

# Heavenly choirs in early medieval England: A study of *topoi* in their contexts

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*For Boody, who taught me how to write.*

*(1932-2011)*

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## Abstract

This thesis tracks ideas about choirs of angels and righteous souls from their early manifestations in the Bible and late antique texts through to their ramifications in Anglo-Saxon and early Anglo-Norman England (up to 1116). It does so by tracing changes in *topoi*, commonplaces that form part of the fabric of visions, hagiographical narratives and ascetic guidance literature. Unlike previous studies that have examined *topoi*, the thesis both thoroughly scrutinises developments in commonplaces and situates them within their wider religious and cultural contexts. It therefore shows how *topoi* intersect with, and construct, ideas about salvation and eschatological reward. The argument also contributes to the field of angel studies and to discussions on heavenly song by examining nuances in the depiction of angelic worship and its perception in the early Middle Ages.

Of all the chapters in the thesis, the first is the broadest in focus: it poses the question of what it meant for spiritual beings to form a heavenly choir, and establishes the major themes and questions that will be pursued throughout the remainder of the study. Chapters two and three follow the developments in two of the *topoi* that are found most frequently in texts of the ascetic tradition – the conveyance of the soul to heaven by psychopomps, and the new song of the virgins. Chapter four, a case study of hagiographies produced at Canterbury in the late tenth and late eleventh centuries, examines the relationship between angelic and monastic choirs. The thesis as a whole illuminates the complexity and diversity of ideas about groups of celestial singers, shedding light on how writers adapted existing material in response to changing spiritual climates.

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## **Front matter**

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**Note to reader**

References in this thesis are formatted according to the guidelines in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition (Chicago; London: Chicago University Press, 2010).

In the footnotes, titles of works are usually followed by section number. Page numbers appear at the end of the citation and are only preceded by ‘p.’ or ‘pp.’ when extra clarity is required.

All translations are my own unless otherwise stated. Key words and phrases in the original language of the quotation are given when needed. They are placed in round brackets following a short quotation and square brackets when they appear within a longer quotation. In cases where an entire passage is relevant to the argument, I have given it in full as a block quotation.

Quotations from the Bible are taken from the Revised Standard Version, accessed online at Bible Gateway (<https://www.biblegateway.com/>). Hebrew Psalm numbering is adopted throughout.

**List of abbreviations**

<i>Acta SS.</i>	<i>Acta Sanctorum quotquot in orbe coluntur</i> . Edited by J. Bolland <i>et al.</i> 67 vols. Antwerp and Brussels: 1643—
<i>BHL</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina</i> . Subsidia Hagiographica 6. Brussels: 1898-1901, with supplements in 1992 and 1986. Cited by item number.
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i> . Turnhout: Brepols, 1954—
CUP	Cambridge University Press
EETS	Early English Texts Society
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
OUP	Oxford University Press
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca</i> . Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 161 vols. Paris: Garnier, 1857-66
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina</i> . Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 221 vols. Paris: Garnier, 1844-64

## General introduction

The everlasting song of the celestial hosts is an enduring feature of Christian depictions of heaven. In countless texts and images from the inception of Christianity up to the present day, multitudes of spirits sing in worship of the Lord at the Final Judgement, angels mingle their voices with the liturgical praises of the world below, and the souls of the perfect are transported to the supernal concert before their bodies can even grow cold. In the *Elucidarium*, the writer known as Honorius Augustodunensis (d. *circa* 1140) appeals to the five senses in his effusive description of the joys of the saints in heaven.<sup>1</sup> The pleasure of celestial sound appears second on his list:

Oh how delightful it is to hear the singing of the angels [and]  
the sweet-sounding melodies of all the saints, from which the  
harmonies of the heavens ceaselessly resound! (O qualis  
voluptas auditus illorum, quibus incessanter sonabunt  
harmoniae coelorum, concentus angelorum, dulcisona organa  
omnium sanctorum!)<sup>2</sup>

There appears to be nothing in Honorius' portrayal of the heavenly harmonies that allows us to date it to the turn of the twelfth century.<sup>3</sup> The apparent lack of historical specificity is partly due to the nature of the *Elucidarium*, a work that summarises and simplifies patristic and early medieval theology, but it is also due to the subject matter – Honorius' representation of the eternal heavenly concert is

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<sup>1</sup> "Honorius Augustodunensis (d. c.1140)," Valerie I. J. Flint in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/53485> (accessed May 13, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Honorius Augustodunensis, *Elucidarium* 3.19 (PL 172: 1172B).

<sup>3</sup> Valerie Flint discusses the dating of the *Elucidarium* (also referred to as *Elucidarius*) in "The Chronology of the Works of Honorius Augustodunensis," *Revue bénédictine* 82 (1972): 219-20, and "The *Elucidarius* of Honorius Augustodunensis and Reform in Late Eleventh Century England," *Revue bénédictine* 85 (1975): 179, reprinted in *Ideas in the Medieval West: Texts and their Contexts* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1988).

one commonplace among the many that abound in medieval texts.<sup>4</sup> Historians and literary critics have not paid sustained attention to these commonplaces. After all, how can one write a history of a motif – something that seems so pervasive, unchanging and decorative – or a piece of literary criticism on a figure so conventional? This thesis, however, contends that *topoi* of heavenly choirs were neither static nor merely rhetorical. It argues that they changed over time and, moreover, played a vital part in the construction of ideas about the perception of holiness and participation in the society of the elect in early medieval England.

Heavenly choirs can be narrowly defined as groups of celestial worshippers (angels and/or the righteous) that sing in praise of the Lord. Angels may be subdivided into different orders (including seraphim and cherubim), whilst categories of saints (for instance, patriarchs) may be distinguished among the righteous. Angels and the righteous have long been of interest to scholars. S.G.F. Brandon's short history of the idea of angels, published in the early 1960s, approached the subject from the perspective of comparative religion, exploring the Christian inheritance of ideas and imagery from Judaism, and Roman polytheism.<sup>5</sup> Brandon's account begins with a reference to the Sanctus of the Christian liturgy, but the article as a whole lacks detailed discussion of heavenly worship. Erik Peterson's *Angels and the Liturgy* appeared in the following year, and provided a starting point for future discussion of the earthly and heavenly liturgies.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the strength of Peterson's analysis is undermined by misreadings of Revelation and misconceptions about early Judaism.<sup>7</sup> Despite its flaws, *Angels and the Liturgy* was one of the pieces of criticism that informed the careful and concise inaugural lecture delivered in 1997 by Henry Mayr-Harting, in which he developed

<sup>4</sup> The same point has been made by C.M. Woolgar in *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2006): '[t]he sounds of Heaven were as familiar as the sounds of Hell: the choirs of saints and angels, the sweetness of melody. These were a commonplace of medieval visions and devotions' (p. 77).

<sup>5</sup> S.G.F. Brandon, "Angels: The History of an Idea," *History Today* 13 (1963): 655-65.

<sup>6</sup> Erik Peterson, *The Angels and the Liturgy* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964).

<sup>7</sup> See chapter one, section 3.1.

the idea of angels as contemplative creatures. In particular, he argued that the social function of angels diminished over time, while their contemplative function grew more apparent in the West from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries.<sup>8</sup> Mayr-Harting attributed the diminishing role of ‘helping angels’ in the Middle Ages to the rise of saints, who filled the same spiritual niche.<sup>9</sup> His analysis built on the work of Peter Brown’s *The Cult of the Saints*, in which Brown contended that spiritual patrons performed a similar function to divine intermediaries such as angels, but better met the needs of late fourth-century Christians.<sup>10</sup> These narratives compelled later historians to investigate the role of angels in society in greater depth.

David Keck’s *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* considered a wide range of sources that allowed him to develop an insight into the ‘social, professional and pastoral contexts of angelology’ as well as its liturgical and literary significance.<sup>11</sup> His discussion of the joint participation of humans and angels in Mass was a welcome contribution to the field, as it highlighted the centrality of sensory experience to the medieval liturgy.<sup>12</sup> Keck’s study is more concerned with the church than the monastery, and with popular belief rather than the construction of sainthood in hagiography. It therefore leaves little room for further discussion of the contemplative function of angels and the related concept

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Mayr-Harting, *Perceptions of Angels in History: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered in the University of Oxford on 14 November 1997* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 15. According to Mayr-Harting, the angelic ‘function of contemplation’ includes their contemplation of God, their companionship of human worshippers and their role as disseminators of divine knowledge (p. 13). Joad Raymond’s summary and qualification of Mayr-Harting’s argument (‘angels became more prominent as celestial objects of human contemplation, at least among the elite’) changes the emphasis from angels as the agents of contemplation to angels as the objects of contemplation. See Raymond, “Introduction” to *Conversations with Angels: Essays Towards a History of Spiritual Communication, 1100-1700*, ed. Joad Raymond (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Mayr-Harting, *Perceptions of Angels in History*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 51-61.

<sup>11</sup> David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York; Oxford: OUP, 1998), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 174-79.

of monastic contemplation as the *vita angelica*.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, while Keck made references to how the social function of angels had changed since the early medieval period, his book focused on the high and later Middle Ages. Two monographs by Ellen Muehlberger and Richard Sowerby have since revealed angels to be part of the fabric of Late Antique and early medieval religious culture. Muehlberger's recent study centres on the angelic 'tropes' (such as the angelic liturgy on earth), which emerged from a productive interchange of two dominant models of discourse on angels in late ancient Christianity.<sup>14</sup> It concluded that 'angels were central to the articulation of Christian religious traditions in late antiquity'.<sup>15</sup> Sowerby's thesis arrived at a somewhat more pessimistic assessment of angelic presence, arguing that between the eighth and tenth centuries, angels lost much of what made them distinctive, and therefore came to be of less importance within religious communities and the discourse of sanctity.<sup>16</sup>

Yet if Mayr-Harting was right, then Anglo-Saxon evidence should reveal the increasing importance of angels as celestial worshippers. One of the purposes of this thesis is to explore angelic contemplation by tracing how ideas about angelic song changed between the first centuries of Christianity and the early twelfth century. Conrad Leyser's paper on angels in medieval monasteries gave an impetus to this approach. Leyser argued that angels were 'part of the routine of every-day life' among the contemplatives, and his assertion that 'the monastic experience of angels differed from that of the laity, for whom angels tended to

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<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the *vita angelica*, see the first chapter of Jean Leclercq's *La Vie parfait: points de vue sur l'essence de l'état religieux* (Turnhout: Paris, 1948), trans. Leonard J. Doyle, *The Life of Perfection* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1961). The purpose of Leclercq's work is to illustrate continuities across time, and indeed, the timelessness of certain religious concepts. This methodology unfortunately leads to a rather homogenous picture of spirituality in the Middle Ages. Ludo J.R. Milis' *Angelic Monks and Earthly Men: Monasticism and its Meaning to Medieval Society* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992), has the same limitations.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity* (Oxford: OUP, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity*, 212.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Sowerby, "Angels in Anglo-Saxon England, 700-1000" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2012).

appear at extraordinary moments of social drama' responded directly to Mayr-Harting's work on angels in society at large.<sup>17</sup> He touched upon the depiction of antiphonal choirs of angels in the sixth-century *Regula Magistri* and their omission from the *Regula S. Benedicti*, and identified the role of angels as observers of monastic choral activity.<sup>18</sup> The first and fourth chapters of this thesis will develop this important aspect of angelic interaction with people on earth.

Still, we must not forget that angels were part of a wider heavenly community that also included the saints.<sup>19</sup> Studies of choirs of the righteous have taken several forms. Two pieces of work have explored images and imaginings of the dance troupe of the righteous.<sup>20</sup> Robert Deshman has written in depth about the iconography of choirs of saints in manuscripts illuminated in Anglo-Saxon *scriptoria*.<sup>21</sup> Finally, the categorisation of saints in medieval litanies has been the subject of a few studies, including Robin Norris' eagerly anticipated monograph on the litanies of Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>22</sup> While Norris' forthcoming work argues that the litany of the saints functioned as the predominant framework within which people thought or wrote about categories of saints in Anglo-Saxon England, the present study demonstrates that the litany was only one of many ways in which heavenly groupings were conceived.

<sup>17</sup> Conrad Leyser, "Angels, Monks, and Demons in the Early Medieval West," in *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 10.

<sup>18</sup> Leyser, "Angels, Monks, and Demons in the Early Medieval West," 9, 17-18, 20.

<sup>19</sup> A good introductory essay on the community of heaven and their liturgy is Clifford Davidson, "Of Saints and Angels," in *The Iconography of Heaven*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1994), 1-39.

<sup>20</sup> James L. Miller, "Choreia: Visions of the Cosmic Dance in Western Literature from Plato to Jean de Meun" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1979): 450-94; Nicoletta Isar, "Χορός: Dancing into the Sacred Space of the Chora," *Byzantion* 75 (2005): 199-224.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Deshman, "The Iconography of the Full-Page Miniatures of the Benedictional of Æthelwold" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1970): 106-116; *The Benedictional of Æthelwold* (Princeton; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1995), 146-57; "The Galba Psalter: Pictures, Text and Context in an Early Medieval Prayerbook," *Anglo-Saxon England* 26 (1997): 109-38.

<sup>22</sup> Edmund Bishop, "The Litany of Saints in the Stowe Missal," *Journal of Theological Studies* 7 (1905): 122-36; J. Hennig, "Studies in Early Western Devotion to the Choirs of the Saints," *Studia Patristica* 93 (1966): 239-47; Robin Norris, *The Litany of the Saints and the Taxonomy of Sanctity in Anglo-Saxon England* (forthcoming). I have consulted the prospectus for the book, which Norris attached to an email on May 22, 2015.

Angels and the righteous have often been considered separately, and the ‘concentus angelorum’ has overwhelmed the ‘dulcisona organa omnium sanctorum’. Since this study focuses on groups of celestial singers, including both saints and angels, it adds an original contribution to scholarship on angelic song. Past studies have provided valuable insights into specific writers (for instance, Richard Rolle and Hildegard of Bingen), genres (especially late medieval English drama) and some have illustrated the abundance and diversity of ideas across time.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to the present study, both literary critical accounts and broader historical works have tended to focus on later medieval examples, passing over the texts of the fourth to the twelfth centuries and glancing back only to the Bible and patristic writers for evidence of an early tradition. In an article of 1923, “The Tradition of Angelic Singing in English Drama,” John Moore avoided giving a historical account of the subject, remarking, ‘[f]or many centuries the conception of angels as heavenly choristers has been traditional’ and adding that this tradition is ‘hardly older’ than the Middle Ages.<sup>24</sup> Richard Rastall was similarly cursory in the conclusion to his 1994 article on the “The Musical Repertory” of heaven: ‘[t]he history of angelic song in the West is a long one.’ He continued,

The worship of God by angels and men gave rise to a wealth of  
ideas connected with singing and with the playing of

<sup>23</sup> A classic study of Richard Rolle’s spiritual song (*canor*) is William F. Pollard, “The ‘Tone of Heaven’: Bonaventuran Melody and the Easter Psalm in Richard Rolle,” *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 28 (1985): 252-276. Two recent theses have placed *canor* within the wider contexts of the music and sound cultures of its time: Andrew Albin, “Auralities: Sound Culture and the Experience of Hearing in Late Medieval England” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2011); Tekla Bude, “*Musica Celestis*: Mystical Song in Late Medieval England” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013). The best article on the intersection of music and spirituality in the works of Hildegard of Bingen is William T. Flynn’s “Singing with the Angels: Hildegard of Bingen’s Representations of Celestial Music,” in *Conversations with Angels*, 203-229. Studies of heavenly song in late medieval drama include: John Robert Moore, “The Tradition of Angelic Singing in English Drama,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 22:1 (1923): 89-99; Richard Rastall, “The Musical Repertory,” in *The Iconography of Heaven*, 162-96; Richard Rastall, *The Heaven Singing: Music in Early English Religious Drama*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: D.S Brewer, 1996). The most comprehensive study on angelic song to date is Reinhold Hammerstein, *Die Musik der Engel: Untersuchungen zur Musikanschauung des Mittelalters* (Bern: Francke, 1962).

<sup>24</sup> Moore, “The Tradition of Angelic Singing,” 89.



instruments in liturgical accretions, especially in the ninth to the eleventh centuries, and this eventually bore fruit in various forms in the late Middle Ages – in the visual arts, in literature, and in drama.<sup>25</sup>

Rastall's summary not only omits to provide any concrete examples from the nebulous 'wealth of ideas,' but it implies that the works of the early Middle Ages were devoid of artistic and literary merit, and only worth studying as background to the more intellectually engaging products of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Angelic song in the early Middle Ages clearly fell outside the parameters of Rastall's work on heavenly music in drama, and in *The Heaven Singing* (1996), he referred his readers to the two most substantial studies on the topic from the second half of the twentieth century: Reinhold Hammerstein's *Die Musik der Engel* (1962) and Kathi Meyer-Baer's *Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Death* (1970).<sup>26</sup>

Hammerstein and Meyer-Baer traced ideas of angelic music and the harmony of the spheres from their origins in ancient texts, through the literary, theological and artistic sources of late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Hammerstein's study begins by commenting that there were two poles to medieval music philosophy: number-based thinking and the theological-liturgical perception of music.<sup>27</sup> *Die Musik der Engel* privileges the latter, and contains much useful discussion of how the earthly liturgy was thought to reflect and participate in divine praise. Meyer-Baer's book was partly a response to Hammerstein's *Die Musik der Engel*. She acknowledged her debt to Hammerstein, but her study departs from his, in that it devotes significant attention to non-Christian religions

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<sup>25</sup> Rastall, "Musical Repertory," 186.

<sup>26</sup> Rastall, *Heaven Singing*, 177; Kathi Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Death: Studies in Musical Iconology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

<sup>27</sup> Hammerstein, *Die Musik der Engel*, 10. Many thanks to Helen Harding for providing me with an English translation of the relevant passages.

and the concepts that arise from consideration of a broader religious spectrum.<sup>28</sup> Both works continue to be extremely valuable to the researcher of heavenly concerts and harmonies, as they contain many and varied examples of musical spirits or systems from different times and places, and in different media. It is notable, though, that neither writer delved into Anglo-Saxon material in detail. Furthermore, Hammerstein's method of presenting numerous examples to create an overall sense of how ancient, late antique and medieval thinkers understood angelic song has two negative effects: it obscures the significance and uniqueness of particular texts and periods, and gives rise to the sense that the music of angels and the perception of their song were historical constants.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, he argued that the singing angel 'represents continuity beyond all historical change'.<sup>30</sup> Hammerstein stated that continuity of ideas arose from the use of commonplaces, *topoi*.<sup>31</sup> Although he acknowledged that *topoi* adapt to different historical circumstances, the absence of detailed case studies in the book makes it difficult for a reader to recognise changes in *topoi* when they do occur. This dissertation takes an alternative approach. Underlying the argument is the conviction that we can best understand both the continuities and changes in ideas about heavenly choirs through detailed scrutiny of *topoi*. Commonplaces have their own histories. Their development is influenced by their use in particular texts, and their meaning is shaped by the milieux in which they were produced.

The study of *topoi* is, however, fraught with difficulty. Firstly, a *topos* can be defined in one of two main ways. It can mean a rhetorical device or figure, such as metaphor, metonymy or hyperbole.<sup>32</sup> It can also mean a rhetorical commonplace

<sup>28</sup> Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Hammerstein, *Die Musik der Engel*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>32</sup> Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr., "Process and Products in Making Sense of Tropes," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 252-76.

(also designated by the terms ‘topic,’ ‘trope,’ ‘motif’ and ‘meme’).<sup>33</sup> This second definition needs further qualification. A commonplace can be as broad as the *topoi* of poetry and oratory discussed in Ernst Curtius’ *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, which include the modesty *topos* and the topic of ‘the world upside-down’.<sup>34</sup> Curtius’ comment that new *topoi* are ‘indications of a changed psychological state’ is tinted with the language of psychoanalysis that was so prominent in the literary criticism of the 1940s, but it makes the important point that innovations in conventions reflect changes in thought-world.<sup>35</sup>

Not all literary scholars shared Curtius’ generous view of *topoi*. In a work of 1997 on the subject of the broad rhetorical commonplace of ‘the world grown old,’ James Dean differentiated between developed structures and their manifestations as textual conventions. He therefore defined ‘the world grown old’ as an ‘idea’ that is often expressed in ‘rhetorical topics’.<sup>36</sup> He stated that an idea, in contrast to a *topos*, ‘transcends mere slogans and tags, and it changes over time’.<sup>37</sup> Dean wrote about *topoi* in a rather pejorative manner, stating that they ‘most often appear as catchphrases or one-dimensional concepts easily identified by a tag in a manuscript’s margin’.<sup>38</sup> There is merit to Dean’s definitions; the recurring idea of ‘the world grown old’ is a more complex and changeable construction than a single phrase that occurs with regularity and is predictable in form. Nevertheless, *topoi* as defined in this narrow sense do still undergo change and ought not to be dismissed as ‘one-dimensional’.

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<sup>33</sup> "topos, n." in *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., Oxford: OUP, 2015, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203433> (accessed May 13, 2015); "trope, n." in *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., Oxford: OUP, 2015, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/206679> (accessed May 13, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern: A. Francke AG Verlag, 1948), trans. Willard R. Trask, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1953), 79-105.

<sup>35</sup> Curtius, *European Literature*, 82. He mentions the work of Jung later in the paragraph and again on p. 101.

<sup>36</sup> James M. Dean, *The World Grown Old in Later Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1997), vii.

<sup>37</sup> Dean, *World Grown Old*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

In this thesis, I use *topos* to mean a recurring formulation of an idea that performs a particular function in a narrative. The two *topoi* of heavenly choirs I consider are the psychopomp *topos* (angels and, occasionally, the righteous, conveying the soul of a recently deceased person to the heavenly regions), and the new song *topos* (virgins following the Lamb wherever he goes and singing the new song). Other *topoi* are also considered as part of the overall argument: the Marian motif (the Virgin Mary leading a chorus of virgins in heaven) and the Benedictine precept that monks worship in the sight of angels.<sup>39</sup> Even the broad notion that angels and the righteous sing in choirs is a *topos*. These commonplaces are readily identifiable in narratives of particular genres because they remain fairly consistent across time both in terms of form and function. Crucially, though, *topoi* undergo almost microscopic changes, which, when interpreted, can bring to light new information about the transmission of ideas and the contexts of the works in which *topoi* are found. *Topoi* can therefore tell us about ideas, but they are also part of the construction of ideas.

A few works of criticism have taken *topoi* as the main subject of their investigation. Helen Cooper's book, *English Romance in Time*, which is broad in scope and rigorous, demonstrates that, 'whilst romance motifs remain superficially the same, sometimes even down to verbal detail, the usage and understanding of them changes over time'.<sup>40</sup> Cooper's treatment of motifs or memes as valuable objects of study in their own right is refreshing in light of the history of criticism of *topoi* in medieval hagiographical texts. The positivist approach to history sought to uncover the objective historical 'truth' of documents, and so privileged history,

<sup>39</sup> I use motif here to distinguish the figure of Mary as choir-leader from the new song *topos* to which it is related.

<sup>40</sup> Helen Cooper, *English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 4.

considered to be factual in nature, over hagiography.<sup>41</sup> The Bollandist historian, Hippolyte Delehaye, wrote in response to credulous readers who did not distinguish between the saints as they really existed and their representations in the ‘legends’ of the Middle Ages.<sup>42</sup> The legends, he argued, may have historical fact behind them, but this is obscured by the poetics of hagiography. His study suggests that the only reason why one would want to study the commonplaces of hagiography is to trace the real acts that inspired them, and since these acts are lost in the mists of time, one should forbear to undertake such a task. ‘There would be no end to a list of the commonplaces of hagiography,’ he warned. ‘The ancients themselves would have been hard put to tell us where they came from; for them, as for us, they were leaves floating in the air, brought by the wind from afar’.<sup>43</sup> Delehaye’s comment presupposes that a historian would approach hagiographical *topoi* either to categorise them or to trace their origins. This study instead considers the forms of the *topoi* themselves and the intellectual currents on which they were carried.

Historians have taken a variety of approaches to hagiographical commonplaces. Frantisek Graus tracked *topoi* across Merovingian texts in his renowned study of 1965, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger*, in which he distinguished between recurring ideas in a general sense (*topoi*) and their manifestation as a specific concept (*Begriff*) or motif (*Treuemotiv*).<sup>44</sup> In the mid-1970s, James Earl offered a new understanding of the conventions of

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas J. Heffernan discusses the positivist or empiricist approach to history and its flaws in *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), 17, 38-71. See also Felice Lifshitz, “Beyond Positivism and Genre: ‘Hagiographical’ Texts as Historical Narratives,” *Viator* 25 (1994): 95-114.

<sup>42</sup> Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, trans. Donald Attwater (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 1962).

<sup>43</sup> Delehaye, *Legends*, 24.

<sup>44</sup> Frantisek Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger: Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit* (Prague: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1965), 360-61. I am grateful to Angela Parkes for her translations of the relevant passages.

hagiography.<sup>45</sup> He suggested that saints' Lives, like icons, participated in the reality they represent, and that reality is God.<sup>46</sup> In stark contrast to Delehay, Earl argued that the lives of saints cannot be separated from their *Vitae*. The truth of hagiography is not literal or historical, but symbolic and moral.<sup>47</sup> *Vitae* are so similar because all saints are images of Christ the prototype.<sup>48</sup> His analysis was to prove influential; other historians adopted the comparison between visual icons and hagiography.<sup>49</sup>

Other ways of approaching the conventionality of hagiography were offered by Structuralism and anthropological theory, as demonstrated by Alison Elliott in *Roads to Paradise*.<sup>50</sup> Scholars have also explored the Lives of saints using the language of ritual. In his *Sacred Biography* of 1988, Thomas Heffernan argued that the repetition of action across narratives became a 'ritual' authenticating the subject's sanctity.<sup>51</sup> Textual conventions, moreover, are part of this sanctifying action: 'rhetorical tropes are not mere linguistic adumbrations superimposed on the life of this or that saintly man or woman; rather they create the type of life being narrated, since our comprehension of that life comes exclusively through the filter of language'.<sup>52</sup> In the 2004 study, *Writing and Holiness*, Derek Krueger paid homage to Heffernan's ideas. He called the 'habits' of hagiographical composition 'ritualizations' and argued that, 'the recurrence of certain topoi signals not only

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<sup>45</sup> James W. Earl, "Typology and Iconographic Style in Early Medieval Hagiography," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 8:1 (1975): 15-46.

<sup>46</sup> Earl, "Typology," 35.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 and 35.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 and 33.

<sup>49</sup> Robert E. Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives: A Study in Direct Discourse and the Iconography of Style* (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 27; Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 36; Thomas D. Hill, "Imago Dei: Genre, Symbolism and Anglo-Saxon Hagiography" in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and their Contexts*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 41-43; Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>50</sup> Alison Goddard Elliott, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover; London: University Press of New England, 1987), 8-10 and 168-80.

<sup>51</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 6.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

their conventionality, but also their meaningfulness as conveyors of ideals within a system of religious practice'.<sup>53</sup> We have moved a long way from the positivist attitude towards hagiography and its conventions. Hagiographical commonplaces (*topoi*) are now frequently understood as signs of the subject's sanctity. How they are used provides a glimpse into the mentality of the age, or at least the localised context, in which the work was produced. Even so, *topoi* continue to be problematic for some readers. Clare Lees and Gillian Overing's *Double Agents* offers an ideological objection to *topoi*, which, they suggest, are disorientating and tiresome at best and, at worst, can reinforce damaging or problematic commonplaces about the female body.<sup>54</sup> This interpretation informed their rather frustrated reading of the figures of virginity in Aldhelm's *De virginitate*: '[w]e are clearly within the realm of the strikingly unoriginal, of the *topos*'.<sup>55</sup>

This thesis uses *topoi* as a methodological tool to pinpoint heavenly choirs within a large amount of material, from the Bible to texts of the late eleventh century. Recurring formulations of ideas are easily located. Such a methodology lends itself to a *longue durée* approach, allowing for the identification of changes and continuities in thought about heavenly choirs over a considerable stretch of time. Several related research questions informed the methodology: what are the major *topoi* of heavenly choirs in early medieval sources? How are they generated, appropriated and adapted in texts? What do they reveal about the perception of, and participation in, heavenly society?

In order to answer these questions as comprehensively as possible for a study of this scale, the investigation begins with the Bible, pseudepigrapha, apocrypha and early Christian sources of the first three centuries, follows the *topoi*

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<sup>53</sup> Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 108.

<sup>54</sup> Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 118-19.

<sup>55</sup> Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 118.

through the late antique period (here, defined as falling between the fourth and sixth centuries) and then delves into the early medieval period (from the seventh to the early twelfth century). The parts of the study situated in the early medieval period focus on Anglo-Saxon and early Anglo-Norman England. Yet the thesis as a whole is not strictly confined within chronological or geographical boundaries. It is necessary to examine how the *topoi* found in early medieval texts in England were formed in biblical and non-canonical writings, the works of the Western Church Fathers, texts associated with the Desert Fathers of Egypt and accounts of saints and their miracles from Francia. While there is manuscript evidence to suggest that many of these sources were read in early medieval England, there is no evidence that some of the texts discussed, particularly in the first chapter, would have been known to writers and readers in Anglo-Saxon and early Anglo-Norman England.<sup>56</sup> They are nevertheless included in the study because they were fundamental to the development of *topoi* at an earlier stage of their history, and thus had an indirect influence on the texts of early medieval England. Furthermore, while some parts of the argument trace the development of *topoi* along a chronological spine, the thesis as a whole does not progress in a linear fashion. The purpose of the study is not to show that ideas about heavenly choirs were building towards a high medieval crescendo, but to illustrate the permutations and ramifications of ideas through time.

The primary sources are, for the most part, textual, and are mainly concerned with the ideals of sanctity and the ascetic tradition. They include the Bible and non-canonical texts, commentaries on Scripture, treatises on particular subjects, letters, dialogues, homilies and hagiographical material (saints' Passions,

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<sup>56</sup> A valuable resource is Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2014). This volume revises and supplements entries in H. Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001).



Lives, Miracles and Translations). The vast majority of sources under consideration were written in prose, but some verse versions of texts are included for comparative purposes. I have considered texts written in Greek, Latin and Old English in order to give a sense of how the verbal formulae, and the ideas moulded by them, translate across languages.

No study, however, can be utterly exhaustive. Historians must select and exclude evidence in order to craft a convincing narrative, and literary critics must sculpt their interpretations into an argument.<sup>57</sup> The process of research began with early saints' Lives in Medieval Latin, and I picked up the threads within those sources and followed them to their conclusions. The thesis therefore focuses on the ascetic tradition. It does not analyse the influence of the celestial hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius on Anglo-Saxon texts or investigate the pervasiveness of the idea of the music of the spheres in early medieval English religious culture, although in future I hope to pursue these lines of research. The abundance of evidence arising from the kinds of textual sources listed above made it unnecessary to look for heavenly choirs in vernacular poetic works that have long been considered part of the Anglo-Saxon literary canon. This is by no means symptomatic of a prejudice against the literature of the Anglo-Saxon period. Indeed, the dissertation celebrates what Ananya Kabir has called 'the effects of strictly 'literary' or aesthetic impulses' in the source material by providing close readings of literary commonplaces and showing how they shaped the ideas that gained cultural currency.<sup>58</sup>

The methodology presented certain structural challenges. If each chapter of the study had considered the manifestation of a *topos* in one snapshot of time, and

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<sup>57</sup> See Hayden White, "The Burden of History" and "Interpretation in History" in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978), 27-80.

<sup>58</sup> Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Paradise, Death, and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 7.

in one text or a few associated texts, the structure might have failed to illustrate continuities in the material. However, if the whole thesis had consisted of chapters which followed *topoi* through time, the result would have been a tediously linear history which would have struggled to shed light on the interpenetration of ideas. The chosen approach therefore embraces both diachronicity and synchronicity.

The first chapter acts as a backdrop to the rest of the thesis by establishing what constitutes a heavenly choir and where groups of singing angels and the righteous are located, i.e., in otherworldly spaces. It argues that the soundscapes of heaven and paradise are far from static representations of bliss, and are shaped by the concerns and conventions of their age. The opening chapter also distinguishes between two kinds of judgement: the individual judgement, shortly after the moment of death, and the Final Judgement. Chapter two shows how choirs of psychopomps accompany and defend the soul at the time of its individual judgement, while chapter three, on the new song *topos*, explores the reward of joining a choir of the elect as depicted in the book of Revelation. These chapters trace *topoi* through time, tracking their development from their use in the Bible and non-canonical material through to their appearances in late eleventh-century or early twelfth-century England.

The final chapter investigates the use of the Marian motif, which is related to one permutation of the new song *topos*, in a late Anglo-Saxon and early Anglo-Norman monastic context. The motif occurs in a late-tenth century Life of St. Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury (d. 988). This provides a focal point for the discussion, which explores how this motif was re-deployed in later Lives of Dunstan, and how the figure of Dunstan himself was placed at the heart of various ideas about the relationship between monastic choirs and groups of celestial singers. The fourth chapter therefore picks up a thread of argument from chapter one concerning the proximity of angels to human worshippers.

It is hoped that this interdisciplinary thesis will be of interest to Anglo-Saxonists who work on sainthood, eschatology, visionary narratives and early music history. Part of its significance lies in the way in which it brings these areas into conversation with one another. Historians and literary scholars outside the realm of Anglo-Saxon studies may also find this work enlightening. It engages with historians of ideas in two ways: by tracing the ideas of heavenly choirs through time, and by testing the extent to which the *topos* can function as a useful methodological tool *and* as the object of study. At the heart of the thesis lie questions of interest to historians of religion as well as theologians: who was considered holy, and what were the rewards of the elect? In many texts, these communities are not only seen, but heard. Literary critics whose work brought about or followed in the wake of the ‘aural turn’ will find value in this thesis for what it uncovers about the relationship between song and sanctity.<sup>59</sup> Finally, scholars working on vernacular texts of the high or late Middle Ages may be intrigued to discover how ideas about celestial music were formed at an earlier time.

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<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of the ‘aural turn,’ see Beth Williamson, “Sensory Experience in Medieval Devotion: Sound and Vision, Invisibility and Silence,” *Speculum* 88:1 (2013): 42-3.

## Chapter 1:

### What is a heavenly choir?

#### A view from the other world

##### 1: Introduction

Visions of heaven divulge much about heavenly choirs: they tell the reader who, or what, worships the Lord, how many worshippers are present, and where they are located. The visionary is also an auditor, whose ears are open to the sounds of celestial praise. Yet the field of other world studies, dominated by discussion of the structure and geography of heavenly, infernal and interim regions, the judgement of souls, and early medieval precursors to Dante, has long prioritised what the visionary sees over what s/he hears.<sup>1</sup> Studies that have considered the importance of sound and song in visionary experience tend to focus on Dante's *Divina Commedia*, while scholars working on early visions of heaven and hell have largely neglected the importance of the soundscapes of other world spaces.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on the other world is wide-ranging; I can do little more here than offer a brief survey of a selection of works that have contributed to the field. On the social structure of the other world, see Peter Dinzelbacher, "Reflexionen irdischer Sozialstrukturen im mittelalterlichen Jenseits schilderungen," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 61 (1979): 16-34. For a general discussion of other world spaces, see Claude Carozzi, "La géographie de l'au-delà et sa signification pendant le haut moyen âge," *Popoli e paesi nella cultura altomedievale, Settimana del Centro Italiano di Studi sull' Alto Medioevo* 29 (1983): 423-81. A starting point for any study of the intermediate regions between heaven and hell is Jacques Le Goff, *La naissance du Purgatoire* (Paris: Gillimard, 1981), trans. Arthur Goldhammer, *The Birth of Purgatory* (London: Scolar Press, 1984). Two studies that challenge Le Goff's approach and demonstrate the richness of the early medieval other world are Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday*, and Isabel Moreira, *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: OUP, 2010). See also Helen Foxhall Forbes, "Diuiduntur in quattuor: The Interim and Judgement in Anglo-Saxon England," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 61:2 (2010): 659-84. Surveys of other world motifs and narratives that place early medieval visions in relation to Dante include Alison Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990) and, less satisfyingly, Aron Gurevich, "The Divine Comedy before Dante," in *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, trans. János M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), 104-52.

<sup>2</sup> Among the studies on music and the *Divina Commedia* are Francesco Ciabattoni, "Dante's Organa: The Comedy from Unholy Racket to Sacred Music," *Italian Quarterly* 43 (2006): 5-23 and John Stevens, "Dante and Music," *Italian Studies* 23 (1968): 1-18. Jeffrey Burton Russell's *A History of Heaven: A Singing Silence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), culminates in a study of the *Commedia*, which 'moves in a stately dance

Attending to the sonic dimension of other world narratives enables us to form a more detailed and well-rounded picture of eschatological destinations. Song fulfils a variety of functions: it glorifies God, signposts exalted regions, rewards the souls of the perfect, comforts souls which pass from earth to heaven, and protects these journeying spirits from malign forces. The music of the other world shaped the understanding of the earthly liturgy. Conversely, early Christian practices of worship affected how heavenly praise was represented in texts.

While scholarship on the other world has touched upon the grouping and judgement of souls according to their merits, there has been no full length study to date on the activity and arrangement of the heavenly host in medieval visions. Such a study would shed light on changing views about the election of souls and the form and performance of music that was regarded as heavenly. This chapter addresses the oversight by answering the question, what is a heavenly choir? It examines visions of heaven and paradise in a wide variety of sources, including the Bible, pseudepigraphic and apocryphal writing from the second century BCE to the sixth century CE, and early medieval texts from the Christian West. While the chapter has the potential to be vast, it focuses only on those instances where the visionary sees and hears groups of celestial beings (angels or righteous souls) praising God with song in a heavenly or paradisiacal location.<sup>3</sup> The argument is also restricted to a study of several closely related genres: apocalypses, visions of heavenly ascent and the journey of the soul into the other world, for such texts provide us with the best insight into the activity and arrangement of choirs in

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between God's singing silence and Dante's speech that is song' (p. 165). The metaphor of heaven as the song which resounds from the silence of God's mystery pervades the book, rendering some passages almost homiletic in tone (see, for instance, p. 187). Although the chapter on "Journeys to Heaven" (pp. 101-13) brings together a number of other world visions with a musical aspect, auditory experiences of heaven are not the focus of the study.

<sup>3</sup> Two resources have served this chapter extremely well: the "Chronological table of principal representations of the other world," in Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World*, 196-233, and Eileen Gardiner, "Judeo-Christian Hell Texts," *Hell-On-Line*, Ithaca Press, 2007, <http://www.hell-on-line.org/TextsJC.html> (accessed April 1, 2015).

celestial regions.<sup>4</sup> Where relevant, references to the writings of the Fathers are included in the footnotes, though a fuller discussion of patristic material can be found in chapters two and three.

This chapter raises more questions than it answers. It is intended to introduce the reader to the main points of investigation that will be developed in greater detail over the course of the thesis, namely: who was able to join the heavenly hosts? How, and why, were celestial choirs perceived? What was the relationship between liturgical worship on earth and that in heaven? More broadly, how were ideas about heavenly choirs transmitted and transformed from the Bible up to the eleventh century? In the conclusion to the chapter, I will assess how useful visionary material is when attempting to answer these questions. Before we venture into the regions of the heavenly hosts, let us begin with a seemingly straightforward question: what is meant by the word, ‘choir’?

## 2: Terminology

The modern English word ‘choir’ carries a range of meanings: it denotes an organised group of singers in a cathedral or church service; the part of the building assigned for their performance; a body of singers or dancers performing for non-religious purposes; groups of angels, arranged in a hierarchy; and a band of people or things.<sup>5</sup> This variety, and at times, ambiguity of meaning, is inherent in the Classical Greek (*χορός*) and Latin (*chorus*), both of which may mean a dance (the ancient Greek specifically denotes a round dance), a group of performers (dancers

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<sup>4</sup> For discussions of these genres, see Martha Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse: A Brief History* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Isabel Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 136-68; Claude Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà: d'après la littérature latine* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1994); Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York; Oxford: OUP, 1993); and Mary Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> "choir | quire, n." in *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., Oxford: OUP, 2015, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/32118> (accessed April 13, 2015).

and/or singers), or, more generally, a collection of people or things.<sup>6</sup> *Χορός* can also refer to the place in which a dance is performed.<sup>7</sup> Although the usual word for place or country is *χωρος*, the words may appear indistinguishable in unaccented Latin. In early Christianity, *χορός* and *chorus* acquired new meanings. Nicoletta Isar has shown that early Christian writers in Byzantium appropriated the ancient Greek *χορός* to describe the Church congregation, sung worship on earth and in heaven, and groups of saints.<sup>8</sup> The unbroken circular dance designated by *χορός* gained a special resonance when it was applied to martyrs and virgins, saints who preserved their integrity and ‘oneness’.<sup>9</sup> In the Latin writings of the Church Fathers, *chorus* came to be applied to gatherings of angels or spirits which worship God with song and dance in heaven.<sup>10</sup>

The Classical use of *χορός* to mean ‘dance’ found its way into the Greek New Testament (Lk 15:25).<sup>11</sup> In the Vulgate Bible, *chorus* is a translation of two distinct nouns in the Hebrew Old Testament (Tanakh): the noun for dancing and the noun for thanksgiving, an activity that may involve a vocal expression of delight.<sup>12</sup> The Hebrew words for ‘dance’ or ‘dancing’ are *mecholah* (מְחֹלָה, fem.) and *machol* (מַחֹל, masc.).<sup>13</sup> After the song of Moses, a hymn celebrating the Israelite escape across the Red Sea and the Egyptian demise beneath the waves,

<sup>6</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, “χορός,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised by Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1999; “chorus,” in *Thesaurus linguae Latinae (TLL) Online*, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, [http://www.degruyter.com/view/TLL/3-0-05/3\\_0\\_5\\_chorus\\_1\\_v2007.xml](http://www.degruyter.com/view/TLL/3-0-05/3_0_5_chorus_1_v2007.xml) (accessed June 28, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Isar, “Χορός: Dancing into the Sacred Space of the Chora,” 215.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 215-16.

<sup>10</sup> Hammerstein, *Die Musik der Engel*, 26. Other scholars who have noted the terpsichorean connotations of ‘chorus’ in patristic and medieval writings include Leclercq, *Life of Perfection*, trans. Doyle, 25-26, and Miller, “Choreia,” 450-94.

<sup>11</sup> Fredrick W. Danker, “χορός,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1087.

<sup>12</sup> F.P. Dutripon, “chorus,” in *Concordantiae biblicorum sacrorum Vulgate editionis* (Paris: 1838), 206.

<sup>13</sup> “mecholah: a dance” and “machol: a dance” in James Strong, *Strong’s Concordance of the Bible* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1980) on biblehub.com (2004-2014) by Biblos.com, <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/4246.htm> and <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/4234.htm> (accessed April 24, 2015).

Miriam the prophetess picks up a timbrel, ‘and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dancing’ (Ex 15:20).<sup>14</sup> In the Old Testament, dancing, often with timbrels, signifies a victory for God’s chosen people.<sup>15</sup> Only in the book of Nehemiah is *chorus* used to denote a group of singers. In this case, it is a translation of the Hebrew, *todah* (תִּדָּה), meaning ‘thanksgiving.’<sup>16</sup> While *todah* normally signifies the act of praising, in Nehemiah, it describes the agents of praise. Nehemiah 12:31-42 narrates how ‘two great companies [giving] thanks’ mount the wall of Jerusalem and arrange themselves opposite one another.<sup>17</sup> They sing loudly, possibly accompanied by musical instruments (Neh 12:35-36 and 12:40). Their division into two groups suggests that the choirs sing to one another in a call-and-response pattern. *Todah* and its forms also occur relatively frequently in the Psalms, in instances when the speaker either lifts his own voice in praise (Ps 69:30) or exhorts others to render thanks to God (Ps 147:7).<sup>18</sup> *Yadah* (יָדָה), the verb from which *todah* originates, occurs more frequently in the Psalms. Its literal meaning is, ‘to throw, to cast,’ but is also used to mean, ‘to confess’ or ‘to praise’ or ‘to give thanks’.<sup>19</sup> It occurs, for example, in Psalm 89:5, to convey the heavenly host’s act of praise: ‘[l]et the heavens praise thy wonders, O Lord, thy faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!’<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The Vulgate gives the text as ‘egressaeque sunt omnes mulieres post eam cum tympanis et choris’. All quotations from the Vulgate are from B. Fischer *et al.*, ed., *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007; first published 1969), 1895.

<sup>15</sup> See Jer 31:4 and 31:13. It occurs with the word for ‘singing’ in 1 Sm 18:6, 21:11 and 29:5.

<sup>16</sup> “*todah*: thanksgiving” in *Strong’s concordance*, <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/8426.htm> (accessed April 24, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> The phrase in Vulgate Latin is ‘duos choris laudantium magnos’ (Neh 12:31).

<sup>18</sup> Ps 68:31 in Vulgate Latin is ‘laudabo nomen Dei cum cantico magnificabo eum in confessione’. Ps 146:7 is given as ‘canite Domino in confessione canite Deo nostro in cithara’.

<sup>19</sup> “*yadah*: to throw, cast” in *Strong’s concordance*, <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/3034.htm> (accessed April 24, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Ps 88:6 in the Vulgate is ‘confitebuntur caeli mirabiliam tua Domine et veritatem tuam in ecclesia sanctorum’.



In the Bible, the heavenly host, *tsaba* (צָבָא), performs a liturgical, militaristic and courtly function.<sup>21</sup> Two passages in the book of Job, for example, indicate that the Lord is served by divine troops and armies (19:12 and 25:3).<sup>22</sup> Hosts of angels visit the inhabitants of earth; the band of angels which greets the shepherds in Luke 2:13-14 is described in New Testament Greek as a ‘multitude of the heavenly host’ (πλῆθος στρατιᾶς οὐρανίου).<sup>23</sup> In most passages, angels do not appear to be organised into groups, but thousands upon thousands attend to God in an undifferentiated crowd (see, for instance, Dn 7:9-10).<sup>24</sup> However, Christ’s retort in Matthew 26:53 – “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” – may be interpreted literally, as an indication that angels are arranged into ranks, or as a metaphorical expression of the strength of his Father’s support.<sup>25</sup> While most ranks of angels are not enumerated or described in the Bible, later Jewish and Judeo-Christian texts depict angelic brigades and assign them militaristic names.<sup>26</sup>

The Bible contains little information on specific categories of angelic beings. The book of Isaiah features a vision of angels called seraphim (6:1-3). Cherubim are mentioned at several points in reference to the Ark of the Covenant and are equated with the ‘living creatures’ attending the divine throne in Ezekiel 10:16. Heavenly ‘powers’ (ἐξουσίαι) or ‘principalities’ (ἀρχαί) appear frequently in the letters of St. Paul, including Ephesians 3:10 and Colossians 2:15, denoting

<sup>21</sup> Saul M. Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), 15.

<sup>22</sup> “tsaba: army, war, warfare” in *Strong’s concordance*, <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/6635.htm> (accessed May 1, 2015); The Hebrew noun for ‘hosts,’ refers both to Israelite armies and God’s divine council. See Bryan D. Spinks, *The Sanctus in the Eucharistic Prayer* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), 18-19. The terms used in the Vulgate are *latrones* and *milites*.

<sup>23</sup> The Vulgate has ‘cum angelo multitudo militiae caelestis’.

<sup>24</sup> Olyan, *Thousand Thousands*, 15. The term for ‘legions of angels’ in the Vulgate is ‘legiones angelorum’.

<sup>25</sup> Passage briefly discussed by Brandon, “Angels: The History of an Idea,” 661-62.

<sup>26</sup> Olyan, *Thousand Thousands*, 58-59.

malign forces.<sup>27</sup> The earliest and most famous work on the angelic orders is *Περὶ τῆς οὐρανίας ἱεραρχίας* or *On the Celestial Hierarchy* by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, who was active in the late fifth or early sixth century.<sup>28</sup> The text systematically arranges all nine types of angel found in the Bible into hierarchies, which are composed of ‘orders’ (τάξεις or διακόσμησεις). The highest angelic hierarchy comprises the orders of seraphim, cherubim and thrones. These angelic beings surround God in a circle (κύκλῳ) and dance around him (περιχορεύουσα). Here, Pseudo-Dionysius hints at a connection between the term for ‘order’ and a choir of dancers.<sup>29</sup> Although Kathi Mayer-Baer argued that the groups of angels in *On the Celestial Hierarchy* are not ‘choirs’ in a musical sense, but ‘classes,’ on several occasions, the work mentions that angels transmitted hymns of praise to earth and even makes reference to a now lost treatise on the subject.<sup>30</sup> Gregory the Great, who was familiar with the celestial hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius, refers to the same nine categories of angels in his thirty-fourth homily. Like the Greek author, he calls these categories ‘orders’ (*ordines*), though elsewhere he uses *chorus* to denote groups of angels, such as the gathering of supernal beings that sang the *Gloria* in Luke’s gospel.<sup>31</sup>

In Medieval Latin, synonyms or alternatives for *chorus* include *agmen*, *cohors*, *contubernium*, and *maniplus*, all of which have martial connotations.<sup>32</sup> Other words for ‘choir,’ including *coetus*, *collegium*, and *consortium*, designate groups of angels or the righteous in heavenly societies or congregations, and so

<sup>27</sup> The Vulgate terms are *potestates* and *principes*.

<sup>28</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *Περὶ τῆς οὐρανίας ἱεραρχίας* = *On the Celestial Hierarchy*, trans. Maurice de Gandillac, *La hiérarchie celeste* (Paris: Du Cerf, 1958).

<sup>29</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *Περὶ τῆς οὐρανίας ἱεραρχίας* 7.4, 117.

<sup>30</sup> Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres*, 39; Pseudo-Dionysius, *Περὶ τῆς οὐρανίας ἱεραρχίας* 4.4, 7.4 and 13.4, 99-100, 118 and 158. The hymns mentioned are the *Gloria* as it appears in Luke 2:14, the thrice-holy and the doxology as found in 1 Enoch 39:12 and the cry of the seraphs in Isaiah 6:3. For more on these hymns, see below.

<sup>31</sup> Gregory the Great, *Homilia* 34.7 (PL 76: 1249D-1250C); *Homilia* 8.2 (PL 76: 1104C).

<sup>32</sup> R.E. Latham, *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, 17 vols. (London: OUP for the British Academy, 1975-2013), “agmen” in vol. 1, fasc. i, ‘A-B,’ (1975), 54; “cohors” in fasc. ii, ‘C,’ (1981), 374 and “contubernium,” 476, and “maniplus” in vol. 2, fasc. vi, ‘M,’ (2001), 1706.

have a collegiate and ecclesiastical feel.<sup>33</sup> *Gre*x, with its pastoral connotations, conjures an image of a heavenly company gathered like a flock of sheep.<sup>34</sup> Latin words for ‘choir’ were translated into the Old English, *þreat* and *weorod*, meaning, ‘throng’ and ‘troop,’ among other things.<sup>35</sup> This begs the question, how important were individual terms in conveying the concept of a heavenly choir in late antique and early medieval texts? More specifically, did particular synonyms or alternatives to *chorus* have particular resonances that affected how writers envisaged heavenly choirs? The Medieval Latin, Greek or Old English words for ‘choir’ and related terms will be supplied throughout this thesis, allowing for analysis and comparison.

A heavenly choir, then, can be narrowly defined as a group of celestial beings that worships God with music and dance. By analogy with earthly armies, groups of spirits which serve the Lord are also called hosts and troops. There is an overlap between the musical and militaristic concepts, as spirits ordered and arranged for the performance of a song or dance can be thought of as occupying different ranks. A heavenly choir can also be understood in a broader sense as an ordered group within the court of God. How, though, were these ranks arranged? What kinds of songs did the host perform, and where were they to be found? Exploring terminology leads us to only a limited understanding of how heavenly choirs functioned in the other world. Let us go now into the fields where angelic troops muster.

<sup>33</sup> “coetus” in Latham, *Medieval Latin from British Sources*, vol.1, fasc. ii, 371, “collegium,” 380 and “consortium,” 454.

<sup>34</sup> “grex” in Latham, *Medieval Latin from British Sources*, vol.1, fasc. iv, ‘F-G-H,’ (1989), 1107.

<sup>35</sup> “þreat” and “weorod” in Joseph Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. T.N. Toller (London: OUP, 1972; first published 1898), 1067 and 1192-93.

### 3: Choirs of angels and the righteous in visions of the other world

#### 3.1: Angelic worship in the Bible

The books of the major prophets in the Old Testament provide an insight into the acts of worship taking place before the throne of God. Daniel's dream vision describes the Ancient of Days sat on a throne, positioned to declare judgement, while 'a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him' (7:9-10). In the first, third and tenth chapters of Ezekiel, the prophet depicts God's throne as a chariot, flanked and supported by cherubim (living creatures), each with the faces of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. When Ezekiel is rapt into heaven, he hears the voice of 'a great rushing,' saying, "[b]lessed be the glory of the Lord from His place," the sound of angelic wings beating and the noise of God's throne moving (3:12). While the cherubim in Ezekiel do not chant around the divine throne, seraphim do worship God in an earthly Temple with the thrice-holy (*Qedussah*) in the book of Isaiah, saying, "[h]oly, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts, all the earth is full of his glory" (6:1-3). The angels cry to one another in a call-and-response pattern. It has been suggested that the angelic praise in the book of Isaiah was based on part of an actual hymn, perhaps performed antiphonally, which was in use from the eighth century BCE at the latest.<sup>36</sup> While the ultimate source of the hymn of the angels in Isaiah can only be the subject of speculation, the thrice-holy as it is found in the vision itself influenced a range of Jewish writings including the non-canonical *Apocalypses* and *Testaments* known as the pseudepigrapha, and ultimately came to influence the statutory prayers of the Synagogue.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Spinks, *Sanctus*, 17 and 194.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 25-45. Examples of the angelic performance of the thrice-holy can be found in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009; first published London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983). All future references will be from *Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*. The texts are: 2 Enoch (J), trans. F.I. Andersen, 134; *Questions of Ezra (Recension A)*, trans. M.E. Stone, 598; *Testament of Adam*, trans. S.E. Robinson, 995.

Early Judaism fostered belief in the simultaneity of celestial and earthly worship; within Hekhalot texts, the Qumran scrolls and other rabbinic writings, there are several references to human worshippers praising God in concert with the community of angels in heaven.<sup>38</sup> Despite evidence to the contrary, earlier scholars have claimed that joint human and angelic worship is specifically Christian.<sup>39</sup> This blinkered view perhaps arose from ignorance of the more esoteric branches of ancient Judaism, which in turn led scholars to over-emphasise the originality of the Revelation of St. John of Patmos, a text that portrays the joint worship of heaven and earth. While this aspect of the texts is by no means unique, Revelation is unusual in that it describes the liturgy of heavenly creatures in great detail.<sup>40</sup> Chapters four and five, a liturgical service, might have been based on early Christian practice.<sup>41</sup> The heavenly service begins with four beasts chanting the thrice-holy continuously around the throne of God:

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all round and within, and day and night they never cease to sing, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’ (4:8).

Early Christian commentators, particularly in the West, interpreted the four beasts as representative of the four apostles, whereas in Coptic and Ethiopic traditions, the

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<sup>38</sup> Spinks, *Sanctus*, 25-26, 33, 35-36, 45. See also Pieter W. van der Horst, “Mystical Motifs in a Greek Synagogal Prayer?” in *Studies in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014): 119-121.

<sup>39</sup> Otto A. Piper, “The Apocalypse of John and the Liturgy of the Ancient Church,” *Church History*, 20:1 (1951): 11; Peterson, *Angels and the Liturgy*, 23; Hammerstein, *Die Musik der Engel*, 30. Peterson also mistakenly remarked that ‘the ceaselessness of praise by the angels was unknown to the Jews’ (p. 19).

<sup>40</sup> Gottfried Schimanowski, “‘Connecting Heaven and Earth’: The Function of the Hymns of Revelation 4-5,” in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions*, ed. Ra’anan S. Boustani and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 67.

<sup>41</sup> Lucetta Mowry, “Revelation 4-5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71:2 (1952): 81-82.

beasts were understood to be creatures from the animal kingdom.<sup>42</sup> The living creatures also bear an undeniable resemblance to the creatures in Isaiah and Ezekiel, which suggests that they are angelic.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, they resemble the angelic Watchers in the *Similitudes* of 1 Enoch, a possible source for Revelation.<sup>44</sup> The Watchers, sleepless angelic beings, offer the thrice-holy before God's glory. They occupy a paradisiacal refuge beneath God's wings, described as the home of the blessed:

I saw other dwelling places of the holy ones and their resting places too. So there my eyes saw their holy dwelling places with the angels, and their resting places with the holy ones [...] And I saw a dwelling place underneath the wings of the Lord of the Spirits; and all the righteous and the elect before him shall be as intense as the light of fire. Their mouth shall be full of blessing; their lips will praise the name of the Lord of the Spirits.<sup>45</sup>

The righteous intercede for the people of earth and praise the Lord in this holy location. The Watchers worship God in two groups; their *Qedussah* and doxology (blessing) reveal the influence of Isaiah 6:3 and Ezekiel 3:12:

Those who do not slumber but stand before your glory, did  
bless you. They shall bless, praise, and extol (you), saying,

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<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of Latin, Greek and Coptic interpretations of the four living creatures, see Kenneth Stevenson, "Animal Rites: The Four Living Creatures in Patristic Exegesis and Liturgy," *Studia Patristica* 34, ed. M.F. Wiles and E.J. Yarnold, with P.M. Parvis (Leuven: Peeters, 2001): 470-92.

<sup>43</sup> Spinks, *Sanctus*, 47-48.

<sup>44</sup> James Charlesworth argued that the parallels between Revelation 4:6 and 1 Enoch 40:2, and Revelation 4:8 and 1 Enoch 39:13 made it 'probable that one of the sources may ultimately originate with the *Parables of Enoch*'. Charlesworth, "The Parables of Enoch and the Apocalypse of John," in *The Pseudepigrapha and Christian Origins: Essays from the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, ed. Gerbern S. Oegema and James H. Charlesworth (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 238.

<sup>45</sup> E. Isaac, trans., 1 Enoch 39:4-7, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 30-31.

‘Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of the Spirits; the spirits fill the earth.’

And at that place (under his wings) my eyes saw others who stood before him sleepless (and) blessed (him), saying, ‘Blessed are you and blessed is the name of the Lord of the Spirits forever and ever.’<sup>46</sup>

The call of the thrice-holy in 1 Enoch corresponds to the chant of the four beasts in Revelation. The doxology following it also has a parallel in Revelation 4:11, a passage in which twenty-four ‘Elders’ respond to the thrice-holy in Revelation with the acclamation, “[w]orthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power...”. The Elders have been interpreted in several ways, as the twelve patriarchs and twelve apostles, kings and angels.<sup>47</sup> A clue to their identity lies in their performance of a ‘new song’ (ὥδὴν καινὴν) on citharas alongside the four beasts in 5:9.<sup>48</sup> The ‘new song’ is a hymn sung by 144,000 male virgins, those ‘who had been redeemed from the earth’ (14:3). The next verse says of them, ‘οὗτοι ἡγοράσθησαν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπαρχή,’ which can be translated as, ‘these have been bought from humankind as first fruits’.<sup>49</sup> Significantly, another passage which uses a form of the verb ‘to buy’ (ἀγοράζειν) is Revelation 5:9, part of the new song of the twenty-four Elders; they sing that the Lamb purchased (ἡγόρασας) them for God from every nation with his blood. The 144,000 are therefore those who have been saved by the sacrifice of Christ. Indeed, Revelation 7: 4-8 gives the number of the children from each of the twelve tribes of Israel sealed with the name of the Father as 144,000. The new song is therefore the song

<sup>46</sup> 1 Enoch 39:12-14, 31.

<sup>47</sup> R.H. Charles claimed that they might be angels in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 1:116, cited in Piper (“Apocalypse of John,” p. 20). Peterson, (*Angels and the Liturgy*, p. 6 and p. 11), and Piper (p. 11), assert that they are both kings and priests in heaven, with Piper also suggesting that they may represent the leaders of the two covenants. Colleen McDannell and Bernard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1988), argue that the crowns of the Elders identify them as priests (p. 39). More interpretations can be found in Spinks, *Sanctus*, 48.

<sup>48</sup> The term is given in the Vulgate as ‘canticum novum’.

<sup>49</sup> The Vulgate has ‘hi empti sunt ex hominibus primitiae’.

of the saved. Are the twenty-four Elders among the 144,000 saved souls? The parallels between Revelation 5:8-9 and 14:3 suggest that this is the case.<sup>50</sup> It is also possible that the groups are related, but not identical. The early Christian commentator on Revelation, Victorinus, wrote that the twenty-four Elders represent the twenty-four books of the prophets (*navi'im*) and laws (*torah*) in the Hebrew Bible, as well as the twelve prophets and twelve apostles.<sup>51</sup> They may therefore represent the leaders of the blessed while the virgins make up the remainder of the saved. Martyrs are also counted among the worthy; they dwell under the altar (6:11) and cry out (κράζουσιν), saying ““Salvation”” before God (7:10) in a manner recalling the acclamation of ““Hosanna”” in the Gospels (Mt 21:9; Mk 11:9; Jn 12:13). While there seems to be, at the most, three groups of the righteous in heaven – the Elders, the virgins and the martyrs – only the Elders sing along with the living creatures and occupy the space around the throne.

In the fifth chapter of Revelation, however, the liturgy that has been confined to those beings nearest the throne spills out of heaven. Angels, the Elders and the living creatures begin a sequence of responses (5:12) which is then chanted by every creature which from the heights to the depths blesses the Lamb (5:13). In the words of Gottfried Schimanowski, ‘[t]he communities in heaven and on earth are united in antiphonal liturgy. The boundaries between them are broken’.<sup>52</sup> Praises resound through the entire universe again in Revelation 19:1-8, in which the people in heaven (19:1), the beasts and Elders (19:4) and the ‘voice of a great multitude’ (19:6) chant ““Alleluia””. The harmony of all things in one united act of praise is a symbol and celebration of Christ’s unification of creation through his incarnation and sacrifice. Indeed, the angelic hymn of Glory in Luke 2:13-14,

<sup>50</sup> J. Massyngberde Ford, outlined parallels between Revelation 14:1-5 and 5:6-11 in *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2007), 245.

<sup>51</sup> Victorinus, *In apocalypsin* 4.7-10 (PL 5: 324C-D).

<sup>52</sup> Schimanowski, ““Connecting Heaven and Earth,”” 78.



which juxtaposes worship in heaven with peace on earth, carries a similar message of universal harmony.<sup>53</sup>

Revelation shows all created things, not just the elect, participating in the chants of the heavenly choirs. Nevertheless, the universal liturgy begins around the celestial throne room and only eventually trickles down to the creatures below. The inhabitants of the celestial city are the angels and the elect, as illustrated by Hebrews 12:22-23, which states that the blessed have come to Mount Sion and the heavenly Jerusalem, ‘to the spirits of the just men made perfect’ (πνεύμασι δικαίων τετελειωμένων) and to ‘innumerable angels in festal gathering’ (μυριάσιν ἀγγέλων πανηγύρει).<sup>54</sup> Several passages of the New Testament also suggest that the righteous can assume an angelic identity, either by becoming equal to the angels (Lk 20:36), or like them (Mk 12:25). In the Akhmim fragment of the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Peter*, Christ shows the disciples the *locus amoenus* outside the world where the just dwell, ‘clad with the shining raiment of angels [...] suitable to their place of habitation’.<sup>55</sup> No longer burdened by bodily needs and desires, they attain an angelic state of existence, and angels walk among them. Furthermore, the passage affirms that angels and the righteous offer praise together: ‘[a]ll who dwell there had an equal glory, and with one voice they praised God the Lord, rejoicing in that place’. The righteous, taking on an angelic state and sharing the angels’ place of habitation and their duty of praise, can truly be said to have joined the chorus of the blessed spirits. Pseudepigrapha and apocrypha are rich in detail about

<sup>53</sup> Hammerstein, *Die Musik der Engel*, 30.

<sup>54</sup> The Vulgate translates these phrases as ‘spiritus iustorum perfectorum’ and ‘multorum milium angelorum frequentiae’. Augustine claimed that humans and angels are part of a fellowship. See *De civitate Dei* 12.1 (PL 41: 349). Gregory echoed the sentiment in his digression on angels in the thirty-fourth homily on the Gospels (PL 76: 1252B), where he added that there are as many human spirits as unfallen angels in the heavenly city, and that people gain a place in that society by exhibiting merits associated with each class of angel.

<sup>55</sup> Ch. Maurer and H. Duensing trans., *Apocalypse of Peter* in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. W. Schneemelcher, and trans. R. McL. Wilson, 2 vols. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965), 2:682. The Greek text discovered at Akhmim, Egypt, was thought to have been written between the eighth and ninth centuries. The *Apocalypse of Peter* is considerably earlier, possibly early second century. See edition in Schneemelcher, 2:663-64.

the liturgy of celestial communities. The following section will briefly consider three visions of Old Testament prophets before moving on to a fuller discussion of a long Latin text of the *Visio S. Pauli* (BHL 6580), a vision that was widely known in the Middle Ages.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.2: Soundscapes of heaven in pseudepigrapha and apocrypha

Non-canonical heavenly ascent visions, composed under the names of prophets of the Old and New Testaments between the last century BCE and the first five centuries of the Common Era, offer detailed accounts of other world geography and its soundscapes. In this section, I use ‘soundscape’ quite simply to mean the sounds that make up the structure and contribute to the atmosphere of the other world space.<sup>57</sup> The Slavonic version of Enoch (2 Enoch) and the *Ascension of Isaiah* depict a multi-layered heaven, in which angelic ministers or priests occupy many of the tiers.<sup>58</sup> In both texts, angels are arranged according to rank, and their position within the heavenly hierarchy is reflected in their performance or non-performance of the liturgy. The seven heavens in the *Ascension of Isaiah* have distinct sonic profiles. As Isaiah ascends, the angelic praise becomes increasingly glorious.<sup>59</sup> In heavens one to five, choirs are divided into two; the angels on the right are more glorious than those on the left and their praises are markedly different. In the sixth heaven, all the angels are identical and their praises are equal,

<sup>56</sup> For evidence that a long Latin version of the text was known in Anglo-Saxon England, see Theodore Silverstein, ed., *Visio Sancti Pauli: The History of the Apocalypse in Latin Together with Nine Texts* (London: Christophers, 1935), 6-7.

<sup>57</sup> See Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, 75-78, for a discussion of the ‘moral soundscape’ of the Middle Ages, including the sounds of heaven and hell.

<sup>58</sup> The date and provenance of 2 Enoch are shrouded in mystery. F.I. Andersen, “Introduction” to 2 (*Slavonic Apocalypse of*) Enoch in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 91-100 (esp. pp. 94-97). Andersen expresses a preference for an early date of the late first century CE, and a Jewish, rather than Christian, provenance, though ‘it hardly stands in the mainstream of either religion’ (p. 95). The *Ascension of Isaiah* contains Jewish and Christian elements. It has been proposed that chapters 1-5 are Jewish in origin but show signs of Christian editing (a Christian apocalypse is inserted between 3:13 and 4:22), while chapters 6-11 are Christian and composed between the first and second century CE. See “Introduction” to *The Ascension of Isaiah* (an Ethiopic text) in *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, ed. H.F.D. Sparks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 779-80.

<sup>59</sup> R.H. Charles, trans. *Ascension of Isaiah* 7, ed. Sparks, 796-800.

which suggests that they sing as one.<sup>60</sup> However, there are several hints in the text that the righteous are the most exalted of all created beings: they occupy the seventh heaven, and although Isaiah can be transformed into the likeness of angels, he cannot resemble the righteous.<sup>61</sup>

In 2 Enoch, all ranks of angels sing apart from those in the fifth heaven.<sup>62</sup> The angels dwelling there are the leaders of the heavenly rebellion – the Watchers which had intercourse with human women.<sup>63</sup> They are silent and mournful, but when Enoch urges them to perform the liturgy, they stand in four regiments and are able to sing in unison.<sup>64</sup> Song thus reflects order and has the capacity to restore those who have fallen into chaos. In the seventh heaven, Enoch sees the ten classes of unfallen angels positioned on steps corresponding to their rank. They direct their praise to God high above, in the tenth heaven.<sup>65</sup> Cherubim and seraphim, which continually sing the thrice-holy, cover His throne.<sup>66</sup> Enoch is endowed with angelic garments and initiated into divine mysteries, but nowhere does the text state that he is able to participate in the songs of the heavenly armies.<sup>67</sup>

As well as being a sign of angelic rank, song demarcates the places of the righteous. There are no choirs in the first two heavens in Enoch's vision. Only when he reaches a place prepared for the blessed, the paradise of Edem [*sic*], does Enoch find three hundred angels worshipping God at all times 'with never-ceasing

<sup>60</sup> Charles, *Ascension of Isaiah* 8.18, 801.

<sup>61</sup> Charles, *Ascension of Isaiah* 9.8 and 9:33-34, 803 and 805.

<sup>62</sup> F.I. Andersen, trans., 2 Enoch 18.9, 132.

<sup>63</sup> See 1 Enoch 6-11 and Genesis 6:1-2, 4.

<sup>64</sup> For more on how this passage influenced the later portrayal of Enoch as an angelic choirmaster in Jewish mysticism, see Andrei A. Orlov, "Celestial Choirmaster: The Liturgical Role of Enoch-Metatron in 2 Enoch and the Merkabah Tradition," in *From Apocalypticism to Merkabah Mysticism: Studies in the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 197-221.

<sup>65</sup> 2 Enoch 20, 134.

<sup>66</sup> 2 Enoch 21.1, 134.

<sup>67</sup> 2 Enoch 22.10, 138. Although Spinks (*Sanctus*, p. 35) presumed that Enoch joins the songs of the heavenly hosts after he is transformed into the likeness of the angels, but there is nothing in the text to support this interpretation.

voice'.<sup>68</sup> When he recounts his journey to his family, Enoch specifies that the angels are gatekeepers “singing victory songs, never silent, rejoicing at the arrival of the righteous”.<sup>69</sup> There is also a lightless place of ice and black fire on the same level, devoid of angelic song. It is prepared for sinners, and anticipates the purgatorial regions of ice and fire so common in medieval visions. In the Egyptian *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, written between 100 BCE and 175 CE, angels sing in front of the seer as he leaves the infernal region of Hades and travels upon a river up to the land of the patriarchs.<sup>70</sup> The visionary becomes like the angels by assuming an angelic garment and praying in their language. The patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Enoch, Elijah and David – can also speak with angels.<sup>71</sup>

Non-canonical apocalypses, including the texts discussed above, circulated within monastic circles in Egypt, a culture ‘steeped in “apocalypticism”’.<sup>72</sup> One of the most widely read and translated apocalypses of the Middle Ages, the *Visio S. Pauli*, might have emerged from this milieu.<sup>73</sup> One part of it is certainly very reminiscent of the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*. The visionary crosses a river in a ship with angels singing before him.<sup>74</sup> On the bank is the City of Christ (the heavenly Jerusalem), which corresponds to the land of the patriarchs in Zephaniah’s vision.

<sup>68</sup> 2 Enoch 8.8, 116.

<sup>69</sup> 2 Enoch 42.4, 168.

<sup>70</sup> O.S. Wintermute, trans., *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 8 in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 514. For dating and provenance, see 500-501.

<sup>71</sup> Wintermute, *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 9.4-5, 514.

<sup>72</sup> David Frankfurter, “The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity: Regional Trajectories,” in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, ed. James C. VanderKam and William Adler (Assen: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 131. Among the manuscripts that originated in Egyptian monasteries or were found in Egyptian tombs are the *Apocalypses* of Enoch, Elijah, Zephaniah, the *Testaments* of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Job, and the *Ascension of Isaiah* (p. 163).

<sup>73</sup> Theodore Silverstein and Antony Hilhorst, ed., *Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition of the Three Long Latin Versions* (Geneva: P. Cramer, 1997), 11-12. The original Greek text might have been written in Egypt as early as the second century CE. It was transported to Asia Minor, where it gained a Preface in the early fifth century. A long Latin version, L<sup>1</sup>, was composed between the middle of the fifth century and the first few decades of the sixth century. All references to the *Visio* in this section will be to L<sup>1</sup> as represented in MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Nouv. acq. lat. 1631, ff 2vb-25vb (dated between S. VIII and S. XI), edited by Silverstein and Hilhorst.

<sup>74</sup> *Visio S. Pauli* (henceforth, *VsP*) 23, 120.

It is where virgins and those who have suffered for the Lord are taken after death.<sup>75</sup> Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Micah and Zachariah dwell by a river of honey, ‘in the place of prophets’ (in loco [...] prophetarum). Innocents (children, perhaps the Holy Innocents slaughtered by Herod) are by a river of milk. Virgins, the ‘brothers’ and ‘friends’ of the innocents, are also transported to this region on account of their purity. Patriarchs who accommodated pilgrims, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Lot and Job, are beside a river of wine. A group of psalm-singers who are wholly devoted to God take their place by a river of oil. The souls of those who knew neither scripture nor psalms, but followed the command of God, sit on thrones around the City gates.<sup>76</sup> Notably, there is no category of martyrs besides the innocents. The *Visio S. Pauli* reflects the variety of acts of spiritual martyrdom that came to equal or surpass physical martyrdom in the post-persecution era.<sup>77</sup>

The psalm-singers by the river of oil may represent early Christian monks. Continual prayer in the form of psalmody was a monastic ideal in late antique Egypt.<sup>78</sup> An anecdote in the Alphabetical collection of Sayings of the ‘Fathers’ of

<sup>75</sup> VsP 22, 118.

<sup>76</sup> VsP 29, 130.

<sup>77</sup> Marcel Viller, in his early twentieth-century article, “Le martyre et l’ascèse,” *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique* 6 (1925): 105-42, argued that martyrdom indirectly influenced the conception of the monastic life. Edward Malone developed the argument that monks were the successors of martyrs in his oft-cited thesis, *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1950). It is important to make a distinction between the erroneous view that confessor saints represented a new alternative to martyrdom and the more feasible view that the asceticism of virgins and monks slowly came to the fore during the course of the third and fourth centuries. See chapter three, section 2.2.

<sup>78</sup> James McKinnon argued that the early monastic practice of singing large portions of the Psalter and, on occasion, the Psalter in its entirety, was a significant factor in the ‘psalmodic movement’ or ‘unprecedented enthusiasm for singing psalms that swept from East to West in the fourth century.’ McKinnon, “Desert Monasticism and the Later Fourth-Century Psalmodic Movement,” *Music and Letters* 75 (1995): 506. Joseph Dyer, however, warned against overstating the importance of song in desert monasteries and its impact on the psalmodic movement in “The Desert, the City and Psalmody in the Late Fourth Century,” in *Western Plainchant in the First Millennium: Studies in the Medieval Liturgy and its Music*, ed. Sean Gallagher (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 11. His focus on the importance of psalmody in urban centres was duly noted by Christopher Page, *The Christian West and its Singers: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2010), 131-51. Even if the psalmody of desert monks was less influential

Egyptian desert monasticism illustrates the difference between the desert ideal and monastic practice outside Egypt.<sup>79</sup> Epiphanius, who had been mentored by a desert monk, tells an abbot of one of his monasteries in Palestine that chanting psalms at the Hours of Terce, Sext and None is not sufficient: “[t]he true monk should have prayer and psalmody continually in his heart”.<sup>80</sup> According to another apophthegm, a brother who never ceased from prayer was considered to be “an angel on earth”.<sup>81</sup> Jean Leclercq has argued that early monks who lived the *vita angelica* attained this blessed state through the ascetic practices of prayer and vigilance: “[t]he angels are models of the contemplative life as well as of the active one. They are before God and they praise him; so do the monks in prayer”.<sup>82</sup> Ellen Muehlberger’s work has shown, however, that the trope of the *vita angelica* functioned in a far more complex manner than Leclercq’s analysis implies, and could even be problematic if monks believed themselves to live *as* angels, rather than merely being equal to them.<sup>83</sup> To return to the *Visio S. Pauli*, it is striking that angels are not found among the psalm-singers in heaven. To join the heavenly host did not necessarily mean to stand alongside angelic singers, but to enjoy the pleasures of eternity within the ranks of the righteous. The inhabitants of the City of Christ share the duty of angels, however – to sing in praise of the King.

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than has previously been thought, it still formed a considerable part of the daily routine for desert ascetics. Anselme Davril argued that it was virtually synonymous with prayer in, “La psalmodie chez les pères du désert,” *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 49 (1987): 132-39. There is also general agreement among the editors and translators of the *Apophthegmata patrum* that the psalms are the most frequently cited of Old Testament texts. See Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York; Oxford: OUP, 1993), 97.

<sup>79</sup> The Alphabetical collection can be found in PG 65: 71A-456B. It is translated by Benedicta Ward in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975). See chapter two, section 3.1 for more detail on the *Apophthegmata patrum*.

<sup>80</sup> Epiphanius, apophthegm 3 (PG 65: 163B-164C), trans. Ward, 57.

<sup>81</sup> Macarius of Alexandria, apophthegm 3 (PG 65: 305A-306A), trans. Ward, 152.

<sup>82</sup> Jean Leclercq, “Monasticism and Angelism,” *Downside Review* 85 (1967), 131. His analysis here echoes that of the *Life of Perfection*, 19-26.

<sup>83</sup> Ellen Muehlberger, “Ambivalence about the Angelic Life: The Promise and Perils of an Early Christian Discourse of Asceticism,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16: 4 (2008): 447-78, esp. 475.

The long Latin version considered here contains no indication that Paul hears celestial music in the Land of Promise – an interim location where souls of the less-than-perfect (including the married) await Judgement – or the third heaven, the abode of Enoch and Elijah.<sup>84</sup> The City of Christ, by contrast, trembles with the liturgy of the saved. In its centre is a high altar, where David, with a cithara and psalter in his hands, sings Alleluia.<sup>85</sup> The inhabitants of the city in turn respond with a cry of Alleluia, which Paul’s angelic guide glosses as “[l]et us all bless him as one”.<sup>86</sup> The guide reveals that, at the time of Christ’s coming, David will lead the righteous in a chorus of Alleluia, an idea clearly inspired by the universal praises described in Revelation 19:1-6. Furthermore, the Host may not be offered on earth without David first intoning his praises.<sup>87</sup> If those who are capable of singing do not do so, they commit a sin of pride. This stands in contrast to the humble psalm-singers who dwell by the river of oil, whose entire hearts rang with praises while they lived. The depiction of worship in the City of Christ seems to reflect the practice of the responsorial performance of psalms in Late Antiquity. Joseph Dyer has shown that prior to the widespread practice of antiphonal choral psalmody in monasteries, psalms were intoned by a single monk while the brethren listened in silence and responded with short refrains.<sup>88</sup> The Pachomian precepts even state that it is forbidden not to respond to the soloist intoning the psalms. It appears that the soundscape of heaven in the *Visio S. Pauli* was thus informed by the rules of the early monastic life.

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<sup>84</sup> Two versions of a different long Latin text, L<sup>2</sup>, contain a scene in which Paul witnesses a procession of saints in the paradise of Eden, accompanied by hymn singing. See texts in Silverstein and Hilhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul*, 202-207.

<sup>85</sup> VsP 29, 132.

<sup>86</sup> VsP 30, 134.

<sup>87</sup> VsP 29, 132.

<sup>88</sup> Joseph Dyer, “Monastic Psalmody in the Middle Ages,” *Revue bénédictine* 99 (1989): 43 and 47. Jesse D. Billett, *The Divine Office in Anglo-Saxon England, 597 – c. 1000* (London: Boydell Press, 2014), pp. 93-97, explained that in a monastic context, the term ‘antiphonal’ refers to the Roman practice of choral singing, whereby the brethren are divided into two groups. This performance style superseded ‘responsorial’ psalmody, which involved a soloist intoning a psalm and the congregation of monks listening in silence and occasionally offering a refrain.

The depiction of the celestial city in the *Visio S. Pauli* also expands on the idea of the city of the blessed as found in Hebrews and on the vision of the liturgy in the Revelation of John by showing that the bonds between the celestial and terrestrial camps of the community are renewed each time the Host is elevated and ingested. David the psalmist performs the rite, highlighting the power of psalmody to bring communities together in praise. Patristic texts of the fourth century by Basil the Great and Athanasius of Alexandria extol the book of Psalms for its capacity to harmonise the different books of the Bible, reflect the different states of the soul and correct a disordered spirit.<sup>89</sup> In one of his epistles, Athanasius states that when worshippers chant psalms ‘so that the melody of the phrases is brought forth from the soul’s good order,’ they sing with the mind as well as the tongue; this activity ‘call[s] them into unanimity with those who form the heavenly chorus’.<sup>90</sup> A good singer therefore follows the dictum of St. Paul: ‘I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also’ (1 Cor 14:15). In the *Visio S. Pauli*, the psalm-singers by the river of oil fulfil this scriptural precept. By contrast, those who do not sing when they are able to are proud of heart.

As in 2 Enoch, there is a relationship between sin and absence of song in the *Visio S. Pauli*. The temporary place of punishment for the impious and the pit of hell are filled with the sounds of ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (*fletus et stridor dencium*) (Mt 13:42; Lk 13:28).<sup>91</sup> The only other place in Paul’s vision that resounds with song is God’s heavenly throne room, where angels and the twenty-four Elders praise God after he delivers individual judgements on souls.<sup>92</sup> This represents the final stage of a soul’s journey and judgement after death. First of all,

<sup>89</sup> Basil, *Homily 10*, in *Exegetic Homilies*, trans. Agnes Clare Way (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 151-53; Athanasius, *Letter to Marcellinus* in *Letter to Marcellinus* in *The Life of Antony; and, the Letter to Marcellinus* (London; New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 101-29.

<sup>90</sup> Athanasius, “Letter to Marcellinus” 29, 125.

<sup>91</sup> *VsP* 16, 102.

<sup>92</sup> *VsP* 14, 94.



angels of piety or impiety determine the camp to which the soul belongs.<sup>93</sup> Then two escorts – the soul’s guardian angel and the spirit which dwelt within the soul in life – lead it through the mid-air to the divine judgement room. Good and bad souls travel the same path to heaven, but the journey is more arduous for impious souls; their journey is impeded by ‘powers’ (potestates) and ‘principalities’ (principes), the evil spirits described in Paul’s letters.<sup>94</sup> Among them is the spirit of slander, whose presence is indicated by ‘whispering’ (susuracio).<sup>95</sup> Finally, God delivers judgement and the soul is taken to a location where it must abide until Judgement Day. Heavenly choirs are only present in the last of these stages of individual judgement.

In the long Latin text of the *Visio S. Pauli*, therefore, the throne room, the City of God, the temporary places of torment and the pit of hell all have soundscapes – yet the interim Land of Promise does not. One reason for this may be that the pit of hell and the places of punishment are not fully differentiated. Both may be viewed as hell, and so share a soundscape. The City of Christ can be interpreted as heaven, although it is not clear whether its inhabitants abide there permanently in advance of their final reward. Those in the Land of Promise, however, are neither in hell nor in heaven, and this indeterminacy of status may account for the absence of a distinct soundscape. In-between places that have purgatorial or paradisiacal features abound in early medieval visions of the other world, displaying variation in structure. How, then, did the relationship between space and sound change throughout this period?

### 3.3: Celestial and infernal voices in early medieval visions

The visions of the other world from the seventh and eighth centuries, narrated not by prophets and apostles but by ordinary men and women, were intended to

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<sup>93</sup> *VsP* 14, 86.

<sup>94</sup> *VsP* 11, 82 and 16, 98.

<sup>95</sup> *VsP* 16, 98.

provoke the reader or listener into undertaking acts of penance. They revealed that the soul, culpable for its actions and the actions of the body in life, was judged after death and sent to a destination appropriate to its degree of merit. The purgatorial suffering of the souls which were neither eternally damned nor wafted straight into heaven could also be relieved by prayers, masses and almsgiving of the living.<sup>96</sup> Just as there was a spectrum of moral worthiness, so there were a range of places where the soul could dwell between its individual judgement and the Final Judgement: heaven, hell and, in-between these two extremes, places of trial and waiting, both purgatorial and paradisiacal.

In his monumental study, *La naissance du purgatoire*, Jacques Le Goff dismissed the period between Gregory the Great and the twelfth century as one of ‘doctrinal stagnation and the riot of imagination,’ because there were no great theological developments in thought on purgatory.<sup>97</sup> By privileging theology over popular literature, Le Goff implied that early medieval visions were a disappointing prelude to the substantial developments that took place in the Parisian schools of the high Middle Ages.<sup>98</sup> Purgatory was not born, he argued, until it appeared between 1150 and 1200 as the noun *purgatorium*, indicating its ‘spatialization’.<sup>99</sup> His approach, driven by a nominalist methodology, has been extensively criticised by researchers who understood the use of the noun to mark but one phase in the gradual evolution of purgatory.<sup>100</sup> However, Sarah Foot reached conclusions that

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<sup>96</sup> On suffrages for souls of the dead, see, for example, Augustine, *Enchiridion* 110 (*PL* 40:283-84) and Gregory the Great, *Dialogi* 4.40 (*PL* 77:396D-97C) and 4.55 (*PL* 77:416D-21C). These passages are discussed in, to name but a few works, Le Goff, trans. Goldhammer, *The Birth of Purgatory* (London: Scholar Press, 1984), 73; G.R. Edwards, “Purgatory: Birth or Evolution?,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985): 639; Marilyn Dunn, “Gregory the Great, the Vision of Fursey and the Origins of Purgatory,” *Peritia* 14 (2000): 241, 245-46; and Moreira, *Heaven’s Purge*, 109-10, and 166-73.

<sup>97</sup> Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 96.

<sup>98</sup> For these developments, see Le Goff, 154-76.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 and 157.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, R.W. Southern, “Between Heaven and Hell,” *Times Literary Supplement* (1982): 651; Carozzi, “La géographie de l’au-delà,” 480; Brian Patrick McGuire, “Purgatory, the Communion of Saints, and Medieval Change,” *Viator* 20 (1989): 65.

were consonant with those of Le Goff in her article on Anglo-Saxon visions. In particular, she argued that the absence of a word for ‘purgatory’ in the early Anglo-Latin sources indicates a lack of theological agreement and understanding about purgatory as a concept; its ‘spatialization’ and organisation differs from vision to vision; and, finally, it is unclear how time works in the other world and therefore how long a soul is expected to suffer.<sup>101</sup> The following year, Moreira’s full length study of purgatory in the ‘long’ late antique period proposed precisely the opposite: ‘the idea of purgatory as a staging post in the afterlife, with recognizable features, descriptive energy, theological justification, and political use, burst on to the eschatological landscape in the eighth century’.<sup>102</sup> Moreira’s study nevertheless acknowledged the fluidity of the early medieval concept of purgatory with a small ‘p’.<sup>103</sup> Paradise, as well as purgatory, was a vague and mutable concept in the early medieval period. Ananya Kabir has tracked paradise in its various permutations through the texts of the Anglo-Saxon period in *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, though her eagerness to find the interim paradise in sources has led to at least one case of misidentification.<sup>104</sup> In this sub-section, I avoid using the nouns ‘purgatory’ or ‘paradise’ unless they are used by the sources themselves, and instead adopt the adjectives, ‘purgatorial’ and ‘paradisiacal’ to convey the character of the intermediate spaces, a character that is constructed partly by what the visionary hears and does not hear.

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<sup>101</sup> Sarah Foot, “Anglo-Saxon ‘Purgatory,’” in *The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul: Papers Read at the 2007 Summer Meeting and the 2008 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), 89 and 94.

<sup>102</sup> Moreira, *Heaven’s Purge*, 5.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>104</sup> Helen Foxhall Forbes (“*Diuiduntur in quattuor*,” 663-64) has argued that Kabir mistook heaven for paradise in Julian of Toledo’s *Prognosticon*. Alessandro Scafi, *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth* (London: British Library, 2006), discusses how the Garden of Eden came to be situated in time and space on medieval maps. For a consideration of some of the visions mentioned in this chapter, see the chapter, “Locating Paradise in Space,” pp. 44-61.

The vision of Drythelm in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (c. 731) depicts a four-part other world, comprised of heaven, hell, and two intermediate places where souls dwell between the time of their deaths and the Final Judgement. As Helen Foxhall Forbes has convincingly argued, the spaces correspond to those outlined in Bede's homily for the second Sunday in Advent, in which he distinguishes between perfect souls which go straight to heaven (apostles, martyrs, confessors and 'other men of a stricter and more perfect life'), less perfect souls which must wait in *paradisus*, and souls which must be punished in the flames of the purgatorial fires (*flammis ignis purgatorii*), where they are cleansed until Judgement Day or until they secure early release on account of suffrages performed by their friends.<sup>105</sup> In Drythelm's vision, the place of purgatorial punishment is portrayed as a valley of snow and fire, where souls leap from one extreme to another. The guide informs the visionary, "this here is not hell, as you think".<sup>106</sup> Hell takes the form of a dark and noisome pit; flames fling the souls up while evil spirits drag them down. Drythelm is then led to a *locus amoenus*, a field blooming with flowers, in which dwell innumerable little gatherings of people in white robes (*innumera hominum albatorum conuenticula*) and many happy crowds (*plurimae agminum laetantium*).<sup>107</sup> These happy choirs (*choros*) dwell in 'mansions of blessed spirits' (*beatorum mansiones spirituum*).<sup>108</sup> The guide tells Drythelm, "this is not the Kingdom of heaven, as you consider it to be".<sup>109</sup> He later explains that this *locus florifer* is for the souls which died practising good works, but were

<sup>105</sup> Bede, *Homilia* 1.2 in *Bedae Venerabilis opera homiletica*, ed. David Hurst, CCL 122 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1955), 12. Although Bede does not name virgins as a category of the elect in this sermon, there is no doubt that he considers them to be among the perfect. See chapter three, section 4.2. The passage is discussed in Foxhall Forbes, "Diuiduntur in quattuor," 668-69.

<sup>106</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* (henceforth, *HE*) 5.12.2, ed. Michael Lapidge and trans. Pierre Monat and Philippe Robin, *Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais*, 3 vols. (Paris: Cerf, 2005), 3:72. All page numbers refer only to the Latin text. Translations into English are my own.

<sup>107</sup> Bede, *HE* 5.12.4, 3:76.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* Both Kabir (*Paradise*, p. 38) and Foxhall Forbes ("Diuiduntur in quattuor," p. 676) comment on Bede's avoidance of the word 'paradisum' in the vision of Drythelm.

not so perfect that they entered the kingdom of heaven immediately after death.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, they will enter into the presence of Christ and the joys of the kingdom of heaven on Judgement Day. For the time being, the kingdom is for those who are perfect in word, thought and deed.

Drythelm thus sees a whole spectrum of heavenly destinations, but only two of them – heaven and hell – have their own soundscapes. The geography of heaven remains unknown to the reader and the visionary, but its sensory character is evoked. The light emanating from the region is more gracious than that of the ‘beatorum mansiones spirituum,’ and the fragrance which drifts towards him is also far more delightful than that which he has experienced before. Moreover, amidst the light, he hears the sweetest sound of singing (uocem cantantium dulcissimam audiui).<sup>111</sup> Drythelm’s guide later tells him that heaven is nearby the place where he heard “‘the sound of sweet song’” (sonum cantilenae dulcis).<sup>112</sup> The melodious singing, sweet fragrance and light provide a foretaste of celestial joy. The dark pit of hell, by contrast, emits a foul odour and echoes with the shrieks of the damned. Drythelm hears ‘the noise of immense and wretched wailing’ (sonitum immanissimi fletus ac miserrimi) coming from five human souls as they are dragged towards the pit by a jeering mob of evil spirits.<sup>113</sup> As they descend, the voices of the punishers and the punished become one and blend together in a ‘confused sound’ (sonum [...] promiscuum).<sup>114</sup> By analogy, the single ‘uocem cantantium dulcissimam’ from the heavenly kingdom is likely to be a blend of the joyful voices of human spirits and angels.

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<sup>110</sup> *HE* 5.12.6, 3:78.

<sup>111</sup> *HE* 5.12.5, 3:76.

<sup>112</sup> *HE* 5.12.6, 3:80.

<sup>113</sup> *HE* 5.12.3, 3:74.

<sup>114</sup> *HE* 5.12.3, 3:74.

The soundscapes of heaven and hell are also vividly portrayed in a letter by Lull, archbishop of Mainz, written after 757.<sup>115</sup> Lull recounts the vision of an unnamed woman: she tells of a *locus amoenus* filled with souls, a three-layered heaven – each level of which is more glorious than the last – and a place of torment where souls are punished. In this place of torture, she sees demons divided into three immense groups (turmas), preparing places of suffering in the air, in the sea and on land. Two souls are immersed in pits, ‘and she heard coming from them a horrible wailing in miserable voices, resonating, as it were, through the whole world’ ([e]t horribilem ululatum quasi per totum mundum resonasse miserabiliter vocibus earum audiebat).<sup>116</sup> As in the vision of Drythelm, this wailing contrasts with the exultation of the heavenly hosts. From the three heavens, she hears an ‘indescribable sound’ (inenarrabilem sonitum) and the voices of the multitudes echoing it back (omnes animarum multitudines in his manentium resultabant), a sound just like the voice of many trumpets (tamquam vocem tubarum multarum) and a wonderful victory (mirabiliterque vincentem).<sup>117</sup> The ‘vocem tubarum multarum’ may, like the silver trumpets of Numbers 10:1-3, signify the calling of the celestial assembly. Alternatively, like the trumpets of Numbers 10:9 or Jeremiah 4:19-21, it may signal a rally to war. It also recalls the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15, the final trumpet before the great battle between Michael the archangel and the dragon of the apocalypse. All of these possibilities suggest a gathering of God’s faithful, a mustering of celestial troops.<sup>118</sup>

The visions discussed so far place heaven and hell in binary opposition. Hell, a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, contrasts sharply with the heavenly

<sup>115</sup> Lull, *Epistola* 115, ed. Ernst Dümmler, *MGH 3, Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini aevi* 1.6 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), 404-405.

<sup>116</sup> Lull, *Ep.* 115, 404.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>118</sup> Carozzi, *Le voyage*, compares this sound to the ‘Alleluia’ chorus of the *Visio S. Pauli*, 265. Both are call-and-response patterns of worship, and both are performed in a heavenly location, yet David’s call to praise and the thanksgiving of the righteous does not carry martial connotations, unlike the praises in Lull’s letter.

region, which resounds with consonant voices. One is a region of disorder, the home of the wicked and the rebel angels; the other is a region of order, the dwelling place of those spirits, angelic and human, which obey God's commands. The dissonance of hell and the harmonies of heaven thus reflect the moral state of their inhabitants.<sup>119</sup> Although the *locus amoenus* is filled with happy companies, they do not praise God like the righteous in heaven. In the vision of Drythelm, there is no evidence of a soundscape in the purgatorial valley.<sup>120</sup> In another vision, however, this is not the case. St. Boniface's letter to Abbess Eadburga of Thanet (716 x 719) records how a monk from the Abbey of Wenlock saw two fiery pits in his vision of the other world.<sup>121</sup> One was a lower pit, reserved for sinners who could never escape. The sound that issued from it was one of continual lamentation: 'he heard the horrible and tremendous groaning and weeping of grieving souls' (*audivit horrendum et tremendum [...] gemitum et fletum lugentium animarum*).<sup>122</sup> He also saw upper pits, reserved for those who would receive eternal rest after Judgement Day. Souls in these pits looked like black birds, and as they were tossed into the air by punishing flames, they made bestial noises, 'crying' (*plorantes*) and 'howling' (*ululantes*).<sup>123</sup> They also spoke in a way that was recognisably human (*verbis et voce humana*) as they lamented their state. Their cries had not, therefore, become too confused or inhuman – they are saved

<sup>119</sup> For extended discussions on the soundscape of hell and the music of devils, see Hammerstein, *Diabolus in Musica: Studien zur Ikonographie der Musik im Mittelalter* (Berne; München: Francke, 1974), 16-19, *Die Musik der Engel*, 100-115, Richard Rastall, "The Sounds of Hell," in *The Iconography of Hell*, ed. Clifford Davidson and Thomas H. Seiler (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), 102-131, and Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, 75-77.

<sup>120</sup> Moreira (*Heaven's Purge*, 151-52) interpreted the silence that attends purgation in the *Visio S. Baronti* as indicative of a lack of pain, and has linked this to the concept of the painless purification of the elect. It is possible that Moreira read too much into this 'silence'. While the sound of heavenly joy has a foundation in Revelation, and the suffering of hell is characterised by the 'wailing and gnashing of teeth,' there is no Scriptural or even apocryphal precedent for sounds in the spaces in between.

<sup>121</sup> Boniface, *Epistola* 10 in *MGH 3, Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini aevi* 1.6, 254.

<sup>122</sup> Boniface, *Epistola* 10, 254.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

the eternal torment of hell that throws everything into confusion. Indeed, they enjoy a small period of respite before falling back into the pits.

One reason why Drythelm's paradisiacal space may lack music is because it does not contain singing angels. Nor are there raucous devils in the valley of ice and fire. These creatures contribute much to the sonic environments of heaven and hell. Three other early medieval visions describe the sounds made by choirs of angels and mobs of demons in detail. Whereas the vision of Drythelm depicts souls awaiting the Final Judgement, these visions show what happens to souls straight after they leave the body.

In the anonymous *Visio S. Fursei* (656 x 657) and Bede's truncated retelling of it in the *Historia ecclesiastica*, the visionary leaves his body on two occasions and is taken up into the air by a group of angels.<sup>124</sup> Bede tells how, on the first occasion, 'he was worthy of gazing upon the flocks of angels and hearing blessed praises' (angelicorum [agmines] et aspectus intueri et laudes beatas meruit audire) such as Psalm 84:8: '[t]he saints shall go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Sion'.<sup>125</sup> The anonymous version tells us that he also hears an unknown song, chanted by 'many thousands of angels,' and is only able to discern, 'they went to meet with Christ,' a reference to 1 Thessalonians 4:17.<sup>126</sup> Bede does not provide the reader with any more information regarding this aspect of Fursey's vision. The music of the psychopomps is not synonymous with the sound of angels praising God *en masse* in heaven; later in the vision, Fursey hears angels singing the *Sanctus* on high, in a heavenly convent (supernum conuentum) where angels gather when they are off-duty from guarding human souls.<sup>127</sup> When

<sup>124</sup> An edition of Fursey's vision, extracted from an anonymous seventh-century *Vita* (BHL 3209-10), can be found in Carozzi, *L'au-delà*, 679-92 (henceforth, *Visio S. Fursei*). The abridged version is in Bede, *HE* 3.19, 2:102-114.

<sup>125</sup> Bede, *HE* 3.19.3, 2:104.

<sup>126</sup> *Visio S. Fursei* 3, 679-80. 1 Thess 4:17 is particularly appropriate to the out-of-body vision, as it refers to the rapture of the living at the time of the Second Coming of Christ.

<sup>127</sup> *Visio S. Fursei* 11, 686-87.



we refer to the anonymous *Visio*, we find that the ‘angelicorum [agmen]’ which lifted his soul from his body consists of three angels, one of which is dressed for battle and travels before the other two. The function of the song of these angelic psychopomps seems to be to comfort the human soul while it embarks on its journey through the sky, and when it returns to the body. Upon his first outing, Fursey is reluctant to leave the company of angels. When one of the angels sings Psalm 84:8 again, Fursey finds himself back in his body with no recollection of how he got there: ‘he was not able to understand how the soul, having been delighted by the sweetness of this song [anima [...] huius carminis suauitate laetificata], entered the body’.<sup>128</sup> The psalm verse has the quality of a magic charm, lulling the soul into a state of security while it is reunited with its sinful and limited body.

The angelic songs also comfort the soul of Fursey when it meets a troop of demons in mid-air during his second out-of-body experience. While the sound of psalmody signals the presence of angels, a terrible noise attends the coming of the demons: ‘[Fursey] heard horrible voices of a great, clamouring multitude’ (audiuit horribiles magnae multitudinis uoces clamantium).<sup>129</sup> The psychopomp angels protect him with their presence and sweet song until they defeat the evil hordes which obstruct Fursey’s way. Likewise, in the *Visio S. Baronti* (BHL 0997) (678 x 679), the soul of Barontus is confronted by a crowd of demons in the air as he travels along with his angelic guide, Raphael. Two angels come to Raphael’s aid and begin to sing an antiphon to Psalm 51:1, ‘[h]ave mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love’.<sup>130</sup> Immediately, the power of the belligerent crowd

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 4, 680.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. 6, 681.

<sup>130</sup> Barontus, *Visio S. Baronti* 7, *Acta SS.* March III, 25 (571D). Note that an ‘antiphon’ is a specific genre of medieval liturgical chant. It has been defined as ‘a liturgical chant sung as a refrain to the verses of a psalm’. See David Hiley and Alex Lingas, “antiphon.” *The Oxford Companion to Music. Oxford Music Online.* Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e321> (accessed June 28, 2015).

wanes, and the demons disperse. The antiphon is therefore not so much comforting as apotropaic, a weapon which serves to dispel evil spirits. The vision of the monk of Wenlock also makes reference to singing psychopomps and the battle between angels and demons over individual souls. The two elements, however, do not seem to be closely connected. Angels take the monk's soul from the body, singing Ps 38:1 in happy and consonant voices (*iucundis et consonis vocibus*), but there is no suggestion that they do so to ward off evil spirits.<sup>131</sup> Rather, vices or demons dispute with virtues or angels over souls in the air near an enormous conflagration, and in an intermediate region with purgatorial features, where the monk sees the souls of the righteous as white souls (*magna [cohors] candidarum animarum*) defending a blessed soul from evil spirits alongside a choir of angels (*chor[us] angelorum*).<sup>132</sup>

Groups of the righteous intercede for the soul of the visionary in the *Visio S. Baronti* and the later *Visio Wettini* (824). The other world landscape in Barontus' vision is peppered with brethren from his own monastery, St. Peter's in Lonrey (now known as Saint-Cyran-du-Jambot). Spirits of the monks welcome him at the first door of *paradisus*, the place where they are gathered in advance of the Final Judgement.<sup>133</sup> They implore Raphael and the Lord that Barontus' soul may be saved from evil spirits that wish to claim it. The dead of St. Peter's therefore join the living monks of the monastery in prayer for their departed brothers. There is a strong sense that St. Peter's is as much a celestial convent as an earthly one, even if this was an ideal rather than the reality.<sup>134</sup> At the third door of paradise, the visionary finds the priests of the monastery dwelling in heavenly mansions, one of

<sup>131</sup> Boniface, *Epistola* 10, 252.

<sup>132</sup> Boniface, *Ep.* 10, 255.

<sup>133</sup> *Visio S. Baronti* 8 (571E).

<sup>134</sup> Michelle L. Roper discussed the external and internal tensions that might have stimulated this vision of monastic concord in "Uniting the Community of the Living with the Dead: The Use of Other-World Visions in the Early Middle Ages," in *Authority and Community in the Middle Ages*, ed. Donald Mowbray, Rhiannon Purdie and Ian P. Wei (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), 19-41.

which is reserved for the Abbot, and at the fourth door, he meets a brother who was hampered by disability in life. Barontus is not permitted to pass through this entrance. Beyond it, he sees only a bright and splendid light. It is possible that beyond this fourth door lies the kingdom of heaven, where the saints in paradise shall dwell after Judgement Day.

Many of the people Barontus meets in paradise have a connection with his monastic community (including the celestial gatekeeper, St. Peter), but he also encounters three groups of saints with whom he does not necessarily have a local or personal connection: innocents, who gather at the second door of paradise; virgins, on the road between the second and third door; and martyrs, who share the space with priests on the other side of the third door. Notably, only these three groups pray to God ‘with one voice’ (*vna voce*), suggesting that the author perceived them to be akin to angels, which praise the Lord in unison.<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, the three groups differ from one another in merit. Virgins rank more highly than the innocents but are of a lower degree of merit than the martyrs. Yet they are the only group out of the three who intercede for Barontus, possibly because he has committed a sexual transgression.<sup>136</sup> In the *Visio S. Wettini*, groups of priests, martyrs and virgins all intercede for the visionary’s soul.<sup>137</sup> The Lord’s increasingly positive response to each group’s supplications implies that they differ in merit, and that the prayers of the ‘innumerable multitude of holy virgins’ (*innumerabilis sanctarum virginum multitudo*) who shine with ‘incomparable dignity’ (*incomparabili dignitate*) carry the most weight.<sup>138</sup> If the writer is indeed lauding virginity as the highest of virtues, it would be in keeping with the rest of the vision, which emphatically condemns sins of a sexual nature.

<sup>135</sup> *Visio S. Baronti* 9 and 11 (572A-B).

<sup>136</sup> The demons which pursue Barontus throughout the vision accuse him of having had three wives, ‘which was not permitted to him’ and committing many acts of adultery (572D).

<sup>137</sup> Heito, *Visio S. Wettini* 16-18, ed. Ernst Dümmler in *MGH, Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881-1951) 2:272.

<sup>138</sup> Heito, *Visio S. Wettini* 18, 272.

The texts discussed above develop motifs from their late antique prototype, the *Visio S. Pauli*, in several ways. While the earlier text gives little indication that the demons of the mid-air are noisy creatures, in later visions, the space in between heaven and earth becomes fraught with the sounds of evil spirits. The noises that they make are diametrically opposed to the unified and soothing psalms of the angels. On one level, the demonic sounds are merely symbolic of chaos of hell. On another level, though, they also have a function – to frighten and disorientate the souls of the newly deceased. The intentionality behind demonic noise is only implicit in the other world visions under discussion in this chapter. However, the *Vita S. Guthlaci* (BHL 3723), an eighth-century hagiographical text that draws on other world *topoi*, states the purpose of demonic noise more directly: demons in the form of beasts appear before the hermit and make horrible sounds with the intention of troubling him, as signified by the gerund of purpose (*ad turbandum veri Dei verum militem horrissonis vocibus stridebant* [emphasis mine]).<sup>139</sup>

Furthermore, while the first two stages of interim judgement in the *Visio S. Pauli* – the exit of the soul from the body and the journey of the soul to heaven – lack any kind of musical accompaniment, several of the visions discussed above specify that angelic psychopomps perform the psalms either to comfort the soul, to entice it, or to ward off the malign spirits in the mid-air. It is questionable whether these psalms form part of the wider heavenly liturgy or whether they are part of the arsenal of weaponry specific to psychopomps. By extension, it is debatable whether the angelic escorts should be interpreted as a heavenly choir discrete from the groups of spirits that worship in heaven. These questions will be explored in the following chapter of the thesis. At present, it is sufficient to note that angels, as

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<sup>139</sup> Felix, *Vita S. Guthlaci* 36, trans. Bertram Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac* (Cambridge; New York: CUP, 1956), 114-115. A longer discussion about fear and demonic noise can be found in my forthcoming paper, "Demonic Anti-Music and Spiritual Disorder in the *Life of Antony*," in *Demons and Illness: Theory and Practice from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Siam Bhayro and Catherine Rider (under consideration by Brill).

well as choirs of the elect in paradise or heaven, develop a distinctly monastic character in the visions of Fursey, Barontus and Wetti. The psalmody of psychopomps perhaps reflects the custom of performing psalms around the bed of a dying monk, and the great heavenly monastery in the anonymous version of the *Visio S. Fursei* surely represents the contemplative ideal of cenobitic life at its most sublime.<sup>140</sup> The visions of Barontus and Wetti, in which groups of heavenly citizens intercede for the soul of the visionary or those on earth, suggest that the monastic practices of prayer and masses for the souls of the not entirely sinful and not entirely good began to influence the structure and soundscape of the other world from the seventh century onwards. In the vision of Barontus especially, the heavenly space is a counterpart of an earthly monastery.

In two narratives of Irish origin – the late-eighth century *Navigatio S. Brendani abbatis* (BHL 1436) and the tenth- or eleventh-century *Fís Adamnán* – heavenly worship takes the form of a Divine Office, a form of worship that would have been recognisable to the monastic communities in which the texts were produced and read.<sup>141</sup> The *Navigatio* is not a vision of the other world in the same sense as, for example, the vision of Dryhthelm.<sup>142</sup> St. Brendan and his company do not have to leave their mortal bodies behind and ascend above the earth in order to perceive the delights of the heavenly land. Rather, Brendan and seventeen monks

<sup>140</sup> For a short discussion of deathbed psalmody, see Dyer, “Monastic Psalmody in the Middle Ages,” 64 and 65.

<sup>141</sup> There is considerable debate surrounding the dating of the Latin *Navigatio S. Brendani*, as summarised by Patricia M. Rumsey in *Sacred Time in Early Christian Ireland* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2007), 57. David N. Dumville’s suggestion of the late eighth century is the most convincing. See his “Two Approaches to the Dating of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*,” in *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature: An Anthology of Criticism*, ed. Jonathan M. Wooding (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 120-132. See also the general introduction in W.R.J. Barron and Glyn S. Burgess, ed., *The Voyage of St. Brendan: Representative Versions of the Legend in English Translation* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2002), 2 and the introduction to the Latin text on p. 18. For an introduction to the *Fís Adamnán*, see David N. Dumville, “Towards an Interpretation of *Fís Adamnán*,” *Studia Celtica* 12-13 (1977-78): 62-77.

<sup>142</sup> In the two earliest extant manuscript versions of the tale, the *Navigatio* is called a *vita*. J.S. Mackley, *The Legend of St. Brendan: A Comparative Study of the Latin and Anglo-Norman Versions* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), argues that the *Navigatio* is essentially hagiographic in nature (p. 22).

set out on a sea voyage, a self-imposed exile or *peregrinatio*, to find the Land of Promise of the Saints (*terra repromissionis sanctorum*).<sup>143</sup> The journey takes seven years, since God wishes them to witness the marvels of creation. During that time, Brendan and his crew encounter a number of islands with infernal, purgatorial and paradisiacal features. On two of the islands – the Paradise of Birds and the Island of Three Choirs – they hear a Divine Office being recited by the inhabitants. The Paradise of Birds is the habitation of spirits which fell along with Lucifer. While the Latin *Navigatio* only hints that the birds are angels, the later Anglo-Norman version (c. 1106 or 1121) identifies them as Lucifer's inner circle.<sup>144</sup> The Latin version goes on to explain that, on most days, the angelic spirits are disembodied, and they wander through the air and upon the earth. On Sundays and holy days, they take the form of birds, stay on the island and praise God. There, they can enjoy God's presence even though he has separated them from the faithful flock of angels. The island is therefore a paradise in the sense that it is not quite heaven. While most early medieval depictions that we have encountered do not present paradise as a musical place, the island of birds resounds with song. The Latin *Navigatio* details how the birds chant psalm verses for an hour at a time at the Hours of Vespers (Ps 64:1), midnight vigils (Ps 148:1), Matins (Ps 89:1), Terce (Ps 46:2), Sext (Ps 69:2) and None (Ps 132:1).<sup>145</sup> Although the birds are separated from their unfallen companions in heaven, they nevertheless continue to take part in the liturgical worship of God, suggesting that they are in a state of grace. The author of the Anglo-Norman version, Benedeit, changes these details quite significantly. The birds are 'deprived of the majesty of God, the presence of glory and the joy of being before God'.<sup>146</sup> They sing hymns in the presence of the monks, but not the

<sup>143</sup> The translation of the Latin text by John O' Meara and Jonathan M. Wooding in *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*, ed. Barron and Burgess, will be cited throughout this section, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>144</sup> Compare the two versions in *Voyage* on p. 36 and p. 82.

<sup>145</sup> *Navigatio* 11, 37.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

canonical Hours. Moreover, they sing for a different reason: “[i]n their exile they were acknowledging the comfort the monks were bringing them; never before had God sent any human beings there”<sup>147</sup>. Their island is still called a ‘paradise,’ but it is more a place of punishment than of grace.

The psalms mentioned in this section of the text occur again in the chapter concerning the Island of the Three Choirs. The choirs of men and boys sing three psalms per Hour (which are specified in the Latin text), and, in addition, they chant the fifteen Gradual psalms at Vespers, twelve psalms in the order of the Psalter at Matins and, at ten o’ clock, Psalm 84:8, ‘[t]he saints shall go from strength to strength’.<sup>148</sup> Michael Curran has noted that the verses chanted by the birds are consistently lifted from one of the three psalms performed by the male singers from the Island of the Three Choirs; from this, he proposed, ‘[w]e can possibly see in the versicles chanted by the birds the antiphons used at the particular hours’.<sup>149</sup> He presented two arguments in support of the hypothesis that the Office depicted in the *Navigatio* is a ‘primitive Irish monastic office’: firstly, the psalms performed by the male-voice choirs are thematically appropriate for the times of day at which they are performed, and secondly, some of the psalms are associated with the same Hours in other documents, such as the late seventh-century *Antiphonary of Bangor*.<sup>150</sup> He concluded that the author of the *Navigatio* was drawing on an actual Office, possibly from one of St. Brendan’s communities in Ireland.<sup>151</sup> This form of

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. 17, 49-50.

<sup>149</sup> Michael Curran, *The Antiphonary of Bangor and the Early Irish Monastic Liturgy* (Blackrock: Irish Academic, 1984), 170-71.

<sup>150</sup> Curran, *Antiphonary of Bangor*, 171-72.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 172. Thomas O’Loughlin has argued against the view that the author of the *Navigatio* drew inspiration from real monastic practices: ‘[w]e would do far better to note that he draws upon the basic guidebook for this Liturgy that was available in the Latin West, Cassian’s *Institutes*, and then develops from that base his own theory of monastic prayer’ (“The Monastic Liturgy of the Hours in the *Navigatio sancti Brendani*: A Preliminary Investigation,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 71 (2006): 124). There are undeniable correspondences between Cassian’s descriptions of early monastic offices and the Office of the three choirs, including the practice of singing only three psalms during the day Hours and twelve Psalms during the night Hours. Yet O’Loughlin has underplayed the

worship was not relevant to the author of the Anglo-Norman version, Benedeit, who dispensed with it along with the Island of the Three Choirs.<sup>152</sup> In the *Navigatio*, however, the monastic Office is transposed onto an other world space, suggesting that all creatures in a state of grace – in the cloisters of Ireland and on far-flung islands – can share in the glorification of God. Furthermore, if Curran is correct in postulating that the psalm verses recited by the birds supply antiphons for the psalms sung on the Island of Three Choirs, the *Navigatio* provides another example of a call-and-response pattern of worship between angelic spirits (the birds) and the righteous (the three choirs of men and boys).

The early Irish *Fís Adamnán*, which follows the *Vita* of St. Brendan in one group of manuscripts, contains a somewhat similar vision of the heavenly host singing the canonical Hours.<sup>153</sup> The visionary, St. Adamnan, sees three regions of heaven: the land of saints, for those who will ultimately join God in the celestial city after the Final Judgement; the region of the heavenly host in the city, who dwell in God's presence; and the hilly and marshy area around the city where imperfect souls must wait until they can enter the city after Judgement Day.<sup>154</sup> In the region of the hosts, birds sing the Hours around the throne, accompanied by archangels, and the holiest of saints make a response. Once again, therefore,

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correspondences between the Office of the three choirs and the *Antiphonary of Bangor* and the sixth-century Office of Columbanus (which also stipulated the performance of three psalms during the day Hours and a lengthier night Office). As Curran noted (p. 172) the Offices outlined by Columbanus and the *Antiphonary* probably had their origins in Cassian's writings. For more on the Office of Columbanus and its relationship to the *Navigatio* and *Antiphonary*, see Jane Stevenson, "The Monastic Rules of Columbanus," in *Columbanus: Studies of the Latin Writings*, ed. Michael Lapidge (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), 209-13.

<sup>152</sup> While Mackley suggested that Benedeit omitted the psalms to maintain narrative pace (*Legend*, p. 31, p. 122, p. 167), an additional factor must have been that the Office of the Three Choirs and, by extension, of the birds, was too specific to the original Irish monastic context of the work, and therefore not appropriate for a twelfth-century courtly audience and readership. Mackley mentions that the islands of the birds and the Three Choirs were rooted in Irish lore, but not that they were informed by contemporary liturgical practices (*Legend*, p. 167).

<sup>153</sup> Dumville, "Interpretation," 63; Mackley, *Legend*, 45-46.

<sup>154</sup> Charles Stuart Boswell, ed., *Fís Adamnán* 3-14, in *An Irish Precursor to Dante: A Study on the Vision of Heaven and Hell Ascribed to the Eighth-Century Irish Saint Adamnán* (London: David Nutt, 1908), 29-35. See summary in Dumville, "Interpretation," 75-77.



angelic figures in the form of birds and human souls join in a song of praise to mark the passing of the Hours.

The grouping of saints in the vision suggests that the author's imagining of heaven was not only indebted to the practice of the *opus Dei*, but also the litany of Mass. The most exalted saints, Mary and the twelve apostles are positioned around the Lord in the region of the host. Next to the apostles are the patriarchs, prophets and disciples of Christ (the saints of the two covenants), while virgins stand by the side of Mary. As in the *Visio S. Pauli* and the *Visio S. Baronti*, innocents gather near the virgins. The presence of disciples and innocents among the saints can be explained with reference to the developments taking place within the early medieval litanies of the saints. While the majority of Anglo-Saxon litanies from the ninth to the eleventh centuries contained petitions to patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, confessors and virgins, in the late tenth century, the Gallican form of the litany expanded upon the list of saints invoked to include evangelists, disciples, the innocents, monks and hermits, and, occasionally, widows and the married.<sup>155</sup> It is quite likely that the composition of the heavenly choirs in the *Fís Adamnán* was borne of the writer's familiarity with this form of the litany of saints. The monastic Office and the litany therefore had a profound effect on the portrayal of heavenly choirs in this text. To what extent this instance was part of a wider tenth- and eleventh-century trend for portraying heavenly worship in terms of earthly worship, or bringing the two sides of the liturgy closer together, remains to be investigated.

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<sup>155</sup> See Michael Lapidge, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991). Lapidge lists the litanies with Gallican influence on p. 42, but does not note that these litanies expand the number of categories of saints. Robin Norris suggested that litany number 41.3 should be added to Lapidge's list of litanies displaying a Gallican influence (email message, May 6, 2015). Norris also made the connection between the new categories of saints and the Gallican form of the litany in the same email.

#### 4: Heavenly choirs on earth

This chapter has focused on narratives of heavenly ascent. Prophets, apostles and ascetics were permitted to hear and see worship in heaven's most exalted regions, mostly for the edification of others, occasionally for their own improvement. However, it could just as easily have been about the participation in the earthly liturgy by celestial citizens. The angelic hymns of the Bible were sung in church services: the thrice-holy became integrated into the Western Mass as the *Sanctus*, prefaced by a call to join the ranks of angels in praising God, and the angelic hymn of Luke 2:13-14 became the *Gloria*.<sup>156</sup> When exegetes sought to explain the origins of earthly hymns, they frequently looked to heaven. In his homily on John 15:26-16:4, Bede recounts how John of the Apocalypse heard groups of heavenly powers or virtues (*caelestium agmina uirtutum*) sing Alleluia and states that the custom of singing the word in Hebrew has prevailed ever since.<sup>157</sup> The earthly liturgy was not just a pale imitation of the eternal ritual in heaven – angels honoured churches by descending from their celestial choir stalls to rejoice in the celebration of the Eucharist. Ellen Muehlberger has argued that a shift occurred in the way the heavenly community was imagined in relation to the earthly congregation at the end of the fourth century.<sup>158</sup> In the catechetical treatises of Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem (written in 348) and Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia (composed 392 or 393), Christian congregants were encouraged to visualise angels in heaven as they watched a church ritual.<sup>159</sup> 'Beginning with John Chrysostom,' she continues, 'Christian writers turned the traditional understanding of ritual on its head'.<sup>160</sup> Chrysostom urged his congregants to imagine angels gathered not in the heavenly

<sup>156</sup> See Josef A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: its Origins and Development*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame: Christian Classics, 2012; first published New York: Benziger, 1951-55), 1:231-39 and 1:279-83. Spinks, *Sanctus*, speculates as to whether the *Benedictus* replaced the earlier use of the doxology from Ez 3:12, 'added in the interests of Christology, originating perhaps in those Syrian areas in close contact with Jews'. He adds, 'the evidence is so meagre that no firm conclusion can be reached' (p. 120).

<sup>157</sup> Bede, *Homilia* 2.16, ed. Hurst, *Opera homiletica*, 295.

<sup>158</sup> Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity*, 176-202.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

city, but in the church itself. Muehlberger's evidence, restricted to catechetical treatises, shows this idea emerging in the late fourth century. When other kinds of sources are considered, it can be seen to occur even earlier. 'I do not doubt that angels are even present in our assembly,' wrote Origen (d. 253 or 254), '[h]ere, a double church is present, one of men, the other of angels.'<sup>161</sup> Just because tainted eyes cannot see the angels in church, he emphasises, it does not mean that they are not present.

Over 500 years later, Bede (d. 735), possibly drawing on the Origen homily as source material, counselled his listeners to take heed of the angels gathering in the church in his own homily on Luke 24:1-9:

Let us believe that angelic spirits are present among us when we devote ourselves in a special way to divine rites, that is, when entering a church, or when we open the ear to sacred readings, or when we perform the office of psalmody, or when we devote ourselves to prayer, or even when we celebrate the solemn mass [...] And the prophet said, "In the sight of angels I will sing psalms to you" (Ps 138:1).<sup>162</sup>

Bede was not the only writer to take Psalm 138:1 at its word. The nineteenth chapter of the *Regula S. Benedicti* quotes the same verse as Bede, expanding on the idea of angelic scrutiny of human worship: '[l]et us consider how to behave in the sight of God and his angels, and thus let us stand to sing so that the mind may always be in harmony with the voice'.<sup>163</sup> The *Regula* encourages monks to adopt

<sup>161</sup> Origen, *Homily 23*, in *Homilies on Luke; Fragments on Luke*, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 101.

<sup>162</sup> Bede, *Homily 2.10*, ed. Hurst, 249.

<sup>163</sup> John Chamberlin, ed., *The Rule of St. Benedict: The Abingdon Copy* (Toronto: Pontifical institute of Medieval Studies, 1982), 39. This passage is based on chapters 47 and 48 of the earlier *Regula Magistri*, trans. Luke Eberle (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 205-207. For a discussion of these passages, see Leyser, "Angels, Monks, and Demons in the Early Medieval West," 9-22.

vigilant behaviour by opening their eyes to the ubiquitous, invisible angelic presences that flock within the monastery. Angels fulfil their function as messengers, reporting each of the monk's acts, good or bad, to God.

The need for vigilance was deeply embedded into Benedictine thought and practice. In his letter of 804 to the abbot and monks of a Benedictine monastic house, Alcuin (d. 804) exhorts his readers to adopt a heavenly mode of existence by keeping vigilant and praising God:

Truly, angels are always vigilant in praising God, and he who makes an effort to be vigilant in praising God lives an angelic life on earth [...] Do not let sleep, desire for worldly things or vain thoughts impede the current of your religion and your divine praises; may angelic visitations find each and every one of you standing in your place and praising God. Therefore, they who make an effort in this mortal life to praise God can sing in perpetual happiness with the psalmist: 'Blessed are they who live in your house, o Lord, forever praising you' (Ps 84:4).<sup>164</sup>

The passage, a gloss on chapter 19 of the Benedictine Rule, offers an interpretation of the text which significantly elaborates on its spiritual and angelic aspects: monks not only emulate angels by singing with an alert mind, but they live the life of angels on earth; praise is the key which unlocks the heavenly life and allows the worshipper to gain access to heavenly company. Unlike the lay worshippers in Origen's and Bede's congregations, who sing in the sight of angels but do not truly become like them, monks performing the Divine Office actually join the heavenly choirs.<sup>165</sup> The text also evokes images of heavenly choirs found in visions of

<sup>164</sup> Alcuin, *Epistola* 278, ed. Ernst Dümmler in *MGH 4, Epistolae Karolini aevi* 2 (Hannover: Weidmann, 1895), 434.

<sup>165</sup> Milis has stated that 'monks were trying to imitate the celestial atmosphere in the Divine Office' and that the 'quality' of the Divine Office in the Middle Ages 'prefigure[d]' life in

heavenly ascent. The ever-praising angels recall the Watchers of 1 Enoch and the four beasts and twenty-four Elders of Revelation. Alcuin's suggestion that the monks will one day be able to sing alongside David recalls (wittingly or unwittingly) the praises in the City of Christ in the *Visio S. Pauli*. Psalm 84 is the very psalm recited by angels in the *Visio S. Fursei*. The image of the heavenly house evokes the paradisiacal mansions of the priests and abbot in the *Visio S. Baronti*. While Alcuin might not have had all of these texts in mind as he wrote his letter, he was nevertheless familiar with the *topoi* of heavenly praise these texts generated, *topoi* which shaped the ideals of the monastic life.

## 5: Conclusion

How useful are other world narratives in helping us to explore the idea of the heavenly choir and the questions surrounding it? Scriptural, late antique and early medieval visions have revealed that there is not one kind of heavenly choir, but many. In biblical and pseudepigraphic texts, the highest ranking angels, seraphim, surround the Lord's throne in the highest part of heaven and sing the thrice-holy continually. Non-canonical scriptural sources and early medieval narratives of the voyage of the soul show that perfect souls dwell in heaven, singing indescribably beautiful melodies, possibly with the angels, while the less perfect reside in paradise and in many cases, do not sing. The latter form a choir in the broad sense of a group of people, but not the narrow sense of a group of singers. Groups of angels also throng the air, where they sing as they carry souls to the celestial regions. Citizens of heaven can also be found on earth, in churches and monasteries, where they watch over earthly choirs as they pray and send praises to God. Although they are associated with particular parts of the other world, heavenly choirs are not confined to the celestial regions. They enable upward

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heaven (*Angelic Monks and Earthly Men*, 77 and 146). For Benedictine monks, however, the Divine Office was more than simply a rehearsal of everlasting worship. For an exploration of how the Office forged links between praising communities on earth and in heaven, see chapter four.

movement, transporting the soul to heaven physically and inspiring the worshipper to make progress towards God and his saints spiritually. Choirs signify order in creation. They are not therefore, found in hell or purgatorial regions, the dwelling places of wailing crowds of sinners and demons.

Over the course of the chapter, we have come across several continuities in ideas about heavenly choirs: angels and the righteous respond to one another's praises, or practice a kind of responsorial worship among themselves; there is an emphasis on the sweetness and continuity of praise; angels, gathered in troops, perform a martial function, serving God and protecting human souls. We have also encountered changes across time. The number of categories of the righteous increases between the first century, when Elders, virgins and martyrs were the only identifiable groups of the elect in St. John's Revelation, to patriarchs, prophets, innocents, virgins and possibly monks in the *Visio S. Pauli*, to all of the aforementioned groups plus disciples in the *Fís Adamnán*. In the latter case, the increase in categories seems to be due to the influence of the Gallican litany. In the case of the *Visio S. Pauli*, the vision accommodates for the different expressions of sanctity in late antique Egypt. Martyrs (apart from the innocents) are not included as a distinct category in the *Visio*, which may indicate the prominence of confessor saints in the post-persecution era.

The chapter has also illustrated the increasingly monastic character of heavenly choirs. Psalm-singers, possibly early Christian monks, appear as a heavenly group in the *Visio S. Pauli*. Angels sing psalms in other world visions from the mid-seventh century onwards, and groups of spirits run through the Divine Office in eighth and eleventh century sources. These changes suggest that as the importance and intensity of monastic psalmody increased, it came to be associated more directly with the worship of heavenly beings. The final part of the chapter has shown that, while angels were believed to be present in the church

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from as early as the third century, Benedictine discourse emphasised the role of angels as guardians or watchers of choral activity and personal devotion. As monastic choirs became more angelic, angels descended into monasteries and drew ever closer to earthly singers.

As informative as these discoveries are, they do not give us a view of to the whole panorama of thought on heavenly choirs. By focusing on popular other world visions, the chapter has mostly left aside patristic theology and homiletic literature. In a study of this size, however, a view of the panorama would be unattainable and even undesirable, as it would potentially quash any attempt at detailed study. What will follow, therefore, is a series of close readings, each one concentrating on a different manifestation of the idea of the heavenly choir. How did angelic psychopomps function as a choir? Who was permitted to join the 144,000 virgins of Revelation 14:1-4, and what was significant about the new song? How did the Benedictine reform of the tenth century shape conventions about heavenly choirs? Only by investigating the small but persistent ideas about the great celestial concerts can we hope to grasp their complexity and diversity.

## Chapter 2:

### Psychopomps as heavenly choirs

#### 1: Introduction

The four angels which accompanied Fursey out of his body sang as they travelled alongside his soul, and fought as a cohesive group against the adverse powers of the air – but could they be described as a heavenly choir? Psychopomps frequently appear detached from the rest of the heavenly host in the literary texts and visual arts of the Middle Ages. Their presence at the death-bed and during the soul's journey to the other world is a widespread *topos*; according to David Keck, it is '[p]erhaps the most common of all angelic motifs in medieval Christianity'.<sup>1</sup> The *topos* nevertheless appears in a variety of guises. Sometimes the escorts appear as singers, while, in other instances, their presence is not perceptible though sound. The current chapter explores this variation and its significance, and also considers two related questions: who can hear the music of psychopomps, and do the righteous, whose voices are an integral part of the heavenly soundscape, also act as escorts of the soul? This discussion therefore returns to the sonic and sensory aspects of the *topos* which have been neglected by recent scholarship, and develops the work of Winifred Temple and Reinhold Hammerstein.

Temple argued that the singing of angelic hosts, thought to summon the soul from the body, was a Christian adaptation of the pagan belief in the magical properties of music.<sup>2</sup> Temple's concise article offered a way into thinking about the function of angelic song and provided an insight into the transmission of ancient and late antique ideas into the early vernacular texts of England and Ireland. Temple's findings highlighted the productive ambiguity in the lexicon surrounding heavenly choirs – for instance, she showed that the Old English word, *drēam*,

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<sup>1</sup> Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 203.

<sup>2</sup> Winifred Temple, "The Song of the Angelic Hosts," *Annuaire mediaevale* 2 (1961): 5-7.



which denotes a joyful noise and carries the abstract sense of ‘delight,’ was also understood to mean ‘choir’.<sup>3</sup> Her focus on how ideas were translated in Old English and Irish restricted the parameters of her investigation such that sufficient attention was not given to the broader developments of the commonplace of angelic song – developments that cannot be mapped so precisely. This chapter explores some of the complexities involved in the adaptation of a *topos* and highlights the variety of its forms and uses. In this way, the argument also offers a response to Hammerstein’s *Die Musik der Engel*. The book contains a bank of examples of singing angelic psychopomps, though it does not include Anglo-Saxon material.<sup>4</sup> While Hammerstein established a wide evidence base for musical permutations of the *topos*, he was not concerned with tracing its fluctuations. As the chapter will show, however, the fluidity of the *topos* is part of its character.

Since the mid-1990s, a number of studies have emerged which investigate the history of belief in angelic psychopomps.<sup>5</sup> Heavenly chaperons were thought to attend the passing of the exceptionally holy, whereas lay people could only hope they would be present at their own death beds. Pamela Sheingorn memorably expressed the double-sided nature of the psychopomp *topos* as a ‘symbol’ that was understood in the ‘subjunctive’ as well as the ‘indicative’ mood: ‘[w]hat had been a certainty in the case of the martyrs is a fervently expressed hope in the case of the average Christian’.<sup>6</sup> More recently, Richard Sowerby argued that while the *topos* of the angelic psychopomp was used in early medieval hagiographies as a sign marking the deaths of saints, late Anglo-Saxon homilists appropriated Latin

<sup>3</sup> Temple, “The Song of the Angelic Hosts,” 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> Hammerstein, *Die Musik der Engel*, 83-88.

<sup>5</sup> Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 203-205. See also the chapter, “The Archangel as Guardian and Psychopomp,” in Richard F. Johnson, *Saint Michael the Archangel in Medieval English Legend* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), 71-86, Sowerby, “Angels in Anglo-Saxon England,” 124-163, and Helen Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England* (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 115-120.

<sup>6</sup> Pamela Sheingorn, “‘And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest’: The Soul’s Conveyance to the Afterlife in the Middle Ages,” in *Art into Life: Collected Papers from the Kresge Art Museum Medieval Symposia*, ed. Carol Fisher and Kathleen L. Scott (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1995), 163.

material and modified it with a view to carving out a more certain fate for the ordinary men and women in their congregation. He discussed the works of Ælfric as a case in point: '[p]assing references to hagiographic death-scenes across [his writings] reveal that he [...] saw little distinction between a saint's death and that of an ordinary virtuous Christian'.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the distinction between the exceptional few and the many dissolved and the *topos* of the heavenly escorts appeared less frequently in the hagiographical writings of the second half of the tenth century.<sup>8</sup>

This chapter shares common ground with the studies by Sheingorn and Sowerby in its analysis of the expectations surrounding the deaths of saints and lay people. It outlines two different discourses borne of the psychopomp *topos*, one generated by the parable of Dives and Lazarus, the other arising from accounts of saints' deaths. The 'Lazarian' discourse tended to be used in homiletic material, while the second was used as part of the hagiographical discourse of merit. One did not preclude the other – rather, they were employed and transformed at the writers' discretion.

The discussion opens with early examples of the *topos* in the Bible, the pseudepigraphic *Testaments* of Abraham and Isaac, and two tales of martyrdom. The second section therefore draws attention to the Lazarian and hagiographical discourses that have continuing importance across the span of time covered in this chapter. Section three covers some of the major examples of the *topos* from Late Antiquity in order to explore the notion of the post-mortem judgement of the soul, the circumstances under which onlookers could see and hear the transportation of souls, and the relationship between angelic conveyance, song and merit. The fourth section offers an insight into sanctity and psychopomp activity by focusing on the

<sup>7</sup> Sowerby, "Angels in Anglo-Saxon England," 156.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 158-59.

use of the *topos* saints' Lives known in Anglo-Saxon and early Anglo-Norman England. Although the *topos* generally functions as a sign of sanctity in hagiographical texts, it is used inconsistently, and its symbolism is often obscure within the world of the narrative. Finally, in considering how the *topos* changes when it comes to be used in Old English homiletic material, I show how translators and compilers conventionalised some of its aspects and how innovations arose from their interpretations of Latin material. The chapter as a whole traces vacillations in the idea that psychopomps form a heavenly choir in the narrow sense of a group of singers.

## 2: The early formation of the *topos*

Angelic psychopomps appear in the Bible only once, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). It tells of an unnamed man (proverbially known as 'Dives'), who overlooks the needs of Lazarus, a beggar at his gates. When the pauper dies, he is carried to Abraham's bosom by angels.<sup>9</sup> The rich man passes away and is taken to hell. The sinner and the patriarch engage in a dialogue, in which Abraham makes it abundantly clear to Dives that it is too late to seek help. Some early Christian commentators interpreted Lazarus' place of rest, the bosom of Abraham, as a paradisiacal region in the upper part of hell where the souls of the blessed dwelt until the Harrowing of Hell.<sup>10</sup> In the Bible passage itself, the 'chasm' that exists between Hades and the bosom of Abraham suggests that it is a physical location, but the passage gives no indication that other righteous souls are gathered there. Lazarus, it seems, is not taken to a heavenly choir. Furthermore, the angelic

<sup>9</sup> The Vulgate has 'portaretur ab angelis in sinum Abrahae'.

<sup>10</sup> One such commentator was Origen. This stance was associated with the anti-millenarian or non-Chiliasm position. See Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), esp. p. 139, and Kabir, *Paradise, Death, and Doomsday*, 26. The apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus details Christ's Harrowing of Hell, but in the Greek and Latin A and B texts, there appears to be no separate region of the righteous. See *The Gospel of Nicodemus, Part 2*, in Montague R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 123-24.

psychopomps are neither grouped together by a mass noun, nor do they sing as they escort the soul of Lazarus towards Abraham's bosom.

As Reinhold Hammerstein has shown, singing angelic escorts *do* make an appearance in the pseudepigrapha and apocrypha.<sup>11</sup> One of the texts in which the singing psychopomp *topos* occurs is Recension A of the *Testament of Abraham*, a Jewish text, probably originating in Egypt, which was copied and edited by Christian scribes.<sup>12</sup> The archangel Michael is sent down by God to collect the soul of Abraham. The patriarch, reluctant to die, devises schemes to escape or at least postpone death, such as requesting that he be taken on a tour of earth and heaven. Michael, unable and unwilling to lead such a holy man to heaven, steps aside for Death, who removes Abraham's soul from his body through deception. Michael reappears with a multitude of angels, and the soul is wrapped up in a precious cloth.<sup>13</sup> Three days after his death, he is buried by his family in the 'promised land,' while the angels ascend to heaven with his soul, singing the Sanctus as they fly. As chapter one demonstrated, Jewish and Christian belief held that the thrice-holy or 'Sanctus' was the unceasing cry of the highest ranking angels standing around the throne of God. The angels' song invests Abraham's passing with a sense of the holiness usually found in the most sanctified part of heaven in Jewish visions of heavenly ascent, and therefore attests his merit. The escorts place Abraham before God, where he is permitted to worship him for a short time. After he has paid due reverence, he is taken to a paradisiacal region of heaven. Christian editors seem to have intervened at this point – rather confusingly, God instructs

<sup>11</sup> Hammerstein, *Die Musik der Engel*, 83.

<sup>12</sup> The text is translated by E.P. Sanders in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:882-895. See "Introduction" on pp. 871-81. Sanders maintained that the originals of Recensions A and B were written in Greek, that the date of the original text is c. 100 CE and that its likely place of origin was Egypt.

<sup>13</sup> Sanders, trans., *Testament of Abraham* 20, 895. Sheingorn discussed images of the cloth of souls at length in "The Soul's Conveyance," arguing that it illustrated Revelation 14:3, 'Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord' (p. 156). If the first part of the *Testament of Abraham* 20 is not a later Christian interpolation, however, the image of the cloth can be traced back to Jewish belief.

that Abraham be taken to the bosom of Abraham, wherein he may find the tents and mansions of his descendants.<sup>14</sup> The addition suggests that early Christian readers of the *Testament* overlaid the *exemplum* of Dives and Lazarus onto the account of the patriarch's passing without giving much thought as to what made literal sense. By the time that this ending was added, the bosom of Abraham had become recognised as a resting place for patriarchs.

An account of another patriarch's death and vision of the other world, the *Testament of Isaac*, also likely to be a product of Egyptian Judaism, is evidently indebted to the *Testament of Abraham*.<sup>15</sup> Isaac is shown the tortures of hell, and then permitted to worship God with the thrice-holy alongside the saints. When the hour of his death approaches, God instructs Archangel Michael to rally the angels. Together, they travel down to Isaac's bed on a chariot of seraphim, with cherubim leading the way. Isaac's newly delivered soul is placed in the chariot, 'while the cherubim were singing praises before it, likewise his holy angels'. Whereas the singing of angels merely evoked the heavenly throne room in the *Testament of Abraham*, here, as in the book of Ezekiel, the throne itself is mobile. The group of singing cherubim is synonymous with the celestial host.

The patriarchs' instantaneous transportation to heaven marks them out as being among the exceptionally holy. Another early category of saints, the Christian martyrs, were also believed to enter heaven at the moment of death. The *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (BHL 6633), a North African text, contains a prophetic vision of heaven recounted by Saturus, who faced martyrdom alongside Perpetua. He sees their souls after they have departed from the body being carried towards the East by four angels.<sup>16</sup> The martyrs enter a heavenly region surrounded

<sup>14</sup> The passage recalls Luke 16:19-31 and John 14:2.

<sup>15</sup> Sanders, *Testament of Isaac*, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 1:905-11. See "Introduction," 903-904.

<sup>16</sup> Herbert Musurillo, ed. and trans., *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas* 11, in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 118-19.

by high walls of light, where they hear voices chanting the Sanctus in unison without end.<sup>17</sup> The writer distinguishes between the silent psychopomps, whose physical presence is palpable, and the crowd of worshippers in heaven, who can be heard but not seen. Only at the end of the vision, when the gates of heaven are closing, does Saturus glimpse the other martyrs within the holy citadel.<sup>18</sup>

In a second tale of martyrdom from North Africa, the *Passio Sanctorum Martyrum Fructuosi Episcopi, Auguri et Eulogi Diaconorum* (BHL 3196), signs of the blessedness of the martyrs are revealed openly to those whose faith allows them to perceive the bounties of heaven. The martyrs are burnt at the stake by a governor, Aemilianus. Members of Aemilianus' household witness a vision of the martyrs rising with crowns into heaven: '[t]hey summoned Aemilianus and said: "Come and see how those you have condemned to death today have been restored to heaven and to their hopes." But when Aemilianus came, he was not worthy to behold them'.<sup>19</sup> Once again, the martyrs receive their reward straight after death, and yet this time angelic psychopomps are not part of the vision. The text, however, contains an element that will become important in the development of the psychopomp *topos*: only those who are worthy can perceive the fruit of virtue through the senses.

These early instances reveal that angelic escorts appear at the deaths of patriarchs and, in one case, martyrs, both of which were later recognised to be choirs of the righteous in the litany and in visions of the other world. By contrast, the parable of Dives and Lazarus features a man who was a simple beggar and does not easily fit into hierarchies of saints.<sup>20</sup> How did late antique and early medieval

<sup>17</sup> Musurillo, *Perpetua and Felicitas* 12, 120-21.

<sup>18</sup> *Perpetua and Felicitas* 13, 122-23.

<sup>19</sup> Musurillo, ed. and trans., *The Martyrdom of Bishop Fructosus and his Deacons, Augurius and Eulogius* 5, in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 182-83.

<sup>20</sup> The list of categories of saints in the Christian litany is not, of course, exhaustive, and the earliest attested forms of litany as a prayer date from the fourth century (Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Litanies*, p. 4). In *De moralitate* 26, Cyprian (d. 258) lists the categories of saints as

writers reconcile the Lazarian discourse of the salvation of the poor and seemingly unexceptional with the discourses surrounding the reward of the exceptionally holy? Some of the texts discussed in the remainder of this chapter allude to the story in Luke, particularly in their insights into the fates of good and evil souls at the moment of death. These texts mostly eschew discussion of the location of the soul between death and judgement day. Occasionally, writers placed the soul in the bosom of Abraham despite demonstrating the belief elsewhere that Christ freed all souls from that location, which perhaps serves as an indication that ideas used across a writer's *oeuvre* were not always consistent.<sup>21</sup> Homiletic texts were more likely to use the Lazarian discourse than hagiographical texts, and emphasise the dichotomy between the good and the bad, heaven and hell. By contrast, texts that were suffused with the conventions of the hagiographical genre drew on early Christian ideas of the immediate reception of the exceptionally holy into heaven.

On the whole, the chapter is less concerned with the status and destination of Lazarus' soul than with the development of the choir of psychopomps. The Judeo-Christian *Testaments* of the patriarchs, in contrast to the parable in Luke and the *Passio* of Perpetua and Felicitas, show psychopomps in song. In the *Testaments* of Abraham and Isaac, the singing of the escorts confirms their angelic identity and suggests that the soul is also worthy of worshipping before God alongside them, if only for a limited time. This feature of the psychopomp *topos* appears to have been influenced by apocalyptic visions of heavenly ascent, which depict the worship of angels before the throne. In the literature of early Egyptian monasticism, the influences of the *Testaments* and *Apocalypses* combined with the Dives and

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patriarchs, the 'glorious choir' (*gloriosus chorus*) of apostles, the number or rank (*numerus*) of exulting prophets, the 'innumerable crowd' (*innumerabilis populus*) of martyrs, virgins and the broader group of the righteous and merciful (*PL* 4: 602A). The latter category is for those who help the poor, rather than those who *are* the poor.

<sup>21</sup> See chapter three, discussion of the Bosom of Abraham in Jerome's letters (3.2).

Lazarus parable to give rise to new imaginings of the heavenly escorts and their musical repertoire.

### 3: Late Antiquity

#### 3.1: Individual judgement in early Christian Egypt

The flight of the angels in Luke 16 fills the gap in time between the death of the pauper and his reception into the bosom of Abraham. What occurs in the interval between the death of the rich man and his torment in Hades, however, remains mysterious. Is he also transported by angels from the body to the other world? The *Testaments* of the patriarchs and narratives of early martyrdom give no answers concerning the fate of the less-than-perfect soul at the time of its individual judgement. Yet the previous chapter's exploration of a long Latin version of the *Visio S. Pauli* revealed that psychopomp angels come not only for the good, but the pious and the impious alike. All pass through a barrier of powers and principalities on the way to heaven, though it is a particularly difficult trial for the souls of the unjust.

The *Visio S. Pauli* is one of several visions that originated in late antique Egypt which describe the role of psychopomps in the post-mortem judgement of souls. Texts that emerged from this milieu are detailed witnesses to the diversity of thought and belief at an early stage of the development of the psychopomp *topos*. They were shaped, either directly or indirectly, by the non-canonical *Testaments* and *Apocalypses* explored in the previous and present chapter, as they recount the soul's journey to the heavenly regions. While there are certain similarities between Paul's vision of the souls' journeys to the heavenly judgement room and the visions discussed here, the accounts should not be understood as a cohesive and consistent body of material representing a unified belief system. Instead, they illustrate the multiformity of belief about individual eschatological judgement in late antique monastic communities. The anecdotes discussed below allow us to



view the thought-world of Late Antiquity as if through a glass darkly. They cannot be dated with any accuracy and were originally oral tales produced communally, which came to be written down and attributed to monastic authorities only later. But the limited view, in so far as we can trust it, suggests that there was a great deal of uncertainty in early Christian monastic communities concerning the salvation of the soul. Even if the monks were regarded as the successors to the martyrs, there appeared to be no guarantee that they would share the same reward.<sup>22</sup>

A Saying attributed to Archbishop Theophilus of Alexandria (d. 412) emphasises the terrifying uncertainty that awaited the average soul once the heart is stilled: “[w]hat fear, what trembling, what uneasiness will there be for us when our soul is separated from the body, [when] the force and strength of the adverse powers [τῶν ἐναντίων δυνάμεων] come against us”.<sup>23</sup> This Saying, from the Alphabetical Collection of the *Αποφθέγματα τῶν πατέρων* (henceforth, *Apophthegmata patrum*), concerns the trial that will begin at the moment of an individual’s death: the adverse powers (among them, *ἐξουσίαι* and *ἄρχαι*) will accuse the soul of its sins and the divine powers will stand opposite, presenting the soul’s good deeds. Only if the soul is judged worthy will the demons receive punishment as angels carry it to heaven. The terror described by Theophilus arises from the uncertainty over the outcome of the quasi-legal battle.

A legend that came to be associated with Macarius the Egyptian (d. 391), the founder of the monastic settlement of Scetis, gives a different explanation of the soul’s sense of dread at the moment of death.<sup>24</sup> It tells of Macarius’

<sup>22</sup> This point is made in response to Sheingorn, “The Soul’s Conveyance,” 158. While Sheingorn emphasised the continuity between martyrs and desert saints, it is necessary also to draw attention to the doubts and fears regarding salvation that can be found in the same material.

<sup>23</sup> Theophilus, Apophthegm 4, in *Apophthegmata patrum* (PG 65: 200A-202A), trans. Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 81.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of this source, see Theodor Batiouchkof, “Le Débat de l’âme et du corps,” *Romania* 20 (1891): 1-55 (esp. pp. 9-10). The version printed in the *PG* cannot be dated with any accuracy, but is the product of a long oral tradition, perhaps from as early as

conversation with two angels about the fate of the soul after death. One of the angels asserts that all souls alike are seized with fear at the presence of the psychopomps:

When an earthly king sends out attendants to apprehend some woman, who meet her or constrain her if she is reluctant to go, that woman is afraid, trembling at the strength of the soldiers who drag her on the journey; in the same way, when the angels of justice or injustice are sent to seize a soul, she trembles in fear and is terrified by the terrible and harsh angels.<sup>25</sup>

The soul is judged first by its own conscience and again once it reaches heaven. The psychopomps, satellites sent by the heavenly king, do not seem to take part in the judgement process.

While these anecdotes suggest that the souls of the just and the unjust exit their bodies in roughly the same way, another apophthegm (henceforth, the Gabriel-Michael *exemplum*) suggests that the moral condition of the soul affects the way in which it leaves the body. This beguiling *exemplum* is from the Systematic Collection of Sayings, which was translated from Greek into Latin in the sixth century. The collection, which became known as the *Verba seniorum*, circulated first as an independent collection, and then as part of a group of texts on the Desert Fathers called the *Vitae* or *Vitas patrum*.<sup>26</sup> The *exemplum* concerns a

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the fourth century. Batiouchkof could not offer anything more certain than: ‘we are inclined to regard this legend as being very ancient, in view of certain archaic traits which distinguish it from other similar stories which date back to the first centuries of our era’ (‘nous sommes enclins à regarder cette légende comme très ancienne, vu certains traits archaïques qui la distinguent d’autres récits analogues qui remontent aux premiers siècles de notre ère’) (p. 10).

<sup>25</sup> Λόγος τοῦ ἁγίου Μακαρίου τοῦ Ἀλεξανδρέως = *A Saying of Macarius of Alexandria* (PG 34: 387C-D). Batiouchkof noted that the legend is attributed to Alexander, an ascetic disciple of Macarius (p. 9). The title in the PG thus mistakenly attributes it to Macarius.

<sup>26</sup> William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 170, and Winifred Rudolf, “Selection and Compilation of the *Verba seniorum* in Worcester, Cathedral Library, F.48,” in *Hagiography in Anglo-*

certain monk who prays that he may see how the souls of the just and unjust are separated from their bodies. He witnesses the death of a hypocritical anchorite. He has many caring attendants, but his death is painful: a spirit appears with a flaming trident and is instructed by God to pierce his heart with the instrument and torture him for hours before extracting his soul. Next, the witness sees the death of a poor wanderer who has no one to minister to him. When the dying man falls asleep, Michael and Gabriel appear, and God commands them to take out his soul “painlessly”. The soul is nevertheless reluctant to leave, and Michael asks the Lord for help. God replies: “[b]ehold, I send David with a harp, and all who are singing psalms to God in the heavenly Jerusalem, so that [the soul], hearing the psalm, may be led towards their voice” ([e]cce mitto David cum cithara, et omnes Deo psallentes in Jerusalem, ut audiens psalmum ad vocem ipsorum egrediatur).<sup>27</sup> All the citizens of heaven descend ‘singing hymns’ (cantantes hymnos), the soul passes into Michael’s hands and is taken away with joy.

In comparing the deaths of a renowned but sinful anchorite and a lowly but virtuous man, the *exemplum* offers a variation on the parable of Dives and Lazarus. It departs from the parable by focusing the dramatic action not on the destination of the soul, but on the moments leading up to death and the instant in which the soul is delivered from the body. Moreover, while heavenly song does not feature at all in Luke 16:19-31, it performs an important function in this *exemplum*, though it is difficult to fathom precisely what that function may be. The song can be interpreted

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*Saxon England: Adopting and Adapting Saints’ Lives into Old English Prose (c. 950-1150)*, ed. Loredana Lazzari, Patrizia Lendinara, Claudia Di Sciacca (Barcelona: Fédération internationale des instituts d’études médiévales, 2014), 184. The textual history and transmission of the *Vitae patrum* is complex and has not received sufficient scholarly attention. A useful, though limited study is Constance L. Rosenthal, *The Vitae patrum in Old and Middle English Literature* (published PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1936). Rosenthal explains that Herbert Rosweyd published an edition of the *VP* in 1615 from earlier printed sources and twenty-five other MS sources; this was later revised in 1628 and re-printed by Migne in the *PL* (p. 12). In this chapter, I will refer to the Latin translation in *De vitis patrum* 6, *Verba seniorum* 3.13 (*BHL* 6529-30) (*PL* 73: 1011D-1012C), which is arranged by subject matter and of uncertain authorship.

<sup>27</sup> *De vitis patrum* 6, *Verba seniorum* 3.13 (*PL* 73: 1012C).

as a divine medication, a sort of anaesthetic, which spares the soul the pain of separation.<sup>28</sup> In discussing this example, Winifred Temple suggested that the beauty of the music acts as a charm, casting a spell on the soul and enticing it out of the body.<sup>29</sup> Whether we call it magic or medicine, the way in which song functions in this story is no doubt shaped by ancient beliefs concerning the power of music to affect the movement and condition of the soul.<sup>30</sup> In the Gabriel-Michael *exemplum*, the soul's delight draws its attention away from its current circumstances and towards the beautiful praises of the host. Angelic psychopomps perform a similar manoeuvre in the *Visio S. Fursei* when they place him back in the body. In the Gabriel-Michael *exemplum*, the song is not attributed to the psychopomps but to David and the host of heaven, the choir that occupy the celestial City of Christ in the *Visio S. Pauli*. The *exemplum* therefore distinguishes between a group of singers from heaven and the archangels whose primary function is to escort the soul.

None of the *exempla* analysed above present the psychopomps as musical creatures, and the escorts of the *Visio S. Pauli* are likewise silent. Some of the hagiographical texts of the Desert Father tradition do, however, indicate that psychopomps sing as they transport the souls of worthy men to the kingdom above. The *Vita S. Antonii*, a text that was highly influential on the saints' Lives of the Middle Ages, presents a somewhat ambiguous case of this *topos*. It describes how Antony witnessed the soul of Amoun, founder of the monastic sites of Nitria and Kellia, ascend towards the heavens:

[Antony] saw [Amoun] being led up into the air and a great joy  
emanating from those who met him. Filled with wonder, and

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<sup>28</sup> Sowerby ("Angels in Anglo-Saxon England," p. 148) mentions the anaesthetising properties of angelic song in his discussion of the *Dialogi* of Gregory the Great (see below).

<sup>29</sup> Temple, "Song of the Angelic Hosts," 5-6.

<sup>30</sup> See Martin West, "Music Therapy in Antiquity" in *Music as Medicine: The History of Music Therapy Since Antiquity*, ed. Peregrine Horden (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 51-68.

blessing such a great chorus [τὸν τοιοῦτον χορὸν], he prayed to  
 learn what this might mean.<sup>31</sup>

It is not entirely clear from this extract whether the chorus is the group of psychopomps which collect his soul or the crowd that greets him in heaven. The fourth-century Latin translation (*BHL* 0609) by Evagrius of Antioch (d. c. 392) specifies that the soul met with praising angels (vidit [...] animam, laetantibus in ejus occursum angelis), but apparently regards the same group as a choir of saints (sanctorum chor[us]).<sup>32</sup> Aldhelm (d. 709/10), who collected stories of saints into the compendia *De virginitate* and *Carmen de virginitate*, recounts how Antony saw Amoun carried to heaven by ‘heavenly soldiers’ (caelestis militiae) or ‘angelic throngs’ (angelicis turmis).<sup>33</sup> It thus appears that later readers interpreted the crowd of spirits quite flexibly, either as angels or as a less distinguishable heavenly crowd. In either case, the rejoicing crowd fulfils the function of psychopomp.

Although we never find out exactly what Amoun saw and heard on his journey, Athanasius’ *Vita S. Antonii* does provide a glimpse into the events that immediately follow the exit of the soul from the body. During an ecstatic vision, Antony witnesses his soul being led through the air by ‘certain beings’ (ὕπο τινῶν).<sup>34</sup> Their way is impeded by ‘foul and terrible figures’ (πικροὺς καὶ δεινούς τινας) who demand an account of the deeds that Antony has committed throughout his life.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Athanasius, *Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τοῦ Ὁσίου Πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀγίου Ἀντωνίου* = *The Life of St. Antony* 60 (*PG* 26: 930A), trans. Robert C. Gregg, *The Life of Antony; and, the Letter to Marcellinus* (London; New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 75. In the following footnotes, I will cite the translation by Greggs, followed by a reference to the Greek text in *PG* 26 in parenthesis, unless otherwise stated. The Latin *Life* by Evagrius runs along the bottom of the pages in *PG* 26. It can also be found in *De vitis patrum* (*PL* 73: 125A-169A).

<sup>32</sup> Evagrius, *Vita S. Antonii* 60 (*PG* 26: 930).

<sup>33</sup> Aldhelm, *De virginitate* 37, trans. Michael Lapidge in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979), 103; *Carmen de virginitate*, l. 1502, trans. James L. Rosier in *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, trans. Michael Lapidge and James L. Rosier (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985), 136. Latin references are from R. Ehwald, *Aldhelmi opera omnia*, *MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi* 15 (1919), 286 and 415.

<sup>34</sup> Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 65, 79 (*PG* 26: 933C).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* (*PG* 26: 933C-936A).

Antony's escorts argue that they are only permitted to take account of his life from the time he became a monk. Finding nothing incriminating, the fiends level false accusations against him, but these efforts prove futile, and his soul is permitted to pass through the air.<sup>36</sup> The account attests the late antique belief that demons occupy the middle air, and we can assume that the group of spirits conducting Antony's soul upwards are angels.<sup>37</sup> The destination of the spirit is determined by the battle between the demons and the angels, and the outcome of that trial depends entirely on the conduct of the body and the soul in life.

Athanasius only alludes to the possibility that Antony himself was transported to heaven by angels upon his demise. The face of the dying hermit lights up, as if he sees dear friends around him, and he is 'taken to the fathers' (προσετέθη πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας).<sup>38</sup> Evagrius made the holiness of Antony's death scene far more explicit in his translation by attributing Antony's elation to the presence of holy angels, 'which had descended to take away his soul' (qui ad perferendam animam eius descenderant).<sup>39</sup> Since it was the Latin version rather than the Greek original which achieved widespread popularity in medieval England, the presence of angelic psychopomps at the time of Antony's death came to be regarded as standard.

Another text in the Desert Father tradition that features singing psychopomps is the anonymous *Ἡ κατ' Αἴγυπτον τῶν μοναχῶν ἱστορία* (the *History of the Monks in Egypt*) (BHL 1433-34), composed in Greek around the year 400. One story concerning the deaths of holy men is of particular interest, as it includes a musical element and depicts choirs of the righteous also acting as psychopomps. An ascetic monk, Abba Paphnutius, prays to God that he may know which of the

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. (PG 26: 935A).

<sup>37</sup> See Jean Daniélou, "Les démons de l'air dans la 'Vie d'Antoine,'" in *Antonius Magnus Eremita, 356-1956: studia ad antiquum monachismum spectantia*, ed. Basilus Steidle, *Studia Anselmiana* 38 (Rome, 1956), 136-147.

<sup>38</sup> Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 92, 98 (PG 26: 972B).

<sup>39</sup> Evagrius, *Vita S. Antonii* 92 (PG 26: 971-72).

living saints he most resembles.<sup>40</sup> Three men are revealed to him. One of them is a flute-player, who, at Paphnutius' instigation, abandons secular music and spends the rest of his days as an ascetic monk, writing only hymns. Paphnutius does not witness the death of the flute-player, but the text describes how he departs into the next life and is numbered among 'the choirs of saints' (χοροῖς ἁγίων) and the 'companies of the just' (τάγμασι δικαίων).<sup>41</sup> The second word used to describe the grouping of the just denotes a division of soldiers (τάγμα), suggesting that the righteous are ranked in heaven, perhaps according to merit.

The second man whom the monk resembles, a headsman, renounced sexual contact with his wife after thirty years of marriage and works for the common good. Paphnutius persuades him to flee the world and take up the cross. When the headsman dies, Paphnutius witnesses his soul being carried away by angels (ὑπὸ ἀγγέλων ἀναλαμβανομένην) singing Psalm 64:4, while the righteous respond (πάλιν τῶν δικαίων ἀποκρινόμενον) with Psalm 118.<sup>42</sup> When Paphnutius reaches the end of his life, he is rewarded with a privilege similar to that of his predecessors. A group of priests coming to visit him sees his soul being carried up to heaven amidst choirs of the just (χοροῖς δικαίων) and angels singing hymns to God (καὶ ἀγγέλων ἀναλαμβανομένην ὑμνοῦντων τὸν θεόν).<sup>43</sup> The sightings in this story provide early evidence for a belief that angels and the righteous worked together as psychopomps and performed psalmody on their journey to heaven.

An anecdote in another chapter of the *History* tells of a similar death scene. Abbas Sourous, Paul and Isaiah visit a confessor called Abba Anouph a few days before his death. Anouph tells his visitors that the heavenly hierarchies have been

<sup>40</sup> Norman Russell, ed. and trans., *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia monachorum in Aegypto* 14 (London: Mowbray, 1980), 94-98. The Greek text is edited by A.J. Festugière, *Historia monachorum in Aegypto: édition critique du texte grec et traduction annotée* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1971), 102-110. Page numbers to this edition are given in parenthesis.

<sup>41</sup> *Lives of the Desert Fathers* 14, 96 (Festugière, 104).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 97 (Festugière, 107).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 98 (Festugière, 110).

revealed to him: “‘I have seen choirs of the just [χοροὺς δικαίων], I have seen companies of martyrs [μαρτύρων ἄθροίσματα], I have seen armies of monks [μοναχῶν πολιτεύματα]’”.<sup>44</sup> Again, this description shows that the righteous were grouped into choirs. After three days of narrating his triumphs, Anouph dies, and, ‘at once angels received his soul, and choirs of martyrs [χοροὶ μαρτύρων] led it to heaven, while the fathers looked on and heard the hymns [ἀκούοντων τοὺς ὕμνους]’.<sup>45</sup> The monk is therefore fetched to heaven by one of the choirs of saints he is about to join for eternity. In all of these examples, the men who are delivered into the hands of the psychopomps are highly meritorious, and do not appear to meet with adverse powers on the way to their heavenly destination. Furthermore, the hymns of the psychopomps, both angelic and human, suggest that their presence is comforting. They are a far cry indeed from the terrible satellites of the Macarius homily.

The presence of choirs of the righteous alongside angelic choruses suggests that souls of the recently deceased join the heavenly community as soon as they are taken from their body. In the *History of the Monks*, the psychopomps which collect the souls are part of the larger body of the heavenly host, but also distinct from them, as they perform a specific function. As in the visions of the other world discussed in the first chapter of the thesis, when the angels and the righteous appear together, they respond to one another in their chants. Despite the potential theological and musical interest of the songs of the choirs of the righteous, Rufinus, who translated the *History of the Monks* into Latin around 403 (*BHL* 6524), omitted almost all references to the choruses of the just from these *exempla*. The flute-player gives up his soul amid the ‘angelic choirs of saints’ (inter sanctorum [a]ngelicos choro reddidit spiritum), but in Paphnutius’ vision of the second man’s

<sup>44</sup> *Lives of the Desert Fathers* 11, 98 (Festugière, 91).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 89 (Festugière, 92).



death, Rufinus only mentions the '[a]ngelorum chorus'.<sup>46</sup> Rufinus makes the most interesting alterations to the Anouph *exemplum*. In describing Anouph's passing, he omits the chorus of martyrs but instead includes a sentence describing how one of the angels, carrying the dead man's soul, calls out to God.<sup>47</sup> He nevertheless retains Anouph's description of the heavenly hierarchies which forewarn him of his imminent death – a retention which suggests that he did not regard the notion of different heavenly gatherings as nonsensical or unorthodox.<sup>48</sup>

It is possible that he was merely inconsistent in his editing, yet it seems more likely that Rufinus thought the detail of the choir of martyrs extraneous. His editorial choice alerts us to two important considerations. Firstly, translation and editing can change the *topoi* of heavenly choirs even when that might not have been the writer's primary intention. Secondly, it is the Latin version of the *Historia monachorum* that would have been known throughout Western Christendom, and, consequently, Latin writers might have been less familiar with the idea of the righteous accompanying choirs of angels on their journey from earth to heaven. Still, this permutation of the *topos* was conventional enough to be included in the *Vita S. Pauli primi eremite* (BHL 6596) by Jerome of Stridon (d. 420), in which St Antony witnesses the soul of the supposed pioneer of desert monasticism, St Paul, being conveyed to heaven by angels, apostles and prophets.<sup>49</sup> His use of the *topos* reveals that, by the fourth century, Latin writers had already begun to associate asceticism with visionary ability, and the righteous with heavenly psychopomps.

### 3.2: Hearing holiness in the miracle collections of Gregory of Tours

The singing of the heavenly escorts did not necessarily herald an end to the threat of demons of the mid-air. A collection of the miracles of Martin of Tours (BHL 5618) by Gregory of Tours (d. 595) recounts Martin's transition from earthly to

<sup>46</sup> Rufinus, *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* 16 (PL 21: 437A and 438B).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. (PL 21: 429B).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. (PL 21: 429A).

<sup>49</sup> Jerome, *Vita S. Pauli primi eremite* 14 (PL 23: 27A-B).

heavenly life, a scene that is not described in the *Vita S. Martini* (BHL 5610) by Sulpicius Severus.<sup>50</sup> Gregory informs the reader that Martin passed away at midnight on a Sunday, at the same time that St. Severinus, bishop of Cologne, was visiting holy shrines. Severinus hears a choir singing up above (*chorum canentium in sublimi*).<sup>51</sup> His archdeacon, however, is deaf to the heavenly sound. Gregory's narratorial voice interjects, 'I believe that this man who did not deserve to hear these songs was not of equal merit'.<sup>52</sup> The archdeacon can only hear the sound of voices singing, 'as if in heaven,' when Severinus prays with him, although he cannot interpret the sound.<sup>53</sup> Severinus explains that the psalmody emanates from the angels which escort Martin up to heaven. There is a short delay in the chanting as the devil and his demons try to detain Martin and lay claim to his soul. Finding no fault, the evil spirits allow Martin to pass through. Severinus' explanation draws to a close on an almost homiletic note, its tone intended to stir the reader to repentance: "[w]hat therefore will happen to us sinners, if this wicked faction wished to harm such a bishop?"<sup>54</sup>

This example of angelic psychopomps is noteworthy for two reasons: it shows that, by the sixth century, heavenly escorts could be detected purely by the sound they made; secondly, it suggests that the ability to hear the heavenly choirs was closely tied to the moral state of the by-stander. On account of his merit, Severinus can hear, interpret and intercede on behalf of the archdeacon. Another holy man who receives a glimpse of Martin's heavenly glory is St. Ambrose.<sup>55</sup> While he is sleeping, his soul leaves his body and attends Martin's funeral. His

<sup>50</sup> Gregory of Tours, *De miraculis S Martini Episcopi* 4 (PL 71: 918A-C). Translated by Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 206-207. The Life of St. Martin can be found in the PL 20 at 159A-176C.

<sup>51</sup> Gregory of Tours, *De miraculis S Martini Episcopi* 4, 206 (PL 71: 918A).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 206 (PL 71: 918A-B).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Van Dam translates this as 'voices of men chanting Psalms, as if in heaven,' though the Latin does not suggest that the voices are male.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 206 (PL 71: 918B).

<sup>55</sup> Gregory of Tours, *De miraculis de S Martini Episcopi* 5, 207 (PL 71: 918C-919B).

spirit chants a psalm sequence in honour of his friend until he is woken by his bemused Milanese congregation, who had been waiting for two to three hours for the service to continue. It would seem, therefore, that only the saintly witnessed Martin's entrance into the celestial life at the moment of his death. However, in the *Libri historiarum*, written after *De miraculis S. Martini*, Gregory affirms that 'many' heard the chanting of psalms in the sky when Martin passed away.<sup>56</sup> Did Gregory deem the testimony of the many more convincing than the visions of the few? Who had access to heavenly secrets in Merovingian Gaul? Isabel Moreira has persuasively argued that while hagiographical texts of the Merovingian period claimed that only a few meritorious individuals could access the world of divinely inspired dreams and visions, many accounts suggest that this realm was open to unexceptional lay men and women.<sup>57</sup> She wrote, 'Gregory of Tours found himself trying to explain, not always very convincingly, how it was that sinners and "ordinary Christians" had important visions'.<sup>58</sup> Although he continued to employ what Moreira called the 'discourse of privilege' in his hagiographies, Gregory of Tours also explored the circumstances in which a lay person might glimpse the divine.

In the first book of the *Libri miraculorum* (*De gloria martyrum*), Gregory suggests that the faithful can encounter heavenly choirs whilst performing their devotions. He introduces his readers to an old woman, 'oppressed by age but elevated by the faith of her whole mind,' who travels around the churches of the saints in or near Bordeaux, bringing oil to light their lamps.<sup>59</sup> One night, she is accidentally locked inside the crypt in the church of St. Peter. About midnight, the doors swing open and the church shines with a great splendour. A choir chanting

<sup>56</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Libri historiarum* 1.48, trans. Lewis Thorpe, *History of the Franks* (Harmondsworth; Baltimore: Penguin, 1974), 97.

<sup>57</sup> Moreira, *Dreams, Visions and Spiritual Authority*, *passim*.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>59</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Libri miraculorum* 1.34 (PL 71: 736A).

psalms (chorus psallentium) enters and recites the *Gloria*, the angelic hymn of Luke 2:14. She overhears men (viro) among them, saying that St. Stephen delays them in making their rounds to churches. The saint finally arrives, dripping wet. It emerges that he has been detained by performing a rescue miracle at sea. The retinue, complete, leaves the church. The old woman collects the water that has dripped from Stephen's clothes, which she later uses as a contact relic.

Severinus' vision of St. Martin and the old woman's encounter with the ghostly choir are just a two of six separate instances in Gregory's works in which a choir of heavenly figures is heard singing psalms in a sacred place at the dead of night.<sup>60</sup> In one case, a chorus of people in white honours the relics of a confessor-saint by singing psalms around his tomb.<sup>61</sup> In another, relics come to life and sing.<sup>62</sup> This account concerns St. Gregory, an ascetic hermit in Dijon, who lives next to a baptistery full of the relics of saints. He makes a habit of visiting this baptistery at night, and one time, his vigils are witnessed by a deacon. After a period of silence, the deacon hears many voices singing for three or more hours. Gregory of Tours surmises that these voices must belong to the saints buried in the baptistery, who worship along with St. Gregory.

Although the examples above do not concern psychopomps, they provide a context in which the vision of the singing angels in *De miraculis de S. Martini* can be better understood. In various *miracula* by Gregory of Tours, the souls of the righteous, both living and dead, are never far from the physical remains of the

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<sup>60</sup> Joan M. Petersen delineates several categories of miracles in the writings of Gregory of Tours, one of which is 'singing by unseen choirs'. The texts in which this miracle occurs are listed in footnote 13 in *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great and their Late Antique Cultural Background* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 125. Of these, *Liber de gloria beatorum confessorum* 30 (PL 71: 850C-851B), *Liber vitae patrum* 7.2 (BHL 6541) (PL 71: 1036C-1037C) and 13.1 (PL 71: 1065A-D) and *Liber de virtutibus S. Iuliani* 42 (BHL 4541) (Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles*, 190) concern the presence of choirs in holy buildings at night. The account in *Libri historiarum* 1.48 is a reference to *De miraculis S. Martini* (see above).

<sup>61</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria confessorum* 29 (PL 71: 851B) and *Liber vitae patrum* 7 (PL 71: 1037B).

<sup>62</sup> *Liber vitae patrum* 7 (PL 71: 1037B).

saints. The very space in which relics are kept is sanctified, a hotspot for miraculous activity. Indeed, it is at a shrine that Severinus witnesses the flight of Martin's soul. Severinus is not only in the right place; he is there at the right time. The Scriptural precedent that seems to underlie Gregory's emphasis on nocturnal angelic appearances is Luke 2:8-12, in which hosts of angels appear to the shepherds who watch their flock by night, though it is also conceivable that the belief that spirits can be seen and heard at this time is founded in folklore or superstition.<sup>63</sup> It would be tempting to interpret these visions as a reward for vigilance were it not that these examples have the feel of a chance encounter; if the old woman had not been locked in the crypt by accident, she would never have seen the heavenly company. The sources suggest that while instances of sightings are rare, it was a common occurrence for celestial crowds to gather in a sacred place – perhaps it was even believed to happen on a nightly basis. Saintliness and exceptional piety may have increased one's chances of witnessing angelic choirs and even singing with them, but it was nevertheless possible for anyone to hear heavenly concerts if they were in the presence of relics.

Peter Brown has described 'tangible loci of the sacred' as sites where 'signs of the presence of the other world in this world,' could be perceived.<sup>64</sup> Saints' tombs in the work of Gregory of Tours were certainly places at which the gauze separating life and death became more permeable. His 'tomb-centred sanctity' continued to exercise an influence on hagiographical texts well into the

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<sup>63</sup> A later account in Thietmar of Merseburg's *Chronicle* 1.7, attributed to the abbess of the monastery of St Laurent, describes how a crowd of ghosts turn with disconcerting alacrity from psalm-singing to priest-killing. The abbess ends the story with a pithy aphorism suggestive of folkloric or superstitious belief: "'Just as the day is given over to the living," she said, "the night is the domain of the dead.'" See Andrew Joynt, ed., *Medieval Ghost Stories: An Anthology of Miracles, Marvels and Prodigies* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001), 13.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Brown, "Glorious Obitus: The End of the Ancient Other World," in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R.A. Markus*, ed. William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 299.

eleventh century, as the final chapter of this thesis will reveal.<sup>65</sup> According to Brown, however, the perception of the other world shifted in the *Dialogi* of Gregory the Great ‘toward the moment of death and the subsequent fate of the soul in an increasingly circumstantial other world’.<sup>66</sup> It is important not to over-emphasise the disjunction between the thought-world which gave rise to the *Miracula* of Gregory, and the miraculous visions in Anglo-Saxon England. Yet the writings of Gregory the Great did mark something of a watershed moment in the history of the psychopomp. As the following sub-section argues, this was the moment when the tacit relationship between heavenly music and the sanctity of the soul they bore was finally stated.

### **3.3: Heavenly song and merit in the *Homiliae in Evangelia* and *Dialogi* of Gregory the Great**

Like his contemporary in Tours, Gregory the Great (d. 604) had a taste for the fantastical. Joan M. Petersen remarked, ‘[p]erhaps [Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great] resemble each other most nearly in their stories connected with celestial choirs, sweet scents arising at or after death, light, fire, water, and the increase of various substances’.<sup>67</sup> Petersen’s comparison provides a stimulus for further research, but it is nevertheless fairly superficial. These categories of miracle are rather broad, and even within the first category, ‘stories connected with celestial choirs,’ the context and purpose of the tales differ significantly for each writer. Gregory of Tours was concerned with establishing the sanctity of men and women, their relics, and the buildings in which they were housed or discovered. Celestial choirs functioned as metonyms for the presence of heaven in a sacred object or a

<sup>65</sup> The term ‘tomb-centred sanctity’ is from Paul Antony Hayward, “Demystifying the Role of Sanctity in Western Christendom,” in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. James Howard Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 126.

<sup>66</sup> Brown, “*Gloriosus Obitus*,” 299. Brown also discusses the *Dialogi* as a turning point in the history of the afterlife in “The Decline of the Empire of God: Amnesty, Penance, and the Afterlife from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages,” in *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 57-58.

<sup>67</sup> Petersen, *Dialogues of Gregory the Great*, 136.

holy hotspot, and songs of angels and the righteous formed part of a set of *topoi* promoting Merovingian saints' cults. In the works of Gregory the Great, *topoi* of heavenly choirs were used as a homiletic or exegetical tool. In the *Homiliae in Evangelia* (delivered in Rome between 590 and 592) Gregory illustrated the moral truths of Biblical passages by offering *exempla* of celestial choruses acting as psychopomps.<sup>68</sup> These stories were re-contextualised in the *Dialogi* (BHL 6542) (593 x 594) where they were given as examples in a commentary on the relationship between heavenly song and merit.

Two *exempla* of heavenly psychopomps in the *Homiliae* illustrate the rewards of patience in times of ill-health, poverty and ostracism, and therefore partake in the Lazarian discourse. The thirty-fifth homily celebrating the nativity of the martyrs distinguishes between two kinds of martyr – the one martyred in secret and the other martyred in public.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, anyone who suffers without complaint and does not seek to avenge wrongs deserves the title of martyr.<sup>70</sup> Gregory gives the example of Stephanus: he treats his adversaries as friends, calls his poverty an asset, and considers his enemies to be his helpers.<sup>71</sup> At the time of his death, a group of spirits – visible to some, invisible to others – gather around his bed.<sup>72</sup> They are first identified as angels and then a chorus of martyrs.<sup>73</sup> The slippage between angelic and non-angelic psychopomps is perhaps intentional; in homily thirty-four, Gregory asserts that the elect make up the number of fallen angels, filling each rank.<sup>74</sup> Although martyrs do not *become* angels, they nevertheless join the angelic choirs.

<sup>68</sup> Dates suggested by Robert Austin Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 16.

<sup>69</sup> Gregory, *Homilia* 35.7 (PL 76: 1263B-C).

<sup>70</sup> Gregory, *Homilia* 35.4 (PL 76: 1261C-1262A).

<sup>71</sup> Gregory, *Homilia* 35.8 (PL 76: 1264A).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. (PL 76: 1264B).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. (PL 76: 1264C).

<sup>74</sup> Gregory, *Homilia* 34.6 (PL 76: 1249C-D).

Homily forty, on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, furnishes the auditor or reader with a further instance of the spiritual recompense for bodily suffering. Romula, a house ascetic, suffers from paralysis but bears it with patience.<sup>75</sup> The disability even allows her to increase in virtue, giving her more opportunity for prayer. As her two female companions attend to her one night, a great light appears, and they sense a great crowd of spirits entering the room. At the same time, the room is filled with a calming and delightful scent. Romula tells her two co-worshippers that she will not die just yet, and the light fades, though the smell lingers on. Three days afterwards, Romula receives the sacrament, and just as her fellow ascetics are leaving her bedside, they see two choirs singing psalms in front of the convent door, ‘and they said that they discerned the sexes from the voices; the men were chanting psalms and the women were singing responses’ (et [...] se dicebant sexus ex vocibus discrevisse, psalmodiae cantus dicebant viri, et feminae respondebant).<sup>76</sup> While the choirs are performing heavenly funeral rites (coelestes exsequiae), Romula’s soul is freed from her body.<sup>77</sup> The choirs take her soul up into the air and the sound gradually diminishes, until both the music and the sweet scent can be detected no more. Although her body is weak – and, Gregory implies, even repulsive – her soul is precious, a pearl of God lying in the dung heap of her body.<sup>78</sup> Her heavenly life is the inverse of her earthly existence: ‘she whom people despised found companions in choirs of angels’ (illa despecta ab hominibus invenit socios choros angelorum).<sup>79</sup> Are the choirs of angels synonymous with the psychopomps, or are should they be regarded as the heavenly community above? Gregory leaves this ambiguous. Yet the division of the

<sup>75</sup> Gregory, *Homilia* 40.11. The *exemplum* extends from *PL* 76: 1310B-1312A.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. (*PL* 76: 1311C).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. (*PL* 76: 1312A). Dyer discusses this example of choral psalmody in “Monastic Psalmody of the Middle Ages,” 65.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory, *Homilia* 40.12 (*PL* 76: 1312A).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. (*PL* 76: 1312B).



psychopomps into male and female choirs suggests that they are human spirits, distinct from the angelic host.

A third homily on the parable of the sower and the seed (Lk 8:4-15) also demonstrates that the humble are received into heavenly choirs. This time, the singing spirits are not psychopomps, but the host which waits to receive the soul. In this homily, Gregory equates the good soil with the virtuous, who endure suffering and produce spiritual fruit. Future joys, tasted at the moment of death, are both the natural outcome and the antithesis of present discomfort.<sup>80</sup> To illustrate this moral, Gregory draws on the example of a paralytic man named Servulus, ‘poor in goods, but rich in merits’ (rebus pauper, meritis dives).<sup>81</sup> Although he is illiterate, he gains a thorough knowledge of Scripture by encouraging house guests to read to him.<sup>82</sup> At the time of his death, he calls strangers and guests to his deathbed and with him they all recite psalms for the dying.<sup>83</sup> Suddenly frightened, he calls for silence: “[h]ush! Do you not hear how praises resound in heaven?” (“[t]acete; nunquid non auditis quantae resonant laudes in coelo?”).<sup>84</sup> As Servulus perceives the heavenly choir with the ear of his heart (aurem cordis), his soul is released from his body.<sup>85</sup> A beautiful scent dissipates throughout the room, filling the by-standers with delight, ‘so that through this they should recognise openly that the choirs had received him in heaven’ (ita ut per hoc patenter agnoscerent quod eam laudes in

<sup>80</sup> Gregory the Great, *Homilia* 15.4 (PL 76: 1133B).

<sup>81</sup> Gregory, *Homilia* 15.5 (PL 76: 1133C).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. (PL 76: 1133D-1134A).

<sup>83</sup> Choral psalmody around the bed of a dying monk was a common monastic practice from early in the Western monastic tradition. See Dyer, “Monastic Psalmody of the Middle Ages,” 63.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. (PL 76: 1134A-B).

<sup>85</sup> The ear of the heart is briefly discussed in Grover A. Zinn, “Sound, Silence and Word in the Spirituality of Gregory the Great,” in Grégoire le Grand: Colloque, Chantilly, Centre culturel Les Fontaines, 15-19 septembre 1982 (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1986), 368.

coelo suscepissent).<sup>86</sup> It is notable that the sweet scent indicates his reception into heaven, and not the heavenly music, which Servulus alone can hear.<sup>87</sup>

These *exempla* provide an impetus for the auditors or readers of the sermons to ponder their future fates and review their attitudes towards the weak and destitute. Stephanus, Romula and Servulus are Lazarus figures: their exceptional merit is not immediately evident, and is only revealed through signs of sanctity at the times of their deaths. Since we cannot know who is saved and who is not, Gregory explains, we must treat all with the reverence due to a member of the kingdom of heaven.<sup>88</sup> One's treatment of the humble will affect one's own judgement at the end of time. In homily fifteen, Gregory beseeches his flock to prepare a strong defence for their eschatological trial. He suggests that the choirs of the righteous will provide evidence against the unworthy in the Final Judgement: 'let not God bring the apostles against us, who drew crowds of the faithful with them to the kingdom of heaven, [and] let not God exhibit the martyrs who came into the heavenly kingdom through bloodshed'.<sup>89</sup> The idea is indebted to the Pauline notion that saints will act as judges of people and angels at the end of the world (1 Cor 6:2-3). In homily forty, he urges his congregation to find paupers to act as their advocates and intercessors.<sup>90</sup> These Lazarus figures are also latter-day martyrs: Gregory specified that Stephanus joined the martyrs on account of his inner suffering. Martyrs, like paupers, act as heavenly defenders and patrons.<sup>91</sup> In the homilies, therefore, Gregory linked the moment of individual judgement and the Final Judgement: those who are judged worthy at their moment of death will

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. (PL 76: 1134B). Note how it is necessary to translate 'laudes' (the activity of praising) as 'choirs' (the body of singers).

<sup>87</sup> For an in-depth study on how early Christians approached the divine through constructions of olfactory experience, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey's study, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>88</sup> Gregory, *Homilia* 40.10 (PL 76: 1310B).

<sup>89</sup> Gregory, *Homilia* 15.5 (PL 76: 1134C).

<sup>90</sup> Gregory, *Homilia* 40.10 (PL 76: 1310A).

<sup>91</sup> Gregory, *Homilia* 32.8 (PL 76: 1238C).

play a role in the judicial proceedings at the end of time. In order to make this link as clear as possible, Gregory he painted the merits of the dying in bolder colours.

The *exempla* of Stephanus, Romula and Servulus appear in close proximity to one another in the *Dialogi*. In this text, Gregory foregrounds the auditory dimension of the stories of Servulus and Romula in order to illustrate their merit. The line of argument to which these *exempla* belong actually begins in book two with a vision in the *Vita* of St. Benedict (*BHL* 1102). The saint is keeping vigil at his window one night when he sees a shaft of light pierce through the darkness of the heavens and witnesses the soul of Bishop Germanus of Capua being escorted to heaven ‘in a sphere of fire by angels’ (in sphaera ignea ab angelis).<sup>92</sup> The vision, indicating Germanus’ holiness and Benedict’s merit, is taken up for discussion in book four. In a debate about the immortality of the soul, Gregory’s interlocutor (Peter) argues that he has never seen the soul leave the body upon the sudden death of any monk. This gives him grounds to question the survival of the soul after death. A stark line is drawn between the conventions of hagiography and lived experience. If the majority of people, even men of a holy order, simply do not see such wondrous phenomena, why should they believe that they happen? Gregory counters his argument by explaining that the soul is invisible, and therefore cannot be seen with bodily eyes. But those with ‘the eye of the mind [mentis oculum] purified by faith and cleansed by prayers in abundance’ have often seen souls leaving the body (egredientes e carne animas frequenter viderunt).<sup>93</sup> Benedict, by performing night vigils and thus cleansing his soul, is granted a view into the afterlife.

The flight of exceptional souls can also be perceived with other spiritual senses. Gregory’s mention of the ‘eye of the mind’ (mentis oculum) perhaps

<sup>92</sup> Gregory, *Vita S. Benedicti* 35 (*Dialogi* 2.35) (*PL* 66: 198B).

<sup>93</sup> Gregory, *Dialogi* 4.7 (*PL* 77: 332B).

evoked for him the metaphor of the ‘ear of the heart’ (*aurem cordis*) used in the Servulus *exemplum*. After all, had not Servulus’ ear been cleansed by listening to Bible passages? Shortly after Gregory’s discussion of Benedict, Gregory links the audition of heavenly song and sanctity in a way far more explicit than we have previously encountered:

It is known that often the sweetness of heavenly praises bursts forth while the souls are leaving the bodies of the elect, so that while they listen to it with pleasure, they are permitted to feel no pain at the separation of the soul from the body.

*sciendum est quia saepe animabus exeuntibus electorum, dulcedo solet laudis coelestis erumpere, ut dum illam libenter audiunt, dissolutionem carnis ab anima sentire minime permittantur.*<sup>94</sup>

Gregory’s explanation chimes with the Gabriel-Michael *exemplum* from the Systematic Collection of the *Apophthegmata patrum*, in which the music of David’s harp and the heavenly choruses enable the soul of the good man to leave his body painlessly.<sup>95</sup> Gregory illustrates his point with the example of Servulus, which he follows with the *exemplum* of Romula. In the new context of the discussion of song and merit in the *Dialogi*, the antiphonal song of the psychopomps functions as a sign of Romula’s election and can even be interpreted as another example of heavenly pain relief. The juxtaposition of the tales of Romula and Servulus also highlights the contrast between the songs of the heavenly host and the songs of psychopomps. Only Servulus is sensitive to the

<sup>94</sup> Gregory, *Dialogi* 4.14 (PL 77: 341B).

<sup>95</sup> Gregory may have known of this *exemplum* from a Latin translation. Petersen, *Dialogues of Gregory the Great*, argues that Gregory drew on a common fund of stories from the East and West sides of the Mediterranean (see summary of argument on pp. xx-xxi and p. 191).

pain-numbing sound of the host, whereas Romula's attendants are astonished by the sound of the antiphonal choir which fetches her soul to heaven.

Within the *Dialogi*, the Lazarian discourse is less pronounced; Servulus and Romula become hagiographical rather than homiletic models. The following section explores how the *exemplum* of Romula, in which the psychopomp *topos* functions as a clear sign of sanctity, was assimilated into the saints' Lives of the early Middle Ages. It is in fact one of the few unambiguous instances of singing psychopomps in the Latin hagiographical tradition.

#### 4: The early Middle Ages

##### 4.1: The ambiguity of the psychopomp *topos* in the hagiography of Anglo-Saxon England

The presence of psychopomps at the scene of a saint's death was not guaranteed; we have seen how neither the Greek Life of Antony nor Sulpicius Severus' *Vita S. Martini* ended with the appearance of a band of heavenly escorts. In both cases, the *topos* was added by later writers. Manuscripts of the Evagrian Life of Antony and the miracles of St. Martin were available in Anglo-Saxon England, and a significant proportion of Latin Lives of ascetic saints written between the eighth and eleventh centuries include a vision of psychopomps or at least an allusion to the *topos*.

The Hiberno-Latin *Vita Columbae* (BHL 1886) (c. 700) contains a whole book dedicated to the saint's visions of angels, many of these visions revealing the activity of psychopomps.<sup>96</sup> Heavenly psychopomps bear away the souls of Earcongota, Chad and Hilda in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*.<sup>97</sup> Psychopomps are seen, and in most cases, heard, at the death scenes of saints in the eighth-century *Vitae* of Wilfrid (BHL 8889) (709 x 720), Guthlac (730 x 740) and Willibrord

<sup>96</sup> Adomnán, *Vita Columbae* 3, trans. Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991; originally published by Nelson, 1961), 183-233.

<sup>97</sup> Bede, *HE* 3.8.3, 4.3.2-4 and 4.21.8, ed. Lapidge, 2:54-56, 2:208-12 and 2:328.

(*BHL* 8935-6) (c. 765).<sup>98</sup> Cuthbert's departure from life in the company of heavenly escorts is evoked at an earlier point in the narrative of Bede's prose and verse Lives, but the scene is not actually depicted.<sup>99</sup> The lack of available evidence from the ninth century distorts the picture, but one of the texts from this period, the metrical *De abbatibus* of Æthelwulf, positively trembles with the beating of heavenly wings: a *chorus* of angels collects the soul of brother Cwicwine and returns, singing, to heaven, and Abbot Wulfsig enters the celestial Kingdom amidst a flock of shining birds.<sup>100</sup>

The *topos* hardly features in the *Vitae* of the three major ecclesiastical Benedictine reformers of the tenth-century. It does not occur at all in Wulfstan's *Vita S. Æthelwoldi* (*BHL* 2647) (written in 996 or shortly afterwards).<sup>101</sup> Nor are psychopomps present at the scene of Oswald's death in the *Vita S. Oswaldi* (*BHL* 6374) (997 x 1002), though the text does state that his spirit was 'borne' (subleuatus) to the kingdom of heaven.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, rather than drawing on the motif of angelic transport to convey the sublimity of the death of Oda, Archbishop of Canterbury, Byrhtferth uses cosmological (computistical) imagery to describe the soul's ascent towards heaven.<sup>103</sup> Dunstan frequently encounters heavenly spirits

<sup>98</sup> Adomnán, *Vita Columbae* 3.23, 226-27; Eddius Stephanus, *Vita S. Wilfridi* 65, trans. Bertram Colgrave, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid, by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge: CUP, 1927), 140; Felix, *Vita S. Guthlaci* 50, trans. Colgrave, 158-59; Alcuin, *Vita S. Willibrordi* 26.1, trans. C.H. Talbot, *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1954), 19.

<sup>99</sup> Bede, *Vita S. Cuthberti* 28, trans. Bertram Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life* (Cambridge: CUP, 1940), 250-51. An equivalent passage can be found in chapter 30 of the metrical Life (*BHL* 2020), ed. Werner Jaager, "Bedas metrische *Vita sancti Cuthberti*," *Palaestra* 198: 108.

<sup>100</sup> Æthelwulf, *De abbatibus* 10 and 18, ed. A. Campbell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 26-27 and 46-47. Æthelwulf never states the name of the monastic house that is the subject of the poem, but the text implies that it is associated with Lindisfarne. D.A. Howlett suggested Bywell in "The Provenance, Date, and Structure of *De abbatibus*," *Archaeologia Aeliana* 3, 5th series (1975): 121-24.

<sup>101</sup> Wulfstan, *Vita S. Æthelwoldi*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Winterbottom, *Wulfstan of Winchester, The Life of St Æthelwold* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>102</sup> Byrhtferth, *Vita S. Oswaldi* 5.17, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge, *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), 192-93.

<sup>103</sup> Byrhtferth, *Vita S. Oswaldi* 2.1, 32-33: 'His power made [Oda] ascend above the orbit of the Milky Way and the solar and lunar spheres'.

in the late-tenth century *Vita* (*BHL* 2342) by the writer known as ‘B.’, and witnesses a band of angelic psychopomps fly away with the soul of a Glastonbury monk, ‘amidst hymns of praise’ (cum ymnorum laudibus).<sup>104</sup> In this way, B. follows Evagrius’ *Vita S. Antonii* and Gregory the Great’s potted Life of St. Benedict in showing that visions and auditions of psychopomps function as a sign of spiritual worthiness. Yet Dunstan himself is not transported to the afterlife by angels.<sup>105</sup> Sowerby understood this as one symptom of the decline in the angelic psychopomp as a sign of sanctity.<sup>106</sup> An alternative explanation is that the idea of saints being conveyed to heaven by psychopomps had become so conventional that it did not need to be stated. If the *topos* did lose some of its potency in the late years of the tenth century, however, the downturn did not last.

It is significant that the eleventh-century hagiographers of Dunstan, Osbern and Eadmer, sought to correct B.’s omission. According to Osbern’s *Vita* (*BHL* 2344), Dunstan ‘saw those blessed angels which had invited him to the celestial feast standing by, and preparing heavenly rites for him’ (videt illos qui se ad coeleste convivium invitaverant, beatos angelos assistentes, et coeleste illi obsequium praeparantes).<sup>107</sup> He continues, ‘[t]he happy soul [...] was led from the habitation of his most sacred body, departing with those [angels] to contemplate the light of the eternal Creator’ (felix anima [...] egreditur de habitaculo sanctissimi corporis, proficiscens cum illis ad contemplantem claritatem aeterni Conditoris). Eadmer characteristically opts for a simpler construction in his version of the Life (*BHL* 2346): ‘he died, and with angelic choirs leading him, he passed over to

<sup>104</sup> B., *Vita S. Dunstani* 34, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom and Michael Lapidge, *The Early Lives of St Dunstan* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2012), 96-97.

<sup>105</sup> B., *Vita S. Dunstani* 38.6, 108-109.

<sup>106</sup> Sowerby, “Angels in Anglo-Saxon England,” 159.

<sup>107</sup> Osbern, *Vita S. Dunstani* 44, ed. William Stubbs, *Memorials of Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury*, (London: Longman and Co., 1874), 126.

Christ' (transit, et angelicis eum choris ducentibus, migrauit ad Christum).<sup>108</sup> As monks of Christ Church cathedral in Canterbury, Osbern and Eadmer might have been personally motivated to underline Dunstan's sanctity through the use of the well-known *topos*.<sup>109</sup> In the small book of miracles appended to the *Vita S. Anselmi* (BHL 0525), Eadmer demonstrates that the spirit of Dunstan even presides over heavenly psychopomps. It records a dream-vision in which a monk from the abbey of SS Peter, Paul and Augustine in Canterbury sees a beautiful crowd of figures in white (pulcherrimum albatum personarum cuneum) gathered in the room where Anselm lay dying.<sup>110</sup> Archbishop Dunstan calls out to psychopomps when Anselm is on the verge of death: "[b]ehold he whom you await is in hand. Receive him, and lead him where the Lord has ordained, with the voice of joy and praise [voce laudis et exultationis]."<sup>111</sup> The dreamer awakes before he sees or hears the presences.

In other eleventh-century texts, psychopomps appear in a more abstract guise. Several of Goscelin's *Vitae* of female saints use the figure of synecdoche: souls are delivered into the 'hands' of angels or God.<sup>112</sup> By contrast, angelic psychopomps and a heavenly choir of the righteous are vividly depicted in the *Vita S. Edithae* (BHL 2388) (1080 x 1083). A sister at the convent of Wilton hears what sounds like a great number of people with a resplendent appearance chanting

<sup>108</sup> Eadmer, *Vita S. Dunstani* 67, ed. and trans. Andrew J. Turner and Bernard J. Muir, *Eadmer of Canterbury: Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan and Oswald* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 156-57.

<sup>109</sup> The role played by Osbern and Eadmer in promoting the cult of Dunstan is explored in greater detail in chapter four. Note that Eadmer did not add psychopomps into the *Lives* of Oda and Oswald, which suggests that he was following Osbern, his primary source, rather than acting on his own initiative.

<sup>110</sup> Eadmer, *Vita S. Anselmi*, ed. and trans. Richard W. Southern, *The Life of St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 155.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-56.

<sup>112</sup> Goscelin, *Vita S. Amelberge* 45 (BHL 0323), *Acta SS.* July III, 10 (102C); *Vita S. Edithae* 24, ed. A. Wilmart, "La légende de sainte Édith en prose et vers par le moine Goscelin," *Analecta Bollandiana* 56 (1938): 94; *Vita S. Mildrithae* 27 (BHL 5960), ed. D.W. Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), 142; *Vita beate Sexburge regine* 24 (BHL 7693) ed. and trans. Rosalind C. Love, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 182-83



psalms in the choir (audit tanquam in choro multitudinem psallencium).<sup>113</sup> One among their number tells her that angels have come to take the soul of the saint, ‘to carry her away with them from here to eternal joys, so that she may enter the court of everlasting bliss accompanied by that harmonious singing of the heavenly host’ (ut ad eterna gaudia hinc secum auferant, quatinus cum isto concentu exercitus celestis aulam introeat perpetue iocunditatis).<sup>114</sup> The presence of the righteous in the choir stalls of Wilton implies that chants performed by the community allow them to cross the boundaries into heavenly society, an idea that became prominent in the tenth century, as chapter four will explore. It also perhaps illustrates a belief that heavenly choirs came to earth to celebrate when a new saint entered the exalted concert hall. Yet by making reference to a choir of singing spirits distinct from the psychopomps, Goscelin seems to suggest that the conveyers of souls should not be conflated with choirs of heavenly singers.

There are indeed surprisingly few clear-cut cases of singing psychopomps. An eye-witness of the miraculous events attending Columba’s death describes how he sees ‘all the spaces of the air [...] illuminated by the shining of [...] angels, who, sent from heaven, had come down without number, to bear aloft his holy soul’.<sup>115</sup> He also hears, ‘sounding on high, the songs, tuneful and very sweet, of the angelic hosts [carminalia et ualde suaui [...] angelicorum coetuum cantica]’.<sup>116</sup> The sound bursts from the sky at the very moment of Columba’s death, but it is unclear from this description whether the ‘angelicorum coetuum’ refers to the celebration of angelic ranks around the throne of God or the angels which have come to bear away the saint’s soul. Felix’s *Vita S. Guthlaci*, which shows the influence of Adomnán’s *Life of Columba*, depicts a similarly ambiguous death-

<sup>113</sup> Goscelin, *Vita S. Edithae* 24, ed. Wilmart, 94.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 95. Translated by Michael Wright and Kathleen Loncar in *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin’s ‘Legend of Edith’ and ‘Liber confortatorius,’* ed. Stephanie Hollis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 58.

<sup>115</sup> Adomnán, *Vita Columbae* 3.23, 226-27.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

scene: '[t]he whole air was heard to thunder with angelic songs' ([c]antibus quoque angelis spatium totius aeris detonari audiebatur). Does the sound come from inside the heavens, yawning open to receive the newly departed soul, or does Guthlac 'sen[d] forth his spirit,' into the hands of singing psychopomps?<sup>117</sup>

The anonymous *Vita S. Cuthberti* (BHL 2019) (699 x 705) and Bede's later version (BHL 2021) (c. 720) record that Cuthbert witnessed heavenly escorts bearing away souls on two occasions, but in neither case is song explicitly mentioned. The first vision draws inspiration from a variety of texts, alluding to Jacob's ladder (Gen 28:10-19), the death of Germanus in Gregory's biography of St. Benedict and, to a lesser extent, the angelic *Gloria* (Lk 2:8-20).<sup>118</sup> Cuthbert, working as a shepherd, sees angels ascending and descending in the distance; in their hands, they carry the soul of Bishop Adrian wrapped, as it were, in a globe of fire (inter manus eorum animam sanctam, quasi in globo igneo ad coelum efferri).<sup>119</sup> Bede uses the phrases 'coelestium choros' and 'choris angelorum' to describe the heavenly host, and while these phrases imply that angels form a choir in a broad sense, Bede does not state that the angels sing.<sup>120</sup>

A less ambiguous death-bed sign of sanctity is light, which features in the hagiographical sketch of abbess Hilda of Whitby in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>121</sup> A sleeping nun in the monastery of Hackness hears the death bell toll. On opening her eyes, she sees a bright light pouring into the monastery, as if the roof has opened up, and, in the midst of the light, angels convey Hilda's soul to heaven. The sonic element of the vision – the ringing of the death bell – could be

<sup>117</sup> Felix, *Vita S. Guthlaci* 50, 158-59.

<sup>118</sup> Clare Stancliffe outlined the literary allusions in this passage of the *Vita S. Cuthberti* in her recent conference paper, "Was Cuthbert of Noble Birth? and Other Puzzles of his Early Life" (paper presented at North of England Saints, 600-1500, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, March 21-22, 2015).

<sup>119</sup> Anon., *Vita S. Cuthberti* 1.5, 69.

<sup>120</sup> Bede, *Vita S. Cuthberti* 4, 165-67. The terms Bede uses to denote the heavenly group in the metrical Life 4 are: 'castra manipulis,' and 'Angelicis comitatus' (pp. 67-68).

<sup>121</sup> Bede, *HE* 4.21.8, 2:328.

interpreted in several ways. Does it suggest that bands of angels have gathered to perform obsequies for the deceased nun? Do angels call the community to prayer? Does the bell have an apotropaic function, warding off the demons of mid-air? It may simply function as an alarm, rousing the nun of Hackness from sleep. Its narrative function is to connect the vision precisely to the moment of death. The sound of the bell has multiple interpretative possibilities, whereas the light from heaven is an unambiguous sign that the soul has been received into the regions above, where darkness never falls (Rev 21:23; 22:5).

Other accounts of heavenly sound in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* suggest that such auditory miracles are far from self-explanatory. Bede records some of the miraculous incidents surrounding the passing of Earcongota, daughter of King Earconbert of Kent and Seaxburga, who served at a monastery in the French town of Brie.<sup>122</sup> As her soul leaves her body at the break of day, brethren in other buildings hear concerts of angels singing and a sound like a multitudinous crowd entering the monastery (iam manifeste se concentus angelorum psallentium audisse referebant, sed et sonitum quasi plurimae multitudinis monasterium ingredientis).<sup>123</sup> Going out to discover what it may be (unde mox egressi dinoscere quid esset), they see a light from heaven leading Earcongota up towards her blessed home country.<sup>124</sup> Although the brethren plainly heard the sounds of angels entering the building and singing, Bede shows that they nevertheless felt the need to investigate the source of the noise, and only received confirmation that it indicated Earcongota's passing when they also saw a bright light drawing her to heaven.

The hagiographical sketch of St. Chad in the following book demonstrates that celestial song can be perceived by the virtuous but not always understood until explanation is given. The monk who witnesses the events surrounding Chad's

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<sup>122</sup> Bede, *HE* 3.8.1, 2:54.

<sup>123</sup> Bede, *HE* 3.8.3, 2:56.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

death, Owine, renounces the world to join Chad at his monastery of Lastingham, and his pure intention makes him worthy to receive and communicate divine secrets.<sup>125</sup> On the day of the miracle, he is alone with Chad at the episcopal see of Lichfield, working outside whilst the bishop reads or prays in his oratory. Suddenly, he hears a voice descend from heaven, singing and praising very sweetly (*uocem suauiissimam cantantium atque laetantium de caelo ad terras usque descendere*).<sup>126</sup> It seems to come from the South-East, then draws up to the oratory and enters it, filling the building and the surrounding area with song. He listens carefully to the sound and, after half an hour, hears the song go back the way it came with ineffable sweetness. Bede records that his immediate reaction is one of astonishment; he ponders for some time what the sound might mean before the bishop interrupts his meditation and bids him to fetch the seven brothers serving at Lichfield. Owine does not truly understand what the song signifies until the bishop explains that the sound emanated from heavenly spirits, which came to give him advanced warning of his death in seven days' time.<sup>127</sup> The group of psychopomps returns to collect his soul after a week has passed, though there is nothing in the text to indicate that Owine heard them a second time.

Like the multitudinous choir which piled into Earcongota's monastery, this miracle recalls Gregory the Great's description of the events surrounding the death of Romula. In each of the cases recorded by Bede, the group of heavenly spirits is invisible, and only detectable by their sound. Their joyful praises and sweet voice (singular) suggests a unified, heavenly presence, and yet in each case, the witnesses do not know what it means. Owine's lack of understanding certainly does not imply a lack of virtue. Rather, his bafflement may spring from his lack of learning. Bede informs the reader that Owine preferred manual work to the labour of

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<sup>125</sup> Bede, *HE* 4.3.2, 2:208.

<sup>126</sup> Bede, *HE* 4.3.3, 2:210.

<sup>127</sup> Bede, *HE* 4.3.4, 2:212.

reading. Unable to unravel the meanings of his own story, Owine stands at a distance from the reader of Bede's narrative, who would no doubt discern the apocalyptic symbolism woven throughout the vision and appreciate how he combines the *topos* of the heavenly psychopomps with the convention of the saint's foreknowledge of his death. Perhaps we should not be too quick to judge Owine; in the *Vita S. Wilfridi*, only the wise (*sapientes*) can interpret the sweet rustling of birds' wings at his death scene and funeral as the movement of Michael and his retinue.<sup>128</sup> While Owine can perceive the divine, he cannot necessarily interpret its manifestation.

As Gregory the Great's *Dialogi* implies, the song of angels is less comprehensible or even accessible than the heavenly fragrance that signifies celestial presence. At the end of the *Vita S. Willibrordi*, the saint's body is interred in a tomb with hymns and praises and a beautiful fragrance fills the nostrils of all who are present, 'so that all were conscious that angels had been present to minister at the last rites of the holy man' (*ut perspicuae intellegeretur ad exsequia viri sancti angelicum venisse ministerium*).<sup>129</sup> Only one of Willibrord's disciples, keeping vigil at a monastery far removed, sees his soul surrounded by light: 'it was being carried by a host of angels to the realms above, all singing his praises' (*cum consonata canentium laude angelicis exercitibus ad caelorum regna portari*).<sup>130</sup> The relative inscrutability of angelic song compared with bright light and delightful fragrance is acknowledged by the ninth-century writer, Paschasius Radbertus, in his pseudo-Jeromian epistle to Paula and Eustochium on the Assumption of Mary. He prefaces his description of the rapturous joy that greeted Mary when she was

<sup>128</sup> Stephanus, *Vita S. Wilfridi* 65 and 66, 140-43. Sowerby and I independently arrived at similar interpretations of the angelic psychopomp miracles in the *HE* and the *Vita S. Wilfridi* (compare this analysis to "Angels in Anglo-Saxon England," pp. 184-86).

<sup>129</sup> Alcuin, *Vita S. Willibrordi* 25.3, 19. Latin text edited by Paul Dräger, *Alcuini Vita sancti Willibrordi: Das Leben des heiligen Willibrord* (Trier: Kliomedia, 2008), 48. Henceforth, references to the Latin edition will be placed in parenthesis.

<sup>130</sup> Alcuin, *Vita S. Willibrordi* 26.1, 19 (Dräger, 48).

assumed into the heavens with a discussion of the signs of sanctity surrounding the death of the elect:

For we often read how angels came to the funerals and burials of certain saints and offered their obsequies with rites; also, they led the souls of the elect to heaven with hymns and praises, on account of which, choirs of men and women on each side were frequently heard singing praises. Meanwhile, what is more evident, they sometimes shone with a great deal of light, and moreover, those still living in the flesh could sense the fragrance of a wonderful odour in that place for a long time after.

Legimus enim quam saepe ad funera et ad sepulturas quorumlibet sanctorum angelos advenisse et exsequiis eorum obsequis praestitisse: necnon et animas electorum usque ad coelos, cum hymnis et laudibus detulisse: ubi et utriusque sexus chori commemorantur frequenter auditi, laudesque cecinisse: interea et quod perspicacius est, multo nonnumquam lumine eosdem resplenduisse; insuper et adhuc viventes in carne, ibidem miri odoris fragrantiam diutius persensisse.<sup>131</sup>

This passage neatly condenses late antique and early medieval hagiographical *topoi*, but in doing so, it raises its own questions. Radbertus does not name any of his sources in this extract, leaving us to wonder where he read these tales of angelic psychopomps. His reference to angels offering their last rites recalls the celestial choirs which gathered at the tombs of saints in Gregory of Tours, while the angelic choirs ‘utriusque sexus’ are reminiscent of the antiphonal chorus that appeared upon the death of Romula in the *Dialogi* and *Homiliae* of Gregory the Great to perform funeral rites (coelestes exsequiae). This reading suggests that Radbertus either consulted the *Dialogi*, in which the relief of heavenly music is stated to be

<sup>131</sup> Paschasius Radbertus, *Epistola 9 ad Paulam et Eustochium* (PL 30: 134C).

the reward of elect souls, or hagiographies that used the text as a model. The part of the passage which begins, '[m]eanwhile, what is more evident...' (interea et quod perspicacius est) suggests that the bright light and lingering fragrance are more readily perceptible to by-standers. This assessment is in agreement with the hagiographical examples considered so far in this chapter, and with Gregory the Great's assertion that it was a sweet smell, rather than a sweet sound, that alerted Servulus' attendants to the fact that he had joined the choirs in heaven.

Part of this ambiguity is the similarity between the song of celestial entities and that of human singers. The voices of human spirits are sometimes intermingled with angelic voices. The anonymous *Vita S. Cuthberti* records how Cuthbert sees the soul of a brother being carried away to heaven and set among choirs of angels, saints and martyrs.<sup>132</sup> Intriguingly, Bede's version does not differentiate between different choirs of souls, and he opts instead for a simplified image of hands of angels delivering the soul into the heavenly kingdom.<sup>133</sup> In doing so, Bede performs a strikingly similar editorial manoeuvre to Rufinus, who removed the choirs of saints and martyrs from the *Historia monachorum*. Once again, the evidence suggests that choirs of the righteous were considered by the author to be extraneous.

Human souls were occasionally included among groups of angelic psychopomps in early medieval texts. In Adomnán's *Vita S. Columbae*, the saint sees a vision of a woman who had been dead for a year meet the soul of her husband in the air. She fights hostile powers along with a group of angels, and thus performs the function of an angelic psychopomp.<sup>134</sup> The soul of a recently deceased holy man also meets with a fellow human spirit on its way to heaven in Bede's

<sup>132</sup> Anon., *Vita S. Cuthberti* 4.10, 126-7.

<sup>133</sup> Bede, *Vita S. Cuthberti* 34, 262-63. In the metrical Life 31, Bede states that a single angel 'ab aethere coetus' and returned with the soul to heaven 'dulcisonis [...] triumphis' (pp. 109-110).

<sup>134</sup> Adomnán, *Vita Columbae* 3.10, 196-97.



*Historia ecclesiastica*. Although Owine may not have seen Chad's soul ascend to heaven, another man, living in Ireland, claimed to know someone who did.<sup>135</sup> This story has several layers: Bede reports that Hygbald, an abbot in Lindsey, visited Egbert, an Irish monk who knew Chad, and Egbert tells Hygbald, "I know a man in this island, still living, who, when that man [Chad] passed from the earth, saw the soul of Cedd, his brother, descend with a group of angels [cum agmine angelorum] from heaven, and, taking his soul with him, return to the celestial kingdom".<sup>136</sup> The name of Egbert's source is not given, and it is possible that he refers to himself. The mysterious circumstances surrounding the sighting accentuate the unusual nature of the vision.

Cedd's inclusion amidst the group of angels seems to have been of major importance to the writer or writers of the *Old English Martyrology*, a ninth-century collection of hagiographical portraits, compiled in the South East of England and showing features of the Mercian dialect.<sup>137</sup> The entry for October 26, St. Cedd's Feast day, is heavily indebted to Bede's description of Chad's passage into heaven, beginning, '[h]e was the brother of Chad, and a holy man saw that he led Chad's soul to heaven with angels' ([h]e wæs Ceaddan broðor, ond sum halig mon geseah þæt he lædde Ceaddan sawle mid englum to heodfenum).<sup>138</sup> The selection of material in the *Old English Martyrology* creates the impression that the appearance of heavenly psychopomps was both regular and significant.<sup>139</sup> They play a major part in the entries for Paul the Hermit, Antony the Hermit (based on Evagrius'

<sup>135</sup> Bede, *HE* 4.3.6, 2:216.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 216-17.

<sup>137</sup> Christine Rauer, ed. and trans., *The Old English Martyrology* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013).

<sup>138</sup> "26 October: Cedd" (no. 214) in *Old English Martyrology*, 206-207.

<sup>139</sup> Günter Kotzor and Christine Rauer have commented on the martyrologist's fascination with the miraculous and numinous, including the activity of psychopomps. Kotzor ed., *Das altenglische martyrologium*, 2 vols. (München: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), 1:408-409. Cited in Rauer, *Old English Martyrology*, 17.

translation of the text), Chad, Wilfrid, Aidan and Hilda.<sup>140</sup> The excerpt for Aidan even begins with the miracle of St. Cuthbert seeing his soul's departure, suggesting that this was his greatest claim to fame. So too, the miraculous events surrounding Hilda's death are a main feature of her entry, her departure being presented in an even more spectacular way than in Bede's Latin version: angels take her soul to heaven, 'and it shone amid the angels like the bright sun or a new dress'.<sup>141</sup> The bell that wakes the witness in Bede's version is transformed from something ambiguous and earthly to something miraculous and heavenly with the addition of the adjective meaning 'wonderful' or 'marvellous' (*wundorlicre*). The entries for Antony and Chad state that angels led the souls, 'openly' (*openlice*) to heaven, thus stripping the visions of obscurity and even exclusivity.

In those cases where the presence of psychopomps is ambiguous – the death scenes of Columba and Guthlac – the compiler(s) thought it best not to include any reference to the manner of the saints' deaths.<sup>142</sup> Either this was due to their uncertainty about what the visions conveyed, or it was because they found the opening of the heavens an occurrence less worthy of note than the appearance of psychopomps. In the process of re-writing these death-scenes, the compiler(s) of the *Old English Martyrology* began to squeeze out the ambiguities in the psychopomp *topos*.

<sup>140</sup> "10 January: Paul the Hermit" (no. 16), 46-47; "17 January: Antony the Hermit," (no. 22), 50-51; "2 March: Chad," (no. 37) 60-61; "24 April: Wilfrid" (no. 68), 86-87; "31 August: Aidan" (no. 171), 172-73; "17 November: Hild" (no. 226), 216-17.

<sup>141</sup> "17 November: Hild" (no. 226), 216-17.

<sup>142</sup> "11 April: Guthlac" (no. 63), 80-81; "9 June: Columba of Iona" (no. 100), 114-15.

## 4.2: Clarification and innovation in Old English homilies<sup>143</sup>

Hagiographical *topoi* entered Old English homiletic writings either through direct translation and adaptation or through reliance on common sources. A homily about Chad, of Mercian origin, and probably originally composed in the ninth century, adapts Bede's account of the bishop's life and death.<sup>144</sup> It captures the character of heavenly song (*þa swetestan stefne singendra 7 blissendra of heofonum*), and translates the Latin terms for heavenly choir (*caelestes [...] coetus; angelis comitibus; agmine angelorum*) into analogous Old English terms (*heofonlicne þreat; mid engla þreatu[m]; engla werode*).<sup>145</sup> Other vernacular homilies were adapted from late antique material via a less direct route. They include the so-called 'Macarius' homily and Wulfstan's homily twenty-nine.<sup>146</sup> Both seem to be related to a Latin prose work, the Nonantola text.<sup>147</sup> This work in turn appears to make playful reference to the Gabriel-Michael *exemplum* discussed earlier in the chapter.

The story common to the two Old English homilies and the Nonantola text can be summarised as follows: a rich and sinful man, the 'Dives' of the story, fears his end. His soul prepares to leave his body, clawing its way towards the gateway

<sup>143</sup> The starting point for this section was Robert DiNapoli, *An Index of Theme and Image to the Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church* (Hockwold cum Wilton: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1995), "Music," 66. There is only one entry under "Heavenly music eases soul's departure from the body," but as this chapter will show, this is but one of many examples of the soul's interaction with singing psychopomps. This sub-section was also informed by D.G. Scragg's excellent study, "The Corpus of Vernacular Saints' Homilies and Prose Saints' Lives Before Ælfric," in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, ed. Paul A. Szarmach with the assistance of Deborah A. Oosterhouse (New York; London: Garland, 2000), 73-150.

<sup>144</sup> Jane Roberts, "The English Saints Remembered in Old English Anonymous Homilies," in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, 436.

<sup>145</sup> Rudolf Vleeskruyer, ed., *In natale Sancti Ceadde episcopi et confessoris* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co., 1953), 170, 174 and 180.

<sup>146</sup> The "Macarius homily" is edited in H. Sauer, *Theodulfi Capitula in England: die altenglischen Übersetzungen, zusammen mit dem lateinischen Text* (München: Fink, 1978), 411-16. Wulfstan's 'Her is halwendlic lar and ðearflíc læwedum mannum, þe þæt læden ne cunnon' is edited by Arthur Napier as homily 29 in *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1883), 134-43.

<sup>147</sup> Theodor Batiouchkof, ed., "MS Bibl. nat., no 2096 (52)," *Romania* 20 (1891), 576-8. The text is translated by J.B. Allen and Daniel G. Calder in *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: the Major Latin Texts in Translation* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1976), 40-44.

of his mouth, but hesitates, not wishing to leave. A gang of demons mock the soul, asking whether it expects Michael and his angels to appear to overwhelm them and take it away.<sup>148</sup> One of the demons confirms that the soul is theirs, and indeed, there is no escape. On its way to hell, the soul hears the song of choirs of angels (in Latin, *choros angelorum*; in Old English, *engla þreatas*), and is told by the demon that it has forfeited its chance to return to its heavenly homeland.<sup>149</sup> The Nonantola version depicts the soul of the righteous pauper being carried away by Michael to the heavenly choirs, singing spiritual songs alongside him.<sup>150</sup> The ‘Macarius’ and Wulfstan do not include this detail, although towards the end of the ‘Macarius’ homily, the writer evokes the soundscape of heaven and its contrast with hell: ‘there, neither wailing, nor groaning, nor lamentation, nor groaning is ever heard [...] but there is always a continual [musical?] sound, which is sung by angels and archangels in the presence of the high king’ (þær næfre heaf ne geomorung ne g’n’ornunge ne granunge bið gehyred [...] ac þær is aa singalic organa sweg, þe from englum and heahenglum on þæs hehstan cyninges gesihðe bið sunge).<sup>151</sup> The Nonantola, ‘Macarius’ and Wulfstan versions do more than attest the continuing importance of the body-soul legend – they display an awareness of hagiographical convention, playing upon the sinner’s hopes of a host of heavenly psychopomps.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, they transform the Dives and Lazarus parable by filling the once silent heavens with angelic song and thus giving the parable an

<sup>148</sup> Batiouchkof, “MS Bibl. nat., no 2096 (52),” 576; ‘Macarius’ homily, 414; Wulfstan, 140.

<sup>149</sup> Batiouchkof, “MS Bibl. nat., no 2096 (52),” 577; ‘Macarius’ homily, 415; Wulfstan, 141.

<sup>150</sup> Batiouchkof, “MS Bibl. nat., no 2096 (52),” 578.

<sup>151</sup> ‘Macarius’ homily, 416.

<sup>152</sup> Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, interprets the soul’s belief to be representative of a ‘widely expected hope, or for those who are very good, an expectation’ that the soul will be taken away by Michael and his angels upon death (pp. 117-18).

auditory dimension. In this case, the sinner is permitted to hear the joys of the righteous, presumably so that his suffering will be more acute.<sup>153</sup>

The Gabriel-Michael *exemplum* is evoked by the story's depiction of contrasting death scenes and the sinner's ironic expectation of archangel Michael. This *exemplum* was certainly known in Anglo-Saxon England: an Old English translation of it appears as an addition to Ælfric's sermon for the sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost in his second series of *Catholic Homilies*.<sup>154</sup> While the rhythmical translation itself is likely to have been composed by Ælfric, it is framed by blocks of homiletic prose which do not display signs of his authorship, and the whole piece seems to have been added on to the foregoing sermon rather indiscriminately.<sup>155</sup> The *exemplum*, however, lends itself to re-contextualisation. Ælfric, or indeed the source he was following, removes most of the traces of its original framing narrative. The portrait of the hypocritical anchorite is tweaked; he no longer dies surrounded by caring attendants, but miserably anticipates his demise.<sup>156</sup> Ambiguities are stripped away, leaving a clearer and broader message.

The *Vitae patrum* is just one of the late antique works to which Ælfric refers throughout the first and second series of his *Catholic Homilies*. Much fruitful work has been done on Ælfric's sources since C. Smetana's article, "Ælfric and the early Medieval Homiliary," published in 1959.<sup>157</sup> Smetana argued that the *Catholic Homilies* are dependent on the Carolingian collection of homilies by Paul the Deacon. He noted that few of the eighty-five sermons are by a single Latin author, remarking that they are made up from various excerpts out of patristic

<sup>153</sup> In Gregory's fortieth homily, on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, he explains that the reprobate are permitted to glimpse the joys of heaven as a punishment, and the joy of the elect is increased when they see the suffering of the damned (*PL* 76: 1308D-1309A).

<sup>154</sup> Ælfric, "Visions of Departing Souls," ed. John C. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, EETS o.s. 259 (London: OUP, 1967), 770-79.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 771-72.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 776.

<sup>157</sup> C. Smetana, "Ælfric and the Early Medieval Homiliary," *Traditio* 15 (1959): 163-204.

commentaries, interspersed with Ælfric's own material.<sup>158</sup> Patrick H. Zettel's doctoral thesis of 1979 returned to the question of Ælfric's source material and showed that Ælfric made heavy use of a compendium similar to the so-called Cotton-Corpus Legendary, which comprises a collection of manuscripts including the collection embodied in London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero E i and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 9.<sup>159</sup> Zettel observed that while Ælfric made heavy use of a compendium like the Cotton-Corpus Legendary, he departed from it and added material from separate works. Zettel claimed, for instance, that Ælfric was likely to have possessed a separate copy of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* in Latin and Old English, Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*, and a version of the *Vitae patrum*.<sup>160</sup> Malcolm Godden's *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary* demonstrated that Ælfric made use of several compendia: the homiliaries of Paul the Deacon and Haymo of Auxerre and a manuscript related to the Cotton-Corpus Legendary.<sup>161</sup> Ælfric does not, of course, mention these sources directly, though he makes reference to patristic authorities that appear in them. In his Latin preface to the first series of *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric lists the authorities whose teachings inform the work as Augustine of Hippo, Jerome, Bede, Gregory, Smaragdus and Haymo.<sup>162</sup> Godden commented that even though Gregory the Great comes fourth in the list, Ælfric used his work most frequently.<sup>163</sup> Godden's printed commentary and glossary and the Anglo-Saxon

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>159</sup> Patrick H. Zettel, "Ælfric's Hagiographic Sources and the Latin Legendary Preserved in B.L. MS Cotton Nero E i + CCC MS 9 and Other Manuscripts" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1979). Some of Zettel's findings are published in his article, "Saints' Lives in Old English: Latin Manuscripts and Vernacular Accounts: Ælfric," *Peritia* 1 (1982): 17-37.

<sup>160</sup> Zettel, "Ælfric's Hagiographic Sources and the Latin Legendary," 84, 87 and 92. See also Peter Jackson and Michael Lapidge, "The Contents of the Cotton-Corpus Legendary," in *Holy Men and Holy Women*, 131-46.

<sup>161</sup> Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary, and Glossary*, EETS s.s. 18 (Oxford: OUP, 2000), xli.

<sup>162</sup> Ælfric, *Praefatio*, ed. Peter Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series: Text* EETS s.s. 17 (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 173.

<sup>163</sup> Godden, *Introduction, Commentary, and Glossary*, xxxix.

Fontes website reveal just how much Ælfric relies on patristic writers who appear in the compendia, particularly Gregory.<sup>164</sup>

This creates a potential methodological problem when analysing Ælfric's homilies – to what extent are we reading his words and engaging with his ideas? Mechthild Gretsch and Milton McC.Gatch have argued that Ælfric's skill lies not only in the stylistic features of the homilies, but in his selection and treatment of his sources.<sup>165</sup> Ælfric's translations and adaptations of his Latin material can indeed tell us much about his attitudes towards the texts and his purposes for writing; his omission and additions of Gregorian and Pseudo-Jeromian material reveal the extent to which the heavenly psychopomp *topos* had become a widely accepted convention.<sup>166</sup>

Gregory's fifteenth homily on the parable of the sower and the seed is a major source of Ælfric's *Dominica in sexagesima* in the second series of homilies.<sup>167</sup> While Paul the Deacon's homiliary also lists this Gregorian source as the festival homily, and several other writers use it, Ælfric appears to lift the material directly from a collection of Gregory's homilies.<sup>168</sup> Like Gregory's sermon, Ælfric's version ends with the *exemplum* of Servulus. Ælfric's version omits the metaphor of the ears of the heart, and the details about the monk who reports on the lingering fragrance. Furthermore, in the act of condensing the story, Ælfric also omits the by-standers' realisation that Servulus' soul has been delivered

<sup>164</sup> See entries by M.R. Godden on Fontes Anglo-Saxonici Project, ed., *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register*, <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/> (accessed October 30, 2014).

<sup>165</sup> Mechthild Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 52 and Milton McC.Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 4-6.

<sup>166</sup> As Godden remarks, Jerome's authentic works have little influence on Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*; the letter to Paula and Eustochium (discussed below) is a misattribution (p. xxxix).

<sup>167</sup> Ælfric, CH 2.6, ed. Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, the Second Series Text*, EETS s.s. 5 (London: OUP, 1979), 52-9.

<sup>168</sup> For Ælfric's source material, see Godden, *Introduction, Commentary, and Glossary*, 388-94.

to heaven by the rejoicing angels. It will be instructive to compare the original Latin and Old English excerpts in full:



And when he listened to the same praises which he heard within with the ear of his heart, that holy soul was released from the flesh. But when he passed away, such a great fragrance diffused through that place that it filled all of those present with an ineffable sweetness *to the extent that it was known openly that praises had greeted his soul in heaven.*

Our monk [i.e. a monk in Gregory's monastery], who is still alive, was present at the time, and he weeps profusely whenever he recounts that until the body was taken for burial, the fragrance of that odour did not leave their nostrils.

After he had heard these heavenly songs, his soul went from his afflicted body to eternal rest. Then the house was filled with a wonderful smell, so that the pall-bearers were filled with that delightful scent, and that smell did not leave their nostrils until the holy body was buried.

Cumque ad easdem laudes	Efne ða mid þam þe he
quas intus audierat aurem	hlyste ðæs heofonlican
cordis intenderet, sancta illa	sanges. ða gewat his sawul of
anima a carne soluta est. Sed	ðam geswenctan lichaman, to
exeunte illa tanta illic	ecere reste; þa wearð þæt hus
fragrantia odoris asperta est,	afylled mid wunderlicum
ut omnes illi qui aderant	bræðe, swa þæt ealle þa
inaestimabili suauitate	licmenn wurden afyllede mid
replerentur, <i>ita ut per hoc</i>	ðam wynsumum stence. and
<i>patenter agnoscerent quod</i>	se bræð on heora nosðyrlum
<i>eam laudes in coelo</i>	ne ateorode. oð þæt se halga
<i>suscepissent</i> [emphasis mine].	lichama bebyriged wæs. <sup>170</sup>

Cui rei monachus noster  
interfuit, qui nunc usque vivit,  
et cum magno fletu attestari  
solet quia quousque corpus  
ejus sepulturae traderetur, ab  
eorum naribus odoris illius  
fragrantia non recessit.<sup>169</sup>

The omission of the detail marked in italics is telling.<sup>171</sup> The signs of the heavenly voices and sweet scent contain an implicit suggestion that Servulus has attained a place among the righteous, and so do not have to be explained to the reader or auditor; they have become conventions. In another homily, *In natale sanctorum martirum*, Ælfric draws on Gregory's thirty-fifth and fortieth homilies concerning

<sup>169</sup> Gregory, *Homilia* 15.5 (PL 76: 4134B).

<sup>170</sup> Ælfric, *CH* 2.6, 58-59.

<sup>171</sup> Note that even if Ælfric was using the *Dialogi* for this part of the text, he would have still had to have omitted the italicised phrase.

the latter-day martyrs, Stephanus and Romula.<sup>172</sup> Ælfric writes an abridged version of the accounts, retaining most of the crucial details. He does, however, curtail Gregory's exposition of the miracles that attended their passing: gone is the detail that Stephanus joined the chorus of martyrs, and the antithesis between Romula's membership of earthly and heavenly societies – 'illa despecta ab hominibus invenit socios choros angelorum' – is also left out.<sup>173</sup> This can suggest one of two possibilities: either Ælfric was familiar with the stories from the *Dialogi*, in which these details are also omitted, or, in the process of editing Gregory's homilies, he no longer deemed such explanation necessary. In either case, Ælfric assumed that the audience of the homilies were familiar with hagiographical commonplaces.

Where ambiguity remains, however, Ælfric sees opportunity for theological creativity. The antiphonal choir which collects Romula's soul in Ælfric's reworking of Gregory's fortieth homily is not identified as angelic. His Old English translation leaves room for interpretation of the crowd as a chorus of the righteous: '[b]ehold, after the sacrament, two heavenly crowds stood before the bedroom door, singing a heavenly song and [the witnesses] recognised that men always began the song and women sang in response.' (Efne ða æfter þære huslunge stondon twa heofenlice werod ætforan ðære cytan dura. singende heofenlicne sang. and hi tocneowon þæt werhades men ongunnon symle þone dream. and wifhades men him sungon ongear andswariende).<sup>174</sup> This reading harmonises with Ælfric's sermon on the Assumption of the Virgin in his first cycle of homilies.<sup>175</sup> Here, he abbreviates Paschasius Radbertus' Pseudo-Jeromian letter to Paula and Eustochium, a source which he could have consulted either in the homiliary of Paul

<sup>172</sup> Ælfric, *CH* 2.37, 310-17. For Ælfric's source material, see Godden, *Introduction, Commentary, and Glossary*, 641-6.

<sup>173</sup> Ælfric, *CH* 2.37, 315-7.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>175</sup> Ælfric, *CH* 1.30, 429-38.

the Deacon or in his manuscript related to the Cotton-Corpus collection.<sup>176</sup> Ælfric, however, radically departs from his source. Again, it is useful to place the two texts side by side for the purposes of comparison. Ælfric's main modification to the source and his addition are placed in italics:

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<sup>176</sup> Godden, *Introduction, Commentary, and Glossary*, 248.

For we often read how angels came to the funerals and burials of certain saints and offered their obsequies with rites; also, they led the souls of the elect to heaven with hymns and praises, on account of which, choirs of men and women on each side were frequently heard singing praises. Meanwhile, what is more evident, they sometimes shone with a great deal of light, and moreover, those still living in the flesh could sense the fragrance of a wonderful odour in that place for a long time after.

We read everywhere in books that very often angels attend the death of good men, and with spiritual praises, they lead their souls to heaven. *And what is more evident is that people heard on their departure a male song and a female song with much light and sweet scent. On account of which it is known that holy men, who come to God's kingdom through good deeds, take away the souls of other men upon their death and lead them to rest with much bliss.*

Legimus enim quam saepe ad	We rædað gehwær on
funera et ad sepulturas	bocum þæt forwel oft englas
quorumlibet sanctorum	comon to goddra manna
angelos advenisse et	forðsiþe. 7 mid gastlicum
exsequiis eorum obsequis	lofsangum heora sawla to
praestitisse: necnon et animas	heofenum gelæddon; 7 þæt
electorum usque ad coelos,	gyt swutelicor is; men
cum hymnis et laudibus	gehyrdon on þam forðsiðe
detulisse: ubi et utriusque	wæpmanna sang. 7
sexus chori commemorantur	wimmana sang mid micclum
frequenter auditi, laudesque	leohte. 7 swetum bræðe; On
cecinisse: interea et quod	þam is cuð þæt ða halgan
perspicacius est, multo	menn þe to godes rice þurh
nonnumquam lumine eosdem	godum geearnungum
resplenduisse; insuper et	becomon. þæt hi on opra
adhuc viventes in carne,	manna forðsiþe heora sawla
ibidem miri odoris	underfoð. 7 mid micelre
fragrantiam diutius	blisse to reste gelædað. <sup>178</sup>
persensisse. <sup>177</sup>	

We can see that Ælfric changes the passage in several significant ways. Richard Sowerby has already noted that Ælfric broadens Radbertus' message by translating the Latin for 'saints' and 'the elect' as 'good men': '[w]e read here and there in books that very often angels came to the death-scenes of good men and, with spiritual songs, led their souls to heaven' ([w]e rædað gehwær on bocum þæt oft englas comon to goddra manna forðsiþe. 7 mid gastlicum lofsangum heora sawla to

<sup>177</sup> Paschasius Radbertus, *Epistola 9 ad Paulam et Eustochium* (PL 30: 134C).

<sup>178</sup> Ælfric, *CH* 1.30, 432.

heofenun gelæddon).<sup>179</sup> Ælfric's choice of vocabulary was not constrained by the language of composition; the Old English *Dialogi* of Gregory the Great by Wærferth translates 'electorum' as 'jecorenra'.<sup>180</sup> The alteration, as Sowerby has argued, is just one of several instances in Ælfric's work where he does not make a clear distinction between the souls of the saints and the 'ordinary' good.<sup>181</sup>

Even more significant for the purposes of this argument is Ælfric's alteration to the second part of the source. While Radbertus argues that *light* and *fragrance* are more clearly perceived than angelic song, which is frequently heard as antiphonal singing, Ælfric instead makes the antiphonal song of men and women the focus of the comparison. This changes the meaning of the sentence entirely – choirs of the righteous are 'more evident' (swutelicor) than choirs of angels. He adds that these choirs are composed of good souls who have entered the kingdom of God, and that they descend to collect other blessed individuals at the time of death. It is, of course, impossible to tell whether this is Ælfric's own theological flourish, or one that appeared in his source. The text of BL, MS Cotton Vespasian E i, part II, f.82r does not contain the emendation and elaboration, but that is not to say that the related legendary did not. Whether this change appeared in his source or whether it was added by Ælfric, the conclusion is the same: the writer (either Ælfric or his source) recognised the obscurity of angelic choirs. Why should he believe choirs of the righteous to be 'swutelicor'? Could he have been thinking of the antiphonal choirs of men and women who appear outside Romula's door in the *Dialogi*? It would have not taken a great imaginative leap for the writer to have associated Gregory's statement that 'the men were chanting palms and the women were singing responses' (psalmodiae cantus dicebant viri, et feminae respondebant)

<sup>179</sup> Ælfric, *CH* 1.30, 432; Sowerby, "Angels in Anglo-Saxon England," 156.

<sup>180</sup> Wærferth, *Dialogi* 15 ed. Hans Hecht *et al*, *Bischofs Wærferth von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialogue Gregors des grossen* (Leipzig: Georg W. Wigand's Verlag, 1900), 281-82.

<sup>181</sup> Sowerby, "Angels in Anglo-Saxon England," 156.

with Radbertus' mention of the 'men and women on each side' (*utriusque sexus chori*). Ælfric then provided a gloss, perhaps shedding light on a popular belief that part of the reward of the souls of the good was to adopt the angelic role of psychopomp. Adamnán and Bede had already gestured to the existence of such a belief when they included individual human souls among crowds of angels in their hagiographical works. Ælfric's innovation was to expand on these earlier instances to create a chorus of the righteous laity, separate from angels.

That is not to say that Ælfric prioritised a general category of the good over categories of saints invoked in the litany. As the next chapter will show, the litanic grouping of saints informed his hagiographical work.<sup>182</sup> Nor did he cease to equate the presence of angelic psychopomps with the deaths of the exceptionally holy; the second volume of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* contains Cuthbert's vision of Aidan's soul being carried to heaven and Severinus' perception of St. Martin's departure.<sup>183</sup> If, as Sowerby has suggested, Ælfric 'saw little distinction between a saint's death and that of an ordinary virtuous Christian,' it was not purely because the power of the angelic psychopomp *topos* had waned at the end of the tenth century.<sup>184</sup> Ælfric wrote according to the needs of his audience. He did not integrate good men and women into the category of martyrs, or indeed any other saint – they therefore remained outside the grouping of the elect evoked by the litany. Yet if lay people could not hope to join the organised heavenly ranks, they could nevertheless participate in celestial joys within the fluid and ill-defined choir of psychopomps.<sup>185</sup> The *topos*, evoked in homilies and hagiographies alike, opened up a conceptual space that was less exclusive and restrictive than that constructed by the medieval litany, other world visions and, as we shall see, the new song *topos*.

<sup>182</sup> Chapter three, 4.3.

<sup>183</sup> Ælfric, *Lives of Saints* (henceforth, *LS*) 26 and 31.53, ed. Walter W. Skeat, EETS o.s. 76 and 82, and 94 and 114, 4 vols in 2 vols. (London, OUP, 1966), 2:142-3 and 2:306-7.

<sup>184</sup> Sowerby, "Angels in Anglo-Saxon England," 156.

<sup>185</sup> For more evidence of Ælfric's equation of the choir of psychopomps with the laity, see chapter three, 4.3.



## 5: Conclusion

Honorius Augustodunensis offers a succinct depiction of the activity of psychopomps in the last book of the *Elucidarium*:

When the just man is dying, his guardian angel comes with a crowd of angels, and carries his soul, the spouse of Christ, from the prison of the body; with a great song of very sweet melody [cum maximo dulcissimae melodiae cantu], and an immense light, and also with the sweetest of scents, it leads the soul to the celestial palace, into the spiritual paradise.<sup>186</sup>

The extract shows that the sonic dimension of the psychopomp *topos* was prevalent enough in early medieval texts for Honorius to include it at the head of a trinity of sensory delights, no less ambiguous than light or sweetness. Yet the present chapter has shown that the conventionality and neatness of Honorius' condensed account should not be taken at face value – behind the serenity of these final moments lies a much messier history.

The chapter has traced the formation of the *topos* of the heavenly psychopomp from its use in the Bible to its appearance in hagiographies of the early twelfth century. Throughout this time, the commonplace underwent several changes. The parable of Dives and Lazarus did not mention the songs of psychopomp angels, but the association of angels with the heavenly throne room led the writers of the *Testaments* of Abraham and Isaac to include heavenly song in their accounts of the deaths of the patriarchs. A convention of other world narratives thus influenced the development of the *topos*. In the anonymous *History of the Monks of Egypt*, souls of holy monks were thought to join organised categories of saints in heaven, and some of these saints appeared with angels to

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<sup>186</sup> Honorius Augustodunensis, *Elucidarium* 3.1 (PL 172: 1157A).

bear away souls at the moment of death. Again, ideas about the arrangement of choirs in heaven shaped notions about the satellite spirits which performed the specific duty of bringing a soul into the celestial fold. In many texts, it is difficult to distinguish between the chanting of the heavenly hosts and the songs of the escorts. Yet the idea that groups of escorts had their own sonic profile came to be accepted in a number of sources, the *Elucidarium* among them.

This discussion has also illustrated several processes that occurred in the transmission of the *topos*. Psychopomps did not always appear upon the deaths of saints, but where they were left out by Athanasius, Sulpicius Severus and the tenth-century hagiographer of St. Dunstan, later writers added them into the narratives. This suggests that they continued to be considered an important sign of sanctity within the hagiographical tradition. By contrast, Rufinus and Bede omitted choirs of the just from earlier depictions of saints' deaths, which implies that the presence of the righteous, as an indicator of a good death in the hagiographical tradition, was not as important or widely recognised as the appearance of angels. However, when writing for a lay audience, Ælfric took advantage of the flexibility in the psychopomp *topos* in his claim that the worthy dead formed their own choir of heavenly escorts.

The choir of psychopomps is, in one sense, not a distinct choir at all, but a synecdoche of the heavenly host. In another sense, its idiosyncratic obscurity and instability lends it a unique character. Psychopomps are creatures of the *limen*. They appear at the perilous time between death and the Final Judgement, dwell in the space between earth and heaven, and consist of spirits that cannot easily be slotted into the celestial hierarchy. Their song, if performed, fulfils a variety of functions. For the saint, the celestial melody that falls and rises through the air is a foretaste of the pleasures of heavenly society, an anaesthetic or a heavenly funerary

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rite. For Dives, the sound of angelic singing is nothing other than a symbol of the joys he can never experience – a bitter reminder of his damnation.

## Chapter 3:

### The new song of the virgins

#### 1: Introduction

The new song *topos* is of a different kind to the psychopomp trope explored in the previous chapter. Although the latter had its roots in the Dives and Lazarus story, it was not lifted straight from Scripture but forged over time in hagiographical narratives, a process which rendered it unstable and flexible. The majority of examples of the new song *topos*, by contrast, are direct references to Revelation 14:3-4. According to these verses, only 144,000 virgins – those who have not been defiled by women – can learn the new song, and they follow the Lamb of God wherever he goes. Allusions to or quotations of one or both of these verse passages occur mainly in treatises, letters, homilies and hagiographies concerning virginity from the second century onwards. In almost all cases, the *topos* functions as a reminder of the eschatological rewards of sexual continence. Despite the seeming restrictions on the *topos*, the third and fourth verses of Revelation 14 do leave some interpretative possibilities open. Who are the 144,000 followers of the Lamb? How do they function as a choir, and what kind of musical characteristics, if any, does the new song have? Is the *topos* appropriate for a readership that includes non-virgins?

The conventionality of the new song *topos* has meant that it has been overlooked by historians and literary critics writing about late antique and medieval virginity (or, rather, virginities).<sup>1</sup> Jo Ann McNamara's foundational

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<sup>1</sup> In her doctoral thesis, "Versions of Virginity in Medieval Texts and Practices" (University of East Anglia, 1999), revised and published as *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), Sarah Salih considered the differences in how virginity was constructed in texts concerning virgin martyrs, nuns and in the *Book of Margery Kempe*. The multiplicity of the virginal identity was further explored in the volume, *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003).

work, *A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries*, appropriated the new song as a metaphor for the rise of female asceticism, particularly for the change that took place in the third century, whereby chaste women attained status as virgins within a church dominated by male clerics.<sup>2</sup> Yet the study did not seek to explore how the *topos* itself embodied the attitudes of late antique churchmen.

A huge volume of work has been produced on female virginity, from which several key themes or concerns have emerged: the importance of virginity to the concept of the *vita angelica*; the perceived superiority of virginity to widowhood and marriage; the metaphor of the virgin as the bride of Christ; and female virginity as presented in texts written by men. The overriding question of how virginity was constructed in early Christian, late antique and medieval texts links these areas of inquiry.<sup>3</sup> It gives rise to the further question of how far virginity was itself a social construct.<sup>4</sup> In her doctoral thesis of 1999 and the book

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<sup>2</sup> Jo Ann McNamara, *A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1985; first published by Haworth Press, 1983), esp. pp. 107-25.

<sup>3</sup> David G. Hunter has provided a useful and concise summary of the developments that took place in some fields of historical scholarship in the 1990s: '[w]ithin the past decade or so, historical studies of early Christianity have been affected by what has been called the 'linguistic turn.' This development has entailed a new appreciation of the varied forms of Christian 'discourse' and their importance in shaping the cultural, political, and social worlds of Late Antiquity. For example, historians of religion and culture [...] have drawn attention to the way in which narrative representation in early Christian literature functioned to construct Christian identities and to negotiate power relations both within the church and in society at large.' Hunter, "The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church: Reading Psalm 45 in Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine," *Church History* 69:2 (2000): 281. This change seems to have been brought about by New Historicism as well as Peter Brown's influential work on the social and cultural aspects of late antique Christianity. One of the clearest examples of the approach described by Hunter is Teresa M. Shaw's "Askesis and the Appearance of Holiness," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6:3 (1998): 485-500, which endeavours to show 'how the rhetoric of appearance and lifestyle might be integrated into a social analysis of the 'making' of the early Christian ideal' (p. 486). The question of how religious and gender identities were made or constructed did not just affect the study of early Christianity, but of the whole medieval period. See, for instance, *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler maintained that gender is not innate or biological, but rather, it is internalised through the repeated performance of acts within one's cultural context. See the "Preface" to the tenth anniversary edition of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006; first published 1999), esp. xiv-xv.

that emerged from it, Sarah Salih contended that virginity, far from being a natural state, was made through the performance of virginal identity. She argued that it constituted a third gender in the medieval period, since virgins did not conform to the late antique and medieval stereotype of women as the heirs to and propagators of Eve's curse.<sup>5</sup> Female virgins were therefore considered to be distinct from women. Other scholars have reinforced the view that virgins or even the chaste were viewed as neither men nor women in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. According to Jacqueline Murray, the practitioners of chastity arrived at a prelapsarian state wherein the differences between the sexes were effectively erased; religious men moved along the sexual continuum towards the more 'female' end of the spectrum and fervently holy women became more 'masculine'.<sup>6</sup> Veronica Ortenberg has demonstrated that powerful widows and royal women who were separated from their husbands were often called *virgines* in Anglo-Saxon texts. She interpreted this as a sign that 'they had become asexual beings who were no longer regarded as specifically female'.<sup>7</sup>

Litanies of the saints, however, could be used as evidence against the argument that virgins escaped all trappings of womanhood. Felice Lifshitz has shown that, by the late eighth or ninth century, early medieval litanies grouped all female saints into the single category of virgins.<sup>8</sup> How could virgins have been

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Research on gender as an aspect of person, which is both environmentally and biologically constituted, renders Butler's constructivist position problematic. See Tom Licence, review of Glen W. Olsen, *Of Sodomites, Effeminate, Hermaphrodites, and Androgynes: Sodomy in the Age of Peter Damian* (Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies: 2011) in *History* 98 (2013): 247-50.

<sup>5</sup> Salih, "Varieties of Virginity" (PhD diss.) and *Versions of Virginity*, *passim*, but see esp. pp. 1 and 2.

<sup>6</sup> Jacqueline Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?" in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, ed. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 34-51.

<sup>7</sup> Veronica Ortenberg, "Virgin Queens: Abbesses and Power in Early Anglo-Saxon England," in *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, ed. Richard Gameson and Henrietta Layser (Oxford; New York: OUP, 2001), 60.

<sup>8</sup> Felice Lifshitz, "Gender Trouble in Paradise: The Problem of the Liturgical *Virgo*," in *Images of Medieval Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson*, ed. Debra Higgs Strickland (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 25-39. In this article, Lifshitz interpreted the liturgical

regarded as a third gender if choirs of virgins were all-female? True, these virgins had forsworn marital duties, at least to an earthly husband, but this choice did not make them sexless or gender-neutral heavenly beings; it transformed them into the likeness of the Virgin Mary, ‘a very special woman’.<sup>9</sup> Still, celestial virgins were not always imagined as holy women. In Revelation 14, only virgins who have not been defiled *by women* can learn the new song. An examination of the new song *topos* therefore allows us to trace the ideals of male virginity, and explore whether the new song became feminised.<sup>10</sup>

Although non-virgins such as widows, women separated from their husbands and mothers who had rejected a life of further child-bearing were identified, or identified themselves, as virgins, there was nevertheless an overwhelming tendency in late antique and early medieval treatises on virginity – which constructed the virginal ideal rather than reflecting real practices and attitudes – to divide men and women into separate groups based on their marital status and sexual experience. Many scholars have claimed that Aldhelm de-emphasised the importance of physical virginity in his *De virginitate* in order to accommodate the needs of his readership, which included the inhabitants of the double monastery of Barking abbey, some of whom had previously been married.<sup>11</sup>

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category of virgin as an ideological tool designed during the Carolingian reform. Its purpose, she argued, was to reinforce the distinction between holy men and women and ultimately exclude the latter from the liturgy. In a later article, she presented more carefully nuanced views, though she still held onto the possibility that the liturgical category of virgin was designed to oppress. See “Priestly Women, Virginal Men: Litanies and their Discontents,” in *Gender and Christianity*, 87-102. Norris’ forthcoming book, *The Litany of the Saints and the Taxonomy of Sanctity in Anglo-Saxon England*, enters into debate with Lifshitz about how we approach the litanic category of ‘virgo’ (email, May 22, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Lifshitz, “Priestly Women,” 90.

<sup>10</sup> While many studies have focused on female virgins, the construction of male virginity in texts has been sorely neglected. Fine exceptions are Emma Pettit, “Holiness and Masculinity in Aldhelm’s *Opus geminatum De virginitate*,” in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. P.H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (University of Wales Press, 2004), 8-23 and Rebecca Pinner, “St Edmund, King and Martyr: Constructing his Cult in Medieval East Anglia,” (PhD diss., University of East Anglia, 2010), esp. p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Lapidge, “Introduction to Aldhelm’s Prose *De virginitate*,” in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 51-6; Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1992), 83-4; Sinéad O’Sullivan, “Aldhelm’s *De virginitate* – Patristic Pastiche or Innovative Exposition?” *Peritia* 12

However, Aldhelm did not dispense with the virginal ideal or change the requirements for access to the heavenly choir of the sexually pure – he instead focused some of his attention on the lesser category of the chaste. Other writers adopted a similar strategy by including choirs of widows and the married alongside the choir of virgins in their beatific visions of the afterlife so as to incentivise those readers who had lost their virginity or who were moving in ascetic circles led by widows and mothers. This chapter will show how, often, only those who have maintained their physical virginity earn the reward of joining the top-ranking choir of virgins and singing the new song. The only other kinds of saints who enjoy this eschatological privilege are martyrs, with whom virgins were associated in early Christianity, and the Holy Innocents, who died before they could violate their sexual purity.

As in the previous chapter, I trace the *topos* from its inception in early Christian literature through to the early twelfth century. Section two of the chapter examines the new song in its original setting – the Book of Revelation – and discusses the identity of the 144,000, with reference to the exegesis of Victorinus of Pettau (*fl.* 270). I then consider how Revelation 14:4 was singled out for use in a letter on martyrdom and in treatises on virginity by the early Fathers. The third section of the chapter examines the image of Mary as leader of a choir of virgins in

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(1998): 282; Carol Braun Pasternack, “The Sexual Practices of Virginity and Chastity in Aldhelm’s *De virginitate*,” in *Sex and Sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Memory of David Gillmore Calder*, ed. Carol Braun Pasternack and Lisa M.C. Weston (Tempe: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 106; Thomas Cramer, “Containing Virginity: Sex and Society in Early Medieval England,” *The Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History* 21 (2010): 47-66 (esp. pp. 50, 59 and 60). Scott Gwara challenged some of the dearly held assumptions about the text in the introduction to his edition *De virginitate* (CCSL 124A, 2 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 1:47-60). He attributed the claim that the work was addressed to the immediate circle of Abbess Hildelith and nuns of the Barking community to William of Malmesbury, and asserted that it was unfounded. In a new analysis of the prologue, he demonstrated that the women mentioned alongside Hildelith could be identified as abbesses of other double monasteries throughout Wessex. Gwara’s analysis offers a fresh perspective on the text, yet does not fundamentally change the main argument made by the scholars listed above: it is highly likely that Aldhelm’s readership would still have included previously married women.



writings of the Western Church Fathers and explores their re-contextualisation of Revelation 14:3-4. In the fourth section, I consider how the Anglo-Saxon writers, Aldhelm and Ælfric, adapted biblical and patristic source material and I explore the connection between virginity and bodily incorruption in the early Middle Ages. The section ends with a discussion of the *topos* and the Feast of the Holy Innocents. The figure of St. Æthelthryth – the twice-married virgin who founded the monastery of Ely in 673 – unites these topics of discussion, providing a valuable glimpse into the life, death and afterlife of one member of the choir of the 144,000 virgins.

## 2: Early Christianity

### 2.1: The choir of 144,000 and the new song of Revelation 14:3

The choir of the 144,000 male virgins in Revelation 14:1-4 is distinct from the celestial multitudes. John of Patmos catches sight of them on the lofty heights of mount Sion, where they stand with the Lamb of God. The name of the Father is written on their foreheads (Rev 14:1). The prophet also *hears* a difference between the song of the virgins and the chants of other heavenly crowds. A sound like the voice of many waters, like thunder, and like harpers playing on citharas emanates from the group (Rev 14:2). The men then sing a ‘new song’ (ὥδὴν καινὴν) (Rev 14:3).<sup>12</sup> Whereas most of the groups of worshippers in Revelation ‘say’ their praises (λέγω), passages describing the performance of the new song use a different

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<sup>12</sup> The Latin term in the Vulgate is ‘canticum novum’. The term ‘new song’ also occurs in Isaiah 42:10, the book of Psalms (33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9 and 149:1) and in Revelation 5:8-9. J. Massyngberde Ford has speculated, ‘this new song [in Revelation 14:3] may be mystical songs unable to be learned by those who are not advanced in prayer’. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 233-34. Gottfried Schimanowski, “‘Connecting Heaven and Earth,’” reads the new song of the Psalms and Revelation as an eschatological hymn of victory (p. 75). Lucetta Mowry, “Revelation 4-5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage,” noted that the new song of Revelation 5 is characterised by its emphasis on redemption, an emphasis also found in Old Testament psalms that mention the new song. She also commented that the new song of verse 5 shares its antiphonal structure with some of the psalms (p. 78).

verb, from ᾄδω or αἰδω meaning, ‘I sing.’<sup>13</sup> Revelation 14:3 states that only the 144,000 men, who have been purchased (ἡγοράσθησαν) from the earth, are able to learn (μαθεῖν) the new song.<sup>14</sup> The following verse specifies that these people are virgins, men who have not been defiled by women (οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν).<sup>15</sup> The exclusivity of their performance marks out the heavenly choir of virgins as the elect. The singers achieve a special intimacy with God, following the Lamb wherever he goes (Rev 14:4). While they are therefore a specially marked group, others in heaven can sing the new song: Revelation 5:8-9 depicts twenty-four elders also playing citharas and singing the new song, and if it is distinguished from all other heavenly chants by the fact that it is sung with instrumental accompaniment, then the Song of Moses and the Lamb (15:2-3) may also be classed as a new song.

What does the new song signify? In his exegesis of chapter 5, Victorinus comments that the performance of the new song signifies a coming together of the proclamation of the Old Testament with the New – the public recognition that the covenant has been fulfilled.<sup>16</sup> The promises of the Old Testament are secured through Christ’s sacrifice. The song is ‘new’ because God’s salvation of humanity is also new: never before had God descended into human flesh and ascended to heaven with a body, and never before had an act of salvation secured the promises made between God and humanity. The physicality of God’s salvific act is signified by the citharas on which the new song is played – the string stretched across the wood of the instrument symbolises Christ’s body united with the wood of the crucifix.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Translated into Vulgate Latin as *canto, cantare*. See entry for “ᾄδω” in Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> In the Vulgate: ‘nemo poterat discere canticum nisi illa centum quadraginta quattuor milia qui empti sunt de terra’.

<sup>15</sup> The Vulgate has ‘hii sunt qui cum mulieribus non sunt coinquinati virgines enim sunt’.

<sup>16</sup> Victorinus, *In apocalypsin* 5: 8-9 (PL 5: 328A-C).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

The new song, as interpreted by Victorinus, has a typological aspect. It suggests that events that took place under the Old Covenant prefigure the sacrifice of God and salvation of humanity. The very use of the term ‘new song’ evokes the prophecies of Isaiah and the psalms of David the Prophet.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the Song of Moses and the Lamb (15:2-3) by the harpers of God is an allusion to Exodus 15:1-19, Moses’ victorious song of escape from the Pharaoh and his host. In Exodus 15:20-21, Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, takes up the timbrel and leads a group of women in dances of celebration, announcing, ‘[s]ing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; he has thrown his horse and rider into the sea’. The death of the Egyptians beneath the waves of the Red Sea is an Old Testament type for the defeat of the beast of the apocalypse. In Revelation 15:2-3, the harpists celebrate Christ the Lamb because his sacrifice allowed the saved to gain victory over the beast, his name, his mark and his followers (Rev 15:2). Despite the evident allusions to Exodus 15 in Revelation 15, Victorinus did not offer a typological reading of these verses, but he interpreted the harpists as those who had been saved through baptism and confession.<sup>19</sup> As we shall see, however, the passage’s allusions to Exodus 15 were not lost on the Fathers of the fourth century.

Chapter one established that the 144,000 are the community of the saved, the first fruits of humankind. The elders may be included within this group, possibly as its leaders. Since Revelation specifies that the 144,000 men are virgins (παρθένοι), are we therefore to suppose that virginity was deemed essential to salvation in the first century CE? In Matthew 19:11-12, Jesus tells his disciples that some people have been eunuchs from birth, have been made eunuchs, or have made themselves eunuchs ‘for the kingdom of heaven’s sake,’ but there is nothing to indicate that the παρθένοι of Revelation 14 are ἐὺνοῦχοι. Victorinus is of no help

<sup>18</sup> The term ‘new song’ appears in Isaiah 42:10 and Psalms 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9 and 149:1.

<sup>19</sup> Victorinus, *In apocalypsin* 15.2 (PL 5: 341A).

either, as he provides no exegesis of Revelation 14:4. Moreover, it is debatable whether *παρθένοι* should be understood literally or metaphorically, and whether it refers to men who have abstained from intercourse from birth or just for a limited period of time.<sup>20</sup> The part of Revelation 14:1-5 that initially seems most transparent is actually one of the most obscure. Later writers, however, understood the passage literally, reading it as a reference to lifelong, physical virginity.

The identity of the choir of 144,000 is further complicated by the suggestion in Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica* (largely complete by 314) that they are early Christian martyrs. Eusebius' book five contains a letter from the 'servants of Christ' in Lyons and Vienne in Gaul to their 'brothers' in Asia and Phrygia, describing the massacre of Christians in the year 177.<sup>21</sup> The first death to be recorded is that of Vettius Epagathus, of whom it is written, '[h]e was and is a true disciple of Christ, following the lamb wherever he goes' (ἦν γὰρ καὶ ἔστι γνήσιος Χριστοῦ μαθητής, ἀκολουθῶν τῷ ἀρνίῳ ὅπου ἂν ὑπάγῃ).<sup>22</sup> Charles E. Hill has commented that '[t]here are many things this does not tell us about the early Gallican exegesis of this passage, but it does tell us that the 144,000 were viewed as departed (perhaps all martyred) saints'.<sup>23</sup> One may even hesitate to attribute this piece of exegesis to a Gallican writer, as Eusebius might have altered his source material, or the line in question might have been added to the letter before it passed into his hands. Nevertheless, this sentence does suggest that, by the beginning of the fourth century, the 144,000 faithful followers of Christ were equated with martyrs, but not necessarily virgins – Vettius Epagathus is twice likened to

<sup>20</sup> For a summary of interpretations posed by Biblical scholars, see Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 234-35 and 241-45.

<sup>21</sup> Musurillo, ed. and trans., *The Letter to the Churches of Lyons and Vienne (The Martyrs of Lyons)*, in *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 62-85, and "Introduction," xx-xxii.

<sup>22</sup> Musurillo, *Martyrs of Lyons* 1, 64-65.

<sup>23</sup> Hill, *Regnum caelorum*, 108.

Zachariah, who was renowned for his righteousness and gift of prophecy, but, given that he fathered John the Baptist, not his virginity.<sup>24</sup>

Groups of martyrs are found in other heavenly locations or performing other kinds of activities in Revelation. Some early Christian writers identified the souls under the altar in 6:9-11 as the souls of the martyrs.<sup>25</sup> This group, who have been given white robes, are described in 7:14 as the great multitude who have come out of great tribulation and have washed their garments white with the blood of the Lamb. They worship God with palms in their hands and cry out (κράζουσιν), saying (λέγοντες), “salvation” to God and the Lamb (Rev 7:10).<sup>26</sup> It is notable that this crowd says rather than sings praise. This potentially marks them out as a different group to the choir which sings the new song, though it is possible that they are the same group, worshipping in a different manner or with a different kind of hymn. Indeed, it appears that the writer of the letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne did not differentiate so carefully between the heavenly groups in Revelation. Yet if he did indeed interpret the choir who followed the Lamb as a group of martyrs, why did he avoid all mention of the new song? The letter only alludes to the latter part of Revelation 14:4, to the statement that God’s elect follow the Lamb. In collapsing together the categories of virgin and martyr, Eusebius omitted the distinguishing feature that marked heavenly singers as virgins – their new song of salvation.

## 2.2: Virgins, martyrs and the hundredfold reward between the second and fourth centuries

At the time of the persecution of Christians in the second and third centuries, martyrs were regarded as spiritually superior to virgins. The Pre-Nicene Church Fathers, Origen (d. 254) and Cyprian (d. 258), drew on the parable of the sower

<sup>24</sup> Musurillo, *Martyrs of Lyons* 1, 64-65.

<sup>25</sup> Victorinus, *In apocalypsin* 7.4-8 (PL 5: 330C-331C); Tertullian, *De anima* 55 (PL 2: 744A-745A).

<sup>26</sup> Λέγοντες is translated into Vulgate Latin as *dicentes*.

and the seed (Matt 13:1-23) to show that martyrs could expect the highest reward in heaven. According to the parable, the seed that fell on the good soil yielded a crop a hundred times, sixty times and thirty times that which was sown (Matt 13:8). Both Origen and Cyprian interpreted the hundredfold fruit as the yield of martyrs and the sixtyfold fruit as that of virgins.<sup>27</sup> In *De habitu virginum*, Cyprian remarks that virgins walk the same arduous and narrow path to salvation as martyrs and the just, who are presumably the broad category of souls who yield the thirtyfold fruit.<sup>28</sup> He compares virgins to martyrs awarded the hundredfold prize, encouraging the virgins to follow their superior example: '[j]ust as among the martyrs there is no thought of the flesh or the world, and no encounter with trifles and frivolous things and delicacies, so also in you, whose reward is second in grace, let there be the strength of endurance like to theirs'.<sup>29</sup>

There is no doubt that, despite their inferiority to martyrs, virgins were nevertheless thought to occupy a special place in heaven and on earth. Cyprian arrives at the conclusion, based on his reading of Luke 20:34-36, that virgins lead an angelic life on earth because they are neither married nor given in marriage but 'pass through the world free from the contagion of the world'.<sup>30</sup> Not all angelic beings were thought to be immune from the contagion of the world, however. Cyprian was familiar with the story of the fallen Watchers of 1 Enoch (the Book of Watchers), whose lustful relations with the daughters of humankind introduced

<sup>27</sup> Origen, *Homily* 2.1 (PG 12: 834A) and Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 21 (PL 4: 460B).

<sup>28</sup> Origen places widows third (Ibid.).

<sup>29</sup> Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 21 (PL 4: 461A).

<sup>30</sup> Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 22 (PL 4: 462A). Luke 20:34-36 differs from analogous passages in the other synoptic Gospels. In all versions of the story, the Sadducees present Jesus with a puzzle: if a woman marries seven times consecutively to seven brothers, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? In Matthew 22:30 and Mark 12:25, Jesus responds that at the time of the resurrection of the flesh, marital ties will be of no relevance, since all will live like angels in heaven. The passage in Luke suggests that a causal link exists between remaining unmarried on earth, which makes people *equal* to angels, and being counted worthy of the resurrection and the age to come. For a discussion of this passage and how it was interpreted and put to use by late antique writers and ascetics, see Muehlberger, "Ambivalence about the Angelic Life," 451-55.

people to magic, medicine, astronomy and the art of bodily decoration.<sup>31</sup> When Cyprian attacks the process of dying wool and the wearing of necklaces and earrings, he invokes the story of the Watchers to warn his female readership not only about their corrupting sexuality, but the fallibility of angels: ‘sinners and apostate angels brought forth all these things with their arts, when, lowered to terrestrial contact [terrena contagia], they withdrew from heavenly vigour [coelesti vigor]’.<sup>32</sup> ‘[T]errena contagia,’ contracted through indulgence of the senses, leads to a kind of heavenly impotence. The story contains a double-edged warning for the female virginal reader: women are temptresses, who can bring about the fall of angels, and even angelic beings can lose their celestial power

In order to avoid endangering their angelic status, virgins are encouraged to shun all the trappings of femininity. Consequently, Cyprian places his virgin readers in the all-male groups of the saved. In the fourth chapter of the treatise, he equates his female readership with the eunuchs of Matthew 19, who are in turn identified as the 144,000 virginal followers of the Lamb.<sup>33</sup> The Bible, he notes, does not refer to female virgins because, as Genesis shows, women were made from men and both sexes are part of the original ‘protoplastic’ form of humanity: ‘since woman is a portion of man and was taken and formed from him,’ he explains, ‘everywhere in Scripture, God talks of the protoplast because [men and women] are two in one flesh and the female is signified by the male’.<sup>34</sup> Although Cyprian’s interpretation of the passage allows him to construct a version of

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<sup>31</sup> 1 Enoch 6-8.

<sup>32</sup> Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 14 (PL 4: 453A).

<sup>33</sup> Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 4 (PL 4: 444A). Other early writers, including Basil of Caesarea (d. 379), considered eunuchs neither men nor women. See Murray, “One Flesh, Two sexes, Three Genders?” 35.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. (PL 4: 444A-B).

virginity that transcends the two-sex model, his reading of the new song highlights the lack of female-specific metaphors for virginity at this point in time.<sup>35</sup>

Cyprian does not mention the new song of Revelation 14, probably because the first part of Revelation 14:4 contains all the information relevant to his argument. The *Banquet of ten virgins* by Methodius (d. 311), which also refers to the fourteenth chapter of Revelation, similarly makes no mention of the new song, being more concerned with the significance of the number 144,000, by which it can be understood that the number of virgins was determined from the beginning, while the number of other non-virginal saints is infinite.<sup>36</sup> By emphasising that the number of virgins is finite, Methodius conveys the preciousness and rarity of virginity, and thus its superiority to other kinds of sainthood. Like Cyprian, he compares virginity with martyrdom, but suggests that it may even surpass it. The virgins are accustomed to ‘tolerating pain as long as life lasts’ and not just ‘a brief moment in time’ and so will ‘bear a reward before others’.<sup>37</sup> For Methodius, therefore, virgins, not martyrs, deserve first prize in the contest against the world and the flesh.

By the fourth century, virgins had risen to a position of prominence over martyrs in the hierarchy of merit. While the cessation of the persecutions might have been a factor in this change, the perception of sexual abstinence as a widely accessible yet outstanding virtue had been slowly developing over the first few centuries of Christianity.<sup>38</sup> Athanasius, discussing the relative merits of marriage

<sup>35</sup> Dyan Elliott pointed out that virginity was often construed in male terms in early Christianity in “Tertullian, the Angelic Life, and the Bride of Christ,” in *Gender and Christianity*, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Methodius, *Συμπόσιον τῶν δεκά παρθένων* = *Banquet of the ten virgins* 5 (PG 18: 46D).

<sup>37</sup> Methodius, *Banquet* 3 (PG 18: 129A).

<sup>38</sup> Marcel Viller “Le martyre et l’ascèse,” 115-16, suggested that the social changes that brought monasticism to the fore also caused the virginal ideal to burgeon. Peter Brown’s sophisticated work, *The Body and Society*, suggested that the ascetics of the fourth century inherited, rather than created, a ‘revolution’: ‘the horizons of the possible had already been determined, silently and decisively, in a slow folding of the moral landscape of the Christian world. Total sexual renunciation had become a widely acclaimed feature of the



and virginity in his letter to the Desert Father, Amoun, grants the virgin, who lives the ‘angelic and supreme’ way of life, the hundredfold fruit, while the married, who live a ‘more ordinary and mundane’ existence, produce a thirtyfold yield.<sup>39</sup> Jerome (d. 420) championed virginity throughout his career, and frequently alluded to the virgins’ top position in the hierarchy of merit (see below). The views of Ambrose of Milan (d. 397) were more subtle. Deep in the first book of *De virginibus*, Ambrose makes reference to the virgins of Bologna, ‘in a fertile flock of modesty’ (fecundo pudoris agmine) who live in a company (contubernium) of twenty and bring forth one-hundredfold fruit.<sup>40</sup> In his treatise to widows, however, he diplomatically reminds his non-virginal readers that all fruit is a product of the same holy garden, and although virginity may be lauded in the present time, widows and the married are no less delightful or impressive when one takes a panoramic view of the fertile field of the Church, ‘now blossoming with the flower of purity, now flourishing with the dignity of widowhood, and now overflowing with the fruit of marriage’.<sup>41</sup> In the fourth century, fruit and flora of all kinds grew in the ecclesiastical garden, but the blossoms of virginity had the sweetest fragrance of all. But as the virgins’ bounty increased, did the importance of the new song also grow?

### 3: Late Antiquity

#### 3.1: Mary and the chorus of virgins in fourth-century patristic writing<sup>42</sup>

The fourth century marks a turning point at which patristic writers looked to the exemplar of the Virgin Mary as an ideal role model for their female charges. In

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Christian life’ (p. 208). Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008; first published 1988).

<sup>39</sup> Athanasius, *Επιστολή πρὸς Ἀμουν* = *Epistle to Amoun* (PG 26: 1174B-C).

<sup>40</sup> Ambrose, *De virginibus* 1.10.66 (PL 16: 205B).

<sup>41</sup> Ambrose, *De viduis* 14.83 (PL 16: 260C).

<sup>42</sup> Parts of the following section are repeated in my paper, “Anchorites in their Heavenly Communities,” in *Medieval Anchorites in their Communities*, ed. Cate Gunn and Liz Herbert McAvoy (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, forthcoming).

doing so, they responded to a shift in social dynamics: the third and fourth centuries saw a rise in the number of women from the upper echelons of urban society in the East and West becoming ascetics.<sup>43</sup> These women, living either in their own households or in ascetic communities, pursued a life of learning and contemplation that was not open to the married.<sup>44</sup> Peter Brown noted that two images emerged in connection with this change: the Virgin Mary as a demure youth, and the female virgin as the bride of Christ – an image that Origen had previously applied to both men and women. While the new song *topos* itself did not change in many texts, it gave rise to a new way of conceptualising the heavenly life of chaste women. An image common to the writings of Athanasius, Ambrose and Jerome is that of Mary at the head of a choir of heavenly virgins. In this section, I ask how this recurring image (henceforth, the ‘Marian motif’) is related to the new song *topos*, and discuss how writers expanded on and adapted the image to address the needs of their readerships.

Charles Neumann has investigated the image of Mary as the leader of the choir of virgins (*chorus virginum*) in Ambrose’s corpus.<sup>45</sup> He has shown that the image has its basis in Exodus 15:20, Miriam’s song of celebration with the timbrel at the head of a group of women. Ambrose read Miriam as ‘Maria,’ which led him to associate the Old Testament figure with the Virgin Mary. Neumann’s work provides a good starting point for further study: he gathered material including the

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<sup>43</sup> See particularly Brown, *The Body and Society*, 263, and Jan Willem Drijvers, “Virginité and Asceticism in Late Roman Western Elites,” in *Sexual Asymmetry: Studies in Ancient Society*, ed. Jostine Blok and Peter Mason (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1987), 241-73.

<sup>44</sup> A number of studies on the ascetic life of late antique virgins appeared in the early to mid-1990s: Joyce E. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (London; New York: Verso, 1991); Susan Elm, ‘*Virgins of God*’: *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Gillian Cloke, ‘*This Female Man of God*’: *Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350-450* (London: Routledge, 1995); Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>45</sup> Charles Neumann, *The Virgin Mary in the Works of Ambrose* (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press, 1962), 51-65.

motif from both Greek and Latin patristic texts,<sup>46</sup> and identified Athanasius' First Letter to Virgins as a source for the image in Ambrose's *De virginibus*.<sup>47</sup> Still, the topic deserves further exploration. Although Neumann takes careful note of appearance of where the Marian motif appears in Ambrose's work on virginity, its significance as a concept within an ascetic context is not explored. Neumann ends his inquiry with Jerome, leaving Augustine's works as uncharted territory. More problematic is his analysis of how the image of the Marian 'chorus virginum' came about through a mistranslation of Hebrew. In the context of Exodus 15:20, he argued, *machol* is best translated as 'wind instrument,' not 'dance'.<sup>48</sup> He then explained that its translation into 'chorus' gave rise to the image of dancing virgins. The terpsichorean overtones of 'chorus' certainly must have contributed to the development of the image. However, the eschatological setting of the Marian motif and the identity of the choir as a group of virgins (only faintly implied by Exodus 15) strongly suggests that another influence, Revelation 14:1-4, was at play.<sup>49</sup>

In 377, Ambrose edited his first treatise on virginity, *De virginibus*, from a selection of his sermons and addressed it to his sister, Marcellina, a consecrated virgin.<sup>50</sup> As Neumann confirmed, the second book of *De virginibus* reveals

<sup>46</sup> Neumann, *Virgin Mary*, 56-60.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 51 and 57.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 61-63. It is also worth noting for the sake of accuracy that the contentious word occurs in Ex 15:20 in its feminine form (מִכּוֹל), not in its masculine form (מִכּוֹל) as Neumann transcribes it. Neumann cited Ps 150 as evidence to suggest that [*mecholah*] was a kind of instrument: there, it is listed among eight instruments and is juxtaposed with the word for tympanum or drum. It also occurs next to the word for 'tympanum' in Jdg 11:34. However, see list of instances in which it is used for 'dance' in chapter one, section 2. There is no doubt that, in these instances, it signifies a dance or dance troupe rather than an instrument: in 1 Kgs 18:6, instruments of music are mentioned after its occurrence. While it is just about feasible that *mecholah* and *machol* signify 'wind instrument' when used in conjunction with 'timbrel,' given the number of examples where it may comfortably translated as 'chorus,' there seems little reason to believe it denotes something so particular in the few cases cited by Neumann.

<sup>49</sup> It is difficult to detect any implication in Exodus 15 that the women following Miriam were virgins, but Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395) commented that 'many learned men' identified Miriam as a virgin on account of the fact that she is referred to as the sister of Aaron, not the wife of any other man. Gregory of Nyssa, *Περὶ παρθενίας* = *On virginity* 19 (PG 46: 395A-C) cited in Neumann, 57.

<sup>50</sup> Angelo Paredi, *Saint Ambrose: His Life and Times* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 142.

Ambrose's indebtedness to Athanasius' First Letter to Virgins, which was directed at house ascetics. Resonances between the two texts are especially strong in the second chapter of book two.<sup>51</sup> Both works construe Mary as the paragon of virginity; her life is held up as an example which other virgins should admire and emulate. Athanasius compels virgins to recognise themselves in Mary 'as in a mirror,' prompting them to reflect on their appearance and behaviour and correct it as appropriate.<sup>52</sup> Ambrose condenses Athanasius' exhortation somewhat clumsily: '[l]et the life of Mary be for you just like virginity copied into an image, which reflects the appearance of chastity and the form of virtue like a mirror'.<sup>53</sup> The two writers depict the Virgin Mary as a house ascetic who sleeps and eats only out of necessity, performs good works and is reluctant to leave the house except to go to the Temple (even then, she is accompanied by her parents).<sup>54</sup> Athanasius' Mary is an inward-looking reader and scholar who 'did not acquire eagerness to look out of the window, rather to look at the Scriptures,' and who values quiet study so highly that she does not even make a sound when reading.<sup>55</sup> Ambrose expands on these ideas, suggesting that solitude elevates Mary above earthly company and enjoins her to the heavenly company of holy people and angels, whose deeds are described in the Bible. His depiction of the Annunciation presents Mary as an exile from the earth and an inhabitant of the holy world of Scripture:

She was found by the angel who came to her in the inmost part  
of the home, without companion, lest anyone break her

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<sup>51</sup> David Brakke has also noted Ambrose's indebtedness to Athanasius, and suggests that Athanasius brought the letter from Rome to Milan during his second exile (339-346). Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 269. See also Brakke, "The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasia," *Orientalia* 63 (1994): 20-21.

<sup>52</sup> Athanasius, "First Letter to Virgins" 11 and 12, trans. David Brakke in *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 277.

<sup>53</sup> Ambrose, *De virginibus* 2.2.6 (PL 16: 208C).

<sup>54</sup> Athanasius, "First Letter to Virgins," 13-15, 277-78 and Ambrose, *De virginibus* 2.2.7-9 (PL 16: 209A-210A).

<sup>55</sup> Athanasius, "First Letter to Virgins," 13 and 15, 277-78. Silent reading was an unusual practice among late antique readers. Augustine records his amazement at Ambrose's intent and silent reading in *Confessiones* 6.3 (PL 32: 720-21).

concentration or make a noise [...] In fact, she seemed less alone when she was alone. For how could she be alone with so many books nearby; so many archangels, so many prophets?<sup>56</sup>

By reading holy texts and concentrating her efforts on her inner life, Mary is able to comprehend the message of the archangel Gabriel and bring forth the Word of God. At the end of her life, she takes her place in the heavenly community she has long read about, as the leader of a choir of virginal souls.

The writers suggest that by emulating Mary, virgins will become like her, and will therefore share some of her joys in the celestial kingdom. In Athanasius' First Letter and Ambrose's *De virginibus* 2.2, which follows its source closely, Mary meets and greets the virgins who have arrived, unsullied, in heaven, and leads them to Christ, their spouse:

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<sup>56</sup> Ambrose, *De virginibus* 2.2.10 (PL 16: 210A).

<p>Oh, how many virgins Mary will meet! And how she will embrace them and lead them to the Lord! How much joy there will be among the angels when they see the image of their purity in the bodies of the virgins!<sup>57</sup></p>	<p>Oh! How many virgins [Mary] will meet, how many she will draw to the Lord, having embraced them [...] What pomp, how great the joy of applauding angels, because she deserves to live in heaven, who lived a heavenly life on earth!<sup>58</sup></p>
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Mary then assumes the timbrel, like Miriam in Exodus 15, and leads the virgins in a celebratory dance while they chant songs of praise:

<p>And next, just like the time at the Red Sea when Miriam walked before the women with a timbrel [...] so it will be in the kingdom of heaven. Virginité leads and walks in front, as she is accustomed, with great boldness, and they all will be a single chorus and single symphony in the faith, praising God and saying, 'I will go in to the altar of God, to God, delighting in my youth' (Ps</p>	<p>Then, furthermore, Mary, taking up the timbrel, will stir up the choirs of virgins singing to God [choros virginales excitabit cantantes Domino] because they have crossed over the sea of the world without the tumult of the world [...] Then each one will rejoice, saying: I will go to the altar of my God; to God Who makes happy my youth (Ps 62:4). I will offer to God the</p>
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<sup>57</sup> Athanasius, "First Letter to Virgins," 21, 280.

<sup>58</sup> Ambrose, *De virginibus* 2.2.16-17 (PL 16: 211A).

43:4) and ‘I will offer to you sacrifice of praise, and a sacrifice of praise; I will render my vows to the make my vows to the Lord’ Highest (Ps 49:14).<sup>60</sup> (Ps 116:17-18). And they will hear this: ‘Enter into the joy of your master!’ (Matt 25:21, 23).<sup>59</sup>

In heaven, virgins are no longer hidden from sight, but at the centre of attention. The Virgin Mary, a silent and demure role model on earth, fulfils the type of Miriam and places herself at the forefront of a choir (or according to Ambrose, the choirs) of her followers. If the heavenly life on earth is defined by the ascetic practices of intensive prayer, fasting, enclosure and silence, the eschatological fulfilment of the *vita angelica* is a noisy affair at which the emboldened virgin chants songs of exultation.

Perhaps the most striking element of these descriptions is the absence of what we have previously characterised as the new song *topos*. The choir of virgins is certainly present, but they follow the Mother of God, not the Lamb of God. In both texts, Christ commends the virgins to his Father, and in *De virginibus*, he says, ‘I beseech that, wherever I am, they may be with me,’ an addition which evokes verse four of Revelation 14 as well as John 17:24.<sup>61</sup> Most notably, though, the choir of virgins does not sing the new song in either of these depictions of heavenly celebration. What relation, then, does the Marian motif bear to the new song *topos*? The degree of closeness between the Marian dance troupe and the new song of the virgins varies across time. In Revelation 15, the new song of the Lamb is an allusion to the song of Moses (and by extension, the dance of Miriam). If the

<sup>59</sup> Athanasius, “First Letter to Virgins,” 21, 280-81.

<sup>60</sup> Ambrose, *De virginibus* 2.2.17 (*PL* 16: 211A-B).

<sup>61</sup> Ambrose, *De virginibus* 2.2.16 (*PL* 16: 211A).

new song *topos* could be interpreted in the light of Old Testament events, surely Old Testament typology could equally be interpreted with reference to the new song? The Marian motif seems to have arisen from an eschatological reading of Exodus 15, informed by a passage or passages (most likely, Revelation 14:1-4 or 15:2-3) that triggered the association between the dance and the heavenly afterlife. Additionally, Exodus 15 does not mention that Miriam was a virgin, or that the women she led in a dance were virgins, but the choir of virgins in Revelation 14 could have prompted a re-reading of this passage. Indeed, Ambrose himself equates Miriam's group of dancers with the virginal choir of Revelation 14:4 in another of his works, *De institutione virginis*, in which he speaks directly to Christ, praising him for guiding the virgin to the heavenly kingdom:

You sanctify her in truth, confirm her in strength, fasten her in love, and lead her to the celestial glory of modesty and integrity and the unimpaired and immaculate crown with your divine aid, so that yonder she may follow in the footsteps of the Lamb, graze in the midday sun and remain in the sun; and not marching in the flock of friends, but mixed in with your lambs [nec in grege sodalium incedat sed agnis tui admixta] she may dwell in the company of unblemished virgins, a follower of Marys [sine offensione versatur comes virginum, pedissequa Mariarum].<sup>62</sup>

The crucial part of this quotation is Ambrose's reference not just to the Virgin Mary or Miriam, but the two of them combined. In this example, therefore, the new song and the Marian motif are virtually indistinguishable.

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<sup>62</sup> Ambrose, *De institutione virginis* 17.113 (PL 16: 333A-B). Neumann also analyses this passage in *Virgin Mary*, 53-54.



The Marian choir and the followers of the Lamb were not always synonymous, however. Jerome's Letter twenty-two to the virgin Eustochium, written in 384, draws in part on Ambrose's *De virginibus*. The Marian motif is expressed thus:

What a day that will be, when Mary, the mother of God, meets you, accompanied by virginal choirs [*choris [...] uirgineis*]; when you have crossed the Red Sea and the Pharaoh and his army are submerged, Mary, taking up the timbrel, will lead the group in responding: 'Let us sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he hath thrown into the sea.'<sup>63</sup>

He distinguishes this group from the followers of the Lamb:

Then the one hundred and forty-four thousand, in front of the throne and the elders, will hold citharas and sing the new song; and no one is able to learn that song apart from that limited number: '[t]hese are they who have not defiled themselves with women – for they remain virgins; they follow the lamb wherever he goes' (Rev 14:4).

tunc centum quadraginta quattuor milia in conspectus throni et seniorum tenebunt citharas et cantabunt canticum nouum et nemo poterit scire canticum illud, nisi numerus definitus: 'hi sunt, qui se cum mulieribus non coinquinauerunt – uirgines

<sup>63</sup> Jerome, *Epistola* 22.41, ed. Isidorus Hilberg, *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, Vols. 54-56 (Vienna: F. Tempsky; Leipzig: G. Freytag, 1910-1918), 54:209.

enim permanserunt-; hi sunt, qui secuntur agnum, quocumque  
audit'.<sup>64</sup>

Here, the new song follows the timbrel dance and appears to be a distinct act of worship. While the choirs of Mary are multiple, there is only one company of virgins who sing the new song, consisting of a set number of 144,000. The passage also suggests that the choirs are single-sex: female virgins are led by Mary, whilst the choir of 144,000 are, as in Revelation 14:4, men who have not been defiled by women. The Marian motif therefore created a conceptual space in heaven for gendered choirs, and thus allowed for the expression of a specifically *female* spirituality. As the choir of virgins bifurcated and burgeoned, other choirs, whose members had specific sexual statuses, also developed.

### 3.2: Choirs of widows and the married in Athanasius and Jerome

Ambrose's *De virginitate* 2.2 departs from Athanasius' First Letter to virgins in one significant respect. While only the choir of virgins graces Ambrose's vision of celestial joy, Athanasius goes on to describe other heavenly groups:

Oh, from how many women Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Susannah, and Elizabeth will come forth! Not to mention the women who have preserved the piety of marriage: how the patriarchs, rejoicing, will receive them, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, testifying [on] their behalf to the Lord, saying: 'All these have kept your law, and the bed they have not defiled (Heb 13:4); rather, just as you commanded, they have completed their lifetime piously'!<sup>65</sup>

Choirs of matriarchs and patriarchs rejoice alongside Mary and her virgins. The matriarchs of the Old Testament, we can assume, accept pious mothers into their

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 54:210.

<sup>65</sup> Athanasius, "First Letter to Virgins," 21, 280.

ranks. Patriarchs accept male (and possibly female) married people who had practised chastity of a kind by remaining faithful to their life partners. Why did Athanasius add these choirs? The answer lies elsewhere in his letter, where he condemns Hieracas of Leontopolis, ‘who says that marriage is evil inasmuch as virginity is good’.<sup>66</sup> From this Letter, we can infer that Hieracas disparaged marriage altogether because he deemed it unequal to virginity. Athanasius criticises his all-or-nothing attitude, arguing, ‘the number sixty is not evil because the number 100 is greater; rather, it is good, but the other is better’.<sup>67</sup> Yet Hieracas believed that virgins were of a fundamentally different nature to the married, having a superior capacity for self-discipline.<sup>68</sup> His theory very much affected his practice: he founded a community of celibate men and women outside the city of Leontopolis.<sup>69</sup> He even excluded married people from his services.<sup>70</sup> The coupling of men and women in wedlock, he asserted, belonged to a different age, the time before Christ’s incarnation.<sup>71</sup> Athanasius protested that to declare marriage evil is to hold the holy patriarchs and the saints who are not virgins in contempt. These souls, however, dwell in the paradisiacal region of the Bosom of Abraham, and are therefore saved by Christ despite having lost their virginity.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, even while Athanasius defends marriage, he demarcates the boundaries between the matriarchs and patriarchs dwelling in Abraham’s Bosom, and the choir of virgins, which has the freedom to roam around the kingdom of heaven.

Jerome’s Letter twenty-two also makes reference to other choirs of the blessed. After his depiction of the timbrel dance, he explains to Eustochium that ‘another chaste choir [castitatis chorus] will meet you: Sarah will come with the

<sup>66</sup> Athanasius, “First Letter to Virgins,” 24, 282.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> See Brakke’s discussion of the Hieracan heresy and Athanasius’ response to it in *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 44-57.

<sup>69</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and Politics*, 44, 48 and 268.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 22 and 46.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

married, Anna, Phanuel's daughter, with the widows.<sup>73</sup> Significantly, Jerome speaks of this choir in the singular: both widows and the married occupy the same choir, betraying a distinction he is making between virgins on the one hand and other kinds of chaste worshippers on the other. Among those wives and widows are Paula, Eustochium's natural mother, and Marcella, her ascetic advisor and spiritual mother.<sup>74</sup>

While this may not seem unexpected in itself, it becomes so when one considers Jerome's stance on marriage, which was not altogether dissimilar to that of Hieracas. The situation regarding the relative merits and rewards of the three classes had become a controversial issue by the 390s with the spread of a work by an ex-ascetic monk, Jovinian.<sup>75</sup> His treatise, now lost, threatened to turn the tide on the wave of enthusiasm for the ascetic life by challenging the hierarchical system of reward and punishment that pervaded the thinking of the chief commentators of the time.<sup>76</sup> In it, he apparently claimed that virginity is not esteemed above marriage in the eyes of God and made a host of other controversial statements: restraining food intake should not be valued above taking food with thanks; baptism wipes away all sins; all punishments are equal; there will be no grades of reward in heaven; and Mary lost her virginity in the act of giving birth.<sup>77</sup> Jovinian did not dwell on the relative merits of good souls: all are saved, and those who are not saved are not classified according to their degree of wickedness; all are damned. The treatise destabilises the distinction between the 144,000 virgins and

<sup>73</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 22.41, 54:210.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 180-85. The following articles by David G. Hunter contain more detail on the Jovinian controversy: "Resistance to the Virginal Ideal in Late Fourth-Century Rome: The Case of Jovinian," *Theological Studies* 48:1 (1987): 45-64, "Helvidius, Jovinian, and the Virginity of Mary in Late Fourth-Century Rome," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993): 47-71, and "Jovinian, Heresy and Fourth-Century Asceticism," in *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 130-70.

<sup>76</sup> Kelly, *Jerome*, 181-82, and Andrew Cain, *Letters of Jerome: Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis, and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 135.

<sup>77</sup> Summary in Kelly, *Jerome*, 185.

the heavenly community at large, as Jovinian interprets the group of virgins allegorically as the Church: followers of the faith are virgins *collectively*, as the undefiled Church body, but they need not be virgins *individually*.<sup>78</sup>

In 393, after Jovinian's work had been condemned as heretical in Rome and Milan, Jerome responded with *Adversus Jovinianum*. In his eagerness to defend the primacy of virginity and the hierarchy of merit, Jerome made statements about marriage which were perceived by his contemporaries to disparage the married life.<sup>79</sup> To take one example, in discussing the Pauline dictum, 'it is good for a man not to touch a woman,' Jerome reaches the conclusion that to touch one must therefore be bad. Marriage is the lesser of two evils, better only than promiscuity. Jerome responds to Jovinian's allegorical interpretation of Revelation 14 by reasserting a more literal reading of the passage – the 144,000 are those who are not defiled by women (hii sunt qui cum mulieribus non sunt coinquinati). He adds that the widows and the continent in marriage follow in the second and third rank, being the second and third fruits. Nevertheless, by including the quotation from Revelation 14:4 cited above, Jerome defines the undefiled against the defiled, and thus creates a binary opposition between male virgins and everyone else. When he attempts to defend his widely criticised treatise in his forty-eighth epistle of 394, he turns to his interpretation of the new song for justification:

In that place, where we dealt with the Apocalypse, was it not obvious what we thought about the virgins, the widowed and the married? 'They are the ones who sing the new song, which no one is able to sing save he who is a virgin [Hi sunt, qui cantant canticum nouum, quod nemo potest cantare, nisi qui uirgo est]. They are the first fruits of God and the Lamb and are

<sup>78</sup> See Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, 1.40 and 2.19 (PL 23: 269 and 314).

<sup>79</sup> Kelly, *Jerome*, 188-9, and Cain, *Letters*, 137-40.

without blemish. If virgins are the first fruits, therefore the widowed and the continent married come after the first fruits, that is, in the second and third grade.’ We place in the second and third grade widows and the married, and we are said to condemn marriage by a heretic in his madness.<sup>80</sup>

Jerome makes no mention of the ‘undefiled’ virgins here. The new song of Revelation 14:3 is a safer reference, as it underscores the exclusivity of the virginal choir without suggesting that those who are not part of it must be sullied, sexually and spiritually.

From this brief exploration of *Adversus Jovinianum* and epistle forty-eight, it would appear that, for Jerome, the new song was an inflexible signifier, representative only of the blessed state of virgins. However, close investigation into how he develops the *topos* of the new song reveals more ambiguity in his thinking than we might have initially expected. Although Jerome praised virginity high above the widowed and married states in his work targeted at combatting heresies, his letters to ascetic women tell a slightly different story. In these epistles, Jerome is prepared to be flexible, showing awareness that ascetics with a variety of sexual and social identities, not just virgins, made up his readership.<sup>81</sup>

While he reserves the new song for virgins, Jerome uses the image of the saved following the Lamb of God (Rev 14:4) as a basis for constructing a new choir of the holy. In Letter 108 to Eustochium, written in 404, Jerome honours the memory of her late mother, Paula. She is said to be in heaven, following the Lamb wherever he goes and singing Psalm 48:8 ([a]s we have heard, so have we seen in

<sup>80</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 48.10, 54:365.

<sup>81</sup> Hunter’s analysis of how Jerome uses Psalm 45 yields similar results, as he finds that Jerome’s use of the book of Psalms and the Song of Songs reflects his preoccupations as an ascetic teacher and mentor. See “The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church,” 291.

the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God).<sup>82</sup> He refers to the same passage in Letter twenty-three of 384,<sup>83</sup> an epistle to Marcella about the death of a widowed noblewoman, Lea. He compares the widow's death to that of Praetextatus, a pagan consul who perished about the same time. Drawing on the parable of Dives and Lazarus, he shows that Lea's conduct is rewarded after death when 'she is taken away by choirs of angels' (*excipitur angelorum choris*) and 'comforted in the bosom of Abraham,' while the consul lies in torment.<sup>84</sup> The Bosom of Abraham was, as we have seen in Athanasius' First Letter to virgins, the abode of the righteous before the time of Christ. Was Jerome suggesting, then, that Lea was unable to leave the resting place of the patriarchs? It is unlikely. Jerome discusses the Bosom of Abraham in Letter sixty, written in 396, remarking that after Christ's resurrection, the apostles and prophets who rested in this half-way house between heaven and hell were given access to the heavenly regions: '[b]efore Christ, Abraham is in hell; after Christ, the thief is in paradise.'<sup>85</sup> Indeed, he confirms this view in his treatise of 406, *Contra Vigilantius*:

For you say that either in the bosom of Abraham, or in a place of refreshment, or under the altar of God, the souls of the apostles and martyrs should hold their position, and are not able to depart from their tombs, and go where they want [...] You chain up the apostles, so that until the Day of Judgement they may be held in custody, and not be with their God, of whom it is written: 'they follow the Lamb wherever he may go'. If the Lamb goes anywhere, and they are with the Lamb, therefore they must be believed to go anywhere.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 108.22, 55:338.

<sup>83</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 23.3, 54:213.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 54:213.

<sup>85</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 60.3, 54:551.

<sup>86</sup> Jerome, *Contra Vigilantium* (PL 23: 344A-B).

Lea, therefore, is at liberty to roam behind the Lamb across the whole kingdom of heaven. It is possible that Paula and Lea attain the privileges of virgins because they were leaders of virgins in their lifetimes. When she became head of a Roman monastery, Lea took on the role of mother to her virgins, and lived an admirable ascetic life alongside them – she denied herself refined food and clothing, gave no regard to her appearance and instead, poured her energies into vigils and exercising humility.<sup>87</sup> Paula, Jerome's patroness, also surrounded herself with companies of virgins (*choris uirginum*) and was the lowliest of them all.<sup>88</sup> The two women, who had a similar status to virgins in life, obtain a similar reward to them in heaven – so similar, in fact, that only the absence of the phrase 'new song' suggests that their reward is different.

Letter sixty is addressed to Heliodorus of Altino and concerns the death of his nephew, Nepotian, who had joined the clergy after having served in the army. Once more, Jerome states that the soul of the deceased is with Christ and the choir of saints, singing Psalm 48:8.<sup>89</sup> It is unclear, however, why Jerome assigns him the psalm instead of the new song of the Apocalypse. Jerome's fifty-second letter, written to Nepotian himself, outlines a rule for life for the young clergyman. Among Jerome's recommendations is that the presbyter should exercise caution when dealing with the opposite sex. He should not live with a woman and simply rely on his past continence, but should refrain from keeping company with women; even on his visits to virgins and widows who are house ascetics, he should not go alone.<sup>90</sup> Jerome hastens to add that his advice is by no means symptomatic of doubt in Nepotian's ability to preserve his chastity, but rather, he issues a general warning that is applicable to both the better and worse kinds of clergyman. Why, then, does he imagine that Nepotian's soul sings Psalm 48:8, but not the new song?

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<sup>87</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 23.2, 54:212-13.

<sup>88</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 108.15, 55:325.

<sup>89</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 60.7, 54:555.

<sup>90</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 52.5, 54:421-25.



One possibility is that, despite the diplomatic tone of letter fifty-two, Jerome was not entirely assured that Nepotian was a virgin when he joined holy orders. This may be why Jerome refers only to his previously maintained *castitas*.<sup>91</sup> Another possibility is that, while Jerome stubbornly maintained his position regarding the special status of virgins in his writings on heresy, in practice he was not quite so uncompromising. His letters offer condolences to men and women whose lives have been blighted by bereavement. Instead of drawing a sharp line between the choir or choirs of virgins and the choirs of widows, the chaste and the married, Jerome depicts a rather more ambiguous and indeed, compassionate, heaven, where a psalm, rather than the new song, unites God's most ardent followers.

### 3.3: Hearing the new song in Augustine's *De sancta virginitate*

Still, Jerome's flexible approach in the letters went largely unnoticed. It is Augustine who became known for making the new song metaphor more inclusive. The focus of Augustine's career in Africa lay on strengthening the Church body as a whole, and not just its monastic portion. Peter Brown argues that, by the fifth century, the ascetic movement was less pronounced within the African Church.<sup>92</sup> Unlike the social and cultural contexts surrounding Ambrose and Jerome, 'there was little nostalgia for the angelic life and no examples of spiritual companionship with gifted and influential ascetic women.'<sup>93</sup> More important, Brown argues, was the need to reinforce ties between Christian communities and strengthen the unit of the family.<sup>94</sup> This naturally affected the way in which Augustine presented the vexatious issue of the hierarchy between marriage, virginity and widowhood. As several scholars of Augustine's asceticism have remarked, Augustine was keen to narrow the rift between virgins and chaste non-virgins.<sup>95</sup> This was undoubtedly a

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 54:423.

<sup>92</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 396.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 397-98.

<sup>95</sup> Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 9-13, and Willemien Otten, "Augustine on Marriage, Monasticism

reaction to Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*.<sup>96</sup> While close reading of Jerome's letters has shown that he was prepared to be flexible with the metaphors surrounding virginity, Jerome was primarily known for his argument that virgins were superior to other kinds of chaste ascetic. In his work of 401, *De sancta virginitate*, Augustine set out to re-interpret the hierarchy of merit and thereby suggest that spiritual life can embody 'difference with concord,' varied and yet harmonious.<sup>97</sup>

In retaliation against Jerome's use of the parable of the sower and the seed, Augustine complicates the model by exposing the history of conflicting interpretation surrounding this parable: while some accounts say virginity merits the hundredfold reward, others give this top prize to martyrs; yet another interpretation suggests that the combination of virginity and martyrdom produces the topmost yield. If a married person should become a martyr, perhaps this would earn her bonus points and she would receive a sixtyfold reward instead of the usual thirty. Augustine follows this with a balancing statement, bringing the issue to a resolution: '[o]r what seems to me more likely, since the gifts of divine grace are many, and one is greater and better than another [...] there are more gifts than can be allocated to these different categories.'<sup>98</sup> In this veiled attack on Jerome's interpretation of the hierarchy, Augustine sets out to show the inadequacy of the categories themselves, which are human constructions and cannot accurately reflect a divine reality. Augustine highlights the ambiguities of the classification scheme by questioning where and how martyrdom fits into the arrangement. A virgin not willing to suffer martyrdom would, no doubt, be spiritually inferior to a married person eager to die for Christ, even if circumstances did not allow for such a

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and the Community of the Church," *Theological Studies* 59:3 (1998): 385-405, and Hunter, "The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church," 296.

<sup>96</sup> Cain, *Letters*, 140.

<sup>97</sup> Otten, "Augustine on Marriage," 402 and 405.

<sup>98</sup> Augustine, *De sancta uirginitate* 46, trans. P.G. Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: OUP, 2001), 132-33.

sacrifice to be performed. The degree of merit between souls should not simply take into account status or even status alongside conduct and manner: the inner life and the direction of the will are also judged by God.

Augustine's interpretation of the parable stresses that the rewards are not simply eschatological prizes, but ways of living and attitudes towards God. Augustine suggests that the followers of the Lamb are those who imitate the humility of Christ: '[f]ollow him as you deserve, because of your virginity in heart and flesh, wherever he goes, for what does "follow" mean but "imitate"?'.<sup>99</sup> Inner motivations are once again shown to be important: virgins must be chaste in heart as well as body, by demonstrating humility and obedience, a point on which Augustine expands at length throughout the treatise.<sup>100</sup> In this way, they can imitate the humble and selfless suffering of Christ as the son of man.

Augustine does not deny that virgins are set apart from other worshippers – only they can follow Christ wherever he goes, only they can sing the new song of Revelation 14; he is careful to draw a distinction between the new song as found in the book of Psalms, which is a universal gift of grace, and the new song as found in Revelation, which is the privilege of the 144,000 virgins.<sup>101</sup> Yet Augustine expands upon the imagery of Revelation 14:1-4 in such a way as to open up the metaphors surrounding the virgins to other groups of the blessed. Firstly, those who have lost their virginity cannot go wherever the Lamb goes, but can follow him so far as nature will allow: 'what is beyond doubt is that married people too can walk in his footsteps. Though they do not plant their feet perfectly in the same traces, they

<sup>99</sup> Augustine, *De sancta uirginitate* 27, 100-103.

<sup>100</sup> Augustine revised the view (espoused by both Ambrose and Jerome) that sex is an act of fallen humanity, arguing instead that it is the desire for lust that characterises the corrupt human state. Augustine thereby judges morality by the movements of the soul rather than the physical outcomes of these motivations. See John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 25-6, and Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins*, 39-54.

<sup>101</sup> See Augustine's commentary on Ps 33:3, *Enarratio in psalmos* 2.1.8 (PL 36: 283) and Ps 98.1, *Sermo ad plebem* (PL 37: 1253).

none the less tread the same paths'.<sup>102</sup> Secondly, Augustine introduces an original element to the new song *topos* which goes some way towards undermining the exclusivity of the heavenly choir of virgins: the rest of the crowd of the faithful 'will not be able to sing that new song which belongs to you alone, but they will be able to hear it and to take delight in that good of yours which is so surpassing' (illud canticum nouum proprium uestrum dicere non poterit; audire autem poterit et delectari uestro tam excellenti bono).<sup>103</sup> Augustine dramatically revises Revelation 14:4. Virgins are not merely the only group able *to learn* the new song, but the only ones able *to sing* it. In addition, all the blessed can hear it and therefore bear witness to the joys of following Christ. Augustine was well aware of the moral dimension of listening. In the *Confessiones*, he records the danger of being swept away by the beauty of music into irrational or overly emotional thoughts.<sup>104</sup> Music's capacity to excite the senses presented a particular anxiety for Augustine, who was aware of the fine line between music for the sake of devotion and music for the sake of physical enjoyment.<sup>105</sup> Reason must reinforce the senses at all times. The entire body of the faithful, therefore, can hear the new song if they let reason direct their will towards God.

Augustine's broadening out of the new song *topos* was as much a warning to virgins of the dangers of pride as an argument in favour of the sanctity of marital fidelity. Only the humble follow (imitate) the Lamb of God, who put on flesh and sacrificed himself for the salvation of humankind. A proud virgin jeopardises her place in the choir of the Lamb. Indeed, Augustine is keen to remind his readers that the virgins of the Apocalypse are only able to occupy such an exalted position because of the grace of God. In order to take their place among the 144,000, virgins

<sup>102</sup> Augustine, *De sancta uirginitate* 28, 102-103.

<sup>103</sup> Augustine, *De sancta uirginitate* 29, 104-105.

<sup>104</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones* 10.33.49 (PL 32: 799-800).

<sup>105</sup> For more on Augustine's relationship with music, see Bruce Holsinger, *Music, Body and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 61-83, and Robert R. LaCroix, ed., *Augustine on Music: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).

must also practise humility, obedience and truthfulness. In *De bono conjugali* and *De sancta virginitate*, Augustine warns virgins not to think of themselves as better than the married, for, '[m]arried persons who are humble more easily follow the Lamb – not wherever he goes but at any rate as far as they can – than virgins who are arrogant'.<sup>106</sup> The new song *topos*, an incentive to the angelic life, becomes a stimulus to pride if read simply as an affirmation of virginal superiority: 'I am, I say, profoundly fearful that in boasting that you will follow the Lamb wherever he goes, you may be unable because of swollen pride to follow him along narrow paths'.<sup>107</sup> In his careful exposition of the meaning of 'follow' as 'imitate' and the surrounding passages of Revelation 14, therefore, Augustine models the correct reading of the new song *topos*. It is not a badge of honour, or a guarantee of election, but a metaphor containing a precept.

#### 4: The early Middle Ages

##### 4.1: A new song for the chaste? The *De virginitate* and *Carmen de virginitate* of Aldhelm<sup>108</sup>

Since the publication of Michael Lapidge's translation of Aldhelm's late seventh-century *Opus geminatum*, scholars have been keen to explore how Aldhelm breathes new life into patristic sources.<sup>109</sup> While the twin treatise on virginity is heavily indebted to works by Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine, Aldhelm adapted and departed from his source material in order to accommodate his non-virginal readers. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, it is likely that the company of nuns living under the abbesses addressed in the prologue of *De virginitate* included women who had previously been married, but who had left

<sup>106</sup> Augustine, *De sancta virginitate* 52, 140-41.

<sup>107</sup> Augustine, *De sancta virginitate* 39, 120-21.

<sup>108</sup> Aldhelm, *De virginitate* trans. Lapidge, and *Carmen de virginitate*, trans. Rosier. Page numbers refer to these editions. Latin quotations are from Ehwald, ed., *Aldhelmi opera omnia*. Page numbers from his edition are given in brackets.

<sup>109</sup> Sinéad O' Sullivan has been especially dedicated to examining Aldhelm's use of patristic sources. See "The Image of Adornment in Aldhelm's *De virginitate*: Cyprian and his Influence," *Peritia* 15 (2001): 48-57, and "Patristic Pastiche or Innovative Exposition?" 271-95.

their spouses to enter the religious life. Although the practice of leaving one's spouse to enter a monastery was permissible in early Anglo-Saxon England, Aldhelm had to approach the subject of the relative merits of the virginal and married states with delicacy.<sup>110</sup> Aldhelm was surely aware that praising virgins as the reapers of the hundredfold yield and participants in the angelic life would alienate those readers who had entered monasteries after having consummated their marriages. One of Aldhelm's strategies early in the prose *De virginitate* is to show that, historically, the status of virgins with respect to other groups has been variable; he remarks that martyrs, not virgins, were placed at the topmost level of the hierarchy of merit in earlier sources, and therefore virgins are not the most exalted of the righteous by nature, but by custom.<sup>111</sup>

Aldhelm also addresses the potential problems caused by his subject matter at the outset of both works by emphasising the importance of chastity and humility.<sup>112</sup> Thomas Cramer has proposed that '[t]hroughout his treatise, Aldhelm prioritizes the interior, spiritual aspects of the Christian experience over corporeal integrity,' a concept Cramer called 'spiritual chastity'.<sup>113</sup> Aldhelm substitutes chastity for widowhood in the hierarchy of merit, assigning it second place below virginity and above marital continence.<sup>114</sup> The chaste are defined as those who, 'having been assigned to marital contracts, [have] scorned the commerce of matrimony for the sake of the heavenly kingdom'.<sup>115</sup> However, the continuous efforts of the chaste can give them the lead over virgins who believe that the key to

<sup>110</sup> The *Canons* of Theodore of Canterbury make allowance for a wives separating from their husbands on the grounds of pursuing a monastic life: 'Mulieri non licet virum dimittere licet sit fornicator, nisi forte pro monasterio'. Cited in Lapidge, "Introduction to Aldhelm's Prose *De virginitate*," 55 (Latin in endnote 16 on page 192).

<sup>111</sup> Aldhelm, *De virginitate* 19, 76.

<sup>112</sup> See above, section 1.

<sup>113</sup> Cramer, "Containing Virginity," 56 and 59.

<sup>114</sup> Carmela Virgilio Franklin has convincingly demonstrated that Aldhelm based his scheme on the *Passio SS. Victoriae et Anatholia* (BHL 8591a-d and 418a-c). See "Theodore and the *Passio S. Anastasii*," in *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on his Life and Influence*, ed. Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 175-203 (pp. 188-90).

<sup>115</sup> Aldhelm, *De virginitate* 19, 75. See also the Preface to *Carmen de virginitate*, 105.

their salvation lies solely in their bodily integrity, and the pride of virgins can result in their downfall.<sup>116</sup> Aldhelm's warning against virginal pride in the prose *De virginitate* echoes Augustine's *De sancta virginitate*. Like Augustine, he suggests that the merits of the second grade can grow to exceed the first if virginity becomes tepid. It is therefore necessary, he argues, for a virgin to maintain the fervour of contemplation and practise other virtues so that 'she may, accompanied by angelic cohorts [...] have joy of the indivisible fraternity of angelic companionship' (supernis comitata cohortibus iugiter assistere et inseparabili angelicae sodalitatis collegio perfrui feliciter mereatur).<sup>117</sup> The male and female virgins of *De virginitate* and the *Carmen de virginitate* are indeed rewarded in such a way. For example, the prose version states that the virgin-martyrs Chionia, Irene and Agape 'went together [...] to hymn the virginal melody in the company of the 144,000 virgins' (cum CXLIV milibus virginalem melodiam modulaturae [...] pariter perrexere).<sup>118</sup>

It is clear that Aldhelm equated the new song with virginity, not chastity. However, his allusions to Augustine's *De sancta virginitate* give the metaphor a degree of flexibility. In the prose *De virginitate*, Aldhelm evokes the hagiographic discourse of merit when he describes how John the Apostle (whom he conflates with John of Patmos) was found worthy of hearing the song of the 144,000 virgins and beholding them 'with his pure eyes'.<sup>119</sup> He then quotes Revelation 14:4, leaving out the clause that virgins are those 'not defiled by women,' thus making the passage applicable to both male and female readers. He follows the quotation with the Augustinian idea that '[t]he rest of the faithful are to hear, but these [virgins] are to sing the holy songs, and to walk with the Lamb through the august glory of the heavenly kingdom' ([c]eteri fideles audituri, isti sancta modulaturi sunt

<sup>116</sup> Aldhelm, *De virginitate* 10-14, 66-71.

<sup>117</sup> Aldhelm, *De virginitate* 15, 71. (Ehwald, 244).

<sup>118</sup> Aldhelm, *De virginitate* 50, 118 (Ehwald, 307).

<sup>119</sup> Aldhelm, *De virginitate* 7, 64.

carmina et cum agno partier per augustam regni gloriam gardituri).<sup>120</sup> The passage implies that whereas John was worthy of hearing the new song because of his merit as a prophet and virgin, the married hear the new song because they are spiritually inferior to the virgins who can learn it. Although Aldhelm does not expound on the acoustics of the new song to the same degree as Augustine, he nevertheless conveys Augustine's central conception of the new song as a piece of music that is sung by an elite band but heard by all the meritorious. While *De sancta virginitate* was the major source of this interpretation of the new song, it was probably not the only text that shaped Aldhelm's figurative understanding of the song of the virgins. It is clear from *De virginitate* and *Carmen de virginitate* that Aldhelm was familiar with stories of singing psychopomps, including the account in Gregory of Tours' miracles of St. Martin, in which Bishop Severin was found worthy of hearing the songs of the angels which conveyed the soul of the saint to heaven.<sup>121</sup> It would not have been much of a leap for Aldhelm to believe that the worthy, who could bear witness to the voices of psychopomps while they lived on earth, could also be auditors of the concerts of the elect in heaven.

Aldhelm does not name Augustine as his source in his discussion of the new song in *De virginitate* but does name him in as a source in chapter fifty-eight, at the end of his diatribe against the glamorisation and ornamentation of the body.<sup>122</sup> Twice, he cites Augustine's texts as they appear in Prosper of Aquitaine's *Epigrammata*.<sup>123</sup> The first quotation, from *De civitate Dei*, argues that the sanctity of the body is not lost, provided that the sanctity of the mind remains; a person who is raped does not give their consent to the sexual act, and therefore does not compromise their spiritual integrity. The locus of sin is in the will, not the body. It therefore seems odd that, earlier in the treatise, Aldhelm justifies suicide for the

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. (Ehwald, 235).

<sup>121</sup> Aldhelm, *Carmen de virginitate*, ll. 708-709, 118.

<sup>122</sup> Cramer, "Containing Virginité," 51-53.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.



purpose of preserving bodily virginity when it is under threat. Prior to his account of the confessor, Malchus, who was willing to perish by his own sword rather than consummate his marriage, Aldhelm explains that he who voluntarily separates himself from human society for the sake of preserving virginity, ‘shall rejoice triumphantly in the celestial society among the 144,000 singing the virginal song’ (apud CXLIII milia virginalis carmen canentia in caelesti contubernio gratulabitur gloriosus).<sup>124</sup> This passage may, on one hand, suggest that Aldhelm was unaware of inconsistencies, and drew on authorities to support his assertions or give doctrinal backing to an *exemplum* without considering how those references harmonised with other arguments in the treatise. Readers were not necessarily looking for consistency; readers probably approached *De virginitate* and the *Carmen* as anthologies, from they could select individual *exempla* and meditate upon them.<sup>125</sup> On the other hand, the passage could lead to the opposite conclusion – that Aldhelm was theologically consistent about the new song. If Aldhelm believed that Revelation 14:4 referred only to those who are virgins in mind *and* in body, then his comment prefacing the story of Malchus is justified. The chaste, who are virgins in mind but not in body, can only hear the new song. The select few, who have managed to preserve their bodily integrity, are celestial singers. If this reading is correct, it runs counter to Cramer’s argument. Aldhelm only emphasises spiritual chastity at certain moments. When discussing the new song, he adopts a rather more traditional position, placing bodily integrity over and above spiritual innocence.

While Aldhelm presents Malchus as a virgin-martyr at least in spirit, the majority of saints in this category are women.<sup>126</sup> This has given rise to discussion

<sup>124</sup> Aldhelm, *De virginitate* 31, 90 (Ehwald, 269).

<sup>125</sup> Lapidge, “Introduction to Aldhelm’s Prose *De virginitate*,” 58.

<sup>126</sup> Jerome’s original account states that Malchus was in fact saved from suicide by his wife, who assured him that the marriage would remain chaste. Jerome, *Vita Malchi* 6 (BHL 5190)

about the limitations of Aldhelm's conception of female sanctity.<sup>127</sup> There are several routes to heaven for the male saints of *De virginitate* and the *Carmen* – some are prophets, some apostles, and others are bishops, popes, abbots, Church Fathers, hermits and martyrs. The female saints in the collection only gain recognition for being martyrs and leaders of religious communities – a gender bias endemic in Aldhelm's source material.<sup>128</sup> Yet while fewer paths lay open to the women of Aldhelm's works, they walk directly behind the Lamb of God. The beginning of the section on female saints in the *Carmen de virginitate* subtly evokes Revelation 14:4, leading the perceptive reader to equate the saints under discussion with the 144,000 who follow Christ:

[Virgins] scorn in their hearts wicked delights of the world,  
[and] leave behind the foul joys of sinful displays so that they  
might follow with devout mind the Lord of Light, when the  
virgin(al) throng in close companies [virginea [...] catervis [...] turma] surrounds the Lamb in the ethereal height of the  
heavens.<sup>129</sup>

If the link between this passage and Revelation 14 seems somewhat tenuous, it becomes more secure when we read the lives of the female martyrs in the *Carmen*. Firstly, Agatha 'despising in her heart the vain riches of the world [...] as a dedicated young lady [...] followed Christ the Lord, at once leaving behind all the adornments of the secular life'.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, Eulalia 'despised [all] worldly displays alike so that, having utterly rejected all delights of treasure as a likeness of

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(PL 23: 0056B-0057B). In the *De virginitate*, Aldhelm omits this ending from his summary of Malchus' life in order to emphasise his act of spiritual martyrdom.

<sup>127</sup> See Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, 75-112, Pasternack, "The Sexual Practices of Virginité and Chastity," and Pettit, "Holiness and Masculinity," 8-23.

<sup>128</sup> Pettit, "Holiness and Masculinity," 13.

<sup>129</sup> Aldhelm, *Carmen*, ll. 1662-67, 139-140 (Ehwald, 422).

<sup>130</sup> Aldhelm, *Carmen*, ll. 1741-44, 141.

squalid filth, she might be free to follow Christ'.<sup>131</sup> Anastasia also 'rejected the despicable patrimony of her suitor and, despising the condition of marriage, she followed the Lord'.<sup>132</sup> The connection between the new song and the act of following the Lamb is made manifest at the end of the poem, where Aldhelm lists the categories or choirs of saints in the order of the litany. Virgins 'abandoned the foul joys of earthly flesh' and 'sing with ten times ten thousand songs and chant together four times eleven songs to Christ, all following the Lamb' (*decies denis modulantes milibus odis / Et quater undecies conclamant carmina Christo / Agnum sectantes*).<sup>133</sup> The women who reject the ties of marriage in the *Carmen* walk, figuratively or, rather, anagogically, in the wake of the Lamb. The *Carmen* therefore presents a gendered version of the *topos*, representing a departure from Revelation 14:4, in which the followers were identified as men. The metaphor of following the Lamb is more suited to the female, rather than the male, saints, as they actually perform the rejection of the world by denying their favour to earthly suitors.

Not only do the *Carmen*'s subjects perform the new song *topos*, but the *Carmen* is itself a performance of the *canticum novum*. As we have seen above, Aldhelm depicts the virginal choir as a group which 'sing[s] with ten times ten thousand songs and chant[s] together four times eleven songs to Christ'.<sup>134</sup> Rather than comprising 144,000 virgins, the choir is said to chant 144,000 songs. This poetic elaboration on Revelation 14 places emphasis on the nature of virginal song rather than its singers, which is highly appropriate given Aldhelm's attention to the song-like quality of the work. The *Carmen* opens with musical metaphors that draw the reader's attention to the differences between its verse hexameters and the prose *De virginitate*. At the end of *De virginitate*, Aldhelm promises his readers

<sup>131</sup> Aldhelm, *Carmen*, ll. 2013-15, 147.

<sup>132</sup> Aldhelm, *Carmen*, ll. 2216-17, 152.

<sup>133</sup> Aldhelm, *Carmen*, ll. 2893-97, 167 (Ehwald, 471).

<sup>134</sup> Aldhelm, *Carmen*, ll. 2895-97, 167.

another version of the work ‘in heroic measures of hexameter verse’.<sup>135</sup> At the beginning of the *Carmen*, he beseeches God that he ‘may be able to sing of the renowned work of saints of earlier days’ in ‘heroic songs’ (ut carmine possim / Inclita sanctorum modulari gesta priorum).<sup>136</sup> The hexameters of the *Carmen* are a ‘new verse’ (novo [...] versu) in which the ‘songs’ (carmina) of the saints are written.<sup>137</sup> Aldhelm describes the work as ‘new’ because it recounts the stories of the prose version in an altogether different style. The *Carmen* is also given the epithet ‘new’ on account of its subject matter. As a song of songs about the joys of virginity and a text of worship and devotion, the *Carmen* reflects, and contributes to, the heavenly harmonies of virgins.

#### 4.2: Bodily incorruption in Anglo-Latin hagiography

Even the minor details of Aldhelm’s prose and verse works on virginity give an indication of the depth and variety of traditions surrounding the special qualities of the virginal mind and body. Amidst a lengthy list of natural phenomena signifying the virginal and the married states nests the symbol of a peacock. Aldhelm first of all brings the reader’s attention to the creature’s appearance: just as dark-hued birds are not utterly scorned when they are compared to the bright-plumed peacock, so the married, when considered in relation to virgins, are less splendid but not without worth. The true symbolic value of the peacock lies not in its plume but in its flesh, which ‘cannot decay’; Aldhelm elaborates, ‘it is a sign and symbol of beloved Virginity, which by devout disposition is accustomed to tread down the wicked filth of the world, scorning the putrefaction of its flesh’.<sup>138</sup> The meaning is, of course, metaphorical – virgins reject the lust of the flesh in order to perfect life

<sup>135</sup> Aldhelm, *De virginitate* 60, 130-31.

<sup>136</sup> Aldhelm, Preface to *Carmen*, ll. 17-19, 103 (Ehwald, 353).

<sup>137</sup> Aldhelm, *Carmen*, l. 45, 104 (Ehwald, 354).

<sup>138</sup> Aldhelm, *Carmen*, ll. 231-35, 108. See also *De virginitate* 8, 66. In both instances, Aldhelm cites Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 21.4.

in the spirit – but other writers of the Anglo-Saxon period interpreted the incorruptibility of virginal flesh more literally.

In Bede's account of the life and death of Æthelthryth, the miraculous preservation of her body is a direct result of her sinless life. Æthelthryth (d. 679) is said to have maintained her virginity throughout two marriages.<sup>139</sup> Her first husband, Tondberht, died three years after they had been joined in wedlock, about 655. Her second husband, King Ecgrith, was married to her for twelve years, before he finally consented to her request to pursue a life of religious devotion in a monastery. She entered Coldingham in 671, and in the following year, she became abbess of her own foundation at Ely. There, according to Bede, 'she became the virgin mother of many virgins devoted to God' and lived an ascetic life, bathing rarely, often eating only one meal a day and praying uninterruptedly from Matins until dawn.<sup>140</sup> In 679, she died after a three day illness, during which she had suffered from pain caused by a large swelling on her neck – punishment, she thought, for wearing necklaces in her youth and thus indulging in vain display. Her sister, Seaxburh, became abbess following her death, and translated Æthelthryth's remains in 685. When the body was exhumed, the linen winding cloths appeared 'intact and new' and the wound caused by a physician's incision into the swelling had healed, leaving only the 'very slight trace of a scar'. The state of Æthelthryth's soul could be read in her flesh: 'the sign of the divine miracle, whereby the entombed flesh of the [...] woman was not able to decay, indicated that she remained uncorrupted by the contact of man'.<sup>141</sup> Æthelthryth's sexual status is particularly crucial to her sanctity and the preservation of her flesh. It is not so for Bede's male saints. In his version of the *Vita S. Cuthberti*, the body of the hermit is

<sup>139</sup> The following biographical details are derived from Pauline A. Thompson, "St Æthelthryth: The Making of History from Hagiography," in *Studies in English Language and Literature: Doubt Wisely: Papers in Honour of E.G. Stanley*, ed. M.J. Toswell and E.M. Taylor (London: Routledge, 1996), 478.

<sup>140</sup> Bede, *HE* 4.17.2, ed. Lapidge, 2:294.

<sup>141</sup> Bede, *HE* 4.17.1, 2:294.

found, ‘intact and whole, as if it were still alive’ eleven years after burial, but although the saint is pure and innocent (*nescia*) Bede does not imply that virginity *per se* was a particularly important factor contributing to the preservation of his flesh.<sup>142</sup> The *Historia ecclesiastica* records that the body of Fursey also did not decay, a testament to his intense ascetic deeds.<sup>143</sup> Uncorrupted flesh thus functions as a sign that the body has attained holiness through ascetic training, which includes sexual restraint but is not reducible to it. Why, then, does Bede equate Æthelthryth’s intact body with her virginity? He was clearly at pains to show that, despite being married twice, the saint remained a virgin. Hence, he also inserted an anecdote from bishop Wilfrid, Æthelthryth’s close spiritual advisor, which recounts how the King Ecgfrid offered him property and money if he could persuade the queen to consummate the marriage.

Incorrupt bodies of medieval saints – if they were indeed as well preserved as hagiographers declare – might have been preserved artificially by embalming techniques or naturally by the moisture levels in or the chemical composition of the soil in which they were buried.<sup>144</sup> Retrospective analysis of how the bodies of medieval saints survived the natural process of decay, however, is bound to be speculative. More relevant to this inquiry is how ideas surrounding these miracles took form. As with Cyprian’s notion of the angelic life of virgins, the idea of the incorruption of the virginal body arose in part from the interpretation of a biblical passage.<sup>145</sup> In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul compares the resurrected ‘spiritual’ body and the earthly, physical body. Verse forty-two is particularly significant: ‘[a]nd in the

<sup>142</sup> Bede, *Vita S. Cuthberti* 42, ed. and trans. Colgrave, 292-95.

<sup>143</sup> Bede, *HE* 3.19.9, ed. Lapidge, 2:112-14.

<sup>144</sup> Antonia Gransden, “The Alleged Incorruption of the Body of St Edmund, King and Martyr,” *The Antiquaries Journal* 74:1 (1994): 135-36.

<sup>145</sup> The assumption of the Virgin Mary was perhaps another source of inspiration. Bede was certainly familiar with the ‘Transitus B<sup>2</sup>’ text of the Apocryphal Gospels of Mary. See Mary Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, CUP, 1998), 102. Paschasius Radbertus, in his epistle, *Ad Paulam et Eustochium*, doubts the veracity of the Marian Apocrypha, and refuses to state categorically that Mary was resurrected in the body; he does not, however, deny it entirely (*PL* 30: 127B-128C).

resurrection of the dead, it is sewn in corruption and rises up in incorruption'. At the end of time, the dead will be given a new body – one that is pure; one that does not decay. The passage comes to be linked to sexual purity, and, crucially, the *topos* of the new song, in Gregory the Great's *Regulae pastoralis*. In a section advising the priest on how to admonish chaste people, Gregory exhorts his reader to give his spiritual charges an incentive to virtue by reminding them of the rewards that await them in heaven. One of these joys is the privilege of singing the new song. Gregory paraphrases Augustine's *De sancta virginitate*, reiterating that only virgins can sing the new song while the rest of the faithful can but hear it. He also adds a phrase inspired by 1 Corinthians 15:42:

To sing to the Lamb in this special way is to rejoice with him forever before all the faithful, *particularly with regard to the incorruptibility of the flesh*. Although the rest of the elect are able to hear the song, they are not able to say it, since out of love they rejoice for [virgins] in celestial joy, even though they cannot take up their reward [*italics mine*].

(Singulariter quippe canticum Agno cantare, est cum eo in perpetuum prae cunctis fidelibus *etiam de incorruptione carnis* gaudere. Quod tamen electi caeteri canticum audire possunt, licet dicere nequeant, quia per charitatem quidem in illorum celsitudine laeti sunt, quamvis ad eorum praemia non assurgant.)<sup>146</sup>

The incorruption of the flesh clearly pertains to the heavenly afterlife, but by including it within a discussion of the new song *topos*, Gregory forges a connection between virginity and the purity and integrity of the resurrected body. Bede was

<sup>146</sup> Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis* 28 (PL77: 106B).

certainly familiar with this reading: his exegesis of Revelation 14:3 in his commentary on the Apocalypse follows Gregory word for word.<sup>147</sup> It is also notable that Bede gives the next verse as, ‘they are virgins, who follow the Lamb wherever he goes,’ which omits the identification of virgins as those who are ‘not defiled by women’.<sup>148</sup> It is likely, therefore, that Bede imagined the group of elect virgins to be composed of both sexes. Could Bede’s exegesis on Revelation have influenced his portrayal of Æthelthryth? Bede’s belief that the intactness of the abbess’ flesh was a sign of her sexual purity might well have been shaped by his reading of Revelation 14, but this is difficult to prove, and it might equally have been suggested by one of Bede’s sources for the story (bishop Wilfrid or Cynefrid the physician). The verse portion of the life of Æthelthryth, an abecedarian poem, written in epanaleptic couplets, is more clearly indebted to a reading of the Apocalypse than the prose portion of her history.<sup>149</sup> While the prose portion of Æthelthryth’s life explores the sanctity of her body, the verse portion celebrates the life of her spirit. The poem ends with an acrostic of ‘AMEN,’ and the penultimate couplet presents Æthelthryth among the heavenly instrumentalists of the Apocalypse: ‘you sing new songs on the sweet-sounding harp / and you, a new bride, exult in the sweet-sounding hymn’ (*noua dulcisono modularis carmina plectro, / sponsa hymno exultas et noua dulcisono*).<sup>150</sup> The structure of the verse itself encapsulates the unending song: the two lines mirror one another, creating the

<sup>147</sup> Bede, *Expositio Apocalypseos* 2.23, ed. Roger Gryson, *CCSL* 121A (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 423. See footnote 690 in the translation by Faith Wallis, *Bede: Commentary on Revelation* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 208.

<sup>148</sup> Bede, *Expositio Apocalypseos* 23, 423-25

<sup>149</sup> The poem to Æthelthryth in chapter 18 (20) forms the second part of Bede’s *opus geminatum* on the saint. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 161.

<sup>150</sup> Bede, *HE* 4.18.3, 2:308.



impression of praise echoing back and forth or being sung by two alternating choirs.<sup>151</sup>

The idea of the incorrupt body as the earthly counterpart of the exulting virginal soul continues into the later Anglo-Saxon period. Abbo of Fleury's tenth-century *Passio S. Eadmundi* (BHL 2392) recounts the martyrdom of the King of the East Angles at the hands of Danish invaders and describes the miracles that occurred at first two sites of his burial – a makeshift shelter close by the scene of his death and a 'great church in marvellous wooden boards' in Beodricesworth (Bury St. Edmunds).<sup>152</sup> Despite the vicious and bloody nature of St. Edmund's death, his body remained 'without any sign of corruption'.<sup>153</sup> Abbo asserts that the flesh of the saint 'displays a certain glory of the resurrection' from which it is possible to deduce the sanctity of the martyr in life.<sup>154</sup> Edmund's sanctity rested on his status as a (royal) martyr *and* as a virgin. Abbo asserts that Edmund's virginity was a triumph over the 'immodest flesh' and the 'luxury of the world'. His position as king exposed him to these possible temptations, and yet he quashed secular desires, 'as the incorruptibility of his flesh reveals'. His restraint is as a kind of living martyrdom, and it thus functions as a precursor to his violent death.<sup>155</sup> While both virginity and martyrdom are essential to Abbo's construction of Edmund's sanctity, he links the incorruption of the body more closely to Edmund's sexual purity than to his martyrdom by claiming that the preservation of the flesh is the 'exceptional privilege granted to virginity'.<sup>156</sup> He alludes to patristic *exempla* of virgin-martyrs, 'who have served up until death, not lacking the harsh persecution of martyrdom,' but the primary importance of these stories, he implies, lies not in

<sup>151</sup> See Lapidge and Winterbottom, ed. and trans., *Early Lives of Dunstan*, 101, n. 286, where it is stated that epanaleptic verse can create the effect of 'alternate repetition'. Their analysis refers to B.'s *Vita S. Dunstani*, but it is also applicable here.

<sup>152</sup> Abbo of Fleury, *Passio S. Eadmundi* 13 in *Memorials of St. Edmunds Abbey*, ed. Thomas Arnold, 2 vols. (London: 1890), 1:82.

<sup>153</sup> Abbo, *Passio S. Eadmundi* 17, 86.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 86-87.

the defiance of the martyrs in the face of persecution, but in the lifelong preservation of their virginity.<sup>157</sup>

The freedom of the virginal soul to follow God is of crucial importance to Abbo, and is as much a sign of sanctity as the preservation of bodily remains. ‘Although his soul is in the glory of heaven,’ Abbo explains, ‘through daily and nightly visitation, it is not far from the body, with which it is worthy [to] flourish in the glory of blessed immortality’.<sup>158</sup> Edmund can visit the locus of his sanctity on earth – his body – but he is not chained to his tomb, ‘[f]or since he is secured in that eternal land which is a complete whole everywhere, he is able to have everything he desires’. As Jerome had asserted in the fourth century, the virgin saints are at liberty to roam across fields of heaven, following in the wake of the Lamb.

The final part of the *Passio* once again privileges virginity over martyrdom by stating that if Edmund’s servants cannot please him with the flower of chastity, they can at least subject themselves to mortification.<sup>159</sup> Abbo does not specify what practices he has in mind, but if virginity and martyrdom are extreme examples, it seems likely that he considered periods of abstinence and fasting more attainable. The text ends with an exhortation to the servants to implore Edmund, king and martyr, for his patronage. The privileges of virginity may not be available to everyone, but those who were thought to have reached the highest pinnacle of heavenly life could at least be relied upon for their intercession, providing that their presence on earth – in the form of incorrupt physical remains – was fittingly venerated. In her doctoral thesis of 2010, Rebecca Pinner set the *Passio* in the context of the tenth-century Benedictine reforms, and argued that, as a male virgin, Edmund could have functioned as a fitting role model for celibate monks at the

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 87

<sup>158</sup> Abbo, *Passio S. Eadmundi* 16, 86.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

community of Ramsey.<sup>160</sup> The final words of the text suggest, however, that Edmund was less a model of emulation than a patron, whose exceptional piety was, for many, unattainable, but whose intercessory services were highly sought after.

### 4.3: Psychopomps and single-sex choirs: Ælfric's *Saints' Lives* and *Homilies*

In other tenth-century texts, however, people further down the hierarchy of merit were granted the reward of heavenly song. The closing lines of Ælfric's verse *Life of Æthelthryth*, the 'unspotted virgin' (ungewemmed mæden), ring not with the voices of virgins, but of angels; a married couple, not the choir of 144,000, is the focus of the passage.<sup>161</sup> Ælfric's source for the last few lines of the verse was the *Historia monachorum*.<sup>162</sup> Among the many portrayals of ascetic life in the desert, Ælfric found the story of Paphnutius and his three spiritual equals. It was the second of the equals, the headman, who caught Ælfric's eye. This man renounced sexual contact with his wife after thirty years and three children, and, afterwards, he and his wife lived separately and distributed alms to the poor. Eventually, the man joined a monastery. Upon his death, the angels of the Lord (drihtnes englas) transported his soul to heaven 'with song' (mid sange). Ælfric introduces the story to illustrate that 'laymen [have] preserved often their chastity in the marriage-state, for the love of Christ'.<sup>163</sup>

Peter Jackson has argued that the *exemplum* of the layman and his wife acts as a counterbalance to the main text concerning Æthelthryth.<sup>164</sup> Ælfric was aware of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7: married couples were expected to have intercourse and only abstain by mutual consent for a short period of time (verse 5) and could not separate on the grounds that one of them was not a Christian (verses

<sup>160</sup> Pinner, "St Edmund, King and Martyr," (PhD diss.), 77.

<sup>161</sup> Ælfric, *LS* 20, ed. Skeat, 1:440-41.

<sup>162</sup> Peter Jackson, "Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage: A Reconsideration of the *Life of Æthelthryth*, lines 120-30," *Anglo-Saxon England* 29 (2000): 238-40.

<sup>163</sup> Ælfric, *LS* 20, 1:440-41.

<sup>164</sup> Jackson, "Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage," 238.

12-14). He was also familiar with Augustine's *De bono conjugali*, which states that married couples who abstain from sex 'by mutual consent' out of choice rather than necessity are praiseworthy.<sup>165</sup> In his *Life of Æthelthryth*, Ælfric makes reference to bishop Wilfrid's anecdote, which suggests that it was Æthelthryth's strong will rather than mutual consent that allowed her to remain pure.<sup>166</sup> Jackson concluded that Ælfric included the anecdote from the *Historia monachorum* for two reasons: '[f]irst, to reassert that the proper function of the laity – both men and women – is to marry, and that the true purpose of marriage is childbearing, not lifelong abstinence. Secondly, to affirm that any decision to renounce intercourse after procreation must be the free choice of both parties'.<sup>167</sup> A third reason may be added: Ælfric wanted to demonstrate that ordinary lay men and women, not just consecrated virgins, could attain heavenly rewards and participate in angelic joy. The anecdote from the *Historia monachorum*, as Jackson has pointed out, is only incidentally about chastity, so we can infer that it was probably not this detail that made it stand out from the other material in the *Vitas patrum*.<sup>168</sup> Ælfric probably noticed it because it ends with the flutter of wings and the sweet song of the angels, and indicates that even the lay person who cannot join the shining chorus of virgins can still enjoy a heavenly reward.

Despite the chaste layman's remarkable death, he occupies the lowest position in the hierarchy of merit. Ælfric asserts frequently and consistently that 'pious laymen' who live in 'lawful matrimony' can expect to bring forth the thirtyfold yield of fruit.<sup>169</sup> He outlines correct marital conduct most clearly in the

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 245 and 248.

<sup>166</sup> Ælfric, *LS* 20, 1:432-33.

<sup>167</sup> Jackson, "Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage," 257-58.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 240-41. Another reason why Ælfric may have included this *exemplum* is that it illustrates a more common scenario than the situation presented by the *Life of Æthelthryth*: he specifies, once in line 120 and once in line 132, that 'oft' lay men (and, in the second case, women) have dwelt in marital chastity. Æthelthryth, who remained a virgin against her second husband's will, is an exception.

<sup>169</sup> Jackson discusses the hierarchy of merit in Ælfric's works in "Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage," 241-44, though he mistakenly states that Ælfric mentions the

homily on Sexagesima Sunday (second series). A married couple, living by the scriptural institutes, should not have sex out of lust, but for the purpose of procreation. Accordingly, when the female partner is pregnant or menstruating, sexual relations should cease.<sup>170</sup> A couple should remain chaste after the female partner has passed childbearing age, but in *De doctrina apostolica*, Ælfric asserts that a husband may not leave his infertile wife for a fertile woman.<sup>171</sup> Widows, who have remained continent since their partner's death, yield the sixtyfold fruit, whilst virgins produce the topmost yield. Chastity (clænnyss) meant different things depending on the social and sexual status of its practitioners. For the laity, it meant having intercourse within marriage purely for the purposes of procreation; for the consecrated, it meant abstaining from sexual contact altogether. Furthermore, while priests 'of the common order' could enjoy wedlock, mass priests and deacons could not even cohabit with a woman.<sup>172</sup>

In the second series Sexagesima Sunday homily, Ælfric states that virginity is practised chiefly by 'God's male servants and female thegns' (godes ðeowum and ðinenum), those who are chaste from childhood.<sup>173</sup> Ælfric's emphasis on 'þeowdom,' holy servitude, is no doubt informed by the Gospel dictum that no man can serve two masters and St. Paul's assertion in 1 Corinthians 7 that the unmarried strive to please God, while a married person is concerned with the things of the world, including how to please his or her partner.<sup>174</sup> The servant of God obeys the

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hierarchy on only four occasions. Catherine Cubitt notes that he refers to the hierarchy of virgins, continent non-virgins and the chaste married 'no less than ten times in his writings' in "Virginity and Misogyny in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England," *Gender & History*, 12:1 (2000): 20.

<sup>170</sup> Ælfric, *CH* 2.6, ed. Godden, 56.

<sup>171</sup> Ælfric, *De doctrina apostolica*, ed. Pope, 628.

<sup>172</sup> Ælfric, *CH* 2.6, 56-57.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. Hugh Magennis has shown that Ælfric avoids using the feminine forms of 'þeow' to designate female followers or servants of God and, instead, only uses the feminine form of 'þegn' ('þinen'), which has positive connotations of attending to a king. See "Godes þeow and Related Expressions in Old English: Contexts and Uses of a Traditional Literary Figure," *Anglia* 116:2 (1998): 165-68.

<sup>174</sup> Matt 6:24, Lk 16:13 and 1 Cor 7:33-34. Ælfric translates this part of Paul's letter in *De doctrina apostolica*, 626.

apostolic imperative to leave all that s/he has in order to follow God – an idea also conveyed by Revelation 14:4. In his first series homily on the Nativity of Paul the Apostle, Ælfric argues that those who have left their family will receive a hundredfold reward on Judgement Day. This, he continues, is especially applicable to monks, who have left fleshly fathers and brothers for a spiritual family and who have forsaken worldly property to hold things in common. Along with the apostles, they will judge the rest of humanity with Christ.<sup>175</sup> If Ælfric did have an uneasy relationship with Æthelthryth because she devoted herself to God rather than living in ‘rihtum sinscipe’ with either of her spouses, it would appear that he did not have quite the same reservation about ‘munuc-hades m[enn]’ who make a similar sacrifice. One of Ælfric’s sources for the sermon, Bede’s homily 1.13, offers Benedict Biscop as an eminent example of a man who abandoned his wife to enter a religious life, preferring to be among the 144,000 virgins, ‘who sing the new song before the throne of the Lamb’.<sup>176</sup> While Ælfric does not refer to the new song in this homily, he nevertheless writes in the same spirit as Bede: male chastity and dedication will be rewarded with admittance to an exclusive heavenly group and the hundredfold reward.

While Ælfric often excludes women from his discussions of monastic life, he is not indifferent to female spirituality, and takes meticulous care in defining the place, constitution and activity of choirs of female virgins in heaven.<sup>177</sup> They are a group distinct from male virgins on account of their sex rather than the nature of their sanctity. In his first series homily on All Saints, Ælfric distinguishes between

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<sup>175</sup> Ælfric, *CH* 1.27, 407.

<sup>176</sup> Godden, *Introduction, Commentary, and Glossary*, 228.

<sup>177</sup> Cubitt, “Virginité and Misogyny,” is correct in claiming that Ælfric does not satisfactorily explore female monasticism in his writings, but she is mistaken in assuming that the closing lines of the *Life of Æthelthryth* demonstrate ‘his lack of interest in the religious life of women’ (p. 14). As Jackson has argued, Ælfric mentions the good deeds of the headman’s wife, who does not receive the same degree of attention in his source material (Jackson, “Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage,” 258-59). Furthermore, while Ælfric may not have much to say about female virginity in its institutional context, he is certainly interested in the heavenly lives of female virgins.

the different categories of heavenly citizens: he begins with the angels, and goes on to list patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, anchorites and, finally, Mary and those who follow her.<sup>178</sup> The *heap* which walks behind Mary comprises ‘mæigðhades manna’ who have remained in ‘clænnysse’ because of Mary’s example.<sup>179</sup> In his commentary on the homily, Malcolm Godden has suggested that the preceding groups of souls are exclusively male, whilst the virgins who follow Mary are all female.<sup>180</sup> He provides three pieces of evidence in support of this suggestion. Firstly, Mary is mentioned last of all, ‘endebyrdlice æfter wifhade,’ which Godden translates as ‘in order according to her female gender’. While Ælfric asserts that she is of a higher spiritual status even than angels, her sex determines her subordinate position in the hierarchy, implying that the groups that come before her are all male. Secondly, Ælfric’s source for this part of the text specifies that the heavenly crowd following Mary is ‘utriusque sexus’. This is a phrase we have seen in Paschasius’ Pseudo-Jeromian epistle to Eustochium and Paula, in which it indicates choirs of men and women.<sup>181</sup> Although Ælfric preserved and even elaborated on this detail when he translated this part of Paschasius’ letter in his sermon on Mary’s Assumption, he omits any mention of ‘utriusque sexus’ in the present homily on All Saints, indicating that he imagined Mary’s chorus as a single sex group. Thirdly, he includes virgin-martyrs within the group of virgins, which distinguishes them, probably by gender, from the martyrs mentioned earlier. This arrangement chimes with Ælfric’s verse composition on the Memory of the Saints, which features a long list of male saints of all kinds, followed by only one category of ‘pure maidens who served Christ / in spiritual service, for their Lord’s love’

<sup>178</sup> Ælfric, *CH* 1.36, 486-96.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 490.

<sup>180</sup> Godden, *Introduction, Commentary, and Glossary*, 303.

<sup>181</sup> See chapter 2, section 4.1

(clæne mædenu þe criste þeowodon / on gastlicre drohtnunge for heora drihtnes lufan).<sup>182</sup>

In Ælfric's homilies, groups of psychopomps, composed of the souls of righteous men and women or angels (as in the case of the headman), appear to the laity. In his *Lives of Saints*, though, Ælfric consistently portrays heavenly choirs of saints as single-sex groups, perhaps to signify their pure and exalted status. His male saints are modelled after the 144,000 virgins of Revelation 14:4. In the Life of St. Eugenia, Protus and Iacintus are depicted as 'martyrs [who] were never, throughout their lives, / defiled with women' (Ðas martyras næron næfre on life / þurh wif besmytene).<sup>183</sup> Likewise, St. Julian is 'counted among the unsullied saints / that never in their lives were polluted with women' (he bið soðlice geteald to þam unbesmitenum halgum / þe næran on heora life besmitene mid wifum).<sup>184</sup> Julian and his equally pure wife, Basilissa, are visited on their wedding night by two gendered choirs: Christ 'with a shining host' (mid scinendum werode) and Mary 'with her virgin train' (mid hyre mædenlicum hæpe).<sup>185</sup> The married virgins are bidden to read a prophecy of their lives from a heavenly book. Julian, as stated above, finds that he will be counted among the undefiled saints, while Basilissa discovers that 'she shall be counted among the number of virgins / who follow Mary' (Basilissa bið geteald to þæra mædena getæle / þe marian folgiað þæs hælendes meder).<sup>186</sup> The other female saints in Ælfric's *Lives* are granted the same reward. St. Eugenia appears to her mother in a vision 'with the heavenly host' (mid ðam heofonlicum werode).<sup>187</sup> In case we were in doubt as to the sex of the 'host,' Eugenia tells her mother that she will join the group while her father has been

<sup>182</sup> Ælfric, *LS* 16, 1:350-51.

<sup>183</sup> Ælfric, *LS* 2, 1:46-47.

<sup>184</sup> Ælfric *LS* 4, 1:94-95.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 92-93.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ælfric *LS* 2, 1:48-49.



placed among the patriarchs.<sup>188</sup> St. Agnes also appears in a vision to her parents among a large crowd of (heavenly) virgins (mycel mædenlic werod).<sup>189</sup>

It is striking that, in all of the examples above, neither the choirs of male virgins nor the groups of female virgins are associated with the new song. Indeed, throughout the *Lives of Saints*, there are only a handful of instances in which groups of heavenly worshippers are shown to perform celestial songs of praise. In the Life of St. Agnes, the young virgin tells her earthly suitor that, '[Christ's] maidens sing to me with melodious voices' ([Cristes] mædenu me singað mid geswegum stemnum) though there is no musical dimension to her parents' vision of the 'mædenlic werod'.<sup>190</sup> St. Cecilia, who later became the patron saint of music, sings an antiphon between the songs and celebrations of her wedding feast. Her steady performance of the antiphon throughout the feast anticipates the continual singing of the heavenly hosts, and allows her to join in angelic praises even in the unholy environment of the banqueting hall.<sup>191</sup> The Life of St. Eugenia conveys a similar idea – the female saint arrives at a place where Christians sing day and night; their community functions as a kind of camp or satellite of the host on earth.<sup>192</sup> Moreover, the psalm-singing of male martyrs in the *Lives of Saints* acts as a symbol of their endurance and transcendence of bodily pain.<sup>193</sup> The most notable example of this is in the story of the Forty Soldiers, who become a unified choir over the course of the narrative: their mode of communication shifts from speech to song; by about the mid-point of the narrative, they are able to sing to God 'as if with one voice' (swylce of anum muðe).<sup>194</sup> These depictions of continuous and unified song are indicative of the angelic nature of the saints, but in none of these

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid. 50-51.

<sup>189</sup> Ælfric, *LS* 7, 1:184-85.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 172-73.

<sup>191</sup> Ælfric, *LS* 34, 2:356-57.

<sup>192</sup> Ælfric, *LS* 2, 1:26-29.

<sup>193</sup> Ælfric *LS* 5, 1:142-43, and *LS* 11, 244-47 and 252-55.

<sup>194</sup> Ælfric *LS* 11, 1:248-49.

examples are the groups are said to sing the song of the 144,000. Does Ælfric, then, make use of the new song *topos* at all?

#### 4.4: The Holy Innocents

Ælfric's first series homily on the Nativity of the Innocents ends with a passage alluding to Revelation 14:4. The Holy Innocents 'are they who follow Christ in white robes wherever he goes; they stand before his throne without blemish, having palm leaves in their hands and singing the new song of praise to the Almighty in his honour' (hi sind þa ðe criste folgjað on hwitum gyrlum swa hwider swa he gæð 7 hi standa ætforan his þrymsetle buton ælcere gewemmednysse hæbbede heora palmtwigu on handa 7 singað ðone niwan lofsang þam ælmihtigum to wurðmynte).<sup>195</sup> The detail of the 'palmtwigu' derives from the portrait of the worshipping martyrs in Revelation 7.<sup>196</sup> Bede refers to this verse in his homily on the Innocents, but does not place it in the context of Revelation 14:4 – this appears at first sight to be Ælfric's own contribution.<sup>197</sup> Paul A. Hayward has suggested that Bede's homily provides an indication that chapter seven of the Apocalypse, not chapter fourteen, was the epistle of the day in Northumbria in the early eighth century.<sup>198</sup> Indeed, Hayward argues that 'it is virtually unknown for sermons to quote [Rev 14:1-5] before the eighth century'.<sup>199</sup> One sermon, found in the eighth-century MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 6233, presents the Holy Innocents as martyrs, who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb *and* members of the choir of virgins who follow the Lamb wherever he goes 'and sing

<sup>195</sup> Ælfric, *CH* 1.5, 223.

<sup>196</sup> Godden, *Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, 45.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. See Bede, *Opera homiletica*, 1.10, 71.

<sup>198</sup> Paul Antony Hayward, "Suffering and Innocence in Latin Sermons for the Feast of the Holy Innocents, c. 400-800," in *The Church and Childhood: Papers read at the 1993 Summer Meeting and the 1994 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 79. The argument of the latter part article is derived from Hayward's PhD thesis, "The Idea of Innocent Martyrdom in Medieval England. Ca 700 to 1150 AD" (University of Cambridge, 1994), 37-39.

<sup>199</sup> Hayward, "Suffering and Innocence," 79.

the new song that no one is able to sing who has been defiled with women'.<sup>200</sup> The sermon provided material for an insular homily which has been found in an eleventh-century homiliary from Bury St. Edmunds (now Cambridge, Pembroke College MS 25).<sup>201</sup> Among the details transmitted from the Munich MS is the characteristic combination of Revelation 7:14 and the new song *topos*.<sup>202</sup> This particular permutation of the new song *topos* was therefore known in England by the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, though it is questionable if Ælfric had direct access to a manuscript that contained a sermon including this *topos* or whether he simply absorbed it while he attended church services.

Ælfric draws a firm distinction between the innocence of the slaughtered children, who are the only figures in his homilies who are said to sing the new song, and other virginal men and women, who, as we have seen, form separate heavenly choirs but do not chant the *canticum novum*. He therefore associates the new song not only with chastity, but with a special kind of purity.<sup>203</sup> Yet this strict compartmentalisation did not appear to be influential, and later writers continued to depict full grown virgins as singers in the choir of the elect whilst also including the innocents among the followers of the Lamb. The different significations of the new song and of bodily purity, did, however, give rise to a more nuanced portrayal of the virtues and rewards of the virgin.

Let us end with two examples from the writings of Goscelin of Saint-Bertin.<sup>204</sup> *De miraculis S. Eadmundi* (c. 1100) features a female recluse, Seitha,

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 77. See J.E. Cross' discussion and edition of the homily: "Insular Connections of a Sermon for Holy Innocents," in *Medieval Literature and Antiquities: Studies in Honour of Basil Cottle*, ed. Myra Stokes and T.L. Burton (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 57-70.

<sup>202</sup> Cross, "Insular Connections," 66 and 70.

<sup>203</sup> Hayward, "Suffering and Innocence," argues that the sermon contained within Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS clm 6233, represents the 'medieval' view of the Holy Innocents as deserving of a special honour because they are exceptionally pure and virtuous, and innocent of any kind of sexual act (pp. 77-78).

<sup>204</sup> The number of works attributed to this prolific hagiographer is steadily increasing. For an overview, see Rosalind C. Love, "Goscelin of Saint-Bertin," in *The Blackwell*

who was permitted by Abbot Baldwin to live close by the community of monks at Bury St. Edmunds in the 1090s.<sup>205</sup> According to Goscelin, Seitha came from a noble background, but declined offers of marriage because she aspired towards a higher form of love:

[A]bandoning every hope of worldly advance, [she] sought the heavenly bridegroom, the angels and the groom's train, the nuptial song, and that new song of the followers of the lamb [nouam illam agni sequacium melodiam], that God might grant her what He promised the eunuchs in Isaiah, who had evidently castrated themselves for love of the heavenly kingdom: that is, 'a place in His house and within His walls, and a name better than sons and daughters: an everlasting name that shall not perish'.<sup>206</sup>

Seitha is cast in the same mould as the female saints of Goscelin's earlier hagiographical work. His *Vita* of St. Edith of Wilton is one long epithalamium combining the new song *topos* with the symbolism of the *canticum canticorum*. The young saint is both bride of Christ and a member of his elect, virginal choir.<sup>207</sup> The *Miracula* of Æthelthryth of Ely (*BHL* 2638), possibly composed by Goscelin in 1087 or 1088, describes how the virgin is brought into the intimacy of God's

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*Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael Lapidge, *et al* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 213, and Michael Lapidge and Rosalind Love, "England and Wales (600-1550)," in *Hagiographies: histoire internationale de la littérature hagiographique latine et vernaculaire, en Occident, des origines à 1500*, ed. G. Philippart, 6 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 3:225-33.

<sup>205</sup> Goscelin, *De miraculis S. Eadmundi Regis et Martyris* 2.5, ed. and trans. Tom Licence, *Miracles of St Edmund: Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2014), 274-299. For more information on Seitha, see Elisabeth van Houts, "The Women of Bury St Edmunds," in *Bury St Edmunds and the Norman Conquest*, ed. Tom Licence (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), 64-69, and Tom Licence, *Hermits and Recluses in English Society: 950-1200* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 83.

<sup>206</sup> Goscelin, *De miraculis S. Eadmundi* 2.5, 274-75.

<sup>207</sup> Goscelin, *Vita S. Edithae*, trans. Wright and Loncar. The following chapters in the *Vita* depict Edith as a virgin bride: 3 (p. 27), 5 (p. 29), 23 (pp. 55-56), and poems 1 (p. 30) and 9 (pp. 59-60). Edith is presented as a member of the heavenly choir of virgins in chapters 8 (p. 33), 11 (p. 38), 16 (p. 47), and in poem 2 (pp. 36-37).

bridal chamber, ‘where with one hundred and forty-four thousand virgins in the sweetest chanting of harmonious melody she sings an ever new song’ (ubi cum centum quadraginta quattuor milibus uirginum dulcissimis consone melodie concentibus nouum semper modulator canticum).<sup>208</sup> Goscelin’s portrait of Seitha is not so idealised – he recorded the history of a flesh-and-blood virgin rather than crafting a hagiography of a virginal ideal. Her path to the anchoritic life had not been a smooth one: she had been refused entry to monasteries of virgins all around the country, and, over the course of her first-person narrative, she admits to falling asleep during vigils and kissing one of Edmund’s contact relics which the monk Herman had illicitly put on public display.

Yet Seitha possesses the qualities of innocence and humility shared by all heavenly virgins. She approaches the relics of Edmund, so ostentatiously displayed by Herman, with ‘clean hands and a pure heart’ (innocens manibus et mundo corde).<sup>209</sup> By contrast, the sacrist at the abbey, Toli, tests the freshness of the body of St. Edmund by pinching his flesh with “‘unclean and unworthy [hands]”’ (“impuris et indignis manibus”), and he falls to his death from the roof of the abbey on account of his misdeeds.<sup>210</sup> Following one of Herman’s showings of the blood-stained garments of St. Edmund, Toli appears in a vision to his earthly companion, Edwin, who presumably took part in the spectacle. The ghostly form of Toli chides him, accusing him of possessing a blind heart (ceca precordia) for failing to realise his transgression. Goscelin’s metaphors of Seitha’s bodily and spiritual cleanness are allusions to Psalm 24:3-4: ‘[w]ho shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart’. As Tom Licence has noted in his edition of *De miraculis S. Eadmundi*, Goscelin alludes to

<sup>208</sup> Goscelin (?), *Miracula S. Ætheldrethe virginis*, ed. and trans. Love, *Female Saints of Ely*, 102-103. For the manuscript context of this work and a discussion of its authorship, see lix-lxxi, esp. p. lxxv.

<sup>209</sup> Goscelin, *De miraculis S. Eadmundi* 2.5, 290-91. See also Tom Licence, “The Cult of St Edmund,” in *Bury St Edmunds and the Norman Conquest*, 121.

<sup>210</sup> Goscelin, *De miraculis S. Eadmundi*, 2.5, 280-81.

the same verse in a passage on the virginal pursuit of the heavenly bridegroom in the *Vita S. Edithae*.<sup>211</sup> A related image of the humble devotee of Christ ascending a mountain to the heavenly city of Jerusalem also appears throughout Goscelin's *Liber confortatorius*, which is addressed to the consecrated virgin, Eve of Wilton. The last book of the text imagines Eve celebrating among the crowd of virgins in that heavenly city, singing the new song and the marriage hymn of St. Edith, the bride of Christ.<sup>212</sup> For Goscelin, then, the new song of the virgins was an expression and a culmination of the moral qualities of purity and humility.

Another highly lauded virgin bride was St. Mildreth, whose body was found incorrupt in her sepulchre at Minster-in-Thamet and translated to Canterbury by Abbot Ælfstan in 1030.<sup>213</sup> After many years lying neglected in the abbey of St. Augustine (in the Anglo-Saxon church of SS Peter, Paul and Augustine), her body was translated along with a host of other saints into the newly built Eastern apse of the abbey in 1091, and was laid to rest in the altar of the Holy Innocents on the North side.<sup>214</sup> Her translation is mentioned in one of the hagiographies Goscelin wrote in the 1090s to commemorate the occasion: the *Translatio S. Augustini et sociorum eius* (1098) (*BHL* 0781).<sup>215</sup> In death, Goscelin's Mildreth is both a bride of Christ and a mother to the Holy Innocents:

<sup>211</sup> Goscelin, *De miraculis S. Eadmundi*, 290, n. 412, and *Vita S. Edithae* 8, trans. Wright and Loncar, 33.

<sup>212</sup> Goscelin, *Liber confortatorius* 4.115, trans. W.R. Barnes and Rebecca Hayward in *Writing the Wilton Women*, 204.

<sup>213</sup> Goscelin, *Translatio S. Mildrethae*, ed. D.W. Rollason, *Mediaeval Studies* 48 (1986): 139-210.

<sup>214</sup> See Richard Sharpe, "The Setting of St Augustine's Translation, 1091," in *Canterbury and the Norman Conquest: Churches, Saints and Scholars, 1066-1109*, ed. R. G. Eales and Richard Sharpe (London; Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1995), 1-13, and "Goscelin's St Augustine and St Mildrith: Hagiography and Liturgy in Context," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 41 (1990): 502-16.

<sup>215</sup> Goscelin, *Historia translationis S. Augustini*, ed. D. Papebroch, *Acta SS.* May VI, 26 (411D-443E). The title in the London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian B.xx is given as *De translatione [Augustini] et sociorum eius libri duo*. In main body of the thesis, I will refer to this text as *Translatio S. Augustini et sociorum eius*.

Mildreth blooms in the altar of the Holy Innocents, all of whom she cherishes in her virginal womb, and with them she plays the cithara and sings the new song to her spouse and the Lamb, following him wherever he shall go.

Mildreda altari praeinitet Sanctorum Innocentium, quos omnes virginali fovet gremio, et cum eis citharizat et cantat canticum novum Sponso suo et Agno, illum quocumque ierit pariter sequendo.<sup>216</sup>

This rich image packs together Biblical, liturgical and architectural elements. Mildreth is reminiscent of the patriarch Abraham, who holds the souls of the righteous in his Bosom (*gremium* can mean ‘womb’ or ‘bosom’) and the virginal matriarch, Mary, who leads a choir of virgins. The new songs of the Innocents and the virgins are simultaneously invoked, and the tomb is at once the altar of Revelation 6:9-11 that shelters the souls of martyrs and a place where the bride and the groom join together in matrimony. It would be naïve to suppose that this image represents the culmination of the new song tradition, but it represents a stage in the history of thought about the new song in which the ideas of times past, distinct as they are, have converged into a pleasing and complex formation.

## 5: Conclusion

The new song *topos* was one of many tools with which writers constructed models of sanctity. If the writer of the Apocalypse of St. John believed virgins to be the most exalted of all holy souls, they were considered less important by some pre-Nicene Christian writers, who regarded virginity as second best to martyrdom. The new song, therefore, was not such a prevalent metaphor until the fourth century, when virgins started to produce the topmost yield in the garden of the Church. At

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<sup>216</sup> Goscelin, *Historia translationis S. Augustini* 3.24, *Acta SS.* (419B).

this time of new developments in female asceticism, the Marian motif came to be invoked along with the new song in patristic writings. These texts continued to be relevant and influential in the Anglo-Saxon period, and even Aldhelm, who attempted to make his source material appropriate for his readership of chaste nuns, clung to the traditional idea that only those who were not defiled in body could sing the new song. The profile of the new song *topos* did change in the Middle Ages, however, thanks to saints' cults, through which it came to be associated with bodily incorruptibility, and the liturgy, in which it was linked to the innocence of martyred children. The association between the Holy Innocents and the choir of virgins was not a new development of the Anglo-Saxon period; as we saw in chapter one, virgins and children share a space in heaven in the late antique *Visio s Pauli*. Nevertheless, evidence of the Holy Innocents singing the new song of the virgins appears in England for the first time in the eighth century.

The new song is gendered in Revelation 14, where it is associated exclusively with male virginity. The introduction of the Marian motif in the fourth century opened up new possibilities for depicting all-female choirs of virgins. Male and female choirs appear in the writings of Jerome, although only the former sing the new song in letter twenty-two. Ælfric segregates male and female virgins in his *Saints' Lives*, but neither of the choirs performs the song of salvation. Two texts discussed in this chapter suggest that the new song was coming to be associated with female spirituality by the late seventh century, however. Aldhelm weaves the language of the new song *topos* through the *Vitae* and *Passiones* of female virgins in the second part of the *Carmen de virginitate*. In the *Historia ecclesiastica*, Bede envisages Æthelthryth playing the new song amongst a virgin choir. Furthermore, a letter from Alcuin to Æthelburga, written in the last decade of the eighth century, states that the reward for virginity is to follow the Lamb and join choirs of



angels.<sup>217</sup> In the late eleventh century, Goscelin used the new song as a symbol of female purity. The *Vita Ædwardi Regis* (BHL 2421), dating from 1065-67 and possibly written by Folcard of Saint-Bertin, contains a poem which envisages the Church of Wilton as a virgin mother; her progeny do not cry, but extol her fame throughout the world ‘singing clear angelic odes or with / The harp [cithara]’ (quibus angelicas clare modulantibus odas / uel pulsu cithara).<sup>218</sup> The passage strongly recalls Bede’s metrical description of Æthelthryth’s epithalamium. It is perhaps also an oblique reference to the childless marriage of King Edward and Queen Edith, the latter of whom had been raised at Wilton and funded the rebuilding project.<sup>219</sup>

What factors changed the new song from an image of masculine virginity to one of female virtue? The Fathers seem to have introduced the Marian motif to honour their female readership. Verse four of Revelation 14 lent itself to Aldhelm’s stories of virgins who renounced the world and followed Christ, and Aldhelm was also influenced by the metaphors of female spirituality in his patristic sources. For Bede, Gregory the Great’s *Regula pastoralis* might have triggered an association between the new song, virginity, and the incorruptibility of the flesh. A combination of these sources and the invocation of all-female choirs in the litany of the saints could have shaped later material. There is no single explanation for the shift, but the interpretation of patristic material by Anglo-Saxon writers certainly contributed to the formation of later ideas about a new song that rang out in female voices.

The musical nature of the new song also varied over time. Augustine was the first writer to convey that the new song, like any other piece of music, could be

<sup>217</sup> Alcuin, *Epistola* 36, ed. Dümmmler in *MGH* 4, *Epistolae Karolini aevi* 2, 78.

<sup>218</sup> Folcard of Saint-Bertin (?), *Vita Ædwardi Regis* 1.6, ed. and trans. Frank Barlow, *The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 74-5. For a discussion of the authorship, see “Introduction,” xliv-liv.

<sup>219</sup> Barlow, “Introduction,” lxxvii.

heard and could elicit an emotional response. He also highlighted the importance of the virgins' capacity to *sing* the new song, rather than their capacity to *learn* it; performance, not knowledge, came to be of primary importance. The verse works of Bede and Aldhelm convey some of the new song's musicality and even perform the sweetness of the virginal life. Aldhelm's *Carmen* is a new song itself, while Bede's melodious poem to Æthelthryth pictures her among the harpers of the Apocalypse and captures a sense of the continuity of her praise in its structure. When Revelation 14:4 became the standard epistle for the Feast of the Holy Innocents, the new song also became part of a wider performance of praise that included the married persons of the congregation.

The chapter has shown that innovations in what is ultimately a rather conservative *topos* occurred under several conditions. The Marian motif came about in response to a changing social and religious environment, one in which women were increasingly choosing a life of chastity. The male-orientated new song *topos* did not provide an incentive for maintaining the demanding ascetic lifestyle, and so a new model, with the Virgin Mary at its centre, was created. Choirs of widows and the married, and Augustine's emphasis on the acoustics of the new song, ran counter to the discourse of the inferiority of non-virgins that could be perceived in the work of Hieracas and even Jerome. The latter also created a new motif, derived in part from Revelation 14, for use in letters commemorating the lives of those who had not preserved their virginity. In early medieval works, a cause of change in the *topos* itself was the cross-pollination of ideas between ascetic, liturgical and pastoral texts. Finally, the *topos* developed a more musical character when it was re-written in hexameters and thus contributed to the melodic tone and form of the metrical work. It is notable that while the last two factors contributed to subtle changes in the expression of the new song *topos* itself, the first factor – social and religious change – resulted in the creation of supplementary

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choirs with their own sonic features. When the new song no longer reflected the cultural mood, it was not disregarded, but used as a model for newer constructions.

## Chapter 4:

### Heavenly choirs in their monastic context, c. 990-1116

#### 1: Introduction

The first chapter of this thesis ended with a brief exploration of the belief that angels attended the liturgical services of human worshippers. The Benedictine precept, '[l]et us consider how to behave in the sight of God and his angels,' was understood not only as an assertion that angels watched the practices of monks from afar, but as an indication that heavenly citizens descended into the cloisters to observe monastic praise.<sup>1</sup> The present chapter examines the increasing intimacy between celestial spirits and monks in a body of material written between the late tenth and early twelfth centuries. In doing so, it illustrates the development of one permutation of the new song *topos* – the Marian motif.

In the late Anglo-Saxon period, there was an intensification of interest in the idea that the monastic Office functioned as a link between worshipping communities on earth and in heaven. This change has been fairly well documented by several scholars including Megan McLaughlin, who proposed that writers developed the concept of the monastic *vita angelica* in the late tenth and eleventh centuries to convey the supreme intercessory powers of monks.<sup>2</sup> Through masses, Offices and prayers, 'a door was opened between this world and the next' and 'in many monastic texts, the monks and the angels join in the same prayer'.<sup>3</sup> Research on texts from the age of the English Benedictine reform has given rise to similar conclusions. Susan Millinger's article, "Liturgical devotion in the *Vita Oswaldi*," suggested that the double purpose of liturgical devotion was 'to praise God on

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<sup>1</sup> Chamberlin, ed., *The Rule of St. Benedict* 19, 39.

<sup>2</sup> Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 228.

<sup>3</sup> McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, 229.

earth, and in so doing, to strive to join the choirs of the blessed in heaven'.<sup>4</sup> The iconography of the late tenth century has been interpreted in a strikingly similar manner. In his analysis of the Benedictional of St. Æthelwold (London, British Library MS Add. 49598), Robert Deshman stated that Æthelwold and the monks of Old Minster, Winchester, might have interpreted the iconography of heavenly choirs in the Benedictional in terms of their own monastic regime. 'Leading the *vita angelica* on earth,' he wrote, 'monks continually chanted the Divine Office so that they could imitate and join the angels' celestial song'.<sup>5</sup> Thus far, therefore, scholars have commented on the simultaneity of angelic praise and the Divine Office, and viewed monastic chant as essentially aspirational, a means by which living souls could secure their place in a celestial choir. While this understanding highlights the spiritual significance of sacred song, it leads to a rather general characterisation of the relationship between heavenly and earthly choirs. Hagiographical sources provide a much more nuanced picture of how the links between monastic and supernal singers were forged than scholars of the late Anglo-Saxon period have previously acknowledged. This chapter offers a contribution to the body of criticism outlined above by tracing changes in ideas about heavenly choirs within the hagiographical tradition of a single saint: Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury (d. 988).

The date range for the chapter encompasses two turning points in English religious history: the Benedictine reform of the late tenth century, and the

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<sup>4</sup> Susan P. Millinger, "Liturgical Devotion in the *Vita Oswaldi*," in *Saints, Scholars and Heroes: Studies in Medieval Culture in honour of Charles W. Jones*, ed. Margot H. King and Wesley M. Stevens, 2 vols. (Collegeville: Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, Saint John's Abbey and University, 1979), 2:247.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Deshman, *Benedictional of Æthelwold*, 175-76. The Benedictional has attracted the attention of art historians on account of its twenty-eight full page miniatures, five of which depict heavenly choirs. Deshman has convincingly argued that the choirs reflect the hierarchy of saints in the Anglo-Saxon litany and that the groupings of saints recall Last Judgement scenes in Byzantine art. By pleading for their intercession, the user of the Benedictional gains the patronage of the saints who will act as judges on Doomsday. 'Thus the prefatory cycle of the saints [...] portrays not only the final reward that the manuscript's benedictions held out to Æthelwold and his flock but also a means of achieving that blessed end'. (Deshman, *Benedictional of Æthelwold*, p. 150).

‘hagiographic revival’ of the late eleventh century.<sup>6</sup> During these times, local saints’ cults flourished and the production of hagiographical texts rose sharply. Among the Lives produced in the late tenth century were the *Vitae* of the three principal ecclesiastical agents of the Benedictine reform: Æthelwold (d. 984), who was venerated in a hagiography by Wulfstan of Winchester in the late 990s; Oswald (d. 992), whose Life was written by Byrhtferth of Ramsey between 997 and 1002; and Dunstan, the subject of a late tenth-century Life by an Anglo-Flemish cleric known as ‘B.’ and a set of lections composed by Adelard of Ghent between 1006 and 1012. B.’s *Vita S. Dunstani* is of particular relevance to this thesis, as it contains an abundance of visions or, rather, auditions, of choirs of heavenly spirits. Dunstan’s ability to hear and comprehend the music of the life beyond became a stable feature of his hagiographical tradition. A *Vita* of Dunstan with an appended miracle collection was produced in the second half of the eleventh century by Osbern, *precentor* at Canterbury’s cathedral priory, Christ Church.<sup>7</sup> Eadmer, who succeeded Osbern as master of the liturgy and library at Christ Church, used Osbern’s texts as a source for his *Vita et miracula S. Dunstani* in the very early twelfth century.<sup>8</sup> Their works elaborated upon earlier accounts of Dunstan as a gifted musician and intermediary between choirs above and below. Goscelin of Saint-Bertin also made reference to Dunstan’s encounters with heavenly choirs in his *Translatio S. Augustini*. As noted in a previous chapter, this text was one of the many hagiographies he wrote in the last decade of the eleventh century to commemorate the translations of Augustine, the early Canterbury

<sup>6</sup> For a good overview of the hagiography produced in the late tenth century and the eleventh century, see the introductory chapter of *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints’ Lives: Vita S. Birini, Vita et Miracula S. Kenelmi, and Vita S. Rumwoldi*, ed. and trans. Rosalind C. Love (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York, OUP, 1996), xxxiv–xlvi.

<sup>7</sup> Jay Rubenstein dated Osbern’s *Vita* and *Miracula* of Dunstan between 1089, the year of Archbishop Lanfranc’s death, and 1093, the year of Anselm’s appointment as the next archbishop of Canterbury. Rubenstein, “The Life and Writings of Osbern of Canterbury,” in *Canterbury and the Norman Conquest*, 83.

<sup>8</sup> In their introduction to Eadmer’s *Vita et Miracula* of Dunstan, Andrew Turner and Bernard Muir gave the *terminus ad quem* as 1116 and suggested that the works might have been written during one of Eadmer’s periods of exile from England (1097–1100 and 1103–1106). See “Introduction,” in *Eadmer of Canterbury*, lxvii–lxix.

archbishops, Mildreth and Adrian of Canterbury into the newly built apse of the abbey of St. Augustine.<sup>9</sup>

The chapter falls into two halves – section two and section three. The first concerns heavenly choirs in Canterbury during the age of Benedictine reform. In light of Dunstan's reputation as an agent of Benedictine reform in England, the discussion begins with an overview of the ideals of the reformers in England and on the Continent, which will go some way towards helping us to understand why heavenly choirs came to be a chief concern of the late tenth century. The chapter then focuses on Canterbury and on Dunstan's first extant hagiography, which contains an account of how he saw and heard a choir of virgins singing and dancing in the abbey of St. Augustine.<sup>10</sup> Although the vision is significantly different to examples of the new song explored in the previous chapter, the hymn of the virgins and its setting indicate that it is a variation on the Marian motif. I argue that the vision resonated with the ideals of the Benedictine reform and established Dunstan's reputation as an intermediary between heavenly and earthly communities. The chapter goes on to explore how Dunstan was constructed as a heavenly patron of the community of Christ Church in the *Lectiones* of Adelard. The dancing virgins of St. Augustine's abbey are omitted from Adelard's version of Dunstan's life, and replaced with a vision of cherubim and seraphim in the cathedral. As early as the first decade of the eleventh century, the setting of Dunstan's vision of the virgins was becoming a point of contention. Section three picks up this thread by showing how Osbern and Eadmer emphasised Dunstan's connection to the liturgical community of Christ Church in their accounts of his posthumous miracles. One story in Eadmer's miracle collection appears to be in dialogue with Goscelin's *Historia translationis S. Augustini*. While Eadmer uses

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<sup>9</sup> See chapter 3, section 4.4.

<sup>10</sup> Lapidge and Winterbottom consider the possibility that Adelard was working from a lost Old English copy of the Life in *Early Lives of St Dunstan*, cxxviii-cxxix.

the miracle to demonstrate that Dunstan's spirit consorts with his relics at Christ Church, Goscelin's potted history of St. Augustine's abbey under Norman control portrays the building as the spiritual home of both Dunstan and the heavenly virgins whom he revered. The chapter ends with two examples from Goscelin's collection of Canterbury hagiographies which reveal his idiosyncratic understanding of the relationship between heavenly and earthly communities of worshippers.

## 2: Choirs in the age of Benedictine reform

### 2.1: Benedictine reform and the monastic Office

The principal aim of the monastic reform that took place during the reign of King Edgar was to establish a strict adherence to the *Regula S. Benedicti* within English monastic houses. Psalmody was of central importance to the Benedictine Rule. Yet the Rule did not have a significant impact on monastic history until the ninth-century Carolingian reform of Benedict of Aniane (d. 821).<sup>11</sup> According to Mechthild Gretsch, the Carolingian reform was characterised by an increased emphasis on psalmody.<sup>12</sup> She has demonstrated that documents associated with the Carolingian programme grouped with a version of the *Regula S. Benedicti* in a selection of English manuscripts, one of which (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 57), might have been produced at Æthelwold's monastery in Abingdon at the turn of the eleventh century.<sup>13</sup> As Jesse Billett has argued with great lucidity in his recent monograph, obedience to the Benedictine Rule ideally entailed the observance of the Benedictine Office, although in practice, the daily routine of psalmody in England was far from uniform across reformed houses.<sup>14</sup> The *Regularis concordia* by Æthelwold is one of the documents from the era of

<sup>11</sup> Dyer, "Monastic Psalmody," 62.

<sup>12</sup> Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 270-73.

<sup>13</sup> Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*, 247 and 252, and Lapidge and Winterbottom, *Early Lives of St Dunstan*, lvi-lvii.

<sup>14</sup> Billett, *Divine Office in Anglo-Saxon England*, 149-96.



Benedictine reform that clearly prescribes a *cursus* of psalmody as stipulated in the *Regula S. Benedicti*, along with prayers and psalms that are to be performed in addition to those specified in the Rule.<sup>15</sup> Mary Berry used the *Regularis concordia* to ‘reconstruct the monastic timetable’ in an article on the acoustic environment of monastic houses at Winchester in the late tenth century. She found, ‘[t]here can hardly have been many moments of the day when the three monastic churches of Winchester [Old Minster, New Minster and Nunnaminster] were not ringing with song’.<sup>16</sup> Although there is an evident danger in supposing the Æthelwold’s communities practised the Office exactly as prescribed in the *Regularis concordia*, Berry’s analysis serves to emphasise the theoretical centrality of the Benedictine Office to monastic life.

The English reformers were exposed either directly or indirectly to the ideals and practices of two tenth-century Continental movements: the Cluniac and Lotharingian reforms.<sup>17</sup> Gorze abbey, in the diocese of Metz, Lotharingia, was

<sup>15</sup> Billett, *Divine Office*, 181 and 185-86. See *Regularis concordia*, trans. Thomas Symons, *The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation* (London; New York: Nelson, 1953). It is now generally accepted that Æthelwold was lead author (Symons, *Monastic Agreement*, li; Richard W. Pfaff, *The Liturgy in Medieval England: A History* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 86). Previously, Dunstan was believed to be the main author (Lapidge and Winterbottom, *Early Lives of St Dunstan*, xlv, n.156).

<sup>16</sup> Mary Berry, “What the Saxon Monks Sang: Music in Winchester in the Late Tenth Century,” in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. Barbara Yorke (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1988), 151.

<sup>17</sup> For the impact of these reforms on late Anglo-Saxon England, see D.H. Farmer, “The Progress of the Monastic Revival,” 10-19, and D.A. Bullough, “The Continental Background of the Reform,” 20-36, in *Tenth-Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and the Regularis concordia*, ed. David Parsons (London: Phillimore, 1975). The Lives of the three major ecclesiastical reformers record that their subjects were well connected to monastic houses on the Continent. Æthelwold sent his monk, Osgar, to Fleury in order to ‘learn the way of life according to the Rule and show it to his brothers when he taught them back home’ (Wulfstan, *Vita S. Æthelwoldi* 14, 26-27). Oswald himself spent time at Fleury and ‘began to memorise and master the monastic offices, desiring [...] to teach those things [...] to his own people at home’ (Byrhtferth, *Vita S. Oswaldi* 3.2, 54-55). Oswald later sent for a monk, Germanus, from Fleury, to instruct his monks at the priory of Westbury in ‘monastic custom’ (Byrhtferth, *Vita S. Oswaldi* 3.7, 68-69). Dunstan, exiled from England, lived for a time in Ghent (B., *Vita S. Dunstani* 23.2, 72-73, and Adelard, *Lectiones in disputatione S. Duntani* 6, in Lapidge and Winterbottom, *Early Lives of St Dunstan*, 126-27). For Æthelwold’s supposed recruitment of the monks of Corbie to instruct the Abingdon monks in monastic chant, see Billett (*Divine Office*, 167-68) and Lapidge and Winterbottom (“Introduction” to Wulfstan’s *Vita S. Æthelwoldi*, lxxxiii).

reformed according to a strict interpretation of the Benedictine Rule by John, who later became abbot. His *Vita* (*BHL* 4396), written before 980 by the Abbot of St. Arnulph at Metz (also called John), contains colourful detail of the abbot's intensely ascetic devotion. This is manifested most vividly in his vigils and psalmody. John did not retire to bed between the Night Office and morning prayers, but occupied himself around the monastery, murmuring psalms continuously 'in the manner of a bee'.<sup>18</sup> As Phyllis Jestice wrote in her engaging article on the *topos* of 'light under the bushel' in texts associated with the Gorze reform, '[m]onks were the prayer elite of society [and] [t]heir duty was to maintain a ritual purity that would make their intercession for the rest of the world efficacious'.<sup>19</sup> By performing psalms throughout the night, John of Gorze went beyond the call of duty and supplemented the Benedictine Office with the nectar of his own devotions.

Although little has been written about the spiritual purpose of prayer in Lotharingian monasteries, the ideals underlying the Cluniac reform are well known.<sup>20</sup> The monastery of Cluny was founded by Duke William of Aquitaine for the purpose of providing monastic intercession for the souls of the faithful. In 931, Pope John XI granted a privilege to Odo, the second abbot of Cluny, to aid him in reforming other monastic centres. One of the abbeys he reformed was Fleury-sur-Loire, in the diocese of Orléans, which had hitherto been under lay control. After its reform, Fleury became a major spiritual and intellectual centre. Cluny, meanwhile, became known as a powerhouse of prayer. The laity donated sums of money in return for a place in the burial ground and in the daily round of prayer

<sup>18</sup> John of Saint-Arnulph, *Vita B. Ioannis* 80, *Acta SS.* Feb. III, 27 (705B-C). It is not entirely clear whether 'in morem apīs' refers to the sound of John's murmuring, his skittish movement from one place to another, or both.

<sup>19</sup> Phyllis G. Jestice, "The Gorzian Reform and the Light Under the Bushel," *Viator* 24 (1993): 76.

<sup>20</sup> Jestice comments on the relative lack of scholarship on the Gorzian reform in "Gorzian Reform," 51. An important study that has emerged since Jestice was writing is Steven Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process: Realities and Representations in Medieval Flanders, 900-1100* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2013).

that would aid them in attaining salvation. Barbara Rosenwein has explained that, '[b]y means of the liturgy, both groups [monastic and lay] were linked to the community of saints, apostles and martyrs.'<sup>21</sup> Donations for burial within the monastery reached their peak under the fifth abbot, Odilo, who introduced the Feast of All Souls, a commemoration of the whole community of the faithful. In her article on Cluniac remembrance of the dead during Odilo's abbacy, Dominique Iogna-Prat remarked that the clergymen living at the turn of the millennium viewed themselves as 'the bridge that assures the easy path for the assembly of the faithful into the choir of angels,' a means that could be achieved through their dedicated liturgical activity.<sup>22</sup> Ralph Glaber (d. 1047) remarked that he had seen the monks at Cluny celebrate masses non-stop from the beginning of the day to meal time with 'so much dignity, so much piety, and so much veneration, that we almost thought they were angels rather than men'.<sup>23</sup> A continual stream of psalmody not only paved the pathway to heaven, but transformed the earthly worshipping community into a quasi-celestial one.

The reform movement in England, fed by insular and Continental streams, was likewise concerned with enhancing the contemplative life to the benefit of those who sought the intercession of the enclosed religious. In the words of John Blair, '[i]n England, as on the Continent, the fundamental aim of the Benedictine movement was to establish and disseminate high liturgical, spiritual, and pastoral standards'.<sup>24</sup> This aim was woven through late tenth-century sources. Millinger has already commented that it was the beautiful singing of nuns and monks that prompted King Edgar to order the establishment of forty new monasteries in the

<sup>21</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Rhinoceros Bound: Cluny in the Tenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 10.

<sup>22</sup> Dominique Iogna-Prat, "The Dead in the Celestial Bookkeeping of the Cluniac Monks Around the Year 1000," in *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, ed. Lester K. Little and Barbara H. Rosenwein (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 346.

<sup>23</sup> Ralph Glaber, *Historiarum libri quinque* cited in Iogna-Prat, "Celestial Bookkeeping," 353.

<sup>24</sup> John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 351.

*Vita S. Oswaldi*.<sup>25</sup> In the *Vita S. Æthelwoldi*, Wulfstan goes into some detail about Æthelwold's fervent expulsion of secular clerics from the Minsters at Winchester and his installation of monks from Abingdon in their stead; he comments that the *canonici* of Old Minster were so proud and insolent that 'some of them did not think fit to celebrate the mass in due order'.<sup>26</sup> The full spiritual significance of Æthelwold's expulsions is illustrated most clearly by the New Minster Charter.<sup>27</sup> The text, written by Æthelwold two years after the expulsion, sets the worthless prayers of the sinful clerics (who are equated with the rebel angels at one point) against the powerful intercessions of the monks, who help King Edgar to attain salvation.<sup>28</sup> The frontispiece portrays Edgar as part of a circle of angels surrounding a mandorla of Christ. Catherine Karkov has argued that it illustrates a statement, made in the sixth chapter, that Edgar implemented the reform in order that he might flourish in the dwelling (*contubernio*) of Christ and his saints.<sup>29</sup> The implication is that the masses of the monks enable Edgar to become part of heavenly society.

B.'s hagiography of Dunstan lacks detail about the specifics of Dunstan's reforming activities and instead develops the spiritual portrait of the archbishop. In an oft-cited passage, the precise meaning of which has been disputed, B. informs the reader that Dunstan became abbot of Glastonbury and, 'following the principles of St. Benedict, which bring salvation, he shone forth as the premier abbot of the

<sup>25</sup> Millinger, "Liturgical Devotion," 242. Byrhtferth, *Vita S. Oswaldi*, describes the *witan* at which King Edgar orders the foundation of more than forty Benedictine monasteries at 3.11 (pp. 76-77). Oswald's monastic foundations are mentioned at 3.16 (pp. 88-89), 4.4 (pp. 100-101) and 4.8 (pp. 112-13).

<sup>26</sup> Wulfstan, *Vita S. Æthelwoldi*, refers to Æthelwold's expulsion of secular clerics from Old Minster at 18 (pp. 32-33) and from New Minster at 20 (pp. 36-37). He establishes nuns at Nunnaminster at 22 (pp. 36-39). The refoundation of Ely is recorded at 23 (pp. 38-41), and the foundation of Peterborough and Thorney at 24 (pp. 40-43). The quotation above is from chapter 18, 30-31.

<sup>27</sup> Discussed in Catherine E. Karkov, *The Ruler Portraits of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 85-93.

<sup>28</sup> Karkov, *Ruler Portraits*, 90. See also D.F. Johnson, "The Fall of Lucifer in *Genesis A* and Two Anglo-Latin Royal Charters," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 97 (1998): 500-21.

<sup>29</sup> Karkov, *Ruler Portraits*, 90.

English people'.<sup>30</sup> Although the contemporary evidence of Dunstan's implementation of the Benedictine Rule at Glastonbury is contested, there is little reason to doubt that Dunstan himself lived by Benedictine principles.<sup>31</sup> It is necessary to exercise a considerable degree of caution when discussing B.'s *Vita S. Dunstani* in the context of the Benedictine reform. Firstly, B. was a secular cleric, not a Benedictine monk.<sup>32</sup> His knowledge of the reform and its spiritual ideology might have been limited. Secondly, Dunstan's primacy of role in the reform has been challenged. Dunstan enjoyed a shining reputation as the principal agent of English reform in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> Yet in more recent years, historians have questioned the extent to which Dunstan drove the institutional changes we associate most readily with the reform. Michael Lapidge found little evidence of Dunstan founding monasteries and Nicola Robertson claimed that Dunstan's reputation rests on post-Conquest fabrications.<sup>34</sup> Although Catherine Cubitt has argued that there was more to being a reformer than refounding monasteries and expelling clerics, contemporary sources portray Dunstan primarily as a figure of influence in the Church and at court rather than an ecclesiastic who tried to impose the Benedictine Rule more widely.<sup>35</sup> Thirdly, we should take care not to over-emphasise the degree to which Dunstan's spirituality is specifically Benedictine. His dedication to vigils could, for example, be seen as part of a wider

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<sup>30</sup> B., *Vita S. Dunstani* 15, 50-51. Nicola Robertson has argued that the word 'primus' in the clause 'primus abbas Anglica nationis enituit' is 'adjectival, not temporal,' making Dunstan not the first abbot of Glastonbury, but one of particular renown. Robertson, "Dunstan and Monastic Reform: Tenth-Century Fact or Twelfth-Century Fiction?" *Anglo-Norman Studies* 18 (2006): 155-56.

<sup>31</sup> Robertson, "Dunstan and Monastic Reform," 154-59; Billett, *Divine Office*, 163-64.

<sup>32</sup> Lapidge and Winterbottom, *Early Lives of St Dunstan*, lxix.

<sup>33</sup> For example, David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England: A History of its Development from the Times of St. Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 943-1216* (Cambridge: CUP, 1949), structured the early part of his study around the reforming activities of Dunstan.

<sup>34</sup> For a more sceptical view, see Lapidge and Winterbottom, *Early Lives of St Dunstan*, xliii-xlv and lxxiv; Nicola Robertson, "Dunstan and Monastic Reform," 153-67.

<sup>35</sup> Catherine Cubitt, "Reading Tenth- and Eleventh-Century Latin Hagiography in the Context of the Reign of King Æthelred II 'The Unready'," in *Hagiography in Anglo-Saxon England*, 363. My thanks go to Catherine for sending me a draft of the paper before the publication of the volume.

hagiographical trend in the tenth century which highlighted the asceticism of recently deceased saints.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, it is likely that the communities at Glastonbury, where Dunstan acted as abbot from 940, and Christ Church, Canterbury, were mixed communities of clerics and monks, which makes it improbable that Dunstan imposed the *Regula S. Benedicti*.<sup>37</sup>

A manuscript that enhanced Dunstan's erstwhile reputation as Benedictine reformer is the Bosworth Psalter, long thought to have been produced at Christ Church while Dunstan occupied the Canterbury See. It contains a collection of texts that would have been used in the implementation of the Benedictine Office. Nicholas Brooks' conviction that the Psalter was a product of Christ Church led him to interpret its contents with B.'s portrait of Dunstan in mind:

If we recall that when B. in his *Life* listed Dunstan's activities as archbishop, he placed sacred prayer, psalmody and the night vigil at the head, then it is not surprising that the Bosworth Psalter should provide such clear evidence that whatever the composition of his community at Christ Church their choral liturgy was essentially and avowedly Benedictine.<sup>38</sup>

Since Brooks performed this analysis, however, other scholars have cast doubt on the Christ Church provenance of the Psalter, and Billett has suggested that the movement from the Roman to the Benedictine *cursus* happened only later at Christ Church, under the governance of Ælfric (995-1005) or Ælfheah (1006-1012).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> David W. Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 168-70.

<sup>37</sup> On the constitution of the communities at Glastonbury and Christ Church, see Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (London; New York: Leicester University Press, 1984), 252.

<sup>38</sup> Brooks, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, 252-53.

<sup>39</sup> Billett, *Divine Office*, 193-94.

While we must bear these points in mind, it would be wrong to lift Dunstan and B.'s Life of the Saint out of the context of the tenth-century reform. The following sub-section argues that B.'s presentation of Dunstan's spirituality resonates clearly within the late tenth-century context of heightened concentration on the spiritual power of psalmody and a strict observance of monastic chastity. Dunstan's vision of the virgins rewards his merits of vigilance, prayerfulness and dedication to virginity, virtues that were particularly in line with the ideals of the monastic reform.

## 2.2: The choir of virgins in B.'s *Vita S. Dunstani*

The *Vita S. Dunstani* is exceptional among Anglo-Latin hagiographies for its emphasis on the miraculous musical experiences of a saint.<sup>40</sup> An unseen hand plays a heavenly antiphon upon Dunstan's harp; Dunstan has a dream-vision in which he is rapt into heaven and taught the antiphon 'O rex gentium' by a celestial figure; and, while he is serving as archbishop of Canterbury between 960 and 988, Dunstan witnesses the singing and dancing of heavenly virgins in St. Augustine's abbey, Canterbury.<sup>41</sup> B. informs us that it was Dunstan's custom to perform psalmody at the holy sites of Canterbury during the night; in another version of the miracle in the *Vita S. Oswaldi*, Byrhtferth explains that Dunstan was performing the Office.<sup>42</sup> His personal devotion to vigils is reminiscent of the spiritual efforts of John of Gorze, though the two hagiographies are so close to one another in date that it is unlikely that B. was following the Gorzian model. Rather, it is more plausible that Dunstan and John of Gorze had Benedictine asceticism in common.

<sup>40</sup> This section was presented in draft form to the Medieval Reading Group at the English Department, University of Cambridge, on December 4, 2013. Thanks are due to all those who attended and improved the work in progress with their insightful comments.

<sup>41</sup> B., *Vita S. Dunstani* (henceforth, *VSD*) 12 (pp. 40-43), 29 (pp. 84-89), and 36 (pp. 100-103).

<sup>42</sup> Byrhtferth, *Vita S. Oswaldi* 5.7, 162-63. Billett has suggested that Dunstan might have been performing the Divine Office as specified in the *Regula S. Benedicti* (*Divine Office*, 171).

Dunstan had refreshed himself with prayer in the main church of SS Peter and Paul and was making his way to the oratory of St. Mary, preparing to begin his psalmody anew.<sup>43</sup> Then, something miraculous occurred:

When he arrived there with a psalm on his lips, he heard to his surprise in the darkness unfamiliar voices, singing in the church with complex harmony [subtili modulamine]. He hastened to look in through an opening, to find the church all bathed in brilliant light; bands of virgins were wheeling around in a dance [uirgineas turmas in choro gyranti], singing as they moved the hymn of Sedulius that begins: ‘Let us sing, friends, to the Lord’ [‘Cantemus, socii, Domino’], and what follows. He also noticed that after each verse they alternately repeated [uocē reciproca [...]] repallere], as mortal girls might have done, and as though in harmony with their circling dance, the first couplet of the hymn: ‘Let us sing, friends, to the Lord His honour; let the sweet love of Christ resound from devout mouths’, and the rest.<sup>44</sup>

There is nothing quite like Dunstan’s vision of the dancing virgins in the hagiographies written in Anglo-Saxon England up to the late tenth century, yet it does draw on familiar hagiographical conventions. As chapter two illustrated, choirs appear during the night at holy sites, often near the relics of saints, in the

<sup>43</sup> Anglo-Saxon church groups often consisted of a main church, dedicated to an apostolic saint, and a second church, dedicated to St. Mary. See Helen Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture, and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 59 and 94. The abbey of St Augustine, Canterbury, consisted of the main church of SS Peter and Paul (built between 597 and 619), the church of St. Mary (built by King Eadbald, d. 640) and the church of St. Pancras (foundation date unknown). See Bede, *HE* 1.33.1, 2.3.2 and 2.6.2 (ed. Lapidge, 1:260, 1:302 and 1:322). During his time as archbishop of Canterbury, Dunstan re-dedicated the abbey of SS Peter and Paul to Peter, Paul and Augustine.

<sup>44</sup> B., *VSD* 36.2-3, 100-101.



miracle collections of Gregory of Tours.<sup>45</sup> These tales of nocturnal sightings of spirits from Francia seem to have had an indirect influence on Anglo-Latin texts such as the ninth-century *De abbatibus* by Æthelwulf. In this history of a Northumbrian monastery, the writer gives an eye- and ear-witness account of how a ‘great troop’ of spirits (agmen / immensum) poured into the church of St. Peter after Compline.<sup>46</sup> He ends with a statement that saints often (saepius) gathered in the church and sang while the brothers were asleep. The text also describes a second church, dedicated to St. Mary, ‘the house which the mother of the exalted dignity inhabits,’ implying, perhaps, that the building has been host to Marian miracles.<sup>47</sup> Æthelwulf goes on to make an intriguing statement which suggests that heavenly choirs dwell within the church:

On the west side are conspicuous those resplendent ministers  
who make the high heaven lovely with concerted melody [qui  
modulis culmen caeli concentibus ornant]. All the saints haunt  
the midmost floor of the church, and occupy it at all times,  
mustering in countless troops [maniplis innumeris].<sup>48</sup>

H.M. Taylor has pondered whether this passage refers to an actual choir stall in the west side of the church, heavenly visitations or wall paintings.<sup>49</sup> Another possibility is that the writer is elaborating on the nineteenth chapter of the *Regula S. Benedicti*, which, as we have seen in chapter one, encourages the monks to imagine that God and his angels watch while they sing.<sup>50</sup> The following line lends support to the interpretation that the passage portrays a supernatural phenomenon: it states that these troops ‘come down like snow when summoned to [...] the prayers of pious

<sup>45</sup> See chapter two, section 3.2.

<sup>46</sup> Æthelwulf, *De abbatibus* 21, 52-55.

<sup>47</sup> Æthelwulf, *De abbatibus* 14, 34-35.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>49</sup> H.M. Taylor, “The Architectural Interest of Æthelwulf’s *De Abbatibus*,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 3 (1974): 168.

<sup>50</sup> *Regula S. Benedicti* 19, 39.

men'. Earlier in *De abbatibus*, Æthelwulf explains that God sends heavenly birds to places of worship in order to collect 'the prayers of the pious'.<sup>51</sup> The choir within the church of St. Mary is clearly one of the holy hotspots at which God's messengers mingle with human worshippers. While Æthelwulf's miracles belong to the same thought-world as B.'s *Vita S. Dunstani*, Dunstan's vision in the oratory of St. Mary contains elements, such as the hymn of Sedulius, which mark it out as significantly different from its hagiographical precedents.

It is possible that the tale of Dunstan's encounter with heavenly spirits in St. Augustine's abbey had an oral origin, and that B. set down one of the versions circulating in Canterbury at the time, although if this is the case, B. gives no indication of where he heard the story. Rachel Koopmans argued that miracle stories were already shaped by oral recitation and circulation by the time they came to be pinned down by a hagiographer.<sup>52</sup> She asserted that similarities between stories can be better explained as a result of the process of oral story-telling rather than hagiographical borrowings: '[i]n general, *topoi* arguments have not served the study of miracle collections well'.<sup>53</sup> An alternative version of Dunstan's vision in St. Augustine's abbey can be found in Byrhtferth of Ramsey's *Vita S. Oswaldi*, which may suggest that different accounts of Dunstan's sighting were circulating orally in the late tenth century.<sup>54</sup> Even if this were so, we should not discount the importance of hagiographical *topoi*: they shape spoken as well as written narratives, and in the process of setting an oral tale down in writing, a writer may employ literary conventions. Two *topoi* in particular are evoked by B.'s account of Dunstan's vision.

<sup>51</sup> Æthelwulf, *De abbatibus* 6, 16-17.

<sup>52</sup> Rachel Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, 29.

<sup>54</sup> Byrhtferth, *Vita S. Oswaldi* 5.7, 162-63.

The first is the ring dance of the blessed, a *topos* that goes back to the apocryphal Acts of John.<sup>55</sup> In this text, the disciples of Jesus form a ring and dance while Christ himself stands in the middle; he sings a hymn and the disciples respond to each line with “Amen”. The image of the round dance appears in texts and iconography from the late antique period, and Nicoletta Isar has shown how the image is used in texts of the Eastern Church Fathers to signify the spiritual integrity of martyrs and the oneness of virgins.<sup>56</sup> While the ring dance is not very common in Western hagiographical writings, the influence of a second *topos* – the new song, or rather, a motif related to it – is also discernible and could have provided a more likely source for the form of the vision. Christopher Page has shown that the Sedulius hymn alludes to the victory song of Miriam (Exodus 15:20-21): the refrain, “*Cantemus socii*” echoes Miriam’s words, given in Vulgate Latin as “*cantemus Domino gloriose enim magnificatus est equum et ascensorem eius deiecit in mare*”.<sup>57</sup> He does not, however, go so far as to state that Miriam was a type of the Virgin Mary, and that the women who followed in her wake foreshadowed the band of virgins whom Mary was thought to lead in heaven. The Marian motif is closely related to the new song *topos*, to the extent that Ambrose used it *in lieu* of the new song when expressing the joys of female virgins.<sup>58</sup> B. also employs the Marian motif in this way, but with some slight departures from the patristic model. The bands of female virgins sing a version of the Exodus hymn not found in earlier sources. Their performance takes place not in heaven, but in the oratory of St. Mary, an earthly dwelling place of the Virgin. B. therefore brings the Marian motif down to earth. As Christopher Page has shown, the form of the

<sup>55</sup> Thanks to Arabella Milbank for bringing my attention back to the ring dance motif at the Cambridge Medieval Reading Group and in an email message on Dec. 6, 2013. For text and analysis of the ring dance in the Acts of John, see Miller, “Choreia,” 86-143.

<sup>56</sup> Isar, “Xopός,” 215-16.

<sup>57</sup> Christopher Page, “The Carol in Anglo-Saxon Canterbury?” in *Essays on the History of English Music in Honour of John Caldwell: Sources, Style, Performance, Historiography*, ed. Emma Hornby and David Maw (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), 268.

<sup>58</sup> See chapter three, section 3.1.

Sedulius hymn and its accompanying dance are reminiscent of the secular *carole*, a dance-song performed frequently by groups of women.<sup>59</sup> While B.'s presentation of the dance was informed by *topoi*, it could equally have been influenced by activities he saw around him in the secular world. Heavenly choirs resemble earthly ones more closely than before.

The vision is one of the many badges of honour (insignia) that mark out Dunstan's spiritual gifts. B. states that it is a reward for Dunstan's righteousness.<sup>60</sup> More specifically, it rewards his vigilance. 'One thing [...] I can assert on my own testimony,' wrote B., '[is] that, though he lived below [...] he was always aloft in his mind, both when awake and when asleep. As Paul the apostle says: "But our conversation is in heaven"'.<sup>61</sup> The vision of virgins occurs at the end of a section detailing one of Dunstan's dream-visions, his prophecies, and his ability to see and hear 'spiritual mysteries' (*spiritualium [...] misteria*). Indeed, Dunstan is represented as being particularly attuned to heavenly praises: B. states that Dunstan's spirit learned 'hymns [divine songs] of sacred melody' (*diuina sacrorum modulaminum cantica*) or 'melodies of sacred songs' (*sacrorum carminum modulamina*) and 'other fitting means of praising God' (*ceteras Deo decibiles laudes*) while his body lay in slumber.<sup>62</sup> In a dream-vision inspired by the Song of Songs, Dunstan sees his mother marrying the King of Heaven. He witnesses the epithalamium of the heavenly ranks: 'there was such joyful singing of psalms [*psallentium laetitia*] that on every side happy thegns were thundering out the [sweetest of] hymns [*ymnum suauiissimam*] to their king, with loud songs of praise [*cum laude sonora*]'.<sup>63</sup> A heavenly citizen teaches Dunstan the antiphon, 'O rex gentium,' thus allowing him

<sup>59</sup> Page, "The Carol in Anglo-Saxon Canterbury?" 264-67. The similarities between the hymn and the *carole* form are more evident in Osbern's later re-writing of the episode than in B.'s original *Vita*.

<sup>60</sup> B., *Vita S. Dunstani* 36.3, 102-103. B. alludes to Prov 8:20 ('I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice'). Elsewhere, he likens Dunstan's intellectual flourishing at Glastonbury with the flowering of the righteous in Psalm 92:12 (pp. 18-19).

<sup>61</sup> B., *VSD* 29.2, 84-87.

<sup>62</sup> B., *VSD* 29.2, 86-87 and 31, 90-91.

<sup>63</sup> B., *VSD* 29.3, 86-87.

to join in the celestial concert. Upon waking, Dunstan ensures that the song is written down, learnt by a monk and taught to ‘all those beneath him,’ including monks and clerics. Dunstan’s spiritual vigilance therefore allows him to mediate between earthly and heavenly communities of singers, and enrich the liturgical repertoire of the community of which he was in charge (B. does not tell us whether these monks and clerics belonged to Christ Church, Canterbury, or Glastonbury).<sup>64</sup>

The text gives no indication that Dunstan wrote down and transmitted the melody of the celestial virgins in St. Augustine’s abbey. B. therefore highlights the difference between the heavenly song that may be learned by all soldiers of Christ (‘O rex gentium’) and the special song of the virgins (‘Cantemus socii’), which is not taught to the monks and clerics. While Dunstan is taught the epithalamial antiphon and can participate in the heavenly concert, he is shut outside St. Augustine’s abbey, and can only witness the spectacle through a small opening in the door of the oratory. Dunstan and his community are not privileged enough to take part in the concert of the virgins while on earth. Despite the exclusivity of the song, Dunstan can nevertheless hear it. Neither the new song nor the song of female heavenly virgins is usually audible on earth, making Dunstan’s ability to hear it all the more indicative of his exceptional merit. Although Dunstan does not sing along with the virgins, he approaches the oratory with the intention of performing his round of psalmody again, and thus anticipates the virgins’ praise. He may not be able to learn the ‘complex harmony’ of the virgins, but he weighs it carefully (*perpendit*).

Dunstan earns the privilege of hearing the song of the virgins because of his devotion to the Virgin Mary. He is pledged to Glastonbury as a youth, where

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<sup>64</sup> Brooks, *Church of Canterbury*, 252. Brooks maintained that the introduction of monks at Christ Church cannot be dated with any precision: ‘[w]e should, perhaps, think in terms of a gradual evolution, begun under Oda and Dunstan with the reform of the liturgy, and continued by their successors with the progressive adoption of monastic vows by new members of the community’ (p. 256).

‘night and day, without remission, he was to serve God and Mary, Mother of God’.<sup>65</sup> B. mentions the existence of an ancient church at Glastonbury, dedicated to Mary. He notes that it was not built in living memory, but that it was revealed to be consecrated to God and Mary, ‘by many miraculous and supernatural happenings’.<sup>66</sup> Æthelflæd, an elderly widow housed at Glastonbury, witnesses a Marian miracle, and B. tells us that Dunstan looked after her as if she were his own mother.<sup>67</sup> B. presents Dunstan as the guardian of the celibate widow, a role in which he thrives on account of his own virginity. Early in the *Vita*, Dunstan considers taking a wife, but a sudden illness brings him to the realisation that he should dedicate his life to God. B. also compares Dunstan to the apostle and evangelist, John, who Christ ‘called back from the marriage chamber’.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, in B.’s exegesis of Dunstan’s dream-vision, he interprets the figure of Dunstan’s mother as the Church in Dunstan’s diocese (either Canterbury or Glastonbury, depending on when the dream-vision supposedly took place), ‘which, under the hand of the eternal King, Christ the Lord, he had taken in charge to look after like a mother and console with the purity of his virginity.’<sup>69</sup> B. compares this to Christ’s act of commending the Virgin Mary to John, his chaste disciple. Christ places Dunstan in a position of trust and responsibility over the Church, the embodiment of the heavenly bride and spotless mother on earth.<sup>70</sup> At the end of his life, Dunstan is not led away by a choir of psychopomps, but ‘he went to his eternal rest, led by the Lord Jesus Christ.’<sup>71</sup> Does this line allude to the *topos* of the 144,000 virgins, following the Lamb wherever he goes?

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<sup>65</sup> B., *VSD* 5.1, 16-19.

<sup>66</sup> B., *VSD* 3.3, 12-13.

<sup>67</sup> B., *VSD* 10.3-6, 34-37 and 11.1, 36-37.

<sup>68</sup> B., *VSD* 8.1, 28-29.

<sup>69</sup> B., *VSD* 30.3, 88-89.

<sup>70</sup> The *topos* of Church as mother occurs elsewhere in the hagiographical material of the tenth and eleventh centuries. See, for instance, the *Vita S. Birini* 19 (*BHL* 1361), ed. and trans. Love, 38-39.

<sup>71</sup> B., *VSD* 38.6, 108-109.

Evidence for Dunstan's devotion to the Virgin can be found outside B.'s *Vita*. Mary Clayton has shown how two manuscripts, Cambridge, Trinity College O.1.18 and Cambridge, Trinity College, B.14.3, attest Dunstan's personal devotion to the Virgin.<sup>72</sup> Both manuscripts contain a poem by Dunstan addressed to God the Father, Christ, the Holy Ghost, Mary, the Church Fathers and the Apostles. The section of the poem addressed to Mary makes the earliest extant reference in England to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The cult of the Virgin Mary extended beyond Dunstan's personal prayers, and blossomed at Canterbury and Winchester during the reform period. Clayton revealed that most of the new Feasts, Offices and prayers to the Virgin can be linked to these two centres.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, two manuscripts associated with Æthelwold contain Marian Offices.<sup>74</sup> In response to Clayton's findings, Catherine Cubitt has called the Virgin Mary 'the reform movement's greatest patron' and proclaimed that virginity was the 'banner' of the movement.<sup>75</sup> Despite the central place of the Virgin Mary in the minds and prayers of Dunstan and Æthelwold, Cubitt has argued that female religious communities did not receive the same degree of attention from the reformers as monasteries, or if they did, no record has been made of it. 'Given the status of female monasticism in the tenth-century reforms,' she wrote, 'it is more likely that the virginity which the reform promoted as the highest spiritual value was associated with the male rather than the female religious life'.<sup>76</sup> Cubitt's interpretation is borne out by the reading of Dunstan's vision in this chapter; the ring dance of the female virgins rewards the chastity of a male observer and his guardianship of a gendered Church.

<sup>72</sup> Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 104-105.

<sup>73</sup> Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 272.

<sup>74</sup> Catherine Cubitt, "Archbishop Dunstan: A Prophet in Politics?" in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks*, ed. Julia Barrow and Andrew Wareham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 158 and 160.

<sup>75</sup> Cubitt, "Virginity and Misogyny," 1 and 3.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Whether or not B. consciously adapted the Marian motif to reflect the ideals of the Benedictine reform, the vision of the virgins forms a part of his complex construction of Dunstan's sainthood, which resonates within a late tenth-century context. Dunstan's merits as archbishop are imbued with the distinctive flavour of Benedictine spirituality: 'it was the height of his ambition to take part constantly in holy prayers and in the psalms of David played on ten strings [and] to conquer sweet sleep and spend whole nights in devoted vigil'. Dunstan's reputation as Benedictine worshipper, holy musician, and intermediary between heavenly and earthly choirs lasted beyond the immediate context of the time of its composition and into the eleventh century. It was at this point that Dunstan began to be represented as a patron of the monastic community of Christ Church and as a member of heavenly choirs.

### 2.3: Dunstan as heavenly patron in Adelard's *Lectiones*

Not long after B. had written the *Vita S. Dunstani*, Ælfheah, Archbishop of Canterbury until 1012, commissioned another Life of Dunstan for liturgical use. The *Lectiones in depositione S. Dunstani* (BHL 2343) by Adelard, a monk from St. Peter's in Ghent, consists of twelve chapters. As Adelard declares in the introductory letter to Ælfheah, the text can be recited from beginning to end as a history, or read aloud in parts during the Night Office (Matins).<sup>77</sup> The Benedictine form of the Night Office for Sundays and major Feasts comprised opening prayers and three nocturns, each consisting of chants and four lessons.<sup>78</sup> The Benedictine Rule states that on saints' Feasts, 'lessons pertaining to the day' should be recited.<sup>79</sup> The *Lectiones* contains several textual indications of its function for reading during

<sup>77</sup> Adelard of Ghent, *Lectiones in depositione S. Dunstani*, in *Early Lives of St Dunstan*, 111-45. For the opening epistle, see 112-13.

<sup>78</sup> The first two nocturns would have each consisted of six psalms with their antiphons, a versicle and response, and then four lessons with responsories. The third nocturn would have been the same, except that canticles would have been sung instead of psalms. See Thomas J. Heffernan, "The Liturgy and the Literature of Saints' Lives," in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001), 88-89.

<sup>79</sup> *Regula S. Benedicti* 14, 36.



the Night Office for the Feast of Dunstan's Deposition.<sup>80</sup> In the first lection, Adelard declares, '[l]et us put together what we know of him amidst hymns to God,' which presupposes that the Life would form part of a musical service.<sup>81</sup> His fifth lection also alludes to the hour at which the story of Dunstan's life would have been recited. He exhorts, '[l]et us appear to him with lamps lit and persevere wakefully in the heavenly conversation which we have started concerning him'.<sup>82</sup> The echo of St. Paul's letter to the Philippians (3:20) harkens back to B.'s *Vita*, where B. cites it just before he recounts Dunstan's heavenly dream-vision. The community of worshippers performing the Night Office on the day of Dunstan's deposition, May 19, keep vigil in honour and emulation of the Canterbury saint renowned for that ascetic feat.

Since readings from the *Lectiones* would have been interspersed with responsories reflecting on elements of the Life, Dunstan's musical experiences would have seemed particularly pertinent to the immediate context. Most of Dunstan's musical encounters are concentrated into the ninth lection. They are slightly different to those recorded in B.'s version. The choir of dancing virgins does not appear in Adelard's lections – in fact, it is the only version of the Life written between the late 990s and 1130 that does not contain the vision in one form or another. In Osbern's vision, Dunstan sees Mary in the midst of the virgins.<sup>83</sup> Eadmer includes the version of the vision found in Byrhtferth's *Vita S. Oswaldi* as well as the Marian vision in his *Vita S. Dunstani*.<sup>84</sup> The Life of Dunstan by William

<sup>80</sup> For a discussion of the *Lectiones* as a liturgical *Vita*, see Heffernan, "Liturgy and the Literature of Saints' Lives," 99-100.

<sup>81</sup> Adelard, *Lectiones* 1, 114-15.

<sup>82</sup> Adelard, *Lectiones* 5, 122-23.

<sup>83</sup> Osbern, *Vita S. Dunstani* 40, ed. Stubbs, 118-19.

<sup>84</sup> Eadmer, *Vita S. Dunstani* 53 and 54, 130-33.

of Malmesbury (*BHL* 2348) (written between 1129 and 1130) adds that Dunstan saw Mary on a throne, surrounded by other virgins.<sup>85</sup>

The omission of the vision in the *Lectiones* might have been due to the fact that it was written for the Christ Church community over which Dunstan presided. The vision of the virgin choirs, as we know, took place at the abbey of St. Augustine. Alan Thacker has suggested that Dunstan might have harboured a certain ‘coolness’ towards Christ Church, and he interprets the setting of his vision of the virgins as one of the ‘hints’ that Dunstan preferred St. Augustine’s abbey.<sup>86</sup> Yet there are several reasons why B. should set the story in St. Augustine’s, its possible oral origins aside. B. states that Dunstan was on a nightly round of prayer and psalmody – by setting the vision in St. Augustine’s abbey, B. shows that Dunstan took his peregrinations even outside the city walls. Furthermore, the abbey of St. Augustine laid claim to the relics of the early archbishops and Anglo-Saxon royalty, and so might have already been established as a place where strange or miraculous happenings occurred. Still, as the chapter will reveal, the setting of the vision in St. Augustine’s did give the monastic community reason to believe that Dunstan blessed it with his spiritual presence. Perhaps Adelard’s omission of the miracle is an early sign of competition between Christ Church and the abbey.

This supposition can be supported by the fact that Adelard includes a new miracle involving heavenly choirs that takes place at Christ Church. In the tenth lection, Ælfgar, one of the clergymen of Christ Church, has a dream-vision in which Dunstan is invited to join the ‘contubernium’ of cherubim and seraphim in singing Sanctus to the highest bishop.<sup>87</sup> He delays his entry into the angelic chorus,

<sup>85</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Vita S. Dunstani* 2.28 in *William of Malmesbury: Saints’ Lives: The Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Idract*, ed. Michael Winterbottom and R.M. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 286-89.

<sup>86</sup> Alan Thacker, “Cults at Canterbury: Relics and Reform under Dunstan and his Successors,” in *St Dunstan: His Life, Times, and Cult*, ed. Nigel Ramsey, Margaret Sparks and Tim Tatton-Brown (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), 238.

<sup>87</sup> Adelard, *Lectiones* 10, 136-39.

however, and explains that he has to conduct the liturgical celebrations for the Feast of the Ascension, saying, “‘it is my duty to give the word and sacrament of Christ to his people who have thronged into the embrace of mother church’”.<sup>88</sup> On the day of the Ascension, Dunstan’s preaching is said to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, and ‘all looked at him as though he were an angel of God’.<sup>89</sup> Rather than joining the ranks of angels immediately, Dunstan brings the angelic into the community of Christ Church through his pastoral duties.

As well as recounting Dunstan’s conversation with the cherubim and seraphim, lection twelve describes how Dunstan joins the ranks of saints as listed in the litany.<sup>90</sup> He is received as a patriarch into the bosom of Abraham, for the Fathers acknowledge that he has exceeded them in place and merit. Prophets count him among their company because he predicted the Viking invasions. Apostles, having visited him on earth in a dream vision, do not turn him away from their company in heaven. He had the willingness to become a martyr, even if not the opportunity, and is therefore welcomed both as a martyr and a confessor. Virgins also welcome him on account of his lifelong chastity. As in B.’s text, he is compared to John, and Adelard evokes the new song *topos*: ‘you chose perpetual virginity, like John, beloved of God, and so you follow the Lamb of God together with those who have not defiled their garments, so at the marriage feast of the Lamb you take your couch with joy’.<sup>91</sup> The reading of the twelfth lection would have ended with a performance of the *Te Deum*, which itself makes mention of praise rendered to God by the angels, apostles, prophets and martyrs, all of whom recognise Dunstan as belonging to their companies. In this way, the singing of the earthly clerics or monks of Christ Church intertwines with the praises of the heavenly citizens.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 138-39.

<sup>89</sup> Adelard, *Lectiones* 11, 140-41.

<sup>90</sup> Adelard, *Lectiones* 12, 140-45.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 144-45.

David Hiley's article on the *Historia* of Dunstan as found in the Worcester antiphoner (S. Xiii med) discusses the interplay of the text of the *Lectiones* and the chants accompanying it.<sup>92</sup> It concludes with a broad statement concerning the spiritual significance of chant in the hagiographies of Dunstan from B.'s *Vita* to the *Life* by William of Malmesbury:

To all the authors of the *Vitae* of St Dunstan there was no essential distinction between chant on earth and that sung in heaven. The music of the liturgy was a representation, a foretaste of the music of heaven. Vouchsafed to men on earth through the Holy Spirit, renewed and extended in their visions, the chant would eventually greet the faithful when they entered the company of Christ and his angels and the multitude of witnesses who had gone before them.<sup>93</sup>

The liturgical songs of the Night Office could certainly be interpreted as the earthly counterpart to the praise of the heavenly groups of which Dunstan is a part. Still, the final paragraph of the *Lectiones* demonstrates that the relationship between earthly and celestial worship is far from simple. It ends with the following invocation to Dunstan:

Great bishop of God, offer for us sacrifices of appeasement and the incense of prayer, cleansed by which we may all follow you in joy to the holy of holies, where Christ the bishop has entered to ask favours of the Father on our behalf, and where he has

<sup>92</sup> David Hiley, "What St. Dunstan Heard the Angels Sing: Notes on a Pre-Conquest *Historia*," in *Laborare fratres in unum: Festschrift László Dobszay zum 60. Geburtstag* (Zurich: Weidmann, 1995), 105-115.

<sup>93</sup> Hiley, "What St. Dunstan Heard the Angels Sing," 115.

ordered you too to reign, crowned on this day in episcopal  
glory.<sup>94</sup>

Dunstan's saintly status invests him with the authority to seek intercession from God the Son, who approaches God the Father. This authority comes not only from his deeds and merits, but from the cult that developed around him – a cult which was mainly based around liturgical devotion locally and even after it achieved national success.<sup>95</sup> The brethren of Christ Church, who attended to the lessons of Dunstan's Life and sang in worship of him, enhanced his reputation not only as a virgin, but as a member of every heavenly choir. As a saint who can intercede among the spirits in all the categories of the litany, Dunstan acts as a powerful patron. The music of the Night Office was therefore more than a 'representation' and a 'foretaste' of heaven, but it was part of a ritual that constructed Dunstan's sanctity. It created and strengthened imagined connections between celestial and terrestrial choirs, and thereby increased the chances of salvation for those with an investment in Dunstan's cult at Christ Church. The next part of this chapter shows that those connections between the two choirs grew tighter still in the following century.

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<sup>94</sup> Adelard, *Lectiones* 12, 144-45.

<sup>95</sup> See Lapidge and Winterbottom, *Early Lives of St Dunstan*, cxxxvii-cl. Alan Thacker in attempting to prove that Dunstan's cult developed slowly at Christ Church, was rather selective with his liturgical evidence ("Cults at Canterbury," 243). For instance, he stated that one of the earliest litanies to mention Dunstan comes from St. Augustine's (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 44), and that Christ Church did not produce a litany invoking Dunstan before 1050. However, the Arundel Psalter (London, British Library, MS Arundel 155), written between 1012 and 1023 at Christ Church, also contains a litany venerating Dunstan. Furthermore, by ignoring the ending of Adelard's twelfth lection, which places Dunstan among the saints mentioned in the litany, Thacker excludes another, more unusual form of liturgical devotion to Dunstan at Christ Church.

### 3: Choirs in post-Conquest Canterbury

#### 3.1: The presence of Dunstan in the works of Osbern, Eadmer and Goscelin

The question of whether Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1070 to 1089, lent his support to Dunstan's cult is debated.<sup>96</sup> Yet there is little to suggest that Lanfranc attempted to suppress local support for the Anglo-Saxon archbishop. Lanfranc's monastic constitutions, written around 1077, do not include a Feast day for Dunstan. It has been suggested, though, that the unspecified major Feast (*festivitas loci*) refers to the Feast of Dunstan rather than that of the Trinity.<sup>97</sup> Whatever the case may be, Dunstan's physical presence in the new cathedral of Christ Church could be felt in two ways by 1077: his relics, along with those of Ælfheah, were placed in wooden chests in the north transept, and a bell, supposedly made by Dunstan's very hands, hung in the cathedral tower.<sup>98</sup>

The preface to Goscelin's *Vita et Translatio S. Edithae* (BHL 2388/89) (1080 x 1083) is dedicated to Lanfranc, partly on account of Dunstan's importance within the narrative. Goscelin states that Lanfranc has shown himself to be an 'effective [...] representative' of Dunstan, and he proclaims that the tolling of Dunstan's bell, installed upon Lanfranc's arrival, sounded out the glory of the English people and Lanfranc's new cathedral.<sup>99</sup> The ringing of Dunstan's bell could be read as a posthumous nod of approval from the old archbishop in favour of the new one; it is just possible that Goscelin is making a reference to Dunstan's reputation as a prophet who recommended candidates for ecclesiastical preferment

<sup>96</sup> For an overview, see Lapidge and Winterbottom, *Early Lives of Dunstan*, cli, and Paul Antony Hayward, "Translation-Narratives in Post-Conquest Hagiography and English Resistance to the Norman Conquest," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 21 (1999): 71. Susan Ridyard addresses the more general question of Norman scepticism and hostility towards Anglo-Saxon saints in "Condigna veneratio: Post-Conquest Attitudes to the Saints of the Anglo-Saxons," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 9 (1986): 179-206.

<sup>97</sup> Margaret Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), make this suggestion only tentatively on p. 172, n. 1.

<sup>98</sup> Lapidge and Winterbottom, *Early Lives of St Dunstan*, cli.

<sup>99</sup> Goscelin, Prologue to *Vita S. Edithae*, trans. Wright and Loncar, 24.

during the reign of Edgar.<sup>100</sup> While Dunstan cannot give assent to Lanfranc's leadership in person, his opinion is nevertheless heard loud and clear. As Hayward has explained, these references to Lanfranc's early activity at Canterbury can be read in one of two ways: '[o]ne could argue that Goscelin is appealing to the respect which he imagines Lanfranc must have held for Dunstan. But it seems more likely that he is attempting [...] to "fashion" the Norman archbishop as an "impresario of things English"'.<sup>101</sup> If the ringing of the bell signified Dunstan's approval of Lanfranc, it also functioned as a reminder to Lanfranc of the responsibility he bore for the maintenance of Anglo-Saxon cults.

The idea that Lanfranc promoted Dunstan's cult at Christ Church may be challenged by manuscript evidence. T.A. Heslop has drawn attention to the exclusion of twenty-seven Anglo-Saxon saints from the Christ Church calendar of the 1120s, which, he claimed, is essentially that which was used in Lanfranc's era.<sup>102</sup> Out of a sample of English calendars from the late Anglo-Saxon and post-Conquest period and a small selection of Norman calendars, the Christ Church product resembles the calendar of Bec most closely.<sup>103</sup> Heslop attributed this parallel to the influence of Lanfranc, previously a monk of Bec, and a group of

<sup>100</sup> See Goscelin, *Vita S. Edithae* 9, 35, and the *Vita S. Wulsini* 3 (*BHL* 8753), trans. Rosalind Love, "The Life of St Wulfsize of Sherborne by Goscelin of Saint-Bertin," in *St Wulfsize and Sherborne: Essays to Celebrate the Millennium of the Benedictine Abbey, 998-1998*, ed. Katherine Barker, David A. Hinton and Alan Hunt (Oxford: Oxbow, 2005), 105. Adelard's *Lectio* 8 states that Edgar only allowed abbots and monks to hold office, who were sometimes marked out by revelation; it then explains that Dunstan had a prophetic dream that he would consecrate Ælfheah as Bishop of Winchester (pp. 130-33). Osbern elaborates on the story in the *Vita* 38 (Stubbs, p. 116). Eadmer follows Osbern (*Vita S. Dunstani* 60, trans. Turner and Muir, p. 149).

<sup>101</sup> Hayward, "Translation-Narratives," 79.

<sup>102</sup> T.A. Heslop, "The Canterbury Calendars and the Norman Conquest," in *Canterbury and the Norman Conquest*, 53. The evidence presented in this paper can be weighed against that in Richard W. Pfaff, "Lanfranc's Supposed Purge of the Anglo-Saxon Calendar," in *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Karl Leyser*, ed. Timothy Reuter (London: Hamledon, 1992), 95-108. Pfaff argued that evidence does not support the view that there was a 'deliberate,' 'massive,' or 'systematic' purging of 'the Anglo-Saxon calendar' (p. 102 and p. 108). However, in his comparison between pre- and post-Conquest calendars, he shows that saints missing from the later source number between one and four, and 'Canterbury alone has lost as many as four' (p. 102). Surely this suggests that the influence of the Norman archbishop could be felt locally? Does a purge have to be systematic and universal in order to be described as a purge?

<sup>103</sup> Heslop, "Canterbury Calendars and the Norman Conquest," 56 and 78.

ecclesiastics he transferred from Bec to the monastic houses of England.<sup>104</sup> Dunstan's Feast of Ordination is absent from the calendar, and was only added in the mid-twelfth century.<sup>105</sup> However, Dunstan's name is found in coloured rubrics on May 19, the Feast of his Deposition. We know from the *Lectiones* of Adelard that Dunstan's entrance into the heavenly life was celebrated at Christ Church before his ordination (October 21) came to be acknowledged. An account in Eadmer's collection of Dunstan's miracles (*BHL* 2347) indicates that vigils were held on a Feast day for St. Dunstan, presumably the Feast of his Deposition, in or before 1087.<sup>106</sup> Although Eadmer had cause to magnify Dunstan's cult, as I shall explore below, there is no reason to doubt Eadmer's testimony that vigils were performed at Christ Church for Dunstan in the 1080s. The Ordination Feast was therefore probably not included in the calendar because the Deposition Feast retained prominence up to the twelfth century.

Osbern's earlier *Miracula* of Dunstan (*BHL* 2245) records wonders that occurred at Christ Church during his youth, when he had been at the cathedral as a child oblate, and from about 1080, when he returned to the cathedral after spending some years studying under Anselm in Bec.<sup>107</sup> One miracle that occurred during this later period has particular relevance, as it highlights the importance of sacred music in post-Conquest Christ Church. Osbern records how he was once gravely troubled by certain men who took out a law suit against him.<sup>108</sup> Jay Rubenstein hypothesised that the conflict in question took place in 1089, involved Prior Henry of Christ Church and concerned the resting-place of Mildreth's relics.<sup>109</sup> Osbern pleads for divine aid at Dunstan's tomb, and soon after, he has a dream-vision in which he is

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>106</sup> Eadmer, *Miracula S. Dunstani* 18, 180-81.

<sup>107</sup> For some details of Osbern's early life and later work, see Rubenstein, "Life and Writings of Osbern," 27-40.

<sup>108</sup> Osbern, *Miracula S. Dunstani* 25, ed. Stubbs, 158-59.

<sup>109</sup> Rubenstein, "Life and Writings of Osbern," 32, 33 and 40. His hypothesis has been accepted by Muir and Turner, *Eadmer of Canterbury*, lxxv.



rapt into an other world space. An immense building lies across a body of water. Having crossed the flood, Osbern enters the house and finds a ‘crowd as if of saints’ (coetum quasi sanctorum) radiating a bright light.<sup>110</sup> He soon discovers that they are the clerical order of Dunstan (clerum magni Dunstani), presumably from Christ Church.<sup>111</sup> The heavenly clerics inform Osbern that Dunstan had been present to celebrate the divine sacraments, but had not yet finished the antiphons of the communion. Instead, he is detained with his relics on earth, attempting to help someone who had asked for his aid. The clerics realise that their heavenly visitor is the one who sought Dunstan’s patronage, and set about finishing Mass with Osbern in their midst. They begin to sing in very sweet and melodious voices, and invite Osbern to accompany them on an instrument ([c]oeperunt itaque dulcissimis ac modulatissimis vocibus psallere, et me ad organizandum quod psallabant invitare).<sup>112</sup> The antiphon they perform (‘Dico autem vobis amicis meis’) is recorded in Continental sources dating from the early ninth century, but only Osbern’s vision suggests that the chant was known in Canterbury.<sup>113</sup> The sound rouses Osbern from sleep, and he rushes to Dunstan’s tomb, imploring him to be present. ‘With God’s help and Dunstan’s patronage,’ Osbern wins the suit.

The dream-vision is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it shows the spirit of Dunstan consorting with his physical remains in the cathedral transept, and thus demonstrates that the relics are the locus of the deceased saint’s power on earth. Secondly, the heavenly crowd share in the liturgical life of the Christ Church community, and their worship does not differ substantially from that which is performed by living monks. Finally, Osbern places himself at the centre of this heavenly worship, which suggests that he believed himself to occupy a prominent

<sup>110</sup> Osbern, *Miracula* 25, 158-59.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> “Dico autem vobis amicis meis” on CANTUS: A Database for Latin Ecclesiastical Chant, University of Waterloo, maintained by Jan Kolářček and Debra Lacoste, <http://cantusdatabase.org/id/002205> (accessed June 16, 2015). It is possible that Osbern learnt the chant while on the Continent.

position in the musical and spiritual life of the priory. Indeed, Osbern acted as the *precentor* at Christ Church from perhaps as early as 1080, which placed him at the heart of the house's liturgical and literary life.<sup>114</sup> David Hiley has tentatively suggested that Osbern, along with Canterbury's two other *precentor* hagiographers, Eadmer and Goscelin, might have contributed to the lively and creative musical atmosphere there in the late eleventh century.<sup>115</sup> Osbern's vision suggests that the *precentor* hagiographers also brought their knowledge of music to bear on their hagiographical products. As Hiley put it, '[t]hose dedicated to a religious life naturally strove to reproduce [...] celestial harmony in their worship, and this in turn is reflected in the hagiographers' descriptions of earthly events'.<sup>116</sup> By positioning himself among the heavenly crowd of Dunstan's disciples, Osbern not only reveals his allegiance to the spirit of the archbishop and patron, but implies that he, like Dunstan, acts as a link between the choirs of heaven and earth, thanks to his position as overseer of the liturgy.

Eadmer's collection of Dunstan's miracles, which followed shortly after Osbern's own hagiographical production, omits Osbern's rather personal account of Dunstan's beneficence but recounts an equally compelling story of Dunstan's membership of the Christ Church community. It is notable that this miracle does not appear in Osbern's earlier collection of Dunstan's miracles, despite the fact that it is purported to have taken place during the lifetime of Scotland, Abbot of St. Augustine's abbey from 1072-87. Eadmer records that Scotland was sitting outside

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<sup>114</sup> For a discussion of how the roles of the monastery librarian (*armarius*) and the cantor came to be conflated during the late-tenth and early-eleventh centuries, see Margot E. Fassler, "The Office of the Cantor in Early Western Monastic Rules and Customaries: A Preliminary Investigation," *Early Music History* 5 (1985): 29-51. Eadmer records that Osbern wrote the *historia* of Ælfheah, containing prose and musical components, under the command of Lanfranc in the *Vita S. Anselmi* 30, p. 54.

<sup>115</sup> David Hiley, "Chant composition at Canterbury after the Norman Conquest," in *Max Lütolf zum 60 Geburtstag: Festschrift*, ed. Bernhard Hangartner and Urs Fischer (Basel: Wiese, 1994), 31-46.

<sup>116</sup> Hiley, "Chant Composition," 31.

at the hour of Vespers on the Feast of St. Dunstan.<sup>117</sup> When the monks of the cathedral rang the bells to signal the beginning of the vigil, Scotland saw a light shine down from heaven and pierce the roof of the cathedral and exclaimed, “[t]ruly our loving father Dunstan comes now to his own festival, wishing to be present [*interesse*] at the show of reverence which his sons are about to perform for God and him on this night”.<sup>118</sup> The brothers of Christ Church indeed ‘sensed his sacred presence [*praesentiam*] among them from the sweet and holy feeling there’.<sup>119</sup> The miracle reinforces Osbern’s conviction that the spirit of Dunstan can be found alongside his relics and underlines the importance of the liturgical commemoration of the saint. The supposed testimony of Abbot Scotland is a particularly powerful tool. In the late eleventh century, the competition between the monastic houses intensified as Lanfranc revitalised the community of Christ Church and Abbot Scotland and his successor, Guy, undertook ambitious building projects at the abbey and translated the relics housed there in a magnificent display of monastic prowess.<sup>120</sup> By claiming that Scotland was a witness to Dunstan’s presence at Christ Church, Eadmer implies that even the abbot of the rival house recognised the potency of the relics.

Eadmer might have added the miracle in light of claims made in Goscelin’s *Translatio S. Augustini*, part of the vast dossier of hagiographical texts finished in the last years of the eleventh century.<sup>121</sup> While the first book focuses on the translations of Augustine and his companions performed between September 6 and 13 in 1091, and on visions and miracles of Augustine that took place at his new shrine, the second concerns the building work that began under Abbot Scotland. In

<sup>117</sup> Eadmer, *Miracula S. Dunstani* 18, 180-81. Osbern and Eadmer’s portrait of Scotland is not a particularly flattering one. Both hagiographers record Scotland’s obstinate reluctance to pardon two knights who killed his nephew. (Osbern, *Miracula* 17, 142-43; Eadmer, *Miracula* 17, 178-79).

<sup>118</sup> Eadmer, *Miracula* 18, 180-81.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Sharpe, “The Setting of St Augustine’s Translation, 1091,” 1-13, and “Goscelin’s St Augustine and St Mildrith: Hagiography and Liturgy in Context,” 502-516.

<sup>121</sup> Goscelin, *Historia Translationis S. Augustini*, ed. Papebroch (411D-443E).

the 1070s, Scotland obtained permission from Pope Alexander II to demolish the earlier structures of the abbey of St. Augustine's and construct new buildings.<sup>122</sup> Some renovation work had been carried out during the abbacy of the penultimate Anglo-Saxon abbot, Wulfric. He had previously obtained permission from Pope Leo IX to construct a rotunda connecting the building of SS Peter and Paul to the oratory of St. Mary.<sup>123</sup> This work involved destroying the western wall of the oratory. Goscelin records that the Virgin was so affronted by this act of desecration that Wulfric was struck dead. Scotland's work involved the complete destruction of the oratory of St. Mary, and the creation of a new crypt dedicated to the Virgin. Despite the radical nature of these renovations, Goscelin demonstrates that Scotland's plans met with divine favour, and that the sightings or auditions, which revealed the holiness of the abbey in Dunstan's time, resumed again during Scotland's abbacy.

First of all, Goscelin emphasises the sanctity of the original oratory by referring to Dunstan's vision of the virgins. He is eager to show that the appearance of the heavenly choir in the oratory of St. Mary was not a single event, but that Dunstan's desire for the spiritual life increased in response to his many celestial encounters at the abbey:

Here, that Most High Parent was often seen, and was known to have been heard [singing] with the sweet chorus of virgins in the ineffable sweetness of celestial harmony [cum dulcimodo virginum choro ineffabili suavitate caelestis harmoniae noscitur audita]. In this most dazzling company [contubernio], the most Blessed Dunstan, the Angel of the armies of the Lord, and, after

<sup>122</sup> Goscelin, *Historia Translationis S. Augustini* 2.2.7 (434A-B); Sharpe, "Setting of St Augustine's Translation," 1.

<sup>123</sup> For details of the design of Wulfric's *rotunda*, see William St. John Hope, "Recent Discoveries in the Abbey Church of St. Austin at Canterbury," *Archaeologia Cantiana* 32 (1917): 1-26.

Augustine and his consorts, the most shining ornament of angels, more closely and more frequently stood among [the virgins]; and just as the thirsting deer goes to the fountain of water [Ps 42:1], so that man, having seized upon the sweetness of supernal harmony [illum supernae modulationis dulcedine captum], incessantly sought this Paradise of Saints.<sup>124</sup>

The allusion to the presence of the Virgin Mary herself within the oratory suggests that Goscelin was drawing on Osbern's version of the miracle. He goes on to show that miracles of this kind took place while Scotland acted as abbot, and offers a technically complex description, no doubt based on his own musical expertise, of how Scotland also heard a heavenly choir singing in the oratory of St. Mary.<sup>125</sup> The Latin is given in full on account of the complexity of the passage:

On a certain night, before nocturnal vigils had aroused him from sleep, as he was lying in a room of the church next to the oratory, a sweet-sounding chorus, as if composed of men and boys, was miraculously heard singing psalms, one side alternating with the other, rendering the most graceful of consonances, an octave. While they sang together in this manner through all the intervals, the boys responded to the men with different intervals in *organum*.

(quadam nocte ante nocturnas vigiliis expurgefactus a somno, uti accubabat in vicina ipsi ecclesiae cella, chorus mire dulcisonus alternatim auditur psallentium, tamquam virorum et

<sup>124</sup> Goscelin, *Historia Translationis S. Augustini* 2.2.8 (434C). London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian B xx, f. 128v, contains an annotation reading 'nota bene' in the margins next to the words 'virginum choro'. There are also traces of a manicule. The provenance of the manuscript is St. Augustine's abbey (S. Xii in).

<sup>125</sup> Hiley, "Chant Composition," mentions Goscelin's accounts of the concerts in the oratory of St. Mary, but goes not go into detail about the kind of music performed by the choirs or its significance (p. 31).

puerorum, gratissimam consonantiam diapason reddentium;  
 dum modo cunctis modulis concinerent, modo distinctis organis  
 parvuli viris responderent.)<sup>126</sup>

The performance by the heavenly choir of men and boys reflects contemporary music practice. The group is divided into two (alternatim [...] psallentium), mirroring the arrangement of monastic choirs. Sometimes the boys sing at an octave (*diapason*) above the men, though all the intervals (*cunctis modulis*), and sometimes they sing at different intervals (*modulis [...] distinctis*).<sup>127</sup> This second type of polyphony, singing in *organum*, is discussed in the ninth century musical treatise, the *Musica enchiriadis*.<sup>128</sup> It is described as a two-voice harmony whereby the organal voice follows the principal voice, note for note, at the interval of a fourth or fifth below it.<sup>129</sup> The practice was common on the Continent, and theoretical texts such as the *Musica enchiriadis* were available at Winchester and Canterbury.<sup>130</sup> Organal singing was also practised at Winchester and something of what was worked out in performance came to be codified in the Winchester Troper.<sup>131</sup> The rubrics that appear alongside the *organa* in the Troper emphasise the sweetness of the sound. For example, one rubric reads, ‘Melodia sublimis et dulcis’.<sup>132</sup> It appears that Goscelin was familiar with this style of polyphony and, deeming it to be supremely beautiful, described the melody of the heavenly citizens

<sup>126</sup> Goscelin, *Historia Translationis S. Augustini* 2.2.8 (434C).

<sup>127</sup> I am immensely grateful to Calvin Bower (email, June 21, 2014) and Susan Rankin (email, June 2, 2014) for discussing this passage with me and providing a gloss on the terms.

<sup>128</sup> Raymond Erickson, trans., and Claude V. Palisca, ed., *Musica enchiriadis and Scolia enchiriadis* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>129</sup> See the introduction to the editions of *Musica enchiriadis* and *Scolia enchiriadis* by Erickson and Palisca (pp. xxii, xxvi, xxxiii) and also *Musica enchiriadis* 13, 37.

<sup>130</sup> Susan Rankin, *The Winchester Troper: Facsimile Edition and Introduction* (London: Stainer & Bell, 2007), 62. Rankin mentions two manuscripts containing the *Musica* and *Scolia enchiriadis* that were copied at Canterbury: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 260 (Christ Church, Canterbury, S. X ex) and Cambridge, University Library, Gg.v.35 (St. Augustine’s Canterbury, S. Xi med).

<sup>131</sup> Rankin, *Winchester Troper*, 61-73.

<sup>132</sup> Rankin, *Winchester Troper*, 63.

(supernos cives) in these terms.<sup>133</sup> The passage therefore not only provides evidence for the practice of organal singing at St. Augustine's in the late eleventh century, but demonstrates the importance of musical performance in establishing the sanctity of a place.

Goscelin takes pains to show that Scotland's destruction of this sacred space and construction of the crypt does not dislodge the heavenly crowds. He confirms that the heavenly patron of the building, the Virgin Mary, continued to use it as an earthly dwelling:

Frequently that Queen of the world deigned to show herself not only through miraculous healings, but also through revelations and the sweet concerts of heavenly citizens [supernorum civium concentibus dulcisonis], with an odour of inestimable sweetness, no less in this crypt than in the oratory that had stood in the same place.<sup>134</sup>

Goscelin relates two of many sightings, or rather soundings, of the virginal choir in the newly constructed crypt. In the first, the guard of the crypt sees Mary encircled by virgins who sing 'the sweet praise of heavenly songs' (dulcimodam modulabant aethereorum carminum laudem).<sup>135</sup> In the second, a venerable old brother named Gregory hears the Office of the Virgin being performed in 'celestial harmony' (supern[a] harmoni[a]) before the Night Office.<sup>136</sup> These visions and auditions are deliberate allusions to Dunstan's sighting of the virginal choir in the hagiographies of B. and Osbern. Scotland is nothing short of a latter-day Dunstan; his church, despite having changed form, remains in essence a house of saints. The miracles assert the primacy of St. Augustine's abbey at a time when there was intense

<sup>133</sup> Goscelin, *Historia Translationis S. Augustini* 8 (434C-D).

<sup>134</sup> Goscelin, *Historia Translationis S. Augustini* 20 (437F).

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. (437F-38A).

competition between the Canterbury religious houses over the relics of Anglo-Saxon saints. Christ Church might have possessed the relics of Dunstan, but St. Augustine's accommodated the heavenly Queen who inspired his devotions. Eadmer's account of Dunstan's presence during his Feast of Ordination is a suitable riposte to Goscelin's bold claims about the sanctity of St. Augustine's.

Scotland's revelation in the *Miracula S. Dunstani* is one of several miracles discussed in this chapter that involve the descent of heavenly citizens to earth. The idea that these citizens appeared at times of the performance of liturgical music is significant. It is also evoked in Goscelin's *Translationes* of Mildreth and Augustine for the purposes of validating the abbey's claims to their relics. In these instances of revelation, spirits do not appear alone, but as part of a heavenly company – a celestial *contubernium* of the kind portrayed in the frontispiece of the New Minster Charter.

### 3.2: *Contubernia* in the hagiographies of Goscelin of Saint-Bertin

Throughout Goscelin's corpus, the word *contubernium* is used most frequently to denote a community of worshippers within a monastery or nunnery.<sup>137</sup> In the *Vita S. Edithae*, it refers to the community of virgins at Wilton under the protection of their spiritual mother, Wulfthryth.<sup>138</sup> Similarly, it indicates a company of virgins acting under the direction of Hildelith, the nuns of Barking abbey under Ethelburga, the virgins at Ely, and Mildreth's community of sisters at Minster-in-Thanet.<sup>139</sup> It is applied to the male monastic communities of Ramsey under

<sup>137</sup> Tom Licence lists occurrences of this word in *Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: Miracles of St Edmund*, "Introduction," 120, n. 444.

<sup>138</sup> Goscelin, *Vita S. Edithae* 4, ed. Wilmart, 43.

<sup>139</sup> Goscelin, *Lectiones de S. Hildelitha* 7 (BHL 3942), ed. M.L. Colker, "Texts of Jocelyn of Canterbury which relate to the History of Barking Abbey," *Studia monastica* 7 (1965), 457; *Vita et virtutes S. Ethelburgae virginis* 2 (BHL 2630), ed. Colker, 401; *Vita S. Wihthurge* 9 (BHL 8979), ed. Love, *Female Saints of Ely*, 68; *Vita S. Mildrithae* 27, ed. Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 141.



Æthelwine and the brothers of St. Augustine's abbey.<sup>140</sup> In the *Vita S. Augustini*, it refers to the group of missionaries and worshippers who accompany Augustine to England.<sup>141</sup> In all of these instances, the word refers to a group of human worshippers living on earth. Elsewhere in Goscelin's *oeuvre*, however, *contubernium* denotes a gathering of disembodied spirits. In his *De miraculis S. Eadmundi*, Goscelin claims that the soul can leave the body in advance of death for periods of time during sleep, when 'it is freer to seek the company of other spirits [*contubernium*] in accordance with its sociable nature'.<sup>142</sup>

The second book of the *Liber confortatorius* (c. 1083), which concerns the battle between good and evil spirits, discusses *contubernia* of spirits in an eschatological context. Goscelin draws on late antique and early medieval ideas about the ascent of the soul through the air after death, warning that the way to heaven is obstructed by malign powers. In a section entitled, 'the multitude of virtues,' Goscelin reassures his reader, Eve, 'because you have heard of such an innumerable multitude with hostile power, it is necessary that you be strengthened with the more powerful allies of supernatural virtues, which you have as your companions [*contubernalibus*]'. He continues, 'we can believe that in death each soul will have those spirits as companions that it associated with itself while living in the body' ([c]redibile est autem quod illos spiritus in egressu suo queque anima comites habebit, quos in corpore uiuendo sibi sociauit).<sup>143</sup> Goscelin provides the example of St. Martin, in whose 'quiet' and 'humble' breast rested the majesty of God and all the saints. Upon his death, these good spirits, which 'possess[ed]' and 'accompan[ied]' his soul in life, transported Martin to heaven (ita migrante ad

<sup>140</sup> Goscelin, *Vita S. Yvonis episcopi Persae* 2.11 (BHL 4621) (PL 155: 87A-B); *Translatio S. Mildrethae* 36, ed. D.W. Rollason, *Mediaeval Studies* 48 (1986), 207.

<sup>141</sup> Goscelin, *Vita S. Augustini* 14, ed. Papbroch, *Acta SS.* May VI, 26 (381C).

<sup>142</sup> Goscelin, *De miraculis S. Eadmundi* 16, trans. Licence, 230-31.

<sup>143</sup> Goscelin, *Liber confortatorius* 2.59, trans. Barnes and Hayward, 139-40. Latin from edition by C.H. Talbot, *Analecta monastica*, 3, *Studia Anselmiana*, 37 (1955): 59. The Latin will henceforth be provided in brackets after the main citation.

sidera omnis celestium uirtutum comitatus suscepit ac deduxit).<sup>144</sup> Goscelin transforms the well-known *topos* of heavenly psychopomps by suggesting that the choir of spirits that leads the soul to heaven comes from within the soul itself. The *contubernales* may therefore be read allegorically. He states that these sacred guards (*sancta presida*) strike a bargain (*paciscantur*) to protect those who engage in acts of praying, psalmody, and divine reading – devotional practices at the heart of Benedictine monasticism.<sup>145</sup> In the fourth and final book, Goscelin imagines Eve’s eschatological reunion with the nuns of Wilton. He describes the hierarchy of angels and groups of saints as listed in the litany, but he also adds that there is an abundance of *contubernia* composed of heavenly inhabitants and people.<sup>146</sup> Are these ‘supernorum cum hominibus [...] contubernia’ the same groupings of good spirits and souls that Goscelin depicted earlier in the *Liber confortatorius*, or is *contubernia* used more generally, to convey the intermingling of souls and angels within the celestial city? The lack of distinction is perhaps intentional – angels elide with virtues gathered in the soul during life. These good spirits not only transport the soul to heaven, but surround it and rejoice with it for eternity. Goscelin’s Canterbury hagiographies show that such companies also visit the resting places of saints on earth.

In 1087 or 1088, the recently founded college of secular canons, St. Gregory’s priory, began to claim that they possessed the relics of St. Mildreth.<sup>147</sup> Goscelin refuted this assertion in the *Libellus contra inanes S. virginis Mildrethae usurpatores* (BHL 5962).<sup>148</sup> One chapter from this document was later incorporated into the *Translatio* of St. Mildreth (BHL 5961), which was among the group of

<sup>144</sup> Goscelin, *Liber confortatorius* 2.59, 140 (Talbot, 59).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Goscelin, *Liber confortatorius* 14.15 (Talbot, 115). Barnes and Hayward give, ‘the glorious assembly of angels and men,’ (p. 205), though this translation does not capture the intimacy of *contubernium*.

<sup>147</sup> Sharpe, “Setting of St Augustine’s Translation,” 4; Sharpe, “Goscelin’s St Augustine and St Mildreth,” 503; and Rollason, *The Mildreth Legend*, 21.

<sup>148</sup> Goscelin, *Libellus contra inanes S. virginis Mildrethae usurpatores*, ed. M. L. Colker, “A Hagiographical Polemic,” *Mediaeval Studies* 39 (1977): 69-96.

texts on the 1091 translations.<sup>149</sup> The chapter centres on an honourable old man in the abbey of St. Augustine, Livinus.<sup>150</sup> Although he is renowned for his conversation, prayer and psalmody, he believes that Mildreth's relics lie at St. Gregory's priory. An angel appears to Livinus while he is sleeping and reveals to him a wedding ceremony taking place between Mildreth and Christ in St. Augustine's abbey. Livinus witnesses Mildreth descend from the heavens and into the nave of the abbey with 'Angels, Archangels, Thrones, Dominions and innumerable flocks of heaven' (Angeli, Archangeli, Throni, Dominationes atque innumera supernorum agmina).<sup>151</sup> Surrounded by these flocks, Mildreth, the bride of Christ, is led up the nave to her monument and altar. Accompanied by angelic hymns, she takes her place inside the tomb 'as if it were the bedroom of her rest'.<sup>152</sup>

The vision takes place at the precisely the same time that the choir of St. Augustine's performs the twelfth responsory of the morning mass in honour of Mildreth. The text of the twelfth responsory, which may have been composed by Goscelin himself, celebrates Mildreth's return from heaven to earth: 'O what a Feast Day, when Mildrith, the salvation of her native land, returns! She is brought to meet all provinces; a hymn of praise is lifted to heaven; the heavenly citizens rejoice [ymnus laudis in celum tollitur, superna congratulantur]'.<sup>153</sup> The content and the timing of the responsory harmonises with Livinus' vision. Goscelin urges each soul that is made happy by that *conuenientia* (which has the double meaning of 'harmony' and 'meeting') to consider (perpendat), 'that she is seen to come with supernal company [superno contubernio] alongside the song of her arrival, and to

<sup>149</sup> Goscelin, *Contra [...] usurpatores* 24, 92-94.

<sup>150</sup> Goscelin, *Translatio S. Mildrethae* 35, 204-206.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 206. In "Goscelin's St Augustine and St Mildrith," Richard Sharpe put forward the suggestion that Goscelin wrote the words of the antiphons and responsories found in London, British Library, MS Harley 3908. In "Words and Music by Goscelin of Canterbury," *Early Music* (1991): 95-97, he hypothesised that Goscelin also composed the music accompanying the words in this manuscript.

go to the storehouse of her rest when this song has finished'.<sup>154</sup> While Goscelin's account suggests that the vision is not caused by, but simply coincides with, the performance of the twelfth responsory, there is an underlying suggestion that the song of Mildreth's arrival invokes invisible presences and brings the eternal into the temporal. Like relics themselves – which Brown calls small objects with boundless associations – the liturgy brought the great, timeless expanses of heaven down in to the cloisters.<sup>155</sup>

The passage is also an extended allusion to chapter 19 of the *Regula S. Benedicti*. Goscelin comments, 'we believe (as the psalmist teaches) that we sing to God in the sight of the angels; neither do angelic citizens disdain to praise God alongside the devoted servants' (*credamus (psalmista docente) in conspectu angelorum nos Domino psallere, nec dedignare concives angelos cum devotis famulis Deum laudare*).<sup>156</sup> The precept of the Benedictine Rule is dramatized in the vision of Mildreth and her cohort of angels. Such a vivid dramatization serves as a positive reminder to the Benedictine brethren at St. Augustine's to sing with their full attention, and thereby increase the glory of Mildreth's cult. Furthermore, Goscelin's additional statement – that angels join in the praise of human worshippers – demonstrates a shift in the understanding of the monastic office. While the sixth-century Rule does not indicate that the angels participate in the praise of human singers, this late eleventh-century text suggests that angelic worshippers join with the community of the devout in mutual admiration of the saints.

The concurrent praise of humans and angels in veneration of saints' relics is also prominent in the *Historia translationis* of Augustine. On the Octave of his translation, at the same time that members of the community of St. Augustine's

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Brown, *The Cult of Saints*, 78.

<sup>156</sup> Goscelin, *Translatio S. Mildrethae* 35, 205-206.

abbey keep vigil with psalms around the altar of the saint, a priest from Canterbury, ‘inter somnolentiam vel ecstasim,’ witnesses a vision of a choir of angels (angelorum [...] choru[s]) descending a ladder from heaven into the nave of the abbey, ‘as if a column was balanced there’.<sup>157</sup> The priest, who knows nothing about the translation of Augustine, is stupefied by the sight. Even when he discovers that St. Augustine’s relics rest in the place where the choirs of angels were seen to descend, he is still amazed by the heavenly sign of the saint’s merits. Goscelin once again offers a gloss on the vision, which is worth quoting in full:

Let no one be reluctant to believe that the ladder of the dreaming Jacob was revealed in the dregs of our time to an ordinary person, because the Lord of all does to great and small what he wants, when he wants, and where he wants. Let us also see in faith that which [the priest] in seeing perhaps did not understand: angelic citizens [angelicos cives] lovingly descended via that ladder to the sweet cast-offs of the soul of their companion [*contubernalis*], Augustine, and warmed again his famous relics in this most generous of visits. They showed that they rejoiced in his glory with the people of the earth. Truly, this is the ladder, which, with the steps of the highest virtues and the supernal flame of love, you ascended with ardour to heaven, high Augustine!<sup>158</sup>

Like the passage from the *Translatio S. Mildrethae* explored above, the story has a clear polemical purpose – the sightings of the heavenly communities validate the

<sup>157</sup> Goscelin, *Historia Translationis S. Augustini* 1.2.14 (415C). The phrase, ‘inter somnolentiam vel ecstasim’ could be translated as, ‘between sleeping and waking’. Tom Licence (personal communication) has suggested an alternative translation of, ‘between dreaming and a visionary state’. The motif of the column of light, stretching from heaven to the relics of a saint, is common in Goscelin’s works. See, for example, *De miraculis S. Eadmundi* 1.5, 160–61.

<sup>158</sup> Goscelin, *Historia Translationis S. Augustini* 1.2.14 (415D).

abbey's claims to the relics of the saints. Both miracles signal a new understanding of the spiritual character of the monastic liturgy by showing that the Offices performed in honour of saints create links between the saint's community on earth and their celestial *contubernium*. Moreover, the passage functions as an extended allusion to Jacob's ladder as it is interpreted by the *Regula S. Benedicti*. Chapter seven of the Rule, 'Concerning humility,' reads the ladder as a metaphor for virtue – one ascends the ladder through humility and descends through pride. 'Truly, that ladder standing upright is our life in the world, which is raised up to heaven by God through humility of heart.'<sup>159</sup> Augustine, who ascended the steps of virtue up to the heavens in life, became part of a community of angels after death. The vision thus bears a similarity to Goscelin's imagining of the psychopomp *topos* explored earlier in the chapter. In each case, the soul is shown to create its own connection to heaven through the practice of Benedictine precepts.

#### 4: Conclusion

This chapter has pinpointed three distinct ways in which writers conceived of the relationship between the saint and his earthly and heavenly communities in the last years of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Firstly, the living saint was the channel of communication between heavenly and earthly realms; in B.'s *Vita*, Dunstan possesses the ability to hear celestial music while still alive and, on one occasion, instructs his monks and clerics in the art of singing it. Secondly, the spirit of the saint was an intercessor among heavenly choirs; in the *Lectioes*, Dunstan is glorified by the antiphons and readings of the Christ Church community, for whom he provides patronage. Thirdly, the body of the saint was a nexus between choirs that sing the same liturgy, as in post-Conquest hagiographies, in which saints' relics are adored in the praises of the living and the dead. The discussion has

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<sup>159</sup> Chamberlin, *The Rule of St. Benedict* 7, 28. A reference to the Ladder of Humility can also be found in the *Liber confortatorius* 2.50, trans. Barnes and Hayward: '[God] accepts those rising from humility and constancy, and throws down those who are slipping because of pride and negligence' (p. 128).

therefore illustrated some of the complexities and nuances of the relationships between heavenly and earthly choirs. While previous scholars have been content to describe monastic song as a participation in and anticipation of the concerts of those spirits above, I have highlighted various ways in which this was thought to be achieved. Monks did not only aspire to join the ranks above – those orders descended into buildings of worship.

The idea of the simultaneity of heavenly and earthly worship stretches back to early Christian and Jewish visions of heaven, but it acquired a new dimension when evoked in connection to eleventh-century saints' cults – the harmonies of heaven were localised, heard in a specific earthly location. This innovation arose from the requirement of hagiographers to demonstrate the sanctity of relic collections, and, by extension, to proclaim the holiness of the buildings in which they were honoured. Visions of choirs at the site of the saints' burial signified and even validated the presence of a member of the celestial community in that particular place on earth. Such assurance was not needed in England prior to the intense promotion of Anglo-Saxon saints' cults and the formation of a competitive atmosphere in the early Anglo-Norman era. Signs of heavenly presence also appear at a specific time in these sources – at night, while monks are performing vigils.

Why were heavenly choirs conjured by the Night Office? There are several possible answers, which need not be mutually exclusive. One possibility is that the miracles of Gregory of Tours provided a precedent and a model for the depiction of the visitation of heavenly choirs to churches in the dead of night. Related to this is the belief that the night was the realm of the dead, and the time at which spirits left their bodies and associated with one another in dreams and in sacred spaces. Another possibility is that it emphasised the merits of vigilance by demonstrating that those who maintain a state of alertness in body and soul will be the first to

sample the delights of the heavenly kingdom. Finally, if Goscelin did indeed compose responsories for the Offices of Mildreth and Augustine, he might have been keen to show that music was a medium through which heaven and earth could be drawn together.

All the hagiographers discussed in the latter half of this chapter were involved in the musical life of the Canterbury houses. Osbern and Goscelin's musical expertise allowed them to develop the acoustic aspect of hagiographical visions to an unusual degree. Osbern's dream-vision contains reference to an antiphon chant for the Feast of All Saints, versions of which were being copied on the Continent from around the last decade of the ninth century. Goscelin's account of Scotland's audition of the heavenly choirs is the first instance of a technically accurate description of (heavenly) polyphony to be examined in this thesis. Along with B.'s mention of the Sedulius hymn, these examples suggest that writers were moving away from abstract descriptions of the sublimity of the music of the angels and righteous and towards more finely drawn depictions of sacred song that, either in form, content, or the context in which it was recited, evoked heaven and its citizens.

The influence of Benedictine spirituality on the texts discussed in this chapter was profound. B.'s portrait of Dunstan as a virgin dedicated to his personal devotions was markedly different to Wulfstan's hagiographical presentation of Æthelwold as founder extraordinaire and scourge of the secular clerics, but it resonated with the spiritual side of the reform movements of the tenth century. The structure of Adelard's *Lectiones* of Dunstan's was shaped by directions supplied in the Rule concerning the form of the Night Office. The *Regula S. Benedicti* also stimulated Goscelin's figurative understanding of Jacob's ladder and the idea that angels attend monastic services. The extent to which the Rule was used by



hagiographers as a stock house of ascetic or contemplative imagery is an intriguing question and merits further consideration.

This case study of the spiritual and intellectual centre of Canterbury has unearthed evidence that shows how heavenly choirs pervaded the musical and literary aspects of monastic culture in the late tenth century and late eleventh century. Only future research that compares the texts discussed here with productions from other monastic centres in England and in the Continent can establish if this interest in groups of spirits and their liturgy was exceptional or typical.<sup>160</sup> Yet the discoveries made here reveal that heavenly choirs were not a static ideal, but part of an ecclesiastical communion in which music came to play an increasingly important role.

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<sup>160</sup> For a glimpse into the lively culture of musical and hagiographical production in which Goscelin and Osbern were working, see Page, *Christian West and its Singers*, 383-410.

## General conclusion

Hippolyte Delehaye's wistful image of hagiographical commonplaces as 'leaves floating in the air, brought by the wind from far' comes to mind again as this study draws to a close.<sup>1</sup> The thesis has not searched for an elusive source of origin of the psychopomp or new song *topoi*. It has examined the form of the commonplaces themselves and how they changed shape and course as they were carried along channels of transmission. Ideas about heavenly choirs were indeed 'in the air,' arising in conversations and lodging themselves in minds, informing the ways in which people understood holiness and its rewards. The permutations of the two major *topoi* examined over the course of the thesis are only examples of the ideas that came to be recorded in writing. Even within this necessarily limited selection of material, there is evidence in abundance to suggest that heavenly choirs were part of early Christian, late antique and early medieval thought-worlds. Since the previous four chapters have only considered *topoi* of heavenly choirs within what may be referred to broadly as the ascetic tradition, there is ample opportunity for future research to explore the influence of the Pseudo-Dionysian celestial hierarchy and the concept of the music of the spheres on the texts of Anglo-Saxon England. It would also be instructive to trace the *topoi* beyond the chronological and geographical boundaries of the thesis and examine, for instance, whether they were transformed by late medieval affective spirituality. At present, it remains for me to summarise the main findings of this thesis.

Most broadly, the study illustrates the richness and diversity of forms of imagined praise. The groups of heavenly singers that have been considered over the past four chapters – the heavenly host as a whole, the satellite chorus of psychopomps, the 144,000 virgins and even the quasi-celestial choir of monastic

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<sup>1</sup> Delehaye, *Legends of the Saints*, trans. Attwater, 24.

singers – have their own group dynamics and acoustic character. Moreover, many examples across the thesis have showed how the simultaneous worship of people and angels did not take one form. Four snapshots from across time offer very different views of joint human and angelic worship. The eternal concert depicted in Revelation (1 CE), which began around the throne of God and percolated through all creation, quite possibly reflected an early Christian liturgical service. A long Latin version of the *Visio S. Pauli*, written in the fifth or early sixth century, revealed that no one could praise God on earth until David the celestial choir-master had intoned the hymns of celebration. The vision indicated the importance of responsorial psalmody in the monastic communities of Late Antiquity. The late eighth-century *Navigatio S. Brendani abbatis* recorded how a flock of heavenly birds sang a monastic Office resembling those found in the *Antiphonary of Bangor* and the Office of Columbanus. Finally, in Goscelin of Saint-Bertin’s late eleventh century texts, heavenly *contubernia* honoured the relics of saints alongside monastic communities in the Night Office. These snapshots reveal that the relationship between heavenly and earthly choirs changed to reflect the forms of worship that were practiced within churches and monasteries. The critical language of angelic praise as a ‘model’ for earthly communities, which ‘imitate’ the worship and ‘participate’ in it, is useful to an extent.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, when we encounter a joint liturgy of heaven and earth in a text, we need to be specific about what kind of heavenly choir is portrayed, the content of their song repertoire and how angels, the righteous and living people establish a relationship through praise. Only then can we situate the worship in its particular historic moment.

In its consideration of angels as part of communities of worshippers, the thesis demonstrates that their presence continued to be felt well into the last years

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<sup>2</sup> Hiley, “What St. Dunstan Heard the Angels Sing,” 115; Deshman, *Benedictional of Æthelwold*, 175-76; Leclercq, “Monasticism and Angelism,” 131, and *Life of Perfection*, 19-26; Milis, *Angelic Monks and Earthly Men*, 77.

of the tenth century and beyond. The argument therefore offers a response to the narrative of the diminishing importance of the angel that runs through the works of Peter Brown, Henry Mayr-Harting and Richard Sowerby.<sup>3</sup> It is notable that in the examples regarded above, the first two visions depict a top-down model of worship whereas the last two show heavenly choirs on earth, singing the monastic hours. Further research is needed to develop this picture of increased intimacy between celestial and terrestrial communities of worshippers in the Anglo-Saxon and early Anglo-Norman periods. Given the cultural exchanges that took place between England and the regions of Ireland, Lotharingia, Flanders and Normandy in the last few centuries covered by this thesis, it will be necessary to place any new developments within a wider European context.

Throughout the span of time covered by the thesis, it is evident that spirits of the righteous shared the contemplative aspect of angelic identity. Chapter one provided a glimpse into the praises of hosts of angels and saints, and chapter two revealed that the spirits of the dead acted as psychopomps alongside angels. In this second chapter, we saw that when Rufinus and Bede re-wrote hagiographical source material, they omitted choirs of human psychopomps, probably because they were thought to be extraneous. In Ælfric's work, however, the idea that human souls could function as psychopomps found its fullest expression. Yet Ælfric continued to associate angelic psychopomps with the death of saints as well as the righteous laity, as witnessed by his *Lives of Saints* – human escorts did not *replace* angels in this niche, but both were employed as the situation demanded. The final chapter of the thesis discussed Goscelin's idea of the *contubernium*, a synonym for *chorus* that specifically denoted the intimacy between human and angelic companions. *Contubernia* gathered around the relics of saints, rather as groups of the righteous appeared at tombs in the writings of Gregory of Tours. Whereas

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<sup>3</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*; Mayr-Harting, *Perceptions of Angels in History*; Sowerby, "Angels in Anglo-Saxon England".

saints might have filled the social niche of angels, the ‘very special dead’ stimulated and perhaps even intensified their contemplative role.

Evidence considered in this thesis suggests that the musical character of heavenly choirs developed over time. Chapter two began with the parable of Dives and Lazarus, which mentioned angelic psychopomps, but not as singers. The influence of visions of heavenly ascent seems to have led early writers to associate the liturgy of the heavenly host with the satellite choir of psychopomps. As the *topos* developed, so did its sonic dimension. Gregory of Tours suggested that psychopomps could be detected by sound alone, Gregory the Great explicitly linked the audition of heavenly music to merit, and despite fluctuations in the *topos*, some writers came to regard heavenly song as a sign of the presence of psychopomps. Chapter three showed that audition of heavenly song was not a major part of the new song *topos* until Augustine conceded that the lower ranks of the saved could hear the song of the highest ranking choir of souls in heaven – an adaptation that proved useful to writers addressing a readership including non-virgins. This made the new song less of an abstract spiritual ideal and more like an experience that had an effect on the embodied soul. Its musical aspects were foregrounded in Bede and Aldhelm’s poetic counterparts to their prose works on virginity. The final chapter demonstrated that the sound of heavenly choirs was further developed in the monastic contexts of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Goscelin’s highly technical description of the *organa* of spirits suggests that the sweet and strange sounds of polyphonic music evoked the delights of the world above, and was perhaps intended to do just that. Although the aural turn in medieval studies has been significantly weighted towards the texts of the later Middle Ages, this thesis has exposed just some of the wealth of evidence that lies, largely overlooked, in the repositories of Latin and Old English texts.

Not only did the sound of heavenly choirs change – writers also altered the number and constitution of choirs in response to the spiritual climate. The third chapter argued that the Marian motif developed to meet the needs of female ascetics in the fourth century. This was a time when martyrs no longer claimed first prize in the ascetic contest, and virginity came to be regarded as the highest form of daily sacrifice. The rise of confessor saints was also a factor in the version of the *Visio S. Pauli* discussed in chapter one; the City of Christ accommodates psalm singers, uneducated devotees to the Lord and virgins. In the third chapter, I also argued that Athanasius created new choirs to accommodate widows and married in response to Hieracas’ denunciation of married life; Jerome crafted a hybrid of one aspect of the new song *topos* and Psalm 48:8 to show that even those souls who did not remain virgins in life were nevertheless deserving of heavenly reward. Even Aldhelm, who clung to the conventions of the new song *topos*, developed the profile of the choir of the chaste so as to lend encouragement to those readers who had lost their virginity. As noted above, Ælfric evoked the psychopomp *topos* to demonstrate that the laity – the group he associated with the married in his threefold hierarchy of merit – could also experience heavenly joy at the time of their death. Choirs increased in response to religious controversy and/or to meet the spiritual needs of the reader or auditor. The *longue durée* approach has given an insight into why new choirs appeared at particular moments, and it has therefore provided a more nuanced view of the increase in categories of sainthood than that offered by the evidence of Anglo-Saxon litanies.

While *topoi* of heavenly choirs shifted in response to changes in spiritual macro-climates (the rise of confessor saints) and micro-climates (the profile of a particular readership), *topoi* also underwent transformations when ideas and images

were exchanged across texts of different genres.<sup>4</sup> Examples of intertextuality occur within each chapter. The first chapter shows that the vision of the *Fís Adamnán* includes choirs of disciples and innocents, categories that might have been imported from the Gallican litany. In chapter two, I suggested that the song of psychopomps developed in light of depictions of the heavenly liturgy in the visions of heavenly ascent. The third chapter argued that the association between the new song and the incorruptibility of the body, as found in the writings of Bede and Abbo of Fleury, possibly arose from a gloss provided in Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis*. Finally, in chapter four, the imagery of angelic choirs within monasteries and the Ladder of Humility from the *Regula S. Benedicti* appeared in the hagiographical works of Goscelin. While *topoi* developed within rather tight narrative and generic contexts, one way in which innovations came about was when ideas travelled from one kind of text to another.

They did not travel of their own accord, however. Behind every new use of a *topos* was a writer, making use of what was around them. The kinds of stories that people told were determined, to an extent, by the availability of resources and by generic conventions. None of the works considered in this thesis fundamentally reimagined the *topoi* of heavenly choirs. Yet changes in the spiritual climate and the writer's engagement of other works of the time triggered new associations, leading to fresh readings and renderings of commonplaces. Although innovations in *topoi* align with some of the macro-narratives of medieval history – the rise of the confessor saint in Late Antiquity, the increased focus on penitence in the seventh and eighth centuries, and heightened attention to the liturgy during the Benedictine reform – the changes that took place on the micro-level of the text happened in a fashion that was far from linear. New contexts awakened writers to

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<sup>4</sup> Sowerby also emphasised the importance of the 'cross-pollination' of different genres in "Angels in Anglo-Saxon England," 253-54.

the significance of old ideas.<sup>5</sup> It is my hope that, by providing a fresh perspective on the conventional, this thesis has also offered an original way of seeing, or indeed, hearing, some works of the early medieval period.

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<sup>5</sup> Leyser (“Angels, Monks, and Demons in the Early Medieval West,” 22) made a similar point: ‘[t]he intimacy of a tradition well-studied, even internalized, coexists with a readiness to take flight in new directions, to respond to new contexts and changed human needs’.



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