

# Preacher, Dragon-Slayer, Soldier, Elephant: George the *Miles Christi* in Two Late Medieval French Versions of the *George and the Dragon* Story

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According to the *Golden Legend* account of the Life of St George, as the pagan princess tells her unhappy story to the saint, she is cut off in mid-flow, petrified by the sight of a dragon poking its head out of a nearby lake (54-6).<sup>1</sup> It might be said that the story of *George and the Dragon* makes a similarly abrupt entrance into the Life of St George. The tale of George's martyrdom, which pits the saint against a pagan tyrant and his seemingly endless array of torture instruments, circulated on all shores of the Mediterranean and in various guises from the fifth century onwards.<sup>2</sup> It was not until the eleventh or twelfth century, however, that the first written traces of George's encounter with a dragon began to surface.<sup>3</sup> And it was only thanks to its inclusion in the famous anthology compiled by Jacobus of Voragine in the second half of the thirteenth century and now known as the *Golden Legend* that the story of *George and the Dragon* circulated so widely in the later centuries of the Middle Ages: before the *Golden Legend*, George's dragon had barely made a splash.

George's heroic antics hardly require a lengthy introduction. According to the *Golden Legend* account of *George and the Dragon*, the pagan citizens of the Libyan city of Silena have been obliged to offer a ferocious dragon a daily tribute of sheep and eventually children to prevent it from breathing its toxic breath over the city walls (19-21). When the Princess of Silena is chosen to be sacrificed, the king initially refuses to hand her over, but before long his people force him to surrender her to the monster in accordance with his own legislation (22-42). Fortunately, however, George is on hand to save the pagan princess: when the dragon arrives to gobble her up, George pierces it with his lance before throwing it to the ground (54-7). The saint and the princess then lead the tamed dragon back to the city, prompting the terrified citizens of Silena to run for their lives (58-62). George summons the pagans back to the city, preaches the Christian faith and ensures that everyone in the audience converts (64). As several commentators have observed, the scene is one of

forced conversion: only once the whole population of Silena has been baptized does George agree to slay the dragon.<sup>4</sup>

Jacobus of Voragine, the man ultimately responsible for the enduring popularity of *George and the Dragon*, expressed doubts about the historical veracity of the legend. In his prologue to the *George Life* in the *Golden Legend* he presents the contradictory evidence for the date and location of the saint's life and death (13-16). Moreover, in case his audience objects to the *merveilleux*, he provides a brief, watered-down version of the dragon episode immediately following the story (75), similar to his less risqué summary of St Margaret of Antioch's encounter with a dragon.<sup>5</sup> But Jacobus was in no doubt about how George's dragon should be interpreted. Among the hundreds of sermons that the Dominican friar bequeathed to posterity, three provide an allegorical gloss on *George and the Dragon*.<sup>6</sup>

The first sermon makes it clear that St George is a *miles Christi*, a soldier of Christ, to be defined in stark opposition to a run-of-the-mill soldier. Jacobus's lesson opens with the following citation from Ephesians 6. 11-12:

Induite vos armaturam Dei ut positis stare adversus insidias diaboli, quia non est nobis collectatio adversus carnem et sanguinem. (p. 189)

[Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood.]

Our struggle is not against our flesh-and-blood enemies, Jacobus reminds us, but against devilish snares. And St George provides the perfect role model in our fight with the Devil. When George fought the dragon, he was fighting the Devil incarnate (p. 190). And the armour he wore was not that of a literal soldier but the allegorical outfit of a *miles Christi*: equipped with the chainmail of justice, the sword of Logos, the helmet of hope, the shield of faith and the lance of charity, George has nothing to fear on his allegorical battlefield (p. 189).<sup>7</sup>

Jacobus's second sermon dealing with *George and the Dragon* interprets the story in the light of the bestiary commonplace, made famous by Isidore of Seville, according to which elephants are the archrivals of dragons. George's dragon, the most evil of earthly beasts, figures the Devil, the most evil of spiritual creatures (p. 191). When George slays the monster with his sword, he successfully neutralizes diabolical temptation, just as elephants are said to neutralize the dragons of far-flung, tropical climes (ibid.). And as Jacobus explains in his final sermon on the saint, the only weapon George wields against the Devil is that of a preacher, the Word of God.

The third sermon begins by citing St Paul's instruction to Timothy to work tirelessly as a *miles Christi* (II Timothy 2. 3) before explaining why St George makes for an exemplary soldier of Christ:

Labora sicut bonus miles Jesu Christi ... Primum est sedulitas in opera cum dicitur, labora. Ipse enim sedule laboravit predicando, ydola destruendo et populum convertendo. (p. 192)

[Work as a good soldier of Jesus Christ ... Firstly, 'work' refers to assiduity in one's labours. For [George] worked assiduously by preaching, destroying idols and converting the people.]

Among the tools of George's proselytizing trade, Jacobus lists the sword the saint uses to slay the dragon. We are not, however, dealing with the sword of an earthly soldier, Jacobus tells us, but with that of the *miles Christi*. George's sword represents Logos:

Habuit enim beatus Georgius ... Verbum Dei tanquam gladium per quem bonos vulnerabat ad amorem et malum incidebat ipsorum evacuando ydolatriam et errorum. (p. 193)

[For St George had ... the Word of God as his sword, with which he wounded the Good to [make them] love and assailed the Wicked by purging them of their idols and error.]

It is tempting to suggest that Jacobus saw George the Dragon-slayer as a role model for his own activities as a preacher. When Jacobus compiled his book of sermons after decades of lovingly wounding the Good and assailing the Wicked with the Word of God, perhaps he imagined himself as treading in St George's footsteps.

Of course, medieval *miles Christi* were not always confined to allegorical battles against spiritual enemies. By the end of the eleventh century, this slippery term was also being applied to crusader knights fighting divinely sanctioned battles against flesh-and-blood foes.<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the exegetical framework provided by Jacobus in his sermons for *George and the Dragon*, grounded as it is on an opposition between the *miles* and the *miles Christi*, falters somewhat if it is applied to the *Golden Legend* Life of St George as a whole. Following the account of George's long, drawn-out martyrdom, during which the saint never stops preaching the Word of God, Jacobus tells the story of the saint's alleged appearance at the Siege of Jerusalem during the First Crusade. George is said to have led the crusader army safely over the walls of Jerusalem, helping them to slay every single one of its Saracen occupants (139-42). Here, and in the scores of other texts documenting George's appearance at battles fought during the late Middle Ages, it is clear that George is not functioning as Jacobus's model preacher who overcomes diabolical snares but as an exemplary soldier slaying flesh-and-blood pagans.<sup>9</sup> It is a reading that Jacobus recognizes, albeit briefly, in his etymologizing prologue to the George Life in the *Golden Legend*. George's name, he tells us, could be derived from the Greek words for 'wanderer' and 'adviser'; or, alternatively, from the Greek for 'holy' and 'war' (7-11). In the opening and closing lines of the *Golden Legend* Life of St George, then, despite the

interpretation sanctioned by Jacobus's sermons, we catch a glimpse of the saint wielding the literal sword of a knight rather than the allegorical sword of a preacher.

Jacobus's version of *George and the Dragon* and his sermon elucidating its meaning may have travelled far and wide, but a preacher's message can, of course, be manipulated in transmission. The medieval Lives and miracles of saints, in Latin as in the vernacular, tend to be labelled as highly conservative texts, but the passage from one language to another and from one manuscript codex to the next affords opportunities aplenty for the text to be manipulated to meet the needs and expectations of new audiences.<sup>10</sup> The French versions of the *George and the Dragon* story that survive in scores of largely unexplored fourteenth- and fifteenth-century codices provide ample evidence of hagiography's unexpected diversity. Unsurprisingly, the majority are found in vernacular renderings of Jacobus's *Golden Legend*. But George's dragon also pokes its head out of a lake where we would not necessarily expect to find it. It seems likely that the association between George and his dragon was strong enough for late medieval audiences, much like their modern counterparts, to expect to find a monster when they read or listened to the Life of St George. And so, from the thirteenth century, the dragon can occasionally be found lurking in historiated initials accompanying non-*Golden Legend* versions of the Life of St George that make no mention of the dragon in the text.<sup>11</sup> It is not unheard of for compilers of anthologies which do not primarily contain saints' Lives borrowed from the *Golden Legend* to insert Jacobus's version of the George Life with its dragon protagonist.<sup>12</sup> Nor is it uncommon to find the dragon episode borrowed wholesale from the *Golden Legend* but combined with versions of the martyrdom story that predate Jacobus's legendary.<sup>13</sup> Slowly but surely, in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the dragon worms its way into vernacular versions of the Life of St George to forge new and sometimes unexpected variants of the story.

My aim here is to examine two such cases in the light of Jacobus's exegetical framework for *George and the Dragon*. If, in the first instance, the vernacular author appears to subscribe so wholeheartedly to Jacobus's reading of George the *miles Christi* as a preacher that he feels he must alter the story, in the second instance the author rejects Jacobus's allegory altogether, instead casting the *miles Christi* exclusively as a flesh-and-blood soldier. By contrasting vernacular Lives in this way I hope to demonstrate the extent to which an ostensibly simple hagiographical narrative could be revised for audiences with rather different vested interests in a single saint.

### George the Preacher in ex-BPH 58

The only extant metrical version of the *George and the Dragon* story in French survives in a late-fourteenth-century manuscript now in an unknown private collection.<sup>14</sup> The author of the French verse Life of St George seems to have drawn on a bewildering array of sources for the tale of George's martyrdom, and the *Golden Legend* is unlikely to have been his only source for the dragon miracle.<sup>15</sup> Overall, however, he sticks to Jacobus's account of George's dragon encounter fairly closely. There are two major differences that are of

relevance here. Firstly, the vernacular author turns the dragon into a symbol of the afflicted city's pagan cult. And secondly, instead of being forced to convert under duress, the pagan population converts voluntarily after hearing the Word of God.

Firstly, then, the French verse *Life* forges an explicit link between the dragon and paganism. When George rides up to the maiden she is astonished that anyone could put on such a heroic display when the dragon could arrive at any moment (vv. 64-6).<sup>16</sup> In response to her praise George explains that there is nothing special about his actions: she too could be acting just as bravely if she were not a 'Saracen' (vv. 76-8). It is only because she is pagan, it emerges, that she needs to be afraid of the dragon. In the *Golden Legend* account of the story, the maiden converts alongside her father and his subjects on returning to the city, but in the French verse *Life*, she takes the advice of George the Preacher to heart and embraces Christianity there and then before the dragon's arrival (v. 79). Having become a Christian, she is immune to the dragon's attack.

That George's encounter with the dragon represents a battle between Christianity and paganism is further emphasized in the ex-BPH 58 *Life* with the arrival of the monster. George has no need to reach for his famous lance and skewer the dragon, as he does in the *Golden Legend*. Possibly betraying the influence of an earlier Latin version of the dragon miracle, George simply invokes God's name to stop the terrifying creature in its tracks:<sup>17</sup>

Ilz n'alerent gaires avant  
 Qu'ilz ne veïssent le serpent.  
 Droit a la cité tient sa voie  
 Car trop lui demouroit sa prie.  
 Saint George lui dist haultement,  
 'De par Dieu, le Roy tout puissant  
 Te conjur que n'aies pouoir  
 Que d'illec te puisses mouvoir!' (vv. 83-90)

[Before they had gone much further they saw the serpent. It was heading straight for the city because its prey was well overdue. St George cried out to it, 'By God, the almighty king, I order you not to be able to move from this spot!']

Once the newly converted maiden has thrown her girdle around the dragon's neck, the monster that had lurched towards them with such speed is motionless forever more (v. 96). In the *Golden Legend*, the dragon is led to the city and George delivers something of an ultimatum to the inhabitants: they can either convert or face the monster (65). But instead of running for the hills and then being baptized by force, in the French verse *Life* the townspeople are delighted to see the tamed monster (v. 98). The maiden preaches the Word of God to her parents, prompting the whole city to turn spontaneously to Christ (vv. 99-102). 'Nous croirons le Dieu de saint George!' [We shall believe in St George's God!], shouts the newly converted populace, once George has dispatched the monster (v. 110).

The saint here has no need for an ultimatum, then, to encourage the dragon's pagan victims to embrace the Christian faith: preaching is given priority over the threat of violence in order to convert Silena.

The French verse Life of St George does not follow the *Golden Legend* for the story of George's martyrdom, instead drawing on at least one pre-*Golden Legend* version of the saint's *passio* (see n. 15). At no point does George adopt the guise of a soldier who slays pagan priests and executioners, as he does in the *Golden Legend*; there is no mention of George's annihilation of pagans at the Siege of Jerusalem as there is in the *Golden Legend*; on the contrary, in the French verse Life George never stops preaching to the faithful and converting pagans as he suffers one torment after another. It is fitting, then, that before being beheaded in the French verse Life, George promises to protect the readers and listeners of his Life not from their human enemies but from the diabolical temptation he has preached against time and time again in a bid to convert pagans to the Christian faith: 'Sire, garde les de mesprendre' ['Lord, keep them from transgressing'], he prays before finally donning his martyr's crown (v. 514). In his sermons, Jacobus may have suggested that George slays the dragon using the allegorical sword of Logos, but here in the French metrical Life the allegory is literalized: George is cast as a preacher who, first and foremost, literally uses words to vanquish diabolical temptation in the guise of a dragon.

#### George the Soldier in KBR 10295-304

The unpublished French prose Life of St George found in a miscellany copied between 1428 and 1429 and now in the Belgian Royal Library is at odds with its surroundings.<sup>18</sup> The section of the manuscript which is a legendary comprises forty-one saints' Lives, many of which can be related to Lives in a late-thirteenth-century anthology now in the Bibliothèque Nationale under the classmark f. fr. 6447. There is no dragon in the Life of St George in Bibl. nationale, f. fr. 6447, however, which is perhaps the reason why the compiler of KBR 10295-304 borrowed his George story from elsewhere. He turned to the *Golden Legend* Life of St George, but reframed it, adding a prologue and an epilogue that identify the narrator as a soldier and dedicate the intervening text to his fellow soldiers.<sup>19</sup>

The short prologue attached to the prose Life of St George in the Brussels manuscript starts by advising men of arms to carry the Life with them at all times:

Chi après s'ensieut le vie monsigneur saint Jorge le glorieus martir,  
comment il fu martirijés. Lequel martire en ramembrance cascuns  
hommes d'armes le doit porter en bataille. (fol. 63v)

[Hereafter follows the Life of St George, the glorious martyr, how he was martyred, whose martyrdom every man of arms must carry on the battlefield in memory.]

Readers here are not just being urged to carry the text with them mentally, that is, 'en ramembrance', but to take a hard copy 'in memory' of the saint. The prayer George pronounces before his decapitation in the Brussels manuscript confirms that the narrator of the Life considers the physical text of the Life of St George to be a talisman that guarantees soldiers victory over their enemies:

'Or vous prie jou pour tous chiaus qui mon non reclaimeront, en tiere, en mer et en baptaille, et en tous lieus perilleus, soit devant juge ou signeur terrijen, que vous les delivrés de tous leur tourmens et de tous les perieus ... E a tous ciaus qui porteront ma vie en bataille, Sire Diex, je vous requier que par vostre merite vous leur donnés victore encontre leur anemis.' (fols 67v-68r)<sup>30</sup>

[I thus pray on behalf of all those who invoke my name, on land, at sea or in battle, in all dangerous places, before a judge or a temporal lord, that you deliver them from torment and danger ... And, Lord God, I ask that, by your merit, you give victory over their enemies to all those who carry my Life with them into battle.']

George is not offering protection against sin and devilish temptation as he did in the French verse Life; he is promising to protect the members of his cultic community from their flesh-and-blood enemies.

In the lengthy prayer which closes the epilogue to the *Geörge Life* in KBR 10295-304, the narrator identifies himself and his readers more specifically as knights under George's chivalrous protection:

Voelliés prijer a lui qu'il voelle prijer a Dieu qu'il voelle ensaucier no prijere ... Sire sains Jorges, je vous prie que vous voelliés mi et mes amis warder de mal et d'encombrier si vorement que je mec mon cors et mes biens en vostre dignez mains. Et tres dous Sires, je vous requierch que vous donnés mes anemis tel destoubrier qu'il ne me puissent nuire ne grever en bataille nulle, quelle que ce soit, ne blecier mes armures. Et si vous prie que par vostre sainte merite et par vostre sainte chievalerie qui vit ou trone devant Dieu ou siecle des siecle, sire saint Jorges, vrais martirs, prijés a Dieu qu'il me voelle ensaucier mes prijeres et que Nostre Signeur Jhesu Crist me voelle donner victore et jetter de l'an et dou jour a honneur. (fols 68r-68v)

[Pray for [George] to pray to God to grant our prayers ... St George, I pray so ardently for you to protect me and my friends from evil and harm that I put my body and possessions entirely in your worthy hands. I ask you to cause my enemies so much turmoil that they can't harm me or



injure me in any battle, whatever it is, or scratch my armour. And I ask you, by your holy merit and your holy chivalry that lives on with God in Paradise, to pray to God so that he grants my prayers and so that Jesus gives me victory and casts me into honour from one day to the next.]

The narrator's prayer may be convoluted, but it is nonetheless clear that he imagines his audience to be made up of fellow soldiers, and not just *milites Christi* in the figurative sense: these are knights who want to avoid injuries and scratched armour on the battlefield. Addressing us as 'you', but also subsuming us into a collective 'we', the narrator invites readers and listeners to participate in an imagined military community that turns to George and his fellow knights in Paradise for victory over our human enemies.

If, in the French verse Life, George behaves as a literal preacher, initially taming the dragon with words to enable the pagan populace to convert of their own volition, in the French prose Life in KBR 10295-304, George the Soldier taps the full potential of the *Golden Legend* dragon as a tool for terrorizing the pagan populace into submission. Once George has spiked the monster with his lance, the princess throws her girdle around its neck, in accordance with Jacobus's account. But instead of leading the dragon to Silena 'like a well-trained dog' (60), the simile is rewritten: George and the princess are said to drag along a 'kien rabbit', or a 'rabid hound' (fol. 65r). The vernacular author thus rejects the hagiographical *topos* according to which the civilizing saint tames the beast, instead leaving the dragon untamed. It is hardly surprising, then, that the people of Silena head for the hills and the strongholds of the city, terrified that George is about to feed them to the monster (ibid.). Once George has summoned the terrified pagans back to the city, he duly delivers his ultimatum: he will slay his rabid dog, on the condition that everyone believes in Christ (fol. 65v).

The author of the prose Life in KBR 10295-304 follows the *Golden Legend* closely for the Passion narrative, but makes several additions to the final miracle story, the Jerusalem miracle, which deals with George's help for the Christian army during the First Crusade. The vernacular author makes it clear from the outset that the aim of the Siege of Jerusalem in 1099 was to destroy all the Saracens within the city walls (fol. 68r). In return for the transportation of his relics to Jerusalem, George enables the Crusaders to accomplish their aim, expelling all the Saracens from the city. The triumphant image of Christian colonization at the end of the passage also constitutes an addition to the *Golden Legend*.

Et mesire sains Jorge tous armés comme chevaliers, sur son ceval couviert de blancques armes, a une rouge crois en son escut, si ala par devant et li peuples si le sieuwi priés de la chité de Jherusalem. Se mirent les sarasins a fin et a essil. Se furent signeur de la chité de Jherusalem. (fol. 68r)

[And St George, fully armed as a knight, on a horse covered with white arms and with a red cross on his shield, went forth and the people



followed him near to the city of Jerusalem. And so they put an end to the Saracens and exiled them and became lords of the city of Jerusalem.]

Most importantly, however, the vernacular author links the tale of George's miraculous appearance at the Siege of Jerusalem to the present day and the community of soldiers he imagines as his audience. The Jerusalem miracle is introduced as an explanation for why knights continue to bear the distinctive arms of St George to this day: it is, we are told, 'le raison pour quoy on a pris les armes monsieur saint Jorge qui estoient blancques a une rouge crois' [the reason why people have taken up the arms of St George, which were white with a red cross] (fol. 68r). Soldier-readers of the Life in KBR 10295-304, then, are not only invited to carry the Life of St George with them on the battlefield for good luck; in commemoration of the crusader victory over the Saracens in 1099, they would do well to wear their role model's arms, too.

### Costume Changes

At the end of the story of *George and the Dragon* in the *Golden Legend*, Jacobus tells us that George took off his armour to reveal a humbly dressed Christian (77). If the dragon miracle is read in the light of Jacobus's sermons on St George, it is clear that he understands the text of the *George and the Dragon* story as similarly clothed. Superficially, on the literal level, St George is dressed as a *miles*, an ordinary soldier who slays a dragon. But underneath George the Soldier's armour lies a preacher, a *miles Christi* like Jacobus himself, who overcomes diabolical temptation with words. Composers of French Lives of St George exploited the fluidity in the definition of the *miles Christi*. In the French metrical version of the dragon story, George is only half-dressed as a soldier to begin with: as if Jacobus's allegorical gloss on the legend has been incorporated into the narrative, George reveals himself from the outset to be less a soldier than a preacher. Other vernacular authors, meanwhile, reject Jacobus's allegorical reading of the story and make sure that George's armour never gets removed. In the French prose Life of the saint now in the Belgian Royal Library, George appears in the guise of a model soldier, to be imitated by an army of readers. When the dragon pokes its head out of a lake in late medieval French versions of *George and the Dragon*, it is never certain which form the monster will take, but George is guaranteed to arrive suitably dressed to dispatch it.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jacobus of Voragine, *Legenda aurea: con le miniature dal codice Ambrosiano C 240 inf.*, ed. Paolo Maggioni, Edizione nazionale dei testi mediolatini, 20, rev. ed., 2 vols (Milano: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 2007), I, 440-48. Numbers in parentheses refer to the line numbers in this edition.

<sup>2</sup> The earliest extant manuscript recording the story of George's martyrdom, in Greek, is dated to the fifth century and known as the 'Vienna Palimpsest'. For a classification of the early Latin, Greek, Coptic, Arabic and Syriac Lives of St George into 'canonical' and 'apocryphal' versions, see John Matzke, 'Contributions to the History of the

Legend of Saint George, with Special Reference to the Sources of the French, German and Anglo-Saxon Metrical Versions', *PMLA*, 17 (1902), 464-535 (464-91). The article continues in *PMLA*, 18 (1903), 99-171.

<sup>3</sup> The *George and the Dragon* story is preserved in Greek in one twelfth-century manuscript (Rome, Bibliotheca Angelica, 46) and in Latin in three manuscripts of a similar date (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 14473; Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica, codex latinus 6932; and Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis 739). For the presence of the story in an eleventh-century Georgian manuscript, see Christopher Walter, 'The Origins of the Cult of Saint George', *Revue des études byzantines*, 53 (1995), 295-326 (320-22).

<sup>4</sup> Didi-Huberman, in relation to the Life of St George, and Riches, more generally, both read the dragon as a divinely sanctioned tool for converting the pagan populace. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Saint Georges et le dragon: versions d'une légende* (Paris: Biro, 1994), p. 123; and Samantha Riches, 'Encountering the Monstrous: Saints and Dragons in Medieval Thought', in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, eds Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 196-218 (p. 198). Barriga i Perez and Good, meanwhile, have noted that conversion is the precondition for slaying the dragon in Catalan and English Lives of St George respectively. See Francesc Barriga i Perez, *Sant Jordi i Catalunya* (Madrid: Edaf, 2007), p. 58; and Jonathan Good, *The Cult of St George in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2009), p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> For Jacobus's version of the Life of St Margaret, see *Legenda aurea*, I, 690-95.

<sup>6</sup> All three are published in Jacobus of Voragine, *Sermones de sanctis per anni totius circulum* (Venice: Somaschi, 1573). Subsequent references in parentheses to this edition. Translations are my own, although the King James Version is used for biblical citations.

<sup>7</sup> On comparisons of knights' armour to monastic virtues, see Giles Constable, 'The Place of the Crusader in Medieval Society', *Viator*, 29 (1998), 377-403 (382).

<sup>8</sup> For a useful summary of the development of the notion of the *miles Christi* as a flesh-and-blood soldier, see Malcolm Barber, 'The Social Context of the Templars', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 34 (1984), 27-46 (28-9). Similarly, Constable observes that *miles Christi* could refer equally to the martyrs of late Antiquity and to members of the crusading army (377).

<sup>9</sup> For a brief history of George's spectral appearances on medieval battlefields, see Samantha Riches, *St George: Hero, Martyr and Myth* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> The assumption that hagiography is always a conservative genre is criticized, for example, by Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, 'Translations of Sainte Foy: Bodies, Texts, Places', in *The Medieval Translator - Traduire au Moyen Âge*, 5, eds Roger Ellis and René Tixier (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), pp. 29-49 (pp. 31-2).

<sup>11</sup> The Life of St George in Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 570, fols 106r-109v, for example, does not include the dragon miracle, but does feature a dragon in the striking illumination on fol. 106r. Similarly, a dragon in an historiated initial introduces the brief French verse Life in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, nouvelles acquisitions françaises, 4412, fols 471r-471v, despite no monster being mentioned in the text.

<sup>12</sup> See the French prose Life of St George in Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek/Bibliothèque royale, 10295-10304, fols 63v-68v (discussed more fully below).

<sup>13</sup> See the French verse Life of St George in ex-Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, 58 (unfoliated and now in a private collection), which is discussed more fully below. Both Matzke and Guilcher suggest that the Amsterdam Life is highly unusual in combining the dragon episode with non-*Golden Legend* accounts of George's martyrdom. See Matzke, 117; Yvette Guilcher (ed.), *Deux versions de la Vie de saint Georges*, Les classiques français du Moyen Âge 138 (Paris: Champion, 2001), p. 57. But see also the Occitan verse Life of St George in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, f. fr. 14973, fols 27v-47v; and the prose French Lives in Tours, Bibliothèque municipale, 1011, fols 155v-159v; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, f. fr. 15475, fols 136v-141r; and f. fr. 1534, fols 39v-40v. Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale, 1430 is unique insofar as it contains a French pre-*Golden Legend* version of the *passio* and the *Golden Legend* version side by side (fols 38v-42r), with the *Golden Legend* dragon miracle squeezed in towards the end of the manuscript (fols 124r-125r).

<sup>14</sup> Once part of the Thomas Phillipps's collection, under the classmark 3668, the manuscript was sold in 1979 to the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica in Amsterdam (Guilcher, p. 26). It has since been sold to a private collector.

<sup>15</sup> Matzke is at odds to explain the composition of the George Life in ex-BPH 58, which, although primarily based on a pre-*Golden Legend* version of the George *passio* that circulated widely, also contains motifs seemingly

borrowed from various Greek manifestations of the story which have left no other written traces in Latin Christendom (115-19). If Matzke deems it 'too ambitious a supposition' for a vernacular author of a rather short poem to draw on such an array of rare texts (119), Guilcher is more willing to accept this possibility (pp. 56-8). In terms of the dragon episode, Matzke assumes the author of the *Life* in ex-BPH 58 borrowed it from the *Golden Legend* (117). It has, however, been suggested that the dragon episode bears a closer resemblance to a Latin version of the story found in a twelfth-century manuscript, namely Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek., codex latinus 14473: Konrad Sandkühler, *Der Drachenkampf des hl. Georg in englischer Legende und Dichtung vom 14. bis 16. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Anton Meindl, 1913), pp. 49-54. While there are indeed a handful of motifs which could be attributed to a Latin source similar to Clm 14476, there is a far longer list of motifs betraying the influence of elaborations on the *Golden Legend* account (the emphasis on the maiden's physical beauty and the addition of her mother, for example) and of motifs apparently unique to ex-BPH 58. It seems sensible to suggest that the vernacular author, who seems to have drawn on so many sources, must have been aware of the ubiquitous *Golden Legend* but is likely to have drawn on at least one other Latin version of the dragon miracle as well.

<sup>16</sup> References in parentheses refer to the edition of the ex-BPH 58 *George Life* in Guilcher, pp. 95-109.

<sup>17</sup> As Sandkühler suggests (p. 53), George's confrontation with the dragon in ex-BPH 58 bears some resemblance to the corresponding passage in Clm 14473. In Clm 14473, however, rather than commanding the dragon to halt in God's name, George tames the dragon by making the sign of the cross and praying for the strength to crush the monster's head. The relevant passage in Clm 14473 is published in Johannes Baptist Aufhäuser, *Das Drachenwunder des Heiligen Georg in der griechischen und lateinischen Ueberlieferung*, *Byzantinisches Archiv* 5 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1911), p. 185.

<sup>18</sup> For the description and provenance history of Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek/Bibliothèque royale, 10295-10304, see Paul Meyer, 'Notice du ms. 10295-304 de la Bibliothèque royale de Belgique (légendes en prose et en vers)', *Romania*, 30 (1901), 295-316.

<sup>19</sup> The beginning of the prologue to the *George Life* in KBR 10295-304 resembles the opening lines of the *George Lives* in Lille, Bibliothèque municipale, 453, fols 94v-99v, and Bibl. de l'Arsenal, 570, fols 106r-109v, which are French renderings of the two major pre-*Golden Legend* versions of the *George passio* that circulated in Latin Christendom in the late Middle Ages. It also resembles the opening lines of the *George Life* in Cambrai, Bibliothèque municipale, 812, fols 432r-441r, which begins with the pre-*Golden Legend passio* found in Lille, BM 453, before providing a reworking of the *Golden Legend* account of George's martyrdom and dragon encounter. Meyer publishes the *George Life* in Bibl. de l'Arsenal, 570, in 'Prières et poésies religieuses tirées d'un manuscrit lorrain (Arsenal 570)', *Bulletin de la Société des anciens textes français*, 28 (1901), 48-93 (59-61). He misclassifies the *Life* in KBR 10295-304 on account of the similar *incipit* ('Notice', 305). The epilogue to the *George Life* in KBR 10295-304 is, as far as I am aware, unique.

<sup>20</sup> Despite recounting a different version of George's martyrdom, the *Lives* in Lille, BM 453 (fols 99r-99v) and Cambrai, BM 811 (fols 437r-437v) include a very similar prayer in which 'Saracen' enemies are given a special mention.