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Questions of Identity

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

Kerryn Olsen

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and History,
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Abstract

Questions of Identity: Rewriting Anglo-Saxon Female Saints in Post-Conquest England, c.1066-c.1500.

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.

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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.

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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.

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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 Ælflæd as Elffled.

On Translations of Latin

Many of the texts discussed here were written originally in Latin. Where published translations exist, such as the Oxford series of parallel Latin/English texts, I have quoted these translations in my thesis, and only quoted the Latin where it is appropriate. The translations thus used are: *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); 'Goscelin's Legend of Edith', trans. by Michael J. Wright and Kathleen Loncar in *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatorius*, ed. by Stephanie Hollis and others, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, 9 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 17-93; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); *Liber Eliensis: a history of the Isle of Ely from the seventh century to the twelfth*, trans. by Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005); William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by R. M. Thomson, R. A. B. Mynors, and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) and William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).

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 A contains my transcription of the Life of Æthelthryth from the *South English Legendary* in *The Vernon Manuscript: a Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. poet. A. 1.; with an introduction by Ian Doyle*, ed. by A. I. Doyle (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987).

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

- Bede, *HE* *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).
- Huntingdon, *HA* Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
- LE* *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth*, trans. by Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005).
- Legend of Edith* 'Goscelin's *Legend of Edith*', trans. by Michael Wright and Kathleen Loncar, in *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatorius*, ed. by Stephanie Hollis and others, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, 9 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 17-93.
- Lyves and Dethes of the Martyres* Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Additional 2604.
- Malmesbury, *GRA* William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by R. M. Thomson, R. A. B. Mynors, M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
- Malmesbury, *GPA* William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).
- Romsey History* London, British Library, MS Lansdowne 436.

Vernon

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS English Poetry a. 1

Wilton Chronicle

S. Editha sive Chronicon Vilodunense im Wiltshire dialekt, aus ms.

Cotton. Faustina B III, ed. by Carl Horstmann (Heilbronn: Verlag von Gebr. 1883).