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Cover Image: Mirror Case with Lovers, French, second quarter 14th c.
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Ritual and Gender in Medieval Cultures:
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Abstract

This first article introduces the theme of the present special issue of *Eventum* that concerns the strong interrelationship between ritual and gender in medieval cultures. Drawing on contemporary ritual and gender theories, such as those of Catherine Bell, Judith Butler, Candace West and Don Zimmerman, and Erving Goffman, which highlight the key role of gender in ritual and treat ritual as the source of gender construction, the article explores briefly the gendered aspects of ritual and the ritual dimensions of gender in the Middle Ages while pointing out the shared characteristics of (medieval) ritual and gender. Followed by the special issue's other contributions, this introductory article argues that a good understanding of medieval cultures' workings cannot be achieved without taking into consideration the inevitable connections between ritual and gender.

Keywords

ritual; ritualization; gender; performativity; embodiment; interactiveness; power; resistance; *Eventum* 2

Introduction

The idea for a special issue of *Eventum* on medieval ritual and gender arose during an international conference entitled "Rituals of Gender Staging and Performance in the Middle Ages" that took place in Bamberg (Germany) between the 03 and 04 of May 2024 and was organised by the Centre for Medieval Studies (ZeMas) of the University of Bamberg.[1] The conference was initiated in the framework of the H2020 project "Network for Medieval Arts and Rituals" (NetMAR, 2021–23; Grant Agreement no. 951875)

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1. This introductory chapter was written during a research visit at Dumbarton Oaks Library and Archives (Washington DC) in June 2024 that was funded by the Byzantine Studies programme at Dumbarton Oaks (DO) and the University of Cyprus. I would like to thank both institutions for making this research visit possible. I shall also warmly thank the Director of Byzantine Studies at DO, Nikos Kontogiannis and all the other members of the staff that made my research stay so enjoyable and productive. My thanks go also to Angeliki Lymberopoulou for our fruitful discussions on Byzantine culture over lunch and coffee breaks during our stay at DO.

and was also supported by the SPOT funding line of the Women's Representative of the University of Bamberg. The editors of *Eventum* welcome this chance to thank the European Commission and the University of Bamberg for their support. They would also like to express their gratitude to both Ingrid Bennewitz and Michaela Pölzl for the initiative to organise this stimulating, well-attended, and successful conference.

The substantial articles included in this special issue were developed from the two conference papers that reached the stage of publication. An important purpose of this special issue and the conference from which it sprang has been to bring to the fore and highlight the intersections of ritual and gender in medieval societies that are frequently reflected in their cultural products, either textual or visual. Even though it is generally agreed that these two diachronic practices "offer valuable new ways to study power and systems of social relations [...], the[ir] connections [...] have remained largely unexplored" (Strochhia 155) – at least as far as the study of premodern cultures is concerned. Sharon Strocchia's assertion that was initially expressed more than thirty-five years ago (in 1988, at a symposium at Cornell University; Migiel and Schiesari vi) is still valid for the field of Medieval Studies.

According to pioneering work in ritual and gender studies, ritual and gender have several common characteristics: performativity, embodiment, repetitive stylization, temporality, collectivity, interactiveness, power, and resistance. These shared features are strongly interrelated,[2] since they are inherent elements of ritualization – the process that brings into being both ritual and gender.[3] Here ritualization is used in Catherine Bell's sense, as a practice and "strategic form of socialization" (Bell, *Ritual Theory* 98) that

> involves the very drawing, in and through the activity itself, of a privileged distinction between ways of acting, specifically between those acts being *performed* and those being contrasted, mimed, or implicated somehow. [...] Intrinsic to ritualization are strategies for differentiating itself [...] from other ways of acting within a particular culture. [...] The strategies of ritualization are particularly *rooted in the body*, specifically, the *interaction* of the social body within a symbolically constituted *spatial and temporal environment.* Essential to ritualization is the *circular production of a ritualized*

2. These common characteristics will be briefly presented below.

3. For ritualization, see also the introductory article of *Eventum* 1 (Constantinou, "*Eventum*" 9). For gender ritualization, see Hollywood, Johnson, "Gender Ritualization", and Butler, *Bodies that Matter* ix, 60.

> *body* which in turn produces *ritualized practices.* […] An important corollary to this is the fact that ritualization […] is designed to do what it does without bringing what it is doing across the threshold of discourse or systematic thinking (Bell, *Ritual Theory* 90, 93; emphasis added).

Being public ritualized practices that are enacted outside "systematic thinking", ritual and gender do, in fact, shape and are shaped by each other. As formulated by Todd Ferguson, "the social differences between men and women shape how bodies respond in rituals" (Ferguson 267) and "ritual [i]s a mechanism of gender" (Johnson 82). It is probably the many similarities and stark interconnections between ritual and gender that led influential gender theorists, such as Judith Butler, to employ ritual language and terminology while developing their gender theories. Influenced by the work of the famous anthropologist Victor Turner, Butler describes gender as another form of "ritual social drama" (Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 526 and *Gender Trouble* 178). More recent work on ritual, on the other hand, has been informed by gender studies. Ritual theorists have used the feminist notion of gender to show the ways in which it influences individuals' (emotional) involvement in rituals and how individuals, in turn, use gender within rituals to validate gender superiority and privilege or to resist subordination and exercise agency (e.g. Ferguson; Grimes, *The Craft* 249, 280; Bell, *Ritual Theory*).

As far as the interaction of medieval ritual and gender is concerned, a good case in point is the (Byzantine) liturgy, since it presupposed and was based on gender differences and distinct types of masculinity and femininity.[4] Throughout the Byzantine period, liturgy was performed by male priests,[5] since women were treated as spiritually inferior and were considered ritually impure due to female bodily functions, such as menstruation, birth-giving, stillbirth, and postpartum bleeding (Glibetić 171–77; Berger, *Gender Differences* 95–126; Viscuso 19–28; Synek). In Teresa Berger's words, "the threefold order of bishop, presbyters, and deacons […] require[d] a gender-specific body, namely that of a man". As she goes on to say, there "was a distinct priestly masculinity, one that excluded not only all women, but also a host of nonpriestly men" (Berger, "Christian Worship and Gender Practices" 8). Furthermore, the women, who were allowed to enter the liturgical space, were separated from men and were (and still are)

4. This is still valid for contemporary orthodox liturgy, that is an heir to Byzantine mass. For gender in ancient, medieval, and contemporary Christian liturgical practices, see Berger. As for the unequal position of women in the performance of contemporary Orthodox rituals, see Purpura who shows how these rituals "reinforce and exhibit androcentric preferences" (Purpura, "Constructing the Patriarchal Woman" 172).

5. Even though in the early and middle Byzantine period there were female deacons (deaconesses), particularly in Constantinople and Jerusalem, these did not have the same functions with their male counterparts who had public processional and other liturgical responsibilities, including the distribution of Communion during the liturgy. Moreover, compared to male diaconate, the prerequisites for becoming a deaconess were much more demanding and the punishment for a deaconess' misbehaviour was by far stricter (see Karras, "The Liturgical Functions of Consecrated Women" and "Female Deacons").

denied access to the sanctuary (Caseau, "Experiencing the Sacred"; Marinis; Berger, "'Wisdom Has Built Her House'"; Taft, "Women at Church in Byzantium").

In what follows, first the central common features of ritual and gender mentioned above will be quickly discussed by drawing once again on contemporary theories, since these offer an insight into the shared workings of ritual and gender, either past or present. For each common characteristic, medieval, and chiefly Byzantine, examples will be given to bring to the fore some of the ways in which ritual and gender operated and intersected in medieval cultures. Finally, within the framework of a sketchy presentation of rituals' uses for gender-specific purposes the remaining articles of this special issue will be briefly introduced.

Performativity

The theorist that exemplified the performative dimension of ritual in the most prominent way was Turner whose most eloquent follower has been the initiator of *performance studies*, Richard Schechner (Schechner, *Performance Studies* and "From Ritual to Theatre"; Turner, *The Ritual Process*).[6] The two theorists treat ritual as a form of drama where participants play their parts by enacting established and recognizable scripts of social roles and identities. Different rituals are performed by specific authorities involving certain groups that have a specified behaviour and/or appearance. Rituals are enacted on designated times and at certain spaces having defined features in terms of architecture, interior design, and light and including certain ritual artworks, objects, and furniture. Rituals observe a given group's, community's, or society's important dates and events (e.g. the liturgical commemoration of Byzantine earthquakes (Croke)) and places (e.g. the square in front of the *Hodegon* monastery in Constantinople where the Tuesday rite of the Virgin Hodegetria icon was performed (Lidov)). Rituals also link personal experiences to society and allow individuals to come in terms with their fears and anxieties (e.g. Byzantine rites of passage from infancy to adulthood (Baun) and rituals of brotherhood (Rapp 48–87), marriage (Radle, "The Development of Byzantine Marriage Rites"), pregnancy loss (Glibetić) and death (Velkovska)).[7]

6. For a short history of the performative turn in ritual studies, see Grimes, "Performance Theory".

7. There is a growing bibliography on the performative dimension of medieval rituals. Some representative examples include Heinzer; Jezierski et al.; White Walker; Pentcheva; Postlewate and Hüsken; Asad.

While the influential sociologist Erving Goffman was probably the first who referred to the performative dimension of gender through his notion of "gender display", which he introduced in his homonymous article of 1976 (Goffman, "Gender Display"), it took more than ten years to develop a first theory of gender performativity. Goffman's performative approach was adopted and modified by the sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman in their article entitled "Doing Gender" (West and Zimmerman). However, it was through the work of a philosopher – Butler – and not a sociologist that the theory of gender performativity found its fullest development. For Butler, like West and Zimmerman whose work is not taken into consideration by the first, "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. […] There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 33). As Butler further states, "the effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 179).

Gender performativity is illustrated in a variety of medieval sources – e.g. theological, legal, medical, hagiographical, and historiographical – prescribing men's and women's behaviour, emotions, gestures and general appearance in their various manly and womanly roles as emperors/empresses, ascetics, ecclesiastics, parents etc.[8] For example, a (Byzantine) woman's good mothering was performed through the practice of breastfeeding and a complete devotion to her children (Constantinou and Skouroumouni-Stavrinou). A bad mother, in contrast, refrained from breastfeeding and disregarded her children's needs (Stathakopoulos). A good (Byzantine) father, on the other hand, had to undertake the family's security and subsistence and to arrange fitting marriages for his children (Caseau "Childhood and Gender"). Of course, the bad father undertook none of these fatherly responsibilities. For instance, the male protagonist of a satirical narrative poem produced in Constantinople in the twelfth century, the so-called "first ptochoprodromic poem", who is totally indifferent to his family's needs, emerges as a bad father.

8. The bibliography on gender performativity in the Middle Ages is vast. See, e.g., Meyer and Messis; Templeton; Constantinou and Meyer; Constantinou 2014 and 2005; Brubaker and Smith; Riches and Salih; Kelly; James; Bullough; Lees.

Despite its inherent performativity, gender is broadly perceived as a natural human quality: "femininity and masculinity are in a sense the

prototypes of essential expression – something that can be conveyed fleetingly in any social situation and yet something that strikes at the most basic characterisation of the individual" (Goffman, "Gender Display" 75; see also Butler, *Gender Trouble*; West and Zimmerman).[9] The idea of gender's naturalness, is not new, but it goes back to the Old Testament where gender is presented as God-given: "God created man in His own image, male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27–28). Following the biblical dictum, medieval people, too, considered masculinity and femininity as attributes that were bestowed upon human beings by God. Even though God is described as to have created the two genders "in His own image", man emerges as more perfect than his female counterpart. Thus, in the Middle Ages men were treated as superior to women (Bennett and Karras 2, 5; Murray).

9. For Judith Butler, neither sex is natural, but like gender it is a construct (Butler, *Gender Trouble*).

Embodiment and Repetitive Stylization

Butler's emphasis on the body for the creation of the gendered self brings us to the second and third common characteristics between ritual and gender: embodiment and repetitive stylization. Butler uses drag as the primary example of the body's recurrent gendered stylization (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxiii–xxiv, xxviii, 175–80). A medieval counterpart of Butler's example can be detected in hagiography where some pious women (e.g. Marina/Marinos, Euphrosyne/Smaragdos, Matrona/Babylas) adopt characteristics of a male appearance and behaviour to lead, for some time or until their death, a religious life as cenobitic monks or male hermits. These women's male bodily stylizations and performances within monastic contexts prove so powerful and successful that their fellow-monks never notice their female sex. Their femaleness becomes perceptible as soon as they switch to the performance of female gender through the corresponding bodily stylization or when their dead bodies are prepared for burial (Wright; Constantinou, "Holy Actors and Actresses" and *Female Corporeal Performances* 90–126; Hotchkiss).

Interestingly, the female monks of medieval hagiography do not only exemplify the embodied performativity and repetitive stylization of gender, but they also manifest the key role of gender in the enactment of monastic rituals. It is through male bodily performances that they can execute and participate in the rituals of their male monasteries. The protagonists whose female sex must be revealed before their

death are forced to immediately leave the monastery, since their female sex excludes them from male monastic (ritual) life. As we read in the anonymous Byzantine Greek *Life of Matrona* (7th c.), the protagonist's involvement in liturgy greatly unsettles the monastery's abbot who tells her: "But how have you approached the divine mysteries with your head uncovered? And how have you offered the kiss of peace to the brethren?" (Featherstone 26). As an individual belonging to the female sex, Matrona was expected to participate in liturgy with her head covered (Radle, "The Veiling of Women in Byzantium" 1092–93), following thus the Pauline commandment (1 Cor. 6). At the same time, she was banned from the male ritual of the kiss of peace that was exchanged among the clergy during the eucharistic liturgy (Denysenko 157–59; Taft, *A History of the Liturgy* 374–75).

While raising gender issues involved in the body's stylization, the abbot's reproaches simultaneously point to the significant role of embodiment and its repetitive stylization in (monastic) rituals that, too, are inherently reiterative (Michaels). Rituals are enacted through the participants' bodies, voices, movements, gestures, postures, dress, hair style, general appearance, and arrangement in ritual space and time. According to ritual theorist Bell, for instance, the ritual's logic is "embodied in the physical movements of the body" (Bell, *Ritual Theory* 99). For Bell, "the body is [also] key to understanding how ritual can cause changes to occur without participants being consciously aware of them" (Bell, *Ritual Theory* 304).

Whereas the body is the chief ritual actor and speaker, there are rituals, such as the kiss of peace, that must not be enacted by female bodies. Moreover, the Byzantine liturgy, as pointed out before, became possible by ruling out menstruating or postpartum women. As the abbot's reprimands to Matrona suggest, gender did not only determine who should perform the liturgy and other monastic rituals or who should be excluded from participating in them, but it also regulated bodily stylization. Women who were granted access to the liturgy, as already mentioned, were expected to cover their heads and thus perform through their bodies their inferior status.

In general, the Byzantine liturgy serves as a good example for illustrating the centrality of the body in association with its repetitive stylization in ritual. Depending on their rank, the priests

performing the liturgy used their bodies – which were dressed in the corresponding rank's liturgical vestments (Woodfin 3–46) – to carry out the liturgy's different parts and embedded rituals, such as the preparation and distribution of the Holy Communion, praying, delivery of sermons, and reading from the Scripture. Priestly prayer, for instance, consisted of a series of bodily motions including posture and gesture and prostration to the ground. Imitating the priest, the congregation would make similar bodily movements and repeat his prayers (White Walker; Taft, *The Byzantine Rite*; Wybrew). To deliver a sermon, a bishop would come out of the sanctuary to climb the ambo: "a set of stairs and raised platform near the center of the nave" (White Walker 34). With the Gospel in his hands, the deacon, who was a low-ranking priest, would also make a short procession from the sanctuary to the ambo and back to read aloud extracts from the Scripture (Mainstone 227).

Temporality, Collectivity, and Interactiveness

Both ritual and gender are temporal, collective, and interactive. Rituals are performed in a certain timeframe (e.g. all-night vigils in (medieval) churches and monasteries). Gender, on the other hand, is "constituted in time"; it is a "*social temporality*" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 179; emphasis in original). As doings, ritual and gender take place in time and become discernible as long as they are performed based on preexisting scripts. Neither ritual nor gender are enacted in isolation. The members of a community come together to a ritual space (e.g. shrine, church, monastery) to collectively participate in one or more rituals (e.g. liturgy, baptism, funeral). Through rituals, a community's collective identity is shaped and strengthened, a process that the French sociologist Émile Durkheim termed as "collective effervescence" (Durkheim). In terms of gender, masculinity and femininity are based upon a "collective agreement" on how to "perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 178). Social and cultural rules determine how men and women should behave, either within or outside rituals.

Lastly, ritual and gender are produced and reproduced through human interaction. Returning once again to the orthodox liturgy, it involves ritual interaction among the members of different priestly ranks and between clergy and congregation. In fact, no ritual is possible without

the participants' interactions. As for gender, according to Goffman, gender identity is framed through interaction rituals within which individuals learn how to display their gender (Goffman, "Gender Display"). In his previous writings, Goffman argues that self-reaffirmation necessitates other people's acceptance and recognition which are achieved during human interactions (Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*). Like rituals, therefore, gender constitution and identity crafting are interactive processes. Our Matrona, for instance, crafts her monkish identity through daily interactions with her fellow-monks. Her unknown hagiographer repeatedly mentions that her virtue supersedes that of the other monks and that she models her way of life on that of the monastery's abbot.

Power and Resistance

Ritual's power, according to Bell, does not only lie "in the shaping of a social ethos, but also in the articulation, redefinition, and legitimation of cultural realities" (Bell, "The Ritual Body" 299). Exploiting ritual's power, social authorities – political, religious, and familial – naturalize and reinforce their supremacy over others who come to an understanding of themselves as inferior. At the same time, as the work of Michel Foucault has shown, the technologies of power that are incorporated in rituals – especially rituals of discipline and punishment – have a great impact on the participants' body which unconsciously takes on, rebuilds, and further reinforces existing power relations (Foucault). In short, rituals have the power to shape individuals' identities and social roles, to connect people, families, groups, and communities, and to reiterate general principles and ideologies, promoting social stability and conserving power relations (Bailey and Barclay 10).

While the social dynamics of ritual power are imposed upon participants shaping and regulating their identity, behaviour, and way of life, individuals or groups can also use rituals in strategic ways to empower themselves, achieve their goals, and exercise agency. Thus, ritual can serve both social control and social change (Bell, *Ritual Theory*). A famous case in point from medieval cultures is illustrated in martyr legends in which public spectacles of ritual violence aim at both disciplining individuals who disrespect official religion and discouraging others from following their example. However,

through rituals of punishment ancient and medieval martyrs exercise agency and are worshipped as saints acquiring innumerable followers (e.g. Healy Wasyliw; Piroyansky; Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances* 19–58; Einbinder).

Like ritual, gender is a cultural arrangement that operates through processes of power and resistance. While it is enacted under social control and restraint, gender includes the conditions and possibilities of resistance against the norms within which it functions (Butler, *Undoing Gender* and *Gender Trouble*). In terms of power processes, the established gender binary – consisting of a superior masculinity and an inferior femininity – is in Butler's words "the effect of a regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 42). Similarly with ritual, gender normalizes certain forms of masculinity and femininity which are unconsciously incorporated by individuals. As a form of social power, gender allows individuals to become socially recognizable and acceptable. Individuals who fail to act according to the regulations surrounding their gender are punished through marginalisation and stigmatisation. Male Byzantine historians, such as Prokopios (6th c.), slandered elite women (e.g. Theodora and Antonina) who appeared to transgress the norms of their gender (Constantinou, "Gendered Emotions and Affective Genders" 288–89; Georgiou).

As already suggested, power is involved not only in the production of hegemonic masculinity and femininity but also in the two genders' interactions and among individuals belonging to the same gender but having different social, financial, religious, and other backgrounds. In Byzantine society, for example, free men were more powerful than women, but free women had more rights than either male or female slaves. Women of the lower social strands, in contrast, enjoyed more freedom of movement than elite women (Herrin; Laiou). Ecclesiastical hierarchy created more and less powerful churchmen while monastic hierarchy involved power relations among monks or nuns (Purpura, *God, Hierarchy, and Power*).

In her *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler makes gender trouble by thinking "through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power"

(Butler, *Gender Trouble* 44). According to Butler, the gender binary can be subverted through the multiplication of gender identities: "whether one refers to 'gender trouble' or 'gender blending,' 'transgender' or 'cross-gender,' one is already suggesting that gender has a way of moving beyond that naturalized binary" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 41–42). Some Byzantine instances of "gender trouble" or "gender blending" include the said female monks, consecrated virgins, and eunuchs.

By participating in male rituals and monastic life, female monks – if they ever existed – cancelled gender segregation in monasticism and subverted the general belief that women were incapable of undertaking a man's ascetic life that was considered harsher (Talbot, *Varieties of Monastic Experience* and "A Comparison of Monastic Experience"). Consecrated virgins were not considered women, since they did not undertake the roles of wives and mothers that the Byzantine patriarchal society assigned to the female gender. Removing themselves from the marriage market and traditional male control, consecrated virgins exercised agency and were respectful in ways that traditional women were not (Brown 259–84). Finally, eunuchs – castrated men or individuals with indefinite genitals – lay also outside the gender binary and the heterosexual matrix (Gonzalez-Salzberg and Perisanidi). They served societal needs related to business, administration, and religion that could not be fulfilled by the two dominant genders (Ringrose). It has to be pointed out, however, that even though male monks, consecrated virgins, and eunuchs might be treated as different Byzantine genders, textual sources often describe them by employing a binary gender discourse: female monks and consecrated virgins are called "manly women" (Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances* 90–91, 112; Brown 259–84) whereas eunuchs are seen as imperfect men and womanlike or womanish individuals (Ringrose 35–42).

Gender *in* Medieval Rituals and this Issue

If, as the previous discussion has hopefully demonstrated, the ritualized body makes rituals and genders that involve relations of power and resistance, what happens when gender determines the initiation, form, structure, enactment, and purpose of a ritual or set of rituals? Medieval rituals – political, religious, and familial –

which were chiefly based on the gender binary, served a number of gender-specific needs and purposes: they were used to teach men and women how to perform their gender as defined by law and canon law; to establish and confirm an individual's manhood or womanhood; to discipline and punish individuals who did not conform to their assigned gender roles; to sustain the gender binary and validate gender inequalities; to empower women in a male-dominated world; to release men's and women's anxieties associated with bodily functions, gender-specific social roles, and professions; and to initiate individuals to male and female forms of piety and asceticism and to gender-specific dynastic and family traditions. To achieve these and other relevant gender-specific goals, rituals were authored either by men or by women to address either mixed audiences or groups belonging to the same gender. They could also be exclusively male or female.

Even though this is more than a schematic presentation of gender's role in and relation to medieval rituals, it reveals the complexity of gender dynamics in ritual enactment which, as pointed out at the outset, has not received yet the scholarly attention it deserves. We must ask many, and often almost unanswerable, questions in order to be able to approach the interactions of medieval gender and ritual, and in so doing to fathom essential aspects of medieval cultures' workings. What kind of rituals were favoured by men and which by women belonging to different social, religious, and other groups? When, where, and which purposes were served each time? How did men or women of different backgrounds "use" their gender practices to exercise power or to cope with being dominated? How did social notions about men and women determine their bodily actions and reactions in rituals? In which rituals and for what reasons did men assume female roles and women male roles? Which rituals created novel forms of gender expression enabling thus the creation of new power relationships? What kind of rituals empowered women?

The following two articles deal with some of these issues. Lilian Diniz's article entitled "'When a Woman Recites an Incantation, a Serpent Recites it': Female Magic and Medicine in Caesarius of Arles" examines women's rituals related to the social role of motherhood. As she shows, these exclusively female rituals provided Western medieval women with agency, allowing them to overcome their gender subordination. The influential sermons of Caesarius of

Arles (6th c.) castigating women, who performed and participated in magic rituals for fertility, abortion, and healing purposes, reveal the church's anxiety over practices that went beyond its control. Caesarius and his later followers throughout the Middle Ages attempted through the first's sermons to reduce, if not to terminate, female rituals by presenting them as demonic.

The second article by Marion Darilek ("Rituals of Female (Dis) Empowerment: Baptism in the Context of Conversion in Medieval German Literature") is concerned with the interplay between female empowerment and disempowerment in Christian rituals depicted in Middle High German literary texts. Taking as a case study the ritual of baptism, the author shows how some heroines use a Christian ritual administered by male clergy to reverse gender hierarchy. However, through close readings of scenes depicting baptismal and conversion rituals in Thecla's legend, Ulrich von dem Türlin's *Arabel*, Rudolf von Ems' *Barlaam und Josaphat*, and *Salman und Morolf*, it becomes clear that female agency is inseparable from female powerlessness in the examined texts.

Apart from examining how rituals in different medieval cultures "helped define and represent gender roles" (Strochhia 155); how in particular they confirmed women's inferior status and subordination; how they provided the female gender with resistance and agency; and in which ways these accomplishments were related to aesthetic and generic concerns, the present issue also points to the key similarities between (medieval) ritual and gender that reveal the gendered aspects of ritual and the ritual dimensions of gender, both in the present and the past. Of course, this is a very preliminary examination of the intersections between medieval ritual and gender. Hopefully, this special issue will initiate new and more systematic studies of this significant aspect of medieval cultures.

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"When a Woman Recites an Incantation, a Serpent Recites It": Female Magic and Medicine in Caesarius of Arles

Abstract

Caesarius of Arles was regarded by the ecclesiastical environment of his times as an authority concerning religious rules and the correct behaviour of Christians. He wrote more than 240 sermons that were diffused by an atelier of copyists in Arles as well as by himself. His sermons were extremely successful, influencing preachers all over Christendom. Among many other subjects, some of Caesarius' sermons were concerned with what he regarded as paganism and unorthodox practices undertaken by Christians. Caesarius' reproaches were generally addressed to both men and women indiscriminately, but some reprimands were made specifically towards his female audiences. This article will analyze the practices that were regarded by Caesarius as being performed exclusively by women, relating them to ecclesiastical legislation and other contemporary sources. It will investigate the nature of these practices and their relationship with women's role in society and the need to seek alternative solutions to problems that were not contemplated by Christianity or contemporary medicine. The analysis undertaken will reveal women's agency in shaping their own religious and healing practices, using creative ways to overcome their marginalized position.

Keywords

Caesarius of Arles; magic; female medicine and healthcare; female practitioners; folk healing

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Introduction

Caesarius of Arles, who became bishop in 502, was known as a man of action. His work is considered fundamental to the Christianization of southern Gaul, the elaboration and imposition of religious dogma and the correct behaviour of Christians who were far beyond his direct sphere of influence. His activities as bishop would go from presiding over councils and founding monasteries to writing an extended collection of treatises and sermons (see Bertrand et al.) – some of these will be analyzed below. He wrote more than 240 sermons that were diffused by an atelier of copyists in Arles as well as by himself, who distributed collections of the sermons to fellow clerics. His sermons were extremely successful, influencing preachers all over Christendom, even many centuries after his death in 542. Caesarius lived in a period of great social and political turmoil in Gaul. During his lifetime he saw the power moving from the Visigoths to the Ostrogoths and finally to the Franks. All of this influenced his work as a preacher and bishop intent on being a patron of charity to his community. Caesarius was committed to reinforcing the process of Christianization of his community, putting a particularly great effort into his sermons, which include an immense variety of subjects aiming to exhort and teach the true path of piety.

Among their many subjects, some of Caesarius' sermons are concerned with what he considered improper behaviour from his community, not fitting to good Christians. Some behaviours he classifies as failures of virtue, as very often, his audiences' failures were associated with paganism and unorthodoxy. We know, however, that his notion of "paganism" had much more to do with practices that retained some sort of traditional imprint than real religious deviations. Caesarius was a member of a cultural, religious, and economic elite that voiced the concerns and prejudices of the environment to which he belonged. Therefore, his approach and discourse constructed a stigmatization of and attack on non-elite behaviour and culture (Grig, "Caesarius" 67). Furthermore, to patristic authors of this time, "paganism" became a generic label to designate all that was not in conformity with the most accepted orthodoxy, meaning deviation, subversion, or heresy.

In this article, I want to focus on Caesarius' condemnation of healing practices, which he addresses in seven sermons (13.3, 19.5, 50.1, 52.5–6, 54.1 and 3, 184.4 and Étaix), and his condemnation of remedies used to favour conception and procure abortions, attested in six sermons (1.12, 19.5, 44.2, 51.1 and 4, 52.4, and 200.4).[1] Generally speaking, most of his reproaches are addressed to men and women indiscriminately, and in these sermons he frequently uses the comprehensive *homines* to designate those who seek the cure of unorthodox practices such as amulets (*caracteres*), bindings (*filacteres*), or potions (*potiones*) or the service of *caraii, divini, sortilegi, aruspices and praecantatores.* The practitioners are also mainly masculine, but in a few cases the bishop sees the necessity to specify the gender of the practitioners that were sought, or of his addressees. In Sermon 52, women are directly identified as practitioners (*erbariae*) as well as those seeking their service. In Sermon 184, women are accused of persuading each other to seek enchanters to cure their children, and in the sermon identified by Étaix, an *incanatrix* is presented as someone sought in the case of illness.

While the picture may not be clear when only healing practices are concerned, it becomes much more evident when we analyze abortion and conception: in five of the six sermons, women are directly accused of taking potions, while in Sermon 51 men and women (*viri vel aliquae mulieres*) are accused of using amulets made of amber to procure a pregnancy. The picture shows that a varied and presumably relied-on web of folk healers providing a multitude of services related to healing practices were available. In this scenario, a portion of these healers might have been women, specializing in female-related problems. We may not be able to rely solely on Caesarius' account to individuate the existence of female practitioners specializing in female health problems, yet he provides precious information that is worth analyzing along with other contemporary sources. Based on his testimony and a number of other documents, we are able to identify the need for specific gynaecological care, which presumably was not extensively available. It is thus only fair to think that to placate this necessity, specialists existed and were sought. The evidence is scant but invites us to take a closer look at what we shall see could have been a network of female domestic care, offering alternative cures to those in need, perhaps available for destitute women, or an alternative

1. For the Latin version of the sermons, I use *Césaire d'Arles: Sermons au peuple* 1, 2, 3, ed. M. J. Delage, Sources Chrétiennes 175, 243, 330 (Paris, 1971, 1978, 1986; hereafter SC I, II, and III). For the English translation, I use M. M. Mueller, *Caesarius of Arles: Sermons,* 3 vols, 31, 47, 66 (Washington, DC, 1956–73; hereafter FC I, II, and III), which are both based on the same Latin version, from Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones,* ed. G. Morin, CCSL 103–04 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953). For his *Vita,* I use the English translation from W. E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters,* Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool, 1994).

closer to people's popular knowledge and culture, which had always been an environment of a pluralism of practices. As rightly stated by Montserrat Cabré, "neither medieval medical resources nor women's health agency can be accurately mapped without thorough consideration of the domestic sphere, normally left outside the histories of the art of maintaining health and alleviating illness" (Cabré 23).

The late antique health market could be seen as a three-way offering: the medical cure, the Christian cure, and the folk cure. Very often these three systems were working together and, often, people would resort to all of them indiscriminately according to their needs and what was available; pastoral literature often shows these three practices living side by side. A profusion of medical manuals were circulating in Western Europe during late antiquity, such as Galen's, Oribasius', Dioscurides', and Marcellus of Bordeaux's, and many sources, some of which we will see further, mention trained physicians operating during this period.[2] There were even medical manuals available for laypeople (see Dietrich Fischer). What we do not know for sure was the range and accessibility of these professionals. We know that kings and nobles had their own court doctors or access to them, and a few sources also show these professionals may not have been affordable or available to everyone. Apparently to fill in the gap of the healing on offer, we see a profusion of healing practitioners using folk remedies and rituals to attend to what would presumably be the majority of the demand. We can call this a third way of medical practices, and here particularly I would like to draw attention to female practitioners and the service they offered to women and their children.

2. I refer to the bibliography on late antiquity and early medieval medicine; see Upson-Saia, Marx, and Secord; Horden, "Medieval Medicine"; Wallis; Nutton.

In late antique thought, the boundaries between magic, medicine, and religion were blurred and overlapping (Holman et al. 3; Betancourt 74.).[3] In this context, what this article aims to demonstrate is how, under the stigma of magic and *maleficium*, female practices that are condemned by Caesarius can be seen as manifestations of alternative female healthcare. Monica Green has suggested that scholars should investigate "how much religious belief served as a supplement to or substitution for other forms of health intervention" (Green, "Recent Work" 22). It is embedded in this principle that I will analyze Caesarius' discourse on medicine and healing practices as a pastoral exhortation to rely on religion as

3. See also Nutzman; Nutton.

a means of cure for body and soul. In this context, his prescriptions are in direct conflict with folk healing. Here I will investigate particularly female practices, their relationship with the role of women in society, and women's need to seek alternative solutions to problems that were not contemplated by Christianity or their community. Thus, I argue for females' agency as a form of creative moulding of their own practices and religious interpretations. I rely on Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische's definition of the sociological concept of agency:

> actors develop their deliberative capacities as they confront emergent situations that impact upon each other and pose increasingly complex problems, which must be taken up as challenges by the responsive (and communicative) intelligence (Emirbayer and Mische 969).

Based on this concept, my analysis will reveal that, by subverting orthodoxy, women were acting as agents of social and religious transformation, shaping their own practices and taking part in the construction of an alternative healthcare system while using creative ways to overcome the difficulties imposed by their marginalized position.

It is important to stress that in this tripartite healing market, Christianity was not averse to empirical medicine, and often both were working together, as some clerics were themselves doctors and hospitals were by origin Christian foundations. Furthermore, medicine and medical ideas "greatly informed the development of Christian doctrine, ascetic behaviours, and ritual practice" (Ihssen 1), which shows Christian authors had a deep familiarity with medical practices (Upson-Saia 438).[4] Also, Christian literature often used medical language as a metaphor to talk about not only healing but also topics such as politics and society in general (Mayer 443). We see all these features in Caesarius' discourse, but he, as with pastoral literature in general, is keen to emphasize the superiority of Christian cures over all others, particularly, and with ferocious force, over folk healers. While directing our gaze to the existence of the domestic web of female care that is rebuked and condemned by Caesarius, we see these two strands in a competition for a monopoly on ritualization. According to Lucy Grig, "rituals allow for the intersection of the sacred and the profane through practice. Rituals did not just reflect the diverse and

4. On the history of Christian healthcare, see also Rhee and Ferngren.

changing religious landscape but also contributed to its ongoing transformation" (Grig, *Popular Culture* ch. 5).[5] In this sense, the conflict over the monopoly on rituals of healing would be another tool for establishing a predominant religious and cultural power.

Catherine Bell argues that ritual "is a strategy for the construction of particular relationships of power. [...] Those who control ritualization are in command of a particularly powerful form of objectification" (Bell 202, 211). If we agree that power and authority construct religion (see Asad), we understand that in the ambit of healing practices and rituals, the church had to establish predominance over unorthodox practices, imposing Christian healing and its monopoly on rituals as a way to establish power: not only over unorthodox and potentially dangerous practices, but also over medicine, because, as Caesarius frequently argues, the maladies of the body are consequences of spiritual maladies and should therefore be treated primarily with religious medicines.

The body of this article is divided into three parts. In the next part, I turn to Caesarius and his sermons that address female religious specialists and women's "unorthodox" practices related to health issues. The second part contrasts illicit female healing practices with the bishop's notion of medicine for the body and soul and his prescription of a Christian cure. Finally, conclusions concern the force and diffusion of the "third way" of healing practices as a means of allowing women to exercise agency and thus to promote social and religious transformation.

Caesarius' Sermons on Female Practices and Religious Specialists

Caesarius was born in 469/70 to an aristocratic family of Chalon-sur-Saône in modern-day Bourgogne. He started his ecclesiastical career at a young age – first as a member of the local clergy. After travelling far to southern Gaul, he joined the renowned monastery of Lérins. Later, Caesarius reached Arles as the protégé of Bishop Aeonius, who designated him his successor.[6] Caesarius left his mark on Arles and the whole of Christendom, and he firmly believed that his task as a bishop was to save and heal his community. He made it one of his priorities that his flock should lead their lives worthy of

5. I am grateful and indebted to Grig for anticipating parts of this work before its publication.

6. The most comprehensive 'biography' of Caesarius remains Klingshirn's *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul.* In this volume, we can find references to and discussions of his life, prose, and language. See also ch. 4 of Grig, *Popular Culture.*

their Christian identity and the kingdom of heaven. This purpose is a common one for a bishop, but Caesarius is regarded to have dedicated himself to it "with exceptional enthusiasm" (Klingshirn, *The Making of a Christian Community* 91), a behaviour attested by his collection of sermons and echoed in his *Vita*, written just a few years after his death by a group of clerics who knew him personally.

Sermons have a crucial social, cultural, and religious meaning and are seen as tools to educate and convey relevant messages regarding many aspects of life in the oral societies of late antiquity and later (see Leemans; Muessig). In late antique Gaul particularly, but also elsewhere, reading sermons aloud to the congregation was a way to educate people and inculcate correct behaviour (Bailey, *The Religious Worlds* 143; see also Weiss). To this extent, Caesarius was particularly dedicated to writing and diffusing his sermons, as the important collection of his writings demonstrates.

In his sermons, Caesarius seldom addresses women specifically on matters of proper behaviour, preferring to address the members of his community in more general terms, regardless of gender, on how to behave as Christians. A few exceptions are made, for instance in Sermon 78, in which he addresses young women who, instead of keeping a proper posture, lie down on the floor of the church,[7] as well as in the sermons that are discussed below. There are also sermons in which we are frequently informed on how a woman ought to behave in relation to male behaviour. In Sermon 43, for example, he says the following while admonishing men on conjugal chastity: "Why do they not observe toward their wives the fidelity they desire to receive from them? Since a man receives his name from manliness, and a woman hers from weakness, that is, from frailty, why does anyone want his wife to be victorious against cruel, bestial lust, when he himself is overcome and falls at the first assault of it?" (FC I, 241).[8] Here we see that virtuous women should enable and facilitate men's virtue, or else be a vessel for the virtue of men.

7. Sermo 78.1, FC I, 360.

8. Sermo 43.1. *Et quare non servant fidem uxoribus suis, quam sibi ab eis servari desiderant? Cum enim vir a virtute nomen acceperit, et mulier a mollitie, id est a fragilitate, quare contra crudelissimam bestiam libidinem vult unusquisque uxorem suam esse victricem, cum ipse ad primum libidinis ictum victus cadat?* (SC II, 31).

Caesarius' role in shaping the religious identity of congregations in Arles through his patronage is another way to access his ideas about female virtue. He was responsible for bringing a monastery for women to the inner city, which aimed to be a model of perfect Christian living. For his sister Caesaria, who was designated abbess of the monastery, he wrote the *Regula virginum*, the first rule written

specifically for a nunnery. His vision of female behaviour, either lay or religious, was one of virtue and passivity. We see, for example, in his *Rule for Nuns* how he describes religious women that should be perfect vessels of purity (Leyser 98). The passivity of women in Caesarius' discourse is contested by some scholars,[9] but will become evident also through the following analysis, which shows women as active in shaping practices and beliefs, thus challenging Caesarius' prescribed notion of female passivity.

Caesarius' approach to female practices is profoundly dependent on diffused assumptions that were present in contemporary sources, revealing not only his own understanding of subversive female behaviour, but also that of his milieu. Caesarius in particular, and ecclesiastical texts in general, tend to contain ideas that are meant to teach and convince the audience of what ought to be, and not to describe what actually is (Klingshirn, *The Making of a Christian Community* 14). In this respect, we know that pastoral literature is highly repetitive (Filotas, "Popular Religion" 436), and time and again scholars have demonstrated that, particularly on subjects of paganism and superstition, authors copied from one another, presumably demonstrating that those mentions would only mean the persistence of a literary tradition rather than actual popular customs (Hen 171; Harmening 19). Dismissing the validity of these sources is, however, too simplistic, as some criteria can be applied to vouch for a source's reliability (Künzel 1060; Gurevich 83): for instance, the use of vernacular to designate a practice, or the rareness of a mention. On the latter, as we will see, Caesarius is the first, if not the only one, to describe practices or practitioners. Furthermore, he is regarded as the source to which later authors resort to talk about unorthodox practices, which, if admitting the unconscious copying and pasting of authors, at least also recognizes that Caesarius' writings are the well from which many drink.[10] Either way, if we choose to see Caesarius' discourse as a mirror to society, we should bear in mind that it is a selective mirror, which reflects only those aspects of behaviour that he chose to address, giving only his selected interpretations. We know that our sources are always partial, but when using them to understand contemporary social behaviour we should reflect on the fact that this partiality also reveals much about the mentality of religious authorities, how they saw their communities, and how they interpreted their beliefs and behaviours. This means that most frequently these texts are windows

9. Maria Del Fiat Miola claims that Caesarius' pastoral work was successful only thanks to the active contribution of his sister and niece, the first two abbesses of the female monastery of St John of Arles, and their congregation (Del Fiat Miola). In the same way, Darya Omelchenko argues that Caesarius sees women as his assistants in the transformation of society in accordance with Christian ideals, since he paid tribute to the modesty of the morals of women – as opposed to the vices of men (Omelchenko).

10. During Caesarius' lifetime alone, his sermons are reputed to have travelled to "the Frankish lands, Gaul, Italy, Spain, and other provinces" (*Vita Caesarii* 1.55).

on the ecclesiastical imaginary rather than on its lay counterpart (Jolly 4). Nevertheless, when addressing his community, Caesarius, as well as other Christian authors, could not use rhetoric and subjects completely out of his audience's reality. Themes and motifs ought to be part of people's lives, otherwise his teaching would be ineffective. As stated by Lisa Bailey, "[t]he negative portraits of lay behavior were just as rhetorically constructed as the positive ones, but still provide a series of intriguing suggestions about what lay people may have been up to" (Bailey, *The Religious Worlds* 118). With this in mind, let us see his sermons as a partial and tendentious reflection of society. Nevertheless, we should also pay attention to the echoes of people's practices, provided that even imaginary or ideal constructs must find references in the real world of everyday practices.

As already mentioned, abortion, conception, and contraception are the most rebuked practices regarding women in Caesarius' discourse addressed in six sermons.[11] In late antique Gaul, denunciation of abortion was a way of defining the Christian community and its values (Mistry 66), and in Caesarius' rhetoric we see an emphasis on condemning abortion as a sexual transgression against chastity (Mistry 69). Ecclesiastical documentation, particularly penitential literature, frequently considers abortion as a consequence of fornication and extra-conjugal sin.[12] This can be seen both in the Synod of Elvira (c. 300), canon 63, and the Council of Ancyra (314), canon 20,[13] which influenced later ecclesiastical literature on this topic.

Caesarius' ideas on abortion and conception can be summarized here:

> Sermo 44.2. No woman should take drugs for purposes of abortion, nor should she kill her children that have been conceived or are already born. If anyone does this, she should know that before Christ's tribunal she will have to plead her case in the presence of those she has killed. Moreover, women should not take diabolical draughts with the purpose of not being able to conceive children. A woman who does this ought to realize that she will be guilty of as many murders as the number of children she might have borne.[14] (FC I, 221)

11. For a categorization and consideration of how each of these sermons addresses abortion, see Mistry 67–68.

12. As in canon 20 of the sixth-century Irish *Paenitentiale Vinniani*, which is part of a larger section about fornication, informing that abortion is here condemned as a consequence of out-of-wedlock relations. Furthermore, Winnebeck concludes that this canon is addressing abortion and fornication by nuns (Winnebeck 6–9).

13. Council of Elvira, *La Colleción canónica hispana* 4, 233–68; Council of Ancyra, *Ecclesiae occidentalis*, 3–115.

14. *Nulla mulier potiones ad avorsum accipiat, nec filios aut conceptos aut iam natos occidat; quia, quaecumque hoc fecerit, ante tribunal Christi sciat se causam cum illis quos occiderit esse dicturam. Sed nec illas diabolicas potiones mulieres debent accipere, per quas iam non possint concipere. Mulier quaecumque hoc fecerit, quantoscumque parere potuerat, tantorum homicidiorum se ream esse cognoscat* (SC II, 328).

The accusation of the use of potions to seek an abortion is a longstanding theme in civil and ecclesiastical literature.[15] Legal codes and penitential literature were particularly keen to accuse men and women of seeking wicked methods to prevent another child being born, frequently associating these methods with magicians and other traditional practitioners (Diniz, "Religious Crafting" 42 and eadem, "Paganism and Traditional Practices").

15. For a comprehensive study of abortion in ecclesiastical literature in early medieval history, see Mistry; also Elsakkers, "Reading between the Lines".

Caesarius is mainly silent on the social meaning of abortion, but some motivations can be gathered from other sources. Some penitential literature prescribes blander punishment for those women who seek to concoct a potion to have an abortion due to poverty,[16] which means this cause could have been frequent and the ecclesiastical authorities were sometimes even keen to recognize the burden of too many children for destitute families. Social and aesthetic vanity were reasons pointed out by some sources, such as Caesarius himself in Sermon 52, where he accuses some women of procuring an abortion "fearing that they cannot be rich if they were to have more children" (*timentes ne forte, si plures filios habuerint, divites esse non possent,* Sermo 52.4, SC II, 438), which is not the same as not wanting a child due to poverty, but, according to Caesarius, a fear of losing economic prestige to feed and provide for more children. As for aesthetics, one example is found in Procopius of Caesarea's depiction of Theodora in his *Secret History*, written in the mid-sixth century, in which the historian accuses the empress of avoiding pregnancies due to her own vanity and desire for self-preservation (Procopius, *Secret History* 2.9.19; 2.15.6).[17] Another motivation for abortion is the desire of certain women to deprive their husbands of an heir. The sixth-century *Digest of Justinian*, a legal compendium culled from ancient legislative opinions, cites a rescript in which a woman who, after a divorce, procure an abortion "so as to avoid giving a son to her husband who is now hateful", is punished with temporary exile (*Digest* 48.19.39, book 4).[18] Another reason is given by John Chrysostom in one of his sermons, in which he offers the example of prostitutes who are forced to have an abortion so as not to lose their livelihood. In this case, the one to blame for the murder of the foetus is her client, not the woman.[19]

16. For instance, the ninth-century Spanish *Penitentiale Vigilanum* states that *Mulier Autem Pauperina si in hoc Inruerit, VII Annos Peniteat,* in CCSL 156 A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 7. This chapter was inspired by the pseudo-Theodorian penitential that states *Mulier si aliquem interemerit malitia sua, id est, per poculum aut per artem aliquant, VIII annos poeniteat. Si paupercula est, V annos* (P. Theodori (U) 1.14.25–6, Finsterwalder 309). It thus consists of a common statement in penitential literature.

17. Procopius, *Secret History:* "She was often pregnant, but by using almost all known techniques she could induce immediate abortions". "She paid more attention to the care of her body than was necessary but still less than she would have liked" (Kaldellis 42, 68).

18. Watson 368.

19. John Chrysostom, Homily 24 on Rom. 13:11, Walker et al. 922.

Finally, in general, the Christian authorities allowed medical practices that provoked a termination of pregnancy if the life of the mother was in danger (Harris 140). This can be seen in a story found in the *Lives of the Fathers of Mérida*, composed in the 630s by Paul the Deacon.

He chronicles the life of Paul, Bishop of Mérida around 540–50, who was "a Greek by nationality and a doctor by trade" (Paul the Deacon, *Lives* 1.1).[20] He was once called to save the life of a noblewoman whose foetus had died in her womb. Her husband begged the bishop that "as he was a servant of God, he should intercede in his prayers for the health of his wife, or, surely, as he was a doctor, not think it unworthy for him to give the sick woman the favor of being cured by his own hand" (Paul the Deacon, *Lives* 2.3).[21] After refusing the task and offering advice to other doctors, the bishop then gives in and performs the procedure to save the woman's life:

> with wonderous skill he made a most skillful incision by his cunning use of a knife and extracted the already decaying body of the infant, limb by limb, piece by piece and, with God's aid, restored forthwith the woman who was on the point of dying and only half alive, safe and sound to her husband.[22] (Paul the Deacon, *Lives* 2.11)

This procedure is considered the first documented Caesarean section ever performed (Tsoucalas et al. 203), and the story attests to the fact that Christian and medical cures could be intertwined and walk side by side.

On the other hand, wicked methods were also regarded to be used to procure a pregnancy. Caesarius is as harsh on the use of potions and herbs to promote conception as he is on abortion. In a sermon known as "On Accepting Barrenness", he states:

> Sermo 51.4. Therefore, those to whom God is unwilling to give children should not try to have them by means of herbs or magic signs or evil charms. It is becoming and proper for Christians especially not to seem to fight against the dispensation of Christ by cruel, wicked boldness. Just as women whom God wants to bear more children should not take medicines to prevent their conception, so those whom God wishes to remain sterile should desire and seek this gift from God alone.[23] (FC I, 258)

Caesarius, however, is only prone to provide harsh accusations. His judgement is peremptory: a woman has no will in her personal situation and should bear whatever God decides to assign to her, to conceive either as many children as possible or none.

20. Fear 58.

21. Fear 59.

22. Fear 60.

23. *Et ideo, cui Deus filios dare noluerit, non eos de aliquis erbis vel diabolicis characteribus aut sacrilegis ligaturis habere conentur. Unde ante omnia et decet et expedit christianis ne contra dispensationem Christi crudeli et impio ausu pugnare videantur. Sicut enim mulieres, quas Deus vult plures habere filios, nullas potationes debent accipere, per quas conceptum habere non possint, ita et illae, quas Deus stereles voluit permanere, de solo Deo hoc debent desiderare vel petere* (SC II, 428–30).

We know from the famous case of King Lothar II (835–9) that a man was able to divorce his wife if she bore no children.[24] Even though Christian thought would rebuke this practice, as attested by Hincmar of Reims in his *De divortio Lotharii regis et Theutbergae reginae,* we can presume the civil practice was possible and used by husbands. On these grounds, if a woman risked being repudiated by her husband, this could justify her resorting to any possible means available to her. Not only the risk of divorce but also that of bearing no heirs is a valuable reason driving women to seek alternative remedies to fight infertility.[25]

24. For a comprehensive study of this case, see Heidecker. See also Flint, "Magic"; more recently, Stone and West.

Caesarius never associates a specific practitioner with the concoction or administering of abortive or fertility remedies. We might think, however, that it remained a female affair, as demonstrated by the sixth-century Frankish *Leges Salicae*, which presents in article 19.4 the only indictment in which women are explicitly named as subject and as indirect object in a prescript. It is an article called "De maleficii" and introduces an example of women who were versed in what the source calls *maleficia*, and based on this knowledge prepared abortifacients and contraceptives for other women (Elsakkers, "Abortion" 258). It says: *Si quis mulier altera mulieri maleficium fecerit unde infantes non potuerit habere, <MMD denarios qui faciunt> solidos LXII semis culpabilis iudicetur.*[26]

25. Interestingly, Hincmar in his treatise affirms that some women would use magic and witchcraft to make their husbands impotent, one of the few reasons that would allow a civil and religious dissolution of a marriage. See Hincmar, *De divortio* 717. On the use of magic in cases of divorce (either to procure or avoid it), see Flint, *The Rise* 296ff.

26. MGH, *Leges nationum Germanicarum* 4.1, *Pactus legis Salicae*, 82.

All these sources demonstrate that women seeking abortions or trying to conceive are seen as social and religious outcasts, subverting the moral, social, and civil order. They are subjected to the moral censure of religious authority but also to the civil punishment of law through exile, divorce, or the payment of fees. In a context like this, where religion would offer no support and medical doctors might themselves be religious men or not easily available, a woman would search for alternative solutions, found apparently in folk and informal healing.

Female healers may not have been restricted to the realm of gynaecological specialities or midwifery. Monica Green describes quantitative studies across Europe in the high and late Middle Ages in which prosopographical research has demonstrated that female practitioners could be found performing a variety of medical specialities (Green, "Women's Medical Practice" 42). Documentation of this sort is non-existent for the late antique

period, but it is not impossible to suppose that women were performing a variety of medical specialities, involving the treatment of men. Even though a plurality of practitioners was available, we could presume that women had a better knowledge of female embodiment and could rely on each other to solve their specific problems and provide assistance in cases of necessity. In a study entitled "La sage-femme" (the wise woman), Aline Rouselle states that in sixth-century Gaul many thermal sanctuaries and sacred springs were regarded to have the power to heal gynaecological illnesses which could not be healed through martyrs' miracles. Wise women would have been the holders of healing formulae concerning exclusively female health problems, since for male and other female afflictions the miraculous cures of saints were sought (Rousselle, "La sage-femme" 269; see also Rousselle, *Croire et guérir*).

Let us now discuss Sermon 52, which admonishes mothers who turn to practitioners to heal their children. In this sermon, as is the case with Caesarius' other sermons, there is a parade of practitioners sought for a variety of situations: soothsayers, diviners, and prophets. Here, however, Caesarius gives us a glimpse of what could have been a specialized practitioner, one he calls an *erbaria*, claimed to be a female specialist in medicinal, amuletic, or poisonous *herbae*.[27]

> Sermo 52.5. Mothers in grief and terror hasten when their sons are troubled with various trials or infirmities. What is worse, they do not entreat the Church's remedy, the author of salvation and the Eucharistic Christ. Nor, as it is written that they should, do they ask the priests to anoint them with blessed oil, or place all their hopes in God. They act in the opposite manner, so that while they seek bodily health they effect the death of souls. If only they would seek that health from the simple skill of doctors! However, they say to themselves: Let us consult that soothsayer, seer, oracle, or witch (*illum ariolum vel divinum, illum sortilegum, illam erbariam*). Let us sacrifice a garment of the sick person, a girdle that can be seen and measured. Let us offer some magic letters, let us hang some charms on his neck. In all this the Devil has one aim: either to cruelly kill the children by abortion, or to heal them still more cruelly by the charms.[28] (FC I, 262)

In this passage, there are three interesting points: Caesarius first admonishes mothers for not seeking the "Church's remedy" (the priest's anointment and prayer), but then also laments the fact they

27. This kind of female practitioner makes her first appearance in Latin in this very sermon (Klingshirn, "Magic and Divination" 973).

28. *Quando aliquarum mulierum filii diversis temptationibus aut infirmitatibus fatigantur, lugentes et adtonitae currunt matres; et quod peius est, non de ecclesiae medicina, non de auctore salutis exposcunt atque eucharistia Christi et, cum sicut scriptum est, oleo benedicto a presbyteris deberent perunguere, et omnem spem suam in Deo ponere. Econtrario faciunt, et dum salutem requirunt corporum, mortem inveniunt animarum. Et atque utiam ipsam sanitatem vel de simplici medicorum arte conquirerent. Sed dicunt sibi: illum ariolum vel divinum, illum sortilegum, illam erbariam consulamus; vestimentum infirmi sacrificemus, cingulum qui inspici vel mensuraru debeat; offeramus aliquos caracteres, aliquas praecantationes adpendamus ad collum. Inter haec una diaboli persuasio est: aut per avorsum occidere crudeliter filios, aut per caracteres sanare crudelius* (SC II, 438–40).

do not even seek the "simple skill of doctors". On the contrary, they go and consult the folk healer. Indeed, the sermon further states:

> Sermo 52.6. Sometimes, women who are apparently wise Christians, when their children are sick, reply to nurses or other women through whom the Devil suggests these practices: "I will not get mixed up in such things, because it is read in church: You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; you cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord and of the table of devils." Then, as if excusing herself, such a woman says: "Go, and do as you know how; no expenses from our storehouse will be denied you."[29] (FC I, 262)

Here we see explicitly that women used to consult one another in search of advice and care. For Caesarius, women who provide health services gather their knowledge from the Devil. It is also interesting to notice that these female health specialists were apparently earning an income from their trade, even though no documentation allows us to know if these specialists exercised healing as a profession or as a "part-time" job performed on demand.

Bernadette Filotas interprets this single mention of *erbariae* in Caesarius' sermons as evidence that he understood this kind of female practitioner as less harmful to faith than other practitioners (Filotas, "Pagan Survivals" 398). Other scholars, however, have understood Caesarius' use of the term *erbaria* as a way of "officialising" the phenomenon of female witchcraft (Campetella 180), as found in other sources. In the *Chronicle of Fredegar*, for instance, the Frankish King Guntrum's second wife, Marcatrude, is called a *meretrix* and *herbaria*, and she is believed to have killed her rival's son with poison.[30] The seventh-century *Pactus Alamannorum* mentions twice the fine to be paid by women accused of being *stria aut herbari*a.[31] Around the twelfth century, the term *herbarius* in male form is associated with botanists and herbalists or practitioners of benevolent magic,[32] while the female *(h)erbaria* always means the female poisoner or the witch who uses herbs (Campetella 183).

Knowledge of the medicinal properties of herbs was longstanding, and numerous herbals and medical treatises listing herbs and plants circulated in the Mediterranean in the early medieval period (Riddle 59). This knowledge was generally accepted, but its relationship with presumably harmful practices was noticed by religious authorities. The Council of Braga of 572 would, a few decades after Caesarius'

29. *Interdum solent aliquae mulieres, quasi sapientes et christianae, aegrotantibus filiis suis, aut nutricibus aut aliis mulieribus, per quas diabolus ista suggerit, respondere et dicere: Non me ego misceo in istis talibus rebus, quia legitur in ecclesia: "non potestis calicem Domini bibere, et calicem daemoniorum; non potestis mensae Domini participes esse, et mensae daemoniorum." Et cum haec quasi excusans se dixerit: Ite, et facite vos quomodo scitis; expensa vobis de cellario non negatur* (SC II, 440).

30. Fredegar, *Chronicle* 3.56, MGH SRM 2, 108.

31. *Pactus legis Alamannorum,* MGH Leges 4.1, 24.

32. Poen. Hubertense (first half of the eighth century) 25, CCSL 156, 111. See also Poen. Merseburgense b (c. 774–c. 850) 24, ibid., 176. *Herbarii* of either sex (*Herbarius vir aut mulier*) are considered as murders of infants in two Continental penitentials from the eighth to ninth century. Cf. Filotas, "Pagan Survivals" 398.

bishopric, regulate the gathering of herbs and concoction of potions: "in the collection of medicinal herbs, let it not be permitted to perform any rituals or incantations except the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, so that only God may be honoured as creator and lord of all things".[33] This canon evidences the acceptance of herbs as useful tools in medical treatment, as long as they are not associated with any illicit practice that can be associated with magic. From this moment on, the admonition against the gathering of herbs using spells will be repeated in numerous sermons, councils, and penitentials, always recognizing the beneficial use of herbs but exhorting their users to dissociate them from harmful practices.[34]

Another female practitioner is introduced in one sermon of Caesarius discovered by Raymon Étaix. She is called in case of illness, and the bishop gives a fitting judgement on her behaviour:

> For then he is proven to be Christian if he does not desert God in [the Devil's] persecution, nor send for the soothsayer, nor make bindings, nor bring in any enchantresses (*incantatrices*). When a woman recites an incantation, a serpent recites it.[35]

While the male terms *incantator* and *praecantator* (*praecantor*) appear in a conspicuous number of early medieval pastoral sources,[36] including Caesarius,[37] the *incantatrix* occurs only three times: once in Caesarius and twice in the Frankish context of the eighth and ninth centuries.[38] *Praecantatrix*, on the other hand, is attested only in Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos* together with *praecantator* as a practitioner that was sought in cases of illness.[39]

Even though a female practitioner is not specified in the sources, women are accused of practising incantations and enchantments in a number of penitentials and other documents.[40] The purpose and intent of the magic practised by enchanters in general is frequently vague in the texts. It could be sorcery, divination, spells, or just an imprecise collection of forbidden practices. The admonition against incantations is present in the *Statuta ecclesiae antiqua*, compiled in southern Gaul in the last quarter of the fifth century, which recommends the expulsion from the Christian community of those who make use of auguries or *incantationes*.[41] From the same environment comes also the mention found in the Council of Agde (506), presided over by Caesarius, which rebukes clerics who perform the functions of magicians and *incantatores*.[42] Apparently, a specific *incantatrix* summoned in case of illness is found only in Caesarius and Augustine. However, the male *praecantator* in

33. Braga (572), can. 74, *Concilios Visigoticos,* 103. *Non liceat in collectione herbarium, quae medicinales sunt, aliquas observationes aut incantationes adtendere nisi tantum cum symbolo divino aut oratione dominica, ut tantum Deus creator omnium et dominus honoretur.*

34. For references, see Filotas, "Pagan Survivals" 399ff.

35. *Tunc enim probatur Christianus si in ista persecutione non deserit Deum, si non mittit ad sortilegum, si non facit ligaturas, si non incantatrices aliquas ducit. Incantat mulier, incantat serpens* (in Étaix 275).

36. According to Filotas, it appears forty times. See Filotas, "Pagan Survivals" 407.

37. *Praecantator* appears in Sermons 1.12, 13.3, 19.5, 50.1, 52.5, 54.1 and 3, and 184.

38. Respectively, Charlemagne's General Admonition: *[U]t cauclearii, malefici, incantatores vel incantatrices fieri non sinantur* (K. M. *Admonitio Generalis* (789) 18, MGH CapRegFr 1, 55) and Ansegesis' collection, in a canon attributed to the Council of Laodicea: *Ansegesis capitularium collectio* (first half of the ninth century) 1.21, ibid. 399); Filotas, "Pagan Survivals" 407.

39. CCSL 40, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 101–05. Augustine, Psalm 127:11, l. 6: *videmus quiamistos parientes intrant multi ebriosi, feneratores, mangomes, quaerentes sortilegos, euntes ad praecantatores et praecantatrices, quando illis caput dolet,* 1875.

40. For a brief discussion of enchanters and incantation in the sources, see Filotas, "Pagan Survivals" 407.

41. LXXXIX, *auguriis vel incantationibus servientem a conventu ecclesiae separandum* (*Statuta ecclesiae antiqua* (c. 475) 83 [89], CCSL 148, 179).

42. LXVIII, *Quoniam non oportet ministros altaris aut clericos magos aut incantatores esse aut facere quae dicuntur filacteria, quae sunt magna obligamenta animarum. Hos autem qui talibus utuntur proici ab ecclesia iussimus. La colección Canónica Hispana* IV, 149.

Caesarius is always related to healing practices, presumably meaning that, to his knowledge, either male or female enchanters could be healing specialists.

As William Klingshirn points out, ecclesiastical documentation evidenced that "both diviners and 'folk' healers could be esteemed as alternative figures of authority in the community. The fact that many of them were women made them doubly threatening to the organized church" (Klingshirn, *The Making of a Christian Community* 222). Indeed, in Sermon 184.4, adapted from Augustine's Sermon 286.7, Caesarius refers to the habit of certain people to advise their peers to employ folk healers:

> Sermo 184.4. It usually happens, brethren, that a persecutor on the side of the Devil comes to a sick man and says: "If you had summoned that magician, you would already be cured. If you had been willing to hang those superstitious signs on you, you would already have recovered your health." Perhaps another man comes and says: "Send to that soothsayer, transmit your cincture or fillet to him so he can measure it and look at it." Then he himself will tell you what to do, or whether you can escape. Still another says: "That man knows very well how to fumigate; and everyone for whom he has done this immediately felt better, and every attack left his house." […] Even women are wont to persuade each other that if their children are sick they should have recourse to some kind of incantation which is not proper to the Catholic faith. This is deception on the part of the Devil.[43] (FC II, 481)

It is worth remembering that when Caesarius makes use of other sources, and here particularly Augustine, it is not with unconscious repetition, but sensible adaptation. What he uses from Augustine is what he regarded as useful to his congregation (De Maeyer and Partoens 215; Klingshirn, *The Making of a Christian Community* 12), making amendments and adaptations according to his knowledge of his community. Here, although making use of Augustine's discourse on the recourse of certain people to wicked healing practices, he adds important and revealing information that is not present in Augustine, who, differently from Caesarius, is very concise in his description of practices:

43. *Solet fieri, fratres, ut ad aliquem aegrotantem veniat persecutor ex parte diaboli, et dicat: Si illum praecantatorem adhibuisses, iam sanus esses; si characteres illos tibi voluisses adpendere, iam poteras sanitatem recipere. Huic persecutori si consenseris, diabolo sacrificasti; si contempseris, martyrii gloriam acquisisti. Venit forte et alius qui dicat: Mitte ad illum divinum, transmitte ad illum cingulum aut fasciam tuam, mensuretur et aspiciat; et ipse tibi dicet quid facies, aut utrum evadere possis. Dicit et alius: Ille bene novit fumigare; nam cuicumque hoc fecit, statim melius habuit, omnis temptatio de domo illius discessit.* [...] *Solent etiam mulieres sibi invicem persuadere, ut aegrotantibus filiis suis ad fascinum aliquid, quod fidei catholicae non conveniat, debeant adhibere. Et ista deceptio de parte diabli est* (Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones* II, 750).

> Sermo 286.7. So while he's being wracked with pain, along comes trial and temptation by tongue; either some female (*muliercula*), or a man, if man he can be called, approaches the sickbed, and says to the sick man, "Tie on that *muti*,[44] and you will get better; let them apply that charm (*ligaturam*), and you will get better. So-and-so, and so-and-so and so-and-so; ask, they all got better by using it." He doesn't yield, he doesn't agree, he doesn't give his consent; he has to struggle, all the same. He has no strength, and he conquers the devil. He becomes a martyr on his sickbed, and he is crowned by the one who hung for him on the tree.[45] (Hill 105)

44. "The universal Southern African word for magic charms, spells, and potions of all sorts; often translated as 'medicine', but as in the expression 'medicine man'" (Hill 106).

45. *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi opera omnia.* Vol. 5, PL 38, 1302.

Here, differently from Caesarius, we don't see any magicians (*praecantator*), or soothsayers (*divinum*), there are no cinctures or fillets to be measured, no fumigations, and more importantly, no women persuading their peers to use these practices to heal their children. Caesarius' additions may be revealing of the practices and instruments that were used by folk healers and of the *modus operandi* of people advising each other on the best method and the most prestigious and reliable healer to consult.

From what we can detect in ecclesiastical sources about traditional cures, references to the practitioners' types and prescribed remedies were numerous and repetitive. The list of magicians and fortune tellers replicated by Caesarius is also found in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (Klingshirn, "Isidore"), which attests to a variety of practitioners and presupposes that people facing different health problems would have diverse options of practices to choose from. While exclusively female specialists are included among these practitioners, one could also assume that women, too, were among the gender-neutral specialists.[46]

46. For a collection of female practitioners in the early medieval West with references (albeit scattered and inaccurate), see Gatti. In Anglo-Saxon context, see Meaney.

We could thus surmise that during late antiquity a rich marketplace for healing was offered. Yet, as we will see below, Caesarius, and ecclesiastical authorities in general, prescribed a standard Christian cure based on anointing and praying, either in church or preferably by the relics of saints and martyrs (Paxton 93). This not to say that ecclesiastical authorities were averse to medical treatments. On the contrary, doctors were recommended and respected by religious authorities, and some clerics were doctors themselves, but in the pastoral discourse, Christian cures remained the most powerful and legitimate. Even so, saints and clerics must have accounted

for a minority of the sick, while family and neighbours must have undertaken most basic nursing tasks. This sector of a curing network is, however, seldom documented, and the knowledge bestowed by these people must have been learned and handed down orally, a fact that renders our understanding of their methods and specialties even harder (Horden, "What's Wrong" 161). Caesarius' sermons show neighbours and family members influencing and persuading each other to search for a certain healer or medical treatment when facing health problems. It is possible that such healers were found nearby, within the same family or neighbourhood (see Horden, "Household Care"). This close network could have also been responsible for primary care, even more so in the case of female health concerns and children's needs. The home was presumably the principal locus of care in this period, a strong alternative as a response to the scarce availability of doctors and the restrictive and not fully inclusive Christian medical care. Taking these into consideration, we could turn our attention to Caesarius' discourse on Christian healing to understand why folk medicine, and particularly female health practices, might have functioned as valid alternatives for people, and particularly women facing gynaecological issues.

Christian Medicine: Caesarius as Healer for Body and Soul

As can be detected from Caesarius' sermons, the pluralism and informal healing network present and sought after in his times was in great contrast with the medical cures prescribed by Christianity. Indeed, Caesarius advises the following standardized procedure to his audience:

> Sermo 13.3. As soon as some infirmity overtakes him, a sick man should receive the Body and Blood of Christ, humbly and devoutly ask the presbyters for blessed oil, and anoint his body with it. […] See to it, brethren, that a man hastens to the church in infirmity, and he will merit to receive both bodily health and the remission of his sins. Since we can find a double good in church, why do miserable men try to bring numerous evils upon themselves through charmers, fountains, trees, diabolical phylacteries, sorcerers, soothsayers, seers or oracles?[47] (FC I, 77)

47. *Quotiens aliqua infirmitas supervenerit, corpus et sanguinem Christi ille qui aegrotat accipiat; oleum benedictum a presbyteris humiliter ac fideliter petat, et inde corpusculum suum ungueat.* […] *Cum ergo duplicia bona possimus in ecclesia invenire, quare per praecantatores, per fontes et arbores et diabolica fylacteria, per caraios aut aruspices et divinos vel sortilegos multiplicia sibi mala miseri homines conantur inferre?* (SC I, 420).

Furthermore, in Sermon 50 he admonishes his community against resorting to wicked practices related to healthcare. He opens his homily as follows:

> Sermo 50.1. You know, dearly beloved, that all men seek bodily health, but this we should acknowledge, that, although health of body is good, health of the heart is much better. Consequently, all Christians should always pray especially that God will deign to grant them health of soul because of their devout life. We should pray for bodily health, but doubly and many more times for health of soul.[48] (FC I, 253)

Even though for him a spiritual care and cure was the priority, we can see that he was not averse to doctors or practical medicine. On the contrary, he emerges as a promoter of empirical medicine. In his sermons, Caesarius often uses the language of medicine or mentions doctors as an analogy of the church in offering remedy for the soul. God appears as the healer of souls just as a physician provides remedy for the body. For instance, he writes in Sermon 17.4: "Truly, dearly beloved, God does not want to kill the sinner, but his sin. Like a good doctor He wants to strike the disease, not the person who is ill" (FC I, 92).[49] Furthermore, Caesarius undertook the building of a structure that was very similar to what later became a hospital.[50] As documented in his *Vita*,

> He had a very great concern for the sick and came to their assistance. He granted them a spacious house, in which they could listen undisturbed to the holy office [being sung] in the basilica. He set up beds and bedding, provided for expenses, and supplied a person to take care of them and heal them.[51] (*Vita Caesarii* 1.20)

Caesarius' hospital is probably the earliest foundation of this sort in Gaul. According to Caesarius' *Vita*, this structure must have been of considerable capacity, annexed to the basilica that some scholars identify as the cathedral of Saint Stephen, patron of Arles (Février and Leyge 63). It is probable that along with the person supplied to take care of the sick, there was also some sort of doctor employed – if this was not the same person (Sternberg 197), suggesting that, along with spiritual remedies, medical treatments were offered to the sick.

Arles was also a renowned place of healing, as its physicians were famous in the region. In a letter from Bishop Avitus of Vienne to Caesarius, the former asks the latter to receive a certain Bishop

48. *Nostris, fratres carissimi, omnes homines sanitatem corporis quaerere: sed hoc debemus agnoscere, quia, quamvis bona sit sanitas corporis, multo melior est sanitas cordis. Unde omnes christiani debent specialiter semper orare, ut illis Deus sanitatem animae digne tur pro sua pietate concedere. Orandum est pro sanitate corporis, sed dupliciter et multipliciter pro salute animae supplicandum* (SC II, 416).

49. Similar rhetoric can be also detected in Sermons 23.2, 36.4, 43.9, 57.2, and 59.5.

50. As Peregrine Horden remarks, "the hospital before the great 'medicalization' of the modern age [...] was by origin a Christian invention, and in our period its history is overwhelmingly a Christian history. It was therapeutic by medieval medical standards as a beneficial regulator of the environment in which the needy poor lived and slept. But still more was it therapeutic by medieval theological standards in that it looked after the health of the soul: the founder's soul through the prayers of patients; the patients' souls through the spiritual and physical healing of the liturgy and the sacraments" (Horden, "Sickness and Healing" 103; see also Horden, "The Earliest Hospitals in Byzantium").

51. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 18.

Maximianus who is seeking "a skilled physician somewhere, who cures eye diseases by a skilful remedy".[52] Caesarius himself as a young monk was taken to Arles "to regain his health" (*Vita Caesarii* 1.7),[53] after being dedicated to a harsh ascetic lifestyle while at the monastery of Lérins. The deacon Helpidius was a known physician who served King Theoderic and whose medical skills were famous in Gaul and Italy (Avitus of Vienne, *Epist*. 38). Nevertheless, when assailed by a demonic infestation, Helpidius was helpless. Only after Caesarius entered his house to purify it with holy water was he delivered from his distress (*Vita Caesarii* 1.41).[54]

Doctors, however, may not have been easily accessible. In another sermon, Caesarius informs us that these professionals might have been quite expensive:

> Sermo 5.5. When bodily doctors refuse to come to the sick, dearly beloved, they are begged with great humility, and rewards and gifts are promised, even though it is doubtful whether their remedies will be beneficial. How is it, then, that we who in no way at all despair of spiritual healing and seek neither earthly reward nor temporal gains should be despised in this way? […] Since bodily health is sought with such great expense and so much pain, why is not the health of souls willingly sought by men when it is granted without any expense?[55] (FC I, 36–37)

Even though the merits of medicine were recognized by pastoral literature, doctors might have offered a costly service not available to everyone,[56] and even so, the Christian cure was always regarded as the best and most appropriate one. Indeed, according to Caesarius' *Vita*, his relics were reputed as having a curative power. Thus, Caesarius provided not only spiritual but also bodily health. His work as a spiritual guide is in numerous cases associated with that of a physician. In one case, he is even described as "a physician of the spirit, who cured the innate vices of diseases and prevented new ones from arising out of wicked thoughts" (*Vita Caesarii* 1.15).[57] In another case, he is reputed to offer the right word and prayer according to each person's needs: "Like a good physician he provided different remedies for different ailments; he did not offer what would please the patient, but rather what would cure him. He did not consider the wishes of the sick but fittingly desired to heal the infirm" (*Vita Caesarii* 1.17).[58]

52. Letter 2, in Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 81.

53. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letter*s 12–13.

54. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 30.

55. SC I, 314–16.

56. Gregory of Tours, in the *Historia Francorum* 7.25, describes the many properties of Chilperic's court physician, Marilief: "He had landed property, horses, gold, silver, and other valuable possessions – all to disappear, though, when he lost his patron at Chilperic's death." This might be an indication of the wealth of physicians. Another interesting anecdote is told in the *Vita Caesarii* 1.50. After Caesarius visited a villa and was welcomed by its owners, a physician named Anatolius used the same bed in which Caesarius had slept to stay with a prostitute. For this audacity and shameful act, he was publicly seized by a divine power and had to confess his sin (Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 34). We see here that doctors would be guests of wealthy people, attesting to their prestige and presumably exclusivity. The anecdote, however, also testifies to the not-so-great esteem hagiographers had for these professionals.

57. Klingshirn, C*aesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 16.

58. Klingshirn, C*aesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 17.

But Caesarius would also provide physical cures through miracles. In one case, while visiting Ravenna, he was called by a mother to cure her young son after she had already sought other unspecified means of healing: "When there was no more hope of a human cure and no more consolation for him, his mother left him behind and ran in haste to the man of God" (*Vita Caesarii* 1.39).[59] Needless to say, Caesarius' payer cured the young man. In another case, a slave of the illustrious patrician Parthenius, known through other contemporary sources as being of noble upbringing and an influential political figure, fell ill, and became victim of a wicked attack. "And since the attack by his enemy seemed in fact to be a spiritual affliction rather than a physical infirmity, he was anointed with holy oil that had been consecrated by the blessed man." The man made a full recovery thanks to Caesarius, "after the treatment of a physician of this world had failed" (*Vita Caesarii* 1.49).[60] We see here that Parthenius could lavishly afford a doctor, but one was of no avail to cure his slave from both his bodily and spiritual infirmities.

59. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 29.

60. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 34.

Hagiographical accounts of saintly cures often show a pattern of behaviour in which the sick persons would first seek the cure of a doctor and/or a witch doctor. Not finding the healing they are looking for, sufferers end up at the shrine of a miraculous saint or at a holy man's dwelling, where they receive a free cure (Flint, *The Rise of Magic* 252).[61] In Gregory of Tours' account of the miracles of Saint Martin of Tours, for instance, the author provides episodes from his own experience to promote saintly healing powers over secular cures. In one case, when Gregory is suffering from severe dysentery, he comments about the physician Armentarius:

> You have offered all the wisdom of your skill, and you have already tested the strength of all your salves, but the devices of this world have been of no use to me who am about to die. One option remains for me to try; let me show you a powerful antidote. Fetch dust from the most sacred tomb of lord [Martin], and then mix a drink (*potionem*) for me. If this dust is not effective, every refuge for escaping [death] has been lost.[62] (Van Dam 229)

The dust is brought from the tomb and a concoction mixed by the physician, who then administers this medicine to Gregory, who immediately starts feeling better. In Gregory's narrative, secular remedies are often sought before succumbing to the power of a saintly cure (Kitchen 17). In this case, the physician is the one

61. For a list of more examples, see also Flint, "The Early Medieval 'Medicus'" 137.

62. *De virtutibus Sancti Martini* 2.1: *Omnem ingenium artificii tui inpendisti, pigmentorum omnium vim iam probasti sed nihil proficit perituro res saeculi. Unum restat quod faciam; magnam tibi tyriacam ostendam. Pulverem de sacratissimo domini sepulchro exhibeant, et exinde mihi facito potionem. Quod si hoc non valuerit, amissa sunt omnia evadendi perfigia.*

administering the miraculous "potion", showing a sort of hybrid medical practice in which formal medicine and Christian cure are again walking side by side. Here we have also an added third dimension, as in this particular example the Christian cure has a strong folk imprint.

We might consider it as a hagiographical *topos* in which a discourse with a rhetorical strategy is built with a didactic scope to emphasize the power of the saint or martyr against popular ignorance and fake healers. However, this detailed description of different steps to achieve the cure must have been plausible for contemporary readers and audience. The folk healers must have been really reputed to offer a credible alternative to the Christian church, otherwise it would have been pointless cataloguing their practices and, most importantly, their failures. As stated by Horden, "the hagiographers are the first to admit that the sick tried secular therapy first and its heavenly counterpart second" (Horden, "Sickness and Healing" 92).

A network of healing practices and healing specialists offering authorized as well as unauthorized rites and rituals was available to people in Arles in Caesarius' times. We may presume, however, that this availability was not comprehensive, or else not obtainable by either women and/or destitute people (Klingshirn, *The Making of a Christian Community* 222). Doctors may have been few and their services expensive. In the realm of folk healing, we see that a great variety of practices and practitioners were available, probably to fill in the void of medical doctors, and some of these could have been women, specialized in female illnesses and available to help in female-related problems, such as their children's sickness. However, as Caesarius demonstrates, and as is generally stated by ecclesiastical discourse, church people promoted the idea that only through prayer and connection with the church could a person find both a spiritual and bodily healing. We see, then, multiple conflicting approaches at stake, which denotes a complex and often unbalanced dynamic of power.

What we have called a third way in medical practices, or else domestic and folk healing, constituted a potentially powerful network of practitioners and neighbours that helped and cared for each other. In this environment, female care was denounced as an illegitimate accessing of ritual power (see also Tuzlak). Accordingly, female healing was not considered as a professional speciality, but

rather can be seen as "an inseparable part of everyday domestic duties and participation in the community of women" (Weston 201). As Caesarius' sermons demonstrate, people found themselves between the lay and Christian cures, relying on each according to specific needs and economic possibilities.

Conclusions

In his multiple abilities and resources, Caesarius of Arles emerges as a healer of both bodies and souls. Being a champion against people's faults and vices, he was also keen to establish proper Christian rules and conduct on what concerned healthcare. To fight subversion, Christian cures should prevail over all other practices, which were considered valuable resources in most cases but inferior to religion in healing the spiritual maladies that led to physical illnesses.

Christian healing, however, neglected the value of traditional medical pluralism for most people. Furthermore, it did not offer a valid alternative for solving a number of health problems, particularly gynaecological ones. Medical doctors were expensive and presumably quite rare if compared to the scale of the demand. In this scenario, female problems were seen as moral and social deviations, passive of spiritual and legal sanctions. Caesarius' accusations of women producing magical potions and resorting to witches is scant if compared to our body of knowledge, but it confirms a widely known social fact that women's problems and concerns were often dismissed or not exhaustively attended to in society.

Alternative women's healthcare practices can thus be seen as attempts to use subversive ways to cope with problems and matters that were overlooked by the other, official medical spheres. Women practitioners were socially useful figures (Gatti 127), performing important roles as domestic healthcare providers (Blumenthal 532), offering services that were often neglected by physicians and the church. As women were frequently seen as social outcasts, women's practices that subverted the prescribed religious norms were seen as sins, paganism, magic, and heresy. Whether talking about the vices of men (drunkenness and promiscuity) or those of women (healing practices), Caesarius' judgement is always the same: they are signals of paganism and bestiality (see Bailey, "These Are Not Men" 34).

Despite these accusations, women had to seek alternative ways to care for their bodies and children. These subversive ways allowed them to take control over their own bodies and to decide about their reproductive system. Women could become agents by crafting and seeking, within their domestic and neighbouring network, solutions to bodily and health issues involving themselves, their children, and other family members. Therefore, women could find ways to take hold of different resources, material and supernatural alike, that would serve their needs (see Frank; Grey). Evidently, despite the official church's attempts, as manifested through Caesarius' pastoral care and work, to keep women in an inferior social place, the latter found ways and means to exercise control. They overcame their exclusion from the ritual performance of healing by being agents of religious transformation, building community through the performance of alternative ways to deal with problems that afflicted them.

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Rituals of Female (Dis)Empowerment:
Baptism in the Context of Conversion in Medieval German Literature

Abstract

This article focuses on the interplay between and the ambiguity of female empowerment and disempowerment in female conversions to Christianity in Middle High German literary texts. With regards to gender, the ritual of baptism is of interest in several respects. Gender and genderlessness, sexuality, and desire, as well as nudity and shame, play a crucial role in baptism, as the ceremony is linked to the Fall of Man and involves ritual nudity. Although the conversion to Christianity by means of baptism in biblical terms (Gal. 3:27–28) erases gender, race, and social status, the Christian practice of baptism is asymmetrical regarding gender because usually only men administer the sacrament, whereas women merely receive it. Moreover, in medieval German literature, male power or romantic interests are often the driving force behind women's conversions. By examining different versions of Saint Thecla's legend, the conversion of Arabel-Gyburc to Christianity in Ulrich von dem Türlin's *Arabel*, conversion as temptation in Rudolf von Ems' *Barlaam und Josaphat*, and the juxtaposition of two female conversions in *Salman und Morolf*, it becomes clear that female agency and lack or loss of power often go hand in hand and are, in fact, inseparable in literary representations of conversions. From the perspective of gender, the baptism ritual is hence characterized by ambiguity and figures as a ritual of female empowerment and disempowerment alike.

Keywords

baptism; christening; gender; ritual nudity; shame; temptation; desire; Middle High German

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Introduction: The Ritual of Baptism

Based on its understanding of baptism, which is open to all people regardless of their race, social status, or gender, Christianity appears to be an egalitarian and accessible religion (Angenendt, *Religiosität* 463). This levelling function of Christianity is best exemplified by the well-known Bible passage: *quicumque enim in Christo baptizati estis Christum induistis. non est Iudaeus neque Graecus | non est servus neque liber | non est masculus neque femina | omnes enim vos unum estis in Christo Iesu* (Gal. 3:27–28).[1] However, in contrast to the unity in Christ that is to be achieved through baptism, religious, ethnic, social, and gender differences, as well as issues of power and violence, are certainly relevant to baptism as a religious practice, especially with regard to conversion and missionary work. Gender issues are particularly delicate in the context of baptism, as the necessity of redemption arises from the Fall of Man: despite the idea of spiritual purification and genderlessness, the baptismal ritual does not allow a return to the prelapsarian state and cannot undo the original sin – and with it the knowledge of gender difference and the sexual desire of man. Before I elaborate my research question – female agency in the depiction of women's conversions in medieval German literature – in more detail, I will outline the biblical and theological foundations and the history of the baptismal ritual up to the Middle Ages. I will focus on the relevance of faith and voluntariness in conversions as well as on the symbolism of water and of the baptismal garment, which are of special significance from the perspective of gender considering the Fall of Man and ritual nudity.

1. "For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus." The Latin Bible quotations here and below are taken from Jerome's *Vulgate* (Hieronymus, *Vulgata*). The English translations are taken from the *Douay-Rheims Bible*. This English translation was chosen because it is based on the Latin *Vulgate*.

In the early church, baptism was first and foremost a rite of conversion that required a conscious decision and a confession of faith (Angenendt, "Taufe" 35).[2] The Gospel of Mark 16:16 puts it this way: *qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit salvus erit | qui vero non crediderit condemnabitur*.[3] The process of baptism consists of two parts: first, a ritual washing that indicates the deliverance from sins; second, an anointment that endows the neophytes with the Spirit of God and makes them children of God (Angenendt, "Taufe" 35). At the same time, baptism is a ritual of initiation that integrates the neophytes into the community of all those who have already been baptized and into the community of Saints. The ceremony is structured by the following three questions: (1) "Do you believe in the Father?", (2) "Do you believe in the Son?", (3) "Do you believe

2. The following account is intended as an overview of the baptismal ritual and its structure. For the development of Christian initiation in the Western Middle Ages and the baptismal liturgy in detail, see Wahle.

3. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

in the Holy Ghost?" The origin of these Trinitarian questions lies in the Great Commission, outlined in Matthew 28:19: *euntes ergo docete omnes gentes | baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti* (Angenendt, "Taufe" 35; idem, *Religiosität* 463).[4] In the course of the spread of Christianity and the expansion of missionary work, the significance of faith for the baptism ritual changed. During the process of European Christianization in the early Middle Ages, it was mainly adults who were converted. When Charlemagne Christianized the Saxons, baptism was not a matter of faith, however, but a matter of life and death, and forced mass conversions took place.[5] Even though Charlemagne's court theologian Alcuin had already criticized the practice of forced baptism, it was not until the scholastic theology of the twelfth century that the voluntary nature of baptism was again emphasized (Angenendt, "Taufe" 38–40). In the *Decretum Gratiani* (*c.* 1140), for instance, it says that no one shall be forced to believe in the Triune God.[6] Thomas Aquinas, referring to heathens[7] and Jews who chose not to adopt the Christian faith,[8] says that belief is a matter of free will (Angenendt, "Taufe" 39–40). But in the course of the Middle Ages, due to Augustine's doctrine of original sin (*De peccatorum meritis* 2.4, 152–53),[9] infant baptism grew in importance. Consequently, the previously important personal preparation for baptism and catechesis faded into the background and the ceremony itself came to the fore instead (Wahle 30; Angenendt, "Taufe" 36; Grayland 211–13; Johnson 213).[10]

Since baptism is to be understood as an act of spiritual purification, water has a special symbolic meaning in the ritual. According to Robin M. Jensen, the baptisms that John the Baptist performed can be seen as "a symbolic, bodily cleansing that signified the recipient's repentance and desire for forgiveness of his or her sins" (*Baptismal Imagery* 8). At Jesus' baptism, the dipping in water is accompanied by the descent of the Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove (Luke 3:22) (R. M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery* 9). In the Middle Ages, the *benedictio fontis*, the blessing of the baptismal water, which was performed during the Easter Vigil, was an integral part of the christening ceremony. This prayer was intended to ensure that the baptismal water would be infused with the Holy Spirit so that those being baptized would be reborn[11] from water and Spirit (Wahle 35 and 43).[12] Despite the etymology of the word 'baptism' from the Greek βάπτω (báptō) or βαπτίζω (baptízō), meaning 'to dip' or

4. "Going therefore, teach ye all nations: baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19).

5. This was legally regulated in paragraph 8 of the *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* (69): *Si quis deinceps in gente Saxonorum inter eos latens non baptizatus se abscondere voluerit et ad baptismum venire contempserit paganusque permanere voluerit, morte moriatur* ("Anyone who wants to remain a pagan and hides among the Saxons in order not to be baptized or refuses to be baptized shall die"). This translation from Latin is my own. Forced conversions of pagans are also addressed in the Middle High German epics about Charlemagne. See for example Stricker, *Karl der Grosse* 3906–13: "toufent sich die heiden, | ich wil si vriden unt vristen, | als unser ebenkristen. | ist aber daz ez sô ergât, | daz si sich des tiuvels rât | sô sêre lânt betriegen, | daz si uns beginnent liegen, | daz gêt in allen an daz leben" ("If the heathens get baptized, I will protect and preserve them as I do our fellow Christians. But if it so happens that they are so deluded by the devil's counsel that they deceive us, they must all die"). Unless otherwise stated, the translations from Middle High German into English are my own. On further examples of group conversions in Northern Europe, see Grayland 202–3.

6. *Decretum Gratiani*, pars 2, causa 23, quaestio 5, c. 30: *Ad fidem nullus est cogendus.*

7. Despite awareness of the problematic Christocentric perspective, the words 'heathen', 'pagan', and 'paganism' are used here and below for lack of a better term.

8. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, quaestio 10, art. 8: *infidelium quidam sunt qui nunquam susceperunt fidem, sicut gentiles et ludaei. Et tales nullo modo sunt ad fidem compellendi, ut ipsi credant: quia credere voluntatis est* ("Among unbelievers there are some who have never received the faith, such as the heathens and the Jews: and these are by no means to be compelled to the faith, in order that they may believe, because to believe depends on the will"); English translation quoted from the edition of Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

'to plunge into water', and the preference for baptism by threefold immersion or submersion found in ancient documents, Jensen, also provides references for other baptismal practices, by means of affusion (pouring) or aspersion (sprinkling) (R. M. Jensen, *Living Water* 136–42). She concludes that the "preference for some form of full immersion, with a practical allowance for other methods, continues through the Middle Ages in the West" (ibid. 141). According to Ursula Mielke (245), immersion baptism dominated until the twelfth century and was not replaced by affusion baptism in the Roman Catholic Church until the Council of Trent in 1545. The initial practice of baptizing outdoors in flowing water – following the model of Jesus' baptism at the hands of John the Baptist in the River Jordan – was gradually replaced by indoor baptism in baptisteries and, later, in chapels or niches in churches (R. M. Jensen, *Living Water* 129–32; Grayland 205–11).[13]

The symbolic significance of the baptismal garment arises from the connection between baptism and the Fall of Man.[14] Before the Fall, it is said that Adam and Eve were naked, but were not ashamed of each other (Gen. 2:25). Afterwards, their eyes are opened, and they realize that they are naked, whereupon they cover themselves with fig leaves as loincloths (Gen. 3:7). Furthermore, God clothes the first couple in animal skins before they leave paradise (Gen. 3:21). The covering in fig leaves and animal skins indicates postlapsarian human sexuality or mortality (Kraß 46). Although the Bible makes no mention of Adam and Eve being clothed in any way beforehand, Bible commentaries often speak of the prelapsarian garment of grace, glory, or light (Murdoch 106–10; Kraß 40–41).[15] The thought that baptism erases hereditary sin is linked with the imagery of taking off one's old clothes and putting on new ones; of stripping off one's old, sinful self and regaining bodily and spiritual purity; of being 'clad in Jesus' – symbolized by the white colour of the baptismal garment (R. M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery* 169–72; Seyderhelm 208–10).[16] Ritual nudity during baptism was understood as "participation in Christ's nakedness at crucifixion" and "renewing the pre-lapsarian condition of Adam" (R. M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery* 167 and *Living Water* 159).[17] Although various written and pictorial sources attest to the practice of naked baptism, ritual nudity – especially of women – was associated with certain worries.[18] Despite the idea of regaining innocence in baptism or even genderlessness,[19] there was a concern about sexual immodesty and scandal (Filoramo).

9. Beatrice (392–93) offers a summary of Augustine's doctrine of original sin: mankind is steeped in carnal desire (*concupiscentia carnalis* or *originalis reatus*) because Adam's sin was passed on to his descendants as a result of sexual procreation. Every human being is therefore born as a sinner. Baptism eradicates the guilt (*reatus*) handed down by Adam, which is necessary so that newborns are not condemned to damnation. However, this does not rule out sinful behaviour in later life, as the impulse to lust (*concupiscentia*) is not extinguished by baptism.

10. On baptism as a tripartite "rite de passage" in the fourth and fifth centuries, i.e. before the advent of mass baptism and infant baptism, see Filoramo 68 (esp. n. 4).

11. The idea of baptism as rebirth comes from the Gospel of John (3:3–5). See R. M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery* 137–76 and Wahle 35.

12. According to Wahle (35), the *benedictio fontis* prayer has hardly changed over the centuries, and the version of the *Decretum Gelasianum* (fourth to sixth century) served as a model until the *Missale Romanum* of 1570.

13. See Mark (1:9–11), Matthew (3:13–17), and Luke (3:21–22). On Jesus' baptism, see e.g. Apel, R. M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery* 7–14, and Lentzen-Deis. On the origins of Christian baptism and the often debated transition "From the Baptism of John to the Ritual of Christian Initiation", see Grayland 111–15.

14. On the "anthropology of clothing", see Kraß 38–65. On "[t]he garments of paradise", see Murdoch 106–18.

15. Murdoch and Kraß mention Ps. 8:6 as an important source for this idea: *minuisti eum paulo minus ab angelis | gloria et honore coronasti eum* ("Thou hast made him little less than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honour").

16. See Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (Gal. 3:27): *quicumque enim in Christo baptizati estis Christum induistis* ("For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ").

This is why in the early church, for instance, deaconesses were to accompany female candidates for baptism according to the *Constitutiones apostolicae* and the *Didascalia apostolorum* and why children, men, and women were to be baptized separately according to the *Traditio apostolica* (Neri 616–17; R. M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery* 168–69 and *Living Water* 164–66).

In Middle High German texts, infant baptism is, despite its frequency in daily life, only rarely addressed. If the christening of children is mentioned at all, it is mostly in the context of difficult birth circumstances, or in order to introduce 'telling names'.[20] Frequently, however, the baptismal rite finds its way into literature in the context of conversion from paganism to Christianity. The concept of conversion has been widely discussed in medieval and early modern research for some time (e.g. Weitbrecht et al., *Zwischen Ereignis und Erzählung*; Juneja and Siebenhüner). I understand 'conversion' to mean the acceptance of the Christian faith in general. The process of conversion and the motives behind it are diverse and multilayered and must be analysed in each individual case.[21]

Since baptism is to be understood as a consequence of the Fall, it is linked to human sinfulness, sexuality, and desire, and therefore also to gender-related questions. In the following, I will focus on women's baptisms because, in terms of gender issues, the set-up of a baptism is – despite the essentially egalitarian nature of a christening (Angenendt, *Religiosität* 463) – usually asymmetrical: men administer the sacrament of baptism, whereas women merely receive it. What is more, in Middle High German literature,[22] women often appear as objects of male power and desire if baptism is imposed on them by their fathers, brothers, or future husbands for political or romantic purposes. For, without being baptized, pagan women could not marry Christian men. Besides, female conversions appear to be delicate due to the factor of ritual nudity: as baptism is performed naked, the female body is exposed to the public gaze during the christening ceremony. At first glance, one might therefore think that the ritual of baptism risks objectifying and disempowering women. Nevertheless, there are several literary examples in which traces of female agency emerge in the context of baptism. In order to explore the interplay and ambiguity between female empowerment and disempowerment in conversions of women to Christianity in Middle High German literary texts, I will

17. See also R. M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery* 175: "[Baptismal death and resurrection] is the way that Christians participate in Christ's death and thus share in his resurrection; it is also the reversal of the human condition of sin and its resulting mortality." On the Adam–Christ typology, see e.g. Rom. 5:12–21 or 1 Cor. 15:22: *et sicut in Adam omnes moriuntur | ita et in Christo omnes vivificabuntur* ("And as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive").

18. There is some uncertainty as to whether 'nudity' in the written sources means complete exposure or whether an undergarment was still worn. See Neri 616–17.

19. See R. M. Jensen, *Living Water* 167–68 and *Baptismal Imagery* 182: "Nude baptism does not eliminate physical differences between men and women; it merely neutralizes their social and sexual power." R. M. Jensen (*Baptismal Imagery* 181–82) also emphasizes the great divergence between different writers on the issue of gender.

20. For example, Tristan, whose father dies before he is born and whose mother dies in childbirth, is given his name because of the sad circumstances of his birth (Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan* 1996–2002): "'wie si diz kint mit triure enpfie, | mit welher triure si'z gewan, | sô nenne wir in Tristan.' | nu heizet triste triure | und von der âventiure | sô wart das kint Tristan genant, | Tristan getoufet al zehant" ("'Since she conceived the child in grief and because of the grief with which she gave birth, we shall call him Tristan.' Triste means sorrow and because of this story, he was called Tristan and immediately baptised as Tristan.").

21. On the variability of conversion in general, see, for example, Weitbrecht et al., "Einleitung" 1–2: "Konversionen sind nicht zwangsläufig mit einem tiefgreifenden, unumkehrbaren, inneren und individuellen Ereignis verbunden, sondern können ebenso als kollektive Ereignisse begriffen sowie als räumlicher Wechsel, Rückkehr oder Unterordnung inszeniert werden".

22. In the absence of a systematic study of baptisms in Middle High German literature, all search results for "toufen" in the *Mittelhochdeutsche Begriffsdatenbank* ('Middle High German Conceptual Database') have been examined for this article. The query in the database was executed on 7 December 2022 using the old version of the database (i.e. before the relaunch in December 2023).

examine different versions of Saint Thecla's legend, the conversion of Arabel-Gyburc to Christianity in Ulrich von dem Türlin's *Arabel*, conversion as temptation in Rudolf von Ems' *Barlaam und Josaphat*, and the juxtaposition of two female conversions in *Salman und Morolf*.

Rewriting Female Baptism: Saint Thecla

When examining female agency in baptism, one cannot help but include Saint Thecla. In the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (second century), the virgin Thecla is seized by Christian faith when she hears Paul preach about chastity (*Thekla* 7) and hence abandons her marriage plans (9–10).[23] Subsequently, both Paul and Thecla are condemned. Paul is scourged and must leave the city (21). Thecla is to be burnt at the stake but is saved by divine grace because a miraculous hailstorm extinguishes the flames (22). Thecla then follows Paul and accompanies him to Antioch, where a man tries to rape her (26). When she publicly denounces and shames her attacker, she is thrown to the beasts (27). Facing the beasts, Thecla turns to prayer, and neither the lions nor bears nor bulls can harm her. When she discovers a pool full of vicious seals, she plunges in, professing to baptize herself in the name of Jesus Christ. The seals die after seeing a flash of fire, whereas Thecla is surrounded by a cloud of fire which protects her from the beasts and covers her nudity (34). After her acquittal, she joins Paul again and tells him about her baptism. He then commissions Thecla to teach the Word of God (40–41). A later Thecla *Vita* from the fifth century (Dagron 19), *The Life and Miracles of Saint Thecla*, not only tells of Thecla's self-baptism (*Vie et miracles de Sainte Thècle* 20), but also reports that the virgin baptized others (ibid. 24 and 28; A. Jensen, *Gottes selbstbewußte Töchter* 373 n. 45; Dagron 42).[24]

As Anne Jensen (*Gottes selbstbewußte Töchter* 373 and "Roman oder Wirklichkeit" 71–73), Stephen Davis (12–13), and Johannes Traulsen (141 and 144) have shown, the rewriting and reinterpretation of Thecla's story started already in late antiquity: in his treatise *De baptismo* (17), Tertullian questions the credibility of Thecla's self-baptism in order to prevent her *Vita* from being used to justify female teaching and baptism.[25] Ambrose reduces Thecla to her virginity and chastity and omits her fellowship with Paul as well

23. The numbers refer to the text sections and are not page numbers.

24. Anne Jensen ("Roman oder Wirklichkeit" 93–95) notes that, although this is the only *Vita* which tells us that Thecla baptized others, the idea is nevertheless firmly anchored in tradition. It can therefore be assumed that the account of Thecla baptizing others was passed on orally.

25. From Tertullian's comments, Davis (13) draws conclusions about the reception of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*: "The characterisation of Thecla in the story indeed seems to have inspired women who read or heard it to embrace new roles of leadership in the early Christian mission".

as her activity as a preacher in his treatise *De virgibinus* (2.3.20).[26] Still, Thecla's story finds its way into the collections of saints' lives, albeit with modifications.[27] In today's best-known Middle High German version of Saint Thecla's legend in the collection *Der Heiligen Leben*,[28] the baptismal act is separated from her martyrdom and transferred to the beginning of the story:

> Vnd tauft si sant Pauls. Nu waz sie gar schön vnd het zu mol ain schon leip. Vnd do er iren leip in der tauf also plosen sah, do gewan er groszev anvehtung der vnkeusch. Vnd wen er si furpas sah oder neur an si gedoht, so het er daz leiden alweg swerleich.[29] ("Tecla von Ikonium" 563.20–24)

Paul's words enlighten Thecla's heart, and she becomes a Christian. In this version, Thecla does not baptize herself, but Paul administers the sacrament of baptism to her. The baptism scene is focalized from Paul's perspective. The narrative emphasizes Thecla's beauty, which challenges Paul's chastity as he catches sight of her naked body during the act of baptism. From then on, Paul suffers when seeing Thecla or when thinking about her. This transformation of the legend probably reflects the general concern about the sexual implications of nudity in the baptism ritual (Neri 616–17; R. M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery* 168–69; Filoramo). Later in the narrative, however, Thecla is protected from the public gaze during her fight against the beasts. When she jumps into the pool of aquatic animals, she is miraculously enveloped in mist so that neither man nor beast sees her naked body ("Tecla von Ikonium" 565.21–23): "Do kum ain lauterr groszer nebel, der bedekt si, daz si weder di menschen noch di tier mohten gesehen" ("There was a bright, enormous fog that covered her so that neither man nor beast could see her").[30]

With the late antique and medieval rewriting of St Thecla's *Vita* we are hence confronted with a case of female disempowerment in the context of baptism. Instead of portraying her as an active follower of Paul, a baptist, and a preacher, the more recent accounts and narratives reduce Thecla to the role of a chaste virgin, turn her into a seductive object of sexual desire, and make her a merely passive recipient of the sacrament of baptism. Remarkably, Thecla's loss of agency is not only a literary one restricted to hagiography, but also an institutional one involving questions of theology and devotion. This becomes clear in Tertullian's and Ambrose's (late) antique treatises that deal with Thecla's *Vita* and are directed against females

26. See Traulsen 146: "Damit wird die Jungfräulichkeit in der Thekla-Legende auf Weiblichkeit und den Widerstand gegen männliches Begehren beschränkt. Virginität ist eschatologisch perspektiviert und begründet nicht mehr wie in den Apostelakten die Aussendung als Predigerin oder die Gemeinschaft mit Paulus".

27. On the Latin tradition, see Traulsen 141–42. Jacobus de Voragine did not initially include Thecla in the *Legenda aurea*, but her *Vita* was added to later versions.

28. Weitbrecht (273 n. 12) mentions another Middle High German version of St Thecla's legend in the *Buch von den heiligen Mägden und Frauen* (Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. Lichtenthal 69, f. 180rb–187ra). This manuscript has not been edited yet.

29. "And Saint Paul baptized her. She was very beautiful and had a beautiful body. And when he saw her naked body in baptism, unchastity tempted him fiercely. From then on, when he saw her or even thought about her, he suffered badly."

30. On the fear of and divine protection from *impudici oculi* ("shameless eyes") in the lives of saints, see Weitbrecht 271–76.

performing baptism and preaching, but this issue remained relevant into the twentieth century: in the 1960s, the Second Vatican Council removed Thecla – the first female martyr – from the Roman Catholic Martyrology (A. Jensen, "Einleitung" 7; eadem, *Gottes selbstbewußte Töchter* 177).

Angelic Beauty – Human Desire: Ulrich von dem Türlin's *Arabel*

The topics of female beauty and temptation occur repeatedly in medieval narratives of women's christenings. Another example can be found in Ulrich von dem Türlin's *Arabel*.[31] This romance from the 1260s is a prequel to Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Willehalm*, a verse narrative at the edge of chanson de geste, legend, and courtly romance.[32] Wolfram's verse epic centres on a war between pagans and Christians, which is triggered by the marriage between Willehalm, the Margrave of Provence, and the former pagan Arabel, who adopts the baptismal name Gyburc. Arabel leaves her husband Tybalt because of her love for Willehalm, who then, supported by Arabel's father Terramer, invades southern France with a huge army. This leads to a war with many casualties, resulting in great suffering for both warring parties. Ulrich's *Arabel* narrates how Arabel and Willehalm fall in love and recounts Arabel's conversion to Christianity in detail.[33]

After Willehalm has explained to her how Mary can be Queen, Mother, and Virgin at the same time (Ulrich von dem Türlin, *Arabel* *A 235.22–31),[34] Arabel accepts the Christian faith. When reflecting on what she has heard about Christianity, she suddenly finds it very appealing and "the joy of baptism soaked her heart": "der gelo͡ube ir gahes wol geviel, | des to͡offes fro͡ode in ir herze wiel" (*A 236.3–4). Intellectual and emotional motives are thus intertwined in Arabel's conversion; one could therefore speak of a mixture of the Augustinian and Pauline models of conversion.[35] As Arabel prepares for her official christening ceremony, she is taught how to behave, when to feel ashamed or unashamed,[36] when to speak and when to remain silent during the ritual (*A 271.2–9). None other than Pope Leo himself is to administer baptism to Arabel (*A 245–50). During the ceremony, she first chooses her baptismal name, Gyburc (*A 275.19).[37] Second, the Pope frees Arabel from her sins and casts out the devil (*A 275–276). Third, Arabel confesses, in

31. The initial title of the romance was *Willehalm* (see Singer's 1893 edition). Werner Schröder renamed it *Arabel* to better distinguish it from Wolfram's *Willehalm*, which was handed down together with its prequel *Arabel* and its sequel *Rennewart* by Ulrich von Türheim from the fourteenth century on (Schröder 40–41).

32. Since the focus of the present study is on the comparison of female conversions to Christianity in different texts and genres, this article is limited to examining the depiction of Arabel's baptism in Ulrich von dem Türlin's prequel. Wolfram only alludes to the events that precede the plot of *Willehalm* (Willehalm's imprisonment, his love for Tybalt's wife Arabel, their escape together, Arabel's baptism, their marriage). The much discussed significance of baptism, conversion, and tolerance in Wolfram's work as well as the question of genre cannot be addressed further here. On baptism in Wolfram's *Willehalm*, see for example Kiening 61, 74–75, 163, 183, 186–87, 191–94, 197, and 220. Fritz Peter Knapp summarizes various interpretative approaches to "religious war, protection and mission" ("Glaubenskrieg, Schonung, Missionierung") in Wolfram's *Willehalm* (690–93). Heinzle's handbook offers a bibliography on tolerance and pagans in Wolfram's oeuvre (1275–77). On the question of genre with regard to Wolfram's *Willehalm*, see Greenfield and Miklautsch 264–71.

33. Arabel's christening is only one of several acts of legitimation when Willehalm and his pagan future wife arrive in France. Urban (207) mentions the arrival, the official welcome, the arrival of the Empress and of Irmenschart (Willehalm's mother), the baptism, the farewell of the imperial couple, and the arrival in Orange. These events are accompanied by seven feasts.

34. Ulrich von dem Türlin's *Arabel* is quoted from version *A in Schröder's critical edition.

35. See Juneja and Siebenhüner 171–72: "The conversion experiences of the Apostle Paul and of the Church Father, Augustine, were crucial to shaping the long-term formation of the concept. While Paul described his conversion as a moment of enlightenment, Augustine represented his experience as a process of theological gnosis."

the form of questions and answers, her faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as well as in the Christian message of salvation (*A 276–77). After she has affirmed her will to be baptized, the Pope pours water over Arabel-Gyburc three times (*A 277).

During the christening ceremony, Arabel-Gyburc has to take off her clothes. When she enters the baptismal font, she is naked except for a vest, which the Pope removes from her in the basin before pouring water over her thrice.[38] When she steps out of the baptismal font after the ceremony, she is seen naked, but only the ladies dare to look at her. She is then dressed in an extremely precious, snow-white,[39] shiny gold, angel-like baptismal robe (*A 278.8: "westerwat") of silk, trimmed with pearls and gems and with seams knitted in gold (*A 278–80). After Arabel-Gyburc has put on the christening robe, we are told: "hie stv̊nt ein engel, nv̈t ein wip, | hie stv̊nt der wu̇nsche v̈bersv̊zze minne" (*A 279.22–23: "An angel stood here, not a woman. | Here stood the perfect, overly sweet love"). This description presumably alludes to the prelapsarian garment of grace, which is called the "angelic garment" (Hamano W 972: "daz engliske gewate") in the Vienna manuscript of the Early Middle High German *Genesis* (Kraß 44–45; Murdoch 106–8).

On the one hand, the course of the narrative makes it clear that Arabel-Gyburc gains a spiritual kind of beauty due to the baptismal ritual and robe. On the other hand, the description of her robe and body is interspersed with erotic allusions. For example, the text says that the robe is free of pearls and precious stones in the areas on which one sits or lies, so that the adornments do not interfere with (making?) love: "daz ez ze minne nv̈t mv̊get" (*A 279.17). Despite the presence of bridal motifs and the idea of spiritual marriage in writings about baptism, which is often inspired by the Song of Songs (R. M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery* 196–200), this tactile allusion seems to refer more to the secular sexual act because, after all, Arabel's baptism is necessary for her marriage to Willehalm (Urban 209–10).[40] The narrator, then, explicitly invites the extradiegetic audience to gaze at the queen (*A 279.24: "nv schv̊wet si hie dv̈ kv̈neginne") and affirms her extraordinary beauty (*A 279.26–27). The intradiegetic audience is indeed sensually affected by Arabel-Gyburc's appearance. This becomes evident in the subsequent description of her hips (*A 280.3: "hv̈ffel") protruding under her robe and causing erotic desire and beguilement.

36. See Ulrich von dem Türlin, *Arabel* *A 271.5: "wa schamen, wa vngeschamet". It is likely that this verse refers to ritual nudity. The idea of nakedness without shame in the baptism ritual is also found in writings of several Doctors of the Church (Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa), who see the original paradisiacal innocence restored in baptism. See R. M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery* 180–81. Later in the ceremony, when Arabel is still naked in the baptismal font after her affusion with baptismal water, the Pope tells the devil to feel ashamed because he has lost her to Christianity (*A 278.1–7).

37. For the history of naming and renaming at baptism from a theological perspective, see Winter 49–59.

38. See Ulrich von dem Türlin, *Arabel* *A 275.5–7: "ja, si waz entnaket gar, | biz in ein hemde waz si bar: | daz zoh in dem stein der babest ir abe." See also *A 277.27–31: "'so wiltv werden getv̊oft?' | 'ja, herre.' der babest si slv̊oft | vz dem hemede, daz si schein bloz. | dristvnt er vf si goz, | daz ez ir v̈ber al den lip nv floz." On the baptismal font and water as means of protection against "the body's vulnerability" and the "exposure to external and environmental dangers" associated with baptismal nudity, see R. M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery* 170.

39. On the meaning of the white colour, which is also important in the description of Arabel-Gyburc's body, see Rieger 340–42. Referring to the chess game in the romance, Rieger (342) accentuates the contrast between Arabel's old identity and her new one as Gyburc: "Arabel wechselt mit der Taufe und ihrem Einzug ins *Kristenland* die 'Farbe' als Signum der Religions- und Gruppenzugehörigkeit. Zudem wird dieser Seitenwechsel hier mit einem realen Farbwechsel der Figur ins Bild gesetzt: Aus der schwarzen Arabel wird die weiße Kyburc". According to Rieger (340), this colour symbolism is based on a literary tradition in which the conversion of literary characters corresponds with a change of colour from black to white.

einez ich vergessen han,
darinne minne frǫde lit.
ich wene der selben sv̊zzi git
vil mǫ̊tes gerenden herzen:
ir loslichez sterzen
betǫ̊ret vil wiser sinne.[41]
(Ulrich, Arabel *A 280.8–13)

The text explicitly addresses the joy of love here (*A 280.9: "minne frǫde"). Moreover, the hip bones are personified as rulers over the "place of love" which Nature has positioned there for the purpose of (erotic) pleasure: "der minne stat si hie wielten, | die natvre durch frǫde het dar gesetzet" (*A 280.4–5).[42]

The Vienna manuscript (Fig. 1) also illustrates the crucial moment when Arabel is lifted out of the baptismal font and when her naked body is exposed to the public gaze. In the illustration, Arabel's hips and pubis are concealed inside the goblet-shaped baptismal font, while she covers her naked breasts with her hands. Both the narrative and the illustration of *Arabel* refer to the iconography of a baptism scene, which usually shows a male person being baptized, with a naked upper body protruding from the baptismal fountain (Mielke 246). Whereas, traditionally, the pouring of water over the baptized person or the blessing is depicted (ibid.), in *Arabel* both the text and the image focus on the moment after baptism, thus accentuating the ambiguity of female ritual nudity.[43]

Fig. 1: Arabel's baptism. Wien, ÖNB, Cod. 2670, fol. 53v.

40. With reference to Aderhold, Hennings (581–82) assumes that the central concern of Arabel may have been to clarify when – before or after Arabel's baptism – Arabel and Willehalm's physical union takes place.

41. "I have forgotten one thing in which lies the joy of love: I guess their [her hips', M.D.] sweetness encourages desiring hearts. Their graceful protruding beguiles the senses of very wise men."

42. Scheidel (118) also points out that the description culminates in the focus on Gyburc's genitals and considers the accentuation of Arabel-Gyburc's beauty in the baptism episode in the context of the general tension between paganism and Christianity in the romance. Arabel's physical beauty is marked as pagan and linked to the ethically problematic "Venus love" (Scheidel 100: "Venus-Minne"). He interprets the appearance of the personified Nature in the description of Arabel's body as an allusion to Venus as the personified pleasure principle (118–19), and notes that Arabel's conversion to Christianity and her pagan carnal beauty go hand in hand (121–22).

43. Hennig (358) notes that the description of Arabel's nakedness, which is unprecedented in Middle High German courtly literature, is made all the more piquant by the fact that it immediately follows the description of the sacramental act of baptism.

In summary, Arabel is well informed about the Christian faith before her conversion, decides of her own free will to convert, and is meticulously prepared for the christening ceremony. However, this self-determined action reaches its limits when her body, clad in the semi-transparent baptismal robe, becomes the object of an intra- and extradiegetic male gaze and desire: despite the spiritual act of purification, the naked female body remains sensual and sexual. The narrative thus accentuates the theological problem – discussed (among others) by Augustine – that baptism relieves the baptized of Adam's guilt, but not of human concupiscence after the Fall of Man (Beatrice 392–93). There are certainly also narrative reasons as to why Arabel's christening is interwoven with erotic allusions: it ultimately leads to and is a precondition for her marriage with Willehalm (Urban 209–10). At this point, the mixture of the genres of legend and romance becomes manifest, as Arabel in her christening gown resembles a saint while also being a bride-to-be. With regard to the bridal motif in the context of baptism (R. M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery* 196–200), narrative motivation and theological tradition might interfere here as well.

Conversion as Temptation: Rudolf von Ems' *Barlaam und Josaphat*

Another variation of temptation in the context of christenings is to be found in Rudolf von Ems' *Barlaam und Josaphat*.[44] The theme of baptism is crucial to this thirteenth-century legendary romance: Josaphat is the son of a pagan king who persecutes Christians. At his birth, a prophecy says that Josaphat will convert to Christianity against his father's will (Rudolf von Ems, *Barlaam und Josaphat* 22, 28–38). After initially growing up in isolation (23–24), Josaphat begins to ask himself what the meaning of life is when confronted with the suffering of the world – illness, old age, mortality, and death – for the first time (30–34). The hermit Barlaam then introduces Josaphat to the Christian message of salvation and, after having explained the baptismal ritual and its theological significance in detail (80–84, 96–101), christens him (169–73).

After his christening, Josaphat's mission is to spread the Christian faith. But, in one episode, this mission of conversion itself becomes a temptation for Josaphat. A disciple of the devil tempts Josaphat

44. On the origin and tradition of and the current state of research on Rudolf's *Barlaam und Josaphat*, see Pölzl (313–32): despite some recent publications (e.g. several articles in Cordoni and Meyer), this text has attracted little scholarly interest. For a long time, research focused primarily on the question of genre and the relationship between the secular and the spiritual. On the German *Barlaam und Josaphat* tradition in general, see Cordoni (195–230).

by means of the most beautiful and lovely of all women, the Syrian king's daughter (302.33–37). The text explicitly relates the attempted seduction of Josaphat to Adam's seduction by Eve (302.25–32). The nameless princess falls in love with Josaphat when she is taken prisoner in his place (303.3–15), but Josaphat is not sexually tempted by her.

er sach si zühteclîchen an,
er sprach: "vrouwe, saelic wîp,
dîn liehtiu jugent, dîn schoener lîp
hât mir sorgen vil gegeben.
sol dîn minneclîchez leben
in ungelouben sterben?
[…]
gedenke, minneclîchez wîp,
durch rehte wîplîche tugent
an dîne minneclîche jugent,
und nim in dîne sinne
die süezen gotes minne.
toufe dich durch sîn gebot" […].[45]
(Rudolf, *Barlaam* 303.18–23 and 31–37)

Although Josaphat notices the woman's extraordinary beauty, he looks at her chastely and is concerned about her salvation. Instead of carnal love, he refers to the sweet love of God, and invites the woman to be christened.

45. "He looked at her chastely and said: 'Lady, blessed woman. Your splendid youth, your beautiful body have worried me. Shall your lovely life die in disbelief? […] Think, lovely woman, on account of the right female virtues, of your lovely youth and let the sweet love of God into your mind. Get baptized because of His commandment.'"

The trouble begins when the woman assures Josaphat that she will be baptized if he does what she wants (304.11–23). Without knowing her intentions, Josaphat promises her twice to do anything she wants: "ich tuon gar den willen dîn" (304.25). The woman, then, asks Josaphat to sleep with her that night and claims that she will get baptized the following morning.

wildû vrô mines heiles sîn,
sô lige dise naht bî mir,
daz ich geniete mich mit dir
mit minneclîcher liebe kraft
lieplicher geselleschaft,
so lobet mîn triuwe wider dich,
daz ich morgen toufe mich.[46]
(Rudolf, *Barlaam* 307.14–20)

The interesting thing here is that the woman uses theological arguments to convince Josaphat to break his vow of chastity: she

46. "If you want to rejoice over my salvation, you shall sleep with me tonight so that I may be in pleasant company with you with the power of passionate love. So I vow to you by my faithfulness that tomorrow I will get baptized."

asserts that the conversion of a sinner makes the choir of angels rejoice (304.38–40) and refers to Paul's teachings on marriage (306.35–40). This leaves Josaphat with doubts:

> Jôsaphât, der guote man,
> vil sêre zwîveln dô began.
> er dâhte, ob erz verbære,
> daz ez vil wirser wære,
> dan ob er si sus koufte,
> daz si sich got getoufte.[47]
> (Rudolf, *Barlaam* 307.27–32)

Josaphat thinks that buying her baptism by sleeping with her is the lesser evil than breaking his vow of chastity.[48] In the end, Josaphat only gets back on the right track through mortification of the flesh[49] and prayer,[50] followed by a dream (309): a vivid vision of paradise and hell appears to him, and he sees and feels the fates that await those who are chaste and those who are unchaste, respectively (310–14), so that he sticks to his vow of chastity in the end.

Barlaam und Josaphat thus presents a harmful form of female empowerment in the context of conversion. The nameless woman's agency is demonstrated by the fact that she participates in the religious discourse by setting theologically justified conditions for her baptism. In doing so, however, she resembles Eve, since she serves as temptation by the devil. Josaphat affirms his faith and successfully keeps his baptismal garment clean by not repeating Adam's sin.[51] In view of the close connection between baptism and temptation in *Barlaam und Josaphat*, it is worth considering whether Josaphat is also likened to Jesus here: Jesus is tempted by the devil right after his baptism by John the Baptist but resists all temptations (Luke 4:1–13; Matt. 4:1–11).

As Matthias Meyer has shown, the image of women in this episode is, however, more complex and ambiguous than that of an Eve-like seductress, due to the narrator's voice: Josaphat's temptation is framed by two narrative digressions. In the first one (294.35–298.10), Rudolf repudiates the claim from the literary tradition that women are diabolical. Instead, he praises courtly love and good women, following Gottfried von Strassburg's model (Meyer 278). The second digression (308.7–29) is a possibly ironic personal statement of the narrator, saying that, in Josaphat's place, he would gladly make the sacrifice of sleeping with a beautiful woman in

47. "Josaphat, the good man, began to have serious doubts. He thought, if he refrained from doing it, it would be much worse than if he bought her so that she got baptized for God."

48. Notice the rhyme of *koufen* and *toufen* which often appears in Middle High German literature to criticize wrong motives for baptism.

49. Geisthardt (123) emphasizes the physical nature of Josaphat's change of heart, as he fails to solve the problem through discourse.

50. This strategy against doubts has been mentioned before: the blessing sign of the cross and prayers protect Josaphat from doubt (301.9–13).

51. Before Josaphat's temptation by the Syrian princess, the text says that Josaphat keeps his "very pure and sweet garment" (301.4: "die vil reinen süezen wât"), which was purified (301.5: "erreinet") in baptism, clean and free from sin.

order to help her get baptized. Wolfram von Eschenbach could have served as a stylistic model here (Meyer 279). The portrayal of the Syrian princess and the way she is judged thus seem ambivalent: "The text tradition does not accommodate the double model of Eve and Mary, but sides clearly with Eve. Rudolf, however, introduces the courtly ideal into the text, and he does it willingly and with emphasis" (ibid. 280). Manfred Kern (209) similarly characterizes Barlaam und Josaphat as "Kunstlegende" ('artificial legend'), i.e. "als Legende, die mit den Mitteln höfischer Dichtkunst komponiert ist, und als künstliches, heterogenes Textprodukt, das divergenten poetischen Einflüssen, den vielfältigen Stimmen legendarischer, heroisch-epischer, aber auch höfischer Erzähltraditionen erliegt".[52]

Two Bridal Quests and Conversions: *Salman und Morolf*

The pre-courtly epic *Salman und Morolf*, which dates back to the second half of the twelfth century,[53] contrasts two conversions of women for the purpose of marriage. Salman is the Christian king of Jerusalem and Morolf is his ingenious brother. Salman wins his first wife Salme, a heathen king's daughter (*Salman und Morolf* 2) of extraordinary beauty (16–18), by abducting her across the sea, holding her captive in Jerusalem by force (3) and finally having her baptized:

> Das ich uch sage, das ist war:
> er dette sie teuffen und lerte sie
> den salter ein gantz jar.
> er lerte sie spielen in dem brett.
> im was die kunigin liep,
> wie vil sie im zu leide ie gedet.[54]
> (*Salman und Morolf* 4)

All we learn about Salme's baptism is that Salman teaches her the Psalter for a year. In addition, she receives lessons in board games. No mention is made of the baptism ceremony. From the beginning, the narrator predicts that Salme will harm both the king and many other men (2 and 20). And indeed, Salme cheats on her husband twice with two different pagan rulers, who win and abduct her by using magic (90–99 and 598–610). The first time, Salman forgives his wife and takes her back to his court; the second time, he regains her, too, but back in Jerusalem, his brother Morolf kills her as a punishment.

52. "… as a legend composed with the means of courtly poetry and as an artificial, heterogenous textual product, which is subjected to divergent poetical influences and to a variety of voices of legendary, heroic-epic, as well as courtly narrative traditions."

53. The anonymous text has survived in three manuscripts and two prints. Two of the manuscripts are illustrated (Frankfurt a.M., Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. germ. qu. 13 [E] and Stuttgart, Landesbibliothek, Cod. HB XIII 2 [S]), and the third one contains blank spaces left for illustrations (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Arsenal Ms. 8021 [P]). A fourth manuscript was burnt (Strasbourg, Johanniterbibliothek, cod. b.81). All the manuscripts as well as several fragments date back to the fifteenth century. Both prints (Strasbourg, Matthias Hüpfuff, 1499 [d] and Strasbourg, Johann Knobloch d.Ä., 1510 [d']) are identical as regards text and pages and are illustrated with forty-six woodcuts (Griese 86–90; Curschmann 515–16).

54. "What I am telling you is true. He baptized her and taught her the Psalter for a whole year. He taught her the board game. He loved the queen, no matter how much harm she caused him."

The second female baptism in *Salman und Morolf* is linked to Salme's first abduction by the pagan king Fore (21–31). When King Fore kidnaps Salme,[55] Salman's brother Morolf is sent out to find her (157). Morolf carries out his mission and brings Salme back home. Yet Morolf suspects that Salme's fidelity will not last (537–39). Therefore, Morolf prepares a future second marriage by secretly obtaining another bride for Salman: Affer, King Fore's sister, whom Morolf wins as a prize in a game of chess with Salme at Fore's court (229–37).[56] When King Salman comes to retrieve his wife Salme, he meets Affer and they take a liking to each other (400–05 and 432–34). In Affer's private chambers, Salman first expresses the idea that Affer could come with him to Jerusalem and be baptized (433). However, Salman does not yet intend to marry Affer, as he is still trying to win back his first wife and does not know about Morolf's secret plan. Affer replies that she is not unwilling to go with him (434).[57] She then helps Salman to overpower her brother Fore (464–72 and 504–12) and accompanies him and Salme to Jerusalem (575) after Fore is killed (540–44).

Back in Jerusalem, Morolf is the one who convinces Affer to get baptized. Compared to the brief narration of Salme's christening, Affer's conversion is recounted at length. At first, Morolf tells Affer that her soul shall be healed, in order to convince her to get baptized: "künigin her, | du solt dich lassen touffen, | so bist du genessen an der sel" (580.3–5). Affer refuses, referring to the grief she still feels because of her brother's death (581–82). Morolf then makes a second attempt to convince her and this time uses a different strategy: he offers her a compensation (583.5, "ergetzen") for her conversion.

> Do sprach die maget wol getan:
> "wie wiltu mich sin ergetzen, dugenthaffter man?
> ich bin von geburt ein künigin her,
> ich enwil mich nit laßen touffen,
> dar so enbit mich es nit me."
> Do sprach der tegen lobesan:
> "vil schone maget wolgetan,
> so wenne gestirbet die künigin her,
> so soltu gewaltig werden
> über das rieh lant czu Jherusalem.
> Ich gib dir czü manne den künig Salmon,"
> also sprach Morolff der ußerwelte man.
> Do sprach die künigin wolgetan:

55. Salme plays an active part in her abduction. After Fore fails to win Salme over by force of arms (*Salman und Morolf* 65–78), he is – against Morolf's advice – captured and placed in Salme's custody (84–87). Using a magic ring and arguments of power politics, he wins her over (96–107) so that she releases him (114). Six months later, Fore sends her a minstrel, with whom she steals away (147) after faking her own death (124–25).

56. According to Griese (127–28), the chess game is to be seen as the beginning of the courtship of Affer, even though Salman and Salme's marriage lasts another seven years before Salme is killed as a punishment for her second adultery and Affer becomes Salman's wife. See also Haug 187–88.

57. Griese (123–24) emphasizes that the conversation between Salman and Affer, which takes place in her private chambers, resembles a romantic encounter. Haug (188) states that the scene appears to be a set piece from a classical bridal quest.

"so wil ich mich lan touffen,
Morolff, tugenthafftiger man".[58]
(*Salman und Morolf* 584–86)

Affer confidently replies that Morolf could hardly compensate her, as she already is a powerful queen by birth (584.3). She explicitly refuses baptism and forbids him to broach the subject again (584.4–5). After that, Morolf promises Affer that she shall rule over the whole kingdom of Jerusalem after Salme's death (585.3–5) and that he will give her King Salman as a husband (586.1). Only then does Affer change her mind and say that she wants to be baptized (586.4).[59]

Fig. 2: Affer's baptism. Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, HB XIII 2, fol. 328r.

58. "The beautiful maiden said: 'How do you want to compensate me? I am a mighty queen by birth. I do not want to be baptized. Do not ask me to do it again.' The venerable hero then said: 'Beautiful and handsome virgin, when the queen dies, you shall rule over the whole kingdom of Jerusalem. I will give you Salman for a husband.' That's what Morolf, the excellent man, said. The handsome queen said: 'Then I want to be baptized, Morolf, most honourable man!'"

59. Neudeck (100 n. 28) states that in *Salman und Morolf*, social factors determine whom women consider as a marriage partner and that the hierarchical thinking of the feudal nobility plays a role not only in Affer's case, but also in Salme's decision to leave her husband for Fore (*Salman und Morolf* 96–107).

Morolf initiates Affer's baptism immediately. For the ceremony, which, according to the text, takes place in a cathedral (588.3, "thum"), Affer is dressed in a silk robe (588.4–5). In contrast to the illustration in the Stuttgart manuscript (Fig. 2), which shows Affer naked, with loose hair[60] and with her breasts and pubic region exposed in an outdoor baptismal font,[61] the text does not go into further detail regarding the actual performance of the christening ritual. Nevertheless, it seems to comment on questions of baptismal practice. The remark that Affer is so heavy that her chambermaid does not want to hold her on her lap (589) is probably a comical allusion to infant baptism (Köppe-Benath 207). The problem of ritual nudity seems to be indicated by the fact that King Salman is sent away from the font by two duchesses during the ceremony, since they could well do without him (590.1–4) and there is the danger of indecent behaviour: "wer weiß, wie es under uch zweien ergat" (590.5, "Who knows what would go on between you?"). After her baptism, Affer goes to the Holy Sepulchre and makes a sacrifice. Afterwards, she studies the Psalter for four and a half years (591). Seven years later, after her second betrayal, Salme is killed by Morolf by bloodletting (777; Fig. 3).[62] Morolf consoles King Salman by marrying him to Affer (781a–784.1). The manuscripts end the story here,[63] and only tell in brief summary that Affer reigns as a powerful queen in Jerusalem for thirty-three years before she and Salman die and obtain God's mercy (783).

Regarding the question of female agency in conversions, the epic of *Salman und Morolf* is complex and ambiguous. On the one hand, women appear, due to the pre-courtly narrative scheme of the dangerous bridal quest,[64] to be mere objects in connection with male marriage intentions: they are won by abduction, by magic, or as a prize in chess. Salme does not seem to have the choice of agreeing or refusing when she is baptized in captivity after her abduction by Salman. On the other hand, the text presents Affer as a power-conscious queen who deliberately and strategically decides to convert to Christianity. Unlike in other texts, where conversions out of worldly interests are condemned, Affer's political calculation regarding baptism is not criticized.

60. R. M. Jensen (*Baptismal Imagery* 168) notes that according to the apostolic tradition women had to loosen their hair before entering the baptismal font.

61. The illustration shows a wooden tub as baptismal font. According to Grayland (204), movable wooden baptismal fonts were used in the northern European mission until the tenth century. Later, wooden tubs only served as baptismal fonts in poorer regions. From the Gothic period onwards, the trend went towards more expensive baptismal fonts made of stone or bronze. On the materiality and mediality of baptismal fonts in Northern Germany in the Middle Ages, see Vennebusch.

62. This time, the pagan king Princian courts and abducts her (*Salman und Morolf* 598–610).

63. The print versions from Strasbourg give more details on Salman and Affer's reign and also on Morolf's belated remorse; see Boyer 56–57 and Kohnen 179–82.

64. On deviations from the classical scheme of the dangerous bridal quest in *Salman und Morolf*, see Griese 133.

Fig. 3: Morolf kills Salme by bloodletting. Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, HB XIII 2, fol. 338v.

But how does the text evaluate the two female conversions? Despite her christening, Salme is repeatedly lured by heathen magic[65] and proves unfaithful to her Christian husband.[66] This can be read as a criticism of forced baptism, which is doomed to fail. Affer, on the other hand, proves her loyalty to Salman even before her baptism. As Böckenholt (112) has shown, Affer repeatedly acts in accordance with Christian ideals such as charity and mercy, and in some passages she is even portrayed as saint-like. This could indicate that the baptismal ritual does not bring about a change of heart. Rather, having the right moral attitude beforehand is crucial to a successful conversion to Christianity.[67] Affer's reign of thirty-three years – which equals Christ's lifespan (Griese 132) – confirms her suitability as a Christian queen.

The illustrations in the Stuttgart manuscript also suggest that a comparison of the two conversions was intended. The undeniable similarity of the wooden baptismal font at Affer's conversion and the wooden bathtub in which Salme is killed emphasizes the contrast between Salme's betrayal and Affer's fidelity and visually relates the unequal conversions to each other.[68] Instead of the cleansing, redeeming baptismal water, the tub finally contains the blood sinfully shed as a result of adultery and murder. The *topos*

65. For example, the text relates how thinking about the magic herb which is supposed to bring about her apparent death prevents Salme from praying and thinking about God during the service (*Salman und Morolf* 123–24).

66. Böckenholt (98–100) notes that Salme is portrayed ambiguously and incoherently, as by her actions she is judged to be culpable on the one hand (ruse, adultery, infidelity), but appears to be blameless on the other hand (sorcery, abduction). Bornholdt (230–32) emphasizes that Salman is partly to blame for his misfortune, as he (like the other men) loses his mind at the sight of Salme and is overwhelmed by his feelings. He thus becomes the antithesis of the Solomonic ruler. Following Haug (183), Griese (107) also identifies Salman's 'blind fascination with sensual beauty' as the fundamental problem of the narrative.

67. In *Salman und Morolf* 578.3–5, it says that women are best guarded by the intrinsic quality of being good and decent: "wan es wart nie kein hut so gut | wan die ein ieglich biderb wip | nun ir selber tut".

68. This is a discrepancy between the illustrations and the verbal narrative. The text says nothing about the material of the baptismal font, but the bathtub is said to be made of marble (*Salman und Morolf* 776.6).

of the bath as a place of sexual immorality (Loleit 81–84) should possibly also be invoked here. Salme's death in the bathtub could thus be interpreted as a punishment which mirrors both her sexual betrayal and her apostasy.[69] Moreover, the narrative might – beyond the mere pleasure of storytelling and entertaining – also be read as a literary reaction to the criticism of forced baptism in Scholastic theology.

69. Interestingly, Morolf advises Salme to take a bath because of her "foreign love" (*Salman und Morolf* 776.3, "fremde minne"), i.e. because of her adultery; see also Griese (131) and Haug (187).

Conclusions

By way of conclusion, I will not only summarize the results of the textual analyses, but also provide some further reflections on the influence of the respective text genre, because it can be assumed that the genre factor is not insignificant for the different representations of female conversions in the examples studied.

The Thecla tradition shows the gradual development and consolidation of gender inequality in the baptismal ritual – not only on a literary level, but also on an institutional one. From late antiquity onwards, Thecla steadily loses agency and is – in hagiography as well as in theological discourse – reduced to the perceptual patterns of chastity and seduction until her removal from the Roman Catholic canon of saints in the twentieth century. The *Vita* of Thecla belongs to the hagiographic tradition and therefore also pursues pragmatic goals: saints serve as role models whose behaviour is intended to inspire imitation. But Thecla's self-baptism and her active teaching and preaching as a woman, still present in the older tradition, contradict later church doctrines. In order to avert the danger of imitation, the church must have considered the rewriting of Thecla's *Vita* to be unavoidable.

Ulrich von dem Türlin's *Arabel* not only gives insights into the ritual of christening and the preparation for it, but also illuminates the ambiguous nature of the naked female body between spiritual purification and sensual corporeality in the christening ceremony: although Arabel decides to be baptized of her own free will and is meticulously prepared for the ceremony, her naked body is exposed to the male gaze and becomes an object of desire when she leaves the baptismal font. In this way, the romance also addresses fundamental theological questions, such as the postlapsarian lustfulness of

mankind or the relationship between baptism and sinful behaviour. The sexual allusions in the baptism narrative are intriguing, as they stand in opposition to the idea of spiritual purification or even genderlessness in baptism. This tension, which might also interfere with bridal motifs in baptismal theology, arises because conversion to Christianity is necessary for the upcoming marriage. The tension in the depiction of Arabel-Gyburc's christening in Ulrich von dem Türlin's *Arabel* is probably also related to the mixture of genres that characterizes Wolfram's *Willehalm*, which inspired it and which oscillates between chanson de geste, legend, and courtly verse romance (Greenfield and Miklautsch 270–71). In some passages, Willehalm and Gyburc are characterized as saints in Wolfram's text; at the same time, however, they act as worldly lovers and fighters (ibid. 188–93 and 200). In the baptism scene in *Arabel*, this tension between religious and erotic discourse becomes evident in the contrast between angelic beauty and human desire, which come together in the depiction of Arabel-Gyburc in her translucent baptismal robe.

In Rudolf von Ems' legendary epic *Barlaam und Josaphat*, Josaphat's vow of chastity and his commitment to convert others are related to sexual temptation and original sin. The nameless Syrian princess, who is well informed about Christianity, assumes the role of a diabolic seductress when she commands Josaphat to sleep with her in return for her consent to baptism. Intradiegetically, Josaphat demonstrates an alternative to the pattern of the Fall of Man by resisting temptation and not repeating Adam's sin. Extradiegetically, the narrator offers an alternative to the model of Eve by disavowing the story and introducing the courtly ideal of femininity in a narrative digression. This variety of voices demonstrates that *Barlaam und Josaphat* likewise represents a mixture of genres – of legend and courtly epic. In other words, Josaphat imitates Jesus as the second Adam, who defied the devil's temptations in the desert after his baptism, by rejecting the temptation of the Eve-like woman, who tries to seduce him to unchastity through baptism. The new female ideal developed in courtly literature could not be incorporated into the narrative, as it would contradict the legendary narrative scheme. Nonetheless, the new model of femininity is reflected in the narrator's commentary.

The pre-courtly epic *Salman und Morolf* contrasts a forced conversion which fails with a voluntary conversion which succeeds. In this way, the text emphasizes that the ethical attitude is more important than the mere performance of the baptismal ritual. Contrary to the narrative pattern of the dangerous bridal quest, which degrades women to objects of male erotic desire and political interests, Affer is portrayed favourably as a strong female character with a sense for power and as a successful Christian ruler. The emphasis placed on the right moral attitude which is necessary for a successful conversion to Christianity is similar to the so-called 'baptism of tears' in the courtly romance. Tears shed out of great sorrow can serve as an analogy or even as a substitute for baptism.[70] The connection between tears and baptismal water is not only a literary motif, but is also to be found in theological treatises, for instance in Ambrose's theology of repentance (Smith 203). Regardless of the genre, the idea of an ethical conversion to Christianity emerges here, so that the act of baptism merely ritually affirms a moral transformation that has already taken place. Conversely, the sheer performance of the ritual cannot bring about or replace the necessary inner and behavioural change.

The topic of female conversion to Christianity has hence proven to be extremely fruitful regarding rituals and gender. Many aspects (sin, seduction, ritual nudity, shame, sexuality, desire) are already present in the Bible or in theological discussion, but in the experimental area of literature, and depending on the genre, they are discussed and negotiated anew. Female agency and lack or loss of power often go hand in hand in literary representations of conversions. In terms of gender, the ritual of baptism is thus deeply ambiguous and is to be considered as a ritual of female empowerment and disempowerment alike.[71]

70. This motif can be found, for example, in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (28.10–19) when Belakane mourns her lover Isenhart, or in Wirnt von Grafenberg's *Wigalois* (8021–32) when Japhite weeps for her deceased lover Roas. On water, baptism, and tears in *Parzival*, with a particular focus on Feirefiz, see Gnädinger. On tears as a substitute for baptism, see esp. 67–69. Lembke (110–15) has analyzed these episodes thoroughly and has shown the great importance of focalization and narrative voice in both romances.

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Fig. 2: Affer's baptism. Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, HB XIII 2, fol. 328r.

Fig. 3: Morolf kills Salme by bloodletting. Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, HB XIII 2, fol. 338v.