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Unmasking a Medieval Pseudo-Saint: The Peculiar Story of Sibylla of Marsal in Richer's *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*

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UNMASKING A MEDIEVAL PSEUDO-SAINT:
THE PECULIAR STORY OF SIBYLLA OF MARSAL IN RICHER'S
GESTA SENONIENSIS ECCLESIAE

A Thesis Presented

by

Courtney A. Smith

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Abstract

This thesis examines the story of a thirteenth-century woman from the diocese of Metz, named Sibylla of Marsal, as the contemporary monk and chronicler Richer of Senones recounts it in his *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*. According to Richer, Sibylla feigned sanctity using various props—including a demon costume that she wore to terrify villagers—and was locally venerated as a holy woman before authorities discovered her fraudulence. This thesis offers the first full-length study of Sibylla and is the first study of this fascinating case to focus on Richer's perspective. After establishing the single extant thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*—Paris, BnF ms. lat. 10016—as the most reliable witness to Richer's original text, this study analyzes Richer's agenda to situate Sibylla within his apocalyptic worldview and his desire to denigrate the emerging mendicant orders. Finally, Sibylla's story is placed within the broader context of thirteenth-century women's religion; because Sibylla exhibited accepted behaviors associated with female sanctity and yet was not ultimately considered a saint by her contemporaries, her story provides insight into the social construction of sainthood in the High Middle Ages. Several appendices edit and translate the crucial medieval sources for the thesis.

Table of Contents

Introduction: The Peculiar Story of Sibylla of Marsal	1
Chapter One: Sources and Historiography	8
Manuscripts and Editions.....	9
Historiography	16
Chapter Two: Richer’s Agenda	24
The Prologue.....	24
Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor and Forerunner of the Antichrist	29
Hildegard of Bingen and Antimendicant Apocalypticism.....	32
The Mendicants.....	35
Richer and Sibylla.....	44
The Mongols and the End of the World.....	47
Conclusion	51
Chapter Three: Sibylla, Beguine of Marsal	53
The Beguine Movement in High Medieval Europe.....	54
Religious Groups in Marsal and Metz	57
<i>Holy Feast and Holy Fast</i>	62
Sibylla’s Celestial Raptures	65
Proof and Discernment	67
Sibylla and Sainthood	72
Conclusion	74
Conclusion	76
Bibliography	80
Appendix A: De Sibilla beguine de Marsal et actibus eius	85
Appendix B: On Sibylla, beguine of Marsal, and her acts	92
Appendix C: Extraits des mémoires d’Errard	99

Introduction

The Peculiar Story of Sibylla of Marsal

Around the year 1240,¹ a woman named Sibylla adopted the religious lifestyle of a group of beguines in Marsal, within the diocese of Metz. She first demonstrated her exceptional dedication to this religious life by arriving early to church for Matins and Masses, and thus began attracting attention in her community; she was even praised by a prominent man in the town named Louis. A local matron, enthusiastic about Sibylla's devotion, granted her a private room within her home. Sibylla flourished there, and her religious experience intensified. She received visits from angels whose delightful aromas wafted through the whole room, and she frequently spent entire days lying in bed as her spirit was enrapt in heaven. When her spirit returned to her body in the middle of the night, she would utter a loud cry, waking her hostess, and she refused earthly food and drink, as she claimed that she was nourished by heavenly feasts. She was even ceaselessly tormented by a demon who viewed her profound piety as a threat.

As Sibylla's reputation as a holy woman spread, Dominican and Franciscan friars came to observe her, wanting to determine whether her miraculous behaviors were genuine, and when they perceived no deceit, they began to preach about her publicly. Hordes of

¹ Nancy Caciola places these events in 1240, while Dyan Elliott estimates the story to have occurred concurrently with the inquisitorial career of Robert le Bougre and therefore between 1233 and 1239. Because Richer names the bishop at the time as Jacques of Lorraine, who assumed the position in 1239, this story must have taken place no earlier than that date. See Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 87-98; Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 194-197.

people, including counts, knights, clerics, and both men and women, all flocked to see her, but her hostess allowed none to enter her room, as Sibylla was spiritually enrapt for the next three days. The bishop of Metz himself, Jacques of Lorraine (r. 1239-60), even came to her, wanting to test her sanctity as well.² Skeptical of her actions within the private room, the bishop had her transferred to another house, where she could be more closely observed. Sibylla stayed there, neither eating nor drinking, for three days and three nights, during which time she complained that the demon was harassing her more than usual and that he would destroy her body entirely if she remained in that place. The demon's violence became especially visible to Sibylla's guardians when they awoke to find that he had scattered feathers around the house. In order to alleviate this increased torment, Sibylla was permitted to return to the home of her previous hostess, having convinced the bishop of her sanctity and thus passed his test.

Although visitors were unable to witness Sibylla's spiritual raptures while she remained enclosed in her private room, her religious experience was known to the broader community as residents reported frightening encounters with a hairy demon who lurked in the streets and cursed her piety. The demon would speak in a hoarse voice to whomever he met, claiming that he hated Sibylla and planned to mutilate her. On one notable occasion, the demon appeared immediately after the death of a particularly detested villager, lamenting that Sibylla had stolen this "friend" from him with her prayers. The demon cried that he had hoped to lure his friend to "a very spectacular and delightful meadow" (*pratum valde speciosum et delectabile*), where he kept many reptiles as pets among sulfurous dew and flames. Fretting that Sibylla's piety was too strong to overcome and dreading his

² On Bishop Jacques of Lorraine, see Monique Arveiler-Ferry, ed., *Catalogue des actes de Jacques de Lorraine: Évêque de Metz (1239-1260)* (Metz: Éditions de Lorraine, 1957).

master Satan's reaction to this failure, the demon warned the bishop and other listeners to stay away from his meadow.

Following this incident, the bishop and the Dominicans were granted access to Sibylla's room and saw that she was in blissful rapture. They found her lying still on a decorated bed, wearing delicate, angelic garments, and hardly breathing. The hostess informed them that Sibylla had often confided in her that the angels had adorned her bed with heavenly ornaments. The men thus became fully convinced of Sibylla's holiness, and the bishop even began to consider having a church built in which he could display her, hoping that pilgrims would travel to witness her miraculous behavior.

On a particular day, Sibylla's visitors, who were not allowed to enter her bedroom, huddled outside the door of the room and listened to two arguing voices, ostensibly those of an angel and a demon. A Dominican friar, wanting to hear the fight more closely, pressed his ear to the wall, and in doing so, found a small hole in the wood. Peering in, he discovered that the voices were not being made by an angel and a demon, but by Sibylla herself as she calmly made her bed. Alarmed, he notified the bishop and together they broke down the door and seized her. Upon searching the bedroom, they found hidden food, on which Sibylla had nourished herself while pretending to fast, as well as fragrant items used to simulate angelic aromas; it was said that a certain priest, whom Sibylla knew well, had stealthily crept into her room at night to provide these things. Even more shocking was the discovery of a tunic made to look like a hairy demon costume, which Sibylla had worn to terrify the villagers.

The realization of Sibylla's fraud created an outrage in Marsal. Men and women who were ashamed to have been deceived by this woman debated by which method she should be put to death, proposing that she should be burned, drowned, or buried alive. The

scandal was especially damaging to the local beguines, who gathered outside of their homes crying and wailing out of shame. The embarrassed bishop, compelled to execute her by his rage but ultimately heeding more reasoned advice, finally imprisoned her, allowing her only a small window and a diet of bread and water. Sibylla then died in prison after just a short period of incarceration.

This, at least, is Sibylla's story as related by the contemporary chronicler Richer of Senones. The preservation of Richer's account of Sibylla through manuscript transmission and modern scholarly interpretations is the subject of the first chapter of this thesis, "Sources and Historiography." Richer himself was a Benedictine monk from the area surrounding the Vosges and a brief chapter in his mid-thirteenth-century chronicle, the *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae* (Deeds of the Church of Senones), offers the only contemporary report of Sibylla. Richer's *Gesta* is today preserved in ten manuscripts, but by far the most authentic source of Richer's text is Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France ms. lat. 10016, the sole thirteenth-century copy and the only extant manuscript produced before the sixteenth century. The subsequent historiographical discussion demonstrates that while several scholars have utilized Richer's story of Sibylla to comment on broader trends in medieval religious culture or have focused on a single aspect of the story, none have conducted a comprehensive examination of Sibylla's case in its entirety; this thesis presents the first full-length study of this fascinating case.

This thesis is also the only investigation of Sibylla's story to focus on Richer's perspective. Chapter Two, "Richer's Agenda," explores how Richer crafted his narrative to comment negatively not only on Sibylla herself but also on the mendicants and more broadly on the world around him. An analysis of the prologue to the *Gesta* demonstrates that Richer himself believed that the end times had befallen his generation, and that his

apocalyptic worldview informed his composition of the *Gesta*. Examination of the structure of the fourth book of the *Gesta*—in which Richer includes his chapter on Sibylla—suggests that Richer had perceived events in his recent past to be indicators of the apocalypse, and that he situated Sibylla among this program of apocalyptic events.

In particular, Book Four of the *Gesta* includes numerous chapters on Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, whom thirteenth-century Joachites had already determined to be the Antichrist, and whom Richer himself—writing after Frederick’s death—portrays as a harbinger of evil. The final chapter on Frederick is followed by a chapter on Hildegard of Bingen, focusing on the prophetess’s predictions of the forthcoming apocalypse. Specifically, Richer places the Dominicans and Franciscans in Hildegard’s prophecies as forerunners of the apocalypse, and uses this and successive chapters to reveal his antimendicant feelings. Richer continues to express these antimendicant sentiments throughout the following three chapters, tracing the formations of the Dominican and Franciscan orders and (what Richer believes to be) their eventual corruption, and the career of the infamous Dominican inquisitor Robert le Bougre. Richer also uses his chapter on Sibylla to depict the mendicants as impious due to their inability to detect Sibylla’s fraudulence, and Sibylla’s association with the mendicants suggests that she too was a forerunner of the apocalypse according to Richer. Perhaps most tellingly, Sibylla’s chapter immediately precedes an account of the Mongol invasion of Hungary, which contemporaries certainly perceived as an apocalyptic catastrophe, and Sibylla’s proximity to this event in the *Gesta* indicates that Richer viewed her as a pseudo-prophet of the apocalypse.

Finally, Chapter Three, “Sibylla, Beguine of Marsal,” places Sibylla within the broader contexts of high medieval female sanctity and the religious culture of thirteenth-

century Marsal and Metz. The fact that Sibylla displayed many behaviors that were expected of female saints and yet was not ultimately regarded as a holy woman by contemporaries reveals that living sainthood could be temporary and was dependent on the community's interpretations of these behaviors. Specifically, Sibylla exhibited extreme fasting, Eucharistic devotion, celestial raptures, and prophetic capabilities. These attributes of female sanctity gained prominence during the beguine movement, which emerged in Liège in the early thirteenth century when laywomen began gathering to pursue uncloistered religious lives together. While no other contemporary sources exist for the group of beguines in Marsal, Sibylla's story indicates that the beguine movement had extended into Marsal by about 1240.

Within the context of the beguine movement, Sibylla's vivid manifestations of piety answered an emerging thirteenth-century need for proof of sanctity, or the discernment of spirits. Although the local religious authorities sought to test Sibylla's piety, she initially succeeded in convincing them of her sanctity and satisfactorily fulfilled their expectations for the behavior of a holy woman. This early success meant that Sibylla was able to enjoy the benefits of a saintly status, and the fact that she held this status as a holy woman only temporarily before she was exposed as a fraud and imprisoned indicates that medieval sainthood was, to a certain extent, socially constructed.

A conclusion and several appendices follow Chapter Three. Appendix A, "De Sibilla beguine de Marsal et actibus eius," includes a Latin transcription of Sibylla's chapter in the *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae* based on BnF ms. lat. 10016, and Appendix B, "On Sibylla, beguine of Marsal, and her acts," provides an original English translation. Appendix C, "Extrait des mémoires d'Errard," includes an extract of a highly dubious French source (see below on Manuscripts and Editions) claiming to be the notes of Michel

Errard—allegedly the valet of Duke Thibaut I of Lorraine—reprinted from “Extrait des mémoires d’Errard, valet de chambre du Duc Thiébaud I^{er} de Lorraine (1213)” in *Recueil de documents sur l’histoire de Lorraine* (1868).

Chapter One

Sources and Historiography

Sibylla's story was initially documented by Benedictine monk and chronicler Richer of Senones in his *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*. Dominique Dantand's analysis of Richer's use of the French language and the cultural and geographic references in his writing, shows that he likely originated from the valley of Lièpvre in the region of Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines and almost certainly belonged to the nobility.¹ Although a native of the Holy Roman Empire and having knowledge of the Teutonic language, Richer was more French than German in terms of culture and outlook, and, according to Dantand, was particularly devoted to Lorraine.²

Richer was born around 1190 and later studied at Strasbourg, where he became acquainted with writings by Hildegard of Bingen.³ Sometime before 1217, he entered the Benedictine monastery of Senones, located in the Vosges approximately 110 km (roughly 70 miles) southeast from Metz, under abbot Henri. There, Richer was prone to criticizing the abbots of Senones, especially Baudoin.⁴ Probably by 1228 he became prior of

¹ Dominique Dantand, "La Chronique de Richer, moine à Senones au XIIIème siècle," in *Histoire des Terres de Salm*, edited by Albert Ronsin (Saint-Dié-des-Vosges: Société Philomatique Vosgienne, 1994), 64; Dominique Dantand, "Chronique de la vie ordinaire d'une abbaye à partir du manuscrit de la Chronique de Richer de Senones," *La croix monastique des Vosges* 1 (2010): 75.

² Georg Waitz, introduction to *Richeri Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum*, 25 (Munich: MGH, 1880): 251; Dantand, "La Chronique de Richer," 64; Dantand, "Chronique de la vie," 75.

³ Waitz, introduction to *Richeri Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, 251; Dantand, "La Chronique de Richer," 64; Dantand, "Chronique de la vie," 75-76.

⁴ Dantand, "La Chronique de Richer," 64-65; Dantand, "Chronique de la vie," 76.

Deneuvre, and was then prior of Moniet before 1240.⁵ He travelled extensively across Lorraine, Alsace, and Metz. In 1218, while a monk at Senones, he was sent by abbot Henri to Wurzburg to see duke Thibaut of Lorraine, who was being held prisoner at the court of emperor Frederick II.⁶ Richer also went to Paris and visited the abbey of Saint-Denis in 1223.⁷

In addition to acting as an ambassador, Richer may have served as a librarian or scribe at Senones. At Deneuvre, Richer also developed his skills as an architect and builder, and there he constructed the Sainte-Catherine chapel.⁸ He was also an accomplished sculptor, having decorated the tombs of Henri de Salm and his wife Judith de Lorraine.⁹ And most importantly for this study, Richer was a chronicler. Richer's *Gesta* covers events as late as 1264 in Book Five. However, according to Richer's nineteenth-century editor Georg Waitz, the majority of the book seems to have been written earlier than that, but not before 1255.¹⁰ Richer most likely died in 1267.¹¹

Manuscripts and Editions

The oldest surviving manuscript of the *Gesta* was created in Richer's lifetime, at his home monastery of Senones. It is unclear whether or not the manuscript is written in

⁵ Dantand, "La Chronique de Richer," 65; Dantand, "Chronique de la vie," 77.

⁶ Waitz, introduction to *Richeri Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, 251; Dantand, "La Chronique de Richer," 65-66; Dantand, "Chronique de la vie," 77.

⁷ Waitz, introduction to *Richeri Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, 251; Dantand, "La Chronique de Richer," 65; Dantand, "Chronique de la vie," 77.

⁸ Dantand, "La Chronique de Richer," 65; Dantand, "Chronique de la vie," 77.

⁹ Waitz, introduction to *Richeri Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, 251; Dantand, "La Chronique de Richer," 66; Dantand, "Chronique de la vie," 77.

¹⁰ Waitz, introduction to *Richeri Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, 251.

¹¹ Waitz, introduction to *Richeri Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, 251; Dantand, "Chronique de la vie," 76.

Richer's own hand, but contemporary corrections indicate that Richer was at least overseeing the manuscript's creation and revision. This manuscript is today Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. lat. 10016. This is not only the sole thirteenth-century manuscript of the work, but the only surviving manuscript copied before the sixteenth century. It is comprised of 111 folios with a later, eighteenth-century calfskin cover. Latin 10016 measures 300 x 205 mm (11.81 x 8.07 in) and has been digitized by Gallica, the BnF digital library, having become available online on February 18, 2018. Although the manuscript as a whole is more complex, the section "On Sibylla, beguine of Marsal, and her acts" (*De Sibilla beguine de Marsal et actibus eius*), found within the nineteenth chapter of Book Four on fols. 62r-65r, is written in a single column with faint marginal and line rulings, and appears to be composed in one consistent hand throughout. It contains no illumination or ornamentation, with the exception of slight decoration of the first letter of each chapter. Chapter titles are added in a lighter-colored ink, probably originally red.¹²

The *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae* is also preserved in four sixteenth-century Latin manuscripts. One of these is Bibliothèque municipale de Nancy, ms. 542, dated 1536. This manuscript consists of 42 folios of parchment, with writing divided into chapters numbered I through CXXXIII. The first two pages are written in single columns; the remaining pages are written in two columns. BM de Nancy, ms. 542 was copied by Albert Regnaud

¹² BnF ms. lat. 10016 is described in Waitz's introduction to his edition of *Richeri Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, 249-53. See also the following catalogue entries: BnF, <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc71787j>; Gallica, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10035704r>; and Léopold Delisle, *Inventaire des manuscrits latins conservés à la Bibliothèque nationale sous les numéros 8823-18613* (Paris: Auguste Durand et Pedone-Lauriel, 1863-1871), 57.

(“Albertum Regnaldus”), a scribe from Raon-l’Etape (near Saint-Dié), as well as parish priest and monk of the Abbey of Moyennoutier.¹³

Albert Regnault copied a second manuscript of the *Gesta*, which was purchased by the Bibliothèque multimedia intercommunale Épinal in 2011. BMI Épinal, ms. 273, dated 1539-1545, encompasses 119 folios on paper and measures 142 x 97 mm (5.59 x 3.82 in). Fols. 1r-114r comprise the *Gesta*, 114v-118v include a table of contents, and 119r-119v feature a list of names of the Abbots of Senones. The pages are ruled in pale lead and written in brown ink by a single hand (cursive hybrid script) with red quire marks, paragraph marks in blue wash or brown ink, rubrics and headings in red, and numerous large, decorated initials painted in red.¹⁴ BMI Épinal also holds two more sixteenth-century Latin manuscripts of Richer’s *Gesta*. BMI Épinal, ms. 121, entitled *Richerii Historiae Senonensis Monasterii*, comprises 93 folios on paper,¹⁵ and ms. 229, dated 1588 and entitled *Richerii Senoniensis Monachi Historiarum*, contains 152 folios, in-quarto, also on paper.¹⁶

Two manuscripts of a French translation, entitled *Chronique de Richer, moine de Senones*, and made directly from the surviving sixteenth-century Latin manuscripts, are extant. One is BM de Nancy, ms. 543 (sixteenth-century, probably the second half of the

¹³ *Catalogue général des manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France*, vol. 4 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1886), 206.

¹⁴ Prior to its purchase by BMI Épinal, this manuscript was listed for sale at <http://www.textmanuscripts.com/medieval/chronicle-senones-60591>.

See also <http://www.bmi.agglo-epinal.fr/PORTPAT/doc/SYRACUSE/925290>.

¹⁵ *Richerii Historiae Senonensis Monasterii* (ms. 121) is catalogued by BMI Épinal, <http://www.bmi.agglo-epinal.fr/PORTPAT/doc/SYRACUSE/88561>. This manuscript is also listed as Bibliothèque d’Épinal ms. 11 in *Catalogue général des manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France*, vol. 4 (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1861), 400.

¹⁶ *Richerii Senoniensis Monachi Historiarum* (ms. 229) is catalogued by BMI Épinal, <http://www.bmi.agglo-epinal.fr/PORTPAT/doc/>. It is also listed as Bibliothèque d’Épinal ms. 87 in *Catalogue général des manuscrits*, vol. 3:434-435.

century), which contains 179 folios on calfskin and measures 296 x 212 mm (11.65 x 8.35 in). It is divided into five books. An inscription on fol. 172v indicates that the manuscript was owned in 1599 by Jean Abram, living in Xaronval, who had received it from M. Eloy of Rainville.¹⁷ The other of these two French manuscripts is BM de Nancy, ms. 1726 (seventeenth-century), which was translated from ms. 542 and is nearly consistent with ms. 543. This version is also divided into five books, with 246 pages on parchment, measuring 310 x 200 mm (12.20 x 7.87 in).¹⁸ Other, later copies also include BnF ms. lat. 12860, a Latin copy, dated 1658;¹⁹ BnF ms. lat. 12861, a Latin manuscript from the seventeenth century;²⁰ and finally BMI Épinal, ms. 272 (1800-1825), which is entitled *Richerii Historiae Senonensis Monasterii* and was edited and copied in Latin by Pierre-Gabriel-Louis Didelot. This manuscript contains 87 folios preceded by 1 flyleaf and followed by 7 flyleaves on paper and measures 323 x 206 mm (12.72 x 8.11 in).²¹

These later copies and translations indicate a prolonged interest in Richer's *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, and the continued inclusion of the chapter on Sibylla suggests a concern for the preservation of her story. However, BnF ms. lat. 10016 remains the oldest surviving manuscript, the only manuscript produced at Senones during Richer's lifetime, and hence the copy closest to the events of Sibylla's story. It is clearly the most reliable source for Richer's account. As a result, this study is based primarily on Latin 10016.

¹⁷ *Catalogue général des manuscrits*, vol. 4:206-207.

¹⁸ *Catalogue général des manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France*, vol. 46 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1924), 374.

¹⁹ Léopold Delisle, *Inventaire des manuscrits de Saint-Germain-des-Prés* (Paris: Auguste Durand et Pedone-Lauriel, 1868), 77. This manuscript is also catalogued at <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc73991x>.

²⁰ Delisle, 77. See also <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc739925>.

²¹ See <http://www.bmi.agglo-epinal.fr/PORTPAT/doc/SYRACUSE/1514369>.

The text of Latin 10016 was first printed by Luc d’Achery in his *Spicilegium* in 1659.²² Richer’s chronicle was printed in the third volume of d’Achery’s *Spicilegium*, and includes Sibylla’s story in Chapter XVIII, *De Beguina Sybilla nomine de Marsal, et actibus eius*, within Book Four.²³ However, as Waitz remarks in the introduction to his subsequent edition of the *Gesta*, d’Achery’s version is incomplete (“[Dacherius] *Multa tamen omisit*”);²⁴ for instance, the chapter preceding Sibylla’s, which discusses Robert le Bougre, is missing from this edition. Waitz’s own edition of Latin 10016 was published in 1880 and has stood as the standard edition ever since. This edition of *Richeri Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae* is found in volume 25 of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*’s *Scriptores* series, and offers a more complete and accurate transcription of the chapter on Sibylla.²⁵ More recently, a new edition of Richer’s chronicle was prepared by the French scholar Dominique Dantand as part of his 1996 doctoral dissertation at the Université Nancy 2.²⁶ Unfortunately, to this point this thesis has remained embargoed to scholarship.²⁷ Dantand

²² Luc d’Achery, ed., *Abbatiae Senoniensis in Vosago Dioecesis Tvllensis, Historia Auctore Richerio Eiusdem Monasterii Monacho Benedictino*, in *Spicilegium*, vol. 3 (Paris: 1659), 271-445; Marie-José Gasse-Grandjean, *Les livres dans les abbayes vosgiennes du Moyen Age* (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1992), 209 n. 14. Using d’Achery’s version, François-Xavier Breyé also published an account of Sibylla in *Amusemens* (Nancy: A. Leseure, 1733), 29-46. See also François-Antoine Chevrier, *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire des hommes illustres de Lorraine: Avec une réfutation de la Bibliothèque Lorraine de Dom Calmet, Abbé de Senones*, vol. 1 (Brussels: [No Publisher]: 1754), 57-58.

²³ d’Achery, *Abbatiae Senoniensis*, 375-80.

²⁴ Waitz, introduction to *Richeri Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, 250.

²⁵ Waitz, ed., *Richeri Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, 308-10. This version will hereafter be referred to as Waitz, ed.

²⁶ Dominique Dantand, *Chronique de Richer, moine de Senones (XIIIe s.): présentation, édition et traduction*, (Ph.D. dissertation, Université Nancy 2, 1996). See <https://petale.univ-lorraine.fr/notice/view/univ-lorraine-ori-27941>.

²⁷ I would like to thank Jacques Dalarun for contacting Michel Bur, who directed the thesis, on my behalf, but my efforts to gain access to Dantand’s thesis did not succeed.

has however published two articles summarizing some of his findings,²⁸ and has also published a full French translation of the *Gesta*.²⁹ Additionally, Michel Parisse made available a straightforward French translation of the section on Sibylla in 1969.³⁰

In addition to these Latin editions, Jean Cayon also published a French edition in 1842, which he entitled *Chronique de Richer, moine de Senones, Traduction Française du XVIe siècle sur un texte beaucoup plus complet que tous ceux connus jusqu'ici; publiée pour la première fois, avec des éclaircissements historiques, sur les manuscrits des Tiercelins de Nancy et de la Bibliothèque publique de la même ville*.³¹ This edition refers to the two sixteenth-century manuscripts that are today housed in the Bibliothèque municipale de Nancy, ms. 542 (Latin) and ms. 543 (French). But it was in fact based on another manuscript, whose subsequent fate is unknown. According to Cayon, this third manuscript had belonged to the Tiercelins of Nancy, a community of Franciscan tertiaries who arrived in Nancy in 1643. After the Tiercelins were suppressed at the time of the Revolution in 1791, by the 1840s the manuscript was in the possession of a bibliophile named Beaupré, from whom Cayon had borrowed it.³² No other scholarship has been

²⁸ Dantand, "Chronique de la vie," 74-89; Dantand, "La Chronique de Richer," 63-73.

²⁹ Dominique Dantand, trans., *La chronique de Richer, moine de l'abbaye de Senones. Lorraine-XIIIe siècle. Terre d'Abbayes en Lorraine*, vol. 3 (Saint-Dié-des-Vosges: Société Philomatique Vosgienne, 2013).

³⁰ Michel Parisse, trans., "De Sibylle, Beguine de Marsal et de ses actes (XIIIe siècle)," *Les cahiers Lorrains* 47 (1969): 18-22.

³¹ Jean Cayon, trans., *Chronique de Richer, moine de Senones, Traduction Française du XVIe siècle sur un texte beaucoup plus complet que tous ceux connus jusqu'ici; publiée pour la première fois, avec des éclaircissements historiques, sur les manuscrits des Tiercelins de Nancy et de la Bibliothèque publique de la même ville* (Nancy: Librairie Ancienne et Moderne de Cayon-Liébault, 1842). For the section on Sibylla, see pp. 137-43.

³² Cayon, introduction to *Chronique de Richer, moine de Senones*, vii-viii. On the Tiercelins, see Henri Lepage, *Histoire de Nancy, ville-vieille et ville-neuve* (Nancy: Mlle. Gonet, 1838), 250-51. Today, the Tiercelins are commemorated by the rue des Tiercelins in Nancy.

conducted on the manuscript of the Tiercelins to which Cayon referred and therefore the precise nature of this source—or even whether it might still be extant—is unclear; however, Cayon dates it to the eighteenth century, five centuries later than BnF ms. lat. 10016.³³

Cayon also supplements the chapter on Sibylla with an additional source, ostensibly from the thirteenth century; this is an extract from the memoirs of a certain Michel Errard, the personal valet of Thibaut I, Duke of Lorraine and elder brother of Bishop Jacques of Metz.³⁴ This extract is also reprinted in a footnote to Waitz's edition of the *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae* in the MGH.³⁵ However, the supposed memoirs of Michel Errard are a highly dubious source. For one thing, they only exist in fragments that were preserved by François-Dominique de Mory d'Elvange who produced a collection of extracted chronicles from Lorraine around 1763. Several of the original works excerpted in this compilation no longer exist, including Errard's memoirs, and the contents of these memoirs therefore cannot be corroborated.³⁶ Furthermore, these memoirs contain numerous inconsistencies. For instance, Mory d'Elvange claims that Michel Errard was born in 1118, but this date is incompatible with Errard's career as valet to Thibaut I, who reigned from 1213 to 1220;³⁷ as François Jean Baptiste Noël remarks, Errard would have been 102 years old at the time of Thibaut's death, an event which is nonetheless recorded in the memoirs. Noël also indicates that the memoirs themselves include errors, suggesting that Errard did

³³ Cayon, introduction to *Chronique de Richer, moine de Senones*, viii.

³⁴ Cayon, "Suppléments et pièces justificatives," in *Chronique de Richer, moine de Senones*, 230-32.

³⁵ Waitz, ed., 308 n. 1.

³⁶ "Extraits d'anciennes chroniques lorraines par Mory d'Elvange," in *Recueil de documents sur l'histoire de Lorraine* (Nancy: 1868), I-IV.

³⁷ "Extrait des mémoires d'Errard, valet de chambre du Duc Thiébaud I^{er} de Lorraine (1213)," in *Recueil de documents sur l'histoire de Lorraine*, 1.

not have a completely accurate understanding of the events of his own lifetime.³⁸ Moreover, the text as it was recorded in Mory d'Elvange's notes is certainly not written in thirteenth-century French. Therefore, a great deal of doubt surrounds the text and even the authenticity of this supposed memoir.

Errard's version of Sibylla's story, as presented by Mory d'Elvange, is considerably shorter than Richer's account and does not contain any discrepancies or additional details, except that Errard suggests a sexual relationship between Sibylla and her priest accomplice.³⁹ In fact, it sticks closely to Richer's account and may in fact be drawn from it. In sum, it is not clear that these extracts represent an independent witness to the thirteenth-century history they claim to relate. Consequently, in light of the document's somewhat dubious nature, Michel Errard's supposed memoirs will not be treated here as a reliable source of elucidation of Sibylla's story. Appendix C reprints the text of these alleged memoirs and provides further discussion of its questionable authenticity.

Richer's *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, as it is preserved in BnF ms. lat. 10016, is the most reliable source for this study.

Historiography

The case of Sibylla of Marsal, documented by Richer of Senones, belongs to the broader history of religious laywomen in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In recent decades, the historiography of medieval female religion and mysticism has been developed

³⁸ François Jean Baptiste Noël, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Lorraine*, no. 6, *Règne de Thiébaud I^{er}, 1213-1220* (Nancy: 1845), 9-11 n. 11.

³⁹ "Extrait des mémoires d'Errard, valet de chambre du Duc Thiébaud I^{er} de Lorraine (1213)," 7-8.

by several prominent historians. Caroline Walker Bynum's groundbreaking work, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (1987), did a great deal to establish medieval female spirituality as a distinct field of scholarship in medieval European history; Bynum has since continued to contribute to this field through additional publications such as *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (1991). More recently, Barbara Newman has offered complex analyses of the role of femininity and sexuality in religious expression throughout the Middle Ages in a number of works, including *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (1995) and *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (2003). And to mention only one more prominent scholar, Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski has published on late medieval religious literature and women's mysticism, notably in *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism (1378-1417)* (2006) and *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims: A Medieval Woman Between Demons and Saints* (2015).

Within the historiography of medieval female spirituality, Sibylla's case has never received a full-length study. It has, however, been briefly examined in several works. Perhaps the earliest is the second volume of *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, where Henry Charles Lea mentions Sibylla's story in passing to comment on the perceived benefits of the beguine status.⁴⁰ A more notable and recent study of Sibylla appears in Nancy Caciola's *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (2003), which explores the development of practices to discern spirits, or test sanctity, throughout the Middle Ages. Caciola reveals that alongside the flourishing of lay religion,

⁴⁰ Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1888), 353-54.

concerns arose about how to differentiate divine possession, or union with God, from demonic possession. This issue became particularly acute because with the new proliferation of apocalyptic thought, medieval society was gripped with anxieties about demons and false prophets. As a result, closer attention was given to the observable behaviors of saintly individuals, particularly women, but the somatic qualities of female spirituality were also seen as potential symptoms of demonic possession. Caciola argues that these behaviors therefore needed to be given meaning by the surrounding society, and the discernment of spirits developed as a cultural process of interpreting performances of divine or demonic possession.

Caciola uses Sibylla's story as a case study within her second chapter, in which she argues that religious women functioned as "ciphers" whose behaviors needed to be decoded and interpreted by the people around them. Caciola's study of Sibylla therefore focuses primarily on the roles played by several different "gossip cells," including the beguines, Sibylla's hostess, the residents of Marsal, the Franciscans and Dominicans, Sibylla's visitors from surrounding regions, the bishop, and Sibylla herself. Caciola also offers speculations into the motivations of these individual parties, each desiring the prestige that a holy woman in Marsal would offer them, and emphasizes that the final interpretation of Sibylla's actions as a hoax was only the last of a series of interpretations and reinterpretations rather than the only possible perception of her behavior.⁴¹

Caciola's arguments are intriguing, but are weakened to some extent by the way she employs her sources. For one thing, she refers to Luc d'Achery's incomplete edition, rather than Waitz's more complete and reliable edition in the MGH. For another, she treats

⁴¹ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 87-98.

the alleged notes of Michel Errard in French as nearly interchangeable with Richer's account in explaining the happenings surrounding Sibylla of Marsal.⁴² As a result of Caciola's use of this dubious French source, the narrative she provides differs from Richer's own version of the story. To give only one example, Caciola offers a positive portrayal of the bishop as a rational man who eventually served as a supportive figure in Sibylla's religious life, whereas Richer himself, in the original *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, presents the bishop as a shamefaced (*pudibundus*) fool who was too easily duped. Moreover, Sibylla's story, concerned with the detection of blatant fraud rather than demonic possession, sits somewhat awkwardly within Caciola's broader arguments regarding the discernment of spirits, illustrating the unusual nature of Sibylla's case. In this thesis, Caciola's arguments will be reexamined based on a rigorous use of the best and earliest sources, especially BnF ms. lat. 10016.

Sibylla has also been studied in Dyan Elliott's *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitorial Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (2004), which traces the increasingly suspicious attitudes surrounding women's spirituality and the gradual criminalization of female religious expression in the Middle Ages. This increased skepticism led to the adoption of inquisitorial procedure to test claims of sanctity. Religious women were then required to "prove" their spirituality, particularly through physical manifestations such as visions, rapture, and strict observance of sacraments. In turn, women's bodies "proved" the truth of Church teachings.

⁴² It seems odd that Caciola chose not to engage with Waitz's superior Latin edition published in the MGH, using only a footnote including an excerpt of the dubious Michel Errard source (taken directly from Cayon, *Chronique de Richer, moine de Senones*) which she refers to somewhat misleadingly as "MGH version."

Sibylla's story constitutes a test case of what could happen when outright falsification entered the dynamic. Yet, as Elliott demonstrates, although Sibylla was not (at least according to Richer of Senones) a genuine exemplar of female piety, the behaviors she chose to adopt offer insight into what types of observable proof she believed her audience expected of a holy woman: celestial raptures, extreme fasting, reports of angelic visitors, and, perhaps most interestingly, a corporeal demon who would directly interact with onlookers rather than just the holy woman herself. Thus, Sibylla perceived a need to provide evidence of her supposed sanctity, and was in fact successful in convincing the authorities and broader community of her holiness for a short time. Elliott attributes this short-lived success to the infancy of inquisitorial methods at this time; the methods of detecting fraud employed by the church officials in this case demonstrate that procedures for uncovering heresy had not been fully established and systematized. Far from an organized inquisition, the bishop had only tested Sibylla by moving her to a different location for a short period of observation before accepting her sanctity and contemplating the construction of a new church in her honor.⁴³ In *Proving Woman*, Sibylla's case therefore represents a particular stage in the development of a much broader culture of inquisition.

Elliott also discusses Sibylla in "Women and Confession: From Empowerment to Pathology," published in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (2003), edited by Mary Carpenter Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski.⁴⁴ This chapter examines the role of the sacrament of confession in female spirituality, and

⁴³ Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitorial Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, 194-97. Elliott uses Waitz's edition of Richer's *Gesta*, published in the MGH.

⁴⁴ Dyan Elliott, "Women and Confession: From Empowerment to Pathology," in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Carpenter Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 31-51.

demonstrates that because confession offered women an opportunity to affirm their sanctity, their religious lives often relied on the involvement of a male confessor. Sometimes this partnership was mutually beneficial to the woman and her confessor; the confessor facilitated the woman's saintly life while also taking advantage of the association with a holy figure. But in other instances, this "sacramental dependency" could be dangerous for women, as illustrated by Richer's account of Robert le Bougre's predation upon a matron seeking confession.⁴⁵ In Sibylla's case, she was able to manipulate this patriarchal system in order to fulfill her own goals. Elliott argues that Sibylla's brief success as a holy woman was dependent on the local priest who, according to Richer, secretly hid food and water in her room. Sibylla therefore employed the confessional relationship to earn prestige and ultimately trick the bishop, reaching further into the larger patriarchy.⁴⁶

More recently, Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski very briefly mentions Sibylla in *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims: A Medieval Woman Between Demons and Saints* (2015), which offers a thorough examination of Ermine de Reims, a laywoman who began experiencing both divine and demonic visions at the end of the fourteenth century. In exploring Ermine's visionary experiences and discernment of spirits, Blumenfeld-Kosinski includes a short comparison with Sibylla's story as an example of fraudulent saints who contributed to a more general societal doubt regarding claims of holiness.⁴⁷ Blumenfeld-Kosinski's brief section on Sibylla draws on a version of the story presented in Peter

⁴⁵ Elliott, "Women and Confession," 33.

⁴⁶ Elliott, "Women and Confession," 38-40. Here Elliott primarily uses Waitz's Latin edition, and also cautiously references the footnote on the Michel Errard source.

⁴⁷ Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims: A Medieval Woman Between Demons and Saints* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 132.

Dinzelbacher's *Heilige oder Hexen?*, a larger study of (predominantly female) individuals who imitated sanctity in the Middle Ages; Dinzelbacher uses Sibylla as just one example of this trend.⁴⁸

Similarly to Blumenfeld-Kosinski, in the fifth chapter of his 2019 book *Courting Sanctity: Holy Women and the Capetians*, Sean L. Field compares Sibylla's case to that of another religious woman, Paupertas of Metz. Paupertas lived as a recluse in Metz at the end of the thirteenth century and then became a beguine in Flanders. Like Sibylla, Paupertas was celebrated as a holy woman but, at least according to the 1308 Continuator of William of Nangis, her sanctity was merely a façade. Paupertas had forestalled King Philip IV of France's attack on Flanders in 1302 by prophesying that the king would find himself in grave danger. However, she was later charged with attempting to poison the king's brother, Charles of Valois, and was tortured and eventually imprisoned. Of course, this revelation of Paupertas's crimes discounted her earlier status as a holy woman, and the Capetians used her false revelations as proof of the devil's active opposition to French forces in order to explain Philip's initial failures in the Flemish wars. Field comments that perhaps Richer's report of Sibylla reached Saint-Denis at the beginning of the fourteenth century and influenced the Continuator's account of Paupertas and her similar imitation of piety.⁴⁹

Finally, Martin Roch has just published an article looking at one small aspect of Sibylla's story—the way the sense of smell was used in writings about her.⁵⁰ Roch explores

⁴⁸ Peter Dinzelbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen? Schicksale auffälliger Frauen in Mittelalter und Frühneuzeit* (Zürich: Artemis & Winkler, 1995), 77-78.

⁴⁹ Sean L. Field, *Courting Sanctity: Holy Women and the Capetians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 158-59.

⁵⁰ Martin Roch, "La béguine, l'ange et l'odeur de sainteté: le cas de Sybille de Marsal, 'garce qui fit de la sainte,'" *Cahiers d'histoire* 34 (2018): 91-118. Roch makes use of both Waitz's

Sibylla's use of aromatic spices to bolster her claim that she had been visited by angels, and compares the role of angelic fragrances to the "odeur de sainteté" of other religious women, especially Mary of Oignies. Through a comparison with Hildegard of Bingen and a discussion of the involvement of the mendicant orders, Roch suggests that as a result of Sibylla's effective use of scent, perhaps the Dominicans and Franciscans had regarded her as "une nouvelle Hildegarde."⁵¹ By failing to detect the falsity of Sibylla's saintly smells, the mendicants revealed that they were actually incapable of truly discerning spirits.⁵² Roch presents a fascinating analysis specifically about the role of smell, but does not attempt a full examination of Sibylla's case.

Thus far in the historiography, scholars have either treated Sibylla as a single example of broader trends in the religious culture of the Middle Ages, or have examined only one specific aspect of this case; a full-length study has not yet been dedicated to Sibylla's story in its entirety. The present study aims to thoroughly investigate this case by situating these events within the thirteenth-century context of the laicization of religion, the beguine movement, and increased concern with the discernment of spirits. This thesis is also the first study of this case to explore how Richer's own apocalyptic worldview and criticisms of the mendicant orders are revealed in his account of Sibylla, paying special attention to the sole thirteenth-century manuscript that serves as the most reliable source of the *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*. It is to that subject that we now turn.

Latin edition and Parisse's French translation. He also cites the memoirs of Michel Errard, attributing this source's preservation to a sixteenth-century version, but does not rely on this text for his analysis of the scents associated with Sibylla.

⁵¹ Roch, "La béguine, l'ange et l'odeur de sainteté," 107.

⁵² Roch, "La béguine, l'ange et l'odeur de sainteté," 117-18.

Chapter Two

Richer's Agenda

Modern scholars have long recognized that medieval chroniclers, like Richer of Senones, generally were not prompted to compose their histories only on account of a desire to accurately record past events for the preservation of their memory, but were often driven to write in response to observations made about their own times. In recent decades, scholarship has shifted toward a tendency to embrace—rather than dismiss—these authorial biases in historical accounts of the Middle Ages as valuable windows into how medieval chroniclers themselves perceived certain events and circumstances.¹ In Richer's case, his authorship of the *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae* is characterized by his preoccupation with divine judgment and belief that the end of times had come upon his generation. Richer thus constructed his account of Sibylla according to his understanding of the position of these events within an apocalyptic program, and more specifically, used this story to comment on the perceived role of mendicant friars as corrupt pseudo-apostles.

The Prologue

In his own prologue to the *Gesta*, Richer identifies the influential figures who inspired him as a chronicler of events to be Moses, who described “the creation of this

¹ See, for example, Justin Lake's historiographical essay, “Current Approaches to Medieval Historiography,” *History Compass* 13, no. 3 (2015): 89-109.

world and the propagation of the human race, and also Joshua of Navi;”² Eusebius of Caesarea, who provided an account of “the beginning of the early Church—founded on the blood of martyrs, the teaching of confessors, and the cultivation of the works of other illustrious men—and its growth;”³ and Paulus Orosius, who reported on “the Punic Wars and civil conflicts, famines, pestilences, signs and omens, and worldly events.”⁴ But Richer acknowledges that these authors had their own motives for preserving the past, referencing Romans 15:4 (“*Everything that was written, was written to teach us*”⁵) and remarking that “they seem to inform and provoke us, some out of fear of God’s judgment, others out of hope for eternal life.”⁶ Richer goes on to question whether “one who reads that Cain murdered his brother due to hatred, or that every creature of the entire world perished for their sins in a flood, is not afraid to fall into the hands of that severe judge—that is, of course, almighty God?”⁷ Even if a man has “a heart of stone,” how could he not be “turned toward the tenderness of compassion and devotion” upon learning of “so many thousands of martyrs, not only men but also virgins and matrons of that fragile sex, young and old, who exerted themselves like men in the struggle of combat”⁸? Indeed, Richer asserts that

² *de mundi huius creatione et humani generis propagatione per sanctum Moysen necnon et Iesu Nave describuntur*. Waitz, ed., 257. I have also had the benefit of being able to consult Dominique Dantand’s French translation.

³ *per virum famosissimum Eusebium Cesariensem episcopum initium rudis ecclesie eiusque incrementum sanguine martyrum, doctrina confessorum aliorumque virorum operum exercitatione fundate declarantur*. Waitz, ed., 257.

⁴ *secundum Paulum Orosium bella Punica et civilia, dissentiones, famines, pestilentie, signa, portenta, eventus rerum mundanarum describuntur*. Waitz, ed., 257.

⁵ *Quecumque scripta sunt, ad nostram doctrinam scripta sunt*. Waitz, ed., 257.

⁶ *alia nos ad iudicii Dei timorem, alia vero ad spem vite eterne informare et sollicitare videantur*. Waitz, ed., 257.

⁷ *Quis enim legat, Cain fratrem ob invidiam interfecisse, universam mundi creaturam pro commissis per diluvium omnino interisse, non formidet incidere in manus illius districti iudicis, scilicet Dei summi?* Waitz, ed., 257.

⁸ *Quis vero audiat, tot milia martyrum, non tantum virorum, sed etiam illius sexus fragilis virgins, matronas, senes ac iuvenes in agone certaminis viriliter desudasse, etiamsi habere*

such a man, if he reads the writings of Paul Orosius and contemplates “so many deaths, such spilling of human blood, so many parricides, such plunders of the spoils of innocent men, so much destruction brought to the world by the secret judgment of God—who, I say, would not fear to incur God’s judgment for his own sins.”⁹ Historical narratives, according to Richer, were meant to remind future readers that all time progresses toward God’s judgment, and to admonish them to avoid sin, keeping in mind this ultimate fate.

Richer judged such a task to be especially imperative in his time, which he identified not as the age of gold, nor even the age of lead or iron; rather, Richer believed that he was living in the age “of clay, in which men seem to be more eager to do bad than good.”¹⁰ He explains his decision to compose the *Gesta* as a response to these present circumstances:

If these [writers, i.e. Moses, Eusebius, and Orosius] wrote down the deeds of ancestors (some abhorrent, others admirable) for their descendants, we—unto whom the end of times has come, because injustice abounds more than usual, and the acts of ancestors seem to be renewed more immensely in our times—are obliged to preserve these events for future generations, so that they should be either frightened by evil or provoked by good to be better (just as we were by the reports of our elders).¹¹

videatur cor lapideum, statim ad molliciem compassionis et devotionis non convertatur? Waitz, ed., 257.

⁹ *Si quis vero consideret secundum predicti Pauli Horosii scripta miserias hominum, tot cedes, tantam humani sanguinis effusionem, tanta parricidia, tot spoliolum innocentum direptiones, tantas clades occulto Dei iudicio mundo illatas: quis, inquam, non abhorreat ipsum Dei iudicium proprio delicto posse incurrere.* Waitz, ed., 257.

¹⁰ *secula...lutea esse comprobentur, in quibus homines potius ad malum quam ad bonum videntur esse promptiores.* Waitz, ed., 257. Here Richer is also referencing Daniel 2:38-45.

¹¹ *Si vero illi per tot annorum curricula posteris suis facta priorum, alia abhorrenda, alia vero admiranda, conscripserunt, nos, in quos fines seculorum devenerunt, quia plus solito habundat iniquitas, et nostris temporibus actus priorum, immo enormiora, innovari videantur, Ipsos rerum eventus ad posteros destinare debemus, ut et ipsi, sicut nos relationibus maiorum, aut malis terreantur, aut certe bonis ad meliora provocentur.* Waitz, ed., 257.

Richer's statement that the end of times was already upon the world when he was writing, somewhat paradoxically coupled with a concern for the salvation of future generations (presuming humanity's continued, though possibly short-lived, existence) reveals a conception of the apocalypse as an epoch that had commenced, but which would not culminate for several generations. This mentality of course informed Richer's treatment of the events he describes in his *Gesta*.

Driven by this sense of duty, considering the fate of the world and "not wanting to conceal events of our times from our successors,"¹² Richer (who identifies himself here in the prologue, *ego frater Richerus monachus Senoniensis*) set about writing his chronicle, "although with an unprepared stylus and unrefined language" (*licet inparato stilo et inculto sermone*) and "in the manner of a babbling infant" (*more balbutientis infantis*). Here Richer employs two closely related motifs prevalent in medieval history writing, identified by Justin Lake as the hesitancy topos and the modesty topos, in which the author cites lack of materials, knowledge, style, or skills to demonstrate his reluctance and humility as a writer.¹³ Richer even explicitly refers to himself as "humblest of all" (*omnium abiectior*). By concluding his prologue with a prayer to God that should anyone "find anything written insufficiently in the present draft, they should attribute it to neither presumption nor audacity, but judge me to have made that [error] by the influence of zeal and good intention,"¹⁴ Richer also expresses a concern for the truth, or at least that readers will

¹² *nolens successoribus nostrorum temporum eventus occultare*. Waitz, ed., 257.

¹³ Justin Lake, *Richer of Saint-Rémi: The Methods and Mentality of a Tenth-Century Historian* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 58-60.

¹⁴ *lectores vel auditors per Deum obtestans, ut, si qua in presenti tractatu minus apte conscripta reppererint, non presumption vel audacie asscribant, sed devotionis et bone intentionis gratia hoc me fecisse arbitrentur*. Waitz, ed., 257.

believe him to be a truthful reporter of historical events.¹⁵ Like most other chroniclers of the Middle Ages, Richer relies on oral tradition and rumor as sources of information, frequently utilizing Latin phrases like *fertur* and *dicitur* to indicate that a certain event “is said” to have occurred in the manner he describes. Richer also cites as his historical sources “verses in certain writings that I was able to uncover, which were recorded about the foundation of this church of Senones or its founder and succeeding abbots” and “things that I saw with my own eyes and heard myself concerning the foundation of neighboring churches and the names or positions of the buildings or any of their miracles, and under which kings or emperors they became famous.”¹⁶

Although Richer identifies the history of his church in Senones and its neighboring institutions as the primary topic of his *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, the chronicle of course includes material pertaining to a much broader geography and range of subjects. The *Gesta*, as it is preserved in BnF. ms. lat. 10016, is comprised of five books organized in roughly chronological order, the first of which commences with a chapter on St. Gondelbert, the archbishop of Sens, who founded the abbey of Senones in the mid-seventh century; Book One spans across the second half of the seventh century and also contains accounts of St. Deodatus, bishop of Nevers; St. Bodo, bishop of Toul and founder of Bonmoutier abbey; St. Hildulf, bishop of Trier and founder of Moyenmoutier abbey; St. Spinulus; and St. Erard, bishop of Regensburg, and St. Odilia. Book Two discusses the subsequent abbots of

¹⁵ For a slightly more in-depth discussion of the topos of truth and plausibility in medieval chronicle, see Lake, “Current Approaches to Medieval Historiography,” 91; idem, *Richer of Saint-Rémi*, 71.

¹⁶ *in quibusdam scriptis versibus adnotatis de fundatione huius Senoniensis ecclesie vel eius fundatore et succedentibus abbatibus reperire potui...et ea que propriis oculis vidi et auditu audivi, et circumadiacentium ecclesiarum fundationes et constructorum nomina vel dignitates vel etiam aliqua ipsorum miracula, quibusque regibus vel imperatoribus claruerint.* Waitz, ed., 257.

the monasteries whose foundations were mentioned in the previous book, and notably also include chapters on the military conquests of Charlemagne (chapter 6) and the First Crusade (chapter 21). The third and fourth books cover contemporaneous events in the first half of the thirteenth century, describing the social and political circumstances of the decades just before Richer's composition of the *Gesta* in the 1250s. Book Five appears to have been written later and spans through 1264, just three years before Richer's death.

Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor and Forerunner of the Antichrist

Sibylla's story is found within the fourth book of the *Gesta*. In total, Book Four contains forty-four chapters, beginning with a chapter on the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), over which Pope Innocent III presided. Richer dedicates several subsequent chapters to Frederick II:¹⁷ he discusses Frederick's mercilessly violent administration of justice as king of Germany, Pope Honorius III's coronation of Frederick as Holy Roman Emperor (1220), Frederick's marriage to Queen Isabelle II of Jerusalem (1225), and Frederick's recurrent battles with the papacy, including episodes in which the emperor "seized for himself" (*sibi usurpavit*) lands belonging to the papacy for which Pope Innocent IV "prosecuted and condemned" (*convenit et dampnavit*) him. Finally, in chapter fourteen of Book Four, Richer recounts "the miserable death of the former emperor Frederick" (*misera Friderici quondam imperatoris*; 1250) after Frederick had been deposed.

In his own lifetime and later, Frederick was deemed by his adversaries to be the Antichrist, whose advent had been foretold by the renowned theologian and prophet,

¹⁷ Specifically, Book Four, chapters 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 14.

Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135-1202), abbot of Corazzo and founder of the Florentian order.¹⁸ Joachim was a renowned exegete and prophet whose radical eschatology included his theory that a close reading of the Old Testament would reveal a divine plan of all future times. Joachim's most famous theory, however, was his idea that all of time would unfold according to three distinct but overlapping ages: that of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, culminating in the final end of time.¹⁹ The third age, that of the Holy Spirit, would be ushered in by the reign and subsequent defeat of the Antichrist, and was impending.

More specifically, Joachim conceived of the Antichrist as two people: "a Nero-like Emperor (Revelation's 'beast from the sea') and a Simon-Magus-like heretical Pseudo-Pope (Revelation's 'beast from the earth')."²⁰ This concept formed the basis of Frederick II's identification as the Antichrist by later followers of Joachim's eschatology, or Joachites. Frederick of course represented the "Nero-like Emperor" of the Antichristian duality, and his ongoing conflicts with the papacy led Joachites to believe that he would soon name his own anti-pope. Additionally, since Joachim had pointed to the year 1260 as the time when the Antichrist would reign fully, by the late 1240s Joachites were anxiously waiting for the emperor to fulfill his role as Antichrist.²¹ Yet Richer does not explicitly

¹⁸ Robert E. Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham: Medieval Millenarians and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 40; "Frederick II, Alive, Aloft, and Allayed in Franciscan-Joachite Eschatology," in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, eds. Werner Verbeke, Daniel Verhelst, and Andries Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 359-84. On Joachim of Fiore, see also Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future: A Medieval Study in Historical Thinking*, rev. ed. (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1999). For an historiographical analysis, see Brett Whalen, "Joachim of Fiore, Apocalyptic Conversion, and the 'Persecuting Society,'" *History Compass* 8, no. 7 (2010): 682-91.

¹⁹ Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham*, 12-19; Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future*, 5-8; Whalen, "Joachim of Fiore, Apocalyptic Conversion, and the 'Persecuting Society,'" 682-84.

²⁰ Lerner, "Frederick II, Alive, Aloft, and Allayed," 363.

²¹ Lerner, "Frederick II, Alive, Aloft, and Allayed," 363.

label Frederick as the Antichrist or as a minion of the Antichrist, and of course by this time Frederick had been dead for several years, having died rather anticlimactically from dysentery in 1250. Although evidently some of the emperor's enemies still believed him to still secretly be alive or identified Frederick's ghost as the real Antichrist, in all likelihood Richer did not believe that Frederick actually was the Antichrist himself, and many Joachites had already moved on to accusing Frederick's heirs.²²

However, Richer does describe Frederick as a monstrously ruthless enemy of the faith and treats him as one of the men referenced in the prologue who "seem more eager to do bad than good" and whose abundance of sin had prompted the end times. According to Richer, as king of Germany, Frederick "decapitated these [criminals and enemies] he found without any redemption, others he broke on wheels, others he condemned to hanging, others he disgraced by mutilating their limbs, others he killed with different tortures."²³ Similarly, as emperor, "he skinned some [enemies] alive, others he sentenced to hanging, others he sent away alive but mutilated in all their limbs, others he broke into pieces on the wheels, others he decapitated with stakes"²⁴ in order to subdue his new territories to his authority. Then he built a fortification which he "filled with innumerable Saracens" (*Saracenis innumerabilibus implevit*) and he summoned mathematicians, astronomers, prophets and seers, and "very many other enemies to the Christian faith" (*alios plurimos christiane fidei adversaries*), whom he appointed as his counselors. In the fifth chapter of

²² Lerner, "Frederick II, Alive, Aloft, and Allayed," 369-72; Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future*, 60-63.

²³ *Inventosque sine aliqua redemptione decapitabat, alios rotis confringebat, alios suspendio dampnabat, alios menbris mutilatos dehonestabat, alios vero diversis suppliciis interficiebat.* Waitz, ed., 301.

²⁴ *Alios quippe vivos decoriavit, alios suspendio deputavit, alios menbris omnibus mutilatos vivos dimisit, alios rotis confregit, alios cum asseribus decapitavit.* Waitz, ed. 302.

Book Four, Richer even compares Frederick to “the most deceitful” (*fallacissimo*) Roman Emperor Julian, known as “the Apostate” (r. 361-363), who “denying Christ, on account of his imperial ambition cruelly fought against the Church in every endeavor, and inhumanly persecuting Christians, he killed those worshipers of the true God whom he found with different tortures.”²⁵ This fixation on a vilification of Frederick II throughout a significant portion of the fourth book implies that Richer did indeed view the emperor as a forerunner of the apocalypse and a sign of the evil and sin that would become manifest in Sibylla and the mendicants.

Hildegard of Bingen and Antimendicant Apocalypticism

The chapters just before the story of Sibylla are devoted to Hildegard of Bingen and the origins of the Dominican and Franciscan orders. Hildegard lived from 1098 to 1179 and was a prominent nun and visionary who founded her own convent in Bingen, at Rupertsburg, and travelled along the Rhine valley preaching publicly and advocating radical church reform.²⁶ She was also the author of various cosmological, scientific, medical, and hagiographical texts, as well as musical compositions and hundreds of letters.²⁷ Her three main theological treatises are *Scivias*, the *Liber vite meritorum*, and the

²⁵ *Christum negans, ob ambitionem imperii omni nisu crudeliter ecclesiam impugnavit, et inhumane christiano persequens, quos very Dei cultores inveniebat, diversis suppliciis interficiebat.* Waitz, ed., 302.

²⁶ Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 23. On Hildegard of Bingen, see also Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

²⁷ Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries*, 23; Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 27.

Liber divinorum operum.²⁸ Yet in the Middle Ages Hildegard was most influential as a prophetess, and it is in this capacity that Richer is most interested in her as the subject of the fifteenth chapter of Book Four. Medieval authors were most familiar with Hildegard's prophecies from a compilation of excerpts of her writings arranged by Gebeno of Eberbach in 1220 and entitled *Speculum futurorum temporum sive Pentachronon*;²⁹ however, it is unclear if Richer's interpretations of Hildegard's prophecies are based on Gebeno's version, as his reference to a medical book written by Hildegard that he saw himself in Strasbourg implies at least some familiarity with her writings in their original forms.

Richer comments on Hildegard's predictions to present the eventual corruption of the mendicants as inevitable and preordained. According to Richer, God had granted Hildegard prophetic knowledge of the imminent arrival of Dominican and Franciscan friars, and "She clearly said that those friars would come from on high, tonsured but in unusual religious dress, who in their beginning were received as God by the whole population."³⁰ Hildegard also predicted that these friars would live in complete poverty, owning nothing for themselves and subsisting only on the charity of others, and that they would wander as itinerant preachers. But, after some time, "quickly abandoning their purpose, they would be held in contempt."³¹ Indeed, "Hildegard is said to have predicted

²⁸ Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism*, 27.

²⁹ Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries*, 197; Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism*, 28-29; Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, "Hildegard of Bingen and Anti-Mendicant Propaganda," *Traditio* 43 (1987): 386-87.

³⁰ *Dixit quippe aperte, quosdam fratres venturos alte tonsoratos in habitu religioso, sed inusitato, qui in principio suo quasi Deus ab omni populo reciperentur*. Waitz, ed., 306.

³¹ *sed cito a proposito suo decidentes, viliores haberentur*. Waitz, ed., 306.

this of the Dominicans and Franciscans, which afterwards their own acts proved to be true.”³²

Richer’s interpretations of Hildegard’s prophecies and connection to the mendicant orders seem to be drawn largely from a letter she wrote the clergy of Cologne, warning them of the imminent arrival of heretics and pseudo-prophets who would feign holiness, poverty, and chastity.³³ Although Hildegard herself was likely referring to the Cathars, by 1220, the Dominicans and Franciscans were being condemned as the pseudo-apostles of Hildegard’s prophecies, and she henceforth became associated with anti-mendicant mentalities and propaganda.³⁴ In fact, when the mendicants first emerged in the early thirteenth century, they seemed to fit Hildegard’s description of the pseudo-apostles perfectly. Richer uses his interpretations of Hildegard’s prophecies to emphasize the novelty of the Franciscan and Dominican religious life.

Hildegard’s predictions of these pseudo-prophets were inextricably linked to her apocalypticism; like Richer, Hildegard conceived of the climax of the apocalypse and advent of the Antichrist as still several generations away, and she proposed an apocalyptic program that would progress from the current age—characterized by a fiery hound—through subsequent ages—identified as those of the lion, the pale horse, and the black pig—and finally the age of the gray wolf, in which the Antichrist would arrive, reign, and ultimately be defeated.³⁵ Thus, the false prophets described by Hildegard, who by Richer’s

³² *Hec Hiltigardis de Predicatoribus et Minoribus fratribus fertur predixisse; quod postea verum actus ipsorum provabit.* Waitz, ed., 306.

³³ Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism*, 39-40; eadem, “Hildegard of Bingen and Anti-Mendicant Propaganda,” 388-90.

³⁴ Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism*, 31; eadem, “Hildegard of Bingen and Anti-Mendicant Propaganda,” 388.

³⁵ Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries*, 197-98; Kerby-Fulton; *Reformist Apocalypticism*, 30, 45-50.

time were identified as the Dominicans and Franciscans, were only the forerunners of the apocalypse who would “signal that the rot has set into the clerical structure” and ecclesiastical world.³⁶

The Mendicants

Following his chapter on Hildegard, Richer endeavors to show how these prophecies were fulfilled—namely, how the mendicant orders emerged and subsequently became corrupt by greedily turning away from voluntary poverty to amass worldly wealth. He begins in chapter 16 by tracing the origins of the Dominican order to Dominic himself during the papacy of Innocent III.³⁷ Richer includes very little personal information about Dominic, who was a Castilian priest and canon in Osma, belonging to the noble family of Guzman. In the summer of 1203 Dominic was travelling to the court of Denmark with Bishop Diego of Osma when they encountered a Cathar sect in Languedoc, and in 1207 they were again travelling through the south of France and met Cistercian legates who had failed to convert the Cathar heretics there. Dominic and Diego then decided to dedicate themselves to an apostolic life of poverty and preaching in order to combat heresy in that region. After Diego died in 1207, Dominic went on to formally establish the Dominican order in 1216.³⁸

³⁶ Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism*, 45.

³⁷ Book Four, chapters 15, 16, and 18 have also been introduced and translated into French by Nicole Bériou and Bernard Hodel in their forthcoming edition of primary sources on St. Dominic and the Dominican order. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Bériou for sending a pre-publication version of these translations.

³⁸ C. H. Lawrence, *The Friars: The Impact of the Mendicant Orders on Medieval Society*, rev. ed. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 65-68.

Richer tells how, initially adhering to the Augustinian rule, Dominic's followers obtained papal permission to travel across the continent, preaching against heresy, and "as long as they continued in their purpose, they were held dear by everyone."³⁹ But, according to Richer, the Dominicans soon "began to live in the richest cities, where they live in splendor, and the inhabitants of those cities abound in pleasures and riches, and there luxury and secular ambition flourish."⁴⁰ Richer even asserts that the Dominicans "shamelessly pursue usury and public rapine"⁴¹ and accuses them of offering absolution to their highest donors for these same sins, "which even the pope cannot do" (*quod papa facere non potest*), and burying dead sinners in their cemeteries with honors. On account of this, Richer claims, many of the Dominicans became contemptible, just as Hildegard had prophesied.

Similar to the Dominicans, the Franciscan order also eventually became despicable according to Richer's *Gesta*, Book Four, chapter 17.⁴² Although Richer does not comment explicitly on Dominic, he praises "blessed Francis" (*beatus Franciscus*) and the initial formation of his order; indeed, "the conduct and life of those [Franciscans] has always remained better and more pious than that of the Dominicans until our time."⁴³ Richer presents Francis (b. 1181) as "a wise young man proving to be of good character" (*bone*

³⁹ *quamdiu in proposito suo permanserunt, cari ab omnibus habiti sunt.* Waitz, ed., 306.

⁴⁰ *opulentissimis habitore ceperunt in quibus splendide vivitur, et habitatores earum civitatum deliciis et divitiis habundant, et ibidem luxus et ambitio rerum secularium vigent.* Waitz, ed., 306.

⁴¹ *[Predicadores] usuris et publicis rapinis impudenter insistunt.* Waitz, ed., 306.

⁴² Book Four, chapters 15 and 17 have also been translated into French in "Richer de Senones: Chronique, *Actes de l'Église de Senones (1255-1264)*" in *François d'Assise: Écrits, Vies, Témoignages*, ed. Jacques Dalarun (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2010), vol. 2: 3083-87.

⁴³ *Illorum siquidem et conversation et vita semper melius et sanctius quam Predicatorum usque ad tempora nostra perduravit.* Waitz, ed., 307.

indolis iuvenis existens et sapiens) and “worthy of praise” (*laudabilis*). The son of a wealthy merchant in Assisi, in the valley of Spoleto, he began donating generous quantities of his father’s money to churches and the poor. Francis then underwent a dramatic conversion when, casting aside his regular garments, he presented himself to his father “wearing a certain tunic, to which a little hood had been sewn, but of the cheapest fabric, tied up with a little knotted cord” (*quadam tunica, in qua caputium consutum erat, et tamen vilissimi panni, se induens, cordella nodata precingitur*) and, tonsured and barefoot, he declared his desire to serve God.

Outside Richer’s account, Francis’s newfound religiosity has been connected to his departure on a military campaign to Apulia on behalf of Walter de Brienne, a local nobleman, around 1205; upon reaching Spoleto, Francis reportedly had a dream in which Christ called on him to abandon his military mission and return home. Francis observed an eremitical lifestyle for a few years following his dramatic conversion, working with his own hands to restore local churches, including San Damiano and the Portiuncula, and subsisting entirely on alms.⁴⁴ Then Richer tells how the Franciscan order formed in 1209 as Francis travelled across the region, accumulating followers. Richer describes a particular instance in which the residents of a certain town derided Francis’s message and appearance, so he went to a nearby field and shared the word of God with a flock of birds who gathered around and turned their heads toward him “as if they understood him” (*quasi eum intelligerent*). Witnessing this remarkable interaction between Francis and these birds, the people of that village then praised Francis and spread word of his holiness.

⁴⁴ Rosalind B. Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis: Responses to Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 13-17; Lawrence, *The Friars*, 29-31.

Yet Richer also explains that “many men and women therefore imitating both orders [i.e. the Franciscans and Dominicans], united themselves to their way of life.”⁴⁵ Of course, some of these were genuine converts, including “nobles, clergymen and the well-educated, scorning their power, dignity, riches and the comfort of their parents”⁴⁶ and virgins (*virgines*), widows (*matrone continentes vidue*) and prostitutes (*meretrices*), “noble and not” (*nobiles et ignobiles*). But Richer ultimately laments that “very many of each sex, who had now *put a hand of salvation to the plow of God, looking back* [Luke 9:62] miserably gave themselves over to luxury and earthly pleasures once again, *as dogs return to their vomit* [Proverbs 26:11].”⁴⁷

By the time that Richer was writing, the Franciscan order had indeed changed. Originally, while a certain amount of education and organization had always been necessary for the Dominicans’ mission to eradicate heresy, such training and institutionalization seemed to contradict Francis’s emphasis on humility.⁴⁸ Francis’s intention was that his brethren would steadfastly adhere to a simple apostolic life of itinerant preaching and absolute poverty, subsisting only on alms; during his own life, Francis himself was uncompromising in his ideals, with the life of Christ and his apostles (as portrayed in the Gospels) as the only basis for his model of piety. But after Francis’s death in 1226 and canonization in 1228, it was necessary for his followers to dilute these

⁴⁵ *Quam plures igitur ambos ordines viri et mulieres imitantes, conversationi eorum se contulerunt.* Waitz, ed., 307.

⁴⁶ *Nobiles quippe clerici et bene literati prelationes suas, dignitates, divicias parentumque consolations contempnentes.* Waitz, ed., 307.

⁴⁷ *plurimi utriusque sexus, qui iam aratro Dei manum salutis apposuerant, miserabiliter retro respicientes, luxui et voluptatibus seculi, quasi canis ad vomitum redientes, denuo se tradiderunt.* Waitz, ed., 307.

⁴⁸ Lawrence, *The Friars*, 46.

ideals in order to establish a permanent order.⁴⁹ Thus, the Franciscans became organized, educated preachers, and the order's membership shifted from predominantly lay brothers to almost entirely clerics.⁵⁰ And as the order expanded into urban centers across Europe, secular patrons enthusiastically answered to their need for residences and churches in which to conduct their pastoral care by gifting them land and erecting elaborate stone structures.⁵¹ This grandeur of course diverged from Francis's doctrine of complete poverty, breeding controversial ideas distinguishing between the use and ownership of property; ultimately, in 1245, a papal bull entitled *Ordinem vestrum* allowed Franciscans to circumvent their obligations to poverty in practice by allowing them to use property technically owned by the papacy.⁵² Such apparent hypocrisy certainly drew criticism from other orders, and as the Dominicans and Franciscans both continued to accumulate benefactions, the older, more traditional monastic orders suddenly saw themselves competing with the new mendicant orders for financial and political resources.⁵³

Antimendicant feelings were also aroused by conflicts over university professorships. For instance, the Dominicans managed to secure an advantageous chair in theology at the university in Paris during the Great Dispersion of 1229, when the mendicants kept their schools open while the university was on strike.⁵⁴ A similar incident occurred in 1253, when the university once again shut down following a violent altercation

⁴⁹ Lawrence, *The Friars*, 26-64; Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 31.

⁵⁰ Lawrence, *The Friars*, 43-53; Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 12.

⁵¹ Lawrence, *The Friars*, 46.

⁵² Lawrence, *The Friars*, 39-40; Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 86-91; Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham*, 56.

⁵³ Guy Geltner, *The Making of Medieval Antifraternalism: Polemic, Violence, Deviance, and Remembrance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5; Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham*, 43. See also, William Chester Jordan, "The Anger of the Abbots in the Thirteenth Century," *Catholic Historical Review* 96, no. 2 (April 2010): 219-33, esp. 222.

⁵⁴ Geltner, *The Making of Medieval Antifraternalism*, 17.

between the local night watch and a group of students, but the mendicants refused to cooperate unless permitted to retain a second professorship.⁵⁵ The conflicts that followed are known as the secular-mendicant controversy.

The secular-mendicant controversy was exacerbated by the Franciscans' radical Joachite eschatology. Robert E. Lerner suggests that Joachism became instilled in the Franciscan order in 1247 when an abbot belonging to Joachim's Florentian order sought refuge at the Franciscan convent at Pisa as he fled from Frederick II's imperial march through Tuscany, bringing with him a collection of Joachite (or Pseudo-Joachite) writings.⁵⁶ These texts—probably including the Pseudo-Joachite Jeremiah commentary (written in early 1243), and possibly also Joachim's genuine commentary on Revelation—alluded to the advent of two new religious orders who would herald the end times and battle the Antichrist, whom Joachite commentators had already identified as Frederick II.⁵⁷ The Franciscans of course believed that theirs and the Dominicans' were the prodigious orders of which Joachim had foretold. Furthermore, since Joachim had also predicted that the Antichrist would reign fully around the year 1260, in the 1250s the secular-mendicant controversy transcended a legal battle over university positions and appeared as an apocalyptic struggle between the mendicants and their enemies.⁵⁸

Thus, when the secular clergy sought to limit mendicant professorships, an Italian Franciscan named Gerardino of Borgo San Donnino responded by publishing the *Liber introductorius in evangelium eternum*, or *Introduction of the Eternal Gospel* in 1254. By

⁵⁵ Geltner, *The Making of Medieval Antifraternalism*, 27; Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham*, 44; Lawrence, *The Friars*, 128.

⁵⁶ Lerner, "Frederick II, Alive, Aloft, and Allayed," 359.

⁵⁷ Lerner, "Frederick II, Alive, Aloft, and Allayed," 361-63.

⁵⁸ Lerner, "Frederick II, Alive, Aloft, and Allayed," 361-63; *The Feast of Saint Abraham*, 40-45; Geltner, *The Making of Medieval Antifraternalism*, 19.

“eternal gospel,” Gerardino was referring to Joachim’s writings, which according to Gerardino represented a third testament. Gerardino also posited that Francis was like a new Christ, a radical proposition that predictably attracted immense criticism from the secular clergy.⁵⁹ In particular, William of St. Amour drew upon Gerardino’s publication as incriminating evidence of the mendicants’ threat to the ecclesiastical hierarchy in his antimendicant treatise, *De periculis novissimorum temporum*, or *On the Dangers of the Last Times*, published in 1256. *De periculis* vehemently opposed the existence of the Dominican and Franciscan orders, presenting the mendicants as harbingers of the Antichrist and calling for their destruction. Richer and William were both writing at the peak of the secular-mendicant controversy and while it is unclear whether Richer ever read *De periculis* or was even aware of it, William’s treatise reveals the antimendicant sentiments that were prevalent as Richer composed the fourth book of his *Gesta*.

Modern scholarship has frequently pointed to William of St. Amour as the originator of a medieval antimendicant tradition; however, Guy Geltner argues in *The Making of Medieval Antifraternalism* that there was in fact no united body of antimendicant literature, let alone a single textual tradition inspired by *De periculis*. Geltner instead distinguishes between “minimalist (total-contrarian)” and “maximalist (critical reformist)” opposition to the mendicant orders, and places William of St. Amour decidedly within the first category. In contrast, Richer’s praise of the origins and initial purpose of the mendicant orders, and especially of Francis’s personal sanctity, differentiates him from William and indicates that he did not totally oppose the existence of the Dominican and Franciscan

⁵⁹ Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham*, 44-45; Geltner, *The Making of Medieval Antifraternalism*, 19-21.

orders, but wished to see them reformed and rid of the wicked brethren who had infiltrated them and betrayed their mission.

One such impious mendicant was Robert le Bougre, as Richer demonstrates in his eighteenth chapter of Book Four, “On master Robert of Paris [i.e. Robert le Bougre] of the Dominican order and his tricks” (*De magistro Roberto Parisiensi ordinis Predicatorum et fallaciis eius*). The name *le bougre* signifies that Robert had actually been a heretic himself, having left the orthodox faith around 1215 to follow a Cathar woman to Milan, where he joined a sect of heretics there and eventually achieved the status of “perfect.”⁶⁰ However, Robert must have renounced the Cathar heresy sometime before 1232, by which time he had already entered the Dominican order and was appointed by Pope Gregory IX as the first papal inquisitor in northern France. Initially, Robert fought heresy in Burgundy through preaching, but in 1233 he was granted papal permission to take more vigorous action against heretics in Burgundy and surrounding regions.⁶¹ He was active as an inquisitor until 1239, traveling across Burgundy, la Charité-sur-Loire, Cambrai, Douai, and Lille, and was said to be able to identify heretics based only on their speech and gestures.⁶² His zealous pursuit of heretics in these regions alarmed local prelates, including the Archbishop of Sens and the Archbishop of Reims, who complained to the pope around 1234 that their authority over matters of heresy in their archdioceses were being

⁶⁰ Jules Frederichs, *Robert le Bougre: Premier inquisiteur générale en France (Première moitié du XIIIe siècle)*. In Université de Gand, *Recueil de travaux publiés par la faculté de philosophie et lettres*, vol. 6 (Gand: Librairie CLEMM, 1892), 6-7; Charles Homer Haskins, “Robert le Bougre and the Beginnings of the Inquisition in Northern France,” *The American Historical Review* 7, no. 3 (April 1902): 452. Haskins employs the term “apostle” rather than “perfect,” referring to Robert’s status within the heretical sect.

⁶¹ Frederichs, *Robert le Bougre: Premier inquisiteur générale en France*, 9; Haskins, “Robert le Bougre and the Beginnings of the Inquisition in Northern France,” 453-54.

⁶² Frederichs, *Robert le Bougre: Premier inquisiteur générale en France*, 14-23; Haskins, “Robert le Bougre and the Beginnings of the Inquisition in Northern France,” 452.

encroached by the Dominicans.⁶³ Charles Homer Haskins also recounts an incident in which Robert bypassed the authority of the bishop of Clermont to pursue an accused heretic named Pierre Vogrin of Souvigny whom the bishop had previously cleared of heresy, commenting that “Such open disregard of a bishop and contempt for the findings of predecessors would naturally irritate the higher clergy, already jealous of the growing privileges and influence of the Mendicant Orders.”⁶⁴ Robert became notorious as the “Hammer of Heretics,” and is even said to have burned 183 Cathars in a single day in 1239.⁶⁵

In his own account of Robert le Bougre, Richer describes Robert as “a man most learned and famous for eloquence” (*vir doctissimus et eloquio clarus*) but who indiscriminately burned countless people to death as heretics, including his own mother and father. Richer attributes Robert’s success as a ruthless inquisitor to a “diabolical trick” (*arte diabolica*) by which he composed a magical charter that, when placed upon the individual accused of heresy, compelled that person to confess to whatever charges he had concocted. On the particular occasion recounted by Richer, Robert encountered a beautiful matron and, lusting after her, attempted to seduce her. But when she refused his advances, he threatened her with accusations of heresy, and secretly touching his magical charter to her head, he forced her to give a false confession in front of an inquisitorial jury. This woman was ultimately rescued by her son, who revealed Robert’s evil trickery by publicly seizing the demonic charter from him at the consistory. Richer then claims that in light of

⁶³ Frederichs, *Robert le Bougre: Premier inquisiteur générale en France*, 11-12.

⁶⁴ Haskins, “Robert le Bougre and the Beginnings of the Inquisition in Northern France,” 454-55.

⁶⁵ Haskins, “Robert le Bougre and the Beginnings of the Inquisition in Northern France,” 452; Frederichs, *Robert le Bougre: Premier inquisiteur générale en France*, 21.

these events, Robert was “perpetually enclosed in a prison of stone” (*in carcerem lapideum perpetualiter clausum*), although Robert’s actual fate remains unknown to scholars.⁶⁶

Richer’s criticism of Robert le Bougre reveals yet another cause of antimendicant feelings: the role of the mendicants—especially Dominicans—as inquisitors. Specifically, Richer uses this chapter and the subsequent chapter on Sibylla to comment on the mendicants’ apparent inability to distinguish heretics from the true faithful; with regard to Robert, the inquisitor falsely persecuted orthodox Christians as heretics, and in Sibylla’s case, as will be seen, the Dominicans and Franciscans were unable to detect the pseudo-saint’s fraud.

Richer and Sibylla

In chapter 19, Richer uses his account of Sibylla to comment further on the mendicant orders. For instance, it was under the instruction of local Dominicans that the beguines flourished in Marsal, and Richer presents them as fools too easily duped by Sibylla. When the Dominicans and Franciscans first came to observe Sibylla, having heard rumors of her sanctity, “they were never able to perceive her deceit” and “they preached in public of her and of her religious life and acts,”⁶⁷ escalating her reputation and trickery. Even after the bishop and his entourage of Dominicans transferred Sibylla to another house

⁶⁶ Simon Tugwell has effectively demonstrated that the *Vitas fratrum* and Matthew Paris both also report that Robert le Bougre was imprisoned for his crimes as an inquisitor. See “The Downfall of Robert le Bougre, OP,” in *Praedicatores, Inquisitores, I: The Dominicans and the Medieval Inquisition. Acts of the 1st International Seminar on the Dominicans and the Inquisition, 23-25 February 2002*, *Dissertationes Historicae Fasciculus* (Rome: Instituto Storico Domenicano, 2004), 753-56.

⁶⁷ *fallatiam ipsius numquam percipere poterant. Sed de ipsa et sanctitate et actibus eius, iam in publico predicabant.* Fol. 63 r.

to test her claims of rapture and ability to abstain from food or drink, they were outmaneuvered, and “seeing that the bishop, the Dominicans, and Franciscans, and others who were observing her gave faith to her acts,” Sibylla “brought herself toward a greater audacity”⁶⁸ and constructed her demon suit. Once again Sibylla was able to deceive them, as when they interacted with her in this demonic costume, “the bishop and others listening truly believed that it was the demon who reported such things to them.”⁶⁹ The next day, as Richer reports, the bishop and the Dominicans who were with him even drank and sprinkled themselves with Sibylla’s urine, which she had placed in a beautiful vessel and claimed to have been blessed by angels to protect her against demons. Ultimately, having uncovered Sibylla’s fraudulence, “The bishop and the Dominicans and all others who had been present, seeing that they had been deceived for so long by such a little woman, suffered indescribably.”⁷⁰ Not only were they simply embarrassed, with these events leaving the bishop “shamefaced” (*pudibundus*), but the mendicants’ inability to detect Sibylla’s false piety also reflected their own lack of true sanctity.

Richer concludes his earlier chapter on the formation of the Franciscan order by commenting that “because the hatred of the devil never ceases to sow tares in the field of God, we should return to those who, under the pretext of religion, proving to be vicious wolves in sheep’s clothing, remarkably deceive the people,”⁷¹ clearly referring to Sibylla

⁶⁸ *Videns autem Sibilla... quod episcopus, Predicatores, et fratres Minores, et alii qui eam observabant factis suis fidem darent, ad maiorem se contulit audatiam.* Fol. 63 v.

⁶⁹ *Episcopus itaque et alii audientes vere credebant esse diabolum, qui eis talia referebat.* Fol. 64 r.

⁷⁰ *Episcopus vero et Predicatores et alii omnes qui aderant videntes se tam diu a tali muliercula fore deceptos, ineffabiliter doluerunt.* Fol. 65 r.

⁷¹ *quia invidia diaboli in agro Dei semper zizania seminare non cessat, redeamus ad illos qui sub pretextu religionis, in vestimentis ovium lupi rapaces existentes, populum mirabiliter deceperunt.* Waitz, ed., 307.

(as well as Robert le Bougre). Of course, Richer does indeed depict Sibylla as a false saint, misleading her audience with a false appearance of piety. Here a helpful comparison can be made between Richer's representations of Sibylla and Hildegard, whom he considers to be a genuine holy woman. For instance, Richer specifically mentions Hildegard's traditional "enclosed" (*inclusa*) lifestyle, which he regards as "most pious" (*sanctissime*), while Sibylla pursues her religious lifestyle outside the cloisters, living in the home of a local matron instead.

Richer also demonstrates that Hildegard's piety was genuine by claiming that she received her sanctity directly from God, who granted Hildegard "the grace of prophecy" (*gratiam prophetie*) as well as the remarkable ability to speak and write Latin, a language that she had never learned before. Bestowed with these gifts, Hildegard "prophesied of course about the state of the kingdom and the outcomes of future events and from these she wrote books in her own hand."⁷² Richer emphasizes Hildegard's divine literacy, declaring that he had even seen a book that she had written about medicine in Strasbourg, and noting that "She wrote in fact about the order of the future Dominicans and Franciscans."⁷³ Thus, Hildegard's sanctity was contemplative and textual.

In contrast, Sibylla built her display of piety based on her worldly skills. Specifically, Richer suggests that Sibylla was remarkably talented in the manufacture of textiles, an industry often practiced by beguines. For example, according to Richer, Sibylla was able to create "a black and hairy tunic with a hood and demonic face,"⁷⁴ which she

⁷² *Prophetavit quippe de statu regnorum et eventibus rerum futurarum et inde libros propria manu conscripsit.* Waitz, ed., 306.

⁷³ *Scrpsit siquidem de ordine futurorum Predicatorum et fratrum Minorum.* Waitz, ed., 306.

⁷⁴ *Fecit...tunicam nigram fieri et hispidam, et caputium vultum diabolicum habentem.* Fol. 63 v.

wore as a costume, pretending to be a demon lurking through the village at night; evidently, her handiwork was so convincing that she could successfully trick villagers into believing that they were speaking to an actual demon. Sibylla also created “the most delicate and white garments” (*subtilissimos pannos et candidos*) with which to decorate her bed, as well as a head covering “so delicate that it was said that it could never have been made by a human hand,”⁷⁵ attesting to her talent. These “white and very fragrant garments” (*candidi panni et bene redolentes*) seemed to be of such angelic and supernatural quality that the bishop and Dominicans believed Sibylla’s hostess that Sibylla “had frequently told her that her bed had been restored by angels, and that she had accepted these ornaments from them.”⁷⁶ The existence of these material props was confirmed when the demonic costume and the ornaments of her bed were found in her room. Furthermore, while Richer attributes Hildegard’s prophecies to the divine and then traces how they came true, from Richer’s point of view, Sibylla’s prophecies were decidedly false; she had concocted these fake predictions herself in order to suit her own needs. Richer’s entire interpretation of Sibylla relies on his assumption that she was not genuinely pious, and in this way Sibylla takes on the role of a pseudo-prophet, a potential sign of the apocalypse.

The Mongols and the End of the World

Indeed, Richer immediately follows his account of Sibylla with chapter 20 on “that horrible nation which is called the Tartars, which ravaged many regions and the kingdom

⁷⁵ *coopertorium capitis sui tam subtile erat ut diceretur numquam a manu humana tale fieri posse*. Fol. 64 r.

⁷⁶ *ipsa ei sepius dixerat, ab angelis lectum suum refectum fuisse, et ab eis ornamenta illa recepisse*. Fol. 64 v.

of Hungary” (*De gente quadam horrida que Tartarina dicebatur, que multas regiones et regnum Hongarie vastavit*), referring to the Mongol invasion in 1241. Richer describes hordes of men “of filthy appearance” (*facie...sordidi*) and “rather monstrous in their dress” (*cultu horribiliores*), whose origins were unknown and mysterious. “Wasting and destroying all that they came upon,” they “slaughtered everyone they found without mercy,”⁷⁷ and when they reached Hungary, “they depopulated it in such a way that neither city nor street nor any building, man nor woman nor—finally—some cattle remained safe.”⁷⁸ Richer certainly depicts the Mongols as abhorrent monsters, but this portrayal was hardly an exaggeration from the Latin West’s perspective.

Richer’s report on the Mongol invasion is generally accurate; the Mongols, led by Batu Khan—grandson of Ghengis Khan—invaded Hungary and defeated the Hungarian King Bela IV’s forces in April 1241.⁷⁹ Bela escaped along with his brother and fled to Austria to seek refuge with Duke Frederick. Meanwhile, the Mongol armies occupied Hungary, slaughtering or enslaving Bela’s subjects while pillaging his cities, and they even stole the royal seal from the corpse of Bela’s chancellor and issued fake orders for subjects to remain in their homes and not to flee. And when the Danube river froze on Christmas Day, 1241 they were able to cross onto the western bank as well. They also attacked Poland and the Kingdom of Bulgaria, but inflicted considerably less damage in those regions than

⁷⁷ *universa queque inveniebant vastantes et perimentes et omnes quos inveniebant sine misericordia interficiebant.* Waitz, ed., 310.

⁷⁸ *ita illud depopulate sunt, ut nec civitas vel vicus vel munitio aliqua, homo vel mulier vel demum aliquot pecus salvum remaneret.* Waitz, ed., 310.

⁷⁹ Robert E. Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy: The Cedar of Lebanon Vision from the Mongol Onslaught to the Dawn of the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 11; Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005), 63-64.

in Hungary.⁸⁰ Finally, the Mongols suddenly withdrew from Hungary in spring 1242, perhaps because they had exhausted the available pastureland in Hungary, which they required for their horses, or in response to political developments in Mongolia.⁸¹ Richer also comments that some people had accused Frederick II of instigating the Mongol attack, and while such accusations surely were concocted as negative propaganda against the emperor, Frederick was at least partly responsible for exacerbating the effects of the onslaught: Frederick had initially failed to take the Mongol threat seriously, and both he and Pope Gregory IX claimed to be unable to provide Hungary with assistance until the other conceded to resolve their conflict, attempting to use the situation to personally advantage themselves in their ongoing battle with one another.⁸²

Even aside from the alleged involvement of the accused Antichrist—that is, Frederick II—the horrifically gruesome Mongol invasion on a Christian nation of course appeared to be of apocalyptic proportions. In fact, the Mongols were seen as portents of the end of the world before their armies even arrived in Hungary. In 1237, Batu Khan himself sent a message to King Bela informing him that the Hungarians would be unable to escape the ruthlessness of his advancing forces—a threat which did indeed ultimately prove true. The message was delivered by a Hungarian Dominican named Julian who reported his knowledge of the Mongolian forces to the Hungarian court in 1238. A few months after Batu executed his threat in April 1241, the earliest surviving copy of Julian's report was transcribed in the Swabian Benedictine monastery of Ottobeuren, Germany. Also copied in the Ottobeuren manuscript along with the report was a short Latin prophecy,

⁸⁰ Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 63-65.

⁸¹ Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 71-74.

⁸² Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 65-72.

probably originally written between 1238 and 1240, known as the “Cedar of Lebanon” vision. Using both biblical and astrological imagery, the prophecy (as deciphered by Robert E. Lerner) predicted that the Mongols would destroy the world, defeating the Saracens—and with them, Islam itself—and heralding the apocalypse. The prophecy also foretold that the world, having been spiritually purified by one of the new orders—probably referring to the Dominicans given their popularity in Hungary—would be united under Christianity before the end of time, which the prophecy predicted to be in 1250.⁸³

This prophecy circulated rapidly and widely, reaching Germany, France, Italy, and England. In France, the prophecy was recorded in Trois-Fontaines Abbey in Champagne, approximately 180 km (roughly 110 miles) to the east of Senones, and Richer may very well have heard of it himself.⁸⁴ Although presumably Richer would not have put much stock in the prediction that the world would end in 1250 (given that he was writing several years after this date had passed), as the year 1260—Joachim of Fiore’s proposed date for the advent and reign of the Antichrist—drew near, the apocalyptic sentiment associated with the Mongol invasion of 1241 remained. Many contemporary chroniclers treated the Mongols as “satellites of Antichrist” and forerunners of the apocalypse.⁸⁵ In *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*, Peter Jackson also demonstrates that thirteenth-century chroniclers often drew parallels between the Mongols and local enemies or societal outcasts, especially linking them with heretics. In fact, according to Jackson, writers sometimes juxtaposed the Mongols with particular heretics or heterodox sects by placing an account of the Mongol invasion either directly before or directly after a chapter on their

⁸³ Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy*, 9-24.

⁸⁴ Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy*, 25-26.

⁸⁵ Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 142.

chosen heretical group (usually the Pastoureaux) in order to suggest that these heretics were also harbingers of the end of time.⁸⁶ Thus, perhaps Richer purposefully organized his chapters on Sibylla and the Mongols in consecutive order to imply that Sibylla, as a false prophet and embodiment of human sin, also represented an early sign of the Apocalypse.

Conclusion

This analysis of Richer as an author and his organization of events in the fourth book of his *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae* suggests that Richer believed Sibylla to be a sort of pseudo-prophet heralding the apocalypse. Interestingly, though, Richer does not claim that Sibylla was acting at the Devil's behest—in sharp contrast, as Sean L. Field points out, to Paupertas of Metz, whose pseudo-sanctity the 1308 Continuator of William of Nangis described by asserting that Satan often employs women to do his bidding.⁸⁷ In Richer's depiction then, Sibylla was merely a little woman (*muliercula*) executing her own scheme to feign sanctity. Her acts were therefore decidedly not supernatural—indeed, quite the opposite, according to Richer—and represented the epitome of human sin, which in Richer's worldview plagued the earth by the mid-thirteenth century and demanded divine punishment in the coming apocalypse.

Of course, scholars today have the benefit of hindsight to know that Sibylla (as well as Frederick II, the mendicants, and the Mongols) did not, in fact, usher in the end of the world in the thirteenth-century. Yet Richer's interpretation of Sibylla as a deliberate imposter was likely accurate, given the evidence of her alleged fraudulence (that is, the

⁸⁶ Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 142-43.

⁸⁷ Field, *Courting Sanctity*, 159-60.

discovery of contraband items beneath her bed) and the number of people in and around Marsal who would have served witness to the events recorded by Richer. Situating the story within the context of thirteenth-century piety will elucidate this matter of false sainthood further.

Chapter Three

Sibylla, Beguine of Marsal

As Chapter Two has shown, Richer certainly did not consider Sibylla an authentic exemplar of female sanctity, and in fact he even treated her as a pseudo-prophet and potentially as a forerunner of the apocalypse. Of course, it is impossible for anyone—including modern scholars as well as Richer himself—to truly know Sibylla’s personal intentions, and thus it cannot be said with certainty whether Sibylla’s actions (as recorded by Richer) were prompted by genuine religious feeling or deliberately crafted in order to deceive others. For his part, Richer presents Sibylla’s story in his *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae* as a case of an individual appropriating the appearance of a holy woman for personal gain. As Nancy Caciola points out, this interpretation of Sibylla as an imposter was surely only the last in a series of judgments about her behavior;¹ prior to her unmasking, Sibylla was locally venerated as a living saint, and before she was imprisoned, she enjoyed the prestige and status of a holy woman, with her every need being met by a wealthy female patron.

It is precisely because of this fluidity in Sibylla’s saintly status that this case provides valuable insight into the extent to which medieval sainthood was a social attribution rather than an inherent quality of an individual’s piety. As Aviad Kleinberg remarks in his study of living sainthood, “The sincere ecstatic and the successful imposter play exactly the same social role and belong in the same social category,”² and indeed

¹ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 91.

² Aviad Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 8.

Sibylla was, for a time—according to Richer—a successful imposter. Assuming that Richer provides a trustworthy and accurate portrayal of Sibylla as a cunning pseudo-saint, her appropriation of certain behaviors in order to imitate sanctity—and her initial success in doing so—illuminate medieval expectations of vivid manifestations of women’s sanctity. But even regardless of the sincerity of Sibylla’s piety, this story demonstrates that medieval sainthood not only rested on certain behaviors or observable manifestations of sanctity, but was also dependent on the community’s interpretations of those behaviors. This becomes especially apparent when Sibylla’s story is placed within the broader context of thirteenth-century women’s religion, revealing that several aspects of her religious expression fit within much wider trends of accepted female piety.

The Beguine Movement in High Medieval Europe

Richer reports that Sibylla first devised her plot to feign sanctity when she observed that “many women called beguines flourished with a kind of religious life under the instruction of the Dominicans, and wanting to imitate them, she pretended her own simplicity with her words and acts.”³ Sibylla’s association with this community of beguines in Marsal and her subsequent religious life thus developed against the backdrop of a wider beguine movement. Motivated by the same religious currents that had, by the end of the twelfth century, inspired spiritual zeal among the laity—contributing as well to the proliferation of new heretical groups such as the Cathars and the Waldensians—the beguine movement emerged in the diocese of Liège at the beginning of the thirteenth

³ *videns plurimas mulieres sub doctrina dictorum Predicatorum specie religionis florere, que beguine appellantur, volens ipsas imitari dictis et factis suis simplicitatem suam pretendebat.* Fol. 62 r.

century when groups of laywomen gathered into informal communities to pursue a kind of religious life outside convents.⁴ Remaining among secular society, these women frequently worked at hospitals helping the sick or performed manual work, particularly in the textile industry, to sustain their communities while practicing a lifestyle of voluntary poverty, charity, and abstinence.⁵ Yet in sharp contrast to the more conventional monastic orders, these loose communities of women took no formal vows and did not subscribe to a common rule.⁶ As a result, not all women regarded their uncloistered lives of contemplation as permanent; some went on to pursue more traditional religious vocations in convents, while others eventually left the communities to get married.⁷ It was precisely this transitory nature of the beguine life that attracted criticism and suspicion of heterodoxy at the outset of the movement. In fact, the title “beguine” itself was originally applied to these uncloistered religious women as a pejorative term.⁸

Nonetheless, the new model of beguine piety also garnered the admiration of some prominent male clerics, perhaps most notably James of Vitry, who recorded the spiritual experiences of Mary of Oignies in his *Life of Mary of Oignies*. Mary’s reputation of sanctity

⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 17; Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links Between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women’s Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 75; Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 34-36; R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 322.

⁵ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 17; Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 147-151; Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 61, 85-87; Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, 326

⁶ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 17; Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 36.

⁷ Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 35-36.

⁸ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 17; Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 80; Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 36, 119; Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, 321-322.

had first reached James while he was studying theology in Paris. Having observed the piety of her community in Liège, he composed her *Life* shortly after her death in 1213, and in 1216 he obtained papal recognition of the groups of laywomen living together and pursuing religious lives outside the cloisters.⁹ The Church evidently perceived that beguine religiosity offered certain benefits to orthodox Christianity, and as Dyan Elliott argues in *Proving Woman*, the beguine movement emerged in the beginning of the thirteenth century as part of a “clerically sponsored program” in which the Church upheld religious women as exemplars of sanctity and orthodoxy in order to combat heresy.¹⁰ With such ecclesiastical sponsorship, the beguine movement then spread rapidly across the Low Countries, France, Germany, and eventually reached as far east as Bohemia,¹¹ and as Caroline Walker Bynum remarks, “For the first time in Christian history, we can identify a women’s movement (the beguines) and speak of specifically female influences on the development of piety.”¹²

Several historians have attempted to explain this rapid growth of the beguine movement by pointing to an increase in the number of women desiring a religious life and the refusal of male monastic orders to accommodate these women. R. W. Southern cites “the insecure position of women in a rapidly growing population”—compounded by an aversion to marriage resulting from a newfound emphasis on virginity and the proliferation of erotic literature highlighting female licentiousness—to account for an increase in the number of women desiring a religious life, which he argues “greatly outran the number of

⁹ Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 47-49; Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 75-76; Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 35, 48.

¹⁰ Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 47-84.

¹¹ Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 48-50; Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, 322.

¹² Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 14.

monastic foundations available for their reception.”¹³ In response to the strain that the pastoral care of female members placed on their orders, both the Premonstratensians and Cistercians passed legislation against the formation of women’s monasteries,¹⁴ and according to Herbert Grundmann, “Beguines thus never represented a planned form of religious life; rather they were the result of the women’s religious movement insofar as it did not find reception into the new orders.”¹⁵ However, Bynum has since refuted this claim, arguing that medieval beguines should not be interpreted as “surplus women, settling for quasi-religious roles because neither husbands nor monasteries could be found.”¹⁶ Pointing out that many medieval women who did indeed have the option of entering a traditional monastic institution instead opted to become beguines, Bynum demonstrates that the loosely organized beguine lifestyle presented a desirable alternative to the more structured life as a nun precisely because it simply provided religious significance to women’s ordinary lives in society.¹⁷

Religious Groups in Marsal and Metz

The appeal of the beguine lifestyle apparently extended into Marsal, as a group of beguines had evidently been founded there by about 1240 when, according to Richer, the community piqued Sibylla’s interest. If the demographics of the beguine houses in the Low

¹³ Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, 311-312.

¹⁴ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 15-19; Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 89-139; Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, 311-312.

¹⁵ Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 139.

¹⁶ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 19.

¹⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 47; eadem, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 17.

Countries can provide any insight into the composition of this group of beguines in Marsal, these women likely would have hailed from the lower aristocracy and urban elite, but no documentation specifically on the beguines in Marsal other than Richer's report exists. It is therefore unclear when and how this community had initially formed and to what extent they were organized into formal or informal houses.

Charles McCurry's investigation of religious groups in the nearby city of Metz reveals that no sources refer specifically to beguines in Metz before 1290, although records indicate the presence of religious "maidens" (*pucelles*) in the city in 1243—just a few years after Sibylla adopted the beguine lifestyle in Marsal; McCurry points to a community of *pucelles* at Pontiffroy as the earliest example of beguines in Metz. There were also women whom contemporaries called "Waldensians" but whom McCurry identifies instead as beguines; however, these women do not appear in sources until 1251.¹⁸ Thus, there are no reports of local precedents to the beguine community in Marsal to elucidate this particular group's formation, but the willingness of the residents of Metz to associate beguines with Waldensians only a decade after Sibylla's story took place in Marsal provides insight into local perceptions of these uncloistered religious women.

The Waldensians were a heretical sect that arose out of new religious fervor among the laity in the late twelfth century. Initially formed in Lyon by a wealthy merchant named Waldes, the Waldensians zealously pursued apostolic poverty and spiritual perfection, translating scripture into the vernacular and preaching publicly without theological training or clerical permission. A Waldensian sect had already been present in the city of Metz in

¹⁸ Charles McCurry, "Religious Careers and Religious Devotion in Thirteenth-Century Metz," *Viator* 9 (January 1978): 329-30; see also McCurry's posthumously published Ph.D. dissertation, *Urban Society and the Church: Medieval Metz, ca. 1200-1378*, ed. Thomas Bisson (Berkeley: [No publisher], 1985), 215-19.

1199, when Bishop Bertram of Metz wrote a letter to Pope Innocent III reporting that a group of laymen and women were holding secret gatherings, reading French translations of scripture and preaching. This group proved obstinate, citing the Bible to deny the authority of the Church; the Waldensians in Metz were ultimately repressed, and their vernacular translations burned.¹⁹ McCurry suggests that the association of these heretics with the beguines was simply due to external similarities between the two groups and the city's earlier familiarity with Waldensians, arguing that the residents of Metz understood the beguines there to be orthodox in their devotion.²⁰ But this misidentification is perhaps indicative of deep-seated suspicions toward beguines in the Metz region, which may have influenced how Richer, the bishop of Metz, and other religious authorities ultimately regarded Sibylla.

Regarding the Marsal beguines' level of organization and formality, Richer's comment that the beguines "went back into their homes" (*in sua revertabantur*) after Sibylla's deception was publicly revealed implies that the beguines had their own residences. However, Sibylla herself did not live in a house with other beguines, as she lodged instead with a local matron who had taken a special interest in her. In fact, the beguines do not actually play a prominent role in Richer's narrative until Sibylla was exposed as a fraud, when "The beguines who had gathered for this spectacle were not able to hear or see these things," and Richer claims that they were "Crying and wailing with covered heads, because none were able to look out of shame," so they retreated back into

¹⁹ McCurry, *Urban Society and the Church*, 35-38; Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 42-44; Courtney Kneupper, "Reconsidering a Fourteenth-Century Heresy Trial in Metz: Beguines and Others," *Franciscana* 8 (2006): 217-18.

²⁰ McCurry, "Religious Careers and Religious Devotion," 330.

their houses.²¹ But the fact that the Marsal beguines were so pained by Sibylla's deception suggests that she had become such an integrated member of their community that their reputation was greatly damaged by their association with her—and therefore indicates that the group was established enough that outsiders could identify them as a distinct and discernible community.

Richer reports that the Marsal beguines lived under the direction of local Dominicans. McCurry's research indicates that Dominican friars were already present in Metz by 1221—just five years after the order's foundation—when a former mayor of the city began the construction of a Dominican church (although the building was not actually finished until the 1280s);²² evidently Dominicans were also present in Marsal by about 1240. The Franciscans seem to have spread into the Metz region somewhat later than the Dominicans; according to McCurry, a wealthy widow had a church built in the city for the Franciscans around 1235.²³ And although the Marsal beguines were affiliated with the Dominican order, Franciscan friars were actively involved in Sibylla's religious life, as Richer frequently mentions Franciscans who came to observe her and test her sanctity.

In addition to the Dominicans and Franciscans, the bishop of Metz, Jacques of Lorraine, figures prominently in Richer's story of Sibylla as a fool whom Sibylla consistently duped and who unwittingly facilitated the pseudo-saint's career as a holy woman. Jacques, a younger son of the ducal family of Lorraine, had previously served as

²¹ *Beguine vero que ad hoc spectaculum convenerant, ista audire vel videre non poterant. Coopertis capitibus flentes et eiulantes, quia neminem pre pudore videre poterant, in sua revertentur.* Fol. 65 r.

²² McCurry, "Religious Careers and Religious Devotion," 328-29; idem, *Urban Society and the Church*, 228-29.

²³ McCurry, "Religious Careers and Religious Devotion," 329; idem, *Urban Society and the Church*, 228.

provost of Saint Lambert's Cathedral in Liège and as archdeacon of Trier, and was elected bishop of Metz in 1239—just before Sibylla had adopted the beguine lifestyle in Marsal. By this time, episcopal control of the local government had already been diminished, largely under the previous bishop, Jean d'Appremont, who warred with the bourgeois of Metz and had effectively lost all governmental revenues in 1234.²⁴

Jacques's tenure as bishop was a relatively peaceful time for Metz, but Jacques himself nonetheless was faced with a number of conflicts, the first of which was his excommunication for not paying debts contracted by his predecessor to the merchants of Rome. Thus, while bishop of Metz, Jacques was excommunicated by the papacy from 1239 until 1244 (although the vacancy in the Holy See between the death of both Gregory IX and Celestine IV in 1241 and Innocent IV's election in 1243 contributed to the overall length of Jacques's excommunication). Although Jacques's relations with the papacy improved, he was met with additional strife when he sided with the papacy against Frederick II. Jacques supported the papacy's proposed replacement for Holy Roman Emperor, Henry of Thuringia, and then in 1247 he backed William of Holland as anti-king, but the bourgeois of Metz still preferred Frederick and revolted against their bishop, further weakening the power of the bishopric.²⁵

Thus, in addition to the broader beguine movement and emergence of lay piety, this was the regional context within which Sibylla's story unfolded—and, later, within which Richer was writing his *Gesta*.

²⁴ McCurry, *Urban Society and the Church*, 62-65; Monique Arveiler-Ferry, introduction to *Catalogue des actes de Jacques de Lorraine: Évêque de Metz*, 1-27.

²⁵ Arveiler-Ferry, introduction to *Catalogue des actes de Jacques de Lorraine*, 1-27.

Holy Feast and Holy Fast

The only mention that Richer makes of religious practices among the Marsal beguines is that Sibylla “frequented churches earlier than the hour of Matins and Masses as is the custom of the beguines.”²⁶ Such dedicated observation of church services is in fact characteristic of medieval female spirituality, and although Richer does not explicitly discuss Sibylla’s reception of the Eucharist, one could assume that Eucharistic devotion was a feature of her regular attendance at Mass. Indeed, Bynum identifies intense devotion to the Eucharist as “the most prominent characteristically female concern in thirteenth-century religiosity.”²⁷ The Eucharist was seen as a source of mystical union with the divine; to eat God was to become God.²⁸ This was especially true for women, whose primary religious role was as vessels for God’s inspiration, paralleling the Virgin Mary’s role as the womb which bore Christ in his human form. To thirteenth-century women, to receive the Eucharist was to be bestowed with a supernatural power that frequently manifested itself in ecstatic visions and trances, like those supposedly simulated by Sibylla.

This Eucharistic piety was an attribute of a broader trend of food practices within female spirituality in the Middle Ages. Food informed medieval women’s religiosity not only through its consumption—specifically in the form of the Eucharist—but also through its absence. In particular, religious women tended to exhibit piety by renouncing food, often for periods of time that extended beyond what was considered humanly possible. That food served as “an obsessive and overpowering concern in the lives and writings of

²⁶ *Ecclesias etiam hora matutinarum et missarum, sicut moris est beguinarum, maturius frequentabat.* Fol. 62 v.

²⁷ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 121.

²⁸ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 126; *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 245.

religious women between the twelfth and fifteenth century” has been effectively proven by Bynum in her groundbreaking work *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, the first in-depth study of the role of food in female religious experience.²⁹ Bynum argues that food was a fundamental part of women’s spirituality because it allowed women to establish control over their own selves, their bodies, and their circumstances.

Bynum also demonstrates that medieval women regulated their bodies’ intake of food through both extreme fasting and intense eucharistic devotion in order to formulate a religious experience that reflected the normal roles of women in medieval society; according to Bynum, “Food is important to women religiously because it is important socially. It is a fact cross-culturally that food is particularly a woman-controlled resource.”³⁰ Thus women adapted the typical symbols of womanhood and motherhood—such as giving birth and feeding others—to imbue them with religious significance through their regulation of food. In doing so, women grounded their spirituality in somatic experiences and used their physical bodies to express themselves religiously, and in particular, women, whose fleshly bodies were especially associated with Christ’s humanity, sought to imitate Christ with their physical suffering.

Food practices formed such an integral part of women’s piety that, according to Bynum, “By the High Middle Ages, fasting and eucharistic devotion were expected of a saint.”³¹ Evidently aware of this expectation, Sibylla imitated a model of female piety that emphasized fasting. In Richer’s account, Sibylla’s performance of fasting included pretending to abstain from food and drink while she simulated celestial rapture, usually for

²⁹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 95.

³⁰ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 189.

³¹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 82.

a period of three days. Witnesses to her behavior marveled at her seemingly supernatural ability to survive without eating or drinking, and because she was “not living in a human manner” (*nec humanitus vivebat*), people from neighboring regions flocked to her for the purpose of seeing “such marvelous things” (*talia mirabilia*). Sibylla herself attributed her abstinence from earthly food to her proximity to the divine, refusing the food offered by her hostess and claiming that “she was filled with heavenly feasts, so she did not want to enjoy the carnal foods of the rest.”³² Of course, writing with the benefit of hindsight after Sibylla was apparently exposed as a fraud, Richer explains that “In truth, it was said afterwards that a certain young priest of the same village, who was a familiar acquaintance to her, would secretly come to her in the night, and would restore her with sumptuous foods.”³³

The appearance of fasting was evidently so vital to Sibylla’s counterfeit piety that it was necessary to devise elaborate schemes and enlist the priest as her accomplice. According to Richer, Sibylla concocted lies about suffering from demonic afflictions and told her hostess “that she should never be afraid if in the night she heard the doors of the house be opened or any other noise, because she was endlessly disturbed by a demon at night.”³⁴ The priest was then able to safely sneak into the house without fear of being caught, and would hide provisions under her bed to sustain her “for three days or four” (*tribus diebus vel quatuor*), or the typical length of her fake raptures. In fact, Richer calls particular attention to the discovery of the “hidden foods under her bed with which she was

³² *illa [cybum] rennuebat, dicens se epulis celestibus ita refertam, ut carnalibus cybariis de cetero uti nollet.* Fol. 62 v.

³³ *Dictum est enim post, quod quidam sacerdos eiusdem ville iuvenis, qui ei familiaris erat, secreto noctu ad eam veniebat, et eam delicatis cybariis reficiebat.* Fol. 62 v.

³⁴ *Illa dicebat hospite sue, ne aliquando timeret, si noctu ostia domus aperiri vel aliquem alium strepitum audiret, quia a diabolo se de nocte immoderate molestaretur.* Fol. 63 r.

being fed”³⁵ and emphasizes that Sibylla “was no longer able to endure the hunger”³⁶ after three days without access to her secret food in order to highlight her inability to fast in reality and thus present her as the antithesis to genuine piety.

Sibylla’s Celestial Raptures

According to Richer, Sibylla also relied on simulations of celestial rapture to effectively feign sanctity. Richer reports that “She declared that in spirit she was dragged into heaven, and thus lying in her bed as if sleeping, not eating and not drinking, she drew out the whole day.”³⁷ Women were believed to be especially prone to spiritual rapture due to the perceived fragility of the female body,³⁸ and such trance-like states were a common feature of medieval women’s spiritual experience, as Nancy Caciola explains: “Paramystical transformations such as immobile and insensible trances...were commonly reported of women visionaries, and were understood by them as the physical side effects of their spiritual union with the divine.”³⁹ Similarly, as Sibylla’s spirit was ostensibly rapt away into heaven, her alleged holiness became physically manifest. For instance, following Sibylla’s daytime raptures, “In any hour of the night, so that it would be believed that her spirit was returning to her, she would utter a wail in a sluggish voice,”⁴⁰ causing her hostess great alarm. On another occasion, the bishop and Dominicans observed Sibylla “lying on

³⁵ *haberet sub lecto suo escas absconditas quibus pascebatur*. Fol. 65 r.

³⁶ *videret se ulterius famem sustinere non posse*. Fol. 63 v.

³⁷ *Fatebatur quippe se in spiritu rapi in celum, et ita in lectulo suo iacens quasi dormiens, non manducans neque bibens, totam diem deducebat*. Fol. 62 v.

³⁸ Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 182.

³⁹ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 87-98; Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 15.

⁴⁰ *Aliqua quippe hora noctis ut spiritus eius ad eam reversus crederetur, lenta voce planctum emittebat*. Fol. 62 v.

her bed with a flushed face as if sleeping”⁴¹ and she “had such delicate breath that it was hardly possible for anyone to perceive whether she was breathing or not.”⁴² In this way, Sibylla presented her apparent detachment from her corporeal self as an observable side effect of her closeness to God.

Whereas the discovery of hidden food could serve as proof that Sibylla’s fasting was fake, it would be more difficult to definitively prove that these trances were insincere. Of course, Richer’s account that Sibylla frequently snuck out of the house dressed as a demon during her alleged raptures and that she was spied making her bed while supposedly rapt suggests that Sibylla simulated these trances to suit her needs. This tendency to seemingly fall into trances also presented Sibylla with opportunities to showcase prophetic capabilities, as she would often predict ahead of time when she would be drawn into heaven. As a result, and because “Her hostess, believing her rapture to be genuine, closed the room and did not allow anyone to enter toward her,”⁴³ Sibylla was able to prevent anyone from observing her too closely. For example, when she initially heard that “Jacques the bishop of Metz himself came to her, counts too, and knights, clerics, monks, and an immense population of each sex flocked to her,”⁴⁴ she evaded their prying eyes by pretending, “as she was accustomed to do, that in spirit she was drawn away into heaven, and she also predicted that she was not going to return for three days; and therefore no one

⁴¹ *[episcopus et Predicatores] invenerunt eam in lectulo suo iacentem rubicunda facie quasi dormientem.* Fol. 64 r.

⁴² *Iacebat enim quasi dormiens habens anhelitum, tam subtilem ut vix ab aliquo percepti posset, utrum anhelaret au non.* Fol. 64 r.

⁴³ *Hospita igitur sua verum esse credens cameram claudebat, nec aliquem ad eam introire patiebatur.* Fol. 62 v.

⁴⁴ *Episcopus ipse Metensis Iacobus ad eam venit, comites quoque et milites, clerici, monachi, et utriusque sexus inmensus populus ad eam confluebat.* Fol. 63 r.

had access to her.”⁴⁵ On other occasions, she “predicted herself to be rapt toward heaven”⁴⁶ in order to gain enough privacy to carry out various deeds in secret. However, Sibylla’s raptures most prominently served as proof of piety, and indeed, it was upon personally witnessing her trance-like state that the bishop of Metz ultimately became convinced of her sanctity and began to consider constructing a church in which to house her.

Proof and Discernment

In fact, every aspect of Sibylla’s religious expression functioned as evidence of sanctity, fulfilling onlookers’ expectations of the ways in which a holy woman’s piety should be visibly manifest. Richer of course claims that this evidence was falsified; indeed, Richer asserts that beyond simply claiming to be visited by angels and demons, Sibylla crafted observable proof of their presence. For instance, she used “fragrant splendors” (*species bene redolentes*) to fill her room with aromas “in order that it would be believed that the aroma had been made in the advent of the angels who were visiting her.”⁴⁷ She also forged “the most delicate and white garments”⁴⁸ for her bed as well as a head covering “so delicate that it was said that it could never have been made by a human hand.”⁴⁹ Sibylla then claimed that the angels had granted her these heavenly ornaments, in addition “to a rather beautiful vessel” (*satis pulcrum vasculum*) from which the bishop and many others drank, believing the water inside to have been blessed by angels (while in fact, Richer

⁴⁵ *simulabat in spiritu sicut facere solebat in celum esse deductam, et etiam predicebat, in tribus diebus non reversuram, et ita nulli aditur ad eam patebat.* Fol. 63 r.

⁴⁶ *se ad superna rapti predixisset.* Fol. 64 v.

⁴⁷ *ut odor ille in adventu angelorum ad se venientium ibi fieri crederetur.* Fol. 62 v.

⁴⁸ *subtilissimos pannos et candidos.* Fol. 64 r.

⁴⁹ *coopertorium capitis sui tam subtile erat ut diceretur numquam a manu humana tale fieri posse.* Fol. 64 r.

asserts that Sibylla had actually filled the bowl with her own urine). And Richer claims that in order to convince her hosts that she was tormented by a demon, Sibylla ripped apart couch cushions and scattered the feathers throughout the house in the middle of the night. She even ventriloquized an argument between the supernatural beings while making her bed, mimicking “one voice horrible like a demon’s, and another delicate like an angel’s”⁵⁰ for the benefit of the audience listening from outside the closed bedroom door.

Perhaps Sibylla’s most audacious deed, as narrated by Richer, was her construction of “a black and hairy tunic with a hood and demonic face.”⁵¹ Clothing herself in this demon costume while everyone believed her to be spiritually enrapt in her room, she would sneak out of the house and lurk through the village of Marsal at night. She would then confront passersby and “speaking in a hoarse and horrible voice, she would instill great fear in listeners”⁵² as she identified herself as a demon intent on destroying “that wicked and impious virgin Sibylla” (*Sibillam illam nefandam et impiam virginem*).

These escapades dressed as a demon not only bolstered Sibylla’s claims of demonic antagonism, but also provided her an opportunity to suggest that her exceptional piety allowed her to intervene with the souls of the deceased. Indeed, on a particular night following the death of a certain Marsal resident, she appeared to a group of villagers dressed as the demon and lamented that “that evil woman Sibylla” (*ista mala mulier Sibilla*) had inflicted much pain because “she violently took from me my friend who died today...and she restrained him to herself with her pleas and prayers.”⁵³ Sibylla’s demon

⁵⁰ *unam habens horribilem quasi diaboli, aliam vero subtilem quasi angeli*. Fol. 64 v.

⁵¹ *Fecit quippe ut fertur tunicam nigram fieri et hispidam, et caputium vultum diabolicum habentem*. Fol. 63 v.

⁵² *loquens rauca et horrida voce, audentibus magnum incutiebat timorem*. Fol. 63 v.

⁵³ *amicum meum qui hodie mortuus est michi violenter abstulit [...] et ita suffragiis suis et orationibus sibi eum retinuit*. Fol. 64 r.

character also corroborated her closeness to divinity by complaining to the villagers that “because that woman took such a friend away from me today, I would gladly tear her into bits, but I do not dare because angels watch over her.”⁵⁴ The alleged demon expressed disappointment that he was unable to lure this friend to his “very spectacular and delightful meadow, where I lead my friends to take a walk. That meadow is always sprinkled with sulfurous and fiery dew; there I have funny reptiles, and viperous animals and serpents, and snakes, and toads and very many others, small ones and big ones, with which I make my dearest friends visit and play.”⁵⁵ Interestingly, “the bishop and others listening truly believed that it was the demon who reported such things to them,”⁵⁶ indicating that demonic interaction with the broader community was a conceivable feature of female holiness in the thirteenth century.

These highly visible and sometimes bizarre presentations of evidence answered to a growing concern in the thirteenth century with “proving” sanctity and orthodoxy. In *Proving Woman*, Elliott traces this anxiety about proof to the Fourth Lateran Council, which took place in 1215—incidentally just one year before James of Vitry obtained papal permission for women to form communities of beguines. Elliott argues that inquisitional procedures for testing orthodoxy thus developed in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council, and that throughout the thirteenth century they were increasingly applied to women:

⁵⁴ *Sed quia ista mulier michi hodie tantum amicum abstulit, libenter eam in frusta discerperem, sed non audeo quia angeli custodiunt eam.* Fol. 64 r.

⁵⁵ *Ego habeo pratum valde speciosum et delectabile, in quo ego amicos meos ad spaciandum deduco. Pratum illud semper rore sulphureo et igneo conspargitur, ibi sunt michi iocosa reptilia, et animalia viperea et serpentina, et angues, bufonesque et alia plurima pusilla cum magnis, cum quibus amicos meos dilectissimos conversari et iocari facio.* Fol. 64 r.

⁵⁶ *Episcopus itaque et alii audientes vere credebant esse diabolum, qui eis talia referebat.* Fol. 64 r.

“female spirituality (‘always already’ suspect) is progressively perceived as a substantial threat to the church and society at large. This gradual criminalization of female spirituality parallels the progressive efforts to constrain and even persecute women.”⁵⁷ Thus eventually, the beguines, whose religion was always subject to the doubts and suspicions of some, once again became scrutinized by society more broadly.

A feature of this new emphasis on proof of sanctity was the prominence of the discernment of spirits. Caciola defines the discernment of spirits as “a long-term labor of social interpretation,” meaning that the classification of a religious individual as a saint, heretic, or fraud depended on how that person’s outward behavior was perceived by others.⁵⁸ Efforts to discern spirits or prove sanctity then typically took the form of observation, and in particular, examination of physical manifestations of piety, such as fasting and Eucharistic devotion, rapture, and visions. The burden of proof was therefore placed on women’s bodies and observable behaviors, and although Sibylla does not represent authentic female piety in Richer’s account, the behaviors she adopted reflect society’s expectations regarding a holy woman’s comportment. Of course, Sibylla’s purportedly falsified evidence ultimately amounted to physical proof of her fraudulence as well, as authorities eventually uncovered her hidden foods, the ornaments she had claimed were given to her by angels, and her demon costume.

While Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski remarks that “Here all that was necessary for discernment was a close look through a keyhole”⁵⁹—referring to the climactic moment when Sibylla was finally exposed as a fraud as a result of one of the Dominicans peering

⁵⁷ Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 1.

⁵⁸ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 2.

⁵⁹ Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 132.

through a hole in Sibylla's bedroom wall—according to Richer, the bishop and the Dominicans and Franciscans did in fact engage in some rudimentary methods of discernment in order to “test” Sibylla's sanctity before giving credence to her claims. At first, when Sibylla initially began deceiving everyone with her performances of fasting and raptures, inquisitive Dominicans and Franciscans came to her to observe her behavior, but “they were never able to perceive her deceit.”⁶⁰ Next, “The bishop of Metz with his clerics and the Dominicans who had been with him, wanting to test whether she truly did not eat or drink, and whether she was carried off in spirit as she said, transferred her into another house,”⁶¹ and watched over her there, preventing her from being able to eat or drink. But Sibylla eventually outsmarted the bishop and eluded his plan by claiming that her demon adversary was able to attack her exponentially more while she resided in this place and asking to be returned to her former hostess's home after three days of observation.

The bishop and Dominicans, now satisfied with Sibylla's ability to pass their tests and present proof of sanctity, having witnessed her trance-like state, also interrogated her hostess about the angelic decorations on her bed, asking “from where such white and very fragrant garments had come;”⁶² the bishop was evidently satisfied by the hostess's answers that “she had often found her in such a state when she was returning from heaven. And she [Sibylla] had frequently told her that her bed had been restored by angels, and that she had

⁶⁰ *fallatiam ipsius numquam percipere poterant.* Fol. 63 r.

⁶¹ *Episcopus vero Metensi cum clericis suis et Predicatoribus qui cum eo erant, volens experiri si ita non manducaret neque biberet, et si in spiritu raperetur ut ipsa dicebat, fecit eam in aliam domum transferi.* Fol. 63 r.

⁶² *[Episcopus et Predicadores] hospitam eius interrogabant, unde tam candidi panni et bene redolentes venerant.* Fol. 64 v.

accepted these ornaments from them.”⁶³ Ultimately, Sibylla’s initial success in convincing others of her sanctity suggests that her behaviors had satisfactorily fulfilled her audience’s expectations for proof of piety.

Sibylla and Sainthood

Sibylla’s success also reveals the benefits of a reputation as a holy woman. In particular, Sibylla quickly attained considerable celebrity and prestige as a result of her performances. At first, she garnered local praise and was “considered most pleasing by Louis, a distinguished man of the common people at the time, and by all inhabitants of the village of Marsal.”⁶⁴ Soon Sibylla realized that “the rumor of her religious life had been spread everywhere,”⁶⁵ at which point Richer reports that she began feigning celestial raptures in order to attract even more attention. Eventually the Dominicans and Franciscans “preached in public of her and of her religious life and acts.”⁶⁶ Her pious reputation even captivated the attention of the bishop of Metz, as well as throngs of admirers from a wide variety of social classes, who all traveled to Marsal to witness her seemingly miraculous acts. And even though these visitors were denied access to Sibylla, they still contributed to an even greater diffusion of her fame: “Those who had come for the purpose of seeing her and had not seen her, hearing from the residents [of Marsal] what she was doing, returning to their own property, told remarkable things of her to those who were ignorant. They

⁶³ *[Hospita] respondebat se pluries quando a superis revertebatur, eam in tali statu invenisse. Et quia ipsa ei sepius dixerat, ab angelis lectum suum reffectum fuisse, et ab eis ornamenta illa recepisse.* Fol. 64 v.

⁶⁴ *Ludowico tunc plebano viro discreto, et omnibus habitatoribus ville de Marsal gratissima haberetur.* Fol. 62 v.

⁶⁵ *ipsa iuvenula videret famam sue religionis ubique diffundi.* Fol. 62 v.

⁶⁶ *de ipsa et sanctitate et actibus eius, iam in publico predicabant.* Fol. 63 r.

hurried to her from Germany and from neighboring regions.”⁶⁷ Then, as had been the case earlier when she escalated her performance in response to increasing attention, when she saw “that the bishop, the Dominicans, and Franciscans, and others who were observing her gave faith to her acts,” she “brought herself toward a greater audacity” and crafted her demon suit.⁶⁸

Her subsequent acts earned her even more recognition as a holy woman, for “Now the bishop was considering establishing a church, in which he wanted to put her, because she was not eating and not drinking and not living in a human manner, so that those flocking to her would be pleased to see such marvelous things in it [i.e. the church].”⁶⁹ The bishop’s plans demonstrate that Sibylla’s fame was also beneficial to the diocese; such a prominent display of Sibylla’s sanctity would attract pilgrims to the region, bringing not only spiritual prestige but also tourism and potentially commerce and trade. Therefore, Sibylla’s promotion as a holy woman may have also been partially prompted by economic incentives.

Indeed, Sibylla’s holy status also afforded her certain material benefits in addition to her newfound fame. In particular, “a certain matron of that village and her husband, believing her deceits, had received her with hospitality”⁷⁰ and “had granted a certain room

⁶⁷ *Illi vero qui ad eam videndam venerant nec viderant, audientes ab incolis que faciebat, ad sua revertentes, mira de ea nescientibus narrabant. Unde de Alemannia et circumadiacentibus regionibus ad eam currebant.* Fol. 63 r.

⁶⁸ *[Videns] quod episcopus, Predicatores, et fratres Minores, et alii qui eam observabant factis suis fidem darent, ad maiorem se contulit audatiam.* Fol. 63 v.

⁶⁹ *Iam episcopus ecclesiam edificare deliberabat, in qua quia non comedebat neque bibebat, nec humanitus vivebat, ipsam ponere volebat, ut ad eam confluentes talia mirabilia in ea delectarentur aspicere.* Fol. 64 v. Dyan Elliott suggests that the bishop’s intention was probably to build an anchorhold for Sibylla, possibly within a new chapel; Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 196.

⁷⁰ *Quedam vero matrona illius ville, cum viro suo simulationibus eius credens, eam hospicio receperat.* Fol. 62 v.

to her, where she could conduct prayers and vigils more privately;”⁷¹ Sibylla thus enjoyed a more comfortable living situation as a result of her claims of sanctity. Sibylla’s hostess diligently cared for her, providing her shelter, checking on her at all hours of the night, and constantly offering her nourishment (which Sibylla of course refused at least for appearances’ sake), and she strove to cultivate Sibylla’s piety by enthusiastically defending her privacy. In doing so, she permitted no one but herself to foster an intimate relationship with this saintly figure. As a result, she attained a position of authority and respect by becoming something of a spokesperson for Sibylla as she interpreted and explained Sibylla’s ostensibly spiritual experiences for such important people as the bishop of Metz himself and his impressive entourage while the alleged holy woman appeared entranced. Her home became a local center of pilgrimage and veneration while Sibylla’s devotees gathered outside her bedroom door, as well as a site for supernatural occurrences as both angels and demons visited with her guest.

Conclusion

The benefits and prestige enjoyed by both Sibylla and the people associated with her certainly elucidate the reasons for which an individual may have imitated a holy woman, as Richer claims Sibylla did. But perhaps more importantly, the fact that Sibylla held this saintly status and yet—in the eyes of her contemporaries who came to view her as an imposter—was not actually a saint reveals the impermanence of living sainthood. Sibylla’s replication of female sanctity initially earned her local veneration as a holy

⁷¹ *Cui matrona illa cameram quandam concesserat, ubi orationes et vigiliis secretius agere posset.* Fol. 62 v.

woman, but as her deception was discovered, society's interpretations of her piety shifted and she was stripped of her saintly status. This suggests that sainthood represented a social construction in the Middle Ages, as it was ultimately the community members who assigned—and then rescinded—Sibylla's position as a holy woman, even despite the fact that she exhibited the accepted behaviors of female saintliness.

Conclusion

As the world seemed to be falling apart and lay piety flourished, Richer of Senones reported that a woman named Sibylla of Marsal established local fame for her exceptional piety, only to be (literally) unmasked as a fraud. Situated in Book Four of Richer's *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae* among chapters on the evil emperor Frederick II, the corrupt mendicants, and the catastrophic Mongol invasion of Hungary, this story unfolded against the backdrop of the emerging beguine movement and the formulation of new criteria for female sanctity. Although Sibylla has received relatively little scholarly attention, this fascinating case indicates Richer's own mentality and authorial role, and offers valuable insight into social constructions of sainthood in the Middle Ages.

Following Chapter One's introduction to the sources, the second chapter's examination of Richer's prologue and the structure of the fourth book of his *Gesta* has suggested that Richer viewed recent events as signs of the apocalypse—including Sibylla's deception. Sibylla's actions—grounded in her worldliness and not attributed to any supernatural entity—represented ubiquitous human sin that necessitated divine judgment in the apocalypse, which Richer believed would unfold in coming generations. The subsequent chapter has placed Sibylla within the context of thirteenth-century piety, demonstrating that the behaviors Sibylla chose to adopt mirrored established manifestations of sanctity. The fact that Sibylla's status as a holy woman was only short-lived reveals that, beyond the performance of certain behaviors, medieval sainthood relied on community members' interpretations of these behaviors and was therefore socially constructed.

A final issue that remains to be explored is the accuracy of Richer's interpretation of Sibylla as a pseudo-saint. In order to propose an answer to this question it is necessary to evaluate the events themselves by stripping away—to the extent that is possible—Richer's authorial voice to arrive at what actually transpired in Marsal around the year 1240.

In Book Four, chapter nineteen of the *Gesta*, Richer's authorship is present at two levels. At the first level, it is necessary to question whether Richer's *Gesta* provides a truthful and accurate report of the events, especially because there are no other reliable sources to either corroborate or challenge his account. In his own prologue to the *Gesta*, Richer indicates his concern for the truth (as Chapter Two has demonstrated). Richer also comments at the beginning of his chapter on Sibylla that "Because that whole region learned of her act, it will not pain them to speak of it more boldly,"¹ suggesting that he anticipated that the residents of Marsal would read his chronicle; presumably Richer would have expected that if he had fabricated any part of the story, those who were closer to the events would likely challenge him. Certain aspects of the story are somewhat dubious; for example, it seems implausible that Sibylla really could have fooled the bishop and townspeople with a homemade demon suit, or that Richer was able to transcribe the fake demon's conversations verbatim. But overall, it is unlikely that Richer fabricated the entire story of Sibylla.

The second question to be resolved—if we assume that Richer is truthful in his account of the events—is whether we agree with Richer's assessment that Sibylla was a fraud, based on the events he reports. If Richer's narrative is correct, the evidence is rather

¹ *Quia tota ista regio actus ipsius cognovit audacius de ea loqui non pigebit.* Fol. 62 r.

damning. According to Richer, the bishop and Dominicans discovered physical evidence of Sibylla's deception: hidden foods, counterfeit angelic ornaments, and the homemade demon costume, as Richer claims that "they saw credibly exposed to view that demonic mask, that is to say that diabolic garment, the hidden foods on which she fed, and the ornaments of her bed."² Sibylla even allegedly confessed to her crimes and pointed the authorities toward the contraband—seemingly without any application of torture, as Richer merely states that once the authorities had restrained her in her bedroom, "She revealed to them all her acts as they are written above, and that she had hidden foods under her bed with which she was being fed; and the food was found there."³ And of course, this discovery began with a certain Dominican and then the bishop witnessing Sibylla making her bed while she had claimed to be rapt, and ventriloquizing the angelic and demonic voices herself. This evidence must have been enough for the residents of Marsal to accept that Sibylla had deceived them, for they immediately lamented this deception: "she [deceived] so many men and women, and those who were believed to be wiser were dismayed more and more. Some declared that she should be burned; others that she should be drowned; others that she should be buried alive."⁴ The beguines, too, suffered, as did the bishop. If Richer's report of these events can be trusted, Sibylla's contemporaries certainly believed that she was a fraud.

² *Videbant enim occulata fide larvam illam, scilicet indumentum illud diabolicum, escas absconditas, quibus illa vescebat, et ornamenta lecti sui.* Fol. 65 r.

³ *omnes actus suos sicut supra scripti sunt illis exposuit, et quod haberet sub lecto suo escas absconditas quibus pascebatur. Quod et ibi inventum est.* Fols. 64 v. and 65 r.

⁴ *illa tot et tantos viros et mulieres, et qui credebantur esse sapientiores magis ac magis confundebantur. Alii clamabant ut combureretur; alii ut aquis suffocaretur; alii ut viva defoderetur.* Fol. 65 r.

However, it is impossible to be sure of Sibylla's own intentions (i.e. what she hoped to accomplish) or how she experienced these events. Regardless of whether or not Sibylla perpetrated the deception Richer described, any truly pious sentiments that Sibylla may have inwardly held cannot be discounted. Even if Sibylla's intentions could be established, her motivations (why she chose to carry out her scheme) would elude scholarship as well. It does seem likely, however, that she was motivated by a desire for the prestige and benefits associated with a saintly status; as Chapter Three has shown, Sibylla not only had her material needs met by the local matron who enthusiastically sponsored her career, but she also achieved far-reaching fame. She was venerated locally, and the mendicant preachers and pilgrims to Marsal spread word of her supposed sanctity to neighboring regions.

Therefore, as bizarre as Richer's account may seem, based on his *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*—the only reliable source for Sibylla's story—Sibylla most likely devised this elaborate plan to feign sanctity using a variety of props in order to achieve a saintly status and the associated worldly benefits. This final estimation then has broader implications for medieval female sanctity more generally. Specifically, although Sibylla was not a genuine saint herself, her unique case of proven falsification of sanctity offers insight into the appealing prestige of a living saint, the expectations for particular manifestations of piety, the discernment of spirits, the social construction of sainthood, and the pervading apocalypticism that informed contemporaries' understanding of women's religious expression.

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Appendix A

De Sibilla beguine de Marsal et actibus eius

The following is a transcription of Richer of Senones's account of Sibylla of Marsal in his *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, based on the single thirteenth-century manuscript of this Latin text, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. lat. 10016. This section is found within the nineteenth chapter of Book Four, on fols. 62r-65r. My transcription has been made from the digitized version of the full manuscript that was made available on Gallica, the BnF digital library, on February 18, 2018. Errors found within Georg Waitz's earlier edition published in the MGH have been indicated in the notes.

Sed quia de magistro Roberto tanto viro versutia diaboli decepto satis compendiose narravimus, de quadam iuencula muliere que plurimos sua subtilitate decepit dicturi accingamur. Quia tota ista regio actus ipsius cognovit audacius de ea loqui non pigebit. In episcopatu itaque Metensi in oppido quod Marsal dicitur illa supradicta muliercula degebat. Que videns plurimas mulieres sub doctrina dictorum Predicatorum specie religionis florere, que beguine appellantur, volens ipsas imitari dictis et factis suis simplicitatem suam pretendebat. [fol. 62 v.] Ecclesias etiam hora matutinarum et missarum, sicut moris est beguinarum, maturius frequentabat. Quid dici?¹ Adeo magnificavit fimbrias suas, ut etiam Ludowico tunc plebano viro discreto, et omnibus habitatoribus ville de Marsal gratissima haberetur. Quedam vero matrona illius ville, cum viro suo simulationibus eius credens, eam hospicio receperat; cui etiam ipsa iuencula suggererat, se etiam angelos vidisse. Cui matrona illa cameram quandam concesserat, ubi orationes et vigiliis secretius agere posset. Cumque ipsa iuencula videret famam sue religionis ubique diffundi, ad maiorem presumpsit audaciam properare. Fatebatur quippe se in spiritu rapi in celum, et ita in lectulo

¹ Waitz's transcription in the MGH edition reads *dicam* here.

suo iacens quasi dormiens, non manducans neque bibens, totam diem deducebat. Hospita igitur sua verum esse credens cameram claudebat, nec aliquem ad eam introire patiebatur. Aliqua quippe hora noctis ut spiritus eius ad eam reversus crederetur, lenta voce planctum emittebat. Quod cum hospita sua audiret, protinus accurrebat, et ei cybum volens dare, illa rennuebat, dicens se epulis celestibus ita refertam,² ut carnalibus cybariis de cetero uti nollet. Dictum est enim post, quod quidam sacerdos eiusdem ville iuuenis, qui ei familiaris erat, secreto noctu ad eam veniebat, et eam delicatis cybariis reficiebat. Et species bene redolentes, ad supervenientes decipiendos ei afferebat, ita ut tota camera illa odore specierum repleretur, ut odor ille in adventu angelorum ad se venientium ibi fieri crederetur. Sacerdos igitur que illa sumere non poterat sub stramento lectuli sui sagaciter recondebat; [fol. 63 r.] quod eidem tribus diebus vel quatuor ad victum sufficere poterat. Et ut dictus presbyter secretius et tutius ad eam venire posset, illa³ dicebat hospite sue, ne aliquando timeret, si noctu ostia domus aperiri vel aliquem alium strepitum audiret, quia a diabolo se⁴ de nocte immoderate molestaretur. Cumque cunctos ita deciperet, fratres Predicatores et Minores fratres ad eam veniebant, et observantes eam, fallatiam ipsius numquam percipere poterant. Sed de ipsa et sanctitate et actibus eius, iam in publico predicabant. Quid plura? Episcopus ipse Metensis Iacobus ad eam venit, comites quoque et milites, clerici, monachi, et utriusque sexus inensus⁵ populus ad eam confluebat, sed non dabatur omnibus copia videndi eam. Quia cum audiret tot et tantos ad se venisse, simulabat in spiritu sicut facere solebat in celum esse deductam, et etiam predicebat, in

² Waitz's transcription reads *refectam*.

³ *illa* has been added above the line.

⁴ *se* is faded or has been erased.

⁵ Waitz's transcription reads *universus*.

tribus diebus non reversuram, et ita nulli aditur ad eam patebat. Illi vero qui ad eam videndam venerant nec viderant, audientes ab incolis que faciebat, ad sua revertentes, mirae de ea nescientibus narrabant. Unde de Alemannia et circumadiacentibus regionibus ad eam currebant. Episcopus vero Metensi cum clericis suis et Predicatoribus qui cum eo erant, volens experiri si ita non manducaret neque biberet, et si in spiritu raperetur ut ipsa⁶ dicebat, fecit eam in aliam domum transferi. Ipsa vero in camera in qua iacebat nullum secum noctu patiebatur manere, quia angeli eam custodiebant cum diabolus eam ita importune infestabat. Sed cum ita custodiretur, ut nec posset manducare vel bibere, et ut verbis suis de diabolo fidem faceret, simulans se de die in celum raptam, noctu surgens, accepit plumas de pulvinaribus [fol. 63 v.] in quibus iacebat, quasi diabolus hoc faceret per cameram ipsam, et per domum in qua custodientes eam iacebant dispersit. Videntes vero credebant, propter molestiam ipsius, a diabolo hoc fieri. Dixerat quippe pluries se a diabolo nimium inquietari. Et hoc ibi et alias sepe fecisse dicebatur. Que ita in illa domo tribus mansit diebus et tribus noctibus, non manducans neque bibens. Et cum videret se ulterius famem sustinere non posse, rogavit episcopum ut eam ad priorem suum locum reportari faceret, quia in visione ad quam his tribus diebus rapta permanserat, audierat si ulterius in ipso loco in quo diabolus eam plus solito infestabat moraretur,⁷ totum corpus eius diabolus in frusta⁸ discerperet. Episcopus vero credulus, eam ad priorem locum reportari fecit. Videns autem Sibilla, ita enim ei nomen erat, quod episcopus, Predicatores, et fratres Minores, et alii qui eam observabant factis suis fidem darent, ad maiorem se contulit audatiam. Fecit quippe ut fertur tunicam nigram fieri et hispidam, et caputium vultum diabolicum habentem, qua

⁶ *ipsa* has been added above the line.

⁷ *moraretur* has been added above the line.

⁸ Corrected from *frustra*.

induebatur, cum ad celum⁹ simulabat se translata, et loquens rauca et horrida voce, audentibus magnum incutiebat timorem. Et quandoque noctu de camera exiens, in illo diabolico et horribili habitu, multis apparebat, et cum eis loquebatur. Et quod mirabilius est dictu, per vicos et plateas de Marsal discurrebat, et obviantibus sibi dicebat se esse diabolum, qui Sibillam illam nefandam et impiam virginem impugnabat, et ita ab illis fugientibus relicta, ad cameram suam secreto revertabatur. Contigit enim quadam die unum de civibus illius ville mori, qui a plurimis non multum bonus homo habebatur. Quod cum Sibilla ab his qui erant in domo audivisset, nocte sequenti, larva sua se induens, sic enim talis habitus appellatur, venit ad hostium camere, et his qui in domo erant quasi diabolus esset rauca voce dixit, Heu heu quantum dampnum ista mala mulier [fol. 64 r.] Sibilla michi hodie intulit, quia amicum meum qui hodie mortuus est michi¹⁰ violenter abstulit. Ipsa enim hodie ad celum rapta est, et usque ad terciam diem non revertetur, et ita suffragiis suis et orationibus sibi eum retinuit.¹¹ Ego enim credebam eum meum esse, et volebam eum ad speciosum pratum meum¹² deducere. Illi vero audientes interrogabant, ubi esset pratum illud. Quibus respondit, Ego habeo pratum valde speciosum et delectabile, in quo ego amicos meos ad spaciandum deduco. Pratum illud semper rore sulphureo et igneo conspargitur, ibi sunt michi iocosa reptilia, et animalia viperea et serpentina, et angues, bufonesque et alia plurima pusilla cum magnis, cum quibus amicos meos dilectissimos conversari et iocari facio, et in illo sulphureo rore ab angelis meis pro deliciis voluptantur.

⁹ *se* has been written and crossed out.

¹⁰ *mortuus est michi* is written as if one word; the abbreviated *est* may have been added later between *mortuus* and the abbreviated *michi*.

¹¹ Damage to manuscript or blotted ink.

¹² *meum* has been added above the line.

Sed quia ista mulier michi hodie tantum amicum abstulit, libenter eam in frusta¹³ discerperem, sed non audeo quia angeli custodiunt eam. Heu michi misero, quare ista contra me et malo meo vobis adnuntio? Quia quam cito ad magistrum meum Sathanam revertar, ipse me ob hoc fetidissimis cruciatibus tradet. Sed non audeo propter istam malam mulierem dimittere,¹⁴ ut¹⁵ vobis ista [ad]nuntiando vobis caveam. Vobis etiam dico episcopis et audientibus me, ne in illud speciosum pratum meum veniatis. Episcopus itaque et alii audientes vere credebant esse diabolum, qui eis talia referebat. Sequenti enim die cum episcopus et Predicatores tantum ad eam videndam intrassent, quia aliis non licebat invenerunt eam in lectulo suo iacentem rubicunda facie quasi dormientem et subtilissimos pannos et candidos circa se habentem, et coopertorium capitis sui tam subtile erat ut diceretur numquam a manu humana tale fieri posse. Iacebat enim quasi dormiens habens anhelitum, tam subtilem ut vix ab aliquo percepi posset, utrum anhelaret au non. Et quia nemo [fol. 64 v.] eam audebat tangere, hospitam eius interrogabant, unde tam candidi panni et bene redolentes venerant, respondebat se pluries quando a superis revertebatur, eam in tali statu invenisse. Et quia ipsa ei sepius dixerat, ab angelis lectum suum reffectum fuisse, et ab eis¹⁶ ornamenta illa¹⁷ recepisse. Asserebat etiam, ei ab eis aquam benedici, qua versutias diaboli ipsam impugnantis superare valeret. Erat enim ad capud ipsius satis pulcrum vasculum positum in qua ipsa minserat, de qua ipse episcopus et Predicatores et alii quam plures ut se a diabolo tutarent, se aspersisse, et ex ipsa olida aqua bibisse feruntur. Quid plura? Iam episcopus ecclesiam edificare deliberabat, in qua quia non comedebat

¹³ Corrected from *frustra*.

¹⁴ Crossed-out word, illegible.

¹⁵ *ut* has been added above the line.

¹⁶ Waitz's transcription reads *iis*.

¹⁷ Waitz's transcription reads *ipsa*.

neque bibebat, nec humanitus vivebat, ipsam ponere volebat, ut ad eam confluentes talia mirabilia in ea delectarentur aspicere, cum subito illud evangelicum¹⁸ nichil occultum quod non reveletur apparuit, namque¹⁹ cum una die se ad superna rapti predixisset et hostia camere bene serata essent et hii qui in domo erant se pausatam dedissent, illa de lecto suo surgens sibi sternere cepit, et diversas voces emittens, quasi obponentis, et respondentis, unam habens horribilem quasi diaboli, aliam vero subtilem quasi angeli, audiebatur, quasi²⁰ conflictus duorum, quod²¹ quidam Predicatorum, conflictum illum volens subtilius audire, accessit ad parietem camere, et circumspiciens casu tenuissimam invenit rimam et aspiciens per eam vidit illam quam credebant raptam fuisse, lectum suum reficientem, et advocans episcopum ostendit ei quid illa interius faciebat. Episcopus vero cum aliis ad ostium venientes illud fregerunt. Quod illa videns proiecit se in lecto imperfecto[.] Illi vero introeuntes levaverunt eam de lecto, et cogentes eam, omnes actus suos sicut supra scripti sunt illis²² exposuit, [fol. 65 r.] et quod haberet sub lecto suo escas absconditas quibus pascebatur. Quod et ibi inventum est. Episcopus vero et Predicadores et alii omnes qui aderant videntes se tam diu a tali muliercula fore deceptos, ineffabiliter doluerunt. Videbant enim oculata²³ fide²⁴ larvam illam, scilicet indumentum illud diabolicum, escas absconditas, quibus illa vescebatur, et ornamenta lecti sui, et alia utensilia, quibus illa tot

¹⁸ Corrected from *eivangelicum*.

¹⁹ *-que* appears to have been added later.

²⁰ *quasi* has been added above the line.

²¹ *cum* has been added and crossed out.

²² *illis* has been added above the line.

²³ The manuscript reads *occulata*, which I have corrected to *oculate*. *occulata* could also be corrected to *occulta*, but I have preferred to amend to *oculata* here. The meaning is clear either way: the objects that had been hidden are now exposed to view.

²⁴ *fide* could also be read as *ficte*, although I am confident that *fide* is the correct reading here.

et tantos viros et mulieres, et qui credebantur esse sapientiores magis ac magis confundebantur. Alii clamabant ut combureretur; alii ut aquis suffocaretur; alii ut viva defoderetur. Beguine vero que ad hoc spectaculum convenerant, ista audire vel videre non poterant. Coopertis capitibus flentes et eiulantes, quia neminem pre pudore videre poterant, in sua revertebantur. Episcopus vero pudibundus suas iniurias non ferens, volens²⁵ eam interficere saniore tamen usus consilio, mulierem illam incarceravit,²⁶ concessa ei tamen parva fenestella per quam ei modicum panis et aque porrigebatur. Pauco enim supervivens tempore, in ipso carcere mortua est. Sic deus ea que per ipsum non fiunt breviter dissolvuntur.

²⁵ Waitz's transcription reads *volut*.

²⁶ A mark has been made above *in carceravit*.

Appendix B

On Sibylla, beguine of Marsal, and her acts

This original English translation of Richer's *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, Book Four chapter 19, is based on the above transcription of BnF ms. lat. 10016, fols. 62r-65r.

But because we told briefly enough of master Robert,¹ a man so deceived by a trick of the devil, we should undertake to tell of a certain young woman who deceived many with her own subtlety. Because that whole region learned of her act, it will not pain them to speak of it more boldly. In the diocese of Metz, that little woman mentioned above lived in the town which is called Marsal. Seeing that many women called beguines flourished with a kind of religious life (*religionis*) under the instruction of the Dominicans, and wanting to imitate them, she pretended her own simplicity (*simplicitatem*) with her words and acts. [fol. 62 v.] She also frequented churches earlier than the hour of Matins and of Masses as is the custom of the beguines. What can be said? She *praised her own fringes*² to such a degree that she was also considered most pleasing by Louis,³ a distinguished man of the common people at the time, and by all inhabitants of the village of Marsal.

In fact, a certain matron of that village and her husband, believing her deceits, had received her with hospitality; the young girl even suggested to this matron that she saw angels. That matron had granted a certain room to her, where she could conduct prayers and vigils more privately. And when the girl saw that the rumor of her religious life had

¹ Robert le Bougre, a thirteenth-century Dominican inquisitor, who has been the subject of the preceding chapter.

² Matthew 23:5.

³ Nancy Caciola identifies this Louis as the parish priest, but there is no indication of his actual identity in the text.

been spread everywhere, she dared to hasten toward a bolder deed. She declared that in spirit she was dragged into heaven, and thus lying in her bed as if sleeping, not eating and not drinking, she drew out the whole day. Her hostess, believing her rapture to be genuine, closed the room and did not allow anyone to enter toward her. In any hour of the night, so that it would be believed that her spirit was returning to her, she would utter a wail in a sluggish voice. When her hostess would hear this, she would immediately rush over, wanting to give food to her; she [Sibylla] refused, saying she was filled with heavenly feasts, so she did not want to enjoy the carnal foods of the rest. In truth, it was said afterwards that a certain young priest of the same village, who was a familiar acquaintance to her, would secretly come to her in the night, and would restore her with sumptuous foods. And he would bring fragrant splendors (*species*) to her for the purpose of deceiving whomever came into the room as the whole room would be filled with the aroma of the splendors, in order that it would be believed that the aroma had been made in the advent of the angels who were visiting her. The priest would cleverly hide what she was not able to obtain under the covering of her bed; [fol. 63 r.] this sufficed as nourishment for her for three days or four. And so that the said priest would be able to come more secretly and more safely to her, she told her hostess that she should never be afraid if in the night she heard the doors of the house be opened or any other noise, because she was endlessly disturbed by a demon at night. And when she was deceiving everyone in this way, the Dominicans and Franciscans came to her, and observing her, they were never able to perceive her deceit. But they preached in public of her and of her religious life and acts.

What more? Jacques the bishop of Metz⁴ himself came to her, counts too, and knights, clerics, monks, and an immense population of each sex flocked to her, but the opportunity of seeing her was not given to everyone. Because when she heard that so very many people had come to her, she pretended, as she was accustomed to do, that in spirit she was drawn away into heaven, and she also predicted that she was not going to return for three days; and therefore no one had access to her. Those who had come for the purpose of seeing her and had not seen her, hearing from the residents [of Marsal] what she was doing, returning to their own property, told remarkable things of her to those who were ignorant. They hurried to her from Germany and from neighboring regions.

The bishop of Metz with his clerics and the Dominicans who had been with him, wanting to test whether she truly did not eat or drink, and whether she was carried off in spirit as she said, transferred her into another house. She laid down in the room, in which she allowed no one to remain with her in the night because angels watched over her while a demon harassed her so ruthlessly. But when she was watched over in this way, so that she was not able to eat or drink, in order to make others believe her words about the demon, simulating herself having been dragged into heaven by day and rising at night, she took feathers from the cushioned couches (*pulvinaribus*) [fol. 63 v.] on which she laid down, and as if the demon were doing this, she scattered [the feathers] through the room and through the house, where her guardians slept. The onlookers believed that this was done by a demon because of her trick. She had often said that she was excessively disturbed by a demon. And this was often said to have been done there and elsewhere.

⁴ Jacques of Lorraine, son of Frederick II, Duke of Lorraine. Bishop of Metz 1239-1260.

Thus she stayed in that house for three days and three nights, not eating and not drinking. And when she saw that she was no longer able to endure the hunger, she asked the bishop that he allow her to be brought back to her previous place, because in a vision in which she had remained rapt for these three days, she had heard that if she stayed longer in this place where the demon was harassing her more than usual, the demon would tear her whole body into bits. [So] the trusting bishop had her brought back to her previous place. But Sibylla, for thus was her name, seeing that the bishop, the Dominicans, and Franciscans, and others who were observing her gave faith to her acts, brought herself toward a greater audacity. It is said that she made a tunic black and hairy with a hood and demonic face, which she would put on when she pretended that she was transported to heaven, and speaking in a hoarse and horrible voice, she would instill great fear in listeners. And coming from the room at night, she would appear to many in that demonic and horrible garment, and would speak with them. And what is more remarkable to say, she would run around through the lanes and streets of Marsal, and would say to those meeting her that she was a demon, who would fight that wicked and impious virgin Sibylla, and when they ran away and left her behind, she would return to her room in secret.

It happened on a certain day that one of the citizens of that village died, whom most considered not a very good man. When Sibylla had heard this from those who were in the house, the following night, she clothed herself in her demonic mask (for such a garment is called thus), went to the door of the room, and to the people who were in the room, she said in a hoarse voice as if she were a demon, ‘Oh, oh, how much damage that evil woman [fol. 64 r.] Sibylla inflicted on me today, because she violently took from me my friend who died today. Today she is rapt in heaven, and will not be returned until the third day,

and she restrained him to herself with her pleas and prayers. I trusted that he was mine, and I wanted to lead him to my spectacular meadow.' Certainly those listening asked, where that meadow was. She replied to them, 'I have a very spectacular and delightful (*delectabile*) meadow, where I lead my friends to take a walk. That meadow is always sprinkled with sulfurous and fiery dew; there I have funny reptiles, and viperous animals and serpents, and snakes, and toads and very many others, small ones and big ones, with which I make my dearest friends visit and play, and in that sulfurous dew they are given pleasure by my angels in front of the pets (*delicis*). But because that woman took such a friend away from me today, I would gladly tear her into bits, but I do not dare because angels watch over her. Oh, I am miserable! How do I report to you all with that one against me and in my distress? Because when I return to my master Satan soon, he will deliver me to the most foul-smelling tortures on account of this. But I do not dare to give up because of that evil woman, so that I may warn you by announcing these things to you all. I also say to you the bishops and those listening to me, do not come into my spectacular meadow.' And the bishop and others listening truly believed that it was the demon who reported such things to them.

Indeed, on the next day when only the bishop and the Dominicans entered to see her (because this was not permitted to others), they found her lying on her bed with a flushed face as if sleeping and having the most delicate (*subtilissimos*) and white garments around her, and her head covering was so delicate that it was said that it could never have been made by a human hand. She was lying down as if sleeping, and had such delicate breath that it was hardly possible for anyone to perceive whether she was breathing or not. And because no one [fol. 64 v.] dared to touch her, they asked her hostess from where such

white and very fragrant garments had come; she replied that she had often found her in such a state when she was returning from heaven. And she [Sibylla] had frequently told her that her bed had been restored by angels, and that she had accepted these ornaments from them. She also asserted that they [the angels] had blessed water for her, with which she prevailed over the tricks of the attacking demon. Indeed, a rather beautiful vessel had been placed near her head, into which she had urinated; the bishop himself and the Dominicans and how many others, in order to protect themselves from the demon, are said to have sprinkled themselves and to have drunk out of that stinking water.

What more? Now the bishop was considering establishing a church, in which he wanted to put her, because she was not eating and not drinking and not living in a human manner, so that those flocking to her would be pleased to see such marvelous things in it [i.e. the church], when suddenly that passage from the Gospel appeared, *there is nothing hidden which shall not be revealed*,⁵ and indeed when on one day she had predicted herself to be rapt toward heaven and the doors of the room were locked, and those who were in the house had taken a rest, rising from her bed she took up making the bed for herself, and uttering different voices, as if objecting and answering, with one voice horrible like a demon's, and another delicate like an angel's, she was heard as if there were a fight between the two voices. One of the Dominicans, wanting to hear that fight more closely, approached the wall of the room, and looking around he found a very thin crack by chance, and looking through it he saw the one whom they believed to have been rapt, making her bed, and he summoned the bishop to show him what she was doing inside. The bishop and others came to the door and broke it. Seeing this, she threw herself down on the unfinished bed. They

⁵ Luke 12:2.

entered and lifted her up from the bed, and restrained her. She revealed to them all her acts as they are written above, and that she had hidden foods under her bed with which she was being fed; and the food was found there.

The bishop and the Dominicans and all others who had been present, seeing that they had been deceived for so long by such a little woman (*muliercula*), suffered indescribably. For they saw credibly exposed to view that demonic mask—that is to say that diabolic garment—the hidden foods on which she fed, and the ornaments of her bed, and other useful things, with which she dismayed more and more so very many men and women, and those who were believed to be wiser.⁶ Some declared that she should be burned; others that she should be drowned; others that she should be buried alive. The beguines who had gathered for this spectacle were not able to hear or see these things. Crying and wailing with covered heads, because none were able to look out of shame, they went back into their homes. The shamefaced bishop unable to bear his injuries, wanting to kill her but having used more sensible advice, imprisoned that woman, nevertheless with a little window permitted to her, through which a small amount of bread and water was extended to her. Surviving for a short time, she died in that prison. Thus, those things that are not made through God himself are quickly destroyed.

⁶ Richer's original Latin seems to be missing a verb in the clause *quibus illa tot et tantos viros et mulieres*. To avoid the necessity of supplying a verb (as Waitz supplies *decipiebat*) I have modified *confundebantur* to *confundebat*, treating *illa* (i.e. Sibylla) as the subject of the verb, and *tot et tantos viros et mulieres, et qui credebantur esse sapientiores* as the direct object.

Appendix C

Extraits des mémoires d'Errard

The following is an extract from a questionable French source, the supposed memoirs of Michel Errard (see the discussion above in Chapter One, on Manuscripts and Editions), reprinted from “Extraits des mémoires d'Errard, valet de chambre du Duc Thiébaud I^{er} de Lorraine,” (1868), including the accents and orthography found there. Errard—who supposedly recorded the story of Sibylla himself in the thirteenth century—was said to be the personal valet of Thibaut I, duke of Lorraine from 1213 to 1220 and elder brother of Bishop Jacques of Lorraine. These memoirs do not seem to exist in any extant manuscript outside a compilation of fragmented sources on the history of Lorraine, published by François-Dominique de Mory d'Elvange in the eighteenth century.

Mory d'Elvange claimed to have received an original manuscript containing Errard's memoirs in 1763 from a lawyer named Reboucher, who in turn had inherited the manuscript from his grandfather.¹ Mory d'Elvange then published extracts of the memoirs along with other fragmented sources, including the memoirs and notes of Louis of Harraucourt (Bishop of Verdun, r. 1430-1437), Jacques Bournon (d. 1611), and Florentin Thierriat (d. 1608); according to François Jean Baptiste Noël, the particular writings presented by Mory d'Elvange as extracts from Bournon and Thierriat—like the extracted memoirs of Errard—exist only in this compilation.²

Mory d'Elvange produced two copies of these collected extracts. One of these remained at his home until his death in 1794, and was then inherited by his friend, Michel-Hubert Oudinot, and was subsequently passed to François Jean Baptiste Noël, who was in possession of the manuscript by 1845. The manuscript was then owned by Nicolas-Antoine-Pascal-Modeste Gillet, and was given to the Musée Lorrain by a man named Chassignet by 1868. Mory d'Elvange gave the other copy to Prince Charles Alexander of Lorraine in 1773. After the prince's death in 1780, the manuscript was sold at auction in 1781 and purchased by the Academie de Nancy.³ This copy was then placed in the Bibliothèque municipale de Nancy and is catalogued as ms. 775, *Notice de quelques manuscrits ou livres rares qui ont rapport à l'histoire de Lorraine*, 382 pages on paper, measuring 330 x 207 mm (13 x 8.15 in); the section by Michel Errard, “Notes tirées de mémoires de Michel Errard, vallet de chambre du duc Thiébaud I^{er}, 1213,” begins on page 33.⁴

“Extraits des mémoires d'Errard” is based on this second version housed at the BM de Nancy and is reprinted here, containing the section on Sibylla. Jean Cayon

¹ “Extrait des mémoires d'Errard, valet de chambre du Duc Thiébaud I^{er} de Lorraine (1213),” 1.

² Noël, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Lorraine*, 10 n. 11.

³ “Extraits d'anciennes chroniques lorraines par Mory d'Elvange,” I-II.

⁴ *Catalogue général des manuscrits*, vol. 4: 243-44.

also included a transcription of Errard's memoirs in the "Suppléments et pièces justificatives" of his French translation of the *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae, Chronique de Richer, moine de Senones* (1842), although it is unclear which version of Mory d'Elvange's compilation Cayon was using, and the text of the extract printed by Cayon differs slightly from "Extraits des mémoires d'Errard."⁵ The version published by Cayon is reprinted in a footnote to Waitz's edition of the *Gesta* in the MGH.⁶

This dubious source presents additional problems of authenticity beyond its questionable provenance. For one, Mory d'Elvange's reproductions of the text are certainly not recorded in thirteenth-century French; the orthography of the French text reprinted here seems no earlier than the fifteenth or sixteenth century.⁷ It is also highly unlikely that Errard's position as a valet would have afforded him the opportunity to compose such memoirs; no other such vernacular memoirs from a layman in a noble French household are known from this epoch. Furthermore, even if this extract were genuine, it would offer little significant insight into Sibylla's story, since it diverges from Richer's account only to suggest that Sibylla and her priest accomplice had a sexual relationship and to describe in more detail Sibylla's hidden food. It is for these reasons that the following extract is not treated as a reliable source of information in this thesis.

Avoit Monsignor un sien frère qu'estoit Jacques, que feut évesque de Metz, qu'estoit prélat voirement bon et de sain jugement, que feut en grande colère pour ce qu'avoit esté induit en grande tromperie et souciance par certaine garce qu'avoit nom Sybilla, et qu'estoit en demeure au lieu qu'est dit Marsal. Avoit la susdite accointance et privauté avec certain quidam qu'estoit prestre, et que volit que por en tant mieux mete en covert ses susdites amours, la dite garce fait de la sainte, en tant que furent béguinard et béguinette, ainsi que M. Jacques, déçus par forfanteries et jactances de la susdite. Icele disoit avoir privautés avec chérubins et séraphins, que enlevoient icelle en dixième ciel, et demouroit ladite en

⁵ Cayon, "Suppléments et pièces justificatives," in *Chronique de Richer, moine de Senones*, 230-32.

⁶ Waitz, ed., 308 n. 1.

⁷ For instance in the use of the forms "grand" and "grande" rather than "grant." See the discussion in Sean L. Field, *The Writings of Agnes of Harcourt: The Life of Isabelle of France and the Letter on Louis IX and Longchamp* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 30-31.

pamoisons dévotieuses, à ce que disoit, à trois nuicts et journées, sans que bût ne mangeât, et avoit grandement débat et rixe avec monsignor Lucifer. Parquoy, por voir vérité d'icelle, monsignor Jacques avint audit Marsal et joua si bellement la susdite garce, que ne feut onc en la ville qui la crût mieux en sainteté que ne crut li dit évesque. Or, à certain jour que la Sybilla jooit dispute diableuse à huis clos, en tant qu'on croioit qu'avoit grande rixe avec le Lucifer, certain béguinard, qu'estoit en moins boin voloir d'avoir croiance à iceux miraculeux efforts, osit viset par certaine fente qu'estoit en l'huis de la chambrette, et vit que la Sybille n'avoit garde de jeuner, comme disoit, voire avoit sous sa couchette chose de bon appétit, que mangeoit par bien.

Quand eut bin vu le susdit, volit que monsignor Jacques ne feut sans voir, et li fait sçavoir que vint, et quand feut vu par la susdite fendresse, fait foncer l'huis et appréhender la susdite, qu'avoua que certain jeune gars, qu'estoit prestre et qu'aimoit bien, avoit souciance de li fornir fruiterie et viandes fraiches et seucculantes, que mangeoit par ensemble, et n'avoient dispute ès déduit d'amour, que trovoit merveilleusement bon. Quand sçut tout, monsignor Jacques fait penre la pauvre Sybille et l'y donna chétive demourance en quatre murailles, où n'avoit ny chaire, ny bon gars à son point ; dont avint qu'en morit de despit et doléance, sans que li monsignor Jacques volit en quoi soit bailler allégence à la pénitence que fait faire à la Sybille. Que feut venu son sien galant, ne sçavons, en tant que n'avons plus veus ne oys nouvelles d'iceluy.