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Questions of Identity

Rewriting Anglo-Saxon Female Saints in Post-Conquest England
c.1066-c.1500

Kerryn Olsen

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and History,
The University of Auckland, 2009.
Abstract


The focus of this thesis is the production of identity arising from the writing and re-writing of the vitae of the Anglo-Saxon female patron saints of certain nunneries founded before the Norman Conquest in 1066, namely Wilton, Nunnaminster, Romsey and Barking. The vitae studied date from the eleventh century, shortly after the Conquest, through to the sixteenth century, just before the English Reformation.

The re-writing of the vita of a patron saint, commissioned by the community who depends on her, is necessarily involved in the formation and reformation of identity of that community. However, the writers of these vitae, where they can be identified, often come from outside the community and, therefore, while trying to fulfil their brief, also bring their own agenda to their texts. In examining the uses and creations of identity in these texts, three layers are focused on: the identity of the saint, as the re-writings of her life alter her personality; the identity of the community around the saint which, as reflected in the changing of the vita, develops over the period in question; and the identity of the Englishness, as it develops after the Conquest to include the Normans.

The function of patron saints’ vitae in the creation and fostering of communal identity has previously been examined with relation to a single location or a single saint. This study draws on a wider range of places and saints in order to form a clearer idea of how saints were viewed in medieval England. The focus on local saints, on Anglo-Saxon saints, allows one to see how historical figures become sources of power, and how that power is utilised in the development of notions of identity. This, in turn, will provide a basis for future study of individual and groups of saints, in assessing how the use of the various identities changed over time, and in different locations. This study also serves to illustrate ways in which women’s history can be recovered, and the involvement of women in the development of English identity.
To
Stephanie Hollis
and
Michael Wright

Teachers, mentors, friends.
Acknowledgements

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I am very grateful to Michael Wright for help with transcription and Latin translation, and discussions on a huge range of topics. Also to Keith Montgomery, for checking the Middle English transcriptions and discussing dialect and other linguistic features.

I am also very grateful for University of Auckland Doctoral Scholarship, without which this project would not have been possible, and for the Faculty of Arts Doctoral Award, which enabled me to visit manuscripts in London and Cambridge.

To Christine Jackson and her team in Interloans at the University of Auckland Library, many thanks for finding copies of obscure manuscripts, and books which have been out of print for centuries.

To fellow students in the University of Auckland: a very big thanks to the medieval girls; Lisa Hawes and Michelle Smith in History and Maria Prozesky in English. Thanks for coffee, discussion on all things medieval, and special thanks to Lisa and Michelle for reading and commenting on the whole thesis. Thanks also to the PhD Writing Group in the English Department, for commenting on my Introduction, and more importantly, for the “footnote party”. Maria, Kirby, Adam, Richard, Gregory, and Sparkle, thank you so much to for giving up your Friday afternoon and evening to check and query my footnotes.
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Notes

On Proper Names

Anglo-Saxon names have been altered and abused by Latin and Anglo-Norman authors, with the result that most names have a wide variety of spellings. In attempting to regulate them, I follow Barbara Yorke, Janet Fairweather and Michael Winterbottom’s works, in order to present the names in an easily recognisable form that is as close to the original Anglo-Saxon as possible. For example, I spell the name of Ely’s primary saint as Æthelthryth, rather than Æðelþryð (most correct), Etheldrede (most common), Audrey (most Anglo-Norman), or any of the other forms used in the source texts.

However, where I am quoting directly from either a primary source, or a secondary study, I use the form employed by the editor or author of the work I am quoting. For example, Eadburh sometimes appears as Edburga, or Eadburg; Wulfhild may show up as Wulfilda, Æthelburh as Ethelburga, and Ælfflæd as Elffled.

On Translations of Latin


For texts for which there is no translation available in published form (principally Goscelin’s *vitae* of the Barking saints, and Osbert’s *Vita Edburge*), I give Latin quotations in the footnotes; the translations in the body of the thesis are my own, based on discussions with Michael Wright. I am very grateful to him for the time spent in translation, and also for access to the drafts of his forthcoming translations of Goscelin’s *vitae* of the Barking nuns, based on Marvin L. Colker’s ‘Texts of Jocelyn of Canterbury Which Relate to the History of Barking Abbey’, *Studia Monastica*, 7 (1965), 383-460.

**On Appendices**

Two texts which are important in this thesis have not yet been published, so they are included in the Appendices for reference.


Appendix B contains my transcription of the Life of Edith and the Life of Audrey from the *Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres*, found in Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Additional 2604. This manuscript is currently being edited by Virginia Blanton and Veronica O’Mara. My thanks to the University of Auckland Faculty of Arts Doctoral Award for providing funding so that I could inspect the manuscript, and also to Keith Montgomery for checking my transcription.
### List of Abbreviations and Short Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title and Details</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres</td>
<td>Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Additional 2604.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romsey History</td>
<td>London, British Library, MS Lansdowne 436.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernor</td>
<td>Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS English Poetry a. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilton Chronicle</td>
<td><em>S. Editha sive Chronicon Vilodunense im Wiltshire dialekt, aus ms.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Cotton. Faustina B III, ed. by Carl Horstmann (Heilbronn: Verlag von Gebr. 1883).</em></td>
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