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ARTICLE

Medieval Saints and Their Miraculous Songs: Ritual Singing, Funerary Piety, and the Construction of Female Sanctity in Thirteenth-Century Liège

Luo Wang

Postdoctoral Fellow in History at Peking University, Beijing, China
Corresponding author. E-mail: wangluo@pku.edu.cn

Abstract

This article explores the conspicuous role of singing in the hagiographical construction of saintly women in the thirteenth-century Diocese of Liège. The constellation of Lives about Liégeois women occupies a prominent place in the "origin story" of the new spirituality in the later Middle Ages. However, one aspect of these women's perceived religiosity—their musical and vocal talent—though omnipresent in the sources, has received only sparse attention from scholarship. This article focuses on two of the most important Lives in this group, those of Mary of Oignies and Christina of Sint-Truiden, and demonstrates that hagiographers, mobilizing liturgical vocabulary and ritual ideas identifiable to a local audience, consistently represented women's singing as magnificent ritual performance. By doing so, the hagiographers highlighted these women's privileged access to the divine and distinct potency as intercessors for the living and the dead. This article also intends to show the highly sophisticated ways in which Latin liturgy and its vernacular appropriation, popular ideas and scholastic theories about music were negotiated, developed, and together contributed to a distinctive religious rhetoric in the articulation of female sanctity in thirteenth-century Europe.

Keywords: medieval hagiography; holy women; singing; funerary piety

In his celebrated *Life of Mary of Oignies,* Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240) describes the saintly woman's deathbed scene that culminated her distinguished religious career. Anticipating death approaching in June 1213, the woman reportedly offered a virtuoso singing performance for three days and three nights:

> She thus began to sing in a loud and clear voice and for three days and three nights did not stop praising God and giving thanks: she rhythmically wove in sweet harmony the sweetest song about God, the holy angels, the blessed Virgin, other saints, her friends and the holy Scriptures. She did not think about composing

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sentences, nor did she spend time arranging what she had composed rhythmically, but the Lord gave it to her just as if it had been written out before her at exactly the same time as it was spoken. She rejoiced with a continuous cry and did not have to deliberate over it, nor did she have to interrupt her song in order to arrange its parts. It seemed to her that one of the seraphim was stretching his wings over her breasts, and with this help and sweet assistance, she was inspired to sing without any difficulty.[1]

The hagiographer goes on, diligently reporting on a whole sequence of Mary's songs, a bewilderingly complex array of liturgical chants, vernacular interpolations, and other stylized vocal acts. Her performance seems to have been structured around the Divine Office, but she constantly interpolated with French rhythmic songs,[2] "expounding (exponens) the holy Scriptures in a new and marvellous way and subtly explaining (edisserens) many things from the Gospels, the Psalms and the Old and New Testaments which she had never heard interpreted."[3] In other words, the woman is said to have offered a running commentary in her native tongue, the Romance language, to the entire Scripture, in the form of song.

This account is noteworthy in that it does not readily conform to common hagiographical tropes. Liturgical piety is, of course, a conventional element in late antique and medieval idealized representations of Christian lives.[4] The twelfth-century visionary Hildegard von Bingen was constantly inspired by liturgical music and church rituals.[5] Recent research has emphasized the observance of liturgical routine as fundamental in shaping the devotional life in some German convents in the late

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[1]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaeualis 252 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 151: "Incepit enim alta voce et clara cantare, nec cessavit spacio trium dierum et noctium deum laudare, gratias agere, dulcissimam cantilenam de deo, de sanctis angelis, de beata Virgine, de sanctis aliis, de amicis suis, de divinis scripturis rithmice et dulci modulatione contexere, nec deliberabat ut sententias inveniret nec morabatur ut inventas rithmice disponeret, sed velut ante se scriberentur dabat ei dominus in illa hora quid loqueretur: continuo clamore iubilans nec in cogitando laborabat nec in disponendo cantum interrumpebat. Unus autem de seraphim, ut videbatur ei, alas suas supra pectus eius expandebat, quo ministrante et dulciter assistente inspirabatur ei carmen absque omni difficultate." The English translation is mainly based on Margot King's but with some changes, most notably translating *alta* as "loud" rather than "high." See: Margot King, trans., "The Life of Mary of Oignies by James of Vitry," in *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation*, ed. Anneke Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 119. For some general studies on this *Vita*, see: André Vauchez, "Prosélytisme et action antihérétique en milieu féminin au XIIIe siècle: la *Vie de Marie d'Oignies* (†1213) par Jacques de Vitry," in *Problèmes d'Histoire du Christianisme* 17 (1987), 95–110; Michel Lauwers, "Expérience béguinale et récit hagiographique: À propos de la 'Vita Mariae Oigniacencis' de Jacques de Vitry (vers 1215)," *Journal des savants* (1989): 61–103; and Anneke Mulder-Bakker, "General Introduction," in *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation*, 3–30.

[2]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 153: "et hec omnia rithmice et lingua Romana protulit."

[3]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 152: "quedam etiam de divinis scripturis novo et mirabili modo exponens, de evangelio, de psalmis, de novo et veteri testamento que nunquam audierat multa subtiliter edisserens." The English translation is based on King's with minor changes: King, "The Life of Mary of Oignies," 120.

[4]E.g., Gregory of Nyssa, "The Life of Macrina," trans. Anna Silvas, in *Macrina the Younger: Philosopher of God* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 109–148; Derek Krueger, "Writing and the Liturgy of Memory in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8/4 (Winter 2000): 483–510; and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "The Stylite's Liturgy: Ritual and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6/3 (Fall 1998): 523–539.

[5]The Hildegardine scholarship is immense, see an overview in Tova Leigh-Choate, William Flynn, and Margot Fassler, "Hearing the Heavenly Symphony: An Overview of Hildegard's Musical Oeuvre with Case

Middle Ages.[6] However, Mary of Oignies's hagiographer seems to have placed emphasis, not primarily on her role as an exemplary participant of communal services or even an overwhelmed recipient of visionary experiences, but on her active possession of vocal talents, mastery of a large repertoire, and articulation of spiritual knowledge through the particular medium of sacred songs. Her younger contemporary, the royal saint Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–1231), for example, is also said to have made sweet voices "in her throat without any movement of her lips" while on her deathbed, surrounded by singing angels.[7] By contrast, the account of Mary's singing is conspicuously lengthier, filled with hagiographic hyperbole that reaches another level. The consummation of Mary's liturgical preparation for death is a prolonged solo performance masterfully executed and fully under her command. The hagiographer attributes exceptional agency to the dying woman and complexity to her performance, which may bear oblique yet intriguing traces of regional ritual practices, but more importantly, serve rhetorical purposes beyond fashioning a stereotypical dying saint.

This paper explores the role of singing in the hagiographical construction of religious women in the thirteenth-century Diocese of Liège. I argue that miraculous singing is by no means a literary trope unwittingly deployed by the hagiographers, but crucial in the construction of pious women as powerful intermediaries between the living and the dead. Women's singing should be understood within the context of local funerary beliefs in the thirteenth century, a period when the notion of purgatorial expiation was actively promoted by the reform-minded clergy and women's intercessory prayers were deemed especially potent.[8] Although the amorphous phenomenon linking women's songs with death rituals can be found across premodern cultures,[9] this article studies one of its particular historical manifestations in which singing was built into the imagery of a holy woman with heightened intensity, reflecting the conglomerate of ideas about death and the afterlife, the resurrected body, and suffrages current in thirteenth-century northern Europe.

This study also intends to highlight liturgical and musical performance as a compelling form in the articulation of female sanctity in the Middle Ages. In particular, the evidence presented here are remarkably early examples showing the complex ways in which Latin liturgy and its vernacular appropriation, popular beliefs and scholastic

Studies," in *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle, Debra Stoudt, and George Ferzoco (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 163–192.

[6]E.g., Claire Taylor Jones, *Ruling the Spirit: Women, Liturgy, and Dominican Reform in Late Medieval Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Michael Norton and Amelia Carr, "Liturgical Manuscripts, Liturgical Practice, and the Women of Klosterneuburg," *Traditio* 66 (2011): 67–169; and Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann, and Anne Simon, eds., *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[7]Kenneth Baxter Wolf, trans., *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth of Hungary: Testimony from Her Canonization Hearings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 95.

[8]Jacques Le Goff, *La Naissance du Purgatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981); Brian Patrick McGuire, "Purgatory, the Communion of Saints, and Medieval Change," *Viator* 20 (1989): 61–84; and Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 108–136.

[9]For example: Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Helen Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 21–55; Jan Ziolkowski, "Women's Lament and the Neuming of the Classics," in *Music and Medieval Manuscripts: Paleography and Performance,* ed. John Haines and Randall Rosenfeld (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 128–50; and Ann Suter, ed., *Lament: Studies in the Ancient Mediterranean and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

ideas about music were integrated and reshaped in the religious practice. Liturgy—that is to say, performative modes of communal worship—as the fundamental context of medieval piety is often assumed rather than investigated. This article attempts to offer a corrective to the tendency to characterize religious women's behavior as ecstatic and inexplicable—"mystical" in the narrow sense of being "disruptive" and "problematic" to the liturgical and parochial routine of the mainstream Christian society.[10] In fact, many such extraordinary phenomena were rooted in concrete ritual context and reflected shared practices and beliefs. Taking women's singing as a case study, the purpose here is to show, without subscribing to a claim of exceptionalism or marginality, that female spirituality in the thirteenth-century Diocese of Liège was distinguishable and precocious in the European context.

The religious women of Liège occupy a prominent place in the "origin story" of late medieval piety. The ensemble of attributes we commonly associate with a medieval "mystic," from fierce asceticism to Eucharistic visions to bridal mysticism, were put together, took a definitive shape, and gained wide currency in the early thirteenth-century Low Countries.[11] Mary of Oignies (circa 1177–1213), a married woman living as an ascetic, has been hailed as a pioneer of this new female spirituality.[12] The Bishopric of Liège, which held spiritual jurisdiction over a geographical area much

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[10]For example, Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1991), 316–17. "Mysticism" is a delicate concept that has a complex history. The most commonly accepted core element of mysticism is the yearning or the experience of a "mystical union" between the human soul and the Godhead. The Liégeois women's religious performances as represented in the hagiographical texts do not always revolve around this theme. But they could be categorized as "mystical" if the term is more broadly defined as devotional piety. See: Amy Hollywood, "Mysticism and Transcendence," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity, vol. 4: Christianity in Western Europe c. 1100-c.1500*, ed. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 297–307; and Bernard McGinn, "Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 8/1 (2008): 44–63.

[11]Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350)* (New York: Crossroad, 1998). On Eucharistic piety and women's fasting, see: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); on "bridal mysticism," see, for example: Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200–1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 174–232; and Barbara Newman, "La *mystique courtoise*: Thirteenth-Century Beguines and the Art of Love," in Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 137–167.

[12]Mary of Oignies has been considered an early example of the so-called "beguines," i.e., lay women who mainly concentrated in urban areas in the southern Low Countries and voluntarily strove to live chaste and pious lives without joining an established religious order. See the classic work: Herbert Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter: Untersuchungen über die geschichtlichen Zusammenhänge zwischen der Ketzerei, den Bettelorden und der religiösen Frauenbewegung im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert und über die geschichtlichen Grundlagen der deutschen Mystik.* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1935; 1961). The English translation is *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1995). For a more recent survey of the holy women in the Low Countries, see: Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). See also: Walter Simons, "Holy Women of the Low Countries: A Survey," in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100-c. 1500*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 625–662; and John van Engen, "The Religious Women of Liège at the Turn of the Thirteenth Century," in *Medieval Liège at the Crossroads of Europe: Monastic*

greater than the city itself, was conveniently located where some of the most important religious currents of the time converged:[13] densely populated with religious institutions, the diocese was under the successive reforming influences of the Cistercians, the Victorines, and the mendicants.[14] One of the most urbanized and most literate regions in Europe, Liège seems to have had a more assertive laity whose religious fervor had been nurtured in a longstanding crusading tradition.[15] The diocese was also receptive to the "pastoral revolution" led by scholar-preachers from the nearby University of Paris and facilitated by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.[16] All these favorable conditions combined might explain the vibrant religious culture that cultivated the *mulieres religiosae,* the intense pastoral care they received, and the creation of a historiographical tradition that has certainly rendered them more visible to posterity.

The vocal and the musical are relatively understudied aspects of this otherwise well-known tradition.[17] Hagiography is often said to be an inherently argumentative

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Society and Culture, 1000–1300, ed. Steven Vanderputten, Tjamke Snijders, and Jay Diehl (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 339–370.

[13]Jean-Louis Kupper, *Liège et l'Église Impériale, XIe-XIIe Siècles* (Paris: Société d'Edition Les Belles Lettres, 1981); Alain Marchandisse, *La fonction épiscopale à Liège aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles. Etude de politologie historique* (Genève: Droz, 1998). A recent collection of papers on the religious culture in the diocese in the central Middle Ages is Steven Vanderputten, Tjamke Snijders, and Jay Diehl, eds., *Medieval Liège at the Crossroads of Europe.*

[14]Simone Roisin, *L'hagiographie cistercienne dans le diocèse de Liège au XIIIe siècle* (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1947); Sara Ritchey, "Saints' *Lives* as Efficacious Texts: Cistercian Monks, Religious Women, and Curative Reading, c. 1250-1330," *Speculum* 92/4 (October 2017): 1101–1143; Robert Sweetman, "Dominican Preaching in the Southern Low Countries 1240–1260: *Materiae Praedicabiles* in the *Liber de natura rerum* and *Bonum universale de apibus* of Thomas of Cantimpré," (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1988); and John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 68–110.

[15]Liège and its surroundings contributed some of the legendary first crusaders, including Godfrey of Bouillon, Duke of Lower Lorraine and the first King of Jerusalem. See: Alan Murray, "The Army of Godfrey of Bouillon, 1096–1099: Structure and Dynamics of a Contingent on the First Crusade," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 70 (1992): 301–329. See also: Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London: Continuum, 1986), 37 and 44.

[16]E.g., John Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and His Circle* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970); David d'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985); Franco Morenzoni, *Des écoles aux paroisses: Thomas de Chobham et la promotion de la prédication au début du XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1995); Nicole Bériou, *L'avènement des maîtres de la Parole: La prédication à Paris au XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1998); Marcia Colish, "The Early Scholastics and the Reform of Doctrine and Practice," in *Reforming the Church before Modernity: Patterns, Problems and Approaches* ed. Christopher Bellitto and Louis Hamilton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 61–68.

[17]Relevant studies see: Carolyn Muessig, "Prophecy and Song: Teaching and Preaching by Medieval Women," in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 146–158; Ulrike Wiethaus, "The Death Song of Marie d'Oignies: Mystical Sound and Hagiographical Politics in Medieval Lorraine," in *The Texture of Society: Medieval Women in the Southern Low Countries*, ed. Ellen Kittell and Mary Suydam (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 153–179; Bruce Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 191–258; and Walter Simons, "Beguines, Liturgy, and Music in the Middle Ages: An Exploration," in *Beghinae in cantu instructae: Musical Patrimony from Flemish Beguinages (Middle Ages-Late-18th Century)*, ed. Pieter Mannaerts (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 15–26.

form.[18] The hagiographer builds his narrative around selected behavior of the protagonist to construct a model of sanctity deemed compelling to his audience. A hagiographical enterprise is retrospective in that it retrieves ritual traditions to legitimize a constructed memory but also prospective so as to perpetuate such a memory. Admittedly, it is an interpretive conundrum to separate the protagonist's actions from the hagiographer's agenda, the woman's doing from the male cleric's understanding of it. But in the case of the Liégeois *Vitae*, given the choice of "living saints" as subject matter, it would have undercut the hagiographers' ideological agenda if the narrative did not appear altogether conceivable to his audience, especially when these *Lives* were written shortly after the women's deaths and living witnesses were likely ample. Also, the circulation of the manuscripts suggests a considerable degree of overlap between the reading community of these texts and the spiritual network in which these women originally operated.[19] The persuasiveness of the saint's self-fashioning or the hagiographical representation about it depended upon its conventionality as well as its originality, on its acceptability as much as its subversiveness. It seems that some identifiable features of these women's religiosity spilt over to the textual level in the particular thematic choices in hagiographical composition. This is not necessarily in conflict with the ways in which the male clerics used precise liturgical and biblical language trying to make sense of what the women were doing. The textual result of such religious negotiations and exchanges reflected the central place these women occupied as ritual performers and powerful intercessors in the religious imagination of the local world.

I. Mary of Oignies's Deathbed Songs

The *Life of Mary of Oignies* is distinguishable, if not entirely distinct, from other literary accounts about liturgical singing as it provides a focused and sustained narrative about a triumphant, awe-inspiring, one-time phenomenon. It has been argued that the theme of miraculous singing was a way of acknowledging women's charismatic gift to teach without impinging upon the priestly prerogative to preach.[20] This line of analysis should be broadly applicable to lay instruction in the Middle Ages in general. But why singing stood as a preferable means of self-expression or self-fashioning chosen by women and recorded by their admiring hagiographers in this particular time and place needs further explanation. Bruce Holsinger has suggested a more specific metaphorical connection between the musical instrument and the suffering body awaiting resurrection in the exegetic tradition of the psalms.[21] It does seem that death and the concern for the afterlife are the underlying themes in many of the Liégeois *Vitae* and particularly in the singing episodes they contain. Even though Jacques de Vitry framed his narrative about Mary of Oignies's singing within the context of ritual performance carrying

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[18]E.g., Patrick Geary, "Saints, Scholars, and Society: The Elusive Goal," in *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 9–29; Nancy Caciola, "Through a Glass, Darkly: Recent Work on Sanctity and Society: A Review Article," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38/2 (April 1996): 301–309; and Felice Lifshitz, "Beyond Positivism and Genre: 'Hagiographical' Texts as Historical Narrative," *Viator* 25 (1994): 95–113.

[19]The Cistercian monasteries where some early copies of these *Vitae* were produced and preserved had a strong relationship with the beguine communities and the Cistercian women's houses in the region. See: Suzan Folkerts, "The Manuscript Transmission of the *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis* in the Later Middle Ages," in *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation*, 221–241; and Ritchey, "Saints' *Lives* as Efficacious Texts."

[20]Muessig, "Prophecy and Song."

[21]Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire,* esp. 191–258.

broad theological messages, it was first and foremost a deathbed song with fervent anticipation for the afterlife, a memorial service she performed for herself.

The ultimate model for Mary's singing was the angels singing at the moment of death, an extremely popular motif in religious literature from this region at this time. In Caesarius of Heisterbach's collection of monastic tales from the turn of the thirteenth century, celestial music sung by the angelic host was almost made into a defining feature of a blessed death.[22] To acknowledge someone's participation in the heavenly liturgy was to affirm his or her membership among the saved and glorified. This topos was also a statement about the person's certified sanctity that might legitimize their cultic veneration. But in Caesarius's stories the soul was mostly *received* into the angelic choir; rarely was a dying person said to be presiding over the performance with artistic mastery and stamina as displayed in Mary's act. In her heroic feat Mary was assisted by one of the seraphim "stretching his wings over her breasts," a reference echoing the biblical passage about the seraphim covering God's face and feet with their wings while crying out "Sanctus" (Isaiah 6:1-3).[23] This is also a liturgical reference, as the hymn *Sanctus*, a joyful acclamation in praise of God, was sung by the church congregation including the laity well into the twelfth century but became exclusive to the clergy in the later centuries.[24] On the summit of the celestial hierarchy of angels, the six-winged seraphim, by their fiery nature, were unsurpassed in their burning love for God and had the special prerogative to sing praises to him.[25] The most famous encounter with a seraph in the Middle Ages was probably that of Francis of Assisi a decade later in 1224 when the saint received the stigmata. Mary's vision of a seraph encapsulates the multi-layered meaning of her performance: like an angel, she sang in praise of God out of ardent love, and she would soon join the angelic choir with a guaranteed entry into heaven.

The hagiographer Jacques de Vitry included considerable details so that the image of an angelic singer was conflated with that of an actual singer in a concrete and palpable manner. Sometimes it is unclear to a modern reader whether a reference in hagiographical sources to singing is meant literally or figuratively, especially when the reference includes biblical phrases such as "the new song" (e.g., Isaiah 42:10) or "songs from the spirit" (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).[26] But this ambiguity does not appear to be the case with Mary's singing. Her performance was given precise temporal and spatial setting and was presented as a premeditated public spectacle of piety. In the year 1213, towards the end of a prolonged fast from the feast of the Annunciation on March 25 to the feast of John the Baptist on June 24, Mary sang unceasingly for three days and three nights in the church of Saint Nicholas near the town of Oignies, a public place of worship, with the priest by her side as a concerned yet acquiescent onlooker.[27]

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[22]Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. Josephus Strange (Cologne: Heberle, 1851), Distinctio XI. Capitula II, III, V, VI, VII, pp. 268–272, 273–276. For recent studies on Caesarius and the Cistercian context, see, for example: Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Faith: Cistercian Men, Women, and their Stories, 1100–1250* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002); and Victoria Smirnova, Marie de Beaulieu, and Jacques Berlioz, eds., *The Art of Cistercian Persuasion in the Middle Ages and Beyond: Caesarius of Heisterbach's Dialogue on Miracles and Its Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[23]See n1.

[24]David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 37.

[25]Keck, *Angels and Angelology,* 58–59.

[26]Ulrike Hascher-Burger, "Religious Song and Devotional Culture in Northern Germany," in *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany*, 261.

[27]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies,* 151.

What first appears remarkable about Mary's singing is her bewilderingly inclusive and hard-to-categorize repertoire. The hagiographer made a meticulous effort in enumerating the different themes of her songs, many of which are comparable to surviving references about regional liturgical practices from this period. Although this does not necessarily prove the account to be a faithful transcription of an actual performance, it does indicate that the special relationship between the woman and the sacred songs was rooted in a much wider song culture. Mary structured her performance around the Divine Office, punctuated it with liturgical songs such as *Magnificat*, Canticle of Simeon, and *Nunc dimittis* and decorated it with numerous French songs, prayers, and variegated vocal acts.[28] Vernacular interpolation in Latin liturgy was a practice already known at this time as "farsing," by which extensive elaborations were inserted to surround the Latin phrases to enhance the ceremonial effects of the liturgical occasion.[29] But Mary's performance was quite unusual in her systematic, sweeping use of this technique for wide-ranging purposes.

The most outstanding feature of Mary's all-encompassing repertoire was the vernacular song commentary she interpolated into the Latin liturgy. These songs were unquestionably exegetical and doctrinal in nature, according to the hagiographer. Mary began with an antiphon about the Trinity. This liturgical chant might have been taken from, or shared similar concerns with, the Feast of the Holy Trinity composed by the tenth-century Bishop Stephen of Liège, which was later adopted throughout western Europe and would be formalized as a universal feast by Pope John XXII in the fourteenth century.[30] Then she inserted "marvelous and, as it were, ineffable things into her song about the holy Trinity."[31] Mary further continued with an exposition on "many things from the Gospels, the Psalms and the Old and New Testaments, which she had never heard interpreted."[32] She also commented on the humanity of Christ and the blessed Virgin, as well as other theological issues, all "rhythmically and in the Romance language."[33]

That is to say, according to the hagiographer, Mary of Oignies expounded on the entire sequence of biblical books and on the two greatest mysteries of Christianity, the doctrines of Trinity and the Incarnation, in the form of versified songs in her native French. Anneke Mulder-Bakker, who seems to read Jacques's account literally, calls Mary outright a "proficient theologian."[34] Mary should have sufficient Latin to be able to read the Psalter as Jacques tells us that she owned a copy.[35] It would be extraordinary but not inconceivable that Mary, a lay woman with mediocre background, managed to acquire knowledge about the Bible with astonishing range and depth through oral communicative means.[36] We know that Maurice de Sully (d. 1196), Bishop of

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[28]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies,* 154.

[29]John Stevens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama, 1050–1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 241.

[30]Rubin, *Corpus Christi,* 180.

[31]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 152; King, "The Life of Mary of Oignies," 120.

[32]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 152; King, "The Life of Mary of Oignies," 120.

[33]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 152–153; King, "The Life of Mary of Oignies," 120.

[34]Anneke Bulder-Bakker, "General Introduction," in *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation,* 8.

[35]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 155.

[36]Anneke Bulder-Bakker, "Introduction," in Anneke Bulder-Bakker, ed., *Seeing and Knowing: Women and Learning in Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 1–19.

Paris, left his homilies on the Gospels in the vernacular French prose.[37] Jacques de Vitry was a follower of Master Peter the Chanter (d. 1197) who exerted influence in creating an intellectual culture in Paris orienting towards pastoral efficacy.[38] Jacques was fascinated by and found his great hero in Fulk de Neuilly, a superficially educated popularizer who preached to the ordinary lay folks "in a simple and vernacular way."[39] Mary was recounted as listening to sermons on the scriptures everyday (even though she did not need to do so as someone graced with divine illumination).[40]

However, even given the possibility that Mary gained scriptural knowledge through attending liturgy and sermons, an inventive exegesis in French songs would still make her case uniquely precocious. The surviving evidence for early French religious songs with musical notation is mainly of two kinds: short, devotional lyrics such as Passion songs and Marian hymns, notable mainly for their emotional intensity, and longer narrative poetry of saintly adventures, such as that of Saint Stephen.[41] The handful of twelfth-century Old French religious texts on the Scriptures targeting the laity were ostensibly selective paraphrases or translations from the Latin original, intended for a limited, aristocratic audience.[42] No audacious theological novelty was claimed and certainly no comprehensive knowledge about the Bible was attempted. An apparently school-educated Cistercian nun from the nearby region, Beatrice of Nazareth (d. 1268), who had practiced the craft of copying Latin liturgical manuscripts, composed a short treatise in Middle Dutch on the seven degrees of loving God. This work is most often described as mystical.[43] In Mary's case, although it is not unthinkable for a non-monastic, non-aristocratic woman to grasp scriptural knowledge, given that the only available evidence are the writings of her hagiographer, it is difficult to draw an unequivocal conclusion. What is truly remarkable in Jacques's account is not the precise extent or depth of Mary's understanding of the Scriptures, but rather his understanding of her *relationship* with them. To provoke hagiographical veneration, Jacques

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[37]C.A. Robson, *Maurice of Sully and the Medieval Vernacular Homily: with the Text of Maurice's French Homilies from a Sens Cathedral Chapter MS.* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952).

[38]Baldwin, *Masters, Princes and Merchants*, 36–39.

[39]Jacques de Vitry, *The Historia Occidentalis of Jacques de Vitry: A Critical Edition*, ed. John Frederick Hinnebusch (Fribourg: The University Press Fribourg, 1972), 95: "Primo siquidem a uicinis sacerdotibus uocatus et inuitatus, cum timore et uerecundia simplicibus laicis simpliciter et uulgariter ea que audierat predicare cepit."

[40]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 120; King, "The Life of Mary of Oignies," 100.

[41]John Haines, *Medieval Song in Romance Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 197–296.

[42]Morgan Powell, "Translating Scripture for *Ma Dame de Champagne*: The Old French 'Paraphrase' of Psalm 44 (*Eructavit*)," in *The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Warren (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 83–103; and Guy Lobrichon, "Un nouveau genre pour un public novice: la paraphrase biblique dans l'espace roman du XIIe siècle," in *The Church and Vernacular Literature in Medieval France*, ed. Dorothea Kullmann (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009), 87–108.

[43]Roger De Ganck, trans., *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth, 1200–1268* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 25, 59–61; Wybren Scheepsma, "Beatrice of Nazareth: The First Woman Author of Mystical Texts," trans. Myra Scholz, in *Seeing and Knowing*, 49–66. Another thirteenth-century woman from the Low Countries who has left poetic and visionary works in her native Dutch is Hadewijch, see: *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, trans. Columba Hart (New York: Paulist, 1980). A good discussion of the use of the vernacular for devotional writings in the thirteenth century, particularly by women, is: Sara Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 17–56.

de Vitry found it important to describe the woman as adroit in vernacular scriptural commentary that was both orthodox and theologically respectable.

Besides theological issues, Mary also sang about saints. A featured song about Saint Stephen is particularly interesting: "When she sang of St. Stephen, the first martyr who is called 'the crown of heaven,' she also said that when he prayed at his death, the Lord gave him St. Paul as a gift. When St. Paul was crowned with martyrdom in his turn and breathed out his spirit in death, St. Stephen was present and offered St. Paul's spirit to the Lord, saying to him, 'You gave me this great and singular gift and I, with the fruit multiplied, give it back to you.'"[44] This passage seems to suggest that Mary was not singing a lyrical song but rather a narrative song about the saint's martyrdom with dramatized monologues from the protagonist. This song might be in the form similar to a troped epistle for the feast of Saint Stephen. The so-called "tropes" are lengthy narrative songs about Stephen's Passion in Old French usually sung by the subdeacons during the high Mass on the saint's feast day, intended to magnify the importance of the Latin reading and the joyfulness of the occasion, because the feast took place on December 26 right after Christmas.[45] In the surviving early medieval French texts with music notation on their manuscripts, Saint Stephen's epistles constitute an impressive proportion, which certainly testifies to the immense popularity of this genre.[46] They were mostly produced in the area around Paris and Chartres, not far from Liège. It is unclear from a liturgical or calendrical point of view, though, why Mary would sing this song at this time, presumably in June. Chanting this particular piece mostly occurred during the Mass of the saint's feast on December 26 and the other feast concerning Saint Stephen was the Finding and the Translation of his body celebrated on August 3. It has been pointed out that Mary used this song as a prelude to her prayers for a certain priest, unnamed in the text but presumably Jacques de Vitry himself, so that she could "offer his spirit to the Lord at her death."[47] Just like Stephen presented Paul to God at his martyrdom, Mary commended Jacques de Vitry at her death.

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[44]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 153: "Dixit etiam, cum de sancto Stephano prothomartyre caneret, quem *rosarium paradisi* appellabat, quod dum oraret in morte dominus sanctum Paulum dedit ei in munere, cumque beatus Paulus martyrio coronatus spiritum in morte emitteret, sanctus Stephanus presens fuit et beati Pauli spiritum domino obtulit, dicens domino: 'Hoc magnum et singulare munus michi dedisti, et ego cum fructu multiplici illud reddo tibi.'" Punctuation for the abbreviation of "Saint" has been added for consistency. King, "The Life of Mary of Oignies," 121. The epithet "rosarium paradisi" has presented some difficulty to the translator. King explains in her footnote that she prefers "the crown of heaven" rather than "the rose of heaven" as the word *rosarium* refers to a kind of "head-covering, often adorned with flowers" in the thirteenth-century Low Countries. See: King, "The Life of Mary of Oignies," p. 121, n. 142. In Thomas of Cantimpré's biography of John of Cantimpré, when a nobleman wore a crown (*crone*) "which he had most curiously and exquisitely fashioned for himself out of herbs and flowers" at the Christmas festival, John delivered a speech on the floral crown exhorting the knight to turn to the "everlasting delight of Christ's verdant paradise of bliss" (perhennem felicitatis uirentis paradisi amenitatem) and to "be crowned with the diadem of his perpetual and immortal glory" (eius perpetue et immortalis glorie diademate coronari). See: Robert Godding, ed., "Une oeuvre inédite de Thomas de Cantimpré, la 'Vita Ioannis Cantipratensis,'" *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 76 (1981): 292; and Barbara Newman, trans., "The Life of John of Cantimpré," in *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints' Lives*, ed. Barbara Newman (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 95.

[45]Stevens, *Words and Music*, 239–249; Haines, *Medieval Song in Romance,* 103–115; John Haines, "Le chant vulgaire dans l'Église à la fête de saint Étienne," in *The Church and Vernacular Literature*, 159–75.

[46]John Haines has edited and translated the surviving five versions of Saint Stephen Epistle with Old French trope in *Medieval Song in Romance Languages*, 245–296.

[47]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies,* 151; Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power,* 83.

This account about Mary singing vernacular saints' lives shares some thematic similarities with another type of evidence about laity singing sacred songs. A late eleventh-century work composed in the diocese of Liège tells about a jongleur's miraculous singing on the occasion of the translation of Saint Remaclus's body to the monastery Stavelot. During the vigil, a jongleur who happened to be sleeping in the hospice, received a vision calling him to venerate the saint; jumping to his feet the jongleur joined the vigil service, and began to sing. He "did not know what he was to sing; he began to sing many things about the saint extemporaneously."[48] Without any contemptuous tone toward the performer's humble profession, this account mainly focuses on the instrumental use of his song in narrating the deeds, i.e. the "many things" about the saint and arousing devotion in an apparently distinguished lay audience including the future Emperor Henry IV. Musicologists and scholars of Romance literature have long recognized that a jongleur could perform epic poetry as well as saints' legends, perhaps during a liturgical service if the service was the commemoration of a saint.[49] In one of the well-known sources from the turn of the fourteenth century, the Parisian cleric Johannes de Grocheo talked approvingly about the jongleurs singing "the life of Blessed Stephen, Protomartyr, and the story of King Charlemagne."[50] Although this reference cannot prove a connection between a jongleur song about Saint Stephen with the one sung by Mary of Oignies, it nonetheless testifies to the popularity of such vernacular genre in propagating knowledge about saints' lives among the lay society and the church's tolerant attitudes towards such a devotional form.

Mary's singing style requires a comment. The hagiographer repeatedly mentioned her voice being "loud and clear" (*alta voce et clara*) and "high and sublime" (*acuta et sublimi voce*).[51] He even took care to mention that the quality of her voice deteriorated to hoarseness at the end of the first day but miraculously recovered its strength the next morning.[52] To describe her voice in English as "loud" and "high" can be confusing as if it resembles some high-pitched shrieking, especially when in one place the hagiographer seems to be comparing the sound to the pangs of women giving birth.[53] In fact, the Latin words belonged to technical terminology about the quality of human voice. Isidore of Seville (d. 636) in his well-known *Etymologies* discussed the three qualities of the perfect voice being "loud, sweet, and clear" (*alta, suavis, et clara*).[54] In a thirteenth-century anonymous *Summa Musice* from Paris, there were three modes

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[48]*Triumphus sancti Remacli de Malmundariensi Coenobio*, ed. D. W. Wattenbach, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores 11 (Hannover: Hahn's, 1854), 456. A discussion of this episode can be found in Alison Elliott, "The *Triumphus Sancti Remacli*: Latin Evidence for Oral Composition," *Romance Philology* 32/3 (February 1979): 292–298.

[49]Stevens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages*, 235–267.

[50]Johannes de Grocheio, *Ars musice*, edited and translated by Constant Mews, John Crossley, and Catherine Jeffreys (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), 66: "Cantum vero gestualem dicimus, in quo gesta heroum et antiquorum patrum opera recitantur. Sicuti vita et martyria sanctorum, et prelia et adversitates quas antiqui viri pro fide et veritate passi sunt. Sicuti vita beati stephani protomartyris. Et hystoria regis karoli." For clerical opinions on the usefulness of secular songs for moral instruction, see: Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France 1100–1300* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1989).

[51]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 151. King translates *alta* as "high" and *acuta* as "piercing," see: King, "The Life of Mary of Oignies," 119.

[52]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies,* 151.

[53]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 152.

[54]Both English and Latin quoted from Timothy McGee, *The Sound of Medieval Song: Ornamentation and Vocal Style according to the Treatises* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 20 and 170.

appropriate to the human voice, the low, the high, and the very high (*gravis, acutus, and peracutus*), and proper modulation of the three would produce a sound pleasing to all.[55] A late thirteenth-century treatise on singing techniques distinguished chest, throat, and head voices, which correspond respectively to the low (*gravibus*), the high (*acutis*), and the highest range (*superacutis*).[56] But it was probably irrelevant to Jacques de Vitry whether Mary's voice was technically well-trained or pleasing to the ear. The vocabulary he used conformed to what was formulaic to say about liturgical singing in the medieval church. For example, Amalar of Metz in his treatise on the liturgy instructed that the hymn was replete with thanksgiving and praises of the angels, so it should be sung in "a very high voice" (*excelsa voce*) befitting the dignity of the ceremony.[57] Mary's "loud and clear" voice was what was expected or even required for jubilant praise to God.

Another word pregnant with biblical resonances yet hard to translate is Mary's "cry" (*clamor*). She was joyful with "continuing cry" (*continuo clamore*);[58] "She cried from day to night" (*tota die usque ad noctem clamasset*);[59] and she was "crying out of joy from a fullness of heart" (*pre gaudio clamans ex plenitudine cordis*).[60] These "cries" were not ecstatic, unintelligible, uncontrollable piercing wails but rather were most likely stylized vocal acts to be expected in a medieval church assembly. The word *clamor* and its various verbal forms frequently occur in the Latin Vulgate to denote the unique relationship the Israelites had with God.[61] These "cries" can express a complaint against God or his enemies, a supplication to redress the injustices, a groan of suffering and distress, or they can simply be synonymous with any prayer directly addressing God: "In my trouble I cried (*clamavi*) to the Lord, and he heard me," (Psalm 119:1). Cries can also be those of praises and jubilation. The Gospels give the messianic description of Jesus entering Jerusalem while people followed him and "shouted (*clamabant*) Hosanna," (John 12:13; also: Mark 11:9, Matthew 21:9). This passage became the Scriptural foundation for the ritualized cries during the Palm Sunday procession in the medieval Latin Church. Amalar of Metz explained this custom in the early Middle Ages: "It is our custom to carry palm branches through our churches and cry (*clamare*) 'Hosanna' in memory of Him the King."[62]

Therefore, the words Jacques de Vitry used to describe Mary's singing were carefully chosen to meet the expectations that a medieval audience would have about a ritual performance. A corollary is that the emotions displayed in Mary's singing that appeared to

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[55]*Summa Musice: A Thirteenth-Century Manual for Singers*, ed. Christopher Page (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 153.

[56]Jerome of Moravia, *Tractatus de musica*, quoted from McGee, *The Sound of Medieval Song,* 174. The author was from Moravia but received his education from Paris.

[57]Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy*, vol. 2, ed. Eric Knibbs (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 134, 136.

[58]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 151.

[59]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 151.

[60]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 152.

[61]Pascal Collomb, "*Vox clamantis in ecclesia*: Contribution des sources liturgiques médiévales occidentales à une histoire du cri," in *Haro! Noël! Oyé! Pratiques du cri au Moyen Âge,* ed. Didier Lett and Nicolas Offenstadt (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003), 117–130. See also: Carleen Mandolfo, "Language of Lament in the Psalms," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 114–130.

[62]Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy*, vol.1, 90: "In memoriam illius rei nos per ecclesias nostras solemus portare ramos et clamare 'Osanna.'"

be uncontrollable and spontaneous were, in fact, framed by liturgy. The overall mood of Mary's singing performance was one of "exultation" (*exultatio*) and "jubilation" (*iubilatio*).[63] The word *jubilus* in the Middle Ages had a more concrete meaning than its modern English counterpart: it was usually associated with "the extended singing of the second part of the Alleluia which was a vital component of the Benedictine liturgy."[64] This word could denote a joyful spoken or sung prayer, with or without the implication of mystical ecstasy. Despite literary flourishes, the account about Mary's singing contained elements—from vernacular "farsing," to narrative poetry on saints' lives, to acclamatory vocal acts—that would have been recognized as ritual practices for a contemporary audience: regardless of whether Mary lived in such a mode of religious expression to its full extent, her hagiographer emphatically represented her as such.

Jacques de Vitry's account about Mary's singing granted her a privileged position to offer intercessory prayers and the commendation of souls. He insisted on the angelic or, more precisely, seraphic origin of her last songs, which is a powerful statement about the woman's promised glorification. During her three-day performance, Mary "said much about her friends who were still in the world and commended them in order, one by one, to the Lord, and poured out many prayers for them to the Lord."[65] Jacques de Vitry highly valued Mary's song about Saint Stephen and found a great sense of validation in her commendation to God on his behalf, as mentioned above. He also recounted a dream he received after her death in which Mary's body was turned into a precious gemstone; the underlying meaning of this imagery is that her resurrected body is translucent and glorious, incorruptible and impassible.[66] Jacques has been described by historians in modern terms as a "sponsor" of female spirituality, or, in a more reciprocal sense, a "collaborator," whereas he likely understood himself as a devotee venerating a saint in the properly "medieval" sense of the word.[67] After Mary of Oignies's death, Jacques kept the bones of one of her fingers as talisman, which, as he believed, worked miracles and safeguarded him from perils during his journey to the crusader states.[68] Jacques would later establish a prominent career as Bishop of Acre in the Holy Land and Cardinal Bishop of Tusculum in Rome, where presumably there was no shortage of saints or relics, but despite this he chose for his body to be returned to Oignies and buried, *ad sanctam*, besides Mary almost thirty years after her death.[69] Whatever ideological reasons he might have had when writing her *Vita*,

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[63]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies,* 151.

[64]Gertrud Lewis, "The Mystical *Jubilus*: An Example from Gertrud of Helfta (1256–1302)," *Vox Benedictina* 1/4 (1984): 245; Peter Dinzelbacher, "Jubilus," in *Wörterbuch der Mystik* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1989), 282.

[65]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 153; King, "The Life of Mary of Oignies," 120.

[66]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 163.

[67]Dyan Elliott, "The Beguines: A Sponsored Emergence," in *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 47–84.

[68]Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 72.

[69]About the life and career of Jacques de Vitry, see: Philipp Funk, *Jakob von Vitry: Leben und Werke* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1909); Jean Donnadieu, *Jacques de Vitry (1175/1180-1240) entre l'Orient et l'Occident: l'évêque aux trois visages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014). About Jacques de Vitry's later veneration of Mary through generous donation to the community at Oignies, see: Sharon Farmer, "Low Country Ascetics and Oriental Luxury: Jacques de Vitry, Marie of Oignies and the Treasures of Oignies, in *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person*, ed. Rachel Fulton and Bruce Holsinger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 205–222.

Jacques de Vitry perceived Mary, as manifested in his lifelong unwavering devotion, primarily as a powerful saint and intercessor on behalf of her spiritual network of friends including himself as a favored beneficiary.[70]

Michel Lauwers has demonstrated that in the thirteenth century there was a major shift of control over the death rituals and the commemoration of the dead from the local monasteries to the emerging mendicant orders and the beguine communities in Liège.[71] The religious women's major work of charity, conducted daily, was to take care of the sick and dying and to prepare for their proper burial. Women's intercessory prayers were considered especially potent in alleviating pains and eliminating sentences the dead had to suffer in purgatory. Mary of Oignies is said to have "occupied herself above all in assisting the sick and being present at deathbeds for contrition, or at burials."[72] Not content with her own assistance, she diligently accumulated prayers and Masses for the tortured souls in purgatory from other people in her spiritual network.[73] The saints' various *Lives* from Liège at this time are replete with stories about the tormenting dead coming back to this world and requesting intercessions from the religious women. In one local legend, even Pope Innocent III, right after his death in the year 1216, with purgatorial fire all over him, appeared to Lutgard of Aywières (d. 1246), a Liégeois nun, requesting intercessory prayers to alleviate his pains.[74] The ghost of Emperor Otto IV (d. 1218) also appeared to a certain nun, asking punctiliously for prayers: she should recite the psalter 10,000 times, and for each verse add the angelic salutation, i.e. the *Ave Maria*, as well as the Lord's Prayer.[75] The most frequent guests received by the holy women on a daily basis in Liège were either dead people returning from purgatory seeking intercessory prayers, or dead people from heaven recounting the splendid vision and delivering inspirational speeches about the afterlife. It seems that the religious women's one major raison d'être was to facilitate the communion between the living and the dead.

The most important saint the beguines identified themselves with was Mary Magdalene, who was a quintessential penitent and reformed sinner for sure, but also a model of funerary piety: she featured prominently in almost every Passion or Deposition scene in medieval art, weeping copiously at the cross by the side of Virgin Mary; she visited the Sepulcher and brought ointment to embalm the body of Christ according to the Gospels and the patristic traditions. She was also identified as one of the first witnesses of Jesus's resurrection from the dead. Her image in the

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[70]For example, it has been emphasized that as a preacher in the Albigensian crusade Jacques de Vitry wrote the *Vita* to combat the perceived heretics in southern France. See: Vauchez, "Prosélytisme et action antihérétique"; Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 47–84.

[71]Michel Lauwers, *La mémoire des ancêtres, le souci des morts: morts, rites et société au Moyen Âge (Diocèse de Liège, XIe-XIIIe siècles)* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1997), 409–473. Scholarship on prayer for the Dead in the early medieval history is extensive, see for example: Le Goff, *La Naissance du Purgatoire*; Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994); Dominique Iogna-Prat, "The Dead in the Celestial Bookkeeping of the Cluniac Monks around the Year 1000," in *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, ed. Lester Little and Barbara Rosenwein (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998), 340–362.

[72]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 101–102; King, "The Life of Mary of Oignies," 85.

[73]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 103; King, "The Life of Mary of Oignies," 87.

[74]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Lutgardis*, ed. Godfrey Henschen, in *Acta Sanctorum*, 16 July (Paris: 1867), 197.

[75]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum universale de apibus* (Douai: Baltazaris Belleri, 1627), Liber I. Capitulum LIII, p. 502.

Middle Ages was further conflated with that of Mary of Bethany whose brother, Lazarus, was raised from the dead by Jesus in the Gospel of John.[76] Mary of Oignies, the only *mulier religiosa* from the Low Countries to receive a local liturgical feast, had her office texts and music heavily borrowed from those of her namesake, Mary Magdalene.[77] The Mass text from Mary of Oignies's liturgical office petitioned for the saint's intercession on behalf of the living and the dead: "Most benevolent God, we ask you, sanctify this Host in view of the grace of the blessed Mary, your benevolent one, and by the most mighty power of your love grant it to all the faithful living and dead for the animation of their souls."[78] And, "God, may the sacraments of your goodness, through the intercession of blessed Mary, your benevolent one, purify us from all that is old, and bestow upon all the faithful living and dead the salutary effect of your perpetual redemption."[79]

Mary of Oignies was by no means an isolated case of ritual singing in the Diocese of Liège. The most extravagant among the singing women from the region, or perhaps anywhere in medieval Europe, must have been Christina of Sint-Truiden, whose *Vita* was written by the Dominican friar Thomas of Cantimpré.[80] Mary and Christina were roughly contemporary and from the same religious environment. Thomas, an admirer of Jacques de Vitry, was familiar with the *Life* of Mary and even provided it with a supplement of miracles.[81] But the two *Lives* are significantly different in style as well as in approach. For one thing, the act of liturgical singing, though grandiosely staged, occurred only towards the end of Mary's life and was but one of the themes explored by Jacques de Vitry, who had a more complicated theological program and whose depiction of Mary was multifaceted. Ritual singing towards death—the ultimate validation of her saintliness—was a vital but not the dominant element in Mary's overall religious identity in Jacques's narrative. By contrast, Thomas, who never met Christina in person but worked from others' testimonies, pursued his protagonist with some single-mindedness: his aim was to present Christina as purgatorial saint who sang. Singing was both a more frequent mundane activity for Christina and a more integral element in Thomas's portrayal of her as an awe-inspiring intermediary between the living and the dead.

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[76]Lauwers, *La mémoire des ancêtres, le souci des morts,* 437. For Mary Magdalene's image through the early centuries see: Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), esp. 18–46.

[77]Ike de Loos, "Saints in Brabant: A Survey of Local Proper Chants," *Revue belge de Musicologie* 55 (2001): 9–39, esp. 25–28; the text is edited in Daniel Misonne, "Office liturgique neumé de la Bienheureuse Marie d'Oignies à l'abbaye de Villers au XIIIe siècle," *Revue bénédictine* 111 (2001): 267–286; an English translation can be found in Hugh Feiss, trans., "The Liturgical Office of Mary of Oignies by Goswin of Bossut," in *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation*, 175–196.

[78]Misonne, "Office liturgique neumé," 278: "Hostiam hanc, benignissime Deus, ob gratiam beatae Mariae benignae tuae, quaesumus, sanctifica atque fortissima caritatis tuae virtute cunctis fidelibus vivis et defunctis in vegetationem transfer animarum." The English translation is mine.

[79]Misonne, "Office liturgique neumé," 278–9: "Sacramenta bonitatis tuae Deus, intercedente beata Maria benigna tua, ab omni nos vetustate purificent, et cunctis fidelisbus vivis et defunctis perpetuae redemptionis tuae salutarem praestent effectum."

[80]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, ed. Ioanne Pinio, in *Acta Sanctorum*, 24 July (Paris: 1867), 650–660; Margot King and Barbara Newman, trans., "The Life of Christina the Astonishing," in *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints' Lives*, 127–160.

[81]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Supplementum*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaeualis 252 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 167–201; Thomas of Cantimpré, "The Supplement to James of Vitry's *Life of Mary of Oignies*," trans. Hugh Feiss, in *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation*, 137–165.

II. Christina of Sint-Truiden's Miraculous Singing

Christina "the Astonishing" is arguably one of the most bizarre holy persons in the Middle Ages. Scholars read her *Vita* with wonder, bemusement, and bewilderment, calling it "all but impervious to history."[82] Active in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century and from the Flemish town of Sint-Truiden near Liège, Christina reportedly died three times, was resurrected twice, and engaged in various outlandish practices of self-torment. Her behavior was deemed so peculiar that it earned her the epithet "the Astonishing" (*mirabilis*). Christina's life is often cited as the startling extreme of the so-called "embodied spirituality," and has been treated as either entertaining fantasies or with a rhetoric of "excessiveness" by the male hagiographer.[83] However, I would like to demonstrate that this text is much more than a bewildering "tissue of extravagances" or an account of "flamboyant mental illness."[84] It is a serious work of serious execution—the text is remarkably strenuous in its attempt to offer a coherent set of ideas about the afterlife, the resurrected body, and the posthumous soul.

Scholars have long pointed out purgatorial piety as a dominant theme in the text and Christina's "bizarre" behavior as a mimesis of purgatorial torments.[85] But they have invariably focused on the theme of suffering. I would like to push this observation a bit further. First, Christina, as represented in the text, was not merely a human volunteer for vicarious penitence, which might well be a constitutive identity of the historical Christina, but a dead person still living in this world in glorified body.[86] Thus, all the bizarre awkwardness of Christina's behavior in the *Vita* was a result of experimenting with this transgressive "inbetweenness." The hagiographer, Thomas of Cantimpré, took the contemporary ideas about the resurrected body, learned or popular, rather seriously and with utter literalism. Christina was not quite like other pious people, whose glorified resurrection was prefigured in bodily signs yet unfulfilled. She literally had a spiritualized body, which the hagiographer obsessively placed in touch with the concrete, natural world of physicality, as if to see what would happen at the contact surface of the two worlds.

Second, I would like to demonstrate how singing, a repeated theme in the *Vita*, was integral to Christina's overall imagery as a glorified intercessor much more potent than a mere pious human being. The text as a whole is a salient example showing the connection between women's songs and beliefs about the afterlife. At the beginning of the story, Christina was already dead. During the Requiem Mass of her funeral, Christina's body stirred in the coffin and she returned to life. She then told the horrified crowd that she had toured in Purgatory, Paradise, and Hell and accepted an offer from God out of

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[82]Barbara Newman, "Introduction," in *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints' Lives,* 30.

[83]Rachel Smith, *Excessive Saints: Gender, Narrative, and Theological Invention in Thomas of Cantimpré's Mystical Hagiographies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 48–82.

[84]The former phrase by Simone Roisin is quoted from Newman, "Introduction," in *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints' Lives,* 30; the latter phrase refers to a period immediately after Christina's first return from death, see: Newman, "Introduction," in *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints' Lives,* 34.

[85]Robert Sweetman, "Thomas of Cantimpré, *Mulieres Religiosae*, and Purgatorial Piety: Hagiographical *Vitae* and the Beguine 'Voice,'" in *A Distinct Voice: Medieval Studies in Honor of Leonard E. Boyle, O.P.*, ed. Jacqueline Brown and William Stoneman (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 606–628; Barbara Newman, "Hildegard of Bingen and the 'Birth of Purgatory,'" *Mystics Quarterly* 19/3 (1993): 90–97; Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 111; and Nancy Caciola, *Afterlives: The Return of the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2016), 66–67.

[86]Sweetman, "Thomas of Cantimpré, *Mulieres Religiosae*, and Purgatorial Piety."

great compassion: she would return to the world as a living revenant, and by her exemplary suffering she would convert the living from their sins and eventually return to God's embrace after the task was done.[87] In this not-very-long biography, Christina died three times and was resurrected twice. Her major work of charity in the world was to take care of the dying, both Christians and Jews: "She assisted the dying most willingly and gladly and exhorted them to a confession of their sins, to the fruit of penance, to a hope of everlasting joy, and to a fear of the destroying fire."[88]

Notably, in a significant reversal to some earlier medieval tales about other-world journey, Christina was not a sinner only to be terrified into penitent after touring in Purgatory or Hell, but a God-appointed blessed returning to this world voluntarily. In order to fulfill her promise to live through the purgatorial pains for the salvation of others, Christina intentionally inflicted upon her own body grotesque sufferings, such as creeping into hot ovens prepared for baking bread or jumping into cauldrons full of sizzling water.[89] Most of these torments centered around either water or fire. They can be seen as deliberate mimesis of the purgatorial torments: to make the excruciating pain not only imaginable but almost palpable by invoking the audience's everyday experience; the purgatorial fire was as cruelly insufferable as touching the inside of a hot oven and worse. But more likely, these details might be built on some common metaphors in medieval visionary literature. For example, in the mid-twelfth-century *Tundale's Vision* recounting a first-person journey through purgatorial torments, the gluttons and fornicators are said to be shoveled into a house in the round shape of "an oven where bread is usually baked."[90]

Besides this general theme of vicarious punishment, the other prominent trope in Christina's *Vita* is her miraculous chanting. Suffering and singing may appear to be uncorrelated, capricious choices made by a whimsical hagiographer. The crucial nexus, however, is Christina's overall identity as someone between-the-worlds, a half-human-half-spirit who "led the souls of the dead as far as purgatory, or through purgatory as far as the kingdom of heaven, without any harm to herself."[91] Miraculous singing is a threshold practice as it fundamentally separates the world of the dead from the world of those who are about to die but also bridges the two.

In the text there are two imageries of Christina's body, possibly indicative of two different notions about posthumous glorification, and in each scenario she sings. At one instance dismissed as incredible physical "abuse" in scholarly opinion,[92] Christina rolled up her body into the shape of a ball in order to contemplate and pray. She gathered together all her limbs "into a ball (*in unum globum*) as if they were hot wax, and all that could be perceived of her was a spherical body (*sphaericum corpus*);" after her spiritual inebriation, her limbs would then extend back to their original positions.[93] This ostensibly bizarre account verging on absurdity, in fact, alludes to a belief about the posthumous disembodied soul widely circulating in the Cistercian monasteries in the

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[87]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis,* I.5–7, pp. 651–652.

[88]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, III.27, p. 655; King and Newman, "The Life of Christina the Astonishing," 142.

[89]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, I.11, p. 652.

[90]Albrecht Wagner, ed., *Visio Tnugdali: Lateinisch und Altdeutsch* (Erlangen: Deichert, 1882), 23; Eileen Gardiner, ed., *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante* (New York: Italica, 1989), 165.

[91]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, p. 650; King and Newman, "The Life of Christina the Astonishing," 128.

[92]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 161.

[93]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, II.16, p. 653.

region. In one of the *exempla* stories compiled by the hagiographer Thomas of Cantimpré, at the deathbed of a Cistercian abbess Genta of Florival, the convent community saw "a globe of the brightest splendor" appear for three nights and stay immobile for the duration of those nights.[94] In an *exemplum* recorded by Caesarius of Heisterbach, a Cistercian abbot died and later returned to life and he was asked about the "shape and power" of the soul; the soul after death was said to be "like a glassy spherical vessel" which had eyes both before and behind and a universal range of vision.[95] Re-affirming this story, a recluse believed that "the soul is of spiritual substance, and in its nature spherical, in the likeness of the globe of the moon."[96] This idea about the posthumous soul being the perfect round shape and resembling a celestial body, with features such as immobility, luminosity and translucency, was popular among the Cistercian circles in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

But Thomas of Cantimpré further reworked this idea. Christina, unlike the actual dead in those *exempla* stories, was the glorified dead. Nor was she a stereotypical returning dead in the tradition of vision literature, who would still be unquestionably human. What she had was a spiritualized material body, which certainly sounds like an oxymoron. Thomas was very careful to let Christina assume the perfect spherical shape of a heavenly body yet without the transparency or luminosity; she still retained her individuality with limbs that were recognizable both before and after the transformation process. The "incompleteness" and "inbetweenness" of Christina's transformation, albeit extremely awkward to visualize, was indicative of her intermediary status crossing here and hereafter.

To complete the assimilation of Christina's body with the heavenly body, she participated, according to Thomas, in the cosmological order by emitting sounds resembling celestial music, *musica mundana*. According to the Pythagorean and Neoplatonic idea that was later picked up by some Christian authors, the concentric revolutions of the planetary bodies would give rise to a music that represents the perfect harmony of the cosmic order.[97] Christina's vocals were presented as follows:

> She whirled around with such extreme violence that the individual limbs of her body could not be distinguished. When she had whirled around for a long time in this manner, it seemed as if she became weakened by the violence of the rolling and all her limbs grew quiet. Then there sounded between her throat and her breast a wondrous harmony that no mortal man could understand, nor could it be imitated by any artificial instrument. That song of hers had only the pliancy and the tones of music. But the words of the melody, so to speak—if they could

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[94]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum universale de apibus*, Liber I. Capitulum XI, pp. 42–43: "Hic coram nobis omnibus, quae astamus, tribus noctibus lucidissimi splendoris globus apparuit, & per maximum noctis spacium immobilis perdurauit."

[95]Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, Distinctio I. Capitulum XXXII, p. 39. On the thirteenth-century Dominican ideas about the resurrected body, see: Zachary Matus, "Resurrected Bodies and Roger Bacon's Elixir," *Ambix* 60:4 (2013): 323–340.

[96]Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum,* Distinctio IV. Capitulum XXXIX, p. 208: "Anima substantia spiritualis est, et in sui natura sphaerica, ad similitudinem globi lunaris."

[97]Kathi Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Death: Studies in Musical Iconology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970); Joscelyn Godwin, ed., *The Harmony of the Spheres: A Sourcebook of the Pythagorean Tradition in Music* (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 1993); and Andrew Hicks, *Composing the World: Harmony in Medieval Platonic Cosmos* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

even be called words—sounded together incomprehensibly. No sound or breath came out of her mouth or nose during this time, but a harmony of the angelic voice resounded only from between her breast and throat.[98]

This passage is the only place in the *Vita* where Thomas uses the term *musica* to describe the sound Christina made. By saying that her song (*cantus*) had "the pliancy and the tones of music (*musicae*)," he discreetly maintained the distinction between *cantus* and *musica*. In medieval usage while *cantus* or *cantilena* referred to a song, *musica* was more often reserved for the intellectual discipline studying mathematical laws of proportions and the type of harmony manifesting such laws and principles.[99] In accordance with this tradition of speculative music and astronomy, the sound Christina produced was said to be wordless and incomprehensible, breathless and non-human. The subtlety resides in that her *cantus* was closely approximate, but not equivalent, to the celestial *musica* from the planetary movements, just like her body transforming into a sphere but incompletely. Only in the next stage, when she "returned to herself" but was still in spiritual inebriation, did she begin to lead the nuns of St. Catherine of Sint-Truiden to sing *Te Deum laudamus*, an identifiable chant appropriate for a human choir.[100] This somewhat hierarchical notion of songs was made more clear in another passage when Christina attended the vigils of matins and sang a marvelous Latin song in the church. This song was considered less sweet and inferior to the incomprehensible harmony, *musica mundana* she voiced when rolling up into a sphere.[101]

   The other imagery of Christina as glorified dead is scattered throughout the text. She is repeatedly said to stand erect in high places, like a bird, and sing. Despite the folkloric flavor of such description, this might be a reference to the scholastic doctrine of the four endowments, or *dotes*, of the glorified body.[102] In Caesarius of Heisterbach's version of the doctrine, the elect after resurrection will assume a much better body endowed with the virtues of "subtlety, clarity, immortality, and agility" (*subtilitate, claritate, immortalitate, agilitate*), each corresponding to the four elements—air, fire, earth, and water—that constitute the human material body on earth.[103] Thomas of Cantimpré was especially keen on the supposed subtlety and levity of Christina's body.[104] The endowment of subtlety, *subtilitas*, often referred to the soul's power to penetrate physical surfaces without harm or effort. Thus, Christina was said to have jumped into the deep streams of the Meuse and re-emerged completely unscathed on the other side of the river like a "phantasm."[105] The endowment of levity, *levitas*, is even more frequently mentioned in the text. When Christina first returned to life at her funeral, her body ascended to the

[98]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, III. 35, p. 656; King and Newman, "The Life of Christina the Astonishing," 145–146.

[99]See for example: Joseph Dyer, "The Place of *Musica* in Medieval Classifications of Knowledge," in *The Journal of Musicology* 24/1 (Winter 2007): 3–71; Gabriela Ilnitchi, "*Musica mundana*, Aristotelian Natural Philosophy and Ptolemaic Astronomy," *Early Music History* 21 (2002): 37–74.

[100]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, III. 35, p. 656.

[101]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, IV. 39, p. 657.

[102]Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), e.g., 131–132.

[103]Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, Distinctio XII, Capitulum LVI, p. 359.

[104]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, II. 15, p. 653.

[105]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, I. 10, p. 652.

rafters of the church like a bird.[106] She fled the crowd "to the tops of towers or churches or any other very high spots."[107] She lived in the woods "in the manner of birds."[108]

It is a hauntingly beautiful image that Christina walked at vertiginous heights and stayed on the slenderest branches of trees like a sparrow.[109] While standing erect in high spots, she sang the psalms.[110] This convergence of the sparrow imagery and the concern for the afterlife resembles the themes in Bede's famous parable about the Northumbrian conversion, in which the ephemeral human life is compared with a sparrow flying into the hall during the winter cold and swiftly flying away.[111] As a biblical reference, the sparrow represents something insignificant and humble that nonetheless is not forgotten by God (Matthew 10:29; Luke 12:6) and finds shelter in his house (Psalm 83:4). In Venantius Fortunatus's Easter poem, the poet as "the humblest sparrow" sings "from love" (*minimus passer amore cano*) celebrating Christ's triumphal resurrection.[112]

It seems that Thomas of Cantimpré struggled with the two notions of the glorified body and tried, if not to reconcile, at least to juxtapose them. He was even meticulous enough to maintain the distinction between the two kinds of songs of Christina's two bodily states: the incomprehensible *musica* of celestial harmony versus the clearly recognizable psalmody. Caroline Walker Bynum has pointed out that medieval Christians, in conviction of the ultimate union of body and soul, were nevertheless torn between whether the posthumous soul before bodily resurrection should be entirely spiritual without corporeal particularities or individualized with earthly traits such as gender and class. She has pointed to a change of preference around the year 1200: in the early Middle Ages, soul was sometimes depicted as a bird or a spark without personal singularities, but by the thirteenth century souls appeared predominantly in highly individualized corporeal forms.[113] Thomas's portrayal of Christina was either a curious amalgam of both tendencies or an experimental transition from one to the other. Christina never completely lost her earthly body form but simultaneously adopted qualities of a celestial entity or a nimble bird. Thomas's depiction of her might have been crudely literal, but it was done with care and consistency.

The splendid beauty of Christina's songs fit perfectly with her eerie status as a revenant. Singing as a liminal practice separating the living from the dead seemed to be a widely held belief in this region around this time. Thomas told a tale about the miraculous chanting of the angels the midnight before the sudden death of a certain blessed Cistercian monk. The singing voice was at first mistaken to be from the choir nuns, perhaps indicating that the angelic voice was considered rather similar to women's voices

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[106]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, I. 5, p. 651.

[107]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, I. 9, p. 652.

[108]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, I. 9, p. 652.

[109]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, II. 15, p. 653.

[110]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, II. 16, p. 653.

[111]Bede, *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam Ecclesiasticam gentis Anglorum*, ed. Carolus Plummer (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), 112. In Daniel 4, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar is portrayed with animal features in his seven years of insanity. It has been argued that the bird imagery in the story can be associated with the dead and the underworld afflictions in ancient Near Eastern traditions. See: Christopher Hays, "Chirps from the Dust: The Afflictions of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:30 in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126/2 (2007): 305–325.

[112]For the Latin text and the English translation, see: Michael Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow: The Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 145–146.

[113]Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, esp. 294.

in medieval imagination.[114] In speculative music theory, the harmony of musical notes was compared with the union of the body and the soul.[115] A corollary of this idea was that a certain disharmony in voice was considered ominous, adumbrating the dislocation of the human soul from the body. In Thomas of Cantimpré's encyclopedia of natural scientific knowledge *Liber de natura rerum* that he compiled before writing Christina's *Vita*, he used the metaphor of musical harmony to describe the relationship between body and soul.[116] Moreover, he put this theoretical idea into the concrete narrative context of medical practices. In one of his *exempla* stories, once when Count Louis of Loon and his court were enjoying the incredibly sweet singing of a beautiful young girl, a court physician suddenly made a grim, Cassandran remark that she would soon die, which later proved to be true.[117] Thomas, the editor, directly addresses the reader to "take notice" (*et nota lector*) that the doctor was able to discern a certain subtle defect in the girl's singing voice (*vocis cantantis vix indagabili vitio*) to make this accurate prediction. These stories suggest, in contemporary imagination, an intimate connection between singing and death: a harmonious beautiful voice indicating a blissful death, a discordant voice somehow prefiguring an unexpected, unfortunate death.

It can be argued that the guiding principle of the selection of attributes of Christina's spirituality was her role as the purgatorial saint in the funerary ritual of the local society: the outlandish torments she inflicted upon her body were part of an extensive, vivid dramatization of the medieval beliefs about the afterlife, and her vocal talent was consistent with her function of guiding the human souls through the *rite de passage* to the other world. Our Dominican hagiographer was unstinting in his imagination and his acknowledgment of Christina's role as an angelic intermediary effortlessly gliding between here and hereafter. In fact, Christina's charismatic presence was so potent in the society that she might have sometimes usurped priestly prerogative to hear the last confessions of the dying: Count Louis of Loon called Christina to his deathbed, lay fully prostrate before her feet, and recited all his past sins to her. Christina alone heard his last confession and advised him how to dispose his worldly possessions. Thomas was obliged to add an awkward explanation that as a lay woman she was not allowed to grant absolution, but only to pray for the count's atonement.[118] This passage, nevertheless, tells us that Christina was at the center of local funerary piety as sometimes people's fear and hope were directed at her rather than the priest.

III. Conclusion

This article has focused on two of the most important hagiographical texts about religious women from the thirteenth-century Diocese of Liège and demonstrated that behind the plethora of accounts about women's songs lurked a great concern for death and the afterlife. Mary and Christina were by no means exceptional or rare in the diocese. A remarkable proportion of religious people from this region are reported in their biographies as either

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[114]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum universale de apibus*, Liber II. Capitulum XL, p. 406.

[115]Hicks, *Composing the World*, 140–150.

[116]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, ed. Helmut Boese (Berlin: Gruyter, 1973), 91–92: "Corpus autem quod prius integrum tanquam organum contemperatum et dispositum, ut melos musicum in se concineret et tractum resonaret, nunc confractum et inutile e regione iacet." Andrew Hicks has pointed out this passage is a corrupt version of a passage taken from the Cistercian Isaac of Stella's treatise *Epistola de anima* (c. 1160). See: Hicks, *Composing the World*, 142, no. 93.

[117]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum universale de apibus*, Liber II. Capitulum XLIII, pp. 418–419.

[118]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Christinae Mirabilis Virginis*, IV. 44, p. 657.

possessing exceptional vocal talents or being sensitive to musical stimulation. Their monastic or clerical hagiographers utilized all intellectual sources at their disposal lavishing women's singing with ornate biblical imageries and liturgical allusions and bestowing a sense of theatricality as well as dignity to their performance. Lutgard, the nun who received Pope Innocent III's petition for intercession as mentioned above, sang wondrously during liturgical service where the paschal lamb was seen sucking melodies out of her mouth.[119] In the case of the recluse Juliana of Mont-Cornillon (d. 1258), who was known for her patronage in the composition and establishment of the Feast of Corpus Christi, she attended multiple liturgical services before her death, fervently listening to communal singing, and sang "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in her heart" (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).[120] The deathbed singing of the Cistercian Alice of Schaerbeek (d. 1250) was both splendid and grotesque, a horrid monstrosity to behold but mellifluous to hear: after years of agonizing leprosy, the woman's skin was wounded and dried like the bark of a tree, her legs like excoriated calf, oozing flesh and pus. Without a good part on her body and both eyes blind due to the disease, she had only her tongue; and "without break, as long as she could, she sang praises to God."[121] After her death, she was seen joining the choir of the Cherubim and the Seraphim, as was so commonly said about the Liégeois saints in their *Vitae*.[122] And like them, her primary work for her community was to pray for the purgation of sins of all the living and the mitigation of purgatorial punishment for all the dead.[123]

This article has argued that hagiographers were strenuous in their efforts to represent women's singing as ritual performance reflective of mainstream beliefs and shared practices in their communities. The overriding purpose of such hagiographical enterprise was to promote religious women as effective intercessors for the living and the dead in their spiritual networks. To offer intercessory prayers is certainly one of the most important and conventional functions of Christian saints; in the thirteen-century Low Countries, such saintly efficacy was for the first time allocated to women without high-aristocratic background or established institutional positions who commanded awe and devotion solely for the perceived potency of their way of life. The singing women of Liège impressed their hagiographers and evoked their imagination; women's angelic songs would bring to their followers a great sense of hope beyond death in "the palace of the eternal kingdom. . .where there is life without death, day without night, truth without falsehood, joy without sadness, security without fear, rest without labour, eternity without end."[124]

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[119]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita S. Lutgardis*, 194.

[120]Jean-Pierre Delville, ed., *Fête-dieu (1246-1996) 2. Vie de Sainte Julienne de Cornillon* (Louvain-la-neuve: Institut d'Études Médiévales de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, 1999), 248. For the history of the origin of the Feast in Liège, see: Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 164–212; Barbara Walters, Vincent Corrigan, and Peter Ricketts, *The Feast of Corpus Christi* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); Anneke Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, trans. Myra Heerspink Scholz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 78–117. See also: Catherine Saucier, "Sacrament and Sacrifice: Conflating Corpus Christi and Martyrdom in Medieval Liège," *Speculum* 87.3 (July 2012): 682–723.

[121]*Vita B. Aleidis Scharembecanae*, ed. Godfrey Henschen, in *Acta Sanctorum*, 11 June (Paris, 1867), 476.

[122]*Vita B. Aleidis Scharembecanae*, 477.

[123]*Vita B. Aleidis Scharembecanae*, 475.

[124]Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 163; King, "The Life of Mary of Oignies," 127.