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People, Places, Things: Material Genealogy and Kinship in The St. Albans Psalter

The homepage for St. Albans Cathedral welcomes visitors by asserting that it is the “oldest site of continuous Christian worship in Britain and stands over the place where Alban, Britain's first saint, was buried after giving his life for his faith over 1700 years ago.”¹ The cathedral simultaneously claims cultural longevity while tracing its roots to Britain’s first saint, establishing a genealogy dating back nearly two millennia. Similarly, the twelfth-century St. Albans Psalter, Hildesheim Dombibliothek, MS St. Godehard 1, is a manuscript that belongs to an established material genealogy rooted in a geographic space; its contents reveal a similar interest in genealogy and kinship. As the title of this paper suggests, I will investigate the ways in which viewers of the St. Albans Psalter read material objects, places, and historical people—such as Christina of Markyate—in and through the codex. This viewership, and beyond orientation, reifies new understanding for readers of material memory, genealogy, and familial lineages of the texts in the St. Albans Psalter.

Just as the cathedral is the “oldest site of continuous Christina worship in Britain,” the psalter has impressive foundational implications. Kristine Haney observes that the manuscript is often “regarded as the first surviving masterpiece of English illumination produced after the Norman Conquest.”² The Norman Conquest here serves for Haney as the temporal marker,

¹ www.stalbanscathedral.org

² Katherine Haney, *The St. Albans Psalter: An Anglo-Norman Song of Faith* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 1.

post-1066, which separates the St. Albans Psalter from its predecessors. Haney also insists upon the Englishness of the creation of the manuscript, which demarcates the geographic location as England, thereby situating the work within a geo-temporal schema.³ Jane Geddes, on the other hand, brings attention to the manuscript's contents and argues that the Anglo-Norman *Vie de Saint Alexis*, which is placed in the first quarter of the manuscript, is "as important to the French language as *Beowulf* is to English."⁴ Haney's position on the Englishness of the manuscript is rivaled by Geddes's claim for the linguistic, and later national, importance of its French content. Yet, this duality is the nature of the St. Albans Psalter, and indeed of post-Conquest England; the interwoven genealogies of Anglo-Saxon and Norman culture in the 11th and 12th centuries created opportunity for the St Albans Psalter to embody both; its lineage is simultaneously English and French, tout court.⁵

In order to properly analyze the material importance of the St. Albans Psalter a description of its contents will prove helpful. The manuscript can be categorized into four sections contained within a total of 25 collations, 209 folios, and 418 pages.⁶ The first section comprises a liturgical calendar including feast days and depicting the labors of the months, as well as the zodiac signs. The second section consists of only images: 40 full-page illustrations known as a miniature cycle which depict the Fall, the Life of Christ, Saint Martin, and David,

³ Haney continues on to say that "No other extant English manuscript of the period is this copiously illustrated," 3. While she does not clarify what she means by English, I am expanding her assertion to include a geographic index rather than national or linguistic.

⁴ Jane Geddes, *The St Albans Psalter: A Book for Christina of Markyate* (London: The British Library, 2005), 8.

⁵ For more on Anglo-Norman literature see the chapters in Section I, "After the Conquest" in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7-178.

⁶ Haney, 2-3.

among others.⁷ The third section, also known as the “Alexis Quire,” contains not only the *Vie de Saint Alexis* mentioned above, but is extended to include a translated letter in Latin and French from Pope Gregory the Great defending the use of images in manuscripts, three full-page illustrations depicting the Emmaus story, a discourse on a spiritual battle, and a “Beatus Vir.”⁸ Finally, the fourth section comprises the Gallican psalter, which is followed by the canticles, creeds, the litany, and prayers, and which ends with two full-page illustrations of the martyrdom of St. Alban and David with his musicians.⁹ Of all the texts in the manuscript, only the *Vie de Saint Alexis* and the letter written by Pope Gregory are in French, while the calendar and the psalter are in Latin.¹⁰

As obvious as it may seem, the St. Albans Psalter is already marked by a name which locates it within a specific geographic area in Britain.¹¹ Yet, this notion of spatial belonging is complicated by the other locational names associated with the codex. On the first page of the manuscript is written “Liber Monast. Lamspring OSB Cong. Angl.” and on the second page, as well, is inscribed, “Liber Monasterii Lambspringensis Ordinis Sancti Benedicti Congregationis Anglicanæ” (Book of the Lambspring Monastery of the English Congregation of the Order of

⁷ Geddes, 15. She writes that “The images are based closely on biblical texts, requiring from the viewer a certain fluency in identifying the gospel locations,” 19.

⁸ Geddes, 15 and Haney, 4.

⁹ Haney, 4.

¹⁰ For more about vernacular psalters instead of Latin, see Geoff Rector, “The Romanz Psalter in England and Northern France in the Twelfth Century: Production, mise-en-page, and Circulation,” *Journal of the Early Book Society for the Study of Manuscripts and Printing History* 13, (2010): 1-38.

¹¹ I identify the creation of the manuscript as St. Albans by an obituary in the calendar: 12 September: θ Rogeri heremite monaci scí Albani • ap’ quéc’q; fuerit h’ psaté:iu’ fiat ei’ memoria maxime hac die [Died Roger the hermit, monk of St. Albans, among whom this psalter was made. May memory of him be made especially on this day]. Transcription and translation are my own. All translations from Latin and French, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

Saint Benedict).¹² Jane Geddes notes that above the first inscription, very faintly, is written “L Monasterii Lamspring 1657.”¹³ This monastic referent is interesting for two reasons. The first being that Lamspringe Monastery is mentioned a grand total of three times within two pages. These inscriptions firmly situate the manuscript within the specific geographic context of Lamspringe in Germany, not in the original locus of provenance. Secondly, the date 1657 allows us to trace, in part, a temporal continuity of the manuscript’s use dating at least 400 years after its creation. Yet, despite the geographic shift, the inscriptions inform us that the manuscript still remained within an “English” genealogy, as part of an English Benedictine congregation.¹⁴ Geddes points out that the monastery was given to English Benedictines in 1643 following the dissolution of their monasteries, and that in the late 18th century, it was believed that Lamspringe had closer ties to St. Albans than was previously believed.¹⁵ All of this information provides textual evidence of the codex’s movement through time and across Europe, establishing the material lineage of Hildesheim Dombibliothek, MS St. Godehard 1.

The presence of people’s names within the leaves of the St. Albans Psalter also demonstrates its genealogy of ownership. As the first page informs us, the manuscript at one point in time, was owned by, or taken care of by, “Fr. Ben.,” or Brother Benedict. The italic hand can be dated to the early 17th century and, while Benedict was one of the most common names among religious communities, Robert Meering is the only brother at Lamspringe to have taken the name in the mid-17th century; it is possible that he brought the Psalter to Lamspringe

¹² The transcription of this phrase on the University of Aberdeen digital version has an inaccuracy in rendering “Monasterii Lamspringensis” and they provide “Monastery Lamspringenis,” <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/index.shtml>.

¹³ Geddes, 15. This is not clearly visible on the facsimile provided by the University of Aberdeen.

¹⁴ It is important to also consider the shift in ideas of the “nation” and the localization of “English Benedictine” between the 12th century and the mid-17th century.

¹⁵ Geddes, 15.

when he left England.¹⁶ While Meering's transportation of the manuscript is not definitive, it is likely that the transfer of the manuscript from England to Germany happened sometime during or after the Reformation in England because at several points in the calendar of the manuscript, the word "*papa*" has been erased.¹⁷ Whatever the case may be, the codex remained in England for several centuries before its lineage passed to Germany into the care of Fr. Ben..

Yet, Frater Benedictus is just one of the possible owners of the St. Albans Psalter. As the subtitle for Jane Geddes book indicates, many scholars believe that the manuscript belonged to the 12th century prioress Christina of Markyate.¹⁸ This is perhaps the most hotly debated aspect of the provenance and ownership of Hildesheim Dombibliothek, MS St. Godehard 1. 400 years before the St. Albans Psalter made its way to Germany, many believe that it was under the care of Christina of Markyate. Jane Geddes argues that the probable patron of the codex was Geoffrey de Gorham, Abbot of St. Albans from 1119 to 1146, and that he gave the manuscript as a gift to his friend, Christina.¹⁹ Morgan Powell takes this assertion farther and writes that the "book is as much a representation of Christina, a material body for her spiritual identity in both its personal and communal dimensions."²⁰ For Powell, the codex is a material manifestation of Christina's readership, ownership, and religious practice. Kristine Haney, on the other hand,

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ C.H. Talbot, ed. and trans. *The Life of Christina of Markyate a Twelfth Century Recluse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 22, n. 3. This was commonplace for the Reformation.

¹⁸ *The St Albans Psalter: A Book for Christina of Markyate*.

¹⁹ Geddes, 5. See Talbot, 147-155 for more on Geoffrey and Christina's relationship as recounted in the *Vita*.

²⁰ Morgan Powell, "Making the Psalter of Christina of Markyate (The St. Albans Psalter)," *Viator* 36, no. 1 (2005), 329-330.

removes the manuscript from the geographic and interpersonal sphere established above.²¹ She argues that “the St. Albans Psalter was not designed in St. Albans, and for this reason among others, was not designed with Christina in mind as the intended recipient. The Hildesheim manuscript is quite probably a copy of a book designed in Canterbury that was originally intended for the use of men.”²² These scholars’ views are merely representative of a wider, ongoing discussion regarding Christina’s relationship to the Geoffrey de Gorham, St. Albans Monastery, and the St. Albans Psalter.

Despite the presence of Brother Benedict in the manuscript, there is more textual and historical evidence to underscore Christina’s involvement with the manuscript and with the monastery at St. Albans, which leads others and myself to focus more on her as an historical figure. Much of what we know of Christina’s life is preserved in a *Vita* found in the second volume of MS. Cotton Tiberius E.1.²³ Dating from the mid-14th century, Christina’s *Vita*, as C.H. Talbot observes, originally came from St. Albans and “may have been written both for an in the monastery.”²⁴ It does not do to speculate that since both the Psalter and Christina’s *Vita* were created in the St. Albans scriptorium that there is a concrete connection between them. Rather, Christina’s *Life* recounts her presence at St. Albans, even as a child: “In the meantime, by an act of divine providence, Autti and Breatrix brought their dear daughter Christina with them to our

²¹ I find Powell’s metonymy compelling and I will take up a similar idea later in this paper, arguing that Christina’s presence is visible within the manuscript, but not that the codex itself is a representation of Christina.

²² Haney, 345. I disagree with Haney because of the calendar’s self-consciousness in stating that the psalter was created at St. Albans by Roger. For more on Roger, see Talbot 81-2.

²³ Talbot, 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

monastery of the blessed martyr St. Alban, where his bones are revered”²⁵ The use of “our monastery” (nostrum . . . monasterium) is ambiguous enough that while the scribe may have simply been referring to his congregation’s monastery, it is even more compelling to consider his inclusion of Christina within the community.

Furthermore, the scribe indicates that Christina left her physical mark on the door of the abbey: “At length, as her parents were leaving the monastery, having fulfilled all the things they had come to do, she made a sign of the cross with one of her fingernails on the door as a token that she had placed her affection there.”²⁶ More nuanced than “made” however, the Latin indicates that Christina wrote or inscribed (scripsit) the sign of the cross into the door. She quite literally wrote herself into the space where both her *Vita* and the psalter in which she appears, were created. Interestingly, Jane Geddes argues that this episode indicates that the scribe personally knew Christina. While this is not certainly verifiable, Christina ensured that she would play a role in the material genealogy and the textual memory of St. Albans.²⁷

While it may be interesting to explore Christina of Markyate as a putative recipient of the Hildesheim codex, more useful to my purpose here is to view her within the material genealogy of the manuscript. Unlike other scholars’ inquiry into how she may have read the text or how the manuscript was intended for her, I will investigate textual moments within the codex where one

²⁵ Talbot, 39. This translation is Talbot’s. The Latin reads: Interea divina disponente providencia contigit Autti ac Beatricem sumpta secum sua karissima filia Christina nostrum adire monasterium ac beati martiris Albani cuius inibi sacra venerantur ossa . . .

²⁶ Ibid. The Latin reads: Denique exeuntibus parentibus suis de templo. postquam expleverint propter que venerunt. illa signum crucis uno unguium suorum scripsit in porta scilicet quod in illo specialiter monasterio suum recondidisset affectum.

²⁷ There are many other instances in the *Vita* where Christina’s involvement with St. Albans and Abbot Geoffrey are mentioned, including the important connection between Markyate and St. Albans. For the purposes of this paper, then, I am assuming that Christina did actually stay at St. Albans for a significant amount of time in her life.

can read Christina herself within the St. Albans Psalter.²⁸ Just as the *Vita* author could read Christina in the door of St. Albans, we too can see her within the leaves of the codex. The best place to start with Christina in the codex is in the psalter itself, with psalm 105 (Confitemini Domino). Rather than the text of the psalm demonstrating Christina's presence, it is the historiated initial that potentially depicts her. Before describing the image, it is important to note that the initial is drawn on a separate piece of parchment and pasted into the manuscript, superimposed on a blank space. Geddes notes that this could have been the result of an oversight wherein the "tightly organized sequence of painting" might have resulted in this initial being forgotten.²⁹ Another possibility for the later addition to the manuscript is that the initial was created before the psalter when Geoffrey ordered it to be designed for Christina.³⁰

Regardless of the reason for the initials inclusion in psalm 105, it is reasonable to consider the figure in the initial to be Christina of Markyate. The initial is a "C" which begins the psalm "Confitemini Domino." The C is divided in half vertically, with the left side occupied by 4 monks and one female figure against a green background. The figures are facing to the right side, which depicts Christ against a blue, sidereal background facing back. Reaching across the divide and touching Christ's hand is the female figure, Christina of Markyate. The main textual evidence for this figure to be considered Christina is found in her *Vita* upon Geoffrey's visit to Christina in her chamber: "He promised to avoid everything unlawful, to fulfil her commands, and to help her

²⁸ This is where I differ most from other researchers. I am not interested in Christina of Markyate as a recipient or as a reader of the text. Instead, I am concerned with reading the St. Albans Psalter with an eye to understanding Christina within the larger material genealogy of the work.

²⁹ Geddes, 94.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 95. While I can see the importance of investigating *why* the initial was added, I do not wish to here. I am less interested in the motivation behind material production for this project, and more interested in the initial's presence in the codex.

convent in the future: all he asked was her intercession with God.”³¹ The initial, then, is read as Christina’s intercession with God on behalf of Geoffrey and the monks at St. Albans.³² This interpretation is further bolstered by the caption of the initial which reads “Parce tuis queso monachis celementia IH̄Y” (I beg you, merciful Jesus, spare your monks).³³ The caption provides additional textual evidence that Christina of Markayte is interceding on behalf of the monks. Together, the historiated initial, corroborated with the caption and the *Vita*, allow us to read the visual presence of Christina in the St. Albans Psalter.³⁴

Our prioress also makes an appearance at the beginning of the codex, in the calendar. Here, a reader of the St. Albans Psalter will find the feast days, zodiac, lunar cycle information, and obituaries, among other labels. It is the obituaries that are particularly striking here because in addition to Christina herself, the calendar memorializes the deaths of her family members:

- 11 January: θ Auti pater dōne Cristine
- 12 February: θ Gregori² m̄ fr̄ dōne Cristine
- 7 June: θ Beatrix mat̄ dōne Cristine
- 2 November: θ Symon fr̄ dōne Cristine
- 8 December: θ Cristina p̄ma p̄iorissa d̄ bosco.³⁵

³¹ Talbot, 139. The Latin reads: “Spondet prohibita vitare. complete mandata. Loci illius se futurum adiutorem. tanum illam apud Deum mereatur interventricem.”

³² Geddes, 95.

³³ The diacritic above the “H” is not exact, but I have tried to recreate the abbreviation as it is provided in the manuscript. I don’t wish to belabor my point, but several lines of the psalm itself seem to facilitate my discussion of genealogy and kinship: “Ad videndum in letitia gentis tue .’ / ut lauderis cum hereditate tua. / Peccavim² cum patribus n̄ris ; / iniuste egrim² iniquitatem fecim² / Patres n̄ri in engypto n̄intellexerunt / mirabilia tua; non fuerunt memores / multitudinis misedie tue.”

³⁴ So convinced is the scholarly community that this is Christina that C.H. Talbot’s edition of *The Life of Christina of Markyate* displays psalm 105’s initial as its cover.

³⁵ “Obiit Auti pater dominae Cristinae (Died Auti, father of Lady Christina); Obiit Gregorius monachus frater dominae Cristinae (Died Gregory, monk and brother of Lady Christina); Obiit Beatrix mater dominae Crisintae (Died Beatrix, mother of Lady Christina); Obiit Symon frater dominae Cristina (Died Symon, brother of Lady Christina); Obiit Cristina prima priorissa de

The overwhelming presence of Christina’s family in the St. Albans Psalter calendar is striking for two reasons. The first is quantitative: of the eighteen obituaries in the calendar, five are for Christina and her family, which places their kinship structure rather at the forefront of the reader’s mind. The second striking characteristic about these entries, of course, is that Christina (dōnē Cristinē) is mentioned in all of her family members’ obituaries. This at once further establishes Christina’s presence in the psalter while recording the nodes of kinship in her family, thus demonstrating a different type of material genealogy from what we have seen so far.

To have the calendar at the beginning of the manuscript, with a loose representation of Christina of Markyate’s family tree, opens the possibility of reading similar types of kinship and material genealogies throughout the rest of the codex. Identifying such intratextual relationships, that is, connections between the various sections of the manuscript, allow us to read how each section treats genealogy and trace lineage between the discrete sections. The *Vie de Saint Alexis*, for example, is a text that revolves squarely around the anxiety of genealogy and familial relationships. In order to provide a more thorough analysis of the *Vie*, a brief synopsis is in order. In Rome, Lord Eufemien and his wife cannot have a child, so they pray to God, who allows for the couple to conceive a child, Alexis. When he is old enough, and in order to preserve the happiness of their only son, and ostensibly preserve their family line, Alexis’s parents arrange for him to marry the daughter—whose name is never mentioned—of another aristocratic family, who similarly had only one child.

On their wedding night, Alexis cannot bear to confront the carnal sin he’s about to commit with his wife, so he flees to Laodicea and commands her to take Jesus as her spouse.

Bosco (Died Christina, first prioress of Bosco).” We know this is Christina of Markyate because Markyate was of the Holy Trinity of Bosco (Sanctae Trinitatis de Bosco), Talbot, 25.

After 17 years abroad living as a pauper, and at God's command, Alexis returns and lives at his family's home, even though they do not recognize him. He lives there as a pauper under the stairs for an additional 17 years. When he is dying of illness, he decides to write a letter recounting who he is and his story. It is not until he dies, and the letter is read, that his family recognizes him. Finally, the pope and the throngs of people in Rome bring Alexis's body to the church of St. Boniface where he is buried and beatified. All those who visit him are cured immediately of all ailments and disease.

From the beginning of the *Vie*, Lord Eufemien and his wife are concerned about their inability to conceive a child. More than concern, however, it grieved them:

Puis converserent ansemble longament,
N'ourent amfant, peiset lur en forment,
- E Deu, - apelent andui parfitement,
- E ! reis celeste, par ton cumandement
Amfant nus done ki seit a tun talent !³⁶

In many ways, the last line of this stanza is the most important because it leads the reader to understand the causality between Eufemien and his wife's burden of being childless and their seeking divine help. This also shows an extension of familial lineage to the religious realm since the parents-to-be ask God for his assistance in helping to create a child not only for Eufemien and his Lady, but for God, who is, of course, the Father. Their prayers pay off and God allowed them the opportunity to have a child:

Tant li prierent par grant humilitet

³⁶ ll. 21-5, "So they lived together a while, / Having no child, which weighed on them heavily, / "Oh God," they both called directly, / "O Heavenly King, by your command / give us a child who will be to your desiring." Instead of using the University of Aberdeen's transcription I have used that provided by Marizio Perugi, ed. *La Vie de Saint Alexis* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2000), and I have double checked the transcription with the facsimile.

Que la muiler duna fecunditet:
Un filz lur donet, si l'en sourent bon gret;
...
Fud baptizet, si out num Alexis.³⁷

The gift God gave, however, was not singular, but rather it was dual. First he gave Eufemien's wife the gift of fecundity and the ability to reproduce. Second, he gave them Alexis, a son who would be able to carry on the family name and ensure the lineage would continue. As we see shortly after this episode in the *Vie*, Alexis' parents will not have another child after him and so they turn their eyes to the future and Alexis' potential children.³⁸

As I mentioned in the summary of the *Vie de Saint Alexis*, our eponymous saint fails to do two things: consummate his marriage and also assuage his parents' anxiety about the family line. After Alexis flees Rome to Laodicea, everyone in his family grieves his loss and his bride remains with Eufemien's parents:

Del duel s'asist la medre jus a terre,
Si fist la spuse danz Alexis a certes:
- Dama, dist ele, jo i ai si grant perte,
Ore vivrai an guise de turtrele:
Nen ai tun filz, ansembl'ot tei voil estra. –
Co di la medre, . . .
Plainums ansemble le doel de nostre ami,

³⁷ ll. 26-31, "They prayed so much and with such great humility / That [God] gave the wife fertility: / He gave them a son, and they were so grateful for it. / . . . / He was baptized and had the name Alexis."

³⁸ We see further anxiety in the following stanza: ll. 36-8, "Quant veit li pedre que mais n'avrat amfrant / Mais que cel sul que il par amat tant, / Dunc se purpenset del secle an avant" [When the father saw that he would have no child / Other than the one whom he loves so much, / He thought thereafter of the future].

tu de tun seinur jol frai pur mun filz.³⁹

The image of the turtledove reassures the reader that Alexis's bride will not seek to marry again, as turtledoves are faithful to their mates.⁴⁰ Yet, more striking than the metaphor of Alexis's bride as a turtledove is the fact that she seems to stand in as a substitute progeny. That is not to say that Alexis's mother no longer recognizes Alexis as her son, because she certainly does, but rather that after her loss, she has welcomed his bride into the family, perhaps as an extension of Alexis himself. The repetition of "ansemble" (together) stresses unity and the creation of new kinship and of new connections; together the bride and mother can grieve for Alexis' death.

Death is, after all, an appropriate way to conceive of what has happened to Alexis. And indeed, Alexis has been removed from his kin group and they all grieve his loss as though he really were dead. The reader knows, however, that Alexis has simply rejected the way of life in which he was raised and educated, and has chosen to follow a more ascetic lifestyle. When Alexis returns to Rome accidentally and rather reluctantly, he laments the possibility of running into his family: S'or me conuissent mi parent d'estre terre, / Il me prendrunt par pri ou par poeste; / Se jos an creid, il me trairunt a perdra.⁴¹ As discussed above, the *Vie de Saint Alexis* seems particularly inclined to link places and people ("mi parent d'estre terre"), and these three lines emphasize the relationship between particular a particular place, Rome, and a kin group, Alexis's family. For

³⁹ ll. 146-155, "Out of grief, the mother sat on the floor / and indeed so did the bride of Alexis. / 'My Lady,' she said, 'I have had such a great loss, / Now I will live like a turtledove: / I do not have your son, / I wish to be together with you.' / This the mother said, . . . / 'Together let us lament the grief of our friend, / You of your master and I of my son.'

⁴⁰ For more one turtledoves, see Florence McCulloch, "Saint Euphrosine, Saint Alexis, and the Turtledove," *Romania* 98, no. 390 (1977): 168-185. The turtledove can also serve as an allegory for the church, which remains faithful to Christ even after his death.

⁴¹ ll. 203-5, "Now if my relatives of this land recognize me, / They will take me by request or by force; / If I let them, they will lead me to my demise."

the soon-to-be saint, success can be found by leaving the space so closely tied to his upbringing, or at its most significant, by abandoning his lineage, and becoming unrecognizable to his family.

Alexis is successful in remaining incognito in Rome. Upon his arrival, he runs into his father, Eufemien, on the street:

N'altra pur altre mais sun pedre i ancuntret,
Ansembl'ot lui grant masse de ses humes:
Sil reconut, par sun dreit num le numet:
- Eufemien, bel sire, riches hom,
Quar me herberges pur Deu an tue maison,
Suz tun degret me fai un grabatum
Empur tun filz dunt tu as tel dolur:
Tut soi amferm, sim pais pur sue amor. —⁴²

Alexis's appeal to the affective relationship Eufemien had with him as a son is what allows him access to his childhood home unrecognized. Despite having removed himself from his family, Alexis takes advantage of his genealogy by invoking his name to his father, who is willing to shelter "Alexis" in the name his son. Indeed, names and naming become critical in this scene of *La Vie de Saint Alexis*, and elsewhere in the St. Albans Psalter, as we have seen on the first couple of pages, in the calendar, and as we will see in the litany. Alexis calls his father by his right name ("par sun dreit num le numet"), but there is a lack of reciprocity; Eufemien does not know what Alexis's name is when he meets him on the street. We can locate here a potential connection between the law and genealogy since while "dreit" means "right," it may also be read as "legal" or "appointed," which establishes Eufemien as the lord and property owner that he is. Alexis's

⁴² ll. 213-220, "None other than his father did he meet there, / All around him was a great group of his men: / He recognized him and calls him by his correct name: / 'Eufemien, good sir and noble man, / Give me shelter, for the love of God, in your house, / Make me a cot under your stairs / In the name of your son for whom you grieve so much: / I am rather unwell, do this for the love of him.'

lack of name here points to his removal from his father's lineage and the inheritance laws that govern it. The fact that Alexis's mother and bride similarly remain unnamed gestures toward the gendered implications of inheritance and genealogy, particularly primogeniture. Indeed, when Alexis is called upon after 17 years of service to the Lord, he is referred to as "l'ume Deu," the Man of God.⁴³

It is only after Alexis's death that his family realizes who he is, and their reactions reveal important unverpinnings of the text. Eufemien's reaction, in particular, emphasizes the text's seemingly self-conscious preoccupation with genealogy and inheritance:

O filz, cui erent mes granz ereditez,
Mes larges terres dunt jo aveie asez,
Mes granz paleis de Rome la citet:
Puis mun deces en fusses enoret,
Ed enpur tei m'en esteie penet.
Blanc ai le chef e le barbe ai canuthe
Ma grant honur taveie retenude
Ed anpur tei, mais n'ene aveies cure.⁴⁴

Eufemien carries on lamenting that Alexis ought to have served the Emperor in battle and headed a great household, but these lines underscore his grief being caused by not the loss of a son, but particularly the loss of an heir. The use of "ereditez," "larges terres," "granz paleis," demonstrates the father's concern for what will happen to his land and property after he dies because he is already old ("Blanc ai le chef e le barbe ai canuthe"). Eufemien questions, too, the

⁴³ For more on kinship and inheritance in Anglo-Norman England, see Richard Britnell, "Social bonds and economic change" in *The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: 1066-c.1280*, ed. Barbara Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 123-133.

⁴⁴ ll. 401-8, "Oh son, whom will my inheritance go to, / My vast estates of which I have so many, / My great palaces in the city of Rome! / After my death you would have been endowed with them, / And it was for you that I worked so hard. / My hair is white and my beard is grey. / I had held my high rank for you / But you had no desire for it."

purpose of having a son if he cannot pass on his social rank and position. Michelle Warren identifies this anxiety as one that appears in several other post-Conquest literatures of England such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* and Brutus' *Historia Brittonum*.⁴⁵ Although histories of Britain differ enough from Saints' Lives, they can provide insight into the cultural milieu of Anglo-Norman England in and from which the St. Albans Psalter was produced.

Yet, Eufemien is not the only one to struggle with understanding the point of bringing a child into the world, only to lose it. Alexis's mother laments:

Pleurent si oil e si jetet granz criz,
Sempres regrete: - Mar te portai, bels filz !
...
Por quei portai, dolente malfeude ?
Co est merveile que li mens quors tant duret.
Filz Alexis, mult ous dur curage,
Cum adosas tut tun gentil linage !
...
Pur quem fuis ? Ja te portai en men ventre.⁴⁶

For Alexis's mother, the emphasis is placed on the physical act of giving birth and her perception of the seeming uselessness of her labor. She cannot understand her son's choice to abandon her after the pain that she endured, nor can she believe how his abandonment and death—which are linked here—has not resulted in her death. Whereas the miracle at the beginning of the *Vie* was God's gift of fertility to her, it is now her ability to stay alive after Alexis's death ("Co est merveile

⁴⁵ Michelle Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1300* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 44-45.

⁴⁶ ll. 436-453, "And she cries and wails / And immediately laments: Would that I not have borne you my beautiful son! / . . . / Why did I carry you, sad wretch that I am? / It is a wonder that my heart endures so. / Alexis, my son, you had a hard disposition / So as to reject your noble lineage! / Why did you run away? I carried you in my womb."

que li mens quors tant duret”). Yet, coupled with her lament at her son’s death is an echo of Eufemien’s anxiety about the interruption of inheritance and genealogy: “cum adosas tut tun gentil lineage !” Neither parent can understand why Alexis would have forsaken his loved ones, the possibility of offspring, and the continuation of the family line. Indeed, Eufemien and his wife believe Alexis’s birth—and God’s gift of fertility—to have been for naught.

Alexis did continue his family line despite his parents’ belief; he lived on within a textual genealogy. To return briefly to the letter that Alexis had written and that was found on his body, it is important to note that it contained all of biographical information, where he traveled, and most importantly, the name of his parents: “Le num lur dist del pedre e de la medre, / E co lur dist de quels parenz il erest.”⁴⁷ Thus, despite abandoning his family and precluding the possibility of offspring, Alexis recorded his genealogy and lives on through the text within the letter. Of course, Alexis lives on textually in the St. Albans Psalter in the Alexis Quire, but also explicitly within the text of the Litany: “Sancte alexi ora” (Saint Alexis pray [for us]). This moment of intratextuality within the psalter grounds Alexis as a figure whose importance spans beyond *La Vie de Saint Alexis* and provides significance to the manuscript. Another example of this intratextual relationship can be seen in the Emmaus illuminations which occur after the *Vie*. In the first illustration, the disciples Cleophas and Lukas are walking to the castle Emmaus and are discussing how sad they are about Jesus’ death. Jesus appears to them dressed as a pilgrim and asks what makes them so sad; the disciples do not recognize who he is. Cleophas replies, “tu solus peregrinus es in ierosalem et non cognovisti que facta sunt in illa his diebus,” referring to Jesus’ crucifixion.”⁴⁸ Jesus replies to them, “Nonne haec oportuit pati christum et ita intrare in gloriam

⁴⁷ ll. 379-380, “[The letter] told them the name of his father and his mother, / And it told them what parentage he belonged to.”

⁴⁸ “Are you the only pilgrim in Jerusalem who did not know what happened over these days?”

suam. Et incipiens a moyse et prophetis interpretabatur illis in omnibus: scripturis que de ipso erant.”⁴⁹ This episode on the road to Emmaus draws three parallels with Alexis: Jesus is unrecognized by those who might otherwise know him; Jesus had to undergo physical suffering for the betterment of others; and, like Alexis, Jesus’ life is transmitted through text.

Yet, it remains to be explained why the *Vie de Saint Alexis* is included, seemingly anomalously, in the St. Albans Psalter. He is mentioned only briefly in the litany and seems otherwise out of place in the Latin codex. Kathryn Gerry explains the importance of St. Alexis to St. Albans:

“The community at St. Albans was probably exposed to the cult of St. Alexis through its continental connections. . . . Texts related to him, the inclusion of his feast day in local calendars and the dedication of a chapel to him at the monastery all attest to this growing interest in a cult of Alexis. The monastery copied and owned several versions of the Life of St. Alexis, in both Latin and French, over the first half of the twelfth century. . . . Other versions of the Life of this saint are found in St. Albans manuscripts, including a Roman version.”⁵⁰

Alexis appears in manuscripts other than the St. Albans Psalter, which indicates that he was a saint whose growing cult seemed to geo-specific to St. Albans. Further evidence of this is the chapel at St. Albans, which was dedicated to Alexis, built between 1115 and 1119.⁵¹ As was the

⁴⁹ “Was Christ not required to suffer these things and so enter into his glory? And beginning from Moses and the prophets and in all things, what was written about himself.”

⁵⁰ Kathryn Gerry, “The Alexis Quire and the Cult of Saints at St. Albans,” *Historical Research* 82, no. 218 (2009): 602-6. Alexandra Verini remarks that the inclusion of the *Vie de Saint Alexis* in the psalter “speaks to the monastery’s special devotion” to Alexis. She indicates that his name is also included in the calendar at the beginning of the manuscript alongside other important English saints, but upon closer inspection of the manuscript, his name does not appear in the calendar, Alexandra Verini, “Performing Community and Place in the St. Albans Psalter,” *English Studies* 97, no. 1 (2017) 70.

⁵¹ Morgan Powell, “Making the Psalter of Christina of Markyate,” *Viator* 36, no.1 (2005) 313. See also, <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/index.shtml>

case with Christina of Markyate and the Abbey, there is a geo-material genealogy created between St. Alexis and St. Albans Monastery.

The intratextual relationship in the St. Albans Psalter creates its own unique genealogy which can be traced throughout. Jane Geddes writes that the relationship between the *Vie* and the Emmaus story is that they were drawn by the same scribe, and more intriguingly that they may also create a link back to Christina of Markyate: “The illustrations of Alexis and Emmaus, linked by their delicate wash technique, are specifically episodes which relate Christina’s life to the holy exemplars.”⁵² Thus a more complex genealogy is created between all of the parts of the manuscript when the codex is examined as a composite work made up of related texts. Christina can be read in the calendar and the psalms, Alexis is read in the litany, the *Vie*, and the Emmaus story illustrations, St. Alban is read in the calendar and in his full-page illumination.

These intratextual connections within the manuscript also have implications for the intertextuality of the St. Albans Psalter. Intertextuality here refers to the other texts that either influence or are influenced by the creation of the St. Albans Psalter. Since there are far too many psalter and calendars that were produced in the Middle Ages to bring into conversation here, I want to bring our attention explicitly to the *Vie de Saint Alexis*. Despite being the oldest surviving French version of St. Alexis’s Life, the oldest known version of the text was composed in Syria between 450 and 475 CE, under the title, as can be seen in our Norman version, “Man of God.”⁵³ Throughout the following centuries, the text was copied into Arabic and Latin in various countries including Syria, Italy, Spain, and France.⁵⁴ Thus, through its various translations, the *Vie de Saint Alexis* in Hildesheim Dombibliothek, MS St. Godehard 1 belongs to the realm of

⁵² <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/index.shtml>

⁵³ Perugi, 13.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 13-18.

translatio, which brings a new sense of genealogy to the work.⁵⁵ We see the essence of *translatio* in the beginning of the *Vie*:

Bons fut li secle al tens ancienur,
Quer feit i ert e justise ed amur,
S'i ert creance, dunt ore n'i at nu prut:
Tut est muez, perdut ad sa colur,
Ja mais n'iert tel cum fut as anceisurs.⁵⁶

By invoking ancestors and the ancient world of Rome, the *Vie* creates genealogical ties with the literary progenitors that date back to the 5th-century Syrian Life of St. Alexis.

The final genealogical connection to discuss is that which is established by the St. Albans Psalter. Hildesheim Dombibliothek, MS St. Godehard 11s is considered to be the exemplar for several other manuscripts. For example, Ian Short, Maria Careri, and Christine Ruby believe the source for the Oxford Psalter (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 320), another Anglo-Norman psalter, was none other than the St. Albans Psalter.⁵⁷ Similarly, within the St. Albans Psalter, the *Vie de Saint Alexis* out to be, according to Karl Uitti, a bit of a trend setter:

It is my belief that *Alexis*, unlike the Clermont poems or “Eulalia,” provides the earliest—or one of the earliest—example of the *francien*-based literary *scripta*. . . .

⁵⁵ Zrinka Stahuljak writes, “Conversely, not only does the biological continuity create the continuity of transmission, but genealogy maintains its apparent continuity precisely through the metaphoric operation of *translatio*. Because this continuity of genealogy is maintained by metaphor, genealogy is undone whenever *translatio* is mobilized,” *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages: Translatio, Kinship, and Metaphor* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 184. I disagree with Stahuljak here. I believe that genealogy is created when *translatio* is mobilized, as the text reaches back across time and space in order to create a lineage.

⁵⁶ ll. 1-5, “Good was society in the time of the ancients, / When there was faith, and justice, and love, / And there was faith, from which no one benefits now: / All is faded and has lost its color, / Never again will it be as it was for our ancestors.

⁵⁷ Ian Short, Maria Careri, and Christine Ruby, “*Les Psautier d’Oxford et de Saint Albans: Liens de Parenté*,” *Romania* 128, no. 509 (2010), 30.

Alexis—providing Gason Paris’s argument holds water—ought to be considered as exemplifying . . . a (perhaps radical) linguistico-literary departure from the written *romana lingua rustica* of the earlier texts.⁵⁸

While building upon a literary genealogy through *translatio*, the departure from linguistic heritage allows *la Vie de Saint Alexis* and the St. Albans Psalter to create a new branch of literary inheritance, one that is arguably as important as *Beowulf*.⁵⁹

The St. Albans Psalter plays part in an undeniably complex system of movement, inheritance, and relationships. In order to make sense of the manuscript we must consider its material conditions and what connections are created in reading it. As Jerome McGann writes, “textuality cannot be understood except as a phenomenal event, and that reading itself can only be understood when it has assumed specific material constitutions.”⁶⁰ In reading the psalter, we can trace its material and geographic genealogies, which include its creation and ownership through France, England, and then Germany. Reading the psalter also allows us to read the presence of Christina of Markyate, whose family’s genealogy is described in the calendar, and who can be seen visually in the psalms. The *Vie de Saint Alexis* thematizes the complexities of inheritance and how texts serve as a medium for genealogical storytelling. Finally, we can trace the connections between the works of the codex and observe how they, separately and compositely, belong to other textual genealogies that span across the globe and across millennia. The St. Albans Psalter, then, provides its reader an opportunity to explore the movement through time among people, places, and things.

⁵⁸ Karl D. Uitti, “Poésie Nationale,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 32, no. 2 (1995), 131-2.

⁵⁹ Geddes, 8.

⁶⁰ Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 4-5.

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