

Chapter One

Constructing the Text: A Comparative Study of Two Saints' *Lives* Written c.1200

Saints' *lives* are among the most plentiful and engaging sources for the study of the Middle Ages. Although a literary genre, they have long been mined by historians seeking biographical information about historical figures or lively anecdotes to illustrate their arguments. This tendency to extract the gems and disregard the rest is, however, a poor use of this evidence. Hagiographers drew on a range of textual, oral, and material sources to create their narratives. Further consideration should be given to the use of these sources and the reasons for their inclusion by the authors. More sophisticated approaches to hagiography examine this information in its literary context and ask two basic, but fundamental, questions: where did this material come from and why is it presented in this way? This essay explores these questions through a comparison of two particular works written c.1200: the *Life and Miracles of St Bega* and the *Life of St Bartholomew of Farne*. Both texts record the lives of saints who pursued monastic and eremitic lifestyles in northern England and who developed modest regional followings. However, there are also significant differences between the two saints and their cults, which allow for a more in-depth exploration of the construction of the texts and of sanctity itself.

The *Life and Miracles of St Bega* provided an official history for the saint's long-established cult at St Bees in Copeland, Cumbria.¹ Bega was, allegedly, an early medieval Irish

¹ *Vita et miracula S. Begae uirginis* (BHL 1080–81), ed. J. Wilson, *The Register of the Priory of St Bees* (Publications of the Surtees Society, 126), Durham, 1915, App. 1, pp. 497–520. For a comprehensive overview of the cult, see J.M. Todd, "St Bega: Cult, Fact and Legend",

princess, who fled to England to escape a forced marriage and to pursue a monastic life, first at St Bees and then in monasteries in Northumbria. Despite this later association with the east coast, the church at St Bees remained the centre of Bega's cult. By the twelfth century, the shrine was under the care of the Benedictine priory of St Bees, which had been founded as a cell of St Mary's Abbey, York, in 1120–35.² The priory church also served as the parish church, and the nine posthumous miracles that make up the second part of the text indicate a close connection between the saint and the local lay community. Indeed, the author notes that the memory of these miracles had been passed from fathers to sons from birth, which suggests that the intended audience of the text, “the sons of the church”, was both lay and monastic.³ The *life* is anonymous and while the author does not seem to have been a member of the priory, she or, more probably, he may well have come from within the wider network of St Mary's and its dependent cells.⁴ The evidence suggests that the text was written *c.*1200. Although the posthumous miracles tend to invoke individuals from the early to mid-twelfth century, the comment about the transmission of this material from fathers

Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society 80 (1980), 23–35.

² *Registrum prioratus de S. Bega*, ed. J. Wilson, *The Register of the Priory of St. Bees* (Publications of the Surtees Society, 126), Durham, 1915, pp. i–v.

³ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 497, 498, at 498: “filiorum ecclesie”.

⁴ C.E. Last, “St Bega and her Bracelet”, *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society* 52 (1952), 55–66, at pp. 62 n.12, 64; Todd, “St Bega”, p. 28.

to sons suggests that these stories were told to the author by a subsequent generation.⁵ Likewise, a reference to pilgrims going to Canterbury indicates a date of writing after 1170 and the growth of the cult of Thomas Becket.⁶ A *terminus ad quem* may be provided by the apparent theft of the main relic, the saint's bracelet, at the beginning of the early thirteenth century, which is not

⁵ The figures mentioned are: Ranulf Meschin (d. 1129), Godard de Boiville (fl. pre-1135), Walter Espec (d. 1147–58), William Hare (fl. pre-1179), and Adam son of Ailsi. A reference to the lands of Adam son of Ailsi in a charter witnessed by Prior Guy of St Bees (1231/32–1239) led both James Wilson and John Todd to suggest a mid-thirteenth-century date for the *Life*—this is possible, but the evidence does not necessarily imply that Adam was alive at this point. A slightly earlier date is also suggested by the only medieval manuscript copy of the text (London, British Library, Cotton Faustina B IV, fols. 124r–40v), which Neil Ker dated to the early thirteenth century. *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, p. 497; *Registrum de S. Bega*, nos. 2, 3, 74, 76, 382 (pp. xxii, 28–32, 104–05, 105 n.3, 106–07, 382–83); E. King, “Ranulf (I) , third earl of Chester (d. 1129)”, in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 46, Oxford, 2004, pp. 52–53; P. Dalton, “Espec, Walter (d. 1147–58)”, in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 18, Oxford, 2004, pp. 602–03; D.M Smith and V.C.M London (eds), *The Heads of Religious Houses: England and Wales*, vol. 2, 1216–1377, Cambridge, 2001, p. 127; Last, “St Bega and her Bracelet”, pp. 62–64; Todd, “St Bega”, p. 28; N.R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books* (Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks, 3), 2nd ed., London, 1964, p. 102.

⁶ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, p. 518.

mentioned by the text.⁷ Aside from the bracelet, there was little other evidence to testify to Bega's existence. As a result, the biographical section of the *life* relied on information from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, topoi, and authorial imagination to create a plausible, three-dimensional figure.

In contrast, the *Life of St Bartholomew of Farne* recorded the life of a near contemporary and drew, explicitly, on the memories of those who had known the saint.⁸ Bartholomew was a Benedictine monk of Durham who lived as a hermit on the island of Inner Farne from c.1150 until his death in 1193.⁹ His *life* was written by Geoffrey, a fellow monk of Durham.¹⁰ This Geoffrey is probably the same man as Geoffrey, the author of the *Life of St Godric of Finchale*, and the

⁷ The bracelet seems to have been taken by Galwegian and Scottish raiders in Prior Robert's time (fl. 1202), but was subsequently returned. "Lists of Conventual Priors and Priors of Cells", ed. H.H.E. Craster and M.E. Thornton, *The Chronicle of St Mary's Abbey, York, from Bodley MS. 39* (Publications of the Surtees Society, 148), Durham, 1934, pp. 74–80, at 76; Todd, "St Bega", pp. 24, 25; D. Knowles, C.N.L. Brooke and V.C.M. London, *The Heads of Religious Houses: England and Wales*, vol. 1, 940–1216, 2nd ed., Cambridge, 2001, p. 95.

⁸ Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomaei Farnensis* (BHL 1015), ed. T. Arnold, *Symeonis monachi opera omnia: Historiae ecclesiae Dunhelmensis*, vol. 1 (Rolls Series, 75.1), London, 1882, App. II, pp. 295–325.

⁹ See A.J. Piper, "Bartholomew of Farne (d. 1193)", in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 4, Oxford, 2004, pp. 166–67.

¹⁰ Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomei*, § 1, ed. Arnold, p. 295.

chronicler Geoffrey of Coldingham (d. c.1215).¹¹ The *Life of Bartholomew* was dedicated to Prior Bertram and the monks of Durham, and must have been completed before Bertram's death in 1212–13—although Geoffrey's concern to gather material while memories of the saint were still fresh suggests it was written some years earlier.¹² In general, the *life* seems to be dependent on oral accounts, most of which appear to have come from the Durham community.¹³ However, the text also includes seven miracles relating to the saint and Farne which can be found in two other near contemporary miracle collections made in Durham circles.¹⁴ Geoffrey's brief allusions to five of

¹¹ A.J. Piper, "Coldingham, Geoffrey of (d. c.1215)", in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 12, Oxford, 2004, p. 496.

¹² Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomei*, § 1, 2, ed. Arnold, pp. 295, 295–96; Knowles, Brooke and London, *Heads of Religious Houses*, vol. 1, pp. 43–44.

¹³ The named sources are Prior Germanus of Durham, Brother Heming, and Brother William. An anonymous monk of Durham is also cited. Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomei*, §§ 2, 6, 13, 14, 26, ed. Arnold, pp. 295, 299, 306, 307, 317.

¹⁴ Arnold's edition notes that the section summarising four of the miracles in § 23 is a marginal addition to his base text, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 6. However, its presence in all other extant manuscript copies indicates that it was part of the original text: Dijon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 657, fols. 60v–66r, at 64ra–b; London, British Library, Cotton Galba A. XVII, fols. 25r–40r, at 34r–v; London, British Library, Harley 4843, fols. 233r–42r, at 238v–39r; London, British Library, Royal 5 F. VII, fols. 108r–18v, at 114vb–15ra. Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomei*, § 19, 21, 23, 26, ed. Arnold, pp. 311–12, 313, 314–15, 316–17; Reginald of Durham, *Libellus de admirandis B. Cuthberti uirtutibus* (BHL 2032), §§ 27–29, 58, 111, ed. J. Raine (Publications of

these stories suggest an awareness of these texts and a desire to avoid repetition. The two stories which he retold at length both concerned Bartholomew directly and probably also circulated independently—Geoffrey ascribes one of them to an oral source. The *life* seems to have been intended mainly for internal rather than external consumption. There is no indication that it was produced as part of an application for the formal canonization of Bartholomew as a new saint: only three posthumous miracles are recorded and they lack the detailed information required in such cases.¹⁵ As Rachel Koopmans has warned, the recording of miracles was a “faddish activity” and we should not necessarily judge the success of a cult by the number of its *miracula*.¹⁶ Even so, the three posthumous miracles listed for Bartholomew are unimpressive, particularly when compared to the more than two hundred posthumous miracles recorded for the neighbouring cult of St Godric of Finchale (d. 1170) and, indeed, over thirty such miracles attributed to St Cuthbert on Farne

the Surtees Society, 1), London, 1835, pp. 60–66, 116–17, 247–48; *De mirabilibus Dei modernis temporibus in Farne insula declaratis* (BHL 2032d), §§ 2–3, ed. E. Craster, “The Miracles of St Cuthbert at Farne”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 70 (1952), 5–19, at pp. 6–7, 10–12; V. Tudor, “Coldingham [Durham], Reginald of (d. c. 1190), in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 12, Oxford, 2004, p. 496–97.

¹⁵ For example, see the evidence submitted for the papal canonization of Gilbert of Sempringham in 1201: *Miracula post mortem Gilberti de Sempringham* (BHL 3535), ed. and trans. R. Foreville and G. Keir, “The Miracles: Formal Collection”, in *The Book of St Gilbert*, (Oxford Medieval Texts), Oxford, 1987, pp. 264–303.

¹⁶ R. Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England*, Philadelphia, 2011, p. 45.

itself.¹⁷ These were saints with whom Bartholomew may initially have competed, but certainly never rivalled.¹⁸

The saints' *lives* of Bega and Bartholomew offer contrasting examples of hagiographical texts that were written in the same period and emerged from similar milieux. The modest nature of each cult and the relatively unexceptional accounts that remain mean neither text has received a great deal of scholarly attention—and are thus representative of the majority of hagiographical sources that await further study. Yet, as this essay demonstrates, analysis of the composition and construction of these works can offer valuable insights into the processes of creation, adaptation, and compilation that lie behind all hagiographical texts—and which must inform any subsequent use of this material.

Creating the Saint

The biographical aspect of saints' *lives* means that most hagiographical texts follow the same pattern: they document the saint's life from birth to death, and then record some of the posthumous miracles associated with the ensuing cult. Like any biography, however, they devote more

¹⁷ Reginald of Durham, *Libellus de vita et miraculis S. Godrici, heremitaie de Finchale* (BHL 3601), §§ 352-615, ed. J. Stevenson (Publications of the Surtees Society, 20), London, 1847, pp. 371–481; *De mirabilibus in Farne*, ed. Craster; V. Tudor, “The Cult of St Cuthbert in the Twelfth Century: The Evidence of Reginald of Durham”, in G. Bonner, D. Rollason and C. Stancliffe (eds), *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to AD 1200*, Woodbridge, 1989, pp. 447–67, at p. 461, 461 n. 119.

¹⁸ See T. Licence, *Hermits and Recluses in English Society, 950–1200*, Oxford, 2011, p. 192.

attention to some parts of the saint's life than others: authors focused on the incidents and deeds that provided turning points in the protagonist's spiritual development or attested his or her main virtues. These stories were usually self-contained narratives that could be, and were, extracted for use in liturgical offices and preaching. As a result, saints' *lives* sometimes seem to lurch from story to story, usually in rough chronological order. These stories are bookended by a statement about the saint's geographical and social origin, including any portents of future greatness, and, usually, a more extended discussion of his or her death. Hagiography is also a genre which draws considerable strength from the repetition of expected patterns of behaviour and formulaic narratives. Consequently, authors were keen to emphasize the ways in which the experiences and actions of their subjects echoed those of previous holy figures—and usually did so by offering explicit parallels. These comparisons empowered the narrative and firmly situated each saint in a long tradition of sanctity. The use of established *topoi* also helped to shape and reinforce the narrative, and could provide plausible, if generic, storylines where factual information was lacking. But narratives were also constrained by the reality, or perceived reality, of the saints themselves. As the sociologist Pierre Delooz has emphasized, saints are created for and by other people.¹⁹ Hagiographical texts were expected to conform to the expectations of their audiences, some of whom might have known the saint personally. For example, the complaints of contemporaries concerning the *Life of St Aelred* forced its author, Walter Daniel, to preface the text with a

¹⁹ P. Delooz, "Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church", trans. J. Hodgkin, in S. Wilson (ed.), *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 189–216, at 194–201.

defensive letter justifying his (mis)representation of Aelred's sexual past.²⁰ Indeed, acknowledging aspects of the saint's life which were not so saintly, such as accounts of worldly activities, inner turmoil, or errors of judgement, offered most hagiographers both challenges and opportunities. Such details provided narrative contrasts that the author could use to emphasize points of conversion or penitence: potential failings were thus reworked into triumphs. All of these traits and strategies were standard elements of the genre and are present, to some extent, in the *lives* of Bega and Bartholomew.

The fact that very little evidence remained for St Bega provided the author of her *life* with a significant challenge. Despite an allusion to various "chronicles and authentic histories" in the prologue, the historical basis of the *life* depended on a liberal interpretation of limited material from one text, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.²¹ Two individuals from the *History* were conflated to create the adult figure of Bega: Heiu, abbess of Hartlepool and the first nun in Northumbria—presumably, a claim also made for Bega; and Begu, a nun of Hackness who saw a vision of St Hilda's death.²² The use of this material allowed the author to situate Bega in a specific historical

²⁰ Walter Daniel, *Epistola ad Mauricium* (BHL 2644ar), ed. and trans. F.M. Powicke, "Walter Daniel's Apologia for his *Life of Ailred*", in *The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx by Walter Daniel* (Oxford Medieval Texts), Oxford, 1978, pp. xxx, 66–81, at 75–77.

²¹ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 504–08, at 497: "ex cronicis et ystoriis authenticis"; Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, 3.3, 3.24, 4.23, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford Medieval Texts), Oxford, 1979, pp. 220, 221, 288–93, 404–15.

²² Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 4.23 (pp. 406, 407, 412–15).

context and to cite Bede as an authoritative witness to the saint's existence.²³ References to historical figures such as Hilda, Aidan, and Oswald, even when of tangential relevance to the story, helped persuade the audience to invest fully in this simulated saintly past.²⁴

While the construction of a single figure from multiple identities may have been expedient, it also required some ingenuity on the part of the author. The use of varied spellings of Bega as "Begha" and "Beghu" in the *life*, especially in the section concerning her activities in Northumbria, helped to merge the separate identities.²⁵ Likewise, the trope of Mary and Martha provided a way to gloss over Bega's transition from abbess of Hartlepool (Heiu) to nun of Hackness (Begu). Here the text notes that Bega, recalling the simplicity of her former life as a solitary in St Bees (a nice touch that integrates this section with the earlier part of the narrative), tired of the administrative role of Martha and resigned her abbacy to concentrate on the contemplative role of Mary as a nun first in Tadcaster then Hackness.²⁶ The author also made use of more recent material provided by the monks of Whitby Abbey and other inhabitants of the region to reiterate the identification of Bega with Begu. The text states that 460 years after Bega's death at Hackness, at some point in the mid-twelfth century, the site of her tomb was revealed in a vision to the monks at Whitby. An expedition to Hackness was made and the tomb, conveniently labelled "HOC EST

²³ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 497, 504, 506.

²⁴ The presence of errors relating to St Hilda, kings Oswin and Oswiu, and the misidentification of the founder of the priory of St Bees suggests that the author was not a particularly careful researcher. *Ibid.*, pp. 504–08, 510–11, 518.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 501, 503–09.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 505–08.

SEPVLCHRVM BEGHV”, was found. As Monika Otter has shown, such *inventiones* were not uncommon in the twelfth century and usually prompted the creation or renewed activity of a cult—although, here, it was noted that no accounts of the translation of the saint’s body or of any miracles had been found. As the author concluded, it was therefore best to concentrate on the miracles performed at St Bees.²⁷

The identification of Bega, whose shrine was on the west coast of Britain, with individuals active on the east coast also created problems for the narrative. Not only did the text have to explain Bega’s relocation to Northumbria, but it also had to account for Bega’s origins and the focus of her cult at St Bees. To fill this void, the author provided Bega with a backstory appropriate for an early medieval virgin saint. The portrait of the youthful Bega combines several topoi to produce a somewhat generic figure, albeit packaged in a lively narrative. While the author’s imagination is certainly behind the latter, it is possible that the former was prompted by local oral tradition as much as the textual conventions of hagiography.

In the *life*, Bega is introduced as the legitimate daughter of a powerful Christian king in Ireland.²⁸ This origin provided her with the high status expected of early medieval female saints, not least because of the narrative contrast this allowed when such status was rejected in favour of poverty—as, inevitably, it was. The text emphasizes Bega’s disdain for worldly goods, most

²⁷ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 508–09; M. Otter, *Inventiones: Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing*, Chapel Hill, 1996, pp. 21–57; C. Downham, “St Bega – Myth, Maiden, or Bracelet? An Insular Cult and its Origins”, *Journal of Medieval History* 33 (2007), 33–42, at pp. 38–39.

²⁸ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, p. 498.

memorably so when she dismisses gifts of purple and brown silken robes as “menstrual rags”.²⁹ The saint’s rejection of these fabrics, as well as gifts of jewellery sent to her, reflects gendered expectations of clothing and the expression of feminine piety, which are rooted in scripture.³⁰ The portrayal of Bega as an Irish princess also represents a considered decision. Other twelfth-century texts had assigned Irish origins to SS Modwenna and Cuthbert in England and St Sunniva in Scandinavia, which indicates that Ireland was considered a respectable breeding ground for saints in this period. For English cults, such origins acknowledged both Ireland’s historical role in propagating Christianity and its more exotic appeal as a close but culturally distinct neighbour.³¹ In Copeland, this interest was no doubt spurred on by Anglo-Norman intervention in Ireland from 1169 and the subsequent founding of a St Bees daughter house at Nendrum in 1178–79.³² The fact that the saint’s main cult site at St Bees looked west across the Irish Sea also supported such an origin.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 499: “pannum menstruale”; see Esther 14:16.

³⁰ See L.L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity*, Philadelphia, 1997, pp. 29–41.

³¹ R. Bartlett, “Cults of Irish, Scottish and Welsh Saints in Twelfth-Century England”, in B. Smith (ed.), *Britain and Ireland 900–1300: Insular Responses to European Change*, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 67–86, at 68–75; J.E. Rekdal, “Vikings and Saints: Encounters *Vestan um Haf*”, *Peritia* 17–18 (2003–4), 256–275, at p. 261.

³² A. Gwynn and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: Ireland*, London, 1970, p. 107; *Registrum de S. Bega*, App. 2.1, p. 520.

Even more important than this elite Irish background is Bega's status as a virgin and *sponsa Christi*, a bride of Christ. Great emphasis is placed on Bega's virginity throughout the text, partly because it is such an important component of female sanctity, and partly because it is used to drive the story forward and to add tension to the narrative. Virginity and the religious life are presented as the only alternatives to the physically degrading experiences of earthly marriage and motherhood. Bega actively chooses "the monastery over matrimony" and confines herself to her room, away from "old wives' tales, silliness and girlish games and jokes".³³ In this space, she prepares for the religious life by reading scripture and making decorative fabrics for the church—pursuits that are recalled later when the author describes her activities as abbess of Hartlepool.³⁴ She lives, in effect, a semi-cloistered life that reveals, enacts, and foreshadows her future vocation.

The emphasis on virginity and spiritual marriage also allows the author to embed Bega's main relic, the bracelet, in the story. The author draws on the language of Isaiah 61:10 to present the saint's vow of virginity as a spiritual marriage in which Bega desires to meet the bridegroom "as a bride adorned with his jewels".³⁵ At this point, the author takes the opportunity to introduce one such "jewel" into the account: a divine being presents the saint with a bracelet to wear as a sign that she will "take no other lover but Him".³⁶ Since the author admits to not knowing whether this being was an angel or a saint, it seems that this story came from local tradition rather than the

³³ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 498, 499: "monasterium potius quam matrimonium", "aniles fabulas et ineptias et puellares lusus et iocos".

³⁴ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 498, 505; see Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, pp. 41–44.

³⁵ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 498–500, at 499: "quasi sponsa ornata monilibus suis".

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 500: "nullum amatorem admittas preter ipsum".

writer's own imagination. It is also an episode that had evidently attracted criticism at some point. The author feels compelled to defend the narrative from seeming "absurd" and cites a similar incident in the *Life of St Genevieve* to bolster its credibility.³⁷ Further unease over popular traditions concerning the bracelet may also be suggested by its later comparison to the "key of David", when Bega uses it to open the locked doors of her father's palace and to escape from an unwanted earthly marriage. The magic properties of the bracelet, as well as the divine sleep that stops the palace guards from hindering her escape, have more in common with folklore or medieval romance than traditional hagiography.³⁸ However, despite the author's qualms, the inclusion of these details seems to have been non-negotiable: the bracelet was the only tangible evidence for Bega's existence and the symbolic object around which the cult revolved.

In addition to introducing the bracelet, the emphasis on virginity allowed the author to use rape narratives familiar from the *lives* of the virgin martyrs to drive the story forward and to shift geographic location.³⁹ In Bega's case, the unwanted suitor is a Norwegian prince—a plausible, if slightly anachronistic, imagining of early medieval politics in this region—while her father

³⁷ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, p. 500: "absurdum". *Vita S. Genouefae virginis Parisiensis* (BHL 3334), § 4, ed. J. Bolland, *AASS*, Jan. I, pp. 138–43, at 138.

³⁸ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, p. 503: "clavis David". Isa. 22:22; R.-J. Hesbert, *Corpus antiphonarium officii*, vol. 3, *Invitatoria et antiphonae* (Rerum ecclesiasticarum documenta: Series maior fontes, 9), Rome, 1968, No. 4010, p. 366; S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Vol. 2, *D-E*, rev. ed., Bloomington, 1956, §§ D1076, D1395.5, D1557.1, D1960, pp. 136, 216, 270, 349.

³⁹ See K.A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England*, Ithaca, 1997, pp. 5–10.

represents the potentially violent male aggressor.⁴⁰ Bega is horrified by the idea that “the lily of her enclosed garden” will be “deflowered and discoloured” and prays desperately to the “Preserver and Crowner of virginity” to help her escape.⁴¹ As in the *lives* of the virgin martyrs, the saint is placed in an impossible situation. Not only is she imprisoned by the bolted doors and armed guards of the palace, but even should she escape, the kingdom itself offers no refuge: she would simply be hunted down by her father and flogged for her disobedience.⁴² Her only recourse is to divine intervention. She makes a desperate appeal to God for help, a speech which is used by the author to align her with other famous virgins, both male and female: the biblical precedents of Abel, Elijah, and John the Baptist; and Agnes, Agatha, Lucy, and Catherine, virgin martyrs of the persecution period.⁴³ In response, a voice instructs Bega to take the bracelet and to leave for “Britain, which is called England”, using a boat waiting for her on the shore—the latter reminiscent of a storyline in the *Life of St Patrick*. With the aid of the bracelet and the deep sleep that has fallen over the inhabitants of the palace, Bega makes her escape and relocates to Copeland.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 500–02.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 501, 502: “orti sui conclusi lilium iamiamque deflorandum et decolorandum”, “conservator et coronator virginitatis”.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 501–02.

⁴³ The belief that Elijah took a vow of virginity is apocryphal. *Ibid.*, p. 502.

⁴⁴ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, p. 503: “Britanniam que vocatur Anglia”. See, for example, Muirchú Maccu Machtheni, *Vita S. Patricii confessoris (BHL 6497)*, 1.1, ed. L. Bieler, “A. Muirchú”, in *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, 10)*, Dublin, 1979, pp. 62–123, at 68, 69.

Finally, the rape narrative is reprised to explain Bega's subsequent move from her cell in Copeland to Northumbria. The activities of "pirates" place Bega's virginity in danger and, under divine guidance, she abandons her cell and flees east.⁴⁵ However, while this episode allows the narrative to shift from the account of Bega's origin to the subsequent material drawn from Bede, the storyline is problematic for the cult: the author must still account for the presence of the saint's bracelet at St Bees. The rather contrived solution is to state that the bracelet was "forgotten by divine will" and left in Copeland as future testimony to her holy life.⁴⁶ It is necessary, but clumsy, storytelling.

In contrast to the carefully imagined narratives of the *Life of Bega*, Geoffrey's *Life of Bartholomew* was constrained by historical reality and the fact that some of the immediate audience had known the subject personally. The result is a more human portrait of the saint, which includes a variety of individualising details that seem to be drawn from real life rather than stock *topoi*. That such details often serve to complicate rather than simplify the overall narrative also points to factual rather than fictional origins. For example, the diverse references to Bartholomew's youth bear the hallmark of lived experience: we are told that teenage taunts led Bartholomew to change his childhood name from Tosti to William; that his early life was devoted to youthful entertainments and travel; and that he almost dabbled in the dark arts while living in Norway.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, p. 504: "piratis".

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: "nutu divino oblita".

⁴⁷ The taunts over the name 'Tosti' seem to reflect ethnic tensions in post-Conquest Yorkshire. The saint took the name Bartholomew when he became a monk. Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomei*, §§ 3, 4, ed. Arnold, pp. 296–97, 298. For a discussion of the Nordic elements in this story, see C.

Likewise, the author notes that Bartholomew was tempted by marriage, but eventually escaped “unharméd”—a brief reference, apparently, to his virginity.⁴⁸ That this attribute receives no further mention in the text may reflect the lower value assigned to virginity in the construction of male sanctity, its later loss, or, possibly, the saint’s own disinclination towards sex—there was, after all, little saintly glory in fighting a weak foe.⁴⁹ However, the author was also careful to temper such details with a more generic narrative that signalled Bartholomew’s saintly potential. As an adolescent, Bartholomew saw three visions of Christ and the Virgin Mary, the remembrance of which prompted his later decision to join the monastic community at Durham.⁵⁰ Indeed, the combination of this narrative with the others creates a more compelling account: it makes Bartholomew’s conversion to the monastic life both understandable and even more striking.

The fact that the *Life of Bartholomew* recorded the acts of a real person also complicates the role of textual models in his story. Bartholomew served as a priest in Norway and then Northumbria before joining the monastic community at Durham, all of which indicates that he was

Whitehead, “The Hermit and the Sailor: Readings of Scandinavia in North-East English Hagiography”, in A. Auer, D. Revenay, C. Marshall, and T. Oudesluijs (eds), *Revisiting the Medieval North of England*, Cardiff, 2019, pp. 123–30, at 127–28.

⁴⁸ Ibid., § 5, p. 298: “illaesum”.

⁴⁹ See J. Arnold, “The Labour of Continence: Masculinity and Clerical Virginity”, in A. Bernau, R. Evans and S. Salih (eds), *Medieval Virginites* (Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages), Cardiff, 2003, pp. 102–18.

⁵⁰ Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomei*, §§ 3, 6, ed. Arnold, pp. 297–98, 298–99.

literate and well-versed in Christian culture.⁵¹ This means that his actions were almost certainly influenced by models of saintly behaviour that he himself had either read or heard. Bartholomew's harsh ascetic practices, his gift of prophecy, and his persistent assault by demons reflect general topoi of male eremitic sanctity and may have been actively emulated by the saint.⁵² Such echoes would have been recognized and highlighted by Geoffrey, but the latter might also have inserted his own comparisons or used other models to shape the narrative. At this temporal distance, it is not always easy to discern which processes are at work in different parts of the text.

In some instances, however, the division between active imitation and external observation seems slightly clearer. For example, it is evident that Bartholomew's personal attachment to St Cuthbert shaped his life and informed his actions. Cuthbert appeared to Bartholomew while he was a monk at Durham and, in a vision, led him to Farne as a place where he could—and would—fulfil his desire for the solitary life.⁵³ The text indicates that Bartholomew subsequently saw himself as the heir and protector of Cuthbert's legacy on Farne. When a Flemish woman ignores Cuthbert's ban on women in the island's oratory and is knocked down by a divine force as she tries to enter, Bartholomew's immediate response is to smile and comment that it serves her right, before going to her aid. Likewise, he cites the "privilege of peace" allegedly granted to Farne by

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, §§ 4–6, pp. 298–99.

⁵² *Ibid.*, §§ 9–14, 18, 28, 30, pp. 300–08, 310–11, 318, 320–21.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, § 7, pp. 299–300.

Cuthbert when the captain of a boat attempts to discipline a boy.⁵⁴ Such devotion received its reward. Bartholomew is said to have been visited by Cuthbert in the form of divine light and as a physical being who once helped him to celebrate the Mass.⁵⁵

However, the more explicit parallels drawn between Bartholomew and Cuthbert seem to represent the intervention of the author rather than self-conscious imitation by his subject. Chapters sixteen to nineteen concern four miracles, three of which are said to echo the miracles performed by other saints. Two of these are likened, with good reason, to episodes in the *Life of St Cuthbert*: Bartholomew's revival of the Flemish woman who was struck down for trying to enter the oratory is compared to a miracle in which Cuthbert restored the gesith's wife; while another miracle, involving a raven that took and then returned an offering of wax to Bartholomew, is likened to one in which two ravens brought a piece of lard to Cuthbert.⁵⁶ The incident involving the raven is also

⁵⁴ Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomaei*, §§ 16, 18, ed. Arnold, pp. 309, 310–11, at p. 310: “paciis ... privilegium”. For prohibitions on women in Durham's churches see V. Tudor, “The Misogyny of Saint Cuthbert”, *Archaeologia Aeliana* 12 (1984), 157–67.

⁵⁵ Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomaei*, §§ 26–27, ed. Arnold, pp. 316–18.

⁵⁶ A gesith (*comes*) was a retainer, similar to a thegn. The story of the raven resembles one told by Reginald of Durham in relation to Aelric, a previous hermit on Farne. Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomaei*, §§ 16, 17, 19, ed. Arnold, pp. 309–10, 311; *Vita S. Cuthberti episcopi Lindisfarnensis* (BHL 2019), 3.5, 4.3, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave, “Vita S. Cuthberti auctore anonymo”, in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*, Cambridge, 1940, pp. 60–139, at 100–03, 114–15; Bede, *Vita S. Cuthberti episcopi Lindisfarnensis* (BHL 2021), §§ 20, 29, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave, “Vita S. Cuthberti

compared to a miracle performed by St Benedict, although exactly which episode the author had in mind is unclear.⁵⁷ Finally, Bartholomew's reaction to a penitent hawk that killed his tame bird is likened to the way in which Godric of Finchale chastised a hare after he caught it eating the produce from his vegetable garden—an example drawn, probably, from Geoffrey's own *Life of Godric*.⁵⁸ The broad similarities highlighted here suggest they are the observations of the author rather than active emulation by the saint. The purpose of these comparisons seems to have been to situate Bartholomew alongside saints who were held in particular regard by the monks of Durham: Cuthbert, their patron; Benedict, the author of their *Rule*; and Godric, a hermit who had placed himself under their authority and was at the heart of a flourishing contemporary cult. They were parallels that signalled the esteem in which Bartholomew was—or should have been—held.

Documenting the Community

However, saints' *lives* do not simply record the lives of the saints. They also articulate the history and identity of the institutions and local communities that venerated them. This is seen in the use

auctore Beda", in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, pp. 142–307, at 222–25, 252–55; Reginald of Durham, *De Cuthberti uirtutibus*, § 78, ed. Raine, pp. 162–63.

⁵⁷ The author is probably referring to the miracle in which Benedict ordered a raven to dispose of some poisoned bread. Gregory the Great, *Vita S. Benedicti abbati Casinensis* (*BHL* 1102), § 8, ed. U. Moricca, *Gregorii Magni dialogi libri IV* (Fonti per la Storia d'Italia, 57), Roma, 1924, pp. 71–134, at 90–93.

⁵⁸ Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomaei*, § 19, ed. Arnold, pp. 311–12; Geoffrey, *Vita S. Godrici eremitae* (*BHL* 3602), § 17, ed. G. Henskens, *AASS*, May V, pp. 71–85, at 74.

of extended and detailed narratives which document local practices, figures, and events, and in which the saint may play only a tangential role. Although these narratives are presented in a particular genre, that of hagiography, their presence should be seen as part of a more general desire to write about the past. Saints' *lives* and, particularly, miracle collections, offered an opportunity to record short accounts relating to the cult that, individually, might be too insubstantial to note elsewhere, but, when put together, contributed to a powerful overarching narrative of sanctity. They also commemorated the shared histories of the saint and those who interacted with his or her cult. As Felice Lifshitz has argued, the clear distinction made between the genres of hagiography and historiography is a modern construct, which obscures rather than aids our understanding of these texts.⁵⁹ Certainly, this is the case with the two saints' *lives* under consideration, which were both used as repositories for institutional and local history.

Both *lives* provided foundation narratives for the monastic communities that inhabited each site. In the *Life of Bartholomew*, Geoffrey was careful to emphasize the ancient origins of the cell at Farne by describing the physical remains from Cuthbert's time and drawing on Bede's *Life of Cuthbert* to do so.⁶⁰ However, he also included a foundation narrative for the more recent establishment of monks on the island. This information is presented through the reported speech of Bartholomew who explains that, after Cuthbert's death, the island was transferred to lay use and

⁵⁹ F. Lifshitz, "Beyond Positivism and Genre: 'Hagiographical' Texts as Historical Narrative", *Viator* 25 (1994), 95–113; see also A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c.550 to c.1307*, Vol. 1, London, 1974, pp. 105–65, 269–317.

⁶⁰ Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomei*, § 21, ed. Arnold, p. 313; Bede, *Vita Cuthberti*, § 17, ed. Colgrave, pp. 214–17.

the oratory became a cattle stall. It was restored to its former state by Brother Edulf and his colleagues from Lindisfarne, whose efforts were rewarded immediately: they landed an unusually large catch of fish and, in contrast to the stench of the muck removed from the oratory, Edulf henceforth smelt only pleasant odours.⁶¹ This episode presumably postdates the monastic resettlement of Lindisfarne in the late eleventh or early twelfth century and, judging from its inclusion here, seems to have been viewed as the key event in the recolonization of Farne.⁶² Geoffrey also took time to describe the harsh landscape of the island as well as its rare birdlife, the famous colony of eider ducks. Both are distinctive features of Farne, but only some of these details are used to set up the stories that follow, for example, the description of the eider ducks introduces a charming story about Bartholomew and the rescue of a duckling.⁶³ The account of the forbidding landscape, however, is not assigned the same narrative purpose. Instead, Geoffrey's description seems to be offered more in celebration of the place itself—in this sense, the text also functions as a local history.

The *Life of Bega* is similarly careful to establish a sense of continuity between the present community and its ancient founder, but is far less concerned with place. The author notes simply that the dense woodland of early medieval Copeland made it particularly suitable for the solitary

⁶¹ Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomei*, § 29, ed. Arnold, pp. 319–20.

⁶² D. Knowles and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales*, rev. ed., London, 1971, p. 69; A.J. Piper, “The First Generations of Durham Monks and the Cult of St Cuthbert”, in Bonner, et al. (eds), *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community*, pp. 437–46, at 444.

⁶³ Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomaei*, §§ 20, 24–25, ed. Arnold, pp. 312, 315–16.

life and that the monks of St Mary's constructed a cell on the same site.⁶⁴ Instead, the text is much more concerned with space or, rather, the delineation of monastic lands. Unlike the enclosed and self-contained island of Farne, which suffered "no contention over boundaries among its citizens", the borders of priory property seem to have been worryingly porous.⁶⁵ The miracle story that records the foundation of the house also defines both the historical and contemporary extent of its territory. In this narrative, the cell's founder, incorrectly identified as Ranulf Meschin rather than his brother William, starts legal proceedings against the monks, who he believes have encroached upon his lands. At this point, the author makes the wry, but telling, comment that patrons and, especially, heirs often "endeavour to diminish those possessions of monasteries rather than augment them".⁶⁶ The monks, fearing that false testimony will be used to undermine their case, turn to Bega, "their advocate", for support.⁶⁷ In response, on the day of the judgment, the extent of secular lands is marked by deep snowfall, while the priory lands remain dry—a sign likened to the story of Gideon and the fleece by the author. As the text notes, the territory of the church of St Bega remained unchanged from that point onwards.⁶⁸ Similar anxieties over monastic landholdings are recorded in the two subsequent miracles. The first concerns trespass and the

⁶⁴ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 503, 510–11.

⁶⁵ Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomei*, § 20, ed. Arnold, p. 312: "Nulla illic inter cives de finibus contentio".

⁶⁶ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, p. 511: "possessiones cenobiorum satagunt minuere potius quam augmentare".

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*: "advocatricis sue".

⁶⁸ Cf. Judg. 6:36–40. *Ibid.*, pp. 510–12.

damaging of priory crops, and results in the extension of monastic property by a grant from Godard, the custodian of Egremont Castle. In the second, the monks of the mother house of St Mary's draw on the power of Bega's bracelet to thwart an attempt by Walter Espec to defraud them of abbey lands. In both accounts, the author cites extant charters as witnesses to the final outcome of the stories.⁶⁹ It seems that although the punitive power of their spiritual patron was valued and to be advertised, the monks also placed their faith in more earthly measures. The defensive discourse of space that underlies all three narratives reflects the needs of monastic communities operating in contested landscapes.

As is indicated by the discussion above, the institutional interests of both texts extended beyond their function as foundation narratives. The priory of St Bees and the hermitage on Farne were both part of the larger monastic corporations of St Mary's, York, and Durham, respectively. The monks who served in these cells were usually members of the mother house on secondment, although the choice to live as a hermit on Farne seems to have been more permanent in this period.⁷⁰ This means that these cells were closely integrated into a wider network of houses and that, to an extent, the texts they produced contributed to shared institutional histories. This dynamic is shown clearly in the *Life of Bartholomew*, which bears witness to the interactions between the

⁶⁹ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 512–14. See also Todd, “St Bega”, pp. 25–26.

⁷⁰ For the development of the cell on Farne see: V. Tudor, “Durham Priory and its Hermits in the Twelfth Century”, in D. Rollason, M. Harvey and M. Prestwich (eds), *Anglo-Norman Durham, 1093–1193*, Woodbridge, 1994, pp. 67–78, at 67–73. M. Heale, *The Dependent Priories of Medieval English Monasteries* (Studies in the History of Medieval Religion, 22), Woodbridge, 2004, pp. 115–29.

monks on Farne and Durham, as well as those in the Durham cells of Lindisfarne and Coldingham. In addition, Geoffrey also uses a digression about Prior Thomas, one of Bartholomew's fellow hermits, to draw attention to other members of the Durham community who were also worthy of commemoration.⁷¹ The inclusion of the miracle concerning the lands of St Mary in the *Life of Bega* attests to a similar sense of corporate identity and implies that Bega's patronage extended beyond the priory to its mother house.⁷² As Delooz notes, the community who venerated a saint was not always confined to the immediate geographic area.⁷³

As a text written by, for, and about the wider monastic community of Durham, the *Life of Bartholomew* can be regarded as an institutional history. In contrast, the *Life of Bega* was produced for a mixed monastic and lay audience. Bega was the patron of an extensive parish served by the cell and, as the posthumous miracles show, veneration of the saint was deeply embedded in local lay culture. These miracles both provide a history of local interactions with the cult and articulate broader social and regional concerns.

The majority of Bega's posthumous miracles concern vengeance and indicate that the saint was venerated, largely, for her ability to right perceived wrongs. Many of these wrongs related to the partisan or limited application of secular justice. In these cases, Bega intervened to prevent or

⁷¹ Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomei*, § 15, ed. Arnold, p. 308.

⁷² *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 513–14. For Bega's later veneration at St Mary's and another cell, Rumburgh Priory, see M.R.V. Heale, 'Rumburgh Priory in the Later Middle Ages: Some New Evidence', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History* 40 (2001), 8–23, p. 18; Heale, *Dependent Priorities*, pp. 221–22.

⁷³ Delooz, "Sociological Study", p. 194.

reverse unjust legal decisions, to pursue wrongdoers who sought to evade the law, or to grant mercy to the truly penitent.⁷⁴ That the cult itself functioned within a legal environment offers one explanation for this emphasis: the text shows that the bracelet was commonly used for the swearing of oaths.⁷⁵ A particularly interesting example of this is the miracle concerning Adam son of Ailsí. Seeking to ingratiate himself with the local elite, Adam gave false testimony at an official inquiry into the customary payment of cattle, noutgeld, and perjured himself on the bracelet. He subsequently lost his senses for nine years and only recovered them after spending a night in vigil at the shrine—after which he openly admitted his crime. However, as the author notes, “his confession, although public, was not able to absolve the people from the heavy yoke of the imposed payment”.⁷⁶ The intention of this statement is not to diminish Bega’s achievements, but to draw attention to an ongoing injustice. It shifts the purpose of the narrative from local history to local protest.

The main source for the miracles was local oral culture and the author tells us that, out of the many stories available, only the most celebrated and well-attested accounts were recorded.⁷⁷ This is borne out by the miracles themselves, which concern, largely, lay interactions with the cult and have the fully developed narratives of frequently told tales. One of the best examples is the first miracle of the collection. In this narrative, a malicious Galwegian plans a raid on Copeland,

⁷⁴ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 508–12, 513–18.

⁷⁵ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 513–15; Todd, “St Bega”, pp. 24–25.

⁷⁶ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 514–15, at 515: “nec tamen eius confessio, licet publica, plebem potuit absolvere ab impositae pensionis gravi iugo”.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 497–98, 509, 519.

but is warned against violating the peace of St Bega by his mother. He responds only with scorn, calling Bega a “little old woman” and inviting the saint to take her revenge by shooting an arrow into his backside. He subsequently leads a raid into Bega’s lands, but his activities are discovered and he is forced to escape on a stolen horse. With a local bowman in pursuit, he attempts to protect his upper body by inclining his head towards the horse’s neck—and thus raising his buttocks in the air... An uncertain shot mysteriously finds its mark: the Galwegian is struck by an arrow in the anus, which penetrates deep into his torso. He falls from the horse, dead, with the feathers of the arrow protruding from his rear—a visual trope familiar from later medieval marginalia.⁷⁸ This is a well-crafted account with a clear narrative arc. The use of stock characters rather than named individuals, the imagined dialogue, and the darkly comic image of the arrow in the anus suggest it was the product of frequent retelling. The appeal of this narrative to a border community subject to raiding is clear: it was intended to shame and deter such attacks from their northern neighbours. Unfortunately, however, the statement that henceforth the Galwegians were afraid to violate Bega’s peace proved wishful thinking rather than reality.⁷⁹

Oral culture also interacted with material objects in the preservation of Bega’s legacy at St Bees. Such practices lay at the heart of the cult: Bega’s bracelet, probably a Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring, was the central object upon which the cult (if not, it is now believed, the

⁷⁸ *Vita Begae*, pp. 509–10, at 510: “vetula”; M. Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*, London, 1992, pp. 106–07.

⁷⁹ See n. 7.

saint's identity) depended.⁸⁰ At the shrine, the bracelet was joined by other artefacts: the shackles of three prisoners miraculously freed from Egremont Castle; the special cart that transported two incapacitated boys from France; and the severed hooves of some horses which had dared to trample on the priory's crops (although it seems that these had since been removed).⁸¹ These objects appear to have been displayed as testaments to the miracles rather than relics in themselves. They provided physical *aides-mémoires* that prompted the telling of particular stories and helped to shape the popular perception of the cult. By noting the existence of these objects, the author showed an awareness of this material and a desire to accommodate it, even if the artefacts had not been seen in person.

Finally, some comment must be made on the arrangement of the posthumous miracles in each text. For Geoffrey, the ordering of the three healing miracles recorded in the *Life of Bartholomew* was a relatively uncomplicated task. He opted to put the most underwhelming narrative first: a single sentence describing the cure of man with a fever. He then appended two more detailed stories, arranging them in order of distance from the shrine: the first concerned a

⁸⁰ J. Sheehan, "Hiberno-Scandinavian Broad-Band Arm-Rings", in J. Graham-Campbell (ed.), *The Cuerdale Hoard and Related Viking-Age Silver and Gold from Britain and Ireland in the British Museum* (British Museum Research Publications, 185), London, 2013, pp. 94–100; L.A.S. Butler, "A Bracelet for St Bega", *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society New Series* 66 (1966), 93–105, at pp. 95–101; Downham, "Myth, Maiden, or Bracelet?", pp. 35–38.

⁸¹ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 513, 517, 519. For discussion of the internal arrangement of the church see *Registrum de S. Bega*, pp. xxxi-xxxii; Todd, "St Bega", p. 26.

possessed woman who was healed within sight of the oratory; the second describes how a youth cured the tumour on his neck by rubbing it against the saint's tomb.⁸² The variety and number of posthumous miracles in the *Life of Bega* posed a slightly greater challenge. The miracle concerning the Galwegian is the first of nine and may have been prioritized because it was a particularly popular and engaging story. After this, the material seems to have been arranged according to theme. Miracles two to four form a coherent group: each concerns property disputes and results in the confirmation or extension of monastic lands. Miracle four leads on to miracle five through a shared focus on perjury, while miracle six, in which a thief steals the cloth covering of the bracelet, displays a similar contempt for the saint. Miracles seven and eight also concern secular crimes, but relate to major violations of the peace such as murder and rape. Finally, the ninth miracle concerns the cure of two boys from Chartres and hints at a potentially international dimension to the cult.⁸³ It is also possible that numerology played a role in the selection of material.⁸⁴ The *Life of Bartholomew* contained three posthumous miracles, while the *Life of Bega* included nine, numbers which both had numerological significance as symbols of the Trinity. Unusually, the *Life of Bartholomew* gives no indication that other miracles had occurred, but the *Life of Bega* makes the more standard claim that its stories were selected from a pool of material—which suggests the

⁸² Geoffrey, *Vita Bartholomei*, §§ 34–36, ed. Arnold, pp. 323–25.

⁸³ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 509–19.

⁸⁴ See Christopher Norton's interpretation of the miracles of St William at York: C. Norton, *St William of York*, Woodbridge, 2006, pp. 150–57.

decision to record nine miracles has significance.⁸⁵ Although this is not a particularly telling observation, it alerts us to some of the less obvious influences on the text.

Conclusion

Hagiography reimagines the past for specific purposes and, even at its most fantastic, it reflects the cares and concerns of real authors and audiences. By exploring a saint's *life* as a coherent whole and recognising its dominant themes and interests, historians can understand the rationale behind the text and why the author has chosen to present and to order the material in a particular way. This essay has used a comparative analysis of the *Lives of Bega* and *Bartholomew* to highlight the different strategies that could be employed by hagiographers in response to the material available and the circumstances in which each cult operated. Saints' *lives* are primarily presented as didactic and promotional literature, intended to edify a local audience and to advertise the cult to prospective pilgrims. However, while the *lives* under consideration here probably served both purposes, they also had important historiographical functions. Hagiography recorded not only the lives of the saints, but also the history of those who interacted with their cults. The historiographical tendencies of these texts make them of even greater interest to the historian. However, they do not lessen the challenges posed by working with this kind of literature. A saint's *life* represents a series of choices made by the author to include, to exclude, to order, to amplify, and to adapt material—and it is only by investigating the possible reasons for these choices that we are able fully to understand the text and the information it contains.

⁸⁵ *Vita Begae*, ed. Wilson, pp. 519–20.

Further Reading

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