Reading Abbey and post-Conquest Marian Devotion

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When Henry I set his heart on founding a new abbey in Reading, one of the most important decisions he faced was to whom the planned foundation would be dedicated. This was in no way less crucial than the more practical aspects of financing or construction management, for the choice of patron saint(s) for the Abbey was not only a sign of the king's personal devotion, it signalled a spiritual programme for the new community, a statement of intent as to the hoped-for charism of the abbey. The protectors chosen for Reading by Henry were two major saints of the Church Universal: the Blessed Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist, a highly appropriate choice for a foundation intended to be the focus of devotion of the royal family and their privileged burial-place.

Mary and St John are explicitly depicted in the Scriptures as (adopted) mother and son, with the Gospel according to St John (19.26-27) telling us that Christ Himself entrusted his mother to John as they stood at the foot of the Cross:

> When Jesus therefore saw his mother there, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, "Woman, behold thy son!"
> Then saith he to the disciple "Behold thy mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.[1]

To this adoptive and spiritual filiation, apocryphal tradition added a further bond between Mary and John, that of blood ties. This tradition was disseminated in an apocryphal family tree of Christ by Haymo, bishop of Halberstadt (d. 853) known under the title of *Trinubium*

Annae, the Three Marriages of Anne, a text attested in England from the eleventh century.[2]

According to *Trinubium Annae*, Anne had a sister, Esmeria, whose daughter Elizabeth was the mother of John the Baptist. St Anne herself is said to have married three times and given birth to three daughters named Mary. Through the first Mary, born of her marriage to Joachim, Anne is the grandmother of Jesus; through her second marriage, to Cleophas, she is the grandmother of the lesser St James, Joseph, Simon and Jude; and through her third marriage, to Salome, she is the grandmother of the greater St James and St John (the Evangelist). The Virgin is therefore the aunt of John, who is the younger son of her youngest uterine half-sister. John is also the youngest of his generation, as well as being traditionally believed to have been the youngest of Christ's disciples. In other words, John is very much at the bottom of the pile in terms of status and prospects according to the norms of twelfth-century society, yet was most favoured. He not only was honoured by having Our Lady entrusted to him, he also became an authority of the highest order, being the author of a Gospel and of the Book of Revelation.

St John would have had particular resonance for Henry I, who had first-hand experience of what it meant to be a younger son. The story of the unfortunate consequences of William the Conqueror's division of his possessions at his death is well known. Henry, at the age of 19, was in the invidious position of having the highest prestige by birth, born to a crowned and anointed king, but holding no lands and therefore enjoying no real status. His inheritance of money was instrumental in causing the hostility of his brothers, as Henry's loan to his older brother, Robert Curthose, in exchange for the Cotentin as guarantee, eventually turned both his brothers against him. The narrative of the disenfranchised younger brother is explicitly articulated in the account of Orderic Vitalis, for example, who in his *Ecclesiastical History* tells us:

> Nam idem dum esset iunior non ut frater a fratribus habitus est sed magis ut externus exterorum id est Francorum et Britonum auxilia querere coactus est et quinque annis diuersorum euentuum motibus admodum fatigatus est.

> (This prince, being the youngest, did not receive fraternal treatment from his brother, but was compelled to seek aid of foreigners, such as the French and the Bretons, as if he had been himself an alien and was harassed by many vicissitudes of fortune during five years.)[3]

The five years in question count from the Conqueror's death, so when Henry was between 19 and 24 years of age.

Orderic's mention of the Bretons refers to the episode of Henry taking refuge in the Mont Saint Michel, which was of course a fortress as well as an important monastery. He was besieged there and eventually came to an agreement with Robert Curthose, following him to Rouen. But this was not the end of the story, as we are told by the Norman historian-poet Wace in his history of the Dukes of Normandy, the *Roman de Rou*:[4]

> Ne voil avant conter ne dire
> par quel coroz ne par quel ire
> Henri fu pois a Roem pris
> e en la tor a garder mis;
> ne coment il fu delivrez
> e de la terre congeez,
> e coment il ala al rei,
> qui en France l'out pois od sei;
> ne coment Haschier le trova
> a Paris donc il l'amena,
> qui se fist un des oilz peier,
> que l'en nel peüst entercier.
>
> (I do not wish to recount or say any more about how anger and wrath caused Henry to be captured in Rouen and imprisoned in the tower, nor about how he was freed and sent away from that land, and about he went to the king, who then retained him in France, nor about how Haschier, who had one of his eyes covered with a plaster so that no one could recognise him, found him in Paris and then took him away).

This Haschier is generally identified as Henry's tutor, Robert Achard, who was sent to the young prince by the inhabitants of Domfront in 1096, 'pitying the misfortunes of the illustrious exile'.[5] This image of a young man in repeated fear for his personal safety and plagued by constant insecurity, yet called by the grace of God to great power and dignity, was likely encouraged by Henry himself and was part of the official narrative. This does not mean that it did not correspond to the king's perception of his own life, and could certainly have fostered a personal devotion to St John the Evangelist, reflected in the dedication of Reading Abbey.

The dedication to the Virgin Mary, on the other hand, was conventional. Since the Benedictine Monastic Reform in the late tenth century, English monasteries were routinely dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and pre-Conquest houses not dedicated to the Virgin are even known to have been rededicated.[6] Placing Reading Abbey under the patronage of Mary would therefore have been expected. To this, one may add that Marian devotion was on the rise in the twelfth century, a movement that was set to increase steadily over the following centuries. However, Marian devotion had also given rise to a doctrinal innovation that caused considerable tension in theological circles, precisely around the time of the foundation of the abbey.

At the heart of what became a heated theological debate is the Feast of the Conception of Our Lady (8 December). This feast was observed in Anglo-Saxon England already in a number of important religious centres, in particular Winchester, Exeter and Canterbury, from where it is known to have spread to monastic houses in Normandy, including the Mont Saint Michel. It was a minor feast, that is, it was a mark of veneration or personal piety, without doctrinal underpinnings, and was abolished in 1070 by Archbishop Lanfranc as part of a rationalisation of the calendar. Political considerations might also have informed Lanfranc's decision, as the two main promoters of the feast, Archbishop Stigand and Abbot Ælfsige (Helsin) of Ramsay had opposed William the Conqueror.[7] The suppression of the feast of the Conception of Our Lady was ultimately unsuccessful. It was reinstated in England in 1129, a clear sign of support at the highest levels of Anglo-Norman society, both ecclesiastical and secular. Normandy had to wait a little longer for the feast to be officially approved, in 1145. However, this was not simply

the reinstatement of an old feast. It was now the vehicle for a doctrinal innovation: the Immaculate Conception of Mary, that is, the belief that Mary was conceived free from the Original Sin as well as being free of personal sin.

The key date here is 1120, when Eadmer of Canterbury produced his *Tractatus de conceptione sanctae Mariae*, the first systematic defence in writing of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The novelty of this work lies in its systematic approach, for Immaculist beliefs had been expressed well before the twelfth century in England. The Missal of New Minster, that belonged to Bishop Ælfwine of Winchester (1032-1057), is a good example of pre-conquest Immaculist belief. The Preface on the Feast of the Conception of Our Lady reads:

> V. D. per Christum dominum nostrum. Cuius uirginis matris conceptionis sollempnia deuotis mentibus recolentes, tue magnificentiae preconia non tacemus, quam ante ortum ita sanctificasti, ante conceptum sic sancti spiritus illustration et uirtute altissimi obumbrasti, ut templum domini, sacrarium spiritus sancti, mundi domina, celi regina, sponsa Christi, et unici filii Dei foeta mater effici, et post partum uirginitatis insigniis perpetualiter meruisset decorari.
>
> (By Jesus Christ Our Lord. As we celebrate with devotion the solemn feast of the Conception of His Virgin Mother, we should not leave unspoken the praise of your great deeds, you who sanctified her even before her birth; before her conception similarly you covered her in the light of the Holy Spirit and by the highest powers, so that she was worthy to become a temple of the Lord, a sanctuary to the Holy Spirit, mistress of the world, queen of heaven, bride of Christ and fruitful mother of the Son of God, and be adorned for ever with the honour of virginity.)[8]

The sentiments expressed by Eadmer are recognisably the same as in the Missal of New Minster, but he underpins them with a reasoned argumentation, encapsulated in the pithy expression: 'potuit, decuit, voluit, ergo fecit'. It was in God's power ('potuit') to make Mary untainted by the Original Sin; it was fitting ('decuit') that he should do

so, since no king would condescend to enter a house that had not been cleaned; it was God's will ('voluit') that this should be; and therefore, He did it ('fecit').[9]

Eadmer's setting down in writing of a clear argument gave credibility to the doctrine, and his *Tractatus* was received all the more favourably because it was believed to be the work of St Anselm of Canterbury, of whom Eadmer had been the secretary. The feast then spread quite fast, across the monastic houses of England, Normandy and Northern France, until things came to a head when the Abbot of Clairvaux, the future St Bernard, heard that the canons of Lyon had openly adopted the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, giving it hitherto unprecedented authority. Bernard of Clairvaux's reaction was a powerful letter to the canons of Lyon, the *Epistola ad canones Lugdunenses* (1139), where he objects in the strongest terms to the Immaculist doctrine, calling it presumptuous and born of superstition.[10] He sees the doctrine as both unnecessary and theologically fundamentally unsound, a view also shared, and actively promoted, by the scholastic theologians of the young University of Paris. Bernard's letter inaugurates a period of systematic suppression of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, particularly (but not exclusively) in France. Marie-Bénédicte Dary describes what later happens as 'une censure liturgique', a liturgical censorship that is dominant by the end of the twelfth century.[11] A preface like that of the Missal of New Minster would have been rewritten or deleted from the liturgical books, while the faithful were encouraged to focus their devotions on a different feast of the Virgin.

At the time of the foundation of Reading Abbey, this was still in the future. The main difficulty confronting the English/Anglo-Norman prelates under Henry I would have been how to justify the reinstatement of a feast that had been abolished under the King's own father. Their solution was, simply, to rewrite history. Anselm the Younger of Canterbury thus penned a legend of the Feast of the Conception of Our Lady that actually credits the establishment of the feast to William the Conqueror, after a vision granted to Abbot Helsin of Ramsay during a storm at sea.[12] This revisionist version of the past must have had the backing of powerful supporters, because we find it disseminated in the vernacular at a surprisingly early date. In the *Conception Nostre Dame*,

composed by Wace in the 1130s, the legend of Helsin is used as a Preface, or Introduction, to an ambitious biography of the Virgin, from her conception to her death and Assumption. The work is based on a wide range of sources, mainly apocryphal, and many of which were English. Wace was clearly familiar with the Immaculist argumentation of Eadmer, which he embeds in his work – but at the end, ostensibly to justify his own belief in the bodily assumption of the Virgin, rather than at the beginning, where he recounts the story of Mary's conception by her parents Joachim and Anne. In this way, he avoids a head-on conflict with influential anti-Immaculist theologians whilst providing his readers with arguments that can also be applied to the Conception of Mary.

Where would Reading Abbey have been positioned in this debate? As a foundation dedicated to Our Lady, it goes without saying that it would have duly observed all the Marian feasts. The question is whether the Reading community celebrated the Conception of Our Lady as a minor observance, or as a solemn feast. We know that the Abbot of Reading at the time of the reinstatement of the feast, Hugh of Amiens (Abbot of Reading, 1120-1129), celebrated the Conception of Our Lady, as Osbert of Clare mentions in one of his letters that *dominus Hugo, abbas Radigensis [...] hanc festivitatem precem etiam regis Henrici solemniter celebrat* ('Lord Hugh, abbot of Reading [...] at the prayer of King Henry solemnly keeps this festival'*)*.[13]

The broader context to this letter of Osbert of Clare, and indeed the letter itself as a whole, provides valuable insights into the intellectual network of which Reading was part. Osbert himself, despite a chequered career, was an influential cleric with friends – or at least, contacts – in high places. Osbert of Clare was Prior of Westminster (elected in 1136), author of the Lives of saints Edmund, Ethelbert, Edberga and Edward, and very active in ecclesiastical politics. One of the earliest of his letters to have survived is addressed to Hugh of Amiens, who was still prior of Lewes at the time of writing, and whom Osbert appears to have known reasonably well.[14] There is no reason to assume that the connection between the two men came to an end when Hugh was elected Abbot of Reading. Osbert clearly had privileged sources of information regarding Reading Abbey, and should be considered a reliable source in this respect.

The specific letter where Osbert mentions the celebration of the feast of the Conception of Our Lady in Reading is further revealing of serious tensions in English ecclesiastical circles well before Bernard of Clairvaux's letter to the canons of Lyon. Osbert's Letter 7 is addressed to one of the most active proponents of the Immaculist doctrine of his time: Anselm the Younger, nephew of St Anselm of Canterbury and at the time of writing Abbot of Bury. We cannot date the letter with precision, but it would appear to have been penned shortly before the Council that legitimised the feast in England, as Osbert feels the need to encourage Anselm in the face of ecclesiastical opposition, crediting him with having initiated the new feast.[15] It is worth quoting from the letter at length:

> Quoniam diligentia sollicitudinis vestrae per diversa mundi spatia multo ad amorem beatae et gloriosae dei genetricis Mariae ferventer accendit [...] et in multis locis celebratur eius vestra sedulitate festa conceptio, quam antiquitus apud patres veteres celebrare non consuevit Christiana religio. Unde in ecclesia dei cum a nobis celebris ageretur illius diei festivitas, quidam post Sathan abeuntes dixerunt esse ridiculum, quod usque ad haec tempora omnibus fuisset saeculis inauditum; et in livore ac felle suae malitiae perdurantes duos episcopos, qui tunc in vicinio forte aderant, Rogerum videlicet et Bernardum, adeuntes convenerunt, ac de novitate solennitas exorta facta relatione animos eorum ad indignationem provocaverunt. Qui hanc festivitatem prohibatam dicentes in concilio, affirmaverunt quod cassanda esset nec tenenda ista tradition. Nos tamen coepta diei insistentes officio cum gaudio gloriosam festivitatem exegimus et solenni tripudio.
>
> (Your sedulous zeal has fired many in various countries with devotion towards the blessed and glorious Mother of God [..] and by your assiduous care the Feast of her Conception is now in many places observed, which was not wont to be celebrated by the ancient fathers. Wherefore, some followers of Satan, whilst we were keeping this feast, decried its observance as hitherto unheard-of and absurd, and with malicious intent they went to two bishops, Roger and Bernard, who happened to be in the

> neighbourhood, and, representing its novelty, they excited them to displeasure. The bishops declared the festival was forbidden by a council, and that the observance of it must be stopped. Nevertheless, we proceeded with the office of the day, which had already begun, and carried it through with joyous solemnity.)[16]

Osbert then dismisses the objections of the bishops in question (Roger, Bishop of Sarum, and Bernard, Bishop of St Davids) and their followers that the feast lacked Roman authority:

> Quos me rationabiliter refellente et eis secundum malitiam eorum respondente, multi testimonium perhibuerunt quoniam et in hoc regno et in transmarinis partibus a nonnullis episcopis et abbatibus in ecclesiis dei celebris instituta est illius diei recordatio.
>
> (I refuted them by reason, and answered them according to their malice, and many persons bore witness that, as well in this kingdom as across the sea, a festal commemoration of the day has been instituted by some bishops and abbots in their churches.)

The mention of Reading occurs towards the end of Osbert's argumentation, where he gives examples of figures of authority who can vouch for the orthodoxy of the new feast: Bishop Gilbert of London, *vir admodum catholicus, de his [...] sufficienter instructus* – 'a most catholic-minded man [...] sufficiently instructed in these matters', and Abbot Hugh of Reading, *qui hanc festivitatem prece etiam regis Henrici solenniter celebrat, in divinis et humanis [...] liberaliter edoctus* – 'who at the prayer of King Henry solemnly keeps this festival, and is well-versed in both sacred and profane learning'.[17] Both men are cited for their stature in intellectual and theological circles, but it is noteworthy that while Bishop Gilbert is presented as a proponent of the feast, the position of Abbot Hugh of Reading would appear to have been more complex. On the one hand, even before the feast of the Conception of Our Lady was officially approved, Abbot Hugh celebrated it in Reading 'solemniter', that is, with the solemnity due to an official feast; on the other hand, the reason he did so is that King Henry requested that it be so. This strongly suggests that the King himself was a driving force in

the re-establishment of the feast and hints at a degree of reluctance on the part of the Abbot. Abbot Hugh could not realistically have refused the request of the King, and would certainly not have disapproved of his devotion to Our Lady; however, within the context of the rise of Immaculist beliefs in English ecclesiastical circles, the solemn celebration of the Conception of Our Lady could well have caused him some concern. We know that in the debate that broke out a decade later, Hugh of Amiens took firmly the side of Bernard of Clairvaux in condemning the belief that Mary was conceived untainted by the Original Sin. The simple fact the new feast was openly celebrated in Reading Abbey as early as 1128 was nevertheless a powerful signal for its advocates.

In practice, this need not have impacted in any significant way on the spiritual life of the Abbey. It was the Abbot, not the King, who had the responsibility for the liturgical prayers used on such a feast, and an acceptable compromise would simply have been to ensure that the prayers for the feast were free of Immaculist connotations. Even if the community was a hotbed of Immaculist belief, it is unlikely that any evidence for this would have been present in the early-twelfth-century missals of Reading Abbey had they survived. The iconographic programme of the building itself, however, is a different matter, as Henry would have had more control over it – he was after all paying for it – which brings us to the celebrated capital in Reading Museum representing the coronation of the Virgin.

The Reading capital, well known among art historians for what Ron Baxter terms its 'precocious iconography', represents two episodes of the life of Mary.[18] The back, almost entirely destroyed, was an Annunciation scene, while the front, better preserved, depicts the coronation of the Virgin by Christ: Mary, her head covered by a veil, is seated on a throne, and Christ, on her left, holds a crown (now lost) over her head. This capital is interesting, because on the one hand, it is firmly 'on trend', a glorious example of the best of prestige *normannitas*, yet is also a very traditional theme well attested in pre-conquest English devotion, where the rise of the theme of the Queenship of Mary has been linked to the importance of Anglo-Saxon queens in promoting the Benedictine monastic reform. This dual relevance puts the capital in the broader context of Henry I's political drive to heal the enduring

trauma of the Conquest through the creation of consensual spaces for his subjects where English traditions are clothed in 'Normanity'. Françoise Laurent, one of the foremost specialists of Anglo-Norman vernacular hagiography, notes that hagiographers of this period choose to celebrate 'universal' saints and saints connected to England, but not 'specialist' Norman saints, as might have been expected: evidence, according to Laurent of an agenda aiming to reconstruct English national history through its spirituality.[19]

In conclusion, Reading Abbey would not only have been conceived by Henry as a prestigious burial place for his family and successors. It was also part of a broader policy to give greater cohesion to the realm and make a fresh start founded on the best of English tradition, reshaped by Norman modernity. The promotion of the Feast of the Conception of Our Lady would have been an important stone in this edifice. Henry's plans, as we know, came to an end when he died in 1136 without a legitimate heir, inaugurating a period of civil unrest. Theological debate was not at the forefront of the concerns of his successor and nephew, King Stephen, who showed little interest in Reading Abbey. When Henry II came to the throne in 1154, it was also the beginning of the end of the influence of one of England's most powerful clerics, King Stephen's brother Henry of Blois, Abbot of Glastonbury, Bishop of Winchester and nephew of Henry I, who had been instrumental in promoting his stellar career in the Church. It is highly likely that Henry of Blois supported, directly or indirectly, the dissemination of the feast of the Conception of Our Lady that Henry I had wished to be celebrated at Reading: under the new dynasty, the prelate was no longer able to promote the ecclesiastical strand of his uncle's vision. He was not present at the dedication of the Abbey church in 1164.[20] This does not mean, however, that devotion to Our Lady would in any way have been marginalised in Reading. Even though, by the late twelfth century, the leading theologians had staved off all attempts to make the Immaculate Conception of Mary an official doctrine, it had won the hearts of the faithful – including, in all probability, at least some of the monks of Reading Abbey.

Notes

1 Holy Bible, King James Version.

2 On the date and authorship of the 'Trinubium Annae', see B. de Gaiffier, 'Le 'Trinubium Annae'. Haymon d'Halberstadt ou Haymon d'Auxerre ?', *Analecta Bollandiana* 90 (1972), pp. 289–98.

3 *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, Book VIII, ch. XIX, ed. and transl. M. Chibnall, 6 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969-1980); vol. 4, pp. 256–7.

4 *Le Roman de Rou de Wace,* ed. A.J. Holden, 3 vols (Société des Anciens Textes Français : Paris, 1970-1972) ; part 3, ll. 9629-40. Translation by G. S. Burgess, *The History of the Norman People – Wace's Roman de Rou* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), p. 200.

5 See Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, Chibnall ed., vol. 4, p. 158. The name of Henry's tutor appears as 'Harecher' in Orderic's version of these events.

6 On pre-Conquest devotion to Our Lady, see Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 2).

7 See Veronica Ortenberg West-Harling, 'L'origine anglaise de la fête de la Conception de la Vierge', pp. 73-81 in *Marie et la "Fête aux Normands". Dévotion, images, poésie*, ed. Françoise Thélamon (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2011), pp. 73–81.

8 Francis Wormwald, *English Kalendars before AD 1100* (London, 1934; reed. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1988, Henry Bradshaw Society 72), p. 190; my translation. Other noteworthy pre-Conquest calendars featuring the Feast of the Conception of Our Lady are the Psalter of New Minster (1030) and the Collect of Bishop Wulfstan of Worcester (second half C11).

9 *Eadmeri monaci Cantuarensis Tractatus de conceptione sanctae Mariae*, ed. H. Thurston and T. Slater (Freiburg-im-Bresgau, 1904); also in *S. Anselmi, ex Beccensi abbate Cantuarensis archiepiscopi Opera Omnia necnon Eadmeri Monachi Historia Novorum et alia opuscula*, ed. D. G. Gerberon (Paris: Patrologia latina 159, 1865), vol 2, Appendix (spuria), 'Tractatus de conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis', cols. 301-318. For a detailed analysis of this argument and the way was exploited, see Rita Beyers, "La *Conception Nostre Dame* de Wace; premier poème narratif sur la Vierge en ancien français", in W. Verbecke, M. Haverals et alii, *Serta devota in memoriam Guillelmi Lourdaux* (Louvain, 1995; Mediaevalia Lovaniensa series I, 21), vol. 2, pp. 359–400.

10 Bernard of Clairvaux, Epistola 174. *Sancti Bernardi Omnia Opera*, ed. J. Leclercq, C. Hugh Talbot and H.M. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercensies, 1974), vol. VII, Epistulae I, pp. 387–92.

11 Marie-Bénédicte Dary, 'Aux origines de la "Fête aux Normands". La liturgie de la fête de la Conception de la Vierge Marie en France (XIIe-XIIIe siècles), pp. 85–98 in *Marie et la "Fête aux Normands". Dévotion, images, poésie*, Françoise Thélamon ed. (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2011), p. 89.

12 The legend first appears in the *Miraculum de conceptione sanctae Mariae*, attributed at that time to St Anselm of Canterbury. *S. Anselmi, ex Beccensi abbate Cantuarensis archiepiscopi Opera Omnia necnon Eadmeri Monachi Historia Novorum et alia opuscula*, ed. D. G. Gerberon (Paris: Patrologia latina 159, 1865), vol 2, Appendix (spuria): 'Miraculum de conceptione Beatae Mariae', cols. 325–6.

13 *The Letters of Osbert of Clare, Prior of Westminster*, ed. E.W. Williamson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), ep. 7, pp. 65–8; excerpts from this letter are translated in Edmund Bishop, *Liturgica Historica: papers on the liturgy and religious life of the Western church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918), pp. 242–7.

14 One might however detect a hint of defensiveness in this superficially warm letter to Hugh of Amiens, which contrasts markedly with the confident tone of Osbert's letter 15, to Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester, in 1139. On Osbert's life and career, see J. Armitage Robinson, 'A Sketch of Osbert's Career', pp. 1–20 in the Introduction to *The Letters of Osbert of Clare,* ed. Williamson.

15 "vos aedificium tantae solennitatis incepistis. Et vos perficite, quodque per vos consummandum est fideliter explete" – "You have begun the building up of this solemnity. And so do you carry it through and faithfully accomplish an undertaking which it is incumbent on you to bring to completion." *The Letters of Osbert of Clare,* ed. Williamson, ep. 7, lines 25–28, p. 67; transl. Bishop, pp. 243–4.

16 *Letters of Osbert of Clare,* ed. Williamson, ep. 7, lines 15-33; transl. Bishop, p. 243.

17 *Letters of Osbert of Clare*, ed. Williamson, ep. 7, lines 17-21; transl. Bishop, p. 243.

18 For a detailed description of the Reading capital depicting the coronation of the Virgin, see Ron Baxter, *The Royal Abbey of Reading* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2016), ch. 8, 'The Sculpture of the Cloister', esp. pp. 275–80.

19 Françoise Laurent, *Plaire et édifier. Les récits hagiographiques composés en Angleterre aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Paris: Champion, 1998); see also

the Introduction to *Wace. Vie de sainte Marguerite, Conception Nostre Dame, Vie de saint Nicolas*, ed. and transl. F. Laurent, F. Le Saux and N. Bragantini-Maillard (Paris: Champion, 2019), esp. pp. 23–35. This agenda is also discernible on the political level in Henry's choice of bride, clearly intended to produce heirs deriving their legitimacy from both the English and Norman lines.

20 Relatively little is known about Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester, considering how eminent a personage he was. A Life of Henry was written shortly after his death in 1171 by Abbot Walter of Westminster (1175-1191), but it has not come down to us. We know, however, that he was a patron of the arts and was not thought of very highly by Bernard of Clairvaux, possibly because of his perceived over-inflated sense of the importance of the see of Winchester. See Jeffrey West, 'A Taste for the Antiques Henry of Blois and the Arts', *Anglo-Norman Studies 30. Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2007* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 213-230; also Yoshio Kusaba, 'Henry of Blois, Winchester, and the 12th-century Renaissance,' in *Winchester Cathedral: nine hundred years, 1093-1993*, ed. John Crook (Chichester: Phillimore, 1993), pp. 69–80.