De vitae van de angelsaksische heiligen van ely in de twaalfde eeuw
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From the *Historia Ecclesiastica* by the Venerable Bede (ca. 672-735) it may be derived that in the second half of the seventh century a monastery was founded on the Isle of Ely (Cambs.) by Saint Etheldreda (Æthelthryth), daughter of king Anna of East Anglia. Etheldreda is the most prominent member of a group of female descendants of this king mentioned by Bede. A coherent cluster of hagiographical and liturgical texts which refer to a number of her saintly female relatives was written down in the Benedictine monastery at Ely in the course of the twelfth century. This corpus of texts forms the basis of the present combined study and text edition. It comprises lives of saints (*vitae*), sometimes combined with descriptions of reburials (*translationes*) of the saints discussed, miracle collections (*miracula*) and teachings or lectures (*lectiones*).

The goal of this research is to discover to what extent the position of the Ely monastery in the last decades of the eleventh and in the course of the twelfth century - when the texts of the corpus studied here originated - affected the definite composition and contents of these *vitae* (and similar hagiographical texts) and *lectiones* and in what way if any they influenced each other. My investigation allowed me to draw conclusions as to the function of these texts with regard to the development of the internal coherence of the monastery and to its position in the outside world.

The texts studied here treat Sexburga (*vita: VS; lectiones: LS*), Eormenhilda (*lectiones: LEh*), Werburga (*vita: VWer; lectiones: LWer*), Whitburga (two versions of a *vita: VWiht-C and VWiht-T; miracula: MWiht*), and Ethelburga and Erkengota (*vitae or lectiones*, which are in fact excerpts from Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica: Ehlg-C, Eh-l, Eg-T*). An obvious demarcation line between the *vitae* and the *lectiones* cannot be drawn in each case; occasionally it is unclear whether a text was considered a *vita* or rather as a set of *lectiones*. Moreover, a text may have had more than one function, depending on the occasion for which it was put to use, as can be inferred from the various ways in which versions of the same text were designated in different manuscripts and also from the addition of a division into *lectiones* by a later hand.

Some texts on Etheldreda were written down at Ely in the course of the twelfth century and they will be dealt with in this study only indirectly (e.g. a *vita, miracula* and parts of the *Ely Chronicle*). Texts that are not accessible in print have been edited in an number of appendices (that is to say a *vita Etheldredae* (*VEthd-C*) and a text with *miracula* (*MEthd-I*)).

In order to study the textual corpus from the viewpoint outlined above, the early history of the monastery and of the texts had to be examined first. Chapter II places the situation of the Ely monastery around the year 1100 against the background of the development of English monasteries during the transition from the Anglo-Saxon to the Anglo-Norman era. At this time, the autonomy of the monastery of Ely was threatened...
by the bishops of the surrounding dioceses and later, in the course of the twelfth century, by an assault on its independence from within, when the monastery was being transformed into a cathedral minster. Such an arrangement was not unusual in England; in other areas, too, existing monasteries were changed into cathedral ministres, and similar conflicts arose in the course of this process.

England around 1100 was characterised by large building-projects. Monasteries tried to outdo one another not only in the size of the new buildings but also by the scale of the accompanying activities. The building process of the present cathedral of Ely, which was begun under abbot Simeon (1081 or 1082-1093), commenced at this time.

These money-devouring building activities were combined with grandiose, eye-catching translations (the solemn reburials of saints), which at the same time stimulated the writing or rewriting of vitae, translationes and miracula, and of lectiones (readings or lectures which were read aloud during the canonical hours). Even today, this ostentatious competition resounds between the lines of the texts themselves.

According to the various twelfth-century vitae recorded at Ely, the saintly female descendants of king Anna – Etheldreda, Sexburga, Wihtburga, Eormenhilda and Werburga – had been closely connected to that monastery from ancient times. Werburga was the only one who did not have a final resting-place at Ely, although, according to the twelfth-century texts, her monastic life did begin here. Two other female descendants of king Anna, Ethelburga and Erkengota, are only indirectly related to Ely through their family ties with Etheldreda, and in the twelfth century, they are commemorated there only to a small degree.

Chapter III contains an inventory of the information about these saintly women available to English hagiographers around 1100 and earlier. The most important source is Bede, whose Historia Ecclesiastica, especially, had an influence which cannot easily be overestimated. Of the group of saints directly connected to Ely in the twelfth century, only the foundress of the monastery, Etheldreda, had been described as a saint as early as the eighth century. Of the remaining four – Sexburga, Wihtburga, Eormenhilda and Werburga – only Etheldreda’s sister Sexburga can be traced back to eighth-century sources and connected to Ely with certainty. Bede describes her as the second abbess of the monastery and the successor of her sister Etheldreda, although he does not call her a saint. Etheldreda and Wihtburga have a reputation of enduring posthumous physical integrity. In the case of Etheldreda, this posthumous incorruption was already attested by Bede. Bede, indeed, describes Ethelburga and Erkengota, the two saints not directly connected with Ely, as saints, but he connects their religious lives and saintliness with a convent life in France in a period preceding the foundation of Ely.

Another group of texts of interest for the hagiography of the saints of Ely contains elements of the so-called Kentish Royal Legend or Mildrith Legend, which has stories of saints and foundations of monasteries associated with the history of the Kentish royal house in the seventh and eighth century. One of these is Pa Halgan, an anonymous text from the beginning of the eleventh century. This text shows for the first time that some of the saints venerated at Ely in the twelfth century are connected to Etheldreda’s family (Wihtburga, Eormenhilda and Werburga). These saints are mentioned in close conjunction with Etheldreda in eleventh-century calendars and litanies, thus suggesting a coherent cultus. From inconsistencies in the texts of the Kentish Royal Legend (e.g. the insertion of Wihtburga’s name instead of Ethelburga’s in Pa Halgan), it can be inferred that these texts were influenced by the context of the eleventh century when...
Witthburga had already become a saint associated with Ely and consequently with Etheldreda, while Ethelburga has fallen into an obscure and subsidiary place.

Some of the manuscripts in which the texts which I have studied were handed down give an indication of their genesis. These manuscripts are described in chapter IV. Special attention has been devoted to the question whether the individual manuscripts that contain the texts of the studied corpus can be connected with Ely especially in the period under investigation. In this way, individual readings of a text in such a manuscript may be connected with local developments. In the case of three manuscripts such a relationship can be established, and they are the basic manuscripts of my corpus. Three other manuscripts which have a single text from the corpus, namely, the vita Werburge, cannot be linked with the twelfth-century monastery of Ely directly. For this reason they are marked as secondary manuscripts, although I have included them in my edition.

The first basic manuscript is London, British Library, Cotton Caligula A.VIII (my siglum A). Three of a total of twelve parts of this manuscript contain hagiographical and liturgical material regarding Sexburga, Werburga, Eormenhilda and Witthburga, A-Itr, A-irv and A-v. A is the only known manuscript with texts of both the miracula Witthburga (in A-IV) and the lectiones Werburge (one of the components of part A-Itr). Besides, A-III contains texts that also appear in one or both of the other two basic manuscripts in a similar or only slightly different redaction. The text of the vita Sexburge in A reveals traces of more than one edition (part A-V). The original text in the manuscript was subsequently edited and supplemented; it stands at the basis of the text of the vita Sexburge in basic manuscript T.

The second basic manuscript is Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 393 (my siglum C). Apart from a number of texts of the corpus, among which is a unique edition of the vita Witthburge (VWit-C), this manuscript also contains two related texts about Etheldreda. The vita Etheldrede (VEthd-C) and a group of miracula (MEthd-I) have been edited in the present study.

The third basic manuscript, Cambridge, Trinity College, O.2.1 (my siglum T) – besides having a proper unique edition of the vita Witthburge (VWit-T) – contains editions of a number of other texts from the corpus which deviate slightly from the edition in A and/or C. The so-called long edition of The Ely Chronicle is in this manuscript as well.

The three secondary manuscripts, Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek 8873-78, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 285 and Dublin, Trinity College 112, each contain the text of the vita Werburge (my sigla B, O and D). Apart from the vita Werburge, D also has the text of a set of early miracles, miracula Etheldrede-I (MEthd-I).

Chapter V gives an inventory of the texts of the corpus, and discusses their presence in the manuscripts and possible earlier editions or descriptions; the texts about Etheldreda used in this study are described here as well. This is followed up by an examination of how the information given in the texts became available at Ely and was there forged into a whole, and by an analysis of the degree to which they influenced each other. Here I use the data about the situation in England and the specific circumstances at Ely at the end of the eleventh and in the twelfth century already presented in chapters II and III.

A comparison of the information given about the saints of Ely in the corpus and in earlier and contemporary texts allowed me to reconstruct the way Etheldreda’s relatives

511
are used to further the interests of Ely and how the cult of these saints fitted the needs of the monastery. Wihtburga is seen to develop from a local saint to Etheldreda’s saintly sister, with a lasting reputation of posthumous physical integrity of her own and a preference for Ely as her final resting-place. Sexburga develops from Etheldreda’s sister to a saint and the ancestor of saints. Her final resting-place, which is explicitly connected with Ely, is transformed into a cult place. At Ely a hagiographical texture is woven by connecting data from different traditions, which go back on Bede and on the so-called Kentish Royal Legend, and from stories about similarly named, but probably different persons, whether saints or not. Not only the independent position of the monastery of Ely – both as an example for and a predecessor of other monasteries – ranks prominently in it, but also the high degree of saintliness of the virgin-founder Etheldreda, proven among other things by her posthumous physical incorruption and the saintliness of her relatives.

Chapter VI discusses the way in which the information in the individual texts is presented and to what extent they deal with the specific problems of the monastery at Ely which were described in chapter II. These twelfth-century texts emphasise the age and seniority of the monastery and the high degree of holiness of the saints who found their final resting-place there. The claim of autonomy and independence for the monastery is pressed by an emphasis on the fact that its foundation precedes the establishment of local dioceses and that it took place on Etheldreda’s own property, i.e. in an area that constituted her dowry.

Ely’s independence from local bishops is also emphasized indirectly. This is clear from the vita of Sexburga, which highlights the superiority of abbess Sexburga, foundress of Minster-in-Sheppey, with regard to Theodore, archbishop of Canterbury, and the independence of the Sheppey monastery; Sexburga had founded her monastery on her own territory. Moreover, Theodore had been invited to assist in the consecration of the convent church at Sheppey although in the end his presence was not necessary. This reflects the problems which arose between Ely and the local bishops in issues regarding authority over the monastery. In the vita of Sexburga, moreover, Sexburga’s wishes and prayers to God overrule the archbishop’s desires: against his will she has to return to Sexburga’s monastery and spend the night there after he had first turned down her urgent initial request to do so. In the vita of Werburga, too, there is no part to play for the bishops, but only for her Werburga’s family, especially her uncle, who places her at the head of the monasteries of Mercia.

The primacy and superiority of Ely in relation to other monasteries is emphasised in a number of texts by the description of saintly women who move to Ely from other monasteries, whether of their own accord during their lifetime like Sexburga, or by posthumous translation like Wihtburga. The monasteries which these two saints abandon, Minster-in-Sheppey and Dereham, respectively, fall into decay; according to the texts of this monastery, Ely, on the other hand, knew an uninterrupted history. The posthumous physical incorruption of the virgin saints who find their final resting-place at Ely, Etheldreda and Wihtburga, contrasts with the eventual decay of the virgin Werburga, who is buried elsewhere. The fact that Ely plays an important role at the start of Werburga’s religious career, where she can imitate the example of her relative Etheldreda and her grandmother Sexburga before continuing her monastic life elsewhere, also points in this direction. At Ely she leads such an exemplary life that her uncle Ethelreda placed her under the care of her mother, Ethelburga, who had joined her, but not before Etheldreda had already joined her, too.

Etheldreda and Ethelburga’s posthumous reputations show not only her influence at Ely. Through the texts about Etheldreda’s final resting-place, her relative Etheldreda’s influence on the cult about these saints was also strengthened, and through the cult at Ely, the file of the saints was increased.

The first part of the texts of the corpus of the twelfth century, (A, C and T) and their redactions.

The individual texts present a specific choice of manuscripts which have been taken into account. In this study, versions (versiones) and intentional changes (redactio or edition) are regarded. These redactions and texts have been discussed in detail in the introduction.

With some regularity, new texts were written about other local bishops, and these have been edited before. From these texts, an edition of the miracles of Etheldreda (miracula Etheldrede) is compiled.

Chapter IX summarises the research on the Benedictine monastery of St Bertin and Caen.

Chapter X contains an introduction to the doctrine of St Bertin and Caen and its opposite qualities in the past, partly of the eighties of the eleventh century, attributed to Goscelin. This section of the appendix takes into account the attributions. From the biography of Goscelin’s, andrew, and the appendix were handed down for the collection, c. 52 by him, although his authorship is not always clear.
Etheldreda’s sainthood and the needs of her own and a monastery. Etheldreda’s sister Ethelburga, which is explicitly mentioned, but probably not in her own name, had joined her, but she did not follow her daughter when she moved on. Etheldreda and Ethelburga, the two saints whose bond with Etheldreda and her family had already been mentioned by Bede but whose religious lives or posthumous reputations show no connection with the Ely monastery, are mentioned only in passing at Ely. Through their own saintliness and in the case of Ethelburga by a reputation of posthumous integrity, they enhance the fame of their saintly relatives, especially that of their relative Etheldreda and her posthumous integrity. For this reason, Bede’s texts about these saints were copied without many changes when they were used to complete the file of the saintly relatives of Etheldreda.

The first part of chapter VII gives the premises that form the basis of the edition of the texts of the corpus. I have taken pains to present a text as it functioned at Ely during the twelfth century. Three manuscripts are evidently connected with Ely in this period (A, C and T) and this applies, too, to the texts of the corpus found in them. The individual texts of the corpus were edited from a single manuscript, and the choice of manuscript has been justified for each text. The remaining manuscripts have been taken into account in the critical apparatus in as much as they contain other versions (versiones) of the edited text (variant readings which do not indicate intentional changes in the text). When a text has been handed down in more than one redaction or edition (an edition of a text containing intentional changes), the versions of these redactiones are presented in parallel columns. In a single case the texts of two redactiones have been edited separately. The relation between specific text editions or redactiones and text versions is described in chapter VIII.

With some regularity the discussion of the texts of the corpus refers to texts which were written about Etheldreda at Ely in the twelfth century. Two of these texts have not been edited before and they appear in one of the basic manuscripts (C). For these reasons, an edition of these texts, a vita Etheldrede (VEthd-C) and a collection of miracula Etheldrede (MEthd-D, has been included in this study.

Chapter IX summarises my conclusions with regard to the function in the Benedictine monastery at Ely of the texts in the corpus which I have studied. Chapter X contains a number of appendices with texts about the saints of Ely that do not fall within the corpus of my investigation but do have a relation to it: two texts about Werburga and Etheldreda and her relatives (in London, British Library, Lansdowne 436); a fragment of a short edition of the lectiones Sexburge (Stockholm, Riksarkivet, Theol.br.246); and a collection of quotes from a vita Wihtburge transcribed by John Leland (1506?-1552) in the sixteenth century.

Chapter XI is an appendix about the eleventh-century hagiographer Goscelin, monk of St Bertin and Canterbury, to whom some of texts of the corpus have been attributed in the past, partly on account of their style and a report of his sojourn at Ely in the eighties of the eleventh century. A survey is here given of works which have been attributed to Goscelin rightly or wrongly or of which the attribution is uncertain. This appendix takes into consideration the arguments that are at the basis of these attributions. From the investigation of these texts in chapters V to VII and from Goscelin’s biography, it can be concluded that the editions or redactiones in which they were handed down for the greater share originated too late for them to have been written by him, although his work may have formed the foundation of an earlier redactio of some of them.