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Title

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Journal

Berkeley Undergraduate Journal, 23(2)

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Publication Date

2011

DOI

10.5070/B3232007683

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THE AUCHINLECK MANUSCRIPT AND FOURTEENTH-CENTURY LAY PIETY

Bo Hyun Kim *

The Auchinleck Manuscript, compiled in the early fourteenth century, is one of the first manuscripts written primarily in English. Its slightly damaged codex currently contains 44 poems, of which 23 are unique copies or unique versions of stories. Scholars have predominately studied the Auchinleck to analyze either individual stories, many of which, if not unique, are the first extant copies, or the manuscript itself to explore early English bookmaking techniques. I, along with a few scholars, have attempted to analyze the Auchinleck holistically. Though crusade romances make up the bulk of the codex in the amount of folios, the *passio*, hagiography and hagiographic romances, various prayers, *exempla-esque* stories, and such shorter religious poems are replete throughout the Auchinleck. The continual appearance of such poems indicates a preoccupation not just with religion, but with the unique, visual, and almost physical aspect of spiritual practices of a laity that was becoming more involved in their religious practices and beliefs. The Auchinleck indicates not only political and linguistic changes, but also the evolution of a religious culture into a 'popular' culture that is participated in, reconfigured, and recreated by an enthusiastic and increasingly knowledgeable laity.

Subject categories: Medieval lay religious culture; Middle English literature

Keywords: Late medieval religious culture; Auchinleck Manuscript, fourteenth-century vernacular literature, *passio*

INTRODUCTION

Advocates' MS 19.2.1, also known as the Auchinleck Manuscript, is a large collection of Middle English poetry compiled sometime between 1330-40.¹ The

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¹ National Library of Scotland Advocates' MS 19.2.1 (Auchinleck MS). Online facsimile at <http://www.nls.uk/auchinleck/>. For the contents of the Auchinleck Manuscript, see Appendix 1.

Auchinleck Manuscript has been used to study the development of Middle English and the process of bookmaking in the early fourteenth century. Currently the manuscript includes 331 folios and 14 stubs, with 47 quires of eight to 10 folios each. Each folio is divided into two columns, each with 44 lines. With a few exceptions, this format remains consistent throughout the manuscript. Groups of quires, or booklets, create the major organizational unit of the codex, as breaks between stories occur only at the end of each booklet. The six scribes wrote in black ink for the poems with alternating blue and red paragraph signs to indicate a separation within a poem and large blue initials to show the start of a new poem. Generally, miniatures also signal the beginning of a new poem, though all but two miniatures have been excised or damaged. Currently the manuscript contains 44 stories, of which 23 are unique or unique versions.

So far, most of the scholarly work on the Auchinleck seems to have focused either on the codicology and paleography of the manuscript to study bookmen and bookmaking, or on individual texts for a self-contained analysis.² Only a few scholars have analyzed the contents of the manuscript as a whole. In *England the Nation*, Tholac Turville-Petre includes a chapter on the Auchinleck, claiming that its contents were carefully chosen to present the theme of national identity, while Jean Harpham Burrows' dissertation examines multiple stories of different genres in the Auchinleck. Recently, Siobhain Bly Calkin argued that the Auchinleck stories used Saracen characters to address and explore issues of English identity during the time of the manuscript's production.³ These scholars, including those who examined individual

² For studies on the Auchinleck Manuscript's physical makeup and bookmaking: A. J. Bliss, "Notes on the Auchinleck Manuscript," *Speculum* 26, no. 4 (1951): 406-9; Laura Hibbard Loomis, "The Auchinleck Manuscript and a Possible London Bookshop of 1330-40," *PostModern Language Association* 57, no. 3 (1942): 595-627; Timothy A. Shonk, "A Study of the Auchinleck Manuscript: Bookmen and Bookmaking in the Early Fourteenth Century," *Speculum* 60, no.1 (1985): 71-91.

³ Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript*. (New York: Routledge, 2005); Tholac Turville-Petre, "Englishness in the Auchinleck MS (Advocates' 19.2.1)," in *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity 1290-1340*, (New York: Oxford University

stories, have focused much of their attention on the longer romances that take up much of the codex.

Though the bulk of the Auchinleck consists of romances, religious poetry dominates the first two fascicles and continues to appear between the longer romances of later ones. The first two fascicles begin with *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and end with *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin* (ff.1v-78r). In between they contain saints' lives, hagiographic romances, a debate between the body and the soul, and devotional poems. The later fascicles also include religious poems, though these tend to be short and interspersed between the romances. For example, the romances *King Alisaunder* and *Sir Tristem* are separated by three short poems: *The Thrush and the Nightingale*, *The Sayings of St. Bernard*, and *Dauid þe King*. In the first poem, two birds debate the virtues of women, and though the Auchinleck lacks the conclusion of the debate, the Digby 86 copy ends with the Thrush admitting that the Virgin Mary's virtue covers all other faults of women.⁴ In the *Sayings of St. Bernard*, the narrator admonishes the reader for their indulgence of worldly pleasures and recommends that they should think upon Jesus and "take þe rode to þi staf."⁵ *Dauid þe King* contains a Middle English paraphrase of Psalm 50, David's prayer of repentance after his debacle with Bathsheba. These religious poems consistently appear throughout the manuscript, and lay piety, as represented in these stories, seems to be a prominent preoccupation, if not one of the major themes of the Auchinleck Manuscript.

The Auchinleck Manuscript's stories and its versions of stories reflect the religious milieu of the fourteenth century. Beginning in the twelfth century, there was an increase in the production of religious books in the vernacular, lay membership in

Press, 1996), 108-41; John Harpham Burrows, "Auchinleck Manuscript: Contexts, Texts and Audience," Ph.D. Diss., University of Washington, 1988.

⁴ Bodleian Library MS 1687 (Digby 86), ff. 136v-138r, <http://www.soton.ac.uk/~wpwt/digby86/thrushtxt.htm>.

⁵ Auchinleck MS, f. 280r, ll. 31-5.

tertiary groups of religious orders, and outbreaks of 'popular' heresies. This was also when the Church had become a politically- and socially-influential institution, and had attempted to implement internal reform and defend itself against heretics. Such efforts, as exemplified in the Council of Lateran IV, led to a clearer definition of canonical doctrine. A large number of catechetical texts were made available for the laity to read to themselves and to others, and to memorize and recite in front of their parish priest during confession. Belief required the knowledge of the correct tenets of the faith, but, as one story in the Auchinleck reveals, knowledge did not confirm true faith.

Seynt Mergrete, *Seynt Katerine*, and *The King of Tars* also hint at anxieties over heresy and false conversion. The Auchinleck versions of *Seynt Mergrete* and *Katerine* represent the virgin saints differently from previous ones. In the Auchinleck, the virgin saints become laypersons, and their speech contains simplified forms of a catechetical text like the *Apostle's Creed*. These two saints' lives, as well as the hagiographic romance *The King of Tars*, recount the conversion of Saracens and the devotion of the Christian virgins and their converts. The results of conversion in these texts imply a preoccupation with the genuineness of conversion and the problem of belief: one can easily declare oneself a believer without truly believing.

Other stories in the Auchinleck exhibit concerns and characteristics of later medieval piety through its representation of penance and confession. These emphasize both hearing and seeing, which, by the fourteenth century, had become essential stimuli for lay devotion. The laity would have heard saints' lives, exempla, and sermons. They would have also seen the many statues and paintings of Christ and the saints. Above all, they would have witnessed the raising of the host, visually experiencing the holy. In the same vein, stories in the Auchinleck highlight the visuality and physicality of the devotions of the Virgin saints, Pope Gregory, and the penitent Amiloun. The *Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Amis and Amiloun* depict their characters undergoing a type of confession and penance that differs from the sacramental ones, and these stories reflect

the importance of the community in public atonement for sin and practice of devotion. The gruesome details of their devotion allow the reader to imagine and see the holy. These stories would nudge the reader to recall the Passion of Christ, in the same way devotional texts urged their readers to think upon “every detail of Christ’s Passion; to gaze at His wounds and, through extended meditation, to identify with His suffering and with His mother’s sorrow.”⁶

SAINT MARGARET AND SAINT KATHERINE’S SIMPLE FAITH

Seynt *Mergrete*, *Seynt Katherine*, and *The King of Tars* recount the conversions of Saracen pagans and the devotion of Christian women. Though there exists a great number of manuscripts and variations of the lives of Katherine of Alexandria and Margaret of Antioch in Latin and in many other vernaculars, the Auchinleck versions differ most strikingly in the speech of the virgins. Compared to other versions in which Margaret rarely speaks, *Seynt Mergrete* includes more dialogue between the saint and her persecutor, while *Seynt Katherine* deemphasizes Katherine’s speech though other versions of this saint’s life prominently feature her debate against the fifty philosophers. The result is that these saints’ lives and their speech are relatively of the same length. The saints’ lives are similar, not only in the quantity of dialogue, but also in the contents of the virgins’ speech, for both saints recite simplified doctrines as retorts against their Saracen persecutors.

Unlike other versions, the Auchinleck *Seynte Mergrete* contains a constant verbal exchange between Margaret and Olibrious, the pagan Saracen who desires her and persecutes her when she unyieldingly remains committed to Christ.⁷ These back-and-forth exchanges occur throughout the story: during their first meeting, when he asks for

⁶ Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 137.

⁷ Auchinleck MS, ff. 16r-21r.

her name, status, and religion (lines 85-104); with Olibrious' first offer and marriage and her refusal (lines 111-24); during the first and second torture sessions (lines 131-42); when Margaret refuses to convert before her last torture (lines 146-286) and in the dialogue between Margaret and Marcus, her executioner and last convert (lines 381-9).

In comparison to the Auchinleck *Seynt Mergrete*, the thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman "Version G" lacks this constant verbal exchange.⁸ In "Version G," when Margaret reveals her faith and love of Christ, Olibrious has her "at once disrobed, hung, and whipped."⁹ There is no dialogue between Olibrious and Margaret as in the Auchinleck version, in which Margaret defends the factuality of Christ's bodily resurrection. In the first torture scene, Olibrious urges Margaret once again to marry him and "Version G" Margaret does not respond, though in the Auchinleck version another argument commences between the two.¹⁰ "Version G" Margaret does speak, but not to Olibrious. She responds to the crowd that tells her to marry the Saracen and spare her body. "The maiden hears and listens/ To the noise and the shouts of the people. And she reacts/ To what they tell her," and proceeds to compare her martyrdom to a bath that cleanses her body and soul, protecting her from the pain of hell.¹¹ In "Version G," Margaret prays when she is thrown into the dark jail, after she encounters the dragon and the demon, and before her death. Thus prayer, a dialogue with God, takes prominence.¹² This Anglo-Norman version underscores both Margaret's relationship with Jesus and her role as a martyr saint destined for persecution.

In the Auchinleck *Seynt Mergrete*, the dialogue between the virgin martyr and her persecutor creates a semblance of a debate, an exchange between Christians and

⁸ Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as a Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 217. This version had become the dominant version in French renditions of Margaret by the end of the thirteenth century.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ll. 188-192.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 221-2, ll. 200-224.

¹² *Ibid.*, ll. 260-274, l. 225, ll. 528-72.

Muslims. Yet in their first 'debate,' Margaret does not actually address Olibrious' question. Instead, she simply repeats her beliefs, as if this recitation is a sufficient, if not logical response to a challenge against the doctrines of Christianity. After learning that Margaret is a Christian, Olibrious says that he would think her crazy if she believes that Jesus still lives, as His death was confirmed by the blood and water flowing out of His corpse.¹³ He questions the resurrection of the body and the deity of Christ, but Margaret responds with a partial recitation of the gospel. She speaks of Jesus' death on the cross, but does not mention the resurrection. She states, "'He ded him on þe rode/ al Critten folk to amende./ To dl[i]uer ous of þe pine, / þat þou shalt in ende.'"¹⁴ When Olibrious tries again to convince her to convert and to become his wife, Margaret continues in the same manner, speaking about Christ harrowing hell and sending the Holy Spirit: "'Al þis midlerd/ dmaked he of nouȝt, / & seþþen into helle/ þe holy gost he brouȝt.'"¹⁵ Both times she only states a few particular facets of her belief, as if refusing to engage in a religious debate.

Whereas Margaret repeatedly recites the tenets of Christianity, the Saracen lord repeatedly commands her to convert and orders her to be tortured when she does not comply. Olibrious' speech during the first torture scene is characteristic of the Saracen persecutors' speech in both Margaret's and Katherine's lives. This scene begins as Olibrious orders, "'Hongeþ hir vp bi þe fete/ for hir lordes tene,/ and beteþ hir wiþ scourges.'"¹⁶ He then asks if she likes this pain, and, expecting a denial, tells her to believe in his gods to end it. However, when Margarete answers that she does, in fact, enjoy her pain, Olibrious' responds with an even more graphic order for her torture: "'Wiþ ȝour croked nayles/ þe hide of ȝe drawe,/ As clene fram þe bon / has houndes it

¹³ Auchinleck MS, f. 17v, ll. 97-100.

¹⁴ Ibid., ll. 102-4.

¹⁵ Ibid., ll. 118-20.

¹⁶ Ibid., ll. 123-4.

hadde knawe.”¹⁷ Though the length of Olibrious’ speech equals that of Margaret’s, his speech is limited to descriptions of torture and the demand for Margaret’s conversion.

There is just as little actual religious debate in the Auchinleck *Seynt Katerine*, even though other versions emphasize Katherine’s eloquent rebuttal in her debate against the fifty pagan philosophers.¹⁸ Katherine, a virgin saint famed for her eloquence and wisdom, confronts the pagan Emperor Maxen when he forces all, Saracens and Christians, to worship his idols. When Maxen realizes that he cannot outsmart the young girl, he summons fifty philosophers to argue against her. In contrast to previous versions, the debate in the Auchinleck consists of but a few lines of the narrator’s description:

Her resouns þai seyden on & on,
euerich on his best maner.
Þis mayden þat ich of told,
stode euer wiþ simple chere
& herd her resouns euerichon —
Godes angel was hir fere.

Her: Their, i.e., the fifty philosophers

When þai hadde her ressouns seyd,
euerichon more & lesse,
Sche answerd hem at eueri point
wiþ ful michel mildenis,
& seþpen seyd hir aviis
of God þat louerd was & euer isse,
Þat euer was & ay schal be;
Pe godspell sche tok to witrnisse.

aviis: opinion, advice

Sche schewed hem wiþ holy writ
of Jhesus incarnacioun
How he was of a maiden born,
& hou he suffred passioun
& hou he sent his apostels wide
for our alder sauacioun.¹⁹

¹⁷ Auchinleck MS, f. 18r, ll. 136-40.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 21r-24v.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 22r, ll. 90-100. *They said their reasons, each one to their best abilities. This maiden that I told you of stood with simple cheer and listened to each one, but God’s angels were her friends. When they had stated all their*

In the Auchinleck, the so-called debate lacks an essential feature, namely speech. No dialogue exists. The narrator states that after the fifty philosophers challenge Katherine on issues against Christianity, Katherine responds to each challenge. Yet the actual points of doctrine with which the philosophers find fault are not specified. Just as Margaret ignores Olibrious and just as the Saracen lords' speech lacks substance, the fifty philosophers do not have spoken parts. Another element missing from the Auchinleck Katherine is the crowd. Earlier thirteenth-century versions of Katherine's life make the debate a public scene at which a large crowd gathers to hear the arguments. In contrast, the Auchinleck version describes a great public debate that no one attends. The only section narrated in any detail is Katherine's witness of the gospel: she affirms Christ's incarnation, His miraculous birth, His Passion, and the believer's salvation.²⁰ *Seynt Katerine* omits any discussion of complex theological issues, which seems ironic when the main character is said to be bold, wise, and above all, eloquent.²¹

The debate in Auchinleck *Seynt Katerine* seems painfully short when compared to a thirteenth-century Middle English version that takes up 381 lines.²² This thirteenth-century version is closely related to a mid-eleventh-century Latin version of Katherine's life, which may explain Katherine's meticulous and theological response. In both versions, Katherine is well-educated, though she says that she forsook her worldly learnings of "Homeres motes, / & Aristotles turnes" to embrace Godly wisdom.²³ Twice

reasons, each one, more or less, she answered them at every point with much mildness and then said her views about God who was and will always be Lord, and she witnessed the gospel. She showed them with the Holy Word of Jesus' incarnation, how he was born of a woman, how we suffered passion and how he sent his apostles throughout the world for the salvation of all.

²⁰ Auchinleck MS, ll. 97-99.

²¹ *Ibid.*, f. 21v, l. 42.

²² Eugen Eickenel, ed., *Life of St. Katherine from the Royal MS 17 A. xxvii., &c. with its Latin original from the Cotton MS Caligula, A. VIII., &c.* (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1884), 35-52, ll. 750-1130. Dr. Eugen Eickenel uses Royal MS. 17 A. xxvii as his base text, but also consults MS Reg. 17 A. xxvii, and MS Cotton Titus D. xviii, and Bodleian MS. NE. A, 3, 11.

²³ *Ibid.*, 40, ll. 852-859.

she quotes I Corinthians 1:19, which states “Ichulle fordon þe wisdom/ of þeos wise world men,/ & awarpen þe wit/ of þeose world witti,”²⁴ and during the debate she herself proceeds to overcome the “wisdom of the world.” The fifty philosophers begin by questioning the hypostatic union of Christ, claiming that they cannot believe a true God could die or a true man rise from the dead.²⁵ In this thirteenth-century version, Katherine answers as thoroughly as possible, explaining the hypostatic union by explaining the nature of God, creation, and other proofs of Christ’s humanity and divinity.²⁶ She ends the debate with a statement of Christ’s resurrection, that death did not overthrow Christ but that he slayed death: “Þus ido dede,/ deaþ ne akaste nawt Crist,/ ah Crist ouercom deþ,/ & sloh hire, in him seoluen.”²⁷

The thirteenth-century Katherine assumes the role of a learned priest who resolves the difficult theological question of Christ’s dual nature. In her long response to the question of the fifty philosophers, she understands and can expound upon the tenets of Christianity, though she does not quote much Scripture. She has the knowledge to make a substantial argument in defense of her faith. In contrast, the Katherine in the Auchinleck Manuscript does not play the role of a priest or a theological master. She essentially becomes a Christian layperson. Thus, she cannot participate in theological debates, nor can the audience, who are presumably uneducated laymen likely to become confused and shaken in their faith. Instead, a recitation of the gospel replaces true religious debate. The two saints resist their Saracen persecutors by continuously reciting the fundamentals of their faith. In the Auchinleck, Margaret’s and Katherine’s wisdom is to have learned the basics of Christian belief and to hold in firmly despite oppositions.

²⁴ Einkenkel, *Life of St. Katherine*, 41, ll. 880- 3. The first time is when she confronts Maxen, (25, ll. 485- 8). “For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the world, and the prudence of the prudent I will reject.” (Douay-Rheims Bible)

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 45, ll. 954-960.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 52, ll. 1127-1130. *Death has not overcome Christ but Christ overcame death, slew it and saved himself.*

The disappearance of debate in the Auchinleck *Seynt Mergrete* and *Katerine* indicates a concern about laity and belief that is well-illustrated by the tale of the old knight in Joinville's *Life of St. Louis*.²⁸ Joinville writes of great debate between clerics and Jews at the monastery of Cluny. An old knight, after gaining permission to open the debate, asks one of the Jews, "Do you believe that the Virgin Mary, who bore God in her womb and in her arms, was a virgin when she gave birth, and is the mother of God?"²⁹ When the Jew answers that he does not, the old knight immediately strikes him down with a crutch, thus ending the debate as the rest of the Jews quickly flee in fear. He then rebukes the abbot for foolishly organizing a debate which would have shaken the lay Christians from their faith as they were not educated like the theologians. His concluding advice is that "no man, unless he is a skilled theologian, should debate with the Jews."³⁰ Similarly, the fourteenth-century *Katherine* cannot enter a theological debate, and neither can she allow an uneducated lay audience outside the text to be involved in it.

Instead of participating in complex theological debates, the Auchinleck *Margaret* and *Katherine* recite simple, catechetical material which would have been commonplace vernacular items by the fourteenth century. One of the outcomes of the thirteenth-century religious reforms was the increased production of religious books for both the priests and the laity. The decree *Omnis utriusque sextus* insisted that everyone above the year of discretion undergo confession and penance every year.³¹ This requirement stimulated the production and dissemination of manuals on sin, confession, and

²⁸ Joinville, *Life of St. Louis*, in *Joinville and Villehardouin: Chronicles of the Crusades*, ed. Caroline Smith (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), 137-336.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *The Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215*. From: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.html>. (Accessed 18 April, 2010).

penance meant to educate not only parish priests, but also the laity.³² Aimed at both priests and worshippers, the confessional manuals explained the sacrament of penance and the three phases of confession (confession, satisfaction, absolution). They also include items intended to facilitate an examination of conscience: the Seven Deadly Sins, the Ten Commandments, the Five Senses, the Spiritual Acts of Mercy, the Four Cardinal Virtues, and the Three Theological Virtues.³³ The laity read these texts as confessors were expected to test penitents on their knowledge of religious doctrines, and both priests and penitents were to use these texts to examine their sins.³⁴

The Auchinleck Manuscript also participates in this program of providing basic religious materials for the laity. Its contents include *The Paternoster*, *On the Seven Deadly Sins*, and *Dauid þe King*, all of which were intended for a lay reader. *The Paternoster* contains both the Latin text and the Middle English translation. *On the Seven Deadly Sins* provides a list of the Seven Deadly Sins, the Paternoster (this time only in Middle English), the Creed, the Hail Mary, and a narrative of Christ's Passion. Lastly, *Dauid þe King* makes available a Middle English translation and commentary of Psalm 50:3-21, with a part of the Latin verse preceding each section.

In *The Paternoster*, the narrator addresses "lewede men þat ne beþ no clerkes,"³⁵ explicitly specifying a lay audience. The poem is divided into seven sections and each section begins with a part of the Latin prayer, followed by a Middle English translation and commentary. The commentary attempts to fully explain the implications for each elements of the prayer and expounds the necessity of moral actions. For example, the first section, "*Pater noster qui es in celis*," is followed by an English translation. The

³² W. A. Patin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 189.

³³ Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*, trans. Eric Nicholson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 202.

³⁴ Patin, *The English Church*, 190.

³⁵ Auchinleck MS, ff. 72r-?72r or ?72v stub; f. 72r, l. 4.

narrator then explains that God's children who call God 'Our father,' must live good lives:

ȝif we willen hise children be,
Fonden to liuen in god lif,
Wiȝouten contek, wiȝouten strif,
Wiȝouten pride and enuye,
Coueitise and glotonye.³⁶

As the narrator urges moral behavior, he also recites all but one of the Seven Deadly Sins, and encourages confession to live a clean life so that one can enter into heaven.³⁷

By presenting Margaret and Katherine as having a simple faith based on basic tenets, and by including the same religious poems from which Margaret and Katherine derive their faith, the Auchinleck Manuscript takes part in the Church's catechetical program for the laity. At the Council of Lambeth in 1218, the English church leaders drew up a document entitled *De informacione simplicium*. Also known as the *Ignorantia Sacerdotum*, it instructed priests to set forth the religious texts to the laity four times a year. Priests were also to exhort the laity to memorize the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the two New Testament commandments of loving God and one's neighbor. In addition, they were to emphasize the Seven Works of Mercy, the Seven Vices, and the Seven Sacraments. Later translated into English in 1357, this manual became known as the *Lay Folk's Catechism*. Priests reiterated such catechetical materials to the laity during confession, which would have occurred at least once a year after the Fourth Lateran decree for a yearly confession. The *Cura* instructed the priest to work through the Ten Commandments, the Seven Sins, and the Corporal Works of Mercy, simultaneously teaching the laity correct belief and obtaining a full confession.³⁸ The Auchinleck Manuscript resembles another early fourteenth-century work by William of

³⁶ Auchinleck MS, f. 72r, ll. 38-42. *If we are his children, we should lead a good life, without conflict, strife, pride, envy, or gluttony.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 45-49.

³⁸ Eamond Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), 53-7.

Pagula, the *Oculus Sacerdotis*. This confessional guide intended for parish priests is divided into three sections. The first, a manual for confessors, teaches priests how to hear and draw out confession by using the structure of the Seven Deadly Sins, and reminds them to recall sins common to people of different ages and occupations. The last section also pertains to priests, covering theological and canonical material on the sacraments. The second includes catechetical texts that mirror the *Lay Folk's Catechism* and a devotional section on the wounds of Christ taken from James of Milan's *Stimulus Amoris*.³⁹ Though the Auchinleck Manuscript and the *Oculus Sacerdotis* anticipate different audiences, one lay and the other clerical, both present an identical picture of lay piety, in which the foundational knowledge of the catechisms support and stimulate the emotional devotions to Christ, His body, and the Passion.

CONVERTS AND HERETICS IN *SEYNT MERGRETE*, *SEYNT KATERINE*, AND *THE KING OF TARS*

The Auchinleck Manuscript depicts another aspect of faith, conversion. In *Seynt Mergrete*, *Seynt Katerine*, and *The King of Tars* Saracen pagans convert after they witness miracles and hear the basics of Christian belief. Immediately after their conversion, the Saracens are physically and socially assimilated to their new identity as Christians. The immediate and physical proof of true conversion in this fictional setting leaves no room for the reader to question the convert's change of faith. Such depictions of conversion reveal an underlying desire for visible signs of an internal, invisible condition. The attempt to give physical proof of conversion appeases and reveals the fourteenth-century Church's anxieties that converts and heretics secretly continued in their former religion and remained hidden among true believers.

³⁹ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 54-5.

While Jewish converts were signs of Christianity's success, there remained doubts about whether their conversion proved genuine and permanent. Even after a Jew had converted, Christians harbored lingering doubts about the sincerity of their conversion. "Christians continued to insist that [the Jewish converts] had retained some element of Jewishness," and conversion stories of Jews anticipated such doubts as they often included miracles as a divine stamp of authenticity.⁴⁰ This distrust of converts manifested itself in the prevention of sexual intermingling and barring Jews from public offices. In 1268, Pope Clement IV reproached Alfonso III of Portugal for allowing marriages between Christians and Saracens or Jewish converts. In the late fourteenth-century Aragon, the death penalty for marriage between Jews and Christians was revised to include new converts.

Converts were also distrusted in the realm of politics. For example, Bernard of Clairvaux opposed Anacletus II's claims to the papacy by pointing to his family background that his great-grand father had been a Jew. In 1437, Jewish converts in Catalonia and Valencia had to petition the pope for aid against the Christian discrimination against them.⁴¹ Though these may have been convenient excuses against Jews who threatened the Christians' political and social status, John M. Elukin argues that Christians doubted the verity of Jewish conversion not only because of anti-Semitism, but also because the conversion process was "incremental and imperfect" and even Christians themselves were uncertain of their salvation.⁴² Outside the issue of conversion, the desire for visible signs of an invisible attribute also appears in the Fourth Lateran decree for Jews and Saracens to wear distinct clothes in order to mark

⁴⁰ John M. Elukin, "From Jew to Christian? Conversion and Immutability in Medieval Europe," in *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 171, 180.

⁴¹ Steven F. Kruger. *The Spectral Jew: Conversion and Embodiment in Medieval Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 105.

⁴² Elukin, "From Jew to Christian?", 179-80.

them as non-Christian, so that no confusion arise that would lead to marriages between Jews and Christians.⁴³

The Auchinleck Manuscript's representation of conversion anticipates concerns about the genuineness of a conversion. In *Seynt Mergrete* and *Seynt Katerine*, the Saracens converts are killed almost immediately after their conversion. The tension that may arise from lingering doubts about their conversion is eradicated as soon as these converts die a martyr's death. The Saracens become martyrs as soon as they convert. In *Seynt Mergrete*, the pagan Saracens witness the miracles of Margaret's torture, for they "seiȝe þere/ an angel com fle" and "seiȝen al þe fat todriue."⁴⁴ Viewing of miracles results in their turning from Muhammad to Jesus: "To forsake Mahoun/ þai heyed hem bilieue/ & leued opon Jhesus Crist,/ fif þousand & fiue."⁴⁵ Death immediately follows their conversion: "Olibrious lete slen hem alle."⁴⁶ There is not even a slight pause in the narrative between their conversion and their martyrdom. Their death is abrupt and immediate.

The Auchinleck *Seynt Katerine* also resolves the tension of a possible false conversion by making the converts immediately become martyrs. At the conclusion of their debate with Katherine, one of the fifty philosophers says to Maxen, "We wil trowe on Jhesu Crist,/ Ðat bar þe croun was made of þorn."⁴⁷ Maxen asks all of them if they will not change their minds. When they confirm their faith, the Saracen emperor orders the new converts burned.⁴⁸ Their immediate martyrdom identifies the converts as saints, and to make sure the reader is left with no doubts, the narrator assures that these converts enter heaven: "To heuen were her soules born,/ in Godes frari to be."⁴⁹ The

⁴³ Kruger, *The Spectral Jew*, 89.

⁴⁴ Auchinleck MS, f. 20r, l. 325. *They saw an angel come flying down.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ll.326-7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 328. *Olibrious slew them all.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 22r, l. 107. *We will believe in Jesus Christ who bore a crown of thorns.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, ll. 110-2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 22v, l. 116. *Their souls were brought up to heaven to be in God's friary.*

conversions of the queen and the knight Porfir also follow this pattern. Though they had converted the first night they spoke with Katherine,⁵⁰ it is not until the queen confronts Maxen and publicly renounces her faith that she is tortured like a virgin martyr. Maxen reacts to the queen's rejection of Islam and conversion to Christianity in the same manner with which he reacts to Katherine's continued defiance.⁵¹ He becomes extremely angry and orders the Queen to be tortured and killed. The torturers tear away the Queen's nipples with iron hooks, behead her, and unceremoniously leave her corpse out in the field.⁵² As a result, the queen acquires a new identity as a Christian martyr.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Christians consistently doubted the authenticity of Jewish conversion. These stories in the Auchinleck resolve the problem of true conversion by providing indisputable evidence for the converts' faith. In the two saints' lives, Saracen converts imitate the saints by becoming martyrs themselves, dying immediately after their verbal profession of faith.⁵³ In the Queen's case, she echoes the sufferings of the virgin martyrs as her body is torn apart and graphically displayed because of her conversion to Christianity.

Conversion is also the main them of the hagiographic romance *The King of Tars*.⁵⁴ In this story, the conflict between Christians and Saracens begins when the Saracen Sultan of Damas desires the Christian Princess of Tars for her famed beauty. The King of Tars, her father, refuses his suit vehemently, to which the Sultan responds by

⁵⁰ Auchinleck MS, f. 23r, ll. 179-80.

⁵¹ Ibid., f. 24r, ll. 254-8.

⁵² Ibid., ll. 265-8.

⁵³ The single exception to the immediate martyrdom of converts in the Auchinleck *Mergrete* and *Katherine* is of Malcus the soldier who beheads St. Margaret. In the Auchinleck version, he converts when he hears the voice coming from Heaven as an answer to Margaret's intercessory prayer, beheads Margaret, for she tells him if he does not do this, she will not plead to God on his behalf and he will not be saved. Malcus' story ends with him kneeling on the ground and praying for mercy, right after he obediently beheads Margaret.

⁵⁴ Auchinleck MS, ff. 7r-13v.

demolishing the Christian army, killing “þritti þousende & seuen” men.⁵⁵ The devastating defeat compels the Princess to marry the Sultan in order to prevent more bloodshed. After their wedding, the Sultan refuses to bed his new bride, in spite of his great desire for her, unless she converts to his religion. The narrator interjects, “Wel loþe war a Cristen man/ To wedde a heþen woman/ Þat leued on a fals lawe;/ Als loþ was þat soudan/ To wed a Cristen woman.”⁵⁶ Alone in bed on her wedding night, she dreams that Jesus comes to her and assures her of His aid. With renewed confidence, the Princess goes to the Sultan on the next day and agrees to convert, asking him to teach her his faith:

Teche me now & lat me here
 Hou y shal make mi preiere
 When ich on him bileue.
 To Mahoun ichil me take,
 & Ihesu Crist, mi lord forsake,⁵⁷

She goes through the process of conversion by learning the tenets of his belief and reciting them. Outwardly, she appears to have converted to Islam:

She lerd þe heþen lawe.
 & þei sche al þe lawes coupe,
 & seyde hem openliche wiþ her mouþe.⁵⁸

Despite her knowledge of the Saracen religion, she does not truly convert, and she continues to pray to Jesus when she is alone: “For when sche was bi hirselve on/ To Ihesu sche made hir mon.”⁵⁹ This fake conversion, in which the Princess learns the proper doctrines, recites the correct prayers, and performs the appropriate religious

⁵⁵ Auchinleck MS, f. 8v, l. 270.

⁵⁶ Ibid., f.9r, ll. 409-13. *As a Christian man would hate to marry a heathen, the sultan also loathed the thought of marrying the Christian Princess.*

⁵⁷ Ibid., f.9r-v, ll. 484-8. *Teach me now and let me here how I need to pray when I convert. I will take Mahoun for my god and my lord Jesus Christ I will forsake.*

⁵⁸ Ibid., f. 9v, ll. 504-6. *She learned the heathen laws and she knew all of them and recited them openly with her mouth.*

⁵⁹ Ibid., ll. 514-5. *For when she was by herself, she prayed to Jesus.*

devotions, essentially transposes contemporary anxieties about false converts onto a world of fantasy. The Princess of Tars claims to be a Muslim and acts like one, but privately and internally she holds a different faith.

The Sultan finds out the Princess' true faith when she gives birth to their child. During her pregnancy, the Sultan is overjoyed while the Princess prays to Jesus to shield her from her shame, presumably of having to bear a pagan child. When she gives birth, the child is headless, limbless, and hairless — a flesh-blob:

¶ & when þe child was ybore
Wel sori wimen were þefore,
For lim no hadde it non.
Bot as a rond of flesche yschore
In chaumber it lay hem bifore
Wiþouten blod & bon.⁶⁰

Seeing this atrocity, the Sultan directly confronts the Princess, and insists that it must have been her false conversion that caused their child to become a flesh-blob: ““Þe childe þat is here of þe born/ Boþe lim & liþ it is forlorn/ Alle þurth þi fals bileue.””⁶¹ She then uses this opportunity to force the Sultan to test his gods, telling him to beg his idols to transform this flesh-blob into a human being. He does so to no avail. Surrendering, the Sultan approaches the Princess with the flesh-blob in his hands, expressing his willingness to convert if her god is able to perform this miracle.

When a Christian baptism transforms the flesh-blob into a beautiful baby, the Princess prays to God to give Him thanks and to ask for strength in order to convert her Saracen husband. The next lines (800-29) present a dialogue between the spouses, similar to the exchanges between Margaret and Olibrious. The Princess nags the Sultan into converting and threatens that neither she nor the child will be a part of him since they are Christian while he is a pagan. He finally concedes: ““Tel me now what is þour

⁶⁰ Auchinleck MS, f. 10r, ll. 577-82. *And when the child was born, they were all very sorry because it had no limbs. They laid it in the chamber before them, it was ball of flesh, shorn of any hair, without blood or bone.*

⁶¹ Ibid., ll. 592-4. *This child is born without limb and life because of your false belief, that is, conversion.*

fay,/ & ichil lere wel fawe."⁶² He responds almost exactly like the Princess does at the start of their marriage when she agrees to convert: "'Teche me now & lat me here/ Hou y schal make mi preire/ When ich on hem bileue."⁶³ Both would-be converts orally confirm their new faith by asking for teaching so that they can hear and learn its doctrines. Ultimately, only one of the characters truly converts. The characterization of conversion and faith look disconcertingly similar.

The process of conversion requires the learning of the doctrines, even though knowledge itself did not indicate a true conversion. In response to the Sultan's request to know more about Christianity, the Princess recites the tenets of the faith: The Holy Trinity is one God and three Persons united, Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, came down to earth as man, died on the cross on Good Friday, harrowed hell, and rose again on the third day. He is now King enthroned in heaven and will judge the living and the dead.⁶⁴ The Princess' speech is strikingly similar to Katherine's and Margaret's. She covers all the particulars of belief present in the Creed of the Auchinleck Manuscript's *On the Seven Deadly Sins*.⁶⁵ In fact, she assures the Sultan and the reader of her summary's orthodoxy in just those terms, for she said everything "'as it is written in þe crede."⁶⁶

Despite her active role in converting the Saracen Sultan, the Princess distinctly remains a laywoman. After she recites a summary of the Creed, the Sultan asks her to bring a priest: "'Preye now þe prest he com ous tille/ & teche me Cristen lay."⁶⁷ Apparently the Princess' "teachings" are not enough, for the Sultan asks for a priest, an educated authority, to teach him Christian doctrines. While *The King of Tars* stresses lay

⁶² Auchinleck MS, f. 11v, ll. 839-40. *Tell me what your faith is and I will learn it.*

⁶³ Ibid., f. 9v, ll. 484-6. *Teach me now and let me hear...*

⁶⁴ Ibid., f. 11v, ll. 842-76.

⁶⁵ Ibid., f. 70v, ll. 99-100.

⁶⁶ Ibid., f. 11v, l. 862.

⁶⁷ Ibid., ll. 881-2. *Now bring the priest to teach me the Christian doctrines.*

belief, it is presented as rudimentary and simple, as if anything more theologically complex was not appropriate for its lay audience.

When the Sultan agrees to convert and be baptized, he insists that it be done as privately as possible, fearing the possibility of persecution.⁶⁸ However, neither the Princess nor the priest respond to his request for secrecy, and the narrator continues on, describing the priest's preparation for the Sultan's christening. A secret conversion proves to be impossible, for as soon as the Sultan is baptized, his black skin becomes white:

His hide, þat blac & loþely was,
Al white bicom, þurth Godes gras,
& clere wiþouten blame.⁶⁹

An external, physical change accompanies the internal change of conversion, through which the Princess and the reader can have a visual confirmation of the Sultan's new physical identity as a Christian. Only after his miraculous baptism does the Princess know that her husband's conversion is real: "'Pan wist sche wele in hir þouȝt/ Pat on Mahoun leued he nouȝt/ For chaunged was his hewe.'"⁷⁰ In contrast to the Princess' false conversion, the physical proof of the Sultan's conversion makes it impossible for him to hide his faith and removes any possibilities that he might be a false Christian. In *Seynte Mergrete* and *Seynt Katerine*, the immediate martyrdom of the Saracen converts preempts any doubts about the genuineness of their conversion. Likewise, the genuineness of the Sultan's conversion is confirmed by the bodily change. His new hue affirms the Sultan's assimilation to Christian identity because he becomes white like the Princess, "as white as feþer of swan."⁷¹

⁶⁸ Auchinleck MS, f. 12r, ll. 880-7.

⁶⁹ Ibid., ll. 928-30. *His skin, which was black and loathsome, became all white through God's grace, and became clear without any blame.*

⁷⁰ Ibid., ll. 943-5. *Then she (the Princess of Tars) knew for certain that he (sultan) no longer believed in Mahoun because his skin changed.*

⁷¹ Ibid., f. 7r, l. 12.

The Sultan imitates and conforms to the Christian identity. Just as his white skin makes him physically identical to the Christian Princess, his new post-conversion behavior aligns him with the Princess' father, the Christian King of Tars. After he converts, the Sultan immediately sends word to the king of Tars of his new allegiance and plans to convert other Saracens. Essentially, he has joined the other side of the Crusade. As the Sultan becomes a Christian king, he undergoes the same persecutions and defeat that the King of Tars had experienced. In the beginning of the story, the Sultan wars against the King of Tars, killing many Christians and burning their cities: "Mani man ben schent,/ Cites nomen & tounes brent."⁷² Similarly, five Saracen kings attack the converted Sultan by killing his people, now Christians, and burning his towns: "His men þai slouþ, his tounes brent."⁷³ When the Sultan converts, his life echoes the life of the Christian King of Tars. The shared experience of persecution allows the Sultan to identify himself as a Christian and attest to the sincerity of his conversion. The conversion of the Sultan reveals the same preoccupation with visual proof that is also evident in stories about Jewish converts. It is only after the Sultan witnesses the miracle of the flesh-blob's transformation into a beautiful infant that he converts. Both the Princess and the reader witness an internal change as an external one to legitimate the Sultan's conversion.

In the Auchinleck, Katherine also undergoes a physical change similar to the Sultan that manifests even though she does not convert as he did. As in *The King of Tars*, the Christian maid Katherine is beautiful and white, while the Saracens are "black and blo."⁷⁴ She does not remain so pure and white, as she is beaten so badly during the course of her torture that her flesh becomes "blo & blac."⁷⁵ Correspondingly, the Sultan in *The King of Tars* changes from black to white because he converts. Clearly physical

⁷² Auchinleck MS, f. 8r, ll. 226-7.

⁷³ Ibid., f. 13r, ll. 1091-2.

⁷⁴ Ibid., f. 11v, l. 799; f. 12r, ll. 928-9; f. 13v, l. 226.

⁷⁵ Ibid., f. 22v, l. 141.

and spiritual transformations are connected. However, in Katherine's case, her refusal to convert drives her persecutor to impose an external change when he finds himself unable to influence an internal one of conversion. This forced physical change makes Katherine look like the Saracens, black and blue, but because she remains faithful to Christ, her physical conformity has no connection whatsoever to a spiritual one. Like the Princess of Tar's verbal confessions of faith, Katherine's outward appearance of belonging stands as a warning reminder in apposition to the Sultan's conversion story. Outward show of faith and verbal confession does not guarantee true and sincere belief.

In *The King of Tars*, Saracens play the role of an 'Other' that outwardly conforms to Christianity but secretly practices another religion. It is quite clear that the Auchinleck Manuscript does not portray Saracens as real-life Muslims. In the two saints' lives and in *The King of Tars*, these fictional Saracens are described as black dogs. For example, when a messenger approaches Margaret with an offer from Olibrious, she immediately prays to Jesus, "'Dis houndes me han bisett, / þat I no may nouȝt fle.'"⁷⁶ The King of Tars calls the Sultan a "heapen hounde," as does the Sultan himself after his conversion: "'We shul make Cristen men out of houndes.'"⁷⁷ The description of Saracens as "so wilde . . . & wode" contrasts their uncontrollable animalistic nature to the civility of Christians.⁷⁸ Such depictions of Muslims were inaccurate because there were no efforts to be accurate, for Saracens were "western representations of a continuum of otherness."⁷⁹

Medieval writers manipulated these convenient representations of an 'Other' to fit different needs. For example, in martyr stories, Saracens served as enthusiastic Christian persecutors, necessary adversaries to Christians. The anecdotes of Ramón Lull and Father Livin reveal that, in reality, Muslims did not actively persecute Christians. In

⁷⁶ Auchinleck MS, f. 17r, l. 76.

⁷⁷ Ibid., f.7v, l. 93; f. 11r, l. 743.

⁷⁸ Ibid., f. 7v, l. 171.

⁷⁹ Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, 1, 3.

the late thirteenth-century, Ramón Lull, a tertiary of the Franciscan order and writer, had embarked on several missions to Tunis to convert the Muslims. Father Livin, a fourteenth-century monk, also traveled to North Africa to preach conversion which led the Muslim authorities to persecute him. Yet despite their efforts to be controversial, they were ignored.⁸⁰ In saints' lives, however, reality is ignored as Saracens become eager persecutors, torturing virgin saints and cutting off thousands of Christian heads.

The religion of the Saracens is also inaccurately represented in *The King of Tars*. Concerns about belief and conversion in this story, as played out through Christian and Saracen interaction, do not concern Islam, as the story does not even depict Islam. Instead, the story portrays Islam as a polytheistic and idol-worshipping religion. Pretending to have converted, the Princess of Tars enters the temple and kisses various idols, including those of Roman gods:

Sche kist Mahoun & Apolin,
Astirot, & sir Iouin,
For drede of wordes awe.
& while sche was in þe temple [þer]
Of Teruagant & Iubiter
Sche lerd þe heþen lawe.⁸¹

Such depiction of Islam seems a purposeful deviation from the actual monotheistic religion, making the religion of the Saracens stand in for a religion of an 'Other.'

Though the distinction between Christians and Saracens are made clear in their physical differences— one is white, the other black— the difference between the two remains ambiguous. *The King of Tars* miniature that directly precedes the text first indicates this ambiguity.⁸² The small rectangular image is divided into two parts like a diptych. The left panel shows a king kneeling in front of an idol — a golden calf— placed upon a table. On the right panel, a queen joins the same king, and they both

⁸⁰ Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, 164-5.

⁸¹ Auchinleck MS, f. 9v, ll. 499-504.

⁸² *Ibid.*, f. 7r. See Appendix II, Fig. 2.

kneel in front of a statue of Christ on the cross placed on an altar. The main difference between the two images is the replacement of the idol with a crucifix. Otherwise, the two figures, their positions, and the tables remain the same. The manner of worship is identical, as in both sections, the figures kneel in prayer, with their hands palm-to-palm, in front of an image of their god. Both parts also include an image of a statue of their god, which, though different, seems easily switched as the figures do not need to change their behavior in any way. The addition of the golden calf, the same idol that the Israelites had worshipped in Exodus, implies that this representation of Saracens does not specifically stand for either Jews or Saracens, but as an 'Other' that could be mistaken for Christians.

The Sultan of Damas' persecution of Saracens near the end of the poem further obscures the line between Christians and the Saracen 'Other.' After he converts, the Sultan calls all of his men and commands them to convert. There were some who complied, but many refused and were beheaded for their faith:

Mani seyð þat þai wold,
 & mani seyð þat þai nold
 Be cristned in non maner.
 Po þat Mahoun wald forsake
 Cristen men he lete hem make,
 & were him lef & dere.
 & he þat dede nouȝt bi his rede,
 Anon he ded strike of his hed,
 Riȝt fast bi þe swere.⁸³

Also, the poem ends with Christians beheading "þritti þousende [. . .]/ Sarra[ȝ]ins boþe blo & blac,"⁸⁴ because they hold fast to their faith, preferring death to conversion. Despite the literal black and white difference between Saracens and Christians, Saracens behave and are portrayed like Christians in their adherence to their faith. These

⁸³ Auchinleck MS, f. 12v, ll. 1048-56. *There were many who both disagreed and agreed to convert back into paganism and reject Christianity. Those that remained Christian, he beheaded.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 13v, ll. 1225-6.

beheaded Saracens resemble Christian martyrs executed for their faith. At the end, Christians are no longer victims of persecution. Rather, they become persecutors of this Saracen 'Other.' This representation of Saracen martyrs and the miniature of *The King of Tars* obscure the difference between the two religions, while the imagery within the poem insists that they do differ completely, dividing black Saracens from white Christians. Even to the end, when the Christians behead the thirty-thousand Saracens, the narrator reminds the reader of this fundamental difference: Saracens are black and blue, Christians are not. This simultaneous ambiguity and distinction of Christians and Saracens seems to stem from concerns caused by 'popular' heresies. Though their inner beliefs remained far from Catholic doctrine, heretics in the later Middle Ages would have appeared quite similar to Christians in their words and actions. *The King of Tars* illustrates the possibility of confusion and obscurity between true and false Christians. Ultimately, the black bodies of the Saracens leave no room for ambiguity, as if to insist that any perceived similarities to Christianity become void in the overwhelming evidence of their physical appearance.

Late medieval 'popular' heresy differed from earlier heresies mainly in its participants. Heresies of antiquity and of the early Middle Ages tended to begin with and remain within a small circle of highly educated theologians. In contrast, heresies originated from the laity in the later Middle Ages. Church leaders mocked these lay heretics for being uneducated and using the vernacular on both principle and preference. Church leaders at this time also put more effort in educating the laity on doctrines of Catholic belief with translations of tenets and prayers into the vernacular. Vernacular religious books, such as the *Lay-Folk's Catechism*, promised a certain number of indulgences in exchange for reading or memorizing the catechisms, indicating an assumption that knowledge of these basic doctrines could be equated with acceptance of and belief in them. The Auchinleck's *On the Seven Deadly Sins* hints at just such expectations, as after the Middle English translations of the Paternoster, Creed, and Hail

Mary, the narrator states, “Now habbe ȝe herd ȝoure bileue./ Þat is maked to soule biheue.”⁸⁵ Yet Bernard Gui’s description of the heretics reveals that knowledge of canonical doctrine did not always translate to belief. Bernard Gui was a Dominican friar and inquisitor who wrote *Practica inquisitionis heretice pravitatis* (1323-4), a five part treatise on the conduct of inquisition. In the last section, Bernard Gui provides an overview of various heresies and methods for inquiring suspected heretics.⁸⁶ After a description of the Manichaeans’ false teachings, he notes how the laity could easily mistake heretics for Christians:

They hold, believe, and teach the afore-mentioned errors and very many others which necessarily proceed therefrom. Nevertheless, because of misleading expressions and terms, to inexperienced person and to laymen they seem at first to profess the true faith, for they say that they believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the creator of all; that they believe in the Holy Roman Church, in the Lord Jesus Christ, in the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the incarnation, passion, resurrection, and ascension of the same Lord Jesus Christ, in holy baptism, in true penance, in the true body of Christ, and in the sacrament of matrimony.⁸⁷

According to Bernard Gui, these heretics affirmed all the parts of belief in the Apostle’s Creed with which lay Christians would have been familiar. Of the Pseudo-Apostles, or the Apostles of Christ, he writes that they showed their piety in a way that made them indistinguishable from Christians. They recited the Lord’s Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Creed, urged others to perform penance, and generally “adopt[ed] the outward marks of devotion to God, all of which, at first glance, seem[ed] good and pious to their auditors.”⁸⁸ Waldensians, too, attended churches and sermons, and seemed to be

⁸⁵ Auchinleck MS, f. 71r, ll. 157-8. *biheue*: to be raised, benefited, as in the soul is made to turn to God.

⁸⁶ Bernard Gui, *The Conduct of the Inquisition of Heretical Depravity*, in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, trans., Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 373-5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 380.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 408.

Catholic in their outward appearances and speech.⁸⁹ Similarly, the Manichaeans called themselves “good Christians” and interpreted their persecution by the inquisitors as a continuation of the Pharisees’ persecution of Christ and His Apostles.⁹⁰ For the laity who based their faith on the Paternoster, Hail Mary, and the Creed, these heretics, who memorized and recited them, would have seemed to be legitimate Christians.

Late medieval heretics seemed to be either good Christians or mendicant preachers whose community often revered them as pious and holy individuals. An anecdote about the bishop of Orvieto and two heretic women demonstrates the difficulty of distinguishing Christians from heretics. Milítia of Monte-Meato and Julieta of Florence had deceived the bishop of Orvieto by their “religious disguise” of eagerness in hearing the holy offices. The bishop and ladies of the city, misled by their false devotion, respected them as holy women.⁹¹ Also, heretics aligned themselves closely with the early apostles, and in many ways seemed identical to the mendicant Franciscan friars. In a letter (c.1367), Italian Waldensians referred to themselves as “unlettered fishermen,” like the early apostles Peter and John, *sine litteris et idiotae* (though ironically, they wrote in a learned and sophisticated Latin).⁹² The founder of the Waldensians seems almost identical to Francis of Assisi. A rich citizen of Lyons, he, like Francis, renounced all of his worldly goods to devote himself to a life of poverty and preaching.⁹³ Following their founder, the first rank of Waldensians, the Prefect, also identified with the apostles, since they owned no property but wandered instead as preachers and claimed to be successors of the early apostles.⁹⁴

By making the Saracens strangely similar to Christians, *The King of Tars* illustrates the ease with which heretics could intermingle and blend in with Catholic

⁸⁹ Gui, *The Conduct of the Inquisition of Heretical Depravity*, 393.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ R. I. Moore, *The Birth of Popular Heresy* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1975), 99-101.

⁹² Biller, *Heresy and Literacy*, 3, 9.

⁹³ Bernard Gui, *The Conduct of the Inquisition, in Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 386-7.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 395.

Christians. This story also demonstrates the instability of belief and conversion, as claiming to be a Christian and reciting correct tenets proved to be unreliable proof of true belief. Both real-life heretics and the Princess of Tars easily memorized and verbally affirmed faiths that they did not hold. Yet knowledge of these tenets remains important, as Katherine and Margaret are depicted as laywomen whose sanctity is affirmed by their steadfast assertion of the articles of their faith without any attempts to understand or intellectually defend them. In *The King of Tars*, the inner change manifests as a physical one in an attempt to remove any doubts about the Sultan's conversion. The story also continuously insists on a distinct, physical difference between Saracens and Christians, as if to insist that despite seeming similarities, as between heretics and Christians, they were not of the same faith.

LAY PIETY AND THE COMMUNITY IN *THE LEGEND OF POPE GREGORY AND AMIS AND AMILOUN*

The same concerns are shown in the Auchinleck manuscript's treatment of confession and penance. The spiritual becomes physical, and the descriptions of these phenomena display a visible spirituality to the reader. Although the penitent characters of the Gregory legend and *Amis and Amiloun* do not actually perform a sacramental confession and penance as dictated by the Church, they do engage in activities that closely resemble these sacraments. The differences between the fictional and sacramental confessions and penances reveal a preoccupation with conflicting desires for privacy and publicity in devotional practices. Though these characters break the rules of sacramental confession in an effort to fulfill their desire for privacy, their inevitable public display of penance implies the need to expose themselves to the community in order to be granted absolution.

The first item in the manuscript, *The Legend of Pope Gregory*,⁹⁵ claims to tell the life of Gregory, from his incestuous birth to his miraculous election as pope. In this version of Gregory's life, an earl's incestuous love for his sister results in her conception of Pope Gregory. The lady secretly gives birth to Gregory and puts him in a boat with silver and gold coins, and two tablets that tell of his shameful beginnings. Fortunately, the infant Gregory is found by a few fishermen during a storm, and he grows up in the household of one of the fishermen. One day he finds out about his birth and decides to go on a journey to find his family. On the journey, he unknowingly comes to his mother's lands, which are being attacked by a duke. Gregory promptly rescues the lands and his mother, who he receives to marry as his reward. Eventually, his identity and his incest are discovered, prompting him to leave his earldom and new wife with the intention of undertaking a pilgrimage. However, he undergoes penance instead by chaining himself to a large rock by the sea for seventeen years, fasting and praying to be washed clean from sin. Finally, an angel appears to the cardinals in Rome to tell them of the holy and pure man who will become their next pope, Gregory.

In *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, the sinners — the earl, his sister, and Gregory — obsessively try to hide their sins, an effort which ultimately proves futile. The earl and his sister confess their sins in a room, in an effort to have a private, secret confession. Instead of going to a parish priest, they summon a knight whom the late earl had assured them was a trustworthy and loyal vassal and someone to whom they could go for aid.⁹⁶ After bringing the knight into a room, the earl and his sister confess only after making certain of their privacy, shutting the door to prevent anyone from overhearing:

⁹⁵ Auchinleck MS, ff. 1r-6v. Carl Keller, ed., *Die Gregorius-Legende*, (New York: G. E. Stechert & Co., 1914). The latter contains four manuscripts of the Gregory Legend: MS Cotton Cleopatra D. IX fol. 153 v.1-161 v.2, MS Vernon fol. 45r1-47r2, MS Rawl. Poetry 225, and the Auchinleck MS. I refer to the other MSS for the first and last parts of the story, which are missing in the Auchinleck and quote the Vernon MS.

⁹⁶ *Die Gregorius-Legende*, 28, l. 225.

“þe dore was barred ful skeet/ For no mon scholde heore serewen seo.”⁹⁷ In contrast to sacramental confession, which would be “short, audible to others, with a long line of other parishioners,”⁹⁸ these penitents make their own version of a confessional, so that their confession seems completely private. Such attempts to keep sins secret continue throughout the story and lead to even more sin. After the earl’s sister gives birth to Gregory, she secretly sends him away by boat. Later in the story, Gregory continues to hide the tablets that tell of his incestuous birth. Both of these characters’ efforts result in another and greater sin of incest between Gregory and his mother.

Yet efforts to hide sins are all for nought, as the narrator states: “Per nis non so derne dede/ Þat sum time it schal be seine.”⁹⁹ Ironically, though the earl and his sister specifically choose someone they believe to be trustworthy, the knight immediately tells his wife about the incestuous relationship: “[He] told his wiif word & oþer/ Hou it was falle of þat dede,/ ‘Wiþ child sche goþ wiþ hier broþer,” imploring her to keep this secret and to help the lady.¹⁰⁰ Although Gregory carefully hides the two tablets under a stone in a cave (*chaumber*) which he forbids anyone to enter, both past and current sins are discovered. Despite these efforts for secrecy, even the most hidden sins are brought to light. Gregory and his mother are unaware of their shared incest until his mother finds the tablets, proving that Gregory had married his own mother, who was also his aunt because of the previous incestuous relationship. Trying to keep sins secret thus proves futile, not only because the sins are uncovered by others within the story, but also because the audience is omniscient. The lack of dramatic irony allows the reader to know and see all, placing the reader in the role of an ever-watchful community. When the earl goes into his sister’s bedroom at night, the two characters are not alone — the reader ‘sees’ and imagines them as they read through the text. Also, the earl and his

⁹⁷ *Die Gregorius-Legende*, 26, ll. 205-6.

⁹⁸ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 60-1.

⁹⁹ Auchinleck MS, f. 5r, ll. 714-5. *There is no such hidden deed that will not one day come to light.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 1r, ll. 33-5. *He told his wife about the situation, that the woman had a child with her own brother.*

sister's closed door does not prevent the reader from hearing their confession. Privacy is an illusion. According to this story, there is no sin so secret that it can be kept from either God's sight or the community's. Yet this inevitable uncovering of sin leads to the soul's healing, for it results in confession and penance, both of which are necessary for atonement.

Though Gregory and his mother each perform different penances, both illustrations of penance reveal the importance of a community in expiating one's private sins. In his efforts towards atonement, Gregory chains himself to a rock, fasting and drinking dew for seventeen years. As he is literally washed by the sea, his sins are also "waschen clane."¹⁰¹ Gregory's excessively physical and visible penance invites the reader to view and take part in his punishment in place of the community. At the end of the story, Gregory's miraculous election as pope assures the readers of the effectiveness of Gregory's bodily penance. When the Pope dies at the seventeenth year of Gregory's penance, a group of cardinals come together to elect the next pope. An angel interrupts the conclave and informs them that God has already chosen the next pope, a man who has been cleansed of his sins. At the end of a successful penance, Gregory is fully integrated back into the community that he was kept apart from for seventeen years. His penance fulfills its purpose of joining the sinner, who had been separated from the community, back into the fold of believers.

Gregory's mother also performs penance. Although it is not a bodily one like Gregory's, it is equally effective. She atones for her sins by serving her community, in her acts of piety as she founds hospitals, builds churches, and feeds the poor and the hungry:

¶ Alle loued hir, wild & tame,
 Þat wiþ mouþe herd hir speke.
 Sche halpe þe pouer & þe lame
 Þe deuel fram hir for to wreke.

wreken: to remove, deliver from

¹⁰¹ Auchinleck MS, f. 6v, l. 1009.

Chirches chapels boþe ysame
 Werche sche dede þurth Godes wille.
 Þe riche of hir hadde game *game: joy, delight*
 Þe pouer loued hir loude & stille.¹⁰²

By serving her neighbors in her penance, Gregory's mother successfully reenters the community and is loved by all, both rich and poor. The community is central to the notion of penance. Thus this public, community-oriented goal of penance negates the desire to have privacy.

The Fourth Lateran Council insisted that the laity perform private confession and penance every year.¹⁰³ Penitents would confess to their parish priest on Maudy Thursday, perform the necessary penance, and be reconciled to the Church during Lent. Confession was to be a private affair, with the priests sworn to secrecy, prohibited from revealing anything about the penitent's sins. However, before the invention of the confessional in 1614, a truly private confession was impossible.¹⁰⁴ Particularly in rural areas, medieval confession was most likely a face-to-face encounter between the priest and the lay person who would have known each other well.¹⁰⁵ The entire affair would have also been witnessed by the community. Many French synods insist that confession be held in a "very public [*communiorem*] place so that they may be seen in public [*communiter*] by all," and urged that "no one receive confession in hidden places or outside the church except in great necessity or in case of sickness." According to some English statutes, church leaders made some effort to provide a semblance of privacy for male penitents with the use of a veil. Women, however, were to confess "in open and without a curtain," as a measure of protection for their sexual purity.¹⁰⁶ Despite such

¹⁰² Auchinleck MS, f. 2r, ll. 217-24.

¹⁰³ John Bossy, "The Social History of Confession in the Age of Reformation," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, series 5, 25 (1984), 21-38 at 22.

¹⁰⁴ For Borromeo and the confessional, see: Bossy, "Social History of Confession," 28-31.

¹⁰⁵ Bossy, "Social History of Confessions", 24.

¹⁰⁶ Powick and Cheney, 992 (Exeter, c. 1287) as cited in Mary Mansfield, *The Humiliation of Sinners: Public Penance in Thirteenth-century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 79.

efforts, confession was firmly a community event. While one confessed to the priest, other parishioners, waiting in line near the priest and the penitent, certainly saw them and perhaps heard the faint whispers of a confession.¹⁰⁷

Religious authorities seem to have been aware of parishioners' fear of their sins being made public knowledge. Theologians and synodal statutes advise priests to beware of 'dropping hints' about a parishioner's sins, for example, by preaching too much on a certain sin. Peter of Poitiers allowed parishioners to break the rule of confessing to one's parish priest if the priest was indiscreet.¹⁰⁸ In an attempt to give a semblance of privacy, Jacobus de Clusa recommends priests to have "their faces be hidden so they could only hear the penitent's voice." Likewise, Myrk suggests that confessors slightly turn their face from the penitent, "sum-what the face from hyree thou wry."¹⁰⁹

Despite its efforts to maintain the secrecy of confession, the church often promoted penance by insisting that sins become public. This can clearly be seen in contemporary exempla. Exempla on confession and penance seem to not be concerned with keeping confessed sins secret. In fact, public exposure of sins proves that a penance completely cleansed the penitent of their sin. In one story, a woman confesses to killing her son-in-law, a sin that the priest promptly reveals to her kin. She is then burned but remains safe from the flames, which prompts the kinsmen to stab her with a lance. Even then, she remains alive for another three days.¹¹⁰ Her miraculous survival reveals that she has been forgiven of her sins. There is no longer a need for her to undergo punishment for she had already suffered through penance. In another exemplum, a woman confesses to a priest that she had poisoned her step-son. The priest

¹⁰⁷ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Cantor, *Summa de sacramentis*, III q. 137, 320-21 as cited in Mansfield, *Humiliation*, 81.

¹⁰⁹ Tentler, 84, n. 2; Myrk (1.775) as cited in Ann Eljenhom Nichols, "The Etiquette of Pre-Reformation Confession in East Anglia," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 17:2 (1986), 145-63 at 150.

¹¹⁰ Gobi, *Scala sceli*, f. 46r-v, as cited in Mansfield, *Humiliation*, 80-1.

tells her husband of her confession, but he refuses to believe the priest without proof. So the priest informs the husband that, because of her sin, his wife performs penance by fasting and beating herself until blood runs from her body. Yet when the husband secretly spies on her, he only sees a splendid feast at the table and her clean, unharmed body.¹¹¹ In this story, the penitent properly confesses her sin and performs penance. However, there is no confirmation that her confession and penance successfully cleansed her until her sin is exposed to her husband whom she wronged. The wife beats herself until blood streams from her body, in a manner that echoes the Passion of Christ, and purifies her soul through the mortification of her flesh. The husband only sees the wife's white and pure body, confirming that her soul has been cleansed and her sins forgiven.

Such exempla and the Gregory legend reveal that not only was privacy not guaranteed, it was neither a reality nor a necessity. In fact, the expiation of sin required the community. Confession was heard in an open and public space within the church, and, though technically sworn to secrecy, priests could easily make their sins known to the community. Furthermore, absolution required restitution, which meant that even if privacy were guaranteed in confession, the necessary penance and restitution publicized one's sins.¹¹² Sin was inevitably a community affair. The societal focus on sin is demonstrated in the preoccupation with sins affecting one's neighbors, such as stealing, lending money at high interest, and adultery.¹¹³ A fifteenth-century manual of practical advice for confessors, St. John's College MS S 35 reveals the social effects of sin in its inquiry into envy:

Have ye hadde anie envie to your neighbores or to your even cristen
[fellow Christian, i.e., neighbor] and be glad of here harmes and of here
evel fare and loth of here good, or of the adversite or desese that hath

¹¹¹ Gobi, *Scala sceli*, f. 45 r-v, as cited in Mansfield, *Humiliation*, 89.

¹¹² Bossy, "Social History of Confession," 25.

¹¹³ Peter Biller, "Confession in the Middle Ages: Introduction," in *Handling Sin*, 1-34 at 15.

falle to hem and be sorie or hevie of here prosperite or welfare . . . and of here good name and good fame. Have ye backbited and dispreised your even cristen or tolde evill tales of hem to a pewn [?] here good name or wolde not heere noo good spoke of hem bi your wille but lette it or stopped it as much as ye might.¹¹⁴

In this manual, sin is tied to social conflicts. For that reason, confession and penance were avenues through which social breaches could be resolved and a divided community healed. Even secret penance united the community through shared suffering, as it was usually undertaken by all during fasting seasons.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, priests were to emphasize the ‘bonds of community’ after Lenten confessions, and encourage neighbors to reconcile with each other, so that, ideally, the parishioners would have forgiven each other before receiving communion.¹¹⁶

Notwithstanding the increasing emphasis on personal meditations on one’s sins and spiritual state, the manner and purpose of religious devotion remained centered on the community. Masses were said for spiritual state of the community, both living and dead. Even ‘private masses’ were community gatherings, as they were attended by the entire family and other members of the household, and held for the good of the church and the benefit of the public.¹¹⁷ Confession and penance also functioned for and within the community by reconciling sinners to their neighbors and to the church. In a sense, sin united the community. The late Middle Ages were characterized by an overarching preoccupation with sin and its consequence, death, that spurred a community effort to deal with sin. After the Fourth Lateran Council a great amount of literature about sin arose, especially confessional handbooks and manuals. There was also was an almost collective quality about the mental condition of those in Western Europe with their “pathological anguish before God’s judgment, an escalation of doubts, a rumination on

¹¹⁴ St. John’s College MS S 35, as cited in: Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 59.

¹¹⁵ Rob Meens, “The Frequency and Nature of Early Medieval Penance,” in *Handling Sin*, 35-62 at 50

¹¹⁶ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 94.

¹¹⁷ Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, 139.

sin [original, deadly, and venial], and a fixation on death." A collective 'guilt complex' plagued their religious preoccupations, as the Christian message focused "on the evocation of sin and . . . aim[ed] to the fight against sinning."¹¹⁸

Amis and Amiloun, a story about two men and their undying friendship, also contains elements of confession and penance. Born on the same day but by different parents, Amis and Amiloun look so alike that they seem to be twins. They grow up together in a duke's household, and after they are knighted, Amis remains the chief butler while Amiloun marries and becomes lord of his own lands. Belisaunt, the duke's daughter, falls in love with the handsome, but poor and low-ranking Amis. One night, the steward Harget finds Amis and Belisaunt together in bed. The following morning, the steward tells the duke about Amis' treachery of violating the duke's daughter. Amis promptly denies Harget's accusations, suggesting a trial by battle to determine the case. Knowing that Amiloun is a better fighter, Amis goes to him so that they can switch places. Amis pretends to be Amiloun and lives with Amiloun's wife, while the real Amiloun fights in the trial by battle pretending to be Amis. Though an angel warns Amiloun of the consequences, he proceeds with the plan, swearing a technically true oath that he himself has never touched Belisaunt, and kills the steward in the trial by battle. When Amis is proven innocent by the trial, the duke allows him to marry Belisaunt, and Amis eventually succeeds the duchy and lives happily with his wife, eventually fathering two sons. Meanwhile, Amiloun suffers as a leper, just as the angel forewarned. Despising him because of his infirmity and his part in the trial by battle, Amiloun's wife kicks him out of his own lands, forcing Amiloun to beg from town to town. By providence, the two friends reunite, and Amiloun is cured from his disease by bathing in the blood of Amis' two children. The Auchinleck version ends here because

¹¹⁸ Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*, 198, 297.

the following folio has been ripped out, but other versions continue to include the miraculous revival of the children.

Like the confession and penance in the Gregory legend, Amiloun's penitential journey also illustrates the community's involvement in the expiation of sin. In the Old French version, both Amiloun's sin and punishment remain private. Though his wife wonders at his sudden disease and detests him for it, Amiloun never tells her the reason for his leprosy. Only Amis and Amiloun know of their trickery in switching identities at the trial by battle.¹¹⁹ His sin remains a secret to the end. Though Amiloun's punishment, leprosy, is physically apparent, this too is kept hidden and unseen. After getting kicked out of his lands, Amiloun stays at the court of his godfather in Rome while two servants beg on his behalf. The Old French version Amiloun sequesters himself, so that his shame and disease remains hidden, for his sins concern none other than himself and God.

The Old French version's private sin and penance differs from the Auchinleck *Amis and Amiloun*, in which Amiloun's sin and penance are publicly displayed. He tells his wife the truth immediately after his return from the trial by battle. When he confesses to his wife, she condemns him that he has done an evil and wrong deed: "Wiþ wrong & michel vnriȝt/ Pou slouȝ þer a gentil kniȝt;/ Ywis, it was iuel ydo."¹²⁰ In the Auchinleck, Amiloun's wife stands as a judge. She finds him guilty and punishes him through the community, by both humiliating and expelling him from the community and from his position as lord. His punishment first begins when he confesses his sin to his wife. Amiloun's wife first comes to hate him, not because of his leprosy as in the Old French version, but because she knows of his sin in killing the

¹¹⁹ *Amis and Amile translated from the Old French*, trans., Samuel Danon and Samuel N. Rosenberg (York, SC: French Literature Publications Co.: 1981), 89, l. 103; 90, l. 104; 93, l. 110. The Old French version has the names switches. Amis (Ami) is Amiloun (Amile) and vice versa. For simplicity's sake, I keep to the Auchinleck version's naming when making comparisons between the two versions.

¹²⁰ Auchinleck MS, f. 56v, ll. 1440-2.

steward and taking a false oath. The leprosy intensifies Amiloun's punishment, for the physical deformities single out Amiloun from his community. As a result, he becomes a visible object of repulsion and pity. The judgment of God becomes indistinguishable from human judgment. The trials that Amiloun suffers from his wife are caused by God, and, in all respects, are allowed by God. However, sin is a community matter. The sinner transgresses against God by transgressing against his community, and an agent of the community deals with the sinner and his sin.

The Auchinleck's *Amis and Amiloun* overtly contrasts with the Old French version in the depiction of Amiloun as a penitential figure. Unlike the comfortably sequestered Amiloun of the Old French romance, the Auchinleck *Amiloun* begs for food like the poor holy men. He moves from town to town and begs with his son Amourant:

Purth mani a cuntre vp an doun
Pai begged her mete fram toun to toun
Bope in winde & rain.¹²¹

Everyone from the towns gladly gives to the beggar-leper Amiloun until a devastating famine prevents such generosity. The community takes part in Amiloun's penance by giving alms and by viewing his diseased body. Amiloun's penitential journey parallels Pope Gregory's penance through his physical affliction. Physical and public devotion needed to be within the setting of community. The pious individual benefited his own soul in devotion, but also benefited others by giving the community an opportunity to participate in pious acts such as alms-giving. The begging Amiloun evokes an image of the mendicant friars who had renounced their worldly goods and begged for alms to survive. As in the case of the Auchinleck Amiloun, the mendicants did not isolate themselves like the hermits, but remained within the community and both interacted with and were seen by the community.

¹²¹ Auchinleck MS, f. 58v, ll. 1746-8. *They traveled through many countries and begged for food from town to town in both wind and in rain.*

The communal efforts in dealing with sin can also be seen in the Auchinleck's Middle English translation of Psalm 50, *Dauid þe King*, a prayer of repentance that David was said to have composed after he sinned with Bathsheba.¹²² This translation takes some liberties with the Latin version of the psalm, recasting Psalm 50 from an individual's penitential psalm into a general prayer for the sins of a community of believers. The Auchinleck translation of Psalm 50 lacks the first two verses that place this psalm in a specific context: "When Nathan the prophet came to him after he had sinned with Bethsabee."¹²³ Instead, the translation begins at verse three. Also, the Middle English translation replaces nearly all the 'I' and 'my' in the Latin vulgate with 'we' and 'our.' For example, the Latin Vulgate version of verse eleven reads, "Averte faciem tuam a peccatis meis et omnes iniquitates meas."¹²⁴ The first-person possessive adjectives make these sins a personal problem. In the Middle English translation of the same verse, these are no longer *my* sins, but *ours*: "Fram our sinnes, lord, turn þi face,/ Ous to amenden ʒeue ous grace,/ & al our sinnes þou do oway."¹²⁵ Yet at the same time, *Dauid þe King* does not discount the need for personal responsibility in dealing with sin. The following two verses of the Middle English translation remain true to the Latin text and retain the first person singular:

Quoniam inquitatem meam &c
 Lord, mi wickednisse y knowe wel,
 Fram ende to ende eueridel,
 & euer is mi sinne oʒaines me;
 Lord, on me haue pite.¹²⁶

Domine, labia mea aperies &c

¹²² Auchinleck MS, ff. 280r-v.

¹²³ Douay-Rheims Bible, Psalm 50:2. From: <http://www.drbo.org/chapter/21050.htm>. (Accessed: 19 April, 2010).

¹²⁴ Latin Vulgate Bible, Psalm 50. From: <http://www.drbo.org/lvb/chapter/21050.htm>. (Accessed 19 April, 2010). *Turn away your face from my sins and all my iniquities.*

¹²⁵ Auchinleck MS, f. 280v, ll. 44-5.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 280r, ll. 14-8.

Lord, mi lippes þou vndo.
 Graunt me, lord, þat it be so.
 Wiþ praiers ichil honour þe,
 Þi godhed & ek þi dignete.¹²⁷

The community of sinners strive together to gain forgiveness and grace, but these two verses also remind the reader that community sin included personal sin, and, without exception, God found all guilty by their individual faults. This poem illustrates the dual goals of devotion, that is, one's personal salvation and the redemption of the community which consist of the body of believers, the Church.

SIGHT AND DEVOTION

By the time the Auchinleck Manuscript was compiled, the laity actively engaged in various types of religious devotion. In much of their practice of faith, the laity participated by sight and imagined sight. They saw the mass, during which they witnessed the transformation of the bread and wine to the real body and blood of Christ. By stimulating their imagination with physical and visual material, the laity also encountered Christ through meditation. With the establishment of the doctrine of transubstantiation, the elevation of the host became a focal point in the mass, a time when man could see God.¹²⁸ Even though the laity could only be involved by watching the service, they did so enthusiastically. Religious authorities expressed their annoyance and concern about the laity leaving the sermons in favor of running around to different churches in order to witness as many elevations as possible.¹²⁹ Some, as did one Lincolnshire layman in the 1520's, claimed to see the Christ child in the center of the

¹²⁷ Auchinleck MS., f. 280v, ll. 68-72.

¹²⁸ Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, 137.

¹²⁹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 98-9.

bread whenever they witnessed the elevation.¹³⁰ The fourteenth-century church also made efforts to intensify the sensory load of the mass. To increase “the beauty of the holiness,” churches were rebuilt and redecorated and the liturgy augmented to become more elaborate. Candles were lit and incense burned as the choir’s haunting music echoed throughout the cathedral. The music surged forward at the elevation to further heighten the climax of the mass, and stir the emotions of the audience.¹³¹ The laity also used ordinary objects and situations to stimulate their imagination and plunge themselves into a heightened emotional and spiritual state. With the help of images and texts to guide their imagination, mystics emotionally and physically shared in Christ’s Passion through their meditation practices. Many texts were available to aid the pious in their personal devotions. For example, the *arma Christi* rolls encouraged the reader to meditate on Christ’s Passion through seeing the drawings of the instruments of torture and Christ’s sufferings.

Another text, *The Book of Holy Medicines* demonstrates how the senses were used, or rather, imagined to be used, in meditation practices.¹³² Henry of Lancaster (ca. 1310-61), the highest-ranking English aristocrat at the time, wrote this devotional treatise on his sins and their remedies. In the first part, he describes his sins as seven great wounds or sores in his sensory organs, limbs, and heart. The second part includes the remedies, which are imagined to be just as physical as the descriptions of his sins. He first asks for the milk of the Virgin for strength and her tears for cleansing. His wounds are then ready for the ointment, Christ’s blood. Each sin-caused wound needs healing from a corresponding wound on Christ’s body: his mouth by the blood of Christ’s mouth, and the wounds on his ears by the blood that ran from Jesus’ crowned head to ears. Henry’s

¹³⁰ Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, 137-8.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹³² Henry of Lancaster, *The Book of Holy Medicines (Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines)*, trans. M. Teresa Tavormina, in *Cultures of Piety: Medieval English Devotional Literature in Translation*, ed. Anne Clark Bartlett and Thomas H. Bestul (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 19-40.

wounds are then dressed by the Virgin Mary's bandages in order to prevent a recurrence of those sins.¹³³ He imagines his sins on his body as gaping, festering wounds of his soul. His healing incorporates the senses of taste and touch as he drinks the Virgin's milk and Christ's blood pours into his mouth, ears, and other wounded body parts.

Margery Kempe provides yet another example of affective lay piety. During a mass on Palm Sunday, Margery Kempe prays for "the ful syght of hym in heavyn," unsatisfied with the limited sight of Christ in the form of the crucifix. While meditating, she sees God with "hir gostly eye" and steps into the scene of the Crucifixion, when Christ speaks to John and the Virgin Mary just before His death on the cross.¹³⁴ Although Margery's devotional practice is an extreme example, her religious experience illustrates how the use of senses and imagined sight can stimulate her imagination into an extraordinary encounter with God.

The Auchinleck Manuscript's unique version of *The Clerk* who would see the Virgin demonstrates the use of sight in devotion.¹³⁵ An angel, sent by the Virgin Mary, approaches the clerk to inform him that he could see the Virgin Mary if he is willing to lose his eyesight afterwards as penance. The clerk agrees after he decides to secretly close one eye and retain a part of his sight. The next day, the Virgin Mary comes down from heaven and the clerk looks at her "bodi & face, brest & swire [neck]"¹³⁶ with just one eye open. Regretting his trickery, he petitions the Virgin to come back so that he may see her again and accept his penance. She grants his prayers. He sees her again and becomes blind, and performs penance for the remainder of his life as a blind beggar. At

¹³³ Henry of Lancaster, *The Book of Holy Medicines*, 19-24.

¹³⁴ Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry A. Windeatt. (Essex, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), ch. 78, 79.

¹³⁵ Auchinleck MS, ff. ?37rb or 37va stub-38vb.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 38r, l. 76.

the story's end, the clerk prays for himself and other Christians, asking the Virgin Mary to listen to their prayers and reserve a place for them in heaven.

The clerk has a full physical experience of the Virgin Mary in which he sees, hears, and smells her. When the Virgin Mary comes down,

Wiþ him þer com a gret odor;
 Nas neure no smel half so swete.
 So swete a smal nas neuer non,
 Of rose no of no spicerie,
 As com into þat leueli won
 Before þat leueliche compeynie.
 Wiþ angel song & miri play
 Our leuedi adoun sche liȝt
 Into þe chaumber þer he lay.¹³⁷

As the Virgin Mary descends from heaven with singing angels, wonderful scents and celestial music fills the clerk's chamber, overwhelming his senses. The clerk sees the Virgin and angels, smells her sweeter-than-rose fragrance, and hears the glorious music of the angels. With this more fantastical version of an elaborate fourteenth-century mass, the clerk has a complete sensual and face-to-face encounter with the holy. The reader also views this vision of the Virgin Mary through the detailed descriptions of her body, face, beauty, and the whiteness of her skin. Within this fantasy world, the clerk takes part in a complete, physical manifestation of an encounter with the Virgin while the reader must remain outside of it and use his 'mind's eye' to imagine the same.

The clerk has an encounter with the holy that inundates all of his senses, which results in the loss of one of them, namely sight. In agreeing to see the Virgin, the clerk chooses to do penance by losing his eyesight, as the angels say: "[If þou] wilt hir bodi sen,/ [If sen] þou wilt þat leuedi briȝt,/ [Pis p]enaunce þou most chesen:/ [Þou m]iȝt be

¹³⁷ Auchinleck MS, ll. 51-9. *With her came a great scent of which there is nothing in the world that smells half as sweet. Its sweetness surpasses that of roses and any spices. And as that lady came to sight she was accompanied by angels' songs and mirthful joy and she came down into the chamber where he (the clerk) lay.*

siker, þine eizesigt/ [Oþer þ]i liif þou schalt forlesen."¹³⁸ As a result of his blindness, he becomes a penitential beggar, visible to others in the community. The clerk plays the same role as the Virgin when he becomes a blind beggar in the community, which also takes part in a communion with the holy by witnessing his penance. Though chance and misfortune are typical causes of blindness and poverty, in this story, God causes the clerk's blindness and poverty to be a form of penance. The ordinary problems of the human condition transform into a religious experience, as the pitiable sights become pious ones and the poor on earth become the rich in heaven. The clerk's blindness and begging recall the figure of Francis of Assisi and the mendicants. When Francis took vows of poverty and preaching, he changed the community's encounter with the poor from ordinary to holy. In encountering the poor, especially the mendicants, the members of the community could meet Christ on earth.

The Auchinleck Manuscript includes another story, *How Our Lady's Sauter was First Found*, that inextricably binds together sight and devotion.¹³⁹ In this story, a monk goes into the chapel every day and night, greeting the statue of the Virgin Mary each time he passes by it before proceeding to meditate on Christ's Passion. One day, a half-naked Virgin Mary in torn and ragged clothing appears before him in the chapel. She petitions the monk to say fifty Ave Maria's each day so that his prayers can clothe her. He obeys and teaches others to also pray to the Virgin for her sake. His prayers prove effective, for at their next encounter, the Virgin comes fully clothed in radiantly white robes. Before his vision of the Virgin Mary, the monk's devotion centered upon thinking of Christ's five bodily wounds. Such thinking stood as a common meditation exercise for the laity by this time.¹⁴⁰ However, in this fantasy world, the monk experiences a physical manifestation of his mental efforts to see when the Virgin appears before him.

¹³⁸ Auchinleck MS, f. 37v, ll. 16-20. *If you wish to see her body, if you want to see that lady bright, you must choose this penance, to become handicapped and lose your eyesight and thus your life (livelihood).*

¹³⁹ Ibid., ff. 259r-260v.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., f. 259v, l. 76.

The reader also takes part in the monk's vision, though this encounter remains limited to the imagination. Yet by linking the recitation of the Ave's to imagining these prayers as clothes for the half-naked Virgin, this poem follows the trend of devotional aids that encourage the pious to contemplate the corporeality of Christ and the physicality of his sufferings.

The Auchinleck *On the Seven Deadly Sins* contains a long narrative of the Passion that helps the reader imagine Christ's tortured and displayed body.¹⁴¹ The Paternoster, Creed, and Ave follow the list of the capital sins, and the poem concludes with the story of Christ's Passion.¹⁴² Before launching into the story, the narrator advises its readers to "holdeȝ in minde" Christ's suffering.¹⁴³ The word *holdeȝ* suggests that the reader was to continually keep in their minds the image of Christ's suffering and see his white body transform into bruised, bloody and mangled flesh. This poem juxtaposes the prayers such as the Paternoster and the Ave with the Passion narrative, as if to insist on the necessity of imagining Christ's suffering while reading and reciting these prayers. The poem is to be used holistically, actively "seeing" Christ as a part of prayer and worship.

The story of Christ's Passion begins with Judas' betrayal of Christ at the Mount of Olives and ends with His painful death on the cross. His pain intensifies at each new scene of His torture. He is first blind-folded, beaten, and spat upon, then chained to a pillar and scourged with whips. He is then taken to Golgotha where His hands and feet are nailed to the cross, then crowned with sharp thorns, finally bearing the sins of the world on the cross until he died. The narrator interjects between different scenes of the Passion with an assurance that Christ suffered much more than previously recounted. The narrator's repeated insistence that Christ suffered even more makes His Passion seem to be an ever-ascending cycle of pain. One torture scene after another

¹⁴¹ Auchinleck MS, ff. 70r-72r.

¹⁴² Ibid., f. 71r, ll. 155-61.

¹⁴³ Ibid., l. 162.

exponentially increases Christ's suffering until he breathes His last. The Roman soldiers beat the blindfolded Christ in the first scene, which ends with the narrator interjecting that Christ "þolede [suffered] mochele more."¹⁴⁴ The next state of the Passion follows, and Christ is spat on and beaten again. After His bloody scourging, the narrator prefaces His nailing to the cross with, "Wel more þolede swete Ihesus."¹⁴⁵ The reader meditates on Christ's suffering through the image of His mutilated body, which is no longer white or whole. Blood slowly trickles out of His head, hands, and feet until a soldier pierces His side, causing His body to become a gushing fountain of blood and water.

The devotional use of the Passion narrative in the Auchinleck is only one of many devotional tracts on the bodily sufferings of Christ. A fourteenth-century Middle English translation of the thirteenth-century Latin *Meditationes vitae Christi*, or *The Privy of the Passion*, also recounts the story of Christ on the cross. In this text, the narrator urges his readers to meditate on Christ's life in order to train their soul to reject the world for Christ's love. He begins the devotional story by informing readers that he has elaborated upon the Passion in order to increase its impact on their meditation:

You must not believe that all things said and done by Him on which we may meditate are known to us in writing. For the sake of greater impressiveness, I shall tell them to you as they occurred or as they might have occurred according to the devout belief of the imagination and the varying interpretation of the mind.¹⁴⁶

The narrator also emphasizes the necessity of seeing with one's mind, to "opyne whyde the Inere eghe of his soul" and to "make hym-selfe present in his thoghte as if he saw

¹⁴⁴ Auchinleck MS, l. 176.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., l. 208.

¹⁴⁶ *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 5, as cited in *The Privy of the Passion*, trans. Denise N. Baker, in *Cultures of Piety*.

fully with his bodyly eghe."¹⁴⁷ This visualization was to not be done "schortly & passandly, bot lufandly, besely, habundandly, & lastandly; not sturdandly, ne with dullnes & havines of sperit."¹⁴⁸ The graphically-detailed torture scene displays Christ's body and the piling upon of tortures intensifies the reader's emotions for he is "betyne and betyne agayne, blester appone blester, and wonde appone wonde." The pale, "floure of all flesche" is scourged to such an extent that blood pours out of his entire body.¹⁴⁹

Similarly, *The Fifteen Oes* prompts affective piety in readers through its description of Christ's physical agony.¹⁵⁰ This meditative text divides Christ's Passion into fifteen "O's" that Christ was said to have uttered. Each section begins with an "O," followed by a scene of the Passion with an accompanied prayer, and ends with the phrase, "Pater noster. Ave maria." Just as in the Auchinleck's *On the Seven Deadly Sins*, the Paternoster and the Ave accompany the Passion narrative, connecting the devotional exercise of imagining Christ's sufferings with that of reciting prayers. Like the *Holy Book of Medicines*, *The Fifteen Oes* makes explicit the correspondence between the bodily sufferings of Christ and the wounds of the reader's soul. For example, the seventh "O" describes Christ's thirst as a thirst for the "helthe of mannys soule," and includes a prayer for Jesus to "take hede to my desire that it maye be parfight in all good werkes and quenhe in me the thirste of all fleshly love and lust."¹⁵¹ He also sees the wounds of Christ and asks: "Wrtye al thy woundes in myn herte wyth thy precyous blode that I may bothe rede in theym they drede and they love."¹⁵² These devotional texts reveal that seeing, whether physically or in the mind, was not a passive act but an

¹⁴⁷ *The Privity of the Passion*, ed. Denise N. Baker, in *Cultures of Piety*, 194.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁵⁰ *The Fifteen Oes*, ed. Rebecca Krug, in *Cultures of Piety*, 212-6.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 215.

extremely active engagement that allowed pious individuals to participate in Christ's Passion by projecting His sufferings on themselves.

Devotional images of Christ also removed the viewer from their ordinary surroundings to place them at the foot of the cross and be drenched in His blood. One fifteenth-century Flemish indulgence document included a wood-block image of Christ on the cross shedding a downpour of blood. This shower of blood seems to reach out from the page to cover the viewer, as if the very act of viewing this image was an act of devotion that cleansed the sins of the viewer.¹⁵³ Though the connection between Christ's wounds and the viewer's is not directly stated as in devotional texts, the intensity of the image was sure to have evoked both disgust and piety of the viewer. Sight was a communion. Through sight, the devotee assimilated themselves to the object of their devotion, Christ, and joined with Him in His bodily sufferings.¹⁵⁴

CONCLUSION

The Auchinleck Manuscript's stories indicate concerns and preoccupations representative of fourteenth-century lay piety. The unique versions of *Seynt Mergrete* and *Seynt Katerine* address the lay reader, as the two saints are depicted as laypersons in their clinging on to their simple faith based on the Apostle's Creed. They become examples for the laity to read and memorize basic tenets of Christianity. These two saints' lives and *The King of Tars* hint at anxieties over popular heresies that began in the twelfth century and continued well long afterwards, culminating in the Protestant Revolution. The story Sultan of Damas' physically-manifested conversion seems to appease the desire for visual confirmation of an invisible, spiritual state of belief, while the Princess' fake conversion to Islam points out the instability of visible

¹⁵³ Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, 223. See Appendix II, Fig. 3.

¹⁵⁴ Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 136.

proof in real life for heretics and false converts, who could outwardly conform to Christianity with ease. Outward demonstrations of spiritual states also occur in the confessions and penances in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Amis and Amiloun*. These stories reveal that individual spiritual devotion remained within and relied upon a community that was preoccupied with sin and death. The necessary visibility of the devotions of confession and penance resulted from the laity's obsession with seeing or imagined seeing that allowed them to experience Christ's Passion and other holy encounters. The shorter poems in the Auchinleck also demonstrate the importance of using the senses, especially sight, and the imagination in meditation, and correspond with contemporary works on devotion. Although so many stories like the saints' lives seem the same, seemingly insignificant and small variations point to a uniqueness in reception, redistribution, and remaking of these stories to reflect contemporary concerns.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thesis on the Auchinleck Manuscript began with an exploration about the fantasy of penance in the stories in the Auchinleck and in other religious works. This later culminated into a larger project on medieval lay religious culture indicated by various devotional poems, prayers, hagiographical legends romances in the Auchinleck and in other manuscripts from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. I wholeheartedly thank Professor Geoffrey Koziol for his guidance throughout the research and writing process, especially in his willingness and thoroughness in reading and editing multiple drafts of my thesis. I also thank Professor Jennifer Miller for her counsel and both intellectual and emotional support.

APPENDIX

Appendix I: Contents of the Auchinleck Manuscript

The Legend of Pope Gregory (ff.1r-6v)

f.6Ar / f.6Av (thin stub)

The King of Tars (ff.7ra-13vb)

The Life of Adam and Eve (E ff.1ra-2vb; ff.14ra-16rb)

Seynt Mergrete (ff.16rb-21ra)

Seynt Katerine (ff.21ra-24vb)

St Patrick's Purgatory (ff.25ra-31vb)

þe Desputisoun Bitven þe Bodi and þe Soule (ff.31vb-35ra stub)

The Harrowing of Hell (ff.?35rb-?37rb or 37va stub)

The Clerk who would see the Virgin (ff.?37rb or 37va stub-38vb)

Speculum Gy de Warewyke (ff.39ra-?48rb stub)

Amis and Amiloun (ff.?48rb stub-?61va stub)

The Life of St Mary Magdalene (ff.?61Ava stub-65vb)

The Nativity and Early Life of Mary (ff.65vb-69va)

On the Seven Deadly Sins (ff.70ra-72ra)

The Paternoster (ff.72ra-?72rb or ?72va stub)

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin (?72rb or ?72va stub-78ra)

Sir Degare (ff.78rb-?84rb stub)

The Seven Sages of Rome (ff.?84rb stub-99vb)

Gathering missing (c1400 lines of text)

Floris and Blanche flour (ff.100ra-104vb)

The Sayings of the Four Philosophers (ff.105ra-105rb)

The Battle Abbey Roll (ff.105v-107r)

f.107Ar / f.107Av (thin stub)

Guy of Warwick (couplets) (ff.108ra-146vb)

Guy of Warwick (stanzas) (ff.145vb-167rb)

Reinbroun (ff.167rb-175vb)

leaf missing.

Sir Beues of Hamtoun (ff.176ra-201ra)

Of Arthour & of Merlin (ff.201rb-256vb)

þe Wenche þat Loved þe King (ff.256vb-256A thin stub)

A Peniworþ of Witt (ff.256A stub-259rb)

How Our Lady's Sauter was First Found (ff.259rb-260vb)

Lay le Freine (ff.261ra-262A thin stub)

Roland and Vernagu (ff.?262va stub-267vb)

Otuel a Knight (ff.268ra-277vb)

Many leaves lost, but some recovered as fragments.

Kyng Alisaunder (L f.1ra-vb; S A.15 f.1ra-2vb; L f.2ra-vb; ff.278-9)

The Thrush and the Nightingale (ff.279va-vb)

The Sayings of St Bernard (f.280ra)

Dauid þe King (ff.280rb-280vb)

Sir Tristrem (ff.281ra-299A thin stub)

Sir Orfeo (ff.299A stub-303ra)

The Four Foes of Mankind (f.303rb-303vb)

The Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle (ff.304ra-317rb)

Horn Childe & Maiden Rimmild (ff.317va-323vb)

leaf missing.

Alphabetical Praise of Women (ff.324ra-325vb)

King Richard (f.326; E f.3ra-vb; S R.4 f.1ra-2vb; E f.4ra-vb; f.327)

Many leaves lost.

þe Simonie (ff.328r-334v)

Appendix II: Images

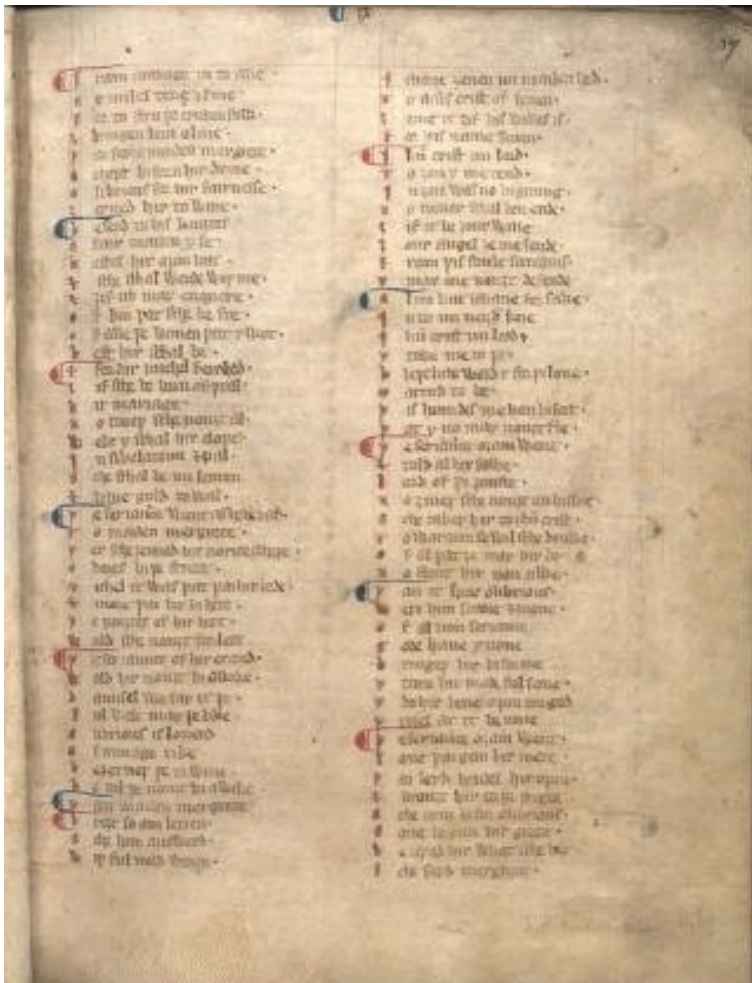


Figure 1. A folio from the Auchinleck Manuscript. Though there are variations, most of the folios in the manuscript are organized in this manner. (f. 17r, *Seynt Mergrete*)



Figure 2. The miniature in *The King of Tars*. (Auchinleck MS, f.7r)

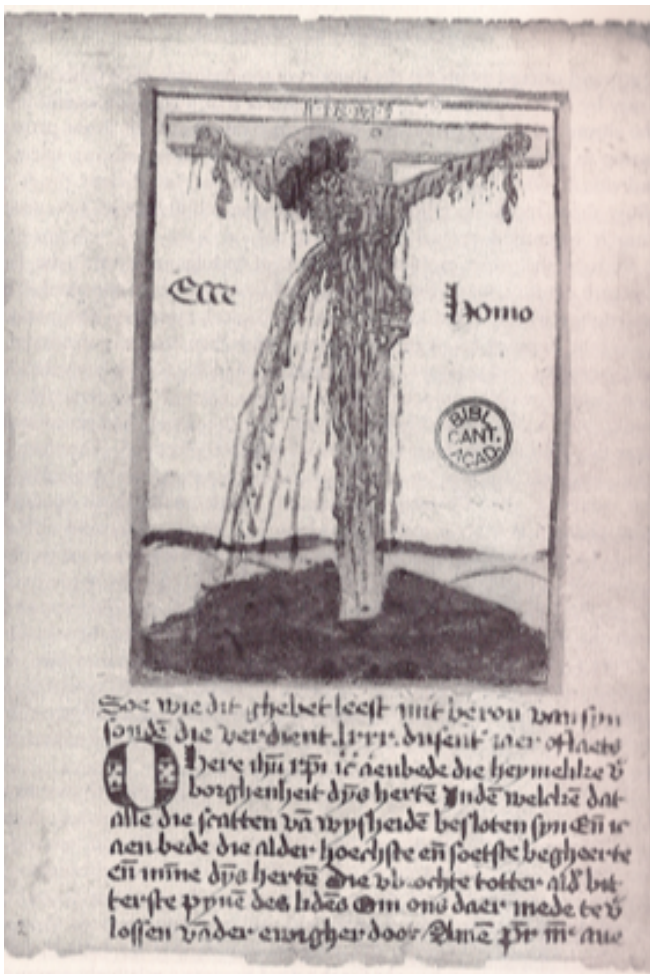


Figure 3. A wood-cut block depiction of Christ on the cross. (Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, 223)

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