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PROJECT

Gendered Transmissions: Women, Christianity and Culture in the Early Middle Ages

Female monasticism flourished in the eighth-century Rhine-Main area, both among insular newcomers (such as Lioba and Thekla, associates of Boniface of Mainz) and among native Franks. Many eighth-century manuscripts survive from the religious institutions of the Main Valley region, including a dozen associated with women's and double houses. The codices contain penitentials, patristic treatises, florilegia, books of the Bible, sermons, the lives of saints, and the passions of martyrs, all except the biblical material originally composed between the fourth and the seventh centuries. I analyze those (heretofore virtually ignored) women's manuscripts, produced and used not only in the new Bonifatian foundations, but also in older Frankish houses. Women copied (and sometimes illuminated) particular texts, namely those supportive of gender-egalitarian or even proto-feminist values, as well as syneisactic or heterosocial organizational forms. Furthermore, they intervened to improve those works through a series of editorial decisions: textual alterations and emendations, large-scale omissions and interpolations, and the combination of originally separate texts to form unique wholes. I thus explore how religious women worked to shape the Christian culture of the Middle Ages through their gendered transmission of the heritage of Late Antiquity. Comparison with the wider corpus of surviving eighth-century manuscripts also indicates that some texts appear to have been preferentially received, read, duplicated, and transmitted through networks of women's religious communities, in contrast to a different - likewise partial and likewise gendered - transmission passing through men's monastic communities.

Recommended Reading

Lifshitz, Felice and Celia Chazelle, eds. *Paradigms and Methods in Early Medieval Studies*. New York: Palgrave, 2007 (includes my contributions: "A Cyborg Initiation? Gender Ideology and Baptismal Liturgy in Carolingian Francia", 101-118 and "Introduction: Early Medieval Studies in Twenty-First-Century America", with Celia Chazelle, 1-21).

Lifshitz, Felice. *The Name of the Saint: The Martyrology of Jerome and Access to the Sacred in Francia (627-827)*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.

Lifshitz, Felice. *The Norman Conquest of Pious Neustria: Historiographic Discourse and Saintly Relics (684-1090)*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies Press, 1995.

Gendered Transmissions: Women, Men and Christian Culture in Carolingian Francia

I will begin by introducing the "Anglo-Saxon missionaries to Germany," an eighth-century group of religious who practiced syneisactism, a form of religious life which encourages sexually chaste contact between men and women. They include Boniface, archbishop of Mainz and his "beloved" Leoba, who may have ruled both the women's house at Tauberbischofsheim and the men's house at Fulda as a double monastery. Boniface and Leoba were buried in adjacent graves at Fulda, against Boniface's wishes; he had requested burial in a single grave.

The "Anglo-Saxon missionaries to Germany" did not always engage in "mission" as commonly understood. The Main Valley had long since been Christianized. There, the work of the Anglo-Saxon "missionaries" was primarily organizational. Their arrival also precipitated the beginnings of book production in the area, which involved both the copying of (versions of) older texts and the creation of new ones. Dozens of eighth-century codices survive from the region. Over fifty years ago, Bernhard Bischoff identified two interrelated sub-groups of these manuscripts. He associated one group, dated to the second third of the eighth century, with the woman's name Gun(t)za; he associated the other group, dated to the final third of the century, with the woman's name Abirhilt. The Gun(t)za and Abirhilt manuscripts are mentioned in every study of medieval women's participation in the world of books and learning (of which there are many) but they have not yet been properly studied themselves.

There is also some skepticism concerning the connection of the codices with women, but it is unwarranted, given the ecclesiastical geography of the eighth-century Main Valley, which I will describe. During the 740s, when book production began, the women's community of Karlburg was probably the only institution capable of hosting a full-fledged scriptorium. By the 780s, the women's house of Kitzingen had eclipsed Karlburg. Several other women's houses could also have hosted scriptoria, but no men's community is a viable candidate as a writing center. I have also discovered a copy of the library catalogue of Kitzingen, on which the Gun(t)za and Abirhilt manuscripts appear.

The content of the Gun(t)za and Abirhilt manuscripts is distinctly gender-egalitarian, and at times feminist. The earlier codices reflect values taken for granted among the Anglo-Saxon missionaries to Germany and their continental collaborators. However, the later codices stake out positions amidst debates over gender roles for religious men and women, debates generated by a movement to reform "abuses" (such as consecrated women carrying out priestly and episcopal duties). Much in the later manuscripts bespeaks an attempt to defend women's central place in the religious life of Francia, including the full-page Crucifixion miniature in a copy of the Pauline Epistles (Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek M.p.th.f. 69) whose theologian-artist drew her inspiration from Paul's assertion that there is no male or female in Christ (Galatians 3:27 - 28), while simultaneously personalizing the Pauline message to speak particularly to a community of female virgins. The final section of my talk will analyze the theology of this women's miniature.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Lifshitz, Felice (Philadelphia, Pa.,2008)

Gender and Christianity in medieval Europe : new perspectives

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=538552557>

The Middle Ages series

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=538552557>

Lifshitz, Felice (New York, NY [u.a.],2007)

Paradigms and methods in early medieval studies

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1611879272>

The new Middle Ages

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1611879272>

Lifshitz, Felice (2007)

Gender trouble in paradise : the problem of the liturgical virgo

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=883002108>

Lifshitz, Felice (2007)

A Cyborg initiation? Liturgy and gender in Carolingian East Francia

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=670711594>

Lifshitz, Felice (Notre Dame, Ind.,2006)

The name of the saint : the martyrology of Jerome and access to the sacred in Francia, 627 - 827

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=501777571>

Publications in medieval studies

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=501777571>

Lifshitz, Felice (2002)

Demonstrating gun(t)za : women, manuscripts, and the question of historical "proof"

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=883065789>

Lifshitz, Felice (Toronto,1995)

The Norman conquest of Pious Neustria : historiographic discourse and Sainly relics 684 - 1090

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Studies and texts ; 122

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