

Proving the Dead  
Doubt and Skepticism in the Late Medieval Lives of Saints Æthelthryth and Edith

by  
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## ABSTRACT

Anglo-Saxon women wielded a remarkable amount of power in the early English church. They founded some of the country's most influential institutions, and modern Christians continue to venerate many of them as saints. Their path to canonization, however, was informal—especially compared to men and women who were canonized after Pope Gregory IX's decree in 1234 that reserved those powers for the pope. Many of Anglo-Saxon England's most popular saints exhibited behaviors that, had they been born later, would have disqualified them from canonization. This project examines how the problematic lives of St. Æthelthryth of Ely and St. Edith of Wilton were simultaneously doubted and adopted by post-Norman Christians. Specifically, it considers the flawed ways that the saints, petitioners, and their communities were simultaneously doubted and legitimized by late-medieval hagiographers.

## DEDICATION

For Mom, Dad, and Molly.

I couldn't have done this without you.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In March of 2017 Ely Cathedral was illuminated with images from the lives of Syrian refugees. The event, titled “Journey to Hope,” used the cathedral to raise awareness and funding for families who were fleeing violence in the Middle East. The proceeds were used to help with refugee resettlement in the Ely area, and in the case of at least one family, it was successful. Though Ely is located in a rural, traditionally conservative area, this light show represented local resistance against the isolationist rhetoric that has recently dominated the world stage. Just a few months later, the cathedral put up a display in the Lady Chapel called “From Dinosaurs to DNA” which was advertised as “a journey through science meeting pre-historic creatures and exploring the latest DNA technology”.<sup>1</sup> First editions of Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* and Newton’s *Principia Mathematica* were placed at the center of the display. In both cases, the modern community of Ely used a quintessentially Christian, English symbol—the medieval cathedral—to make space for a new definition of both “Christianity” and “Englishness.” In an interview with the press Alan Williams, a volunteer cathedral guide and local science teacher, said “Too often churches simply look inward at their own, and we just want to embrace other people and engage other people and just say ‘just think about the wonder that we have in life.’”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “From Dinosaurs to DNA Exhibition,” *Ely Cathedral*, accessed February 24, 2018. <https://www.elycathedral.org/events-archive-january-june-2017/from-dinosaurs-to-dna-exhibition>

<sup>2</sup> Laura Brainwood, “Everything from Dinosaurs to DNA Displayed at Ely Cathedral’s Science Festival,” *That’s Cambridge*, May 25, 2017. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57z1n4B\\_4uY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57z1n4B_4uY)

In many ways these events are an answer to contemporary doubts about Christianity's place in a modern, pluralistic society. The Christian population in Europe is projected by the Pew Research Center to decline from 553 million to 454 million over the coming decades,<sup>3</sup> and Ely also costs more than £1.4 million per year (or about £ 3,800 a day) to operate. While the historical significance and stunning architecture of places like Ely lead to a constant stream of visitors and funding, (more than 250,000 people visit per year),<sup>4</sup> the changing face of England's cultural and spiritual identity can lead to questions about the spiritual relevance of working cathedrals. By placing dinosaurs next to images of the Virgin Mary and projecting the experiences of Muslim refugees on a Christian cathedral, the Ely community is acknowledging its role as a contested space. Rather than becoming *more* orthodox or exclusive, the cathedral is suggesting that there is space for many contradictory voices to claim this ancient building as part of their identity.

Though this phenomenon is not surprising in a contemporary, postmodern community, I would argue that it is not exclusive to modernity. Religious communities have *always* been contested spaces that struggled to reconcile a problematic past with a turbulent present. The older the community, the more complicated its history, and a religious house like Ely was nearly four-hundred years old at the time of the Norman invasion. Oral accounts and the records of historians and hagiographers such as Bede

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<sup>3</sup> Conrad Hackett, et. al. "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections 2010-2050," *Pew Research Center*, April 2015, 17. [http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/03/PF\\_15.04.02\\_ProjectionsFullReport.pdf](http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/03/PF_15.04.02_ProjectionsFullReport.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> "Support Us." *Ely Cathedral*. Accessed July 12, 2018. <https://www.elycathedral.org/support-us>



and Ælfric ensured the survival of the community's foundation myths; however, historical, social, and political shifts left plenty of room for doubt and anxiety about the role that Anglo-Saxon founders would play in the late-medieval world.

The purpose of this dissertation is to consider how surviving records of Anglo-Saxon founding saints reflect these shifting anxieties. As figures who inhabited a distant past, their default identity was “forgotten,” “doubted,” and “dead” more than “remembered,” “venerated,” or “present”. Many saints persisted in spite of qualities that would have left them forgotten. This project will focus on the traditions of two problematic Anglo-Saxon women: Æthelthryth, the founder of the double monastery in Ely, and Edith, the patron saint of Wilton.<sup>5</sup> Æthelthryth was a daughter of King Anna of East Anglia. She was married twice and by all accounts remained a virgin (in spite of her second husband's vigorous protests). She abandoned him to establish the double monastery at Ely in 673 A.D. Edith was born some three hundred years after Æthelthryth. She was the questionably legitimate daughter of Edgar and Wulfthryth, and was known for wearing rich clothing, using a heated bathtub, upbraiding her confessors, and keeping a private zoo. She was made abbess of Wilton, but since she died at twenty-three, her lasting contributions to the community were limited.

In everyday circumstances neither woman's behavior would have been embraced by the church or held up as an example to other religious women. However, they were

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<sup>5</sup> In the Latin tradition and also contemporary Ely, the saint is known as “Etheldreda”. Her Norman French name and many Middle English accounts call her “Audrey”. Current scholars, however, tend to call her by her Old English name which is “Æthelthryth”. For the purposes of this dissertation I will also call her Æthelthryth unless I am quoting a primary source or referring to a specific tradition. Edith's Anglo-Saxon name was “Eadgyth”; however, since no Anglo-Saxon accounts of her vita survive, most scholars call her by her Latin/Norman-French/Middle English name, and I will do the same in this project.

simultaneously threatening and necessary; they metonymically represented the communities that they founded, the individuals who prayed at their shrines, and the states that their fathers ruled.<sup>6</sup> In his tenth-century *Lives of the Saints* Ælfric of Enysham emphasizes that “nis angle-cynn bedæled drihtnes halgena” (neither are the English people deprived of God’s holy ones).<sup>7</sup> He specifically lists St. Edmund, St. Cuthbert, St. Æthelthryth, and her unspecified sister as “holy ones” who, not only represented heavenly favor in England, but also made their locations “worthy” of God’s “pure servants.”<sup>8</sup> It follows that when the Normans tried to redefine “Englishness” they, like the modern refugee light show at Ely, appropriated Anglo-Saxon saints and symbols to fit with their plans for the new state.

As independent, unorthodox religious women as well as daughters of prominent English kings, Edith and Æthelthryth were spiritually and politically troubling. It was certainly not in the church’s best interests to encourage queens to reject their husbands or nuns to keep a menagerie. Her hagiographers themselves often mentioned concerns about the legitimacy of their saints. Æthelthryth’s virginity was constantly questioned;

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<sup>6</sup> Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe, *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*. (Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2002), 2. It is widely accepted that the saints have a metonymic relationship with the houses that they patronized. Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe suggest that as Christianity spread, local (as opposed to universal) saints created “a new personalized sacred topography for the Christian world.” They had a nationalizing as well as devotional effect that allowed people to feel that the Christian God was present in their recently-converted countries. See also Michael Goodich, “Miracles and Disbelief in the Late Middle Ages,” *Mediaevistik* 1, (1988). Goodich’s article examines the saints’ local roles in supporting and undermining a community’s identity.

<sup>7</sup> Ælfric, *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints* ed. and trans. Walter Skeat (London: N. Trubner, 1881): 322.

<sup>8</sup> Ælfric states that “Wyrðe is seo stow for þam wurðfullan halgan þæt hi man wurþige and wel gelogiege mid clænum godes þeowum to cristes þeow-dome for þan þe se halga is mærra þonne men magon asmeagan” (Worthy is the place for the sake of the venerable saint that men should venerate it, and well provide it with God’s pure servants, to Christ’s service, because the saint is greater than men may imagine Ibid., 332-33

she founded a double monastery where men and women lived together under the guidance of an abbess and she rejected her husband's legal right to her body. Edith was wealthy and well-connected, but she died at twenty-three without making any identifiable contributions to her community, and her birth and behavior made her claims on sainthood questionable. In spite of their problems, both saints maintained a continuous presence in their communities. Æthelthryth was remarkably popular during the later middle ages. More than twenty-six versions of her vita survive, and she continues to be venerated in present-day Ely. Edith was less popular, but she patronized one of England's most wealthy and influential religious houses. Some accounts of her life—especially Goscelin of St. Bertin's *Legenda Edithae* were significant literary achievements. The point that I want to make here is that Edith and Æthelthryth were venerated in spite of their behavior, birth, and questionable virginity.

My interest is in the literary, historical, and rhetorical approaches that hagiographers used to adapt these saints for an audience that doubted them. Anglo-Saxon women were particularly susceptible to criticism—even from the faithful. The continuity of their cults might deceptively suggest that they were widely accepted by post-Norman hagiographers. Norman-French writers such as Goscelin of St. Bertin and Marie de France certainly invested considerable effort in establishing Æthelthryth and Edith as relevant to a post-Norman community. As Barbara Abou-El-Haj has argued, however, there are significant gaps in the record that suggest lapses in devotion or significant changes to the saints' reception. After the Norman invasion these reconstructions

centered on the redefinition of an Anglo-Norman state.<sup>9</sup> Abou-El-Haj's argument focuses on the cult of St. Cuthbert's late-medieval reception; however, I would argue that the renegotiation of female saints' lives is uniquely complicated in the ways that all women's histories are complicated. No Anglo-Saxon male saint to my knowledge was criticized as a bastard or punished for vanity. As women, Edith and Æthelthryth were doubted by default. Later on, they were reinterpreted as romance heroines, militant defenders of their communities, and examples of saintly humility. The real contributions of saints like Æthelthryth, Sexburgh, Abbe, and Æthelburgh might be held up as exemplary; however, much of their claim on holiness centered around their sexuality (in the case of virgins) and their leadership skills (in the case of abbesses and reformers). In both cases, it caused no end of late-medieval anxiety.

The other cause for concern was their lack of bureaucratic approval. Saints before 1234 A.D. did not go through a formal canonization process. Women like Æthelthryth, Sexburgh, Hilda, Æbbe, Edith, Wulfthryth, and Æthelburh may have laid the foundations for some of England's most powerful religious institutions, but they were sainted on the authority of rumors and local politics. There have been some 300 canonizations in the Catholic church since Pope Gregory IX's 1234 decree which reserved that power for the pope; however, more than 10,000 saints are or have been found in the pantheon.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Paul E. Szarmach, *Holy Men and Holy Women : Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 177.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints : How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 17.

*Doubt in Two Anglo-Saxon Cults: Scholarship and Context*

Both of these saints have been examined to greater or lesser degrees by contemporary scholars. Virginia Blanton's foundational book, *Signs of Devotion*, illustrated the extent of Æthelthryth's importance both nationally and internationally.<sup>11</sup> Katherine O'Brian O'Keefe's *Stealing Obedience* discussed the concept of holy women's agency through the lens of Edith's remarkable independence.<sup>12</sup> The two were discussed together in Mary Dockray-Miller's edition of *The Wilton Chronicle* and *The Wilton Life of St. Æthelthryth*.<sup>13</sup> Cynthia Turner Camp also discussed the *Wilton Chronicle* as a uniquely women's history of Wilton.<sup>14</sup> They were often found together in a number of other saints' miscellanies including Cambridge Additional 2604, Cotton Faustina B.III, and the *Salisbury Breviary*.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, I could have chosen any number of saints as the focus for this study. Anglo-Saxon England was populated with hundreds of abbesses and assorted holy figures who were subject to criticism; however, these two women represent key moments in the development of the English church. Æthelthryth's community was and is remarkably

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<sup>11</sup> Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615*. (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Mary Dockray-Miller. *Saints Edith and Æthelthryth : Princesses, Miracle Workers, and Their Late Medieval Audience : The Wilton Chronicle and The Wilton Life of St Æthelthryth*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Cynthia Turner Camp, *Anglo-Saxon Saints Lives as History Writing in Late Medieval England*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> See Mary Dockray-Miller. "The St. Edith Cycle in the *Salisbury Breviary* (c. 1460)," *Fifteenth Century Studies* 34 (2009).

successful; Edith's community slowly declined until it was dissolved entirely during the Reformation. They were popular enough that their lives were re-memorialized many times over the course of the middle ages and beyond, they share some of the same textual history, and both were problematic enough that their adaptors felt the need to justify their respective claims to holiness on numerous occasions.

Æthelthryth was associated with several important figures in the conversion of Anglo-Saxon England; she was the daughter of King Anna, temporary wife of King Ecgbert, and acolyte of Bishop Wilfrid. She was arguably the most widely venerated female English saint, and the remarkably large textual tradition that survives her provides a strong sense of her cult's late-medieval development. More than twenty-five different medieval accounts of her life survive.<sup>16</sup> Some of her more famous hagiographers included Bede, Ælfric of Enysham, William of Malmesbury, Goscelin of St. Bertin, Marie de France, and Osbern of Bokenham. From the institution of her cult in the seventh century until Henry VIII's Reformation in the sixteenth century, evidence of her veneration continuously permeated England's religious landscape. Virginia Blanton has identified at least seventeen locations associated with her cult in late medieval England and thirteen from the Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>17</sup>

Nearly every account of Æthelthryth's life mentions people who mocked and disbelieved her. She was a daughter of King Anna of East Anglia, wife of King Ecgbert of Northumbria, and first abbess of Ely. She was married twice, and according to Bede

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<sup>16</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 5

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 9-10, 21, 269

she remained a virgin despite her marriages—a fact that was proved when her body was found incorrupt sixteen years after her death. Though married virgins are not uncommon in the hagiographic tradition, it seems that Æthelthryth’s contemporaries doubted that one could be found among the English people. Bede, after attempting to refute certain critics, argued that “we [need not] doubt that this which often happened in days gone by, as we learn from trustworthy accounts, could happen in our time too through the help of the Lord.” (Nec diffidendum est nostra etiam aetate fieri potuisse, quod aevo praecedente aliquoties factum fideles historiae narrant, donante uno eodemque Domino.)<sup>18</sup> By defending Æthelthryth, Bede, not only protects the saint herself, but also the English church—which was still in the early stages of development. He was clearly interested in defending both the integrity of the community as well as the saint who founded it.

Though Edith of Wilton was far less popular, she was the patron saint of one of England’s most wealthy women’s communities and the debatably legitimate daughter of King Edgar of Mercia. He was the political face of the Benedictine reforms and sponsored both the dissolution of the double monasteries as well as the creation of several women’s houses during the tenth century. However, her reputation was rattled by her birth and behavior. In her *vita* it claims that she wore rich furs and other unsuitable clothing, enjoyed baths, and kept a private zoo. Though she was praised in typical hagiographic fashion for her achievements as an abbess, Edith died at the age of twenty-three, and is mentioned only in passing in historical accounts that described her more

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<sup>18</sup> Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991): 392-93. Note: Latin translations are by the cited translator unless otherwise noted. Old English translations are mine.

famous half-brothers: Edward the Martyr and Æthelred Unræd. Her mother, Wulfthryth was likely the real power behind the foundation of Wilton; however, the question of whether she was Edgar's concubine or proper wife was hotly debated in medieval histories, and led later historians to doubt, not only her claim on sainthood, but her daughter's as well.<sup>19</sup>

Though they represented significantly different moments in Anglo-Saxon history, these two saints were often described in conjunction with one another. Æthelthryth was easily the more popular of the two; however, Edith's vita are found in at least three of the same texts as Æthelthryth—often in direct conjunction with one another. The fifteenth-century *Wilton Chronicle* focuses on the life and death of Edith, but the manuscript also includes an account of St. Æthelthryth's life that was written in the same hand, meter, and dialect as Edith's history. This text is probably trading on the Ely saint's considerably more popular reputation and the historical connections between the two houses. Though Æthelthryth formed her community in 672, it was ruined by Vikings and then taken over by secular canons in the ninth century. Edith's father, Edgar reestablished Ely as a Benedictine monastery at the same time that he sponsored Wilton.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Barbara Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses. Women, Power, and Politics*. (New York: Continuum, 2003). Barbara Yorke has argued that late-medieval confusion over Edith's legitimacy and Wulfthryth's status in the convent may have stemmed from a misunderstanding of how Anglo-Saxon convent culture functioned on a day-to-day basis. Rather than the carefully enclosed sisters of later centuries, Anglo-Saxon nuns were probably similar to the continental canonesses who were able to leave their houses if they wished to marry. At least, it seems that early writers did not always distinguish between canonesses and consecrated nuns. It was this confusion that was supposedly remedied by the Benedictine Reforms; however, the practical consistency of these changes would have varied. The fact that Edgar took Wulfthryth from a convent may have been something of a doctrinal grey area. Yorke further argues that it was likely that the two were married and Edith was their legitimate issue.

<sup>20</sup> Simon Keynes, "Ely Abbey 672-1109," in *A History of Ely Cathedral*, ed. Peter Meadows and Nigel Ramsay, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003.). 21-22.



Not only does Wilton connect itself with Æthelthryth, hagiographers in East Anglia seem to connect themselves with Edith. In Cambridge University Library Additional MS 2604 (hereafter CUL 2604), twenty-two vernacular saints' lives are included in the same fifteenth-century hand—indicating that, like Cotton Faustina B.III, they were intentionally grouped.<sup>21</sup> A number of these texts describe the lives of the female leaders of Ely: Æthelthryth, Sexburgh, Eormenhild, Eorcengota, Whitburh, and Wærburgh. This grouping is immediately followed by the life of St Edith. CUL, Add. MS 2604's depiction of Edith's life and miracles bears striking resemblance to those events described in *The Wilton Chronicle*.<sup>22</sup>

Both women are also included in the Salisbury Breviary: an illuminated fifteenth-century assembly of saints' lives that was owned by John of Lancaster, the Regent of France.<sup>23</sup> This highly decorated text includes miniatures of each saint's life which are useful because they illustrate those elements that were most important to either the artist or the patron who commissioned the book. For example, Edith's cycle includes her induction into the religious life, her service to the poor, and her intercession with her father for prisoners. Omitted from text and art are her discovery of a fragment from the true cross (which Æthelwold tried to take for himself until it started bleeding) and her miraculous intercession with King Canute. As Mary Dockray-Miller has argued, the

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<sup>21</sup> See Veronica O'Mara and Virginia Blanton, "Cambridge University Library, Additional MS 2604: Repackaging Female Saints' Lives for the Fifteenth-Century English Nun" *Journal of the Early Book Society* 13, no 1 (2010), 259.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-247 (especially 259). Only three men are included in this text: John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, and Leonard. The rest are women.

<sup>23</sup> Dockray-Miller, "Salisbury Breviary," 49.

portrayal of Edith in this text reflects a humble, obedient young woman in stead of one who interfered with the actions of bishops and doubters.<sup>24</sup> Æthelthryth's vita similarly focuses on scenes of her obedience: her marriage to Ecgfrith, her final illness, and her prayers at an altar.

The textual relationship between these saints suggests that, in the face of doubt and criticism, they create in interconnected history and community. The connections that medieval hagiographers seem to be making between Æthelthryth and Edith's lives also suggest a kind of collapsed version of history. Even though the two saints were born more than three hundred years apart, texts like MS CUL 2604 and MS Cotton Faustina B.III suggest that by the fifteenth century, late-medieval authors viewed major abbesses in Pre-Norman England as a legendary, interconnected community. While one saint might be less popular or orthodox than another, these kinds of miscellanies suggested that the saints upheld one another and, by extension, the communities that they all founded.

Edith and Æthelthryth have long, complicated textual traditions that span more than a thousand years. Ultimately, I would argue that doubt can function as a hermeneutic for understanding the development of Edith and Æthelthryth's textual traditions.

#### *Doubt and Skepticism: Definitions and Scholarship*

There is a large body of literature that discusses the concepts of doubt and skepticism. Though total disbelief in God, miracles, saints, or an afterlife have little to no recorded tradition during the Middle Ages, vague allusions to disbelief and accusations of

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<sup>24</sup>Dockray-Miller, *Edith and Æthelthryth*, 50-53.

heresy are ubiquitous. Carl Watkins calls doubt the “dark matter” of medieval literature and suggests that it must be perceived in moments of “suggestive defensiveness”—when orthodox writers betray their anxieties about unwritten, but common attitudes.<sup>25</sup> In hagiography these moments are often embodied by Vikings, Jews, heretics, or Romans. These oppressive figures provide a threatening “other” that allowed the saints to demonstrate their devotion.<sup>26</sup>

Just as often, however, doubt was embodied by the faithful—people whose curiosity or mistaken worldview led them to unnecessarily “steady the ark” or criticize positions that the Church held to be orthodox. Fear of internal corruption became steadily more pronounced during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The Church began to be more defined by bureaucratic systems and more anxious about heresy. Saints such as Dominic and Aquinas—drawn from mendicant, scholarly orders—rose in influence.<sup>27</sup> It was also during this period that long descriptions of posthumous miracles became popular.<sup>28</sup>

Though many medieval and modern scholars have tried to define doubt, it tends to resist the typologies that are drawn out for it. In his *Summa theologiae* Thomas Aquinas divided it into the unbelief of pagans and the unbelief of lapsed believers.<sup>29</sup> For the first

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<sup>25</sup> Carl Watkins, “Providence, Experience, and Doubt” in *Fictions of Knowledge Fact, Evidence, Doubt*. ed. Yota Batsaki, Subha Mukherji, and Jan-Melissa Schramm (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 45.

<sup>26</sup> Goodich, “Miracles and Disbelief...” 23-24.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 24

<sup>28</sup> Rachel Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011): 9-12

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the Dominican Province, (Benzinger Brothers, 1947), 2:10:1-12, accessed June 1, 2018, <https://dhspriori.org/thomas/summa/>

group doubt is simply a biproduct of the Fall, and not a sin in itself. When this group is damned, it is for sins that require faith and sacraments for absolution, not for their unbelief itself. He argues that the willing rejection of belief, however, is a sin—one that can only be committed by those who are offered knowledge and reject it.<sup>30</sup> If unbelief, however, is the human default, and all belief is an act of creation that is built against this backdrop, any act of questioning one's preconceived assumptions can place a believer in danger of sin. Since the *Summa* itself involves thousands of pages of questions meant to reshape both the reader and the thinker's worldview, it follows that this dichotomy undermines itself. The line between believers and unbelievers becomes perilously thin.

Another typology by Carl Watkins divides medieval doubt into “pious” and “impious” expressions. Impious doubt leaned toward blasphemy or heresy; it was meant to tear down belief. “Pious” doubt was the natural response of the faithful when faced with an event that challenged their worldview; it usually provided an opportunity for greater wonder or faithfulness, upheld the orthodox positions of the church, and was wary of false visions, signs, and saints. Aquinas would doubtlessly fall into this category. This division, however, also undermines itself—a fact that Watkins recognizes from the beginning of his analysis.<sup>31</sup> Though the binaries are useful as tools, Barbara Newman's hermeneutic in *Medieval Crossover* of both/and to describe the medieval relationship between secular and sacred also applies to the doubt/belief dichotomy.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 2:10:7

<sup>31</sup> Watkins, “Providence, Experience, and Doubt,” 40. See also Steven Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?” *Representations* 103, no. 1 (2008): 1-29.

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013). 7-13.

I argue that in medieval narratives belief and doubt coexist in tension, but one does not necessarily cast out the other. Though a definition of “doubt” is difficult to pin down, for the purposes of this project, I would argue that doubt is an absence; it is “not belief.” On the other hand, belief is “not doubt.” They represent positive and negative sides of the same coin (in the sense that an artist paints in negative space).<sup>33</sup> Any attempt to say what doubt *is* must, essentially, prove a negative—that did not keep people from trying.

Medieval writers and philosophers spilled much ink trying to fill this negative space with miraculous evidence; hagiography was one of the most widely accessible mediums where they did that. I argue, however, that by memorializing a saint, they also memorialize the doubt that they were attempting to cast out.

### *Chapter Summaries*

#### Chapter 1

This section discusses the parallels between doubted pride and doubted virginity. The two concepts have been connected since late antiquity when virgin women began to use their position as spouses of Christ to claim power for themselves. Philosophers such as Augustine, Tertullian, Jerome, Ambrose, and eventually Gregory the Great argued that a proud virgin is not a virgin at all. Virginity, they argued, was a state of mind as much as a physical status. This argument shaped Anglo-Saxon as well as late-medieval constructions of virginity. It therefore influenced the entire arc of *Æthelthryth* and

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<sup>33</sup> Aquinas, *Summa* 2:10 Thomas Aquinas also defines doubt by its contrary. He prefaces his tenth question in the second part by discussing the “contrary vices”: “In due sequence we must consider the contrary vices: first, unbelief, which is contrary to faith; secondly, blasphemy, which is opposed to confession of faith; thirdly, ignorance and dullness of mind, which are contrary to knowledge and understanding” (Consequenter considerandum est de vitiis oppositis. Et primo, de infidelitate, quae opponitur fidei; secundo, de blasphemia, quae opponitur confessioni; tertio, de ignorantia et hebetudine, quae opponuntur scientiae et intellectui.)

Edith's cult development. Since Æthelthryth's virginity was doubted and Edith's humility were doubted, humility was emphasized by hagiographers in both cases. While virginity on its own was not sufficient reason to exercise power over men, humility was emphasized in powerful women to proactively counter accusations of pride.

## Chapter 2

The second chapter of this dissertation explores how doubt was constructed in late-medieval and early modern constructions of Æthelthryth and Edith's vita. Using the work of Augustine and Aquinas, I read the punishment of doubters in miracle narratives through a hermeneutic of personal devotion. I argue that, while Æthelthryth and Edith were judged and defended through hagiography, it also provides a model by which doubters should judge. Through devotional practices—especially the veneration of the saints, a petitioner came to connect with miracles and divine intercession in stead of doubt. The two sides, however, coexisted as two sides of the same coin. Doubt did not dissolve the cults of the saints, and evidence did not dissolve doubt. Rather, hagiographers placed the two in unresolved tension with one another and allowed for a dialectic process for acquiring faith.

## Chapter 3

The third chapter considers the anxieties that were related to both Edith and the community that venerated her. Both Edith and Æthelthryth were born to power, connection, privilege, and wealth. They brought all of those things into the communities that they founded; however, in a religious tradition that valued humility and submission—especially in women—these were not necessarily qualities that led to sainthood. Moreover, both saints were written as models of elite religiosity, and their

behavior was not always desirable for aristocratic women: Æthelthryth refused to consummate both her marriages, and Edith rejected marriage and position altogether, which put the oft-ridiculed Æthelred on the throne. Scholars such as Virginia Blanton, Monika Otter, and Stephanie Hollis have described the devotional qualities of Æthelthryth and Edith's vita. In this chapter I outline both the political problems that Wilton faced, the ways that Edith reflected those problems, and how they can be read through John of Salisbury's arguments from the *Policraticus*

### *Conclusions*

People in the seventh century were no more likely to believe that a twice-married woman remained a virgin than people today. Though hagiographers valiantly attempted to prove their legitimacy, they were largely unsuccessful. No amount of miraculous evidence stopped people from questioning whether Æthelthryth was truly a virgin. No amount of dedicated, beautifully written hagiography could prove that Edith was as pious as Goscelin or the Wilton author claimed. That's not really the point—my purpose in writing this dissertation is to examine the ways that people *tried* to process the cognitive dissonance between these strange, funny, at times ridiculous stories, and their very real desire to connect to their histories and their faith.

## CHAPTER 2

### PROUD VIRGINITY

Pride was the first sin committed by a woman, and it has been a recurring accusation leveled against any of her daughters who threatened established systems of power. During the final stages of her first heresy trial Joan of Arc was specifically charged with it. According to her accusers she had “presumptuously and arrogantly...ma[de] herself leader and commander of an army.”<sup>34</sup> When she recanted from her earlier confession the records describe her as follows: “the fire of her pride, which had seemed quenched, was revived by demonic winds and enkindled into destructive flames.”<sup>35</sup> In spite of all she had accomplished in defense of France, it was her intent that seems to have been on trial, and it was perceived intent that ultimately condemned her during her second trial.

Intent, however, was also used to exonerate her. When her conviction was examined and finally overturned in 1456, several witnesses wrote in her defense—specifically praising her humility and submission to the church. For example, Brother Ysambard de la Pierre said that “Joan had, at the end, so great contrition and such beautiful penitence that it was a thing to be admired” and he claimed that “As I was near her at the end the poor woman besought and humbly begged me to go into the Church

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<sup>34</sup> Daniel Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 148

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 210



nearby and bring her the Cross, to hold it upright on high before her eyes until the moment of death.”<sup>36</sup>

Joan may have been a fifteenth-century martyr, but this language of pride and humility was an old defense that was used to protect other women whose threatening behavior needed to be “made safe” for the communities and cults that they founded. Anglo-Saxon women were especially susceptible to accusations. Æthelthryth’s name literally means “noble power” or “noble pride.”<sup>37</sup> Edith’s Old English name, Eadgyð, literally means “blessed or rich gift.” Their names were a good start for potential queens, but not necessarily for potential saints. Though Edith and Æthelthryth’s doubters accused them of many things, most of their criticism centered around pride. Ælfric was concerned that Æthelthryth was not appropriately submissive to her husband. William of Malmesbury accused Edith of wearing elegant clothing. King Cnut laughed at Edith’s royal lineage (he crudely called her a bastard).<sup>38</sup> Æthelthryth even accuses herself of vice, claiming that her final illness was caused by pride in her position and her fine jewelry as a young woman.

For both the early church fathers and the hagiographers who were influenced by them, pride in virgins was a special concern. Their marriage to God lent them authority that laywomen lacked, and while they upheld power systems, they also undermined them. Anxieties about the power of virgins led to a strong rhetorical tradition that made

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<sup>36</sup> T. Douglas Murray. *Jeanne D’Arc, Maid of Orleans, Deliverer of France*. (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1902). 161, *Nineteenth Century Collections Online* (accessed June 1, 2018). <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/tinyurl/6heja2>. 161

<sup>37</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 46

<sup>38</sup> Dockray-Miller, *Edith and Æthelthryth*, 236

virginity a metaphorical, spiritual state that relied on humility and obedience to remain legitimate. For theologians like Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great, proud virgins were not virgins at all. Pride became a rhetorical control mechanism. The saints and their defenders, however, returned in kind. Internal pride might undermine performative virginity, but humility could also undermine performative pride. Both early and late writers emphasized humility in order to undermine accusations of pride and sexual misconduct. In the following chapter I hope to accomplish two things: first, I will argue that pride and virginity were rhetorically connected in both the patristic tradition and for the Anglo-Saxon authors who established Æthelthryth's cult. I will then argue that Edith and Æthelthryth's hagiographers invoked humility to counter doubts about their legitimacy.

#### *Virgin Monstrosities and the Patristic Tradition*

When the earliest women started forming chaste communities during the third century, there was some debate as to whether consecrated virgins should wear a veil in church.<sup>39</sup> Tertullian responded that, since “man is the head of the woman,” (*Si caput mulieris vir est*) it follows that men must also be the heads of virgins unless they would wish to form “some monstrosity with a head of their own” (*nisi si virgo tertium genus est monstruosum aliquod sui capitis*).<sup>40</sup> To prevent the creation of an ungovernable third gender, the church fathers took pains to safeguard the status quo. Philosophers such as Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great argued that in the eyes of God proud virgins

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<sup>39</sup> Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England*. (Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 2001): 28-30.

<sup>40</sup> Tertullian, “De virginibus velandis,” *The Tertullian Project*, Ed. V. Bulhart (1957), [http://www.tertullian.org/latin/de\\_virginibus\\_velandis.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/latin/de_virginibus_velandis.htm)

were not virgins at all— that virginity was as much a state of mind as a bodily status. They encouraged humility and obedience as a prophylactic against any mental, emotional, or physical loss of “virginity.”

As Tertullian’s comments demonstrate, the early church fathers struggled to define the roles of virginity, marriage, and widowhood in the lives of consecrated women.<sup>41</sup> They certainly disagreed with the Manichaeans’ strict condemnation of marriage, but at the same time they also wished to establish virginity as a superior way of life. This resulted in a number of disagreements and rhetorical acrobatics that left the issue, at times, more vague than when it began. Several of St. Jerome’s most detailed treatises on the topic of marriage and virginity were written in response to a heretical monk named Jovinian, and many of the other church father’s treatises were written in response to Jerome. Though little is known about Jovinian, he apparently took opposition to Manichaean Gnosticism too far. It seems that he rejected monastic asceticism and specifically argued that virgins, widows, and married women were equal in heaven. Jerome’s *Adversus Jovinianum* is a thorough condemnation of his philosophy.

Though he specifically avoids the Manichaean condemnation of all marriage, his position throughout his written works was fairly aggressive. Apparently his extremism

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<sup>41</sup> From the early church fathers to nineteenth century conduct novels, the process of defining, much less proving virginity has been a subject of anxious debate. Though the arguments of early theologians such as Tertullian, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great were key to medieval constructions of holiness, the standing definitions of chastity and virtue lacked concrete language. As Kathleen Coyne Kelly has demonstrated, the terms “castitas” and “virginitas” were used interchangeably to describe women who were strictly physical virgins, faithful in their marriages, committed to a chaste life regardless of their sexual history, or some combination of each. See Sarah Salih. *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England*. (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001.), 2 Also see Kathleen Coyne Kelly. *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*. (Taylor and Francis, 2000). *Proquest Ebook Central*. Accessed December 28, 2017. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/lib/asulib-ebooks/detail.action?docID=178659>.

was widely known until the end of the period, since it is Jerome who was specifically mocked in the Wife of Bath's Prologue.<sup>42</sup> In his letter to Eustochium he argued that "I praise wedlock, I praise marriage, but it is because they give me virgins."<sup>43</sup> Jerome even suggested that God himself could not restore virginity once lost. He argues that "Though God can do all things He cannot raise up a virgin when once she has fallen. He may indeed relieve one who is defiled from the penalty of her sin, but He will not give her a crown."<sup>44</sup> His overemphasis on physical virginity led other philosophers to encourage a more moderate approach to marriage and focus on metaphorical virginity.

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<sup>42</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 114. Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* as well as unspecified works by Tertullian were both listed in "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" among the anti-feminist books that Alisoun's husband, Jankyn read nightly:

A cardinal, that highte Seint Jerome,  
That made a book agayn Jovinian  
In which book eek ther was Tertulan  
Crisippus, Trotula, and Helowys,  
And eek the Parables of Salomon  
Ovides Art, and books many on  
And alle thise were bounden in o volume  
And every nyght and day was his custume  
Whan he hadde leyser and vacacioun  
From oother worldly occupacioun  
To reden on this book of wikked wyves  
He knew of hem mo legends and lyves  
Than been of goode wyves in the Bible  
For trusteth wel, it is an impossible  
That any clerk wol speke good of wyves  
But if it be of hooly seintes lyves  
Ne of noon oother woman never the mo. (lms 674-691)

The appearance in Chaucer suggests that the ideas set forth by the early church fathers were widely known among both learned scholars and the laity. Saints' lives are also listed as the only "safe" spaces women were allowed to inhabit. The only "good" wife in this situation is a dead one that can be made orthodox through the systems of canonization. Chaucer's playful tone also suggests that a medieval audience may have found this as ridiculous as a modern one.

<sup>43</sup> Jerome, *Letters and Select Works*, trans. W.H. Freemantle, (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 123.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 113

Augustine, for example, mirrored Jerome in many respects; however, he wrote several texts on marriage and virginity that responded to his more extreme positions. While he also believed that marriage is the best recourse for those who are too weak to commit to a chaste life, Augustine's *De bono coniugali* praises marriage for its ability to produce children and fidelity as well as a sacrament.<sup>45</sup> He also prefaces *De sancta virginitate* with a warning to virgins:

We recently published a book, *The Good of Marriage*, in which we also admonished and warned the virgins of Christ that they must not, because of the superiority of the more perfect gift which they have received from on high, despise, by comparison with themselves, the fathers and mothers of the people of God; and that, because by divine law continence is preferred to matrimony and holy virginity to wedlock, they must not belittle the worth of those [married].<sup>46</sup>

In Augustine's case, he seems more interested in keeping virgins humble than in shaming married people. Indeed, he makes it clear that virginity is as much a mental as a physical state in the first book of *Civitas dei*. He argues that rape or accidental rupture of the hymen does not destroy virginity:

Let us rather draw this conclusion, that while the sanctity of the soul remains even when the body is violated, the sanctity of the body is not lost; and that, in like manner, the sanctity of the body is lost when the

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<sup>45</sup> Augustine, *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*. Ed. Roy Deferrari and Charles Wilcox, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1999.), 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 143-44

sanctity of the soul is violated, though the body itself remain intact. And therefore a woman who has been violated by the sin of another, and without any consent of her own, has no cause to put herself to death; much less has she cause to commit suicide in order to avoid such violation, for in that case she commits certain homicide to prevent a crime which is uncertain as yet, and not her own.<sup>47</sup>

For Augustine, virginity can give rise to pride. Though a woman might be physically intact, her intent could lead her to metaphorically break her vows.

Several hundred years later, Gregory the Great turns the argument backwards and spoke of virginity as a remedy to pride. Though he, too, warns against hypocrisy in celibate men and women, Gregory also argues that pride is the root of all vices, and “it is from reasons connected with marriage that this pride mostly begins.”<sup>48</sup> He fears that people wish to accomplish great things for their children and also as a debt to their parents. By rejecting family connections, men and women also reject a desire for personal advancement.

Clearly Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory differed on the fine-grain definitions and role of virginity, marriage, and pride; and the history of virginity is a much larger discussion than I will address here. My key point, however, is that, though they significantly differed in degree and approach, all three of these men agreed that pride undermines “true” chastity.

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<sup>47</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, ed. Marcus Dods, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871). I: 14, Accessed June 5, 2018, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/45304/45304-h/45304-h.htm>

<sup>48</sup> Gregory, *On Virginity*, (New York: Aeterna Press, 2016). 214

### *Aldhelm and English Virginity*

As the concept of consecrated virginity came to Anglo-Saxon England, the interrelationship between virginity and pride arrived as well. In fact, it was politically useful; many of England's earliest religious leaders were once-married women. The double-monastery system relied on the leadership of widowed (and occasionally separated) royal women such as Æthelthryth, Sexburgh, Erminilda, Cuthburga, and Werburh. Most of them were not virgins, but they were wealthy and politically connected to husbands, fathers, and sons whose patronage was essential to the growth of a young religion.

The earliest English treatise on the subject was written by St. Aldhelm during the seventh century for the nuns at Barking. *De virginitate*, is distinctive as one of the few books by a known author that was written for Anglo-Saxon women.<sup>49</sup> He appropriated Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory's work; however, he was far more enthusiastic in his praise of marriage. Like earlier philosophers and theologians, he claimed that virginity was not just a matter of corporeal chastity. "Many," he claimed, had achieved that without any benefit to their own souls. Corporeal chastity had to be ratified by "spiritual purity," and this was only accomplished by a "few."<sup>50</sup> Unlike other scholars, however, Aldhelm praised women who had willingly abandoned their marriages for a religious life. Earlier scholars had outlined a hierarchy of women's virtue: that described virginity as

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<sup>49</sup> Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press: 1992): 78-79. Aldhelm encouraged the women at Barking to read Gregory's *Moralia in Job*—a fact that both demonstrated the high level of women's Anglo-Saxon education and also suggests a special doctrinal focus on the relationship between pride and chastity.

<sup>50</sup> Ed. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, *Aldhelm, the Prose Works*. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer 1979) 59.

gold, widowhood as silver, and marriage as bronze. Aldhelm replaced “widowhood” with “chastity”—thereby allowing separated women to be elevated to the status of widows.<sup>51</sup> He enthusiastically praises the value of marriage and calls its disparagement “the ravings of heretics”. While once-married women might never rise to the level of their virginal sisters, he maintained that “the radiant beauty of pure silver is not shamefully debased, even though the refined metal of shining gold is preferred.”<sup>52</sup>

His treatment of virginity is also wary in stead of enthusiastic. Relying on Gregory’s *Moralia in Job*, Aldhelm suggests that, if spiritual virginity is to be maintained, the devout must arm themselves with “the iron-tipped spears of the virtues” against “the horrendous monster of Pride and at the same time against those seven wild beasts of the virulent vices.”<sup>53</sup> Pride, it seems, is Aldhelm’s greatest concern, especially among virgins who might turn their sexual abstinence into a reason to think highly of themselves. Rather, quoting Gregory the Great, he believes that pride, which would consume all other virtues, can only be led “with the nose-ring of humility.”<sup>54</sup>

As hagiographers and historians shaped saints’ cults, they rhetorically warded against accusations of doubt by calling on the language of vice and virtue. Though both the definitions of pride and humility were ill-defined, they were consistently paired in visual and textual representations. As Richard Newhauser has argued, at times they were treated as remedies to one another, warring opposites, and contemplative aids. In any

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<sup>51</sup> Lapidge, *Prose Works*, 55-56

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 64-65

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 68

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 67



case, they were defined by their opposite. Humility was paired with pride; chastity with lust; envy with largess; wrath with brotherly kindness, etc. Unlike other devotional lists such as the penitential psalms, Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Beatitudes, etc. that often appeared alone, the “contrary” virtues consistently appeared with their opposites. One was not necessarily seen as a “remedy” to the other; rather, they were juxtaposed in such a way that facilitated personal interpretation. Virtue and vice shaped and defined one another in a kind of circular self-theorization that encouraged contemplation but resisted concrete definition.<sup>55</sup> While most theologians agreed that the best devotion was physical abstinence combined with virtue, the institutional definition of both concepts was murky at best. The process of proving an unorthodox saint was thus a devotional exercise as well: humility was not a remedy, but a compliment to pride. Both could rest in unresolved tension, and the act of recognizing holiness was interpretive—it involved faith as much as evidence and sanctified the reader.

### *Writing the Anglo-Saxon Saints*

Bede and Ælfric—both of whom were influenced by Aldhelm—wrote saints’ lives that reflected the rhetorical relationship between pride, sexuality, and humility. Each was tasked with establishing Æthelthryth’s cult at major turning points in the English church. During the conversion period Bede wrote her first vita. Though he mentions that several people doubted her, his work takes pains to establish her cult. He

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<sup>55</sup> Richard Newhauser, “Preaching the Contrary Virtues,” *Mediaeval Studies* 70: (2008), 135-162. The concept of “contrary virtues” is discussed at length in Richard Newhauser’s article, “Preaching the ‘Contrary Virtues’”. This list is different from the so-called “cardinal virtues” that are described and discussed at length in Istvan Bejczy, *The Cardinal Virtues in the Middle Ages: A study in Moral Thought from the Fourth to the Fourteenth Century*, (Boston: Brill, 2011).

adds a long hymn to virginity that compares Æthelthryth to universal virgins and famous women such as Mary, Agatha, Agnes, and Cecilia.<sup>56</sup> Of course, Æthelthryth lacked the drama and violence that ratified these saints' legitimacy, and the Virgin Mary was the only married woman among them who lived in continence. He argues that, while Æthelthryth's earthly spouse was powerful, she rejected him for a better, heavenly spouse. His work demonstrates some anxiety about how this saint's improbable claims on virginity would be received. He mentions two doubts: first, people did not believe that a married woman could be a virgin, and second, even if there had been such marriages in other places and times, it would not happen in England.

Some three hundred years later Ælfric, writing during the Benedictine Reforms, sought to reestablish her cult after the Viking invasions had decimated Ely. Though his life is essentially a vernacular translation of Bede, he makes changes that suggest that he was uncomfortable with the nature of Æthelthryth's marital continence and its reception by uneducated readers. He was clearly influenced by later Anglo-Saxon anxieties about orthodoxy, the role of priests and the laity, and women's place in the English church. He composed the *Lives of the Saints* at the request of Bishop/Alderman Æthelwerd. In a prefatory letter to the work he politely makes it clear that he did so against his better judgment. He feared that by translating the Lives of the saints into English that "the pearls of Christ [would be] held in disrespect."<sup>57</sup> He asks that, since he writes at the request of Æthelwerd and Æthelmer, "it not be considered as a fault in me that I turn

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<sup>56</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 399

<sup>57</sup> Ælfric, *Lives of the Saints*, 1-2 "Nec tamen plura promitto me scripturum hac lingua, quia nec conuenit huic sermocinationi plura inseri; ne forte despectui habeantur margarite Christi."

sacred narrative into our own tongue”. He also adds that “I have resolved at last to desist from such labour after completing the fourth book.”<sup>58</sup> It seems clear that Æthelwerd wished to promote the saints among the laity as part of the Benedictine Reforms. At the same time, Ælfric was anxious about the text’s reception—which suggests that some of his work contained stories that he preferred to leave unexamined.

Æthelthryth may be one of these saints; his portrayal of her vita demonstrates certain anxieties about the relationship between the saint and her second husband. He added an incongruous story about a “certain thane” (*sumum ðegne*) who had children with his wife and then lived in continence until they eventually took holy orders.<sup>59</sup> Peter Jackson has argued that in the context of the Benedictine Reforms, Ælfric may have felt uncomfortable with a woman who rejected her husband’s legal right to consummate their marriage—a practice that Augustine and other church fathers had condemned. The anecdote about the unnamed man provided a more orthodox alternative.<sup>60</sup> Both Bede’s overemphasis on her virginity and Ælfric’s anxieties about her relationship with her husband suggest that Æthelthryth’s status as a married virgin troubled her earliest historians. Both of them engaged with the patristic conversations about pride and virginity and also alluded to humility as evidence of the saint’s holiness.

Bede

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 5 “Amplectuntur lectitando; sed decrui modo quiescere post quartum librum”

<sup>59</sup> Ælfric, *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints* ed. and trans. Walter Skeat (London: N. Trubner, 1881): 440-441

<sup>60</sup> Peter Jackson, “Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage: A Reconsideration of the *Life of Æthelthryth*, lines 120-130.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 29 (2009): 235-60.

As Bede sought to establish Æthelthryth as a quintessentially English virgin, he used Aldhelm's work. He praises *De virginitate* in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, and he specifically identifies pride and sex as sources of doubt in Æthelthryth's vita.<sup>61</sup> Specifically, when her corpse was exhumed Bede records two miracles related to her body: first, it was preserved, and second, an incision to the tumor on her neck had healed. Both of these miracles are an answer to doubts that had been mentioned earlier in the vita. Bede specifically cites the former as "proof that she had remained uncorrupted by contact with any man" (*indicio est quia a uirili contactu incorrupta durauerit*).<sup>62</sup> The second miracle, however, also legitimized her virginity by suggesting that she had overcome pride.<sup>63</sup> The tumor that had killed her sixteen years earlier had represented Æthelthryth's pride as a young woman. Before she died she made the following speech:

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 514-15 He [Aldhelm] also wrote a most excellent book on virginity both in hexameter verse and in prose, producing a twofold work after the example of Sedulius. (*Scripsit et de uirginitate librum eximium, quem in exemplum Sedulii geminato opere et uersibus exametris et prosa composuit.*)

See also Ibid., 392-93 Though she lived with [King Ecgrith] for twelve years she still preserved the glory of perfect virginity. When I asked Bishop Wilfrid of blessed memory whether this was true, because certain people doubted it, he told me that he had the most perfect proof of her virginity; in fact Ecgrith had promised to give him estates and money if he could persuade the queen to consummate their marriage, because he knew that there was none whom she loved more than Wilfrid himself. Nor need we doubt that this, which often happened in days gone by as we learn from trustworthy accounts, could happen in our time too through the help of the Lord, who has promised to be with us even to the end of the age. (*Cuius consortio cum XII annis uteretur perpetua tamen mansit uirginitatis integritate gloriosa, sicut mihimet sciscitanti, cum hoc an ita esset quibusdam uenisset in dubium, beatae memoriae Uilfrid episcopus referebat, dicens se testem integritatis eius esse certissimum, adeo ut Ecgridus promiserit se ei terras ac pecunias multas esse donaturum, si reginae posset persuadere eius uti conubio, quia sciebat illam nullum uirorum plus illo diligere. Nec praecedente aliquoties factum fideles historiae narrant, donate manere pollicetur.*)

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 393

<sup>63</sup> Virginia Blanton also points out that in the patristic tradition, women must be made "not women" or healed from reproductive corruption in order to enter heaven. Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 43-44

I know well that I deserve to bear the weight of this affliction in my neck,  
for I remember that when I was a young girl I used to wear an unnecessary  
weight of necklaces; I believe that God in His goodness would have me  
endure this pain in my neck in order that I may thus be absolved from the  
guilt of my needless vanity.<sup>64</sup>

In Æthelthryth's case, pride is complimented and literally healed through the application of humble submission to God. Virginia Blanton also connects this scene to Aldhelm and argues that it takes on the language of "feminine pride"<sup>65</sup>—Æthelthryth names and interprets her own sin to her confessor in stead of vice versa.<sup>66</sup> I would argue, however, that, this act of pride is healed by her humble display of penitence. When the body is found preserved and the wound is posthumously healed, the corpse comes to represent *both* her humility and her virginity. One legitimizes and proves the other.

Ælfric

Like Aldhelm, Ælfric's tenth-century hierarchy of chastity is also based on Augustine's *De sancta virginitate*. He describes a range of different types of holiness in his "Homily on the Purification of St. Mary." Unlike Aldhelm, however, Ælfric keeps the language that puts "widowhood" in between "maidenhood" and "proper marriage," and does not elevate women who leave their marriages to take religious vows. For him

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<sup>64</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 396-97. Scio certissime quia merito in collo pundus languoris porto, in quo iuenculam me memini superuacua moniliorum pondera portare; et credo quod ideo me superna pietas dolore colli uoluit grauari, ut sic absoluar reatu superuacuae leuitatis.

<sup>65</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 46.

<sup>66</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 48. Virginia Blanton connects this scene to Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*: specifically a section that argues that married women must be worried with wearing fine jewels, whereas virgins can simply adorn themselves with virtue.

the three levels of chastity are “mægð-had,” “wudewan-han,” and “riht sinscype.”<sup>67</sup> He also emphasizes that these categories apply to both women and men: “mægð-had is ægþer ge on wæpmannum ge on wifmannum.”<sup>68</sup> His emphasis on traditional virginity was clearly influenced by the Benedictine Reforms which dissolved the double-monastery system and replaced abbesses with bishops and priests. Ælfric’s homilies and additions to Æthelthryth’s life suggest a shift toward more continental roles for religious women.

Similarly, in his homily for Sexagesima Sunday, he directly cites “Augustinus Magnus” and describes a hierarchy of chaste people in which married couples who reserve sex for procreative purposes can still receive salvation, but (in an allusion to the parable in Matthew 13) those who abstain entirely produce greater “fruit” in the kingdom of heaven. Even among those who live monastic lives, there is a hierarchy of chastity. He states that lay priests may marry, but those who have chosen consecration may not even allow any woman outside of their immediate family into their dwellings.<sup>69</sup> In both cases, his discussion of chastity focuses on men rather than women and omits the dire warnings against those who might become prideful of their virginity.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ælfric, *Sermones catholici*, or, *Homilies of Aelfric* : in original Anglo-Saxon, with an English version, Ed. and Trans. Benjamin Thorpe, (London: Ælfric Society, 1846). 148-49

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-49 virginity is preferable among both women and men

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-98

<sup>70</sup> See Morton Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*. (Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1952), 112. Ælfric is also one of the earliest English writers to actively incorporate the cardinal sins into his theology. In his third series homilies, he described a set of sins in which perverted desire “gives rise to gluttony (*gyfernesne*), lechery (*forlygr*), and avarice (*gitsunge*). Evil irascibility causes *unrotnisse* (*tristitia*) and *æmylnysse* (*accidia*). Reason can lead to pride (*modignysse*) and vainglory (*ydel gylp*).”

Ælfric's treatment of the Life of St. Æthelthryth also makes adjustments that shift the focus of her life from women's virginal autonomy to men's exaltation through marital continence. As I mentioned earlier, he inserted an incongruous story to his otherwise faithful translation of Bede's vita. Interpretation of this section varies:<sup>71</sup> Virginia Blanton has argued that, in the context of the Benedictine Reforms, his portrayal of St. Æthelthryth attempts to re-center the focus of Æthelthryth's life from female to male chastity. During this period Ely was reestablished as an all-male monastery, and the role of secular canons was significantly diminished.<sup>72</sup> In response to her claim Peter Jackson, argued that, based on his source texts, Ælfric may be trying to reinforce an Augustinian concept of appropriate marital continence in which both parties (especially the male one) consent. Their arguments do not seem to be mutually exclusive. I would suggest that Ælfric was both uncomfortable with the potential heresy of a married woman who sexually rejected her husband, and he was also appealing to Ely's transformation into an all-male community. In any case, Ælfric's work demonstrated a kind of anxious defensiveness about a saint's cult that he was reestablishing, not creating.

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<sup>71</sup> Ælfric's addition to Æthelthryth's vita is translated as follows: We will nonetheless speak about a certain thane. He remained with his wife for thirty years in continence. He fathered three sons and afterwards they lived together for thirty years without relations and gave many alms. Eventually that man went and took on a monastic life until the Lord's angels came to his side and took his soul up to heaven with song—just as the book tells us. Many such examples are in books: how husbands and wives live in wondrous cleanliness as a glory to the Lord, he who established virginity, even Christ our Lord.

We segað swa-ðea be sumum ðegne se wæs þryttig gera mid his wife on clænnysse þry suna he gestrynde and hi siððan buta ðrittig geara wæron wunigende butan hæmede and fela ælmyssan worhton oð þæt se wer ferde to munuclicere drohtnunge and drihtnes englas comon eft on his forð-siðe and feredon his sawle mid sange to heofonum swa swa us secgað bec. Manega bysna syn on bocum be swylcum hu oft weras and wif wundorlice drohtnodon and on clænnysse wunodon to wuldre þam hælende þa þa clænnysse astealde crist ure hælend.

<sup>72</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 105-106

*Pride in Post-Norman Lives of Æthelthryth and Edith*

The *Liber Eliensis* and Goscelin of St. Bertin's *Legenda Edithae* were the first major post-Norman versions of each saints' life, and most later, vernacular texts rely on them as sources. They were closely connected to Anglo-Saxon texts, but also deeply influenced by a rise in devotional, visionary, and exemplary literature for women. Though neither of these texts were firmly in the tradition of devotional literature, Goscelin's *Legenda*—especially when we consider that it was written at the same time as his *Liber confortatorius*—begins to move in that direction.<sup>73</sup> Goscelin's *vita* has been interpreted before as a devotional text—especially by Stephanie Hollis who discusses its audience of Latin-literate women at Wilton.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women*, 281-306. The *Liber Confortatorius* was a letter written from Goscelin to Eva of Wilton. He advised her on appropriate devotional practices; it is emotional, personal, and provides a good lens into Goscelin's personal attitudes toward religion.

<sup>74</sup> Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women*, 24, 281-306. Goscelin of St. Bertin was commissioned during the eleventh century—almost immediately after the invasion—to record the *vita* of saints such as St. Eadwold, Wulfsige, Edith, Æthelthryth, Ivo, Sexburg, Eormenhild, Waerburh, Wulfhild, Æthelburh, Hildelith, and Mildrith. His work is distinctive, poetic, and permanently shaped public perception of England's founding saints. Though his life of St. Æthelthryth is now lost, he influenced the construction of the *Liber Eliensis*, and other histories of the Ely women. Goscelin's account of Edith's life was also a baseline for most accounts of St. Edith's life. Though Anglo-Saxon accounts existed, none have survived. Goscelin alludes to earlier texts and also quotes women who witnessed the miracles that he describes in his *vita*. It seems that he relied so heavily on these sources that he felt the need to defend them to potential detractors. In his prefatory letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury he states that "the handmaids of the Lord prophesy as well as the men-servants, and speak in tongues in the same grace of the Holy Spirit."



The *Liber Eliensis*<sup>75</sup> tends to be read as more historical than devotional. It was written during the twelfth-century and is meant to establish Ely's post-Norman identity. The audience and compiler were probably men. Despite their very different audiences, the authors of both texts have a vested interest in reconciling Anglo-Saxon traditions with Norman ones. Both Goscelin and the Ely compiler's work are establishing two founding saints as key to the communities' group identities in a period when they were in flux.

#### Goscelin of St. Bertin

As Edith and Æthelthryth's communities and cults were reestablished under Norman leadership, these same anxieties about pride and sex persisted, but they were addressed through a more continental lens. Though they did exist, no Anglo-Saxon accounts of Edith's vita survive. Goscelin of St. Bertin was commissioned to write her history during the eleventh century. His account references the oral traditions of the Wilton nuns as well as books that were kept at the convent during his time there. While

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<sup>75</sup> The *Liber Eliensis* is a cartulary-chronicle that was the authoritative source for nearly all late-medieval accounts of Ely's history and Æthelthryth's life. It includes more embellishment and emotion than its Anglo-Saxon predecessors and also provides compelling insights into how the twelfth-century members of the Ely community viewed themselves and their Anglo-Saxon foundations in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest. Though it is widely recognized as a major historical source, its literary significance has received relatively less attention.<sup>75</sup> It incorporated histories that are not found anywhere else. Goscelin of St. Bertin was commissioned to write an account of Æthelthryth's life some time shortly after 1082. It is now lost, but referenced briefly in Book II section 133 of the *Liber Eliensis*. The first modern edition was produced by E.O. Blake in 1962, and its first English translation was published by Janet Fairweather in 2005. Latin excerpts here are taken from Blake, and English translations are taken from Fairweather. See their work for discussion on authorship and textual history. E.O. Blake *Liber Eliensis* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1962). Janet Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005). For discussion on the text's significance, see Virginia Blanton. "King Anna's Daughters: Genealogical Narrative and Cult Formation in the 'Liber Eliensis.'" *Historical Reflections*, vol 30 no 1 (2004): 127-19. In this article, Virginia Blanton discusses the construction the Ely's royal family—especially the creation of St. Wihtburg (a most-likely fabricated member of Anna's family) in the construction of Ely/Æthelthryth's community identity. See also Thomas Hill. "The 'Liber Eliensis' 'historical selections' and the Old English 'Battle of Maldon.'" *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 96 no. 1, (1997): 1-12. Also see Jennifer Paxton, "Monks and Bishops: the Purpose of the 'Liber Eliensis.'" *The Haskins Society Journal*, 11 (1998): 17-30.

there is no definitive evidence that Goscelin read Aldhelm, there are several similarities between the two writers' discussion of virginity. Rather than the thirteenth century bridal mysticism of the Katherine and Wooing groups, Stephanie Hollis has pointed out that these earlier writers describe virgins as warriors of Christ; virtues are weapons; and vices are monstrous attackers.<sup>76</sup> It is most likely that they were both drawing on Gregory the Great, who also described the vices as "captains" to pride in his *Moralia* on Job. When pride "conquered" the heart of an individual, she immediately gave up the soul to her six followers who would entirely lay it to waste.<sup>77</sup>

Though he does not specifically discuss pride as a byproduct of virginity, Gregory does describe the same fear that good deeds could lead to pride.<sup>78</sup> In a different book he also argues that all virtues support one another. Specifically he says that "if either humility forsake chastity or chastity abandon humility, before the Author of humility and chastity, what does either a proud chastity or a polluted humility avail to benefit us?"<sup>79</sup> Though Aldhelm may or may not have directly influenced Goscelin, they were almost certainly sharing sources that framed inner struggle as a physical battle and humility as a weapon and proof of "true" virginity.

Goscelin's concept of appropriate virginal behavior is, perhaps, best described in a long, detailed letter titled the *Liber confortatorius* addressed to one of his former pupils

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<sup>76</sup> Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women* 286-288

<sup>77</sup> Newhauser, "Contrary Virtues," 11

<sup>78</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, 35, 44:86

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, 3:6

at Wilton. Goscelin's advice to Eva frames virtue as a battle. In Book II he tells her to resist depression and lust by marshalling virtue against carnal desire:

Carnal desires must be tamed; as soon as vices raise their heads, they must be crushed. Your army must butt their heads against the rocks of brooding thought and the forces of temptation. You must keep watch in the armor of prayer on the ramparts of your confinement. Against all the snares and hostile arguments, you must exert yourself on the steps of humility towards the heights of virtue.<sup>80</sup>

Aldhelm and Goscelin both see humility as a weapon against vice and evidence of devotion. One seems to prove and fortify the other.

Goscelin of St. Bertin argues that, because of God's desire to exalt the virtuous, "the innocent must fear, the fallen may take heart; the virgin must be afraid and the married woman may be confident."<sup>81</sup> He cites John the Baptist and points out that this "great" man did not dare touch Jesus; however, the sinning woman in Mathew 11, not only touched the Lord, but "from the great burning of her heart, salves even his head with ointment and massages it with both hands. She envelops his hair in the sweetest scents." For Goscelin, Christ is both "great" and "small"; "mighty" and "meek"; "exalted" and "humble."<sup>82</sup> Ultimately, salvation is illegible to outside participants—and medieval writers often acknowledge that in their vita. Hagiographers like Goscelin rhetorically

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<sup>80</sup> Otter, *Liber Confortatorius*, 55-56

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 126-27

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 127

structure saints' lives in such a way that they encouraged the faithful to see humility when they could see pride, and belief when they could see doubt. The act of choosing which to believe was a performative, individual act of devotion that became more and more pronounced in later medieval texts.

#### Liber Eliensis

The twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*, for example, places a great deal of emphasis on the legitimacy of its founder and, by extension, the community itself. Perhaps Æthelthryth's most threatening act as a saint was to reject Ecgfrith and take vows of virginity with her ex-husband's aunt Æbba at Coldingham. The *Liber Eliensis* once again legitimized this moment by emphasizing the relationship between virginity and humility.

It states that

In that place also, she attained to such a high level of holy living and presented a demonstration of such perfect humility that, if anyone were in search of an illustration of holy discipline, he would realize that its mastery was expressly exemplified in her life. And truly, I say, the happy virgin was now adorned by two triumphs. For ealdorman and latterly to a king—but yet, by the power of God she made her marriage-union with both of no validity. And behold, it came to pass that, because she always

upheld a soul unconquered in its determination upon virginity, she could never be defiled by the violence of two husbands.<sup>83</sup>

Once again, the “determination” of Æthelthryth’s soul and divine intervention uphold her virginity—in spite of violence and social obligation, the saint embodies virginity and humility simultaneously. The text also makes it clear that, if she were to remain a virgin and not be drawn back into Ecgfrith’s house, she must not “rest until she reached her home in Ely” and thereby avoids “the Charybdis of inconstancy” (*Illic Dei virtute incontinentie Caribdim posse vitare decernit*).<sup>84</sup> Her insistence on maintaining humility and virginity legitimize the community of which she was a part—the only safe place was Ely.

This is particularly important given that Æthelthryth began her escape at Coldingham—a house that was condemned for its lax application of monastic rule in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*.<sup>85</sup> Adamnan speaks to the abbess, Æbbe about it, specifically condemning the qualities for which Æthelthryth is praised:

I have examined their cells and their beds, and I have found no one except you concerned with his soul’s welfare; but all of them, men and women alike, are sunk in slothful slumbers or else they remain awake for the

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<sup>83</sup> Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, 33. See also Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, 26: In quo etiam loco tam sancta conversationis culmen arripuit, tam perfecte humilitatis exemplum ostendit, ut in eius vita expressum intelligeret magisterium, si quis sancta institutionis requireret documentum. Et vere inquam nunc felix gminis ornatur virgo triumphis. Nam duobus maritis desponsata, prius videlicet duci ac denuo regi, sed Dei virtute amborum frustrata et conubio. Et ecce contigit ut, quia in virginitatis proposito semper animum gessit invictum, nunquam corrumpi potuit duorum violentia maritorum.

<sup>84</sup> Fairweather *Liber Eliensis* 34. See also Blake *Liber Eliensis*, 27

<sup>85</sup> Blanton, *Liber Eliensis* 39

purposes of sin. And the cells that were built for praying and for reading have become haunts of feasting, drinking, gossip, and other delights; even the virgins who are dedicated to God put aside all respect for their profession and, whenever they have leisure, spend their time weaving elaborate garments with which to adorn themselves as if they were brides, so imperiling their virginity.<sup>86</sup>

Both her rejection of her husband and Coldingham's reputation for pride, gluttony, lasciviousness, and pride threaten Æthelthryth's legacy. It makes sense that the *Liber Eliensis* takes pains to preemptively counter these accusations by praising her humility and obedience.

### *Imposing Humility*

In each of the examples that I discussed so far, humility is used in a liberating, legitimizing sense. At the same time, however, this rhetorical approach is most easily applied to dead people. Several of the miracles in the *Liber Eliensis*, however, dramatize the relationship between humility and virginity violently. Specifically, a young virgin and acolyte of St. Æthelthryth named Reinburgis is assaulted by saints and angels in an attempt to create humility and thereby safeguard virginity. It describes a young woman named Reinburgis who has a dream-vision of a woman with frightening eyes. The text

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<sup>86</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 424-27 Siquidem modo totum hoc monasterium ex ordine perlustrans, singulorum casas ac lectos inspexi, et neminem ex omnibus praeter te erga sanitatem animae suae occupatum repperi; sed omnes prorsus, et uiri et feminae, aut somno torpent inerti aut ad peccata uigilant. Nam et domunculae, quae ad orandum uel legendum factae errant, nunc in comesationum, potationum, fabulationeum et ceterarum sunt inlecebrarum cubilia conuersae; uirgines quoque Deo dicatae, contemta reuerentia suae professionis, quotiescumque uacant, texendis subtilioribus indumentis operam dant, quibus aut se ipsas ad uicem sponsarum in periculum sui status adornant, aut externorum sibi uirorum amicitiam conparent.

refers to her as a “virago” or “warrior woman”. The apparition struck the sleeping virgin in the face until blood came from her nose and then disappeared without saying a word. The next morning, the girl woke up with blood-stained clothes and a terrible sickness. Her mother’s prayers led the virago to appear to Reinburgis again and partially heal her. She explains that she was sent by Æthelthryth, and that the girl must travel from her home in Mercia to the saint’s shrine in order to be completely healed. Reinburgis explains that, as a young woman, she cannot make such a journey without the help and permission of her guardians. She is sharply berated by the apparition but stays in Mercia anyway. Some days later the warrior woman appeared again and pierced Reinburgis’s eye to her brain with an iron nail—blinding her. With her parents’ help, she finally makes the journey and is healed of all her afflictions. The author justifies this vicious anecdote with the following:

Given that there is a saying by Solomon, ‘Rod and correction will bring about wisdom, but a child who is left to his own desiring will confound his mother,’ God perhaps saw fit to educate her by flagellation of this sort, so that after these happenings she would not be subject to a threat to her virginity. Accordingly, bodily losses were inflicted on the virgin in this way as a means of preserving her humility.<sup>87</sup>

The idea that Æthelthryth would send a warrior woman to preemptively impose “humility” on a young woman is both disturbing and also in keeping with the writings of

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<sup>87</sup>Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis* 377. See also Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, 307: Et quia per Salomonem dicitur: ‘Virga atque correctio tribuent sapientiam, puer autem qui dimittitur voluntati sue confundet matrem suam’ Deus eam fortasse erudire dignatus est huiusmodi flagello, ne virginitatis post hac subiaceret pericula. Ad humilitatis ergo custodiam hoc modo corporalia illata sunt virgini detrimenta.

the early church fathers. From Tertullian to Jerome to Gregory the Great, they intended humility as a control mechanism on women's sexuality. Once a dead virgin such as *Æthelthryth*, Edith, or even Joan of Arc is branded with the label of humility, it can be remarkably legitimizing for both the community and for herself. Among the living—especially the believing, however, it could be an excuse for violence and control. The following chapter will examine how individual doubt was portrayed and policed in late-medieval miracle narratives.



## CHAPTER 3

### ABSENT BODIES AND ANGRY SAINTS

In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas listed doubt as a “contrary vice” (*vitiis oppositis*) which is defined as “opposite to faith” (*quae opponitur fidei*). He also breaks unbelief into blasphemy (*blasphemia*), which is the opposite of confession of faith (*opponitur confessioni*), and ignorance and stupidity (*ignorantia et hebetudine*) as contrary to knowledge (*scientiae*).<sup>88</sup> In all of these cases, the two ideas are defined by their opposite; much as the seven vices and their contrary virtues were also defined by what they were *not* more than what they *were*. Therefore, any attempt to define them essentially requires philosophers to prove a negative—it is an interpretive more than an empirical act. Just as Joan of Arc was tried on accusations of pride and exonerated on claims of humility, signs of holiness were easy to manipulate. This caused no end of anxiety for historians and hagiographers who were tasked with proving the saints’ holiness.

In the previous chapter I discussed pride and humility as rhetorical tools; I focused on how the saints themselves were proven or criticized by people who were already convinced of their position. In the following chapter I will discuss how Edith and Æthelthryth proved *themselves* to their detractors through miracles, words, and actions. Granted, since all these proofs were written by third parties, they are also rhetorical—they *do* defend the saint herself. However, it also provides a model of appropriate faith

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<sup>88</sup> Aquinas *Summa* 2:10

for members of the community; it is a safeguard against doubt, ignorance, and (most importantly) blasphemy.

In the following chapter I will, for the most part, focus on punishment narratives: pilgrims, priests, pagans, or penitents who are punished or reproved by the saint for disbelief. By including these exempla, hagiographers provided a model and a warning for people who came to the saints' shrines with doubts. These kinds of stories largely appear in saints' vita during the later middle ages when anxieties about heresy were becoming more prominent.<sup>89</sup> For example, in 1198 when a priest refused to listen to an angel who wanted the altars at St. Peter's to be repaired, he was made deaf and took the apparition's request to the pope. In a letter to the cardinal-bishop of Ostia, Innocent III ordered the altars to be repaired and remarked that, "In such matters the angel of Satan would not transform himself into an angel of light; and it is better to piously believe than to rashly doubt...it is honorable to do what has been suggested, even if it may not be true."<sup>90</sup>

A number of principles are at work in this example about the nature of reading miracles and the nature of disbelief. Michael Goodich argues that in this case miracles were literally a "weapon" against doubt, and I agree. At the same time, however, this example suggests that even a pope hesitated to call a thing "miraculous." Innocent III was especially anxious about the warning in II Corinthians 11:14 that mentioned Satan

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<sup>89</sup> Goodich, "Miracles and Disbelief..." 23. That is not to say that they do not appear at all in earlier texts. Ælfric's *Life of St. Edmund*, for example, describes a group of thieves who attempted to break into his shrine and were punished for it. The sections on posthumous wonders and miracles are simply *more* prominent. See Ælfric, *Lives of the Saints*, 349

<sup>90</sup> Goodich, "Innocent III..." 461

who could appear as an “angel of light.” Though Pope Innocent III came before Gregory IX’s institution of a formal canonization process, he significantly limited the number of people who could be sainted for this reason.<sup>91</sup>

Major church theologians prescribed a hermeneutic for reading holiness that is, perhaps, as messy and unreliable as the signs themselves. It relied on cycles of personal interpretation and public confession that is exemplified in Aquinas’s “contrary” virtues. For him faith is an individual matter; knowledge is gained from other people, but it, too, is personal. The third of his virtues (confession of faith), however, belongs to the group as a whole. It is an externalization of the first two steps, and a performative act that manifests internal qualities. Faith leads to a search for knowledge, knowledge to confession, confession to encourage others’ faith. On the other side, the “contrary” vices follow a similar pattern of progressive community engagement. Doubt leads to confusion, and confusion/foolishness leads to blasphemy; blasphemy perpetuates doubt.

One’s participation in this cycle is essentially a semiotic process that is outlined in Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*. He argues that the desire to choose faith over doubt is driven by a love of God and other people whereas wickedness is driven by lust and selfishness.<sup>92</sup> The process of interpreting signs correctly marks the difference between empty ritual and saving sacraments.<sup>93</sup> It also measures the motivations of those who wish to interpret holiness. In this system the judgment of another individual is actually a

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 461

<sup>92</sup> See R.A. Markus, *Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996).

<sup>93</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*. Trans. R.P.H. Green. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). 74-75.

measure of the judge, not the judged. It seems logical that Innocent would be hesitant to interpret a miracle's veracity.

*Not Seeing the Inviolable Body*

The doubt and punishment narratives in the lives of Æthelthryth and Edith also focus on questions of interpretation, and seeing is a key component of both the vita and Augustine's sign theories. In Book VII of *Confessions* he emphasizes that to perceive truth the soul must use the body to see in stead of the body using the soul. Though "invisible things...are understood by the things that are made" they must be interpreted through learning and faith.<sup>94</sup> Augustine may have been alluding in this section to Hebrews 11:1-3 which argues that "Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not. For by this the ancients obtained a testimony. By faith we understand that the world was framed by the word of God; that from invisible things visible things might be made"<sup>95</sup> It seems that for both Augustine and Paul, the act of seeing and not seeing is fundamental to discerning truth and forming faith out of signs. Like faith, however, which exists behind signs as an unseen thing, doubt also rests next to miraculous evidence.

Some of the most telling articulations of doubt centered around the preservation, construction, translation, and destruction of Æthelthryth's shrine. It was first constructed sixteen years after her death when Sexburgh had her sister's body moved into Ely's

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<sup>94</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 7: 17-19.

<sup>95</sup> Hebrews 11:1-3 Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition. See also Hebrews 11:1-3 Vulgate Version: "Et autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium. In had enim testimonium consecuti sunt sense. Fide intelligimus aptata esse saecula verbo Dei: ut ex invisibilibus visibilia fierent."

newly-constructed church. The community was destroyed by the Danes, and then rebuilt during the tenth century under King Edgar; though the shrine was damaged, it remained in its place until Ely Cathedral was rebuilt by the Normans. That would be the last time it was opened until it was destroyed c. 1539. Her body was therefore only seen three recorded times over the course of more than 850 years. Bede's claims that she was virgin rested—at least partially—on the evidence of her preserved body, but that body was a constant source of doubt and what Carl Watkins calls “suggestive defensiveness” in which the presence of doubt was masked by anxious expressions of faith.<sup>96</sup> Several accounts described unbelievers who tried to force their way into the shrine or peek into cracks that were made by other vandals. By all accounts, however, none were successful, and all were punished. Accounts of attacks on her shrine span the breadth of her medieval cult and even beyond it.

Though Bede wrote about the ocular proof of a miraculously preserved body, Æthelthryth's pilgrims had to be content with a coffin; those who tried to see her body were punished.<sup>97</sup> The first account of these attacks is found in the *Liber Eliensis*. It records the Viking assault on Ely during the late ninth century. One of the invaders broke into her coffin and made “a hole...which remains visible to this day.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Watkins, “Providence, Experience, and Doubt,” 45

<sup>97</sup> Michael Goodich, “Miracles and Disbelief in the Late Middle Ages,” *Mediaevistik* 1 (1988): 23-38. This was not unusual in the hagiographic tradition. Goodich's article describes other doubters who attempted to prove the validity of both male and female saints with similar results. Their emphasis on Æthelthryth's preserved body and its consistent absence, however, make this version of the story somewhat more complicated.

<sup>98</sup> Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, 75

Immediately, his eyes were torn from his body, and none of the other soldiers wanted to go near the saint's shrine.

Following the account of destructive Vikings, the *Liber Eliensis* describes an archpriest during the reign of Eadred<sup>99</sup> who wished to break into her shrine, so he would ...know without the slightest doubt, if the venerable virgin Æthelthryth remains even now whole in body as the sacred writings of the venerable Bede relate in the *History of the English People*, or if anything whatsoever of her remains in the monument...since it does not seem to me probable, but rather I believe that there is nothing in the sarcophagus.<sup>100</sup>

His priests reacted with shock and disgust at this proposition. He responded that “I believe that if a virgin so holy were at this present time lying in the basilica as of old, God would have performed many miracles here through her.”<sup>101</sup> They told him that his disbelief was because he was a “recent newcomer,” and had not seen the miracles at Æthelthryth's shrine. The text follows with five exempla that were meant to prove the legitimacy of her cult. Rejecting their advice entirely, the archpriest gathered a group of men and approached the shrine. He inserted small branches into the cracks left by the Viking invaders. When he felt a body there, he said that he knew that there was truly a preserved corpse inside and proceeded to hold a burning candle into the crack. Though

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<sup>99</sup> In reality, this was probably one of the secular canons who took over the monastery after the Viking invasions. Eadred was king from 946-955.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 78. Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, 58: Volo indubitanter scire, si venerabilis virgo Æðeldreða etiam nunc integra manet carne, sicut referent sacra scripta venerabilis Bede in Hystoria Gentis Angligene, aut si aliquid omnio ex eo manet in monument, in quo olim tumulata est corpusculo, quoniam mihi non videtur esse verisimile, sed potius credo quod nichil est in sarcofago.

<sup>101</sup> Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, 78

the candle slipped from his fingers and fell on Æthelthryth's clothes, it did not burn them, so the priest drew out and cut a piece from her robe. At that point two warrior angels dragged the shrine away and he, his accomplices, and his family<sup>102</sup> all died horribly.<sup>103</sup> There were only two who was spared: a scribe who "forgot all his knowledge" and was driven mad, and another priest named Alfhelm who recovered due to penance after suffering a terrible illness.

There are several records of damage to Æthelthryth's shrine.<sup>104</sup> They were recounted in numerous places including Marie de France's late twelfth or early thirteenth-century *Life of St. Audrey*, the fifteenth-century *Life of St. Æthelthryth*, and CUL 2604.<sup>105</sup> The accounts are largely very similar to the one in the *Liber Eliensis*, but its significance changed with the telling. For example, when Æthelthryth's tomb was violated in the *Liber Eliensis*, the author writes that it was "as if the holy virgin, still alive, were saying to them: 'May you have neither God's favour nor mine because you have dared to

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<sup>102</sup> Though he is called a priest, he was likely a secular canon since the text mentions that his wife was among the dead.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 77-82

<sup>104</sup> An abbreviated version of this scene is also found in CUL Add. 2604. It includes the Viking attack on the community, but excludes the assault by secular canons. A transcription of the vita is included in the appendix to this dissertation. See page 57r.

<sup>105</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 137 With the exception of her translation, neither Bede nor Ælfric focused on posthumous accounts of miracles at Æthelthryth's shrine. The story of her shrine's construction was first recorded in Bede and goes as follows. Since stone was scarce in Ely, two monks were sent to Grantchester (an area near Cambridge) to find appropriate building materials for her shrine. In stead, they found a marble coffin that fit her perfectly. In post-Norman accounts Æthelthryth also appeared and gave her ring to the monks who found the stone. When they exhumed her corpse to put it in the coffin, it was missing from her hand, and was set into the lid of her tomb. Referencing Judith Butler, Virginia Blanton argued that, for Æthelthryth, the outward trappings of the saint became the signifier for her signified body, and the two as a whole were a sign for the unity of Ely's all-male community.

damage my muslin!”<sup>106</sup> Marie de France’s *Life*, on the other hand, is almost identical, but it states the following: “The virgin inside spoke aloud and the people could hear her quite well. She said: ‘You do not have the right or permission from either God or me to pull apart my shroud. You will be punished for this.’”<sup>107</sup> In one text it is *as if* Æthelthryth defends herself; in Marie’s work, she actually does—and her anger is about the priest’s lack authority, not her clothes. Marie also omits a section in which two angels appear and drag Æthelthryth’s shrine away from the lay canon. Marie essentially lends the saint authority and autonomy that the *Liber Eliensis* omits.

The fifteenth-century Wilton *Life of St. Æthelthryth* does not allow the saint to defend herself, but it does make other significant changes to the *Liber Eliensis*.<sup>108</sup> Citing a text that the author read at Godstow Abbey, the fifteenth-century Wilton *Life of St. Æthelthryth* does not mention the Vikings, but seems to combine the two stories, and blames a ninth-century secular canon named Cerdic for the hole in her coffin. It claims that he chiseled a hole and tried to insert a hooked stick in order to see whether the saint’s body was miraculously preserved. Æthelthryth grabbed onto the stick and refused to let him pull it out. He too was blinded, and the other canons kneeled and prayed at the saint’s shrine together. After they prayed, an angel appeared in a vision and

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<sup>106</sup> Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, 82. See also Blake, *Liber Eliensis* 61: “...quasi ipsa adhuc virgo sancta vivens eis diceret: ‘Nec Dei nec meam habeatis gratiam, quia ausi estis corrumpere sindonem meam’”

<sup>107</sup> McCash and Barban, *Life of Saint Audrey*, 146-147. Si que bien oïerent les genz,/ Et dist: “Vos n’avez mie espase/ Ne de deu ne de moi la grace/ Ke vos depecez mon suiare./ Vos en avrez peine et contraire.”

<sup>108</sup> Dockray-Miller, *Edith and Æthelthryth* 396-397. It seems that the *Liber Eliensis* was not the author’s direct source; s/he cites a manuscript from Godstow Abbey



told the canon that he would “never have þy syȝt after þis...by cause þat þou byleveduste of þis mayden amys.”<sup>109</sup>

In these three texts that were written over the course of roughly three hundred years, none of the figures who try to see her body *actually* see the preserved corpse. The Viking and Cerdic are blinded, and when the canon in the *Liber Eliensis* tries to look into the hole with a candle, the author claims that he “could see no more within than if he had been blinded in both eyes.”<sup>110</sup> Even touch happens by proxy; they reach in with tools and branches to draw out pieces of her clothing. Cerdic uses a hooked stick to touch the saint, and she takes it away. In all of these cases, I agree with Virginia Blanton that the tomb is an outward signifier for the signified body; however, I would also suggest that the absence of her body perpetuates both doubt and faith simultaneously. The text gives voice to a question that was almost certainly on the minds of Æthelthryth’s devotees: was she really in there?

Even when they moved her body from the old church to the new, she made her displeasure clear. Though the *Liber Eliensis* describes the movement of her body as an act of “enormous devotion” to the intact body, (Tandem cum ingenti devotione sacrosanctum corpus virginis assumunt)<sup>111</sup> Æthelthryth commanded lightning, thunder, and wind to break the windows of the church—the storm was witnessed as far away as Kent. The entire event happened “so that she might show, by means of the terror from

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<sup>109</sup> Dockray-Miller, *Edith and Æthelthryth*, 402

<sup>110</sup> Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis* 81

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 276, see also Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, 229

Heaven, that she was displeased at being so handled in public.”<sup>112</sup> It seems that, even when the saint was legitimately removed from her shrine, people were punished.

Though the other priests who had long been members of the Ely community listed miraculous occurrences as evidence of her holiness, the priest insisted on ocular evidence and lost (depending on the account) either his eyes or his life. In this case, the doubting priest follows the cycle that Aquinas’s binaries imply: he doubts, refuses knowledge, commits blasphemy, and then draws other priests into his actions. Though the doubters are painfully punished, their question about Æthelthryth’s body is never answered. Even during her tenth-century translation when her body *is* seen by the community, the textual focus is on the destruction of the chapel. One would think that her body would be described as more than “sacrosanctum corpus” which could indicate a “sacred,” “inviolable,” or perhaps “intact” body, but the word itself has multiple meanings. The question of Æthelthryth’s miraculous preservation ultimately perpetuates doubt in texts that overtly attempt to record and venerate her memory.

Monika Otter reads the assaults of Æthelthryth’s tomb as a symbolic rape;<sup>113</sup> their inability to actually see Æthelthryth’s body represents her continued integrity. Virginia Blanton builds on this argument; she suggests that the specific timeframe outlined by the *Liber Eliensis* (during the reign of Eadred, and before the cathedral’s refoundation by Æthelwold) allows this scene to be emblematic of the tension between the double monastery system and their reestablishment as an all-male community. She argues that

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<sup>112</sup> Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, 277. See also Blake, *Liber Eliensis* 230: Hoc siquidem magnum miraculum, sancta illa operante, sic contigit, ut iuxta quorundam opinionem celesti terrore ostenderet sibi displicere tam publice se tractari.

<sup>113</sup> Monika Otter, "The Temptation of St. Æthelthryth." *Exemplaria* 9 (1997): 139-63

this scene mirrors Ely's twelfth-century political situation in which foreigners (in this case Normans) also threatened the integrity of the community; Æthelthryth's invisible integrity extends to the community itself.<sup>114</sup> This reading certainly makes sense when applied to the *Liber Eliensis*; however, the repetition of this episode in the Wilton life, and the Protestant omission are suggestive. They create (it seems, intentionally) a self-perpetuating Schrodinger's cat paradox: her body is simultaneously present and absent in the stone sarcophagus. The act of looking in the "box" kills, not the cat, but the observer.

Their doubt might be called "pious" under other circumstances. With the late-medieval proliferation of false saints, relics, and miracles, it seems rational—even faithful to ask whether a saint who went through no formal canonization process was truly holy. It was *certainly* faithful to move the saint's body to a position of greater honor behind the altar in a new church (which would become the cathedral), and Æthelthryth brought a storm so large that it was seen in Kent and broke their windows.

Their disbelief mirrors an argument made in Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job*. He reads the three temptations of Christ as an exercise in Satan's doubt. Though the devil might pretend to be an angel of light, his knowledge was limited by pride. For Gregory, the temptations were *actual* tests because Jesus's humble behavior made the devil question whether he was truly the son of God. Satan desired evidence—which he did not get.<sup>115</sup> There is a sense here that the desire for signs represents a misreading. The inability to read correctly stems from allowing vices to flourish.

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<sup>114</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 131-41

<sup>115</sup> Gregory the Great *Moralia in Job* Trans. by John Henry Parker and J. Rivington (London: 1844): Vol I. part.1, Book II.24

Though the Viking simply sinned without knowledge, the two canons are presented as cautionary tales of proud Christians who sinfully reverted to the level of pagans in their desire for a sign. There is the sense in these repeated stories that doubt, faith, and punishment exist in the same space, and that they are unpredictable—it indicates that the “correct” way to read is also unpredictable.

*Edith and Self-Interpretation: Goscelin of St. Bertin*

The impious attempt to disprove or undermine the saints seems to be central to the miracles that occurred at Æthelthryth’s shrine. Edith’s experiences with her confessor, Æthelwold, follow a similar pattern. In her case, however, the shrine/body relationship begins with a clothing/body relationship. She was known for wearing fine clothing as a nun—a fact that Goscelin of St. Bertin first recorded in his vita of St. Edith, and each of her other hagiographers repeated. He told her that “O daughter, not in these garments does one approach the marriage chamber of Christ, nor is the heavenly bridegroom pleased with exterior elegance.”<sup>116</sup> Edith, who wore a hair shirt under her silks replied that “a mind by no means poorer in aspiring to God will live beneath this covering than beneath a goatskin. I possess my Lord, who pays attention to the mind, not to the clothing. Here the world of the Lord is declared: ‘According to your faith, be it done unto you.’”<sup>117</sup>

In this case, Edith actually argues that she is a paradox that only God can read (as opposed to the blinded doubters who learn it by miraculous intercession). Æthelwold,

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<sup>116</sup> Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women*, 42.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43

being a saint himself, knows that he has behaved inappropriately. After his “rough goatskins” were insulted by a young woman, Æthelwold was afraid that he might “distress the heavenly guardian within her” and “recognized the authority of grace excelling in the virgin”<sup>118</sup>. Though he acknowledges that the Rule would have required her to wear black clothing, Goscelin moralizes that there is not “any harm in keeping [a thing] in a golden vase.”<sup>119</sup> He also quotes the senior nuns that he interviewed, and explains that Edith wore a hair shirt unbeknownst to her confessor or anyone else.<sup>120</sup>

Edith’s “golden vase” and Æthelthryth’s sealed tomb are sources for the most fundamental doubts and miracles that follow both saints. Æthelthryth’s virginity was doubted, and while the ocular proof of her corpse might have laid that question to rest (or at least legitimized Bede’s testimony), that degree of evidence is denied to the doubting canons. Similarly, Edith’s commitment to holy orders was doubted. Æthelwold, however, recognized that he was reading the outward saint inappropriately and reacted accordingly. The “evidence” that would put doubts to rest is textually, but not physically present. Æthelthryth “wears” her hidden virginity in an intact body; Edith wears her hidden hair shirt. Neither can be definitively proved, and the outward trappings make it seem as if both saints have something to hide. Sacred evidence of devotion is hidden in anxiety-causing external displays, and the act of seeing virtue is itself a virtuous act.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 67

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 67

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 24 Goscelin’s sources make Edith’s hair shirt another cause for doubt. At least, he seems to be anxious about they would be received. In his prefatory letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Goscelin explains that he draws Edith’s life from both books found at Wilton as well as oral accounts by older nuns who remembered Edith’s early miracles. He defends this second source by saying that “the handmaids of the Lord prophesy as well as the men-servants, and speak in tongues in the same grace of the Holy Spirit.”

*Doubtful Miracles: The Wilton Manuscript*

Not all evidence, however, seems to legitimize the saints. Many of Edith's recorded miracles actually support doubts and criticism against her. By perpetuating her cult, however, the author suggests that these apparent contradictions are reconcilable with continuing veneration at her shrine. The fifteenth-century *Wilton Chronicle* is especially detailed in its descriptions of these miracles.<sup>121</sup> For example, one of the first evidences of Edith's holiness centers on her love of animals. Though she loved all living things, doves were naturally her favorite birds. The author describes their great meekness as a particularly praiseworthy quality; their associations with the Holy Spirit and God's condescension also made them an obvious iconographic choice. Less predictably, she also kept and fed ravens. The author claimed that she had a special love for them out of an affection for Elias the prophet.<sup>122</sup> Miraculously, these animals would take food from her hand, obey her commands, and come or go as they were told. Edith's relationship with living things led her historian to declare that

He was so virtuouse and so full of grace  
and so meche godenesse he had in herre delyte,  
þat nouthere wytte ny space  
all here godenesse for to wryte.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Goscelin of St. Bertin does describe the scene with doves and ravens but omits the scene with King Cnut.

<sup>122</sup> Dockray-Miller, *Edith and Æthelthryth* 107-08

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 108

Despite her author's enthusiasm, the miracles associated with Edith's corpse represent a less positive assessment of her affection for animals. Portions of her body, such as the thumb she used to cross herself, are preserved. However, in a vision to St. Dunstan, Edith explains that "þe organys of þe lemys þe whyche goveernede my wittes five" and "þe fyngers wyth þe whyche y fedde bestes wylde" would be corrupted because they were those parts that "childlych y usede when y was chylde."<sup>124</sup> It seems that, in spite of their associations with humility and religious symbols, Edith's childhood affections physically corrupted her body.

Another of the major criticisms against Edith came from her parents' relationship. Edith's lower body was also corrupted by sin—however, it was not her sin. In the same vision to Dunstan she claims that it is more "for my fader gulte" than for "ony thyng þat y dud myself amys/ owthere by nyȝt or ellus by day."<sup>125</sup> Her "fader gulte" corrupts her body—even though she rejects all claims on royalty. At the same time, however, it is Edith herself who directs St. Dunstan on how to honor and interpret her remains, so this sort of thing seems to be acceptable. When outside sources use these "flaws" as a point of criticism, it tends to end badly for them. For example, when King Cnut visited Wilton abbey he was less than impressed by the cult of St. Edith. *The Wilton Chronicle* claims that when the Archbishop of Canterbury presented Edith's shrine to the king, he laughed and said:

Kyng Edgares douȝter, yche wene he was

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 184

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 186

y kete bot upon a wenche  
How shulde he ever have such a grase  
whose woulde hym self þis well by thenche?”<sup>126</sup>

Edith did not take kindly to Cnut’s comments: her miraculously preserved dead body sat up in its tomb and made a fist as if she would punch him in the face. The king fell into a dead faint, and when he woke up he paid to build Edith an elaborate shrine. Similarly, bishop Æthelwold is silenced by Edith’s argument when he criticizes her clothing. It seems that, while God was permitted to criticize her, neither the church nor the state were granted the same privilege.

Edith is not the only saint in this manuscript who interprets the corruptions of her own body. Æthelthryth, likewise, is punished for her childhood sins. Before her death in the Wilton text a woman appeared to her in a vision and explained that the tumor on her neck was a punishment for “þe synne of þy 3ong age, when þou were wyld and prouȝt.” It was her habit of wearing gold necklaces, “gaynes,” and pride in a “worthy lynage” that all led to to her final sufferings.<sup>127</sup> The poet explains that Christ sent her this trial so that, unlike her sisters who would also die, she would not have to suffer the pains of Purgatory.<sup>128</sup> Æthelthryth reported this vision to her confessor and the women in her monastery and they rejoiced at this mercy. Later, when her body was exhumed and

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 236

<sup>127</sup> Dockray-Miller, *Edith and Æthelthryth* 366

<sup>128</sup> See Jacques Le Goff. *The Birth of Purgatory*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.) Compellingly, this is the only version of Æthelthryth’s vita that references Purgatory—probably as a result of the doctrine’s growing legitimacy during the later Middle Ages.



translated to the chapel, this tumor had healed entirely. In this case, the bodily corruption which was condemned in life becomes a sign of divine approval afterwards.

Aquinas's first question in the second part of the second part of his *Summa* asks whether the physical object of faith can be called the "first truth" (*veritas prima*).<sup>129</sup> His response amounts to a sign theory and an epistemological theory in which he argues that all knowledge comes from both the physical experience with the thing combined with the "true" principle behind it. The problem, however, is that the "true" nature that underlies all things is ineffable and imperceptible—especially for flawed human beings. Steven Justice's essay, "Did the Middle Ages Believe in the Miracles?" argues that Aquinas and medieval hagiographers saw faith, not as a thing which "settles the mind, but riles it."<sup>130</sup> Medieval perceptions of Æthelthryth's preserved body and Edith's threatening miracles suggest that this is the case. Doubt and faith exist in the same space and are created by the same objects. Though Bede is anxious to prove that Æthelthryth was holy by using her preserved body and referring to Wilfrid's testimony, these are not the spiritual experience that late-medieval (or even modern) writers and theologians seem to encourage. Rather, hagiography asks readers to interpret their saints in spite of perfectly reasonable objections to their legitimacy. It requires a kind of double-reading that I will explore in the following chapter.

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<sup>129</sup> Aquinas, *Summa*, II.II.10, preface

<sup>130</sup> Justice, "Did the Middle Ages..." 12-13

## CHAPTER 4

### THE POLITICS OF DOUBT

In a miracle that was first recorded by Goscelin of St. Bertin, Edith was brought to Wilton at the age of two. Her father arrived with his entire retinue, and the whole city gathered as if to witness a royal wedding. The king draped an adorned robe on the steps of Mary's altar and laid all the accoutrements of nobility on it: bracelets, rings, necklaces, and jeweled purple robes. Edith's mother, on the other hand, presented the symbols of her order: a black veil, chalice, paten, dish, and psalter of prophecy. In Goscelin's account, the child turned away from her father's offering, took the veil, and placed it on her head "as a crown."<sup>131</sup>

This was Edith's first rejection of royal privilege, but not her last. It became a theme that Goscelin and other hagiographers used to solidify her claim on sanctity. For example, he claimed that after her brother Edward's death, Edith was offered the crown of England by Ælfhere, a military leader who hoped to stop the succession of her brother Æthelred. Leading members of the court attempted to first persuade her of a "spiritual obligation" to aid her homeland, and then threatened to remove her from the the abbey by force. Edith, however, "smiled, untroubled, at the empty attempts of them all" and rejected them with "constancy and liberty in the spirit of the Lord."<sup>132</sup> Upon hearing this, Ælfhere's coalition determined "that it would be easier for rocks to be turned into lead,

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<sup>131</sup> Hollis, *Writing the Wilton*. 435

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 52

than that she should be diverted from her intent.”<sup>133</sup> They left her at Wilton, and Æthelred “the uncounseled” took the crown.

This exemplum implies that Edith might have been a better leader than her unpopular half brother. His decisions after the Battle of Maldon combined with the St. Brice’s Day Massacre led to the installation of a Danish king of England.<sup>134</sup> Given her brother’s perceived failings with the Norsemen, there is a certain comic revenge in the story of Cnut’s visit to Wilton.<sup>135</sup> His comments in *The Wilton Chronicle* put a voice to the doubts about her parentage that haunted Edith’s claim on sanctity, and his defeat by a saint’s dead body metonymically represents the defeat of other doubters. At the same time, however, this episode not only defended Edith’s position, but also her parents, her brother, the Wilton community, and England’s *English* (or non-Danish) identity. By doubting the English virgin, Cnut doubted England herself, and the country’s body literally rose against him.<sup>136</sup> The sense here is that Anglo-Saxon saints and their miracles

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 52

<sup>134</sup> Æthelred’s reputation was largely a construct of later medieval historians, and did not necessarily reflect contemporary attitudes toward his rule. See Simon Keynes, “A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 36 (1986) 195-217.

<sup>135</sup> This scene does not appear in Gosceline of St. Bertin’s account of Edith’s vita. Though Edith has dealings with Cnut, he is portrayed as a believer from the beginning. The scene originated in William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta Pontificum* see Dockray-Miller, *Edith and Æthelthryth* 22. He had particularly negative feelings toward Æthelred and specifically associated him with Cnut’s disgust for English saints R.A.B. Mynors, Rodney M. Thompson, and Michael Winterbottom. *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 299. It was later used in *The Wilton Chronicle* and also CUL Add. 2604. (See the appendix for a transcription.)

<sup>136</sup> See O’Brien O’Keefe *Stealing Obedience* 151-184. She discusses the idea of agency and whether children were truly considered capable of taking vows. Also, O’Brien O’Keefe suggests that Goscelin may have edited himself given his audience of bishops.

were emphasized during the later middle ages in an attempt to create a unified sense of community despite the founding saints' unusual behavior.<sup>137</sup>

*Wilton: Politics and Conflict*

Though her hagiographers enthusiastically praised her, Edith was doubted for the same reasons that Wilton was doubted during the later middle ages: self-indulgence, misuse of wealth, a certain disregard for the Benedictine Rule, pride, and a tendency to threaten powerful male religious leaders. Though the community was influential during the tenth century, Wilton's rise and fall was largely a matter of economics and gender politics after the Norman invasion. In *The Victoria County Histories* Elizabeth Crittall demonstrated Wilton Abbey's initial importance as a political, religious, and economic force during the period shortly after 1066. In 1086 it was the richest women's house in England: it surpassed the establishments at Barking, Shaftsbury, and Winchester with a gross income of £246 14s. It enjoyed the patronage of significant members of both Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman aristocracy.

By the end of twelfth century, however, Wilton was showing signs of financial decline that would continue until the end of the fourteenth century. Some of the abbey's charters indicate that the abbess began to default on dues owed to the crown in 1195. Scutages from 1195 were not fully paid until 1208. In 1223 the abbess seems to have been "dissiesed of her property for failure to answer summons promptly," and in 1229

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<sup>137</sup> Goodich, "Miracles and Disbelief...", 23-38.

letters indicate that the tenants of Wilton were being asked to help the abbey with financial contributions.<sup>138</sup>

Much of this financial decline was tied to the rise of Salisbury as an economic, political, and religious center.<sup>139</sup> After Old Sarum was dissolved, the religious seat of Wiltshire needed to be moved. There are folk traditions about how that happened, but one of them was recorded in the *Tropenwell Cartulary*. Reportedly, Bishop Richard Poore was planning to move the church-center to Wilton and met with the Abbess regularly in order to arrange the details. It led to some speculation in which an “ancient spinster” asks

“What...can bring the b[isho]p here so often? Is he going to marry the abbess? Can he have got a dispensation at Rome?” “Nothing of the sort” replied her companion “You slander the holy man; he is about to transfer the church and cloister from the Castle of Sarum to some spot near

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<sup>138</sup> “Houses of Benedictine Nuns” 231-42.

<sup>139</sup> Sarum was founded when the Council of London in 1075 determined that all bishop’s seats should be relocated to urban areas. The bishopric of the Wiltshire area was transferred to Old Saurum, even though the cathedral, castle, and settlement were so far from the river that it made the practical matters of day to day life a serious obstacle. The area was a strange choice, given that the bishop’s seats were expected to move toward “urban” areas. Even at its peak, Saurum never surpassed nearby Wilton. By the end of the twelfth century these difficulties had grown to the point that Bishop Herbert Poore decided to move the cathedral to another area. Political and religious instabilities caused by King John’s exploits, however, made the move impossible; it was not until the beginning of the thirteenth century (1219 A.D.) that the bishop’s brother, Richard Poore, actually succeeded in making the move to Salisbury. Wilton would have been the logical choice for relocation; the abbey had long harbored people from Sarum. This rise in prominence would have brought economic, political, and (by extension) spiritual benefits to the abbey. However, it was ultimately decided that the center of the religious community would be moved to lands owned by the bishop. See Christian Frost, *Time Space, and Order: the Making of Medieval Salisbury*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 17

Wilton” “But” persisted the other “Has not the b[isho]p land enough of his own that he must spoil the abbess?”<sup>140</sup>

When these rumors reached Poore, he began to look to his own property for a new site but had little success. The Virgin Mary appeared to him and told him that he was to place the abbey at a place called Myrfield. It was only later that the bishop realized that a portion of his property in Salisbury was called Myrfield, and he gratefully began construction on this divinely ordained location. Though this foundation myth was almost certainly based in an oral tradition, the documents that record it date to the fifteenth-century and were written about forty years after the Wilton manuscript.<sup>141</sup>

The situation was exacerbated in 1244 when Bishop Bingham commissioned the Ayleswade Bridge<sup>142</sup> to be built to the south in Salisbury. It replaced upper Fisherton

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<sup>140</sup> *The Tropenell Cartulary: Being the Contents of an Old Wiltshire Muniment Chest*. Ed. J. Sylvester Davies, vol II, (Wiltshire Archeological and Natural History Soceity, 1908), xliii-xliv. accessed June 19, 2018. <https://archive.org/details/tropenellcartul02davigoog>

Ibid., 185: Cum quadam vice pro isto negocio pertransiret Wilton [ad] locum predictum contemplandum, dixit quedam vetula filatrix cuidam socie sue, ‘Miror,’[sic] inquit, ‘de episcopo isto quod tociens Wilton vadit: forte intendit dispensare Abbatissam, quia postquam de Roma venit solito sepius venit huc. Putas nunquid papa ne posset dispensare cum eo quod eam duceret in uxorem?’ Cui respondit social sua, ‘Non est,’ inquit, ‘sic set falsum de viro sancto opinaris; ipse autem intendit transferre ecclesiam et claussum de castro Sarum juxta Wilton.’ Tunc dixit illa vetula filatrix, ‘Nunquid [non] habet episcopus terram propriam nisi quod spoliat Abbatissam’ et adjecit ‘Nunquid fuit Deo carus qui sibi ipsi fuit avarus? Terras,’ inquit, ‘habet episcopus Sarum plures quam adhuc fundavit ecclesias.’

<sup>141</sup> Rich Jones and John Macray, *Charters and documents illustrating the history of the cathedral, city, and diocese of Salisbury, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries*. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1891), 266. Accessed 1 June, 2018, <https://archive.org/details/chartersdocument00sali>.

<sup>142</sup> Evelyn Hart. “The Creative Years 1220-1535.” *City of Salisbury*. Ed. Bugh Shortt. (London, Phoenix House, 1957) 45. Shortly after Salisbury obtained its first charter in 1227, both Wilton and Old Sarum complained against the new city’s trade practices. The new city had been given the right to one weekly market, however Salisbury’s bishop allowed several meetings that competed with Wilton’s Monday, Wednesday, and Friday markets. Their complaints were not addressed until 1361—long after the damage was already done.

See also Edwyn Jervoise *The Ancient Bridges of the South of England*. (London: Architectural Press, 1930). for details on this bridge’s architecture.

Bridge in the north which had once encouraged traffic through Wilton<sup>143</sup>. John Leland, a sixteenth-century historian and prebendary of Wilton abbey claimed that “the changing of this way was the totale cause of the ruine of Old Saresbyri and Wiltoun. For afore this Wiltoun had a 12 paroch churches or more and was the heade town of Wileshir.”<sup>144</sup> By 1248 the buildings at Wilton were so dilapidated that Bishop William de York reduced the rectory at Bulbridge to a vicarage and allocated two thirds of the church’s annual tithes to Wilton. In return, the church was released from its annual obligations to provide wax and a horse to the abbey.<sup>145</sup>

Numerous censures were sent from various bishops of Salisbury that criticized Wilton’s capacity for self-governance. Among these are a number of formal criticisms of the abbey’s lax enforcement of the *Periculoso*. Elizabeth Makowski has suggested that this 1298 document, which ordered the strict cloistering of all nuns in the area, led to a serious financial and political decline in medieval women’s houses. It severely limited the opportunity to court patronage, since Boniface VIII’s decree prohibited the “furnishing of room and board to laywomen, no matter how respectable” and also caused that the cloistered nuns had difficulty engaging in any type of work outside of the abbey.<sup>146</sup> In 1299 (a year after the Papal decree) Simon of Ghent wrote to the abbess of Wilton, and asked that she and her nuns observe the rules regarding enclosure more

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<sup>143</sup> Frost, *Salisbury*, 67

<sup>144</sup> John Hearne, *The itinerary of John Leland the Antiquary*. Vol I (Oxford: Oxford University, 1768). 89. Accessed July 5, 2018. [https://books.google.com/books?id=0U0VAAAQAAJ&source=gbs\\_navlinks\\_s](https://books.google.com/books?id=0U0VAAAQAAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s) Hart, “Creative Years,” 29.

<sup>145</sup> Jones and Macray *Charters and documents*, x

<sup>146</sup> Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women : Periculoso and Its Commentators, 1298-1545*. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 3

carefully and ordered that the walls surrounding the abbey should be carefully maintained.<sup>147</sup> In 1303 Simon of Ghent re-issued the order to Wilton and also sent it to the nuns at Amesbury, Lacock, Tarant, Keynes, and Kington.<sup>148</sup>

In 1379 Bishop Ralph Ergham of Salisbury criticized a number of Wilton Abbey's managerial practices; he mandated that "the abbess was to more rigorously enforce the Rule," "no letter or deed was to be sealed with the common seal except in the chapter and in the presence of the convent," "no married woman was to sojourn within the convent," and advised that the "nuns were to reprove their pupils kindly and were forbidden to entertain themselves with superstitious plays or games."<sup>149</sup> This sort of censure indicates a certain laxness in the abbey's devotion to vows of obedience and poverty as well as a general disregard for the rules of enclosure. Dockray-Miller further speculates that the abbot's criticisms on the state of buildings at Wilton suggest that the decline was not only moral, it was also financial.<sup>150</sup> Similarly, Wogan-Browne suggests that such a laxness would have been particularly problematic, given Henry V's patronage

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<sup>147</sup> "History...", 231-42. Incidents of financial strain also continued into the late thirteenth century. In 1246, the house had fallen into serious disrepair, and the Bishop of Salisbury assigned funds to repair the convent's infrastructure. Between 1246 and 1276 there are several accounts that show the crown's contribution of building materials to the abbey. In 1299 there was also a large royal grant of oaks to the abbey to repair the buildings damaged by a fire. Between 1328 and 1442 there are numerous instances of borders who were nominated by the King. In 1328, for example, there is evidence that indicates that the abbey was housing two royal borders. When the Bishop of Salisbury came in 1379, he ordered that "no more corrodies or pensions were to be granted without very good reason, and only with the consent of the chapter and the advice of the bishop". The 1379 censure that is cited here and above in relation to Dockray-Miller also ordered that the laws of enclosure should be more strictly enforced, and that no married women should be allowed to stay in the convent and the entrance of visitors was to be severely scaled back.

<sup>148</sup> Makowski, *Canon Law*, 112-13

<sup>149</sup> Dockray-Miller, *Edith and Æthelthryth*, 6

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 6



of the rigid Brigettine foundation at Syon. As a Benedictine house, Wilton was part of a less austere sect, and Wogan-Browne's article argues that the *Wilton Chronicle* attempts to reclaim the abbey as a location that possessed "particularly valuable sacralizing powers for the Lancastrian dynasty."<sup>151</sup>

By the beginning of the fifteenth century, matters were beginning to improve for the abbey. The Wilton manuscript, itself, seems to have been written in a period where Wilton's position appeared to be improving.<sup>152</sup> By 1423 Archbishop Chicheley reported that the abbey was in order, and by 1425, the Bishop of Salisbury began to grant indulgences to those who visited St. Edith's shrine.<sup>153</sup> There is the sense, however, that the abbey was recovering from a long period of difficulty, and the need to legitimize its own saints and encourage patronage to the area was absolutely key. Ultimately, however, the effort failed, and Wilton was dissolved during the Reformation.

### *Devotion and Wealth*

Wilton abbey's political, financial, and spiritual problems paralleled with a saint who was constantly doubted; those doubts centered around politics and patronage. Both her initial miracle as a child and the episode with King Cnut focus on the political implications of Edith's religious choices. Though she definitively defeats King Cnut, she does not necessarily act in her country's best interests. It is implied that by rejecting

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<sup>151</sup> Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "Outdoing the Daughters of Syon? Edith of Wilton and the Representation of Female Community in Fifteenth-Century England" in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain* ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000) 397.

<sup>152</sup> Dockray-Miller, *Edith and Æthelthryth* 1, 413. The manuscript is usually dated c. 1420 since the abbey's list of royal founders includes Henry V, whose reign lasted only from 1413-1422.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

political position she made way for Æthelred's reported mismanagement and Cnut's power over the convent and England. As the daughter of a king, Edith's body is England's body, and England/Edith replaced physical martyrdom with a martyrdom of Æthelred's leadership.<sup>154</sup> Perhaps it is unsurprising that her miraculous body is only partially preserved after her death. She is an imperfect example of a "good" religious/royal woman.

At the same time, however, she is constructed as an example for other virgins to follow—in fact, it is the only real martyrdom or suffering that Edith experiences. She lacks the drama of her bleeding, burning, decapitated sisters—which makes her more relatable than figures like Agnes or Katherine. Her position as a princess (even a questionably legitimate one) allowed her to bridge the space between religious women and political women. Edith's sacrifices as she rejected royal privilege would have been familiar to the women who were instructed at Wilton. The abbey was one England's early centers of learning; it educated influential daughters of aristocracy including Edith (Edward the Confessor's wife), Gunhild (Harold's daughter), Maud (Henry I's wife),<sup>155</sup> and Matilda (Henry I's daughter).<sup>156</sup> Its earliest leaders included King Egbert's sister, Alburga, and Radegund, the daughter of the Earl of Wiltshire. They would have been well aware of the pressures to make good marriages, obey their parents, and support their husbands. Goscelin's life of Edith framed the choices of such women who take holy

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<sup>154</sup> Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women*, 52

<sup>155</sup> "Houses of Benedictine nuns: Abbey of Wilton," in *A History of the County of Wiltshire: Volume 3*, ed. R B Pugh and Elizabeth Crittall (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 231-242. *British History Online*, accessed June 30, 2018, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/wilts/vol3/pp231-242>.

<sup>156</sup> Mynors et. al., *Historia regis...* 755

orders as equal to the sacrifice of more bloodied saints such as Cecilia, Agnes, or Lucy. He argues that, while “the faith of so many saints has been tested by torture and death,” Edith “was tempted by the glory of the world” and “abstinence among delights and riches is also a martyrdom.”<sup>157</sup>

This sense that one could be “martyred” by simply rejecting the world is not limited to Edith’s life. Saints were often used as a model to encourage virgins to exchange a worldly marriage for a spiritual one, but the Anglo-Saxon founders of English religious houses were rarely subjected to the violence that was idealized in universal saints. For example, in *Holi Meidhad*, the author encourages young women to:

þench o Seinte Katerine, o Seinte Margarete, Seinte Enneis, Seinte Iuliene,  
Seinte Lucie, and Seint Cecille, and o þe oþre hali meidnes in heouene, hu  
ha nawt ane ne forsoken kinges sunes ant eorles, wiðalle worldliche  
weolen and eorðliche wunnen, ah þoleden stronge pinen ear ha walden  
neomen ham, and derf deað on ende. þench hu wel ham is no, ant hu ha  
blissið þeruore bituhe Godes earmes, cwenes of heouene.<sup>158</sup>

Once again, the author holds up the rejection of the world as an ideal. However, though the letter is written in English and associated with the “Katherine Group,” all of the saints highlighted by the author had universal cults. Catherine, Margaret, Agnes, Juliana, Lucy, and Cecilia rejected their families and political leaders under the threat of death, torture, and/or rape. The suitors, husbands, fathers, kings, and emperors tend to be the villains of

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<sup>157</sup> Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women*, 52

<sup>158</sup> Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Bella Millett, *Medieval English Prose for Women: Ancrone Wisse and the Katherine Group* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 40.

these stories; this is not the case with Edith. Though her father tries to tempt her into marriage as a child, there is no attempt at force. In fact, she brings wealth into her marriage with Christ as a kind of dowry. Edith's commitment to God might not produce heirs to Edgar's kingdom, but after she rejected her father's gifts, "The king added lands, he added royal gifts and augmented pastures; he augmented the flock of the Lord with great increase. So in the blessed Edith the abundant blessing of God has overflowed on this place through the ages." Though she took the black "crown" of a nun in stead of the accoutrements of royalty, Edith still keeps all of her father's fine gifts, and they act as part of her legacy in Wilton "through the ages".<sup>159</sup> Like any other political marriage, both parties (the church and state) benefit from Edith's spiritual union. All of these qualities described by both Goscelin of St. Bertin and, three hundred years later, by the Wilton Chronicler demonstrate Wilton's legitimacy as a spiritual support to political ends. At the same time, however, Edith also undermines this spiritual/political goal by only partially rejecting her worldly possessions.

Though the image of a young woman leaving her family and position to take orders might have been familiar to the women at Wilton, the image of Edith herself with a large bathtub, menagerie of pets, and costly robes would have been less familiar. Though Edith ostensibly rejected fine clothing, jewels, and prestigious marriages, images of wealth run through many of Goscelin's descriptions. For example, she embroidered ceremonial robes for a local bishop:

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<sup>159</sup> Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women*, 49

...with Punic red, with murex and Sidonian shellfish, and twice-dipped scarlet were interwoven with gold; chrysolite, topaz, onyx and beryl and precious stones were interwoven with gold; union pearls, the shells' treasure, which only India produces in the east and Britain, the land of the English, in the west, were set like stars in gold; the golden insignia of the cross, the golden images of the saints were outlined with a surround of pearls. Her whole thought was Christ and the worship of Christ.<sup>160</sup>

Goscelin's detailed description is lovely, sensual, and clearly focused on the fabulous wealth that Edith brought into the abbey. Her rejection of the things of the world is not exactly a true "rejection." It is more of a "redirection." The king offered his daughter as a bride, but more importantly Goscelin tells us that he offered "lands, he added royal gifts and augmented pastures; he augmented the flock of the Lord with great increase. So in the blessed Edith the abundant blessing of God has overflowed on this place through the ages."<sup>161</sup>

As I mentioned before, the priest's robes were not the only thing that she adorned; her fine clothing was criticized, not only by Æthelwold, but also her historians and hagiographers themselves. William of Malmesbury wrote the following in his history of the English kings:

I have heard from my elders, she used to give no small offence to public opinion (deceiving it, no doubt, by appearances, the splendor of her gold-

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 39

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 29

embroidered garments; for she always went about in more elegant clothes than were called for by the sanctity of her profession.<sup>162</sup>

Though the child saint might have chosen her mother's rough robes, it seems that as an adult, Edith preferred her father's fine silk. In both cases, however, she is praised by her hagiographers with a little too much exuberance—their consistent emphasis on her humility is clearly compensating for her flagrant disregard for the Benedictine Rule. Though women like Edith brought wealth and prestige into a convent, it is almost impossible to convert her into a humble, submissive ideal of womanhood.

### *Clothing and Skeptical Politics*

As Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe argues, Edith's clothes demonstrate a kind of "agency" and identity that unsettles the saints' readers and writers—especially the ones who were writing after the fourteenth century.<sup>163</sup> The contradictions in that identity were closely related to the dichotomy between religious and political power. The rules of the religious orders demanded that no member of a monastic order should dress with any adornment that a stable hand would not use. Though Goscelin would have been familiar and anxious about her disregard for these rules, state rules about clothing rendered it something of an obsession in later medieval writers. The sumptuary laws of 1363 indicate that the lower classes were prohibited from wearing "precious stones, cloth of silver, silk...gold or silver, and embroidered or silken clothing."<sup>164</sup> While visitation

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<sup>162</sup> Mynors et. al., *Historia regis*, 403

<sup>163</sup> O'Brien O'Keefe, *Stealing Obedience* 180-84.

<sup>164</sup> Hodges, Laura F. *Chaucer and Clothing Clerical and Academic Costume in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 17.

records seem to indicate that English abbesses often ignored the expectation that they would wear “appropriate” clothing, these records indicate that “to be properly dressed as a nun was to give up all idea of upper-class status as acquired by birth or expressed in clothing.”<sup>165</sup> In a very real sense, Edith is failing the requirements of her order—and things like the sumptuary laws simply made her more and more inappropriate—especially in the context of the *Wilton Chronicle* and CUL 2604 which were written during the fifteenth-century.

In Edith’s case the problem actually started well before Goscelin wrote his vita. It stemmed from the shifting relationship between royalty and women’s position in the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon church. During the Benedictine Reforms women were expelled from participation in mass and more strictly enclosed, which effectively barred them from access to the kind of formal education that they enjoyed before the Danish invasions.<sup>166</sup> It also significantly limited the convent’s ability to take on boarders and financially support itself. On the other hand, lay queens—both married and widowed—seemed to rise in terms of religious, political, and social position. Æthelwold, Edgar, and Dunstan’s reforms positioned the queen as the main intermediary between the government and convents. Bishop Æthelwold’s *Regularis concordia* specifically names Queen Ælfhryth, Edgar’s third wife, and positions her as the “protectress and fearless guardian of the communities of nuns.”<sup>167</sup> Edgar is similarly given charge of male

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 107

<sup>167</sup> Trans. and Ed. Dom Thomas Symons, *Regularis Concordia: The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation*, (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), 2.

monastics so that “there should be no cause for any breath of scandal.”<sup>168</sup> This document also forbids religious institutions from recognizing the authority of any secular leader except the queen and king themselves; it also reserves the right of both “fathers and mothers”<sup>169</sup> to access the king and queen in matters of their house’s financial welfare and safety.<sup>170</sup> Edith was positioned directly in the middle of these changes. While earlier saints such as Æthelthryth and Sexburgh took over monasteries, they did so at the explicit exclusion of male power—Ecgrith is left behind and Sexburgh’s husband is dead. While their confessor Wilfrid is often present, he rarely exercises any kind of autonomy.

So it is not necessarily surprising that when later hagiographers including the Wilton author, Goscelin, and the author of CUL 2604 adapted her vita as an exemplary model of self-denial. It is also unsurprising that Edith is a bit hazy on how self-denial was supposed to look. Edgar’s active role in the Benedictine Reforms and his new queen’s role suggest that the country’s ruling families exercised more religious authority whereas the convents exercised less. In that transitional period, however, it makes sense that Edith seems to be both wealthy and religious at the same time.

Goscelin inherited these confused dynamics about how a semi-legitimate royal nun was supposed to behave and appear in public. Later authors inherited his confusion. In all of this contradiction, however, Edith becomes emblematic of England’s confusing relationship between church and state and women’s role inside of it. Since Edith’s is

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid. Coniugique suae Ælfrithae sanctimonialium mandras ut impaudi more custodis defenderet cautissime praecepit; ut uidelicet mas maribus, femina feminis, sine ullo suspicionis scrupulo subueniret.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 7 Ad regis uero obsequium et reginae patres monasteriorum matresque, quotiens expedierit ad scri coenobii cui praesunt utiliatem, cum Dei timore et regulae obseruantia humiliter accedant.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid



“martyred” by her rejection of political position, her claim to sanctity centers around similar women’s relationship between church and state. Goscelin, writing in the immediate aftermath of the Norman Invasion, places commitment to the church above political and social stability. Her marriage to Christ is framed as expatriation—as if Wilton were an allied country rather than an abbey established through the generosity of King Edgar. He calls her monastic robes “the black garment of an exile” and her new country the “fatherland of immortality.”<sup>171</sup> Nor is this perspective limited to Goscelin’s eleventh-century account. For example, in the twelfth century William of Malmesbury claimed that she “suppressed the pride that her high birth might have inspired.”<sup>172</sup> The fifteenth-century account in CUL 2604 similarly claims that she left behind the privileges of nobility to serve the poor:

All erthly favour she forsoke. To the seke she was full petyvous to the  
 destitute; full comfortable *and* cherisshed more lepres than lordis children  
 for the more fauler asek man were; the mor pite she had upon hym.

The fifteenth-century *Wilton Chronicle* also praises her commitment to service and humility. It states that Edith “covetede never in no wyse/ to be worsheped for here hey3e lynage,/ bot ever to meke in lowe servyse,/ for all to mekenes were here currage.”<sup>173</sup> Over the course of more than four-hundred years, Edith’s hagiographers frame her “martyrdom” in terms of Wilton’s political position.

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<sup>171</sup> Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women* 453

<sup>172</sup> Mynors and Winterbottom, *Historia*, 296. ...obsequiorum sedulitate hominum gratiam emebat, natalium tumorem ingenuitate mentis premens.

<sup>173</sup> Dockray-Miller, *Edith and Æthelthryth*, 102

## *Medieval Skepticism*

Since the doubts that followed Edith were often political doubts, it is useful to consider them through the lens of political and religious philosophers. John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* was written during his exile in France and is filled with a number of remarkable claims including the necessity to overthrow a tyrant and a certain advocacy for moral Skepticism.<sup>174</sup> In it he examines the problems with a corrupt aristocracy. Like medieval hagiographers who tried to judge a saint's holiness through miraculous evidence, John's theories are written as a hermeneutic to judge the actions of politicians. Though a member of the aristocracy might appear to be virtuous, he argued that they often had their own ends in mind. It follows that the inverse is also true: problematic actions could be motivated by virtuous intent. The *Policraticus* reaches back to Classical discussions about skepticism and moral relativism in order to read the actions of contemporary nobles. As the only medieval scholar to call himself a skeptic, John of Salisbury departed significantly from other leading medieval theories.<sup>175</sup>

For Augustine, Aquinas, and other significant thinkers the judgment of God's actions relies on the true "nature" of God and things he created. Miracles work because they are following laws that are otherwise unknown to man. In *City of God* Augustine lists a number of marvels including the "wondrous" preservation of peacock flesh (he believed that it did not rot), mares in Cappadocia that could be impregnated by the wind,

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<sup>174</sup> Albrecht Classen, "The People Rise Up against the Tyrants in the Courtly World: John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, the Fables by Marie De France, and the Anonymous *Mai Und Beafloer*." *Neohelicon: Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 35, no. 1 (2008): 17-29

<sup>175</sup> Nicolette Zeeman, Kantik Ghosh, and Dallas Denery, "The Varieties of Uncertainty," in *Uncertain Knowledge: Scepticism, Relativeism, and Doubt in the Middle Ages*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 3.

and an island in India where trees never lose their foliage.<sup>176</sup> He ultimately argues that, if doubters cannot explain these “scientific” phenomena, they should not be surprised if they cannot explain miracles either. For Aquinas, doubt was the natural state of human beings; it was a direct result of the Fall and not a sin in itself. For him, the process of turning unbelief to doubt required the acquisition of knowledge. John of Salisbury would have agreed with both of these men; however, his epistemic philosophies did not believe that human beings could always attain the truth that they searched for.

Though Augustine argues that things may be unknown to human beings, he does not argue that they are unknowable—he specifically condemns that philosophy. One of his earlier works, *Contra academicos*, specifically argued that it was impossible that “anyone can live happily if he’s only searching for the truth and hasn’t found it.”<sup>177</sup>

Henrik Lagerlund sums up his argument as follows: “Every happy human desires the truth. Humans can be happy. No human can be happy if there is something she greatly desires but cannot obtain. At least some humans can attain truth”.<sup>178</sup> The syllogistic logic here is problematic, but Augustine’s essay is ultimately a rejection of Academic

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<sup>176</sup> Augustine, *City of God* II.4

<sup>177</sup> Augustine. *Against the Academics and the Teacher*, Ed. and trans. Peter King, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 7.

<sup>178</sup> Henrik Lagerlund, *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background* (Boston: Brill, 2010), 6.

Skepticism. His ideas had a lasting influence on later philosophers such as Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus.<sup>179</sup>

That being said, however, the concept was not entirely expelled from the Middle Ages—in fact, skepticism, like doubt, seems to underlie many aspects of medieval life. Edith’s argument that unknowable virtue may lie under fine clothes could be called an argument for skepticism. Its reiteration in the fifteenth-century *Wilton Chronicle* could also be read as a call for the Wilton community to be read “correctly” by the priests and leaders who censured it. John made this argument the *Policraticus*, a twelfth-century treatise that described aristocratic wordplay, games, clothing, and machinations as the epitome of corruption. Like many other medieval writers, he wished to differentiate between virtue itself and the mere appearance of virtue. Though his *Metalogicon*<sup>180</sup> praised dialectics by using them in the text itself, the problem of judging *people* in the *Policraticus* led John to suggest a certain kind of moral adaptability that made behaviors moral at one moment and immoral at the next. Essentially, as Dallas Denery suggests, John was relying on rhetoric rather than a binary morality. He associated the Fall with a corruption of language:

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<sup>179</sup> Though I give a very brief overview of some significant figures in the development of skepticism, it is not my intent to make it comprehensive. For a more detailed discussion see Henrik Lagerlund’s *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*. He provides a more extensive explanation of skepticism’s Greek roots and also a description of medieval skepticism’s critical history. Christophe Grellard discusses elements of skepticism in Nicholas of Autrecourt and John Buridan’s arguments. Christophe Grellard, “Scepticism, Demonstration, and the Infinite Regress Argument (Nicholas of Autrecourt and John Buridan)” *Vivarium* 45, no 2 (2007) 328-42.

<sup>180</sup> See Lagerlung, *Skepticism* 10-11

His *Metalogicon* was also key to describing John’s understanding of skepticism. In this text, he describes three major skeptical approaches: 1. “skepticism doubts all things” 2. skepticism only believes “what is necessary and self-evident”, 3. “skepticism must withhold judgement in all matters that are doubtful.” John embraced the third of the three options.

Consequently the nature of man is prone to evil whose infancy of innocence, so to speak, continued as long as he abstained from communication perverted and perverting. Man spoke not and remained innocent. A deep sleep was cast upon him and he fell asleep in innocence. He awoke, and recognizing a helpmate like unto himself which God had fashioned for him, he spoke the wonderful works of God. But from the day that he was given speech and led out through the door of curiosity, he had converse with the tempter.<sup>181</sup>

According to John of Salisbury, the human beings who first spoke with with the language of “curiosity” became “perverted”—and unhappy—by it. Counterintuitively, however, John suggests that the way out of this unhappiness is to return to the tree that caused the Fall.

Therefore man while climbing it, though forbidden, fell from the tree of knowledge and from truth, virtue, and life; he lost his way and shall not return to life unless he return to the tree of knowledge and borrow from it truth by knowledge, virtue by deed, and life by joy.<sup>182</sup>

By seeking “knowledge,” “deeds,” and “joy” John is suggesting that human beings (by grace—he is careful not to fall into Pelagianism) can return to the garden. The same desire for knowledge that caused Eve to be cast out allows mankind to return. This

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<sup>181</sup> John of Salisbury, *Frivolities of the Courtiers and Footprints of the Philosophers: Being a Translation of the First, Second, and Third Books and Selections from the Seventh and Eighth Books of the Policraticus*” Ed and trans. Joseph B. Pike (New York: Octagon Books, 1972) I.16

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., II.25

analysis made space for a certain amount of moral relativity that also extended to appropriate social maneuvering. For example, as Joseph Pike and Dallas Denery have pointed out, John seems to simultaneously praise and condemning hunting. At one point he says “For it is quite unfair that noble natures be degraded by lowly pursuits and that those whose tasks are to be arduous and burdensome be distracted by the vain pursuit of pleasure.”<sup>183</sup> After thoroughly rejecting the practice for several pages, John seems to reframe his view when he argues the following:

That it may be evident that I am attacking with my pen hunting and other diversions of courtiers judiciously rather than in a spirit of hatred, I would gladly agree to count hunting among things called indifferentia (neither good nor evil) were it not for the fact that the inordinate pleasure that it causes impairs the human mind and undermines reason itself.<sup>184</sup>

Whereas Scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas saw the morality of choice in terms of dialectics, John of Salisbury focused on a rhetorical model in which the situation determined the best moral behavior.<sup>185</sup> As Cary Nederman has pointed out, we often tend to divide twelfth century ethical philosophy between Abelardian and Aristotelian models; however, this does not account for more nuanced approaches. Though John of Salisbury has developed something of a reputation for uneven philosophical leanings, even his decision to praise dialectic arguments in the *Metalogicon* and then reject them in the

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., I.3

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Cary J. Nederman *John of Salisbury*. (Tempe, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005). Cary J. Nederman has suggested that this sense of situational morality, which departs from a strictly Stoic or Aristotelian approach was influenced by John of Salisbury’s appropriations of Cicero.

*Policraticus* allows for a certain amount of moral relativity that borders on the humanistic concept of argumentative invention rather than dogmatic statements of absolute truth.

This is, essentially, the crux of Dallas Denery's assessment of John of Salisbury's work.

He argues that the differences between this twelfth-century philosopher and Early Modern thinkers was "less significant, less dramatic, than what they have in common" and that "these commonalities may reveal real continuities. If this is the case, then the real outlier is Scholasticism itself."<sup>186</sup>

Like John's *Policraticus*, the lives of Æthelthryth and Edith focused on social and personal maneuvering; they were practical and didactic, but not dogmatic. They promoted the cults of the saints, instructed would-be virgins, legitimized the community's historical identity, and generally encouraged "appropriate" religious behavior. Like other instructive manuals such as the *Acrene Wisse* and the so-called "Katherine Group," the Post-Norman accounts of early virgins instructed women from a variety of social backgrounds. Just as John's treatment of desire for the tree of knowledge allowed Eve to be condemned and her children to be saved, Edith was praised for her fine apparel and also doubted for it.

#### *Reading through John of Salisbury*

Though Augustine may have disapproved of skepticism, there is evidence for its persistence against the backdrop of Scholasticism—especially in women's conduct manuals. The reasons for medieval anxieties about women's clothes were the same as modern ones: Thomas Aquinas argued that women's apparel could lead men to lust. The

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<sup>186</sup> Denery, *Skepticism*, 33

only exception that he allows is for married women who should make themselves attractive for their husbands to keep them from adultery. Moreover, citing Deuteronomy 22: 5, he also argues that women may not wear men's clothing and vice versa. While she did not specifically discuss Edith, Christine de Pizan rejects this kind of misogynistic rhetoric in typical fashion. Specifically, she discusses the double standard that clothing represented—especially among young aristocratic women. She argues that appropriate clothing is a biproduct of a person's nature; what is right for one person is wrong for another depending on how God has created them. For example, in *The Book of the City of Ladies* she asks whether we should blame women who try to attract men with their beauty and clothing. She replies that, “while excessive elegance is not without blame,” many women *and* men take pleasure from “coquettishness or in beautiful and rich clothes....If such a desire occurs to them naturally, it would be difficult for them to avoid it.” Christina goes on to reference the apostle, Bartholomew.

Is it not written that... [he]wore clothes of silk with fringe and precious stones his entire life in spite of our Lord's preaching poverty? It occurred to him naturally to be richly dressed, which is normally vain and pompous, and yet he did not sin in this....I tell you these things to show that no one should judge someone else's conscience from dress, for it is God's office alone to judge his creatures.<sup>187</sup>

Christina specifically cites a man who outwardly demonstrated the qualities of vanity, but was not held guilty for them because it was “natural” to him. Later, in *The Treasure of*

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<sup>187</sup> Christine de Pizan, *Book of the City of Ladies*, Trans. Earl Richards” (New York: Persea Books, 1982). 205.



*the City of Ladies*, she expounds on her previous point and includes five reasons why it is important for women to avoid extravagance in their clothing. Only the first reason refers to the sin of vanity, and the rest focus on its social implications such as inciting jealousy, inviting censure, and providing a bad example to one's peers. At the same time, she feels that it is "quite right that each woman wear such clothing as indicates her husband's and her rank" to do otherwise would be "a thing contrary to good public order, in which, in any country, if it is well regulated, everything ought to be within limits."<sup>188</sup>

Similarly, she also argues that shows of devotion should not be an excuse to behave inappropriately—and specifically references St. Æthelthryth in the process. She says that

Neither should she use pilgrimages as an excuse to get away from town in order to go somewhere to play about or kick up her heels in some merry company. This is merely sin and wickedness in whoever does it....Pilgrimages lie that are not worthy of the name. Nor should she go gadding around the town with young women, on Monday to St. Audrey, on Thursday to St. Catherine, and so forth on other days.<sup>189</sup>

Christine's work suggests that women's behavior—good or evil—must be read through multiple lenses simultaneously.

Even the advice to nuns seems to mirror Christine's approach to reading appropriate saintly/religious behavior. After providing a detailed description of

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<sup>188</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies or The Book of the Three Virtues*. Trans. Sarah Lawson, (New York.: Penguin, 1985), 149-50.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 152.

appropriate clothing for anchoresses that includes instructions for trimming hair, bloodletting, and prohibitions against adornment, *The Ancrene Wisse* includes an important caveat. The author instructs readers that they should “Understondeð eauer of all þose þinges þet nan nis heast ne forbod þet beoð of þe Uttre Riwle, þet is lute strengðe of, for hwon þet te inre beo wel iwist, as Ich seide i þe frumðe.”<sup>190</sup>

For example, in a fifteenth-century English life of Bridget of Sweden, the saint and her husband agree to a life of marital continence. However, it is only after he dies and “sho departed hir gude amange hir childir and pore folke and also sho changed hir clethinge and hir lifinge” (Ellis 3) Then she begins to dress in “febill cleþing”—to the point that “diuers folk saide þat sho was wode” (Ellis 3).<sup>191</sup> In this case, it seems that leaving her position for holy orders is acceptable, but when Bridget takes on “febill cleþing” it seems to be a different matter altogether—it concerns people. While Edith and Æthelthryth’s choices were not something that a late-medieval author would want repeated in the contemporary daughters of nobility, there is a real sense that they should be selectively exemplary. The process of behaving as “good” members of the state and “appropriate” women is not an obligation that rests on the saints—in fact skepticism suggests that there is no single interpretation. Rather, as John of Salisbury argues in the case of Eve, it rests on hagiographers, readers, and communities to reach back toward the same fruits that could (in another circumstance) condemn them. By reading both Edith and the

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<sup>190</sup> Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Ancrene Wisse*, 142.

<sup>191</sup> Roger Ellis, *The Liber Celestis of St. Bridget of Sweden: The Middle English Version in British Library MS Claudius B I, Together with a Life of the Saint from the Same Manuscript*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3.

community that she founded through this lens, it suggests that, through the lens of skepticism, doubted actions could be made “safe”.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Though St. Æthelthryth of Ely has been credited with many miracles over the years, survival may be her greatest accomplishment. In spite of invasions, political upheaval, religious reform, misogyny, vandalism, and doubt, the community that Æthelthryth founded in 673 A.D. still venerates her. Other founding abbesses did not fare so well. Whitby, for example, is a famous tourist destination, but its visitors tend to be more interested in Bram Stoker than Hild—the abbess who sponsored Cædmon’s singing as well as the Synod at Whitby. Barking is better known as a tube stop than for St. Æthelburga, the founder of an important center of medieval women’s education. St. Etheldreda, however, is well known in modern East Anglia. They have preserved her rood screens and icons; distribute prayer cards, celebrate her feast day, and hold community celebrations in her honor. Whereas most of the houses founded by Anglo-Saxon women were lost to the Reformation, Æthelthryth still maintains a strong presence in the community that she founded.

Wilton did not fare so well. Edith was largely erased during the Reformation. Even during the Middle Ages, her influence never approached that of St. Æthelthryth. Pilgrim badges from Ely found in Wilton as well as the *Wilton Life of St. Æthelthryth* suggest that Wilton was trying to trade on Ely’s popularity—or at least they both attracted similar groups of people. Though Wilton maintained at least a semi-affluent position until the end of the period, the convent never entirely recovered from the Norman invasion, and the rise of Salisbury as a spiritual, political, and economic center essentially dismantled Wilton’s position as the region’s leading religious establishment.

The death-knell came later circa 1542 when the property of Wilton Abbey was turned over to William Herbert. He tore down the convent and replaced it with Wilton House—a sprawling manor that is still the country seat of the Earls of Pembroke. With the dissolution of her shrine and community, Edith was largely forgotten. Only three manuscripts survive that were clearly associated with Wilton Abbey, and most modern interest in her life is scholarly, not religious.

As this dissertation has shown, doubt is not erased by evidence—in favor or against the saints. It is unlikely that Edith would have survived had she been a little more orthodox. Æthelthryth did not survive because she was orthodox. Rather, the process of believing in the saint simply involves a willing decision. That decision comes through faith in the establishment, in the system, or simply interest in the subject. It is not physically proven in miracles or shrines—it is an act of creating meaning against a backdrop of negation and inscrutable signs. In his 1999 biography of St. Etheldreda, Norman Sneesby said that “We cannot know what was going through Etheldreda’s mind when she made her vow....While the spiritual side of any human being is a natural secret, immune to exploration, one may look further into related matters of mundane historical fact.”<sup>192</sup> Like the blinded vandals who came to St. Æthelthryth’s shrine looking for treasure or a preserved body, neither modern nor medieval pilgrims can interpret the saints’ level of devotion. No amount of evidence—textual, miraculous, or otherwise can expel doubt as the backdrop of any saint’s cult. That does not keep people from trying, however. This dissertation has focused on the ways that people *try*.

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<sup>192</sup> Norman Sneesby, *St. Etheldreda: Princess, Queen, Abbess, and Saint*. (Ely: Fern House, 1999) 24.

Bede and Ælfric emphasize physical evidence. When “some people doubt” that she is a virgin, Bede claims that Wilfrid gave him “the most perfect proof of her virginity” (*dicens se testem interitatis eius esse certissimum*) by explaining that her husband had tried to bribe the bishop if he could persuade Æthelthryth to consummate their marriage.<sup>193</sup> By the time that the *Liber Eliensis* was compiled in the twelfth century, the author mentions that Ecgfrith begs Wilfrid to persuade his wife, but this is not the “most perfect proof” anymore. The chronicle claims that “Only in the secret awareness of God was knowledge of this amazing thing accessible.”<sup>194</sup> When “some people ask the question” of Bede’s precedent for claiming that Æthelthryth is not unique among virgins, the Ely author cites the Virgin Mary as well as Eucharistus and Maria from the *Vitas Patrum*.

By the fifteenth-century when texts like Osbern Bokenham’s *Golden Legend* and the Wilton life were being composed, proof became far less important than devotional practice. There is an overwhelming emphasis on spiritual access to the saints. In Bokenham’s life of St. Audrey, the text emphasizes her relationship with her parents and her process of pushing out vice by applying virtues. The *Wilton Life of St. Æthelthryth* describes her decision to take vows as a conversation between herself, her confessor, and her bishop. Ecgfrith takes the position of the government: he argues that for the good of the country he needs an heir. Wilfrid responds as the voice of the church: he “toke rygt gode hede” of Ecgfrith’s words, and turned to Æthelthryth with “grette drede” because

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<sup>193</sup>Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 390-393

<sup>194</sup> Fairweather *Liber Eliensis*, 29

“he knew þat maydyns hert ryȝt well.”<sup>195</sup> Though the author includes no direct quotation from the bishop, it seems that the institution here is reluctantly on Ecgfrith’s side (which would have been the orthodox position). Æthelthryth responds with a thirty-five line speech that ultimately persuades her husband that virginity is a superior state. Ecgfrith departs from earlier versions of his vita where he is the persecutor and would-be rapist, and concedes “in his hert anon.”<sup>196</sup> Here there is a textual move toward persuasion—seeing, and interpreting correctly. Like Æthelthryth’s hidden body in the tomb—saints must be believed on the authority of flawed evidence and faith.

Though women’s bureaucratic power in the English church faded with the Benedictine Reforms and the rise of English queens as the regulators of feminine spirituality, mysticism and devotional practices became a new way to “prove” the early saints in spite of their socially and doctrinally problematic qualities. While visionary women, stigmatics, beguines, and other forms of independent feminine spirituality were comparatively rare in England, the Anglo-Saxon saints embodied qualities that were anxiety-producing in living women, but safe in dead ones. Edith’s clothing did not follow the Benedictine Rule—even though her father sponsored the Benedictine Reforms. Æthelthryth led a monastery for both men and women (which is somewhat downplayed in later accounts) and refused to consummate her marriage with the King of Northumbria. Neither is an “exemplary” woman in the sense that the late-medieval

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<sup>195</sup> Dockray-Miller, *Edith and Æthelthryth*, 352

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

Church would have encouraged her behavior. If they had not been saints, they might have been heretics.



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APPENDIX A

DESCRIPTIONS AND TRANSCRIPTIONS OF RELEVANT UNEDITED

MANUSCRIPTS



### *Abbotsford Golden Legend*

The *Abbotsford Golden Legend* is an unedited manuscript written sometime during the fifteenth century. It was discovered in 2004 in the library of Sir Walter Scott, and Simon Horobin has argued that it was written by Osbern of Bokenham.<sup>197</sup> It is heavily adorned, and the section devoted to Saint Audrey is the largest vita in the miscellany. Simon Horobin suggests that it was likely written for a leading female member of the East Anglian nobility—almost certainly a supporter of the Yorkist cause such as Isabel Bouchier or Elizabeth de Vere.<sup>198</sup> Specifically, he suggests Cecily of York as a viable candidate for ownership.<sup>199</sup> This version of the text includes significant differences from many other versions of Æthelthryth's vita. He, like Marie, emphasizes her relationship with her parents. He also describes the process of her education in terms of devotional practices: she counters vices with virtues and quickly surpasses her teachers.<sup>200</sup> The Life of Audrey is the longest text in the miscellany. Since the manuscript is unedited, I included a transcription of her life here.<sup>201</sup>

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Column A

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<sup>197</sup> Simon Horobin, "A Manuscript Found in the Library of Abbotsford House and the Lost Legendary of Osbern Bokenham," *English Manuscript Studies* 14 (2008): 130-162.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 149

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.* 151

<sup>200</sup> See also Simon Horobin, "Politics, Patronage, and Piety in the Work of Osbern Bokenham," *Speculum*, 82, no 4 (2007): 932-49.

<sup>201</sup> The following text is transcribed from the following online manuscript: *Legenda Aurea*" *Faculty of Advocates*, accessed July 1, 2018, <http://www.advocates.org.uk/faculty-of-advocates/the-advocates-library/significant-finds-at-abbotsford/legenda-aurea>

Whilome in estynglonde there was  
As in his gestis writeth worshipful bede  
A noble kyng which hight Annas  
A worthy man both of worde and dede  
Whos famous name fer aboute did sprede  
Not only of temporal and worldely habundance  
But also of cristen and religions gouernance

This worhty Annas this noble knyght  
A wife had accordyng to his degree  
Bothe of brythe and conditions a ful fair. wight  
And heriswitha clepid was she  
Which sister was to blissid hilde  
An hooly abbesse the story ferth thus  
whos fadris name was Henricus

This noble kyng and this worthy quene  
Ioyned to gider in p(er)fite charite  
As the lawe of mariage wolde it shuld bene  
Bitwin hem of issue had fair plentee  
The pedegrie of whom who so list to see  
At Ely in the mu(n)kys bothe in picture  
He it fynde inow shal. and in scripture

Of which noble issue for I may not al  
Declaren at this tyme the high worthynesse  
For little is my ku(n)nyng and my witte smal  
Douly of oon the life forto expresse  
Chosen I haue after my rudnesse  
I mean of that geme of virginytee  
Twyes wife and evir maide blissid Audree

This blissid virgyne this hooly ethedrede  
In hir noone age fostrid in hir fadris hous  
From hir norices brestis god to loue and drede  
was tenderly taught. and al thyngis vicious  
To fleen and eschue. and in werkis v(i)rtuous  
Hir to exercise. and so in little space  
She passid hir techers helpyng hir grace

Pride in hir myght ketche no place  
Fleniyd away by v(e)rey mekenesse  
Ire and envie from hir hert did chace  
Perfite cherite. and slouth gode busynesse  
Couertise repressid dame largesse  
Abstinence drofe away gredy gloteny

Courtyence and chastite flemyd letchery

In her demeanyng she was amyable

In coutenance and port sad and demure

In comunycacion benygne and affable

In hir aray honest and in her vesture

Noyeng ner hurtyng noon erhely creature

But glad she was to helpen eche wight

As far as hir kunyng stretchid and hir myght

#### Column B

And whan to the yeris she did atteyn

That she was able maiyed to be

Ageyns hir plesaunce the soth to seyn

maried she was with grete solempnyte

To the prince of Girueys in the south cuntre

Tombert by name and and she assentid therto

For hir fadir and hir modir wolde han it so

Nevirtheles that she hir holy eintent

The more oportunely shuld mow fulfille

God by his comounn messenger deth sent

Aftir hir yung husbonde as it was his wille

Sone aftir hir mariage. She beyng stille

A maiden pure bothe in wille and dede.  
The same life purposyng evir aftir to lede  
  
Not forthan hir holy purpos  
Of coutynence and of virginyte  
Hid in hir breste she kept so cloos  
That no man pivey therto myght be  
Neither her modir but god and she  
Hopyng the lesse it were knowe to man  
Nempst god the more merite and mede to han

And for she yung was and faire of face  
And issued ooute from so royal blode  
And by mariage eke within shorte space  
Lefte to possedyn moche temporal gode  
Desired she was in mariage of many oon  
But in truth she hir delf desired noon

But first of al of northumbirlonde  
Kyng Edfrid a right manly man  
Sent to the kyng of Est Ingelonde  
Forseid Annas desiryng to taan  
His doughtir to spouse and hir to han

Past al othir as as for his queen  
yf it hym liked that it myght been

And whan that brought was the tidying  
to kyng Annas and to his queen also  
Of this matter withoute lettyng  
Thei bothe gladly assentid therto  
Thynkyng wisely that it was to doo  
With so worthy a kyng to han allyannce  
And that hir kynrede it moch myght avance

And anoon forthwith thei did charge  
upon hir blissyng her doughtir Audree  
That yf she yit stode at hir large  
And myght reioyssen hir libertee  
That to noon othir make shuld she  
P(ro)misse ner biheste but to hym oonly  
For that was best them thought pleyonly

Whan Audree had herd the massage  
that upon hir fadris and modris blissyng  
She assentyn shuld to make mariage  
with Edfrid of northumbirlond kyng

Gretely astoynd of that tidying  
She was. for which upon this wise  
In hir prively thought she gan to syllogise

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Column A

“Allas” quoth she “how shuld I my purpoos  
And myn entent kepyn of virginyte  
which in myn hert hid and cloos  
From al men I haue kept secree  
Now must nedis disclosid be  
my prively conseil and myn inward entent  
Or els to my frendis I must assent

Yf I sey nay thei displesid wil be  
For my wille to hers I ne wil applye  
yf I sey yea. than my virginyte  
Putten I shal in grete inpartye”  
But fynally in this contrauersye  
She comitted al thyng to goddis wille  
and hir frendis conseil she assentid tille

Which doon in moste hasty wise

Solempnized was this high mariage  
As roially and as wele as coude devise  
Both kyngis with al her counseil sage  
Beyng p(re)sent al the baronage  
Of both kyngdams in her best aray  
In worship of that festful day

In which mean tyme she preyed inwardly  
God of his grace hir so to spede  
and so to gouern thugh his mercy  
that undefoulid. she hir haidenhede  
myght fulle kepe and so out drede  
God of his grace did for hir provide  
that a maide stil she lived and a maid dide

But what maner meanys she usid certeyn  
to p(re)serue with maidenly integrite  
withoute the kyngis mangre I ne can seyn  
But that the lover of pure chastite  
Criste (Jesus) wolde that it so shuld be  
For nevir fleshly the kyng cam hir nere  
while she abode with hym ful twelue yere



In which mean tyme in hir demeanyng  
And in hir gouernnice she bihad hir so  
that in as hole affection toward the kyng  
She stode as the day she first came hym to  
And as gode loue was bitwne hem twoo  
In speche and in talking and eche othir wise  
As it is ony man possible to devise

For wele he p(er)ceived and did aspye  
That she woman was of gode livyng  
And he eche day sawe with his eye  
By vigilies preyers and by fastyng  
And of almesse by hir large yivyng  
Not disdeyn ons among pore to walke  
And with hem faimiliarly for to talke

Pitous she was and ful of mercifulnesse  
To them geys hir which did trespace  
Was noon so redy to aske foryivenesse  
As she was redy to offren hem grace  
In etyng and drynkyng was hir solace  
Yf she ony sey. which she thought had nede  
More briskly them than hir self to fede

Column B

For which maner cansis the kyng hym selue  
And for many othir moo which hym did meve  
In al the tyme of the yeris twelue  
For no thyng he hir did repreve  
Ner doon ner seyn that hir myght greve  
Ner nought of hir desired he safe oonly  
Aftir mariages licence knoulech fleshly

Nevirtheles withouten hir p(ro)pre assent  
Hir he therto wolde nevir constreyn  
Al be it he nevir so sore brent  
And in his sensual felyng suffrid grete peyn  
Yet lever he had his passions to refreyn  
Than ought of hir his flesh with to pese  
Desire or aske that hir shuld displese

Wherfore ful often whan titillation  
Of fleshly lust hym ought did greve  
to hir confessour he made supplication  
That he vouchesafe wolde hir to meve  
T'assentyn therto and to yiuen hym leve

And he hym p(ro)mised withoute faile  
many grete yiftis for his travaile

But whethir hir confessour bihight hy ought  
His matter to labouren effectuely  
Or nay siker that wote I nought  
But this dar I sayn certeynly  
That what evir to the kyng he seid priuattly  
He nevir to hir wolde make suasion  
To mekynten hir hert to flessly corruption

But this dare I p(re)sumen to seyen pleynly  
that whan he came w(i)t(h) hir to han dalyance  
He hir stired and exortid ful feithfully  
In hir holy purpoos to han constannc  
For douteles withoute p(er)seuerannce  
Though a man begynne nevir so gode a dede  
Frustrat fynally shal ben his mede

For aftir the philisophres det(er)mynacion  
As in his phisikes writen fynde we  
Euery werk takith denomynation  
Of his ende. whedir either it be

Gode or ille thus pleynty seith he  
wherof it concludid may be certeyn  
That withoute p(er)souerance gode dede is veyn

I sey thus that but veyn is  
Eche gode dede who so evir it doo  
As for to purchace with eternal blis  
And to encresyn with merite also  
But fynal p(er)seuerannce be ioyned therto  
for not to the begynnyng of a gode dede  
But to the ende god takith hede

Example herof may be Judas  
Which wele bigan whan that he  
Folowid crist yit dampned he was  
For lack of p(er)senance. lottys wife for she  
Lookid a bak and nolde p(er)seuerant be  
Lost hir first shappe and even anoon  
She turned was into a salt stoon

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Column A

In figure herof eke boden fynde we

That of bestis in eche sacrifise  
The taile with the hede shuld offrid be  
Wherby is ment as doctours devise  
That noo gode dede. god doth apprise  
Lesse than be knytte withoute varianuce  
The ende to the begynnyng w(ith) oute tariannce

What makith now in blisse so glorious to be  
Cristis appostiilis and holy martirs also  
Confessours and virgynes in her degree  
But that no tyraunt myght makyn hem to doo  
What so evir peyn were put hem to  
Contrarie to that thei wele had bigune  
By which p(er)seuerance this heven thei wune

Thus to p(er)seuerance this worthy confessour  
And othir wife moche bettir than I telle kan  
Exortid and sirved eche day and hour  
This noble quene this blissid woman  
Assurance hir makyng that she shuld han  
For hir reward whan she hens shuld wende  
That ioye and blisse that nevir shal ende

By this and many an othir exortation  
Goddis chosen doughtir blissid Audree  
Toke p(er)fite and constaunt confirmation  
Of p(er)seuerannce. in virginyte  
Wherfore the kyngis wil as in that degree  
As he desired withouten doute  
Myght in no wife be brought aboute

A man was this confessour of hy reuence  
Of yorc the bisshopriche was his dignyte  
Blissid Wilfride to whom credence  
Must for holynesse nedis yoven be  
Of this seid mater witnesseth berth he  
pleynly affermyng that it was doo  
For he knew the counseil of hem both twoo

And whan thus twelue yer coutyinned had  
This blissed blissid game of virginyte  
In chast mariage with chere sad  
Of this grace the kyng preyed she  
That withouten his offence hir liberte  
He woulde hir graunten god forto serve  
In a nothir habite til she did sterve

That is to seyn that hir desire was  
To be a nune in some religious place  
For he ne myght hir doon more solas  
And aftir many grete instance he yafe hir grace  
Aftir hir wil and within short space  
To abbesse Ebbe his aunte he hir sent  
There to p(er)formen hir holy entent

Where whan she came w(i)t(h) grete deuocion  
The abbesse she preyed mekely knelyng  
That she hir comyng and hir entention  
wolde acceptyn at reuerence of the kyng  
and anoon bisshop Wilfrid thurgh his blissyng  
Sacrid hir a nune aftir hir entent  
which doon eche man whider by list went

#### Column B

But blissid Etheldrede there abode stille  
The holy obedience of hir new abbesse  
At al tymes hir offryng to fulfille  
Of body and soule with al the mekenesse  
what of hir gouernance shuld I more expresse

But that aftir religion what evir was to doo  
was noon of hir sustris more redy therto

Now sith this precious geme is shett  
Within the cloos of this hooly abbey  
And for a while must abiden there yett  
In the mean tyme my muse may pley  
where hir best list for the soth to sey  
To this geme ageyn she must sone returne  
For in this abbey it shal natt longe for ourne

For certeynly it nedis must be  
Translatid unto a nothir place  
Not oonly but eke to a nothir cuntree  
And that within a right short space  
There to shewen thugh goddis grace  
The brightnesse therof and the grete light  
To comfort and help of many a wight

Now farewele lady and do thy part  
For the litle while thou shalt here be  
So to ben exercised in religions art  
That whan thou comest hoom into thy cuntre



Al folk there which the shul here and see  
For such grace in the as they shul aspy  
mow god preysen and his name magnify

Within<sup>202</sup> the p(er)ordial circuyte of a yere  
That this noble geme closid ben had  
The bright bemys therof shyne so clere  
That fer rounde aboute the bemys is sprad  
And not oonly northumbirlonde is made glad  
But thurghoute al Ingelond in length and brede  
The fame therof did sprynge and sprede

And no wondir for aftir the gospel  
A citee on an hille may not hid be  
ner no man puttith vndir a busshel  
A lantarn quoth ofte but up settith it he  
On a candelsticke that men mow it see  
Right so criste wold nat this geme hide  
But made it to shyne aboute on erthe side

For which cause within a short space  
Bildid was in hir owen cuntre

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<sup>202</sup> Adorned blue, red, and gold “W”

A nunery a ful religious place  
Where abbess to be p(ro)vided was she  
In thilk region which clepid was Elge  
In tho daies but as now sothely  
It in our vulgar is clepid Ely

In which place whan made abbess  
Was blissid Audree ful diligently  
She did hir cure and hir busynesse  
Hir sustris to fostren religiously  
In al v(ir)tues but principally  
She evir to hem comendid charite  
Mekenesse obedience and chastitee

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Column A

And nat oonly hir sistris thus v(ir)tuous to be  
She exortid aftir religions institution  
But eke hir self so exercised she  
In the seid v(ir)tues that to p(er)fection  
She atteyned of high contemplacion  
For lich as al metills golde doth appalle  
So she in holynesse surmountid hem alle

And as touchyng hir outeward demenyng  
First inn mete and drynk this is no nay  
right seldom she wolde for ony thyng  
more than o(ne) mele takyn on the day  
And next hir skynne stainyn or say  
Or wullen cloth she evir did vse  
And al lynen to were she did refuse

Bathid or wasshen at the mooste  
Past thries in the yeve she nolde be  
Ageyns twelfe past or pentecoste  
But at othir tymes in no degree  
And yit last of al evir shuld she  
Both of sustris and sunt goo therto  
and whan to hem al she þinse had doo

Aftir matyns eke for the moste party  
She accustomed was nyght by nyght  
In the chirch to abiden and devoutely  
Knelyng to preyen or stondyng up right  
Lesse than sikenesse byrefte hir myght  
Or els such cause as must nedis be doo

For the comonn p(ro)fite and hir sustris also

But in the tyme of hir seid preyer

How many an holy meditacion

This blissid lady had of hert entier

And how many a devoute and high conteplacion

How many teerys eke of inward co(m)punction

No man but god hym self doth knowe

which in his chosen hertis can such g(re)te sowe

And fynally the spirite of p(ro)phecie

She had by which thurgh goddis grace

How many p(er)sones she tolde shuld die

And which by pestilence in hir place

And how hir self among hem shuld pace

Neither first ner last but in such degree

That myd hem alle hir passage shuld be

And within short while aftir so it byfelle

Wiche as she had seid certeynly

For in hir necke a pestilence swelle

Grete grue and rede even vpon hy

which whan she felt ful devoutely

vp to hevenward lifyng both her eyne  
al folk hir heryng thus did seyne

Gramercy lorde which of thy grete grace  
vouchsafe mercyfully me to visite  
with a pesulence soore and on such place  
where I was wone me to delite  
In my youthe to beren grete wyte  
Of golde and siluer wherfor now there  
where I than synned I peyne bere

#### Column B

But not forthan though she glad were  
to be dissolued and with crist to goon  
yit hir sustris looth to forbere  
Hir blissid presence sentyn anoon  
Aftir a leche hym bisechyng eche oon  
That he wolde doon his diligent cure  
Aftir his kunyng hir soore to cure

And Kenefrid was this lechis name  
A ful famous man in his facultee  
Which anoon the fore to attaine

With his lannce bigan. and oute lete he  
Of attir and mattir. right grete plente  
vndir the cheke the chynne fast by  
And she it suffrid right paciently

Which doon anoon she wex more light  
Than she was biforn in sundry degre  
Wherof comfortid gretely was eche wight  
Which hir sawe hopyng that she  
Myght of that sikenesse retirid be  
And youe laude to god and grete thankyng  
Hir stille to han. fore desiryng

But the souereyn leche which sittith aboue  
Al thyng disposyng aftir his plesaunce  
Ordeyned had that no lenger his loue  
Shuld here abiden in this worldis variance  
Wherfore ageyn hir first grevaunce  
The thrid day aftir to hir he sent  
And in that agonye she forth hens went

That is to seyn she chaungid hir hous  
which corruptible was mortal and variangle

For a nothir which right glorious  
And incorruptible is stedfast and stable  
Enduryng evir and incorunable  
And how gracious was this p(er)mutacion  
For erthe in heven to han an habitation

And whan thus from this wreathid valey  
The nynthe kalend of jule was went  
This noble geme unto the place hy  
Of heven aboue the sterred frimament  
Hir body they buried with humble entent  
Myddis hir sustris in a cophir of tree  
In the ordre she deied as chargid had she

O noble geme wele in the vertu  
Groundid thou were of humylite  
Which of hym to be lerned comaindid Jhesu  
And salamon seith yf men p(r)ince make the  
In no wife therof thou proude ne be  
But hem amonge as oon of them the bere  
These lessons to the weren not new to lere

For al be it that thou were an abbess

And of royal blode right worthy bore  
A glorious queen eke aftir a pryncesse  
Yit in no wise would if thou therfore  
Of worship vpon the takyn the more  
Quycke ner dede. but the lowest place  
Evir thou these so gouernyd the grace.

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Column A

Wherfore though thou a while doo rest  
O noble examplarie of al humbilnesse  
Here lowly bigraved in a treen chest  
Not longe lyen here thou shalt in sothfastnesse  
For in the gospel. as crist doth wittenesse  
Who hym self exaltith fallen shal he  
And who hym self mekith enhanncid shal be  
  
And whan thus in hir fate was forth procedid  
This worthy abbesse this blissid Audre  
Hir sistir Sexburga aftir hir succedid  
The which of Cainterbury the kyngis wife had be  
Ercombert and whan that dede was he  
Al vanythe forsakyn to hir sustir she went



And a nune was sacrid with an holy entent

But yit for as moche as biforn seid ys  
That light vndir a busshel my nat hyd be  
Right so this geme hir bright bemys  
Wide spred abrode in many a cuntree  
Of myraclis werkyng by grete plentee  
For which moche peple came hir to seke  
In place where she lay lowly and meke

And whan the abbesse Sexburgh such habundance  
Of myraclis encresyn sawe there dayly  
She hir purposid to translate and enhauncen  
Oute of that place hir sustris body  
Where it lay first. and more reuerently  
It leyn that pilgrymes thider comyng shul morn  
The more therby to stired to deuotioun

For which entent of hir monastery  
To diuers brethern she yafe in charge  
In as moche as in the yle therby  
Ner nere aboute grew no stoones large  
That they anoon shuld taken hir barge

And ferther of goon into the cuntree  
Such a stoon to sekyn as conveyent myght be

That is to seyn she desired to haue  
Aftir hir entent so large a stoon  
That therof a thorough or els a graue  
myght be made with a coveryng theron  
Of whos comaundement thei forth went anoon  
But where to spedyn or in what place  
They wist nevyr but vpon goddis grace

And whan thei had sailed a litle stounde  
And not fully the iourney of o(ne) day  
Undir an olde citee wallis they founde  
Of white marbyl a thorough where it lay  
Coueryd of the same which whan thei say  
To her purpos them thought it conveyent  
yf they myght geten the owners assent

And grauntchestre this olde citee hight  
Into which these massangers entrid anoon  
Diligently enquiryng of euery wight  
Who myght ben owner of that fair stoon

But it to chalangen pleynty wolde noon  
Of whom al siker this was the annswere  
Biforn that day they it nevyr seyn ere

Column B

And whan these men this annswere had  
That chalange of the stoon wold no man make  
In her hertis they weren right glad  
And in her barge thei didden it take  
And from the teyeng anoon thei did it slake  
And rowyng hoom ageyn w(i)t(h) grete gladnesse  
How they had spedde thei tolde the abbesse

And whan she had herd al the p(ro)cesse  
and how graciously sped was her iournee  
She hertely thankyd goddis godenesse  
Without which it myght nat hane be  
So sone sped as fully trustid she  
Where she it received. w(ha)t as devoute entent  
As though from heven god it hir had sent

Not<sup>203</sup> longe aftir this worthy abbesse

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<sup>203</sup> Gold, blue, red initial "N"

purposyng to p(er)fourmen hir holy entent  
Aboute fourtenyght aftir myghelmasse  
unto hir sustris grave she went  
And did it ovir curen with a tent  
That no man shuld see that blissid body  
Til the boones were washed and made redy

And rounde aboute the tent al the company  
Of his sustris stooden and prestis also  
Syngyng and preyeng ful dovoutely  
While the abbesse with a fewe clepid hir to  
Went in and did the grave vndoo  
Which doon the body truly thei founde  
As it was buried al hole and sounde

That is to seyn that no corrupcionn  
Was thereupon. ner feculencie  
From the hede abouen to the foot down  
As fer as the abbesse coude aspye  
For forhede and cheke mouth and iye  
And al the face eke was as fresh to see  
As she not dede but a slepe had be

And not oonly hir body but the clothis also  
In which it wrappid was and wounde  
with al othir thyngis longyng therto  
without putrefaction heyl were and sounde  
As though tho nevir had leyn on grounde  
And therto of adour as redolent certeyn  
As tho amounge flouris or spices had leyn

And whan the abbesse p(er)ceivid al this thyng  
With a lowde voice she thus gan cry  
To the name of god laude and preysyng  
Mote be now and evirmore endlesly  
Which us hath shewid here his mercy  
And forthwith she the pavillion dore vnshett  
And to see this wondir othir folk in lett

Amonge which of moste aucturity  
And right sufficient witnesse forto bere  
Was blissied Wilfrid which had be  
His confessor biforn ful many a yere  
Kenefrid the leche was also there  
Which biforn hir deth hir soore did styng  
and was eke there with hem at hir buryeng

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Column A

And o(ne) thyng in special this leche kenefride

Evir aftir while he lived did testifye

That the wounde in hir neck moist and wide

Which hym self made was curid and drye

So fair that vunethe he coude aspye

Where it was which aftir his faculte

Semyd i(m)possible evir curid to hane be

Hir clothis had also such vertu

That who hem tonchid with ony sikenesse

Thurgh grace of our lorde crist jhesu

He curid was anoon were it more or lesse

And as al there present born wittenesse

The cophir eke which was first hir grave

From sekenesse of eyn many oon did save

But of al the circustauncis to make declaracion

Of the myraclis which there weren wrought

At this blissid and hooly virgynes translacion

And how fer and for what causis folke hir sought

My witte is to litle and suffiseth nought  
Wherfore I biseche no wight me blame  
Though I presume nat the mater to attaine

But in my p(ro)cesse forth to procede  
Whan wasshen was this blissid body  
And new araied in neore p(re)cious wede  
Into the church it born was ful reuently  
And in the fair thorough which myraculously  
God of his grace thider had sent  
Thei it to dressyn diden her entent

And that al men ther p(re)sent myght wele wete  
That by grace al oonly it thider was brought  
It for the body was even as mete  
as though it therfore had be special wrought  
and so it was sikerly I doute it nought  
By angels hadis for no man coude truly  
Withoute a mesure had made it so accordyngly

For al abouen for the hede a place  
Graven was of conuenient quantite  
As byrethen eke was a nothir space

where leggis and feet shuld leyd be  
And for the body in the myddis in conform degree  
Neither more ne lesse than it nedis be must  
Without pressure to lyen pleyn and just

The couertour abouen was conformely  
Graven in aftir the nethir stoon  
So that it not touchyn shuld the body  
And so instely ioyned that in un(r)yght goon  
Wyude ner evre. ner othir thyng noon.  
Wherin as cloos as in a chest  
this blissid body yet doth rest

And so shal it stille I hope certeyn  
Til the day come of the grete assise  
Whan the soule therto shal be knytte ageyn  
And glorified it makyn up to rise  
And so both togider in ful sole(m)pne wise  
Entren shullen into the court celestyal  
where ioye and blisse is eternal

Column B



[...] ...ut<sup>204</sup> Audree for the grete grace  
which thou receiveddest of god in this life mortal  
Purchase thi puritis in this worldis space  
Pardon of her synnes both grete and smal  
And to the translationr gete in espial  
Of thy life unto englissh aftir his kunyng  
Aftir this outelawry in heven a wonnyng

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<sup>204</sup> There is a large section cut from the manuscript at the top.

Cambridge University Library Additional 2604 (CUL 2604) took pains to memorialize “secondary” saints—women such as Æthelthryth’s sisters and relatives and Edith’s relatives as well. It is a currently unedited miscellany that has gone largely unexamined in recent scholarship. The content, dialect, script, artistic features, and ownership history of this manuscript indicate that it was probably produced in East Anglia in the late fifteenth century.<sup>205</sup> It contains the vernacular lives of twenty-two saints all but three of whom are women. Of these women, six belong to Æthelthryth’s family: Sexburh, Eormenhild, Eorcengota, Whitburh, Wærburgh, and Æthelthryth herself. The manuscript also includes several saints who were Kentish or had ties to Kent, notably, St. Eanswith who founded one of Kent’s earliest religious centers at Folkstone, and St. Eadburh who was an abbess of Thanet and venerated at Lyming.<sup>206</sup> Though their legacy was centered in East Anglia, the Ely group had clear ties to Kent. Sexburh was married to King Eorcenbeht, and she founded Milton and Minister in Sheppey for herself and her daughter, Eormenhild, before they left and became abbesses at Ely.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Veronica. O’Mara and Virginia Blanton, “Cambridge University Library, Additional MS 2604: Repackaging Female Saints’ Lives for the Fifteenth-Century English Nun” *The Journal of the Early Book Society for the Study of Manuscripts and Printing History*, 13 (2010), 237-47. This article outlines some of the major arguments that O’Mara and Blanton will discuss in their upcoming edition of Add. 2604. Their work will provide important insights into the manuscript’s provenance and historical context.

<sup>206</sup> Barbara Yorke, *Nunneries*, 23.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

This manuscript is clearly concerned with the families of royal women who set the stage for Christianity in Eastern England.<sup>208</sup> Hild, Modwenna, and Edith are the only British saints included who were not widely associated with this region. Edith, however, was born in Kemsing near Sevenoaks in modern-day Kent. Currently, the Cambridge University Library is unable to account for this manuscript; however, the Harvester Manuscript Series<sup>209</sup> has a microfiche scan of the text available. Though the copies are obscured in some places, I have included a transcription of a few legible, relevant sections in the appendix of this dissertation.

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Edith

Blessid Edith the virgyn was the dough-  
tir of kynge Edgar and of wolfride  
that was a dukes doughtir born in  
Kent in a small village callid Lesing which wol  
frid kynge Edgar had purposed for to wedde.  
but she wold not for as sone as seynt Edith was  
borne she made hir selfe a nonne of Wilton ab-  
bey and at laste was abbes ther made by seynt

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<sup>208</sup> O'Mara and Blanton, "Cambridge University Library," 237-47.

Blanton and O'Mara have argued that Add 2604 does not emphasize family connections that would tie the Ely saints to their Kentish sisters—for example, the author fails to mention that Eadburh is Sexburh's sister in law. They suggest that by omitting the genealogies that were present in Add. 2604's source texts, the manuscript seems to separate the Kentish saints from the Ely group.

<sup>209</sup> Cambridge University Library, and Harvester Microform. *British literary manuscripts from Cambridge University Library*. Series one, reel 44 (1984). All transcriptions from CUL Additional 2604 in the appendix were taken from this manuscript scan.

Ethelwolde bisshop of wynchestre and encresid  
vertuously and goode ensample yaf to all hir  
covent aftir tyme the mayde Edith wax four  
what about y yere of age; she was count-  
tid to hir modir by consent of hir fadir into  
the monastery of Wilton and so ther lernyd le[...] -  
trure and vertu and at last was made nonne  
in the same place offred up in þe same age But  
first er than she was offred up ther was layde  
at a pit afore the high awter wher upon king  
Edgar the fadir layde many worldly iewells  
as crownes of golde golden oriches and rigne  
precious stones and riall clothynge On the  
todir syde the abbes the childis modir layde on  
the todir syde a blake habyte a blak vayle and  
a sawter boke. Then the childe Edith was so-

70r

dyn chese of all these thinges which she wolde take  
she went streyght to the blake wayle and caste  
it upon hir hede. Than the kynge w[i]t[h] his lordes  
on the to syde and the modir abbes with hir  
syster on the todir syde praysid god and thankyd  
him hertely and so she was offred up with Te

deum laudannis. And as she encreasid in age; so  
she encreasid in vertues and conyng aft tymmes  
reding seyntes lyves but amonge all that  
she radde; she lyfed best the maydynly and  
religious lyving of hir awnte Edith in in seynt  
modwenia dayes which was sister to hir  
fadiris brodir and was abbes of pollisworth  
in staffordshire lyving there with grete  
vertues lyving; as this yonge Edith did  
in Wylton abbey. This holy yonge Edith  
was to hir sisters in Wilton Martha and to  
god hir spouse Maria She bowed to all systers  
in mynstryng; right lowly she in recey-  
ving of geftis; shewid hir full charitably in  
gladsom etyng amonges theym and yit in  
abstinence so absteynyng; that plesente of  
mete and drinke was never the lesse. All erthly  
favour she for soke to the seke she was full pe-  
tyvous to the destitute; full comfortable [and]  
cherished more lepres than lordis children  
for the more fauler asek man were; the mor  
pite she had upon hym and the more benynge  
she was for to serue him To the blynde; she

was an eygh of m[er]cy to the feble; a staf of comforth  
 and supporting to the nedy; mete and drinke and  
 clothing and to hem that weree discomfortid; she  
 was comforth and solace. the sharpe heyre she used  
 upon hir nakyd body and upon hir body above  
 she weyred cloth ryall of purpull m...de blak and  
 therfore in a tyme whan seynnt ethelolde sigh hir  
 go in suche precious clothes and baite; he seyde to  
 hir in man[er] of a blame O doughter spouses of crist  
 go not to the chambyr of our lorde with suche ry-  
 all clothing sor of such outward aray; the heven-  
 ly spouse hath no ioy ne delyte. but of inward aray  
 upon this she knowyng well that hir wel belo-  
 ved spouse was within hir answerd thus ayen  
 leve me well fadir. my sould is new the ferther  
 fro god undir this rich abyte; than tho nigh I wey-  
 red a bostous slaven. I haue my lorde within me  
 that takith not hede only to the clothes outward  
 but to þe soule within forth This holy man and  
 felt of hir gret authority of grace within; and  
 durst no more say for displesaunce of him that  
 was within hir but rathir praysing our lord

in his seyntis which workith in theym as he will  
considering in him selfe that it is no fors what a  
chosyn soule wyre; so it be clene with yn And wh[erever]  
that evn this holy mayde went she had in an  
holy custom for to blesse hir forhed hir brest and  
eu[er]y worke that she began. In a tyme as she was  
wont she bare in a dissh of mete for to yeve a po[r]tion [to]

71r

man þ[at]a child come and met with hir sodenly by the way  
upon the to side of hir and axid hir som almes and  
she tornyd hir for to þis him the same almes with  
blessing afor of the crosse; but the childe that  
ap[er]is it vanysshid away and durst no more aper  
that was no goode childe which sovid not the  
crosse

How this mayden was made abbess of berkyng  
and of wynchestre and ordenyd for to be abbes  
of Wylton.

Whan this holy mayde seynt Edith was  
fyftene yere olde; hir fadir Edgar or-  
denyd by seynt dunston and seynt Ethelwolde for  
to make hir abbes of thre monasteries of nones  
on of wynchestre and an othir of barkyng and

the third of wylton. She was disposed and so she  
was, but yit wolde whe neur go out from Wilton  
ther that she began to serue god first; ther wold  
she abyde for evir Save in eu[er]y place that she was  
abbes of; she ordenyd gostly moders suche as she  
myght truste to for þe goode gou[er]naance of reli-  
gion leyver to be under gouernance of a gostly  
modir; that to be a modir hir selfe. Rathir to be  
bodyn than to bydde whan hir fadir Edgar  
was kynge aftir him yet beyng a childe and in  
a tyme this holy mayde had a dreame and hir thought  
that hir right eygh was put oute. Which she  
tolde hir systers and expounnyd it hir selfe in

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this wyse are senyth sisters that this vision beto-  
kenyth the deth of my borthir Edward which I  
hold my right eygh and it happid. For it was not  
longe aftir as he went for to se his brothir Ethel-  
red; he was kylded of the children of wikkednes  
by counsell of his stepdame Than the Lordis of  
this reine wolde had oute seynt Edith for to go  
verue this reine as the next eyre aftir hir bro-  
thir but she wold not they asayed by maystrye



for to haue hir out; but they cowth not. they  
might rather torne stones [and] melt hem as lede;  
than for to make hir to leve hir holy purpose  
of religion.

Of the glorious passing of seynt Edith and  
of hir translacion

In a tyme whan she had made a chapell  
of seynt Denyce and prayde seynt dun-  
stone for to cm halowe it this holy bisshop seynt  
dunstone sigh as they went to gedres howe this  
holy mayde oft tyme crossid hir forhed with the  
figu[r]e of the crosse Of the which he had grete  
ioy and toke hir by the right honde and sayde  
pray god doughtir that this fynger never  
rote; anon the same day at masse aftir tyme  
he had halowed that chapell of seynt denyce;  
he fille in a grete weping and sobbid and of comse  
othirwyse than he was wont to do aftir masse  
he was inso moche than whan he halowed hir  
he sobbyd sore Aftir masse it was of his dekon

72r

why he wept so sore; and he seyde with grete sighinge  
This wel beloved soule to god this glorious ster

edith; shall hastily passe out of this wrecchyd  
world and out of this erthly dwelling place  
for this blinde cursyd world is not worthy for  
to haue the presens of so gret a light; This  
say thre and fourty dayes this fayre bright  
sould shall lese the fals light of this worlde and  
fynde light evirlastinge in the blisse of heven  
O shall thus betake from us the light of seynte  
and we shull sytte in derknes and in þe shadowe  
of deth; Oure unripe life of olde age hurtith  
us that whiles we slomber in age; she shall  
entre the paleys of blisse whan the yme came  
that she shulde passe; seynt dunstone was by hir  
and armed hir soule with many holy exorta  
cions and prayers and so in hir passage he  
comendid hir in to the handis of our lorde In  
the menewhile ther was anonne of the same  
place for fere ranne into the high church from þe  
same place where she died and herd a gret mul-  
titude si[n]gyng as it had be in the quere and as  
she listenyd what songe that might be on  
come to hir a feyre man and a semly and had  
hir come no nere for the holy mnngells of god

were come for to haue with hem to the blisse  
of heven the goode mayde of this monastery  
So seynt Edith was clepid in all þe countray  
aboute the goode mayde of Wylton and ther-

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fore in hir passage our lorde will þat she passe to the  
place of evir lastinge ioye with myrth and glad-  
nes of songe and so the thre and twenty yere of  
hir age and the sextene day of the moneth of  
Octobr which is the morne aftir the vtas of the  
nativite of our lady she passid with myrth [and]  
melodye out of this worlde the yere of our  
lorde nyne hundreth foure score and foure and  
seynt dunstone beryed hir in the same church of  
seynt denys that she made afore Of þe same  
church oft tymes she wold p[ro]phecye by hir lyve that  
she shuld be beried ther yn and therfore oft tymes  
afore she wolde be ther and p[r]ay with many teres  
that she myght dye well and ther besyde the  
same chirch whiles she lyved; she made an al-  
mes house wherin ben refresshed unto this  
day thirtene pore folke.  
Of the holy apparicion howe this holy mayde

apperyd to hir modir and tolde hir co[m]fortable thynges how she was welcome to our lorde.

The third day aftir this holy mayde seynt  
Edith apperid to hir modir Wilfryde fayr  
and glad and with bright shynyng clothes  
seyng to hir modir in this wyse that she was  
acceptable and welcom to þe kyng of blysse  
as sone as she passid out of this worlde and yet  
the fende accused me afore our lorde she syd  
but by the holpe and comforth of the holy apostelis by the victorie passion and crosse of

73r

our lorde [Jesus] criste I ou[er]come hime and destroyed his malice. The same thirty day aftir hir passing ther was a worthi mans childe borne for the which childe whiles she levyd; she was prayed to be god moder whan that ev[e]n it were borne She grauntid therto and sayde whan that eu[en] it be borne if it please god I will be god modir whan the childe was borne and brought to church for to be cristenyd seynt alpee cristenyd it and whan he shuld yif the childe the candill in hir honde aftir bapteme seyng the wordes haue now and take

this light in thyn honde by the which thou  
mayste entre to the wedding fest of our lorde.  
Anone in saying of these wordes apperid seynt  
Edith halding the childe and strechid forth a  
fayre litill honde for to take hir candell of wax  
and so hilde it unto þe tyme the þince of criste-  
nyng was done By this undirstode seynt alphe  
the bisshop that this childe was graciously cho-  
syn of god and than bad the frendes noryssh  
this childe fro this day forthwarde for to be de-  
sponsid to our lorde and for to be maried to his  
holy seruyce in religion This childe was este-  
myd and namyd brithyne which was aftirward  
made nonne of wylton and aftir that abbes  
of the same monaster and lyved an holy life  
and so died in our lord vertuously  
How she appered thirtene yere aftir to seynt  
dunston by a vision and tolde him by special

74r

tokenes that he shuld dye go to wylton [and] translate hir  
Thirtene yere aftir she was beried she appe-  
red to seynt dunston and syde It plesith  
our lorde [Jesus] of his unspecable goodnes for to

clarifye me amonge the peple having mynde  
of his grete mercies he will that I be translated  
for helth and comforth of all folke for I am glo-  
rified in his presence amonge the holy cetisens of  
anngells Go therfore to Wilton and fulfille the  
bidding of god and a rayse my body out of the  
grounde Be not in doute ne thenk it not fan-  
tasye that I saye to the but take it for trewthe  
and in tokyn that it is trewthe that I say; than  
shalt fynde my body all hole uncorrupte; as it  
was undefouled by my lyve outake certen pla-  
ces which wantonly which wantonly I mysused in my youthe  
that is myn eygghen myn handis and my fete  
these in parties of my body ben rotyd all the  
remenaunt is hole for I was nevyr guilty by  
my lyve in gloteny ne in lechery The thombe  
also of the ryght hande wherwith I was  
wonte to crosse me in all the partyes of my  
body thou shalt fynde hole So that by þe  
benyginte of our Lorde; some p[er]ty of my body  
is chastised by consumpcion and som rekned  
hole. In tokyn also whan thou comyst for to  
translate me thou shalt fynde my body re-

dy arysing upward out of the grounde.

after this vision seynt dunstone wen un-

74r

to wylton streyght to the tombe of this holy mayde  
and sodenly he sigh seynt deynes and this holy mayde  
standing togedir at the awter bright as aungels  
which holy mayde sayde to seynt deynes in this  
wyse Thou knowest well fadir the wille of our  
lorde as touching to me thou are sende from him  
hider to this bisshop dunstand for to enforme him  
of that thinge that I bad him come for than seid  
seynt denyes to dunstane Borthir thou shalt un-  
derstonde that the vision which was late shewed  
to the of the declaracion of this dere beloved w[i]t[h]  
god seynt Edith It is right worthy that she be  
reverensed and honoured of erthly men that is  
crowned amonge virgyns in heven. It is worthi  
that hir body which is the temple of maydenly  
clennes be worshipped in the which the lover  
of virginite kynge of ioy regnyd by hir life For  
hir plesable suffrages afore god; ben ben necessary to  
mankynde after this declaracion of seynt deynes;  
Dunstane anone fonde trewe by all tokenys as it

was sayde and translatid hir the third day aftir all  
halowe day.

Of a monke of glastinbury howe he wold h...  
cut away a pece of hir cote within hir tonike [and]  
of a nonne which wolde had cutte away a pece of  
hir hede bonde in hir graue

A monke ther was of glastinbury that was  
callid Edulph which in a tyme prevely  
cut away out of hir tombe a pece of seynt Edithis

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cote and as he was therabowte; folily with the cote he cut  
hir body inso meche that it bled and made all blody  
the pament ther she lay than for fere the monke threw  
his knyfe from him and fell down to the grounde and  
axid foryevenes for the sacrelegie and theft that  
he had do and nevir wolde aryse unto the tyme he  
had foryevenes of his trespace with that he loked  
abowte and founde the pament drye without any  
coloure of blode and so he knewe well his trespas  
was foryeven In the same wyse ther was a wo-  
man anonne of the same house of Wylton which  
for deuoc[i]on desyred for to haue a pece of the here  
of hir hede bonde and in a tyme went prevely to



hir tombe and wolde had cut a litill pece prevely  
away of the same and as she was therabowte þe  
holy mayde lift up hir hed as though she had be  
alyve and so made hir aferde that she durst no mor  
do so but repentid hir of that she had done  
Of kynge Cnute of Inglonde howe he had noby  
leve that seynt Edith was a seynt forasmoche  
as hir fadir kynge Edgar was namyd for a vial  
man of his body

In a tyme whane kynge Cnute made a feste  
at wylton upon whitsonday it was tolde  
him howe that kynge Edgaris doughtir Edith  
was a seynt he seyde he cowde not beleve that  
forasmoche as hir fadir kynge Edgar was a vial  
man of his body and scornyd hir and sayde it might  
not be so the for I shall nevir beleve that Than

75r

Ednoth the bisshop of cant[er]bury which was ther p[re]sent  
seyde that she was a worthi seynt and aftir mete the  
tombe of seynt Edith was a penyng that the kyng  
might se howe she lay uncorrupte anon the holy  
mayde Edith rose up to the girdelstede and in maner  
lift up hir honde ayenste the kynge that was so ob-

stenate by way of thretinge with that the kynge fill  
doun for fere to the grounde almoste dede at the laste  
he caught breth and rose up agen and was sore asha-  
med of him selfe of his folous p[re]sumpc[i]on and obsti-  
nacye axing mercy and foryevenes of that holy  
mayde and evir aftir did hir grete renerens and  
worship as to a seynt For in a tyme as he was  
in the see in a shippe; he stode in grete perile and  
than he prayed help of seynt Edith and forth w[i]t[h]  
the eyre waxed sonple and he and his by hir  
p[r]ayers come to goode haven.

Of a miracle shewed to alred the erchbisshop of  
Yorke which was in grete p[er]ill of the see

In a tyme the archbisshop of york that was callid alrede as he was in the see he  
stode in grete p[er]ille of perisshing In the which p[er]ill  
he cryed help of seynt Edith and non seynt Edith  
stode afore him visibly and seyde I am Edith to  
whom thou p[r]ayest thou shalt not p[er]issh with  
that the stormys of the see cessid and was sonple  
and so come to londe safe and sounde.

Of venieanns that fill to on that toke away  
londe which longed to seynt Edith and the

house of Wilton.

Ther was on that had take away wrongfully  
certeyn londe longyng to seynt Edith and  
to the monastery of Wilton and therfore he dyed so  
unrepentaunt but aftir tyme he was dede; with in  
a litill while he a roose and sayde haue mercy upon  
me and helpe me nowe ye that ben my trewe fren-  
dis to my soule for I may not suffre the indignacon  
of seynt Edith that holy virgyn inasmoche as  
she will not suffre me nothir to be in hevyn nor  
erth ne inns cuntrey unto the tyme the londe which  
I haue take from hir; be restorid ayen and therfore  
ye goddis trewe children helpe me nowe and yelde  
the same londe ayen for unto the tyme that be do;  
she will not suffre me nothir to lif ne to digh his  
frendis hering this restored the londe ayen [and]  
than he yelde the spirite and so died well  
Thus endith the lifre of seynt Edith the goode  
mayde of Wilton.

St. Æthelthryth

Of seynt Audre howe she was weddid to twayn  
hosbondes on aftir an other and allway she was  
A mayde and afterward made nonne.

The<sup>210</sup> blessed virgin seynt awdre was  
the doughter of kynge anne that  
was kynge of est englonde which  
had foure doughters. On was clepid Sexburgh  
an other alburgh the third awdre and þe fourt  
witburgh. This mayden seynt awdre whan  
she come to age was weddid ayenst hir

53r

will to a kynge and prince of the yle of hely whos  
name was called Tonberte. It happid aftir tyme  
seynt awdre was weddid at evyn the same day  
she went to hir chammre onely for to p[ra]y. that  
herd hir husbonde Tonberte; and sent hir worde  
that he wolde come to hir anone. Than seynt  
awerye was passing sory dreding gretly for to be

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<sup>210</sup> Square capital T

deceived of hir holy purpose and therwith she  
wept and p[ra]yed devoutly to god that hir chastite  
might be kept clene to him. As she prayed he come  
and lokid in prevely in to hir chamber for to se what  
she did and with that him thought he sigh the  
bouer ther she knelid all in a fyre. Whan he had  
seynt that; he with drewe him and cryed to hir  
and Goode woman thenk it not that I will make  
yon lese your chastite I p[ra]y you thenke it not  
for I wott well now god is your p[ro]tector and  
helper and defender ayenst me and ayenst all  
men. It was not longe aftir but that at hir  
husbonde the same Tonbert dyed and than eft  
sones she was weddid to Egfrýde of northum-  
berlande by avise of all hir frendes with who  
she lyved twelve yere weddid and he loved hir  
not duly as his wife; but as his lady and  
worshipped hir for hir holy lyving þat non-  
theless he felt oft tymes stirrynges for to take  
hir as his wife. But he durst not for fere of  
god. So that in a tyme he prayed seynt wil-  
frýde the erchbisshop of yorke whom seynt

awdre lovyd right gostly as hir gostly fadir and  
confessone that he wolde bowe hir will for to con-  
cent to him as a wife shulde do to hir husbonde for  
he wylt wll that she loved no man so well. ne he  
loved no mayden so gostly well as eche of hem did  
other. This holy man seynt Wylfryde seyde that  
he wolde do what he cowthe, but evir he coun-  
ceyled hir for to kepe hir chastite and seid that  
for trewe keping therof; she shulde haue a gret  
rewarde and mede in heven. At the laste with  
grete menes made the kyng consent that she  
shulde be made a none. and was so in the mo-  
nastery of Coldingham with hir husbondes  
awnte seynt Ebbe abbes of the same monaste-  
ry and was a none veiled and p[ro]fessid by  
the same archebisshop of yorke seynt wilfride  
and the next yere aftir hir fadir repayred an  
olde monastery for hir in the kyngdome of hely  
where she was made abbes

Howe this holy mayde was pursued of  
husbonde and at the last fled unto hely.

Whan seynt austyn come into ynglonde  
he bildid in the same kyngdome a mo-

nastery and hallowed it in the worship of  
our lady of the which worke kynge Ethel-  
bert was furst founder with seynt austyn  
and in the same monastery ordenyd monkes  
for to serue god which afterward Penda on  
of the hethen kynges of this londe destroyed

54r

and putt out the monkes and made therof a wyl-  
dernes which afterward as it is rehersed seynt  
Ethelbert the fadir of seynt awdre repayred a-  
yen into a monastery of nonnes. yet whiles  
this holy mayde lyved under goode religious  
gouernance of seynt Ebbe which was abbes  
of Coldingham; the kyng Egfride hir secund  
husbonde coud not suffer that devorse; but  
be connsett of sume of his meane was abowte  
to take hir oute ayen. Whan the holy maide  
herde that; she comendid to god hir chastite  
and fled unto an high hill ether beside with  
two nonnes of the same monastery where  
our lorde shewed a wonder miracle. for he  
made the water of the see flowe rounde a-  
bout the hille and there kepte bothe hir and

hir maydenes from the pursute of that kynge  
and so hidde the virgyns lyfyng by p[ra]yers w[ith]-  
out mete and drinke a long while that mar-  
velous worke of god seyng the kynge which  
pursued hir repented him of his presump-  
tuous pursuing and so turned home ayene  
comittyng hem to god that so meraclously  
p[re]serued hem. In the mene while that she  
was there hir two nonnes for passing  
of water were right thistlewe. than the  
holy virgin seynt awdre prayed deuotely  
to god for some so[...]ure; and anon a well of  
fresh swete water sprayge up at hir fete

54v

Wherof all they were relevid of their thirst  
And thanked god and yit in to this day the same  
Well is ther and called seynt awdryes well  
Than fewe dayes aftir; seynt awdre toke  
With hir bothe hir nonnes and passed over  
The water of humbyr and so come streyght  
Into hely and in hir goying ther was  
Such a stronge hete by the way; that bothe  
She and hir nonnes lay and rested hem



undir an hille and seynt awdre pitched  
hir staffe at hir hede in the ground It was  
not so sone in the grounde but it wax grene  
and bare grene leves and with in p(ro)cesse of  
tyme it grewe into a grete hole ther  
fore evir aftir that place was and is cal-  
led awres is stowe that is for say awdre  
is resting place and is now made ther  
a fayre chapel in the worship of seynt  
awdre.

Whan this holy mayde seynt awdre  
Come in to hely; howe she lyved and passed  
Out of this wretched worlde.

Whan this holy virgyne seynt Aw-  
dre was come to hir olde possessi-  
on of hely which hir first husband yaf  
hir which place was som tyme called  
Elge that is for to say goddis grounde  
and aftir was called hely that is for  
to say the worthi hors of god She than

55r

tradred many sistres to hir and encresed ther an  
holy congregacion of nonnes in the yere of our

lorde sex hundredth seventy and thre and fro that  
tyme forth aftir tyme she was entred as abbes  
into that monastery. she weyred nevyr unto  
hir lyves ende but wollyn next hir. ne ete  
nevyr but o mele a daye euyr in p[ra]yers conti-  
nel nyght and day and moche wacche ta-  
kyng right littell slepe. and that but abitess  
while a fore midnyghte for allway aftir  
maatines she wole till daye in holy p[ra]yers  
in the church aftir tyme the covent were  
gone to reste. She tolde also by spiryte of p[ro]-  
phecie of the deth of many of hir monastery  
what daye and what houre they shuld passe  
out of this worlde. hir owne day also wha[t]  
she shuld dye. and of what seknes she tolde  
for she said that she shulde dye of a siveuysye  
and so she did for whan our lorde had tou-  
ched hir with a swelling in the cheke and  
abolinyng in the nekke; she wolde say ...  
tymes that she had more ioie ther ...  
of any other seknes for she wolde some tyme  
say to hir systres that she was glad for haue  
suche a speciall selues for as moche as four

tyme she sayde she had gret ioy for to aray  
hir nek with broches; and ... .. in ...  
yonge age. Ther ... blessid be the yfte of  
god and god in his yefte that thus ...

55v

changed worldly ioyes into gostly iewllis  
which shuld purite and clense my soule fro the  
trespass of wanton lightnes that I used in my  
yowthe Therefore nowe for gold and preci-  
ous stones; shynith in my cheke and in my  
nek; the renes and the hete of swellings  
inso myche that seknes encresed day by day;  
that at laste a wyse by leche was sent aftir for  
to do his cure the leche come and laughed and  
cut that swelling undir hir cheke so that the mater  
went oute and the swelling abated and aftir  
that she was well esyd and lighted to dayes  
aftir but the third day it swellid ayen that  
she channged this wrecchid life by temp[er]all  
deth; int eu[er]lasting lyfe and so passed out of  
this worlde on seynt John Baptist even whos  
holy body was layde in a chest of tre and beried  
Of the translacion of seynt awdre howe

sixteen yere aftir she was fonnde in body all  
hole incorrupte

Aftir tyme this holy virgin seynt aw-  
dre had lay in the grounde sixteen  
yere; for many miracles that was shewed  
where that she lay; it was ordenyd by seynt  
sexburge which was aftir hir abbes that  
the holy body shuld be translated [and] layed  
in amore solempne place and in the mene  
while; brethren of the same place were  
sent a bowte into diuerse places forto lefe

56r

some trough made of stow for to lay hir in be-  
cause she lay in a chest of tre and as thei sought  
in diuerse places; they come at laste into a de-  
solate towne by side cawmbrige which was  
called Granncetre and there soddenly thei found  
a white marble stone of alabaster evyn mete  
and shape for hir body. that they toke in[to]  
hem and went home with grete ioy. at the day  
sett of translacion which was of seynt Lukeis  
evyn. the abbes sexburge went first into the  
grave with certeyn of hir sistern and brethren

and sett honde upon the chest and in the ta-  
kin it up they herd a voice which sayde a lawde  
"Sit no[b]i[s] d[eu]m gloria" that is to the name of our  
god; be ioy and glorye. Than thei openyd the  
chest and founde the body uncorrupte swete  
smelling and lyghing as she had that same  
day firth be layde therin more like as she had  
be aslepe; than ded. The selues also that she  
had in hir nek aperid all hole w[i]t[h] oute any  
wounde saue a litill marke in a maner of a  
seme ther she was cutte Of the which bare  
wittenes the same leche that lawunced it  
which was ther present amonge all other  
people and seyde that he him selfe lawnced it  
Howe monkes were putt into the same  
monastery afterward many yere by seynt  
Aftir seynt awdre is Ethelwolde  
dayes and longe tyme aftir seynt

56v

Sexburghis dayes; the same monastery of hely  
was destroyed by paynemes in the tyme that  
seynt Edmunde was slayne and then it stode  
occupied with secular chanones which levyd

unclely. unto the tyme seynt Ethelwolde  
come and by the helpe of Kynge Edgar putt  
onto tho chanones and sent in monkys and  
then repayred the monastery new amonge  
all tho monkes seynt Ethelwolde made the  
prieore of wynchestre first abbot in þe same  
place which was called knghtrode Te same  
holy bisshope than bought diuerse maners  
and places and yaf it to the chirch of seynt  
awdre for the mentene the seruauntes of god  
in the same place

Of diuerse miracles shewed in the same  
place there she heth in tyme of the danes  
In the tyme of the danes whan the mo-  
nastery of nonnes was destroyed; ther was  
a payneme which had gret despite of seynt  
awdries tombe and wolde oft in reprove  
smyte it with his swerde. and so of the smote  
ther ord; in the tyme he made upon the  
same tombe an hole. Which hole is sene  
unto this day and whan he had do that; a  
none forth with withoute any taryeng  
he was blynde and so dighed full cursedly

Of an other miracle shewed in that same  
tyme whan secular chanons dwelled ther

57r

There was a man which was callid brightstone  
that had be a grete usurer and an evill  
y... at the laste he felle in a grete seknes and  
than he made a behest to seynt awdrye for to  
spende all the remenaunt of his yeres if he  
might escape that seknes under the abyte of  
monke in hir owne monastery at hely and  
with that anon he yaf all his goode to the  
abbey of hely That herde the kynges mynisters  
and a vested him and sett him in preson at Lon-  
don and bare him on honed that he was a thefe  
and had robbid the kynge. and therefore it was  
that he wolde be a monke forto escape the payne  
that he was worthy forto haue and so he  
lay longe in preson bounde with sore bonde  
of yren at the laste he made his mone to  
seynt awdre and to seynt Benett and prayed to  
hem bothe with wepyng and inly sorowe  
of herte nyght and day. So longe he prayed  
so; that at laste seynt benett and seynt awdre

with hir syster seynt sexburgh appered a  
fore him with a grete light To whome  
seyde seynt awdre Bristane wherefore haste  
thou clepid us hedir so oft with so many  
teeres and cryed so oft aftir us; I and she  
sayde awdre whom thou haste cried aftir  
so ofte and this man is seynt benett whos  
helpe thou desyrest with that she said to  
seynt benett. Lo benett do now as oure

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lorde hath comanndid the he anon putt his fyn-  
ger in on of the holes of the yrmnes and forth  
with he las losed and with that he drewe  
away from him his feteres and yaf a a stroke  
upon on of the bemes of the hous; as all the  
hous shuld had falle downe with that noyse  
the keepers awoke and thought that all the  
presouers had broke lose and a rose an lokid  
and founde hem all fast I nogh saue Bristane  
for he was loose of that they wondred gretly  
for he was fastest y bounde of hem all. Of  
this thei anone tolde queen mawte and  
howe these holy seyntis were there and loo



and desired hym out of preson and so he  
made him selfe a monke of helly and lyved  
well to his lyves ende and in remembraunce  
of this miracle yit into this day; the same  
bondes of yrin hangyn at hely  
Of an undirshreve which was a com-  
brous man and a wised to the monaste-  
ry of hely in beninyng the lyvelode and  
possessions of seynt awdre.

Ther was a shreve of cambridgeshire  
which had a man with him that  
was a fell wikked man and was callid  
Gervayse the shreve made this gervayse  
for because he was so full of excorcion  
undirshreve of cambridgeshire and count-yd

59r

and a continuell besecher to our Lorde for the trespas-  
ses of theym that trespasen here yn The same  
thata thou fighest pay afore the maieste of god  
amonge the company of holy spirits the [...] pestilence  
for to make hole all that be [...] seke in this monasterye  
and fort was all also which were seke; were made hole and than

byd god.

Of an other wikkid man of cambregeshire  
that occupied the londres of seynt awdre  
wrongfully

Ther was a man which was callid  
picote and was a norman and shrev  
of cambrigeshire. This picote occupied est-  
reyn londres longyng unto seynt awdre of  
hely by extorcon which [...] was war-  
nyd oft tymes of many folke [...]  
leve of hurt not the syvelode the so[...]ne  
of the place of that holy virgin sey[...]  
dre left [...]nuance falle to him than she  
sayde who is that awdre of whom ye spoke  
I knowe hir not and therefore hir [...]  
I shall not leve he had not so sone sayde  
thus but that soddenly he dyed no man  
wyst howe  
Thus endith the holy life and the miracles  
of seynt awdre of hely.

## Saint Sexburgh

59r

Here begynnyth the lyfe of seynt Sexburge sister  
to seynt Awdre which was the next abbes of  
hely aftir hir

Seynt sexburgh was sister to seynt  
Awdre and doughtir of Anne kynge  
of Estynglonde which was right  
virtuous in hir lyving and gentill and graci-  
ously beloved of all folke. Ther was non so  
abstinent in delites so lowly in hir condici-  
ons non so pore in spirite as she was. for a-  
monge all riches and temp[or]all goodes  
ther was non that set so litell therby as  
she did this holy woman whan she was  
in age for to be weddid; she was maryet  
to kynge Orcoinbert in which was kynge of  
kent and brought forth to holy doughters  
The first holy doughtir was callid Erme-  
nyld and thodir Erkengode. Ermenylde  
was weddid to kynge Wolfere and brought  
forth an holy mayde seynt Werburgh and  
thodir doughtir Erkengode went to a

monastery beyond the see and ther dyed graci-  
ously as a pilgryme and shewith a grete mira-  
cles ther she lyeth This holy Sexburgh ly-  
ved wonder marvelously and graciously undir  
the sacrament of matrimony. Lordis of this  
londe knewe hir for a meke lady. pore peple  
knewe hir for a felowly frende they sought  
unto hir as to theyr tendir modir Lordis sought

60r

unto hir as for amiable and comfortable lady  
She was renensed of the ton as a lady She was  
renensed of the todir as a meke souveyn to the  
lordis; she shewid hir a queen to the pore  
a felawe She bad and commanded as a lady  
to the statys She mynistred and seruyd to the  
lowest as a þunat so that she was all folke be-  
lovid as a modir reuenced as a queen. Sedome  
come she onte amonge many oft tyme kept  
she the church and a boue all thinges she stirred  
the kynge hir husbonde to loue god and his ho-  
ly puice. The kynge by hir holy stirrings  
first destroyed in his teme all mawmentrye  
which was left undestroyed by op[er] kynges day-

es afore him So that he encreseed not only  
cristes kyngdome in erth; but rather made  
all his kyngdome cristes kyngdome by hir  
stirring also; he encresed monasteries in his  
reine and made many churches. he was the  
first also that comanndid lenton to be kept  
in abstinence from flesh in all his reine  
and he that did othirwyse he made him to be  
ponysshed grievously. This holy modir seynt  
Sexburgh taught all hir children for to drede  
god and reuence him and for to kepe his bid-  
dinges. At laste this ggoode kynge hir husband  
kynge Erconbert died the foure and twenty  
yere of his kyngdome and than seynt sex-  
burgh threwe away from hir all þe roiall

60v

ornamentis which pompe and worldly arrays  
and was made none at hely undir hir sister  
seynt awdre. Than she roose up mightily and  
entresed in all vertu and tormented hir body w[i]t[h]  
fasting and sakynges and diuerse labours  
and so than she began to brenne away the  
fire of love all spottis of lustes which she

cawght afore whiles she dwelled in the worlde  
and wysshe hem away with habundannce  
of many teres and thus began to be an holy  
follower of hir sister seynt awdre and aftir  
tyme hir sister was passed out of this world  
she was chosyn of all the covent with one  
acorde for to be their abbeyes and modie  
in hir stede Than this holy abbes Sexburgh  
undirstode that she was more charged than  
she was afore. for than she had charge not  
only of hir selfe; but of all the hole covent  
and therefore she must be more wakyr than  
she was afore hir thought. Wherefore evir  
aftir mekly she mynistred to hir sisters and  
did all her besines for to kepe hem in vertu  
But amonge all gracious yiftes that our  
lorde grauntid to that monastery; she was  
ioyfull and glad of the holy body of hir sys-  
tir seynt awdre which lay amonges hem  
sextene yere uncorrupted the which trans-  
lacion she was the first that fond it so and  
first lift hir out of the grounde aftir longe

tyme that this holy modir sexburgh had so lyved a  
monges hem vi[r]tuously and holily; she passed grea-  
ciously out of this worlde upon the evon of the  
t[r]anslacion of seynt Thomas the martir and heth  
shrined beside hir owne sister seynt awdre She  
was abbes of hely aftir seynt awdre abowte  
the yere of our lorde sex hundred and fourty.  
Thus endith the life of seynt Sexburgh

#### Saint Ermenylde

Here begynnyth the lyfe of seynt Ermenylde  
the first doughtir of seynt Sexburgh  
Of the gode lyving of seynt Ermenyde both  
[...] and in religion  
Seynt Ermenylde the first doughter  
of kynge Ercombert and of seynt  
sexburgh was a woman of grete  
[...] and compassion and grete helper in  
all maner necessitees to all maner of peple  
allway benyngne and charitable and full  
of heavenly desyres This holy woman was  
at laste weddid to the kynge wolfere which en  
aftir lyved an holy life and made pees be-  
tweene diuerse kynges in this feine and

brought hir husbonde to cristendome which  
was afore an hethen kynge and evir hir holy  
besines was for to excite the commune peple  
61v  
and the rude peple to take upon hem the swete yok  
of criste by holy bapteme and all tho that were  
wikked and obstinate; she chastised mercibly. she  
cessid nevir till she had destroyed all the fals man  
in entrye in hir reine. and made many chirches  
and storid theym with honest prestis and cher  
kys for to encrease the seruyce of god and dedis  
of pite and in all this the kynge enclyned to  
hir holy desyres with a goode wille Not only  
halp hir by his ryall power; but also by  
hir ensample did many goode thingin destroy-  
ing of fals mawmentrye thorowe out all  
his londe and did hir gret reuerence as to c[r]ifte[n]  
þuanut in veyling of hir stedfast entent to  
Godward amonge all hir wordly besines  
And a doughtir she had which was clepid we-  
reburgh that levid aftir the goode condicons  
of the modir and seventeen yere aftir hir fa-  
dir wolfere died than seynt Ermenylde and hir



holy doughtir wereburgh were made nonnes  
of hely undir the goode religious gouernanuce  
of hir modir seynt sexburgh forsaking al man  
truste and hope and love of the worlde for c[hri]ste  
sake lyving evyr aftir in discrete fasting  
waith prayers and affeccions of hir body  
holding hir selfe lowest of all hir systers  
and so in goode works that holy woman  
seynt Ermenylde endid hir lyfe upon seynt  
agate day

62r

Of miracle shewed aftir hir deth of a saxon  
which prayed at hir tombe sore bonde with  
bondis of yren  
Ther was a saxon which was upon a  
high festfull deay prayed at the tombe  
of seynt Ermenyld at hely whiles the gospel  
was a a reding that was right sore bounde  
w[i]t[h] yren bondes and soddenly as he prayed; the  
yren bondes losyd from his armys and was  
throwe from hym all a ferre upon the au-  
ter marvelously.

Of an other miracle howe a stolemayster

bete his children undiscretely aftir tyme  
they had prayed for help to seynt Ermenyld  
at hir tombe

Ther was a stolemaystir of hely which  
was a cruell beter of children In  
a tyme as he blamyd his children sharply  
he thretenyd forto bete hem and thei for  
fere ranne to the tombe of seynt Ermenyld  
praying to hir for so come and helpe. The  
mayster herd that that they were in the  
tombe; and went aftir hem and took hem  
home ayen and bett hem right disp[...]ly  
and seyde to the weping children with a  
maner of storne in this wyse. Trowe ye  
for to haue seynt Ermenyhilde always your  
helper and defender from beting whan  
ye trespass; Nay nay ye shull nevir be betyn

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the lasse for hir but rather the mor loke aftir no  
nothir Therfore that same nyght fewing  
seynt Ermenylde apperid to the same stolemaister  
and bonde him in his bedde bothe hand and fote  
that he might not meve him. On the morowe

he awoke and anon sent aftir tho children  
and cryed hem m[er]cy and prayed hem for to pray  
for him that he might be losid Than forth w[i]t[h]  
he was borne to the tombe of seynt Ermenyld  
and anon was unlosid and hole.  
Thus endith the life of seynt Ermenyld þe  
first the doughter of seynt sexburgh

Werburch

Her begynnyth the life of seynt Werburgh  
the daughter of seynt Ermenyld  
Of the goode begynnyng of this holy maide  
howe vertuously she began  
This holy maide wereburgh the  
doughtir of seynt Ermenyld was  
fayre in face and more fayrer in  
[...] and therfor to him that is most fairest  
[...]ly est our lorde [Jesus] criste; she offred  
hir yonge tendir age of clennes and for love  
of virgiinite she fled to him of how virgin  
he begynnyng all fleshly woes and had

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abhominacion of all fleshly lusts and Golde and  
siluer precious stoyns riche clothis [and] all man[ner]  
pompe of the worlde; was more cumbrous to  
hir than glorious at the laste she forsoke all this p[er]-  
fytely and went straight to hely and undir the  
holy p[ro]tection of seynt awdre here awnte; she  
toke upon hir the abyce of religion and than  
fro that tyme forthwarde she trade undirfote  
all the pryde of the worlde. shewyng hir selfe

as a meke mayde of criste and ovirpassid in  
meknes all the sisters of the monastery and  
also shewed hir selfe lowest and lest of all  
in all man[ner] of lowly þince charitably mynis-  
trynge to hir sisters in all their nedis at the  
laste than whan hir fadir kynge Wolfere was  
dede; his brodir Ethelrede which was kynge  
aftir him yaf to his nece seynt Werburgh  
the gouernannce of all the monasteries of  
nonnes in his reule that was in lyncolnshy[er]  
and othir biy shires aboute whan she had  
suche gou[er]nuance of so many holy s[er]uanntis  
of god; she was such a maystres amonges  
hem; that rather she was more like a s[er]unt  
than a souerayn She was lowly and s[er]ue-  
sable for she taught hem rather by ensam-  
ple than by bidding She chase than for delites  
abseinence For to moche slepe; holy waking  
For luste: labure For grete delicate festis;  
absanence holy redinges and p[ra]yers. In body

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she was erth but in thought she was in heven  
Of a miracle shewed by hir dayes how wylde

geese were shitt up at hir bidding in an house  
all nyght

In a tyme whan this holy mayde was at a  
maner of hirres in wydon which is beside  
hampton a grete multitude of wylde gese  
assendid upon a certen londe of hirs and  
were abowte for to destroye the corne that was  
late sowe thr in. Which was anon tolde to  
seynt Wereburgh and she comanndid all to  
be shett up in ane house all nyght till on the  
morowe than the bayly drofe hem all afore  
him in so moche that ther was not on of hem  
that went oute of the way but mekly han-  
gyng downe their wynges as thei had be  
broken and hir nekkys lowe to the grownde  
for shame of their trespass and preying of  
leve for to flee away Than this holy maide  
as she was meke and benigne to all greatn-  
nes; yaf hem leve for to flee away and co  
manndid hem nevir to come aftir upon  
hir londis and so into this day that command-  
ment is kept and so thei fled away yit on  
her was left behind that on of hir s[er]unte

stale away and therefore whan thei bovyd  
in the eyre eche of theym lokid on othir as  
it had befor to espye if any lakkid and on thei  
espied wanted and ther with ech of hem a  
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lighted on hir housing and cryed wondirly though  
they had playned in maner to seynt werburgh  
that of their felawes lakkyd She herd that  
and anon inquired who had take away any  
of hem Than he that was gilty come forth  
and knowlegid his trespass. With that she  
toke the gose and bad hir goe to hir felowes  
and flee away and so thei did. Insomoche  
nevir aftir ther come no wild gose upon hir  
londis.

Of a goode man which was kepar of hir beste  
howe he was bete wrongfully of hir bayby  
Ther was a goode meke man which  
kept the beste of the plowe of this  
holy mayde seynt werburgh that was callid  
alnothe This goode man in a tyme was  
an ely bete of the bayly of seynt werburgh  
and come and buelid to hir which betyng

that goode man suffred right mekely This  
sigh seynt Wereburgh and come and buelid  
to hir bayly bidding him and p[ra]ying him to  
leve of he nold not but prowldly layd him  
on and therefore soddenly because he wolde  
not do as she bad him. His hede was tornyd  
upon his nek backward and weylyngby he  
fell down to the fete of this holy mayde and  
a[sp]id for yevenes praying hir that his hed  
might be returned ayen in his kynde and  
so it was but that goode meke man which

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was cruelly bete made him self an ankyr in a wode  
ther beside and at last was kylded of thereys and so  
died a martyr.

How this holy mayde knewe the day of hir deth  
many day afore er she passid out of this  
worlde and howe she was founde all hole uvcor-  
rupte wyne yere aftir.

This holy mayde seynt werburgh know-  
yng of god the day and the tyme of hir  
passing out of this worlde; bad and comanndid  
hir systers that where that euyr she passid; she



shulde be caryed and beryed in the abbey and  
monastery of hamburge. And aftir this war-  
nyng; she passid holyly the morowe aftir cau-  
masse day that is upon seynt blaseis day whos  
holy body was borne to the church of Crys[n]g  
ham and ther it was kept close in sylirwarde  
all the churche dores stongely shutt But yet  
that same nyght aftir tyme the kepers had  
longe wakyd

Thus begynnyth þe lyfe of seynt modewyne  
In Erlonde þ[at] was a blessid mayde which was cal-  
lid modewyne fayre and seemly and of worthy  
kynne but more worthier in uthes... holy lyving  
She was þe dought[ir] of kynge ...dughteye and of  
choinan þat was hir modir This mayde in Yonge  
and tendir age comendid to god hir vi[r]ginite  
It happid in a tyme þat s... ily come in-  
to Erlonde for to speke to pl... lorde  
þe senly of criste of criste of þe ...  
p...ynemys mand come under...  
v...ey seyth amonge all in h...  
to here his speching come...  
-dene forte here sule worde of ...  
and as she hend seynt patrik...  
of vi[r]ginte and of grete nede...  
soules shull haue and of gret...  
wicked soules shull receyne she fell ...  
to his fete enflawmys by feruent love of god  
w[i]t[h] many terys axed of him devoutly þ[a]t abyte

and þe veyle of gynethes and sayde þat she  
would evir aftir lyve in clennes of mayden-  
hode as moche as she may by þe grace of  
god to hir lyves end. Than seynt Patrick  
p[er]ceyved þat the grace of god had truly  
touched hir; was right joyfull and veyled

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hir halowyng hir virginite to god comittyng  
to hir gouernanns his owne cosyn Atheam  
which purposyd for goddis lave to lyve a vi[r]gyn  
Howe this holy mayde modewenne beganne  
to lyve vertuously.

This holy mayde modewyn aftir tyme  
she was thus hallowed to god. She be-  
ganne to take feling of holy writ and diss-  
pised all vanitees of þe worlde having mynde  
oft tymes of þe holy doctrine of seynt patrik  
in keping hir hert and all of hir dedis vertu-  
ously by use of holy p[r]ayers and wepinges  
and oft sighynges chastising hir body with  
grete wakynges and fastinges; and so she be-  
gan w[i]t[h] all hir soule to love god and sett in  
hir hert aboue all loves þe love of cryste

all erthly thinges w[i]t[h] all hir gostly streng[t]h  
thes for to come to þe grete medes [and] rewar-  
dys of þe blisse of hevyn fering gretly the  
peynes of helle. Insomoche þe g[re]ace of oure  
lorde god encresyd in hir; þat hir brother  
komang by ensaumple of hir; forsoke all the  
world and toke hym to hir gouernanns  
and so was made a religious bishop under

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the stole of god hir fadir also left all vicious  
living and turnyd v[i]rtuously hir modir in þe  
same wyse by hir in þe  
same wyse by hir stirryng left all þe worlde  
and levid fifteen yere a religious life and so in goode  
leving made an holy ende.

Howe this holy mayde lyved aftir tyme hir fadir  
and modir were passed out of this worlde.

Aftir tyme this mayde Modewenne was  
thus sep[er]tid from fadir and modir she  
desired for to stye hierin to vi[r]tuous lyving and  
as she herd sey of an high lyver þat was cal-

lid hybar dwelling upon an yle of þe see w[i]t[h]  
his disiples and lyved a streyte lyfe; anon  
she went to him for to know of his holy co-  
versacon and as sone as she considred his ly-  
ving howe hard it was in laboure of his hon-  
dis in sharpnes of abstinens and howe [...]  
and mery he was w[i]t[h] all considering also his  
feruent loue þat he had to god. and þ[e] gret  
mervelos werke that he did; she thanked  
god in his worke and so was benignely en-  
formyd of him and went home ayene and  
made a monastery upon a certeyn hill [and]  
dwelled ther with hir syster athea seynt  
paterikis cosyin and with hir brother  
lyving þ[at] full streytly eting oft tymes

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rawe herbis and rotis occupying their tyme w[i]t[h] con-  
tinuall dovoute p[r]ayers and was in no wyse charge-  
able to no body. axing almes of none but onely  
with labour of her hondis gate her her sustinaunce  
having rather a mannys might than a  
womans For she dalfe hir grounde and sowed  
it and harrowed it and wedid hir corne hyr

selfe To þe which newe monastery come  
many worthy women bothe quenes and  
maydenys for to be enformed by hir in v[i]rtu-  
es lyving and for to here hir speyke of god  
She had w[i]t[h] hir in hir monastery yit but [...]   
maydenes nonnes amonge whome on was  
callid bride. and an op[i]r orbile and w[i]t[h] hem  
was on goode wedowe which had a yonge  
sone þat was callid Luger whom seynt  
modewnn lovid as hir own childe. and  
norissed him both in feyth and in good  
[...] lyving

Howe seynt modewene by miracle  
awylde wolfe for to kepe hir kowe from  
all op[i]r wilde bestis.

This child Luger on a tyme as he  
kept seynt modeweneis kowe w[i]t[h]  
hir calfe; þ[hen] come a wolfe soddenly and de-  
voured hir calfe. The childe Luger rane

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home and tolde þe abbes þ[at] of than that

holy modir toke hir staffe to the childe and  
bad him go and bid the wolfe come to hir  
aand tell him þat ibad so the child went  
and founde yit the wolfe etyng of þe same  
calfe. he touched him with þe same staffe [and]  
sayde my lady bad that thou shuldest come  
to hir anone þe wolfe as a tame dogge  
rose up and followed þe child and fell down  
to þe abbes fete p[ro]strate axing [...] were  
foryevenes for his trespase to whome the  
abbes seynt modewen seyde. why hafe þu  
devoured our calfe therefore because þu  
hast so so I charge them the name of o[u]r  
lorde [Jesus] criste that thou go to þe same  
cowe whose cale þu hast eten and kepe  
hir from all op[er] bestis and bringe  
hir hime and lede hi route and loke [...]  
ete none op[er] mete than wylde bestis take  
no tame beestis for thy mete and from this  
day forthward I charge them our lordis  
name þat thou do no harme to no man  
man ne woman ne childe anone the  
wolfe obeyed to hir comaundement and

ayenst kynde he was made tame [and] kept  
as a sheperde w[i]t[h] all his besynes þe same  
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cowe. And she likked him as it had be hir owne  
calfe and all op[i]r wolvys þat were kynled [and]  
brought forth of þe same wolfe and of all  
hir p[ro]genye yit into this day be thre myle  
abowte kepyn þe best longyng to þe monas-  
tery of seynt modewyn and they ben lasse  
than op[i]r wolvys in þe contray aboute and  
beyryng in their forhedis a white spotte [and]  
they do neu[ir] harme to tame bestis but getyn  
their lyving of wilde bestis By suche my-  
racles and op[i]r mo this childe Luger was  
strenghted and confermyd in suche vi[r]tu-  
es lyving; þat afterward he was made a  
preste and at laste a bishop turnynge  
many one from their mysbeleve and con-  
fermyd hem in full trewe seyth and good  
werkys

How certeyn theves had stole seynt mo-  
dewene kene and might not passe a c[e]rteyn



water till they had restored hem ayene.

On a tyme certeyn theves ther wer  
which had stole to kene of this ho-  
ly mayde seynt modewyn and as they  
wolde had passed on a certeyn flode thei  
fonde the water so brennyng hote; that  
they might in no wyse touche þe same

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water by no man going on for brennyng of  
their fete. Te thevys were gretly astonyed  
seying howe thei had all might labored  
wenyd thei had be farr passed þe monastery  
on the morowe; and fonde hem selfe standing  
afore þe yates of the monastery Tan thei  
com in and fell downe p[ro]strate afore the  
abbess fete knowleggyng their trespase  
and cryed mercy and axid foryevenes and  
she mekely foryeve it hem

Howe this holy vi[r]gyne seynt modewene  
made an op[ir] abbes in þat monastery [and] went  
hir sef selfe thennes and bilded an abbey

in an oþ[i]r place

In the forsayde monastery were an hundred and fyfty virgyns nonnes gadrid to gedris in congregacion which lyved by labour of their hondis and wanne their lyving þ[e]rby and lyved right holily Than seyng this holy modir modewyn þat such a nombre was amonges hem made orbila their abbeys and modir and went hir selfe to an oþ[i]r place for to make an oþ[i]r monastery To whom seid Orbila in this wyse modw[enna] howe may I obey to your comaundmente Seth it is so þat I am but yonge and I dred

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of my tendir age left I lyfe here w[i]t[h]out you yonge men might come and robbe me fro god and fro my purpose of vi[r]tue for my fayrnes bothe of my face and of myne here þat is delicious to yonge men. Spare me goode lady spare me at this tyme and forsake me not To whom answered seynt Modewyn and seyð dought[ir] be not disconsfortid but be stronge in god

trust in him and do myghtely for he woll  
helpe the. And if þu wold wytt þat he hath  
chose the þis day for to be abbes of this con-  
gregacion aftir my bidding; nowe shalt  
þuse his m[er]veyles wrought in the Than seynt  
modewyn toke hir owne girdell and gyrte  
Orbila with it and made a crosse in hir for-  
hed and brethid in hir face. and forthwith  
anow hir here of hir hede waxe white [and]  
hir face was changed into an op[er] liknes  
as it had be of a sad and arenent age and  
than seide she to hir in this wyse. Lo dough-  
ter like nowe as þu arte channged in body  
so shall thi name be channgid. for þu shalt  
nowe be callid Servyle for Orbile by þe  
which þu shalt understonde þat our lorde  
hath not putt the in this office for to be  
lady and to yfe dominacion of ladyship;

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but for to be a seruande to the serniannts of god  
and for to serue hem þat servyn god. Whan þat  
Orbila which is clepid now Svile sigh such  
merveyles wrought of god upon hir that day;

she durste no more deye but toke upon hir the charge as she was comanndid and kept it devoutly beyng to all hir sisters p[ro]fitable and fayre in speche shewyng goode ensample to all and so lyved vertuously keping hir office diligently unto þe last ende.

Howe seynt modewynne toke with hir fourty sisters of the same monastery and beganne a newe monasteri

Whann this goode modir modewenne had so ordenyd for this forsayde monastery as I haue sayde; anon she toke with hir fourty nonnes of the same place [and] went into an hille ther besyde and bilded an other monastery makyng cellis for hem with in þe rochis or þe cliftis of þe same hille which monastery was callid evir aftir for þe same cause; the monasterye of celliseleve. In the which monastery the mynches of þe same place ete none other mete than rawe herbis barks of threes and rotys seruyng our

lorde mekely in devout prayers in besy wacche

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and grete abstinens. In a tyme it befell þat  
þe kynges hierd went a boutte in the wylder-  
nes þ[a]t besyde and sought his floke besely and  
cowde not fynde hem at laste he bethought  
him and come to this holy mayde Modewyn[na]  
þa[nk]yng hir of helpe and comforth for he  
sayde I haue sought myn hoggis longe tyme  
and can not fynde hem to whom she an-  
swered Goo she sayde ayen and then shall  
fynde hem all thi beste kepte of god sekirly  
inough with out hurting of any wylde  
best Thau went he forth and founde hem  
all as she sayde and caught on of the best  
hoggis and kylled it and dep[er]ted it in diu[er]se  
porcions and so brought it to that holy  
mayde in a maner of rewarde thankyng  
hir for hir goode comforth But in no wyse  
wolde she receyve it for she sayde it was  
unlefull for hir systers to ete suche mete  
in as moche as for our lordis love they  
haue forsake all seculer condicions and

customes having op[ir] maner metes and  
drinkes for to use than suche and in op[ir]  
thinges they desyre no thinge ekke but for  
to stye higher and higher to vertu Than  
the man whan he sigh þat þe mayde wold

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not take his yeft; he was sory þat he had kil-  
led his beste She seing þat clepid þe man to  
hir and toke þe best and layde eu[er]y parte by  
op[ir] in her ordir as it was at begynnynge  
whan it was on lyve and made hir prayers  
and blissed it and so toke it to the same man  
a lyve by þe m[ar]velous workyng of god and  
sayde. Lo frende take nowe thy best ayene  
and be a trewe man unto thy laste ende ho-  
ping and trustyng evir in god and do all þe  
goode þu canste and be his siraunt from þis  
day forthward for he it is alone þat dothe  
merveyls worke and none but he blessyd  
be he endelesly.

Howe seynt Patrik in a tyme sent to seynt  
Modewen[na] viii prestis for to visyte hir and

comforth hir and for to bringe him tythinge  
howe she did.

Seynt patrik in a tyme sent viii pres-  
tys to seynt Modewen[na] to visite and  
comforth hir and for to bringe him tythinge  
ayene howe she did and as þe preste went  
by desert and wyl dernes; they mett with  
fyfty thevys which robbid hem and killed  
hem eu[er]y chone The p[r]ince of all tho thevys  
was callid Chinelach wheche thevys wel

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en walkyng by dennes and woddess wayting  
aftir theyre par[t]y and so did moche harme to ma-  
ny folke having pyte of no man ne woman  
but whom þat euyr they myght fynde they  
wolde bothe robbe hem and kille theym whan  
Modewen[na] knewe this; for þe deth of the good  
preste she ioyed in god be cause they died by  
martirdome and þat their soules in so short  
tyme were sent to heven but she had gret  
compassion þat their bodies were left un-  
beryed lest they shuld be devoured by wylde

bestis but most of all she sorowed in hert for  
the cursed and wrecchid lyving of tho the-  
vys wech nob[er] belevid ne dred tormentys  
and paynes that were ordenyd for theym  
in helle. Wherefore she p[r]aued wotj a devpit  
hert to god almyghty þat she myght haue  
pces of tho thevys unto the tyme she had  
beried the bodies of tho martyrs þ[a]t wer  
so kyllid. She had not so sone prayed this  
prayer but þat ther stode before hir an  
angell of god and sayed to hir Go with  
thy systers and seke þe holy bodies dout not  
but trust well in god for he soll helpe the  
Than she toke with hir nyne and fourty  
of hir systers and went to þe same place

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where þe bodies lay unberied and anon come  
forth out of þe same wode the grete prince of  
thevys Glunelache with nyne and fourty  
of his felawys rennyng ayenst the abbes  
and hir nyne and fourty of hir systers been-  
nyng eche of hem with fould lecherous love  
for to defould þe nonnes. Whan Modwenna



sish this; she doutid not but confortid hyr  
ferfull systers and sayde be not aferin but  
eche of you p[r]ay to god with a pure hert  
ye shull se this day þe grete inweylence of god  
wrought upon us. Theis recchid men  
drewe more neree no thing ellis desiring but  
þat eche of hem myght take one of the  
nonnes aftir their fleshly lustis. But as  
sone as they were come anone sodenly they  
lay downe upon the grounde and fell aslepe  
So that fro prime upon the thursday; unto  
none tyme upon the satirday next they  
slept continnelly nnevir moving ne bre-  
thing as though they had lay dede. In þe  
mene tyme an anngell of god apperyd  
with grete clernes shynyng and seyde to  
Modewyn thus Modewyn be stedfast and  
trust in god and come with me bothe thou  
and Elimelache for I shall shewe you bothe

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the previtees of god and also ferfull thinges [and]  
gladsom thinges. Anon bothe she and Elime-  
lache were ravished in spirite and folowed

that anngell of god which shewed hem pey-  
nes of hell and horrible tormentis and  
also fayre fetys and mery full of swete  
flowers in paradise. And aftyr eu[er]y manys  
[...] fayre dwelling places full  
[...] and delectable and whan Elimelach  
sigh all this on in speciall he sigh amonge  
all which him thought was most fayrest  
and passed hem all þat lykyd him pas-  
singly well Than he p[r]ayed Modewenne  
þat she shuld axe the anngell for who  
þat fayre dwelling place was ordenyd  
She axed þe anngell and he sayde þat  
it was ordenyd for a religious bisshop  
iwhich waas called Chevyn þat hathe  
lyved this vii yere right strytlly in  
wildernes. And therfore our lorde hath  
ordenyd for him such a dwelling place  
endlesly in hevyn aftir this vision  
eche of hem were restored to theyr bo-  
dyes ayen and than seynt Modewen  
seyng all the other men yet aslepe;  
woke hem and seyde. In the name of

the holy trinite arysyth up. Than all the soden-  
 ly arose and satt puright eche of hem astony-  
 ed of othir merveling where they haue bene  
 and whennes they come. They were so asto-  
 nyed that none of hem cowthe well knowe  
 othir Elimelache seyng all this; fell down  
 to Medwenis fete axing foryefnes [and] m[er]cy  
 seying in this wyse Holy lady connsell me  
 thy seruannt and helpe me moste wrecchid  
 creature þat I may be partiner of thy lorde  
 god lest I fall at the laste in the paynes þ[a]t  
 I haue sighe. Axe g[r]ace for me of him that  
 I may seþne for to haue suche a dwelling  
 place in heven as was shewed to the in  
 paradise for that holy bisshop Chevyn  
 To whom she answered and seyde yf thou  
 wilte beleve; all thingeis possThau he sible to him  
 þat belevith Thou he seyde with wepinge  
 Lady I shall beleve as thou techist me and  
 what þat euyr thou wilt teche me I woll  
 to as thou biddist me That seing Alphin  
 the systerson of Elimelache þat his eme

Elimelache was tornyd to g[r]ace than fill  
he downe to the vi[r]gines fete modewen[na]  
and sayde O lady lyke as I se myn Eme  
wyll do by thy counsell; so am I redy

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in all wyse to obey trewly to thi bidding with  
out any contradiction or withstondning all  
the othir meany of thevis seing this; suppo-  
sid it was but wicche crafte and so rose up  
with grete fere and ranne away ferr into  
strannge contreys wen[t] abode aftirward in  
that contrey ne nevyr dust do man harme  
ther abowte Than this holy modir and  
lady Modewen[na] toke home with hir; the  
dede bodies of tho viii martires and be-  
ryed hem in hir monastery and cristined  
bothe Elimelache and Alphin and taught  
theym the seyth and put hem to lernyng  
of letterure which p[er]feted gretly. And gra-  
ciously lyved and were bothe holy bisshop-  
pis and dyden blessingly  
Of þe fals soteltees of þe fende howe  
he cessith nevyr with his wrecchid wy-

les for to deceyve cristen peple as he  
did to the holy bisshop Chyven.  
Aftir this done þe fende our olde  
enemye which hath grete envye  
to the gostly goodes of mankynde cessid  
nevir; but wilyly is euyr aboute to de-  
ceyue c[r]isten menis soules. Hem a tyme  
apperyd in liknes of a clerke to the holy

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[This is written in another hand]  
Of alrede the son of adulphe kinge of the west  
ende of Inglonde howe he was helyd by mira-  
cle of hir of an uncurable lekenes.

Alfred kynge adulpheis sone which  
was kynge of the west end of Inglond

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aftir tyme he had spoke with hir; he betoke to  
hir holy gouernannce his owne syster mayden  
Edith praying hir to vayle hir a nonne that  
under hir lore she myght deuoutly and ple-

singly s[er]ue god and bad hir chese where she  
wolde in his londe haue a grownde for to bilde  
upon a monastery {o}r two than this holy  
mayde modewenne chase hir on place at pol-  
lesworth in arderu and ther she made abyde  
and dwell the seynt patrikis cosyn and  
made Edith abbes therin which was þe kynge  
syster; Alrede and she went thens and bilded  
an other monastery for hir self at Streneshall  
wherin she lyved many dayes aaftir a solitary  
lyfe attending oonly to our lorde by deuout  
p[r]ayers and holy meditacons. In the mene  
while the abbes Edith and Athe at Pollesworth  
in Arthern and ther she had receyved Ofye a  
nonne amonges hem by the bidding of seynt  
modewenne not yit fully halowed a mynche  
but onlely offred to religion under a blake veyle.

Howe that the childe Oly[e] lay in dayes undir awa-  
tir and by miracle lyved ayene

It befile in tho dayes that edithe the kynges  
sister which was abbes of pollesworth clepid

to hir childe Osye and syede unto hir. Go to my  
lady modewenne and beyre hir this boke

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wherin she may rede and peraventure fynde some  
thinge of contemplacion which may lyke hir ryght  
well the childe Osy went forth with the same  
boke toward hir modir modewenne and whan she  
come to a certeyn brigge of tre that she nedys  
must go over she lokyd upon the watir and  
for drede that she had therof; she fell in with þe  
boke in hir honde and lay ther iii dayes and iii  
nyghtis in the botom of the watir and no man  
knewe where she was Than appered an ann-  
gell of god to modewenne in hir selle p[r]aying  
and sayde modewenne a ryse and go in all haste  
to the flode dicke where thou shalt do a thyng  
that is right nedfull She arose out of hyr  
p[r]ayers anon and went thedir where she fonde  
standing Edith sekyng the childe Osye whom  
modewenne sigh all aferde axed hir what she  
did there and howe it was with hri Is it all  
well doughter; She sayde modir iii dayes a-  
gon I sent to you with a boke childe Osye and

therfore I come nowe forto seke hir and forto  
witt the cause why she omyth not ayene Is  
she with you modir Modewenne seyde nay  
syster with me is she nott. I sigh hir not than  
she axed sheperdis in the felde ther by syde whe-  
thir they sigh such a mayden childe come that  
way thre dayes ago; They sey yea Such on

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they sigh upon the brigge where she be came;  
they wyst neuer they toke more hede to theyre  
bestis they seyde than for to loke aftir hir that  
herde modewenne; and seyde to Edith Dere  
sistre pray we dovoutly to our lord that by  
the merytis of all seyntis he vouche safe to  
restore unto us at this houre our litell doughtir  
Osye which is loste that by knowyng and  
seyng at this tyme of his m[a]rvelous myght  
we mowe haue cause to thanke and p[r]ayse his  
gret mercy endlesly Than bothe knelyd down  
and p[r]ayed devouutly and whan they had  
done modewenne rose up and with a clere voyce  
clepid thries to gedir the childe and syd Osy  
Osy Osy in the name of the holy trinite come



forth out of this flode þat thou art drenchid  
in and by the myght and strenght of the  
trinite apere afore us hold and sounde mode-  
wenne had unneth seyde tho sordis but þat  
the childe answered and seyde thries to gedir  
with a clere voyce these wordis; here I am  
here I am here I am lady and so apperyd afore  
theyme Than modewenne and edith toke  
that child with gret ioy and thankyd our  
lorde of his speciall grace and be left the  
childe to Edith and toke the boke to hir self  
and went home ayene into Erlonde takyng

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with hir Bryde and left in Inglonde Athea [and] Luge  
for to go gouerne the monasteryes which she had made  
Of the Miracles that she did by the way.