INCIDENTAL HAGIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

by

DAVID KEVIN BELL

(Under the Direction of Katharina Margit Wilson)

ABSTRACT

When fully examined, Chaucer's numerous references to incidental saints in *The Canterbury Tales* serve to enrich the meaning of the rhetorical context in which they occur. Although, at first glance, these references may appear arbitrary to today's reader or perhaps even irrelevant to the *Tales*, they actually hold great significance and often enhance one's understanding. Chaucer's audience most likely understood the function of these hagiographic references based on a thorough familiarity with the legends of the saints. Saints and their legends were ubiquitous in medieval culture, ranging from their prominence in Mass readings and visual depictions in stained glass windows to pilgrimages to their shrines and relics. Their mere mention in the *Tales* would have triggered a whole host of concrete associations, specific character traits, and iconographic recollections related to their colorful legends and pictorial representations. With the advent of collections of saints' lives like Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* and *The South English Legendary* in the late thirteenth century, hagiography reached an unprecedented level of popularity by the fourteenth century. Chaucer's incidental references to such saints as Frideswide, Neot, and Cuthbert, point to their legends, which, when explored, serve the purpose of enhancing and subverting a tale's meaning, typically through such elements as ironic contrast, wordplay, comic relief, and double entendre. The *Legenda Aurea*

and other sources, including the *South English Legendary,* are valuable resources in one's effort

to recover a portion of the meaning Chaucer most certainly encoded into *The Canterbury Tales*

via incidental hagiographic references.

INDEX WORDS:  Chaucer, hagiography, legenda aurea, saints

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DEDICATION

To Jessica, Aidan and Sherrod, with all my love.

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**CHAPTER 1**

**INTRODUCTION TO INCIDENTAL HAGIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**


Hagiographic references have a ubiquitous presence throughout *The Canterbury Tales.*

From the pilgrims' journey to venerate the relics at the shrine of St.Thomas à Becket in

Canterbury to the ninety-seven references to saints in *The Parson's Tale*, Chaucer's fluency in

respect to saints and their legends clearly influenced the overall shape and tenor of his

masterwork.  Given the fact that there are multiple references to saints in eighteen of the twenty-

four total tales, the significance of saints to Chaucer's literary schema cannot be

overemphasized.

This study is concerned with a portion of this overall significance, namely the extent to

which "incidental" references to specific saints inform and enrich the meaning of *The*

*Canterbury Tales*.  An incidental hagiographic reference is one that at first glance appears to be

secondary, arbitrary, or even tangential to the rhetorical context in which it occurs.  The saints

typically invoked in these contextual situations, not surprisingly, are ones whose cults were

localized, geographically defined and time specific rather than universal or globalized.  This

emphasis on localization naturally excludes references to biblical figures such as the Virgin

Mary and the apostles, universal Christian icons, whose names evoked such a plethora of

connotations and associations that a narrative including references to them might potentially

collapse under its awe-inspiring weight.[1] Furthermore, the potential for ironic subterfuge, a

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[1] Further study needs to be done on the significance of invocations of apostolic figures.

hallmark of incidental references, is also greatly compromised in their case in contrast to some of

the localized medieval saints like St. Dunstan or St. Joce whose attributes were specifically

aligned with their legends.  References to "primary" saints such as those in *The Parson's Tale*

whose mention is essential to the text, rather than incidental, are also excluded from this study,

the intended focus of which is the exploration of the less stellar icons of Christianity, invoked

incidentally by Chaucer.  To demonstrate, included among the less stellar saints are St.

Frideswide, St. Cuthbert, St. Neot, St. Eligius, St. Dunstan, and St. Joce, whose cults flourished

at one point or another leading up to the composition of *The Canterbury Tales* in the fourteenth

century.  They, along with the other twenty, are the saints who possessed the richest, most

immediate, personal recognition value to Chaucer's audience.  Their mere mention in the *Tales*

would have triggered a whole host of concrete associations, specific character traits, and

iconographic recollections related to their colorful legends and pictorial representations.

In *The Miller's Tale*, for example, John the carpenter swears "By St. Frideswide," an

eighth-century abbess whose link with the town of Oxford could have hardly escaped Chaucer's

audience.  Like the other incidental saints, Frideswide's name signified many things: she was the

patron saint of Oxford; she was known for healing; she was a king's daughter who forsook her

royal lineage for a life of chastity and service to God; her symbol was the flower, and she was

often depicted in visual representations beside an ox and a fountain.  Her feast day was October

19th.  Frideswide's name is mentioned only once in *The Miller's Tale*, but rather than this being a

limitation, Chaucer uses John's reference as an opportunity to encode her legendary footprint

into both the narrative context and the entire tale.  The result is a number of hagiographic

parallels from her legend which serve to inform, enrich, and subvert the meaning of *The Miller's

Tale*.  The medieval audience would have picked up on any parallels Chaucer intended to draw

between the actions of the characters in the tale and the Frideswide legend. These parallels may have been ironic, intended for comic relief, for satirical purposes, or simply to draw a distinction between two or more characters, but in any case, they most likely would have been quite obvious to a medieval audience.

Incidental, therefore, is a word that applies to the perspective brought by today's audience, a vantage point severely obstructed by our considerable distance from the medieval hagiographic code.  In essence, "incidental" is a term that would have meant little to Chaucer's audience, for they would have recognized the hagiographic references for their full worth.  Given this hazy distance it remains to be seen if we possess the ability to fully appreciate these oaths and invocations for what they signified in the fourteenth century.  However, there is little doubt that these references and oaths, when fully investigated, can broaden our understanding and add to the overall depth of meaning of the tales in which they appear.  They may even, as William Keen observes, help to draw us nearer to the mindset of Chaucer's imaginable medieval audience during an age when "Christian hagiography was still a vital universal code."[2]

Clearly since hagiography no longer informs culture to the extent it did in the Middle Ages when the Christian faith was at its apogee, the full resonance of Chaucer's hagiographic references, particularly oaths, is likely lost even on today's most seasoned reader of *The Canterbury Tales*.  As an illustration of this point, the St. Neot oath in *The Miller's Tale* serves as a particularly good example*:*


> "What, Absolon! for Cristes sweete tree,
> Why rise ye so rathe? Ey, benedicitee!
> What eyleth you?  Som gay gerl, God it woot,

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[2] William P. Keen, "Chaucer's Imaginable Audience and the Oaths of *The Shipman's Tale*," *Topic, A Journal of the Liberal Arts*  50 (2000):  91.

Hath broght youw thus upon the viritoot.
By Seinte Note, ye woot wel what I mene."[3]


This oath, pronounced by the blacksmith, Gerveys, comes in response to an early

morning visit from Absolon, the parish clerk, whose ill-fated passion for the Carpenter's wife,

Alison, leads to his humiliation in one of the more memorable scenes in *The Canterbury Tales*.

In visiting Gerveys, Absolon is on a mission to get revenge for the blow his dignity and pride

have suffered. Though Gerveys guesses correctly that a "gerl" is the basis for the early morning

call, he does not stop there but goes on to invoke St. Neot presumably to reinforce his point. This

raises the question of just what exactly St. Neot has to do with any of this. Perhaps, one might

argue, Chaucer is merely injecting a bit of verisimilitude, for it is very probable that a smith

would have felt little if any compunction in swearing by a saint as well as by "Cristes sweet tree"

in the same breath. While it is true that Chaucer is noted for his realistic portrayal of everyday

life—swearing on the Cross would have been one of the great taboos and therefore would have

carried much more weight than, say, the Neot oath--it is reasonable to assume that few twenty-

first century readers, if any, would instantaneously comprehend what Chaucer intimates here in

this rather curious allusion to Neot, by rights an obscure saint from Cornwall. Chaucer's

audience, for example, would have known that Neot had chastised King Alfred for *not* rising

early. The saint thought his rising early would be suitable penance for the King's difficulty in

dealing with sexual urges.  Neot also was known for standing naked in a well to say his daily

offices, a strange tendency, no doubt, echoed in the *Miller's Tale* with its emphasis on water and

flesh.  Clearly, without the details of Neot's legend at one's fingertips, the full intent of the

allusion could not  be absorbed by the reader.   Neot, in fact, *has* become relegated to little more

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[3] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton
Mifflin, 1987), 76.

than a footnote in most translations of the *Canterbury Tales.* His is a name that understandably holds little meaning for the modern reader. Unfortunately, the fact that we are no longer in a privileged position, so to speak, *vis-à-vis* hagiographic name recognition and association in our culture--having lost a great deal of the ability to unlock meaning on our own as Chaucer's audience surely would have done almost spontaneously—the significance of the Neot oath, regrettably, becomes lost and therefore essentially meaningless.

In order to restore the real force of this oath as well as the other hagiographic references in *The Canterbury Tales*, we are obliged to attempt to recreate the hagiographic milieu as best we can during the time in which Chaucer wrote, arming ourselves with all possible sources that might have been at his disposal. Today, this task would be almost futile were it not for hagiographic sources such as Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* and the thirteenth century collection of saints' legends called *The South English Legendary* both of which contain lives with which Chaucer would have been acquainted; I will argue that these texts contain some of the keys to unlocking the meaning behind the numerous incidental hagiographic references, invocations, and allusions in *The Canterbury Tales*. These sources may help us restore the full resonance of the oaths in context and allow us to more deeply absorb Chaucer's full intent in each tale. In this sense, the legendaries function as one more vital piece of the Chaucerian puzzle. Without their guidance, we lose a great deal more than simply knowing who Frideswide, Cuthbert, Loy, or Neot were. More precisely, we lose the ability to appreciate fully Chaucer's literary capacity for taking something as ostensibly benign as a local saint's name and loading it with meaning and symbolism in an ironic narrative context. In this regard, Chaucer makes more out of less by allocating room for the bias and preconceived notions of individual audience members to come into play. Few would disagree that in this respect Chaucer's literary skill and

repertoire are unmatched. Thus, as we unlock the story behind the saints' names, we shall begin to see a multiplicity of dormant elements emerge, like images appearing on photographic paper: double entendre, irony, satire, comic relief, paradox, and inversions, to name but a few. Much like the rich tradition of medieval iconography in churches, windows and bas-reliefs, the legends serve as signposts for us in our efforts to retrace the footsteps of Chaucer's band of pilgrims as they journey to the shrine of another highly revered saint whose relics awaited them in Canterbury.

It is the case with Chaucer criticism in general that few if any stones remain unturned. This is certainly true with the study of incidental hagiographic references in *The Canterbury Tales,* though perhaps to a lesser degree than some other areas, since there has been only a single study of any length devoted to Chaucer's saints. The study in question, Ann Haskell's *Essays on Chaucer's Saints*, published in 1976, is a compilation of the author's articles, many of which were published in the *Chaucer Review;* Haskell's *Essays* will be reviewed at length in the following chapter, but it is worth mentioning here that the focus of her text is clearly on source materials rather than implications. Furthermore, Haskell's *Essays* is limited in its scope to a total of nine oaths, eight saints, and one "non-saint" from the thirty-six that make-up the total. It is with this small yet significant number in mind, along with Haskell's own admission that her work "is not to be construed as comprehensive," plus the relatively sporadic and uneven critical coverage of references in *The Canterbury Tales* from the late nineteenth century up through the twenty first that prompts me to maintain that the time has never been more appropriate for an examination of this kind. This study, while benefiting from the  work in the field, will offer a different approach in the form of a reference guide, the primary interest of which will be saints and their hagiographic narratives (i.e. legends and sermons). The guide proper will be preceded

by three chapters, the first of which examines the critical literature and prior scholarship on

hagiographic oaths and references in *The Canterbury Tales*.  Thus far, no one has compiled a

review as such of the critical literature on this topic in *The Canterbury Tales*, which is something

long overdue and useful, one hopes, for future scholarship in this area. As a result, though it will

not contain a review of every single footnote and passing reference made in anthologies and

collected works, chapter one will assemble a "greatest hits" of sorts of the critical literature.  This

will consist of summaries, presented in a chronological fashion, of some of the more cogent and

useful essays that have been written on the subject. The assessment of the critical literature will

be followed by an overview of the source material with which Chaucer and his audience most

likely would have been familiar.  There is no incontrovertible evidence to suggest that Chaucer

read these particular sources, just as there is no real direct evidence, for example, to suggest that

he read Boccaccio, yet it is demonstrably clear that Chaucer was intimately familiar with both

*The Decameron* as well as the legends within the sources reviewed here.  These sources include

the *Legenda Aurea*, *The South English Legendary*, Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert*, and Osbern

Bokenham's *Legend of St. Anne,* among others.  The overview of sources in chapter two will be

followed by a discussion of the historical evolution of the term "saint."  Here, a survey of the

meaning of sainthood will be presented from the first century, when, for the most part, every

recipient of the sacrament of baptism was a saint, to the High Middle Ages, by which time

sainthood was conferred solely by the Church in a much more bureaucratic manner, primarily

driven by the performance and verification of miracles.  The chapter on saints will precede the

main section of the study, the reference guide.   The guide itself will be arranged in alphabetical

order with an entry for each incidental saint to whom Chaucer refers in *The Canterbury Tales.*

Beginning with St. Adrian and concluding with St. Yves, the guide will feature the following

elements:  1) *Nomenclature*: the saint's name along with any alternate spellings or aliases as well as his or her historical data; 2) *Referential context:* the quotation(s) from the Canterbury tale in which the saint is mentioned; 3) *Summary of Scholarship:*  a concise formulation of the scholarly consensus on the saint's significance; here, notes and commentary from collected works will be incorporated; 4) *Legend Summary*: a summary of the saint's legend and life; and 5) *Application*: an analysis of the significance of the reference to the context in which it occurs.  How, for example, does the blacksmith's invocation of St. Neot add meaning to the rhetorical context in which it occurs?  Is the reference ironic?  Is the context enriched by the reference? The application will help us determine if a reference is significant or not.  In some cases the outcome may prove to be inconclusive; in these instances, there simply may not be enough context around which to build an argument; while in others, it should be clear that the overall depth of a tale's meaning is considerably enhanced. Finally, following the conclusion, there is a detailed appendix containing stratifications of each hagiographic reference, including such categories as the saint's nationality, patron status, and iconography, among other attributes.

**CHAPTER 2**

**REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP ON INCIDENTAL HAGIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES,**

**ALLUSIONS AND OATHS IN THE CANTERBURY TALES**


There are a total of twenty-nine incidental saints whom Chaucer's pilgrims and characters invoke or swear by in his *Tales*. British saints are in the majority with eight: St. Cuthbert (Lindisfarne), St. Dunstan (Glastonbury), St. Edward (Westminster), St. Frideswide (Oxford), St. Hugh (Lincoln), St. Kenelm (Mercia), St. Neot (Cornwall), and St. Thomas à Becket (Canterbury). France has a total of six saints: St. Denys (Paris), St. Giles (Brittany), St. Joce (Brittany), St. Loy (Paris), St. Martin (Tours), and St. Yve (Chartres). There are saints who represent a number of significant Christian traditions, including the patristic: St. Ambrose, St. Augustine and St. Jerome; the monastic: St. Benedict and St. Maurus; and the ecclesiastical: St. Urban and St. Nicholas. There are a total of five female saints: St. Anne, St. Cecilia, St. Frideswide, St. Helena, and St. Mary of Egypt. There are even two "saints," St. Madrian and St. Ronyan, of highly questionable origin, whose mention by Harry Bailly, the host of the Tabard Inn, has been the cause for great debate and consternation, leaving some critics thoroughly perplexed. Numerous theories have been offered—some outlandish, others plausible--as to what the oaths by these two signify and who or even what they might be. In any event, Chaucer shows his considerable range and impressive command of the hagiographic tradition and source materials by presenting such a wide-reaching multiplicity of voices and personalities, real and

apocryphal, along with an equally diverse gradation of intent and purpose, ranging from sincere to sardonic to highly ironic, in *The Canterbury Tales.*

In terms of the tales themselves, hagiographic references are distributed as follows:

♦ *General Prologue--7*

♦ *The Summoner's Tale--7*

♦ *The Wife of Bath's Prologue--6*

♦ *The Shipman's Tale--6*

♦ *The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale--6*

♦ *The Miller's Tale--6*

♦ *The Man of Law's Tale--5*

♦ *The Friar's Tale--4*

♦ *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale—4*

♦ *The Prioress's Tale--4*

♦ *The Nun's Priest Tale--3*

♦ *The Second Nun's Tale--3*

♦ *The Reeve's Tale--2*

♦ *The Canon Yeoman's Tale: 2*

♦ *The Squire's Tale: 1*

♦ *Prologue to the Monk's Tale: 1*

Scholarly coverage of oaths in *The Canterbury Tales* dates back at least as far as the late 1800s, when scholars typically wrote expansive annotated notes that explained primary sources virtually line by line. Many of the original identifications of saints and the interpretation of the

significance of oaths and references are found in these notes.  And though some offer little more than fairly straightforward identifications, they are quite valuable for focusing on the origins and transmissions of the references and oaths.  In many cases the notations are rather perfunctory and subsequently fail to penetrate beneath the surface of the saints' names to determine if any deeper significance exists; in other instances, the notes are much more precise and provide historical and legendary contexts.  As such, they appear to be the basis for some of the more fruitful debates that have taken place over the years.  One of the earliest instances of this type of identification is found in Walter W. Skeat's 1894 edition of *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* in his *Notes To The Canterbury Tales*.  In the following quote, Skeat identifies a correlation between two specific saints and their native regions.  He notes the logic behind the fact that John the carpenter in the *Miller's Tale* swears by St. Frideswide, the patron saint of the town and university of Oxford, since the carpenter too hails from Oxford:

The carpenter naturally invokes St. Frideswide, as there was a priory of St. Frideswide at Oxford, the church of which has become the present cathedral. The shrine of St. Frideswide is still to be seen, though in fragmentary state, at the east end of the Cathedral, on its former site near the original chancel-arches and wall of her early stone church.[4]

Skeat also draws a similar conclusion in respect to St. Cuthbert, a native of Northumberland, and the Cambridge student, John, also from the area, who swears by "Cutbert" in *The Reeve's Tale*:

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[4] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Complete Works of Geoffery Chaucer,* ed. Walter W. Skeat (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 105.

St. Cuthbert, bishop of Lindisfarne, died in 686. Being a Northumberland man, John swears by a Northumberland Saint.[5]

In other cases, Skeat gives detailed descriptions of saints based on their legends, particularly in the case of saints who have proven, over time, to be the most problematical. His entry for St. Loy, for example, runs almost a page and a half, and in it, he refers to one of the earliest "letters" written on the French saint by Professor J.W. Hales in *The Athenaeum*. It is perhaps a bit of an overstatement to suggest that Skeat launched the hagiographic debate on St. Loy by referring to Hales' argument as "interesting," but one thing is for certain, St. Loy still remains the most widely discussed saint in *The Canterbury Tales*. No one critic seems, in the eyes of others, to have adequately cracked the code of the Prioress's "greatest oath." Next to St. Loy, scholars have written about St. Neot second most, and, not surprisingly, *The Miller's Tale* is the tale about which scholars have written most frequently in respect to saints.

The following review of critical literature begins with Hales' letter of 1891 in *The Athenaeum* and considers many of the most essential articles in the tradition up through the most recent article published in 2003.

*1891: Chaucer's Prioress's "Greatest Oath"*

This article by John W. Hales in *The Athenaeum* appears to be one of the earliest written on oaths in *The Canterbury Tales*, though Hales refers to the fact that the Prioress's oath by St. Loy already had generated a good deal of discussion.[6] Most of this critical conversation, Hales adds, centered around "why" Chaucer would have a lady swear by Loy "of all the saints in the

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[5] *Ibid*, 124.
[6] See John W. Hales, "Chaucer's Prioress's Greatest Oath," *The Athenaeum* No. 3298 (Jan. 1891): 54.

calendar" when Loy (Eloy or Eligius) was the patron saint of "goldsmiths, blacksmiths, and all workers in metals, also of farriers and horses."[7] It makes perfect sense that the carter in the Friar's Tale would invoke Loy, Hales observes, but "what is his saintship to the Prioress...?" Hales summarizes the various conjectures offered in respect to the oath, both probable and not so probable, including the claim that Loy is the diminutive of St. Louis and a similarly far-reaching assertion that Loy really means "loi," French for law. Hales also quotes Skeat's famous assertion in his notes to *The Canterbury Tales* that, "Perhaps she invoked St. Loy as being the patron saint of goldsmiths; for she seems to have been a little given to love of gold and corals."[8]

Hales then offers his explanation for the oath, which revolves around Loy's supposed refusal to swear an oath under the direct order of King Dagobert. Upon the king's second request, Eligius is said to have burst into tears. The king relented and placed his confidence in Loy nevertheless. This, Hales maintains, then, is the reason why the Prioress's "greatest oath" is by Loy: she, as he did, refuses to swear at all.

*1907: Two Chaucer Cruces*

In the first half of this article in *Modern Language Notes*, Eleanor Prescott Hammond offers a new explanation for the Prioress's oath by St. Loy. Hammond takes issue with W.W. Skeat's "less definite note than usual" in the *Oxford Chaucer* on Loy. In particular, Hammond seems unconvinced by Skeat's enthusiasm for Hale's conclusion that swearing by Loy means not to swear at all.[9] She also seems unconvinced by Skeat's assessment that the Prioress swore by Loy, or Eligius, because of his status as protector of goldsmiths. The Prioress, Madame

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[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Eleanor Prescott Hammond, "Two Chaucer Cruces," *Modern Language Notes* Vol. 22 (1907): 51.

Eglantyne, swears in this regard, Skeat argues, because she is "a little given to a love of gold and

corals."[10]  Rather, Hammond suggests that a more probable answer to why the Prioress swears

by Loy is found in a stanza from John Lydgate's poem on the *Virtue of the Mass.*   In the stanza,

Lydgate expounds upon the benefits of "heringe of mass" which does "passing gret avayll."  One

of the great merits, according to Lydgate, is that the legends of the saints are read aloud which

gives people an opportunity to relive them.  He lists four saints as examples to illustrate:

Nicholas (who gives good counsel); Julian (who provides hospitality); Christopher (who

provides protection); and Loye about whom Lydgate says:  "your iournay schall preserue."

Hammond allows this quote from Lydgate to speak for itself, and, as such, we are left to read

between the lines and conclude that one of Loy's many functions as a saint was that he was the

patron saint of pilgrimages.  Thus, when one invokes him, neither "Hors nor cariage" will be in

danger.  Hammond concludes by stating that one can learn a great deal from Lydgate, whom, she

hastens to add, Skeat himself has called "our best commentator on Chaucer."[11]


### 1926:  St. Ambrose and Chaucer's Life of St. Cecila

In this article, Oliver Farrar Emerson explains the significance of Chaucer's reference to

St. Ambrose in *The Second Nun's Tale.*[12]  Scholars previous to Emerson were unable to locate

the basis for the reference in the tale and some even dismissed it as an irrelevant intrusion.

Emerson shows that Ambrose used the phrase "palm of martirdom" and that he was the source

for the floral symbolism of the "corones two," or two crowns, both prominent images in the tale.

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[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Oliver Farrar Emerson, "Saint Ambrose and Chaucer's Life of St. Cecilia," *PMLA* 41.2
(Jun. 1926):  252-261.

In his commentary on the *Canticum Canticorum,* Ambrose alludes to the floral symbolism of the two crowns, using the phrases *confessorum violae, lilia virginium*, and *rosae martyrum*.[13] Ambrose is the only one of the "Latin fathers" to be associated with this kind of interpretation of the text. Emerson adds that the symbolism and use of floral and horticulture terms is seen elsewhere in Ambrose's works, such as in his exposition of Psalm 118, *Expositio in Lucam*, and in his *Liber de Institutione Virginies*. The flower symbolism associated with Ambrose persisted after his death and is noted by those after him, such as the fifth century Bishop Eucherius of Lyons, ninth century Rabanus Maurus, and St. Bernard, all of whom repeat the symbolism of the rose for martyrs and the lily for virginity.

Although Ambrose never mentions Cecilia, Emerson adds, Chaucer closely paraphrases Ambrose's Latin in the last line of the speech on the virtue of St. Cecilia: If Chaucer's line "deuocioun of chastitee to loue" is read using the Old English meaning for "to" as "against," then "devotion to chastity against love" closely resembles the meaning of Ambrose's Latin.

Emerson concludes that the Ambrosian symbolism "so permeates the story" in the *Life of St. Cecilia* that a clerical writer may have easily illustrated Ambrose's *palma martyrii* quotation with a reference to St. Cecilia, after which Ambrose's declaration of the worth of the other principal characters in the tale followed naturally.[14]

### *1933: Harry Bailey's Corpus Madrian*

One of the earliest articles dealing with oaths and saints is "Harry Bailey's Corpus Madrian," written by Dorothy MacBride Norris, and published in the *Modern Language Notes*, 1933. Norris argues that the Tabard's host's "by corpus Madrian" oath is likely an extension of

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[13] *Ibid*, 253.
[14] *Ibid*, 261.

Bailey's penchant for taking liberty with language and in keeping with Bailey's character. At the

crux of the argument is "why" Chaucer has one of his characters swear by what by all accounts is

a fictitious saint, when virtually all of the other saints sworn by in *The Canterbury Tales* were

drawn from legendaries and other collections (with the exception possibly of Ronyan). Although

close approximations such as Madryn, Madron, and Madian were in fact names of actual,

documented saints, Norris points out, there is no evidence of a St. Madrian. She dismisses

Professor Manly's position (which even he admits is conjectural) that perhaps Chaucer intended

either Saint Mathurin or Saint Materne. In conclusion, MacBride argues that "Madrian" is

potentially a name the host may have overheard while serving a diverse clientele consisting of

various nationalities, especially Italians, and ethnicities at his pub near London. She suggests

that he may have heard one of his Italian customers utter "Madrian" in reference to the Holy

Mother, Mary, *il madre*. Norris concludes that, "here perhaps was a new-fangled word for the

Host which we may surmise he took great delight in adding to his store of unusual

expressions."[15] It is as if the Host, to paraphrase MacBride's argument, has created his own

parlance and in this instance has come up with his own way of saying "by the precious body of

the Holy Mother."[16]

*1942: That Precious Corpus Madrian*

In 1942 *Modern Language Notes* published an article by George L. Frost titled, "That

Precious Corpus Madrian," in which Frost also discusses the oath sworn by Harry Bailey. Frost

echoes MacBride's position on Harry Bailly's penchant for mispronunciations and verbal

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[15] Dorothy MacBride Norris, "Harry Bailey's Corpus Madrian," *Modern Language Notes*" 68 (1933): 148.
[16] *Ibid*.

corruptions as well as his role of providing comic relief as a means of explaining the Madrian

oath. As Frost notes, the humor found in such Bailly oaths as "By corpus bones" and "By corpus

dominus", would have undeniably "aroused the mirth of the learned," but in the case of the

host's two oaths by Madrian (as well as Ronyan), fictitious saints by all accounts, the humor is

not immediate and only emerges after a good deal of explication is done. Frost reinforces

MacBride's dismissal of earlier scholars' attempts to connect Madrian to saints with similar

names. Yet, he just as readily dismisses MacBride's theory that "Madrian" came to the ears of

the host from an Italian visitor: "I am unable to see any merit in Mrs. Norris's suggestion that

"Madrian" was evolved from Harry Bailly's having heard an Italian visitor to London "address

the Holy Mother in his tongue as 'Madre.'"[17] Frost proposes an alternative approach, having

identified a common noun "madrian" in the *NED* which was used, he asserts, in the latter half of

the fourteenth century in both English and French, although, he adds, "Its meaning, however, has

never been precisely clear." Frost then develops a winding etymological path to argue that

Madrian is a spice or a "kind of ginger," even a "sweetmeat." He presents two recipes from the

fourteenth century, the first titled "To mak Conserue of Madrian" and the second, "To Make the

Madrian in confitte." Both recipes refer to Madrian as a type of ingredient to be added to sweet

sugar. Frost concludes that the Host is mixing some long-forgotten saint with a long-forgotten

word with sweet connotations: "When the Host swore by that precious corpus Madrian," he

transformed the vaguely remembered name of some saint into a word familiar to them all…"[18]

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[17] George L. Frost, "That Precious Corpus Madrian," *Modern Language Notes* 57 (1942): 177.

[18] *Ibid*.

*1943: 'Seint Julian He was'*

Henry Savage's short article in *Modern Language Notes* reveals that Chaucer's description of the Franklin as "Seint Julian ... in his contree," was not random in its application. He bases this assertion on a quotation he "chanced upon" regarding the Count of Savoy who is described as a "St. Julian" in a *Chronique* from 1386. What the quote indicates, Savage says, is "the currency in the later fourteenth century of the expression that a certain person was 'a St. Julian,' or his house a 'maison' or 'hostel' of that saint."[19] Savage is the first to identify this connection which he concludes "adds picturesque detail to the poet's description" of the Franklin in the *General Prologue*.

*1945: Four Chaucer Saints*

"Four Chaucer Saints," published in *Modern Language Notes* (*MLN*) by Ruth Huff Cline in 1945, takes an important step toward establishing the notion that oaths and references were not arbitrary: "A brief study of the saints by which the pilgrims swore indicates that the choice of oaths was not entirely haphazard."[20] Furthermore, Huff Cline expands upon Skeat's locale-based identifications of the Frideswide and Cuthbert oaths by turning to their legends as sources for additional details that strengthen the case for the oaths not simply being arbitrary. She introduces Frideswide's healing prowess as a logical explanation, in addition to the Oxford locale, for John's request for Frideswide's intercession in the case of the clerk Nicholas who appears to have gone mad or ill over astrological dabbling. Frideswide's modern-day shrine, Huff Cline points out, was constructed on the basis of a thirteenth-century plan and includes carvings of herbs known to have healing properties. John therefore invokes Frideswide's aid in healing Nicholas

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[19] Henry Savage, *"Seint Julian He was," Modern Language Notes* 58.1 (Jan. 1943): 47.
[20] Ruth Huff Cline, "Four Chaucer Saints," *Modern Language Notes* 60 (1945): 480-482.

whom he views as being physically sick. She also identifies a passage in Bede's *Legendary Lives of Saints* in which St. Cuthbert "entertained angels unaware" and was rewarded the very next day by having food "miraculously" supplied to him to suggest another reason why John, a Northumberland man, might also swear by Cuthbert in addition to Skeat's suggestion. In the remainder of her article, Huff Cline briefly considers two more saints: St. Yve, who is invoked in the *Shipman's Tale*, and St. Thomas, invoked by the Merchant in his tale. In presenting her case for Yve being St. Ivo of Chartres, Huff Cline takes issue once again with Skeat for what she terms a "glaringly inaccurate" identification of Yve as St. Ivia or Ivo. Ivo was a Persian Bishop who had preached in England in the seventh century, legend has it, and consequently less likely to have been *the* saint in question than St. Ivo of Chartres, since the tale is set in Brittany. Further evidence, she notes, is readily available in the tale to prove Yve's identity as Ivo of Chartres--two of the other five saints invoked in *The Shipman's Tale*, St. Martyn and St. Denis, are French and in fact are both patron saints of France. She concludes her argument by declaring that it would be strange indeed for the Merchant to "pass by the famous French Bishop, St. Yve, for a relatively little-known Persian Bishop or a Breton Saint. Finally, Huff Cline turns to the prologue to the *Merchant's Tale* where she locates an "imprecation the significance of which has been overlooked…" (p. 482). She refers specifically to St. Thomas of Ynde whom she identifies as the Apostle Thomas, known traditionally for his "show-me" posture in respect to the resurrection of Christ. Thomas supposedly journeyed to India as a missionary, so, clearly, the implication here is that the Merchant would need his support in his travels to faraway places to conduct his affairs. However, Huff Cline merely tantalizes us with a reference to Thomas's iconographic representations and fails to entertain the irony contained within a reference to a saint known for his high-level of incredulity.

*1957:  The Prioress's Greatest Oath Once More*

James J. Lynch's article on the Prioress's vexing oath by St. Loy calls for a

reconsideration of the conventional and fairly well substantiated wisdom that Loy refers to St.

Eligius, the seventh century goldsmith turned Bishop who later became an advisor to and mint-

master under King Dagobert I.  Scholars before Lynch, namely Skeat, Manly, and Robinson,

have found solid etymological evidence and support from the legendaries to support their

respective contentions in identifying Loy as Eligius.  Furthermore, J.W. Hales made a

compelling case for the saint based on an incident from his life in which he wept rather than

swearing an oath as the king had asked him to do.  Hales concludes that it would make perfect

sense for the Prioress, a model of propriety, to swear an oath by a saint who would not, himself,

swear an oath, thus canceling out her own oath.  Another theory suggested Eligius based on his

status as the patron saint of goldsmiths, since it seems Madame Eglatyne appears to fancy

expensive things. Eligius's rank as a courtier and as an artificer of beautiful objects informed a

similar position.  In essence, roughly two generations of criticism made the case for Eligius.

Hammond even based her argument on the fact that the Prioress called upon Eligius as the patron

saint of pilgrims.   After extensively summarizing the preceding critical interpretations of the

oath and concluding that each link to Eligius is conjectural, Lynch proposes his own

"conjecture": Loy, he suggests, might alternatively refer to St. Eulalia, a female saint from

France, whose name means "sweet-spoken," though he concedes it is very difficult to prove that

Chaucer knew of her.  Bearing this in mind and acknowledging the need to proceed with caution,

Lynch offers "evidence" based on several possibilities.  The first, Lynch notes, is a "rather

dubious" attribution in Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* in which the curé makes a connection

between St. Eulalie and St. Eloi.  Just as readily as he offers this possibility, however, Lynch

undercuts it by noting that "Proust ... was not above attributing erroneous knowledge" to his clerical characters.[21]  Lynch provides evidence from fourteenth-century documents that a border town in Burgundy, St. Eloi, was on at least one occasion referred to as S. Eulalia.[22]  Though Chaucer was not known to have been in Burgundy, Lynch adds, he was known to have been in the south of France "more than once" on his way to Italy.  In the south of France, Lynch speculates, he likely would have come across a number of towns and villages "named for St. Eulalia" who was the patron saint of town and villages.  There he may have been exposed to "well-developed [cults] of St. Eulalia and corrupted place names like Sent-Aoloia."[23]  Given all of this evidence, Lynch concludes that it is "phonetically possible" that Chaucer may have "interpreted" Seinte Loy as St. Eulalia.  Finally, Lynch turns to the legends of two saints named Eulalia, whose stories, he claims, add "probability to possibility" in making the case for the Loy identification.  Both St. Eulalia of Barcelona and St. Eulalia of Merida were young virgins and martyrs whose legends, evidently, due to frequent confusion have come to form somewhat of a composite.  Eulalia of Merida's legend is recounted in *Butler's Lives of the Saints* and tells of the twelve-year old's torture and martyrdom under the rule of Diocletian.  While she is tortured and set on fire, "nothing came from her lips but thanksgivings, and a white dove issued from her mouth."  Lynch draws parallels between these lines from the life of St. Eulalia and the fact that the Prioress later tells the tale of St. Hugh of Lincoln, the young martyr to whom she refers as "O martir, sowded to virginitee."[24]  Likewise, the Prioress would have been attracted to Eulalia for her propriety even during her final moments on earth.

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[21] James J. Lynch, "The Prioress's Greatest Oath, Once More," *Modern Language Notes* Vol. 72.4 (Apr. 1957):  246.
[22] *Ibid*.
[23] *Ibid*.
[24] *Ibid*, 248.

Ultimately, Lynch's argument seems less convincing than those discussed earlier in respect to the oath by St. Loy.  He concludes that it is just as likely that Chaucer would have known of St. Eulalia as it is he would have known of St. Eligius but this seems rather tenuous based on the evidence he presents.

*1959:  Hir Gretteste Ooth:  The Prioress, St. Eligius, And St. Godebertha*

The ongoing historical debate as to the identity of St. Loy and the meaning of the Prioress's oath continues in this article by John M. Steadman.  Steadman notes that scholars have generally tended to agree on two specific aspects of the oath:  that it is relatively mild when compared to some of the other oaths in *The Canterbury Tales* and that the Prioress appears to have a special "affinity" for the saint whom she invokes.  The oath is "ladylike," decorous, and antithetical to the wholesale "dimembrynge of Crist" which occurs in practically every one of the Host's oaths.[25]  The decorousness of the oath, Muriel Bowden suggests, is due to Eligius's former life as a courtier and an artist.  Loy's sensibility and his sensitivity, in other words, connect with the Prioress's own temperament, itself very decorous and proper, at least in the *General Prologue*.  He cites Lowe's similar conclusion that it was "perfectly in keeping" with Madam Eglentyne's character to invoke "a courtier-saint" as further evidence.  After summarizing this general consensus, Steadman moves to a discussion of Hales' early position (1891) that Loy's refusal to swear an oath at his king's command must mean that the Prioress herself therefore refuses to swear at all.  Despite the fact that that Lowes dismissed this position in 1914, calling the interpretation "hopelessly forced," Steadman sees Hales' theory as meriting further consideration.  It had been taken seriously by Skeat after all who termed it "interesting."

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[25] John M. Steadman, "Hir Gretteste Ooth: The Prioress, St. Eligius, and St. Godebertha," *Neophilologus* 60 (1959): 49-57.

Steadman turns to the *Vita S. Eligii* by St. Ouen and quotes extensively from the episode in which Eligius refuses to swear.  He concludes that, "Surely Chaucer had this episode in mind when he declared that the Prioress' *greatest* oath was *but* by St. Loy."[26]  Steadman then demonstrates how this interpretation of the oath is a superior mode of understanding the mildness of the Prioress's disposition and her special affinity for the so-called courtier saint.  Eligius' legend contains several instances in which the saint gives away all of his personal belongings to charities or to individuals in need.  This, Steadman points out, directly contradicts Lowes' "overemphasis" of Eligius' "weakness for personal adornment."[27]  In fact, Eligius, despite his artistic past and stint in the royal court, wore a hairshirt and conducted himself more in keeping with an ascetic.  Steadman cites an Italian legend in which Eligius appears post mortem to speak on behalf of residents of a poorhouse who are receiving ill treatment from the house's guardian. He was known to bury the dead and spent much of his time tending to the needs of prisoners. This theme of *misericordia*, exemplified by his performance of "corporal almsdeeds," runs throughout Eligius' *vita*, Steadman points out, and sits in sharp contrast to the Prioress's parodic deeds and "acts" of *misericordia* (i.e. her pity for a mouse).

Furthermore, Steadman finds a connection between Eligius and St. Godebertha, the abbess of Noyon, whom Eligius persuaded to leave the "active" life for a life of contemplation. Of utmost importance to their connection and by extension to the Prioress's oath, is the fact that, as Steadman indicates, Eligius "affianced" Godebertha to Christ "with his own ring."[28] Steadman, therefore, sees Eligius as being a "singularly appropriate saint" for any nun to call on,

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[26] *Ibid*, 51.
[27] *Ibid*, 53.
[28] *Ibid*, 55.

particularly one for whom renouncing the material world was challenging.[29]  Finally, Steadman

draws a parallel between the ring Eligius gives to Godebertha and the brooch that the Prioress

wears.  As one recalls, her brooch, attached to a rosary, is inscribed with the phrase:  *Amor vincit*

*omnia*.  Both the ring and the brooch, Steadman observes, juxtapose the spiritual with the

secular; in the case of Godbertha's ring, it symbolizes her "renunciation of carnal for spiritual

love," whereas in the case of the Prioress the end result is much more ambiguous. Does she give

primacy to spirtual love or does she still cling fast to the material form?  This ambiguity

ultimately adds to the irony but also the appropriateness for her invocation of St. Loy.

It is worth mentioning Steadman's closing comment on the dangers of placing more

emphasis on one interpretation at the expense of all of the others in terms of the critical tradition

of the Prioress's oath.  Though Steadman's analysis is undoubtedly the most carefully detailed

and well-argued to date, he rightly suggests that relying too much on one interpretation

"unnecessarily restricts" the reference's possibilities.  As he quotes Lowes, "no detail is

unimportant that adds to what we know of Chaucer's art."[30]

### 1964:  Absolon and St. Neot

In his article in *Neophilologus*, Angus Macdonald sets out to correct what he views as a

glaring omission in respect to the St. Neot oath in *The Miller's Tale*.  Previous scholars,

Macdonald laments, have done little more than speculate about the linguistic meaning of the

word *viritoot*, failing, in the process, to analyze the entire passage, thereby negating the real

potential for uncovering the admittedly obscure word's actual meaning.  In building his

argument, Macdonald recounts the details leading up to and during Absolon's conversation with

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[29] *Ibid.*

[30] *Ibid*, 56.

Gervys, who correctly surmises that "some gay gerl" is the cause for Absolon's distress and odd request of a hot branding iron.

Next, Macdonald discusses scholarly evidence that suggests that St. Neot did in fact exist. Neot is mentioned in connection with Athelstan, whose family, including his younger brother, Alfred, the eventual king, revered the saint based on their relation by blood to one another. However, Macdonald quickly dismisses the significance of the historical Neot, suggesting instead that it is the legendary Neot whose details provide the keenest insight into the meaning of the word *viritoot.* Though Macdonald cites Asser's *Life of King Alfred* (W.H. Stevenson edition) as being the source for details most pertinent to the Neot oath, he hastens to add that scholars have proven that "the passages in [the] work related to Neot are in fact interpolations, the material for which was put together by the end of the eleventh century."[31] Nonetheless, the most relevant interpolations, Macdonald adds, pertain to Alfred's defeat at the hand of the Danes at Chippenham and his ostensible reputation for a strong sexual appetite. Neot evidently was so bewildered by Alfred's "impetuousness and tyranny early in his reign" that he predicted that the king would one day suffer on account of it. Alfred overcame his rash behavior by praying at a church in Cornwall. Of utmost relevancy to the Neot oath, according to Macdonald, is the fact that Alfred was known to "rise at cockcrow and in the morning hours" to pray for strength to overcome his burden.[32] This pivotal connection to Neot is the basis for Macdonald's assertion that, "The parallel seems sufficiently obvious. Gervys in effect suggests that Absolon, like King Alfred, had risen early in order to avoid the temptation of some 'gay gerl,' and to pray in church for strength of mind."[33]

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[31] Angus Macdonald, "Absolon and St. Neot," *Neophilologus* Vol. 47-48 (1963-64): 236.
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.*

Macdonald goes one step further in his argument, looking to later chroniclers who "go so far as to make St. Neot rebuke Alfred for his sins," which resulted in a kind of bad karma, leading to his defeat by the Danes. It is possible, then, Macdonald suggests, that Gervys is playing at being St. Neot and that he substitutes Absolon in the place of King Alfred, whom he rebukes for rising early as a result of his passion for some "gay gerl."

### *1975:  The Miller's Tale:  By Seinte Note*

Mary Richard's article, *The Miller's Tale: "By Seinte Note,"* published in *The Chaucer Review* in 1975, takes issue with Macdonald's claim in his *Neophilologus* article that the interpolations in Asser's *Life of King Alfred* and the subsequent chronicles clearly explain the significance of the St. Neot oath in *The Miller's Tale*.  Richards points out inconsistencies in Macdonald's reading of the chronicles and concludes that the "likelihood of a Chaucerian allusion to these stories appears slim."[34]  She bases this on the fact that the two interpolations on which Macdonald establishes his argument—Alfred's habit of rising early to pray for strength to overcome his lust and Neot's rebuke of Alfred—are never actually connected with one another in the chronicle tradition.  For instance, in the chronicle account of John Wallingford, Richards notes, "Wallingford relates St. Neot's admonishment of Alfred ... where the saint reprimands the king for his sins of the flesh as well as for his pride," but, she adds, "Wallingford never mentions Alfred's habit of rising early for prayer."[35]  Richards contends that this lack of a consistent connection between the two stories in any of the eight chronicles she mentions provides enough evidence to reject Macdonald's argument entirely.

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[34] Mary P. Richards, "The Miller's Tale: 'By Seinte Note,'" *The Chaucer Review* 9 (1975):  212-215.

[35] *Ibid,* 213.

A more probable explanation, of the Gervys and Absolon encounter as well as the Neot

oath, Richards suggests, comes from the tradition of "recensions of the life of the saint."[36]  The

three recensions, two of which are Latin and one of which is in Old English, date from the

twelfth through the thirteenth centuries.  These dates, Richards states, are enough to comfortably

conclude that Chaucer could well have known the "more traditional events of the life of St.

Neot."  Neot's reputation for rising early, oftentimes in the middle of the night for private prayer

along with his quirky habit of singing psalms without clothes while immersed in a well, are

recounted in each of the recensions.  Richards concludes, based on the former assertion, that

when Gervys swears, "By seinte Note, ye woot wel what I mene" he most likely has in mind "the

saint's rising early for private prayer," rather than King Alfred's tendency to do so as Macdonald

argues.   To further concretize her claim, Richards points out the following ways in which ironic

parallels exist between Absolon and the legend of St. Neot.:  both, she says, are up early to tend

to their affairs; both pay attention to clothing—Neot changes prior to praying, whereas Absolon

does so before courting; both sing:  one to God, the other to Alison; one neglects  his

"ecclesiastical" responsibilities while the other strictly adheres to them.[37]  Each of these parallels

intensifies the tale's irony and also underline Chaucer's overt "criticism of the clergy" in the tale.

The recensions, then, not the chronicle tradition, Richards affirms, are the correct place to

turn in order to best understand the implications of the St. Neot oath.


*1976:  Essays on Chaucer's Saints*

The most ambitious effort on hagiography and *The Canterbury Tales* to date is Ann S.

Haskell's study, *Essays on Chaucer's Saints*, published in 1976.  In a collection of ten essays, the

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[36] *Ibid*.
[37] *Ibid*, 213-14.

author discusses how an assortment of saints in *The Canterbury Tales*—Madrian (*The Monk's Prologue*), Ronyan (*The Pardoner's Prologue*), Giles (*The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*), Loy (*General Prologue and The Friar's Tale*), Thomas (*The Summoner's Tale*), Simon (*The Summoner's Tale*), Joce (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*), and Nicholas (character in *The Miller's Tale* and an allusion in the *The Prioress's Tale*)--are utilized by Chaucer "for special effects." Haskell examines instances in which the above eight are sworn by, alluded to, and employed as character names in the tales in addition to the degree to which the "lore" concomitant to each name contributes to a tale's context. Haskell states that the primary objective of her essays is to ascertain what Chaucer's audience imagined when one of the eight saints she discusses was called to mind. In order to grasp this mindset, she proposes to eschew "historical accuracy" for the aspects of the legend and the lore surrounding a specific saint. Lore in Haskell's assessment includes just about anything within the realm of the "accretion of ideas" of a particular saint including "ecclesiastical art, myth, confusion with other saints, breviaries, festivals and sermons…"[38] This "accretion" of ideas or lore would have been at Chaucer's disposal, she argues, and we can rest assured that when Chaucer named a saint he intended for his audience members to take advantage of all relevant associations. Chaucer's dexterous references to saints, Haskell contends, packed the same multiple layers of meaning for his audience as the medieval artist's, giving "depth to descriptions that would otherwise have required lengthy explanations to achieve the same effect."[39] Ultimately, once we do get at the depth of their meaning we become aware of just how fully they can alter our perception of a character or the context in which they appear.

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[38] Ann Haskell, *Essays on Chaucer's Saints* (Paris: Mouton, 1976), 1.
[39] *Ibid*, 2.

Haskell's approach is equal parts philological and historical and is remarkable for its incorporation of a wide variety of source materials ranging from more conventional texts in medieval art history, religion, and drama to less conventional ones such as the history of shrines, medieval drinking customs, handbooks on feasts and customs, to bestiaries and fourteenth-century English wall paintings.  It is her contention that there is no one specific approach that can be applied across the board and that every saint and his or her context requires an "individual method of study."

In her approach to the Madrian oath, Haskell states that a "candidate" should agree "as closely as possible" with the name in manuscript B-2 of 1892 as well as being known by Chaucer's audience.  She sees Madrian as one of the saints whose unusual name "implies a special relationship between saint and context."[40]  She dismisses close approximations to Madrian such as Madron, Mathurin, Materne, Modan, and Matrona, a name shared by three female martyrs.  She dismisses Mathurin despite the fact that his body plays a prominent role in his legend, asserting that his *cultus* was restricted to Sens.  She proposes St. Adrian, the "variant" with the "least possible change" in name as a possible solution.  She dismisses other arguments, such as those by Norris and Frost, on the grounds that they do not deal with the *precious corpus*.

Haskell identifies three St. Adrians who would have been known in England but settles on the third-century Roman officer, mentioned in the *Legenda Aurea* and the *Roman Martyrology*, who is martyred after converting to Christianity during the persecutions. Haskell also discusses the significance of Adrian's feast day, September 8 (the date of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin as well), and emphasizes Adrian's "longevity" in rituals and rites in England. The disposal of Adrian's body, which is mutliated and distributed in the *Legend,* is also assessed

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[40] *Ibid*, 7.

by Haskell, who impressively lists the various places where his body parts were translated: Byzantium (entire corpse), Rome (bones), Leon (arms), Lisbon (various relics), Cologne (jaw), England (bones), Ghent (an entire body), etc. She also notes that he was the patron saint of brewers and of blacksmiths (he was martyred on an anvil).

Haskell notes that the Adrian's legend is "especially appropriate" to *The Monk's Prologue*, revealing a number of "echoes" of the legend in the Host's words. These include his reference to a barrel of ale, she says, which is made particularly "pithy" based on Adrian's patronage of brewers. She sees a contrast betweeen Goodelief's "demands for worldly recognition" and Natalia's disdain for them in her speech to Adrian. She also sees a connection between Goodelief's role reversal with Harry and Natalia's role reversal in which she cuts her hair and disguises herself as a man. Finally, Haskell finds yet another "possible reference" when Goodelief calls Harry a coward and Natalia's diatribe against her husband when she think he has changed his mind and disavowed his faith.

St. Nicholas is a dominant presence throughout *The Prioress's Tale*, despite being mentioned only once, Haskell argues. The Prioress sees a connection between the young boy of her tale and St. Nicholas who was noted for "doing reverence" to Christ at an early age. Haskell points to a prominent moment in Nicholas's childhood which seems to be most relevant to the association of the saint with the protagonist of the tale: when Nicholas was a newborn he supposedly stood up in the tub and looked to the sky for two hours. The remainder of the article focuses on other instances, besides this obvious one, in which the death of the child evokes details from St. Nicholas's legend. The martryred child's "body sweete" recalls Nicholas's "Manna" which attracted many pilgrims to his tomb. He was also the patron saint of perfumers. Nicholas's intercession on behalf of a kidnapped boy who constantly prays to the saint is another

example of connections between the tale and the saint's legend.  She also cites a parallel between

a tale from Nicholas's legend in which a Christian borrows money from a Jew which he swears

to repay on an image of St. Nicholas but takes advantage of the Jew until St. Nicholas intercedes

and sets things right.  The remainder of Haskell's article looks at the tale from the standpoint of

anti-semitism, something she sees St. Nicholas in clear opposition which makes his invocation

ironic in light of the Prioress unforgiving, condemnatory tone.

Haskell's assessment of the "by Seint Joce" oath is an excellent example of how a

presumably innocuous hagiographic reference can accrete meaning and add depth to the

narrative context.  Through a careful analysis of the word *croce* she explains how Joce's

predominant attribute in medieval art, the staff, is suggestive of a phallus.  Once this connection

is applied in the context of the Wife of Bath's comments, it is hard to miss the sexual

implications.  The wife confirms this implication, no doubt, in the lines that follow in which she

refers to her husband frying in "his owene grece," living a life in "purgatory," and suffering at

the hands of her torture and "twisting." Croce, then, takes on the dual meaning of phallus and

burden, apropos of her husband's perpetual state of sexual deprivation.[41]

*1978:  Chaucer's Nicholas and Saint Nicholas*

In this article from *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, Michael Harry Blechner suggests that

Nicholas in the *Miller's Tale* is a "conscious parody of Saint Nicholas," particularly as he is

portrayed in respect to the etymologies and legends of St. Nicholas contained in the *Legenda*

*Aurea*.  When the actions of "hende Nicholas" are contrasted with the etymologies with which

Jacobus glosses the saint's name, two of them in particular stand out, Blechner argues:  "victor

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[41] For Haskell's interpretations of the St. Ronyan and St. Giles references please see the respective entries in Chapter 5 under "Significance of Reference."

of the people," and "brightness of the people." As Blechner shows, the characteristics of Chaucer's Nicholas are the exact opposite of the saint's virtuous traits: he only conquers two people, John and Alison, not for virtuous means but for self-gratification, and his "brightness" edifies no one, effectively leading to the carpenter's humiliation and cuckolding. When juxtaposed with one another, the legends of Nicholas also shed interesting light on Nicholas the clerk's deeds. In the *Legenda Aurea*, St. Nicholas was both the patron saint of mariners and was invoked by those who were fearful of drowning. Nicholas, Blechner points out, mentions to John that they (John, Alison, and himself) will soon take an "ocean voyage," and, upon learning of the impending flood, John bewails the fact that the world "Shal al be dreynt."[42] John also seeks boat-building advice from Nicholas, another ironic moment in the tale. Blechner also discusses the significance of two stories from Nicholas's legend, the first involving the three daughters whom the saint saves from prostitution by throwing gold into their father's house; the second story he references is of the resurrection of the three clerks who are murdered by the greedy innkeeper and his wife. As one recalls, Nicholas finds the bodies of the clerks in a pickling tub and brings them back to life. In the first instance, Chaucer's audience would have been keenly aware of the inversion of the story of the three daughters, due to the fact that Nicholas essentially prostitutes Alison, whose love he tries to purchase. In the second instance, the tubs which Nicholas asks John to procure for them to wait in for the flood would have evoked the tub in which the bodies of the clerks were placed. Both the innkeeper and "hende" Nicholas try to use the tubs for their own personal gain, Belchner concludes.

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[42] Michael Harry Blechner, "Chaucer's Nicholas and Saint Nicholas," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 79.3 (1978): 369.

*1983:  Chaucer's Beard-Making*

Catherine Brown Tkacz's article in *The Chaucer Review* treats the "Saint Cutberd" oath as a pun that, when fully understood, opens up layers of double entendre and irony in *The Reeve's Tale*.  And although previous scholars have examined *The Reeve's Tale* in terms of its puns, Brown Tkacz notes that no one has done so with the Cuthbert oath from the standpoint of the "beard-making idiom."  Brown Tkacz's essay is a thoughtful addition to the rather limited critical coverage of the "by seint Cutberd" oath initiated by Ruth Huff Cline, who saw the oath as an ironic evocation of Cuthbert's association with hospitality.[43]

"Cutberd," Brown Tkacz identifies, is an unusual spelling of the saint's name that never appears in any of the extant manuscripts concerned with Cuthbert's life. At the very least, she observes, the unique spelling is a "comic mispronunciation," but, upon closer observation, the orthographic oddity is a signal that Chaucer is engaging in a bit of wordplay. To "make" or to "cut" someone's beard has been identified by F.N. Robinson to mean outwitting, cheating, or deluding that person; we see a similar instance of making someone's "berd" in *The Miller's Tale* when poor Absolon is "bearded" or duped by Alison.  Likewise, in the case of the reference in *The Reeve's Tale*, "cutting" becomes synonymous with deception.  In this respect, though "Cutberd" clearly refers to the Northumbrian saint, it also signifies "Cut-Beard" or, as Brown Tkacz observes, the "bogus patron of deceivers" whom she terms "Saint Deceiver." [44]  The pun on the saint's name, Brown Tkacz suggests, allows us to read the following exchange between the miller and John in terms of the "beard making" idiom:  "I have herd seyd, 'man sal taa of twa

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[43] See the above discussion of Huff Cline's *Four Chaucer's Saints*.
[44] Catherine Brown Tkacz, "Chaucer's Beard-making," *The Chaucer Review* 18.2, (1983): 128.

thynges/Slyk as he fyndes, or taa slyk as he brynges.'"[45]  In effect, Cuthbert's role as a provider

and receiver of hospitality is inverted in John's oath.  With "Cut-beard" as their patron saint, the

clerks avenge their losses from earlier in the day and "taa" what they "fynde." What they take is

primarily sexual gratification by way of the miller's wife and daughter. Of course, they also

manage to get their grain back.  This "repayment," so to speak, at the expense of the greedy

miller is achieved through "cutting" his beard.  Just as earlier in the day, he has "made" the

clerks' "beard" by stealing their grain and freeing their horse, he is repaid via the invocation of

the "bogus saint."


     *1985:  Dismemberment, Dissemination, Discourse:  Sign And Symbol In The Shipman's*
*Tale*

In this article in *The Chaucer Review*, John P. Hermann discusses the significance of the

monk's oaths by St. Denis and St. Martin as they relate to the primary theme of

"dismemberment," a kind of symbolic fragmentation of the self, according to Hermann, based on

both "the ritual dismemberments of the medieval hunt" and episodes in classical mythology in

which figures such as Orpehus and Actaeon are physically torn apart.  The notion of

dismemberment in *The Shipman's Tale* is signalled, Hermann says, by Daun John's hare/hound

terminology in his initial meeting with the merchant's wife with whom he initiates a sexual tryst.

He refers to 'wedded men" as though they were "wery" hares "al forstraughte with houndes grete

and smale." This language, Hermann argues, serves to "dismember" the husband from the wife,

destroying their unity.  In an extension of this "symbolic chain" of dismemberment, after the

wife agrees not to tell anyone about her conversation with the monk she vows to keep her secret

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[45] *Ibid*, 130.

that even if men tore her to pieces she still would not tell. Later, she invokes God to take

vengeance on her like "Genylon of France" if she breaks her vow to repay Daun John.  Likewise,

the monk, a supposed man of God, tears himself apart from his vows and thereby, Hermann

contends, runs the risk of the ultimate violence to self:  separation from God and an eternity

spent in hell.  Furthermore, Daun John and the merchant are portrayed as close friends, cousins

even, who spend much of their time together, but the monk disavows this supposed relation that

he had recently invoked in an effort to borrow money from the merchant.

Hermann argues that these hagiographic references are "charged with meaning" in regard

to the theme of fragmentation of the self. The monk's ironic invocation of Martin is best

understood, Hermann suggests, in terms of an incident from Martin's legend in which he comes

across a beggar who did not own a cloak.  Martin takes pity on the poor man and divides his own

cloak in two with his sword and gives half of it to the beggar.  According to the *Legenda Aurea,*

the next night Christ appeared to Martin in a dream wearing the same cloak, praising Martin for

his act of charity.  The rending of the garment is simply another way in which Chaucer alludes to

the dismemberment *topos*, Hermann implies.  Hermann identifies two additional aspects of St.

Martin's legend that are relevant to the dismemberment theme.  First, he notes the irony inherent

to the wife's affair with a monk who swears by St. Martin.  She borrows money from the monk

(which he borrows from the merchant) to buy clothing for "decidedly uncharitable purposes."[46]

Second, in respect to the hare/husband language that the monk employs, Hermann sees an

additional parallel between an episode from Martin"s legend in which he was witness to a hare

being pursued by a pack of dogs.  Martin "commanded them to desist; and at once they stood

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[46] John P. Hermann, "Dismemberment, Dissemination, Discourse:  Sign and Symbol in
*The Shipman's Tale," The Chaucer Review* 19 (1984-85): 329.

still," according to the legend.[47]  This contrasts with the pleasure the Monk takes, Hermann adds,

in relation to the "cruelty of the hare's position" and the fact that he utilizes the image to

"describe his contempt for the merchant he is about to cuckold."[48]

Finally, in respect to the monk's oath by St. Denis, Hermann sees a dual degree of irony

at work.  He reminds us first of all that the tale is set in St. Denis, and that it is therefore very

likely that the Benedictine monk, Daun John, "must be presumed to have dwelled" there.  St.

Denis's representation is one of the more famous ones in all of medieval inconography:  he is

portrayed holding his decapitated head in his hand.  This image, subsequently, becomes an

emblem for the numerous "dismemberments" that occur throughout *The Shipman's Tale*,

Hermann says.  The oath by St. Denis is part of the final plea Daun John makes in an effort to

convince the wife to spend the night with him, and when he returns, Hermann points out, the

monk is freshly shaved and tonsured, the final irony which highlights his utter betrayal of his

monastic vows.

*1986:  Hagiographic (Dis)play:  Chaucer's The Miller's Tale*

Katharina Wilson's essay in *Auctor Ludens:  Essays on Play in Literature* argues that

Chaucer's fanciful use of the hagiographic stories of St. Nicholas and the "dramatic treatments"

of Absolon in *The Miller's Tale* exemplify a broader tendency in the fourteenth century toward

"playing around" with the sacred canon, something previously unheard of, which became

tolerated more and more as miracle plays initially brought the sacrosanct down from the pulpit

and into the marketplace of popular culture. Wilson terms this playful use of the sacred

"hagiographic (dis)play" and connects it to the mode of interpretation in the Middle Ages known

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[47] *Ibid*, 330.
[48] *Ibid*.

as analogical logic, in which audience members were predisposed to look for "implied parallels with Scripture, hagiography, liturgy, and the like."[49] Though Wilson's article deals with a multiplicity of ways in which hagiographic (dis)play functions in the *Miller's Tale*, the stories from the legend of St. Nicholas are the most pertinent to this discussion.

In terms of St. Nicholas, Wilson investigates how Chaucer's playful treatment of "his legende and his lyf," to quote the Miller, enhance existing levels of irony. Due to their predisposition toward looking for analogies, Chaucer's audience, Wilson adds, would have had no problem whatsoever in seeing the connection between Nicholas the clerk and Nicholas of Myra, undeniably the "most popular saint in Christendom" due to both his altruism and gift giving, not to mention his numerous miracles, which were regularly performed on his dual feast days in vernacular dramatic enactments.

The specific stories from the Nicholas legends and miracle plays with which Chaucer "plays," Wilson maintains, are the *tres clerici* and the *tres filiae*, which he inverts and ultimately perverts for ironic and comic effect. Wilson explains the inversion of the *tres filiae* motif in terms of gift-giving. Whereas St. Nicholas throws his gifts of gold *through* the window, Alison and Nicholas throw their gifts—in one instance, an ass ready-made for kissing and in the other, a thunderous fart—*out* the window. Whereas the saint's gift has no strings attached and is intended to prevent prostitution, the lovers' "gifts" to Absolon are an "inducement" to fornication and revenge. Whereas the three daughters are "saved from the sins of fornication" and "their father is saved from shame," Alison fornicates with Nicholas and the carpenter John is

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[49] Katharina M. Wilson, "Hagiographic (Dis)play: Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale*," in *Auctor Ludens: Essays on Play in Literature,* ed. Gerald Guinness and Andrew Hurley (Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1986), 37-45.

"cuckolded" and "shamed."[50]  Next, Wilson explains the inversion of the *tres clerici* motif.  In the case of the legend, the clerks are "tricked and killed in their sleep by [the] innkeeper for their money" while in the Miller's Tale, John is duped by Nicholas "who promises survival."  While the bodies of the clerks are immersed in a pickling tub in preparation for them to be served as food, John the carpenter gets in a tub and waits for the pending flood with an ample supply of food.[51] And finally, while St. Nicholas reveals the trickery of the innkeeper and resurrects the clerks, Nicholas's plan goes undetected by John who is both defeated and humiliated and, according to Wilson, symbolically "killed."

*1997:  Chaucer's St. Anne Trinity*

Prior to Ann Astell's article in *Studies in Philology*, the St. Anne oaths from *The Man of Law's Tale* and the oath from *The Second Nun's Tale* had been identified as "routine uses of the name" St. Anne.[52]  In her essay, Astell argues that there is a great deal more to these oaths than meets the eye. She examines two of the three oaths "by Seint Anne" in terms of the so-called "St. Anne Trinity" grouping of Anne, her daughter Mary, and Mary's son, Jesus, in medieval art. The almost identical nature of the oaths, one in *The Man of Law's Tale* and the other in *The Second Nun's Tale,* Astell points out, both "form a neat chiasmus which mirrors the iconography of the St. Anne Trinity." [53]  Astell demonstrates that both oaths activate separate subsets of associations and meaning from the legend of St. Anne and Mary (which fuse together as Anne-Mary) which Custance, in *The Man of Law's Tale*, and Cecilia, in the *Second Nun's Tale*,

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[50] *Ibid*, 41.
[51] *Ibid,* 41-42.
[52] Ann Astell, "Chaucer's St. Anne Trinity: Devotion, Dynasty, Dogma, and Debate," *Studies in Philology* 94.4 (1997):  395-416.
[53] *Ibid*, 395.

"perform" in their "life-stories." These performances in respect to the invocation of Anne evoke complex fourteenth-century debates and points of contention regarding "genealogical associations" that existed between the lay nobility and the merchant class in the case of the former and echo the intense debates that took place between the laity and clergy in respect to the interpretation of the Immaculate Conception, in the case of the second.  The Trinity, Astell argues, emerges as the "archetype of the ideal family" for both the laity and the clergy, but their respective interpretations are different.  *In The Man of Law's Tale* and *The Second Nun's Tale* two divergent interpretations emerge: one for the sanctity of marriage and one for the sanctity of virginity.

### *2000:  Chaucer's Imaginable Audience and the Oaths of the Shipman's Tale*

William Keen's article, *Chaucer's Imaginable Audience and the Oaths* of *The Shipman's Tale*, appears in the 2000 edition of the journal *Topic*.  Keen sets out to examine the oaths in *The Shipman's Tale*, he says, "as they are illuminated by details in the lives of those saints invoked, using principally the biographical sketches provided in the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine."[54]  He bases his approach on research which has revealed "previously unsuspected depths of meaning" beneath the surface of *The Shipman's Tale'*s simple fabliau structure. Keen's analysis of oaths in *The Shipman's Tale* is valuable, but it is his methodology that proves to be of most worth for exploring the real meaning of oaths in *The Canterbury Tales*.  By turning directly to sources with which Chaucer's readers would have been familiar, he attempts to conjure up what Chaucer's audience would have recognized from the legend. The *Legenda Aurea,* Keen argues, is the source to navigate the paths Chaucer takes and in turn reveal

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[54] Keen, 91.

"unsuspected depths of meaning":[55] "Many of us, to be sure, may need such a pony as the

*Legenda Aurea* to ride along Chaucer's trail in a way that will heighten our sense of the text's

considerable moral intention."[56] Chaucer's "imaginable audience," Keen suspects, would have

likely included monks, nuns, friars, parsons, laymen and women, compilers of saints' lives, like

Jacobus who died in 1298, and certainly readers of saints' lives.  There is no question, Keen

suggests, that the *Legenda Aurea*, as well as the other legendaries, is a valuable place with which

to begin the search for answers to the meaning of Chaucer's oaths:  "A reading of the tale from

this perspective will help current readers discover a considerable range of ironic suggestion, of

which some medieval readers were certainly aware."[57]  "Informed medieval readers," Keen says,

would have most definitely been "alerted to ironic subtexts."[58]

In Keen's assessment of oaths in *The Shipman's Tale*, he relies upon Jacobus'

biographical sketches and etymological descriptions as well as scenes from the saints' lives to

tease out ironic subtexts in respect to the main characters and their actions in the tale.  The

applicable details of each saint's life (with the exception of Yve who is not included in the

*Legenda Aurea*) and the etymological explanations Jacobus gives for a saint's name are cast in a

light by Keen which indicts the three main characters in the story: John, the philandering monk's

lusty appetites are contrasted with the pious acts of Martin, known for wearing a hair shirt and

sleeping on a bed of straw; the adulterous, conniving wife, whose actions also are juxtaposed

with the relevant aspects of Martin's *vita*: overcoming temptation and "mortification of the

flesh."[59] The story of Martin's famous rending of his garment in two and giving half of it to a

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[55] *Ibid*.
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] *Ibid*.
[58] *Ibid*, 92.
[59] *Ibid*, 93.

beggar while keeping the other half for himself "impugns" the "Wife's desire to accumulate expensive clothing," Keen says. He contrasts Martin's fiery "celibate bed" and the prayers that miraculously save him from the burning straw with the adulterous bed in which the Wife, described as being "bolt urpright," and the monk cavort all night. Keen explores the "shared virtues" of St. Denys and St. Martin, the dual effect of which "extends and deepens the irony of John's behavior."[60] Both Denys and Martin survived episodes in which they were exposed to extreme heat--Martin in the burning bed; Denys the heat of a gridiron on which the emperor placed him for torture--and were able to control wild beasts with the sign of the cross and their words. The monk, Keen points out, also has control over animals--he is in charge of the "graunges" and "barnes"--but he fails to master his own animalistic tendencies in respect to the "heat" of lust.[61] The etymology of Denys's name also serves to underscore certain instances of irony in the tale, Keen shows, particularly as it applies to John. Jacobus translates the saint's name as "one who flees swiftly," which throws light on John's tendency to depart abruptly, something he does after having sex with the wife and after getting the loan from the merchant. The final irony of the St. Denys's oath, in this aspect, Keen notes, occurs when John tells the merchant he has repaid the loan, after which he "excuses himself in a great rush."[62]

Keen also discusses the significance of the Merchant's oath by St. Yves. He determines that Ivo of Chartres' life has "useful insight" for the Merchant who is soon to be cuckolded by his friend and his wife, as well as portraying the "corrupt" clergy which Daun John represents in the Tale. The oath by St. Yve, therefore, is a "careless one," according to Keen, because John represents everything Ivo loathed and stood against as bishop. Ivo, Keen says (quoting Baring-

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[60] *Ibid*, 94.
[61] *Ibid,* 94-5.
[62] *Ibid,* 96.

Gould), was regarded as a "light in a dark age," for speaking straight even when it meant he would have to resign his position in order to avoid "acrimonious debate" with the pope.[63] This act of self-sacrifice in order to serve the interests of the Church outside of the decaying hierarchical constraints, in Keen's opinion, is the critical element from Ivo's life which "corresponds to a similar indictment rising from the treatment of several religious figures in the Canterbury Tales."[64] John's position as an "outrider," unchecked in his ability to go wherever he pleases, is the example Keen gives to emphasize this point. He has ingratiated himself to the point of being able to get at the Merchant's money and his wife. Knowing this, Keen adds, in addition to the Wife's materialistic bent, makes the Merchant's oath by St. Yve all the more ironic.[65]

### 2000: Chaucer and St. Kenelm

Robert Boenig's article in *Neophilologus* examines the reference to St. Kenelm in the *Nun's Priest's Tale* and determines that the allusion is not "offhand" or "haphazard." Upon closer examination, Boenig says, the reference, in fact, suggests the possibility that Chaucer had the *Life of St. Kenelm* in mind as a source "to help structure" both the *Nun's Priest's Tale* and *The Prioress's Tale.*[66] For the purpose of this study, I will briefly examine the implications of Boenig's analysis for the St. Kenelm reference by Chauntecleer.

Boenig illustrates how certain aspects of the *Life of St. Kenelm*, preceding, during, and after his murder at the hands of his stepmother, Quendred, inform *The Nun's Priest's Tale*. He focuses on four thematic similarities: the "admonitory" dream which both Kenelm and

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[63] *Ibid*, 97-98.
[64] *Ibid*, p. 98.
[65] *Ibid,* p. 98.
[66] Robert Boenig, "Chaucer and St. Kenelm," *Neophilologus* 84 (2000): 157-164.

Chaunticleer have; the poison; the retreat to the woods; and, the "bird in a tree" motif, in which both characters see their potential assassins. While these elements do not necessarily add irony to the tale, they do function as hagiographic echoes, and reveal, once again, Chaucer's penchant for utilizing intertextual parallels in order to supplement his primary narrative.

### 2003: *Gerveys Joins the Fun: A Note on Viritoot in the Miller's Tale*

This article by James Ortego in *The Chaucer Review* suggests that Gerveys' St. Neot oath in the *Miller's Tale* might best be understood from the vantage point of the saint's "physiognomy." Neot, Ortego explains, was barred from conscription in the army due to his diminutive stature. He was reportedly around three feet tall and, according to his legend, required a stool on which to stand in order to celebrate mass. Ortego sees Neot's size as a key to understanding Gerveys' curious usage of the phrase "upon the viritoot" in his response to Absolon's early morning visit. The fact that Neot was inadequate in size, Ortego argues, is a key for us to understand that Gerveys is poking fun at Absolon's sexual inadequacy. He concludes that, "The oath by St. Neot is one more joke by Gerveys to ridicule Absolon." [67] By invoking St. Neot, Ortego argues, Gerveys questions Absolon's manhood for which he substitutes a redhot poker in order for the clerk to seek his revenge. In his aborted dalliance with Alison, Absolon fails to measure up but has the last laugh as he makes quite an impression on Nicholas.

This concludes the discussion of the critical literature as it applies to hagiographic references in *The Canterbury Tales*. In the one hundred and twelve year span between 1891 and 2003, a great deal has been said, and although the significance of some references appears to be settled, in other instances, as much remains open to interpretation. In addition, while some

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[67] James Ortego, "Gerveys Joins The Fun: A Note on Viritoot in *The Miller's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 37.3 (2003): 277.

saints—Loy, Madrian, Neot, and Nicholas, for example--have received the lionshare of critical coverage from scholars, others such as St. Frideswide, St. Cuthbert, St. Mary of Egypt, and St. Dunstan, conversely, have received very little, if any, critical treatment. While these eight saints in some ways represent the polar extremes of the critical spectrum, the saints' references somewhere in between continue to provide fertile and challenging ground for interpretation. Yet, part of the basis for this study is that the firm belief that if one looks closely enough at the legends, there will always be something more to be said. With this in mind, it will be useful to become acquainted with the legends and the sources with which Chaucer and his audience were presumably familiar. For it is in them that we might find new paths to explore in our search for additional points of irony, meaning, and intent. To quote William Keen, "Many of us, to be sure, may need such a pony as *The Golden Legend* to ride along Chaucer's trail."[68]

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[68] Keen, 91.

CHAPTER 3

AN OVERVIEW OF CHAUCER'S LIKELY HAGIOGRAPHIC SOURCES

The significance of hagiography as a lens through which to understand many cultural aspects of the Middle Ages has been well-documented, from the monumentally exhaustive work of the Bollandists whose ongoing project, the *Acta Sanctorum*, launched in 1643, has amassed an astounding 68 folio volumes of saints' lives, to the elegant work of art historian Emile Mâle whose seminal book, *The Gothic Image*, champions hagiography as the preeminent source for recapturing the medieval zeitgeist. The Bollandists' project has demonstrated that hagiographic texts have great value beyond simply augmenting our general knowledge of monastic and popular piety throughout history.  Hagiographic texts have become indispensible resources for scholars of such subjects as history, religion, music, law, and art, among other disciplines, owing to the extent to which saints and their legends permeated every aspect of day-to-day existence.  If one were to attempt to recreate the cultural climate of the thirteenth century, for example, it would be impossible to fully appreciate or evaluate such essential facets as the annual calendar, festivals, fairs, feast days, birthdays, pilgrimages, segments of the day, the professional guilds, and even something as common as naming a child—all oriented around or connected with a particular saint and his memory—without recourse to the legends of the saints and an understanding of their perceived roles.  There is no question, then, that without the legends, martyrologies, and individual lives of the saints from the fourth and fifth centuries onward, that which we know of several fields of study would be greatly diminished.

Whereas the Bollandists' larger endeavor speaks to the importance and impact of hagiographic texts in general, Mâle emphasizes the value of one text, the *Legenda Aurea,* as an interpretive tool for medieval scholars.  In fact, Mâle's recognition of the *Legenda*'s utility in approaching history inspired him to devote an entire chapter of his book on religious art in thirteenth-century France to its profound impact. In the fourth chapter of *The Gothic Image*, Mâle likens the *Legenda*  (Th. Graesse's Latin text published in 1845) to a guidebook designed for the express purpose of uncovering some of the great mysteries of the past, and, in the process, exposing a symbiotic relationship between the sacred visual art and literature of the period:

> The *Legenda Aurea* remains one of the most interesting books of its time for those who seek in medieval literature for the spirit of the age to which it belonged.  Its fidelity in reproducing earlier stories, and its very absence of originality, make it of special use to us … Nearly all the bas-reliefs and windows which deal with legends can be interpreted with its help, and in re-editing it Graesse rendered a valuable service to the history of art, if not also to the history of religion.  So we will take the *Legenda Aurea* as our chief guide, seeking in that popular book the interpretation of the works of art made for the people.[69]

Without this text, Mâle contends, one could only stare in admiration and awe at the skilled stone carvings of St. Martin, St. Gregory, and St. Jerome in the cathedral at Chartres; one could only gape in wonder at the meticulously-styled scenes of the life of St. Eustace in the stained-glass windows.  Furthermore, it would be impossible to make sense of the symbolism of the "attributes" accompanying the sculptures and carvings of the saints in Chartres and elsewhere for that matter.  How would one know, for example, what the hound at the feet of the sculpture of St. Martin symbolized, or, likewise, what the dove on St. Gregory's shoulder represented, without their legends?  Male uses the *Legenda*, the "chief guide," to explicate each of these works of art—all of which he says, "can be deciphered without difficulty with Jacobus de

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[69] Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image*, *Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Dora Nussey, (New York:  Harper & Row, 1958), 273.

Voragine's text at hand," including the stained glass windows in the aisles of the magnificent cathedral at Chartres, the scenes of which he likens to pages in a sublime book—a golden one, called the *Legenda Aurea*.[70]

Though deciphering the exact meaning of Chaucer's incidental hagiographic references may not be quite as straightforward a proposition as Mâle's seamless interpretation of thirteenth-century hagiographic art seems to be, one can certainly learn a great deal from his approach, for it is in the legends that the answers, if there are any to be had, most likely reside. And this is essentially the vantage point from which I would like to approach incidental hagiographic references in *The Canterbury Tales*. Using Mâle's approach of applying the legends to thirteenth-century art as a point of departure, I will endeavor to explain the references, allusions, oaths, and invocations in Chaucer's tales with the aid of the various legends and saints lives that most likely would have informed the consciousness of his audience. This approach is very similar in intent to the one employed by William Keen in his valuable article, *Chaucer's Imaginable Audience and the Oaths of The Shipman's Tale*, in which he proposes to "examine the oaths in the tale as they are illuminated by details in the lives of the saints invoked, using principally the biographical sketches provided in the *Legend Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine."[71] With the support of these hagiographical stories, as Keen and others have shown, it is possible for one to unpack the loaded references and to capture the resonance of the hagiographic echoes which Chaucer has set out like little land mines, in many cases, exploding with meaning that enhances the context of his narrative.

Prior to moving forth with this discussion, however, I would like to provide some general background on the source materials in which the lives of the saints invoked in *The Canterbury*

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[70] *Ibid*, 282.
[71] Keen, 91.

*Tales* are found.  It is a relatively safe assumption that Chaucer and his audience—based on the extent to which the legends saturated public life—knew them, either from the Mass Lectionaries, their widespread circulation in the public realm, or from visual representation and periodic exegesis.

The following discussion will include a brief overview of the *Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine, the *South English Legendary*, Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert*, William Caxton's translation of the *Legenda Aurea*, and *The Life of St. Anne* by Osbern Bokenham, prefaced by a discussion of the significance of the lectionary.


*A Brief History on the Reading of Saints*

In what qualifies as one of the more remarkable coincidences in the history of hagiography, two major collections of saints' lives were compiled at virtually the same time in the latter half of the thirteenth century. What is truly noteworthy about this occurrence is the fact that both of these "projects" developed without any knowledge of each other.  One, the *Legenda Aurea*, which dates to 1263, was written in Latin and was the work of a Dominican preacher named Jacobus de Voragine.  The second, the *South English Legendary*, which dates to c. 1260, appears to have been assembled by a collective rather than by one individual.  Once collected, the *Legenda Aurea* and the *South English Legendary* served the same central purpose of edifying and entertaining the public, and, in the process, both achieved varying degrees of popularity and acclaim. On the whole, both collections did more for popularizing saints' lives than any texts had before or have since.  The *Legenda* may have also played a central role in the Liturgy of the Church as its chronological delineation of saints' lives ran parallel to the Church's calendar of saints' feasts.

The tradition of compiling saints' lives in the Middle Ages prior to 1260 can be traced to the efforts of three Dominicans, Jean de Mailly, whose *Geste des saints* was written sometime around 1225, Vincent de Beauvias, whose *Speculum historiale* was written in 1244, and Bartholomew of Trent whose *Afterword on the Deeds of the Saints* also preceded Jacobus's collection. It is generally agreed that Jacobus relied on each of these sources to a certain extent in compiling the *Legenda Aurea*,[72] which in due time became an excellent source for preachers to use in preparing sermons for one of the many feast days in the Church's sanctoral cycle, an annual calendar presumed to be the earliest maintained by the Christian Church. Historically, thirteenth century collections of saints' lives such as the *Legenda Aurea,* a function of which was to be read during Mass on a given saint's day, are intimately linked to the tradition begun in the early Roman Church in which the names of martyrs were recorded on lists and then read on the anniversary of their martyrdom known as the *dies natalis*, or day of one's Christian rebirth. On this day, a liturgical feast would be held at the site of the saint's tomb and the details of the saint's martyrdom—such elements as the circumstances surrounding the death, the time at which it occurred, and the location—would be read. In the case of a Christian community such as Rome, where multiple martyrdoms had occurred during the persecutions, a specific saint's *dies natalis* would be recorded on a list with those of other martyrs. Over time these lists became less provincial in their makeup, and communities eventually began incorporating martyrs from outside their dioceses in their martyrologies. For example, the Roman *Kalendar* of 354 lists the names of three martyrs from Carthage and other non-Roman martyrs, a fact which seems to

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[72]For further study see Richard Hamer's introduction to Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend: Selections*, trans. Christopher Stace, (New York: Penguin, 1998), p. xiii, in which he cites Ernest Geith's research which shows that Jacobus derived sixty-one legends from deMailly and closely followed the legends contained in Bartholomew of Trent's *Afterword on the Deeds of Saints* in the *Legenda Aurea*.

signify the first shift in sensibility towards a more universal Church.[73]  This movement towards

inclusiveness of outside martyrs and saints (including fourth century bishops and confessors)

became more fully realized in the fifth and sixth centuries, by which time, "saints from other

churches and those of interest to all of Christendom ... led to the elaboration of a universal

sanctoral cycle."[74]  The continuing evolution of the universal sanctoral cycle reached back to the

era of the apostles, who were each given their own feast dates, and St. Stephen, the proto-martyr

of the Christian Church, whose feast day became December 26th.  This trend continued over the

next few centuries, as martyred popes were inscribed, and by the twelfth century, room was

made on the calendar for contemporary saints.  The registration of St. Thomas à  Becket (d.

1170) represented a watershed moment in the evolution and expression of the calendar in that it

demonstrated a willingness on the part of the Church to move forward rather than simply

backward in order to embrace the present along with the past. With the inclusion of Becket, the

first "modern" saint, the cycle truly had evolved into "a reflection of the Church's life."[75]

It is worth mentioning the historical connection between the martyrologies, read at the

tombs of the saints in the early centuries of the Church, and the liturgical books, called

Lectionaries, from which saints' lives were read aloud during the daily Mass in the medieval

Church and in the Divine Office of the monastic orders.  In actuality, Lectionary is a term that

applies to several types of books available for the various readings assigned to different readers

during the Mass and the Divine Office.  The most common types of Mass lectionaries would

have been those that contained scriptural passages or epistles assigned to be read on a given day

in the temporal cycle, the calendar of feasts for the ecclesiastical year.  The various forms of

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[73] *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967 ed., s.v "Sanctoral Cycle," 1045.
[74] *Ibid.*
[75] *Ibid.*

lectionaries available during the reading of the Divine Office would be such texts as the writings of the Patristics, homilies, and lessons, and just as was the case with the martyrologies, the saints' lives in the Mass Lectionary and the Lectionary of the Divine Office were read in conjunction with the sanctoral cycle. As Roger Reynolds notes, the "lections or readings themselves could be gathered into separate sections within the lectionaries according to the *temporale* (a liturgical cycle arranged according to feasts of the ecclesiastical year) or *sanctorale* (the cycle arranged according to the feasts of saints) or they might be mingled."[76] M.H. Driscoll notes that a further type of lectionary used during both the Mass and Divine Office was the *legenda* from which short biographical sketches of saints were read. "Legenda" means "to be read," so, above all, these collections were designed with the express purpose of being read at Mass. Mâle notes that, "For centuries the saints lived in the memory of the Church through the lectionary... made up of extracts from the more famous legends."[77] The Lectionary, according to Mâle, was invaluable for what it summarized and taught due to the fact that books were so scarce.[78] The fruition of this great tradition of reading saints' lives, traced all the way back to the acts of the early martyrs, culminated in the thirteenth century when the definitive source, the *Legenda Aurea,* began circulating, first in the monasteries, and then in secular environs, where congregants would have heard saints' lives from the lectionary on practically every occasion during which they attended Mass.

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[76] *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967 ed., s.v. "Lectionary," 534
[77] Mâle, 272.
[78] *Ibid*.

*Jacobus de Voraigne and the Legenda Aurea*

A combination of statistical evidence, tradition, and some speculation has led scholars to conclude that there was only one other book during the Middle Ages that rivaled the popularity of the *Bible*. That book, purportedly, was the *Legenda Sanctorum,* a collection of saints' lives assembled in 1263 by the thirty-three year old Dominican priest from Varazze, Jacobus de Voragine, who was later beatified by Pope Pius VII in the 19th century. In addition to being a skilled preacher, Jacobus, like fellow Dominicans de Vignay, Beauvais, and Bartholomew of Trent, also was an adept compiler of other source materials. This fact planted Jacobus firmly in the footsteps of the literary aesthetic predominant throughout the Middle Ages in which writers based their own texts on precedents or *auctores*. *Auctoritas* was the *modus operandi* for the medieval writer who, in contrast to the classical *poeta—*the maker—was a re-maker, so to speak. Chaucer, too, understood the importance of *auctoritas,* as this remark from one of his lesser known works, *Treatise on the Astrolabe,* illustrates: "But considre wel that I ne usurpe not to have founden this werk of my labour or of my engyn. I n'am but a lewd compilator of the labour of olde astrolgiens, and have it translated in myn Englissh oonly for thy doctrine."[79] Here Chaucer acknowledges one of the primary goals of the use of *auctoritates*, namely moral edification or doctrine. Authority was meant to be used for didactic purposes, a point echoed by Hugutio of Pisa's statement, "Auctoritas, id est sententia digna imitatione," that is, "an authority, it is a teaching worthy of imitation."

Jacobus's source materials for *the Legenda Sanctorum* numbered in the neighborhood of 130, the earliest of which dates to the second century and the latest of which dates to the

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[79] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 662.

thirteenth.[80]  The last miracle he recounts is one attributed to St. Peter Martyr in the year 1259,

which took place four years before the supposed completion of the *Legenda.* Though its initial

title was the *Legenda Sanctorum*, the collection of assorted legendaries soon achieved an

unparalleled level of popularity and fame which in turn brought about a new title reflective of the

conventional wisdom that the *Legenda* was "worth its weight in gold." William Caxton, whose

English translation of the *Legenda Aurea* went through nine editions from 1483 to 1827, offered

the following assessment of the collection in his preface to his first edition:

> I have submysed myself to translate into englysshe the legende of sayntes, which is
> callyd legenda aurea in latyn, that is to say the golden legende.  For in lyke wyse as gold
> is most noble above all other metals, in lyke wyse is thys legende holden moost noble
> above al other werkys.[81]

Caxton's words ring true given the longevity of the *Legenda's* popularity, not to mention

the financial boon he must have realized, as a printer, from its continued successes. If there had

been a medieval bestseller list, the *Legenda* would have remained on top, not simply for weeks

or months, but for years, not just in England, but in France, Germany, and Italy among others.

Some scholars, most notably Robert Seybolt, have surmised that the time frame could have

lasted anywhere from 150 to 175 years—a staggering run by anyone's standards.  William

Granger Ryan, in the introduction to his second edition of the *Legenda*, provides statistical

support to bear out Seybolt's claim:

> The popularity of the *Legend* was such that some one thousand manuscripts have
> survived, and, with the advent of printing in the 1450s, editions both in the original Latin
> and in every Western European language multiplied into the hundreds."[82]

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[80] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* trans. by William Granger Ryan, (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1993), xiv. Hereafter cited as "Jacobus."

[81] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*:  *Selections,* trans. by Christopher Stace, (New York:  Penguin, 1998), xiii. Hereafter cited as "Jacobus, trans. William Caxton."

[82] Jacobus, trans. by Ryan, xiii.

In her book, *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History,* Sherry Reames substantiates this claim, noting that the "thirty years between 1470 and 1500 saw the publication of at least 156 editions of the *Legenda*, and perhaps as many as 173; the more conservative figure, omitting questionable identifications, includes 87 Latin editions and 69 vernacular ones: 10 Italian, 17 French, 10 Dutch, 18 High German, 7 Low German, and 3 Bohemian, as well as the 4 earliest editions of Caxton's English version."[83] Reames draws a very interesting comparison between the *Bible* and the *Legenda Aurea*, noting that, "the comparative figures for printed Bibles before 1501 are just 128 editions all told: 94 in Latin, 4 in Hebrew, and 30 in vernacular translations."[84] Based on statistical data alone, one cannot help but infer that the hold saints' lives in general and the *Legenda Aurea* in specific had on the medieval mind was nearly all-consuming if not completely enthralling; saints and their heroic exploits were so much a part of the fabric and common vernacular of the European Middle Ages that one would not be far off in attributing to them an appeal beyond that of scripture.

The most recent English edition of the *Legenda Aurea* includes a prologue and 182 chapters, consisting of saints' legends and major feast days presented in an order that reflects the annual calendar of the Church. The saints whose lives Jacobus compiled into a unified body of work were already included in the martyrologies and legendaries. They were, as Ryan notes, "official" saints whom "the Church, up to Jacobus's time, had declared worthy of public veneration, and particularly those whose feast days were celebrated in the Church's liturgy."[85] As noted earlier, the order in which the legends are presented is based on the liturgical year, itself made up of several key seasons and feasts: Advent, The Birth of Christ, Lent, Easter, and

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[83] Sherry Reames, *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History*, (Madison: University of Wisconson Press), 1985, 4.
[84] *Ibid.*
[85] Jacobus, xv.

Pentecost.[86]  All told, there are two hundred saints whose names are mentioned in the *Legenda*

*Aurea* (several virgins, martyrs, and confessors not on the church calendar at the time were

subsumed within the Feast of All Saints chapter).[87]  Of this total, there are 159 male saints and

forty-one women, most of whom were virgins.   Of the 182 chapters each was devised to be read

on a particular feast day in the *calendria*.

From the standpoint of thematic coherence, the legends are each linked by a singular

objective: the "dealings of God with humankind," or "salvation history as it revealed itself in

God's agents and instruments, the saints."[88]  The legends' constant interplay between the earthly

and supernatural realms kept readers mindful of the greater truth, often with disregard for

historical accuracy.  Jacobus configures each saint's legend in terms of the following schema:  1)

A series of etymologies, through which he explains the saint's name and defines prominent

character traits; 2) Scriptural texts and authoritative sources interspersed throughout the legends

which serve to reinforce the message of salvation history and in order to support his doctrinal

statements; 3) Narrative accounts, varying in length, in which the saint's biographical details,

acts of heroism, exemplary deeds, and encounters with the devil are detailed; 4) Miracles,

generally the most prominent feature of the legend, both during the saint's lifetime and after.

The miracle served the purpose of solidifying the saint's reputation as Christ's chosen

representative on earth.

As an introduction into each saint's life, Jacobus typically prefaces the legend by giving

etymologies of the saint's name (St. Patrick and St. Adrian are two notable exceptions.) He

follows the etymology with a brief explanation of how the saint's life affirms the attributes

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[86] *Ibid*.
[87] *Ibid*.
[88] *Ibid*, xiv.

associated with his name.   Ryan notes that though the etymologies often seem contrived and even far-fetched, they are, nonetheless, a product of Jacobus's firm belief that a name symbolizes "the person who bears it, and in its letters and syllables can be found the indication of what the person's life, with its virtues and its triumphs, is to be."[89]  This point is elaborated upon by Hamer who asserts that, during the time in which Jacobus compiled the *Legenda*, it was firmly held that "names signified in a profound way the nature of the person or object they belonged to, so that in the case of a saint it would be particularly important to seek the underlying meaning."[90]

As an illustration of the way in which Jacobus characteristically arranges an etymology, consider the following entry for St. James, the apostle. "Jacobus," he says, is Latin for James and may be interpreted as "one who causes to fall, or trips someone who is in a hurry, or as one who prepares."[91]  It is also possible, he says, that the name may derive from *Ja*, "a name of God, and *cobar*, which means burden or weight."  Furthermore, he says, James might also stem from "*jaculum*, lance, and *cope,* a cutting, so one cut down with lances."  Jacobus then fleshes out these etymologies in terms of James's accomplishments.  James's contempt for the world brought about its fall; he "tripped up the devil who is always in a hurry"; he readied himself for "good work."  He also interprets *Ja-cobar* as a "divine weight" based on James's conduct. *Jaculum*, lance, and *cope* are connected to James''s martyrdom.  Jacobus's etymologies are useful tools in interpreting oaths and allusions in *The Canterbury Tales*.

The narratives, which include both biographical information and the miracle accounts of the "official" saints, satisfied many purposes, one of which served to bring the saints back down to earth, in that they humanized them in the eyes of the public who regularly prayed to and

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[89] *Ibid*, xvii.
[90] Jacobus, *The Golden Legend*: *Selections*, trans. by Christopher Stace, xi.
[91] Jacobus, 269-277.

venerated them.[92]  This, of course, was achieved by the discussion of their birth, the sometimes

difficult to comprehend fact that saints, too, had parents, an education, and personal interests, not

to mention death.  This grounding in reality made saints more approachable in the mind of the

common man, in contrast to Christ, for example, whose divinity seemed to overpower his

humanity.  This notion, known as the *imitabile,* held that the saint was the medium through

which ordinary mortals gained access to Christ. By the High Middle Ages, this idea of the saint

as *imitabile* took on a subsidiary meaning in which the saint was seen as the *patronus*, or

protector.

      An additional feature of this "fleshing out" of the saint is Jacobus's articulation of the

tone of conflict that would beset the saint later on in life. St. Anastasia's details, offered in the

following passage, serve as a straightforward example of Jacobus's quick, biographical sketches

(as well as revealing her greatest endeavor—preserving her virginity to remain pure and holy):

> Anastasia was born into a noble Roman family; her father, Praetaxtatus, was a pagan, but
> her mother Faustina was Christian.  Anastasia was raised in the Christian faith by her
> mother and Saint Chrysogonus.  Given in marriage against her will to a young man
> named Publius, she feigned an enfeebling sickness and kept herself apart from him.[93]

      A second purpose of major importance is the fact that the narratives also verified that a

person "was truly a saint."[94]  There was no question about a martyr's right to sainthood—the

martyr had paid the price in blood and experienced death in the same vein as Christ; on the other

hand, in order to prove that a saint *was* a saint beyond a shadow of a doubt, those who had not

worn the crown of martyrdom had to have a means of showing that God worked through them.

This came in the shape of exemplary acts of heroism, and, most importantly, in miracles, which

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[92] *Ibid,* xvi.
[93] *Ibid,* 43.
[94] *Ibid*, xvi

were tangible evidence that men and women were representatives of Christ. The fact that he had imbued them with his power confirmed their sanctity beyond dispute. As Ryan asserts, "Miracles were *expected* of the saint, and the saint's miracle was the work of God."[95] The miracle stories in the *Legenda Aurea* are its most interesting feature, and it is from them, generally speaking, where the saints' defining attribute or attributes were generated. It was these stories that would have most readily captured the attention and the imagination of the audience whose recollection of them would have been reinforced through iconography and the readings from the Lectionary.

Each of these attributes—etymologies, biographical sketches, narrative, and miracles—constituted the primary features of the readings in the *Legend Aurea*.

*The South English Legendary*

The earliest and most sizable collection of saints' lives available in the Middle English language is the *South English Legendary* (*SEL*), a series of texts written in verse which scholars agree was most likely composed for the edification and entertainment of the laity. This collection was recorded somewhere near Gloucester in the Southwest of England during the late thirteenth century between 1270 and 1285. A total of sixty-two manuscripts, including fragments, ranging in size from one saints' life to one hundred lives survive and cover a period from biblical times to the martyrdom of St. Thomas à Becket in 1170. The legends therein tip heavily in favor of male saints, with female saints represented in roughly twenty percent of them.[96] Like the *Legenda Aurea*, the *SEL* contains a number of the saints whom Chaucer

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[95] *Ibid*.

[96] *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, ed. Sherry Reames, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), 7.

references in *The Canterbury Tales*, and though its appeal was much more regional than the ubiquitous *Legenda*, Chaucer almost certainly knew it.

From a chronological standpoint, scholars agree that the compilation of the *SEL* was contemporaneous with the *Legenda Aurea,* although the *SEL* probably preceded the *Legenda* by three to five years. Horstmann believes that the concurrent nature of the compilations was dictated by the needs of the culture: "Neither of these collections is the source of the other; both were formed independently of one another, and prove that the same task, which was indeed required by that time, was attempted by different writers at different places."[97] Horstmann's position that the *SEL* was not the work of one writer, in contrast to the *Legenda Aurea*'s clear singular authorship, is based on the fact, he says, that there was "no library of the present type" in existence and the fact that the materials would have been brought in from numerous locales—a job beyond the capacity of one man.[98] Thus, it is likely that the *SEL* "project" might well have been a collaborative effort, continued over the course of several years, perhaps undertaken at a monastery in Gloucester, "where the plan seems to have been fixed and brought into definite shape."[99] Klaus Janofsky notes that the *South English Legendary's* popularity and circulation placed it with "Chaucer, Langland, and *The Pricke of Conscience* as one of the most widely read, copied and distributed texts of the Middle English period."[100]

The Early English Text Society has published two editions of the *SEL* from the sixty-two extant texts. The first publication, the Laud MS. 108, edited by Horstmann in 1887, has a total of sixty seven combined saints' lives and Church feasts. Laud MS. 108, which is missing its first

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[97] Carl Horstmann, *The Early South-Engish Legendary Ms. Laud 108, (*New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1973), viii.

[98] *Ibid*, viii.

[99] *Ibid.*

[100] Klaus P. Janofsky, *The South English Legendary, A Critical Assessment*, (Tübingen: Francke, 1992). ix.

nine entries, begins with the *Discovery of the Cross* on May 3rd and concludes with the

*Martyrdom of St. Hippolyte* on August 13. There are a total of forty-seven male saints and ten

female saints in Laud MS. 108.  The second, edited in 1956 by Charlotte D'Eveyln and Anna J.

Mill from two major manuscripts, Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS. 145 and British

Museum Ms. Harley 2277, with variants from Bodley  MS. Ashmole 43, and British Museum

MS. Cotton Julius D. IX, contains a total of 90 combined saints' lives (two of which are of non-

saints:  Pilate and Judas) and Church feasts.  There are sixty-two male saints and a total of twelve

female saints in this edition. While Horstmann's edition, according to D'Evelyn, lacks a clear

chronological structure in that it fails to replicate the Church calendar, her edition with Mill is

reflective of the Church calendar, beginning with the Feast of Circumcision on January 1st and

ending on December 29th with the martyrdom of St. Thomas à Becket and the translation of his

relics.  Though neither of the manuscripts Horstmann and D'Evelyn edited contain a life of St.

Fridewide, the patron saint of Oxford, seven *SEL* manuscripts do.  In 2003, The Middle English

Text Series published *Middle English Legends of Women Saints* which features two versions (a

short version and a longer version) of the St. Frideswide legend.  The Shorter *South English*

*Legendary Life of St. Frideswide* comes from Trinity College, Cambridge MS. 605 while the

longer Life is from Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Ashmole 43.

In terms of the saints in the *SEL* whom Chaucer includes in *The Canterbury Tales*, the

two editions by Horstmann and D'Evelyn and Mill both contain legends of saints Cuthbert,

Dunstan, Kenelm, Martin, Mary (of Egypt), Nicholas, and Thomas à  Becket. Laud MS. 108

includes lives of saints Austyn, Cecilie, Edward, and Julian, while D'Evelyn and Mill's edition

contains lives of saints Benedict, Denys, Giles, and Jerome.

Despite their similarities in theme and objective, the *SEL* is unique from the *Legenda* in several respects, not the least of which is the question regarding singular versus multiple authorship. Moreover, whereas Jacobus was first and foremost a compiler, the author(s) of the *SEL* were compilers *and* poets, presenting the legends in a verse form known as the septenary couplet.[101] And while the *SEL* does not make use of etymologies nor does it invoke scriptural sources as Jacobus does throughout the *Legenda,* it has its own distinctive traits, including plain idiomatic language and "humorous and satirical" interjections from the narrator, as Reames has identified, as well as doxologies in which the narrator asks for God's blessing.[102] At the end of The *Shorter Life of St. Frideswide*, for example, the narrator closes with these words: "Now God ous bringe to the blysse that He broght that may! Amen." *The Longer Life of St. Frideswide* closes with this prayer: "Nou bidde we God, vor hire love, that He to hevene ours bringe!" And a third example from the *Early South English Legendary Life of Mary Magdalen*: "God us schilde fram peyne and to Heovene us bringe! AMEN."[103] Ultimately, though, it is the common objective, the socio-cultural value, shared by both texts and other texts that preceded and followed them in the hagiographic tradition, which is most significant to our discussion. As Janofsky notes:

> The collection's purpose was obviously the instruction of the laity in matters of the faith, mainly through straightforward stories that could be understood at first hearing. … Its singularity consists in the new tone and mood of compassion and warm human empathy for the lives and deaths of its protagonists and in the pedagogic care and pastoral concern for its intended original audience, which seems to have consisted at one time of unlettered listeners.[104]

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[101] *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, 24. See also *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative,* in which Anne B. Thompson discusses the value of the septenary couplet to the *SEL*.

[102] *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, 24.

[103] *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, 79

[104] Klaus Janofsky, *National Characteristics in the Portrayal of English Saints in the South English Legendary*, in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and T. Szell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 83.

*Other Sources:  Bede, Bokenham, & Caxton*

While the *Legenda Aurea* and the *South English Legendary* are the two primary

collections of saints' lives to emerge in the thirteenth century utilized for the purpose of writing

summaries of the saints' lives for the guide in this study, there are three additional hagiographic

texts I would like to briefly review.

As discussed in chapter one, Harry Bailly's mention of St. Madrian has continuously

confounded scholars.  In the attempt to identify Madrian from all possible angles, I have

included both a *Life of St. Adrian* from Jacobus as well as a *Life of St. Mathurin* from Caxton in

the guide.  Caxton's translation of the *Legenda Aurea* also has a *Life of St. Loye* (Eligius), a *Life*

*of St. Kenelm*, which Jacobus's does not, as well as a life of *St. Edward*.  In the case of St. Anne,

the Virgin Mary's mother, whose cult did not fully develop until well into the twelfth century, the

best available source is a *vita* from British Library MS Arundel 327, written in Middle English in

the early fifteenth century by Osbern Bokenham, a self-professed acolyte of Chaucer.

Not surprisingly, SS. Neot and Ronyan have called for some improvisation in respect to

source materials.  Just as is the case with Madrian, any attempt at identifying St. Ronyan, another

potential fabrication by the host, should be conducted with extreme caution. Chaucer seems to be

leading his readers down a rather slippery hagiographical slope with Ronyan, and though

technically speaking, there is no St. Ronyan, the scholarly tradition has approached him as such.

A secondary source by Rev. S. Baring-Gould in his sixteen volume series, *The Lives of the*

*Saints*, featuring a *Life of St. Ruan* (Ronan), seems to be the best source for taking on this

identification.  And, while St. Neot's cult flourished in the ninth century according to various

dictionaries of saints, details from his legend are patchy and extremely anecdotal.  Apart from a

few stained glass windows in Cornwall depicting Neot performing various miracles, culled

sources, as is the case with Ronyan, appear to be the best hope in piecing together details from Neot's life.  Culled sources will also have to suffice for St. Ivo of Chartres, St. Joce, and St. Hugh of Lincoln.

In the case of St. Cuthbert, whose legend is included in the *SEL* as well as Caxton's translation of the *Legenda Aurea*, the definitive source is Bede's famous prose *Life of St. Cuthbert*.

### The Venerable Hagiographer:  Bede and the Cuthbert Vita

Bede was born in Northumbria in 673 and became a monk at Jarrow where he wrote extensively in a number of different genres, including homilies, poetry, historiography (for which he is most renowned), biblical and didactic works, and hagiography. He is one of the giants in the Western tradition and therefore any attempt to summarize his achievements in such limited space would be a severe injustice; for the sake of this study, I will only mention Bede's hagiographic texts.

Among Bede's hagiographic writings are a *vita* of St. Felix, a *vita* of Anastasius, a *Marytrology*, which includes notices on a total of 114 saints and martyrs, and two *Lives* of St. Cuthbert, one in verse, the *Vita metrica Sancti Cuthberti, episcopi Lindisfarnensi* (c. 705-716) and a second, written in prose, the *Vita Sancti Cuthbert Prosaica* (721).  His writing on Cuthbert also extended to *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, a work concerned with converting England to Christianity, in which Bede wrote a concise account of the Northumbrian saint.

Bede based his *Lives* of Cuthbert on the *vita* composed by an anonymous monk from Lindisfarne, who first recorded the Northumbrian saint's life in c. 698-705.  In the preface to the

verse *Life*, Bede laments the fact that it would not be complete, because Cuthbert was still

performing miracles on a daily basis through his relics.[105] In his prologue to Cuthbert's prose

*Life*, written to Eadfrith, the bishop of Lindisfarne, Bede explains the rigor with which he

approached his subject and the fact that it was achieved by turning to "credible witnesses" and

those "who knew him."[106] He mentions one source by name, the priest Herefrith, as well as

"others who had lived some considerable time with the man of God and were fully conversant

with his life." Bede also speaks of the approval his proofreaders gave the draft of the manuscript

and the fact that not one word needed to be changed. Not surprisingly, Bede's prose version, due

to his writing style, was almost double the size of the anonymous monk's. In all, the prose *Life*

of Cuthbert contains 46 chapters, many of which feature one or more of the numerous miracles

performed by the saint. Of distinct importance are chapters 41-46 which describe Cuthbert's

postmortem miracles and the fact that eleven years after his death his body was found to be

incorrupt when his sarcophagus was opened prior to the translation of his relics. On the whole,

Bede's prose *Life* is considered to be far superior to his verse *Life*. It is equal parts "fleshing out"

of the paradigmatic qualities expressed in the verse *Life* and the biblical allusions of the

anonymous Lindisfarne monk's original.


 *Osbern Bokenham:  St. Anne's Vita*

 Bokenham, an Augustinian friar at St. Clare priory in Suffolk, lived from 1393 to c. 1447,

situating him historically as a near contemporary with Chaucer. There is some confusion as to

the exact place of Bokenham's birth which has been reported as being both Bookham in Surrey

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[105] George Hardin Brown, *Bede The Venerable*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 69.

[106] Bertram Colgrave, ed., trans. *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert, A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1985), 143.

and Bokenham in Norfolk. The date upon which he entered the Augustinian Order is also

unrecorded. Bokenham is known to have made five pilgrimages to Italy as a younger man and

one to Santiago de Compestela. Despite few biographical details, Bokenham wrote twelve

Lives of female saints called the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (a possible allusion to Chaucer's

*Legend of Good Women*) in Middle English verse, patterned after the *Legenda Aurea*. Many of

the "legendys" were dedicated to various female patrons and laywomen.[107]

At the age of fifty, Bokenham wrote the *Life of St. Anne*, which he dedicated to Katherine

Denstone, the daughter of a wealthy cloth merchant with one child named for the saint.[108] In the

opening lines of his prefatory remarks, he pays homage to three of his literary predecessors,

Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate (who was still alive at the time), "fresh rhetoricians," whose talent,

"cunnying and eloquens," he modestly acknowledeges he does not have.[109] Throughout the

preface, Bokenham repeatedly employs the classical rhetorical device of *humilitas:* he is, he

claims, unskilled, too old, and unworthy. In a moment of humorous self-deprecation, he even

threatens not to write the legend, suggesting that it would be in his best interest to give up

writing altogether in order to reform his life. However, as Reames points out, Bokenham is a

skilled poet by anyone's standards, composing his poem in a "conspicuously elaborate and

demanding stanza form that rhymes sixteen lines on just three sounds (ababbcbccbcbbaba)."[110]

The work focuses on Anne's exemplary life as both a dedicated wife and a paradigm for

motherhood, for which she became the patron saint. In taking this last point and applying it to a

real-life situation, Bokenham closes his legend of St. Anne by asking the saint to intercede on

behalf of Denston and her husband, who were hoping for a second child: "Provide, Lady, eek

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[107]*Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, ed. Reames, 253.
[108] *Ibid.*
[109] *Ibid*, 275
[110] *Ibid*, 297

that Jon Denstone/And Kateryne his wyf, if it plese the grace/Of God above, thorgh thi merytes a sone/Of her body mow have or they hens pace/As they a dowghter han, yung and fayre of face/Wyche is Anne clepyde in worshyp, Lady, of thee…"[111] In doing so, Bokenham pays fitting tribute to both his patron and the patron saint of motherhood.

*William Caxton's Translation of the Legenda Aurea*

Caxton set up his first press in Cologne in 1471, a year in which he spent much of his time translating *La recuiel des histoires de Troye* which became the first book, as the *History of Troy*, printed in English (1473). [112]  Three years later, Caxton moved from Germany back to England, where, according to Blake, "From 1476 until his death in 1492 [Caxton] published almost 100 books, many of them his own translations from French," including, "romances (*Paris and Vienne*), saints' lives (*Legenda Aurea*), medieval versions of the classics (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), and religious treatises (*The Art and Craft to Know how Well to Die*)."[113]  His translation and publication of the *Legenda Aurea* in 1483 is an interesting moment in the history of hagiography, as Caxton basically pushes the idea of compiling to a new place.

Richard Hamer tells us that virtually from the time that Jacbous completed his collection, the *Legenda Aurea* was thought of not only as a "complete unit" but as "one which could be used as a basis either for selective collections … or for adding to it."[114] Over the course of the two

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[111] *Ibid*, 296.

[112] See *New Catholic Encyclopedia* entry for Caxton. The date of Caxton's birth in Kent is disputed as historians place it somewhere between 1415 and 1424.  Early in his life, Caxton gravitated to overseas trade, working a route between Belgium and England, where he was exposed to the high-end manuscripts in which he soon traded in addition to apparel and cloth. Norman Blake contends that it is this exposure, and the fact that printed books were available in Bruges in the 1460's, which led Caxton to get his own printing press.

[113] *Ibid*.

[114]  Jacobus, *The Golden Legend: Selections*, trans. by Christopher Stace, xx.

hundred plus years that elapsed between the compilation of Jacobus's original collection in 1265

and the publication of Caxton's English version in 1487, a number of such "selective

collections" and translations with added lives had been created that were at the English printer's

disposal.  It was not without precedent then, when Caxton composed an English translation of

the *Legenda Aurea* himself from three such sources: one Latin (unidentified), one French (15th

century) and one in English from an earlier rendering called the *Gilte Legend* (1438).[115]  Caxton

combines the three version of the *Legenda Aurea*, each with their own additions of saints' lives

and biblical stories, into an uber-version of the *Legenda*, so to speak, which Blake says may have

been the result of his desire to "enhance the value of his edition."  But, to be fair, he also

theorizes that Caxton was operating from a less money-driven mindset, too.  It could have simply

been that Caxton, in the traditon of the *auctor*, felt the need to make use of all available sources.

Even though Caxton's translation wasn't in circulation until eighty three years after Chaucer's

death (1400), the lives, for the most part, come from earlier sources, from legends with which

Chaucer would have been familiar.  From the vantage point of this study, Caxton's translation is

of great value because it provides a few additional lives Jacobus apparently felt did not warrant

inclusion but Caxton did. These are the lives of Edward, Kenelm, Loye, and Mathurin, all of

whom, in one way or another, are relevant to *The Canterbury Tales.*

   While the collections have distinct flavors in regard to prosody, focus, and thematic

concerns, they do converge in the definition of what constitutes sainthood, which in the Christian

context is a relatively static one; almost everyone has a notion of what sanctity entails and could

put together a composite that would look much like that of his neighbor.  However, the evolution

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[115] N.F. Blake, *Caxton And His World,* (London:  Andre Deutsch Ltd, 1969), 118. Here, Blake identifies Caxton's French source as a fifteenth century redaction of Jean deVignay's 1333 version, "represented by British Museum MS Stowe 50-51."

of this composite and the components are what interest me, and there are a handful of significant developments as far as traits are concerned. Thus, I would like to focus on the extent to which this definition of the saint undergoes alterations and accumulates additional meaning from the first century to the Middle Ages. The first two of these developments will prove to be critical in shaping our understanding of the ways in which people regarded saints, and in the case of the third, in respect to the evolution of invocations and oaths in the time of Chaucer.  So, with this in mind, let us first consider what a saint is and the ways in which one achieved sainthood in Western European Christianity.

# CHAPTER 4

# A SURVEY OF SAINTHOOD FROM THE FIRST CENTURY THROUGH THE EARLY

# MIDDLE AGES

*"If any man wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up the cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whosoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." (MK 8.34-35; Mt 16:24-25; Lk 9:23-24)*

*The Definition of Saint*

There are a few defining moments in the evolution of Christian sanctity beginning with the early first century and through the Middle Ages. The key instances this chapter will focus on are intended to give a general background to the historical progression of the concept of sainthood in an effort to develop a clear understanding of the tradition which informed the legends at Chaucer's disposal. Furthermore, it will construct the grid/metatext against which Chaucer's art unfolds in *The Canterbury Tales*. Some of the fundamental questions addressed in this grid are "What is a saint?"; "What function did saints serve?"; and "What compelled medieval men and women to invoke saints and swear by them?" These questions will underpin our discussion of the primary types of saints, the martyr and confessor and the ascetic, who came to personify the models for the *imitatio Christi*. The prototypes for each category, Stephen and Anthony, will be discussed in some detail in order to illuminate the extent to which their exemplary acts served as ideals for Christian communities and their attendant understanding of saintly virtue. Further, I will discuss the rise of the cult of the saints, a phenomenon ostensibly unique to Christianity that materialized almost exclusively from the ability of the saint to

perform post-mortem miracles.  Although exemplary deeds were the touchstone by which saints

were measured in the early centuries, by the fourth century, saints came to be esteemed primarily

for their skills as post-mortem miracle workers.

Understanding these defining attributes as they relate to the cultural-historical evolution

of the concept of sainthood will serve to reinforce our eventual assessment of Chaucer's frequent

invocation of saints in *The Canterbury Tales*.

*Martyrs and Confessors:  Imitatio Christi Part 1*

In the earliest days of Christianity, all baptized followers of Christ were considered

saints.   Kenneth L. Woodward, author of *The Making of Saints,* attributes this reality to the fact

that most Christians in the initial days were Jews or Jewish proselytes who, as such, "regarded

holiness as a quality shared by the community, not the mark of an individual."[116] Nonetheless, by

the midpoint of the first century a radical shift began to occur in which this communal,

egalitarian sense of sanctity gave way to a more hierarchically defined and individually-driven

view of the saint.  This initial shift in sensibility was prompted by the persecutions of the first

century, carried out at first by Jews against Jewish converts to Christianity, followed a few

decades later by the Romans, who came to view Christians as politically subversive.  The

persecutions consisted of various forms of maltreatment ranging from seizure of personal assets

and backbreaking forced labor to intense physical and mental torture and, in frequent cases,

execution. Beginning with the martyrdom of St. Stephen (d. c. 34-35) and continuing through the

early part of the fourth century, the currency of the term "saint" was viewed primarily through

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[116] Kenneth L. Woodward,  *Making Saints, How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why*, (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 52.

the prism of the martyr's blood and sacrifice, though, to a lesser degree, the exemplary deeds of the confessor also shaped the standard.

Still, despite a fundamental difference between the two categories, "there seems to have been no fine distinction between the terms confessor and martyr" in the first century.[117]   The martyr—a word from the Greek *martus*, meaning "witness"—and the confessor—from the Latin *confiteri*, meaning "to proclaim publicly"—both were held in equally high esteem for professing a "public act of faith," known as the *confessio fidei*. [118]  While the martyr's testimony on behalf of his belief in the divinity of Christ led to his own death, the confessor, on the other hand, was denied the crown of martyrdom, despite his public proclamation of faith while under duress.  The confessor's fate historically was one of imprisonment or internment in a work camp, oftentimes for life. While the confessor's example exhibited incredible fortitude and faith and was exemplary in and of itself to early Christians, it also reaffirmed the scriptural admonition that "denying Christ risked denial by Christ before the Father."[119]  Given Christ's sacrifice for mankind, the confessor put his imprisonment into perspective:  it certainly was preferable to an eternity spent in damnation and little to ask of oneself given the great reward waiting on the other side. Thus, in light of their "living sacrifice," confessors by and large were regarded as living saints by the faithful.  Even though martyrs gradually assumed the mantle as the model for saintliness by the second century, confessors would still have their role in the grand scheme.  As the perception of Christian *virtus* evolved over the next two centuries, the confessor's increased eminence as a living martyr opened the door for additional paths to sanctity.  As a result, dying was no longer the exclusive means by which one achieved the status of saint.  By the third

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[117] *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Confessors."

[118] Lawrence S. Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 12.

[119] Matthew, 10:32

century, St. Cyprian wrote about a second category of confessors whom he identified as "those

who privately confess [Christ] by fleeing to the desert to escape offering pagan sacrifices."[120]

As Luke observes in the *Acts of the Apostles*, an intense level of Christian persecutions

took place on the heels of Stephen's martyrdom, due, no doubt, to the pandemonium and sense

of vulnerability surrounding the death of such a renowned and important leader in the Christian

community.  The persecutions eventually reached Rome, where, under Nero (d. 68), many

Christians were brutally tortured and martyred, including Peter and Paul, the protomartyrs of

Rome. Tacitus states that Nero persecuted the Christians because of the great fire of Rome in

A.D. 64.  Evidently, the historian suggests, some had blamed Nero for intentionally setting the

fire, and in his own defense, the emperor accused the Christians, whom he rounded up, tortured

and martyred in an effort to squelch the rumor.  In the *Legenda Aurea*, Jacobus recounts

numerous martyrdoms that took place under Nero's reign, as well as Maximian, Maxentius,

Decius, and Diocletian.  And while Nero's persecution of the Christians, presumably, was one of

self-preservation, other emperors after Nero carried out persecutions in an effort to quell the

impressive growth of the new religion, viewing it as a potential threat to Roman Imperial

authority.  Because Christians typically refused to swear allegiance to the Roman emperor, they

were held to be in defiance of the age-old Roman tradition of *pietas*.  *Pietas* is loosely defined as

the respect one paid to the will of the gods, an act which by extension was directly related to the

honoring of one's own lineage.  *Pietas* hinged on the belief that by honoring the gods, the people

and state would in turn receive blessings from them. Therefore, due to their refusal to pay

homage to the emperor and the gods, Christians were viewed as political dissidents. Though they

were very often given the opportunity to recant their beliefs and acknowledge the emperor's

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[120] *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Confessors,"83.

divinity, it was uncommon for Christians to disavow their faith, and many who eventually were martyred are portrayed in the legends as lecturing the emperor and his court as to the error of their ways. They humiliated the pagan priests and often destroyed their gods in the name of a higher God. It was within this environment that many were martyred, such as SS. Nazarius and Celsus, St. Laurence, St. Katharine, SS. Perpetua and Felcitas, and St. Cecilia. The prototype for their deeds and actions was Stephen, the "protomartyr" of the Christian Church, whose death in circa A.D. 34-35 became the benchmark for all future martyrdoms.

### *St. Stephen And The Paradigm of Self-Sacrifice*

The ideal of the martyr is exemplified in the case of St. Stephen, the protomartyr of the Christian church (d. c. 34-35), whose arrest, trial, sentence, passion, and death appear in the *Acts of the Apostles*. As the protomartyr, St. Stephen's legend and numerous post-mortem miracles also feature prominently in the *Legenda Aurea*.

Luke's narrative of Stephen's trial and execution in *Acts* closely parallels his gospel account of Jesus's trial and death. Luke focuses on the details from Stephen's story which emphasize his significance as an *imitatio Christi*, or imitator of Christ, typical of postfigurative and Christo-centric narratives of hagiographic schemata. To begin with, much is made of the fact that Stephen was both a gifted preacher and a miracle worker in the account. Stephen was put on trial by the Jewish elders for four separate counts of blasphemy against God and the laws of Moses. The Sanhedrin also tried Stephen, who had been appointed to the position of deacon by the apostles, on one count of treason for his alleged involvement in a purported plot to destroy the temple in Jerusalem. Despite the false nature of the charges, Stephen refused to declare his innocence during the trial, instead offering eloquent rebuttals and reasoned proofs to refute the

claims of his accusers from a theological perspective. Much to his own detriment, he also seized

the opportunity to speak out against the Jews, in particular their historical intractability, going so

far as to denounce them as "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears" for their

complicity in rejecting the words of their own prophets.  It had been these same prophets,

Stephen hastened to add, who had foretold the coming of the "Just One," whose death his

accusers had sanctioned years earlier.  At this pivotal point in the trial, Stephen went on record as

blaming his fellow Jews for Jesus' death. Stephen's history lesson and accusation were not well

received.  But, in establishing the pattern for the typology of the martyr, he verbally witnessed

for Christ and stood firm in his resolve, eschewing the need to defend his own innocence for the

greater glory of Christ's.  Presumably, it was at this moment in his trial that Stephen's enraged

accusers dragged him out of the city limits of Jerusalem and proceeded to stone him to death.

Stephen experienced a theophany in which he saw Christ standing at the right hand of the Father

in heaven as he took his last breath.  Here, he called out to God to intercede on his behalf and

"receive [his] spirit." The theophanic vision is critical to the formation of the saint's typology as

it reveals Stephen's direct access to the Father and the Son. As he lay dying, baptized in his own

blood so to speak, Stephen personified the *imitatio Christi* to the fullest extent possible, echoing

the words of Jesus as he hung on the cross:  "Father forgive them for they know not what they

do."[121] Jacobus tells us that afterwards, Stephen's friends gathered up his remains and buried

him, and "made great mourning over him."[122]   Stephen's life became an exemplary one for other

Christians to follow in that he both lived a life like Christ and in that he died like Christ.  The

importance of the exemplary acts and deeds of the saints would play a prominent role in

Christian communities everywhere from the second century on as martyrs and their deeds began

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[121] Jacobus, 46.

[122] *Ibid*, 48.

being recounted at Mass. As previously mentioned, the deaths of these local saints were remembered on their anniversary in their communities, and soon, as more martyrdoms occurred, names and dates were written down on lists for commemoration purposes. These lists, or martyrologies as they came to be known, led to the establishment of a calendar which in turn led to the celebration of feast days or *dies natalis*. The acts of the martyrs would dominate the path to sanctity for at least two and a half centuries.

With Constantine's Edict of Toleration, issued in Milan in A.D. 313, however, the epoch of Christian persecutions came to a halt and martyrdom became less and less significant to the advancement of sainthood. Though Christians would again be persecuted, martyrdom would no longer be the predominant means by which one became a saint. It was around this time that the definition of the confessor evolved into something altogether different from its original conception. The confessor's acts at this point came to signify a kind of spiritual martyrdom: "After the termination of the Roman persecutions, Christian writers used the term confessor in a metaphorical sense, applying it to Christians who proclaimed their faith by their spiritual lives."[123] Cyprian's thoughts on the confessor who fled to the desert to escape persecution evolved into the model for the desert father.

*Asceticism: Imitatio Christi Part 2*

From the fourth century onward, asceticism surfaced as the principal means through which one achieved sainthood. And, though it took on various forms, Christian asceticism is characterized principally by the strong desire to remove oneself from the temptations of the world, not through literal death as in the case of the martyrs who sought death as a matter of

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[123] *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Confessors," 83.

course, but through a kind of symbolic death in which the ascetic died to life through conquering his desires and physical needs in order to become more Christ-like.  This was perfectly in keeping with Christian doctrine realized in St. Paul's belief that in order to live, the Christian has to die to the world. Hagiography from this time forth is replete with lives of anchorites, hermits, and virgins who renounce material possessions and physical comforts in an effort to follow the model of Christ and his self-imposed exile in the desert.  More times than not, in the narrative accounts of their lives, these individuals subsist and endure, not on food and water nor in many cases with much clothing, companionship, or shelter, but on severe abstinence, fasting, prayer and solitude, inuring themselves to some of the harshest conditions and deprivations known to man. Their setting of choice, the desert, was viewed, paradoxically, as a place at least similar in spirit to the Garden of Eden, in which man conceivably could return to a perfect state similar to that of Adam and Eve before the Fall.

The theme of endurance and self-discipline is in keeping with St. Paul's idea of the spiritual athlete "who consciously and constantly disciplines himself in a strong effort to live more fully in docile obedience to the Spirit of Christ, to attain not only his own salvation but also that of the community."[124]  The desert saint truly believed that his renunciation of both self and the world coupled with his continuous prayer and clashes with temptation could usher forth the salvation of mankind. This individualized disavowal of the material and renunciation of the world would later become institutionalized during the Middle Ages where a shift from the desert to the monasteries occurred. Gradually, the nexus of contemplative life relocated from the desert to the monasteries where a distinctively Anthonian culture materialized. Here, abbots and abbesses, apologists, monks, nuns, and mystics, were all part of the rich tapestry of types who

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[124] *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Asceticism in the New Testament," 776.

served to expand the narrow definition of sainthood with which the early centuries began toward

a much broader, more inclusive one.  This new democratic approach to sanctity would not have

been possible had it not been for the earlier desert fathers, in particular St. Anthony and his

biographer Athanasius.

*St. Anthony:  The Model Ascetic*

If one were to look for an approximate time in which the waning tradition of martyrs and

confessors coalesced with the approaching tradition of the so-called "spiritual martyrdom"

actualized in the eremitic tradition, one would need look no further than the *Life of Saint*

*Anthony*, the first recorded saint's *vita* in the Christian tradition, written by Athanasius in 357.

Anthony's life (251-356) is important not only from the standpoint of its privileged place in

hagiography (it quickly became the benchmark by which all subsequent hagiographies would be

measured), but it is revolutionary also in that it gave rise to two enduring impulses in

Christianity:  asceticism and monasticism. With the waning of martyrdom's long-term grip as a

near compulsory means of achieving sainthood for over three centuries, Jesus's self-imposed

isolation in the desert became an attractive alternative to those who wished to emulate his life

removed from the vagaries of society and material existence.  B.B. Price assesses this

transformational shift in Christian history at the end of the second century:

> By the third century … there were followers emphasizing overwhelmingly a different part of Jesus' life as *the* way of the Christian: Jesus' withdrawal into the desert. They interpreted his act as a demonstrative retreat from society, an individual confrontation with evil, a testing of the body in asceticism and the soul in meditation ... They were returning back to God alone, back to the bare essentials of bodily existence, in order to reclaim the freshness, purity, and vitality of the soul beyond the distraction of their contemporary society.[125]

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[125] B.B. Price, *Medieval Thought: An Introduction*, (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 12.

Along with his immediate predecessor and contemporary, St. Paul the Hermit (d. 345),

Anthony was one of the first Christians drawn by the silence and isolation of the desert, a place

where Christ had confronted a barrage of temptation and self-doubt to discover his true mission.

The desert offered an environment in direct contrast to society:  stark, barren, and static,

detached from the mutability associated with time and human contact. As Jacobus says in his

legend of the saint, "Anthony despised the world because it is unclean, restless, transitory,

deceptive, bitter."[126]  Thus, at the age of twenty, Anthony put his aversion to the world into

practice, and after hearing the passage in which Jesus tells the rich man to sell what he has and

follow him, he departed from society.  Athanasius describes this scene, clearly the most decisive

in Anthony's life, in the following words:

> And so it happened that the Gospel was being read at that moment and he
> heard the passage in which the Lord says to the rich man*:  if thou wilt be
> perfect, go sell all that thou hast, and give it to the poor; and come, follow
> me and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.*  As though God had put him in
> mind of the saints and as though the reading had been directed especially
> to him, Antony immediately left the church and gave to the townspeople
> the property he had from his forebears ...[127]

This "call to action," to rid oneself of material possessions in order to gain a greater

reward, would mark a continuation of the martyr's essential quality of self-sacrifice.  In the case

of Anthony as well as other ascetics, such as St. Francis much later, it signified a radically new

approach to one's identity, involving total self-abnegation, the new virtue around which the

Christian saint-hero would be circumscribed.  Anthony lived in the wilderness for the next 85

consecutive years, where, as the quintessential *miles Christi*, he combated attacks by demons,

tamed wild beasts, conquered self-doubt, and performed a variety of miracles.  In Anthony, Satan

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[126] Jacobus, 93.

[127] Athanasisus, *The Life of Saint Anthony*, trans. Robert T. Meyer, (Westminster, Maryland:  The Newman Press, 1950), 19-20.

saw an opportunity to avenge his defeat by Jesus in the desert, so he frequently tormented the saint with lurid visions of beautiful women and suggested to him that the discipline he was placing on himself was too rigorous. The saint repeatedly fought back the urge to return to the secure, easy life of society and chastened his flesh to the point that the devil finally admitted defeat.

The latter portion of Anthony's life reads much like an instruction manual for monasticism and how to live a chaste and pious life in respect to the Gospel passage which originally inspired the saint to flee the world. Much to Anthony's chagrin, others followed him to the desert, so he instructed them to give everything they had to the discipline of their bodies, for the benefit of their souls. Athanasius tells of the creation of a monastic community in the Theban desert based on Anthony's example which became a "a land of piety and justice" and in which "the love of virtue increased."[128] Here, this "multitude" of ascetics spent their time "singing Psalms, studying, fasting, praying, rejoicing in the hope of the life to come, and laboring in order to give alms."[129] He viewed the body as little more than an impediment to the spirit's contemplative quest for union with God. Anthony's desire to control his body was so intense that normal bodily functions were viewed as humbling impediments to his wish to attain spiritual perfection. In this passage, one sees the formation of the contemplative spirit which later characterized the practice of such orders as the Carthusians and the Carmelites:

> When he was about to eat and sleep and provide for the other needs of the body, shame overcame him as he thought of the spiritual nature of the soul. Often when about to partake of food with many other monks, the thought of spiritual food came upon him and he would beg to be excused and went a long way from them, thinking that he should be ashamed to be seen eating by others … He used to say that one should give all of one's time to the soul rather than to the body

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[128] Athanasius, 57
[129] *Ibid*.

[believing] it must not be dragged down by the pleasures of the body, but rather the body must be made subject to the soul.[130]

In sum, Anthony's humility, coupled with his self-denial and renunciation of the world, became a model for others and an alternative means of achieving what the martyr had attained through explicitly dying to the world.  The life Anthony and his disciples engaged in was not literally the way of the martyr, but it was in some ways a close approximation of it.  The idea of "dying to life" daily had taken root via Anthony's exemplary life.  As Athanasius says at the conclusion of his *vita*, "This is the end of Anthony's life in the body, and the above was the beginning of the discipline." Anthony inspired others to pursue  "a slow death to the world," and it was this example that would motiviate scores of priests, members of religious orders, virgins, and even virtuous rulers who followed in the footsteps of Anthony's "spiritual tradition."[131]  In the introduction to the *Life of Saint Anthony*, Robert Meyer ascribes a level of greatness to Anthony which, he feels, surpasses even the great Aeneas, the model for all Romans in the classical age: "the highest prototype of classical antiquity, the *pius* Aeneas, was but a pale ghost beside Saint Antony who achieved what Socrates and Plato and Plotinus could only grope for in their highest speculation."[132]

### The Rise of the Cult of the Saints:  Miracles And Intercession

Though the palm of martyrdom evaded Anthony, his "right" to sainthood was beyond reproach due to the fact that his exemplary life inspired others to follow Christ.  His "slow death" to all things physical and material was as close an approximation of the martyr's death as one

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[130] *Ibid*, 58.
[131] Woodward, 54.
[132] Athanasius, 13.

could imagine.  Anthony also had the good fortune of having his life recorded by a fellow

companion whose account bore the mark of authenticity since Athanasius claimed to be an "eye-

witness."  Yet, as Kenneth Woodward remarks, there was a consensus among some at the end of

the fourth century, in general terms, who found the "living saint's" elevation to sainthood to be

problematic.[133]  On the one hand, no one ever questioned the legitimacy of the martyr's right to

sainthood.  After all, martyrs died the perfect death for Christ, and in some cases court records

and eyewitness accounts existed to prove it. However, who would be able to say whether or not

an ascetic had lapsed in any way, or whether or not a confessor who had been imprisoned for life

may not have had regrets about his *confessio fidei*?  How would one ever really know?  Were

petitioners safe in invoking the name of someone who had not died the perfect death for Christ?

Where was the hard data to validate such a claim? The answer to this question was found in the

miraculous, which, in addition to exemplary deeds, became *the* essential criterion needed to

cement one's status as a saint.  By the fifth century, the standards that would eventually be

adopted by the Church as the basis for sainthood began to take shape.  These included

martyrdom, hagiographic source material which demonstrated the saint's exemplary and heroic

deeds, and, most prominently, the saint's performance of posthumous miracles.[134]

It was a widely held notion that since martyrs had shared in the death of Christ and had

been sanctified through their acts, Christ had bestowed his thaumaturgic powers upon them.  By

virtue of this gift, martyrs became much more than simply heroic Christians who had fought the

good fight for the greater cause or mere models of exemplary behavior; they became the *imitatio*

*Christi par excellence*, coming to be viewed as possessors of incredible power through which

assorted miracles of all shapes and sizes were realized. In his fascinating account of the

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[133] Woodward, 62.

[134] *Ibid*.

reappearance of St. Stephen's remains, which reportedly were missing for almost 400 years after his martyrdom, Jacobus describes how the saint's relics were brought to St. Augustine in Hippo, and soon thereafter, miracles of all sorts were reported. Stephen, Jacobus says, "raised six dead persons to life, cured many who were suffering from various illnesses, and performed other miracles worth remembering."[135] In one instance, flowers and cloths that had been on Stephen's altar healed many sick and deformed individuals on whom the cloths and flowers were placed.

The idea of the saint as thaumaturge, or wonder worker, stems from the many miracles Jesus worked during his brief lifetime. He cured people of a wide array of maladies including deafness, blindness, leprosy, and paralysis. He performed exorcisms, raised the dead to life, turned water into wine, and fed 5,000 from five loaves and two fish. He often used his power to confound nature and, ultimately, to conquer death. In the case of the former, he walked on water and calmed a raging sea, while, in the case of the latter, he descended into hell to release the righteous, returning victoriously to life in order to give his followers their mission before returning to his kingdom.

In addition to scriptural and apocryphal accounts of Christ's miracles, there are also existing early illustrations of Jesus performing wonders carved on reliquaries and on the walls of catacombs. One extant illustration of Christ portrayed on a Brescian sarcophagus, dated to circa A.D. 360-370, shows Christ the Thaumaturge holding a wand raising a figure from the dead. The same panel also depicts Christ laying his hands on the forehead of a young man in the act of healing. The wand "signified the transmission of power" which Jesus recognizes in Luke 8:43-48 when he says, "Someone did touch me, for I felt power had gone out from me."[136] According to Matthew 10:1, Christ passed this very same power, the basis for the saint's intercessory powers,

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[135] Jacobus, 48.
[136] Cunningham, 13.

down to the disciples: "And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity."[137] According to Luke, "many wonders and signs were done through the apostles."[138] Peter's shadow, for example, fell on a crowd of people among whom were many "sick and afflicted with unclean spirits, all of whom he healed."[139] Paul's miraculous power is described in a way that prefigures the relics of the saints. In Ephesus, Paul's personal belongings are highly sought after for the power they possess, foreshadowing the healing and miracles later associated with saints' relics and *brandea*:

> And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.[140]

In the same regard that the disciples received power to work miracles from God, saints, too, were the recipients of Christ's munificence. And although many saints performed miracles during their lifetime, the ones for which they were most revered took place from beyond the grave, proof that they were accepted as such by Christ.[141]

Without question the most significant result of the era of martyrs and confessors was the "cult of the saints," a movement whose strength as an organic cultural institution had become so formidable by the twelfth century that the Roman Church took the steps necessary to require Papal authorization before veneration of any new saint could occur.[142] Prior to this time, localized cults continued to crop up everywhere due to an explosion of reported miracles.

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[137] *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 10:1, ed. Michael D. Coogan, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[138] *Ibid*,1322 2:43.
[139] *Ibid*, Acts 5: 15-16.
[140] *Ibid,* Acts 19: 11-12.
[141] Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 14.
[142] *Ibid*, 67.

Exemplary deeds, though not entirely forgotten, took on a subsidiary role alongside the saint's

prowess as a miracle worker.  The apotheosis of miracles, along with the growing veneration of

saints" relics as sources of prodigious power, had profound implications for local communities:

> This emphasis on the miraculous was so complete in the early Middle Ages that
> the saints, by and large, lost any exemplary value as persons of paradigmatic worth and
> became instead a locus of power.  That power was exercised mainly after death and
> through their relics.  Relics were essentially passive objects, but from them could come
> the power to heal.  They were also used for the swearing of oaths, centers around which
> monasteries were built, a "drawing card" for pilgrims (and, hence, of some economic
> value), a source of civic pride ... and a protection against civil and political evils.[143]

And, as such, communities everywhere began setting up shrines to their local martyrs, in

many instances building chapels and churches around or near martyrs' tombs.  An accompanying

aspect of the proliferation of miracles was the fact that the saint's tomb gradually came to be

regarded as a place in which immense supernatural power resided.  Although saints had

physically moved on to join in the communion with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they were

thought to be present in their tombs.[144]  Take, for example, the following description over the

tomb of St. Martin of Tours perhaps:

> Here lies Martin the bishop, of holy memory, whose soul is in the hand of
> God; but he is fully here, present and made plain in miracles of every kind.[145]

In light of this mode of thinking, an entire "culture" developed around the saints' tomb in

addition to the feasts which were held to commemorate the *dies natalis*.  Martyrs in particular

were honored at special masses which were said at the site of their burial, the eventual place of

"cult" (from the Latin *cultus* meaning adoration).  Peter Brown, author *The Cult of the Saints*,

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[143] Cunningham, 20.

[144] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*: *Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity,*
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3.

[145] *Ibid*, 4.

speaks of this decisive juncture in Christian history as the joining of "tomb and altar."[146] The

celebration of Mass on and over the martyr's tomb was such an integral part of the evolving

Christian church that eventually it became a mandatory component of Christian worship: "By

767... the Council of Nicaea decreed that every church altar must contain an 'altar stone' housing

the relics of a saint."[147] Furthermore, the ancient practice of celebrating Mass over a saint's

remains became the basis for the current definition of "altar stone" in use by the Church

today.[148]

In conjunction with this wave of activity at the site of saints' tombs, a further function of

sainthood surfaced. Intercession is defined as the "act of pleading by one who in God's sight has

a right to do so in order to obtain mercy for one in need."[149] Envisioning Christ seated at the

right hand of the Father and his communion of martyrs and confessors flanking Father and Son

on both their left and right, the faithful believed that the saints were in a privileged position to

pray to Christ on their behalf. It is from this belief that the notion of intercession developed.

Logic held that if Christians could pray to God for one another, both living and dead, and if they

could pray for each other, then they could also invoke the saints, much closer in proximity to

God, to pray for them as well. In the following, St. Jerome (AD 347-420) speaks to the veracity

and efficacy of the notion of intercession:

> If the Apostles and Martyrs, while still in the body, can pray for others, at a time when
> they must still be anxious for themselves, how much more after their crowns, victories,
> and triumphs are won! One man, Moses, obtains from God pardon for six hundred
> thousand men in arms; and Stephen, the imitator of the Lord, and the first martyr in
> Christ, begs forgiveness for his persecutors; and shall their power be less after having
> begun to be with Christ? The Apostle Paul declares that two hundred three score and
> sixteen souls, sailing with him, were freely given him; and, after he is dissolved and has

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[146] *Ibid.*
[147] Woodward, 59
[148] Woodward, 59.
[149] *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* 1910 ed., s.v. "Intercession," 70.

begun to be with Christ, shall he close his lips, and not be able to utter a word in behalf of those who throughout the whole world believed at his preaching of the Gospel?[150]

The notion of intercession derives from the Catholic doctrine of the communion of the saints which holds that the faithful, those in heaven, earth, and in purgatory, constitute a unified mystical body, the Church Militant (those living), the Church Triumphant (those in Heaven), and the Church Expectant (those in Purgatory) in which each respective echelon works for the benefit of the next for the glorification of Christ's kingdom.  Just as those on earth pray for those who are in purgatory in order that their souls may eventually ascend to heaven, saints are said to intercede on behalf of petitioners who are in distress or in need of aid, by praying for them or petitioning on their behalf to Christ.

Again, returning to Jacobus' account of "The Finding of St. Stephen," he also tells of a pagan woman named Petronia who had suffered great pain through a protracted illness for which she had sought every imaginable remedy, none of which worked.  As a last ditch effort, she visited the shrine of St. Stephen where she prayed to the saint for his intercession, and she was immediately healed. Through his intercession, Stephen also healed a brother and sister who had been badly deformed as a result of a curse placed on them by their mother.  After arriving in Hippo, they went to see St. Augustine. As they entered his church, the brother and the sister were drawn to the altar of Stephen, in which his relics were stored, and after resting on it, were restored to their former health.  After the miracles, Augustine led his assembly in praising Stephen for his intercession and recorded an account of the miracle in their martyrology. Augustine soon established a cult in Stephen's honor in Hippo, where his feast day was recorded as December 26th, the day after the Church's celebration of the birth of Christ.

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[150] *Ibid.*

By 1563, at the Council of Trent, some 173 years after the completion of *The Canterbury Tales*, the Church's position on the intercession of the saints had been fully developed and thoughtfully articulated in response to the Protestant position that invocation of the saints constituted idolatry:

> … the saints who reign together with Christ offer up their own prayers to God for men. It is good and useful suppliantly to invoke them, and to have recourse to their prayers, aid, and help for obtaining benefits from God, through His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, Who alone is our Redeemer and Saviour. Those persons think impiously who deny that the Saints, who enjoy eternal happiness in heaven, are to be invoked; or who assert either that they do not pray for men, or that the invocation of them to pray for each of us is idolatry, or that it is repugnant to the word of God, and is opposed to the honour of the one Mediator of God and men, Jesus Christ.[151]

Intercession became the saint's distinctive calling card from the late fourth century through the time in which Chaucer wrote. The saint's role as an intercessor brought about a significant shift in the overall ethos of sanctity. Given saints' rise to prominence as posthumous miracle workers, the faithful steadily came to view them more as protectors, guardians, and even friends, whose ancillary function was one of mediation with Christ on their behalf. The prevailing assumption was that if saints truly possessed the power to stop famines and plagues from spreading, flood waters from rising, invading armies from advancing, and wholesale catastrophes from occurring, they could most definitely come to the aid of individual supplicants in times of personal distress if and when invoked. This trend continued to gather momentum to such an extent that, by the fourth century, "Christians increasingly prayed to [saints] for protection, courage, cures, and other forms of spiritual and material aid."[152]

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[151] *Ibid*.

[152] Woodward, 55.

*Chaucer and the Cult of the Saints*

The extent to which the cult of the saints saturated late medieval culture cannot be overestimated.  After briefly trying his hand at secular hagiography in the *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer built the action of his most ambitious poem around the cult of the martyred archbishop, St. Thomas à Becket. As a literary topos, the pilgrimage to the cult center of the esteemed saint of England was the perfect vehicle for bringing disparate walks of life together around one common cause:  veneration of a known miracle worker.

What, one asks, were Chaucer's pilgrims hoping to gain from their spiritual journey to Becket's shrine?  Certainly one might argue that each character had different motivations if the profiles in *The General Prologue* are any indication, but at the very minimum the primary purpose ostensibly must have been the same for all:  participation, sincere or insincere, in the veneration of St. Thomas and his relics in Canterbury, an assumption shared unequivocally by Chaucer's audience.  Sure, the Pardoner, no doubt, hoped to sell a "relic" or two, while the Wife of Bath, one can only imagine, may have prayed to the saint for a new husband or some way in which to strengthen her virility.  At any rate, the pilgrims were well aware that St. Thomas, England's most esteemed martyr and favorite saint, had performed a number of impressive miracles.  As Jacobus proclaims, "God deigned to work many other miracles through his saint. By Thomas's merits the blind saw, the deaf heard, the lame walked, the dead were brought back to life.  Indeed the water in which cloths stained by his blood were washed brought healing to many."[153]  Thomas's steadfast piety as a Christian leader and his exemplary loyalty to the Church in the face of grave political danger partially led to his veneration. But, his numerous miracles were the basis for the invocation of his name by petitioners from all walks of life.   Just

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[153] Jacobus, 63.

as earlier cults had formed around Stephen and the wave of martyrs who followed him,

Thomas's cult formed from the miracles associated with his relics.  It is likely then that the

pilgrims not only hoped for an opportunity to venerate their saint at his tomb, but that they also

sought his intercession in the hopes of receiving something by which to benefit themselves,

either spiritually or physically.  The character and lore of St. Thomas looms over the journey's

complex narrative proper, and it is under this umbrella of sanctity that *The Canterbury Tales*

unfold.

**CHAPTER 5**

**A GUIDE TO SAINTS, HAGIOGRAPHIC OATHS, ALLUSIONS, AND**

**REFERENCES IN THE CANTERBURY TALES**

The following summaries of saints' lives are based on legends found in *The Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine, the *South English Legendary*, Bede's Life of St. Cuthbert, Caxton's translation of the *Legenda*, and *The Life of St. Anne* by Osbern Bokenham. In the case of saints such as Ronyan and Madrian, I have summarized lives of saints in which a close approximation of their name occurs, though that is not to suggest that I necessarily agree that one can prove beyond a reasonable doubt that either were in fact intended to be saints. St. Ronyan's summary comes from the Reverend S. Baring-Gould's *Life of St. Rumon*, while St. Madrian's summaries are based on two saints who seem most likely to have been Chaucer's model: St. Adrian, whose life is in the *Legenda Aurea,* and St. Mathurin, whose life is in Caxton's translation of the *Legenda Aurea*.

The guide is arranged by name in alphabetical order beginning with St. Adrian and concluding with St. Urban. Where available, I have provided an entry for the historical dates of each saint, followed by the quotation(s) in which the saint's name is mentioned in *The Canterbury Tales*. After this, a short summary of the scholarly consensus is given for each saint's incidental reference. This is followed by the summary of the saint's legend. These generally vary in length depending on the number of details that inform the reference. And finally, an analysis of each saint's reference in *The Canterbury Tales* is presented in an effort to determine whether or not additional layers of meaning are suggested. Summaries and

interpretations vary in length depending both on the size of the *vita*, and on how much of the

material from the *vita* seems applicable to the characters in the reference.

**A**

**ST. ADRIAN/MADRIAN (MATHURIN) (252-280):**

**"Oure Hooste syde, 'As I am feithful man,/And by that precious corpus Madrian,/I**

**had levere than a barrel ale/That Goodlief, my wyf, hadde herd this tale!'"—Harry Bailly,**

*The Monk's Prologue* **(1892-1894)**

*Scholarly Consensus*:  Tabard innkeeper Harry Bailly swears by "that precious corpus

Madrian" in the Monk's Prologue (l. 1892-1894). Along with the oath by St. Ronyan, this oath

has been considered the most perplexing of all hagiographic references in *The Canterbury Tales*.

To date, no saint's life has been identified for a St. Madrian.  Widely divergent opinions have

emerged amongs critics as to who or even what Madrian actually is.  Norris argues that Madrian

is an alteration of *madre*, a form she claims Bailly would have been likely to hear in his tavern

from his Italian clientele; Frost suggests that Madrian is one in a long list of Bailly's verbal

mishaps or corruptions, which, in this instance, results in a mixture of two incompatible

ingredients with one another: a long-forgotten saint's name and a spice or sweetmeat called

madrian; Steevens and Manly offer the possibility of St. Mathurin; Urry suggests St. Materne;

and Haskell proposes that Madrian is St. Adrian, though the host, if we are to accept any of these

theories, egregiously mispronounces his name. What follows is my summary of the two *vitas* that

seem to best approximate "Madrian":  *The Life of St. Maturin*[154] from Caxton's translation of the

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[154] Jacobus, trans. by William Caxton, Vol. IV, 1-3.

*Legenda Aurea* and Adrian's conversion and subsequent persecution and martyrdom under the reign of Maximian.[155]

***Summary of St. Maturin's Legend:*** [156] Despite the fact that Maturin's father, Marin, was one of the commanders in Emperor Maximian's (250-310) persecution of Christians, Maturin, born in Sens, is said to have had Christ in his heart from an early age. After praying constantly for his parents' conversion, Maturin heard a voice proclaim that his wish had come true. He subsequently taught his mother and father about the resurrection of the body and soul, and they were baptized. Marin then had a vision in which his son led numerous sheep from their cage, and Maturin's ordination to the priesthood at the age of twenty soon followed.

In the meantime, Maximian continued his persecutions and martyred St. Maurice and many others. It was during this tense climate that Maturin came to the Emperor's aid and exorcised his daughter of a demon which had possessed her for a long time. Though Maximian had resorted to all means of spells and incantations to free his daughter from her possession, everything failed. Finally, the demon spoke through her and said that he refused to leave until Maturin came from France to cure the daughter and Maximian's followers. Maturin came to Rome under the condition that if anything happened to him his body would be returned to France for burial. The Emperor along with many witnesses swore to this. After healing the daughter, Maturin also healed every other sick person brought to him.

However, as Jacobus says, Maturin "gave up his soul" in Rome, where his "precious body" was taken and anointed and "buried with much reverence."[157] The next day, Maturin's body was found above the ground, miraculously disinterred. The people were amazed at the

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[155] Jacobus, 160-164
[156] Jacobus, trans. by William Caxton, Vol. IV, 3-4.
[157] *Ibid*, 2-3.

events when one of the "knights" recalled the promise to bury the body in France. Maximian had the "holy body" taken home where Maturin's relics worked further miracles through his virtue and intercession.

  ***Summary of St. Adrian's Legend***: Adrian was the commander of the guard under Maximian who issued a decree that all Christians should be hunted down and brought before him for interrogation and torture if they refused to sacrifice to the gods. Thirty-three were captured and severely beaten, after insulting Maximian and the Roman gods. Their resolve in the face of tremendous suffering impressed Adrian. He converted after the prisoners told him of their reward awaiting them in heaven. After Adrian announced his conversion, he was imprisoned. His wife, Natalia, also a Christian, was horrified upon learning of her husband's imprisonment, but her horror soon turned to joy as she learned of the reason. She quickly ran to the prison where she implored Adrian to accept his fate willingly and to turn away from the things of the earth in return for eternal glory. Adrian agreed and promised to send word to Natalia regarding the day of his "passion" which was expected to come quickly on the heels of his imprisonment if he didn't sacrifice to the Roman gods; he learned the day of his martrydom and bribed the guards to allow him to run home to tell Natalia. But before he set out for home, Adrian was seen outside the prison by a friend who ran home and told Natalia of his release from prison. Natalia assumed that Adrian had changed his mind about his martyrdom and rather than suffer instead had sacrificed to the gods. Heartbroken at the news, Natalia refused to let Adrian in the house and accused him of renouncing the Lord and also of becoming a coward. After Adrian explained his reason for coming, Natalia remained unconvinced and continued to verbally abuse her husband while bemoaning her fate as the "wife of a renegade" rather than the "wife of a martyr." Adrian knocked a second time but still she refused entry calling him a "Judas," cursing her fate

of being married to a heathen, and threatening to kill herself.  Adrian finally prevailed upon Natalia that he had come to say his goodbyes and she accompanied him to the cell where she attended to the wounds of his fellow prisoners for seven days.  Adrian was beaten mercilessly by the strongest men in the kingdom to the point that his entrails fell out.  After returning to jail, Adrian was visited by Natalia who predicted that his martyrdom would rank him among the saints.

The emperor learned that women were ministering to the prisoners and banned them from doing so, but undaunted, Natalia cut her hair and dressed as a man, inspiring the other women to do so.  Upon learning of the women's defiance, Maximian called for an anvil to be brought in so that Adrian's bones could be broken.  Natalia, for fear that Adrian would be traumatized by the others' suffering, asked that he be martyred first.  The executioners cut off his feet and broke his legs on the anvil.  Natalia asked for Adrian's hand to be cut off as well so that his suffering would equal the others.  After Adrian's death and the death of the others, the emperor wanted their bodies burned but a miraculous storm came and quenched the fire.  Natalia kept Adrian's hand at her side, and it was thought to be the source of many miracles.

*__Significance of the "By Corpus Madrian" Oath__*:  Two scholars, Frost and Norris, have suggested the possibility that Madrian is not a saint, while one, Haskell, has argued for the third century martyr, St. Adrian. Other variants of Madrian, such as Materne, Mathurin, and Matron have also been mentioned as possibilities.  The climate of scholarship in respect to this oath has been very polarized in the sense that the pendulum has fallen on the side of this saint or that with rarely a call for any middle ground or the possibility that Chaucer may have deliberately conflated the saints' names.

While I am not prepared to argue for the interpretation of "multiple" saints, I would like to suggest a new reading of the Madrian oath which posits that the Host had both Mathurin *and* Adrian in mind when swearing his oath by "that precious corpus Madrian." In other words, Madrian turns out to be a composite of the significant features from both the legend of Mathurin and of Adrian, and the Host, in the tradition of his various instances of mispronunciations, verbal "mishaps," and blunders, commits a malapropism, so to speak, in which he fuses, probably unintentionally, the name of a fairly well known saint—Adrian, whose legend, as Haskell demonstrates does have elements of "dismemberment," to borrow Hermann's terminology—and Mathurin, a saint known, at least today, to a lesser degree, whose legend includes the exact phrase "precious body" and "holy body." This theory does not champion one legend at the expense of the other but rather embraces aspects of both which connect the relevant moments from the legends to the Host's discourse in *The Monk's Prologue*. What it does do is look at other instances in which Chaucer calls a saint by an incorrect name. With the exception of St. Ronyan there is no other instance in the *Tales* in which Chaucer does so. Not surprisingly, the Ronyan oath has been just as polarizing. Another fact to consider is that there are also instances in *The Canterbury Tales* in which Chaucer incorporates two saints with the same name, as is the case with Thomas the Apostle and Thomas à Becket. The fact that Chaucer does not spell out *which* Thomas he may have intended only deepens the possibility for meaning, adds to the potential for irony, bringing pertinent aspects from their legends to bear, and rewarding his readers who each may have brought differing levels of familiarity to extrapolate their conclusions.[158] Unfortunately, for all of the merits of her argument, in my opinion, Haskell too readily writes off St. Mathurin. Part of her argument rests on the "longevity" of Adrian being

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[158] See Ed Malone's article "*Doubting Thomas and John the Carpenter's Oaths in the Miller's Tale*, *English Language Notes*, 1991.

known, and she mentions his inclusion in a "majority of rituals" in the fourteenth century. St. Mathurin clearly was known as late as 1438 when Caxton included his life in the English translation of the *Legenda Aurea*. If Mathurin had been a saint of insignificant renown, it seems rather odd that Caxton would have inserted him in his text near the apostles Peter and Paul. If there is such a thing as a bottom line, which I hesitate to suggest, one could make the case for the fact that Chaucer does not call "that precious corpus" "Adrian," nor does he call it "Mathurin" or anything else for that matter. He simply refers to is as "Madrian" which means that all theories to the contrary are just that. My suggestion that Madrian is a composite of Mathurin, whose "precious body" is returned to France, and Adrian, whose hand is reunited to his body by his wife at the end of his *vita*, makes room for the fact that Chaucer's audience likely knew both legends and would have caught onto Harry's verbal miscue.

One final connection to consider is the fact that both Mathurin and Adrian lived in the same part of the same century under the rule of Maximian. Mathurin's father was a commander in the persecutions of Christians, as was Adrian, who converted to Christianity after being impressed by the fortitude of Christians who sustained their torture. Perhaps this coincidence was just enough to trip up Harry Bailly, whom one can almost imagine wanting to be sure that he invoked the correct saint, be it Mathurin or Adrian.


**ST. AMBROSE (c. 340-397):**

**"And of the myracle of thise corones tweye/Seint Ambrose in his preface list to seye;/Solemnely this noble doctour deere/Commendeth it…"—the Second Nun,** *The Second Nun's Tale* **(270-273)**

*Scholarly Consensus:*  Emerson has shown in his article from 1926 that Ambrose was in fact the basis for the symbolism of the "corones tweye," the two crowns, in *The Second Nun's Tale*, associated with Cecilie's martyrdom, despite the fact that Tyrwhitt, Skeat and others dismissed Ambrose's mention in the tale as insignificant.  The source for the flowers in the two crowns was Ambrose's *Commentarius* in *Cantica Canticorum* in which he speaks of three flowers: "confessorum violae, lilia virginum, rosae martyrum."[159]  Emerson also identifies Ambrose's use of the phrase the "palm of martirdom" which resonates throughout the tale as a powerful symbol not just for Cecilie, Valerian, and Tiburtius, but also for the numerous martyrs whose remains are in the cave near the Via Appia where Pope Urban is in hiding.  He also interjects that both Jacobus and Chaucer briefly halt the legend of St. Cecilia in order to cite Ambrose as an authority for the miracle.

*Summary of St. Ambrose's Legend:*  Jacobus traces Ambrose's name to *ambra*, an aromatic spice, and *syos*, God.  Ambrose's relics were said to exude an ambrosia-like fragrance.

He was known for his high moral character, intellectual acumen, and an eloquence so profound that Augustine, simply by hearing him preach, converted to Christianity. Ambrose's expressiveness came from a swarm of bees which flew into his mouth when he was a baby.  His father, who witnessed this, predicted his son was destined for greatness.  A few years later when still a young boy, Ambrose saw his sister, a nun, kiss the hands of a priest, and extended his own hand for her to kiss.  She assumed this gesture to be little more than the child's playful imitation of the priest, and brushed it off, but her refusal provoked a retort from Ambrose none expected: Ambrose let it be known that one day his sister would kiss his hand out of respect for his rank in life.

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[159]Emerson, 252-261.

As Bishop of Milan, Ambrose led an extremely austere life; he fasted daily and gave everything he had either to the poor or to the church. He was known for having such compassion for his flock that he frequently wept upon hearing their confessions.

Jacobus lists numerous miracles attributed to Ambrose. Once, a notorious magician sent demons to Ambrose's house to torture him, but they were repelled by a barrier of fire that scorched them as they approached. For fear of Ambrose, a demon that possessed a man left his body upon entering Milan and re-entered it upon departing. Another man's arm turned lifeless as he attempted to stab Ambrose. Once a man laughed at the site of Ambrose who had fallen by accident; he immediately suffered the same consequence himself. Jacobus tells the story of Ambrose's sister kissing his ring as he had predicted.

As the end of his life approached, Ambrose's frustration with corruption and greed led him to pray to God for instant deliverance; he learned of his impending death and told his followers that he would die the day after Easter. A small fire in the shape of a shield was seen emanating from Ambrose's mouth just before he went to his eternal rest.

***Significance of the St. Ambrose Reference:*** The biographical detail most relevant to the Ambrose reference in the *Second Nun's Tale* is not included in Ambrose's *vita* in the *Legenda Aurea*. It is, however, mentioned in St. Cecilia's legend:

> Ambrose testifies to this miracle of the crowns of roses in his Preface, where he says: "Saint Cecilia was so filled with the heavenly gift that she accepted the palm of martyrdom, cursing the world along with the pleasures of marriage. Her witness is the confession she evoked from her spouse, Valerian, and from Tiburtius, both of whom, O Lord, you crowned by an angel's hand with sweet-smelling flowers. A virgin led these men to glory, and the world recognized how powerful commitment to chastity can be." Thus Ambrose.[160]

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[160] Jacobus, trans. William Caxton, Vol. II, 320.

As stated above, Skeat, Thrywitt, and others previous to Emerson were concerned with locating the source for the remark Chaucer attributes to Ambrose regarding the miracle of the two crowns.  With Emerson's location of the source material in 1926 along with his discussion of Ambrose's affiliation with the "palm of martirdom" and his acknowledgement of the fact that Ambrose's primary role in the *Second Nun's Tale* is that of an authority, Emerson covered practically every aspect of this rather straightforward hagiographic reference.

One additional aspect of Ambrose's legend that bears mention is his association, by virtue of his name and in terms of his relics, with a powerful and sweet fragrance.  When Ambrose's tomb was opened, his relics were said to have given off a fragrance akin to ambrosia. There is no question that Jacobus, Chaucer, and their respective audiences would have had this association in mind when Ambrose's name was cited both in the *Legenda Aurea* and in the *Second Nun's Tale*.  In the preface to Ambrose's life, Jacobus states that Ambrose comes from amber, "which is fragrant precious substance"; he was precious to the Church, "and spread a pleasing fragrance both in his speech and in his actions"; likewise, Jacobus says, "through him God diffused fragrance everywhere, as amber does; for Ambrose was and is the good odor of Christ in every place."  And, Jacobus also cites *The Glossary* which describes Ambrose's in the following terms:  "Ambrose was a heavenly perfume by the fragrance of his renown, a supernal flavor due to his contemplative prayer, a celestial honeycomb by the sweetness of his exposition of the Scriptures, a food for angels in his glorious fruitfulness."[161]

When the angel brings Valerian two crowns of fragrant flowers, it is the sweet smell from heaven which literally overpowers Tiburce, who "withinne his herte ... gan to wondre fast" (245),  Tiburce, begins to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit stirring inside him, as he wonders

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[161] Jacobus, 229.

why the smell in the room is so pungent, despite it not being spring: "I wondre, this tyme of the yeer/Whennes that soote savour cometh so/Of rose and lilies that I smelle heer/For though I hadde them in myne handes two/The savour myghte in me no deeper go./The sweete smele that in myne herte I fynde/Hath chaunged me al in another kynde."[162] Valerian explains to Tiburce that "thou smellest them through my preyere" (256). He then reveals the source of the fragrance, the truth, which he has received from Urban and the angel. Valerian promises to show Tiburce the source of the fragrance if he too agrees to believe. It is at this point in the narrative of both the *Legenda* and *The Second Nun's Tale* that Jacobus and Chaucer pause momentarily to introduce their authority, Ambrose, who, no doubt, was the saintly manifestation of the wondrous fragrance to which both writers refer.

**ST. ANNE (1ˢᵗ Century; apocryphal)**:

**(1) "'Immortal God, that savedest Susanne/Fro false blame, and thou, merciful mayde,/Marie I meene, doghter to Seint Anne,/Bifore whos child angeles synge Osanne,/If I be giltless of this felonye,/My socour be, for ellis shal I dye.'"—the Man of Law,** *The Man of Law's Tale* **(641-644)**

**(2) "Pay me," quod he, "or by the sweete Seinte Anne/As I wol bere awey thy newe panne."—the Summoner,** *The Friar's Tale* **(1613-1614)**

**(3) O thou, that art so fair and ful of grace,/Be myn advocat in that heighe place/Theras withouten ende is songe "Osanne,"/Thow Cristes mooder, doghter deere of Anne!—the Second Nun,** *The Second Nun's Prologue* **(67-70)**

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[162] Chaucer, 265.

***Scholarly Consensus***:  Astell's article situates the oaths in *The Man of Law's Tale* and *The Second Nun's Tale* in terms of the medieval iconographic representation of the St.  Anne's Trinity which stands as an "archetype of the ideal family."  The oaths in *The Man of Law's Tale* resonate more for an audience comprised of the laity who would have interpreted the image as affirmation of the traditional family: mother, father, child vis-à-vis Joachim, Anne, and Mary.  Astell:  "The Trinity of St. Anne offers an image of lay holiness, suitable for husbands, wives, and families."[163]  For the Second Nun, whose audience would be monastic, the St. Anne oath in her tale, symbolizes an "ideal monastic family" consisting of Cecilia and Valerian, who agreed to a chaste marriage, and Valerian's brother Tiburce, who also received the crown of martyrdom.  The St. Anne Trinity image evokes the possibility of "ideal" families on two different planes and functions as a "multi-form" *imitatio Christi*.

***Summary of St. Anne's Legend:***  Bokenham says that Anne means "grace," for her womb was blessed and was the root that led to that most gracious flower, Jesus, son of Mary.  Bokenham traces Anne's lineage to the House of David and describes her upbringing in Bethlehem as virtuous and in keeping with her royal nature.  At the appropriate age she was wed to Joachim, a wealthy and virtuous man, in Galilee. And, as the years passed, the couple grew in virtue together, but had no children after twenty years.  They continued to petition to God for his grace and promised they would devote their "fruht" to his service if ever blessed.

One day at the temple, the high priest singled out Joachim for what he considered to be an affront to God: Joachim's childless union with Anne.  The priest demanded that Joachim refrain from bringing offerings to the temple until he rectified his transgression. Duly humiliated,

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[163] Astell, 402.

Joachim left the temple and went far away into the hills where his herdsmen tended sheep.  He

fully intended to stay there until the end of his days without telling Anne.

Five months passed and Anne was overcome with sadness due to the disappearance of

Joachim.  She prayed to God for his return and reiterated her willingness to dedicate a child to

His service.  At that very moment, Anne looked up and an angel appeared who brought good

tidings of a child who would be revered throughout the land.  Moments later, the same angel

appeared to Joachim with the news that Anne was to give birth, judiciously explaining to a

stunned Joachim how the Lord often works in mysterious ways.  The angel explained that Anne

would give birth to a child named Mary, the likes of whom the world had never beheld. He told

Joachim that God expected the child to be dedicated to the temple as they had vowed.  With that,

the angel disappeared in a cloud of smoke.  The thirtieth day into Joachim's journey home, an

angel appeared to Anne telling her to go to Jerusalem's golden gate through which she would see

her husband enter.  She hurried there and reunited with Joachim, telling him of her blessing,

unaware that he knew as well.  The impending birth was celebrated with great fanfare throughout

the land, and nine months later Anne gave birth to Mary, or in Bokenham's words, "the oyel-

tunne of gracycous helthe to alle that beth syke/Wyth a devouht hert if they wyl it seke."[164]

Anne and Joachim took Mary to the temple when she was three years old.  She walked up

the huge steps by herself, keeping her eyes focused on the temple, never turning back for help

from her parents.  Anne offered thanks to God for giving her fruit to bear to the temple for an

offering.

**_Significance of the St. Anne References_**:  In Astell's groundbreaking reading of the

oaths "by Seint Anne" in *The Man of Law's Tale* and *The Second Nun's Tale,* one sees the force

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[164] *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, ed. Sherry Reames, 293.

and depth with which Chaucer's hagiographic references are capable of operating. In both cases the references trigger aspects of fourteenth century dogma and doctrine at the heart of debates regarding the role of the family and the community, both secular and ecclesiastical. Though the oaths, on the surface, appear to be nothing more than "appropriate usages" of the saint's name in conjunction with calls for intercession from the Blessed Virgin, they turn out to be oaths of major consequence that help the informed reader engage with their larger historical implications.

Although the oath "by Seint Anne" in *The Friar's Tale* lacks the same *gravitas* and historical import of the aforementioned oaths, it *also* serves to activate associations specific to the legend of St. Anne, calling to mind both her status as the patron saint of the domestic realm and motherhood as well as her celebrated fidelity to her husband. Chaucer "plays" with these details which have clear comic overtones in keeping with Wilson's notion of "hagiographic (dis)play."

In terms of her patronage, Anne has been associated historically with mothers, grandmothers, homemakers, and housewives. This is signifcant to the scene in which the summoner swears his oath "by the sweete Anne," as it is set at the home of an old widow, "Mabely," from whom the summoner attempts to extort payment of "twelf pens" under false charges. The rhetorical context in which the oath occurs is redolent of the domestic realm and its trappings, including a "panne," "cloths," and a "smok." Chaucer further alludes to Anne's patronal status when the Feend calls Mabely "myne owene mooder deere" (1626). This subtly links back to Mabely's oath by "lady Seint Marie," whom she invokes in reaction to the summoner's threat to have her excommunicated if she refuses to pay. At first, the summoner does so without even announcing the charges, but Mabely counters that "I have no gilt" (1612). She asks him to show her his charity since she is poor and old, but the summoner will have none

of it and exclaims, "Pay me … or by the sweete Anne,/As I wol bere awey thy new panne/For dette which thou owest me of old./Whan that thou madest thyn housbande cokewold." (1613-15). This accusation is presumably connected to the unspoken suggestion in St. Anne's legend that Joachim was cuckolded.  It also is suggestive of Joseph's initial disbelief that his wife, Mary, was pregnant.

There is one final association which is triggered in this scene that bears mentioning.  In light of Astell's connection of the two oaths discussed in terms of the Trinity of St. Anne—the grandmother, mother, and son—there are three oaths sworn in the scene just discussed.  The first one is to "Crist Jhesu, kyng of kynges," (1590) the second is to "lady Seinte Marie," (1604) and the final is by "the sweete Seinte Anne."

**ST. AUGUSTINE (AUGUSTINE, AUGUSTYN, AUSTYN ) (354-430):**

**(1) "What sholde he studie and make hymselven wood,/Upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure,/Or swynken with his handes, and laboure,/As Austyn bit?  How shal the world be served?/Lat Austyn have his swynk to him reserved!"—Chaucer,** *The General Prologue* **(184-188)**

**(2) "But I ne kan nat bulte it to the bren/As kan the hooly doctour Augustyn—the Nun's Priest,** *The Nun's Priest's Tale* **(4430-4431)**

*Scholarly Consensus:*  St. Augustine is the third saint in Chaucer's descriptive inventory of saints (along with Maurus and Benedict) whom he contrasts with the Monk in the General Prologue.  Skeat identifies Austyn as "Augustine of Hippo, after whom the Augustinian Canons were named," noting that the Canons' "rule was compiled from his writings."  Furthermore, he quotes John Wyclif's observation that, "Seynt Austyn techith munkis to labore with here hondis,

and so doeth seint Benet and Bernard." But Chaucer's Monk places absolutely no value in labor, either physical or intellectual. The following is my summary of St. Augustine's legend as it is found in the *Legenda Aurea* with the application of the "Austyn" reference to follow.

***Summary of St. Augustine's Legend***: Referred to as Augustin, Augustinus, Augustyn, Austyn on various occasions in *The Canterbury Tales*, Augustine was born in Carthage to Patricius, a pagan, and Monica, a devout Christian; he was a brilliant scholar, rhetorician, and philosopher who studied both the liberal arts and Aristotle of his own accord. Jacobus draws two analogies to illustrate the significance of Augustine's name: 1) Augustine's "excellence" surpassed that of all doctors as Augustus surpassed all kings in his own excellence; 2) Augustine's passion for God was such that he was warmed with the fire of love for God as the month of August is hot. Much of Jacobus's account focuses on Augustine's conversion to Christianity.

Early on, after flirting with Neo-Platonism, Augustine came under the influence of Manichaean teachings, and, according to Jacobus, remained in this error "for nine years." At nineteen, he read a book teaching that the world should be despised. Later, he taught rhetoric in Carthage but left one night for Rome, deceiving his mother, who cried out to God for Augustine's return. A while later, Milan needed a rhetoric professor; so Augustine left Rome to fill the position, where his mother found him neither, Jacobus says, Manichean nor Catholic. Augustine began to follow Ambrose who gave a lecture on the error of Manichaeism; Augustine took the words of Ambrose to heart and finally eschewed the dualistic teachings of Manichaeism.

Augustine took stock of his life up to the point of his encounter with Ambrose and found himself woefully inadequate. But a voice told him that he could "grow strong" if he would only

"eat the lord."  Although these moments of intensity left an imprint on him, Augustine did not give himself over completely to the Lord.  He was encouraged to seek out Simplicianus who then advised him to follow Christ without equivocation: "Why strivest thou to stand upon thine own strength, and so standest not?" To illustrate his point, Simplicianus told Augustine about the renowned pagan Victorinus.  He was a man of great virtue who sometimes called himself a Christian. Simplicianus challenged Victorinus, saying "I'll believe you when I see you in church." Victorinus one day climbed high up in the city and proclaimed his faith to everyone.

Pontianus, a friend of Augustine's, came and told him of the miracles of St. Anthony. Finally, all of these examples aroused a new and previously unmatched passion and zeal in Augustine.  He rushed in on his friend Alypius, and said, "Hearing what we hear, why do we delay? The unlearned start up and seize heaven, and we with our learning sink into Hell!"

Augustine had an epiphany under a fig tree.  He was so moved that he made a beautiful, plaintive cry to the Lord.  He then heard a voice say, "Take and read, take and read!"  Augustine opened the book and the page to which he opened read:  "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its concupiscences."

*__Significance of the St. Augustine References:__*  Based on his penchant for decidedly non-monastic pastimes, the Monk strikes the average reader as being less than admirable in respect both to his vocation and to his character.  This, despite the fact that Chaucer never passes explicit value judgments nor does he resort to language overtly critical of the Monk.  How then, one asks, is Chaucer able to lead the reader into a stance of such patent prejudice against the Monk?  One way he effects this bias is through introducing the name "Austyn," which brought with it such a wealth of overarching sense of positive value, preconceived notions, and biases, that the Monk's defects are laid bare to the degree that riding a horse and hunting become tantamount to heresy.

If one were to read the Monk's description without Austyn, Benedict, or Maurus, the effect clearly would not be the same.  Although no one invokes Augustine or swears by him in this particular instance, Chaucer's use of the saint as a contrasting hagiographic reference serves to indict the Monk's actions and to call his motives into question.  If anything, this ironic contrast allows Chaucer to move swiftly through his description of the Monk without having to pause and give a history lesson on the erosion of the monastic tradition. By the time he juxtaposes the Monk with Austyn, so many negative connotations has accrued that the credibility of the monk buckles under the strength of these hagiographic references.

The second reference to Augustine in *The Canterbury Tales* occurs in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*.  Augustine, along with Boethius, is cited as an *auctor* on the subject of freewill, which the Nun's Priest considers in light of Chauntecleer's decision, despite his dreams, to go into the yard where the Fox lay in wait. Augustine, Benson notes, "was an exponent of the orthodox doctrine … which held that free will was granted to man by God to be used to the extent that God allowed."[165] The Nun's Priest admits his own difficulty with the perplexing issue, stating, "But I ne kan nat bulte it to the bren" ("sift the matter"—Skeat trans.).[166] Rather, he leaves it to Augustine, "the hooly doctour," to deal with God's "forwityng" (3243).  The Nun's Priest is correct to have invoked Augustine and Boethius as authorities; any preacher, writer, or compiler worth his salt would have done the same in a similar situation.  Is it ironic or ambiguous in any way?  Certainly not, but it is a moment replete with a comic undercurrent—the narrator is, after all, citing authorities in respect to the free will of a rooster.

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[165] Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer,* ed. Larry D. Benson, (Boston:  Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 939.

[166] Skeat, *Notes To The Canterbury Tales*, 255.

**B**

**ST. BENEDICT (BENEIT, BENEDIGHT) (480-546):**

**1) "The reule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneit—/By cause that it was old and somdel streit/This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace,/And heeld after the newe world the space."  Chaucer,** *The General Prologue* **(173-176)**

**2) "Jhesu Crist and Seinte Benedight,/Blesse this house from every wikked wight/For nyghtes verye, the white pater-noster!/Where wentestow, Seinte Petres soster?"**
**John the Carpenter,** *The Miller's Tale* **(3483-3486)**

*Scholarly Consensus*: St. Benedict, Beneit, or Benedight is mentioned twice in *The Canterbury Tales*, once in *The General Prologue* (173-176) and once in *The Miller's Tale* (3483-3486).  Benedict founded the Benedictine Order and is credited with founding Western monasticism based in part on the rule that he wrote.  The Rule of St. Benedict stresses such virtues as self-discipline, humility, prayer, obedience, and work and even defines the four types of monks.  The reference to Benedict in *The General Prologue* has generated little debate due to the obvious association to the saint's emphasis on discipline in his rule in juxtaposition to the Monk's apparent lack thereof.

The invocation of Seinte Benedight along with Christ by John in *The Miller's Tale*, by contrast, has perplexed scholars, due to the fact that the exact "night-spel" pronounced by the carpenter cannot be located.  DeWeever argues that the "meaning of the charm is not all clear."[167]  Skeat, however, makes a convincing argument for the charm's similarity to the following children's prayer, which he notes is, in fact, a charm itself:

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,

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[167] Jacqueline de Weever, *Chaucer Name Dictionary,* (New York & London:  Garland, 1987), 55.

Bless the bed that I lie on

Four angels round my bed, &c

He notes that John blesses all four corners of his house, which signifies invoking the four evangelists.[168] Skeat contends that the spell is a "reproduction of a popular saying." Even with this observation, St. Benedict's exact relationship to the spell is unclear. What follows is a summary of Benedict's legend that focuses on specific episodes that illustrate his connection to the monastic tradition.

***Summary of St. Benedict's Legend***: Jacobus says that Benedict's name means blessed in that he blessed many, received many blessings, and also merited eternal blessings. He was born in Nursia but left for Rome to study liberal arts, eventually fleeing the city for the desert where his devotion to a rigid, ascetic existence began to give shape to his personal rule. Later, Benedict went to live in a cave and his whereabouts were unknown to anyone for three years, except for a monk named Romanus who brought Benedict food and the sacrament. Benedict endured numerous trials and tribulations in the desert, including extreme temptations of the flesh. He saw a vision of a naked woman which filled him with such passion that he almost renounced his vocation; but instead, he stripped himself bare and rolled in a bed of thorns until his body bled. Benedict never again felt the pangs of temptations of the flesh.

During his time in the desert, Benedict's fame spread. After the death of their Abbot, a group of monks asked Benedict to succeed him. Benedict refused time and again on the grounds that the monks' lifestyle would clash with his. Yet, he was asked so often that he finally consented. After his appointment, his fellow monks soon regretted their decision, as Benedict

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[168] Skeat, 106-107.

had predicted, due to his application of an exceedingly strict rule.  As a result, the monks

attempted to kill Benedict by giving him wine laced with poison.  However, Benedict made the

sign of the cross over the wine glass, which shattered.  Benedict asked God to pardon the monks

and promptly returned to his previous life in a cave, where the faithful came to visit him.

Eventually, due to the extraordinary number of followers attracted to him, he founded a series of

monasteries in which his rule flourished.

Benedict once saw a black dwarf terrorizing a brother in the monastery, causing the

brother to neglect his responsibilities for materialistic pursuits.  As Benedict was the only one in

the monastery who could see what was happening, he prayed so that his brother Maurus might be

able to see the dwarf wreaking his destruction.  Once Maurus had received the special grace, the

abbot followed the brother outside as he was drawn away from his work by the dwarf, and

pummeled him with a staff.  The brother returned to his work, and it was as if the devil had been

hit with the staff as well, for the brother was no longer troubled.

Jacobus relates another miracle that Benedict performed in which he was able to draw

water from stones on an arid mountaintop.  Three of his twelve monasteries were built at the top

of a high mountain and many brothers complained that it was too far to travel to the cliff below

to get water.  They asked Benedict to consider moving them to a new location. One evening,

Benedict climbed to the top of the mountain, prayed, and placed three stones there to remember

the spot.  When the brothers came to complain that night, Benedict instructed them to go up the

mountain and dig where they found the stones.  Water began to pour from them and still flows

there today.

A priest named Florentius who hated Benedict sent him a poisoned loaf of bread in hopes

of killing him.  Benedict graciously accepted the loaf and asked a crow which had often come to

eat crumbs from his hands to take the bread away.  The bird was frightened and refused at first.

Benedict, however, assured the bird everything was fine, so it did as the monk commanded.

Three days later, the bird returned to receive his reward for being obedient.

  ***Significance of the St. Benedict References****:*  The reference to the rule of St. Beneit in

the prologue is neither ambiguous nor is it ironic, but it does provide a wealth of insight into the

Monk's character nonetheless.  In the *Prologue*, Chaucer depicts the Monk as an emancipated

monastic who holds the "reule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneit" in disdain.  In the Monk's

opinion, the rule is outdated, too strict and too constraining in regard to the modern pursuits he

fancies.  Specifically, he would rather dine, hunt, and ride horses than follow the rule of St.

Benedict. Thus, the reference to Benedict draws the character of the Monk into sharp contrast

and indicates that, while he is clearly far from being a saint, he is just as far from being a monk,

in that he fails to follow the fundamental tenets of his order.  In Benedict's own words, this monk

appears closer in spirit to the type of monk he detests most, the gyratory, who are "always

wandering and never stationary, given over to the service of their own pleasures and the joys of

the palate, and in every way worse than the sarabaites."[169] The monk's clear contempt for the

rule also calls to mind the three episodes from Benedict's *vita* in which disillusioned monks take

their frustrations out on the saint.  Each of these examples is either directly related to or is

suggestive of the "streit rule" which the Monk in *The General Prologue* disavows. When

contrasted with the monk, the Benedict reference calls to mind the group of monks who try to

kill the abbot by poisoning his wine, the monks who complain about having to walk to far to get

water, and Florentius who also tries to poison Benedict with a loaf of bread. The Monk who is

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[169] Halsall, Paul. "The Rule of St. Benedict." Medieval Sourcebook Jan. 1996. 1 Oct. 2007<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/rul-benedict.html>; The sarabaites was a class of monks despised by Benedict for following their own rules based on whim and expediency; Benedict says that whatever the sarabaites find difficult they call "unlawful."

controlled by the black dwarf also resonates with the Monk in *The General Prologue* as well as the monk, Daun John, in *The Shipman's Tale*, both of whom are preoccupied with material possessions.  The black dwarf also calls to mind the demon who was the embodiment of sexual temptation in St. Anthony's legend, a fitting idiom for Daun John's lasciviousness.

Despite Skeat's compelling argument for the "night-spel's" connection to the "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John" charm, the basis for Benedict's invocation in the spell remains mysterious.  In spite of that, one could argue that Benedict's name, which means "blessed" or "blessing," and which translates as "favored by God," might be seen by John, who asks "Jhesu Christ and Seinte Benedight" to "Bless [his] house" as carrying double weight as a protective talisman to ward off "every wikked wight." In situations such as the one in which the carpenter finds himself, a blessing with double strength certainly could not be a bad thing.

## C

**ST. CECILIA (d. 223):**

**"I have heer doon my feithful bisynesse/After the legende in translacioun/Right of thy glorious life and passioun/Thou with thy gerland wroght with rose and lilie—/Thee meen I, mayde and martyr, Seint Cecilie"—the Second Nun,** *The Second Nun's Prologue,* **(24-28)**

*Scholarly Consensus*: *The Second Nun's Tale* is a retelling of the life of St. Cecilia. Chaucer's turn at hagiography stays true to the legend of St. Cecilia found in *Legenda Aurea* throughout, although, according to Skeat, he appears to have "consulted another Latin life."[170] Skeat states that the "legende" to which the Second Nun refers in the above quotation is "the

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[170]Skeat, 401.

*Legenda Aurea*," something not only clear from the similarities between the legends, but also based on the fact that Chaucer mentions Jacobus by name:

> Interpretacio nominis Cecilie quam
> Ponit Frater Jacobus Januensis in
> Legenda. (84)

   ***Summary of St. Cecilia's Legend***: Jacobus says that there are five possible origins for Cecilia's name:  lily of heaven (*coeli lilia*) due to her renowned virginity; lacking blindness (*caecitate careens*); *caecis via* or road for the blind; a woman who works for heaven (*coelum and lya*); or one who works for the people (*coelum and laos*).

   Cecilia was raised a Christian in a noble Roman family and dedicated herself to the Lord at an early age, constantly praying for her virginity to be safeguarded.  She became engaged to a young nobleman named Valerian to whom she confided on their wedding night that she had another lover, an angel of heaven, who protected her body from those who looked on her with lust.  If he, Valerian, loved her truly and chastely, she continued, he would be rewarded with eternal glory.  Valerian asked to see the angel for proof and threatened to kill Cecilia and her lover if she was lying.

   Cecilia sent Valerian to the Appian Way to receive instruction and purification from Urban who was in hiding during the time of the persecutions.  If Valerian received baptism from Urban, Cecilia promised, he would see the angel.  Upon finding Urban, Valerian told him what Cecilia had said, and they were both joined by an old man in white garments who presented Cecilia's husband with a book which told him of the true faith.  Valerian believed the words and was baptized by Urban.  When he returned home, Valerian found Cecilia talking to an angel. The angel presented two crowns made from lilies and roses, one for Valerian and one for Cecilia, which had come from heaven as a symbol of the couple's chastity. The crowns would never

wither, the angel said, nor would they ever lose their fragrant aroma, though they could only be seen by those who had commended themselves to a chaste life.  The angel granted Valerian a wish in gratitude for his self-sacrifice.  Valerian asked that his brother, Tiburtius, be given the truth, and, upon walking into the house, Tiburtius was overwhelmed by the crowns' fragrance. The brothers were soon martyred for their beliefs, and Cecilia buried the bodies together.

Cecilia's martyrdom was sealed when she called the Roman gods lumps of stone in front of the prefect Almachius.  She was sentenced to die by being boiled alive in a scalding tub. However, Cecilia did not so much as perspire in the bath which led Almachius to  have her beheaded in the tub.  After three attempts at beheading her, the executioner gave up.  Roman decree prevented a fourth blow, and since he could not cut off Cecilia's head, she was left to bleed to death.  During the three days Cecilia remained alive, she committed more charitable acts and acts of conversion.

*__Significance of the St. Cecilia Reference__:*  Of all the hagiographic references in *The Canterbury Tales* this one is unique for the specific fact that it functions as a segue into the actual life of the saint as opposed to pointing to a metatext for explanation or obliging the reader to extrapolate meaning from the mention of the saint's name. In the case of the St. Cecilia reference there is no need for that—the explanation is provided in the lines that follow. Clearly there is no irony or ambiguity in play here either.  Rather, it is a straightforward hagiographic reference which is explained in the 521 lines that follow. At any rate, we have already established the fact that Chaucer knew the *Legenda Aurea* well enough to compose a saint's life based on Jacobus's version.  He even follows Jacobus's etymologies for St. Cecilia verbatim: "hevenes lilie," "wantynge of blindnesse," "the hevene of peple."  There is little left to explain of

this reference apart from, perhaps, wondering why it is that Chaucer has the Second Nun tell a hagiographic tale which everyone, for the most part, already knew intimately.

As her description in *The General Prologue* tells us, the Second Nun serves as the chaplain to the Prioress whom she has accompanied on the pilgrimage along with three priests. Her description, in contrast to the Prioress, goes almost without notice, yet it is the tale she tells which gives us insight into her character, just as is the case with the Prioress, whom one recalls tells a gruesome, anti-Semitic 'martyr" story of revenge about a young boy, Little St. Hugh. That tale serves as a bastardization of the hagiographic genre due to the fact that it fails to edify but rather foments hatred and anti-semistism. While the Prioress tale seems wholly inappropriate for someone of her rank, stature, and ostensible courtly demeanor, the Second Nun's recitation of the legend of a virgin martyr who dies defending her chastity is perfectly suitable to her station as a nun and chaplain. The contrasting tales of the two nuns serve to further the ambiguity of the Prioress's character, who in the light of *The Second Nun's Tale*, comes out worse for the wear.

**ST. CUTHBERT (CUTBERD) (634-687)**:

**"'Now, Symond,' seyde John, 'by Seint Cutberd,/Ay is thou myrie, and this is faire answer./I have her seyd, Man sal taa of twa thynges:/Slyk as he fyndes, or taa slyk as he brynges.'"—John the Clerk, *The Reeve's Tale*, (4127-30)**

*Scholarly Consensus:* John's invocation of the Northumbrian saint in *The Reeve's Tale* has been analyzed by one scholar, Katherine Brown Tkacz, who argues that the "Cutberd" reference is one in a long line of Chaucerian puns. Rather than being Cuthbert of Lindisfarne,

Brown Tkacz suggests that Cutberd is a bogus saint, St. Deceiver, who tricks the miller and figuratively "cuts his beard." In her article *Four Chaucer Saints,* Huff Cline notes that Cuthbert had entertained angels unaware.

    ***Summary of St. Cuthbert's Legend:*** St. Cuthbert, who hailed from Northumbria,[171] lived from 634-687. At different stages in his life, Cuthbert was a shepherd, a monk, an anchorite, the host of an ecclesiastical hostel, and the Bishop of Lindisfarne. Cuthbert was legendary for his hospitality both to visitors and to those whom he visited himself. The guest-host dynamic, therefore, played a central role in Cuthbert's legend. The saint was frequently visited by angels in the guise of humans, whose acts of kindness gave aid to Cuthbert during times of distress. In terms of his appeal to Chaucer, Cuthbert's fame in England would have made him an obvious choice for inclusion in *The Canterbury Tales*. As legend has it, when his casket was opened eleven years after his death, Cuthbert's body was found to be in an uncorrupt state. It was this strange phenomenon that led to Cuthbert's status as the most popular saint in northern England over the course of several centuries, a position Cuthbert maintained for nearly 500 years until the ascension of St. Thomas whose martyrdom and canonization in the late 12th century led to his apotheosis as England's most revered saint.

    As Bede recounts, Cuthbert received the first of several divine visitations at the age of eight when his destiny as a powerful figure in the church was foretold by a three-year old boy, an angel in disguise, who disrupted a game Cuthbert and his friends were playing. The child implored Cuthbert to stop wasting his time on games and collapsed to the ground in tears when Cuthbert ignored his plea and continued playing. Shaken by the child's grief, Cuthbert questioned him and learned from the child that he would become a great leader in the church.

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[171] Northumbria is the region near Melrose in modern-day Scotland.

From this point on, Cuthbert often found himself in the position of entertaining angels unaware. The following scenes from his legend are particularly significant to the Cuthbert oath in *The Reeve's Tale.*

Some time after becoming a monk Cuthbert was appointed to the position of host of a small cell in the abbey where it was his responsibility to provide guests with food, drink, and a comfortable place to rest. On one such occasion, Cuthbert received a group at the hostel whom he prepared to serve in the usual manner.  After going out to arrange for their needs, he was startled to find, upon coming back, that they had vanished without so much as a trace.  Cuthbert could find neither tracks in the snow nor any evidence of their presence until he returned to the hostel where he found a table elegantly set with three warm loaves of bread.  The room was filled with a heavenly aroma, and, as Bede tells us, Cuthbert knew his guests were angels in disguise:

> I see that it was an angel of God whom I received and that he came to feed and not to be fed.  Behold, he has brought loaves such as the earth cannot produce; for they excel the lily in whiteness, the rose in fragrance, and honey in taste.  Hence it follows
>
> that they have not come from this earth of ours but they have been brought from the paradise of joy.[172]

On another occasion, with winter fast approaching, Cuthbert traveled a desolate road on horseback until he came upon a house where he stopped to rest and to ask for supplies for his horse.  At the house, an elderly woman greeted Cuthbert and, as was customary, prepared a meal for the monk.  Cuthbert, however, refused to eat as he was fasting, Bede says, until around the third hour before sunset. The woman cautioned Cuthbert of the unlikely nature of his finding

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[172] Bertram Colgrave, ed., trans. *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 179.

lodging or food over the next day or so as she knew of no house on the road ahead. She pleaded with him to take food on his journey, but Cuthbert declined a second time out of his duty to the Lord. As he journeyed on, Cuthbert soon realized he would not reach his destination before the sun set. As night fell, and just as things began to look exceedingly grim, the saint spotted a row of deserted thatch huts built by shepherds for shelter during the summer. Cuthbert took his horse inside where he found some hay for the animal to eat. In the middle of saying his evening prayers, Cuthbert noticed his horse eating away at the hut's thatch roof when, all of a sudden, something wrapped in a cloth fell to the ground. Much to his amazement, Cuthbert found a loaf of hot bread along with meat which had been tucked away there in advance of his coming. After thanking God for helping him to break his fast, Cuthbert divided the bread with his horse. It was clear once again that Cuthbert had been taken care of by an angelic being, this time the elderly lady at whose house he had stopped in earlier in the day.

Of additional relevance to the Cuthbert oath in *The Reeve's Tale* is the account from Cuthbert's legend in which he is visited by a flock of greedy birds while he harvests wheat on Lindisfarne. Some time after moving to the island of Lindisfarne where, with the aid of angels, he built a cell in which to live from giant boulders, Cuthbert decided he should work the land himself rather than continue to accept bread from the people of the island. Thus, after gathering tools to do so, he planted some grain which he hoped to harvest that spring. Nonetheless, after a sufficient amount of time passed, much to his dismay, no crop grew. Cuthbert asked the islanders for barley to plant despite the fact that it was well past the planting season. He vowed that he would return to the religious community if the seed failed to yield a crop rather than depending on the labor of others to sustain himself. Not long after planting the barley seed, an abundant crop sprung forth and Cuthbert began to harvest it. However, it was only a matter of

time before a group of birds showed up and began to eat a large portion of the crop. Upon seeing this, Cuthbert scolded the birds for their greed and disrespect in eating what they did not sow and told them that unless they had God's blessing in what they were doing or more need of it than he, they should be ashamed for taking what did not belong to them. Cuthbert promptly banished them from the property.

Of further importance to the Cuthbert oath is the story of the two ravens which carried away thatch from the roof of the hostel in which Cuthbert had once served in order to build a nest. Upon seeing the birds do this, Cuthbert commanded them to return the straw to the brothers to whom it belonged, but the birds only mocked him in return. Cuthbert then commanded them in the name of Christ to leave at once and never return. At this, the birds left, and Cuthbert resumed his work. After three days elapsed, one of the birds returned humbly to ask forgiveness, and Cuthbert granted him his request to return to the island. Soon the second bird showed up with a gift of grease for Cuthbert, which the saint gladly accepted and used for many years after to lubricate the shoes of visitors and his fellow monks.

***Significance of the St. Cuthbert Reference***: Bearing in mind these four vignettes from Cuthbert's legend, one can begin to examine the implications of his invocation by the clerk in *The Canterbury Tales*. In addition to the fact that he is Northumbrian, Cuthbert's reputation for hospitality is clearly the reason, on the surface at least, why John—one of the two poor clerks from Cambridge who hopes to catch the miller at his cheating ways—swears by "Cutberd" in *The Reeve's Tale*. But, if one looks a bit closer at the way in which the tale unfolds, one will see how the specific incidents from Cuthbert's legend, recounted above, serve to deepen the overall meaning of the story.

Symkyn, the miller from Trumpington, has a reputation for taking advantage of his customers, especially, the Reeve tells us, those from Cambridge where he held a "sokene" or monopoly on grinding grain. In the past, we are told, Symkyn had used this as a license to steal a certain percentage from his clients, and though everyone knew he did it, since he was so cunning and intimidating to boot, no one could catch him in the act nor did anyone feel comfortable confronting him. The Reeve tells of two adventurous clerks from the north of England, John and Aleyn, who received permission, after much pleading, to take the college's grain to Symkyn for grinding, with the purpose of preventing the miller's chicanery or at the very least exposing the miller's illicit practices and catching him at his thievery.   Soon after their arrival, the clerks watch the miller grind their grain with great care, until the miller, well aware of the students' intentions, slips away, very briefly, and unties the knot of their horse's rein. Confident that they have thwarted the miller from stealing any of their grain, John and Aleyn prepare to head back to Cambridge with their meal. The clerks then realize that their horse has gotten loose and after several hours of chasing it, finally catch it as daylight begins to dwindle.  At this stage, it is too late for them to return to Cambridge, and, to make matters worse, while the clerks tracked down their horse, the miller helped himself to at least a "half bushel" of the clerks' meal, which his wife uses to bake a loaf of bread.  While the clerks bemoan their bad luck, the miller gloats over outsmarting the scholars and soon has them even further at his mercy:  with no place to go, they are forced to ask him to put them up for the night.

This point in the tale is where a noticeable shift in momentum begins to occur, and interestingly it does so around the invocation of St. Cuthbert at line 4127. It is telling that John's invocation of Cuthbert occurs almost exactly at the midpoint of the tale. The Miller tells the clerks that he has no rooms available except for the tiny room in which he and his family live,

but, he adds, since they are learned, perhaps through their "speche" they might succeed in making the room bigger.  In a classic example of adding insult to injury, the miller is not simply content to have stolen from the clerks and brought about their utter misfortune—he cheekily insults them as well.  Yet the clerks give credit where credit is due: they acknowledge the Miller's joke is a worthy or "faire" one even if it is made at their expense.  But they make this concession "by Cutberd."

From the standpoint of Chaucer's imaginable audience, it seems probable that the mention of Cuthbert at line 4127 would have drawn their attention in two different respects. First, it obviously would have prompted them to be on the alert for forthcoming parallels between the events of *The Reeve's Tale* and the *Life of St. Cuthbert*.  Second, as they considered what they had heard up to this point, they would have begun to realize that Chaucer had been building up to the introduction of Cuthbert and details from his legend all along.

The first parallel that would have been drawn would have been Symkyn's obligation to play the role of host, which he gladly accepts since the clerks are obligated to pay him; this runs parallel but obviously contrary to Cuthbert's job as hosteler.  Both the miller's quarters and Cuthbert's cell are small if not cramped. The invocation of Cuthbert by John would have brought these strands together in the minds of Chaucer's audience.  The attendant irony is that just as Cuthbert's reputation as a host was legendary, the miller also was rather well-known for his ill-treatment of "visitors" in his own little corner of the world.  So, perhaps John invokes the name of Cuthbert, the consummate Christian host, as a talisman, a means of protection against the kind of hospitality he has come to expect from the miller. The mention of Cuthbert's name presumably would put the Miller on notice to engage in fair play and would have given the Miller pause to institute a cease-fire since he had profited so greatly off of the men from

Cambridge. He has conducted himself in a fashion antithetical to that of the saint who has just

been invoked, and one doubts in all seriousness that he would have been too bothered by the

suggestion in the oath that Cuthbert had a lengthy history of hosting angels.

Though John and Aleyn prove to be anything but angelic in their conduct, Chaucer keeps

the divine moments in Cuthbert's legend close at hand for ironic effect. He never lets us stray

very far from the aspects of the legend which call to mind angelic visitors who appear and

disappear with no trace. This also applies to the miller, who, one recalls, disappears briefly in

order to set the clerks' horse free. The miller's thievery of the clerks' meal also reminds one of

another scene from the legend in which the ravens steal Cuthbert's crop of barley. After the

birds ravage his crop, the saint addresses them as follows:

> "Why," said he, "do you touch the crops that you did not sow? Or is it, perchance, that
> you have greater need of them than I? If, however, you have received permission from
> God do what He has allowed you; but if not, depart and do not injure any more the
> possessions of another."[173]

As stated above, the miller does have a "sokene" or license to grind meal in the area but

that by no means suggests that he has the permission of God or a greater need than the clerks.

The hagiographic contrast is clear in this case. Yet the miller can hardly be banished from his

own property, and he appears to lack the capacity to repent, so the clerks are left to take matters

into their own hands, "touching" or taking that which belongs to the miller in return.

An additional reference from the legend of Cuthbert bears this point out. As discussed,

Cuthbert's *vita* includes multiple references to bread and wheat, which solidifies the connection

between the legend and *The Reeve's Tale*. Angels leave Cuthbert loaves of bread for his

hospitality, and much later in his legend, Cuthbert comes upon a hut with a loaf of bread and

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[173] Colgrave, 223.

meat in the roof, presumably set there by a female angel looking out for him on his arduous journey. Of course, in *The Reeve's Tale*, Simkin's daughter tells Aleyn to look in the mill by the main entrance door where he will find a cake baked of half a bushel of his very own "mele." Following the tit-for-tat motif—he has referred to his sexual encounter with her as "grinding the corn"—things have come full circle with her revelation. She is his angel in more ways than one, and in the end, the clerks take back from the miller not only those things that they sowed but also those things which they reaped.

## D

**ST. DENYS (DIONYSIUS, DENIS) (d. c. 250**):

**(1) "I clepe hum so, by Seint Denys of Fraunce/To have the moore cause of gurayntanne/Of yow, which I have loved specially/Aboven alle women sikerly."—Daun John,** *The Shipman's Tale* **(1341-44)**

**(2)** *The Shipman's Tale* **is set in the city of St. Denys.**

*Scholarly consensus*: Hermann (1985) and Keen (2000) have written the most convincing arguments to date on hagiographic oaths and saints' names in *The Shipman's Tale*. Both have discussed the extent to which John's oath by St. Denys draws one's attention toward the irony in the monk's actions vis-à-vis the saint's legend. By analyzing two specific episodes from Denys' life in the *Legenda Aurea*, Keen illustrates how the oath serves to underscore the monk's hypocritical tendencies, both physical and verbal. Denys' virtuous life, coupled with his capacity for surviving extreme heat and mastering animals act as contrasting examples in relation to the monk's sleazy disposition, characterized by his inability to survive the "heat" of lust and

his own animalistic tendencies.  Keen also sees Jacobus' etymology for Denys—"one who flees

swiftly"—as grounds for an ironic parallel with the monk who flees the scene after wreaking

havoc on at least two separate occasions.

Hermann's emphasis on the topos of "dismemberment" in the tale leads him to look more

closely at St. Denys' death by beheading.  The saint's decapitation serves to highlight the general

mood of separation in the lives of the three characters, especially in respect to their obligations,

both contractually and sexually.

***Summary of St. Denys' Legend***:  Dionysius, or Denys, was the first Bishop of Paris and

the patron saint of France.  He was martyred alongside his companions Rusticus and Eleutherius,

whose legends Jacobus recounts in the *Legenda Aurea*.  Dionysius was a brilliant philosopher

who lived in Areopagus, a wealthy district of Athens in which several schools of the liberal arts

were instituted.  Dionysius "The Areopagite" was converted by Paul in Athens following the

apostle's debates with the Stoics and Epicureans.  Paul found Dionysius to be the most learned in

respect to theology and was satisfied with the answers the philosopher gave regarding the

"unknown God" to whom the Greeks had established a shrine after the strange phenomenon of

total darkness which enveloped the world on the day of Christ's passion.  Dionysius had

explained the phenomenon as one in which the "God of nature" suffered, but, he added, "This

dark night which we regard as something new, signals the coming of the whole world's true

light."[174]  Dionysius was therefore already predisposed to Paul's proclamation that the "unknown

God" was the true God "who made the heavens and earth."[175]  But, before converting, Dionysius

challenged Paul to heal a blind man in the name of this God.  Yet, to discourage Paul from using

magic which might also succeed in healing the man, Dionysius gave Paul the specific words to

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[174] Jacobus, 238.

[175] *Ibid*.

utter. Paul, fearing Dionysius would remain skeptical, insisted that the philosopher himself utter the words from the Apostle's Creed. Dionysius did so, and the man was healed. As a result, Dionysius and his entire family were baptized. He studied under Paul for three years and was then ordained bishop of Athens. Dionysius, held to be an amazing orator, was responsible for converting much of Athens and the surrounding areas of Greece to Christianity.

Dionysius was said to have corresponded with John during his exile on Patmos as well as being at the "dormition" of the Blessed Virgin Mary. After Peter's martyrdom, Clement became Pope and sent Dionysius to France, where he helped in the conversion of thousands in addition to overseeing the building of numerous churches. Yet, this success came at a great price. The devil resented Dionysius' conversion rate and soon convinced Domitian, the emperor, to decree that all Christians must either make sacrifice or be mercilessly tortured. Soon after, Dionysius was captured while preaching and thrown into prison where he was beaten and taken before the prefect along with Eleutherius and Rusticus. They confessed their faith but were renounced by a noblewoman who accused them of tricking her "fickle" husband. The noblewoman's husband came forth and also made his confession, after which the prefect put him to death. The next day the prefect had Denys placed on an iron grill naked over a roaring fire, though he remained immune to its effects while singing the Lord's praises. He was taken off the grill and thrown to the lions and tigers but they refused to eat him after he made the sign of the cross. Dionysius was then crucified but before he could die he was taken down and returned to prison. There, he said Mass for the prisoners, and as he prepared communion, Christ came into the prison and gave Dionysius the host to eat, telling him that his reward would be great. In the morning Dionysius, Rusticus, and Eleutherius were beheaded. Dionysius' body stood up, grabbed his head from the

ground and immediately began to walk after an angel towards Montmartre where his remains lay.

*__Significance of the St. Denys Reference:__* A significant episode from Denys' legend, not previously discussed, of particular relevance to the monk's oath by St. Denys, concerns the "noblewoman" who charges that Denys, Rusticus, and Eleutherius "grossly and shamefully deceived her fickle husband into accepting the faith."[176] The themes of fickleness, deceit, and loyalty, not to mention the act of confession which results in martyrdom, pervade this brief vignette and are important for understanding the irony inherent to the St. Denys' oath in *The Shipman's Tale*.

Interestingly, this is the only scene in Jacobus' account of Denys' life involving a woman.[177] More importantly, for our purposes in analyzing the oath in *The Shiptman's Tale*, is the fact that the scene involves a *wife* who believes that she and her husband have been victimized by three con artists masquerading as holy men. In the process of renouncing Denys, Rusticus, and Eleutherius, the noblewoman basically betrays her husband, who proves to be anything but fickle in his allegiance to Christ. The husband remains steadfast, makes his confession to the prefect, and then, as Jacobus says, "was unjustly put to death." [178] Finally, the Wife's language in the scene in which the monk swears by St. Denys is redolent of martyrdom, a further irony in light of the quadruple martyrdoms that take place on the heels of the noblewoman's accusations. It stands to reason that Chaucer surely had in mind this episode,

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[176] Jacobus, 236.

[177] In *The Golden Legend*, Denys's martyrdom inspires the prefect's wife, Laertia, to proclaim her belief in Christ. She, too, is beheaded for her *confessio fidei*. Laertia appears *after* Denys's death.

[178] Jacobus, 240.

packed with hagiographic echoes and ironic parallels from Denys' legend, when the monk swears by St. Denys.

In Denys' legend, the act of renunciation by the noblewoman occurs in the midst of the three confessions being given to the prefect by SS. Denys, Rusticus, and Eleutherius. These three are also followed by a fourth confession given by her husband. Ironically, the monk's oath by St. Denys in *The Shipman's Tale* takes place in the middle of a confession the Wife gives regarding her feelings towards her husband with whom her loyalties clearly no longer lie. The monk encourages her to do so and promises that he will never betray her: "For on my porehors I make an ooth/That nevere in my lyf, for lief ne looth/Ne shal I of no conseil yow biwreye" (1321-23). Within the pretext of this holy confidence, conducted within a private garden, she calls her husband, "the worste man/That evere was sith that the world bigan" (1351-52). Not content with simply besmirching her husband's good name, she accuses him of blatant disregard for her feelings and needs and strikes an agreement with the monk to borrow one hundred francs, in turn promising the monk whatever he wishes as payment. Thus, the theme of the fickle husband in Denys' legend is inverted in *The Shipman's Tale* by the Wife's egregious disloyalty in respect to her husband, not to mention the monk's own fickleness as evidenced by his expedient dismissal of his self-proclaimed blood relation to and purported close friendship with the merchant. In denying his allegiance to the merchant, the monk, too, offers his own confession:

> He is na moore cosyn unto me/Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree!/I clepe
> him so, by Seint Denys of Fraunce/To have the moor cause of aquenyntaunce/Of yow…"
> (1339-1343).

In one fell swoop, the affection that both had previously held for the merchant is undercut by an unholy alliance the monk seals with a pat on the Wife's "flankes," an embrace, and several parting kisses.

A second ironic evocation of the St. Denys' legend present in *The Shipman's Tale* is the manner in which the Wife's language parodies the multiple acts of martyrdom that occur on the heels of the noblewoman's accusation. As the scene begins, the Wife playfully questions Daun John as to why he is "so rathe for to ryse" (1289); the monk uses this seemingly harmless question about his sleep habits as an opportunity to segue into an invective against "wedded men" whom he compares to a "wery hare ... forstraught with houndes grete and smale" (1293-95). Daun John then questions the Wife about her pale complexion and suggests that her husband must have kept her up all night engaged in sexual exploits. Her reply is an extended one in which she speaks of her sexual frustration and financial deprivation in terms of "life and death." She gravely intones that had she "a space" (the time), then she would "telle a legende of my lyf/What I have suffred sith I was a wyf" (143-46). The language of mock martyrdom continues throughout their dialogue as she promises to keep her agreement with the monk a secret, "Though men me wolde al into pieces tere" (1326)—a statement which calls to mind the gory death of many a martyr including, of course, Denys' death by decapitation. Furthermore, she swears by the "ilke Lord that for us bledde" that she must receive money in order to buy new clothes by next "Sonday." The monk, she says, holds the key to her salvation, without which "moot I deye" (1376).

One final irony related to the legend of St. Denys is the monk's general abuse of his office as priest. In bringing her charge forward, the noblewoman in Denys' legend asserts that her husband has been tricked by three charlatans, who deceive her husband into believing

something she and others hold to be untrue. This parallel would not have been lost on Chaucer's audience, who would have recognized the irony in the fact that Daun John swears by a saint who, himself, is accused of being a fraud. The sympathetic reader, of course, recognizes that Denys, Rusticus, and Eleutherius were not out to trick the noblewoman's husband; rather, it is Daun John who abuses his vow of chastity, baiting, rather than discouraging, the Wife into a treacherous arrangement, the payment for which is adultery: a mortal sin, the commitment of which would have placed her soul, and his, in peril. Finally, back to the theme of confession that plays such a prominent role in Denys' legend, the Monk blasphemes the sacred role of the priest as the bearer of the sacrament of penance. He hears the Wife's "confession" but offers no absolution and even goes so far as to violate the sacred seal of the "mock" confessional by divulging their sworn "secret" about their financial transaction. Ultimately, it is left up to the husband—the cuckold and perhaps the only character resembling a martyr—not the monk—to offer absolution to his wife:

> "Now wyf," he syde, "and I foryeve it thee;
>
> But by thy lyf, ne ba namoore so large.
>
> Keep bet thy good, this yeve I thee in charge." (1620-22)

**ST. DUNSTAN (925-988)[179]:**

**"And somtyme be we servant unto man,/As to the erchebishop Seint Dunstan/And to the apostles servant eek was I." —The Feend/Yeoman, *The Friar's Tale* (1501-1503*)**

_**Summary of St. Dunstan's Legend**_: Dunstan was born in A.D. 925. His parents, Herston and Quendred, were Anglo-Saxon nobles in Baltonsborough, just outside of Glastonbury.

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[179] Jacobus, trans. by William Caxton, Vol. III, 87-89.

Dunstan is credited with his first miracle while still in his mother's womb. As Caxton tells the story, this miracle took place on Candlemas day, an occasion on which all the parishioners carried lit candles in a procession inside the church. On this particular night, all of the candles except one, Dunstan's mother's, burned out at the same time. As hers burned, the rest were able to light theirs from Dunstan's mother's, which led a holy man to declare that Dunstan would one day be the light of England.

Dunstan was schooled at the abbey of Glastonbury where he later became abbot. Afterwards he spent time in Canterbury with his uncle Ethelwold who was bishop, continuing his education, until Ethelwold took Dunstan to stay with and learn from King Athelstan. Dunstan became a Benedictine monk, again in Glastonbury, where he acquired a variety of skills, academic and artistic, including casting bells, carving crucifixes, and making musical instruments. When he grew tired from his daily round of praying, Dunstan was known to pass the time working at the abbey as a goldsmith. As a result, Dunstan is the patron saint of goldsmiths, blacksmiths, and armorers. Dunstan's innumerable talents made him the envy of Satan who begrudged that one man could be so holy and multi-talented at the same time.

One day when Dunstan was busy at work making a chalice, he received a visit from a woman who smiled at him and flattered him, speaking, as Caxton notes, without virtue but with many nice trifles. Dunstan began to suspect that this was no ordinary woman, perhaps no woman at all, and possibly a demon, so he grabbed her by the nose with a pair of fiery hot tongs just removed from the crucible. The demon writhed and wailed and tried to pull free, but Dunstan held fast, refusing to let the spirit go until late into the night. Finally, the departing spirit let out a horrible cry, embarrassed at the shame Dunstan had caused. The demon never returned again to tempt Dunstan.

Dunstan was appointed to chief counsel for King Edmond who ascended to the throne at the death of his brother, Athelstan. Dunstan served him well throughout the king's reign. However, the new King, Edmond's son Edwin, disagreed with Dunstan's uncompromising counsel that he should live a less sinful life; therefore Dunstan was exiled to France where he stayed until Edwin was replaced by Edgar. At the behest of Edgar, Dunstan returned to England where he eventually became Archbishop of Canterbury. Dunstan's reputation as a holy and good leader was renowned throughout England. As he approached nearer to the time of his death, Dunstan received a special miracle from heaven as he sat in a contemplative state in his chamber. A harp which hung on the wall in his room on which he often played hymns to the Virgin Mary and the saints began to play a hymn of its own accord; this brought great joy and comfort to Dunstan, who a few days later became ill and passed away. Dunstan's soul was lifted up to heaven by a band of angels in A.D. 988. His remains are at a shrine in Canterbury.

*__Significance of the St. Dunstan Reference:__* In *The Friar's Tale*, the summoner is curious as to why the Yeoman/Fiend bothers to change his appearance and works so hard in order to get his prey. He says, "What maketh yow to han al this labour?" (1473). The Fiend's response is that, "For somtyme we been Goddes instrumentz/And meenes to do his comandementz" (1483-84). He goes on to credit God for his power and gives examples of times when demons have worked for God to the benefit of man, as in the case of Job and in the many instances in which they have tempted men who have withstood temptation and become stronger. The Fiend also mentions that in addition to serving God, "somtyme be we servant unto man/As to the erchebisshop Seint Dunstan/And to the apostles servant eek was I" (1501-03). This is the setting in which the St. Dunstan reference occurs, as the pair rides on to see how much they can acquire in the form of ill-gotten gains on this day.

The reference to Dunstan evokes one particular scene from the saint's legend, perhaps the most memorable scene, in which he is visited by a demon dressed as a beautiful woman. The demon proceeds to flatter Dunstan, who is working on a chalice, and the saint reaches up and grabs the woman on the nose with a pair of hot pincers. Dunstan holds the demon all day and humiliates it before finally letting it go. In neither of the accounts in the *The South English Legendary*[180] or in Caxtons' *Legenda* does Dunstan actually put the demon to work, but, in a manner of speaking, he most certainly *works* the demon over himself.

Dunstan clearly possesses a power over demons in a physical sense and also has the very useful skill of being able to recognize demons in disguise. This latter point is the basis for the reference in *The Friar's Tale*, except in this instance the demon reveals his identity to the summoner, rather than being unmasked: "'Brother,' quod he, 'wiltow that I thee telle?/I am a feend; my dwelling is in helle'" (1447-48). The demon goes on to provide a detailed account of the various shapes and sizes he and others of his kind can assume for the benefit of plying their trade. Yet, all during this discourse, the summoner does not seem to understand that the real threat is to his soul, which is, in many ways, as corrupt as the demon's. As the tale unfolds, the Fiend takes what is rightfully his based on the agreement he has struck with the summoner. His prize is to take the summoner, body and soul, into hell, where he promises to educate him to the fullest degree on the ways of demons: "Thou shalt with me to helle yet tonyght,/Where thou shalt knowne of our privetee/Moore than a masister of dyvynytee" (1636-38). The reference to St. Dunstan's knowledge of and legendary control over demons in disguise points to an irony which Chaucer seems to offer as the message of this story. When those vested with the power and

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[180] See D'Evelyn's and Mill's, *The South English Legendary*, 206-207.

authority of the Church are so blinded by their own corruption that they can't recognize evil right in front of their noses, to hell with them!

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**E**

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**ST. EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (1003-1066)[181]:**

**"I wol doon al my diligence,/As fer as sowneth into honestee,/To telle yow a tale, or two, or three./And if yow list to herkne hyderward,/I wol yow seyn the lyf of Seint Edward"—the Monk,** *The Monk's Prologue* **(1966-1970)**

*Scholarly Consensus*: Very little has been done in the way of determining precisely which "Edward" the Monk intends to tell a life of in his tale, perhaps due to the fact that the he never gets around to doing so and in the process leaves us with very few clues. Rather than recounting a saint's life, the Monk decides instead to present a catalog of tragedies, starting with Lucifer and concluding with Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Cresus. He might have gotten around to telling the "lyf," but Harry Bailly can take no more and stops him from going forward. In terms of the consensus on Edward, scholars have typically sided with Skeat, always a useful resource for identifications, who states that, "Edward the Confessor is certainly meant."[182] Jacqueline de Weever echoes Skeat's conclusion with slightly less assurance: "The Monk announces that his tale will be about Saint Edward … referring, most likely, to Edward the Confessor."[183] And Larry Benson identifies St. Edward as "Edward the Confessor" in his notes to *The Riverside Chaucer*.[184]

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[181] Jacobus, trans. by William Caxton, Vol. III, 33-35.
[182] Skeat, 227.
[183] de Weever, 120.
[184] Chaucer, 241.

***Summary of St. Edward's Legend***: The last of the Anglo-Saxons to reign, Edward was one of the most celebrated and beloved kings of England, thanks in part to his restoration of the royal line after a period of Danish usurpation. He was renowned for his holiness and unmatched leadership. It was not until after his 40th year that Edward the Confessor returned to England to fulfill his destiny. After his coronation, Edward returned England to a time of great prosperity and one of spiritual renaissance. Jacobus describes it in these terms: "The sun was lifted up, and the moon set in his order, that is to say, priests shined in wisdom and holiness." The king's piety, virtue, and chastity were a model for all. The holy king became renowned throughout Cristendom for his wise counsel and reputation for fairness, a trait solidified by his eventual renunciation of an unfair tax which his advisers had encouraged him to implement. After the tax was collected, Edward saw a black devil sitting on the pile of money his men had collected and knew that the tax was corrupt.

He only agreed to marriage under the condition that his vow of chastity would not be compromised. Thus, Edward and his wife, Edith, remained chaste and lived a life together described by Jacobus as "a loving spousehood without bodily knowing."

Edward's acts of healing were numerous. One of the more famous episodes involved a cripple named Giles Michell who was born without any feet. One day Michell broke into the palace where he explained to the king's chamberlain that he had visited the relics of St. Peter on six separate occasions, each time praying to be healed. On Michell's last visit, St. Peter told him he would be healed if King Edward were to carry him on his back into the church of St. Peter. Edward took pity on Michell and carried him on his shoulders into the church. The cripple's racked body loosened up and became whole. But, in his typical self-effacing manner, Edward gave Michell a reward, rather than taking credit for the miracle, and sent him to Rome for a

seventh time to pay honor to St. Peter. Late in his life, Edward was on his way to a church in Essex in the process of being dedicated to St. John when an old beggar approached and asked for alms in the name of St. John. Edward's almoner was nowhere to be found, so Edward took off his ring and gave it to the old man who duly thanked Edward. Several years later, two men from England were in the midst of a pilgrimage to the holy land when they got lost. As night fell they began to fear for their lives. They came upon a group of elderly men dressed in white robes, the leader of which approached them and asked them of their origin. When he learned the pilgrims were from England and that they were lost, he assured them that they had no need to worry. He took them into a beautiful city where they ate and were rejuvenated. He overheard the pilgrims speak highly of Edward, their king. As they were set to depart, the old man told the pilgrims his name: St. John the Evangelist. He produced the ring Edward had given to him years ago at the hallowing of his church, and the saint asked them to return it to Edward. John also told the pilgrims to inform Edward that he would die in 6 months. Edward's joy at the receipt of this news was great. His death came later that year in 1066 and his legend states that his body became luminous at the moment his soul departed.

 ***<u>Significance of the St. Edward Reference:</u>*** In light of the Monk's portrait in *The General Prologue* as one who has little if any time for the monastic teachings of Benedict, Maurus, and Augustine, it comes as no great shock when he decides to forgo telling the *Life of St. Edward*, a story one presumes most monks would have known well and, as such, would have excelled at telling in the tradition of the *exemplum*. The fact that he backs off and settles on a gloomy set of tragedies which emphasize Fortune's control over the vagaries of material existence does not seem entirely inappropriate either, though it is odd that a monk would not emphasize redemption through Christ as the moral to these vignettes. Instead he fixates on the

fickleness of Fortune, whose presence underpins his tragedies.  Benson notes this idea in his profile of *The Monk's Tale*:  "The world as it appears in *The Monk's Tale* is a grim and discouraging place in which happiness is to be avoided … Such a view fits well with the Monk's profession; it embodies the monastic imperative to flee this miserable world and seek God in the security of the cloister."  Yet, ironically, this Monk does not ascribe to such a world. On the contrary, he revels in the material world and wishes for nothing more than to operate in a world without control and devoid of boundaries.  As one recalls from the Monk's portrait, Chaucer likens a monk without rules to a fish out of water.  The St. Edward reference, then, seems in some strange way to operate by negation.  By *not* telling the story of Edward's exemplary life (or the tale of the young martyred king) but instead resorting to a design for life which he disregards at will, the Monk's connection to the cloistered life becomes further effaced, and in the process he reveals himself for the hedonist he truly aspires to be.

**ST. ELIGIUS (ELOY, LOY, LOYE)  (588-660)**[185]:

(1) **"Hir gretteste ooth was but by Seinte Loy/And she was cleped madame Eglentyne." —Chaucer,** *The General Prologue*, **(120-121)**

(2) **"That was wel twight, myn owene lyard boy./I pray God save thee/And Seinte Loy!"—the Carter,** *The Friar's Tale,* **(158-159)**

*Scholarly Consensus:*  The Prioress' "greeteste ooth" has been written about more often than any other hagiographic oath or reference in *The Canterbury Tales*.  Beginning with Hales' letter in *The Athenaeum* in 1891 to Haskell's chapter on Loy in 1976, this oath has beguiled scholars who have approached it from every imaginable historical perspective.  In Hales'

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[185] Jacobus, trans. by William Caxton, Vol. III, 120-123.

estimation the Prioress' oath was not an "oath" at all since Loy refused to swear one. Skeat gives his approval to Hales' position and suggests, too, that perhaps the Prioress swore by him because she had an appreciation for jewelry. In 1907, Hammond counters Hales' conclusion with the details from Lydgate which suggest that Loy was the patron saint of pilgrimages. Lowes notes that Loye had a penchant for personal adornment, a likely basis for the Prioress' oath. Lynch suggests St. Eulalia, a female saint, whose name, at least in one instance, was pronounced on a nearly equivalent basis to Loy. He conjectures that Chaucer "may" have come across Eulalia in his documented travels near the south of France. In 1959, Steadman revisits Hales'position that the oath was not in fact an oath, providing solid evidence of this fact from the Vita S. Eligii by St. Ouen. He also notes an important connection between Eligius and St. Godebertha, the abbess of Noyon, whom Eligius "affianced" to the Church with his own personal ring. He sees this example of selflessness in respect to a Godebertha as a basis for any nun to invoke Loy. Steadman, therefore, sees Eligius as being a "singularly appropriate saint" for any nun to call on, particularly one like the Prioress, for whom, it seems, giving up the spoils of the material world was hard. This observation opens up a new layer of ambiguity in respect to the Prioress portrait. The accrual of meaning in terms of the St. Loy oath is not lost on Steadman, who admonishes those who would put too much emphasis on one interpretation at the expense of another. This leads into the final assessment to date of the Prioress' "gretteste ooth," given by Haskell who builds on Steadman's identification of Godebertha and the ring by identifying three other ladies of the St. Loy "salon" whom the Prioress "would have found socially correct": St. Gertrude, St. Bathilda, and St. Aurea, each of whom possessed specific personal traits (austerity of dress, fastidiousness, and extreme penance) that provide contrasting character traits to the portrait of the Prioress.

_**Summary of St. Loy's Legend:**_  Loy came from Limoges in France.  When his mother,

Terrigia, was pregnant with him, she had a dream in which an eagle flew over her bed and bowed

to her three times, promising the child would have a great future.  During Loy's delivery,

Terrigia and the child were in grave danger, so she called for a holy man to come to her bedside

and pray for her and the child.  He assured her that she should not fear because her son would

grow up to be a great leader in the church.  In his youth, Loy was apprenticed to a goldsmith and

as he grew in virtue he also grew in skill. As a goldsmith Loy's talents were unmatched. Loy's

reputation as a goldsmith of unparalleled skill resulted from an assignment his master was given

to make a jewel-encrusted gold saddle for the king of France.  The master goldsmith knew Loy's

talent would more than suffice in such an instance, so the young apprentice was given the

assignment.  Loy fashioned not one but two saddles of incredible beauty, presenting the first to

the King and then later giving him the second.  It also was at this time that Loy's reputation as a

provider for the poor began to grow.  He loved the poor and gave his possessions and clothes to

them whenever the opportunity arose.  Caxton tells us that on many occasions Loy was reduced

to nakedness due to his largesse.  Loy became the patron saint both of the poor and of

blacksmiths and goldsmiths.  Loy gave so often and willingly to the poor that one day, when he

had given everything he had in his possession to a group of beggars, he had no more to give

when the next group approached him.  Undaunted, he borrowed money from a friend of his so

that the others would not go away empty-handed. After this exchange, even more beggars came

and upon putting his hand in his purse, which he knew was empty, Loy found more gold coins

which he eagerly distributed.

Loy's example was much admired by the king, who encouraged his followers to give Loy

whatever he needed.  Loy in turn made sure that whatever he was given was divided among the

poor. Loy was appointed Bishop of Noyen, where he ministered to the needy by feeding and clothing them. Every day he brought in twelve people from the streets to his table and fed them. St. Loy also took it upon himself to seek out the condemned of his region, who had been hanged, in order to give their bodies a proper burial.

Loy spent much of his spare time decorating tombs of the martyrs including Columba, Germain, Severin, Martin, and Denys. One year after Loy's death, a group of monks were given word to move his body to a new location. Loy was found in an incorrupt state and most mysteriously, despite the fact that he had been shaved cleanly in preparation for his burial, his beard and hair had grown in fully as if he were still alive.

*__Significance of the St. Loy Reference:__* The large body of criticism devoted to explaining the Prioress' "greeteste ooth" leaves little in the way of room for new interpretations. The historical evidence in respect to Loy's courtly background has been thoroughly fleshed out by Steadman and Haskell. Their "discoveries" of the nuns, Godebertha, Bathilda, Aurea, and Gertrude, are the most recent additions to a dense body of scholarship which has diverged wildly in its high praise for the piety and decorousness of the Prioress and the belief that she is a hypocrite whose outward emphasis on social niceties, material possessions, and appearance undercuts her feigned piety.

The oath by St. Loy in *The Friar's Tale*, however, lacks the ambiguity found in the Prioress's oath in *The General Prologue.* As the Fiend and the summoner travel along the road in search of prey and "pley," they come upon a carter whose horse and cart are stuck in the mud. The carter curses his fate and offers his cart, horse, and hay to the devil out of sheer frustration. The summoner sees this as an opportunity for the Fiend to cash in, but the demon realizes the carter does not mean what he says: "It is nat his entente, trust me weel" (1556). Eventually, the

carter gets his horse and cart out of the mud and proves the Fiend right, praising his horse, "the

lyard boy," in the name of God and St. Loy: "I pray God save thee, and Seint Loy!/Now is my

cart out of the slow, pardee!" (1564-65). The invocation of Loy in this scene has a two-fold

significance. By virtue of the beautiful saddles he fashioned for the king of France, Loy became

known as the patron saint of goldsmiths and blacksmiths; his association with horses via his

patronage of blacksmiths as well as his association with horses in the *Legenda*, led him to

become the patron saint of carters, therefore a most appropriate hagiographic reference in this

particular case.

## F

**ST. FRIDESWIDE (FRYDESWYDE) (c. 680-735)**[186]**:**

**"This carpenter to blessen hym bigan,/And seyde, "Help us, Seinte Frydeswyde;/A**

**man woot litel what hym shal bityde/This man is falle, with his astroyme,/In some**

**woodnesse or in some agonye."—John the carpenter,** *The Miller's Tale* **(3448-3452)**

*Scholarly Consensus*: Frideswide is mentioned only once in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Though very little has been written about the carpenter's invocation of St. Frideswide, two critics

have briefly remarked on its significance. In his note on St. Frideswide, Skeat mentions that the

priory of St. Frideswide is now the town's cathedral. This connection with Oxford, he states, is

sufficient reason for the carpenter to invoke her.[187] Huff-Cline views Frideswide's healing

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[186]My summary is based on two slightly different versions of the Life of St. Frideswide:
*The Shorter South English Legendary Life of St. Frideswide* from the Trinity College, Cambridge
manuscript MS 605, fols. 247r-248v and the *Longer South English Legendary Life of St.
Frideswide* from the Bodleian Library manuscript Ashmole 43, fols 155v-157v.
[187] Skeat, 105.

power as the basis of John's invocation. John, she states, hopes Frideswide will intervene and heal Nicholas of his illness.[188]

***Summary of St. Frideswide's Legend***: Frideswide was the patron saint of the town and University of Oxford in England, and was the first abbess of the monastery she founded in A.D. 735. Her name in Old English, "Friðe" or Frith means "peace," and "swiþ" means "strength." In medieval iconography Frideswide is portrayed in the black and white habit of her order. Medieval stained glass windows in Christ Church Oxford depict her either holding a flower, an open book, next to a kneeling ox, having her hair cut, and curing the blindness of Prince Algar's messenger.

Frideswide was a precocious child with a strong love of God. When her mother died, she begged her father, King Dydan of Oxford, not to remarry but to build a church. Dydan dedicated the church to the Virgin Mary, The Holy Trinity, and All Saints. A few years later, at her request, Dydan endowed Frideswide to the Church and eventually she entered a nunnery. To symbolize her passage from secular life to holy orders, Edgar, the Bishop of Lincoln, cut Frideswide's hair.

As a nun, Frideswide's devotion to God and her daily offices went unrivalled. The devil took note of her purity and came to her cell one night, dressed as a nobleman, intent on seducing her. Frideswide's reward, he promised, would be a gold crown just like his if she agreed to worship him.[189] But the nun saw through the ruse and told Satan to flee from her as she made the sign of the cross.

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[188] *Op. cit.*

[189] In the *Longer South English Legendary Life of St. Frideswide*, Satan claims he is Jesus Christ and that his accompanying devils are angels from Heaven. Frideswide recognizes him as a fraud and rebukes him for offering something not rightly his to offer. She implores him to return to hell and to never darken the door of church or hall again.

With the death of Dydan, Algar ascended to the throne.  The devil soon turned his attention to the new king, whose mind he filled with lewd thoughts of Frideswide. Algar devised a plan, under Satan's sway, to marry her in order to fulfill his wanton desires. He sent messengers to Oxford to bring Frideswide back, but she refused on the grounds of her betrothal to God, a vow she had sworn not to break. Algar's messengers forced Frideswide to go with them, but, all of a sudden, they went blind. As news of this miracle spread, the citizens of Oxford begged Frideswide to restore the men's sight.  In the meantime, Algar learned of Frideswide's refusal and swore revenge.  He vowed to defile her and to have others, more lecherous and wanton in their desires, do the same.  He wished to degrade her into a "comun hore." Frideswide left the convent with two sisters in a boat on the Thames, and an angel guided them to a forest outside of Bampton where Frideswide hid in a cave.[190]

Algar traveled to Bampton and questioned the townspeople.  Since no one could tell him where she was, he threatened to kill the men of the village and to wreak havoc in general.[191] But, just as Algar prepared to begin his carnage he went blind. Thereafter, he wandered aimlessly in the village where people believed he had been blind his whole life.

With this news, Frideswide set out for Oxford, but first she stopped in the woods of Binsey where she built a chapel dedicated to Saint Margaret. The sisters there complained that there was no water.  Frideswide asked God for his grace, and to everyone's amazement a spring

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[190] Legend also tells of Frideswide hiding from Algar in a pig sty which is especially relevant to our discussion of Frideswide and John the carpenter in *The Miller's Tale*.

[191] Eventually he learned her whereabouts and set out, once again, to capture her. Frideswide fled as the king and his men approached.  As she ran to town, Algar pursued her relentlessly, yet, as they reached the city gate, his horse stumbled; Algar fell and broke his neck. The king's men refused to pursue Frideswide any further, so she returned to her home, the nunnery where she was safeguarded.

sprung up with pure water.  According to the legend, the well became a source for healing and is still present at St. Margaret's today.[192]

As news of her return to Oxford spread, Frideswide passed throngs of people along the road, including an hideous leper who accosted her and asked Frideswide to kiss him with "her sweet mouth" in the name of Jesus Christ.  Frideswide is described as being quite embarrassed by this request, which she essentially ignored at first.  However, the leper was determined, and eventually Frideswide relented, giving the man a kiss on the mouth.  The leper was healed of his affliction instantly.

**_Significance of the St. Frideswide Reference:_**  Wilson has demonstrated how in the case of *The Miller's Tale* Chaucer uses analogical logic to introduce "hagiographic plot details" that are then "translated into a game mode … involving 'play' in the erotic sense."[193]  She notes that the process "involves a literal reenactment of the nuclei (motifs) of the hagiographic tales and, simultaneously, their metaphoric burlesque."[194]  Among the parodies she interprets is the scene in which Alison "pretends to kiss Absolon but does something entirely different," and the scene in which Nicholas "pretends to be saving the carpenter's life while he cuckolds him."[195]  The resulting effect of this "play" is typically an inversion, or, in some instances, even a perversion of the hagiographic story's outcome.  I will argue that the carpenter's invocation of St. Frideswide lends itself well to this approach, particularly in terms of the scene in which Alison

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[192] Supposedly the well attributed to St. Frideswide's miracle in Binsey at the Church of St. Margaret still exists today. It is known as the "Treacle Well" since in the Middle Ages, treacle was held to be an antidote to poison and many were healed by its water.  The well at St. Margaret's is also thought to be the well from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*.

[193] Wilson, 43.

[194] *Ibid*.

[195] *Ibid*, 44.

promises to kiss Absolon.  Moreover, there are other instances in the tale in which Chaucer

clearly utilizes analogical logic to tease out comparisons between St. Frideswide and Alison.

In the mind of John the carpenter, Nicholas, his lodger, is in grave danger. The clerk has

been sequestered in his room for nearly two days and for all they know he may even be dead.

The carpenter sends his servant up for a report on the clerk's condition. John is extremely

alarmed at what he hears: Nicholas, John's servant says, is gaping up at the heavens with a

stunned look on his face.  The carpenter quickly shifts into crisis mode, and after crossing

himself, he does the one thing an Oxford native would likely do:  John calls on St. Frideswide,

the local saint, to come to their aid and heal the clerk of his madness:  "Help us, Seinte

Frydeswyde!" (3449).

As Skeat and Huff Cline have suggested, the Frideswide invocation is appropriate based

on Frideswide's reputation as a known miracle worker, and, as the patron saint of Oxford, her

shrine was the closest in proximity to the miller's home, making the call for intercession

"natural." But there is more to the invocation than meets the eye. Frideswide's invocation marks

a critical juncture in *The Miller's Tale*.  For one, it is at this exact moment that John first "takes

the bait" set for him by "hende" Nicholas, who, along with Alison, hatches the plan to cuckold

the gullible carpenter.  Little does John suspect, when he says, "A man woot litel what hym shal

bityde," how his words apply to his own future as much as anyone else's.  In actuality, they

apply to everyone:  the carpenter, the clerks, and the wife.  As the story unfolds, one begins to

see the many levels on which the irony of this remark develops.

Upon closer examination of Frideswide's legend in relation to specific scenes in the t*ale*,

hidden layers of "unsuspected meaning," to borrow Keen's terminology, both ironic and parodic,

emerge to add to the already ironically charged tale.  One aspect of the invocation that would

have captured the attention of Chaucer's audience is the fact that Frideswide and Alison are the only females whom Chaucer names in *The Miller's Tale*. In fact, of the thirty-six saints in *The Canterbury Tales* whom Chaucer names in oaths or by reference, only five are female, which suggests that Frideswide's significance as a "marker" is worth deeper exploration. For example, simply by looking at Frideswide and Alison, the contrasting hagiographic reference serves to draw a distinction between them in terms of the theme of fidelity and, in specific, fidelity to their vows of marriage.

As discussed above in the summary of her *vita*, Frideswide's devotion to chastity and morality set her apart from others in her youth as well as in monastic life, where she excelled and surpassed all others at self-discipline, fasting, and prayer. One hallmark of the hagiographic genre is its emphasis on the battle between good and evil, and just like the great desert ascetics before her, Frideswide's innate purity, austerity, and single-minded devotion to God made her a prime target for Satan's wiles. Just as Anthony and Jerome were confronted with frequent temptations of the flesh sent by the devil, often in disguise, the young nun fended off repeated attempts at seduction and threats to her vow of chastity. Her spiritual betrothal to Christ came under fire on three separate occasions, and each time Frideswide successfully repelled her suitor and in the process defended her virtue.

In comparison to the chaste youth of Frideswide and her endowment to the Church and the body of Christ at a very young age, Alison marries the carpenter at eighteen years of age. Chaucer describes her as having a "likerous eye," compares her to a "jolly colt," and adds that she would be a fine catch "For any lord to leggen in his bedde" (3268-69). Unlike Frideswide, moreover, Alison treats her marriage vow as disposable and gives into temptation at the first opportunity, quickly capitulating to Nicholas' pleas and sexual advances. In doing so, she

renders useless her marriage vow to the carpenter, in one fell swoop, as she swears an oath to Nicholas, "by Seint Thomas of Kent,/That she wol been at his commandment" (3292).[196]  Before taking their leave, Alison and Nicholas make yet another vow, "they been accorded and ysworn" (3301), to bring their plan to cuckold the carpenter to fruition.  After Nicholas "thakkes" Alison on her rear end, "He kiste hire sweete …" and thereby seals their allegiance in deception (3305).

As it turns out, however, Nicholas is not the only suitor who has his eye on Alison. Absolon, the parish clerk, also desires the carpenter's young wife, and in a scene, whose language recalls Frideswide's rebuff of Algar and which echoes the devil's late night visit to Frideswide's cell,and parodies the saint's kiss of the leper, Absolon learns a hard lesson in keeping with the carpenter's remark that,  "A man woot litel what hym shal bityde."

The theme of the "kiss" in *The Miller's Tale* has not been explored previously in relation to the invocation of St. Frideswide.  As one recalls from Frideswide's legend, as the abbess returned home to Oxford from Binsey, a gruesome leper came forward from the crowd of people assembled along the road and asked her to kiss him in the name of the Lord with "her sweet mouth."  At first, the thought of kissing the leper was repellent to Frideswide.  In the longer version of the legend, Frideswide is described as being embarrassed by the attention, rather than repelled, so she simply ignored him.  In both versions, Frideswide hesitated momentarily before rewarding the leper's persistence, and after making the sign of the cross, she kissed him on the mouth.  Miraculously, the leper's complexion is said to have returned to normal after the kiss, "as smooth as a baby's bottom once more," whereas just minutes before, his skin was both leprous and diseased.

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[196] For a discussion of Alison's oath by St. Thomas of Kent please see pages 212-215.

One would be hard pressed to find a moment in the entirety of literature as bawdy and hilarious as the scene in which, to quote Catherine Brown-Tkacz, Absolon the clerk's "beard is made." Wilson has clearly demonstrated how hagiographic play and parody inform *The Miller's Tale* in terms of this scene. She has illustrated the significance of gift-giving vis-à-vis the *tres filiae* story from the *vita* of St. Nicholas as it applies to the scene in which Alison and Nicholas are interrupted *in flagrante delicto* by Absolon. When this scene is also viewed through the lens of the legend of Frideswide, and in particular the leper's kiss, an additional layer of irony is added to the tale.

After learning of John the carpenter's absence from Oxford for a day or so, Absolon becomes positively giddy at the thought of acting on his "love-longynge" for Alison. On his way home from working at the church, which incidentally housed the priory of St. Frideswide as well as her relics, Absolon speaks to himself of kissing Alison twice. In the first instance, he muses that a kiss is the very least of the possibilities the evening may hold for him: "To Alison now wol I tellen al/My love-longyge, for yet I shal nat mysse/That at the leeste way I shal hire kisse" (3679-81). In the second, Absolon describes his own mouth as having "icched al this longe day" which he concludes, again, is "a signe of kissing atte leeste" (3683). Third, on his way to see Alison, Absolon conceals "a trewe-love" underneath his tongue. Skeat suggests that the "trew-love knot," similar to the four-leaf clover, must be due to some superstition of Absolon's, but it seems that one possibility is that the parish clerk may have meant to pass it on to Alison during the act of kissing, otherwise he could have concealed it anywhere other than under his tongue.[197] At the window's ledge, Absolon makes his move, calling out to Alison for her affection. Her

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[197]In *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 109, Skeat identifies "trewe-love" as "(probably) a leaf of herb-paris; in the efficacy of which he had some superstitious belief. True-love is sometimes used as an abbreviation of true-love knot, as in the last stanza of the Court of Love…"

reply is for him to leave at once, for there will be no kissing she says, "As help me God, it wol nat be 'com pa me'/I love another—and elles I were to blame—/Wel bet than thee, by Jhesu, Absolon" (3709-11). Skeat translates 'it wol nat be com pa me' as "It will not be (a case of) come-kiss me," which, he adds, means, "you certainly will not get a kiss."[198] Despite the initial rebuff, Absolon persists, despite cursing his "trewe love," and says, "Thanne kysse me, syn it may be no bet/For Jhesus love, and for the love of me" (3717-17). Alison finally agrees to his wish and beckons him to the window, where in contrast to Frideswide's miraculous kiss of the leper with her "sweet mouth," Absolon with "his mouth…kiste hir naked ers/Ful savourly, er he were war of this" (3734-75). Absolon's act of kissing Alison on the "ers" makes for an interesting parallel with Frideswide's kiss of the leper in that in both instances the object of the kiss, Frideswide in her legend and Alison in *The Miller's Tale*, initially acts with revulsion towards their suitor. Whereas Frideswide's motivation to kiss is directed by her recognition that the leper is a child of God and that her gift of healing can be applied to an act of intercession, Alison's motivation merely perpetuates the process of deception in which she and Nicholas have been engaged: adultery, cuckoldery, deceit, and humiliation. The result is a total inversion of Frideswide's chaste kiss on the lips, both figuratively and anatomically; Alison and Absolon are unified momentarily in a kiss of sheer repulsion which brings no resolution, only disgust and the thirst for revenge. Not only does the kiss distort the perceived natural order of things, but since it is an inversion twice removed from the original, it also serves as a grotesque perversion. In sum, the Frideswide invocation not only adds color and depth to the scene in which John invokes her, but also functions as a contrasting hagiographic reference, the echoes of which reverberate throughout *The Miller's Tale*.

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[198] Skeat, 109.

# G

**ST. GILES (AEGIDIUS, GYLES) (d. c. 720)**:

**Now lat me medle therwith but a while,/For of yow have I pitee, by Seint Gile!/Ye have been right hoot; I se wel how ye swete./Have heere a clooth, and wipe awey the wete."—the Canon, *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, (1184-1187)**

_Scholarly Consensus_:  Skeat notes that Giles or Gyles, whose day is Sept 1, is a corrupted form of Aegidius; de Weever states that Giles is the patron saint of blacksmiths and outcasts (cripples, beggars, lepers); Benson refers the reader to Haskell's interpretation.  Haskell argues that the St. Giles oath "decorates and illuminates."  One of its functions is to show that alchemists are social outcasts.  According to Haskell the oath has hidden meaning just like the the traditon of alchemy itself, including sexual connotations related to mixing and "meddling."  She explores the appropriateness of the oath vis-à-vis the biblical tradition of leprosy since Giles was the patron saint of lepers and examines the motif of the unforgivable sin.

_**Summary of St. Giles's Legend**_:  Giles's name is the Frankish version of Aegidius, which Jacobus defines as "A" or "without"; geos, or "earth," and dyan, which means bright, even godlike; Giles, Jacobus says, was therefore without peer in his contempt for material things, bright or brilliant based on the "light of his knowledge" and godlike due to the love his followers had for him.  Giles was the patron saint of smiths and also outcasts including beggars, the handicapped, and lepers.

Giles worked many miracles during his lifetime. He was from a royal Athenian family and received instruction in holy scripture from the time of his infancy.  Once, Giles gave his cloak to a sick man lying in the street his cloak, and the cloak immediately restored the man to

health. On another occasion, Giles came upon a man who had been bitten by a snake. Giles immediately prayed for him and was able to drive out the poison through speech. He also drove the devil from a man possessed with a demon who had been shouting in church. He received free passage from Athens to Rome after he calmed raging waters that caused a ship to be tossed about at sea. Giles cured a man who had been sick with a fever for 3 years. He also was able to turn the previously barren soil of the place where the hermit Veredonius lived into fertile ground. As Giles's fame and the acclaim of his miracle working spread, he was forced to go deeper into the wilderness than Veredonius' hermitage. Jacobus tells us Giles was always fearful of adulation.

The most famous episode Jacobus recounts in his legend of Giles centers around a doe that Giles encountered in a cave. Giles had entered the cave in search of solitude. The hind he met there took great pity on Giles and fed him her milk, treating him like her own child. One day hunters pursued the hind, and, as she fled from the hunting dogs, she returned to the cave and came to rest at the feet of Giles. Giles was greatly concerned and prayed to God for the doe who whimpered inconsolably. Giles emerged from the cave and saw the dogs, who refused to come any closer; when the hunters returned the next day, the dogs refused to pursue the doe. Word ultimately reached the king, and the bishop and huntsmen went to the cave suspecting that Giles was there. Giles was hit by an arrow intended for the hind as he prayed for the hind's safety. Men found the old monk wrapped in his habit with the hind's head resting at his feet. The Bishop and king attempted to administer medicine to Giles, but he refused treatment on the grounds that his soul might gain strength from it. Upon seeing Giles's holiness, the king visited him repeatedly and entreated him to take his money, but each time Giles refused. Instead, he convinced the king to build a monastery, of which Giles was appointed Abbot.

Some while later, King Charles, having heard of Giles's fame and holiness, asked for an audience with him.  Charles wanted to confess a sin but could not bring himself to name it due to its loathsome nature; he asked Giles to pray for him and to intercede on his behalf for forgiveness with God.  An angel from heaven appeared to Giles at a Mass which he was celebrating for Charles and placed a piece of paper on the altar.  The paper named Charles's sin and offered a pardon if he promised to do penance and to eschew the sin in the future.  Giles was also told that anyone asking for his intercession would be forgiven provided that the sin was shunned in the future.  King Charles saw the paper on which his sin was named and repented.

***Significance of the St. Giles Reference:***[199] Haskell's interpretation of the St. Giles oath connects Giles, the patron saint of lepers, beggars, cripples and blacksmiths, to the tradition of alchemy, whose practitioners were considered social aliens in the Middle Ages.  Giles's patronage extended to alchemists and his invocation in *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* is therefore appropriate. Like the practice of alchemy, Haskell notes, the oath has significance beneath the surface and the "context in which the oath occurs gives a clue to further meaning."[200]

Haskell states that when Chaucer wrote his tale, there was a strong distrust of alchemists throughout England.  This distrust is evident in the tale as alchemy is regarded as a dubious science.  Furthermore, alchemy's vocabulary is overtly sexual.  "Medle" connotes mixing, but it also suggests intercourse.  When the canon "medles" he does so by St. Giles, implying the need for spiritual cleanliness in approaching his art.  Manipulation of "impure" metal would not be successful without a pure heart and chaste body.  As the patron saint of lepers and epileptics, St. Giles also had an association with venereal disease to which leprosy was linked. Haskell also

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[199] See Haskell, 26-29.
[200] Haskell, 26.

points out that in the Middle Ages diseases were related to specific sins and in the case of leprosy its parallel sin was lechery.[201]

A second association between the tale and St. Giles is the herb fennel, which was a known aphrodisiac but also had connections to fire and the myth of Prometheus. Fennel was also used in fertility rights on holidays such as Midsummer's Eve and in treatments for eye disease.[202] The third association Haskell identifies between the tale and Giles is the legend of the "unremitted sin" discussed above in Giles's legend. Charlemagne committed a sin so horrific, presumably incest, that he could not name it. St. Giles had the ability to forgive an unconfessed sin as long as it was repented. This is significant from an alchemical standpoint and for the tale because the "brother-sister pair stands allegorically for the whole conception of opposites."[203] Here Haskell draws an interesting parallel between *The Second Nun's Tale* in which Cecilia and Valerian participate in a chaste, pure marriage indicative of "mulitplication"[204] without "meddling"; the Canon, on the other hand, oversees an unclean "alchemical union" which includes "meddling with multiplication."

Haskell draws the final distinction from this set of opposites that "St. Cecilia represents not only charity, opposing avarice in *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, but also chastity, the traditionally mitigating virtue for lechery, underscored by the St. Giles oath."[205] Haskell's interpretation of the St. Giles oath is admirable for its syncretic illustration of the depth and significance of associations connected with the reference.

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[201] *Ibid,* 27.
[202] *Ibid,* 28.
[203] *Ibid.*
[204] *Ibid.*
[205] Ibid, 29.

# H

**ST. HELENA (ELYENE) (c. 250-330)**:

**"Lat be," quod he, "it shall nat be, so theech!/Thou woldest make me kisse thyn old breech,/And swere it were a relyk of a seint,/Though it were with thy fundament depeint!/But by the croys which that Seint Eleyne fond,/I wolde I hadde they coilons in myn hond/In stide of relikes or of seintuarie./Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carrie;/They shul be shryned in an hogges toord!"—Harry Bailly,** *The Pardoner's Tale***, (947-955)**

*Scholarly Consensus:*  Skeat identifies the oath "by the croys which that Seint Eleyne fond" as a "reference to the 'Invention of the Cross,' or finding of the true cross by St. Helen, the mother of Constantine."[206]  Benson likewise identifies the oath as "St. Helen's Discovery of the Cross…"[207]

*Summary of St. Helena's Legend:*  The legends of the Cross and of St. Helena are intertwined in the *Legenda Aurea* as well as in *The South English Legendary*. Many details of Helena's life are found in Jacobus's entry for the feast day for the Finding of the Holy Cross as well as a brief mention in the entry for the Exaltation of the Cross.[208]  According to Jacobus, there was some dispute as to Helena's background, so he offers three possibilities.  The first assertion, based on the writings of Ambrose, states that she was an innkeeper whose beauty attracted Constantine's father.  The second states that she was the daughter of Clohel, a king of the Britons, while the third simply holds that she was from the ancient German city of Trier.  In any event, Helena was the mother of Constantine the Great whose conversion to Christianity

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[206] Skeat, 290.
[207] Chaucer, 910.
[208] Jacobus, 277-284.

influenced her own.  She supposedly made an initial pilgrimage to Jerusalem where she

discovered the Church of the Nativity.  Her second pilgrimage, at the behest of Constantine, was

conducted with the express purpose of finding the cross on which Christ was crucified.

      According to legend, the Holy Cross was hidden underground for approximately 200

years after the death of Christ.  A cabal of the most learned rabbis in Jerusalem knew the

whereabouts of the cross, but when Helena arrived in Jerusalem these men were resolved not to

tell her for fear that Jewish law and tradition would be rescinded at her whim.  Helena sent out an

order for all of the learned rabbinate to come to her at once and began questioning them about

the cross and the location of Golgotha.  They refused, of course, and Helena threatened them all

with death by fire; with this in mind, they told Helena of the wisest among them, Judas, who had

been warned by his father on his deathbed not to lie about the cross.  At first, Judas remained

tight-lipped.  He was promptly thrown into a dungeon and starved for six days, but on the

seventh, he was taken out and led a group to the spot.  As they climbed, the earth quaked and a

sweet aroma emanated from the ground.  During his reign, Hadrian supposedly had constructed a

pagan temple on top of the spot of the crucifixion so Christian pilgrims would be put in the

awkward position of praying to pagan gods.  Helena had the temple razed and charged Judas

with locating the cross.  After digging to a depth of twenty feet, Judas found three crosses which

he took to Helena.  Helena was faced with a dilemma, however, because they could not

distinguish Christ's cross from the other two.  Therefore, they took the crosses into the streets of

Jerusalem to see if they could receive a sign.  After nine hours, a funeral procession came by

with a dead man. Each of the crosses was placed over his body. The first two crosses did nothing but when the third was placed upon the man, he rose up and came back to life. [209]

In the meantime, Judas had willingly converted and was eventually made bishop of Jerusalem under the new name Quiriacus. Helena was grateful for his help with the cross but also wanted the nails used to crucify Christ. Quiriacus was commissioned to find them. After praying, he located them near the place where the crosses were found. The nails appeared to him as shining gold which he then took to Helena. Helena kept a portion of the cross and eventually gave Constantine both the nails and a piece of the cross. Constantine placed one of the nails into the bit of his horse's bridle and the other in his helmet. Helena built a shrine of gold and silver in which she encased the rest of the cross. She also declared the day on which the Holy Cross was found an annual feast. According to the *South English Legendary*, the "Holy Rood" was found on May 3rd.[210]

*__Significance of the St. Helena Reference:__* After the Pardoner delivers his *exemplum*, he goes into a slick sales pitch in an effort to unload a few of his impressive but clearly bogus relics on his fellow pilgrims. However, he presses his luck just a bit too far when he calls Harry Bailly the "moost envoluped in synne," and encourages him to come forth and purchase a relic: "Come forth, sire Hoost, and offre first anon,/And thou shalt kisse the relikes everychon,/Ye for a grote, Unbokele anon thy purs" (9443-45). One presumes that the sheer shock value of Harry Bailly's blasphemous rejoinder must have simultaneously repulsed and titillated Chaucer's audience, who

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[209] Jacobus turns to Ambrose for a slightly different account of these events. Ambrose was convinced that Judas figured out which cross was Christ's based on the title inscribed above his cross by Pilate.

[210] Jacqueline de Weever observes that the day on which the church celebrated the feast of the Cross, May 3, was considered a day of bad luck. Palamon breaks out of prison on May 3, (KnT 1462-1469) Pandarus falls in love on that day, (Tr II.56), and on May 3 Chauntecleer is carried off by Daun Russell, (NPT 3187-3197).

must have recoiled at the extreme juxtaposition of the Holy Cross, the Pardoner's testicles, shit-

stained pants, a hog's turd, and St. Helena.  When one considers the Host's promise to "no

longer pleye" in this fashion, with sacred things and with things not so sacred, one recognizes

that this qualifies as an excellent example of a playful use of a hagiographic oath, in keeping

with the growing trend in the fourteenth century for the sacrosanct to be pulled down into the

marketplace if not the gutter.  No doubt, bearing in mind Wilson's terminology, one would be

hard pressed to find a stronger example of hagiographic (dis)play at work in *The Canterbury

Tales* than the traumatizing image of the Pardoner's testicles enshrined in a hog's turd, in

contrast to both the imagery and associations people would have had of St. Helena's recovery of

the most venerated relic in Christendom. On second thought, this may have been the one instance

in the *Tales* in which audience members recoiled at the thought of "implied parallels between

Scripture, hagiography, liturgy, and the like."[211]

**ST. HUGH OF LINCOLN (LITTLE ST. HUGH) (1246-1255)[212]:**

**"O yonge Hugh of Lyncoln, slayn also/With cursed Jewes, as it is notable,/For it is

but a litel while ago,/Preye eek for us, we sinful folk unstable,/That of his mercy God so

merciable/On us his grete mercy multiplie,/For reverence of his mooder Marie."—the

Prioress,** *The Prioress's Tale* **(684-690)**

*Scholarly Consensus*:  Benson provides some background on the Prioress's invocation of

Hugh of Lincoln from Butler's *Lives of the Saints* and mentions an ironic fact that a later Hugh of

Lincoln was a lawyer who defended Jews. Benson notes that Hugh's cult was never officially

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[211] *Op. Cit,* 40.

[212] From Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, Volume III, "St. Hugh," ed. by Herbert Thurston,
S.J. and Donald Attwater, (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1956).

sanctioned, and cites Langmuir's conclusion that Hugh was not murdered by the Jews.[213]  Benson also mentions the fact that at late as 1959, a plaque commemorating Hugh's martyrdom was in Lincoln Cathedral.

 ***Summary of St. Hugh's Legend***:  Hugh, the son of a widow named Beatrice, was only nine years old when he was viciously murdered in Lincoln on August 27th, 1255.  Lincoln was a center of law and learning in England, heavily populated with Jews.  As the story goes, Hugh was on his way home from school on the day of July 31st when he was lured into the home of a Jew named Koppin.  For the next twenty-seven days, Koppin kept Hugh under lock and key until the day of August 27th, at which time Koppin was joined by several of his friends who ritually murdered Hugh after re-enacting the crucifixion of Christ.  Hugh was tortured, scourged, and made to wear a crown of thorns before being brutally crucified.  Koppin and his mates then attempted to bury the body, but the earth would not take it, leaving them with no alternative but to throw the body down a well, where Hugh was later found.  His body was then taken to the parish church where it was buried.  In the meantime, Hugh's schoolmates began pointing fingers at Koppin, who was arrested and charged with the murder, along with ninety-two other members of the wealthy and influential Jewish community in Lincoln.  Koppin not only confessed to the crime but also turned in his accomplices, swearing under duress, that it was Jewish custom to crucify a Christian boy once a year. King Henry II issued an order requiring Koppin to be dragged to death by horses, while eighteen of his accomplices were hanged.  The rest were imprisoned in the Tower of London, until the Franciscan Order interceded on their behalf, paying fines, and securing their release.  Historically, this legend has been connected to a tradition of

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[213] Chaucer, 916.

antisemitism which involves envy towards wealthy Jewish communities.  From a historical

standpoint, both Christians and Jews have refuted this ever happened.

     ***Significance of the St. Hugh Reference:***  As is the case with St. Cecilia in *The Second

Nun's Tale*, the invocation of St. Hugh of Lincoln is not incidental, technically speaking, because

Hugh is the primary saint on whom the Prioress patterns her seven-year old protagonist.  The

Prioress closes her tale with an invocation to the child martyr, St. Hugh, whom she asks to

intercede on the pilgrims' behalf to secure God's blessing.  But whereas the St. Cecilia legend is

a sustained hagiographic narrative illustrating noble Christian sacrifice, the Prioress's tale is a

sustained hagiographic narrative devoid of exemplary tendencies. Ironically, it is also a tale of

Christian sacrifice, but one that undermines the "Amor vincit omnia" topos, her personal motto,

and instead sanctions vicious acts of revenge and murder in lieu of orthodox redemption. The

hagiographic reference contains no irony nor is it ambiguous; it is an entirely straightforward

presentation with a one-to-one correspondence: Hugh is the child in the story, and the Prioress

tells his legend.  The reference to Hugh is most telling, however, for what it reveals about the

tale's teller, the Prioress.

     We have already discussed the fact that the Second Nun's telling of the life of St. Cecilia,

the virgin martyr, would have been perfectly in keeping with her status.  Cecilia's devotion to

chastity at all costs would have been the ultimate virtue in the eyes of the Nun, herself a bride of

Christ, and presumably her superior, the Prioress.  While we learn nothing additional of the

Second Nun that modifies our opinion of her in respect to her tale, the Prioress's choice of the

murder of St. Hugh as her subject matter casts her character into an even less flattering light than

what we already know of her from the *Prologue*.  If one can assume that Chaucer meant the

*Tales* to tell us something about the teller, then, as is more the case than with any other character, the Prioress's tale says quite a great deal about her.

The harsh juxtaposition of her tender heart crying over the death of a mouse with the *denouemen*t of the Jew being drawn and quartered exposes her as a chief hypocrite. Her personal motto of "Amor vincit omnia," once again, seems ludicrous in light of her grisly subject matter. The Prioress who emerges from this tale is considerably less attractive than the petty-minded Prioress in the Prologue, whose fastidious manners, pseudo-French, and potentially meaningless oath by St. Loy reveal her to be little more than a social climber in a nun's habit. Though a tale of martyrdom was fitting in terms of genre, the tale of Little St. Hugh is entirely inappropriate for someone of the Prioress's rank and title. Her tale not only inverts the exemplary characteristics illustrated in the Second Nun's legend of St. Cecilia, but also removes her own makeup, so to speak, and discloses the heart of an antisemite underneath it all.

## J

**ST. JEROME (c. 341-430)**:

**"And eek there was somtyme a clerk at Rome,/A cardinal, that highte Seint Jerome,/That made a book agayn Jovinian"—the Wife of Bath,** *The Wife of Bath's Prologue***, (673-675)**

*Scholarly consensus:* The Wife of Bath's reference to St. Jerome is explained in Benson's textual notes to *The Riverside Chaucer.* Benson identifies the book to which she refers as Jerome's *Epistola adversus Jovinianum.* He also cites Delahaye's suggestion that St. Jerome also drew from "classical philosophy" and predominantly "anti-feminist" writings.[214] DeWeever

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[214] Chaucer, 866-72.

gives a short biographical account of St. Jerome, noting that he is one of the "four Latin Doctors

of the Church, the others being Augustine, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great." She notes that

Jerome comes across as an "irritable cleric, gifted in the rhetoric of abuse..." DeWeever names

Jerome's five major treatises, which include the *Episotla adversus Jovinianum* and *the Epistola

ad Eustochium de virginitate*, a letter on virginity. DeWeever explains that Jerome's *Letter

Against Jovinian* was "an answer to Jovinian's advocacy of marriage for the clergy and his

denigration of virginity."[215]

     ***Summary of St. Jerome's Legend:*** Jacobus tells us that Jerome's name, Hieronymus,

comes from *gerar* (holy), *nemus* (grove), or *noma* (law). Jerome exemplified each of these three

elements in his actions. He was devoted to sacred law. He was holy through his "long-

suffereing perseverance." And, he was called "grove" "after the grove where he lived at times."

     Jerome was the son of a nobleman from Dalmatia; he was considered to be the most

learned of all his peers in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek by no less of an authority than Augustine,

who described his eloquence as "a ray of the sun" which shone from "East to West." As a young

man, he was stricken with a fever after reading Plato and Tully instead of the scripture he studied

incessantly and was so close to death that his funeral was arranged. On his death bed, Jerome

had a vision of his own judgment in which he was asked, "What are you?," to which he replied,

"A Christian." The judge replied "Thou liest; you are a Ciceronian" and ordered him to be

beaten. Jerome cried out for forgiveness and begged for mercy, swearing that he had profaned

God by reading secular books. Upon waking, he found his body bruised and wet with tears. He

soon returned to reading sacred books with a newfound fervor.

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[215] de Weever, 178-79.

While considered by many to be the individual most likely to become the next Pope, Jerome was tricked by a group of jealous and lascivious monks who put a woman's garment in his chambers. To prove his innocence, Jerome wore the garment to chapel. At this point, Jerome decided to seek further instruction from Gregory; he went into the desert, where he suffered great physical hardship, including visions of dancing women who tempted him to abuse himself; he fasted for weeks, did penance for four years and went to Bethlehem to "dwell at the Lord's crib like an animal." Jerome gained a number of disciples and proceeded to translate scripture for fifty-five years, using a rope tied to a beam over his head to pull himself up every morning from his exhausted state.

Jacobus devotes a great deal of his life of St. Jerome to the story of a lion, who one night limped into the monastery and caused all of the monks to flee, except Jerome, who greeted him as a guest. After showing Jerome his wounded foot in which several thorns were stuck, Jerome ordered the brothers to treat the lion's injury. Upon being healed, the lion was tamed and lived among the monks, assuming care of a donkey who hauled wood to the monastery. The lion, Jacobus says, looked after the donkey as a shepherd after his sheep. One day the lion dozed off while the donkey worked in the field and some merchants proceeded to steal him. The lion returned home dejected and refused to enter the monastery because of his humiliation. The brothers wrongly accused the lion of eating the donkey; as a result he was given a donkey's load to carry until one day the caravan of men and camels returned with the donkey in the lead. The lion roared a mighty roar and scattered the caravan. The men were brought in as guests, and fell upon their faces in front of Jerome to ask forgiveness, pledging a quantity of oil annually.

***Significance of the St. Jerome Reference:***  St. Jerome's significance is suggested in the notes provided by Benson and in particular by DeWeever, who also mentions the fact that

Jerome was portrayed in a Cardinal's hat and robes by the illuminator of *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*.[216] Alys refers to Jerome as a Cardinal although he was a Church Doctor. We learn from Dame Alys that Jerome's book *Against Jovinian* was part of a collection, loosely analogous to Jacobus's collection of saints' lives in the *Legenda*, comprised of lives of "wykked" women. The book, which contained several misogynistic and misogamous source materials, belonged to Alys's husband Jankyn, who once hit her on the ear for ripping a "leaf" from this book, *Wykked Wyves*. In this act of violence, the book with which Jankyn hit his wife thus becomes a physical tool for the traditions contained inside it, implicating "Seint" Jerome and the other *auctores* in the process.

**ST. JOCE (JUDOCUS, JOSSE) (d. c. 668)[217]:**

**"I seye, I hadde in herte greet despit/That he of any oother had delit./But he was quit, by God and by Seint Joce!/I made hym of the same wode a croce;/Nat of my body, in no foul manere,/But certeinly, I made folk swich cheere/That in his own grece I made hym frye/For angre, and for verray jalousye."—The Wife of Bath, The Wife of Bath's Prologue, (481-489).**

*Scholarly Consensus:* Skeat identifies Joce as a Breton saint who died in 669 and contends that Chaucer used the saint's name to "rime' with croce. He defines *croce* from the Old French as "staff." He also adds that the source for Chaucer's use of Joce probably came from *Le Testament de Jean de Meung* (461-464): "When dame Katherine sees the proof of Sir *Joce*, who cares not a prune for his wife's love, she is so fearful that her own husband will do her like harm,

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[216] de Weever, 178-79.

[217] Butler, *The Lives of the Saints,* vol. IV, 550.

that she often makes for him a staff of a similar bit of wood."[218]  De Weever echoes this historical data and adds that Joce, or Judocus, achieved a high level of popularity during the Middle Ages, coming to be known as the patron saint of pilgrims.[219]  In a further link to *The Canterbury Tales*, Benson adds that Joce's relics "were at Hyde Abbey, whose Abbot owned the Tabard Inn and had lodgings adjacent to it."[220]  In Haskell's estimation, however, none of these explanations looks beneath the surface far enough.  She offers a reminder that saints were known during the Middle Ages by a personal attribute taken from their legends.  In the case of Joce it was the pilgrim's staff, also known as a *bourdon*.  Haskell finds a link between Joce's *bourdon* and research done on The Pardoner's "stif burdoun," which has been shown to signify both "phallus" and "pilgrim's staff."  Haskell applies this double meaning to the wife of Bath's comment about  a "croce" of "the same wode" regarding her fourth husband, a known philanderer, whom she causes to fry in "his owen grece."  Perhaps, she concludes, Chaucer's word play makes room for such an interpretation.

   ***Summary of  St. Joce's Legend***:  Joce's father was the King of Brittany, and his brother Judicael was a fearless *miles Christi* whose name was said to be weapon enough in and of itself to defeat armies before battles were even fought.   But, his militancy was a sore subject with King Dagobert I, who dispatched St. Loy from Paris to rein in his activities.  Joce rejected his former life as a prince to become a priest at Pontheiu in A.D. 636.  He took a pilgrimage to Rome a few years later and ultimately settled in Runiacum where he lived the life of a hermit until his death in 668.  Rather than inter Joce's body at his death, his fellow hermits kept his body, which stayed incorrupt, on display, where, due to inexplicable circumstances, his

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[218] Skeat, 303.
[219] de Weever, 180-181.
[220] Chaucer, 869.

fingernails, hair, and beard continued to grow so that the hermits had to trim them periodically.

As mentioned above, Joce is typically depicted holding the staff of a pilgrim and with a crown by

his feet, representing his disavowal of the secular world in favor of the ecclesiastical one.

    ***Significance of the St. Joce Reference***:  One additional attribute of Joce which both de

Weever and Haskell mention but which neither explores further is the fact that St. Joce, or

Judocus, was also the patron saint who offered protection against fires and burns.[221]   It seems

apparent then that the lines which most vividly describe the husband's torture are intended to

prolong the hagiographic reference to Joce:  "But certeinly, I made folk swich cheere/That in his

owene grece I made him frye." The image of Alys' fourth husband burning as a result of sexual

deprivation would not have been lost on Chaucer's audience, who would have recognized the

irony in her allusion to Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "But I say to the unmarried, and to the

widows: It is good for them if they so continue, even as I. But if they do not contain themselves,

let them marry. For it is better to marry than to be burnt."[222]  Paul's remark is intended for

bachelors whom he encourages to live a chaste life, the alternative of which is to marry in order

to avoid "burning" with lust and passion.  Marriage, in Paul's mind, is the less desirable of the

two options, not because he was opposed to marriage, but because he was encouraging his fellow

Christians to prepare themselves for the return of Christ.  Though Paul's statement was written

from an eschatological perspective, the average medieval reader would have taken his words as a

*dissuasio* against marriage and, perhaps, even by implication, against women, who in the

equation become the object of the male's sexual needs.  In other words, taking a wife becomes

the means by which an unmarried man, to use the Wife of Bath's words, avoids burning in his

own grease. Paul's admonition in his epistle, however, was not intended for those already

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[221] de Weever, 181.

[222] See *Douay-Rheims Bible*, 1 Corinthians 7.

married, although that is the manner in which the Wife of Bath applies the passage following her oath by St. Joce.

The Wife's clever rhetorical inversion shifts the implication of Paul's famous line to the blessed state of matrimony in which her husband, ironically, is forced, due to his own indiscretions, to burn with lust and passion without access to the object of his desire. In this respect, the Wife of Bath creates a literal "hell on earth," from which there is little if any hope for relief from the incendiary devices of a woman spurned. By St. Joce? Perhaps the patron saint of burn victims had one further miracle at his disposal, although the prospect of relieving another man's "bourden" surely falls outside the parameters of a patron saint's intercessory obligations.

**ST. JULIAN (date unknown):**

**"An householdere, and that a greet, was he;/Seint Julian he was in his countree./His breed, his ale, was alwey after oon;/A bettre envyned man was nowher noon."—Chaucer,** *The General Prologue,* **(339-342).**

*Scholarly Consensus:* Chaucer compares the Franklin to St. Julian in the General Prologue. This analogy seems relatively transparent. Skeat notes that, "St. Julian was eminent for providing his votaries with good lodgings and accommodation of all sorts." He also mentions that Julian is called the "good harbourer" in Bodl. Ms. 1596, fol. 4.[223] Savage's note on the provenance of Julian adds insight from a fourteenth-century chronicle that refers to the Count of Savoy as a "St. Julian." The mention in the chronicle, Savage says, proves that Chaucer's reference was not arbitrary.

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[223] Skeat, 33.

*Summary of St. Julian's Legend*:  In the *Legenda Aurea* Jacobus recounts the lives of four separate Julians.  The name derives from Julius (one who begins) + *anus* (old man).  St. Julian was blessed with patience and humility.

The first legend is of Julian, the Bishop of LeMans, who, Jacobus posits, is possibly the same man as Simon the Leper whom Christ cured and who subsequently invited Christ to dine with him.  He received great notoriety for hosting Christ as his guest and ultimately became the saint whom travelers invoked in order to find hospitality on their journey.

The second Julian desired martyrdom, so much so that he sought out his persecutors, running out to greet his killers.  Julian's severed head was taken to his beloved friend Ferreolus as a warning for him to sacrifice to the gods, but he refused and was martyred as well. The heads were buried together, and they miraculously preserved themselves.

Jacobus next discusses the strange death of a thief who stole sheep from the Church named in honor of St. Julian.  Inexplicably, the thief caught a fever and burned up despite cool water repeatedly being used to revive him. Jacobus also recounts an incident in which a stiff-fingered peasant was healed of his ailment in the same church.

The third St. Julian asks to build churches in place of pagan shrines and is given the blessing of Emperor Theodosius who proclaims that everyone must give builders aid.  Julian thus became the patron saint of builders.

The fourth is likely the Julian with whom most in the Middle Ages were familiar.  While on a hunt one day, he prepared to slay a stag that turned around and questioned him.  He learned from the stag that he would one day kill his parents.  After fleeing the scene, Julian relocated, trying to avoid his fate, and eventually married; while he was away one day, his wife took in two wayfarers and upon learning their true identity—his parents—she went to church to pray and to

give thanks.  Julian returned home, startled to find strangers asleep in his own bed. He killed

them and upon his wife's return learned the awful truth.  He and his wife did penance and took

on the difficult task of carrying people across a dangerous river. They also set up a hospice, and

one night, after a particularly exhausting day, received a visit from a leper, who begged them for

passage.  Julian provided the leper passage, and the leper turned into an angel with tidings of

Jesus' forgiveness.

*__Significance of the St. Julian Reference:__*  I would tend to agree with Skeat that Julian

the Hospitaller, the fourth Julian whom Jacobus lists, is most likely the one to whom the Franklin

is compared in the Prologue.  One prominent element of the Julian legend that seems significant

in light of the general consensus among Skeat, Savage, and even Benson, who lists Julian as the

patron saint of hospitality in his notation to the Riverside Chaucer, is the connection to the

Oedipus myth.  The fact that Julian murders both his mother and father should, at the very least,

raise a shred of doubt about the Franklin's past.  This bit of irony is certainly in keeping with

Chaucer's evident love of ambiguity.


# K

**ST. KENELM (d. c. 812)[224]:**

**"Lo, in the lyf of Seint Kenelm I rede,/That was Kenulphus sone, the noble kyng/Of**

**Mercenrike, how Kenelm mette a thyng./A lite er he was mordred, on a day,/His mordre in**

**his avysioun he say."—Chauntecleer,** *The Nun's Priest's Tale* **(3110-3114)**

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[224] *The South English Legendary,* trans. D'Evelyn and Mill, Vol. II, (London: Oxford Press, 1969), 279.

*Scholarly Consensus:*  Both Skeat and Benson list brief summaries of St. Kenelm's legend and note the extant source materials for his life:  Caxton's translation of the *Legenda Aurea* and *The Early South English Legendary*.  Boenig's article illustrates how Chauntecleer's reference to St. Kenelm is not haphazard.  Shared themes, motifs, and features such as the dream, the forest, and the bird in a tree inform *The Nun's Priest's Tale* and reveal a hagiographic subtext which enriches the tale's meaning.

*Summary of St. Kenelm's Legend*:  When Kenelm was seven years old, he succeeded his father, Kenulf, as king of the territory in England that included Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, and Warwickshire.[225]  Kenulf, who had established a monastery in Winchcombe, died in A.D. 819, leaving behind Kenelm and two older daughters, Dornemilde, who loved her brother very much, and Quendred, who was jealous of his newly acquired power.  Quendred hatched a plot to murder Kenelm—a move which, if carried out successfully, would guarantee her rule of the kingdom. Quendred's first attempt failed:  she gave Kenelm a concoction of poison, but he was fortified by the Lord and escaped harm. Quendred, undaunted by her failure, enlisted Kenelm's tutor, Askeberd, to carry out the young king's murder.  Quendred promised Askeberd money, sex, and power to guarantee his involvement in the plot.

Around this same time, Kenelm had a magnificent dream in which he saw, next to his bed, a beautiful golden tree bursting with flowers and fruit and branches full of glowing candles. The young king looked down from the highest branch of the tree which grew all the way to heaven and witnessed Askeberd chop down the tree.  As the tree fell, Kenelm was filled with melancholy, but he looked upward to see a beautiful bird fly up to heaven.  After he awoke, Kenelm sought out his nurse, Wolweline, who interpreted his dream to mean that Askeberd and

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[225] Jacobus, trans. by William Caxton, Vol. IV, 30-32.

Quendred intended to kill him. The white bird, Wolweline said, represented the young king's soul.

Soon thereafter, Askeberd and Kenelm went into the woods at Clent where the king, weary with knowledge of his impending doom, laid down to sleep. Askeberd began to dig a pit in which to bury Kenelm's body, but the king awoke and told him that the spot where he dug was not the one ordained for his martyrdom. Kenelm led his tutor to a hawthorne tree where Askeberd beheaded the king and buried his body in a pit near the tree, which began to sprout green leaves. As he knelt to prepare for his death, Kenelm begain singing the *Te Deum laudamus*. As in the dream, Kenelm's soul flew straight to heaven in the form of a dove.

Quendred assumed rule of the kingdom and pursued her wanton desires with reckless abandon, banning anyone from so much as mentioning the name of her brother. As a result, Kenelm's body remained in the woods at Clent for a long time.

In his account of the life of St. Kenelm included in the *Legenda Aurea*, Caxton recounts a miracle which occurred soon after the king's death. There was an old woman who lived near Clent who owned a white cow which went to graze in the dale where Kenelm was buried. Day after day, the cow would sit by the spot where the king's body was buried without consuming anything. Yet, upon her return home with the others, the cow would appear fattened and would give out more milk than any of the younger ones. This happened for several years, and the valley is now known as Cowbage.

***Significance of the St. Kenelm Reference***:  Boenig has demonstrated that the legend of St. Kenelm and *The Nun's Priest's Tale* share four specific analogues:  an admonitory dream, a retreat to a forest, a bird in a tree motif, and a comic parallel in which the poison in Kenelm's legend is reduced to a laxative to cure dyspepsia in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*.  Chauntecleer's

reference to the tale of the young martyr king is one of the many stories he enumerates in his attempt to convince Pertelote that dreams should be taken seriously.  Besides these shared themes there are further aspects of the reference which bear mention.

In addition to the comic reduction of the poison to a laxative, one assumes Chaucer's audience would have also found a great deal of humor in the fact that Chauntecleer the rooster reads saints' lives.  This is an instance in which Chaucer utilizes a reference for pure comic relief. It is clear, furthermore, that Chauntecleer not only reads legends, but he reads them closely since he correctly summarizes Kenelm's legend and appears to have interpreted the meaning correctly in terms of his own dream.  Pertelote, however, badly misinterprets Chauntecleer's dream, which she views as nonsense, advising him to "Dredeth no dreem" (255). He nearly loses his life as a result of this misreading but escapes thanks to his quick wit, essentially outsmarting Daun Russell.  This is in direct contrast to the nurse in Kenelm's legend, who correctly reads the king's dream to mean that his sister, Quendred, plans to have him murdered.  The symbolism of the tree Askebert chops down in the dream is clear to her; yet, surprisingly, no one protects Kenelm from assassination.   Although he is filled with melancholy, Kenelm actively goes to his death, joining Askebert on a hunting expedition, despite the fact that the chamberlain had been identified as his murderer in the prophetic dream.

Both the legend and the tale use similar language in describing Daun Russell and Askebert.  The fox is described as "liggen" in wait "to mordre men" and again as a "false mordrour, lurkynge in thy den!"  His character is conflated with some of the quintessential villians of history and legend:  Judas Iscariot, Sinon, and Genylon.  Askebert, likewise, is described as a "traitor," one who "falsely conspired his death," and as a "wicked traitor."

One final echo evoked in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* by the reference to St. Kenelm arises from the parallel scenes in which the perpetrators, Askebert and Russell, take their victims into the forest in order to slay them. During their expedition, Kenelm is so heavy with grief that he lies down to take a nap. Askebert views this as an opportunity to dig a pit in which to bury the king, but Kenelm awakens for the express purpose of telling him that his labor is in vain. Instead of using it as an opportunity to trick Askebert or to flee from him, Kenelm instead instructs Askebert on how he will know when the time comes to kill him. He essentially directs his own murder, and when the small rod he carries starts to bloom, he allows Askebert to behead him.

As the fox carries Chauntecleer into the woods, the rooster comes up with a brilliant plan to extricate himself from almost certain death. In a close parallel to the language used by Kenelm and in a similar setting, Chauntecleer, who is lying on the fox's back, suggests to Russell that he should turn to the mob of people and animals hot on their trail and tell them, in essence, that they labored in vain: "Turneth agayn, ye proude cherles all!/A verray pestilence upon yow falle!/Now I am come unto the wodes seyde;/Maugree youre heed, the cok shal heere abyde./I wol hym ete, in feith, and that anon!"[226] The proud fox follows the rooster's directions to the letter, which shows him to be a close reader, but in this case one who misinterprets the ending.

In addition to the analogues identified by Boenig, I have provided further instances in which Chauntecleer's reference to St. Kenelm informs the narrative of *The Nun's Priest's Tale*. From the language used to describe the traitors to the scene in the forest in which the victims direct the action, Kenelm's legend is at the heart of Chaucer's tale of the rooster with bad dreams and a penchant for hagiography.

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[226] Chaucer, 260. In the note in *The Riverside Chaucer,* Benson translates "Maugree youre heed…" as "in spite of all you can do."

# M

**ST. MARTIN (c. 316-397)**:

**"With myn housbonde, al be he your cosyn/'Nay,' quod this monk, 'by God and Seint Martyn'/He is na moore cosyn unto me/Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree!'"—Daun John,** *The Shipman's Tale***, (148-150)**

*Scholarly Consensus:* Keen and Hermann both have written convincing arguments on the significance of the monk's oath by St. Martin. Hermann views the oath as an ironic extension of the theme of "dismemberment" and gives examples from the saint's legend which illuminate the monk's cruelty (the monk's hare/husband simile contrasted with St. Martin's control over the wild dogs who chased a hare) in relation to the saint's compassion; the rending of the garment is simply another way in which Chaucer alludes to the dismemberment topos, Hermann implies. Hermann identifies two additional aspects of St. Martin's legend which are relevant to the dismemberment theme. First, he notes the irony inherent to the wife's affair with a monk who swears by St. Martin. She borrows money from the monk (which he borrows from the merchant) to buy clothing for "decidedly uncharitable purposes."[227] Second, in respect to the hare/husband language that the monk employs, Hermann sees an additional parallel between an episode from Martin's legend in which he was witness to a hare being pursued by a pack of dogs. Martin "commanded them to desist; and at once they stood still," according to the legend.[228] This contrasts with the pleasure the Monk takes, Hermann adds, in relation to the "cruelty of the

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[227] John P. Hermann, *Dismemberment, Dissemination, Discourse: Sign and Symbol in the Shipman's Tale*, *Chaucer Review*, 19, 1984-85, 329.
[228] Ibid, 330.

hare's position" and the fact that he utilizes the image to "describe his contempt for the merchant he is about to cuckold."[229]

***Summary of St. Martin's Legend:*** Martinus or Martyn embodied the spirit of the *miles Christi,* according to Jacobus, who likens his name to *Martem tenens*--one who wages war "against sin and vice" -and *martyrum unus* or "one of the martyrs."

The son of a military officer, Martin hoped to serve God despite his parent's wishes that he join the army. Due to an edict that required offspring to serve, he was forced into conscription and served under both Julian and Constantine.

On one occasion, Martin came upon a naked beggar in the dead of winter. Realizing that God had left the beggar for him, Martin promptly cut his own cloak in two and gave one half of it to the destitute man. Later, Martin had a vision that Jesus was wearing the half he had given to the beggar. In the vision, Jesus told a host of angels that a catechumen, Martin, had given it to him when he was in need. After this incident, Martin rushed to receive the sacrament of baptism. He was eighteen years of age, and he continued, out of duty, to serve in the army for two more years. Ultimately, when asked by the emperor Julian to serve a second tour, Martin refused due to his faith. He became an acolyte under Hilary, bishop of Poitiers.

Jacobus also tells us that Martin had power over both inanimate objects and non-rational animals. He effortlessly stopped a fire from destroying a building by controlling the wind that blew it; he also calmed a raging sea that tossed a ship about when the ship's captain, a pagan, invoked his name for protection. He commanded a pack of wild dogs to stop their pursuit of a hare, and, as a result, they froze in their tracks. Once while Martin bathed in a river, he commanded a river snake, which had stalked him, to stop in the name of the Lord; the snake did

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[229] *Ibid.*

as he was told and swam to the other bank. Martin also prevented a tree from falling on himself by making the sign of the cross. As did saints Francis and Frideswide, Martin also kissed a leper he encountered one day in the streets of Paris, curing the man instantly.

Martin was noted for his devotion to the Lord as well as for his ascetic lifestyle. His preference for austerity on one occasion nearly cost him his life. One night Martin was received as a guest at a friend's house in his diocese. As Martin was known to sleep on the floor covered by nothing more than a hairshirt, he found himself unsuited to the comforts of the straw-stuffed bed his friends had provided. Martin removed the straw, threw it on the floor, and stretched out on the ground to rest. Later, while Martin lay asleep, the straw burst into flames and caught his shirt on fire. When he awoke, Martin felt pain from the flames but quickly made the sign of the cross and prayed. As flames danced all around him, Martin continued praying, and when his fellow monks came to his rescue, fearing the worst, they were shocked to see him completely unharmed rather than burned alive as they had feared.

The devil continued to despise Martin because he took pity on all sinners, especially those who had fallen and wished to repent. Martin's capacity for forgiveness in the Christian spirit was so great that he even offered Satan the opportunity to repent. Some considered Martin to be on equal footing with the apostles due to the fact that a globe of fire burned over his head once when he said mass.

Martin's death was not without controversy. His impact as a Bishop was so profound that a battle was waged between the citizens of Tours and Poitiers over who would be allowed to keep the saint's body. The battle continued until one night, a group of men from Tours made off with Martin's body through a window and took it by boat to their city. Sixty-four years after Martin's death, Jacobus reports that his cloak, or *cappa*, was used by the French army as a

talisman every time they went into battle. The keepers of the cloak were known as the

*cappellani*, that is, chaplain.

***Significance of the St. Martin Reference:*** *The Shipman's Tale'*s underlying theme of

the exchange of goods and services has not been given previous consideration in light of the

Monk's oath by St. Martin. Throughout the tale, transactions abound in terms of either financial

or physical exchange: the monk borrows money from the Merchant, the Wife borrows the same

money from the monk, and the only form of repayment which takes place involves sexual

intercourse, the oldest form of commerce known to man. For 100 francs, the wife essentially

prostitutes herself "for to arraye" (for the purpose of buying fine clothing), something which she

ends up paying for two times, sexually, and actually, when the Merchant learns about the monk's

supposed repayment. Though the wife allows the Merchant to "score it upon [her] taille" (a

phrase which Benson translates as, "mark it on my tally, charge it to my account") (414), he

never comprehends that his own repayment has come in the form of the cuckold horns, a gift to

him by his Wife and his "cosyn" the monk. When these actions are paralleled with Martin's

selfless act of cutting his cloak in two with his sword and giving one half to the beggar, the

various transactions—sex for money, money for clothing, and sex to cancel out a bad loan—are

thrown into a harsh, condemnatory light which serves to illuminate the corrupt nature of

relationships devoid of love and altruism. St. Martin's cloak, his most recognizable

hagiographic attribute, becomes a metaphor for Christian charity and evokes Christ's gift of

himself for humanity's salvation. Martin's gift to the beggar increases his literal worth

exponentially in the eyes of Christ.

One final irony evinced by the monk's oath by St. Martin is the fact that the Wife is

"split" between the monk and the Merchant for sexual purposes. In light of St. Martin's

"splitting" of his cloak in two for the benefit of the beggar, the Wife"s "doubling" is one more instance in which the hagiographic echo informs the tale's rich meaning.

**ST. MAURUS (MAUR, MAURE) (sixth century)[230]: "The reule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneit—/By cause that it was old and somdel streit/This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace,/And heeld after the newe world the space."—Chaucer, *The General Prologue* (173-176*)***

*Scholarly Consensus:* Maurus's mention in *The General Prologue*, like Benedict's and Augustine's, serves as a contrasting hagiographic reference which further condemns the Monk's behavior. Chaucer's reference to St. Maurus has been discussed very briefly by Skeat who confirms the legend summarized below.

*Summary of St. Maurus Legend*: Maurus's family entrusted his care while still a boy to St. Benedict at his monastery in Mont Cassino. He was an exceptional child who set a good example for others in learning, prayer, and devotions. One of his earliest miracles involved walking across water to save a drowning child. At the request of Innocent, bishop of Mans who hoped to establish a monastery in his province, Benedict reluctantly sent Maurus, with his hand-written rule, on a lengthy journey to Mans. Before his departure, Maurus received several holy relics from Benedict to take on the trip. Maurus also received a special gift from Benedict. The holy man told Maurus the year he would die. When Maurus and his companions arrived in Mans, Innocent also had died around the same time as Benedict, and the presiding bishop had no interest in his predecessor's plans.

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[230] Jacobus, trans. by William Caxton, Vol. III, 33-35.

Maurus therefore left Mans without any prospects but quickly was received by Florus, a Frankish noble, who acquired permission from the king to build a monastery. Maurus took charge of the project, building it to his own specifications, near the Loire. While there, Maurus performed many miracles and was praised by Florus and others for receiving Benedict's "art." Maurus was expert at exorcism and once banished a host of demons from the body of three of his workers who were fomenting a rebellion. After healing a bed-ridden man who had not walked in seven years, Maurus found himself with a growing group of supporters. The monastery was completed in the eighth year, and many of the noblemen consigned their sons to Maurus. Eventually, his ranks grew to 140, the number at which he stopped accepting novitiates. In his final few years, Maurus rarely left the monastery, for he was well aware of Benedict's foretelling. In fact, Maurus made Florus's son the presiding abbot so that he might devote himself more fully to prayer. Maurus faced off with the devil in his last year. One night when he was on his way into the church, he was accosted by a band of demons, who promised to destroy the lives of as many monks as possible since they were jealous of Maurus' success. Exacly 116 monks, including Maurus, were struck with a pestilence and died. Twenty-four monks survived.

*__Significance of the Reference to St. Maurus__*: As is the case with the reference to Benedict, Maurus' significance to the Monk's portrait is neither ironic nor necessarily ambiguous. It does, however, serve at least two purposes, one purely poetic, and the other thematic, as it reinforces the contrast between traditional monasticism and the new guard of cenobites with whom the Monk clearly associates. First, by positioning the disciple, Maurus, before Benedict in the line's scansion, in effect inverting the position of disciple in relation to teacher, Chaucer is able to rhyme Benedight, which appears to be a unique spelling of the saint's

name, with "streit." Second, as Benedict's most famous disciple, Maurus was sent by Benedict to establish and perpetuate his rule in France. The Monk's contrast with a true follower of Benedict only serves to reinforce how egregiously he has contravened the laws by which his order is governed.

**ST. MARY OF EGYPT (241-317)**:

**"Who fedde the Egipcien Marie in the cave,/Or in the desert? No wight but Crist, sanz faille./Fyve thousand folk it was as greet mervaille/With loves five and fishes two to feede./God sente his foyson at hir grete neede."—the Man of Law, *The Man of Law's Tale*, (497-504).**

*Scholarly Consensus:* Chaucer's reference to St. Mary of Egypt has not been discussed in the critical literature. She is identified in Skeat as living in the fifth century. Skeat also observes that she was often mistaken for St. Mary Magdalene.

*Summary of St. Mary of Egypt's Legend:* Mary lived in Alexandria until the age of twenty-nine where she led a life of prostitution and self-indulgence for seventeen years. In her own words, she never once "refused my body to anyone," thereby earning the nickname, "The Sinner." Before her powerful conversion in A.D. 270, she boarded a ship to Jerusalem, having heard that a group of pilgrims were leaving from Egypt to venerate the Holy Cross. The sailors asked her how she intended to pay for her fare, and since she had no money, she offered her body as payment. Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, each of the pilgrims entered the church with the exception of Mary who was restrained by an invisible force at the entrance. Recognizing that her sins were preventing her from going inside, Mary let out a groan and upon looking up saw an apparition of the Blessed Virgin. Mary prayed to the Virgin and promised she would renounce

her former life if allowed to enter and venerate the cross. After adoring the cross, she was given

three coins which she used to purchase three loaves of bread. Mary then heard a voice tell her to

cross the Jordan where her salvation would be waiting for her. She left immediately and

remained there for forty-seven years, wandering the desert, eventually in rags and ultimately

naked. Despite these physical hardships, she sustained herself on the three loaves of bread,

subsequently conquering the temptations of the flesh that had plagued her for years. She lived in

a state of perpetual penance, but steadily grew holier and holier.

Mary told all of these things to Zozimus, a priest who first encountered her in the desert

by chance as he left his monastery in search of a holy man. Much to his amazement, Mary knew

his name and the fact that he was a priest before he identified himself. He witnessed her levitate

and later walk on water. Before leaving, Zozimus promised Mary he would return to the same

spot a year later to administer communion during Holy Week. On that day, as he looked across

the horizon, Zozimus watched in amazement as Mary made the sign of the cross and walked

across the river Jordan to meet him. She requested his presence again the following year. A year

later, however, Zozimus returned to find Mary dead. There was a note written in the sand asking

him to bury her. Though he lacked both the strength and a shovel to dig a grave, Zozimus was

miraculously aided by a lion, which prepared a grave for him in which to bury the saint. Mary of

Egypt died April 2$^{nd}$. Jacobus dates Mary's death to A.D. 317 though other sources suggest she

died in A.D. 421.

***Significance of the St. Mary of Egypt Reference:*** In *The Man of Law's Tale*, Chaucer's

reference to St. Mary of Egypt calls to mind scenes from the hermit's legend which parallel the

wanderings of Custance, after she is forced into exile by the Sultan's mother. The narrator

presumes that since she wandered for three years, Custance eventually had to have run out of

food.  In the following lines, the Man of Law raises the question of how she continued to survive

under such desperate circumstances, with no food, no water, and, seemingly, no hope:  "Where

myghte this womman mete and drynke have/Thre yeer and moore? How lasteth hire vitaille?"

(498-99).  The reference to St. Mary of Egypt occurs at line 500, almost at the tale's halfway

mark, and is made in response to this larger question of the source of Custance's nourishment.

The Man of Law answers his first question by asking another question, "Who fedde the Egipcien

Marie in the cave,/Or in the desert?"  In this particular reference, the story of St. Mary's

miraculous survival in the desert is taken at face value and therefore serves as an authoritative

text which bolsters Custance's own miraculous survival.

In her legend, Mary leaves behind a life of prostitution in Alexandria in order to go to

Jerusalem to venerate the Holy Cross.  Once there, and after learning her calling from a voice

which tells her to go into the desert, she buys three loaves of bread.  The loaves miraculously

sustain her over the course of the forty-seven years she lives alone in a cave and wanders the

desert.  In her legend, Mary never lacks for "bread," either physical or spiritual, despite severe

deprivations and a life of utter solitude.  Through her devotion to the Cross, she is given a

strength and a fortitude, symbolized in the three loaves of bread, which never run out.

Interestingly, the last food she receives is from Zozimos the priest who brings her the Holy

Eucharist in the desert.

These details serve to support the fact that Custance somehow survived her time at sea

without starving to death.  The motif of the Cross is also crucial to the way in which St. Mary's

legend informs this scene in *The Man of Law's Tale.*  As one recalls, Custance's three-year

peregrination at sea begins with a prayer for protection spoken to the Cross she carries aboard the

ship. After she crosses herself, she asks the Cross to keep her from the devil's grip:  "O cleere, o

welful auter, hooly corys,/Reed of the Lambes blood ful of pietee,/That wessh the world fro the olde iniquitee/Me fro the feend and fro his clawes kepe…."[231]  She closes her prayer by asking the "Victorious tree" to give her back her life to amend, a direct allusion to the *Life of St. Mary of Egypt*, who goes to the Cross in Jerusalem in order to receive, essentially, a new lease on life. Her devotion to the Cross, on which "The white lamb, that hurt was with a spere" becomes the means through which she is saved, as "Crist" works a miracle similar to the miracle of the three loaves of St. Mary of Egypt.

Finally, regarding the setting of this scene from the tale, Mary's legend holds particular resonance in regard to the solitary nature of Custance's exile.  Surely it is no coincidence that Chaucer's female heroine survives on prayer and solitude in a cell-like setting from which she cannot escape.


# N

**ST. NEOT** (**NOTE**) (**d. c. 877**)[232]:

**"What Absolon! For Cristes sweete tree,/Why rise ye so rathe? Ey, benedicitee!/What eyleth yow?  Som gay gerl, Got it woot,/Hath broght yow thus upon the viritoot./By Seinte Note, ye woot wel what I mene."—Gerveys,** *The Miller's Tale* **(3766-3701)**

*Scholarly Consensus:*  Benson identifies Neot as an obscure ninth-century saint and states that the basis for Gervase's oath is "not clear": he concludes that it is "just possible" that Chaucer "might have heard of the tradition associating St. Neot with King Alfred's legendary

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[231] Chaucer, 93.
[232] From Rev. S. Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints*, Vol. 8, 1898, 697-698.

founding of Oxford University." [233] Macdonald looks beyond previous scholars' almost single-minded linguistic interest in the word *viritoot* to focus on Neot's relationship with King Alfred. Macdonald examines a series of interpolations from the eleventh century which indicates that Neot may have counseled Alfred regarding his need to rise early in order to pray to defeat his sexual appetite. This suggests Absolon rising early to visit Alison. Richards concludes that Macdonald's thesis is flawed and that the probability of Chaucer alluding to the interpolations is unlikely. She argues for the "recensions of the life of the saint," which reveal ironic parallels between Neot's quirky habits and Absolon's routine before courting Alison. While Neot strictly follows his clerical obligations, Absolon abandons his.

    ***Summary of St. Neot's Legend***:  Known as the pygmy saint and a supposed relative of King Alfred, St. Neot (pronounced as either "need" or "note") was a clergyman from Cornwall whose height, depending on sources, was anywhere from fifteen inches to four feet. Neot, the patron saint of Fish and the eponymous town in Cornwall, was evidently so vertically challenged that he was required to throw his key into the lock to open the church. He also needed a stool on which to stand in order to say Mass. Neot, who was initially a soldier, he became a monk at Glastonbury abbey, but later opted for a more solitary life as a hermit on the Bodmin Moor near Cornwall. According to legend, Neot performed his daily devotions while naked in a holy well in which he stood up to his neck in water. His meals were provided by an angel who one day revealed to Neot that there were three fish in his well and that as long as he ate only one fish per day there would always be a total of three. Neot abided by this custom and never ran out of fish. However, one day Neot was ill and incapable of performing his offices in the well, so, in his stead, he sent a fellow monk, Barius, to get his lunch. Hoping to please Neot, Barius caught two

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[233] Chaucer, 848.

fish, and baked one and broiled the other.  When Neot realized what Barius had done, he shot up from his bed, said a prayer over the cooked fish, and asked the monk to return them to the well immediately.  Once they were returned to the water, the number of fish was restored to three.

     ***Significance of the St. Neot Reference:***  This oath has been well-mined both by Macdonald, whose false starts nonetheless yielded valuable momentum in terms of the ironic qualities of the oath, and by Richards, who rejects Macdonald's assertion that Chaucer had in mind King Alfred rising early; she substitutes for Alfred St. Neot, who also was in the habit of rising early to pray.  In terms of the oath's ironic qualities, the saint's fastidiousness in terms of his dress, singing, and early rising are evoked by Absolon's early rising, his concern with his appearance, and his neglect of his clerical obligations.

     In the introduction to her book, Haskell mentions that the Neot oath has "the hallmarks of an illuminating reference."[234]  But, she says, "because of the immediate context of the oath and because of the character to whom it is applied, we should expect something in the legend of St. Neot to expand the pithiness of the fabliau in which it appears, either by comic complement or ironic contrast."[235] One further comic parallel suggested by the Neot oath has to do with the miniscule saint's habit of immersing himself in water while he prayed.  Though the narrative of *The Miller's Tale* had momentarily forgotten about the carpenter while Nicholas "pleyed" with his wife and while Absolon readied his revenge, the oath by "Seint Neot" surely would have quickly turned the audience's attention back to the carpenter who was still waist high in a tub without water, waiting for a flood, whereas earlier he had spent time saying his "devocioun": "The carpenter seyde his devocioun,/And stille he sit, and biddeth his preyere,/Awaitynge on the reyn,  if he it heere" (3640-42).

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[234] Haskell, 1.

[235] *Ibid.*

**SAINT NICHOLAS (d. c. 345)[236]:**

**"But ay, whan I remembre on this mateere,/Seint Nicholas stant evere in my presence,/For he so yong to Crist dide reverence."—the Prioress, *The Prioress's Tale*, (513-515)**

*Scholarly Consensus*:  Haskell makes several significant connections between the legend of St. Nicholas and the tale told by the Prioress.  She suggests that although there is only one mention of the saint in the tale, his presence nonetheless is felt throughout.  Besides the obvious allusion to the "reverence" which "yong" Nicholas did to "Crist," other aspects, such as the fact that he was patron saint of clerks, his connection to the Feast of the Innocents and his association with the Virgin Mary, as well as the saint's sympathy for Jews in some of his tales, increase the layers of meaning in the Prioress's story but also ironically undercut her piety and indict the brutality of the tale in general.

*Summary of St. Nicholas's Legend:*  Nicholas's name derives from *nicos*, which means victory and *laos* which means people; therefore, Jacobus says, Nicholas's name may be interpreted to mean "victory over people" or a victory over sin and vice.

Nicholas was born to wealthy parents who were extremely devout.  He was a prodigy of sorts who supposedly, while a baby, stood straight up in the tub while bathing.  While still an infant, Nicholas, much like his parents, who embraced a life of celibacy after his birth, showed a remarkable proclivity for self-denial. He breastfed only on Wednesdays and Fridays.  He was devoted to God and spent most of his days in church rather than playing with other children.

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[236] Jacobus, 21-27.

After the death of his parents, Nicholas was left with a large inheritance and a strong desire to distribute his wealth in order to help others. He soon learned of a poor man in Patera who was considering a life of prostitution for his three daughters. Nicholas, disgusted by the prospects of this fact, took a quantity of his gold one night, wrapped it up, and threw it into the man's window. The poor man was amazed and, as a result, was able to have his oldest daughter married. Nicholas did the same thing two more times, on both occasions saving each of the daughters from a horrible fate.

Nicholas became bishop of Myra after a bishop from another district had a dream in which he was told the name of the man who would succeed Myra's previous bishop. The new bishop of Myra, he heard in a voice, would be the first man named Nicholas to show up at the church's doors the next morning. Nicholas, who had been told by God to get up early and to go to the church, presented himself promptly, at which point he was taken in and installed.

Once, Saint Nicholas was asked to intercede on behalf of some sailors whose ship was being tossed about at sea. An apparition of Nicholas appeared on board and helped the sailors steady their ship, assisting with the roping and sails. As the ship pulled into harbor, the sailors went to church to offer thanks and, much to their amazement, they recognized the figure celebrating mass as the same man who had helped them on the ship. On another occasion, Nicholas came to the aid of the people of his district who were in the midst of a horrendous famine.

Nicholas was also known as the patron saint of students. Jacobus tells of a post-mortem miracle Nicholas performed after a schoolboy was deceived and killed by the devil. The boy's father was a devotee of Saint Nicholas and kept his feast in his honor yearly, on one such occasion inviting numerous guests to his home to celebrate. The devil showed up dressed in

similar fashion to the others, and when the boy answered the door, Satan lured him away and murdered him.  The father was beside himself with grief and called out to St. Nicholas to explain how the boy could have been killed after all of the reverence they had shown Nicholas over the years.  As he spoke the words, his son rose up as if he were waking from a nap.

  ***Significance of the St. Nicholas Reference:*** I am in agreement with the assessment that Chaucer probably had the story of young St. Nicholas standing in the bath as an infant in mind when the Prioress says, "Seint Nicholas stant evere in my presence,/For he so yong to Crist dide reverence" (514-15)[237].  It is surprising that this somehow managed to evade scholars who typically connected the reference in the tale to a moment in Nicholas's legend (see above) in which he breastfed only on Wednesdays and Fridays.

  In her chapter "St. Nicholas and The Prioress's Cursed Jewes," Haskell explores a host of connections between the overtly anti-semitic delivery of the Prioress and the action in the tale itself involving the martyrdom of the seven year old boy, along with the reference to St. Nicholas, which she argues, works to ironically undermine The Prioress's tale of "cursed" Jews. The two stories she focuses on are the "The Image of St. Nicholas" and "The Jew and the Dishonest Christian," both of which involve Jews who are robbed by Christians.  Thanks to an intervention on behalf of Nicholas, in both instances the property and money are returned to their rightful owners and as a show of solidarity with the saint, the Jews convert to Christianity.[238]

  These stories play a crucial role in Haskell's development of the overall irony in the tale, but there is one tale she neglects to mention that points directly to the boy's martyrdom in the Prioress's story.  In the *Legenda Aurea,* the tale in question comes directly after both "The Image

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[237] Chaucer, 210.
[238] See Haskell *Essays on Chaucer's Saints*, chapter seven, in which she discusses these two tales from the St. Nicholas canon (52-53).

of St. Nicholas" and "The Jew and the Dishonest Christian" and is the only story in the Nicholas'

legend in which a young student is murdered.  In the tale, the devil appears at the home of the

boy's father, who is celebrating the feast of the St. Nicholas.  The devil is dressed as a pilgrim

and knocks at the door and begs for charity.  The father sends his young son to the door to give

alms but finds no one there, leaves the house and follows the stranger to a crossroad, where the

devil "waylaid and strangled" him.  At the news the father moans with grief and questions how

the saint could let this happen to his beloved son. The young boy is miraculously revived by

Nicholas.  Though there is no overt mention of a Jew in this particular tale, it certainly would

have been in the minds of Chaucer's audience, when the poet prefaces the murder of the young

boy in *The Prioress's Tale* with the following lines:  "Our firste foo, the serpent Sathanas/That

hath in Jues herte his waspes nest/Up swal, and seide, 'O Hebrayk peple, allas!'" (558-560).  In

these lines, Satan inspires the Jews to grab the young boy on his way home, where they also

waylay him and then slit his throat.  However, in *The Prioress's Tale* there is no miraculous

resurrection by the patron saint of clerks and schoolboys, an interesting interpretation of St.

Nicholas's legend.  The Prioress forgoes the standard *topos* in the Nicholas legend, in which

Jews are converted after some miraculous resurrection or occurrence. She opts instead to have

them drawn and quartered.  The idea of Satan as a pilgrim has not been directly explored in

relation to this tale or in any other.

# R

**ST. RUMON (RUEN, RONAN, ROMANUS) (c. 7th century)**:

 (1) **"So moot I theen, thou art a propre man,/And lyk a prelat, by Seint Ronyan!/Seyde I nat wel? I kan nat speke in terme"—Harry Bailly,** *The Introduction to the Pardoner's Tale*, **(309-311)**

(2) **"'Thou beel amy, thou Pardoner,' he sayde,/ 'Telle us som myrthe or japes right anon.'/'It shall be doon," quod he, 'by Seint Ronyan.'"—the Pardoner,** *The Introduction to the Pardoner's Tale*, **(318-320)**

*Scholarly Consensus*:  There is much dispute about the exact identity of the St. Ronyan by whom both the Host and the Pardoner swear in *The Pardoner's Prologue*.  Scholars have linked Ronyan to both St. Ninian and St. Ronan in separate instances, but those are not the only possible names. Skeat, who argues for Ronan, notes that Ronyan is apparently a corruption of Ronan, "a saint whose name is well known...[but] of [whom] scarcely anything is known."[239]  He also suggests the possibility of St. Rinian or St. Tronian and that Bede mentions Ronan.  Here is the passage from his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*:  "The most zealous champion of the true Easter was an Irishman named Ronan, who had been instructed in Gaul and Italy in the authentic practice of the church."[240]  Skeat concludes that the Host and the Pardoner "were not very clear about the saint's name, only knowing him to swear by."[241]  Sledd argues for St. Ninian of Scotland, also mentioned in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, as the man who brought Christianity to the Picts:  "The southern Picts are said to have abandoned the errors of idolatry

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[239] *Ibid*, 266-267.

[240] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, (New York and London: Penguin, 1990), 186.

[241] Skeat, 266.

and accepted the true Faith through the preaching of Bishop Ninian."[242]  The editor's note to this entry mentions that Ninian was a fifth-century scholar, traveller, and "admirer of St. Martin of Tours, some of whose relics he may have brought to Tours."[243]  In the most recent article to have been written about the St. Ronyan oath (1976), Haskell agrees with Skeat's asessment that the intended reference is Ronan and adds an abundance of evidence from celtic folklore and Breton saints' lives to support the connection.

*__Summary of St. Rumon's Legend:__*[244] Baring-Gold begins the entry for Rumon of Devon, or Ronan of Brittany, with a note of caution that the identification of the seventh-century Breton saint is far from conclusive.  Rumon is possibly Ronan, the same Celtic saint whom St. Patrick confirmed as bishop in the seventh century, who also was the first saint to travel to Scotland. He also may have been Ruan of Cornwall.  The legend, as presented in Baring-Gould's *The Lives of Saints,* is very disconnected and the saint's primary characteristic is an indefatigable wanderlust. He travels from country to country, rarely staying in one place for very long.  Perhaps in an effort to emphasize the multiple associations, Baring-Gold alternates indiscriminately between the proper names Ruan, Ronan, and Rumon in explaining the saint's movements.

There are a few locales which bear Ronan's name in England including a well in the town of Lanihorne (a corruption of Llan-ruan) called Ronan's well.  At some point in the seventh century, Ronan journeyed to Léon, where a large rock is named in his honor.

The legend most commonly associated with St. Ronan is that he was a werewolf.  This legend also is the only sustained narrative in Baring-Gould's account and is summarized as follows:  Ronan settled in Brittany among a diverse population of British settlers made up of

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[242] Bede, 148.
[243] Bede, 367-368.
[244] Baring-Gould, Vol. 16, 165-167

some Christians and some pagans who were herders and farmers. The locals' herds were under siege by a pack of wolves. In the meantime, St. Ronan preached the Gospel and worked hard to convert the locals. But many resented his success and were also suspicious of his motives. According to Baring-Gold, Ronan's chief naysayer was a beautiful woman named Keban, whose husband had been converted by Ronan. Afraid that her husband would become a monk like Ronan, she accused the saint of being a werewolf that went around at night eating the people's sheep. She also accused St. Ronan of kidnapping and eating her daughter. She made her case before the king and proposed that Ronan should be burned at the stake. The king's solution was to have two wolf-dogs smell Ronan. If Ronan was a wolf, the dogs would attack and kill him. If not, they would leave him alone. When they approached the saint, he said, "Do what God wills," and they licked his feet. The people then wanted Keban burned alive for slander but Ronan prevented her death. Keban's daughter was found later that day hidden away inside her house. Little more is known of Ronan, the saint with many identities.

    ***Significance of the St. Ronyan Reference:*** It has been suggested that more confusion has stemmed from the legend of St. Ronan and his multiple associations with other saints of similar names—Ruan, Rumon, and Romanus (third-century martyr)—than any other saint in hagiographic lore.[245] This shifting composite has led to an interpretive quagmire of sorts, in which scholars, without a definitive source or clear-cut saint, have been left with no choice but to speculate and approach the reference from a philological standpoint. In sum, the identification of St. Ronyan with St. Ninian and other variants does not seem to reverberate with elements of *The Pardone's Tale* to the same extent that most hagiographic references do in other tales. But, with Haskell's analysis in 1976, the scholarly impasse was breached in convincing fashion.

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[245] Haskell, 18.

Haskell examines the life of the Celtic saint Ronan through a variety of Breton sources and makes a compelling case for St. Ronan as Chaucer's intended reference.[246] She dismisses the "Scottish Runyon/Rinnian/Ninian saints" which seem "remote from Chaucer's continentally oriented ecclesiastical world," and proposes to look at the legend of the Breton St. Ronan whose lore "had been gathering for centuries."[247] However, Haskell points out, the wealth of associations with Ronan have a direct parallel to the Pardoner's character, which previous interpretations have failed to consider. A brief survey of some of Haskell's major points will reveal the connection between Ronan and the Pardoner and the "by St. Ronyan" oaths in *The Pardoner's Prologue*.

Haskell catalogs a wealth of attributes associated with St. Ronan from his reputed sorcery, control of the elements, and petrification, to his link with coldness, werewolves, and purported bisexuality, based on Ronan's reputation as the "ravager of men." This designation may have come from the fact that instead of converting Keben's husband to Christianity, as Baring-Gould relates in the saint's legend, Ronan might have kidnapped him. A prominent symbol in some of the stories that mention Ronan, according to Haskell, is stone, and in particular, a Stone Mare that went everywhere with him. After Ronan's death, the Stone Mare gave up its animation and turned into a shrine visited by barren women. Ronan was also said to have turned Keban into stone when she attempted to retrieve her husband, and he is associated with a stone in Léon. One further symbol of importance to the Ronan legend identified by Haskell is the holly leaf, which has explicit sexual implications in respect to the Pardoner. Holly, Haskell suggests, in the case of Ronan is identified with sexual exclusivity. Rather than its

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[246] Sources include La Braz's *The Land of Pardons*, Gougaud's *Les Saints irlandais hors d'Irland*, a Lheureux's *Bretange*, and *Le Folklore de la Bretagne*.
[247] Haskell, 18.

typical association with regeneration, the plant is in fact "dioecious," or degenerative, which symbolizes Ronan's hermit life: "In its bisexuality it represents the self-contained hermit who wants no contact with women, particularly, or humans generally, except with the person he has brought within the holly circle, another man."[248]

Haskell sees a connection between Ronan's attributes and some of the Pardoner's primary attributes: cold and isolated, ambiguous sexuality, hermaphroditic (dioecious), the Pardoner's mention in connection with a mare, the fact that women only appear as temptations in his tale. Haskell also sees the holly (possibly the holly-oak), a primary symbol in Ronan's legend, as a metaphor for age and endurance. The old man in *The Pardoner's Tale* exemplifies this notion: "To fynde Deeth, turne up this croked wey,/For in that grove I lafte hym, by my fey,/Under a tree" (761-63). Furthermore, Haskell identifies an additional symbol from the Ronan legend: the spider web, "which protected the entrance to the hermit's cell"; The spider "represents self-containment, as well as death and avarice."[249] She also cites the wolf as a symbol of avarice.

Haskell concludes with a historical connection between Chaucer's life and St. Ronan. Evidently in the summer of 1377, Chaucer visited France while the "Grand Tromenie" or "Pardon of the Mountain" was taking place in Brittany. During this pardon, the feast of St. Ronan took place, and pilgrims climbed a mountain to emulate the saint's supposed daily path. Those pilgrims who finished the walk received a pardon. Haskell speculates that Chaucer might have been there in 1395, the year in which he supposedly wrote *The Pardoner's Tale*.

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[248] Haskell, 20.

[249] *Ibid,* 21.

# T

**ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY (c. 1118-1170)**:

1) **"That she hir love hym graunted ate laste,/And swor hir ooth, by Seint Thomas of Kent/That she wol been at his commandment…"—the Miller,** *The Miller's Tale***, (3291)**

2) **"I am adrad, by Seint Thomas/It standeth not aright with Nicholas/God shilde that he deyde sodeynly!"—John the carpenter,** *The Miller's Tale***, (3425-47)**

*Scholarly Consensus:* Alison's oath by St. Thomas has generated very little commentary beyond the obvious identification with St. Thomas à Becket. DeWeever, in the *Chaucer Name Dictionary*, notes that "Thomas of Kent" and "by Seint Thomas" occur as "rhyming tags" in *The Miller's Tale*. Huff Cline declares Thomas à Becket the default saint mentioned in *The Miller's Tale* due to local appropriateness (there was a church in Osney dedicated to the martyr) which, by extension, covers the two "by Thomas" oaths sworn by John the carpenter. In respect to the carpenter's oaths by St. Thomas, Malone calls for a more expansive interpretation which takes into consideration Chaucer's probable wish for ambiguity which would have allowed for more meaning.

*Summary of St. Thomas' Legend*: Jacobus tells us that Thomas' name correlates to his greatest attribute: depth, in specific, as it applies to his humility, as well as his twofold disposition towards excellent preaching and good deeds. He became Archbishop of Canterbury though he resisted the king's initial offers; his decision was life-altering as it propelled him to pursue a state of perfection close to the limits of human capability. Thomas mortified his flesh and fasted daily, gave alms, and humbled himself, becoming the living manifestation of the *imitatio Christi.*

The King of England tried to bend Thomas for his own political purposes. After relenting once to the wishes of King Henry II, Thomas became full of remorse and renounced his ministry, throwing himself at the mercy of the Pope. As King Henry plotted to kill him, Thomas fled to Pontigny. In turn, the King exiled Thomas' family and seized their property, making their life generally miserable. After seven years of exile, Thomas returned to England with the highest honors.

Jacobus recounts a vision of heaven in which a young man claims to have been admitted into the Holy of Holies where, among the apostles and saints, he saw an empty throne. He was told by an angel that throne was for a dignitary of the English Church. Thomas' martyrdom occurred on the heels of his continued defense of the church—after repeated defiance of his wishes, the King sends soldiers to kill Thomas. Thomas was martyred in 1170 at the altar during Mass while the other clergy present are spared.

Jacobus relates several post-mortem miracles and attendant legends attributed to Thomas. Many miracles were worked through Thomas' intercessory call: the blind and the deaf were healed, the lame were able to walk again, and there were even some instances of the resurrection of the dead. The sick were healed by touching the blood on Thomas' garments. During his own *requiem aerternam*, a choir of angels came and interrupted the choir to sing the Mass of Martyrs. A sick man who prayed to Thomas to get well did so, but he had regrets thinking the state of health might prove detrimental to his soul. As a result, he prayed to be made ill as before, and his sickness returned.

In one case, a woman wished for more alluring eyes and went to Thomas' tomb to ask for them. She was struck blind upon her request and only received her sight again after much

suffering.  Jacobus also tells of a talking bird, which while being pursued by a hawk, called out, "St. Thomas come to my aid," and the hawk instantly dropped dead.

***Significance of the St. Thomas References:*** To give Huff Cline her due, the proximity of the church of St. Thomas in Osney to Oxford is a solid basis for concluding that both Alison and John "meant" St. Thomas à  Becket, though this observation in no way comes close to explaining the language, context, implications, or irony of the oath.  What remains curious to me, and unexplained by anyone, however, is the fact that in *The Miller's Tale*, both the husband, John, and his wife, Alison, swear by a saint with the same name in such a short expanse of time out of "concern" for the same person, Nicholas.  John, of course swears "by Seint Thomas" for fear that Nicholas's has gone mad, whereas Alison swears "by Seint Thomas of Kent" in order to seal her promise to have an extramarital affair with the clerk.  Surely there must be some additional ambiguity in the latter of these three oaths, given the rather bizarre choice of Becket, the martyred archbishop, as a saint who would somehow be sympathetic to an infidelity of the nature Nicholas and Alison propose.  True, the pilgrims are on their way to the shrine of Becket, but, again, that does absolutely nothing for the oath's implications.  The phrase "she wol been at his commandment" is perhaps as good a point as any with which to begin the search for further ambiguity.

"Being at someone's commandment" is suggestive of subservience and implies a relationship in which one has power or dominance over another.  And, as Becket's legend attests again and again, the theme of subservience is a crucial one in terms of his relationship with King Henry. After his appointment to Archbishop of Canterbury, Becket repeatedly refuses to relent to the king, who clashes with the priest over church property rights and his excommunication of other bishops.  Becket's fidelity is not to his king but to the Church.  His unwillingness to bend

his will despite repeated overtures, leads, ultimately, to his untimely martyrdom.  Jacobus uses

the words "strenuously resisted," "imposed," "consent," "confirm," "royal demands,"

"suspended," and "absolutely refused" to describe the push and pull between the king and his

subject, Thomas.  Henry is described as "unable to move him by pleas or force," and only when

the king's men come to murder him does Thomas give way, realizing his martyrdom is at hand:

"Having said these words, he bowed his venerable head to the swords of the wicked…."[250] The

saint finally concedes, realizing that his true reward is at hand, rather than compromising either

his reputation or the kingdom of God.

The dalliance between the young wife and the clerk a few lines previous to Alison's

concession to be "at his commandment" is characterized by a similar language of pursuit and

resistance in which, initially, Alison refuses to bend: "And she sproong as a colt dooth in the

trave/And with her heed she wryed faste awey" (3282-83).  For a brief while longer, she persists

in defending herself against Nicholas' advances:  "I wol nat kisse thee, by my fey," and, "Why

lat be!" quod she, "Lat be, Nicholas" (3285). Nicholas, on the other hand, pursues Alison

vigorously, but, in doing so, assumes the posture of the martyr:  "Ywis, but if ich have my

wille,/For deerne love of thee, lemman I spille" (my love I die) (3277-78).  He repeats his plea

again:  "Lemman, love me al atones,/Or I will dyen, also God save me!" (3280-81), and "gan

mercy for to crye…" before Alison finally relents and agrees "by Seint Thomas of Kent" to be

"at his commandment."

The language of pursuit and resistance in the scene from *The Miller's Tale*, described

above, when contrasted with the language of conflict in St. Thomas à Becket's struggle with

King Henry reveals the wife's oath "by Seint Thomas of Kent" to be purely ironic and is one

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[250] Jacobus, 60-61.

more instance in which Chaucer uses a hagiographic reference to expand meaning in *The Canterbury Tales.*

<div align="center">

**U**

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**ST. URBAN**[251] (d. 230):

**"Seint Urban with his deknes prively/The body fette and buryed it by nyghte/Among his othere seintes honestly/Hir hous the chirche of Seinte Cecilie highte/Seint Urban halwed it, as he wel myghte." –the Second Nun,** *The Second Nun's Tale* **(547-53)**

*Scholarly Consensus*:  Skeat identifies St. Urban in his notation to *The Second Nun's Tale* as Pope Urban I who was pontiff from 222 until his death by beheading in 230.  Urban's name appears twelve times in Chaucer's tale of St. Cecilia's martyrdom.  He is referred to as "goode Urban," "Pope Urban," and on three occasions, "Seint Urban."

*Summary of St. Urban's Legend***:**  Jacobus divides the name Urban into two parts in his explication: *ur*, which he defines as light or fire, and *banal* which he defines as response. Jacobus emphasizes light as the key to defining Urban's character.  Urban, he says, was a light to those to whom he responded and whom he led.  Urban was also a light in that he was on fire for God.  Like light, Urban illuminated everything in his surroundings. Furthermore, since light is immaterial, Jacobus states that it is fair to say that Urban was "immaterial in his contempt for the world."

Urban's *vita* is one of the shorter presented in the *Legenda Aurea,* and as such Jacobus focuses primarily on one specific incident near the end of Urban's pontificate.  Urban reigned

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[251] Jacobus, 314-315.

during a period when Christian persecution was severe.  The new emperor, Alexander Severus, was under pressure, however, from his mother, Ammaea, a recent convert to Christianity, who wanted the persecutions to end.  But Alexander had little immediate success in curtailing Christian maltreatment, due in part to the agenda of the Roman prefect, Almachius, notorious for having had Saint Cecilia beheaded for supposed blasphemy.  Almachius' most recent target, Urban, was nowhere to be found, and so Almachius and his henchmen began an exhaustive search for the pope.  They discovered Urban in a cave hiding out with three deacons and three priests.  Urban was put on trial before Almachius, who accused him of "misleading five thousand persons, among them the blasphemer Cecilia and two illustrious men, Tiburtius and Valerian." In the course of the trial, however, Almachius revealed his true motive to Urban when he ordered the return of Cecilia's fortune.  Urban condemned Almachius for his public display of hypocrisy, lashing out at him for appearing to be pious when he was motivated by greed all along.  Urban, the priests, and deacons were whipped, and as the beatings continued Urban cried out to Elyon. Eventually, Urban and his cohorts were imprisoned, and in the prison  he was able to convert and baptize three jailers.  Almachius brought the men to the temple where they were asked to sacrifice to the gods.  Urban asked for God's intercession and an idol toppled to the ground, killing a number of pagan priests.  After receiving another beating, Urban and his colleagues were given a second chance to sacrifice, but they were even more resolved, spitting on the idol and crossing themselves in defiance.  The men were beheaded and very soon thereafter, one of Almachius's men, Carpasius, a staunch persecutor of Christians, was attacked and interrogated by a demon.  Carpasius, despite his prior vehement opposition to the faith, defended Christianity and consequently was murdered by the demon.  Many were converted as a result of Carpasius's bizarre defense of Christianity.

*Significance of the St. Urban Reference:*  St. Urban had been pope for one year when Cecilia was martyred.  In the tale, he is in hiding and living in a cave presumably where the tombs of the martyrs were located.  He plays the role of the wise elder who keeps the faith alive and is presumably called "Seint" during the tale, which would indicate he had already been given the status of saint as a confessor.  Cecilia sends Valerian, her husband, to Urban for confession, baptism, and instruction in the mysteries of her faith and chastity.  At the end of the tale Cecilia gives Urban her "moebles" or property as well as her fortune before her death.  It was left to Urban to bury Cecilia with the bodies of the other martyrs, and after doing so, he consecrated a church in her honor.

Those familiar with Urban's legend would have known that Cecilia's bestowal of her inheritance to Urban for the benefit of the church would eventually lead to his own martyrdom, for in the legend Almachius admits that the reason he is seeking Urban is to seize the virgin martyr's property.  In the same sense that some of the other references are unambiguous, the St. Urban reference(s) is as well, but his character strengthens the narrative by adding an element of historical veracity to Cecilia's martyrdom, not to mention his own, which came eight years later.

# Y

**ST. YVE (IVO OF CHARTRES) (1040-1116):**

**(1) "For of us chapmen, also God, me save,/And by that lord that clepid Seint Yve,/Scarsly amonges twelve twey shul thryve/Continuelly, lastyinge unto oure age."—the Merchant,** *The Shipman's Tale***, (226-229).**

**(2) "Thomas, Thomas! So moote I ryde or go,/And by that lord that clepid Seint Yve,/Nere thou our brother, sholdestou nat thryve."—the Friar,** *The Summoner's Tale***, (1942-1944).**

*Scholarly Consensus*:  The identity of Yve is far from definite.  Skeat settles on Alban Butler's *Life of St. Ivia* or Ivo, a Bishop from Persia, whose journeys led him to England where he preached in seventh-century Huntingdonshire.[252]  Benson makes the case for St. Ivo of Chartres.  In the *Chaucer Name Dictionary*, De Weever identifies all three St. Yves with the oath by St. Yves: 1). A "mythical Persian Bishop...and patron saint of Huntingdonshire": 2. A "Patron saint of Brittany": and 3) A "Bishop of Chartres in the twelfth century."[253]  Cline dismisses Skeat's choice of the Bishop from Persia and bases her choice, St. Ivo of Chartres, on the fact that "two of the other five saints invoked in *The Shipman's Tale*... are French and ... in fact are both patron saints of France."[254]  In the only article of substance in which the implications of the oath are discussed, Keen sides with Cline in supporting the case for the "well-known French bishop." During his lifetime, Ivo was a principled advocate for upholding the moral standards of the Church.

Alban Butler's *The Lives of the Saints* and S. Baring-Gould's work of the same name provide the most complete look at the twelfth-century French bishop.

*Summary of St. Yve's Legend:*  Butler notes that there is no definitive early biographical matter available on Ivo of Chartres, apart from the fact that his birth was in Beauvais in 1040. He studied law and theology and became an Augustinian canon at Saint-Quentin, where he taught theology and canon law.  Later, he became superior of his house, a position he held for fourteen years.  During this time his reputation as a prudent leader spread throughout the country, and as Baring-Gould notes, "bishops and princes asked him to send canons brought up in his school, to

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[252] Skeat, 172.
[253] de Weever, 353.
[254] Op. cit.

reform old chapters fallen into laxity, or to found new ones."[255]  Ivo was noted for his strong

sense of principle and morality and was both a vocal opponent of corruption in the Church and a

noted reformer.  According to Butler's account, Ivo was consecrated Bishop in 1091 after his

predecessor, Bishop Geoffrey, was deposed for grave abuses of his ecclesiastical office.  Not

long after his appointment, Ivo was confronted with a dilemma.  King Phillip wanted to divorce

Bertha, his wife and the mother of his two children, in order to marry Bertrada, the wife of a

duke.  Butler gives the following account of the bishop's reaction:  "Ivo did his utmost to

dissuade the king from proceeding further, but when he found his remonstrances unavailing he

declared openly that he would prefer to be cast into the sea with a mill-stone round his neck

rather than countenance such a scandal; and he absented himself from the wedding

ceremony…"[256] The king imprisoned Ivo for his act of insubordination and had his financial

holdings liquidated.  But, after a great outpouring of support from the citizens of Chartres, the

pope intervened on Ivo's behalf, and he was released.  Still later, Ivo played a prominent role as

a mediator in Church proceedings regarding investitures and, as Butler says, protested openly

"against the greed of certain Roman legates and the simony of members of the papal court."[257]

    ***Significance of the St. Yve Reference:***  Although it is difficult to rule out the possibility

that Chaucer may have been working from a composite sketch to suggest elements of all three St.

Yves, Cline's insistence on St. Ivo of Chartres has merit based on the conclusions generated in

Keen's analysis of the Merchant's oath.  Though St. Yve of Brittany was a contemporary of

Chaucer and the patron saint of lawyers and judges, his life in Caxton's *Legenda*, does not

resonate with the action in *The Shipman's Tale* to the same degree that the life of St. Ivo of

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[255] See Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints*, Vol. 15, 241-261.
[256] Butler, 377.
[257] *Ibid.*

Chartres does. The closest connection from Yves of Brittany's legend to the corrupt materialism of *The Shipman's Tale* is the fact that he often preached against lechery and vice, but Caxton gives no substantive examples to support this statement. Based on these conclusions, I tend to agree with Keen and Cline that St. Ivo of Chartres is the intended reference. Details from Ivo's legend simultaneously underscore the Monk's corrupt acts of shameless self-gratification and condemn his wholesale abuse of his monastic obligations. Furthermore, when considered in light of Ivo's extensive writings on the subject of marital fidelity, the laymen in the tex—the Wife and the Merchant—are also indicted for their breach of their sacramental vows and crass preoccupation with money, sex, and material possessions. The Merchant's oath by St. Yves, then, is highly ironic and even thoughtless, as Keen suggests, given the overtly corrupt conduct in the tale.

As evidence of the link between the tale and the legend, Keen points to the story of a debauched archdeacon named John, whom he suggests Chaucer had in mind when he named the monk, "Daun John." Despite Ivo's pleas to his superiors that this John not be appointed to the position, the powers that be disregarded the bishop's concerns and gave in to the influence of political patronage. Had the merchant done his homework and really known the texts and legends of St. Ivo, Keen argues, he would have been much more leery of his John, whom Keen likens to another type of "john." Keen sees further irony in Ivo's description by his peers of being a "light in a dark age" when juxtaposed with the following description of the Monk:

> Ther was a monk, a fair man and a boold--
> I trow a thirtty wynter he was old--
> That ever in oon was drawing to that place.
> This yonge monk, that was so fair of face…
> (25-29)

The monk's description as a "fair man" and "fair of face" underscores the notion that looks can be deceiving, something a shrewd businessman like the Merchant should have noticed.

Baring-Gould's legend of St. Ivo also contains a number of instances in which Ivo rendered opinions regarding marriage and fidelity, a clear parallel to the illicit love triangle in *The Shipman's Tale*. The overriding message of these opinions is that marriage is a sacrament that must be treated with the utmost respect and sanctity, an attitude clearly absent from the Merchant's marriage and one held in low regard by Daun John, the supposed man of God. In his legend, Ivo's defense of the sanctity of marriage was so resolute that he refused to officiate at King Philip's wedding to his second wife, Bertrada, after he left his first wife and mother of his children, Bertha. Philip then attempted to convince Ivo to offer his support for their union. Since Ivo was a canon lawyer, Philip also wanted him to adjust the laws regarding marriage in his favor, but the monk refused to do so: "Ivo stood on moral grounds, and refused to sanction or be present at the proposed marriage."[258] Ivo's letter to the king in which he outlines his opposition to Philip's conduct, contains an apt metaphor for his unshakeable faith in the traditions of the Church:

> I write to you what I said to your face, that I will never assist at the solemnity of the marriage, without being assured that a general council has approved of your divorce, and that you can contract a legitimate marriage with this woman…. But now that I am summoned to Paris to meet your wife, without knowing if she has any right to that title, my conscience towards God and my reputation as a bishop tell me that I should prefer a millstone round my neck and a plunge into the depths of the sea, to sanctioning such a scandal.[259]

Ivo's willingness to stand up for the rights of the Church in the face of extreme pressure landed him in prison. King Philip, subsequently, divested Ivo of his financial holdings and property to emphasize his displeasure with the bishop's insubordination, another point of irony in

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[258] Baring-Gould, 244.
[259] Baring-Gould, 242.

light of Daun John's unlimited freedom to roam the countryside as he pleases. The Monk's freedom stands in direct contrast to the image of St. Ivo with the millstone around his neck, plunging into the sea in an effort to preserve the purity of the institutions of the Church. The millstone, functioning as the attribute for the incidental reference, reinforces Ivo's reputation as a reformer, carrying a heavy responsibility—tradition and orthodoxy—during a period in which wholesale abuses, political expediency, and corruption were the rule rather than the exception in the medieval Church. This image highlights the culture of corruption in *The Shipman's Tale*, particularly in respect to the monk Daun John, whose freedoms are excessive by anyone's standards, let alone those of St. Benedict. By extension, the reference to Ivo implicates the Monk in *The General Prologue,* who holds similar views to Daun John in regard to monasticism and "the rule." The Monk, too, is a reformer, but of a different sort, more in keeping with Daun John who takes "outriding" to new extremes. The oath by St. Yve indicts this type of modern reform, illustrating the fact that more freedom begets more potential for temptation, which eventually leads to corruption.

Jacobus's remark about St. Anthony's retreat from the world is a fitting way to close: "Anthony despised the world because it is unclean, restless, transitory, deceptive, bitter."[260] St. Ivo of Chartres, like Anthony, was truly exceptional in that he realized the only way the Church could stand up to such a transitory and bitter world was to remain consistent and firm in the face of calls for a lessening of strictures. Yet, by this time, it would no longer suffice to run into the desert for a life of contemplation. The real battle was now in the City of God. Sadly, Daun John and the Monk were among the victims of the very evils against which St. Ivo fought so assiduously.

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[260] Jacobus, 93.

## CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSION

The men and women who constituted Chaucer's medieval audience knew the lives of the

saints as intimately as they knew the histories of their own families.  From the vivid stained glass

windows prominently displayed in local parish churches and the lectionary readings on feast

days, to the collections that circulated in the medieval marketplace, saints' names, legends, and

pictorial representations were part of the daily rhythm that defined what it meant to be a

Christian in the fourteenth century.  It is safe to assume that Chaucer structured his *Tales* around

a pilgrimage to the shrine of the "hooly blisful martyr" in an effort to portray this rhythm as

realistically as possible.  And, not surprisingly, along the road to Canterbury, many of his

pilgrims tell tales replete with hagiographic references.  This study has been concerned with a

select group of such references, the so-called incidental hagiographic allusions and invocations,

which characteristically serve to accentuate the meaning of the rhetorical context in which they

are expressed.  Although to today's reader they appear to be off-hand or secondary expressions

(due to the fact that the saint evoked is not a primary character in the tale), the references are far

from haphazard.  To Chaucer's audience, the saint's name functioned much as a symbol would,

calling to mind a wide range of attributes and traits associated with the saint's legend: St. Neot's

name would have summoned thoughts of a holy man saying prayers in a well; St. Martin's

invocation would have suggested a divided cloak and charitable giving; an allusion to St. Denys

would have suggested a decapitated bishop carrying his head as concrete proof of his martyrdom.

Each of these attributes, coupled with specific details from the respective legends, made up a

grand hagiographic code waiting to be unraveled by informed readers. As illustrated in many of the applications above, incidental hagiographic references, when fully mined, serve the purpose of enhancing and subverting a tale's meaning, typically through such elements as ironic contrast, wordplay, comic relief, and double entendre. The *Legenda Aurea* and other sources, including the *South English Legendary,* have been invaluable resources in the effort to recover a portion of the meaning Chaucer most certainly encoded into *The Canterbury Tales* via incidental hagiographic references.

Finally, at first glance Chaucer appears to be anti-religious, if not anti-clerical, throughout *The Canterbury Tales*, if one considers his deft but equally scathing portrayals of characters like the Monk, the friar in *The Summoner's Tale*, Daun John in *The Shipman's Tale*, the summoner in *The Friar's Tale*, and the Pardoner, whose excessive desire to "wynne silver" typifies the negative prototype. One of the subsidiary functions of incidental hagiographic references, I would suggest, has been to demonstrate Chaucer's deep concern with righteousness and virtue, in all walks of life, for it is through his references to these the saints that Chaucer manages to offer examples of true virtue. By juxtaposing the greed and corruption of specific types of monastics and clerics with the virtue and altruism of specific types of holy men and women, Chaucer proves, if anything, to be right in line with Church doctrine.

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# APPENDIX
## Incidental Hagiographic References in *The Canterbury Tales*

| Speaker | Referent | Reference | Function | Pilgrim/ Character | Speaker's Gender | Saint's Gender | Nationality | History | Patron of | Status | Text(s) | Attributes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Prioress** | St. Loy | GP,120 | Oath | Pilgrim | Female | Male | French | 588-660 | Goldsmiths | Bishop | LA/Caxton | Hammer |
| **Monk** | St Benedict | GP, 173 | Reference | Pilgrim | Male | Male | Italian | c. 480-546 | Monks | Abbot | LA | Bell, Cup |
| **Monk** | St. Maurus | GP, 173 | Reference | Pilgrim | Male | Male | French | d. 584 | Cripples | Abbot | Caxton | Measures |
| **Monk** | St. Augustine | GP, 187 | Reference | Pilgrim | Male | Male | N. African | 354-430 | Theologians | Bishop | LA | Dove, Pen |
| **Franklin** | St Julian | GP, 340 | Reference | Pilgrim | Male | Male | Unknown | Unknown | Hospitality | Lay Penitent | LA | Travellers |
| **Alison** | St. Thomas | MT, 3291 | Oath | Character | Female | Male | English | 1118-1170 | Lay Clergy | Archbishop | LA/SEL | Sword |
| **Carpenter** | St. Thomas | MT, 3425 | Oath | Character | Male | Male | English | 1118-1170 | Clergy | Archbishop | LA/SEL | Injured Head |
| **Carpenter** | St. Frideswide | MT, 3449 | Oath | Character | Male | Female | English | 680-735 | Oxford | Abbess | SEL | Ox |
| **Carpenter** | St. Thomas | MT, 3461 | Oath | Character | Male | Male | English | 1118-1170 | Clergy | Archbishop | LA/SEL | Injured Head |
| **Carpenter** | St. Benedict | MT, 3483 | Invocation | Character | Male | Male | Italian | c. 480-546 | Against Poison | Abbot | LA | Bell, Serpent |
| **Gerveys** | St. Neot | MT, 3701 | Oath | Character | Male | Male | British | d. 877 | Fishermen | Hermit | Culled | Fish |
| **John the Clerk** | St. Cuthbert | RT, 4127 | Oath | Character | Male | Male | British | 634-687 | Mariners | Bishop | Bede/SEL | Swans |
| **Man of Law** | St. Mary of Egypt | MLT, 500 | Reference | Pilgrim | Male | Female | Egyptian | 241-317 | Temptation | Hermit | LA/SEL | Lion |
| **Constance** | St. Anne | MLT, 641 | Invocation | Character | Male | Female | Hebrew | Unknown | Mothers | Mother | Bokenham | Mary & Christ |
| **Wife of Bath** | St. Joce | WBP, 483 | Oath | Pilgrim | Female | Male | French | d. c. 668 | Pilgrims | Hermit | Culled | Staff, Crown |
| **Wife of Bath** | St. Thomas | WBP, 666 | Oath | Pilgrim | Female | Male | British | 1118-1170 | Clergy | Archbishop | SEL/Caxton | Sword |
| **Wife of Bath** | St. Jerome | WBP, 674 | Reference | Pilgrim | Female | Male | Slovenian | c. 341-430 | Archivists | Church Doctor | LA | Lion |
| **Fiend** | St. Dunstan | FT, 1502 | Reference | Character | Male | Male | British | 925-988 | Clergy | Archbishop | LA/SEL | Tongs, Cup |
| **Carter** | St. Loy | FT, 1564 | Reference | Character | Male | Male | French | 588-660 | Crafts | Bishop | LA/Caxton | Anvil |
| **Summoner** | St. Anne | FT, 1613 | Oath | Character | Male | Female | Hebrew | Unknown | Pregnancies | Mother | Bokenham | Mary & Christ |

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| **Friar** | St. Yve | ST, 1943 | Oath | Character | Male | Male | French | 1014-1116 | Lawyers | Bishop | Culled | Doves |
| **Host** | St. Ronyan | PP, 309 | Oath | Pilgrim | Male | Male | Celtic | 7th Century | Scottish towns | Hermit | Culled | Unknown |
| **Pardoner** | St. Ronyan | PP, 320 | Oath | Pilgrim | Male | Male | Celtic | 7th Century | Scottish towns | Hermit | Culled | Unknown |
| **Host** | St. Helena | PT, 951 | Oath | Pilgrim | Male | Female | Byzantine | c. 250-330 | Archeologists | Queen | LA/SEL | Cross |
| **Daun John** | St Martin | SHT, 148 | Oath | Character | Male | Male | French | c. 316-397 | France | Bishop | LA | Cloak, Beggar |
| **Daun John** | St. Denys | SHT, 151 | Oath | Character | Male | Male | French | d. c. 258 | Headaches | Bishop | LA | Severed Head |
| **Merchant** | St. Yve | SHT, 227 | Oath | Character | Male | Male | French | 1014-1116 | Lawyers | Bishop | Culled | Doves |
| **Daun John** | St. Augustine | SHT, 259 | Invocation | Character | Male | Male | N. Africa | 354-430 | Theologians | Bishop | LA | Dove, Pen |
| **Prioress** | St. Nicholas | PrT, 514 | Invocation | Pilgrim | Female | Male | Asia Minor | d. c. 345 | The Poor | Bishop | LA/SEL | Bag of Gold |
| **Prioress** | St. Hugh | PrT, 684 | Reference | Pilgrim | Female | Male | British | 1246-1255 | Unknown | Child Martyr | Culled | Bound in cords |
| **Monk** | St. Edward | MkTPR,1970 | Reference | Pilgrim | Male | Male | British | 1003-1066 | Kings | King | SEL/Caxton | King with Coin |
| **Chauntecleer** | St. Kenelm | NPT, 3110 | Reference | Character | Male | Male | British | d. c. 812 | Unknown | King | SEL/Caxton | Purple Robe |
| **Nun's Priest** | St. Augustine | NPT, 4431 | Reference | Pilgrim | Male | Male | N. African | 354-430 | Sore Eyes | Church Doctor | LA | Dove, Pen |
| **Second Nun** | St. Cecilia | SNT, 28 | Reference | Pilgrim | Female | Female | Roman | d. c. 223 | Musicians | Virgin Martyr | LA | Organ, Lute |
| **Cecilia** | St. Urban | SNT, 547-53 | Reference | Character | Female | Male | Italian | d. 230 | Unknown | Bishop | LA | Unknown |
| **Second Nun** | St. Ambrose | SNT, 271 | Reference | Pilgrim | Female | Male | Italian | 340-397 | Beekeepers | Bishop | LA | Church |
| **Canon** | St. Giles | CYT, 1185 | Oath | Character | Male | Male | French | d. c 720 | Beggars | Hermit | LA | Hind |