The Construction of Episcopal Identity: The Meaning and Function of Episcopal Depictions within Latin Saints' Lives of the Long Twelfth Century

Submitted by Matthew Michael Mesley to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History, September 2009.

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Matthew Michael Mesley

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Abstract

My PhD offers a reassessment of the representation of English bishops within episcopal *vitae* composed between 1093 and 1214. It argues that the depiction of episcopal sanctity was shaped by the expectations of the community for which these texts were written and the hagiographer's specific *causa scribendi* (reasons for writing). Through an investigation of four distinct Latin episcopal saints' lives, I investigate the relationship between hagiographical function, episcopal identity and patronage by setting each text within its specific institutional and historical context. The *vitae* I have selected are: Faricius of Arezzo's life of Aldhelm (*c.*1093-1099), William Wycombe's life of Robert Bethune (*c.*1148-1150) and Gerald of Wales's lives of Remigius (*c.*1198-1199) and Hugh of Avalon (*c.*1210-1214).

One aim of my thesis has been to establish the precise hagiographical function of each text. As such, each chapter begins by providing a textual history of the particular *vita* in question, and situates the source within its historical and cultural environment. By reflecting upon the local circumstances surrounding the production of these texts, we establish how different twelfth-century religious communities sought to interpret the episcopal office in the light of their own spiritual values and concerns. The thesis also demonstrates that these texts were all written for a particular purpose, including didactic instruction, propaganda, and to construct the way a community remembered its past and/or to promote an institution's cult. Yet, we also show how each author employed different techniques and hagiographical models to achieve his objective. By investigating the ways in which episcopal

vitae were composed in their specific localities and how bishops were represented in these texts, we can look afresh at the wider religious environment of the twelfth century.

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Contents Page

Abbreviations 9

Introduction: 11

I. An Approach to the Issues: Miles Crispin's *Vita Lanfranci* 11
II. Historiography 17
(a) Work on English Bishops 19
(b) Approaches to Historiography 29
(c) Identity 34
III. Methodological Approach 43
IV. Sources Considered 45
V. Structure 48

Chapter 1: *Vita Sancti Aldhelmi* 50

I. Faricius's *Vita Sancti Aldhelmi* 51
(a) The Text: Manuscripts, Editions, Recensions and Date 51
(b) The Author 56
II. William of Malmesbury's Account of the *VSA* 60
III. Approaches to the *VSA* 63
IV. William of Malmesbury's Treatment of the *VSA* 66
V. The Use of Oral Sources in the Work of William of Malmesbury and Faricius of Arezzo 71
(a) Malmesbury's Hagiographical Traditions 71
(b) Compositional Methods 72
(c) Faricius: An Outsider? 81
VI. Faricius's Treatment of the *VSA* 83
(a) The Audience for the *VSA* 84
(i) The Significance of the Dedication to Osmund, Bishop of Salisbury 84
(ii) Osmund, Bishop of Salisbury 86
(iii) The Cult of the Saints at Salisbury 89

(iv) Bishop Osmund's Relations with Malmesbury 94
VII. The Depiction of Aldhelm as Bishop: A Comparison 100
VIII. Conclusion 111

Chapter 2: *Vita Roberti Bethune* 113

I. Introduction 113
II. The Composition of the *VRB* 117
(a) Date 117
(b) Manuscripts Containing the *VRB* 118
(c) Editions 122
III. The Structure of the *VRB* and its Intended Audiences 122
(a) Structure 122
(b) The Prologue as Evidence for External Audiences 125
(c) An Internal Audience? The Significance of the Foundation of Lanthony Secunda 128
IV. Pastoral Models in the *VRB* 134
(a) The *VRB*: The Portrait of Robert Bethune as 'Bonus Pastor' 134
(b) The *VRB*: The Depiction of Robert as Prior 137
(c) The *VRB*: Robert's Elevation to the See of Hereford 144
(d) The *VRB*: The Depiction of Robert as Bishop 146
V. Asceticism within the *VRB* 149
(a) Background 149
(b) Foundation of Llanthony 152
(c) Asceticism with the *VRB* and the Influence of Augustine and the Rule of Augustine 157
(d) Flagellation within the *VRB* 168
(e) The Bishop and His Community: The *VRB* in Context 172
VI. Conclusion 176

Chapter 3: *Vita Sancti Remigii*: 178

I. Introduction 178
II. The Date and Structure of the Text 181
(a) Date 181
(b) Manuscript 183
(c) Editions 184
III. The Sources Used by Gerald to Represent Lincoln's Past 189
(a) Earlier Scholarship 189
(b) Gerald's Sources 191

IV. Gerald's Hagiography 196
V. The *VSR* 200
(a) The *Proemium* to the *VSR* 200
(b) The Preface to the *VSR* 202
(c) The Life and Death of Remigius 208
(d) Remigius's Successors at Lincoln 218
(e) *De episcopis Angliae tergeminis* 223
(i) Earlier Scholarship 224
(ii)The Re-use of *DEAT* in Gerald's Other Works 226
(iii) View of Episcopal Office 226
(iv) The Liberty of the Church 237
VII. Conclusion 239

Chapter 4: *Vita Sancti Hugonis*: 241

I. Introduction 241
II. Manuscript and Text 244
(a) Composition of the *VSH* and MS CCCC 425 244
(b) The *Proemium* to the *VSH* 246
(c) Manuscript Context and Editions 248
(d) Audience for the Manuscript 250
III. Audience 253
(a) Stephen Langton 253
(b) Hugh of Wells, Bishop of Lincoln 254
(c) Roger of Rolleston & the Lincoln Cathedral Chapter 259
IV. The Miracles Within the *VSH* 262
(a) Role of Chapter in the Cult 262
(b) Role of Other Elites 267
(c) The Identity of the Chapter 271
V. Depicting Episcopal Identity 273
(a) Gerald's *VSH*: Hugh's Earlier Life 274
(b) Textual Models of the Depiction of Hugh in the *VSH* 278
(c) Thomas Becket as a Model for the *VSH* 282
(d) *VSH*: Hugh as Model for Delivery of Pastoral Care 302
VI. Summary 315

Conclusion 316

Bibliography 326