Leeds Studies in English

New Series XLIX

© *Leeds Studies in English* 2018
School of English
University of Leeds
Leeds, England

ISSN 0075-8566

Leeds Studies in English

New Series XLIX

2018

Edited by

Alaric Hall

Leeds Studies in English

<www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>
School of English
University of Leeds
2018

Wise Aggressors and Steadfast Victims: The Shift in Christian Feminine Ideals from Old to Middle English Religious Poetry

Judith Kaup

Introduction

In this essay I explore the shift in the depiction of ideal Christian feminine virtues which takes place in the transition from Old to Middle English religious poetry. A brief analysis of the Old English poems *Judith*, *Elene*, and *Juliana* illustrates emerging differences in the treatment of the topics of group identity, the common good, and the relationship between worldly and spiritual power.[1] Further examination of these topics with regard to the virgin martyr legends that gained popularity in the Middle English period reveals a trend in the depiction of saintly women. The politically influential and temporally powerful female saints of the heroic tradition are superseded by equally strong but unworldly holy women. I propose that this shift is connected to a broader change in ideals of Christian living, which first emerged in the Benedictine reform movement and was further enhanced in the Gregorian reform.

Judith, *Elene* and *Juliana* are representative of two types of Christian narratives, one presenting a world where natural kin and kin in faith are identical, and where power and worldly authority reside with this kin-group; the other a situation where the only possibility to achieve Christian perfection lies outside all worldly spheres and ties. While the first type shows close affinity to the heroic tradition and represents pre-reform ideals, the latter strictly distinguishes religious and secular ideals in accordance with the ideology of the reform movement. Though the dating of all three poems is notoriously difficult, it is likely that the Cynewulfian poems *Elene* and *Juliana* were composed some time between 750 and 850, while *Judith* is probably of a slightly later date.[2] Therefore, I do not intend to establish a strictly linear development from one type of Christian narrative to the other within the Old English period. Instead, it seems prudent to present the differences between these texts as examples of

[1] Unless otherwise stated, quotations of Old English poetry are from *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition*, ed. by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, 6 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–53): *Juliana*, *ASPR*, III, 113–33; *Elene*, *ASPR*, II, 67–102. *Judith*, ed. by Mark Griffith (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1997).

[2] R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Metre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p. 368, reaches the conclusion that Cynewulf must have composed between 750 and 850. *Judith*, ed. by Griffith, pp. 44-47, suggests a late ninth- to early tenth-century date for *Judith*.

synchronic cultural variation which nevertheless herald a trend in religious poetry. This trend later becomes predominant and manifest in the rising popularity of narratives of the virgin martyr type in late eleventh- and early twelfth-century England.

Unlike most scholarship on the role of women in the religious life of Anglo-Saxon and Norman England, my essay sets out from an analysis of the crucial elements of religious narrative which shed light on underlying beliefs and concepts of Christian perfection. Though my focus is on female Christian ideals, observations regarding the evaluation of worldly power, kinship ties, and virginity as a way of distancing oneself from the world, show trends in religious observance that hold true for both men and women. The changing ideals of religious life are reflected in the literary presentations of female Christian virtues and the portrayal of exemplary, saintly Christian women. This change is closely related to a wider tendency to strictly differentiate between institutionalised religious living and religious devotion within a secular setting, which started with the Benedictine reform in the late tenth century and gained momentum after the Gregorian reform in the late eleventh century. I start with a few observations on the development of women's religious lives in Anglo-Saxon England, pointing out their relevance for my discussion of *Judith*, *Juliana* and *Elene*. After that I close with a glance at the virgin martyr tales and suggest reasons for the genre's rise in popularity in the Early Middle English period.

Developments in the Religious Life of Women in Anglo-Saxon England

In the Anglo-Saxon period, different models of religious life for women coexisted. However, Foot observes how a clear distinction was drawn between cloistered religious and those living in the world after the monastic revolution of Edgar's reign.[3] Vernacular texts highlight this distinction by using different terms for cloistered women (*mynecena*) on the one hand, and on the other vowesses (*nunnan*) who remained in the secular sphere but devoted their lives to spiritual endeavours.[4] The desire to clearly differentiate between these categories of religious life is in line with the reformers' intention to highlight the superiority of the monastic life. They wanted to make clear whether a woman belongs to the more prestigious category of *mynecena* or not. The concept of the cloistered woman is 'an invention of tenth-century circumstances, arising from the novel imposition of Benedictine ideals, notably [...] the separation and claustration of women'.[5] Cubitt also stresses the far-reaching implications of the Benedictine reform movement and proposes that Ælfric's writings attempted to impose monastic standards upon the whole of society.[6] If monastic standards were supposed to serve as a model even for the laity, it is clear that anyone aspiring to religious perfection would necessarily have to do so in a monastic setting. This devaluation of alternative Christian lifestyles is at odds with heroic Christian role models as presented in *Judith* and *Elene.* Cubitt also suggests that 'the reformers were less interested in promoting women's religious life than in controlling it'. Such a climate would obviously favour cloistered female devotion, as it ensures regulation and control over devout women. Strong, powerful, independent and, most importantly, worldly women as role models would counteract this purpose. Furthermore, the

[3] Sarah Foot, *Veiled Women*, 2 vols (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), I, 101.
[4] Foot, *Veiled Women*, I, 200.
[5] Foot, *Veiled Women*, I, 203.
[6] Catherine Cubitt, 'Virginity and Misogyny in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England', *Gender and History*, 12 (2000), 1-32 (p. 2).

idea of spiritual kindred, which is so important in *Juliana*, is also propagated by Ælfric. It is closely connected to the ideology of virginity, which naturally inhibits worldly kinship ties.[7] A virgin martyr, disconnected from her natural family and opposed to forming worldly ties by marriage, is of course a perfect representation of these ideals. Virginity gains additional value in the discourse of the Benedictine reform. Though always the height of Christian perfection and deserving the hundred-fold heavenly reward, it now also signifies the monastic life. The separation of the virgin from all things worldly, including natural kinship ties, becomes at least as important as her bodily purity. This new use and interpretation of virginity in the reform context clearly differs from the pre-reform situation, when the divide between secular and monastic devotion was not as deep. A monastic, possibly virginal, life was only one of various ways to lead an exemplary Christian life. Luecke points out that neither Bede nor Aldhelm spoke derogatively of nuns who were not virgins.[8] Although Aldhelm's work on virginity was to be very influential in the Benedictine reform[9] and probably used to propagate the aforementioned Benedictine ideal of virginal female religious in a regulated, cloistered setting, Luecke observes how Aldhelm, though valuing virginity higher than chastity in principle, still stresses that a devout chaste nun may actually achieve greater holiness than her proud virginal sister.[10] When Aldhelm addresses the nuns of Barking as his equals in religious devotion in his preface to the prose *De Virginitate* and sees them as fellow fighters in the struggle for the evangelisation of England, this suggests that an active involvement of the nuns in affairs outside their convent was welcomed in the seventh century.[11] Total disentanglement from all worldly matters was not yet the ideal, even for a virgin.

Let us keep the developments briefly sketched here in mind, and turn to the analysis of the three Old English poems and determine their relationship to the reform movements.

Judith, Juliana, and Elene — Female Saints Grounded in the Heroic Tradition

Here, I analyse the poems with a view to their evaluation of power, kinship, and violence. The treatment of these crucial topics reveals the poems' relationships to ideals of Christian living, showing clearly whether Christian perfection can be achieved in a secular setting or depends on total renouncement of all worldly ties and values.

Judith is portrayed as wise, divinely chosen, and a responsible leader of the Hebrews. The repeated emphasis on her wisdom and good counsel make her a paragon of Anglo-Saxon feminine virtues.[12] This, together with her special connection to the divine and the fact that her

[7] Cubitt, 'Virginity and Misogyny', p. 18.

[8] Janemarie Luecke, 'The Unique Experience of Anglo-Saxon Nuns', in *Medieval Religious Women. Volume 2: Peaceweavers*, ed. by Lillian Thomas Shank and John A. Nichols (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987), pp. 55–65 (p. 56).

[9] Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the Benedictine Reform*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 25 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 184, shows the immense influence of Aldhelm, particularly of his *De Virginitate*, on members of the Benedictine reform movement.

[10] Luecke, 'Unique Experience', p. 61.

[11] Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 109; Sarah Foot, '*Flores ecclesiae*: Women in Early Anglo-Saxon Monasticism', in *Female 'Vita Religiosa' between Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages: Structures, Developments and Spatial Contexts*, ed. by Gert Melville and Anne Müller, Vita regularis. Abhandlungen, 47 (Zürich: Lit, 2011), pp. 173–86 (p. 173).

[12] Cf. the ideal as described in *Maxims I*, ASPR, III, 156–62, ll. 84b–92b: 'ond wif geþeon leof mid hyre

actions always aim at the common good of her people,[13] makes her a representative of a 'hero of the tribe', that is a 'figure who is marked by extraordinary power and therefore functions as a mediator between the categories of human and divine'.[14] The aspect of usefulness for and inclusion in one's society which is expressed in the categories 'hero of the tribe' and 'hero outside the tribe' is also a crucial distinctive feature of the protagonists in the religious poetry surveyed here. Judith, although exceptional in her unfaltering trust and belief in God and the resulting courage and determination, is firmly situated within the social network of her people. Her killing of Holofernes is an act of salvation on behalf of all the Bethulians, and her deed not only heralds but brings about the Hebrews' victory over the Assyrians. Her success is proof that God cares for his people, as is made visible by the token of Holofernes' head. Bourquin sees Judith's actions as an example of a heroic chain structure, where the hero serves to catalyse the heroic potential of her/his community. As the hero heroises others, they can in turn heroise yet more people, resulting in a heroic chain which perpetuates the original courage of the hero.[15] However, the Bethulians are already called *sigefolc* (l. 152a) immediately after Judith's return and before they actually achieve victory on the battlefield, which makes the exemplary function of Judith's deed secondary. Furthermore, Judith addresses the men as *sigerofe hæleð* (l. 177b). While this could be interpreted as simple encouragement, she also explains (ll. 195b-198a) that:

> Fynd syndon eowere,
> gedemed to deaðe ond ge dom agon,
> tir æt tohtan, swa eow getacned hafað
> mihtig dryhten þurh mine hand.
>
> ([The] enemies are yours, condemned to death, and you shall have fame, glory in battle, as has shown you [the] mighty lord through my hand.)

leodum, leohtmod wesan, rune healdan, rumheort beon meorum ond maþmum, meodorædenne for gesiðmægen symle æghwær eodor æþelinga ærest gegretan, forman fulle to frean hond ricene geræcan, ond him ræd witan boldagendum þæm ætsomne' ('and a woman shall thrive beloved amongst her people, be light-hearted, keep counsel, be generous with horses and treasures, at the mead-drinking always and everywhere in front of the warrior-band first greet the protector of nobles, put the first cup in the lord's hand, and know counsel for the both of them, the hall-rulers'). Note that the importance of counsel is mentioned twice. See also Elaine Tuttle Hansen, 'Women in Old English Poetry Reconsidered', *Michigan Academician*, 9 (1976), 109–17 (pp. 111–12) for women's role as counsellors. Cf. Fred C. Robinson, 'The Prescient Woman in Old English Literature', in *The Tomb of Beowulf and Other Essays on Old English*, ed. by Fred C. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 155–63 (pp. 157 on female counsel and 160 on Judith's depiction as typical Germanic wise woman).

13 Hansen, 'Women in Old English Poetry', p. 111, observes that 'the queen's value is reflected in her noble conduct towards others' and highlights the importance of women for the stabilisation of society.

14 Joseph F. Nagy, 'Beowulf and Fergus: Heroes of Their Tribes?', in *Connections Between Old English and Medieval Celtic Literature*, ed. by Patrick Ford and Karen G. Borst, Old English Colloquium Series, 2 (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), pp. 31–44 (p. 34). The term was originally coined by Marie-Louise Sjoestedt, *Dieux et Héros des Celts* (Paris: Leroux, 1940), pp. 79–121, and taken up by Nagy in his study of the Old English hero Beowulf and the early Irish hero Fergus.

15 Guy Bourquin, 'The Lexis and Deixis of the Hero in Old English Poetry', in *Heroes and Heroines in Medieval English Literature*, ed. by Leo Carruthers (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 1–18 (p. 10), explains the concept of the heroic chain: 'the Dobest of the genuine hero(ine) is his/her heroizing of fellow creatures (*Judith* 150–58, 171–79, 195–98): such heroizing takes heroism one step onwards beyond simply acting heroically for the sake of others (the heroic Dowel). Heroizing one's neighbours (heroic Dobest) means prodding them, through one's own example, to take their fate into their own hands, avail themselves of their own heroic aptitudes and become in their turn exemplary to still others. That the heroic chain is a circular one becomes still clearer at the end of the poem when the semiotic process works backwards: the warriors bring a complementary token back to Judith who in her turn attributes the glory of everything to God's own glory (332–46)'.

The statement clearly does not refer to a possibility or a likely event but is asserting that victory is already gained. While both *sigefolc* and *sigerofe* could be seen simply as conventional terms, the poet's careful and conscious use of epithets and terms throughout the poem suggests the relevance of his choice here as well. The military action is a fulfilment of the logic set in train by Judith's deed, not an imitation of her example. Judith's example does not call for courageous imitation — her deed has already demonstrated God's support for his people, and the victory on the battlefield has to be claimed, not won, by the Bethulians.

While Irving also observes the operation of a double structure (the exemplary deed of a hero leads to the subsequent following of his heroic example) in Old English, Middle High German and medieval Spanish literature,[16] he stresses how the 'continuity and transmission of heroic values'[17] is thematised in the poems he studies. In *Judith* the virtue transmitted by the heroine's deed is faith rather than heroic courage, as her people, once they have regained faith in God, can be certain of victory. Notwithstanding Judith's exemplary courage, the more important revelation for the Bethulians is God's unfaltering support of His people. Judith's announcement that God is gracious to them (l. 154) already results in an outburst of ecstatic joy before she even reveals Holofernes' head and shows the token of her heroic deed. It was their trust in God and subsequently in their own abilities that needed to be renewed. In the poem's effect on its audience, however, the exemplary function is paramount: the text demonstrates that a people that trusts in God's help will inevitably achieve victory. The point is brought home with utmost effectiveness by the double structure of the narrative (Judith kills Holofernes — the Bethulians kill the Assyrians), which shows that once firm trust in God's help is established, victory is already achieved. The message to the audience is an exhortation to have true faith in God. True faith can lead to heroic courage in battle, but the moral of the poem is also applicable to other spheres in life. Faith enables the believer to cope with the struggles of this world.

The absolute superiority of God's followers over the infidel is also apparent in the direction of violence in the poem. Contrary to the expectations raised by the initial depiction, which presents Holofernes and his men as aggressors, they are never given a chance to make good their threat against the Bethulians. Violence is a positive force, used to destroy God's enemies. Judith and her people wield the power to control the direction of violence. Violence thus features in the sense of the Old English noun *geweald* or the cognate German term *Gewalt*, which can express the power to direct or control action. This aspect is also present in the poem in the verb *gewealdan*, which is used to describe Judith's handling of Holofernes immediately before the fatal blows.[18] In this scene the power relations of the poem seem to be reversed: Judith, the intended victim, does with the former aggressor Holofernes as she pleases. He is in her power, an expression which uses *geweald~Gewalt* in both German and Old English.[19]

[16] Edward B. Irving, Jr., 'Heroic Role-Models: Beowulf and Others', in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. by Helen Damico and A. Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 347–72.

[17] Irving, 'Heroic Role Models', p. 370.

[18] Cf. Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1898), s. v. *geweald*: 'power, strength, might, efficacy'. Friedrich Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache,* 24th edn, rev. by Elmar Seebold (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), explains German *Gewalt* as an abstract verbal noun of the verb *walten*, a cognate of OE *wealdan*, going back to a Common Germanic root *wal-* with the meaning 'to be strong, to rule'.

[19] Cf. *Elene*, ll. 610a–11a ('he wæs on þære cwene gewealdum'; 'he was in the power of the queen') and the German idiom *jemanden in der Gewalt haben* ('to have someone in one's power').

In fact, it is not a reversal but an epiphany of the power balance which was in operation all along. God is the 'highest judge', the supreme ruler, whose people can only be harmed by their own inadequacy, that is through a lack of belief and trust. To belong to God's people results in worldly as well as spiritual power and superiority. In *Judith*, group identity is not a complicated issue: the right group with respect to faith and power matches with Judith's kin group, the Hebrews.

Power also resides with the faithful in Cynewulf's *Elene*. The connection of worldly power and Christian faith is already established in the introductory sequence, which deals with the Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity. Faced with a large army of Huns, who far outnumber his troops, Constantine receives a vision of the cross, telling him to carry this 'sigores tacen' (l. 85a, 'sign of victory') into battle.[20] He follows this advice, whereupon the Roman troops achieve a miraculous victory. After learning about the Christian faith, the Emperor entrusts his mother Elene with leading a mission to the Holy Land to discover the cross of Christ. The main part of the poem is concerned with Elene's dealings with the Jew Judas, who at first stubbornly denies his knowledge of the whereabouts of the cross and has to be forced into co-operation. Once forcibly persuaded he is readily converted and becomes a fervent Christian. Elene names him Cyriacus and has him made bishop of Jerusalem. Judas' conversion is a central theme of the poem, and it has been suggested that *Elene* should really be renamed.[21] Schrader is convinced that Elene 'is not the central figure in the poem, despite its customary title. The actual hero is Judas Cyriacus, and the poem is about him in the way *Juliana* is about Juliana'.[22] In addition, Regan observes that 'Judas is clearly the poem's most complex character, and for modern readers nourished on psychological subtlety in characterisation he is probably the most attractive'.[23] Though true to an extent, such evaluations overlook Elene's essential importance as the initiator of most of the narrative's actions and the driving force behind Judas' conversion. However interesting Judas may be, he only exemplifies Elene's power to achieve her goals — without her determined and forceful treatment of him, he would not have accepted Christianity. Elene's role is indispensable and in line with her presentation as a type of *Ecclesia.*[24] Furthermore, her depiction as a strong, determined and authoritative figure underlines her regal character. The fact that she is a woman does not play an important role in the narrative, though it has some relevance for its typological reading, as women were viewed as best suited to being a type of the church. Elene's mission, which links two peoples across the sea, is reminiscent of the important role

[20] Note how the sign of Christ's spiritual victory becomes a sign of worldly, military victory. The easy conflation of both spheres, the spiritual and the worldly, is typical for the poem and others of its type.

[21] Rosemary Woolf, 'Saints' Lives', in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. by Eric G. Stanley (London: Nelson, 1966), pp. 37–66 (p. 46). Jackson J. Campbell, 'Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations', in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. by Robert E. Bjork (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 229–50 (p. 229) states that 'it has been recognized by a number of people for a number of years that this arbitrary yet persistent title [i.e. *Elene*] is a grave misnomer. After absorbing the full impact of all 1300-odd lines of the poem, we are conscious that it is not a poem about Queen Elene at all, however important she may be as a part of the total structure. It is hoped that its next editor will have the courage to call it the *Invention of the Cross*, or something more appropriate'.

[22] Richard J. Schrader, *God's Handiwork: Images of Women in Early Germanic Literature* (London: Greenwood, 1983), p. 18.

[23] Catherine A. Regan, 'Evangelicism as the Informing Principle of Cynewulf's *Elene*', in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. by Robert E. Bjork (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 251–80 (p. 257) [first publ. *Traditio*, 29 (1973), 27–52].

[24] Stacy S. Klein, 'Reading Queenship in Cynewulf's *Elene*', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 33 (2003), 47–89 (p. 49) mentions Elene's interpretation as a type of *Ecclesia* as the predominant critical reading. See also pp. 57 and 61.

of women in creating family bonds among different kin groups. Her description is typical of Old English queens and noblewomen. Her external appearance is not mentioned beyond ornamental attributes, which serve to highlight her regal status and by implication represent the power of her people and the orderly state of her society.[25] Elene is, like Judith, a leading figure and also holds a firmly established position within her society. She is Constantine's mother ('his modor', l. 214b), the 'kinswoman of the emperor' (l. 330b and l. 997a, 'caseres mæg'). Some critics have taken the stress on her kinship with Constantine and the frequent reference to her son in the poem as an attempt to diminish her importance, as it would portray her as a surrogate for Constantine.[26] However, Klein observes that it is part of a more general tendency of Cynewulf's to describe Elene as embedded within a firm network of social relations: 'with her son frequently in her thoughts, her own men always around her, and her regular correspondence with the imperial court, Elene is hardly ever alone or lacking in company'.[27] Far from diminishing her role, Cynewulf thus shows Elene to be in accord with Anglo-Saxon ideals, endowed with qualities desirable in an Anglo-Saxon queen. Klein points out that Cynewulf's preference for naming his female protagonist by the generic terms *cwen* or *hlæfdige* as opposed to the personal name *Elene* (which is most often used in the source) also suggests an interest in transforming Elene from a particular queen into a more generic exemplar of queenship, an image of female royalty whom Anglo-Saxon readers might view not simply as a phenomenon of a bygone Roman past but as a figure who might be found within their own Germanic world.[28]

This technique heightens the exemplary effect of the narrative, as it reduces the distance of the Anglo-Saxon audience from the historical plot. Elene is a good queen, always surrounded by and mindful of her kin and people. What is more, all her actions are driven by a concern for the greater good of her community, which by extension includes all Christians.[29] Terms underscoring her regal authority predominate: she is the *cwen* ('queen'),[30] *guðcwen* ('battle-queen'),[31] *sigecwen* ('victory-queen')[32] and *þeodcwen* ('queen of the people').[33] Her authority clearly extends to sovereign power even in Jerusalem, where her orders are obeyed immediately upon her arrival.

Heht ða gebeodan burgsittendum
þam snoterestum side ond wide
geond Iudeas, gumena gehwylcum

[25] I have discussed how Old English poetry uses the figure of the gold-adorned woman to represent intact social order and a thriving community in an as yet unpublished article, 'The Gold-Adorned Woman as a Symbol of Social Order'.

[26] Earl R. Anderson, 'Cynewulf's *Elene*: Manuscript Divisions and Structural Symmetry', *Modern Philology*, 72 (1974), 111–22 (p. 118); Gordon E. Whatley, 'The Figure of Constantine the Great', *Traditio*, 36 (1981), 161–202 (pp. 175–77).

[27] Klein, 'Reading Queenship', p. 69.

[28] Klein, 'Reading Queenship', p. 56.

[29] Campbell, 'Multiple Revelations', pp. 234–35, interprets her introduction in terms of her relationship to Constantine, and the stress on her queenship and absolute dedication to her mission as elements which enhance the 'feeling […] that this "queen of Christians" is acting not for her own benefit or from personal motives but as an agent of divine power'.

[30] Lines 275b, 324a, 378b, 384b, 411b, 416b, 551b, 558b, 587b, 605a, 610b, 662a, 715b, 848b, 979b, 1017a, 1068a, 1129a, 1135a, 1151b, 1169a, 1204b.

[31] Lines 254a, 331a.

[32] Lines 260a, 997a.

[33] Line 1155b.

meðelhegende, on gemot cuman
þa ðe deoplicost dryhtnes geryno
þurh rihte æ reccan cuðon.
Ða wæs gesamnod of sidwegum
mægum unlytel, þa ðe Moyses æ
reccan cuðon.

(Then she ordered the citizens to be bidden, the wisest far and wide throughout Judea, each one of the men, to be assembled, to come to a council, who most deeply knew the mysteries of the Lord by rightly interpreting the scriptures.)[34]

The way she is described when she awaits the assembly of wise men highlights all the essential features displaying her authority:

þrungon þa on þreate þær on þrymme bad
in cynestole caseres mæg,
geatolic guðcwen golde gehyrsted.

(Then they thronged in a band where in power and authority on a throne the kinswoman of the emperor awaited them, the stately battle-queen, adorned with gold.)[35]

The passage unites regal attire, aspects of kinship, and the control of power and violence implicit in the term 'battle-queen' to present Elene as an embodiment of the perfect ruler. Epithets accentuating her power and regal appearance abound,[36] and there are additional descriptive references to her powerful status: she is 'sio rice cwen bald in burgum' (ll. 411b-412a, 'the powerful queen, ruling in cities'); 'sio þær hæleðum scead' (ll. 709b-710a, 'she ruled there over warriors'); and Judas is 'on þære cwene gewealdum' (ll. 610b, 'in the queen's power'). In addition, her actions also emphasise her authoritative position: she orders,[37] speaks[38] and teaches.[39] She also dispenses treasures to her 'new' people, thus cementing the bond between ruler and retainer.[40] Her ensuing exhortation to worship the true God shows how the act of treasure-giving, a typical feature of heroic society, is transferred to a Christian context. Here, the receiving of treasure calls for religious observance, not brave deeds of war. Her depiction as regal and community-minded is thus also in keeping with a typological reading. It is fitting that Elene as a type of *Ecclesia* should demand religious duties in exchange for the treasures. All her actions are directed at the furthering of the Christian faith, increasing her community and shielding it against the threats of the opposing forces. Her mission to discover the true cross of Christ is an act designed for the common good of all Christians, and the bit she has fashioned for her son's horse in accordance with Judas Cyriacus' advice is also an instrument furthering the forces of the righteous in their battle against evil.[41]

Elene uses violence, in the aforementioned sense of wielding her power to direct action, to achieve her aims when she orders the Jews to answer her questions. She has the authority to

[34] Lines 276a–84a.
[35] Lines 229a–331b.
[36] For example *ðære æðelan* (l. 545a, 'the noble one'); *tireeadig cwen* (l. 605a, 'glorious queen'); *arwyðan cwen* (ll. 1128b–29a, 'venerable queen'); *seo æðele* (l. 1130b, 'the noble one'); *cwen seleste* (l. 1169a, 'best queen').
[37] For example lines 276a, 278b, 412b.
[38] Examples being lines 285a, 287b, 332a–b, 403a–6a, 642a–b, 662a–b, 669a, 685a–b.
[39] For instance l. 1205a.
[40] Lines 1217b–26a.
[41] Lines 1173b–86a; ll. 1196a–1200b.

criticise their failure to accept the Messiah,[42] and she causes them confusion and distress by her anger and insistence on discovering the hiding place of the cross. The number of wise men thought to be competent to answer the queen's question dwindles, and the fear and confusion of the Jews grow until they finally hand over Judas as the most knowledgeable member of their community. Woolf sees it as a weakness of the narrative that Elene's treatment of Judas recalls the typical scenery of a passion and suggests that Judas' 'resistance, which is structurally that of a martyr, may arouse an unintended sympathy'.[43]

Regan questions Woolf's assumption that the sympathy the audience may feel for Judas is unintended, and offers a plausible reason for the parallels to a passion:

> in the traditional passion, the punishment meted out to the prisoner by the ruler is the prisoner's means of gaining sainthood. The same relationship between ruler and prisoner exists in the poem. Judas is a potential saint and Elene's punishment is the means by which he comes to acknowledge the Cross and thereby achieve sanctity.[44]

I believe the audience's possible sympathy with Judas is indeed intended and a vital element in furthering the didactic purpose of the poem, as he serves as a positive role model. His conflict exemplifies problems of group identity, which become especially visible in what I would define as a phase of transition from the kinship bonds constituting a heroic society to the spiritual bond prevalent in religious communities. Unlike in *Judith*, where these commitments are not in conflict, *Elene* addresses this problem, showing an awareness of possible difficulties posed by the concept of spiritual kinship. Judas' loyalty to his people — 'he fears that if the truth were known, the lineage (*æðelu*, 433) and religion of Israel would no longer rule the world'[45] — conflicts with his knowledge of the truth, which makes him a potential member of the spiritual community of Christians. Whereas in *Judith* the identity of the kinship group and the religious community overlap — the Hebrews are God's people and the Assyrians are God's enemies — *Elene* thematises the possibility that one has to forsake one's kin group in order to become a member of the — superior — spiritual community of Christians.[46]

In *Elene*, the Christian community is portrayed as superior in worldly as well as spiritual matters. All instances of violence in the poem, including the initial battle of Constantine against the Huns, yield positive results and promote the advancement of the Christian faith. As in *Judith*, violence is exclusively carried out against the unbelievers. A marked difference between the two texts is the effect violent action has on those afflicted: in *Elene*, the unbelievers are given a second chance, because they have the option to discover and embrace the true faith and thus become part of the community of Christians. The aim of violence is not the destruction but the conversion of the opposing party.[47] While they can initially belong to the 'right' or the 'wrong' group, just as in *Judith*, group identity in *Elene* is flexible, as it is

[42] Lines 288a–312b.

[43] Woolf, 'Saints' Lives', pp. 46–47.

[44] Regan, 'Evangelicism', pp. 258–59.

[45] Richard J. Schrader, *Old English Poetry and the Genealogy of Events*, Medieval Texts and Studies, 12 (East Lansing, Michigan: Colleagues Press, 1993), p. 45.

[46] We will see shortly how the prevalent importance of spiritual kinship in the family of Christ is already firmly established in *Juliana*, where the saint's loyalty towards her father or the obligations of the society she lives in are irrelevant when confronted with the demands of her identity as a Christian.

[47] Klein, 'Reading Queenship', p. 62, points out that 'the particular tactics that Elene uses to convert the Jews — the verbal denigration of their community and intellectual traditions, and the actual physical torture of their leader, Judas — is also implacably anchored in a sentiment that was widespread throughout Anglo-Saxon England: that violence was both a precondition for and an intrinsic part of strengthening and extending Christian *imperium*'.

defined solely by acceptance or rejection of the Christian faith. This aspect is highlighted by using the term *þeodcwen* (l. 1155b, 'queen of the people') for Elene towards the end of the poem, when at least a substantial number of Jews have been converted. It is employed in the passage which relates how Elene reflects upon the best use for the newly discovered nails of the cross:

> þeodcwen ongan
> þurh gastes gife georne secan
> nearwe geneahhe, to hwan hio þa næglas selost
> ond deorlicost gedon meahte, dugoðum to hroðer,
> hwæt þæs wære dryhtnes willa.
>
> (The queen of the people by the grace of the spirit eagerly pondered exactly to what purpose she could best and most worthily put the nails, for the good of the people, [and] what would be God's will with regard to that.)[48]

While the term *þeodcwen* may not necessarily carry strong associations with 'people' and *þeod* can also be a simple intensifier, I suggest it is used purposefully here. As the scene stresses Elene's concern with the common good of her people, it seems fitting to call her the 'people's queen'. In addition, the frequent use of the term 'the people' with reference to the converted Jews in the last passage of the poem also suggests a conscious employment of *þeod* to define the newly forged spiritual kin of believers. Elene's people are defined in accordance with their religious beliefs. They are not an ethnically defined group but include everyone who belongs to the community of the faithful. Thus, all Christians belong to Elene's people, which is true both on a historical and a tropological level, concurrently reflecting her roles as worldly queen and type of *Ecclesia*.

Like *Judith*, *Elene* thematises group identity and leadership. However, whereas good and bad leadership are exemplified in *Judith* by Judith and Holofernes respectively, *Elene* features only positive leading figures: the Christian queen who embodies an ideal Anglo-Saxon noblewoman and her son, the willingly converted Emperor Constantine. The opposing side is depicted as lacking any authoritative leader at all. Bjork observes 'a confusion or lack of focus in the *dryht* of hell'[49] as a typical feature in its description in Old English verse saints' lives. This concept is employed to some extent in the description of both the Huns and the Jews. The king of the Huns remains a shadowy figure in the background who lacks distinctive features.[50] The Jews are portrayed as a rather disorganised group without a distinguishable leader. Only after Judas' conversion, when he takes on a leading role as bishop Cyriacus, is order achieved.[51] The chaotic state of a pre-conversion society is replaced by the functional structures of the Christian community. The fault of the Jews is their stubborn refusal to join what they should recognise as the right group. This is made clear by the example of Judas, who needs Elene's aggressive conversion approach to accept what he has known to be the truth all along.

[48] Lines 1155b–59b.

[49] Robert E. Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 127.

[50] Lines 32b, 49b.

[51] The distribution of order and disorder is also visible in the speech patterns of the respective parties. Carol Braun Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1995), p. 105, points out how 'the contrast between Judas's and the devil's speech pattern' in the confrontation between Judas and the devil in ll. 902a–52a 'is the contrast between the disorder of evil and the clarity of good'.

It is worth noting that all the actions in *Elene* are significant in matters of group identity, group formation and the achievement of a common good. Bourquin recognises a heroic chain structure in *Elene* and specifies that each of Constantine, Elene and Cyriacus 'is made to develop his own capabilities to the full but is also recaptured at a higher level in a communal process where each hero is generated by some other and generates the next in succession'.[52] Only as a functional member or leader of a group can the individual Christian in the poem develop his or her full potential. Constantine achieves victory for his army under the sign of the cross and then strives to help the community of Christians by sending Elene on a mission to discover the true cross. Elene is the protagonist in which responsibility for kin group and Christian community merge. Though at first glance Judas' conversion seems to be an individual act, it is really an event serving the common good. Elene forces Judas to reveal the location of the cross in order to advance the good of all Christians, and her desire to do so is initially caused by her kinship with Constantine. The action is thus motivated by the demands of her natural group and her spiritual community. Judas' conversion results in a positive effect on his ethnic kin (the conversion of the Jews is a positive effect within the logic of the narrative), and his subsequent role as bishop is one of responsibility for his new spiritual group. The Christian faith is a unifying force which not only enhances social order and group coherence but also endows its members with the power to direct action, and perpetuates itself by communal actions. In *Elene*, the community of Christians is identical with the worldly social group of Elene. Of course on an allegorical level this is only natural, as the queen is a type of *Ecclesia*. However, it is still important that even on a strictly historical level of interpretation there is total agreement of the dominant worldly power with the divine power. To be a Christian means to be part of a community desirable in all regards, worldly and spiritual.

The exemplary character of *Elene* is directed predominantly at the audience. The Christians are portrayed as the good, functional group which operates according to the patterns familiar to the audience, thus making it easier to embrace the values transmitted. The merging of ideals and structures of heroic society with Christian values is clearly visible.

Cynewulf's virgin martyr tale *Juliana* introduces a shift from the easy conflation of worldly and spiritual power and the conciliation of heroic and Christian values. *Juliana* is, on the one hand, still grounded in heroic tradition, but is on the other hand critical of the values of traditional heroic narrative. Magennis highlights how *Juliana* exploits the language of Germanic heroism only to denounce it and show the audience the superior value of Christian ideals.[53] Cynewulf's poem is the first vernacular English example of a virgin martyr tale.[54] It is representative of a type of religious narrative in England which propagates very different values of Christian living from those illustrated in the religious poems of the heroic tradition. This type of narrative, which puts its saintly protagonist squarely outside of the secular world, was to become the predominant model in the Middle English period. The treatment of topics such as group identity, the common good, power relationships and the exertion of violence in

[52] Bourquin, 'Lexis and Deixis', pp. 10–11.

[53] Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 18 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 86.

[54] Margaret Enid Bridges, *Generic Contrast in Old English Hagiographical Poetry*, Anglistica, 12 (Copenhagen: Roskilde and Bagger, 1984), p. 13: 'in the virgin-martyr passion — of which *Juliana* is the first known vernacular example and which becomes very popular in the late Old English and early Middle English periods — the persecution is sexual as well as religious'. It is debatable whether the differentiation of 'sexual' and 'religious' is applicable for these passions, as the sexual violation of the Christian virgin is so closely connected to her spiritual corruption. The symbolic value of pure virginity cannot be detached from its religious significance.

Juliana differs strikingly from their evaluation in *Judith* and *Elene*.[55] While both Judith and Elene perform acts of salvation on behalf of their communities and hold respected positions within these communities, Juliana does not belong to her worldly community. Her separation from her father, who is representative of kinship bonds, and from Eleusius, who represents the worldly community both as her suitor and as prefect, is visible in the terms applied to her. Initially, possessive pronouns and terms of kinship dominate,[56] but soon give way to epithets and terms stressing her fearlessness, purity and holiness.[57] Abraham discusses the question of how community inclusion is defined in *Juliana* with a focus on legal terminology. On account of the terminology used in the context of sacrifice, she concludes that the crucial question dealt with in *Juliana* is a legal matter — that is, whether tribute should be rightfully paid to the gods of Eleusius or to the Christian god — not a question of religious truth.[58] Though I believe matters of religious truth and judicial matters can easily and purposefully overlap, Abraham's astute observations regarding the terminology employed are revealing. They show that Cynewulf consciously drew on contemporary legal practices and customs in the composition of the poem and must have had a purpose for doing so. I believe this technique highlights how the saint's isolation from her community is absolutely inevitable, not only spiritually but also legally. If Juliana pays tribute to a different ruler, she obviously belongs to a different community. It is in line with the critical stance Cynewulf takes towards traditional heroic society to thus bring home the point that one cannot be a Christian and a member of a heathen community.[59] Furthermore, Abraham shows how the theme of guardianship (*mundbyrd*) becomes more central in Cynewulf's poem in contrast to the Latin legend.[60] Thus, the message that Juliana belongs to a different community and follows different laws is enforced continuously throughout the poem. This alienation of the saint from her worldly community is a typical feature of the *passio*.[61]

Especially when Juliana is compared with the heroines Judith and Elene, it becomes clear that we are dealing with a very different kind of heroism. The isolation of the saint from her worldly community naturally affects the nature of her heroism, which has no immediate positive effect for anyone else but her. What Juliana achieves is first and foremost her own

[55] Cf. Magennis, *Community*, p. 90: 'in contrast to its [the hall and feasting imagery's] effect in endorsing Germanic communal values in *Judith*, this imagery contributes in *Juliana* to the expression of moral hostility with which Cynewulf views the values of the secular world'.

[56] Line 41a 'bryd' ('bride'); l. 61b 'haligre fæder' ('father of the holy one'; the expression, though not applied to Juliana herself, defines her within family bonds); l. 68b 'þin dohtor' ('your daughter'); l. 79a 'fæmnan fæder' ('the women's father'; cf. l. 61b); ll. 93a–96a 'þu eart dohtor min seo dyreste ond seo sweteste in sefan minum ange for eorþan, minra eagna leoht Juliana!' ('you are my daughter, the dearest and the sweetest in my heart, the only one upon earth, light of my eyes Juliana!'); l. 141b 'dehter' ('daughter'); ll. 166a–67a, 'min se swetesta sunnan scina, Juliana!' ('my sweetest ray of the sun, Juliana!').

[57] For example l. 147a 'seo unforhte' ('the unafraid one'); l. 175a 'seo æþele mæg' ('the noble maiden'); l. 209a-b, 'æþele mod unforht' ('the noble one, with unafraid heart'); l. 454 'seo wlitescyne wuldres condel' ('the splendidly shining candle of glory'); l. 315b, l. 345a, l. 589b, 'seo halge' ('the holy one').

[58] Lenore MacGaffey Abraham, 'Cynewulf's *Juliana*: A Case at Law', in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. by Robert E. Bjork (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 171–92 (p. 175).

[59] The notion of two separate spheres which do not interfere with regard to the paying of tribute expressed in Matthew 22.21 is not relevant here. The poem clearly stresses the opposition of worldly and spiritual sphere and does not allow for reconciliation.

[60] Abraham, 'A Case at Law', p. 176.

[61] Magennis, *Community*, p. 169: 'the saint who aspires to and represents an ideal of heavenly community, is isolated in a hostile and obdurate earthly community. The individual *passio* is a version of an archetypal conflict rather than a dramatization of a unique event'.

salvation. Her refusal to marry a heathen and her steadfast endurance of all tortures only achieves a positive effect for other people by giving an example which can inspire others to toil for Christian perfection. Her actions are exemplary both within the narrative and with respect to the poem's effect on its audience. She sets an example and is an ideal to be aspired to. The principle of contrast employed in the *passio* serves to achieve unequivocal support for the ideals the saint embodies as well as clear rejection of the worldly values he or she eschews. Bridges proposes two essential kinds of contrast in the *passio*:

> if the diametrical mode of contrast involves a clash of opposites, the gradational mode of contrast marks the varying degrees to which characters either approximate or fall short of an ideal. The latter mode is characteristic of such traditional categories of speech as the farewell address and the prayer, which the *passio* may have borrowed from the *vita*. Insofar as they contain exhortations to imitation (addressed to the sympathetic audience) and requests for intercession or elevation, these speeches imply gradational contrast along a continuous scale separating yet linking the imperfect mimetic Christian and his exemplary ideal (Christ and the translated saints).[62]

In *Juliana*, then, diametrical contrast is employed in the depiction of the heroine and her heathen persecutors, and made even more pointed by the stress on the irreconcilable nature of the Christian and worldly communities. Her parting speech, which is highly didactic, explains how every Christian can aspire to the ideal presented by the saint, thus bridging the gap between sainthood and 'ordinary' Christian conduct.

The direction of violence in *Juliana* also sets the poem apart from *Judith* and *Elene*. Here, only the heathens exert violence, but to no avail.[63] Juliana's strength lies in the unmoving resistance she displays in the face of violence directed against her — thus demonstrating the futility of worldly power against the power of faith. Whereas Judith and Elene possess the strength to move and display the power to direct action, the virgin martyr has the strength to remain unmoved and the power to resist action. There is also one instance in *Juliana* where violence directed against her is reflected back upon her persecutors: the bath of boiling lead prepared for the saint does not harm her but instead spurts out and kills 75 heathens nearby.[64] The worldly power of the prefect cannot reach Juliana, who wields the superior spiritual power. Moreover, her victory over the devil is clearly depicted as a result of spiritual strength. It demonstrates that the predominant danger for the Christian lies in being deceived by the forces of evil. Juliana is wise enough to suspect the trap and thus able to overcome the devil. Bzdyl points out that 'in *Juliana*, Cynewulf's subject is the true nature of reality; his goal is to win men to salvation by teaching them to see through devilish delusion'.[65] The motif of deceit as the main tool of the devil is elaborated on in the devil's account of his evil deeds, which focuses on his attempt to mislead rather than simply tempt man into committing sins and acquiring vices.[66] Wittig highlights how exemplary and didactic purposes are met in the

[62] Bridges, *Generic Contrast*, pp. 14–15.

[63] The death of Eleusius and his men at sea may be regarded as an instance of an act of violence by God. The notion that the sea passes divine judgement is reminiscent of the scene where the lead 'acts' to protect Juliana and punish the heathens (ll. 384b–589a). Note also that Eleusius' sea voyage lacks any logical motivation and appears to be an action caused by his overwhelming anger at his defeat by Juliana. Thus, his irresponsible and uncontrolled wrath drives him out to sea, where he and his men are destroyed by divine power.

[64] Lines 384b–589a.

[65] D. G. Bzdyl, '*Juliana*: Cynewulf's Dispeller of Delusion', in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. by Robert E. Bjork (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 193–206 (p. 194) [first publ. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 86 (1985), 165–75].

[66] For example ll. 325b–27a, 'þæt we soðfæstra þurh misgedwield mod oncyrren, ahwyrfen from halor' ('so that we

heroine's encounter with the devil: while Juliana's behaviour is exemplary in its Christ-like strength, the devil's confession contains homiletic elements as it explains the psychology of temptation, thus making the faithful aware of the devil's techniques.[67]

The comparison of the three poems illuminates the religious values of their intended audiences. If we look at the heroic appeal of poems like *Judith*, *Elene*, *Andreas* and the *Dream of the Rood*, they seem to be written for an audience which cherishes martial success and measures the power of a god in terms of its manifestation in worldly affairs.[68] It is also visible that the common good of the respective heroine's and hero's kin is of predominant importance in these texts. Christian faith functions as a stabilising factor within the society of the heroes and heroines depicted. *Juliana* and other narratives of the virgin martyr tradition put the emphasis on spiritual strength and the salvation of the individual believer who is part of the community of the faithful, which does not coincide with the society one is born into.

Woolf suggests that

> in the Anglo-Saxon period the particular tastes of the ladies of a noble household seem not to have been considered by the authors of secular poetry, but Juliana is unmistakably a religious poem designed for the pleasure and edification of women in a religious community.[69]

It is debatable whether the tastes of the noblewomen would have always differed so much from those of men as long as they shared the same social background. A lady established in the social network and raised according to the values of a society cherishing heroic deeds and often engaged in military conflicts would probably have enjoyed narratives which deal with these topics.[70] However, just as Judith and Elene are more feasible role models for a noblewoman because they adhere to the ideals of an Anglo-Saxon lady and fulfil functions within a worldly society, Juliana is a better model for a nun, who forsook her role within worldly society, possibly even against the wishes of her kin group, in order to become part of a spiritual community.

While *Judith* and *Elene* thus exhibit clear similarities,[71] *Juliana* belongs to a different genre, although traces of the heroic tradition can be found. Magennis rightly points out that a tension between the overt repudiation of heroic values and the poem's strong connection to

change the heart of the faithful by deceit, turn them from salvation'); ll. 363b–64b, 'þus ic soðfæstum durh mislic bleo mod oncyrre' ('thus I pervert the heart of the faithful by various shams').

67 Joseph Wittig, 'Figural Narrative in Cynewulf's *Juliana*', in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. by Robert E. Bjork (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 147–70 (p. 156) [first publ. *Anglo-Saxon England*, 4 (1975), 37–55].

68 The Old English *Judith* can be included under 'Christian' as it has been thoroughly adapted to suit a Christian audience and all traces of the heroine's Jewish faith have been removed. Cf. Paul de Lacy, 'Aspects of Christianisation and Cultural Adaptation in the Old English *Judith*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 97 (1996), 393–410.

69 Woolf, 'Saints' Lives', p. 46.

70 Cf. Schrader, *God's Handiwork*, p. 47.

71 It should be borne in mind that these similarities also align them with other poems in which heroic tradition and religious motives merge. Poems such as *Andreas*, *Guthlac A* or *The Dream of the Rood* bear clear similarities in style and diction and likewise merge religious topics and heroic tradition. Gordon Hall Gerould, *Saints' Legends* (New York: The Riverside Press, 1916), pp. 61–62, 65, and 79 coins the term 'epic legend' for the poems *Juliana*, *Elene*, *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Guthlac* and *Andreas*. He supposes that they are representative of 'a much larger body of verse, which celebrated the heroes and heroines of the church in true Germanic fashion' (pp. 89–90). He situates the 'epic legend' within a larger tradition (including *Genesis A* and *B*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, *Christ*, the *Dream of the Rood* and *Judith*), which dealt with religious topics using the established diction and style of heroic epic (pp. 90–91).

the heroic tradition is noticeable.[72] I believe this tension is representative of the poem's status as a transitional work. The introduction of new Christian values and ways to achieve Christian perfection to people still grounded in a different tradition naturally creates this tension. We have seen that *Elene* addresses the tension caused by the competing ties of natural and spiritual kinship. While the topic is not discussed in *Juliana*, the tension between competing values is still felt.

Virgin Martyrs: The Power of Passivity

I now examine more closely the genre of the virgin martyr tale in its relationship to heroic Christian poems and changing feminine ideals in religious poetry. It is beyond the scope of this essay to aim at a complete evaluation of the genre, which remained popular over several centuries.[73] A condensed overview will suffice to specify the essential differences as well as the common features in the portrayal of ideal Christian women in comparison to poems of the heroic tradition.

An emphasis on communal values and the common good, the overlapping of spiritual superiority and worldly power, and the positive role of Christianity in advancing group coherence and the social order are the shared features of the narrative poems *Judith* and *Elene*. The eponymous heroines of these poems present positive feminine role models for Christian conduct within communities adhering to the values of heroic society. *Juliana* differs in all of these respects: the heroine distances herself from her role in society, and her actions are directed at her individual salvation. Her defiance of the obligations of kinship in favour of her Christian identity depicts the Christian faith as incongruent with traditional values. Worldly power and spiritual superiority appear in stark opposition. These differences are due to the genres of the three poems, i.e. to the fact that *Juliana* is, despite its stylistic and lexical proximity to heroic diction, more akin to other virgin martyr tales than to the poems *Judith* and *Elene*. It has been pointed out by many scholars that narratives of the virgin martyr type display striking parallels in plot and also contain recurrent motifs. Winstead explains the deliberate similarity, and occasionally even identical reproduction, of these tales with the desire to show the saints' resemblance to one another and to Christ.[74] It is no surprise, then, that we readily recognise the parallels between the Old English *Juliana* and the Middle English *Sainte Margerete* from the Katherine Group. Both virgins are initially desired by a pagan of worldly standing. Once it becomes clear that marriage is not an option due to the woman's Christian faith, the focus shifts, and the pagan tries to force the virgin to sacrifice to the heathen gods.[75] After a series of tortures, the virgin, who remains steadfast in her faith throughout, is executed. Both virgins also encounter demons while imprisoned, whom they

[72] Magennis, *Community*, p. 87.

[73] See Gerould, *Saints' Legends*, pp. 133–34.

[74] Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 1-3.

[75] Perhaps it is not really a shift in focus but rather an adjustment of the method — if the virgin can be convinced to give up her faith, she would no longer be betrothed to Christ and therefore free for her heathen suitor. Cf. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' Lives and the Female Reader', *FORUM for Modern Language Studies*, 27 (1991), 314–32 (p. 321): 'in the legendary lives, there is a certain amount of displacement designed to reveal the ideological force of virginity: the pagan persecutors are often surprisingly willing to accept the saint's refusal of physical favours and they embark at once not on forcible rape but on torture-enforced campaigns for her ideological capitulation'.

successfully force into submission and interrogate. Comparable patterns recur in all tales of the genre.[76]

A brief analysis of the genre's treatment of central topics such as virginity, power and violence in comparison to *Judith* and *Elene* reveals essential differences, but also shared features in the depiction of women.

Virginity or even chastity are never mentioned in *Judith* and *Elene*. The authority of the respective heroines stems from their faith, wisdom, determination and/or social standing, not from virginal purity. Although Judith is presented as especially affiliated with God, the connection is not depicted in marital or erotic terms. She is the handmaid of God, not the bride of Christ. Neither *Judith* nor *Elene* are concerned with the heroines' gendered and sexual identities at all. This is particularly striking in comparison to *Judith*'s biblical source: any trace of Judith's exploitation of her sexual allure to lead Holofernes on is edited out of the poem, as is the exceptional beauty of the protagonist.[77] She is, however, not depicted as virginal either — sexuality is simply not an issue.[78] In the virgin martyr tales on the other hand, virginity is the essential asset of the saintly woman. Her exceptional status and her essential immunity to physical violation are grounded in the sealed perfection of her virginal body. Salih observes that '[the virgin martyrs'] power stems from their virginity; the choice to be a virgin is the originary choice which enables all others'.[79] This choice makes the virgin martyr 'both bride and virago; her desires are directed to Christ and her body is glorified and miraculously impermeable'.[80] The *sponsa Christi* motif also adds a secular dimension to the importance of the saint's virginity: as the bride-to-be, the martyr has to save her virginity for her future husband, a practice also expected of any other betrothed maiden.[81] Several concepts of virginity merge in the figure of the virgin martyr. On the one hand, the Christian

[76] See Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2001), p. 48; cf. Karl D. Uitti, 'Women Saints, the Vernacular, and History in Early Medieval France', in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 247–67 (pp. 253–54): 'when we look at the handful of surviving texts devoted to women saints on Gallo-Romance territory from the late ninth century through about 1200 or so, a striking and recurrent narrative pattern manifests itself. I refer to the tale of a holy and beautiful Christian maiden who refuses both the blandishments and the threats of a pagan (usually Roman) ruler, and who maintains her chastity and her status as God's betrothed to the point of accepting extraordinary physical suffering and a martyr's death'. In *Medieval English Prose for Women*, ed. by Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. xxi, the editors explain the selection of *Sainte Margerete* for their edition of texts from the Katherine Group by arguing that the 'shared design and purpose make it possible for a single Life to give a good idea of all three'. See also *John Capgrave: The Life of Saint Katherine*, ed. by Karen A. Winstead (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 1999), p. 1 and Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' Lives', p. 315.

[77] Cf. Hugh Magennis, ' "No Sex Please, We're Anglo-Saxons"? Attitudes to Sexuality in Old English Prose and Poetry', *Leeds Studies in English*, n. s., 26 (1995), 1–27 (pp. 12–13). Magennis sees a twofold reason for the changes applied: 'this is due in part to the Anglo-Saxon discomfort with sexual themes evident too in Ælfric's version of the Judith story (as elsewhere), but it is also a feature of the poet's *Germanizierung* of the biblical material, a is transposed into a type of narrative poetry which traditionally lacks of a sexual dimension' (p. 13).

[78] See my detailed discussion of the opinion that Judith is depicted as a virgin in the Old English poem: Judith Kaup, *The Old English 'Judith': A Study of Poetic Style, Theological Tradition and Anglo-Saxon Christian Concepts* (Lewiston: Mellen, 2013), pp. 279–89.

[79] Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 49.

[80] Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 98. Cf. Sarah Salih, 'Performing Virginity: Sex and Violence in the *Katherine* Group', in *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl (London: St Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 95–112 (p. 100): 'virginity constitutes a "culturally consistent gender", in which the virgin's desire is directed towards God and her body is whole and impenetrable'.

[81] See Felicity Riddy, 'Temporary Virginity and the Everyday Body: *Le Bone Florence of Rome* and Bourgeois Self-making', in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England*, ed. by Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University

virgin is a creature of angelic perfection, unblemished by the world, and oblivious to all desires of the flesh.[82] On the other hand, the virgin martyr's relationship with Christ is described in erotic terms. She achieves redemption 'not through her transcendence of earthly desire, but through her transference of physical desire to Christ'.[83] Thus, in contrast to Judith and Elene, whose femininity is hardly noticeable, the corporeality and sexuality of these holy women is of predominant importance for their religious achievement.[84] In addition, her status as the betrothed of Christ puts the virgin martyr under his personal protection, and her violation would constitute an offence against him as her future husband. It is also important to realise that this emphasis on virginity clearly situates these women saints outside secular society. If they are role models at all, they are role models for women who devote their lives entirely to God, namely nuns or anchoresses, who do not fulfil secular female roles in their society.

The issue of power also sets the heroic Christian women apart from the virgin martyrs. Both Judith and Elene are portrayed as powerful and authoritative figures. They are respected and obeyed within their communities and even beyond. They are heroines in a heroic setting, with warriors at their command and equipped with the attributes of worldly power, gold and adornment. At first glance, the typical virgin martyr appears, especially in comparison, absolutely powerless. Nevertheless, while Judith and Elene wield the power to direct action, which could be also described as the power of moving both themselves, as they travel freely across boundaries, and others, whom they order to move, the virgin martyrs possess the power to resist action — to remain unmoved. The virgin martyr Lucy is an especially graphic example, as she literally cannot be moved by any means. Neither magic nor the physical power of a thousand men and a large number of oxen can drag her away when her persecutors want to hand her over to a crowd to be gang-raped to death.[85] In the Old English *Juliana* the heroine

Press, 2004), pp. 197–216 (p. 203), for an evaluation of the relationship of secular and religious virginity. Cf. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, 'The Heroics of Virginity: Brides of Christ and Sacrifical Mutilation', in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. by Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp. 29–72 (pp. 40–41), on the merging of secular and Christian feminine ideals regarding virginity.

82 Ruth Evans, 'Virginities', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. by Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 21–39 (p. 25).

83 Elizabeth Robertson, 'The Corporeality of Female Sanctity in the *Life of Saint Margaret*', in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 268–87 (p. 269). Cf. Armando Maggi, 'Virgins for the Virgin: The "Imprese" of Three Sixteenth-century Italian Academies and the Gaze of the Holy Mother', *Rivista di Letterature Moderne e Comparate*, 51 (1998), 367–78 (pp. 367–78), who describes practices of male devotion to the Virgin Mary. He argues that the direction of erotic desires towards Mary nullifies them, because the Virgin cannot comprehend them (p. 373).

84 It is noticeable that the *sponsa Christi* motif is not yet present in the Old English *Juliana*. L. Hödl, 'Jungfräulichkeit', in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977–99), cols. 808–9, highlights the influence Cistercian spirituality and the commentaries on the Song of Songs in the twelfth century have on the development of the *sponsa Christi* motif. See also Theodor Wolpers, *Die Englische Heiligenlegende des Mittelalters* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1964), pp. 158–59: 'das Martyrium kann ohne seine Schrecken als etwas Herbeizusehnendes, als eine Form ekstatischer Liebesvereinigung mit Christus gesehen werden, wie es besonders seit Bernhard v. Clairvaux geschieht. Damit verbindet sich, in den Jungfrauenlegenden, vielfach das Sponsa-Christi-Motiv' ('martyrdom can be viewed without its terror as something desirable, as a kind of ecstatic union with Christ. This has been especially common since Bernard of Clairvaux and often, in the virgin martyr legends, connected with the *sponsa Christi* motif').

85 'Life of the Blessed Virgin Lucy', in *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints. Compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, 1275. First Edition Published 1470. Englished by William Caxton, First Edition 1483*, ed. by F. S. Ellis, Temple Classics, 7 vols (London: Dent, 1900), II, 130–35; see also Kathleen Coyne Kelly, 'Useful Virgins in Medieval Hagiography', in *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Cindy

is also described in terms stressing her defiance of threat and torture.[86] It is an essential trait of the virgin martyr that she is absolutely unmoveable and indestructible.[87]

Power, often associated with activity, is displayed in passive resistance. However, the active involvement of the virgin martyr in shaping events should not go unnoticed. Salih clarifies:

> the tyrants believe that they are in control of the narrative, that they have the choice of whether to execute or reprieve the heroines, but they are wrong. The virgins take control even of the details of their deaths. Having survived fires, wheels, boiling liquids, etc. by the magical strength of their virginity, the martyrs consent to be beheaded.[88]

A powerful instrument of heroic Christian women and virgin martyrs alike is their tongue. The authority of speech and the superiority that derives from wisdom and understanding, which are associated with the true faith, are important assets of the heroines in both genres. The ability to control the situation, be it actively or by resistance, is due to their superior understanding of the significance of events. Knowledge is a prime asset of the faithful and is set in stark contrast to the ignorance of the heathens. The persecutors of the virgins are unable to decode the meaning of the miraculous events taking place before their very eyes. Their blindness is usually further highlighted by the fact that other pagans witnessing the events understand their significance and convert to Christianity.

While the virgin martyrs cannot directly cause action by means of commands, as the heroic saints do, they still exercise considerable influence by their speech. Their utterances can be divided into two basic types: those which further the action in accordance with the martyr's wishes[89] and those which verbalise their faith, sometimes in the manner of learned discourse, or stress their commitment to their heavenly spouse. Taunting and thus further enraging the potential or active torturer also features prominently in the virgin martyr legends.[90] The display of their broken, tortured bodies in contrast to their unbroken, glorious spirit, manifested in their speech, is the virgins' proof of divinely sanctioned authority. The public torture creates the stage for the virgins' performance of faith.[91] In the virgin martyr legend, the proof of spiritual superiority enables the women to exercise worldly power through their speech. No

L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl (London: St Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 135–64 (p. 151), and Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), p. 130.

86 She is unafraid and unmoved, e.g. lines 147a, 'seo unforhte' ('the unafraid one'); 209b, 'mod unforht' ('unafraid mind'); 259b, 'seo þe forht ne wæs' ('she, who was not afraid'); 226a–27a 'þæt he ne meahte mod oncyrran, fæmne foreþonc' ('that he could not change the mind, the intention of the woman'); 600b–700a, 'wæs seo wuldres mæg anræd ond unforht' ('the woman of glory was resolute and unafraid').

87 Evans, 'Virginities', p. 31.

88 Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 95–96.

89 Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 95–96, points out with reference to the Katherine Group's *Juliana* that she 'helpfully lists the tortures she is prepared to withstand, as if prompting her father, who has not yet begun to torture her, to fulfil his proper role in the narrative. The tyrants never understand that they do not control the narrative but are simply the virgins' instruments'.

90 While in this discussion I am concerned with medieval English examples only, the basic pattern of these legends stays very much the same from antiquity even to the present day. Cf. Uitti, 'Woman Saints', pp. 253–54; Sheila Delany, *Impolitic Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 191.

91 Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 74–98. Katherine J. Lewis, '*Lete me suffre*: Reading the Torture of St Margaret of Antioch in Late Medieval England', in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain. Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchison, Carol M. Meale, and Lesley Johnson, Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts, 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 69–82 (p. 78), analyses the process in the legend of Margaret: the torture 'is intended to silence her, but actually serves to construct an affective and authoritative platform from which to speak and preach. Olibrius seeks to harm and

such proof is necessary in the poems *Judith* and *Elene*, because worldly and spiritual authority are presented as identical. This contrast between the two spheres is also visible in the depiction of violence.

There are usually two types of violent encounters in the virgin martyr tale. While the virgins are the object of violence at the hands of fathers, heathen suitors and persecutors, they are often also portrayed as physically wrestling with demons. The two types can be seen as representing worldly and spiritual combat. The tortures inflicted upon the virgins by the representatives of worldly authority always fail to achieve the desired effect. The virgins are thus presented as beyond the reach of worldly afflictions and temptations — they have already achieved a state of spiritual perfection which manifests itself on the stage prepared for them by their persecutors. The confrontations with demons illustrate that the exceptional virtue of the virgins also enables them to withstand the far more dangerous spiritual onslaughts and inner temptations. Salih suggests that Margaret's encounter with the dragon possibly represents her final rejection of female sexuality and thus all temptations of the flesh.[92] Juliana's demon tries to deceive her in very much the same manner which he later reveals to be one of his favourite tactics in leading Christians astray.[93] Interestingly, the virgins are as physically engaged in these spiritual battles as they are physically unaffected by the worldly violence directed against them. This paradoxical depiction emphasises how much more strength is needed to ward off the more subtle spiritual temptations than the more obvious worldly ones. Therefore, while the virgin martyr legends exemplify the futility of physical violence and worldly power in the face of spiritual superiority, they also show the difficulties involved in attaining such superiority.

Conclusion

It has become clear that the main difference between religious texts of the heroic tradition like *Judith* and *Elene* on the one hand and legends of the virgin martyr genre on the other lies in the evaluation of the relationship between spiritual and worldly power. The virgin martyr legends equate worldly authority with paganism, propagating the rejection of worldly goods and status. Accordingly, an ideal Christian woman can only exist outside the structures of worldly society. In addition, her perpetual virginity, the cornerstone of all her achievements, creates an unbridgeable gap between the virgin martyr and any woman embedded in secular society. A woman cannot hope to achieve Christian perfection without rejecting the world and thus there is no place on earth for the woman saint. The absolute manifestation of feminine Christian perfection is only achieved in death and departure to heaven for the consummation of the holy marriage.[94]

correct her, but she turns the punishment back upon him: her ability to withstand sustained and ferocious torture renders him and his people unable to watch, thus destabilizing him from his position of apparent author of the spectacle. Her exemplary suffering further undermines his position and authority by converting thousands of his people, who have read it as confirmation of the truth of Christianity, as she intended, rather than as an exposition of is fallacy, the reading which Olibrius attempts to impose. […] Margaret, the putative "passive" victim, becomes agent and campaigner, using her bleeding body and her unwavering speech as weapons against Olibrius'.

92 Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 88–89.

93 Disguised as an angel, he attempts to convince her that God does not want her to suffer martyrdom. Interestingly, this is the only point in the poem where Juliana is afraid (ll. 267a–68a), which could be intended to illustrate the dangers of deception, because it illustrates that only deception can frighten the saint.

94 Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 97.

A powerful queen or a cunning woman who engages in military action is clearly at odds with such an ideal. The Old English heroines Judith and Elene present models of ideal faith that can be lived out within worldly society. The poems' presentation of societies where the common good and worldly power are in harmony with ideal Christian living aligns them with the broader tradition of saints' lives featuring lay protagonists. I have pointed out earlier that already the Benedictine reform deepened the divide between secular and monastic forms of Christian life, favouring monasticism over all other forms of religious devotion. The Gregorian reform in the late eleventh century continued this process and it has been observed that legends about saintly lay people were no longer in line with the dominant church doctrine of that period.[95] Vauchez points out that, even though salvation could be attained by the pious laymen, 'Christian perfection [...] was identified more and more closely with isolation from and contempt of the world'.[96] It is easy to see how the virgin martyr legends fit into this concept of sainthood — and it is equally obvious that narratives about saintly women like Elene or Judith do not adhere to these ideals.[97] In addition, the depiction of powerful worldly women as Christian role models is probably influenced by the realities of the times when the texts were composed.

The idea of the Anglo-Saxon period as a Golden Age for women with the Norman Conquest as a decisive turning point has been rejected or modified in recent scholarship.[98] There is, however, an undeniable decline in female agency in religious life from early to late Anglo-Saxon times, which is connected to the effects of the religious reform movements. Women played an important role in the early monastic foundations in Anglo-Saxon England, with the religious life offering opportunities to exert considerable influence. Neuman de Vegvar stresses female monastics' involvement in shaping events and developments of their day and emphasises the worldly power attained by Anglo-Saxon royal women monastics.[99] This heyday of female monastic power was short-lived and Neuman de Vegvar suggests it was closely tied to the needs of the conversion period.[100] Foot's findings support this opinion as they show that there were fewer nunneries in tenth and eleventh century England than there had been in the seventh and eight centuries.[101] This will have affected the opportunities for women to exercise power and rulership in monastic roles. The decline of the power of female religious in turn influenced modes of female devotion. Schulenburg observes that changing societal realities in the eleventh century occasioned new models of female sanctity

[95] André Vauchez, 'Lay People's Sanctity in Western Europe: Evolution of a Pattern (Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries)', in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 21–31 (p. 22). The Gregorian reform, named after pope Gregory VII, is an ecclesiastical reform which propagated, *inter alia*, spiritual renewal, celibacy of the clergy and the prohibition of lay investiture. Overall, it also deepened the divide between lay and institutional piety.

[96] Vauchez, 'Lay People's Sanctity', pp. 23–24.

[97] See Wolpers, *Englische Heiligenlegende*, pp. 157–208, for a description of developments in hagiographic writings.

[98] Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, is one of the most prominent advocates of the idea of the deterioration of women's rights and social standing after the Norman Conquest. This evaluation is still found in more recent studies, e.g. Laurie A. Finke, *Women's Writings in English: Medieval England* (London: Longman, 1999), esp. p. 23. Pauline Stafford, 'Women and the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4 (1994), 221–49, refutes the idea and stresses the relative scarcity of evidence for the Anglo-Saxon period and points out how scholars' political agendas have influenced their readings.

[99] Carol Neuman de Vegvar, 'Saints and Companions to Saints: Anglo-Saxon Royal Women Monastics in Context', in *Holy Men and Holy Women. Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. by Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 51–93 (pp. 76–77).

[100] Neuman de Vegvar, 'Saints and Companions', p. 77.

[101] Foot, *Veiled Women*, I, 201.

in Europe.[102] McNamara also suggests a direct link between the deterioration in women's economic independence and means of achieving powerful positions within church and society on the one hand and the development of extreme forms of asceticism and devotion amongst religious women on the other.[103] She contrasts the situation from the early days of conversion up to the eleventh century, 'when sainthood continued to reward women who expressed their high status by generosity to the church and to the poor'[104] with the period between 1050 and 1150 when the 'Gregorian church sought to disentangle itself from the power of lay patrons, bringing the system that had produced so many saintly women into disrepute'.[105] McNamara points out that this development coincided with a devaluation of the role of women in twelfth-century society and states:

> as a group, women were being systematically deprived of control over their own wealth and reduced to dependency upon their families or their husbands. Thus, if we divide society into alms givers and alms takers, many women of the ruling classes who had been securely placed among the givers suffered a decisive loss of status and were once more reduced to takers.[106]

Subsequently, women's expressions of their faith and Christian charity took new forms. Service for the poor was soon restricted by church authorities and replaced by spiritual almsgiving. Religious women did not only offer up their prayers but also their fasts and other, more austere forms of self-inflicted suffering for the redemption of souls from purgatory.[107]

At a time where female agency was more restricted, two contradictory reasons for the increasing popularity of the virgin martyr legends seem plausible. On the one hand, the legends may have appealed to a female audience as they offered models of female agency and volition — agency through the power of resistance and examples of the divine protection of female choice.[108] On the other hand, they can be read as prescriptive texts, meant to channel female devotional practices and promote controlled female monasticism. This second reading involves a reception of the texts as more abstract role models, propagating the values of virginity and separation from the world — virtues, which could be imitated in a regulated monastic setting. By contrast with the early Anglo-Saxon situation, where female religious could obtain considerable power and influence through monastic life, hierarchical ecclesiastical order after the Gregorian reform also reaffirmed the gender boundaries and hierarchies, making cloistered women the subject of male control.[109]

On a more general level, affecting the depiction of saintly men as well as women, the Gregorian reform resulted in a more spiritualised view of sainthood, causing a shift in

[102] Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500–1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 7.

[103] Jo Ann McNamara, 'The Need to Give: Suffering and Female Sanctity in the Middle Ages', in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 199–221.

[104] McNamara, 'The Need to Give', p. 203.

[105] McNamara, 'The Need to Give', p. 202.

[106] McNamara, 'The Need to Give', p. 204.

[107] McNamara, 'The Need to Give', pp. 205–20.

[108] Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' Lives', p. 321, suggests a metonymic link between literary convention and social conditions in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England in the virgin martyr legends.

[109] See, for example, Janet Nelson, 'Women and the Word in the Earlier Middle Ages', *Studies in Church History*, 27 (1990), 53–78 (pp. 77–78). Klein, 'Reading Queenship', p. 74, observes a profound emphasis on hierarchy and boundaries, including gender oppositions, already for the Benedictine reform. This supports my essay's argument that the development started with the Benedictine reform and continued through to the Gregorian reform.

hagiographic production towards legends dealing with saints who clearly rejected all worldly matters. Religious narratives or saints' lives of the heroic tradition, such as *Judith* and *Elene*, are in contrast clearly from a different social and religious era. They are 'outdated' with respect to the models of exemplary, saintly Christian life within the world they represent and also in their depiction of powerful female figures. Both Elene and Judith are portrayed as positive models of Christian rulership.[110] The poems offer examples of Christian living within the world and show the achievement of Christian perfection in a secular setting.[111] To wield worldly power on the basis of strong faith is depicted as a laudable Christian activity. Role models like this were clearly at odds with the ideals of the Benedictine reform and even less acceptable after the Gregorian reform.

Not only the underlying theological ideologies but also the realities of female (Christian) living are reflected in the hagiographic and religious writings of the respective periods. Prior to the Benedictine and Gregorian reforms, when women were participating more actively in secular as well as clerical power, narratives about powerful Christian heroines were at once more credible and more appealing. It should also be noted that Anglo-Saxon ideals greatly favour the individual's positive identification with his or her community.[112] Therefore, the ideal of the virgin martyr, with its stress on the saint's conflict with her worldly community, is considerably less attractive for an Anglo-Saxon audience still grounded in the values of heroic society. However, by the late eleventh century, when the reality of female religious practices and devotion were centred around strict enclosure and distance to worldly affairs, such legends were both prescriptively and descriptively appropriate.

[110] Kathryn Powell, 'Meditating on Men and Monsters: A Reconsideration of the Thematic Unity of the *Beowulf* Manuscript', *Review of English Studies*, n. s., 57, no. 228 (2006), 1–15 (p. 10). Marie Nelson, 'Judith: A Story of a Secular Saint', *Germanic Notes and Reviews*, 21 (1990), 12–13, similarly points out that *Judith* is the story of a great war leader who wins a secular fight (p. 13) and stresses that she 'is more a defender of an earthly people than she is a defender of her own eternal soul' (p. 12).

[111] Fell's sentiment that male and female saints in the Anglo-Saxon period are portrayed as 'real people' certainly stems from these saints being part of the secular world: *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 109.

[112] Magennis, *Community*, p. 105: 'the heroic world is presented as a world of immutable certitude in which one's place is defined and one's obligations are clear. The society is presented as firm and cohesive, and it is this society which gives the individual his or her significance in the world. A message of many poems preserved in the great poetry codices of late Anglo-Saxon England is that life outside the ordered society has neither attraction nor meaning. As suggested in an earlier chapter, this is a message which members of the textual community would have found congenial and pertinent'.