also ch. 64, pp. 148-150.

made it half of a matching pair with the crown worn by the pilgrim-Christ.<sup>109</sup> Contrarily, in the pivotal vision that confirms Aldegund as bride of Christ she is garbed only in precious clothes (in her case directly by Christ who appears as a beautiful child), but she sees her future self wearing the celestial crown which features as a promised reward in her later visions.<sup>110</sup> Aldegund did not have as ambivalent a relationship with her bishop as did Christina, and indeed Christina's visions about Geoffrey's salvation (which do not use the crown motif) find a parallel in Aldegund's special relationship with her bishop, Amand, whom she sees being crowned by the Lord.<sup>111</sup>

As with Christina and Margaret, Aldegund's sister Waldetrude plays a critical role in supporting and presenting her holiness. Margaret is both witness to, and participant in, her sister's revelations - most importantly at one of the appearances of the pilgrim-Christ. Waldetrude is likewise witness to one of Aldegund's miracles, the relighting of an extinguished candle, and has visions of her sister being led to heaven at her death.<sup>112</sup> Coming from a saintly dynasty Waldetrude was also a visionary and, unlike Margaret, was a mentor to her sister. We have a canonisation *vita* from the thirteenth century, derived from an existing textual tradition, for Waldetrude as Abbess of Mons (d. c.688) and a saint in her own right.<sup>113</sup> This *vita*, although probably not known at St Albans, shows that modes of sanctity like Christina's had something of a past and that this kind of holiness was better recognised and revered in the later Middle Ages. Christina's *Life* matches Waldetrude's even more closely than Aldegund's, since Waldetrude seems to have suffered similar slanderous gossip amongst the local population.<sup>114</sup> Patterns taken from the *vitae patrum*, including male-supported reclusion and demonic temptations, are found in both Waldetrude and Christina's *vitae*. Aldegund's sanctity, in contrast, does not seem to be attacked from all sides and unlike Christina she is not continually obliged to bring in outside witnesses to verify her charismatic abilities.

In Aldegund, and to a lesser extent the Merovingian abbesses Radegund and Balthild, Christina's supporters at St Albans had available to them respectable models of visionary spirituality which must have coloured their ideas about how women could be saints.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> *Life*, ch. 52, p. 128 and ch. 80, p. 186. It is important to note that there is no equivalent to Christina's pilgrim narrative in the *Vita S. Aldegundis*.

<sup>110</sup> *Vita S. Aldegundis*, ch. 7, pp. 317-318, and ch. 13, p.320.

<sup>111</sup> *Vita S. Aldegundis*, ch. 14, p.320.

<sup>112</sup> *Vita S. Aldegundis*, ch. 21, p.322 and ch. 29, pp.323-324.

<sup>113</sup> *Vita S. Waldetrude*, AASS, 9<sup>th</sup> April, vol. 1, pp. 828-833. See McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women*, p. 235.

<sup>114</sup> *Vita S. Waldetrude*, ch. 6, p. 830 on Waldetrude as a visionary and on her detractors. *Life*, ch. 76, pp. 172-174.

<sup>115</sup> See Suzanne Wemple, 'Female Spirituality and Mysticism in Frankish Monasticism: Radegund, Balthild, and Aldegund', in *Peace Weavers*, pp. 39-53.

Indeed Aldegund, like Christina, had felt that her visions were of sufficient importance to arrange for them to be recorded, initially perhaps by one of her own nuns and later by Subinus, abbot of Nivelles whose account was used by the anonymous writer of her *vita*.<sup>116</sup> By looking at the model presented in the lives of Aldegund and Waldetrude we can also see how Christina's *vita* might have been continued if it had been finished, and so what other saintly activities we might have expected of her. The three lives follow a similar course until Christina's breaks off, after the accounts of visions but before the accounts of good works in acts of alms and charity, tempered with miracles, which follow in Aldegund and Waldetrude. Given the availability of such a suitable model of holiness it is all the more remarkable that the Writer deliberately chose not to use Aldegund's *exempla*, but instead looked back to patristic classics in order to overlay saintly shape onto his *vita*. It is worth now asking why he took this approach, and with what level of success he applied it.

### V. Writing Holiness: A Transitional Text

"The blood of the holy martyrs and worthy virginity", Geoffrey wrote for Christina "illuminate the book of life".<sup>117</sup> In this discourse on vices and virtues (*psychomachia*) which he composed for the Hildesheim Psalter Geoffrey draws a picture of sainthood directly from the virgin-martyrs and *vitae patrum* based on the heroic overcoming of the flesh, not on the humble and charitable monastic leadership of abbess lives. These two models also influence the shaping of Christina's *vita* under Geoffrey's guidance, and were clearly important to his understanding of sainthood. Patristic female sanctity is predicated on sexual purity, whereas it forms only one component of the virtues of abbess holiness. If the purpose of the *vita* was more concerned with creating an authoritative position on Christina's chastity than with creating a text for a specific monastic community, then the choice of these models held a functional advantage.

Samuel Fanous has carried out an important intertextual reading of the *Life*, in which he argues that the Writer integrated these "two forms of related sanctity equally, consistently and seamlessly".<sup>118</sup> Fanous first identifies the motifs and structure of a virgin-martyr narrative like Saints Lucy and Agatha. These include Christina's aristocratic lineage, beauty and intelligence, her sexual and social renunciation, her change of name, the battle of wills, the deployment of magic by her persecutors, the stripping of the virgin, the physical match, and her divine protection and subsequent crowning. He

<sup>116</sup> See McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women*, p. 235.

<sup>117</sup> "*Quia sanguis sanctorum martyrum & digna virginitas illuminant librum vite*", Hildesheim Psalter, p. 72.

<sup>118</sup> Fanous, 'Double Crown', p. 70.

then shows how Christina resists the flesh and the devil through *ascesis* and was rewarded with spiritual gifts including clairvoyance which mirror those of the desert hermit St Anthony. Fanous's reading is thorough and there is therefore no need to revisit the ways in which the Writer successfully employs these two models. What is of more interest are the ways in which these models are not fit for purpose in trying to account for Christina's sanctity.

In particular, the model breaks down after Christina has been crowned by angels and the focus of the *Life* shifts to Christina's relationship with Abbot Geoffrey. Fanous offers the model provided by Saints Paul and Thecla, but this *passio*, although it offers impeccable credentials to the relationship between Christina and Geoffrey, revolves around Thecla's recurring miraculous escapes from martyrdom and is not employed in any sustained way in Christina's *Life*.<sup>119</sup> Rather than using this model, the Writer has shifted the whole structure of the story from a sequential to one episodic one, with chronological markers included only as they relate to the liturgical year or the experiences of Abbot Geoffrey. In fact Geoffrey's near-fatal illness is in the fourth year of Christina's profession, and his involvement with the royal court form some of the few accurately datable events in the whole text.<sup>120</sup> In the last third of the text we see most clearly the challenges presented to the Writer in his effort to pin down a 'living text'. Spiritual perfection is written in terms of distance from the ordinary,<sup>121</sup> and temporal distance made it easier to work over and give shape to the stories recollected from many years previous.

The *Life* would inevitably remain unstable until Christina was dead, and it is interesting to speculate on how it might have been continued and revised had Geoffrey lived longer. Perhaps the potential offered by abbess-lives would have brought structural coherence to an ever-increasing body of anecdotes, largely from Abbot Geoffrey, about Christina's abilities. Certainly the Writer shows no signs of having arrived at the spiritual climax of his account in the pilgrim narrative,<sup>122</sup> as he goes on to add yet more relatively minor incidents of Christina's clairvoyance. In his attempt to make Christina 'fit' the Writer may even have recognised the problematic nature of her holiness. He forced the two models discussed by Fanous onto resistant material, partly because he had not yet taken adequate time to reflect on and to refine his material, and also because of the conflicting demands required of his text by Christina's stakeholders. It is a bricolage

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<sup>119</sup> Fanous 'Double Crown', p. 67, see also Elliott, 'Spiritual Direction', p. 162.

<sup>120</sup> *Life*, ch. 63, p. 146 and ch. 71-74, pp. 160-170.

<sup>121</sup> See Brigitte Cazelles, 'Introduction', in *Images of Sainthood*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>122</sup> For this view see Thompson, *Women Religious*, p. 18.

which was trying to make sense of a woman whose spiritual horizons had more in common with subsequent continental women of spirit than they did with the existing hagiographic models available.

Two shifts in the later twelfth century altered how holiness was written, shortly after the Writer was trying to resolve these tensions. Firstly papal canonisation procedures developed, which required all proofs of holiness to be presented in standard formats. Secondly, parallel to the canonisation documents, accounts of mystical spirituality which moved away from chronological life-stories to recounting only the interior spiritual life of the possible saint, began to be written. The latter change involved a move towards lay sanctity and the active life with a reduced importance being accorded to elevated birth. For the former, the papacy was interested in the pious behaviour of the possible saint and the eye-witness testimonies to it.<sup>123</sup> In contrast a 'mystically interested elite' were, as Werner Williams-Krapp has shown, for the most part uninterested in obtaining this ecclesiastical recognition, since official canonisation held no currency for them as a means of identifying the true sainthood of women of spirit.<sup>124</sup> These therefore became two increasingly diverging ways of writing holiness, as the lives of figures like Dorothea of Mantau, Christina of Stommeln and Agnes Blannbekin were deemed to be a different genre, recorded in different collections, to traditional and canonisation *vitae*. Adjunct to this new genre of vernacular lives were the Latin *vitae* of women whose texts dealt with mystical spirituality, such as Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau and perhaps, I would argue, Christina of Markyate.

It is not possible to position the *Life* entirely with older or newer ways of writing holiness. Christina is certainly written into an older typology valorising the contemplative life, retaining the association between noble birth and moral and spiritual perfection, and exhibiting an exterior performance of sainthood. Her story was transmitted in volumes that set it in the traditional genre of *vitae* owned by a Benedictine house. However it is worth noting that these older forms of virgin-martyr and in particular *vitae patrum* models also underpinned all later hagiography. They were woven into early medieval abbess lives, and the rhetoric of the desert brought respectability to the "asceticism, demonic temptation, visionary experience and spiritual leadership" of the thirteenth century holy women in Liège and Italy.<sup>125</sup> Patristic motifs of

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<sup>123</sup> This contrasts with episcopally directed cults, which sought primarily to ensure church hierarchy control of the "boundaries of the holy", Bartlett, *England*, p. 471.

<sup>124</sup> Werner Williams-Krapp, 'Literary Genre and Degrees of Saintliness: the Perception of Holiness in Writings By and About Female Mystics', in *Invention of Saintliness*, pp. 206-218.

<sup>125</sup> See Petroff, "'She Seemed to Have Come from the Desert': Italian Women Saints and the *Vitae Patrum* Cycle', in *Body and Soul*, pp. 110-136, citation p. 116.

spiritual virility - found in Christina's *Life* as she makes good her escape from Huntingdon - made the new holiness of women of spirit comprehensible to readers.<sup>126</sup> Their brutal austerities were validated as being saintly credentials by the sufferings found in virgin-martyr and desert mother lives, since in other ways they lacked any of the traditional abilities of the saint, such as performing miracles for needy petitioners.<sup>127</sup> By deconstructing where the models employed by Christina's Writer fail to be convincing we have a rare opportunity to "watch a process of saintmaking unfold before our very eyes".<sup>128</sup> Admittedly this process is not as clear in the *Life* as it is in the *vita Hildegardis*, to which Barbara Newman's quotation refers, since the voices in Christina's text are more muddled. Nevertheless we can still find compelling evidence in the *Life* for the shifting discourses from older to newer paradigms of female sanctity.

### V.I Disrupting the Discourse

Christina's *Life* is both like and unlike a saint's life because she is caught between ideas about holiness. The forms of her sanctity are frequently out of step with their meanings: she enacts saint-like behaviours, but with remarkable regularity these are done for the wrong reasons, lacking the spiritual justifications that should underpin them. It is reasonable to be cautious about what has been shaped or even deliberately added to enhance Christina's position in the company of saints, but in the saintly attributes that are missing from the text it is possible to see literary construction and lived reality butting up against one another. A few examples will illustrate that in some ways Christina was not actually a very convincing saint at all.

Resisting marriage was a motif found in male as well as female saints' lives.<sup>129</sup> However, where for a male saint like Alexis this is a self-imposed exile for the love of God, a female saint should engage in a protracted conflict with their intractable would-be spouse in order to obtain her freedom. What began as a virgin-martyr motif was adopted by some of the abbess lives, for example the *vitae* of St Radegund, and is alluded to in Christina's *Life*. Christina's husband Burthred, however, is remarkably compliant and supportive of her choice, as would be the husband of the first beguine Marie of Oignies.<sup>130</sup> Burthred was first persuaded by her account of saints Cecilia and

<sup>126</sup> *Life*, ch. 34, p. 92.

<sup>127</sup> See Williams-Krapp on this new kind of sainthood-free sanctity, 'Literary Genre', p. 213.

<sup>128</sup> Barbara Newman, 'Hildegard and Her Hagiographers: The Remaking of Female Sainthood', in *Gendered Voices*, p. 16.

<sup>129</sup> Georges Duby, *The Knight, The Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (Chicago: UCP, 1993), pp. 123-128.

<sup>130</sup> Jacques of Vitry, *Vita Mariae Ogiacensis*, bk. I, ch. 13-14, p. 550.

Valerian, and then agreed a second time not only to release her but also to set her up financially in religious life before any legal pronouncements had been made against her choice.<sup>131</sup> Although Burthred is constructed in the *Life* as the pawn of Ranulf Flambard, who takes the role of the virgin-martyr's pagan tyrant, neither man actually makes any great effort to keep Christina from her religious vocation. Thus when she is awarded the crown of virginity (which is found in the text far removed from the rest of the virgin-martyr narrative, after her 'desert' reclusion), this celestial reward is not for preserving herself against sexual assault; instead, as was shown in the second chapter, the meaning of the crowning motif was disrupted by Christina's own sense of episcopal persecution.

In order to first escape from this persecution, of her family and bishop, not her husband, the textual device of cross-dressing is used.<sup>132</sup> Most cross-dressing saints undertake the costume as a prolonged exile, like St Euphrosyne or Christina's German contemporary St Hildegund of Schönau (d.1188),<sup>133</sup> but some do use it as a temporary expedient as did St Thecla in order to return to St Paul.<sup>134</sup> A critical part of the cross-dressing saint is the revelation of her true sex, but in Christina's *Life* there can be no revelation, since it seems that at no point was she disguised. Christina enacts a double 'drag', with female clothes over her male ones, and is recognised – not revealed – by her sister Matilda.<sup>135</sup> There is no instance of identity camouflage nor does it alter her ability to take flight with the boy Loric.

The *Life* makes reference to a remarkable number of animals, as might be expected for a text reliant on the *vitae patrum* cycle. But whilst in desert lives these are "legendary beasts associated with magical power, such as lions and deer... used to represent an aspect of the holy person that has not been seen before",<sup>136</sup> in Christina's *Life* they are mostly the domestic creatures of her ordinary world. Two terrifying animals do largely fit the *vitae patrum* model: the Lustful Cleric appears to Christina as a wild bear and shortly afterwards renounces his illicit intentions towards her,<sup>137</sup> and in a vision a field of bulls is kept at bay by her resolute virginity as she embarks on her early religious career.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>131</sup> *Life*, ch. 10, p. 50, and ch. 21, pp. 68-70.

<sup>132</sup> Shari Horner identifies this as "simply as a textual device that the narrator evidently deems important for constructing female sanctity", *Enclosure*, p. 177.

<sup>133</sup> See Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross-Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 33-47.

<sup>134</sup> 'The Acts of Paul and Thecla' in *The Pre-Nicene New Testament*, ed. and trans. Robert Price (Salt Lake City: Signature, 2006), pp. 1091-1106; ch. 9.25, p.1102.

<sup>135</sup> *Life*, ch. 33, pp. 90-92.

<sup>136</sup> Petroff, "She Seemed to Have Come from the Desert", in *Body and Soul*, p. 113.

<sup>137</sup> *Life*, ch. 44, p. 116.

<sup>138</sup> *Life*, ch. 37, p. 98.

Straight after the vision of bulls, toads invade Christina's cell and the Writer, buoyed up by the association, assures his readers that these too are of demonic nature. None of these animals, however threatening, were fabulous in twelfth-century England. The Writer has the idea that animals are necessary, but not how to integrate them, so he uses animal orientated biblical references – the wolf and the lamb, the dog returning to its vomit, the Holy Spirit as dove – as well as relating two stories in which horses are the foil to displays of holiness.<sup>139</sup> When Christina's revelations stray furthest from what was familiar to her stakeholders, he also uses animal imagery, of a bird fluttering in her breast, as a phenomenological descriptor.<sup>140</sup>

Talbot described Christina as "a well-balanced and integrated person", and observed the lack of hagiographic extremities in her behaviour and representation with some degree of relief.<sup>141</sup> In doing so, however, he miss a key point: motifs of asceticism *are* present in the text but are down-played by the Writer because of their embarrassing lack of penitential motive; instead they primarily occur as strategies for Christina to manipulate her unhappy circumstances. Christina's periods of fasting are at her most geographically powerless, and in both cases she is hiding and confined. She uses control of food at two critical moments where she feels sexually threatened: while hiding from her marriage in Roger's cell and when resisting the temptations presented by the Lustful Cleric,<sup>142</sup> and in both cases her behaviour wins her autonomy and residence at Markyate. However it is also inappropriate to argue that she therefore belongs with the later medieval "holy anorexics", who fasted to "establish a sense of oneself[...] a quest for autonomy".<sup>143</sup> Christina does not manipulate food when a near-captive in her parental home, and holy anorexics share other patterns of behaviour – for example the rejection of intercession by priests and saints – that do not feature in Christina's piety.<sup>144</sup>

A similar contradiction is found in the role played by Christina's illnesses in the *Life*. Christina is first ill whilst staying with the Lustful Cleric, and her subsequent paralysis seems to have been brought on by ascetic behaviour through which she tried to control her situation. A series of increasingly severe maladies plagued her until she received the crown of virginity which supposedly permanently restored her health, "*preterea se*

<sup>139</sup> *Life*, ch. 5, p. 42; ch. 32, p. 90; ch. 1, p. 4; ch. 69, p. 156; ch. 34, p. 92; and ch. 43 p. 112.

<sup>140</sup> *Life* ch. 33, p. 90, and ch. 75, p. 170.

<sup>141</sup> Talbot, 'Introduction', p. 33.

<sup>142</sup> *Life* ch. 39, pp. 102-105, and ch. 44, pp. 116-7.

<sup>143</sup> Rudolf Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: UCP, 1985), p. 8.

<sup>144</sup> Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, p. 19. On later medieval religious women and manipulation of food see also Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

*repperit ita sanam ut infirmitatum quibus ante laboravit nec minimam quidem deinceps sentiret molestiam*'.<sup>145</sup> Nevertheless she is again confined to bed when one Christmas she is divinely transported to see the St Albans choir including her pilgrim-Christ wearing his matching crown. Like Hildegard of Bingen, who took to her bed when she was thwarted in her plans for her community and miraculously recovered once she received assent, Christina used illness as a means of getting her own way.<sup>146</sup> She principally uses this tactic in her relationship with her celestial bridegroom. She sought confirmation of their relationship and sighed for his return respectively when she became ill before the two matching crown visions. Self-induced suffering was integral to later medieval religious women's stories about themselves and an extended metaphor of *imitatio Christi* through which they could take a co-redemptive part in the mysteries of salvation.<sup>147</sup> Christina's illnesses show nothing of this wider social conscience, nor are they a gift from God, or pleasing to God. Sickness as a trial of holiness had a long history, but where it should provide an opportunity to showcase Christina's fortitude and virtuous behaviour the Writer is only able to give account of the extremity of her conditions.<sup>148</sup> In this, as with other behaviours, Christina seems to have rather deserved the murmured accusation that her supposed gifts from God were actually earthly prudence, "*quod divini erat muneris seculari prudentie conantes imputare*".<sup>149</sup>

According to patristic ideas of female holiness a virgin should not go about in public or consort with married women, she should dress simply and be always covered even in her own home, she should act with economy of movement and gesture and voice, walk with control and discipline and have restricted eating.<sup>150</sup> Christina is remarkably unsuccessful at enacting these behaviours: her holiness, dress, speech and gait appear as motifs in specific anecdotes rather than as general personal attributes. For example when Christina and Roger meet in his chapel he is impressed by the propriety of her prayerful bearing, but instead of remaining modestly with downcast eyes she looks up and meets the hermit's gaze - a divinely ordained meeting, the reader is hastily assured.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>145</sup> *Life*, ch. 52, p. 128.

<sup>146</sup> *Vita Sanctae Hildegardis Virginis*, ed. Monika Klaes, CCCM, 126 (1993), bk. I, ch. 5, pp. 10-11.

<sup>147</sup> See Barbara Newman, 'On the Threshold of the Dead: Purgatory, Hell and Religious Women', in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, pp. 108-136 and Jo Ann McNamara, 'The Need to Give: Suffering and Female Sanctity in the Middle Ages', in *Images of Sainthood*, pp. 199-221.

<sup>148</sup> *Life*, ch. 48, p. 122.

<sup>149</sup> *Life*, ch. 76, p. 172.

<sup>150</sup> See, for example Jerome to Eustochium, Letter 22, *Selected Letters of St Jerome*, ed. and trans. F. A. Wright (London: Heinemann, 1933), pp. 53-159. For a discussion of these themes see Teresa Shaw, 'Askesis and the Appearance of Holiness', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 6 (1998), 485-499, esp. pp. 487-489.

<sup>151</sup> *Life*, ch. 38, p. 100. For a more detailed reading of this passage see Lynnea Brumbaugh-Walter, 'The Grace of that Mutual Glance', and Elisabeth Bos, 'Patterns of Male-Female Religious Friendship', pp. 316-317.

Similarly, in renouncing the trappings of secular life Christina only removes her beautiful clothes, she does not give them away either to the poor or to the church (as does say Radegund who offers her most beautiful fabrics for altarclothes), and her piety never encompasses the extensive charity, tending to the sick and embracing of the diseased, which humble the body of the female saint.

## VI. A Problem of 'Brand Management'

If a saint is a saint because at some time and place, and within some social field, they are believed to be one, then the absence of this or that pious quality is of no consequence to their sanctity. Canonisation can bolster the reputation of the saint and provide official parameters for the qualities that *should* be seen as saintly, but many widely revered individuals with these qualities, including Robert Grosseteste Bishop of Lincoln (d. 1253) and Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179), missed out on official papal approval.<sup>152</sup> However the acclaiming of a saint, particularly if their potential cult is close in time and place to their lived experience, is rarely without debate and controversy. For sanctity to be manifest, the individual's manners must therefore sufficiently incline towards those which both the saintly actor and their audience agree to bear saintly meaning.<sup>153</sup> Creating the necessary distance between the saint and their devotees is achieved through the tools of their behaviour.

The virgin lifestyle is therefore described by Theresa Shaw as "a kind of 'brand' by which social status is both claimed by the wearer and recognised by the observer",<sup>154</sup> and Christina's failure to perform some of its attributes were critical to the doubts expressed about her. The *Life* suffers from poor 'brand management' with superficial and inconsistent use of models of female sanctity. In a climate of church reform, capable administration was no longer a fashionable route to female holiness; but the hermit life was praised by monastic writers including William of St Thierry and Peter the Venerable as the contemplative ideal.<sup>155</sup> The *Life* adopts these monastic preferences in an attempt to prescribe an official line on Christina. The discourse of sanctity to which she more rightly belongs, however, has not yet been established, so she was 'packaged' according to inappropriate expectations of her manners. To her critics she must have seemed self-absorbed rather than a woman of spirit at the cutting edge of new ideas about holiness.

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<sup>152</sup> For a discussion of a failed bid for canonisation see Lorna Walker, 'Hamo of Savigny and his Companions: Failed Saints?', *Journal of Medieval History*, 30 (2004), 45-60.

<sup>153</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

<sup>154</sup> Shaw 'Askesis', p. 489.

<sup>155</sup> See Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), p. 343.

Although circumstances were against him, the Writer's role in the ineffectual construction of Christina's sanctity should not be entirely overlooked. The *Life* compares unfavourably with the contemporary *vita dominae Juttae inclusae*, the mentor of Hildegard of Bingen, written by a monk of the local Disibodenberg community in around 1139-1146.<sup>156</sup> Like Christina her *vita* can be read retrospectively to be compared with figures like Radegund in her ascetic virile virtue and position as spiritual mother and oracle in the local monastery, or it can be read forwards into the vision-driven lives of Hildegard and later women of spirit.<sup>157</sup>

Jutta is from noble lineage and takes a youthful vow of virginity which she struggles to defend against the manoeuvrings and attacks of her family. Her victory must have been more conclusive than Christina's as the *vita* does not dwell on these, although their details can be found in one of the letters of Guibert of Gembloux.<sup>158</sup> Like Christina with Alfwen, Jutta placed herself as disciple to an older woman in religion, the widow Uda. After her mentor's death Jutta, like Christina, contemplates leaving the country but is persuaded to stay, make monastic confession and be enclosed with a small number of female companions. She then undertakes ascetic penance in order to humbly chastise her body, including wearing a hairshirt and lorica, doing manual work and silent reading. Perhaps if Christina's Writer had made less slavish use of the syntactic requirements of a virgin-martyr narrative, ascribing her self-mortification to the necessity of hiding from her persecutors, the equivalent period of her *Life* may also have appeared more convincingly saintly. Jutta is more open than Christina to helping and teaching those who approached her, and when she becomes ill it is through her unrelenting labour, rather than as manipulation of her circumstances. During her illness a large and unidentifiable waterbird appears when Jutta begs the abbot Adilhun to excuse her from eating meat and both recluse and abbot are transformed by this fabulous visitor, with Jutta undertaking measured obedience to her superior.

Like Christina, Jutta has revelations relating to the leadership of the male house who mentored the community that was evolving from her anchoritic cell. However, in writing Jutta's *vita* discretion was used to avoid the multiplication of examples of her

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<sup>156</sup> The text of the *Vita Juttae* has been published by Franz Staab, 'Reform und Reformgruppen im Erzbistum Mainz. Vom *'Libellus de Willigisi consuetudinibus'* zur *'Vita dominae Juttae inclusae'*', in *Reformidee und Reformpolitik im Spätsalisch-Frühstauischen Reich*, ed. Stefan Weinfurter (Mainz: Selbstverlag der Gesellschaft für Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 1992), pp. 172-187. In her recent translation Anna Silvas has argued that the author was Hildegard's scribe Volmar, see *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 46-84, esp. pp. 48-49.

<sup>157</sup> See Silvas, *Jutta*, p. 61.

<sup>158</sup> *Guibert Gemblacensis Epistolae*, ed. Albert Derolez et al, *CCCM*, 66A (1989), Letter 38, ch. vi, pp. 366-379.

charismatic powers; there is one example of her intercessory prayer and another of her discerning and chastising spiritual immorality. The *vita* instead devotes an appropriately lengthy section to visions by Jutta and others predicting and pertaining to her death (which occurs in her *vita*, unlike Christina's), and her body is displayed with its attendant evidence of holiness, sweet odour etc. Although the life experiences and claims to sanctity of both women are similar, Jutta's *vita* has a clarity of shape and spiritual motivation that is absent from Christina's *Life*. Perhaps Hildegard's involvement in its composition provided a stakeholder with a clearer understanding of the dialectic between established ideas about sainthood and the spirituality of visionaries than was available at Markyate.

## Chapter 4.

### Autohagiography and Holy Performance

The dialogue between example and imitation lies at the heart of sanctity. Each iteration of sainthood imperfectly imitates the examples set by other saints, thereby creating a new model to be imitated. Of course imitation of the saints was no guarantee of sainthood, since their stories were recorded specifically with a view to providing imitable virtues to their followers. Nevertheless an aspiring saint must be able to prove that their credentials had appropriate precedent, and there could be few *exempla* as unimpeachable to a monastic audience as Gregory the Great's *Life of St Benedict*. Gregory tells of a layman who invited St Benedict to build a monastery in Terracina. Benedict sent a team of monks to the site thirty miles away from Monte Cassino, saying that he would visit them with directions on a specified day. When his monks complained that he had not attended on them as promised, the saint observed that he had visited both the new abbot and new prior that night in a dream with detailed plans for the buildings.<sup>1</sup> We learn that the soul has an agility denied to the body which makes this bi-location possible.<sup>2</sup> Christina used the authority provided by this vignette to make an active bid for her own sanctity. Through the corroboration of her sister Margaret, Christina demonstrates that she too is able to visit her beloved Geoffrey in a night-time apparition without leaving Markyate.<sup>3</sup> She argues, with an audacious degree of false modesty, that if such a thing had happened in Gregory the Great's time, "*si tale quid in tempore beati Gregorii accidisset*", it would have been recorded, even though it was a small thing, "*quamvis res parva sit et memoria parum digna*". Her sister duly jumps to her defence declaring it to be a marvellous thing the memory of which should be preserved, "*respondique non parum quid esse sed mirabile: posterisque memorabile*".<sup>4</sup>

It is currently unfashionable to suggest that we can find evidence of Christina's voice in the *Life*, yet this passage demonstrates that there is more to be said about her ideas about herself than retreating into reading her only as a textual creation of the Writer. One of the key observations emerging from current scholarship is that medieval women of spirit

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, bk. II, ch. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory references as proof the transportation of Habakkuk from Judea to Chaldea in Daniel 14.32-38.

<sup>3</sup> The *Life* contains several further incidents of Christina being transported to a different temporal place, but only in this one is the attestation of both Christina and a person that she visits recorded. See for example *Life*, ch. 59, pp. 140-142; ch. 64, p. 148; and ch. 77, p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> *Life*, ch. 67, pp. 152-154. Looking forwards rather than backwards Barbara Newman has likened this passage to later medieval women of spirit in the Netherlands 'sending God' whereby one friend would promise to obtain special graces for another at a set time and place, see "To Say 'I Saw'", p. 21.

were often complicit in the matrix of masculine agenda that constrained and channelled them, even at the same time that they challenged or disrupted these regulative discourses.<sup>5</sup> Certainly the textual Christina is used by the monastic community at St Albans, and in particular by Abbot Geoffrey, as a mirror to reflect back to them their own gendered ideas about holiness and charisma. However the living Christina also exercised agency in how she positioned herself alongside those ideas: the textuality of Christina is partly a deliberate self-textualisation.

If Christina could exercise only limited power over how her *vita* was shaped structurally, she could nevertheless try to control how her spiritual powers were perceived, which affected how they were recorded. On the one hand Christina was operating with an understanding of sainthood that required her to be like the saints in order for her visions to be recorded. She modelled herself on the stories that she knew, and as such we need to look for a process of externalising imagined sanctity.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand by investigating how, and if, the (clothed) body operates as the site for the external performance of internal virtue in the *Life* it is possible to glimpse ways in which, by miming of ideas about her, Christina begins to form a subjectivity for herself. This chapter contends that it is as impossible to claim to find the unmediated voice of the Writer as it is to claim the same for Christina.

### I. Writing the *Life* III: Performing Sainthood

In the last chapter we established that although sanctity is supposedly about inner virtue and a unique relationship with God, in practice someone becomes a saint because their audience recognise them as one, based on their exterior manners. Sainthood is something that its protagonists *do*, not just something that they *are*. It is an identity inscribed on the surface of the body, which operates as a stage where the appearance of a core of internal holiness is performed. As an ongoing practice of 'becoming' through the enactment of regulative discourses, sainthood is a mode of subjectivity similar to Judith Butler's influential model of gender: it is an effect rather than an ontological reality.<sup>7</sup> To the extent that the discourses of sanctity can be termed hagiography, the

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, pp. 49 and 160, and Dyan Elliott, *Proving Women: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). For a critique of scholarship that suggests there were women-specific forms of knowledge which deliberately and strategically undermined male hegemony see Allen, 'The Holy Feminine'.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Claude Poulin made the distinction between 'lived' and 'imagined' sanctity, *L'Idéal de sainteté dans l'Aquitaine carolingienne (750-950)* (Quebec: Université Laval, 1975), p. 33. I believe Christina studies must look beyond this distinction, to how her lived sanctity was a deliberate performance of her imagined sanctity.

<sup>7</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, esp. pp. 175-193.

very process of sainthood is *auto-hagiographical*, in that the saint learns practices from earlier saints, and their own behaviour becomes itself normative for sanctity and thereby extends the model. The ultimate model is the image of God, so the saint by their *imitatio Christi* is a person who has made extraordinary progress in personhood as well as holiness. Gregory the Great in his *Moralia on Job* had given patristic authority to the active involvement of saints in the creation of their own sanctity.<sup>8</sup> Christina engaged in an exteriorised situated performance of saintly self-fashioning in two ways. She performed saintliness in so far as she understood it, negotiating its contingency on audience perception, and she staged her understanding of her own past, shaping it to relate it to her Writer. Christina's involvement in the creation of her own sanctity was performed by mimetically (imitatively) engaging with models.

### I.I Exterior Performance and Interior Holiness

If Christina was performing sainthood then it is necessary to look at contemporary ideas about the relationship between outer behaviour and inner virtue, which had previously concerned patristic writers and were attracting renewed interest in the twelfth century.<sup>9</sup> Scholars are still debating exactly how to contour this new concern with interiority, which is identified in texts like Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* and St Bernard's *De Diligendo Dei*.<sup>10</sup> It is widely agreed, however, that an interest in the relationship between the elements of personhood, and between "individual, community and model", was being actively explored in both religious and secular writings.<sup>11</sup> Importantly, twelfth-century thinking about personhood was an exploration of similarity and conforming to patterns: it looked for a 'self' *despite* having to recognise difference and

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<sup>8</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralium Libri sive Expositio in Librum B. Job*, PL 75: 499-1162, bk. II, ch. 33, col. 1004. For a discussion of this passage see Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, pp. 10-12.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of patristic writings see Shaw, 'Askesis'.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, 'On Loving God', *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, ed. Harry Plantinga, <[www.ccel.org/ccel/bernard/loving\\_god.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bernard/loving_god.html)> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008].

<sup>11</sup> Colin Morris, 'Individualism in Twelfth-Century Religion: Some Further Reflections', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31, (1980), 195-206, citation p. 202. The debate about the twelfth-century 'discovery of the individual' began in the 1970s with the work of Colin Morris, notably his *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (London: SPCK, 1972). In 1998 Paul Freedman and Gabrielle Spiegel observed waning interest in the subject as the otherness of the medieval has come to dominate scholarship, 'Medievalisms Old and New: the Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies', *The American Historical Review*, 103 (1998), 677-704. However recently Susan Kramer and Caroline Bynum have re-addressed the subject, including an extensive review of the literature to date, 'Revisiting the Twelfth-Century Individual: The Inner Self and the Christian Community', in *Das Eigene und das Ganze: Zum Individuellen im mittelalterlichen Religiosentum*, ed. Gert Melville and Markus Schuerer (Munster: LIT, 2002), pp. 57-85. Working on secular texts C. Stephen Jaeger has shown how the gestures of public discourse were the guarantors of inner feelings, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia: UPP, 1999).

uniqueness, not because of it.<sup>12</sup> Whilst no contemporary writer viewed interiority as simply a product of individual behaviour with no independent existence of its own,<sup>13</sup> in the church reform climate of the eleventh and twelfth centuries there was a renewed awareness of the external to internal dynamic.<sup>14</sup> An obvious example of this is the emergence of the rosary as an external to internal prayer tool in the period.<sup>15</sup> As well as creating internal identity, bodily practices were also seen as the evidence or guarantor of that identity; the two were not, however, simply being correlated as commensurate. Schoolmen such as Peter Abelard were seeking ways to gauge the workings of the heart if the locus of sin was not action but internal intention. Taking the problem in another direction, Guibert of Nogent was questioning the best way to authenticate holiness in saints relics. Susan Kramer and Caroline Bynum have consequently described the early twelfth century as “characterised by a nuanced disjuncture between inner and outer”:<sup>16</sup> there was always the risk of being deceived through false performances.

Christina’s story was plagued by the possibility that she was enacting a false performance and that she lacked the interior holiness which would give authenticity to her possible sanctity. Her two claims to holiness - sexual purity and the reality of her visions – were also the source of the scepticism that Aviad Kleinburg has described as “a formative part of the dynamics of sainthood”.<sup>17</sup> At the start of the twelfth century the external manifestation, not just the internal spiritual state, of virginity was still of primary importance, although the word *virgo* held both meanings in the contemporary literature of instruction being written for religious women.<sup>18</sup> Almost all later medieval women of

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<sup>12</sup> See Caroline Walker Bynum, ‘Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31 (1980), 1-17.

<sup>13</sup> This kind of anti-foundationalism is found in the modern performance theory of Erving Goffman and Judith Butler, whose work informs this chapter. Both see the inner self as a product, rather than a cause, of its external performance.

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting the difference between this intellectual theorising, which rightly belongs in the ferments of the twelfth century, and the ongoing existence in practice of just such performances of identity. For example Jo Ann McNamara has demonstrated that many centuries earlier Merovingian abbesses were framing their aspirations and strategically performing behavioural norms that their clerical audience recognised as the marks of sanctity, *Sainted Women*, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Amongst the earliest Rosary references is Countess Godiva of Coventry’s (d.c.1075) bequest to the statue of Our Lady, “*iamiamque moritura circum gemmarum, quem filo insuerat, ut singularum contactu singulas orationes incipiens numerum non premitteret, hunc ergo gemmarum circum collo imagines sancta Mariae appendi iussit*”. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum*, bk. 4, ch. 175.2, pp. 470-472.

<sup>16</sup> Kramer and Bynum, ‘Revisiting’, p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> Kleinburg, *Prophets*, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> The way in which these two kinds of virginity, the external static and the internal active, were gendered is debated. See, for example, Newman, ‘Flaws in the Golden Bowl’; McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*; and Elisabeth Bos, ‘The Literature of Spiritual Formation for Women in France and England 1080-1180’, in *Listen Daughter: The Speculum Virginitatis and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Constant Mews (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 201-220.

spirit were wives like Christina, who nevertheless took onboard the centuries of textual association between female perfection and virginity.<sup>19</sup> Whilst the *vulgus* was accusing Christina of physical unchastity with Abbot Geoffrey,<sup>20</sup> Christina herself seems to have been aware of Jerome's famous warning to Eustochium that physical virginity was no protection against the loss of spiritual virginity, "*perit ergo et mente virginitas*".<sup>21</sup> She prayed ardently for a sign following her trials with the Lustful Cleric to confirm there had been no disruption between her inner spiritual and her outer physical virginity.

This concern about her inner wholeness locates Christina within specifically monastic contemporary discourses of interiority, which are marked by inner conflict and responsibility for the spiritual status of the self.<sup>22</sup> The account of her dilemma is a good example of the difficulty involved in separating out the voices of the *Life*. For example it is hard to know whether we are encountering Christina or the Writer in the concerns about the relationship between her interior and exterior virginity. Christina's doubts are linked in the *Life* with the monastic profession that she would not undertake for several years, suggesting that a Church line on male supervision of religious women is being read onto Christina's interest in her interior spirituality. Amy Hollywood has noted that for another woman of spirit, Beatrice of Nazareth (1200-1268) exterior performance was broadly irrelevant to her interior spiritual life, which was instead somatized by the male writer of her *vita*.<sup>23</sup> Christina, however, was operating a hundred years earlier, when her only experience of charismatic spirituality was as outwardly performed sainthood, primarily through miracles. Indeed, rather than hiding her virtues as Beatrice did, at times it seems that Christina deliberately exteriorised her spiritual life as a strategy to help her stakeholders understand her interior experiences.

Doubts about Christina's prophetic powers were expressed by her monastic stakeholders, including Abbot Geoffrey, rather than the local laity or Christina herself. Like the permissibility of her married status, her visions were being recorded shortly before such experiences formed a strong case for entry into the company of saints, as they soon would for Godric of Finchale (d. 1170). For a monastic audience familiar with

<sup>19</sup> A key exception is Catherine of Siena, see Vauchez, *Sainthood*, p. 381.

<sup>20</sup> *Life*, ch. 76, pp. 172-174.

<sup>21</sup> Jerome to Eustochium, *Selected Letters*, Letter 22, ch. 5, pp. 60-62.

<sup>22</sup> See Ineke van't Spijker, 'Saints and Despair: Twelfth-Century Hagiography as 'Intimate Biography'', in *The Invention of Sainthood*, pp. 185-205, and Staples and Karras, 'Christina's Temptings', pp. 160-183.

<sup>23</sup> Amy Hollywood, 'Inside Out: Beatrice of Nazareth and Her Hagiographer', in *Gendered Voices*, pp. 78-98. For a similar argument about other women of spirit see Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 84. Some other scholarship has shown female authors to be less dependent than male on externalised bodily practices as proof of sanctity, see for example Simon Coates, 'Regendering Rade Gund? Fortunatus, Baudonivia and the Problem of Female Sanctity in Merovingian Gaul', in *Gender and Christian Religion*, *SCH*, 34 (1998), 35-50.

the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great it was clear that spiritual merit was not a decisive factor for receiving visions, even for the benefit of others,<sup>24</sup> although Gregory had contended that saints can always recognise the difference between true revelations and illusions.<sup>25</sup> By the fourteenth century clerical technologies of proof had been refined to assess whether the appearance of female holiness was divinely inspired or fraudulent. The discourse of *discretio spirituum* which had originally been developed in the fourth century east by Evagrius Ponticus (c.345-399) as a tool for self-examination,<sup>26</sup> was appropriated as a series of measures against which the church could judge women's ascetic behaviour and revelations. Texts like Alfonso of Jaén's *Epistola solitarii ad reges* (c.1375-1379), written as an introduction to Bridget of Sweden's *Revelations*, simultaneously established the parameters that were acceptable for visionary behaviour and created clerical and social expectation of what a visionary should be doing.<sup>27</sup> In the twelfth century, however, such tools lay in the future. In accordance with Gregory the Great's model, the only hope of validating of Christina's divine encounters as authentic was to prove her to be a saint, and therefore impossible to deceive.

In fact the fledgling nature of Christina's position as a woman of spirit is brought into sharp relief by the evident lack of suitable measures to assess the relationship between her performances of holiness and the divine origin of her visions. Christina's contemporary Hildegard of Bingen was the first amongst a number of women of spirit to use the "poor little woman" motif, invoking the humility of negative capability as proof that the call to make their revelations public came from the highest possible (male) divine source.<sup>28</sup> Such protestations are absent from Christina's *Life*; the only mention of Christina's humility comes from the Writer, rather than her, and is connected to the consecration of her virginity rather than any prophetic mission, "*virginee humilitatis et humilis virginitatis sacratum susciperet signum*".<sup>29</sup> When Christina is told in a vision to speak out and reprimand Abbot Geoffrey it is fear of not being believed, rather than

<sup>24</sup> Gregory of Tours had argued that access to the supernatural must be on spiritual merit, but his position was undermined by the many scoundrels seeing visions in sixth-century Gaul, see Moreira, *Dreams*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>25</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, bk. iv, ch. 50.

<sup>26</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, 'The Monk: A Treatise on the Practical Life', in *Evagrius Ponticus, The Greek Corpus*, trans. and commentary Robert Sinkewicz (Oxford: OUP, 2003), pp. 91-114.

<sup>27</sup> See Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), esp. pp. 41-72.

<sup>28</sup> See Hildegard's reply to Guibert of Gembloux, c.1175, in *Hildegardis Bingensis Epistolarium*, ed. L. van Acker, *CCCM*, 91-91a (1993), II, no. 103R, pp. 258-265: "*O serve fidelis, ego paupercula feminae form in vera visione hec verba iterum tibi dico*", citation p. 260. See also Barbara Newman, 'Divine Power Made Perfect in Weakness: St Hildegard on the Frail Sex', in *Peaceweavers*, pp. 103-122.

<sup>29</sup> *Life*, ch. 62, p. 144. Christina does protest that her only miraculous healing be ascribed to God rather than to her, but this forms part of the established motifs of sanctity discussed in the last chapter rather than an example of negative capability. *Life*, ch. 47, p. 120.

humility, that causes her to hesitate.<sup>30</sup> Instead of negative capability and prophetic injunction, the proofs offered to demonstrate Christina's internal holiness are her abilities to be in places that she could not have humanly been and to see things that she could not have humanly seen, for example her bilocating visit to Simon of Bermondsey and her knowledge of Geoffrey's dream about the Camilla flower.<sup>31</sup> Unlike later women of spirit the question of Christina's internal holiness is compounded into doubts about whether she had paranormal abilities at all. The Writer knew the importance of distinguishing her visions from dreams but does not seem to have been troubled by the risk of their demonic origin, as later holy women's male collaborators would be.

So the saint is 'really' a saint because internally they are holy, in that they conform to the likeness of God. Since the climate of thought in which Christina was being a saint viewed somatisation as the route, albeit incomplete, to proof of this interior conformity, Christina herself was in no position to defend or make sense of her experiences in any other way. The discourses in which the revelations of women of spirit were dialogic and authoritative could not form part of her interpretive toolbox. She actively and strategically performed a holy identity which she pieced together from her personally experienced revelations and recognised *auctores*. Christina, as well as her Writer, exteriorised her spirituality, although, as will become evident, not necessarily for the same reasons.

## I.II Autohagiography

Christina's *Life* should be read alongside a body of other texts in which the holy protagonist is involved in actively performing an identity derived from the lives of the saints. 'Grace-lives', *Gnadenvitae* are an intermediary or *Zwischenform* between the external virtues and miracles of the saint's life and the personalised encounter of the divine in vision-literature.<sup>32</sup> As such they retain something of a notional chronology, but it is of subservient importance to the visions which are the principle vehicle of meaning in the text. To pick just one example that follows a similar story line to Christina's, the Italian tertiary Gheradesca of Pisa (d. 1260/1267) had a childhood desire for the religious life only to become wed under the persuasions of her parents. Her later release from marriage and close spiritual relationship with her Camaldolensian confessor

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<sup>30</sup> *Life*, ch. 56, pp. 134-136.

<sup>31</sup> *Life*, ch. 77, p. 176 and ch. 66, p. 152.

<sup>32</sup> The term *gnadenvitae* or *gnadenleben* – 'grace lives' – has emerged from the debate between Peter Dinzelbacher and Siegfried Ringler, see above p. 17. It was originally coined by Ringler to describe the account of Friedrich Sunder (1254-1328) chaplain to the nuns of Engelthal, perhaps written by Christine Ebner, see Siegfried Ringler, *Viten- und Offenbarungsliteratur in Frauenklöstern des Mittelalters: Quellen und Studien* (Munich: Artemis, 1980).

included visions about his spiritual state and progress, although she experienced opposition from other brothers of the local house. Nevertheless Gheradesca's visions, populated by the saints and companies of heaven, comprise almost the whole of the text. Kate Greenspan has advocated adopting the term 'autohagiography' specifically for these *vitae* which are dominated by the revelations and inner spiritual life of the protagonist. In doing so she argues for increased recognition that the texts cite the oral testimony of the holy woman as their source, and at the same time are fashioned into the models provided by saint's lives rather than presenting a private self.<sup>33</sup> They are marked by multi-vocality and the involvement by the woman of spirit in deliberately subordinating their self-understanding to an exemplary and universal rather than a private and historical truth.<sup>34</sup> Their motivation is to present imitable example for, and inspire mystical spirituality in, their readers. Greenspan's model deliberately groups texts according to processes of their construction rather than their subsequent use in order to look at how women of spirit participated in the co-creation of an exemplar out of the performances of their lives.<sup>35</sup>

The historical boundaries of which texts scholars deem to be *gnadenvitae*, or 'autohagiography' are being gradually pushed backwards in time from the fourteenth century German Dominican sisterbooks to the twelfth century. Peter Dinzelbacher argued that the *vita* of the French leper St Alpais of Cudot (1150-1211), which is comprised almost entirely of her visions,<sup>36</sup> should be deemed the first, but more recently Barbara Newman has shown that as early as the 1180s it is possible to identify the voice of Hildegard of Bingen in the construction of her visionary *vita*.<sup>37</sup> Christina's *vita* is earlier still than all of these texts, and as a consequence is necessarily a partially formed contribution to the genre.<sup>38</sup> It is structured around her many visions, locutions,

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<sup>33</sup> Kate Greenspan, 'Autohagiography and Medieval Women's Spiritual Autobiography', in *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. 216-236. The term 'autohagiography' has been used by a number of modern scholars in different ways. Notably Richard Kieckhefer employs it for a similar set of texts to Greenspan, but omits the active imitation of existing saintly models as their key feature, *Unquiet Souls*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>34</sup> See Greenspan, 'Autohagiography', pp. 218-220.

<sup>35</sup> The questions that modern scholarship wants to answer may involve comparing texts that were not necessarily grouped at the time. On the classifying of texts as a subjective, interactive and continually changing performance of shared codes of meaning between producers and readers see Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', *Critical Enquiry*, 7 (1980), 55-82.

<sup>36</sup> *De Beata Alpaïda, Virgine Cudotensi AASS*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November, vol. 2, pp. 167-209.

<sup>37</sup> Dinzelbacher 'Nascita e funzione della santità mistica', pp. 489-506. Newman teases out different ideas about Hildegard's holiness held by her two writers Gottfried and Theodoric and by the seer herself, 'Three-Part Invention: the *Vita S. Hildegardis* and Mystical Hagiography' in *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of her Thought and Art*, ed. Charles Burnett and Peter Dronke (London: Warburg Institute, 1998), pp. 189-210.

<sup>38</sup> Although yet earlier texts telling the spiritual life of an individual exist – for example Rupert of Deutz (c.1075-1129) account of his visions in his commentary on Matthew – they are not widespread.

prophecies and ecstasies and shows her deliberately being a saint, but has more of a tendency than later autohagiographies to forefront identifiable events and personalities, which the Writer only draws to additional attention by his coyness when they are deliberately omitted. It also lacks the proper topoi of humility which “ensure that the author does not make claims of sanctity for him or herself”.<sup>39</sup> Rather to the contrary, Christina was indeed making claims to sanctity for herself on the grounds that she had no other explanation for her heavenly patronage and perhaps her very failure to be seen as humble contributed to the lack of support for her cult.

Finally Christina’s unusual *Life* has another quirk in the inclusion of several additional characters who function as subsidiary saints and who merit mention. Roger, whose veneration gave the impetus for rediscovering Christina’s *vita* in the fourteenth century is likened to the patristic desert fathers, “*antiquis patribus*”.<sup>40</sup> Additionally her dead friend Alvered is sent with a message to Christina carrying a candle as a “friend of light”, *lucis amicus*, much as a saint might be.<sup>41</sup> Appearing subsequently to Geoffrey he is able to command punishment onto the abbot, who addresses him as *dominus* and *sanctus*.<sup>42</sup> Towards the end of the *Life* a third possible candidate for sainthood is tentatively put forward by Christina in the form of her morally reformed Abbot Geoffrey. If Roger and Alvered reflect a collaborative sanctifying between Christina, the Writer and Abbot Geoffrey, perhaps approved by the wider St Albans community, this last potential saint is entirely the outcome of Christina’s enthusiasm and visions. Before considering where Christina got her ideas of what a saint should be, and how she wanted to carry Geoffrey along with her on that journey, it is necessary to review where we might distinguish her own ‘autohagiographic’ performances from the voice of her Writer.

### I.III Negotiating Recollection

There are two levels involved in looking for Christina’s performances of holiness as having agency in the *Life*. The first is finding ways to distinguish her voice, seeking the places where we can have some confidence that it is predominantly Christina herself who is telling the story, albeit translated and transcribed by the Writer. This is not to downplay the magnitude of the editorial control exercised by the Writer explored in the last chapter, but to seek the fissures in that control. The second is to see if Christina ever meaningfully breaks out of the patriarchal discourses that speak to her about herself, and

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<sup>39</sup> Greenspan, ‘Autohagiography’, p. 224.

<sup>40</sup> *Life*, ch. 28, p. 80.

<sup>41</sup> *Life*, ch. 56, p. 134.

<sup>42</sup> *Life*, ch. 56, p. 136.

forges a feminine speaking self. At its core the question becomes whether it is plausible to identify multiple points or layers in the 'metonymic chain' of meaning for Christina's lived experience.

To begin with the first of these questions: where can we look for Christina telling the stories in the *Life*? In places the Writer ascribes the story straight to Christina, and her early life probably came predominantly from her, but the clearest possibility for identifying her own voice is in her visions. Yet medieval visions were not stable experiences, and they often went through a multi-stage process of interpretation before being written down.<sup>43</sup> Sometimes it is possible to glimpse this process, for example when in 1206 an Essex peasant named Thurkill was taken on a two-day tour round the otherworld by St Julian. On waking he told his relatives a garbled account of disconnected tales; but a visit to the local priest and a second chastising appearance of St Julian enabled him to give the eloquent polished account that was written down. Thurkill himself had brought a number of stakeholders to bear on his interpretation of the visions.<sup>44</sup> Similarly Christina's contemporary Elisabeth of Schönau's more controversial visions, like the Virgin sitting in the sun as the humanity of Jesus, were palliated by the guidance of her brother Ekbert who had her seek further visionary explanation.<sup>45</sup> Although there are no visions in Christina's *Life* that come with an explanatory celestial follow-up, it is evident that the input of other stakeholders was brought to bear on them.

Her visions as they appear in the *Life* are the outcome of conversations between Christina and the Writer, who, like Elisabeth's brother Ekbert, was asking questions which directed the way that her experiences were told. For example it is difficult to know whether the very specific but slightly chaotic geography that is found in a number of Christina's visions reflects her own interests, the Writer's questioning, or the outcome of shared interpretative horizons. Two examples will give an idea of this interest in geographic place. In Christina's first identifiably celestial vision she is first in a church where she meets the Empress-Virgin seated on a dais; she descends from this meeting to encounter the prostrated and enraged Burthred and in escaping him ascends to an upper chamber where she again meets the Empress before waking with a tear-stained pillow.

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<sup>43</sup> For discussion of a similar process see Heffernan on St Perpetua, *Sacred Biography*, pp. 200-213.

<sup>44</sup> H. L. D. Ward, 'The Visio of Thurkill, Probably by Ralph of Coggeshall', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 31 (1875), 420-59. See also Paul Gerhard Schmidt, 'The Vision of Thurkill', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 41 (1978), 50-64, and Aaron Gurevich, 'Oral and Written Culture of the Middle Ages: Two 'Peasant Visions' of the Late Twelfth to the Early Thirteenth Centuries', trans. Ann Schkan, *New Literary History*, 16 (1984), 51-66.

<sup>45</sup> Elisabeth, 'Third Book of Visions', ch. 4, pp. 123-125. On the relationship between Ekbert and Elisabeth see Clark, *A Twelfth Century Visionary*, pp. 50-67.

Many years later when Christina is eager to prevent Abbot Geoffrey travelling to the second Lateran Council she sees him in “a kind of enclosure surrounded by high fences which were transparent: it resembled a cloister without door or window, but it was round and the grass in the garth was greener than ordinary grass”.<sup>46</sup>

It is worth noting that Meyer Schapiro has drawn attention to Anglo-Saxon interest in optical realism - what can actually be seen - as a way of positioning the self in relationship to familiar religious themes.<sup>47</sup> The Hildesheim Psalter is one of the manuscripts in which Schapiro’s ‘disappearing Christ’ motif (an ascension scene shown from the vantage of the apostles with only Christ’s feet visible, vanishing into the clouds) is found. As a composite volume, the psalter is less a reflection of Christina’s ideas of herself than of Abbot Geoffrey’s ideas about her: ideas which he offered to Christina as a mirror in which he saw his own image sanctified through her. Perhaps, therefore, the interest in somatising the physical spaces in Christina’s visions reflects only the interests of the Writer and of Abbot Geoffrey.<sup>48</sup> Yet it was Christina who maintained her links to the Anglo-Saxon culture of her family, much of which had been swept away after the Conquest from the Abbey of St Albans. Moreover, if the *Life* is read alongside later *gnadenvitae* such as Agnes Blannbekin (d. 1315)<sup>49</sup> or Gherardesca of Pisa, a similar importance is attached to symbolic objects and landscapes – flowering branches, birds, gardens and crowns – which seem to have come from the holy women themselves.

Over the course of twenty years of friendship with Abbot Geoffrey, contact the former school teacher had persuaded Christina that a written account would be a fitting record of her extraordinary access to God. Yet some of the efforts by the Writer and Abbot Geoffrey to question Christina about the nature of her visions seem to have been too gauche for her liking. Without any of Christina’s own writings to compare with the visions in the *Life*, there is no way to be sure that her revelations present the same

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<sup>46</sup> “*in oracionibus namque constituta vidi ambitum quemdam de lignis candidissimis et his perspicuis circumseptum ostio fenestrisque carentem ad modum claustris sed rotundum cuius interioris herba pratelli communium virorem excedebat herbarum*”, *Life*, ch. 72, p. 164.

<sup>47</sup> Meyer Schapiro, ‘The Image of the Disappearing Christ: The Ascension in English Art around the Year 1000’, *Gazettes des Belles Arts*, ser. 6, 23 (1943), 133-152. See also the reassessment of his work by Robert Deshman, who argues that the ‘Disappearing Christ’ includes a warning against over-reliance on the power of corporeal vision as a route to spiritual vision, ‘Another Look at the Disappearing Christ: Corporeal Vision in Early Medieval Images’, *The Art Bulletin*, 79 (1997), 518-546. I am grateful to the ‘From Leofric to Lievrich’ seminar at the University of York (November 2006) for drawing my attention to this insular practice.

<sup>48</sup> Simone Roisin observed that somatization increases the further away the report of the vision is from the visionary, *L’hagiographie cistercienne dans la diocèse de Liège au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l’Université, 1974), cited by Bynum, ‘Foreword’, in *Gendered Voices*, p. xi.

<sup>49</sup> *Leben und Offenbarungen der Wiener Begine, Agnes Blannbekin (d. 1315)*, ed. by Peter Dinzelbacher and Renate Vogeler (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1994). See also the translation by Ulrike Weithaus, *Agnes Blannbekin, Viennese Beguine: Life and Revelations* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002).

balance of interior and exterior that she would have chosen to record. However Christina was thinking about herself in the saintly mode, in which the protagonist never personally writes their own story. Since her enthusiasm for the *vita* was based on wanting her visions recorded it is reasonable to assume that she took some care over how they were reported. She was not able to offer a controlled mystical vocabulary in her explanations but its very absence testifies towards their authenticity.

That the *Life* and *Gesta Abbatum* were redacted over two centuries after Christina's *vita* only adds to the instability of a text which was already the outcome of several layers of interpretation. Even when the details of her life were related by Christina directly to the Writer, that very process of recollecting the past was partial, inter-textual with other memories, and recast based on the embedded *doxa* of the fields in which she operated. There was no 'factual' account that could be recalled: the only way that Christina can be encountered is through situated, intersubjective, processes of recollection. Since people offer different accounts of themselves to different people, by telling her stories to the Writer he necessarily altered how Christina conceived of her own past.<sup>50</sup> Slavoj Žižek has explored the process of remembering and retelling past traumas as one which radically recreates the teller's self-understanding, making them "not the same subject as before".<sup>51</sup> Christina recast a painful and confusing period of her life into an account of the celestial battle and the heroism of sainthood, which therefore made her older adult self into a candidate for sanctity.<sup>52</sup> We might do best to look at the *vita* as the outcome of a process akin to that identified by Penny Summerfield in her oral history study of British women recalling their experiences during the Second World War, whereby Christina took up the multiple and sometimes competing discourses about holiness and adopted various and changing positions in relation to them.<sup>53</sup>

## II. Texts and Self-Textualisation

If partly what can be seen in the *Life* is Christina interacting with and shaping herself using the ideas that she has about sainthood and holy behaviour, then it is necessary to look at the source of those ideas. The process of example and imitation should not be oversimplified. Texts written for or recommended to women were intended to stabilise

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<sup>50</sup> See Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>51</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 32-33.

<sup>52</sup> On memory as a strategy through which medieval people internalised and re-formed themselves along the lines of their learning see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990).

<sup>53</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester: MUP, 1998).

women's devotional communities and imagine a collective response.<sup>54</sup> The literature of spiritual instruction is often very explicit and cautious about what message the female reader should take from a text. Looking at the ways in which women of spirit used texts to bring meaning to their own experiences provides a rare opportunity to explore some examples of a real, rather than an imagined, female audience interpreting their reading. As is to be expected, these interpretations do not consistently reflect how they are recommended to be read. For example the fourteenth-century anchorite Julian of Norwich heard the story of St Cecilia and asked God for three wounds,<sup>55</sup> rather than seeing Cecilia as a model for resisting the embraces of marriage as did her lay contemporary Margery Kempe.<sup>56</sup> A century earlier St Douceline (d. 1274) had used the same saint as a model for the kind of hairshirt asceticism that is absent from the texts of Julian, Margery or Christina.<sup>57</sup> When we look at Christina performing from texts that she knew we encounter something of her own interpretation of the narratives of gendered holy identity.

Christina's imitation was of models that she encountered through her reading, through hearing stories and through her liturgical knowledge. Despite the relative paucity of evidence,<sup>58</sup> medieval women's education and relationship with texts through patronage and readership has been the theme of much valuable work.<sup>59</sup> The actual extent of

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<sup>54</sup> See Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: UPP, 2007), esp. p. xii. Two contrasting interpretations of the kind of identity offered to women by male-authored devotional literature are found in Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), and Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>55</sup> *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Watson and Jenkins, p. 65, line 36-43.

<sup>56</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Harlow: Longman, 2000), see Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, pp. 132-144, for a reading of Margery's *imitatio Ceciliae*.

<sup>57</sup> *The Life of St Douceline, A Beguine of Provence*, ed. and trans. Kathleen Garay and Madeleine Jeay (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), ch. 1.13.

<sup>58</sup> In his catalogue of the extant texts from English nunneries David Bell identified only 17 to 27 manuscripts written before the end of the twelfth century. Over half are liturgical, mostly psalters, with the rest tending to be monastic classics, biblical books and glosses, although two volumes of saints lives also remain, *What Nuns Read: Books and Libraries in Medieval English Nunneries* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995).

<sup>59</sup> Volumes of papers on subjects related to women, literacy and learning include Meale, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain*; Lesley Smith and Jane Taylor, eds., *Women, The Book and the Godly* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995); Mews, ed., *Listen Daughter*; Anneke Mulder-Bakker, ed., *Seeing and Knowing: Women and Learning in Medieval Europe, 1200-1550* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004); and on monastic education more generally George Ferzoco and Carolyn Muessig, eds., *Medieval Monastic Education* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000) and James Clark, ed., *The Culture of Medieval English Monasticism* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007). The work of Jocelyn Wogan-Browne has been particularly important for the reading practices of women, notably her *Saints' Lives*. The classic work on monastic learning remains Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961).

Christina's literacy remains unresolved.<sup>60</sup> Her ownership of the Hildesheim Psalter, with its elaborate illustration and texts written or translated for her use, suggests both that meditation on images formed a key part of her devotional practice and that she was at least learning to read French and Latin under Geoffrey's tutelage.<sup>61</sup> It is evident from texts like Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum* (c.1158-1163) and Goscelin of St Bertin's *Liber Confortatorius* (c.1082-1083) that some contemporary English religious women living in informal semi-solitary communities had a high level of Latin reading ability and a solid knowledge of a range of monastic texts. Both Abelard and Goscelin draw upon the famous recommendations of Jerome to Paula's daughter-in-law, Laeta, for a reading scheme to teach her daughter the scriptures, in their recommendations for the studies of female religious.<sup>62</sup> Alongside some knowledge of scripture Christina must have been familiar with at least the most famous of the monastic classics. The example which opened this chapter demonstrates her knowledge the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, and perhaps she therefore also knew texts like Augustine's *Confessions* or Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* which were amongst the books recommended by Goscelin of St Bertin for the recluse Eva to read aloud.<sup>63</sup>

Christina remained grounded in insular ideas of sanctity substantially lost at the Abbey of St Albans, for example the legend of St Cecilia, whose cult had long been especially popular in England. Nevertheless her interaction with St Albans had formed the context for half her lifetime and the cultic culture of that house must have influenced how she conceived and performed sainthood, just as she challenged those conceptions for Abbot Geoffrey and her other followers. The only texts that can definitely be located at Markyate are the *vita* and the Hildesheim Psalter. Christina also brought another psalter to the community (the one that the *Life* suggests became infested with toads).<sup>64</sup> Since Benedictine nuns are supposed to read the Benedictine Rule it seems reasonable to suppose that Abbot Geoffrey provided a copy of this amongst his gifts when he was importuning Christina to take profession. If Markyate continued to be dependent on St

<sup>60</sup> It is interesting to note the contrast with the only other contemporary insular female *vita*, of Margaret of Scotland, for whom book reading and learning form a critical part of her sanctity.

<sup>61</sup> See Geddes, 'The St Albans Psalter: The Abbot and the anchoress', p. 203 and Barratt, 'Small Latin?', pp. 56-57. Scholarly opinion currently leans towards Christina having a level of reading ability, but Henrietta Leyser's 1995 observation that "turning points in her life are marked by what she sees rather than the written word", remains an important caveat to any position on the subject, *Medieval Women*, p. 198.

<sup>62</sup> Jerome to Laeta, Letter 107, *Selected Letters*, pp. 338-371. Abelard to Heloise, Letter 9, 'Quae est eiusdem Petri ad virgines Paraclitenses', *PL*, 178:325-336, esp.325-328. See also the translation by Vera Morton in *Guidance for Women in Twelfth-Century Convents* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 122-138. Goscelin of St Bertin, *Liber Confortatorius*, ed. C. H. Talbot, *Studia Anselmiana*, 37 (1955), bk. III, *Mensa Scripturarum*, pp. 80-81. See also the translation by Monika Otter, *The Book of Encouragement and Consolation* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Goscelin of St Bertin, *Liber Confortatorius*, bk. III, *Mensa Scripturarum*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>64</sup> *Life*, ch. 37, p. 98.

Albans for many of its practical needs then it is worth noting that in subsequent rules given to its daughter-house at Sopwell, St Albans made no provision for the nuns to develop their reading beyond the liturgy.

The question of Christina's actual reading ability is something of a moot point since Brian Stock has argued that medieval literacy was about participating in textual communities rather than about personal skill. Literacy, he suggests, is actually the interpretative field where communities form because they assign a shared authority and meaning to texts.<sup>65</sup> From this brief discussion it is possible to see Christina potentially operating in three different textual communities: The St Albans community through the sharing of books with Abbot Geoffrey and other monastic friends; the wider community of contemporary religious women's reading (where parallels can be found between what she reads and what is recommended in the literature of spiritual instruction); and the stories and texts that derived from her Anglo-Saxon heritage. It is therefore evident that the texts that inspired Christina's own performances of sainthood were not necessarily the same ones that inspired the Writer at St Albans in the construction of her *Vita*.

## II.I The Hildesheim Psalter

The Hildesheim Psalter is the principal text we can be certain Christina used in her devotional practice. Nevertheless the relationship between her self-textualisation and the psalter is complex. The most apparent links between the two texts are found in Christina's visions, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter since here we are specifically concerned with identifying models for her lifestyle and ideas about sainthood. It is worth observing that the potential connection between the psalter and Christina's performances is often an oblique one. For example the dramatic realism illustrated in the miniature cycle episodes such as the Magi travelling to and returning from the stable, is also found in Christina's awareness of the performative role of bodies. There is no direct connection between the psalter and episodes such as her giving away of the garments that she made for Geoffrey's aborted travels, but there is a similar sense that the ends of the story must be tidied away.

One of the notable links between the psalter codex and the *Life* is that both give mixed messages about Christina's status in religious life. The psalter makes extensive use of imagery from the Benedictine rule, especially in the historiated psalm initials.<sup>66</sup> Even if

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<sup>65</sup> Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), esp. p. 522.

<sup>66</sup> For a detailed description of all the initials see Pächt, *AP*, pp. 206-272.

not originally drawn for Christina (and current scholarship agrees that there was a revision of the rubrics when it was redirected to her), these would nevertheless daily present to her the consecrated life. In the Alexis quire Gregory the Great's letter on the use of images configures her as a layperson for whom the symbiotic relationship of illustrations and script in the psalter are suitable meditational tools. This quire also includes the only text which was composed directly for Christina herself: a *psychomachia* or discourse on spiritual warfare. Probably penned by Geoffrey himself, this discourse nevertheless belongs with an existing tradition of illustrating the spiritual battle in Anglo-Saxon monastic psalters.<sup>67</sup> Around the same time that Geoffrey wrote this *psychomachia* St Albans was copying Peter Damian's *Laus Eremiticae Vitae*, which presents the hermitage as the fortress and battlefield of God.<sup>68</sup> A similar association of the hermit as engaged to a unique degree in the spiritual battle was finding expression through other contemporary writers like Orderic Vitalis.<sup>69</sup> This contradiction between the coenobitic and eremitic slants to the Hildesheim codex becomes less remarkable when the psalter is looked at in light of Morgan Powell's codicological reassessment, which places the Alexis quire at the start and the psalms at the end of a compositional process. When the first texts were made for Christina she had not yet finally chosen to take profession and Markyate was at the very start of its progression towards the regularisation of the 1140's when the psalter was added to complete the volume.

Although the psalter is the only text that can be used as a yardstick for the performances in Christina's *Life*, unfortunately much of what can be discerned is where to *not* look for her authentic voice. For example the prevalence of Mary as Queen of Heaven in the *Life* but not in the psalter suggests that this devotion was important to Christina but not to Geoffrey, who instead was preoccupied with Christina's intercessory powers which he arranged to be illustrated for her to meditate upon. This discrepancy of interest is also evident in the two saints who receive special attention in the psalter: Alexis and Mary Magdalene. There were any number of female saints who fled marriage (and did not ultimately return, as did Alexis) whose stories could have been included. Instead, recent scholarship has shown, Geoffrey gives Christina a text that comes from his own spiritual

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<sup>67</sup> See Katherine Openshaw, 'Weapons in the Daily Battle: Images of the Conquest of Evil in the Early Medieval Psalter', *The Art Bulletin*, 75 (1993), 17-38. Openshaw argues that it is in the secularisation of this religious motif that the *Beatus Vir* page in the Hildesheim Psalter departs from existing tradition. On similar secular images in subsequent Gothic psalters see Howard Helsinger, 'Images on the Beatus Page of Some Medieval Psalters', *The Art Bulletin*, 52 (1971), 161-176.

<sup>68</sup> Peter Damian, 'Laus Eremiticae Vitae', cols. 247-248.

<sup>69</sup> To give only two of many examples, Orderic records one hermit engaged in single combat with the devil, and on another occasion describes the hermit as "*athleta Dei*", suggesting they are individual fighters for God, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall, 6 vols (Oxford: OUP, 1968-1980), II, bk. IV, p. 327 and p. 334.

journey.<sup>70</sup> A popular *vita* in Norman monastic reform circles, written in French, with a preface derived from a semi-remembered text of Geoffrey's youth,<sup>71</sup> the *exemplum* of Alexis is at best a late recommendation to Christina whose ideas about herself - the crowned spouse of Christ - were already well developed. The cult of the Magdalene flourished in the twelfth century and her unusually prominent place in the Hildesheim miniature cycle has been mapped onto Christina's own devotional interests.<sup>72</sup> But here again the cultic interest seems to really lie with Christina's male stakeholders. It is the Lustful Cleric whose own devotion causes the Magdalene to chastise him, and is to be contrasted with the Virgin Mary's personal protection of Christina in visiting her husband Burthred. Christina's doubts about her chastity are dismissed, rather than her sins forgiven, in her celestial crowning. It seems that Geoffrey and the Writer were more concerned to illustrate sanctity after redemption from sexual failings than was Christina herself, who reads her own holiness back to infancy in her imitation of the Virgin Mary.

It has been much remarked upon that the feasts of a number of female saints are included in the Hildesheim Psalter which are absent from the Ramsey or St Albans calendars.<sup>73</sup> Here, perhaps, it is possible to get more of an insight into Christina's personal interests than in the representations of Saints Alexis or Mary Magdalene. It is impossible to establish how well known the stories were either at St Albans or Markyate, but that Juliana, Amalberga and Frideswide all struggled to escape suits of marriage has been plausibly connected to Christina's own unhappy flight.<sup>74</sup> The Hildesheim litany also includes a body of female saints added onto the end of a St Albans litany. Some of these were also added to the psalter made for the Abbess of Wherwell, and so perhaps indicate saints deemed suitable by the male abbey for female devotion. Nevertheless the Hildesheim list is longer and uniquely includes Saints Eufraxia (d. after 410), Marina (d. c.303-5), Elizabeth, Susanna (d. c.295), Ursula and her virgins, Helen (d. c.330), Florentia (d. c.612), Consortia (d. c.578) and Smeralda (date unknown). There is little in the way of obvious pattern connecting this group of saintly women which ranges from early virgin-martyrs (Marina, Susanna, Ursula) and a desert ascetic (Eufraxia) through women whose sainthood rested on their motherhood of important church figures (Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist and Helen, mother of Constantine) to sixth century

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<sup>70</sup> See Geddes, *St Albans Psalter*, pp. 113-116; Hunt, 'The Life of St Alexis', pp. 223-224; and Haney, 'The St Albans Psalter', pp. 171-172.

<sup>71</sup> Hunt 'The Life of St Alexis', p. 222.

<sup>72</sup> See Carrasco, 'The Imagery of the Madelen', pp. 67-80.

<sup>73</sup> See for example Pächt, *AP*, pp. 30-31; and Jane Geddes, 'The Calendar and Liturgical Apparatus', <<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/essays/calendar.shtml>> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008].

<sup>74</sup> Francis Wormald, who first drew attention to these unusual saints was reluctant to see the selection as a direct consequence of Christina's interest, Pächt, *AP*, pp. 30-31.

foundresses of religious houses (Florentia and Consortia). Ursula and Helen are British saints, but Florentia was from Visigothic Spain, Consortia from Lyons in France and Smeralda, despite the Italian implications of her name, cannot be traced. Caution should therefore be exercised before assuming that Christina was continually seeking out only stories that directly shed light on her own. That she was engaging with a wider range of spiritual interests is also suggested by the psalter since Geoffrey's psychomachia was a response to conversations between them on contemporary themes including crusading and the civil war context of King Stephen's reign.<sup>75</sup>

## II.II Saints' Lives

Although a variety of female saints were presented for religious women to meditate upon, internalise and imitate in the literature of spiritual instruction, the recurring names are all virgin-martyrs of the universal church. Saints Katherine, Margaret, Agnes and Agatha were deemed particularly suitable for their resistance of temptation and commitment to virginal integrity. Aelred of Rievaulx recommends thinking of St Agnes when the devil attacks with the tools of beautiful clothes and jewels, or at night, "[c]ogita Agnetem beatissimam, a qua aurum, argentums vestes pretiosissimae, lapides pretiosi, et tota saecularis gloriae pompa, quasi quaedam stercora sunt reputata".<sup>76</sup> Peter the Venerable and Osbert of Clare write to their respective nieces about the example presented by these saints as brides of Christ, and Goscelin of St Bertin, otherwise little interested in the question, commends "resplendent Agnes, glorious Lucy [and] heroic Potamina", "*sic splendida Agnes, sic gloriosa Lucia, sic fortissimo Potamiana*", to Eva for their preservation of virginity.<sup>77</sup> The famous Katherine group of texts compiled in the early thirteenth century for a West Midlands anchoritic community includes a miniature female legendary of Saints Katherine, Juliana and Margaret. Additionally the *vitae patrum* were ever popular, recommended by Aelred to relieve the fatigue and inspire fervour of spirit in the solitary, and by Goscelin as *exempla* of patience.<sup>78</sup> Although Goscelin singled out Mary of Egypt as "a matron whom virgins should venerate and a

<sup>75</sup> This psychomachia merits further investigation than it has yet received. For brief discussion of it see Geddes, *St Albans Psalter*, pp.116-118; and Powell, 'Making the Psalter', pp. 315-317.

<sup>76</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *De Institutione Inclusarum*, in *Aelredi Rievallensis Opera I: Opera Acetica*, ed. C. H. Talbot, *CCCM*, 1 (1971), pp.637-682, bk. II, ch. 16, p. 652. See also the translation by Mary Macpherson, 'A Rule of Life for a Recluse', in *Aelred of Rievaulx: Treatises and Pastoral Prayers*, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971), pp. 43-102.

<sup>77</sup> Goscelin, *Liber Confortatorius*, bk. IV, *Merces Elationis et Humilitatis*, p. 98.

<sup>78</sup> Aelred, *De Institutione Inclusarum*, bk. I, ch. 9, p. 645. Goscelin, *Liber Confortatorius*, bk. III, *Longanimitas Sanctorum*, pp. 75-77.

woman men should admire", "*mulier virginibus veneranda, femina viris admiranda*",<sup>79</sup> the desert mothers did not enjoy particular recommendation for devotion or imitation over their more prolific male counterparts.

Whilst men with responsibility for the spiritual care of religious women sought female exempla to direct their imitations of holiness, women of spirit routinely rejected female models in favour of assimilating male ones to their own situation.<sup>80</sup> Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau draw on such male biblical figures as Moses, Job and Jeremiah, rather than Anna or Deborah to authenticate their prophetic gifts. Christina too occasionally likens herself to male biblical figures. During her early years at home she quits the room in which her husband is left holding her mantle, like a second Joseph, "*et exemplo Ioseph*".<sup>81</sup> Towards the end of the *Life* she is given the opportunity to offer Geoffrey up for martyrdom and is eager to do so with her own hand like Abraham with his son.<sup>82</sup> These mentions are brief, however, and Christina lacked the experience of being cloistered with other women from her youth, the contact with influential powers in the monastic reformation, and the rapidly widespread reputation for spiritual distinction of these more famous women of spirit. Consequently she remained more tied to the discourses offered to religious women by the male church. Yet at the same time that Christina was conforming to masculine discourses she made active choices about the examples which she assimilated.

Christina herself likens her situation to two popular female saints, Judith and Cecilia. In Christina's first vision of the Queen of Heaven she is promised a place in Mary's chamber alongside the biblical slayer of Holofernes, and she offers the chaste-married martyrs Cecilia and Valerian as a compromise lifestyle to Burthred.<sup>83</sup> Judith and Cecilia were frequently recommended to women for imitation, although it is perhaps worth noting that Osbert of Clare deemed them suitable examples only for the august Abbess Adelidis and not for his younger nieces under her care. They are both chaste in marriage, rather than the virgin-martyrs whose stories are overwritten onto Christina's by the Writer. Both are active in their courage, going out and taking action rather than patiently suffering action taken against them, and Osbert holds them up for strong leadership and private prayer. Most interestingly in these two saints we see Christina remaining grounded in Anglo-Saxon cultic culture. Both references are found at the start

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<sup>79</sup> Goscelin, *Liber Confortatorius*, bk. III, *Longanimitas Sanctorum*, p. 75.

<sup>80</sup> See Catherine Mooney, 'Voice, Gender and the Portrayal of Sanctity', in *Gendered Voices*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>81</sup> *Life*, ch. 22, p. 72.

<sup>82</sup> *Life*, ch. 79, p. 180.

<sup>83</sup> *Life*, ch. 25, p. 76 and ch. 10, p. 50.

of the *Life*, before she encountered the Normanised monastic culture at St Albans, but are important enough to her for their stories to be included.

A chaste widow, rich, beautiful, heroic in virtue, ingenious and courageous, Judith held particular appeal for late Anglo-Saxon writers including Aelfric, Adhelm and the anonymous writer of the ninth century *Judith* fragment.<sup>84</sup> In the vulgate Jerome had recommended Judith as a model for the resistance of sexual temptation: "*Judith viduam, castitatis exemplum*" ("Take the widow Judith as an *exemplum* of chastity"); and Aelfric's Anglo-Saxon homily tailored this exemplarity specifically to female monastics: "*nunnan þe sceandlice libbað tellað to lytlum gylte, þæt hi hi forlicgør*" ("nuns who live shamelessly consider it a small fault that they commit fornication").<sup>85</sup> For Christina, the homilist's message that Judith's chastity was an enabling force, facilitating her conquest of Holofernes, could have been a stirring encouragement, and one that was directly tied to her coenobitic aspirations. The Anglo-Saxon Judith wore beautiful clothes and jewels, but resisted them as gifts from the Assyrian enemy, giving Christina a narrative that echoed the reality of her own youthful temptation. Moreover Christina had clearly spent time reflecting on the relationship between military and spiritual warfare, discussing it with Abbot Geoffrey, suggesting that she was indeed familiar with a text that had the dual purpose of encouraging virtuous living amongst nuns, but also prowess at arms amongst the noble laity.<sup>86</sup>

With the Cecilia story we have to make fewer suppositions about how it influenced Christina's performances of holiness, as the narrative is more clearly woven into her *Life*. Like Judith, Cecilia was a saint with enduring popularity amongst women and an important cult in Anglo-Saxon England. Christina intends at first to use the story strategically as she and Burthred perform it in order to deceive their families and neighbours: an effort which exposes Christina's own awareness of the socio-political dramas implicit in sainthood. For Christina, Cecilia was both the chaste wife, and a model which continued to help her deal with her disrupted relationship with episcopal authority.<sup>87</sup> Catherine Sanok has made an insightful and detailed comparison of how

<sup>84</sup>Aelfric, *Homily on Judith*, in 'Aelfric's Homilies on Judith, Esther and The Maccabees', ed. S. D. Lee (1999), <<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~stuart/kings/>> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008]. Adhelm, *De Virginitate*, in *Aldelmi Opera*, ed. Rudolfus Ewald, *MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi*, 15, 3 vols (1919), I, pp. 226-323; ch. 57, pp. 316-317. See also the translation by Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1979), pp. 126-127. *Judith*, ed. Mark Griffith (Exeter: Univeristy of Exeter Press, 1997).

<sup>85</sup> Jerome, *Vulgate, PL*, 29:37-40. Aelfric, 'Homily on Judith', ch. 10, lines 360-362.

<sup>86</sup> For discussions of Aelfric's two audiences see Ian Pringle, 'Judith: The Homily and the Poem', *Traditio*, 31 (1975), 85-97; Mary Clayton, 'Aelfric's Judith: Manipulative or Manipulated?', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 23 (1994) 215-227; and Stacy Klein, 'Aelfric's Sources and His Gendered Audience', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 13 (1996), 111-117.

<sup>87</sup> Writing to Adelidis, Osbert of Clare had expanded on Cecilia's unique privilege of preaching not like a woman but like a bishop. *Letters*, no. 42, pp. 155-156.

Christina and Margery Kempe assimilated St Cecilia into their performances of holiness. She argues that Christina's *imitatio* "culminates – and abruptly ends – when she makes her monastic vow",<sup>88</sup> and as a consequence Christina entirely fails to take on a public role. We have already seen that Christina's involvement in the affairs of the realm were not necessarily her primary interest, but Sanok's reading fails to look beyond the Writer's narrative to the fissures created by Christina's own performances later in the text. Although Christina has received only the crown of virginity, not of martyrdom, she does not relinquish the latter. Rather she takes the St Cecilia story right through with her and, let down by Burthred, she brings it to bear on her relationship with her beloved Geoffrey whom she casts as a replacement Valerian.

Geoffrey's prolix anecdotes in the third section of the *Life* are not the only reason that it loses narrative direction. The Writer also found that his goalposts shifted as Christina developed an enthusiasm for taking Geoffrey with her on her quest to sainthood, in particular to see him as a martyr. In one vision Christina, eager for news of her beloved, sees Geoffrey conducting the Christmas mass not in white vestments – as was evidently customary given the testimony of the sub-prior the following day – but in the red of the martyrs, his face shining with a ruddy and transcendental brightness, "*cuius facies non simplici candore sed candori mixto rubore prefulgidam humanum vultum transcendere videbatur et gloriam*".<sup>89</sup> A few years later, after the political crises of the late 1130s, Christina's visions return to the theme of Geoffrey as the martyr Valerian.<sup>90</sup> Whilst deep in protracted prayer Christina is filled with joy at an inward exchange with the voice of God who asks if she would like Geoffrey to suffer martyrdom. Christina's *imitatio Ceciliae* becomes the forum for her only vision about questions of theology and doctrine. Seeing herself and Geoffrey on either side of Christ at the altar, Christina learns that in God's love one should not put another above self. This is a vision with many possible readings: perhaps a rebuff to Geoffrey's increasingly tenacious grasp on her divine encounters, or alternatively a reflection of Christina's internalisation of the Benedictine concentration on personal salvation. Either way it illustrates the complex processes by which Christina's performances of holiness draw on, rather than conform to, a variety of inspirations and models.

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<sup>88</sup> Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, p. 120.

<sup>89</sup> *Life*, ch. 64, p. 148. On the local variations in medieval colours of liturgical vestments see J. Barrington Bates, 'Am I Blue? Some Historical Evidence for Liturgical Colors', *Studia Liturgica*, 33 (2003), 75-88; and Roger Reynolds, 'Clerical Liturgical Vestments and Liturgical Colors in the Middle Ages', *Clerics in the Early Middle Ages: Hierarchy and Image* (Aldeshot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 1-16.

<sup>90</sup> This, of course, assumes that both experiences are in correct chronological position, which is by no means certain given other shifts in the texts.

### III. Clothing and the Sainly Body

Having explored how Christina was active in shaping her story according to established saintly ideas, it is now worth turning to look at how she was involved in a very different set of holy performances that position her in the vanguard of later medieval women of spirit. Christina's self-narrative in the *Life* is found, not only in her visions and the saints' lives she integrates, but also in the unusual weight of attention paid to the clothed body. In her sartorial performances, Christina enacts an early form of 'writing the body', both using and disrupting the motifs of saints lives and views on women's dress found in male writings. She falls between practices of marking the body in imitation of the asceticism of the desert fathers, as is found in the earlier asceticism of saints such as Radegund, and marking the body as a strategy to acquire a public voice for the visions of later medieval women of spirit. Christina was a skilled needlewoman and shared a love of fabrics with Abbot Geoffrey who became a monk because some fabulous garments he borrowed were destroyed by fire.<sup>91</sup> She fabricated her holiness partially out of the fabrics that she sees as important to her female identity.<sup>92</sup> She confounds the male distinction between the 'ideal noble woman' and the 'ideal holy saint', allowing what Gail Ashton calls a "feminine rhythm" to break into the narrative.<sup>93</sup> Christina's interest in dress therefore links the first question posed above - how to find Christina's voice in the text - to the second - whether she successfully forges a feminine speaking self in the *Life*.

Characteristic of later medieval women of spirit is the appropriation of the symbols of women's existence, of home and domestic life, to narrate and perform their spiritual identity. Hence for example, the *Christuskindje* and *Virgin and Child* were central images in the meditations and art of beguine spirituality.<sup>94</sup> The skilful and distinctive needlework of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman noble women is one of their most remarked upon qualities, an activity that was both sanctioned and admired by the men in authority over them.<sup>95</sup> It also formed an important part of the working day of the recluse, with *Ancrene Wisse* cautioning against the anchoress indulging in making

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<sup>91</sup> *GA*, I, p. 73.

<sup>92</sup> A number of modern studies have illustrated the different circumstances in which women have used textiles as a site of expression, some of which are reviewed by E. Jane Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Literature* (Philadelphia: UPP, 2002), p. 14.

<sup>93</sup> Ashton, *Generation of Identity*, p. 81.

<sup>94</sup> See Joanna Zeigler, 'Reality as Imitation: The Role of Religious Imagery Among the Beguines of the Low Countries', in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991), pp. 112-126.

<sup>95</sup> See for example the famous comments of William of Poitiers on the needlework and gold cloth of English women, *The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers*, ed. and trans. R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 176-177. Additional examples are cited by Lucien Musset, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, trans. Richard Rex (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp. 22-23.

overly elegant textiles and Aelred of Rievaulx recommending that his recluse sister meditate on the white altar-clothes in her cell as both her penitential and bridal garbs.<sup>96</sup> The reform climate turned particular attention to the question of religious clothing, with the Cistercians parading their holiness in un-dyed habit cloth.<sup>97</sup> One of the earliest vision collections of the period, the *Liber visionum* by Otloh of St Emmeram (d. 1067) who was something of a spokesman for reform, includes two visions about the corrupting effect of luxurious clothing.<sup>98</sup> From the twelfth century onwards, then, there was a new level of interest in questions of dress sparked both by the economic changes that increased access to luxury goods and the debates surrounding the relationship between inner and outer person. Both in literature and everyday practice later medieval Europe developed a heightened awareness of the directive, and the subversive, possibilities of textiles.<sup>99</sup>

Clothes are a situated performance of the social body which inscribes identity on the variable, politically and culturally regulated boundary between self and other.<sup>100</sup> Operating on this boundary between inner and outer, clothing is not supplemental to, but is integrally part of, the body that it fabricates: it is what Jane Burns usefully calls a “sartorial body”.<sup>101</sup> It is the sartorial body that is the carrier of meaning and identity; acting from without to confine the body within a social role, and from within as an outward expression of self-chosen definition.<sup>102</sup> We can look for the elusive women who are the protagonists of their *gnadenvitae* at the moments where an ‘ideal holy woman’ narrative is overwritten onto their bodily disruption of the explicit conflation of interiority and exteriority. For example Marie of Oignies as a married woman wore tight rough bindings under her clothes, normatively a holy behaviour, because, we are told, “she clearly did not have power over her own body”, “*potestatem proprii corporis aperte*

<sup>96</sup> Aelred, *De Institutione Inclusarum*, bk. II, ch. 26, pp. 657-658. See also Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives*, pp. 32-40.

<sup>97</sup> See also the case-study of clothing references in a bishop's register by Susan Carroll-Clark, ‘Bad Habits: Clothing and Textile References in the Register of Eudes Rigaud, Archbishop of Rouen’, in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, vol 1, ed. Robin Netherton and Gale Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp. 81-103.

<sup>98</sup> See Ellen Joyce, ‘Scribal Performance and Identity in the Autobiographical Visions of Otloh of St Emmeram (d.1067)’, *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 22 (2005), 95-106.

<sup>99</sup> See Dyan Elliott, ‘Dress as Mediator Between Inner and Outer Self: The Pious Matron of the High and Later Middle Ages’, *Mediaeval Studies*, 53 (1991), 279-308.

<sup>100</sup> See Joanne Entwistle, ‘Addressing the Body’ in *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), pp. 6-39 for a summary of the theoretical framework that situates dress as a situated bodily practice. See also Butler, *Gender Trouble*, esp. pp. 175-193.

<sup>101</sup> See Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed*, p. 12.

<sup>102</sup> See for example Gloria Thomas Gilmore, ‘Marie de France's *Bisclavret*: What the Werewolf Will and Will not Wear’, in *Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress: Objects, Texts and Images*, ed. Désirée Koslin and Janet Snyder (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), pp. 67-84.

*non habebat*.<sup>103</sup> Marie *clearly* cannot have power over her own body, since she is a married woman whose husband has that power; but *secretly* (read 'subversively') she does have that power to mark, to discipline, to control it. For Christina too, clothing is a recurring but ambiguous motif in the *Life*: enemies try to grab it, she sheds it, disguises herself by it, is unable to wear enough of it and discerns it in visions. It is especially front-staged in stories that must have come primarily from Christina herself, and in places is present by its very absence, where the impression of Christina's body is instead made out of gardens and flowers.

### III.I Fabricating a Holy Identity

At first glance the argument for her sartorial body as performing Christina's *holy* identity seems tenuous. Fine clothing explicitly performs a conjugality that the female saint must reject,<sup>104</sup> and most references to Christina's sartorial body occur whilst she is still potentially a wife. After she actively renounces the claims held over her by the secular world, when she enters Alfwen's cell and changes her silken clothes for the habit, her social body mostly vanishes. Unlike her English contemporaries Wulfric of Haselbury or Godric of Finchale, ascetic eremitic clothing is not a constitutive part of Christina's subsequent holiness.<sup>105</sup> However a closer reading reveals a story of her spiritual maturation told through clothes, and where they do feature in the later parts of the *Life* they make bold claims for Christina by her deliberate appropriation and performance of the external models of ideal womanhood.<sup>106</sup>

Clothes are part of the dowry and dower of the bride; they inscribe Christina's dotality, her 'thingness' that means she can be given as symbolic capital within masculine discourse.<sup>107</sup> Ranulf Flambard tried to 'buy' her round with silks (*sericas vestes*), in a gift-giving ritual which employed Christina as a parameter to define a discussion with her father Autti. Autti undresses her of both her silks and of the family keys when

<sup>103</sup> Jacques of Vitry, *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis*, bk. 1, ch. 12, p. 550.

<sup>104</sup> See also Elliott 'Dress as Mediator', p. 299; Hanning, *Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*, pp. 42-44; and Stanton, 'Domestic Violence', p. 244.

<sup>105</sup> See D. Alexander, 'Hermits and Hairshirts: The Social Meaning of Saintly Clothing in the *Vitae* of Godric of Finchale and Wulfric of Haselbury', *Journal of Medieval History*, 28 (2002), 205-226.

<sup>106</sup> See Luce Irigaray, 'The Power of Discourse', in *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), "The issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which women would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself[...] repeating/interpreting the way in which, within discourse, the feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject, they should signify that with respect to this logic a *disruptive excess* is possible on the feminine side", p. 78.

<sup>107</sup> On the dotality of women's bodies in an Anglo-Norman context see Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives*, pp. 57-90. On marriage as gift-exchange see also Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1949).

Christina is first excused from the nuptial economy.<sup>108</sup> These are not simply hagiographic motifs but plausible performances of symbolic violence/violation.<sup>109</sup> Before she leaves home Christina's clothes are repeatedly grabbed at, and it must have seemed to her that she was being held back from the religious life that she sought. Of these attacks on her sartorial body only Bishop Flambard grasps a garment – her sleeve (*tunice manicam*) – that constructs a secular body. All the other efforts to access Christina are made by her secular family networks whose molestations are recalled as assaulting a religious body. In particular two garments with loaded meanings fabricate this body: a flowing white robe, "*vestimenta...candidissima*", and her mantle, "*pallium*". In Christina's first Marian vision she descends from the throne of the Queen of Heaven to see Burthred prostrated on the ground in a black cloak (*cappa*) clutching out at her. The white garment that Christina herself is wearing has a complex set of spiritual meanings, including the *candidati* which was associated by the time of St Perpetua's visions (d. 203) with the martyrs,<sup>110</sup> as well as the more evident virginity that is being expressly drawn to attention.<sup>111</sup> If Christina is bestowed only with the single crown of virginity, she is also laying claim to the more prestigious narrative of martyrdom.

This dream-vision is conditioned by attempts to access Christina's body, which she thinks of as already consecrated, through the machinations of her kin to arrange consummation of her marriage. She is required to lay aside her mantle at the Guild Merchant's feast and bind her clothes to her body in order to better display it for admiration and soften her up to agreeing to the marriage bed.<sup>112</sup> This is predictably unsuccessful, since the first time Burthred enters her chamber we specifically learn that Christina is dressed and awake, "*vigilans atque vestita*",<sup>113</sup> although amenable at this stage to negotiation with her earthly husband. Thinking the case for chaste marriage and

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<sup>108</sup> *Life*, ch. 7, p. 44, and ch. 23, p. 72.

<sup>109</sup> Robin Flemming has demonstrated that owning and dis-owning silks was an important late Anglo-Saxon elite discourse, see 'Acquiring, Flaunting and Destroying Silk in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Early Medieval Europe*, 15 (2007), 127-158. Symbolic keys have been found in elite Anglo-Saxon female graves that do not also hold the jewelled grave goods of the lady of the house, perhaps explaining why Christina, rather than her mother, had the keys to the family coffers, Christine Fell, 'A *frīwif locbore* revisited', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 13 (1984), 157-64 and Sonia Chadwick Hawkes 'The Dating and Social Significance of the Burials in the Polhill Cemetery', in *Excavations in West Kent 1960-1970*, ed. Brian Philip (Dover: Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit, 1973), pp. 186-201 esp. p. 195.

<sup>110</sup> e.g. Revelation 7.13-14. See also Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 209.

<sup>111</sup> An interesting comparison can be drawn with Margery Kempe, who struggled to be allowed to wear white clothes. For Margery laying claim to this particular performance of spiritual status, which contradicted the widely known 'fact' of her ample progeny, was more important than it was for Christina. Christina's physical virginity enables her to use the story of her sartorial body in more sophisticated ways. On Margery see Mary Erler, 'Margery Kempe's White Clothes', *Medium Ævum*, 62 (1993), 78-81 and Gunnell Cleve, 'Semantic Dimensions in Margery Kempe's "Whyght Clothys"', *Mystics Quarterly*, 12 (1986), 161-170.

<sup>112</sup> *Life*, ch. 9, p. 48.

<sup>113</sup> *Life*, ch. 10, p. 50.

then monastic retiral settled between them, when Burthred is persuaded to make a second nocturnal attempt on her chastity, Christina is forced to take refuge from him and her kin behind the fabric wall hangings.<sup>114</sup> The fabrics are the tools of an elaborate performance, through which Christina's religious aspirations are simultaneously displayed and disguised. Her secular clothes *protect* her from the requirements of noble womanhood, and so are transformed, subverted, into an exteriorisation of her interior religious identity. The dressed, dotal, body is the very one that her family need to remove; but since Christina is created by her sartorial performances so she can disappear into them, just as the wall hangings prevent her kinsman knowing that he has grasped her foot during their search.<sup>115</sup>

The mantle that Christina is forced to lay aside at the feast is twice more grasped: firstly by Burthred who is left holding it as she flees their quarrel over the validity of their marriage, just as in Goscelin's account St Wulfhild of Barking left her sleeve with King Edgar,<sup>116</sup> then again, when effecting her escape from Huntingdon, by the town reeve who oddly releases her.<sup>117</sup> *Pallium* can mean various kinds of cloth in British Latin texts, and by the late twelfth or early thirteenth century was a normal choice of word for a woman's mantle, mirroring the Middle English *pal*.<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless given Christina's preoccupation with resisting episcopal control, reflected in the *infulae* attached to her crown of virginity,<sup>119</sup> echoes of its better known meaning as a vestment conferring the power of a metropolitan must surely be identifiable. The pope could confer the right to wear pontifical ornaments, including the mitre, as a special privilege on non-metropolitain prelates, as it was on Abbot Robert of St Albans shortly after 1155, when he was also given a decorated *pallium* amongst other gifts.<sup>120</sup> In the case of Christina's mantle the word *cappa* could have been used instead of *pallium*, as it is when she is running away with a male disguise under her cloak. Instead a deliberate point is made

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<sup>114</sup> *Life*, ch. 11, p. 52.

<sup>115</sup> This reading does not compromise the similarity of this disguise motif to contemporary secular imaginative texts, for example Reynard the Fox evading capture by hiding amongst fox hides. If Neil Cartlidge is correct in identifying a "shared sensibility" of "imaginative possibilities" in contemporary writings, ('The Unknown Pilgrim', p. 90), it seems even more likely that we access here Christina's self-positioning and situated recollection integrated with the stories that she knows.

<sup>116</sup> *Life*, ch. 2, p. 72. Goscelin of St Bertin, 'La Vie de Sainte Vulfilde par Goscelin de Cantorbéry', ed. Mario Esposito, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 32 (1913), 10-26, ch. 3, p. 16.

<sup>117</sup> *Life*, ch. 22, p. 72; and ch. 32, p. 88.

<sup>118</sup> See attestations in D. R. Howlett, *Dictionary of Medieval Latin From British Sources: Fasc IX* (Oxford: OUP for the British Academy, 2005), p. 2088. I am grateful to Mark Chambers for help with this point.

<sup>119</sup> *Life*, ch. 52, p. 128.

<sup>120</sup> *GA*, I, pp. 132-133.

about the religious authority conferred by her saintly resolution, which allows her to lay claim to the encratic identity that the bishops should have ratified.

*Pallium* carries further connotations of disguise and concealment, similar to the modern English verb 'to cloak'. Christina, in hiding behind her rich clothes, exposes them as a false performance: she never intends to be the 'ideal noble woman', she is always really herself: a holy woman. Although this sacred identity is as much a masculine construction about Christina as her secular one, Christina herself is made visible through manipulating the conflation of the two. In the confused and manuscript damaged account of her escape wearing men's clothes, Christina nevertheless remains recognisably *herself* to her sister, to the servant-chaperone Loric, and to Alfwen when she arrives at the hermitage.<sup>121</sup> She keeps the male clothes hidden under a long cloak so that Matilda recognises her *from her clothes*; that is, she puts a disguise of her self as a woman over her disguise of her self as a man. The Writer seems particularly uncomfortable with this story: female transvestite saints formed a coherent body of *vitae* but Christina never de-feminises herself and only uses male disguise as a temporary escape mechanism.<sup>122</sup> The Writer superimposes the necessary concepts of spiritual virility and therefore legitimate empowerment, yet it is apparent that Christina is never actually disguised and so there is no possibility of dissolving that disguise and reasserting cultural order.<sup>123</sup> He even prevaricates over the story of the dropped sleeve/veil by which Christina engineers Matilda's return to their father's house. As with submitting to her marriage, Christina, from the Writer's perspective, disrupts the saintly discourse at the same time as insisting on it, and he is left unable to impose narratorial control.

In the textile/ual story Christina's clothing becomes a space within a space that she claims for herself. A central narrative in the *Life* is her whereabouts, and the multiple relocations of Christina's body - by men, (nominally) by women, by God, and by herself. Christina is primarily (re)located by men who use her as "an envelope, a container, the starting point from which man limits his things".<sup>124</sup> She is the prime treasure in her family's 'chest'; she is Roger's 'sunendaegē dohter' who enables him to understand the extent of his spiritual influence; she is the boundary to Geoffrey's political movements. At every point where Christina's sartorial body tells an alternate story about Christina forging inner ideas about herself, this provides another layer of wrappings, of enclosures, that Christina de-stabilises. The Markyate hermitage, for example, has Christina safely

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<sup>121</sup> *Life*, ch. 32-34, pp. 88-92.

<sup>122</sup> See Bynum, *Fragmentation*, p. 38.

<sup>123</sup> On the transvestite saint see Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*, esp. p. 128 on the necessity of exposure.

<sup>124</sup> Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian Gill (London: Athlone, 1993), p. 10.

enclosed whilst she is living with Roger, but she is also unable to wear enough clothes, her nakedness has her clothed in the very walls of the cell. For a headstrong woman like Christina this must have been a terrible trial of being without an identity, but it also gave her the opportunity to forge a new one in laying claim to the very fabric of Markyate, making her the obvious successor to Roger. Christ passing through the locked door of her cell, in the vision which convinces Roger to bestow the house on Christina whilst she is so enclosed, has much the same meaning as his subsequent appearance as a child to comfort her, passing through the barrier of her flesh to be felt inside Christina.<sup>125</sup> The anchoritic cell, as Jocelyn Wogan-Browne has shown, is modelled on the female body with windows that disrupt the absolute sealing off of the anchorite from the world and allow fluid movement between inside and outside.<sup>126</sup> Both Christ visions are tied up with Christina securing Markyate as a space for herself in which her sartorial body emerges not as a site of disguise and negotiation, but of power and authority.<sup>127</sup>

Since the redactions of Christina's *vita* were created amidst new interest in the hermit Roger at St Albans, the passages about him have the greatest claim to comprehensive re-copying. It is particularly interesting then that the only concrete example of his holiness came in a story directly from Christina and which fabricates sanctity out of his sartorial body. When at prayer Roger's cowl was set visibly on fire, "*visibili igne*", but Roger remained impervious to the diabolic attack, demonstrating the commensurability between his interior sanctity and its external performance.<sup>128</sup> Whether Christina was actively selective in the accounts that she provided of Roger to bolster the saintliness of her own body-story, or whether as a consequence of her own experience of demonic ignition this formed a dominant memory of her mentor, hardly matters. What is clear is that the account of Christina thinking that the clothes clinging to her body might be set on fire because she is so inwardly inflamed with lust forms a parallel story with Roger's.<sup>129</sup> Since sexual temptation of women was not in the established stock of hagiographic topoi, Christina's clothing is used to neutralise the potential threat of her transgressive sexuality.<sup>130</sup> Christina's lust, we are to surmise, is the same as Roger's

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<sup>125</sup> *Life*, ch. 41, p. 106 and ch. 44, p. 116.

<sup>126</sup> Wogan-Browne, 'Chaste Bodies'.

<sup>127</sup> I am not questioning Margaret Hostetler's view that Christina's youthful experience left her with "anxiety about unstable space" ('Designing Religious Women', p. 226), only that she fails to accord appropriate credit for the extent to which Christina does succeed in securing herself and so disrupting the male gaze upon her.

<sup>128</sup> *Life*, ch. 40, p. 104.

<sup>129</sup> *Life*, ch. 44, p. 116

<sup>130</sup> On female saints and sexual temptation see Staples and Karras, 'Christina's Tempting'. I draw slightly different conclusions on this passage to them.

demonic assault, her internal temptation the same as his external one.<sup>131</sup> For Christina, however, she is performing the same holiness as Roger and is legitimately his heir at Markyate as well as to his visionary and prophetic abilities. That there was nothing to be seen in Christina's trial by fire is one of the many instabilities of this text, caused by its chronological position before women of spirit like Marie of Oignies were more fully mastering how to use the body as a dynamic border for enacting redemption.<sup>132</sup>

### III.II Weaving a Speaking Self?

The 'nothing to be seen' of Christina's sartorial, social, body is how we mostly encounter it in the last section of the *Life*, where the Writer has no clear model to work with and Christina has had her spiritual status confirmed to her through the sartorial performance of her crowning. Her clothing features again in only two incidents, and her holy identity has shifted from protecting Christina from other people, to a tool by which she can protect, and thereby control, people around her.<sup>133</sup> Firstly she fabricates under-chemises (*interulas*) for Abbot Geoffrey's journey on behalf of King Stephen. Since the relic potential of these shirts is lost when she gives them away to the poor, never to be heard of again, it is unclear why the Writer would have included such a potentially compromising incident of his own accord.<sup>134</sup> Gossip about the intimacy between the holy woman and the abbot needed no further encouragement, and Christina's accompanying vision of Geoffrey held in a wall by her prayers would surely have sufficed as evidence of her intervention in his travel plans. The episode is amongst the most anomalous in a text full of mixed meanings and intentions: either the event must have been well known and needed to be explained away, or Christina understood it as an important part of her own story. Perhaps what we encounter here is partly the outcome of Christina's meditations on the famous story of St Martin sharing his cloak with the beggar-Christ.<sup>135</sup> The chemises are not clothes that she is given to wear, but clothes that she makes and has power to bestow. Her faith and God's faithfulness enable her to perform a display of charity, but this is a saintly attribute conspicuous by its

<sup>131</sup> On the twelfth century as a time of shift from external to internal temptation see Henrietta Leyser, 'Two Concepts of Temptation', in *Belief and Culture*, pp. 318-326.

<sup>132</sup> For example Marie of Oignies' white clothing provides the site for a similar display of holiness to Christina's, when they become soaked in her aromatic sweat despite cold conditions, because the heat of her spirit warmed her outer body. Marie provides living relics of her body, and so a more successful performance of sanctity than does Christina, Jacques of Vitry, *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis*, bk. 1, ch. 37, p. 555.

<sup>133</sup> I am leaving aside the passage in which Christina is transported to Abbot Geoffrey's sickbed as the manuscript is too corrupted to be certain of Talbot's suggestion that her "short sleeveless tunic" is mentioned. *Life*, ch. 59, p. 140.

<sup>134</sup> *Life*, ch. 71, pp. 160-162. This is the only example of Christina's charitable works, but the Writer is unsuccessful in placing this saintly spin onto the incident.

<sup>135</sup> Hildesheim Psalter, p. 53.

absence from the rest of her *Life*, and such a 'holy woman' reading is also fissured by Christina controlling access to the site of that identity.

The last appearance of Christina's body as a clothed border occurred only a couple of years before the Writer set about composing her *vita*; it was fresh in her memory and surely affected how she positioned her memories of earlier attempts to grab her clothes. Early one morning before Matins, Christina's community are driven to frantic scrabbling for a touch of her garments in order to escape a terrifying diabolic headless apparition, "*omnibus id erat remedii, si vel Christine vestes possent contingere*".<sup>136</sup> Despite Christina's evident *imitatio Mariae* in other aspects of her sartorial holiness – for example the importance of Mary's cloth-making as an Anglo-Saxon metaphor for the incarnation, which also has her clothed in white wool for purity,<sup>137</sup> the crowning of the virgin and wearing of the *pallium* – the similarity between this story and the Madonna of Misericord which became popular in fourteenth-century art is anachronistic.<sup>138</sup> Instead we find Christina's clothes enabling her to enact the kind of co-redemptive *imitatio Christi* commonly found in the vision-literature that she anteceded.<sup>139</sup> They are a border between the human and celestial worlds, and by using the signifiers that inscribe her totality, her given-ness, Christina acts as giver in the economy of salvation.

Christina was better able to control access to her body by her later years. In the process of mimetically claiming Markyate as a space for herself and establishing legitimacy for her visions, she also tapped into the autonomous power of the periphery to define and gaze upon the centre. She remained the envelope by which the new man in her life, Geoffrey, created the limits to himself, but an alternate reading of the *Life* which takes seriously Christina's visions as an insight into her self-understanding finds her turning around earlier revelations, sent for her comfort, and making their motifs into tools of control. The flowering branch offered by Christina during her persecutions to the Queen of Heaven who returns a twig of it to her care, becomes the Camilla flower that can only be accessed by Geoffrey with her permission and the correct degree of reverence. The blossom represents her actual body, not in an allegorical sense, but as a real

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<sup>136</sup> *Life*, ch. 78, p. 178.

<sup>137</sup> See Elizabeth Coatsworth, 'Cloth-making and the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Art', in *Medieval Art: Recent Perspectives, A Memorial Tribute to C. R. Dodwell*, ed. Gale Owen-Crocker and Timothy Graham (Manchester: MUP, 1998), pp. 8-25.

<sup>138</sup> The Madonna with her cloak spread over the faithful is, however, an image that develops out of other religious and secular images, see for example Barbara Wollesen-Wisch and Susan Solway, 'The Madonna of Mercy' and 'Reply', *The Art Bulletin*, 68 (1986), 674-676, and an example of her protecting the Cistercian order in this way is included by Caesarius of Heisterbach in his early-thirteenth century *Dialogus Miraculorum*, bk. VII, ch. 64.

<sup>139</sup> See Mark 5.25-34, Christ healing the woman with internal bleeding. The, now widely discussed, co-redemptive possibilities of the religious woman's body were first posited by Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

encounter,<sup>140</sup> and as with Christina's bilocations, the boundary between her spiritual body and her physical body is blurred. Subsequently Christina surrounds Geoffrey and guides him through dreams and prayer, but her vision of him in the verdant round garden-cloister sealed by transparent fences (the 'nothing to be seen') locates him in the feminine space that she has struggled to carve for and with her body, and she is now the voyeur who finds herself by looking at Geoffrey. By mimesis of the effects of the male specular gaze Geoffrey becomes the inverted reflection of Christina; he is part of the garden with invisible boundaries which is Christina. Such a radical reassertion of power over her own body does not completely liberate Christina from a masculine economy. The garden can only be accessed through its divine male keyholder, *claviger*, who had assured Christina in a rapture some years earlier that the key to her heart, and therefore her body, was controlled by him, "*cordis enim tui clavis in m[anu] mea est] seramque mentis tue cet[erique corporis] custodio nec patebit cuiquam ingre[ssus] nisi mee disposicionis arbitrio*".<sup>141</sup> Her spiritual body is a locked garden, but the threat that the female symbolic offers to the official male narrative is no less real for its limitations.

Whether or not they really managed to forge a female space by laying claim to their own 'fleshy' spirituality and escape patriarchal colonisation underlies the questions being asked by much of the scholarship on later medieval women of spirit. Luce Irigaray famously described their texts and visions as "the only place in the history of the West in which woman speaks and acts so publicly";<sup>142</sup> but not all historians are as convinced that resistance through similarity does "jam the theoretical machinery" of the masculine Church that silences women.<sup>143</sup> Although the revelations of later medieval women of spirit vary greatly in content and type of paranormal experiences, scholarship widely agrees that these women should be collectively understood as doing something new which gave them a rare and significant female public voice. It is not necessary to require this phenomenon to be the successful catalyst for sweeping social change to recognise in it strategies of feminine subjectivity and to look for the practices of mimesis which are stretching towards new technologies of meaning and identity. Christina's Writer knew that the saintly form makes demands on the dressed female body, for example the rejection of beautiful secular clothes for spiritual ones, and he remembers to observe

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<sup>140</sup> For this economy of what he terms "the 'reverse polarity' of symbols" in the *Life* see Cartlidge, 'The Unknown Pilgrim', pp. 87-89.

<sup>141</sup> *Life*, ch. 54, p. 132. Compare also ch. 81, p. 188 where Christ is able to escape the locked Markyate church despite the key being held by one of Christina's maidens.

<sup>142</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 191.

<sup>143</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'The Power of Discourse', p. 78. The most sustained critique is by Sarah Beckwith, 'A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe', in *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. 195-215.

that when Christina was stripped by her father she was nevertheless blessedly clothed in virtues, "*beacius indute virtutum ornamentis*".<sup>144</sup> Likewise, in moving from training her own spiritual purity to intervening for others, Christina was following the well-established pathway of the saint. But for Christina the clothing which from the earliest patristic church writings was used to define and mark the virgin as an external guarantor of her internal state, could also be a subversive site where she embodied – literally gave body to – her ideas about identity. These ideas hold in tension hagiographic models and an awareness of the novelty of her spirituality.

The discourses around the revelations of later medieval women of spirit developed their own vocabularies. Some of this vocabulary is about violently marking the body through voluntary and involuntary suffering in imitation of Christ's crucified flesh. Flesh is the entire human being in all the ways that it places self-will over God, it is neither body nor soul, but implicates both.<sup>145</sup> Flesh exists on the borders and is the pervious place that offers both the possibility of frail corruption and divine redemption. The association of woman with flesh that pervades medieval writings meant that she had to be contained by sealing her body, but some women of spirit appropriated it to their own stories of holiness. Karma Lochrie and Laurie Finke have demonstrated that through abjection, through taking responsibility for the Fall which violated the boundaries between body and soul, women of spirit found a public and dialogic route to the sublime which was not the same as the dominant discourses that dictated self-abnegation to them.<sup>146</sup> Christina's *Life*, however, is remarkably lacking in this kind of ascetic behaviour. Where we do encounter her marked body it is caused by Christina's mother, who is a foil character vicariously imposing the law of the father (and an important topos of the virgin-martyr story) over her daughter, beating and deriding her at a family banquet.<sup>147</sup> If Christina's ascetic time in Roger's cell was the kind of abjection found amongst later medieval women of spirit then the Writer has completely erased this in his textual rendering. This absence is not surprising since the flesh too has a history, and Sarah Beckwith's criticism that without the "pose of suffering" women's visions were accorded

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<sup>144</sup> *Life*, ch. 23, p. 72.

<sup>145</sup> See Karma Lochrie, 'The Language of Transgression: Body, Flesh and Word in Mystical Discourse', in *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies*, ed. Allen Frantzen (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 115-140.

<sup>146</sup> Lochrie, 'Language of Transgression', pp. 115-140 and Laurie Finke, 'Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision', in *Maps of Flesh and Light*, pp. 28-44. On female suffering as providing the vocabulary for infinite desire and so empowering them to speak the language of God see also Joanna Royle, 'The Efficacy of Tears in Medieval Women's Purgatorial Piety' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Glasgow, 2001). For the theoretical background to the risk posed by unregularised permeability see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966) and Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>147</sup> *Life*, ch. 23, p. 74.

no credibility is a more acute observation on the fourteenth century of Margery Kempe than it is of the start of the movement.<sup>148</sup> Ascetic behaviour *became* approved of, and required by, the men who were involved in supporting, promoting, providing for and recording the spirituality of women of spirit. Men re-colonised the space that women opened up for themselves. Once the discourses of women of spirit had established parameters, then their male collaborators knew what to look for and expect; and these discourses started to speak to women as well as about them.

Resistance can precede the language of resistance, and in Christina we find a woman of spirit who does not yet have access to this vocabulary of abjected flesh, but is nonetheless occupying and performing holiness on the borders of the body. The sartorial body has all the disruptive possibilities identified by Karma Lochrie as associated with woman-as-flesh in Augustinian and Bernardian theology. It is the site of her oppression and her liberation, it appears to provide boundaries that turn out to be permeable, it tells a parallel story to the official one related by the Writer, and so opens the *Life* up to the possibility of heterogeneous meanings and confounds any reading that insists only one voice can be heard at a time. In the places where it is possible to gain access to Christina's own ideas about herself in the *Life* the story is not a static one, but nor is it one of exciting crises and resolutions. Christina seems to have grown into the role of a saint, and as she recalled her life she wove it into a pattern of self-development in which she grows up spiritually without ever needing to reject her Anglo-Saxon heritage or social identity. If she never smashes the patriarchal discourses which shape her, nor does she allow them free rein over her voice and her identity.

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<sup>148</sup> Beckwith, 'Very Material Mysticism', p. 206.

## Saint Christina: Sanctity and Learning

### Conclusions

Christina makes an unlikely and unfamiliar kind of saint because she falls between old and new discourses about holiness. Her claim to spiritual distinction lay in her visions, but it is this very distinction that both made her controversial in her lifetime and placed her outside the interpretative frameworks available to her Writer and other stakeholders. This is not to say that the monastic networks radiating out from St Albans were unfamiliar with visions. Indeed key events in the recent history of the Abbey itself had been mediated by them with their own patron manifesting himself twice to confirm the veracity of his relics in the ongoing dispute with Ely.<sup>1</sup> However England boasted no recent female saints and news of appropriate contemporaries like Hildegard of Bingen or Elisabeth of Schönau had not reached insular shores. Visionary powers and preservation of virginity against attack were certainly saintly qualities, but in the 1140s they were not self-evidently sufficient to merit a *vita* and the trappings of cult. Christina's visionary persona is also qualitatively different from later women of spirit. She lacks the appropriate humility topos, is remarkably limited in good works, and where she fits any model of a 'standard' woman of spirit even in the fledgling form of the model, it is not prized in the *Life*.

Christina's *vita* was the outcome of a process of negotiation in which the most active stakeholders, Christina, the Writer and Abbot Geoffrey brought to the table different ideas about what her story was. These had to square with what people in the social and monastic networks radiating out from Markyate and St Albans knew or had heard about Christina, at the same time as bringing this information into line to produce an official view on her holiness. The analogy with weaving fabric, in Latin *texere*, is a good one for a text that is firstly predicated on saintly models, but which brings in motifs, structures and ideas from many different textual genres and social expectations.

Although far from a self-penned text, Christina's involvement in shaping her *vita* considerably exceeds that of other contemporary English 'living saints' like Anselm. She was as grounded in her own times, circumstances and expectations as her other stakeholders, so it is to be expected that she would position her devotions and supernatural experiences alongside the stories of the saints that populated her spiritual imagination. What does not happen is the complete collapse of her story into theirs.

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<sup>1</sup> First to the monk Gilbertus de Sisseverne before the conquest, and again to Anketil the goldsmith during the abbacy of Geoffrey de Gorham, *GA*, I, pp. 37 and 87.

Christina did not simply allow her unusual skills to be colonised, tidied up and made into a channel for the men around her. Perhaps because her *vita* was abandoned incomplete and unrevised, by an inexperienced Writer who was trying to juggle a number of differing agendas, and so was unable to fully subsume the various voices into his own narration, it is possible to “listen hopefully”<sup>2</sup> for Christina’s ideas about herself. If saints are saints because people believe them to be so, then Christina, with her real if limited efforts to secure an autonomous identity through the tools of her social world, acted in a dynamic tension with the very forces that could have secured her cultic status.

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<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 104.

PART 3:

*Ancilla Christi: Visions and Community*

Christina's visions provide a key to the modern scholar for unlocking something of the nature of, and reasoning behind, her *vita*, the dynamics of her relationship with Abbot Geoffrey and the Writer, and an insight into her own ideas about herself and about the divine. They are the credentials that specifically rendered her wonderful and to be revered, "*erat enim mirum de illa sed venerandum*".<sup>1</sup> There is currently no published attempt at a sustained study of these visions, so this section offers one possible reading of Christina's spirituality, situating her in different strands of medieval visionary discourse in order to seek a context for a woman of spirit who was seemingly incongruous in time and place. This section starts by considering the most elevated ideas about the individual encounter with(in) God, and moves through to the least highly regarded - the visions and locutions of saints and angels that populate a whole variety of medieval writings from chronicles to biographies, treatises, dialogues and miracle collections – in order to contribute to nuancing the complexity of twelfth-century visionary culture.

The gamut of supernatural encounters and accompanying paranormal abilities is rarely critically regarded as a whole except when it is being pathologised. Lay and peasant visions tend to be considered separately from monastic spirituality, 'mysticism' proper is frequently confined to unitive experiences, and inclusion in the many recent composite volumes of papers such as *Mysticism and Spirituality in Medieval England* depends on established canons of texts.<sup>2</sup> A consideration of Christina's visions calls these distinctions into question. Taking Christina seriously as a visionary means first taking a position on the debate over terminology and the criteria used to classify supernatural encounters. A weak constructivist position accommodates the possibility of direct and unmediated experiences of the divine, a mode only commonly found in the West after the twelfth century, without privileging them over the many other culture-specific mediated experiences which rely in part on the expectations, imagery and ideas that are brought to them. Whilst 'mysticism' and 'experience' are still potentially useful terms, they are therefore avoided in favour of 'vision' and 'encounter' which draw attention to the continuum of all engagements with the supernatural and which recognise agency in the person(s) involved in the encounter.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, ch. 75, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> William Pollard and Robert Boenig, eds., *Mysticism and Spirituality in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> As scholarship further refines modern understanding of 'consciousness', this may ultimately prove to be a more useful term than either 'experience' or 'encounter'.

Once Christina's visions are isolated from the rest of the narrative it becomes clear that they tell a story of spiritual maturation which is connected, but not identical, to her changing lifestyles and her growing sense of her own possible sanctity. This maturation was not the kind of linear progression that leaves behind 'immature' forms of vision by becoming increasingly intimate with the Godhead, as many medieval and modern theorists of mysticism have championed. Rather it consisted of a widening repertoire of modes through which Christina grew in confidence and conviction as she meditated upon recurring themes. Mentoring from the hermit Roger, her meditations on texts including the Hildesheim Psalter, and life within an increasingly visionary community all contributed to this development. Dreams are the only mode of vision deemed 'immature' in the *Life*, and it is mostly nocturnally that other people encountered the numinous, in a web of visionary activity that spread out from Markyate. The valuable work on boundaries developed by Ernest Hartmann recognises natural aptitude for an openness to numinous encounter.<sup>4</sup> When used alongside Max Weber on the charismatic band or community,<sup>5</sup> it points towards a varying response to visualisation tools which Jeffrey Hamburger and others have identified as catalysts for visions.<sup>6</sup>

Inevitably it must be assumed that the Writer has excluded Christina's visions where they did not easily contribute to the saintly narrative. Several general references (to demonic temptations, whilst at Mass, and describing how she knew her prayers to be answered),<sup>7</sup> confirm that they were of greater frequency than is found in the *Life*. Nevertheless Christina's hand is also seen in the collated anthology: there was, for example, little need to include an enraptured audition about Christ holding the keys to her heart so shortly after her crowning by angels, except because it was significant to her.<sup>8</sup> The Writer and Abbot Geoffrey were interested in the logistics of Christina's abilities – how God communicated with her and what kinds of experiences she had – but Christina herself seem to have been more concerned with the celestial relationships that she built up. By reviewing the role of Mary, Christ and the Trinity in her spirituality, Christina can be partially situated with later women of spirit, and the vision of a dove flying towards Geoffrey, which has recently held prime position in Christina scholarship, can also be put into its proper context as far less central to her visionary career than other, more authentically Trinitarian, encounters.

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<sup>4</sup> Ernest Hartmann, *Boundaries in the Mind: A New Psychology of Personality* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> See S. N. Eisenstadt, 'Introduction, *On Charisma*, p. xx.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> *Life*, ch. 53, p. 130; ch. 68, p. 154; and ch. 75, p. 170.

<sup>8</sup> *Life*, ch. 52, p. 128 and ch. 54, p. 132.

Like saints, visionaries require recognition if they are to become socially visible and influential. Christina's limited recognition directs this section, which looks at the charismatic or 'imagistic' mode, as identified by religious anthropologists, just as it directed the first section which positioned Christina within structured 'doctrinal' frameworks of social networks and as prioress at Markyate. By reviewing a number of possible twelfth-century contexts for her spirituality - including the visions of continental women of spirit, insular monastic communities of men and women, and male hermit saints connected to the northern Cistercian movement and Rievaulx - Christina can be shown as neither entirely conventional nor entirely anomalous in an English setting.<sup>9</sup> She was at a crossroad that left her and her Writer without clear parameters of interpretation; yet by using the same ideas about the *domus* employed in the first section to consider Christina's spheres of influence in order to explore the symbolism and effectiveness of visions, it is possible to illustrate that in practice boundaries blurred between the religiosity of different visionary cohorts.

Christina's *Life* can be used to enhance understanding of the common ground between elite and popular visionary culture, for example in the inspiration of Church art. She also offers an insight into the kind of visions that informed the everyday choices of some of their participants which have been largely neglected as a group phenomenon, though they are mentioned by scholars in other contexts. Overall this section takes a fresh look at the visionary spectrum and contends that Christina should be taken seriously as a woman of spirit, whilst recognising that special conditions of an English context affects how this is manifest.

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<sup>9</sup> Herbert Grundmann's pioneering work on how religious movements interact and evolve necessarily forms the background to all of the more recent studies on these relationships, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

## Chapter 5.

### Ineffably Sweet Communings?

Towards the end of the *Life* Christina's Writer turns a whole chapter over to explaining the nature of her numinous encounters and how they relate to her more conventionally saintly paranormal qualities, including powerfully effective prayer and divine vengeance on her enemies.<sup>1</sup> Christina, we learn, was often rapt in ecstasy, "*rapiebatur in exstasim*", unaware of her corporeal surroundings. During these separations of body and spirit she was being shown things by the Holy Spirit "*videbatque que sibi videnda sanctus monstrabat spiritus*". Her ecstasies are deliberately linked with the intercessory powers that were of paramount interest to a St Albans audience, but the Writer and his patron Geoffrey were also fascinated and awestruck by Christina's extraordinary access to God in its own right.<sup>2</sup>

They, like Christina, had almost no contemporary comparable materials to elucidate her revelations, but they did know the monastic classics, including Gregory the Great, Augustine and perhaps Macrobius, which had influenced all subsequent thought on the subject.<sup>3</sup> This paradox of having some knowledge of these taxonomies but little understanding of how they might work out in practice, results in the Writer offering a confused three-fold description of how God vouchsafed his answers to Christina. Two of these guarantors - having her face caressed by a dis-embodied Evianus and feeling fluttering bird wings in her breast - do not correlate with any well known medieval formulations. They are neither the first stages of the Pseudo-Dionysian Way of purgation-illumination-union, nor the lower levels of Augustinian sight. However, the third sign - a single or group of three brilliantly shining lights, "*aliquando unum tria*

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, ch. 75, pp. 170-172.

<sup>2</sup> For the opposite emphasis, that the *Life* is interested in Christina almost exclusively for the advantages she brings to St Albans see Koopmans, 'Dining'.

<sup>3</sup> We can be sure from the reference to Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* in Christina's *Life*, ch. 67, pp. 152-154 that the abbey held a copy. They also owned his *Homilies on Ezekiel* (Thomson, *Manuscripts*, cat. no. 61, XII-med) and at least extracts from his *Moralia on Job* (Thomson, *Manuscripts*, cat. no. 48, pre-1107), both of which were important in formulating medieval visionary theory. The extant Augustinian texts include his *Libro de doctrina Christianorum* (Thomson, *Manuscripts*, cat. no. 21) and other non-pertinent fragments (Thomson, *Manuscripts*, cat. nos. 16, 58 and 64), but it is implausible that a library of St Alban's size would not have originally contained the *Confessions*. Whether they owned his *De Genesis ad Litteram*, in which Augustine sets out his hierarchy of vision, is less clear, but a copy was held by the closely connected library of Canterbury Christ Church (Gameson, *Manuscripts of Early Norman England*, cat. no. 151). They may have had a copy of Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, which Thomson dates to the middle or third quarter of the century (Thomson, *Manuscripts*, cat. no. 4). Additionally the library had long held Ambrose of Milan's liturgical homilies *On the Mysteries* and *On the sacraments* (Thomson, *Manuscripts*, cat. no. 22, XI-ex), which were of some importance in the development of mystical theology, see Bernard McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p. 204.

*sepius videbat lumina equo splendour luceque radiancia*, enjoyed when she is in ecstasy, *cum vero mens eius liberius evolare!*<sup>4</sup> - fits with the light symbolism that is found in the works of both theologians. Christina's spiritual repertoire was evidently not in the same league as well-researched contemporary figures such as Bernard of Clairvaux or Hildegard of Bingen, but it drew on the same traditions and provides a bridge between them and the lower-key sporadic visions that were a constant in medieval literature.

Visions play an unusually structural role in Christina's *Life*, shaping the key characters' understanding of events and functioning as a metonymic sub-narrative for the reader. We repeatedly meet Christina and follow her journey through symbolic substitutions for her circumstances. Unlike her near contemporary Elisabeth of Schönau, Christina was no "Prophet of the Lord" and her visions did not have repercussions on contemporary questions of theology and liturgy.<sup>4</sup> Instead they were about her immediate world and circumstances, the people that she loved and those that persecuted her. Nevertheless the core motifs, outside of demonic temptations (which draw inspiration from the desert fathers), are of Christ, Mary, their angelic ambassadors and entourage, and, debatably, the Trinity. These motifs situate her spirituality alongside more elevated names. As a visionary, Christina stands in the place where lines are usually drawn: between hagiographical and mystical texts, between male and female religiosity, between visions and affective visualisations, between monastic and lay devotions. Fitting her into a wider context of supernatural encounters therefore not only helps us to better understand a remarkable woman, but also the complex and changing discourses of contemporary spirituality and the extent to which these are substantially affected by the special conditions of an English context.

## I. The Debate Over Mysticism

When seeking the patterns of medieval spirituality, strategies are needed to distinguish between, and to categorise, different paranormal happenings. The healing dreams of shrine-visiting peasants are to be differentiated from the monk whisked round on an angelic tour of heaven and hell; Hildegard of Bingen watching theology unfold cinematographically before her eyes is not the same as Catherine of Siena enjoying mystical marriage to Jesus in the company of his mother and saints; and both contrast

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<sup>4</sup> See M.Colman O'Dell, 'Elisabeth of Schönau and Hildegard of Bingen: Prophets of the Lord', *Peaceweavers*, pp. 85-102.

with the four-fold ascent of the soul found in the writings of Teresa of Avila.<sup>5</sup> Such distinctions have been subject to heated, multi-faceted and interdisciplinary debate, at the centre of which lies the question of what can be considered ‘mysticism’ and who can be considered a ‘mystic’. The search for a suitable taxonomy presents extraordinarily complex problems of vocabulary. Any attempt to accommodate both the reports of the persons involved and the weight of scholarship on the subject is caught up in preconditioned uses of the terms it seeks to interrogate. ‘Paranormal’, ‘supernatural’, ‘experience’, ‘presence’, ‘vision’, ‘prophecy’, ‘ineffable’, ‘noetic’, ‘devotion’, ‘numinous’, ‘spirituality’ and even ‘religious’ are all words that must be employed with care.

The *Life* makes it clear that Abbot Geoffrey and the Writer were both acutely interested in defining and quantifying Christina’s revelations in order to position her on the highest spiritual planes.<sup>6</sup> Her visions, we are told, were neither fantastical nor seen through a dream, but were perceived by the intuition (or contemplation) that is the deserved enjoyment of the spiritual eyes, “*neque enim phantastice erant visiones iste sive per sompnum. Sed vero intuitu cernebantur ab ea. Illo scilicet quo spirituales frui merentur oculi*”.<sup>7</sup> The Writer recognises both the possibility of deception and a hierarchy of experiences, dependent on how they are encountered. Whether Talbot’s free translation that Christina saw “with the true intuition enjoyed by the mystics” captures awareness of an elite group of individuals who attract the special attentions of the Holy Spirit, is more questionable. Christina’s visions are never directly compared to those of good saintly precedents like Martin of Tours,<sup>8</sup> and she is evidently too early to have been likened to the Flemish Beguines or Italian Tertiaries. Even if such an implication is present in the description, the Writer does not actively follow it through, reinforcing the case that I am building for Christina’s spirituality as following a route only partially familiar to her core stakeholders.

The problem of whether or not Christina can be considered a ‘mystic’ is important as a test-case for approaching other people of spirit who do not have the kind of unitive experiences in which the self and the transcendent are merged, that form the more specialist use of the word found in much theological and some philosophical thought.

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<sup>5</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Adelgunis Führkötter, *CCCM*, 93-93a (1978), see also the translation by Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, *Scivias* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990). Raymond of Capua, *De S. Catharina Senensi*, ch. 12, pp. 888-891. Teresa of Avila, *The Complete Works of St Teresa of Jesus*, trans. E. Allison Peers, 3 vols (London: Sheed and Ward, 1944-1946).

<sup>6</sup> See for example *Life*, ch. 38, p. 102 on Christina and Roger attaining lofty places in heaven.

<sup>7</sup> *Life*, ch. 75, p. 170. I am grateful to Daniel Gerrard for help translating this enigmatic passage.

<sup>8</sup> However, see below p. 197 for the Writer’s familiarity with this *vita*.

In contrast, amongst the expanding field of scholars working on the medieval 'Frauenbewegung' the term is rarely closely inspected and justified as an analytical category.<sup>9</sup> This perhaps partly reflects a confidence founded on the recent genesis of the word mysticism,<sup>10</sup> partly a bold attempt to claim for medieval women of spirit an alternative non-establishment voice. For a strong historical and feminist approach to understanding visions it is necessary to recognise the potential problems that this latter reasoning can present. An approach like Luce Irigaray's, which colonises the 'ineffable' (literally unspeakable) for women's voices as a *jouissance* generated by the abolition of power differentials, fails to recognise that a unitive mysticism like that of the Helfta nun Mechthild of Magdeburg (c.1208-c.1282/94) involved a negotiation of power at the same time as she became (one with) God.<sup>11</sup> It also undermines the majority of women's paranormal experiences which are not unitive, ironically sustaining the ascendancy of masculine norms, and makes assumptions about the radicality of the 'mystical' voice which it is not clear that such a voice always merits.<sup>12</sup>

Some Catholic theologians, for example the influential Karl Rahner,<sup>13</sup> have insisted that theoretically mysticism cannot be separated out from the life of faith, but just such a distinction is usually made. Where the alternative approach is taken, and all manifestations of the paranormal are deemed mysticism, embodied experience can be privileged in such a way as to reify the discourses that situate it,<sup>14</sup> and thus to relegate it, with all spirituality, to the private and personal rather than the public and discursive realm.<sup>15</sup> This potentially leads to psychological readings that deny the person of spirit

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<sup>9</sup> One of the gravest offenders is Monica Furlong's now rather dated *Visions and Longings: Medieval Women Mystics* (London: Mowbray, 1996), which includes Heloise amongst their number. For one critique of this kind of de-historicisation see Kathleen Biddick, 'Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), 389-418. The recent work of Nicolas Watson is addressing the lacuna, for example, 'The Middle English Mystics', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: CUP, 1999) pp. 539-565.

<sup>10</sup> The 'mystical' (hidden) qualities of God and scripture are found in theological writings from the earliest centuries of the church, but the term 'mysticism' originated in seventeenth-century France, see McGinn, *Foundations*, p. xvi and n. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, trans. Frank Tobin (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> See also Beckwith, 'Very Material Mysticism', p. 200, and Steven Katz, 'The "Conservative" Character of Mystical Experience', in *Mysticism and Religious Tradition*, ed. Steven Katz (Oxford: OUP, 1983), pp. 3-60.

<sup>13</sup> For a thorough discussion of Rahner's position, which is spread over a substantial body of work, see Philip Enden, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), pp. 32-68.

<sup>14</sup> See Joan Wallach Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Enquiry*, 17 (1991), 773-797.

<sup>15</sup> Grace Jantzen primarily developed this feminist critique of perennialist models of mysticism, but her point holds for all discussions which fetishise experience, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, pp. 4-12. Richard King further considers how white western male imperialism defines normative states of consciousness against which mysticism is 'altered' and 'non-rational', *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (Oxford: Routledge, 1999), pp. 7-34. Whether spirituality remains excluded from the western public sphere in a post-9/11 political climate is more debatable.

any access to the meanings of their 'altered state of consciousness', which is considered to be simply an intensely felt subjective state,<sup>16</sup> and often as evidence of childhood trauma or mental imbalance,<sup>17</sup> instead of a potentially radical encounter with the divine. Certainly, spiritual merit has no bearing on a person's ability to have supernatural encounters - indeed it is the very lack of it which causes the men in Christina's life to be chastised through them - yet for 'mysticism' to be meaningful it must operate within a tradition and practice of devout spirituality. Just as restricting mysticism to the narrow sense of one kind of unitive experience is problematic to the feminist, so is the reduction of all mysticism to being abnormal para-sensual experience, in which normality is defined by current (post-enlightenment, white, western, male) standards. Whether Christina is a mystic is also, therefore, a test-case for how to historically situate mysticism in the twelfth century more generally which has gained better recognition as a monastic than as a mystical period.

### I.1 Categorising Experience: Medieval Thought

Medieval people of spirit and writers about contemplation sought to categorise the calibre of supernatural encounters hierarchically, but there was no consistent position on where the parameters of 'higher' and 'lower' graces fell. Without the wider debate of cross-cultural comparison found in modern discussions, their schema were able to invest more in the nuances of experience and veridicality (the truthfulness of mystical knowledge-claims) within their own tradition. Nevertheless such schema were varied and the late-antique Christian taxonomies of Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Pseudo-Dionysius, and the pagan dream theories of Macrobius and Calcidius were all excerpted into texts such as Peter of Cornwall's *Liber Revelationum* and Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Anima*,<sup>18</sup> as well as being adapted into many new models from the twelfth-century onwards.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For example the non-faith work by Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956). See also the extreme constructivist, but faith, perspective of Robert Gimello who argues that "mystical experience is simply the psychosomatic enhancement of religious beliefs and values [...which] should be disturbing only to those who set little store by religious beliefs and values", 'Mysticism in Its Contexts', in *Mysticism and Religious Tradition*, pp. 61-88, citation p. 85.

<sup>17</sup> For example Ralph Frenken, 'Childhood and Fantasies of Medieval Mystics', *Journal of Psychohistory*, 28 (2000), 150-172, and Jerrold Atlas, 'Medieval Mystics' Lives As Self-Medication for Childhood Abuse: Achieving Divine Experience as a "Reward" for Damaged Personalities', *Journal of Psychohistory*, 31 (2003), 145-169.

<sup>18</sup> Peter of Cornwall, *Liber Revelationum*, Lambeth Palace, MS 51, fol. 5v-9v. For an overview of the content of Peter's manuscript, see Montague Rhodes James and Claude Jenkins, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Lambeth Palace* (Cambridge: CUP, 1930), pp. 71-85. Aelred of Rievaulx, *Dialogue on the Soul*, trans. C. H. Talbot (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), pp.111-149.

<sup>19</sup> See Steven Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), pp. 58-64.

The most influential taxonomy, at least by the twelfth century, was Augustine's trichotomy of vision, expounded in book twelve of his *Literal Interpretation of Genesis*. He ranked hierarchically corporeal, spiritual and intellectual vision, describing the relationship between the three using a biblical example: "For when we read, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself', the letters are seen corporeally, the neighbour is thought of spiritually, and love is beheld intellectually. But the letters when absent can also be thought of spiritually, and the neighbour when present can be seen corporeally. But love can neither be seen in its own essence with the eyes of the body nor be thought of in the spirit by means of an image like a body; but only in the mind, that is, the intellect, can it be known and perceived".<sup>20</sup> Augustine was a cautious thinker and his expansion of this model is not simple, distinguishing both by objects seen and the power of the soul that sees. Nevertheless contemporaries found that in practice his modes were of limited use as a critical tool for assessing individual visions which often blurred them. Caesarius of Heisterbach, for example, admitted to novices that he was uncertain which category many of the visions he had collected belonged to, despite having modified Augustine's model to accommodate physical apparitions of saints and angels alongside corporeal vision, and making intellectual (image-free) a subset of spiritual (images without bodies) vision.<sup>21</sup>

The feature which most clearly distinguishes the Christian theological models that build on a medieval inheritance from the wider philosophical debate, is a prioritising of linear, three-fold, ascent models of spiritual development. The Unitive Way of purgation (body), illumination (soul/mind) and union (spirit) was rooted in Origenist thought and developed in the late fifth-century East by Pseudo-Dionysius. It was made accessible to the West by Eriugena's ninth-century translation, becoming widely influential in the twelfth century principally through Victorine works.<sup>22</sup> Richard of St

<sup>20</sup> "Cum enim legitur, 'Diliges proximum tuum tanquam teipsum', corporaliter litterae videntur, spiritualiter proximus cogitatur, intellectualiter dilectio conspicitur. Sed et litterae absentes possunt spiritualiter cogitari, et proximus praesens potest corporaliter videri; dilectio autem nec per substantiam suam potest oculis corporis cerni, nec per imaginem corporis similem spiritu cogitari, sed sola mente, id est intellectu, cognosci et percipi". Augustine, *De Genesis ad Litteram*, PL 34:245-486, bk. XII, ch. 11, col. 462. All translations are from John Hammond Taylor, *Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, 2 vols (New York: Newman, 1982).

<sup>21</sup> Caesarius, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, bk. VIII, ch. 2.

<sup>22</sup> On the circulation of Pseudo-Dionysius see Robert Boenig, 'Pseudo-Dionysius and the Via towards England', in *Mysticism and Spirituality*, pp. 21-38; David Luscombe, 'The Reception of the Works of Denis the Pseudo-Areopagite into England', in *Tradition and Change: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Chibnall Presented by her Friends on the Occasion of her Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Diana Greenway (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), pp. 115-143; and Dale Coulter 'Pseudo-Dionysius in the Twelfth-Century Latin West', in *ORB Online Encyclopedia* <<http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/culture/philos/coulter.html>> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008], which includes a useful bibliography on the subject.

Victor in particular built on Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius to develop a practical how-to handbook, *De duodecim patriarchis*, of spiritual exercises to ascend to God from the *via positiva* to the *via negativa*.<sup>23</sup> The lower the level of *kind* of experience on these hierarchies the easier it was to be deceived. Hence, for example, within Macrobius's three kinds of true dreams the lowest, *somnium*, must be correctly interpreted to avoid being as deceptive as his two kinds of false dreams<sup>24</sup> Indeed, despite a well developed dream theory and good biblical and patristic precedents, it was only in the twelfth century that the potential trustworthiness of the dream was substantially re-asserted. With the expansion of the possibility of neutral dreams and works such as Hildegard of Bingen's *Causa et Curae* giving authority to the significant dream,<sup>25</sup> more readily available means of celestial communications for ordinary people were increasingly acceptable to clerical elites. Veridicality was difficult to test, but waking evidence, like the famous burn-marks on the shoulder of Abbot Fursa, or Christina's damp pillows from the tears she shed in the presence of the Queen of Heaven, provided one route.<sup>26</sup> However, because of the risk of physio-psychologically induced experience, particularly amongst women, some churchmen were reluctant to accord authority to experiences that fell below fully-unitive unmediated criteria.<sup>27</sup>

Employing only phenomenological and linear models of spiritual maturation devalues feminine modes of spirituality which tend to be repeating, overlapping and cyclic,<sup>28</sup> but some individual medieval texts were instead splitting up experiences on the basis of their *content*, providing models for the kataphatic *via positiva* as a valid kind of encounter. Caesarius of Heisterbach's widely circulated collection of *exempla*, used a

<sup>23</sup> Richard of St Victor, *Les douze patriarches (Benjamin minor)*, trans. Jean Châtillon and Monique Duchet-Suchaux, *Sources Chrétiennes*, 419 (Paris: Cerf, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Macrobius's system of *insomnium*, *visum*, *somnium*, *visio*, *oraculum*, gradates dreams from lowest and false to highest and true. The highest is marked by direct instruction from an authority figure, in contrast to the Christian vision models which in their highest form are unmediated. On *Commentary on the dream of Scipio* see Kruger, *Dreaming*, pp. 20-24.

<sup>25</sup> See Jacques Le Goff, 'Dreams in the Culture and Collective Psychology of the Medieval West', in *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: UCP, 1980), pp. 201-204, esp. p. 204.

<sup>26</sup> Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), bk. III, ch. 19, pp. 268-274. *Life*, ch. 25, p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> St Bernard is an interesting culprit in this regard, since he is so closely associated with affective mysticism himself, see Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, pp. 123-133 and 184-192. Male attitudes towards rapture in particular changed over the later medieval period, see Dyan Elliott, 'The Physiology of Rapture and Female Spirituality', in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis (York: York Medieval Press, 1997), pp. 141-173.

<sup>28</sup> See for example Sandra McEntire, 'Journey into Selfhood: Margery Kempe and Feminine Spirituality', in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra McEntire (New York: Garland, 1992), 51-69; Carol Christ, *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Boston: Beacon, 1995); and Lily Mo, 'Public Bodies and Private Spaces: Locating Cloistered Contemplative Discourses in Female Franciscan Spirituality in Thirteenth Century Umbria' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2001), esp. pp. 213-218.

ladder alongside his Augustinian and Pseudo-Dionysian criteria, “by which the celestial army may come within sight of human vision”, “*per quam humanae visione condescendat coelestis exercitus*”.<sup>29</sup> Christ, angels, patriarchs and prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins and widows and the undefiled, could all be aspired to from a bottom rung of “the vision of all miraculous appearances”, “*visionem quarumlibet rerum miraculose apparentium*”.<sup>30</sup> Similarly the *Sawles Warde*, a meditation on virtue written for the thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse* anchoritic group has Love of Life, Joy’s messenger, as *dramatis persona* arriving from the contemplation of the heavens. Love of Life says the most sublime visions he has seen are of the Trinity, but it can hardly be gazed upon directly because of its shining brightness, “*Swa Ich habbe ofte isehen þe hali þrumnesse, Feader ant Sune ant Hali Gast, þreo an untodealet, ah lutle hwile Ich mahte þolie þe leome*”. Christ’s humanity can be briefly directly borne, and Mary endured a little longer. Love of Life then proceeds further downwards to the angels and archangels, patriarchs and prophets, martyrs, confessors and virgins whom he can contemplate at great length.<sup>31</sup> This pattern with the Trinity at the top, passing down through the humanity of Christ, Mary and so on is found repeatedly in the texts of later medieval women of spirit, of whom Marie of Oignies is only a notable representative.<sup>32</sup> Finally the rather different approach to classification taken at the end of the twelfth century by Peter of Cornwall reflects the shift identified by Dinzelbacher during the twelfth-century in the overall content of visions.<sup>33</sup> Peter, despite being familiar with the classifications of Augustine, found it serviceable to split his great visionary compendium into two books to indicate whether the content dealt with the future life and other world or whether it dealt with other things, whatever the kind of experience involved, “*quorum primus solas illas revelations continent que ad gloriam celestis vite sive ad penas eternas vel transitorias pertinent. Secundus autem omnes alias revelations habet*.”<sup>34</sup>

## I.II Categorising Experience: Modern Thought

The question of what kind or kinds of experiences should be considered mystical has also dominated the modern philosophical debate. The problem supersedes a uniquely

<sup>29</sup> Caesarius, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, bk. VIII, ch. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Caesarius, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, bk. VIII, ch. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Bella Millett & Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, eds. and trans., *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections From the Katherine Group and ‘Ancrene Wisse’* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 86-109, citation, p.100.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques of Vitry, *Vita Mariae Oigianensis*, bk. II, ch. 99, p. 569.

<sup>33</sup> See above, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Peter of Cornwall, *Liber Revelationum*, Lambeth Palace, MS 51, fol. 2r.

Christian setting and is now formulated around whether the 'mystic' and their tradition should be understood together, as interacting in culture-specific and mediated experiences; or whether 'mysticism' transcends cultural difference and is by definition a common core experience which can be identified by prescriptive criteria. The 1980s saw this discussion at its height, when a constructivist or pluralist model, inspired by Wittgenstein and associated with a body of scholarship around Stephen Katz,<sup>35</sup> challenged the long established perennialist or essentialist position inspired by the formative work of William James.<sup>36</sup>

James considered the four essential defining characteristics of mysticism to be ineffability (literally, unutterability); possessing noetic quality (from the Greek word for the intellect, *nous*); transience and passivity (at the highest level of experience, the mystic is overwhelmed by a greater will than his own, which subsides temporarily into abeyance). Perennialist thinkers, notably Walter Stace, have subsequently added paradoxicality to this list.<sup>37</sup> Of these qualities, ineffability is particularly controversial since to say that the experience is ineffable is actually to say something about it, causing some scholars to suggest ineffability is more an honorific marking the intensity of the experience which becomes to a degree effable after the event.<sup>38</sup> The extreme perennialism of Aldous Huxley, who contended that hallucinogenically induced contemplation should be understood alongside the many conventional religious techniques,<sup>39</sup> is less common than comparativist models which split mystical experience into a small number of strands.<sup>40</sup> However these are contoured, all the

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<sup>35</sup> The most important of these works are found in three volumes of papers edited by Katz: *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: OUP, 1978), and *Mysticism and Language* (New York: OUP, 1992).

<sup>36</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902, reprinted New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1961). The work of Evelyn Underhill, although addressing mysticism in different ways to James, has also been a foundational, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1911, reprinted Cleveland and New York: World: 1965).

<sup>37</sup> Walter Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1961).

<sup>38</sup> For example this is the view of Walter Stace. See also the work of Ninian Smart who suggests a four-fold system of interpretation, 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience', *Religious Studies*, 1 (1965), 75-87; and Caroline Davis who argues that ineffability is a combination of "poetic hyperbole"; the impossibility of fully describing an experience not shared by the other person; the overwhelming nature of some experiences such that they cannot be coherently recalled; and, on occasion, Stace's dissolution of the subject-object distinction, *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 14-18.

<sup>39</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (New York: Harper, 1954).

<sup>40</sup> Notable are the extrovertive (finding Oneness in the multiplicity of all things) and introvertive (finding the One by looking inwards) mysticisms of Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*; which is responded to by the works of R. C. Zaehner (monistic, theistic and nature mysticism), *Mysticism Sacred and Profane: an Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praeternatural Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), and William Wainwright (four extrovertive and two introvertive mysticisms), *Mysticism: A Study of its Nature, Cognitive Value and Moral Implications* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981). For an important recent contribution to the contouring of cross-

classifiers are fundamentally marked by a “general sense of unity”, and the differences within any given classifier deemed to be matters of post-event interpretation. The constructivist response to this debate contends that the very concept of a pure unitive experience of the divine is spurious, however many strands are distinguished, since the very experience itself, and not simply its interpretation, is necessarily informed by the concepts that are brought to it. ‘Ineffability’ is an irrelevant measuring criterion because the meaning of abstract words are themselves culture specific so “neither the nature of the experience nor the nature of the referent nor the comparability of various claims is assured by this seemingly common verbal presence alone”.<sup>41</sup> Since unitive-type encounters are cross-culturally reported, strong constructivism has not been without its critics, most recently Robert Forman who has argued for the existence of “Pure Consciousness Events”, and for the many examples of mysticism which contradict immediate cultural expectations.<sup>42</sup>

The *possibility* of the unmediated experience remains unresolved and perhaps unresolvable. This is certainly the view of Diane Jonte-Pace who has used the Rorschach test, designed to study perception and cognition, to test the essentialist-constructivist debate, and concluded the question to be scientifically unprovable.<sup>43</sup> John Hicks’ pluralist conditional realism comes closest to reconciling the two positions, allowing both for the authenticity of the ultimate ‘real’, or noumenon, and its many manifestations.<sup>44</sup> For Hicks all religious experience becomes part of a continuum of mysticism, and veridicality should be tested on the rational and pragmatic grounds of how they fit with existing situated knowledge, not against absolute criteria.<sup>45</sup>

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cultural classifiers see Andrew Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Steven Katz, ‘Language, Epistemology and Mysticism’, in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, pp. 22-74, citation p. 47.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Forman, ed., *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (Oxford: OUP, 1990) and ‘What Does Mysticism Have to Teach us About Consciousness’, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 5 (1998), 185-201. For a recent contribution to the constructivist position see Matthew Bagger, *Religious Experience, Justification and History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999).

<sup>43</sup> Diane Jonte-Pace, ‘The Swami and the Rorschach – Spiritual Practice, Religious Experience and Perception’ in *Mysticism: A Variety of Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Jacob Belzen and Anton Geels (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 55-80.

<sup>44</sup> John Hicks, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), and ‘Ineffability’, *Religious Studies*, 36 (2000), 35-46.

<sup>45</sup> John Hicks, ‘Mystical Experience as Cognition’, in *Mystics and Scholars*, ed. Harold Coward and Terence Penelhum, SR Supplements 3 (Waterloo: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1976), pp. 41-56.

If the question were simply whether only the unitive experiences (or in Christian terms the unmediated *visio Dei*) recognised by the perennialist position or whether all kinds of first-hand encounters should be termed 'mysticism', then the problem would be reduced to a quibble over semantics. Serious issues arise, first because the unitive can rarely be separated out from other aspects of the encounter, and second because issues of power are built into the question. Phenomenological approaches privileging apophatic over kataphatic mysticism, have placed unitive encounters, which in the Christian tradition are most fully expressed by the Spanish discalced Carmelites Saints Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and John of the Cross (1542-1591), as qualitatively superior to those of women of spirit such as Christina, Hildegard of Bingen or Elisabeth of Schönau.<sup>46</sup> 'Mysticism' is restricted to an elite activity that excludes the majority of paranormal experiences which women, and some men, of spirit themselves understood as direct encounters with the divine.<sup>47</sup> Ultimately using types of experience as the defining note of mysticism leads to the disparagement of visions, apparitions, locutions, raptures, ecstasies etc which David Knowles contemptuously dismisses as "at best a superficial reflection of an impression which the soul itself was incapable of receiving fully...a sign of weakness and immaturity...visions and all other psycho-physical manifestations are neither mystical nor a direct preparation for it".<sup>48</sup>

### I.III Beyond Phenomonology

Contrary to the claims of scholars like Knowles and Stace, phenomonology is not consistently at the heart of what people of spirit themselves deemed important. Evelyn Underhill's observation that "the mystics are all but unanimous in their refusal to attribute importance to any kind of visionary experience" presupposes that only people

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<sup>46</sup> Janet Ruffing has also concluded that kataphatic mysticism, including visions have been neglected because of institutionalised philosophical misogyny, see 'The World Transfigured: Kataphatic Religious Experience Explored through Qualitative Research Methodology', *Studies in Spirituality*, 5 (1995), 232-259.

<sup>47</sup> A surprising number of feminist scholars have propagated a gendered model of 'male mystics' and 'female visionaries', for example Rosalynn Voaden correlates Augustinian intellectual vision with mysticism as a male activity, and spiritual vision with visions as a female activity, see *God's Words, Women's Voices*, pp. 9-19. Anne Clark takes a similar line on Elisabeth of Schönau, contrasting her to unitive mysticism, *Elisabeth*, p. 105. Grace Jantzen's use of the distinction, for example in *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, p. 184, seems to stand at odds with her paradigm-shifting work which calls for a Foucauldian genealogy of the term 'mysticism'. In contrast, Kevin Magill has recently subverted the distinction, arguing that to classify Julian of Norwich as a mystic silences and reduces her, but that as a visionary she had a public and didactic role in her community, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic or Visionary?* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> David Knowles, *What is Mysticism?* (London : Burns and Oates, 1967), pp. 54-55 and 136.

of spirit who took this position are in fact mystics.<sup>49</sup> Moving back from the broader philosophical landscape to the situated one of the Medieval West, a model and language is needed to authenticate as well as to accurately describe and classify the priorities of people of spirit.<sup>50</sup>

Some efforts have been made to find a different kind of measuring criteria. Peter Dinzelbacher shifts the locus of mysticism from the kind of experience to their content, arguing that “insofar as their cause and content is God’s love, insofar as a personal relationship to Jesus is expressed in them, be it loving him, being loved by him, be it having compassion for his sufferings” all kinds of experience are truly mystical.<sup>51</sup> He sees the twelfth century as a transition to mysticism proper and therefore believes Christina to be a mystic in those visions that display Christo-centricity.<sup>52</sup> His model is interesting but suffers from similar problems to Bernard McGinn’s, whose weighty *Presence of God* forms the most comprehensive study of Western Christian mysticism to date. McGinn argues that an encounter with the direct *presence* of God rather than a mode of union is the “essential note” of mysticism, encompassing as mystical “everything that leads up to and prepares for this ‘presence’, as well as all that flows from or is supposed to flow from it for the life of the individual in the belief community”.<sup>53</sup> Both McGinn and Dinzelbacher open up mysticism to include the processes around a moment of *cognitio Dei experimentalis*, adjusting the role of revelations from having a set position in a hierarchy of spirituality to a fluid one. Their models remain committed, however, to absolute criteria of the “immediate presence of God” operating in the realm of the private and personal,<sup>54</sup> rather than using the word ‘mysticism’ as a tool for understanding the variable and discursive ways that people of spirit sought to classify their encounters. They are not sufficiently flexible to accommodate group or community paranormal experience and they assume that all experiences of the Godhead must necessarily be of an exclusive and higher order than

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<sup>49</sup> Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. 279-280. A more balanced discussion of medieval attitudes towards visions with empirical content, although which ultimately draws a similar conclusion is Bernard McGinn, ‘Visions and Visualisation in the Here and Hereafter’, *Harvard Theological Review*, 98 (2005), 227-246.

<sup>50</sup> In addition to Dinzelbacher and McGinn, Dan Merker has argued that mystics should be differentiated by their lack of public social authority, *Gnosis: An Esoteric Tradition of Mystical Visions and Unions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), and Jess Hollenback that mystics are individuals who have “mastered the difficult art of shutting off [their] habitual interior dialogue” causing “a dramatic change in the mystic’s mode of consciousness”, *Mysticism: Experience, Response, and Empowerment* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), citation pp. 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> Dinzelbacher, ‘Beginnings of Mysticism’, p. 112.

<sup>52</sup> Dinzelbacher, ‘Beginnings of Mysticism’, pp. 120-121.

<sup>53</sup> McGinn, *Foundations*, p. xvi.

<sup>54</sup> See for example McGinn’s on Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau in *Growth*, pp. 333-337.

those of other things. For a person of spirit whose higher order encounters are of, for example, the Virgin Mary as well as of Christ or the Trinity, only the latter ones could count as mysticism, whether or not the person experienced these as the more elevated.

In the midst of this cacophony of approaches some scholars have suggested that the word mysticism has “largely outlived...usefulness to scholars”,<sup>55</sup> since it is impossible to use with any exactitude and enforces a false separation of experiences, motifs and texts from their historical settings. Henrietta Leyser has pointed out that this may be as much about English scepticism towards spiritual enthusiasm as it is about the theoretical problems of the term.<sup>56</sup> Without a scholarly consensus to renounce and abandon the term, the historian who rejects it risks being unable to enter into discussion with this wide body of thought. Since each time and place is self defining in terms of the criteria for the spiritual journey, it is impossible to speak for them saying this or that is or is not mysticism. There are higher and lower experiences, but how these are classified is situated, as are tests for veridicality. Mysticism can only be a discourse about the higher goals of a spiritual practice and no absolute cut-off point can be set for mysticism/non-mysticism. This also works inversely: Burthred’s dream of the Virgin Mary was not deemed to be a ‘higher’ level experience, so is not mysticism.<sup>57</sup> Wherever the boundaries for ‘mysticism’ are drawn, they encompass an *experiential* side of religion.<sup>58</sup> In looking to move beyond phenomenology I do not suggest that mysticism is altogether something else, but that its meanings are not well elucidated by using experience as the base criterion.

Rather than ‘experience’ or McGinn’s ‘presence’, (Western) mysticism should be conceived of in terms of *encounter*, and more specifically a spectrum of encounters with the numinous, which are time and context dependent but not time and context defined. It is the encounter that is important, not simply the presence of the ‘Other’; the person of spirit is intimately part of the encounter, even in the rare cases where they find their subjectivity merged into it. This is a weak constructivist position which still accommodates the existence of an ‘Other’ to be encountered, and so enables the potential for such encounters to have innovative force, for example the innovation of the Corpus Christi feast because of Juliana of Mt Cornillion’s (1192-1258) allegorical

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<sup>55</sup> Watson, ‘Middle English Mystics’, p. 539.

<sup>56</sup> Leyser, ‘Christina: the Mystic of Markyate’.

<sup>57</sup> *Life*, ch. 42, p. 108.

<sup>58</sup> See Sallie King’s critique of constructivism that “it reduces mystical experience to mystical language for reasons of methodological convenience”, ‘Two Epistemological Models for the Interpretation of Mysticism’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 56 (1988), 257-279, citation p. 268.

and Christological visions.<sup>59</sup> My use of the word numinous here is distinct from that employed by Rudolf Otto. Otto set out to extend the bracket of religious experiences, of which the unitive is only a part, and to recognise both personal devotions and corporate religious practice as significant forums which accommodate and perhaps condition such experiences. In practice his model requires that the encounter includes *mysterium tremendum*, in feelings of awefulness, overpoweringness and urgency, in order to be numinous.<sup>60</sup> Rather than separating the numinous from the mystical,<sup>61</sup> I suggest that mysticism, in so far as the term is useful, is a subset of the numinous spectrum.<sup>62</sup> This being so, Augustine's classifications make the term 'visions' viable for all kinds of encounter with the numinous.<sup>63</sup> One final taxonomy merits mention in light of this definition: Elisabeth Petroff's seven-fold classification, developed from a study of late medieval women of spirit, proposes a spiritual trajectory as the outgrowth of the spiritual exercises of the religious life, which passes through stages "dominated by a specific content and attitude".<sup>64</sup> She indicates unitive visions to be a specific (sixth) stage, and significantly one that precede the seventh "feminine as the operative principle in the cosmos". Petroff's model suffers from the assumption of a linear progression, with each stage as a necessary part of the journey, which is not sustained by the evidence: Hildegard of Bingen had seventh-stage, world ordering, visions early in her career and fifth-stage participatory visions, of suffering as the crucified Christ, not at all. Nevertheless Petroff offers a way of thinking about visions which does not inherently privilege one kind of encounter, and one that should cause scholars to reconsider the priorities of the visionary 'experience'.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> John of Lausanne, *De B. Juliana, Virgine Priorissa Montis-Cornilii*, AASS, 5<sup>th</sup> April, vol. 1, pp. 435-475. See also translation Barbara Newman, *The Life of Blessed Juliana of Mont Cornillion* (Toronto: Peregrina, 1988).

<sup>60</sup> Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John Harvey, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: OUP, 1978).

<sup>61</sup> This distinction is made by Ninian Smart, although he uses 'prophetic' for Otto's model of the numinous, see *Philosophers and Religious Truth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: SCM Press, 1969), ch. 5.8-5.10, pp. 134-136. He may also be the source for the Latin appellation, which is not actually found in Otto, see John Durham, 'Understanding the Sacred: The Rudolph Otto Virus', <<http://www.bytreant.demon.co.uk/virus.html>> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008].

<sup>62</sup> C. S. Watkins has also recently argued for the need to "abandon[...] rigid categories and think instead of medieval religion as a kind of spectrum", 'Sin, Penance and Purgatory in the Anglo-Norman Realm: The Evidence of Visions and Ghost Stories', *Past and Present*, 175 (2002), 3-33, citation p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> Precedent for my decision is found in Nicholas Watson, 'The Composition of Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Love*', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), 637-683, esp. n. 16.

<sup>64</sup> Elisabeth Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, p. 6. See also her 'Medieval Women Visionaries: Seven Stages to Power', *Frontiers*, 3 (1978), 34-45. The seven stages of vision are Purgation, Psychic, Christian Doctrine, Devotional, Participatory, Unitive/Erotic, Cosmic Ordering.

<sup>65</sup> It should, however, be noted that Petroff is not consistent in her approach, and elsewhere has subscribed to a more perennialist position, see, for example, *Body and Soul*, p. 5.

## II. Writing the Life IV: Managing Christina's Visions

Hardly a chapter of Christina's *Life* passes without someone encountering the numinous or the demonic. Although there are few visions in the first third of the text about her early years (the section which bears closest resemblance to the virgin martyr *passio* which, apart from St Perpetua, does not employ visions as a component part of holiness), Christina's adult life is told almost entirely through the conduit of this kind of encounters. The patterns in these are striking: few stand alone and many show development either of themes or of kinds of encounter. Some of these patterns are close together, others are scattered through the *Life* and perhaps experienced over a number of years. The *Life* contains little exegesis of her visions but Christina's own reflections must have influenced her expectations of her encounters and coloured how she remembered subsequent ones. Christina's visions weave most of the narrative, but every third or fourth vision is either experienced solely by, or jointly with, one of Christina's stakeholders. The structural role played by visions, as well as their varying nature, can be most vividly appreciated if they are tabulated. Christopher Holdsworth identified forty-two visions,<sup>66</sup> and I have additionally included some of the more general descriptions of ecstasies or paranormal abilities, paralleling the visions of Christina and other people if they occur in the same chapter.

**Table 1: Visions in the Tiberius *Vita*** (\* also included in the *Gesta Abbatum*)

Ch.	Christina's visions	Ch.	Other people's visions
12	Dream ( <i>per sompnum</i> ) of Burthred as devil.		
		23	Jewess: sees ( <i>video</i> ) two figures in white protecting Christina.
24- 25	1 <sup>st</sup> Queen of Heaven (Mary) dream ( <i>cum dormiret</i> ). Interacts in vision. Wakes ( <i>post hec visa evi&lt;gi&gt;lavit</i> ) with tears on pillow.		
26	2 <sup>nd</sup> Queen of Heaven (Mary) apparition ( <i>videbat se ancilla Christi</i> ).		
		27	Sueno: audition ( <i>exaudivit vocem fletus eius</i> ) reassuring him about Christina
		28*	Roger: led to Markyate ( <i>inde visibiliter ambulantes</i> ) by three angels in white (not part of Christina's story).

<sup>66</sup> Holdsworth, 'Christina of Markyate', p. 198.

33	Interior bird-like fluttering, becomes audition when trying to escape ( <i>quasi avicula viva et exultans omnia interiora eius ...et huiusmodi verba forma</i> ).	
36	Dead Loric appears to Christina whilst she is barely awake (The first use of <i>visionem</i> ).	36 Sueno: accurately predicts to Beatrix that her house will burn down.
37	Vision ( <i>visione</i> ) of field of bulls. Wakes up ( <i>evigilavit</i> ), and interprets it herself ( <i>videbat se, audita est vox</i> ). Invasion of demonic toads into cell.	
		38 Leofric and Acio: sing antiphonally with unseen virginal choir ( <i>sonus quasi virginei cantus... audiebatur</i> ).
41*	1 <sup>st</sup> Christ apparition. At the Annunciation, adult Christ passes through door ( <i>obserato aditu</i> ), gives her a cross to carry and vanishes ( <i>evanuit</i> ). Interpreted by Roger.	
42- 43	3 <sup>rd</sup> Queen of Heaven (Mary) vision. Transported in rapture ( <i>subito rapitur</i> ). Interacts in vision. Obtains Markyate.	42 Burthred: chastised in night-time vision ( <i>visu noctis apparuerat</i> ) of Mary. On date of Resurrection.
44	Lustful Cleric appears ( <i>apparuit</i> ) as a bear.	
45*	2 <sup>nd</sup> Christ apparition. Child Christ felt and seen ( <i>non modo sensibilis sed etiam visibilis</i> ), and passes through her flesh. Cures her lust.	45 Lustful Cleric: chastised in dream ( <i>dum dormienti nocte</i> ) of John the evangelist, St Benedict and Mary Magdalene.
46- 47	Healing miracle, sees saintly figure ( <i>Christina que sola ex omnibus hoc [po]tuit videre</i> ) holding book out to woman, proving her cured.	46- 47 Canterbury woman: sees St Margaret ( <i>per visum</i> ) telling her drink water blessed by Christina in name of Trinity.
		49 Christina's maiden: has dream ( <i>per somnium</i> ) of Mary curing Christina. Christina is cured.
52	Crowned by angels sent from Christ. World around her stops ( <i>Ipsisque et quicquid est auditu sensibile circumquaque contra solitum alto silencio demersis</i> ) Confirms her chastity and heals her maladies.	
53	Description of sordid demonic apparitions.	
54	En-raputed audition of divine voice ( <i>d[um terra] ipsam transcensa tota transferret[ur in celum] audivit</i> ), saying it holds the keys to her heart.	
56*	Appearance ( <i>hic visibiliter apprens</i> ) of deceased Alvered. Prophetic injunction ( <i>mandatum indico</i> ), to warn Abbot Geoffrey about his behaviour.	56* Abbot Geoffrey: chastised in night-time apparition ( <i>vidit</i> ) of terrifying figures and Alvered. Leaves real scars.
59	Transported ( <i>sentitque se transduc</i> ) to see Abbot Geoffrey in his sick chamber. Uses	

	Margaret to validate.	
60-61	Predicts ( <i>predixit</i> ) visits of Abbot Geoffrey. Uses Margaret to validate.	
63	Audition ( <i>voca sibi celitus</i> ) confirming restoration of Abbot Geoffrey's health.	
64	Meditating on Christmas. Audition ( <i>ecce vox ad eam dicens</i> ) asking if she would like to see Abbot Geoffrey. Sees ( <i>vidit</i> ) him wearing red cope.	
66	Audition ( <i>hoc enim sibi vocis delapse revelacione didicerat</i> ) telling her of Geoffrey's Camilla flower vision.	66 Abbot Geoffrey: night-time vision ( <i>vero nocte vidit</i> ) of Camilla flower. Christina describes as vision ( <i>visione vidisti</i> ) Geoffrey interprets in discussion with Evisandus.
67*	Bi-location at night to visit Abbot Geoffrey. Uses Margaret to validate, but describes it as dream ( <i>somnio</i> ).	67* Abbot Geoffrey: sees Christina clearly, at night but not a dream ( <i>vidi manifeste neque enim somnium erat</i> ).
68	Description of ecstasies at Mass ( <i>sic mente excedebat Deo ut terrena nesciens solius faciem creatoris intenderet contemplari</i> ).	
69	Dove/Trinity vision, confirming Geoffrey's salvation. Christina sees herself ( <i>vidit siquidem Christina se</i> ) and Geoffrey, but can alter events from outside the vision.	
70	Audition whilst at prayer and weeping ( <i>vocem sentiret delapsam</i> ) about Mary's love for her dying brother Gregory.	
71*	1 <sup>st</sup> vision restricting Abbot Geoffrey from travel. Audition ( <i>auditque vocem</i> ) and vision ( <i>viditque maceriam</i> ). Geoffrey cemented alive ( <i>vivus incementatus</i> ) in a wall. Commanded ( <i>michi dicta sunt</i> ) to give away clothing made for him.	
72	2 <sup>nd</sup> vision restricting Abbot Geoffrey from travel. Vision ( <i>in oracionibus namque contituta visi</i> ) and audition ( <i>dictum est michi</i> ). Sees enclosure that Geoffrey can only leave with divine intervention.	
73	3 <sup>rd</sup> vision restricting Abbot Geoffrey from travel. In rapture ( <i>extasi rapta, vidit se</i> ). Sees self holding Geoffrey in her arms and Jesus closing hands over hers.	
74*	Predicts the amenability of King Stephen towards Abbot Geoffrey.	
75	Description of how Christina has visions: <i>Rapiebatur in extasim. Videbatque que sibi videnda sanctus monstrabat spiritus. Nichil senciens nichil sciens eorum que</i>	

	<i>circa se vel fiebant vel dicebantur.</i> Three signs that her prayer are answered: 1. Sees Evanius caressing her face, 2. Feels bird fluttering in her breast, 3. One or three bright shining lights.	
		77 Simon of Bermondsey: celebrating Mass sees bi-locating Christina ( <i>mirum dictum ipsam Christinam videt</i> ).
78	Diabolic apparition of headless devil bursts into Markyate church, cast out by Christina's prayers ( <i>fusisque precibus fantasticum illud monstrum eiecit</i> ).	78 Christina's maidens: see diabolic apparition of headless devil ( <i>vident corpus se sine capite</i> ) in the Markyate cloister.
78	Receives answer to her prayers ( <i>pro huiusmodi supplicationibus non indulseras</i> ) that she need only pray for Abbot Geoffrey, and not to fear the devil.	
79	Vision about sacrificing Geoffrey to martyrdom. Prayer leads to unusual joy ( <i>repentino suffuse est gaudio ut nec comprehendere necdum illud cuiquam valeret edicere</i> ) and inward conversation with God ( <i>que cum Deo familiaria mente non verbis miscebat colloquia in sacrario pectoris huiusmodi vocem percepit</i> ), which is secret, sweet and indescribable ( <i>his alternis sed secretis sed dulcibus sed indicibilibus</i> ). Physical touch and instruction to look ( <i>respice</i> ). Sees ( <i>vidit</i> ) self and Abbot Geoffrey on either side of Jesus at the altar. Christina able to interact during her vision.	
80-81	3 <sup>rd</sup> Christ apparition. Pilgrim-Christ makes 4 visits at Christmastide: 1. Pilgrim visits ( <i>peregrinum... venisse ad cellam virginis Christine</i> ), and leaves. 2. Pilgrim stays for meal with Christina and Margaret (closely linked to first visit). 3. Christina feels self transported to see pilgrim in the St Albans choir ( <i>sensit se in ecclesia...translatem</i> ) Then is inexplicably rapt to another world ( <i>ista tamen sive in corpo[re sive extr]acorp[us] viderit, deo teste se [fatetur] nescire</i> ). 4. Pilgrim joined Markyate Mass procession ( <i>pro[ficis]centium [process]ionem</i> ), who then vanishes.	80-81 Margaret: meets pilgrim on first visit. Whole Markyate community: sees pilgrim on third visit.
83	General examples of Christina's clairvoyance. Knows the illicit thoughts and actions of her maiden Godit. Knows a servant has stolen things. Knows her sister's bedtime conversations with her husband.	

As encountered by the modern reader, most visions are texts whose meanings have been decided by the time they are written down.<sup>67</sup> They are managed and interpreted to meet one or more sets of expectations, and as with any medieval text may subsequently be altered in tone, content or context. The nature of the project to frame Christina's visions is more obvious in the *Gesta Abbatum*, which omits most of them, than it is in the *Life*. The *Gesta Abbatum* principally tells the tale of Roger and secondarily that of Geoffrey, and it retains visions which very clearly meet this remit. Roger's acquisition of Markyate through the guidance of angels is moved to prime position at the start of the narrative, as is the story of his miraculous resistance to demonic incineration.<sup>68</sup> Whereas these stories are tributaries of Christina's in the *Life*, in the *Gesta Abbatum* they form the core narrative and Christina's role is omitted. The full story of Christ's first appearance in Christina's cell offering her a cross is included only because of Roger's role in interpreting it. A curtailed version of Christ's second appearance as a child is also included, but the Mariological implications are dropped and instead it becomes the occasion for God to bestow powers of prophecy on Christina: thereafter she began, by the inspiration of divine merit, to grow bright with the spirit of prophecy and to emerge as a miracle worker, in such a degree that the reputation of her virtues flew through the whole country, "*deinde coepit, virtute divina, spiritu propetiae clarescere, miraculorum patatrix existere; in tantum, ut fama virtutum ejus totam patriam pervolare*".<sup>69</sup> It works as a turning point in the narrative which then authenticates Alvered's visits to the holy woman and the abbot, and Christina's bilocation with its similarity to St Benedict at Terracina, both of which also demonstrate Geoffrey's participation in Christina's unusual abilities. Finally Christina's saintly intercessions on his behalf protect Geoffrey from going to Rome, although the elaborate symbolic visions themselves are omitted. All the direct patronage that the Virgin Mary offers to Christina in the *Life* is omitted, as are Christological references that cannot be directly tied to the interests of St Albans, most notably the three visits of the Pilgrim-Christ. Curiously, the encounters in which Christina obtained the Holy Spirit for Geoffrey and en-visionsed his prospective saintliness (in the red cope vision and his possible martyrdom) are not included either. Evidently there was no intention of making their abbot holy as well as good. The *Gesta Abbatum*, then, provides a condensed template of how Christina's visions might have been managed in the original *vita*, had the goal been purely to shape her into a St Albans intercessor.

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<sup>67</sup> See also Moreira, *Dreams*, p. 55.

<sup>68</sup> *GA*, I, p. 97. See also Koopmans, 'Conclusion', p. 670.

<sup>69</sup> *GA*, I, p. 101.

Such a high level of deliberate selectiveness is not found in the *Life*, and I suggest that the original *vita* included a genuine attempt to understand Christina's visions, held in tension with a degree of narrative management. Some of her visions in the *Life* have subject matter that gives them a clear position in the story, for example the three Queen of Heaven visions during her troubled time at home and in securing Markyate; the three occasions in which she prevented Geoffrey from travel on royal business; or the apparition of Alvered which precipitated her meeting the Abbot. Others, such as the visions of Geoffrey in a red cope or her clairvoyance over his whereabouts, might have occurred at any time after 1124. Others have clearly been manipulated for narrative effect, for example the consolation of the Christchild is associated with the timing of Robert Bloet's death, yet it is unlikely that Christina was able to return to Markyate, where the vision occurs, before the threat that he posed was alleviated. More obvious time disjunctures are Christina's crowning by angels, which is set adrift from her consecration to which it refers, and the visits of the Pilgrim-Christ, which must have occurred before her sister Margaret died. The crowning may have been moved to establish her divinely confirmed purity before she meets Abbot Geoffrey, so proving that he had not become involved with a woman of doubtful virtue.

It is amongst the visions that have the strongest claim to a clear narrative function that the deliberate use of patterns is most visible. For example the three Marian visions are mirrored by the three times that Christina keeps Geoffrey back from Rome, each set comprising two apparitions and a third in ecstasy with Christina a very active participant in the encounter. One vision that merits particular attention is the promise that Christ holds the key to Christina's heart, in an audition heard whilst Christina is enraptured in prayer. Situated just before Christina meets Geoffrey but after her crowning by angels, this vision provides her with a tool to resist demonic trial, and as the ending to a period of desert-mother temptations it is ideally located. However it is overshadowed in the narrative by the crowning that has already confirmed this relationship, and is also one of only two numinous encounters which explicitly baffle the Writer.<sup>70</sup> It is only possible to speculate on why it is located and yet disappeared into such a hinge-point in the story: perhaps this image-free encounter was more important to Christina than her crowning and the Writer was pressured into including it, or perhaps the situation was reversed and the Writer saw in it a higher form of vision which he lacked the vocabulary to describe.

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<sup>70</sup> The other is Geoffrey's Christmas Mass in a red cope, *Life*, ch. 64, p. 150. See also the pilgrim-Christ visions where Christina is unable to explain her rapture, *Life*, ch. 80, p. 186.

The overall shape of Christina's visions, follows the three-part model of the *Life*, moving from a sparse scattering principally of dreams in the first section; to a number of personal and intimate encounters with the Virgin and Christ mixed with demonic temptations in the second; and many interventions for Abbot Geoffrey in the third. The division is not proscriptive, particularly in the third section which records her recent past and also includes visions that specifically advance Christina's own spiritual story. It is in this last section that Christina begins to develop a degree of Eucharistic piety, perhaps as a result of increased access to the host with the routinisation of Markyate, and has her only visions that relate to wider theological issues. It is possible to see how the three sections shift in rhythm with an exemplar like the life of St Martin, from a pious but secular young adulthood, including an influential vision and a postponed plan to take up the religious life, to a semi-solitary period of testing and encouragement, and then to being an active intercessor equipped by a special relationship with the divine to work from religious retirement for the special benefit of others. It is less easy to see in Christina's *Life* an ascent trajectory corresponding to the Unitive Way. As will be shown shortly, this is partly because Christina's spirituality did not follow a linear pattern; but it is also interesting to speculate on the kinds of tools available to the Writer. By the later twelfth century the St Albans library boasted the biggest English collection of the Victorine mystical theology that influenced subsequent *gnadenvitae* like Jacques of Vitry's life of Marie of Oignies.<sup>71</sup> One of these volumes, Oxford, Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 370 which opens with Hugh of St Victor's *De Arche*, may have been copied in the early 1140's, after Christina had become popular at the abbey but around the time that her *vita* was being composed.<sup>72</sup> If the Writer knew of this work it cannot have been with the kind of long and reflective acquaintance that would have enabled him to skilfully overwrite such a model onto Christina's visions. He was more comfortable with Gregory the Great's entwining of moral purity with visionary clarity, and so the tension between old and new ideas about sanctity carries through into his structuring of Christina's visions. The Writer was familiar with saints who appear fully-formed like Sulpicius's Martin, and lacked confidence when dealing with a holiness that emerged and changed over time.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Thomson *Manuscripts*, cat. nos. 26, 49, 50, and 54. On Marie see Miriam Marsolais, 'Jacques de Vitry and the Canons of St Victor', *The Life of Marie d'Oignies*, trans. Margot King (Toronto: Peregrina, 1993), pp. 12-33.

<sup>72</sup> Thomson, *Manuscripts*, cat. no. 49, p. 41. Jane Geddes has argued that the illustration of Hugh of St Victor and his pupils in Oxford, Bodleian MS Laud Misc 409 fol. 3v was painted as early as the 1140's during Geoffrey's abbacy, *St Albans Psalter*, p. 13, but Thomson dates the collection to the 1180s.

<sup>73</sup> See also the comparison between Saints Martin and Francis in John Coakley, *Men, Women and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 9-10.

## II.I Visionary Modes and Spiritual Maturation

As Christina looked back over her visions to relate them to the Writer she did not see a static spirituality in which the Lord unfolded a comprehensive plan, cosmic or personal, to her fully-formed and amenable soul.<sup>74</sup> The key-note of her visions was always resolving problems, doubts or fears, but she recollected herself as gaining in confidence about the efficacy of her encounters, the breadth of her spiritual repertoire and the availability of such encounters as the outcome of prayer and meditation. She also moved from principally Mariological to principally Christological devotion, although the two relationships were never mutually exclusive.

From her earliest encounters Christina was able to interpret most of her own visions, and sometimes those of other people.<sup>75</sup> For example, the meaning of Geoffrey's dream of the Camilla flower, which he laboriously deduced with help from Evasandus, was already known to Christina. The Writer makes no attempt to cover this up, she is, after all, being prophetic in the highest Augustinian sense of being able to explain and interpret the likenesses that she encounters: *"Less a prophet, therefore, is he who, by means of the images of corporeal objects, sees in spirit only the signs of the things signified, and a greater prophet is he who is granted only an understanding of the images. But the greatest prophet is he who is endowed with both gifts, namely, that of seeing in spirit the symbolic likenesses of corporeal objects and that of understanding them with the vital power of the mind"*.<sup>76</sup> The only exception is the apparition of Christ holding the pilgrimage cross, where, as the original charismatic leader of Markyate, Roger's explanation forms a hinge-point in Christina's story. Responsibility for interpreting the visions of the Markyate community rested with Roger,<sup>77</sup> and this vision was both an elaborate premonition of liberation from her marriage and also confirmation to Roger that Christina had progressed sufficiently under his tutelage to

<sup>74</sup> For different views on whether or not Christina matures spiritually see Elliott, 'Spiritual Direction', p. 178, Huntington, 'Nam et ipsa', p. 49 and Brian Stock, 'The Self and Literary Experience in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages', *New Literary History*, 25 (1994), 839-852, (which should be used with caution).

<sup>75</sup> Subsequently Abbot Geoffrey re-interpreted some of Christina's visions, but it is her primary reading that the Writer includes in the *Life*.

<sup>76</sup> *"Minus ergo propheta, qui rerum quae significantur, sola ipsa signa in spiritu per rerum corporalium imagines videt; et magis propheta, qui solo earum intellectu praeditus est: sed et maxime propheta, qui utroque praecellit, ut et videat in spiritu corporalium rerum significativas similitudines, et eas vivacitate mentis intelligat, sicut Danielis excellentia tentata est et probata, qui regi et somnium quod viderat dixit, et quid significaret aperuit. Et ipsae quippe imagines corporales in spiritu ejus expressae sunt, et earum intellectus revelatus in mente. Ex hoc ergo modo quo appellatur in ista distinctione spiritus, secundum quem dixit Apostolus, Orabo spiritu, orabo autem et mente, ut et signa rerum formarentur in spiritu, et eorum refulgeret intellectus in mente; secundum hanc, inquam, distinctionem spirituale nunc appellavimus tale genus visorum, quali etiam corporum absentium imagines cogitamus"*. Augustine, *De Genesis ad Litteram*, bk. XII, ch. 9, col. 461.

<sup>77</sup> For example *Life*, ch. 38, p. 100.

take over the mentoring of his community. Christina's readings of her own encounters are never theologically complex, but they do become more explicit. Hence in her earliest dream of the Queen of Heaven Christina was merely convinced of its reality, but by middle age she was able to elaborate at length to Geoffrey on the meanings of her vision of them both standing with Christ who was serving the Eucharist.

Like Elisabeth of Schönau, Christina remained foregrounded in her visions; she was never simply the conduit for a divine narrative as was Hildegard of Bingen.<sup>78</sup> In the majority of them she was also an active participant, and when simply a spectator she gazed on herself or Geoffrey as they encountered the numinous. Christina *requested* visionary elucidation for her circumstances for the first time as soon as she had run away, although the resulting vision of Loric was the outcome of community prayer and her interpretation was part of a group experience. Subsequently almost all her visions except her powers of precognition were the outcome of Christina's directly seeking answers to specific spiritual or circumstantial problems, and her autonomy in the process around and within obtaining those answers increased over time. For a number of key visions, it was Christina's own choices that determined the direction which they took, including requesting Markyate from the Queen of Heaven and petitioning that the Holy Spirit would fly out to Geoffrey. It is unclear from the *Life* whether Christina was able to manipulate her visions from outside them, such that part of her consciousness and attention remained separate from the vision, or whether she was controlling from within the experience. The Writer was not alone in his unfamiliarity with Christina's exact state in some of her experiences - Walter Daniel expressed similar ignorance about his mentor Aelred of Rievaulx.<sup>79</sup> The lack of clarity in the *Life* thus reflects both Christina's own interest in her visions as effective tools and intimate relationships, and the wider knowledge base of twelfth century English monasteries about visionary praxis.

Visions did not cause the immediate transformation of Christina's circumstances, but she did associate effecting change with her having visions. When she told Sueno about her first encounter with the Queen of Heaven he passed it on to his prior Fredebert, who in turn passed it on to Autti and tried to persuade him to abandon his case with the bishop. Although Autti persisted, and a second apparition to Christina plus an audition to Sueno were required before there could be any certainty about her future, Christina must have got a first taste of how her visions could alter the views of people

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<sup>78</sup> See Clark, *Elisabeth*, p. 78.

<sup>79</sup> See Walter Daniel, *Life of Ailred of Rievaulx*, p. 35, Walter Daniel uses the famous passage about Peter in 2 Corinthians 12.2 to describe his Abbot.

around her, elucidating the judgement of God, "*divinum iudicium*".<sup>80</sup> A few years later, after she had endured prolonged enclosure, the apparition of Christ was fulfilled within only two days, by the arrival of Burthred who had suffered under a parallel vision and intended to release her from marriage. Even if the close dates are given as hagiographic convention, the connection between vision and effect seems to have been made by more than just the Writer. By the time she was crowned by angels Christina had come to expect that her personal problems would be resolved by heaven-sent intervention, but she did not yet think of them as available on demand. She waited impatiently for the feast of the Assumption, framing her own abilities within, and subservient to, the liturgical setting of the formal church. Over the next decade her commitment to the Marian calendar did not abate, but Christina gradually became certain that she could effect change directly by her visions at will, as is shown by her checking Geoffrey's travel plans, even when this involved criticising the failings of formal church authority. Christina grew into a woman of spirit whose sphere of authority complemented and corrected priestly authority, as outlined by John Coakley, but her early visions did not manifest this confidence.<sup>81</sup>

Dreams, in the *Life*, are a preliminary or immature form of celestial communication. Christina's early visions are in fully sleeping dreams, and other players who have only one vision usually experience it in a dream. The Lustful Cleric was visited by three saints in a dream; Burthred at night by a terrifying Queen of Heaven, to be reprimanded for persecuting Christina; one of her *puellae* saw Mary ministering to Christina's sickness also in a dream; and although Christina met Alvered "*hic visibiliter apparet*", the parallel experience for Geoffrey was in the night.<sup>82</sup> Only those who are already undertaking a mature spiritual life – Sueno, Leofric and Acio, Simon of Bermondsey – hear auditions or see apparitions when they are fully awake. On all occasions dreams turn out to be a reliable source of knowledge, but the possibility of being deceived by them is clearly addressed. It is a sign of Geoffrey's immaturity that he dismisses Christina at first for putting her trust in dreams, "*ne sompniis crederet*",<sup>83</sup> but Christina too is sceptical about them by the time she is middle-aged and is experiencing raptures and encountering apparitions of figures from the highest echelons of the celestial realms.<sup>84</sup> Christina had only one non-dreaming encounter

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<sup>80</sup> *Life*, ch. 26, p. 78.

<sup>81</sup> John Coakley, *Men, Women and Spiritual Authority*, esp. pp. 19-22 on Christina and Geoffrey.

<sup>82</sup> Christopher Holdsworth has noted that the apparition of the dead to the living whether in waking or sleep was approached similarly to dreams, 'Visions and the Visionary', p. 146.

<sup>83</sup> *Life*, ch. 56, p. 136.

<sup>84</sup> *Life*, ch. 47, p. 120.

before she moved into Roger's cell, in the second apparition of Mary as Empress. This seems to be the kind of spontaneous waking vision, the rarity of which has been identified by Barbara Newman.<sup>85</sup> Christina has done no sustained study or visualisation, nor is it a violent, or even clearly a trance state experience; rather she "saw herself standing quietly, and quite unexpectedly the queen of heaven stood before her", "*videbat se ancilla Christi quiete stare et reginam celi ex insperato stantem ante se*". There is a move away from describing her encounters as dreams during her time at Alfwen's, but there is as yet no clear confidence to describe them definitively as visions. In contrast, the only time that Christina interprets her later visions as dreams, it appears to be a deliberate rhetorical strategy to liken her bi-locating to St Benedict's. That the Writer emphasises Geoffrey's wakefulness when he saw Christina suggests either that he was trying to chart his abbot's spiritual progress or that he had not fully understood Christina's claim. Overall, the dreams during Christina's lengthy persecution at home and at Alfwen's are used as a narrative device to indicate the passing of time and convey suffering without giving much detail of her trials. What they do show is that Christina did not have a clear handle on her visionary abilities, or an interpretive contexts for them, before she took up the religious life herself.

The *Life* does not show "blithe indifference" to the distinction between dreams and visions, but Barbara Newman has rightly identified the interchangeable treatment of physical apparitions and visions seen or heard with some kind of spiritual senses.<sup>86</sup> As in the visions of Elisabeth of Schönau there is no distinction made between the content found in different kinds of encounter,<sup>87</sup> rather Christina's visions built cumulatively on a remarkably limited number of themes, most of which had their genesis in the earliest years of her visionary life. So, for example, the torments by demons (which are par for the course in modes of holiness inspired by the desert fathers), make little differentiation between visions and physical apparitions, nor between real devils and her persecutors. Likewise her encounters with Jesus and Mary transcend differentiation based on kinds of experience, instead building relationships based on the roles played in the visions. Even the para-physical phenomena accompanying some of Christina's most sophisticated and intercessory encounters began before she had left home. An internal fluttering "like a small bird full of life and joy", "*quasi avicula viva et exultans*", flew upwards through her body into a voice in her throat to inform Christina that her getaway team had arrived.<sup>88</sup> On this first occasion she was sufficiently

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<sup>85</sup> Newman, 'To Say "I Saw"', p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Newman, 'To Say "I Saw"', pp. 20-22.

<sup>87</sup> See Clark, *Elisabeth*, p. 85.

<sup>88</sup> *Life*, ch. 33, p. 90.

unclear as to whether she had heard a corporeal or spiritual voice that she checked whether it was audible to the rest of the company. By her later years, just such a fluttering was one of the three means by which she knows her prayers to be answered, and can be grouped with her encounters of 'light mysticism'. Christina's own early visions are source material for her later ones, and combined with emblematic elements from her reading and church art they enable her to nuance these encounters, as Thomas Heffernan finds that they did for St Perpetua who "intuitively recognized the rightness of them ... judg[ing] the appropriateness of the language...to render the totality of her meaning".<sup>89</sup>

Unlike many people of spirit, illness does not seem to have been central to Christina's encounters with the numinous.<sup>90</sup> She was intermittently ill for many years as a result of her austerities in Roger's cell, and was close to death for a period when she returned to Markyate. Although cures for her illnesses were obtained through visions,<sup>91</sup> the relationship did not operate in the opposite direction, and it is concentrated prayerful request and expectation, not personal sickness, which forms the setting for most of her encounters with the numinous. The only exception is her witnessing the pilgrim-Christ in the St Albans Christmas choir whilst confined to bed with an illness - presumably unrelated to the earlier ones that the Writer describes as forever healed by her crowning by angels.<sup>92</sup> This latter sickness disappeared as she became caught up in the office for the feast and then into a rapture described in language taken straight from St Paul's out-of-body visit to paradise.<sup>93</sup> Christina's trance-state encounters, where she is taken to some degree out of herself, seem to mostly be the result of prolonged prayerful preparation which she learns to do principally from Roger, and none are recorded before she was released from her marriage and was a well-established member of Markyate. Her third Queen of Heaven vision; her crowning by angels; her key to her heart audition; her third vision restricting Geoffrey from travel; and the Pauline-style encounter just mentioned,<sup>94</sup> are all in the context of meditation, weeping, yearning, and the need for specific questions to be resolved. The heart-key audition in

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<sup>89</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 206.

<sup>90</sup> This is particularly the case with later medieval women of spirit, but see also, for example, Eadmer, *Life of St Anselm*, p. 35.

<sup>91</sup> See *Life*, ch. 48-52, pp. 120-128.

<sup>92</sup> This is almost certainly another example of the lack of careful revision of Christina's *vita*.

<sup>93</sup> 2 Corinthians 12.1-4.

<sup>94</sup> *Life*, chs. 42-43, pp. 108-114; ch. 52, p. 128; ch. 54, p. 132; ch. 73, pp. 166-168; and ch. 80, pp. 182-186. The inclusion of her crowning by angels in this list may be inappropriate since Christina perceived the rest of the world, rather than herself, to be in a trance. Since this dynamic is so unusual I have included it on the assumption that it was similar to the famous Pauline example.

particular became itself a 'text' that Christina later meditated on and which could effect subsequent visionary-type encounters by inducing divine consolation, "*divinum senciebat levamen*".<sup>95</sup>

Towards the end of the *Life* it is claimed that Christina could be caught up in ecstasy, externally paralysed and shown things by the Holy Spirit at any moment (such as in the middle of conversation), "*quia sepius inter colloquendum rapiebatur in extasim*".<sup>96</sup> This does not seem to have been part of her early spiritual life, and it is regrettable for the modern scholar that it is passed over so quickly and subsumed into descriptions of encounters that are very directly the outcome of prayerful intercession, making it unclear how important a part of her visionary repertoire this kind of passive and unsolicited encounter formed. Christina's ecstatic encounters were rarely free of the empirical content that would mark out perennialist ideas of mysticism or Augustine's intellectual vision. Only in the two general descriptions of her ecstasies, at Mass and during conversations, and the Pauline rapture, is no account given of the content of her visions; and for all three the *Life* implies that such content has been omitted rather than not existing.<sup>97</sup> Instead ecstatic encounters occur as relationships mature particularly, but not exclusively, Christina's relationship with her divine husband Christ. There is no consistent and specialised use of terminology for her trance states; *raptus* with its implications of assault and seizure is the most common, used for encounters as diverse as Christina being caught up into the heavens with Mary as Empress in her angelic court and Christ helping Christina to restrain Geoffrey from travel to Rome by his embrace. In others she is described more generally as transferred from earth to heaven, "*tota transferretur in celum*", or exceeding the boundaries of her mind, "*mente excedebat*". "*Exstasis*" is used only twice, in conjunction with "*raptus*", to reinforce rather than alter the description.

One mode of Christina's vision does, however, seem to fit neatly with the highest levels identified by all attempts to find a taxonomy of vision based on practice. The three-in-one lights that she saw, apparently more rarely than her other kinds of visions, reflects the primary Christian metaphor for God and resonates with experiences described in accounts of many people of spirit, notably for our purposes by Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau. Hildegard spoke of rare encounters with the "living light", "*lux vivens*", by which she was physically transformed, and at one

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<sup>95</sup> *Life*, ch. 54, p. 132.

<sup>96</sup> *Life*, ch. 75, p. 170.

<sup>97</sup> The *Visio Pauli* circulated widely, despite the disparaging views of St Augustine who contended that it was impossible to know what Paul saw, (*De Genesis ad Litteram*, bk. XII, chs.1-6, cols. 453-459) so the use of this biblical motif by no means suggests that the rapture was image-free.

Christmas feast Elisabeth, in an unusual non-ecstatic vision, saw an extraordinary bright light through a doorway which she describes as being ten-times brighter than ones seen in past visions.<sup>98</sup> Unexpected bright light almost always indicates a particularly sophisticated level of vision, although there was no unified way of interpreting it. Evagrius Ponticus famously consulted John of Lycopolis on whether such light flowed from or to the intellect, and was told that there was none who could answer such a question.<sup>99</sup> Combined with its Trinitarian elements (and we might note the comparison both to Hildegard's vision of the Trinity, where the Father is a radiant light, the Son a figure in the same sapphire-blue as Evagrius's mystical light, and the Holy Spirit a glowing fire, and to Elisabeth's frequent experiences of the Godhead as light, including her unusual Trinity of enthroned Majesty with the Son of Man on one side and the sign of the cross on the other),<sup>100</sup> Christina's light-visions are the best illustration of the tension in the *Life* between situating her on the highest spiritual planes and the *usefulness* of her abilities. These lights, so bright that she feels she could show them to other people, "*crederet se alicui de dilectis suis si presentem haberet eadem lumina posse monstrare*",<sup>101</sup> are evidence that her prayers on specific matters have been answered.

The visions in the final section of the *Life* are intently focused on Christina's predicting and protecting Geoffrey from his own spiritual and social mistakes, partly because she has developed a maturity and confidence in her own abilities and is able to turn them outwards to other people. Clairvoyance, the second of Elisabeth Petroff's visionary modes, seems to be a skill developed by Christina only later in life. Christina's spirituality did not follow a linear path to higher experiences; rather it progressed helix-like through themes and modes, building tangible relationships. Her 'psychic' abilities show an increased range in her numinous encounters rather than registering a higher level of vision. Christina, we must conclude, did not clearly differentiate

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<sup>98</sup> Elisabeth, 'First Book of Visions', ch. 34, p. 65.

<sup>99</sup> See William Harmless and Raymond Fitzgerald, 'The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus', *Theological Studies*, 62 (2001), 498-525.

<sup>100</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Adelgunis Führkötter, *CCCM*, 93-93a (1978), 93, bk. II, vision 2, pp. 124-132. This vision is introduced by Hildegard as "I heard the Living Light saying to me", "*et iterum audivi eandem viventem lucem mihi dicentem*", rather than her customary "I heard the voice from Heaven, saying to me", "*et audivi vocem de caelo mihi dicentem*". Elisabeth of Schönau, 'First Book of Visions', ch. 20, pp. 55-56. See also Elisabeth's vision with the Trinity symbolised by three differently coloured columns of light, 'Second Book of Visions', ch. 4, pp. 98-99. Elisabeth sees these visions again when she is close to death ten years later, see Ekbert of Schönau, 'Death of Elisabeth' in *Elisabeth of Schönau: The Complete Works*, trans. Clark, p. 265. Examples of the Trinity as unbearable, beautiful or startling light abound in the visions of later people of spirit, to give just one example Agnes Blannbekin was shown the first heaven of the Blessed Trinity by Christ as a sudden light, which then vanishes except around him, *Leben und Offenbarungen*, ch. 25.

<sup>101</sup> *Life*, ch. 75, p. 170.

between developing her celestial and her terrestrial relationships: both were implicated in the process of her spiritual maturation, and neither remained static.

### III. Some Key Themes

What is missing from Christina's visionary repertoire is almost as interesting as what it includes. Most notably, with the exception of the visits from Loric and Alvered, Christina has little interaction with the otherworld. England was something of a cradle for lay visions touring heaven and hell, and the visions of Orm (1125), the monk of Eynsham (1196) and Thurkill (1206) were amongst the most popular and widely circulated vision stories from the twelfth century.<sup>102</sup> Christina did not share this spiritual enthusiasm, nor did she perform an apostolate to the dead through the purgatorial piety that brought some women of spirit, such as Mechthild of Magdeburg and Catherine of Siena, into the salvific economy through their spiritual patronage.<sup>103</sup> Her visions all concerned the current world and on the rare occasions that she was rapt out of it, the celestial cast rather than the setting was more important to her.<sup>104</sup> It is therefore to some of these celestial relationships that we will now turn.

#### III.I Mariology

As with many saints, Christina's mother was treated during her pregnancy to visionary forewarning of her daughter's impending holiness by a visit from the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. In the *Life*, this is set between the feasts of the Assumption and the Nativity of the Virgin, framing Christina's special relationship with Mary as already existing and given specific parameters from this earliest point. It offered proof that Christina would be "taught by the example and strengthened by the protection of Blessed Mary", "*nec non beate marie semper virginis et erudiendum exemplo et comuniendum presidio*".<sup>105</sup> It is impossible to know whether it was the Writer who thus interpreted Christina's Mariology, or whether he was responsible only for fitting her devotion into a suitably hagiographic format. Undoubtedly the Virgin Mary was Christina's most important mentor, and the relationship did work out along the lines of

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<sup>102</sup> On otherworld visions, including an extensive bibliography see Eileen Gardiner, 'Hell-on-Line: An Interactive Tour of the Infernal Otherworld', (Italica Press on the Web, 2006) < <http://www.hell-on-line.org/> > [Accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008], and Robert Easting *Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English, Vol 3: Visions of the Otherworld in Middle English* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997).

<sup>103</sup> See above p. 169, n. 146.

<sup>104</sup> See *Life*, ch. 42-43, pp. 108-110.

<sup>105</sup> *Life*, ch. 2, p. 34.

the supposed prophecy. Mary was Christina's feudal lord, her protectress and mediatrix, powerful to grant her graces. It was the monastery of the Blessed Mother of God that Christina was forbidden from attending, and she fixed her mind on Mary to help her get through the ordeals of fashionable society imposed by her parents.<sup>106</sup> It was Mary who comforted Christina in her youth and gave her the land at Markyate; she who rebuked Burthred to persuade him to relinquish his claims on Christina; and she who interceded to obtain for Christina the all important crowning by angels vision; cured her deathbed illness; and took her dying brother into royal care.<sup>107</sup> She was also the ultimate model for Christina's own spiritual practice, and in a number of her visions Christina reworked well known Marian scenes.

Christina engaged with whole lifecycle of the Virgin: Mary's Nativity, in the early prophecy about Christina; the Annunciation, when Christ visited her to give her the cross in language taken straight from Gabriel to Mary; the Incarnation, in Christina's nursing of the Christchild and in the importance given to the Christmas feast;<sup>108</sup> and finally Mary's assumption and power in heaven, in Christina's crowning by angels. For the most part we do not learn of Christina's meditating on these and seeing them acted out before her, as Petroff's modes of devotional and participatory visions anticipates that she would:<sup>109</sup> rather they became internalised into her own visionary identity. God looked down, as at the Annunciation, "on the lowliness of his handmaiden", "*immo benigne respexit humilitatem ancille sue*", when Christina felt deserted by Sueno.<sup>110</sup> Yet it is not as this archetype of pending female grief, but as an intimidating royal power, that Christina predominantly understood and imitated Mary. On the Assumption feast when Christ appeared to Christina, the Virgin also terrifyingly appeared to Burthred, persuading him to come and release his wife. If Christina was playing the role of Mary in her own vision, then the angry Mother of God was also in some senses Christina. Where Christ merely comforted Christina and brought promise of change, it was her patroness Mary who had agency in her marital situation and effected its dissolution.<sup>111</sup>

For Christina, Mary and her Son were a co-operative team, in constant dialogue over which of them would attend to her needs and sending each other to resolve her

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<sup>106</sup> *Life*, ch. 8-9, pp. 46-48.

<sup>107</sup> *Life*, ch. 24-25, pp. 74-78; ch. 42-43, pp. 108-112; ch. 51-52, pp. 126-128; ch. 49, p. 124; and ch. 70, pp. 156-160.

<sup>108</sup> For the importance of Christmas see *Life* ch. 64, pp. 148-150 and ch. 80, pp. 182-186.

<sup>109</sup> Petroff, *Visionary Literature*, pp. 9-15.

<sup>110</sup> *Life*, ch. 13, p. 56.

<sup>111</sup> *Life*, ch. 42, p. 108.

problems; but it was ultimately Mary who was the *effective* side of the partnership, and she who is enthroned as Empress in heaven as in Elizabeth Petroff's seventh visionary mode, the feminine principle in the cosmos.<sup>112</sup> When Mary saw that her first apparition to Christina, in which the young woman became her vassal, had not worked, she appeared a second time, boasting of her celestial power and actively chose Christina and her unnamed companion, rather than merely interceding with or deferring to her Son on the subject.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, in Christina's spirituality we learn of no stern Christ-in-judgement whom Mary could have petitioned. During Christina's crowning Mary admittedly interceded rather than act directly, but it was in her effective intervention that Christina sought help. The resulting vision is the equivalent of Hildegard of Bingen's fiery light inflaming her with knowledge of the scriptures in 1141, or Dorothy of Montau's mystical extraction of her heart in 1385:<sup>114</sup> it was a crucial event that shifted the dominant mode of her revelations. It is also the point at which Christina's Mariology and Christology most clearly fuse, and she *becomes Mary*.

The first insular illustrations of the Coronation of the Virgin, though never a common image in England, precede Christina's crowning by angels at the feast of the Assumption. Mary's cult held a special place in Anglo-Saxon England, and a number of her feasts had their earliest success there.<sup>115</sup> During the Mariological ferment of the twelfth-century West, Mary as well as her Son shifted from a figure of power and dominion to a more humanised intercessor: available, affective and suffering.<sup>116</sup> However, in England Nigel Morgan has shown that this shift came to popular fruition only in the thirteenth century; insular twelfth-century monasticism continued to represent Mary as a figure of power.<sup>117</sup> For Christina, situated between older and newer spiritual discourses, Mother and Son were humanised and intimate, but still

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<sup>112</sup> Petroff, *Visionary Literature*, p. 18.

<sup>113</sup> *Life*, ch. 26, p. 78.

<sup>114</sup> Hildegard, *Scivias*, *CCCM*, vol. 43, 'Declaration', and John Marienwerder, *The Life of Dorothea von Montau, a Fourteenth Century Recluse*, trans. Ute Stargardt (NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), bk. II, ch. 1, pp. 77-79.

<sup>115</sup> See Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990).

<sup>116</sup> See R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 227-229. Robert Scribner has convincingly linked this to the shift in semiotic practice during the later middle ages from symbol to sign identified by Julia Kristeva. Meaning was increasingly established through material and visual referents, so Christ's salvific power was understood through his physical suffering, and his mother was soterologically involved through the incarnation, see 'From the Sacred Image to the Sensual Gaze: Sense Perceptions and the Visual in the Objectification of the Female Body in Sixteenth-Century Germany', in *Religion and Culture in Germany 1400-1800*, ed. Lyndal Roper (Leiden: Brill, 2001: original German article published 1992), pp. 129-147, esp. pp. 135-137.

<sup>117</sup> Nigel Morgan, 'Texts and Images of Marian Devotion in English Twelfth-Century Monasticism and their Influence on the Secular Church', in *Monasteries and Society in Medieval Britain*, ed. Benjamin Thompson (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1999), pp. 117-136.

grand rather than fleshy, triumphant rather than suffering. The face of the Queen who Christina saw on a throne shining brighter than the surrounding angels was a face that had some years earlier laid on her lap and promised that she would be able to gaze on her forever. Yet on balance it is in her more traditional guise as majestic *Regina Caeli*, rather than as a tender Bernardine bride and mother, that Christina built her relationship with Mary. Two popular images of Mary found in contemporary art are of particular interest in light of this. The Mother and Child cast Mary's power purely through the incarnation, but the Triumph of the Virgin, (which morphed into the Coronation of the Virgin), gave her power in her own right, as co-ruler of heaven.<sup>118</sup> Christina's own coronation vision must have drawn on a combination of imagery from the Annunciation and the Assumption of the Virgin. Since George Zarnecki has highlighted the compositional similarity between a capital in Reading Abbey (c.1125-1130) showing Mary's Coronation and the Annunciation illustration in the Hildesheim Psalter, there is every likelihood that Christina would have been familiar with the motif.<sup>119</sup> In her crowning, Christina thus laid claim to more than her virginity and spiritual marriage, she became the Queen of Heaven, the effective power in her own life and in the heavens.

This *imitatio Mariae* is particularly worthy of remark, since it has become something of a truism that women were devoted to the human, suffering, erotic Christ and men to his nourishing and caring mother.<sup>120</sup> Some groups of continental women, including 'free recluses' and Cistercian nuns, have been recognised as less Eucharistically orientated and enjoying a special intimacy with Mary,<sup>121</sup> but a particular female devotion to the Virgin seems to be more common still. For example Yvette of Huy (a rare instance of a married beguine from thirteenth century Liège celebrated by a *vita*) was shielded first from rape by an amorous youth, and then from Christ's wrath, by the

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<sup>118</sup> Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and The Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago: UCP, 1987), pp. 43-75.

<sup>119</sup> See George Zarnecki, 'The Coronation of the Virgin on a Capital from Reading Abbey', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 13 (1950), 1-12, esp. p. 5.

<sup>120</sup> This paradigm originates with Simone Roisin, but has been popularised by the work of Caroline Walker Bynum, see *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), esp. pp. 140-141 and 162, and *Holy Feast*, esp. pp. 26 and 267-270. It has been nuanced by, amongst others, Martha Newman's work on the male Cistercian soul as the bride of Christ, 'Crucified by the Virtues: Monks, Lay Brothers and Women in Thirteenth-Century Cistercian Saints' Lives', in *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, ed. Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 182-209.

<sup>121</sup> For recluses see Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses*, p. 15, and her '*Maria Doctrix*: Anchoritic Women, the Mother of God and the Transmission of Knowledge', in *Seeing and Knowing*, pp. 181-191; for Cistercian nuns see Roisin *L'Hagiographie Cistercienne*, p. 115. See also Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 269.

Queen of Heaven.<sup>122</sup> Subsequently, Mary protected and guided the handmaiden given to her by Christ, arranging for a number of sexually transgressive men to be brought to account, and was at Yvette's side at her final unction to lead her to heaven.<sup>123</sup> As she was for Christina, Yvette's Mary was powerful and effective, enthroned in triumph next to her Son. Hugh of Floreffe found Yvette's preference for the Mother over the Son more problematic than did Christina's Writer, and more frequently has her interceding with Christ rather than acting independently from him. Hugh justifies the intimacy because the incarnation created between them a unity of corporeal substance, which makes worship of one the same as worship of the other.<sup>124</sup> Just as it is not possible to consider Mary uniquely important to women with links to the Cistercians, who are themselves noted for their Mariology, nor was she unusually important only to married women of spirit like Yvette and Christina.<sup>125</sup> Elisabeth of Schönau, a Benedictine from the age of twelve, also had a particular intimacy with the Queen of Heaven as her regal mentor. Elisabeth's Mary, though in many ways more powerful and magnificent than Christina's, is, like Yvette's, markedly subject to the Trinitarian Godhead and simultaneously the averter of divine wrath.<sup>126</sup> Her Mary is also more fickle, losing patience and turning her face away when she thinks Elisabeth has shown insufficient ardour in her reverence.<sup>127</sup>

Similarly, for the Helfta nun Gertrude the Great (1256-1301/2), or the Florentine recluse and abbess Blessed Ulmiltà (1226-1310), Mary was a great queen and a powerful and effective patroness, not a dearly beloved intimate and teacher. Gertrude was under her special protection,<sup>128</sup> although she had an anxious relationship with the Virgin Mother who could take control of a visionary scenario,<sup>129</sup> and sometimes

<sup>122</sup> Hugh of Floreffe, *De B. Juetta Sive Jutta, Vidua Reclusa*, AASS, 13<sup>th</sup> January, vol. 2, pp. 145-169; ch. 8.24, pp. 149-150; and ch. 15.44, p. 154. See also the translation by Jo Ann McNamara, *The Life of Yvette of Huy* (Toronto: Peregrina, 2000).

<sup>123</sup> Hugh of Floreffe, *De B. Juetta*, ch. 22.63, p. 158; ch. 32.93, pp. 162-163; and perhaps ch. 20.58, p. 157 (on unsatisfactory men);, and ch. 48.118, p. 167 (on her unction).

<sup>124</sup> Hugh of Floreffe, *De B. Juetta*, ch. 22.64-67, p. 158.

<sup>125</sup> Jennifer Carpenter links Yvette's Mariology to her own marriage and motherhood, but the association does not transfer to other women of spirit, 'Juetta of Huy, Recluse and Mother (1158-1228): Children and Mothering in the Sainly Life', in *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Toronto: Centre for Medieval Studies, 1990), pp. 57-93.

<sup>126</sup> See, for example, Elisabeth, 'First Book of Visions', ch. 5, pp. 46-47; ch. 20, pp. 55-56; ch. 23, pp. 58.

<sup>127</sup> Elisabeth, 'Second Book of Visions', ch. 11-13, pp. 103-105. This motif, when found in Christina's *Life* is used purely to heighten Christina's anticipation and delight in the Queen, not to chastise her.

<sup>128</sup> Gertrude the Great, *Legatus Memorialis Abundantiae Divinae Pietatis*, in *Oeuvres Spirituelles*, ed. P. Doyère and others, *Sources Chrétiennes*, 5 vols (Paris: Cerf, 1967-1986), bk. III, ch. 1 (vol. III, pp. 14-16) See also the translation by Margaret Winkworth, *The Herald of Divine Love* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993).

<sup>129</sup> Gertrude, *Legatus Memorialis*, bk. II, ch. 16, (vol. II, pp. 290-298).

Gertrude resorted to petitioning the gentle Christ to intercede with his own mother for her, in an absolute reversal of their roles as found in male spirituality.<sup>130</sup> St Umiltà brought the praise of Mary into all her sermons, meditated on the whole lifecycle of the Virgin and often enjoyed visions and graces from her; but she always remained a mighty and detached Queen, whilst St John the Evangelist was Umiltà's sweetly beloved friend and co-worker.<sup>131</sup> Instead of seeing Mary as unimportant to women's spirituality, played up by male biographers and then only as the conduit through which the logic of Christ's flesh as female and suffering must pass,<sup>132</sup> Mary should be understood as performing a different but significant role for women than for men.<sup>133</sup> Mary as Queen of Heaven offered female leadership to women who were able to be "freely moving subjects and key players *in propria persona*"<sup>134</sup> in heaven as they could not in the sacred spaces on earth that were controlled by men. Far from being an unachievable ideal,<sup>135</sup> some religious women, like Christina, found in Mary a powerful figure of effective womanhood - sometimes so powerful that she coloured all their other celestial relationships.<sup>136</sup>

### III.II Christology

Surprisingly, for a holy woman who changed her very name to parallel his, Christina did not intimately connect her story with Christ's, nor, for the most part, are her sufferings part of his crucified passion. Indeed the only clear example of *imitatio Christi* in the *Life* is the abandonment of Christina by her friends, a problem that the Writer seems to have also recognised since he integrates the justification for her nomenclature here, though it was evidently a much later choice.<sup>137</sup> This is not to say that her Christological devotion formed an insubstantial part of her spirituality; only

<sup>130</sup> Gertrude, *Legatus Memorialis*, bk. III, ch. 19, (vol. III, pp. 106-110). See also Sharon Elkins, 'Gertrude the Great and the Virgin Mary', *Church History*, 66 (1997), 720-234.

<sup>131</sup> Biagio, *De S. Humiltate Abbatissa*, AASS, 22<sup>nd</sup> May, vol. 5, pp. 205-224. See also the translation by Elizabeth Petroff in *The Consolation of the Blessed* (New York: Alta Gaia Society, 1979), pp. 121-150.

<sup>132</sup> See Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 169.

<sup>133</sup> Robert Scribner has come to a similar conclusion, that Mary was a differently contoured sign for both sexes, although he does not elaborate upon the point, *Religion and Culture*, p. 137.

<sup>134</sup> Ulrike Weithaus, 'Interpretive Essay', in *Agnes Blannbekin, Viennese Beguine: Life and Revelations* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2002), p. 166.

<sup>135</sup> This is the thesis of Marina Warner's otherwise impressive and influential reading of Mary, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976).

<sup>136</sup> For a reading of a different *imitatio Mariae* by a woman of spirit which uses her attributes of motherhood and grief, rather than queenship and power, to carve a position of authority see Liz Herbert McAvoy, 'Motherhood and Margery Kempe' in her *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 28-63.

<sup>137</sup> E.g. Matthew 26.31. *Life*, ch. 13, p. 56.

that amongst women of spirit in the early twelfth century, including Elisabeth of Schönau and Hildegard of Bingen, the human Christ did not carry the erotic charge of intimate embrace found in, to give only one example, the thirteenth century *vita* of Ida of Nivelles (d.1231).<sup>138</sup>

Whereas Mary had a very clear role in Christina's cosmology, her bridegroom Christ did not have a settled identity, and it is in her Christological devotion that the clearest development of a relationship can be seen. Christ was the child to be embraced, the Lord in heaven who could command angels, the guardian of Christina's body, the terrifying bearer of instruction, the modest pilgrim, the Eucharistic priest, the supportive friend. Usually a grown man, when he appeared in the prime of his years at the Christmas feast Christina's Writer felt this needed explanation in a now sadly lost section of the manuscript.<sup>139</sup> Though a helpful husband and thoughtful lord, Christ is neither the Anglo-Saxon *Christus Victor*, nor the courtly lover of *minnemystik*. Physical attraction is hinted at only once, and then obliquely, in the first pilgrim visits, and even when Christ helps Christina to hold Geoffrey back, their hands entwined, there is nothing erotic in the tug-of-war.<sup>140</sup> Christ, more than Mary, comes out of Christina's idealisation of the real roles that the men in her world played. Christina's sexual interests were all projected onto real men and it is tempting to speculate that in her more dignified relationship with Christ, Christina found a man free from the failings that she encountered in the real men to whom she was attached. Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that female devotion to Mary was a prelude to devotion to her Son, whose incarnation she symbolised.<sup>141</sup> Whilst Christina's spiritual focus did shift from primarily Mariological to primarily Christological, these seem to have been different modes, responding to her changing situation, rather than an outgrowth of one another. In her youth she sat on her bed chattering to Jesus as her invisible spiritual companion, and in her adulthood Mary was the Lady receiving her brother into the heavenly courts.<sup>142</sup> Marian visions mostly relate to the affairs of her secular life and family, Christ visions to those of her religious life and family, although in her *imitatio Mariae* Christina qualifies any absolute distinction between the two.

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<sup>138</sup> Goswin of Bossut, *Life of Ida*, in *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of La Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers*, trans. Martinus Cawley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003).

<sup>139</sup> Lacuna at *Life*, ch. 81, p. 188.

<sup>140</sup> *Life*, ch. 80, p. 184 and ch. 73, p. 168.

<sup>141</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 269.

<sup>142</sup> *Life*, ch. 2, p. 36 and ch. 70, p. 158.

The start and end of Christ's life provided the two main bodies in which his humanity was revered by later medieval women of spirit. Despite the evident distance between such women and Christina, her spirituality is embryonic of this piety. Christina took frequent communion when Geoffrey was celebrant, yet this does not seem to have corresponded with a particular devotion on her part. The broken and bleeding body of the passively suffering saviour never penetrated into her spiritual vocabulary, still less her spiritual practice. However she did often experience ecstasy while at Mass, where the metaphors of eating and assimilating are unavoidable, and the Eucharist was the setting for, if not the content of, some of her visions. For example in her second vision about sacrificing Abbot Geoffrey, and perhaps also in her first vision of Mary when a priest lead her to the Queen,<sup>143</sup> Christ stood as if to be celebrant at his own Mass, though he did not become manifest in the transubstantiated specie.<sup>144</sup> On the whole, however, it is Christmas not Easter, and the cradle not the cross, which dominated Christina's Christology. Even when she was released at Easter from her marriage it was on the Sunday of Christ's triumphal resurrection not the Friday of his pain-filled crucifixion, and, as has been seen, this is of lesser consequence than its Marian liturgical setting.

Nursing visions, like Christina's encounter with the Christchild, were also an important and gendered part of the metaphoric landscape of later medieval people of spirit. Christina's was not the first vision of this kind - at least two early medieval Irish saints, Ita (d. 570) and Brigid (d. c.525) were known as the 'wet-nurses of Christ' – but she is an early example in a discourse which made feeding the pervasive symbol of motherhood in women's piety.<sup>145</sup> Although full of sweetness, and the only vision in which she achieves the kind of fusion with Christ passing through the boundaries of her body that was later common, for Christina this encounter carried connotations of wholeness, not personal dissolution into the Godhead. It restored her after her time with the Lustful Cleric threatened her virginity, and reconfirmed her *imitatio Mariae*. Interestingly Christina's nativity devotion is separated out from any Eucharistic connotation, despite the Eucharist, as the body of Christ, tying together Mary's

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<sup>143</sup> *Life*, ch. 79, pp. 180-182 and ch. 24, p. 74.

<sup>144</sup> This contrasts with the many visions of Christ in the specie, for example the seventh vision of Hadewijch of Antwerp in which a child comes from the altar bearing the Eucharistic elements, transforms into the adult man from the passion, gives her the chalice and host and then embraces her until Hadewijch is unable to distinguish her own self from his, see Frank Willaert, *Hadewijch: Visionen* (Amsterdam: Uitgererij Promotheus, 1996), pp. 78-83. See also translation by Columba Hart in *Hadewijch: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 280-282.

<sup>145</sup> On this discourse see Bynum, *Holy Feast*.

incarnation of his flesh and its ultimate suffering.<sup>146</sup> This division is unusual even amongst her English contemporary visionaries; for example Godric of Finchale saw the Christchild clamber twice out of the crucifix in his oratory, the first time from its mouth to exchange embraces in the arms of his mother's statue, and the second from the lateral wound, skipping playfully around before marking the hermit with the sign of the cross and returning to the crucified body.<sup>147</sup>

Christina's relationships with Mary and with Christ always implicate each other. Mary's role in the Incarnation is the focus for her power, and as Christina's spirituality matured to an orientation on the higher numinous realms this incarnation piety looked to the Christmas feast. Christ did not become the suffering feminine body for Christina: this would have dispensed with the primary need for Mary in a salvific economy where the visionary herself could participate.<sup>148</sup> Too much significance can be accorded to this unusual paradigm, however, which reflects a relatively 'popular', rather than critical theological, engagement with Son and Mother on Christina's part, as well as the transitional nature of her spirituality. Christina's understanding of Christ, like her understanding of human men, was complex; her understanding of Mary, like her understanding of her own vocation, was absolute.

### III.III Trinity

For Christina the most significant visions in her relationship with Abbot Geoffrey were the two which set up the possibility of his accompanying her in spiritual martyrdom. Geoffrey's own interest in their friendship was less committed to a mutual paradigm, and he was moved principally by her vision of a dove flying out from the shoulders of two figures to meet him because of her prayers.<sup>149</sup> The Abbot arranged for this vision to be illustrated in detail in the Hildesheim Psalter litany introduction, alongside the Trinity invocation by a number of small nuns around a preposterously large monk,<sup>150</sup> in an illustration which mixes a concern for accuracy with a deliberate reinterpretation

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<sup>146</sup> On the relationship between nativity devotion and spiritual marriage amongst later women of spirit see Rosemary Hale, *'Imitatio Mariae: Motherhood Motifs in Devotional Memoirs'*, *Mystics Quarterly*, 16 (1990), 193-203.

<sup>147</sup> Reginald of Durham, *Libellus de vita et miraculis S. Godrici*, ch. 41, p. 99-101 and ch. 70, pp. 157-159.

<sup>148</sup> However, see also Cartlidge, 'Unknown Pilgrim', pp. 82-83, which nuances this reading, giving the Pilgrim visits a more Eucharistic slant.

<sup>149</sup> Jane Geddes has argued it was this vision which caused Geoffrey to divert the psalter to Christina's use, *St Albans Psalter*, pp. 122-123. Her description of the vision as a "profound moment of shared revelation" is correct to the extent that Geoffrey is implicated in the vision by hearing about it and re-interpreting it; but he was not present at or participating in the moment of encounter itself.

<sup>150</sup> Hildesheim Psalter, p. 403.

of the original vision. Peter Kidd has pointed out that the wings of the dove are carefully re-arranged from extended to folded to match the description in the *Life*,<sup>151</sup> but the other two figures are re-dressed from the white of the vision, a motif used throughout for angels,<sup>152</sup> to the blue and red of the Godhead. Christina's own interpretation is more modest, the vision is evidence to her only of the Abbot's need for the Holy Spirit. Given the sequestration of this vision by St Albans it is worth looking more closely at whether Christina's own spirituality was strongly Trinitarian.

Patterns of threes in Christina's visions are unmissable: there are three visits of the Queen of Heaven; three apparitions of Christ (the last of which, the pilgrim-Christ, is broadly set over three scenes); three times that Christina restrains Geoffrey from travel; three ways that she knows her prayers are answered; three examples of her clairvoyance near the end of the *Life*; three men who have dreams rebuking them for doubting or persecuting Christina's holiness, and so on. Trinity devotion, like that of the Virgin Mary, had a special place in England, with an established Anglo-Saxon cult as well as renewed enthusiasm for church dedications brought over with the Normans.<sup>153</sup> Under popular pressure Thomas Becket introduced Trinity Sunday in England over 150 years before it became accepted on the continent as a feast of the universal church. Ursula Rowlett has suggested that for the English laity the Trinity was a more accessible devotion than the complex message of crucifixion salvation, and points out that the number three was used talismanically in all fields of life.<sup>154</sup> Perhaps, then, Christina recalled her visions within a framework that anticipated the Trinitarian patterns which shaped the rhythms of popular symbolic gesture.

There are three visions in the *Life* that have Trinitarian implications: the three angels who guide Roger to Markyate; the three-or-one lights Christina sees when her prayers are answered; and the Geoffrey-and-dove vision just mentioned. The iconography of the first has solid Anglo-Saxon precedent, where the Trinity was represented either by the hand, dove and lamb of Christ's baptism or by its prefiguration in the three men

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<sup>151</sup> See Jane Geddes, 'The Alexis Quire: Illustrations and Discourse on Good and Evil', <[www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/essays/alexisquire.shtml](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/essays/alexisquire.shtml)> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008].

<sup>152</sup> See for example *Life*, ch. 23, p. 74, where a Jewess sees two angels in white accompanying Christina.

<sup>153</sup> See Barbara Raw, *Trinity and Incarnation in Anglo-Saxon Art and Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), esp. pp. 12-13 on church dedications in the Anglo-Saxon cult. See Binns, *Dedications*, pp. 18-27 and Haywood, 'Translation Narratives', p. 90, on the Norman fashion for central cults such as the Trinity being introduced into English church dedication patterns. Between 1066 and 1216, the Holy Trinity leapt to being the third most common choices of English church dedication, particularly amongst Benedictine communities. Markyate was therefore dedicated in accordance with the fashions of the time.

<sup>154</sup> Ursula Rowlett, 'Popular Representations of the Trinity in England, 990-1300', *Folklore*, 112 (2001), 201-210.

appearing to Abraham.<sup>155</sup> The abstract Trinity which is shrouded in light need not draw directly on any particular image, so ubiquitous is the divine light motif. The construction of two identical figures with a bird, however, is extremely unusual.<sup>156</sup> Only two pre-conquest images from the early eleventh-century may possibly contain the composition, an ivory seal of the thegn Godwine and the Bury psalter psalm 109 illumination. The Godwin seal is a truncation of the Quinity found in the Aelfwine Prayerbook made for the Abbot of Newminster (1031-1057), where Christ's divine and human natures are separated out into a mother and child image, and since it is damaged there can be no certainty that the dove was included.<sup>157</sup> The Bury psalter, made at Christ Church Canterbury, is a straight Trinity, though each Person is in their own mandorla.<sup>158</sup> From the Carolingian Utrecht psalter onwards, Binity illustrations of Psalm 109 asserting the co-enthronement of Christ with his Father were common in the West. François Boespflug and Yolanta Zaluska note something of a vogue for them in English psalter illustrations 1125-1160, seeing the Hildesheim litany illustration as an extension of these.<sup>159</sup> Nevertheless the St Albans psalter is itself one of the most innovative texts, with the only comparably 'Trinity of the Psalter' in a late-twelfth or early-thirteenth century sacramentary from Tours,<sup>160</sup> so it is difficult to see where Christina would have gained inspiration for her vision. Indeed it is unlikely that she would have had any reason to be familiar with changes in manuscript iconography, and evidence for any representations of the Trinity in wall paintings or other monumental art in England is not substantial.<sup>161</sup>

If Christina's dove vision was self-consciously Trinitarian then she was extraordinarily spiritually innovative not only in iconography, but in the very content of her encounter. Although for the early Christian theorists of 'mysticism', including Evagrius Ponticus, Pseudo-Dionysius, Augustine and John Scottus Eriugena, the Trinity is at the heart of the *visio Dei*,<sup>162</sup> few known visions of the Trinity precede those in Christina's

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<sup>155</sup> Raw, *Trinity*, pp. 78-80.

<sup>156</sup> The composition does, however, have a secular classical precedent, in the *synthronismoi* with the *Victoria* bird, see Ernest Kantorowicz, 'The Quinity of Winchester', *The Art Bulletin*, 29 (1949), 73-85, esp. pp. 77-78.

<sup>157</sup> See Raw, *Trinity*, p. 161 and Kantorowicz, 'Quinity', p. 74, n. 6.

<sup>158</sup> See Raw, *Trinity*, fig. XIb.

<sup>159</sup> François Boespflug and Yolanta Zaluska, 'La Dogma Trinitaire et l'Essor de Son Iconographie en Occident de l'Époque Carolingienne au IV<sup>e</sup> Concile du Latran (1215)', *Cahier de Civilisation Médiévale*, 37 (1994), pp. 181-248, esp. pp. 216 and 227.

<sup>160</sup> *Sacramentaire de Saint-Martin de Tours*, Tours, BM, MS 0193, fol. 059, 193. Available on *Le Moyen Âge en Lumière* project, <[www.moyenageenlumiere.com/image/index.cfm?id=20](http://www.moyenageenlumiere.com/image/index.cfm?id=20)>, [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008].

<sup>161</sup> I am grateful to Anne Marshall for help on this point, *Pers. Corr.* March 2008.

<sup>162</sup> See McGinn, *Foundations*, pp. 152-155, 160-165, 243-248, and *Growth*, pp.101-106.

*Life*.<sup>163</sup> The sixth-century Irish ‘wet-nurse of Christ’, St Ita, had a highly Trinitarian spirituality, not only having symbolic visions of the Trinity herself, but also being the focus for others to see them, in three bright lights.<sup>164</sup> In the early twelfth-century, Norbert of Xanten (c.1080-1134), a religious founder rather than a noted man of spirit, was tempted by the devil masquerading as the Trinity in a three-headed form - a popular image condemned in 1628 by Pope Urban VIII.<sup>165</sup> More notable are the visions in the autobiographical account of Rupert of Deutz (c.1075-1129).<sup>166</sup> The Benedictine abbot saw three visions in which the persons appeared separately, and one of the whole Trinity. The three persons are anthropomorphised, as in their Abrahamic pre-figuration, as persons of matching reverence and dignity beyond the power of language to describe, “*tres personae states habitus valde reverendi et dignitatis, quantam nulla potest lingua verbis consequi*”. For Rupert it is Christ, not the Holy Spirit, who is distinguishable from the other two persons, being a youth to their white-haired age in both his Crucifixion and Trinity visions, “*duae personae multum antiquae, id est valde cani errant capitis, persona tertia ut speciosus astatat iuuenis, regina dignitate, ut ex vestitueius poterat agnosci*”.<sup>167</sup>

Precedents in contemporary culture, art, other visionaries and Christina’s own mentor Roger, lean towards representing the Trinity as three identical motifs. Therefore the hand of Geoffrey, an educated cleric well versed no doubt in the *filioque* controversy of the previous century,<sup>168</sup> is probably visible in making the dove vision into a Trinity. After Christina, many women of spirit, including Yvette of Huy and Juliana of St Cornillon, had encounters in which the unity of the Trinity was revealed to them.<sup>169</sup>

<sup>163</sup> According to the French thirteenth-century chronicler Helinand of Froidmont (c.1166-c.1237) a British hermit saw a vision of the Holy Trinity whilst his soul was touring the otherworld in 717, which he records in a text called the *Gradale*. The former troubadour claims to be using French texts held by noblemen and his interpretation necessarily brings much later imagery and expectations to the vision, reducing its value as a precedent. *Helandi Frigidi Montis Monaschi Chronicon*, PL 212:711- 1082, col. 814-815.

<sup>164</sup> St Ita, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, ed. Carolus Plummer, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), II, pp. 116-130, ch. 3, p. 117 and ch. 23, p. 124. See also ch. 26, p.125 and ch. 30, p.127.

<sup>165</sup> *Vita Norberti, Archiepiscopi Magdeburgensis*, *MGH Scriptores*, 12, Version A, pp. 663-703, ch. 9, pp. 667-680. See also the translation by Theodore Antry and others, *Norbert and Early Norbertine Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007) pp. 138-139.

<sup>166</sup> See also François Boespflug, ‘La Vision de la Trinité de Norbert of Xanta et de Roupert de Deutz’, *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 71 (1997), 205-229.

<sup>167</sup> Rupert of Deutz, *De Gloria et Honore Filli Hominis Super Mattheum*, *CCCM*, 29 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), Book 12, p. 371. On Rupert theological writings on the Trinity see John van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), esp. pp. 74-81 and 352-369.

<sup>168</sup> Although not well-stocked with material on the question, by the middle of the twelfth-century the St Albans library contained a copy of Hilary of Poitiers’s *De Trinitate* (Thomson, *Manuscripts*, cat. no. 8), which supports the progression of the Spirit from Father and Son, e.g. Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, ed. P. Smulders, *CCSL*, 62-62a (1979-1980), bk. II, ch. 29 and bk. XII, ch. 56.

<sup>169</sup> Hugh of Floreffé, *De B. Juetta*, ch. 23.71, p. 159. John of Lausanne, *De B. Juliana*, ch. 4.20, p. 449.

Others had visions of symbolic Trinities, for example Hildegard of Bingen's saw it as a pillar,<sup>170</sup> and Elisabeth of Schönau (in a vision which most closely matches Christina's dove vision) as two trees in the celestial city with a river between them.<sup>171</sup> For still others, such as Gertrude the Great and Hadewijch of Antwerp, the Trinitarian qualities of humanity reflecting the Godhead are the critical seasoning which pervades their spirituality. None of these women of spirit seem to be making the point that Geoffrey does in the litany illustration. It is unlikely that Geoffrey was deliberately setting out to twist Christina's visions to his own ends; indeed his interpretation of the dove vision probably seemed the natural one given the slant of her piety evident from details like her only miracle being undertaken in the name of the Trinity.<sup>172</sup> The Trinity was perhaps a subject for the many intimate conversations between the Abbot and the holywoman, and there may even have been a wider climate of devotion in Christina's social networks and around St Albans, visible through church dedications. St Albans had owned the Church of the Holy Trinity, later a dependant priory at Wallingford, since the time of Abbot Paul (1077-1093),<sup>173</sup> and the house was also closely linked with Christchurch Canterbury which Lanfranc had rededicated to the Holy Trinity. Ranulf Flambard, a patron of St Albans if not of Christina, rebuilt the Hampshire foundation of secular canons at Christchurch, Twynham, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, and the first prior of Holy Trinity Aldgate witnessed the Markyate foundation charter of Markyate.<sup>174</sup> Such a climate of Trinitarian piety would have lent weight to the decision to dedicate Markyate away from Christina's patroness Mary.

As with Christina's Christology, her Trinitarian devotion may have been influenced by her Mariology. The two are not directly connected in the visions found in the *Life*, but her psalter contains another unusual Trinity illustration for the Credo that is suggestive of her influence, which also includes Mary in the composition. The Credo is illustrated by Quinities in both the Utrecht psalter and its late twelfth-century imitator, the Canterbury psalter. These have Mary holding her Son in her arms with the dove on her head illustrating the Incarnation, and the Father accompanied by a symbol of Christ's divinity, making up the five figures in all.<sup>175</sup> In the Hildesheim Credo, however, there

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<sup>170</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, vol. 93a, bk. III, vision 7, pp. 462-478. Elisabeth of Schönau had a similar vision, 'Second Book of Visions', ch. 4, pp. 98-99, which Anne Clark suggests was inspired by the older Benedictine, *Elisabeth of Schönau*, p. 22.

<sup>171</sup> Elisabeth, 'Third Book of Visions', ch. 1-2, pp. 117-120.

<sup>172</sup> *Life*, ch. 46, pp. 118-120.

<sup>173</sup> *GA*, I, p56.

<sup>174</sup> See Binns, *Dedications*, pp. 66, 128 and 141.

<sup>175</sup> Utrecht psalter fol. 90 and Canterbury psalter fol. 278v, see Kantorowicz, 'Quinity', pp. 78-79.

is no Christchild, nor any symbol of his divinity; instead the adult Christ and his mother stand side-by-side surmounted by an open-winged dove,<sup>176</sup> a composition that almost exactly matches the litany illumination. Instead of turning to each other, as in the litany, Mother and Son both look up to a celestial Father, who is being pointed out by a monk.<sup>177</sup> There is no incestuous slip from Mary as Christ's parent to his bride, as there often was in later medieval quaternities, but we are reminded of the intimacy between Christ and his Mother as an effective team in Christina's cosmology and, as François Boespflug notes, the absence of any suffering Christs, as lamb or cross, in any of the psalter illustrations, Trinitarian or otherwise.<sup>178</sup> It would be inconsistent with the piety of later women of spirit to contend that the Trinity was important to Christina *because* her Christology was incarnational rather than suffering. However, Mary was the accessible face of Trinitarian power for both Christina and her Mariologically orientated contemporary Elisabeth of Schönau; and in the fleur-de-lys, the flowering branch of Jesse which links the Marys of the Hildesheim Psalter and of her visions with Christina's own *imitatio Mariae*, there is also a symbol of the Trinity.<sup>179</sup>

#### IV. Affective Piety and Visionary Praxis

The three central motifs identifiable in Christina's visionary life coincided with (and contributed to) contemporary devotional practice. In the early twelfth century a flurry of texts emerged from the cloister as teaching aids for a direct and personal spirituality. These were produced and circulated in particularly large numbers in England, where Anselm, in his *Prayers and Meditations* (c.1070-1080), was amongst the first to invite readers to stir up inner religious affections through private devotional meditation.<sup>180</sup> Read particularly by women, Anselm's work belongs alongside the influential

<sup>176</sup> See Goldschmidt, *Der Albanipsalter*, p. 136.

<sup>177</sup> Hildesheim Psalter, p. 396.

<sup>178</sup> Boespflug, 'La Vision de la Trinité de Christine de Marquate', p. 107.

<sup>179</sup> See for comparison Gertrude, *Legatus Memorialis*, bk. III, ch. 18, (vol. III, pp. 84), "*As quod illa ex minutissimo carbone convalescens in viriditatem arbores, cuius rami in tres partes ad modum lilii dividebantur. Quam arborem Filius Dei assumens, cum gratitudine et Gloria semper venerandae Trinitati praesentavit. Qua praesentata, tota beata Trinitas tanta dignatione se ipsi acclinavit.*"

<sup>180</sup> *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm*, trans. Benedicta Ward (London: Penguin, 1973). On this transition see Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages*, esp. 'From Epic to Romance', pp. 209-244. For one overview of the way in which the texts supporting affective piety developed see John Hirsh, 'The Origins of Affective Devotion', in *The Boundaries of Faith: The Development and Transmission of Medieval Spirituality* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 11-62. Recent work has questioned whether there was a comprehensive shift in English sensibilities during the mid-eleventh century, and has challenged the exclusion of Anglo-Saxon spirituality from narratives of affectivity, see Allen Frantzen, 'Spirituality and Devotion in the Anglo-Saxon Penitentials', and Scott DeGregorio, 'Affective Spirituality: Theory and Practice in Bede and Alfred the Great', both in *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 22 (2005), 117-128 and 129-139.

visualisations that Aelred proposed for his sister. Aelred lead the anchoress on a step-by-step meditation from sitting reading with Mary, to the prophecies of the virgin birth, through Christmas and the life and crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>181</sup> He repeatedly draws the virgin reader's attention to the Virgin Mother and virgin disciple, and so to her own vocational assimilation into the gospel stories. She is also invited to recall that this special relationship brought with it privileges, in the form of a special and delightful intimacy with Christ. "*How often*", Aelred reminds her, "*he came to your side to bring you loving consolation when you were dried up by fear, how often he infused himself into your innermost being when you were on fire with love... how often he carried you away with a certain unspeakable longing for himself when you were at prayer, how often he lifted up your mind from the things of the earth and introduced it into the delights of heaven and the joys of paradise*".<sup>182</sup>

This kind of meditation or visualisation could be directly preparatory to the encountering of visions, as when Christina's reflection on the liturgy for the coming feast of Christmas disposed her for being transported to see Christ in the St Albans choir.<sup>183</sup> It could also be indirectly preparatory, providing the imagery that shaped visions of angels, saints, the Virgin Mary and Christ. Instructions such as Aelred's offered external bodily practices that could trigger emotional internal spiritual experiences. In this sense, the performances of affective piety do not contrast sharply with rule-driven 'doctrinal' modes of religious practice. The distinction lies instead in what such performances achieved: affective piety facilitated an individual spiritual subjectivity through discursively imposed practices, which could be the context for an encounter mediating between the devout performer and God. Undoubtedly the spontaneous visions which dominate extant textual records before the twelfth century continued to be an important component of the spiritual landscape. Nevertheless, amongst the reasons for visionary culture flourishing in the high and later Middle Ages was the popularisation of practices which brought the *possibility* of personal and intimate numinous encounter to the forefront of spiritual expectations amongst the groups using them.<sup>184</sup> It is neither necessary to pathologise visions, nor to reduce them

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<sup>181</sup> Aelred's text was also influential for the composition of later works including *Ancrene Wisse*, see Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson 'Introduction', in *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), pp. 7-32.

<sup>182</sup> "*Quotiens prae timore arescenti pius consolator astabat, quotiens aestuanti prae amore ipse se tuis visceribus infundebat... quotiens orantem in quoddam ineffabile desiderium sui rapiebat, quotiens mentem tuam a terrenis subtractam ad caelestes delicias et paradisiacas amoenitates transportabat*". Aelred *De Institutione Inclusarum*, bk. III, ch. 32, p. 676, translation by Macpherson, 'Rule for a Recluse', p. 96.

<sup>183</sup> *Life*, ch. 80, pp. 184-186.

<sup>184</sup> On practice (or *doing*) making belief (or *knowing*) possible see also Talal Asad on the Rule of St Benedict, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins

to hyper-imaginings, in order to recognise that sustained visualisation within the setting of the monastic disciplines created an environment conducive to visions. There are, however, some problems of evidence that must be acknowledged before the process of how Christina learned to become a visionary can be considered.

The first problem is that England with its abundant literature of spiritual direction was not also abundant in noted visionaries. Brenda Bolton has proposed that the availability of written devotional tools was, contrarily, amongst a nexus of reasons why England did not develop beguine-type lifestyles or spirituality, since the literature successfully filled the corresponding spiritual needs of women.<sup>185</sup> Certainly some of the literature was actively resistant to the affective visions of women, with *Ancrene Wisse* warning that all dreams and visions should be ignored as demonic deception, “*Na sihðe þet Ʒe seoð, ne i swefne ne waken, ne telle Ʒe bute dweole, for nis hit bute his gile*”.<sup>186</sup> Paradoxically, that such a warning was felt necessary by the anonymous Augustinian writer suggests visionary activity was being cultivated through meditative practice in vernacular anchoritic culture, even though it was not being supported by the kind of enthusiastic male patronage enjoyed by the Beguines. Two helpful observations highlight the tension in the English situation: Jane Zatta points out that the politics of an increasingly centralised monarchy caused the later twelfth-century Church to encourage liturgical devotion rather than interior personal spirituality,<sup>187</sup> and for the same period Nicholas Watson reveals the emotional inner life in *Ancrene Wisse* as similar in intensity, if not in direction, to the texts of fourteenth-century English people of spirit.<sup>188</sup> It seems likely that there was not strictly an absence of women of spirit in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England, but that the boundaries between high

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University Press, 1993), pp. 62-65, and Richard Jenkins on the work of Bourdieu, *Pierre Bourdieu* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 69.

<sup>185</sup> Brenda Bolton, ‘Some Thirteenth Century Women in the Low Countries: A Special Case?’, *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, 61 (1981), 7-29, see also her ‘Thirteenth-Century Religious Women: Further Reflections of the Low Countries “Special Case”’ in *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liège and Their Impact*, ed. Juliette Dor and others (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), pp. 129-152. Interestingly Joanna Zeigler in ‘Reality as Imitation’, makes a similar point for the Beguines themselves in the later-thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, where visual imagery was used to encourage the externalising of spiritual experience away from raptures and revelations.

<sup>186</sup> *Ancrene Wisse, A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 402 with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, ed. Bella Millett (EETS, 325: 2005), bk. IV, p. 86. See also Watson, ‘Julian of Norwich’, pp. 647-648.

<sup>187</sup> Jane Zatta, ‘The Vie Seinte Osith: Hagiography and Politics in Anglo-Norman England’, *Studies in Philology*, 96 (1999), 367-393, esp. p. 369.

<sup>188</sup> Nicholas Watson, ‘The Methods and Objectives of Thirteenth Century Anchoritic Devotion’, in *Medieval Mystical Tradition in England IV*, pp. 132-152, esp. from p. 143.

and low culture, and between interesting and insignificant visions, were drawn in a different place by many prelates than they were on the continent.<sup>189</sup>

The second problem is that not everyone using spiritual visualisation tools had numinous encounters. In a given monastic or anchoritic community all members probably used the same devotional materials, saw the same church art and participated in the same liturgy, yet even within one house some had visions whilst others did not. Christina Ebner has become as well known amongst modern scholars for her surprise at a fellow nun who did not have visions, as she is for her spiritual writings,<sup>190</sup> but it is reasonable to surmise that the balance more usually leaned towards only a minority of visionaries in a community. Strongly constructivist approaches to visions which entirely privilege the circumstances within which they occur, are unable to account for the initiating figure in a visionary community. Why an individual might begin to have visions that include images otherwise commonly found in vision literature but which are not already known to them (for example, through circulating texts), is particularly apposite when considering the shifting spirituality of the twelfth century.

Ernest Hartmann's psychological model of boundaries may provide a tool to help surmount these difficulties.<sup>191</sup> In his work on nightmare sufferers, Hartmann has used qualitative and quantitative methods to establish a spectrum in personality types which he calls thick to thin boundaried. These boundaries are not structures as such, but a "new dimension of the personality", through which he seeks to offer "a broad way of looking at individual difference" that can encompass other personality measures.<sup>192</sup> Thin boundaried people tend to have fluidity and non-cohesive self identity, openness in interpersonal transactions and a lack of overall firmness; thick boundaried people tend towards the opposite. Of the people who vividly remember their dreams, most are thin boundaried, able to overcome the sleeping/waking boundary,<sup>193</sup> a model which can be adapted for all numinous encounters. Importantly, Hartmann's framework of

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<sup>189</sup> For a similar interpretation of the existence of ecstatic visions amongst English religious women see Karras, 'Friendship and Love', p. 316. On male backlash against women of spirit more generally see Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, pp. 184-192.

<sup>190</sup> See for example Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 83, and Watson, 'Julian', p. 643, both citing Felix Vernet, *Mediaeval Spirituality* (London: Sands & Co, 1930), p. 61.

<sup>191</sup> Hartmann, *Boundaries in the Mind*. See also his 'Thought People and Dream People: Individual Differences on the Waking to Dreaming Continuum', in *Individual Differences in Conscious Experience*, ed. Robert Kunzendorf and Benjamin Wallace (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1999), pp. 251-267.

<sup>192</sup> Hartmann, *Boundaries*, p. 7. For one critique of Hartmann's model see Glen Gabbard and Eva Lester, *Boundaries and Boundary Violations in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), pp. 14-17.

<sup>193</sup> Hartmann, *Boundaries*, p. 151.

characteristics that render some individuals more open to the numinous, emphasises that thin-boundaried people are no more neurotic or psychopathic than their less open counterparts.<sup>194</sup> Hartmann's boundary levels do not preclude the reality of people of spirit having a privileged access to the divine, nor assume they are necessarily mistaken in understanding their own encounters. It does, however, provide an insight into the sadly isolated nun at Engelthal mentioned by Christina Ebner, who was suffering the all the troubles of her meditations without enjoying their advantages, or, for our purposes, how a visionary community might spring up around a charismatic solitary like Christina.

Christina's spiritual maturation was, at least in part, the outcome of a process of education whereby she learned to be a visionary as well as a saint. This education came from texts and teachers, and from a reflexive praxis of encountering the divine, whereby she reflected on her encounters, brought her life to bear on her meditations and brought her meditations to bear on her life.<sup>195</sup> In this sense Christina was similar to her German contemporaries Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau, neither of whom follow the 'Unitive Way', but both developed their charismatic persona through their revelations and progressed towards God through the education rather than the sublimation of the spiritual self.

#### IV.I Images, Visions and the Hildesheim Psalter

Christina's meditations show no evidence of reaching the narrative complexity of later women of spirit, of whom Bhattacharji suggests it is "difficult to posit a definite boundary between... visualisations, themselves experienced as a gift, and actual 'visions', experienced as unexpected and unsought supernatural phenomena".<sup>196</sup> However she was practising visualisation from a very young age, contemplating her deathbed whilst her family revelled nearby before she had even made her vow of virginity, and before she had any visions. Most of the imagery co-opted into Christina's

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<sup>194</sup>Hartmann, *Boundaries*, p. 100. Hartmann does identify childhood trauma as affecting the extent to which boundaries thicken in the progression to adulthood, but notably finds no correlation between thin boundaries and artistic creativity with its associated manipulations of fantasy. He suggests that very thin boundaried people have some qualities in common with schizotypal personality disorder, and very thick boundaried with obsessive compulsive disorders, but concludes that at neither end is a medical diagnosable disorder inevitable or even common. My interpretation of Hartmann's tool is to be contrasted with that of Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), esp. pp. 55-59, a collaborative partnership between a psychiatrist and a historian who see mysticism primarily as the outcome of "self-injurious behaviours".

<sup>195</sup> Reflexive praxis has a different set of specific meanings in some strands of Christian thinking, notably liberation theology and Orthodox theology, which are not implied here.

<sup>196</sup> Bhattacharji, 'Medieval Contemplation', p. 56.

visions came from her day-to-day experiences of encounters with bishops, pilgrims to St Albans, of liturgical vestments and of crusading fervour. However, their content was also inspired by and illustrated in the Hildesheim Psalter, which had originally been diverted to her use because of her visionary powers. The close relationship between Christina's visions and the psalter was noted by Christopher Holdsworth in 1978, and is a theme that has been further developed in recent work by Morgan Powell.<sup>197</sup>

The Hildesheim Psalter is particularly noted for its lavish illustrations, yet theoretically the meditational practices of western monasticism were to be imageless: a question that was causing controversy about the time that the Alexis quire was composed. The quire defended Christina's lay recluse status, and therefore the permissible use of images, through Gregory the Great's classic letter to Bishop Serenus of Marseilles.<sup>198</sup> Around the same time, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) was turning Gregory's positive justification of didactic art into a negative attack on its suitability for a literate monastic viewer;<sup>199</sup> and conversely Abbot Suger of St Denis (c.1081-1151) was championing monastic art as a meditative tool and form of spiritual *lectio* which was *only* suitable for the theologically educated and literate, in his building programme and writings.<sup>200</sup> In practice, Jeffrey Hamburger has shown that nuns were in the vanguard of using images as visualisation tools,<sup>201</sup> and argues that by 1300 imageless devotion did not even remain an ideal as part of numinous encounters: "imagery was, to the contrary, frequently considered an ideal vehicle for transporting the soul to God".<sup>202</sup> Hamburger also identifies the difficulty of moving beyond simply noting parallels between art and vision to articulating the significance and direction of the relationship,<sup>203</sup> a problem that is acute in the case of Christina. Some of Christina's visions are illustrated in the psalter (as has been shown for the Trinity images), some derive part of their inspiration from her meditations on the codex, and in some cases it is not clear whether a relationship should be identified at all.

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<sup>197</sup> Holdsworth, 'Christina of Markyate'. Powell, 'The Visual'.

<sup>198</sup> Hildesheim Psalter, p. 68. On Gregory's letter see Lawrence Duggan, 'Was Art Really the Book of the Illiterate?', *Word and Image*, 5 (1989), 227-251, and Celia Chazelle, 'Pictures, Books and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I's Letters to Serenus of Marseilles', *Word and Image*, 6 (1990), 138-153

<sup>199</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia ad Guillelmum*, *PL*, 182: 895-918.

<sup>200</sup> Abbot Suger, *On the Abbey of St Denis and its Art Treasures*, ed. and trans. Erwin Panofsky, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). On the close relationship between images for monastic and lay use more generally see Miriam Gill, 'The Role of Images in Monastic Education: The Evidence from Wall Paintings in Late Medieval England', in *Medieval Monastic Education*, pp. 117-135.

<sup>201</sup> Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, and 'The Visual and the Visionary: The Image in Late Medieval Monastic Devotions', *Viator*, 20 (1989), 161-182.

<sup>202</sup> Hamburger, 'The Visual', p. 170.

<sup>203</sup> Hamburger, 'The Visual', p. 167.

The three-picture Emmaus cycle and Christina's vision of the Pilgrim-Christ offer the clearest examples of her meditations on the psalter impacting on her visionary self. Morgan Powell has established from the dating of the Emmaus composition that the relationship must be from psalter to vision,<sup>204</sup> although he overstates the novelty of this arrangement since similar iconographic inspiration must also lie behind St Aldegund's vision of letters circling the head of an angel in the seventh century and St Leoba's prophetic dream of a great purple ribbon coming out of her mouth in the eighth century.<sup>205</sup> Both cycle and vision contain three 'scenes', the first of mis-recognition of the pilgrim, the second of recognition and the third of disappearance. But Christina's vision is not simply a literal re-performance of this dramatic text.<sup>206</sup> Her misrecognition is spread over two meetings, so the shared bread and fish meal is at the second meeting in both the *Life* and the illustration, but the mis-recognition should be understood as part of the first 'scene' in the *Life*, rather than the second. Christina also brings to her vision a variety of other concerns and motifs, not least the matching crowns of her spiritual nuptials. The Emmaus story is adapted to support Christina's claims to her own sanctity, a claim which is backed up by the witness of her own community. On Christmas day the Pilgrim-Christ visits the Abbey of St Albans and Christina is miraculously transported to see him approving of the monks' reverent chanting. The next day he attends Mass at Markyate, where he is seen by the whole community rather than just by Christina as he had been the day before. Both places, it is implied, are therefore pilgrimage sites which contain the bodies of Christ's dearly loved saints, and should attract devout visitors.

Christina's particular devotion to, and imitation of, the Queen of Heaven is not profusely recognised in the Psalter. Where Mary is illustrated, the connection to Christina's visions is a good example of the need for what Penny Schine Gold terms "a commitment to seeing complexity" in the relationship between images and experiences of women.<sup>207</sup> One example of this can be found in the flowering branches that operate in Christina's visionary praxis as representations of, or substitutions for, her (sartorial) body. From the 1120s onwards, English Benedictine imagery of the

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<sup>204</sup> Powell 'The Visual', pp. 346-347. Holdsworth previously argued for the relationship as being from vision to psalter, and dated the psalter accordingly, 'Christina of Markyate', pp. 192-195.

<sup>205</sup> *Vita S. Aldegundis*, ch. 6, p. 317. Rudolph of Fulda, *Vita Leobae, Abbatissae Biscofesheimensis*, *MGH Scriptores*, 15, pp. 118-131, ch. 8, p. 125. See also translation by C. H. Talbot in *Soldiers of Christ: Saint and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas Noble and Thomas Head (London: Sheed and Ward, 1995), pp. 255-277.

<sup>206</sup> On the Emmaus cycle as liturgical drama see Pächt, *AP*, pp. 73-79 and Cartlidge, 'The Unknown Pilgrim'.

<sup>207</sup> Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin*, p. xix.

Virgin often shows her holding just such a flowering branch in her role as the 'Tree of Jesse',<sup>208</sup> and three of the historiated initials in the psalter which include this motif merit attention.<sup>209</sup> In psalm 18, illustrating the verse "as a bridegroom coming out of his bride-chamber...He hath set his tabernacle in the sun", Christ is in a chamber holding a flowering branch whilst a small head of the sun watches over him. In psalm 71 Mary holds a flowering branch whilst the Magi adore her Son, who is seated on her lap. Mother and child are arranged as for the 'Throne of Wisdom', which Roberta Gilchrist has shown to be an enduringly popular composition amongst monastic women.<sup>210</sup> Finally in psalm 118 a woman holds a flowering branch in resistance against her lustful husband.<sup>211</sup> The relationship between these initials and the visions in the *Life* are evident, but hard to define. Do psalms 71 and 118 separate and illustrate the component parts of Christina's youthful vision of Mary,<sup>212</sup> or simply make use of stock contemporary motifs? Similarly the psalm 18 illustration looks remarkably like the head of Christina watching over Geoffrey's night-time revelation,<sup>213</sup> but without clear dating it is impossible to know whether their shared vision drew inspiration from jointly reading the psalter, whether the artwork was an amendment to illustrate the vision, or whether the likeness is simply coincidental.

The miniature cycle accords an unusually prominent place to women in the Jesus story and includes the most important illustrations of Mary. Yet it is easy to overestimate the direct connection between these and Christina's spirituality, and a final example from the cycle will consolidate the case for the real but indirect role of the Psalter in informing Christina's visions. The descent from the cross scene includes two extra unidentified characters on either side of the cross; the woman has a nimbus but the man does not. They perhaps illustrate Nicodemus and a second Mary,<sup>214</sup> but the likeness to Christina's last reported vision about Geoffrey, in which she saw herself and the abbot on either side of Christ at the altar (and so at the celebration of his sacrifice) is striking. But without being able to accurately date this vision it is impossible to know whether it or the miniature came first, and so whether this is another example of

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<sup>208</sup> Isaiah 11.1, "there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots". See Nigel Morgan, 'Texts and Images of Marian devotion', esp. p. 133.

<sup>209</sup> Psalms 89, 91 and 136 also include branches which illustrate a particular point of the psalm, for example the willows of Babylon.

<sup>210</sup> Gilchrist, *Gender*, pp. 146-148. On the Throne of Wisdom see Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>211</sup> On psalm 118 and the redirection of the psalter see Geddes, *St Albans Psalter*, p. 99 and 'The Abbot and the Anchoress', pp. 200-202; and Powell, 'Making the Psalter', p. 322.

<sup>212</sup> *Life*, ch. 24, pp. 74-76.

<sup>213</sup> *Life*, ch. 67, pp. 152-154.

<sup>214</sup> Geddes, *St Albans Psalter*, p. 51.

Geoffrey illustrating his access to God through Christina's holiness. More likely, given the inconsistency of detail between the two (Christina would need to be looking on the cross with her back to the reader, and Geoffrey lying prostrated), Christina's meditation on the scene provided imagery which informed a more complicated vision, and notably one in which the colonisation of her visions by Geoffrey is resisted.

#### IV.II Teachers, Authority and Monastic Learning

Yet book learning was not the principal mode for medieval religious and spiritual education, and particularly not for women.<sup>215</sup> Learning was a process of imitating the example of superiors and absorbing the verbal wisdom of teachers. Stephen Jaeger has shown that over the course of the twelfth century academic learning began to be dominated by the authority of set texts. Previously a "charismatic pedagogy", whereby a master was able to project transformative power that shaped his students from the outside-in, had dominated learning.<sup>216</sup> This earlier kind of formation by the example of the moral individual continued to hold stronger sway over female religious education than it did over its male counterpart.<sup>217</sup> Christina had a series of men whose authority over her made them also responsible for her instruction,<sup>218</sup> even where the relationship was one of mutual affection and spiritual devotion.<sup>219</sup> Her visionary life developed partly as a result of their mentoring: either directly, as Roger taught her contemplation, or indirectly, as Geoffrey provided and elucidated texts that informed her spirituality.

Caroline Walker Bynum has shown that the practices and responsibilities of teaching and learning were lines along which the literature from canonical and monastic religious orders of the twelfth-century most clearly divided.<sup>220</sup> In "works of practical advice" canons saw the obligation to edify others as part of their vocation, which

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<sup>215</sup> See Mulder-Bakker, 'Metamorphosis of Woman'.

<sup>216</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200* (Philadelphia, UPP, 1994).

<sup>217</sup> However, see above p. 149-152 on women's book learning, and Carolyn Muessig, 'Learning and Mentoring in the Twelfth Century: Hildegard of Bingen and Herrad of Landsberg', in *Medieval Monastic Learning*, pp. 87-104.

<sup>218</sup> Christina was also, of course, under the authority of the anchoress Alfwen, but in accordance with the rhetoric of the *Life* we are told nothing about the dynamics of this relationship. It is reasonable to suppose that, as with Hildegard and Jutta, the teaching offered by the older woman was principally in setting an example of 'right living', rather than theological or visionary instruction.

<sup>219</sup> For the mutuality of Christina's relationship with Roger and Geoffrey see Eleanor McLaughlin, 'Women, Power and the Pursuit of Holiness in Medieval Christianity' in *Feminist Theology: A Reader* ed. Ann Loades (London: SPCK, 1990), pp. 99-123, esp. pp. 105-110.

<sup>220</sup> See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Docere Verbo et Exemplo: An Aspect of Twelfth Century Spirituality* (Montana: Scholars Press, 1979), and *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 22-81.

included exhibiting a *forma* for literal imitation to teach inner morality. In contrast the monastic vocation recognised the effect of words and actions only on the monk's own soul: their audience was solely celestial not temporal, and the ordinary monk operated only as learner, never as teacher.<sup>221</sup> Her distinction is one of self-awareness and rhetoric rather than one of practice, and this seems to be borne out by the real men who were Christina's teachers. Indeed two of Christina's mentors, Sueno and Roger, reverse the pattern of canons and monks in the practical level of teaching that they gave her. Not only was it Roger who instructed her by word and example, but it was he who taught her to see the ascent of her soul as mirroring the things of God (a theme commonly found in canonical spirituality), whilst Sueno focused on maintaining the inner relationship of the soul to God by ordering the outer affairs, such as preserving chastity, as in the Benedictine Rule.<sup>222</sup>

Christina's first teacher, the Augustinian Sueno, was famed for his teaching and the example that he set by his good life, "*profectus etate vita clarus et doctrina potens*".<sup>223</sup> He taught Christina, however, more by word and encouragement, than by example, "*illa nichilominus per doctrinam et exhortacionem Suenonis profecit tantum*".<sup>224</sup> His explanation of the trials and rewards of virginity was the context for the meditations that led to Christina's secret vow, which he confirmed.<sup>225</sup> Later in the story Sueno also transpires to have pre-cognitive powers, when Christina's disappearance from home prompts him to foresee a devastating domestic fire.<sup>226</sup> He is supportive of Christina's visionary abilities, and even participates in them, hearing an audition at Mass connected to Christina's two Marian apparitions.<sup>227</sup> Yet it was not Sueno's example that aided Christina in developing and channelling her abilities, indeed he set rather a bad example, losing faith in Christina when she remained firm in her spiritual resolve, "*puella perseverante, vir defecit*".<sup>228</sup>

<sup>221</sup> Bynum refined her model to contrast older Black Benedictines with the new Cistercians. The Cistercians were concerned with the example set to others, but as an emotional stage in the inner growth of the individual monk.

<sup>222</sup> See Ruth Smith, 'Cistercian and Victorine Approaches to Contemplation: Understandings of Self in 'A Rule of Life for a Recluse' and 'The Twelve Patriarchs', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England Ireland and Wales IV*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1999), pp. 47-65, and Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, pp. 244-277.

<sup>223</sup> *Life*, ch. 3, p. 36.

<sup>224</sup> *Life*, ch. 3, p. 38.

<sup>225</sup> *Life*, ch. 5, p. 40.

<sup>226</sup> *Life*, ch. 36, p. 96.

<sup>227</sup> *Life*, ch. 27, p. 78.

<sup>228</sup> *Life*, ch. 13, p. 54. The person who describes themselves as struggling under lust which attracts them to any deformed beggar need not necessarily be Sueno, or even an accurate representation of him, since Christina accuses the speaker of near-slander, *Life* ch. 2, p. 36. It is therefore is not a helpful incident for determining Sueno's teaching by example.

In contrast to Sueno's pedagogic eminence, the monastic hermit Roger is cast in a desert framework "*meritis sanctitatis par habitus est antiquis patribus*".<sup>229</sup> It is, however, Roger whose teaching of Christina was specifically by word and example, "*eam informabat nunc doctrina, nunc exemplo*"; although in prayer and contemplative meditation as befitted a monastic.<sup>230</sup> Teaching was fitting only for a monastic superior, and Roger's autonomy from his house at St Albans is underlined by the kinds of authority, such as teaching, that he assumed. It was under Roger's training that Christina was able to refine her visionary skills, and so it is particularly frustrating for the modern scholar that her Writer chose to skim over the details of the prophetic and contemplative abilities that he passed on to her, saying only that they are difficult and that it is not necessary for him to describe them, "*quia ineffabilia tum quia non hic necessario dicenda*".<sup>231</sup> The vocabulary selected may perhaps be intended to convey their ineffable or unutterable greatness. It is certainly the first indication of the Writer's access to the vocabulary of visions, and to the available knowledge about Roger over twenty years after his death. Christina's visions preceded her relationship with Roger but they were altered by it. Before she moved to Markyate her encounters were mostly simplistic or Mariological, and all directed towards her immediate circumstances; Roger took this existing ability and channelled it through monastic disciplines towards what he saw as higher heavenly things to be sought in their own right. He had trained his own gaze heavenward to a degree that the Writer calls hardly credible, "*pene incredibilia*", and instructed Christina in strategies to do likewise.<sup>232</sup> When Christina had her vision of Christ carrying the cross, it delighted Roger as a teacher who had fostered his first serious spiritual protégée.<sup>233</sup>

Roger's direction of Christina's meditations, and probably therefore his own spirituality, produced kataphatic rather than apophatic results. In comparison to the many years that she subsequently spent developing her visionary abilities without the guidance of a visionary mentor, Christina's time with him was quite brief. He was nevertheless her most formative teacher because he orientated her expectations as a learner towards 'seeing' divinely-imparted knowledge. When Abbot Geoffrey took on responsibility for the oversight of Christina's affairs, she was already trained to bypass

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<sup>229</sup> *Life*, ch. 28, p. 80.

<sup>230</sup> *Life*, ch. 40, p. 104.

<sup>231</sup> *Life*, ch. 28, p. 82.

<sup>232</sup> On monastic praxis as training for visions see also Newman, "To Say "I Saw"", from p. 14.

<sup>233</sup> *Life*, ch. 41, p. 106.

book-learning and go straight to the spiritual source for her information.<sup>234</sup> We might wonder whether he included the earliest known representation of the Virgin as meditating on a text into the Hildesheim miniature cycle in order to show Christina that the kind of instruction which he could offer also had some reliability and authority.<sup>235</sup> John Coakley has argued that it was in Geoffrey's interest to stress the great difference between his own powers and Christina's, the holywoman providing the divine access which the abbot could not provide for himself.<sup>236</sup> But the Hildesheim Psalter seems to be symptomatic of a more complex relationship in practice: Geoffrey was making use of the spiritual services which Christina offered, but the school teacher in him could not help but try to dictate what they ought to mean, and what directions and models they ought to take. Geoffrey had nothing to teach Christina directly about visionary praxis, but he did provide her with tools to 'think' with, just as she did reciprocally for him. One of these thinking-tools was Geoffrey himself, whose very presence in Christina's life developed her visionary repertoire and caused her to jeopardise, and then regain, the correct balance between her responsibility for her own spiritual progress and her responsibility to others.<sup>237</sup>

In the *Life*, Geoffrey is never directly acknowledged as Christina's teacher; however a third figure, the Pilgrim-Christ, is very clearly framed in this role. The pilgrim is the continuation and fulfilment of Roger's teaching that spiritual knowledge and authority comes from direct encounter with the numinous. Christina and her sister are certain that their visitor is angelic *because* he teaches them by the example of his beauty and gravity in appearance and speech. The two sisters are internally transformed by his external manifestations of holiness, "*tanto spirituali affecte sunt gaudio*", and they yearn for his return, not principally as a lover but as a teacher, "*O si maturitatis eius et venustatis exempla ipsum intuendo amodo percipiemus*".<sup>238</sup> Christina, at least, anticipates that what she has learnt from his visit will enable her to scale new, unpredictable, spiritual heights, "*incerta tamen quid eius protederet desiderium*".<sup>239</sup> Although the pilgrim spoke with them it was the *style* of his speech, rather than the *content* of its message, which impressed itself on the sisters, and when he vanished from the Markyate church before Christina could speak with him again, he left only his

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<sup>234</sup> On this tension between book and visionary learning, and the lack of simple gendering of the two, see Mulder-Bakker, 'Introduction' in *Seeing and Knowing*, p. 2-4.

<sup>235</sup> See also Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, pp. 191-2.

<sup>236</sup> Coakley, *Men, Women and Spiritual Power*, pp. 19-22.

<sup>237</sup> *Life*, ch. 9, pp. 180-182.

<sup>238</sup> *Life*, ch. 80, p. 184.

<sup>239</sup> *Life*, ch. 80, p. 184.

carefully studied deportment as an example to the community, "*modestia perpenditur in incessu severitas in aspectu maturitas in habitu[...] cere videretur virgineum chorum [simili] gravitates studio*".<sup>240</sup>

Education is central to numinous experience: God is making known something of God directly to an individual, sometimes (but not necessarily) by bringing celestial secrets into the signifiable realm. The nature of education is cumulative, and the individual brings to this education both knowledge and expectations that shape how they interpret it. Christina's learning developed both in content and in its mode of delivery. Once Sueno had taught her by word to discard the world, she was able to undertake Roger's tuition by word and example to orientate her gaze towards heavenly knowledge. Geoffrey's book-learning equipped her with ideas, motifs and theological reasoning, but his teaching did not contribute to Christina's progress towards sanctity as the Pilgrim-Christ did, who taught her by example, as is only fitting for a potential saint who must herself edify through example. Thus, built into the development of Christina's visionary praxis is development in holiness, and so in anticipated sanctity. As her visionary abilities were turned outwards to the affairs of others, so her usefulness as a saint increased, and it is a particular irony that it is this mature holiness and spirituality that the Writer was least equipped to describe.

## V. Visionary Communities and Visionary Individuals

Christina's visions are the most diverse, creative, meaningful and sustained in the *Life*, but she was not a solitary visionary: around a third of the recorded visions are encountered by people close to Christina, rather than by Christina herself. Some are reciprocal visions where Christina was involved in the encounter - either through knowing that the other person had the vision, or by having a parallel vision herself. This is always the case with Abbot Geoffrey, whose encounters with the numinous are invariably supported, verified or predicted by hers, but it is also found in Christina's wider relationships, for example in the parallel encounters between the Queen of Heaven and both Christina and her husband which secured her religious life at Markyate.<sup>241</sup> Other visions reassure or alarm people within Christina's close circle regarding her physical or spiritual welfare, while the community at Markyate seems to have become something of a hub for supernatural activity, visited at different times by angels and devils, Mary and Christ himself. Christina came into a community that was

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<sup>240</sup> *Life*, ch. 81, pp. 186-188.

<sup>241</sup> *Life*, ch. 42, p. 108; and ch. 43, p. 110.

already centred around a man of spirit and conversant with visions; her arrival was heralded by celestial music heard by two of Roger's companions and the male community confidently applied prayer to interpret its meaning.<sup>242</sup> When she was away from Markyate, Christina's visionary powers were depleted, with only one apparition of her clerical supervisor as a bear.<sup>243</sup> Max Weber articulated the importance of the charismatic group or band, for example the religious sect, rather than simply the prophet at their centre. His model, which has the power of the central individual radiating out to their associates, has validity for the development of visionary communities as well. Indeed, Christina as the second leader in the 'double charisma' that founds Markyate seems to have caused almost all who became close to her to have visions: Sueno, Burthred, the Lustful Cleric, Geoffrey, her mother, *puellae* at Markyate and her extended network of friends represented by Simon of Bermondsey, are all touched by such encounters.

The solitary visionary was rare, particularly after the shift that Dinzelbacher identified in the twelfth century from male to female, and from single and long to multiple and shorter visions.<sup>244</sup> The effect of being in contact with a known person of spirit drew others into a dialogue created by these encounters with the numinous, which spilled over into at least the *expectation* of further encounters.<sup>245</sup> The possibility of visions was always available in the medieval West; visionary communities grew up, often around one or two central figures, because the group was specifically orientated to find in visions a symbolic capital that was desirable and available to them. In the case of many visionary communities it is difficult to accurately identify the 'occupational' person or people of spirit at the heart of a network. For the better documented thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the evidence is in some ways clearer - for example, the guidance of Gertrude of Hakeborn made Helfta into a centre where a distinctive form of nuptial visions flourished – but less clear in others, as the availability of visionary and devotional literature makes it hard to identify where an immediate visionary community stops and wider textual communities begin.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> *Life*, ch. 38, pp. 98-100.

<sup>243</sup> *Life*, ch. 44, p. 116.

<sup>244</sup> Dinzelbacher, *Visions und Visionlitteratur*, especially the tabulation of his typology, p. 229.

<sup>245</sup> See also Mary Suydam, 'Beguine Textuality: Sacred Performances', in *Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Medieval Spirituality*, ed. Mary Suydam and Joanna Zeigler (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 169-210, esp p. 173 on Ida of Nivelles causing her companion to be able to have visionary abilities by retelling her own.

<sup>246</sup> On textual communities for visions see Rosalynn Voaden, ed., *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996), and Felicity Riddy, 'Women Talking about the Things of God: A Late Medieval Female Sub-Culture', in *Women and Literature*, pp. 104-127. Jocelyn Wogan-

The involvement of a visionary community around a central figure operated at different levels. Firstly there was the role of witnessing to the encounters of the person of spirit, which involved, implicated, and indirectly was experienced by the community. So, for example, the Markyate *puellae* who authenticated Christina's pre-cognition were drawn into the process of that encounter, which was itself not actually completed until it was reported, analysed and understood. There were, secondly, other people who came into contact with the person of spirit who then themselves began to have visions. This should not be seen purely as something that happens after the shift identified by Dinzelsbacher: for instance Aldegund's nuns at Maubeuge and the priest that served their community had visions in the pattern of their abbess and her sister.<sup>247</sup> The monastic setting, with its emphasis on *communitas* and education was particularly conducive to this kind of community, and was certainly its primary social setting before the multiplication of religious options from the end of the twelfth century. The originator need not remain the most prestigious member of a visionary community - for example Roger was overtaken by Christina - but they often did. They may also have been the focus or subject of other visions experienced by their community, for example when Christina of St Trond was consecrated at the Cistercian convent of Aywières a fellow nun had a vision of her being crowned with a golden crown. Thirdly were joint visions, either between two close spiritual companions, such as Wulfric of Haselbury and his servant-boy who both saw the celestial light that rewards the hermit's prayers, or Dunstan the priest and the female recluse at Bruton who saw St Wulfstan in the heavenly choirs; or as group visions, like the appearance of the headless devil at the Markyate church.<sup>248</sup> The visionary community cannot, however, be entirely explained by this network process. Hence fourthly there are many examples of people who were not close physically or personally to the person of spirit or their immediate circle, but who were told to attend on saints. This happens with gifts of furs and parchment taken to Wulfric of Haselbury, with the woman from Canterbury visited by St Margaret and told to go to Christina for a cure, or with the similar cure instructions received by a man from outside Flanders to visit St Anselm at

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Brown has pointed out that even if women participated in female subcultures, this often coexists with participation in dominant culture, and texts were not routinely segregated by sex, *Saints' Lives*, p. 11, n. 17.

<sup>247</sup> *Vita S Aldegundis*, chs. 25 and 29, pp. 323-324, and ch. 17, see above p. 126, n. 107. In the *vita* these visions are interpreted as being about Aldegund, rather than a numinous message for the visionary themselves.

<sup>248</sup> John Abbot of Ford, *Wulfric of Haselbury by John Abbot of Ford*, ed. Maurice Bell (Somerset Record Society, 47, 1933), bk. I.ii, ch. 35-36. William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives: Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract*, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom and Rodney Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), bk. III, ch. 29, pp. 154-155. *Life*, ch. 78, p. 178.

Bec.<sup>249</sup> Whether we can reasonably assume that in all cases the fame of the person of spirit had spread sufficiently widely to influence these visions remains open to further study. Finally there are separate people having visions of the same thing (often the death of a beloved religious mentor or saint, although not necessarily closely known by those seeing the vision) which are collected together and understood and reported as connected. So, for example, Prioress Agnes of Nunappleton and the wife of Ralph de Hauteville, though strangers, both saw visions of the heavenly preparations made at Gilbert of Sempringham's death.<sup>250</sup>

Finding an English context from this typology in order to situate the visionary network emanating from Christina and from Markyate is not straightforward. Several known male-female partnerships, such as those between Wulfric of Haselbury and Matilda of Wareham or Godric of Finchale and his sister Burchine, had at least a prophetic element to them, but in neither case is it the holywoman driving the numinous angle of the relationship. Nor were the male hermits able to offer the kind of institutional and financial patronage in exchange for visionary access which is found in Christina's relationship with Abbot Geoffrey, and in many later continental pairings. The absence from textual record is not necessarily evidence that such pairings did not exist, and the mutually confirming otherworld visions shared by an anchoress of Brading and Robert sub-prior of Holy Trinity Aldgate suggest that they probably did.<sup>251</sup> Two monastic houses that experienced differing levels of visionary community, Stratford Langthorne and Watton, yet are only known about because they proved useful to the literary projects of one of their acquaintances, illustrate how easily communities which did not prove as useful could fail to reach textual record.

The male Cistercian house of Stratford Langthorne, in West Ham on the outskirts of London, was the source for a number of visions collected by Peter of Cornwall for his *Liber Revelationum* compendium, written c.1200. Peter, himself prior of the nearby prestigious Augustinian house of Holy Trinity Aldgate, was on close terms with several members of the house, from the Abbot to the lay-brothers.<sup>252</sup> Most of the eleven visions he recorded were demonic temptations or relate to the post-mortem wellbeing of community members. For example a humble monk, Hugo, reported that he had

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<sup>249</sup> John of Ford, *Wulfric of Haselbury*, bk. 1.1, chs. 25-37. *Life*, ch. 46, pp.118-120, Eadmer, *Life of St Anselm* pp. 57-58.

<sup>250</sup> *Book of St Gilbert*, chs. 53-54, pp. 124-128.

<sup>251</sup> Peter of Cornwall, *Liber Revelationum*, Lambeth Palace MS 51, fol. 124v.

<sup>252</sup> See C. J. Holdsworth, 'Eleven Visions Connected with the Cistercian Monastery of Stratford Langthorne', *Cîteaux*, 13 (1962), 185-204, esp. pp. 188-189.

witnessed himself being saved from purgation by the intervention of Mary and St Thomas at the tribunal of Christ. His concerned brothers, meanwhile, had doused him in water to establish whether he had died from his sickness or was in ecstasy.<sup>253</sup> Other apparitions provided salutary reminders about the privileges procured by living a good Cistercian life by fulfilling agreements contracted between monks to provide knowledge of their subsequent whereabouts. In the midst of this quite traditional set of visions the precentor Herveus encountered a more diverse heavenly company, enjoying special patronage from the Virgin Mary, the general protectress of his order. She appeared to teach him consolatory mnemonic songs when he was suffering near-fatal illness, "*iam in extremis agens*", as she more famously had to Godric of Finchale,<sup>254</sup> and then sent him three apparitions of her Son crucified, and angels to sing for him as a foretaste of heaven.<sup>255</sup> Herveus seems to have been a favourite mentor amongst the younger members of the community; he taught the songs from the Virgin Mary to the other monks and was the source of stories about the novices under his care encountering demons.<sup>256</sup> Herveus was also an intimate of his abbots, and when Arnold was at the helm of the community Herveus was given insight into a vision enjoyed by the abbot during Matins.<sup>257</sup> Arnold had seen an angel descend from heaven, in a bright light and with the odour of celestial grace, into the Stratford choir and sprinkle the monks with incense from a golden thurible which made them sing more sweetly. Herveus received a double dose of the incense, giving him a privileged awareness that an encounter with the divine had occurred, though he himself did not see the angel.<sup>258</sup> Most of the Stratford visions must have been told to Peter in the late 1190s, shortly before the prior Benedict became abbot in 1199. Though not apparently a visionary himself, Benedict nevertheless seems to have encouraged the climate of visions in his monastery and contributed stories of visions that he heard when undertaking travelling duties within the order,<sup>259</sup> suggesting that Stratford was plugged into a wider monastic visionary network.<sup>260</sup>

<sup>253</sup> Holdsworth, 'Eleven Visions', no. II, pp. 194-195.

<sup>254</sup> Reginald of Durham *Libellus de vita et miraculis S. Godrici*, ch. 50, p.117-120 (for Mary teaching Godric songs earlier in his life), and ch. 151, p. 286-287 (for near-death dialogue with Mary in which these are repeated).

<sup>255</sup> Holdsworth, 'Eleven Visions', no. I, pp. 193-194.

<sup>256</sup> Holdsworth, 'Eleven Visions', no. X, pp. 202-203.

<sup>257</sup> This vision must have occurred before 1192 when William is known to have been Abbot, followed by Benedict, but after 1169 when the abbot was Henry, see *VCH, Essex II*, p. 133. These visions were told to Peter over a period of time, though mostly in the late 1190s, since Herveus reports some but in others he is dead.

<sup>258</sup> Holdsworth, 'Eleven Visions', no. VIII, pp. 201-202.

<sup>259</sup> Holdsworth, 'Eleven Visions', no. III, p. 195, of a monk enraptured to the tribunal of Christ, as was the Stratford monk Hugo, and no. XI, pp. 203-204, of demonic temptation gleaned from a visit to Revesby Abbey.

<sup>260</sup> On the evident but limited relationship between the Stratford cache and other Cistercian visions see Holdsworth's introduction, 'Eleven Visions', pp. 185-193.

The visions at Stratford Langthorne, as at Markyate, were concerned almost entirely with the domestic and personal needs, affairs and relationships of the house. Yet even Herveus did not begin to achieve the spiritual maturity and sophistication of Christina. A more dynamic comparison than Stratford Langthorne is the Gilbertine nunnery at Watton in Yorkshire, which had a flourishing visionary slant to its spirituality from the earliest years of its foundation in 1150, as well as belonging to a wider social network of saintly male ecclesiastics who had visions.<sup>261</sup> Many of the nuns regularly enjoyed raptures which seemingly took them to be amongst the angelic choirs, "*saepe in quosdam indicibiles rapiantur excessus, et angelicis videantur interesse choris*", and they were upbraided, advised, and fortified by good spirits, "*cum bonis spiritibus*", on the logistics of their lives in community.<sup>262</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, who was himself a man of spirit, though his biographer knew few details about his encounters,<sup>263</sup> deliberately recounted the details of these visions to illustrate the mutual commitment and intimacy of the nuns, giving a positive frame for their hard treatment of a pregnant member of the community.<sup>264</sup> The nuns were zealous in seeking information on the eternal fate of their sisters, and the prayers and tears of one particularly close friendship was rewarded with the apparition of her beloved dead sister into a beam of glitteringly bright light before the altar. The living nun was struck insensible by the vision, "*sensibus corpus stabat immobile*", only returning to herself when mass ended and the vision withdrew. The purgatorial piety of this vision combines some of the traditional elements found in the Stratford Langthorne visions (the apparition of dead members of a religious community), with more advanced visionary modes including rapture and heavenly imparted and ineffable joy, "*ita ineffabili perfuse gaudio finem coelestis*".<sup>265</sup>

Elsewhere Aelred used the Watton community to illustrate the third in his vast collection of sermons on the dream of Isaiah, and here he went into more detail about

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<sup>261</sup> On visions at Watton see also Elkins, *Holy Women*, pp. 100-101 and Golding, *Gilbert*, p. 187. The latter argues that Aelred may have been exaggerating their spirituality, and compares the nuns unfavourably to Christina.

<sup>262</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, 'De Sanctimoniali De Wattun', *PL*, 195:789-796, col. 790.

<sup>263</sup> In his letter to Maurice defending the miracles in Aelred's *vita*, Walter Daniel wrote that he knew of the abbot's sweet and indescribable visions which left him oblivious to the flesh only through Aelred's own report, "*eum non vidi raptum 'in corpora, an extra corpus nescio', Deus scit, ad mellifluas visiones et inenarrabiles, nisi quod ipse michi secreto retulit tales se visus degustasse, quorum comparacione in oblecacione dulcedinis quod in carne quoquomodo existeret penitus obliviceretur*", Walter Daniel, *Life of Ailred of Rievaulx*, p. 69.

<sup>264</sup> This scandal occurred c.1160, see Elkins, *Holy Women*, p. 201, n. 2. Affectionate violence seems to have been meted out regularly at Watton since the nun at the centre of its visionary culture was beaten to return her from ecstasy, "*pulsata a sororibus, vix potuit ad corporales, quos reliquerat, sensus redire*", Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Sermones de Oneribus Isiae', *PL*, 195: 363-500, col. 371.

<sup>265</sup> Aelred, 'De Sanctimoniali', col. 791.

the content of their visions.<sup>266</sup> One unnamed nun was evidently the original woman of spirit whose visions reached the highest levels of prolonged light-filled rapture and Christological devotion as the result of sustained private prayer, "*moxque anima ejus, quasi oneribus quae in mundo sunt valedicens, rapitur supra se, et ab ineffabili quadam et incomprehensibili luce excepta[...] hac igitur luce perfusa, ipsum Christum*".<sup>267</sup> Her sisters, inspired by the expectation of such divine intercourse, began to imitate her example. The veridicality of these encounters is addressed in Aelred's account by an influential member of the community itself, whose concerns that visions distracted her sisters from virtue were abruptly halted by an affective vision of Christ's passion, "*vidisset quasi raptim id esse[...] Jesum in cruce pendentem, confixum clavis, lancea perforatum, sanguinemque per quinque foramina profluentem, ipsamque mitissimo oculo respicientem*". She brings the corpus of reported visions closely into line with later continental women of spirit, identifying with the female grief at Christ's passive suffering which precedes erotic union, "*tum illa resolute in lacrymas*"; a devotion that is notably absent from Christina's spirituality.<sup>268</sup> In this spiritual climate it is little surprise that the offending pregnant nun, though taking little delight in the rigours of Gilbertine life, should have a series of visionary and then miraculous dreams of the bishop who had arranged her oblation, including the delivery and disappearance of her child whilst she sleeps by two venerable women who accompany him.<sup>269</sup>

The interest shown by Aelred in the Watton nuns gave them the best possible patronage in England, from a man whose sympathetic and sincere spiritual leadership and writings have been identified as unique amongst Cistercian writers by scholars as diverse as Bernard McGinn and David Knowles.<sup>270</sup> McGinn describes his *Jesus at the Age of Twelve* as "one of the classic statements of Cistercian devotion to the carnal love of Christ",<sup>271</sup> of the kind found in the Watton spirituality. Aelred is also best remembered for his prodigious capacity for friendship, captured in his most famous and most personal work *De Spirituali Amicitia*, and he was intimate with several men of spirit who achieved the celebrity necessary to be deemed saints. Gilbert of Sempringham (1083/9-1189), master of the Watton nuns, was a charismatic and authoritarian leader who complemented his other saintly qualities with a smattering of

<sup>266</sup> Aelred, 'Sermones', col. 370-2.

<sup>267</sup> Aelred, 'Sermones', col. 371.

<sup>268</sup> I.e. Petroff's fifth visionary mode, *Visionary Literature*, pp. 11-14.

<sup>269</sup> Aelred, 'De Sanctimoniali', col. 794-795.

<sup>270</sup> McGinn, *Growth*, pp. 309-323, Knowles, *Monastic Order*, pp. 257-266.

<sup>271</sup> McGinn, *Growth*, p. 314.

visionary encounters rather than being a reputed man of spirit. The reputation of saints Godric of Finchale (c.1070-1170) and Waldef of Melrose (c.1095-c.1159), however, rested more substantially on their spiritual powers. Yet the Watton nuns, though located in this visionary network and recorded in texts with a wide insular and continental circulation, did not become celebrated as occupational visionaries as would the Beguines of Liège; nor were they remembered fifty years later by Peter of Cornwall, or a century later by Matthew Paris, both admirers of visionary women.<sup>272</sup> Aelred, it must be supposed, was personally knowledgeable about the dynamics of vision and so did not need women of spirit to complement his own sphere of activity. On the same grounds perhaps he was also disinclined to consider visions sufficient evidence of holiness, and certainly would not compromise the authority of his friend by taking particular notice of some of his nuns, so they enter the textual record only to illustrate questions of pastoral and spiritual discernment.

Stratford Langthorne and Watton illustrate that visionary communities were flourishing in England, but neither had a spirituality that was unmistakable similar to Christina and Markyate. Christina was more forcefully at the helm of Markyate's visionary culture than Herveus or the anonymous visionary nun, and her spirituality was neither otherworld, as at Stratford, nor passion-orientated, as at Watton. In Aelred's friends Godric and Waldef (themselves part of his social network of visionaries but celebrated in their own right), it is possible to seek another group of comparisons to Christina's spirituality. It is worth noting that all the male hermit-saints of twelfth-century England were visionaries to a greater or lesser extent. Wulfric of Haselbury (c.1090-1154/5) was caught up by the Angel of the Lord whilst praying at his altar in an ecstasy which John of Ford likened to St Ambrose before the altar of St Martin, "*Cui cum quadam nocte orans assisteret, repente astitit ei angelus Domini et animam eius a corpore ut ei diebatur eductam in caelestia rapuit, ubi et gloriam Dei et spem sanctorum ostendit*", and on another occasion was immobilised by heavenly light at the same altar, "*qui cum ostium cellae fuisset ingressus lucem miri splendoris super medium altaris conspexit. Sanctus autem ante gradum altaris in illud lumen intentus stabat immobilis*".<sup>273</sup> Bartholemew of Farne (d.1193) was persuaded to leave his dissolute youth by visions of the Virgin Mary accompanied by her son and Saints Peter and John.<sup>274</sup> When he was admitted as a Benedictine novice at Durham he saw the

<sup>272</sup> Peter's collection precedes most of the continental women of spirit, but he includes extracts from the visions of Elisabeth of Schönau.

<sup>273</sup> John of Ford, *Wulfric of Haselbury*, bk. 1.1, ch. 18, and ch. 35.

<sup>274</sup> Geoffrey of Durham, *Vita Bartholomaei Farenensis*, in *Symeonis Monachi: Opera Omnia*, ed. Thomas Arnold, 2 vols (RS 75, 1882), 1, pp. 295-325; vision ch. 3, pp. 297-298.

crucified Christ reaching out to embrace him, "*vidit in spiritu cruces imaginem submisso vultu adorantem resalutare et protensis brachiis novum se cruces bajulum in amplexus excipere*",<sup>275</sup> and later enjoyed the patronage of St Cuthbert (whose relics were held at the abbey) who appeared in order to persuade him to take up the hermit life on the saint's own island.<sup>276</sup> Bartholomew even saw visions of the light of heaven, which he interpreted as sent from St Cuthbert,<sup>277</sup> but it was his robust life, prophetic powers and resistance of demonic attack which most impressed his hagiographer, Geoffrey of Durham. Indeed, amongst the male hermits, only for St Godric of Finchale do visions comprise an important constitutive part of his sanctity rather than a supplement to miracle working, asceticism, demonic temptation and prophecy.

Like Christina, the bulk of Godric's visions occurred once he had finally undertaken a settled religious life, after many years of travel as an international merchant and pilgrim. His abilities included bi-locating to reassure a concerned mother in Norway, *nunc in Norwagia fui*, of the good health enjoyed by her son: a vision that is likened even more explicitly than Christina's to the story of St Benedict at Terracina.<sup>278</sup> Unlike Christina, however, there is no suggestion that Godric consciously cultivated and developed his visionary praxis. Instead his visions, like those of Wulfric of Haselbury, were grounded in the monastic routine of prayer, and their respective private oratories formed a privileged (male) space in which the numinous could be encountered. Godric had two chapels, a private one dedicated to the Virgin Mary and a more open one to John the Baptist, both of whom offered him protection and patronage at their altars. In particular, Godric's crucifix over the altar to St John was capable of feats of spiritual agility and consolation. It produced the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove as well as the two Christchild apparitions mentioned above, and on one occasion it levitated entirely and spun around to land with its head on the altar steps.<sup>279</sup> The levitating cross situates Godric at the heart of a visionary community, since it is he who has the power of prophetic discernment.<sup>280</sup> His interpretation of the vision has it illuminating how Christ gives life to everything that is born "*virtus enim quae de Ipso*

<sup>275</sup> Geoffrey of Durham, *Vita Bartholomaei Farenensis*, ch. 6, p. 299.

<sup>276</sup> Geoffrey of Durham, *Vita Bartholomaei Farenensis*, ch. 7, pp. 299-300, and ch. 26, pp. 316-317.

<sup>277</sup> Geoffrey of Durham, *Vita Bartholomaei Farenensis*, ch. 27, pp. 317-318.

<sup>278</sup> Reginald of Durham, *Libellus de vita et miraculis S. Godrici, Item Aliud Argumentum* ch. 9, p. 349. On another occasion the author is admonished in a dream, by a young man sent from the saint for his failure to go and say Mass for him. Godric was himself so spiritually compelling that he could send this messenger whilst he was himself sleeping, ch. 107, p. 223.

<sup>279</sup> Reginald of Durham, *Libellus de vita et miraculis S. Godrici*, ch. 118, p. 274 (dove), ch. 119, pp. 154-156 (levitating cross).

<sup>280</sup> For a discussion of what could happen when the cantankerous hermit's powers were questioned see Victoria Tudor, 'Reginald of Durham and Godric of Finchale', in *Religion and Humanism, SCH*, 17 (1981), 37-48.

*progreditur, animando vivificat omne quod nascitur; et tali virtutis miraculo elegit Christus nobis ostendere, quem fideliter credere debeamus omnia quae de Christo audivimus vera fuisse*'. When his more sceptical bishop accuses the saint of wasting episcopal time with nothing more than a domestic accident, and offers a sarcastic counter-interpretation, "*tam stupendae rei signum presignare arbitror nuper tuae mortuis imminere periculum*", the bishop suffered the consequences of his own prediction and rapidly died.<sup>281</sup> Godric's visions were more profuse than other hermits, but his spirituality was more static and traditionally saintly than Christina's despite his connections with the Cistercian spiritual flowerings in the North.

My last male example, Waldef of Melrose was a man of spirit cut from the new cloth of the Cistercians.<sup>282</sup> His life littered with visions of Christ which fit with the liturgical calendar from nativity to passiontide, and a particular Eucharistic devotion.<sup>283</sup> He was both a visionary and also interested in the visions of others, writing in his capacity as abbot to Maurice, Prior of Kirkham, with details of a vision experienced by a lay brother under his care.<sup>284</sup> Despite what Derek Baker calls Waldef's "homely spirituality",<sup>285</sup> his Christology and otherworld visions, as well as his social position amongst the elite of professional ecclesiastics, make him an even less helpful comparison to contextualise Christina.<sup>286</sup> As Waldef's abbatial successor and later Bishop of Glasgow, Jocelin of Furness took on responsibility for successfully promoting his cult after 1170, and Waldef's royal connections as half-sibling to David I of Scotland, humility in office and post-death miracles were more significant markers of sanctity than his visions.<sup>287</sup>

<sup>281</sup> Reginald of Durham, *Libellus de vita et miraculis S. Godrici*, ch. 119, pp. 154-156.

<sup>282</sup> The Scottish abbey of Melrose was founded as a daughterhouse of Rievaulx in 1136 and the church was dedicated in 1146. Waldef was abbot from 1146 to his death in 1159 after King Stephen had refused his succession to the archbishopric of York because of his pro-Scottish leanings.

<sup>283</sup> Jocelin of Furness, *De S. Waltheno, Abbate*, AASS, 1<sup>st</sup> August, vol. 1, pp. 242-278. On the composition of Jocelin's text see Derek Baker, 'Waldef of Melrose: Legend and Reality', *Church, Society and Politics*, SCH, 12 (1975), 59-82. Parts of the *vita* were excerpted by Walter Bower, see *Scotichronicon*, ed. and trans. D. E. R. Watt and others, 9 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1995), III, bk. VI, chs. 5-9.

<sup>284</sup> Hugh Farmer, ed., 'A Letter of St Waldef of Melrose Concerning a Recent Vision', *Studia Anselmiana*, 43 (1958), 91-101.

<sup>285</sup> Derek Baker, 'Waldef (c.1095-1159)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28647>> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008].

<sup>286</sup> Indeed in a review article Richard Pfaff unkindly describes the contrasts in English spiritual life as "balancing the noble figures (Waldef of Melrose) with the less edifying or marginally pathological (Christina of Markyate)", *Church History*, 49 (1980), p. 452.

<sup>287</sup> See Derek Baker, 'Legend and Reality: The Case of Waldef of Melrose', in *Church Society and Politics*, SCH, 12 (1975), 59-82.

The greatest difficulty in positioning Christina's spirituality then lies in finding out more than the most paltry details about truly appropriate and contemporary peers: twelfth-century women recluse-foundresses and prioresses whose devotional lives extended to visions, perhaps as the outcome of meditative practices and training. Two continental women of spirit, Alpais of Cudot and Bona of Pisa do not seem to have been part of a wider spiritual convergence and were only a generation or two younger than Christina, but the stories and spirituality of each have limited commonality with hers. Alpais (c.1150/55-1221) was a French peasant girl and a leper who was rejected by her family who refused to feed her, and so she miraculously subsided off the host.<sup>288</sup> Living as a solitary her fame spread rapidly because of her inedia and her visions. The queen of France sought her advice and by 1180 her celebrity was already being chronicled by a Premonstratensian canon.<sup>289</sup> Like Christina, Alpais had a special relationship with Mary and Christ, and saw visions of them as well as ones of the Trinity, saints and angels. Many of these, however, had the wider prophetic focus of Hildegard of Bingen rather than being similar to Christina's own domesticated visions, and were mixed with unitive encounters that belong clearly with later continental women of spirit. Alpais had out of body experiences in which she roamed outside the confines of the ordinary world, described, with more clarity than Christina's ever managed, as like the soul as a runner shedding in an instant the cloak of the flesh.<sup>290</sup> Bona of Pisa (c.1156-1207) contrasts to Alpais's reclusion and holy anorexia, being instead noted for her many pilgrimages and leadership of pilgrims. Her visions were, like Christina's, more clearly about her own situation, but began young and were strongly Christological tempered by a particular devotion to St James. She was Augustinian and ascetic by the age of 10 and undertook the purgatorial piety missing from Christina's spiritual praxis.<sup>291</sup>

Attention has already been drawn to the similarities and differences between Christina and her German contemporaries Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau, and it is to these two Benedictines, far from England, that we must look for the best documented context for her visions. Anne Clark has rightly cautioned against uncritically bracketing twelfth with thirteenth-century female spirituality, or indeed

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<sup>288</sup> *De Beata Alpaïda*, pp. 167-209.

<sup>289</sup> *De Beata Alpaïda*, pp. 167-171.

<sup>290</sup> "*Tam leviter enim et tam subito, sicut mihi visum est, in ictu oculi tunica carnis suae exuta fuit anima mea, tamquam si quis indutus tunicam desuper inconsutam per viam festinus currat et dum currit tunica subito dilapsa ab humeris currentis, et soli labori itineris et cursus intenti, eo nesciente penitus et ignorante decidat in terram, quam tunc primum cecidisse cognoscit, quando se nudum videns tunicam suam in terra iacentem post tergum suum respicit*", 'Vita B. Alpaïdis' bk. III, ch. 17, in *De Beata Alpaïda*, p. 206.

<sup>291</sup> *De S. Bona Virgine, Ordini Canoniarum Regularum Devota*, AASS, 7<sup>th</sup> May, vol. 2, pp. 141-161.

assuming that a monolithic female spirituality can be found in the twelfth century.<sup>292</sup> Christina was very different to the older woman of spirit,<sup>293</sup> but Hildegard's mentor Jutta forms a better comparison as a visionary on the border between old and new modes of spirituality, though insufficient of her visions were recorded to enable a critical comparison. Christina's spirituality does show some similarity to the younger woman in her conception of the Godhead as a Trinitarian power, and Mary as the accessible face of the Trinity. The depth and sophistication of Elisabeth's visions overshadows Christina's; the German woman gazed on a multitude of celestial and infernal scenes, and it is she whose visions had transferability and were widely circulated. Yet the start of her *First Book of Visions* has much in common with Christina, with even the devils appearing as bulls, and perhaps she shows where Christina's spirituality *could* have gone with the right encouragement from mentors who understood the potential of her abilities and had directed her to channel them into wider questions about the Church. Instead, Christina's supporters were more interested in their own salvation than the heavenly realms, and had a more practical real-life approach to why a person would have visions at all. The parameters of Elisabeth's radical, socially and liturgically influential visions, which stretched to world-ordering far outside her own community, are much wider than Christina's personal and localised encounters with the numinous.

The spirituality at Markyate was dominated by Christina's visionary abilities, which matured in its numinous relationships but still understood her celestial mentors as figures of power and majesty. Yet a visionary community, in the sense of other people themselves having visions, grew up around her to a greater degree than it did around, say, Elisabeth. Christina did not have the other qualities that enabled her male hermit peers to succeed as saints, but the effective domestic use to which she put her abilities was valued by her stakeholder network. If it is possible to plausibly overcome the diversity, and paucity of record, of the twelfth-century spiritual scene for women then Markyate fitted somewhere between the insular spirituality of the nuns at Watton and the continental spirituality of Elisabeth at Schönau.

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<sup>292</sup> Clark, *Elisabeth*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>293</sup> A great quantity of scholarship has been produced on Hildegard's spirituality, amongst which the work of Barbara Newman remains authoritative, *Sister of Wisdom: Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Aldershot: Scholar, 1987).

## VI. Domestic Visions: A Twelfth Century English Subculture

The beginning of this chapter argued for an approach to the modelling of numinous encounters, at least as they are understood within Christian traditions, which recognises a spectrum of kinds of experience. It also sought to recognise that this taxonomy is not the primary criterion used by people of spirit to give priority to their encounters. Not only do privileged or 'professional' people of spirit co-exist alongside ordinary Christians' dreams and visions, but the elite culture incorporates many themes and modes in its encounters that cannot be actively separated from the popular.<sup>294</sup> Christina belongs in at least two distinguishable, but therefore not distinct, threads of contemporary visionary discourse.<sup>295</sup> She is an early figure in many important motifs (for example nativity piety) commonly found amongst later continental women of spirit, and so should be read alongside them. If this were a complete picture, however, then Christina would be a more important figure on the numinous-mystical landscape than she has been given credit for, and than this thesis argues that she deserves. Rather, she illustrates the kind of kataphatic but lower level visionary culture that made up everyday life in England in the twelfth century.

When comparing numinous encounters to the Rhineland, Liège or Umbria and Tuscany, no contribution of consequence to the history of spirituality, and in particular the spirituality of women, is usually deemed to have been offered by England until Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. From a Europe-wide perspective this is probably a correct interpretation of the extant materials, since, apart from perhaps Christina, there are no women of spirit who achieve celebrity in the continental manner. The slip should not, however, be made from acknowledging a different culture to justifying the neglect of numinous encounters in England as a subject not meriting much consideration.<sup>296</sup> Instead England, without many spiritual celebrities to

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<sup>294</sup> Isabel Moreira has made a similar case for the Merovingian period, reversing the earlier arguments of Peter Brown and E.R. Dodds that only clerical and ascetic specialists could be approved as having visions, see *Dreams, Visions and Spiritual Authority*, esp. pp. 2-4.

<sup>295</sup> A third might include the wandering preachers and monastic founders of the 'new hermits'; although, as indicated in chapter two, her charisma belongs to a later stage in the development of a religious foundation. The patterns of visions in Christina's *Life* are very different to, for example, the focus on exorcism and community building in the *vitae* of Norbert of Xanten.

<sup>296</sup> Some recent scholarship has also called for more work to be done, see for example Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives*, pp. 245-256 who cites a range of visions to English women in the twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries, pp. 248-249, and Leyser, 'Christina: the Mystic of Markyate', whose current work is questioning so-called English pragmatism with relation to spirituality. Nicholas Watson has reviewed some of the English evidence for female visions, but still contends that their very lack of prominence in the literature makes them "at best a minor feature" of insular female spirituality, 'Composition of Julian', pp. 646-649.

dazzle the attention, offers the opportunity to turn critical attentions on what might be considered 'middle register' visions.

The acerbic French abbot and Bishop of Chartres, Peter of Celle, in his debates with Nicholas of St Albans over the Immaculate Conception c.1180-1181, accused the English of having a watery constitution which caused an un-Gallic propensity to be deluded by dreams and visions.<sup>297</sup> Peter was himself a man of spirit, but also a monastic snob, grounded in a method of approaching God that relied heavily on scripture, and highly sceptical about the possibility of non-enclosed people encountering the numinous.<sup>298</sup> It is interesting to wonder whether his mockery was referencing Christina who was not long dead, but even if so, the jibe insinuates a wider view of the tendencies across the channel. Over forty years ago R.W. Southern drew attention to twelfth-century England as "a sort of nodal point" for the collection and distribution of visions and marvels, most markedly in the Mary legends, despite an unusually practical and literal national mentality. He also observed the unusually high level of connection between monastic houses and lay society in terms of learning and devotional practice.<sup>299</sup> The recent critique of anti-intellectualist readings of the English tradition by Nicholas Watson may prove to have foundation,<sup>300</sup> but Southern's model does at least reflect a substantial part of the insular spiritual scene.

One way of approaching this material is to seek a vocabulary that situates it within, but nuances, existing models which group visions by the motifs and metaphors that they contain. The best known of these models are the *Brautmystik* or bridal mysticism associated with Bernard of Clairvaux and allegorical readings of the Song of Songs, and *Minnemystik* or *mystique courtoise* associated with the thirteenth-century Beguines and the *fin'amors* lyrics. In the former the bridal self is the female soul in love (which can, of course, be male in person), in the latter, as Barbara Newman has elaborated, it is principally the divine male protagonist who desires and reaches out to the female soul.<sup>301</sup> These are often contrasted to *Wesenmystik* or speculative mysticism associated with Meister Eckhart, in which the soul is annihilated in God, although work especially on Hadewijch of Antwerp has illustrated that the spirituality

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<sup>297</sup> *Letters of Peter of Celle*, pp. 587-590.

<sup>298</sup> See McGinn, *Growth*, pp. 343-346, and Jean Leclercq, *La Spiritualité de Pierre de Celle (1115-1183)* (Paris: Vrin, 1946).

<sup>299</sup> R. W. Southern, 'The Place of England in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance', *History*, 45 (1960), 201-216, citation p. 212.

<sup>300</sup> Watson, 'Middle English Mystics', pp. 545-547.

<sup>301</sup> Barbara Newman, 'La *mystique courtoise*: Thirteenth-Century Beguines and the Art of Love' in *Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, pp. 137-167.

of an individual person of spirit could operate in both modes.<sup>302</sup> Ulrike Weithaus has taken the contrast in a different direction, offering a discourse of “street mysticism” amongst women of spirit whose spatial metaphors were not enclosed, elite, sumptuous and romantic courts, but were “the open spaces of markets, churches, shrines dedicated to the saints, shops, apothecaries, roads and hospitals”.<sup>303</sup> Weithaus emphasises the sanctification of the quotidian by women such as Marie of Oignies, Christina Mirabilis and Agnes Blannbekin, whereby transactions, care of animals, cooking, use of medicines and similar daily activities became ritual spiritual performances. Her model draws closer to Christina’s own spirituality and the visionary dynamics in England than does ‘courtly mysticism’, but its spaces rely on a highly developed urban setting that is not found in her insular setting. I therefore suggest a further category of ‘domestic visions’ (or ‘domestic mysticism’) to complement and interact with this literary approach to seeking a taxonomy of numinous encounters.

Domestic visions, like these other thematic modes, are not reliant on *how* a vision is encountered, but on a combination of the content, purpose and outcome of the vision. More importantly they transcend the division between monastic and lay concerns, by relating to the affairs of the visionary and their immediate household, religious or secular. They are rarely profoundly theological, world-ordering, or political in content except in a local sense; instead they direct, comfort, encourage or guide the choices of the person encountering them, responding to their hopes, doubts and questions, and drawing on the settings of domestic life to illustrate their message. The domestic, as has already been noted, is not a purely private nor a purely female sphere; the affairs of the household can extend to commerce, tithing and religious patronage, management of resources, lordship, feasting, romance and so on. These populate the metaphors of ‘domestic visions’, and as such they often overlap with other modes, offering a fluid category that exposes the real problems with attempts to draw borders disentangling ‘elite’ from ‘popular’ culture.<sup>304</sup> A woman of spirit as elevated as Gertrude the Great, whose visionary repertoire included *Minnesmystik* and

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<sup>302</sup> See for example Christopher Nugent, ‘The Harvest of Hadewijch: Brautmystik and Wesenmystik’, *Mystics Quarterly*, 12 (1986), 119-126.

<sup>303</sup> Ulrike Weithaus, ‘Interpretive Essay’, p. 170. Weithaus does not adopt the German *Straußemystik*, and I likewise have not adopted any variant on *Inländischmystik* or *Haushaltmystik*.

<sup>304</sup> This kind of distinction is particularly associated with the *Annales* School, for example Jacques Le Goff, ‘The Learned and the Popular Dimensions of Journeys to the Otherworld in the Middle Ages’ in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Steven Kaplan (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984), pp. 19-38; although some *Annales* work focused on the interplay at the borders, for example Aron Gurevich’s *Medieval Popular Culture*. A good summary of the literature up to the mid-1990s is found in Karen Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf-Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). The Ecclesiastical History Society recently readdressed the usefulness of the distinction, *Elite and Popular Religion*, *SCH*, 42 (2006).

*Wesenmystik*, had encounters relating to the impact of the weather upon the harvest.<sup>305</sup> The idea of ‘domestic visions’ specifically locates the centre of the encounter in the networks and affairs that radiate out from the *domus*: as a place between the public and the private but always local and familial, as a place where both men and women could exercise authority in differing gendered ways, and as a place where personal decision making and problem resolution is the primary function of the vision.<sup>306</sup>

It is relatively easy to see how Christina expressed ‘domestic mysticism’: all her visions directed her own immediate affairs or those emanating out from her household, they used metaphors of household rooms in which the Virgin Mary appears, walls into which Abbot Geoffrey is cemented, or gardens which come from the cloister not the court.<sup>307</sup> Keys, clothing, candles, domestic animals, wild flowers and pilgrims illustrate her visions – all things encountered in everyday life. On occasion Christina found herself in church and closer to the altar than a woman should be, but rather than actively compromising or commandeering the sacrament, her visits form an extension of domestic church attendance where the priest controlled the ritual space. In the secular to religious shift of Christina’s primary *familia*, her visions were key to securing Markyate and yet continued to be the means by which she straddled the two identities, bringing her Huntingdon family into her Bedfordshire one. The sensory, secular tone of the *Life*, observed at the very start of this study, is almost as worthy of remark as Christina’s visions. Using this domestic model it is possible to marry the two and recognise where the many agendas of the text fracture to expose an authentic and pragmatic spirituality.

Numerous accounts exist of single visions, such as the one encountered by Osbert of Clare’s in a church at Pershore, which he relates and interprets in his epistle prefixed to the Life of St Edburga.<sup>308</sup> Likewise apparitions of the dead to warn their living relatives or fellow religious are particularly common. Though these certainly relate to the familial affairs of those involved, they are perhaps not best classified as ‘domestic visions’ unless effecting some notable change in the choices or decisions of the visited,

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<sup>305</sup> Gertrude, *Legatus Memorialis*, bk. I, ch. 13, (vol. II, p. 194).

<sup>306</sup> My classification identifies a relationship between the content of domestic visions and the life situation to which they relate, but it does not imagine all numinous encounters to be a kind of psychic counselling service as does Antoon Geels, who renders all religious visions as “autosymbolic representations of intrapsychic conflicts[...] of order, as against chaos”, ‘Transforming Moments, A Psychological Perspective on Religious Visions: Contemporary and Historical Cases’, in *Mysticism: A Variety of Psychological Perspectives*, p. 248.

<sup>307</sup> *Life*, ch. 25, p. 76; ch. 71, p. 160; and ch. 72, p. 164.

<sup>308</sup> Osbert of Clare, *Letters*, no. 43, pp. 180-181.

as in the apparition of Alvered to Abbot Geoffrey.<sup>309</sup> As is the case with all visions, it is difficult to identify Christina's peers in comparable English people of spirit for whom 'domestic visions' were a sustained part of their spirituality. Some accounts of visions leading to religious foundations indicate that this could be part of an effective numinous relationship, although regrettably few legends are contemporary with the establishment of their houses.<sup>310</sup> According to the mid—fifteenth century 'Pynson' or 'Walsingham' Ballad, in 1061 the Virgin Mary appeared three times to a widowed noblewoman Richeldis de Faverches concerning the most domestic of affairs: she transported Richeldis in spirit to visit her house in Nazareth, site of the Annunciation, which was to be replicated for pilgrims at Walsingham in Norfolk. When the undertaking encountered building problems Richeldis turned to prayer, which effected the arrival of angels sent from the Virgin to miraculously reset the foundations, "*Oure blyssed Lady, with hevenly mynystrys / Hirsylfe beyng here chyef artyfycer / Arerid this sayd house with aungellys handys / And nat only reyrd it but set it there it is / That is, two hundred fote and more in dystaunce / From the fyrste place bokes make remembraunce*".<sup>311</sup> When it came to founding Godstow in 1138 Edith, the widow of William Lancelane, already had a long-established relationship with the numinous. She had previously been directed to undertake the solitary life in Oxford and await further celestial instruction, "[a]fyr the decese of her housbond, ofte to her come by a vysyon that she shulde goon ye to the Cyte that Oxenford was l-callyd, and there she shold a-byde anone to the tyme she se a tokyn of the kyng allmyhty. It seems probable that Edith was, like Christina, accustomed to securing the details of her life choices through domestic visions, although regrettably little is known about them beyond her eventual nocturnal audition accompanied by celestial light, which commanded her to found the nunnery.<sup>312</sup>

The most lucrative insular evidence for twelfth-century 'domestic visions' is Peter of Cornwall's collection, cited already as the source for the visionary community at Stratford Langthorne. Peter included stories as similar to those found in Christina's *Life* as hermits being led by angels and hearing angel song, and others as earthy as the villager John of Orpingham who personally related to the prior his accurate dream-premonition of winning a wager against the local priest over the number of suckling-

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<sup>309</sup> *Life*, ch. 56, pp. 134-136.

<sup>310</sup> On the relationship between foundations, dreams and art see Carolyn Carty, 'The Role of Medieval Dream Images in Authenticating Ecclesiastical Construction', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 62 (1999), 45-90.

<sup>311</sup> John Compton Dickinson, *The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham* (Cambridge: CUP, 1956), pp. 124-130, citation verse 12, p. 127.

<sup>312</sup> *English Register of Godstow Nunnery*, pp. 26-27.

pigs available for tithing.<sup>313</sup> Indeed it is Peter's own family that offers the clearest example of a sustained domestic visionary praxis, centred on his grandfather, Ailsí. Ailsí was Christina's contemporary, flourishing during the reign of Henry I (although Peter recorded his visions from memory and oral tradition two generations later), and a burgess of some social standing in Launceston, Cornwall. Like Christina he was heralded as a possible saint by the local community because of the frequency of his visions, especially of the proto-martyr St Stephen, and the godly parenting of his sons, "*unde contigit quod sicut ille vir bonus fuit et sanctus et pro frequenti visione beati Stephani ab omnibus sanctus proclamabatur, ita fecit filius et enutriuit et educauit in timore Domini qui et ipsi in generatione sua iusti erant et ab omnibus qui patrem noverant semen sanctum sunt vocati*".<sup>314</sup> As with the religious family at Markyate, Ailsí's kin were swept up into the expectation of visionary and paranormal abilities, though none were so influential as their father. The two elder sons, who went into the Church, enjoyed miraculous escapes from death by fire and spider poison respectively.<sup>315</sup> The cult of St Stephen remained at the heart of the family, and the third son Jordan (Peter's own father), saw a vision before his death of a banner being carried out of his daughter's house which, it must be presumed, was the very one illustrating Stephen's stoning given by his elder brothers to the local church.<sup>316</sup> Given the proximity and connection between Holy Trinity Aldgate and Markyate; Peter's own grandfather's visionary holiness; and Peter's compulsive enthusiasm for collecting evidence of veridical or effective local encounters, the omission of Christina's visions from the *Liber Revelationum* is perhaps more remarkable than the many other silences on her story. Nevertheless Ailsí, as a non-culted localised visionary holyman, provides an interesting comparison to her.

Ailsí's particular devotion to St Stephen involved seeking and expecting answers to the problems of everyday life from his celestial patron. He was, we learn, was on the most familiar terms with the saint who appeared with great frequency for friendly chats, "*vir Dei Ailsí ita familiaris erat beato Stephano cum quo nimirum locutus et frequentissime facie ad faciem sicut solet loqui amicus cum amico*".<sup>317</sup> Stephen did not reveal theological secrets, or even symbolic images requiring interpretation as are found in

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<sup>313</sup> Peter of Cornwall, *Liber Revelationum*, Lambeth Palace, MS 51, fol. 4v, see also transcription in James and Jenkins, *Descriptive Catalogue*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>314</sup> Hull and Sharpe, 'Peter of Cornwall', ch. 9, p. 22.

<sup>315</sup> Hull and Sharpe, 'Peter of Cornwall', ch. 10-11, pp. 22-24

<sup>316</sup> Hull and Sharpe, 'Peter of Cornwall', ch. 11-12, pp. 24-26. This vision proved to be pre-cognition, though it was his granddaughter, not the banner, that was carried out concurrently with his death.

<sup>317</sup> Hull and Sharpe, 'Peter of Cornwall', ch. 9, p. 22

Christina's visions, instead he addressed Ailsi's decisions very directly. Whilst Ailsi was in charge of building a tower onto the secular canonry dedicated to the saint in the town, Stephen took the keenest interest in the details of the project and its staffing. The saint had a waggoner sacked for theft, showed Ailsi where stones for lime might be locally obtained, appeared in parallel nocturnal visions to reassure Ailsi and berate the uncooperative canons when work was halted because the latter provoked an industrial dispute over the positioning of the lime kiln, and finally was seen by the holyman while at nocturnal prayer being escorted by candle-holding boys in white taking a tour round the scaffolding to inspect the project.<sup>318</sup> Stephen's relationship with Ailsi is more consistently framed in terms of vassalic obligations than is Christina's with Mary. When Ailsi sought relief for an eye infection he berated the saint for failing to protect his health in exchange for his dedicated service to the building project, comparing his patron's liberality unfavourably to the secular Lord of Cornwall who would have rewarded comparable service, "*si comiti Moretonie que modo dominus est cornubie tantum servitium impendissem quantum et tibi iam pridem inpendi, multa iam mihi contulisset donaria*".<sup>319</sup> The saint, of course, visited him the following night to effect the needed miraculous recovery. Stephen was not a parsimonious patron and intervened in another dispute connecting the Ailsi household to the St Stephen canons, who were receiving their tithes that rightly belonged to another church. Stephen appeared to clarify to Ailsi that using his reputation for holiness to undermine the rightful recipients was inappropriate since St Paer was a friend of his and should not be defrauded even for his own benefit, "*Ego et sanctus Paer boni socii et amici sumus adinuicem et nolo in iacturam illius iniuste ditar*".<sup>320</sup> The modes of Ailsi's spirituality were considerably more limited than Christina's, and had a single primary devotional focus similar to St Godric's devotion to the crucifix in his chapel. But like both these monastic people of spirit, the layman Ailsi was a visionary on the cusp of older and newer types of visions. Predictably, where Christina inclined towards newer forms, as a man Ailsi, inclined towards the older ones, and his longest vision was a traditional tour of the otherworld, its punishments and glories, guided by his youngest son Paganus who had died whilst in his teens.<sup>321</sup>

There was considerable intellectual freeflow between England and the continent in the twelfth century, and if insular spiritual culture was distinctive because of "the diversity

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<sup>318</sup> Hull and Sharpe, 'Peter of Cornwall', chs. 2-5, pp. 16-19.

<sup>319</sup> Hull and Sharpe, 'Peter of Cornwall', ch. 6, p. 20.

<sup>320</sup> Hull and Sharpe, 'Peter of Cornwall', ch. 7, p. 20.

<sup>321</sup> Hull and Sharpe, 'Peter of Cornwall', ch. 13-17, pp. 26-34.

of the scene, its blend of[...] imagination and practical insight",<sup>322</sup> it was not inherently different from the continental landscape. In 1225 Matthew Paris reported that an anchoress of Leicester had been living off nothing but the host for seven years yet retained a complexion of lilies and roses that reflected her virginal modesty,<sup>323</sup> a practice of inedia that Caroline Walker Bynum has shown to be common amongst thirteenth-century holywomen across continental Europe.<sup>324</sup> What I have termed 'domestic visions' were also common on the continent, and offer a way of thinking about the English situation that prevents it from being dismissed as far removed from the continental one. A well known example is the adored mother of the French Benedictine Guibert of Nogent, who had effective visions that resolved or consoled her in her domestic circumstances whilst she was still married as well as in her widowhood as a recluse.<sup>325</sup> Many of these related to her troubled son, about whose state of heart she was often given images, and her visionary abilities were able to prevent him from leaving the monastery of St-Germer of Fly, ostensibly for a stricter religious life but actually to escape the bullying of his brothers. Seeing herself in the abbey church where all the brothers including Guibert were reduced to raggedly-dressed dwarves, his mother witnessed the Virgin Mary as Lady of Chartres pointing at Guibert declaring that she had brought him to the community and would not let him leave and then restoring all the monks to normal height.<sup>326</sup> Guibert, reproved by his mother's vision, connected it to a youthful dream of his own, emphasising the importance to him of their visionary relationship as a shared identity which revolved around his religious vocation. For his mother, however, Guibert was only one of her familial concerns. Though her relationship with his father seems to have been fraught, his absence when he was captured at the battle of Mortemer (1054) laid her open to a suffocating demonic attack which was only averted by the intervention of a good spirit who called on the Virgin Mary to protect her.<sup>327</sup> Later she relieved her husband's purgatorial sufferings by taking on the care of a tempestuous child to recompense the child that he had illegitimately fathered.<sup>328</sup> She was also able to act in the affairs of her

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<sup>322</sup> Southern, 'The Place of England', p. 215.

<sup>323</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Maiora*, III, p. 101, "*Faciem quoque semper habuit ut liliū candidissimam roseoque rubore perfusam, ad indicium pudicitiae et munditiae virginalis*".

<sup>324</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast*.

<sup>325</sup> Guibert wrote extensively about his mother in his autobiography, *De Vita Sua Sive Monodiarum*, PL, 156:837-962, and we are inevitably reliant for information on his idealised view of her. See also the most recent translation by Paul Archambault, *A Monk's Confession: The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>326</sup> Guibert of Nogent, *Monodiarum*, bk. I, ch. 16, col. 875.

<sup>327</sup> Guibert of Nogent, *Monodiarum*, bk. I, ch.13, cols. 860-861.

<sup>328</sup> Guibert of Nogent, *Monodiarum*, bk. I, ch. 18, cols. 876-879.

extended community, partly through visionary intimacy with Guibert's tutor and partly because she was known and consulted for her spiritual insight. During an out of body visit to her husband in purgatory she also prophetically saw the fate of a local knight, and on another occasion was able to identify why the child of her former nursemaid was convinced it was being eaten by dogs, since devils were triumphing over the treasure hidden in its cot. Her own lifestyle choices were also mentored and confirmed through visions; soon after the death of her husband she dreamt that she was at her own nuptials, which she interpreted for Guibert's tutor as instruction to take up the religious life.<sup>329</sup> Then when in her later years she resolved, against widespread clerical advice, to formalise her religious life by taking the veil, an apparition of the Virgin Mary giving her a costly robe for safekeeping reassured both her and her son, who had originally opposed the decision.

It was the content and its effective veracity, rather than the phenomenology, of the visions of Ailsa and Guibert's mother that conferred holiness onto them in the view of their peers. Guibert's mother made life choices which more closely resemble Christina's than did Ailsa, but there is considerable similarity between the concerns of both visionaries, in the affairs of their household, their own life choices and the afterworld location of their families. Amy Hollywood has observed that the gendering of visions may have more to do with "the multiplicity of male paths to the divine and the uniformity of those prescribed by men for women" than gendered religiosity *per se*.<sup>330</sup> This seems to be borne out for domestic visions which reflect some of the gendered restrictions of everyday life: where Ailsa had to be remonstrated with because others could not control his tithing, Guibert's mother needed celestial intervention to confirm her choices and care for the spiritual needs of her family. Domestic visions, as much as other modes, could be the opportunity for actively resisting as well as conforming to gendered norms. For example on the unrecognised feast of St Gertrude Marie of Oignies began to ring the bells at a parish she was visiting, apparently bolstering the authority of the cult of saints and divinely enabling the priest to fulfil his duties, but simultaneously setting out to provoke the local priest and take for herself the voice with which he spoke to his parishioners.<sup>331</sup>

The best set of comparisons for Christina as a visionary may actually be found in Germany, in the *Dialogus magnus visionum atque miraculorum* of Caesarius of

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<sup>329</sup> Guibert of Nogent, *Monodiarum*, bk. I, ch. 14, cols. 862-863.

<sup>330</sup> Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 28.

<sup>331</sup> Jacques of Vitry, *Vita Mariae Oignacensis*, bk. II, ch. 89, p. 567.

Heisterbach. Unlike Peter of Cornwall, Caesarius did not dwell on stories from the monastic classics; instead, between 1220 and 1235, he was persuaded by his novices and then his abbot to record some of the many miracles that were then being wrought within the Cistercian Order.<sup>332</sup> These are mostly short anecdotes, often including names and places, and rather than embodying a particularly distinctive Cistercian spirituality he includes visions in a range of modes to both men and women, many of which illustrate the domestic concerns of religious community life. These vary from devils appearing in both friendly and horrifying disguise like the headless devil that distressed the Markyate community, to tales of special veneration for particular saints like Ailsi and his sons, to the revelation of abstract truths about the Trinity encountered by a nun in an ecstasy during the Athanasian Creed at prime, which she “was unable to explain to her confessor even the method of that vision”, “*ut suo confessore illa, sive modum eiusdem visionis, explicare non posset*”.<sup>333</sup> Some of the visions do confirm the particular rightness of the well-lived Cistercian life, for example a laybrother from Lucka who had encountered many revelations saw fifteen men from his own community hanging on crosses alongside Christ, who informed him that this was because their holy lives conformed to the pattern of his passion.<sup>334</sup> Caesarius also devoted a whole book to the Virgin Mary, protectress of his order, including stories not known in the widely distributed English Marian collections. He knew something of the Benedictine Elisabeth of Schönau’s devotion to Mary, recording an ecstasy in which Elisabeth saw the Virgin knelt at prayer for the welfare of her convent.<sup>335</sup> Another nun whose vigorous genuflections to Mary hurt her leg obtained healing, as had Christina, through a dream of the Virgin anointing her from a box of ointment. Her community was drawn into the vision, as the Markyate *puellae* had participated in the visionary healing of their mistress, since the ointment was of such sweet smell that it woke the other nuns in the infirmary.<sup>336</sup>

This collection is too vast to compare the spirituality of all its many protagonists with Christina’s, but it is of interest that Caesarius gives an account of some women of spirit with a sustained visionary piety that passed through different modes. Two women connected to the nunnery of St Walburgis near Cologne are particularly remembered in person by Caesarius for visionary holiness. Richmud, a lay virgin, had a

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<sup>332</sup> Caesarius, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, Prologue.

<sup>333</sup> Caesarius, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, bk. VIII, ch. 39.

<sup>334</sup> Caesarius, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, bk. VIII, ch. 18.

<sup>335</sup> Caesarius, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, bk. VII, ch. 30. Although this is the only vision included, a passing comment likening a later vision to Elisabeth’s suggests greater knowledge of her, see bk. VII, ch. 37.

<sup>336</sup> Caesarius, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, bk. VII, ch. 48.

Christological piety which included visions of Christ as child, at the high priest's house, and in the body of the host.<sup>337</sup> The nun Christina of Volmuntsteine likewise saw Christological visions of his Nativity and Crucifixion,<sup>338</sup> but had others which commended the efforts made in the Cistercian life by her fellow religious in the eyes of God, and confirmed her salvation amongst them.<sup>339</sup> Less close to home, Caesarius had heard many stories of a noble but paralysed maiden from Quida in France who had taken up an informal religious life and had prophetic abilities which, like Christina, she exercised by knowing when monks from the local community were going to come to visit her. On one occasion, when left alone and unable to attend service on the feast of the Purification, as Christina had been at the Christmas feast, she was transported out of her body and taken by an angel to the heavenly Jerusalem where she witnessed the office sung by a procession of the orders of the faithfully deceased, Christ and his Mother, and brought back a miraculous candle as evidence of her encounter. She too had a particular devotion to Mary, although for her the Virgin's power was incarnational rather than as Queen of Heaven, and she was given care of the Christchild by his mother. Like Christina her meditations on questions of theology were answered by symbolic visions that were perhaps partly inspired by church art. A vision of a crystalline Mary with an infant in her womb whose crown became a tree to the four corners of the earth bearing fruit which only the elect could pluck, not only answered her meditations on predestination but also enabled her to foresee the eternal destination of people whom she met.<sup>340</sup>

Domestic visions do not conclusively solve the difficulties of identifying a visionary discourse to which Christina's spirituality belongs, but they do offer a model that points towards an appreciation of the dialogue between different visionary registers whilst avoiding melding these to a monoculture. The model may also offer a route for comparing Christina to her later English counterpart the laywoman Margery Kempe, who was also sexually ambivalent, spiritually unconventional and performed a very personal visionary praxis which attended to her own affairs. Margery has commanded a contradictory body of modern scholarship, which variously considers her to be an important contributor to Middle English mysticism, a feminist writer, or a highly conventional practitioner of devotional piety, and it seems likely that further work on Christina as a visionary will evoke a similar set of contradictions. By looking at the places where apparitions of angels and saints overlap with ecstasies to the celestial

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<sup>337</sup> Caesarius, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, bk. VIII, ch. 7 and 9 and bk. IX, ch. 33-34.

<sup>338</sup> Caesarius, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, bk. VIII, ch. 3 and 15.

<sup>339</sup> Caesarius, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, bk. VII, ch. 21 and bk. VIII, ch. 65.

<sup>340</sup> Caesarius, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, bk. VII, ch. 20.

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courts and visions of Christ or the Trinity, either in terms of a similarly effective outcome or of an individual encountering the numinous through diverse modes, it is possible to see that Christina was not as anachronistic as she at first appears. Her spirituality was sufficiently recognisable as holiness that, even without otherworld visions which were popular in England, she attracted a monastic audience. The frequent if transitory attention paid to visions in English materials is indicative of their relative normality, and Christina was remarkable only in degree to other visionary women living lay and professed lives. Overall we might conclude that the Anglo-Saxon chronicler was mistaken in his lament that during the nineteen years of King Stephen's reign "the land was all ruined...and they said openly that Christ and his saints were asleep".<sup>341</sup> At least in north Hertfordshire, the heavens seem to have been quite conspicuously awake.

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<sup>341</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle E*, 1137, trans. in *English Historical Documents*, II, p. 200.

## *Ancilla Christi: Visions and Community*

### Conclusions

The diversity and interconnectedness of medieval visionary culture has sometimes been obscured by theoretical approaches which privilege one visionary mode over others on phenomenological grounds. Christina's spirituality encompassed a range of visionary modes which developed over the course of her adult life, but this was an expansion in the breadth of her repertoire, not an ascent towards annihilation of the soul in God. For example, her visions of three bright lights fit with some of the most elevated modes put forward by theorists, ancient and modern, but she never ceased to see the symbolic image-based scenes that had formed her earliest encounters with the numinous.

A helical progression, (moving always onwards, but often returning to established themes), is found in the modes of Christina's encounters and also marks the celestial relationships that she cultivated. From Christina's youth, Mary was a powerful patroness and the effective force in a partnership with her Son, intervening in and reassuring Christina about her circumstances. As mighty Queen of Heaven, rather than nourishing mother, Mary fulfilled a different role in the devotions and encounters of women of spirit than she did in male spirituality, and it was Mary's story which was assimilated into the visionary symbolism of Christina's own. Contrastingly, Christina's ideas about her heavenly bridegroom did not share later women's devotion towards a suffering or courtly Christ; instead he was a compound figure who reflected both her complex relationships with men and the wider shifts in Christological imagery during the twelfth century. Overall it is not possible to situate Christina's spiritual orientation clearly with any single social cohort. The Trinitarian thread which runs through her visions is both spiritually innovative, being commonly found only after the twelfth-century shift identified by Dinzelbacher and others in the visions of both men and women of spirit, and taps into an established Anglo-Saxon cultic practice.

The development of Christina's spirituality was partially a cultivated praxis in which the unsought encounters of her teenage years were channelled, through reflection and interaction with other facets of her devotional life, into an expectation of numinous encounter. The hermit Roger, rather than Abbot Geoffrey, was the most formative influence over the direction taken by Christina's expectations, though the Abbot provided their most significant textual resource in the Hildesheim Psalter. Situated within a visionary community, Christina was both the *exemplum* that caused others to anticipate visions as forming part of their own spirituality, and was validated in her

unusually frequent and intense commerce with the divine by their participation. Christina's visions fuelled her sense of saintliness, and in middle age as she was reflecting on her story with the Writer the connection was made between her developing abilities as a visionary (which were increasingly being turned outward through a prophetic mode to the affairs of others), and her progression in holiness.

Twelfth-century England was more prolifically graced with numinous encounters than is usually recognised in studies on Western spirituality. Such encounters seem to have been sufficiently commonplace that writers rarely elaborated on their nature, being more interested instead in their content and effectiveness. Although principally of a middle register, the insular scene, like the continental one, manifested the shift from older to newer types of visions over the century. This can be seen in the contrasting visionary communities of Stratford Langthorne and Watton. However, in seeking a context for Christina's spirituality it is necessary to identify monastic women whose elite-register visions were principally orientated towards their own personal and spiritual affairs, like the later Helfta women of spirit, rather than given for public proclamation as were those of Hildegard of Bingen or Julian of Norwich; but who also cross over to a middle- or even low-register visionary culture in which dreams and apparitions were portentous and effective guides to everyday life. A few such *mulieres religiosae*, for whom visions were key to their self-identity and potential holiness but who did not achieve widespread fame, are found in late-twelfth and early-thirteenth century vision collections. None, however, are recorded in early-twelfth century England, and as such Christina, in the degree to which visions formed her occupational identity, remains as unique by time and place as she has ever been supposed. Though she did not achieve the widespread acclaim of her contemporary Elisabeth of Schönau, whose visions were of a more liturgical, complex and public content, Christina illustrates something of the complexity, communality and cross-over of contemporary visionary culture, and as such may prove to be a most valuable, if less remarkable, woman of spirit.

## Conclusion: Spiritual Success in a Transitional Context

The last folio of the extant *Life* recounts a series of incidents which showcase Christina's telesthesia, prescience and mind-reading abilities. They are, we learn, the outcome of her ever deepening intimacy with God as his specially beloved handmaid, which has enabled her to penetrate the hidden wisdom of the divine, *tanto manifestus mundo corde penetrare meruit occulta sapientie tue*.<sup>1</sup> Although the narrative and structural intentions of the Writer at this point are obscure, for my purposes this set of anecdotes is interesting because it brings together many of the strands from this study. The recipients of Christina's timely attentions are drawn from the religious and secular networks of her adult life, including her *puellae* at Markyate, personal friends and their servants, her own family in Huntingdon and her *familiarissimus* Abbot Geoffrey.<sup>2</sup> In them, Christina is shown to be a special friend of God, able to cure people of their spiritual if not of their physical afflictions, and so is at a mature stage in the life of a saint. Finally it is these visionary abilities which merited the composition of a *vita* for Christina. Her frequent encounters with the numinous are tied closely to Christina's sense of spiritual and social selfhood, and to the domestic concerns of her intimates and wider circle of stakeholders.

### I. Reviewing the Christina Thesis

By the fourteenth century, when the extant redactions of Christina's original *vita* were made, a female holiness based almost entirely on visions was widely recognisable in a way that it had not been whilst the original was under composition. Although in lifestyle and education Christina was very much a woman of her time, she shortly preceded most of the women of spirit who form the most obvious comparison to her, and who changed contemporary expectations of female religious life. This tension between newness and familiarity explains why the Tiberius *Life* is a chaotic text which neither fully conforms to nor fully confounds our expectations of a saint's life.

Commissioned amidst a complex web of expectations, the *vita* was a component of the concentrated patronage of Abbot Geoffrey to Christina and her Markyate community c.1141-1145. A number of interested parties, including Christina herself

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, ch. 82, p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> See *Life*, ch. 64, p. 148.

(perhaps even particularly Christina herself) thought her visions remarkable and worthy of record. Not everyone agreed, and Christina was accused of being deliberately calculating in the way that she manipulated her situation and abilities to further her social position and relationship with the Abbot. Her two claims to sanctity - her flight from marriage and her visions - were both good saintly traits but were not in themselves a guarantee of sainthood, and she always risked disjuncture between her external behaviour and her internal virtue compromising her holiness. Yet with the increasing social visibility of her visions, as Abbot Geoffrey came to rely on her direct access to the divine, it became increasingly necessary for Christina to be(come) a saint, particularly since patristic wisdom had established that only saints could be certain of avoiding deception when encountering the numinous. The 'envisioning' of the trappings of cult for Christina (her visionary powers being employed both to suggest that a *vita* should be written and that Markyate should become a pilgrimage site), highlights her situation caught between existing and new models of holiness.

Having a living protagonist rendered the task of the Writer both easier and much harder than recasting a long-dead saint to meet new needs, as was done for the abbey's own Saint Alban a few years later. Some of the stories were too recent, and others too well known, for an authorised line to be placed on them, but the overall goal was to realise a saint. Christina herself had aligned her story with St Cecilia in her youth, and carried that story into her adult life when she hoped that Abbot Geoffrey would play the co-lead as Valerian. That the model offered by the seventh-century visionary abbess Aldegund of Maubeuge was neglected by the Writer in favour of the virgin martyrs and *vitae patrum* of the early church may be testimony to his inexperience, or to the need to neutralise detractors, or the degree to which Abbot Geoffrey's preoccupations were driving the writing process, or a combination of all these factors. It is therefore little surprise that the construction fails at numerous points. A tension is also visible in the *Life* between attraction to Christina's charismatic abilities which fitted with an interest at St Albans in spiritual innovation, Benedictine monasticism as the religious ideal to which she must inevitably be shaped, and the decentering of her own Markyate community in order to claim her for St Albans.

The *vita* was a collaborative project in hagiography, but rather than preventing us from accessing the 'real' Christina it partially exposes her own preoccupations and ideas about her identity. The process of writing down her story was a negotiation of recollection and Christina's own understanding of that story was not necessarily the same as the Writer's, nor was she simply compliant with contemporary paradigms of womanhood. Like Margaret of Cortona who declared to the sceptical Franciscans that

her visions would make her a saint despite her scandalous sexual past,<sup>3</sup> a careful reading of the *Life* offers routes into Christina's disruption of the masculine narrative voice. Christina did not distinguish between her secular and religious identities, nor between her visionary role and her responsibilities as a prioress, instead they formed a fluid continuous selfhood. She continued to have active contact with her family, despite her teenage trials, and had always considered herself to be monastic through the many years that she was not able to embrace the lifestyle. Christina also used the fabrics that were important to her secular identity as a means to write using her body as text, her secular clothes functioning in her early years to protect her religious identity. Sainthood is, at its core, an unusually authentic *imitatio Christi*, and where later women of spirit laid violent claim to their bodies to participate in the performance of redemption, Christina, situated at the very start of the discourse, used her sartorial rather than her physical body as the site of assault and ultimately of *imitatio Christi*.

A saint is only a saint if recognised as one, and it is possible to consider how authoritative Christina was by examining her social networks and monastic foundation. Her fame encompassed the South East of England, certainly amongst the monastic houses, but the wider circle of prestigious contacts that Christina made for her priory did not last, except for the great Abbey at St Albans. Nunneries in Britain were rarely affluent, and Markyate was relatively successful within that framework. It was not, however, a cultic centre, nor does Christina seem to have been remembered as anything more than a fondly appreciated prioress. Christina held what Toth has called the "charisma of an inner consolidation",<sup>4</sup> turning the corner from the hermit Roger, a Weberian prophet who exercised unmediated authority over his followers by virtue of his personal gifts, to the *amtscharisma* of later prioresses conveyed by their official position over Markyate. Even this was not a role that Christina came to fully-formed, she *became* charismatic, just as she became a saint and a visionary, and the process of learning and development during her lifetime is interesting in its own right.

Christina's most significant teacher and mentor was Roger, the original charismatic prophet at Markyate, who orientated her spiritual eyes towards the visionary powers that they shared and entrusted his growing community to her care. By handing his charisma on to her, Roger, who had been buried at St Albans as a saint, was also partially responsible for creating the suggestion that she might be one too. No stories were known about Roger beyond those told by Christina, and it is therefore

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<sup>3</sup> Cited by Petroff, 'Seven Stages to Power', p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Toth, 'Towards a Theory', p. 93.

particularly interesting that the best lesson he taught to his pupil was spiritual immunity to attacks on the sartorial body which fabricates sanctity. Though the four years that Christina spent with Roger were particularly formative, she was still young, and as she looked back over the subsequent decade she told the Writer a story of ongoing spiritual development: importantly she thought of herself as having such a story to tell. Divine education is both individual and communal, both active and passive. The person of spirit is often enjoined to prophesy what they have learnt, but what they have learnt has been shaped by their own agency in the act of 'seeing' and digesting the revelations they receive.<sup>5</sup> Christina became a holy woman through an dialectic process of socially constructed meaning, which validated her choices and abilities but which also determined the directions that these must take. She became a hub for spiritual excellence and is a chartable example of how visionary communities could spring up around a charismatic leader, even when this influence was limited in scope and durability.

Christina was precocious in her religiosity, as were many women of spirit, but her visions only seem to have started in earnest when this religiosity was threatened by her impending marriage. Beginning with dreams, by mature adulthood Christina had a broad visionary repertoire which was frequently ecstatic and perhaps included the unitive encounters that are sometimes deemed to be a separate kind of experience, alongside more usual apparitions, auditions and domestic prophecies. Christina calls into question such distinctions, as well as giving an unusually early insight into how art and texts could embolden a visionary to aspire to ever more intimate dealings with the numinous. Some of the themes and relationships of her visions anticipate female continental spirituality from the succeeding century, but in other respects she is the better known face of a less visible contemporary insular scene. Christina's spirituality was not static like that of contemporary male English visionaries such as Godric of Finchale or Ailsi of Lauceston, yet it did not show the same breadth of theological and liturgical sophistication or prophetic public utility as is found in her continental female peer Elisabeth of Schönau. The Gilbertine house at Watton hints at an English proto-engagement with the kind of affective female spirituality, partially inspired by the Cistercians, which was beginning to develop on the continent. Instead of challenging the wider church to spiritual reform or the individual soul to greater repentance and

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, Hildegard's canonisation process was never completed, because there is no official category of prophet saints. Prophecy does not indicate a heroic virtue binding the person to God by supernatural charity, and so she is seen to have had agency in the reception of her revelations. See Robert Murray, 'Prophecy in Hildegard', in *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of her Thought and Art*, ed. Charles Burnett and Peter Dronke (London: Warburg Institute, 1998), pp. 80-88.

intimacy with the divine, Christina's visions were principally practical solutions to her circumstances. Although Jocelyn Wogan-Browne perhaps does Christina a disservice in claiming that England lacked any women who had "an early career as a *mulier sancta*", her description of insular women's visions as "strategic or revelatory" rather than "occupational" identifies an important strand in the visionary spectrum.<sup>6</sup> 'Domestic visions', form a subset of the spiritual activities of many people of spirit, as well as those of ordinary people who were making decisions about their patronage of religious houses or seeking miracle cures. Christina enables us to see where the clear demarcations between elite and popular visionary activity breaks down.

Christina's *Life* lies in a "fragment of collective memory",<sup>7</sup> which participated in the formation of discourses about holiness. It is therefore not consistently clear whether we should read her as a model for spirituality - and so much more spiritually innovative than has previously been credited - or as part of contemporary discourses that have yet to be put into words.<sup>8</sup> She seems to have posed some threat to contemporary holiness, since her voice was silenced until the fourteenth century when people of spirit formed a well-established part of the religious landscape. Yet her contemporaries at St Albans were interested in new spiritual currents arriving from the continent and comfortable with visions, so perhaps she was not actually radical enough to shift the discourse. Taken as a whole, to borrow from Ann Warren's description of English anchorites, Christina and her patrons "straddled two worlds. Both conservative and avant-garde, conventional and faddish".<sup>9</sup>

## II. Directions for Future Research

In arguing for Christina as a possible saint and for her *Life* as predicated on contemporary ideas about sanctity, and in contending that Christina's own voice can be discerned from amongst others in the text, I have offered a reading of her that makes a sustained case for realigning her *Life* with approaches which are currently out of fashion in Christina studies. Urgently needed though such a correction is, it does not aspire to 'close the case' on Christina, nor to contend that the many other genres and voices in the text do not merit further research.

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<sup>6</sup> Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives*, p. 249.

<sup>7</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, cited by Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> For a rehabilitation of agency in individual and collective meanings as preceding and subsequently creating the language of discourse, see A. P. Cohen, *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Warren, *Anchorites*, p. 288.

The “textual archaeology” of Christina’s story itself still offers unresolved questions that would further nuance any reading of her. We might wonder why the foundation charters for Markyate have survived at all when there is little other charter evidence for the priory or for its great mentor at St Albans, and the significant errors of chronology and detail found in Nicholas Roscarrock’s account suggests that the known accounts of Christina may not reflect all of the original corpus about her. An explanation for the appended *vitae* immediately before Christina’s in the Tiberius manuscript would greatly increase our understanding of why and how Christina’s redaction was produced. A careful study of the overall priorities and interests of John of Tynemouth as he undertook the main body of his extrapolations would make an interesting comparison with the final item in his compilation, as well as being a valuable independent project for the wider field of *mouvance* in later medieval saints lives.

Reconsideration of naming patterns in the *Life* also has the potential to bring radical revision to Christina studies. Christina is a very common name, but that all her siblings having names which link them to recent English royal saintly networks is suggestive either of myth-making or more interesting social networks in the *Life* than is currently apparent. Theodora, Christina’s original name, is unusual but is contemporaneously found in a manual for nuns, the *Speculum Virginum* dialogue between a virgin of Christ and her mentor Peregrinus, which circulated widely in the Rhineland and may even have been known by Hildegard of Bingen.<sup>10</sup>

There are a number of additional directions that wider research might take to build on the grounding established here about the social, saintly and spiritual identity of Christina, and about her extended network centred on the abbey of St Albans. In particular she represents a middle-register of secular and religious society that is not usually easily accessed. Research on contemporary gift-giving, which has tended to focus on elite and financially substantial exchanges, would benefit from considering how gifts operated at a domestic level. Christina’s story offers a start-point for considering how women use gifts and bribes, and a way to straddle existing work on women’s financial patronage of religious houses and their spiritual patronage of the dead through purgatorial piety. In terms of the domestication, or routinisation, of religious houses, work has yet to be done on the comparative *cultic* success of community leaders at different stages in the early life of new monastic establishments. Greater clarity on the relative veneration of originating hermits and the community

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<sup>10</sup> See Mews, ed., *Listen Daughter*; and Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St Hildegard’s Theology of the Feminine* (Aldershot: Scholar, 1987), p. 62.

legislators that followed them would provide a framework for situating Christina's holiness in the absence of comparable English prioress saints. Finally the preliminary reconsideration of visionary culture in England offered here has drawn attention to the fruitfulness of cross comparison between visionaries who are not usually studied together, in order to move beyond restrictive paradigms which rely on classifying spiritual difference. Christina had neither the drive nor the fierce intelligence of a Hildegard of Bingen, so it is impossible to tell whether England was particularly resistant to the influence of prophetic women; but the invitation to take more seriously the visions of everyday life which are so common in medieval texts of all kinds will, I hope, be pursued in future scholarship.

### III. A Failed Saint or a Failed Text: Is there a Holywoman in this *Life*?

Canonisation is not a useful measurement of sanctity for a twelfth-century woman, but the trappings of cult cannot be so easily dismissed. In one sense Christina is a 'failed saint' because she fell between expectations of sanctity: what her holiness *was* did not fit sufficiently within brackets that were recognisable in her own time to generate sustained reverence for her. That Christina's *vita* exists at all makes her uniquely successful as a English woman, yet it remained incomplete and was not circulated outside St Albans Abbey and Markyate Priory. A century after her death Matthew Paris was writing at St Albans about visionary dignitaries who mirror Christina on some of the spectra that have been considered in this thesis – the Anglo-Danish Robert of Knaresborough whose relationship with the Abbey of Newminster placed him between the hermit and monastic lifestyles, the German prioress Hildegard of Bingen, who could influence important political players, and collectively the Beguines of Liège who were revered for their living holiness<sup>11</sup> - but Christina did not enjoy his attention. Modern network theory has shown that seemingly minor factors tip a phenomenon into a success epidemic: a combination of individuals to promote it who are extra-highly connected, information brokers and persuasive sellers, a counter-intuitive stickiness in the phenomenon and the right context.<sup>12</sup> Rather than Christina's mode of holiness being too obscure to her contemporaries to make her a successful saint, perhaps we should be thinking about her *vita* as an unsuccessful text which did not ultimately meet with enough of these factors to reach the "tipping point" that would have facilitated and regulated remembrance of Christina.

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Maiora*, IV, pp.278 and 82-83, V, p. 195.

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (London: Abacus, 2001).

Overall Christina's mode of holiness was not completely foreign to her stakeholders, though it would become more familiar over the next century. She modelled herself on familiar patterns, an active self-textualisation which fissures at the points where appropriate language for her charismatic abilities and experiences was still rudimentary. This performance attracted sufficient recognition during her lifetime to make her a plausible provincial saint, and her story could have been tidied up after her death to control its more unstable and transgressive elements. Her virginity and visions might have exonerated her for lack of humility and charity under thoughtful revision, although perhaps not from the missing post-mortem miracles which guaranteed popularity amongst the laity. That such revisions were not eventually undertaken was partly, I suggest, because Christina's position in the spiritual landscape of mid- to late-twelfth century England was more impressive and simultaneously less unusual, and so less worthy of remark, than has been previously supposed. Admittedly without clear criteria against which to test Christina's visions her situation was precarious and open to negotiation, and the scurrilous maligning of her detractors should not be overlooked. Yet, as a skilled prioress of a successful nunnery whose domestic abilities were enhanced by her visionary ones Christina is for us the celebrity face of a wider current of living holiness in English female religious life. There is a holywoman in this *Life*, but she is, in fact, disruptively ordinary.

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