

Translating Marian Doctrine into the Vernacular:
The Bodily Assumption in Middle English and
Old Norse-Icelandic Literature

by

Daniel Najork

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Robert Bjork, Chair
Robert Sturges
Heather Maring

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the ways in which translators writing in two contemporary medieval languages, Old Norse-Icelandic and Middle English, approached the complicated doctrine of the bodily Assumption of Mary. At its core this project is dedicated to understanding the spread and development of an idea in two contemporary vernacular cultures and focuses on the transmission of that idea from the debates of Latin clerical culture into Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic literature written for an increasingly varied audience made up of monastics, secular clergy, and the laity. The project argues that Middle English and Old-Norse Icelandic writing about the bodily Assumption of Mary challenges misconceptions that vernacular translations and compositions concerned with Marian doctrine represent the popular concerns of the laity as opposed to the academic language, or high Mariology, of the clergy.

DEDICATION

To the memory of my Grandmothers Mary and Grace

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ASSUMPTION IN THE MEDIEVAL WEST	27
3 CHANGING OPINIONS OF THE BODILY ASSUMPTION IN THE TRANSITION FROM OLD TO MIDDLE ENGLISH	52
4 WIDESPREAD ACCEPTANCE: THE DOCTRINE IN MIDDLE ENGLISH TEXTS OF THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES	82
5 CAUTIOUS THEOLOGY: MEDIEVAL ICELANDIC COMMENTARY ON THE BODILY ASSUMPTION IN <i>THE OLD ICELANDIC HOMILY BOOK</i> AND <i>MARÍU SAGA</i>	120
6 THE BENEDICTINES OF NORTHERN ICELAND AND THE PROMOTION OF THE BODILY ASSUMPTION IN THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CENTURIES	151
7 CONCLUSION	180
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	187
APPENDIX	
A MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE MAJOR OLD-NORSE ICELANDIC ASSUMPTION TEXTS	204

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In her 2009 study, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary*, Miri Rubin suggests that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries Marian devotion was primarily a monastic concern, but that in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries the Virgin Mary was made “local and vernacular.”¹ Mary was no longer the private possession of the Latin world but became central to an increasingly diverse group of vernaculars. As Rubin suggests, this attention to the mother of God “was meant above all to make familiar and cherished the figure of Mary and her saving child.”²

The localizing and vernacularizing of the mother of God is the genesis of this study; in this investigation I examine the translation of a significant Marian doctrine, the bodily Assumption, into Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic³ for both clerical and

¹ Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary*, p. 192.

² Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 220.

³ The term Old Norse-Icelandic has been promoted in recent scholarship to denote texts from both Norway and Iceland. Texts composed in Norway were often copied in Iceland, and vice versa. Saints' lives translated in Iceland were exported to Norway. There were also Icelandic poets in the service of the Norwegian court. While most of the surviving material under consideration here survives in Icelandic manuscripts, there will be some cause to refer to Norwegian clerical culture and translational activities. The term Old Norse-Icelandic was popularized by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow in their *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*. Thomas N. Hall offers, in “Old Norse-Icelandic Sermons,” in Beverly Mayne Kienzle, ed. *The Sermon. Typologie des Sources du Moyen Age Occidental*, pp. 661-662, a useful summary of the reasons for adopting the term: “In linguistic parlance, the term “Old Norse” is customarily used as an equivalent of the modern Scandinavian *norrøn* (Icelandic *norræna*), a blanket label for the literary dialects of the Old Scandinavian period (ca. 1050-ca. 1350) before they became fully distinguished as individual languages. Theoretically, a study of ‘Old Norse sermons’ ought to take into account sermons written in any of the older Scandinavian dialects, including medieval Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and Icelandic, as well as the Norse dialects of the Faroes, Orkneys, British Isles and Greenland, but in practice this is not the case since, as happens to be true with virtually all other categories of Old Norse literature, the surviving texts in Norwegian and Icelandic are both much older and far more abundant than those in any of the other dialects, so that in effect they dominate and define the entire field, particularly in the earliest stages. As any student of Old Norse language and literature soon comes to realize, most of the texts one encounters under this rubric are in fact Icelandic, and as a result the terms ‘Old Norse’ and ‘Old Icelandic’ are often, if not quite accurately, used synonymously. The potential for confusion in this overlapping linguistic terminology has recently prompted some scholars to adopt a new term, ‘Old Norse-Icelandic’, to refer to the large number of texts of Old West Scandinavian (i.e. Norwegian or Icelandic) origin surviving mainly or exclusively in Icelandic copies, recensions, or manuscripts, but

lay audiences in the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. While much of this study focuses on Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic texts, Latin ones have been consulted as sources for the translations.

At its core then this study is dedicated to the spread and development of an idea in two contemporary vernacular cultures. This study focuses on the transmission of that idea from the debates of Latin clerical culture into Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic literature written for an increasingly varied audience made up of monastics, secular clergy, and the laity. This examination hopes to answer questions about the mentalities of English and Icelandic translators in their approaches to translating religious material into the vernacular, namely, did English translators move away from academic language in favor of popular devotion in their approach to Marian doctrine, as is commonly suggested about the lives of Christ? Do Icelandic clerics engage source texts, quote and cite authority, and use academic argument in their discussions of the fate of Mary's soul and body? Why are Icelandic translators less willing than English ones to confirm the bodily Assumption openly, especially if, as Arnved Nedkvitne has recently suggested, Norse society was especially interested in learning about life after death?⁴

Often Old Norse-Icelandic translators defer to authorities, such as Jerome.⁵ English authors seem to more readily accept the bodily Assumption and include it in lives of Mary or poetry dedicated to her, but does it follow that Middle English writers avoid the theological arguments supporting or criticizing the doctrine of the Assumption? The English authors are clearly aware of the discussions, and many of them were taking place

once again this turns out to be a roundabout way of saying everything in Old Icelandic plus a few odd bits in Norwegian and peripheral dialects.”

⁴ See Nedkvitne's conclusion, pp. 305-316, to *Lay Belief in Norse Society*, 1000-1350.

⁵ Pseudo-Jerome, now commonly thought to be the Carolingian Paschasius Radbertus.

in England, but some do not feel the need to cite authority. What I will argue in the following chapters is that as support of the bodily Assumption spread, two implications emerged. The first of these, and perhaps the more doctrinally significant of the two, was what the bodily Assumption signified for Incarnational theology. The second, and perhaps more suspect of the two, was what the bodily Assumption revealed about Mary's special privilege and thus her powers of intercession at both personal death and the Last Judgment. These two implications were first considered among monastic thinkers in Latin and then later celebrated by vernacular writers. Though both of these implications find voice in English and Old Norse-Icelandic writing, English authors tend to stress the importance of the bodily Assumption for the theology of the Incarnation and the atonement of the flesh while Icelandic ones appear to have been more interested in Mary's role at the Last Judgment.

The increased focus on Mary beginning in the thirteenth century is linked to the devotion promoted amongst preachers, particularly among the Franciscans and Dominicans, to the life of Christ. Gail McMurray Gibson has pointed out, in her influential *The Theater of Devotion*, that “the incarnational preoccupation of the late Middle Ages tended to make the Virgin Mary—perhaps even more than Christ himself—the very emblem of Christian mystery.”⁶ In recent decades scholars focused on this “incarnational preoccupation” and have seen in the late Middle Ages a shift towards imaginative meditation on Christ and Mary.⁷ This type of meditation was thought, as

⁶ Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*, p. 137.

⁷ See for example, Nicole Rice's *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature*, Nancy Bradley Warren's essay in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, ed. by Paul Strohm, and Ian Johnson's recent *The Middle English Life of Christ: Academic Discourse, Translation, and Vernacular Theology*.

Michael Sargent has argued about Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, to be more appropriate "for the physically minded, who were unable to think of spiritual things – for carnal men, for novices, and for women."⁸ Love transmits a popular idea in the prologue to his translation of the Pseudo-Bonaventuran work that the lay people should be likened to "symple creatures þe whiche as childryn hauen nede to be fedde with mylke of ly3te doctrine & not with sadde mete of grete clargye & of hye contemplacion."⁹ To this end Love emended certain parts of his translation for the edification of men and women. He admits also to the "wipdrawyng of diuerse auctoritis and maters as it semeth to þe wryter hereof moste spedefull & edifying to hem þat bene of symple vndirstondyng to þe which symple soules as seynt Bernerde seye contemplacion of þe monehede of cryste is more liking more spedefull more sykere þan is hyze contemplacion of þe godhed."¹⁰ Love's text was extremely popular, and much has been said about his translation techniques in connection with the Oxford translation debates of the fourteenth century which culminated in Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409. There was anxiety in late-medieval England about imparting the "mete of grete clargye & of hye contemplacion" to the laity, in large part because of the Wycliffites and their insistence on more access to spirituality among the lay folk; religious texts translated from Latin into English were to be, ideally, approved by the clergy before being presented to the laity.¹¹

⁸ Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text*, ed. Michael Sargent, p. x.

⁹ Love, p. 10.

¹⁰ Love, p. 10.

¹¹ Since the publication of Nicholas Watson's "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," there has been an increasing amount of scholarship on these issues. See, for example, Nicole Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature*; Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh, *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*; Vincent Gillespie, "Vernacular Theology," in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, ed. by Paul Strohm, Ian Johnson's recent

A major concern of this examination is to challenge or at least complicate presumptions that vernacular translations and compositions about Marian doctrine represent the popular concerns of the laity, as opposed to the academic language of the clergy. Brian K. Reynolds argues in *Gateway to Heaven* that in the later Middle Ages “the single greatest change was to be in the increasing use of the vernacular in popular devotion and homilies, which would lead to an even greater dichotomy between ‘high’ Mariology of the theologians and the fervent devotionism of the laity.”¹² Gail McMurray Gibson points out similarly in *The Theater of Devotion* that in England and France the development of Mary’s cult “depended hardly at all on logic, on scholasticism, or indeed on theological *argument* of any kind.”¹³ In the following chapters I will argue, however, that Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic writing on the doctrine of the Assumption provides ample evidence to the contrary. The “high Mariology” of the scholastics is not absent from vernacular texts focused on the Assumption as previous scholarship has suggested.

There are, though, certainly examples of popular belief exceeding the doctrine of the Church.¹⁴ A.J. Minnis has pointed out, in reference to the laity’s approach to the cult of the saints and pardons, that ecclesiastical authorities allowed for liberties to be taken among the populus to avoid scandal. Because the clerical elite wanted to avoid

The Middle English Life of Christ: Academic Discourse, Translation, and Vernacular Theology, Kantik Ghosh *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts*, and *Prestige, Authority and Power in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts*, ed. Felicity Riddy.

¹² Brian K. Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven. Marian Doctrine and Devotion: Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods, Volume 1 Doctrine and Devotion*, pg. 242.

¹³ Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*, p. 138.

¹⁴ We might take as an example the laity’s tendency to appeal for salvation directly from Mary rather than Christ. This was not only the target of Protestant and Catholic reformers. Theologians like Thomas Aquinas had attempted to reinstate Christ as the center of salvation. Because of Mary’s perceived compassion and inability to deny those that loved her, many medieval Christians focused their devotional energy on winning the Virgin’s favor. Many of these issues are examined in Rubin, *Mother of God*.

confrontation with popular belief, according to Minnis, many practices were allowed that could never have received the approval of high-ranking churchmen or the validation of scholastic theology.¹⁵ This is not the case in the example of the Assumption of Mary though. English and Middle English writers and translators often adopt the language of high ranking churchmen to defend the belief.

The doctrine of the bodily Assumption was first popularized in Latin and spread among monastics despite some skepticism of the apocryphal legends of Mary's death and ascent to heaven. It is possible that these apocryphal legends were seen as safe in the monasteries because clerical culture also produced non-apocryphal arguments based in scripture to support the doctrine. But the apocrypha were widely available in the vernacular, and we can see in vernacular texts the struggle between the apocryphal and the Church sanctioned version of the Assumption, which was widely written about amongst academics. Vernacular sermons, for example, often avoid apocrypha in favor of more scriptural understandings, but many accept the Assumption in both body and soul. For these authors, the vernacular is a sufficient medium to take up arguments in favor of or against the bodily Assumption.¹⁶ It is my contention that the distinction offered by Reynolds is neither a clear-cut nor an easily identifiable one. Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic authors often feel confident in the capabilities of the vernacular in the realm of Marian debate. They often adopt similar techniques to Latin academics. Some vernacular texts on Mary's Assumption are simple translations, but many others are

¹⁵ Minnis, *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁶ On defense of the vernacular as sufficient for academic argument, see for example, Alistair Minnis, *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular*; Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts*; Ian Johnson, *The Middle English Life of Christ: Academic Discourse, Translation, and Vernacular Theology*. These issues are also considered in Wogan-Browne et al., *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520*.

compilations or adaptations that involve scholarly acumen on the part of the translator/compiler/commentator.

I have chosen the bodily Assumption as my focus because the doctrine was not, until recently, an officially settled matter.¹⁷ Because of its status, the doctrine of the bodily Assumption was the subject of great debate and allowed medieval academics to test their scholarly acumen in defending or criticizing the belief. Study of these medieval debates in Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic allows further investigation into the motivations for and process of vernacular translation. Mary was the center of much academic writing. In the universities she was the focus of “intellectual sparring.”¹⁸ For the scholastic theologians she was an important part of the Incarnation. For the Franciscans and Dominicans she was a model for living and for the Cistercians the object of deep desire. Her Assumption was imagined in the liturgy, in poetry, in sermons, in biographies of her life, in art, and in drama. The Assumption clearly captured the imagination of both clerical and lay audiences in medieval England and Iceland because the belief in Mary’s dual Assumption provided hope of the believer’s own bodily resurrection.

Studying the translation of Marian doctrine into Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic provides the opportunity for worthwhile comparative research. The two languages were contemporary and there were intimate connections between Iceland and

¹⁷ The doctrine was not made official dogma until 1950, when, as Brian K. Reynolds explains, “Pius XII declared, in the Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* that ‘we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.’” See Reynolds, p. 293 and http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus_en.html for the official document.

¹⁸ See Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 276. Georgiana Donavin’s recent book *Scribit Mater: Mary and the Language Arts in the Literature of Medieval England* also discusses Mary’s role in the teaching of grammar and as a figure for wisdom and the sharing and producing of knowledge.

England throughout the medieval period.¹⁹ The number of surviving Old Norse words in modern English attests to the continued contact between Norse and English speakers and the impact of Scandinavian settlement in the Danelaw region of England.²⁰ Some scholars have speculated that speakers of Old Norse and Old English enjoyed some level of mutual intelligibility²¹ and Anglo-Saxon missionaries have long been seen as influential in the development of ecclesiastical institutions and the education of clerics in Norway and Iceland.²² England features regularly in the action of the historical and heroic sagas,²³ and historians of the later Middle Ages in Iceland identify the end of the fourteenth century and fifteenth century as the ‘English Age’ of Iceland.²⁴ It was during this period that an Englishman was appointed as bishop in Iceland and that a collection of exempla was translated from Middle English into Icelandic.²⁵ Though brief, this survey highlights the continued and lasting contact between England and Iceland. Comparative study of Old Norse-Icelandic and Middle-English translation is also warranted by the fact the translators are often using the same source material. Iceland, in fact, imported many

¹⁹ The connections did not end with the medieval period of course, and we can point to Victorian interest in the sagas and in Iceland as a manifestation of the continued connection. On this, see Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain*.

²⁰ This number is approximately four hundred and it is significant that many of these words are part of everyday usage. Many studies have been dedicated to the influence Old Norse enjoyed on English. See, for example, Eric Björkman, *Scandinavian Loan-Words in Middle English*; John Geipel, *The Viking Legacy: The Scandinavian Influence on the English and Gaelic Languages*; Richard Dance, *Words Derived from Old Norse in Early Middle English: Studies in the Vocabulary of the South-West Midland Texts*.

²¹ On this see Matthew Townend, *Language and History in Viking Age England: Linguistic Relations between Speakers of Old Norse and Old English* and D.M. Hadley and J.D. Richards, *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*.

²² This matter is discussed more fully in chapter five.

²³ For a survey of references to England in Icelandic sagas, see Magnús Fjalldal, *Anglo-Saxon England in Icelandic Medieval Texts*.

²⁴ See Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*, pp. 118-122. Gunnar Karlsson focuses on merchants and fisherman, but there were ecclesiastical connections in this period also.

²⁵ Three English bishops were appointed in Iceland during the medieval period. These were Jón Vilhjálmsón Craxton (1426-37), Jón Bloxwich (1435-1441), and Robert Wodborn. Only Craxton ever actually visited Iceland. Peter A. Jorgensen believes that Jón Egilsson, Bishop Craxton’s *notarius publicus* during the years 1429-1434 could have been the translator of the Middle English exempla. The exempla are translations from a Middle English version of the *Gesta Romanorum* and Robert Mannyng’s *Handlyng Synne*. See Peter A. Jorgensen’s “The Icelandic Translations from Middle English,” especially p. 314.

texts from England²⁶; the Icelandic, along with the Norwegian, clergy had connections to English centers such as those at Worcester, Bury St. Edmunds, and Lincoln. This study then seeks to identify shared concerns and anxieties and where there are differences in the way in which Icelandic and English translators adapted source material and negotiated discussions of the complicated doctrine of the bodily Assumption in the vernacular. An examination of these issues will not only contribute to the understanding of the localizing and vernacularizing of Mary but also of the spread of a doctrinal idea from the contemplation of monastics to the devotion of the populus.

The study of vernacular²⁷ has dominated medieval scholarship in recent decades. According to Alastair Minnis, the term “vernacular” does not simply incorporate translation but also encompasses “acts of cultural transmission and negotiation,” or in Rita Copeland’s terminology, “translatio studii et imperii.”²⁸ Translation “does not mean merely the production of a replacement text: exposition, exegesis, interpretation (however one wishes to denote hermeneutic process) is involved as well.”²⁹ Recent collections like *The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature* and *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity* have sought to examine a wide variety of vernacular productions in order to assess the connotations different medieval cultures placed on their “mother tongue” in relation to the languages of prestige.³⁰ For Fiona

²⁶ This will be discussed more fully in chapter five.

²⁷ Vernacular (*vulgari*) is understood, as Minnis points out in *Translations of Authority*, as that which is deemed “public, popular, common, manifest” (p. 1).

²⁸ See Minnis, *Translations of Authority*, p. 1, and Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts*.

²⁹ Alastair Minnis and A.B. Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1100-c. 1375: The Commentary Tradition*, p. 363. The activities, Minnis and Scott continue, “of *expositio* or *interpretatio* and *translatio* were complexly interrelated.”

³⁰ See Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Roberts, and Nancy Bradley Warren, eds. *The Vernacular Spirit*, and Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson, *The Vulgar Tongue*. See also Elisabeth Salter and Helen

Somerset and Nicholas Watson, the “vernacular” describes, “not a language as such, but a relation between one language situation and another, with the vernacular at least notionally in the more embattled, or at least the less clear-cut, position.”³¹ Scholars studying medieval vernaculars, then, have examined texts for the ways in which they negotiate sources and incorporate academic language and style, convey doctrinal complexities or the spirituality practiced by the clerical elite, or adopt academic commentary and exegesis and render it with sophistication, or not, in vernacular religious and secular texts.³²

Middle English studies have always involved the study of translation because, as Laura Ashe notes “Middle English literary culture was forged in contact, in negotiation, and in adaptation; above all, in translation.”³³ Scholars have had some success in locating the academic commentary tradition in the works of Chaucer and Gower,³⁴ but Minnis and others have wondered at the absence of glosses in Middle English literature when it is viewed in the context of other medieval vernaculars. Minnis’s explanation for this is that “vernacular hermeneutics (being practiced outside the schools and written *in vulgari*) needed high-level sponsorship to thrive, but the prospect for that happening in Britain was remote at a time when books in English were generally coming under suspicion, due

Wicker, eds. *Vernacularity in England and Wales c. 1300-1550* and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al., eds. *The Idea of the Vernacular*.

³¹ Somerset and Watson, *The Vulgar Tongue*, p. x.

³² The increased focus on these issues is the result of the implications Alastair Minnis’s presentation of Latin academic culture in Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Late Middle Ages*, Minnis and Ian Johnson, eds. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume II, The Middle Ages*, Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, and Rita Copeland’s *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts*.

³³ Laura Ashe “Language,” in Marion Turner, ed. *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*, p. 379.

³⁴ See, for example, Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation* and T.W. Machan, *Techniques in Translation: Chaucer’s ‘Boece.’*

to fears prompted by the Wycliffite heresy.”³⁵ We do see *amplificatio*, re-compilation, and the source references in margins, but what is missing, as Minnis points out, is the explication of text so common among clerical academic circles elsewhere in Europe.³⁶

Middle English scholars, then, have had to take into account two related developments in understanding translation in medieval England. The first is the increasing interest among the laity, from the end of the thirteenth century and on,³⁷ in the spirituality and learning traditionally associated with Latin clerical culture. The second, which can be seen as a possible consequence of the first, is the ongoing debate of the translation of scripture, but also of the devotional literature the clergy utilized in its own spirituality and in the correction of the moral behavior of the laity.³⁸ If the laity were to

³⁵ Minnis, *Translations of Authority*, pp. 4-5. The successes of the impositions on vernacular writing and translation have been, with good reason, re-evaluated in recent scholarship.

³⁶ Minnis, *Translations of Authority*, p. 17. Ian Johnson has also commented on this in his recent *The Middle English Life of Christ: Academic Discourse, Translation, and Vernacular Theology*: “Such a tradition of translation and the accompanying cultivation of ‘vernacular hermeneutics’ are markedly less visible in England, though there are honourable exceptions... it is telling that the greatest textual monument to academic translation and hermeneutics in late medieval English is the Wycliffite Bible (to which must be added the allied vernacular outpourings of dissenting exegetes and learned polemicists)” (p. 5).

³⁷ See Nicole Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature*, who connects this increased interest to the promotion of lay education after the Fourth Lateran Council and the English Lambeth Council of 1281: “The Latin and vernacular texts produced from the thirteenth century onwards as adjuncts to penitential practice and public worship depended on the requirements of the confessional and translated monastic and clerical modes of knowledge and practice, encouraging lay textual engagement as means to ‘self-correction’ and devotional practice. After the Fourth Lateran Council, the syllabus for lay education in England was standardized over the course of the thirteenth century, culminating in England’s own Lambeth Council of 1281. Canon 9 of the Council, known as *Ignorantia Sacerdotum*, required parish clergy to preach at least four times per year on the articles of the faith, the ten commandments, the two evangelical precepts, the works of mercy, the seven deadly sins, the seven virtues, and the seven sacraments” (p. 11). The laity hoped, and was encouraged, to move beyond the catechism and to “explore the ordered practice and contemplative experience traditionally associated with life in religious orders.”

³⁸ The preaching and ideas of John Wycliffe are of course an integral part of these discussions. These issues have come under increased scrutiny in recent decades. See, for example, Nicholas Watson’s “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409,” Nicole Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature*; Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh, *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*; Vincent Gillespie, “Vernacular Theology,” in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, ed. by Paul Strohm, Ian Johnson’s recent *The Middle English Life of Christ: Academic Discourse, Translation, and Vernacular Theology*, Kantik Ghosh *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts*, and *Prestige, Authority and Power in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts*, ed. Felicity Riddy, and Mary Dove, *The First English Bible: The Text and Context of the Wycliffite Versions*.

use the tools of the clergy in a process of self-correction, mediated of course by the clergy, it had to be made available in a medium that could be used by both the literate lay and the Latin-illiterate clergy; this led to the translation of the “professional” literature of the clergy.³⁹ Which works should be translated for the consumption of the laity was part of a lively academic debate towards the end of the fourteenth century and there were those involved in this debate hopeful of “safely adapting texts and practices traditionally associated with the clergy for lay readers.”⁴⁰ Based on fears that the laity was too dependent on self-correction and was disrupting the hierarchical order between clergy and lay,⁴¹ the Blackfriars Council of 1382 began the process of prohibiting unauthorized commentary on the Bible in Latin or in the vernacular. The Oxford debates of 1401-1407, which culminated in the publication of the Constitutions of Arundel in 1409, led to the, seemingly unsuccessful, prohibition of the translating of scripture or of using translations made since Wycliffe’s time.⁴²

The effect of the Constitutions on the culture of translation is explored in Nicholas Watson’s influential “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409.” Watson, Minnis, and others suggest that it is this event that is the likely culprit for the absence of the gloss tradition in both Latin and the vernacular and in both secular and religious literature.⁴³ The Constitutions hoped to restrict not only the

³⁹ See Rice, *Lay Piety*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 134. These debates, and some of the texts of the debate, are discussed in Dove, *The First English Bible*, and Mary Dove, ed. *The Earliest Advocates of the English Bible: The Texts of the Medieval Debate*.

⁴¹ These fears were spurred on by the preaching of Wycliffe and the beliefs of the Lollards, as well as anti-clericalism and criticism of the abuses of clerical culture.

⁴² See Rice, *ibid*, pp. 69-70.

⁴³ Minnis, *Translations of Authority*, p. 17: “The Constitutions sought to suppress any unapproved vernacular activities in preaching and in translation, along with the debate on supposedly dangerous subjects in the schools. The culture of control and repression fostered by these prohibitions inhibited the

translation of scripture, but also vernacular theology, and lay access to the literature of the clergy.⁴⁴ The success of this program of suppression is still under investigation,⁴⁵ obviously works continued to be copied and translated and this has led scholars of medieval English textual production in the fifteenth century and sixteenth centuries to try to develop a better understanding of how both lay and clerical translators negotiated the restrictions of the Constitutions to produce material for religious instruction.⁴⁶ In this area of study, Ian Johnson remarks, “Much remains to be done. And one key question remains inadequately addressed. How much did the Latin tradition of academic literary theory and commentary on *auctores* inform the most important part of a *mainstream* late medieval English literature, that is, religious texts made in the vernacular?”⁴⁷ In chapters three and four I intend my examination of Middle English discussions of the bodily Assumption of Mary to further contribute to a better understanding of how Middle English translators negotiated the presentation of complicated theology to both the laity and fellow clerics. Because of her popularity among the clergy and laity in late-medieval England, and because of the potential impact of the doctrine of the bodily Assumption, the circumstances of Mary’s death and the fate of her body offer an area rich with material to help us better understand the culture of translation in the high and late Middle Ages in England. We will see that because the doctrine was, for the most part, accepted among

development not only of what Nicholas Watson has called ‘vernacular theology’ but also of vernacular commentary-tradition in general, by which I mean commentary, both in Latin and *in vulgari*, on texts of all kinds – secular and religious – which were composed in English.” These claims are currently being reassessed, and, as I show in chapters three and four, commentary on the bodily Assumption at least calls into question the success of this culture of suspicion.

⁴⁴ See Dove, *The First English Bible*, p. 37, and Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change.”

⁴⁵ See for example the essays in Gillespie and Ghost, *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*.

⁴⁶ See Fiona Somerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England*, Vincent Gillespie, *Looking in Holy Books*, Ian Johnson, *The Middle English Life of Christ: Academic Discourse, Translation, and Vernacular Theology*, and Ian Johnson and Alan F. Westphall, eds. *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ: Exploring the Middle English Tradition*.

⁴⁷ Johnson, *The Middle English Life of Christ*, p. 2.

English clerics after the twelfth century, it is often presented un-controversially in the vernacular and often furnished with the theological arguments supporting it.

Vernacular translation does not appear to be as controversial an endeavor in medieval Iceland when compared to the complicated debates ongoing in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England. This is probably because the Icelandic church did not have to confront any substantial heterodox movements. This does not mean, though, that some of the issues driving dissidence in England, such as anti-clerical sentiment and criticism of clerical culture, was absent within the Icelandic church or that it did not have internal problems or difficulties reaching the laity. It is worth noting also, while there does not seem to have been much debate regarding the issue, the Bible was not translated into Old Norse-Icelandic in its entirety until the sixteenth century.

For much of its existence the Icelandic church struggled with socio-political problems more than doctrinal ones, which has led Marianne Kalinke and others to view the Icelandic church as a more predominantly political than religious institution.⁴⁸ The most pressing issues for the church in Iceland were its finances, its fight with local aristocrats over church rights, its difficulties in the promotion of peace in an often violent society, and its losing battle in enforcing the idea of clerical celibacy in a society where the separation of the church from secular familial relationships was nearly impossible to perpetuate.⁴⁹ Sverre Bagge has pointed out that the fact that “the clergy and above all the

⁴⁸ See Marianne Kalinke, *The Book of Reykjahólar: The Last of the Great Medieval Legendaries*, p. 27. Scholars of the Icelandic Middle Ages generally agree that both the conversion to Christianity and the later switch to Lutheranism in 1550 were political matters rather than spiritual ones. On this subject see also Arnved Nedkvitne, *Lay Belief in Norse Society, 1000-1350*, pp. 46-49.

⁴⁹ On the church in Iceland generally, see Orri Vesteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change 1000-1300*. On the church's role in promoting peace, see Haki Antonsson, “Salvation and Early Saga Writing in Iceland: Aspects of the Works of the Þingeyrar Monks and Their Associates.” On marriage and issues of clerical celibacy in Iceland, see Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *The*

bishops were recruited from this aristocracy and continued to have strong connections with their families and acquaintances in lay society” was the greatest obstacle “for two essential issues of the ecclesiastical reform program, namely celibacy and the abolishment of lay patronage of churches.”⁵⁰ Among the positive outcomes of these social circumstances, though, was that the lay aristocracy was deeply involved in the production and consumption of learning,⁵¹ though it tended to favor chronological, historical, and mythological writing and reading to the spiritual works so popular among the English laity.

Assessing devotion among the Icelandic laity has often proved difficult. Marianne Kalinke has stated rather bluntly that the “Icelanders had never been known as people of strong faith.”⁵² Arnved Nedkvitne has analyzed the situation further and concluded that while devotion was encouraged among the laity, as was attendance and participation at mass, “laymen increasingly sought individual purification through pilgrimage, private prayer, fasting and gifts to the churches. But they did so because they had these practices imposed on them through the sacrament of penance.”⁵³ While the Icelandic church tried to impart religious ethics on the laity through preaching, hagiography, and exempla, Nedkvitne has concluded that these attempts only “marginally changed the social practices of Norse laymen” and that for them Christianity was a set of rituals enacted to guarantee life after death; that there would be eternal life is what most interested lay Norsemen, according to Nedkvitne.⁵⁴ Norse laymen accepted that if one wanted to enjoy

Christianization of Marriage in Medieval Iceland, 1200-1600, and Margaret Clunies Ross, “Love in a Cold Climate – With the Virgin Mary.”

⁵⁰ See Sverre Bagge, “Nordic Students at Foreign Universities until 1660,” pp. 4-5.

⁵¹ There can be no better example of this than Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241).

⁵² Kalinke, *The Book of Reykjahólar*, p. 27.

⁵³ Nedkvitne, *Lay Belief*, p. 97.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 216.

eternal life one needed to be cleansed of sin. The laity achieved cleanliness through ritual and practicing virtue. While Christian ethics was presented to them in the vernacular, “laymen never managed to practise [*sic*] these norms fully; they sinned and needed to be purified through the church’s rituals.”⁵⁵ Nedkvitne suggests the laity in the North observed a “second-class Christianity” which was “just sufficient to save their souls.”⁵⁶ The preponderance of miracle tales, including Mary and both foreign and local saints, is indeed concentrated on last minute appeals by sinners for intercession.

Perhaps due to the lack of a central administration, which often promoted the use of Latin, or because of the inability of most Icelanders to get a foreign education,⁵⁷ Latin learning was comparatively scarce in Iceland, and works of religious instruction had to be available in vernacular translation not only for the laity, but for much of the clergy as well.⁵⁸ Hagiography was the most popular genre of religious writing in Iceland, and the earliest manuscripts are made up of sermons and saints’ lives. Thomas N. Hall, in his survey of sermon writing and homiletic manuscripts written in Old Norse-Icelandic, has recognized a culture of repeated copying and retranslating of texts

as if they were found to be indispensable resources for preaching and private meditation, regardless of their antiquity. The impression one gets from this recycling of old favorites is that the corpus was built around a core repertoire of scripturally based exegetical homilies, sermons for principal feasts, penitential sermons, and sermons on selected topics such

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ There are of course notable exceptions. The earliest bishops studied in Germany and England, and several students went to Paris to study at the schools of St. Victor. On this, see Sverre Bagge, “Nordic Students at Foreign Universities until 1660,” and Hans Bekker-Nielsen, “The Victorines and Their Influence on Old Norse Literature.”

⁵⁸ On these subjects see the chapters on “Education” and Latin Learning and Literature” in Phillip Pulsiano et al., eds. *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, pp. 152-153; 380-381, and Margaret Cormack’s chapter on “Christian Biography” in Rory McTurk, ed. *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, pp. 27-42. There were cathedral schools in Iceland, and certainly many students developed skills in Latin and in other languages as well.

as church dedication and the consecration of an altar, all based on materials from the twelfth century and earlier.⁵⁹

This conservative program of collecting and re-copying of sermons is, Hall continues:

probably ascribable to the same backward-looking antiquarian impulse that governed much of Old Norse literature during the period. If the history of the genre is marked by few significant formal or intellectual developments, it seems to be because Norwegian and Icelandic authors sustained a greater fascination with Bede, Caesarius of Arles, and Gregory the Great than they did with most later writers. They appear never to have become seriously engaged with scholastic theology, and as late as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries they were still translating works by Alcuin and Honorius Augustodunensis.⁶⁰

I mention Hall's comments about medieval Icelandic preservation and re-copying of old texts because these statements will be relevant for my discussion of the *Maríu saga*, which continued to be copied, though with some alterations certainly, from its original composition in the early thirteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth.

While Hall's comments are generally accurate in regards to the sermon corpus, there are other areas of writing in which the Icelandic monasteries had collections similar to their English and Continental counterparts. A mass of learning was transmitted to Iceland in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but once this stock was built up there does seem to be a lack of new learning being imported to Iceland in any large numbers.

From the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there are translations of Honorius of Autun's *Elucidarius*, *Gemma animae*, and *Speculum ecclesiae* in part or in full. From the same period there is the work *Stjórn*, which was probably composed first in Norway but also survives in Icelandic copies. *Stjórn* preserves translations from the Old Testament furnished with commentary from the *Historia scholastica* of Peter Comestor and Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale*. It thus represents the kind of text in frequent use in

⁵⁹ Hall, "Old Norse-Icelandic Sermons," p. 668.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 669.

the schools of Paris. Translations were also made of Alcuin's *De Virtutibus and de Vitiis*, Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, Hugh of St. Victor's *Soliloquium de arrha animae*, and the *liber exceptionum* of Richard of St. Victor. This list certainly does not exhaust the translations made into the vernacular in Iceland but is offered to reveal the religious writing available in the monasteries which could be used to teach the laity the principles of doctrine.

The fact that these works continued to be copied and translated is peculiar, given that Iceland and Norway maintained contact with religious centers in England and on the Continent involved in education and textual production. Indeed we find no biblical commentary aside from the translation of Comestor, no psalter commentary, and only rare endeavors in transmitting and commenting on penitential manuals. We can only speculate about the reasons for this. This copying and retranslating of the same religious texts may reflect public, and even clerical, tastes, as both religious and lay Icelanders were perhaps more interested in historical writing, royal biography, mythography, and romances (*riddarasögur*). We could also say that this lack of updating of the corpus of religious material is the result of the advent of saga writing. Or perhaps the stock of religious material may have been deemed sufficient for the pastoral purposes of the Icelandic church. Despite this characterization of Icelandic religious writing as lacking in scholarly sophistication, there are of course notable exceptions,⁶¹ and Reidar Astås has suggested that the influence of Latin academic culture is still to be fully examined in Old

⁶¹ Exceptions are identifiable in Icelandic Marian literature, for example.

Norse-Icelandic texts so that we may be able to determine the theological expertise among Old Norse-Icelandic writing on religious controversies and dogma.⁶²

Despite the wealth of material in Old Norse-Icelandic translation, this literature has often been ignored, due no doubt to the vast native literature of the Eddas, the sagas, and skaldic poetry.⁶³ Scholars of Old Norse-Icelandic text production are becoming increasingly interested in the literature of translation as is witnessed in the number of recent studies on the translation program at the court of Hákon Hákonarson IV (1206-1263) of Norway.⁶⁴ Hákon is credited with the translations from the Old Testament in *Stjórn*, as well as several French romances such as Thomas de Bretagne's *Tristan*, Marie de France's *Lais*, and Chrétien de Troye's *Yvain*, as well as numerous other French and Latin works. He also seems to have commissioned the *Speculum regale* to be used by his children. Despite the increased attention on the literature of translation in Iceland much remains unstudied in the religious texts and in particular the large corpus of Marian material.

By way of concluding this introduction I would like to make a few general comments about translation and the status of the vernacular in Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic texts with a few examples from the prologues of the translators

⁶² See Astås, "Spor av teologisk tekning og refleksjon i norks og islandsk høymiddeladler (Traces of Theological Thought and Reflection in Norway and Iceland during the High Middle Ages.)"

⁶³ See Christopher Abram, "Anglo-Saxon Influence in the Old Norwegian Homily Book," p. 1. Abram points out that the religious literature written in Old Norse-Icelandic translation was left out of Carol Clover and John Lindow's introduction to Old Norse studies; fortunately this trend is beginning to be reversed as is witnessed in the Blackwell *Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*.

⁶⁴ On this translation program see Sif Rikhardsdottir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia*, Marianne Kalinke, *King Arthur: North-by-Northwest*, Marianne Kalinke, *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realms*, Marianne Kalinke, *Norse Romance*, and Stefka Georgieva Eriksen, *Writing and Reading in Medieval Manuscript Culture: The Translation and Transmission of the Story of Elye in Old French and Old Norse Literary Contexts*.

themselves.⁶⁵ We will see that despite the vastly different social and devotional circumstances, translators from England and Iceland express remarkably similar motivations in the negotiation of texts.⁶⁶

Icelandic and Middle English translators see the work they are engaging in as vital to the edification of their audiences and for the pastoral program of saving souls. The fourteenth-century Benedictine monk Arngrímur Brandsson, for example, states in the prologue to a collection of *Ævintýri* (exempla) that he has translated them for the “nytsemdar” (use/utility/need) of those who want to know how to come to the “heimsins vitringar” (heavenly wisdom).⁶⁷ His colleague Bergr Sökkason uses the same word “nystemdar” in his revised translation of the *vita* of St. Nicholas.⁶⁸ Similarly in the prologue to the Middle English translation of the *Speculum devotorum* the translator informs his audience that the work is meant for the “encresynge of youre love to God and vertuys.”⁶⁹ The Middle English author of the *Prik of Conscience* hopes to make clear “fele maters that are unknowe” to the laity to prick their souls toward the heavenly joys.⁷⁰ The author of the Northern Homily Cycle admits a similar purpose in that he seeks to

⁶⁵ This is of course a brief sampling and is intended only to show some basic similarities between translators. A key difference is that Old Norse-Icelandic texts often lack a prologue or preface. Many hagiographies begin immediately with the *vita*, and penitential manuals often lack prefatory material because they are copied in preacher’s manuals and were meant for their use and not the laity.

⁶⁶ While similar arguments could certainly be made about other medieval vernaculars, I have focused in particular on Old Norse-Icelandic and Middle English because of the deep connections between the two cultures which spoke these languages. Icelandic texts are often translated from French, German, and indeed Latin texts from other countries besides England; yet since my interest is in religious writing, England must be taken into account over other languages because of the ecclesiastical influence it held over Norway and Iceland throughout the Middle Ages. While French was an important language for both Old Norse-Icelandic translators and Middle English translators, the French tongue held a place of prestige for these translators. English was superseded, at least in the twelfth to early fourteenth centuries, by French and Latin, whose places were insured politically and socially. French in Norway and Iceland was associated with the most sophisticated of courts and thus also enjoyed a certain prestige alongside Latin.

⁶⁷ Text in Hugo Gering, ed. *Islendzk Ævintýri: Isländische Legenden Novellen und Märchen*, p. 3.

⁶⁸ *Nikolaus saga Erkibyskups II*, in C.R. Unger, *Heilagra Manna Sögur: Fortællinger og Legender om Hellige Mænd og Kvinder*, vol. 2, p. 49.

⁶⁹ Text in Wogan-Browne, et al., eds. *The Idea of the Vernacular*, p. 74.

⁷⁰ Text in James H. Morey, *Prik of Conscience*, “Entre,” ll. 326-331.

make available the wisdom of “lered” men for the “laued” so they “the wai til hevin kenne.”⁷¹ In the prologue to the Old Norse-Icelandic translation from the *Historia scholastica* we see biblical narrative made available in the Norse tongue so that the people may have a better understanding about what is said concerning the saints on “haatidum ok messudogum” (feasts and mass days).⁷²

Tied in to this concern for the knowledge of the laity is a shared awareness among Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic translators of the lack of Latin learning among their readers. The Middle English translator of the *Speculum devotorum*, for example, has rendered the work from Latin into English for “sympyl and devout soulys that cunne not or lytly undyrstonde Latyn.”⁷³ These sentiments are echoed in numerous other Middle English translations of religious instruction, such as John Capgrave’s *Life of St. Gilbert*, John Mirk’s *Festial*, and the Pseudo-Augustinian *Soliloquies*. These sentiments in England extend to translations from French as well. Arngrímur recognizes that for most of his audience there are “margskonar fræðum” (many kinds of learning) in Latin which are greatly concealed from the people and lie in “myrkvapoka” (dark mists). We also see a common interest in providing authority when necessary and available so that the vernacular audience has assurance in believing firmly in the doctrine presented.⁷⁴

One final similarity we can point to among English and Icelandic translators is the impulse to use Mary as a model for chastity, virtue, humility, and the contemplation of

⁷¹ Text in *Idea of the Vernacular*, p. 127.

⁷² Text in, C.R. Unger, *Stjórn*, p. 2.

⁷³ Text in *Idea of the Vernacular*, p. 75.

⁷⁴ Middle English authors frequently use the words *auctoritee* while Old Norse-Icelandic writers refer to the books of the “kennifeðr” (wise fathers) or “helgum bókum” (holy books).

the doctrines of Christianity. In the fourteenth-century Skaldic poem *Lilja* (The Lily)⁷⁵

the poet opens his poem with an address to his Lord:

Fyrri menn, er fræðin kunnu
forn og klók af sínum bókum
slungin, mjúkt af sínum kóngum
sungu lof með danskri tungu.
Í þvílíku móðurmáli
meir skyldumz eg en nökkurr þeira
hrærðan dikt með ástarorðum
allsvaldanda kóngi að gjalda.

Skapan og fæðing, skírni og prýði,
skynsemd full, að betri er gulli,
dreyrinn Krists af síðusári,
syndalíkn og dagligt yndi,
háleit ván á himnasælu,
hrygðin jarðar neztu bygðar
bjóða mierz í frásögn færa
fögr stórmerkin drottins verka.

Men of old, who from their books knew complex learning, ancient and profound, sang in the Nordic tongue elegant praise of their kings. In just such a mother tongue I am more obliged than any of them to present the all-ruling king with a poem, composed with loving words.

Creation and birth, baptism and glory, complete reason, which is better than gold, the gore from the wound in Christ's side, mercy for sins and daily happiness, exalted hope of heavenly bliss, the sorrow of the lowliest dwelling on earth compel me to present the beautiful wonders of the Lord's deeds in a narrative.⁷⁶

The poet calls attention to the rich history of poetry in his language and is turning to that language and a verse form popular before the advent of Christianity to relate a new history. His poem focuses on the history of salvation and throughout reflects on Christ's and Mary's roles in that history and the significance of doctrine and the repentance of sin.

⁷⁵ *Lilja* has been attributed to a brother Eysteinn in some manuscripts. The poem is generally associated with the monk Eysteinn Ásgrímsson, who apparently wrote the poem as penance. The poem is edited by Martin Chase in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages: Poems on Christian Subjects*.

⁷⁶ Translation Martin Chase, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, pp. 566-567.

A similar perspective is apparent in the fourteenth century Middle English poem *The Prik of Conscience*, which, though less focused on Mary, uses Mary as confirmation that believers will still see the fiend at their deaths. The *Prik* author, as the *Lilja* poet, is interested in using the vernacular to relate to his audience the wretchedness of mankind, the fleeting nature of the world, death, purgatory and the cleansing of souls, the Last Judgment, the pains of hell, and the joys of heaven. His work too is a history of salvation drawn in the mother tongue to help others learn, understand, and practice doctrine. The Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic translators of longer works dedicated to Mary often locate their narratives in the context of Christian doctrine; discussion of the Assumption, indeed, often begins at the end of contemplation on the Crucifixion.

Where the translators differ is in the value they place on their language. The editors of *The Idea of the Vernacular* point out that there is the common motif of anxiety about “English as a medium” in Middle English writing and translating.⁷⁷ This often also leads to the use of the modesty topoi in which translators admit their limited ability and ask for forgiveness in any faults made in translation. These mistakes, they argue, are made out of ignorance and not out of any malice. These motifs and topoi are largely absent in Old Norse-Icelandic translations of religious materials. Latin is certainly placed in the prestige here, but there is also a rather frank understanding of the necessity of the mother tongue. While learned Icelandic translators rendered texts from Latin, French, German, and English, they did not see their language as innately inferior to the others. In England, the prestige of French and Latin had political implications which led to the hierarchical organization of language. Icelandic translators must not include modesty topoi or worry about the ability of their language because their political and social

⁷⁷ *The Idea of the Vernacular*, p. 4.

situation was quite different. In the chapters that follow these issues will be examined alongside Icelandic and Middle English negotiation of source material when writing about the Virgin's Assumption.

In the second chapter I offer a survey of the development of the doctrine of the bodily Assumption in the Latin West. While this survey might seem redundant given the number of thorough studies on the subject, I recall some of the key arguments and interventions that are represented in Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic texts. I focus in particular on the liturgy and commentary and explication of the scriptural passages used in the celebration of the feast (the Song of Songs and Luke 10: 38-42), Pseudo-Jerome's *Cogitis Me*, Pseudo-Augustine's *Liber de assumptione Beatae Mariae*, and Elisabeth of Schönau's *Visio de resurrectione beatae virginis Mariae*. Each of these texts represents important moments in the shift from skepticism of a bodily Assumption to widespread acceptance in medieval Europe and play an important role in vernacular writing.

The third chapter examines changing perceptions of Mary's Assumption in the transition between Old and Middle English. The apocryphal legends of Mary's death were clearly known in Anglo-Saxon England since they survive in Old English translation, but the translators do not add their own commentary on the narrative and thus do not defend the doctrine with reason. Ælfric, often seen as the voice of the monastic reform in tenth century England, was not enthusiastic about the presence of these narratives and instead relied on the arguments of Pseudo-Jerome (Radbertus). Early Middle English authors generally seem to have accepted the doctrine and the concerns over using apocryphal material seem to have largely vanished. It is in the twelfth century

that we can begin seeing the influence of Pseudo-Augustine on vernacular discourse. English translators are no longer content to simply translate the apocryphal narratives and, in an Anglo-Norman poem and late Old English early Middle English poem, turn to the academic tradition to defend their belief in Mary's dual Assumption.

English discussions of the Assumption from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, or before and after the 1409 *Constitutions* of Arundel, are the emphasis of chapter four. The approach to the Assumption of Mary is un-changed by the impositions of Arundel's *Constitutions*. Here I examine different genres of literature, including sermons, religious manuals, biographies of Mary and Christ, drama, and poetry. By this period Pseudo-Jerome has disappeared, except in translations of the *Legenda Aurea*, and the doctrine of the bodily Assumption appears to be unanimously accepted. We might expect the arguments defending the appropriateness of the Virgin's corporal Assumption to disappear in a climate where the doctrine is widely supported, but varied Middle English texts engage the doctrinal reasons for Mary's dual Assumption because by this period it had become incorporated into the basic syllabus of Christian teaching due in large part to the relation between the doctrine of the Assumption and Incarnational theology. There are, however, some who are still hesitant to confirm the dual resurrection of the Virgin, the Wycliffites among them.

In chapter five I shift from Middle English texts to the oldest Icelandic sermon for the feast of the Assumption and the *vita* of Mary, the *Maríu saga*. Here the Icelanders maintain Old English ideas about the Assumption throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, despite the enthusiastic reception of the bodily Assumption among many of their European contemporaries, England in particular. Pseudo-Jerome dominates both of

these texts and his arguments about the Assumption are deferred to even though by the time of the Icelandic compositions many arguments in favor of the dual resurrection would likely have been available. The author of the saga of Mary pauses regularly to comment on scripture and to explain doctrine to his vernacular audience, which was most likely made up of monastics and lay listeners (and possibly readers).

Chapter six concentrates on the Benedictines of Northern Iceland and their interest in the bodily Assumption. This particular group of monks and nuns is responsible for introducing new material on the Assumption, namely Elisabeth of Schönau's vision, a translation of the apocryphal *Transitus Mariae*, and, in one reference, a quotation from the Pseudo-Augustinian treatise on Mary's fate. These translational activities seem to be common for this group of writers, who took it upon themselves to both compose new hagiography and revise old saints' lives and furnish them with all of the latest information. It is among this group of writers that we can see the best example of academic commentary in the vernacular in Iceland.

The appendix provides modern English translations of the Old Norse-Icelandic Assumption texts discussed in this study so that they may be made available to a wider range of scholars unable to read medieval Icelandic.

For Old Norse personal names I have maintained the original spelling. In the bibliography I have used standard practice for Icelandic names by recording the name alphabetically by first and then last. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ASSUMPTION IN THE MEDIEVAL WEST

When Pope Pius XII defined Mary's bodily Assumption as dogma in his Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* of November 1, 1950, he defended the adoption of doctrine with the arguments debated by medieval theologians. Pius XII believed that Mary's bodily privilege had shown forth in "new radiance" because Pius IX had proclaimed the Virgin's Immaculate Conception as dogma in 1854. These two privileges, Pius XII notes, "are most closely bound together."⁷⁸ Though God does not grant the just the "full effect of the victory over death until the end of time has come," God has willed "that the blessed Virgin Mary should be exempted from this general rule."⁷⁹ Mary is exempt from this general rule because, due to the Immaculate Conception, she completely overcame sin and thus was not subject to the corruption of the body. It is important, however, that Pius XII leaves unanswered the question of whether or not Mary actually died before ascending to heaven.

Pius XII recognizes in his constitution that the feast of the Assumption has always been one of the most important and solemn celebrations of the Catholic Church and names some of the theologians that helped secure its place in the calendar. Pius XII cites St. John Damascene, St. Germanus of Constantinople, Amadeus of Lausanne, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Albert the Great, the Angelic Doctor (Thomas Aquinas), the Seraphic Doctor (Bonaventure), St. Bernardine of Siena, and St. Robert Bellarmine and St. Francis de Sales of the late medieval/early modern period. The scholastic theologians of the medieval period, Pius XII explains, based their support of Mary's bodily

⁷⁸ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus_en.html. Paragraph 4.

⁷⁹ See *Munificentissimus Deus*, paragraphs 4 and 5.

Assumption on Jesus' filial love for his mother, her divine motherhood, her exalted holiness which surpassed all saints and angels, the intimate union of Mary and her Son, and the affection which passed between the two.⁸⁰ Her freedom from sin and her concorporeality with her child are also important factors in the acceptance of the doctrine. Pius XII is not satisfied with these arguments alone, as his medieval predecessors were not either, and turns to scripture for support of Mary's special privilege. To this end he cites Psalm 131:8 (Surge, Domine, in requiem tuam, tu et arca sanctificationis tuae/Arise, O Lord, into thy resting place; thou and the ark, which thou hast sanctified), Canticles 3:6 (Quae est ista quae ascendit per desertum sicut virgula fumi ex aromatibus myrrhae, et thuris, et universi pulveris pigmentarii?/ Who is she that goeth up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, of myrrh, and frankincense, and of all the powders of the perfumer?), Revelation 12:1 (Et signum magnum apparuit in caelo: mulier amicta sole, et luna sub pedibus ejus, et in capite ejus corona stellarum duodecim/And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars), and Luke 1:28 (Et ingressus angelus ad eam dixit: Ave gratia plena: Dominus tecum: benedicta tu in mulieribus./ And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women) as a few examples.⁸¹

What is absent from Pius XII's Apostolic Constitution on the bodily Assumption of Mary is the group of texts which began the debate, the apocryphal *Transitus Mariae* legends in particular. He also omits references to Pseudo-Jerome's (Paschasius Radbertus) *Cogitis me* and Pseudo-Augustine's *Liber de assumptione beatae Mariae*

⁸⁰ *Munificentissimus Deus*, paragraph 25.

⁸¹ For Latin and translation, see Douay Rheims *Vulgate*. www.drbo.org.

Virginis, both of which represent major interventions in the development of the doctrine of the bodily Assumption. The remainder of this chapter offers a survey of the doctrine of Mary's bodily resurrection as discussed among medieval theologians. Special attention is given to those texts which are most relevant to Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic writing on the subject.

Belief in Mary's bodily Assumption developed, according to Marina Warner, because it promised "the resurrection of the flesh that will come to every creature."⁸² The Assumption fulfills the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. In the songs for the feast day, and images in manuscripts and on walls, believers were encouraged to celebrate the Virgin's Assumption and observe the glory that greeted Mary's arrival, a glory that all the faithful are promised to enjoy. The feast of the Assumption became Mary's most popular throughout Europe because, as Rubin observes, "the Assumption celebrated the enduring hope of heavenly intercession, the hope that linked heaven and earth" and served as a reminder of the promise of salvation.⁸³ Though the Feast of the Assumption became one of the most popular and most extravagant in medieval Europe, its acceptance in the West was a slow and continually debated process.⁸⁴

Interest in the bodily Assumption of Mary strengthened in the West between the sixth or seventh century, when the Eastern *Transitus* legends became known, and the twelfth century, when Elisabeth of Schönau (1129-1165) received a vision of the Virgin

⁸² Marina Warner. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, p. 84. Warner adds later in her chapter on the Assumption that it was a "promise that each creature could attain such rank," pp. 96-97.

⁸³ Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 140 and 143.

⁸⁴ The following brief overview of the doctrine of the Assumption is based on fuller surveys in Henry Mayr-Harting, "The Idea of the Assumption in the West," Brian K. Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven*, chapter seven, and Rachel Fulton, "'Quae est ista quae ascendit sicut aurora consurgens?': The Song of Songs as the Historia for the Office of the Assumption." The Assumption is dealt with in more detail in each of these works. I have selected particular interventions in the doctrine of the Assumption to review here which will be relevant for my examination of vernacular treatments.

which confirmed the Holy Mother's bodily and spiritual Assumption.⁸⁵ The feast of the Assumption was transported to the Western Church from the East, where Mary's Assumption in body and/or soul was widely accepted. The Eastern Church used several apocryphal narratives to celebrate the Virgin's bodily Assumption. The Western Church, however, was hesitant to use these apocryphal writings during the feast. There was a need then for texts which could provide more acceptable readings for liturgy and sermons that could be read during the celebration. The texts used most frequently in vernacular discussions of the Assumption are the apocryphal *Transitus* Legends, lines from the *Song of Songs* and the liturgy and commentaries based on those lines, Luke chapter 10:38-42 ("intrauit Jesus in quoddam castellum") and commentaries on those verses,⁸⁶ the *Cogitis me* of the Carolingian Paschasius Radbertus, which was for so long falsely attributed to Jerome, the Pseudo-Augustinian *Liber de assumptione beatae Mariae Virginis*,⁸⁷ and Elisabeth of Schönau's *Visio de resurrectione beate virginis Mariae*.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ See Mayr-Harting, "The Idea of the Assumption in the West," p. 86. Reynolds also gives a summary of the development of the doctrine of the Assumption in the Eastern and Western Churches, with quotations from primary texts. See *Gateway to Heaven*, pp. 293-329. Reynolds sees the Pseudo-Augustinian *Liber* as overturning the authority of Jerome in *Cogitis me*, while Mayr-Harting favors Elisabeth's vision as the intervention that finally displaced Jerome's letter.

⁸⁶ When the Feast of the Assumption was adopted in the seventh century, there was already a lection for August 15. That is Luke 10:38-42. The Eastern Church changed the Gospel pericope for August 15 to Luke 11:27-28 ("Beatus venter qui te portavit, et ubera quae suxisti."). Western theologians recognized that there was a seeming incoherence about the reading for the feast, but the Mary and Martha story remained as the lection, prompting many to write sermons explaining why this Gospel reading was related to Mary's Assumption (the reading was deemed appropriate because the Virgin Mary exemplified both the active and contemplative lives presented by Mary and Martha in the Gospel of Luke). The most widely disseminated of these was Ralph d'Escures twelfth century *Homilia de assumptione* which was translated into Old English and Old Norse-Icelandic, as well as other vernaculars. On this, see Aidan Conti, "The Old Norse Afterlife of Ralph d'Escures *Homilia de assumptione Mariae*," p. 219, and Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, chapter two.

⁸⁷ *Patrologia Latina* 40, 1140-48.

⁸⁸ For the Latin edition, see F.W.E. Roth, *Die Visionen der hl. Elisabeth und die Schriften der Aebte Ekbert und Emecho von Schönau*, pp. 53-55. For the English translation, see Anne L. Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau: The Complete Works*, pp. 209-211.

The Eastern *Transitus* legends seem to have developed sometime in the fourth century, though most of the earliest texts are datable to the fifth century.⁸⁹ As many of the medieval theologians commentating on the Virgin's death make clear, scripture, early Christian writing, and even the Pre-Nicene Fathers were all silent on the matter of Mary's departure from life and ascent to heaven.⁹⁰ Among the earliest mentions of an interest in Mary's final days is in the fourth century in the *Panarion* of Epiphanius of Salamis.⁹¹ Epiphanius notes the difficulty of finding any information on the matter and outlines three ideas in circulation in the fourth century: Mary may have died and been buried, she may have been martyred, or she may have remained alive.⁹²

The fifth and sixth centuries saw the abrupt multiplication of narratives concerned with these events and were written in Ethiopic, Syriac, Greek, Coptic, Irish, and Latin.⁹³ Most scholars group the *Transitus* narratives into two families, the "Palm of the Tree of Life" branch and the "Bethlehem and the Burning of Incense" group, which will not be discussed in detail here because all of the Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic narratives are related to the "Palm" tradition.⁹⁴ The families are distinguished mainly by the location of Mary's house. Some details, however, are common to both and include Mary's death in Jerusalem, the participation of some or all of the apostles, Christ's taking of Mary's soul, the transfer of at least her soul, and in some cases her body, to Paradise,

⁸⁹ On the early apocryphal narratives on the Virgin's Assumption and the likely dates of many of the texts, see Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, pp. 1, 76-77.

⁹⁰ Some examples are given below.

⁹¹ On this text and Epiphanius's comments on Mary's death, see Shoemaker, pp. 11-14.

⁹² See Shoemaker, who gives a translation of this passage, p. 14.

⁹³ On this moment in history, see Shoemaker's introduction and first chapter. The complicated history of the *Transitus* legends is also discussed in Mary Clayton, "The *Transitus Mariae*: The Tradition and its Origins."

⁹⁴ On this, see Shoemaker's introduction and first chapter, and Clayton, "The *Transitus Mariae*: The Tradition and its Origins." The Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic texts are likely all related to the "Palm" tradition because most Latin versions are members of this family.

and the purported attack on Mary's funeral procession by Jews.⁹⁵ In some of the narratives, Mary's soul is reunited with her body, which is resurrected after three days, and she then sits next to her son for eternity in both soul and body. In other versions, her body is hidden somewhere awaiting reunification at the Last Judgment.⁹⁶ To the "Palm" family belong the Ethiopic *Liber Requiei* and fragmentary Syriac *Obsequies*, Old Irish versions, the earliest Greek narrative, John of Thessalonica's homily, and almost all of the Latin texts.⁹⁷ The Ethiopic *Liber Requiei* and Syriac *Obsequies* are generally agreed to be the oldest, but there is some disagreement over the language of the original composition.⁹⁸ Since the Latin legends are the most significant for the study of Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic translations of the apocrypha, some discussion of the divergent Latin narratives, their contents, and distribution is necessary.

Almost all of the Latin versions of the *Transitus* Legend, with the exception of the Latin translation of the Greek *Pseudo-John* and the text attributed to Joseph of Arimathea, are in the same family, though not translated from, the sixth century Greek text titled *R* by Antoine Wenger.⁹⁹ Because the diverse Latin texts have been edited at various stages by different editors, classifying them can be a complicated process. Wenger edited *Transitus A*, which is presumed to be based on a Greek source behind the

⁹⁵ See Shoemaker, p. 2.

⁹⁶ On these positions, see Shoemaker, p. 3-5. Shoemaker believes, contrary to many other earlier scholars, that there is no one original theological perspective either in favor of a bodily Assumption or rise to heaven in soul only, but rather that we should see the narratives as witnessing the existence of multiple and simultaneous origins.

⁹⁷ For a schema of the texts, see Shoemaker, pp. 32-33, which is based on the work of Van Esbroeck, "Les Textes littéraires sur l'assomption avant le Xe siècle," in François Bovon, ed. *Les actes apocryphes des apôtres*, p. 270. This is not an exhaustive list of the texts of this family but rather of the more textually significant ones.

⁹⁸ On this, see both Shoemaker, introduction and chapter one, and Clayton, "The *Transitus Mariae*: The Tradition and its Origins." Shoemaker believes that the narratives were likely first written in Greek and then translated into Syriac and Ethiopic, but does not rule out a Syriac origin. See p. 38.

⁹⁹ On this, see Mary Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 49. The Greek *R*, and the Latin *Transitus A*, are edited in Antoine Wenger, *L'assomption de la très Sainte Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du vi^e au x^e siècle*.

Greek *R*.¹⁰⁰ *Transitus W* has been edited by André Wilmart from nine manuscripts ranging in date from the eighth to the fourteenth century.¹⁰¹ *Transitus B*, or *Pseudo-Melito*, can be identified in two versions termed *B*¹ and *B*². Like *Transitus W*, it is in the same family as the Greek *R* but is not a direct translation of it or of *Transitus A* but more likely of a lost intermediary in either Greek or Latin.¹⁰² Pseudo-Melito of Sardis's Latin *Transitus Mariae* (*B*¹ and *B*²) is the most widely disseminated of the Western texts on Mary's Assumption, and its composition is generally dated to sometime between the fifth and the seventh centuries.¹⁰³ The latest of the Latin texts is the narrative attributed to Joseph of Arimathea, titled *Transitus A* by Constantine Tischendorf.¹⁰⁴

Though there are certainly variations, all of the Latin texts share some common elements in their presentation of Mary's death and resurrection. Mary's death is usually announced by an angel, who in some versions is named. The apostles arrive at Mary's deathbed, often snapped up and carried on clouds immediately to Mary's side. More angels appear and finally Christ comes to guide Mary's soul to heaven. Mary is taken up

¹⁰⁰ See Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁰¹ See Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 78, and Andre Wilmart, "L'ancien récit latin de l'Assomption," in *Analecta Reginensia, Extraits des manuscrits latins de la Reine Christine conservés au Vatican*, pp. 323-62.

¹⁰² See Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 70, and Clayton "The *Transitus Mariae*" The Tradition and Its Origins," pp. 85-86. *Transitus B*¹ has been edited from a single fourteenth century manuscript in Constantine Tischendorf, *Apocalypses Apocryphae*, pp. 124-136. *Transitus B*² has been edited from eighteen manuscripts by Monika Haibach-Reinisch, *Ein neuer 'Transitus Mariae' des Pseudo-Melito*.

¹⁰³ See Shoemaker, p. 35 and Mary Clayton, "The *Transitus Mariae*: The Tradition and its Origins," p. 88-89. Though scholars have struggled with a definitive date of composition, what is certain is that by the eighth century, at least two versions of Pseudo-Melito were in circulation. Pseudo-Melito's text survives in forty-six known manuscripts ranging in date from the eighth to the fifteenth century, far exceeding the number of manuscripts of the other Latin texts. See Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary*, p. 83, and Clayton, "The *Transitus Mariae*: The Tradition and its Origins," p. 92.

¹⁰⁴ Edited in Tischendorf, *Apocalypses Apocryphae*, pp. 113-123, from three Italian manuscripts of dated to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. See Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 99. Shoemaker, pp. 67-68 dates the text to between 550 and 750 and classifies it as a member of the "Late Apostle" tradition because Thomas arrives late to Mary's burial but sees her rising bodily to heaven as he nears Jerusalem. As a token of proof, Mary gives, in some versions, her girdle, and in others, her burial robe. This tradition developed, according to Shoemaker, in order to defend the finding of the Marian burial relics. M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 209, 218, believed the *Transitus* of Joseph of Arimathea to be a late Italian production composed no earlier than the thirteenth century.

above by angels; in some versions she is placed right next to her son in heaven, but in others a separate paradise from her son.¹⁰⁵ Then there is a funeral procession and Mary's body is buried in a tomb in the Valley of Josaphat/Jehosaphat or at mount Sion, depending on the text. Mary's tomb is found empty afterward; in some of the accounts she has been resurrected and reunited with her soul, but in others her body is hidden and awaiting unification after the resurrection of the dead.¹⁰⁶

Some of the variations in these texts are doctrinally significant. There is dispute among the narratives as to whether or not Mary's body actually died, or if after death Mary was forced to see Satan and his demons as is the required punishment for human flesh. Some of the Latin texts confirm unambiguously the Assumption in body and soul, while others show more caution.

The *Transitus* of Pseudo-Melito offers one of the most significant doctrinal changes, and is indeed the most theologically sophisticated of the apocryphal narratives, a fact that may have led to its popularity over the other versions. In describing the crucial moment, Christ's taking of Mary to heaven, Pseudo-Melito's text observes that the apostles suggest to Christ that Mary's body deserved to be taken to heaven because Mary's body did not suffer from human corruption in life, it should not after death either. Christ accepts their decision and thus takes his mother to heaven in both body and soul.¹⁰⁷ This is significant, as Mary Clayton has observed, because it is an early witness to the arguments made by the scholastics in the eleventh and twelfth century that would so

¹⁰⁵ See Clayton, "The *Transitus Mariae*: The Tradition and Its Origins," p. 85. Clayton points out that some texts make a distinction between *paradisum* where Mary ascends, and *caelum*, where Christ returns after retrieving his mother. Pseudo-Melito does not maintain this distinction and is among the few Latin texts that identify Mary as rising to the same place as her son, i.e. heaven.

¹⁰⁶ For a longer summary, see Reynolds *Gateway to Heaven*, pg. 297.

¹⁰⁷ See Clayton's commentary on this passage, "The *Transitus Mariae*: The Tradition and its Origins," pp. 89-90.

widely influence the support of the doctrine of the Assumption and because it presents the bodily Assumption as part of the apostolic faith.¹⁰⁸ The *Transitus* of Pseudo-Melito is the source text for many of the English translations, though the narrative attributed to Joseph of Arimathea is also witnessed in English, and in Old Norse-Icelandic, translation. Pseudo-Joseph of Arimathea's important contribution to the apocryphal legends is that of the late arrival of Apostle Thomas. Thomas misses Mary's death and burial but sees her rise bodily to heaven and is tasked with giving proof, Mary's girdle, to the rest of the apostles. Thomas, who needed something tactile to believe in Christ's Resurrection is here tasked with providing other believers with material witness to the Virgin's bodily ascension.

These apocryphal texts were often used in the Eastern Church as the basis for sermons and the liturgy, and some contain liturgical direction, for what was called the feast of the Dormition but were often viewed skeptically in the West, due in large part to the so-called Gelasian Decree (of ca. 500), which had declared these apocrypha forbidden.¹⁰⁹ It is for this reason that many of the authors of these narratives suggest to their readers that they have revised earlier versions so that the material is not safe to read and use liturgically.¹¹⁰ These opening apologies did not assuage the doubts of some notable theologians, though.

¹⁰⁸ See Clayton, "The *Transitus Mariae*: The Tradition and its Origins," p. 90.

¹⁰⁹ See Mary Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 1, 2, and 8.

¹¹⁰ On this see Shoemaker, p. 7, and Clayton, "The *Transitus Mariae*: The Tradition and Its Origins," p. 89. Clayton highlights the "self-consciousness" of the author of *Pseudo-Melito*. He shows awareness of earlier versions of the narrative, points out their flaws, and promises to correct them and produce a text free of heresy.

Isidore of Seville is among the earliest theologians in the West to express dubious feelings towards the apocrypha.¹¹¹ Isidore rejects, as did Augustine, that Mary was martyred (referring to the prophecy of Simeon and the sword that pierces Mary's breast) and reminds that we have no information about Mary's death, even though some say her tomb may be found in the Valley of Josaphat. Adamnan of Iona also refers to Mary's tomb, and his description indicates that he may have been to the Valley of Josaphat or was familiar with someone who had. Adamnan confirms the tomb is empty but is unwilling to discuss what may have come of Mary's body.¹¹² Reynolds points to the Carolingian Ambrosius Autpertus's (d. 784) sermon *Assumptionis beatae Mariae*, which was attributed in the Middle Ages to Augustine, as the earliest extant sermon in the West for the feast of the Assumption. Ambrose supports the introduction of the feast and believes that Mary is in heaven above the angels but does not accept documents that discuss her death and the location of her body.¹¹³ Ambrose reveals a particular problem that would face later writers: "But how she passed from here to the celestial kingdom, no catholic history recounts. For the church of God is said not only to reject the apocrypha, but even to be unaware of these same events. And indeed there are several anonymous reports of her assumption, which, as I said, are warned against, so they are not permitted to be read to confirm the truth of the matter. Hence some are truly troubled, because neither is her body found on earth, nor is her assumption in the flesh found in catholic history, as it is found in the apocrypha."¹¹⁴ The problem highlighted here is that while the

¹¹¹ See Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven*, p. 309. Isidore speaks of the Mary's Assumption in *De ortu et obitu patrum* (*Patrologia Latina* 83, 148D-149C).

¹¹² See *ibid*, p. 310.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 311.

¹¹⁴ Translation Fulton, "Quae est ista," p. 89. Latin reads: "Sed quo ordine hinc ad superna transierit regna, nulla catholica narrat historia. Non solum autem respuere apocrypha, uerum etiam ignorare dicitur haec eadem Dei Ecclesia. Et quidem sunt nonnulla sine auctoris nomine de eius adsumptione conscripta,

feast was accepted in the West, and was one that brought great joy to theologians, there was a serious need for legitimate texts to be read in church and privately since there was nothing authoritative which spoke on the matter.¹¹⁵ Autpertus bases his argument on the fact that there is no scriptural basis for the bodily Assumption, that none of the Latin fathers speak about the Virgin's death, and that if the faithful were supposed to know, John the Evangelist, Mary's dearest friend after the Ascension, would have revealed that knowledge.

It is during this period, as far as can be determined, that the Song of Songs was incorporated into the liturgy for the feast of the Assumption.¹¹⁶ The liturgy incorporates readings from Songs, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, and Luke. In these scriptural passages the faithful see the bride rising out of the desert like the daybreak. Both the earthly and heavenly hosts praise the beauty of this rising figure and are treated to the indulgence of sweet odors, heavenly choruses, and blinding radiance. The liturgy as sung and celebrated on the feast of the Assumption in its inception never really distinguished itself from the apocryphal legends of Mary's death and Assumption; in fact it celebrated the feast with those narratives in mind, but the main difference is that the feast's imagining of the death and rise of the virgin was based in scriptural reading. The other scriptural reading for the feast, used in both the liturgical celebration and as the Gospel pericope, is taken from the Gospel of Luke 10: 38-42. The Gospel reading's concentration on the labor of Martha and the sitting of Mary is read as an example of the active and contemplative lives and is read on Mary's feast because she embodied both modes. This

quae, ut dixi, ita cauentur, ut ad confirmandam rei ueritatem legi minime permittantur. Hinc sane pulsantur nonnulli, quia nec corpus eius in terra inuenitur, nec adsumptio eius cum carne, ut in apocrypha legitur, in catholica historia reperitur." *De adsumptione sanctae Mariae*, ed. R. Weber.

¹¹⁵ See Fulton, "Quae est ista," p. 88 and following.

¹¹⁶ On this see Fulton, "Quae est ista," pp. 101-109.

Gospel pericope from Luke was already read for an older feast of Mary and remained as the reading for the Assumption, at least in the West.¹¹⁷ The immediate connection between these readings and this feast of Mary is not readily apparent, and theologians must have recognized this because there is a continued effort to provide commentary on these passages in homilies and other texts.¹¹⁸

The Carolingian Paschasius Radbertus, abbot of Corbie (d. 865), turned to the Song of Songs when looking for appropriate reading material for the feast of the Assumption and is among the first in the West to provide a commentary defending the use of Canticles for the feast. In a letter, known by its first words *Cogitis me*, Paschasius Radbertus deliberately masked his identity under the guise of Jerome by addressing the nuns of Notre Dame at Soissons as Paula and Eustochium. Radbertus's letter answers the nuns' need for material to be read during the feast of the Assumption and would be used by theologians, sermon writers, and hagiographers for the next two hundred years, and in some cases longer, in discussions of the Assumption of Mary;¹¹⁹ its longevity is due in large part to the authority of Jerome, but we might also suggest that its popularity was the result of a lack of readings among churches in the West that wanted to celebrate the feast of the Assumption without going against church sentiment. The nuns expressed anxiety to Radbertus about the available readings for the feast. This is a problem that Radbertus is aware of, but he does not chide those who do read from these apocryphal texts, and

¹¹⁷ On this see Aidan Conti, "The Old Norse Afterlife of Ralph d' Escures's *Homilia de assumptione Mariae*," pp. 218-219.

¹¹⁸ There was no patristic commentary to rely on either. Fulton, "Quae est ista" pp. 63-67, notes that in the commentary of the fathers the Song of Songs was generally understood to be read as Christ and the Church. The Marian sense of the Song of Songs and commentary explicating Luke would become popular in the twelfth century, which I will discuss in more detail below.

¹¹⁹ Fulton, "Quae est ista," p. 82, points out that from soon after it was written, the work was taken to be the authentic writing of Jerome and used in place of apocryphal legends. The two oldest manuscripts (4th quarter of the ninth century) divide the sermon into liturgical lessons.

believes that it comes from their piousness and their zeal for reading.¹²⁰ In fact, Radbertus does not clearly condemn or accept the doctrine of the bodily Assumption, though he does seem to be hopeful that the apocryphal legends preserve some truth. Paschasius ultimately claims though that all that can be known with certainty is that on this day Mary left her body. It is certainly within God's power to perform this glorious deed, but believers must pray about that and commit to the Lord rather than make any rash claims of fact.¹²¹

Paschasius maintains the tradition that Mary's sepulcher was in the Valley of Josaphat, in between Mount Sion and the Mount of Olives, and that it is empty (as Paula can attest to); this fact has led many to speculate that Mary's body was assumed into heaven.¹²² Much of the letter praises Mary for her role in the Incarnation, her virtue and chastity, her faith and dedication to prayer, and her love for her son. Her love for her son was so passionate that she spent her life after his Ascension visiting the places he had been in this life, such as where he was born, crucified, buried, or resurrected, or some place in between so that all could see her continued dedication to her child.¹²³ Radbertus

¹²⁰ Paschasius Radbertus (Pseudo-Jerome). *De Assumptione Sanctae Mariae Virginis*, ed. Ripberger, pp. 111-112: "De assumptione tamen eius, qualiter assumpta est, qui uestra id deposcit intention, praesentia absens scriber uobis curauit, quae absentia praeiens deuotus obtuli, ut habeat sanctum collegium uestrum in die tantae sollemnitatis munus latini sermonis, in quo discat tenera infantia lactis experiri dulcedinem, et de exiguis eximia cogitare, qualiter fauente Deo per singulo annos tota haec dies expendatur in laudem et cum gaudio celebretur, ne forte si uenerit uestris in manibus illud apocryphum de transitu eiusdem uirginis, dubia pro certis recipiatis, quod multi latinorum pietatis amore, studio legendi, carius amplectuntur, praesertim ex his cum nihil aliud experiri potest pro certo, nisi quod hodierna die gloriosa migravit a corpore."

¹²¹ Ripberger, p. 112: "Verumtamen quid horum uerius censeatur, ambigimus; melius tamen Deo totum, cui nihil impossibile est, committimus, quam aliud temere definire uelimus auctoritate nostra, quod non probamus."

¹²² Ripberger, p. 112: "Monstratur autem sepulcrum eius cernentibus nobis usque ad praesens in uallis Iosaphat medio, quae uallis est inter montem Sion et montem Oliueti posita, quam et tu, o Paula, oculis aspexisti, ubi in eius honore fabricate est ecclesia miro lapideo tabulate, in qua sepulta fuisse, ut scire potestis ab omnibus, ibidem praedicatur; sed nunc uacuum esse cernentibus ostenditur."

¹²³ See Ripberger, p. 146-148, and especially, p. 147: "Fortassis ergo prae nimio amore, in loco, quo sepultus dicitur, interdum habitasse eam credimus, quatenus piis pasceretur internus amore obtutibus. Sic namque locu medius est hinc inde constitutes, ut adire posset ascensionis eius uestigia, et locum sepulturae

also encourages the nuns to imagine the awesome reception Mary must have received upon her arrival in heaven. Believers can imagine this because they have often heard about how angels appear at the deaths of the faithful with hymns, splendid light, and the sweetest of fragrances. If the angels perform this honor for the elect, the reception of Christ's mother must have been exquisite.¹²⁴

The readings Radbertus provides for the nuns are sourced from the Song of Songs, which as I mentioned, Fulton believes was part of the liturgy at least by the ninth century and probably before Radbertus composed his letter.¹²⁵ It is difficult, Fulton argues, to discover how the Song of Songs came to be used for the feast of the Assumption since there is no formal commentary tradition reading Mary as the exegetical key of the book of Solomon before the twelfth century.¹²⁶ The nuns were meant to recite Canticles 3:6 and 6:9¹²⁷ to celebrate the moment of Mary's arrival in heaven. The one who rises from the desert is the one who sprung from the root of Jesse. She is the one

ac resurrectionis seu Omnia, in quibus passes est, loca inuisere, non quod iam uiuentem quaereret cum mortuis, sed ut suis solaretur aspectibus.”

¹²⁴ Ripberger, p. 130: “Legimus ergo quam saepe ad funera et ad sepulturas quorumlibet sanctorum angelos aduenisse, et ad exequias eorum obsequia praestitisse: necnon et animas electorum usque ad caelos cum hymnis et laudibus detulisse: ubi et utriusque sexus chori commemorantur, frequenter auditi, laudes cecinisse: interea, et quod perspicacius est, multo nonnumquam lumine eosdem resplenduisse; insuper et adhuc uiuentes in carne ibidem miri odoris fragrantiam diutius persensisse.

Quodsi ad recreandam spem, dilectissimae, et corroborandam fidem interdum adstantium, Saluator noster Christus ob merita suorum amplius comprobanda talia et tanta dignatus est exhibere per suos caeli ministros circa defunctos, quanto magis credendum hodierna die militiam caelorum cum suis agminibus festiue obuiam aduenisse genitrici Dei eamque ingenti lumine circumfulsisse et usque ad thronum olim sibi etiam ante mundi constitutionem paratum cum laudibus et canticis spiritalibus perduxisse!”

¹²⁵ See Fulton, “Quae est ista,” pp. 56-58.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 57. According to Fulton, the Marian interpretation of the Song of Songs was not an allegorical one, as the interpretation of the bride as the church had been. Rather, the Song of Songs was intended to recall “the series of events celebrated by that feast [the Assumption]: Mary's death, resurrection, and assumption,” p. 60. On the Song of Songs in the Middle Ages more generally, see Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* and E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*.

¹²⁷ Douay Rheims Vulgate (www.drbo.org). 3:6: *Quae est ista quae ascendit per desertum sicut virgula fumi ex aromatibus myrrhae, et thuris, et universi pulveris pigmentarii?* 6:9: *Quae est ista quae progreditur quasi aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol, terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata?* Radbertus does not quote 3:6 in its entirety and records a slightly different line for 6:9, using *ascendit* in place of *progreditur*. In later citations vernacular authors often use the same verb as Paschasius. See, for example, my discussion of early Old Norse-Icelandic Assumption texts in chapter five.

whose virtue overshadows the angels. She is compared to daybreak because she shines in her ascent, flanked by angels (hence terrible as the arranged battle line). She is more beautiful than the moon because she does not wane. She is chosen as the sun because of the brightness of her virtues.¹²⁸

Radbertus's letter and the liturgy incorporating the Song of Songs give an authorized account of Mary's death and ascent to heaven, without committing on the question of whether or not she rose to heaven in both body and soul.¹²⁹ The apocryphal narratives are lurking behind both Paschasius's account and the liturgy, but the abbot of

¹²⁸ Ripberger, 128-129: "Et haec est eius praesentis diei festiuitas, in qua gloriosa et felix *ad aethereum peruenit thalamum*. Quae profecto festiuitas, sicuti et uirgo incomparabilis est ceteris uirginibus, ita et incomparabilis est omnium sanctorum festiuitatibus et admiranda etiam uirtutibus angelicis.

Propter quod ex persona supernorum ciuium in eius ascendit admirans Spiritus Sanctus ait in canticis: *Quae est ista, quae ascendit per desertum, quasi uirgula fumi ex aromatibus*. Et ben *quasi uirgula fumi*, quia gracilis et delicate, quia diuinis extenuata disciplinis et concremata intus in holocaustum incendio pii amoris et desiderio caritatis. *Vt uirgula fumi*, inquit, *ex aromatibus*. Nimirum quia multis replete erat uirtutum odoribus, manans ex ea fragrabat suaussimus odor etiam spiritibus angelicis. Ascendebat autem *de deserto* praesentis saeculi uirga de radice Iesse olim exorta, sed mirabantur electorum animae prae gaudio, quanam esset, quae etiam meritorum uirtutibus angelorum uinceret dignitatem.

De qua rursus idem Spiritus Sanctus in eisdem Canticis: *Quae est ista quae ascendit*, inquit, *quasi aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol, terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinate*. Admiratur autem Spiritus Sanctus, quia omnes de ascensu huius uirginis admirantes facit, quod, quasi noui diluculi auror rutilans, ascensu suo resplendeat multis freta et uallata sanctorum agminibus. Vnde dicitur *terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinate*. Siquidem terribilis suis facta uirtutibus, ut castrorum acies admodum ordinate, hinc inde sanctorum angelorum fulsa praesidiis. *Pulchra ut luna*, immo pulchrior quam luna, quia iam sine defectu sui coruscat caelestibus illustrate fulgoribus. *Electa ut sol* fulgore uirtutum, quia ipse eam elegit sol iustitiae, ut nasceretur ex ea."

Translation Fulton, "Quae est ista," p. 93: "This is the feast of the day at hand, on which glorious and happy *she rises to the ethereal bridal chamber*. . . . On this account the Holy Spirit, in accord with the heavenly citizens, wondering at her assumptions, says in the songs: *Who is this who ascends through the desert like a column of smoke from the spices* [Song 3:6]. . . . That shoot which once sprung from the root of Jesse ascended *from the desert* of the present world, and the souls of the elect wondered for joy: who was she, who by the virtue of her merits might outstrip even the dignity of the angels.

Of her again the same Holy Spirit says in the same songs: *Who is she who ascends*, he says, *like the rising dawn, beautiful as the moon, chosen as the sun, terrible as a battle line drawn up from the camps* (Song 6:9). The Holy Spirit marvels—for he causes all to marvel at the ascension of this virgin—that she, like the ruddy dawn of the new daybreak, shimmers in her ascent, supported and walled round by so many ranks of angels. Hence she is called *terrible as a battle line drawn up from the camps*. Indeed, like the perfectly ordered battle line of the camps, she has become awesome in her wondrous deeds, supported on all sides by garrisons of holy angels. *Beautiful as the moon*, or rather more beautiful than the moon, because now she shines without waning, illuminated by celestial splendors. *Chosen as the sun* by the gleam of her virtues, because the sun of justice himself chose her, that he might be born from her."

¹²⁹ See Fulton, *ibid.*, p. 118.

Corbie's account has the authority of scripture.¹³⁰ We might suggest that the abbot's letter and the liturgical readings tell the same story, but in a less controversial way. Twelfth and thirteenth century theologians, as Fulton points out, came to read Song of Songs 3:6 and 6:9 as definitive proof of Mary's bodily Assumption.¹³¹ Jacobus de Voragine is willing, in his compilation of available material on the Assumption, which would become widely disseminated in Latin and the vernacular, to make the leap Radbertus had not. The *Legenda Aurea* compiler apologizes at the beginning of his survey for including the apocryphal legends in his account, but he has included them because even though their authority is dubious, they are nevertheless true.¹³²

Paschasius was clearly hopeful that the doctrine of the bodily Assumption was true but did not feel comfortable with confirmation; his caution would be present, because of the authority of Jerome, in Latin and vernacular writings until the eleventh and twelfth centuries when the Pseudo-Augustinian *De assumptione beatae Mariae Virginis* and Elisabeth of Schönau's *Visio de resurrectione beate virginis Mariae* were produced. The Pseudo-Augustinian treatise appeared near the end of the eleventh century and the author, like Paschasius before him in the ninth century, disapproved of the apocrypha and instead relies on exegesis of scripture and scholasticism to build a case for the dual Assumption of Mary.¹³³ Pseudo-Augustine indicates the change of opinion regarding the Assumption that has occurred between the ninth century and the eleventh among theologians: "Veritates sunt de quibus Scriptura silet, non ratio. Ex iis est

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 96.

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 118.

¹³² But de Voragine still shares the sentiments of Pseudo-Jerome, even while confirming the bodily Assumption.

¹³³ See Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven*, p. 316-318. Reynolds suggests that the document was likely written by a disciple of Anselm. Most agree with this, though no names have been won favor.

assumption beatae Mariae” / “There are truths on which scripture is silent, but not reason. One of these is the Assumption of the blessed Mary.”¹³⁴ The *Assumptione* author argues that despite the silence of the Bible on many important pieces of doctrine “it is possible with care and erudition to uncover the deeper, mystical meaning of scripture which lies beneath the literal. Moreover, he notes, just because scripture remains silent on something this does not mean that reason cannot deduce something from what it does say.”¹³⁵ Given this approach to biblical reading, it is little wonder that the *Assumptione* treatise was attributed to Augustine.

Pseudo-Augustine then progresses through a series of proofs based in reason. First, though Adam did return to dust because the punishment of sin is death, the flesh of Christ, which he took on from Mary, did not experience decay. This proves that God allowed for an exception to the law of the corruption of the flesh in this particular case; thus he could have done it for Mary also.¹³⁶ Since Mary is also exempt from the labor pangs Eve earned for all women after the fall, and thus avoided another natural law, it is not a stretch that her body was protected from returning to dust. Pseudo-Augustine’s main argument, and the one that would be utilized by later preachers and theologians, was based in Incarnational theology and asserted that due to con-corporeality, it would be unthinkable that Mary would become the food of worms.¹³⁷ As Reynolds points out, this author later “uses the same argument as Pseudo-Jerome, but to opposite effect: in the absence of confirmation from scripture, it is preferable to believe the best, that is, that Jesus glorified his mother’s body, basing such a belief on a rational interpretation of

¹³⁴ *Patrologia Latina* 40, Caput II, Col. 1144.

¹³⁵ See Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven*, p. 317

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

scripture, enlightened by faith.”¹³⁸ One portion of Pseudo-Augustine’s treatise, his conclusion, was particularly cited in later Latin and vernacular texts:

It is right, therefore, that Mary should rejoice in body and soul with an ineffable joy in her Son, together with her Son, and through her Son. It is right that she should escape the misery of corruption, she who, in giving birth to so great a Son, knew no corruption of her integrity. It is right that she who was pervaded by such an exalted grace should remain forever incorrupt. It is right that she who gave birth to the entire and perfect life of all should live fully. It is right that she should be with him who she bore in her womb, that she should be next to him whom she generated, nourished, and surrounded with tenderness. Mary is the Mother of God, the nursemaid of God, the most faithful servant of God, and the follower of God.¹³⁹

This passage would enjoy the most lasting influence because it was incorporated into Vincent of Beauvais’s *Speculum historiale* and de Voragine’s *Legenda Aurea*, and it was from these two sources that the arguments of Pseudo-Augustine reached most vernacular writers.

Elisabeth of Schönau’s *Visio* is the other major response to Pseudo-Jerome’s arguments about the feast of the Assumption. The *Visio* is actually the record of a series of visions of the Virgin which the nun experienced over the period of three years; each of the visions occurred near the feast of the Assumption. While the vision was widely disseminated throughout Europe in both Latin and the vernacular,¹⁴⁰ it is likely that this vision and Elisabeth’s works as a whole were meant as responses to an immediate

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Translation Reynolds, p. 317. Latin, *Patrologia Latina* 40, Col. 1148: Ac per hoc videtur digne laetari Maria laetitia inenarrabili anima et corpore, in proprio filio, cum filio proprio, per filium proprium, nec ullam sequi debere corruptionis aerumnam, quam nulla secuta est tantum filium pariendo integritatis corruptio: ut sit semper incorrupta, quam tanta perfudit gratia; sit integritate vivens quae omnium integram perfectamque genuit vitam; sit cum illo quem in suo gessit utero, sit apud illum illa quae genuit, fovit et aluit illum Maria Dei genitrix, Dei nutrix, Dei ministratrix, et Dei secutrix.”

¹⁴⁰ The Latin texts survive in approximately 145 manuscripts. See Barbara Newman, in the preface to Anne L. Clark’s translation of *The Complete Works*, p. xi.

problem, that of the Cathar heresy.¹⁴¹ Even if this is true, the *Visio* on the Assumption became widely disseminated with Elisabeth's other works, but also on its own and in collections like the *Speculum Historiale* and *Legenda Aurea*.¹⁴² Elisabeth felt deep anxiety about making her revelations public, but her brother Ekbert and abbot Hildelin encouraged her to record them; Hildelin even pushed her to allow them to be published in her lifetime, which she had hoped would not happen. Hildelin and Ekbert frequently posed difficult theological questions to Elisabeth, which she then asked the angels she witnessed in her visions, and this is the setting for the vision of the Assumption.

During the octave of the feast of the Assumption, in the same year that the angel of the Lord had announced the *Viarum dei* to her, Elisabeth fell in a trance and was visited by the Virgin. Elisabeth does what her elders have asked her and inquires if Mary will relate whether she was taken up into heaven in spirit alone or also in the flesh.¹⁴³ Elisabeth repeats the complaint voiced by Radbertus and Pseudo-Augustine and so many other theologians: "I asked this, because, as they say, what is written about this in the books of the fathers is found to be ambiguous."¹⁴⁴ Mary denies this knowledge to Elisabeth for the moment. In the next year Elisabeth had another vision; this time she sees in a distant place a tomb surrounded by great light, with what looks like a woman inside, and angels surrounding it. After some time the woman rises with the multitude and is met by a glorious man descending from the heavens. Elisabeth is then made aware that this is Mary. When she asks the angel she is acquainted with what this vision has meant, he

¹⁴¹ See Anne L. Clark's introduction to *The Complete Works*, p. 6.

¹⁴² This may be due to its length. The text is short (about two folio pages, and two to three printed pages) and could be passed along in letters, miracle tales, or as a part of collections on Mary.

¹⁴³ Clark, *The Complete Works*, p. 209. Roth, *Die visionen*, p. 53: "Domina mea placeat benignitate tua, ut de hoc certificare nos digneris, utrum solo spiritu assumpta sis in celum, an etiam carne."

¹⁴⁴ Translation Clark, *ibid*, p. 209. Roth, p. 53: "Hoc autem idcirco dicebam, quia, ut aiunt, de hoc dubie in libris patrum scriptum invenitur."

reveals that this vision has revealed to her how Mary was assumed into heaven in both body and soul. The angel also informs her that the current feast of the Assumption celebrates the day she departed from earth, but that her body rose forty days later on September 23rd. Elisabeth is afraid to make the vision public and asks Mary two years later whether she should inform others of what she has seen. Mary encourages Elisabeth to record the visions but to share them only with those who truly love her. While there may have been some concern over the validity of Elisabeth's experiences, the text of the vision of the Assumption was welcomed and used as further proof by those who already believed in the bodily resurrection of Mary.

Pseudo-Augustine's *Liber* and Elisabeth's *Visio* are both outgrowths of the so-called Golden Age of Marian devotion that developed from the final decades of the eleventh century to the beginning of the thirteenth.¹⁴⁵ It is in this period that much of Marian doctrine is developed and defined and English centers are deeply involved in this process.¹⁴⁶ It is also during this period that theologians engage in commentaries on the Marian sense of the Song of Songs,¹⁴⁷ compose homilies on the Gospel reading from

¹⁴⁵ For a detailed discussion of the Golden Age of Marian devotion, see Luigi Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians*, pp. 105-108, and Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, chapter five.

¹⁴⁶ The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is developed largely among the circle of Anselm and, as I noted above, the Pseudo-Augustinian treatise on the Assumption was probably written by a disciple of Anselm as well. Honorius, Eadmer of Canterbury, William of Malmesbury, and Aelred of Rievaulx can all be pointed amongst theologians associated with England at some point in their careers who exhibit enthusiasm for the bodily Assumption. It is also worth mentioning that the Cistercians of Yorkshire enthusiastically received and copied Elisabeth's *Visio* and aided in its dissemination.

¹⁴⁷ See E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*, pp. 205-210. The number of commentaries in Latin on the Song of Songs produced between the last decades of the eleventh and first of the thirteenth is nearly double the amount written up to that point. Anselm, Peter Damian, Alain of Lille, Alexander Neckham, Balduin of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, Geoffrey of Auxerre, Geoffrey of St. Victor, Honorius Agustodunesis, Hugh of St. Victor, John of Ford, Philip of Harvengt, Rupert of Deutz, Stephen Langton, Thomas the Cistercian, William of Newburg, William of St. Thierry, and Conrad of Saxony are among the more well-known theologians to write commentaries on the Song of Songs, and most understand Mary to be the bride. The *Glossa ordinaria* commentary is also produced during this period, though its commentary reads the bride as *Ecclesia*.

Luke,¹⁴⁸ and write lives of Mary supported with scripture and other authoritative sources.¹⁴⁹

Throughout this long century theologians and scholastics came to accept the bodily Assumption with more frequency. Nicholas of Clairvaux, Peter Comestor, Vincent of Beauvais, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Conrad of Saxony, and many others all confirmed the bodily Assumption with varying degrees of certainty even though the official Church stance remained non-committal.¹⁵⁰ The main argument in favor of the bodily Assumption as developed by theologians in the twelfth century and further contemplated by the scholastics of the thirteenth was that Mary deserved the protection of her body because of, first and foremost, her con-corporeality with her son. God had protected the human flesh of his son and could do so also for Mary. It would be right for him to do so because of her absolute grace and sinlessness, because she was the Mother of God, because he could not allow the Temple of the Lord to decay, and finally because Mary, through the Incarnation, helped reverse the sins of Adam and Eve.¹⁵¹ If Mary was without spot, as Cantic 4:7 says (*Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te*) then she was exempt from the corruption of the body as her son had been.¹⁵² It should be stressed that for the Latin theologians who developed this doctrine, the bodily

¹⁴⁸ The most widely disseminated of these is probably Ralph d'Escures *Homilia de assumptione Mariae*, which was incorporated into later redactions of Paul the Deacon's homiliary. See Aidan Conti, "The Old Norse Afterlife of Ralph d'Escures *Homilia de assumptione Mariae*," p. 218. Anselm, Honorius, Peter Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux, Aelred of Rievaulx, and Meister Eckhart also all wrote on the connection between the Gospel reading and Mary's Assumption. This matter is also explained in Jean Beleth's *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*.

¹⁴⁹ The *Vita sancte Marie* of Thomas of Hales and the *Vita beatae Virginis Marie et Salvatoris Rhythmica* are two examples of this trend. They both focus on doctrinal moments of the life of Mary and Jesus. The *Vita Rhythmica* was massively popular and served as the basis for vernacular lives of Mary; the Latin text, unfortunately, remains, for the most part, un-studied.

¹⁵⁰ See Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven*, pp. 319-329.

¹⁵¹ See Reynolds, p. 326.

¹⁵² This is an argument that Thomas Aquinas would make in both *Expositio super salutation angelica* and *Summa Theologiae III*, q. 21, a. 1.

Assumption was entirely Christological; Mary was assumed because of the Incarnation. Mary's other attributes and practice of virtues certainly further promoted her case, but the only real argument was that she willingly accepted the Incarnation. I stress this fact because, as we will see in the following chapters, this fact is not always stressed by vernacular writers.

After the developments in the doctrine of the bodily Assumption of the twelfth and thirteenth century "the faithful intuitively recognized that faith in the Assumption led to the recognition of other Marian truths implicit in the mystery, such as Mary's queenship, her mediation and heavenly intercession, and her role as paradigm of the heavenly Church, with regard to the earthly Church."¹⁵³ Thus the promises of the faith disseminated from the clergy to the laity could be confirmed in the doctrine of the bodily Assumption.

The battle over the doctrine had been waged in Latin, and by the end of the twelfth century it seemed that those in favor of a bodily Assumption were winning out, though it was still certainly common enough in the eleventh and twelfth centuries for theologians to believe personally but hesitate to admit it publically to the laity.¹⁵⁴ The various arguments of theologians and Latin academics were collected together in compendiums like the *Legenda Aurea* and *Speculum historiale* to be distributed amongst those responsible for educating the clergy and the laity; this material was then translated into the vernacular. The *Legenda Aurea*'s presentation of the Assumption is more important for Middle English discussions, while the *Speculum historiale*'s lengthier

¹⁵³ Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, p. 107.

¹⁵⁴ Peter Damian, Bernard of Clairvaux, Aelred of Rievaulx, and Alain of Lille are among the more well-known examples. See Luigi Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, pp. 101, 139, 164-65, and 189. None of them were opposed to the idea, but rather hesitant to confirm something openly for which there was little proof.

treatment of Elisabeth of Schönau's vision seems to be the preferred text in Iceland.¹⁵⁵ It is unlikely that all of Paschasius Radbertus's letter, Elisabeth's full vision, Pseudo-Augustine's *Liber*, or the lengthy commentary of Latin theologians was translated into Middle English or Old Norse-Icelandic. It is more fruitful to look at the two compendiums mentioned above, which were designed and utilized by preachers and other educators to bring doctrine to the parishes.¹⁵⁶

Jacobus de Voragine (1230-1298), the Italian Dominican responsible for the compilation of the *Legenda Aurea*, presents all of the available knowledge on Mary's Assumption.¹⁵⁷ He begins with the apocryphal legend of Mary's death and Assumption and quotes scriptural text used in the liturgy. In the commentary he puts forth the comments of Pseudo-Jerome, followed by Saint Elisabeth's *Revelations*,¹⁵⁸ Bernard, and finally Pseudo-Augustine's arguments about con-corporality. This collection of material provided preachers with a stock of material to craft sermons for the feast on August 15th in both the vernacular and in Latin. Jacobus also appends exempla at the end of the account that can be used to further augment sermons. The Dominican Vincent of

¹⁵⁵ This discrepancy is probably the result in differences in taste between Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic translators. The *Speculum historiale*'s interest in history and chronology would have appealed more to Icelandic writers, while the devotional and hagiographic approach to the *Legenda Aurea* was preferred by Middle English writers more interested in the religious education of their vernacular audiences.

¹⁵⁶ On the use of the *Legenda Aurea* in the Middle Ages, see Sherry L. Reames, *The Legenda Aurea: A Re-examination of its Paradoxical History*. Reames refers to the *Legenda* as a "summa hagiographiae, a book presenting the essence of what medieval people knew, or thought they knew, about the saints" (p. 5). Vincent Beauvais's encyclopedia of the world's knowledge is less well studied, in English at least, than the *Legenda Aurea*. For an introduction on Vincent and his works, see Serge Lusignan, Monique Paulmier-Foucart, and Marie-Christine Duchenne, eds. *Lector et compilator. Vincent de Beauvais, frère prêcheur: un intellectuel et son milieu au XIII^e siècle*. The numerous Marian miracles preserved in the *Speculum* are discussed in Michel Tarayre, *Le Vierge et le miracle: le Speculum Historiale de Vincent de Beauvais*. Study of the *Speculum historiale* is hindered by the lack of a modern edition.

¹⁵⁷ For the Latin text, see Theodore Graesse's edition, *Legenda Aurea: Vulgo Historia Lombardica Dicta*, pp. 504-527.

¹⁵⁸ Elisabeth's affiliation is often not given in *Legenda* manuscripts, which, as we will see, led to wild attributions to many different Elisabeths in vernacular texts.

Beauvais's (1190-1264) *Speculum historiale* presentation of the Assumption is different in nature. It situates this event within historical context and reflects Vincent's preference for chronology.¹⁵⁹ Mary's Assumption occurs after the death of Paul the Deacon and after the advent of the preaching of Paul in Damascus. Vincent bases his account on the apocryphal *Transitus*, citing "Miletus" (Pseudo-Melito). As support Vincent cites "Augustinus in sermone de assumptione eiusdem virginis ita loquitur" who wrote that "caro enim Iesu, caro Maria est" / "as it is for the flesh of Jesus, so it is for the flesh of Mary." Vincent follows up Augustine's comments with an abbreviated version of Elisabeth's vision.

As I indicated above, the doctrine of the Assumption was deemed important because it fulfilled the promise of the resurrection of the body for all believers. One crucial aspect to be examined in the following chapters is whether it was necessary that vernacular audiences know the scholastic arguments in favor of Mary's dual Assumption or if the knowledge that it happened was sufficient enough. Both Icelandic and English translators and compilers seem to have favored narrative when presenting Mary in the vernacular. But occasionally clerical writers commented on the material on the Assumption they were translating; under examination will be which arguments they offered to the laity and what that tells us about their thoughts on the capability of the vernacular language and audience to manage the information.

Finally, it is important to remember that no matter how widely celebrated belief in Mary's Assumption was among both the clergy and the laity, the doctrine remained

¹⁵⁹ There is no modern edition of the *Speculum historiale*, or the larger work the *Speculum maius*. I have consulted the manuscripts available here: <http://www.vincentiusbelvacensis.eu/bibl/bib11.html#SMa1700>, as well as the 1624 printed work in *Bibliotheca Mundi. Vicenti burgundy, ex ordine Praedicatorum venerabilis episcopi Bellovacensis, Speculum Quadruplex, Naturale, Doctrinale, Morale Historiale*.

unconfirmed by the Church until 1950. Those monastics and lay people who wrote of Mary's bodily rise to heaven did so without the sanction of the Church, but they did not adopt the belief simply on the hope that the apocryphal legends preserved some truth of her demise and rise to heaven. Instead they defended the doctrine with the interpretation of scripture, with theology, and with reason and deep reflection. The doctrine was and is wholly rejected by Protestants because of its origins in the apocrypha and absence from scripture. Some Catholic scholars too, during the debates that led up to the acceptance of the doctrine and still after, were also hesitant in accepting a belief largely determined by legendary material and sincere hope rather than definitive proof. Thus, as I suggested in the introduction, my interest in this study is in determining how medieval English and Icelandic writers negotiated a doctrinal issue not settled by the Church.

CHAPTER 3

CHANGING OPINIONS OF THE BODILY ASSUMPTION IN THE TRANSITION FROM OLD TO MIDDLE ENGLISH

The prominence of the cult of Mary in England is hardly doubted, as a cursory glance of the number of studies on the subject reveals.¹⁶⁰ The cult of the Virgin Mary has a long history in England and may have arrived soon after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Though the early cult in England was not well known elsewhere in Europe as being on the leading edge of Marian doctrine, this began to change in the twelfth century. Many of the Marian miracle collections which so quickly spread throughout Europe—reaching as far north as medieval Iceland—were first compiled in twelfth-century England.¹⁶¹ It was English monks, many associated with Canterbury, who were the staunchest supporters of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.¹⁶² The Marian interpretation of scripture was also developed by monks associated with English centers.¹⁶³ Mary appears regularly in the poetry of Chaucer, John Lydgate, Thomas Hoccleve, the *Pearl*-poet, and in the cycle plays performed throughout and even after the

¹⁶⁰ Some recent examples include James Roger Bell's *Conceiving the Word: Mary's Motherhood in the Oxford Franciscan School, 1285-1315*, Adrienne Williams Boyarin's *Miracles of the Virgin in Medieval England: Law and Jewishness in Marian Legends*, and Georgiana Donavin's *Scribit Mater: Mary and the Language Arts in the Literature of Medieval England*. These examples form only a small portion of the scholarship dedicated to Mary's importance for medieval England.

¹⁶¹ On this see R.W. Southern, "The English Origins of the 'Miracles of the Virgin,'" pp. 176-216, Beverly Boyd, *The Middle English Miracles of the Virgin*, pp. 5-8, Karen Saupe, *Middle English Marian Lyrics*, p. 10, Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages*, p. 117. The Latin miracle collections have been associated with Anselm the Younger of Bury St. Edmunds and Dominic, prior of Evesham. William of Malmesbury's *mariale* is also an important collection in this context. The miracles of Mary first appeared in the vernacular in England in an Anglo-Norman collection of the twelfth century. See Boyd, pp. 7-8. Boyd believed the *South English Legendary* to be the first Middle English examples of Mary's miracles.

¹⁶² On the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the role of English monastics in its promotion, see Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven*, chapter eight, and Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, pp. 165-174. Some of the important names here are Eadmer of Canterbury, William of Newburgh, and Aelred of Reivaulx.

¹⁶³ See for example, the *Sigillum beatae Mariae* of Honorius Augustodunensis. Though his birthplace is unknown, he was, for a time, associated with Worcester and many manuscripts of his works were produced there.

Middle Ages. Many of these poets may have first developed their devotion to Mary in the grammar schools, which Georgiana Donavin has recently investigated.¹⁶⁴ In the eleventh century the vision of the English woman Richeldis de Faverches led to the construction of a supposedly exact replica of Mary's house in Nazareth where she had received the Annunciation. This site became one of the most popular pilgrimage destinations in medieval Europe.¹⁶⁵ Mary was so apparent in every aspect of English culture that by the thirteenth century England became known as the dower of the Virgin.¹⁶⁶

Veneration of Mary in England prior to the twelfth century had been, however, as Mary Clayton has suggested, a primarily monastic concern connected to the centers of learning at Winchester and Canterbury.¹⁶⁷ This early English cult of Mary "is not associated with any conscious development of new theories related to Mary or any explicit theological discussion, except in Ælfric... The pre-Conquest cult was a purely devotional one, originating in the piety of the monks, who showed little interest in Marian doctrine."¹⁶⁸ Indeed Ælfric is the only Anglo-Saxon theologian to contemplate the doctrine of the bodily Assumption in the vernacular, but there are several texts related to the feast, including translations from the apocryphal legends of Mary's death.

By the Late Middle Ages belief in the dual Assumption of Mary was the dominant position in England and the apocryphal legends of Mary's death and ascent to heaven, as well as the liturgy for the feast of the Assumption, are witnessed certainly in the literature of religious instruction but also in verse and in the cycle plays. This widespread

¹⁶⁴ See Georgiana Donavin's *Scribit Mater: Mary and the Language Arts in the Literature of Medieval England*.

¹⁶⁵ On the shrine at Walsingham, see Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*, pp. 139-140.

¹⁶⁶ See Gibson, *ibid.*, p. 138. Gibson claims the fervent devotion "had by the thirteenth century so penetrated English culture and spirituality that it is nearly as difficult to trace the outlines of the cult of the Virgin as to describe the meaning of Jesus of Nazareth to the medieval Christian Church." See p. 137.

¹⁶⁷ On this, see Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 272-274.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

acceptance among both monastic and lay culture took some time to develop though and the matter was contemplated by English theologians in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and English. Anglo-Saxon supporters do little more than translate the apocryphal narratives, and one of their fellow monastics, Ælfric, vents frustration at this practice. In two texts between Old and Middle English, one an Anglo-Norman poem, the other a late Old English/early Middle English homily, we can see the immediate influence of the scholastic arguments of Pseudo-Augustine. In the period of transition between Old and Middle English, English clerics appear to no longer be satisfied with the apocryphal narratives alone but feel the need to adopt Latin academic discourse in the defense of Mary's bodily Assumption.

Marian feasts were gradually accepted in Anglo-Saxon England throughout the course of the seventh and eighth centuries.¹⁶⁹ At first, only four feasts were adopted: the Purification, the Annunciation, the Assumption, and the Nativity. By the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, the feast of the Presentation in the Temple and the feast of the Conception were also celebrated in England.¹⁷⁰ Awareness of the apocryphal legends of Mary's death and the controversy surrounding them appear to have reached England fairly early in its Christian history as well. Adamnan of Iona's (c. 624-704) *De locis sanctis* provides an account of the Frankish bishop Arculf's pilgrimage to sacred sites in, among other locations, the holy land. One of the holy sites Arculf visits is the church

¹⁶⁹ On this and the cult of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England in general, see Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*. For the feasts see pp. 25-52. Mary Clayton has thoroughly discussed the adoption of the feast of the Assumption and the literature dedicated to it in relation to Anglo-Saxon England in her two volumes on the subject. I do not intend to challenge her assessment here, but it is necessary to begin with Anglo-Saxon views on Mary's death as they form the beginning of the history of the doctrine in the English language.

¹⁷⁰ See Clayton, *ibid.*, pp. 25-52, especially pp. 50-51. The first four were, as Clayton points out, celebrated throughout the country. The feasts of the Presentation and Conception were celebrated in only a few monastic centers. The feasts of the Presentation and Conception, Clayton believes, reveal eastern influence in the Anglo-Saxon cult of the Virgin.

dedicated to Mary at the base of the Mount of Olives in the Valley of Josaphat. This church was purportedly, according to the apocryphal legends, the final resting place of Mary's body. Adamnan reports that Mary's stone sepulcher is empty, but that no one knows where her body has been moved, when, or who has relocated the Virgin's holy corpse: "in cuius orientali parte altarium habetur, ad dexteram uero eius partem Mariae saxum inest uavuum sepulchrum, in quo aliquando sepulta pausauit. Sed de eodem sepulchro quo modo uel quo tempore aut a quibus personis sanctum corpusculum eius sit sublatum uel in quo loco resurrectionem exspectat nullus, ut refert, pro certo scire potest" / "In the eastern portion of it is an altar, and at the right-hand side of the altar is a stone sepulcher of the holy Mary, where she was once laid to rest. But how, or when, or by what persons her holy remains were removed from this sepulcher, no one, it is said, can know for certain."¹⁷¹ Adamnan does not address the apocryphal legends concerning Mary's fate and resurrection, though he was most likely aware of them. Adamnan's apparent ignorance in this passage is worth taking note of because in it we can hear the same caution first voiced by Epiphanius of Salamis, and then continued among the Carolingians Ambrosius Autpertus and Paschasius Radbertus.

Ambrosius Autpertus and Paschasius Radbertus were probably made aware of these doubts, according to Mary Clayton, through the repetition of Adamnan's passage in Bede's *Liber de locis sanctis*.¹⁷² Bede supplies an abbreviated version of Adamnan's account of the tomb of Mary in the Valley of Josaphat and in his commentary on the *Acts*

¹⁷¹ For edition and translation, see Denis Meehan, *Adamnan's de locis sanctis*, p. 59. Text is also quoted in Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 14.

¹⁷² See Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 16-20, and Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 102-103.

of the Apostles criticizes the apocryphal legends of Mary's death.¹⁷³ Bede references the text attributed to Melito and takes issue with its chronology and authenticity but does not reveal his own thoughts over the question of Mary's bodily Assumption.¹⁷⁴

The evidence of the Latin homiliaries disseminating from Carolingian monastic centers, and later used by English and Icelandic homilists, confirm Mary Clayton's argument that "the pronouncements of Adamnan and Bede exercised a profound influence over the Carolingians."¹⁷⁵ In the chapter two I highlighted the importance of two Carolingian works, Ambrosius Autpertus's sermon *Assumptionis beatae Mariae* and Paschasius Radbertus's *Cogitis me*, for the promotion of the cautious approach to Mary's death and possible resurrection. These texts were incorporated into other Latin sermons dedicated to the feast of the Assumption and compiled in homiliaries, such as Paul the Deacon's, which were used in Anglo-Saxon England (certainly by Ælfric), but also in medieval Iceland. Yet it is important to stress that while all of these Latin theologians express doubt over Mary's bodily Assumption, they do not condemn it as heresy but rather leave the matter up to God, and some of them, Paschasius for example, hope that Mary's bodily resurrection did happen. Some Anglo-Saxon English texts on the Assumption preserve these doubts, while others promote the bodily Assumption through the translation, or depiction, of the apocryphal narratives of Mary's death and resurrection.

Ælfric appears to be the only theologian writing in English who claims the belief to be not only un-substantiated but actually heretical. We do not find this condemnation in Middle English texts, where belief in the bodily Assumption seems to be almost

¹⁷³ See Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 16-20.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

universally held. Ælfric exhibits frustration over the translation of the apocryphal legends and follows the pronouncements of his predecessors Bede and the Carolingians Ambrosius Autpertus and Paschasius Radbertus. Ælfric's use of the *Cogitis me* is noteworthy because it shows the spread of Pseudo-Jerome's work, and it is one of only a few occurrences of this text in medieval English writing. Middle English authors do not appear to have heeded Ælfric or Radbertus's warnings, though both authors' texts were available to early Middle English writers. The pronouncements of these two cautious theologians would, however, exert an influence in early Icelandic writing, as I will discuss in chapter five. Ælfric, then, is unique in the English vernacular tradition of commentary on the Assumption of Mary. Some Old English and Middle English texts avoid the issue or claim ignorance, but it is rare to find outright condemnation, and in this English writers do not appear to be out of step with developments in Latin theological discourse.

The first Old English work to mention the feast of the Assumption is the *Old English Martyrology*, which is dated to the second half of the ninth century and survives in seven manuscripts.¹⁷⁶ The Old English martyrologist utilized a number of sources to make his collection of saints' lives and was apparently a learned man. He regularly relies on the Bible, Bede, and the homilies or dialogues of Gregory the Great, but he also uses apocryphal sources on occasion; he uses the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* for his entry on the Nativity, for example.¹⁷⁷ The account of the Assumption in the *Martyrology* is brief and avoids any apocryphal material:

¹⁷⁶ See Christine Rauer, *The Old English Martyrology: An Annotated Bibliography*. <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cr30/martyrology/>. Rauer is also the most recent editor of the text.

¹⁷⁷ See Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 107.

On þone fifteogðan dæg þæs monðes bið seo tid, þæt is sancta Marian tid: on þone dæg heo geleorde of middangearde to Criste, one heo nu scineð on þam heofonlican mægene betwyh þa þreatas haligra fæmnena, swa swa sunne scineð on þisne middangeard. Englas þær blissiað, ond heahenglas wynsumiað, one ealle þa halgan þær gefeod in sancta Marian. Sancta Maria wæs on feower ond sixte gum geara þa þa heo ferde to Criste. Sancta Maria is godfæder snoru ong godes suna modur ond haligra sawwla sweger ond seo æðele cwen þara uplicra cesterwara; seo stondeð on þa swyðran healfe þæs heahfæder ond þæs heahcyninges.

On the fifteenth day of this month is that celebration which is the feast of Saint Mary. On that day she departed from earth to Christ, and now she shines in that heavenly might among the multitude of holy virgins, just as the sun shines on this earth. Angels rejoice there, and archangels exult, and all the saints delight in Saint Mary. Saint Mary was in her fourth and sixtieth year when she went to Christ. Saint Mary is the daughter-in-law of God the father, mother of the son of God, mother-in-law of the holy souls, and the noble queen of the dwellers of the heavenly city. She stands on the right side of the High-Father and the High-King.¹⁷⁸

The Old English martyrologist leaves out any details of Mary's death, though he describes the deaths and the location of the bodies of most of the saints. He does not, as many others before him had, mention the empty tomb of Mary in the Valley of Josaphat and thus does not speculate about whether or not Mary died, and if she did, why no one knows the location of her body.¹⁷⁹

It is difficult to say with any certainty that the Old English martyrologist knew the apocryphal legends of Mary and deliberately avoided them; given his wide reading, however, and the fact that at least one version of the *Transitus Mariae* was circulating in England, it is likely that he has chosen to ignore this apocryphal source and leave the matter undiscussed. The fact that the martyrologist uses Adamnan's *De locis sanctis* for several of his legends might indicate that he was aware of some of the doubts

¹⁷⁸ Text taken from George Herzfeld, ed., *An Old English Martyrology*, p. 147.

¹⁷⁹ See Clayton's observation on this fact, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 215-216.

surrounding Mary's death and Assumption.¹⁸⁰ But it is peculiar that the Old English martyrologist chooses to avoid bringing up the question of Mary's death. In his entry for December 27th, the feast of St. John, the Old English writer does entertain divergent claims regarding the death of John the Evangelist:

...rice hæðene men hine snidon þæt he dranc attor, on þam wæs ælces cynnes wrym oððe ban oððe blod, ond ne ablacode he. Ond his byrgen is mid Grecum on Effesio þære ceastre, æt þære byrgenne bið welmicel wundor gesewen ond gehyred: hwilum heo eðað swa lifiende man slæpe, hwilum þonne man þa byrgenne sceawað, þonne ne bið þær nan lichama gesewen, ac bið micel swetnisse stenc. Forðam nat nænig man hwæðer se Johannes si þe cwicu þe dead.

...powerful heathen men attacked him so that he drank poison, in which was every kind of worm or bones or blood, and yet he did not grow pale (i.e. die). His sepulcher is among the Greeks in that city Ephesus. At that tomb many miracles have been seen and heard of. At times it breathes as if a living man is sleeping, at times when a man looks in the grave no body is seen there, but there is a very sweet stench. Because of this no one knows whether St. John is alive or dead.¹⁸¹

It is odd that the Old English martyrologist is seemingly so relaxed in discussing the rumors about the demise of St. John the Evangelist. The assumption of John the Evangelist was perhaps more controversial, or at the very least less-well supported, than the doctrine of Mary's bodily Assumption.

The belief in John's assumption was first developed in the apocryphal *Acts of John* of the second century. St. Augustine, in his 124th tractate on the Gospel of John,¹⁸² had rejected the idea that John remained alive. St. Augustine seems to be aware of claims that the ground above John's tomb in Ephesus can be seen moving as if he breathes in his sleep below. St. Augustine was one of the most well respected authorities among the Anglo-Saxon clergy and his rejection of the assumption of John is clear. It is certainly

¹⁸⁰ See *ibid*, pp. 215-216.

¹⁸¹ Text from Herzfeld, p. 8.

¹⁸² Edited in Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 7.

possible that the Old English martyrologist did not know Augustine's commentary on the episode, but it is curious that he is willing to entertain dubious stories about John's death and not Mary's. Clearly the Old English cleric does not believe that it is outside of Christ's power to enact the assumption of one of his beloved; the issue here must be the specific case. This may be further proof that he avoided writing about Mary's death because he did know of sources that doubted the authenticity of the apocryphal legends concerning Mary.¹⁸³

No surviving vernacular English text enters the discussion concerning Mary's Assumption after the *Martyrology* until the tenth and eleventh centuries. It is during this period that English opinion concerning the Assumption of Mary shifts towards favoring a dual Assumption.¹⁸⁴ Four homilies dedicated to the feast of the Assumption survive from the tenth and eleventh centuries. Two (*Blickling Homily XIII* and a homily in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 41) are mostly translations of the *Transitus Mariae* and unambiguously confirm the bodily Assumption. These two homily writers do not comment on their translations or engage with any of the theological reasons used to support the bodily Assumption. The other texts, the two homilies in Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies I* and *II*, condemn the idea and express annoyance with those Old English works which transmit the heretical writings as well as the unlearned people who read and produce them.

¹⁸³ Though, as I noted above, this did not stop him from using apocryphal legends concerning Mary's childhood.

¹⁸⁴ There is art and sculpture produced in the period between the *Old English Martyrology* and the homilies of the tenth and eleventh century which depict scenes most likely inspired by apocryphal narratives on Mary's death. One in particular, the Benedictional of St. Ædelwold, will be discussed below because of its relation to Ælfric's views on the subject.

Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 41 and Princeton, Scheide Library, MS 71 (*Blickling Homilies*) both postdate Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies I* (c. 990-94) and *II* (c. 995).¹⁸⁵ We do not know though if these collections are based on older exemplars and are thus products of the pre-reform period or if they were compiled during the Benedictine reform movement.¹⁸⁶ Since they both translate the apocryphal legends of Mary's death and both confirm the bodily Assumption of the Virgin, it is tempting to identify them as examples of the kind of texts that Ælfric targets in his two homilies.¹⁸⁷ But this would not necessarily exclude them from being composed in the Reform period. Mary Clayton has pointed out that it was not only Ælfric's predecessors who were interested in and helped spread the apocryphal gospels of Mary.¹⁸⁸ The reformed centers, Winchester among them, continued circulating the apocrypha into the eleventh century and used them in drafting benedictions and other material for the feasts of Mary.¹⁸⁹ The manuscripts produced in the reformed centers often combine the homilies of Ælfric with anonymous homilies which rely on the apocrypha.

¹⁸⁵ On the dating of these manuscripts and of Ælfric, see Richard J. Kelly, *Blickling Homilies*, p. 28, and Mary Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 239. Kelly suggests that Ælfric postdates *Blickling*, but since we do not have a precise date, and since most scholars date the collection to c. 1000, I have placed Ælfric earlier. The two collections must be roughly contemporary though. Malcom Godden has also discussed the dating of Ælfric's homilies. See *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, p. xxxv.

¹⁸⁶ On the Benedictine reforms of the tenth century, see Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform*.

¹⁸⁷ Ælfric's views on these apocryphal narratives will be discussed in detail below. In the following discussion, I refer only to *Blickling XIII* because it might be a better example of the kind of unlearned preaching so upsetting to Ælfric. The Assumption text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 41 is a much more successfully produced text. It is an abbreviated translation of *Transitus B²*, the text of Pseudo-Melito. The manuscript is an eleventh-century copy of the Old English Bede given to Exeter by Leofric. It also includes homilies, liturgical texts, and other items. The six homilies show interest in apocryphal materials. On this text, see Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 211. Clayton has edited the text in *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 216-236.

¹⁸⁸ See Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 149.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Blickling XIII, as Mary Clayton has shown, is a clumsy combination of *Transitus W*, *Transitus B²*, the Magnificat, and the beatitudes.¹⁹⁰ The scribe has combined these two versions of the *Transitus Mariae*, presumably, because his copy of *W* had removed the depiction of the bodily Assumption.¹⁹¹ He has added the end of *B²* to make the bodily Assumption of Mary clear.¹⁹² Due to the translator's clumsy combination and poor Latinity, the text can offer difficulties in understanding.¹⁹³ The translator often fails to recognize biblical allusions and, as Clayton observes, also "shows an astonishing degree of ignorance of what one would expect to be basic religious teaching. He appears to think that the date of Mary's death was identical with that of Christ's death, not realizing that Easter and the feast of the Assumption on 15 August were widely separated."¹⁹⁴ Despite the many flaws exhibited within the text, there is evidence of its usage in monastic settings and the Anglo-Saxon monk's text shows awareness of contemporary Latin homilies concerning the Virgin's Assumption.

The same homily is preserved in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 198. Both offer indications of liturgical use. Though the translator's Latin is poor, he has nevertheless inserted several lines of Latin associated with the liturgy and translated them for his audience.¹⁹⁵ These lines also appear in a Latin homily for the Assumption

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 243.

¹⁹¹ See Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 232-234. Clayton suggests that while it is possible that the Old English scribe's source combined the texts, his poor Latinity and numerous other faults would suggest that the poor transition between narratives is his own doing.

¹⁹² Ibid, p. 232.

¹⁹³ Ibid, pp. 232-234. See also Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 241: "The translator's Latin was poor and his grasp of the role of Latin inflectional endings, in particular, was erratic and unreliable. This occasionally results in a translation which is almost nonsensical, but the nonsense is, in most cases, clearly original, not the consequence of a later scribe's intervention." The translator often misunderstands dialogue and who is speaking or being spoken to.

¹⁹⁴ Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 147-148.

¹⁹⁵ These include: "Benedico nomen tuum et laudabile in secula seculorum," "ecce quam bonum et quam iocundum habitare fratres in hunum," "deo gratias," "Domine Deus omnipotens, qui sedes super cherubin et profundi," "Benedicite fratres. Et dixerunt Petrus."

collected in a homiliary at Bury St. Edmunds in the eleventh century, which is preserved in Cambridge, Pembroke College MS 25. This manuscript is a copy of the Homiliary of Saint-Père de Chartres (c. 820), which was widely used by Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon preachers and possibly later by Icelandic priests as well.¹⁹⁶ The homiliary often served as an exemplar for translations into the vernacular. The Latin homily is based on the *Transitus Mariae* and confirms the Assumption of Mary in both soul and body. The Old English text then, though poorly executed, is not out-of-step with at least some Latin preaching on the subject of Mary's death. The Old English text may have been used during mass for monks, and if this text was copied during the reform period, then the laity may have heard it as well. It is likely the sort of text Ælfric had in mind when warning both the clergy and laity against heresy, but as the example of the Assumption homily in Pembroke MS 25 shows, it may have been Ælfric who was at odds with the theological tastes of some of his contemporaries.

Ælfrician scholarship has long viewed the monk from Eynsham as the champion and definitive voice of the Benedictine Reform in Anglo-Saxon England. His writings were meant for both the clergy and the laity, and he strove for orthodoxy and supporting

¹⁹⁶ See Thomas N. Hall's website for the digital edition project: <http://www.stoa.org/Pembroke25/Website-tv/>. The text of the homily is available here: <http://www.stoa.org/Pembroke25/Website-tv/HTML/49.html>. There were a number of Carolingian homiliaries available in Anglo-Saxon England and indeed into the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Paul the Deacon's (eight century) was widely used, but there were also the ninth century collections of Hrabanus Maurus, the Homiliary of Saint-Père de Chartres, and the Homiliary of Landpertus of Mondsee. The homilies of Haymo of Auxerre and Smaragdus of Saint-Mihel were also widely copied in Anglo-Saxon England. What is interesting about the wide availability of these collections is that preachers had choices when approaching controversial doctrine, such as the Assumption. In Paul the Deacon's homiliary, for example, a preacher could find a homily on the Assumption based largely on (Pseudo) Jerome's *Cogitis me* and could warn his audience accordingly. The preacher could, alternatively, turn to the Homiliary of Saint-Père de Chartres instead and find a homily based on the *Transitus Mariae* and encourage his audience to celebrate the Virgin's dual Assumption. Thus it is apparent that within Carolingian monastic circles, as among Anglo-Saxon ones, there was some disagreement over the Assumption of Mary. On the homily collections available in Anglo-Saxon England, see Mary Clayton's chapter, in Paul Szarmach et al., *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, pp. 151-198.

theology with authoritative voices.¹⁹⁷ His works show a desire to correct doctrine and promote morality within not only the laity but within monastic culture as well. Recent scholars, however, are beginning to examine Ælfric for the ways in which he is not reflective of the reality of the time, and for examples as Christopher A. Jones describes it, “that his doctrinal and moral standards did not belong to all his monastic colleagues.”¹⁹⁸ Ælfric’s concern regarding the Assumption of Mary, I think, is one such example of his doctrinal incongruity with fellow monastics.

Ælfric’s *Catholic Homilies I and II* were designed as collections that could provide English reading material for preachers on mass-days and Sundays. Throughout the collection Ælfric paraphrases Gospel passages and provides authoritative exegesis on the doctrinal significance of those readings. Though the collection was initially meant for the unlearned laity and the preachers teaching them, there is plenty in the homilies that might be more appropriate for monastic readers.¹⁹⁹

Ælfric’s concern with providing authoritative voices for biblical interpretation is immediately apparent as he references his sources in his Latin preface to the collection. The *auctores* he intends to use for his explanations are St. Augustine of Hippo, Jerome, Bede, St. Gregory the Great, Smaragdum, and Haymo.²⁰⁰ According to his own words,

¹⁹⁷ For surveys of Ælfric’s theology, see Lynne Grundy, *Books and Grace: Ælfric’s Theology*, and Milton McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan*.

¹⁹⁸ See Christopher A. Jones’s chapter, “Ælfric and the Limits of ‘Benedictine Reform,’” in Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan, *A Companion to Ælfric*, p. 68. See also Magennis’s review of scholarship on Ælfric in the first chapter. Jones believes that Ælfric “may well have aimed unusually high in his insistence on orthodox texts, meticulously corrected and properly interpreted.” See pp. 95-97.

¹⁹⁹ See Godden’s observation, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, p. xxvi: “If the primary target audience was the laity and their ill-educated preachers, there is also much in the Catholic Homilies that reflects the specialist concerns of monks, the clergy and the more learned. The main sources, and precedents, for Ælfric’s collection were homiliaries and legendaries made for the use of monks in their services. The Gospel exegesis which is the most frequent concern of his homilies reflects the practices of monastic devotion more than preaching for the laity.”

²⁰⁰ Text edited in Benjamin Thorpe, *The Sermones Catholici*, Vol. 1, p. 1. For a discussion of Ælfric’s source material, see Godden’s introduction, pp. xxxviii-xliv. Ælfric used the homiliaries of Paul the

Ælfric's collection of homilies began with the sincere belief that the end times are near and that the erroneous teaching available to the English people will lead them to eternal damnation:

þa bearn me on mode, ic truwig e þurh Godes gife, þæt ic ðas boc of Ledenum gereorde to Engliscre spræce awende; na þurh gebylde mycelre lare, ac forþan ic geseah and gehyrde mycel gedwyld on manegum Englisum bocum, þe ungelærede menn þurh heora bilewitnyse to micclum wisdom e tealdon... For þisum antimbre ic gedyrstlæhte, on Gode truwiende, þæt ic ðas gesetnyse undergann, and eac forðam þe menn behofiað godre lare swiðost on þisum timan þe is geendung þyssere worulde, and beoð fela frecednyssa on mancynne ærðan þe se ende becume, swa swa ure Drihten on his godspelle cwæð to his learning-cnihtum.

Then it consumed me in my mind, I trust through God's grace, that I should turn this book from the Latin tongue into English speech; not through pride in my own great learning, but because I see and hear much heresy in many English books, which unlearned men, through their simplicity, have considered as great wisdom... Because of this matter, I dared, trusting in God, that I should undertake this composition, and also because it behooves men to have good teaching, particularly at this time when this world is ending and there will be many dangers for mankind before the end comes, just as our Lord, in his Gospel, told his disciples.²⁰¹

Ælfric's urgency is clear in the preface to the collection. The heretical teachings need to be corrected not only to better understand doctrine, but also because when Christ comes, those spreading heresy will be specifically targeted. Ælfric's goal is not just to help the laity better understand Christian doctrine but to reprimand them and those priests spreading what he views as false beliefs, such as the suggestion of Mary's bodily Assumption.

Ælfric composed two homilies for the feast of the Assumption. The first uses Paschasius Radbertus's *Cogitis me* to condemn belief in Mary's bodily Assumption. The second is a commentary on the Gospel pericope for the feast, Luke 10:38-42, which is

Deacon, Haymo of Auxerre, and the Cotton-Corpus legendary. These three sources provided him with over six hundred homilies and saints' lives. See Godden, pp. xli.

²⁰¹ Text edited in Thorpe, Vol. 1, p. 2.

based on Augustine's *sermones ciii* and *civ*.²⁰² The commentary explains the significance of the active and contemplative lives. Ælfric most likely used the version of *Cogitis me* circulating in Paul the Deacon's homiliary. His account of (Pseudo) Jerome's letter is an abridged one. Mary Clayton has observed in fact that Ælfric uses only twenty-six of the one hundred and seventeen paragraphs of *Cogitis me*.²⁰³

We should recall, as I noted in chapter two, that Paschasius Radbertus only took issue with the apocryphal book and was rather hopeful that Mary was taken to heaven bodily. The possibility was not outside Christ's prerogative or ability, and he offered some reasons why it may have occurred. Ælfric preserves some of this, but his condemnation of the apocryphal *Transitus* is severe. Oddly enough, by using *Cogitis me*, Ælfric does end up including some details of Mary's death first popularized in the apocryphal legends, such as Christ's coming to personally receive Mary's soul, the angelic choirs that greeted her advent, and the fact that her tomb once had a body in it but does not now. Radbertus had told the nuns at Soissons that he recognized that the faithful had been reading the apocryphal legends of Mary's death out of a desire to read and out of deep piety. Radbertus refers to the *Transitus Mariae* as apocryphal and doubtful, but not heretical. He is sympathetic to those who want to believe the legend. Ælfric, on the other hand, calls those disseminating the text *gedwolmen* (heretics).²⁰⁴ Ælfric's commentary on Radbertus's letter is brief:

²⁰² See Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 242. For a full commentary on both of Ælfric's homilies for the Assumption, see Godden, pp. 248-256 and 588-592.

²⁰³ See Clayton, *ibid*, p. 211.

²⁰⁴ Ælfric states similarly at the beginning of the second homily on the Assumption: "Men ða leofostan, hwilon ær we rehton eow ðone pistol þe se halga Hieronimus sette be forðsiðe þære eadigan Marian, Cristes meder, þurh þone he adwæsete ða dwollican gesetnysse þe samlærede men sædon be hire forðsiðe." / "Most beloved men, some time ago we translated for you that epistle which Saint Jerome wrote concerning the death of the blessed Mary, Christ's mother, through which he extinguished the heretical composition, which poorly taught men said concerning her death." Text edited in Thorpe, Vol. II, p. 438.

“þes pistol is swiðe menigfeald us to gereccenne, and eow swiðe deop to gehyrenne. Nu ne onhagað us na swiðor be ðam to sprecenne, ac we wyllað sume oðre trimminge be ðære mæran Godes meder gereccan, to eowre gebetrunge. Soðlice Maria is se mæsta frofer and fultum cristenra manna, þæt is forwel oft geswutelod, swa swa we on bocum rædað.” / “This epistle is very complicated for us to interpret, and is very deep for you to hear. It is not convenient for us now to speak more about it, but we will show you some other edifying examples concerning the famous mother of God, for your bettering. Truly Mary is the greatest comfort and support to Christians. That is very often manifested, just as we read in books.²⁰⁵

Without any expounding on his part, it is difficult to determine if Ælfric thought of the idea of Mary’s bodily Assumption as heretical itself or if it was the source of that belief that caused his ire. He never informs his audience why this text is heretical and it is not clear if he actually knew why it was considered as such.²⁰⁶

Ælfric uses apocrypha in other cases when he is not aware of any warning against them. He, like the Old English martyrologist, uses the apocryphal *Acts of John* in his homily for the saint. Ælfric records that “He gewat swa freoh fram deaðes sarnysse, of ðisum andweardan life, swa swa he wæs ælfremed fram lichamlicere gewemmednysse. Soðlice syððan wæs his byrgen gemet mid mannan afylled.” / “He departed thus free from the pain of death, from this present life, because he was free from bodily impurity. Truly afterwards his tomb was found filled with manna.”²⁰⁷ The argument made for the case of John here could have equally been applied to special privilege for Mary’s body,

²⁰⁵ Text edited in Thorpe, Vol. 1, p. 448.

²⁰⁶ Ananya Kabir has suggested that Ælfric’s disgust with the *Transitus* legends was due to his belief that heaven and paradise were equivalent. Many of the apocryphal legends related that Mary was taken to a paradise separate from heaven. If this was indeed Ælfric’s problem with these texts, he must not have known the *Transitus* of Pseudo-Melito, which equated *caelum* and *paradisum*. If Kabir is right, then Ælfric presumably only knew those versions which separated Mary into a lower paradise. This is speculative, of course, since Ælfric never informs his readers why he holds such disdain for these materials. See her discussion of the *Transitus* tradition in *Paradise, Death, and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, pp. 31-48. See also Mary Clayton’s discussion of this argument in *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 111.

²⁰⁷ Text edited in Thorpe, Vol. 1, p. 76.

as it was by proponents of her bodily Assumption. Ælfric does not make that argument, though, but he clearly does not think it is outside of Christ's power to give John this special gift, or that John is undeserving. If John had no stain in life then he should be spared from the corruption of the body. It is likely that Ælfric was unaware of Augustine's protest against this event and this apocryphal source or he would likely have avoided mentioning John's empty tomb.

If Ælfric indeed thought the resurrection of the body possible, then his issue with confirming Mary's bodily Assumption must rest in the lack of authoritative witnesses. His own obsession with authority may have led him to criticize belief in the Virgin's bodily resurrection because it was outlined in apocryphal narratives. There was no clear scriptural backing, and more importantly, the authorities that Ælfric respected either ignored the matter or urged caution in accepting the belief. Ælfric, then, is orthodox in relation to the teaching of the Church, but he is at odds with the thinking of his peers in following Carolingian pronouncements regarding the death of Mary. He chose the texts available in Paul the Deacon's homiliary over the sermon on the Assumption in the homiliary of Saint-Père de Chartres.

Ælfric seems to have been alone among his contemporaries and successors in condemning the apocryphal narratives of Mary's death. His own teacher at Winchester, St. Æðelwold, who Ælfric mentions in his preface and speaks fondly of, seems to have been interested in the *Transitus* legends. There is an image of the Assumption in his benedictional which depicts the scene of Mary's death. The apostles are gathered, as are the three virgins, and at the top of the image Christ's hand is reaching down towards his

mother.²⁰⁸ Æðelwold was one of the leaders of the reform movement and connected with the learning center in Winchester; his support for the bodily Assumption must be seen as another example of Ælfric's unusual views concerning Mary's death. It is also worth noting that though Ælfric's homilies continued to be copied in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it was not uncommon for his homilies warning against the apocrypha to be in the same manuscript as the *Transitus* legend and the anonymous Old English homilies on the subject.²⁰⁹ Within decades after his death, another Englishman, perhaps a disciple of Anselm, would produce the scholastically-minded *Liber de assumptione Beatae Mariae* in support of Mary's bodily Assumption. Though Ælfric was perhaps the loudest voice speaking against the apocryphal accounts of Mary's death in the Anglo-Saxon period, his contemporaries and successors did not heed his warnings.

There are no new texts, or at least none that survive, with commentary on the Assumption of Mary in English until the twelfth century. Ælfric's homilies were still copied, as I noted above, and there is the English translation of Ralph D'Escures's commentary on Luke 10:38-42 and Martha and Mary's representations of the active and contemplative lives respectively. Though there are no new English-language texts composed in the eleventh century, there are two twelfth-century texts which represent important interventions in vernacular narratives on Mary's bodily Assumption. One is an Anglo-Norman verse text attributed to Wace which was written probably between 1130

²⁰⁸ The manuscript, British Library, additional MS 49598, has been digitized and made available on the British Library's digitized manuscripts page. www.bl.uk/manuscripts.

²⁰⁹ On the continued copying of his homilies, see Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 211. One example, British Library, Cotton Vespasian MS D XIV of the twelfth century has a copy of Ælfric's first homily on the Assumption. The manuscript contains a second homily that it is explanation of the Gospel reading for the feast, but this not Ælfric's but a translation of Ralph d'Escures's homily on the Assumption. On this homily, see Elaine Treharne, "The Life of English in the Mid-Twelfth Century: Ralph D'Escures's Homily on the Virgin Mary," in Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones, *Writers of the Reign of Henry II*.

and 1140,²¹⁰ the other is an English homily from the twelfth-century preserved in Trinity College, Cambridge, MS B.14.52. The Anglo-Norman text, or another very similar to it, may have influenced the earliest Middle English Assumption narratives.

The Anglo-Norman poem is based on *Transitus B*, and possibly also *Transitus A*,²¹¹ but is more than a translation. The text opens with Mary's family history before rehearsing the Crucifixion and Christ's words to John and Mary from the cross. The text shows some evidence of being intended for liturgical use, perhaps among the Latin-learned. In lines 471 to 472, for example, Peter repeats the psalm *in exitu Israel de Egypto Domus Jacob de populo suo*, which was part of the liturgy for the feast of the Assumption. The poet does not translate this line into Anglo-Norman and thus must have assumed his audience would recognize it.

The end of the text is the most significant section for the future of discussion about Mary's bodily ascent. The Anglo-Norman poet takes up the controversy surrounding Mary's death:

Li apostre unt le cors porté/Iloc u Deus l'out comandé,/Al val de Josaphat
le mistrent/En un selpulcre bel assistrent./Sempres fu le cors [si] levez,/Ne
fu puis veu ne [fu] trovez./Ne voil dire nē afermer,/Ne en escrit nel pus
trover,/Ke hom ne femme ki vesquit,/Pus cel hure le cors veïst./Le
sepulcrē est ben mustrez,/Mais le cors ne fu pas trovez.

The apostles carried the body to where God had commanded. They placed it in the Vale of Josaphat; they put it fittingly into a sepulcher. Then straightaway the body rose up and was never found or seen again. I cannot say or tell, nor can I find it written, that man or woman alive ever saw the body from that day to this. The sepulcher was to be seen, but the body was not found in it.²¹²

²¹⁰ See Tony Hunt, ed., and Jane Bliss, trans., "*Cher alme*": *Texts of Anglo-Norman Piety*, p. 154.

²¹¹ Mary's preaching about the two angels present at each death in lines 235-258 could indicate awareness of *A*.

²¹² Text ed. in Tony Hunt, "*Cher Alme*": *Texts of Anglo-Norman Piety*, p. 174. Translation Jane Bliss in the same volume, p. 175. Lines 579-590.

The poet here describes the same mystery and the same lack of knowledge we have seen in Adamnan, Paschasius Radbertus, and a number of other early medieval texts. But the poet is not satisfied with concluding the poem with the mysterious and unexplainable disappearance.

Mary's body is not there, he claims, because it was carried away, because God brought it back to life.²¹³ He continues:

Si nul demande ke jo crei/Del cors, il est al ciel par fei,/E l'alme par fei
ensement,/De ço responderai breifment. Jo crei k'ele est resuscité/E l'alme
s'est al cors resemble,/De li e[st] la char senz luxurie,/Ben deit estre senz
purreture./Ne deit pas la char purir/Ne par pureture perir/Dunt la char
Dampnedeu fu fet[e],/Nee et conceue e traite./De l'une char est l'autre
ne[e],/L'une de l'autre est honore[e]./Cil ke le corse e l'alme fist/E l'un a
l'autre ensemble mist/Puet bien le cors resusciter/E l'alme arere al cors
poser,/E meime[me]nt de sa mere/Dunt il esteit e fiz e pere.

If anybody asks what I believe about the body: it is in Heaven by faith, and the soul by faith also. I shall reply briefly to this: I believe she was brought back to life, and the soul reunited with her body; her body is without any unchastity and must surely be free from corruption. That flesh ought not to rot, nor perish or decay, from which was made and born, conceived and suckled, the flesh of the Lord God. From the one flesh was the other born, and the one is honored by the other. He who made the body and soul, and put the one with the other, can very well raise up the flesh and put the soul back into the body. And especially that of his mother, to whom he was both Son and Father.²¹⁴

The poet's reliance on belief only early in the passage might make more rigorous theologians cringe, but the poet's insistence on Mary's right to be spared the corruption of the grave because of her sinlessness and role in the Incarnation shows the influence of the scholastic arguments of Pseudo-Augustine's treatise on the Assumption. Christ has the power to resurrect her body, he has reasons to raise her body, so he must have done so. It was unthinkable to Pseudo-Augustine, and to the Anglo-Norman poet here, that the

²¹³ See lines 601-604.

²¹⁴ Text ed. in Tony Hunt, "*Cher Alme*": Texts of Anglo-Norman Piety, p. 174. Translation Jane Bliss in the same volume, p. 175. Lines 605-624.

breast that suckled the savior of mankind be subject to the decay of the grave and the appetite of worms. The poet concludes his account of Mary's death with a reminder to believe that Mary is in heaven (not some lower paradise) in both soul and body and that we should pray to her so that she will show her followers the way. This text is significant because it provides an example of a commentator not relying on apocryphal narrative alone but instead using it in combination with academic argument to defend belief in Mary's dual Assumption.

Trinity College, Cambridge, MS B.14.52 has hands from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries; it was written in either London or south Cambridgeshire.²¹⁵ M.R. James suggested that the hands of the two main scribes should be dated to the thirteenth century.²¹⁶ N.R. Ker dated the thirty-six homilies to before 1200, and Elaine Treharne agrees with the end of the twelfth century as the likely date for the composition of the homiletic material.²¹⁷ The manuscript contains the homilies, the *Poema Morale*, and other miscellaneous items. The homily on the Assumption is a learned one and is peculiar in some of its comments.

The homily serves as an explanation for the Latin liturgy associated with the feast of the Assumption. It opens with the liturgical line "Maria uirgo assumpta est ad ethereum thalamum. Et cetera" and is followed by a promise to explain what these words

²¹⁵ See Treharne, "Cambridge, Trinity College, B.14.52," in *The Production and Use of English Manuscripts 1060 to 1220*, available here: <http://www.le.ac.uk/english/em1060to1220/mss/EM.CTC.B.14.52.htm>.

²¹⁶ See M.R. James, *The Western Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge: A Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 459.

²¹⁷ See Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*, p. xix, and Treharne, "The Life and Times of Old English Homilies for the First Sunday in Lent," in Hugh Magennis and Jonathan Wilcox, *The Power of Words: Anglo-Saxon Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg on His Seventieth Birthday*, p. 281. The manuscript is also discussed in Treharne, "Cambridge, Trinity College, B.14.52," in *The Production and Use of English Manuscripts 1060 to 1220*, available here: <http://www.le.ac.uk/ee/em1060to1220/>.

mean, who this Virgin is, where she was fetched, who fetched her, and how.²¹⁸ For every Latin line, the homilist provides at least a paraphrase, if not a full translation into English. The homilist makes an important claim in the opening of the homily that hints at the feast's significance: "Lusteð nu... and cunnen 3if we muzen cumen after, for þan þe we ben alle boden þider" / "Listen now, and know if we may come after, because we have all been invited there."²¹⁹ Besides indicating that this homily was meant to be read out loud for a listening audience, this passage reveals that the Assumption of Mary is important because what she received at the end of her life is promised to all the faithful.

The homily proceeds through rehearsing some basic doctrine, while maintaining the inclusion of Latin liturgical phrases. The homilist reminds his audience that Mary bore the Lord Jesus Christ, her virginity was not "wemmed" / "spoiled," she is the daughter and mother of the heavenly king, and she is the Virgin of all virgins and lady of all angels. Her name is Mary, "quod est interpretatum stella maris, ðat is on englis sæ sterre."²²⁰ Seamen rely on this star, and the world is called the sea because it flows and ebbs. Mary, the sea-star, guides us through this world. The middle of the homily turns to a criticism of the teachers of the church who, though they should be sowing the Lord's seed in the land, are actively sowing the devil's seed and by their foul livelihood leading men to hell.²²¹ It is probable then, that this homily is meant for unlearned clergy charged with preaching to the parish. They are given the tools to explicate the liturgy and instructed in the basic tenets of doctrine while also being criticized for their idleness and

²¹⁸ Text edited in Rev. R. Morris, *Old English Homilies of the Twelfth Century from the Unique MS. B.14.52 in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge*, pp.158-167.

²¹⁹ Morris, p. 159.

²²⁰ Morris, p. 161.

²²¹ Morris, p. 163, "ac nu is þat lond tilðe atlein. and ifuren was. for þi þið tilien. Ðo þe lordewes of holie chireche. þe sewen 3erneluker þe defles sed þan ure louerdes ihesu crist. and mid forbisne of here fule liflode beden men te helle and naht to heuene."

failure in saving their parishioners; perhaps they are being chided for failing to preach. The homilist continues his criticism and suggests that each of the priests is more interested in providing for his “hore” instead of his “spuse,” the Church. Again indicating his own status and his intended audience, the homilist reprimands his readers, or hearers, for soiling the vestments of the church.²²² The homilist also criticizes the clerics for gluttony, ill speech and deeds, pride, wrath, envy, hatred, and “oðer iuele lastes.” The world is now a desert devoid of virtue, and it is with this comment that he returns to his subject, the Assumption of Mary.

The homilist points out that “of þesse waste and grisliche stede was þis holi maide fet þe ich of speke. Þat is ure lafdi seinte marie. And hire fette þe heuenliche king.” / “from this wasteland and ugly place was this holy maiden, of which I speak, fetched. That is our lady Saint Mary. And the heavenly King fetched her.”²²³ The homilist ends his text with an explanation of the three ascensions of Mary:

Ter ascendit. Primo quidem passibus corporis ante templum ab imo quindecim graduum. usque ad summum. Secundo in temple passibus mentibus de uirtute in uirtutem. ubi uidetur deus deorum in syon. Tercio corpore. Et anima assumpta in celum. Þreo siðees steʒh þis holie maiden. Erest lichamliche þo hie was þreo ʒier heold. biforen þe temple on þe steire of fifteen stoples, fro neþerwarde to uuewarde. Wiðute mannes helpe. Oðer siðes hie steʒh in þe temple gostliche. fram mihte to mihte forte þat his alre mihtene louerd biheold also hie hit wolde. Ðe þridde siðe hie steʒh þis dai þo engles hire beren mid soule and mid lichame. in to þan heuenliche bure, þar heo was wurðliche understonden.

This holy maiden ascended three times. The first bodily, when she was three years old, before the temple on the stairs of fifteen steps, from the bottom to the top, without anyone’s help. The second time she ascended spiritually in the temple, from virtue to virtue until she beheld the Lord of all virtues as she wished it. The third she ascended on this day when angels bore her with soul and body in to the heavenly city, there where she was worthily welcomed.²²⁴

²²² The homilist shows an intimate knowledge of the vestments of the clergy.

²²³ Morris, p. 165.

²²⁴ Morris, pp. 165-167.

Mary was taken from this wasteland of sin and evil. The homily reminds its audience that they have been promised this route from the wasteland also, but they must first amend their sinful behavior described throughout the lesson. The author expresses no awareness of controversy here, or of the apocrypha, and has no doubt that Mary is in heaven, not a separate paradise, in body and soul. He does not defend this belief with the reasons of Pseudo-Augustine, but he does suggest that her bodily Assumption was predicted by her life and importance to her son. This homily should be seen an early example of an academic-text in the vernacular. It is text that offers explanation and interpretation of liturgy alongside discussion of doctrine. The sermon is structured similarly to the academic type as it begins with a thematic passage and progresses through different headings of explication on that passage.²²⁵

I will end my investigation of early English Assumption texts with the oldest surviving Middle English account of Mary's death and resurrection, the so-called *Southern Assumption*. The *Southern Assumption* poem has a long history. It was first composed in the thirteenth century, perhaps around c. 1250, but continued to be copied well into the sixteenth century.²²⁶ Due to its manuscript witnesses it could be seen as the standard Middle English text on the Assumption of Mary. Identifying the poet's sources has proved difficult. The editors of the edition for the Early English Texts Society, Lumby and McKnight, suggested a connection to Wace, as did Emil Hackauf.²²⁷ The Middle English text, however, is much longer than Wace's poem and selects entirely

²²⁵ The academic sermon is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

²²⁶ On the date of the text, see Rev. J. Rawson Lumby and George H. McKnight, *King Horn, Floriz and Blauncheflur, The Assumption of Our Lady*, pp. l-lvi.

²²⁷ see Rev. J. Rawson Lumby and George H. McKnight, *King Horn, Floriz and Blauncheflur, The Assumption of Our Lady*, pp. l-li, and Emil Hackauf, *Die älteste mittelenenglische Version der Assumptio Mariae*, p. 1.

different details in recounting the events prior to and after the Virgin's death. The presence of occasional Anglo-Norman loans could hint at another Anglo-Norman text as the source, but this fact does not demand an Anglo-Norman source necessarily. The account is made up of a combination of the *Transitus B* of Pseudo-Melito and the *Transitus* attributed to Joseph of Arimathea. It is unclear if the English poet had both versions of this text available to him or if he used a composite manuscript no longer witnessed, but the latter is more likely. The Middle English poem survives in six manuscripts ranging in date from the second half of the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century.²²⁸ Aside from the manuscript witnesses, the poem shows its influence on a range of other texts, including the Auchinlek MS Assumption, the *Northern Homily Cycle*, and the account of the Assumption in the *Cursor Mundi* poem.²²⁹

The opening of the poem indicates that it was meant to be read on the feast day of Mary for the edification of listeners:

Cambridge. Univ. MS. Gg.4.27.2
 Merie tale telle ihc þis day
 Of seinte Marye þat swere may.
 Al is þe tale and þis lescoun
 Of hire swete assompcion,
 Hu heo was fram erþe ynome
 In to blisse wiþ hire sone.
 Þe kyng of heuene hem blessi
 Pat þis listneþ and wel herknie.
 Alle moten hi iblessed beo,
 Pat vnderstonde wel þis gleo.

Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 10036
 In honorance of ihesu cryst
 Sitteþ stille and haueþ lyst;
 And 3if 3e wille to me here,
 Off oure ladi 3e mail ere,
 Floure of heuene, ladi and queene,
 As sche au3t wel to bene,
 To wham aungeles doun here my3t
 To serue her boþe day and ny3t.
 Par auenture 3e haue no3t iherde
 How oure ladi went out of þis werde
 Sitteþ stille and herkeneþ to me;
 Now ihesu cryst oure helpe be!²³⁰

The two manuscript witnesses printed by Lumby and McKnight both suggest a listening audience in need of knowledge concerning the end of Mary's life. While this is not a

²²⁸ See Lumby and McKnight, pp. liv-lv.

²²⁹ Ibid, pp. lii-liv.

²³⁰ Ibid, p. 111, lines 1-12.

sermon, it seems clear that the text was meant to be read during the feast of the Assumption. The poem then relates the history of Mary from the Crucifixion to her death, pausing for the benefit of the listeners over significant moments in Christian history, especially the Passion of Christ. In recounting the Passion, the poet relates the words of Christ on the cross, who reminds those present, both at the scene and in the listening audience, that he endured this deed without guilt so that he could ask his father to forgive mankind. The poet highlights Mary's weeping, including her lament over how she should live without him, during this episode before transitioning to Christ's giving of Mary to John.

The English poet follows the narrative details of the *Transitus* legend closely, but in delivering one of the reasons for Mary's corporal Assumption, the poet gives the argument to Mary herself: "Nabbeþ no drede ac witeþ hit wel;/Of pine ne schal ihc þole no del./Ne schal no soreþ come me to,/For my sone hit wule so,/Mi body ne schal no pine þole,/For he was þer of ibore."²³¹ This is one of the theological reasons provided in academic discourse; the body that bore the Word made flesh could not possibly endure the pain of death or suffer corruption after death. What is unique here, and what might support Georgiana's Donavin's argument about Mary as a learned debater in medieval England, is that Mary delivers the argument herself to those gathered around her bedside. Christ later confirms this argument when he comes to retrieve his mother by reminding those gathered that he "toke flesche and blode" from his mother and thus owes her this special gift.²³² Christ reminds his followers that he purchased this gift for all the faithful when he hung on the cross, but because Mary made him flesh, she is able to claim this

²³¹ Lumby and McKnight, p. 117, lines 211-216.

²³² Ibid, p. 122, line 421.

reward prematurely. The poet maintains the insistence, though, that even Mary has to pass through hell before ascending to heaven, but her son reassures her that he and his host will proceed before her so that she will not see any devil or suffer torment there.

As Christ takes Mary up to heaven, there is a passage that could potentially be seen as the kind of exaggeration Brian K. Reynolds has in mind when suggesting that vernacular authors took liberties in ascribing certain powers to the Virgin. The English poet reveals to his audience Christ's promise to Mary as she ascends to heaven:

Moder, one thing y gef to the;
Thu shalt be in heuene with me.
Moder, for the loue of the,
Y woll haue mercy and pite
Of al man kynde thurgh þi prayere,
Yf þou ne were, they were for-lore.
And of them namelich
That the serueth trulich,
And that to the done mercy crye
And sey, 'help vs, dere ladye,'
In what synne that thei be,
Moder, for the loue of the,
Thogh a man had lad his lyf
In onde, in synne, and in strif,
Yf he on his last dawe
Wepe and crye, and to the be-knawe,
And telle it oute vnto a preste,
Or in case, vnto his nexte,
Yf that he may do no more,
But that he aruwe it sore,
In what synne that he be,
Moder, for the loue of the,
I woll of hym haue mercy.²³³

This passage reveals the significance of the Assumption to the listener. Mary's special gift allowed her certain intercessory powers. Because of her intimate role in the Incarnation, Christ allows Mary special privilege in asking for mercy for those devoted to her. While this passage certainly grants a great deal of power to Mary and is an example

²³³ Lumby and McKnight, p. 125, lines 411-433.

of the kind of thought reformed by both Catholics and Protestants after the sixteenth century, it is not the invention of the English poet and is not uncommon amongst the Latin doctors.²³⁴ The English poet may be guilty of granting too much authority to Mary here, but his idea of her ability is not at odds with the teaching of many theologians of the period.

Towards the end of the poem Christ comes to take Mary's body to heaven,²³⁵ and the audience is reminded why: "he hym self dud þerynne,/that neuer had y-done synne./he wolde not in no manere/that the body lafte there."²³⁶ The Apostle Thomas arrives late to Mary's burial but sees her ascending in great light. She gives him her girdle as a token of proof to show the other apostles what he has seen. This is a new detail for English texts and is based on the *Transitus* attributed to Joseph of Arimathea. Thomas tells the other apostles that the tomb is empty, and they chide him for doubting Christ's crucifixion and now for doubting Mary's death and Christ's taking of her soul. Thomas had to touch the wound to believe in Christ's passion, now he is able to provide the tangible proof of Mary's bodily resurrection. In some of the manuscripts the poem concludes with the promise that Saint Edmond has promised forty days of pardon to anyone who hears this life of Mary, learns it, and responds with a *Pater noster* and *Ave Maria*.²³⁷

Many of the Middle English Assumption narratives succeeding the *Southern Assumption* follow a similar pattern in presenting the Virgin's death. The authors rely

²³⁴ On this, see Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven*, chapter five, especially pp. 207-245. The liturgy for the feast also celebrated these Marian powers of intercession.

²³⁵ Heaven and paradise are equivalent terms throughout. Mary is not placed in a separate paradise but in heaven with her son.

²³⁶ Lumby and McKnight, p. 132, lines 603-606.

²³⁷ This may be why the *Cursor Mundi* poet suggested that Edmond was the author of the Assumption narrative.

mostly on narrative but do insert commentary on significant moments in the passages. They are often part of collections of hagiography that could be read in the church on the feast days. These texts include *The South English Legendary* Assumption from fourteenth century manuscripts, the *Cursor Mundi* (c. 1300), *The Lyfe of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary* (early fifteenth century), *The Northern Homily Cycle* Assumption (fifteenth century expansion), the *Metrical Life of Christ*, and the *N-Town* and *York Corpus Christi* play cycles. All are based on one or more versions of the apocryphal *Transitus* texts and thus favor the story over theological discourse. There are several texts, however, mostly sermons, which take up more learned arguments on the Assumption and present them in the vernacular.²³⁸

The Assumption texts of Anglo-Saxon England began simply as translations of Latin materials or condemnation of those translations and sources. English authors then progressed to texts which translate but also contemplate the doctrinal implications of the source material. Those texts which focus more on narrative are no longer just translations but rather original compositions constructed from a variety of source material meant to provide reading material for a broader audience. Later English authors seem to have not heeded, if they even knew, Ælfric's condemnation of the apocryphal legends of Mary's death. It is apparent that his own contemporaries considered his viewpoint as backward and out of touch. Reference to Pseudo-Jerome's *Cogitis me* is rare in English after Ælfric,²³⁹ as are doubts as to the certainty of Mary's dual Assumption. The apocrypha are widely represented in Latin manuscripts and in English translation from the eleventh century on and their influence is complicated. Many texts rely on the details of the

²³⁸ Both groups of texts will be examined in chapter three.

²³⁹ There are a few interesting examples of the usage of Pseudo-Jerome in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England. These will be discussed in chapter four below.

apocrypha without citing them and perhaps without even being aware of the provenance of the information. The Cambridge, MS B.14.52 homilist and the poet of the *Southern Assumption* offer no indication that they saw the descriptions of Mary's death available to them as suspect. The central Church, however, remained, officially, non-committal on the matter, never stamping out the belief of the source material or openly supporting it.

CHAPTER 4

WIDESPREAD ACCEPTANCE: THE DOCTRINE IN MIDDLE ENGLISH TEXTS OF THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

I noted in chapter three that after Ælfric, English dissent towards the bodily Assumption of Mary is increasingly rare. We might expect that in this climate of general acceptance references to the theological arguments supporting the belief would be sparse. This is not the case, however, and there are two reasons for this. The first is that the doctrine remained unconfirmed in the central Church. Believers still needed access to the specialized knowledge used to defend the dual Assumption. The second is the result of the impositions of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, Archbishop Pecham's Lambeth Constitutions of 1281, and the *Lay Folks' Catechism* (c. 1357) associated with John of Thoresby (Archbishop of York) to teach the basics of Christian doctrine in the vernacular to under-educated priests and the laity.²⁴⁰

The Assumption may not immediately appear to be basic Christian doctrine - especially since Rome remained uncommitted on the matter throughout the Middle Ages - but because Mary's bodily resurrection had been associated with Incarnational theology at least since the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century,²⁴¹ it was indeed

²⁴⁰ Under these regulations priests were required (and given the tools) to instruct the laity in the articles of faith, the commandments of the Old and New Testaments, the seven sacraments, the seven deeds of bodily and ghostly mercy, the seven virtues, and the seven deadly sins. On the importance of the Fourth Lateran Council and Archbishop Pecham's *De Informatione Simplicium* (or as it was more widely known *Ignorantia sacerdotum*) for England, see Andrew B. Reeves, "Teaching the Creed and Articles of Faith in England: 1215-1281," in *A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Late Middle Ages (1200-1500)*, ed. by Ronald J. Stansbury, pp. 41-71. On the *Lay Folks' Catechism* and Archbishop John of Thoresby, see Anne Hudson, "A New Look at the *Lay Folks' Catechism*," *Viator* 16 (1985), pp. 243-258; R.N. Swanson, "The Origins of the *Lay Folks' Catechism*," *Medium Ævum* 60 (Jan. 1991), pp. 92-100; and Moira Fitzgibbons, "Disruptive Simplicity: Gaytryge's Translation of Archbishop Thoresby's *Injunctions*," in *The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature*, ed. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Bradley Warren, pp. 39-58.

²⁴¹ Though Mary's role in the Incarnation was always present as a defense of the bodily Assumption in many of the apocrypha, it was in the eleventh and twelfth century that this argument was formally defined

an important part of necessary Christian teaching. Reflecting on the Assumption allowed for commentary on such basics as the Incarnation, the atonement of the flesh, the Last Judgment, and the importance of the virtues of humility and meekness so typified by Mary. This is why the bodily Assumption is insisted upon in a wide swathe of Middle English literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and across different regions of England.²⁴² The doctrine is defined and defended where we would expect it to be, in sermons and texts of religious instruction, but it also appears in legendary material,²⁴³ chronicles and travel narratives,²⁴⁴ lyrics²⁴⁵ and other poems,²⁴⁶ *vitæ* of Christ and Mary,

by monastics with the assistance of academic reason. Pseudo-Augustine's treatise on the Assumption is a prime example. On Incarnational theology and English texts, see, for example, Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*, especially the first chapter, Cristina Maria Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation: Middle English Writing and the Leap of Love*, and Karen Cherewatuk, "'Becoming Male, Medieval Mothering,' and Incarnational Theology in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the *Book of Margery Kempe*." *Arthuriana* 19.3 (Fall 2009), pp. 15-24.

²⁴² A particular interest in the bodily Assumption cannot be associated more with one region than another. The manuscripts containing texts supporting the bodily Assumption come from the south, near London, from the Midland, from East Anglia, from York, from Canterbury, from Oxford, from Worcester, and so on. We can certainly point to, as Gail McMurray Gibson has, more fervent devotion to Mary in East Anglia; but no region shows itself to be more devoted to the bodily Assumption than another, as is the case in Iceland where the Benedictines of Northern Iceland associated with the See of Hólar were the most prominent supporters of the belief.

²⁴³ Legends of the Assumption, similar in type or actually based on the *Southern Assumption*, continued to be copied throughout the Middle Ages. See for example the account of the Assumption in *Cursor Mundi*, the *South English Legendary*, and the *Northern Homily Cycle*. This is not an exhaustive list of the accounts of the Assumption based on the apocrypha. Many remain unedited. There is a Middle English translation preserved in All Souls College MS 26 of *Transitus A* (the text attributed to Joseph of Arimathea) from 1485. This text is, as far as I have been able to determine, the only direct translation of one of the Latin apocryphal narratives which does not rely on some intermediary source for the details of the *Transitus* legends. I am preparing an edition of the Middle English translation in All Souls College MS 26.

²⁴⁴ The fifteenth-century *Chronicle of John Hardyng*, for example, uses the death and Assumption of Mary to comment on the death and reign of Agrestes. John Hardyng claims that at this tyme Mary died "or elles assumpte in body and soule to lyue,/Vnto the blysse after her ioyes fyue." See *The Chronicle of John Hardyng*, ed. Henry Ellis, p. 84. Mary's death and Assumption is worked into *The Book of John Mandeville* (c. 1357-1371) also. Mandeville describes the Valley of Josaphat near the Mount of Olives and notes that this is the place where Mary Magdalene was forgiven, where Lazarus was raised from death, where Saint Thomas received the girdle of Mary, where Christ preached many times, and where he will sit in Judgment. Mandeville alludes also to the church near there where an angel informed Mary about her death. See lines 877-885 in *The Book of John Mandeville*, ed. by Tamarah Kohanski and C. David Benson.

²⁴⁵ Many of the lyrics do not address the bodily Assumption directly, but rather are expansions of the liturgy of the feast of Assumption. In a lyric on the Five Joys of Mary (with an acrostic), edited from MS Bodley 22 by Carleton Brown (*Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*), the lyricist confirms a bodily Assumption: "In solempne wyse assumptyd wyth a songe/Of cherubyn, thy for the ioy to atteyne,/was þi body and thy sowle aungellys amonge,/vnto thy son browte vp yn febus wayne,/wher personys three yn O

and, towards the end of the Middle Ages, acted out in the cycle plays. This chapter begins by focusing first on those texts of religious instruction and sermons meant for both monastics and the laity. The chapter then concludes with works that would have been consumed outside of church, here represented by the *N-Town* and *York Corpus Christi* plays, to understand what effect the catechetical and sermon texts had on the perception of the Assumption in other Middle English literature not necessarily meant to be used in church service. These texts focus on narrative detail and dramatization to stir the audience's imagination towards the love and imitation of Christ and Mary instead of doctrinal issues concerning Mary's death and ascent to heaven. The Oxford translation debates of the late fourteenth century culminating in the Constitutions of Arundel in 1409 do not appear to have suppressed the spread of the debates about the Assumption in English, though sermons on the subject do take up the issues of lay learning and the Lollard heresy and had some success in shifting the focus of late-medieval Assumption texts.

In the examination which follows, it will become apparent that in England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there were two approaches to defending belief in the

god sytte certeyne./Of whose presens ryght ioyful mayse thow be,/ffor as scription in holy bokys sayn,/Thow conceyuydyst clene that holy trinite," Brown, p. 56. The lyricist has clearly been informed that Mary has been taken to heaven in both body and soul, and that she obtained this special gift because she bore, as a pure virgin, the Son of God. Often the lyrics, as that printed by Brown from Cotton MS. Caligula A.ii, copy part of the Latin liturgy in the first line and then expand on the imagery suggested by the liturgical line. Thus the "Song of the Assumption," Brown, p. 65, begins stanzas with "Surge mea sponsa," "Columba mea," "total pulcra," "veni, electa mea," "veni de libano," "pulcra ut luna," "que est ista," and "aurora consurgens." All of these opening lines are from Cantic of Canticles and were included as Antiphons for the feast of the Assumption. See also the five lyrics on the Assumption edited by Karen Saupe in *Middle English Marian Lyrics*.

²⁴⁶ See, for example, the discussion of Mary's death in the fourteenth-poem the *Prik of Conscience*. In book three, in his commentary on the death, the *Prik*-author mentions Mary's death as proof if Christ would not spare his mother from the sight of the fiend after death, no one should expect to be spared from that sight. See lines 550-581. This image of Mary's death is of course influenced by the apocryphal narratives, which had also stressed the doctrinal significance of the appearance of the fiend and his demons at the death of everyone's flesh, including Christ's and Mary's. On the popularity of the *Prik* and its wide dissemination in manuscript copies, see Nicole Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline*, pp. 14-15.

bodily Assumption of Mary, and often these methods were blended. The first approach, the one ideally promoted for the laity, relied on pious belief and devout imagination;²⁴⁷ in this method one was encouraged, by the apocryphal narratives and the liturgy, to imagine Mary's last days and the joy that must have occurred on Earth and in Heaven at her reception next to the throne of her son. The second approach, meant to be reserved for the clergy, was to use reason to develop proofs for the appropriateness of Mary's bodily Assumption so that one could more devoutly celebrate the Assumption in the imagination. This approach relied on the logical combination of scripture to support the belief, the use of confirmed Marian privileges which could be extended to support the bodily resurrection, and an understanding of the mysteries of Christian doctrine.

The fifteenth-century Bridgettine *Myroure of oure Ladye*, designed for the sisters, priests, deacons, and lay brothers of the Bridgettine house of Syon in Isleworth (founded 1415),²⁴⁸ combines both approaches and relies on devout imagination in its celebration of the Assumption but reasoned arguments supporting the Assumption in its explanation of the divine service.²⁴⁹ *The Myroure* indicates in numerous passages that the life of the

²⁴⁷ Appealing to the devout imagination of the laity was the approved form of vernacular instruction in fifteenth century England. Perhaps the best example of what this means is Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. Love promotes, on numerous occasions, that though the church is "not fully affermyng in þis or oþer þat we mowe not openly preue by holi writ or doctors apreuede. Bot deuoutly ymaginyng to edificacion & stiryng of deuocion." Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text*, ed. Michael Sargent, p. 61. Those narrative details, or even doctrinal points, which have no scriptural or exegetical backing, can be proved by the imagination and the stirring of devotion. The doctrine of the bodily Assumption succeeded throughout Europe precisely because of this approach. Love makes similar statements elsewhere, for example in *Die dominica* when including Christ's appearances after the Resurrection which have no scriptural reference. Sometimes Love frames this with the phrase "we suppose" instead. This language is also common in another contemporary Carthusian work, the Middle English *Speculum devotorum*.

²⁴⁸ On the Bridgettine Abbey of Syon, see E.A. Jones and Alexandra Walsham, eds. *Syon Abbey and its Books: Reading, Writing and Religion, c. 1400-1700*, Vincent Gillespie, ed. *Syon Abbey*, and Claes Gejrot, Sara Risberg, and Mia Akestam, eds. *Saint Birgitta, Syon and Vadstena: Papers from a Symposium in Stockholm*.

²⁴⁹ The work is not dissimilar in design to popular Latin works, such as Jean Beleth's (d. 1182) *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* or Guillaume Durand's (d. 1296) work of the same name.

Virgin and her relationship are never to be far from the thoughts of the sisters. The author indicates in the prologue that the program of service is designed so that “from Sunday tyll Saterdag, dayly, wekely, and yerely; ye ar occupied with youre tongues in oure Ladyes seruyce, wherfore ye ought to take hede, that youre myndes be as besy and contynually occupied aboute the same thinges by inwarde vnderstondynge and deuocyon.”²⁵⁰ Inward understanding, or contemplation, or, as Love had called it, devout imagination, was not sufficient though.

The author later indicates to the nuns that the service “be sayde wyth meke²⁵¹ reuerence and deuocyon, bothe inwarde in harte, & in all outwarde obseruaunces. as in knelynge, enclynyng. syttyng and stondynge. and in sad and reuerente keypyng of all the members of the body, moche more then yf ye were in presence of eny erthly kyng. or quene, or other erthly creature, as ye that are there in the presence of almyghty god to do hym seruyce, bothe wyth body and with soule. lyke as he made bothe to that same ende.”²⁵² The divine service is not only meant for inward contemplation but must also be apparent to those standing near; the author does seem to value the inward experience over the outward and encourages the nuns in their pursuit of this, but he insists on there being some outward proof, or “open shewyng,” of celebration as well.²⁵³

The author of *The Myroure* has no doubts that Mary was taken to heaven in both soul and body and now reigns as queen in heaven next to the holy trinity because she is

²⁵⁰ John Henry Blunt, ed., *The Myroure of oure Ladye: Containing a Devotional Treatise on Divine Service, with a Translation of the Offices Used by the Sisters of the Brigittine Monastery of Sion*, pp. 5-6.

²⁵¹ “Mekeness” is valued throughout the work and Mary is praised repeatedly for showing an example of the virtue performed at its best.

²⁵² Blunt, *The Myroure*, p. 62.

²⁵³ Throughout the prologues and explanation of the divine service, the author repeatedly stresses the combination of “inwarde loue and deuocyon” with “open shewyng.”

“gate of the hye kyng and the brighte gate of lyghte.”²⁵⁴ Mary is the gate by which Christ entered earth and human flesh and in turn, Mary is “the wyndowe of heuen.”²⁵⁵ Mary deserved the bodily Assumption because she was an “ouercomer” just like Christ, who overcame the fiend of hell. In the hymn for the Saturday service, the author explains that the hymn *Exatla es* should be understood in this way: “yt ys to wytte that the gates of paradyse and of heuen were shytted to mankynde by the synne of Adam and of Eue. and by oure lady, they were opened, for she broughte fourthe oure lorde lesu criste. Whiche by hys passyon. and hys assencyon. opened heuen gates. And therefore oure glorious lady in her assumpcyon entred these gates as an ouercomer. as thys antempne tellyth.”²⁵⁶ It is clear that Mary is an integral part of the purchase made by Christ not only because she bore him and fed him with her “maydenly brestes” but because her own bodily Assumption proves the promise made by the Incarnation and Passion.

In the third lesson for the Saturday service the author points out that it is because Mary was the beginner of all good deeds, because her body was an instrument and continually pliable, and because this body was assumed that “we byleue verily that of the ryghtwysnes of God all menes bodyes shall aryse in the laste day and take rewarde with theyr sowles as theyr workes aske.”²⁵⁷ The nuns, then, are celebrating the Assumption to honor Mary’s special privilege but also because singing this service meekly can assist their own future reward. Mary received her body before everyone else will, of course, because she had no “defaulte in good workes,” but her example does show the capability of souls and bodies being in heaven. In another hymn for the Saturday service the author

²⁵⁴ Blunt, *The Myroure*, p. 258.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 257.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 258.

²⁵⁷ Blunt, *The Myroure*, p. 268.

relies on those arguments first popularized by Pseudo-Augustine's *Liber de assumptione* to remind the sisters that "the kyng of blysse hath not suffered hys mothers body to rotte whereof he toke the hoste, by which he sheweth souerayne grace."²⁵⁸ For the author of the *Myroure*, the doctrinal reasons for Mary's bodily Assumption encourage more fervent devotion. The inward and outward expression of love towards Mary is championed for the sisters and lay brothers of Syon, but the author does not avoid the reasons for Mary's special privilege because he deems them an important part of the lesson.

The Lay Folks' Catechism is quite different from the *Myroure of Oure Ladye* and is interested more in basic instruction than the kinds of devotion promoted for the community of Syon. The *Catechism* never mentions the doctrine of the bodily Assumption directly, though it does promote clerical and lay understanding of Mary's role in the Incarnation and thus vital contribution to the redemption of the flesh. It has become a complicated text in scholarship because of its program and the circumstances of its copying and use. There is some disagreement about what represents Archbishop Thoresby's original text and what may or may not be Wycliffite revision of the *Catechism*.²⁵⁹ Some scholars have suggested that the *Catechism* laid the groundwork for clerical criticism even while insisting on the importance of the clergy.²⁶⁰ Nicole Rice prefers to see *The Lay Folks' Catechism* as a suggestion of "the possibility for practical

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 271.

²⁵⁹ On this, see Anne Hudson, "A New Look at the *Lay Folks' Catechism*." Hudson questions the Lollardy of the Lambeth Palace Library, MS 408 printed by Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth in the edition of the text. Simmons and Nolloth suggested that the Lambeth Palace MS was associated with Wycliffe himself and represented his revision. Understanding the differences in the manuscript witnesses, which can often vary widely, is complicated by the fact the copy in Thoresby's own register might be a copy itself. On this, see R.N. Swanson, "The Origin of *The Lay Folks' Catechism*," p. 93. Swanson also argues that the Lollardy of the so-called "Lollard" version is "highly suspect." See p. 94.

²⁶⁰ See Nicole Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline*, pp. 14-15, for a summary of these issues. See also Moira Fitzgibbons, who suggests, in "Disruptive Simplicity," p. 40, that Gaytryge's insistence on openness in the English translation of Thoresby's *Injunctions* reveals his interest in lay people taking more responsibility for their own salvation.

cooperation and identification among parishioners and their priests” in the usage of clerical books.²⁶¹ Rice further suggests that “devout urban laity were exploring the intellectual aspects of clerical discipline, notably sermon construction and penitential theory, and perhaps using them in personal ways for their own techniques of self-correction.”²⁶² Writing about the Assumption of Mary provides, as the examples below will show, further witness to lay interest in the professional literature of the clergy.

The prologue of *The Lay Folks’ Catechism* reveals the particular problem which the text hopes to amend and relates that the creatures of the earth, air, and water, could not come to the bliss of heaven without knowledge of God. Because of this, God created angels and men with the knowledge and wisdom necessary to know God and thus serve him and love him. This knowledge came to mankind in the “state of innocency that thai were made in,/and so shuld we have had, if thai had not synned.”²⁶³ Humankind now bears the “wickednesse” of those misdeeds. They had that knowledge “with-outen travaile” but we can now only acquire it through “heryng,” “leryng,” and “techyng” of “halikirke.”²⁶⁴ Many people are not learned enough to know God, to serve him, and to love him as they should. This work, translated into English, is meant to be used by “prelates, parsons, vikers, and prestes/That er halden be dette for to lere thame.”²⁶⁵ *The Lay Folks’ Catechism*, then, seeks to establish a unified understanding of Christian

²⁶¹ See Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline*, p. 15. Rice supports this view with the evidence of the lay use of the professional literature of the clergy, including Latin texts such as *Oculus sacerdotis*, *Manuale sacerdotis*, and the *Speculum Christiani*. English translations of at least parts of these works were available as well.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Simmons and Nolloth, p. 2, lines 17-18.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 4, lines 25-30.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 4, lines. 40-41.

doctrine and values the roles of the clergy in this project and to present this material in English so that it can be utilized by a wider body of believers.²⁶⁶

There is, as I have said, no direct reference to the Assumption of Mary in *The Lay Folks' Catechism*. There are, however, two passages – one, a statement on the manhood of Christ, in the text of Thoresby's register and one, a commentary on the *Ave Maria*, in Lambeth 408 – which have some bearing on the arguments favoring Mary's bodily Assumption. The "manhede" of Christ is described in seven points. The *Catechism* begins this commentary by stating "that er nedefull to trowe til al that er cristen./The first is, that Iesu crist, goddess sone of heuen,/Was sothefastely consayued of the maiden mari,/And toke flesh and blode, and bicom e man/Thurgh might and strength of the haligast/Withouten ony merryng of hir modihede,/Withouten ony mynnyng of hir maidenhead./That othir point, that we salt trowe/That he, god and man bathe in a person,/Was sothefastly born of that blissed maiden,/Godde, geten of his fadir before ony tyme,/And man borne of his modir and brought forthe in tyme."²⁶⁷ The insistence on the uncorrupted flesh of both Christ and Mary, which the Son received from Mary, is important not only in Christ's resurrection, but is also the main argument in favor of Mary's resurrection in body and soul. The remaining points remind the clergy teaching and the laity listening that this human flesh was beaten, nailed, crowned with thorns, and subjected to many other tortures before dying. When the body died, the soul went to hell and harrowed it and fetched Adam, Eve, and others of the forefathers. Christ died because of the "sekenesse of our manhede" but rose through the "strenthe of his godehede." In this rising, he brought life back to all flesh.

²⁶⁶ See R.N. Swanson's observation on the goals of the *Catechism* in "The Origin of *The Lay Folks' Catechism*," p. 93.

²⁶⁷ Simmons and Nolloth, pp. 26, 28, lines, 119-130.

The commentary on the *Ave Maria*, which is included in the manuscript before the list of important doctrine in Thoresby's register, may not have originally belonged to the *Catechism*.²⁶⁸ The passage on the *Ave* is represented in the supposedly Lollard revision, Lambeth 408, which has led to its being understood as a Wycliffite interpretation of the *Ave*,²⁶⁹ despite the fact that this section is also preserved in other manuscripts of the *Catechism*.²⁷⁰ The description of the *Ave* opens with the statement that the *Ave* is commonly used to greet Christ's mother and that "we suppose þat þis gretynge sauys many a man/For we take as be-leue. Pat sche ys blyssyd in heuyn./And crist wyl do at hyr praynge among al oþyr seyntyty./And þow we trow þat noþer crist ne sche/wil do for man but yt be resonable."²⁷¹

There are a few points worth pausing over here. First, the statement that many can be saved through this greeting should indicate that at least this section of the commentary is not of Lollard origin, and indeed the final section of the treatise notes that this is an addition to the Bible and is thus questionable. It is likely then, that we have here a pre-existing treatise that has been incorporated into the *Catechism* and then questioned by some revisers. Second, there could be a suggestion of Mary's placement next to the throne of Christ since she is blessed in heaven, but it is not clear if the commentator believes her to be there in both soul and body. Third, the cleric is clearly aware that there is a tendency among the laity, and probably the clergy also, to assume that Mary and

²⁶⁸ See Hudson, "A New Look," p. 251. Hudson believes that the commentaries on the *Creed*, *Pater Noster*, and *Ave Maria* which preface the *Catechism* were likely copied from existing treatises and included into the work.

²⁶⁹ Hudson, *ibid.*, p. 257, notes that the Lollardy of the *Ave Maria* commentary is not apparent until the end, when the author criticizes the supplementing of the Bible and the pardon given by the Pope for supplementing scripture. See lines 209-221, p. 14, in Simmons and Nolloth.

²⁷⁰ See Hudson, *ibid.*, p. 250. The *Ave Maria* treatise is also preserved in Oxford, Bodley 789, Trinity College Dublin 245, British Library Harley 2385, York Minster XVI.L. 12, and Cambridge University Library Add. 17013.

²⁷¹ Simmons and Nolloth, p. 11, lines 162-167.

Christ through her appeals will grant anything that is asked of them. In the middle of the treatise, the commentator highlights that the *Ave* reveals that Mary reverses the name of “Eva” as did Mary’s acceptance of the Annunciation of Gabriel. The cleric also reminds priests and the laity that Mary had but one child, that this child was Jesus, the savior of mankind, and thus that “iesus and Marie ben cawse of mannys saluacioun.”²⁷² Again here is an indication that some of this commentary would not have been acceptable to Wycliffe,²⁷³ as the final section of the commentary makes clear, but it also highlights Mary’s specialness and the reasons Assumption texts used to support belief in her bodily resurrection.

The absence of direct commentary on the Virgin’s Assumption in *The Lay Folks’ Catechism*, or the *Lay Folks’ Prymer* for that matter, might suggest that contemplating the reasons for the bodily Assumption and imagining her reception in heaven was reserved for the clergy, but towards the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth century more texts interested in the available learning on Mary’s resurrection became available in English to priests and the laity.

Academic arguments for belief in the bodily Assumption reached the laity and many priests most often in the sermon form. Preaching was required by the Fourth Lateran Council, the Lambeth Constitutions of Archbishop Pecham, and the Injunctions

²⁷² Simmons and Nolloth, p. 12, line 187.

²⁷³ The suggestion Jesus and Mary together were the causes of man’s salvation is in opposition with what we find in Wycliffite sermons. The Wycliffite sermon for the Vigil of the Assumption, for example argues that this gospel reading (Luke 11:27-28) “telluþ how it is more mede to here Godus word and kepe it, þan to bere Crist bodily and norsche hym, as Marie dyde.” This reading is certainly in direct opposition to the value placed by medieval Catholics on Mary’s role in the Incarnation, which so set her apart that it was right that she be spared the corruption of the grave. The sermon later argues that Mary would not have come to the bliss of heaven if she had not heard and kept his word. What Wycliffite means here is that it did not matter if she bore Christ or not, they only way to be saved is to hear and keep the word. As proof the sermon notes that many other people have been saved who had not carried Christ in their bodies. Neither of the two Wycliffite sermons on the Assumption mention Mary’s resurrection at all because it is based in apocrypha. These two sermons are numbers 112 and 113, in, Anne Hudson, ed. *English Wycliffite Sermons*, volume II, pp. 285-292.

of Archbishop Thoresby. As the two volumes of G.R. Owst have shown,²⁷⁴ the sermon provided clergy with a place not only to instruct the laity and less-educated priests in devotional matters, it also allowed them a space to speak about contemporary political and social issues.²⁷⁵ But sermons could also provide a space for academic theologians to contemplate doctrine. Siegfried Wenzel identifies preaching as “very closely linked to academic theology.” Preachers in academic settings “set up arguments both against and for a theological statement and then committed themselves to one position.”²⁷⁶ While Wenzel refers specifically to Latin sermons, we can see a similar approach to sermon construction in the Middle English sermons on the Assumption of Mary.

Two sermon collections (John Mirk’s *Festial* and the fifteenth-century *Speculum sacerdotale*) designed for priests to teach the laity provide both audiences the access to professional thinking on the Assumption. Mirk’s sermon collection shows the influence of the *artes praedicandi* and his sermons on the Assumption attempt to present the material in the style of the “modern” or “scholastic” sermon.²⁷⁷ Two sermons produced in and probably for an academic setting at Oxford discuss this material but also warn the laity against pushing the boundaries of their learning and directly criticize the Lollards

²⁷⁴ See *Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period c. 1350-1450* and *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters and of the English People*. Owst’s work has largely influenced scholarship on the sermon because of its focus on the influence of the sermon on the literature of medieval England.

²⁷⁵ This is especially clear in the fourteenth century, which witnessed the decimation brought by the plague, the Great Schism (c. 1378-1418), and political strife in England in particular (the reigns of Edward II and Richard II, the Hundred Years War, the Peasant’s Revolt of 1381, and of course condemnation of the Lollard heresy). On this, see Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century* and Judy Ann Ford, *John Mirk’s Festial: Orthodoxy, Lollardy and the Common People in Fourteenth-Century England*, pp. 2-8.

²⁷⁶ Wenzel, *Latin Sermon Collections from Later Medieval England: Orthodox Preaching in the Age of Wyclif*, pp. 313-314.

²⁷⁷ On this, see the introduction to Siegfried Wenzel, *The Art of Preaching: Five Medieval Texts and Translations*, pp. xi-xii. The modern/university/scholastic sermon is characterized by “a relatively short string of words from scripture, the *thema* (hence its being called a “thematic sermon”), which is then divided into parts that could be further developed in a variety of ways. It is important to realize that the (biblical) *thema* and its division are the main constituent features of a scholastic sermon.”

and lament contemporary social and political problems. These texts represent important interventions in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century thinking over not only the bodily Assumption but also of presenting the learning associated with it in the vernacular.

John Mirk's²⁷⁸ *Festial* was the most popular vernacular sermon collection in late-medieval England and was used and copied from its appearance in the 1380s to the end of the medieval period and even after the Reformation.²⁷⁹ Together with two of his other works, the Middle English *Instructions for Parish Priests* and the Latin *Manuale Sacerdotis*, the *Festial* is an integral part of a pastoral program meant to amend the ignorance of parish priests and the parishioners they served.²⁸⁰ The three works together offer guidance to priests on their duties, especially in the realms of pastoral instruction, hearing confession, the sacraments, and the performance of last rites. The works also explain the significance of the Paternoster, Ave Maria, Creed, articles of faith, seven sacraments, Ten Commandments, seven deadly sins, seven acts of mercy, and seven virtues. Mirk's works then are continuations of the programs set out by Archbishops Pecham and Thoresby.²⁸¹

In the prologue to *Instructions for Parish Priests*, Mirk opens by revealing the motivation behind the work:

God seyth hym self, as wryten we fynde,/That whenne þe blynde ledeth þe
blynde,/In-to þe dyche þey fallen boo,/For þey ne sen whare by to go./So
faren prestes now by dawe;/They beth blynde in goddess lawe,/That
whenne þey scholde þe pepul rede/In-to synne þey do hem lede./Thus þey

²⁷⁸ John Mirk was an Augustinian canon at the abbey of Lilleshall in Shropshire.

²⁷⁹ On this, see Susan Powell's introduction to her edition of the *Festial*, pp. xliii-lix. The *Festial* survives in twenty-two fairly complete manuscripts. A revision designed for a more sophisticated audience survives in four manuscripts. There are a further nineteen manuscripts with anywhere from one to twenty *Festial* sermons. Powell, *Festial*, pp. xliii-xliv. See also Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, pp. 9-10.

²⁸⁰ On Mirk's other works and the sequence of their composition, see Powell, *Festial*, p. xix.

²⁸¹ Mirk bases much of his material on the *Legenda Aurea*, William of Pagula's *Oculus sacerdotis*, and Jean Beleth's *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*. For a longer list of his sources, see Powell, *Festial*, p. xxiv, and the commentary and notes on the individual sermons.

haue do now fulle 3ore,/And alle ys for defawte of lore,/Wharefore pou
 preste curatoure,/3ef þou plese thy sauouere,/3ef thou be not grete
 clerk./Loke thou moste on thys werke/For here thou my3te fynde and
 rede./that þe be-houeth to cone nede./How thou schalt thy paresche
 preche./And what þe nedeth hem to teche,/And whyche þou moste þy self
 be.²⁸²

Mirk is clearly worried about dangerous ideas, and it was not long after the appearance of his works that the first condemnations were made of the Lollard heresy. Mirk is aware also that much of what the priests are supposed to be teaching and the laity learning is inaccessible to them, either because of a lack of understanding or a lack of available materials. Mirk does not expect these parish priests to be “gret clerkes” but does believe his works can help them lead their parishioners to salvation. Mirk’s prologue to the *Festial* opens with a similar impression:

By myne owne febul lettrure Y fele how yt faurth by othur that bene in the
 same degree that hauen charge of souldus and bene holdyn to teche hore
 pareschonus of alle the principale festus that cometh in the 3ere, schewyng
 home what the seyntus soffreden and dedun for Goddus loue, so that thay
 schuldon haue the more deuocion in Goddus seyntys and wyth the better
 wylle come to the chyrche to serue God and pray to holy seyntys of here
 help. But for mony excuson ham be defaute of bokus and sympulnys of
 lettrure, therefore in helpe of suche mene clerkus as I am myself I haue
 drawe this treti sewing owt of *Legenda Aurea* wyth more adding to, so he
 that hathe lust to study therein he schal fynde redy of alle the principale
 festis of the 3ere a schort sermon needful for hym to techyn and othur for
 to lerne.²⁸³

Mirk again expresses an interest in making the learning of “clerkus” available to those who lack books or are un-lettered because he recognizes that for the clergy, the stirring of the devout imagination begins first with learning. Mirk’s own words in the prologues to both the *Instructions for Parish Priests* and the *Festial* and the contents of those works have led many scholars to suggest that Mirk’s materials were meant “to be preached by

²⁸² John Mirk, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. Edward Peacock, p. 1, lines 1-19.

²⁸³ Powell, *Festial*, p. 3.

the most ignorant of priests to the most ignorant of people”²⁸⁴ and that his sermons lack the organizational format and structured form of the scholastic sermons of late-medieval England. While this is true generally, this assessment is a generalization. Mirk’s two sermons on the Assumption reveal an awareness of academic sermon writing and the belief that it was appropriate to present that learning to parish priests and the laity in the vernacular.

Mirk’s *Festial* includes two sermons for the feast of the Assumption. The first is based on the *Legenda Aurea* and relates Mary’s final days on earth and then her Assumption in both body and soul. The second sermon is an explanation of the Gospel reading for the feast, Luke 10:38-42.

Mirk’s first sermon on the Assumption, *De assumptione beate Marie virginis sermo*, opens with a blessing explaining the feast. It is called the Assumption of our lady, Mirk says, or in English “þe taking vp of oure lady, for þat day scheo was takyn vp into heven and now is helpe and sokur to alle þat callyn to hure with ful herte.”²⁸⁵ Mirk’s opening allows the priest to explain the name of the feast and to indicate why the feast is significant to the audience. Though Mirk relies heavily on the *Legenda Aurea* for the details of Mary’s death, the theological arguments favoring the bodily Assumption, and the exempla meant to entertain the audience, he makes some significant changes, most of which are related to the structure of the sermon.

After explaining what the name of the feast means, Mirk reveals at least some familiarity with the *artes praedicandi* by introducing a structure to his sermon. The sermon proper begins with the statement that: “schul 3e knowen wel þat þis assumpcion

²⁸⁴ See Susan Powell, “Mirk’s *Festial* and the Pastoral Programme.” *Leeds Studies in English* 22 (1991), pp. 85-102, especially pp. 85-86. Judy Ann Ford has suggested.

²⁸⁵ Powell, *Festial*, p. 200.

was don worcheply and ioyfully and also holyly, þat is, boþe in body and in soule.”²⁸⁶

Though this triple structure is in the *Legenda Aurea* sermon, it occurs in the middle of the Latin collection after Jacobus de Voragine recounts the narrative of Pseudo-Melito’s *Transitus B*. Mirk has reordered the sermon so that the preacher may indicate from the beginning three important points about the Virgin’s Assumption. The rest of the sermon is structured around these three points. According to Mirk the Assumption was done “worchepfully” because “God taght hymselfe in þe ten commaundmentis þat vche chylde schulde worchepon hys fadur & hys modur. Wherefore Criste, to schewon in dede þat he taght beforen, in grete worchep to hys modur, whan he wolde takyn hyr oute of thys worlde into þe blysse þer he was hymselfe.”²⁸⁷ Christ honored his mother by sending an angelic messenger to her to announce her death and present to her a branch of the palm of victory. When the angel arrived he greeted her with “Heyle, Mari” and related to her that she would die in three days’ time. Where the *Legenda Aurea* had started first with the apocrypha, Mirk has provided parish priests with a format for interpreting the doctrinal importance of the Assumption but also the narrative material necessary to stir the imagination. Mirk’s sermon continues with the details of the apocryphal narrative, including the arrival of the apostles on clouds, Christ’s coming to meet Mary’s soul, the washing of the body and the brightness of that holy corpse, and the beautiful celebration that was her funeral procession before moving to the second point.

The Assumption was done joyfully because on the third day, as he had promised, Christ came down with a multitude of angels, prophets, and other saints. Michael the archangel is among that party and is cradling Mary’s soul in his arms; Christ then

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Powell, *Festial*, p. 200.

commands to Michael: “do my modur soule into þe body aʒeyne.”²⁸⁸ Then with mirth and melody the body and soul together traveled together into heaven. Mary is now living in “one wylle and one loue wyth þe Holy Trinite þat graunteth hur whatte scheo askuth and at hur preyere rewarduth alle hur servauntes, and so sytteth in heven nexte þe Holy Trenite wyth body glorifyeth and is in ful certeyne þat þeis ioyes schul duren euremore. þus was þis assumpcion don ioyfully.” Here, in the second point, is an indication of the significance for the audience, because Mary has received this reward and is now in heaven, her followers have an advocate next to the throne of the Holy Trinity.

On the third point, that the Assumption was done holily, Mirk reveals to parish priests the scholastic arguments of Pseudo-Augustine. The Assumption was done holily, in body and soul, because it removed “þe comyn condicion of mankynde þat is for te dyon and so þe body turnon into corrupcion and stynkyn careyne.”²⁸⁹ Though it has been decreed that mankind should suffer the corruption of death, Mary is exempt from this for the “encheson” that Christ took his flesh and blood from Mary’s body. Christ and Mary’s flesh and blood are one, Mirk notes, and therefore it is right that she was saved from the human condition and taken to heaven in body and soul. It is interesting that Mirk has included these arguments here in a sermon collection intended for the most ignorant of priests and parishioners. This level of theology could be difficult for the un-lettered to understand, but it does fulfill Mirk’s goal of imparting the basics of doctrine to some extent because here he can insist on the doctrine of the Incarnation and the atonement of the flesh.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 202.

²⁸⁹ Powell, *Festial*, p. 203.

Mirk concludes the third point with an interesting comment about the late arrival of the Apostle Thomas: “But for somme weren in doute þereof, hyt mythe bene be Goddys ordynaunce þat Thomas of Ynde was not þere wen þe assumpcion was done but come aftur and sayde he mythe not leven þat scheo was in heuen body and soule.”²⁹⁰ That Thomas, the great doubter, was absent from the Assumption because it necessitated the tangible proof of Mary’s bodily resurrection, her girdle, had always been implied by the apocryphal narratives and commentaries on them. But Mirk’s suggestion that this was God’s will is among the rare explicit statements suggesting that this absence was necessary.

Though Mirk has provided parish priests with both narrative details sufficient to stir the imagination and the theological support to satisfy any doubts, he offers other *probaciones*, of which he says, there are many. Here Mirk relies on the *Legenda Aurea* and reveals Bernard of Clairvaux’s claim that if the body of Mary were on earth, everyone would be looking for it as they do for Peter and Paul and many other saints. He returns to Saint Augustine’s (the Pseudo-Augustinian *Liber de assumptione*) argument that God forbid that the body of Christ’s mother should suffer the corruption of death and be gnawed with worms. Mirk also relates the vision of “Seynt Elyzabeth of Spayne” (Elisabeth of Schönau) which offers further confirmation of Mary’s bodily resurrection.

A notable omission is the skepticism of Jerome’s (Paschasius Radbertus) *Cogitis me*, which was copied in the *Legenda Aurea*. It could be that this is absent in Mirk because the bodily Assumption was so widely accepted that he felt it unnecessary to include skepticism. It is more likely though that Mirk recognized that though it was clerical practice to include the theological proofs and the doubts in order to arrive at a

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

learned decision, it was not necessary for parish priests to introduce any confusion to their parishioners. Mirk's final statement after the *probaciones* indicate that this is why he has left out the doubts of Jerome. Before shifting to exempla Mirk states that "þus clerkys preuen þat oure Lady was assumpte bodily into heven."²⁹¹ Mirk was probably aware of some skepticism towards the bodily Assumption, especially since Rome still had not confirmed the doctrine and there were Latin and English sermons available which presented both sides, but as far as he is concerned, clerks have done the hard work to find the doctrinal support for the belief and have supplied the theology with narrative detail, which is what he presents to parish priests.

Mirk's second sermon on the Assumption, *Sermo de euangelio in die assumptionis beate Marie virginis: hoc modo*, takes up the difficult matter of the Gospel pericope for the feast, which read literally seemingly has nothing to do with the Virgin Mary.²⁹² Mirk opens this sermon by describing the heavenly celebration that greeted Mary when she arrived in heaven in body and soul and thereby hopefully stirring the imagination of the listeners. Mirk points out that the celebration of the feast in the "Holy Chyrche" is meant to be an imitation of the "myrthe and melody" that the angels and saints joyfully exhibited to honor and worship Mary. Mirk is also aware of the problem and probably assumes that parish priests and the laity will wonder why this passage from Luke is read: "Be semyg þe gospel makyth no mensyon of hure, bot only of too systemes,

²⁹¹ Powell, *Festial*, p. 205.

²⁹² Countless sermon writers of the Middle Ages often allude to the problem of interpreting these scriptural lines in relation to Mary. The problem was a perplexing one, and, as I noted in the introduction, required skill in explicating. There are other Middle English sermons which take up this problem. There is also an unedited Middle English commentary on the gospels preserved in the fourteenth-century Parker College Library MS 32 which provides an explanation of this passage from Luke. What is interesting about this commentary is that in this context it need not be immediately associated with the Assumption of Mary. The image at the head of the commentary, however, is a drawing of Mary being taken to heaven in the vernicle, with a banner around Mary stating that this commentary is an expounding of the Assumption of Mary.

Martha and Maria hure syster, and seth þus: Ihesus entred into a castel, and a woman was callyd Martha toke hym into hyre houce, þe Wyche hadde a syster was callyd Mary þat satte at Cristes fettee and herde hys wordys þat comyn owte of of Cristes mouthe.”²⁹³

Mirk provides an English paraphrasing of the Gospel and then relates the story of Mary and Martha and their reception of Christ into the house.

Before moving into his explication of these lines, Mirk repeats that “here is no mencyon of oure Lady be semyng to many mennes vnderstandyng.”²⁹⁴ Mirk then proceeds with Anselm’s exegesis²⁹⁵ of the story of Martha and Mary which was also developed in more detail in Robert Grosseteste’s *Chateau d’ Amour*.²⁹⁶ This story pertains to Mary because she is the castle which Christ entered. Just as a castle should be “bygge and strong,” Mary had the virtues that made her more able before all others to receive Christ. Just as a castle has a deep ditch to strengthen the fortification, so Mary was strengthened by meekness. The ditch in front of the castle is even better if it is full of water. Water is the compassion that a man has for his own sins or for the pain of others. Mary revealed this “water” when she wept both water and blood at her Son’s Passion. Castles also have a drawbridge to keep out enemies. The drawbridge signifies Mary’s obedience, which she exhibited in accepting Gabriel’s message and the Incarnation. Castles are double-walled, Mirk notes, made up of a lower and higher wall. The lower wall betokens Mary’s marriage to Joseph and her patience. The higher wall signifies her virginity and maidenhood. These walls rely on each other, as maidenhood would be

²⁹³ Powell, *Festial*, p. 206.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Anselm, *Homiliae et Exhortationes*, homily nine.

²⁹⁶ On this, see Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, pp. 77-78.

nothing without patience. In the wall there is a gate which signifies faith because just as no man can go through a wall without a gate, no man can go to God without faith.

After explaining the imagery of the castle, Mirk then moves to another interpretation of the Gospel reading which was also common, that Martha and Mary represented the active and contemplative lives. The Virgin Mary fulfilled both of these lives. She first lived as Martha. Just as Martha received Christ into her house, Mary received him into her body. She fed him, she clothed him, she comforted him, and when he was dead, she helped bury him, thus performing the office of Martha and the seven works of mercy. She also lived the contemplative life because she delighted in her Son's Word, in hearing his preaching, and she bore all of his teaching in her heart and regularly contemplated his life.

Mirk has provided parish preachers with two possible interpretations of the Gospel reading for the day. The preacher could certainly present both to a lay audience, but he could also easily favor one or the other. In any case, Mirk concludes with the belief that with these two interpretations, “eury creature þat can vndirstandon may sene þat þis gospels is þis day comnabuly redde in Holy Chyrche, for it comprehendeth hure lyfe from þe begynnyng to þe ending. Þan for þis day was þe ending of hur lyfe, þefore þis day þis gospels is rede in Holy Chyrche.”²⁹⁷ Mirk has not indicated here that one reading is preferable to the other, or set up a hierarchy in relation to the active and contemplative life. He has not mandated that one is meant for the layperson and one for the cleric. His second sermon on the Assumption lacks the kind of style that characterized the first, but it still grants access to the professional learning of the clergy so that the laity can imitate the proto-monastic Mary.

²⁹⁷ Powell, *Festial*, p. 210.

Mirk's sermon collection is not the only work from later-medieval England to be similar in approach to teaching the laity. The fifteenth-century *Speculum sacerdotale*, preserved in the sole manuscript British Library Additional MS 36791, is a collection that also seeks to provide appropriate material for the instruction of priests and the laity with little knowledge of Latin in matters of church ritual and the observance of service, the theory and necessity of penance, and the birth, life, and death of Christ and his saints. Its interests are orthodox and it insists on the necessity of a priest in confession.

In the prologue the *Speculum*-author suggests what the intention of the collection is by revealing that these texts are meant to stir the hearers of these "commemoracions" to "folowe hem in the same wey."²⁹⁸ The author has collected together material for the Church's feasts that "the peple of God may be lyghtenyd with vnto the knowlge of sothfastnes, and to the loue thereof be inflamyd and styred."²⁹⁹ The appropriate response of the laity is clearly delineated. There is no high contemplation to be offered here. The author is hopeful rather that the audience will know the truth of God and be able to appropriately express love and admiration towards that truth. The focus is on narrative and exempla, but the author does pause on occasion to explain basic doctrine. Thus though it is similar to Mirk's sermon collection in that it is aimed at under-educated parish priests and the laity, what is to be offered is quite different.

The sermon on the Assumption reaches nowhere near the theological and structural sophistication of Mirk's sermons on the Assumption. The *Speculum* sermon on the Assumption is based entirely on the *Transitus* of Pseudo-Melito, which the author probably found in the *Legenda Aurea*. The *Speculum* sermon is a complicated text. It

²⁹⁸ Edward H. Weatherly, *Speculum Sacerdotale*, p. 1.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

does not make any claims about the Assumption that were not already available in Mirk, the translations of the apocryphal narratives, or to be heard in the liturgy for the feast (which it occasionally translates). The problem is that the text attempts to present one of the arguments made in favor of the Assumption, but makes many mistakes in its explanation of this argument.

The *Speculum* text would have been a welcome one because it supplied priests and the laity with the narrative detail necessary to imagine Mary's last days and her reception in heaven. The text also translates several Latin liturgical lines that may have been mysterious to the unlettered users and listeners of these sermons. The sermon promises to relate how Mary passed out of this world and delivers a fairly close translation, though abbreviated, of the *Transitus Mariae B*. The translation preserves moments of doctrinal significance, such as the fact that Mary must die and must still face the fiend in hell because Christ too had to pass through this realm before reaching heaven.

The sermon concludes the narrative of Mary's death and Assumption with the confirmation that Christ took Mary's body unbeknownst to the apostles. In the attempt to offer a "proof" as Mirk had, the author borrows one of the *probaciones* preserved in the *Legenda Aurea*. The *Speculum* author passes over the arguments of Pseudo-Augustine, the skepticism of Pseudo-Jerome, and even the statements of Bernard. He chooses as his proof the vision of Elisabeth of Schönau. That he has included this vision as proof is not necessarily problematic, but the author claims that "we fynde i-write in þe lyf of Seyn Elisabeth that the same Elizabeth, moder of John the Baptist, was in a certeyn tyme rauyschyd in hire spirit and sche sawe in a ferre place fro hire a sepulcre i-set a-bowte

with a greet ly3t and as hit were the schappe of a woman in it and a grete multitude of aungels abowte it also.”³⁰⁰ This is clearly the vision of Elisabeth of Schönau and it is a summary similar to that given in the *Legenda Aurea*. The problem the author has discovered is that very few manuscripts of the *Legenda Aurea* indicated who this Elisabeth was that had the vision of Mary. Mirk had called her Elisabeth of Spain; it is also common to find Elisabeth of Hungary, as we do in Icelandic translations of her vision. The author does not know who this Elisabeth is and thus decides to grant the vision to Elizabeth, mother of John.

The issue here is that this lends a somewhat scriptural air to the bodily Assumption because it attributes the knowledge to a Gospel figure. The cleric has attempted to provide some of the learning available to clerics regarding Mary’s Assumption, but his account ends up being based largely on apocryphal material and lacks the theological reasons supporting belief in Mary’s bodily ascent. Though he does try to offer one proof, his errors in the usage of that proof and the lack of the inclusion of others reveals serious problems with the presentation of this material to parish priests and the laity. In this sermon at least, the *Speculum* author has done more harm than good to the learning of the Latin-illiterate.

It is tempting to speculate that the *Speculum* collection, and perhaps Mirk’s, is the type of text that incited the ire of two sermons – one Middle English and the other a macaronic mix of Latin and English – of the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries.³⁰¹ Both of these sermons on the Assumption originated in Oxford and are

³⁰⁰ Weatherly, *Speculum*, p. 188.

³⁰¹ Type is the keyword here. I do not mean to suggestion that these sermon are in direct dialogue with each other, but rather that the sermons of the *Speculum* collection, and to some extent Mirk’s, represent the kind

associated with the university and thus most likely with the translation debates of the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth century. Both the Middle English sermon and the macaronic sermon criticize the Lollard heresy and emphasize the role of the clergy in the dissemination of learning.

The Middle English sermon is preserved in British Library Royal MS 18 B. xxiii, which was written sometime between the last decades of the fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth century. Though the sermons are Middle English and thus would have likely been preached to the laity, there is a great deal of untranslated Latin and many of the concerns of the collection are those of the clergy, not the laity.³⁰² The sermons also exhibit a desire to follow the formal practices of the “university” or “scholastic” sermon type.

The Middle English sermon on the Assumption in Royal MS B. xxiii, *De sancta Maria*, takes as its theme Canticles 7:6: “Quam pulcra es, et decora carissima, in deliciis.” The opening blessing, another indication of its “modern” form, asks that God help the preacher overcome his “febulnes” and alleviate his “ignoraunce.” The principles to be discussed come from 2nd Timothy, where the word of God teaches four occupations: “techyng, vndernymmyng, chastizyng, and vertewous lyvyng.”³⁰³ The preacher then explains each of these occupations and their significance. The preacher reminds throughout that teaching is reserved for the clergy who are required to teach the laity what they need “to be tauȝthe to consceyve qwhat þat is necessary to hem goostly.”³⁰⁴

of vernacular texts that were under scrutiny in the last decades of the fourteenth-century and the beginning of the fifteenth.

³⁰² The sermons are concerned with the Lollard heresy, the damage of the Great Schism, and the newly arising tendency among the laity to try and learn too much on their own.

³⁰³ W.O. Ross, *Middle English Sermons from MS. Royal 18 B. xxiii*, p. 242.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Much of the sermon provides examples of “virtewous lyuyng” in the Virgin Mary. He targets deadly sin and in particular “fleshly lustes.”

The preacher returns to the scriptural theme and relates that these words (“*Quam pulcra es*”) were said to our Lady from Christ’s own mouth. The preacher also provides a translation of these lines. The preacher then highlights four words as principals to be discussed:

“In þese words ben meved iiii questions, þe wiche towcheþ Oure Lady. The first is of hur comlynes, ‘*quam pulcra;*’ the second is of spirituall bewte, ‘*decora;*’ the third is of goostly delites, ‘*delicis;*’ the fowte is of hur charite, ‘*carissima.*’ This þan þe first question, how comly is þis maide, modur to heuenly Kynge? The second is, how vertewous is she goostely in all maner of lyuyng? The third, how desirous to holynes was she in contemplacion? The fourte, how is she to Cristes pepull full of verry compassion?³⁰⁵

As the preacher moves through each question and its relation to Mary, he includes Latin liturgy associated with these points in order to make connections to the celebrations the laity are expected to know and sing. Much of the rest of the sermon is a *vita Mariae* which uses key moments in her life to expound her virtue.

When the preacher does finally refer to the actual event of the Assumption, he confirms that Mary is in heaven above all the angels in soul and body because of “hur vertewes and preuilegees.” Saint Augustine, Saint Anselm, and Saint Jerome have supported this, he argues, though he does not include their arguments (and Augustine is surely Pseudo-Augustine *Liber de assumptione* and Jerome Paschasius Radbertus). The preacher is delighted to have an example of the glory given to Christ’s mother and urges his audience to be her followers so that they may too be saints here and afterward in heaven.

³⁰⁵ Ross, *Middle English Sermons*, p. 244.

It is here that the preacher digresses into a critique of contemporary society, of the heretics, and of the Great Schism. The preacher is concerned that if “þis world be an enterludie, as doctors ymagynne, I wote neuer who shall pley þe seynte in oure enterludie. For in comparison þat it was som tyme, vertewes morall ben goyn. Fey3th, hope, and charite be welny3 exiled, and sewerly with-owte þise vertewes may be no seynt in þis liff.”³⁰⁶ The message delivered about the Assumption becomes clear then. Mary deserved her bodily Assumption because she exhibited the virtues he has just described. This virtue is all gone now. The preacher laments that the faith of Abraham and Isaac, the prudence of Job, the chastity of Joseph, and the patience of Moses are long gone. The devotion of Bernard is a distant memory, the holiness of Saint Basil is unheard of, the wisdom of Thomas – the writer of the “Summe” – is no longer to be seen, nor is the meekness of Gregory. All holiness is gone now. Instead people are now living in the foul stinking of sin. The preacher first felt bitter over the death of the martyrs, but this bitterness was displaced by the ire he feels towards the doctrine of the heretics; but what is most bitter to him is the horrible sins of faithful people. This is the result, according to the preacher, of poor teaching.

The Middle English sermon writer has used Mary to promote the virtues he finds absent in this time of schism and heresy. He is not interested in describing the narrative details of Mary’s final days or even in defending belief in her dual Assumption. His interest is in a return to the practice of basic Christian virtue which Mary espoused and which helped her earn special privileges. In concluding his sermon the preacher encourages his audience to beseech Mary so that she will help them recover. The preacher might be suggesting here that what Mary’s Assumption promises is in danger of

³⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 252.

slipping away. The laity, in his view, has no business contemplating the doctrinal reasons for the Assumption when it is more urgent for them to cleanse their daily life from the stain of sin.

The sentiments of the Oxford Middle English sermon writer are shared by a roughly contemporary Oxford macaronic sermon writer. The hybrid Latin and English sermons of Oxford, MS Bodley 649 were most likely used also in the university.³⁰⁷ They were written in the first half of the fifteenth century and contain a number of sermons of the “modern” or “university” type and are extremely critical of the Lollards and supportive of Henry V. The sermons are entirely orthodox in their approach and repeatedly defend the sacraments, the creed, the role of the clergy in confession, church services, and learning, and often warn against the potential dangers of unchecked lay learning. The sermons were most likely directed at both a clerical and lay audience, albeit a literate lay audience.³⁰⁸

The sermon on the Assumption’s theme is the gospel pericope from Luke read during the feast. The preacher follows the interpretation of Anselm and Robert Grosseteste in figuring the castle as a representation of Mary. Christ entered into the fortress of our flesh and blood through Mary. In return, “in illud sublime celeste castellum Virgo Benedicta et mater misericordie intrauit isto die non solum in anima set corpore et anima simul vnitis iuxta sad felinge er sentenciam plurium venerabilium doctorum” (Into this sublime celestial fortress the Blessed Virgin and mother of mercy entered on this day not only in soul but body and soul united as one according to the

³⁰⁷ On this manuscript, see Patrick J. Horner’s introduction to the text, *A Macaronic Sermon Collection from Late Medieval England*. On macaronic sermons, see Siegfried Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons: Bilingualism and Preaching in Late-Medieval England*.

³⁰⁸ See Horner, pp. 6-7.

strong feeling and sentence of many venerable doctors).³⁰⁹ That Mary was taken up in both body and soul could be proved by reason and history if there was time, but it has already been debated by many doctors including Jerome. The preacher then is going to skip these *probaciones* because his audience does not need to be bothered with them. His focus is instead on interpreting the meaning of the gospel passage and reminding his mixed audience that clerics and laity have specifically delineated roles.

Many, the preacher argues, try to move beyond their *pater noster* and *creed* and attempt to involve themselves with the scriptures and the learning of the clergy.³¹⁰ These individuals are over-stepping boundaries and climbing too high; they will fall and death is not the only punishment. The preacher uses the example of Moses on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 21 as the appropriate approach to learning. Moses ascended the mountain and spoke with God; the people waited below for his return. Mt. Sinai represents scripture, clerical learning, and the mysteries of the faith. It is a difficult mountain to climb. The top cannot be seen or understood by human sense. Moses signifies the clergy who can lead the people out of sin through teaching in God's law. The people at the base of the mountain are the laity, and the base of the mountain is the *creed* and the articles of faith. The laity should not exceed this boundary and set foot on the mountain or they will fall. The preacher does not restrict his criticism to the laity alone, though. He reminds the clerics that Moses came down from the mountain and that they too must come down from their studies to teach to the laity.

Having discussed the appropriate hierarchy of learning, the preacher returns to the day's subject, Mary. The preacher urges his listeners to flee into the fortress, as Mary

³⁰⁹ Trans. Horner, p. 504.

³¹⁰ See Horner, pp. 508-508.

had. The fortress has three towers. The first is humility of heart and meekness, the second is deeds of mercy and almsgiving, and the third is charity without duplicity.³¹¹ Each tower also has a gate. In the tower of humility the gate is knowledge of the self. The gate in the tower of mercy is pity and compassion. The third gate, the one of the tower of charity, is the fear of displeasing God. The lesson, according the preacher, is that if one hopes to walk through the gate of heaven and reign in bliss with Christ's mother, he or she must first enter the fortress of virtue. From this fortress one can resist the injuries of the Lollards. This sermon, too, meant for both a clerical and lay audience, focuses very little on the actual Assumption and the doctrinal reasons for it. Again the preacher is interested in virtue and combatting contemporary heretical ideas.

It is not surprising to find concern over lay learning in sermons emanating from Oxford in the late-fourteenth and early fifteenth century; this is, after all, the place and time in which translation debates occupied the minds of monastics and university clerics and students. These warnings over lay learning do not seem to have enjoyed much success though. The sermons of Mirk continued to be copied, providing lay hearers and readers with access to the proofs of Mary's Assumption, the kind of material the Oxford macaronic sermon author had suggested should be left to the doctors. Assumption texts based on the apocrypha but supplemented by academic argument also continued to be composed and copied.

There are fifteenth century texts dedicated to the contemplation of the lives of Christ and Mary which include accounts of the Assumption of Mary; all of these depend on the *Transitus B* of Pseudo-Melito. These texts are focused mostly on providing details of Mary's last days and resurrection to heaven to stir devotion in the hearts and

³¹¹ Horner, pp. 512-513.

imagination of hearers and readers but do occasionally pause over sticky points of doctrine. The Middle English *Metrical Life of Christ*, preserved in a unique copy in British Library, Additional MS 39996, bases its account of Mary's passing on some composite version of the *Transitus Legend*, or more likely the *Legenda Aurea*, but this is not a direct translation.

The author expands regularly on symbols presented in the apocryphal material. When the angel brings Mary the palm, the *Metrical* author reveals that it is a token of “al þe prophecye þat euer was spoken./In þee is ended witterly,/Þat þou hast geten þe victorye./For God & his manhede,/Þat he toke in þi virginhede,/Haþ schent þe deuel fully,/And vndone hym witterly./And for þat skil virginite/In Heuen is þe highest degree.”³¹² For the author the palm is a token of the victory of the Incarnation. This is not in the apocryphal legend because its original Eastern audience would have recognized the palm as a symbol of the afterlife. It functions in that way here too, but it has taken on a new meaning as the symbol of the victory achieved by Christ and Mary. The *Metrical* author emphasizes Mary's meekness throughout as key to her special privilege. Though the author relies mostly on apocrypha and miraculous material to weave a narrative for religious entertainment,³¹³ he does remind readers (or listeners) frequently of the importance of the Incarnation, of the blood and flesh taken “clenely.” He thus combines an interest in the virtues, particularly meekness and patience, with an insistence on Mary's deserving of the bodily Assumption because of her purity and role in the overcoming of the devil.

³¹² Walter Sauer, ed. *The Metrical Life of Christ*, p. 88, lines 4903-4911.

³¹³ These are the thoughts of the Walter Sauer. See his introduction to the text, p. 19.

Another fifteenth century Middle English work, a translation of Thomas of Hales' thirteenth-century *Vita Sancte Marie*,³¹⁴ is noteworthy because it preserves the glossing of its Latin exemplar. The text is a close translation of the Latin work, which had glossed the narrative with authorities both in the text and in the margins. The Middle English translation preserves this glossing, and translates the name of many of the sources into English. The Middle English account provided here follows the Oxford sermons in that it highlights Mary's meekness above all else, but the text also narrates the events surrounding Mary's end and the arguments supporting the doctrine, as its source does. The narrative is based on *Transitus B*, Pseudo-Jerome's *Cogitis me*, and Pseudo-Augustine's *Liber de assumptione*.

After relating the history of Mary's death, the Middle English translator preserves his source text's note by relating that “Þouȝ þese þingis biforeteeld be seid apocrifa, þat is wiþouten autorite of bileue, þo semeden worþi to be set in here, for me douteþ not þat þis maner of gloryfijng was couenable.”³¹⁵ This kind of statement is rarely seen in Middle English writing and is probably the result of direct translation rather than the contemplation of the author, but he does follow this passage up with a further proof of the bodily Assumption (as his source) by including the arguments of Saint Augustine (Pseudo-Augustine's *Liber de assumptione*). Thomas of Hales' *Vita* was produced and probably consumed in a monastic setting, but the Middle English translation may have been used by the laity, who again would have been able to access not only the narrative detail of Mary's death and resurrection but the doctrinal reasons for it.

³¹⁴ This translation is preserved in two manuscripts. See the introduction of Sarah M. Horrall's edition, *The Lyf of Oure Lady: The Middle English Translation of Thomas of Hales' Vita Sancte Marie*, pp. 16-28.

³¹⁵ Horrall, p. 108. Latin of Thomas of Hales' *Vita*, “Predicta lice apocrifa dicantur, hic inserenda uidebantur, quia modus iste glorificationis decens fuisse non dubitatur.”

In concluding this chapter on the representation of the Assumption of Mary in Middle English texts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, I would like turn to those texts almost certainly designed for lay consumption, the *N-Town* and *York Corpus Christi Plays*. There are hints of some thinking in the plays that might have angered the Oxford sermon authors and the writers of the Constitutions of Arundel, but there is plenty that would have been approved as appropriate for the laity as well. These performances rarely focus on the doctrine of the Assumption itself; they take it as fact that Mary is in heaven in body and soul and presume that what they have heard from priests is accurate. The Assumption performances are meant to dramatize the liturgy for the feast and thus to help the laity imagine the celebration of Mary's death on earth and in heaven as they hear the liturgy on the feast day. The Assumption plays, then, are appropriately framed for the laity in that they appeal to the devout imagination for the purposes of edification and the stirring of the heart. These plays also reinforce basic doctrine in that the Assumption story serves as an integral part of the whole of Christian history. It usually occurs in the plays between Pentecost and the Last Judgment; it is therefore a confirmation of the promise of atonement and is meant to relieve audiences.

The *N-Town Play of the Assumption* is preserved in an East Anglian manuscript written sometime around 1468 alongside other plays most likely performed separately and not as a full cycle.³¹⁶ The Assumption play is based on the apocryphal *Transitus Mariae* material, which the author probably accessed through the *Legenda Aurea*, but he supplements his account with details not found in the *Legenda* or in the apocrypha. The

³¹⁶ See Douglas Sugano's introduction to his edition, *The N-Town Plays*, p. 2. Sugano speculates that the manuscript may have even been used in private devotional reading. Sugano also points out in his notes to the play that the Assumption play was copied into the manuscript "after having an independent existence." p. 429.

play is introduced by a “Doctor,” presumably a theologian, who warns the audience that what is about to be related is taken from a book that John the Evangelist taught which is “clepid Apocriphum.”³¹⁷ This introduction is probably borrowed from the *Legenda Aurea*, but with the mistake that the work was called apocrypha rather than being apocryphal being original to the English author.

The English play diverges from its source quickly, though, and sets in early on the hostility of the Jews towards Christ and Mary. The Jews are still reeling over the claims made by Christ and that his followers claim that he was resurrected afterward. They decide that if they can destroy the body of Mary once she is dead, and the disciples afterwards, then they can restore their law. This is unique in Assumption narratives. It certainly increases the drama of the event, but it also indicates the importance of Mary’s bodily Assumption to Christian history and serves as part of the play’s instruction in basic doctrine. Mary’s bodily resurrection is further proof to the success of the Incarnation, a success which the Jews are hoping to conceal by destroying the body of Mary. The play also further reveals its interest in the basics of Christian teaching when the angel comes to inform Mary that she is to be taken to heaven; Mary is told that it is due to her meekness, her humility, and her learning.

The theological arguments of Pseudo-Augustine, the skepticism of Pseudo-Jerome, and the Revelations of Elisabeth of Schönau, or the *probaciones* shared by Mirk, are absent here. These subtleties of doctrine have been left where they belong, to the clergy. What the play does provide is visual representation of the Latin liturgy the laity would hear in the celebration of the feast. Penny Granger has pointed out that “the largest

³¹⁷ Sugano, p. 313.

concentration of sung liturgical items occurs in the Assumption play.”³¹⁸ This incorporation of the liturgy is not merely background music or singing but is an integral part of the play and is meant to assist the laity through the devout imagining of the celebration of Mary’s Assumption.³¹⁹

The dramatization of the Assumption in the *York Corpus Christi Plays* is similar to the *N-Town* text, but it includes far fewer liturgical references.³²⁰ The narrative details are also largely based on the *Legenda Aurea*; this play, too, is interested in the role of the Assumption in Christian history. The “Death of Mary” play opens with a new Hail Mary. This time, Gabriel has come to announce that Christ is coming in three days to bring his mother to eternal bliss. This opening reveals the pattern that is to follow; in imagining the death of Mary and her rise to heaven, the play also reminds the audience of what has already happened.

This is apparent also in the “Assumption” play proper, which opens with Apostle Thomas and his distraught mood in the loss of his Lord and the knowledge that he had doubted the resurrection because he thought that “to rise fleshly” was “paste mans poure.”³²¹ It is significant that the Apostle Thomas has reminded the audience of his doubt that it was possible for human flesh to rise again, because he is soon to be the proof of Mary’s bodily rise in the events of the play. Thomas arrives late and misses Mary’s death and burial, but he is lucky enough to arrive as she is ascending in great light to

³¹⁸ See Granger, *The N-Town Play: Drama and Liturgy in Medieval East Anglia*, p. 88.

³¹⁹ See Granger, p. 69.

³²⁰ The *York Corpus Christi Plays* are preserved in a manuscript written between 1463-1477. These plays, as Clifford Davidson points out in his introduction to the text, “form the only complete play cycle verifiably associated with the feast of Corpus Christi that is extant and was performed at a specific location in England.” Davidson, *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, p. 1. The plays may have been performed as early as the last decades of the fourteenth century. Unfortunately the manuscript lacks an entry for the “Funeral of the Virgin.”

³²¹ Davidson, p. 371.

heaven. Mary speaks to him and once he recognizes her voice, he asks where she is going. When she says that she is going “to blisse” with her “barne,” Thomas rejoices and has no doubts. Mary tasks Thomas with providing proof to the other apostles, and to all believers, that she has risen bodily, and thus she casts her girdle down to him. Again the Assumption play provides an opportunity to rehearse previous moments in Christian history. Thomas, who had required tangible proof of Christ’s wounds and living body, now had the tangible proof of Mary’s bodily resurrection to share with doubters. The subtlety of doctrine is absent here too. The Assumption play is focused solely on imagining Mary’s end and revealing how this moment was prefigured by previous events in the history of Christ.

The late-medieval plays reveal that for the English clergy and laity, the doctrine of the bodily Assumption had become part of basic Christian teaching. The bodily Assumption of Mary began in England as a primarily monastic concern. The earliest English monks expressed little interest in the doctrinal reasons for Mary’s dual resurrection, preferring instead to accept the apocryphal legends of Mary’s death and celebrate the feast by imagining the scenes described in those texts. It is certainly likely that Anglo-Saxon lay people were asked to celebrate the feast of the Assumption, but this does not mean they understood it (and the presence of sermons explaining the Gospel reading for the day indicate that they, and probably many priests, did not).

The perspective changes among English churchmen in the eleventh century, resulting in the *Liber de assumptione* of Pseudo-Augustine. The earliest Middle English texts exhibit this shift in Latin theological thinking and embrace both the belief in the bodily Assumption and the doctrine supporting it. The bodily Assumption in late-

medieval England became an integral part of Christian history, of the history of the world, and references to it are so pervasive in Middle English literature that it is clear that the doctrine was of interest to the clergy certainly, but also the laity. It was no longer enough for the laity to simply celebrate the feast of the Assumption. It became important for the laity to know why they were celebrating this event and what implications it had for Christian doctrine as a whole, and it was the responsibility of their priests to understand this and teach them accordingly. Ideally the laity was supposed to be informed of the bodily Assumption through narrative detail which would then stir their hearts to devotion. The proofs and counter-arguments used in the debates over the appropriateness of Mary's bodily rise were meant to be left to the clerics, but this was not always the case as the example of Mirk's sermons and their popularity show.

Dissenting voices towards the doctrine of the bodily Assumption were rare in late-medieval England. Criticisms from the clergy usually involved criticizing the laity for pursuing the professional knowledge of the monasteries, though it is clear that some clerics thought this information appropriate for lay hearers and readers. The only critic of the doctrine itself was probably Wycliffe and his followers. The Wycliffites clearly felt Mary's role in salvation had been overvalued. Wycliffe questioned whether Mary was really free from original sin and whether or not her body had been taken to heaven after her death, mostly because the idea developed outside of scripture. The Wycliffite sermons for the Assumption do not state this explicitly but do note that the Word is more important to carry than Christ's body itself.³²² Despite its popularity in medieval England,

³²² See Wycliffe, *The English Works of Wyclif*, ed. by F.D. Matthew, especially p. xlii. See also my note 272 on p. 92 for references to Wycliffe's sermons on the Assumption.

the feast of the Assumption was one of those celebrations targeted by the reformers of the sixteenth century and was abolished.³²³

³²³ On this, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*, p. 465.

CHAPTER 5

CAUTIOUS THEOLOGY: MEDIEVAL ICELANDIC COMMENTARY ON THE BODILY ASSUMPTION IN *THE OLD ICELANDIC HOMILY BOOK* AND *MARÍU SAGA*³²⁴

In chapter three I began my discussion of the doctrine of the bodily Assumption in England with Old English texts. This was a necessary starting point, as I previously mentioned, because the Old English approaches to the Assumption and the sources the Anglo-Saxons used are relevant not only to the representations of the doctrine in early Middle English, which we have already examined, but also Icelandic ones.

England is believed to have been intimately involved in the Christianization of Norway and Iceland and in the development of Christian institutions in those countries.³²⁵ Due to scant evidence, however, it is difficult to determine the scale of the influence. Some of the first converts were made through commercial contacts between England and Scandinavia, and diplomatic relationships cannot be discounted.³²⁶ In her survey³²⁷ of the subject Lesley Abrams speculated that there was a drive among Anglo-Scandinavian immigrants in England to convert the homelands of their ancestors, but of course this

³²⁴ Some material from this chapter was presented at The Cardiff Conference on the Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages (The Medieval Translator), which was held July 8-12, 2013, at KU Leuven in Belgium and at the 20th Annual Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies Conference, "Catastrophes and the Apocalyptic in the Middle Ages and Renaissance," held February 6-8, 2014, in Phoenix, Arizona.

³²⁵ On the Christianization of Iceland in general, see Orri Vesteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change 1000-1300*. Many studies have focused on English influence. See Henry Goddard Leach, "'The Relations of the Norwegian with the English Church, 1066-1399, and Their Importance to Comparative Literature,'" Absalon Taranger, *Den Angelsaksiske Kirkes Inflydelse paa den Norske*; F. Berkeli, "The Earliest Missionary Activities from England to Norway;" Lesley Abrams, "The Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of England," and "Eleventh-Century Missions and the Early Stages of Ecclesiastical Organisation in Scandinavia."

³²⁶ See Abrams, "Eleventh-Century Missions," p. 22, 25. Abrams notes that Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri (920-961) of Norway was raised in the court of Æthelstan, king of England 927-939. Hákon was converted and baptized there. His children grew up in Northumbria. Tenth and eleventh century Norwegian rulers brought priests and bishops from England, as the Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson records in his *Heimskringla*.

³²⁷ See Abrams, "The Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia," pp. 213-49.

motivation is difficult to prove; given that Germany was also involved in missionary projects in Norway and Iceland,³²⁸ we must see these activities as part of the Church's broader project of conversion.

There is more evidence for connections between Norway and England than there is for Iceland, but since Norway and Iceland existed in a textual partnership, and since Iceland's archbishopric was in Niðarós (modern Trondheim), consecrated in 1151 with the Englishman Nicholas Breakspere present, this English influence is assumed to have passed on to Iceland as well. Øystein Erlendsson (d. 1188), the second bishop of Niðarós, spent some time at Bury St. Edmunds³²⁹ and was in contact with Thomas Becket. Cistercian monks from Fountains Abbey founded a monastery of St. Mary at Lyse in 1146.³³⁰ Þorlákr Þórhallsson (1133-1193), bishop of Skálholt in southern Iceland from 1178 to 1193, studied in Lincoln, as did his nephew and successor Páll Jónsson.³³¹

Though few Latin manuscripts of English origin, or of any origin for that matter, have been found in Norway and Iceland, there is nevertheless mounting evidence that early Icelandic and Norwegian writers worked from English exemplars, both in Latin and the vernacular.³³² Thomas Hall points out in his introduction to Old Norse-Icelandic sermons that "it has long been assumed that most Old Norse sermons are translations of Latin texts transmitted through Carolingian homiliaries imported from England or the

³²⁸ Determining which country was more responsible, either England or Germany, for the missionary efforts in Scandinavia, is the subject of S. Hellberg's essay "Tysk eller Engelsk mission? Om de tidige Kristna lánorden," pp. 42-9.

³²⁹ Bury St. Edmunds and Worcester are often cited as the two English centers which had the most contact with Scandinavian churches.

³³⁰ See Leach, "The Relations," p. 540.

³³¹ See Leach, "The Relations," p. 555.

³³² Icelandic book lists, which were generally well kept though often lacking in detail, list English breviaries, an *Ensker Graduell*, and an *Ensker Psalter*. See Tryggvi J. Oleson, "Book Collections of Medieval Icelandic Churches." The Latin manuscripts of medieval Norway continue to be studied. See Karlsen Espen, ed. *Latin Manuscripts of Medieval Norway: Studies in Memory of Lilli Gjøløw*.

Continent.”³³³ Lilli Gjerløw has identified English liturgical manuscript fragments used as bindings in later manuscripts in Iceland and Norway.³³⁴ John Toy recently surveyed the presence of English saints in liturgical manuscripts of medieval Scandinavia.³³⁵ In the last decade, a number of studies have focused on the usage of English source material in Old Norse-Icelandic religious writing. Christopher Abram, in two separate examinations, has suggested the likelihood the compilers of the homilies in *Old Norwegian Homily Book* and the *Old Icelandic Homily Book* used English models.³³⁶ Abram believes that some version of Paul the Deacon’s homiliary was brought from England and points to Cambridge, Pembroke, MS 25 of the eleventh century,³³⁷ which contains a copy of the homiliary of Saint-Père de Chartres, as the kind of homiletic manuscript that may have come to Iceland and Norway from England. Icelandic writers were willing to use English vernacular manuscripts as well. The short text, *Um þat hvaðan otru hofst*, in the early fourteenth century collection *Hauksbók*, is a translation and paraphrase of Ælfric’s Old English homily *De falsis Diis*.³³⁸

Though there is no proof that Ælfric’s sermons on the Assumption of Mary were known in Iceland, the earliest Icelandic discussions of the Assumption are characterized

³³³ Hall, “Old Norse-Icelandic Sermons,” p. 669. Hall continues: “Many of those Latin models have now been identified, but we are still unable to identify the routes by which they came to Norway and Iceland or explain how, in most cases, the collections they were transmitted in relate to the main families of Carolingian homiliaries.”

³³⁴ Lilli Gjerløw. *Liturgica Islandica*.

³³⁵ John Toy. *English Saints in the Medieval Liturgies of Scandinavian Churches*. Many Anglo-Saxon saints are present in the calendars, again highlighting the influence of that church upon the institutions of Scandinavia. Saints Alban, Cuthbert, Dunstan, Erkenwald, Hilda, and Swithun are among those represented.

³³⁶ See Abram “Anglo-Saxon Influence in the Old Norwegian Homily Book,” and “Anglo-Saxon Homilies in Their Scandinavian Context.”

³³⁷ This manuscripts is also discussed in Hall, “Old Norse-Icelandic Sermons,” pp. 672-73.

³³⁸ See Arnold Taylor, “*Hauksbók* and Ælfric; *De Falsis Diis*,” and Abram, “Anglo-Saxon Homilies,” p. 436. Kari Ellen Gade’s “Ælfric in Iceland” also discusses the matter.

by the same hesitancy witnessed in Ælfric.³³⁹ The earliest documents also rely on similar source material, such as the *Cogitis me* of Pseudo-Jerome. The feast of the Assumption must have been brought to Iceland with the English missionaries and was considered an important feast from the beginning.³⁴⁰ Understanding how the feast was celebrated in Iceland is complicated due to relative dearth of liturgical manuscripts or Books of Hours.³⁴¹ That the liturgy for the feast of the Assumption was known to Icelanders is clear. References to *Maríumessa hin fyrri* (the first feast of Mary) are common, as are references to Mary's *uppmumningardagr* (Day of up-taking, or day of the Assumption) and *uppmumningartið* (Festival of the Assumption). The Icelandic skaldic poem *Drápa af Maríugrát*, which is a rendition of the Lament of Mary, lists the Assumption among the five joys of Mary.³⁴² The Old Icelandic skaldic poem *Máríudrápa* (c. 1400) translates liturgical lines from the feast of the Assumption.³⁴³ The feast of the Assumption is also often used as a reckoning of time in the varied texts of the *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, the Marian miracles, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, *Kristni saga*, and *Sturlunga saga*. In these cases the audience is often told when a person dies or travels to or from something in relation to the date of the feast of the Assumption. The feast in the Assumption is listed

³³⁹ While this caution in confirming the bodily Assumption and relying instead on Jerome is not particularly English, it is tempting to speculate, given the date of composition of these materials in the twelfth and thirteenth century, that the Icelandic writers were influenced in their ideas by English churchmen or English sources.

³⁴⁰ The earliest law code, *Grágás*, lists the feast of the Assumption (*Maríumess fyrri*-the first feast of Mary) as one of "greater observance" (*meira hald*). See Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 14, 126.

³⁴¹ We do have the liturgical material preserved in the *Ordo Nidrosiensis Ecclesiae*, which was the rite for the archbishopric of Niðarós (Trondheim). This text is preserved in some Icelandic manuscripts and since the Icelandic churches were in the see of Niðarór, it is likely that this would have been the form of the liturgy recited by Icelandic monastics. The text has been edited by Lilli Gjøløw, *Ordo Nidrosiensis Ecclesiae*.

³⁴² See Kellinde Wrightson, *Fourteenth-Century Icelandic Verse on the Virgin Mary*, p. 23, stanza 46.

³⁴³ See Katrina Attwood's edition of the poem in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages: Poems on Christian Subjects*, Vol. II, pp. 476-514.

as mandatory in all of the Icelandic legal codes as well. None of these references indicate, however, what the Icelanders believed about the Assumption of Mary.

The only early Icelandic texts that comment on Mary's death and ascent at any length which we have to work with are homilies and the sagas of Mary. These texts reveal that Icelanders were much slower than the English in adopting the doctrine of the bodily Assumption; instead the caution and conservative theology of Pseudo-Jerome is maintained in early medieval Icelandic literature. As I noted in the previous two chapters, English texts on the Assumption depended largely on apocryphal narratives, usually as they appeared in the *Legenda Aurea*, and Pseudo-Jerome's *Cogitis Me* was largely absent in Middle English literature. Thus despite English influence on the rituals and literature of the Icelandic church, the views of theologians like Ælfric seem to have held more sway than the anonymous homilies.

The Icelandic cult of Mary was, as Mary Clayton suggested for the Anglo-Saxon cult, in its inception a primarily monastic concern. As it developed, though, an extensive corpus of Marian literature was produced in the vernacular both in poetry and prose.³⁴⁴ There are of course homilies on the Marian feast days but also sagas detailing Mary's life, miracle collections in prose and poetry, and beautifully vivid Icelandic Skaldic poems, such as *Lilja*, in honor of the Virgin. Mary was certainly promoted in the vernacular to both the lay and the religious as a model of virtuous behavior and contemplative devotion as she was in England, but, perhaps due to what Nedkvitne calls the Norse predilection toward ritual preparation for the afterlife, most of the Icelandic interest in Mary seems to have been related to her powers as an intercessor at the

³⁴⁴ For prose *vitae* of Mary in the vernacular, See Kirsten Wolf, *The Legends of the Saints in Old Norse-Icelandic Prose*, p. 231.

individual judgment after death and Last Judgment at the end of time.³⁴⁵ Indeed the Icelandic miracle translations³⁴⁶ selected from popular Latin collections are often those involving last minute prayers to Mary that result in her salvation of rampant sinners.³⁴⁷ It would seem to make sense, then, that the bodily Assumption would have gained favor in Iceland because it would have shown the population that Mary had overcome the punishment of sin and that they too, if they were cleansed of sin, would receive their bodies after Judgment. Yet much of the Icelandic writing on the Assumption, at least up to the fourteenth century, has more in common with the conservative approach of Ælfric and Radbertus than it does with contemporary English views.

The oldest extant texts in Old Norse-Icelandic that speak on the Assumption of Mary are two homilies from the late-twelfth/early-thirteenth century preserved in the *Old Icelandic Homily Book* (Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, Cod. Holm. Perg. 15 4to, ca. 1200),³⁴⁸ which preserves sixty-two homilies and other religious works including hagiography. Some of the homiletic material is clearly directed towards a monastic audience, but some of the material comments on moral and penitential issues as well as models of behavior that would have been accessible to lay audiences.³⁴⁹ Hall refers to this

³⁴⁵ This is reinforced not only in the miracle tales but also in the sermons and sagas, which often close with reminders to pray to Mary for her intercession because she is the most compassionate and is more likely to help them.

³⁴⁶ On the Icelandic miracles, see Ole Widding, "Norrøne Marialegender på europæisk baggrund." Widding catalogs the miracles into groups and establishes sources where possible. He also compares the collections to those Latin collections circulating in England and on the Continent using R.W. Southern, "The English Origins of the 'Miracles of the Virgin,'" and Adolf Mussafia's *Studien zu den mittelalterlichen Marienlegenden*.

³⁴⁷ There are also, naturally, many Marian miracle tales in the Icelandic collections interested in assistance to sailors.

³⁴⁸ *The Old Icelandic Homily Book* has been edited by Theodore Wisen, *Homilíu-bók: Isländska Homilíur Eftir Handskrift Från Tolfte århundradet* and Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen, *The Icelandic Homily Book : Perg. 15o in the Royal Library, Stockholm*.

³⁴⁹ See Hall, "Old Norse-Icelandic Sermons," p. 667. On the manuscript in general, see Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen's facsimile edition and transcript, *The Icelandic Homily Book: Perg. 15o in the Royal Library, Stockholm*.

manuscript as a “debased form of a liturgical homiliary” because it does not follow a pericopal order and “conflates two independent series of sermons to which other texts have been added that are difficult to class as sermons.”³⁵⁰ The homilies on the Assumption, and many of the other texts in the manuscript, were likely copied from older sermons from perhaps as early as 1150, not long after the first churches in Iceland had been founded. This lost vernacular source was also the basis for a Norwegian homily and several chapters of the saga of Mary.³⁵¹ These homilies present the Assumption entirely in the vernacular (with the exception of one or two common Latin phrases such as *omnium sanctorum*). This choice is rare in Icelandic texts on the Assumption, as most other Icelandic clerics incorporated some Latin, usually biblical or liturgical text, into their description or commentary.

The first homily on the Ascension of Mary is fragmentary, and the reference to Mary’s death is brief: ... “helgar bókr segia at hon hafé fram líþet af þessa heims life, oc faret í anan heim til ... ifrar dýrþar” / “holy books say that she has passed from this earthly life and into heaven into everlasting glory.”³⁵² The homilist does not name these

³⁵⁰ Hall, *ibid.*, 670. Hall gives, p. 692, an overview of the contents of the manuscript and the identified source material: forty-two texts and fragments which are sermons or pericope homilies, a fragmentary allegorical explanation of the eight musical church modes, three commentaries on the Lord’s prayer, two versions of the Apostle’s Creed, and commentary on the mass based on Honorius of Autun’s *Gemma animae*, a partial translation of Pseudo-Ambrose’s *Acta S. Sebastiania*, an account of the Passion, extracts from the saga of Stephen, a translation from the *Regula S. Benedicti*, a translation of the *Trinubium Annae*, a treatise on the priest’s pastoral duties. Sixteen of the sermons, Hall notes, are “more or less direct translations of widely available Latin works including sermons by Augustine, Bede, Gregory, the Great, and Caesarius of Arles, while the rest are often highly original in their manipulation of both traditional and non-traditional materials.”

³⁵¹ See Gabriel Turville-Petre “The Old Norse Homily on the Assumption and the *Mariú saga*.” This fact hints at the complicated textual connections between Norway and Iceland. The *Old Icelandic Homily Book* and the *Old Norwegian Homily Book* contain eleven items in common. The *Old Norwegian Homily Book* (composed in Bergen) is presumed to be older, but it is impossible to say that it is the source of the *Old Icelandic Homily Book*. Both are probably copies or expansions of lost exemplars. The fact that many of the passages in the homilies also appear in *Mariú saga* further complicates the matter. And again neither homily is likely to be a source for the saga, especially since the saga has longer and more detailed passages than either homily. On this See Turville-Petre, p. 137, and Hall, “Old Norse-Icelandic Sermons,” p. 692.

³⁵² Old Norse-Icelandic text from Wisen, pp. 2-3.

“holy books,” probably since there are not actually any officially sanctioned holy works that do discuss her death. Most of the rest of the homily stresses the importance of holding the feasts of the saints, but towards the end, the homilist reveals some awareness of apocryphal legends of Mary’s death: “þa er Maria var af heime liþen at þa voro aller postolar hiá oc þíonþo licgrefte hennar” / “When Mary passed from this earth all of the apostles were next to her and assisted in her burial.”³⁵³ That this homily includes details of Mary’s death made known through apocryphal legends is peculiar, since the homily *assumption sancte marie* on the next folio encourages, citing “Jerome’s letter,” those listening or reading to avoid those questionable narratives about Mary’s end,³⁵⁴ yet this homily also places the apostles at Mary’s death: “En viþ andlát hennar voro staþder aller postolar, þvi at hon andaþesc fyr en þeir skiptesc til landa” / “All the apostles were present at her death because she died before they had separated among the lands.”³⁵⁵ Here the image is different and actually disagrees with the apocryphal legends, since in many of those representations the apostles are brought on clouds from their preaching locations. It is entirely possible that the authors (or compilers) of these two homilies were unfamiliar with the apocrypha which Jerome referred to and translated model sermons available to them.

The second homily on the Assumption (*assumption sancte Marie*) is much longer and attempts to handle questions about Mary’s death in more detail. The Icelandic homilist only mentions the Assumption once though and delays speaking about her death

³⁵³ Text, Wisen, p. 3.

³⁵⁴ This discrepancy is not peculiar because different homilists held diverging opinions on the usage of apocryphal legends of Mary’s Assumption, since we have seen this divergence in Old English and Middle English texts. What is peculiar is that this disagreement occurs in the same manuscript one folio part, even if in different hands.

³⁵⁵ Text, Wisen, p. 8.

throughout much of the narrative; it is not clear if this homily was meant to be read or recited on the feast day or to serve as a model for preachers. Though the homily is dedicated to the Assumption, the homilist covers Mary's history from her lineage to her life with her son and the apostles, and then finally her death and role in heaven as an intercessor. It tends to favor narrative over commentary on doctrine or scripture, aside from a few notable examples that will be discussed below. The homily opens with praise of Mary's dedication to God, reading, and praying and says that she directed all of her love toward God "suat hon vas a vallt i guþs þionosto anattveggia á bønnum eþa hon hugþe at spamanna bócum eþa vas i necqverio góþo verke" / "so that she was always in God's service, she was either in prayer or reading in the books of prophets or performing some kind of good work."³⁵⁶ The homilist then praises Mary for her chastity and her humility before comparing the suffering of the saints to Mary's at the Passion: "þeir men ero ok mikils virder af guþe es piningar taka af vándum monnom fyr hans sakar, en þo hefer maría þessa dýrþ frammar en aþrer, þviat aþrer helger men took piningar a likame sína, en önd marío vas pínd þa es hon sa aúgom sínom a pining drottens várs" / "There are saints who are highly esteemed by God who endured martyrdom through the wicked for God's sake, but Mary has more glory in this than others because those saints endured bodily martyrdom, while Mary was martyred in soul when she saw the Crucifixion of our Lord with her own eyes."³⁵⁷ The homilist does not indicate a source here, but these lines are paraphrased from the *Cogitis me* of Pseudo-Jerome.³⁵⁸ For Radbertus, Mary was truly

³⁵⁶ Text, Wisen, p. 4.

³⁵⁷ Text Wisen, p. 5.

³⁵⁸ Ripberger, pp. 150-151: "Recte igitur, quoniam beata Dei genitrix et martyr et uirgo fuit, quamuis in pace uitam finierit, Hinc quoque quod uere passa sit, Symeon propheta loquens ad eam: *Et tuam*, inquit, *ipsius animam pertransibit gladius*. Ex quo constat, quod alii namque sancti, etsi passi sunt pro Christo in carne, tamen in anima, quia immortalis est, pati non potuerunt. Beata uero Dei genitrix, quia in ea parte passa est, quae impassibilis habetur, ideo ut ita fatear, quia spiritualiter et atrocius passa est gladio passionis

a martyr even though her life ended peacefully. Radbertus comments on the prophecy of Simeon in Luke 2:35. Like Augustine and Ambrose before him, Radbertus did not think that this prophecy meant Mary was bodily martyred but that this was a reference to the pain she must have felt watching the Crucifixion of her son. The Old Norse preacher omits the reference to Luke and the prophecy of Simeon, but does consider Mary to be a more holy martyr than those other saints who endure bodily torture. We cannot know for sure if the Icelandic homilist's source included this information and he decided to leave it out or if his source was an abbreviated version of the Carolingian's letter.³⁵⁹

The next section of the homily also has a parallel in Pseudo-Jerome's letter. The Icelandic homilist follows the narrative of Mary's life after the Ascension of the Lord; the audience is reminded that Christ, while on the cross, placed Mary into the care of John. The homilist then relates that after the Ascension, "Meþan hon vas i þessom heime þa vas hon i þeim stöþom es cristr var boren eþa pínðr eþa hann sté til himna, eþa för þar a miþle at henne scyllde aldrege fyrnask stórmerke drotens várs" / "While she was on this earth Mary was in one of these places: either where Christ was born or crucified, or where he rose up to heaven, or somewhere in between so that our Lord's miracles were never forgotten to her."³⁶⁰ Again this is not a translation but rather a paraphrase as the Icelandic

Christi, plus quam martyr fuit. Vnde constat, quia plus omnibus dilexit, propterea et plus doluit, intantum ut animam eius totam pertransiret et possideret uis doloris, ad testimonium eximiae dilectionis. Quae, quia mente passa est, plus quam martyr fuit, nimirum et eius dilectio amplius fortis quam mors, quia mortem Christi suam fecit."

³⁵⁹ It is more likely that the Icelandic homilist's source was an abbreviated version that may have been adapted for liturgical use. While he does paraphrase the letter more than once (even if he is not aware of this), it is unlikely that a full copy of the letter made it to Iceland.

³⁶⁰ Text, Wisen, p. 6. Radbertus, in Ripberger, p. 147: "Fortassis ergo prae nimio amore, in loco, quo sepultus dicitur, interdum habitasse eam credimus, quatenus piis pasceret internus amore obtutibus. Sic namque locu medius est hinc inde constitutes, ut adire posset ascensionis eius uestigia, et locum sepulturae ac resurrectionis seu Omnia, in quibus passes est, loca inuisere, non quod iam uiuentem quaereret cum mortuis, sed ut suis solaretur aspectibus."

homilist has left out Mary's motivations and focused solely on the narrative; Jerome is not mentioned here as the progenitor of these ideas.

The narrative in the previous sections of the homily and the focus on purification from sin, chastity, and humility would have been simple enough for the laity to follow, but in the passages that follow the intended audience of the homily becomes clear as the Icelandic author turns to a discussion of the purity of Mary and of the Incarnation using complicated allusions to the transparency of glass that, at least at this early date, only fellow monastics would understand.³⁶¹ Here we catch a glimpse of some sophisticated academic language, that of the mirror or glass, that maintained popularity throughout the medieval period and was used to describe the mystery of the Incarnation.

The Icelandic homilist has been praising the purity of Mary and now pauses to offer an example and commentary on that example. He begins by describing the way in which the sun shines through glass: “þa es sól skin a gler i heíþe, þa es gleret lysesc oc hitnar af solone, en geísle sa es skin igeðnom gleret, hever lýse oc hita af solone, en licneske af glereno” / “when the sun shines brightly through glass, then the glass lights up and is heated by the sun; and that beam which shines through the glass has light and heat from the sun and the form of the glass.”³⁶² The homilist then expounds this symbolism

³⁶¹ On the laity's managing of religious texts in early Iceland, see Nedkvitne, *Lay Belief*, p. 53, where he argues that the Icelandic “homilies go some way to explain religious truths to laymen. But the preacher often seems intent on impressing the congregation with his own learning. Some homilies are full of Latin quotations, the preachers used abstract concepts like ‘cardinal virtues’, and it was perhaps hard for an illiterate to grasp what a ‘gospel’ was.”

The invocation of “ver” / “we” and “góþer brœþr” / “good brothers” might also be a clear indication of a monastic audience but could also be classified as standard sermon parlance.

³⁶² Text, Wisen, p. 6. On the popularity of glass and mirrors as a symbol generally, see Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-Imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance*. For a discussion of Mary and glass imagery, see Andrew Breeze, “The Blessed Virgin and the Sunbeam through Glass.” Determining a source here is difficult. There is some similarity in language to the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux, and we could point to the optical text of Peter of Limoges, *The Moral Treatise on the Eye* (trans. Richard Newhauser), as part of the same interest among clergy on the aspects of light and

for his audience: “Sólen merker guðdóm, en gleret ena helo Mario, en geíslen droten várn *iesum christum*. Þa es sól skin a gleret þa er hon iambiort sem áþr...sva vas oc guðdómren heíll oc óskadr i öllum krafte a himnom, þót hann teóke mandóm a sic her a iorþo...þui mátte hon maclega son geta af helgom anda, at hon vas þeim mun öllum hreílfre en áþrer men, sem gler es hreína oc gagnsnæra en anat smíþe” / “The Sun signifies the Godhead, and the glass the blessed Mary, and the beam our Lord Jesus Christ. When the sun shines in the glass it is just as bright as before...so also was the Godhead whole and un-scathed in all the virtue of heaven, though he took human flesh on himself here on earth... Thus was she deserving to receive the son from the holy spirit, because she was purer of life than all other saints, just as glass is purer and more transparent than other materials.”³⁶³ The Icelandic homilist concludes this discourse with how the beam (Jesus) transforms in this process: “En geíslen skin igegnom gleret, oc hever bæþe birte solskíns oc licneske af glereno, sva hever oc dróttin vár iesus cristr bæþe guðdom af guþe, en mandóm af mario” / “The beam shines through the glass and has both the brightness of the sun and the shape of the glass, just as our Lord Jesus Christ has both the Godhead from God, and human flesh from Mary.”³⁶⁴ Here, then, the Icelandic author has taken on the task of rendering a rather sophisticated image, first developed in Latin clerical language, of the doctrine of the Incarnation and Mary’s role in it, into his vernacular Old Norse-Icelandic. The image comes through clearly in Old Norse and offers a glimpse into the kind of theology presented and devotion practiced in

refraction. The Icelfander here reveals a great deal of learning and shows himself to be very current with the theology of the schools in Paris.

³⁶³ Text, Wisen, p. 6-7.

³⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 7

early Iceland to the clergy, and possibly the laity, about one of the more important pieces of Catholic doctrine.

After his discourse on the Incarnation, the Icelandic homilist returns to the subject of the feast at hand; on the topic of the death of Mary and the ambiguity surrounding the fate of Mary's body, he follows Radbertus's letter and cites Jerome as the authority on this matter:

Þat finzk oft i sögum heilagra manna at englar guþd vittrasc i adnláte þeira með líóse, eþa þeir, es hia standa, kena himneskan ilm eþa heyra fagran song. En ef drotten iesus Christ veíter oft slíka dýrþ i andláte þraele sina, þa megom ver at glikendom marka hversu mikla dýrþ hann mynde sýna i andláte moþor sinar er drotning er *omnium sanctorum*; Eþa ella hefþe hann eige halden þau lög es hann bauþ hveriom manne at göfga föþor oc móþor. Af þui scolom vér trua at drotten iesus cristr fór i gegn önd moþor sinar með alre himna dýrþ, oc vas sén i andláte henar oc heyrþ öll su dýrþ es men mótto standasc at sia eþa heyra. En als likamr henar fanzc eige, þa hygia marger at hon hafe upp veret numen bæþe með önd oc licama. En likamr henar vas grafen i dal þeim es heiter uallis iosafaph oc vas geor síþan kirkia dýrleg henne til vegs. En nu es þar tó, funden gröfen. En önd hennar vas upp hafef yver öll engla fylgia, oc lúta henne aller englar oc aller helger men. Jeronimus prestr seger skýrt at hon andaðesc oc vas grafen, en hann seger eige víst hvárt heldr vas at hon tók upriso likams sins lítlo eþter andlát sitt, eþa guþ fal likam henar at synþger men mege eige síá.

I find that often in the writings of holy men that the angels of God are revealed in their deaths with light, or that those who are standing near sense heavenly odor or hear beautiful song. And if the Lord Jesus Christ grants such glory often in the deaths of his servants, then we may think it likely how much glory he would show in the death of his mother who is the queen of all saints, or else he would not be holding that law in which he commanded that all should honor his father and mother (Matt. 15:4). Because of this we should believe that the Lord Jesus Christ went to meet the soul of his mother with all the glory of heaven and was seen and heard in her death all that glory which humanity may stand to see or hear. But because her body has not been found, many men think that she has been raised up both in soul and body. Her body was buried in that dale which is called the Valley of Josaphat. A glorious church was made there in her honor. But now the tomb is found empty. Her soul was taken up over all the angels, and all the angels and all the saint kneeled to her. Father Jerome says in a letter that she died and was buried, and he says that he

does not know whether her body was resurrected a little while after her death or if God hid her body so that sinful men could not see it.³⁶⁵

The Icelandic homilist here combines and then translates and paraphrases different sections of Radbertus's *Cogitis me*.³⁶⁶ This is the first mention of the authority of Jerome, though the Icelandic writer has used several passages from the letter before this condemnation of the belief in the bodily Assumption. It is possible he was unaware that the other material was from the same letter and that his source material was adapted from the letter into a particular lesson, probably a liturgical one, on the Assumption.

Despite his reticence concerning the Virgin's dual Assumption, the Icelandic cleric promotes the "hotíþ upnumningar" / "feast of the Assumption" as an important celebration for both God and the angels in heaven and the faithful on earth. The cleric calls on his fellow religious to imitate Mary's moral behavior, her eagerness to learn, her humility, her moderation in all things, and above all else, to remember to call on her compassion and intercessory powers. For the homilist, this is the day that we are reminded that Mary is next to her son in heaven, whether that is in body or not. He is unwilling, or uncomfortable, in claiming a bodily resurrection for Mary, even though by the time this copy was written in the Stockholm manuscript at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the scholastic argument of Pseudo-Augustine and the vision of

³⁶⁵ Text, Wisen, p. 8.

³⁶⁶ On the appearance of angels at the deaths of the saints, see Ripberger, p. 130: "Legimus ergo quam saepe ad funera et ad sepulturas quorumlibet sanctorum angelos aduenisse, et ad exequias eorum obsequia praestitisse: necnon et animas electorum usque ad caelos cum hymnis et laudibus detulisse: ubi et utriusque sexus chori commemorantur, frequenter auditi, laudes cecinisse: interea, et quod perspicacius est, multo nonnumquam lumine eosdem resplenduisse; insuper et adhuc uiuentes in carne ibidem miri odoris fragrantiam diutius persensisse," and a few lines later the commandment: "Alias autem quomodo impleuisse creditor quod in lege ipse praecipit: *Honora, inquit, patrem tuum et matrem tuam?*" On the empty tomb in the Valley of Josaphat, see Ripberger, p. 112: "Monstratur autem sepulcrum eius cernentibus nobis usque ad praesens in uallis Josaphat medio, quae uallis est inter montem Sion et montem Oliueti posita, quam et tu, o Paula, oculis aspexisti, ubi in eius honore fabricate est ecclesia miro lapideo tabulate, in qua sepulta fuisse, ut scire potestis ab omnibus, ibidem praedicatur; sed nunc uacuum esse cernentibus ostenditur."

Elisabeth of Schönau were both circulating among contemporaries in Europe. The homily, then, shares more in common with the sentiments of Ælfric than it does with contemporary theologians, and this might offer another clue that this homily is a copy of an older vernacular exemplar.

There is another text which borrows significantly from Radbertus's letter. This is the *Mariu saga*,³⁶⁷ which is generally assumed to have been written between 1216 and 1236 by the Icelandic cleric Kyrgi-Björn Hjaltason.³⁶⁸ The saga survives in nineteen manuscripts.³⁶⁹ Out of these nineteen manuscripts five preserve the vita only while the remaining ones append miracles of the Virgin.³⁷⁰ Despite the saga's, and the miracles', clear popularity in medieval Iceland,³⁷¹ this Marian literature has been largely ignored.³⁷²

³⁶⁷ For a brief introduction to the saga, the possible sources, and a bibliography, see Wilhelm Heizmann, *Mariu saga*, in Philip Pulsiano et al. *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, pp. 407-408. The saga has been edited in C.R. Unger, *Mariu saga: Legender om Jomfru Maria og Hendes Jarategn*, in Wilhelm Heizmann's *Das Altisändische Marienleben. Teil I: Historisch-philologische Studien. Teil II: Edition der drei Redaktionen nach den Handschriften AM 234 fol., Holm 11 4to, und Holm 1 4to* (though, since this is his dissertation, it is not readily available), and in modern Icelandic in Ásdís Egilsdóttir, Gunnar Harðarson, and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, eds. *Mariukver: sögur og kvæði af heilagri guðsmóður frá fyrri tíð*. Some caution is required in reading Unger's edition. He edited and printed two versions. Pages 1-62 of his edition is based on S, with variant readings from E and other manuscripts. Pages 332-401 are based on A, though Unger has included the prologue from E at the beginning of this saga. Heizmann's edition is the most usable because he separates the three redactions, but, as I mentioned, it is difficult to obtain.

³⁶⁸ This assumption of authorship is based on a comment made by Arngrímr Brandsson (d. 1361), abbot of Þingeyraklaustri in northern Iceland, in his biography of Guðmundr Arason (1161-1237), bishop of the northern see in Hólar from 1203 until his death: "Var hann mest af lærðum mönum í mótgangi við herra Guðmund biskup. Var Kyrgi-Björn mikilsháttar klerkr, sem auðsýnast má í því, at hann hefir samsett Mariu sögu" / "He was the most learned man in opposition to bishop Guðmunr. Kyrgi-Björn was a distinguished cleric, as it is made evident by the fact that he has compiled the saga of Mary." Text, Jón Sígurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, eds. *Biskupa Sögur*, p. 186. There is little proof to support or disprove this attribution, so most scholars generally accept his authorship of the original saga. If he is indeed the author, then it must have been written before his death in 1237 but also probably after 1215 since Kyrgi-Björn was in Rome for the Fourth Lateran Council, which he describes in his chapter on the Baptism of the Jesus in chapter twenty-three of the saga, Unger, p. 45-47.

³⁶⁹ See Laura Tomassini, "Attempts at Biblical Exegesis in Old Norse: Some Examples from *Mariu saga*," p. 129; the introduction to Wilhelm Heizmann's *Das Altisändische Marienleben*; and Kirsten Wolf, *The Legends of the Saints in Old Norse-Icelandic Prose*, p. 231.

³⁷⁰ See Tomassini, "Attempts at Biblical Exegesis," p. 129.

³⁷¹ Monastery book lists frequently mention the ownership of Marian literature. On this, see Margaret Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400*, pp. 126-129, and Marianne Kalinke, *Mariu saga og Önnu*, p. 45. The book lists of medieval Icelandic churches are edited in the series *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, which last up until 1570.

The saga traces the history of Mary from her birth (including some information about her family before her birth) to her death.³⁷³ There is clear unease about the use of unauthorized texts, but nevertheless the source material represented in the saga of Mary is a mixture of canonical and apocryphal texts such as the *Evangelium de Nativitate Mariae*, the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, and the *Trinubium Annae* for Mary's birth and infancy alongside Josephus. More authoritative church figures such as Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, Augustine, and Jerome are cited by name. The saga also suggests an awareness of the *Historia scholastica* of Peter Comestor, and the works of Bernard of Clairvaux and Hugh of St. Victor.³⁷⁴ It is difficult to identify an intended audience. The focus on narrative and the key points of Mary's life, especially those related to Christ, might hint at the kind of devotional program practiced in the monastery, but the fact that the Icelandic saga frequently displays an interest in commentary on scripture and explanation of doctrine could also indicate a lay audience. For Laura Tomassini the Icelandic saga of Mary has a dual purpose; the first is to offer the mixed audience "an example of spiritual perfection personified in Christ's mother – a reflection of increasing devotion to the

³⁷² See Margaret Clunies Ross's comment in "Love in a Cold Climate-With the Virgin Mary," p. 303: "the voluminous Marian literature of medieval Iceland awaits further investigation, in order to throw light on this literature's role in the expression of indigenous religious devotion and the exploration of the medieval Icelandic psyche through adaptations of well-known miracle stories involving the Virgin's intervention."

³⁷³ See Heizmann, *Maríu saga*, p. 407, who summarizes the contents of the saga: "The biography focuses on the time up to the return of the holy family from Egypt: the story of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne; Mary's conception and release from original sin in the womb; her birth; the first years of life and the stay at the temple in Jerusalem; her betrothal to Joseph; the Annunciation; and Immaculate Conception; the visit to Elizabeth; the birth of Jesus; the Adoration of the Magi; and the Flight into Egypt. The saga merely touches on later events in her life, and then goes into detail about the circumstances of her death and Assumption... The *vita* contains numerous theological opinions and commentaries, which give the saga its distinctive stamp. Among other points, the saga treats the following: Mary's original sin, the name 'Mary,' the significance of the fifteen steps of the temple in Jerusalem and the psalms associated with them, the mystery of Jesus's human and divine nature, Mary's freedom from sin, the painless virgin birth, the gifts of the three Magi, the Slaughter of the Innocents in Bethlehem, the resurrection of the body at the Last Judgment, and man as the likeness of God."

³⁷⁴ On the sources of the saga, see Tomassini, "Attempts at Biblical Exegesis," p. 131; Laura Tomassini, *An Analysis*, pp. 1-8; Heizmann, *Maríu saga*, p. 407-408; Wolf, *The Legends of the Saints*, p. 231.

Virgin in Iceland,” and the second is to explain theological difficulties regarding Marian doctrine; from this double purpose the saga exhibits an author involved in the “constant effort to explain and interpret, making use of allegories and examples from the scriptures and from everyday life that were intended to dispel or at least reduce any doubt or mistrust.”³⁷⁵ In *Maríu saga* we see a text not content with focusing solely on Mary as a model of Christian behavior, it is also interested in contemplating, along with the audience, important facets of doctrine. It is precisely because of this that his compilation is an educated mixture of narrative, historical, scriptural, and exegetical sources.³⁷⁶

Wilhelm Heizmann,³⁷⁷ and Laura Tomassini after him,³⁷⁸ have identified three distinct redactions ranging in date from c. 1325 to c. 1500³⁷⁹; the saga was repeatedly copied, and in some cases slightly revised, from its original composition in the thirteenth century into the eighteenth. Since no manuscripts survive from Kyrgi-Björn’s lifetime, and since the saga as we have it now in the three main redactions are copies that exhibit revision,³⁸⁰ I will refer to an author of the *Maríu saga* redactions in ambiguous terms, though I do not dispute Kyrgi-Björn’s original authorship. Though there are certainly differences among the three redactions,³⁸¹ all of them are identical in their description of

³⁷⁵ Tomassini, “Attempts at Biblical Exegesis,” p. 131.

³⁷⁶ See also Tomassini’s observations, in *An Analysis*, p. 2.

³⁷⁷ Heizmann, *Das Altisändische Marienleben*.

³⁷⁸ See, *An Analysis of the Three Redactions of Maríu saga, with Particular Reference to Their Style and Relation to Their Latin Source*.

³⁷⁹ The A-Redaction is represented by AM 234 fol. (c. 1340). The S-Redaction, the longest of the three, survives in Holm Perg. 11 4to (c. 1325-75). The latest and shortest of the three, the E-Redaction, is represented in Holm Perg. 1 4to (c. 1450-1500). The three are not based on each other but a lost exemplar, possibly the one written by Kyrgi-Björn.

³⁸⁰ On these revisions, see Tomassini, *An Analysis*. Though there are revisions the redactions are similar enough to suggest a lost exemplar; and it may be that much of the material in these redactions should be attributed to Kyrgi-Björn. I use the terms writer, author, compiler, cleric because it is impossible to know how close the saga we have is to Kyrgi-Björn’s original. For these reasons I hesitate in claiming particular theological sentiments for Kyrgi-Björn.

³⁸¹ The differences in these redactions are the subject of Tomassini’s *An Analysis*. The A-redactor focuses on humility, love, mercy, chastity, and the abandonment of worldly pleasures (p. 144). The A-redaction

Mary's death and their discussion of the Assumption, so I will refer here to a singular author since none of the redactors change details from the original composition about the death and resurrection of Mary.³⁸²

When the saga arrives at the death of Mary and her assumption, the Icelandic cleric presents an interesting compilation of source material. At the end of the chapter on the Crucifixion, the saga follows Radbertus's picture of Mary traveling between the sites where she and her son were together, and suggests that this is an example of the heat of love that existed between Mary and Christ:

Meþan María dróttning var í þessum heimi, þá var hon í þeim stöðum, er Crístr var borinn eða pínðr eða hann steig upp til himna, eða fór þar í milli, til þess at henni skyldi alldregi fyrnaz stormerki dróttins várs. Ok má þaðan af síá hita ástar þeirrar, er hon hafði, er henna þótti hverr staðrinn unaðsamligr.

While Queen Mary was on this earth, she was in one of those places, either where Christ was born or crucified or where he rose up to heaven, or someplace in between, so that the miracles of our Lord would never be forgotten to her. And from this may be seen the heat of love she shared with her son, because each place seemed delightful to her.³⁸³

The saga of Mary represents Radbertus's letter more fully than the homily on the Assumption, but the similarities in language between the saga and the homily is striking.³⁸⁴

also incorporates the most Latin of the three. The S-Redaction is the longest and the main virtues promoted here are the love of God, the love of one's neighbor, and the sustaining of the poor and the church (p. 195). The E-Redaction is the shortest of the three and is most likely directed towards nuns, hence the reference "systir minar kærustu" / "my dearest sisters" (p. 246-247). One of the key differences is that the A-redactor discusses the Immaculate Conception. He confirms the doctrine of original sin as the result of sexual intercourse, but argues, as Bernard of Clairvaux had, that Mary was purified in the womb, and states that his audience should avoid celebrating the Immaculate Conception since it is not known for sure when she was sanctified. On this, see Tomassini, "Attempts at Biblical Exegesis." Belief in the Immaculate Conception was becoming more common in fourteenth-century Europe; whether the Icelandic cleric is here reacting to that phenomenon or transmitting older theology is unclear.

³⁸² The death and Assumption of Mary in S and E is edited in Unger, pp. 1-62; the A text is edited in Unger, pp. 388-401.

³⁸³ Text in Unger, p. 49.

³⁸⁴ Compare to the *Old Icelandic Homily Book* and Radbertus, pg. 7 above.

Just a few lines later, the compiler indicates some familiarity with the *Transitus* legends. At the beginning of the chapter on Mary's death the author claims that wise men have said that all of the apostles were present at the death of Mary because they were lifted up and carried there by God's angels:

Á þeim degi er dýri drótning himins ok iarðar en sæla mæR Mária andaðiz þá vóro þar við staddir allir postolar guðs. Ok segia svá fróþir kennifeðr at hvar sem hverr þeira var áðr staddr postolanna, þá var hann þaðan uppnuminn með engiligu fulltingi ok settr þar niðr, sem en sæla María andaðiz.

On that day when the glorious queen of heaven and earth, the blessed maiden Mary, died, all of the apostles of God were present. Wise clerics say that each of those apostles was snatched up with the assistance of the angels and set down there where the blessed Mary would die.³⁸⁵

The Icelandic cleric does not mention who these wise fathers are here, and this is peculiar since he often takes the opportunity to name wise fathers when discussing important moments in Marian history or doctrine. The key difference between the saga's inclusion of the apocryphal reference about the apostles and the Old Norse-Icelandic homily on the Assumption is that the saga author offers two proofs for this legend. The first is scriptural and is in keeping with the author's concern for defending Marian doctrine with scripture whenever possible. The author offers a summary of Daniel 14:31-35³⁸⁶ and points out that the angels of God carried the prophet Habakkuk to Daniel in the lion's den. The second is not scriptural, and no source is revealed; here the author claims again that wise clerics have said that God told the apostles that they would be brought into the Valley of Josaphat when Mary was going to die.

What is interesting about this episode is that the author's source here is probably the *Transitus Mariae* attributed to Joseph of Arimathea, which survives in a fifteenth

³⁸⁵ Text in Unger, p. 49

³⁸⁶ The "Bel and the Dragon" episode preserved in the extended book of Daniel.

century Icelandic translation.³⁸⁷ The suggestion that the apostles were present at the death of Mary and brought there by clouds, the defense of this possibility with the episode of Habakkuk and Daniel, and the discussion of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor are related in Pseudo-Joseph of Arimathea's *Transitus*. While it is certainly possible that the Icelandic cleric remembered Habakkuk's journey and the Transfiguration from his reading in the Bible, the fact that it is combined here with the image of the angels arriving and departing on clouds reveals the Icelandic author's usage of the apocryphal narrative. This means that he had access to a variety of texts on the Assumption, with some supporting belief in the bodily Assumption and others urging caution in the reliance on apocryphal narratives. The Icelandic monk, then, has deliberately chosen to ignore Pseudo-Joseph of Arimathea's insistence on a dual Assumption but has decided nevertheless to borrow some details from the account.

Immediately after this discussion of the apostles at the death of Mary the author shifts back to Jerome: "Ok ero margar frásagnir, sem segir enn helgi Jeronimus prestr, um þenna atburð" / "There are many accounts, as says the holy father Jerome, concerning this event."³⁸⁸ Here again the saga author refers to Radbertus. Radbertus had pointed out to the nuns of Soissons that there were many accounts that should be avoided, but here the saga author is misleading; he uses the authority of the name of Jerome to confirm that there are accounts of the apostles present at the death of Mary, but he omits that Jerome had criticized these accounts.

The saga author then paraphrases Radbertus's argument about the appearance of angels at the deaths of saints and that because of this we can fantasize about the great

³⁸⁷ This translation is discussed in more detail in chapter six.

³⁸⁸ Text in Unger, p. 50.

glory Mary received upon her death since God’s law about honoring one’s father and mother had to be observed; the saga author also confirms that Mary’s soul has been resurrected above the angels and the other saints.³⁸⁹ Her body was buried in Josaphat and a glorious church was made in her honor. The Valley of Josaphat, the saga author continues, is between the Mount of Olives and Mount Sion.³⁹⁰ Up until this point the saga of Mary reveals its textual connection to the *Old Icelandic Homily Book* sermon on the Assumption, but where the homilist discussed the Incarnation using the symbolism of glass, the saga author discusses the importance of the Last Judgment.³⁹¹ Much of his commentary is based on book three of the *Elucidarius* of Honorius Augustodunensis,³⁹² though the Icelandic cleric is not translating from Honorius but rather synthesizing theological material he has read or heard into his own discourse on salvation and judgment. The Last Judgment has come to the author’s mind because the place where Mary was buried, the Valley of Josaphat, is also the place where Christ ascended to heaven: “En af því fialli Oliveti steig dróttinn Jesus til himna” / “and from this Mount of Olives Jesus ascended towards heaven.”³⁹³ Here the saga author again reveals his awareness of contemporary learning by connecting the site of Mary’s death and burial

³⁸⁹ The language here is nearly identical to the homily on the Assumption and hints at a shared vernacular source: “Þat finz opt í sögum heilagra manna, at guðs englar koma ok vitraz í andláti þeira með miclum ilm ok líósi, ok þeir er hiá standa, kenna himneskan ilm eþa heyra fagran song, eþa síá biart líós. En ef dróttin Jesus Cristr vietir opt micla dýrð í andláti þræla sinna eða þjóna, þá megum vér at líkindum ráða þaðan af, hversu mikla dýrð hann munde veita í andláti móður sinnar, er drótning er allra heilagra mann, eða elligar hefði hann eigi halldit lög sin síálfr, þau er hann settis, fyrir því at hann bauð hverium manni at vegsama föður ok móður... En önd hennar var upphafin yfir öll engla fylki, ok lúta allir englar henna, ok allir helgir men á himni.” Texts in Unger, p. 51. Compare to the homily, pp. 9-10 above.

³⁹⁰ “En líkami sællar Marie var iarðaðr í dal þeim, er heitir Vallis Josaphat. Þar var síðan dýrlig kirkia gör henni til dýrðar. En nú er gróf hennar tóm fundin. Staðr sá, er en helga mæz María andaðiz í, heitir, sem áðr var sagt, Vallis Josaphat. Hann liggr á milli fialla þeira, er annat heitir Oliveti en annat Sion.” Text in Unger, p. 51. Again the language between the homily and the saga in this passage are remarkably similar.

³⁹¹ And that this forms a significant part of the saga may go some way in providing a further example to Nedkvitne’s claim that Icelanders were particularly interested in the Last Judgment.

³⁹² *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 172.

³⁹³ Text in Unger, p. 52.

with the site of the Christ's Ascension and the Last Judgment,³⁹⁴ but what is interesting about this combination is that the author is also citing Radbertus's letter, which for so long was used to urge caution in the doctrine of the bodily Assumption, just before he shifts into a theological commentary on the Last Judgment and the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

It is here where Mary was buried, according to the holy writings, that Christ will appear in the sky at the Last Judgment (Þat er sögn heilagra ritninga, at dómr enn efzti, sá er dróttin skal dæma um allt mannkyn, skal þar vera í loptinu uppi yfir dalinum Josaphat).³⁹⁵ In his left hand he holds the earth, that is the damned, and in his right, heaven and the faithful (ok horfir en vinstri hönd dróttins til iarðar, en hægri til himnins).³⁹⁶ Neither side will slide or skew, because the Lord is so even-tempered (Ok skal þó ecki skaxt né allt vera, fyrir því at iafnhægt er hugnmum).³⁹⁷

After locating the place of Judgment, the author shifts his attention to the fate of the souls and bodies of the righteous. This subject had occupied many of the Icelandic author's predecessors in the twelfth century and contemporaries in the thirteenth. Many of the doctrinal subjects the saga author comments on appear in Latin theological manuals such as the *Compendium theologiae veritatis* of Hugh Ripelin of Strasburg (1205-1270), Thomas Aquinas's (1225-1274) *Summa Theologica*, and of course the

³⁹⁴ On this tradition, see Thomas N. Hall, "Medieval Traditions about the Site of Judgment." Hall finds this tradition as developing in the sixth century. The idea became so popular that it was incorporated into travel itineraries and even into *Mandeville's Travels*. Hall notes that before the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there appears to be little commentary on the site of judgment but that this changes and "there was an impressive revival of interest in the topic, particularly among sermon writers and scholastic theologians bent on compiling an exhaustive inventory of Christian teachings about Judgment. Within a span of just over a hundred years, the Valley of Josaphat was proclaimed the future site of Judgment by, among others, Honorius Augustodunensis, Rupert of Deutz, Robert Pullen of Oxford, Peter Lombard, Richard of St. Victor, Magister Bandinus, and Martin of Leon" (p. 83).

³⁹⁵ Text in Unger, p. 52.

³⁹⁶ Text in Unger, p. 52.

³⁹⁷ Text in Unger, p. 52.

Elucidarius.³⁹⁸ The Icelandic author begins with the fourfold magnificence of the resurrected bodies of believers: “þá skulo likamir góþra manna taka ferfallda þrýðe, því at hverr maðr er skapaðr af fiórum höfutskepnum, elldi ok lopti, vatni ok iörðu. Ok ero þessi efni saman færð til allra líkamliga luta af guði, en önd er af öngu efni sköput” / “Then the bodies of the righteous will take a fourfold magnificence because everyone is shaped from four elements, that is fire and air, water and earth. These are the materials God brought together in all bodily things, but the soul is not created from any of these materials.”³⁹⁹ The bodies of the faithful will enjoy four corporeal gifts; they will be *léttfærr* (nimble), *skjótr* (swift), *gagnfærr* (penetrable), *smugall* (penetrating).⁴⁰⁰ The body will be seven times brighter than the sun (“Hann skal vera .vii. lutum biartari en sól”).⁴⁰¹ The body also “lifa þaðan frá án siúkleika ok án allri meinsems, brumaz hann alldregi né hrörnar, öngu sýtir hann né kvíðir, því at llt hefir hann, eptir því sem hann beiþir” “lives from then on without sickness and without any pain. It is never made infirm nor decays; it does not mourn nor fear because it has everything it asks for.”⁴⁰² The Icelandic author then senses a theological complication. The only body known to him to have been resurrected was that of Christ, which “getinn var af Maríu meyiú án synd” / “was born from the Virgin Mary without sin.” Since our bodies were gotten through

³⁹⁸ Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir has discussed Icelandic use of this theology in relation to the world chronicle in AM 764 4 to. See her dissertation, *Universal History in Fourteenth-Century Iceland: Studies in AM 764 4to*, pp. 214-217.

³⁹⁹ Text in Unger, p. 52.

⁴⁰⁰ This list is not taken from Honorius, who outlines seven corporeal and seven spiritual gifts. See *Elucidarius*, Col. 1169D: “Septem speciales glorias corporis habebunt, et septem animae. In corpore quidem pulchritudinem, velocitatem, fortitudinem, libertatem, voluptatem, sanitatem, immortalitatem: In anima autem sapientiam, amicitiam, concordiam, potestatem, honorem, securitatem, gaudium.”

⁴⁰¹ Text in Unger, p. 52. See also *Elucidarius*, Col. 1169A: “Discipulus: Replesti me de bonis domus Domini: dic, qualia corpora habebunt sancti? Magister: Septies quam sol splendidiora, et prae animo agilliora.”

⁴⁰² Text in Unger, p. 52.

human infirmity (“getinn af mannligri óstyrkt”),⁴⁰³ we might have some cause to be concerned whether our bodies deserve to be resurrected. The Icelandic cleric reassures his audience that they can obtain their body in heaven if that body is first “breinsaðr frá öllum syndum” / “cleansed from all sin.”⁴⁰⁴ Here we have another example of the saga author’s usage of theological commentary to explain doctrine and promote Christian practice. This passage also further reveals his caution in confirming the bodily Assumption. Mary’s body, he has just pointed out, was without sin and the suggestion that she was also assumed into heavenly glory in body would have been extra reassurance to his fellow clergy and to the laity concerned about eternity. After his commentary on the four corporeal gifts the Icelandic author reviews the three spiritual gifts promised to the bodies of the righteous. The faithful will have *skynsemd* (reason), *fýsi* (desire), and *bræði* (passion).⁴⁰⁵ We were promised these gifts, the author claims, when God created humanity in his image and likeness.

Though the Icelandic cleric has used the *Elucidarius* for his commentary on the Last Judgment, he does not cite Honorius, and we should not classify this as a translation of the English theologian’s work. The Icelandic compiler has certainly quoted, but he also paraphrases and omits material on the Last Judgment regularly. The Icelander’s commentary is based on two separate sections of book three, that is questions 7 and questions 79-104.⁴⁰⁶ He does not include Honorius’ statements about the age bodies will be at the resurrection or the fact that the bodies of the saints are naked; he is also not interested in enumerating the many torments that await the damned or describing the

⁴⁰³ Text in Unger, p. 53.

⁴⁰⁴ Text in Unger, p. 53.

⁴⁰⁵ These three gifts are the Icelandic cleric’s rendering of Honorius’s “rationalis (*skynsemd*), irascibilis (*bræði*), concupiscibilis (*fýsi*) (Col. 1158B).

⁴⁰⁶ Col. 1158B and Col. 1169A-1171B

coming destruction of the earth. The most interesting omission, though, is that the Icelandic cleric avoids Honorius's argument that Mary's (and John's) bodily Assumption prove that the bodies of the elect will be taken to heaven by angels.⁴⁰⁷ It could be suggested that the Icelandic author did not have access to this part of the *Elucidarius*, but he probably did as this passage is in the Old Norse-Icelandic translation of the *Elucidarius*. We must assume then that this is a deliberate omission by the Icelandic author; the rest of the saga after the explanation of the Last Judgment offers us some clues as to why the author might have done this.

Having digressed on the Last Judgment and the everlasting joys Christians will enjoy in the re-unification of soul and body, the Icelandic author returns to Mary:

“En fyrir því at gröf ennar sælu drótningar Marie er tóm ok líkami hennar finnz eigi, þá hyggja men, at hon hafi af dauða risit, ok siti nú í háseti með syni sínum yfir öllum engla fylkium með önd ok líkama. En þar qveðr Jeronimus prestr skirt á, at hon andaðiz ok var iörðut, en hann segir eigi víst, hvárt var helldr, at hon tók upprisu líkama sins litlu eptir andlát sitt, eða væri fólginn líkama hennar, til þess at syndugir men næði eigi at síá né höndla” / “And because the blessed Queen Mary's grave is empty and her body is not found, that caused men to think that she had risen from death, and now sits on the high throne with her son over all the angels with soul and body. In a letter father Jerome says that she died and was buried and that he does not know whether her body was assumed a little while after her death or whether her body was hidden somewhere so the sinful could neither see it or touch it.”⁴⁰⁸

The saga, here, again indicates a shared source with the Old Norse-Icelandic homily on the Assumption. The saga author, like the homilist also, has already used passages from

⁴⁰⁷ See *Elucidarius*, Col. 1164C: “Justi, cum resurgent, mox ab angelis in aera obviam Christo rapiuntur, et electi viventes cum eis rapiuntur, et in ipso raptu moriuntur, et reviviscunt: **hoc praecessit in Maria matre Domini, et Joanne Evangelista: Maria, quae recepto corpore post mortem in gloriam est assumpta;** Joannes qui vero fuit corpore raptus, et in ipso raptu creditur mortuus et reviviscens. Reprobi de ipso terrore moriuntur, et confestim reviviscunt: et hoc est judicare vivos et mortuos.”

⁴⁰⁸ Text in Unger, p. 57.

the letter of “Jerome” without citation but does give his name when it comes to making a statement about the fate of Mary’s body.

The saga author follows the letter more fully than the homily in the narrative and commentary that follows. The Icelandic cleric quotes the Latin of Canticles 6:9: “Que est ista que ascendit sicut aurora consurgens, pulcra ut luna, electa ut sol, terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata” / “Who is this who ascends just as the rising dawn, beautiful as the moon, chosen as the sun, terrible as the army set in array.”⁴⁰⁹ The Icelandic writer then calls his audience’s attention to the translation of this biblical passage: “Þessi orð þýðaz svá: Hver er þessi svá myklu dýrligri en aðrar, er upp stígr svá sem rísande dagsbrún, fögr sem tungl, valit sem sól, ógurlig sem skiput fyking hermanna” / “These words are translated in this way: Who is this who is so much greater in glory than others, who rises up just as the rising daybreak, beautiful as the moon, chosen as the sun, terrible as the ordered host of warriors.”⁴¹⁰ The translation is a literal one, even if the Icelandic cleric adds an extra line of praise for Mary; the Icelfander has used native idioms in rendering the Latin, which is particularly clear in his translation of “castrorum acies ordinata” as “skiput fylking hermanna.” The saga author is not content with just translating the biblical passage though; he follows his translation with exegesis on the meaning of these lines so that this “spásaga megi liós verða” / “prophecy may become clear.”⁴¹¹ He seems to be aware that his mixed audience may have difficulty in understanding the meaning and importance of these scriptures: “Fyrir því at þat var háttir spámanna, at þeir mælltu myrkt ok ræddu ymissa hluta” / “It is a custom of the prophets

⁴⁰⁹ Text in Unger, p. 57. The Douay Rheims Vulgate reads “Quae est ista quae progreditur quasi aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol, terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata?” The Icelandic author is citing the line as it appeared in Radbertu’s letter, hence “ascendit” instead of “progreditur.”

⁴¹⁰ Text in Unger, pp. 57-58.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, p. 58.

that they speak in obscure meanings and discuss various subjects.”⁴¹² That he has taken the opportunity to explain these lines is significant, especially since these lines would have been part of the liturgy for the feast of the Assumption.

The saga author is in this translation and explication imparting the specialized knowledge of the clergy to increase the devotional knowledge of his mixed audience. He is providing direct access to academic learning in the vernacular. We can see him engaging in the same kind of scholarly commentary observable in Ralph d’ Escures homily on the Assumption and Honorius of Autun’s commentary on Canticles in *Sigillum Beatae Mariae*. Ralph, as we have seen, sought to explain why the Gospel reading of Luke 10: 38-42 was used for the August 15th feast to fellow clerics, who could then make the laity aware of this connection. Honorius’s explication of Canticles and his use of Mary as the exegetical key to Solomon’s songs is produced, according to the preface, because his students do not understand why the Canticles is read during Marian feasts.⁴¹³ I think we can see the Icelandic author of the saga of Mary as informed by this scholarly tradition in what he performs in the vernacular.

The Icelandic cleric prefaces his exegesis with a warning, though, and this warning, I think, reveals why he is so cautious in confirming the bodily Assumption. The saga author notes that due to the obscurity of the prophets, an exegete has to make

⁴¹² Ibid, p. 58.

⁴¹³ *Patrologia Latina*, col. 495D: “Optimo magistro, librorum registro, frequentia discipulorum, videre in Sion Deum deorum. Omnium fratrum conventus tuae diligentiae grates solvit, quod eis spiritus sapientiae tot involucra per tuum laborem in elucidario evolvit. Rogamus igitur te omnes uno ore iterum novum laborem subire, et nobis causa charitatis aperire cur Evangelium: Intravit Jesus in quoddam castellum et Cantica canticorum de sancta Maria legantur, cum nihil penitus ad eam pertinere videantur” / “To the excellent master, with the register of books, from the assembly of students; may you see in Sion the God of Gods. The convent of all the brothers thanks you because the Spirit of Wisdom working through you in the *Elucidarium* lifted so many veils for them. We all beg you, therefore, to undertake a new work and show us, in the spirit of Charity, why the Gospel text *Jesus entered into a certain town* and the Cantic of Canticles are read on the Feast of Mary, although they do not seem to pertain to her at all.” Translation Amelia Carr, *The Seal of the Blessed Mary*, p. 47.

cautious use of his knowledge (*vitz*) and eloquence (*snilldar*) when he undertakes the explanation of what is signified in the prophecies of the holy fathers, lest he have to answer before God and men (“En fyrir sakir myrkleiks spásagna þá giæti sá varligar sins vitz ok snilldar, er tekr skýrlingar heilagra feðra spáð, helldr en hinn er tekr af síálfum sér, ok á þá at hafa svör fyrir við guð ok menn”).⁴¹⁴ The saga author was probably aware of many of the theological arguments in favor of a bodily Assumption, and he certainly could have celebrated it privately, but he is unwilling to promote the belief without proof; this is the way he approaches the Immaculate Conception.

His exegesis on Canticles is only loosely based on Radbertus’s commentary.⁴¹⁵ The Icelander expands on the original letter’s explanation of this biblical passage. The author first explains that the daybreak is that light which comes at the beginning of the day when the sky still has both light and darkness; this occurs because night has not yet ended and the point of day is not fully come. We must wonder here if an explanation of exactly what daybreak is was necessary for an audience used to cycles of light one experiences so near to the arctic circle. In any case Mary is compared to dawn because of her purity; since she is free of sin the sun shines through her breast. She is also compared to dawn because when she bore Christ night was conquered. The moon signifies Mary because, as the moon is the image of the sun, Mary bears the image of God. Because of her virtue Mary is more holy than the other saints, as the moon is much brighter than the stars. She is compared to an army set in array because she is armed with the virtues.

⁴¹⁴ Text in Unger, p. 58.

⁴¹⁵ The author could also have known some of this material from the Assumption homily in the homiliary of Paul the Deacon (*Patrologia Latina* 95, col. 1490D-1497D), but the similarities are not close enough to recommend it as a source. Indeed much of the expansion could be the author’s own.

In concluding his chapter on the Assumption of Mary the Icelandic author admits that it is because the faithful believe that the soul and body will be reunited after the Last Judgment that “flestra manna eða allra trúa náliga, at drótning allra hluta af dauða risit ok siti á himni með alrri prýði andar ok líkama myklu meiri en líkamlig óstyrep megi hyggia eða ætlun á koma” / “many, or nearly all, prefer to think that Mary, queen of all things, rose in body and soul and now sits in heaven in complete magnificence rather than to think or consider that any bodily infirmity might have come to her.”⁴¹⁶ In his conclusion the Icelandic author points out that Mary’s life reveals to us how we can receive the sevenfold gifts of heaven; we can obtain that glory through humility, patience, righteousness, moderation, and purification (*hreinlífi*). And if we doubt our place, we must remember, as the Icelandic author reminds, Mary will be at the Last Judgment with her son and she will grant even more than what is requested to those who love her.

The Icelandic cleric is sympathetic, and aware, of the various theological arguments in favor of a bodily Assumption.⁴¹⁷ He also seems to be aware of the potential power of the doctrine of the bodily Assumption; it could offer proof of the promise of humanity’s eventual resurrection in the body. Though the author is writing in the thirteenth century, when belief in the bodily Assumption was more common, and though the *Speculum historiale*’s synopsis on the doctrine and Elisabeth of Schönau’s vision were available⁴¹⁸ in his lifetime, the author has chosen to return to an older source because it is more appropriate for his own sentiments. I do not think the original inclusion of this source into the *Maríu saga* is an example of the “backwards antiquarianism” Hall

⁴¹⁶ Text in Unger, p. 60.

⁴¹⁷ That it was unthinkable that Mary’s body could have been subjected to any infirmity, or decay, is the thrust of Pseudo-Augustine’s treatise on the Assumption.

⁴¹⁸ On the arrival of these texts in Iceland, see the next chapter below.

observed in sermon copying, though we have to wonder why redactions made in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries did not update the saga's chapters on the Assumption.

It is clear the author compiled all of the learning on Mary available to him. In this he undertakes a project that occupied his contemporaries, such as Thomas of Hales in the *Vita sancte Marie* or the compiler of the *Vita beatae Virginis Mariae et salvatoris rhythmica*. The Icelandic cleric handles the material with skill, balancing narrative with theological commentary. As we have seen he is conservative in his approach to doctrine, but he is thorough in his exegesis of the mysteries of the faith. In chapter one I provided an overview of scholarship that suggested that in Iceland religious instruction focused on the basic aspects of religious ethics and promoted peace and that the Icelandic laity directed their faith largely into the practice of ritual rather than in the dedication to devotional thought and academic contemplation. In *Maríu saga* we have a learned counterexample to these sentiments about Icelandic devotion; its power as an example is increased by the number of manuscripts spanning most of the medieval period; clearly Icelanders enjoyed reading and adding to this text.

I do not think we can read the conservative approach to the doctrine of the bodily Assumption in either the Icelandic homily or the *Maríu saga* as a response to a concern among Icelandic monastics over unchecked popular devotion among the laity or the clergy, but rather as anxiety in promoting the celebration of a particular doctrine which they themselves were not sure about.⁴¹⁹ “Jerome’s” letter is deferred to as the available

⁴¹⁹ There is of course Latin precedence for this. See, for example, Peter Damian’s sermon on Saint John (*Patrologia Latina* 144, 870D) in which he will not confirm the doctrine, though he is clearly sympathetic: “Unde et si non audeamus pleniter definire, pium tamen est arbitrari ut sicut de beata Dei Genitrice creditur, ita etiam B. Joannes jam resurrexisse probabiliter asseratur, quatenus sicut in virginea fuerunt integritate participes, ita nihilominus et in anticipata resurrectione merito videantur aequales; nec sit in resurrectione diversitas quibus tanta fuerat unanimitas conversationis in vita. Si enim beatissimi virgines isti, Joannes videlicet et Maria, nullatenus surrexissent, cur in eorum tumulis sepulta cadavera non jacerent,

knowledge on the subject, but we do not see any of the anger of the reform-minded Ælfric. Given their willingness to provide their vernacular audiences with the tools of interpretation to learn what the Latin Church believes about Mary, their caution must be the result of their own unease in the face of a lack of proof. We see that the saga author is nervous about interpreting the prophecies of the fathers, and I think we can assume the same anxiety characterizes his approach to the bodily Assumption. Textual authority proving the Virgin's dual resurrection was apparently unavailable to him, though by the date of composition the arguments of Pseudo-Augustine and the vision of Elisabeth was circulating widely in Europe and especially in England. Because a desire for authority seems to have permeated Icelandic commentary, especially in early Icelandic translation of religious texts, the author feels some unease about confirming doctrine without being able to attach it to a particular person.

cum scilicet BB. Petri et Pauli caeterorumque apostolorum et martyrum corpora suis quaeque noscantur mausoleis tumulata?" We could also point to the hesitation of Bernard of Clairvaux, who knew the Church's teaching that on this day Mary went into heaven and received a magnificent welcome, which the faithful could hope to also receive. Aelred of Rievaulx and Alain of Lille were also cautious, as I pointed out in the introduction, to confirm the doctrine openly. See Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, pp. 101, 139, 164-65, and 189.

CHAPTER 6

THE BENEDICTINES OF NORTHERN ICELAND AND THE PROMOTION OF THE BODILY ASSUMPTION IN THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CENTURIES⁴²⁰

Despite the caution that characterized the early Icelandic homily on the Assumption and the *Maríu saga* redactions, it is clear that the feast of the Assumption was an important one in Iceland and a variety of reading material was translated into Old Norse-Icelandic that would have been useful in private devotion and in public service. Aside from the homily in Stockholm, Cod. Holm. Perg. 15 4to and the *Maríu saga*, the only other texts we have with substantial interest in the Assumption are a homily on the Gospel reading (Luke 10:38-42) for the feast, four redactions of Elisabeth of Schönau's *Visio de Resurrectione*, a translation of the C-version of *Transitus Mariae A*, and a life of Mary and Anne in the so-called *Reykjahólabók* (which includes a discussion of the Assumption) translated just before the Reformation from Low German; of these texts, the translations of the *Transitus Mariae*, the redactions of Elisabeth of Schönau's *Visio*, and the life of Mary and Anne in *Reykjahólabók* represent the only testimony to belief in the bodily Assumption in medieval Iceland. We have seen that the Icelandic clergy was conservative in its approach to the doctrine of the bodily Assumption, and as I will argue below, Icelandic belief in Mary's bodily ascent can be associated with a specific group of monasteries and clerics working in and nearby those institutions.

The Old Norse-Icelandic homily on the Assumption lection Luke 10:38-42 is preserved in AM 624 4to, a religious miscellany written between 1490 and 1510.⁴²¹ The

⁴²⁰ Some material from this chapter was presented at The Cardiff Conference on the Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages (The Medieval Translator), which was held July 8-12, 2013, at KU Leuven in Belgium.

manuscript preserves a combination of texts translated probably near to the date of copying of the manuscript and several that were available as early as the thirteenth century in Iceland. Among the texts are a translation of the Pseudo-Bernardian *Meditationes piissimæ de cognitione humanæ conditionis*, *Íslensk ævintýri* (Icelandic exempla) translated from a Middle English version of the *Gesta Romanorum* and Robert Mannyng of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne*,⁴²² a copy of the penitential of Saint Þorlákr Þórhallsson (1133-1193), a commentary on the psalms and their use (*Um sálmasöng og nytsemi hans*), and a commentary on the seven deadly sins (*Um sjö höfuðlesti*), among other religious texts.

Most of the manuscript remains unedited and un-studied; Aidan Conti has recognized though that the homily on the Assumption is a composite one based on Ralph d'Escures' *Homilia de assumptione Mariae* and other material with no known exact parallel, but is similar to Bede's commentary on Luke.⁴²³ Ralph d'Escures left France to become bishop of Rochester in 1108, and then archbishop of Canterbury in 1114. According to Conti, the homily was most likely written between 1088 and 1107.⁴²⁴ His homily circulated widely because it was incorporated into updated redactions of Paul the Deacon's homiliary and in collections of the works of Anselm.⁴²⁵ Ralph's homily seeks to explain the Gospel reading for the day and then provide a commentary on the active and contemplative lives, which are both represented in the Virgin Mary. Ralph defends the usage of this Gospel reading for the feast of the Assumption with a discussion of the

⁴²¹ This homily has been edited in Þorvaldur Bjarnarsson, *Leifar fornra Kristinna fræða Íslenzkra*, pp. 154-158.

⁴²² See Jorgensen, "The Icelandic Translations from Middle English."

⁴²³ See Conti, "The Old Norse Afterlife," p. 222. The first editor, Þorvaldur Bjarnarsson, thought that the homily was based on Gregory's homilies on the Gospels.

⁴²⁴ Conti, *ibid.*, p. 218.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

Bible's ability to signify different meanings with one passage, an idea widely used in the Middle Ages from Augustine on.

The Old Norse-Icelandic homily, as it survives in AM 624 4to, is probably meant to serve as a model sermon for a preacher. Given the manuscript contents, as well as the overabundance of abbreviation in the writing, it is unlikely that this manuscript was read widely. The homily has no title, but is marked out in an abbreviation of the beginning of the Gospel reading (Intrauit Jesus in quoddam castellum etc.).⁴²⁶ The opening of the homily is a translation of the Gospel lection:

Inn gieck Jesús í nokkuru sinni í einhvern kastala ok tók kona nokkur hann í hús sitt, sú er Martha hjet; en hún átti systur ok hjet María. En hún sat hjá fótum drottins, ok heyrði orð hans, enn Martha starfaði ok vann beina. Hún nam staðar fyrir drottni ok mælti: 'Rækir þú ecki drottin það, er systir mín lætr mic eina starfa? Mæltu við hana at hún tæi mjer.' Enn drottinn svaraði ok mælti: 'Martha, Martha! Áhyggjusamt er þjer, ok starfar þú í mörgum hlutum; en þó er ein nauðsyn; en María valdi sjer enn bezta hlut, þann er eigi mun frá henna takaz.

Jesus went at some time into a certain town and a certain woman, who was named Martha, took him into her house; she had a sister named Mary. And she sat next to the feet of the Lord, and heard his words; Martha worked and offered hospitality. She stood before the Lord and said: 'Do you, Lord, not heed that, that my sister lets me serve alone? Speak with her so that she will help me.' And the Lord answered her and said: 'Martha, Martha! For you is care (anxiety), and you labor in many things; but is one thing necessary; and Mary has chosen for herself the best portion, that which may not be taken from her.'⁴²⁷

The homily begins at the end of the reciting of the Latin. The preacher provides a translation of the scriptural text for his audience, and then the sermon proper begins and the Icelandic cleric provides an explication of these lines: "Nú sem drottinn vor Jesus

⁴²⁶ Folio 243, p. 154 in Bjarnarsson.

⁴²⁷ Text in Bjarnarsson, p. 154. Vulgate: "Factum est autem, dum irent, et ipse intravit in quoddam castellum: et mulier quaedam, Martha nomine, excepit illum in domum suam, Et huic erat soror nomine Maria, quae etiam sedens secus pedes Domini, audiebat verbum illius. Martha autem satagebat circa frequens ministerium: quae stetit, et ait: Domine, non est tibi curae quod soror mea reliquit me solam ministrare? dic ergo illi ut me adjuvet. Et respondens dixit illis Dominus: Martha, Martha, sollicita es, et turbaris erga plurima, Porro unum est necessarium. Maria optimam partem elegit, quae non auferetur ab ea."

kristr kenndi oss orðum, hversu vjer skulum lifa, svo sýndi hann oss ok í líkamligum verkum sínum, hvað hann veitti oss í verkum andliga” / “Now our Lord Jesus Christ teaches this to us in these words, that is how we should live; he also reveals to us also in his bodily works, what he gives to us for spiritual works.”⁴²⁸ The two faithful (trúfastar) sisters signify the two lives of the Christian community (kristens lýðs), that is the active life (sýslo líf) and the contemplative life (upplitningar líf). As is common in homilies on the Gospel reading for August 15th, the preacher does not actually mention the Assumption except to say that Mary is “upphafin yfir alla engla, ok sjer hún nú guð” / “assumed over all the angels, and now sits next to God.”⁴²⁹ Though the bodily Assumption is not mentioned and we cannot know whether the Icelandic preacher would have promoted the belief or not, we do see here an Icelandic cleric bringing scholarly practice to his vernacular audience. He translates scripture into the mother tongue and then leads his audience through an understanding of the biblical text. This is meant to assist the devotion of the laity and possibly provide useful information to a parish priest, but it also maintains the primacy and necessity of the clergy.

There was, as far as the evidence reveals, only one particular group of Icelandic clerics who indicate an awareness of contemporary arguments on the bodily Assumption of Mary. Icelandic confirmation of and theological commentary on the assumption of Mary in body and soul can in fact be particularly associated with a group of Benedictine monasteries and one convent, near the northern see of Hólar (f. 1106 by Saint Jón Ögmundarsson); these are the two northern monasteries of Þingeyri (f. 1133) and

⁴²⁸ Text in Bjarnarsson, p. 154.

⁴²⁹ Text in Bjarnarsson, p. 158.

Munkaþverá (f. 1155) and the Benedictine convent at Reynistaður (f. 1295).⁴³⁰ The thirteenth and fourteenth century monks of these monasteries have been referred to as the North Icelandic Benedictine School (“Norðlenski Benediktskólinn”).⁴³¹

There are three monks in particular associated with much of the writing produced in fourteenth-century Iceland. The first is Bergr Sökkason, who was a monk at Þingeyrar in 1317 before becoming a prior there in 1322 and then later abbot of Munkaþverá. The second, Arngrímur Brandsson, began his career at the Southern diocese before moving to Oddi and then later Þingeyrar in 1341, where he became abbot in 1351. The third, and less productive only by comparison to the previous two, is Árni Lárentíusson, who became a monk at Þingeyrar in the same year as Bergr. These three monks and their colleagues are believed to be responsible for the “hagiographic renaissance” of the fourteenth century.⁴³² The writing of this “hagiographic renaissance” is characterized by “a new, more elaborate rhetorical style, as well as a new approach to source material.”⁴³³ In their new approach to source material these hagiographers of northern Iceland turned to a mixture of translation, compilation, commentary, and revision to produce new versions of saints’ lives as well as *vitae* previously unknown; they also often named themselves as the composers of the sagas. Prose lives of saints were among the first documents to be written in Icelandic, and saints’ lives seemed to maintain some

⁴³⁰ The major monasteries of medieval Iceland are as follows. The monasteries of the Southern diocese of Skálholt (f. 1056) were Þykkvibær (f. 1168, Augustinian friars), Kirkjubær (f. 1186, Benedictine nuns), Helgafell (f. 1184, Augustinian friars). It was formerly the monastery of Flátey, which had been founded in 1172), Viðey (f. 1226, Augustinian friars), and Skriðuklaustur (f. 1493, Augustinian friars). This monastery in Eastern Iceland had a hospital). The monasteries attached to the Northern diocese of Hólar (f. 1106) were Þingeyrar/Þingeyri (f. 1133, Benedictine monks), Munkaþverá (f. 1155, Benedictine monks), Reynistaður (f. 1295, Benedictine nuns), and Möðruvellir (f. 1296, Augustinian friars). It was formerly Saurbær, which had been founded in 1200). On this subject see Nedkvitne, *Lay Belief in Old Norse Society*, p. 339, and Erika Ruth Sigurdson’s dissertation, *The Church in Fourteenth-Century Iceland: Ecclesiastical Administration, Literacy, and the Formation of an Elite Clerical Identity*.

⁴³¹ The phrase was coined by Sverrir Tómasson, in “Trúarbókmenntir í lausu máli á síðmiðöld.”

⁴³² See Kalinke, *The Book of Reykjahólar*, p. 38.

⁴³³ See Erika Ruth Sigurdson, *The Church in Fourteenth-Century Iceland*, p. 55.

popularity with the clergy and laity in Iceland, though they were probably never as widely read as the historical and family sagas. The early hagiography of the twelfth and thirteenth century, though, was often literal translation from one Latin source. The sagas of the fourteenth-century, however, are made up of a wide range of source material; they are wordy, in comparison to early hagiography, and are not literal translations from Latin, though they often do incorporate Latin into the text. It is difficult to know, as Margaret Cormack has pointed out, “whether these new works were intended for a clerical audiences who could appreciate the rather baroque style, or whether Icelandic laymen were now sufficiently sophisticated and familiar with the plot lines of the better known saints’ lives to want the latest edition of the sagas.”⁴³⁴ It is worth noting that these revised sagas of the saints are often more represented in manuscripts than others. Because this new style has been deemed “more sophisticated – though not necessarily more comprehensible – than those of the previous centuries,” much of this hagiography has been ignored in scholarship.⁴³⁵

As these monks frequently name themselves as the saga authors, it is possible to connect them with many of the works produced in the fourteenth century. Bergr Sökkason is linked to both religious texts and romances: *Nikolás saga erkibyskups II*, *Michaels saga höfuðengils*, *Karlamagnúss saga B*, *Af Agulando konungi*, *Um kraptaverk ok jartegnir*, *Jóns saga postola IV*, *Tveggja saga postola Jóns ok Jacobs*, *Af Diocletiano keisara*, *Drauma-Jóns saga*, *Thomas saga erkibyskups II*, *Ævintyri i AM 657a 4to*, *Maria-mirakler*, *Guðmundar saga byskups C*, *Magnúss saga helga*, *Stjórn*, and *Jóns saga*

⁴³⁴ See Cormack, “Christian Biography,” p. 34.

⁴³⁵ See Cormack, “Christian Biography,” p. 33.

*byskups B.*⁴³⁶ Fewer works have been ascribed to Arngrímr; his known and likely compositions include *Thomas saga erkibyskups II*, a revision of Bergr's *vita* of Guðmundar, *Guðmundar saga byskups D*, and exempla in AM 657 a-b 4to. Árni Lárentíusson is also credited with a smaller list; his works include a life of Saint Dunstan, *Dunstanus saga*, and a revised version of *Jóns saga helga*. The two texts from these works relevant to the discussion of the celebration of the bodily Assumption in Northern Iceland are Bergr Sokkaason's life of Bishop Guðmundr Arason (1161-1237), *Guðmundar saga byskups C*, and Arngrímr Brandsson's revision of that life *Guðmundar saga byskups D*.

Guðmundr Arason became bishop of Hólar in 1203 and remained so until his death in 1237; he is one of the more controversial figures of medieval Iceland. Joanna Skórzewska has highlighted some of the varied opinions about the hopeful saint: "Guðmundr Arason's personality and behaviour [*sic*] have often been presented as the cause of conflicts...he has been called a nuisance, 'unreasonable in every way, showing disrespect both to men and to the law of the land.' At the same time, it has been said that 'the popular regard for Bishop Guðmundr was very great.'⁴³⁷ Much of his tenure as bishop was characterized by disputes with local, powerful chieftains over the church's rights, and because of this, he was forced to flee Iceland and stay in Norway more than once. His defense of the church and ecclesiastical property is also one of the reasons his later biographers compared him to Thomas Becket. He was celibate while many of his

⁴³⁶ On this list of works attributed to Bergr and the two following for Arngrímr and Árni, see Karl G. Johansson, "Bergr Sokkason och Arngrímur Brandsson – översättare och författare i samma miljö," p. 186. Johansson synthesizes the attribution of different scholars, and there is some disagreement; for example, both Bergr and Arngrímr have been credited with writing a revised biography of Thomas Becket.

⁴³⁷ See Skórzewska, *Constructing a Cult: The Life and Veneration of Guðmundr Arason (1161-1237) in the Icelandic Written Sources*, p. 1. Skórzewska cites here W.P. Ker, "Guðmund Arason," p. 102, and J.H. Jørgensen, "Hagiography and the Icelandic Bishop Sagas," p. 15.

fellow clergy were married. He also embraced poverty and was generous to the poor; this generosity led to a large entourage of vagrants and beggars that followed him on his travels. More importantly, though, is that he was deeply devoted to Mary and sought the latest doctrine on the Virgin; he also appears to have been a firm believer in the bodily Assumption of Mary.

Guðmundr's life is recorded in four redactions of his saga (*Guðmundar saga byskups*)⁴³⁸ and in other non-hagiographical sources. The *Prestssaga Guðmundr góða* was written shortly after the bishop's death, around 1240, and was incorporated into some redactions of *Sturlunga saga*. *Guðmundar saga byskups A* and *B* were both written between 1320 and 1330 and must be connected to the translation of his relics in 1315. *A* and *B* contain some authorial comment, and *B* appends a miracle collection to the end of the saga, but it is Bergr Sökkason's *C* redaction, (written c. 1340-45) which is a revision of *B*, and Arngrímr's revision (written c. 1350) of Bergr, that were written according to the new taste for both a native and foreign audience⁴³⁹; Bergr and Arngrímr hoped that their sagas would gain papal approval for the canonization of Guðmundr. Their sagas show not only the holiness of the bishop but also his learning, contemplation of doctrine, and the education of his followers in the North of Iceland.

Bergr and Arngrímr both incorporate an abridged translation of Elisabeth of Schönau's *Visio de resurrectione Beate Virginis Marie* into their sagas of Guðmundr, but Arngrímr adds a commentary to his revision, based on the *Speculum historiale*, that is absent in Bergr's saga. Arngrímr, then, has taken a vernacular exemplar, which is itself a

⁴³⁸ On the different sources for Guðmundr's life, see Skórzewska, *Constructing a Cult*, pp. 20-26. See also Kirsten Wolf's summary, in *The Legends of the Saints in Old Norse-Icelandic Prose*, p.

⁴³⁹ Icelandic, Norwegian, and Papal audiences have been suggested. This would mean that there may have been a Latin *vita* as well, but one has not been found. See Skórzewska, *Constructing a Cult*, p. 1 and pp. 25-26.

revision of earlier biographies, and included authoritative commentary from a Latin text. For Bergr and Arngrímr, Elizabeth's vision is translated to authorize both the Virgin's bodily Assumption for medieval Icelanders and the candidacy of Guðmundr for sainthood.

As I noted in the introduction, translation has come to be regarded, following the work of Alastair Minnis and Rita Copeland, not simply as the translation of texts from one language to another, but also as the translation of prestige, especially in the case of vernacular translation of Latin academic culture.⁴⁴⁰ This transfer of prestige is precisely the purpose of digressing into Elizabeth's vision in the middle of a biography about Guðmundr Arason. Arngrímr and Bergr are certainly aware that describing Elizabeth's vision and supplementing the description with commentary shifts away from focusing on Guðmundr's life, but Arngrímr defends this digression as necessary because of the friendship between Mary and Guðmundr: "Leiðist þat af vináttu várrar frú ok herra Guðmundr, at drottningin eignast þvílíkan part í hans lífssögu" / "Such friendship passed between our lady and master Guðmundr that the queen occupied this part in the saga of his life."⁴⁴¹

Elizabeth's vision, if we take Bergr and Arngrímr's account to be valid, was translated into Old Norse-Icelandic at least by 1237 before the death of Bishop Guðmundr Arason. Both clerics mention in their biographies of Guðmundr that the bishop was a supporter of the bodily Assumption and was delighted to receive news of

⁴⁴⁰ See Alastair Minnis, *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular*, and Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts*.

⁴⁴¹ Text in, Jón Sígurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *Biskupa Sögur*, p. 155.

Elizabeth’s vision from Norway in a letter.⁴⁴² Guðmundr most likely received this letter containing a translation of Elizabeth’s vision after 1218 when he returned to Iceland from Norway.

Bergr begins his account of Guðmundr’s interest in the Assumption with the bishop’s stay in Norway: “Þann tíma er virðuligr herra Guðmundr byskup var í Noregi heyrði hann orðfleytaz at háleit Guðs getara, heilög Maria, mundi birz hafa einni nunnu, Elisabeth at nafni, enn ljósligar af sinni uppnumning inni dýrðarfullu en áðr fyndiz skrifat” / “At that time when the worthy bishop Guðmundr was in Norway he heard rumors that the sublime getter of God, the holy Mary, had revealed sometime to a nun named Elisabeth more clearly the full glory in her Assumption than was before found written.”⁴⁴³ Bergr’s opening lines reveal that no information on Elisabeth’s vision, or probably any other documents confirming the bodily Assumption, was available to Guðmundr in thirteenth century Iceland. At this time Guðmundr determines that he cannot rely on rumors and asks a good clerk, his intimate friend, to send him a letter with this revelation when he found real evidence (“Ok meðr því at herra byskup þóttiz eigi þar af svá sannliga vissu fá sem hann vildi, það hann einn góðan klerk, sinn heimulligan vin, skrifa til sín sagða birting þann tíma sem hann þættiz sannligt próf hafa fengit með hvílíkum hætti hon heyrz hefði”).

When the Norwegian clerk does find out more information, he “skrifandi eitt bréf ágætum herra Guðmundi Hólabyskupi af dýrðarsamligri vitran heilagrar Marie, því at

⁴⁴² That Elisabeth’s vision circulated among letters is not unusual. See Ruth J. Dean, “Elizabeth, Abbess of Schönau, and Roger of Ford.” There was a copy of Elisabeth’s vision circulating, particularly in England, prefaced with a letter by Roger of Ford.

⁴⁴³ *Guðmundr saga C* is forthcoming in an edition in the publications of the Árni Magnússon Institute. I am grateful to Gunnvör Sigríður Karlsdóttir of the University of Iceland, who is working on her dissertation about Guðmundr, for sharing the relevant passages of *Guðmundr saga C*.

hann klerkrinn vissi vel at Guðmundr byskup var mikill elskari frú sancte Marie, sem víða birtiz í hans lífssögu” / “wrote a letter to the renowned Guðmundr, Bishop of Hólar, concerning that glorious vision of Saint Mary, because he knew well that Bishop Guðmundr was a great lover of our Lady Saint Mary, which is widely shown in his saga.” The clerk has sent the proof in the letter and it has been rendered into Norse (norrænaz). Bergr is hinting here at Guðmundr’s care as a theologian; the hopeful saint is unwilling to believe in doubtful things without proof, no matter how dearly he loves Mary and personally believes she was taken to heaven in body and soul.

The next section of Bergr’s account is a quotation of the whole letter the Norwegian clerk sent to Guðmundr, including the abridged translation of Elisabeth’s vision. It is possible that Bergr is deferring authority to Guðmundr here and further promoting the bishop as responsible for bringing the belief and the doctrine of the Bodily Assumption to Iceland. In his greeting the Norwegian clerk asks Guðmundr if he remembers the conversations they had about the bodily Assumption of Mary (“Minniz þér, heilagur faðir, hvat við töluðum af líkamligri upprisu sællar Guðs móður”). Enclosed in the letter, the Norwegian clerk says, is what he has learned concerning the vision of Mary’s Assumption. The translation of Elisabeth’s vision in Bergr’s *Guðmundr saga C* begins with biographical information about the nun and the date of the visions. The Norwegian clerk relates that in the year 1152, in the days of Pope Eugene the second, a nun named Elisabeth lived in the cloister which is called Schönau, in the diocese of Trier in Saxony. The abbot Hildelin presided over them. There are two inconsistencies here regarding the timing of Elisabeth’s visions of Mary’s Assumption. The first is that Elisabeth’s visions of Mary’s resurrection began taking place in 1156, not 1152, which

would have actually placed the onset of the visions during the reign of Pope Anastasius IV and their conclusion in the Papacy of Adrian IV. The second is that the pope in 1152 was Eugene the III, not the Eugene II.⁴⁴⁴ This mistake is based on the prologue to the *First Book of Visions*, which does place the beginning of Elisabeth's visionary career in 1152. Thus the Norwegian clerk's source text was a combination of Elisabeth's vision and a biographical prologue. This kind of composite text circulated in the *Speculum historiale*, though Vincent of Beauvais's compendium cannot be clearly identified as the source here. The letter that Bergr reproduces is a translation from Latin, but it is not a direct translation from Elisabeth's text, but rather the source text's altered redaction of the Latin produced by Elisabeth's brother Ekbert.

Elisabeth's vision in the Latin produced by Ekbert is narrated in the first person; the Old Norse-Icelandic translation in Bergr's saga, however, is in the third person; though when the translator renders the conversation between Mary and Elisabeth or Elisabeth and the angel the direct address is preserved. The Old Norse-Icelandic translation, or its source, also adds narrative detail to the Latin of Ekbert. The way in which Elisabeth describes the onset of the visions of Mary's resurrection in Latin and the parallel passage in the Old Norse-Icelandic translation provides an example:

In the year that the angel of the Lord announced to me the book *Viarum Dei*, on the day that the church celebrates the octave of the Assumption of Our Lady, at the hour of the divine sacrifice, I was in a trance and my Comforter, the Lady of Heaven, appeared to me in her usual way. Then, just as I had been advised by one of our elders, I inquired of her, saying, 'My lady, may it be pleasing to your kindness to deign to verify for us whether you were assumed into heaven in spirit alone or in the flesh as well?' I asked this because, as they say, what is written about this in the books of the fathers is found to be ambiguous. She said to me, "What you ask, you cannot yet know. Nevertheless, it may be revealed through you in

⁴⁴⁴ See the discussion below of Arngrím's commentary, as this is one of the things he criticizes in the letter.

the future.’ Therefore, for the span of that whole year I dared not ask nothing further about this, either from the angel who was intimate with me or from Mary when she presented herself to me. However, the brother who was urging me to inquire about this enjoined upon me certain prayers by which I might obtain from her the revelation she had pledged to me.⁴⁴⁵

If a reader was familiar with Elisabeth’s visionary career through reading books of visions or the book *Viarum Dei*, then no extra detail would be necessary; but if that reader was unfamiliar with Elisabeth’s other works and only knew the *Visio de resurrectione* then some explanation might be needed about how it came to pass that Elisabeth conversed with Mary and an angel and that when she revealed this to a monk that he asked her to inquire about doctrine from the Virgin and the angel. The Old Norse-Icelandic translation provides this extra detail to the narrative, though it is difficult to know whether this is the work of the translator or is from his original source.⁴⁴⁶

The Old Norse-Icelandic translation, which Bergr records, begins by relating that Elisabeth had gone into the cloister at age eleven. After eleven years had passed and she had proved herself in her humility and devotion, she became so esteemed by the Lord and Mary that both thought she could bear witness to the mysteries of the faith. Ekbert’s preface to the *First Book of Visions* relates that Elisabeth had been eleven when she entered the convent and that eleven years had passed when she began receiving visions.

⁴⁴⁵ Translation Clark, *The Complete Works*, p. 209. Latin in Roth: “In anno qui michi per angelum domini annuntiabatur liber viarum dei, in die, quo octavam assumptionis domine nostre ecclesia celebrat, in hora divini sacrificii fui in excess mentis, et apparuit michi suo more illa consolatrix mea domina celorum. Tunc, sicut ab uno ex senioribus nostris premonita fueram, rogavi illam dicens: ‘Domina mea placeat benignita tue, ut de hoc certificare nos digneris, utrum solo spiritu assumpta sis in celum and etiam carne.’ Hoc autem idcirco dicebam, qui, ut aiunt, de hoc dubie in libris patrum scriptum invenitu. Et dixit michi: ‘Quod inquiris, nondum scire potes, futurum tamen est, ut per te hoc reveletur.’ Ego itaque toto illius anni spacio nichil de hoc vel ab angelo, qui familiaris mihi est, vel ab ipsa, cum se mihi presentaret, amplius interrogare audeba. Iniunxit autem mihi frater ille, qui ad hanc inquisitionem me horta-quam sponponderat michi.”

⁴⁴⁶ Though no source for Bergr and Arngrím’s redaction has been identified (it does not appear to have been based on the *Speculum historiale* version, though Arngrím clearly knew it), I would suspect that this added narrative detail comes from an expanded Latin text meant to be circulated independently of the rest of Elisabeth’s works.

The rest of the narrative detail in this passage and the ones which follow are not from any of the texts produced by Ekbert.

The Old Norse-Icelandic translation continues by informing Guðmundr, presumably, that after this period, Mary and an angel often visited Elisabeth and revealed wisdom to her. In a passage that is suggestive of anticipating criticism about the vision, the Old Norse-Icelandic translator points out that Elisabeth “kenndi hon þenna engil inn sama til sín komanda sem sannan vin ok kæran féлага” / “recognized that this same angel which was coming to her was a true friend and dear companion.” When Elisabeth is made to understand that this is Mary that is visiting her, she “segir leyniliga einum andaligum feðr sínum þar í klaustranum, hverr henni gefr þat ráð at spyrja nökkurs dróttningina þá er hon birtiz henni næsta sinni” / “speaks secretly to a spiritual father who is in the cloister, who gives her advice on what to ask the Queen the next time she appears to her.”

Ekbert’s Latin mentions ambiguously that Elisabeth asked what one of her elders has recommended, but the Old Norse-Icelandic translation provides that exchange between Elisabeth and her elder just before detailing the exchange between Mary and Elisabeth:

Hann segir: “Þat vilda ek, dóttir mín, at þú spyrir hana hvárt hon hafi af dauða risit ok lifi nú í Guði bæði með önd ok líkama.” Nú á næsta tíma sem blómstr allra meyja, virðulig Maria, birtiz Elisabeth tala þær miðil sín harla kærlega. Þat var in octava assumptionis sancte Marie meðan guðspjónusta framfluttiz í kirkjunni. Leið þá létr höfgi yfir nunnuna, í hverjum henni birtiz eftir vana heilög mæri Maria. Elisabeth spyr hana þá djarfliga, svá segjandi: “Dróttning mín kærasta. Ef þat líkaði þínum góðleika vildum vér gjarna vita hvárt þú hefðir at eins í andanum upp risit ok ríki tekit með syni þínum eða reistu af dauða, upp numin yfir öll englafylki, bæði meðr önd ok líkama? Spyr ek fyrir þá grein þessa hlutar þína mildi, at mér er sagt at efanliga finnist skrifat í bókum heilagra feðra af þinni uppnumning.” Dróttningin svarar svá hennar máli: “Þat sem þú spyr máttu eigi at sinni vís verða. En þó er þat fyrir ætlat at þessi hlutr skal þér bjartr ok auðsýniligr verða.” Sem þessi sýn hverfr brott gjörir systirin kunnigt inum gamla föður hversu farit hafði spurning ok andsvar með dróttninginni, en sá góði bróðir leggr þat til at nunnan taki upp

einkanligar bænir Guðs móður til sæmðar í minning þessa fyrirheits ok haldi þeim dagliga þar til er fram kemr vitranin. Líðr nú svá heilt ár at þessa hlutar þorir nunnan hvárki spyrja Guðs móður Mariam né sinn heimulligan engil, þó at þau birtiz henni bæði eftir vana.

He says: “I want, my daughter, you to ask her whether she has risen from death and lives with God both with soul and body.” Now the next time the flower of all maidens, the worthy Mary, appeared to Elisabeth, they spoke with each other very dearly. That was in the Octave of the Assumption of Saint Mary when they recited God’s service in the church. Then the heaviness over the nun lightened each time the holy Mother Mary appeared to her as expected. Elisabeth asked her then boldly, so saying: “My dearest Queen, if it be pleasing to your holiness, we wish to know eagerly whether you have only risen up in spirit and taken power with your son or if you rose from death, and were assumed above all the angels, both with soul and body? I ask for understanding about this event in your kindness, because it is said to me that what is found concerning your Assumption in the writings of the holy fathers is ambiguous.” The Queen answered her question: “That which you ask may not be made known to you at this time, but never the less it is intended that this event shall become clear and evident to you.” When this sight turned away the sister went to make the old father aware of what had happened during the dialogue with the Queen, and that good brother suggested that the nun take up special prayers in honor of God’s mother as a reminder of that promise and to hold them daily until that vision came forward. A whole year now passed and the nun dared not ask God’s Mother Mary nor the intimate angel about these things, though they both appeared to her as was customary.

The Old Norse-Icelandic translator offers more detailed narrative about the circumstances of Elisabeth’s experience, but the exchange between Elisabeth and Mary is a close translation of Ekbert’s Latin; the translator must have deemed accuracy in this dialogue as vital given the sensitive nature of the content, and he maintains direct translation of the words Elisabeth speaks to Mary and the angel and the responses they offer to the nun.

The Norwegian clerk’s letter to Guðmundr transmits most of Elisabeth’s vision and direct address. The translation depicts Elisabeth’s vision of a stone coffin surrounded by light and the figure of a woman placed in that coffin. It describes the angels placed around the coffin and then that the woman glides into the sky surrounded by the angels as

God comes to meet her bearing a cross. The Old Norse-Icelandic translation also incorporates Elisabeth's question of confirmation: "Herra minn, hvat merkir sú sýn er mér fyrir skömmu birtiz?" / "My lord, what does that vision signify which was shown to me recently?" and also the angel's reply: "Í þessari vitran, er Guð veitti þér, birtiz þat auðsýniliga hversu vár dróttning, frú sancta Maria, var upp numin til himinríkis bæði samt með önd ok líkama" / "In this vision, which God gave you, it was revealed to you clearly how our Queen, Lady Saint Mary, was assumed to heaven both in soul and body," including the angel's chronology of the event and statement that the fathers had no knowledge of her bodily resurrection.

The Old Norse-Icelandic translation then points to Elisabeth's doubts, doubts clearly present among Guðmundr and other Icelanders, about being the spreader of rumors: "Elisabeth spyr þá dróttningina eftir þeim hlut sem hon hafði áðr oftliga hugsat ok segir svá: „Frú mín, hvárt munum vér eða eigi opinbera þat orð sem mér er birt af þinni upprisu?" / "Elisabeth asked the Queen about that even which she had so often considered before and said thus: "My Lady, should we make public that knowledge which you revealed to me concerning your Assumption or not?" Mary's reply: "Eigi skal þat með lýðnum orðfleytaz eða opinberaz, því at veröldin er eigi svá góðgjörn sem þyrfti, ok því munu þeir sem heyra sáluháska fyrir taka ef þeir mistrúa sanna hluti ok í háði hafa guðlig stórmerki" / "We should not start rumors or reveal it to the public, because the world is not as benevolent as needed, and those who hear it will be taken into soul-danger (perdition) if they disbelieve the truth and in mockery hold God's miracles." The translation ends with Elisabeth's question about whether what has been written should be destroyed and Mary's response:

Systirin spyr þá enn: “Nú þá, dróttning mín, viltu at vér sköfum af með öllu þat sem skrifat er af þessari birting?” Guðs móðir svarar: “Eigi eru þessir hlutir til þess birtir at þeir afmáiz ok síðan gleymiz heldr til þess at mitt lof margfaldiz meðal þeira er mik einkanliga elska. Því skulu þessi orð kunnug verða vinum mínum ateins fyrir þinn framburð ok munu þeim þessir hlutir bjartir verða er mér auðsýna sitt hjarta, at hér fyrir gjöri þeir mér einkannlig lof ok taki af mér einkannligt verðkaup þar í mót. Margir eru þeir at með miklum fagnaði ok virðing munu þessu viðr taka ok í verki varðveita sakir elsku við mik.”

The sister asked then further: “Now then, my Queen, do you wish that we scrape away all that which is written concerning this revelation?” God’s Mother answers: “These things have not been revealed to you so that you may blot out and later forget them, but so that love of me may multiply among those who are my special lovers. These words should be revealed to my friends who are alone present at the delivering of your speech, and these things will be revealed to those who manifest me in their hearts, those who here make particular love to me and take from me special reward in return. Many are they who will receive these words with great joy and esteem and preserve them in their works, for the sake of love towards me.”

The translator omits Elisabeth’s questions about how long Mary lived after the Ascension of Christ, whether or not the apostles were present at the Virgin’s death, and Mary’s age when she conceived the Son of God. These omissions may have been made by the Latin source, but it is no surprise they are missing here since they have no direct bearing on the doctrine of the Assumption, with the exception of the presence of the apostles, but even skeptics of the bodily Assumption presumed the apostles to be present at Mary’s death.

With the translation finished, the Norwegian cleric then returns to his address to Guðmundr by informing him that after this vision the monastics in Schönau began celebrating a new feast of the Assumption with more glory than the first; they did this though secretly in chapel and not openly in the parish churches (“í leyniligri kapellu en opinberri sóknarkirkju”) in accordance with Mary’s request. On the new feast they read Elisabeth’s vision as the lection for Matins (óttusöng), but use a completely different office for the August 15th celebration (“hafa þetta fyrer lectiones í óttusöng en allt annat

officium sem á Máriaumessu fyrri”). Though this is the proof Guðmundr was looking for⁴⁴⁷ his Norwegian clerical friend reminds him that the bodily Assumption is still to be celebrated secretly among Mary’s dearest friends and not to be shared with the laity. But it seems that Guðmundr and his fellow Benedictines in the North of Iceland did not keep this secret, and indeed Bergr informs us in his commentary that

Sem greint letr kom til ins góða Guðmundar byskups tók hann þat með mikla ástsemð, gleðjandiz þar af harla mjök, margar þakkir Guði gjörandi ok hans hreinustu móður at hennar svá háleit vitran af sinni stórmerkisfullri upprisu skyldi þessu landsfólki ok víða annars staðar kunnug verða á hans dögum, honum til huggunar ok öðrum Guðs móður ástvinum.

It is recorded that when this letter came to Guðmundr the Good that he took it with great love; he was exceedingly gladdened, giving many thanks to God and his purest Mother that her (Elisabeth’s) so sublime vision concerning her miraculous Assumption should be made known to the these people and widely in other places during his days, to comfort him and the other friends of God’s mother.

Bergr’s comment again hints at the reason for the inclusion of this digression. Guðmundr is linked with introducing the doctrine of the bodily Assumption in Iceland.

Arngrím’s saga of Guðmundr revises, as I have already mentioned, the one produced by Bergr. Arngrím’s version was written no more than ten years after Bergr’s. He copies the contents of the Norwegian clerk’s letter to Guðmundr exactly from Bergr; where Arngrím’s saga differs is in his introductory and concluding commentary on the letter. Arngrím highlights Guðmundr’s interest in Mary’s Assumption six chapters before he transmits the contents of the letter. In chapter sixty-four Arngrím narrates the daily happenings of Guðmundr during one of his many periods of exile in Norway. The day before Guðmundr is to travel back to Iceland he goes to Mary’s church in Bergen to pray for Mary’s blessing. That night, the flower of all humanity appears to him and he

⁴⁴⁷ Bergr comments that the bishop received this news with much joy and thanked God and his pure mother for this great miracle.

and Mary gladly speak about many different subjects, “sem eigi er manns to greina” / “which is not for men to understand.” Guðmundr informs his closest friends what Mary revealed to him but does not make the knowledge more widely known because he has not found written proof. Before he departs for Iceland he asks a close friend to send him any doctrinal information he can. Angrímr hints here that Guðmundr also received a vision of Mary’s Assumption but was unwilling to make it public before finding authoritative proof, and here his skepticism and holiness are clearly compared to Elisabeth’s.

With this added context it is clear why Angrímr returns to the Norwegian clerk and the bodily Assumption in chapter seventy; he has already established that Guðmundr was hopeful of hearing something that might confirm his own vision. Thus when the Norwegian clerk asks, “Minnist þér, heilagr faðir, hvað vér töluðum af líkamligri upprisu sællar guðs móður?” / “Do you remember, holy father, when we discussed the bodily Assumption of God’s mother?” the audience is aware of the context and the bishop’s active search for confirmation of his own holy vision.

In his commentary, as I have already noted, Angrímr uses Vincent of Beauvais’s *Speculum Historiale* to correct certain inaccuracies in the letter and to provide further witness to the truth of the vision. Angrímr opens his commentary with a bold statement: “Er öllum vel skiljandi mönnum efalaus þessi birtíng, því at sú lögtekin bók, er heitir *Speculum historiale*, setr skýrlinga á hverju ári hún varð” / “that vision is known to all men without doubt, because that authoritative book, which is called *Speculum historiale*, sets clearly in which year it happened.”⁴⁴⁸

Angrímr points out that the Norwegian cleric was mistaken when he had related to Guðmundr that the visions occurred in 1152, during the Papacy of Eugene III, when,

⁴⁴⁸ Text in Jón Sígurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *Biskupa Sögur*, p. 154.

the actual circumstances were that she entered the cloister in 1152 and was there into the Papacy of Anastasius IV, and that the vision of the resurrection occurred in in the days of Pope Adrian IV. To prove his point Arngrímr quotes from Vincent's text:

...en Speculum sem hér stendr í Latínu: 'Anno domini M.c.l.vj in partibus Ssaxoniae sanctimonialis Elisabeth mirabiles visions vidit, inter quas etiam angelus familiaris ei librum, qui dicitur Viarium dei, annuntiavit et diem translationis sacris corporis beatissimae virginis in celum demonstravit.' Sama bók segir í kapitulo, at þann tíma, sem vitranin varð, blómgaðist heilagr Thomas í Englandi, þá vorðinn kanciler Heinreks konungs, á dögum Theobaldi erkibiskups Kanuariensis, þat var fimm arum fyrir fæðing herra Guðmundr.

...and in the Speculum, as here stand in Latin: 'In the year of our Lord, 1156, in the land of Saxony the holy Elisabeth witnessed wonderful visions, among which, furthermore, her familiar angel related to her a book, which is called *The Ways of God*, and demonstrated the day of the translation of the sacred body of the most blessed virgin into heaven.' This same books says in a chapter, that at that time, when the vision occurred, holy Thomas flourished in England, and then Henry became king, in the days of Theobald the Archbishop of Canterbury, that was five years before the rearing of Guðmundr.⁴⁴⁹

The first of Arngrímr's quotations, as is apparent, is interested only in chronology and, of course, in connecting Guðmundr to so many happy and holy events. His second quotation from the *Speculum*, however, is scholastic in nature.

In his conclusion to chapter seventy Arngrímr cites Augustine, in this case the unknown author of the late tenth/early eleventh century *Liber de assumptione*, as further bearing witness to the truth of Mary's bodily Assumption:

Sæll Augustinus magnus sýnist ok framt vitni bera birtíng þessi, þá er hann skýrir evangelium: Intravit Jesus, ok setr svá: Letatur igitur Maria letitia inerrabili anima et corpore, in proprio filio, cum filio proprio, per filium proprium, et cet (Blessed Saint Augustine the Great saw and bears further witness to this revelation, when he interpreted in the Gospels: *Intravit Jesus* (Jesus entered), and explained thus: *Letatur igitur Maria*

⁴⁴⁹ Text in Jón Sígurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *Biskupa Sögur*, pp. 154-155. Arngrímr has combined information from two sections of the *Speculum historiale*, these are Liber XXIX, cap. III for information on the Papacy of Adrian, and Liber VII, cap. LXXX for the Assumption of Mary and Elisabeth's vision.

Letitia inenarrabili anima et corpore, in proprio filio, cum filio proprio, per filium proprium, et cet. (Therefore rejoice, Mary, in indescribable joy in both soul and body, in your own son, with your own son, by the side of your own son, et cet.).⁴⁵⁰

Arngrímr here indicates the Gospel reading for the feast, Luke 10:38-42, but the Pseudo-Augustinian comment here is not from an explication of the Gospels, though these arguments circulated in sermon texts and could have easily been added to the Gospel reading as part of the celebration of the Assumption. It is impossible to know if Arngrímr's had a copy of Pseudo-Augustine's text since no Latin copy or Icelandic translation survives, nor is it mentioned in any of the book lists compiled by the monasteries. Where Arngrímr sourced this quote from is also a peculiar mystery. Of the copies of *Speculum historiale* I have been able to examine, which is a small fraction compared to available witnesses, I have not found this quotation from Augustine, though there is a brief summary of Pseudo-Augustine's arguments supporting Mary's bodily resurrection. This passage is, however, well represented in the *Legenda Aurea*.

Based on available evidence, belief in the bodily Assumption of Mary was not widespread when Guðmundr received Elisabeth's letter in Norse. Arngrímr and Bergr's sagas, as scholars have suggested, were meant for a wider audience in the hopes of securing the sanctity of Guðmundr. His candidacy was not successful, though, and here we see later revisers hoping to succeed in promoting a saint from their own monastic environment. Arngrímr and Bergr highlight the great admiration for Mary among Icelanders, and Guðmundr emerges here as an early adopter of a belief that honored the Lord's dear mother. For Arngrímr, in particular, the translation of Elisabeth's vision of the Assumption and his learned commentary on it confer the prestige of Latin monastic

⁴⁵⁰ Text in *ibid*, p. 155.

culture onto the cult of Guðmundr and the monasteries of Northern Iceland. Elisabeth's vision is used to confirm Guðmundr's own and thus connect him and his fellow Icelanders to current thought that they can then pass along to their parishioners.

By the end of the fourteenth century Elisabeth's vision is transmitted to the nearby convent of Reynistaður and is preserved also in a collection of Marian miracles.⁴⁵¹ In the fifteenth century in the North of Iceland the *Transitus Mariae* is also translated. These texts attest to a growing interest in the doctrine first imported by Guðmundr and then promoted and authorized by two of his biographers.

The redaction of Elisabeth's vision associated with the nuns at Reynistaður survives in AM 764 4to (written, c. 1376-1386),⁴⁵² a chronicle of the world broken up into five ages that have passed and three that are to come.⁴⁵³ Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir has connected the manuscript, based on orthographic and paleographic evidence, with scribes working at the farm Akrar in Skagafjörður and with the Benedictine nuns at Reynistaður.⁴⁵⁴ The references to scripture are brief and are usually paraphrased, and the manuscript displays an interest in history and chronology, often augmenting scriptural

⁴⁵¹ This is in AM 240 fol. IV (c. 1350) and AM 240 fol. IX (1350-1400). The provenance of these manuscripts has not been established, as is the case with many Icelandic manuscripts. This redaction is actually based on the *Speculum historiale* version, as the preface indicates: "Sem lidit var fra holldgan vars herra Jesu Kristz þusung aara .c. fimtigar aara of sex vetre, tediz i nockuru klaustri i Saxlandi systur, er Elizabet het, margar fagrlligar vitranir." Text in Unger, pp. 915- 917. The Marian miracle version is the only one of the four Icelandic redactions to include Elisabeth's question about Mary's age when she conceived Christ. Since the provenance is difficult to establish (the manuscript could be from the south of Iceland), and since it is textually different from the three known to be used in Northern Iceland, I have not discussed it here in detail.

⁴⁵² This redaction has been edited, with a brief introduction, by Ole Widding and Hans Bekker-Nielsen, in "Elisabeth of Schönau's Visions in an Old Icelandic Manuscript, AM 764, 4to." The text is edited on pp. 94-96.

⁴⁵³ See Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, "Writing Universal History in Ultima Thule: The Case of AM 764 4^{to}," p. 185.

⁴⁵⁴ See Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, "Writing Universal History," p. 193.

accounts with secondary source material that fills in historical and chronological detail.⁴⁵⁵

The manuscript incorporates biblical history with other sources such as a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*Breta sögur*) and a history of the Romans based on Sallust's *Jugurtha* and *Catiline* and Lucan's *Pharsalia*.⁴⁵⁶ There are also short notices on saints and selections from the *Vitae patrum*.

Elisabeth's vision of the Assumption is incorporated into the sixth age, the age of Christ and the Antichrist. It opens with the dating of Mary's death and then her bodily Assumption, again highlighting the manuscript's preoccupation with history and chronology. This redaction is ultimately based on the same source used by Bergr and Arngrímur, though the AM 764 4to scribes have removed some of the narrative detail from the vision but have preserved the dialogues between Elisabeth and Mary and the angel. The account cuts off before Elisabeth expresses her doubts about making the vision known and her discussion with Mary about these doubts. The vision seems to serve as an account of a historical moment. There is no commentary on the vision and no other references to the Assumption or theological arguments in support of it. Though the scribes appear to be so interested in accuracy, they attribute the vision to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, though this should not be surprising since as we have seen in English texts the vision was attributed to at least four different women named Elizabeth. What is interesting about the brief notice on the bodily Assumption is that given its manuscript content it is being related to the nuns as a historical and factual event. There is no caution here and there is no need for academic supporting arguments.

⁴⁵⁵ See Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, *Universal History in Fourteenth-Century Iceland*, pp. 169-176, for example.

⁴⁵⁶ See Þorbjörg Helgadóttir, "On the Sources and Composition of *Rómverja saga*," p. 203. On the contents of the manuscript, see Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, *Universal History in Fourteenth-Century Iceland*, pp. 239-241.

We can add two further proofs that the caution that characterized the *Icelandic Homily Book* sermon on the bodily Assumption and the *Maríu saga* was largely absent by the fourteenth-century in Northern Iceland and possibly the rest of the country. The first is the translation of the *Transitus Mariae*; the second is the late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century translation of the life of Mary and Anne from Low German.

The Icelandic *Transitus Mariae* is a translation of the C version of *Transitus A* attributed to Joseph of Arimathaea.⁴⁵⁷ That this is the version attributed to Joseph is confirmed by the inclusion of a lengthy depiction of Thomas's absence and his receiving the girdle of Mary as she ascended to heaven. Some parts of the manuscript may have been assembled at the end of the fourteenth century, but the *Transitus* translation is in a fifteenth-century hand.⁴⁵⁸ The manuscript contains a fragment on the Saints Barlaam and Josaphat (*Barlaams saga ok Jósaphat*), *Maríu saga* with miracles, the *Transitus* (*Framför Maríu*), *Jóns saga baptista*, and the *Vitae Patrum*. The manuscript is associated with Munkaþverá and attests to increased celebration of the bodily Assumption in Northern Iceland. It is somewhat amusing that this manuscript contains a text that promotes caution in celebrating Mary's bodily resurrection, *Maríu saga*, followed by a text that not only confirms Mary's rise in body but also describes how it occurred.

The translation is a close rendering of the Latin, but there are some clues that this text may have been composed for liturgical use as the writer includes Marian devotional phrases in Latin and then calls attention to their being translated into Old Norse-Icelandic

⁴⁵⁷ See Ole Widding and Hans Bekker-Nielsen, who edited the text in "An Old Norse Translation of the *Transitus Mariae*." For a classification and description of the different version of the *Transitus*, see Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels*, pp. 24-100. Clayton mentions the redaction attributed to Joseph of Arimathaea on p. 99, where she points out that it survives only in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts and is mostly based on Eastern sources. Clayton believes it to have been composed after the seventh century.

⁴⁵⁸ See Widding and Hans Bekker-Nielsen, *ibid*, p. 328.

in formulaic terms. When Gabriel comes to Mary to give her the palm, the Icelandic translator records the exchange of greetings between the angel and the Virgin Mother: “Ave maria gracia plena dominus tecum. Huat sua norænazt Heil maria full med nad, drottin er med þier. Hon suarade. Deo gracias. Þat norænazt sua, lof ok dyrd heidr ok æra vegur ok virding se almattigum gudi” / “Hail mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. That in Norse is translated thus, Hail Mary, full with grace, the Lord is with you. She answered. Thanks be to God, which in Norse translation is: love and glory honor you and honest honor and esteem be to you almighty God.”⁴⁵⁹ The Icelandic translator renders the first two lines of Latin literally, but in a nod to the likely purpose of this text, his translation of *Deo gracias* gets carried away and surely even the Latin-illiterate in his congregation would notice two words turning into such a clunky phrase. These liturgical lines are repeated throughout the narrative on Mary’s death and bodily Assumption but are not translated again. The first translation seems to serve as a reminder of what the biblical line is and the listener is responsible for producing it on the next hearing.

The Icelandic translator translates two further Latin passages. The first occurs as Mary dies and the audience is encouraged to imagine the sweet smell and hear this beautiful love-song: “Sicut lilium inter spinas sic amica mea inter filias. Huad sua norænazt. Suo sem lilia jmillum þyrna, suo er min vnnasta millum dætra jersalems” / “As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters” / “That is translated into Norse so: Just as a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters of Jerusalem.”⁴⁶⁰ The translator has returned to a literal rendering of Canticles 2:2. The final translation of scripture offers a hint to the intended audience. After Thomas receives the girdle he is full

⁴⁵⁹ Text in Widding and Bekker-Nielsen, “An Old Norse Translation,” p. 330.

⁴⁶⁰ Text in Widding and Bekker-Nielsen, “An Old Norse Translation,” p. 331.

of joy and says: “Ecce quam bonum et quam jocundum habitare fratres in vnum. Huad sua norænaz: siait bredr huad got er ok skemtiligt ath byggia jeinum huga” / “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brother to dwell in unity. Which is translated into Norse so: See brothers how good and how pleasant it is to dwell in one mind.”⁴⁶¹ The last scriptural text, Psalm 132 (in the Douay Vulgate numbering) suggests that this reading was part of the feast of the Assumption among the monks at MunkaÐverá, though certainly the laity could have participated. The formulaic “Huad sua norænaz” prepares the listeners for their response. The work of Guðmundr and his successors seems to have certainly taken hold by the time this text was translated; there is no commentary on this apocryphal text, which we will remember is in a manuscript with a saga urging readers to avoid such dubious narratives. By the fifteenth century then, at least in the Northern quarter of Iceland, the bodily Assumption was celebrated openly and deemed uncontroversial by the monastic community.

The life of Mary and Anne in the so-called *Reykjahólabók* (Stockholm MS Perg. Fol. 3)⁴⁶² which was written just a few decades before the Reformation, might lead us to believe that the bodily Assumption was no longer a controversy anywhere in Iceland. It is a translation from now lost Low German sources; it is possibly the work of the wealthy layman Björn Þorleifsson, whose family was among the wealthiest and most powerful in the West Fjords.⁴⁶³ The legendary’s Low German source relied heavily on the *Legenda Aurea*, and its influence is clear also in the Icelandic translation of the legends. The last

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, p. 332.

⁴⁶² This legendary is edited in two volumes in Agnete Loth, *Reykjahólabók: Islandske Helgenlegender*.

⁴⁶³ See Marianne Kalinke, *The Book of Reykjahólar: The Last of the Great Medieval Legendaries*, p. 27. He was certainly the scribe, and there is enough evidence, “however circumstantial,” that he was also the translator (p. 78).

See also the conclusion to Marianne Kalinke, “Maríu saga og Önnu.”

entry is a saga on Anne, Mary, and Emmerencia; the last folios of the saga address the bodily Assumption of Mary following the narrative of the *Legenda Aurea* closely. The apostles are snatched up into the sky from their preaching and are present at Mary's death, with the exception of Thomas of course.

There is a gap in the manuscript where we would have seen the bodily resurrection of Mary, but I would agree with Ole Widding and Hans Bekker-Nielsen that the translator (Björn Þorleifsson) "has no hesitation in stating that Mary was taken body and soul into Heaven."⁴⁶⁴ Björn does include the fact that Mary gives her girdle to the late arriving Thomas, and as I have mentioned before, this image was popular in both drama and art. Björn does not engage in any commentary of his own, though he does include that "Jerome" had preached (predikade) on the feast of the Assumption and said he did not know "hvortt sem hvn være vpp hafen med avnd og likama eda eigi" / "whether she was assumed in soul and body or not." Here is another reference to Radbertus, whose arguments urging caution regarding the bodily Assumption remained in the *Legenda Aurea* despite widespread belief in the doctrine in the fifteenth century. Björn, or his lost Low German source, does not transmit the arguments of Pseudo-Augustine or Elisabeth concerning the Assumption and instead uses a miracle as proof of Mary's dual resurrection. Björn rarely includes theological commentary, which has led Marianne Kalinke to conclude that this legendary, "while certainly read, had no demonstrable impact on either the religious or literary life of Iceland."⁴⁶⁵ When Björn does concentrate on doctrine, there are occasional discrepancies.⁴⁶⁶ This might be the

⁴⁶⁴ See Widding and Bekker-Nielsen, "An Old Norse Translation of the *Transitus Mariae*," p. 327.

⁴⁶⁵ See Kalinke, *The Book of Reykjahólar*, p. vi.

⁴⁶⁶ For example his presentation of the Immaculate Conception. See Kalinke, "'Maríu saga og Önnu,'" pp. 75-77 and 88-89.

result of Björn Þorleifsson's interests as a compiler. He was a collector of a variety of literature, and his legendary is full of apocryphal narratives and sagas that are comparable to German prose romances.⁴⁶⁷

I pointed out in the previous chapter that Paschasius Radbertus's letter dominated Icelandic texts about Mary's Assumption. Radbertus's cautious optimism remained the norm in clerical circles in Iceland, and with no evidence to the contrary, we must assume for the laity also. When the Icelandic clerics did decide to begin promoting belief in Mary's dual ascent, they did not turn to the apocryphal narratives so popular in England or to the ready-made encyclopedia on the subject in the *Legenda Aurea*, which had also been widely used in England. The Benedictines of Northern Iceland instead turned to a different letter, one that overturned the sentiments of Pseudo-Jerome. The vision of Elisabeth of Schönau is the main authority in support of the bodily Assumption in Iceland, and the only one that survives in more than one copy. This source was rarer, as I have pointed out, in Middle English sources. This fact is odd given that the visionary experience was more popular in England than in Iceland and that the Latin text of the vision circulated widely in England and was the basis for an Anglo-Norman poem on the Assumption. I would suggest that for the Icelanders Elisabeth's vision was adopted widely because it was the most current proof when they began looking for source material that supported the bodily Assumption and that because Elisabeth's vision was a historical event, it was appealing as a source because of their own interest in chronology and history.

Arngrímur seems to have been worried about the acceptance of the nun's experience and thus further authenticated this new doctrinal information with

⁴⁶⁷ See Kalinke, *The Book of Reykjahólar*, p. viii.

commentary from Vincent of Beauvais and who he believed was Augustine. Though Elisabeth and Ekbert had intended her vision to be welcomed news only among Latin monastics who believed that Mary was in heaven in both body and soul, the reach of her vision was much wider. When it reached Northern Iceland it became the main proof the monks had been looking for and authorized them to celebrate the bodily Assumption with no hesitation. They shared this information not only among themselves but also among Latin-illiterate clerics and the laity by making the vision available in the vernacular. This is rare among contemporary translators, as translations of Elisabeth's vision only survive in French, Anglo-Norman, and Icelandic.⁴⁶⁸ The translation of Elisabeth's letter and the scholastic efforts of Guðmundr, Bergr, Arngrímr, and the other Benedictines of Northern Iceland led the way in promoting the doctrine of the bodily Assumption and allowed later believers and writers to celebrate it openly without controversy.

⁴⁶⁸ See Barbara Newman's preface, p. xi, to Anne L. Clark's translation of *The Complete Works*.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The bodily Assumption was a sensitive and dangerous aspect of Marian doctrine. There was much room for outlandish claims and misunderstandings. But English and Old Norse-Icelandic translators reveal themselves to have been up to the task of negotiating this potentially dangerous idea and presenting it to an audience within and outside the church, despite some level of anxiety in the minds of translators from both cultures. Those monastics and lay people who wrote of Mary's bodily rise to heaven did so without the official sanction of the Church, but they did not adopt the belief simply on the hope that the apocryphal legends preserved some truth of her demise and rise to heaven. Instead they defended the doctrine with the interpretation of scripture, with theology, and with reason and deep reflection, as the examples of Mirk's *Festial* and the writing of the Benedictines of Northern Iceland show.

This study began with a desire to challenge and complicate common misconceptions which view vernacular translations of Marian texts as exhibiting the popular concerns and fervent devotionism of a lesser educated clergy and laity and as clearly distinct from the academic discourse, or 'High Mariology' of monastic culture. An examination of the products of the translators reveals that Middle English and Old Norse-Icelandic thinking on the Assumption of Mary reflected contemporary Latin clerical thinking and followed similar developmental paths. What is significant about this discovery is that translators determined that vernacular audiences needed to be made aware of the reasons justifying Mary's dual Assumption, not just the narrative details of her final days.

Despite different social, political, and religious circumstances, English and Icelandic translators shared similar motivations and goals in translating the doctrine of the bodily Assumption into the vernacular because it provided them with the opportunity to impart important aspects of doctrine on a day when people were required to be in church and celebrate this most holy of Marian feasts. It is clear from the examples given in this study that both English and Icelandic translators felt confident in the appropriateness of their native languages to comment on the bodily Assumption even though it remained a contested aspect of Catholic doctrine through the Middle Ages and until 1950.

It is impossible to know what Icelandic monks may have written about the Assumption in Latin. The only material we have is the liturgy, which does not reveal whether or not the Icelandic church celebrated the Assumption only in soul or in body as well. The denial or promotion of a bodily Assumption in Iceland appears to have been a largely monastic concern, as it had been in Anglo-Saxon England. Fortunately we do know what English authors were saying in Latin about Mary's death, and this is not dissimilar to what vernacular writers are arguing. Based on the available evidence, it is difficult to uphold the notion that, at least in terms of this particular doctrine, vernacular authors took liberties in attributing special powers to Mary. The apocryphal material was first circulated in Latin among monastics. It does find its way into English and Icelandic, but so do the reasoned arguments of scholastic theologians. Both English and Icelandic commentators wholeheartedly adopted the arguments of the twelfth and thirteenth century that it would not be appropriate for the body that carried, gave flesh and blood, fed, and cried for Christ to become subject to decay, and these arguments would be

repeated in the official confirmation of the doctrine in 1950. English authors often stressed the Incarnation's significance for Mary's bodily Assumption more than Icelandic authors, who preferred to contemplate what the bodily Assumption signified for Mary's role in the Last Judgment and more generally for what this doctrine had to say regarding death. These interests reflect the differences in devotional practice more generally, as the first chapter indicated.

There is little skepticism towards a bodily Assumption to be found in England, in any of its languages (Latin, Anglo-Norman, and English) after Ælfric, but doubts persist in Iceland at least until the thirteenth century, which could be the result of the source material used by the earliest Icelandic authors. English authors rely less on citing authority and more on apocryphal narratives, probably because the belief was adopted much more quickly than in Iceland. Though there is an absence of authority in some English texts, this does not mean that the authors find narrative detail sufficient in itself. In Iceland clerics are more interested in attaching a particular name to the doctrine, and this name became for them, in the thirteenth and fourteenth century, Elisabeth of Schönau. There are four redactions of Elisabeth's vision in medieval Icelandic translation. The only other main source is Pseudo-Jerome's *Cogitis me*, which is partially translated and incorporated into Icelandic sermons and the saga of Mary. Though there is a brief reference to the arguments of Pseudo-Augustine in Iceland, there is no evidence that this text existed there and it is more likely that Arngrímr Brandsson found a reference to the reasoning of the *Liber de assumptione* in Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum historiale*.

English authors of the fourteenth and fifteenth century depend heavily on the *Legenda Aurea*, which would appear to be entirely absent in Icelandic accounts of the Assumption. There are no Middle English translations of Elisabeth's vision, though, which might strike us as odd given that there were Latin manuscripts of Elisabeth's works available in England by the end of the twelfth century and English Cistercians seem to have played a prominent role in the dissemination of Elisabeth's works.

The authorities English and Icelandic translators rely on reveal much about the priorities and devotional life in these contemporary cultures. Because Icelandic writers were, above all else, interested in situating doctrine within a historical context, Elisabeth of Schönau's vision became the preferred authority in confirming the event because it placed the Assumption in Christian history and itself could be associated within a specific time and place. Because English writers valued a devout imagination stirred by an understanding of doctrine and the application of reason, the apocrypha and arguments of Pseudo-Augustine enjoyed supremacy in English Assumption texts because this allowed them to combine the fantasizing of Mary's last days and rise to heaven with the reasoned logic of a scholastic argument.

After Ælfric, Pseudo-Jerome is only referenced in academic settings as a way of arriving at a reasoned decision. Few Middle English authors, or Latin writers for that matter, expressed sympathy to the doubts found in *Cogitis me*. The logic of Augustine's *Liber de assumptione* is the most commonly cited text in English as proof of the Assumption. For both cultures, though, discussion of the Assumption was an integral part of the understanding of Christian doctrine as a whole because it had implications for both the mystery of the Incarnation and the atonement of the flesh, but also for what believers

could expect at death and at the Last Judgment. In England this message was disseminated from monastics to parish priests and then to the laity, especially after the demands of the Fourth Lateran Council, the Lambeth Constitutions of Archbishop Pecham, and the Injunctions of Archbishop Thoresby. Though the Icelandic church had monks present at the Fourth Lateran Council and did adopt its policies towards basic instruction, the realities of the ecclesiastical system in Iceland made realizing this ideal difficult. It is thus hard to determine how much the laity would have known about Mary's Assumption. Those aristocratic laymen and chieftains who donated property to the church were surely familiar with the idea, but how far it spread from there is unknown.

While it is possible to suggest that support of the bodily Assumption in Iceland was regional and associated with a particular order (that is in the northern district among the monastic houses associated with the See of Hólar and the Benedictine order), the same cannot be said for devotional practice in England. It is difficult to attach the belief in the bodily Assumption to a particular place in England, though it is possible to observe areas particularly dedicated to the cult of Mary, such as East Anglia. This discrepancy is indicative of religious life in the two countries. Promotion of the bodily Assumption in Iceland seems to have begun as a way to promote the sanctity of Guðmundr Arason. It was probably not lost on the monks of Northern Iceland, who often had connections to English and Norwegian ecclesiastical networks, that many faithful in England celebrated the bodily Assumption. Interest in the doctrine of the Assumption of England certainly seems more widespread and the result of an emphasis on Christian education in the vernacular.

Finally, by way of concluding this study, I would like to return to some of the questions I began with regarding the approach to translation and the status of the vernacular in these two contemporary cultures. Anxiety is present in the translations produced in both languages, but the causes of this anxiety are different. English translators appear to have felt the impact of the long displacement of their mother tongue in favor of Latin and French. Another possibility is the suspicion of English books in the later Middle Ages, though this suspicion has probably been overestimated. Thus English translators often preface their Marian texts with the topoi of humility and modesty and a concern over the ability of English as a medium. Yet these prefaces also all share the goal of instructing the laity in the language common to the clergy and larger body of faithful. There is then a belief in the absolute necessity of translating the basics of doctrine for vernacular audiences because of the lack of Latin learning, as we see in Mirk's prefaces and in *The Lay Folk Catechism*.

This belief in the necessity of translation is even more frankly understood in Iceland. Old Norse-Icelandic translators do not seem to doubt their language's ability to render Latin, French, English, or any other language and the usefulness of this endeavor does not seem to be questioned. They share an awareness of the scarcity of Latin learning, though this is not lamented as deeply by Icelanders as it is by English translators. Anxiety over translation in Iceland seems to be based on a desire for accuracy and authority, which is less common in English writing about the bodily Assumption. English texts are often composite accounts or paraphrases and excise and add material at will. While Old Norse-Icelandic texts do paraphrase and interpret, dialogue is often

translated with accuracy, as it is in the case of Elisabeth's vision, and an authoritative name, if available, is regularly attached to interpretation.

If, as I noted in the first chapter, translation is not merely the act of a replacement text but an act of cultural transmission, then one final question is what the translation of the doctrine of the bodily Assumption reveals about medieval English and Icelandic culture. English Assumption texts reveal a deep interest in situating Mary's death and rise to heaven with a Christological and Incarnational framework and thereby revealing the success of the vernacular program of education. Old Norse-Icelandic translation of the doctrine of the Assumption is connected to an overall interest in death and life after that event and the belief seems to have first been supported for a self-interested reason, the promotion of Guðmundr Arason as a saint.

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APPENDIX A

MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE MAJOR OLD NORSE-ICELANDIC

ASSUMPTION TEXTS

THE OLD NORSE-ICELANDIC HOMILY ON THE ASSUMPTION⁴⁶⁹

The holy maiden, Mary, the mother of our Lord, was of the best lineage. She was descended from Abraham and also the kin of King David. Her closest relatives were righteous and received great virtue from God, and looked on worldly luck from Earth.

And when Mary understood the distinction between good and bad, then she directed her love towards God so that she was always in God's service. She was either at prayer or reading over the books of the prophets or was performing some service to God. She is called the first of women who was called by God to hold chastity; she did not take any of that from other judgments or teachings, rather she imitated God's angels.

Good men may have that chastity which Mary had before she bore Christ. Though her chastity is more glorious than others' and thus should her sight be more honored as the best example and should afterwards be imitated. After she bore our Lord, then was all her life holier than men may after imitate or speak about. And because of this she took more on her hands to serve God than was ordered or determined, and God caused her to perform more good works than other holy men. All those good works, those with other men perform to the followers of God, Mary did the same for the Lord himself. Other men give food to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty; Mary reared our Lord from her own breast and from her labor. Other men close those who are cold; Mary clothed God's son in his flesh with swaddling clothes. Other men visit those who are in dungeons or give mercy to those who are condemned from the tyranny of evil men; Mary fled under the tyranny of Herod with our Lord to Egypt. While our Lord was on this Earth

⁴⁶⁹ Translation based on text edited by Theodor Wisén, *Homilíu-bók: Isländska Homilíer Eftir Handskrift Från Tolfte árhundradet*, pp. 4-10, and Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen, *The Icelandic Homily Book : Perg. 15 4to in the Royal Library, Stockholm*, ff. 2r-5r.

Mary followed him and took from him all her wisdom and kindness, that which man may not take or know, and thus became far greater than all other holy men.

Even though God gave her these things, she valued herself, nevertheless, little and was always humble though God gave her more glory.

Those men who are highly esteemed by God, who endured suffering from wicked men for his sake, are still not as glorious as Mary is. Some holy men endured suffering on their body, but Mary was tormented in her soul when she saw with her eyes the crucifixion of our Lord. And from that sign we may guess how painful that sight must have been for her to see her own son crucified, the one she had gotten from the Holy Spirit. She knew that he had complete godliness in that body, which he took from her flesh. Other men were killed nearby, though little harm was done to those children, those who because of sins gotten on themselves have little of good virtues. Mary must grant them more love and shows it her holiness as her son was holier than others. We may also see how much she must have wished to take all of that suffering on her own body, rather than to see her son tortured, because she loved him much more than she loved herself. Thus is her suffering greater and holier than other men, since her soul endured more pain in the death of the Lord than any man may know on his body.

After the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord, then she followed the apostles of God. Apostle John, her sister's son, watched over her condition most of all, as the Lord had commanded him when he was hanging on the Cross, that he must protect her as he would his own mother. While she was on this Earth she was in one of these places: either where Christ was born or crucified, or where he rose up to heaven or somewhere in between those places, so that our Lord's miracles were never forgotten to her. And that is not said, that she performed miracles in her life, because her whole life was a miracle to others, because wicked men receive miracles

at times just as good. And this was not the case in Mary's life, that the wicked have also, but many holy ones receive from the good

But yet one of her miracles is holier than all other miracles, that is that she bore our Lord, that is a miracle to all and gives complete mercy to holy men. God has given us mercy in the arrival of his son; we have all of that allotted to us because she took it upon herself to bear that one who releases us from the torments of hell through his sacrifice. Or what about those other men equal to her, those who so much more companionship with the divinity himself than other men. They get most who saw the Lord or heard his words or were in his company and had meals with him or slept near him. But Mary deserves even more because she had him in her womb for nine months and he received from her flesh all his bodily nature.

Now just as all things happened in holy judgment, they who were nearest our Lord, near that manger in which he rested, where was born, or clothed or many other things, may from such signs see how holy that maiden is, who all of her life had served God and was like God's angels in her behavior rather than like men, before she bore our Lord. She enjoyed so much togetherness (literally wedded life) with God that she had him enclosed in her body. And when we are worldly in our behavior, then we may not expect to come from it near to heavenly things, unless we take example from earthly things so that we may distinguish it from the spiritual. And that example we should take is this: When the sun shines into glass in the clear sky, then glass gives light and heat from the sun, that beam which shines through glass has light and heat from the sun and the glass keeps its ship. The sun signifies godliness, and the glass holy Mary, the sunbeam our Lord Jesus Christ. When the sun shines in the glass it is just as bright as before, the glass does not take away any of that light. So also is Godhood healthy and unscathed in all the virtues from heaven, though he took the form of man on himself here on earth. And the glass is

clear and transparent, so that through it may be seen as not is before both sun and the other. Likewise may we also see heavenly life in the behavior of Mary, who always has such pure thought for God, so that no bodily pleasure is in her flesh. She never knew pleasure, but is better than linen which is cut and split apart.

Thus she was fit to get a son from the holy spirit because she was more chaste in all things than others as glass is clearer and more transparent than other materials. The Lord has to take his body from that maiden, and so was chastity come into his form as that color and beam shines through. Though gold and silver are in the sunshine, it does not show through that beam, because that is not transparent. Likewise many women have honorable behavior as gold and silver are treasure, but they did not bear the Lord, because they did not have chastity as did Saint Mary, likewise those materials do not shine through the beam, which is not transparent, though its aspect is beautiful and good to experience. In good glass are both the hue of gold and silver and all the most beautiful colors. So also was in the conduct of Mary all the most honorable virtues, so that she had not only chastity but also all that kindness, which we know as an example, and must be for each more charity than for others as all the colors are brighter when the sun shines through the glass than in every place.

That glass, which alone is so white, is a miracle of God's angels, because it is purest and clearest above all, just as the angels are so holy and pure; they have no defilement in their nature in any way. If the sun shines through white glass, then is the beam through that likeness not beamed to them, because that glass has one color and is not in that image. So also God's angels imitate God's brightness in their natures. But nevertheless they cannot take manhood on their bodies, because they do not have bodies, just so is not the image in the beam, which is not from the glass. Thus Mary had chastity just like the angels and also bodily honor in addition. Thus she

was a fit mother for God, because and had purity like God's angels and human nature, so that the divine could take from her flesh humanity, just as he had created it in the beginning, that man should be gotten from man.

And the beam shines through glass and has both the brightness of the sunshine and the form of the glass. Likewise our Lord, Jesus Christ, has both divinity from God and manhood from Mary. And Mary maintains all his kindness with humility, so that she is never injured by sensual pleasure, and she requested to have his humility as the greatest token, when God gave her such much glory. And while she was on this Earth, then she separated herself little from most and was always silent and gentle and had in her thoughts God's glory and miracles, and did that alone in shyness, which reconciles need. And at her death all the apostles were present, since she died before they were spread out through the lands.

I find it often in the writings of holy men that God's angels appear at their deaths with light, or that they, who are nearby, recognize sweet smells or hear beautiful songs. And if the Lord Jesus Christ gives such glory so often in the deaths of his servants, then may we consider the likelihood of how much glory he must show in the death of his mother, who is the Queen (*omnium sanctorum*) of all saints.

Or else if he did not do this then he would not be following his own law, when he commanded everyone, that they honor their father and mother. Because of this we should believe that the Lord Jesus Christ went to meet his mother's soul with all the glory of heaven and the good scents, of was seen in her death and heard all that glory, which people are able to see or hear.

And since her body is lost, many think that she must have been assumed both in soul and body. Her body was buried in that valley which is called the valley of Josaphat. A glorious

church was afterward built there in her honor. And now that grave is found empty. Her soul was assumed up to heaven over all the angels, and all the angels bowed to her as did every holy person.

Father Jerome says in a letter that she died and was buried and says that he does not know whether her body was resurrected a short time after her death or if God concealed her body, so that those able to see it could not.

The festival of the Assumption of God's Mother gives great joy to the angels in heaven and people on Earth. If the Lord called for there to be joy among the angels in heaven over one person, to be for everyone the repentance of their sins, then we can see the likelihood of how great the joy must be among them, who come to their Lord and their Lord's mother. On earth should all rejoice in her glory, because she wishes to help all of them, who honor her, and she can help all of those who she wishes to. And the ones who honor righteously God's Mother, must model his life after her conduct, so that he values her son in all his charity and places his love to counteract wrong pleasures.

Now we speak somewhat about the holiness of Mary so that you may understand how much holier she is than other holy persons. And since we believe that she is holy than all others, we should also believe that she is more compassionate and more deserving of prayers, because she has all of her goodness from God. They are considered best who are most pleasing to him.

And thus we should call on her for intercession first before all other holy people and be unafraid of that, that she will not have better vows for us than others since we need her more. Thus this happens, that she does not seem to be better for vows than other holy people against sickness or other bodily harms, even though that proves to be, then is known in each vow with her, that she most give to us in one of two ways: she grants both or else others of our needs. And

what comes from more love with us than to give us better than what we know to ask for? We ask often that these things turn from us, which are afterwards to be without, and we do not wish to ask this, which course we have most need to get. Thus we should raise up our prayers, so that God gives us that wisdom, so that we may understand how much more valued spiritual things are valued than bodily and that it is better to receive heavenly wisdom than earthly wealth and also that there is more need of holy love with God and humanity than glory among mankind.

So also the Lord shows this in himself, that he was on this earth just as wicked men and was sheltered by his mother and foster father and won on that long day, when they requested him, or then to the others, and he was not requested to come to this earth to be allowed to serve himself, but rather to serve others. Now each of them, who wished to become his followers, they took first all portions and abandoned all things, those who are self-indulgent on this earth, and afterwards to were eager to learn God's law and wise teachings with their unwise people and sought to perform only good works, when he teachers others with words. And so it may happen when he won the highest reward from God, that it is more worthy than bodily miracles, because each one who is good and valued by God has complete sufficiency.

The Lord himself bore witness to that Gospel, when he spoke before mankind, and a certain woman heard his speech: "Blessed is that womb which bore you and that breast, which you desired." And he answered: "How blessed they are afterward, when they hear God's words and keep them afterward." These words must also have seemed to turn as others had heard God's word and guarded in sacred Mary, who bore the Lord and had him on her breast. And if this law is understood, then is that the special speech of Saint Mary. And shall then each understand her merit and the reward for that merit, and how it is for each of those who equally have the grace to

hear God's words, there where Gabriel carried to her ears the holiest message; and they hear those words, which the host said, and also that which the three kings of the East said.

We must try this now, good brothers, to imitate the Saint Mary in good behavior and holy eagerness to learn, in humility, in love with God and humankind, and in moderation in all things, those which she performed. And each of those who live this way will win her intercession with our Lord and support against all the temptations of the fiend in this earth and her adoration after death in heavenly glory with God and the holy host.

And our Lord himself must be determined with us, if he sees our goodness, and strengthens us in all that good, so that for each of us our benevolence must be better concluded when we have raised up and grown our merit with God day by day, while we are on this earth, so that in the next life he gives us more glory than we know to ask for. That is the same Jesus Christ, with which the Father and Holy Spirit live and rule *per Omnia secula seculorum*.

MARÍU SAGA⁴⁷⁰

While Queen Mary lived on this Earth she was in one of these places, either where Christ was born or where he was crucified or where he rose up to heaven, or somewhere in between, so that the wonders of our lord would never be forgotten to her. In this we may see the heat of the love they shared when we see how delightful that place seemed to her, the one where Jesus Christ had come, there had been something of a miracle in his arrival. Most men say that Mary had lived nine years after the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ; that was just a few years before she was nearly sixty. The Lord Jesus Christ himself came and invited here to eternal joy in the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

On that day which the glorious Queen of heaven and earth, the holy Mother Mary, died, all of the apostles of God were present there. Wise clerics say this, that each of those who was before placed in preaching was lifted up with the assistance of the angels and set down there, where the blessed Mary died. In that form an angel of God came to the prophet Habakkuk when he was preparing food for his laborers. God's angel was sent from God and took Habakkuk up and bore him in the sky on a multiple day journey in a short space of time. He then set him down in an animal pit in Babylon the great, where the prophet Daniel was. And the angel urged Habakkuk to give Daniel that food, which he had earlier intended for his laborers, as a day-meal. When Daniel was sated, the angel took Habakkuk back up and set him down in Judea. Some wise men say that God had revealed that before to his apostles, that they should all, on that day when the blessed and glorious mother Mary died, be brought into that valley called Josaphat. Their journey has come about according to the nature of mankind. There are many accounts, as

⁴⁷⁰ Translation based on text edited in C.R. Unger, *Maríu saga: Legender om Jomfru Maria og Hendes Jartegn*, pp. 49-62. This is based on Holm 11 4to. I have also consulted Wilhelm Heizmann's dissertation edition and Ásdís Egilsdóttir, et al.'s modern Icelandic edition in *Mariukver: sögur og kvæði af heilagri guðsmóður frá fyrri tíð*. My translation begins at line 14 of Unger's text.

the holy priest Jerome says, concerning this event. And many think that their journey had been come about more swiftly than the miracle had been in memory.

It is said of all of those men that they were present there where the blessed Mary died because she died before they had spread out across the lands. That was twelve years after the crucifixion of our Lord. Every twelve months they met amongst each other when they came to Jerusalem. It is nevertheless not mentioned that they spread out through these lands while they had these meetings. In a later meeting they decided to cast lots and departed to distant lands, and then they wrote their *Creed*, so that they could use it to teach all the one way to believe in God. These true words would not afterward be attacked or taken away. They decided, when they were summoned, it should not be altered that which is now taken up in the ecumenical councils and the priesthood, and that all should obey it. Then it was revealed to each of those men how to find each land or kingdom. And three years before the glorious Queen Mary had died in the presence of all of the apostles of God. Apostle James, the brother of John, was called from Earth before the blessed Mary died, and he came with the almighty Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ to meet the soul of the blessed Mother of God Mary and his own aunt.

I find it often in the writings of holy men that God's angels come and appear in their deaths with great sweetness of smell and light. Those who stand near recognize the heavenly and sweet smell or hear beautiful song, or see bright light. If the Lord Jesus Christ gives often great glory in death to his thralls and servants, then we must consider the likelihood from this, of how much glory he must give in death to his mother, who is the Queen of all holy men, or else he would not be heeding his own law, the one which he set, because he commanded each man to honor his father and mother. From this we must believe that the one who comes to follow the law and not to disregard it, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, went to meet the soul of his mother with all

the glory of heaven and unspeakable sweetness. And was by those men, who were present at the death of God's mother, in the accounts of some of those men who were nearby, which all men believe, seen and heard recognized all that glory of heavenly joy, which men may bear or stand to see or hear bodily. Her soul was assumed over all the angels, who bowed down to her along with all the holy men in heaven. The body of blessed Mary was buried in that valley which is called Josaphat. There was afterwards a glorious church built there in her honor. But now here grave is found empty.

That place, where the holy maiden Mary died, is called, as was before said, the valley of Josaphat. It lies in between two mountains, one is called the Mount of Olives and the other is called Mount Sion. On one side of Mt. Sion stands Jerusalem, right on the mountain-side. King David had built a proper tower there in the walled city, one that was higher than all the other towers in the city. The tower took the name of that mountain on which the city stood, the one called Sion. Because of this, Jerusalem is often called Sion in books. From the Mt. of Olives the Lord Jesus rose up to heaven.

It is said in holy writings that at the Last Judgment, when the Lord shall judge all of mankind, the Lord will be in the sky over the valley of Josaphat. Enclosed in his left hand will be the earth, and in his right heaven. And neither side will skew or incline to the other, because he is so even-tempered in thoughts to support equally heaven and earth, east and west, north and south. Wherever he supports, he does not allow any sliding. And when the soul has gone from the body into the afterlife, the same one will have what he bore here on earth. The body of good men will take will take fourfold magnificence because each man is shaped from four primal elements, that is fire, air, water, and earth. And these same elements are brought together from God to form all bodily things, but the soul is not shaped from these elements. The one whose

body does service to God on this earth then takes this reward on Judgment Day, He will become as nimble and as quick as the mind of man, as penetrable and penetrating, so that he carries through all that which he wishes as the angels, even though he had been as strong as a mountain before. Then he passes through and is pressed in no place nor needs to increase its place, even though he is inside. He shall be seven times brighter than the sun. He lives on without sickness and completely without pain, he is never made infirm nor decays; he does not mourn nor fear because he has everything he asks for. He sees with his eyes all the good things and unspeakable glory of the Lord, and he is placed above all these things, because he is invited into the joy of his Lord, and he will live in eternity in the power and joy of almighty God without end. Each may believe this, that one whose body, which now may not embrace himself in the sky from earth, so that he does not fall after to it, must be so passable, he will become as the mind and will be able to go into the sky as the earth, and take all of these kinds and natures, as was before said, unless the Lord Jesus Christ, who both is God and man, had that all clearly in his judgment while he dwelled here.

Through his crucifixion He revealed our fleeting bodies which we should have after the resurrection, and when he went with dry feet onto the sea. He gave that also to the apostle Peter so that his body went into water as on land. While he believed without doubt that he must listen, when he looked down he became afraid of the threats of the sea, but he was gladdened more in that joy when he rejoiced in the sight of the Lord. This body was gotten from human infirmity. That one body, which was gotten from the maiden Mary without sin needs no place, because it was born from her un-violated maidenhood, as was before said. He revealed to us, what the nature of our bodies should be after the resurrection, for those who live in joy with God. But it does not come to them unless he is before cleansed from all sin.

After the resurrection the Lord came himself to his apostles behind closed doors and revealed to them that same body, which was before fast on the cross, and asked Thomas the apostle to place his hand in the wound where the nails had been driven through, and also in the side-wound. When that was grasped Thomas came to Dionysius and his bride behind locked doors and closed that house which they dwelled in.

And that is said, that the body of man will be brighter than the sun, but it is then seven times brighter than now. The Lord revealed that on the mountain, when he commanded that the apostles Peter, John, and James should go up on the mountain with him away from other men. And when they came up to Tabor, then the Lord Jesus Christ showed them his body as bright as the sun, and his clothes as white as snow; that sight was to them so beautiful, which good men's bodies should have after the Last Judgment. It is certain that all orthodox men are given eternal life and endless joy with almighty God, according to what all good and righteous men are promised on Judgment Day. That is the same life that the Lord revealed after the resurrection, and said that good men should have it in the future.

Now these are the four love-gifts given to the bodies of good men in spiritual life. But the soul takes the threefold magnificence from God, because it is with three elements shaped; it is given reason, desire, and passion. All men together are shaped after the form of the holy trinity and in the image of God. But what does that mean to say that man bears the image of God, when God is seen in all places, and since the divine nature may not be intended for him in the limbs? What, then, should his image be called, which the man bears? These gifts are likened to the image of God, and are natural gifts, and are common to good men and the wicked. These gifts are virtue, intelligence, and beauty. All of that a good man may have, so that it does not diminish his merit before God. It goes the same with the wicked man, so that it does not increase his merit

before God. Now that is called the image of God, because God is so strong, that he does not become deficient in strength; he is almighty; he is called wisdom itself, beauty and fairness and all else, and so superior above all things, that no one may equal him or intend to have what he does. And is the man in that way in the image of God, so that none is completely denied from these gifts of the bodily nature.

And how should we distinguish God's image and God's form? The form of God is called his spiritual gift, that which none may have except good men; it is not common to wicked men. It provides assistance against the temptation of the fiend, patience against adversaries, righteousness in all things, moderation and temperance against all. As the holy writings say, no work is holy unless it follows from moderation. Now man carries the form of God, the one he was shaped for, if he had spiritual virtues. But the man loses this form if he offends God and lives in the cardinal sins. But with true repentance he will be redeemed and taken up. But one may not lose the image of God, because that is common to good and wicked men. But that soul which bears the form of God on it, so that it has virtues in the uppermost place of its dwelling, then takes the glory and security of God's affection. It may never transgress because of the warmth of love which it possesses with God. Then it is given all of that which it may bear from its merit, and is under it, so that it knows, and likewise wishes others to be like it, so will teach others. It was revealed when the Lord showed Peter, James, and John his body bright as the sun on Tabor, that Moses and Elijah came along that way; Peter recognized them both, even though he had never seen either before; the Lord gave the skill of the power of recognition to Peter, as good men should have in eternal joy. And here is released from many men this question, whether he should recognize his dear friends in the next life. In the third division of endless joy, the soul does not rejoice among another's blessing other than its own.

In the nature of the sun God has revealed a hint to these seven gifts which man takes in his resurrection. The sun has seven elements. In its beam it shines through like glass, there where it is whole, and needs no place. The sun is bright in its nature. In the twinkling of an eye it illuminates all the earth, since it is so swift. It never wanes or grows, and it indicates that it is never failing in life and steadfast after Judgment Day. The sun heats and floods all the world, and signifies in its warmth the eternal warmth of love, that which good men have with God and other on Earth. The sun illuminates all the Earth, and in its light signifies that for each man is equally clear another's desire for eternal joy as his own. The sun delights and gladdens all of those who dwell on Earth; from it the heavenly bodies, the world, the sky, and the earth take their light. From its heat run up and grow trees and grass with their moisture, when God desires to temper the heat of the sun, so that there is not excessive heat, because the nature of earth cannot be fertilized unless heat and moisture unite together. The nature of the sun gladdens the path and causes joy for the whole world. And this signifies the joy of the world, when the soul rejoices in the place of another in the heavenly kingdom and is equally glad from another's happiness and blessedness as much as in its own.

So it is said also, that good men glide into the sky, where God sits and judges; this indicates that all those who come to God's right hand on the resurrection day of all humanity, love heavenly things more than earthly. And those who are in God's left hand are down on earth and may not come into the sky, because they love earthly things rather than the security of heaven.

And because the blessed Queen Mary's grave is empty and her body is not found, that caused men to think, that she had risen from death, and now sits on the high throne with her son over all the angels with soul and body. In a letter father Jerome says that she died and was buried

and that he does not know whether her body was assumed a little while after her death or whether her body was hidden somewhere where men could neither see it or touch it.

Solomon the wise spoke of the Assumption of blessed Mary and the journey to her by the Lord and his heavenly host. He gave this speech to his intimate friends, who were accustomed to have this as his known men, those who came for that honor and for the chief gifts given and conveyed to them by their chieftain. His kinsmen did not receive those same gifts, and his acquaintances saw him honored before all men, then they asked, as they did not recognize that man, who is that? After this speech in praise of God's mother Mary and holy Christianity Solomon said in this song: "*Que est ista que ascendit sicut aurora consurgens, pulcra ut luna, electa ut sol, terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata*" (Who is this that ascends just as the rising dawn, beautiful as the moon, choice as the sun, terrible as the head of the arranged army). These words are translated in this way: Who is this who is so much greater in glory than others, who ascends just as the rising dawn, beautiful as the moon, choice as the sun, awful as the arranged host of warriors.

And so that this prophecy may become clearly seen, we should consider the nature of these things, since the wisest man has in his wisdom taken it up in praise of our Lady Saint Mary. It is the habit of prophets to speak in obscure meaning and discuss various subjects. They were given such skill and say or speak senselessly about God's creation, and say that it speaks of or reminds us of the praise of God. And then they consider attaching their name, when they write in their books, or the nature of their subject, which they speak about, and write one before the other, that form is the same. Through God's forethought holy men explain the words of the prophets. And it is because of this that the same subject has more meanings than one. His name is set in time as a good signification after good nature. Take for example the wild animal, which

signifies our Lord God the Father, because that is the nature which revives his son on the third day; that same animal signifies also the fiend after his cruel nature. And because of that obscure prophecy then one watches warily his intelligence and eloquence, when he explains the narratives of the holy fathers, and what they mean by their distinctions, which prophets have before prophesized, rather than take that upon himself, and in his interpretation have to swear before God and men.

And for what reason is the daybreak compared to the Assumption of Mary? This is the true speech, that Mary is compared to the daybreak. It is explained so in the writings, which will be here signified in the beginning, what the daybreak is. Daybreak is that light which comes at the beginning of the day, when the sky has both light and darkness, because the night is not yet brought to an end, and the point of the day is not yet fully come. And how may this form of daybreak or nature come to the blessed Mary? It comes only through this method, that Mary was cleansed from the old sun, and she served almighty God so gloriously, that she did not transgress except for the smallest offence, those which are not in the free will of men, since it is the case that men may not decide what should come to him in mind. And while that priming or kindling was with God's Mother Mary, so that she could transgress if she had liked to or consented to. That is why she is compared to the daybreak. And when God came to be with her and took her from the body, as was before said, then had the day vanquished the night, because the righteous sun shone then outward from her breast, so that she may not from then on promote sin in her thoughts.

And always afterward, while God's mother lived, from when the angel Gabriel had taught her that helpful saying the *Ave Maria*, then the nature of the moon signifies her conduct and life; because the moon bears the image of the sun in its growth and beauty. So the blessed

Mary bears in the same way the image of God, or this form, as the righteous sun has itself, in her life and nature, above other holy men in their natures. She is so superior that she alone has protected such natural gifts fully in complete purity. Those are the natural gifts which the first men were shaped in and which they enjoyed, while they did not break God's commandments and obeyed his will. And the blessed Queen Mary must be superior, since she is not able to transgress, as was mentioned before. In her life she bore the form also of God himself, as the moon does the sun, because the moon has more brightness from the sun than other heavenly bodies. Between Mary and her son there must be more love, and she has the reward of complete virtues from her son more so than other holy men, as the moon is much brighter than the stars. This is why Solomon said that she is beautiful as the moon, and choice as the sun. For each the sun is chosen or set to illuminate the earth for all who live on it. It softens that which was before hard, such as the hard snow or ice; it tempers and strengthens that which was before weak, such as tiles or those other things which it dries with its heat.

And the blessed Getter of God, the Queen of heaven and earth, sitting in the throne next to her special son over all the angels brighter than the sun, also reveals to all God's Christians the judgments of her life and those rewards, which she has taken before all others by almighty God. She is chosen by God as a bride, the son to his mother, as a help to all, those who wish to strive there, she floods and heats, through her intercession with God, the heart cooled by the absence of love with God; she heats the hard ice, frozen from long feuding or misguided ambitions and manifold wicked desires. She gives that mercy and has given as proof, that she softens and melts hard ice. From that springs up the water of repentance in the heart and then falls from the eyes. As the sun dries and tempers tile, so the blessed Queen, our Lady Saint Mary, strengthens those men who are in truer hope, those who wish to serve God here on earth with true repentance and

fear. That means that they do not fall into despair even though they will be faced with great trials or the temptations of the fiend because they trust in God's mercy. They do not murmur in return so that they are unworthy in such battle, when it is brought to them. Now from this nature of the sun then Solomon says that Mary is chosen just as the sun, and from those sevenfold natures of the sun, it was before said, that the soul and body will be resurrected after the Last Judgment. Because of this most men or nearly all prefer to believe that the Queen of all things has risen from death and sits in heaven with complete magnificence in soul and body much more than to consider that bodily infirmity came to her or might come to her.

Solomon also said that Queen Mary is as awful as the arranged army camp, that is because she has the weapon of all virtues, so that she cannot be wounded by the deceitful cunning of the fiend. She protects against anything that comes against God. And because of this unclean spirits are not as afraid of God's nights as our Lady Saint Mary. She stands under the banner of victory next to the King, there where all his knights fly from him; it bears the sign of the cross itself. And thus she is as terrible against all of God's enemies and adversaries just like the arranged army camp.

Now we have said something about the life and Assumption of blessed Lady Mary, God's mother, so that those who read or hear about it may set her apart for praise and honor and have her help and mercy on themselves, and believe that she is far superior to other holy men in her glory and works on behalf of God. And if we believe that she is holier than all others, then we should also believe that she is more compassionate than all others and more deserving of prayers. She has complete goodness of heart from God, and all of those who are pleasing to her are held in her heartfelt affection. Thus we should call on her intercession first over all holy men. Since she must be more deserving of our prayers, and since we need her more, we should not

fear if we entreat her with sincere faith and a righteous heart and with repentance of sins. And if it seems that we cannot recover with an invocation when we call on here in sickness or in some other bodily harm, when it is thus made against it, then nevertheless we know that must be given to us, and we will receive much more in our need than that which we asked for. And what more can be done to show love to us than to give us better than what we know to ask or pray for. And we wait for some time so that those things turn away from us, which we are afterwards to be without, and we do not ask according to that desire which our race has the most need to receive. Thus the beginning of our prayers should be that God almighty give us that knowledge so that we may determine what each of us needs most, so that while we live here in the world God's mother will count us among the community of her friends. The omnipotent Lord gives that to us because he lives and rules over all things. Amen.

THE OLD NORSE-ICELANDIC TRANSLATIONS OF ELISABETH'S *VISIO*⁴⁷¹

ELISABETH'S *VISIO* IN *GUÐMUNDR SAGA C*

That time when the worthy lord Bishop Guðmunrd was in Norway, he heard rumors that the holy getter of God, the blessed Mary, may have revealed to a nun, Elisabeth in name, more clearly her assumption in full glory than has before been found written.

And because the lord bishop did not seem to have received thereof such true knowledge as he wished, he asked a good clerk, his intimate friend, to write to him the story of that revelation at that time when he seemed to have found certain proof with what danger she had heard, which the distinguished clerk remembered at this time; he wrote a letter to the goodly/famous lord Guðmundr Bishop of Hólar concerning the glorious vision of blessed Mary, because the clerk knew well that Bishop Guðmundr was a great lover of our Lady Saint Mary, as is widely revealed in his vita. The aforementioned clerk had also taken the intimate friendship of the bishop, while he was away from land, which is in this letter proved, and is below translated into the Norse tongue.

Esteemed father, Lord Guðmundr, bishop at Hólar in Iceland with God's mercy, the so named clerk sends true greetings in the advancement of complete health. Lord God, who after preaches to each those good things when they help their neighbors for his love, is to you

⁴⁷¹ There are, as I noted throughout this study, four redactions of Elisabeth's vision of the Assumption extant in Icelandic manuscripts. The translation in *Guðmuundr saga C* is presumably the oldest because its author is thought to be Bergr Sökkason (died c. 1350). The vision in *Guðmuundr saga C* survives in Stock. Papp. 4to no. 4 (c. 1600-50), and is currently being edited by the Árni Magnússon Institute. My translation is based on this forthcoming edition. Arngrímr Brandsson (died c. 1361) used Bergr's text to produce his own redaction of the vision, with added commentary, in *Guðmundr saga D*. My translation is based off of Jón Sígurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon's *Biskupa Sögur*, pp. 150-155. There is a roughly contemporary redaction preserved in manuscripts of the medieval Icelandic miracles of Mary. These manuscripts are AM 240 fol. IV (c. 1325-75) and AM 240 fol. IX (c. 1350-99). This text is edited in Unger, *Maríu saga*, pp. 915-917. The latest redaction is preserved in AM 764 4to (c. 1376-86). The text of Elisabeth's vision in this manuscript is edited in Ole Widding and Hans Bekker-Nielsen, "Elisabeth of Schönau's Visions in an Old Icelandic Manuscript," pp. 94-96.

unhidden reward for all that good which you allowed me when I was near your blessed fatherhood.

I know, good lord, I know that you have long remained away from the inheritance of heaven while in much burden in hard exile, particularly for this sake that you reside among unpliant people who are rather reluctant to go to the paths of God with true homage. But whatever your subjects do against you, the heavenly father will preserve your life and soul slipping into all the worldly ways.

You will remember, holy father, that we spoke of the bodily assumption of God's blessed mother, which I recall in this letter, writing to you that letter which affirms what has happened concerning knowledge of her assumption.

When 1152 years had passed from the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is in the days of the apostolic days of Pope Eugene the second, there was a nun, Elisabeth by name, who lived in the cloister in Schönau, which is in the diocese of Trier in Saxony. In charge over that convent was the abbot Hildelin, who watched closely that which she had taken by rule from God's hand.

The aforementioned nun Elisabeth had gone into the cloister at eleven years old and lived so honorably that God the omnipotent and his blessed mother both considered her worthy to bear witness. When this nun had lived in the cloister another eleven years, at twenty-two years of age, God enriched her comfort so marvelously that holy God's mother Mary appeared to her often, speaking with her about the various discernments and reasons of holy writings.

With Mary an angel of God also often appeared to Elisabeth, an angel who prepared her to learn from diverse wisdom. She recognized that same angel coming to her as a true friend and dear companion. After she had blossomed from these gifts for a time, she was even further intent on being the most pleasing to God in all things, preserving her true humility in good works.

And so it happened, after she understood that the pure mother of God, Mary, valued her enough to visit her often, that she mentioned secretly to one of her holy fathers there in the cloister, who gave her that counsel that she ask certain questions of the queen the next time Mary appeared to her.

The sister asked what the old man wanted her to find out:

He said: “I ask, my daughter, that you ask her whether she has from death risen and now lives next to God in both soul and body.”

Now the next time when the most blossoming of all women, the honorable Mary, appeared to Elisabeth, they spoke with each other very dearly. That was in the octave of the Assumption of Saint Mary when God’s service was performed in the Church. Then a heavy light passed over the nun, and at that moment the holy maiden Mary appeared to her as was customary. Elisabeth then asked her boldly: “My dearest queen. If it pleases your Godly will, we eagerly wish to know whether you have been taken up in soul alone and rule with your son or if you rose from death, and were assumed over all the angels, with both soul and body? I ask for a distinction concerning this event in your kindness, because it is said to me that what is found written about your assumption in the holy books of the fathers is doubtful.”

The queen answered her question: “That which you ask may not at this time become clear. Nevertheless I intend that this knowledge will become clear and evident to you.”

When this sight had turned away from her the nun made the old father aware of how the question and answer had gone with the queen. That good brother suggested that the nun occupy herself with special prayers to God’s mother in honor of the remembrance of this promise and to hold them daily until the next vision.

A whole year passed. During that time the nun did not dare to ask either God's mother Mary nor her intimate angel about those things, even though they both appeared to her as expected, until the feast of the Assumption of Saint Mary came in the next year. Then Elisabeth became so sick at this time that she lied very weakened in bed during the feast.

At that time when the cloister performed the most sublime service on that blessed day, a heavy swoon passed over her, and next she saw a stone coffin a great distance off. In the coffin she saw a woman's body lying. On all sides of the coffin stood the servants of the heavenly kingdom. God's bright angels appeared clearly with shining light. After a short while the body, which had before rested in the grave, rose up with great glory. The holy angels bowed then and came to her flying all together high up in the heavens in worshipful order truly sounding the arrival there of the heavenly curia, fair and glorious from the son of man above, the living son of God with many thousands of his host. That same Lord bore in his hand the holy cross covered in glorious markings. Then an especially heavenly and sublime processio is arranged which is far from what a human heart may consider to come about. Next that blessed queen, who had shortly before risen from the grave, goes honorably into that joy. The heavenly King himself came flying to meet her. He leads her with his hand. Then the host is arranged on all sides, the host who seemed to be most able to carry her. And next this most sublime processio disappeared from the eyes of Elisabeth.

Some time passed before the blessed Mary appeared to her with the same light which was before customary, so that she was able to stand well in strength of mind. Then the queen revealed her mild and graceful face to the nun, but did not speak with her.

And when she disappeared the intimate angel of God appeared to her in the same place. And then she spoke to him, saying: “My Lord, what does this vision that was recently revealed to me signify?”

The angel answered: “In this vision, which God gave you, it was revealed clearly how our queen, the lady Saint Mary, was resurrected to heaven with both soul and body together.”

After this vision sister Elisabeth quickly became health. Some time now passed from the octave of the Assumption, and on verge of the next octave the same angel appeared to her in great happiness. Immediately she asked about another thing: “My Lord, I ask that you tell me how much time passed from the Assumption of our lady before her bodily resurrection followed?”

The angel answers her very happily: On that same day on which her Assumption is celebrated in the Catholic faith, she passed away from this life, but forty days after that, on the ninth of the calends of September, she rose from death. The holy fathers, those who arranged for her Assumption-day to be held as a festival in the Catholic faith, had no knowledge of her bodily Assumption and thus they called her death-deay her assumption because they believed without hesitation that she was assumed with both soul and body together.

When sister Elisabeth had heard these things and was satisfied, she was conflicted as to whether she should make this revelation public because she feared that she would be judged as the originator of an unheard of innovation concerning this matter. And so two years passed. Then during the same feast of the blessed mother of God, Mary revealed herself to this oft-named nun. Elisabeth asks the Queen about this matter, which she had considered so often before, and says thus: “My Lady, we want to know whether we should make open or not that knowledge which you revealed to me concerning your Assumption?”

Our lady, Saint Mary, answers her: “We should not start rumors among the commoners or make it public, because the world is not as benevolent as needy, and thus must they who hear it damage their souls if they misunderstand true things and have godly miracles in mockery.”

The sister then asks again: “Now then, my queen, do you wish that scrape completely away that which is written concerning this revelation?”

God’s mother answers: “These things were not revealed concerning this matter so that they may be blotted out and afterwards forgotten, but rather, so that my praise will multiply among those who particularly love me. Thus should we make this information known to my friends who are alone before your delivery. And must these things be made clear to them who exhibit me in their heart, so that they can perform special praise in my honor and receive from me a special reward in return. Many are they who will receive these words with great joy and esteem and preserve them in their works for the sake of love with me.”

After this vision the monastery at Schönau began to sing the festival in praise of God’s mother on the ninth day of September, holding with honor her Assumption, more than the first feast, as was commanded, in secret chapels rather than publicly in the parish churches.

Now they who sing this festival, said the clerk who wrote concerning this to Bishop Guðmundr, have that letter for a lection at Matins and another one for the office of the first feast of Mary (the Assumption).

Now I ask your blessed bishopric, that you remember me and my brothers in your holy prayers, committing me under the control and merit of queen Mary, so that you and we are able be eternally enjoying the heavenly host with worshipful joy in the Godly countenance. In Christo Valet.

When that expounding letter came to the good Bishop Guðmundr he received it with great affection, and became exceedingly glad from it. He gave many thanks to God eagerly and his purest mother that such sublime knowledge concerning her wonderful Assumption should be made known to these people and widely in other place during his days, to come as comfort to him and the other friends of God's mother. And concerning that oft-mentioned sister Elisabeth is that discerned that she passed from this life with surpassing chastity, revealing after death sublime miracles, wherever Christian leaders see her to give open honor as truly a saint amongst Gods friends. Thus she was taken in to the catalog of the saints, that is manifest in the fellowship of the saints.

ELISABETH'S *VISIO* IN *GUÐMUNDR SAGA D*

It was said that many worthy men from Norway wrote to master Guðmundr to gladden him during this time. During this time he received another letter of this type, when he received true knowledge concerning the revelation of the resurrection of our lady. He had asked his friend, a clerk, to write to him from Norway about this matter.

What the clerk sent to the bishop in this letter, here follows in these words: ‘Honorable master Guðmundr, bishop at Hólar in Iceland through God’s mercy, your clerk fulfills his promise and sends you true greetings and the continuation of good health. Good lord, you who afterwards will announce the good news to each person, when they act with tenderness to their neighbors, let this be your indissoluble reward for all of that good, which you granted me when I was nearby, when I was under your fatherhood.

I know, good master, that you have been long delayed from that heavenly inheritance while you have been greatly burdened in difficult exile, particularly because you dwell among uncharitable people. I know also that it has been rather difficult to travel along God’s path in true obedience. Even though your subjects come against you, the heavenly father keeps your life and soul from all sliding into worldly ways. You will remember, holy father, that we spoke of the bodily assumption of God’s blessed mother, which I recall in this letter, writing to you that letter which affirms what has happened concerning knowledge of her Assumption.’”

When 1152 years had passed from the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the apostolic days of Pope Eugene the Third, there was a nun named Elizabeth in that cloister which is called Schönau, which was in the diocese of Trier in Saxony. In charge over that convent was the abbot Hildelin, who watched closely that which she had taken by rule from God’s hand.

The aforementioned Elizabeth had gone into the cloister at eleven years old, and lived such a glorious life. Omnipotent God and his blessed mother valued Elizabeth so much that both thought she could bear witness. By that time when this nun had lived in the cloister another eleven years, at the age of twenty-two, God enriched her with such careful comfort that God's holy mother was revealed to her often and spoke to her about various parts and the knowledge in the holy writings.

With Mary was often revealed to Elizabeth one of God's holy angels, one who was able to teach Elizabeth in extraordinary wisdom. She knew that this same angel was always coming to her as a true friend and dear companion. And when she prospered from this gifts, she was even more intent to be most pleasing to God in all things, committing to her humility in good works.

And so it happened, after she understood that that lady was God's mother Mary who valued her enough to visit, that she mentioned it secretly to one of her holy fathers there in the cloister, who gave her the counsel to ask certain questions of the queen when she visited her the next time.

The sister asked what the old man wanted her to find out.

He said: "I ask, my daughter, that you find out whether Mary has risen from death and lives with God now in both soul and body."

Now the next time when the most blooming of all women, the honorable Mary, appeared to Elizabeth, they spoke with each other very dearly. That was in the octave of the assumption of Saint Mary, when they recited the greatest service to God in the church, when the heavy light passed over the nun, which in every moment appeared to her after the custom of the holy mother Mary. Elizabeth then asked boldly, saying: "My truest queen, if it be pleasing to your holiness, we wish to know eagerly whether you have risen up in soul and taken power with your son or if

you rose up from death and ascended above all the angels in both soul and body. I ask for distinction about this event through your kindness because it is said to me that there is ambiguity about your Assumption in the writings of the holy fathers.”

The Queen answered her in this way: “that which you ask may not be made known to you at this time, even though I intend this event to be clearly revealed to you eventually.”

When this sight turned away the sister told the old man how the questioning and answers with the Queen had gone. Then that good brother suggested that the nun take to special prayers to God’s mother to honor in remembrance this promise, and to hold them daily until a further vision came.

A whole year passed. During that time the nun did not dare to ask neither God’s mother nor the intimate angel about those things, even though they appeared to her both as expected. Things continued like this until the feast of the Assumption of Saint Mary in the next year. Elizabeth became so sick from this that on the eve of the feast she remained in bed greatly weakened.

At that time, when the cloister performed the most sublime service on that blessed day, a heavy burden or swoon passed over her. Next she saw a stone coffin a great distance off. In the coffin she saw a woman’s body lying; on all sides of the coffin stood servants of the heavenly kingdom. God’s bright angels appeared clearly with shining light. After a short while the body, which before had been in the grave, rose up with great glory. The holy angels bowed then and came to her flying all together high up in the heavens in worshipful order truly sounding the arrival there of the heavenly curia, fair and glorious from the son of man above. It was the living son of God with many thousands of his host. That same Lord bore in his hand the holy cross covered in glorious markings. Then an especially heavenly and sublime *processio* was

arranged, which was much longer than any manly mind could consider to come about. That blessed Queen, who had shortly before risen from the grave, went into that honorable joy. The heavenly King himself came flying on the path to greet her with his hand. Then the host was arranged on all sides, the host who seemed to be most able to carry her. Then next this most sublime *processio* disappeared from the eyes of Elizabeth.

Some time passed before the blessed Mary appeared to her in that same light, which before was customary, so that she was able to stand well in strength of mind. The Queen revealed her mild and graceful face, but did not speak with her.

When she disappeared the intimate angel of God came in the same place. Then Elizabeth spoke to him saying: “My lord, what does this vision, which was recently revealed to me, mean?”

The angel answered: “In this vision, which God gave you, it was revealed clearly how our Queen, the lady Saint Mary was resurrected to heaven with both body and soul together.”

After this sight sister Elizabeth quickly became healthy. Some time now passed toward the next octave of the Assumption. On the verge of the octave the same angel appeared to her in great happiness. Immediately she asked about another thing: “My lord, I ask you, that you tell me how much time passed from the Assumption of our lady before her bodily resurrection followed?”

The angel answered her with respect: “on that same day, which you now celebrate in the church as her Assumption, she passed away from this life. Forty days later, which is the 14th of the calendar of September, she rose from death. The holy fathers, those who arranged for her Assumption day to be held as a festival in Christianity, had no knowledge of her bodily

resurrection. Thus they called her death day the Assumption because they believed without hesitation that she was taken up in both soul and body.”

When sister Elizabeth had heard these things and was satisfied, she was then conflicted as to whether she should make public this revelation. She feared that she would be judged as the originator of an unheard of innovation concerning this matter. And so once two years had passed, when the same festival was close at hand, God’s mother appeared to that often named nun. Elizabeth asked the Queen about this issue, which she had considered so often before, and said this: “My lady, Should we make public this information, which was revealed to me concerning your resurrection?”

Our lady Saint Mary answered her: “We should not make it public and start rumors amongst the common folk because the world is less benevolent than needy. This information, when they hear it, could cause their souls danger if they mistrust true events and mock godly miracles.”

The sister then asked: “Now then my Queen, do you wish that we scrape away all that is written concerning this revelation?”

God’s mother answered: “These things were not revealed to you so that they may be blotted out and forgotten, but rather, so that my praise will multiply among those who particularly love me. We should make this information known to my friends that are alone before your delivery. This news will be beloved to them, who exhibit me in their heart, so that they can perform special praise in my honor and receive from me special reward in return. Many are they who will receive these words with great joy and esteem and preserve them in their works, for the sake of love towards me.”

After this vision the monastery at Schönau began to sing the festival in praise of God's mother on the fourteenth day of September, holding with honor her resurrection festival, more than the first, as was commanded, in secret chapels rather than publicly in the parish churches.'

Now they who sing this festival, said the clerk who wrote concerning this to Guðmundr, have that letter as lection at matins, and another one as the office for the first feast of Mary, which is here translated into Norse.

Now I ask you blessed bishop, that you remember me and my brothers in your holy prayers, committing us all under the shield and merit of Queen Mary, so that you and we are able to be enjoying eternally that heavenly host with worshipful rejoicing in the godly countenance. *In Christo Valet* (Yours in Christ, Farewell)."

Master Guðmundr was exceedingly pleased by this letter because of his love and friendship with our lady Saint Mary. This revelation is now well understood to all men without doubt because it is in that authoritative book which is called *Speculum Historiale*. It intelligently corrects the year that this happened. 1156 years had passed since the Incarnation of Lord.

It is necessary that the distinction is made that the clerk began his account four years too soon in the days of Pope Eugene, and that sister Elizabeth had gone into the cloistered life during his days, and stayed there throughout his days and into the tenure of the next pope, Anastasius, keeping busy with holy spirit, before she gained this vision.

This vision did not happen in the days of Eugene, but rather in the years of Adrian the fourth, who was first named in the saga, as is proclaimed in the chronicle here and there. The prologue follows the chronicle of Adrian the fourth, which the *Speculum* copies in Latin: *Anno domini M.C.L.VJ in partibus Saxoniae sanctimonialis Elisabeth mirabiles visiones vidit, inter quas etiam angelus familiaris ei librum, qui dicitur Viarium dei, annuntiavit et diem translationis*

sacri corporis beatissimae virginis in celum demonstravit (In the year of our Lord 1156 in the land of Saxony the holy Elizabeth witnessed wonderful visions, among which, furthermore, her familiar angel related to her a book, which is called *The Ways of God*, and demonstrated the day of the translation of the sacred body of most blessed virgin into heaven). This same book says in a chapter, that at that time, when the vision happened, that saintly Thomas prospered in England, and Henry became king, in the days of Theobald archbishop of Canterbury.

This was five years before the rearing of master Guðmundr. Blessed Saint Augustine saw himself and from this revelation bears witness, which he wrote in the *evangelium: Intravit Jesus* (Jesus entered), and follows this way: *Letatur igitur Maria Letitia inenarrabili anima et corpore, in proprio filio, cum filio proprio, per filium proprium, et cet.* (Therefore rejoice, Mary, in indescribable joy in both soul and body, in your own son, with your own son, by the side of your own son, et cet.). Such friendship passed between our lady and master Guðmundr that the Queen occupied this part of his *vita*.

ELISABETH'S *VISIO* IN AM 240 FOL. IV AND AM 240 FOL. IX

When one thousand, one hundred and fifty years and six winters had passed from the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, many beautiful visions were shown to a sister, who is called Elisabeth, in a certain cloister in Saxony.

That angel, who was given to her by God in intimate care, showed her the book which is called *Viarium Domini*, and there also was shown to her, on which day the blessed mother of God, the lady Mary rose from the dead. The aforementioned Elisabeth says this: "In this year, when the angel of God revealed to me that book, which is called *Viarium Domini*, was my spirit taken up from the sight of earthly things."

In the Octave of the Assumption God's mother Mary, at that time when is offered the gift of flesh and the blood of God's body, the Lord of Heaven revealed to me as my comfort after his custom. Then I asked her, after that which I had been before advised by an old brother, so saying: "my lady, I ask that your good-will think to grant me knowledge concerning whether you were assumed into heaven with only your soul or with both your soul and body."

She says: "That which you ask, you cannot yet know, but, that shall nevertheless be made known to you later."

"I never dared afterward in this year," says the sister, "to ask further about this from the angel, who was intimate to me, nor her, then when she was revealed to me." The aforementioned brother asked me to read aloud certain daily prayers, so that through them I might be able to receive this knowledge from her.

"When a year had passed and the eve of the festival of her Assumption had come, I had been sick for many days. I lay in my bed at that time when (they) sang holy mass. I saw with (my) soul in a far off place a shining grave with great light, and in that place I saw the body of a

certain woman and a great multitude of angels standing around it. After a little time she rose up from the grave and went up into the sky with that multitude of angels, who were with her, traveling in this way up to heaven. A little bit after when I saw these things, my lady went to the doors of this city, where she was expecting to visit me. As she stood there, she showed me her glory. At the same time the angel of God was revealed to me, the angel who came to relate to me the tenth chapter of the aforesaid book *Viarium Dei*. I asked him concerning it, what was symbolized by this knowledge, which I had seen.”

The angel says: “With this vision was to you shown how our lady was assumed to heaven with soul and body.”

“After that I asked him how many days had passed after her death before her body was taken up.”

He answered happily and said: “On that day, which now is held to be her assumption day, she died from this life, and in forty days after, that is the ninth day of October, she rose from death. The holy fathers, who did not possess full knowledge concerning this, that is how her body was assumed, took up this, that is her death day alone should be held with festivity, and called that her assumption day, because they believed fully, that she was assumed with her body.”

“When two years had passed, my lady visited me again,” says the sister, “and, as she spoke with me about many things, I asked, how long she lived on earth after the crucifixion of our Lord.”

She answers happily, saying “she herself had lived an entire year and so many days until this day, when is held the high festival of the lordly resurrection, when she died.” “Then I asked whether all the apostles were with her at the burial.” “All were with me,” our lady said, “and

buried my body in the earth with great honor.” “On the festival when the angel Gabriel announced to her God’s son, my lady visited me again, I was so bold that I asked her how old she was when she birthed God’s son, when the angel proclaimed to her the holy birth.” She revealed this in answer: “I had then, said she, fifteen winters and so much time beyond from my birthday to this festival, when God’s son was proclaimed to me.”

ELISABETH'S *VISIO* IN AM 764 4to

Seven years after the crucifixion of God was the blessed mother Mary assumed, and forty days after she was assumed in the flesh, that is two nights after the mass of Matthew. There was for a long time much unknown concerning her death, and how that revelation became clear will discerned below.

Elisabeth, the daughter of the king of Hungary (a scribal mistake here), went into the cloister when she was eleven years old. She lived a very holy life and when she had lived in the cloister for eleven years the mother of God was revealed to her often. She spoke to her about various division of holy writings.

Here with her was revealed an angel of God who prepared her to learn from the godly wisdom so that she could recognize this angel, always the same who came to her as true friend and dearest companion, and when she blossomed in such gifts she thus stood further to please God and be the best in heeding him in all things.

She sat humbly with good works and she made that distinction when Mary, Mother of God, thought to visit her often. This she says secretly to her spiritual father there in the cloister, who gave her that advice to ask that certain queen when she appeared to her next time.

The old man gave her this counsel: "I bid this of you my daughter that you ask her whether she had risen from death and now lives with God in both soul and body."

And the next time when the blessed Mary appeared to Elisabeth they spoke together very lovingly. That was during the octave of the Assumption of Saint Mary God's service is recited in the Church.

A heavy color passed over Elisabeth each time the holy mother appeared. Elisabeth then asked her, speaking daringly: "My true queen, if be pleasing to God's will, we eagerly want to

know whether you have risen up and taken your kingdom with your son in soul alone or if you rose up from death both in soul and body. I ask about these things by your grace because it is said to me that information regarding your Assumption cannot be found written in the books of the holy fathers.”

The queen answered her speech: “That which you ask may not become known to you at this time, nevertheless it is my intention that this information will be shown and revealed to you.”

As this sight disappeared the sister made known to the old father how the question and answer had gone with the queen. The good brother requested that the nun take up special prayers to God’s mother to honor the promise between them and to hold to them daily until a came from them.

A whole year passed and the nun did not dare to ask either God’s mother or the holy angel about these things, but they both appeared to her according to custom. When the feast of the Assumption of Mary stood near, Elisabeth became sick. From that she lay very weak in bed, holding a feast by herself.

At that time when they did the sublime service on the blessed day, over her passed a great heaviness. Next she sees in the distance a stone coffin, in which she sees laying a womanly body. On all sides of the house stood the men of heaven, God’s bright angels with shining light. And a little later that body rose up with great glory which before had lain in the grave.

The holy angels bowed then and came to her flying all together high up in the heavens in worshipful order truly sounding the arrival there of the heavenly curia, fair and glorious from the son of man above, the living son of God with many thousands of his host. That same Lord bore in his hand the holy cross covered in glorious markings. Then an excellent *processio* is arranged.

The queen went into such glory, she who had recently risen up from the grave; the highest king led her with him. Afterward this same procession disappeared from her eyes.

A little space of time passed before the blessed Mary appeared to her. Mary revealed to Elisabeth her blessed and gentle face, but she did not speak with her. And when Mary disappeared the same angel came. Then she spoke to him so saying: “My lord, what does that sight, which I saw recently, signify?”

The angel said this: “In this vision God showed you how Saint Mary was assumed both in soul and body.”

After this vision she became fully healthy. And on the verge of the octave this same angel spoke to her. She said: “I ask that you tell me how much time passed from the Assumption of our lady before the Assumption of her body followed.”

The angel answered: “On the same day which you now honor as her Assumption she went away from this life. And forty days after that, which is the ninth day of October, she rose from death. After that this angel disappeared from her sight.

THE OLD NORSE-ICELANDIC *TRANSITUS MARIAE A*⁴⁷²

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ here is revealed the miracle of the *Transitus* of our lady Saint Mary. At that time when our Lord Jesus Christ came to his crucifixion, and among other words the glorious mother asked him that he tell her of her death and her prayer follows in this way: “Hear you my sweetest son, I ask your holiness that at that time when my soul shall go away from this world that you my most loved son will take me with your angels, archangels, and that all your apostles will be allowed to be near me at death.”

The Lord spoke to her: “Hear you temple of eternal God,” and then he said to her: “Hear fair and blessed queen of all flowers. Hear you lady who is blessed and raised above all queens. And because you bore me in your womb I fed you from the bread of angels before the arrival of my angels and after your wish I guarded you. How may I abandon you when you bore me and I sucked on your breast, when you flew (to Egypt) with me and endured many struggles for my sake? Thus you should know that my angels always watched you and served you, and likewise it is clear that they will watch you and serve you all the way up to your death. And after I suffer torment here and die for mankind, as it is written and prophesized, I will rise up on the third day. And thereafter you will see my angel Gabriel, coming to you with that pal which I will send to you from heaven. You shall know certainly that I am coming with my disciples, angels, archangels and with the strength of heaven. And that same angel Gabriel will make known to you when the time is near that your sould will depart from your body. And I will come with my flock of angels, archangels, and virgins and carry your soul and body to heaven where it will never be in grief or sorrow.” Then she fell to the feet of her blessed son and kissed both his knees

⁴⁷² The Old Norse-Icelandic *Transitus Mariae A* survives in a single fifteenth century copy in AM 232 fol. The text is edited in Ole Widding and Hans Bekker-Nielsen, “An Old Norse Translation of the ‘*Transitus Mariae*,’” pp. 329-333.

and said thus: “Blessed is the shaper of heaven and earth who gives me such gifts on behalf of my son Jesus Christ.”

And after this the suffering of the Lord continued in the Crucifixion. After the resurrection and ascension, the queen of heaven, God’s mother Mary always in prayers. On the third day before the blessed mother Mary passed from this world God’s angel Gabriel came to her, having in his right hand the palm. He greeted her so saying: “*Aue Maria gracia plena Dominus tecum.*” Which is translated into Norse thus: “Hail Mary full of grace, God is with you.” She answered thus: “*Deo gracias,*” which is translated into Norse in this way: “Love and glory, honor and distinction, honor and esteem be to you almighty God.” And the angel said: “Take this palm with you as my Lord your son sends it to you from heaven.” She did so verily, then thanked God for the foretold gift, so saying: “*Magnificat anima mea dominum,*” which is translated into Norse thus: “Increase my spirit Lord.”

And that man who is named Joseph, from that place which is called Aramathea, guarded the maiden Mary in his house night and day, served her, and made her death known to all of her friends, kinsmen, and neighbors who had gathered together. And the blessed maiden Mary washed her body with great joy and waited until the coming of her blessed son. She had three virgins who were called Sez (Zael), Sephora (Sepphora), and Alizota (Abigea). Each served her and guarded her night and day.

And on the third day after Gabriel’s arrival, in the third hour of the day, there was great thunder, lightning, rain, and earthquakes, but the maiden Mary stood at that time in prayer in her prayer room. And the Apostle John came to her and greeted her, so saying: “*Aue Maria. gracia plena. Dominus tecum.*” And she answered truly: “*Deo gracias.*” She then went to meet him, kissing him, saying thus: “My dearest why have you abandoned me at this time and kept not the

promise of your master, when he bade you while he hung on the cross, to help his folk?” And Saint John was falling forward and on both his knees weeping and asked for her mercy. And she was immediately showing mercy to him, giving him her blessing, and again she kissed him. And as soon as she thought to ask him where he had come from or for what sake he come into Jerusalem, she saw God’s disciples standing before the doors of her house, except for Thomas who is called the doubtful. And all entered immediately so saying: “*Ave Maria. gracia plena. Dominus tecum.*” And she answers: “*Deo gracias.*”

These were the names of God’s disciples who had come there: John the Evangelist, Peter, Andrew, James son of Zebedee, James son of Alphaeus, Philip, Luke, Barnabas, Bartholomew, Judas Iscariot, and Thaddeus; and there were so many others that we may never recount all the names. And the blessed Mary spoke thus to those who had come there: “How did you all come here?” Apostle Peter answered: “Hear my queen and lady of heaven and earth, there is more need among us to ask you about this which you have asked us. Today I was in Antioch and with such great speed I came here, and I was brought in such a way that I was not able to neither consider nor speak in between and then I was here.” All the other apostles said much the same concerning which place or kingdom from where each was taken away. Each then wondered greatly at their arrival there. The maiden Mary then said to them: “I prayed to my Lord and Son because today my soul must be separated from my body.” Then she showed them that palm which the Lord sent to her from heaven. And then she spoke to them: “Stay awake and wait with me so that the Lord my Son will find us awake.” Then they all promised her that they would stay awake and they watched all night with hymns and spiritual praise-songs on Godly praise.

Now at the coming of the day the holy spirit appeared in a cloud just as the disciples Peter, Jacob, and John had. A great multitude of angels also appeared and descended with. They

took with them the soul of the most beloved mother. And then the earth shook and was illuminated with brightness by the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ. And all who were nearby recognized the sweetest scent and heard the fair hymns of angels, sounding thus: “*Sicut illum inter spinas sic amica meat inter filias.*” That is in Norse: “Just as a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters of Jerusalem.” And while this surpassing light and *processio* had lasted over half the time of the day none of them was able to see the uprising from earth because of the great brightness. And when that light went away the soul of the queen of heaven, or lady Saint Mary, was immediately assumed to heaven along with that light.

After the death and Assumption of the soul of God’s mother Mary, satan entered into the Jewish people and they considered among themselves what they should do with her body because they said that she was the destroyer of the people of Israel. Because of that, they wanted to spoil and burn her body.

Then they held a great banquet and all came together in one place and wanted to erase all the evidence that Saint Mary was ever on this earth. Thus they took their weapons and believed that they must show some outrage towards God’s disciples and plunder Mary’s blessed body through superior power. They willingly wanted to destroy and burn her body. And due to the mercy and righteousness of God’s judgment, then they prepared themselves to do that which they had before considered. And in that same moment they started to fight amongst themselves with their weapons and fell down because they became mad. They pounded their heads against the wall and quickly fell down and over them came malice and wickedness.

Then all of God’s apostles and disciples became stricken with terror from such brightness, they began lifting themselves up with great confidence, gladness, and honor, through psalms and the highest praise of God and spiritual love-songs. During these love-songs, they

took her holiest body from Mount Sion and carried it into the Valley of Josaphat. And then they came to the middle of the rode which they entered, they cmet a learned Jew from Jersalem, one who wished to cast her body down to the ground due to outlawry. And according to the righteousness of God's judgment, at that time when he touched her blessed body with his right hand, it withered up to the elbow so that he could not draw it away after that. Then he prayed to the apostles of God with great grief and fear. He promised them that if through their prayers he became healthy that then without any delay he would convert to Christianity. Then all of God's apostles fell down to their knees and prayed for him to God that he would be saved and in the same hour he became healthy. Then this same Jew kissed the feet of blessed Mary and all of the apostles. And without any delay he became baptized in that same place and preached afterwards the name God wherever he went. Then the apostles took the body and carried into the Valley of Josaphat, and they themselves set her bodu down with great joy and honor, grieving and singing from deep love and sweetness. Then light from heaven came over them and the holy body of God's mother Mary was taken up to heaven.

At that time when Saint Thomas traveled to the Mount of Olives, he saw the holy body of God's mother assumed in that manner. Then he began crying and called in a loud voice: "Hear you blessed mother. I came to you to see you. But you have forgiven me because I see through your mercy that you have been assumed to heaven. Gladden me your thrall." Then the holy Mary heard him and sent him her girdle with which the apostles had encircled her. He received it and kissed it and made thanks to God. He came into the Valley of Josaphat and found all of the apostles there and another large crowd beating there breats because of that great sight of joy which they had been able to see. And as soon as they had seen that Thomas had come they kissed him with great joy. Saint Peter then reprimanded Saint Thomas so saying: "Truly you have

always been hard and doubtful, thus it was not pleasing to God that you be here with us to bury the holy mother of God, Mary.”

Blessed Thomas struck his breast and said thus: “Truly I know and believe that I am a bad, hardm and unbelieving man. Thus I pray to God and the mercy of the maiden Mary and all of you for my grimness and doubting.”

And they all prayed for him and after the prayer was finished he asked them where they had buried her blessed body and they showed him the grave with their fingers. Holy Thomas said to them: “It is not here as your say or believe.”

And Peter said to him: “Earlier you were so doubtful and unbelieving that you do not want to believe the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ unless you felt the points of his wounds with your fingers. How will you come to believe no that her holiest body was buried?”

Then he asserted again that it was not there. All of the aspostles became angry at this and ran to the grave and took that stone away which lay over it there. Then they looked in the grave and saw nothing there, except a grave full of manna, and then they wondered among themselves what they should now say to blessed Thomas.

And when Thomas saw that then he became afraid and did not know what they would say to him now regarding the burial of the body of God’s mother Mary, saint Thomas said thus to them: “Hear God’s friends and my brothers. Today I was performing mass all the way out in India and I was still in those same priestly-robles and I did not know in which way I came here or was hence led. At that time when I went to the Mount of Olives I saw the body of God’s mother on the way to heaven and I called with a loud voice so that she would give me her blessing. Thereafter that heavenly queen sent me that same girdle which she was encircled with.” And then he showed it to them.

Then the apostles saw that girdle, with which they knew they had placed around her blessed body, and worshipping God, they begged mercy from the blessed Thomas for that reprimand and what they had said to him; and because of this the glorious apostles of God were able to see that the most holy body of the maiden Mary was assumed to heaven and likewise that girdle which to him was received from God's angel.

Then took blessed Thomas with much joy to weeping and great praise of God and said so: "*Ecce quam bonum et quam jocundum habitare fratres in unum,*" which is Norse, "See brothers how good and pleasant to dwell in one mind." And immediately in that same hour each one went and traveled to those same places from which they came, just as Habakkuk saw when he brought food to Daniel in Babylon, when he was closed in the lion's den. In the same way the blessed Thomas turned to Inida and in the same manner so did each one of the apostles. In those same clouds in which they were brought thence, they turned after to each one's own place there where they were before occupied.

And you who hears this should not wonder to see such from the same one who was enclosed in the womb of Mary, he who watched each and guarded all time unspoiled and rose up on the third day after his crucifixion and appeared to his apostles in the interior of the house in closed doors, that same one who caused the deaf to hear, the dead to rise up, the sightless to see, who cleansed the lepers and turned water into wine in Cana of Galilee.

I am Joseph, who took the body of our Lord Jesus Christ and placed it in my sepulchre and I buried it. And after the resurrection I saw him myself and I spoke with him and thereafter I guarded his mother in my house until now when she was assumed to heaven. And I heard many things from her mouth secretly and at the same time told myself I should say and preach those things to all God's Christians, which I did better wherever I came. Thus has our Lord Jesus

Christ granted by his mercy that anyone who has this written in his house, be that one a clerk or layman or woman, that the devil will not hurt him. And whoever writes are causes this to be written, reads or hears, reads or causes to be read, he shall win entrance into the heavenly kingdom. And in every house wherein this *Transitus* text of the heavenly queen Mary is found, if there is raised a child, it shall not be deaf, nor blind, will not be a lunatic,⁴⁷³ it will not be possessed by the devil nor become mute, it will not hastily die. And in this man's house there will not be great poverty. And in every distress in which they call to her just, she will give them support, so also at the time of their death she will be near them to help with God's angels and the hosts of heaven. Thus we ask the most merciful queen of heaven and earth that she be mindful of us, and all who believe and trust in her blessed son in our needs and thus to us may be the best guarantee for both life and soul. That same joy worthies us so that almighty God helps us with his sublime mother, he who lives and reigns, one God in three persons through ages of ages. Amen.

⁴⁷³ The translator has rendered the Latin *lunaticus* as "tunglamein," or literally moon-injury. The term "tunl-sjúkr" is more often used to describe lunacy.