BOOKS OF DEVOTION: FEMALE INFLUENCES ON MEDITATIVE LIVES OF CHRIST AND THEIR READERS IN LATE-MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

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Degree

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Caitlin Josephine Branum Thrash

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the interactions in the transmission and reception of visionary women's texts, devotional retellings of Christ's life, and female book cultures in late-medieval England (ca.1350-1550). Surveying English manuscripts and texts containing the texts of St. Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn indicates a link in the commensurate popularities of the Life of Christ genre and the visionary women. Devotional Lives of Christ written by men incorporate visionary texts, though they reflect implicit medieval misogyny even as they celebrate the holy women. In contrast, a Life of Christ written by a medieval English nun blends the lived experiences of nuns and the narratives of women's encounters with Jesus in the Gospels to create a unique devotional text. Finally, women's religious miscellany manuscripts containing the texts of Birgitta of Sweden and Mechtild of Hackeborn reveals that women sought out the texts of holy women for use in their own devotional practices, and that women may have created original paths of textual transmission in their communities.

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INTRODUCTION

The Birgittine sisters of Syon Abbey kept an open grave within their monastery, at which they would gather daily to say this prayer:

> Lorde hody fadir þat keptist the body whiche Þoue toke to thi sonne of the virgyn marie vnhurt in þe grave and reysudyst it vncorrupt, we beseche þe: Kepe oure bodies clene & vndefoyled in thyn holy seruice, & dresse so oure weyes in this tyme. þat whan þe grete dredful day of dome comythe. oure bodies mowe be reysid vp amonge thy seyntys. & oure soules ioye with thy chosyn. In the name of the fadir & of þe sonne & of the holi gost. Amen.[1]

The prayer and the graveside ritual come from *The Rule of St. Saviour*, which was revealed to Saint Birgitta of Sweden in one of her numerous visions. Birgitta is one of the most famous and influential visionaries of the medieval period, a woman who received visions from God that often featured appearances from Christ, the Virgin Mary, and other saints. In her revealed rule, she creates a double order of 60 nuns, and 25 men, consisting of 13 priests, four deacons, and eight lay brothers. The entire community followed the precepts of the rule, remarkable both because of its divine origin and because its creator was a woman, however saintly. The establishment of Syon in England and other Birgittine houses in Europe is a testament to the incredible influence Birgitta had as a visionary woman in late-medieval culture.

Though the graveside prayer encourages the sisters of Syon to contemplate their own mortality and eventual divine judgement, it firmly grounds itself in the humanity of Christ by beginning with a reminder of the crucified Christ's body in the tomb. In this unique service, the nuns received a visceral daily reminder of Christ's suffering and death. However, the nuns considered not only the dead yet uncorrupt body of Christ, but imaginatively requested that their own bodies be "clean and unbefouled" in life so that they might join the ranks of heaven in death. The primacy of the Incarnation and *imitatio christi* in the prayer and the service itself echoes its overwhelming importance in the nuns' lives as they strove to be worthy brides of Christ.

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1. Transcribed from Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Ff.6.33, f. 66v-67r. Cf. James Hogg. *The Rewell of Seynt Sauioure and the other Middle English Birgittine Legislative Texts*,Vol. 2, (Salzburg: Institut fur Englische Sprache und Literatur Universitat Salzburg, 1978).

This continuum of Christ, holy visionary, and monastic women illustrates an interconnected cultural and religious phenomenon that had immense influence in late-medieval England.

My dissertation explores the nexus of meditative Lives of Christ, female continental mystics, and their audiences in England, particularly women, in the flowering of devotional material that occurred there in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. I use manuscript and textual studies to contribute a greater understanding of how women affected and were affected by devotion to the life of Christ in late-medieval England. By considering how excerpts of medieval holy women's texts were used in manuscript collections, I determine their influence on medieval readers and on the corpus of Life of Christ devotion. I also investigate how male clerics compiled the texts of holy women into formal meditative Life of Christ works, such as *Speculum devotorum.* Additionally, I explore how English women responded to mystical women both in excerpt and in compiled Lives of Christ, which leads me to unpublished texts such as the Holkham Prayer cycle (a Life of Christ text composed by one nun for another) and to women's religious miscellanies containing the material of mystical women.

Critical Context

Studying the intersection of female mystics with mysticism and Life of Christ devotion offers a feminist case study of how religious material created by and for women fits into the wider milieu of medieval culture. My dissertation intervenes in existing scholarship by focusing on the connections between these monumental medieval cultural touchstones and its reliance on understudied aspects of medieval textual culture, namely devotional Lives of Christ and manuscript miscellanies. It would be impossible to fully explore any of these individual aspects of medieval textual and religious culture, but through examining the relationships between Lives of Christ, the transmission of female mystical texts, manuscript culture, and women's spirituality, I provide insight into each aspect that could not be reached by studying the subjects alone. Focusing on the relatively small number of texts and manuscripts that represent the intersection of these monolithic cultural phenomena enables a deeper look into *how* and *why* medieval audiences were so enamored with both visionary women and Christ's life. My textual and material approach investigates both what parts of the massive texts of visionary women are used in particular manuscript contexts, and the material elements of manuscripts, such as the *mis-en-page*, marginalia, and other physical details, provides details about how the readers of individual manuscripts perceived and used the texts of visionary women and lives of Christ. I argue that the

popularity of visionary women and devotion to the Incarnation fed into one another; women's visions of Christ's life encouraged the insatiable desire for more devotional material on the subject, and in turn the fame of the visionary increased.

My dissertation chiefly focuses on two of these visionary women: Saint Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn. While England had its own female mystics, most famously Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, neither of these female authors received wide textual transmission in the medieval period. Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love* is only preserved in one medieval manuscript: the Short Text in London, British Library, MS Additional 37790.[2] Julian's Long Text exists in several post-reformation manuscripts, but as they are not from the medieval period, they are beyond the scope of my study.[3] *The Booke of Margery Kempe* only survives in one manuscript— London, British Library MS Additional 61823— which was created c. 1440-50.[4] In contrast to Julian and Margery, Birgitta and Mechthild enjoyed wide manuscript transmission in England, reaching audiences all over the country.[5] These two continental female mystics had the greatest impact on literary culture in late-medieval England, and they interact the most with Life of Christ devotion. For that reason, they are the visionary focal points of this project. In the following sections of this introduction, I provide a brief overview of the major subjects of the dissertation, followed by an outline of the chapters.

Medieval Mysticism and Spirituality

Medieval mysticism is an enormous cultural phenomenon that influenced art, religion, and literature throughout the high and late medieval periods. Medieval mysticism seeks to describe the ineffable, and it can be rather difficult to define as a result. Vincent Gillespie states, "Mystical texts seek to understand or impressionistically describe moments of intense experience (or the

2. Liz Herbert McAvoy, "Julian of Norwich" in *Medieval Holy Women and the Christian Tradition c.1100-c.1500,* 197.

3. McAvoy, "Julian of Norwich," 197.

4. Anthony Goodman, "Margery Kempe," in *Medieval Holy Women and the Christian Tradition c.1100-c.1500,* 223; 237.

5. See Rosalynn Voaden, "Mechthild of Hackeborn," in *Medieval Holy Women and the Christian Tradition c.1100-c.1500,* 445-7 for descriptions of Mechthild's popularity in Europe and England in particular. See Alexandra Barratt, "Continental Women Mystics and English Readers" in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing,* ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace, Cambridge Companions to Literature, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 244-6; 248-50 for more on Mechthild and the Helfta women as well as Birgitta of Sweden's popularity in England.

transcendence of experience)."[6] Nicholas Watson says that mysticism has two characteristics: "First, these writings are phenomenological, concerning individual felt experience in addition to systems of knowledge or belief. Second, they represent this experience as transcendent, involving an encounter—whether direct or mediated, transformatively powerful or paradoxically everyday—with God."[7] Both Gillespie and Watson make a distinction between mysticism and contemplation. Gillespie says that "Contemplation might usefully be thought of as a state (perhaps transient, only occasionally achieved, and often fleeting) or a way of life (vowed, professed, or aspired to) of preparing and readying the soul to receive whatever sight, sound, word or revelation might appear to be offered in a mystical experience."[8] Thus, *mysticism* refers both to the experience of having a transcendent encounter with the divine and the attempt to articulate this experience for the consumption of others in text or speech. *Contemplation,* then, is the courting of such a mystical experience through some sort of mental or physical preparation. These contemplative practices can be in-the-moment practices such as reading, prayer, or fasting, or lifestyle changes such as taking the vows of a religious life or becoming a recluse.

Though mysticism and contemplation are distinct processes, contemplation and mystical experiences can form a cyclical process. Julian of Norwich describes it here:

> But whan our curtes Lord of His grace shewith Hymselfe to eur soule, we have what we desire, and than we se not for the tyme what we shuld more pray, but al our entent with al our myte is sett holy to the beholdyng of Hym, and this is an hey, unperceyvable prayor as to my syte. For al the cause wherfor we prayen, it is onyd into the syte and beholdyng of Hym to whome we prayen, mervelously enjoyand with reverent drede and so grete sweteness and delite in Hym, that we can pray ryth nowte but as He steryth us for the tyme.[9]

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6. Vincent Gillespie, "Preface," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ix.

7. Nicholas Watson, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, 1.

8. Gillespie, "Preface," x. See also Watson's discussion of the development of contemplative practice in his "Introduction" to the same volume, 11-14.

9. Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich,* ed. Georgia Ronan Crampton, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), line 1510, page 92.

Julian describes the state of contemplation as prayer that opens up the soul to God. The mystical experience here is the "beholding" of God, which produces an overwhelming, "unperceiviable" effect in the beholder. This experience goes beyond the earthly senses, and it is enabled by God, but it produces "sweetness" and "delight" for the person who experiences it. Though mystical experiences do not necessarily need the preparation of contemplation, nor does every contemplative state result in a mystical beholding of God, this passage describes the medieval ideal of contemplation and mystical experience. For the purposes of this dissertation, I am chiefly interested in the interaction of mysticism and its practices with gender, as well as its effects on literary and textual cultures in late-medieval England.

Literary Mysticism

The literature of the fifteenth century benefits and suffers from the legacy of literary mysticism in medieval England. Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, mystical literature gained popularity among religious and laypeople alike. Mystical texts from English writers such as Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* were produced to meet the demand of readers who wanted to use mystical techniques to encounter God. Part manuals for contemplative and meditative technique, part sensory and narrative accounts of subjects on which to meditate, literary mysticism aimed to make contemplative union with God more accessible even as it lamented the ineffability of mystical experience. Though the literary mystical tradition continued in a limited form in the fifteenth century, worries about the Wycliffite heresy led to sharp censorship of literary material.

The practices of mystical meditation originated in monastic practices of reading and study. Reading was a twofold process for monastics; it was "a complex activity involving both an oral phase, that of *lectio*, and a silent one, of *meditatio,* committing the substance of the text to memory in mental images that enable one to mull it over and make it one's own."[10] *Meditatio* took much longer, as one digested and incorporated the text: "Reading is to be digested, to be ruminated, like a cow chewing her cud, or like a bee making honey from the nectar of flowers. … It is both physiological and psychological, and it changes both the food and its consumer."[11]

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10. Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed., Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature. (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2008), 276.

11. Carruthers, 205.

However, the physical and literary qualities of the text could help the process of *meditatio* along. The "two gates of access" to the memory are the eyes and ears.[12] A text can enter these gates either physically, as when one sees an illustration or hears a story read aloud, or mentally, such as when one imagines the City of Troy from a description or imaginatively hears an instrument.[13] Because of this, the "vividness" of a book was a "much prized quality" because it takes hold "as though they were happening before one's very eyes and ears" (Carruthers 278).

The process of *meditatio* evolved into a genre of literature in the twelfth century, with Anselm's *Orationes sive meditationes* as the first work to claim the term.[14] It began as "contemplative works which recorded an individual speaker's private communion with his soul or with the deity," but over time they became "compendious" and were "systematic, even mechanistic in form," narrated by "a somewhat detached didactic voice instructing the reader in the techniques of meditation through precept and example."[15] In a parallel development, meditations dealing with "self-examination as part of or prefatory to penitential discipline" grew more popular.[16]

As the genre grew, the contemplative methods became centered in the imagination and the emotions. Michelle Karnes describes the cognitive aspects of *meditatio,* though she does acknowledge that "Affect and intellect more often complement each other in medieval texts than not."[17] Imagination forms the bridge between the senses and the intellect in medieval thought, making it essential to any act of understanding.[18] In meditation, "imagination became a vehicle by which divine influence reached individuals as it became a means to reverse direction and facilitate human contemplation of the divine."[19] In her influential book on affect and *meditatio*, Sarah McNamer argues that affective meditative texts serve as "'intimate scripts': they are quite literally scripts for the performance of feeling."[20] These emotional scripts, she says, encourage

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12. Carruthers, 277.
13. Carruthers, 277.
14. Thomas H. Bestul, "Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* and the Late-Medieval Tradition of Religious Meditation," *Speculum* 64, no. 3 (July 1989): 601.
15. Bestul, "Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*" 601-2.
16. Bestul, "Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*" 603.
17. Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 16.
18. Karnes, 41.
19. Karnes, 61.
20. Sarah McNamer,. *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 12.

readers to perform emotions so that eventually, the performance will become genuine: this is how one learns emotional as well as theological truth.[21] Therefore, the imaginative process that the reader goes through in meditation is the simple visualization of the scene described, then imagining their own presence in the scene. Once they accomplish this, they can perform the emotions that accompany the scene they witness with the hope that they will become genuine. Emotions go beyond the mere visual power of the imagination, so the genuine feelings are the key to passing beyond the bodily experience to the spiritual understanding behind the image. Through imaginative thought leading to emotional response, a person could draw closer to God.

As meditation became more popular as a technique, the life and humanity of Christ became one of the main subjects of this meditative process. Bonaventure, who was so influential in shaping Franciscan spirituality and the Life of Christ genre, took the idea that "Christ particpates repeatedly and profoundly in every act of human knowledge" from Augustinian theology and transformed Christ into the species, or "cognitive representations that convey sensory and intellectual data about an object" for meditative success.[22] When one imagines Christ's life, it spurs spiritual development because "as species direct the mind back to its originating object, so Christ leads the individual back to God."[23] Meditations on Christ's life also "appealed to people's need to be led into scriptural events in a personalized, individual way," as Hennessey describes.[24] These meditations "were designed to arouse compassion in their readers and also to make the biblical past fresh, immediate, and alive."[25] These qualities became especially important in late-medieval England.

In the late-medieval period, literacy, in Latin and more commonly in the vernacular, became more common among the general population instead of remaining the province of the learned and the religious.[26] In the profusion of devotional literature that followed this increase in

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21. McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 13.
22. Karnes, 65; 92.
23. Karnes, 99.
24. Marlene Villalobos Hennessy, "Passion Devotion, Penitential Reading, and the Manuscript Page: 'The Hours of the Cross' in London, British Library Additional 37049," *Mediaeval Studies* 66 (January 2004): 215.
25. Hennessy, 215.
26. Andrew Taylor, "Authors, Scribes, Patrons, and Books."*The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*. ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Andrew Taylor, Nicholas Watson, and Ruth Evans (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 356.

literacy, monastic meditation became more democratized. Devotional literature in the vernacular often used the same sources as literature in Latin but had a gendered element because a large section of it was written for nuns and other devout women. Some of the gendered elements of vernacular devotional literature were related to language alone. Alexandra Barratt points out that meditations on the life of Christ were recommended reading for women because they generally could not read Latin very well; since the translation of scripture into the vernacular was forbidden and therefore they could not read scripture directly, lack of Latinity presented a problem for religious women.[27] They also could not read the Latin devotional works circulating through Europe without a translation. However, translations of Latin Lives of Christ and other devotional literature, as well as works composed in the vernacular, could act as a stand in for direct contemplation of Latin scriptures. Laypeople and women could also imaginatively participate in prayer and contemplation of images rather than books for similar contemplative effects, where the reader is to "focus on the suffering of Christ instead of the more traditional meditative exercise derived from reflection and rumination on a text."[28] Therefore, in the late-medieval period, contemplative experiences went from being the sole province of God's chosen few to being theoretically accessible to everyone. Part of this accessibility was achieved through a concentration on the life and humanity of Christ.

Lives of Christ

In the late-medieval period, devotion to the incarnation and humanity of Jesus Christ became the focal point of worship and devotion in Western Christianity. As Ian Johnson says, in the Middle Ages, "Christ's life was the model for all human conduct and self-understanding. Christ… was the basis, means, and end of human identity, ethics, happiness, self-understanding, and all meaningfulness in life and beyond."[29] Gospel harmonies, which combined the four biblical books into one cohesive narrative, were composed as early as the second century by those

27. Alexandra Barratt. "'Take a Book and Read': Advice for Religious Women." In *Texts and Traditions of Medieval Pastoral Care: Essays in Honour of Bella Millett,* edited by Catherine Gunn, Catherine Innes-Parker, and Catherine York, (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), 196.

28. Vincent Gillespie. "'Lukynge in Haly Bukes': Lectio in Some Late Medieval Spiritual Miscellanies." *Analecta Cartusiana* 106, no. 2 (1970): 10.

29. Ian Johnson, *The Middle English Life of Christ: Academic Discourse, Translation, and Vernacular Theology*, Medieval Church Studies 30, (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013), 5.

studying scripture.[30] These gospel harmonies quickly developed further, incorporating "apocryphal, homiletic, and meditative material."[31] By the eleventh century, Christ's life was used as a basis for the church year's liturgy and practice, cementing the importance of Christ's life in the Catholic Church.[32] In the Eastern church, a focus on the Virgin and her compassion for Christ's suffering during the Passion developed from the seventh to the ninth centuries.[33] Stephen Shoemaker identifies the earliest example of what is known as affective piety in the Western tradition in a seventh-century *Life of the Virgin* attributed to Maximus the Confessor.[34] This life includes "an effusive meditation on the Passion as seen through Mary's tearful eyes."[35] The biography influenced sermons and other Lives of the Virgin in the Eastern church during the Byzantine Iconoclastic period.[36] Greek traditions gained influence in the Western church in the tenth and eleventh centuries, as "There was, moreover, a new spirit in Western monasticism of this age that deeply admired and longed for the spiritual austerity of Eastern ascetic practice, and thus Greek monks were welcomed into Western religious communities and revered for their preservation of the ancient monastic tradition."[37] This migration of monks and traditions coincides with the shift in Lives of Christ toward a more contemplative and affective focus, as characterized by the prayers of Anselm of Canterbury. In the thirteenth century, Franciscan spirituality further developed

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30. Elizabeth Salter, *Nicholas Love's "Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ."* Analecta Cartusiana 10. (Salzburg: Universitat Salzburg, 1974), 57.

31. Salter, "Nicholas Love's '*Myrrour*,'" 57.

32. Salter, "Nicholas Love's '*Myrrour*,'" 58.

33. S. J. Shoemaker, "Mary at the Cross, East and West: Maternal Compassion and Affective Piety in the Earliest Life of the Virgin and the High Middle Ages," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 62, no. 2 (October 1, 2011): 573.

34. Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Introduction," in *The Life of the Virgin*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 1-35. Shoemaker's claims about the seventh-century date as well as his attribution of the text to Maximus the Confessor are questioned by Phil Booth, who argues that Maximus' authorship is "almost impossible" (164). Shoemaker refutes Booth and reinforces his attribution and dating of the work in a responsive article. See Phil Booth, "On the Life of the Virgin Attributed to Maximus Confessor," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (April 1, 2015): 149–203; and Stephen J. Shoemaker, "The (Pseudo?-)Maximus *Life of the Virgin* and the Byzantine Marian Tradition," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 67, no. 1 (April 2016): 115–42.

35. Shoemaker, "Mary at the Cross, East and West," 579.

36. Shoemaker, "Mary at the Cross, East and West," 576. cf. Vasilakē, Maria, and Niki Tsironis. "Representations of the Virgin and Their Association with the Passion of Christ." In *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vasilakē and Mouseio Benakē. (New York: Abbeville Pub. Group, 2000), 453-63.

37. Shoemaker, "Mary at the Cross, East and West," 597.

this contemplative view of Christ's life, adding further apocryphal and imaginative details designed to engage with readers' emotions. This movement produced perhaps the most influential Life of Christ, the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditaciones Vitae Christi (MVC).*[38]

In England, as in the rest of Europe, there are many iterations of this devotional genre in both Latin and in the vernacular. Elizabeth Salter separates the Life of Christ genre into four groups in both Latin and Middle English: informative works, works that present Christ's life with learned commentary and interpretation, vernacular poems like the *Stanzaic Life of Christ* which are meant for a general audience and incorporate apocryphal material, and lives for meditative purposes.[39] For this project, "the Life of Christ genre" will largely refer to the meditative branch of these texts which share a meditative and affective purpose as well as a joint concentration on the life and humanity of Christ. These meditative Lives of Christ were very popular in late-medieval England, with its most prominent instance, Nicholas Love's *Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ,* extant in almost fifty manuscripts.[40]

Visionaries

As a subset of my study of women's religious culture, I focus on the proliferation of people—and especially women—who experienced religious visions. Barbara Newman, in her influential article on the subject, points out that "vision recitals are the sole medieval genre dominated by women."[41] Newman describes visions and visionaries as "a specialized religious subculture that included not only an array of theories to interpret it but also techniques to facilitate it," contextualizing the array of theoretical literature and contemplative pieces that this subculture produced.[42] In an attempt to define the sprawling phenomenon of visionary literature, Newman develops a typology of visions, which have four characteristics: The first is that visions can happen

38. For a more thorough overview of the development of the Life of Christ genre, see Caitlin Branum Thrash, "The Life and Passion of Christ in the Middle Ages." In *The Encyclopedia of the Global Middle Ages,* ed. Danna R. Messer. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

39. Salter, 73; 78; 84; 97.

40. Salter, 10.

41. Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80, no. 1 (2005): 1–2.

42. Newman, "What Did it Mean to Say 'I Saw,'" 2.

without warning, and are "paranormal" in nature.[43] The second is that they are “fruits of a complex spiritual discipline.”[44] The third component is the “aesthetic... of artistic refinement,” by which she means that medieval visionary writings often conform to a certain artistic form, either by mimicking “conventional types” or developing a “highly stylized” internal schema.[45] Finally, the most important element is “the supernatural” in that they claimed wholeheartedly “that their experiences whether spontaneous or cultivated, derived solely from the grace of God and by no means from their own imagination, learning, devout meditation, or artistic skill, however much those qualities may be apparent to the reader.... To endorse this claim normally meant to endorse the trustworthiness or even the saintliness of a visionary, whereas to reject it meant to cast aspersions on her veracity, probity, or mental health.”[46]

The supernatural, and specifically heavenly, origin of visions was the most important factor both because the visionaries were likened to biblical prophets and because it granted authority to women without upsetting the clerical hierarchy into which they were not admitted.[47] After the twelfth century, women’s ability to participate in the rituals of the Catholic church was severely diminished: women could not preach, distribute communion, hear confessions, or preside over liturgical services.[48] In this dearth of opportunity, “women sought for themselves roles which were encouraged—or at least not actively discouraged—by the ecclesiastical establishment” which often involved ways to “exploit, transcend, and even defy the strategies of control which had developed in late medieval theology and canon law.”[49] Likening visionaries to biblical prophets allowed them to circumvent ecclesiastical authority because their authority was derived straight from God, as Claire Sahlin describes in the case of Birgitta of Sweden: “Birgitta is continually depicted as an inspired prophet in the Old Testament sense of the term—a conduit of divine revelation who serves as God's messenger of judgement and repentance. The *Revelations* portray her as the recipient of the highest degree of prophecy with a mission as monumental as

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43. Newman, “What Did it Mean to Say ‘I Saw,’” 3.
44. Newman, “What Did it Mean to Say ‘I Saw,’” 3.
45. Newman, “What Did it Mean to Say ‘I Saw,’” 3-4.
46. Newman, “What Did it Mean to Say ‘I Saw,’” 4.
47. Newman, “What Did it Mean to Say ‘I Saw,’” 5.
48. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, “Introduction,” in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c.1100-c.1500*, eds. Alastiar Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 3.
49. Minnnis and Voaden, 3.

the biblical prophets, apostles, and evangelists."[50] Holy women and visionaries were often also seen as specialists in prayer and intervention. C. Annette Grisé states that the visionary's "mystical relationship with the divine places her in the privileged position of intercessor and authority, both mediating between the reader and God and instructing pious Christians on devotional practices."[51] Newman points out that holy women were particularly valued for their ability to intervene on behalf of souls in Purgatory, even challenging God in extreme cases.[52]

Scrutiny of visionary women increased over the course of the medieval period until it reached its height in the fifteenth century, as Margery Kempe famously experienced in her confrontation with the Archbishop of York.[53] When the Archbishop commands Margery not to preach, she refuses, saying "'Nay syr, I schal not sweryn,' she seyde, 'for I schal specyn of God and undirnemyn hem that sweryn gret othys wheresoevyr I go unto the tyme that the pope and holy chirche hath ordeynde that no man schal be so hardy to spekyn of God, for God almythy forbedith it not, ser, that we schal speke of hym."[54] This rebuttal provokes one of the clerics in the room to call her possessed: "'A ser' seyd the clerkys, 'her wot we wel that sche hath a devyl wythinne hir, for she spekyth of the gospel.'"[55] Margery's confrontation and the clerk's accusation illustrate the dangers that holy women sometimes encountered. Margery insists upon her orthodoxy and divine inspiration, and of course she records the incident in her own book. The main way that visionary women influenced the way that the Church saw them and their visions was through their texts, whether they authored the works themselves or whether their followers wrote about their lives.

The concept of authorship for visionary women is complicated. Female mystics, English and continental, rarely wrote their own texts in a physical sense. Instead, they often had a male

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50. Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, Studies in Medieval Mysticism 3 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), 35.

51. C. Annette Grisé, "Continental Holy Women and the Textual Relics of Prayers in Late-Medieval England," in *The Medieval Translator, 10/ Traduire Au Moyen Age, 10,* eds. Jacqueline Jenkins & Olivier Bertrand (Turnhout : Brepols, 2007), 165-6.

52. Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 123-4.

53. Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Staley, Middle English Texts, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 126.

54. Kempe, ed. Staley, 126.

55. Kempe, ed. Staley, 126.

confessor or other cleric who would act as an amanuensis, writing down the woman's visions as she dictated them, or translating them from the vernacular into Latin for wider consumption. This was the case for Birgitta of Sweden, for instance.[56] Such a composition process creates problems of interpretation for modern scholars. Hence, it can be difficult, for example, to sort out what parts of the published *Liber caelestis* stem purely from Birgitta and what parts are from her editors.[57] More recent scholarship has moved from trying to differentiate the voice of the female mystic from that of her confessor, instead arguing for "some evidence of a collaborative relationship."[58] This view seems to more accurately reflect that of medieval audiences, for they seem not to have found issue with the potential changes in the composition and editorial process. For instance, Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena's editors were very concerned about the method with which the holy woman composed and presented her text, especially during the canonization process: "in an unprecedented way, their followers made publication of manuscripts of their writings central to the campaigns for their canonizations: Birgitta and Catherine were promoted as authors at the same time as they were promoted as saints. That Birgitta and Catherine were authors clearly mattered to the communities that participated in both the creation and the dissemination of their writings."[59] As Minnis points out, the presentation of female authors as

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56. The exception to the case mentioned above is Mechthild of Hackeborn, whose sisters at Helfta were her recorders, the most notable of whom was her fellow mystic, Gertrude the Great. See Teresa A. Halligan, "Introduction," in *The Booke of Gostlye Grace of Mechthild of Hackeborn,* Studies and Texts 46, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1979), 37, for a description of this process.

57. For scholarship on the composition process and editorial influences on the *Liber caelestis,* see Hans Alii, "Alfonso's Editorial Work in the Liber Ad Reges: A Pitfall for Vernacular Translators?" in *The Translation of the Works of St. Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars*, The Medieval Translator 7, ed. Bridget Morris and Veronica O'Mara, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 25–42; Bridget Morris "General Introduction" in *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume I: Liber caelestis, Books I–III* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9-15; Catherine M. Mooney, ed. *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.)

58. F. Thomas Luongo, "Catherine of Siena: *Auctor"* in *Women Intellectuals and Leaders in the Middle Ages*, 101; see also John Coakley, "Women's Textual Authority and the Collaboration of Clerics," in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c.1100-c.1500*, 83-104.

59. F. Thomas Luongo, "Birgitta and Catherine and Their Textual Communities," in *Sanctity and Female Authorship: Birgitta of Sweden & Catherine of Siena*, ed. Maria H. Oen, and Unn Falkeid, (New York: Routledge, 2019), 29. For more on Birgitta in particular, see F. Thomas Luongo, "Inspiration and Imagination: Visionary Authorship in the Early Manuscripts of the Revelations of Birgitta of Sweden," *Speculum* 93, no. 4 (2018), 1102–50. Note the section

prophets, whose authority comes directly from God, "constituted a form of *publicatio* or 'making public' which audiences could read (and hear read aloud) without worrying about the general prohibition of female teaching in public."[60] Formulating a visionary woman's authority through the canonization process validated the women's visions and allowed their experiences to be shared on a much wider scale.

Over time, women's visionary literature took on characteristics of its own. Barbara Zimbalist argues that though it began in hagiography, by the fifteenth century it had developed into its own "literary mode."[61] Like Newman, she develops a list of characteristics for this literary mode, which is worth quoting at length:

> (1) The text depicts a woman receiving devotional instruction from Christ in a vision. (2) The female visionary hears this devotional guidance spoken directly by Christ and (3) describes that devotion as taking verbal form. … Further, (4) the visionary narrator stands as a devotional model meant for readers to imitate while (5) locating the performance of her spoken devotion in the future beyond the text. At the same time, (6) it positions itself within a gendered canon of visionary literacy, and finally (7), it authorizes speech and literacy as divinely approved devotional practices, in the vernacular, for female readers.[62]

Zimbalist's list is a useful tool for describing women's visionary literature, though I would add that the visionary often interacts with figures such as the Virgin Mary and other saints. However, this list is also helpful because it highlights the fact that women recorded their visions for a communal purpose, whether it be for the edification of the immediate community — such as Mechthild's monastery at Helfta— or for the guidance of wider society—Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena both had visions that were meant for political and religious leaders.[63] Most

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on how the illuminated initials in some of the earliest manuscripts of Birgitta's revelations are used to construct her visionary authority.

60. Alastair Minnis, "Religious Roles: Public and Private," in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c.1100-c.1500*, 62.

61. Barbara Erin Zimbalist, *Translating Christ in the Middle Ages: Gender, Authorship, and the Visionary Text*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022) 6.

62. Zimbalist, *Translating Christ,* 2.

63. Birgitta and Catherine were both concerned with the Great Schism of the papacy, and Birgitta had visions about the Hundred Years War. See F. Thomas Luongo, "The Historical Reception of Catherine of Siena," in *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, ed. Carolyn Muessig,

importantly, it demonstrates that women's visionary texts were intentionally designed with a significant devotional component for their audiences. While visionary women recorded their visions to establish their authenticity and authority, they also did it so that others could benefit spiritually from their revelations. This devotional component was perhaps the most influential one because it led to their popularity in late-medieval culture.

Birgitta of Sweden

Birgitta was a Swedish noblewoman born in 1302 or 1303 in Uppland.[64] She married Ulf Gudmarsson in 1316 and had eight children with him.[65] During her marriage, she lived at the Swedish court and served as a mentor to Queen Blanche.[66] She and her husband took a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in 1341, and he became very ill in Arras on the way home.[67] After Ulf's illness, he and Birgitta swore a vow of chastity, and upon their return to Sweden lived near the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra.[68] Ulf died in the mid 1340s, and soon after Birgitta experienced a "calling vision" to become the *sponsa et canale* [spouse and channel] of Christ.[69]

There are some records of Birgitta experiencing visions before her calling, but afterwards, she pursued the life of a holy woman wholeheartedly. She gathered her first clerical supporters—Master Mathias Ovidi, Prior Petrus Olavi, and Master Petrus Olavi—within the next few years, and lived near Alvastra Abbey until 1349.[70] In that year, she and her clerical entourage moved to Rome, never to return to Sweden.[71] While she was in Rome, she made pilgrimages to holy sites in the city and throughout Italy.[72] She also established connections with the nobility, campaigned for the papacy to return to Rome from Avignon, and worked to establish her

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Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 32 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 23-45 and Unn Falkheid, "The Political Discourse of Birgitta of Sweden" in *A Companion to Birgitta of Sweden and Her Legacy in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Maria H. Oen, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, volume 89 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2019), 80-102.

64. Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*, Studies in Medieval Mysticism 1 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 35.
65. Morris, 40; See 46-52 for short biographies of Birgitta's children.
66. Morris, 57.
67. Morris, 59.
68. Morris, 60.
69. Morris, 60-1; 64.
70. Morris, 91.
71. Morris, 93.
72. Morris, 100.

monastic Rule.[73] In 1367/8, Birgitta met Alfonso of Jaén, who became her confessor and chief editor.[74] She completed a pilgrimage to the Holy Land from 1371-2, where she had many visions that pertained to Christ's life and Passion.[75]

Birgitta died in Rome in 1373, and her remains were translated to Vadstena, where the motherhouse of her monastic order was being established, in 1374.[76] Her followers applied for her canonization in 1377 and 1378, but the outbreak of the Great Schism complicated the process.[77] Birgitta was canonized in 1391.

Birgitta's Rule, which was revealed to her as part of her visions, and her visionary texts in general gained great popularity throughout Europe, and there are at least 180 Latin manuscripts of various redactions of her writings. In England, Birgitta's popularity was enhanced by the foundation of Syon Abbey, the only Birgittine monastery in England, in 1415.[78] Henry V established it along with the Carthusian Sheen monastery, and Syon quickly became one of the richest and most visited monastic houses in England. Syon was a double order focused on contemplation.[79] It quickly became known as a nexus of books and texts with a particular focus on mystical and religious works, which is appropriate for its mystical patron saint.[80] Birgitta's works circulated widely in England, more often in excerpts than *in toto* due to the sheer volume of her writings.[81]

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73. Morris, 99-117.
74. Morris, 118-20.
75. Morris, 122-139.
76. Morris, 141-2.
77. For a detailed account of the canonization process and how Birgitta's supporters handled it, see Arne Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén: His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi*, Studia Graeca et Latina Lundensia 1 (Lund: Lund University Press, 1989).
78. Christopher De Hamel, *Syon Abbey: The Library of the Bridgettine Nuns and Their Peregrinations After the Reformation*. (Otley: The Roxburghe Club, 1991), 51-2.
79. De Hamel, *Syon Abbey,* 52.
80. For an account of the development of the Syon Library, see Vincent Gillespie, "Introduction" in *Syon Abbey,* eds. Vincent Gillespie and A. I. Doyle, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 9 (London: British Library in association with the British Academy, 2001), xxix-lxv.
81. Roger Ellis, "'Flores Ad Fabricandum ... Coronam:' An Investigation into the Uses of the Revelations of Saint Birgitta of Sweden in Fifteenth-Century England," *Medium Ævum* 51, no. 2 (1982): 166.

Mechthild of Hackeborn

Mechthild of Hackeborn was a thirteenth-century visionary nun at the Benedictine/Cistercian monastery of Helfta in Germany. She and her sister Gertrude were the daughters of the baron of Hackeborn-Wippra; Gertrude joined a nunnery as a young girl, and when Mechthild went to visit her at the age of seven, she refused to leave.[82] Mechthild became the chantress and choir mistress at Helfta.[83] In this position, she directed the choir, maintained the liturgical books of the monastery, oversaw the library and scriptorium, and taught the novices.[84] She experienced visions from a young age, but kept them a secret until 1291, when at the age of fifty she became ill and spoke of them.[85] Her sisters recorded her visions from her recounting of them, first in secret and then with Mechthild's permission. Mechthild was initially "anxious and upset" at her visions being recorded, but Christ reassured her in a vision that he wanted her revelations to be recorded.[86]

Helfta was known as a center of women's learning and mysticism. Aside from Mechthild herself, it provided shelter for another visionary, Mechthild of Magdeburg, who is known for her vernacular *The Flowing Light of the Godhead,* and it was home to Mechthild of Hackeborn's mystical successor, Gertrude the Great.[87] The original Latin text of Mechthild's book, the *Liber specialis gratiae,* or *LSG*, consists of seven parts and was completed shortly after Mechthild's death in 1298. Because of its orthodoxy and its compelling images of heavenly glory, intimacy with Christ, and the sacred heart of Jesus, it was very popular in late-medieval Europe.[88] The *LSG* came to England in the early fifteenth century, largely through textual exchange networks

82. Barbara Newman, "Introduction," *The Book of Special Grace*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York ; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2017), 2.

83. Rosalynn Voaden, "Mechthild of Hackeborn," in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c.1100-c.1500*, eds. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, Brepols Essays in European Cuture 1 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 432.

84. Newman, "Introduction," 4.

85. Voaden, "Mechthild of Hackeborn," 432.

86. Voaden, "Mechthild of Hackeborn," 433.

87. Voaden, "Mechthild of Hackeborn," 433.

88. Margarete Hubrath, "The *Liber Specialis Gratiae* as a Collective Work of Several Nuns," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft*, vol. 11, 1999, 233; Liz Herbert McAvoy, "'O Der Lady, Be My Help': Women's Visionary Writing and the Devotional Literary Canon," *Chaucer Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism*, vol. 51, no. 1, (2016), 71.

among the Carthusians.[89] It was very popular at Syon Abbey, and it spread through their extensive textual network.[90] There is a Middle English translation of the *LSG,* called *The Booke of Gostlye Grace,* which translates the abridged version of the Mechthild's work and contains only five parts.[91]

Women's Religious Culture

Though this project makes no attempt to cover or define the entirety of medieval female spirituality, women's spiritual culture, particularly as it relates to mysticism, is a major theme. The foundational text for studying women's religious culture in the Middle Ages is Caroline Walker Bynum's magisterial *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.[92] Bynum's study of the significance of food in women's spirituality led to a reframing of their embodiment and physicality as it relates to God:

> When women spoke of abstinence, of Eucharistic ecstasy, of curing and healing through food, they called it *imitatio Christi*. "Imitation" meant union—fusion—with that ultimate body which is the body of Christ. The goal of religious women was thus to realize the opportunity of physicality. They strove not to eradicate body but to merge their own humiliating and painful flesh with that flesh whose agony, espoused by choice, was salvation. Luxuriating in Christ's physicality, they found there the lifting up—the redemption—of their own.[93]

Bynum's study places women's spiritual practice firmly within the experiences of the physical body as a locus for divine unity. Her theories provide a useful framework for describing

89. Rosalynn Voaden, "The Company She Keeps: Mechthild of Hackeborn in Late- Medieval Devotional Compilations" in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England,* ed. Rosalynn Voaden, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 65-6.

90. Voaden, "The Company She Keeps," 66.

91. Mechthild of Hackeborn, *The Booke of Gostlye Grace of Mechthild of Hackeborn*, ed. Theresa A Halligan, Studies and Texts ; 46 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1979).

92. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, The New Historicism : Studies in Cultural Poetics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

93. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 246.

the elements of medieval women's spirituality that seem strange to modern people: extreme fasting, desire for spiritual unity with Christ expressed in physical terms, eroticism, and even physical mortification. Bynum's theories exemplified and prompted a scholarly outpouring of studies on the relationship of medieval women to physicality. In recent scholarship, however, "scholars have questioned whether it runs the risk of essentializing women and whether, in its most pronounced form, it can also bracket out women's intellectual, political, and spiritual lives, or dimensions of them."[94] Of course, there are middle grounds. For instance, Nancy Bradley Warren offers the concept of incarnational piety and epistemology: "By *incarnational piety,* I mean devotional practices and forms of spirituality focused on embodied interactions with holy bodies, especially those of Christ and the Virgin Mary. … *Incarnational epistemology* refers to processes of knowledge production and acquisition grounded in corporeal, sensual, and affective experiences."[95] Incarnational piety and epistemology lead to incarnational textuality, in which "Incarnational texts catalyze intersubjective relations and enable readers, through knowing another's embodied experiences textually, to participate in those experiences."[96] Warren's approach blends bodily experience and the more ephemeral realms of piety and textuality, so that physical embodiment becomes a method for accessing intellectual and spiritual ideas rather than physicality being the goal in itself.

Rather than making a distinction between the body and the mind in women's spirituality, I aim for a more holistic approach. Pious medieval women often sought unity with Christ, a unity which would subsume any delineation between parts of the self. Medieval women's spirituality dealt with bodily experiences and symbols, but it also involved intellectual and spiritual engagement that goes beyond the body's borders. In practice, the best form of piety involved all aspects of the self, from the body to the para-physical environment—such as speech and sensual experience—to the entirely spiritual realm of contemplative practices. The examples of medieval holy women that Bynum, Warren, and others bring up in their studies demonstrate that individual

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94. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, "Taking Early Women Intellectuals and Leaders Seriously," in *Women Intellectuals and Leaders in the Middle Ages*, eds. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, and John Van Engen, (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), 7.

95. Nancy Bradley Warren, *The Embodied Word: Female Spiritualities, Contested Orthodoxies, and English Religious Cultures, 1350-1700* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 7.

96. Warren, *The Embodied Word*, 42.

women relied on different aspects of their experiences to access the divine. Pious medieval women's overall goal of achieving intimacy or unity with Christ seems to be a universal trait, however it is achieved.

Though this project focuses on women's religious and textual cultures, it is by no means an attempt to discern a monolithic "female piety" of the late-medieval period. To make these claims would be to ignore the individuality of experience in this period and would certainly stretch the available evidence beyond its usefulness. There is also the danger of modern-day essentialism. Howard R. Bloch, in his book on misogyny in the Middle Ages, defines misogyny as "a speech act in which woman is the subject of the sentence and the predicate a more general term; or alternatively, as the use of the substantive woman or women with a capital W" (5). This generalization of language, he argues, is the root of misogyny because it denies the existence and experience of the individual woman, lumping her into a category that can be discriminated against. Instead of forming a united theory of female authorship and piety, this dissertation will build on the burgeoning work that has already been done by Alexandra Barratt, Veronica O'Mara, Ann Hutchison, Catherine Innes-Parker, Rebecca Krug, Rosalynn Voaden, and others on the history of women's literacy and textual cultures by doing a series of case studies on individual texts and manuscripts.

Women's Literacy in Late-medieval England

Education and Literacy in General

The ideas of literacy, book ownership, and writing were vastly different in the Middle Ages than they are today, and these ideas also changed over the course of the medieval period. Changes in time, technology, and culture impacted how medieval people wrote, read, and produced books, and throughout that time wider cultural elements such as class, gender, and education also affected individuals and their ability to read and write in various languages. Generally, when one thinks about medieval literacy, one must remember that reading and writing were not necessarily commensurate skills.[97] Also, one must recall that when medieval scholars discuss literacy, they specifically refer to Latin literacy, not the ability to read and/or write the vernacular.

97. M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307*, 3rd ed (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 234.

The terms *clericus* and *litteratus* were generally interchangeable, which meant that medieval religious churchmen, whether they were secular clergy or monastics, were literate in terms of understanding Latin.[98] They were also men. Reading, writing, and book production were almost exclusively the province of male monastics in the early Middle Ages.[99] Though monastic book production continued throughout the medieval period, in the later medieval period it became more common for monastic houses to hire professionals to produce books.[100] By the fifteenth century, monastic establishments in England did not usually produce their own manuscripts, instead ordering them from scribes and book merchants.[101] However, the ability to read, and especially to read Latin, remained the hallmark of male religious throughout the period.

Laypeople received much less formal instruction in literacy than religious people. However, they often achieved a degree of practical literacy, and their ability to read, especially in the vernacular, increased with time. Laymen of high and noble status were much more likely to be literate in both Latin and the vernacular than those of lower classes, as was the case, for example, in the court of Henry II, where "there was school every day."[102] There were schools in late-medieval England for lay and religious students alike.[103] However, very basic education in literacy seems to have happened at home, with mothers using Books of Hours, ABC primers, and foundational prayers like the *Pater Noster* to teach children.[104] This foundation was followed by instruction in a school, which was taught in English by 1358, and could be attended by boys and

98. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record,* 229. This assumption was by no means universal on an individual level, and there were many issues with priests especially who did not understand Latin.

99. A. I. Doyle, "Book Production by Monastic Orders in England (c. 1375-1530): Assessing the Evidence," in *Medieval Book Production : Assessing the Evidence : Proceedings of the Second Conference of the Seminar in the History of the Book to 1500* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1990), 1.

100. A. I. Doyle, "Book Production by Monastic Orders in England" 1.

101. See Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin, "Introduction," in *The Production of Books in England 1350-1500,* eds. Gillespie and Wakelin (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1-11, for a useful overview of these changes in production.

102. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record,* 237.

103. Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). See in particular chapter 7, "Schools from 1350-1530" (218-54) for a discussion of the late-medieval period.

104. M. T. Clanchy, *Looking Back from the Invention of Printing: Mothers and the Teaching of Reading in the Middle Ages*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 40 (Turnhout,

girls alike. Girls usually did not to continue to grammar school to learn Latin as boys did, however.[105] They were also forbidden from the universities, which led to their exclusion from scholastic literary culture. However, as D. H. Green points out, this exclusion meant that women's reading continued in the meditative monastic model rather than veering towards scholastic rationality: "Lacking access to higher education, women could claim, like monks, to belong to the *schola Christi*…What in the eyes of not just the world but of educated male clerics placed these women in a disadvantageous position could be turned into one of spiritual strength, as late medieval religious movements were to show."[106] Though the education and literacy of lay folk increased over the course of the medieval period, it remained true that men had more formal educational opportunities than women, especially when it came to learning Latin.

From writers in the Middle Ages to modern scholarship, it is a widely-held assumption that medieval women could not read Latin. The translator/compiler of the *Myroure of Oure Lady,* a translation of the Birgittine Rule into Middle English for the nuns of Syon Abbey, says that "Forasmoche as many of you, though ye can synge and rede, yet ye can not se what the meanynge therof ys: therefore the onely worshyp and preysyng of oure lorde Iesu chyste and of hys moste mercyfull mother oure lady and to the gostly comforte and profyte of youre soules I have drawen youre legende and all youre servyce into Englyshe."[107] The production of this book supposes that the majority of medieval English nuns did not understand Latin enough to comprehend the services which they sang daily. There are individual exceptions to this generalization, such as the sister of Aelred of Rievalux, who was the audience for his *De institutione inclusarum*; however, such exceptional individual examples are not necessarily helpful in determining the Latinity of the average female book user. As it turns out, medieval female literacy is a much more complicated prospect than simple Latinity, and so we will look first at religious women's literacy and then lay women's literacy in some depth.

Belgium: Brepols, 2018). See especially Ch. 4 "Images of Ladies with Prayer Books: What Do They Signify?."

105. Clanchy, *Looking Back,* 154.

106. D. H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 65 (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007), 77.

107. John Henry Blunt, ed. *The Myroure of oure Ladye*, EETS, Extra Series 19 (London: EETS, 1873), 2.

Religious Women

Modern scholars have traditionally held a negative view on women's literacy similar to that of medieval scholars, though that is changing as studies of women's literacy and book ownership progress. Eileen Power famously wrote in her 1922 monograph that "The majority of nuns during this period knew no Latin; they must have sung the offices by rote and though they may have understood, it is to be feared that the majority of them could not construe even a *Pater Noster,* an *Ave* or a *Credo*."[108] In the years since Power's study, scholars have interrogated her statement and discovered that the reality of English nun's Latinity and literacy is more complicated. In the early Middle Ages, especially, nuns were renowned for their learning. Lisa M. C. Weston says that "Substantial evidence reveals Anglo-Saxon monastic women as active and engaged readers of both sacred scripture and contemporary writers."[109] Though there is not as much evidence for their literary activity as there is for early medieval English male writers, she argues that early medieval monastic women "participated in the development, during the later seventh and early eighth centuries, of a distinctly Anglo-Latin literacy associated with major (male) authors like Bede, Aldhelm, and Boniface."[110] And, lest it seem that these women were exceptional examples, Stephanie Hollis finds evidence for cathedral schools at Barking, Nunnaminster, and Wilton in the tenth and eleventh centuries.[111] Nunneries were more likely to be royally supported and to have members who were royal themselves in the early medieval period, and perhaps this explains the greater amount of literacy and Latinity among early medieval English nuns.

In the late-medieval period, there is more evidence for expanding women's literacy but less for their Latinity. The amount of vernacular literature written for nuns suggests that many possessed considerable ability to read in the vernacular. C. Annette Grisé samples six individual works written specifically for a religious female audience.[112] Felicity Riddy mentions eight

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108. Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 277.

109. Lisa M. C. Weston, "Conceiving the Word(s): Habits of Literacy among Earlier Anglo -Saxon Monastic Women" in *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogue*, 150.

110. Weston 167.

111. Stephanie Hollis, "The Literary Culture of the Anglo -Saxon Royal Nunneries : Romsey and London , British Library , MS Lansdowne 436," in *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogue*, 171.

112. C. Annette Grisé,"Women's Devotional Reading in Late-Medieval England and the Gendered Reader," *Medium Ævum* 71, no. 2 (2002): 209–25.

works written for women in the Vernon Manuscript.[113] Catherine Innes-Parker adds to this number works from Rolle, Hilton, Suso, and others even as she argues that works written for female audiences found a much wider readership. [114]She says of her findings,

> "The reading patterns uncovered here suggest that, contrary to received opinion, women were not relegated to the marginal wastelands in their devotional reading. New developments in vernacular devotional writings rapidly found their way into the hands of women who were, it is increasingly evident, intelligent and sophisticated readers. Nor were their reading habits and materials substantially different from many men, particularly laymen." [115]

In terms of the nuns themselves, Marilyn Oliva argues that "Both corporate collections and also books belonging to individual nuns in the diocese [of Norwich] indicate that at least some, and probably most, could read some English and French, and perhaps a little Latin."[116] Warren says that while nuns generally could not understand Latin, they were very literate in the vernacular, which sometimes led to male clerics manipulating texts as they translated them for a female audience.[117] The issue of nuns not being able to read or understand Latin was a continual issue in late-medieval England. Alexandra Barratt perhaps best sums it up when she says, "In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it was a commonplace that English nuns did not understand Latin, only French and English, but they wrote hardly anything in either language. … However,

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113. Felicity Riddy, "'Women Talking about the Things of God': A Late Medieval Sub-Culture," in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 106-7.

114. Catherine Innes-Parker, "The 'Gender Gap' Reconsidered: Manuscripts and Readers in Late-Medieval England," *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia: International Review of English Studies* 38, no. Midsummer (2002): 239–69.

115. Innes-Parker, "The Gender Gap' Reconsidered," 265.

116. Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England: Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350-1540* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1998), 64-5.

117. Nancy Bradley Warren, *Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 33. Sally Thompson also acknowledges that the majority of nuns didn't understand Latin, and moreover had a hard time finding reliable male scribes since nuns were not generally able to write. Sally Thompson, *Women Religious: The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1991), 13-15.

they knew that written text was useful, and they read recreationally."[118] Vincent Gillespie confirms this commonplace when he says, "Of course, one area of religious life had always laboured under the handicap of limited Latin literacy. Nuns, anchoresses and recluses had always been assumed to possess a less fully developed capacity for independent reading and meditation."[119] Recently, this assumption has been carefully interrogated by scholars, with some interesting results.

Rigorous investigations of female literacy and scribal work have found that while widespread Latinity was rare among English nuns, there are a few examples of nuns who were clearly adept at the language. The best example is Mary Neville, a Syon nun, who was literate in Latin and a scribe for Syon manuscripts in both Latin and the vernacular.[120] In addition to extraordinary examples like Mary Neville, it is possible that nuns had some writing ability, even if they did not often use it to copy manuscripts. Marilyn Oliva examines household accounts from nunneries in the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, which were kept in the nun's own hands. These records indicate that nuns could write and reckon accounts for their own use, and that multiple nuns (the cellaress, the treasuress, and other nuns with adminsitrative positions) took part in this recording process.[121] Her study suggests that despite the absence of formal scriptoria in English nunneries, nuns were able to write for pragmatic purposes such as keeping records and signing their names.

It is also possible that nuns had more understanding of Latin, and specifically liturgy and prayer, than has heretofore been assumed. Katherine Zieman argues that nuns could achieve "liturgical literacy," which she defines as "the performance of sacred Latin texts in which the relationship to grammatical understanding is ambiguous."[122] Though the nuns didn't often receive education on the grammar of the Latin liturgy, repeated performance of it and explication of it

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118. Barratt, *Women's Writing in Middle English,* 3-4.

119. Vincent Gillespie, "'Lukynge in Haly Bukes': Lectio in Some Late Medieval Spiritual Miscellanies," *Analecta Cartusiana* 106, no. 2 (1970): 1–27.

120. Veronica O'Mara, "Scribal Engagement and the Late Medieval English Nun" The Quest Concludes?" in *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Antwerp Dialogue,* eds. Blanton, Virginia, V. M. O'Mara, and Patricia Stoop, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 202-6.

121. Marilyn Oliva, Rendering Accounts: The Pragmatic Literacy of Nuns in Late Medieval England" in *Nuns' literacies in Medieval Europe: the Hull dialogue,* 51-68.

122. Katherine Zieman, "Reading, Singing, and Understanding: Constructions of the Literacy of Women Religious in Late Medieval England," in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad*, ed. Sarah Rees Jones, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 106.

from sources like the *Myroure of Oure Lady* provided the nuns with enough knowledge to receive heavenly *vertu* from its performance.[123] M. T. Clanchy makes a similar argument about women using prayer books, suggesting that "repeated recitation of the same texts, articulated into short accessible passages, might itself be a process of learning which could lead the user of a prayer book to 'read even by and by.'"[124] Therefore, even nuns who did not receive a formal Latin education could achieve a functional Latin literacy through continual exposure to Latin liturgical texts and prayers. While that would not result in a medieval scholar giving them the designation of *litteratus,* it could indicate that nuns had more facility with Latin than modern scholars have assumed. It is too much to claim that late-medieval nuns knew and understood Latin, or that they could all write as well as they could read in the vernacular, but it would also be inaccurate to claim their total ignorance of Latin.

Despite the difficulty of finding evidence of late-medieval nuns who could understand Latin and who acted as scribes, these women had a good reputation for vernacular literacy, and they were somewhat voracious readers. The nuns at Syon in particular were particularly devoted to books, for their Rule says "Thoo bookes they shall / haue as many as they wyll in which ys to/ lerne or to studye."[125] This was despite their call to general poverty from the Rule. Syon nuns eagerly took advantage of this exception. Mary Erler has found that Syon kept a scribe and bookbinder on retainer from 1498 by the name of Thomas Raille, who "would receive a payment for each book bound, written, illuminated, or noted, depending on the book's size."[126] There are entries in the sacristan's rolls for payments dealing with books, with bookbinding being "by far the most frequent."[127] Julia King has found that thirty-eight manuscripts bearing ownership inscriptions out of the nearly sixty extant associated with the Syon sisters.[128] The advent of print also allowed the Syon nuns to expand their libraries: King describes a symbiotic relationship that Syon had with London printers, where Syon would commission a "class set" of devotional books

123. Zieman, 111.

124. Clanchy, *Looking Back,* 92.

125. Hogg, 50.

126. Mary Carpenter Erler, "Syon Abbey's Care for Books : Its Sacristan's Account Rolls 1506/7-1535/6," *Scriptorium* 39, no. 2 (1985): 296.

127. Erler, "Syon Abbey's Care for Books," 298.

128. Julia King, "Inscriptions and Ways of Owning Books among the Sisters of Syon Abbey," *The Review of English Studies*, October 1, (2021), 9.

for the nuns.[129] Each nun would receive her own copy of the printed book, which King suggests could be "seen as a sort of approved curriculum for the sisters."[130] This idea of an approved program of reading would bolster the practice of a virtuous religious life. Anne Hutchison argues that *The Myroure of Oure Lady,* which translates and describes the service for the nuns, gives the nuns "a rationale for their way of life" when it says "And therefore thys ghostly study to kepe the harte, ys youre chyefe laboure, thys ys youre moste charge and gretest bonde, this maketh the soule to be vertuous. and this causeth all the outwarde beryng to be relygious."[131] Though Syon had a particular reputation for studiousness, nuns throughout England had access to and made use of vernacular devotional works: David Bell identifies 150 surviving books owned by nunneries in the medieval period, and he suggests that not only were nuns more literate than they have been given credit for, but that "the interest of the nuns in fifteenth-century books and literature stands in marked contrast to the unimpressive record of their male counterparts."[132] Oliva lists books that were owned by individual nuns as well as books that were given to convent libraries for the nuns' use, bequests which "indicate an active group of readers who not only traded books with each other but also with local people whose comments signal a public perception of nuns as readers."[133] Despite the intense scholarly debate about nuns and their abilities to read in the Middle Ages, it seems that nuns could and did read with some frequency.

Lay women

Susan Groag Bell's statement in her foundational article on women's book ownership that "Medieval laywomen's knowledge of Latin was even rarer than that of laymen, who were often taught Latin in preparation for a possible career in the church," still holds true.[134] Lay-

129. King, 17.

130. King, 18.

131. Ann M. Hutchison, "Devotional Reading in the Monastery and in the Late Medieval Household," In *De Cella in Seculum: Religious and Secular Life and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, ed. Michael H. Sargent (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989), 221. See page 64 of Blunt for the passage from *Myroure.*

132. David N. Bell, *What Nuns Read: Books and Libraries in Medieval English Nunneries* (Cistercian Studies Series, no. 158. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995) 76.

133. Oliva, *The Convent and the Community,* 69.

134. Susan Groag Bell, "Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture." *Signs 7, Women and Power in the Middle Ages, Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages*, (1982), 758.

women did not perform the liturgy as nuns did, which means that they likely did not achieve "liturgical literacy" through performing it, though as I mentioned above their interactions with Latin prayers and going to church services may have given them familiarity with religious Latin. However, it is also true that the division between laywomen and religious women was much more permeable than it may seem. Anne Dutton's survey of women's book ownership and reading concludes "first that women's reading is predominantly in the vernacular, second that the literary devotional culture of women religious and that of laywomen are virtually indistinguishable, and third that the corpus of religious literature in women's hands is broader than and different from the narrow range of texts written and recommended for them."[135] Dutton notes that religious and laywomen shared similar levels of education and social background, for nuns largely came from the nobility, gentry, and wealthy merchant classes.[136] Nuns also tended to preserve connections with laywomen more than monks preserved connections with the outside world in what seems to be a mutual relationship between nuns and devout laywomen who wished to pursue the "mixed life."[137]

Many medieval women, especially widows of the higher classes, pursued the mixed life and maintained close relationships with female monasteries. In fact, there were enough of them that there was a religious ceremony for a woman to become a "vowess" or to swear to live a chaste life in the world.[138] Mary C. Erler has found records of 251 vowed women in episcopal registers from 1251-1537, and she believes that further searching will yield more.[139] Some of these vowed women lived in nunneries, and some maintained their own homes, since women often became vowesses to fulfill a religious desire without giving up their property.[140] Other lay

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135. Anne Marie Dutton, "Women's Use of Religious Literature in Late Medieval England," (Ph.D. diss., University of York, 1995), 142.

136. Dutton 142-3.

137. Dutton 156-164. It is a medieval commonplace to make a division between the active life, essentially associated with the lay life, and the contemplative, monastic or reclusive life. Walter Hilton's *Mixed Life,* as well as other late-medieval devotional treatises for lay people, offered the option of the quasi-monastic mixed life, where one did not formally enter a monastery but followed a strict schedule of religious observance.

138. Mary C. Erler, "English Vowed Women at the End of the Middle Ages," *Mediaeval Studies* 57 (1995): 155.

139. Erler, "English Vowed Women," 157.

140. Erler, "English Vowed Women," 157.

women who did not formally take vows designed their own mixed lifestyle. The most famous example is Cecily Neville (d. 1495), the mother of Richard III and Edward IV, whose household ordinance reflected monastic habits.[141] Other devout lay noblewomen, such as Lady Margaret Beaufort (d. 1509) and Margaret, Duchess of Clarence (d.1439), maintained close relationships with Syon Abbey and were involved with its textual communities, despite not being enclosed there themselves.[142]

Lay women were much more comfortable with texts in the vernacular than in Latin, though some exception might be made for prayers and Books of Hours. Perhaps more common than any other type of medieval book, Books of Hours were personal devotional objects that contained the Hours of the Virgin, along with various combinations of the Psalter, the Hours of the Holy Spirit, the Hours of the Cross, and the Office of the Dead, along with a calendar.[143] Notably, a large number of these prayer books were made for women.[144] Indeed, women's Books of Hours are sometimes the only records modern scholars have of the women as individuals.[145] The entirety of the texts in the books were Latin, and this trend persisted because "the principal purpose of a Book of Hours was to provide in the home a programme of authentic devotions which matched those of the regular clergy in the church."[146] Books of Hours, or Primers, might have

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141. Mary Dzon, "Cecily Neville and the Apocryphal Infantia Salvatoris in the Middle Ages," *Mediaeval Studies* 71 (2009): 235–300. See also Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "Mechthild of Hackeborn and Cecily Neville's Devotional Reading: Images of the Heart in Fifteenth-Century England," in *Revisiting the Medieval North of England: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Anita Auer, Denis Renevey, Camille Marshall, and Tino Oudeslujis, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019), 25–38.

142. See Susan Powell. "Lady Margaret Beaufort: Books, Printers, and Syon Abbey," in *The Birgittines of Syon Abbey: Preaching and Print* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), for a full discussion of Lady Margaret's patronage of print texts at Syon. Margaret, Duchess of Clarence was the patron of Symon Winter's *Life of St. Jerome*, which was one of Syon Abbey's earliest printed texts. For more on her, see George R. Keiser, "Patronage and Piety in Fifteenth-Century England: Margaret, Duchess of Clarence, Symon Wynter and Beineke MS 317," *Yale Universtiy Gazette* 60, no. 1 (1985): 32–46.

143. Joni M. Hand, *Women, Manuscripts and Identity in Northern Europe, 1350-1550* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 3.

144. Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240 - 1570* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 8.

145. Kathryn A. Smith, *Art, Identity, and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England: Three Women and Their Books of Hours* (London: British Library and University of Toronto Press, 2003), 11.

146. Clanchy, *Looking Back,* 90.

helped lay women achieve some experiential literacy with Latin, much like performing the Liturgy helped nuns. Erler suggests, "That this Latin book remained so long at the centre of religious life for most people, even those usually considered non-Latinate, argues some partial, adaptive, complex, accommodation to a language deeply familiar to the ear, moderately familiar to the eye."[147] This statement echoes Clanchy's remark that familiarity with the Latin of the prayers in one's personal prayer book might have led to eventual comprehension of them. Another sign of a Primer's use and familiarity is their use in children's education. Clanchy differentiates between Primers as in Books of Hours and the ABC Primer, which was a booklet containing the alphabet and critical prayers such as the *Pater Noster*, *Ave Maria*, and *Credo*.[148] Though Primers were often independent booklets with the intention of children's use, some Books of Hours have them included, such as the Bolton Hours.[149] Additionally, Books of Hours had elaborate artwork. Smith argues that the artwork in these books was an essential part of their purpose: "For its 'devotionally literate' owner, the images in a book of hours were more than didactic, mnemonic, and devotional aids: they were potentially profound vehicles of 'devotional communication.'"[150] Some aspects of this art may have helped the owners with imaginative prayer, such as portraits of the owners praying in the presence of the Virgin and Child as in the Hours of Mary of Burgundy.[151] Sometimes, however, the art performed other functions, such as demonstrating the owner's identity, taste, and interests.[152] The art could also provide the viewer with examples of both good and bad behavior, as when a hagiographical image is included in an initial while marginal figures provide humorous commentary.[153] Books of Hours clearly served multiple purposes in the lives of their owners.

Class is a factor in the education and book ownership of lay women moreso than is the case for religious women. Most of the evidence for laywomen's book culture is for those from

147. Mary Carpenter Erler, "Devotional Literature," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. 3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 498.

148. Clanchy, *Looking Backward,* 137-9.

149. Clanchy, *Looking Backward,* 146.

150. Smith, 3-4.

151. Hand, 33-36. See plate on 35.

152. Hand, 57-8.

153. See Smith, Chapter Three, "Devotional Themes and Pictorial and Textual Strategies" for examples of this from the De Bois Hours (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M.700), especially 168-74.

the higher classes, though that isn't entirely the case. Dutton found in her survey of women's book ownership that while the majority of book owners were nuns and aristocrats, there were also women who owned books among the gentry and merchant classes.[154] Certainly the most well-known cases of laywomen who owned books are those of the highest status, in the cases of Cecily Neville, Lady Margaret Beaufort, and Margaret, Duchess of Clarence mentioned above. To their number, we can add Dame Eleanor Hull (d. 1460) who translated several religious works from French into English and was associated with St. Albans as well as Syon Abbey.[155] These women used their high status and wealth to pursue their interests in religious literature by patronizing, buying, and sometimes translating or creating books, and then leaving those books to other women in their wills. With so much influence and activity, it makes sense that these women would be the ones who left the most evidence of their literary activity. However, women from slightly lower social stations perhaps represent a more normative pattern for women's interactions with book culture. Caroline M. Barron writes of Beatrice Melreth, a member of the London gentry, who owned books in English, Latin, and French and left them to her sister, Agnes, upon her death despite the fact that she had several children and stepchildren.[156] Women such as Anne Harling and Anne Bulkeley, as we shall see through examining their manuscripts in chapter four, commissioned books for their own personal use that they then passed on to their family and friends. If women of the gentry and lower classes did not make a splash in the literary culture of late-medieval England like their more wealthy counterparts, they certainly made waves.

Women's Textual Networks

In addition to their individual activities with books and book culture, women formed and maintained textual networks in late-medieval England. These networks are perhaps where the porous division between lay and religious women becomes most evident, because wills and other documents record that women maintained textual connections and communities across the walls

154. Dutton, 69-72, with particular attention to the graph on page 69.

155. Barratt, *Women's Writing in Middle English,* 233. For a more extensive overview of Eleanor Hull's literary activities, see, chapter five of C. Annette Grisé, "Syon Abbey in Late-Medieval England: Gender and Reading, Bodies and Communities, Piety and Politics," (Ph.D. diss, The University of Western Ontario, 1998), 183-225, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, NQ31152.

156. Caroline M. Barron, "Beatrice Melreth: A London Gentlewoman and Her Books," in *Reading and Writing in Medieval England,* 39-55.

of house and convent. Erler explores the idea that nuns were not as enclosed as their orders would have them be, citing the many injunctions and reprimands that nuns received for leaving the cloister to visit friends and family after Boniface VIII's 1299 bull *Periculoso*.[157] Secular women also visited nuns in their convents. Erler states, "The convent appears at the heart of a local network—a position at once immensely useful to its neighborhood… and immensely at odds with traditional religious life."[158] Therefore, women's reading communities may not have only involved the movement of books across cloister walls, but the women themselves.

We have already seen some evidence of women's textual communities in the circle of Cecily Neville, who not only owned books but was in the habit of having them read aloud to her at dinner, then giving a lecture on her reading to her household at supper.[159] Joyce Coleman demonstrates what these readings may have looked like through examining Criseyde's parlor in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde,* where she argues that this scene is "probably the most detailed and important account of female reading of romanticized history that we have."[160] In the poem, Pandarus goes to Criseyde's house

> And fond two othere ladys sete and she,
> Withinne a paved parlour, and they thre
> Herden a mayden reden hem the geste
> Of the siege of Thebes, while hem leste. [161]

If we consider this as a typical scene of a noble lady reading with her community, we can see that reading could be a communal activity rather than a private one, though some women certainly read privately. Also, the person who is reading to the group is a woman, indicating that it was not women's lack of ability to read at all that led to these group readings. Finally, there are no men present until Pandarus intrudes, suggesting that some reading was a gendered activity in

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157. Mary Carpenter Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 46, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 10.

158. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety,* 11.

159. Dzon, 246-7; "Orders and Rules of the Princess Cecill," In *A Collection of Ordinances and Regulations for the Government of the Royal Household*, *37-*39. London, 1790.

160. Joyce Coleman, "'Withinne a Paved Parlour': Criseyde and Domestic Reading in a City Under Seige," in *Reading and Writing in Medieval England: Essays in Honor of Mary C. Erler,* 25.

161. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde,* Book II, lines 81-4, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry Dean Benson (Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1987), 490.

a gendered space. As Coleman states, the parlor was a relatively new invention in Chaucer's time, having evolved from spaces in convents.[162] Coleman's argument that Chaucer was writing about contemporary women's reading groups suggests that we can apply this image to Cecily Neville and other women, both lay and religious. Through this image, we can see that women had personal reading groups where they would absorb and interpret a single text in various ways, either by hearing it read or by listening to a lecture on its content, which may have been slightly different.

In addition to physical reading communities like the ones referenced above, women had wider textual communities that operated among circles of familial and friendly bonds, and usually involved women leaving other women books, precious and otherwise, in their wills. Felicity Riddy identifies fifteen different cases of women leaving their books to other women, finding that books were likely to transmit between women who were related either by blood or by spiritual bonds, and that "the literary culture of nuns in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and that of devout gentlewomen not only overlapped but were more or less indistinguishable."[163] Carol Meale, in her essay that appeared in the same collection as Riddy's, also looks at women's textual transmission through wills, giving the caveat that they can be unreliable because "the nature of the document, and the solemnity and formality which characterises it, undoubtedly had some influence on the kind of books which were specified by a testator, in terms of both their content and their value."[164] Women were much more likely to mention religious books by name in their wills, though their literary tastes may have been wider.[165] Erler details the wills of Margery de Nerford and Margaret Purdans, which demonstrate both the value of women's wills in determining their involvement in book culture and some of the challenges of it. Margery de Nerford (c. 1358-1417) became a vowess in London after obtaining an annullment from a marriage she entered against her will and spent her life surrounding herself with and supporting learned ecclesiastical society. Erler proposes that she had a personal library of fifteen to twenty books,

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162. Coleman, 19.

163. Riddy, 110.

164. Carol M. Meale, "'...Alle the Bokes That I Haue of Latyn, Englisch, and Frensch': Laywomen and Their Books in Late Medieval England," In *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, 130.

165. Meale, 131.

and upon her death, she left them to women around her, including to an anchoress outside Bishopsgate.[166] Margaret Purdans of Norwich (d. *c.* 1481) spent forty-five years as a widow, and upon her death she left books to enough women to indicate she was part of a large textual community.[167] She made monetary bequests to four female recluses and eight nunneries—she also gave books to three nunneries.[168] She also left financial bequests to several individual women in the convents, though she also left books to Margaret Yaxley, a nun, and Alice Barley, a laywoman.[169]

One side effect of women having their own textual culture and circles of transmission is that their reading material may have been different than wider trends of medieval circulation may indicate. For instance, while the texts of visionary continental women circulated fairly widely in late-medieval England in general, Dutton says that "The writings of continental women visionaries such as Saint Bridget of Sweden, Mechthild of Hackeborn, and Saint Catherine of Siena also achieved only a very narrow circulation among women, chiefly among nuns from wealthy houses and laywomen with connections to such houses."[170] However, the texts of these women did circulate among women, both lay and religious. Cecily Neville's Household Ordinance notes that she owned copies of texts from all three visionary women.[171] Riddy notes that Ailenora Roos left a "Maulde book" to Dame Jane Courtenay in 1438, that Margaret Purtans left an "English book of St. Bridget" to the nuns of Thetford in 1481, and Mald Wade, a prioress of Swine, gave a book containing the texts of Catherine of Siena to Dame Joan Hyloft, another nun.[172] So, though mystical women may have only achieved modest circulation in women's circles, they were not absent from them.

It's also possible that women accessed visionary texts through books that were ostensibly owned by men. Rosalynn Voaden notes that Egerton 2006, a copy of Mechthild's *Booke of Gostlye Grace* that is most well known for having "R. Gloucestre" inscribed on the front and back flyleaves for Richard III, also has "Anne Warrewyk" on the front flyleaf and "Mareget

166. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety,* 58-60.
167. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety,* 68.
168. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety,* 75.
169. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety*, 76-7.
170. Dutton, 183.
171. "Orders and Rules of the Princess Cecill," *37.
172. Riddy, 108.

Thorpe" inscribed in a childish hand on f. 127v.[173] She identifies Anne Warwick as Richard's wife, and Margaret Thorpe as the daughter of Isabel Thorpe (*ca*. 1460-1505) and Stephen Thorpe (d.1503).[174] Her grandparents were Sir John Constable of Halsham and Burton (*ca.* 1428-1472) and Lora Fitzhugh (d. *ca.* 1469). Voaden claims that the manuscript came to the Constable family around the time that Richard and Anne died, and then was passed down through their family, and therefore to Margaret's parents, for the Constables were staunch supporters of Richard.[175] The signatures of women, Anne Warwick and Margret Thorpe, show that women could access manuscripts that their male family members owned. This could indicate that women did have more access to texts than those circulating in female textual circles alone, though unless there are inscriptions as there are in Egerton 2006, it is impossible to tell.

Devotional Miscellanies and Methodology

As we have seen, much of the research into women's literacy, textual culture, and book ownership has centered on wills. This methodology has provided an enlightening window into women's textual cultures, and it allows more visibility to how women circulated texts among themselves than any other method. However, there are problems with this methodology, as there are with any. Carol Meale points some of these out:

> [I]t has to be recognised that wills cannot give a balanced view of the nature and probable extent of the female bookowning population. Not only do they offer incomplete chronological and geographical coverage —that is, they have different survival rates from different periods and from different parts of the country—but also they are limited as to the marital status and class of the women represented. The majority of extant wills were made by widows, by independent women.[176]

As Meale says, surviving records of wills from women differ according to geographical and chronological particularities, and the only women who had wills were independent women, who were mostly widows and nuns. Women who were married or under the aegis of a male relative

173. Rosalynn Voaden, "Who Was Marget Thorpe? Reading Mechthild of Hackeborn in Fifteenth-Century England," *Religion & Literature* 37, no. 2 (2005): 9.

174. Voaden "Who was Marget Thorpe" 16.

175. Voaden, "Who was Marget Thorpe" 18-19.

176. Meale, 131-2.

would not have had their own wills. She also says that wills are mostly from the upper classes, with most in the nobility and gentry and a few in the merchant classes. These are problems that plague any scholar who wishes to trace evidence of women in the Middle Ages, for records of them tend to only exist when the woman was independent and wealthy enough to have a record made. However, another problem with looking at books recorded in wills, as well as those in library catalogues and other lists, is that one cannot see exactly what is inside the book in question. For instance, a woman might refer to a book in her will by the biggest or most used text within that volume, when it very well may contain others. If the book is a collection, anthology, or miscellany, it is impossible to know which parts of which texts are included. And finally, some wills only refer to books by appearance and not by content.

Since a primary concern in this study, particularly chapters one and four, is with *what* people read, particularly with how much exposure they had to texts of Mechthild of Hackeborn and Birgitta of Sweden, wills do not offer enough information. Instead, I focus on manuscripts which contain Birgitta and Mechthild in chapter one, and in chapter four, manuscripts that have evidence that they were owned by women, either because of ownership inscriptions, use of feminine pronouns, or other evidence. Some scholars have done in-depth studies of individual manuscripts, miscellanies, or related groups of codices.[177] However, rather than doing a close study of one manuscript, I am looking at the inclusion of specific texts in a variety of these collected manuscripts, which closely mirrors Rosalynn Voaden's methodology in "The Company She Keeps," and echoes that of Roger Ellis in "Flores ad Fabricandam… Coronam."[178] However, while these two scholars have been interested in the general transmission of excerpts from Mechthild of Hackeborn and Birgitta of Sweden, respectively, they do not go beyond identifying what texts

177. The most well known of these studies is likely Susanna Fein, ed., *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts of British Library MS Harley 2253* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000). See also Susanna Fein, ed., *Interpreting MS Digby 86: A Trilingual Book from Thirteenth-Century Worcestershire*, Manuscript Culture in the British Isles 9 (Rochester, NY: York Medieval Press, 2019); Margaret Connolly, "Books for the 'Helpe of Euery Persoone þat þenkiþ to Be Saued': Six Devotional Anthologies from Fifteenth-Century London," *Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (January 2003): 170–81; and
Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

178. Cf. Ellis, "Flores," and Voaden, "The Company She Keeps."

appear in these manuscripts. I deepen their studies by considering how these excerpts were perceived by the individual users of each manuscript. This reception-focused methodology relies on the individual contexts of these selections, so that my study is combined with *materialist philology,* which Stephen G. Nichols and Sigfried Wenzel describe as a technique where scholars "look closely at the relationship of the individual version [of a text] to its historical context in a given manuscript."[179] This is particularly true for miscellanies, for as Diana Deniessen argues,

> a compilation has a literary effect that might be different (but not less interesting or relevant) than the literary effect of the compilation's source texts. Furthermore, I will argue that although the source texts of a compilation form the foundations of such a text—and these sources function not merely as citations, but are the starting point of any research to compiling activity—it is the precise way in which these sources are included into a compilation, the activity or style of compiling, that needs further attention.[180]

Besides looking at the individual contexts of the manuscript and its owners, it is important to see how each manuscript presents the material of its source text to process its affect on readers. This addition of a gendered lens on the transmission of these texts and to their individual appearances in these particular manuscripts sheds light not only on how a particular subset of late-medieval textual culture with its own circles of transmission viewed these authors, but also on how much exposure women had to texts that were written by women.

This methodology comes with its own challenges. Medieval books that collect excerpts of larger works and shorter works in their entirety are very common, and they are called different things by different scholars. Moreover, there has been considerable debate about how to classify this type of medieval book. The most common name for these books is the miscellany, which

179. Stephen G. Nichols and Sigfried Wenzel, "Introduction," in *The Whole Book,* 2.

180. Diana Denissen, *Middle English Devotional Compilations: Composing Imaginative Variations in Late Medieval England* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2019), 2.

Charles Radding defines as "several texts of different authors are more or less coherently juxtaposed in a single container."[181] The degree of intention behind the assembly of a given miscellany is the central node of the debate about what to call such a book and how to study it. Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson describe how these volumes were produced, positing that in professional book trade, scribes had access to shorter works through small booklets that were then copied and arranged into larger collections based on author or subject matter. The quality and availability of these booklets was somewhat limited, depending on location and personal collections.[182] Ralph Hanna further comments on miscellanies, suggesting that while these miscellaneous manuscripts may have been organized around a theme, outside factors come into play in their actual composition. In examining a particular miscellany, he says that "thematic texts… form only a core to the book. And this core never thoroughly programmed contents and production: the compilers remained open to the possible, as yet unforeseen usefulness that some audience might find in ancillary texts."[183] This leads him to the conclusion that

> in a precanonical period, exemplar poverty motivates much of the literary record. Quite simply, in any given locale, even a metropolis, one cannot be certain that exemplars of any given text were available. As a result, manuscript compilers… were constrained to make the fullest imaginable use of any book that came to hand, and their planned core selections would come to coexist with other items.

Thus, while the compiler of a manuscript may have particular contents in mind, or a theme, he would not have an exemplar of every extant text on that theme. Instead, he would be constrained by whatever exemplars he had available at the time, which would be subject to conditions of geography, economics, demand, personal connections, and a multitude of other factors. However, a compiler might have one or two core texts on hand, and then assemble the rest of the manuscript around that core. Derek Pearsall questions even this much intention in some miscellanies, citing

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181. Charles Radding, "From Unitary Book to Miscellany," in *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy: Studies in the History of Written Culture*, ed. Armando Petrucci (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1.

182. Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson, "Anthologies and Miscellanies: Production and Choice of Texts" in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, 280.

183. Ralph Hanna III, "Miscellaneity and Vernacularity: Conditions of Literary Production in Late Medieval England," in *The Whole Book,* 46-7.

scholarly overzealousness: “It is understandable that people should experience tremors of excitement when they think they detect signs of intelligent life in the otherwise alien alterity of the manuscript compilation.”[184] However, his statement turns out to be a question of taxonomy, for he later distinguishes a miscellany from an anthology, where the latter has "direct and fairly obvious" purpose in collecting pieces.[185] As part of this, he excludes religious compilations from his argument in particular because most of them have some organizing impulse.[186]

In light of Pearsall and Hanna’s questioning, scholars have moved toward a more descriptive method for categorizing manuscript compilations, though at this point there does not appear to be much consensus on how to delineate these categories or even what to call them. Seth Lerer distinguishes between a miscellany and an anthology, where the difference is “that the mark of the anthologistic—that is, the distinguishing feature of manuscripts or sections of manuscripts guided by a controlling literary intelligence—is a moment when the idea of the anthology is thematically present in the texts.”[187] While his definition is rather circular, the idea that manuscripts can be distinguished in terms of intentional production has taken hold. Julia Boffey and A.S.G. Edwards attempt to move forward with manuscript taxonomy, identifying features that need to be taken into account when one is classifying a manuscript, such as whether it is “accretive”—assembled over time—or “purposive”—assembled all at once.[188] However, they do not really arrive at any distinctions of new taxonomy. In lieu of a systematic set of terms and definitions, and acknowledging that the terms for manuscript compilations are necessarily inaccurate to some degree, I will use “miscellany” to refer to the manuscripts under consideration here, and make further distinctions on an individual basis as needed.

While the debate about definitions and terms rages on, scholars are agreed in arguing for the value in studying this kind of manuscript. Because they are not particularly glamorous and because they rarely contain the most authoritative versions of texts, modern scholarship has often

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184. Pearsall, “The Whole Book: Late Medieval English Manuscript Misc. and their Modern Interpreters,” in *Imagining the Book,* 20.

185. Pearsall, “The Whole Book,” 21.

186. Pearsall, “The Whole Book,” 22.

187. Seth Lerer,“Medieval English Literature and the Idea of the Anthology,” *PMLA* 118, no. 5 (October 2003): 1255.

188. Julia Boffey and A.S.G Edwards, “Towards a Taxonomy of Middle English Manuscript Assemblages,” in *Insular Books: Vernacular Manuscript Miscellanies in Late-Medieval England,* 277.

overlooked miscellanies.[189] However, scholars now recognize that miscellanies are mines for cultural and material data on medieval life. Ralcua Radulescu claims that "these manuscripts do, by their very existence, reflect cultural attitudes from a particular time period (even when considered individual preferences) and played a role in the shaping of cultural attitudes, even if on a small scale, in a particular locality."[190] In looking at the "bad texts," or incomplete versions and excerpts, of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Kate Harris argues that "such statistics on the survivors of a sort of obstacle race of medieval taste and manuscript survival are of very limited utility" but that "it is with this variety, with the extracts in their settings in the individual manuscripts that the 'archaeologist of reading' must be concerned."[191] In a discussion of devotional miscellanies in particular, Gillespie says that the availability of texts in a certain region may contribute more to the content of a miscellany than the discernment of compiler, but that the addition of apparatus like tables of contents or indices "transforms the book from a random collection into a working anthology."[192] By their arrangement and organization, whether applied from the beginning or later, devotional miscellanies "could generate within themselves an internal logic, an artificial atmosphere in which distinct texts came together to create a new whole to be read in new ways and in new circumstances than those in and for which they had originally been conceived."[193] Ryan Perry argues that while devotional anthologies tend to be "idiosyncratic," they often have themes that organize them and reflect the interests of the owner, patron, or compiler.[194] With or without these themes, devotional miscellanies "reveal the inclination to have a collection of vernacular texts within a single codex… Texts were not only copied as they were found in an attempt to accumulate a mountain of texts, but many were thoughtfully adapted for

189. There are some exceptions to this, but it usually only applies to the grandest of miscellanies, such as Harley 2253, or the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts, which are enormous compilations of vernacular literature which are sometimes otherwise unattested.

190. Margaret Connolly and Raluca Radulescu, "Introduction" in *Insular Books: Vernacular Manuscript Miscellanies in Late-Medieval England,* 25.

191. Kate Harris, "John Gower's 'Confessio Amantis': The Virtues of Bad Texts," in *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-Century England: The Literary Implications of Manuscript Study: Essays from the 1981 Conference at the University of York*, ed. Derek Albert Pearsall, (Cambridge : D.S. Brewer , 1983) 33-4.

192. Vincent Gillespie. "'Lukynge in Haly Bukes,'" 21.

193. Gillespie "'Lukynge in Haly Bukes,'" 2.

194. Ryan Perry, "An Introduction to Devotional Anthologies: On Volume 'Collections' and Their Contents," *Queeste* 20, no. 2 (2013): 130.

their new contexts."[195] Therefore, we cannot say that the compiler of a miscellany conscientiously chose each text within it out of the entire corpus of devotional literature for being perfectly suited to his or her purpose for a book. We can say, though, that a compiler may have had a general theme in mind, and as he selected texts for a miscellany out of those which were available, he considered how that text might address that theme, his audience, or his own preference. A miscellany does not need a grand organizing intelligence behind it for a reader or a scholar to consider how the individual texts interact with the other texts in the manuscript, nor to think about how the individual manuscript presents its texts to its reader.

Chapter Outlines

In the first half of the dissertation, I explore how the texts of visionary women related to the life of Christ transmitted in England. I consider individual manuscripts containing female visionary texts in chapter one, arguing that these female authors had considerable influence on the late-medieval trend of devotion to Christ's life and Passion. In chapter two, I look at three Middle English devotional retellings of the life of Christ which use visionary women as sources. I argue that while the writers treated the women as authority figures, they also relegated the use of their texts to things they considered female-coded concerns. I then shift to considering how English women thought about the Life of Christ genre and the texts of female visionaries in the second half of the dissertation. Chapter three examines a prayer cycle about Christ's life written by a woman, arguing that women drew on their own experiences and voices in their devotions on Christ's life by focusing on female figures in it. In chapter four, I survey women's devotional manuscripts containing female visionary texts and conclude that women used them for prayers to pray, devotions on Christ's life to perform, and spiritual guidance to follow.

Chapter One

In the first chapter, I explore the involvement of Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn in Life of Christ devotion in late-medieval England. In her investigation of the impact of continental female mystics in England, C. Annette Grisé argues that of the female continental mystics, Birgitta of Sweden, Catherine of Siena, and Mechthild of Hackeborn had the widest textual impact on England; while the works of Mechthild and Birgitta circulated widely in both

195. Perry "An Introduction to Devotional Anthologies" 126.

Latin and Middle English, Catherine's mystical text circulated mostly in the vernacular.[196] I build on the work of Roger Ellis, Rosalynn Voaden, and Teresa Halligan on tracing the transmission of these mystics by looking at manuscripts that contain excerpts from and references to their texts that pertain to Christ's life specifically.[197] I divide the manuscripts of Birgitta and Mechthild into several groups: manuscripts containing the whole text of the female mystic, miscellanies, and compiled Lives of Christ which use Birgitta and/or Mechthild as sources. Using close examinations of the *mis-en-page*, the structure of manuscripts, the hands, marginal notes, and other features, I investigate the holy women's influence on Life of Christ devotion. I argue that while not every manuscript contains evidence that its makers and users placed special emphasis on Birgitta and Mechthild's insights on the Incarnation and Passion of Christ, manuscripts in every group indicate it was a significant part of their popularity.

Because this chapter encompasses manuscripts owned by people from the King of England to the middle class, clerics, monastics, and laypeople, it provides a broad survey of the influence these female mystics had on the culture of late-medieval England.[198] The manuscripts themselves are varied. Birgitta and Mechthild transmitted in both Latin and the vernacular, with Latin manuscripts more likely to have been created for a clerical or monastic context. Vernacular manuscripts were more likely to have a lay audience. They also had varying levels of luxury, with extremely deluxe manuscripts such as the immense Harley 612 and Cotton Claudius B.I, to rather scruffy manuscripts such as Lansdowne 379 and Sloane 982. This remarkable diversity of form suggests the near universal popularity of the holy women in late-medieval England.

Chapter Two

In the second chapter of my dissertation, I consider three male-authored Lives of Christ that specifically incorporate continental female mystics as sources in their texts. The first is *Speculum devotorum,* a Life of Christ written by an anonymous Carthusian brother for a sister of Syon Abbey, which uses Birgitta's *Revelations* and Mechthild's *Liber specialis gracie,* as well as excerpts from the *vitae* of Catherine of Siena and Elizabeth of Hungary, as sources. The second

196. C. Annette Grisé, "Textual Relics," 166-7.

197. Cf. Ellis, "Flores"; Voaden, "The Company She Keeps"; and Halligan, "Introduction."

198. Egerton 2006, an English translation of Mechthild of Hackeborn's works, was owned by Richard III and his wife, Anne Warwick. They inscribed their names on the inside of the front cover.

is *The Fruyt of Redemption,* a spiritual treatise written by the recluse Simon of London Wall, which incorporates substantial Birgittine material.[199] Finally, I examine *The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary,* an anonymous but likely male-authored Middle English Life of Christ which uses Birgitta's *Revelationes* as a major source.[200] I examine these texts in particular because they are English examples of male-authored meditative Lives of Christ directly influenced by the texts of women.

Scholars have already commented on both the origins of *Speculum devotorum,* its sources, and its readers. Vincent Gillespie writes about how the text is "haunted" by the overwhelming amount of devotional material available on the Life of Christ, which overwhelms the author and encourages him to limit himself to his audience of a nun at Syon.[201] Much attention has also been paid to the female sources of the *Speculum devotorum* by scholars such as Paul J. Patterson and Rebecca Selman. I build on their work in this chapter by investigating further how the author uses his sources, as well as how his intended audience may have factored into his selection of authorities. I also compare this text to two other works that use similar female sources, which allows me to investigate to what degree the *Speculum* author's treatment of his female sources is unique.

The Fruyt of Redempcion, which only survives in print, has received less scholarly attention than *Speculum devotorum.* As cited above, Roger Ellis includes it as an example of a meditative work on the life of Christ including Birgittine material, noting that Simon of London Wall made use of Revelation 1.10, as well as 4.70 in his work.[202] He also investigates how Simon "transforms" some of the material by making it third-person rather than a first-person narrative.[203] Elizabeth Salter also briefly considers it in her overview of meditative Lives of Christ.[204]

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199. Ellis, "Flores," 179.

200. Elisabeth Blom-Smith,"The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary Edited from MS Trinity College Cambridge B.15.42 and MS Bodley 578," (Ph.D. Dissertation, King's College, London, 1993).

201. Vincent Gillespie, "The Haunted Text: Reflections on A Mirror to Devout People," in *The Text in the Community: Essays on Medieval Works, Manuscripts, Authors, and Readers*, ed. Maura Nolan and Jill Mann (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2006), 139.

202. Ellis, "Flores," 179.

203. Ellis, "Flores," 179-80.

204. Salter, 111-12.

Clare Dowding edited this work in her Ph.D. Thesis, which is the only modern edition.[205] *The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary* is an anonymous Middle English life of Christ which has been studied by only a few scholars. Elizabeth Blom-Smith prepared an edition of it for her dissertation, and Ellis briefly mentions it in his article.[206] Both of these works were created for a more general audience than *Speculum devotorum,* and they only use Birgitta of Sweden as a female visionary source, rather than incorporating the work of multiple female sources.

In my examination of these three texts, I explore how male authors used female sources in their own works on the life of Christ and how that may be different from the way the women themselves described the life of Christ in their texts. I first establish that female mystics had a greater influence on the Life of Christ genre than has been recognized. Then I move into a close study of how these authors used their female mystical sources, arguing that they limit their use of them to what they consider female concerns, but nonetheless give them full recognition as *auctores*.

Chapter Three

The third chapter shifts the dissertation's focus to how women in late-medieval England thought about the Life of Christ genre. Bodleian Library, MS Holkham Misc. 41 contains two long texts and a lyric: *The Festis and the Passion of Oure Lord Ihesu Crist,* the lyric beginning "Syke and Sorrow Deeply," and William Flete's *De Remediis Contra Temptaciones,* all in Middle English. I am chiefly interested in the first text because it is an unedited prayer cycle on the life of Christ written for a nun by another religious woman. In late-medieval England at least, this text survives as perhaps the only known example of a woman participating in the composition of a meditative work for nuns. We know that the author was female because in the beginning of the text, the author states, "O myn sustir p[re]ie / my lord god the Trinite that for / his gret bounte. and for his endeles / mercy. haue mercy and pite on me / sinful. And make me a good wo / man."[207] As Veronica O'Mara points out in her article, "The Late Medieval English Nun and

205. Clare M. Dowding, "'For Your Ghostly Conforte That Vnderstande No Latyn': A Study of The Fruyte of Redempcyon by Symon Appulby." (Ph.D Thesis, King's College, London, 2014).

206. Blom-Smith; Ellis, "Flores," 177.

207. Holkham Misc. 41, p. 3. This manuscript does not have foliation, but the pages are numbered, so this is the designation that I will use for location. See Figure 17. All figures are in an appendix at the end of the document.

Her Scribal Activity," the fact that this work is authored by a nun makes this text an incredibly rare and valuable artifact from late-medieval England.[208] In line with the overarching theme of my dissertation, I will examine the manuscript in its unique context as an example of a Life of Christ written by a religious woman for another. Birgitta was a laywoman, and her *Revelations* were not compiled with a specific audience in mind; Mechthild was a religious woman, but the nuns at Helfta preserved her visions as a record of her experiences rather than as a meditative text for nuns in particular.[209]

Scholars have not considered the *Festis* at great length in the past, though with a forthcoming TEAMS edition, it will likely receive more attention.[210] I first analyze this work for possible connections to the Syon textual network in order to weigh in on the debate on whether this work originated at Syon or at another nunnery in England. I also build on work by Innes-Parker and Barratt which notes that the text focuses strongly on feminine role models in the gospels and has a notable lack of shaming for lust and other sexual sins.[211] Unlike Birgitta and Mechthild, who received and recorded visions of Christ's life that were then edited and excerpted into works in or related to the genre, the author of this text composed a meditative Life of Christ that is meant to instruct and guide rather than reveal the experiences of a visionary. I claim that medieval women sought examples of normal women with whom Christ interacted as focal points for their meditative interactions with Christ. The author uses familiar and communal aspects of female monastic life, such as the liturgy, prayer, and community, to encourage the reader to embody and engage with events from Christ's life, particularly his conversations with biblical women. In examining the sources and origins of this text and manuscript, as well as how it fits

208. Veronica O'Mara, "The Late Medieval English Nun and Her Scribal Activity: A Complicated Quest," In *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogue,* 69-70.

209. Luongo, "Inspiration and Imagination," 1104; Margarete Hubrath, "The *Liber Specialis Gratiae* as a Collective Work of Several Nuns," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft*, vol. 11, (1999), 239.

210. I would like to thank Ben Parsons for confirming that he is preparing an edition for TEAMS via personal correspondence, and for kindly sharing a working version of the edition and his introduction with me.

211. Barratt, ed. *Women's Writing in Middle English*, 212; Catherine Innes-Parker, "The Anchoritic Elements of Holkham Misc. 41," in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards, Religion & Culture in the Middle Ages (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), 175.

into the Life of Christ genre, I demonstrate how a female author reinterprets the genre for her female readers.

Chapter Four

The final chapter takes a step away from close analysis of individual texts and focuses mostly on manuscript evidence, chiefly that of devotional miscellanies containing texts from Mechthild and Birgitta that are known to have been owned by women in order to examine how female readers may have thought about female authors and the Life of Christ genre. This chapter considers female literacy in late-medieval England, both reading and writing, and whether literate women considered the gender of authors such as Birgitta and Mechthild. I begin with an overview of the manuscripts covered in the chapter, describing their connection with late-medieval women. In particular, I examine devotional miscellanies as a way of sampling the variety of material that was available to female readers at the time. This represents a newer methodology for investigating women's book ownership, which had earlier been approached through wills and other records, or through concentrating on women's inscriptions of their manuscripts alone.[212] These books, with their groupings of different texts into one volume, could represent the varieties of texts that were available to women at the time, as well as providing a representative sample of how medieval people may have thought about and grouped texts together.

I find that medieval women largely used mystical texts for reasons as individual as the manuscripts in which they are found, but that generally they were interested in what Birgitta and Mechthild advised for spiritual advancement; they used Birgitta and Mechthild as models for their private prayers; and there was a definite desire for their perspective on the life and Passion of Christ. My research in this chapter also finds a previously unanalyzed strain of transmission for the prayers of Mechthild of Hackeborn. There is an independent version of excerpted prayers that only appears in women's manuscripts associated with Syon Abbey, with a different translation appearing in manuscripts from a different origin, which builds on scholarship on textual transmission within female communities.

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212. The touchstone work in this branch of shcolarship is Groag Bell, "Medieval Women Book Owners"; but see also Caroline M. Barron, "Beatrice Melreth" 39-55; Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety*; King, "Inscriptions and Ways of Owning Books,"; Meale"'...Alle the Bokes That I Haue of Latyn, Englisch, and Frensch.'"

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Chapter 1

"Debeam breviter compilare": Christ's Life, Birgitta of Sweden, and Mechtild of Hackeborn in Late-medieval England

Abstract

I trace the transmission of Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn in late-medieval England by looking at manuscripts that contain excerpts from and references to their texts that pertain to the life of Christ specifically. I divide the manuscripts of Birgitta and Mechthild into several groups: manuscripts containing the whole text of the female mystic, miscellanies, and compiled Lives of Christ which use Birgitta and/or Mechthild as sources. Using close examinations of the *mis-en-page*, the structure of manuscripts, the hands, marginal notes, and other features, I claim that the holy women's influence on Life of Christ devotion was a significant part of their reception in late-medieval England. I found that while not every manuscript contains evidence that its makers and users placed special emphasis on Birgitta and Mechthild's insights on the Incarnation, manuscripts in every group indicate that it was a significant part of their popularity.

Among the many devotional and religious writers that circulated in late-medieval England, Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn were perhaps the most influential female authors. Roger Ellis's 1989 article, "'Flores ad Fabricandam ... Coronam:' An Investigation into the Uses of the Revelations of Saint Birgitta of Sweden in Fifteenth-Century England," demonstrates the far-reaching influence of Birgitta's writings.[213] Rosalynn Voaden's chapter, "The Company She Keeps: Mechthild of Hackeborn in Late- Medieval Devotional Compilations," performs a similar service for Mechthild, demonstrating the various ways that her text was incorporated into devotional manuscripts.[214] Both scholars conclude that Birgitta and Mechthild, despite having both died before the fifteenth century started, had a meaningful impact on the devotional landscape of late-medieval England. This chapter builds upon their foundational research by surveying the subset of English manuscripts containing material from Birgitta and Mechthild that focus on devotion to the life and Passion of Christ. I argue that the overwhelming popularity of Life of Christ material contributed significantly to Birgitta and Mechthild's influence on the devotional milieu of late-medieval England, while at the same time Birgitta and Mechthild's visionary accounts of Christ and Mary influenced affective piety and Life of Christ devotion in return. This effect is evident across different manuscript iterations of their texts: manuscripts containing complete works of the visionary women, miscellanies containing excerpted passages from Birgitta and Mechthild, and devotional retellings of the lives of Christ and Mary which use Birgitta and Mechthild as sources.

This chapter surveys British manuscripts which contain material from Birgitta and Mechthild related to the Life of Christ. It does not attempt to survey all British manuscripts containing material from Birgitta and or Mechthild. Laura Saetveit Miles is working on a project to determine "the full impact of Birgitta and her *Revelations* on medieval England."[215] To my

213. Roger Ellis, "'Flores Ad Fabricandum ... Coronam:' An Investigation into the Uses of the Revelations of Saint Birgitta of Sweden in Fifteenth-Century England," *Medium Ævum* 51, no. 2 (1982): 163–86.

214. Rosalynn Voaden, "The Company She Keeps: Mechthild of Hackeborn in Late- Medieval Devotional Compilations," in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England,* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 51-69.

215. Laura Saetveit Miles, "ReVISION: Re-assessing St. Birgitta and her Revelations in Medieval England: Circulation and Influence, 1380-1530," Projects, updated 2021, http://www.laurasaetveitmiles.com/projects.

knowledge, there is no project that attempts to do a complete survey of Mechthild. My methodology centers on close analysis of the mis-en-page of the sections containing material on Christ's life to consider whether these passages show signs of differentiation or special presentation. Variations in layout such as differently sized initials, changes in decoration, and additions of headings and *litterae notabiliores* could suggest that the creators of a manuscript considered that section especially interesting to the manuscript's users. Kathleen L. Scott argues that including decorative elements functioned "as a quick flip-through method of locating a list of contents, the first text page, the chapters, book divisions, and other units of a text."[216] I also look for reader comments, markings, or other signs of engagement with these passages as signs of engagement with the manuscript.

This chapter treats each instance of a text and manuscript as an individual case study while also summarizing trends within groups of manuscripts. My methodology is based on the precepts of New Philology, also sometimes called Materialist Philology, which argues that manuscript texts should be studied as individual material objects rather than focusing on them as repositories of ephemeral texts.[217] Bernard Cerquiglini's famous statement that "medieval writing does not produce variants; it *is* variance" remains one of the best articulations of the underlying philosophy of this movement in manuscript studies.[218] In treating each manuscript as an individual object, I essentially compare the manuscript to itself. However, since this chapter surveys fif-

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216. Kathleen L. Scott, "Design, Decoration, and Illustration," in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475,* eds. Jeremy Griffiths, and Derek Albert Pearsall, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 31.

217. See the introductions of, Stephen G. Nichols, and Siegfried Wenzel, eds., *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, Recentiores (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 1-6, and Stephen Kelly and John J. Thompson, eds., *Imagining the Book*. Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 7 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005), 1-14 for articulations of materialist philology. New Philology is already over a quarter-century old. For a sample of its original flowering, see Stephen G. Nichols, "Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture," *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (January 1990): 1–10, and the other articles in this *Speculum* special issue on the topic. For a more recent update on the topic, see Markus Stock, "Introduction: Philological Moves," *Florilegium* 32 (January 2015): 1–17, and the other articles in this special edition of *Florilegium.*

218. Bernard Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*, trans. Betsy Wing, Parallax (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 77-8.

teen different manuscripts, I have found it helpful to categorize them thematically by their contents. I have selected manuscripts from as many medieval social circumstances as possible to represent both lay and religious interests as well as a variety of socio-economic situations.[219]

I have found that while every manuscript does not meaningfully differentiate the sections on the Life of Christ, some kind of special marking or response often marks Life of Christ material across all types of manuscripts and their historical contexts. Some, like London, British Library MS Sloane 982, differentiate the sections on the Passion with red ink and illustrations of blood. Others, like London, British Library Egerton MS 2006, have more marginal notes and markings in the sections relating the Life of Christ than sections on other subjects. These decorative or structural elements demonstrate that material related to the Life of Christ was often considered different or significant to readers and manuscript creators. Setting apart these sections also demonstrates that Mechthild's and Birgitta's insights into the Life and Passion of Christ were influential in the overall cultural landscape of Life of Christ devotion because their visions about Christ and Mary were considered authoritative sources of devotional literature.

Comparison of Latin and vernacular texts shows that Life of Christ devotion was popular among both clerical and lay audiences. Most of the Latin manuscripts I include here have evidence of a clerical or monastic audience beyond the use of Latin itself; for example, many include Birgittine revelations which center on clerics and monks.[220] Some have provenance that proves a clerical context, such as Harley 612's creation for the library of the brethren at Syon Abbey.[221] Manuscripts in the Middle English vernacular, for their part, tend to have a lay audience. In addition to the language, the inclusion of works intended for a layfolk, like the collections of prayers and catechetical works in Lansdowne 379, indicates a lay audience. In general, the manuscripts for lay, clerical, and monastic audiences contain curated material from

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219. It is unlikely that this survey can cover the lowest classes of medieval England because most manuscripts are prestige objects of some kind. See Carol Meale, "Patrons, Buyers, and Owners: Book Production and Social Status," in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475,* eds. Jeremy Griffiths, and Derek Albert Pearsall, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 201-38 for more on the socioeconomics of manuscript production and ownership.

220. Sloane 982 and TCD MS 277 are good examples of this.

221. Christopher De Hamel, *Syon Abbey: The Library of the Bridgettine Nuns and Their Peregrinations After the Reformation* (Smith Settle, Otley: The Roxburghe Club, 1991), 57. De Hamel mentions the colophon at the end of Harley 612, which "confirmed the accuracy of the transcription of the text made for John Hartman and brothers Robert Belle and Thomas Stevinton of Syon Abbey while on their visit to Vadstena in 1427."

Mechthild and Birgitta based on their individual interests, but material on the lives of Christ and Mary was prominent among all groups.

Complete Works

My first group of manuscripts contain either the entire *Liber caelestis* of Birgitta of Sweden (in Latin or in Middle English) or the *Liber specialis gratiae* (*LSG*) of Mechthild of Hackeborn (or its English translation, *The Booke of Ghostly Grace).* Both Birgitta and Mechthild had a significant corpus of manuscripts in England: the ε section of the β recension of Birgittine manuscripts identified by Undhagen is largely comprised of English manuscripts, as Roger Ellis notes, and Mechthild has four extant Latin manuscripts with English provenance and two English.[222] The version of the *LSG* which circulated in England was not the full, seven-book version of the work, but a revised five-book version that reorders some of the chapters.[223] Because both of these works were so massive, the survival of multiple copies of the entire work (or even an abridged version) indicates significant popularity in late-medieval England.

Since these manuscripts contain the entirety of Birgitta and Mechthild's texts, they are ideal testing grounds for determining what creators and readers may have found most interesting out of the entire corpus of a holy woman. I examined the sections of these manuscripts that deal with the Christ's and Mary's lives to investigate signs of creators or readers meaningful engaging with them beyond how they treated the rest of the manuscript.

Oxford, Trinity College MS 32

Oxford, Trinity College, MS 32 is a composite manuscript combining incunabula and manuscript sections from the fifteenth century. It contains the *Vita Christi* of Ludolph the Carthusian—the incunabula—on folios 1-61v, and the *Liber specialis gratiae* of Mechthild of Hackeborn—the manuscript—from folio 62-126r. The first folio has a printed pastedown reading "Liber *colegii* sanctae & individuae *Trinitatis* Oxon. Ex dono *Francisci Combes* armigeri & ejusdem *Colegii* olim convictoris. 1641." [Book of the holy and indivisible Trinity College Oxford. From the donation of Francis Combes, squire and once fellow of the same college, 1641.]

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222. Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, "Introduction," *Revelaciones*, (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1977), 196-99; Roger Ellis, "'Flores,"165-6.

223. Theresa A. Halligan, "Introduction," in Mechthild of Hackeborn, *The Booke of Gostlye Grace of Mechthild of Hackeborn*, ed. Theresa Ah Halligan, Studies and Texts; 46. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1979), 8.

The printed section consists of two columns with initials and highlighting in red ink, which appear to have been added by hand. This work also includes marginal notes in an elegant Secretary hand and a few manicules. The manuscript portion is in a Secretary hand in one column, with red initials and rubrics. The *LSG* section contains no marginal notes, though there are crude decorations in the bottom margins of some pages and additional decorations to initials in black ink on 103r. The two works may not have originally bound together, as the first page of the *LSG* (now folio 62) exhibits some discoloration, staining, and other signs of wear that could show it was the initial page of a book at one point.

Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.19

Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.19 is a Latin parchment manuscript of the *Liber specialis gratiae* of Mechthild of Hackeborn.[224] It was written c. 1492 by John Wetham, who leaves a colophon on the last page:

> Explicit liber spiritualis gracie. Scriptus per Manus Johannis Whetham monachi & professi
> domus Matris dei ordinis Carthusiensis prope london anno domini M°CCCC°-lxxxxii°. Trinitati laus.
>
> [The end of the *Liber spiritualis gracie.* Written by the hand of John Wetham monk and professed of the Carthusian house of the Mother of God [Charterhouse of the Salutation of St. Mary the Virgin] near London in the year of our Lord 1492. Praise to the trinity.][225]

The manuscript appears to have stayed in the library of the Carthusian Charterhouse of the Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.[226] Wetham's hand is a Gothic Textualis Media with upticks rather than quadratic feet to his letters, though he does include horns on the ascenders of

224. Charles Hardwick and Henry Richards Luard, *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts Preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge,* Edited for the Syndics of the University Press (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1856), 310-11.

225. For more on John Wetham, see E. M. Thompson, *The Carthusian Order in England* (London, The Church Historical Society, 1930), 324.

226. N. R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain, a List of Surviving Books*, 2nd ed., The Royal Society Guides and Handbooks 3, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1964), 122. Henceforth this work is summarized as *MLGB.*

b, *l*, *h*, and *k*.[227] It is written in one column with ruling in red ink. There are decorated initials at the beginnings of each book, with the initial in gold leaf surrounded by a decorated block in red and blue with white linework. *Litterae notabilitores* and rubrics are in red ink throughout. There are also marginal annotations throughout the book in a different hand, which uses a fine-nibbed pen and appears to be a slightly later, possibly Italic hand. Some of the marginal notes are *nota bene* marks which look like musical notes, or manicules, but some are summaries and comments on the matter of the text. There are also some marginal notations which are in plummet rather than ink, though they appear to be a similar hand to that of the ink annotations.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 220

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 220 is a manuscript from the first half of the fifteenth century containing the *Booke of Gostlye Grace*, with four short religious pieces in Middle English. These short works are *De duodecim gradibus humilitatis* from St. Gregory, *Consilia Isidori* from Isidore, and two Middle English poems. Sir Walter Cope gave the manuscript to the Bodleian in 1602. The manuscript has its original fifteenth-century binding intact, though the outer parchment on the binding is flaking off in places. The support is parchment, though there are some original paper flyleaves with an ox head watermark. Decorated initials appear throughout in red and green ink, and the manuscript is copied throughout in one Secretary hand with some Anglicana influences. The scribe leaves a signature on folio 103r, which reads "Deo Gracias Amen. Quod Wellys I. Et cetera." Marginal comments appear throughout the *Booke of Gostlye Grace*. Some are organizational notes in the scribe's hand (such as arabic numerals for each chapter), and others in a different fifteenth-century hand in a contrasting color of ink, which mostly consists of summaries and *notae*. There is also a thread stitched into a triangle at the top of folio 92, which is where the fifth part of the *Booke* begins, apparently functioning as a bookmark.

227. Gillespie notes that Wetham wrote several other books for the London Charterhouse, including another copy of Mechthild dated 1513. See, Vincent Gillespie, A. I. Doyle, eds. *Syon Abbey*. Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 9 (London: British Library in association with the British Academy, 2001) 622-3; *MLGB*132.

London, British Library, Egerton MS 2006

London, British Library MS Egerton 2006 is a copy of *The Booke of Gostlye Grace,* the English translation of the *LSG.* Copied c. 1450, this manuscript is written in an Anglicana hand with Secretary influences.[228] There is a decorated initial on the first page in red and blue ink with penwork that extends to a partial border, and there are *litterae notabiliores* in alternating red and blue ink in the table of contents at the beginning of the work. Each chapter begins with a *littera notabilior* in blue ink. Teresa Halligan, after a linguistic analysis of the dialect in Egerton 2006, provides the "cautious suggestion" that it was copied in Axholme, a Carthusian house in Lincolnshire.[229] The manuscript still has records of its royal owners, namely Richard III and his wife Anne Warwick, who inscribed the inside front cover and, in the case of Richard, the back cover as well.[230] Richard and Anne may have been introduced to Mechthild's work by Richard's mother, Cecily Neville, who is well known for her devotional practices and attention to mystical texts.[231] Cecily had a well-developed repertoire of mystical and devotional readings, as described in her household ordinance.[232] Voaden proposes that Richard and Anne could have had "joint ownership" of Egerton 2006, and that it stayed in the Yorkshire area after it passed from royal hands.[233] There are marginal notes in several hands throughout the document. Most of these are *nota bene* marks, but some summarize the content. There is also an inscription on 127v of "marget Thorpe" in a childish hand. Voaden attributes the inscription to a Margaret Thorpe who was a granddaughter of the Constable family, who supported Richard III and had connections to other powerful Yorkshire families.[234]

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228. N. F. Blake, "*The Booke of Gostlye Grace of Mechthild of Hackeborn* . Theresa A. Halligan." *Speculum* 56, no. 2 (April 1981): 386–89.

229. Halligan, "Introduction," 22.

230. I verified the existence of this inscription , but was unable to take pictures of this manuscript because of its restricted status at the British Library.

231. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "Mechthild of Hackeborn and Cecily Neville's Devotional Reading: Images of the Heart in Fifteenth-Century England," in *Revisiting the Medieval North of England: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, eds. Anita Auer, Denis Renevey, Camille Marshall, and Tino Oudeslujis (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019), 28.

232. Mary Dzon, "Cecily Neville and the Apocryphal Infantia Salvatoris in the Middle Ages," *Mediaeval Studies* 71 (2009 2009): 235–300.

233. Rosalynn Voaden, "Who Was Marget Thorpe? Reading Mechthild of Hackeborn in Fifteenth-Century England," *Religion & Literature* 37, no. 2 (2005): 9–25.

234. Voaden,"Who Was Marget Thorpe?" 16; 19.

London, British Library, Harley MS 612

London, British Library, MS Harley 612 was created in the second or third quarter of the fifteenth century and contains the entire works of Birgitta of Sweden, along with *vitae* of Peter Olafson and Katherine, Birgitta's daughter, entirely in Latin. One scribe, Thomas Colyngborne, copied the entire contents for the brethren of Syon Abbey.[235] The codex is unusually large: the pages are 550 x 390 millimeters, and at 303 parchment leaves, it has considerable heft. The text is in two columns throughout, written in Colyngborne's rather spiky Anglicana Formata hand, with some influence from Secretary.[236] There is a sophisticated organizational structure to this manuscript: there is no contemporary foliation, but each column is numbered with arabic numerals continuously throughout the manuscript, and a running title at the top of each page designates which book of the Revelations one is consulting. Christopher De Hamel proposes that the exemplar for this copy of Birgitta's works came directly from Vadstena, based on the colophon stating that a notary in Sweden has verified the accuracy of the copy.[237] Interestingly, the additional works after the eight books of the *Liber caelestis* are numbered as consecutive books in the volume. For example, *Celeste viridarium* is labeled as Book X. Each chapter is designated with a rubric in red ink and a three-line-high *littera notabilior* in blue ink. The beginning of each new book is marked with a decorated or historiated initial in bright colors, often with a curious three-dimensional effect. A good example is the first initial, which uses the S of "Stupor et mirabilia" to include the word "Syon," with the *y*, *o*, and *n* interwoven with the two bars that form the body of the letter *S* (See Figure 1). The initial also incorporates the detail of a nail, which appears to be stuck into the parchment of the page with clever shading.

This three-dimensional effect extends to the marginal artwork which occasionally appears throughout the manuscript. The most common marginal drawings occur where Colyngborne left out sections of text and the artist created marginal insertions that look like scrolls on the page (see Figure 2).

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235. Gillespie, *Syon Abbey,* M.64, 240-1. See also MLGB 185.

236. Colyngborn switches from a two compartment to one compartment a with some regularity, and some of his letterforms, such as g and c, have the Secretary characteristic of "horns." Some of his letterforms, like d, o, and single-compartment a, also have the "breaking" of Secretary.

237. De Hamel, 57. The colophon is on folio 302r of the manuscript.

Sometimes these corrections grow more elaborate and become an illustration that relates to the revelation being corrected, such as the illustration of a dead woman appearing out of the grave with an insertion about bodily death on folio 78v (see Figure 3).

There are also parchment bookmarks pasted to the pages where a new book starts. The manuscript was likely a display piece within the Abbey due to its enormous size, but the marginalia and bookmarks, along with the sophisticated organizational schema, indicate that this book was could also be used and referenced within the Abbey.

London, British Library, Cotton MS Julius F.ii

London, British Library Cotton MS Julius F.ii contains one of two complete Middle English translations of the *Liber caelestis* of Birgitta of Sweden.[238] This manuscript is the more complete of the two surviving translations, preserving the prologue to Book I and other materials missing from the translation in Cotton MS Claudius B.i.[239] This version does not, however, contain the Life of St. Birgitta. Created in the second half of the fifteenth century, it is written in a clear Secretary Media hand on paper. A much less elaborate manuscript than Claudius B.i, Julius F.ii has no program of decoration other than using red ink for rubrication and space left for initials, generally two lines high, at the beginning of each chapter, though the initials were never added in. It is copied in a one-column format, with wide margins that have been somewhat damaged by the Cotton library fire of 1731. The manuscript was rebound in 1961, when all the paper pages were mounted on modern supports which were then sewn together to reflect the original collation. The gatherings are in groups of eighteen to twenty leaves, with gathering 4 (at sixteen leaves) and 13 (at twenty-four leaves) as the exceptions. The preserved collation is supported by the catchwords and quire signatures on the medieval pages.

The format, support material, less elaborate hand, and lack of decoration suggest that this manuscript is more of a workaday study copy than the deluxe Claudius B.i. Domenico Pezzini suggests that both translations were created "to make the work available for study or for reading," pointing out that both Claudius B.i and Julius F.ii have "literal" and "economic" translation

238. Roger Ellis, ed., *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*, EETS os 291, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), xvi.

239. Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta: Edited from the Fifteenth-century Ms. in the Garrett Collection in the Library of Princeton University*, ed. William Patterson Cumming, EETS OS 178 (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), xvi.

of the original Latin, where "expansions are avoided, instead many omissions are found which at times reduce the text to a kind of summary, more similar to draft, or a working copy."[240] Julius F.ii was evidently used for study and reading, for there are marginal corrections, manicules, and notes throughout the manuscript. The manicules are rather crude drawings of pointing hands (though they do often have sleeves), and they occur both alone and in conjunction with *nota bene* marks and marginal notes. Folio 84r is a good example of the different kinds of notation present, with its manicule accompanying a "nota notabilis" comment in the top half of the left margin, and the more common *nota* mark in the bottom half of the page. The other marginal writing, in the bottom right corner, is a catchword (See Figure 4).

London, British Library, Cotton MS Claudius B i

London, British Library, Cotton Manuscript Claudius B.i is one of two Middle English translations of St. Birgitta of Sweden's *Liber caelestis,* comprised of seven books. It was copied in the first quarter of the fifteenth century in an Anglicana Formata hand. This manuscript is laid out in a two-column format, with initials in blue ink with red linework. At the beginning of each book, more elaborate initials with gold and botanical details form borders on the pages. There are several leaves missing from the manuscript, most notably at the beginning, though the omissions occur throughout, as Cumming notes in his description of the manuscript.[241] Some of these missing pages may have been removed because they were illustrated. The manuscript contains three miniatures of Birgitta, which usually occur at the beginnings of the individual books. It is possible that there were once more miniatures which have been removed by later owners of the manuscript. All the extant miniatures depict Birgitta herself.[242] Joan Isobel Friedman argues that the

240. Domenico Pezzini, "Book IV of St. Bridget's Revelations in an Italian (MS Laurenziano 27.10) and an English Translation (MS Harley 4800) of the Fifteenth Century," *Aevum* 70, no. 3 (December 1996): 489.

241. Cumming, xvii. The beginning of the *Revelations* is lost, with the manuscript beginning on f. 5 in the middle of chapter 1. There are also leaves missing after f. 41 (Book I, chapters 38-41); after f. 84 (Book II, end of chapter 10 and beginning of chapter 11); after f. 144 (Book III, chapters 28-9); after f. 167 (Book IV, chapters 16-31); after f. 203 (Book IV, chapters 111-115); after f. 211 (Book IV, chapters 129-130 and introductory paragraph of Book V). There are also possibly some missing pages at the end, as the manuscript ends in the middle of chapter 28 of Book VII.

242. The miniatures are reproduced in black and white in their approximate locations in Ellis' EETS edition. I was unable to take my own photos of the manuscript because it is restricted at the British Library.

style of the miniatures and illumination is consistent with English illumination of the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries in the International Gothic style.[243]

Roger Ellis suggests that the Claudius manuscript was directly translated from one of the Latin manuscripts in England, which he claims represent "a distinctive English tradition."[244] He claims that the Middle English translation in Claudius B.i is independent of the other Middle English translations of Birgitta's work in England.[245] However, he never published his full investigation of the sources for the translation. The Claudius translation rearranges some of the material from the standard order of the Latin, such as the reversal of chapters 15 and 18 in Book I.[246] Marginal notes and *nota bene* marks throughout the manuscript indicate that it was used and referenced by its creator or original owner.[247] Some marginal corrections were probably made by the original scribe, but others are in a different hand.

Summary of Findings

For the most part, the makers or readers of manuscripts containing the whole works of Birgitta and Mechthild did not engage with the sections dealing with the lives of Christ or Mary in a significant way. Though five of the seven manuscripts (Bodley 220, Egerton 2006, MS Ff.1.19, Julius F.ii, and Harley 612) have marginal notes throughout the manuscript, the particular sections dealing with Christ's and Mary's lives do not demonstrate changes in marginalia that reflect any specific regard to sections dealing with the Incarnation.

Manuscripts containing Mechthild's works display changes in organization and marginalia that could indicate special Life of Christ devotion. Trinity College MS 32, which contains the

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243. Joan Isobel Friedman, "MS Cotton Claudius B.I.: A Middle English Edition of St Bridget of Sweden's Liber Celestis," in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England.* ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 109.

244. Ellis, *The liber celestis*, xii. See also
Ellis, "Flores," 165-6.

245. Ellis, *The Liber celestis*, ix.

246. Cumming outlines all the changes in his description of the manuscript, xvii. Ellis also summarizes them: Ellis, *The Liber celestis,* xvi.

247. F. R. Johnston claims that the manuscript has a northern provenance based on the Middle English dialect and its presence in the collection of Sir Henry Savile. He suggests that Lord Scrope of Masham could have been the original owner, since he mentions a copy of Birgitta's works in his will. See F. R. Johnston"The English Cult of St. Bridget of Sweden," *Analecta Bollandiana* 113, no. 2 (1985): 79-80. Friedman argues that "much of [Johnston's] evidence is speculative" (95).

Latin *LSG,* has no marginal comments, but subtle differences in the schema for the pages could indicate additional interest from the readers or creators. Most compelling are inexpertly executed marginal doodles in the bottom margins of some pages. These doodles are flourishes in red or black ink that extend from a descender, some with a drawing of a leaf (See Figure 5).

These marginal drawings also appear in other sections of the manuscript, but they could be an indication of reader engagement with the text because they could act as a finding aid. Three of these drawings occur during a section on the life of Christ: one on 63r, where the chapter on the Annunciation begins, and 77r, in the middle of the chapter on the Passion, and the last two on 81r and 81v, which has the chapter on the Pentecost. Since the flourishes stand out from the other pages, they could be a way that a reader marked passages of particular interest. Beyond the marginal drawings, the structure of the text could also indicate engagement with Life of Christ devotion. This manuscript has been influenced by the same branch of textual transmission as the Middle English translation of the *LSG, The Booke of Ghostly Grace.* Both this Latin witness and the English translation represent a version of the text which breaks longer visions, such as the ones for Good Friday and Easter, into shorter sections. For example, the Resurrection chapter, which is generally identified as Book 1, chapter 19, is divided into eight subsections in these witnesses. MS 32 follows these shorter chapter breaks, giving each with its own rubric and initial.[248] While the scribe is likely following the exemplar in terms of where each chapter breaks, the page layout, with rubrics for each subsection of the chapters, make the longer episodes dealing with Christ's life resemble other devotional texts on the subject that break the events into short meditative chunks.

MS Ff.1.19 also breaks the longer chapters into smaller chunks, making the passages a more digestible source of study. Unlike Trinity College MS 32, however, the marginal notes in FF.1.19 are much more frequent and elaborate. There are several kinds of non-linguistic marks, such as the musical notes for *nota bene* marks, manicules drawn in black and red ink, and mar-

248. The rubrics are "De christ*i* gl*or*ificacione & eius resurrecci*one*" [of Christ's glorification and his resurrection] (76r); "De vnguento spirituali," [of the spirit's anointing] (76v); "De domo cordis," [of the heart's house] (76v); "Quod d*omin*u*s* congregacioni ministrabat," [That the Lord ministered to the congregation] (77r); "Aliud," [another] (78r); "Qualit*er* cu*m* a*nim*a d*eu*s maneat: & de co*m*munio eius," [How God stayed with the soul and of his and of his communion] (78r)"De Resurrecione d*omin*i" [of the Lord's Resurrection] (79r).

ginal brackets that indicate longer passages of interest. Special notes for prayers occur throughout the entire manuscript, in the form of the abbreviated "oro"with a macron for the Latin "oratio," indicating that the reader found exemplary prayers a matter of special interest. Finally, words and longer marginal comments are used more sparingly, but likely indicate matters of special interest. These marginal marks and comments do suggest interest in Christ's life, especially in book 1, which contains visions corresponding to the liturgical year. There is a marginal note reading "de circu*m*cisione Christi" in the margin of folio 12r. For the chapter on the Passion, there is a marginal note in plummet reading "nota totu*m* cap*itulu*m" on folio 24v, and further *nota* marks throughout the chapter. There is also a note for a prayer on folio 29 next to chapter 34, which records the end of the Passion section and recommends that anyone who wishes to remember the Lord's Passion should recite the Psalm *Exaltabo te domine* for a year, so that the number of prayers will match the number of Christ's wounds.[249] Though the annotator of Ff.1.19 notes prayers more frequently than incidents in Christ's life, the notes and organization of the manuscript indicate some interest in Christ's life.

Bodley 220, a copy of the Middle English *BGG,* has extensive marginal notes which summarize the events of the chapters. These summaries are helpful in identifying what the annotator found significant in each chapter, and they present the surest evidence for particular engagement with the events of Christ's life in this group of manuscripts. For instance, in Book 1, chapter 2, on the Annunciation, the marginal summaries are more about Mechthild's reactions to her visions than the content of the visions themselves. One note on 14v reads, "How thys mayde seye her soule i*n* a foule garme*n*t." However, some marginalia summarizes the content of the vision specifically, such as the one for Mechthild's vision of the Annunciation: "Of þe worchy*n*g of þe holigost in our*e* ladye." This combination of emphasizing Mechthild's reactions to her vi-

249. QVi d*omini*ce passionis colendam memoriam frequentate desiderat, feria sexta vice horarum legat sepcies Ps*almu*m. Exaltabo te d*omi*ne q*uonia*m suscepisti me. Et post circulum anni habebit tot versus quot Chr*ist*us vulne*r*a habuit. [Whoever desires to cultivate memories of the lord's passion frequently should read the seventh psalm, *I will exalt you lord, who sustains me* in the sixth hour of the sixth feria. And after the turning of the year he will have as many verses as Christ had wounds.]

cf. Mechthild of Hackeborn, *Liber specialis gratiae,* in *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechthildianae*, ed. Dom Ludwig Paquelin, 2 vols., (Paris: H. Oudin, 1875), 59. Henceforth, this source is shortened as Paquelin.

sions and summarizing the visions themselves could indicate that the annotator developed a devotional practice in these chapters where the reader could identify with Mechthild and react to her visions with awe, praise, and love. This model of devotion is also reflected in the marginal comments on the Nativity chapter. Some comments mention Mary's actions and feelings in the vision, such as on 18r: "Of þe ioys & of the gladnes þ*a*t our*e* lady hadde i*n* her sones berth." A summary on the same page draws attention to Mechthild as the witness of the vision: "How þis mayde [Mechthild] receyued of our*e* lade her desyre," referring to a passage where Mechthild requests to hold the infant Christ and Mary "so toke hym to the mayde for she shulde holde hym in her armes as she desyred."[250] These summary notes reflect an interest in both the events of Christ's and Mary's lives and Mechthild's devout responses. Unfortunately, the marginal notes are most frequent in the first twenty leaves of the manuscript, then they mostly disappear. The scribe could have considered these passages particularly significant, or he simply could have found the marginal summaries too onerous and stopped. Without the full program of marginal notes, the annotator's intentions for a devotional regimen are unclear.

Egerton 2006, another Middle English copy of the *BGG,* has marginal comments throughout the manuscript in different hands. While the manuscript itself is in an Anglicana Formata hand, the marginalia are in a Secretary hand. There are a variety of *nota* marks, either in the form of a N abbreviation, the full written "Nota bene," or sometimes symbols that look like three-leafed clovers. There are also marginal comments that summarize or draw attention to the text, such as "de sancta katherina" in the margin of 8v, next to the entry on the table of contents where Mechthild sees Saint Katherine. Out of almost 90 marginal marks in the manuscript, eleven occur in chapters which have to do with the lives of Mary and Christ. Most of these are *notae*, and they often correspond with the beginning of a chapter, indicating that the whole passage is of interest. Other marginal notes mark particular passages, such as the *nota* mark on folio 31r, where the child Christ comments to Mechthild that "When I come in to þis worlde anone I was bowndene in clothes w*ith* a swedlynge bande that I ne meght on none syde move me. Ande that was in toekne that I gaffe my holye with all the goodis whiche y brought with me fro hevene in to mannys power."[251] The differentiation in noting either select passages or whole chapters indicates the annotator was engaging closely with the text. Interestingly, this manuscript notes the

250. Halligan, ed., *BGG,* 94.
251. From my transcription. See Halligan, ed., *BGG,* 99.

chapters on Mary Magdalen, which refer to the Passion particularly. In the vision, Mechthild sees the Resurrected Christ embrace Mary Magdalen, and he tells Mechthild to praise each of the five wounds that his Passion inflicted upon Mary Magdalen. In the next chapter, Mary Magdalen burns with divine love, and promises that anyone who "yeeldes thankkynges to God for the teres whiche y schedde at Crystes feet" will receive forgiveness for sins and the love of God.[252]

Manuscripts containing Birgitta's complete works reveal less engagement with Christ's life than Mechthild's manuscripts, with one notable exception. Harley 612 employs a very regimented design throughout the manuscript, and the revelations on Christ's and Mary's lives do not deviate from the style in any specific way. The deluxe manuscript preserves the red rubrics and the large blue initials at the beginning of each chapter in the *Liber celestis*, and the initials preceding the chapters of interest are not more elaborate than the norm. There are no marginal notes on Birgitta's revelations dealing with Christ's life and the Passion, or even the corrections that appear elsewhere in the manuscript. However, this absence may be because specific devotion to the lives of Christ and Mary was focused on the copy of *Celeste viridarium* in this manuscript, which I will discuss later in the chapter.

Julius F.ii resembles Harley 612 in that there is no difference in passages pertaining to Christ's life from the overall schema of the manuscript. The only revelation specifically related to Christ's life that does have a *nota* mark is 6.58, which has the *nota* mark beside this passage:

> He was so obedie*n*t what it happenyd on tyme þat Iosep seid to him / do this or þat / Anon he dede it for so he hid þe poure <of> his godhed. Þat it might not be known but of me and su*m*tyme of Iosep / for we sy often a mervelous light schinnyng*e* a bough him and we haue herd aungelic voyces singinge vp on him.[253]

This passage's insight into the childhood of Christ is unique to Birgitta, and the note on this passage seems to indicate an interest in Christ's miracles as a child rather than a more affective devotional interest in his activities or behaviors.[254] Revelation 2.21, on the Deposition from the

252. Halligan, ed., *BGG,* 237.

253. Cotton Julius F.ii, f. 214r. cf. Ellis, *The Liber celestis,* 447.

254. For more on this revelation, see chapter 2, and Mary Dzon, *The Quest for the Christ Child in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 208-219. Dzon suggests that Mary's lists of Christ's childhood miracles and the subjects of her conversations with him indicates that Birgitta "was influenced" by contemporary apocryphal legends of Christ's childhood (218).

Cross, has a *nota* mark and a manicule. These do not occur near the description of the Deposition itself, but beside advice given to a maiden choosing a spouse in the passage that follows. The selection reads,

> And whan sche schuld*e* drawe the ringe of here finger. And geue it the yong ma*n* / sche <saw> abovyn awritynge in þe wheche was iii wordis The first was / whan þu comys to þe heyte of the tre. Be war*e* thou take no <rotyn or> drey bough to helde þe by for fallynge. The ii worde was be ware þu take no counsel of thin enemy. The iiide word was put nat thin hert/ betwen the leons teeth./[255]

The interest in spiritual advice over information about Christ's Passion, along with the lack of markings on other revelations about Christ's life, suggests that the annotator of Julius F.ii was not looking to Birgitta's revelations as a means of practicing affective piety or devotion to the life of Christ.

The Middle English translation of Birgitta's *Revelations* in MS Claudius B.i retains the style of the overall manuscript in the chapters on Christ's life, but the miniatures indicate that the creators of the manuscript found the Life of Christ and Marian material important. The *nota bene* marks that occur throughout the manuscript tend to highlight prayers or matters of spiritual advice. For example, one *nota* on fol. 15r appears next to Book I, chapter 14, where Christ teaches Birgitta the correct way to pray.[256] There are many *nota* marks in Book IV, which mostly coincide with good conduct, such as the one on fol. 163v, where St. Agnes advises Birgitta that good works and earthly rewards are not necessarily indications of God's favor.[257] The annotator of the manuscript also puts *nota* marks in the passages that are illustrated by the miniatures, showing that they are interested in the passages that correspond to the illustrations. The miniatures with John the Baptist and the bishop both occur next to the revelation which they illustrate, and the annotator marks it with a *nota bene*. The third miniature, depicting the Nativity, does not have a *nota* mark, but this could be because the revelation that it illustrates occurs several leaves later. The unusual aspects of the Nativity miniature, such as the fact that the artist chose to illustrate

255. Cotton Julius F.ii, f. 74v. cf. Ellis, *The Liber celestis,* 172-3.
256. Cf. Ellis, *The Liber celestis*, 25.
257. Cf. Ellis, *The Liber celestis*, 277.

this famous vision for Book VII when it is not adjacent to the space left for the miniature, suggest that this scene from Christ's life was important to the creators and audience of the manuscript in late-medieval England.

The schema of the illustrations in Cotton Claudius B.i emphasize both Birgitta's status as an saintly author and her interactions with holy figures, with the illustration of the Nativity as a focal point. All three of the miniatures feature Birgitta herself, dressed in the black robe and white wimple of a widow and haloed with gold. In the first, Birgitta occupies the center of the miniature, either kneeling before the virgin with John the Baptist at her back to explain the symbolism of the vision. Friedman notes that "there is a genuine sense of psychological interaction between the protagonists" of the image, emphasizing Birgitta's connection with the exalted saints.[258] In the second miniature, Birgitta is the figure of authority, with her seated in a "throne-like" chair and holding a book and pen before a bishop, who is blessing her.[259] Though Birgitta is depicted as an author in other illustrations, Friedman notes "how little correspondence there is in [the] iconography" between Cotton Claudius B.i and the more well-known miniature in New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS 498.[260] Both of these images place Birgitta in a position of holy authority, emphasizing her status as the prophetic author of the *Revelations.* In the Nativity miniature, Birgitta is also in a prominent place, mirroring the Virgin as they both kneel over the newborn Christ, who lies on the tiled floor before them in a golden ray of light rendered in gold foil. Behind Christ, an ox and an ass peep over the manger. The choice to have Birgitta mirroring the Virgin Mary in this miniature is different from her centrality in the other miniatures. This positioning emphasizes her insight and special visionary presence at a holy event. Again, Friedman draws attention to the "intimacy and aesthetic appeal" of the scene, though she notes that the richness of the clothing and setting contrast with the humble descriptions of Birgitta's actual vision.[261] The choice to illustrate the famous Nativity vision as the miniature for Book VII, as well as the sumptuousness of the miniature itself, suggests that Birgitta's insight into biblical events was a major point of interest to her medieval English audience. This program of decoration emphasizes Birgitta's authority and her insight into sacred history.

258. Friedman, 102.
259. Friedman, 103.
260. Friedman, 103.
261. Friedman 107.

Miscellanies

Miscellanies containing excerpts of Birgitta and Mechthild express more specific interests of the creators and readers than do volumes of a holy women's entire works. In this segment of the chapter, I examine four religious miscellanies, three from a monastic or clerical context and one from a lay context. All these manuscripts include a section relating to the life of Christ, and each of these Life of Christ sections has some significant difference from the other sections of the manuscript. As with the first part of the chapter, I will give an overview of the manuscripts and then detail my findings.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson A.389

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson A.389 is an early fifteenth-century devotional miscellany containing a selection of Richard Rolle's works, Richard Maidstone's *Paraphrase of the Seven Penitential Psalms,* John of Hoveden's *Philomena* in Latin, several short religious meditations, and the *Quattuor Oraciones* of Birgitta of Sweden. Copied in several hands which are variations on Anglicana, the manuscript switches between a one-column and two-column page layout depending on whether the work being copied is prose or verse. Though the parchment is not of the best quality—there are holes in several pages and discolorations that appear to be original—the text is decorated with initials and *litterae notabiliores* in red and blue ink. Perhaps the original commissioner wished to economize on parchment, but not on decoration. The manuscript was probably created under the episcopate of Richard Scrope at Lichfield, for from c. 1470 to 1627 it was at Lichfield.[262] The text itself is a mix of Middle English and Latin, and the *Quattor Oraciones* are in Latin. There are some marginal notes and symbols, such as crosses, on various pages throughout.

Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 277

Dublin, Trinity College Library MS 277 is a Latin miscellany with some Middle English, containing over 100 devotional and religious items, including multiple instances of revelations

262. MLGB 115. "Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawl. A. 389," *Manuscripts of the West Midlands Catalogue,* Project Director Wendy Scase, (The University of Birmingham, 2009), https://www.dhi.ac.uk/mwm/browse?type=ms&id=129.

from Birgitta of Sweden and one passage from Mechthild of Hackeborn.[263] At 564 pages, it is a very robust volume, though the dimensions of the pages (220 mm by 110 mm) make it more manageable. The manuscript has stamped modern pagination, which is what I use for reference. It is dated 1430-1469, and it is copied in a number of hands from that time period. The hands usually change along with the text copied. There is no consistent system of decoration, though there are some initials in red ink, some rubrication, some highlighting of letters, and some initials with linework decorations in ink. The manuscript includes many signs of use. Though it is a lengthy miscellany, many of the texts are identified in the rubrics. For instance, the Birgitta passages are often identified with a reference to the book and chapter from the *Liber caelestis.* This careful organization not only makes it easy to find the beginnings and endings of passages, but also to source them for further consultation. The extensive marginalia is another sign of heavy use. The marginalia ranges from simple *nota* marks all the way to rather elaborate amateur illustrations, such as the demon on page 264 (see Figure 6). Though the manuscript contains no inscriptions of original ownership, the didactic nature of the texts it contains and the extensive marginal engagement suggest that it was made and used in some sort of clerical context, perhaps in a school or university. The manuscript came to the Trinity College Library in 1661 with Bishop Ussher's books.

London, British Library, Sloane MS 982

London, British Library MS Sloane 982 is a fifteenth-century paper manuscript that chiefly contains excerpts from the *Liber caelestis* of Birgitta of Sweden, supplemented by passages from the works of Mechthild of Hackeborn, Catherine of Siena, Anselm, as well as other religious treatises. While the majority of the content is in Latin, two passages, one from Catherine of Siena and one from Mechthild, are in Middle English. It is written in the same Anglicana Media hand with some Secretary influences throughout. Although there is highlighting of *litteras notabiliores* and underlining in red ink on almost every page, there is little in the way of formal decoration. The red highlighting and underlining seem to serve an organizational purpose, as they generally mark the beginning of a new excerpted text. This manuscript also has occasional smaller leaflets added into the binding, which appear to be additional excerpts which the users

263. Marvin L. Colker, Trinity College Dublin: *Descriptive Catalogue of the Mediaeval and Renaisance Latin Manuscripts,* 2 vols. (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1991), 509-32.

found later (see Figure 7). These additional leaves are in a contemporary hand, and they usually lack the red highlighting of the main pages.

There are also extensive marginal notes in various hands, with some underlining in red, that serve several purposes. Sometimes they summarize the excerpted text, such as the marginal note "de memor*ia* passio*n*is chr*ist*i" [about the memory of Christ's passion] on folio 55r. Other times they note a specific feature of the text that the reader found important, such as "q*ui* lac*ri*-mas effud*er*it p*ro* passione chr*ist*i" [who will pour out tears for Christ's passion] on 55v. There are often numerals for points or groups referenced in the text, as the inhabitants of heaven who are listed in the margins of 58r. Between the extensive marginal notes, the general wear on the paper, and the additional pages, this manuscript seems to have been in heavy use, despite its lack of grandeur.

London, British Library, Lansdowne MS 379

London, British Library, MS Lansdowne 379 is a fifteenth-century religious miscellany copied on paper, bound together with a seventeenth-century section (folios 10r-15r) and a fifteenth-century printed tract on the Articles of the Faith by Wynkyn de Worde (folios 30r-42v). The fifteenth-century manuscript sections contain sermons on holy days, carols, medicinal recipes, and an assortment of Middle English and Latin prayers. Peter Wormald argues that because of the different date and the change in the paper's watermark, "There seems to be no reason to connect this part with the rest of the MS, and it seems probable that the MS took its present form at the end of the seventeenth century when it was owned by John Somers, Baron Somers of Evesham, 1651-1716."[264] The fifteenth-century section is written in several hands, varying from a compressed Secretary hand (as in the remedy for toothache on folio 46v), to a lovely Bastard Secretary book hand (which copies the prayers section). The paper of the manuscript has been damaged in some sections, and the pages have been mounted on paper binding supports throughout. There are marginal corrections and notes throughout the manuscript in different hands, mostly either *notas* or textual corrections. The item of most interest to my research is one of the prayers, the *100 Pater Nosters,* located on folios 41r to 54v.

264. Peter Wormald, "*The Revelation of the Hundred Pater Nosters*: A Fifteenth-Century Meditation," *Laudate* 15 (1932): 166.

Summary of Findings

Miscellanies containing material from Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn have shown that the creators of miscellaneous manuscripts in late-medieval England considered the two holy women to be experts on devotional life and spiritual conduct, and that a significant portion of that expertise lies in their knowledge of Christ's life. Of the manuscripts surveyed, Birgitta appears more often, with passages in all four manuscripts. In these miscellanies, revelations tend to be included for their spiritual advice and for their content on the life of Christ, as Roger Ellis also found.[265] Both TCD 277 and Sloane 982 contain many revelations about the correct behavior of clerics. Many of these follow the pattern of a misbehaving cleric being censured by Mary or Christ, with Birgitta acting as the prophetic messenger of their judgements.[266] Mechthild does not appear as frequently in the manuscripts surveyed, in three out of four (none of her texts appear in Rawlinson A.389). Rather than the extended collections of Birgitta's revelations which appear in these miscellanies, Mechthild is more likely to only have one passage included in each manuscript. In two of the manuscripts (Lansdowne 379 and Sloane 982), her name is explicitly associated with a passage relating to prayers and the Passion. The third, TCD 277, includes a revelation on how good it is to attend Mass. This difference could be because Birgitta had greater fame in late-medieval England. It could also be that Mechthild was considered more of a specialist, while Birgitta's revelations were more broadly applicable.

Rawlinson A.389 only contains one short selection from Birgitta. Rather than multiple revelations, it only includes the *Quattuor oraciones,* as mentioned in the description above. This passage is copied on folios 25v-31v in a single column format. The prayers follow the general decoration scheme for the entire manuscript, with red rubrics and blue initials with red linework.

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265. Ellis, "Flores," 67.

266. Clerical audiences of these manuscripts may have used these revelations as examples of what not to do, for they were proof of divine disapproval for clerical sins. For example, page 362 of TCD 277 contains a witness of *Liber caelestis* Book 4, chapter 62, in which the Spirit criticizes a priest burying the body of a faithful person, saying, "Cur p*re*sumis plac*er*e p*ro* eo iudic*em* cu*m* gest*us* tui et mores si*m*iliores su*n*t ioculatori quam deuoto sacerdoti?" [Why do you presume to please the judge for him when your deeds and habits are more similar to a jester than a devout priest?]. The rubric for this revelation in TCD 277 reads "In lib*ro* iiii de quod sac*er*dote i*n*iquo & de septe*m* plagis spi*rit*ualib*us* & septe*m* corp*or*alib*us* i*n*iquor*um* sac*er*dot*um"* [In book 4 about that wicked priest and about the seven spiritual and seven corporal plagues of wicked priests].

All four of the *Quattuor oraciones* are present, following the order that the Latin authorized edition establishes.[267] First is the prayer celebrating Mary's life, then the prayer on the life of Christ, third a prayer in praise of Christ's body, and last a prayer on Mary's body. The prayers in this manuscript have marginal crosses throughout the selection. The first two crosses are at the end of the prayer on the Virgin's life, and three more appear beside the Passion section of the prayer on Jesus' life. These crosses probably prompt the reader to make the sign of the cross at that point in the prayer. The reader was likely intended to pray Birgitta's prayers aloud, in addition to the somatic component of making the sign of the cross as they spoke. With the addition of the crosses in the margins, it could be that the prayers formed a short devotional program focused specifically on the lives of Christ and Mary.

TCD 277 contains several sections transmitting Birgitta's revelations and one selection from Mechthild. The Birgittine selections cover most of her corpus, with excerpts from books 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and the book to Emperors. The Mechthild passage is two short excerpts from the *LSG,* Pars 3, chapters 26 and 19. Both refer to the benefits of going to Mass. The revelations from Birgitta are not ordered according to their appearance in the *Liber caelestis*; they seem to have been copied according to the interest of the scribes more than according to a particular exemplar. Some excerpts are partial revelations, which are more common, and others are revelations in their entirety. They are cited throughout, either in the text's body or in the margins. There is also marginal commentary in multiple hands on many of the passages, ranging from simple *nota* marks to summaries to analysis of the text. The concentration on correct religious behavior, particularly for priests and clerics, suggests that the chosen material directly applied to the manuscript's creators and audience.

Though TCD 277 is constructed to be more utilitarian than beautiful, it reveals a structure and logic in its *mis-en-page* that indicates that multiple people used it as a reference book. Therefore, the revelations that are included in full are arguably more important than the revelations which are included partially. Eight revelations are quoted in whole in this manuscript, and of those, two deal with Christ's life, specifically the Crucifixion. Revelation 4.70, recorded on pages 363-5, does not have much marginal commentary. Revelation 1.10, which is copied on

267. Bridget Morris discusses the transmission of the Latin prayers in his introduction to the translation. See Bridget Morris "*Quattor oraciones* Introduction," in *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, Volume 4*," 199.

pages 349-53, has extensive marginal notation. The entire passage has a line border, and the beginning of the passage is visually distinguished by a two-line-high initial in black ink with yellow highlighting.

The marginal notes on revelation 1.10, in both Latin and in English, demonstrate considerable engagement with the passage. The most extensive marginal note is a quote attributed to Bede on page 350, which reads:

> Beda. Multi puta*n*t q*uod* chr*ist*us nat*us* fuit sic*ut* alii i*n*fantes nascu*ntur*. quod no*n* e*st* v*er*u*m* q*uia* alii i*nfan*tes ap*er*to \ vt*er*e nascu*ntur.* s*ed* christ*us* no*n* ap*er*to q*uia* sc*ri*ptu*m* e*st* fuit v*ir*go m*ari*a p*ost* p*ar*tu*m* et i*n* p*ar*tu. Et sic*u*t clauso \ sepulcro surrexit et clauso ostio ad discipulos c*us*to*d*iit. sic nat*us* e*st* q*uia* o*mn*ia clausa ap*er*ta su*n*t d*omin*o etc.
>
> [Bede. Many think that Christ was born just as other infants are born, that is not true because other infants are born through an open womb. But Christ was not [born] through the opening [of the womb] because it is written that Mary was a virgin after birth and in birthing. And just as he rose from a closed tomb and he watched over the disciples from a closed door. Just so he was born because all closed doors are opened to the Lord, etc.]

The marginal comment appears alongside Mary's assertion that she carried Jesus in her womb with no pain and that she gave birth painlessly as well.[268] This quote indicates a medieval scholarly engagement with Birgitta's vision, where another authority (Bede, in this case) is consulted to confirm her claim that Jesus was born without injury to Mary's virginity, suggesting that the users of this text sought to understand this revelation in the wider context of medieval theology and thought.

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268. cf. Undhagen 265,
"Cumque haberem eum in utero, portabam eum sine dolore, sine grauedine et tedio ventris…Quando vero peperi eum, sine dolore et peccato peperi eum, sicut et concepi, cum tanta anime et corporis exultacione, quod pedes mei pre exultacione non senciebant terram, ubi stabant." [When I had him in my womb, I carried him without pain, without heaviness and weariness of the womb… But when I gave birth to him, I gave birth to him without pain and sin, just as I conceived him, with such exultation of soul and body that my feet did not feel the ground where I stood for rejoicing.]

Other marginal notes, this time in English, suggest that the readers of the manuscript considered the revelation in a more literary or meditative way. On page 351 and on the pages immediately following, there are English marginal and interlinear notes on the Latin, as well as some Latin synonyms which suggest that the readers were reading and translating the passage closely (See Figure 8). These annotations occur on the sections of Revelation 1.10 that narrate the Passion. On the top of 351, above the words "carnes ipsi*us* flagellis sulcaba*ntur"* [his flesh was carved with whips] there is an English gloss reading "a*ll* holkyd and holyd." Later on the same page, the line "berba to*ta* deq*uren*te sa*ngui*ne det*ur*paret*ur [sic]"* [he was disfigured with his beard running with blood] has "was defyled and vgsom."[269] There are also Latin glosses. Above the word "concitato," there is an interlinear gloss reading "i*d est* veloci" [that is, quickly]. This kind of gloss could indicate that this manuscript was used in a school context, teaching young clerics their Latin. The marginalia and interlinear glosses suggest that this passage was considered important in the miscellany.

Like TCD MS 277, Sloane 982 is a clerical miscellany, but it is less organized than the other manuscript. Many of the excerpts are not labeled with the citation for the original revelation, as is usual in other manuscripts containing Birgittine revelations. There are some headings and marginal notes which describe the contents of a passage on a particular page, such as "de sac*er*dotib*us"* written in the top margin of folio 32v (see Figure 9). Many of the revelations included in this manuscript describe clerics behaving badly, offer spiritual advice for both clerics and laypeople, and present visions of judgement. There is a preoccupation with the senses and cognition. The compilers also had an interest in Birgitta's visions of devils and temptation.

Two sections in the manuscript deal explicitly with the Passion. One is a Passion meditation compiled from Birgitta's visions of the crucifixion, and the other is an excerpt from the Good Friday chapter in Mechthild of Hackeborn's *LSG*. Both of these meditations are differentiated from the other content in the manuscript. The Passion meditation from the *LSG* is on folios 53v-60v. This section resembles the general layout of the rest of the manuscript with its black ink, red paraph marks, and underlining rather than rubrication. It is compiled from several of Mechthild's visions relating to the life of Christ, including *LSG* Pars 1 chapter 5, on the Nativity, and Pars 1 chapter 19, which relates to the Resurrection. Most of the passage, however, comes

269. The Latin in this section of the revelation contains several morphological mistakes. Cf. Undhagen 268, "barba tota decurrente sanguine deturparetur."

from *LSG* Pars 1 chapter 18, which details the visions Mechthild had on Good Friday. It begins with a conversation Mechthild has with Christ about making restitution for his suffering. Rather than fixating on her vision of the Crucifixion, this excerpt contains the vision Mechthild had during the Prime service, where Christ brings Mechthild to heaven with him to be judged. All the saints and the different orders of angels accuse Mechthild of various sins and negligences. In response to all of these objections, Jesus comes before God the judge and says, "De omni querimonia ei obiecta; pro ea ad singula respondebo. quia eius amore fateor me captum esse."[270] [About all the complaints set against her; I will respond to each one for her, because I confess she has captured me with her love.] At this, she is excused. While the appearance of this section is not much different from the rest of the text, there are significant marginal comments that indicate substantial reader engagement. The simplest of these annotate the different groups of heavenly inhabitants who bring charges against Mechthild, such as "potestates" on 58r (See Figure 10). Other marginal notes indicate passages of interest, such as "qui lacrimas effuderit pro passione christi" [who poured out tears for Christ's passion] on 55v (See Figure 11).

A large amount of red ink distinguishes the Birgittine Passion meditation in Sloane 982, on folios 121r-133v.[271] In the top, right, and left margins of the leaves, there is a large IHC inscription in red ink, with a large "virgo maria mater dei" in the bottom margin (see Figure 12). These inscriptions are written in a Gothic display script which is much more formal than the main text's Anglicana Cursiva hand. Individual rubrics in red ink in the body text divide as the meditation into articles. Red underlining and paraph marks appear throughout much of the text, and there are red marginal numbers for each of the new articles. There is also a small drawing of a shield with five bleeding wounds on the first page of this section. The overall impression is that the pages are soaked in red, perhaps evoking Christ's spilled blood.[272] This decorative scheme,

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270. Sloane 982 f. 58r. Cf. Paquelin, ed., p. 55. Manchester, John Rylands Library MS Latin 395 also contains an excerpt of this scene of judgement on folios 90r-90v. Interestingly, it does not contain the part of the revelation where Christ intervenes for Mechthild.

271. The paper in this section of the manuscript is a slightly different size than most of the pages, but it is unclear whether this difference is original to the manuscript or the product of later trimming. The manuscript pages are mounted on binding supports, making it impossible to examine the original quiring. The overall layout of the text, despite the changes in decoration and rubrication, resembles the rest of the manuscript enough that it seems to have been created by the same scribes.

272. Marlene Villalobos Hennessey, in a discussion of a Passion meditation in London, British Library MS Additional 3079, says that "[Synasthesia] presents a succession of sensations,

which is the only real program of decoration in Sloane 982, indicates that the Passion meditation was considered an important genre of revelations from holy women, and that this portion of the manuscript may have had a different purpose. While it may have functioned as a reference, like the rest of the manuscript, the additional decorative elements imply that the Passion meditation could be a devotional passage for the clerics themselves.

Finally, Lansdowne 379 has a strange passage attributed to Mechthild appended to the end of the short devotional work *The 100 Pater Nosters. The 100 Pater Nosters,* structured around the days of the week, asks the reader to recall one of the seven times that Christ shed his blood for mankind each day. It contains many of the characteristics of fifteenth-century affective piety. Each short meditation lingers on the suffering of Christ and ends with an exhortation to remember the meditation throughout the day. A citation for Birgitta of Sweden in the meditation for Tuesday recalls the Flagellation: "And Saint Brigyt saithe he was betyn so sore that the white bonys of his Rubbes appered bare & naked of fflesche[273]." In addition to the devotion itself, *The 100 Pater Nosters* records the circumstance of its inscription as a sort of authentication. It was sent from the Carthusian Charterhouse in London to the Carthusian Monastery of Mount Grace in Yorkshire, where one of the monks found it efficacious to add a prayer attributed to Mechthild to the devotions each day:

> And beside all this he vsed to say this lytell prayer folowyng afore eu*er*y hundred pater noster which litel prayer the holy virgyn saint Mawde vsed to say thus in latin, Domine Ih*es*u Chr*is*te filii dei viui suscipe hanc orationem in amore illo su-p*er*excellentissimo in quo o*mn*ia vulnera tui sanctissimi corporis sustinuisti et michi miserere et om*n*ib*us* peccatorib*us* cunctis q*ue* fidelib*us* ta*m* viuis qua*m* def-funct*is* ame*n.* That ys to say my lorde Ih*es*u crist þe sone of almyghty god Receyue this prayer in that most excellent loue in the which thou souffred all*e* the

emotions, sounds, and images—and a string of scenic moments of the Passion—that gradually are woven together in the reader's mind." The use of images and other sensory cues in meditations like the one here would therefore aid the reader in making themselves imaginatively present at the Passion., Marlene Villalobos Hennessy, "Passion Devotion, Penitential Reading, and the Manuscript Page: 'The Hours of the Cross' in London, British Library Additional 37049," *Mediaeval Studies* 66 (January 2004): 237.

273. f. 44v-45r. Cf. Wormald, "*Revelation of the Hundred Pater Nosters*," 175.

> woundes of thy most holy body and haue mercy of me and all*e* synners. And on all*e* crysten people qwyk & dede, amen.[274]

Rosalynn Voaden identifies this prayer as coming from Pars 4, chapter 56 of the *LSG* and Book 4, chapter 32 of the *BGG.*[275] She notes that Lansdowne 379 participates in a trend of English devotion to Mechthild which considers her *Pater noster* particularly effective, citing CUL MS Dd.xiv.26, Harley 4012, and Lambeth Palace Library MS 3597 as other manuscripts in this group. The Carthusian monk of Mount Grace connected this revelation on the reciting of many *Pater nosters* to a revelation of Mechthild's where her congregation offers thousands of *Pater nosters* in memory of Christ's wounds, which results in him showing his wounds to her. Mechthild's prayer seems to enhance the efficacy of the devotion even further. The end of the passage recounts a tale of an ox beaten so cruelly that "the sely beste lay still on the ground w*ith*-oute eny mete or drynke from sat*er*day no*n*ne till monday aft*er* no*n*ne."[276] The owner of the ox eventually gives up on veterinary care and "co*m*myted all his complaunte in this mater to god and vsed forthe þe prayer aforsaid as deuoutly as he coude," upon which he finds "his oxen hooll*e* & sounde stondyng on his ffeete, etyng his mete as lustely as yf he had no thing be seeke."[277] This practical application of the prayers (it is unclear whether the yeoman recited only Mechthild's prayer or the full century of *Pater nosters* over the ox) demonstrates that English readers of Mechthild both associated her with devotion to Christ's Passion and that they found her prayers to be particularly effective in achieving divine grace. While this manuscript does not have any marginal comments or formal system of decoration, there are some cadelles that could suggest that *The 100 Pater Nosters* was considered special. Those in the upper margin, which come from extended ascenders on the letterforms, appear to be original to the scribe. Some of the cadelles in the upper margins are decorated with further sketching—perhaps meant to be botanical, though they mostly present as circles or ovals—these too could either be original or later additions. The pen flourishes in the bottom margins, which consist of simple back-and-forth marks, are more likely later additions. If some of the flourishing is a later addition, it further indicates that those readers agreed with the passage's assertion of its own importance.

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274. f. 51v-52r. Cf. Wormald, "*Revelation of the Hundred Pater Nosters*,"180-1.
275. Voaden, "The Company She Keeps," 64.
276. f. 53v. Cf. Wormald, "*Revelation of the Hundred Pater Nosters*," 181.
277. f. 54r. Cf. Wormald, "*Revelation of the Hundred Pater Nosters*," 181.

Lives of Christ and Mary Compiled from Visionary Women

Manuscripts containing compiled Lives of Christ and Mary that use Birgitta and Mechthild as sources demonstrate how texts of the holy women were incorporated into literary works. Manuscripts containing entire works and miscellanies are usually designed so that a reader can reference what they are looking for within the larger collection, such as the column numbers and running heads in Harley 612. Some, however, like Sloane 982, are more haphazard and probably serve as references for individual passages rather than extended reading. The referential finding aids and uniformity of appearance and design displayed in devotional Lives of Christ indicates their purpose. They are created to be a pleasure to read at length. They also exhibit signs of reader engagement in the form of marginal marks, comments, and drawings. Unlike the miscellanies, the marginalia here seem to signal more imaginative than scholarly engagement with the texts.

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson C. 41

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C. 41 is a composite manuscript, binding together two works from disparate time periods. The first section is the fifteenth-century *The Life of the Blessed Virgyn Mary,* and the second half contains the seventeenth-century *The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene* composed by Thomas Robinson c. 1621. The manuscript is paper, but the seventeenth-century section's pages are slightly larger than the fifteenth-century section. In addition, the first folio of *The Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary* is numbered "fo. 97" by the rubricator, which suggests that the fifteenth-century section was previously bound in another book, then removed at some point and combined with the seventeenth-century part. This rebinding perhaps occurred under the ownership of Richard Rawlinson (1690-1755), who bequeathed the manuscript to the Bodleian upon his death.[278] This chapter only considers the fifteenth-century section of the manuscript. This segment begins with a somewhat messy Secretary hand written

278. "MS Rawl. C 41," *A Catalogue of Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian Libraries and Selected Oxford Colleges,* Bodleian Libraries, updated 31 October 2019, https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_8208.

with a pointed pen, but highlighted and rubricated in red ink (folios 98-102).[279] A red initial begins each chapter, often on the same line as the end of the rubric. The hand changes to a more formal Secretary hand, written with a straight-edged pen, on folio 102 and continues until 120v, where it switches back to the original hand to finish the piece. Quire signatures at the bottom of the page indicate that the switch in hands corresponds to a change in quires. The first hand writes the rubrics and the running title "vita beate maria" at the top of most pages in red ink, and the recto sides of the folio are numbered in the same hand.

The Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary is compiled almost entirely from the *Liber caelestis* of Birgitta of Sweden, arranged to form a *Vita Mariae.* Most rubrics cite the individual chapters from which each revelation comes. These revelations are not from the *Sermo Angelicus,* which focuses on Mary's life.[280] That work is in the third person, while this *Life* collects first-person revelations from Mary to Birgitta. It is mostly compiled from Revelations 1.10, 4.70, 6.55-8, and 7.21-25.[281] The text concentrates on Mary's birth and childhood, then moves directly to the Annunciation and the Nativity. After that, it summarizes Mary's life with Jesus until the Passion.

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279. Because I am only considering the fifteenth-century section of the manuscript, I have chosen to follow the contemporary foliation on the pages. However, the numbering does not correspond with their actual position within the current binding.

280. The *Sermo Angelicus* is a set of twenty-one liturgical readings that were revealed to Birgitta while she lived in Rome. They were incorporated into the daily service for the Birgittine nuns, forming a Marian center to their worship. Bridget Morris helpfully summarizes the *Sermo Angelicus*: "For Sunday, the angel describes how God had always loved the Virgin Mary above all created things; for Monday the angel tells how after the fall of Lucifer the angels heard about the future coming of the Virgin and how she seemed to be present to God and the angels after the creation of the world. In the Tuesday readings Adam's repentance is described, and the foreknowledge of the Virgin's coming by the prophets of the Old Testament. The Wednesday readings describe her conception and birth and God's eternal love for her even while she was still in her mother's womb. The Thursday readings describe her beauty in soul and body, and the conception and birth of Jesus. The Friday readings describe her suffering and sorrow at the painful death of her Son, and the Saturday readings describe her unwavering true faith when others were in doubt of the resurrection, and how her example and teaching helped others; finally the assumption of her body and soul into heaven." See Bridget Morris, "Introduction [to the *Sermo angelicus*]," in *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, Volume 4*, 156. Searby also translates the *Sermo angelicus,* 159-91. For the Latin of the *Sermo Angelicus,* see Birgitta of Sweden, *Sermo angelicus*, ed. S. Eklund, *Opera Minora* 2 (Uppsala: Almquist & Wiskell, 1972).

281. Domenico Pezzini identifies all the revelations used as sources for this work in "'A Life of the Blessed Virgin' from the *Revelations* of St. Birgitta," in *The Translation of Religious Texts in The Middle Ages: Tracts and Rules, Hymns and Saints' Lives*, Linguistic Insights: Studies in Language and Communication 69 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 320, n. 9.

There, it lingers on a detailed meditation on Christ's and Mary's suffering, in accordance with the trends of affective piety. After the Passion meditation, it continues with Mary's death and assumption. After *The Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary,* Rawlinson C. 41 records several of Birgitta's revelations from Christ on correct belief, his reflections on his Passion, and Birgitta's position as a prophet.

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 578

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS 578 is a manuscript from the first half of the fifteenth century containing only *The Lyf of Our Lord and the Virgyn Mary,* also known as the *Meditaciones domini nostri*, a Middle English meditative Life of Christ which relies heavily on Birgitta of Sweden's visions as a source.[282] The writing support is paper that is nine by six and three-quarters inches. The handwriting of the main text is a neat Anglicana hand with Secretary influences in dark brown ink. The chapter headings are copied in a larger Gothic Textualis Formata, often with red highlighting and flourishes (See Figure 13). The red ink also appears in underlining throughout the text and in large red decorative initials, generally about four lines high. Marginal notes throughout summarize the text. These summaries often have rubrication and highlighting, suggesting that they were added at some point in the manuscript's production rather than by a reader. As part of this marginal commentary, there is a curious system of *nota* marks with characters consisting of squares with long ascenders and descenders, with the *nota* mark that resembles the @ abbreviation mark above them. They resemble musical notes in form, though I do not know whether they would be recognizable musical motifs. The squares and lines are joined in different configurations, and I cannot easily decipher whether the different variations have any significant link to the text or to each other. While the medieval provenance of the manuscript is unknown, it seems to have been a mid-range production, most likely for a lay audience.

Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Gg.i.6

Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Gg.1.6 is a fifteenth-century paper manuscript with parchment flyleaves. It contains the entire text of the Middle English *Speculum devotorum* and the Prayer *O Intemerata. Speculum devotorum,* or *A Mirror to Devout People,* is

282. Cf. Elisabeth Blom-Smith, "The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary Edited from MS Trinity College Cambridge B.15.42 and MS Bodley 578," (Ph.D. Dissertation, King's College, London, 1993).

a fifteenth-century devotional life of Christ composed by an anonymous brother of Sheen for a nun of Syon, and is covered in much more detail in the second chapter. The manuscript is associated with the Carthusian Charterhouse of Jesus of Bethlehem at Sheen.[283] A colophon at the top of the third parchment flyleaf that identifies the scribe and the Sheen provenance:

> Speculum devotorum & cetera est liber domus Ih*es*u <de Bethlehem> ordinis carthus*iensis* de Shene & Nome*n* sc*ri*ptoris William*us* plen*us* amoris. Quicumque in ho*c* libro p*ro*fecerit oret p*ro* sc*ri*ptore pur*e* & caritatiue [sic] Sunt enim medicationes deuote & motiue de vita domini <nostri> Ih*es*u chr*ist*i.
>
> [A Mirror to Devout People etc. is a book of the house of Jesus of Bethlehem of the Carthusian order of Sheen and the name of the scribe is William full of love. Whoever benefits from this book pray for the scribe purely and with charity, for these are the devout and stirring meditations about the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.]

William's hand is a neat Anglicana with Secretary influences, namely the horned *g* and the "cracked egg" form of *s* at the end of words. He also has a distinctive *w* form, with an ascending loop in the middle and a zig-zag final stroke. There is no formal scheme of decoration in the text, though red ink is used throughout for paraph marks, underlining rubrics, and highlighting *litterae notabiliores.*

William was a conscientious scribe, and he corrected his work as he went along, usually with marginal corrections that use insertion marks to indicate their position in the main text. Interestingly, some of the marginal corrections are decorated so that they look like paper scrolls, such as on folio 66v. Though the drawing of the scroll is rather crude, it appears to make an attempt at three-dimensionality, and it contains some elements of decoration with the flourishing of black and red ink. This form of correction is very similar to that in Harley 612, hinting that the scribe or corrector of this manuscript had seen the large deluxe manuscript and wished to imitate it. There are also other, more simple marginal comments, corrections, and symbols throughout the manuscript. The majority of these marginal addenda are corrections.

283. MLGB, 178.

Celeste viridarium

Celeste viridarium, a devotional work which narrates Mary's and Christ's lives, is compiled entirely from Birgitta of Sweden's revelations. Alfonso of Jaén, Birgitta's confessor and editor, compiled it after Birgitta's death in 1370. Arne Jönsson dates its composition to between 1374 and 1381.[284] In a review of Jönsson, Roger Ellis points out that *Celeste viridarium* differs from Alfonso's other works related to Birgitta because it was composed for the nuns at Vadstena as a "supplement to the Birgittine liturgical texts on which it drew so heavily" rather than for the "overtly propagandist aim" of gaining papal approval for the Birgittine order and canonization of Birgitta herself.[285] *Celeste viridarium* begins with the entire *Sermo angelicus*, which describes Mary's life, and supplements it with information from other Birgittine revelations to form a cohesive Life of Mary and Christ in the pseudo-Bonaventuran tradition.

Celeste viridarium currently exists in only two manuscripts. These are London, British Library, MS Harley 612, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Canon Misc. 475. Canon Misc 475 contains only the *Celeste viridarium,* in Latin, comprising 83 paper leaves and two flyleaves. The much more modern binding has lovely pastedowns with a floral pattern in mulberry and gold. The entire manuscript is written in a single Gothic Cursiva Hybrida Media hand which is neat and compact. There are rubrics in red ink in what appears to be the same hand, usually for changes in chapter. Initials and paraph marks in red and blue ink (though a different, more orange red than the rubrics) occur throughout, as well as *litterae notabiliores* in black ink with a red highlight. Folio 5r has a large decorated initial in blue ink with red geometric linework to mark the beginning of Alfonso's prologue to the *Celeste viridarium.* While the medieval ownership of this manuscript is unknown, in the eighteenth century it was in the collection of Matteo Luigi Canonici (1727-1805) and then passed to Guiseppi Canonici (d. 1807) before the Bodelian

284. Arne Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén: His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi*, Studia Graeca et Latina Lundensia 1 (Lund: Lund Univ. Press, 1989), 65-6.

285. R. Ellis, "*Alfonso of Jaen. His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi,* (Studia Graeca et Latina Lundensia, 1) By Arne Jonsson." *The Journal of Theological Studies* 42, no. 2 (October 1, 1991): 762. There is no scholarly edition of the *Celeste viridarium.*

bought it in 1817.[286] Some medieval nota marks, manicules, and marginal notes occur throughout the manuscript, but there is not a significant program of annotation. Though the manuscript is currently held in England, the provenance and the Hybrida hand indicates that it was likely copied and owned on the Continent. Though there is a chance that a continental scribe copied the text in England, it is more likely that this manuscript was produced outside of England, and it therefore falls outside the scope of this dissertation.

The other manuscript which contains the *Celeste viridarium*, Harley 612, is described in the first section of this chapter. *Celeste viridarium* spans from folio 133r to 160v.

Summary of Findings

Manuscripts which contain Lives of Christ and Mary compiled from the visionary works of Mechthild and Birgitta suggest that they were created and used with readerly engagement in mind. The layout of the pages is generally clear and spacious, with elements like rubrics and chapter headings to make the reading experience easier. The manuscripts in this group also demonstrate signs that readers engaged with the text through marginal marks and drawings, in the cases of Bodley 578, CUL Gg.1.6, and Harley 612. Ultimately, this final category of manuscripts demonstrates that Birgitta and Mechthild were not just used as references and sources of knowledge by medieval readers. They also were treated as authorities, whose works were to be meditated upon for their affective and devotional contents.

The fifteenth-century section of Rawlinson C.41 is uniform in appearance and does not include any marginal commentary that reveals obvious ideas of how the creators and readers of this manuscript thought about the *Life of the Virgyn Mary.* However, the clear rubrication and general organization of the pages suggests the manuscript was designed for repeated reference. Clear and eye-catching rubrics summarize and uniformly enumerate the chapters. The running title in the top margin of many pages also records the chapter number, allowing a reader to quickly find their place within the organization of the text. The spacious layout, with ample blank space between the lines, allows for easy perusal of the text, suggesting that this could be a professional presentation copy. In the Passion meditation, the rubrics, initials, and running title

286. "MS Canon. Misc. 475," *A Catalogue of Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian Libraries and Selected Oxford Colleges,* Bodleian Libraries, updated 14 October 2018, https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_3513.

are complemented by red highlights on the *litterae notabiliores* at the beginning of each sentence. This change further decorates the manuscript and serves as additional organization for the reader. Given the meditative nature of the text, it may have been designed so that a reader might look away while they imagine the scene described in a sentence, then use the highlighting to easily find their place again. The red might also serve as a reminder of the shedding of Christ's blood in the Passion. While this manuscript does not have elaborate decorations or expensive materials, its organization and layout suggests a careful attention to the experience of reading it.

Bodley MS 578 also has many signs of being designed for the ease of the reader. The chapter headings are in a higher order hand, Gothic Textualis Formata, with red ink line flourishes and decorations. These flourishes and decorations fit the page, filling the blank spaces around the written rubrics so the beginning of each chapter is easy to find. An example of this is folio 26, which has the rubric "Of Cristis Scorgyng" centered on the page, surrounded with red ink linework that looks like chains or braids. This image also contains *nota* marks resembling musical notation. They appear throughout the entire text, often coinciding with underlined passages and likely forming an additional method for finding passages of interest. The marginal notes in the Passion section also draw attention to Christ's speech, which was a common theme in medieval devotional practice. The summary notes in the margins often focus on Mary, such as "þat o*u*r lady yaff first ensa*m*pull to wurshipp the crosse" on f. 36v (see Figure 14). This manuscript has more elaborate annotations and decorations than Rawlinson C. 41, but the creators of both manuscripts designed the pages to enhance the reader's experience of the text.

Though the marginal comments in MS Gg.1.6 are mostly corrections to the text, there are some that summarize or draw attention to the text, and these indicate a special interest in St. Birgitta of Sweden. Birgitta's visions are specifically noted in the margins three times in this manuscript, once in chapter five, which narrates the Nativity; once in chapter thirteen, which describes Christ's adolescence; and in chapter twenty-two, which describes the Crucifixion. In the Nativity and Crucifixion chapters, there is a marginal drawing of a shield and a short label that marks Birgitta's revelation. In the chapter on Christ's childhood, there is a simpler marginal note. These three notes mark every use of Birgitta's *Revelationes* in *Speculum devotorum.* In the first, on folio 24v, the shield is decorated in red and black ink, and it has the detail of a string and a pin that appears to fix it to the page. The text in the shield reads "Reuelacio b*ea*te brigitte de natiuitate

d*omi*ni." [The revelation of blessed Birgitta about the Nativity of the lord]. The shield appears directly next to the portion of the text where Birgitta's vision is recorded.

In the second instance, which occurs on folio 48r, there is a marginal note in black ink reading "oure lady to seyint brygytte" and outlined in black ink. Again, this marginal citation occurs not with the beginning of the chapter, but in direct proximity to where Birgitta's vision appears in the text. It is not clear why this citation is less elaborate than the shield illustrations of the other chapters. Perhaps since this one is a less illustrious event (compared to the Nativity and the Crucifixion), it was not deemed as important to the annotator.

The final citation, on folio 96r, the shield is a bit smaller and is only decorated with black ink, though the R is highlighted with red ink. It reads only "Reuelacio beate brigitte." This shield appears directly next to the beginning of the vision itself, though there is another marginal note at the bottom of the prior leaf which reads "the ruelacyon of seyint Brygitte" next to the introduction and citation of the vision in the text.

These marginal notes for Birgitta indicate a special reverence for the holy woman, as there are no such notations for the passages from other continental holy women which are cited in *Speculum devotorum*, Elizabeth of Hungary, Mechthild of Hackeborn and Catherine of Siena. Singling out Birgitta could reflect the close geographical and textual ties of Sheen and Syon.[287] In a text that narrates the entirety of Christ's life, Birgitta's insights are highlighted with marginal notes and decorations. This manuscript draws attention to the fact that the veneration of Christ's humanity and continental holy women goes both ways, reflecting back and forth depending on the circumstances of a particular text.

As I noted in the manuscript description, Harley 612 contains *Celeste viridarium*, a Life of Christ work, along with all the individual revelations pertaining to the lives of Christ and Mary in their accustomed places within the *Liber caelestis.* Unlike the individual revelations, *Celeste viridarium* shows considerable evidence of reader engagement from the manuscript's users within the Syon community. In this manuscript, *Celeste viridarium* is listed as Book X of Birgitta's revelations, indicating that the Syon community considered it to be just as authentic as

287. For more on these bonds, see, Paul J. Patterson, "Preaching with the Hands: Carthusian Book Production and the *Speculum devotorum*," in *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature: Essays in Honour of Jill Mann*, ed. Jill Mann, Christopher Cannon, and Maura Nolan, (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011) 134–51.

Birgitta's other works, though the prologue states that it was compiled by Alfonso of Jaén rather than written by Birgitta herself:

> caritas me co*m*pellit libellu*m* quendam contexere de reuelacionib*us* que disperse sunt per libros celestes eiusdem beate Birgitte m*at*ri n*ost*re di*ui*nit*us* reuelat*is* In quo materias que p*er*tinent ad b*eatu*m aduent*um* ip*si*us marie virginis et chri*st*i filii eius in mu*n*du*m*; et de ipsor*um* s*anct*is virtutib*us* et gestis que operabant*ur* in mu*n*do don*e*c ascenderu*n*t ad sua celestia regna nouu*m* tractatu*m* sub quodam conpendio debeam breuit*er* compilare.[288]
>
> [Love compels me to construct this little book from the revelations which are dispersed through these heavenly books which were divinely revealed to the same Blessed Birgitta our mother. I ought to briefly compile a new treatise in this book matters in the form of a compendium which pertain to the blessed advent of the Virgin Mary and her son Christ into the world, and about their holy virtues and the deeds which they worked in the world before they ascended to their heavenly kingdom.]

In a community dedicated to Birgitta and her works, a version of her revelations tailored to the meditative practice of the nuns would have been welcome, even though there is no indication that it was translated from the Latin for the nuns at Syon. However, the text itself displays evidence of meditative engagement.

Harley 612 is extensively corrected in the margins with illustrations that surround the corrected text. While most of the corrections are decorated with comparatively simple drawings of scrollwork, there are also corrections which have more elaborate figurative drawings, usually illustrating an aspect of the revelation it corrects. I hypothesize that these figured illustrations appear in sections of the book which contain greater interest to the Syon community. *Celeste viridarium* has two of these figured corrections, an unusual concentration for a relatively short work. The first occurs on folio 141r, depicting an elaborate rose bush growing from the grassy ground (see Figure 15). Wound around the bush is a scroll with the amended text, with the buds and blooms of the branches surrounding the words.

288. Folio 133r, col. 525.

The passage reads

> Ita h*ae*\c/ benedicta rosa maria tam constantem gerebat a*nimu*m. q*uod* quantu*m*cu*m*q*ue* tribulacionu*m* spine cor ip*siu*s stimulabant. voluntate*m* t*ame*n sua*m* neq*u*\a/q*u*\a/*m* variabant. s*ed* ad sufferendu*m* ac faciendu*m* quidq*uid* deo placeret se p*ro*mpissima*m* exhibebat. fflorenti *er*g\o/ rose dignissime comp*ar*at*ur*: et reu*er*a rose in iericho. Nam sicut rosa illius loci. pulcritudine sua cet*er*is florib*us* legitur precellere./ ita maria vniu*er*sos i*n* h\o/*c* mu*n*do viue*n*tes . solo excepto filio b*ene*d*ict*o: honestatis & mor*um* pulcritudine. excellebat.[289]

> [So this blessed rose Mary bore such a constant mind that whenever thorns of tribulations goaded her heart, nevertheless they never changed her will. But whatever was to be suffered and done to please God she herself delivered most promptly. Therefore she is compared to the most worthily flowering rose, and in truth to that rose in Jericho. For just as the rose of that place was is read to excel in superior beauty over other flowers, so Mary excelled all those living in this world in honesty and beauty of character, with her blessed son being the sole exception.]

The passage illustrating the metaphor of Mary as a rose chosen by God demonstrates the meditative purpose of the illustration. Readers can imagine the gorgeous flower as they think about Mary, with the juxtaposition of the lovely blossom and the painful prick of the thorn to represent Mary's joys and sorrows as the Mother of God.

On the next page, folio 141v, there is another figured correction, this one depicting a heart pierced by a lance, with red blood dripping from the wound and the point of the spear (see Figure 16).

The passage this corrects reads:

> Sciebat eni*m* virgo q*uo*d exalato in cruce sp*iri*tu ip*siu*s filii latus lancea acutissima p*er*foraret et ip*s*ius cor per medium transfoderet.[290]

289. Folio 141r, col. 558. I have underlined the words which appear in the correction.
290. Folio 141v, col. 559.

> [For the virgin knew that, when he had breathed out his spirit on the cross, a most sharp lance would perforate her son's side and would transfix his heart through the middle.]

This correction occurs in the middle of a passage describing Christ's suffering on the cross in excruciating detail, and the addition of such a compelling image would only enhance the meditative experience of the reader. The fact that this image makes use of perspective to show the lance piercing all the way through the heart and coming out the other side, complete with running droplets of flowing blood, is a simple yet effective visual representation of the doubled suffering of Christ and his mother.[291] The image of the lance recalls Christ's pierced side and provides a visceral illustration of his suffering. The piercing lance could also recall Mary's heart, as Mary repeatedly tells Birgitta that it felt as if her own heart were pierced as she witnessed the Passion.[292] Though the placement of these illustrations is predicated by where the text of Harley 612 needed correction, the choice of which corrections to illustrate with figurative images related to the passage indicates that the editors of the manuscript considered these moments worth extra effort, thought, and decoration. Choosing to illustrate *Celeste viridarium* in particular demonstrates that the Syon community thought that this meditative text held a special significance to the community. This is even clearer considering that the revelations which were used to compile this work are not similarly decorated. The Abbey community demonstrably valued this devotional Life of Christ compiled from the revelations of their Abbey's patron saint.

Conclusion

Across geographical, cultural, and textual borders, devout people in late-medieval England considered both Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn to be authorities on Christ's life and models for devout worship of his incarnation. Their cultural prominence in this

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291. Mary's suffering at the Passion was a common theme in late-medieval Passion devotion, often expressed as the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin. For the development of the veneration of the Seven Sorrows in art and literature, see Carol M. Schuler, "The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: Popular Culture and Cultic Imagery in Pre-Reformation Europe," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 21, no. 1 (1992): 5-28.

292. Cf. Mary Dzon points out that "In Birgitta's writings, Mary's heart symbolizes her union with Christ on many levels: the physical, the intentional, the experiential, and the emotional." This union amplifies her suffering, but it also makes her a Co-Redemptrix with Christ. Mary Dzon, *Quest*, 189.

pillar of medieval devotion contributed significantly to the female mystics' overall fame in England. My survey of different types of manuscripts containing their texts, which includes volumes of their entire works, devotional miscellanies, and Lives of Christ which use their works as sources, reveals that Birgitta and Mechthild's insights into Christ's life were often given meaningful attention in manuscript form. This observation holds true for clerics, religious people, and lay people, reflecting both the overwhelming popularity of Life of Christ devotion and the fact that Birgitta and Mechthild were considered experts on this subject. Latin manuscripts with clerical audiences and lay devotional miscellanies alike display signs that mystical insight into the life and suffering of Christ was a hallmark of general interest in Birgitta and Mechthild. These signs of attention often go beyond mere inclusion in the manuscript: often there are differences in the *mis-en-page*, decoration, or annotation for the relevant sections. The connection between the transmission and reception of continental female mystics in England and the cultural trend of affective piety demonstrates that the popularity of Life of Christ devotion likely also increased the influence of Birgitta and Mechthild in late-medieval England.

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Chapter 2

Compiling "Approued wymmen": Visionary Female Sources in Lives of Christ Written by Men

A version of this chapter was originally published by Caitlin J. Branum Thrash:

Caitlin J. Branum Thrash. “Selecting Authority: The Compiler and Female Mystical Sources in *Speculum devotorum.*” *Medieval Feminist Forum*, forthcoming.

Abstract

This chapter considers three Lives of Christ written by men that specifically incorporate continental female mystics as sources in their texts: *Speculum devotorum,* a Life of Christ written by an anonymous Carthusian brother for a sister of Syon Abbey; *The Fruyt of Redemption,* a spiritual treatise written by the recluse Simon Appulby, also known as Symon of London Wall; and *The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary,* an anonymous Middle English Life of Christ. In my examination of these three texts, I explore how male writers used female sources in their own works on the life of Christ and how that may be different from how the women themselves described the life of Christ in their texts. I first establish that female mystics had a greater influence on the Life of Christ genre than has been recognized. Then I move into a close study of how these writers used their female mystical sources, arguing that they limit their use of them to what they consider female-coded concerns, but nonetheless give them full recognition as *auctores*.

In addition to being a source for personal devotions, the texts of Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn influenced the Life of Christ genre, both in England and on the continent. Ludolph the Carthusian used material from both Birgitta and Mechthild in his massive *Vita Christi*.[293] Birgitta also makes an appearance in Jan Hus' *Passio Domini Christi.*[294] In England, at least three Lives of Christ use substantial sections of Birgitta's writings as sources: *Speculum devotorum,* written in the first half of the fifteenth century; The *Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary,* also known as *Meditaciones domini nostri*; and *Fruyt of Redempcyon,* printed in 1514.[295] Mechthild (along with other mystical women) appears in *Speculum devotorum.* The texts of holy women did not impact the early development of the Life of Christ genre, mostly because the mystical texts were not yet extant—Alfonso of Jaén edited the first edition of the *Liber caelestis* in 1377, and its popularity grew after Birgitta was canonized in 1391.[296] Female mystical texts did significantly affect the genre once it reached its full meditative flowering in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. In this chapter, I will investigate how these female authors, as well as other mystical women, affected the Life of Christ genre in late-medieval England by examining the Middle English texts listed above.

Speculum devotorum and *The Fruyt of Redempcyon* are two Middle English Lives of Christ that are notable among the many texts in the genre because their religious male compilers used female sources in their works. The compiler and audience of the *Lyf of Oure Lord* are unknown, but it can be assumed that the compiler was male as well.[297] It is notable when female sources were used in Lives of Christ because the vernacular religious texts were considered ap-

293. Thomas H. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 58. Ludolph uses Mechthild in his chapter on the Angelic Salutation. See Ludolf of Saxony, *The Life of Jesus Christ*, trans. Milton T. Walsh, vol. 1 (Collegeville, Minnesota: Cistercian Publications, 2018), 88.

294. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 61.

295. Mary Carpenter Erler, "A London Anchorite, Simon Appulby: His Fruyt of Redempcyon and Its Milieu," *Viator* 29 (1998), 227.

296. Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, "Introduction," in *Revelaciones*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1977.

297. While it is of course within the realm of possibility that the anonymous author is female, the common circumstances of the medieval period make it more likely that the compiler was male. See Liz Herbert MacAvoy, "Anonymous Texts," in *The History of British Women's Writing 700-1500*, eds. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt, Vol. 1 of 9, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 160-8.

propriate mostly for female religious and lay people. But how do these male writers use their female sources, and how do their ideas of gender affect their use of female writers and visionaries? It is a widely acknowledged fact that medieval literature has a certain degree of inherent misogyny, and that medieval authors who were explicitly writing for women assumed a gendered reader despite the reality that most texts reached readers of multiple genders.[298] While the incorporation of female material into these works at all necessitates some influence, to what degree do these female visionary authors affect the Life of Christ genre overall if male compilers modify their texts to fit within their own purposes?

Most scholarship on the gendered nature and misogyny of devotional texts written for women falls in either the direction of oppression on the part of the authors or towards women's empowerment on the part of the female readers themselves. Anne Clark Bartlett and C. Annette Grisé are good examples of scholars who have noted such trends: Grisé argues that while the texts are designed to supposedly "empower" the female reader, "the female models and prescriptions represented in these texts limit the reader to certain kinds of behaviour, and stress a stance of obedience and recognition of authority and hierarchy above all else (despite the feistiness of the models)."[299] Bartlett, on the other hand, argues that some of these devotional texts written for women are "an affirmation of sexual equality" and "refuse to validate conventional antifeminist stereotypes."[300] The contradictions about gender in these texts, where ideals of femininity such as virginity are lauded, yet misogynistic commonplaces proliferate, ensure that the debates about how they should be interpreted will continue.

A particular subset of this line of scholarly inquiry on the interaction of male writers and female subject matter is how male authors, compilers, and translators used feminine imagery and texts in the Middle Ages. Caroline Walker Bynum discusses how male authors use gender and other binary reversals to bring themselves closer to God in their works, casting themselves in the feminized figure of a bride or a child in order to assume the submissive attitude they considered

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298. Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 1; C. Annette Grisé, "Women's Devotional Reading in Late-Medieval England and the Gendered Reader," *Medium Ævum* 71, no. 2 (2002), 210.

299. C. Annette Grisé, "Continental Holy Women and the Textual Relics of Prayers in Late-Medieval England," in *The Medieval Translator, 10/ Traduire Au Moyen Age, 10,* eds. Jacqueline Jenkins and Olivier Bertrand (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 165–78; 219.

300. Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers*, 101.

necessary to approach the divine.[301] She says, "the very set of dichotomous symbols that clustered around male/ female in the western tradition suggested that men—powerful, clerical, authoritative, rational, 'divine' men—needed to become weak and human, yet spiritual, 'women' in order to proceed toward God. And male writers in the later Middle Ages used much such reversed imagery for self."[302] This does not hold true in female works, which tend to eschew images of reversal in favor of continuity and paradox: "[women] saw themselves, metaphorically speaking, not as warriors for Christ but as brides, as pregnant virgins, as housewives, as mothers of God"[303] These subject positions concerning gender and divinity demonstrate that men often thought of femininity as limited and submissive, which was a desirable state in which to approach a relationship to God. It was a role to be adopted when one wanted to be particularly subservient. However, women embraced their gender identity and the multiplicity of intimate roles it could offer for drawing oneself closer to God. C. Annette Grisé offers another view on the roles of religious women, noting that when female mystical texts circulate both by themselves and as part of larger works, they tend to be seen as "specialists" of a particular sort, often as a "specialist in prayer and devotional practices."[304] Not only did male authors sometimes misrepresent how women thought of female relationships to the divine based on their own conceptions of gender and divinity, they also often limited these women to specific roles in their own works, when the women themselves had a much more expansive view of their connection to divinity. When men wrote texts for women, they certainly made assumptions about what their female readers wanted or needed in their devotions, which may not have corresponded to what the women actually did want or need. However, this position of limitation could also be mitigated by how the male compilers include female sources within their texts: they often treat them with just as much respect as church fathers and other authorities.

In the context of these works in particular, scholars have largely concentrated on their use of female visionary sources as a marker of their audiences. *The Fruyt of Redempcyon* and *The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary* have not been extensively studied. Mary C. Erler has

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301. Caroline Walker Bynum, "Men's Use of Female Symbols," in *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, ed. Lester K. Little and Barbara H. Rosenwein (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 277–89.

302. Bynum, "Men's Use of Female Symbols," 283.

303. Bynum, "Men's Use of Female Symbols," 286.

304. Grisé, "Continental Holy Women," 165.

done studies of *Fruyt* as one of the last vestiges of medieval meditative texts before the Reformation, noting that Simon Appulby makes extensive use of Birgittine material.[305] Clare Dowding's doctoral thesis on *Fruyt* remains the most thorough source on the text, though Ben Parsons is currently working on an edition of it for TEAMS.[306] *The Lyf of Oure Lorde* is even more obscure to scholarly coverage, with a mention of it in Roger Ellis' overview of Birgittine texts in England and a thesis and edition of the text from Elisabeth Blom-Smith.[307]

Speculum devotorum, though not so well known in scholarly circles, has received the most comment of the texts covered here, with Paul J. Patterson leading the charge. He prepared the edition of *Speculum* for EETS and has published articles on it as well.[308] In his introduction as well as his other publications, he emphasizes the popularity of the holy women that the compiler includes and how their inclusion ingratiates the work to a female audience. This view of *Speculum devotorum* is further explored by Rebecca Selman, who investigates how the piece is tailored to a female audience not just through the use of female sources, but through the focus on the Virgin Mary and through the inclusion of feminine pronouns in the prose.[309] Finally, Ian Johnson focuses more on how the compiler situates himself within the medieval tradition of

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305. Mary Carpenter Erler, "Looking backward? London's last anchorite, Simon Appulby (1537)," in *Reading and Writing during the Dissolution: Monks, Friars, and Nuns 1530-1558*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 25.

306. Clare M. Dowding, "'For Your Ghostly Conforte That Vnderstande No Latyn': A Study of The Fruyte of Redempcyon by Symon Appulby," (Ph.D. Thesis, King's College, London, 2014)

307. Roger Ellis, "'Flores Ad Fabricandum ... Coronam:' An Investigation into the Uses of the Revelations of Saint Birgitta of Sweden in Fifteenth-Century England," *Medium Ævum* 51, no. 2 (1982): 163–86; Elisabeth Blom-Smith, "The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary Edited from ME Trinity College Cambridge B.15.42 and ME Bodley 578," (Ph.D. Dissertation, King's College, London, 1993).

308. Paul J. Patterson, ed. *A Mirror to Devout People (Speculum devotorum),* EETS o.s. 346 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Paul J. Patterson, "Female Readers and the Sources of the Mirror to Devout People," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 42, no. 2 (2016); Paul J. Patterson, "Preaching with the Hands: Carthusian Book Production and the *Speculum devotorum*," In *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature: Essays in Honour of Jill Mann*, eds. Jill Mann, Christopher Cannon, and Maura Nolan, (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2011), 134–51.

309. Rebecca Selman, "Spirituality and Sex Change: *Horologium sapientiae* and *Speculum devotorum*," in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 63–80.

compilers through his use of rhetorical strategies and scholastic prefaces than his use of his female sources.[310] The trend for Patterson, Selman, Johnson, and other scholars who mention *Speculum devotorum* is to focus on the audience's perception of the text, usually through a gendered lens since the audience is specifically identified as female. However, audience-based studies often omit considerations of how the compiler of *Speculum devotorum* and other compilers of Lives of Christ deployed female visionary texts to their own purposes in their works. While the investigation of audience reaction is important with these texts, the compilers also had a reaction to the sources that they used, and studying how they are incorporated into the extant works can reveal how these male compilers thought about their female sources and how they wanted to present them to their audiences.

I would like to suggest a middle ground for the texts in this chapter where the male compilers and authors assume the concerns of women, but turn to female sources to address those concerns. When they include female sources, they incorporate them as full *auctores*. While these male writers are limiting the extensive texts of their female sources to those assumptions, the fact that they turn to female sources at all is a step toward acknowledging that female readers may want to encounter other women in their readings. In including these female voices, the male authors open their works to the expansiveness of female religious experience. *Speculum devotorum, Fruyt of Redempcyon,* and the *Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary* demonstrate how male compilers incorporated female voices into the popular Life of Christ genre and how male authors addressed female concerns within a medium that they knew women would read. In this genre, where scripture and orthodoxy dictate the sequence of events and much of their interpretation, it is not so much that compilers are trying to invent new material so much as they are incorporating material that they believe will create a reaction in their (often female) audience. By incorporating some authoritative female sources, the compilers are acknowledging both the expertise of their mystical female sources and the desires of a female audience to see themselves in the text.

I would like to add a caveat here, which is that none of the things that are identified in this chapter as "women's spirituality" are chiefly the purview of women. However, they are often interpreted both by medieval writers and modern scholars as female-coded concerns. These female-coded concerns include everything from such seemingly clear-cut issues as childbirth and

310. Ian Johnson, *The Middle English Life of Christ: Academic Discourse, Translation, and Vernacular Theology* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013), 152.

child care, to the more ambiguous discernment of spirits and praise of God. Nevertheless, in this chapter I will argue that male compilers used their female sources to address what they saw as feminine spirituality and issues, and that this produces an ambiguous interpretation of how the writers themselves perceived their female sources. Before I get to a close analysis of the texts themselves, I will look at the composition, audience, and context of *Speculum devotorum* and *Fruyt of Redempcyon,* with a glance at *The Lyf of Oure Lord* since not much is known about its context, then explore the complicated contexts of the women's visionary texts that were used in these works. Finally, I will do a close analysis of how each of these texts use their female visionary sources.

Compilers, Audiences, and Sources

Medieval Authorship

The concept of medieval authorship has many distinctions of hierarchy, authority, and responsibility, which are necessary to understand for a discussion of Lives of Christ. A.J. Minnis shows that medieval *auctores* were more than just writers: their works "contained, or possessed, *auctoritas* in the abstract sense of the term, with its strong connotations of veracity and sagacity."[311] Scripture was considered the most authoritative text, with its ultimate authority derived from the divine inspiration to the human author.[312] Therefore, the act of writing a book did not necessarily assure full authorship. St. Bonaventure's prologue to Peter Lombard's *Sentences* describes four concepts of medieval authorship, categorizing them according to the degree of creative involvement: the scribe (*scriptor*) copies and neither adds to nor changes the text; the compiler (*compilator)* selects and rearranges the texts of others into something new, adding nothing original; the commentator (*commentator*) writes some original material for the purpose of explaining extant material; the author (*auctor)* writes original material that may include the works of others as confirmation.[313] Thus, the writers of the *Speculum devotorum* and *The Lyf of Oure*

311. Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 10.

312. There was, of course, debate about the involvement of the human author versus divine inspiration. For a discussion on how medieval scholars thought about this, see Minnis Chapter 3, "Authorial Roles in the 'Literal Sense,'" 73-159.

313. Minnis, 94.

Lord are more compilers than authors. The same could be said for Simon Appulby, the writer of *Fruyt,* though his addition of original material makes this a more complicated question.

Female Visionary Authors

The concept of medieval female authorship is even more complicated. To say that women, and visionary women in particular, are authors outright in the modern sense is a difficult proposition. To begin with, female mystics, whether English or continental, rarely wrote their own texts. Instead, they often had a male confessor or other cleric who would act as an amanuensis, writing down the woman's visions as she dictated them or translating them from the vernacular into Latin for wider consumption. This was the case for Birgitta of Sweden, for instance.[314] This creates problems of interpretation because it can be difficult to sort out what parts of the text purely stem from Birgitta and what parts are from her editors in the edited and published *Liber caelestis*.[315] Though the voice of the female mystic is therefore often mitigated by the editorial presence of men, this influence was part of the medieval process of validating the visions of women and allowing their experiences to be shared at all. However, contemporaries considered the texts of visionary women to be authored by the women themselves, as we see in *Speculum, The Lyf,* and *Fruyt.*

Men and the Church affected female visionary authors not just in their texts, but in most aspects of their lives. The process of visionary women receiving approval from the Church in the high and late middle ages was difficult and complicated for visionary women. Dyan Elliot argues that the mandates of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, with its requirements for auricular con-

314. See Introduction for a more detailed discussion of how Birgitta's visions were recorded. The exception to the case mentioned above is Mechthild of Hackeborn, whose sisters at Helfta were her recorders, the most notable of whom was her fellow mystic, Gertrude the Great.

315. Though this problem is beyond the scope of this chapter, other scholars such as Hans Alii and Catherine M. Mooney, among others, have worked to figure out how this editorial process has worked and how this affects the transmission of Birgitta's visions. See Hans Alii, "Alfonso's Editorial Work in the Liber Ad Reges: A Pitfall for Vernacular Translators?," in *The Translation of the Works of St. Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars*, ed. Bridget Morris and Veronica O'Mara, The Medieval Translator 7, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2000), 25–42. See also Catherine M. Mooney, ed. *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.)

fession and reception of the eucharist, heavily influenced women's spirituality towards "physicality, eucharistic devotion, [and] confessional practice" as "proof of orthodoxy."[316] Thus, for women who had visions, the oversight of a confessor was necessary, and "[a] saint's confessor was usually the chief purveyor of proof on behalf of his holy client's sanctity."[317] The late-medieval canonization process was incredibly complicated, drawn out, and, Elliot argues, inquisitorial. Canonization proceedings were "exquisitely slow," involving prolonged campaigning from the proposed saint's supporters, multiple investigations by high-ranking church officials, the production of witnesses and documentation of miracles, and a final evaluation by the papal curia.[318] While this process was common to all proposed saints at the time, potential female saints and mystics in particular drew gradually more ecclesiastical suspicion as temporal distance from the Fourth Lateran Council increased. Since the women were overseen by their confessors, and since the canonization process was so intensive, the confessors often began the recording and testing process while the woman was alive, even though the process of canonization could not occur until after her death.[319] The increasing cases of mystical fraud led to all mystical women gaining a reputation for it, no matter how genuine their experiences. [320]

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316. Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2.

317. Elliot, *Proving Woman,* 181.

318. Elliot, *Proving Woman,* 127. See 127-135 for the full description of the canonization process.

319. Elliot, *Proving Woman,* 181. These tests could range from merely recording her life, visions, and miracles, to the autopsy of Elizabeth of Hungary, where investigators looked to see if her statement that she "had no need of crosses and icons, for she carried the crucifixion in her heart" was true. They did find an inscription of the crucifixion in Elizabeth's heart, thus rewarding the "incumbent literalism" of the canonization process. (192).

320. In contrast to Elliot's more pessimistic view of the relationship between female mystics and their confessors, Elizabeth Petroff sees this relationship in a much more positive light. She argues that in certain situations between confessor and mystic, the "clearly hierarchical and power-laden situation" became "one of equality"(139). She argues this happened because the men want to learn from the women after they demonstrate their closeness with God, and they are interested in women's "refreshing new viewpoints; they can react and respond to situations directly (or so it seems to male observers) without recourse to precedents, and thus they can be transgressive in ways a male ecclesiastic cannot be"(140). As the men learned from the holy women, they use their belief in their holiness to construct a "rhetoric of transgression" in their *Vitae* because the lives are "caught, deformed, by the felt contradiction between their own sense of mission and vocation and their internalization of the medieval world's institutionalized misogyny"(161). Most of this rhetoric of transgression is using the woman's reputation of holiness to overcome her transgressive acts by showing how they are divinely inspired or miraculous (165).

However, this meant that women who did make it through the process of canonization were eminently proved and approved by the church. Though there were many mystical and holy women during this time, we can note that all three of the Middle English Lives under consideration use officially canonized mystical women, with the possible exception of Mechthild of Hackeborn in the case of *Speculum devotorum.* Though she was not officially canonized by the church, she was generally regarded as a saint and had a great reputation for orthodoxy within the late-medieval religious community.[321] Due to scrutiny from the Church, authors and compilers only used the most vetted and appropriate women as sources for their texts.

Because the Church generally discouraged the appearance of more visionary women, the writers who did use these women's writings in their works made efforts to cast them in a different light, and in the cases of *Speculum devotorum, The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary,* and *Fruyt of Redempcyon,* they are portrayed as female *auctores.* Rebecca Selman argues that *Speculum devotorum* specifically uses female authors as a way to tailor the book to its female audience, using the Virgin Mary and Birgitta as *auctores* whom the reader can emulate to further her own spiritual growth.[322] Likewise, Catherine of Siena is used as an authority "on a topic normally out of bounds to women"—that is, spiritual discernment.[323] I would counter that while these visionary women were certainly considered exemplary, the compilers' casting them as *auctores* places them firmly in the role of unattainable holiness rather than as imitative examples for the female readers of their works.

Therefore, the confessor, compiler, or editor has an important role of verification, working with the female saint rather than constantly testing her holiness, as Elliot portrays. These differing interpretations show two sides of the spectrum for the relationship between female saints and male clerics, and while each case inevitably varied based on the situation, the individual personalities involved, and the specific interventions of the divine, the process of verifying a female saint was fraught with gender trouble no matter the circumstance. See Elizabeth Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

321. Voaden, "The Company She Keeps," in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England,* ed. Rosalynn Voaden, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 56. Teresa Halligan, introduction to *The Booke of Gostlye Grace of Mechthild of Hackeborn* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1979), 55.

322. Selman, 71.

323. Selman, 71.

The complex relationships between medieval *auctores* and compilers and the gendered trouble of visionary women and their authenticity still result in the texts of visionary women influencing the Life of Christ genre, despite being filtered through the scholarly auspices of male compilers. This process leads to a strange hierarchy of authority, where the visionary women are treated as superiors within the texts, yet the male compilers' carefully selected passages display a limiting influence on the expansive experience of the holy woman. This creates another complication, where the audience encounters the selected passages of the visionary not as they originally presented themselves and their texts, but as authorities on various aspects of Christ's life and spiritual issues that surround it. These relationships of texts, compilers, and audiences are what makes it so important to contextualize them as much as possible.

The Compilers

Little is known about the compiler and the audience of *The Lyf of Oure Lord*. The text exists in two manuscript copies. One is in Cambridge, Trinity College Cambridge B. 15. 42, and the other Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 578. It presumably has a male author, though it is unclear whether he was a religious or lay person. His lack of prologue or any reference to himself makes identifying him very difficult. The organization of his sources and his citing of them suggest that he was well-educated and familiar with both scripture, the Life of Christ genre, and common methods of compilation. Indeed, Elisabeth Blom-Smith, in her dissertation on this text, calls him a "scholarly compiler."[324] His audience is equally opaque. Blom-Smith suggests that his interest in the Virgin Mary could indicate a general lay audience, or an audience of nuns.[325] Without more information on the author and audience of this text, it is impossible to further determine the compiler's identity or his intended audience for the work.

The writer of the *Speculum devotorum* is an anonymous Carthusian linked to Sheen Charterhouse.[326] His preface to the work and the colophon of one of the two extant manuscripts, Cambridge University Library MS Gg.1.6, provides the information we have about him. He includes a description of the circumstances for the composition of *Speculum devotorum*, referring to a

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324. Blom-Smith, viii.

325. Blom-Smith, xvii.

326. Patterson quotes this colophon in "Female readers": "Mirror to Devout People: and it is a book of the home of Jesus of Bethlehem by the Carthusian order of Sheen" [Speculum devotorum: et est liber domus Ihesu de Bethleem ordinis cartusiensis de shene] (fol. iii)" (182). I also transcribe, translate, and discuss the colophon in chapter one.

conversation with the Syon nun who is its intended audience: "whenne we spake laste togyderys I behette [promised] ȝow a medytacyon of the Passyon of oure Lorde."[327] The compiler of S*peculum devotorum* is fully aware of his status in the hierarchy of authorship. His prefaction contains many of the elements of an academic prologue: the title, the name of the book, his intention for the composition, the subject matter of the book, the didactic purpose of the book, and its utility. The *Speculum devotorum* compiler is also careful to note where he gets his material, and what his *auctores* say, with introductions to their words whenever he uses them, such as "for the whyche synne as Hylton seyt," in chapter one, referring to Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* as a source.[328] He does this so fastidiously because "[t]o be authentic, a saying or a piece of writing had to be the genuine production of a named auctor," which means that when one is introducing an *auctor*, one must name them.[329] This was especially true with compilers rather than authors, because the compiler's role was to arrange the texts of *auctores*, not to contribute their own material.

In addition to his clear knowledge of formal scholastic structure, the Carthusian compiler was also familiar with the enormity of the genre to which he was contributing. He became quite daunted by the realization of his competition. When he discovered that there were already several books extant that accomplished what he meant to do, notably the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditaciones Vitae Christi* and Nicholas Love's English translation of it, he nearly abandoned his work. He includes his many doubts and how he overcame them in the preface, which is worth quoting at length:

> I have besteryd [resolved] ofte tymys to have lefte thys bysynesse, both for my vnworthynesse, and also for Bonauenture a cardynal and a worthy clerke, made a boke of the same matere the whyche is callyd *Vita Christi.* And most of all whenne I herde telle that a man of oure ordyr of charturhowse had iturnyd the same boke in to Englyische. But er I began this occupacyon, I askede conseyil of spiritual and goode men I hope and leue of my Pryoure. And ȝytt aftyrward whenne I was moste in dowte of all and hadde proposyd to haue left all togyderys and no more vtterly to haue therto [and have nothing more to do with it], ȝytt

327. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 1.
328. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 14.
329. Minnis, 11.

> thowgth I woulde aske conseyul of my Pryoure the whiche I specyally louyde and truste myche to. And I trowe I tolde hym what mevyde me [how I felt], and he ful charytably comfortyde me to performe hyt wyth sueche wordys as cam to hys mynde for the tyme. And so on the mercy of God trustynge, to whom ys nothynge vnpossyble, wyth drede of my vnkunnynge [ignorance] and vnworthynesse, also sumwhat bore vp be [inspired by] the conseyil of goostly fadrys and the merytys of hem that be þe mercy of God mowe be profytyd be my sympl traveyle … I thowgth be the grace of God to make an ende therof .[330]

While this tale definitely has elements of the humility *topos* so common among medieval writers, it also has a tone of genuine struggle and reluctance to finish the project, despite the pressure of a promise made to his female friend. The compiler's panic at finding an analagous task already done, turning to his prior for advice, and his own thoughts about how to complete the project can be read as confirmation that some of the difficulties of writing do not change through the centuries. However, this description of one monk's composition process has been interpreted as both complete ineptitude and as brilliance in modern scholarship, which offers us insight into both the compiler and the audience for the work.

Vincent Gillespie argues that the compiler of *Speculum devotorum* is "haunted" both by the thought that he is resowing an already fruitful textual field and the possibility that his work will reach audiences beyond his intended audience of one.[331] Gillespie sees the compiler's insecurity as an indication of this: "Indeed the prologue presents a compelling portrait of a man haunted by his own sense of textual inadequacy, an inadequacy that goes well beyond conventional generic gestures of humility and incapacity."[332] With the Arundelain declarations against Lollardy and the glut of devotional texts emerging at the time, he argues that the *Speculum devotorum* compiler's solution to dealing with this insecurity was to tailor the work to the Syon sister in particular, and the larger Syon community as well. He cites the references to male contemplatives who also preach and a wider female audience within *Speculum devotorum*, which fits

330. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum*, 3-4.

331. Vincent Gillespie, "The Haunted Text: Reflections on A Mirror to Devout People," in *The Text in the Community: Essays on Medieval Works, Manuscripts, Authors, and Readers*, ed. Maura Nolan and Jill Mann (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2006), 129–72.

332. Gillespie, "The Haunted Text," 139.

the split community of Syon perfectly.[333] Gillespie's interpretation of the prologue is that the compiler framed his text more in terms of the completion of a personal agreement rather than an advanced literary undertaking.

In contrast to Gillespie's evaluation of the preface, Ian Johnson argues that the compiler's protestations are a careful rhetorical assembly of authority. He suggests that the compiler's proclaimed ineptitude is a rhetorical strategy, playing into the humility *topos* to add further authority to his work by invoking his prior and other spiritual advisors: "The Translator tells us that before beginning the work, and also during his greatest doubts in the throes of performing it, he consulted suitable people, including, most importantly, his Prior, who had a personal spiritual responsibility for him, and, by extension, for all his work, including this text. To follow such advice lends a form of *auctoritas* to the text different from and beyond the authority to be gained from sources alone."[334] The Carthusian compiler successfully makes his own humility evident, but he places the authority of his prior, other spiritual advisors, and his sources in the place of any authority he may give up. In addition to that, the compiler uses the example of the gospels and their complementarity, or the fact that "that one leuyth anothyr supplyeth" to justify himself making another life of Christ, for "It is possible to diverge in treatment from other versions of this material but still to be a faithful interpreter, for the *sentence* of the Gospels is greater than any one version of them can contain."[335] If the authority of the prior and the other sources are not enough, he reaches for the highest of authorities, scripture itself, to argue that his iteration of a meditative Life of Christ has a place in a devotional landscape which has already been flooded with similar material. Though Johnson could potentially be reading too much rhetorical gymnastics into this tale of doubt, I am inclined to agree with him that the compiler's preface makes the case that *Speculum devotorum* is a valuable contribution to the Life of Christ.

Though there are varied views of *Speculum devotorum*'s compiler, the facts about him remain clear. The Carthusian of Sheen was familiar enough with formal medieval literary theory to compose his work in accordance with it, indicating that he was well educated and well read. Indeed, Patterson says that with all the sources the *Speculum devotorum* uses, it is "unique as a

333. Gillespie, "The Haunted Text," 154.
334. Johnson, 152.
335. Johnson, 155.

text that would not likely exist outside the Sheen-Syon nexus of textual production."[336] This nexus is a well-known collaboration between the Carthusians and the Birgittines, where the Carthusian monks would curate and prepare texts for the nuns at Syon.[337] As part of the mentorship of the sisters, the two houses likely exchanged resources so that the texts produced at Sheen were as comprehensive as possible.[338] Patterson proposes that most of the sources that the compiler uses would have been available at Sheen or Syon. However, the compiler does seem to become genuinely overwhelmed with his project. To overcome this, he relies on the rigor of academic writing and the *auctoritas* of the sources he consults, proving himself a traditional and capable compiler.

The author of *Fruyt of Redempcion* is Simon Appulby, a priest who became an anchorite of Allhallows London Wall. Charles Welch first brought him to scholarly attention in 1912, when he prepared an edition of the account Rolls of the Allhallows London Wall parish. He describes the financial contributions that Simon made to the church.[339] These may not seem to be very significant, but in the context of a poor parish, Simon and his contributions indicate that he was a lively participant in parish life despite his enclosure.[340] In modern scholarship he appears in Mary Rotha Clay's *The Hermits and Anchorites of England,* where she groups him with other "literary recluses" like Julian of Norwich and Richard Rolle for his composition of *Fruyt*.[341] In her "Further Studies of English Recluses," she fully identifies the Symon of London Wall from the colophon of *Fruyt* as Simon Appulby of the Allhallows London Wall parish, which prompted

336. Paul J. Patterson, "Female Readers," 194.

337. E. A. Jones and Alexandra Walsham, eds. *Syon Abbey and Its Books: Reading, Writing and Religion, c.1400-1700* (Woodbridge, U.K. ; Rochester, N.Y: Boydell, 2010), 27-8.

338. Patterson, "Preaching with the Hands," 136.

339. Charles Welch, ed. *The Churchwardens' Accounts of the Parish of Allhallows, London Wall, in the City of London : 33 Henry VI to 27 Henry VIII : (A.D. 1455-A.D. 1536) / Transcribed and Ed. ... by Charles Welch ... To Which Is Added a Facsimile of The Fruyte of Redempcyon by Symon the Anker of London Wall, Emprynted by Wynkyn de Worde, 1514*, (London, 1912).

340. Over the years of his enclosure, he contributed a stand of ale, the hiring of his servant for plastering a wall, financial gifts he had received as personal gifts from "divers men and women of their devocion," a loan to the church, presumably for the building of a new aisle, and finally a chalice and a pax. See Welch, *The Churchwarden's Accounts,* 53; 56; 59; 68.

341. Rotha Mary Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., Singing Tree Press, 1968).

other scholars to elucidate on his life there.[342] Mary C. Erler then takes up the story. She finds that Simon was a priest before he was enclosed, and that he was elected 1505-7 as a warden for the St. Augustine Pappey, a community for aged and infirm priests.[343] *The Fruyt of Redempcyon* was published in 1514, a year after Simon's enclosure.[344] From his 1537 will, Erler determines that he was the last anchorite of London Wall—and indeed perhaps in all of London—since he left all of his belongings to the next anchorite, or, if one was not found after a year and a day, to his executor to bestow as he thought best.[345]

The Audiences

Speculum devotorum identifies a very specific audience for itself, namely the anonymous sister of Syon Abbey whom the narrator addresses often within the text. The compiler seems to know her well, since he addresses her personally in the preface. Anne Clark Bartlett says that this friendliness is part of a "discourse of familiarity" that developed in literature for nuns by monks in this period.[346] This discourse of familiarity "provides a textual space for the elaboration of a communal ethic forbidden, or at least discouraged, by religious authorities; it offers some compensation for the ubiquitous warnings of ecclesiastics against personal contact between pious women and men; and it may document a type of intimacy that flourished in practice, despite being banned in theory."[347] Most notably, she says that it displays a tone of equality between the writer and the reader. Bartlett says that this tone indicates some progress from the inundation of misogynistic textual material of the Middle Ages, though these texts still have some of the "misogynistic commonplaces" that were so ubiquitous at the time.[348] This closeness is inevitably undermined by the perceived relationship between the writer as a spiritual director and the addressee as the spiritual advisee. Despite this, the air of spiritual friendship makes itself quite clear in the preface to *Speculum devotorum*, and the compiler seems to genuinely care for the welfare and spiritual growth of his dedicatee.

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342. Rotha Mary Clay, "Further Studies on Medieval Recluses," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 16, no. 1 (June 1953), 74–86.
343. Erler, "Looking Backward," 25.
344. Erler, "Looking Backward," 25.
345. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 236.
346. Bartlett, 4.
347. Bartlett, 91.
348. Bartlett, 109.

As Gillespie suggests, though, the compiler of *Speculum devotorum* may have had a slightly wider audience in mind than the original ghostly sister.[349] He takes a rather didactic tone in explaining how to use his work, returning to an academic tone after his long digression on his own failings and insecurities: "Ferthymore, ȝe schal vndyrstande þat the dylygent thynkynge of oure Lordys manhede ys a trewe weye wythoute dysseyte [deceit] to vertuys and to the gostly knowynge and trewe louynge of God and the suetenesse in grace to a deuot soule that canne deuoutly and dylygently occupye hym therinne."[350] Although the statement that the incarnation is the best way to increase one's faith and love of God is a rather common medieval belief, the command that "ȝe schal vndyrstande" underscores the didactic purpose of this text. The ghostly sister's request for the work indicates that she likely understands the purpose and use of such a text, and teh compiler's statement fulfills the rhetorical need for an intention for the text rather than directly educating the stated audience. However, it could indicate that the compiler anticipates a larger readership than the one sister. While it reminds her of the purpose of such a text, a novice within the Syon community or a lay reader may need the introduction to the theology behind the work.

Paul Patterson's studies into the reception of *Speculum devotorum* show that it did reach beyond the walls of Syon and into lay hands. He determines that one of the two manuscripts of the work, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame, Hesburgh Library, cod. Eng. d. I (Notre Dame MS 67) belonged to the aristocratic Scrope family.[351] He argues that they had ties both to Syon and Sheen as well as the London book trade, which would allow them to obtain a copy of *Speculum devotorum* and other devotional works.[352] This would indicate that though *Speculum devotorum* did not enjoy as wide an audience as Nicholas Love's *Mirror* or other popular devotional texts, it did reach a larger audience than the author initially intended.

Unlike *Speculum devotorum, The Fruyt of Redempcyon* does not define a specific audience within the text. Claire Dowding, in her unpublished doctoral thesis on *Fruyt,* says it is "a text aimed firmly at the English-reading laity and presenting material which will help both increase their knowledge of the faith and deepen their experience of the practice of that faith."[353]

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349. Gillespie, 154.
350. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 5.
351. Patterson, "Female Readers," 181–200.
352. Patterson, "Female Readers," 188.
353. Dowding, 13.

This audience reflects Appulby's immediate community. Though it is unclear when he wrote *Fruyt*, Appulby had been involved in the community close to his anchorhold for a number of years before his enclosure, which we know from his involvement in the St. Augustine Pappey. The Pappey itself, as Erler notes, was united with Allhallows in 1427, and the community of aged priests was founded in 1442.[354] After his enclosure, we know that Simon was very engaged in the day to day running of the parish from the account rolls, discussed above, and from the established tradition of the anchorite being an important spiritual and financial contributor to the parish. Additionally, Simon is not the only Appulby to appear in the Allhallows account rolls; around the time that Simon is active in the rolls, there are other Appulbys peppered throughout the accounts.[355] This would seem to indicate that in addition to being involved in the community of Allhallows London Wall in general, Simon had some family in the area, who either moved there with him or had been there all along. His immediate community of priests and the members of the Allhallows London Wall parish must have influenced his writing, especially because he had a variety of devout lay people within his immediate environment to provide inspiration about what would be most helpful for their spiritual development. In addition, he had a community of elderly priests nearby, whom he could consult about the needs of laypeople should he wish to do so. Being part of such a vibrant if poor community surely influenced him as he compiled his text.

Despite its focus on the laity in general, *Fruyt* also reached religious audiences, and it enjoyed a great deal of popularity. Mary C. Erler reports that William Bonde of Syon Abbey recommended it in the first edition of his *Pylgrimage of Perfection* in 1526.[356] It was also collected into a personal volume of religious tracts by Dame Margaret Nechollson, a nun, around the same time.[357] It received the printed approval of the London Bishop, Richard Fitzjames, in the form of a colophon, which Erler and other scholars parallel with Archbishop Arundel's endorsement of

354. Erler, "Looking Backward," 16.

355. Welch, 56-60. There are multiple entries Appulbys, such as "Item for ryngynge of the knyll & makyng of the pytt for the goode wyfe Appulby" in the out payments. There are also many records of a Raffe Appulby, a married man who may first appear in one of the middle years of King Henry VIII's reign as a churchwarden (the account lists "Raffe" but the last name is not recorded); but who paid for his wife's "knyll" in the same year, lived in the church house, "Item Rs of Raffe Appulbey for a holl yers Rent of the Churche hovs" in 1528, and a record of a loan to the church from Raffe from the same year, which was paid back over the next two.

356. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 231; Dowding, 89.

357. Erler, "Looking Backward," 28.

Nicolas Love's *Mirror*.[358] The *Fruyt* went through five editions, as Erler notes, and which Dowding outlines most completely in her thesis, with the first edition in 1514 by Wynkyn de Worde, followed by three more editions by him in 1517, 1530, and 1532.[359] Robert Redman also printed an edition of *Fruyt* in 1531.[360] Dowding also notes that all of these editions contained Bishop Fitzjames' endorsement, even though he died in 1522 and London had gone through two more bishops by the time it was next printed in 1530.[361] Erler elaborates, arguing that "spring 1530 was clearly a high point in London's struggle over scriptural access, and *Fruyt* should be seen at this time, in its second set of appearances, as a substitute for William Tyndale's New Testament whose revised edition had been printed in Antwerp on January 17, 1530."[362] Throughout that year there had been a debate about producing the Bible in the vernacular, with Henry VIII and Bishop of London John Stokesley coming down on the side of traditional orthodoxy and therefore against vernacular scriptures.[363] Perhaps because of its orthodoxy and its endorsement from powerful figures, *Fruyt* was quite popular for its time, though it probably enjoyed most of its circulation within the environs of London.

The Sources

In addition to the gospels, Lives of Christ have a cumulative list of sources that includes the Church Fathers, *Vitae* of saints, and other Lives of Christ. The three texts surveyed here are no exception. The *Meditaciones Vitae Christi (MVC)* is the main source for *The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary*, which is fairly common for Lives of Christ written after its appearance in the fourteenth century.[364] Though both *Speculum devorotum* and *Fruyt of Redempcyon* fit into

358. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 228.
359. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 229; Dowding, 21.
360. Dowding, 21.
361. Dowding, 22.
362. Erler, "Looking Backward," 31.
363. Erler, "Looking Backward," 30-1.
364. See pp. 48-62 of Bestul for a discussion on how the *MVC* fits into the Latin Life of Christ genre and tradition. He says that many details of the Passion narrative are taken from the earlier Latin textual tradition (49). However, unique details from the *MVC,* such as Christ's body being stretched so much on the cross that only his head can be moved and the wounds from the flagellation being reopened when he is stripped, made their way into later Latin and vernacular Lives of Christ, such as those by Richard Rolle (50). Though the *MVC* may not be the origin of Mary's heightened emotional role in the Passion (contemporary works such as the "Quis dabit" also focus on Mary's grief) this trend from the end of the thirteenth century made its way into the subsequent works in the genre (51; 52-62).

the Life of Christ genre, neither of them use the *MVC* as a main source, despite its continuing popularity into the sixteenth century. The *Speculum devotorum* compiler bypasses the famous pseudo-Bonaventuran text consciously, supposedly avoiding the *MVC* because he knows of Love's translation and the latter's popularity. It is unclear whether Simon Appulby was aware enough of the *Meditaciones,* or its translation the *Mirror,* to have either incorporated it or avoided it, though its general popularity in the late Middle Ages would make it probable that he was acquainted with it. Regardless, both of these texts are unusual in that they are affective lives of Christ that do not openly incorporate the *Meditaciones*, suggesting that, though the text was very popular, the demand for material on the life and humanity of Christ necessitated that compilers seek out other sources for their new works.

Although *Speculum devotorum* does not use the *MVC* as main source, it was certainly inspiration for the author. Patterson says that he creates a companion text for the *Meditaciones* instead: "The *Mirror…* fills in and supplements the details of the *Meditationes vitae Christi* and its English translations. As a result, the *Mirror* author never directly relies on the *Meditationes vitae Christi* as a source, instead relying on the Bible, the Church Fathers, and a select group of female authors to compose a life of Christ. This use of sources allows the *Mirror* to act as a companion to the *Meditationes vitae Christi* that inserts details not found in the pseudo-Bonaventuran work while also offering spiritual guidance and direction to its audience."[365] In fact, Patterson astutely observes that "At nearly every point that the *Mirror* author discusses a detail of the life of christ found in the *MVC,* he chooses a different source to follow" and "when it does rely on the *MVC* for a detail, the *Mirror* [*Speculum*] does not give the *MVC* credit."[366] The *Speculum devotorum* compiler draws on details from the *MVC* in the Passion sections especially without crediting his source.[367] Though this unacknowledged use of the source indicates, as Patterson argues, that the *Speculum* compiler was trying to distance himself from the *MVC,* it also suggests that work's ubiquity and perhaps how well it had worked itself into the medieval consciousness about the events of the Passion.[368] Either the compiler or the reader may have simply expected details from

365. Patterson, "Female Readers" 191. See also the introduction to Patterson's edition to *Speculum devotorum.*

366. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* xxxiv-xxxv.

367. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* xxxv.

368. Birgitta especially was likely also familiar with the *MVC.* A comparison of her revelations on the Passion (1.10 and 7.15) show that many details are shared—in the MVC, he

the *MVC* in the Passion narrative especially, given its popularity. The compiler seems to have been unable to avoid the *MVC* despite his best efforts.[369]

With regard to the sources that are named in *Speculum devotorum*, the compiler himself says that "specyally I haue folowyd in þys werke tueyne doctorys," Nicholas of Lyra and Peter Comestor, whom the compiler always refers to as the "Mastyr of Storyis."[370] Patterson identifies the specific works he draws on as Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilla* and Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica.*[371] There are other sources as well, such as the *Legenda Aurea,* John of Hildesheim's *The Three Kings of Cologne,* Henry Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae,* the Venerable Bede, St. Bernard, Adam the Carthusian, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Walter Hilton, and of course his female sources, discussed more extensively below.[372] The compiler chooses his two main sources, Lyra and Comestor, "for they goo neryest to the storye and the lettural vnderstandynge."[373] Indeed, Gillespie, Patterson, and others have noted that, for better or worse, *Speculum devotorum* is perhaps more concerned with relating events and orthodox theology, or the literal interpretation of

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"opened up those royal arms and stretched out his most beautiful hands, extending them high for his crucifiers" (Taney et al. 252) ("et aperit illa regalia brachia, et expandit manus pulcherimas, et excelsas eas porrigens crucifixoribus suis," Stallings-Taney, ed. 271) whereas in 7.15 he "stretched his right arm out voluntarily, opened his hand and placed it on the cross" (Searby vol. 3 p. 235) ("voluntarie extendit brachium suum et aperta dextera manu posuit eam in cruce," Bergh, ed. 165). However, Birgitta includes details that distinguish her visions from the *MVC,* such as the fact that she insists in both visions that Christ's feet are fastened to the cross with two nails while the *MVC* only has one (Searby, vol. 1, p. 68; idem vol.3, p. 235; Taney et al. 253). She also includes details of Christ's suffering that are entirely absent from the *MVC,* such as the detail in both visions of his stomach being so thin that it appeared "as if he had no vital organs" [quasi non haberet viscera](Searby vol.1 p. 69; Undhagen 269; see also Searby vol. 3 p. 237). See Taney et al., *MVC*, ch. 78; Searby and Morris vol.1 p. 65-70; idem vol. 3 p. 234-8 for English translations. For the Latin see Birgitta of Sweden, *Sancta Birgitta: Revelaciones*: Book I , ed. Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, SFSS, ser. 2, Latinska skrifter 7:1 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977): 263-71; Birgitta of Sweden. *Den Heliga Birgittas Revelaciones*: Bok VII , ed. Birger Bergh. SFSS, ser. 2, Latinska skrifter 7:7. (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967), 165.

369. It could also be that, as Vincent Gillespie argues, the author of the *Speculum devotorum* is losing control of his sources in general: "His array of sources, and his often clumsy marshalling of them, reveals more of the influence of anxiety rather than the anxiety of influence. Far from being a dwarf on the shoulders of giants, he is a dwarfish narrator lost among a sea of giant legs and often uncertain which leg to cling to." "The Haunted Text," 141.

370. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum*, 6.

371. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum*, xxxii.

372. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* xxxii; xliv.

373. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum*, 6.

scripture, than affective reaction, which perhaps supports the idea that the author was trying to avoid the *MVC*.[374]

Unlike *Speculum devotorum*'s complicated relationship with the *MVC,* Simon Appulby seems to have little trouble avoiding the pseudo-Bonaventuran text in favor of his own sources in *Fruyt of Redempcion*. Mary C. Erler identifies the sources of this text as the *Antidotius animarum,* the *Liber caelestis* of Birgitta of Sweden, and some original material from Simon Appulby himself. She splits the distribution of these sources into about fifty percent of the work incorporated from the *Antidotius animarum*, twenty-five percent Birgitta, and the last quarter of the work original.[375] The *Antidotius animarum* is a shortened version of the anonymous *Meditationes de vita et beneficiis Jesu Christi, siue gratiarum actiones*.[376] This longer and very popular work of passion meditations was published in 1488 in Cologne, with six more editions printed before 1500.[377] A Cistercian abbot compiled the *Antidotarius* as a highly abridged version of the *Meditaciones de vita et beneficiis Jesu Christi*, and it was published on July 9, 1489.[378] *Antidotarius* is not so much a *Vita Christi* text as "a manual of spiritual medicine… it was popular and useful collection, providing prayers for a variety of occasions."[379] There were seventeen printings of it in multiple continental cities, indicating its widespread popularity.[380] Simon used this text as a close source for *Fruyt,* for though he shortened its forty chapters into thirty one, he often keeps the chapter titles in his translation and frequently translates whole chapters verbatim.[381]

While *Speculum devotorum* and *Fruyt of Redempcyon* avoid using the *MVC* as a main source, the *Lyf of Oure Lord* employs the *MVC* as its main source text, though it supplements the *MVC* with both Latin and vernacular material. At its heart, the *Lyf* is a translation of the *MVC* into Middle English, though, as Blom-Smith notes, the compiler does not call his work a translation at any point.[382] However, though it is the text used most consistently throughout the *Lyf,* the

374. Gillespie, "The Haunted Text," 141; Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* xxxvii.
375. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 230. Dowding confirms this distribution of source material in her thesis, 103.
376. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 229.
377. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 229.
378. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 229.
379. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 229.
380. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 229.
381. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 229.
382. Blom-Smith, viii.

compiler only took selections from the *MVC* rather than using it as the foundation for his work.[383] He also seems to have a different intention for his narrative, since he almost always excises the meditative material from the *MVC* chapters, which Blom-Smith says creates "a narrative work rather than a devotional/meditative one."[384] After the *MVC,* the compiler of the *Lyf* relies on the Gospels, though with caution, as the translation of scripture into the vernacular was a fraught subject at the time of its composition.[385] The writings of Birgitta of Sweden also appear consistently throughout his text. In addition to these main three sources, the compiler incorporates material from other texts such as *Mandeville's Travels,* the apocryphal gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*,* the apocryphal *De nativitate Mariae,* and Bernard of Clairvaux's *Super missus est.*[386] During the Passion narrative and after Christ's ascension, the compiler makes considerable use of the *Lamentacion of Mary,* another Middle English devotional text. [387]He also uses Walter Hilton's *The Prickynge of Love* and Thomas of Hales' *Vita Sanctae Mariae.*[388]

Female Sources

The remarkable thing about all three of these texts is their incorporation of continental female mystical writings into their Lives of Christ. Despite the fact that the *Speculum devotorum* compiler seems to have steered more towards didacticism than mysticism, he incorporates "summe reuelacyonys of approuyd wymmen" into his text:, Elizabeth of Hungary, Mechthild of Hackeborn, Catherine of Siena, and Birgitta of Sweden.[389] Birgitta is used by far the most extensively, with her writings appearing in chapters 5, 11, 22, and 25. Chapter 5 is the Nativity, chapter 11 is on what Christ did between the ages of 12 and 33, and chapters 22 and 25 are on the

383. Blom-Smith, ix.

384. Blom-Smith, ix.

385. Blom-Smith, xi. See Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," *Speculum* 70, no. 4 (October 1995), 822–64 for a discussion of the issues surrounding vernacular translations of scripture.

386. Blom-Smith, xiii-xiv. For modern editions of these works, see Mandeville, John, *The Book of Marvels and Travels,* ed. Anthony Paul Bale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), *Libri de nativitate mariae,* eds. Jan Gijsel and Rita Beyers (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997).

387. Blom-Smith, xiv.

388. Blom-Smith, xiv. She notes that Pseudo-Matthew is employed in the passages on Anna's three marriages and for the flight into Egypt, while *De Nativitate Mariae* is used for Mary's betrothal to Joseph and other material.

389. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum*, 6.

Passion, with the incorporated revelations describing the method of the crucifixion and how they took Christ's body from the cross. Roger Ellis tells us that *Speculum devotorum* uses material from individual chapters of the *Liber caelestis,* most notably Book 7, chapter 15, which is a Passion narrative.[390] However, he does not specifically note the other revelations that the compiler cites in *Speculum devotorum,* which are Book 7, Chapter 21 for the Nativity, Book 6, chapter 58 for Mary's description of the interim years of Christ's life, and Book 7, chapter 15 for the revelation of taking Christ's body from the cross.[391]

The texts of Mechthild of Hackeborn and Catherine of Siena are each used only once in *Speculum devotorum*. Mechthild is used in Chapter 29 very briefly to describe a vision of angels at Christ's Resurrection. This citation comes from Pars 1, chapter 19 of the *Liber specialis gratiae* (*LSG*)*,* or Book 1, chapter 37 in *The Booke of Gostlye Grace.*[392] The *vita* of Catherine of Siena is used in Chapter 3 of *Speculum devotorum* as an authority on spiritual discernment. Finally, the Life of Elizabeth of Hungary is used in chapter 33 of *Speculum devotorum,* which focuses on devotion to St. John the Evangelist. Though these visionary women have relatively short excerpts when compared to the entirety of the book, they are used to comment on things that the compiler considers to have special importance for his female readers.

As I said above, Erler identifies the *Liber caelestis* of Birgitta of Sweden as constituting one quarter of the *Fruyt of Redempcyon.* Most of the interpolations of her visions are in the Passion chapters, with some additions of further Marian material earlier in the work. Dowding and Erler note that this material appears in chapters 4, 16, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26, and 28.[393] In the printed versions of *Fruyt,* the Birgittine citations of book and chapter are in the margins, such as "Liber primo reuelatio capitulum x E" in chapter 19.[394] Roger Ellis does a close study of Simon's incorporation of Birgittine visions into his work, saying that he only used individual chapters of the

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390. Ellis, "Flores," 179.

391. See Table 2 in the appendix to this chapter.

392. Halligan, ed., *Booke of Gostlye Grace,* 180-182. The organization is different between the Latin and the Middle English versions of the text.

393. Dowding, 37; Erler, "A London Anchorite," 230. See Table 3 in the chapter appendix for a chart of sources and chapters in *Fruyt.*

394. Dowding, Appendix, Diii. There are other marginal notes in the printed text, most often "oratio" to mark the prayer section at the end of most chapters, but other than a citation of "bernardus" and "leuiticus xii" in chapter vii, Birgitta is the only source that is identified in the marginal glosses. Dowding notes that these marginal citations are "so precise…that these notes

Liber caelestis, like the author of *Speculum devotorum*, most frequently material from Book I, chapter 10, though he does also sample from 4.70.[395] He notes that while Simon leaves most of the text unchanged in his compilation, he does change Birgitta's first person narrative to third person.[396] Dowding confirms Ellis' identification of source chapters from the *Liber caelestis*, adding that there are references to Book IV, chapter I, and Book X, chapter x.[397] Dowding is puzzled by the reference to a Book X of the *Liber caelestis,* pointing out that "[t]here are, however, only eight Books in the *Revelations* as edited during Bridget's lifetime and immediately after her death by Alphonse of Pecha. It would therefore appear that these references are misprints, although it seems strange that someone as able as Symon was at interweaving material from two sources into a single whole, showing at least a working familiarity with the *Revelations* in the process, should make such an error."[398] I would argue that this identification is not an error, but rather points to a close association with Syon Abbey.

The *Lyf of Oure Lord* uses only Birgitta of Sweden as a female source, though it uses her text most extensively of the three surveyed here. The *Revelations* are used throughout the text, and notably the *Sermo angelicus,* which served as the Matins readings for Birgittine nuns, is a major source.[399] The description of the marriage between Joachim and Anna uses *Revelations* 1.9. The nativity of Mary uses *Revelations* 6.56. *Revelations* 6.59 is used to describe Joseph's discovery of Mary's pregnancy, and *Revelations* 7.25 is used in the same section to comment on Mary's perpetual virginity. *Revelations* 7.21 provides a source for the Nativity, which is combined with material from *Revelations* 1.10. The section covering the childhood and adolescence of Jesus uses *Revelations* 6.58 and 6.1, in addition to material from the *MVC.* The Passion sequence paraphrases or translates *Revelations* 1.10 and 7.15 throughout, though as Blom-Smith notes, when the *Revelations* contradict the *MVC,* the compiler chooses the information in the

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also have to be authorial," though it is unclear whether they were only part of the printing process or whether they were orignally intended to be part of the work (39).

395. Ellis, "Flores," 179.

396. Ellis, "Flores," 180.

397. Dowding, 37.

398. Dowding, 38.

399. All of the following identifications are taken from Blom-Smith's explanatory notes, pp. 172-245 of her thesis. See Table 4 in the chapter appendix.

MVC.[400] At the death of Christ, the compiler includes *Revelations* 6.11, in which Mary tells Birgitta what happened when her son died. After the Ascension, the compiler uses passages from the *Sermo angelicus,* passages from 19.11, 16.11, and 17.11, and some additional material from the *Revelations*, from 1.10 and 6.61, to describe what Mary did after that time and before her own ascension. Mary's assumption uses material from *Revelations* 6.62, 1.9, 2.23, and 1.50 and *Sermo Angelicus* 19-21. The *Lyf* uses much of the same material as *Speculum* and *Fruyt* but also extensively mines other chapters from the *Revelations* as a source for information on the lives of Christ and Mary.

Syon Connections

While *Speculum devotorum* has obvious Syon connections, with the primary audience for the work being a sister at the Abbey, *Fruyt of Redempcyon* has more tenuous connections to the abbey that nevertheless indicate an association. In both texts, the use of the *Revelations* of Birgitta of Sweden as a main source is a significant clue that there is probably some connection to the only Birgittine house in England, though Birgitta's popularity in England went beyond even the reach of that very influential religious house.[401] *Speculum devotorum*'s use of other female mystics, most notably Catherine of Siena and Mechthild of Hackeborn, further indicates a Syon connection, since the monastery is known to have promoted the dissemination of female mystical texts in England and the works of these two women in particular.[402] The lack of context surrounding *The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary* obscures any connections to the Birgittine Abbey it may have had, though the extensive use of Birgittine sources, particularly the *Sermo angelicus,* and the concentration on the Virgin Mary throughout the work, could be indications of a Syon tie.

Simon Appulby and *The Fruyt of Redempcyon* could have textual relationships to Syon beyond the simple use of its patron saint's text. The relative proximity of the Allhallows London Wall community to Syon, also in the London area, could also indicate a link, as word of such a famous monastery was bound to trickle throughout the city. However, links through the book trade as well as links to a particular Syon manuscript provide closer ties between Simon, the

400. Blom-Smith, xii.

401. F. R. Johnston, "The English Cult of St. Bridget of Sweden," *Analecta Bollandiana* 113, no. 2 (1985), 75–93.

402. Voaden, "The Company She Keeps," 56. See also Grisé, "Textual Relics," 165–78.

Fruyt, and Syon. As noted above, Dowding says it is strange that Simon cites a book X of Birgitta of Sweden's *Revelations* when there were only eight books edited and published by Alfonso of Jaén, Birgitta's editor.[403] However, Syon Abbey had a copy of the Latin *Revelations* of Birgitta of Sweden which contained additional material related to her. This immense fifteenth-century volume still survives as London, British Library MS Harley 612. This manuscript also contains the *Celeste viridarium*, another work of Birgitta's revelations compiled by Alfonso of Jaén that compiles information about the life of Mary and Christ from Birgitta's *Revelations* into a single coherent work.[404] The manuscript is incredibly well-organized, beginning with the original eight books of the *Revelations,* then following that with *Ad Pontifices,* another compilation of revelations to popes specifically, the *Celeste viridarium,* the *Regula salvatoris,* the defenses for Birgitta's canonization, and then lives of Katherine of Sweden and Peter Olafson. These items are presented as continuing books of revelation material, and the *Celeste viridarium* is labeled Book X in Harley 612. The marginal notes in the *Fruyt* cite Book X chapter x E, and the passages can be traced to similar accounts in the *Celeste viridarium* of Harley 612.[405] This mirroring is a bit contestable, since most of this passage in *Celeste viridarium* comes from Revelation 1.10. However, as Table 1 shows, Simon's translation is closer (though not exact) to the passage in *Celeste viridarium* than to the original revelation.[406] Though some passages are closer to the original revelation, such as where the person asks if they will kill Jesus without a death sentence, Simon takes some details, such as Pilate leading Jesus to the cross in the first sentence of the passage, from *Celeste viridarium.* Since *Celeste viridarium* was not likely known as the tenth book of Birgitta's revelations outside of Syon or this manuscript, it is not impossible that Simon consulted Harley 612 in the process of writing *Fruyt*.

There are several issues with this theory. The first is that Simon would have had to travel to Syon to consult the book. Though books may have traveled outside of the walls of Syon, the

403. Dowding, 38.

404. Ellis, 167. I discuss *Celeste viridarium* and Harley 612 in chapter one.

405. Dowding says that the letters in the citations refer to sections of the text within the chapters that Appulby cites, particularly when he cites multiple non-consecutive portions of the same chapter (157-8).

406. See Table 1 in the appendix. The bolded passages demonstrate areas where the translation more closely matches *Celeste viridarium.* Italicized text is omitted from Appulby's translation. Note that Simon moves the passage where Christ's enemies tie him to the pillar, though he translates it closely.

sheer size of Harley 612 would make that nearly impossible. This magisterial tome measures 550x390 mm, or almost two by three feet. As if this were not enough, the manuscript's 312 leaves make it incredibly heavy, so that while it is possible for a single person to carry it, it is an arduous endeavor. It is very unlikely that this book moved even within the monastery very much, and the likelihood that it left Syon after its arrival there is very low. Therefore, Simon would have had to consult it *in situ* for his work or have someone transcribe the needed passages for him. There is no record of Simon visiting or becoming a benefactor of Syon himself in the Martiloge, which recorded saint's feast days and was used by the abbey to record the deaths of its benefactors and important visitors. However, there is a record in the Martiloge of Thomas Graunt, the cantor of St. Paul's cathedral, in this volume. Thomas may be related to another Graunt, John, who mentions Simon as the Anchor of London Wall in his 1517 will.[407] Erler notes that John Graunt was very interested in and invested in books, as his will leaves several books in print and manuscript to religious houses around the London area.[408] It is possible, then, that through his connections in book production and trade in London, Simon obtained access to Harley 612, either in person or through proxy.

Differences in citations also present a challenge to the theory that Simon used Harley 612 directly. Harley 612 does identify *Celeste viridarium* as book X, but it divides it further into three books and then chapters within that. The passage on the Passion is Book 3, chapter 1 according to Harley 612, not chapter 10 as Simon indicates.[409] This discrepancy could be his conflating the chapter of the source revelation of 1.10 with book X. It could also be that Simon had access to a different copy of *Celeste viridarium* that contained different organization. Or it could be a mistake. These connections, though tenuous, provide a window into the possible textual ties of *Fruyt* to Syon. A more concrete tie is William Bonde, a brother of Syon, recommending *Fruyt* in his *Pylgrimage of Perfection* in 1526.[410] However, this connection happened after the publica-

407. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 232.

408. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 232.

409. The only other extant manuscript copy of the *Celeste viridarium,* Oxford, Bodleian Library Canon Misc. 475, does not indicate what book of the Revelations it might be, nor does it share Harley 612's book organization. The chapter on the passion is numbered LXX in the table of contents of the manuscript and LXXI in the actual text.

410. Erler, "A London Anchorite," 232.

tion of *Fruyt* in 1514, so it may not indicate that Simon had a Syon connection during the composition of his work. Since *Fruyt* was published the year after his enclosure, it's possible he was working on it before he was enclosed, and could have made a trip to Syon.

Speculum devotorum and *Fruyt of Redempcyon* have many similarities. Both are written by religious men, both incorporate the texts of visionary women, and both were written with specific audiences in mind. In addition, both texts are shaped beyond the intentions of the compilers, with the *Speculum* compiler struggling with making his Life of Christ different from the ones already available to his audience, and with Simon Appulby's work receiving the endorsement of the Bishop of London. Though we do not know the particular circumstances of *The Lyf of Oure Lord,* we can surmise that this compiler also strove to make his contribution to the genre unique with his extensive use of vernacular sources for new material. Having explored the particular circumstances of these works, let us now turn to a close examination of how the texts about and by holy women are incorporated in these Lives of Christ.

Approuyd Wymmen, Female Authors, and Complications

Female Sources in *Speculum devotorum*

The author of *Speculum devotorum* adds the texts of his "approuyd wymmen" to his work to discuss things that he thinks are particularly female-coded concerns. However, he treats these women as *auctores* with just as much respect as he does his other sources, granting them legitimacy and authority on their subjects. Elizabeth of Hungary comments on chastity. Mechthild of Hackeborn is used in the context of female praise and possibly Eucharistic devotion. Catherine of Siena is used as an expert on the discernment of spirits. Finally, Birgitta of Sweden is used as an authority on exclusive material about Christ's life with a concentration on maternal concerns since much of her revelations on the subject come from Mary. I will look at his use of them in order of how much material he uses from each source, starting with Elizabeth of Hungary.

The last chapter of the *Speculum devotorum,* which details Pentecost and some of the activities of the disciples after the events of the Gospels, contains a lengthy sermon on John the Evangelist. A brief detail from the *vita* of Elizabeth of Hungary in Jacobus de Voragine's (ca. 1229-1298) *Legenda aurea* appears in the chapter within a long list of rulers and holy people

who relied on John the Evangelist especially.[411] The compiler introduces Elizabeth by noting that she "chese oure Lady, Godys modyr, into here patrone and mene, and Seyint Iohn euangelyste into the kepare of here chastytee."[412] He then recounts that Elizabeth's participation in a ceremony where the apostles' names were written upon scrolls which the maidens at court randomly selected from an altar, and "fyrste prayinge thre tymys as sche desyryde, toke þe scrowe þat Seyint Iohn euangelystys name was writte inne."[413] This small miracle cements the idea that John the Evangelist guarded the saint's virginity—until she later submitted to marriage.[414] Despite the protection of a male saint, the compiler's inclusion of a female source here suggests that he considers chastity a fundamentally female-coded matter. Though non-married men (and especially monks, who vowed chastity) were also encouraged to remain virgins, it was a much more popular and important social and religious concern for women.[415]

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411. Patterson attributes this section to Elizabeth of Töss in his introduction (xl). However, the Elizabeth that the compiler makes mention of in chapter 33 is Elizabeth of Hungary, or Elizabeth of Thuringia (1207-1231). I shall use Thuringia in the remainder of this note for clarity. This is *not* the Elizabeth who authored the mystical *Revelacions of Saynt Elysabeth the Kynges Doughter of Hungarye,* though it has often been attributed to her. Despite this confusion, *Speculum devotorum* cites the Life of Elizabeth of Thuringia from the *Legenda Aurea,* which has no relationship to the *Revelacions.* For a concise summary on the debate over the authorship of the *Revelacions*, see Laura Saetveit Miles, *The Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation: Reading, Interpretation, and Devotion in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), 120-2. See Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), Elizabeth of Hungary at 688-704; Iacopo Varazza, *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Giovanni Paolo Maggioni (Firenze: Sismel, 1998), 1156-79.

412. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 172.

413. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 172.

414. de Voragine, trans. Ryan, 689; Varazza, ed. Maggioni, 1157. The translation of the *Legenda* cites Saint Peter as the name on the scroll rather than John the Evangelist. The Latin cites John the Evangelist.

415. Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 39. Karras notes that because "virginity was the opposite of marriage", it was also "the rejection of the control of a husband" (39). However, she also points out that virginity was a much less variable and permanent state for men because "[h]aving had sex once did not make a man permanently impure, because men in heterosexual intercourse were not penetrated" (43). Therefore, virginity was a possible opportunity for freedom for women, but it was also much more limiting because a woman's chastity was thought to be much more dependent on her physical purity than a man's.

St. John the Evangelist's association with chastity as a male saint makes him an outlier in this usually female-coded issue. As the compiler extols at great length, John the Evangelist himself remained a virgin.[416] At the Crucifixion, John becomes the caretaker of the Virgin Mary, "þat a vergyne mygthte kepe a virgyne."[417] Because of his virginity and his closeness to Christ, as Jeffrey Hamburger asserts, "In John the Evangelist's person … the Virgin Mary finds her male counterpart."[418] Sarah McNamer takes this idea further, arguing that John the Evangelist was regarded as both feminine and masculine in late-medieval culture, and particularly in Passion narratives. She posits that in Middle English Lives of Christ, John the Evangelist "appears to function more broadly as an image of a mixed or third gender: as a model of the feminized man."[419] However, John's feminization strengthens him rather than weakens him, for his mix of female compassion for Christ's suffering and his assertion of his male gender accords him "centrality in the drama of the Passion."[420] With his crucial role in the Passion narrative, his status as a virgin, and his special closeness with Christ, John the Evangelist becomes an excellent candidate for the keeper of any holy woman's chastity. As a male virgin his combination of masculine authority and the more feminine trait of chastity may have appealed to the compiler's ideals of encouraging appropriate male protection for female virtues.

Even though the compiler venerates John the Evangelist's male virginity at length, when he specifically recommends John as a keeper of chastity, he turns to a female source. He selects one small episode from the lengthy *vita* of a well-regarded female saint, Elizabeth of Hungary, choosing a miracle that confirms a male saint's protection of her sexual purity. Though this choice shows some consideration of his audience, since the presumably female reader can follow the holy woman's example and devote her own chastity to St. John the Evangelist, it also demonstrates the compiler's strategy of selectively excerpting his female sources.

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416. The compiler considers Saint John's virginity to be one of the main factors that made him a favorite of Jesus: "And for the clennesse of vyrgynytee, as doctorys seyin, oure Lorde louyede hym afore othyre." *Speculum devotorum,* 162.

417. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,*163.

418. Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *St. John the Divine: The Deified Evangelist in Medieval Art and Theology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 166.

419. Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 142. For McNamer, this feminization of John originates in his feelings of compassion for Christ's suffering during the Passion, an emotion that she characterizes as feminine.

420. McNamer, *Affective Meditation,* 145.

The compiler briefly excerpts Mechthild of Hackeborn's *LSG* in chapter twenty-nine, which focuses on the Resurrection. The compiler cites her as an *auctor*, introducing her as an expert on praise and the glory of heaven. I quote the excerpt here in its entirety:

> And att thys gloryus Resurreccyon, ȝe may thynke was a gret multytude of angyllys, for hyt ys conteynyd in a reuelacyon of Seyint Mawte þat here semyde sche seygh sweche a multytude of angyllys aboute the sepulcre þat fro þe erthe vp to the skye they wente aboute oure Lorde as hyt hadde be a walle.[421]

Mechthild's fifteenth-century reputation makes her an appropriate touchstone for a vision of heaven. Barbara Newman states that "no other visionary text is so preoccupied with heaven or so convinced of its nearness to earth."[422] Voaden notes that walls of angels appear four times in Mechthild's visions, making this a characterizing image for her.[423] Further, she argues that Mechthild "was a familiar figure of orthodox piety to those connected with Syon, to the extent that her name became a kind of free-floating talisman, to be attached to various devotions and prayers in order to add to their *gravitas* and signal their orthodoxy."[424] The compiler draws on Mechthild's popularity at Syon to reinforce his connections with his audience and to reposition female praise at the center of the salvific narrative of the Resurrection.

The "wall of angels" passage is excerpted from a larger vision in the *LSG*, which is Pars 1, chapter 19 of the *LSG*, or Book 1, chapter 37 in the Middle English *The Booke of Gostlye Grace*.[425] The compiler more likely made his own translation from a Latin copy of the *LSG* than that he transcribed it directly from the Middle English, though I quote the Middle English here for accessibility and because the Middle English follows the Latin closely. In this vision, which

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421. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 141.

422. Barbara Newman, introduction to *Mechthild of Hackeborn: The Book of Special Grace,* ed. Barbara Newman (New York: Paulist Press, 2017), 1-34 at 16. See also Barbara Klein, "The Discourse of Heaven in Mechthild of Hackeborn's *Book of Gostlye Grace*," in *Imagining Heaven in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays,* ed. Jan Swango Emerson and Hugh Feiss (New York: Garland, 2000), 83-99.

423. Voaden, "The Company She Keeps," 56.

424. Voaden, "The Company She Keeps," 60.

425. Mechthild of Hackeborn, *Liber Speicalis Gratiae,* in *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechthildianae*, ed. Dom. Ludwig Paquelin, 2 vols (Paris: H. Oudin, 1877), vol. 2, 60; *Booke of Gostlye Grace,* ed. Halligan 180-182.

takes place appropriately on "Paske nyȝt" or Easter Vigil, Mechthild has a vision of Christ's Resurrection that begins with Jesus "syttynge or restynge in þe sepulcre."[426] She is then "lyȝttenede with grace of God" so that she "had knowynge" of how each person of the Trinity contributed to the incarnation of Christ, and Jesus tells her, "In my resureccioun, hevene ande erth ande eche othere creature mynystrede to me þe same seruyse."[427] Mechthild then sees the wall of angels: "Ande anone, to here semynge, sche sawe a multytude of awngels abowte þe sepulcre insomoche þat to here syght fro the erth vppe to hevyne þay were al abowte oure lorde as a walle."[428] She then asks Jesus what the angels are saying to him, and he responds that they are singing the liturgical *Sanctus,* and *Eya nunc iubilemus.* Mechthild then sees her own congregation around Jesus and

> fro his herte þare wente manye sunnebemys into eche of þame syngerly: Oure lorde also strecchyd oute hys hande to ech of þame and gaffe þame his gloryficacion and sayde: "Loo, y gyffe to ȝowe the cleerte of my humanyte glorifiede."[429]

The nun who was the stated audience for the *Speculum devotorum* would likely be familiar with this passage's wider context. Syon Abbey had seven copies of the *LSG*: three sixteenth-century printed editions (which admittedly would have been too late for the nun to access) and four manuscripts, three in Latin and one in English.[430] This evidence for multiple copies of Mechthild's work at Syon demonstrates her popularity within the community, and it suggests that the compiler expected his audience to be acquainted with this passage.

The Resurrection is a particularly female-centered episode within the gospel narrative, for Christ first appears to women—the Virgin, Mary Magdalen, and the other Marys, in the *Speculum devotorum*.[431] Female praise of Christ is at the heart of this episode. The compiler thus turns

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426. *Booke of Gostlye Grace,* ed. Halligan 180.
427. *Booke of Gostlye Grace,* ed. Halligan*,* 180.
428. *Booke of Gostlye Grace,* ed. Halligan*,* 181.
429. *Booke of Gostlye Grace,* ed. Halligan, 181.
430. Patterson, "Preaching with the Hands," 147. See also *Syon Abbey*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and A. I. Doyle, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 9 (London: British Library in association with the British Academy, 2001), entries 755 M.22; 780 M.47; 792 M.59; 827 M.94; 840 M.C7; 854 M.121.
431. Mary Magdalen is the first to see the resurrected Christ in the Gospel narrative (Mark 16:9, John 20:11-18). In *Speculum devotorum, MVC,* and other lives of Christ, Jesus visits his mother first.

to a female visionary known for her revelations of heavenly rejoicing. He first spotlights women and their reaction to the Resurrection, mentioning that the angel sat down on the stone of the tomb in order "þat *the wymmen* mygthe see þat oure Lorde was aryse" and that "hys clothynge as snowe *to ȝeue conforte to the wymmen.*"[432] The long passage where Jesus visits Mary first after he rises, which of course focuses on the "ioye and gladnesse" (joy and gladness) Mary experiences when she sees him again, further enhances these reminders that women were the first to learn of the Resurrection.[433] The compiler's use of Mechthild's vision and his emphasis on women in the narrative amplifies the Resurrection as a moment of specifically female rejoicing. Just as female compassion is a primary concern in the Passion narrative, as we shall see, female joy becomes the focal point of the Resurrection.

The compiler's emphasis on female praise and rejoicing at the Resurrection may be his attempt to fill a meditative gap in the Life of Christ narrative. Mechthild's vision draws attention to the Resurrection, which can often seem like a disappointment in affective Lives of Christ after the intense descriptions of Christ's suffering in the Passion. George R. Keiser comments that the narrative of Middle English Lives of Christ after the Resurrection is "inevitably repetitious and a bit tedious" because "there is not much opportunity for affective writing in this portion of the narrative."[434] Unlike the grisly details of the Passion, compilers have no details of Christ's experience for the Resurrection and therefore must rely on the overjoyed or doubting reactions of Christ's followers for affective material. In adding Mechthild's vision of the wall of angels at this point, the compiler gilds the miracle of the Resurrection with heavenly glory even as he references a holy woman familiar to his audience.

Speculum devotorum uses excerpts of Catherine of Siena's *vita*, compiled by Raymond of Capua, in chapter three, the Annunciation, to discuss the discernment of spiritual visions. Discernment of spirits became a vital issue in medieval Europe because the correct discernment of

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432. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum*, 141, my emphasis.

433. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 143.

434. G. R. Keiser, "Middle English Passion Narratives and Their Contemporary Readers: The Vernacular Progeny of *Meditationes Vitae Christi*," in *The Mystical Tradition and the Carthusians,* ed. James Hogg, vol. 10 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1996), 85–99.

visions—whether they were of divine or demonic origin—was often the difference between becoming a saint and becoming a heretic.[435] Barbara Newman argues that visionary devotional culture was plagued with confusion about "uncontrolled visionaries" that came from "a profound, yet rarely explicit, clash between two competing theologies of revelation": the theology of meditation, where the "spiritual elite" could "court sacred encounters through techniques for the deliberate alteration of consciousness" and spiritual discernment, which "sternly warned the devout never to covet, much less solicit, any vision."[436] This confusion could lead to conflict with or even repression of female visionaries.

While Elliot notes that many visionary women were gifted with spiritual discernment, such as Birgitta of Sweden and Marie d'Oignies, "a more systematic approach to discernment was pioneered by a series of important theologians who were trained at the University of Paris and occupied official positions there," such as Jean Gerson (d.1429).[437] Rather than complementing the gifts of discernment that female mystics demonstrated, "the development of an academic theory of discernment … necessarily sidelined the apostolic emphasis on practice, deflecting attention away from its female practitioners."[438] This academic method of discernment relied on theories derived from scripture and careful evaluation of the visionary's morality rather than the visionary's experiences of the divine and their own testimony of receiving discernment as a spiritual gift.[439] As the most enthusiastic proponent of academic discernment, Jean Gerson directly challenges the influence of Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, creating a "shadow text"

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435. Nancy Caciola describes discernment of spirits as "a practice of institutionalized mistrust regarding individual claims to visionary or prophetic authority. …On the one hand, a person encompassed by constant supernatural interventions might be defined as a divinely inspired prophet or visionary, a mouthpiece of God. Yet it was equally possible to categorize such an individual as a demoniac possessed of unclean spirits, as a false saint puffed up with pride, or as a victim of demonic delusion." See Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*. Conjunctions of Religion & Power in the Medieval Past, (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1-2. Those claiming to be visionaries placed themselves in a position fraught with real danger of extreme institutional condemnation and even death.

436. Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80, no. 1 (2005), 1-43 at 5-6, DOI:10.1017/S0038713400006643.

437. Elliott, *Proving Woman,* 256-7.

438. Elliot, *Proving Woman,* 222.

439. See Elliot's discussion on the subject in *Proving Woman,* 215-222.

of Alphonso of Pecha's defense of Birgitta.[440] This systematic theological approach dominated the ecclesiastical milieu.[441]

The *Speculum devotorum's* compiler implicitly takes a side in this debate by referring to a female mystic rather than to the scholastics as the expert here, supporting divine inspiration rather than scholastic study in this matter. He brings the matter up at the Annunciation, for "oure Lady was dystrublyd or abaschyd in the speche of the angyl … for they were not wounde to seye sueche thyngs to here."[442] The Virgin Mary's encounter with a divine visitor mirrors Catherine's experience, further signaling the compiler's alliance with the visionaries. However, he is cautious in how he incorporates the visionary source itself. He leans hard on the aspect of divine insight in his introduction: "How a man or a womman mygth knowe a good vysyon fro a badde, and whenne they be of God and of an euyl spyryt, *oure Lorde taugth* Kateryne of sene a prophytable lore."[443] Catherine's introduction emphasizes the inspiration much more than the holy woman herself in comparison with the compiler's other introductions of female mystics. The compiler couches her authority in divine instruction and church authentication rather than her own visionary prowess, getting directly to the revelation, and therefore God's words, as quickly as possible. Christ teaches Catherine, and by proxy the reader of the *Speculum devotorum*, two methods of spiritual discernment. In the first, Christ tells Catherine:

> Doctorys that I haue taugth seyin, and soth hyt ys that my vysyonys begynn wyth a threde, but euyrmore be processe they ȝeuen more sykyrnesse. They begynnyn also wyth a manner bettyrnesse but alwey by processe they wexe more suettyr. the vysyon of the enmy hath the contrarye, for he ȝeuyth in the begynnynge, as hyt semyth, a maner gladnesse, sykyrnesse, or suetnesse, but alwey be processe threde and byttyrnesse growen contynuwally in the mynde of hym or here that seyth.[444]

440. Elliot, *Proving Woman,* 237. For more on Alfonso, see Arne Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén: His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi*, Studia Graeca et Latina Lundensia 1 (Lund: Lund Univ. Press, 1989).

441. Elliot, *Proving Woman,* 263.

442. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 20.

443. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum*, 20, my emphasis.

444. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 20.

He presents the second method, which is "more vndeseyuable and sykerer," [more valid and secure] as follows:

> Haue þu for a certayne þat sygth I am trewthe alwey of my vysyons reboundyth in the soule more knowynge of trewthe, and for the knowynge of trewthe ys most necessarye abowte me and abowte hytself, þat ys to seye, þat hyt knowe me and hytselfe, of þe whyche knowynge euermore comyth oute þat hyt dysspysyth hytself and worschypyth me, the whyche ys the propyrtee of mekenesse, hyt ys necessarye thanne that of my vysyonys the soule be made more meke and more to knowe hytself and hys owen vylytee and wrecchydnesse and so to dyspyse hytself. The contrarye comyth of the vysyonys of the enmy, for in as myche as he ys fadyr of falsnesse and kynge vpon alle the chyldryn of pryde and maye not ȝeue but that he hath, alweye of hys vysyonys reboundeth in the soule a maner propyr reputacyon or a presumptousenesse of hytself, the whyche ys the propyr offyce of pryde and hyt abydyth isuolle and yblowe wyth the wynde of pride.[445]

Clever readers can apply Catherine's criteria for good visions to the Annunciation. Her first method of discernment, that divine visions begin bitterly but grow sweeter, is borne out when Mary is "dystroblyd" at the angel's appearance. However, Gabriel tells her to "Drede not" (Fear not) and "for more certeyne confort of here" informs her that her cousin Elizabeth has also conceived.[446] Mary's experience of the Annunciation here begins with fear and discomfort, but eventually she is filled with joy. As for Catherine's second method of discernment, which states that the soul becomes meeker and more obedient to God, the compiler characteristically uses repetition as emphasis as he instructs the reader to "beholdyth … the meke consentynge of the blyssyd virgyne and also how mekely she callyth hereself but a seruant whenne sche wyste hereself be hym that sche schulde be werkynge of the Holy Gooste brynge forth to be Quene of Heuene, Lady of þe Worlde, and Empresse of Helle."[447] Mary's experience perfectly demonstrates Catherine's methods of discernment.

445. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 20-1.
446. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 18-9.
447. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 19.

Catherine is a reliable *auctor* because she acts as a conduit for divine revelation, but the compiler also subtly incorporates scholastic approval into this endorsement of visionary discernment. Jennifer Brown notes that this passage originates from the *vita* of Catherine written by Raymond of Capua rather than from the *Dialogo*, to which it is most often attributed.[448] Since the *vita* is a vital piece of evidence in the canonization process, Raymond makes rhetorical choices in its composition that draw attention to Catherine's orthodoxy, such as drawing attention to the places where her visions confirm clerical teachings. Luongo argues that this was a deliberate strategy: "The production of Catherine's writings was a cooperative effort, one in which both Catherine and her scribes participated, but one from which Catherine nevertheless emerges with a clear authorial voice. Neither Catherine nor her followers, by emphasizing the divine source of her texts, intended to undermine her claim to the status of an author, any more than they did John, or Aquinas, or Augustine."[449] These rhetorical choices have further consequences—other clerics may find the *vita* more acceptable or authoritative because of them. The text itself already conveys a certain kind of institutional authority in how Raymond carefully aligns Catherine with orthodox beliefs; for example, according to Brown, "it is notable that Jesus's first words to Catherine are to validate the opinions of what 'some clerks say,' confirming that Catherine's visions are in line with orthodox arguments on the matter."[450] Though the compiler turns to a female source in this instance, he also acknowledges divine and clerical approval for this controversial subject.

The compiler's choice of the *vita* rather than the *Dialogo* is unlikely to be one of simple availability. The *Dialogo* is the source for *The Orcherd of Syon,* which was translated and compiled within the literary circle of Syon Abbey. It is puzzling that the compiler of the *Speculum devotorum* chose the source that may be less familiar to his audience, though as Brown suggests there may have been a translated life of Catherine circulating before de Worde printed it in

448. Jennifer N. Brown, "The Many Misattributions of Catherine of Siena: Beyond *The Orchard* In England," *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 41, no. 1 (2014), 67-84 at 68, DOI: 10.5325/jmedirelicult.41.1.0067. See note 7 for a list of sources in which the mistaken attributions occur, at 82.

449. Luongo, "Catherine of Siena: *Auctor*," 111.

450. Brown, "The Many Misattributions," 75.

1492.[451] If this was the case, the *vita* may have been at Syon and available to the nuns and possibly to the compiler. Though the compiler of the *Speculum devotorum* chooses to use a female source for what was often considered a female concern, and though he puts himself on the side of the visionaries rather than male theologians, he chooses the text that conveys male institutional approval more clearly to the audience.[452]

Finally, the compiler of the *Speculum devotorum* uses Birgitta of Sweden by far the most of his "approuyd wymmen," namely in chapters five, eleven, twenty-two, and twenty-five. These chapters concentrate on the Nativity, Christ's hidden years (specifically between the ages of twelve and thirty), the Crucifixion, and the Deposition. These chapters, as Selman notes, correspond with Marian material, and Birgitta is employed as an authority on information directly from Mary herself.[453] Significantly, Paul Patterson argues that the revelations present Mary as the *auctor* in Birgitta's text.[454] He explains:

> The extra-biblical information on the life of Christ and his Passion is only available through Mary's accounts of her son as given to Birgitta in a series of visions. A female perspective relates the central moments in Christ's life and makes the text accessible to women. At a time when aristocratic women were seeking access to devotional texts, a work like *Speculum devotorum*, which elevates Mary and

451. Brown, "The Many Misattributions," 79. Alexandra Barratt points out that the brethren of Syon had a Life of Catherine and calls her *vita* "relatively accessible," which may indicate that it was more widely transmitted than the *Dialogo*: Alexandra Barratt, "Continental Women Mystics and English Readers," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 240-55 at 252. A copy of "Vita sancta Katerine de Senis" appears in the Syon Registrum; see *Syon Abbey,* ed. Gillespie and Doyle, entry 814 M.81, 246.

452. Jennifer N. Brown, *Fruit of the Orchard: Reading Catherine of Siena in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019). Brown does argue that this passage and the choice of Catherine in particular may have a more permissive purpose for the reader, for her discussion of spiritual discernment "seems to gesture towards a hidden spiritual life that has less extant textual presence. Clearly, the anthologizers/excerpters felt the passage holds an important, maybe even crucial, lesson. But that assumption is predicated on the belief that readers experience visions and need to understand how to parse them. For the reader who may not have encountered a vision, it almost permits that experience to happen, giving the reader concrete guidelines and a tacit permission" (106).

453. Selman, "Spirituality and Sex Change", 71.

454. Patterson, "Female Sources", 194.

> gives her the role of *auctor*, would have helped shape the role of reader and narrator.[455]

Indeed, Patterson argues that Mary could be the most important *auctor* of all, for she "preserves the text [of the life of Christ] for the Apostles, who will later record the story for posterity."[456] Ian Johnson agrees that Mary's role is that of an *auctor* in addition to her being "accorded an exemplary meditative role" in the narrative.[457]

While I agree that Mary's position in the *Speculum devotorum* is a vital part of the work, and that the compiler gives her pride of place in the narrative as an *auctor,* both Patterson and Johnson de-emphasize Birgitta's status as an *auctor*. Birgitta's Marian visions contain information about the life of Christ that cannot be accessed anywhere else. In much the same way that medieval scholars considered writers of scripture the height of authority because they received inspiration from a divine source, Birgitta is an *auctor* because she receives her knowledge about Christ's life directly from the Mother of God. While Mary is indeed the ultimate source of the information, the earthly status of *auctor* in the *Speculum devotorum* belongs to Birgitta because she is the one who records it. Thus, in incorporating Birgittine material, the Carthusian compiler endears himself to his audience at Syon and gains access to a new *auctor* who has information on Christ that cannot be obtained anywhere else.

The exclusivity of Birgitta's information is also tied to gender—she records maternal details from the Virgin that relate to female experiences and which travel along a line of communication among holy women. Patterson attributes the compiler's decision to use Birgitta in these chapters as a method for making the text more "accessible" to women, but the compiler may have considered the authority of the source more than its accessibility to the audience. Birgitta's gender and her access to Mary cement her expertise in moments of high maternal emotion.

The compiler draws details from Birgitta's texts which not only focus on Mary's relationship to Christ, but also contain intense affective detail. This affective detail can be considered a feminine concern, though it makes an appearance in much of the era's religious literature. Sarah McNamer's well-known claim that in late-medieval England, "Compassion, as scripted in and through Middle English meditations on the Passion, is largely a function of gender performance:

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455. Patterson, "Female Sources," 194.
456. Patterson, "Female Sources," 195.
457. Johnson, *The Middle English Life of Christ,* 174.

to perform compassion is to feel like a woman," applies here.[458] McNamer argues that identification with the Virgin Mary is a common part of this trope, where readers of meditative texts are invited to perform *imitatio Mariae* (imitation of Mary) as a way to produce a mother's compassion and grief.[459] This imitative method leads to "beholding," which McNamer says "may have functioned as a mechanism … for generating a specific way of seeing … that had the potential for producing —in the body as well as the mind— an impulse toward a particular form of compassion: the protective and ameliorative action of holding."[460] Rather than just witnessing, McNamer argues, the Middle English valences of the word *biholden* "carries, as one of its distinct meanings, the sense of seeing empathetically."[461] Birgitta's position as a visionary holy woman would have made her a professional beholder of sorts. In the Middle English tradition of Passion meditation, this makes her a model of feminized affect for the reader to follow. If the compiler follows the medieval trend of considering compassion as a feminine activity, then he considers Birgitta, with her close ties to the Virgin and the affective detail in her revelations, a font of feminine feeling as well as information.

Birgitta's status as an *auctor* in the *Speculum devotorum* is also rooted in the specifically maternal aspect of Mary and Christ's relationship. Miles argues that for medieval visionary women, "there was an *imitatio Mariae* in which the visionary saw reflected in the Virgin her own female body and its power to channel the divine, and trusted that precedent enough to trust their own calling."[462] Female visionary *imitatio Mariae* is rooted in "maternality (i.e. expressing or resembling the maternal)," which "should also been seen as a characteristic way for women to attain God. And not just maternality, but maternality as a way of *making female* textual engagement and interpretation – that which is usually marked male."[463] For Birgitta in particular, maternality signifies bringing forth her prophetic texts, not children. It is unlikely that the *Speculum devotorum's* compiler sees Birgitta's maternal *imitatio Mariae* as a conception of herself as a visionary. However, he certainly picks up on the emphasis her writings place on maternal knowledge and compassion, for he chooses to incorporate this theme into his own work.

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458. McNamer, *Affective Meditation,* 119.
459. McNamer, *Affective Meditation,* 132.
460. McNamer, *Affective Meditation,* 135.
461. McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 135.
462. Miles, *The Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation,* 118.
463. Miles, *The Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation*, 118.

The first chapter that contains Birgittine material is chapter five, the Nativity, which contains details about the birth of Christ from Mary's point of view. However, the compiler is careful to introduce Birgitta as an *auctor* with exclusive knowledge at the beginning of the passage: "Ȝytt more opynly how oure Lorde was borne and all the maner ther of oure Lady schewede to Seyint Brygytt ful fayre be reuelacyon the whyche sche tellyth thus."[464] Then follows the recounting of the birth from Birgitta's perspective. First the Virgin prepares herself and the space for the arrival of a child, removing her shoes and outer clothing and laying out cloths with which she will wrap the infant Jesus.[465] These practical nuances of childbirth are topics that one experienced medieval mother, like Birgitta with her eight children, would share with another.[466] Mary Dzon argues that these details likely offer insight into Birgitta's own ideas of childcare, or at least those of her Swedish culture, commenting on the Virgin's careful preparations.[467] After this comes the birth itself:

> Whenne all thys was thus aredy, thanne the virgyne knelyde downe wyth gret reuerence puttynge hereself to prayere, and forsothe sche helde vp here face to heuene, ilifte vp to the estewarde, and thanne she lefte vp here handes and eyen lokynge intently into heuenwarde and sche stode as thougth sche hadde be lefte vp into the extasye or suowynge of contemplacyon filde wyth goostly suetnesse. And as sche stode so in prayere I seygth thane þe chylde meuvynge in here wombe and anone, in a moment and the stroke of an eye, sche brougth forth a sone of the whyche cam out so vnspekeable lyght and bryghtnesse þat the sonne was not to be lykned therto ne the candyl that the olde man [i.e. Joseph] hadde putt in the wall in eny manerwyse ȝaf eny light, and that godly light had all brougth to nowgth the materyal lygth of the candyl and that maner bryngynge

464. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 31.
465. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum*, 31.
466. Bridget Morris, "Chronological Table," in *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden,*1:xvii-xxiii at xviii.
467. Mary Dzon, "Birgitta of Sweden and Christ's Clothing," in *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha es et O!*, ed. Mary Dzon and Theresa M. Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 121.

forth was so sodeyne and in so schorte tyme doo that I myghth not perseyve ne dyscerne how or in what membyr she browgth forth chylde."[468]

Mary's painless, instantaneous childbirth is described as a mystical episode. Instead of suffering the pangs of childbirth, Mary enters a state of divine rapture while the infant Christ emerges from her with such "unspeakable light and brightness" that Birgitta cannot quite discern how it happens. Even though Birgitta gets a privileged view of the miraculous birth of Christ, some things remain a mystery. However, Birgitta's shared status with Mary as a visionary and a mother allows her special access to episodes from Mary's life that mirror Birgitta's own experience. The compiler's framing of Birgitta's vision of the Nativity demonstrates that he is chiefly interested in Birgitta's authorial connection to maternal information rather than the parallel mystical experiences of the saint and the Mother of God.

The Nativity is not the only time that Birgitta receives special access to Mary's actions as a mother via the *Liber caelestis*, which are then incorporated into the *Speculum devotorum* as authoritative material. In chapter eleven, Birgitta becomes the authority on the years of Christ's life not recorded in scripture. The source text for this passage is Book 6, chapter 58 of the *Liber caelestis*. Dzon points out that medieval literature rarely covers this section of Christ's life, with only the *MVC* and apocryphal narratives addressing the "hidden life of Jesus."[469] In the *MVC,* the Franciscan compiler goes to great lengths to describe the virtues of Jesus doing nothing, which cultivates humility: "You see, therefore, what he was doing by accomplishing nothing; he was presenting himself as despicable to all, as I have said … The person who has so conquered self and the arrogance of the flesh, is the master of his soul, truly and without fakery."[470] However, Mary tells Birgitta that Christ did do noteworthy things in these intermediary years. Mary describes the holy family's home life. Jesus "was contynuant in preyre and he went obedyently

468. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 31-2.

469. Mary Dzon, *The Quest for the Christ Child in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 208.

470. *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, ed. and trans. Francis X. Taney, Anne Miller, and C. Mary Stallings-Taney (Asheville, N.C: Pegasus Press, 2000), 57. For the original Latin text see *Meditaciones Vitae Christi,* ed. M. Stallings-Taney, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis CLIII, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), at 66. The Latin reads, "Vides igitur quid faciebat nichil faciendo; reddebat se uilem et abiectum omnibus ut dixi… qui ad hoc peruenit, ut ex corde et animo uero non ficte, ita se vincit ac dominatur animo suo et superbo supercilio carnis sue."

wyth us to festys iordeynyd in Ierusalem and othyr placys."[471] He also "laboryde wyth hys handys othyrwhyle sueche thyngys were semely," and he "spake to vs … comfortable wordys and wordys of dyuynytee so þat we were fulfyld contynually wyth vnspekeable ioye."[472] Mary and Joseph saw his divinity as "meruelys lygth schyne abowte hym and we herde angyllys voysys syngynge vpon hym and seygth that vnclene spyrytys the whyche mygth not be put out be prouyd exorcystys in oure lawe wente out att the sygth of the presence of my sone."[473]

In Birgitta's vision, Jesus is in a form of seclusion. He does not declare himself and conceals his divinity from all but his parents, but he shows signs that he is the son of God. Again, the compiler introduces Birgitta as an *auctor,* saying that the information is "aftyr the *Revelacyon* of seyint Brygytte, as oure Lady, þat knewe best nexte God alone, tolde here."[474] This introduction highlights the authority of the source and specifies that it is from divine revelation. Dzon argues that the compiler's wording of this citation indicates that he trusts Mary's revelation to Birgitta more than any other because Mary, as Jesus's mother, was "the ultimate authority on Jesus's hidden years."[475] Rather than having to invent virtues from nothing, as the *MVC* compiler does, the *Speculum devotorum'*s compiler turns to a definitive source on these hidden years in the form of Mary's revelation to Birgitta. The conversation of two mothers gives insight into material that the evangelists chose not to cover and provides exclusive information about Christ to the audience of the *Speculum devotorum.*

The compiler next turns to Birgitta as a source for chapters that cover the Passion, specifically the Crucifixion and Deposition. The Crucifixion chapter (twenty-two) includes two versions of the method of crucifixion, instructing the reader, "whyche of hem maye beste styre ȝow to deuocyon, that takyth."[476] Johnson argues that leaving the choice of meditation up to the reader is a part of the compiler's didactic method in the *Speculum devotorum*, for as the reader progresses in the text's guided meditations, she can then apply what she has previously learned

471. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 58.
472. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 58.
473. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 58-9.
474. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum*, 58.
475. Dzon, *Quest for the Christ Child,* 220. Dzon also notes that one of Birgitta's purposes in recording this Revelation was to "undermine as well as provide an alternative to [apocryphal infancy legends]" circulating in late-medieval Europe (219).
476. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum*, 117.

to the new situations the text presents.[477] At this late point in the narrative, the reader has skills to determine which of the described crucifixions stirs her most. However, the compiler does not leave it entirely up to the reader, for he tells her that he holds Birgitta's version to be more reliable and presents it second: "Anothyr wyse ȝe maye thynke hyt, aftyr Seyint Brygyttys *Reuelacyon*, and þat I holde sykyrer to lene to."[478] The introduction shows the compiler thinks Birgitta is more thorough than even the evangelists in this case.

This instance of Birgitta's *Revelations* in the *Speculum devotorum* comes from Christ rather than Mary, an exception to the general rule of how the compiler uses Birgitta's writing.[479] The perspective parallels the Nativity vision, where Birgitta witnesses an important event with her own eyes. Birgitta "tellyth it in here owen persone as sche seyth hit doo," and the compiler encourages the reader to "beholdyth wyth the forseyde holy lady" how Christ was crucified.[480] Birgitta, rather than Mary, becomes the focal point of the reader's beholding, and therefore the focus of her imaginative emotion. In this vision, Birgitta is still an expert on maternal relationships, but she steps out from behind Mary and reveals the narrative in her own voice, fully embodying the visionary's status as a "professional beholder."

Birgitta's feminine compassion and exclusive detail combine most effectively in the chapters on the Passion. Her detailed descriptions of Christ's suffering demonstrate her compassion for his pain. She narrates that they "putte tablys of tre thereaboute in the maner of greys vnto the place where the feete schulde be crucyfyed" for Christ and his crucifiers to stand upon.[481] In addition, they use two nails to attach his feet to the cross rather than one, a detail nearly unique to Birgitta. Birgitta's descriptions of affective detail also emphasize her position as witness and beholder. Jesus mounts the steps to the cross "frely," and "as a suete lombe iled to be sacryfyed."[482] His hand is "cruelly fastnede to the crosse and holowede here wyth a nayil in that place þat the bone ys saddyst inne, and in that hyt was more payneful."[483] Then Christ is painfully attached to the cross—"so myche they strawfte oute thyke gloryus membrys strongly in the

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477. Johnson, *The Middle English Life of Christ*, 171.
478. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum*, 117.
479. *The Liber celestis*, ed. Ellis 479-81. *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, ed. Searby and Morris, 3:234-8.
480. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum*, 117-118.
481. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 118.
482. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 118. See Isaiah 53:7.
483. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 118.

crosse þat alle the vaynys and synuys tobraste."[484] Finally, they place the crown of thorns on his head, "the whyche so strongly prykkyde hys reuerent heede þat hus eyen were fylde anone wyth flowynge blode and hys erys were stoppyd and hys face and berde were as hyt hadde be keueryd and depte wyth that rede bloode."[485] Birgitta's notice of every excruciating detail shows that she is imaginatively suffering with Christ, yet not overcome with grief like Mary, whose anguish she also describes. Birgitta retains the authority and meditative focal point of the passage, standing as a figure of compassion for both Christ and Mary rather than a figure of pain and grief, which Mary represents. Birgitta becomes an example for the audience, a female model to emulate not necessarily for having visions but as an appropriate emotional focal point for the reader.

Birgitta of Sweden in *Lyf of Oure Lord*

The compiler of *The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary* also turns to Birgitta of Sweden as an authority on otherwise unreported or unknown aspects of both Christ and Mary's lives, since he focuses on the Virgin much more strongly than the other two works considered in this chapter. However, it cannot be said that the compiler uses Birgitta as his main source on the Virgin, since he also incorporates other sources such as the *Lamentacions, De nativitate Mariae,* and *Transitus Mariae,* which particularly focus on Mary.[486] Blom-Smith argues that "the selection of source texts gives the impression of active planning on the part of the author to emphasize the role of Mary."[487] Even without consideration of the sources used, the focus on the life of the Virgin is clear: the *Lyf* begins with the conception of Mary, and follows her past the death of her son to her own assumption into heaven. This narrative sequence, which follows the course of Mary's life with the life of her son incorporated therein, cements the emphasis on the Mother of God in this piece.

The compiler of the *Lyf* seems to use Birgitta in particular to emphasize the holiness of Mary: Birgitta's visions are used to describe Mary's supernatural qualities, such as her chastity, her insight and authority on divine matters, and miracles that happen to her and her son. Interestingly, these elements of holiness mirror the characteristics of holy women in the late medieval period, such as Birgitta herself. The marks of a holy woman and particularly of a female saint

484. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 118.
485. Patterson, ed., *Speculum devotorum,* 118.
486. Blom-Smith, xv.
487. Blom-Smith, xv.

changed over the course of the medieval period, but in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries holy women were particularly characterized by contemplative visions and revelations; direct connections with God and the powers that may impart, such as discernment of spirits or casting out demons; and miracles that usually centered around bodily functions like healing, eating, and the alteration of the physical body.[488] Though Mary does not exhibit all the signs of a characteristically mystical female saint, the revelations about her life that this compiler chooses draw parallels between Mary as the ultimate holy woman and holy women of the high and late medieval period.

Early in the narrative, the compiler is very concerned with Mary's chastity and virginity. Of course Mary's virginity is worth emphasizing because it is a major component of Christ's miraculous birth, but the attention to her virginity and overall purity is also a significant sign of Mary's particular holiness in this text. The compiler turns to Birgitta as an authority on this matter. Even though Birgitta herself was not a virgin, having been married with multiple children before she devoted her life to God, her access to Mary and her divine insight allow her to comment on this aspect of the virgin's holiness. The sanctity of Mary's virginity is emphasized with the incorporation of Revelation 6.56, which includes demons' reactions to Mary's birth. They say,

> 'Byholde, a vergyn is ibore. What schull we do? It spekith wele yn hure that a meruelous thynge is comynge. Yf we leye for hure all thoo nettis of oure malice sche wall ryue [tear] hem all to pecis, and thou we enserche [search] and rensake [ransack] all hur inwardis [inward parts], scheo is so graciousli and so well ikept and sche hathe so strange defenders[489] þat ther nis no spot of vnclennesse withynne hure whereyn eny spot of vnclennesse myȝt be ipreyntid [imprinted]. Therfor it is for to drede that hure clennese schall turne vs to tene and tormentis, and hure

488. For an enlightening discussion on visions and connections to God, see Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'?"; Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* has become the definitive resource on medieval holy women and their relationships to their bodies, food, and the spiritual world, but it sparked a larger realm of scholarly inquiry on the experiences and characteristics of holy women to which many have contributed. In addition to Bynum, see Dyan Elliot, particularly "The Physiology of Rapture and Female Spirituality," in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, eds. Peter Biller, A. J. Minnis, and Eamon Duffy (Rochester, NY: York Medieval Press, 1997), 141–74; and Elizabeth Petroff, *Body and Soul.*

489. This refers to Mary's angelic helpers.

grace schall brynge to nouȝt all oure strengthe, and hure stedfastnes schall caste vs downe vndur hure feete.'[490]

The demons specifically note that a Virgin is born, which implies that they know that Mary is already marked by God from the moment of her birth. And it is specifically her cleanness and purity that worries them and brings them pain. Mary's cleanness, which can also be translated as purity,[491] is not only impervious to the searching of the demons, but also the harbinger of the even more marvelous birth of the savior.

The significance of virginity as a particularly female sign of holiness persisted from late antiquity throughout the medieval period.[492] Although there were instances of male virgins in the medieval period and among the saints, it was a technically female category: "'Virgin' is a category only for women saints… 'virgin' is a life-stage only for women," as Sarah Salih recognizes.[493] The Virgin Mary, of course, is the prototypical female virgin, so that her holiness comes to be symbolized entirely by her virginal state, as we see here. Birgitta's revelation shows that Mary's virginity and purity are so strong that even the demons are afraid of it, which is insight that only another holy woman can provide. The compiler includes the detail of this revelation to show that Mary's chastity is not only a sign of her personal holiness, but a sign of divine work in creation at large. Here, the compiler chooses a female authority to give credence to a female matter. Birgitta's insights into Mary's holiness add proof of her involvement with the divine from the moment of her birth.

In addition to Mary's personal holiness, which is signified by her bodily purity, Mary is cited in the *Lyf* as having characteristically feminine insight into divine matters. The compiler turns to Birgitta again as a source on Mary's holiness when he includes Revelation 6.11, where Mary describes Creation's reaction to Jesus' death. She says that "In the dethe of my swete sane Jhesu all thinges were inquietyd and troublid and astonyd," then moves down through the order

490. Blom-Smith, 80. cf. Genesis 3:15, Revelation 12.

491. "clĕnnesse n." *Middle English Dictionary Online.* Accessed 22 Jan. 2020.

492. For an overview of the development of virginity as a mark of female sanctity, see, Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 8-10.

493. Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001),17.

of creation, describing the various reactions in affective terms of compassion.[494] She says that the Godhead "was troublid by a maner of compassyon" though it was with Christ throughout his death and the time afterwards.[495] The angels "were inquietyd and heuy, as yf a man saw his good frende suffur enythinge the whiche schulde turne hym to worschippe and glorye."[496] The angels' response to Christ's suffering is characterized as specifically empathetic and compassionate. She says that the "elymentis were troublid" as evidenced by the eclipse, the earthquake, and the stones breaking in two.[497] The Gentiles, the Jews, the devils and spirits are all disturbed.[498] The souls in limbo are "mete with gret trobull in heuynesse by wey off compasschyon in so moche that they had leuer euer haue be in helle than for to see suche a payne in hire lorde."[499] Finally, Mary's own grief is indescribable: "I þat was *and* am bathe virgyn and his modur and that in the tyme of his deþe stade with hym and was ther present with hym, what / peyne and what sorow Y suffird no tonge may telle, ne no man may consedur."[500]

This curious round through creation, which begins with God in heaven, goes down to Hell, then returns to Mary herself, characterizes the reactions of the whole chain of being in terms of female-coded affect, so that Mary gains divine insight into not just the events, but the emotion of all of creation. The scope of her insight is remarkable: she knows that God, the angels, celestial bodies, the very stones of the earth, all the people on earth and in limbo, and the demons echo her distress, which itself is so overwhelming that words cannot describe it. This passage is another example of Sarah McNamer's argument that the particular emotion of compassion is a female feeling, and that to feel compassion, one must "feel like a woman."[501] Mary, as the ultimate holy woman, feels the utmost compassion, and she reveals this insight to Birgitta as a fellow holy woman. The compiler sees this example of female feeling and includes it as an example of Mary's insight into divine awareness through her own grief. Her feminine emotion gives her the key to see all of creation mourning along with her.

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494. Blom-Smith, ed., 116.
495. Blom-Smith, ed., 116.
496. Blom-Smith, ed. 117.
497. Blom-Smith, ed., 117.
498. Blom-Smith, ed., 117-18.
499. Blom-Smith, ed., 118.
500. Blom-Smith, ed., 118.
501. McNamer, *Affective Meditation,* 119.

Finally, the compiler uses Birgittine material to demonstrate Mary's holiness in the form of miracles. Mary's life is replete with miracles, such as the virgin birth of her son, which does not disfigure or weaken Mary in any way.[502] Perhaps the most evocative inclusion of a Marian miracle from the *Revelations* comes at the end of the *Lyf,* at Mary's assumption. The compiler cites the twentieth chapter of *Sermo angelicus*, telling us that Mary's body was miraculously raised to Heaven along with her soul, and that God, the angels, and the company of heaven are filled with "vnspekeable ioy."[503] Importantly, after this passage the compiler includes *Revelations* 1.9, which describes the virtues of Mary's name, which "makith [angels] ioy yn here consciens," souls in purgatory to "ioyth passyngly like as a sike man eat lyggyth yn dred," and devils to "fle fro a solle."[504] Notably, these miracles have nothing to do with Christ himself; they are solely dependent on Mary's personal holiness. Perhaps most importantly, they mirror the miracles of late-medieval female saints.

Mary's miracles in this passage and indeed throughout the *Lyf* mirror those that characterized late-medieval female saints and visionary women, though it could be that medieval visionary women are mirroring *transitus Mariae* texts. The ineffable joy that she and the angels feel echoes the heavenly visions that mystical women such as Birgitta of Sweden, Catherine of Siena, and Mechthild of Hackeborn experienced, particularly on their deathbeds. For example, Book 7 of the *LSG* details Mechthild's death from a lingering illness. In the process of her death, she is welcomed by the Virgin Mary (7.6), received by Christ in the persona of a Bridegroom (7.8), greeted by the Trinity and all the saints, and praised by the angels (7.9).[505] Mary's glorious reception into Heaven contains many of the same elements. The prayers of late-medieval holy women were also thought to have particular efficacy for souls in purgatory and even in Hell, which Mary echoes above.[506]

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502. Blom-Smith, ed., 43.
503. Blom-Smith, ed., 168.
504. Blom-Smith, ed., 169.
505. See Newman, *The Book of Special Grace,* 228-33 for these passages in translation.
506. Barbara Newman says that holy women often had the role of "medium and mediatrix, the psychopomp whose compassion takes her through the portals of hell and heaven so that she may lead souls out of purgatory." Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 108.

In all of these cases from the *Lyf,* the compiler uses the *Revelations* of Birgitta of Sweden to affirm Mary's holiness by aligning her with the particular characteristics of late-medieval holy women. Her virginity, miraculously preserved through conception, pregnancy, and birth, is a sign of her moral purity and spiritual cleanness. Her insights into divine details imperceptible to others, here illustrated through a particularly female-coded lens, echo the contemplative revelations of visionary women. Finally, the miracles of divine love and intercession echo the particular efficacy that holy women were thought to have. In turning to a holy woman writer for his authority on Mary's holiness, the compiler acknowledges the expertise that Birgitta has. However, his selection of which visions to incorporate, though he does include more than the other texts examined in this chapter, still characterizes her divine expertise as a particularly female holiness.

Birgitta of Sweden in *Fruyt of Redempcyon*

In the midst of the hundreds of sources available to him on the life of Christ, Simon Appulby only uses two main sources, the *Antidotarius animae* and the *Revelations* of Birgitta of Sweden. Unlike *Speculum devotorum* and *The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary,* Simon seems to have deliberately limited himself to these two works and his own additions. If the *Antidotarius* is his main source for the events of Christ's life, why add the visions of a mystical saint, out of all the available versions of the typical scenes in the meditative Life of Christ genre? Pondering the reason that Simon Appulby uses Birgitta of Sweden's *Revelations* as a source on Marian material, Dowding argues that the Birgittine material's purpose is "adding a layer" to the text that is "particularly affective."[507] While these things are true, I would add the distinction that the material from the *Revelations* falls into two categories. The first is specifically related to Mary's personal relationship to her son and to God in general, and the second adds details of Christ's suffering at the Passion, largely through Mary's perspective. These gruesome details can indeed be seen as affective, but more specifically, they build on the previous descriptions of Mary's relationship to Jesus in order to emphasize her grief for his pain. While Dowding is correct that Appulby uses Birgitta for Marian material and for affective intensity, Appulby more specifically incorporates Birgittine material to describe the relationship of a woman to the divine, both as God and as her son.

507. Dowding, 176.

Birgitta's visions are used as sources in chapters 4, 16, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26, and 28 of the *Fruyt.*[508] Unlike the compilers of the *Speculum devotorum* and the *Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary,* Simon does not introduce Birgittine material with a full *auctor's* introduction. This change in method is likely because, although Simon is very faithful in his translations of Birgitta's visions, he interweaves them with his own material and that of the *Antidotarius animae* so seamlessly that full introductions would not work. Dowding calls his compilatory method a "tapestry"; he combines verbatim translations of his sources and his own words together to form a text that perfectly conveys not only the events of the chapter but also Simon's particular point about that chapter.[509] However, Simon does indicate when material comes from the *Revelations* with marginal citations of the book and chapter. These marginal citations, which also appear for scripture (i.e., "Leviticus xii" in chapter vii) and for church fathers (i.e., "Bernardus" also in chapter vii) suggest that Simon considers Birgitta to have some kind of *auctor*-like status. Since he rarely cites his sources beyond these marginal notes, however, his reverence for his sources is harder to determine than that of the compiler of the *Speculum devotorum.* His lay audience may also lead to his compilatory style— his purpose is not so much to distinguish his sources as to provide a cohesive narrative for their devotional practice. This is evident in how he transforms his material from a first person revelation to a third person meditation, as Ellis has noted.[510]

The first way that Appulby incorporates Birgittine material is to describe Mary's relationship to Christ, and in a larger sense, her relationship to God. Birgitta's visions offer insight into Mary's intimate personal relationship that goes beyond the information in the gospels. In chapter 4, which covers the Annunciation and Nativity, Appulby weaves together material from several of Birgitta's revelations to describe Mary's devotion to God, which is rewarded by her becoming the Mother of God. The particular revelations which are sources for this chapter are 1.10, the *Celeste viridarium*, and 6.1.[511]

Mary's youth is characterized by the fact that she "pleased god moost hyghly by moost holy and vertuous lyuyng," to the extent that she becomes rather anchoritic herself:

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508. See Table 3 for an example of how Simon uses his Birgittine sources.

509. Dowding, 166. See 166-170 for further discussion of how Simon combines and weaves together his sources.

510. Ellis, "Flores," 179.

511. See Dowding, 157-165 for a close analysis of how Simon arranges and compiles his source material.

> as moche as thou myght thou withdrewest thy selfe fro the presence and speche of thy parentes and frendes, and thou gaue of thy goodes as moche as thou myght to the poore and nedy people."[512] Mary's devotion only increases when she is presented to the temple, after which she "brenned more feruently and fully in the swete loue of god than thou dyd before, and dayly thou were inflambed with newe ardour and hygh desyres of loue and therfore good lady thou enlonged [separated] thy selfe more than thou were wont to do fro the company of all people and were alone by thyselfe bothe day and nyght dredynge greatly leest thy mouth sholde speke, or eeres sholde here ony thynge agaynst the wyll of thy god, or that thyne eyen sholde se ony delectable thynge.[513]

Mary's anchoritic devotion to God not only mirrors her anchoritic author, but also conveys the singular affection and desire for the divine that makes her worthy of being Christ's mother. Despite the fact that Mary's isolation seems rather extreme, the language here reflects the solitary devotion that Simon's audience could have been familiar with from their interactions with anchorites at London Wall and elsewhere. Mary's anchoritic devotion is a signal to Simon's late-medieval audience that she has characterized herself as God's spouse even before the Annunciation.

Because Appulby uses material from the *Antidotarius* for the description of the Annunciation in Chapter 4, the next use of Birgittine material comes with his description of the Nativity and in Mary's subsequent relationship with Jesus. Much like the description of the Nativity in *Speculum devotorum*, Simon uses Birgittine material from *Revelations* 1.10 and 6.1 to describe the painless birth, though in less detail. He says, "and in his byrth thou bare hym without sorowe and synne, in lykewyse as thou conceyued hym in all clennes with suche exultacyon of soule and body, that for thaboundance of ioye and exultacyon thy holy fete felte not the grounde that they stode on."[514] Mary's exultation in the birth of her child is also echoed in a lesser way by everyone around her, "for sothly he was so fayre and delectable, that who so euer behelde hym, he was

512. Dowding, *Fruyt,* Bii.

513. Dowding, *Fruyt,* Bii-Biii.

514. Dowding, *Fruyt,* Biii. Though Simon cites the *Celeste viridarium* here, the detail of Mary levitating comes from Book 1, chapter 10 of the *Revelations,* which covers the Nativity more quickly than Book 7 chapter 21, which is the source of the Nativity in *Speculum devotorum.*

comforted of ony sorowe that was in herte. Therfore many of the iewes sayd. Go we to se the sone of Mary, that we may fynde therby consolacion."[515] Finally, Simon demonstrates the close relationship of mother and son with a scene of their shared sorrow:

> And good lady whan thou behelde and consydered the places in his fayre handes and prety fete where the sharpe nayles sholde perce through, as thou had herde by holy prophetes, thy blessed eyen were replete with teres of wepyng, and thy virgynall herte was as clouen asonder for sorowe. And whan thy lytell swete sone behelde thy eyen full of wepynge, he was sorowfull as vnto the deth for the.[516]

Appulby uses Birgitta's *Revelations* to establish Mary's loving relationship with her son, which is a natural outgrowth of her youthful devotion to God. Her enraptured joy at his conception and birth morph into a motherly love and personal relationship with the Christ Child that is demonstrated in their mutual sorrow and comfort. Simon uses these relational details from Birgitta's *Revelations* to show Mary's intimacy with Jesus, but he also sets up the description of Mary's love and her suffering at the Passion, to which he quickly moves, skipping most of Christ's ministry.

In the Passion narrative, Simon uses Birgittine material to emphasize Mary's reactions to her son's suffering and to enhance the descriptions of the Crucifixion process. In chapter 16, narrating the flagellation, Simon describes Jesus' embarrassment at his nakedness: "Than Pylate toke the and made the personally to put of thy clothes, and thou stode naked and bare suffrynge the erubescensy [embarassment] of nakednes in the presence of thy mother as thou were borne of her body, and before thyne irrysors [mockers] and enemyes all thy frendes fleynge from the."[517] However, more of the material is used to describe Mary's reaction to Christ's pain:

> and at the fyrst stroke thy sorowfull mother (that stode by the) fell to the grounde as deed, and takynge spiryte agayne she behelde all thy body beten and scourged that the stremes of blode ran downe on euery syde, the bare bones apperynge of thy sydes. And this was moost bytter of all, whan they drewe the knotty scourges

515. Dowding, *Fruyt,* Biii. The source of this passage is *Revelations* 6.1.

516. Dowding, *Fruyt,* Biii. This passage comes from *Revelations* 1.10. See Dzon, *Quest,* 200-2 for an insightful close reading and contextualization of the original revelation.

517. Dowding, *Fruyt,* D.

> they rent awaye the flesshe withall. And than good Jesu thou stode all tremblynge and quakynge for anguysshe and payne all blody and torne, so that fro the sole of the fote to the top of the heed in the was no hole place where thou myght suffre ony more betynge [Isaiah1:6].… And than whan thou were losed from the pyller, thy blessed mother behelde the place where as thou stode, and she sawe it replete with thy blode, and she folowynge the knewe where thou had gone by the tokens and steppes of blode, for the grounde where thou had gone appered infuded with thy blode.[518]

These mirrored reactions and embarrassments echo the mutual sorrow and comfort established between Christ and Mary in chapter 4 and continue their mutual suffering into the Passion narrative. Just as Mary cannot physically stand to witness her son being whipped, Christ can barely stay upright from his injuries. The detail of Mary following Christ's bloody footprints also emphasizes their connected suffering, for Christ bleeds enough to leave them and Mary must follow the signs of her son's injuries in order to stay with him as his suffering continues.[519]

Appulby also uses Birgitta's *Revelations* to describe the methods of the Crucifixion, adding details of the painful process to increase affective reaction from his audience. He separates the material on the Crucifixion from I.10 and the *Celeste viridarium* into two chapters, one on the process of Crucifixion and the next on Christ's time on the cross. In the first, Birgitta's visions are incorporated with material from the *Antidotarius* to describe how Christ was nailed to the cross. The specific details Appulby incorporates from Birgitta are someone bringing a covering for Christ's nakedness, as well as the pains of crucifixion itself:

> And thou Jesu standynge there naked and bare as thou were borne, one rennynge brought to the a couerynge, wherof inwardly thou ioyed, and fastenynge it aboute thy myddes mekely thou layest downe on the crosse, spredyng out thyne armes

518. Dowding, *Fruyt,* D-Dii.

519. Christ's feet being covered in blood (even up to the ankles) is a trope of Passion narratives. See James H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative*, Vol. 1 (Kortrijk, Belgium: Van Ghemmert Publishing Company, 1979),139-40. See also Ann Eljenholm Nichols, "The Footprints of Christ as *Arma Christi:* The Evidence of Morgan B54," in *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Culture,* eds. Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 113-142.

> and layenge forth thy legges in length, thou offred there thy precyous wounded body on the harde crosse in sacrifyce to god thy father as a moost meke lambe for our synnes, and the cursed tyrantes cruelly nayled fyrst thy ryght hande where the hole was perced for the nayle to entre, and than with a rope fastned to thy hand-wrest violently halyng and drawynge they nayled thy lefte hande on the syde of the crosse where as the hole was ordeyned for the same, and in lyke maner halyng [pulling], drawynge and straynynge they crucyfyed fyrst thy ryght fote, and vpon the same thy lefte fote with two nayles, wherby the senewes and vaynes of thy body were broken.[520]

It is notable that, as Dowding says, Appulby includes some material from the *Anti-dotarius* within this section to make it clear that Christ is lying down for the Crucifixion rather than upright, as another of Birgitta's visions has it. Dowding points out that this vision of the Crucifixion was seen as "anachronistic," and so Simon corrects it with his main source.[521] Be that as it may, Birgitta's details of Christ's pains in the process of being nailed to the cross, namely the descriptions of his body being stretched and the two nails at his feet, are kept as spurs to the audience's affective devotions.

The next chapters, which use material from Revelation 1.10, turn again to Mary to describe the mutual suffering of mother and son during the Crucifixion. After describing the taunting of the Jews, Appulby uses material from Birgitta to depict the commendation of Mary and John:

> And whan thou behelde her and other that loued the [i.e., John the Evangelist] vstandynge by her sore wepynge and waylynge, whiche leuer wolde haue suffred that payne that thou suffred in themselfe with thyne helpe, or to bren in hell for euermore than to se the so crucyate and turmented. And the sorowe that thou toke

520. Dowding, *Fruyte,* Div. cf. MVC chapter 78, where the Virgin covers Christ's nakedness with her headscarf, as opposed to the anonymous person here.

521. Dowding, 171.

> for thy mother and frendes waylynge for the, exceded all the bytternesse of trybulacyons that thou suffred in thy body or in thy herte. for full tenderly thou loued them.[522]

Christ's suffering is exacerbated by the grief of his followers and particularly that of his mother, which again echoes their connection. Birgitta's vision here is used to emphasize the mental and emotional torment of the mother and son, which he says is more painful than Christ's physical suffering. This elevation of the relational pain of Mary, Jesus, and the disciples reflects how Appulby uses his Birgittine source to add details to his Passion narrative that will stir the emotions of his readers, but he chooses details from Birgitta's revelation that have to do with Mary's relationship to Christ and his suffering. This emphasis on the intimate suffering of mother and child lend a specifically female and maternal perspective on the Passion to which the reader may relate. Appulby's use of Birgitta's visions as a source for these affective and Marian details indicates that he sees Birgitta as an authority on this matter, especially given the many other affective sources that were available.

Conclusion

In late-medieval England as well as on the continent, compilers of Lives of Christ turned to texts of mystical women for authoritative new material on the life and humanity of Christ. Women like Elizabeth of Hungary, Catherine of Siena, Mechthild of Hackeborn, and most especially Birgitta of Sweden were approved by the church for having unique visions and experiences of the divine which were then filtered into Lives of Christ for their specificity, emotional impact, and novelty. Compilers of Lives of Christ treat the holy women as full medieval *auctores,* acknowledging their expertise and special access to God. However, the misogynistic climate of the late Middle Ages caused these compilers to filter the involvement of these mystical women so that they are specifically treated as experts on things that the male compilers see as female-coded concerns. They relate these women to other women in the biblical narrative, most often the Virgin Mary, and offer insights into female-coded aspects of her life such as her virginity and motherhood. They also use female sources as authorities on other female-coded issues such as virginity, the discernment of spirits, and female praise and worship.

522. Dowding, *Fruyte,* Dv.

These three compilers deploy their female sources in subtly different ways. The compiler of the *Speculum devotorum* uses by far the largest number of mystical women, adding Elizabeth of Hungary, Catherine of Siena, and Mechthild of Hackeborn to Birgitta of Sweden. However, he most stringently limits them to what he considers the female-coded issues of his day, using small excerpts of their larger works for his own agenda. In fact, he sometimes sidesteps the works of the woman herself and uses her male-authored *vita* instead, as in the case of Catherine of Siena and Elizabeth of Hungary. The compiler of *The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary* uses Birgitta of Sweden's revelations centered on Mary and the *Sermo angelicus* to characterize the Virgin as a late-medieval holy woman. Though he includes the highest volume of women's writing in his work, he still selects it so that it fits with his definition of a female saint. Finally, Simon Appulby uses Birgittine material from the *Revelations* and *Celeste viridarium* to add affective details about Mary's relationship to God and Jesus that emphasize their mutual suffering in the Passion.

Despite the fact that these compilers limit their inclusion of female *auctores* to what they consider female-coded concerns, the incorporation of these female sources does offer the works' often female audiences examples of the expansiveness of female religious experience within a devotional text. The Syon nun who is the intended audience for *Speculum devotorum* can see the words of her abbey's patron and those of other holy women reflected back into her own meditations on the life of Christ. The nuns or laywomen who may have encountered *The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary* can see the words of one holy woman affirming another. The lay readers of *Fruyt of Redempcyon* can see the loving relationship of Mary and her son in their own maternal relationships with their children. Though the male compilers somewhat limit the expansiveness of their female sources, by including them at all they open the Life of Christ genre to a lasting and compelling female influence.

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Appendix

Table 1: Comparison of Revelation 1.10, Fruyt of Redempcyon, and Celeste viridarium

Revelation 1.10	**Modern English Translation 1.10**	**Fruyt of Redempcyon**	**Modern English Translation CV**	***Celeste viridarium* (Harley 612, f. 148r col. 585)**
Deinde ductus ad columpnam, personaliter se vestibus exuit et personaliter manus ad columpnam applicuit, *quas inimici sine misericordia ligauerunt. Alligatus autem nichil omnino operimenti habebat sed,* sicut natus est, sic stabat et paciebatur erubescenciam nuditatis sue. Consurrexerunt autem inimici eius, qui, fugientibus amicis suis, vndique astabant;	Then led to the column, he personally pulled off his clothes and he applied his hands to the column, which his enemies without mercy bound fast. *But bound he had nothing at all for covering*, but, just as he was born, he stood thus and suffered the embarrassment of his nudity. *Moreover his enemies rose up and*, with his friends having fled, *stood all around*	Than **Pylate** toke the and made the personally to put of thy clothes, and thou stode naked and bare suffrynge the erubescensy of nakednes in the presence of thy mother as thou were borne of her body, and before thyne irrysors and enemyes all thy frendes fleynge from the.	**And there by the lictor's order** he personally pulled off his clothes **and immediately embracing the column** he applied his hands to the column, which his enemies without mercy bound fast **with ropes**. *But bound he had nothing at all for covering*, but stood just as he was born and suffered the embarrassment of his nudity. *Moreover his enemies rose up and*, with his friends having fled, *stood all around*	Et ibi iubente **lictore** seipsum personaliter vestibus exuit. et columpnam sponte amplectens manus ad columpnam applicauit. quas inimici eius cum reste sine misericordia ligauerunt. *Alligatus autem nichil omnino operimenti habebat;* sed sicut natus est sic stabat. et paciebatur erubescenciam nuditatis sue. Consurrexerunt autem inimici eius qui fugientibus amicis suis vndique astabant;

Table 1 Cont.

et flagellabant corpus eius, ab omni macula et peccato mundum.	And they whipped his body clean from all spot and sin.	And personally thou put thy handes aboute the pyller, and thyne enemyes bounde the fast, and the cursed tyrantes layde vpon thy fayre body tender and clene from euery spotte of synne, **some with whyppes, and some with roddes,** and thy skynne was so tender and fayre, **so that with the leest stroke that they coude laye on thy body the purpre blode appered flesshely in syght vpon the fayre beautefull skynne,**	And they whipped his body clean from all spot and sin **with thorny whips** *with the spines infixed and drawn back in them* which **they did not tear away but they savagely mangled his entire body by furrowing his flesh.**	& flagellabant corpus eius ab omni macula et peccato mundum **cum flagellis aculeatis.** *infixis in eis aculeis et retractis.* **que non auellabant sed sulcando carnes eius totum corpus immaniter lacerabant.**
Ad primum igitur ictum ego, que astabam propinquius, cecidi quasi mortua e**t resumpto spiritu**; vidi corpus eius verberatum & flagellatum vsque ad costas, ita vt eius coste viderentur.	Therefore at the first stroke I, who stood nearby, fell as if dead And having recovered in spirit, I saw his body so beaten and whipped continuously at the sides that his rib was visible.	and at the fyrst stroke thy sorowfull mother (that stode by the) fell to the grounde as deed, and **takynge spiryte agayne** she behelde all thy body beten and scourged that the stremes of blode ran downe on euery syde, the bare bones apperynge of thy sydes.	Therefore at the first stroke I, who stood nearby, fell as if dead *with my heart having beaten.* And *after some interval as if waking* having recovered in spirit I saw his body so beaten and whipped continuously at the sides that his rib was visible.	Ad primum igitur ictum; ego que astabam propinquius quasi corde meo percusso cecidi quasi mortua. Et *post aliquod interuallum* **quasi euigilans resumpto spiritu;** vidi corpus eius verberatum & flagellatum vsque ad costas ita vt eius coste viderentur.

Table 1 Cont.

Et, quod amarius erat, cum retraherentur flagella, carnes ipsius flagellis sulcabantur.	And, what was more bitter, when they dragged back with the whips, his flesh was furrowed with the whip.	And this was moost bytter of all, whan they drewe the knotty scourges they rent awaye the flesshe withall.	And, what was more bitter, when they dragged back with the whips, his flesh was furrowed with the whip.	Et quod amarius erat; cum retraherentur flagella caro eius flagellis sulcabatur.
Cumque filius meus totus nudus totus sanguinolentus, totus sic laceratus stabat, ut in eo non inveniretur sanitas nec quid flagellaretur	And when my son stood totally naked, totally bloody, so that in him soundness could be found which was not whipped	And than good Jesu thou stode all tremblynge and quakynge for anguysshe and payne all blody and torne, so that fro the sole of the fote to the top of the heed in the was no hole place where thou myght suffre ony more betynge.	And when my son stood totally naked, totally bloody, *totally mangled thus,* so that in him soundness could be found which was not whipped	Cumque filius meus totus nudus totus sanguinolentus. *totus sic laceratus* staret vt in eo non inveniretur sanitas nec quid flagellaretur
tunc unus concitato in se spiritu quesiuit,"Numquid interficietis eum sic inuidicatum?"	**Then one moved in his spirit asked, “Will you kill him thus unjudged?”**	**Than one moued in spiryte asked whether they wolde slee the not iudged to deth.**	Then one of his enemies moved in spirit *from official guidance* asked whether they would be killing him thus unjudged. *And do you want to make yourselves the cause of his death*	tunc unus inimicorum *eius ab assistentibus lictoribus* concitato in se spiritu quesiuit. Numquid interficientis eum sic iniudicatum. *& vultis causam mortis eius vestram facere;*

Table 1 Cont.

Et statim secuit vincula eius. *Inde filius meus induit se vestibus suis* . Tunc locum, ubi stabant pedes filii mei, totum repletum vidi sanguine,	And immediately he cut his chains. *Then my son dressed himself.* Then I saw that tehy place where my son's feet stood was totally filled with blood,	And than whan thou were losed from the pyller, thy blessed mother behelde the place where as thou stode, and she sawe it replete with thy blode,	*And saying this,* immediately he cut his chains. *Then my son now free before the column first turned himself to his clothing and nevertheless the space for dressing himself was not yielded to him, but still while he was dragged out he inserted his arms into manacles.* Then however I saw that the place where my son's feet stood were filled with blood.	*Et hec dicens;* statim secuit vincula eius. *Inde filius meus iam solutus a columpna primo ad vestimenta sua se conuertit. nec tamen spacium induendi se ei concedebatur; sed adhuc dum traheretur brachia sua manicis inseruit* Tunc autem locum vbi stabant pedes filii mei totum vidi repletum sanguine;
et ex vestigiis filii mei cognoscebam incessum eius. Quo enim procedebat apperebat terra infusa sanguine.	And I knew his going from the prints of my son. For from where he proceeded the earth appeared infused with blood.	and she folowynge the knewe where thou had gone by the tokens and steppes of blode, for the grounde where thou had gone appered infuded with thy blode.	And I knew his going from the prints of my son. For from where he proceeded the earth appeared infused with blood.	et ex vestigiis filii mei cognoscebam incessum eius. Quo enim procedebat apperebat terra infusa sanguine;

Table 2

Table 2:Speculum devotorum's Incorporation of Female Mystical Sources

Chap-ter	Contents of Chapter	Mystical Sources	Summary of Corresponding Revelation
3	Discernment of Spirits	Vita of Catherine of Siena, Raymond of Capua, 1384-95, ch. 9.	
5	Nativity	*Revelations,* Birgitta of Sweden, Book VII Chapter xxi	Mary reveals the details of Christ's birth to Birgitta in Bethlehem
11	Life of Christ from 12-Bap-tism	*Revelations*, Birgitta of Sweden, Book VI Chapter lviii	Mary describes Jesus' adolescence
22	Crucifixion	*Revelations*, Birgitta of Sweden, Book VII Chapter xv	Vision of the Passion from Birgitta in the Church of the Holy Sepulcre, Jerusalem
25	Deposition	*Revelations*, Birgitta of Sweden, Book VII Chapter xv	Vision of the Passion from Birgitta in the Church of the Holy Sepulcre, Jerusalem
29	Resurrection	*Booke of Gostlye Grace,* Mechthild of Hackeborn, Book I, Chapter 37	Mechthild's vision on Easter of the Resurrection: the Trinity's contributions, the wall of angels, and the nuns receiving eucharist from Christ.

Table 3

Table 3:Revelations of Birgitta of Sweden in Fruyt of Redempcyon

Chapter	Chapter Contents	Revelation	Summary and Relevant details from the Revelation
4	Mary's Childhood, the Annunciation, and the Nativity	Rev. 1.10, *Celeste viridarium*, Rev. 6.1.	Here, the first half of the revelation on Mary's childhood and the Nativity. The passage from *CV* combines information from 1.10 and 7.15, here that Mary laid Christ in a manger and her preemptive mourning for the Passion. Rev. 6.1 is Mary telling Birgitta that the Jewish community would come visit Jesus.
16	Jesus before Pilate, the Flagellation	*Celeste viridarium* and Rev. 1.10.	Description of the Flagellation, Mary falling, and a profusion of blood.
19	Bearing of the Cross, Crucifixion	Rev. 1.10 and *Celeste viridarium*	The bearing of the Cross, Christ standing naked before the cross, the method of Crucifixion.
20	Jesus on the Cross	Rev. 1.10.	Christ's enemies mocking him on the Cross
22	Commendation of Mary to John the Evangelist	Rev. 1.10.	Mutual mourning of Christ and his followers, Commendation of Mary to John the Evangelist.
24	Last words of Christ	Rev. 1.10.	Christ's heart, Christ crying out to the Father.
26	Christ's death	Rev. 1.10.	Mary's grief at Christ's death.
28	Deposition from the cross	Rev. 1.10.	Description of Christ's corpse, Mary wrapping Christ's body with cloth.

Table 4: Birgittine Material in the Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary

Page in Blom-Smith	Passage Contents	Birgittine Material	Summary of Birgittine Material
2	Mary's Conception	Revela-tions 1.9	The Marriage of Mary's Parents, the Immaculate Conception, and Mary's Assumption
3	Mary at the Temple	Revela-tions 6.56	Mary tells Birgitta of her birth and of various reactions to it.
32	Visitation to Elizabeth	Revela-tions 6.59	Mary tells Birgitta about her visit to Elizabeth, her worries about Joseph which are assuaged by an angel, Joseph's own visitation from an angel, and their marriage. (first half)
33	Joseph's Doubts	Revela-tions 7.25	Mary discusses her son's and her own humility, giving the example of her betrothal to Joseph and his doubts when he learned she was pregnant with the son of God.
34	Mary and Joseph's life to-gether	Revela-tions 6.59	Mary tells Birgitta about ver visit to Elizabeth, her worries about Joseph which are assuaged by an angel, Joseph's own visitation from an angel, and their marriage. (second half)
40-41	Christ's Nativity	Revela-tions 7.21	Mary reveals the details of Christ's birth to Birgitta in Bethlehem.
43	The Nativity	Revela-tions 7.22	The Virgin reaffirms Birgitta's vision of the nativity and assures that Christ's birth was not in the "ordinary way."
44	The Nativity	Revela-tions 1.10	Mary describes her childhood, the Annunciation, the Nativity, and the Passion. Here, *The Lyf* uses the portion on the Nativity.
63	Jesus' Childhood and Ado-lescence	Revela-tions 6.56	Mary describes Jesus' adolescence
64	Jesus' Childhood and Ado-lescence	Revela-tions 6.1	Mary tells Birgitta that the Jewish community would come see Jesus as a child.

Table 4 Cont.

96	The Passion, Flagellation	Revela-tions 1.10	Mary describes her childhood, the Annunciation, the Nativity, and the Passion. Here, The Lyf uses the portion on the flagellation.
100	Mary despairs and falls as if dead	Revela-tions 1.10	Mary describes her childhood, the Annunciation, the Nativity, and the Passion. Here, The Lyf uses the portion on Mary's reaction to Christ's suffering.
104-106	The Passion, Crucifixion and Crowning with Thorns	Revela-tions 1.10	Mary describes her childhood, the Annunciation, the Nativity, and the Passion. Here, The Lyf uses the portion on the crucifixion.
116-18	Miracles at Christ's Death	Revela-tions 6.11	Mary describes how creation reacts to Christ's death with compassion.
155	Summary of Mary's Life	Sermo An-gelicus	
160	Summary of Mary's Life	Revela-tions 1.10	Mary describes her childhood, the Annunciation, the Nativity, and the Passion. Here, The Lyf uses the portion on the Mary's life.
164	Mary's actions after Jesus' Ascension	Revela-tions 6.61	Mary tells Birgitta about her life after Christ's ascension.
166-7	Assumption of Mary	Revela-tions 6.62	Mary describes her assumption
168	Assumption of Mary	Sermo An-gelicus	
169	Assumption of Mary	Revela-tions 1.9	The Marriage of Mary's Parents, the Immaculate Conception, and Mary's Assumption. Here, the portion on the Assumption.
170	The Virtues of Mary's Name	Revela-tions 2.23	Mary tells Birgitta of her mercy and humility, then describes the three virtues of her cloak of humility.
171	The Virtues of Mary's Name	Revela-tions 1.50	Jesus and Mary praise each other, and Jesus promises to save souls who have cried out to Mary.

Chapter 3

The Voices of Good Women: Prayer and The Festis and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Abstract

The third chapter explores how women in late-medieval England conceptualized the Life of Christ genre, centering on *The Festis and the Passion of Oure Lord Ihesu Crist,* an unedited prayer cycle on the life of Christ written for a nun by another religious woman. This text survives as perhaps the only known example of a woman participating in the composition of a meditative work for nuns in late-medieval England. I first analyze this work for possible connections to the Syon textual network in order to weigh in on the debate on whether this work originated at Syon or at another nunnery in England. Unlike Birgitta and Mechthild, who received and recorded visions of Christ's life that were then edited and excerpted into works in or related to the genre, the author of this text composed a meditative Life of Christ that is meant to instruct and guide rather than reveal the experiences of a visionary. I claim that medieval women sought examples of regular women with whom Christ interacted as focal points for their meditative interactions with Christ. The author uses familiar and communal aspects of female monastic life, such as the liturgy, prayer, and community to encourage the reader to embody and engage with events from Christ's life, particularly his conversations with biblical women. In examining the sources and origins of this text and manuscript, as well as how it fits into the Life of Christ genre, I claim that the female author reinterprets the genre for her female readers and demonstrate what this text can reveal about how English women may have read and interpreted Lives of Christ.

Though meditative Lives of Christ were often written with a female audience in mind, most of the extant works were compiled and composed by men. As I argued in chapter two, male writers' suppositions about women's religious interests—especially on female-coded subjects such as chastity—were not always fully representative of women's religious concerns or experiences. To investigate what women may have sought in their private devotional literature and particularly from a Life of Christ, we will turn to a meditative work written by a woman for a female audience: *The Festis and Passion of Oure Lord Ihesu Crist.*

While devotional works abound in the wider milieu of late-medieval England, *Festis* represents a rare instance of female authorship of a strictly devotional work. The author reveals her gender in an appeal to the reader to pray for her (see Figure 17): "O, myn sustir, preie my lord god the Trinite that for his gret bounte and for his endeles mercy have mercy and pite on me, sinful, and make me a good woman."[523] Alexandra Barratt's collection *Women's Writing in Middle English* demonstrates how distinctive *Festis* is among female-authored texts of the Middle Ages. Barratt's survey contains works of romance from Christine de Pisan and Marie de France; a wealth of visionary and mystical texts from Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Birgitta of Sweden, Mechthild of Hackeborn, Catherine of Siena, Elizabeth of Hungary, the anonymous author of *A Revelation of Purgatory,* and Marguerite Porete; and devotional texts translated by Dame Eleanor Hull and Lady Margaret Beaufort.[524] In contrast, *The Festis and Passion of Oure Lord Ihesu Crist* is a striking and singular example of a devotional work that is aimed at stimulating the private devotions and meditations of women in a religious community rather than displaying the visions of a singular mystic or translating an existing work. It offers a unique lens through which to view how women themselves approached meditation on the life of Christ, prayer, and contemplative experiences.

Although *Festis* does not record the experiences of a holy visionary, its status as a meditative devotional work means that it has contemplative and mystical aims, namely to draw the reader's soul closer to Christ through imaginatively participating in the events of his life. *Festis*

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523. Holkham misc. 41, p. 3. There is a forthcoming TEAMS edition of the text: *The Holkham Prayers and Meditations,* ed. Ben Parsons, 2. I would like to thank Dr. Parsons especially for providing me with a copy of his edition before it was published. The page numbers here refer to the word document.

524. Alexandra Barratt, ed. *Women's Writing in Middle English*, 2nd ed., Longman Annotated Texts (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2010).

stands out from other contemplative Lives of Christ because it participates in a uniquely female-coded mode of devotion, usually associated with female mystical texts. Barbara Zimbalist, Jessica Barr, and others have all recently published studies arguing that mystical texts by and about female visionaries encourage the reader to engage intimately and verbally with the texts through imaginatively imitating the mystic. These studies add an important cognitive element to discussions of embodiment in medieval women's spirituality, which is most famously articulated by Carolyn Walker Bynum.[525] Though embodiment and materiality is an important component of the devotional practice described in these studies, they focus on affective and intellectual aspects of women's spirituality that produce a more wholistic experience for both the visionary and the reader.

Barbara Zimbalist frames visionary writing as an act of translation, by which she means "to carry meaning across or over, from one context to another."[526] These acts of translation then provide a devotional opportunity to their readers:

> "When medieval women translated visions of Christ speaking into written text, they necessarily performed multiple transformations: of speech into text, of vision into language, and of divine utterance into human discourse. Through these transformations, the female visionary authorized herself and her text and performed a rhetorical *imitatio Christi* that offered readers a model of both interpretive practice and spoken devotion."[527]

Furthermore, she argues that women's visionary literature solidified into its own influential literary mode:

> The literary tradition of visionary translation and the rhetorical and hermeneutic responses it had activated finally resulted, by the fifteenth century, in a common mode of devotion central to women's spiritual practice and widely recognized as

525. Cf. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, The New Historicism : Studies in Cultural Poetics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

526. Barbara Erin Zimbalist, *Translating Christ in the Middle Ages: Gender, Authorship, and the Visionary Text* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022), 3.

527. Zimbalist, *Translating Christ,* 3.

> an acceptable form of piety. Yet these women shared not just an identity as visionaries; they shared a literary practice as authors and visionary translators that turned them into models of vernacular piety.[528]

The Book of Margery Kempe provides an example of how this literary mode functions. Zimbalist argues that "By listening first to Christ's voice and then to Margery's voice, we can hear the rhetorical construction of a devotional mode that figures verbal imitation as exemplary."[529] Margery's *Book* blends direct quotes from scripture with visionary speech, eventually "expanding the expression of Christ's earthly speech to incorporate the earthly speech of his visionary interlocutor."[530] Margery's dialogic encounters with Christ are a "devotional model" for her textual community in Book 2, where "the *Book*'s structure invites the reader to imitate, inhabit, and use Margery's voice as a mode of engagement with the divine."[531] In the person of the female mystic, the reader can imaginatively participate in the mystic's experience of conversing with Jesus. However, this imaginative process goes beyond verbal imitation. Jessica Barr proposes that medieval women's mystical and visionary texts encouraged what she calls *intimate reading*:

> *Intimate reading* is the term I use to name and theorize the strategies by which this form of textually mediated, shared experience of the immaterial divine is formulated. … Intimate reading generates and affirms in the reader a deep desire for a shared experience with the textual subject; "intimacy" is the blurred boundary between the reader and this subject, and this blurring brings the reader empathetically and experientially into the text. Intimacy may include identification with the subject of the text, but it is not limited to identification; it may drive the reader to seek within the text a sudden revelation of God's presence, or it may dissolve the obstacles to such revelation put up by the reader's rational mind. Intimacy may be

528. Zimbalist, *Translating Christ,* 213.

529. Barbara Zimbalist, "Christ, Creature, and Reader: Verbal Devotion in The Book of Margery Kempe," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 41, no. 1 (2015): 4.

530. Zimbalist, "Christ, Creature, and Reader," 7.

531. Zimbalist, "Christ, Creature, and Reader," 15.

> affective, but it is also intellective, calling for the reader's sustained engagement.[532]

Barr's focus on medieval visionary and hagiographical texts means that the subject with which the reader shares experience is the mystic herself. Through engaging with the materiality of the book—the physical bodies of the holy woman and the reader, and the spiritual intimacy that the text encourages—the reader is drawn into the mystic's experiences of the divine so that they encounter the divine themselves.

Festis represents a unique outgrowth of this female-coded devotional mode because it does not revolve around a single mystical female figure. Instead, the textual subject changes to reflect the different episodes of Christ's life, and the reader inhabits various characters, often female, who interact with Christ. While the framework of a visionary text uses the persona of the visionary as a structural focal point to the work, *Festis* uses the form of prayer and the familiar narrative of Christ's life to ground the reader as it guides her toward a mystical encounter with Christ. Because the structure and action of prayer become the material component of the work, the female voice—that of the author, the reader, the various characters in the text, and the voices of the female monastic community—becomes the link that draws the reader into mystical experience.

Background

The Text and the Manuscript

The Festis and Passion of Oure Lord Jhesu Crist survives in only one manuscript: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Holkham Misc. 41. This small yet deluxe manuscript dates to the first half of the fifteenth century.[533] It is copied in a Gothic Textualis Formata hand throughout. Such a formal script may have been chosen because of the devotional nature of the texts, so that it would resemble a Book of Hours or other deluxe religious codex. Several pages are decorated with borders and illuminated initials in red, blue, pink, green, and gold, with details of leaves and

532. Jessica Barr, *Intimate Reading: Textual Encounters in Medieval Women's Visions and Vitae* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 3.

533. Alexandra Barratt dates it around 1450, while Josephine Koster dates it closer to 1425 based on the hand. See Alexandra Barratt, ed., *Women's Writing in Middle English*, 212; and Josephine A. Koster, "Theorizing in Advance of the Facts: Knowing the Author of The Festis and the Passion of Our Lord Ihesu Crist," *Medieval Perspectives* 25 (January 2010): 69.

vines. The chapter divisions are marked in the manuscript by initials in blue ink with red linework, and the prompts for the *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria* at the end of each chapter are in red ink with blue initials. The entire manuscript is badly damaged by mold, which appears as pink, purple, and gray spots on the pages, and has resulted in holes in many of the leaves. Some restoration with contemporary parchment was undertaken in the nineteenth century, when the manuscript was rebound.[534] Thankfully, aside from the first few leaves, the most extensive damage is in the latter half of the manuscript, which makes the *Festis* largely legible. Holkham Misc. 41 contains three texts in the following order: *The Festis,* a four-line Middle English lyric beginning "Syke and sorowe depely," (*IMEV* 3012), and William Flete's *Remedies Against Temptations,* titled *Consolatio animae* in this manuscript.[535]

The damage to the first few pages of the manuscript presents several challenges to the text. Perhaps the most crucial is the difficulty in determining the modern name. The damage and repair to the first page of the manuscript obscures the lines where the scribe summarizes the content of the text (lines 5-7) as "I wol/de write yow the fe[i/s]tis and the pas/sion of oure lord Ih*es*u crist." The letter in question is hidden by mold and a parchment repair to the page, rendering it indiscernible (see Figure 18). Alexandra Barratt renders the word "feitis," meaning "deeds" in Middle English, while Pollard, Koster, and Innes-Parker prefer "festis," that is, "feasts."[536] Ben

534. Koster, "Theorizing," 70. William F. Pollard identifies the binder as John Jones in Liverpool, who rebound the Holkham Hall manuscripts for their owner, Thomas Coke, between 1814 and 1822. See William F. Pollard, "Bodleian MS Holkham Misc. 41: A Fifteenth Century Bridgettine Manuscript and Prayer Cycle," *Birgittania* 3 (1997): 44.

535. For an edition of Flete's text, see Jessica Lamothe, "An Edition of the Latin and Four Middle English Versions of William Flete's 'de Remediis Contra Temptaciones' (Remedies against Temptations)," University of York, 2017.

536. Pollard, "Bodleian MS"; Catherine Innes-Parker, "The Anchoritic Elements of Holkham Misc. 41," in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, eds. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards, Religion & Culture in the Middle Ages, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005); Josephine A. Koster, "Gender, Text, Critic: The Case of Holkham Misc. 41," *Medieval Perspectives* 14 (January 1999): 229–41. Koster in particular makes a strong paleographical case for "festis," comparing the *st* ligature with the *ei* characters to argue that the obscured letter is an *s* ("Gender, Text, Critic" 234). The occurrence of the word "festis" on page 9 of the manuscript, whereas "feitis" does not occur in the work at all, also supports this conclusion.

Parsons, who has edited the text in a forthcoming TEAMS edition, sidesteps the question of *feitis*/*festis* entirely and calls the work the *Holkham Prayers and Meditations.*[537] While it is still unclear what the scholarly community will ultimately settle on calling this work, I have chosen to refer to it as "festis" both on paleographical grounds and because the majority of scholars working on it know it by that name.[538]

Author and Audience

The absence of the gendered power dynamic between the author and the audience in *Festis* is rare among late-medieval works written for women. Like *Speculum devotorum* and other religious works with a stated female audience, the author includes the solicitation for the work in the prologue, which traditionally takes on the tone of the medieval humility *topos* (see Figure 18). *Festis* opens,

> Religious sustir, in as mechil as ye have desirid and preyed me divers tymes that I wolde write yow the festis and the passion of oure lord Jhesu Crist: therfore now at this tyme to folwe yowre desire, aftir myn simple conyng [intelligence], I wole writin hem to yow, in whiche ye may usen bothe preyeres and meditacions, yef it liken yow to folewe my lewde [unlearned] techinges.[539]

This passage exemplifies the humility of the author with an emphasis on her simple intelligence and supposed lack of learning. As with other female authors, the humility *topos* reflects the general state of medieval education. Women were rarely formally educated in the same way that men, and especially men of the Church, were.[540] In books written by religious men for women,

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537. Ben Parsons, "Introduction" 18.

538. The parchment repair makes it impossible to fully determine whether the letter is an *i* or a long *s*. Based on comparisons between the two letter forms, I think it more likely that it is an *s*. See Koster, "Gender, Text, Critic," 234 for illustrations of the letter forms.

539. Parsons, ed., 1; Holkham Misc. 41, p. 1. The glosses on Middle English terms come from Parsons' edition unless otherwise noted.

540. D. H. Green *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 65. (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007). cf. Richard Rolle's introduction to his second meditation on the Passion: "Lord þat made me and hast yeven me many yiftis, gostly, bodily, and worldly, I beseche þe, graunt me grace to use ham al in þy service and to þat end þe whoche þou yaf ham to me, þat I ever wyrship þe in þy yiftes; and graunt me grace ever to be meke in þy yifte, to hold me apaid, and never to be proud ne presumptuouse of þy yiftes,

the humility topos can seem disingenuous when the writer has received much more formal education than the reader. In this case, however, the humility topos carries more weight because one woman asked another to compose a meditative work rather than turning to a male authority figure. C. Annette Grisé suggests that the singular mention of the author's gender in the work "leads me to suspect that it was not considered relevant or important for her writing of the text. Perhaps this was because she knew her audience very well, and as the text was not designed for broad circulation (or for that matter for any circulation beyond what the single manuscript might find) she did not feel she needed to defend or excuse her act of writing as a woman."[541] However, minimizing the writer's gender in a passage marked by the humility *topos* may have been a strategic move. Nicholas Watson reminds us that Arundel's Constitutions of 1409 aimed to preserve the clergy's role as "communicators or, alternatively, guardians of knowledge."[542] Women assuming the role of religious teachers, even to other women, could be seen as a threat to male clerical authority. Watson points out that another English female author, Julian of Norwich, diffuses the possibility of clerical censure with "a nonhierarchic relationship between writer and reader" couched in the humility *topos*:

> Here is a text in which a woman indeed teaches (and teaches men, among others) and advances, if not heresy, then unusual religious teaching. Julian addresses her book to all Christians and speaks of herself, not as an authoritative recipient of grace, but as a "simple creature that cowde no letter" (a persona parallel to that of "pore caitif" and "pauper"), who, as such, can act as a representative for everyone. … Julian states that God reveals himself to all according to the depth of their love

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bot ever to know me for such as I am, a synful wreche." Richard Rolle, "Meditations on the Passion Text II," in *English Writings of Richard Rolle*, ed. Hope Emily Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), 27.

541. C. Annette Grisé. "Prayer, Meditation and Women Readers in Late Medieval England: Teaching and Sharing through Books," in *Texts and Traditions of Medieval Pastoral Care: Essays in Honour of Bella Millett,* eds. Catherine Gunn and Catherine Innes-Parker (York : York Medieval Press, 2009), 188.

542. Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," *Speculum* 70, no. 4 (October 1995): 846.

> of him, privileging not even the recipient of the revelation herself; like the compiler of *Pore Caitif*, she situates herself with (not over against) her readers, a learner, not a teacher.[543]

The author of *Festis* similarly presents herself in a "non-hierarchical" relationship to her reader, who is explicitly defined as another woman. Even as this preserves the communal aspect of the circumstances of the work's composition, it also neatly skirts possible clerical critiques by disavowing clerical learning and, like Julian, assuming an authorial position of equality to the reader.

The author's employment of a conventional *topos* as part of the opening of her work also indicates that she *was* well-educated and familiar with the steps that such works often assume at the beginning. Just because most medieval women were not formally educated does not mean that the *Festis* author had no formal education herself. Indeed, most of the scholars who have studied *Festis* have remarked on how learned she is: Colledge and Chadwick note that "she is well-versed in Scripture, able in pastoral theology, [and] interested in the techniques and the theory of prayer."[544] On the subject of the author's learning, Parsons asserts, "It is obvious that the author knew the Vulgate well and probably had access to a glossed version of the bible, most likely some form of the twelfth-century *Glossa ordinaria*."[545] Koster points out that the author of *Festis* has had requests to write prayers and meditations for her community before, indicating that she "is known to them as a person who has particular expertise in the subject [of prayers and meditations], and who would have been authorized by a male spiritual director to write such a text for other women, which in the fifteenth century would have been a particularly unusual occurrence."[546] Parsons asserts that "such is the depth of her entanglement in the various threads of contemporary religious thought that it can be difficult to know where she might have encountered a particular concept or motif."[547] The author's knowledge of contemporary religious and meditative texts demonstrates her education even as her humility in the prologue denies it.

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543. Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change," 850-51.

544. William Flete, *Remedies Against Temptations: The Third English Version of William Flete,* ed. E. Colledge and N. Chadwick (Rome: Archivo Italiano per la Storia de la Pieta), 211.

545. Parsons, "Introduction," 8.

546. Koster, "Theorizing in Advance of the Facts," 73.

547. Parsons, Introduction, 6.

Besides the author's general use of the humility *topos*, there is also the question of her relationship to the reader. Most scholars agree the author is an authority figure within her female religious community. However, Parsons and Innes-Parker suggest that the text itself frames the author/reader relationship as a more equal one. Innes-Parker argues that the author has apparently experienced the mystical union with Christ that is "the goal of prayer," an experience that "she expects her reader to achieve through the teachings of her text."[548] Though the author takes a guiding role, she "encourages the independent thought and private spiritual growth necessary for advanced religious practitioners: in the end, the goal of the prayer cycle seems to be to make itself obsolete as its readers progress beyond its pages to interior prayer."[549] Parsons argues that the author sees prayer "as a distinctly communal enterprise," which relies on "a full-fledged model of reading and writing, one that stresses the importance of collaboration between equal partners, in which each assists the other; it sees author and reader as participants in a mutually beneficial project, rather than assuming a one-sided transmission of knowledge."[550] Both scholars note the "merging" of the author's and the reader's voices in the prayers, making the point that the author uses collective language (such as "we" or "us" instead of "I" and "me") to bring her community into her private devotions.[551] An example of this is the prayer for the Visitation:

> I thanke and magnifie yow, graciouse quene of hevene and erthe, and empresse of helle, that wente to seinte Elizabeth yow cosine and tolde here goode tidinges, and sche tolde yow here joye. And thanne ye withyn thankid and magnified god for his yeftis of grace, and ye lady madin the psalme of *Magnificat* at that time. O virgine, preie yowr sone, my lord hevene kyng, that he sende me alwey good cumpanie and holi communicacion [fellowship] in whiche we may in gret reverence thanke and magnifie that Trinite for alle his benefites. Pater noster. Ave maria.[552]

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548. Catherine Innes-Parker, "Bodleian Library MS Holkham Miscellany 41 and the Modelling of Women's Devotion," in *Devotinal Literature and Practice in Medieval England*, ed. Kathryn Vulić, Susan Uselmann, and C. Annette Grisé, Disputatio, 29 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 241.

549. Innes-Parker, "The Modelling of Women's Devotion" 241.

550. Parsons, Introduction, 10;11.

551. Innes-Parker, "The Modelling of Women's Devotion," 241; Parsons, Introduction, 11.

552. *Festis,* ed. Parsons, 2. Holkham Misc. 41 p. 11-12. Cf. Luke 1:39-56.

The prayer for the Visitation focuses specifically on female companionship and company. In the description of the event, the author concentrates on the sharing of good news between Mary and Elizabeth. Mary responds to the exchange with private worship, expressed orally with the *Magnificat*, which then became part of the Christian liturgy. In the prayer at the end of the passage, the author reinforces the importance of holy female community by asking for "good cumpanie and holi communicacion." The prayer uses the single subject before this point, reflecting how the individual benefits from community; however, the voice then shifts to the plural "we," demonstrating the communal worship of the convent and bringing the entire community into the private prayers of the reader.

The striking model of communal devotion based on the merging of voices and the diffusion of authority goes beyond the humility *topos* to uplift the reader's spiritual status to a level that equals that of the author. In the prologue, when the author asks for the reader's prayers to "make me a good woman," she follows the request with an explanatory statement: "For ful ofte sinne and wrechidnes withdrawith my gosteli [spiritual] syht from his glorious presence, and therfore yow and othere of his special children I preie to purchace me sum grace of that benigne lord in whom al grace is in."[553] This prayer characterizes the reader as one of God's "special children," who is able to "purchase… sum grace" from God for the author even before she begins the prayers. It confirms the merging of voices and the mutual benefit of the prayers and suggests that all the members of the community are of equal status before God, regardless of differences in worldly status.

Though there is much debate over the origin of the *Festis and Passion of Oure Lord Ihesu Crist,* some things are more certain. The author of this text was a religious woman, either a nun or perhaps an anchoress. She was highly educated, and could likely read both Latin and the vernacular due to the references to other texts she makes within her meditations. She had access to multiple books, for though she does not cite particular works directly, she incorporates scripture, devotional sources, and learned sources like the *Glossa Ordinaria* into her work.[554] She was deeply in touch with the devotional culture and texts of the period, for she structures her own work around the theme of Christ's life, and she echoes the wider cultural interest in affective piety. However, she is also interested in making her own unique work, rather than mimicking the

553. Parsons, ed., 2; Holkham Misc. 41, p. 3.
554. Koster, "Gender, Text, Critic," 237.

other iterations of the Life of Christ genre which have come before and with which she was likely familiar.

Scholarly Debates

We have seen that scholars argue about the title of this work, and scholars also debate whether it originated at Syon Abbey or another female monastic institution in England. Pollard's 1987 article claims that the mystical elements in the prayer sequence point to an association with Syon Abbey.[555] In 1997, Pollard followed up with an article that proposed Joanna North, the abbess of Syon from 1421-1433, as "a prime candidate" for the author of the work.[556] Other scholars have followed Pollard's lead in associating *Festis* with Syon. Alexandra Barratt acknowledges that the author "may have been a Bridgettine" in her introduction to the selection from the text she edited for *Women's Writing in Middle English.*[557] Catherine Innes-Parker refers to Pollard's suggestion of Joanna North, though she includes the possibility that Pollard may be mistaken.[558] Although subsequent scholars have questioned Pollard's claim that North is the most likely author for the *Festis*, they have generally accepted that the author was a Birgittine or related to Syon in some way.

However, there has been pushback against Syon, as much of a textual hub as it was, as the origin point of this text. Koster entirely disagrees with the idea that *Festis* was written at Syon. She declares that Pollard's argument is "tenuous," refuting his claim that Holkham Misc. 41 is related to Latin Liturg. e. 17, which has "Iohannna" inscribed with a late-fifteenth century hand and is the link to Joanna North.[559] Instead, she suggests that the work could come from a different community of women, one with an anchoress who lives enclosed alongside the nuns in a convent. She offers an example of such a community with the nunnery at Polesworth, which consisted of an abbess and thirteen nuns, one of whom was enclosed.[560] The last anchoress of

555. William F. Pollard, "Mystical Elements in a Fifteenth-Century Prayer-Sequence: 'The Festis and the Passion of Oure Lord Ihesu Crist,'" in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium IV*, ed. Marion Glasscoe, (D. S. Brewer, 1987) 41–67.

556. Pollard, "Bodleian Manuscript" 45.

557. Barratt, 211.

558. Innes-Parker, "Anchoritic Elements" 174; Innes-Parker, "The Modelling of Women's Devotion," 29.

559. Koster, "Theorizing in Advance of the Facts," 72-3.

560. Koster, "Theorizing in Advance of the Facts," 73-4. Cf. Rotha Mary Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London, Methuen & Co., 1914), 79.

Polesworth, Benedicta Burton, was known to own books and had a connection to the Knightley family, which was related to the Coke family who eventually came to own the manuscript.[561] Koster's argument is a reminder that textual provenance can be a tricky and contradictory process. While her argument is sound, she implicitly assumes that this witness of the work is directly tied to the composition of *Festis.* Given that there is only one copy, it is indeed probable that the scribe had access to an exemplar that was close to the original. However, the origins of the Holkham Misc. Manuscript do not necessarily coincide with the creation of the text it contains, which presents a major flaw to Koster's argument. Still, her point that close analysis of the text and manuscript is needed to provide further knowledge about the author and origin of *Festis* stands.

Ben Parsons takes the middle road in the debate about the origin of *Festis.* He acknowledges that *Festis* has several possible links to Syon but also argues that the apparent inactivity of the nuns in terms of textual production suggests that *Festis* may not have been written at the Abbey.[562] He says, "Put simply, the prayers would be an anomaly in this context, if not quite an impossibility. There is also a striking lack of material from St Bridget herself in the prayers. Despite her unfaltering emphasis on the presence of women in the New Testament, the author makes little use of Bridget's revelations: she does not even refer to Bridget's lengthy spiritual biography of Mary, a vision that left a deep impression on other meditative works of the period."[563] It is indeed surprising that if the author were a Birgittine, she would not include material from Birgitta's visions on the life of Christ in her work on the subject. This absence is especially strange given that Birgitta was such a popular source of information on Christ's life in late-medieval England, as we saw in the previous chapters.

However, one passage which could point to a Syon context within the *Festis* has so far gone unnoticed in the argument about the text's origins. This lacuna is the author's metaphor where a clean house echoes a clean soul. It reads:

> Fertheremore, sustir, much as a man may se that it is not faire ne semli for a gret lord to comyn into a foul hows, but first the hous muste be swepid and mad fair and clene and honestli araied [appropriately set in order]; rith so [in the same

561. Koster, "Theorizing in Advance of the Facts," 74.
562. Parsons, Introduction, 15.
563. Parsons, Introduction, 14.

> way] it is not fair ne semli for oure lord god to comyn in to oure soule, ne we to make us homily [intimate] with him with famulier speche and loving daliaunce [communion], yef ony spot of sinne be with inne us wilfulli, til the house of oure conscience be clene swepid be confession and maad fair be contricion, and the soule honestli arraied with meknesse and alle other gostli vertues, or ellis to stonde in good wil and desir to have alle gode vertues. And seke and preie therfore, and be the endeles mercy of oure lord god that good wil [intent] schal been acceptid as for dede [done in fact], yef a man seke besili [diligently] ther aftir.[564]

While, as Parsons notes, this metaphor comparing a clean house to a clean soul is common in other medieval sources such as the *Doctrine of the Hert* and *Ancrene Wisse,* it also appears in the writings of Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn. Birgitta's analogous passage comes from Book IV, chapter 22 of the *Liber caelestis,* which concludes in the Middle English version,

> For it is skyll þat þe house be clensid into þe whilke þe kynge sall entir; and þe glas also, þat þe drynke mai be schewid; and þe whete commes soner fro þe cafe [chaff] þat þe bred sall be made. And þan, ryght as eftir wynter comes somer, so eftir tribulacion sall I sende comforthe to þame þat will be meke and desire heuenly thynges.[565]

The other possible source passage from Mechthild comes from the *Liber Specialis Gratiae* (*LSG*)*,* Pars 2, chapter 14. This passage is cited in *The Myroure of Oure Lady,* the translation of the Syon liturgy made for the nuns. The translation from *The Myroure* reads,

> And hereof ye haue a notable example in saynt Maudes reuelacions, both for diuine seruyce, & for howslyng. That lyke as a man agenst a lordes comyng to hym maketh clene his house, & yf he may not for hast, cast out all the vnclennesse before his entrey, then he swepeth yt vp togyther in to a corner & castyth yt oute afterwarde. Ryghte so when a persone goyth to dyuyne seruyce, or to the

564. Parsons, ed. *Holkham Prayers,* 2. Holkham Misc. 41 f. 4r-4v. All textual notes come from Parsons' edition unless otherwise noted.

565. Roger Ellis, ed., *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*, Vol. 1, EETS O.S. 291 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 280.

> howslynge, & felyth grudgeyng [remorse] in conscyence, yf he may not get his gostly father to shryue hym, then he hought to sorowe hys synnes in his harte by contricion, and to shryue him therof to god and so swepe yt in to a corner of hys mynde tyll he may gette hys confessour, and trustynge in oure lordes mercy go to hys seruice or to hys howslyng.[566]

This passage from the *Myroure of Oure Lady* is the closest analog I have found to the passage in *Festis.* Along with the metaphor itself, the wording and order of events is close, even down to the "right so" as a transition to the interpretation of the metaphor. The appearance of this passage in both the *Festis* and a document so closely related to the nuns of Syon could perhaps further support that *Fesits* is indeed connected to the Birgittine nuns. If so, it would be the only known incidence of a nun of Syon composing an original work.

Liturgical Connections

The incorporation of liturgical texts further emphasizes the communal emphasis of *Festis*. In his discussion of the author's learning, Parsons notes that the only Latin included by the author in the text of *Festis* "draw[s] from biblical texts that had themselves been incorporated into liturgy by the time the author is writing: almost all can be found among the established forms of the mass or daily hours."[567] He considers this method a way of accounting for a presumed lack of Latinity in the female reader, as the quotes would be familiar to her already and would not require further explication.[568] Nuns might understand the Latin of the liturgy more readily than unfamiliar texts. Katherine Zieman argues that female monastics were likely to achieve "liturgical literacy," which she defines as "the performance of sacred Latin texts in which the relationship to grammatical understanding is ambiguous."[569] Anne Bagnall Yardley has found that bishops' injunctions to nuns indicate that "the only two specific skills required of a nun are reading and

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566. John Henry Blunt, ed. *The Myroure of oure Ladye*. EETS, e.e. 19, (London: EETS, 1873), 38-9; Cf. Mechthild of Hackeborn, *LSG* Pars 2 chapter 14, in Dom. Ludwig Paquelin Paquelin, ed. *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechthildianae*, vol. 2 (Paris: H. Oudin, 1875), 147-148.

567. Parsons, "Introduction," 9.

568. Parsons, "Introduction," 9.

569. Katherine Zieman, "Reading, Singing, and Understanding: Constructions of the Literacy of Women Religious in Late Medieval England," in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval*

singing" for "choir service is her principal work."[570] Because the nuns would be participating in the liturgy every day by singing in the choir, Yardley concludes that "[t]he majority of nuns seem to function at least on the second level [of Latin literacy]—reading and understanding liturgical texts."[571] Therefore, nuns's familiarity with Latin of the liturgy would make it much more likely that they understood references to it in *Festis*.

The use of liturgical Latin in *Festis* has a purpose beyond demonstrating the linguistic abilities of the author and audience. It would remind the reader of the daily communal performance of the liturgy in nunneries, which would not only tie the events of Christ's life to the services a nun performs, but would also call to mind her own experiences of adding her voice to the community of faith. It is difficult to overestimate the impact that the performance of the liturgy had on the life of a nun: "The communal spirituality of medieval nuns is grounded in and shaped by the regular performance of the divine office—the nearly ceaseless singing that occupies nuns for so many of their waking hours. This constant music making shapes the vocabulary of spirituality, teaches and reinforces the tenets of Christianity, interprets the relationships among nuns, and even connects them to the world outside the cloister. Singing the liturgy is a performative act—one that shapes the very community that gives it form."[572] Thus, when the *Festis* author reminds the reader of the liturgy, she would evoke not only the text itself, but the physical, aural, and spiritual memories of the reader.

Many references to liturgical Latin in *Festis* come from Holy Week services, which were designed to engage the congregation of nuns in the biblical events that Holy Week celebrates. These events are the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem, the institution of the Eucharist and the washing of feet on Maundy Thursday, the Crucifixion on Good Friday, and the Resurrection on Easter Sunday. Because these events are so integral to the Church, "the rituals associated with

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England and Abroad, ed. Sarah Rees Jones, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003): 106.

570. Anne Bagnall Yardley, *Performing Piety: Musical Culture in Medieval English Nunneries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 76.

571. Yardley, 76. *Cf.* David N. Bell, *What Nuns Read: Books and Libraries in Medieval English Nunneries*, Cistercian Studies Series, no. 158 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 60.

572. Yardley, 1.

Holy Week are among the most concentrated and powerful of the liturgical year and play an important role in the extant sources."[573] The nuns' participation in these services placed them in the roles of the people who interacted with Christ: "In these ceremonies the nuns have been the patriarchs and the prophets, the disciples of Christ, and the followers weeping at the foot of the cross. In the following ritual, they become the women who went to the tomb and found it empty. All of these images add to the central monastic image of the nun as the bride of Christ, giving the nuns a wealth of visions for their self-identity."[574] Obviously, these communal ceremonies complement the private devotional activities that the *Festis* encourages. The *Festis* author draws on the rich experiences of festival worship which the nuns celebrate every year during Holy Week, as well as the daily services in which they take part. These references to acts of voice and performance familiarize the nuns with the experiences of Christ's life and bring holy events closer to the experience of the author and reader.

Connections to the Life of Christ Genre

Though *Festis* engages with the liturgy and community in which the author and reader take part, it also fits snugly into the meditative Life of Christ genre. Prayer cycles on the Passion as a form of meditation are a recognized "sub-genre" in the Life of Christ corpus. Alexandra Barratt identifies two types of meditations recommended to medieval readers, the first perhaps the more well-known type of meditative Life of Christ, where "the speaker addresses an individual or collective audience… and exhorts this audience to ponder particular aspects of the Passion."[575] Works such as the *MVC* and *Speculum devotorum* are examples of this sub-genre. This type of Passion meditation refers to Christ in the third person, and Barratt notes that "the speaker additionally adopts a controlling, almost aggressive, attitude toward the audience, whom he manipulates emotionally."[576] The second type, of which *Festis* is an example, "uses a first-person

573. Yardley, 124

574. Yardley, 124.

575. Alexandra Barratt, "Stabant Matres Dolorosae: Women as Readers and Writers of Passion Prayers, Meditations, and Visions," in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. A.A. MacDonald, H. N. B. Ridderbos, and R. M. Schlusemann (Groningen: Egbert Forster Groningen, 1998) 55.

576. Barratt, "Stabant Matres Dolorosae," 55.

speaker and addresses Christ as 'thou.'"[577] The speaker in this type of meditation "positions himself (or herself) as inferior to the figure of Christ, who is not only addressed but also thanked for his sufferings."[578] Barratt notes that Richard Rolle's *Meditation B* on the Passion is an example of this second sub-genre.[579] *Festis* conforms almost perfectly to the second type of meditation, where the religious sister reads or says prayers for each event in Christ's life, which begin with variations on the formula of "Jhesu, I thanke and magnifie yow."

As a Life of Christ text *Festis* lingers on the sufferings of Christ while he was on earth, but it dwells less on the gruesome physical torture and suffering of Christ during the Passion than other texts of this type. The relative lack of gore may be because the section that may have contained the Flagellation, traditionally very gory in Passion narratives, is in the missing folios of the manuscript.[580] While *Festis* does not shy away from depictions of Christ's suffering during the Passion, it tends to limit itself to one image or idea per chapter of the Passion narrative rather than piling image upon image of Christ's pain. For example, the first extant chapter on the Passion, "The Procession to Calvary," thanks Christ "that ye baar the hevy cros up on youre sore brousid [bruised] schuldren [shoulders] and woundid body."[581] This image becomes the focal point of the chapter, and the speaker asks, "O, goode god, yeve grace that I may helpe to bere youre cros, that is to say mekli to bere for your love alle hevy burthenys of charge that fallith to me, also to doon penaunce for the love of yow, as ye dede for me, and graunte me grace, blisful god, to been contemplatif as my degre askyth."[582] Instead of dwelling on the suffering that Christ experiences carrying the cross, the prayer makes a comparison to the supplicant's life. Instead of directing the reader to focus on Christ's pain, *Festis* instead asks the reader to pray for relief from their own pains and burdens.

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577. Barratt, "Stabant Matres Dolorosae," 55.

578. Barratt, "Stabant Matres Dolorosae," 55.

579. Barratt, "Stabant Matres Dolorosae," 57.

580. There is a section missing between pages 64 and 65. Because the manuscript has been rebound, it is impossible to know how much is missing. The prayer on 64 is for the Last Supper, and page 65 picks up with the beginning of the procession to Calvary chapter. Regarding the bloodiness of the Flagellation, see James H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance : A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative*, Vol. 1,Ars Neerlandica (Kortrijk: Van Ghemmert, 1979), 134-41.

581. Parsons, ed., 27; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 65.

582. Parsons, ed., 27-8; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 65.

The Crucifixion chapter is the only Passion chapter that deviates from the overall trend of focusing on one image or event. This chapter has two primary images: Jesus' pain at his clothes being ripped off of his wounded flesh and the pinning to the cross. These scenes are the goriest moments of *Festis*. When Jesus' clothes are removed, he suffers great pain because "goode lord, youre clothis clevid to youre gracious body, for the blood of youre precious wowndes was dried and congelid ther to, and therfore in the takinge a-wey it rered [raised] of bothe skin and flessh of youre blissid bak and sides."[583] The narrative continues with the account of the Crucifixion, which only takes one sentence: "A debonor [meek] Jhesu, than thei leide yow to the cros and bownde yow ther-on and with cordes thei drowen [dragged] youre hondes and feet to the holes of the cros, and nailid hem ther-to with grete ruggid nailes."[584] While these two sentences highlight the details of pain and suffering typical of the genre, they are much more brief than other examples of the same events in other Lives of Christ, which often take entire paragraphs to describe individual instances of Christ's suffering.[585] This lack of emphasis on the actual torments of Christ indicates that the affective focus of *Festis* is not on Christ's pain *per se*, but, as we shall see, on his relationships: with his family, his disciples, the women he meets, and the reader.

Festis as a Devotional Practice

Life of Christ Elements

Despite its overall focus on women in Christ's life, the prayers in *Festis* do not dwell very much at all on the Virgin Mary. Lives of Christ during and after the twelfth century tend to employ Mary as an emotional focal point, especially during the recounting of the Passion.[586] Descriptions of her crying, lamenting, and even fainting can serve as emotional triggers for the

583. Parsons, ed., 29; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 67. This is a very common detail in Passion narratives: see Marrow 138.

584. Parsons, ed., 29; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 67.

585. cf. the *MVC,* chapter 78, which describes two different possible methods of attaching Jesus to the cross in vivid detail. Ps. Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, ed. and trans. Francis X. Taney, Anne Miller, and C. Mary Stallings-Taney (Asheville, N.C: Pegasus Press, 2000), 252-4; Ps. Bonaventure, *Meditaciones Vitae Christi,* ed. M. Stallings-Taney, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis CLIII, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997)*,* 270-2.

586. Thomas H. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 113.

reader, signaling them to emulate Mary's compassion.[587] Instead of presenting Mary as a *loca* of affective identification for the reader, *Festis* instead treats her solely as a quasi-divine figure. While the vast majority of the prayer chapters are addressed to Jesus, Mary is also addressed as the recipient of the reader's prayers in five chapters: the Incarnation, the Visitation, the Joys of Mary, the Sorrows of Mary, and the Burial of Christ. In all of these chapters, Mary is not presented as a figure of identification for the reader, but rather as the "graciouse quene of hevene and erthe, and empresse of helle."[588] In the prayers addressed to her, the supplicant asks Mary to communicate with Jesus or the Trinity on her behalf, cementing her role as a powerful mediatrix rather than a figure for *imitatio.*

While Mary is not presented as an emotional focal point for the reader, the text emphasizes her maternal closeness with Christ and the intimacy she shared with him. *Festis* draws attention to Mary's connection with the child Christ in the chapters on the Incarnation and the Wedding Feast at Cana. In the Incarnation chapter, the prayer reads: "A ladi, for the greite joyye that ye hadde at al times whanne ye, swete mayde, felt hym stere [stir] in yowre precious wombe knowing wel that he was verray [truly] goddes sone."[589] In the Wedding Feast at Cana chapter, the prayer is to Jesus: "O goode lord, for that lady love betwene whose preciouse sides fourty wikes ye lay, and aftir youre birthe ful tendirli kept yow and nurichede yow and fedde yow with swete mylke, graunte me continually youre grace and turne my vices in to vertues."[590] Both prayers focus on the intimacy with Jesus that Mary's pregnancy and motherhood created. This emphasis celebrates Mary's feminine body as the vessel which carried and nourished Christ, praising her for being the divine Mother of God while also glorifying the very human and physical aspects of her motherhood.

Instead of relying on Mary as an imitable figure, *Festis* uses the other women in the Gospel narratives as figures with whom the reader can identify. The women whom Jesus meets over the course of his life view him as an object of love, worship, and adoration. Jesus comforts them,

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587. Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 127-8.

588. Parsons, ed. 7; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 11.

589. Parsons, ed., 6; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 11.

590. Parsons, ed. 12; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 25. Cf. Birgitta of Sweden's mystical pregnancy, Revelation 6.88. See Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume 3: Liber caelestis, Books VI–VII*, ed. Bridget Morris, trans. Denis Michael Searby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 155-6.

helps them, and saves them, and his relationship with the women in the gospel narratives more closely resembles that of the medieval female reader than his relationship with the Virgin Mary. Through these female figures, their conversations and relationships with Christ, the *Festis* author creates a contemplative experience for the reader designed to bring them closer to Christ.

Women's Voices in Festis

While *Festis* is unusual in the Life of Christ genre for merely summarizing Jesus' physical suffering, it lingers on Christ's conversations with women. Conversations and speech are more likely to be recorded in *Festis* when there is a woman involved, and more likely than not, it is a conversation between a woman and Christ. Twelve of the fifty-four chapters, almost a quarter, explicitly deal with Christ's interactions with women. Ben Parsons notes that the longest chapters in the work are either those about women or those that depict Jesus "engaging in traditionally 'feminine' domestic duties," such as feeding the multitudes and cleansing the temple.[591] The chapter on Jesus' relationship with Mary Magdalen is the only chapter which exceeds five hundred words, and the second longest chapter is the feeding of the multitudes.[592] The longer chapters depicting Christ's interactions with women tend to focus on women who turned to Christ for help or forgiveness, such as the woman taken in adultery, the Samaritan woman at the well, or Mary Magdalen.

Festis participates in the fifteenth-century devotional trend of facilitating conversation with God through dialogue, as Rebecca Krug describes. She defines this pattern as "a common interest, new to the long fifteenth century, in imagining readers of written texts as participating in direct conversation with Jesus through their reading. Although dialogue was popular throughout the Middle Ages, earlier dialogues rarely represented Jesus in conversation with humans who

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591. Parsons, Introduction, 4. Though Parsons reasons that the cleansing of the Temple chapter is so long because Jesus is performing a feminine duty, gendered activity does not seem to be the chief concern here. Instead, this chapter is important because it depicts the scriptural event that echoes the house-cleaning metaphor from the beginning of *Festis.* That passage enjoins that "the house of oure conscience be clene swepid be confession and maad fair be contricion," and the prayer in the Cleansing chapter asks Jesus to " make oure soule, bodi, and herte alwei clene and able it to been youre temple, fulfille it in alle virtues that ye may reste fully and dwelle in us, and we in yow, Jhesu ful of bounte" (Parsons, ed. 2; 26; Holkham Misc 41 p. 4; 62-3). Rather than emphasizing Jesus's actions as feminine, it draws attention to contrition, a major theme in *Festis.*

592. Parsons, Introduction, 4.

were not part of the gospel narratives."[593] *Festis* and other fifteenth-century devotional works used dialogue as a direct mode of reader response: "Fifteenth-century readers 'read' themselves into books; dialogues in which the reader might 'speak' with Jesus were attractive because they offered audiences the opportunity to enter into direct conversation with the divine."[594] As a prayer cycle that focuses on Christ's life, *Festis* facilitates a reader's connection with God in multiple modes. Engagement with scripture enables connection through what Krug calls the "inscription," meaning the "insertion of authoritative written texts [i.e. Scripture] into a written work."[595] Reframing Christ's conversations from scripture allows the reader to read herself into the dialogue as both Christ and his conversational partner, thus engaging in *imitatio Christi* and direct conversation with the divine in the context of a single prayer.

Chapters with biblical women follow a general formula: the woman meets and converses with Jesus, Christ grants the woman's request, and then the text applies the biblical woman's issue to the reader in the form of a prayer. This application echoes the major theme of confession and prayer in *Festis.* The prologue prepares the reader for devotional exercise by beginning with "a general confession to god, the wheche a general confession may be clepid the sweping awey the filthe of oure sinnes in a corner."[596] In this case, the author means a private prayer of confession that the reader prays to God directly "whanne we may noyt have oure confessour to be confessid whiche time as we fele us defaute [defective] with sinnes."[597] The prologue then provides a model of general confession for the reader. After covering a general multitude of sins, the confession ends,

> "But the grete multitude of yowre mercy whiche hath noon ende ne noumbre, that grauntid the woman of Caninee the preiere that sche besoughte, and to many anothir also opinli han schewid yowre mercy, and noyt onli for hem, but also for [so that] alle sinful that wole forsake here sinnes schulde trustli [faithfully] ful

593. Rebecca Krug, "Jesus' Voice: Dialogue and Late Medieval Readers," in *Form And Reform: Reading Across the Fifteenth Century*, eds. Shannon Gayk and Kathleen Tonry (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), 110.

594. Krug, 111.

595. Krug, 112

596. Parsons, ed., 3; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 5.

597. Parsons, ed., 3; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 5.

hope to yowre mercy. Lord, ful of pite, this makith me hardy to preie and speke to yow, putting alwey my wil to yowre wil in al myn asking."[598]

The end of the confession connects the reader specifically to the Canaanite woman (Matthew 25:21-28), who is presented as a figure of effective prayer. She is linked to others who received Christ's mercy because of their prayers, and the confession itself is presented as a method for abandoning sins in order to encounter God more closely. The final request, that God would make the reader "hardy to preie and speke to yow," is the fulfillment of the general confession. Having swept her sins into a corner, the reader is prepared to personally encounter Jesus through the figures of other sinful women who nonetheless receive mercy. This depiction of ordinary, sinful women throughout *Festis* indicates that one only needs strong faith to have a mystical encounter with Jesus.

As with most meditative Lives of Christ, the reader of *Festis* is expected to imaginatively place herself in the events of Christ's life. *Festis*'s emphasis on women's conversations with Christ make it so that the reader identifies with the biblical women in the text by giving them her own voice. The reader speaks directly to Christ by reading the book. Each episode and conversation echoes an experience that the reader knows from her own spiritual life, drawing the reader and the characters closer together and providing the reader with an imaginative encounter with Jesus.

Catherine Innes-Parker argues that the *Festis* author uses her work to react to male-authored devotional works for women, deploying her female role models in the text and "often calling into question conventional attitudes about women and women's piety."[599] She proposes that "what these biblical women do *not* model is as important as what they do: the total absence of reference to either the sin or the purity of the female body significantly undermines the emphasis on sexual sin found in most thirteenth-and fourteenth-century devotional writings for women."[600] Instead, she says, "In *Festis* the sinful female body is absent, replaced by an idealized feminine soul."[601] The complete absence of condemnation for sexual sin, even for women who did sin sexually, demonstrates the author's focus on her audience as well as her emphasis on redemption

598. Parsons, ed., 4-5; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 8.
599. Innes-Parker, "The Modelling of Women's Devotion," 244.
600. Innes-Parker, "The Modelling of Women's Devotion," 255.
601. Innes-Parker, "The Modelling of Women's Devotion," 255.

and meditative experience. Rather than concentrate on sins that the readers may or may not have committed, the author uses women's encounters with Christ to move them into a positive and loving interaction with Christ. As Innes-Parker says, the author's dismissal of sexual sins defies the emphasis which male authors usually put upon such trespasses, but that seems to be a side effect of the author's purpose rather than her main goal.

The Samaritan Woman

Christ's first encounter with a contrite woman in *Festis* is the Samaritan woman at the well—an episode that recalls both baptism and the Eucharist with its references to the water of life:

> O Jhesu ful of benignite, I yelde yow thankynges that ye so meke and mildeli spak a good while with the woman Samaritan that come to the welle ther ye sat to fetche watyr, and ye, benigne Jhesu, bad[602] here yeve yow drinke and seide to here, who that drank of the water of lif that ye yevin that thei schulde not thurstyn perpetueli; for the watir, ye seiden, is the welle that hem schal lede to everlastyng lif. And thus fulhomli [in a very friendly manner] ye spak with here a good while and told here her prive secretes.[603]

Though Jesus' description of the water of life is the only direct quote, the passage is bracketed by descriptions of conversation. The *Glossa Ordinaria*'s gloss on "*Dicit ei Jesus"* also emphasizes the salvific power of Jesus' conversation with the woman:

> Paulatim eam attollens adhuc mysteria loquitur, ut paulatim perduceret eam ad cognoscendum quis cum ea loqueretur. Et non opus bonum, non prudentem mulieris laudat responsionem, sed veritatis laudat confessionem.[604]
>
> [Little by little he spoke still lifting her up to the mysteries, so that gradually he guided her to recognizing who was speaking with her. And he did not praise a

602. The edition has "lad." The MS reads "bad."

603. Parsons, ed., 15; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 31-2. Cf. John 4:6-30.

604. *Biblia Latina cum glossa Ordinaria,* ed. Jaques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 114: 371B-373C, *Patrologia Latina Database.* See also Karlfried Froehlich, ed., and Margaret Gibson, intro. *Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria*. Facsimile of Strassborg 1480/81. Vol. 4. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992).

good work or the woman's prudent response, but he praised the confession of truth.]

The gloss demonstrates the Samaritan woman's honest confession of her sins is what enables her to understand Jesus' teaching her through their conversation. The personal prayer at the end of this chapter echoes the effect of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman, asking the lord to "come in to my soule, tel and schew me the derkhed [darkness] defaute that priveli lurkyn withinne me, suffre me not to make of vertu vice ne of vice vertu, voide [purge] fro me alle evil custumes and yeve me cler syht of trewe undirstonding and sothfast knowinge so that I may fully amende me of alle myne defautes."[605] The emphasis on confession leading to enlightenment in both the description of the event and the prayer encourages the reader to put herself into the place of the Samaritan woman and discuss her faults with Jesus. The prayer's request for "clear sight and true understanding" suggests such an encounter should result in spiritual insight.

The final prayer in the passage, which reads "A gracious Jhesu, graunte me also the water of lif that I thurste not endelesli, and make me drinke in youre swete love wherthorw I may at the laste come to everlasting lif," cements the connection between the reader and the Samaritan woman, for it echoes her words from the scriptural passage.[606] The *Glossa Ordinaria*, unsurprisingly, also comments on the water of life:

> Aqua corporalis deorsum fluit, aqua spiritualis sursum salit et secum eos qui eam bibunt in aeternam gloriam subvehit.[607]
>
> [Physical water flows downwards, spiritual water springs upwards and brings those who drink it with it into eternal glory.]

The *Glossa* makes the distinction between physical and spiritual water to reinforce the miraculous salvific effect of the spiritual libation. *Festis* takes this one step further by equating the water of life with love, adding an element of relationship to the metaphor. The passage allows the reader to embody the Samaritan woman's encounter with Christ and adds emotional resonance to the sacraments of confession and baptism. The Samaritan woman's confession leads to

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605. Parsons, ed., 15; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 32.

606. Cf. John 4:15, "The woman saith to him: Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come hither to draw." Parsons, ed., 15; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 32-3.

607. *Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria*, Migne, ed, PL 114: 0372C.

Jesus offering her the ultimate absolution, the living water of symbolic baptism. The reader participates in this exchange, perhaps coming to a deeper understanding of her own salvation in the process.

The Woman Taken in Adultery

While the scene with the Samaritan woman reminds the reader of her baptism and salvation, the scene with the woman taken in adultery focuses on confession and contrition more specifically. Innes-Parker states that in this episode, "this most obvious model of the dangers of sexual sin is the only biblical woman who is *not* applied to the individual soul."[608] Drawing on the prayer at the end of the passage, she argues that "The reader identifies with no one in the story, but responds by praying for her enemies, with true Christ-like love."[609] However, Innes-Parker overlooks the conversations in this passage with both the Pharisees and the woman, which require the reader to at least give voice to these characters, but more likely to imaginatively become them. While the conversation with the Pharisees has the reader enacting a theological debate with Christ, embodying the pride of the theological elite, the conversation with the woman focuses on her salvation despite her sin.

The text emphasizes that while Jesus is critical of the Pharisees, he is kind to the woman herself: "And thanne ful debonerli ye seide to here: woman where been thei that accusid thee, dampnid thee noman. Now lord, quod sche, noman. And than ye, mercyable god, seide to here that ye wolde not dampne here, and bad here go and welne [seek][610] to sinne nomore."[611] This conversation specifically focuses on the absolution of the woman's sins, which have been completely absolved by the end of the encounter. Rather than concentrating on the sin itself, the emphasis is placed on the instant that the woman repents and receives mercy. Jesus's mercy is underscored by what each person sees when he writes in the dust: for the woman, he writes "for the woman schulde not be aschamid," while for the Pharisees he writes so that "everich of hem saw

608. Innes-Parker, "The Modelling of Women's Devotion," 261.

609. Innes-Parker, "The Modelling of Women's Devotion," 262.

610. My note. From ME "wilnen," to seek, strive, or aspire. See "Wilnen" *Middle English Dictionary,* ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001), Online edition in Middle English Compendium, ed. Frances McSparran, et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2018).

611. Parsons, ed., 22; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 51. Cf. John 8:3-11. The edition reads "lad" for "bad."

there here owin sinnes."[612] The woman has achieved remission for her sins through confession to Jesus and contrition for her sin, while the Pharisees' pride stays with them because they desire to trick Jesus more than they care for their own souls. The woman undoubtedly forms the better example here, despite the egregious nature of her former sin.[613]

This interpretation of the passage is reflected in the *Glossa ordinaria.* The gloss for the verse "*Nec ego te condemnabo*" reads,

> Sed quia poterat timere ne iste qui sine peccato est eam puniret, dicit ei, ut misericors praeterita peccata dimittens: *Nec ego te condemnabo*, ut justus ne amplius peccet interdicens.[614]
>
> [But because she could fear that he who was without sin could punish her, he says to her, as a merciful person sending away past sin: *Neither will I condemn you*, as a just person, forbidding her to sin further.]

Jesus' position as the only person who could punish the woman is made clear in this gloss, but instead of enacting his own command to condemn her, he has mercy on the woman and sends her home. The gloss on the verse before, "*Et iterum se inclinans"* refocuses the condemnation of the passage onto the judgemental Pharisees:

> Data sententia justitiae qua illi conscii malorum, percussi sunt, iterum scribit in terram ex more, vultum alio vertens: ut illis sit liberum exire, quos praevidebat citius exituros quam plura interrogaturos. Docet autem nos sicut et ante correctionem alterius, ita et post nos ipsos humiliter investigare, ne idem vel aliud simile in nobis sit.[615]
>
> [With this statement of justice having been given by which they, conscious of wickedness, were struck, again he wrote in the earth as is customary, turning his

612. Parsons, ed., 22; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 50.

613. cf. Play 24 of the *N-Town Plays,* which focuses on the same episode, and where the Mulier is also the best example of behavior. "Play 24, Woman Taken in Adultery," *The N-Town Plays,* ed. Douglas Sugano, Robbins Library Digital Projects, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007).

614. *Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria*, Migne, ed, *Patrologia Latina* 114: 0390A.

615. *Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria*, Migne, ed, *Patrologia Latina* 114: 0389D-390A.

face in another direction: so that they, whom he foresaw were sooner about to leave than they were about to ask more questions, were free to leave. But he teaches us that in the same way as before the correction of another, so afterwards we humbly investigate ourselves, lest the same [sin] or another like it appear in us.]

The gloss points toward self-examination and confession of sin as the moral of the story rather than the woman's sin.

Festis also directs the reader toward self-reflection. When the reader prays at the end of the passage, she has identified with *everyone* in the story: the prideful Pharisees who thought they knew better than the Messiah and the sinful woman whom Jesus lovingly forgives. In this passage perhaps more than any other, the reader learns that encounters with Christ are not solely the province of the most pious. Instead, she learns through embodying the Pharisees and the woman taken in adultery that Jesus meets contrition with kindness and prideful defiance with condemnation.

The Canaanite Woman

The woman of Canaan appears in *Festis* as a figure representing persistent prayer and hope in the face of difficulty. The chapter focuses on the power of the individual woman's persuasion of Jesus. When the woman first approaches Jesus to ask that he chase demons out of her daughter, "first [he] made daunger [was aloof]" to her, saying "it was not leful [lawful] to take the bred that was ordeynyd to the children and yeve it to the houndes."[616] However, the woman persists, saying, "lord, noo, but houndes may ete the crummes that fallin doon from the lordis bord [table] out of children handes."[617] At this remark, Jesus replies, "O woman, mochil is thi feith; be it as thow witt."[618] The woman's persistence and argument cause Jesus' response. Without her speech and conversation with Jesus, she would have been helpless in the face of her daughter's diabolical ailment.

Lest the reader miss that the woman's faithful words garner Christ's response, the anonymous female author's gloss on the passage makes it clear: "A dere Jhesu, therfore ye made so

616. Parsons, ed., 23; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 52-3. My note on "daunger."
617. Parsons, ed., 23; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 53.
618. Parsons, ed., 23; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 53.

straunge [aloof] atte beginnyng of here preiere for sche schulde gete here the more mede [reward] and thanke of yow, and also yeve us exsaumple that we schulde mekli abide in preiere though firste we finde straungeness and have not oure preieres a-noon [immediately] whan we wolde."[619] The application prayer clarifies that Jesus' reluctance to grant the woman's prayer allowed her to receive greater benefit in the end, eliminating the possibility of an interpretation in which Jesus rejects her because of her gender, her ethnicity, or her sin. This interpretation could be an echo of the *Glossa Ordinaria,* which states:

> **Etiam domine**. Sub persona mulieris mira fides ecclesie et patientia & humilitas praedicatur. Fides quia credit posse sanari filiam. Patientia: quia totiens despecta in precibus perstat. Humilitas quia se non canibus sed catellis comparat.[620]
>
> [Under the character of the woman is preached the wonderful faith of the church and patience and humility. Faith because she believed her daughter could be healed. Patience because despite being despised so many times, she persisted in prayers. Humility because she compared herself not to dogs but to puppies.]

The *Glossa* attribues virtues to the woman that she earns not in spite of the adversities she encounters, but because of them. The author of the *Festis* seizes upon this positive depiction of the Canaanite woman and applies it directly to the practice of prayer.

The tie between the reader and the Canaanite woman is cemented in the last part of the prayer, when the reader asks "thowgh I be most unworthi and am an hound thorw bestli condicions, and werse than an hound as in ther that I have wrethed yow, yet goode lord I preie yow yeve me crumes of youre mercy and grace and the bred of everlasting life."[621] Through echoing the woman's humble argument that even the hounds receive the crumbs from the master's table,

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619. Parsons, ed., 23; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 53. My note on "straunge"

620. *Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria*, Migne, ed, *Patrologia Latina* 114: C0139A-139B. This passage ultimately comes from Jerome's Commentary on Matthew cf. St. Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* trans. Thomas P. Scheck, Fathers of the Church 117 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 183. The word "catellus", which I have translated as "puppies" is used in the Vulgate as well as in the *Glossa Ordinaria*. cf. Matt 15:27: "At illa dixit : Etiam Domine : nam et catelli edunt de micis quae cadunt de mensa dominorum suorum." [But she said: yes Lord: for don't even the puppies eat from the crumbs which fall from the table of their lord?]

621. Parsons, ed., 23; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 54.

the text asks the reader to imitate the woman in her own personal prayer in addition to reading the Canaanite woman's part in the conversation with Christ. This practice encourages the reader to apply such an encounter to her own life, meeting any resistance to her prayers with determination, humility, and faith.

Mary Magdalen

As Parsons notes, the chapter on Mary Magdalen is the longest chapter in *Festis,* likely because the medieval Mary Magdalen is the woman in Christ's life who most closely approximates the experience of the author and the audience. Mary Magdalen is used throughout the medieval period to signify the contemplative life, and this makes its way into the Life of Christ genre. In the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *MVC,* chapter forty-five is dedicated to describing how Mary and her sister Martha each represent the contemplative and active lives, followed by a small treatise on the two modes of life.[622] As a representative of the contemplative life, she becomes medieval shorthand for the religious life of a nun. Perhaps because of this, this chapter contains the contemplative climax of the work, followed by its most effusive personal prayer.

The chapter reflects the medieval idea that Mary Magdalen is a composite of multiple women who appear in the gospels. Some women who are thought to be Mary magdalen are unnamed and some are identified with the name Mary. Katherine Ludwig Jansen notes that confusion Mary Magdalen's identity began when Patristic writers associated Mary Magdalen with Mary of Bethany (Martha's and Lazarus's sister) and had a hard time keeping track of the many Marys among Christ's followers.[623] She identifies Pope Gregory the Great's thirty-third homily as the main source for the "composite" Mary Magdalen because he conflated Mary Magdalen with both the unnamed sinful woman who washes Christ's feet and dries them with her hair and Mary of Bethany.[624] As we can see from *Festis,* this composite version of the saint persisted throughout the Middle Ages.

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622. Ps. Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ,* 156-7; Ps. Bonaventure, *Meditaciones Vite Christi,* 171-3.

623. Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 29. These Marys were the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalen, Mary the mother of James the less and Joses, Mary of Bethany (Martha and Lazarus' sister), Mary Cleopas, and "the other Mary."

624. Jansen, 32-3.

The chapter begins with the three instances in which Christ excuses Mary Magdalen to others for her devotion to him. The first excuse is when she weeps at his feet, the second when her sister Martha complains that Mary is not helping with the housework, and the third when Judas begrudges the expensive ointment Mary uses to wash Jesus' feet.[625] These three episodes mark instances of pure devotion, which Jesus interprets correctly, but others see as foolishness or sin. In these instances, Mary's behavior exemplifies the contemplative who entirely devotes herself to her relationship with Christ, even when it makes her seem ridiculous or opens her up to scorn from other people. Two of these scenes, the one in which Mary Magdalen weeps at Christ's feet and the one where she anoints him with expensive oil, can also be interpreted as scenes of confession and salvation. Jansen argues that the Magdalen became "the exemplar of perfect penance" in medieval sermons after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.[626] Her reputation for great sin before her conversion coupled with her intense holiness afterwards made her a perfect *exemplum* for penitential salvation, earning her the paradoxical title of *beata peccatrix*.[627] The *Glossa Ordinaria's* gloss on *Coepit rigare* in Luke 7:38 neatly encapsulates both the conflation of Maries and her penitential transformation:

> Maria soror Lazari bis eodem functa est officio: semel in Galilaea cum primo accedit cum humilitate et lacrymis, ubi remissionem peccatorum accepit. Secundo, in Bethania, non jam peccatrix nominata, sed casta, et ideo devota: ibi pedes, hic caput inungit.[628]
>
> [Mary Lazarus' sister twice performed the same function [of anointing Christ's feet]: once in Galilee when she first came up to him with humility and tears, where she received remission for her sins. Second, in Bethany, not now named a sinner, but chaste, and on that account therefore devoted: there [in Galilee] she anoints his feet, here [in Bethany] his head.]

625. Parsons, ed., 17-18; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 37-8. Cf. Luke 7:37-9, John 11:2 for the anointing of Jesus' feet; Luke 10:38-42 for Martha and Mary; John 12:3-9 for Mary anointing Christ's feet and Judas' protests.

626. Jansen, 203.

627. Jansen, 205-6.

628. Migne, ed., *Biblia Latina cum glossa Ordinaria, Patrologia Latina* 114: 271D.

Mary Magdalen's contemplative episode is an exemplary focus for the reader's own devotion. The prayers for the reader reflect this theme by asking for direct encounter with Christ: "And gracious lord, for the gret pite and mercy that ye hadde of Marie Maudeleyne and also for the gret love that sche hadde to yow here in erthe and hath now in hevene, Blissid trinite, be holde me with youre pitable yen and graunte me yowre love."[629] This prayer is the contemplative climax of the work, requesting a direct mystical encounter with the Trinity when the person praying asks to be beheld. Notably, the prayer asks that the Trinity do the beholding. Instead of the reader imaginatively beholding God through contemplation, the reader here asks to be seen in return by the divine gaze, which takes the prayer beyond contemplation and into the realm of mysticism. The result of that mutual beholding is the granting of divine love, much as Christ pardons and praises Mary Magdalen's devotion. Receiving divine love here is not a recognition of divine care, but a request for a mystical understanding and unity that echoes the mystical experiences of biblical holy women like Mary Magdalen and medieval holy women like Mechthild of Hackeborn and Birgitta of Sweden. Mary Magdalen's representation of the contemplative life becomes the focal point for the reader's own contemplative experience and the site of her possible mystical union with the divine in *Festis.*

After the request for an encounter with the Trinity, the prayer retreats into a humble, but no less effusive, withdrawal from the mystical. The tone shifts into penance and humility:

> "O allas, I sinful, how dar I thus holi spekin with my lord god that with his myht hevene and erthe made and alle thing of nowht [nothing]? Certeinli I, sinful wreche, am not worthi to speke to hym, ne to hevyn [raise] up myn eyn to hevene, but as a sinful worm down to the erthe, as sche that is not worthi to preise god, ne to nemine [pronounce] his name, for the profith [prophet] seith the preising of god is not fair in a sinful mouth."[630]

This penitential turn also echoes Mary Magdalen's tears and penance when she meets Jesus in the Samaritan's house. In *Festis*, this part of the prayer could also serve as a safeguard for a contemplative reader who had not had or does not want a full mystical experience. If she does not

629. Parsons, ed., 18; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 39.

630. Parsons, ed., 18; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 39-40. cf. Psalm 21:7, "But I am a worm, and no man," and Ecclesiasticus 15:9, "Praise is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner." My definition for "benomyn."

achieve a mystical encounter with God, she has still taken part in Mary Magdalen's penance before the Lord. In this way, the author anticipates diverse results from the reader's contemplative practice. Her strategy echoes her treatment of the women Christ meets in *Festis,* where no shame is attributed to them during their encounters with Christ, whatever form that encounter takes or whatever the woman's background may be.

The prayer at the end of Mary Magdalen's section uses a conventional form with a possible mystical application:

> "And myhtful lord, I beseche yow: sithin I am not worthi to preise yow, make me worthi and able ther-to, and youre owyn goodnesse preise, blisse and magnifie yow in me, so that what ever I write, thinke or speke of yow and for yow, be it youre werk and not myn. And seie to me, and to alle that have for-sake the world for yow, as ye seide to Martha of Maudeleyne, that we have chose the partye that never schal be benomyn [taken from] us."[631]

Rather than asking for a moment of mutual gaze and love, this prayer asks that God make the supplicant more worthy of being God's instrument, like the mystical women who were often considered to be prophets or mouthpieces of God.[632] This conclusion reiterates the relationship between Mary Magdalen's contemplative life and that of the reader, but it also contains the possibility that the reader could ask God for a mystical experience.

Although the Passion is the contemplative climax and focal point for the reader in most Lives of Christ, in *Festis* the emphasis is on women's encounters and conversations with Jesus. The ordinary women whom Christ meets become not just examples for the reader but characters whom she inhabits in the course of her prayers. She speaks the women's words in conversation with Christ, so that the prayers themselves become models for mystical encounters with God. The climax of this process is the prayers surrounding Mary Magdalen, where the reader requests an encounter with God in her own voice. This feminine mystical focus within the text echoes the experiences of the writer and her audience, who were both nuns or perhaps recluses.

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631. Parsons, ed., 18-19; Holkham Misc. 41 p. 40-1.

632. Cf. Birgitta of Sweden, who characterized her writings as prophecy. See Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, Studies in Medieval Mysticism 3 (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2001).

Conclusion

The Festis and Passion of Oure Lord Ihesu Crist stands as a unique representation of women's devotional practice in late-medieval England. Engaging with the traditions of female monasticism, anchoritism, medieval mysticism, and devotion to the life and Passion of Christ, this work blends many influences into an evocation of intimacy with Christ through the vehicle of the female voice. While the work itself is intended as a source of private prayer and devotion, the reader is never quite alone when she reads. She encounters the voice of the author, a kindred spirit and encouraging friend, throughout the work as the composer of the prayers. She recalls the resounding and singing voices of her religious community through the text's references to the liturgy and divine office. And through reading and giving voice to the prayers herself, she inhabits the voices of women who encountered Christ in his incarnation. Rather than lifting up a singular holy woman, such as a mystical visionary or the Virgin Mary, *Festis* celebrates devout women encountering Christ in the community of faith. Like a nun singing in the choir who becomes part of the larger performance of a chant, the author and reader of *Festis* join their voices to the community of faithful women wishing to draw nearer to God. This distinctly female version of Life of Christ devotion demonstrates that medieval women sought to see themselves in their devotional material, and suggests that the female community of faith had their own methods for participating in the devotional traditions of the late-medieval church.

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Chapter 4

"Yif thou desire to praye…seye thus": Female Readers, Continental Mystics, and Devotional Miscellanies

Abstract

This chapter considers female literacy in late-medieval England, both reading and writing, how literate women perceived female mystics and the Life of Christ genre by examining devotional miscellanies known to have been owned by women that contain texts from the female mystics. This chapter represents a newer methodology in investigating women's book ownership, which more often looks at wills and other records or concentrates only on women's inscriptions of their manuscripts. I find that medieval women largely used mystical texts for reasons as individual as the manuscripts in which they are found, but that generally they were interested in advice for spiritual advancement, models for their private prayers, and perspective on the life and Passion of Christ. My research in this chapter also finds a previously unanalyzed strain of transmission for the prayers of Mechthild of Hackeborn. There is an independent version of excerpted prayers that only appears in women's manuscripts associated with Syon Abbey, with a different Middle English translation appearing in manuscripts from a different origin. This finding builds further on scholarship on textual transmission within female communities.

It is a modern commonplace that people want to see their own faces, voices, and ideas reflected in the media that they consume. With this assumption comes the idea that a wide variety of people, from different geographic, socioeconomic, racial, and gender backgrounds should produce media to be consumed both by people who share traits with them and by others. This theoretically expands consumer's horizons, engages their imaginations, and activates their empathy. However, medieval media was very different, not just because of the different kinds of media available, but because medieval culture was much more concerned with the authority of the media in question. In the case of religious texts, the authority given to it was most closely related to its perceived orthodoxy and whether a particular text could lead a person towards heresy or towards salvation. Therefore, the *correctness* of a given text was much more important to those in the medieval reading community than its novelty or entertainment value. The authority of a text's creator or even of the text itself, both in terms of correctness and in terms of its efficaciousness for its purpose, be that devotional enrichment, entertainment, or education, was paramount.

Women in the later Middle Ages seem to not have been terribly concerned whether the authors and texts in their books were composed by men or women or whether they were from a similar age, culture, or class as themselves. However, this is not to say that women did not value texts of other women in their books. They were concerned, in their religious books especially, with enhancing their individual devotions, learning more about their religion, and finding effective prayers to pray. Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn's works do appear in women's devotional books. These holy women were highly influential and widespread in the religious culture of late-medieval England, and this chapter is concerned with how women in late-medieval England encountered and used the texts of these holy women. Did they find these texts in their entirety or in selection? Were they in Latin or the vernacular? How did they use them? Were these cases of usage any different from how they were used in wider English textual culture?

Through surveying manuscripts that were both owned by medieval women and contain the texts of Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn, I have made several discoveries about how English women encountered and made use of the texts of these continental holy women. English women were much more likely to own books which excerpt from the large texts of Mechthild and Birgitta than copies of their entire works. While it cannot be said that women,

especially nuns in places like the Birgittine Syon Abbey, did not have access to the whole of Birgitta's or Mechthild's texts, their own books tended to contain only small, useful excerpts. They were also more likely to encounter these texts in vernacular translations than in Latin. English women used the texts of continental mystical women to advance their own individual aims and interests, which tend to center on religious devotion. Finally, women's manuscripts in late-medieval England exhibit signs of unique patterns of transmission within female communities and textual networks.

In 1982, Roger Ellis examined manuscripts containing excerpts from the *Revelations* of Birgitta of Sweden. In this foundational article, he argues that these excerpts fall into three categories: "those that contained a prophetic element, or described the requirements of the spiritual life, or provided information about the life of Christ and the Virgin."[633] Rosalynn Voaden provides similar insight into the English reception of Mechthild of Hackeborn, concluding that the writings of Mechthild likely came into England under the auspices of the Birgittines and Carthusians, and that she was "perceived as an orthodox visionary, whose prayers and revelations were worthy of dissemination."[634] Interestingly, Voaden notes, "Women seem to have been particularly drawn to her work; a large number of the compilations show evidence of female ownership, and records demonstrate a considerable female readership."[635] Unlike Ellis, however, Voaden does not further categorize how English people used these excerpts from Mechthild's text. This chapter expands on Ellis and Voaden's work by focusing exclusively on women's manuscripts and delving more deeply into what excerpts appear there and their reception by individual manuscript users. In doing so, the chapter reveals that women's book culture is a distinct branch of transmission and reception for the continental female mystics. I have found that while Ellis' categories are generally accurate, his findings lack some nuance for a specifically female audience. Late-medieval women do not seem to have been interested in prophecy, but they were certainly invested in what Birgitta and Mechthild advised for spiritual advancement. Specifically, women

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633. Roger Ellis. "'Flores Ad Fabricandum ... Coronam:' An Investigation into the Uses of the Revelations of Saint Birgitta of Sweden in Fifteenth-Century England." *Medium Ævum* 51, no. 2 (1982): 167.

634. Rosalynn Voaden, "The Company She Keeps: Mechthild of Hackeborn in Late-Medieval Devotional Compilations," in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England,* ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 68.

635. "The Company She Keeps," 68.

used excerpts from Birgitta and Mechthild as sources of prayer, for material on Christ's life and Passion, and for spiritual guidance. This chapter will first examine the manuscripts and their medieval female owners, then investigate the individual instances of Birgitta and Mechthild's texts within the manuscripts.

The Manuscripts

The manuscripts I consider here were all owned by women, and all contain at least one text that comes from or is attributed to Birgitta of Sweden or Mechthild of Hackeborn. The information I present here comes from my in-person examinations, and all transcriptions and translations from the manuscripts are my own unless otherwise noted. The manuscripts are all late-medieval books, dating from the fifteenth and the early-sixteenth centuries. Their owners were both laywomen and nuns, and they span the upper social classes from women who had ties to the royal family to women of the gentry and upper merchant classes. All of the manuscripts are devotional in character, with none containing secular material such as romances. Before I look at how these manuscripts present the texts of the female mystics, I will first give a general overview of their makeup and history, with an eye to their female owners.

London, British Library, Harley MS 494

London, British Library MS Harley 494 is a devotional miscellany that was owned by at least one woman named Anne Bulkeley. Alexandra Barratt has traced its ownership to a mother and daughter of the same name in her excellent study of this manuscript. She says that the first Anne Bulkeley was born Anne Poyntz, in Ringwood near Winchester. She married Robert Bulkeley, who died in 1485, though Anne lived until about 1535. Her daughter, also named Anne, was a nun at Fontevrault House in Amesbury at the time of its dissolution in 1539, after which she went to live with her brother. Two Annes make sense here, because there are two ownership inscriptions of the same name. The first is the more elaborate inscription on folio 1r (see Figure 19) and the second Anne added her name to the book on the facing flyleaf (see Figure 20).[636] Barratt dates the manuscript between 1532 and 1535, so it would have been completed at the end of the first Anne's life and then passed to her daughter.[637]

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636. Alexandra Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley and Her Book: Fashioning Female Piety in Early Tudor England: A Study of London, British Library, MS Harley 494*, Texts and Transitions 2. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 27-29.

637. Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley*, 22.

This devotional miscellany contains four separate examples of material from Birgitta and Mechthild, a remarkable number. Msot of the prayers are in Middle English but there is a considerable amount of Latin, some of it untranslated. There are three from Mechthild of Hackeborn and one from Birgitta of Sweden. Barratt theorizes that the imbalance in material comes from the fact that Birgitta's text "had become fatally contaminated by the Elizabeth Barton affair" in 1534, an unfortunate case in which Barton, the Holy Maid of Kent, became ill in 1525 and began experiencing visions after being miraculously healed. Her confessor, Edward Bocking, introduced her to the writings of Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena. Her political visions criticizing King Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon eventually led to the execution of Barton and her confessor in 1534.[638] This tale of a visionary woman gone bad may have darkened perceptions of even the most orthodox holy women, such as Birgitta. Because Birgitta's text was explicitly linked to Barton's case, the compiler of Harley 494 may have chosen to focus on Mechthild as the primary holy woman for the book. Even so, Barratt points out that only one of the three prayers from the *Liber specialis gratiae* (*LSG*) is identified with her name.[639] Nevertheless, the execution of a holy woman in England was not enough to completely eradicate the inclusion of visionary women's texts in devotional manuscripts, which indicates their enduring popularity.

The frequency of female mystical material in Harley 494 is likely a result of its connections to Syon Abbey. It includes seventeen scribes, though Ian Doyle identifies the hand that writes the majority of the material in the manuscript as Robert Taylor, the Clerk of the Works at Syon.[640] Anne senior also had connections to Syon Abbey through the royal family. Anne's mother was an illegitimate first cousin to Elizabeth, Henry VII's wife, and several of her male relatives had careers at court.[641] Harley 494's arrangement fits the lifestyle of a pious laywoman with religious associations. Barratt observes that the book seems to be arranged holistically around the religious hours of the day, starting with morning prayer and ending with evening prayer. She argues that because of this arrangement of content, the manuscript is "more appropriately to be regarded as an anthology," meaning that it was assembled intentionally rather than

638. Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley,* 65. See Barratt 60-5 for a more detailed summary of Barton's visionary career.

639. Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley,* 65.

640. Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley*, 13-15.

641. Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley*, 31-2.

randomly.[642] The passages from mystical women occur throughout the manuscript, beginning on folio 2r and continuing intermittently until the last passage from Mechthild on folio 105r, which is the 28th item out of 33 in the manuscript.

London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 546

London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 546 is a small, handheld book from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. It was likely owned by at least one Syon nun, as there is a sixteenth-century inscription on folio 56r (see Figure 21).[643] Veronica O'Mara identifies this monogram as probably belonging to Sister Elizabeth Woodford, whom she cites as Senior Sister from August 31, 1518 until her death on March 5, 1523.[644] However, the manuscript was likely in use before Sister Elizabeth received it, since most of the hands in the manuscript date from well before her inscription. We know the names of three of the male scribes who copied the texts in this manuscript. The first two, John Warde and Robert Davenport, leave their names in colophons on folios 20v and 52r, respectively. Warde was the steward of Syon Abbey in 1485 and Davenport, a priest, was related to a nun at Syon.[645] The third, William Darker, has been identified by A. I. Doyle. Considering that Darker died in 1512/13, we know that at least some portion of the manuscript was completed before that date.[646] Since at least one of the other scribes was at Syon before 1500, it is even more likely that the manuscript was created in the late fifteenth-century. Another sign that this is a Syon manuscript is the inscription of the names IHESU MARIA BIRGITTA in the top margin of folio 29r in a very ornate script, later highlighted in pink and blue ink.

One section of this manuscript has a female scribe: folios 52v-55r are written in the same distinctive hand which writes a colophon identifying a female scribe. The hand is a Secretary

642. Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley,* 34. For more on the nomenclature of multi-text manuscripts, see my discussion in the introduction.

643. MLGB 186. The foliation numbers on this manuscript are inaccurate, as folio 8 was skipped and the numbering continued with the pagination adding one to the actual number. I use the foliation from the manuscript in this chapter since other scholarship on this manuscript also uses it. However, this makes problems of collation slightly more complicated to describe.

644. Veronica O'Mara, "Middle English Text Written By A Female Scribe," *Notes & Queries* 37, no. 4 (December 1990): 398.

645. A. I. Doyle, "William Darker: The Work of an English Carthusian Scribe." In *Medieval Manuscripts, Their Makers and Users: A Special Issue of Viator in Honor of Richard and Mary Rouse* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011) 200.

646. Doyle, "William Darker," 200.

style with the characteristic "prickly appearance," though it is clear and rather formal.[647] The broken, diamond shaped lobes of *a*, *d*, *o*, and *s*, the horned *g*, the looped *x*, the spaces between minim letters, including *w* and majuscule *y*, and the *st* ligature, where the loop of the *s* and the stem of the *t* are one stroke, are all characteristic features of the hand (see Figure 22). The colophon reads, with the second paragraph in red ink,

> Good Syster of your charyte I you pray remember the scrybeler when that ye may with on aue maria or els thys swete word ihesu haue marcy on my wreched syster whose name by the marcy of god <Y trust> shall be wrytyn Yn the boke of lyfe
>
> Good deuoute Syster Y pray you to lerne thys lesson well of your master & sauyour cryst ihesu that sayth lerne of me for I am mylde & meke in hart & pray for me that Y may do & haue the same.

O'Mara points out that "it is inconceivable that someone would refer to herself as a 'scrybeler' if she were merely dictating," confirming that a female scribe wrote this colophon.[648] She also concludes that this scribe was a Syon nun, given the references to sisters and the manuscript's overall associations with Syon.

The inclusion of the sister scribe in this manuscript seems to be a happy accident rather than a part of the manuscript's original plan. The conclusion of the text before this passage, written by Richard Davenport, ends in the middle of a quire, leaving several pages empty. The owner of the manuscript then had the empty space filled in by a sister who could write.[649] The sister scribe, then, filled the already-rubricated pages at the end of a quire. Her incidental inclusion in the manuscript indicates that the sister scribe was not a professional, and the absence of her hand in other extant documents further indicates that she did not necessarily make a habit of writing

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647. M. B. Parkes *English Cursive Book Hands 1250-1500*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), xx.

648. Veronica O'Mara, "Female Scribal Ability and Scribal Activity in Late Medieval England: The Evidence?" *Leeds Studies in English* 27 (1996): 99.

649. This works with the collation of the manuscript, as the Richard Davenport text ends on 52r, on the third leaf of quire 6 (folios 41-55—Again, the foliation of this manuscript is mistaken, so what is labeled as f. 52 is actually f. 51). The remaining folios in the quire, numbered 52-55, are pricked and ruled in the same red ink and have the same number of lines (14) as the text from Davenport, so we can suppose that he ruled them but did not fill them with writing.

formally. Still, the presence of her hand is an important indicator of women's scribal practice in Syon.

London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 3600

London, Lambeth Palace Library, Ms 3600 is another important indicator of women's scribal practice at Syon, a small devotional miscellany containing mostly prayers in Latin and English. Veronica O'Mara has identified the scribal hand in this book which wrote the main book block from folio 9-144 as that of Mary Nevel.[650] O'Mara describes several features that characterize Mary Nevel's distinctive *Gothic textualis quadratus* hand: the large letterforms; the exaggerated serifs on the bottoms of the letterforms, which "look like drips from the pen," and the dotted letter *y*.[651] Mary Nevel was professed at Syon Abbey in 1535, and upon the dissolution of Syon in 1539 she joined Agnes Jordan's Southlands community in Denham.[652] While she was at the abbey, she served as Chantress.[653] The Chantress was in charge of keeping and correcting all the liturgical books at Syon, for the maintenance and reading of legislative books in the refectory, and the supervision of the books in the chapterhouse, which included the martyrology.[654] Thus it makes sense that Mary Nevel's hand appears in not only LPL 3600 but also in two Syon Processionals and in bookmarks in the Syon martyrology.[655] After Jordan's death in 1546, she and the rest of the Southlands community moved to the Low Countries, where she lived at the

650. Veronica O'Mara, "A Syon Scribe Revealed by her Signature: Mary Nevel and Her Manuscripts," in *Continuity and Change: Papers from the Birgitta Conference at Dartington 2015*, ed. Elin Andersson, Konferenser Kungl. Vitterhets, Historie Och Antikvitets Akademien 93. (Stockholm: Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 2017), 299.

651. O'Mara, "A Syon Scribe Revealed," 288.

652. O'Mara, "A Syon Scribe Revealed," 285.

653. Christopher De Hamel, *Syon Abbey: The Library of the Bridgettine Nuns and Their Peregrinations After the Reformation*. (Smith Settle, Otley: The Roxburghe Club, 1991), 108.

654. De Hamel, *Syon Abbey,* 69-73.

655. O'Mara, "A Syon Scribe Revealed," 302. The two processionals are Oxford, St. John's College, MS 167 and Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Additional 8885. The Syon Martyrology is London, British Library, MS Additional 22285. I have not consulted the St. John's manuscript or the Martyrology, but I agree with O'Mara that the hand copying the Feast of the Holy Name in Add. 8885 is Nevel's.

Birgittine convent of Maria Troon in Dendermonde.[656] In 1557 she returned to the reinstated Syon Abbey, but she died shortly after in October of either 1557 or 1558.[657]

The date of LPL 3600's composition is unclear. The distinctive cover of the manuscript, embossed with an elaborate image of a woman stabbing herself, has been dated to Louvain or Levin around 1550.[658] This binding leads O'Mara to speculate that perhaps this manuscript was created while Nevel was in exile at Maria Troon, where Nevel may have "made use of her time in Dendermonde by copying Latin prayers (some of which would seem to come from early printed sources)."[659] If this is the case, Nevel may have used her scribal talents to preserve Syon's textual community even in exile and then brought her book back to England with her when the Abbey was reinstated. In addition to its female scribe, LPL 3600 is designed for female use, employing feminine forms of nouns in prayers such as "indigna pecatrix" on folio 70v (see Figure 23). This manuscript is one of the few in England written "almost entirely" by female hands.[660]

Cambridge, Trinity College MS O.1.74

Though the minuscule Cambridge, Trinity College MS O.1.74 has no ownership inscription, references to specifically female audiences within the text indicate that a nun owned it.[661] For example, the included form of confession for religious persons on folios 60v-70r contains the

656. O'Mara, "A Syon Scribe Revealed," 285.

657. O'Mara, "A Syon Scribe Revealed," 285. The Syon Martyrology gives both years for Mary Nevel's death.

658. N. R. Ker, and Alan J. Piper, *Medieval manuscripts in British libraries*, vol. 4: *Paisley–York*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) 199; see also O'Mara, "A Syon Scribe Revealed," 304.

659. O'Mara, "A Syon Scribe Revealed," 304.

660. Veronica O'Mara, "'Scribal Engagement and the Late Medieval English Nun' The Quest Concludes?," in *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Antwerp Dialogue,* ed. Virginia Blanton, V. M. O'Mara, and Patricia Stoop, Medieval Women : Texts and Contexts (MWTC) 28. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 203.

661. Margaret Connolly, "Books for the 'Helpe of Euery Persoone Bat Benkib to Be Saued': Six Devotional Anthologies from Fifteenth-Century London," *Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (January 2003): 180.

particular that "Y have talkid with my sistren" on 61r (see Figure 24).[662] Although evidence suggests a female audience for this manuscript, it is not enough to localize it to a particular convent or individual. It is a devotional miscellany created in the environs of London in the fifteenth century, and Margaret Connolly points out that its contents are related to several other devotional miscellanies created in the same geographical area.[663] Connolly argues that the similarity of contents a desire among both ecclesiastical authorities and individuals that every person be educated in basic church doctrine influenced their construction.[664] However, despite sharing some contents, each manuscript was customized for its particular owner, which led to the inclusion of Mechthild of Hackeborn in this manuscript. The manuscript's diminutive size (108 x 75 mm) implies that it could have been carried around with its owner for reference or impromptu private study.

Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Ff.6.33

Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Ff.6.33 is a small Middle English manuscript that belonged to a Syon nun. It was prepared by a Carthusian scribe, William Darker, who wrote in a Gothic *fere-textura* hand.[665] In addition to the Birgittine *Rule of St. Saviour* CUL MS Ff.6.33 contains many devotional tracts concerning the contemplative life, such as the *Book of the XII Patriarchs of Richard of St. Victor, The V Wiles of Kyng Pharao* (Joliffe K.7), the *Rule of St. Augustine* in Middle English, *Agayns Temptacion* (Joliffe K.4), *A Ladder of Foure Ronges* (Joliffe M.1, O.2), and *A Pistill of Seynt Machary* (Joliffe H. 12 and O.22). Laura Miles argues that, given these contents, this manuscript was constructed for the practice of *lectio divina* on the part of the nun who owned it.[666] In addition to being focused on contemplative living, the manuscript also has a general theme of confession and penance, which could suggest that it is more of

662. Connolly, "Books for the 'Helpe'" 180. I have included a photo of the page in question for reference, but this manuscript has been digitized in its entirety for the Wren Digital Library at https://mss-cat.trin.cam.ac.uk/Manuscript/O.1.74

663. Connolly,"Books for the 'Helpe,'" 170.

664. Connolly, "Books for the 'Helpe,'" 171.

665. A. I. Doyle, "William Darker," 200. Malcolm B. Parkes says that the *fere textura* hand which Darker used contains elements of Bastard Anglicana, Anglicana Formata, and Secretary, according to the scribe's taste. See Parkes, *English Cursive Book Hands,* 8, for more detail on Darker's hand.

666. Laura Saetveit Miles, "Bridget of Sweden," in *The History of British Women's Writing 700-1500*, eds. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt, Vol. 1 of 9 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 210.

an anthology than a miscellany. While there are no ownership marks, the scribe and the contents have led scholars to unequivocally state that it belonged to the nun's library at Syon.[667]

London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 432

London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 432 is a small handheld paper volume that probably belonged to a woman. It contains the Middle English Life of St. Jerome composed by Simon Winter, a monk of Syon, for Margaret, Duchess of Clarence as well as *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, an *Excitation to Comfort for Them that Be in Peril of Death* (Joliffe L.5), the *IX Virtues* (Joliffe I.12), revelations about St. Jerome from Birgitta, a compilation of Birgitta's revelations on the Passion of Christ, a Latin prayer attributed to Bede, a collection of miracles of the Virgin, and a Life of St. Dorothy. The inclusion of material on or from two female saints and the inclusion of "brethren and susteren" and "sonne or doughter" at the beginning of the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and the *Excitation of Comfort* indicates the possibility of female readers or owners.[668] Claire M. Waters proposes that the contents of the manuscript and the fact that most of it is in the vernacular suggest "that it was produced in the milieu of Syon" with "a devout layperson" as the audience.[669] The Syon connections and the inclusion of so many works which have a female audience suggests that the owner was a devout laywoman particularly. The entire manuscript appears to be copied in one Secretary hand with some Anglicana influence, with multiple scribal signatures of "quod Fuller" at the ends of texts. The manuscript is mainly in black ink with occasional red initials and rubrics, but no other decoration or illustration.

Lambeth Palace Library MS 3597 and London, British Library MS Harley 4012

London, British Library, Harley MS 4012 and London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 3597 (formerly Coughton Court MS) are two related manuscripts constructed for women. Edward Wilson notes that the two manuscripts share eight items, some of which share a the same relative order.[670] For instance, 4012 has "Foure Things be Nedefull" as its third item, followed

667. Hannah Lucas,"Private Pilgrimages at Syon Abbey? A Note on Cambridge University Library MS Ff.6.33," *Notes & Queries* 66, no. 2 (June 1, 2019): 220.

668. On folios 37v and 68v, respectively.

669. Claire M. Waters, ed. *Virgins and Scholars : A Fifteenth-Century Compilation of the Lives of John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, Jerome, and Katherine of Alexandria,*(Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2008), 44.

670. Edward Wilson, "A Middle English Manuscript at Coughton Court, Warwickshire, and British Library Ms. Harley 4012," *Notes and Queries* 24, no. 4 (July 1977): 302.

by the *Mirror of Sinners* as item 4, "Words to Sent Moll" as item 5, and a *Twelve Degrees of Meekness* as item 6. These same items are items 1, 2, 4 and 5 in LPL 3597. Wilson reasons that because the dialect of the texts in LPL 3597 seems "considerably to the south of the Harley manuscript" that the two manuscripts share an exemplar which was probably another devotional miscellany.[671] I agree that the two manuscripts were not likely to be direct relatives of one another, due to the different placement of the texts and slight variations in wording between the two that are still too distinct for one to be a direct exemplar of the other.

Harley 4012 was owned by Anne Wingfield Harling, born circa 1426. Her inscription on one of the back flyleaves, "Thys ys the boke of dame Anne Wyngefeld of Har[l]yng," is now only fully visible under ultraviolet light. The manuscript itself measures 280 x 195mm, which is slightly too big for being readily portable. It has some illuminated initials in purple, green, and blue; decorated initials in blue with red linework; and red and blue paraph marks throughout the manuscript. There are signs of use and amateur decoration throughout the manuscript as well, such as the crude drawings on 33v and 45v. Anne Dutton, in her thorough study of this manuscript and its owner in her unpublished dissertation, says that Anne Wingfield was a substantial heiress, with "15 manors and ten avowedsons in Norfoll, as well as four manors and one avowedson in Suffolk and four manors in Cambridgeshire."[672] She was married three times, to Sir William Chamberlain in 1438, Sir Robert Wingfield between 1463 and 1472, and John, fifth Lord Scrope of Bolton, after Feb 9, 1491.[673] Dutton dates the manuscript during Anne's marriage to Sir Robert Wingfield, and she further narrow the composition date to the 1460s or 70s due to the contents of the manuscript.[674] Voaden further clarifies Dutton's dating of the inscription of Anne's name to "The period of Anne Harling's widowhood from Wyngfield, that is, between 1481 and 1490/91."[675] Dutton characterizes Anne as a pious and dutiful woman, who cared

671. Wilson, 303.

672. Anne Marie Dutton, "Women's Use of Religious Literature in Late Medieval England," (Ph.D., University of York, 1995), 188.

673. Dutton, 190; 192; 194.

674. Dutton, 195.

675. Rosalynn Voaden, "Who Was Marget Thorpe? Reading Mechthild of Hackeborn in Fifteenth-Century England," *Religion & Literature* 37, no. 2 (2005): 13.

equally for her devotion to her religion and for the dynastic concerns of her family.[676] She also notes the general penitential focus of the texts in Harley 4012.[677]

LPL 3597 was also owned by a woman: there is an inscription of "Elyzbeth" on folio 95r, along with later inscriptions from J. Roger Staggs and Robert Gilberd on the same leaf. On folio 2 there is an inscription of Sir Rob. Throckmorton, Bar. from after 1642 when the Throckmorton baronetcy was created.[678] The manuscript's association with the Throckmorton family leads Wilson to identify the Elizabeth who left her name on folio 95r as the second wife of Sir Robert Throckmorton (1451-1519), though he says it could also be Sir Robert's sister Elizabeth, who was the final abbess of Denny.[679] This manuscript is of a similar size to Harley 4012, 267 x 185mm. Unlike Harley 4012, this manuscript has two main hands, one a Gothic *fere-textura* and the other an Anglicana hand, and two more hands that add or correct material. It has an illuminated initial and an elaborate floral border on folio 2, and throughout the rest of the manuscript the initials are in blue ink with red linework.

Texts of Holy Women in English Women's Manuscripts

A female reader might encounter one small portion of the texts of mystical women like Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn amongst other devotional material. In the case of Mechthild, her text was often unattributed, combined from different sections of her work, or supplemented with other material. Birgitta of Sweden's writings enjoyed more faithful transmission; though her writings are frequently translated into the vernacular, they remain close renditions of her text and are not often reworked without a specific agenda. Manuscripts are also more likely to attribute her texts to her. Although the manuscripts share similarities—they are devotional miscellanies, they were made for or owned by women, most of them are a small size—their individual circumstances of creation, composition, and ownership mean that each instance of a holy woman's text can be interpreted in different ways. However, the excerpting of individual revelations and prayers from both holy women indicates that their texts were used in different ways by medieval women. These categories of use are sources of prayer, devotion to the Passion and life of Christ and the life of Mary, and spiritual guidance.

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676. See Dutton, 203-11 for a close description of how Harling's will demonstrates her concerns.

677. Dutton, 214-16.

678. Wilson, 298.

679. Wilson, 298, see especially note 5.

Sources of Prayer

Harley 494

The visions of holy women often contained directions on how to pray effectively. One characteristic of these medieval prayers that separates them from simple revelations is that they almost always list a result or application of praying each prayer for the individual supplicant, such as Jesus bringing them to the Father's attention when they die. These results seem to apply to any person who prays a particular prayer, whether that is the visionary or the woman using the prayer in her own devotions. The ensuring of a particular benefit from a particular prayer echoes a wider genre of medieval prayer which Eamon Duffy calls "magical prayers." These prayers promise a particular effect, such as protection from devils, if the supplicant fulfills the criteria of the prayer, which may be something like reciting it daily for an entire month. Though these prayers can seem like "pagan survivalism," Duffy argues, "The world-view they enshrined, in which humanity was beleaguered by hostile troops of devils seeking the destruction of body and soul, and to which the appropriate and guaranteed antidote was the incantatory or manual invocation of the cross or names of Christ, is not a construct of the folk imagination. Such ideas were built into the very structure of the liturgy."[680] "Magical" prayers, therefore, "represent the appropriation and adaptation to lay needs and anxieties of a range of sacred gestures and prayers."[681] One example is Mechthild's "Triple Ave," which promises that Mary will be with the supplicant in the hour of her death. Though the prayers come from the spiritual elite— visionary women— their benefits also apply to the individual women who use their texts as sources of prayer.

The three prayers from Mechthild in Harley 494 are on folios 2r and 105r. The first set of prayers, on 2r, is in Barratt's Hand B, a messy Secretary hand. The prayers are entirely in Latin, with no explanatory rubric, and praise the five joys of the Resurrection from Pars 1, Chapter 19 of the *LSG*. The prayers included here are Mechthild's response to her vision, and they "praise, love, adore, magnify, glorify, and give thanks" for Christ's incarnation, suffering, soul, power, and salvation on the part of humanity. The prayers end with the reward for anyone who reminds Christ of these joys:

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680. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England ; c. 1400- c. 1580*, 2nd ed., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005): 279.

681. Duffy, 283.

> Si quis horum gaudiorum me meminit, pro primo dabo ei, si desiderauit, ante mortem eius gustum mee diuinitatis. Secundo, dabo ei intellectum cognicionis. Tertio, animam eius in extremis suis Patri meo presentabo. quarto, fructum et participacionem passionum et omnium labrorum meorum ei tribuam. Quinto, jocundam sanctorum ei et societatem dabo.[682]
>
> [If anyone reminds me of these joys, I will first give to her, if she desires it, a taste of my divinity before her death. Second, I will give her the understanding of acknowledgement [of the divine]. Third, I will present her soul to my Father at her death. Fourth, I will grant her the fruit and share of my Passion and all of my labors. Fifth, I will give the joyful fellowship of the saints to her.]

This promise comes from the passage immediately preceding the "Laudo, adoro, magnifico, glorifico" prayers, where Christ explains the five joys of the Resurrection to Mechthild as if they were "dishes in a supper."[683] This manuscript reorders the passage so that this speech from Christ comes after the prayers which will remind him of his joys, rather than before them as it does in the *LSG*. This reordering of the passage emphasizes the benefits to the supplicant, as does the scribe's capitalizing, underlining, and framing the ordinal numbers of the benefits. With these marks, the person praying can easily pick out the rewards of her prayers. By reminding Christ of his joy at the Resurrection with the words of these prayers, the woman who prays them obtains the same benefits that he promised to Mechthild.

Harley 494 only contains one Birgittine text, which appears on folio 88v. The source for this Middle English prayer is *Liber caelestis* book 1, chapter 8. In it, the Virgin appears to Birgitta, who wishes to know how she may properly venerate Mary. Mary answers, "Know thou for a suerte that euery lawd & praise of my son is my praise," and gives her a series of prayers that focus specifically on the mother and son together. For example, "Blessid be þou, God, which hast cum to this vergyn with moche joye, to her soule and to all her membres, and þou hast de-

682. fols. 3v-4r, Barratt 174.

683. "Quinque enim fercula," cf. Mechthild of Hackeborn, *Liber specialis gratiae,* in *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechthildianae*, ed. Dom Ludwig Paquelin, 2 vols., (Paris: H. Oudin, 1875), 64.

parted from her body with joye of all her membres at thyn natiuite without eny synn." The prayers focus on the joy that Christ brings to Mary before he is born and after his Ascension, and ends with a supplication to "haue mercy on me for her prayers."[684]

This Birgittine revelation is included as a model for Anne Bulkeley, the owner of the manuscript, to follow in her own prayers to the Virgin. The selections immediately following this passage are a devotional formula on saying *Ave Marias*, and then another Marian prayer. The revelation from Birgitta, however, may seem especially efficacious because Mary herself revealed the prayers to the saint. Bulkeley may also especially identify with Birgitta as a source for her private prayers because they were both devout noblewomen. By reciting the tried and true prayers of Birgitta, she could be more certain that Mary heard her prayers. This rather practical purpose for Birgitta's *Revelations* shows that though she was a mystical figure, devout laywomen employed her texts for the daily practice of religion. It is a wonderful example of how a mystical saint's writings can be applied to the everyday concerns of a medieval woman.

Lambeth Palace Library MS 3600

LPL 3600 contains several prayers from Birgitta of Sweden. One is in the main text block, and others are added on the paper flyleaves in a different hand from that of Mary Nevel. The passage from Birgitta in the main text block occurs from folio 106r-107r and comes from book 1, chapter 8 of the *Liber caelestis.*[685] This prayer is the same revelation which is translated into Middle English in Harley 494, addressed above. LPL 3600 includes just the prayer, written with alternating red and blue capitals for each section (see Figure 25). It also has a tabbed bookmark, which originally had a woven bauble on the end, on the page so that it could be easily referenced. There is a marginal citation of "li*bro* 1 / 8 ca*pitulo*" beside the first prayer in another hand. The prayer itself primarily addresses Christ in the person of God with the repeated refrain of "Benedictus sis tu deus." However, each prayer quickly veers into praise of the Virgin as well, as the first and second prayer show:

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684. These prayers also appear in Latin in LPL 3600 and are discussed in the next section.

685. cf. Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones,* ed. Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1977), 259-60; Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, Volume 1: Liber Caelesits, Books I-III,* trans. Dennis Searby, ed. Bridget Morris, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 63-4.

> BEnedictus sis tu deus. qui es creator omnium et qui in uterum virginis descendere dignatus es. BEnedictus sis tu deus. qui cum maria virgine esse sine grauamine voluisti. et de ea immaculatam carnem siue peccato sumere dignatus es.
>
> [May you be blessed, God, who is creator of all and who deigned to descend into the virgin's womb. May you be blessed, God, who wished to be with the Virgin Mary without discomfort, and from her you deigned to take up immaculate flesh without sin.]

rThough the prayer is taken out of the context of the larger revelation, Mary Nevel was likely familiar with the circumstances Birgitta had been given to say the prayer. She places this prayer in a section of the manuscript that contains a series of devotions to the Virgin, including this prayer, *O intemerata*, prayers on the Joys and Sorrows of the Virgin, and other prayers to and about Mary.[686] This system of extraction, where prayers are removed from a known context, demonstrates that Nevel was primarily interested in Birgitta's prayers as opposed to her entire vision. Accuracy seems to have been her main goal in recording the prayer in her manuscript, and she relied on the reader to know when to say it.

The prayers on the added flyleaves in LPL 3600 are, like the prayer from 1.8, extracted from various revelations without the wider context. Though they are separated by the main book block, I take them as a matched set because they are written in the same hand and follow a similar theme. One of the owners of the manuscript likely utilized the blank space on the flyleaves for recording additional material, and as such the prayers were added after the creation of the original manuscript (see Figure 26). They are all prayers given to Birgitta to pray herself, pass along to another person, or pray under a certain circumstance. The sources for the passages at the beginning of the manuscript are from the *Liber caelestis,* 4.18 and 19 while the sources for the passages at the back are from 4.126, 1.6, 6.9, and 6.10.

The prayers from the beginning of the book are praises to the Virgin revealed to Birgitta. LPL 3600 records them together, with citations in the inner margin (see Figure 26).

686. Barratt describes this section of the manuscript, from folio 106r-124r, as "Marian devotions." Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley's Book,* 130.

In the original context, the prayers occur at the opening of the chapters and are presented as greetings that Birgitta gives to the Virgin before conversing with her. In 4.18, Mary explains the symbolic spiritual value of each of the apostles. In 4.19, Birgitta praises Mary's beauty, and Christ compares Mary to a goldsmith. The prayers echo the circumstances for each revelation: 4.18 praises Mary "quia sola cum apolstolis fide plenissima. quia pre confessoribus abstinencia clarissima" [because you alone with the apostles were most full of faith, because your abstinence was the brightest among the confessors], while 4.19 begins "dulcis maria pulchritudo noua. pulchritudo clarissima. veni in adiutorium michi tu. ut deformitas mea depuretur. charitas quia accendatur" [Sweet Mary, fresh beauty, brightest beauty, come to my aid so that my deformity be purified and my love be kindled] before describing the gifts her beauty gives to the head and the heart.[687] The isolation of the prayers suggests that the nuns could use these prayers to greet the virgin in their own devotional practice. Since Birgitta used the prayers as salutations in preparation for her own holy work, it could be that the person who added these prayers considered their original context when she placed them at the front of the codex.

The prayers at the end of the book are more penitential and are often quite short. Interestingly, all of the prayers at the end are from the context of revelations that criticize wicked people, and most of them are given as examples of what a person should have prayed. The scribe here seems to be taking the prayers in their general context as prayers of contrition but without the specific application to their original audience. The first, from 4.126, comes from a long revelation about a "blind bishop" who is acting badly and then goes on to describe how the bishop should arrange his days.[688] The prayer is given for the bishop to say as he goes to bed:

> O domine deus meus qui creasti corpus meum. vide me misericordia tua. et presta michi auxilium tuum ut non ex nimietate somni accidiosa fiam ad seruicium tuum nec ex defectu somni deficiam in servicio tuo. sed modera somnum meum. quem precipis habere ad temporum et corporis releuacionem. ut inimicus non noceat corpori. nec ex iudicio tuo in anima dominetur.

687. LPL 3600 folio 3r-3v. cf. Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones Book 4,* edited by Hans Alii. (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1992); Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, Volume 2: Liber caelesits, Books IV-V,* trans. Dennis Searby, ed. Bridget Morris, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), 59; 61.

688. Searby, trans., Volume 2, 215.

[O lord god who created my body, show me your mercy, and give your help to me so that I do not become slothful in your service from too much sleep nor become deficient in your service from lack of sleep, but moderate my sleep which you advise me to have for the temporal relief of the body so that the enemy may not harm my body nor have dominion in my soul according to your judgement.]

The next three prayers all seek mercy from Christ by calling on the Passion. All of them are presented as ways that the wicked can show contrition for their sins, however bad. The longest comes from 6.10, which presents ways that people on earth can help those in Purgatory. The prayer here appears as a help for those whose main sin was pride, where the living person should gather seven paupers once a week for a year and wash their feet, thinking this prayer to himself:

Domine iesu christe qui captus es a iudeis miserere mei. Domine iesu christe qui ligatus es ad columnam miserere mei. Domine iesu christe. qui iudicatus es innoceus a nocentibus miserere mei. Domine iesu christe. qui propriis vestibus exutus es et indutus vestibus derisionis miserere mei. Domine iesu christe. qui ita graviter flagellatus es. ut coste tue viderentur. et non esset in te sanitas miserere mei. Domine iesu christe. qui colaphisatus. et consputus es. miserere mei. Domine iesu christe. qui in stipite extensis es cuius manus et pedes fuerunt clavis perforati. et caput cruentatum spina. oculi fuerunt pleni lachrymis. os et aures plena sanguine. misereremei.

[Lord Jesus christ, you, who was captured by the Jews, have mercy on me. Lord Jesus Christ you, who was tied to the column have mercy on me. Lord Jesus Christ you, who was judged innocent by the wicked have mercy on me. Lord Jesus Christ you, who was taken out of your own clothes and dressed in the clothes of derision have mercy on me. Lord Jesus Christ you, who was whipped so heavily that your rib was seen and nothing in you was sound, have mercy on me. Lord Jesus Christ you, who was struck and spat upon, have mercy on me. Lord Jesus Christ you, who was stretched on the tree, whose hands and feet were pierced by nails and whose bloody head was pierced by thorns, whose eyes were full of tears, whose mouth and ears were full of blood, have mercy on me.]

LPL 3600 does not mention the foot-washing exercise. Instead, the prayer is reframed for use by the reader of the manuscript. The fact that these prayers were taken out of context for nuns' use suggests that Birgitta's prayers were considered to be effective outside of their immediate contexts. Presumably, the nun was expected to be familiar enough with Birgitta's revelations or her prayers that she should know when to use them most effectively. The prayers for contrition, framed for use at the end of the day, may be an instance of the prayers being selected to be placed at the end of the already-constructed book.

The "Triple Ave" in Three Manuscripts: Harley 494, LPL 546, TCC O.1.74

Harley 494, LPL MS 546, and Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.1.74 all contain a prayer exercise from Mechthild that is known as the "Triple Ave." This prayer is a combination of passages from *LSG*, Pars 1, chapters 11 and 47. In chapter 11, Mary asks Mechthild to say an *Ave Maria* for her, and Mechthild is divinely inspired to add phrases to the prayer.[689] In Chapter 47, Mary tells Mechthild to say three *Aves* each day, the first to the omnipotence of God the Father, the second to the wisdom of the Son of God, and the third to the sweetness of the Holy Spirit, so that in the hour of her death, Mary will be with her.[690] These passages are modified in these three manuscripts so that they become personal prayers and devotions for the individual readers.

In Harley 494, Mechthild's "Triple Ave" follows a prayer labeled "þe bedis pardon in Englysche of St. Gregorrys Pytye" in the manuscript.[691] This prayer is more commonly known as

689. Paquelin uses italics to designate the traditional parts of the prayer from Mechthild's additions: "*Ave,* ex patris omnipotentia; *Ave*, ex filii sapientia; *Ave,* ex Spiritus Sancti benignitate, dulcissima *Maria,* coelum et terram illuminans. *Gratia plena,* infundens and replens omnes te diligentes. *Dominus tecum,* Dei Patris unicus, et tui virginei cordis unigenitus, amicus et sponsus dulcissimus. *Benedicta tu in mulieribus*, quae Evae fugasti maledictionem, et aeternam impetrasti benedictionem. *Benedictus fructus ventris tui,* omnium Creator et Dominus, omnia benedicens et sanctificans, omnia unificans et locupletans" (35). "*Hail*, from the omnipotence of the Father; *Hail* from the wisdom of the Son; *Hail,* from the benevolence of the Holy Spirit, sweetest *Mary,* illuminating heaven and earth. *Full of Grace,* infusing and replenishing all who are loving you. *The Lord is with you,* the only one of God the Father, and the only-begotten of your virgin heart, sweetest friend and spouse. *Blessed are you among women,* who averted the curse of Eve, and obtained eternal blessing. *Blessed be the fruit of your womb,* Creator and Lord of all, blessing and sanctifying all things, unifying and enriching all people.

690. Paquelin, ed. *LSG,* 133.

691. 105r; Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley,* 256. "The Pardon Beads of Syon" appear in other manuscripts such as Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud misc. 19, foos. 31v-33r. Harley 494 is

"The Prayer Beads of Syon."[692] It is written by a Secretary hand that does not occur in the rest of the book, and it is rather plain and undecorated, though the *O* at the beginning of each prayer is adorned simply with black ink.[693] After the conclusion of "The Prayer Beads of Syon," there is a rubric which directs the reader to "Say at euery verse a Pater Noster & Ave Maria, all with on Credo." Mechthild's Latin "Triple Ave" follows the rubric. The version which appears in this manuscript is an adapted version of the prayer from *LSG*, Pars 1, chapter 11, with the injunction to pray to the Trinity from chapter 47 added at the end. It reads,

> Aue Maria, eterni Patris sponsa, ex omnipotencia Patris post Deum potentissima, in celo & in terra. virgo mater Jhesu veri Dei & hominis amantissima, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus & benedictus fructus ventris tui. Amen. Et benedicta sit sanctissima mater tua Anna, ex qua sine macula tua processit caro virginea. Amen.[694]
>
> [Hail Mary, spouse of the eternal Father, most powerful after God from the omnipotence of the Father, in heaven and earth the most beloved virgin mother of Jhesu true god and man, full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Amen. And blessed be your most holy mother Anna, from whom your virgin flesh proceeded without spot. Amen.]

The prayers combine English with Latin variations on the original prayer, as in the below example:

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the only manuscript that continues with the "Triple Ave." See John C. Hirsh, "A Fifteenth-Century Commentary on 'Ihesu for thy holy name,'" *Notes & Queries* 17, no. 2 (Feb. 1, 1970): 44-5, and Julia Boffey, and A. S. G. Edwards, eds., *A New Index of Middle English Verse*, (London: British Library, 2005): no. 1703 for more on this prayer.

692. Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley,* 258.

693. Barratt designates this as "Hand L," where she says that this piece may be "filler" (35). However, she also says that the spacing of Mechthildian material throughout the book means that "in spite of the numerous hands involved in its production, Anne Bulkeley's book was conceived as a unity" (31).

694. f. 105v; Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley,* 256.

O swete blessyd Lady, as thou art moste myghty next God in heven & in erth, I besech the so be present & defend me from þe powre of my gostly enymy in þe houre of my deth. Aue Maria, gratia plena.

Aue Maria, eterni patris sponsa, ex sapiencia filij prudentissima, virgo mater Jhesu veri Dei & hominis amantissima, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus &c.[695]

[Hail Mary, spouse of the eternal Father, most wise after God from the wisdom of the Son, the most beloved virgin mother of Jhesu true god and man, full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women etc.]

Though these prayers do not explicitly have the same stated benefit as chapter 47 in the *LSG*, the text does ask Mary to "be present, & geet me love & grace & kepe me in my ryght naturall wyttes, and temper the passiones of my deth."[696] The spirit of the original revelation is maintained, even if the text is changed. Mechthild is not cited in this passage of the manuscript explicitly. The lack of attribution may be a result of the changes that the scribe makes to the prayers, namely the combination of separate passages from the *LSG.* It could also be that the scribe did not realize that this part of the text comes from a different source. Some of these changes might have been made with the reader explicitly in mind, as with the addition of the prayer to St. Anne in the first *Ave*, since the owner or owners of the manuscript were also named Anne. Most of the variation comes in the English prayers, which invoke the members of the Trinity individually along with Mary to grant the supplicant protection. The Latin prayers that follow these English prayers are the original Latin *Ave* from the beginning of the passage with slight variations. Notably, the English is not a translation of the Latin, but rather an independent prayer, implying that the owner(s) of the manuscript may have at least a cursory understanding of Latin. Although the Latin here is a variation on a prayer that most late-medieval English people would have known, the lack of translation of the variations implies that the reader could parse the new text from the familiarity of the prayer. The untranslated Latin could also reflect that Latin prayers are thought to be more effective than the vernacular, or at least more authentic, regardless of whether the person praying understood them.

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695. f. 106r; Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley,* 257.
696. f. 106r; Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley,* 257.

LPL 546 contains the English version of the "Triple Ave" prayers from the macaronic passage in Harley 494 on folios 52v-53r, which is especially interesting here because this section of the manuscript written by a female scribe (see Figure 27). The prayers are in black ink with red *O*s, two of which contain an IHS monogram. This version of the prayer centers on Marian devotion but does not fully maintain the Trinitarian invocation of the original:

> O swete blessyd lady as thow art most myȝty next god yn heuyn & yn erthe Y besech the to be present & defend me from the power of my gostly enymy yn the oure of my deth amen. [A]ue[697] Maria.
>
> O moste gloryous lady as thow art most wytty next god yn heven & yn erthe Y besech the to be present & kepe me yn the ryght fayth of holy church yn the houre of my deth aue.
>
> O most gloryous lady as thow art most lover of hart next god yn hevyn & erth Y beseche the to be present gete loue and grace kepe me yn my ryght naturall wytis & temper the [f.53r] passyonis of my deth. Aue maria.

This triple prayer further indicates that Mechthild's revelation from *LSG* Pars 1, chapter 47 was turned into a vernacular devotion for personal use. The Trinitarian invocation has been simplified to references to God alone rather than the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, though the distinctions of power, wisdom, and kindness remain, as do the requests for Mary's presence at the supplicant's death. Like the prayer in Harley 494, the focus remains on the Virgin as the grantor of the prayer.

The transmission of this text is unclear. The isolation of the Middle English in LPL 546 from the Latin accompaniment we see in Harley 494 is one issue. This omission is not likely due to a lack of Latinity on the part of either the scribe or the reader, for the English "Triple Ave" prayers are immediately followed by a different Latin prayer in the same hand on the facing folio. The two manuscripts have a similar date of the late fifteenth- or early sixteenth century, which does not necessarily help with determining whether one was copied from the other.[698] However, the passages are almost exactly the same, so if one was not copied from the other, they

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697. The A here is absent. Perhaps the scribe meant for it to be inserted later in red ink to match the Os.

698. O'Mara. "Middle English Text Written By A Female Scribe," 396.

likely share an exemplar. Since the two manuscripts share a Syon connection, a shared exemplar is entirely possible, and it would seem that this prayer was somewhat popular among women associated with the Abbey.

As stated above, this section of LPL 546 is particularly interesting because it was written by a female scribe.[699] The fact that a female scribe chose a passage from a female visionary to copy into a book for her fellow sister speaks not only to Mechthild's popularity among medieval religious women, but demonstrates that these women self-selected her writings for their own use. In other manuscripts with male scribes and female owners, the woman's ability to choose the visionary text for inclusion is unclear; however, we can be certain that one woman selected this prayer for another.

The "Triple Ave" passage on folios 74v-77r of Trinity College, Cambridge MS O.1.74 is much closer to Mechthild's *LSG* Pars 1, chapter 47, though it is cast as a first-person prayer in the Middle English while the original Latin is in third person. This version of the revelation seems to be transmitted from the Middle English translation of the *LSG*, the *Booke of Gostlye Grace*, as it bears remarkable similarities to the version of the *Booke* in London, British Library, MS Egerton 2006.[700] For example, compare the texts of the second prayer in Table 5, with O.1.74 on the left and Egerton 2006 (as its text appears in Halligan's edition) on the right, with major variations underlined.

We can see that the Middle English phrasing is quite close, with the major variations being between first and second person pronouns, and that TCC O.1.74 focuses more clearly on the Virgin as the recipient of God's blessings. Halligan catalogues the two extant whole copies of the *Booke of Gostlye Grace* in England—Egerton 2006 and Oxford, Bodelian Library, MS Bodley 220— with at least one more English copy in circulation.[701]

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699. O'Mara, Veronica. "The Late Medieval English Nun and Her Scribal Activity: A Complicated Quest." In *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogue: Conference ... at the University of Hull from 20 to 23 June 2011*, edited by Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara, and Patricia Stoop, 69–93. Medieval Women 26. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013): 78.

700. This is in contrast to Alexandra Barratt's assertion that this manucsript has an independent Middle English version of the passage (*Anne Bulkeley,* 258). See chapter one for more discussion of Egerton 2006.

701. Teresa A. Halligan, ed., *The Booke of Gostlye Grace,* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies,1979), 52.

Table 5: Comparison of the text of the "Triple Ave" in MS O.1.74 and London, British Library MS Egerton 2006

TCC MS O.1.74, f. 75r-76r	BL MS Egerton 2006 (Halligan)
"At the secund tyme Aue maria &c. Mary moder of mercy y beseke the that as goddis sone after the passing worthynes of his wisdom whiche may not be enserchid/ Ful curiously apparayled and fulfullid the al hool with science and intellect. so that thou schuldist haue passinge knowing of the blisful trenyte more than of seyntis whiche made also to schyne with so muche clernesse as the sunne with the same bemys lyghteneth all heuene by his vertu/ Ryght so y beseche thee lady that in the oure of my deth my soule mow be filfilled with the lyght of knowyng/ so that my feith for temptacioun faile not be ignoraunce ne by errour.	At the secounde Aue, preye the þat as Goddys sone, aftere the passynge worthynes of his wisdome whiche may now3t perfytelye be enserchede, fulle curiouslye appayraylede me and fulfullid me al hoole with scyence and intellecte so that y schulde haffe passynge knowynge of the blesfulle trinyte more þan alle seyntis whiche also made me schyne with so moche cleerenes as the sunne with the sunnebeemys lyghteneth all hevene be his vertw, ry3t so prey þowe þat in the oure of thy deyde y mowe fulfylle þy sowle with the ly3tte of knawynge so þat þy feith for temptacioun fayle not be ignoraunce ne by errour.

The presence of two separate versions of the "Triple Ave" in these four manuscripts suggests that there were at least two circles of transmission of this text happening in late-medieval England, one from the "official" English translation and one more from independent translations of the Latin. It also indicates the possibility that there was a strain of transmission between women's manuscripts in particular, with the independent English prayers of the "Triple Ave" appearing in both Harley 494 and in LPL 546. As the prayers are transmitted in each version, however, they were adapted to the specific context of the individual manuscript, whether to add or take away text, change pronouns, or excise whole sections of text based on language. The different versions of this prayer in women's manuscripts highlight the importance of studying miscellanies for the individual iterations of a single text, both in terms of transmission and for how the variations of the text change the individual reader's interpretation of the text.

Let us return to the above passage for an examination of how the readers of these manuscripts may have used the "Triple Ave" as a source of prayer in their own devotions. The prayer promises that Mary will be present to guard the reader against the powers of evil at the moment of her death. Each version replicates Mechthild's association of Trinitarian qualities with Mary and makes her an intermediary for the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost on behalf of the supplicant. The reader's prayers might have been enhanced with Latin recitations of the extended *Ave Maria,* as in Harley 494, or they may remain entirely in the vernacular. Regardless of textual changes, each of the women who owned these manuscripts could have prayed this passage as a devotional exercise, allaying her fears about the moment of her death with the promise included in this prayer.

The Commendation of the Senses

Another prayer of Mechthild's appears in several women's manuscripts—TCC MS O.1.74, LPL 3600, and Harley 494—which I will refer to as "The Commendation of the Senses." In MS O.1.74 and LPL 3600, the Commendation is an independent series of prayers. In Harley 494, it is part of a Passion devotion, and it will be examined in the next section of the chapter. This passage is a combination of two chapters in the *LSG,* Pars 3, chapter 17, and Pars 4, chapter 23. Both chapters contain prayers that Jesus gives Mechthild to say in certain situations. In 3.17, Christ tells Mechthild that when she wakes in the morning, she should greet the heart of God and offer her heart in return, then commend all five of her senses and her spirit to God in preparation

for the day.[702] In 4.23, Mechthild feels discouraged in prayer and Jesus reassures her, giving her a prayer that asks him to supply anything lacking in her.[703]

MS O.1.74 appends the Commendation of the Senses to the end of the Triple Ave, recording it on folios 77r-80r. An introductory passage states the purpose of the prayer:

> Yif thou desire to praye or worschippe or loue god and maist not fulfille in desire as thou woldist than seye thus: Good ihesu y loue and worschipe thee. and what that is to litil in me. y pray the good lord performe it out for me/ Also whanne thou hast delyt to loue him seye this | Good ihesu y loue thee & what so be to litil in me. y biseche thee good lord that [f.77v] thou offer the loue of thin hert to the fadir for me /Amen/[704]

This section comes from the *LSG* Pars 4, chapter 23. The passage continues immediately after with the commendation of the heart, soul, and senses to God from Pars 3, chapter 17.

> ffirste whanne thou risiste eerly at morowe grete and do reuerence to the florisching and the louyng hert of thi louere ihesu. from whom al goodnesse flowid out flowit and schal flowe with out ende/ Therefore with a good herte thou schalt seie thene/ Y loue y blisse. y glorofie y grete that delycious herte of ihesu my trewe loue yelding [78r] thangingis to thee my lord ihesu for the trewe keping wherwith thou haste defendit me this nyght/ And that thou hast yeldit preisingis and thonkyngis to god the fader thingis whiche y scholde haue do thou hast performed for me. | And now my oonly loue y offre my herte to thee with al maner reuerence besechinge thee that thou drawe it to thee and accept it to [78v] thee. so that from this tyme forward it may fele it silf graciously preie with ynne so that eche

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702. cf. Paquelin, ed., 217-18; Newman, *Mechthild of Hackeborn,* 154-5.

703. cf. Paquelin, ed., 280; Newman, *Mechthild of Hackeborn,* 171.

704. Cf. Paquelin, ed., 280. “Optime sic facies, et cum me laudare sive amare cupis, nec perpetuo desiderio illud implere vales, ita dicas: Jesu bone, laudo te, et quidquid minus est in me, rogo ut tu suppleas pro me. Cum vero amare delectat te, dicas: Jesu bone, amo te, et quidquid minus est in me, rogo ut Cordis tui amorem Patri offeras pro me. [Thus you do best, and when you desire to praise or love me, and you are not able to constantly pour that into desire, say thus: Good Jesus, I praise you, and whatever is less in me, I ask that you fulfill for me.” But when it delights you to love, you should say: “Good Jesus, I love you, and whatever is less in me, I ask that you offer the love of your heart to the Father for me.]

thought speche & worching and my wil mowe be gouernyd this day after the plesaunce of thi benygne wil/[705]

This passage leaves out several sentences and phrases from the original Latin, such as the fact that Mechthild offers her heart to Christ three times, but otherwise makes little change to the text. After this passage, the excerpt skips a section from the original where Mechthild commends her spirit to Christ and jumps right into the commendation of the sight, hearing, mouth, hands, and heart to Christ. These commendations center on the sites of the five senses, but they include all the uses of the sense organs within them, such as the prayer for the mouth, which reads,

Lord y comende my mouth my vois and my speche to thi devyne trouthe and feithfulnesse/ praying thee that thou [79v] pore into me the taast of thi devyne spirit / wherthorugh al thingis mow be fauoure to me whiche y schal schewe forth

705. Cf. Paquelin, ed., 217-18. "Mane cum primo surgis, saluta florens et amans Cor dulcissimi amatoris tui, a quo omne bonum, omne gaudium et omnis felicitas effluxit in coelo et in terra, effluit et effluet sine fine; et cor tuum totis viribus ejus Cordi infundere conare, ita dicens: Laudo, benedico, glorifico et saluto dulcissimum et benignissimum Cor Jesu Christi, fidelissimi amatoris mei, gratias agens pro fideli custodia, qua me hac nocte protexisti, et pro me laudes et gratiarum actiones et omnia quæ ego debebam Deo Patri incessanter persolvisti. Et nunc, o unice amator meus, offero tibi cor meum, ut rosam vernantissimam, cujus amoenitas tota die oculos tuos alliciat, et ejus fragrantia divinum Cor tuum delectet. Offero etiam tibi cor meum, ut eo pro scypho utaris, unde tui ipsius dulcedinem bibas, cum omni quod hoc die in me operari dignaris. Insuper offero tibi cor meum, ut optimi saporis malogranatum, et tuo regio condecens convivio, quod comedendo sic trajicias in te, ut de cætero se feliciter sentiat intra te: orans etiam ut omnis cogitatio, locutio, operatio et voluntas mea secundum beneplacitum tuæ benignissimæ voluntatis hodie dirigatur. [In the morning when you rise, salute the flowering and loving heart of your sweetest lover, from which all good, all joy and all happiness in heaven and on earth flowed out, flows out, and will flow out without end; and try with all your strength to pour your heart into his heart, saying thus: I praise, bless, glorify, and salute the sweetest and kindest heart of Jesus Christ, the most faithful of lovers to me, giving thanks for the faithful watch in which you have protected me this night, and that you have incessantly given the praise and thankful actions and all that I should have done to God the Father. And now, my only love, I offer my heart to you, as a most flourishing rose, whose delightfulness may attract your eyes all day, and whose fragrance should please your divine heart. I also offer my heart to you so that you may use it as a siphon from whence you drink your own sweetness, with all that you deem worthy to work in me today. Moreover, I offer you my heart as a pomegranate of delicate taste, becoming of your royal feast, which you, by eating it, pass through yourself so that it may henceforward gladly feel itself within you: praying also that my every thought, speech, deed, and wish is directed according to the good pleasure of your most benign will.]

this day/ And that my mouth mowe opene in louynge to thee and worschippe/
And that thou kepe it from al synne.[706]

Even though the mouth is characterized with the sense of taste, the prayer includes all the functions of the mouth, such as singing, speech, worship, and sin.[707]

LPL 3600 also uses the Commendation of the Senses as a prayer exercise, though it is in Latin in this manuscript. It occupies folios 73v-76r and is not attributed to Mechthild in any way. Each prayer has an initial in alternating red and blue ink to signal the beginning of the prayer. It elides Jesus' speech from the revelation, instead recording the prayers alone. It begins with the greeting and commendation of the heart, then follows with the prayer for each sense in the first person.[708] As an example, take the commendation of the sight:

Domine iesu christe diuine sapiencie co*m*mendo visum meum interiorem et exteriorem vt lumen cognicionis michi dones quo voluntatem tuam. Et o*m*nia beneplacita tibi [f. 75r] agnoscere valeam.

[Lord Jesus Christ I commend my interior and exterior vision to divine wisdom so that you give me the light of understanding according to your will. And let me be able to recognize all things pleasing to you.] [709]

706. ff. 79r-v. Cf. Paquelin, ed., 218, "Os quoque et vocem divinæ commenda fidelitati; orans ut tibi gustum divini Spiritus sui infundat, quo omnia quæ illa die proferre debes, tibi sapiant, et os tuum in ejus laudes et gratiarum actiones aperiat, et etiam ab omni peccato custodiat." [Also commend your mouth and voice to divine fidelity, praying the Spirit fill you with the taste of its divinity, by which taste is flavored all that you should do that day, and to open your mouth in praise and giving thanks, and to guard you from all sin]

707. For more on the senses in the Middle Ages,
see Richard Newhauser, ed., *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Middle Ages*, A Cultural History of the Senses 2 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

708. Paquelin records the prayers for the senses in the imperative second person, as directions that Jesus gives to Mechthild for how to pray.

709. Cf. Paquelin, ed., 218, "Commenda etiam visum tuum, tam interiorem et exteriorem, divinae sapientiae; orans ut lumen cognitionis tibi donet, quo voluntatem ejus, et omnia sibi placita agnoscere valeas." [Commend also your vision, both interior and exterior, to divine wisdom, praying that it gives you the light of understanding according to your will, and that you will be able to recognize all things pleasing to him.]

For the most part the prayers are quite close to the original Latin of the *LSG,* aside from the transformation to first person. However, some are shortened, like the commendation of the mouth:

> DOmine iesu christe oro te. Vt os meum in tua laude et graciaru*m* accione [f.75v] aperias. Ac a vani loquio mendacio. Et ab omni peccato custodias. Amen. [710]
>
> [Lord Jesus christ I pray to you that you open my mouth in your praise and in the performance of grace. And that you protect me from vain speech, lies, and all sin. Amen.

The motive for separating the prayers from the wider revelation in this manuscript is unclear. The prayers themselves were clearly the most important part of the selection for Mary Nevel. Presumably, she would have known the source of her prayers, and therefore chose not to record that Mechthild was the source. The lack of citation fits the rest of the prayers in the manuscript, which also have no source identification. The prayers themselves are included in such a way that the owner of the manuscript could use them in her own devotions, from her own point of view. Indeed, both sets of prayers are recorded as direct first-person prayers, rather than the second person imperative of the original Latin. This transformation indicates that usefulness to the reader, rather than fidelity to the source, was paramount. It could also suggest an independent strain of transmission with the first-person version of the revelation.

The combination of the two revelations indicates the Commendation of the Senses could be used as a method for reconciliation with God after a falling away, as well as a routine morning prayer. The focus on the speaker's heart and its relationship to Christ's heart, which defends her heart and recommends it to the Father, is characteristic of Mechthild and echoes the tradition of nuns seeing Christ as a lover. The addition of the senses and the body parts associated with them unites the soul and the body in devotion to God, drawing the person who prays closer through the commendation of body, soul, and all the uses thereof. The Commendation of the Senses is particularly useful for the nuns who owned these manuscripts, who could pray these prayers to bring themselves more in alignment both with an exemplary visionary nun in the figure of Mechthild and could draw nearer to God in prayer.

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710. Cf. Paquelin, ed., 218.

In Harley 494, LPL 546, LPL 3600, and TCC MS O.1.74, the texts of mystical women are used as sources of prayer for the medieval women who owned—and sometimes created—the manuscripts. These women could read the prayers much like they would the texts of Books of Hours or other liturgical sources for their own private devotions. However, these prayers contain practical benefits for the soul who prays them, such as protection in the hour of death. Holy women like Birgitta and Mechthild's prayers were considered especially efficacious, to such a degree that they took on a magical quality for those who prayed them. Additionally, it seems that women were particularly assiduous about finding and sharing prayers with one another. Many of the prayers from holy women discussed here appear in multiple manuscripts. With the exception of TCC O.1.74, the manuscripts in which these versions of the prayers appear have strong associations with Syon Abbey. At least two of them, LPL 546 and LPL 3600, were written by female scribes at Syon. These witnesses suggest that there was a unique strain of transmission at Syon, where nuns would share favorite prayers among themselves and perhaps with laywomen they knew outside of the Abbey, as in the case of Anne Bulkley. Late-medieval English women had strong interest among women in prayers from holy women for their own use, and it is exciting evidence for women's textual communities in late-medieval England.

Passion and Life of Christ Devotion

The second way that English women employed women's visionary texts is as a source of information on and devotion to the Life of Christ and Mary. This trend coincides with the general late-medieval cultural fascination with Christ's humanity, which is explored in greater detail in my previous chapters. As I discuss in chapter one, Birgitta and Mechthild were often excerpted in devotional miscellanies as sources of devotional meditation on the lives of Christ and the Virgin. They were also influences on narrative Lives of Christ, as I discuss in chapters one, two, and three. We saw in chapter one that Birgitta and Mechthild influenced Life of Christ devotion in the general devotional culture of late-medieval England, but here we can confirm that the holy women's influence on Life of Christ devotion did extend to a specifically female audience.

Harley 494 contains the Hours of the Passion, with the rubric (on folio 26r) saying the whole passage was showed to Mechthild. This rubric, in black ink that mirrors the rest of the passage, reads, "A short meditacion and informacyon of oure lord Ihesu schewyd to seynt

Mawde by reuelacion." This passage begins with the Commendation of the Senses that also appears in TCC MS O.1.74 and LPL 3600, but here it is used as opening and closing prayers for the Passion meditations. The original text of the revelation from the *LSG* is in the second person and is imperative in mood, asking the reader to pray for certain things, as in, "Commenda etiam visum tuum, tam interiorem quam exteriorem, divinae sapientie; orans ut lumen cognitionis tibi donet, quo voluntatem ejus, et omnia sibi placita agnoscere valeas. [Commend your vision, both interior and exterior, to divine wisdom, praying that he give the light of recognition to you, in which you can acknowledge his will, and that all that is pleasing to him.]"[711] As in the other manuscripts, the text of Harley 494 also separates the passage into individual first person prayers, so that the above text becomes, "Domine Jhesu Christe, tue diuine sapeintie commendo visum meum interiorem & exteriorem vt lumen cognicionis mei dones, quo voluntatem tuam et omnia beneplacita tibi agnoscere valeam. [Lord Jesus Christ, I commend my interior and exterior vision to your divine wisdom so that you give me the light of recognition, in which I may acknowledge your will and all that is most pleasing to you.]" This switching around of persons makes the revelation more useful to the reader by modeling the prayer as the reader would say it. The layout of the prayers also provides direction on how to perform them. Each one is separated out into its own paragraph, with a centered rubric for each prayer such as "for the heryng say thus" followed by a cross, presumably so that the reader will cross themselves. The layout of the manuscript lends itself to an oral devotional practice, not just silent reading or prayer.

The Middle English Hours of the Passion that follow Mechthild's Latin prayer are also arranged to reflect devotional practice, as they are oriented to the canonical hours of the day. This encouraged the reader to return to them over a period of time instead of reading them in one devotional stint. They are written from Jesus' point of view and ask the reader to "behold" the events of the Passion, as in the reading "Be-for thy Terce":

> Behold as if þou were present when I was at þe commaundment of Pilate bounden to a pillare so scharply scourged my skynn so rent that all by body rann of blode, send to Kyng Herode & sith ayen to Pilate, clothed in whit as a fole [fool], after in

711. Paquelin, ed., 218.

purpos scornefully called kyng of them, crownede with sharpe thornes at the cryeng of the Jewes, iuged to þe deth of the crosse. [712]

Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa argues that this passage on the Hours of the Passion is "borrowed" from Pars 3, chapter 29 of the *LSG* but "rendered freely, this time, in English."[713] She makes no further comment on this passage. While the passage in Harley 494 is structured around the hours like this chapter of the *LSG*, it is unclear whether the compiler of this passage actually referred to Pars 3, chapter 29 in the process of composition. For comparison, let us look at the corresponding Terce section from this chapter:

Ad Tertiam, ob amorem quo ego contemptus, consputus et omni oppobrio saturatus, temetipsam contemnas et vilipendas.[714]

At terce, on account of the love in which I having been disdained, spat upon, and filled with disgrace by all, let you condemn and despise me yourself.

The passages from the *LSG* do not generally contain references to the specific events of the Passion as does the English version, and while it retains the second person address of the *LSG*, the English passages add much more material than what appears in the supposed source. While there are some parallels, I would argue that this passage is not simply a "free rendering" and that it has been largely added to or enhanced with traditional images and events from medieval Passion devotion.

Voaden says that though Mechthild is named in this manuscript, the text that follows this passage "bears little direct relation to anything Mechthild wrote," apparently missing the Latin citations of Mecthild's revelations and going straight into the English prayers which follow the Passion meditation.[715] Nevertheless, she argues that "it was Mechthild's name that mattered, rather than what she wrote… her name became a kind of free-floating talisman, to be attached to

712. f. 27v, Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley,* 196.

713. Naoe Kukita Yoshikawa, "The *Liber specialis gratie* in a Devotional Anthology: London, British Library MS Harley 494," in *Late Medieval Devotional Compilations in England*, ed. Marleen Cré, Diana Denissen, and Denis Renevey (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2020), 355.

714. Paquelin, ed. 234.

715. "The Company She Keeps," 59. Since Voaden mentions "prayers and blessings for the rituals of life, for rising and sleeping, for hearing and speech, for various hours and for members of the family," she may be referring to all of the texts and prayers that follow from 26v-33r.

various devotions and prayers in order to add to their gravitas and signal their orthodoxy."[716] Though Mechthild is only truly associated with the commendation prayers, the rubric makes it clear that the entire Passion prayer sequence is attributed to her. In addition to lending an air of orthodoxy to the meditation, it also indicates that visions of the Passion were specifically associated with holy women like Mechthild, and that the attachment of such narratives to their names made the narratives more credible for readers.

The Hours of the Passion end with another Latin prayer which is directly attributable to Mechthild. This prayer comes from *LSG* Pars 4, chapter 23, which is the second half of the Commendation of the Senses. In this manuscript, it reads, "Jhesu bone, laudo te & quicquid minus est in me, rogo vt te supleas pro me. Jhesu bone, amo te et si quid minus est in me, rogo ut cordis tui amorem Patri offeras pro me. [Good Jhesu, I praise you and whatever is lesser in me, I ask that you repair it for me. Good Jhesu, I love you and if anything is lacking in me, I ask that you offer the love of your heart to the Father for me.]"[717] Though the entire text is not directly from Mechthild, the bookending prayers from the *LSG* and the citation of her in the rubric indicate that Mechthild was associated with Passion devotion for the readers of this manuscript. Not only did these women pray Mechthild's prayers in order to prepare themselves for the meditation, they also envisioned Jesus narrating his suffering to her as an intermediary for their own devotional meditative practice.

In addition, these prayers, in comparison with their appearance in TCC MS O.1. 74 and LPL 3600, show that the same passages from Mechthild's work were used in different ways by different manuscript compilers. In MS O.1.74 and LPL 3600, the prayers are a devotional script for commending oneself to God every morning. They are a way to incorporate the prayers of a holy woman into a woman's daily routine and are meant to bring her closer to Christ as his spouse. The prayer from *LSG* 4.23 is at the beginning of the passage in MS O.1.74, framing the entire prayer exercise as a method for making up one's defaults. In LPL 3600, the passage from *LSG* 4.23 is at the end of the Commendation, forming a conclusion to the prayer exercise. In Harley 494, however, these prayers are inverted and used to bookend a Passion meditation, with

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Barratt identifies these last prayers as selections from Richard Whitford's translation of *Due Preparacion* and William Bonde's *Pilgrymage of perfeccyon* (202-3).

716. Voaden, "The Company She Keeps," 60.

717. f. 30r, Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley,* 198.

4.23 also serving as a conclusion. Not only do they add authority to the Passion meditation by making it seem to come from Mechthild (though it does not), they also frame it within the practice of a day's prayer, so that the reader opens with the commendation of the senses and ends with a prayer for Christ to offer her soul to the Father, which seems most appropriate to the end of the day. The addition of these prayers to a Passion meditation gives them an entirely new context. These three instances of the same passage put to entirely different uses demonstrate how the circumstances of the individual miscellany can alter the appearance and use of a single text.

Lambeth Palace Library, MS 432 also uses the revelations of a holy woman as a source of information on Christ's Passion, in this instance a Passion devotion compiled from several of Birgitta of Sweden's visions. The compiler of the Passion meditation on folios 76r to 84v combines Birgitta of Sweden's *Liber caelestis* 1.10, in which Mary describes the Passion in detail, and revelation 4.70, which also describes the Passion from Mary's point of view, into a cohesive narrative of the events of the Passion. The only other text from the *Liber caelestis* is a passage about Judas' betrayal of Christ from revelation 4.99, which makes special note of his short stature. Notably, this manuscript does not make use of revelation 7.15, as Roger Ellis observes in his short analysis of part of the Passion narrative.[718]

Domenico Pezzini has closely analyzed the method of textual conflation used in this passage, observing that the translator seems to have the goal of incorporating as much information as possible while maintaining conciseness in the prose.[719] Folio 78v is a good example of this conflation method, as it contains material from all three revelations. I include the text of the page below, with annotations for each time the source revelation changes. As Pezzini observes, the deftness with which the compiler shifts between textual sources is notable.

> [4.70] Eyhen and swett on his body for ffere of the passioun [4.99] whan Iudas the Traytoure come vnto hym he bowid downe unto hym by cause that Iudas was of short stature and than he yaffe him a Cusse and sayde ffrende wherfore comyst thou And anone Sum toke him Sum drew him and defoulid hyme by the here |
> [4.70] And anone he was drawe [by the here (interpolated)] [4.70] out of my

718. Ellis, "Flores," 178.

719. Domenico Pezzini, "The Meditacion of Oure Lordis Passyon" and Other Bridgettine Texts in Lambeth Palace Library MS 432," in *Studies in Birgitta and the Birgittine Order* 1, (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 283.

> Sighte And y See him no more vnto the tyme that he was ledde to be scourgid
> And than he was drawe a gayn to the grounde by his Enmyse and so cruelly
> throwe downe and withe so grete violence that whan his hede was smyttene to the
> erthe his tethe bett to geddris he was also smytt in the nekke and about the chekis
> So strongly that the sounde of the smyting come to myn Eris. Than was he
> scoruyde and ledde vnto the pyllere and at the Bidding of the turmentours did of
> his clothis hym selffe And hym selffe applied his hondis aboute the pylere
> whicche his enmyse hounde withe a Rope [1.10] without mercye And so bound he
> had no maner of heling [covering] But nakid as he was borne So he stode and suf-
> fred shame fastnesse of his nakidnesse Than his frendis fleying a way his enmyse
> rose and stode on euery syde and scourgid his body that was clene

Most of the time, the compiler places individual clauses end to end, like in the transition from 4.70 to 4.99, where Judas betrays Christ: "teris were in his | Eyhen and swett on his body for ffere of the passioun" and the switch, "whan Iudas the Traytoure come vnto hym he bowid downe unto hym bycause that Iudas was of short stature." However, the transition to different revelations sometimes happens with even a prepositional phrase, as in the switch from 4.70 to 1.10 towards the bottom of the folio, which describes Jesus being bound to a pillar to be whipped: "And hym selffe applied his hondis aboute the pylere whicche his enmyse hounde withe a Rope" and here it switches, "without mercye And so bound he had no maner of heling." The seamless transition from one source to another exhibits the medieval compiler's art. This kind of interpolation of passages from individual revelations was not unique to this manuscript or even to English devotional culture. Compilation of bible verses, especially in order to form gospel harmonies, dates back to the late antique period.[720] Birgitta's main editor, Alphonse of Pecha, compiled a life of Christ and Mary from Birgitta's visions called *Celeste viridarium*, and Roger Ellis notes other Middle English compilations which all seem to be independently constructed.[721]

The Life of Christ compiled here is part of a larger tradition of Lives constructed from Birgitta's visions, but it is independently compiled and not copied from another of the English

720. Salter, 57.
721. Ellis, "Flores," 168.

Lives. It is also independent of the *Celeste viridarium*, though Pezzini argues that this compilation takes the *Celeste viridarium* and other compilations of Birgitta's visions into account.[722] As Ellis notes,

> where the Viridarium had, to some extent, subordinated its version of the narrative of Christ's life to its presentation of the character of St Bridget herself, each of the [English] compilations… was producing a life of Christ pure and simple. Their practice, with regard to the narrative line, was thus rather more consistent than Alphonse's had been. Material that could be harmonized with their base text they incorporated; material that could not they suppressed.[723]

Though English compilers did not have Alphonse's hagiographical agenda, they referenced his compilation to accomplish their own, purely devotional, goals.

The combination of revelations seems to be motivated not only by a desire to collect the most information available from the visions, but also to develop affective devotional detail. This effect is most clear when details are doubled, as on folio 79v. Here, the text describes the scene of the Crucifixion, with Mary's narration saying, "[1.10] And whan y com with hym by to the place of his passioune I se there [4.70] ffoure naylis and a hammoure and [1.10] all other Instrumentis made redy vnto his dethe." The compiler includes the details of the four nails and a hammer from 4.70 even though the main text of the passage, which comes from 1.10, makes sense without the detail of the tools. This addition of detail also happens on folio 82r, where Mary reacts to Christ on the cross: "[1.10] his ffyngers and armys in maner strecchid hem out and the Bak lenyd strongly vnto the Crosse [4.70] and was all Saggyng [1.10] And than Sum said vnto me Mare thy Sun ys dede [4.70] Othir that had bettr ffeling sayd O lady the payne of thy Sunne is losid vnto his endlese glorye ffor he is dede but he shall a Ryse." The doubled details are specifically affective, focusing respectively on Christ's suffering and Mary's grief. The sagging body encourages pity for Christ, but the two reactions to Mary show the reader multiple options for a reaction in their own reading. The text's addition of the value statement of "bettr ffeling" to the more hopeful response that Christ will rise again is interesting, both for the seemingly prophetic bystanders and for the fact that most high and late-medieval Passion narratives seem to

722. Pezzini, 285.
723. Ellis, "Flores," 178.

focus on the sadness and compassion of the moment of suffering over the hope of the coming Resurrection.

This compilation of individual visions into a narrative account also shows that Birgitta's readers in England cared more for the content of her visions than maintaining their original setting or context. On the one hand, this pattern of transmission fits well with the medieval predilection for compiling disparate sources into new works. This work is notable, however, for only including texts from Birgitta's revelations rather than material from the Gospels or other sources. This choice may be because the compiler has decided to focus on visions that are strictly from the Virgin's point of view like 1.10 and 4.70, rather than through a purely mystical revelation as Birgitta experiences in 7.15. The focus on Mary not only adds authority to the narrative, but also emphasizes the affective purpose of the meditative activity. The persistent female point of view would perhaps have been particularly inspiring for a female audience.

Harley 494 and LPL 432 demonstrate that accounts of the Passion from visionary women had devotional value in medieval women's manuscripts. While it is true that the "authenticity" of the two passages varies wildly, the attribution of a Passion devotion to a mystical holy woman added an authoritative weight to the devotional exercise in which her work appeared. As I demonstrated in chapters one and two, Birgitta and Mechthild were often employed as sources of Passion devotion in wider late-medieval English culture. Their presence in women's manuscripts for this purpose indicated both that female piety reflected that of wider devotional culture and that women may have particularly valued a female point of view and female authority as part of their private devotional practice.

Spiritual Guidance

Finally, English women also turned to continental mystical women for spiritual guidance. Birgitta and Mechthild have many passages in their texts in which they give specific advice to a friend or a supplicant who asked for their insight. Their advice also appeals to a wider audience, offering guidance on everything from general behavior to obtaining forgiveness for a particular sin. In England, mystical women were seen as experts on devotion and prayer. As C. Annette Grisé explains, "her mystical relationship with the divine places her in the privileged position of intercessor and authority… By participating in the holy woman's devotions, the reader/prayer-

maker accesses the sacred power possessed by the mystic."[724] In the case of these manuscripts, women could turn to holy women for insight into the behaviors, thoughts, and actions that would bring them closer to God. Though spiritual guidance may involve prayer, it is more about the reader's desire to reform her thoughts and behavior than her seeking a prayer for a certain occasion or effect.

A passage attributed to Mechthild of Hackeborn, "Three Things to Keep in Mind," is a perfect example of a holy woman's spiritual guidance for those who wish to draw closer to Christ. It appears in Harley 4012, folios 77v-78r and LPL 3597 folio 6r-6v. Since it is unpublished, I include my transcription here in its entirety:

> Theis be the wordis that oure Saueoure Ihesu spake to his holy spouse and virgen sent Moll in al thi werkis kepe iii thingis in thi mynde.
>
> Oone is what seruice or benifice or humanite be donne vnto þe of ane creture receue hit soberli & mekeli with gladnes of sprite yilding al þankingis to me as hit were donne to me in þe saing with moupe and herte deo gracias that is to saie to þe my lord god be hit þanking presing or worship. The secunde is whateuer þou doo doo hit with a meke intencion to þe worship and plesans of me, and þink pat I am worcher and ordainer in þe and þou but as an instrument not knawing whеþer þou be thanke worthi or reproue, hatered or loue. ffor all goodnes cometh of mee and not but wrachidnes of thee. The iiide is what adversite sicnes or disses of bodi or of sprit þat falleth vnto þe, gurche [grudge] not þerwith but committe it to mee as I sufferd hit in þee and thinke pat hit mai not falle soo to þe but bi my will and my sufferance. Com therfor first to me and compleine þe to me of all þi dissease shewing openli þi hert as I were ther with þe present for I am soueren leche and ther mai noon help pe in þi dissease but I or bi mee. Therfor trust faithfulli to me þat I wil help þi dissease and then I shal strengh the to paciens þat whateuer þou suffer hit shalbe frutefull and profitable to þe. Trobill the not ne tare [tarry] not þi liue striuing therwith as þou woldist ouercom hit bi mistrie or bi awne wit or

724. C. Annette Grisé, "Continental Holy Women and the Textual Relics of Prayers in Late-Medieval England," In *The Medieval Translator, 10/ Traduire Au Moyen Age, 10,* eds. Jacqueline Jenkins & Olivier Bertrand (Turnhout : Brepols, 2007), 165-6.

> strengh for þat is presumcion and pride. But aftir þou hast complained þe to me and wrought after [behaved according to] discrete counsell and findiste no remedie, were [be aware] þou well þenne þat hit is ordained in my prive counsaill þat thou shalt suffire for þe best in ponisshing of thi sinne & clensing of þi saule and if hit be soo greuous too þe þat þou arte were [weary] of þi lif and desire to die orels to fall in dispaire þat þe thinkith þat þou arte reprouid me and art not of my chosen saules it com to mee as I haue saide with full trust and hope of help, and thorowe doune at my fete all þi heue burden and worship my passion and think faithfulli þat I of my awne frewill and for thi loue sufferid so gret paines will not suffer þe to be ouer com with my enmy pe deuill. Therfor kepe feith and worche þou mekeli and all shalbe to þe grete profet and merite to thi soule with me and my aungell in þe kingdom of heuyn. That blis he us graunt þat is endles god in trinite AMEN. (ff. 77v–78r)

As Rosalynn Voaden notes, this passage is an adaptation of several passages from *The Booke of Gostlye Grace* rather than a direct excerpt. The passage can be divided into two sections: the first is "Three Things to Keep in Mind," which is from Book 3, chapter 13, and the second, the image of Christ as a physician, is from Book 1, chapter 19.[725] After the true Mechthilidan material, there is a great deal of added content with an unknown origin. The "Three Things to Keep in Mind" have been altered from the original text, which says that first one should take all one's sufferings to Christ, second that one should receive all benefits and ministrations as if they were done for Christ rather than for themselves, and third that one should ascribe all one's works to Christ rather than to their own power.[726] This text reorders the three things to receiving benefits as if to Christ, that all good works come from Christ, and to take all sufferings to Christ. The revelation about Christ being a doctor seems to come from one sentence within the revelation on the Resurrection, "Sed si tu infirmaveris, ego sum medicus peritissimus, ab omni infirmitate sanans te; et ita inter nos nulla poterit esse divisio, sed aeterna copula et inseparabilis unio. [But if you will have become sick, I am the most skillful doctor, healing you from all infirmity; and thus no division can be between us, but an eternal coupling and inseparable unity.]"[727] This

725. Cf. Halligan 436, 197; Paquelin, ed., 211-12, 68.
726. Paquelin, 211-12; Halligan 436.
727. Paquelin, ed., 68.

sentence has obviously been altered in the above passage. Though Voaden only finds this passage in these two related manuscripts, I suspect that the passage is the product of independently circulating Mechthildian material that has been corrupted and added to as it has transmitted.

The combination of these revelations, along with some invention on the part of the writer, produces a devotion that stresses intimacy with and reliance on Christ without overemphasizing sin and penitence. The "Three Things to Keep in Mind" directly from Mechthild focus on humility and hope, with the assurance that God is directly involved in the everyday activities, relationships, and difficulties of the reader's life. Such assurance takes advantage of the visionary's intimate knowledge and experience of God without making it necessary for the devotee to have visionary experiences of their own, applying the special knowledge of the mystic to the devotional reader.

The section about Christ as the sovereign "leech" takes the notion of everyday intimacy further and advises the reader on how to obtain closeness with Christ when one has become spiritually ill with sin, requiring Christ's healing. The image of Christ as a physician is quite common in the Middle Ages. Here, Christ prescribes a regimen of treatment consistent with the culture of lay piety of late-medieval England, suggesting that the reader confess her sins openly, turn away from despair, and rededicate herself to the devout life through study and meditation on Christ's Passion. According to the passage, these citations will result in the reader attaining immediate comfort and eventual salvation. Such advice, though not directly from Mechthild's text, is what readers would expect from a mystic with such a reputation for orthodoxy. For the devout laywomen who owned Harley 4012 and LPL 3597, this passage would affirm the actions they had already learned for devout practice.

Birgitta of Sweden also offers spiritual guidance in an English woman's manuscript, though in a far more specific circumstance than Mechthild's "Three Things to Keep in Mind." Cambridge University Library MS Ff.6.33 contains a Middle English translation of *Regula salvatoris*, or the *Rule of St. Savior* in its entirety and an extract from the *Revelations* where Christ commands the Pope to approve the *Rule*. The inclusion of the *Rule* makes perfect sense for its audience, since the nun of Syon who owned the book was expected to follow it, along with the *Rule of Augustine* (also included in this manuscript), which the Birgittine monasteries also followed. This was due to the fact that the Council of Lyon in 1274 forbade the founding of new

rules, so new foundations technically had to use an extant one.[728] The Birgittine Rule was designated as constitutions added to the Rule of St. Augustine.[729]

A nun of Syon would have the opportunity to encounter the texts of Birgitta in a unique way. First, the nuns followed the *Rule* that Christ dictated to Birgitta himself, which was then developed into a full monastic system. The nuns also sang the *Sermo angelicus,* another of Birgitta's texts, as matins readings each day. This liturgical involvement with their mystical founder would have put them in her textual presence frequently and in different ways, where they could not only read and hear her words, but where they would be singing and performing her texts themselves. A nun of Syon, perhaps more than any other kind of medieval woman, would be steeped in the texts of the Abbey's foundress, allowing her great familiarity with Birgitta's work. However, the order's encouragement of the nuns to read privately would mean that they also encountered a multitude of other texts, such as the ones in this manuscript. The inclusion of the *Rule of St. Savior* in this volume of private prayer and meditation indicates that the nun would have the opportunity to encounter Birgitta's writings in a private setting in addition to her communal engagement with Birgitta's texts.

Although nuns were expected to know the monastic rule they vowed to follow, the inclusion and layout of the *Rule of St. Savior* in this manuscript suggests that its owner turned to it more for spiritual guidance than as a rule book for reference. Laura Saetveit Miles argues that "this manuscript suggests it was also studied in private meditation, operating more as a visionary text than a practical text."[730] This statement bears further examination. The manuscript is a small, handheld volume, which would make it more suitable for private study. As we can see on folio 63r, the *Rule* is laid out with clear rubrication in red ink, with decorated initials in red and blue to delineate the beginnings of chapters. Additionally, the text within the chapters is marked with paraphs in red and blue ink, and the chapter numbers are clearly noted in the margins. This organization and decoration aids the reader in navigating the text and finding specific passages. Though there are no reader's marks or inscriptions in the manuscript, the layout and richness,

728. Bridget Morris, "Introduction to the *Rule of the Savior*,"in Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden* Volume 4: *The Heavenly Emperor's Book to Kings, The Rule, and Minor Works,* trans. Dennis Michael Searby, ed. Bridget Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 110.

729. Morris, "Introduction to Rule of the Savior," 110.

730. Laura Saetvit Miles, "Bridget of Sweden," 211.

along with the size, do suggest that it was meant for a private reader, and that the private reader was encouraged to linger over the texts in devotional meditation rather than merely referring to them or reading over them quickly.

The nun would have many avenues from which to approach the *Rule* for spiritual advice and direction. The most obvious is meditating on the *Rule* as a text for directing behavior. She would be familiar with the *Rule* from her induction into the order, for the *Rule* says that before her induction, "the duresse and sharpnes of the ordre. contempt of the worlde and forȝetynge of the fadir & modre. must be shewid to hir."[731] However, the mandates for how the nuns are to dress, eat, and behave are recorded for the reader to consider for herself, along with why the injunctions are so strict.

Because the *Rule* was believed to be revealed directly to Birgitta by Christ, the requirements carry an extra weight of spiritual direction. In the prologue to the *Rule,* Christ explains to Birgitta about why he wants her to establish a new rule:

> I sayde vnto the byfore. that I was lyke a kynge that plantyd good vynyerdes whiche yeue goode frute long tyme. What were thes vynȝerdes. but religions and institutes of holy faderys… But nowe I playne me that the walle of the vyneȝerdes is distroyed. þe kepers slepe and theuys entyr in. the rotys arn vndyr doluyn of mollis [moles have dug under the roots]. The braunches arn wedryd by drynesse. and the finale brawnchis þat þe grapys sculde growe on. are borne downe wythe the wynde and trode vndyr the fete. Therefore lees that wyne shuld fayle in alle wyse; I shal plante me a vynȝerde of newe.[732]

This explanation can remind the nun that conforming herself to the regulations of the *Rule* established directly by Christ makes her more pleasing to him.

The text of the *Rule*, which is in the first person, also provides opportunities for meditative practice. There were multiple versions of the Latin *Regula salvatoris*, and one of the most distinctive differences between them is whether Christ is referred to in the first person or the

731. f. 48r; cf. James Hogg, ed. *The Rewell of Seynt Sauioure And the other Middle English Birgittine Legislative Texts*, Vol. 2, (Salzburg: Institut fur Englische Sprache und Literatur Universitat Salzburg, 1978), 20.

732. f. 41r; cf. Hogg 6.

third. These differences originate from the various editorial changes the *Regula salvatoris* underwent in the process of being approved.[733] In the earlier versions, Christ uses the first person in his appearances to Birgitta. Later versions, many of them combined with the papal bull approving the order, refer to Christ in third person. This translation preserves the earlier, shorter text, which uses the first person for Christ and only contains the prologue and chapters 1-27 out of a possible 31.[734] The first person of the early editions adds an immediacy and urgency to the text that the third person lacks, such as when Christ says "Obeye as I have bode the. Discusse thy conscience euery houre how myche thoue excedyst. & howe. Ryse vp anone if thoue falle. charge not þe worshyp of the worlde nor the freendys þer of. ffor whanne þoue hast me; alle thynges wex swete vnto the. And whanne thoue lovist me parfitly: alle thyngys of the worlde saue me shalle be bytter vnto the as venym."[735] Though these words are from a revelation to Birgitta, the reader of this passage can very easily envision Jesus saying these words to her. In addition to meditating on what it means to follow the requirements of the *Rule*, by studying the text she can also keep in mind the ultimate goal of the Birgittine monastic life and its rootedness in Christ's will.

Conclusion

Women in late-medieval England could have encountered the texts of Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn in multiple ways. If they were associated with the Birgittine Syon Abbey, either as a nun or as a laywoman, they could have heard or performed Birgitta's writings in the form of her liturgy. Laywomen and nuns could also have heard or read Birgitta or Mechthild in a women's reading group, like that of Cecily Neville.[736] But they also encountered these texts intimately in their own books of private reading, devotion, and prayer. English women applied the revealed wisdom of these mystical women to their own lives by using their texts as sources of prayer, meditations on the lives of Christ and Mary, and instructions on ways

733. Sten Eklund, ed., *Sancta Birgitta Opera Minora I,* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1975).

734. Morris, "Introduction to the Rule of the Savior," 109. See also Elklund *Opera minora,* especially page 90.

735. f. 32; cf. Hogg 8.

736. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "Mechthild of Hackeborn and Cecily Neville's Devotional Reading: Images of the Heart in Fifteenth-Century England," in *Revisiting the Medieval North of England: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Anita Auer, Denis Renevey, Camille Marshall, and Tino Oudeslujis, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019), 25–38.

to improve their devotional lives and spiritual practices. Each of these women encountered the texts of Birgitta and Mechthild in individual ways depending on the layout, language(s), and contexts of her personal manuscript. She would also have interpreted them differently, depending on their perceived connection with the other texts in the same volume. Through examining the individual iterations of Birgitta and Mechthild's texts in the books of women, we can gain insight into how these women encountered and interacted with the texts of holy women and see that they impacted the private religious practice of lay and religious women.

Additionally, it is also possible that there may have been circles of transmission among the texts that women owned which were separate from other patterns of transmission that these texts may have. For example, the "Triple Ave" of Mechthild exists in three of these manuscripts (TCC MS O.1.74, LPL 546, and Harley 494), with links to a fourth that was not covered here in depth (Egerton 2006). While these manuscripts were owned by a nun, the sisters of Syon, and a laywoman, they may exhibit signs of textual exchange between women. This exciting possibility could demonstrate how women shared their texts not just by physically giving books to one another, but by lending them to be copied and by recommending passages that they have found to be particularly moving in their own studies and prayers. My exploration here further underscores findings of other scholars that the divisions between religious and lay were permeable, if not non-existent, in terms of women's book trade and textual culture.

Finally, the discoveries and arguments made here could be expanded with the discovery and examination of more women's manuscripts that contain the works of Birgitta and Mechthild. More connections among texts and patterns of transmission could be made. In addition, the individual uses and purposes that English women had for the texts of continental mystical women could be further expanded. By looking at how a particular subset of the late-medieval population encountered and made use of these texts, we gain insight into not just the culture of late-medieval devout women, but also into their individual lives, tastes, and practices.

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—.“Mechthild of Hackeborn and Cecily Neville’s Devotional Reading: Images of the Heart in Fifteenth-Century England,” in *Revisiting the Medieval North of England: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, edited by Anita Auer, Denis Renevey, Camille Marshall, and Tino Oudeslujis, 25–38. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019.

Conclusion

Christ's life was a major organizing structure for the culture and religious practice in late-medieval England. It shaped the liturgy that dictated the worship practices of the year. It was the subject of art, in all levels of execution and across multiple media. It also formed the subject for a vast amount of literary and devotional output, generating thousands of leaves of manuscript writing and even more of print. In this deluge of text, women exerted a great deal of influence over the proliferation of this literary trend.

The visionary texts of Saint Birgitta of Sweden and Mechthild of Hackeborn became so popular in medieval England in part because of their insights into the lives of Christ and his mother. Though English people were interested in Mechthild and Birgitta for their prayers, their prophecies, and their spiritual advice, there was also a distinct strain of literary fascination with their visions of Christ's time on Earth. Exclusive glimpses of what *really* happened, as shown to holy women, gave readers more fodder for their devotional imaginations and authoritative insight into the most holy of figures. The holy women's interactions with the Holy Family, Christ and Mary in particular, also allowed new possibilities for readers to imagine encounters of their own with them. The treatment of Life of Christ material in manuscript transmission and reception of the holy women shows that people particularly valued these exclusive revelations. We saw in chapter one that the creators and owners of manuscripts used various means to draw attention to holy women's revelations on Christ's life: making marginal notes, designing the pages differently, recording these revelations in isolation, and even compiling entire works on Christ's life from the revelations. Birgitta and Mechthild enjoyed a symbiotic textual relationship with devotion to the Life of Christ, where their visions ignited new interest in exclusive looks at Christ's life, which in turn catapulted the holy women to greater spiritual authority.

However, the textual authority of visionary women was subject to those who transmitted it. We see in chapter two that, though there was considerable interest in vernacular Lives of Christ that incorporate the texts of continental mystical women, the compilers of these texts constrained the texts of these women to their own purposes. In three Middle English Lives of Christ, *Speculum devotorum, The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary,* and *The Fruyt of Redempcyon*, male compilers demonstrate their interpretive control over both the text of the female mystic and the readers of their texts. In their selections from the texts of female visionaries and in their presentations of these texts, the compilers express the passive misogyny of the Middle Ages by

aligning female visionary *auctores* with female-coded concerns, such as compassion, maternity, and virginity. Though the compilers could have seen the female mystics as experts on these matters, their presentation of Birgitta and Mechthtild's texts—along with those of other female mystics like Catherine of Siena—both distances their experiences from the readers' and constrains them to the textual limits which the compilers allow them. Women who read these Lives of Christ, such as the nun of Syon Abbey who commissioned *Speculum devotorum*, would still have encountered the texts of mystical women and their insights into Christ's life, though their connections to the holy women were mitigated by the compilers' editorial restrictions.

In contrast to the vernacular lives of Christ composed by men, *The Festis and Passion of Oure Lord Jesu Christ,* a Life of Christ composed by a nun for other nuns, calls on women's experiences in the Middle Ages and in the narrative of Christ's life itself to create the possibility for contemplative intimacy with Christ. Throughout the prayers, the author uses verbal devotion and aural practices to draw the reader into a state of contemplation. References to the liturgy in the chapters call the monastic reader into the imaginative context of worship and remind her of the musical and spoken cues for encountering Christ in her own life. At the same time, the chapters that focus on women in the biblical narrative use conversations with Christ to imaginatively draw the reader into biblical events as a model for how they might interact with Jesus. Through the contemplative practice of reading and prayer, the audience for *Festis* embodies the women in the Bible and grows in their own faith by uniting their lived experience with their contemplative interactions with Jesus, their spiritual spouse.

Finally, women's manuscripts containing the texts of Birgitta and Mechthild demonstrate that women in late-medieval England both wanted the texts of visionary women in their own books and that they had unique ways of reading, transmitting, and using those texts. Women were interested in holy women's insights into Christ's life and in their advice on how to live their own lives. We see this in women's manuscripts that contain meditations on Christ's life that use Birgitta's and Mechthild's texts and in those that have spiritual direction such as the Birgittine *Rule*. In both of these cases, women seem to have used Life of Christ meditations and spiritual advice as devotional reading rather than references, lingering over the words on the page in search of their own spiritual advancement. This finding is further confirmed by the fact that women were by far the most interested in Birgitta and Mechthild as sources of prayer for their

own use. Women's religious miscellanies excerpt prayers from Birgitta and Mechthild, often outside the context of the revelation in which they appear in the larger text. This practice suggests that women considered the holy women particularly effective experts on prayer and would say their prayers in their own devotional practices. We know that women themselves compiled of these prayers from mystical women because in at least two instances, women were the scribes for these prayers. We also see that women wanted to share particularly effective prayers. This desire led to unique lines of transmission among women's manuscripts, which we see with prayers from Mechthild of Hackeborn such as the "Triple Ave."

Female visionary authors, then, had a considerable impact on the devotional landscape of late-medieval England, as evinced by their involvement in the Life of Christ genre. But women in late-medieval England were also affected by both Life of Christ devotion and female visionary authors themselves. As the complementary popularity of Life of Christ devotion and visionary texts grew, women in England responded with eager desire to read more. The anonymous sister of Syon Abbey who commissioned *Speculum devotorum* from the monk of Sheen who compiled it sought out a tailor-made devotional text for her own use. The woman who wrote the *Festis* for her spiritual sister created a sequence of prayers that other women could use to draw nearer to their spiritual spouse through imaginatively conversing with him. The women who owned books that contained the texts of Birgitta and Mechthild prayed the prayers of visionary women in hopes that they would be especially effective in their own lives. Through the connections of these avenues of textual transmission and reception, we gain insight into the interconnected textual and devotional worlds of medieval people. The links of prayer, devotional contemplation, visions, and the well-trodden narrative of Christ's life form a chain of piety that surrounds the textual and religious communities in late-medieval England. We see that there was not necessarily a monolithic piety or devotion even among the most popular modes of expression, but instead that individual permutations of a text, a genre, or a codex can reveal both the immense influence of greater devotional trends, and the impact a single text can have on a single person.

APPENDIX

Figures

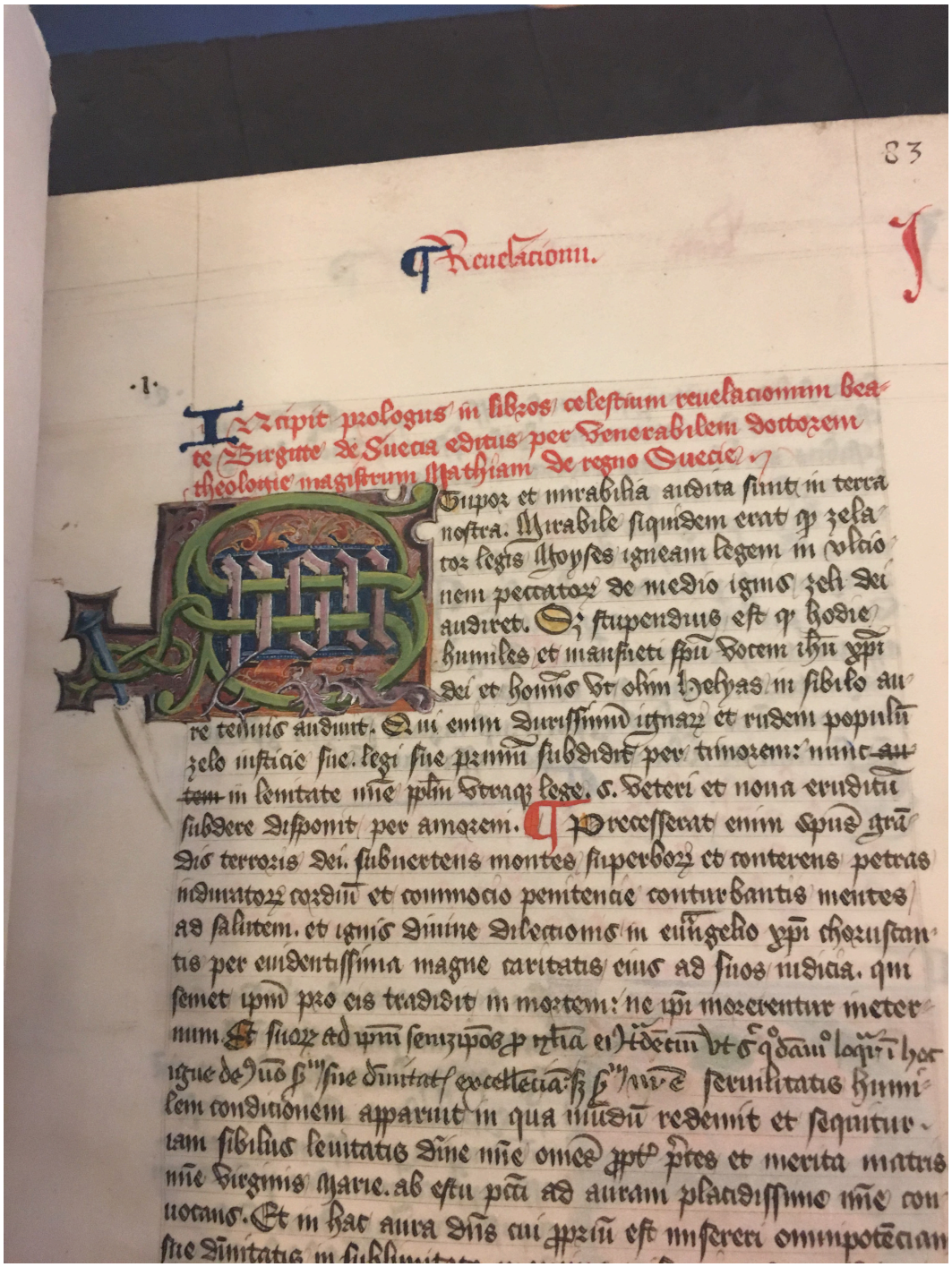


Figure 1: London, British Library, Harley MS 612, folio 1r. By permission of the British Library.

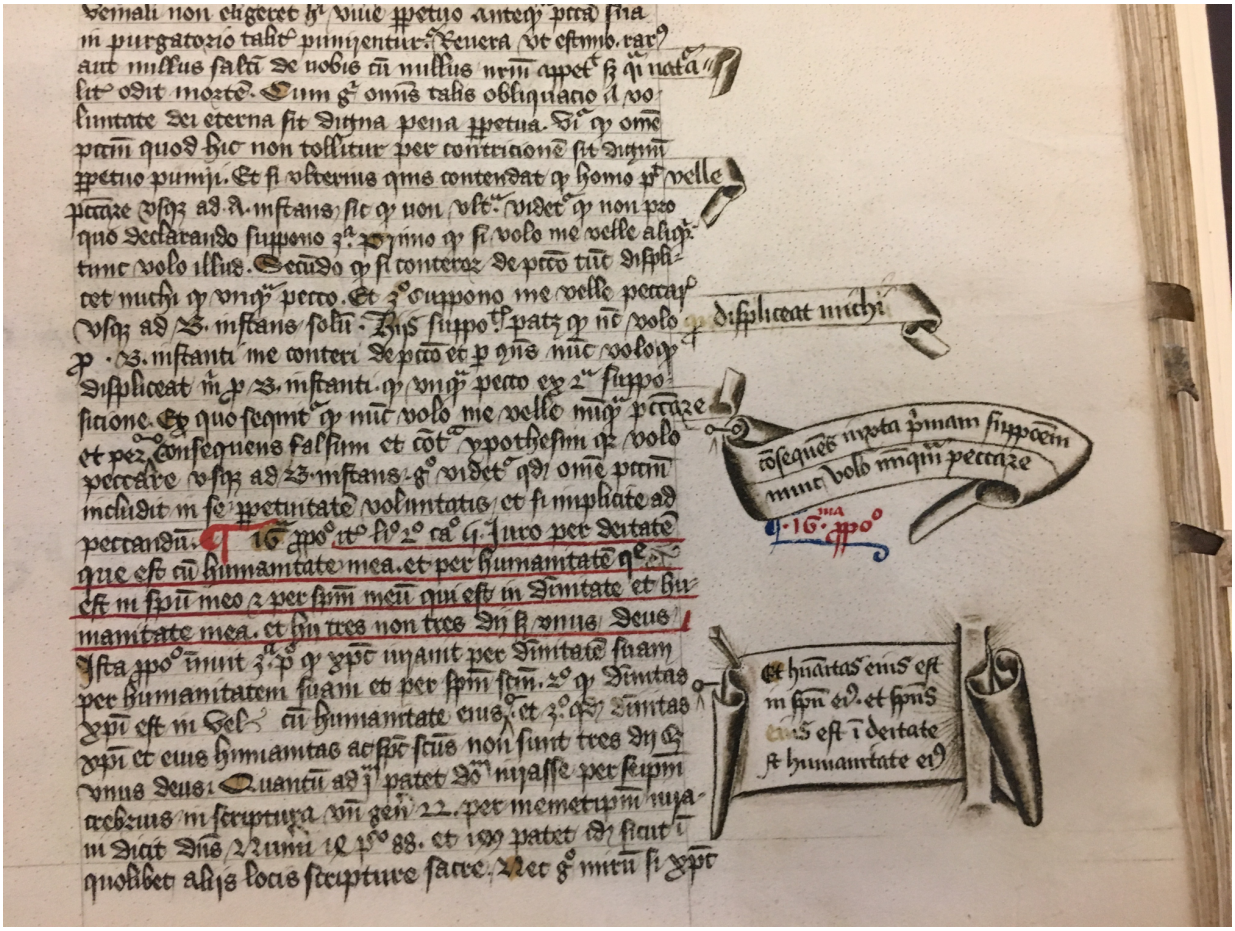


Figure 2: London, British Library, Harley MS 612, folio 187r. By permission of the British Library.

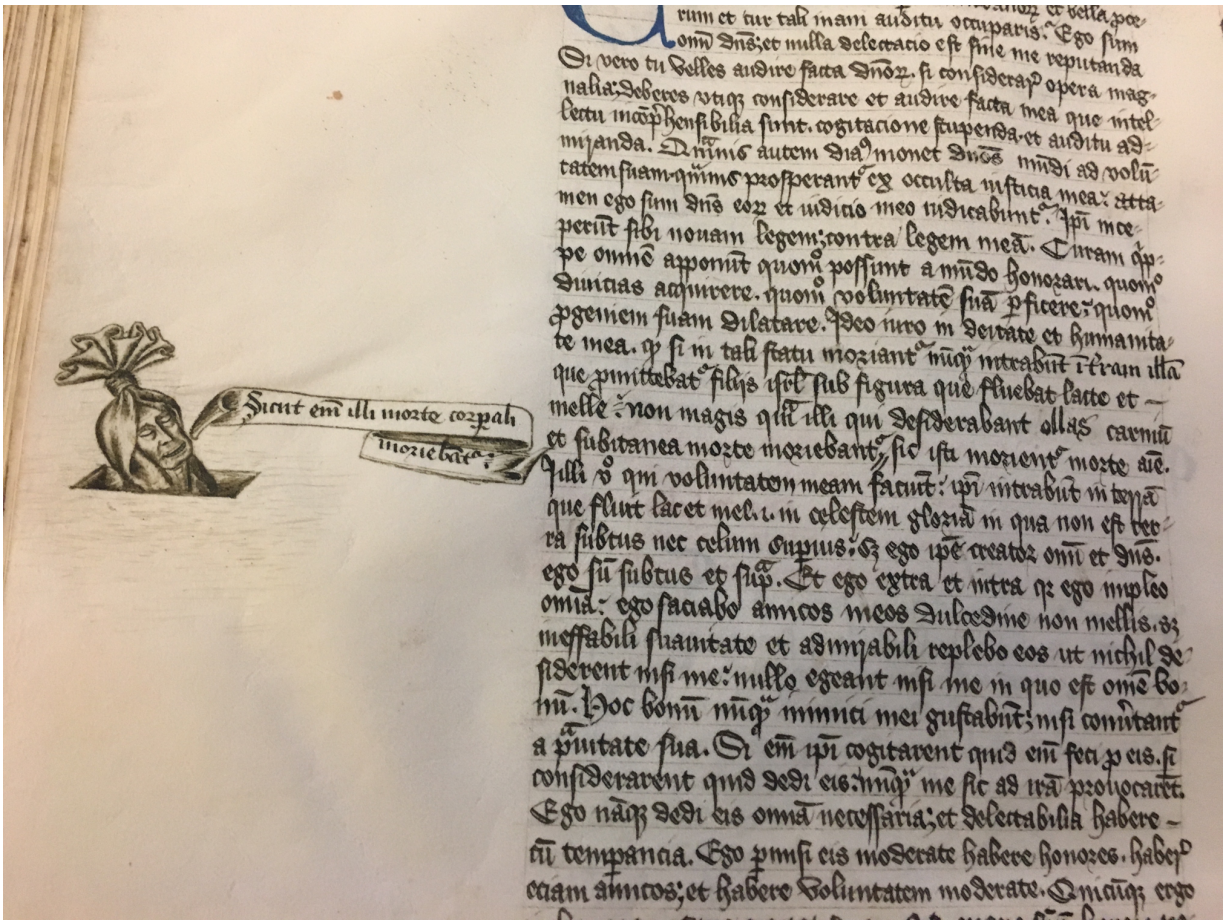


Figure 3: London, British Library, Harley MS 612, folio 78v. By permission of the British Library.

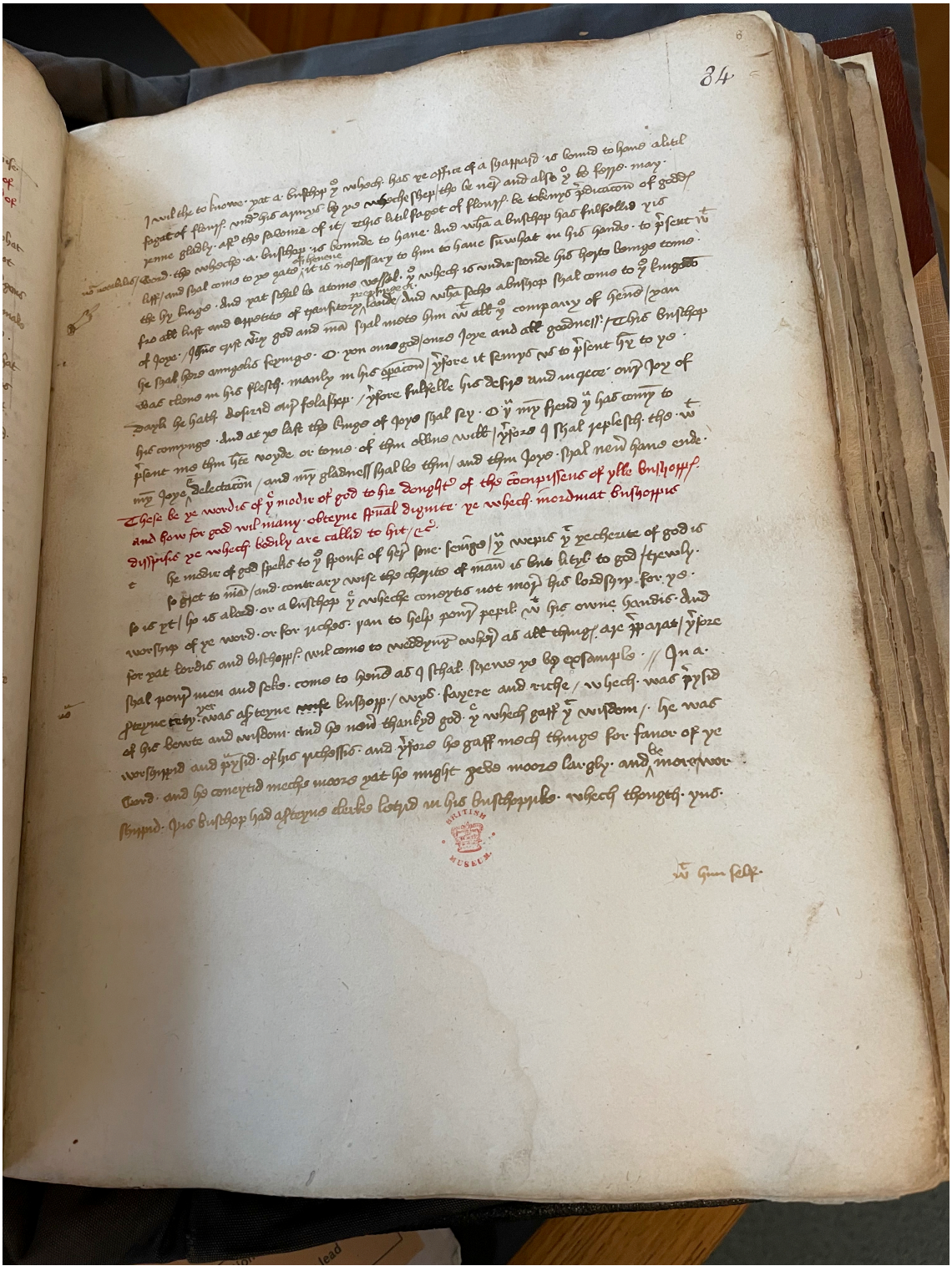


Figure 4: London, British Library, Cotton MS Julius F.ii, folio 84r. By permission of the British Library.

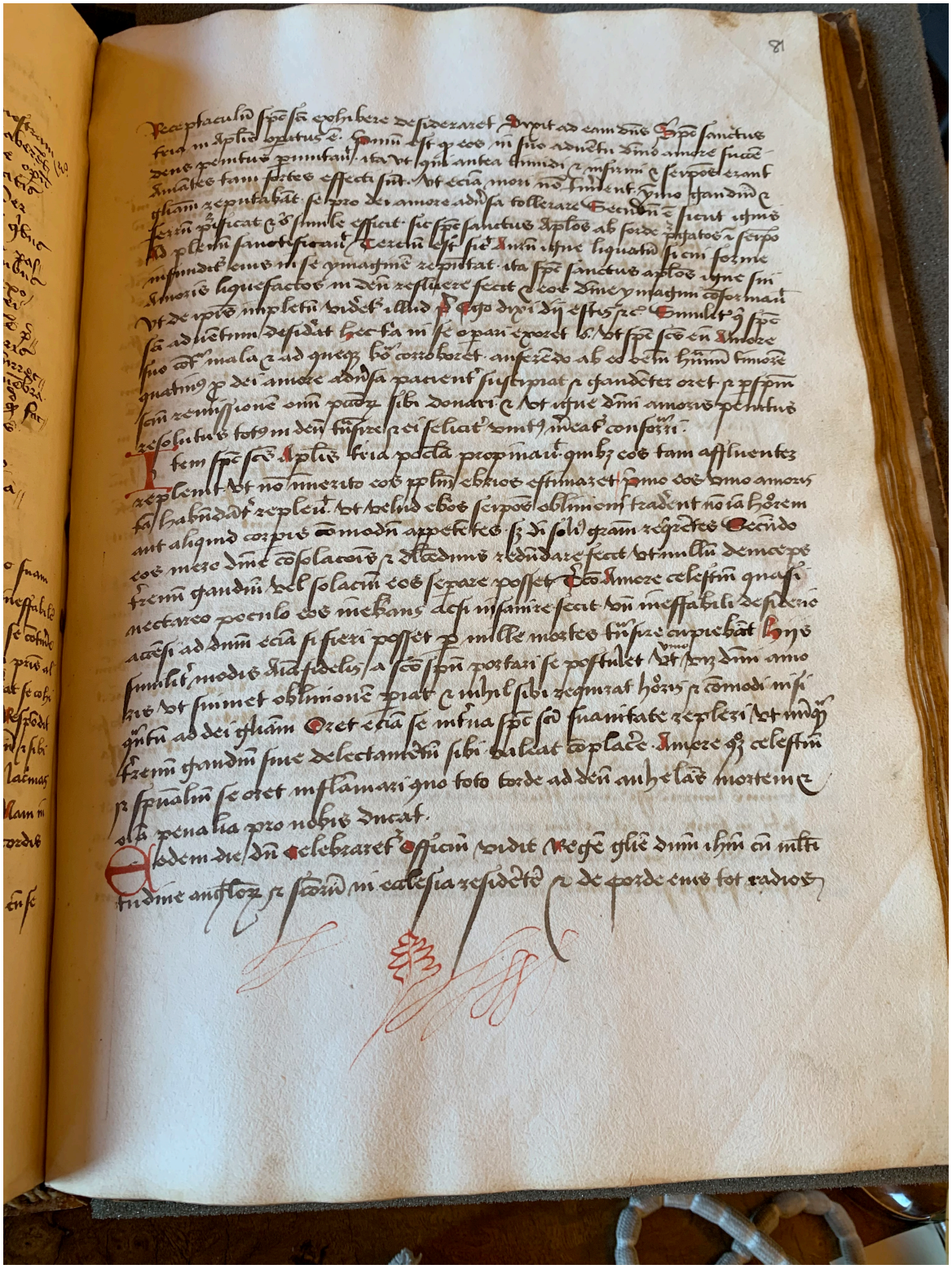


Figure 5: Oxford, Trinity College Library MS 32, folio 81r.

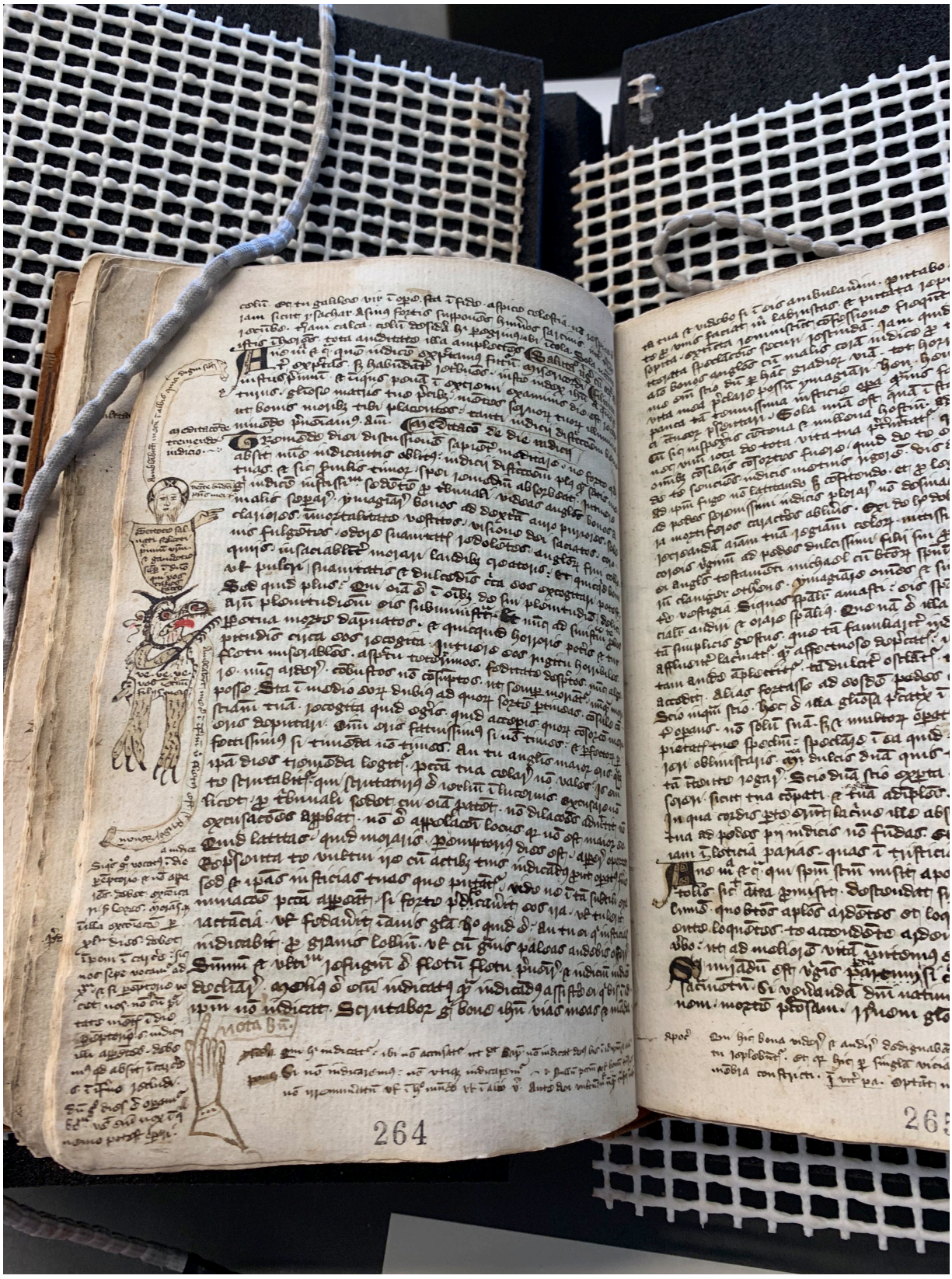


Figure 6: Dublin, Trinity College Library MS 277, page 264.

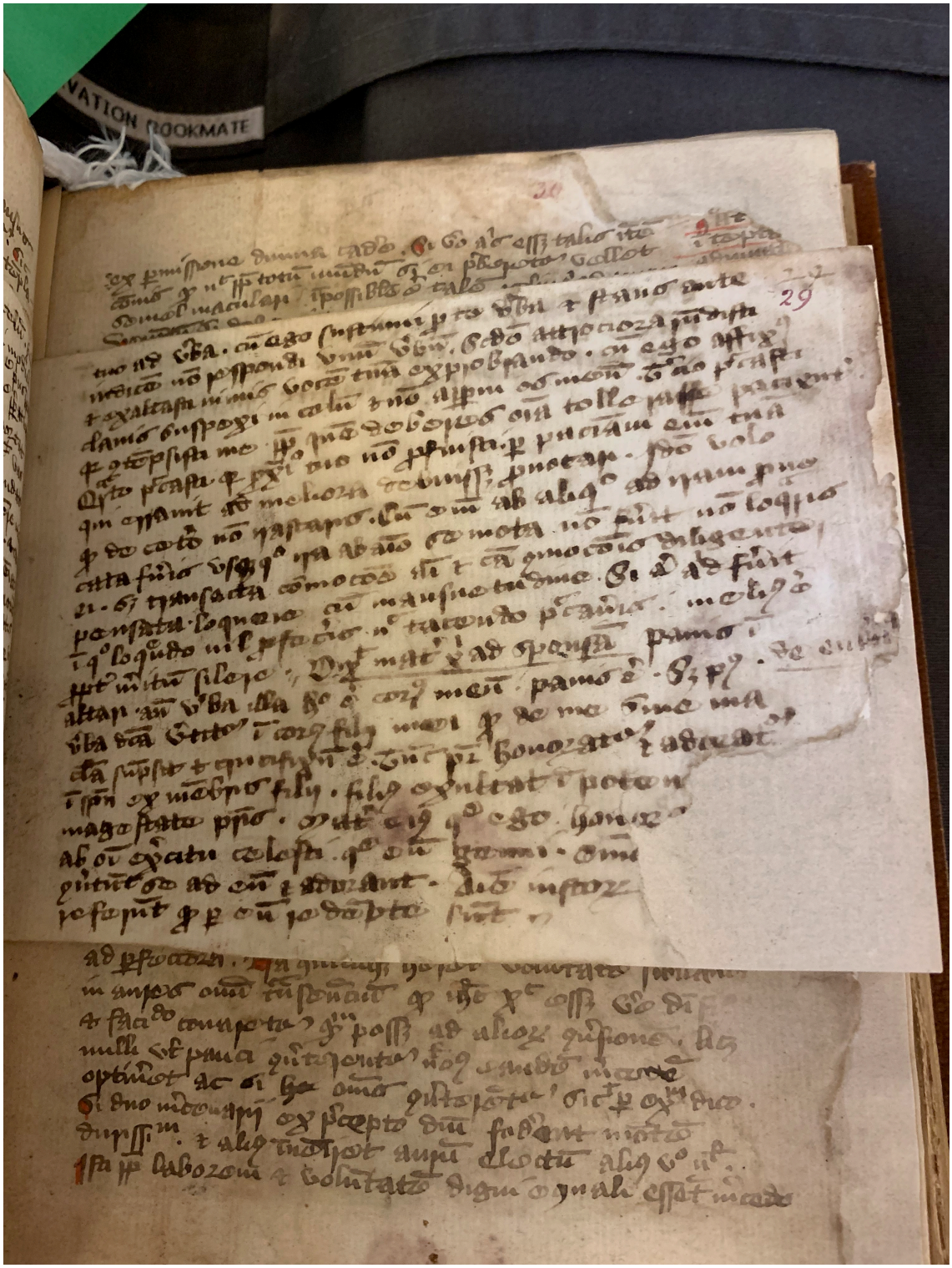


Figure 7: London, British Library, Sloane MS 982, folio 29r. By permission of the British Library.

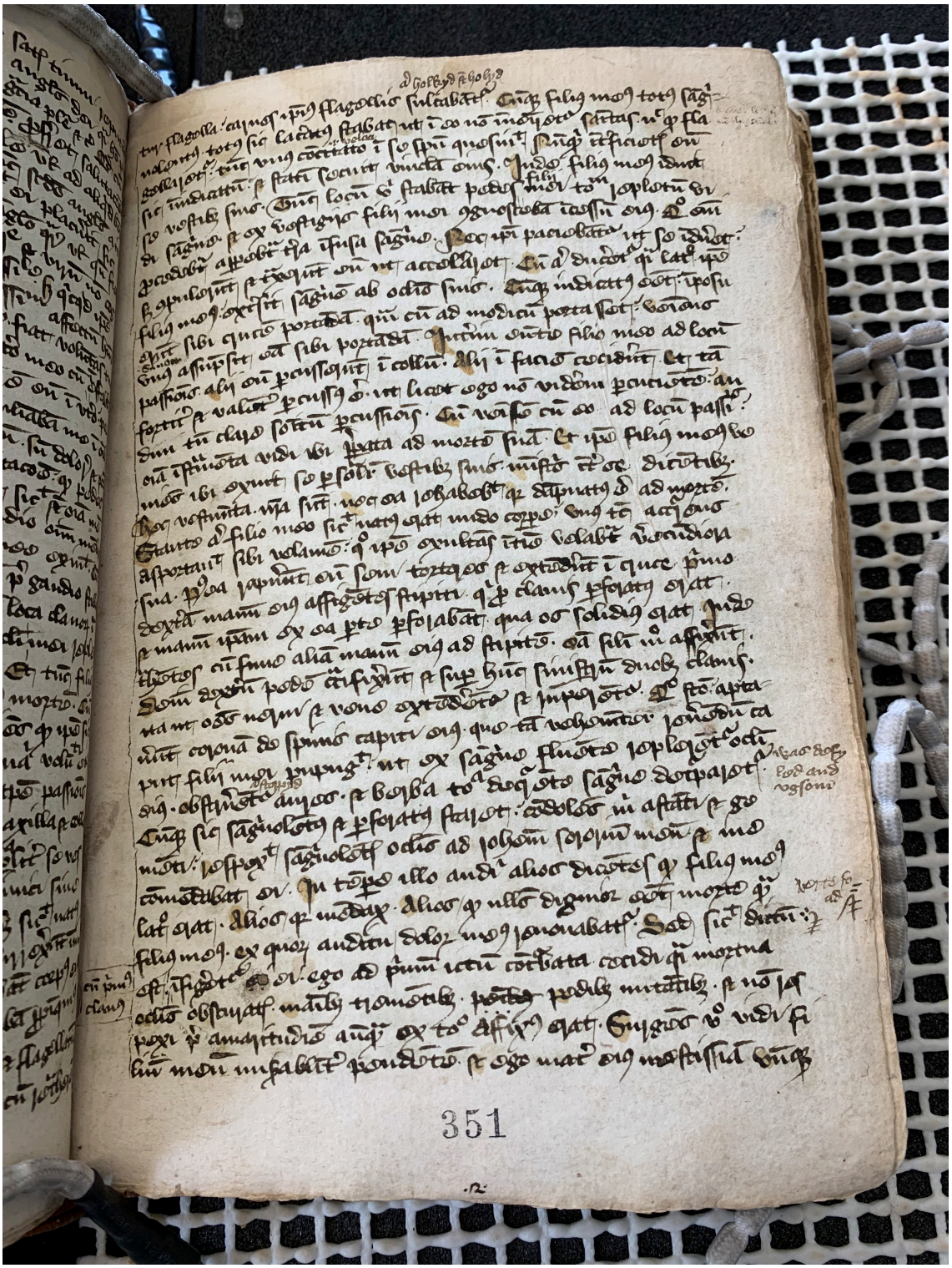


Figure 8: Dublin, Trinity College Library MS 277, page 351.

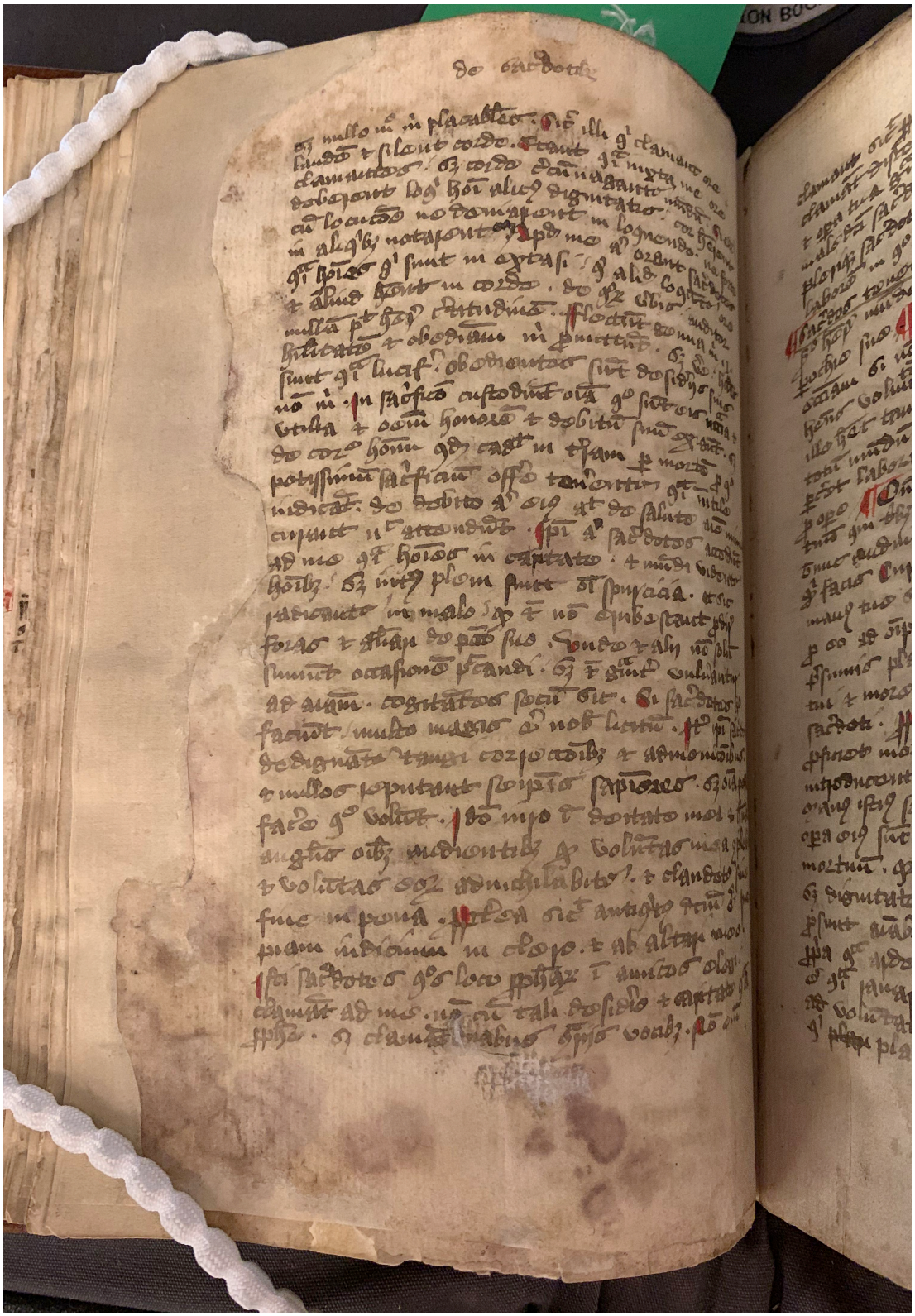


Figure 9: London, British Library, Sloane MS 982, folio 32v. By permission of the British Library.

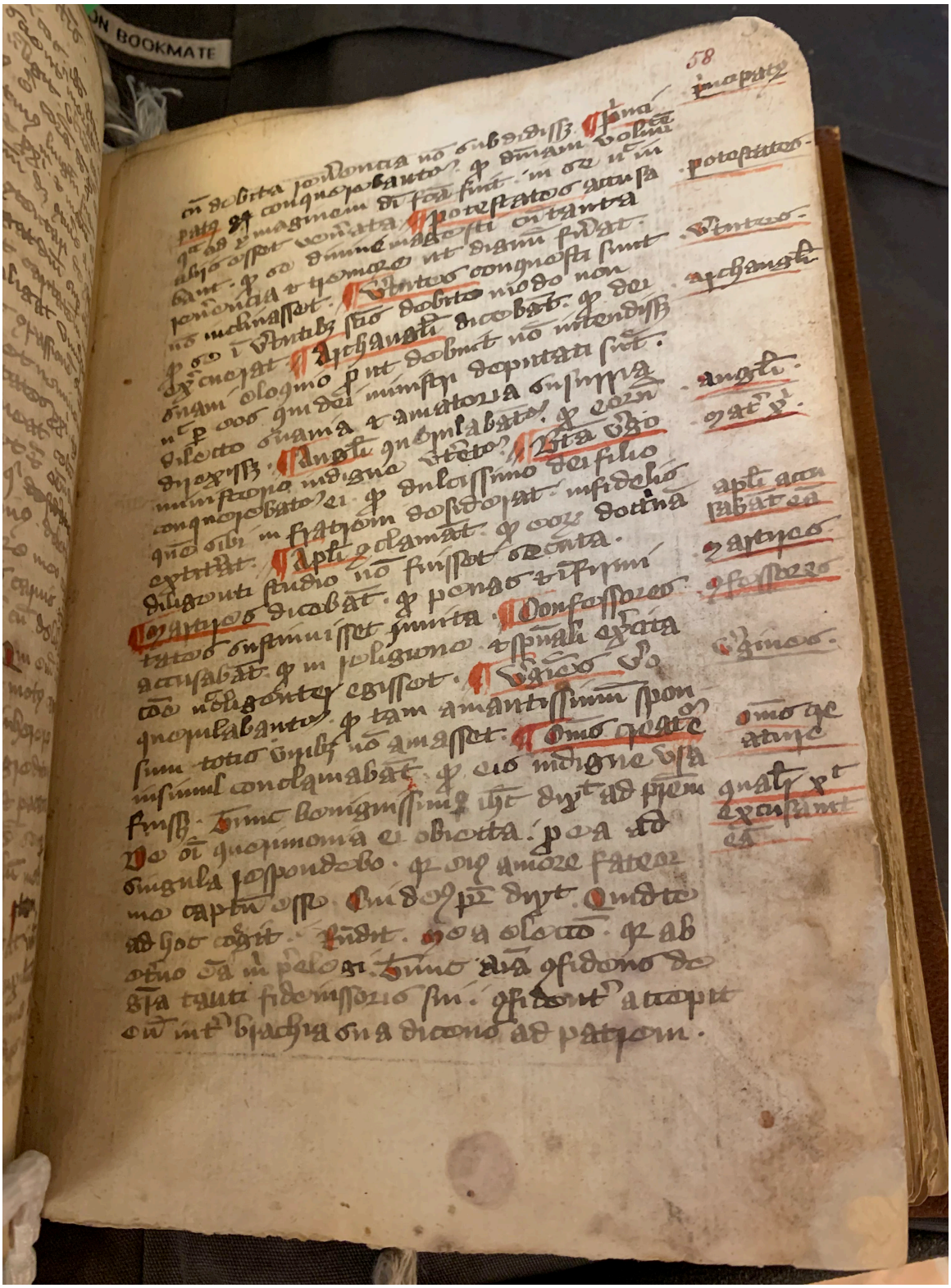


Figure 10: London, British Library, Sloane MS 982, folio 58r. By permission of the British Library.

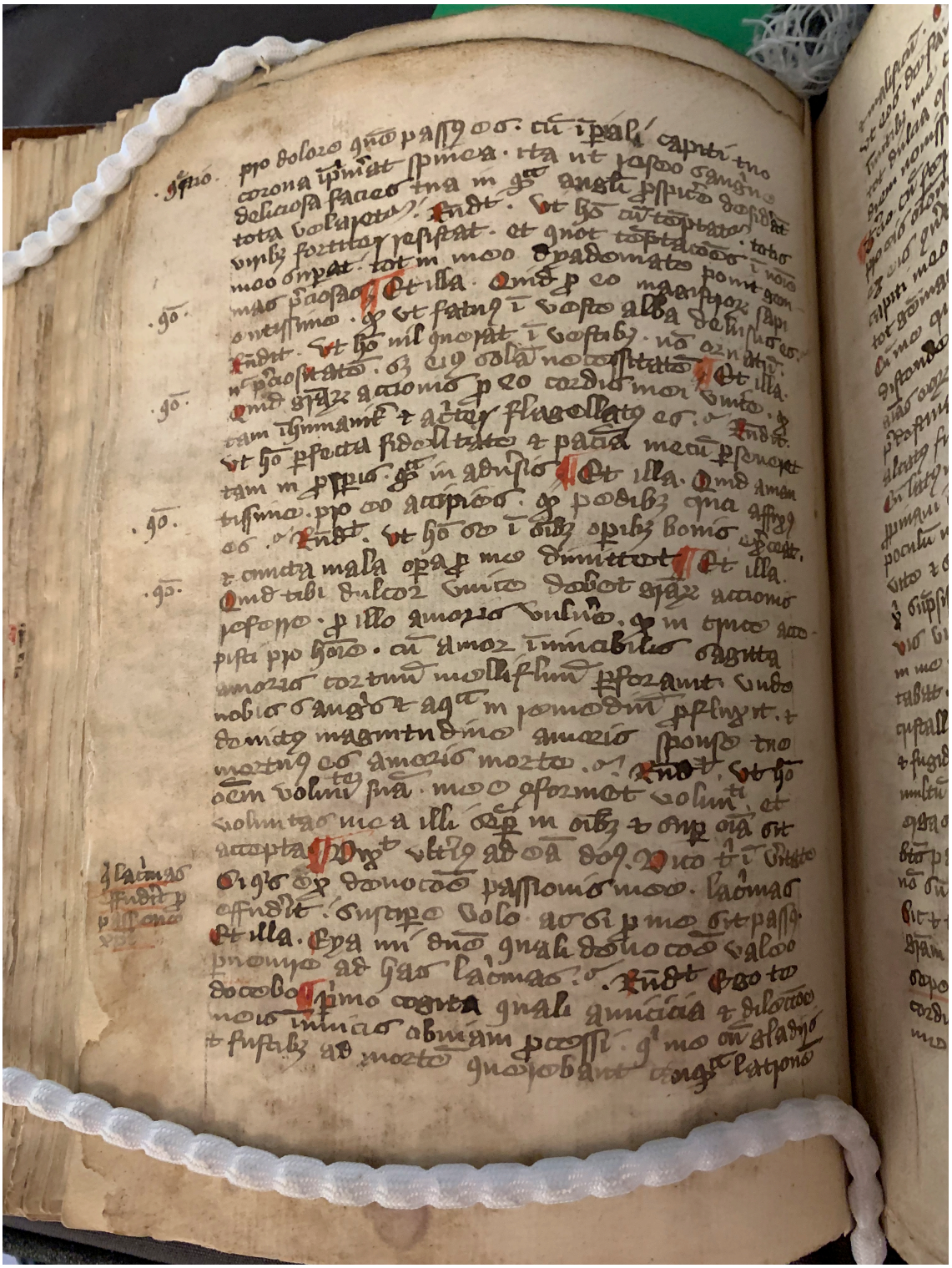


Figure 11: London, British Library, Sloane MS 982, folio 55v. By permission of the British Library.

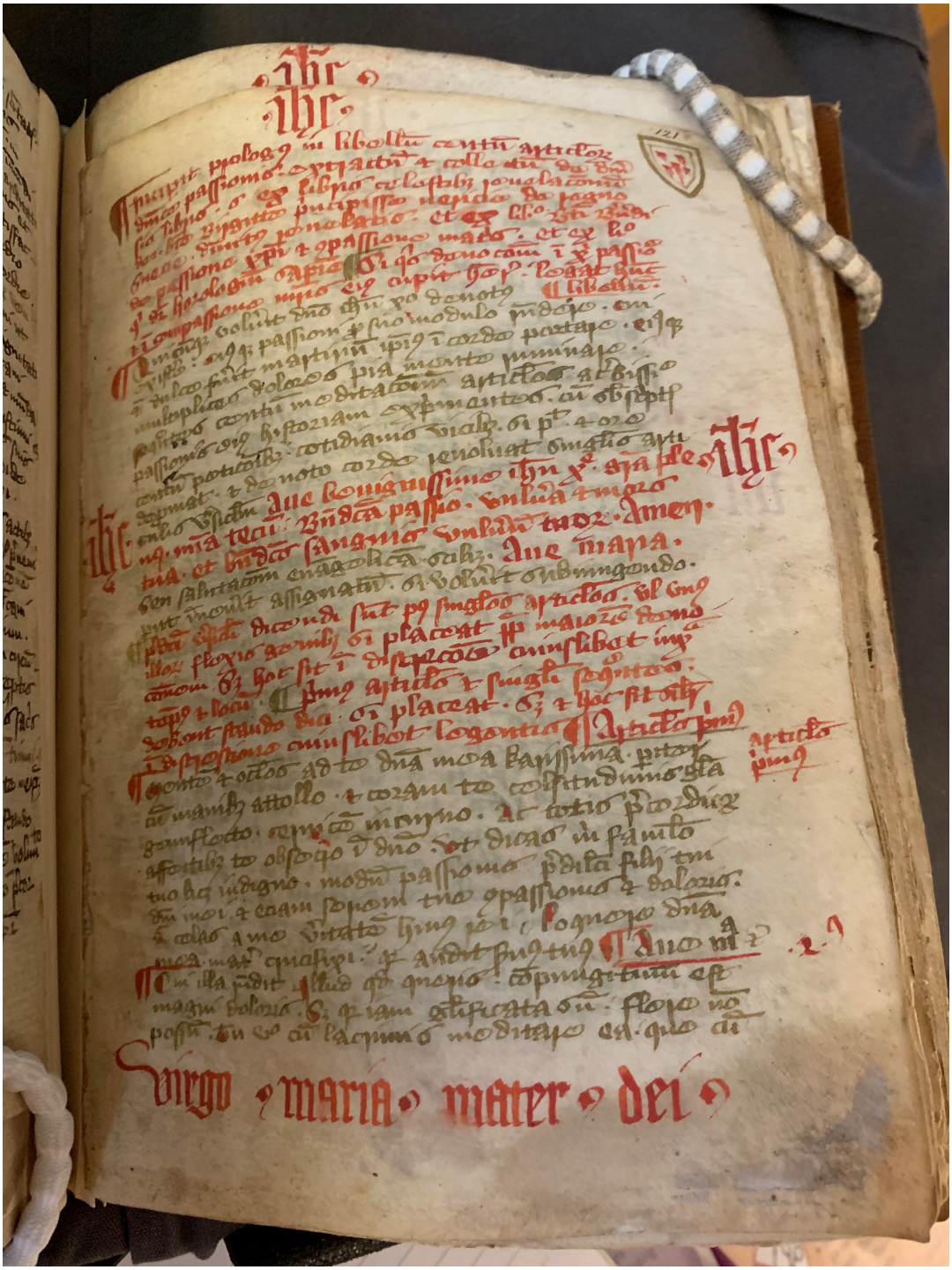


Figure 12: London, British Library, Sloane MS 982, folio 121r. By permission of the British Library.

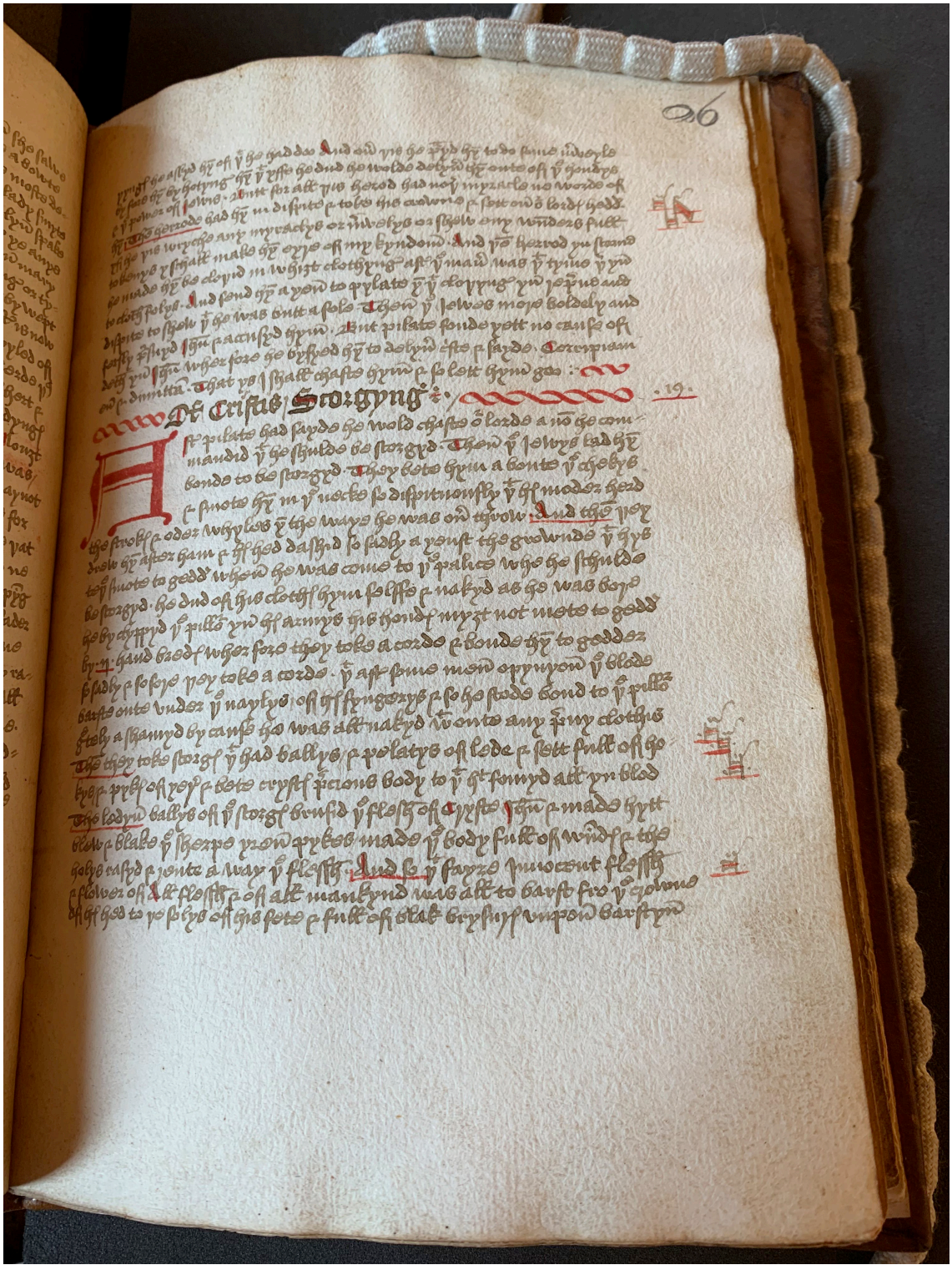


Figure 13: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 578, folio 26r.

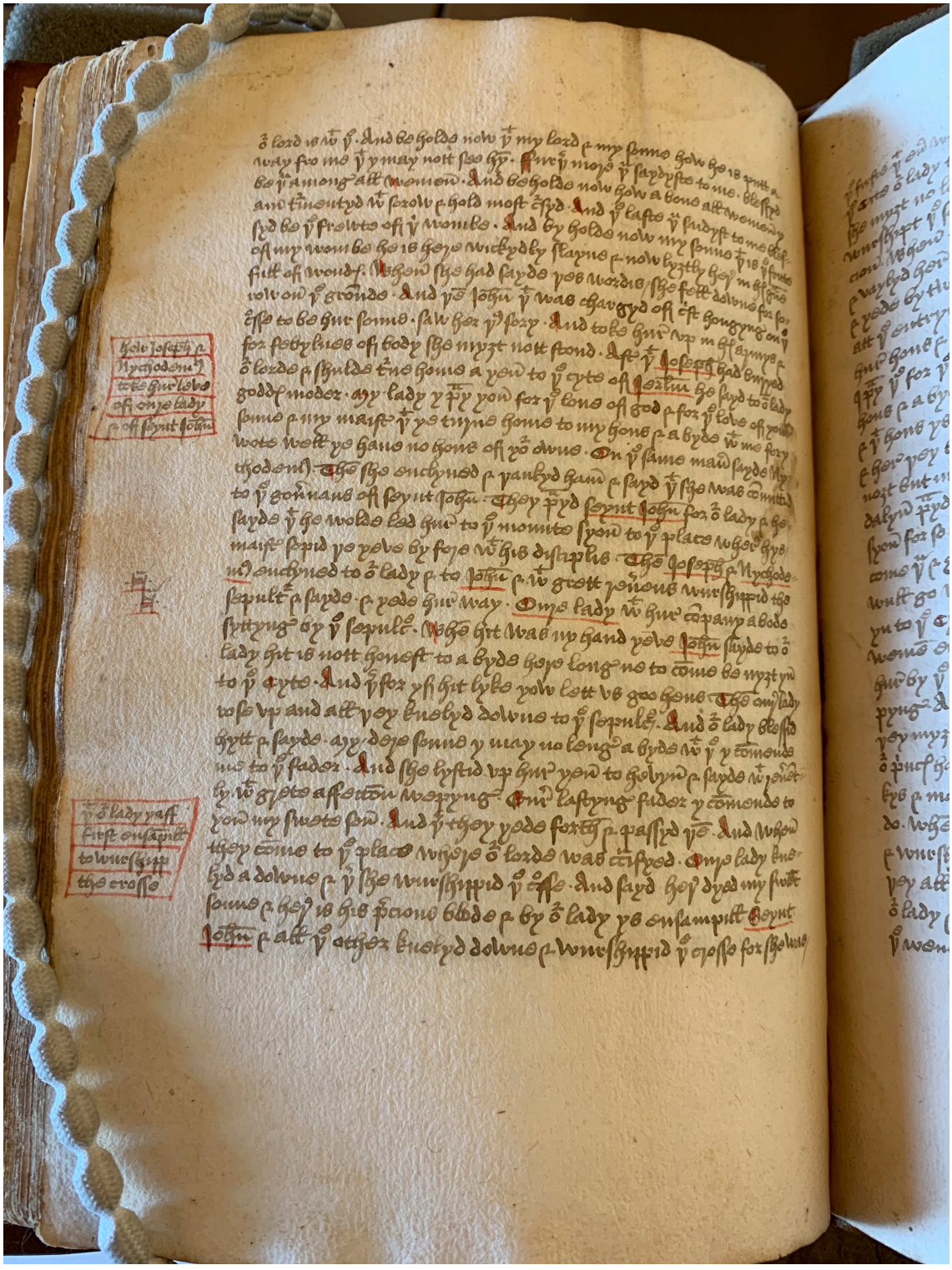


Figure 14: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 578, folio 36v.

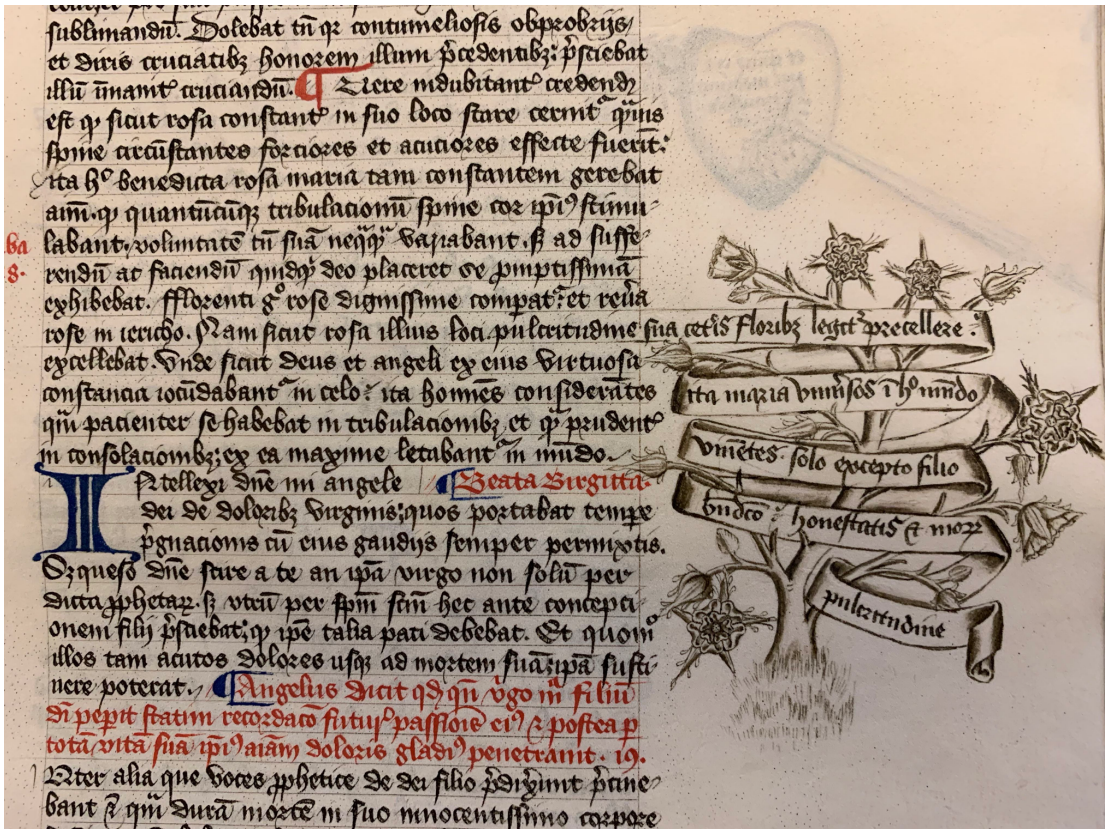


Figure 15: London, British Library, Harley MS 612, folio 141r. By permission of the British Library.

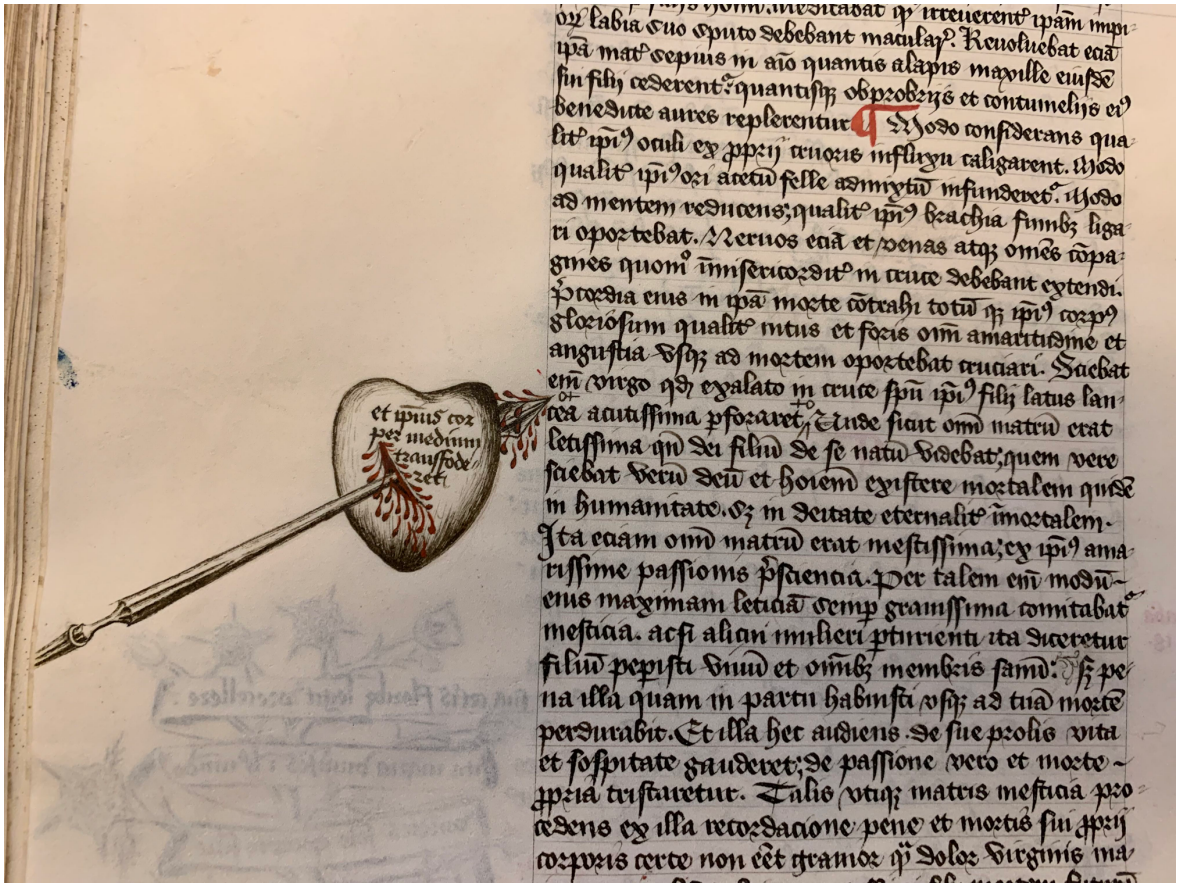


Figure 16: London, British Library, Harley MS 612, folio 141v. By permission of the British Library.

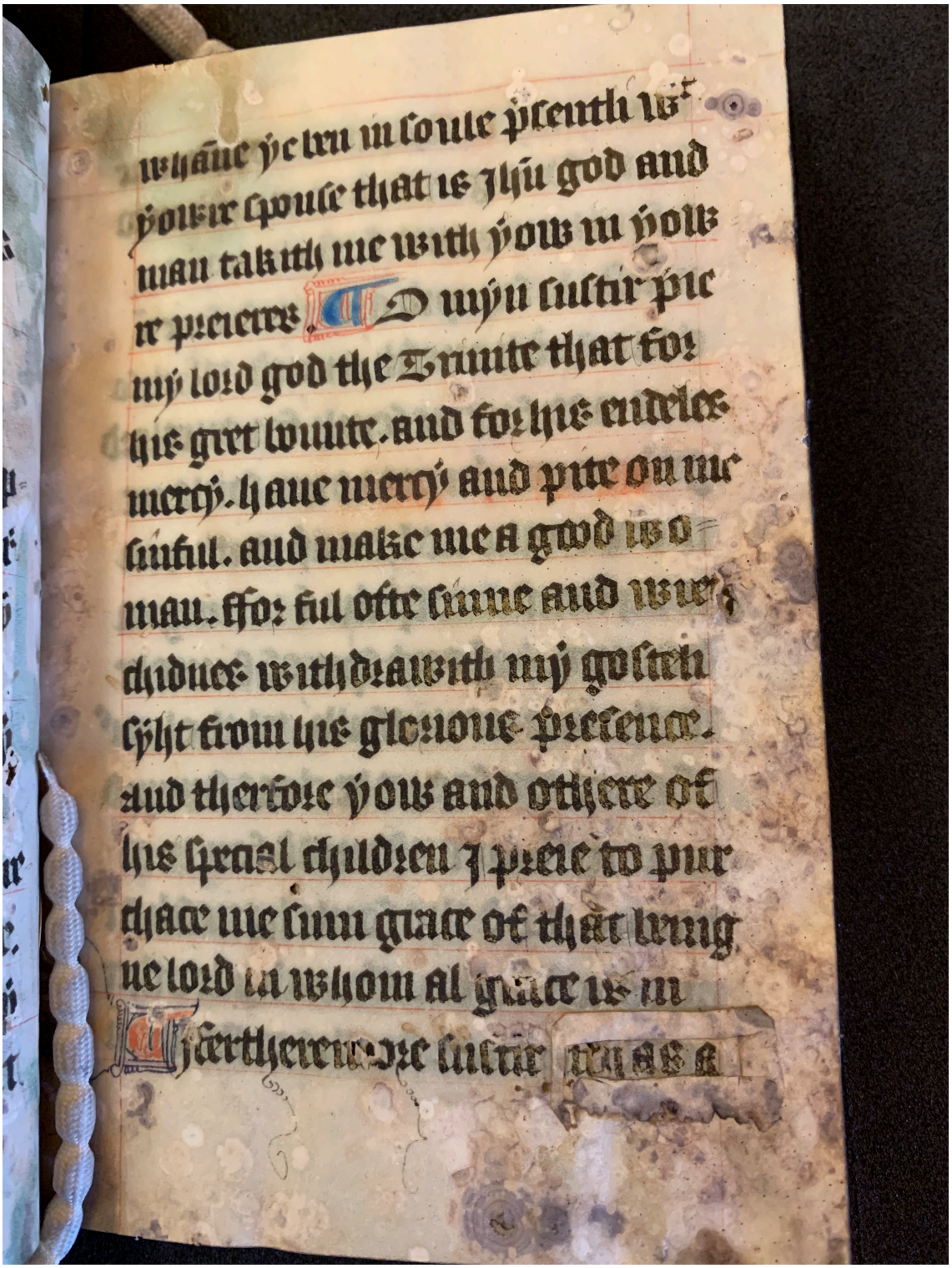


Figure 17: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Holkham Misc. 41, page 3.



Figure 18: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Holkham Misc. 41, page 1.

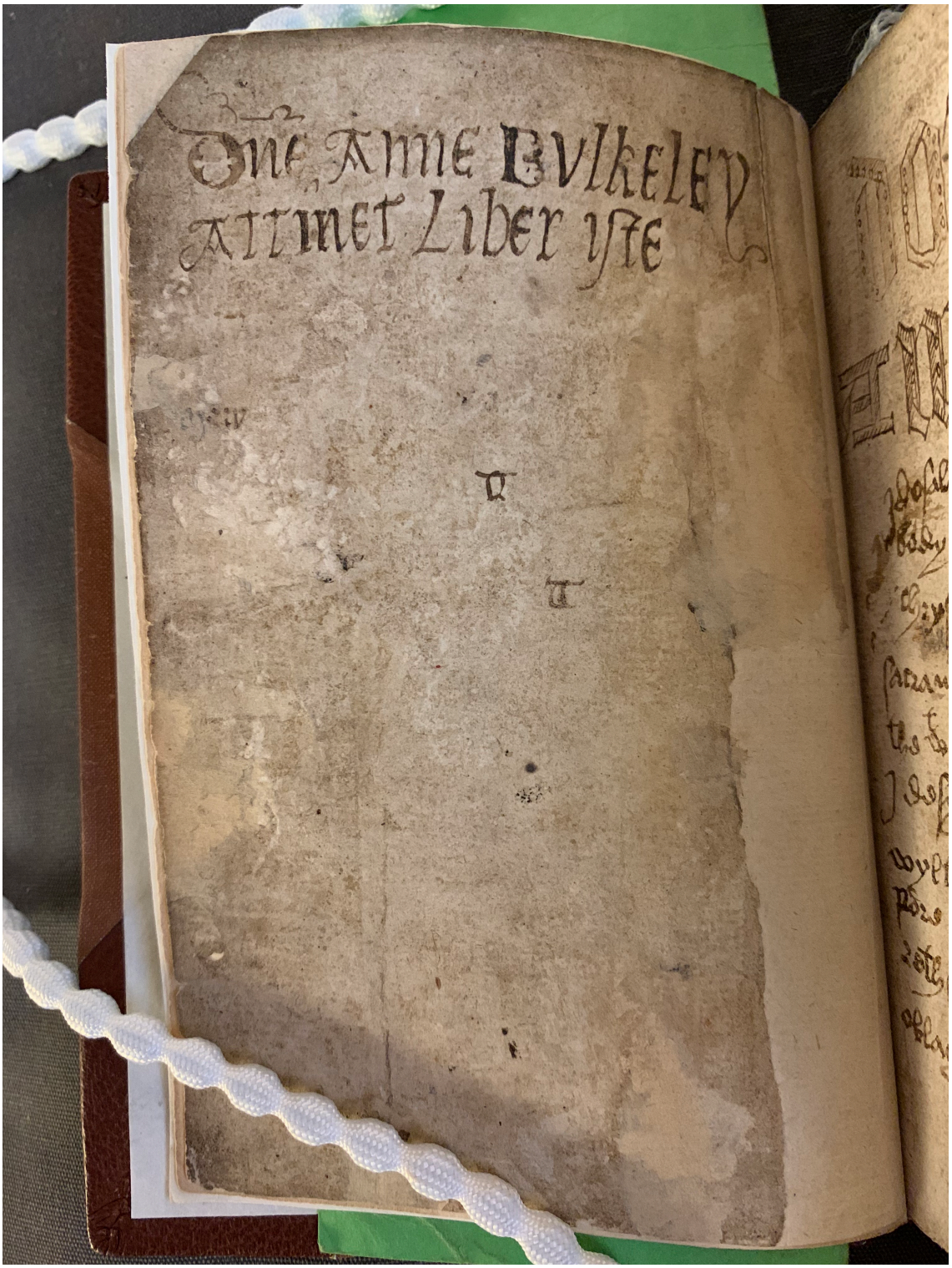


Figure 19: London, British Library, Harley MS 494, folio iv. By permission of the British Library.

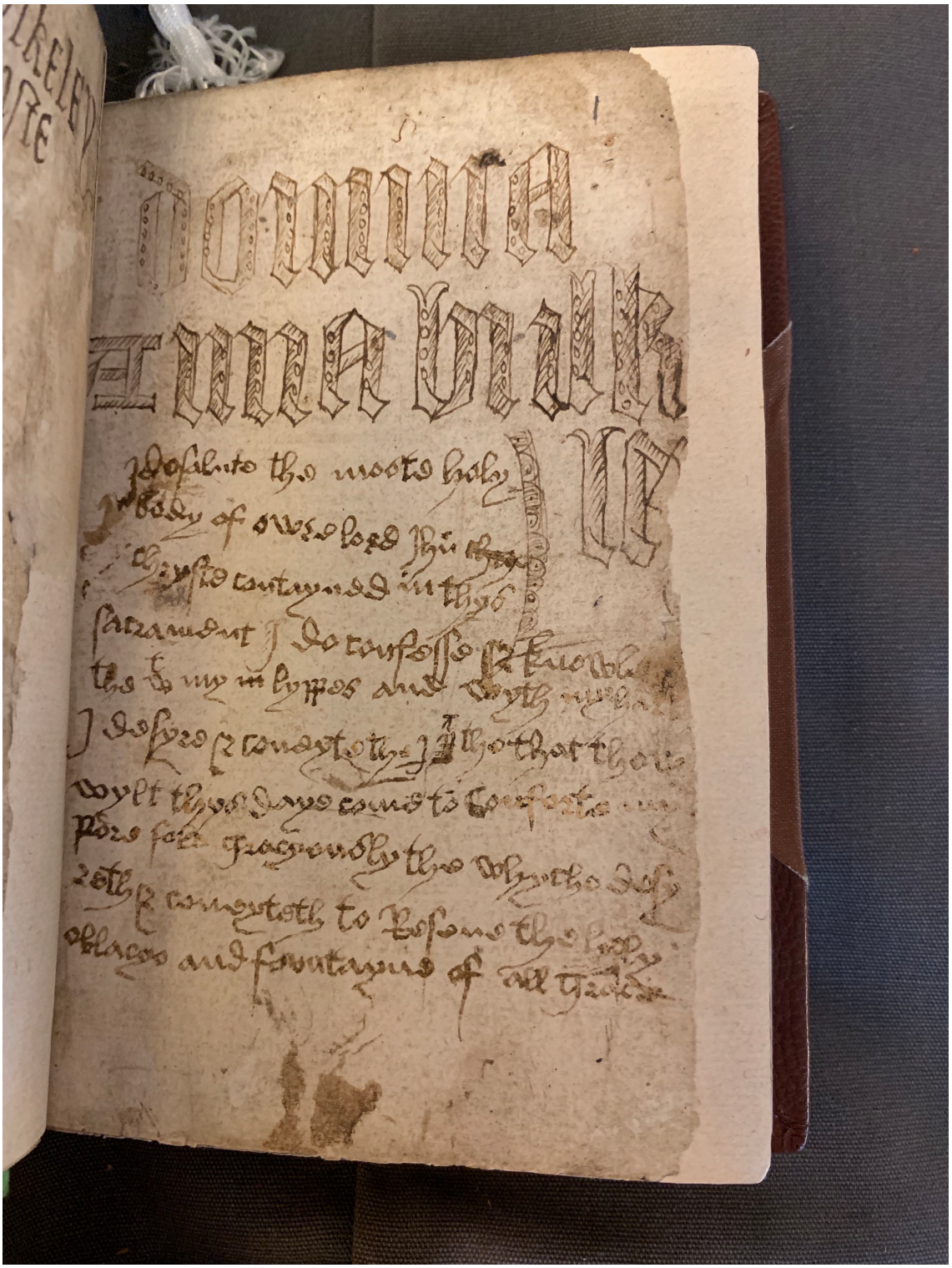


Figure 20: London, British Library, Harley MS 494, folio 1r. By permission of the British Library.

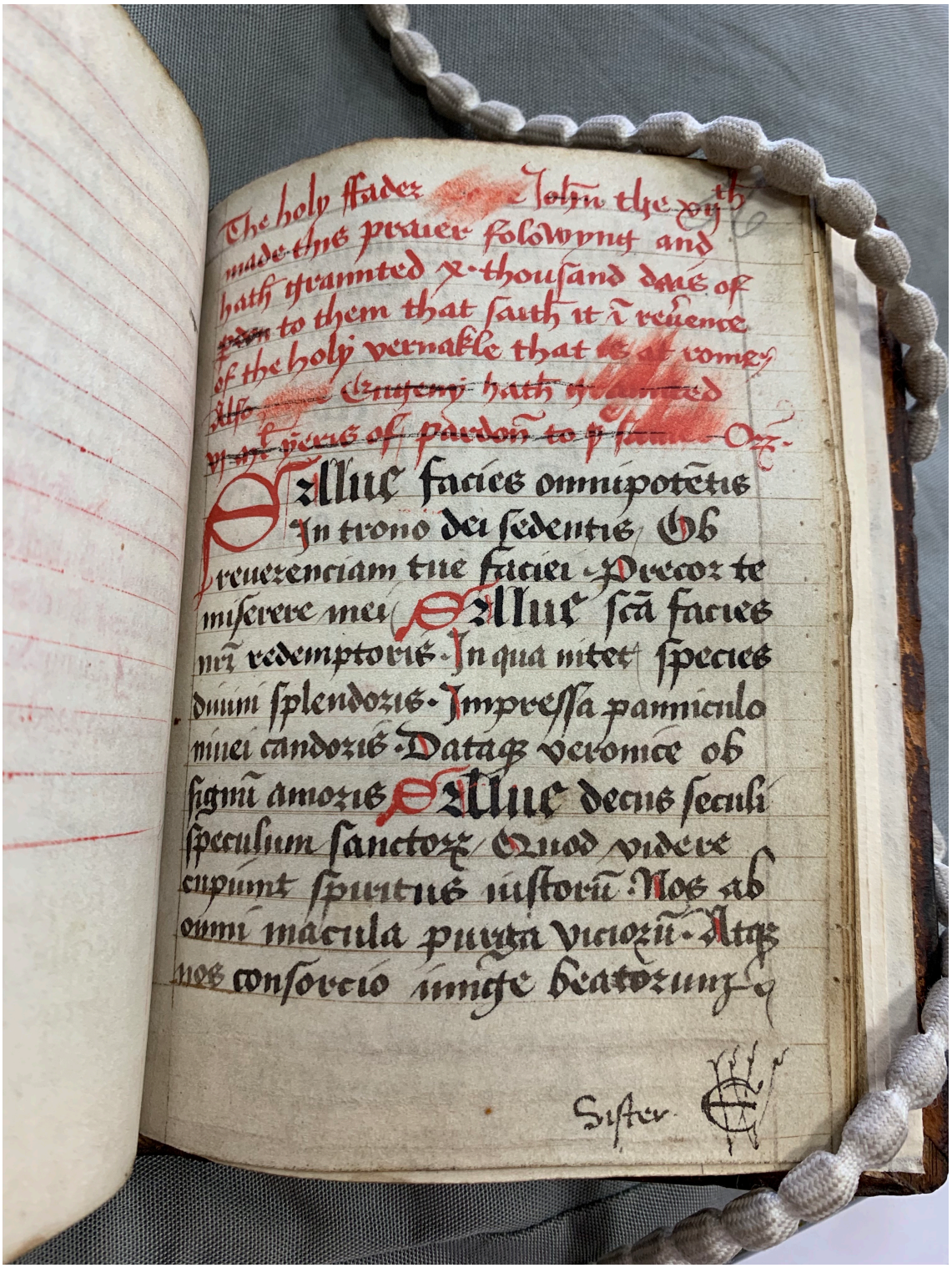


Figure 21: London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 546, folio 56r.

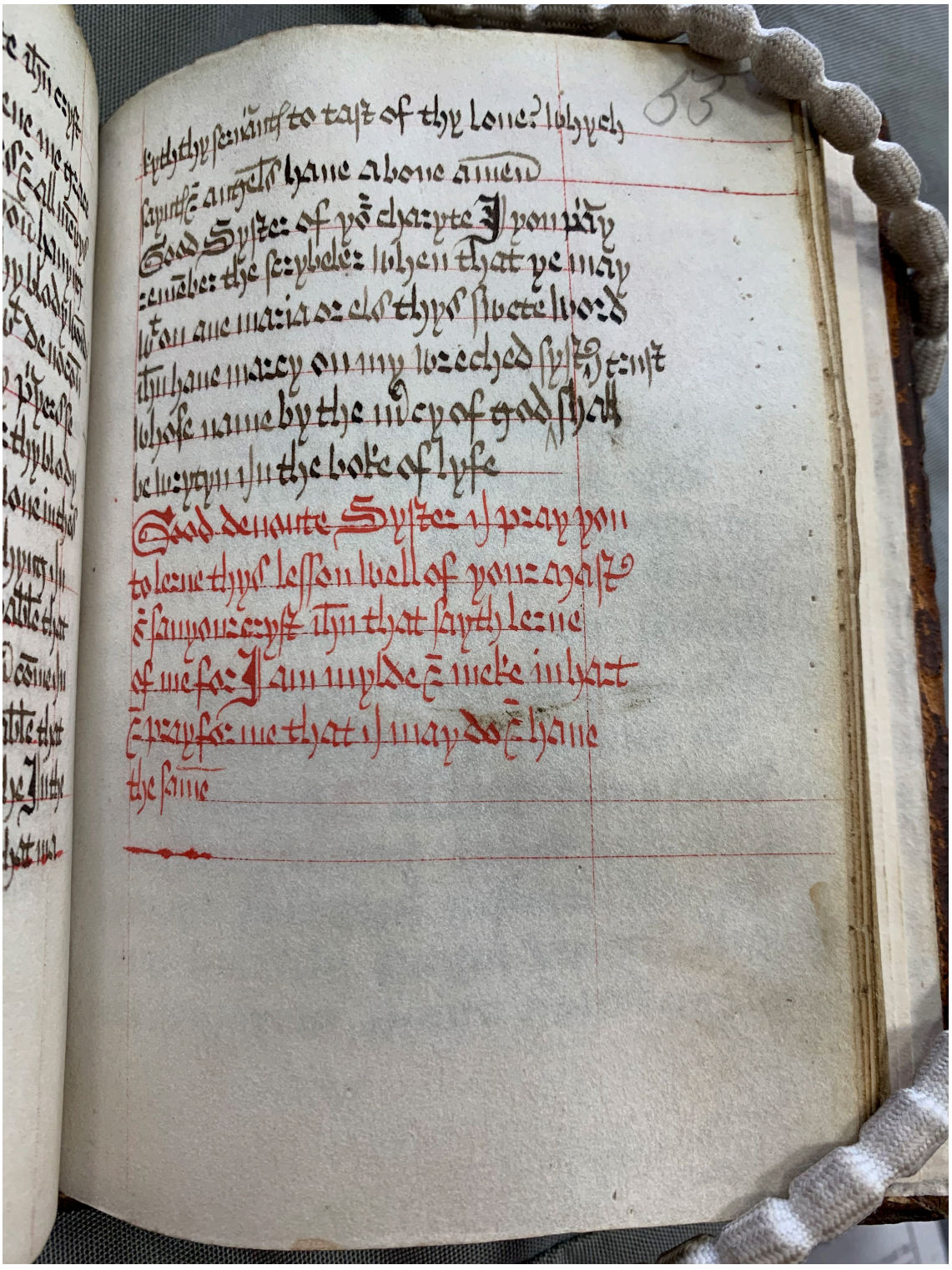


Figure 22: London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 546, folio 55r.

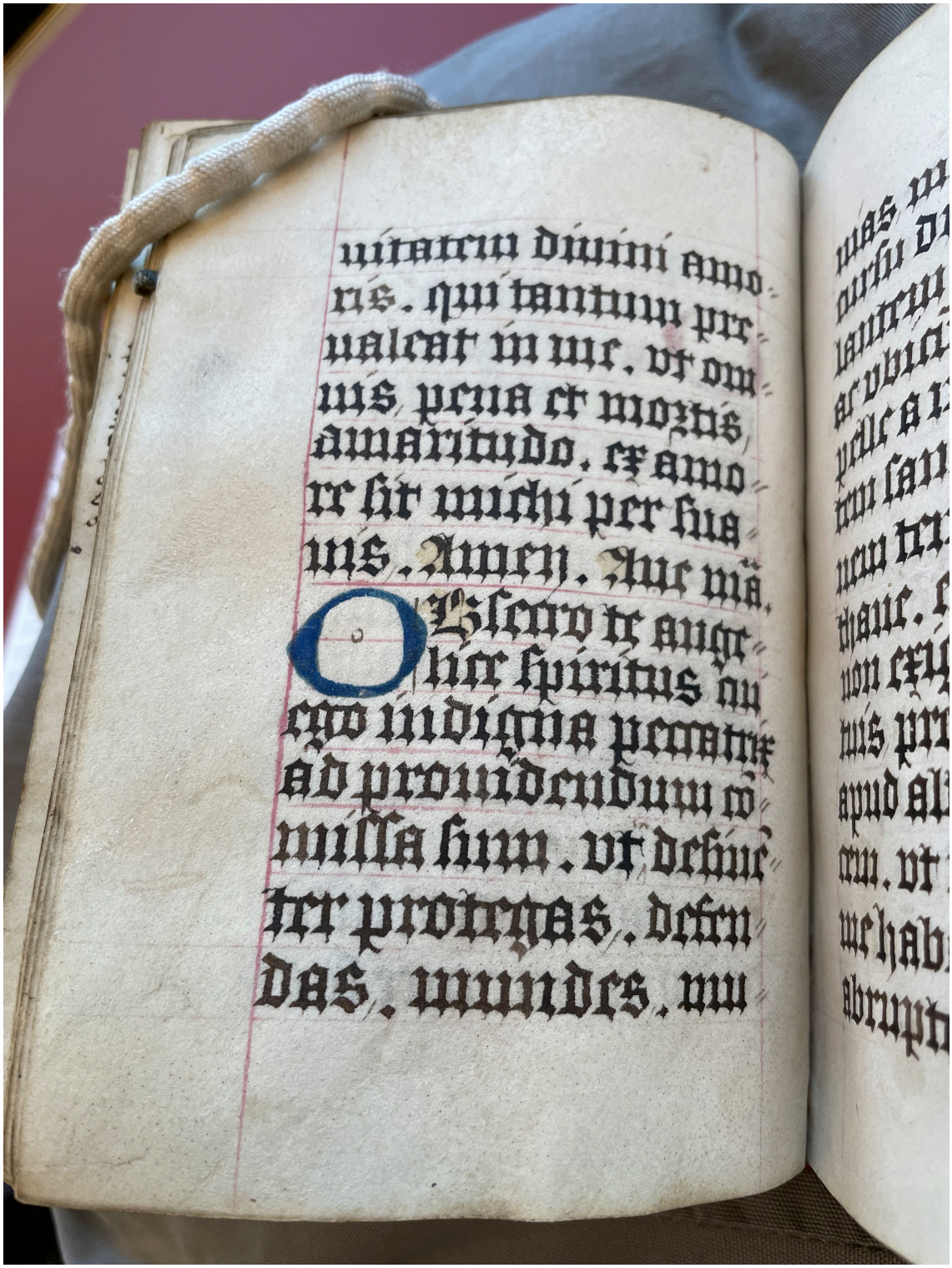


Figure 23: London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 3600, folio 70v.

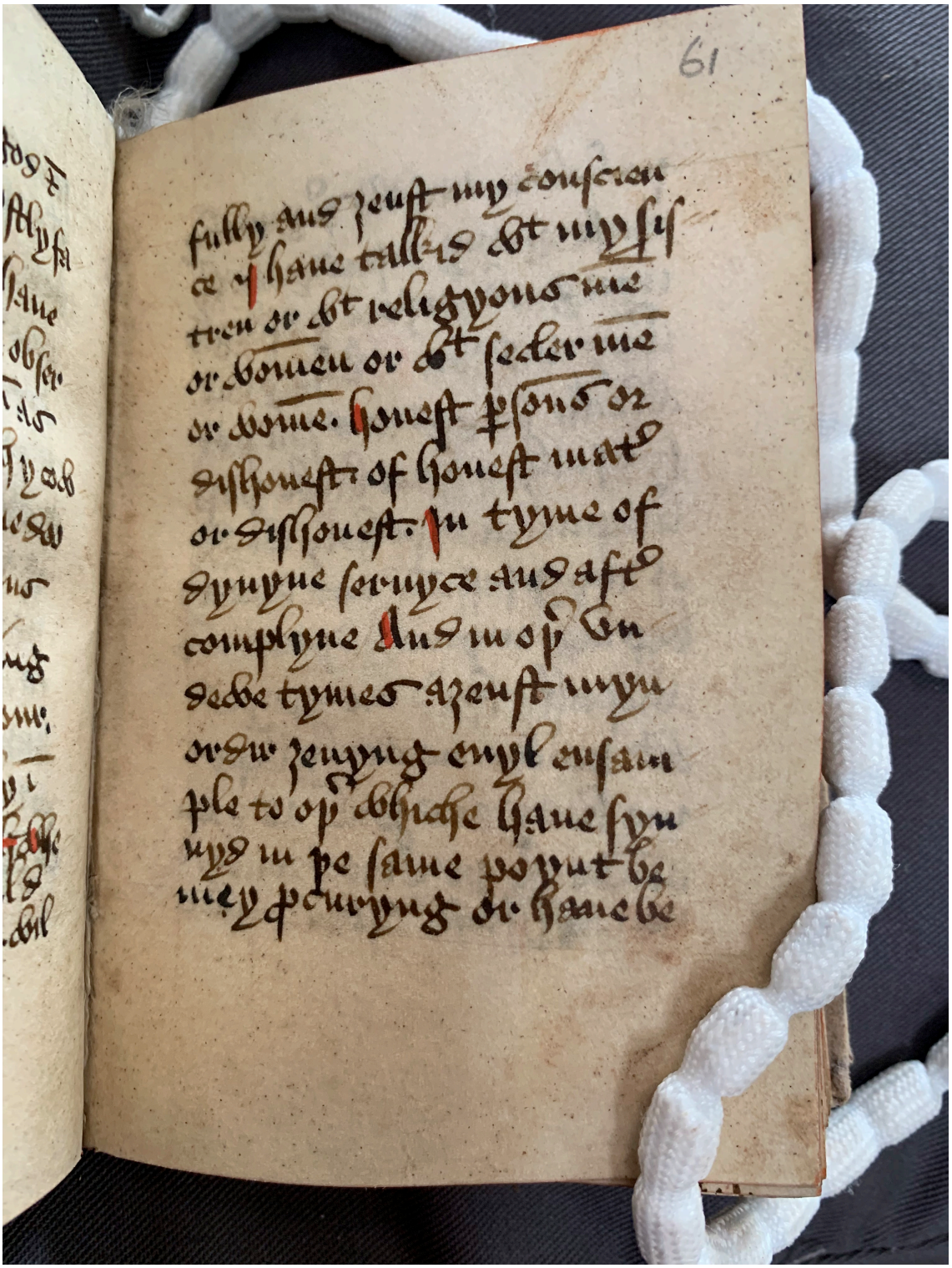
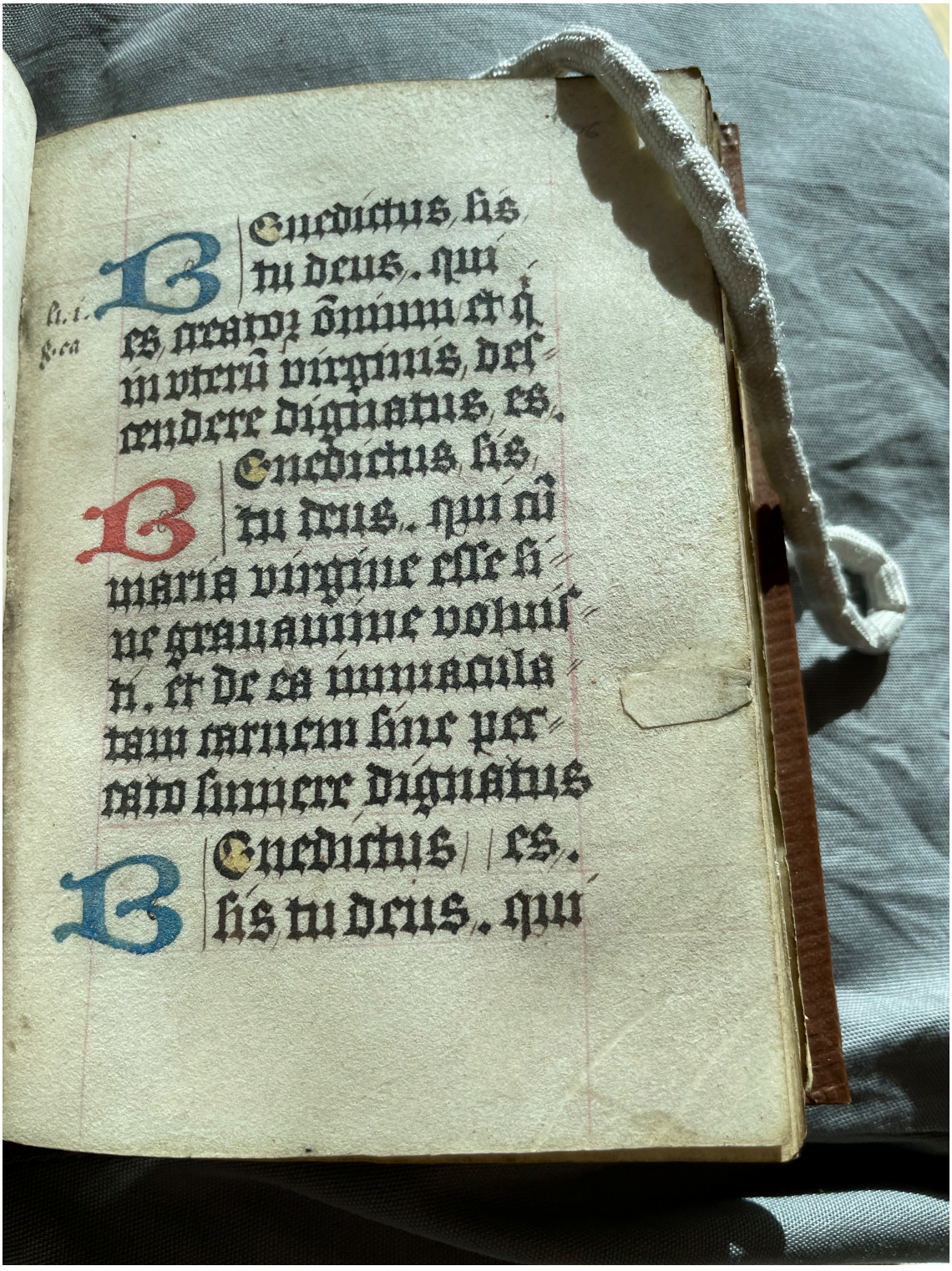


Figure 24: Cambridge, Trinity College Library MS O.1.74, folio 61r.



Benedictus es,
tu deus. qui
es creator omnium et q
in uteru virginis, dei
genere dignatus es.
Benedictus es,
tu deus. qui ut
maria virginie esse fe
ne gratiamine voluis
ti. et de ea immaculata
tam mirem hinc per
mo limere dignatus
Benedictus es.
Benedictus es tu deus. qui

Figure 25: London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 3600, folio 106r.

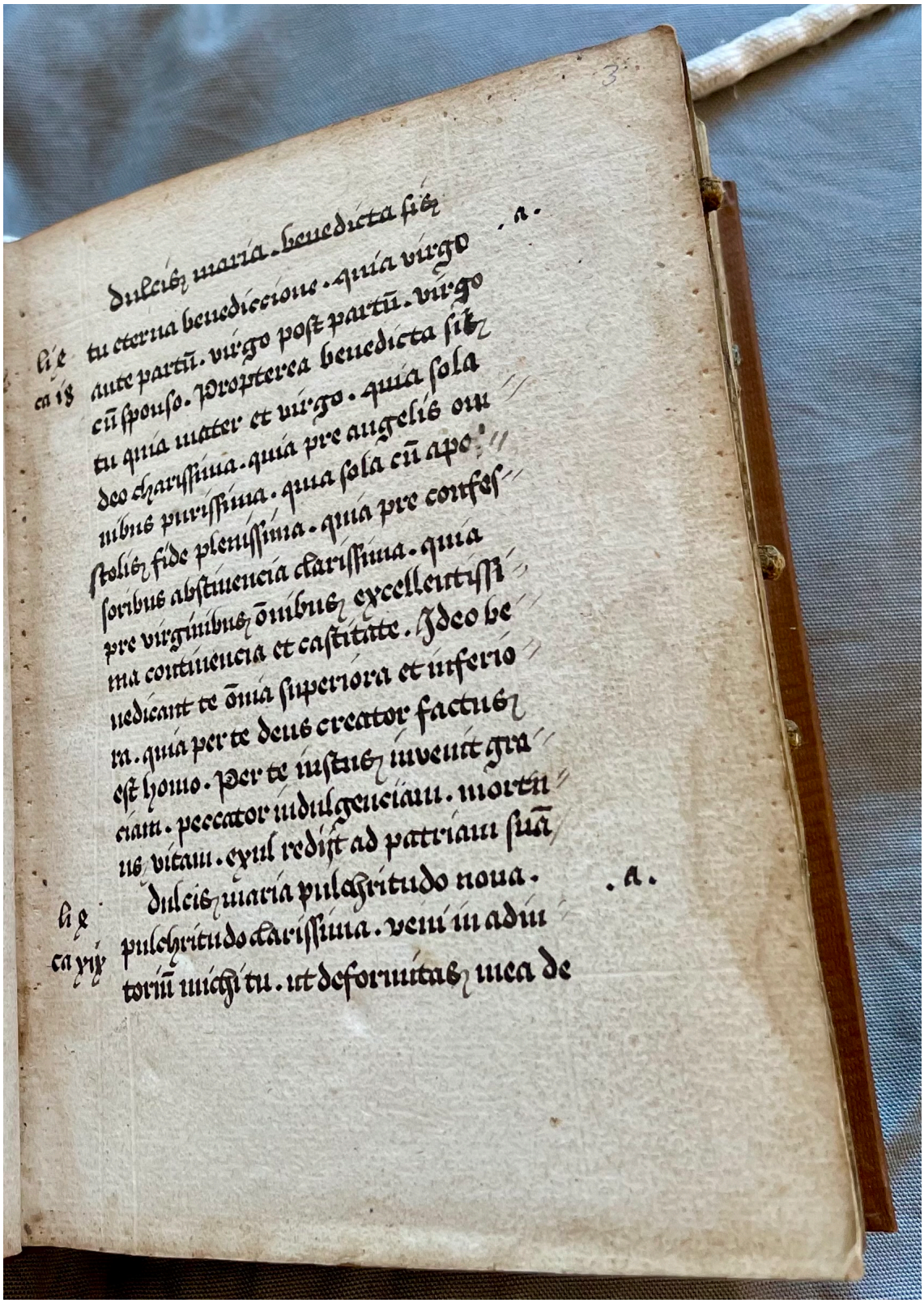


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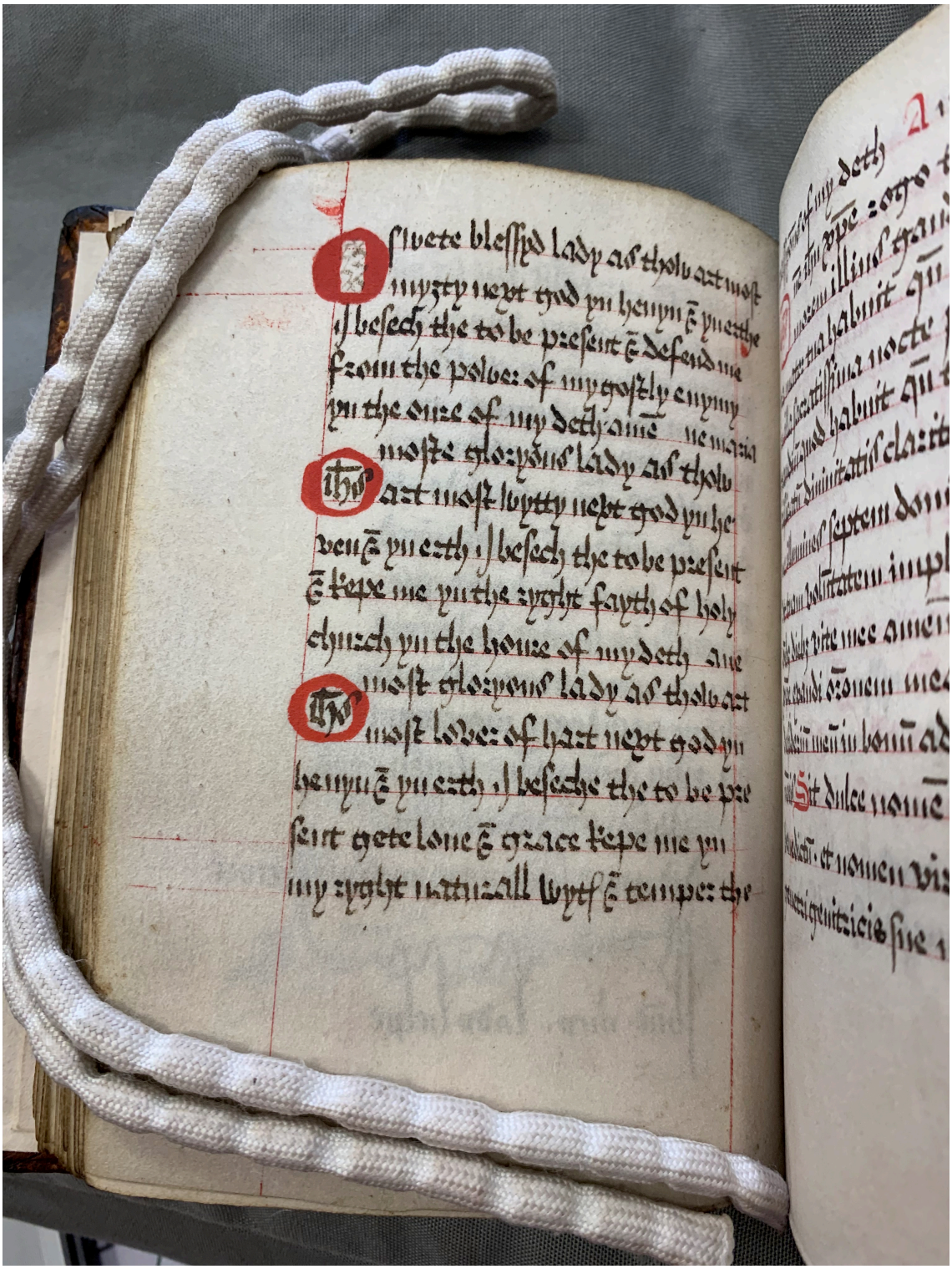


Figure 27: London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 546, folio 52v.

Vita

Caitlin J. Branum Thrash was born in Birmingham, Alabama. She attended Samford University, where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in English in 2014. She then went to Mississippi State University, earning a Master of Arts in English in 2016. She chose to attend the University of Tennessee, Knoxville for her Doctor of Philosophy in English with a Graduate Certificate in Medieval Studies. Her research interests include medieval religious and devotional literature, women's literature, feminism, manuscript studies, paleography, codicology, and Digital Humanities.