Immaculate Perceptions

Gender and Sanctity in Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*

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Abstract

During the medieval period saints played a significant role in the religious culture of Western Europe. During the thirteenth century a Dominican monk named Jacobus de Voragine compiled and edited a collection of hagiographies, named the *Legenda aurea*, or 'Golden Legend'. The lives of women saints included in this text highlight gender-specific concepts of sanctity. The sanctity of women was constructed in a distinctive way, and saints provided a model for religious women to imitate. Historians have largely ignored both female saints and the *Legenda aurea* as areas of research, despite the popularity they inspired in medieval society. Certain themes permeate the *vitae* so frequently that it appears Jacobus intended to promote particular tropes of female sanctity. Saints who were virgins were probably included to appeal to a young female audience, possibly to encourage them to join the fledgling Dominican nunneries. The economic concerns of the order are also highlighted through Jacobus' emphasis on the saint's renunciation of wealth, as the Dominicans survived on alms. Noble and widowed saints could have appealed to an older audience of economically autonomous women. By emphasising a return to apostolic types of sanctity Jacobus is promoting his order and safeguarding the economic interests of the Dominicans.

Contents

Introduction

The thirteenth century in Western Europe was characterised by significant religious upheaval. Important changes were taking place within religious culture, including the development of new mendicant orders. The Franciscan and Dominican orders emerged within a civic culture centred around new city-states, but were also created in an attempt to revive the religious culture of the early apostolic Church. These orders inspired new religious scholarship in this period. As part of this movement, a Dominican monk named Jacobus de Voragine compiled and authored a collection of hagiographies. This work, titled the *Legenda aurea*, or 'Golden Legend', consists of one hundred and eighty two chapters, each dedicated to a particular saint or feast day. This research paper will analyse this text from a gendered perspective, concentrating on the women saints who are included in the work. The goal of this analysis is to determine whether these saints can illuminate what audience Jacobus may have intended these hagiographies to reach, and whether the author intended religious women of this period to emulate these saints.

The *Legenda aurea* became extremely popular during the later medieval period, and a large number of early manuscript versions of the text survive. A major problem regarding medieval sources is that before the advent of printing in the fifteenth century manuscripts were copied by hand, and therefore were extremely susceptible to human error. A thousand manuscript versions of the *Legenda aurea* in Latin have survived, and a further five hundred more that were translated into vernacular

European languages.[1] The large number of manuscripts could allow for a cross-referencing project that could closely resemble Jacobus' intended manuscript. The risk that the text has been altered, however, is a factor to take into account when using any medieval sources. Another potential limitation that although the *Legenda aurea* was originally written in Latin, the main source for analysis will be an English version, translated by William Granger Ryan in 1993. Ryan translated Theodor Graesse's Latin edition from 1845, although Ryan discarded chapters that he believed were not composed by Jacobus.[2] An earlier translation by Ryan and Helmut Ripperger, published in 1941, excluded certain portions of the text that were thought to be unnecessary.[3] The 1993 translation, however, is purportedly based on Graesse's full Latin text.[4] The processes of change and alterations the text has undergone have arguably produced a version of the *Legenda aurea* that could be described as a primary source in it own right, although based upon one or many Latin manuscripts. This dissertation will also examine a Latin version, edited by Giovanni Paulo Maggioni and published in 2007, in order to compare particular phrases or words and add a greater depth of understanding. The English translation by Ryan, however, will continue to be the main source of interpretation and analysis, and will therefore embody all the problems of translation. Changing the language of a text can transform structure, meanings, and subtle messages. Even the most careful, accurate translation

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[1] William Granger Ryan, 'Introduction', in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* vol. I, trans.

[2] Ryan, 'Introduction', pp. xiii–xiv.

[3] Ibid., p. xiv.

[4] Ibid.; Sherry L. Reames, 'Review of *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints* by Jacobus de Voragine, William Granger Ryan', *Church History*, vol. 64, no. 1, 1995, p. 99; Thomas Head, 'Review of *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints* by Jacobus de Voragine, William Granger Ryan', *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 80, no. 1, 1994, p. 117; In conversation Dr. Chris Jones has questioned the validity of this claim.

can never fully transmit the meaning of the original text. Certain elements of the *Legenda aurea* in English may not fully represent Jacobus' meaning.

As the *Legenda aurea* is hagiographical in nature, it may not be perceived as containing any historical facts or 'truth'. The personalities and events described in the text cannot be historically corroborated, and therefore it is impossible to know how much of the content of these Christian legends is based in fact. The purpose of this paper is not to determine to what extent the *vitae* are truthful, but instead to examine how gender is utilised within the text, and how saintly women are portrayed. As Jocelyn Wogan-Brown has noted, hagiographical literature can assist in understanding women's contribution to religious culture, as their influence has often been ignored.[5] Whether these women actually existed at all is irrelevant to the topic, as the questions are based around how they are portrayed, what common characteristics they share, and what the intention of these representations may have been. These women exist in Christian folklore, and were included in the *Legenda aurea*, and it is this existence as legendary figures that this paper will investigate.

History in the medieval period was not approached with the same goals or expectations as in the modern era. Although the *Legenda aurea* contains historical information, it was instead intended to be a compilation of Christian histories which could sacralise time and space.[6] The text fits within the author's conception of time,

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[5] Jocelyn Wogan-Brown, 'Powers of Record, Powers of Example: Hagiography and Women's History', in Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (eds.), *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2003, p. 93.
[6] Jacques Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time: Jacobus de Voragine and The Golden Legend*, trans. Lydia Cochrane, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2014, p. xiii.

which was pervasive in the medieval period, and was profoundly eschatological.[7] Although the text deals fundamentally with time, as it is set out in a calendar format, it does not engage with historical time in the ways modern historians might anticipate. Jacobus de Voragine was a friar, and was not interested in history for any reason other than as a testament to God's will enacted in the mortal world.[8] Jacobus did not conform to the ways modern historians show evidence for their assertions, and it is not always clear where the information in this source originates. Some chapters clearly state if portions have been taken from the writings of the Early Church Fathers, however many are ambiguous regarding where the content of the *vita* has derived. The hagiography of Saint Perpetua, for example, may draw content from her third-century diary, a rather extraordinary piece of Christian history.[9] Both in her diary and in the *Legenda aurea* Perpetua's visions are outlined,[10] however whether Jacobus draws directly from the diary is not clear. These limitations are simply something to keep in mind, however, and will not have a significant impact on any conclusions this project will draw. The *Legenda aurea* will not be contrasted with other sources to ascertain its reliability, but instead will be scrutinised to draw conclusions about how the compiler conceived of gender and how this is portrayed.

This research topic intersects various historiographical schools. Female saints have not been a particular focus for feminist and women's historiography, but the focus on

[7] Jennifer A. Harris, 'The Bible and the Meaning of History in the Middle Ages', in Susan Boyton and Diane J. Reilly (eds.), *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages: Production, Reception, and Performance in Western Christianity*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 88.

[8] Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time*, p. 18.

[9] Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman*, New York and London, Routledge, 1997, p. 2.

[10] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2012, p. 728; Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion,* p. 92.

gender and women places this topic in these categories. The reason for this neglect

may be due to the uncertainty that these women ever existed, or because they

represent personalities promoted by the Church. The medieval Church did not allow

women to enter clerical roles, but this does not accurately reflect the widespread

participation of women in religious culture. There is a large array of evidence that

suggests medieval women actively engaged in both public religious rituals, such as

pilgrimage, and private worship, whether lay or monastic. This dissertation is

intended to fill a gap in historiography of this period. Jacobus de Voragine intended

this text to be read by an audience, possibly including an educated class of women. As

Michael Goodich has noted, there was a community of literate, religious laywomen in

the thirteenth century.[11] Although many would not have been able to read Latin,[12] the

Legenda aurea was quickly translated into vernacular languages, and therefore

reached a wider audience. This paper will analyse the characteristics of the women

saints included in the *Legenda aurea*, and who these hagiographies were intended to

be read by.

This topic has links with first-wave feminist and intellectual historiography. Although

this research paper does not highlight the lives of real women during the medieval

period, and therefore does not integrate social history or social feminist

historiography, the audience who read the text was certainly real. This dissertation

will not attempt to analyse the effect the *Legenda aurea* had on its female readership,

but instead focuses on what message the author may have intended to transmit to this

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[11] Michael Goodich, 'The Contours of Female Piety in Later Medieval Hagiography', *Church History,* vol. 50, no. 1, 1981, p. 25.
[12] Ibid.

audience. As Church history, it also could be argued that this topic integrates concepts that had significant ramifications on the religious culture of the period. This topic also has a peculiar focus on the Dominican order, as Jacobus belonged to this religious group, and his work probably conveys certain motivations or beliefs inspired by this association. Dominican monks in this period were facing religious difficulties concerning women, and the *Legenda aurea* may provide new insight regarding this matter.

A significant text for this research project is Miri Rubin's *Mother of God*.[13] This work applies gender history to the notable figure of the Virgin Mary, and provides a methodological model for this research project. Other important texts regarding women and gender in the medieval and Renaissance periods include *Her Life Historical* by Catherine Sanok, and Natalie Zemon Davis' *Women on the Margins*.[14] Only two significant texts on the *Legenda aurea* exist, a 1985 book by Sherry L. Reames and a 2014 English translation of Jacques Le Goff's *In Search of Sacred Time*.[15] This neglect of the text may reflect the heavy focus of traditional historians on the institutions and theology of the medieval period. Certain shorter works provide a greater insight into how gender is portrayed in the text, for instance a section on Jacobus in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* and Courtney E. Rydel's 2012 dissertation regarding the effect the *Legenda aurea* had on the literature of late-

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[13] Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2009.

[14] Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives*, Cambridge, MA, Belknap Press, 1995.

[15] Sherry L. Reames, *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History*, Madison, WI and London, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985; Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time*.

medieval England.[16] Key texts on medieval sanctity, such as André Vauchez's

Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages, can provide insights into how sainthood was

constructed, although there is generally a greater focus on male sanctity.[17] R. W.

Southern's 1990 edition of his book on the medieval period can provide insight into

traditional perceptions of the medieval period, and can be contrasted with more avant-

garde interpretations, such as John Bossy's 1985 work *Christianity in the West*.[18] The

influence of Church institutions and fluctuating theological ideas can be found within

the *Legenda aurea*, however the text is overwhelmingly dedicated to saints' lives. A

post-Reformation, English apathy to scholarship about Catholic saints could explain a

lack of interest in the *Legenda aurea* in the English-speaking world. The text enjoyed

popularity in continental Europe only until Renaissance humanists emphasised going

back to the key primary source, the Bible, and largely discarded the work of medieval

theologians.[19] As the work enjoyed such popularity throughout the later medieval

period, however, it is certainly worth examining, and this dissertation's focus on

gender will bring a new perspective to the text.

The first chapter of this paper will discuss what influences may have inspired Jacobus

de Voragine, as the author and compiler of the *Legenda aurea*, to include certain

female saints in the work. The formation of the Dominican order will be summarized,

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[16] Sherry L. Reames, 'Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*', in Margaret C. Schaus (ed.), *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, New York and London, Routledge, 2006, pp. 419-420; Courtney E. Rydel, 'Legendary Effects: Women Saints of the *Legenda Aurea* in England, 1260-1532', PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2012.

[17] André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

[18] R. W. Southern, *The Middle Ages*, Penguin Books edn, London and New York, Penguin Books, 1990; John Bossy, *Christianity in the West: 1400-1700*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1985.

[19] Duffy, 'Introduction', p. xx.

and the perceived problems regarding women who wished to join the new mendicant order. The second and third chapters will analyse the distinguishing characteristics of the saintly women to whom chapters are devoted in the *Legenda aurea*. The second chapter will focus on certain common acts performed by these saints, particularly renunciation of property and wealth, the active protection of the state of virginity, and entry into religious houses. The third chapter will focus on the shared attributes of these saints, including nobility and widowhood. The aim of these two chapters will be to determine whether Jacobus intentionally included women with desirable attributes, besides their position as officially acknowledged saints, and if so what he may have intended these women to demonstrate to a female audience. The acts and the characteristics of these saints are two interconnecting, but separate, elements of the female sanctity that the author wished to promote.

The *Legenda aurea* contains thirty chapters either entirely devoted to female saints, or with a female saint in the title alongside male saints. These thirty chapters will be the subject of this paper, and will provide the necessary material for analysis and any conclusions drawn. Jacobus de Voragine compiled this text over the course of over thirty years, from around 1260 until his death, and it became a highly popular and influential text of the later medieval period.[20] The women included in the text must have appealed to Jacobus, and to the religious elites, both monastic and lay, among whom the work was circulated. The *Legenda aurea* was initially intended to be a handbook for preachers to assist sermon writing, but reached a much wider

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[20] Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time,* p. x.

audience.[21] Why the women saints were included and what they represented can be determined from a careful consideration of the text. Although the Virgin Mary has three chapters within the text devoted to her life, these will not be the subjects of my analysis, as she is such an established figure of female sanctity, and she has been the subject of extensive research by Rubin. This paper will however consider the extent to which the other female saints resemble the Virgin Mary, in terms of chastity and miracles. Whether saints deviate from the precedent set by the Virgin Mary will also be investigated, as she tends to epitomise female sanctity. The other women saints in the *Legenda aurea* will provide a fascinating base for analysis, as some are not well known today. Analysis of the *Legenda aurea* and the women saints included within the text may provide insight into what the author intended to convey to his audience. During the medieval period the cults inspired by the memory of saints were diverse and many were widespread. Saints were motivators for pilgrimage and acted as mediators between religious Europeans and the divine. Their importance for medieval Europe and religious culture cannot be overstated.

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[21] Bossy, *Christianity in the West,* p. 11.

Chapter One: The Dominican Problem of Penitent Women

Jacobus de Voragine intended that the *Legenda aurea* have a particular purpose within the doctrine of the Dominican order. The background of the order and Jacobus' life may provide insight into whether the author intended to influence religious women of the period, and how the Dominicans perceived women in general. The *Legenda aurea* was composed in the thirteenth century, a period of religious fervour in which women actively participated. This chapter will attempt to assess how the Dominicans perceived religious women, particularly nuns. This will give greater insight into what gender-related messages Jacobus may have been attempting to convey, and to lay the groundwork for an analysis of the hagiographical source material.

Jacobus was a Dominican friar who lived and worked in Genoa during the thirteenth century. The *Legenda aurea*, his best-known work, was probably begun around 1260, and he continued compiling, editing and altering this text until his death in 1297.[22] As a source, the *Legenda aurea* can provide insight into religious ideas from the period, as well as the intentions of the author and the Dominican order. As one of the relatively new, mendicant, and officially sanctioned orders, the Dominicans, like the Franciscans, were in the process of determining and consolidating their fundamental goals and principles at this time. An Iberian, Dominic of Caleruega had established the Dominican order, known colloquially as the 'Black Friars', in an attempt to

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[22] Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time,* p. x.

combat the pervasive heresy of the Cathars in the South of France.[23] C. H. Lawrence

argues that Saint Dominic was born at a period when the society of Spain was

obsessed with *reconquista*, which could help explain why the Cathar heresy resonated

so strongly with him.[24] Throughout Dominic's life and the rest of the thirteenth

century the Dominican leadership attempted to consolidate the purpose of the order

within the parameters determined by the papacy. Of all the emergent religious groups

of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Larner has argued that the Dominicans

generated the most support from Rome, as they enforced the authority of the papacy

to the greatest extent.[25] The Rule of Saint Augustine was determined as the

foundational rule of the order in accordance with decisions made at the Fourth

Lateran Council: due to the widespread religious fervour of the period, it was

determined that new religious groups must follow a pre-existing rule rather than

formulate their own.[26] As Lawrence has noted, the Rule of Augustine was relatively

insubstantial regarding the day-to-day fixtures and regulations of monastic life, which

allowed Dominic and his successors to determine many elements of Dominican

devotion.[27] The new requirements and popularity of the mendicant orders was partly

due to a new urban culture, particularly in the city-states of Italy.[28] The Rule of

Augustine may not have elaborated on the concerns peculiar to monks who largely

engaged with a civic, religious culture outside the confines of the monastery. This

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[23] C.H. Lawrence, *The Friars: The Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement on Western Society*, London and New York, Longman, 1994, p. 65.

[24] Ibid., p. 67.

[25] John Larner, *Italy in the Age of Dante and Petrach 1216-1380*, London and New York, Longman, 1980), pp. 234-5; Simon Tugwell (trans.), 'The Early Dominican Constitutions', London, SPCK, 1982, p. 468.

[26] Lawrence, *The Friars*, pp. 70-1.

[27] Ibid., p. 71.

[28] Rubin, *Mother of* God, p. 197.

intangibility could have allowed for individual interpretation, but aspects not covered

under the Rule were documented in the Dominican Constitutions, written during the

thirteenth century.[29] Lawrence has argued that although some interpretations have

suggested that the Dominicans followed a precedent set by the Franciscans, this is not

the case, and in many ways the two orders followed divergent courses.[30] In the period

in which Jacobus was living, therefore, the Dominican order was still determining its

function and the methods of piety it was to adopt.

Jacobus was born around 1228, and entered the Dominican monastery at Genoa in

1244.[31] His career in the Dominican administration was illustrious. As a prior of

Lombardy, Jacobus' religious activities led to two unsuccessful attempts upon his life,

both motivated by his rigorous support for his superiors and doctrine.[32] Jacobus

subsequently was appointed as the archbishop of Genoa in 1292.[33] Clearly Jacobus

was a significant and conspicuous figure during his lifetime.[34] The period in which he

lived was notable for the divisive Guelph/Ghibelline rivalry, and Jacobus acted as an

intermediary in the Genoese conflicts between these two factions.[35] Jacques Le Goff

has argued that Jacobus was a dedicated Genoese citizen, and also zealously

committed to the Dominican order.[36] These two loyalties may have been difficult to

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[29] Ann Roberts, *Dominican Women and Renaissance Art: The Convent of San Domenico of Pisa*, Aldershot, Hampshire, Ashgate, 2008, p. 18.

[30] Lawrence, *The Friars*, p. 68; James M. Powell, 'Mendicants, the Communes, and the Law', *Church History*, vol. 77, no. 3, 2008, p. 561.

[31] Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time*, p. 2.

[32] Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, 'Chastity Models in the *Legenda Áurea* and in the *Sermones de Sanctis* of Jacobus de Vorágine', *Medieval Sermon Studies*, vol. 52, 2008, p. 19.

[33] Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time*, pp. 2-3.

[34] Maggioni, 'Chastity Models', p. 19.

[35] Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time,* pp. 2-3.

[36] Ibid., p. 4.

reconcile, as the ecclesiastical and secular authorities of Italian city-states were in conflict often during this period.[37] Although this period is generally characterised as a highlight in the history of Genoa, Steven A. Epstein has emphasised that factional differences affected the peace and prosperity of the city-state.[38] It was in this context that Jacobus authored the *Legenda aurea*. Le Goff has argued that Jacobus was not only a compiler, despite claims to the contrary, but was also an author and editor, and it does not give the scope of the work due credit to claim otherwise.[39]

Jacobus was probably endeavouring to compile and compose a legitimate Christian history in the *Legenda aurea*.[40] Jacobus intended that his other works be used for more practical reasons. The *Sermones de sanctis*, for example, contains much of the same hagiographical information, but appears to have been written as a conduit to express the sentiments of the *Legenda aurea* to a wide, possibly illiterate audience.[41] Many theologians authored both *vitae* and sermons, as both vehicles ultimately engaged with the lives of saints.[42] Sermons, however, had more practical implications.[43] If the practicalities of the *Legenda aurea* were transmitted to lay people through sermons, the question of what the original text's purpose was arises. Le Goff has asserted that although the *Legenda aurea* was not intended to be a

[37] Daniel Waley, *The Italian City-Republics*, 3rd edn, London and New York, Longman, 1988, p. 58.

[38] Steven A. Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese*, Chapel Hill and London, The University of North Carolina Press, 1996, pp. 140-1.

[39] Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time*, pp. xi–xii.

[40] Robin Vose, 'The Dominican Order in Late Medieval and Early Modern History', *History Compass*, vol. 11, no. 11, 2013, p. 971.

[41] Maggioni, 'Chastity Models', pp. 20–21.

[42] Barbara Newman, 'Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century', *Speculum*, vol. 73, no. 3, 1998, p. 736.

[43] Maggioni, 'Chastity Models', pp. 20–21.

calendar, its purpose was to lay the groundwork for sacralised, Christian time.[44]

Saints had a direct association with time, as remembrance feasts were held on the date

of their death, and therefore celebrations of sanctity saturated the social life of

Western Europeans.[45] Jacobus therefore allocated specific sacred space and time for

saints to be commemorated in compiling the *Legenda aurea* in a calendar format. The

majority of the saints included in the *Legenda aurea* are men, but there are several

female saints allocated space and time for admiration and remembrance. These saintly

women were obviously considered worthy of worship, but to what extent? The

Dominicans and Jacobus may have had particular aspirations regarding women that

can be interpreted through the *Legenda aurea* and the events of the thirteenth century.

Although women found the new mendicant orders attractive, they presented a

problem for the Dominican order. Women had few conduits to explore religiously-

inspired lifestyles in the centuries leading up to the thirteenth century, which may

explain why they found the Franciscan and Dominican orders inspiring.[46] For the new

mendicant orders the possible financial liability of taking on women was unattractive

as medieval social norms dictated that women were unable to beg for alms.[47]

Mendicant nuns were constrained by the demands of mendicant religiosity, and often

could not produce wealth for themselves.[48] The preaching and travelling promoted as

apostolic, and which Dominican friars were free to engage in, were not considered

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44 Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time*, pp. 10–11.

45 Thomas Head, 'Introduction', in Thomas Head (ed.), *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, New York and London, Routledge, 2001, pp. xiv–xv.

46 Southern, *The Middle Ages*, p. 310.

47 Lawrence, *The Friars*, p. 77.

48 David Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria: Women and Work in Medieval Europe*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1990, p. 64.

suitable for pious women either, and therefore 'group homes' or cloisters would be required.[49] Saint Dominic, however, had made provisions for specific communities of women in his lifetime, and the order attracted a vast group of female admirers, although Lawrence argues that Dominic never believed women could fulfil the requirements of pious apostolic life.[50] Humbert of Romans, the fifth Master General of the order, was persuaded to adapt the constitutions for the requirements of Dominican nuns, after attempts by previous Dominican leaders to exclude any women from association with the order failed.[51] Lawrence argues that there were pervasive misogynistic fears that prejudiced the Dominicans against women, such as the perceived dangers of hearing women's confessions.[52] Women's sexuality was considered dangerous to monks in general, and in the altered constitutions for Dominican nuns sexuality is listed as the 'very grave fault'.[53] This diverges from the Dominican friars' counterpart fault, which is incorrigibility.[54] Women as overtly sexual creatures were common tropes in medieval writing, authors often portraying women as lustful and seductive.[55] Augustine directly addresses this in his Rule, by policing the ways nuns can even look at men.[56] Women could not preach or beg, and

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[49] Julie Ann Smith, '*Clausura Districta*: Conceiving Space and Community for Dominican Nuns in the Thirteenth Century', *Parergon*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2012, p. 14.

[50] Lawrence, *The Friars,* pp. 75–76.

[51] Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner, 'Creating the Sacred Space Within: Enclosure as a Defining Feature in the Convent Life of Medieval Dominican Sisters (13th-15th C.)', *Viator*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2012, p. 310; Lawrence, *The Friars*, p. 78.

[52] Lawrence, *The Friars*, p. 78.

[53] Roberts, *Dominican Women and Renaissance Art*, p. 20.

[54] Ibid., p. 30.

[55] Ulrike Wiethaus, 'Sexuality, Gender, and the Body in Late Medieval Women's Spirituality: Cases from Germany and the Netherlands', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1991, p. 35.

[56] Augustine, 'The Rule of Saint Augustine: Feminine Version', in Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, *The Rule of Saint Augustine: Masculine and Feminine Versions*, trans. Raymond Canning, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984, p. 30.

their sexuality was regulated: internment in cloisters seemed a clear solution to the

problem of Dominican women.

Although very nearly eliminated from the Dominican order, women's religious needs

seem to have been a fundamental component of the friar's work from the very

beginning. As already noted, Saint Dominic helped found two religious settlements

for women, at Prouille and San Sisto.[57] James M. Powell has argued that in fact the

financial and devotional support of women was instrumental in ensuring the success

of the mendicant movements.[58] Even the Rule upon which the entire male order was

based was formulated from a letter written by Saint Augustine to a community of

nuns.[59] Women were attracted to the mendicant movement despite indifference on the

part of the friars. Once nuns were accepted into the order, however, the friars ensured

their lives were regulated. Four *institutiones* were written to standardize and oversee

the way the cloisters were managed.[60] Ehrenschwendtner has noted that although

some communities of nuns in the following centuries did resist the strict enclosure

these *institutiones* enforced, many nuns saw enclosure as a physical manifestation of

their religious obedience.[61] The suggestion that enclosure was simply forced upon

these religious women denies their agency in choosing and perpetuating the cloistered

life as an alternative to other forms of female piety, or living in traditional family

groups. Sean L. Field's study of Isabelle of France and her cult, for example,

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[57] Lawrence, *The Friars*, pp. 75–76.

[58] Powell, 'Mendicants, the Communes, and the Law', p. 570.

[59] Lawrence, *The Friars*, p. 71; Lawless questions this interpretation, see George Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987, p. 140.

[60] Smith, '*Clausura Distri*cta: Conceiving Space and Community for Dominican Nuns in the Thirteenth Century', p. 19.

[61] Ehrenschwendtner, 'Creating the Sacred Space Within', pp. 307, 302.

emphasised that she took an active part in determining how the nuns under her leadership would live.[62] Lehmijoki-Gardner has outlined how religious women's agency has been neglected in the historiographical analysis of religious rules, and argues that women contributed to and altered the rules that governed the manner in which they lived.[63] By using hagiographical material of early Dominican saints, Lehmijoki-Gardner has shown that Dominican women acted as agents in the construction and development of penitential rules.[64] Another method these women used to expand their religious agency, Lehmijoki-Gardner argues, was through the promotion of the cults of saints affiliated with the order.[65] It is clear that not only were women present throughout the creation of the Dominican order, but that they were active agents in the processes that shaped their religious life. The accounts of the sacred women Jacobus compiled in the *Legenda Aurea* may have provided these Dominican women with inspiration through diverse examples of female piety.

In the period before the *Legenda aurea* was compiled, changes were being made to the pervasive themes in hagiographical literature. This is reflected in the types of saints who were canonised during the thirteenth century, who tended to be those who lived an apostolic lifestyle.[66] This emphasis on early Christian models of sanctity can be found within the *Legenda aurea*, as Jacobus selected many early Christian martyrs for inclusion. Popular movements demanded a return to the apostolic way of life, and

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[62] Sean L. Field, *Isabelle of France: Capetian Sanctity and Franciscan Identity in the Thirteenth Century*, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2006, p. 156.

[63] Maiju Lehmijoki-Gardner, 'Writing Religious Rules as an Interactive Process: Dominican Penitent Women and the Making of Their "Regula"', *Speculum* 79, no. 3, 2004, pp. 660-1.

[64] Ibid., pp. 661, 683.

[65] Lehmijoki-Gardner, 'Writing Religious Rules', p. 683.

[66] Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 389.

the mendicant orders were adopted by the Church to meet this demand.[67] The papacy

also established their singular control over canonisation of saints in the thirteenth

century.[68] The *Legenda aurea* could therefore be understood as a guidebook of the

types of sanctity the papacy deemed appropriate. Jacobus included women's *vitae* in

order to provide examples of female sanctity. Courtney E. Rydel has argued that these

lives would not have appealed to religious laywomen,[69] however the religiosity the

mendicant orders promoted obviously resonated with women of the later Middle

Ages, as this chapter has shown.

This chapter has investigated the creation of the Dominican order and the life of

Jacobus de Voragine, in order to discover what their purpose for religious women and

the portrayal of female saints was. Although Dominicans initially attempted to thwart

the popularity of the order amongst women, women were intrinsically connected with

the order from its foundation. Due to medieval social norms, women were not

perceived as being able to participate in mendicant piety in emulation of the apostles,

and therefore their enclosure in nunneries was considered necessary. Legislative

decisions, however, were not simply made by men and followed by women. The

participation of women in the mendicant movement contributed to the success of the

Dominican order. Religious women actively participated in the pervasive religiosity

of the thirteenth century. The next chapter will develop these ideas alongside the

hagiographical source material of the *Legenda aurea*. The lives of female saints can

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[67] Larner, *Italy in the Age of Dante and Petrach*, p. 234.

[68] Reames, *The Legenda Aurea,* p. 198; André Vauchez, 'The Saint', in Jacques Le Goff (ed.), *Medieval Callings*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 325.

[69] Rydel, 'Legendary Effects', pp. 3-4.

determine what kinds of piety were considered appropriate for thirteenth-century

women, and whether Jacobus intended these *vitae* to be emulated.

Chapter Two: Acts

This chapter will focus on the actions of women saints that are particularly emphasised by Jacobus de Voragine in his *Legenda aurea*. These women experience certain common situations and act in ways peculiar to female sanctity. The characteristics this chapter will focus on include virginity or chastity, renunciation of possessions, and the entry of these saints into religious houses. Many of these actions display an autonomy not usually afforded to medieval women, and provide insight into how religious women may have displayed agency within the confines of the traditional Church. These particular deeds may display features that the author perceived as particularly appropriate for religious women, even as they subvert traditional gender norms.

The most obvious of the characteristics shared by many of the women included in the *Legenda aurea* is virginity or chastity. The persistence of this theme reflects the great interest in sexuality that is perceived throughout Christian Europe in the medieval period.[70] An emphasis on virginity had been inherited from Classical Europe, and had been developed as part of Christian theology by the Early Church Fathers.[71] Of the thirty chapters that make up the focus of this dissertation, eleven contain hagiographies of female saints who explicitly preserved their virginity throughout their lifetime. The Virgin Mary provided a model of legitimate, virgin sanctity for

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[70] Pierre J. Payer, 'Confession and the Study of Sex in the Middle Ages', in Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (eds.), *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, New York and London, Garland Publishing, 1996, pp. 13, 15.

[71] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 8, 396-7.

subsequent saints to emulate. As Lisa Colton has argued, Mary provided an impossible standard for women of the medieval period, but ultimately could never emulate.[72] Katherine L. Jansen has noted that the loss of a woman's virginity was accorded immense significance by medieval society, and religious women took the ramifications of sexuality seriously.[73] The hagiographies of the *Legenda aurea* describe the diverse methods the women saints employ in order to retain their virginity. Saint Anastasia was forced into marriage, but simulated a disease that did not allow her to engage in a sexual relationship with her husband.[74] The hagiographies of Saints Lucy, Justina, Petronilla, and Agnes describe how they maintain their virginity in spite of the attempts of either suitors or family to force them to marry.[75] These saints derive from the early centuries of the Christian period, however the inclusion of a thirteenth-century saint displays the continuation of these sentiments. Elizabeth of Hungary, who died in 1231, exhibits the importance virginity could have for contemporaries of the *Legenda aurea*. Jacobus writes that Saint Elizabeth wished to preserve her virginity, but out of deference to her father she consented to marry and bear children. There is, however, an emphasis in this hagiography of a continued lack of sexual desire throughout her married life.[76]

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[72] Lisa Colton, 'The Articulation of Virginity in the Medieval *Chanson de Nonne*', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, vol. 133, no. 2, 2008, p. 159.

[73] Katherine L. Jansen, 'Like a Virgin: The Meaning of the Magdalen for Female Penitents of Later Medieval Italy', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, vol. 45, 2000, p. 145.

[74] *The Golden Legend,* p. 43.

[75] Ibid., pp. 28, 102, 315, 578–579.

[76] Ibid., p. 690; Eamon Duffy questions whether Elizabeth's hagiography was written by Jacobus, however this *vita* resembles the hagiographies of other thirteenth-century saints, such as Saint Dominic, see Duffy, 'Introduction', p. xv, and *The Golden Legend*, pp. 441-3, 615-6, 700-3.

Another virgin, Margaret of Antioch, asserted her faith and virginity so vigorously

that her father rejected her.[77] Subsequently a Roman prefect tortured and murdered

her.[78] Jennifer Borland has argued in her analysis of a manuscript version of Saint

Margaret's hagiography that it was intended for an audience of young, virginal

women.[79] The significance of virginity to Jacobus is also reflected in the inclusion of

the Virgin of Antioch, whose name is unknown and throughout the text is simply

referred to as *virgo*.[80] The tendency to refer to the women saints by the title 'virgin'

could reflect their youth or unmarried state. Patricia Watson has shown that in

Classical literature, however, the synonymous use of 'puella' and 'virgo' occurs far

less that traditional scholarship has supposed.[81] This is probably the case in the

Legenda aurea, as the hagiographies often explicitly detail the extent to which these

women will go to preserve their virginity. As Jo Ann McNamara has noted, since the

beginning of the Christian period retaining one's virginity was the only viable option

for women who did not want to be constrained by an authoritarian husband.[82] A

virgin possessed religious power, and this can help explain why so many of the saints

in the *Legenda aurea* resist marriage so strongly.

Within the text are several instances where men attempt to rape the women saints.

These attempts at sexual assault are usually thwarted through divine intervention or

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[77] *The Golden Legend*, p. 368.

[78] Ibid., pp. 369-70.

[79] Jennifer Borland, 'Violence on Vellum: St. Margaret's Transgressive Body and Its Audience', in Elizabeth L'Estrange and Alison More (eds.), *Representing Medieval Genders and Sexualities: Construction, Transformation, and Subversion, 600-1530*, Farnham, Surrey, Ashgate, 2011, p. 79.

[80] Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda Aurea*, vol. I, Florence, SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007, pp. 466-72.

[81] Patricia Watson, 'Puella and Virgo', *Glotta*, vol. 61, no. 1/2, 1983, pp. 119, 143.

[82] Jo Ann McNamara, 'Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginity in Early Christian Thought', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3/4, 1976, p. 151.

miracles. Saint Daria tames a lion, which then captures the man sent to assault her.[83]

Saint Agnes was taken to a brothel, but her hair grew long enough to cover her as

clothes would, and the brothel shone so brightly that the men who wanted to assault

her were too frightened to enter.[84] The Roman judge Priscus who attempted to rape

Saint Euphemia was paralysed through divine will.[85] It should be noted that these

saints do not necessarily avoid other types of bodily punishments. This highlights the

central importance afforded to preserving virginity. As Goodich has noted, the threat

of rape by invading Saracens or Tartars was a pervasive theme of thirteenth-century

hagiographies, which may explain why retaining chastity and escaping sexual assault

was given such precedence in these *vitae*.[86] If virginity was lost in illicit

circumstances, the ramifications for a woman could be manifold and severe. Death is

not avoided in the *Legenda aurea*, as once dead, a women's virginity can be

preserved forever.[87] In the *vitae* chastity is preserved, often through divine

intervention, although the saints may undergo brutal torture and the threat of rape.[88]

The saints go to great lengths to retain their virginity, and by doing so provide a

model of female sanctity for late medieval women to emulate.

Another religious act performed by many of these women is the renunciation of their

possessions. The majority of the female saints included in the *Legenda aurea* were of

noble lineage: Jacobus explicitly states that twenty of the saintly women are noble in

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83 *The Golden Legend*, p. 641.
84 Ibid., p. 103.
85 Ibid., p. 568.
86 Goodich, 'The Contours of Female Piety', p. 29.
87 Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 59.
88 Ibid., p. 56.

the chapters that make up the focus of this study. The importance of this factor will be further discussed in the third chapter. These women with noble lineage were very wealthy, and although as ancient and medieval daughters and wives women are not usually perceived to have a large amount of economic independence, in fact many of the women included in the *Legenda aurea* exhibit economic autonomy by making the decision to give away their possessions to the poor. Saint Cecilia's beheading was badly mismanaged by the executioner and she lived for three days afterwards, time that she made use of by giving all her possessions to the poor.[89] Saint Paula was so determined to give up her wealth to those less fortunate that she resolutely left nothing to ensure her children's wellbeing.[90] Mary Magdalene and her sister Saint Martha vary slightly from this convention, as they sold their properties and gave up the proceeds to the apostles.[91] This fits with the general theme of renouncing property, however, and early apostolic work was probably considered to be of central importance by Jacobus, as it is how Christianity was initially spread. Possibly these particular examples are of central importance. The Dominican order was founded upon principles that closely matched those of the early apostles, and Dominican monks were itinerant and lived upon alms. Mary and Martha may have been included, not only as significant, early saints, but also as encouragement for wealthy women to give donations to Dominican monks. The Dominican order had only recently been compelled to assume financial responsibility for the convents attached to the order, but this presented a liability to an order founded upon mendicant values. Jacobus may have been intending to motivate wealthy women who intended to join the order to

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[89] *The Golden Legend*, p. 709.
[90] Ibid., pp. 125–6.
[91] Ibid., p. 375.

give up their assets not only to unfortunate people in general, but as alms to Dominican monks, or to support Dominican convents.

Another noble saint, Pelagia, gave away everything she owned to the poor after her conversion, when she renounced her vain and promiscuous lifestyle.[92] Some of the saintly women who were not of noble birth also renounced their property in various ways. Saint Thaïs, a courtesan, destroyed everything she had earned through prostitution by burning it in the middle of the Egyptian city in which she lived.[93] Saint Mary of Egypt renounced her possessions in a similar way, after which she lived in the desert for forty-seven years with only three loaves of bread to sustain her.[94] The pervasive theme throughout these hagiographies is that wealth is at variance with the religious lifestyle that Jacobus de Voragine wishes to promote through the lives of these women. The emphasis on prosperity, however, does provide an interesting paradox, as Jacobus emphasised apostolic renunciation of property, but also wished to identify with wealthy religious women. This is why there are so many examples of affluent women within the text. The wealth of the saints is clearly central, but only when relinquished as a religious act.

An interesting element of a few of the hagiographies included in the *Legenda aurea* is that the respective woman saint enters a monastery dressed up as a monk. This seems to subvert the traditional power structures of the Church, but the inclusion of these women in monastic situations may have had a clear purpose. It seems that Jacobus

[92] *The Golden Legend*, pp. 617–8.
[93] Ibid., p. 620.
[94] Ibid., p. 228.

was attempting to emphasise the superiority of a monastic life, even as these *vitae* undermine the traditional significance placed upon gender segregation in religious houses. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there were large numbers of women who could not marry purely because there was a lack of men.[95] This led to the popular beguine movement among religious women, however Jacobus possibly wished to promote an enclosed religious life for women rather than that of beguine women, who interacted in the public sphere.[96] The reasons these saints removed themselves from secular life vary, but once confined they display dedication to the religious life until their deaths. Saint Theodora was tempted to commit adultery by the devil, and entered a monastery as penance for the sin she had committed against her husband.[97] Saint Marina's widowed father introduced her to the religious life, dressed her as a boy when she was young, and encouraged her to continue the charade on his deathbed.[98] One of the two Saint Margarets was so desirous of retaining her virginity that she ran away to a monastery and called herself Brother Pelagius.[99] Saint Pelagia, confusingly also called Margaret, entered a monastery as a man in order to impose penance upon herself for the lavish life she had been living.[100] It seems as though these last two examples had become interlaced, or perhaps derive from the same origin story.

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[95] Fiona Bowie, *Beguine Spirituality: An Anthology*, London, SPCK, 1989, pp. 13-4.
[96] Ibid., pp. 13, 18-20.
[97] *The Golden Legend*, pp. 365-6.
[98] Ibid., pp. 324-5.
[99] Ibid., pp. 618-9.
[100] Ibid., pp. 616-8.

The similarities throughout these hagiographies are undeniable, and represent a curious diversion from accepted gender norms of the period. Another interesting characteristic which three of these saints share is that as monks they were accused of impregnating women, which was impossible as they were secretly women themselves.[101] Not only do none of these saints deny the charge of impregnating these women, they take care of the child after it is born. Rather than simply showing the deferential and unassuming nature of these saints, these stories may display a common concern of monks of the period. As discussed in chapter one, women's sexuality was perceived as being dangerous, particularly for monks, whose vows of chastity could be derailed.[102] These stories of women dressing up as monks, only to be accused of impregnating other women, could be interpreted as a defence of monks accused of breaking their vows. In these cases it is impossible that the monk accused of fathering a child was guilty of breaking the vow of chastity. These saints also never explicitly deny the charges laid against them, but simply accept the repercussions. A possible interpretation is that these hagiographies implicitly support monks in similar situations. In these hagiographies the pregnant women are lying, and this could reflect what the author believes occurs in everyday life. It seems odd for Jacobus to include such hagiographies without a particular purpose, as he surely was not encouraging contemporary women to smuggle themselves into monasteries, where they could receive privileges and leadership roles usually not accorded to women. As mendicant monks were not cloistered in monasteries, and were engaged in religious work that required travel and public preaching, Jacobus may have been concerned that a greater degree of interaction could result in more accusations of sexual indiscretion. These

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[101] *The Golden Legend*, pp. 325, 366, 619.
[102] Lawrence, *The Friars,* pp. 77–8.

chapters therefore could have had the dual role of promoting religious life as of utmost importance, whilst also defending monks who were accused of sexual indiscretions. The repetition of this series of events throughout the text suggests that women often lie about the identity of the man who impregnated them, and use monks as scapegoats.

The women saints included in the *Legenda aurea* may seem to have varied experiences and personalities, but on closer analysis these hagiographies contain themes and events that recur throughout the text. The importance placed on preserving virginity is a persistent theme, underscoring the religious value sexual purity could have for women. Saints actively avoided marriage, and divine intervention prevented rape. Virginity was a central component of sanctity for these saints. Jacobus probably intended to attract the devotion of young religious women, and chastity was an essential characteristic of monastic life. By setting up virgin women as models for young women to emulate, Jacobus may have been promoting the new Dominican nunneries. Many of the women saints are wealthy, but give away their possessions. This religious deed may have been highlighted to encourage the wealthy to donate to Dominican monks, as they subsisted upon alms. An action taken by some of these saintly women in the *Legenda aurea*, in contrast, that Jacobus would not have desired women to emulate, was entering a monastery disguised as a male monk. Perhaps the author wanted to emphasise the monastic lifestyle to such a great extent that any saint entering any monastery was worth including. A few of these saints are accused of impregnating other women whilst impersonating monks, and as this was impossible, it may be an implicit defence of monks accused of this indiscretion. The religious acts of the women saints in the *Legenda aurea* can be

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interpreted in multifaceted ways. As well as acting in certain sacred ways, the saints

also shared certain characteristics that were emphasised by the author, and these

features will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Women in Gold

The previous chapter has discussed the acts most commonly performed by the women saints whose hagiographies are compiled within the *Legenda aurea*. Although the vast majority of these saints lived in the later Roman Empire, this text is a product of the thirteenth century, and displays the interests of both this period and its author. The themes and characteristics that imbue the sections devoted to women saints are so similar that this chapter will argue that Jacobus de Voragine designed them for a particular audience. The women in this text were not included by accident, and this chapter will discuss why Jacobus chose to incorporate their *vitae*. A number of shared characteristics can be traced throughout the text. The qualities this chapter will discuss are widowhood, nobility, and a conversion event after living an immoral lifestyle. These features are repeated several times throughout the text, and the reason for this emphasis will be explored.

A persistent theme permeates certain hagiographies within the *Legenda aurea*: female saints have lived a licentious lifestyle before a conversion event, and then make a vow of chastity. There are similarities between this characteristic and the prominence of virginity, discussed in the second chapter. The audience Jacobus was addressing through these two topics, however, differed significantly. The hagiographies of virgins may have enticed young religious women to join the new Dominican religious houses. *Vitae* about immoral women, however, were not included with the intention of attracting a young, chaste audience. Mary Magdalene is the most recognizable of the female saints that fit into this category. Jacobus focuses mostly on her life after the death of Christ, rather than the events that occurred before that, which were

already accounted for in the most legitimate Christian text, the Bible.[103] Other saints

whose hagiographies are similar may have been included as Mary Magdalene's story

is legitimised through her personal relationship with Christ. Any similar hagiography

implicitly reminds the reader of the Gospels. Saint Thaïs, for example, lived as a

courtesan before her conversion, after which she was sealed in a cell until just before

her death.[104] A religious leader initially imposed this isolation upon her, but her

atonement was so profound that she did not want to leave her cell, even after two

years.[105] Saint Mary of Egypt worked as a prostitute for seventeen years before she

renounced the world in favour of an ascetic lifestyle.[106] Saint Pelagia was another

woman who prior to her conversion lived in a promiscuous style.[107] Jacobus does not

seem to make allowances for class differentiation when he discusses these vices: the

prostitution of both wealthy and poor saints is presented as immoral. The promiscuity

of Mary of Egypt and Thaïs, which due to their lower class was probably determined

by necessity, is considered to be abhorrent, although there is an economic

justification. Jacobus may have expected that these examples of saints who forswore

their previous sexual lives for the greater religious benefits of a chaste life would

attract the attention of an older female audience. Another possibility that Jacobus may

have wished to emphasise, as Sherry L. Reames has argued, is that 'saints are made,

not born'.[108] This argument advances the belief that the saints of the *Legenda aurea*

were meant for emulation. Although saints are divinely appointed, a characteristic that

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[103] *The Golden Legend*, pp. 374-381.
[104] Ibid., pp. 620-1.
[105] Ibid., pp. 621.
[106] Ibid., pp. 227-8.
[107] Ibid., pp. 616-7.
[108] Reames, *The Legenda Aurea*, p. 198.

is proven through miracles, any person can emulate the life of a saint, through their penance and adherence to an apostolic lifestyle.

This focus on an older generation of women could also extend throughout other hagiographies within the *Legenda aurea*. Jacobus may have been attempting to encourage a particular audience to adopt a religious life: widows. As Virginia Blanton has noted in her analysis of *La vie seinte Andrée*, hagiographical works could be aimed towards a specific audience of widowed women.[109] Widows may have had more economic freedom than other women, which could have made them ideal contributors to, and inhabitants of, fledgling religious communities.[110] In fact widows without children may have been the only women in medieval Europe with economic autonomy.[111] Katherine Clark has noted that the Church wished to discourage the remarriage of widows during this period, as it was overtly reminiscent of bigamy.[112] Clark also highlights other motivations for an emphasis on chaste widowhood, such as the development of conceptions of purgatory, which made widows responsible for the fate of their dead husband's soul, as well as penance for a widow's previous sexual life.[113] Encouraging noble, wealthy widows to join Dominican nunneries had both economic and spiritual benefits.

[109] Virginia Blanton, 'Chaste Marriage, Sexual Desire, and Christian Martyrdom in *La Vie Seinte Andrée*', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2010, p. 97.
[110] Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A History of Women in England 450-1500*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995, pp. 168-9.
[111] P. H. Cullum, 'Gendering Charity in Medieval Hagiography' in Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih (eds.), *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, London and New York, Routledge, 2002, pp. 135-6.
[112] Katherine Clark, 'Purgatory, Punishment, and the Discourse of Holy Widowhood in the High and Later Middle Ages,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2007, p. 175.
[113] Ibid., pp. 174-5, 188.

The emphasis on a religious life after the death of a husband is not confined to the chapters written by Jacobus himself. The Early Church Father Jerome wrote the *vita* of Saint Paula in the fourth century.[114] Jacobus included word-for-word portions of Jerome's writing in the *Legenda aurea*, and in doing so probably intended to promote the legitimacy of his work. Saint Jerome was a well-known, academic, highly praised source of theological information, and by utilising previous hagiographies Jacobus' work also became a reputable religious source. As William Granger Ryan notes, this excerpt of Jerome's hagiography of Saint Paula was condensed and paraphrased by Jacobus, and therefore probably conforms to the general themes he wished to prioritise.[115] Although Saint Paula had been married and had children, after the death of her husband she prioritises her religious, penitent life over familial concerns. Jerome knew Paula, and was an eyewitness to some of the events that he describes. The inclusion of Jerome's personal account reflects the growing emphasis on eyewitness accounts and historical accuracy of this period.[116] This could be another reason why Jacobus may have particularly wished to include this excerpt.

Saint Jerome is not the only Early Church theologian and hagiographer Jacobus references in the *Legenda aurea*. The life of the Virgin of Antioch is appropriated from Ambrose's *De Virginibus*.[117] In the chapter dedicated to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary Jacobus quotes from Augustine's *City of God,* corresponding Augustine's description of the heavenly City with Saint Elizabeth's many virtues:

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[114] *The Golden Legend*, p. 121; William Granger Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, p. 121, n. 1.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Peter Ainsworth, 'Contemporary and 'Eyewitness' History', in Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis (ed.), *Historiography in the Middle Ages*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2003, pp. 249-50.
[117] *The Golden Legend*, p. 250.

'*eternitate dei uiget, in ueritate dei lucet, in bonitate dei gaudet*'.[118] R. W. Dyson

translates this passage as "its strength is in the eternity of God; its light is in God's

truth; in God's goodness is its joy".[119] Jacobus explicitly links Saint Elizabeth with

Saint Augustine's heavenly City, and quotes a religious text that holds great

importance throughout the medieval period. The Early Church Fathers significantly

contributed to Christian thought, as through works such as *The City of God* they

illuminated the sometimes confusing and contradictory teachings of the Bible.

Augustine, for instance, outlined in The City of God that the entire history of

humanity is continuous, even the irreligious parts.[120] Saint Augustine was particularly

connected with the Dominicans, as the order is founded on his monastic rule.

Augustine also developed the Christian ideals of chaste marriage and community life

for virgin women.[121] The expansion of these doctrines throughout the medieval

period had a significant effect on both nuns and religious laywomen.[122] Excerpts and

quotes included within the text have the effect of legitimising the *Legenda aurea* and

place it in a continuum of Christian theological thought. Saint Elizabeth's

hagiography is an outlier in some respects, but by invoking Augustine, Jacobus

associates her legend with early Christianity.

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[118] *The Golden Legend*, p. 688; Iacopo da Vazarre, *Legenda aurea*, vol. II, Giovanni Paolo Maggioni (ed.), Florence, SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007, p. 1296.

[119] Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 482.

[120] Henry Chadwick, *Augustine of Hippo: A Life*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 144.

[121] Margaret McGlynn and Richard J. Moll, 'Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages: "It Were to Hire a Great Merite"', in Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (eds.), *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, New York and London, Garland Publishing, 1996, p. 104; Tarsius J. Van Bavel, 'Commentary on the Rule', in *The Rule of Saint Augustine: Masculine and Feminine Versions*, trans. Raymond Canning, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984, p. 76.

[122] McGlynn and Moll, 'Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages', p. 111; Van Bavel, 'Commentary on the Rule', p. 77.

The major difference between Elizabeth of Hungary and the other female saints

included in the *Legenda aurea* is the time period they derive from. The majority of

the hagiographies are placed in the period of early Christianity, before the conversion

of Constantine. These early saints are therefore often the subjects of persecution by

the Roman authorities. Saints from late antiquity and the saints of the later medieval

period, as Goodich has noted, displayed a striking similarity of victimisation, in

comparison to early medieval, apathetic, female sainthood.[123] The thirteenth century

was a period of heretical challenges to the established Roman Church, and

emphasising the persecution early Christian saints experienced provided a model for

contemporary women to oppose heresy. Although Saint Elizabeth does not

specifically oppose a heretical movement, she does undergo political alienation after

the death of her husband, and therefore her hagiography fits into the general theme of

persecution.[124] Elizabeth's husband was noble, and after his death his vassals

denounced her and forced her to leave her homeland.[125] Saint Elizabeth embraces her

new poverty and alienation through a spirituality that Jacobus clearly admires. In

many ways her hagiography provides a perfect exemplar for thirteenth-century

women to emulate. After her husband's death she commits herself to a penitent

religious lifestyle. Although noble, she submits to the instruction of Master Conrad, a

male religious authority. The women in the *Legenda aurea* often submit to the

traditional gender hierarchy within Christianity, even as these women are allocated

greater spiritual significance. This could reflect Jacobus' concern with the growing

spiritual power of women in the thirteenth century. As Carolyn Walker Bynum has

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[123] Michael Goodich, 'A Profile of Thirteenth-Century Sainthood', *Comparitive Studies in Society*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1976, p. 26.
[124] *The Golden Legend,* pp. 693-4.
[125] Ibid., p. 693.

noted, during this century women began to interact with religious culture in new ways, as mystics and hagiographers.[126] Jacobus emphasised Elizabeth's submission to men.[127] Elizabeth also prays that her heart be hardened against her children, so that her devotion to God becomes preeminent. This theme of the dominance of a spiritual family over the temporal family is found throughout the *Legenda aurea*, particularly as saints from the Roman period attempt to preserve their virginity in the face of marriage, or when they have converted against the wishes of their pagan families. As Petroff has noted, many women saints of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had been married, which differs from earlier virgin saints.[128] The length of Elizabeth's hagiography suggests that this saint was of particular importance to Jacobus, and her inclusion is particularly striking when one notes the omission of Clare of Assisi and other significant female saints of the later medieval period. Saint Clare, however, may have been canonised too late to be included in the *Legenda aurea*, as this only occurred in 1255.[129] Marco Bartoli has noted that even within the Franciscan order there was initially resistance to Clare's saintly status,[130] and so Jacobus may have not recognised her as a true saint. It may however have been Elizabeth's widowhood, an attribute that Clare did not share, that made her most attractive as an example of sanctity for Jacobus.

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[126] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studied in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1982, pp. 170-1.
[127] *The Golden Legend*, pp. 691, 695.
[128] Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 115.
[129] Marco Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, trans. Frances Teresa, Quincy, IL, Franciscan Press, 1993, p. 198.
[130] Ibid., p. 199.

Another shared attribute, as noted in the second chapter, is that many of the women whose hagiographies are included in the *Legenda aurea* are from wealthy backgrounds. This paper has previously discussed how many of these saints renounced their possessions. There is also a pervasive focus among these hagiographies on the noble lineage of these saints. The Latin script of the hagiographies of Saints Anastasia and Paula describes these women as *nobilissima*, while Saint Pelagia is described as "*prima femina Antiochie ciuitatis*".[131] In promoting a sanctity that was noble and wealthy, Jacobus may have designed these hagiographies to address a particular audience of women. The new Dominican religious communities for women may not only have required financial aid, but also a type of legitimacy which noble lineage could generate. This emphasis on nobility was not accidental: twenty of the women saints in these chapters are explicitly described as noble, as Saint Elizabeth was.[132] The type of lifestyle these noble women live ranges widely, from Saint Julitta, who married and gave birth to Saint Quiricus, to the promiscuous and ostentatious Saint Pelagia, to Saint Lucy the Virgin.[133] These women are noble, wealthy, and in many cases renounce their possessions, potentially providing a model for noble pious women to emulate in Jacobus' time. As John Larner has noted, by the mid-thirteenth century nobles in Genoa had grouped together in confederations called *alberghi* in response to economic or political problems.[134] In Jacobus' Genoa, therefore, noble families and their supporters were reasserting their control over the city. The compiler and author of the *Legenda aurea* must have

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[131] *Legenda Aurea*, vol. I, pp. 88, 236; *Legenda Aurea*, vol. II, p. 1160.
[132] *The Golden Legend*, p. 689.
[133] Ibid., pp. 27, 324, 616-7.
[134] Larner, *Italy in the Age of Dante and Petrach*, p. 86.

understood the validity and political potency noble benefactors or associates could bestow upon religious institutions. The apprehension of noble families over the chastity of noble women was particularly acute, as sexual indiscretions of noble women could result in the inclusion of illegitimate blood in noble genealogical lines.[135] Jacobus' emphasis on noble saints living a life of sexual abstinence may have been influenced by some of the concerns regarding noblewomen's sexuality. The new Dominican nunneries could utilise the political clout and networks that would accompany any noble women who joined the order.

The hagiographies of the *Legenda aurea* that Jacobus chose to include must have displayed features that the author found particularly compelling. As Dominican nunneries were so new in the late thirteenth century, this chapter has argued that some of the pervasive themes were included to promote a penitent religious lifestyle to noble and widowed women. Noble, politically connected, and wealthy women could bring economic and social benefits to the fledgling Dominican nunneries.

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[135] Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, 'Women and the Family', in Jacques Le Goff (ed.), *Medieval Callings*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 291.

Conclusion

The *Legenda aurea* contains a diverse range of hagiographies, a minority of which are dedicated to women saints. This dissertation has used the *vitae* of these women to discover why these particular saints were included. Certain themes are repeated throughout the text, and were features of female sanctity that particularly attracted the author and compiler, Jacobus de Voragine. As a Dominican monk writing in the thirteenth century, these pervasive themes may illustrate the concerns not only of Jacobus, but also the order at large.

Women preserving their virginity and renouncing their wealth and possessions were performances of spirituality which the Dominicans would have approved of, and Jacobus included these features in the *Legenda aurea* for both young and wealthy women to emulate. The hagiographies that describe women entering monasteries disguised as monks would not have been included as a model for late medieval women to emulate, but may have demonstrated the strong desire for the monastic life that the Dominicans hoped to foster. The Dominicans had only recently been forced through papal intervention to adopt the economic responsibilities of religious communities of women inspired by their teachings. This research paper has argued that Jacobus used the *Legenda aurea* as a conduit to encourage religious laywomen to either join the order or to contribute economically to the Dominicans. Many of the saints are either noble, widows, or have renounced a licentious lifestyle for a penitent existence. Noble women could convey respectability and political connections to fledgling Dominican nunneries if they enlisted. Widows could have greater economic autonomy than other women, and were considered to be responsible for their late

husbands' souls in the developing purgatorial thought of the period. By inducing widows to enter the monastic life, Jacobus may have been ensuring the spiritual health of the greater community by attempting to prevent remarriage. Saints who had been promiscuous previously but had subsequently changed their ways may have been included to emphasise that the penitent life was open to all women, no matter how immoral. It seems clear that whatever the author's intention, certain hagiographical themes were of particular interest to him. These themes also resonated with the audience of the *Legenda aurea* as it became an immensely popular text by medieval standards.

This paper has attempted to examine certain shared attributes that are extremely pervasive throughout the work. There are many gendered characteristics that have not been investigated, however, which could be the subject of future scholarship. A direct comparison of the sanctity of men and of women may provide a deeper insight into the customary gender roles Jacobus thought appropriate. The subject of sexual assault has been briefly examined in the second chapter, but only in reference to virginity. An investigation of the way rape is utilised within the text could provide insight into the way sexual assault was used as a literary device and the repercussions this may have had on society. Another pervasive theme throughout the *Legenda aurea* is the relationship between saints and animals. Beasts and animals may have been used as representative devices that are not immediately clear on an initial reading of the text, a subject that would make for a fascinating investigation. The *Legenda aurea* was a significant text for the late medieval period, not only due to its grand scale, but also the popularity it generated. The saintly women included in the text would have provided a model of piety for many medieval women to emulate. Although an

analysis of the text itself will not illustrate the way in which the *Legenda aurea* may have inspired medieval women, it can provide clues as to what type of female sanctity Jacobus de Voragine desired to promote.

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