Ideals and Realities of Death and Dying in the Twelfth Century

by

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Abstract

The twelfth century developed a particular conception of what an ideal death was that came to serve as the standard against which different types of deaths were measured. For the benefit of both monastic and lay communities monks and other writers stressed the importance of achieving a good death. Images and attitudes toward death are to be found in various sources, including monastic customaries and constitutions, paintings, lay instructional texts, and histories and chronicles. The idealization of death and the way it was accepted and developed, and how it corresponded to actual deaths, suggest that the expectations of a good death varied among different groups in twelfth-century Christian society. There remained throughout, however, the hope of personal salvation for all who led good, Christian lives, and who faced death constant in their faith in God and in keeping with the expectations of how one was supposed to die.

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Introduction

There were many different ways to die in the twelfth century. Old age, illness, disease, accident, and violence were all common forms of death. The ideal death, as conceived by people in the twelfth century, played a significant role in the development of attitudes toward death and dying, and served as the standard against which different types of deaths were measured. Twelfth-century ideals also formed the basis of the way in which people viewed their own lives, and informed their beliefs about what constituted a 'good death' and the implications this had for them in the afterlife. The idealization of death and the way it was accepted and developed by people in the twelfth century, and how it corresponded to actual deaths, are my topics of investigation in this thesis.

If we look beyond the twelfth century to the fifteenth century, we find a formalized literary version of the ideal death, the *ars moriendi*, firmly in place. It served as a primer, as it were, on how one was expected to achieve a good death. The literary form of the *ars moriendi* has been traced back to the early fifteenth century, and some scholars have argued that there is little evidence in the first fourteen centuries of Christianity that indicate an earlier existence of such an 'art'. Beaty suggests that prior to then, one finds only isolated and incidental references to the *ars*, describing the *ars moriendi* as a truly

original work.[1] While the literary tradition of the *ars* may only be traced back to the fifteenth century, there are many sources that illustrate the existence of the 'idea' of an *ars moriendi* going back as far as the early Middle Ages, primarily in monastic communities. By the twelfth century there were several sources that stressed the importance of the ideal death for both monastic and lay communities. These consisted of monastic customaries and constitutions, as well as iconographic imagery, lay instructional texts, and histories and chronicles, which represent the range of different forms of instruction that were disseminated throughout many layers of society.

The twelfth century was, therefore, a period when a variety of new forms of instruction on death and dying emerged, but the question remains whether there was at the same time a particularly new interest in or emphasis on the importance of dying well. There is considerable evidence that tells us this was not the case. As Aaron Gurevich and Frederick Paxton argue, there are many sources dating back to the early Middle Ages that suggest the existence of a strong concern among medieval people with making a good death as a means of achieving salvation.[2] Both authors debate the argument made by scholars such as Philippe Aries and Jacques Le Goff, who identify the twelfth century as a

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[1]N.L. Beaty, The Craft of Dying: a Study in the Literary Tradition of the *Ars moriendi* in England. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) 1-2. See also Mary Catherine O'Connor, who suggests that the fifteenth century was when death received the most emphasis among medieval people. Mary Catherine O'Connor, The Art of Dying Well: the Development of the Ars moriendi. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942) 3.

[2]Aaron Gurevich, Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages. ed. Jana Howlett. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992). Frederick S. Paxton, Liturgy and Anthropology: a Monastic Death Ritual of the Eleventh Century. (Missoula, Montana: St Dunstan's Press, 1993), and see also Frederick S. Paxton, Christianizing Death: the Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe. (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1990)

period when one observes a distinct shift in perceptions of death and the afterlife as unique from earlier conceptions that influenced the thought of medieval people at all levels of society.[3]

Aries first introduced the subject of attitudes toward death in the Middle Ages in his work, *Western Attitudes Toward Death*, in which he describes a gradual change in the *mentalité* of medieval people from one that was a collective, familiar and comfortable notion of death in the early Middle Ages, toward an increasingly individualistic concern over the destiny of the self in the twelfth century; until the eighteenth century, when the death of others became more prominent and dramatic, and loss and memory emerged as the primary focus. The attitude toward death as it exists today then followed, when death, once familiar and close, became something that was no longer spoken of among the living and was removed from their homes and minds to the sterile surroundings of hospitals and funeral homes. Aries identifies these shifts in perception as *tamed death*, *one's own death*, *thy death*, and *forbidden death*.

Aries points to the eleventh and twelfth centuries as the period when a new concern over individual salvation gained prominence over the previous notion of collective destiny, and when personal action became a larger factor in the determination of each

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[3]Philippe Aries has been singled out as a pioneer in the study of attitudes toward death in the Middle Ages with his work, The Hour of Our Death. trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981); as well as Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present. trans. Patricia M. Ranum. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), an earlier work that provides a brief introduction to his description of attitudes toward death as they progressed over the ages, which he discusses in greater detail in *The Hour of Our Death*. Jacques Le Goff emerged onto the scene shortly after Aries with his controversial work, The Birth of Purgatory. trans. Arthur Goldhammer. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984)

individual's salvation.[4] What Aries fails to regard, however, is the complex relationship that existed between the individual and the community that was a striking feature of monastic death rituals from the early Middle Ages onward.[5] It is difficult to support Aries's argument when one considers the responsibilities of the individual and community that are described throughout the rituals associated with an ideal death. The individual did not act alone in his or her progression towards a good death, nor did the community act alone on the individual's behalf. Cooperation between them both was required in order to achieve the desired goal of the ideal death. Thus Aries's description of a shift from the *tamed death* to *one's own death* is perhaps not as distinct as he would have us believe.

Aries and Le Goff argue that it was also in the twelfth century when the concept of purgatory emerged, when a new conception of the other world developed among medieval people and when individual responsibility and free will took on a more prominent role in the fate of each person's destiny in the afterlife.[6] Aries associates the rise of purgatory with the emergence of official penitentials within the church and an increased emphasis on individual confession and penance, resulting in the formation of a highly legalistic perception of punishment and forgiveness that Le Goff suggests was projected into the afterlife and onto notions of purgatory.[7]

Jean-Claude Schmitt takes up the discussion of the emergence of purgatory in his

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[4]Aries, Western Attitudes Toward Death, 28.

[5]Paxton, Liturgy and Anthropology, 4.

[6]Le Goff, The Birth of Purgatory, 2-5.

[7]Aries, The Hour of Our Death, 154, and Le Goff, The Birth of Purgatory, 5.

work, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, in which he makes a more direct connection between the rise of purgatory and the religious hold that the church had over the laity, specifically with respect to penance and suffrages.[8] Schmitt interprets Christian attitudes toward death as notions that were defined and imposed by the church as a means of organizing and controlling the laity.[9] Due to a system of what Schmitt describes as a "religious, ethical, and ideological harnessing of lay people" by the church from the twelfth century forward, there emerged a massive production of *exempla* that described the deaths and, in many cases, the return of various individuals, out of which developed a relationship between medieval people and the dead.[10] He further argues that this then led to new perceptions of the afterlife and purgatory that grew in strength over the following centuries.

The argument that Schmitt makes, as does Aries and Le Goff, is that the attitudes and beliefs surrounding death and the afterlife were very much 'top-down' phenomena, and that were it not for the pressure exerted by the church, subsequent perceptions of an afterlife would not have taken root and spread among lay people. Schmitt does not consider the possibility that perhaps these beliefs grew out of those of the general populace earlier in the Middle Ages and were later taken up by the church to be further refined and formalized. As Gurevich argues, there is considerable evidence that contradicts the argument made by these authors. Purgatorial visions that attest to an intense concern

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[8]Jean-Claude Schmitt, Ghosts in the Middle Ages: the Living and the Dead in Medieval Society. trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 4.

[9]Schmitt, Ghosts in the Middle Ages, 5.

[10]Schmitt, Ghosts in the Middle Ages, 223-224.

over the fate of souls in the afterlife among all levels of society can be traced back to the beginning of the Middle Ages.[11] An examination of these sources refutes the argument that beliefs surrounding the existence of an afterlife and a purgatorial 'place' were simply created by the church in order to control the laity and bring it in line with the rituals and expectations of the church.

The chapters that follow address these issues as they pertain to the ideal death through an investigation of sources that reveal the rituals and habits that people were expected to follow in order to achieve an ideal or good death within the context of twelfth-century society. The twelfth century is of particular interest considering the recent attention the period has received by scholars from a wide range of fields and perspectives. It is a century that has been described as a period of scholastic revival or Renaissance, and a time as well when Europe experienced strong economic improvement along with an increased level of political and military stability. Thus the twelfth century was a time of thriving prosperity and growth, and serves as an interesting context within which to observe this particular aspect of medieval life, for death, strangely enough, is mostly about the living.

As a means of extending my investigation into ideal deaths across a broader section of society, I examine the way ideals matched up against actual accounts of deaths written by twelfth-century historians. In this way, we can observe how medieval people reconciled the expectations and standards of a good death, as set by society, with the

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[11]Gurevich, Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages, 36. See below, chapter three, for a more in depth discussion of this debate.

realistic and, in most cases, imperfect conditions under which most twelfth-century men and women lived, worked, and died. Some authors, such as Christopher Daniell, argue that when a person did not die according the expectations of a good death, it was assumed that meant that he or she was not a Christian.[12] However, an examination of the sources suggests otherwise. Twelfth-century historians were aware of the complications that arose in the cases of the many deaths that did not fit the ideal, but it did not follow that they resolved the situation by simply concluding that these were then non-Christian deaths. The way in which they confronted and attempted to reconcile these contradictions brings us closer to the realities of dying in twelfth-century society.

The realities of life and death in the twelfth century, addressed in chapter one, form the wider context for this study, since it is through an examination of the many different ways in which people actually died that we can best understand the *ars*. The ideal death was something that twelfth-century people could strive toward, but which would have been largely out of their reach or even the bounds of their control. Through historical accounts, we observe how the ideal was held up as a model against which historical writers set their accounts of deaths. In only a few cases do the accounts completely match the ideal. There were strong limitations that prevented most people in the twelfth century from achieving a good or ideal death that historians were forced to come to terms with in their writings. These limitations comprise the realities of life and death in the twelfth century and are important to understand when considering the complex relationship

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[12]Christopher Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550. (London: Routledge, 1997). See further discussion in chapter three, below.

between the ideal, as it was laid out for medieval society, and actual deaths.

Sources that provide a glimpse into the realities of life and death in the Middle Ages include archaeological records that contain information on diet, illness, disease, and injuries (work-related or otherwise), that were very much a part of life for medieval people from all walks of life; from rural farmers to urban merchants, and men, women, and children. By turning the focus toward the lives and deaths of a larger and varied section of twelfth-century communities, we can then come to a better understanding of how the greater population of medieval people perceived and approached death and, as a result, may have lived their lives as well.

It is for this reason that I have chosen not to address the deaths of exceptional people such as saints or martyrs. The death of a saint was considered to be the purest and most desirable type of death, and thus would have been out of the realm of expectation for the vast majority of people. Saints' *vitae* also had a specific role in society as a record of the exemplary acts and miracles performed by each saint as a testament to their beatitude. Such deeds were beyond the grasp and even conception of most members of twelfth-century Christian society.

Death on crusade is a type of death that can be viewed as exceptional as well. Those who lost their lives while on crusade died as soldiers of Christ and as such were promised personal salvation for their commitment and sacrifice. Only a small section of society actually participated in the crusades, thus the stories of knights who fought and died on these expeditions served more as an example of the honourable and virtuous deeds of a Christian soldier than as an example of how one might strive to accomplish one's own

'good death'. Thus this type of death also is not addressed in this study.

As with most historical topics, there are many different approaches that one could take. Indeed, the scholarship on the study of death and dying in the Middle Ages alone is extensive and covers a wide range of fields and disciplines. The historiography of the subject is too vast to go into fully in the thesis, but a comprehensive collection of the more prominent studies, as well as the most recent research, can be found in the bibliography. Areas of particular interest that could be pursued in future research include: representations of the ideal death in twelfth-century iconography, illustrations and illuminations; an analysis of beliefs specific to an understanding of an afterlife; a study of the rituals surrounding preparations for burial; and research into twelfth-century burial and funeral practices. The focus of my thesis, however, is on the rituals and actions that twelfth-century people were expected to follow in their last hours, thereby leading the reader up to the exact moment of their death. Where the soul went after that moment and the way in which the living dealt with its passing remains a subject for future research and discussion.

Chapter One

Realities of Living and Dying in the Twelfth Century

Before considering the idealization of dying in the monastic tradition, we should perhaps begin by thinking about the realities of death and dying in the twelfth century. The end result of dying may be the same for all human beings in all ages, but the experiences of dying may be quite different and are shaped by historical circumstances. There is, in other words, a history to death.

To die in the twelfth century was to do so without anaesthetics and pain relievers, without the comforts of modern medicine and professionally run hospitals; twelfth-century people did not go gently into some good night of death; rather they must have known the full force of the horror of dying without relief. And the very conditions of dying were bracketed by changing historical circumstances: a burgeoning population, chaotic small cities, and a new mobility of peoples. We need, therefore, to take account of the historically informed nature of dying in the twelfth century before we turn to the spiritualization of dying by the Catholic church.

The investigation of actual death and the realities of dying is a daunting task. This is due in large part to the significant lack or limitation of sources from the twelfth century. Documentation regarding censuses, births and deaths are few from the time of Domesday Book in 1086 up to 1348. Thus what we are left with is a very general idea of the rate of population growth over the course of these centuries. Archaeological records of cemeteries are useful sources of information, but are also limited because they do not tell

us exactly when individuals died, how they died, and who they were, but can be helpful about the sex and age of those who died. As well, due to the length of time that many of these cemeteries were in use, and also due to the relatively low number of complete skeletal remains in existence, it is difficult to gather enough evidence to determine the population of a particular parish or region. With these limitations in mind, however, demographic and archaeological studies can still provide us with information regarding various aspects of population growth around the twelfth century, including birth and death rates. In addition, through the evidence found in these studies, we can gain a greater understanding of diet, health, sickness and disease as it existed in the twelfth century.

A variety of demographic studies have been conducted for numerous regions of western Europe, many of which focus specifically on England such as those provided by Josiah Cox Russell. The most significant piece of documentary evidence of British medieval population is Doomsday Book, from 1086. In the centuries following Doomsday there is little documentation available that may be used to measure the rate of population growth, birth rates and death rates. Russell estimates, however, that the population in England tripled between 1086 and 1348, from approximately 1,099,766 to 3,700,000.[1] He observes that there appears to have been a more rapid increase in population in the first half of this period, the post-conquest period, than the second, when population growth seems to have slowed down shortly before the plague.[2]

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[1]Josiah Cox Russell, British Medieval Population. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1948), 246.

[2]Russell, British Medieval Demography, 247.

The population fluctuation around the time of Doomsday is particularly interesting when one examines, as Russell has done, the effect of the Norman Conquest on demography in England between 1066 and 1086, specifically in the cities and the countryside, and the effect that had on English life in subsequent centuries. *Table one* illustrates the estimated population of various cities in 1066, the area of each in hectares, and the density of population to hectare.[3]

Table one

Rank	*Name*	*Estimated Population*	*Area in Hectares*	*Density to Hectare*
1	London	17 850	138	129
2	York	9590	86-89	86-90
3	Norwich	7635	58	132
4	Winchester	6500-7000	70-80	90
5	Lincoln	5600	65	85
6	Oxford	5350	74	72
7	Thetford	4715	45-48	98-105
8	Gloucester	3065	47	65
9	Dunwich	3000	-	-
10	Canterbury	2995	40-45	60-75
11	Wallington	2760	48	58
12	Chester	2645	44	66
13	Stamford	2575	30	86

Russell has calculated these population figures based on an estimate of five persons per

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[3]Adapted from Josiah C. Russell, "Demographic Aspects of the Norman Conquest," Medieval Demography: Essays by Josiah C. Russell. (New York: AMS Press, 1987), 129.

household (as opposed to the generally accepted figure of 3.5 per household in the country). Based on that, the population of the first ten cities listed would have been approximately 160,400 in 1066, which amounted to 5.47 percent of England's entire population. Russell further states that shortly before the Black Death, in 1348, the estimated population of those same cities was 170,000, which was 4.5 percent of the country's estimated population. England represents one of the few countries whose ratio of city population to total population actually declined over the course of this period.[4]

Several explanations have been suggested for this loss in population. Russell proposes that it was due in part to the destruction of the boroughs by William, after the Conquest, as he began to build his castles, which he estimates resulted in a population loss in the boroughs of approximately ten percent. Another significant loss in population was the thegns. Russell states that a number of thegns would have died in battle, but many in fact left England and those who remained were either murdered or stripped of their holdings and reduced in social rank and thus essentially disappeared.[5] The disappearance of the thegns also resulted in the deterioration of the civic development that had been established by Alfred and Edward the Elder, which was not replaced by the new Norman administration.

In total, after the battle of Hastings approximately 60,000 people went to England from Normandy, while an equal number of Anglo-Saxons either fled or were killed.[6]

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[4]Russell, "Demographic Aspects of the Norman Conquest," 135.

[5]Russell, "Demographic Aspects of the Norman Conquest," 138.

[6]Russell, "Demographic Aspects of the Norman Conquest," 142-143.

However, the Normans who immigrated to England tended to settle in the countryside rather than the cities, generally due to the tensions and animosity that existed between the Normans and the Anglo-Saxons, which further contributed to the loss of population in the cities. As Russell points out, this had a profound impact on English life over the course of the following centuries as it minimized the influence English cities would have on politics, commerce and culture, relative to that of major continental cities such as Toulouse and Lyons in France, and others in Germany and Italy.[7]

In addition to Russell's study on population growth in England, there is a study by Robert Fossier on population trends in Europe as a whole in which he provides a general breakdown of growth by country, specifically France, Italy and the German Empire. *Table two* illustrates the annual population growth of Europe, as estimated by several researchers, between the years 1000 and 1300.[8]

Table two

1000-50 %	***1050-1100*** %	***1100-50*** %	***1150-1200*** %	***1200-50*** %	***1250-1300*** %
0.5	0.38	0.55	0.45	0.35	0.18

As Fossier points out, these figures appear to be quite small; however overall, the trend reflects an annual rate of growth of 0.4 percent over the course of three centuries, which

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[7]Russell, "Demographic Aspect of the Norman Conquest," 140-143.

[8]Excerpted from Robert Fossier, Peasant Life in the Medieval West. trans. Juliet Vale. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 11.

in effect resulted in a doubling of the workforce as well as their food consumption.[9]

Population trends varied, however, from one country to another. For instance, the population of France would have been approximately 6,200,000 in 1100, over 9 million by 1200, and 22 million by 1328; while the population of Italy increased from 5 million to 8 million, and the German Empire from 4 to 9 million over the course of two centuries.[10] It is interesting to note that the older countries, Italy and France, experienced a smaller rate of increase, but also that the population of France represented between one third and one half of the western European total.[11]

Fossier also provides an estimate of the average number of children born to each family household, as shown in *Table three*.[12]

Table three

Years	*900-1000*	*1000-1050*	*1050-1100*	*1100-1150*	*1150-1200*
Average number of children per fertile household	4	4 or 5.3	5 - 5.7	6 - 7.3	5 - 6.5

Fossier bases his analysis of the number of children per household on a number of studies, including the archaeological excavations of cemeteries from twelfth-century Poland and thirteenth-century Sweden and Hungary. These excavations revealed a high proportion of infantile skeletons, with 20 percent under five years of age, 30 percent under eight, and 43

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[9]Fossier, Peasant Life in the Medieval West, 11.

[10]Fossier, Peasant Life in the Medieval West, 12.

[11]Fossier, Peasant Life in the Medieval West, 12.

[12]Fossier, Peasant Life in the Medieval West, 11.

percent under fourteen.[13] Fossier indicates that these findings reflect a high rate of infant mortality, but also imply the existence of a society with a high percentage of children, which would be necessary in order to explain the rapid rate of population growth.[14]

There are several difficulties, however, in relying entirely on archaeological evidence for projecting birth and death rates, thus it is important to bear in mind that these figures are approximate, as Fossier readily points out. This is particularly so when estimating infant mortality as in many cases there is considerable under-representation of children in medieval cemeteries. A number of explanations have been proposed for this. As Berit Sellevold states, the manner in which children were buried could have a significant impact on the ability of archaeologists to locate them; for instance, in cases where their graves had not been dug as deep as they might have been for an adult, children's graves were more likely to have been disturbed by subsequent surrounding burials, and thus their bones would have been more easily dispersed.[15] Other factors that may have led to the dispersal or disintegration of infant remains include small rodents or scavengers, or the chemical composition of the soil, which may have led to a more rapid breakdown of the delicate bones.

As Christopher Daniell points out, however, there are many instances when there

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[13]Fossier, Peasant Life in the Medieval West, 10.

[14]Fossier, Peasant Life in the Medieval West, 10. Fossier points out that archaeological evidence of this type has not been found to as great an extent in western areas of Europe, but that there is no reason to assume that the situation in the west would have been much different.

[15]Berit J. Sellevold, "Children's Skeletons and Graves in Scandinavian Archaeology." Death and Burial in Medieval Europe: Papers of the 'Medieval Brugge 1997' Conference. vol. 2. ed. Guy de Boe and Frans Verhaeghe. (Zellik: Insitute for the Archaeological Heritage, 1997), 16.

is a distinct absence of infant burials in medieval cemeteries, which suggests that children were buried elsewhere.[16] He proposes that this may have been the case particularly for unbaptized children. The church had specific restrictions regarding the burial of unbaptized individuals which stipulated that they were to be excluded from church cemeteries, thus Daniell speculates that in many cases this could be why there are so few children found in archaeological excavations.[17]

Berit Sellevold and Simon Mays point out, however, that in many archaeological excavations only a portion of the cemetery is generally investigated, which would be another reason why infant burials are not always discovered. In two studies, one by Sellevold in Norway and another by Mays at Wharram Percy in England, it was discovered that a special area was reserved for children's burials immediately to the north of the church. *Table four* illustrates the proportion of burials by age at St Olav's church in Norway, on the north side of the church, according to their proximity to the church.[18]

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[16]Christopher Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550. (London: Routledge, 1997), 125.

[17]Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550, 128.

[18]Excerpted from Sellevold, "Children's Skeletons and Graves in Scandinavian Archaeology," 17.

Table four

Age Group	*Far From the Church*	*Close to the Church*
New-born	1.2 %	27.6 %
0-6 years	2.4 %	17.2 %
7-13 years	4.9 %	3.4 %
14-19 years	14.0 %	3.4 %
20-35 years	32.3 %	20.7 %
36-55 years	22.6 %	27.6 %
over 55 years	0.6 %	-
over 20 years	17.1 %	-
undetermined age	4.9 %	-
Total	100 %	99.9 %

As the numbers illustrate, there was a much higher frequency of infant burial in close proximity to the church, particularly the youngest children. As Sellevold suggests, had these two areas not been investigated, one might have come to the conclusion that either this parish had a very low rate of infant mortality, or that children were not regularly buried in the churchyard.[19] Not only is this not the case, but it appears as though young children were provided a special place of burial close to the protection of the church.

The same form of burial is also evident at Wharram Percy, where a much more extensive investigation of the area was performed. The following two tables, *Tables five* and *six*, illustrate the proportion of burials by age category in areas immediately north of

[19]Sellevold, "Children's Skeletons and Graves in Scandinavian Archaeology," 18.

the church in relation to the cemetery as a whole.[20]

Table five

	Location		
Age Group	**Immediately North of the Church**	**Other**	**Total**
Perinatal	44 (67 %)	22 (33 %)	66 (100 %)
0-0.9	21 (60 %)	14 (40 %)	35 (100 %)
1-1.9	15 (50 %)	15 (50 %)	30 (100 %)
2-2.9	8 (38 %)	13 (62 %)	21 (100 %)
3-4.9	12 (38 %)	20 (62 %)	32 (100 %)
5-18	47 (33 %)	96 (67 %)	143 (100 %)
Adult (18 +)	70 (19 %)	290 (80 %)	360 (100 %)
All burials	217 (32 %)	470 (68 %)	687 (100 %)

Table six

	Location	
Age Group	**Immediately North of the Church**	**Other**
Perinatal	44 (20.3 %)	22 (4.6 %)
0-0.9	21(9.7 %)	14 (3.0 %)
1-1.9	15 (6.9 %)	15 (3.2 %)
2-2.9	8 (3.7 %)	13 (2.8 %)
3-4.9	12 (5.5 %)	20 (4.3 %)
5-18	47 (21.7 %)	96 (20.4 %)
Adult (18 +)	70 (32.3 %)	290 (61.7 %)
Total	217 (100 %)	470 (100 %)

[20]Adapted from Simon Mays, "Life and Death in a Medieval Village." Death and Burial in Medieval Europe, 121.

As indicated in *Table five*, a significantly higher proportion (about two thirds) of infants who died before their first birthday were buried in the north churchyard. As well, in the north churchyard alone, the number of infants who died before the age of one is almost equal to the total number of adult burials over the age of 18. Mays indicates that it has been suggested that the north churchyard was traditionally set aside as an area reserved for the unbaptized, thus these burials might represent a large group of unbaptized infants. He comments, however, that given the importance placed by the church on the sacrament of baptism, and that even in a case when it appeared that a child did not have long to live a layperson could perform the baptism, it is questionable that one would find such a high percentage of unbaptized children in a church cemetery.[21] Whatever the reason, it does appear that medieval peoples felt the need to designate a special place of burial for their children separate from the rest.

In a further examination of medieval death rates, Russell has completed a unique study on plague and non-plague cemetery patterns through an investigation of archaeological records with respect to differences in the time of year that individuals died, as well as the sex and age ratio. Russell presents his findings according to plague and non-plague groupings consisting of the following periods: before 542 (non-plague), 542-700 (plague), and 700-1348 (non-plague). The area that his study covers is all of Europe, west of Russia and north of the Alps. His results therefore reflect a general estimation of cemetery patterns which are nonspecific to a particular century or region, but still prove useful by providing some preliminary estimations of mortality rates by age and sex that

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[21]Mays, "Life and Death in a Medieval Village," 121.

may be applied to the twelfth century, as a non-plague period.

Through an examination of the direction of graves in cemeteries, Russell demonstrates how one may determine when the highest instances of mortality occurred according to season. The general practice in Christian cemeteries was to align the body toward the horizon at the point where the sun rose. In non-plague cemeteries, graves generally point east to southeast, indicating greater mortality between the months of October and February. In plague cemeteries, however, graves tend to point east to north northeast, reflecting greater mortality in the summer months, which is also when plague outbreaks were more frequent.[22]

Russell also points out the difference in sex ratio (presented as number of men to a hundred women), between plague and non-plague cemeteries. He indicates that the rate of death among men appears to have been higher in non-plague than plague periods, at roughly 100-115 in times of plague, versus 120-130 in non-plague periods. There is much speculation as to why such a disparity exists, however Russell proposes that one explanation for the lower number of women found in non-plague cemeteries is that there was a higher rate of infant mortality among females, who were then not buried in the cemeteries.[23] *Table seven* illustrates the different groupings of burials according to plague and non-plague periods, and by age and sex.[24]

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[22]Josiah C. Russell, "Medieval Cemetery Patterns: Plague and Nonplague." Medieval Demography: Essays by Josiah C. Russell, 150.

[23]Russell, "Medieval Cemetery Patterns: Plague and Nonplague," 151.

[24]Excerpted from Russell, "Medieval Cemetery Patterns: Plague and Nonplague," 151.

Table seven

	Number of burials				*Percentage*			
	Plague		**Non-plague**		**Plague**		**Non-plague**	
	M	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**
Juvenis (14-19)	34	57	151	327	5.2	10.0	2.9	8.5
Adultus (20-39)	317	353	1687	1654	48.8	61.9	32.6	43.0
Maturus (40-59)	261	134	2593	1364	40.2	23.6	50.1	35.4
Senilis (60-)	37	26	741	505	5.8	4.5	14.4	13.1
Total	649	569	5172	3850	100	100	100	100
Sex ratio	114		134					

As indicated in the chart, in non-plague periods more died in the *maturus* age group (40-59) than the *adultus* age group (20-39), but the case was reversed during plague periods, which then also contributed to an overall shortening of life. However, as Russell points out, death rates in non-plague periods were still fairly high, with an estimated 20 percent death rate of children before the age of seven, a figure he indicates is likely an underestimation given the assumption that many children would not have been buried in regular cemeteries.[25]

The following table (*eight*) provides a further breakdown of burials strictly according to age group.[26]

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[25]Russell, "Medieval Cemetery Patterns: Plague and Nonplague," 152-153.

[26]Excerpted from Russell, "Medieval Cemetery Patterns: Plague and Nonplague," 152.

Table eight

	Number of burials		*Percentage*	
	Plague	**Non-plague**	**Plague**	**Non-plague**
Infans I (0-6)	372	3199	17.2	20.1
Infans II (7-13)	451	1730	20.9	10.9
Juvenis (14-19)	146	851	6.8	5.3
Adultus (20-39)	699	4154	32.3	26.1
Maturus (40-59)	420	4573	19.4	28.7
Senilis (60-)	74	1402	3.4	8.8
Total	2162	15 909	100	100

What is interesting to note here is that in the plague period the *Infans II* age group has a higher percentage of burials than *Infans I*, which is the opposite in the non-plague period. Russell speculates that perhaps the reason for this was that the youngest children were somehow protected from the plague by, for example, a stronger natural immunity.[27] Perhaps, however, this is also a reflection of a difference in burial practices of infants between plague and non-plague periods; unfortunately, there is simply not enough evidence available to account for the discrepancy.

While archaeological studies prove quite useful in providing information pertaining to birth and death rates, as well as population trends, investigations of cemeteries can also shed some light on other aspects of medieval life such as diet, health, sickness and disease. From these we can gain a sense of the quality of life medieval people experienced, as well

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[27]Russell, "Medieval Cemetery Patterns: Plague and Nonplague," 152.

as some of the hardships they faced.

Generally, in addition to marked population growth the twelfth century also experienced a relatively vibrant increase in prosperity on several different counts. The economy, for instance, underwent vast improvements from the twelfth century onward, in addition to an increased level of political and military stability resulting in a relative slowing down of invasion and war, which also contributed to a sense of overall stability.[28] In agriculture, farming techniques improved as farmers began to reclaim vast amounts of arable land. These included experimentation with new types of crops, planting systems, plowing equipment and the development of new sources of power in the form of windmills and watermills.[29] Agricultural improvements in turn led to a surplus of food and a reduction of poverty. Overall, this period of reclamation led to the expansion of villages and the development of new ones, which significantly contributed to the rapid rate of population growth experienced at the time.[30] In fact, as indicated by Georges Duby, population growth was much higher in areas of greater reclamation.[31] As well, the rise in the production of food and per capita food consumption furthered the development of the market economy in Europe along with an increase of the merchant class in the towns. The result was an increase in the migration of people into the towns as fewer found the need to

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[28]Robert S. Gottfried, The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe. (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 16.

[29]Gottfried, The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe, 16.

[30]George Duby, Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West. (Great Britain: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1968), 80-81.

[31]Duby, Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West, 121.

live directly off the land.[32]

The environmental conditions of the twelfth century are another factor believed to have contributed to Europe's increasing prosperity. The period up to the late twelfth century is described as the 'little optimum', with respect to the weather conditions of the time. The dry, mild conditions of the period were a significant factor in the success of crops, also an important factor in the economic and political trends of the time.[33] In contrast, the period following the little optimum known as the 'little ice age', when conditions became increasingly colder and wetter, coincided with the point when Europe's former prosperity began to take a slight downturn. The poor weather led to an increased incidence of crop failure and, while population levels continued to rise, food supplies decreased dramatically until, by 1250, Europe was drawn into a steadily increasing rate of hunger and poverty.[34]

The period of 'little optimum' was also a time when Europe experienced less disease, particularly in the form of epidemic diseases. Infectious diseases at the time were

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[32]Gottfried, The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe, 20.

[33]Gottfried, The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe, 22.

[34]Gottfried, The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe, 24. For further insight regarding climatic influences on society, see John D. Post and Jan de Vries. Both authors question the extent that climatic change is supposed to have impacted human history in terms of its long-term effects. Post states that "...long-term consequences of climate change have not been decisively resolved," and as such, it would be difficult to evaluate the impact of climate change or variability on various trends in history such as demography. De Vries indicates that the difficulty lies in the fact that historians have not yet developed the means by which to measure such influences on society. John D. Post, "The Impact of Climate on Political, Social, and Economic Change: A Comment." Climate and History: Studies in Interdisciplinary History. ed. Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 142. Jan de Vries, "Measuring the Impact of Climate on History: The Search for Appropriate Methodologies." Climate and History: Studies in Interdisciplinary History, 44.

for the most part endemic and had become relatively stable in the disease pool. Illnesses such as smallpox and measles were mainly restricted to the young and had become established as childhood diseases, which thus had little effect on population growth, given the relatively high birth rates.[35] Other illnesses that were dominant around the twelfth century include malaria and ergotism, also known as St Anthony's Fire, and, perhaps most prevalent, leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease.

Leprosy is a chronic infection that develops over the course of many years. The disease itself rarely kills its victims. However, its debilitating effects produce considerable pain and suffering and render the afflicted vulnerable to other, life-threatening illnesses.[36] The outward signs of leprosy include scaley patches of skin, mutilation of fingers and toes, as well as bone degeneration.[37] Bacterial leprosy also causes significant damage to the upper lip and nose, and can affect the nerves surrounding the larynx and vocal cords causing the victim to develop a raspy voice.[38] A.H. Gale indicates that leprosy was frequently confused with other diseases that caused lesions on the skin. Thus she points out that many who were diagnosed with leprosy may in fact have been suffering from some other dermatological condition, or even smallpox or syphilis, noting that there are several references to 'pockes' in the Middle Ages but it is unclear to what these are

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[35]Gottfried, The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe, 12-15.

[36]Gottfried, The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe, 13.

[37]Roy Porter, The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: a Medical History of Humanity. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 121.

[38]Kenneth F. Kiple, ed., Plague, Pox and Pestilence: Disease in History. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997), 50-54.

referring.[39] Leprosy is identifiable through archaeological investigations such as one completed by Calvin Wells at South Acre, Norfolk. As stated by Wells, leprosy may be identified in skeletal remains by certain changes to the hands, legs and feet, as well as through certain cranial signs.[40] All of the skeletons excavated at this particular site demonstrated at least some indication of the disease, a diagnosis that was further strengthened by the knowledge of the existence of a known leper house from the same period that was in close proximity to the cemetery.

Leprosy is not a very contagious disease and it was not a great killer in the Middle Ages, but there was a powerful social stigma attached to the leper that drew a great deal of attention to the disease. Lepers were removed from society, both physically and spiritually. Leper houses were established outside cities and, as part of their removal from the community, a quasi requiem mass was performed for lepers by the church. They were, in fact, dead to the world. As Roberta Gilchrist explains, lepers existed in a 'liminal' state, between the living and the dead, while leper houses were 'liminal' places, bordering the town and its surroundings. As it was with the biblical leper in Leviticus 13:46, "...his dwelling shall be outside the camp."[41]

In addition to leprosy, there are other diseases and illnesses that can be identified in archaeological investigations. Certain excavations produce more evidence than others,

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[39]A.H. Gale, Epidemic Diseases. (London: Penguin, 1959), 51.

[40]Calvin Wells, "A Leper Cemetery at South Acre, Norfolk." Medieval Archaeology, XI. (1967), 242-243.

[41]Roberta Gilchrist, "Christian Bodies and Souls: the archaeology of life and death in later medieval hospitals." Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100-1600. ed. Steven Bassett (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 115.

particularly when comparing urban cemeteries to rural ones. For example, at Wharram Percy Mays reports a lower incidence of infectious diseases relative to other urban centres, which he attributes to a couple of reasons. Sanitation is a significant factor in the spread of disease, which may not have been as serious a problem in Wharram Percy, given the lower population density.[42] As indicated by Keith Manchester, poor sanitation in cities contributed to a number of diseases. These were mainly specific to gastrointestinal or enteric infections, such as cholera, due to the ingestion of contaminated food or water.[43] Also common to urban environments were other acute crowd diseases such as measles and smallpox, which Manchester states cannot be maintained in small populations as a high density of people is required to enable the continuous transmission of the virus. Without this, the population would dwindle to the point where the virus itself would also die out.[44] That is not to say, however, that areas such as Wharram Percy did not experience infectious diseases. As Mays points out, in cases where there is little evidence of infection on the bones, it may be because the population had a lower resistence to various diseases which would then result in earlier death before the infection had time to affect the skeleton.[45]

Periodontal disease is another feature of many medieval cemeteries, such as that found in an investigation of St Nicholas Shambles in London, a cemetery dated to the

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[42]Mays, "Life and Death in a Medieval Village," 123.

[43]Keith Manchester, "The Paleopathology of Urban Infections." Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100-1600, 10.

[44]Manchester, "The Paleopathology of Urban Infections," 12.

[45]Mays, "Life and Death in a Medieval Village," 123.

eleventh to twelfth centuries. Based on the findings of this excavation, William White states that 87.8 percent of the adult population showed evidence of dental disease. Of the younger skeletons only 11.8 percent demonstrated signs of disease.[46] Overall, periodontal disease affected about half of the population, equally between the sexes, a finding which White indicates is fairly comparable to other archaeological findings of medieval cemeteries.[47]

Nutritional diseases make up the next category of illness among medieval people, particularly those caused by iron deficiency such as chronic anaemia and *cribra orbitalia*. At St Nicholas Shambles *cribra* was detected among both young and old of both sexes in 17 percent of the skeletons.[48] As stated by Daniell, iron deficiency was particularly widespread in the Middle Ages, as well as other conditions such as rickets, due to a considerable lack of a varied and nutritional diet.[49] The main staple in the twelfth century were carbohydrate-based foods, with a large supply of cereals and a variety of vegetables, while protein, particularly from animal sources, was less common.[50]

Other common degenerative diseases were in many cases due to work-related

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[46]William J. White, Skeletal Remains From the Cemetery of St Nicholas Shambles, City of London. (London: London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, 1988), 38.

[47]White, Skeletal Remains From the Cemetery of St Nicholas Shambles, City of London, 39.

[48]White, Skeletal Remains From the Cemetery of St Nicholas Shambles, City of London, 41.

[49]Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550, 142.

[50]Gottfried, The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe, 19-20; and Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550, 143.

habits or injuries. Osteoarthritis was detected at St Nicholas Shambles in at least 40 percent of adults, and was at least suggested in 62.3 percent.[51] Osteoarthritis is a disease that affected the small joints of the afflicted, but more especially the vertebrae column. White indicates that based on evidence from other sites it is generally believed that this particular condition was mainly caused by stress or trauma.[52] Other degenerative conditions involving the vertebrae include the presence of osteophytes on the thoracic vertebrae, which has been connected to work patterns as well as obesity. There are other work-related injuries that are commonly found in archaeological investigations such as one known as 'the clay-shoveler's fracture', a lifting injury caused by a sudden jerking motion.[53]

The extent and variety of degenerative conditions that appear to have resulted from everyday work patterns is perhaps only a small indication of the intense and laborious environment in which many medieval people existed, leading to the early onset of painful, chronic conditions that are associated today with the signs of old age. As Daniell points out, while archaeological studies do not necessarily deal in emotions, there are still cases that clearly illustrate a degree of human pain and suffering.[54] The above studies also demonstrate that while we are not dealing with a period of exceptional disease and illness

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[51]White, Skeletal Remains From the Cemetery of St Nicholas Shambles, City of London, 42.

[52]White, Skeletal Remains From the Cemetery of St Nicholas Shambles, City of London, 42.

[53]Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550, 138-139.

[54]Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550, 126.

such as plague, death due to disease was still an ever-present fate of many medieval people; as Russell's study on population death rates in non-plague periods illustrates.[55] Medieval people also met death through accidents, wounds and infections, as well as fires, drownings and violence. Given the lifestyle and circumstances of most people, death was a more omnipresent feature of twelfth-century society than in our own, along with higher rates of infant mortality, shorter life expectancy and fewer means to prolong life, particularly considering the primitive state of health care at the time.[56]

Thus death was likely to have been more sudden than it is today. Over the course of the previous century our society has gradually moved death and dying to the periphery of life, where we have given over the responsibility of assisting people in their dying hours to professionals such as doctors, nurses and hospice care-givers, with most people ending their lives in hospitals or nursing homes. Throughout the final days and hours of a person's life those professionals do everything they can to help the patient to recover from his or her illness or, if that is not possible, at least to relieve the suffering of the afflicted with pain medications and sedatives. The emphasis is, therefore, mainly on attending to the physical comforts of the dying.

In the twelfth century, however, the circumstances were entirely different. Death was a stronger presence in the lives of people and the care and preparations for the dying

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[55]Above, page 22.

[56]For an in-depth study of the history of medical science from antiquity through to the previous century, see Porter, The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: a Medical History of Humanity, and Jacalyn Duffin, History of Medicine: a Scandalously Short Introduction. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999)

fell to the individual's family and were centred in the home. Hospitals were not a prominent feature of the twelfth century, with little access to medical doctors and very few means to relieve pain due to illness or injury. In this context, in which death was viewed and accepted as inevitable, we find a greater emphasis on the spiritual comforts of the dying as a means of assisting them to move beyond the physical pain of this life into an afterlife where the resurrection and the glory of heaven awaited.

The ideal death, as one means of providing for those spiritual comforts, is addressed in the next chapter as we examine the way in which twelfth-century people were expected to prepare for death as a means of achieving spiritual relief through personal salvation.

Chapter Two

The Ideal Death

Because of the grimness and unpredictability of death in the twelfth century, we find in twelfth-century Christian society an underlying desire to humanize death, and to provide a way to allay personal suffering and spiritual anxiety through the development of ideals and rituals for the preparation of death. Throughout the Middle Ages there were frequent references to death and dying that stressed the importance of achieving a proper death so as to ensure a safe and secure end for the soul in its afterlife. By the fifteenth century there had emerged a formal literary tradition of the *ars moriendi*, the art of dying, which came in the form of short works. These instructional booklets on dying well were also available to lay members of society and became, for some, an important tool in preparation for death. Even those who were illiterate benefitted from these books as the woodcuts provided detailed illustrations for them to study and follow. What then of the *ars moriendi* in the twelfth century? While we may not find convenient instructional booklets among clerical and lay society at that early date, we do find in various sources an emphasis on the importance of achieving a good death, the most explicit of which may be found in monastic communities.

Three such examples of these instructional texts are *The Monastic Customaries of Bernard and Ulrich of Cluny*, *The Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc*, and *The Letters of Direction from Abelard to Heloise*. Both Bernard's and Ulrich's customaries as well as

Lanfranc's constitutions are eleventh-century texts, but Frederick Paxton and David Knowles stress that these customaries had considerable influence on Cluniac monastic communities throughout Europe and England for generations to follow.[1] Indeed, one can find similarities between these customaries and Abelard's letters to Heloise, which were written in the twelfth century for the purpose of establishing a rule of direction for the nuns of the Paraclete, the convent over which Heloise was abbess. These texts, most particularly Bernard's customary, provide a detailed description of the necessary rituals for members of a monastic community to follow in order to arrive at a successful end to life during those final important days and hours.

The monastic customaries as presented by Bernard and Ulrich were not the result of one person's work, or even the work of one group. These texts are rather a reflection of generations of the development of monastic piety and way of life, which suggests that the rituals were already well established long before Bernard or Ulrich undertook the task of putting them into writing.[2] As Paxton points out, concern for one's own personal

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[1]Frederick Paxton states that the customaries of Bernard and Ulrich of Cluny "...formed the institutional basis for life at Cluny, her dependencies and affiliates, and those other communities in Europe and England that followed or were influenced by her customs." Bernard and Ulrich of Cluny, A Medieval Latin Death Ritual: The Monastic Customaries of Bernard and Ulrich of Cluny. trans. Frederick S. Paxton. (Missoula, Montana: St. Dunstan's Press, 1993), 1. David Knowles also indicates that it appears as though Lanfranc had read closely Bernard's customaries as there are several resemblances between the two. He further asserts that Lanfranc's customaries were subsequently applied at a number of cathedrals and abbeys in England. Lanfranc, The Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc. trans. David Knowles. (London: Thomas and Sons Ltd., 1951), xiii and xxii. See also Guibert of Nogent, in his memoirs, where he makes reference to the rituals surrounding the death of an elderly monk according to "...the monastic custom," which John Benton suggests is a reference to *The Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc*. Guibert of Nogent, Self and Society in Medieval France: The Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent. ed. John F. Benton (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 103.

[2]Paxton, A Medieval Latin Death Ritual, 1.

salvation went back to the beginnings of Christianity and thus was not a new concern that emerged with these written texts.[3] What the texts do provide, however, is a precise rule for dying that was to be followed if possible, thus establishing a model for an ideal or formal death.

Bernard addresses the rites for the sick and dying in chapter 24: *On the death and burial of a brother*. The following discussion will provide a brief overview and discussion of Bernard's text. His is more detailed than the other customaries and thus will form the basis of my examination of rituals for dying in a monastic setting. When a monk had taken ill and felt that he was nearing his death, he was to first make confession to his abbot or prior and request absolution. Then, if he chose, he could go to chapter where he would make a public confession and also absolve any others who had transgressed against him; this was to be followed by a second absolution. Note first of all the awareness that one was expected to have of one's own death, in that he "...feels himself near to his departure from this world."[4] This warning of one's approaching death was expected and accepted by the sick man and enabled him to prepare for the next stage on his journey toward death.[5] As well, it is significant that once the brother came to this realization, it was incumbent

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[3]Frederick S. Paxton, Liturgy and Anthropology: A Monastic Death Ritual of the Eleventh Century. (Missoula, Montana: St. Dunstan's Press, 1993), 4.

[4]Bernard, A Medieval Latin Death Ritual, 71.

[5]Philippe Aries also discusses the importance of being forewarned of one's own death in *Western Attitudes Toward Death*; a warning that he indicates usually came by way of a natural sign or a strong inner conviction. Philippe Aries, Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 4. See also Philippe Aries, The Hour of Our Death. trans. Helen Weaver. (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1981), 5-7.

upon him to go to the priest himself to request absolution. Throughout the course of these rituals for dying, there was a strong emphasis on the individual's responsibility to ensure that all the necessary steps were taken in those final days and hours. Personal salvation was thus a choice and available to all Christians, but one had to choose God in order to attain it. Volition reinforced the Catholic doctrine of free will. Once the choice was made the priest and the rest of the community commenced with the necessary services in order to assist their brother on his journey.

The brother next asked to be anointed "with the oil of the sick," and was placed on the bed in such a manner as to permit the other brothers to gather around him on all sides.[6] While the priest performed the unction the seven penitential Psalms were intoned by the community,[7] and the unction continued as follows:

> [The priest] smears his thumb with the oil and makes with it the sign of the cross upon both eyes saying 'through this holy anointing, and through His most just mercy, the Lord forgives you whatever you have sinned through sight; (upon both ears) through hearing; (upon both lips) through taste; (upon the nose) through smell; (on the hands) through touch; and (if the sick man is a conversus, on the inside and if he is a priest, on the outside of the feet) through walking and (on the testes) through the heat of desire.'[8]

Again, the monk himself requested the rite, and the priest completed the action by absolving him of any further sins he may have committed through all of his senses, which were thought most vulnerable to perpetual death. The same idea was emphasized by Abelard, in reference to Jeremiah 9:21: "Death comes in through our windows;" meaning

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[6]Bernard, A Medieval Latin Death Ritual, 71.

[7]Psalms 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129 and 142

[8]Bernard, A Medieval Latin Death Ritual, 73.

sin penetrates the soul through the senses.[9] We thus see a recurring emphasis throughout on the absolute necessity of repeated confession and absolution as a means of purification in order to clear the soul completely in preparation for its departure from this life.

Finally the sick man asked for communion, in which case his mouth was first washed, again a further act of purification, followed by another confession. He was then brought a cross "...so that he may adore it and kiss it," followed by a kiss for the priest, all the brothers, and the boys of the monastery.[10] That completed the monk's task of preparing for his own death. These rites signify what Arnold van Gennep called 'rites of separation', or 'preliminal rites'.[11] Rites of separation were the necessary actions that the dying man must have completed in order to separate himself successfully from this life and move on to the next. The rites involved an intense focus on the purification of the soul through various stages of confession and absolution, followed by a final taking leave of the members of the community. With that done, the dying man could move confidently onto the final stage of his journey, a period of waiting that would carry him into a 'liminal state' in which he would hang above the threshold between life and death.

Once the members of the community had received their farewell kiss, they departed and the brother was left with a servant to watch over him, "...so that his death

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[9]From Abelard's "Letters of Direction to Heloise." Peter Abelard, The Letters of Abelard and Heloise. trans. Betty Radice. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1974), 205.

[10]Bernard, A Medieval Latin Death Ritual, 75.

[11]Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage. trans. M.B. Vizedom and G.L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Paul, 1960), 10-11. Paxton examines this concept in great detail in Liturgy and Anthropology, 9-10.

does not happen unexpectedly."[12] From that moment on, the dying man was never left alone. The cross was laid next to him, and candles were kept burning all through the night. When he finally reached the hour of his death, as perceived by servants, whom Bernard indicates were "well trained in such matters," a blanket was spread out on the ground and ashes were sprinkled over it in the shape of a cross.[13] The sick man was laid on the blanket, and the prior was notified of his approaching end. At this point, should the man have remained conscious, the passion was read aloud to him, otherwise the Psalms were to be sung continuously.

When the servant observed that the soul was about to depart the body, he took a board out into the cloister, and struck it quickly. When the signal was heard by the monks, all those who could were to stop what they were doing and run to the dying man's side, chanting the Credo repeatedly "...until the soul is released from the body."[14] If, however, his death was prolonged the abbot or prior would begin with the litany, appealing to the saints to protect the dying man's soul. Once this was completed the priest commenced with prayers to God, beseeching Him to free the monk's soul.[15] No matter how long it took for the brother to breathe his last, the prayers and Psalms would not cease, and, above all, the man was not left alone, as Bernard admonished that "The brother ought

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[12]Bernard, A Medieval Latin Death Ritual, 76.

[13]Bernard, A Medieval Latin Death Ritual, 76.

[14]Bernard, A Medieval Latin Death Ritual, 77.

[15]"Be merciful: spare him Lord. Be merciful: free him Lord. From the evil sword; free him Lord. From perpetual death, free, etc..." Bernard, A Medieval Latin Death Ritual, 78.

never to die without all being present."[16] This was a crucial time for the dying monk as until his soul was finally released, it was thought to remain in an extremely vulnerable state and needed the protection of the saints and the prayers of the monks. The danger of his soul being lost to Satan was ever present in those final moments and thus it was essential for it to remain pure right to the end. For as Abelard states, "What can be destroyed so easily as the soul?"[17]

The prayers and Psalms that were recited by the members of the community formed the necessary 'rites of transition', or 'liminal rites', which would carry the dying man safely from this life to the next. In this sense the entire community was also thrown into a liminal state along with their dying brother as they worked to assist him through his transition by their prayers and invocations. Their focus remained on the security of his soul, which is also evident in the fact that when they heard the clapping of the board, they were instructed to run to his side, for running was something they were only permitted to do in the case of death or fire. Otherwise, as Bernard states, "...the step of the man of our order is exceedingly restrained."[18] The singing and the chanting continued and built until, finally, the soul departed from the body and the bells tolled. Then all might feel secure in

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[16]Bernard, A Medieval Latin Death Ritual, 79.

[17]Abelard, The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, 205. The anxiety surrounding the last hours or moments of life continued to be a concern throughout the Middle Ages and was vividly illustrated in the *ars moriendi* (see *figures 1 and 2*), where we see the dying man lying in a bed surrounded by the saints. Meanwhile, there are also demons present, vying to turn him away from God, so that they may snatch his soul at his final breath. As illustrated in *figure 2*, however, their attempts were thwarted as the man's journey safely came to an end. Taken from Philippe Aries, Images of Man and Death. trans. Janet Lloyd. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 150-151.

[18]Bernard, A Medieval Latin Death Ritual, 76.

the knowledge that the danger had passed, as the transition was now complete.

Ulrich and Lanfranc's customaries are quite similar to Bernard's text. The differences lie in the number of details involved in the administration of the sacraments and the prayers that were to be read; although, it is possible that they were so well known that it was not considered necessary to provide any more than a general outline of the rituals involved. One aspect that does still stand out, however, is that the sick individual remained responsible for his own salvation in that he had to request the necessary sacraments. As well, the involvement of the community in these rites also played an important role. Personal salvation and communal participation and support are thus prominent themes found throughout all the texts.

Abelard's *Letters of Direction to Heloise* resemble the customaries, although they have a slightly different perspective since his instructions were meant to be followed by nuns. Abelard placed particular emphasis on the importance of caring for the soul in times of sickness and death. He directed the nuns that they should most especially observe silence and prayer during periods of illness. As instructed in Ecclesiastes 39:9-10, "My son, if you have an illness, do not neglect it but pray to the Lord, and he will heal you. Renounce your sin, amend your ways, and cleanse your heart from all sin."[19] With respect to the rituals of the dying themselves, Abelard also stressed the importance of the support of the community in their vigilance over the dying sister and their persistence in their prayers, quoting from Ecclesiastes 7:2, "It is better to visit the house of mourning than the house of feasting; for to be mourned is the lot of every man, and the living should take this

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[19]Abelard, The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, 215.

to heart."[20] Abelard took care to instruct that throughout this time the nuns also maintain their distance from any priests or monks who might tend to the dying woman. It would have been necessary to summon the priest to perform the sacraments, and it was also important that all the nuns of the convent be present, as in the monastery, but he instructed that there be a screen placed between the priest and the nuns to avoid any contact between the men and the sisters.[21] Even in times of sickness and death, the purity of the convent must be maintained along with the dying sister's soul. The greatest difference between Abelard's directions and those of the customaries is that he did not discuss the actual sacraments themselves, as this obviously was not the station of a woman and thus should not have concerned them.

Thus far we have examined texts that strictly deal with death in a monastic setting. While the customaries do provide us with important insight into what was considered to be a most ideal form of a death, there is also the question of how death was dealt with by those outside of the monasteries. Paxton states that the death rituals found in the monastic customaries began with the early medieval church.[22] These rites were developed and passed down for centuries at a time when, as Caroline Bynum indicates, monastic spirituality was "...held up to all as the Christian ideal."[23] By the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, however, Bynum states that there was a diffusion outward from the

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[20]Abelard, The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, 216.

[21]Abelard, The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, 216.

[22]Paxton, Liturgy and Anthropology, 4.

[23]Caroline Walker Bynum, Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 9.

monasteries into society, resulting in what she terms an emergence of 'lay spirituality' in which religious practices, values and roles were redefined outside the monastic cloister.[24] Throughout the twelfth century there was an increased focus on establishing canon law, the sacraments, and the penitential system, which in turn also increased the level of direction that the clergy claimed over the laity.[25] Subsequently, one might expect that there was a greater concentration on instruction for the laity regarding rites surrounding dying as a means of making a good death; and as mentioned above, we can see this in its fullest representation after the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the *ars moriendi*.

In the twelfth century, however, there were other sources outside of the monastic texts that offered inspiration on making a good death. The most popular were representations of the *Dormition of the Virgin*. The Virgin's dormition, or falling asleep, was depicted more often throughout the Middle Ages than any other deathbed scene and, as Aries indicates, "for centuries it remained the prototype of the good death."[26] While there is no mention of the Virgin's death and assumption in the Gospels, tales of how she died were told all over the near east from the second century onwards and by the sixth century they had also reached Gaul. By the seventh century the tale was viewed as a tradition.[27] Subsequently, the feast commemorating the Virgin's death, 15 August, was officially entered into the Roman Church calendar in the mid-seventh century, with artistic

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[24]Bynum, Jesus as Mother, 3.

[25]Bynum, Jesus as Mother, 11.

[26]Aries, Images of Man and Death, 96.

[27]Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: the Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 81.

representations emerging by the tenth century in the form of sculptures, stained glass, paintings, and manuscript illuminations.[28]

The source for the account of the Virgin's death and assumption is *The Apocryphal New Testament*, which provided the basis for the legend as it was assembled in the thirteenth century by Jacobus de Voragine in his *Golden Legend*.[29] According to the apocryphal texts, it was initially revealed to Mary by an angel that her death was at hand. Mary then asked that all of the apostles of Christ be brought to her, to which the angel responded, "Lo, this day by the power of my Lord Jesus Christ all the apostles shall come to thee."[30] Then she asked that "...no power of hell may meet me in that hour wherein my soul goeth out of the body, and that I may not see the prince of darkness," to which the angel replied, "The power of hell shall not hurt thee."[31] Mary then began to prepare her funerary clothing and, shortly after, by the power of heaven the apostles were "...lifted up on a cloud and caught away from the places where they were preaching and set down before the door of the house wherein Mary dwelt." Upon entering her home Mary rejoiced to see them and said to them, "Now therefore I beseech you that we all keep watch

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[28]Donald F. Duclow, "Dying Well: the *ars moriendi* and the Dormition of the Virgin," Death and Dying in the Middle Ages. Edelgard E. DuBruck, Barbara I. Gusick, eds. (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 387.

[29]Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend. trans. William Granger Ryan. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), II, 78-82. The specific text that formed the basis of the Golden Legend was the Latin translation of the Greek text attributed to Melito, bishop of Sardis, from the second century. The Apocryphal New Testament: Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses. trans. Montague R. James. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 209-216.

[30]The Apocryphal New Testament, 210.

[31]The Apocryphal New Testament, 210-211.

together without ceasing, until the hour when the Lord shall come and I shall depart out of the body." For the following three days, as the Virgin lay in her bed, the apostles sat around her and comforted her, while sending praises to God and offering up prayer. And on the third day everyone fell asleep; everyone, that is, except the Apostles and the three virgins, who remained constant in their vigil. Finally, when the hour was at hand, Christ himself came to her and said, "Come, thou most precious pearl, enter into the treasury of eternal life." And so, giving thanks to God, the Virgin's soul departed from her body; a soul that "...was of such whiteness that no tongue of mortal men can worthily express it; for it excelled all whiteness of snow and of all metal and silver that glistereth with great brightness of light."[32]

Such was the Virgin's peaceful departure from this life. It is important to note, as Marina Warner points out, that despite the fact that her death and assumption did not form part of the New Testament, "The assumption of the Virgin reflects a deeply ingrained attitude to the afterlife that is an essential feature of the Christian philosophy."[33] Within the narrative of her death, as with the various depictions that were prevalent throughout the Middle Ages, we see all of the elements of a good death. Mary died at home, in her bed, surrounded by the watchful care of the Apostles. She and the Apostles remained constant in their prayers and she experienced no anguish as her soul was released into the care of Christ himself in an absolutely pure state. See also *figure 3*, in which we see the angels descending from heaven with Christ, as he holds up Mary's soul which is represented in

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[32]The Apocryphal New Testament, 211-213.

[33]Warner, Alone of All Her Sex, 90.

the form of a child. The Apostles are gathered around her in mourning, kneeling as though in prayer, while the Virgin lies in her bed as though asleep.[34]

The notion of death as sleep was also prevalent throughout the Middle Ages, one which Aries indicates "...is ancient and constant."[35] There are several such references to this image in the Bible, as in Psalm 13:3 which reads, "...I will sleep the sleep of death;" and in Acts 7:60, on the death of the first martyr, Saint Stephen, it is written that he "...fell asleep in the Lord." As well, in I Thessalonians 4:13-14 Paul writes, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep." Death as sleep or rest was further taken up by the early Christians, as revealed in the following prayer: "Alexander is not dead, but lives above the stars, and his body rests in this tomb, a rest that will end with resurrection."[36] Rest, sleep, and peace are thus the prominent themes that are conveyed in the *Dormition of the Virgin*. That the Virgin was depicted as asleep inspired hope for a peaceful death, one that was to be embraced gladly, and accepted without struggle, always with the promise of the resurrection before them. This image would likely have provided great comfort to those confronted with the approach of death.

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[34]Taken from Warner, Alone of All Her Sex, colour plate IV, figure 5. This is a an illustration of a twelfth-century golden mosaic from the Church of La Martorana, Palermo, 1143. Scala, Milan.

[35]Aries, The Hour of Our Death, 23.

[36]From Alec Robertson, Requiem, Music of Mourning and Consolation. (London: Cassell and Company, 1967), 6.

An important theme found throughout these examples of dying well is that one does not face death alone, as there are normally many people involved in the process. In the monastic customaries it was stressed that the entire community was to assist the dying man or woman's passage both with prayer and chant, while the priests held the responsibility of administering the necessary sacraments. As well, with the *Dormition of the Virgin*, we can see the intense vigil of the Apostles and Mary's insistence that they remain with her and keep watch until the moment of her soul's departure. Ilse Friesen identified Mary Magdalene as the first person in Christian literature to have assumed the responsibility of assisting in the preparation of death when she anointed Jesus with her tears and perfume, as though "...in anticipation of his burial."[37] This act was considered particularly significant by the church as she actually ministered to Christ himself.[38] From that we can see how the emphasis on the sacrament of anointing was continued in the church through the various rites of purification.

We can also see that the focus on communal support extended beyond the monastic sphere. As mentioned above, the twelfth century saw an increased focus on clerical direction of the laity. However, as Bynum suggests, this also contributed to a removal of the clergy from the lifestyle of the laity, and "...from certain kinds of contact with men and women."[39] This led to the emergence of numerous lay spiritual groups who

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[37]Ilse E. Friesen, "Saints as Helpers in Dying: the Hairy Holy Women Mary Magdalene, Mary of Egypt, and Wilgefortis in the Iconography of the Late Middle Ages." Death and Dying in the Middle Ages, 240.

[38]Friesen, "Saints as Helpers in Dying," 241.

[39]Bynum, Jesus as Mother, 11.

devoted themselves to pastoral care which, in many cases, would include providing service for the sick and the dying within lay society. This commitment continued to grow throughout the Middle Ages, taking on a prominent role within society and resulting in several well-established communities.[40]

Aside from instructional texts and images on dying well, there was another element involved in making a good death, and that was the importance of living a good life. While the opportunity was there for one to find salvation on one's death-bed, it was equally important to ensure that one lived a righteous life, particularly because of the danger of a sudden death.[41] There are several sources that emphasize this threat and stress the importance of remembering that everyone dies, sometimes before we expect it. Thus one must always be prepared and act as though death could approach at any moment.

In monastic writings there was a strong emphasis on contemplation of death as a form of preparation for one's own end. Rupert of Deutz wrote in his *De meditatione*

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[40]One group that became particularly prominent in the thirteenth century is the Beguines. Christine Guidera has studied the role that the Beguines played in providing care for the sick, the dying and the dead, pointing to Marie d'Oignies, who lived at the turn of the thirteenth century, as possibly the first of their following. Christine Guidera, "The Role of the Beguines in Caring for the Ill, the Dying, and the Dead." Death and Dying in the Middle Ages, 51-72. Jacques de Vitry pointed to this service as a prominent feature of Marie's life: "Therefore, from the abundant piety of her heart she busied herself as far as she was able in the external works of mercy. But in these works of mercy, she above all occupied herself in assisting the sick and being present at death-beds for contrition or at interments where she very often received many things concerning the heavenly secrets through a revelation of God." Jacques de Vitry, The Life of Marie d'Oignies. trans. Margot H. King. (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co.,1987), 66.

[41]This will be demonstrated fully in the following chapter on accounts of death, where we find that many narratives about an individual's death will also include a description of how they lived their life. See also Milton Gatch, who argues that "The best Christian teaching about death has always been teaching about life." Milton McC. Gatch, Death: Meaning and Mortality in Christian Thought and Contemporary Culture. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 159.

mortis, "Henceforth be wiser, and in the time that remains, live the life of wisdom, which is to meditate on death."[42] A wise man is one who devotes his time in this life to the contemplation of the next as a means of preparing for one's salvation. He likened this to the work of an ant who gathers corn at harvest to prepare for the winter: "...the small ant, while he collects corn properly at harvest, is said to be similar to a great man, to a wise man, who by his good actions provides for his life in the future."[43] Instruction on contemplation had roots in the Rule of Saint Benedict, in which monks were directed:

> Live in fear of judgement day and have a great horror of hell. Yearn for everlasting life with holy desire. Day by day remind yourself that you are going to die. Hour by hour keep careful watch over all you do, aware that God's gaze is upon you, wherever you may be.[44]

A monk who lived every day in prayer and contemplation, while remaining pure both in heart and soul, would ultimately find his way to a good end to life and thus also to personal salvation.

Outside the monastery we find other forms of instruction on how to live a good life. One example is a text entitled *Disciplina clericalis,* or *The Scholar's Guide*, which was written by Pedro Alfonso, a physician, scientist, and theologian who served the king of Aragon. The composition of his work takes the form of tales and parables, which

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[42]*Salutem abhinc eruditior esto, et quod reliquum est temporis, vive secundum vitam sapientis, quae est meditatio mortis*. Rupert of Deutz, *De meditatione mortis*. PL 170, 357.

[43]*...exigua formica dum frumenta congregat in messe recte dicatur similis viro magno, viro sapienti, qui bonis actibus sibi providet in vitam futuri saeculi*. Rupert, *De meditatione mortis*, 357.

[44]Saint Benedict, The Rule of St. Benedict. Timothy Fry, ed. (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 4: 44-49.

Alfonso hoped "...may offer the readers and listeners a stimulus and occasion to learn."[45] The parables consist of tales told by an Arab father to his son, instructing him in the ways of the world.

There are several references to death and dying within Alfonso's text, specifically with respect to how one should prepare for death through one's actions in life. Unlike the monastic emphasis on contemplation as a form of preparation, Pedro focused on the more practical aspects of life with respect to wealth and how one should live *in* the world. He states that "The world is like an unstable bridge; the entrance of which is the mother's womb and the end of which is death."[46] He referred to life as a journey, and how one completed the journey would ultimately impact one in death. For instance, when asked by his son what exists beyond death, the father responds by telling him that "It is the house of delights for those who serve God; but it is different for those who deserve punishment." The son then asks how he might attain this house of delights, to which the father responds, "Put in it for safe-keeping the best and most precious things that you have, and you will find it prepared for you when you arrive there."[47] The father explains further in the parable that follows.

The tale tells of a young man who inherited great riches from his father, who had served as the king's advisor. It came to pass that a terrible famine fell upon the people of

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[45]Pedro Alfonso, The Scholar's Guide. trans. Joseph Jones and John Keller. (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1969), 33.

[46]Alfonso, The Scholar's Guide, 106.

[47]Alfonso, The Scholar's Guide, 106.

the boy's region, with many facing starvation. The boy used his treasure to help these starving people, but he continued to donate until all was gone. The king heard, however, that the boy had squandered all of his wealth and became very angry. He summoned the boy to him and demanded to know why he had done this. The boy responded by stating:

> My father amassed a treasure and after gathering it, he put it where thieves break through and steal, and he left it to me, from whom you could take it, or fire burn it, or some bad accident destroy it. I however, put it where it will be faithfully preserved for him and for me.[48]

Thus the boy had "...stored up the most precious thing he had in the house of delights."[49] This is one of several tales regarding death, but the emphasis remains the same: that one must take care in this life to prepare for the next and not become too attached to wealth and material things. For no matter how many riches one gathers in life, death will come for everyone in the same way, and all will need to earn their way into the 'house of delights'.

One further example of this emphasis on the importance of living a good life as a means of achieving a good death is to be found in the *Three Living and the Three Dead*, a legend that first appeared in the second half of the twelfth century. This legend also admonished all who were surrounded by wealth and riches to watch how they lived their lives, as when death came upon them all the wealth in the world would not save them if they had not followed a careful and pious life. According to the legend, the *Three Living and the Three Dead* is a tale of three young men who went out into the woods to do some hunting, all decked out in their best finery. Suddenly they were met by three cadavers. As

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[48]Alfonso, The Scholar's Guide, 108.

[49]Alfonso, The Scholar's Guide, 108.

the three living expressed fear and disgust at the decaying beings standing before them, the three dead warned them "...to improve their ways, and to ponder the transience and essential baseness of the human condition."[50] As Paul Binski indicates, this tale was directed towards the laity, a level of society that lived in the world and thus needed to be guided accordingly.[51] Again, the legend stressed that regardless of the amount of wealth one had, death would come for all, and it would not be pleasant. Fine clothes and jewels meant nothing in death as, ultimately, it was one's actions that would decide one's fate. This particular form of representation of death became increasingly popular throughout the Middle Ages. *The Three Living and the Three Dead* had considerable influence on poetry, the *Dances of Death,* and iconography, often appearing on wall paintings, in Psalters and Books of Hours.[52] It formed part of the beginnings of a focus on the macabre and the fear of death as decay that increased in intensity over the following centuries.

As has been demonstrated here, there were several elements essential to making a good death. Rituals surrounding the last moments of death were integral to one's final step on the journey toward personal salvation. However, this journey was not to be faced alone, as the responsibility of assisting one along this path weighed heavily on the members of one's community or family. Finally, one's salvation was not just dependent

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[50]From Paul Binski, Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 134.

[51]Binski, Medieval Death, 135.

[52]See, for example, *figure 4*, the Psalter of Robert de Lisle, 1310. Across the top of the page are the words of the three living: 'I am afraid', 'Lo, what I see', and 'Methinks these be devils three'. And the three dead reply: 'I was well fair', 'Such shall you be', 'For God's love beware by me'. From Binski, Medieval Death, plate VIII.

upon one's behaviour or actions at the moment of death, but also on how one had lived one's life. All of this was strongly impressed upon members of society both within the monasteries and outside in the greater world. These elements taken together form what may be thought of as an 'ideal death'.

The next chapter will provide an examination of how the ideal death matched up with the deaths reported in various narratives written by four twelfth-century authors. The point will be to examine how death was treated by these authors in terms of what they believed to be good and bad deaths.

Figure 1

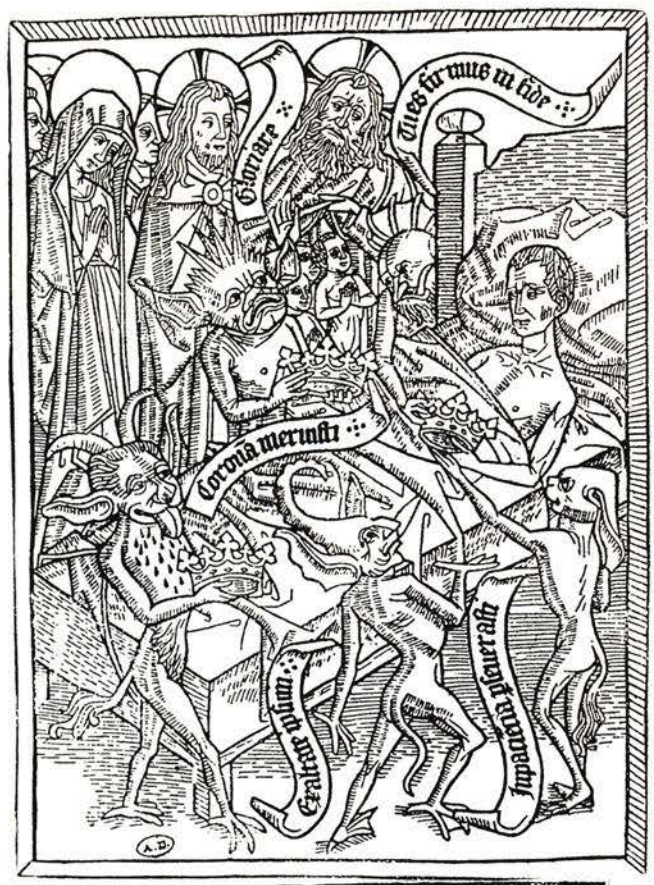
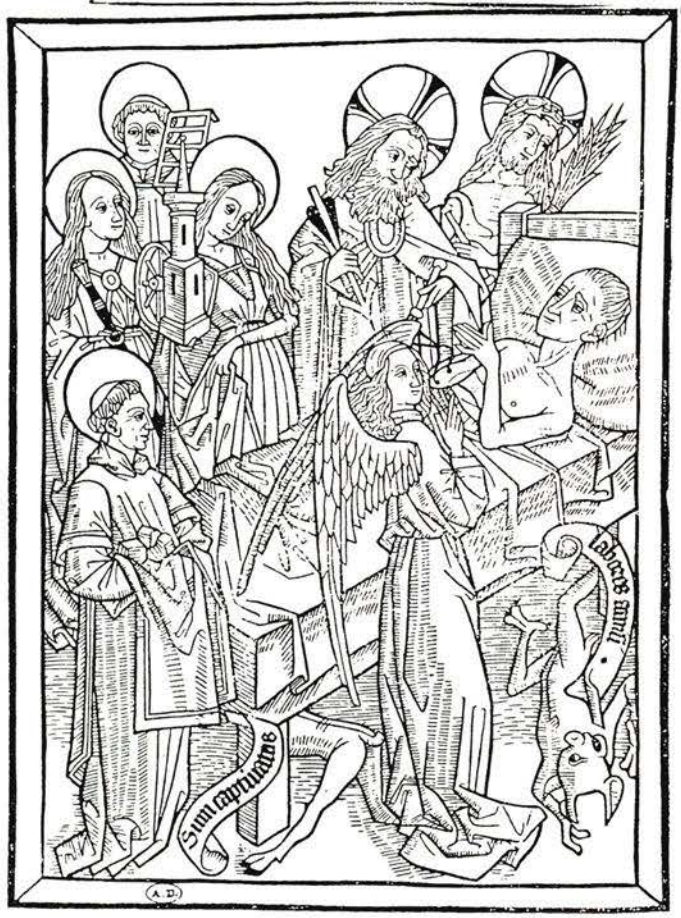
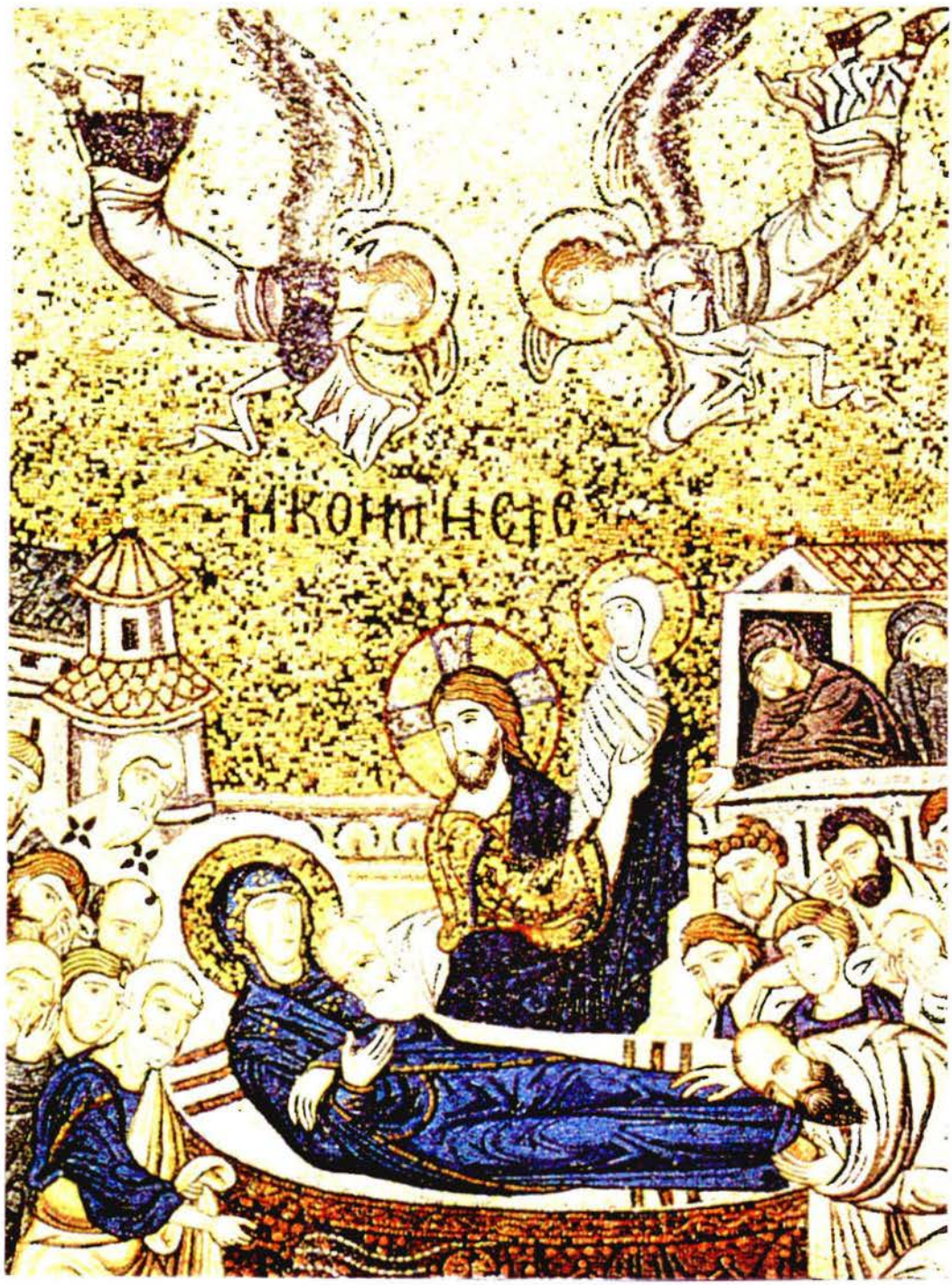


Figure 2



***ars moriendi*, fifteenth century**

Figure 3



***The Dormition of the Virgin*, twelfth century**

Figure 4

The Three Living and the Three Dead, **fourteenth century**

Chapter Three

Accounts of Death

Along with the collective or ideal conceptions of death and dying in the twelfth century, we need to look at descriptions of the deaths of individuals. A great deal of research has been done on the emergence of the individual in the twelfth century, and some on the increased emphasis on the death of the individual. The twelfth century has been referred to as a period of Renaissance with a renewed interest in classical literature and thus also a revival of humanistic ideals.[1] With this it has also been suggested that one finds greater concern with the inner self and personal self-expression, resulting in a more intense focus on the individual both in life and death.

The question remains, of course, whether the twelfth century in fact 'discovered' the individual, or 'the self' as some prefer to call it. John Benton suggests that the twelfth century was not so much a period of discovery as it was a period of renewal of a deeper

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[1]R.R. Bolgar and David Knowles provide in-depth studies on humanism in the twelfth century, in which they particularly focus on the revival of Latin literature as a distinctive feature of this age. R.R. Bolgar, The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1954). David Knowles, "The Humanism of the Twelfth Century," The Historian and Character. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 16-30. For an alternative interpretation of the humanism of the twelfth century, see R.W. Southern, who places more emphasis on elements of dignity of nature and humanity and a greater understanding of the order of the universe, reason, and intelligibility. R.W. Southern, Medieval Humanism and Other Studies. (Oxford: A.T. Broom and Son, 1970), 29-60.

commitment to an examination of the inner self, as this certainly was not a new concept.[2] One finds such an awareness earlier in Augustine's *Confessions*, as well as in the works of other authors stretching back to Antiquity such as Jerome. While one does not necessarily find a trend equal to that of Antiquity, what is clear is that the twelfth century saw a resurgence of the practice of self-examination which was more widespread than it had been in Western Europe since the fifth century.[3]

A particularly important feature of this form of examination was confession and penance, (as well as intention). As Peter Brown observed, penance played a significant role in the lives of Christians in late Antiquity, and confession and penance were, as we have seen, always crucial aspects of a good death.[4] From the twelfth century forward a more rigorous penitential system began to emerge with the introduction of various penitentials as well as an insistence upon mandatory annual confession within the church, as was imposed in 1215 by the Fourth Lateran Council. Alongside an increased emphasis on regular confession also emerged the notion of inner repentance, with the understanding that this was what God truly valued, as God could see into one's soul. Thus only through a deep and inner commitment to repentance could one truly find salvation.[5] As Geoffrey of

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[2]John F. Benton, "Consciousness of the Self and Perceptions of Individuality," Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century. ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 264.

[3]Benton, "Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality," 264.

[4]Peter Brown, "The Decline of the Empire of God: Amnesty, Penance, and the Afterlife from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages." Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages. ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 44.

[5]Colin Morris, The Discovery of the Individual. (London: SPCK, 1972), 71.

St-Thierry stated, "Confession that simply tells a story with the mouth is useless and fruitless unless confession of the heart is added."[6] Giles Constable noted that this was a relatively new form of spirituality in the twelfth century, one that Benton suggests led to the emergence of a 'guilt culture', where personal guilt and responsibility began to play a more prominent role.[7] The source of this new perspective on confession and penance, as Morris and Benton both point out, was the monastic customs that had been passed down over the centuries and were increasingly employed in the greater world throughout the course of the twelfth century.[8] The focus on the inner self then found expression through various literary devices, such as autobiographies, biographies and poetry, as well as in the form of meditations and letters.[9]

As Caroline Walker Bynum states, however, one should take care not interpret the discovery or renewal of the self as a loss of community. Rather, she would suggest that what one finds in the twelfth century is a movement toward defining specific roles within various groups or institutions, particularly in light of the rapid emergence of many new forms of communities throughout Europe.[10] She also notes that even within various

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[6]From Giles Constable, The Reformation of the Twelfth Century. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 264. Taken from Geoffrey of St-Thierry's sermons.

[7]Constable, The Reformation of the Twelfth Century, 264. And see Benton, "Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality," 271.

[8]Morris, The Discovery of the Individual, 74. Benton, "Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality," 283.

[9]Such examples include the writings of Guibert of Nogent and Peter Abelard, the meditations of Anselm and Aelred, and the letters of Peter the Venerable.

[10]Caroline Walker Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages. (Berkeley: University of California

monastic communities, which she sees as the source of this increased focus on individual salvation, there remained a recognition of the importance of the community through the various efforts of the individual.[11] As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, we see how this relationship was illustrated in the monastic customaries of Bernard, Ulrich, and Lanfranc, as well as in Abelard's letters, where we can observe the various roles that each brother or sister was expected to fill as a means of contributing to the work of the community in an effort to ensure the personal salvation of each individual. Ultimately, however, individual responsibility still played a prominent role. As the customaries emphasized, all of the rituals surrounding death rested on the individual's initiative, as without such strong inner conviction and commitment, individual salvation could not be attained.

The concept of the discovery of the self also touches on issues surrounding the death of the individual. Philippe Aries suggests that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries there was a change in attitude toward death from "...a traditional familiarity with death," which he describes as "...a collective notion of destiny," to a more serious concern with one's own personal fate.[12] He thus suggests that there was a distinct shift in perception in which the judgement of the individual became more important than the judgement of humanity on the Last Day. Morris also subscribes to the same argument as Aries stating

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Press, 1982), 85.

[11]Bynum, "The Spirituality of Regular Canons in the Twelfth Century." Jesus as Mother, 53.

[12]Philippe Aries, Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 28.

that "...the whole strength of eschatology now became attached to the individual." By that he means that the individual became the central focus with respect to the Last Judgement, with the 'end of days' taking a secondary place.[13] Furthermore, Jacques Le Goff, Jean-Claude Schmitt, and Christopher Daniell also point to the twelfth century as the period when the idea of judgement of the individual after death emerged, along with the introduction of purgatory. The argument made by these authors is that before the twelfth century the journey of the soul in the afterlife had been unclear and it was not until the introduction of the doctrine of purgatory that medieval people were given a progression from death to the Last Judgement.[14]

By the twelfth century, Aries notes that there had emerged two different scenes of the Last Judgement in Christian iconography, one old and one new. The older one consisted of the Christ of the Apocalypse, with little detail of the history of humanity or of individuals. The new one represented the judgement of the Last Day in which the just were separated from the damned.[15] Aries suggests that from the twelfth century onward, the latter iconography was superimposed on the former to the extent that by the thirteenth

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[13]Morris, The Discovery of the Individual, 147-148.

[14]As will be discussed below, however, there are several sources that demonstrate a clear concept of judgement and purgation after one's death that go back well before the twelfth century. Jacques Le Goff, The Birth of Purgatory. trans. Arthur Goldhammer. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Jean-Claude Schmitt, Ghosts in the Middle Ages: the Living and the Dead in Medieval Society. trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) Christopher Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550. (London: Routledge, 1997), 11.

[15]Philippe Aries, The Hour of Our Death. trans. Helen Weaver. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 100.

century iconographic imagery of the Apocalypse had all but disappeared.[16]

Aries associates this shift in perception of individual judgement with a number of factors, one of which was the emergence of a new biographical view of life, which can be connected to notions of the *liber vitae* or book of life. The belief was that each individual would have to answer for every deed, action, or thought that he or she had committed throughout the course of his or her life before the courts of heaven. All of these details were recorded in a book, the *liber vitae*, which was to be presented to God at the Last Judgement.

Aries argues that in the early Middle Ages the *liber vitae* was thought to be a scroll containing the names of the elect, who were to be called to Christ when it was opened at the end of the world. By the seventh century it had taken on the role of a real book that contained the names of all the benefactors of the church, taking on the form of a census. Aries states that by the thirteenth century it had become a register containing the details of each individual's life in two columns: one for evil and the other for the good.[17] Gradually, as we move into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, he argues that we find the book figuring more prominently at one's deathbed, as illustrated in the *ars moriendi*, where it was consulted by God and Satan before the individual actually died.[18] Most

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[16]Aries, The Hour of Our Death, 101.

[17]However, this type of register was not new to the thirteenth century, as we find examples of the same in the ninth century as well. See, for example, the dream of an English priest in which he is shown several books with alternating lines of black and red writing, after which he learns that the red lettering represents the sins of Christians. Paul E. Dutton, The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 107-108.

[18]Aries, The Hour of Our Death, 104.

significant throughout the progression of the *liber vitae* was an increased emphasis on the importance of how one lived one's life, since it would affect each individual after death. The book of life would play a significant role in the decision of whether a soul would find everlasting peace in heaven or eternal torments in the fires of hell.

While Aries does touch on certain trends that were prevalent from the twelfth century forward, there are aspects of his argument that pose problems and that have been taken up in greater detail by Frederick Paxton and Aaron Gurevich. Both authors disagree with Aries's argument that we find in the twelfth century the emergence of a *new* concern for individual salvation in death, and argue instead that there are sources from the early Middle Ages that attest to an intense concern over individual judgement following death.[19] In particular, Gurevich points to early visions as examples of instances where there is a clear sense of individual judgement and purgation after the death of an individual, such as those found in Gregory's dialogues and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.[20] He asserts that we do not find simply one eschatology taking precedence over another in the minds of people in the Middle Ages; but rather that the two coexisted together in the form of what he terms 'major' and 'minor' eschatologies. The major was the collective judgement of all, while the minor pertained to individual judgement.[21] Indeed, these two eschatologies trace

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[19]Gurevich points to such writings as those of Gregory the Great, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Boniface. Aaron Gurevich, Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages. ed. Jana Howlett. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992), 36. Frederick Paxton, Liturgy and Anthropology: A Monastic Death Ritual of the Eleventh Century. (Missoula, Montana: St Dunstan's Press, 1993), 4.

[20]Gurevich, Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages, 72-77.

[21]Gurevich, Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages, 36. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman also examine the existence of multiple eschatologies that coexisted, and in some

back to the Gospels themselves, in which the Gospel of Matthew emphasizes collective judgement at the end of time, while Luke's Gospel is concerned more with the judgement of individual souls. Thus through the coexistence of these 'major' and 'minor' eschatologies, one can see how the teachings of the two Gospels were reconciled in the minds of medieval people.

It is clear that while we certainly do see a strong emphasis on the death of the individual and concern over personal judgement from the twelfth century forward, that is not to say that this was a particularly new concern for Christians. Again, as the customaries examined above demonstrate, individual responsibility was a significant factor in making a good death. The strict attention to repeated confession and purification itself attests to the importance placed on the preparation of the soul for its journey from life to death. With the discovery of the self in the twelfth century, however, we see a movement outward from the monasteries to regulate and structure the details surrounding confession and penance, thus also to systematize these rituals for all Christians.

As the following accounts of death will demonstrate, there was indeed a great deal of attention paid to the personal salvation of certain individuals and an interest in how they met their deaths, as well as how they had lived their lives. In the interests of time, only four histories have been selected and they will be used to provide a brief window into how death was treated by these authors, and how their accounts matched up to the 'ideal death' laid out in the previous chapter. The texts examined here are: the *Memoirs* of

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cases conflicted, throughout the Middle Ages. Bynum and Freedman, Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages, 7.

Guibert of Nogent; *The Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis; *Historia Novella* of William of Malmesbury; and *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa* of Otto of Freising.

It is important to appreciate that the histories listed might not conform to the forms of history we know today. Historical writing in the twelfth century certainly had a very different character. Before then, works had hardly gone beyond the genres of annals, deeds or *vitae*. In the twelfth century, however, there emerged a greater interest in well-rounded, more inclusive history, which Chenu describes as "...[an] awareness, in a universal or quasi-universal view, of human activity considered as a whole," at which point, "historical causality becomes perceptible with social awareness."[22] There was a greater concern for sequences and causes, that went beyond the history of the Bible, or religion, to gain a sense of the history of humanity as a whole. In terms of quantity, there was a considerable increase in historical writing in the twelfth century, both on the continent and in England. Peter Classen categorizes these works into three main areas: narrative, or *res gestae*; universal history; and works by theologians who were chiefly interested in discovering the "universal meaning" of history as a means of looking ahead into the future.[23]

As well, histories written in the twelfth century do not follow a particularly strict

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[22]M.-D. Chenu, "Theology and the New Awareness of History." Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 177.

[23]Peter Classen, "*Res Gestae*, Universal History, Apocalypse: Visions of Past and Future," Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century, 387. See also Rodney Thomson on the contribution of English writers, such as William of Malmesbury, to historical literature in the twelfth century. Rodney Thomson, "England and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance," Past and Present. 101 (November 1983), 3-21.

organizational structure. As Karl Morrison observes, they did not normally contain a beginning, middle and end, but rather "...a series of segmented episodes."[24] He indicates that they were often incomplete, in some cases missing important information, and they also tended to exclude certain classes or sections of society such as Jews, women, heretics, artisans and peasants.[25] The perspective of the authors is then also significant, and, as Chenu points out, was primarily religious. There was very little secular history being written at this time which resulted in a flourishing of what he terms a "theology of history."[26]

The four histories examined here are all works by ecclesiastical writers. Guibert of Nogent was born sometime between 1060 and 1064, perhaps in Clermont-en-Beauvaisis.[27] He came from a noble and influential family, although not a notably wealthy one. Before he was born, his father dedicated Guibert to the church, so that from a young age he was prepared for his future calling as a monk by both his mother and his tutor. When he was about twelve or thirteen years of age he entered the monastery of Saint-Germer de Fly. Guibert's *Memoirs* consist of details about his own childhood, a history of the two monasteries in which he resided (Saint-Germer as a monk and Nogent as abbot), as well as certain events of the world outside, particularly the revolt at Laon in 1112. Thus his work is at the same time an autobiography and a local history.

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[24]Karl Morrison, History as a Visual Art. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 25.

[25]Morrison, History as a Visual Art, xiv.

[26]Chenu, "Theology and the New Awareness of History," 167.

[27]Benton, Self and Society in Medieval France, 11.

Throughout Guibert's life, he had the opportunity to experience the world outside the monastery, particularly during his time as abbot. He was frequently involved in ecclesiastical affairs, attending various councils, and he also traveled to Langres at one point to see the pope.[28] Guibert's work reveals someone who was aware of the happenings in the world around him, thus providing, as Benton suggests, "...primary documentation of fundamental importance for the history of northern France in the early twelfth century."[29] Guibert's writing is dramatic and provides us with numerous accounts of the activities of various monks, lords and bishops, and throughout it he demonstrates himself to be a "moral commentator."[30] As will be demonstrated below, this perspective is evident in his descriptions of the deaths of various individuals in his narrative.

Orderic Vitalis was born near Shrewsbury, England, on 16 February 1075, to an English mother and a Norman father. By the time he was five years old he had begun his studies in Latin at a school in Shrewsbury, where he remained until 1085. At that time he was sent over to Normandy, to the cloister at Saint-Evroul, where he remained until his death in 1141. Orderic's studies continued throughout his life and he proved to be a prolific writer. His *Ecclesiastical History* was his most extensive work and was begun in 1114; it has been described as "...one of the most valuable and readable of twelfth-century historical works, fundamental to our understanding of feudal society, social custom, and

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[28]Benton, Self and Society in Medieval France, 19.

[29]Benton, Self and Society in Medieval France, 31.

[30]As per Jacques Chaurand, "*La conception de l'histoire de Guibert de Nogent*," *Cahiers de civilisation medievale*, VIII (1965), 381-395. From Benton, Self and Society in Medieval France, 31.

monastic culture."[31] Composed in thirteen books, it provides us with an extensive history of Normandy and Norman England, consisting of many details of the lives and deaths of kings, queens, knights, and churchmen.

Saint-Evroul was located in a region that was both intellectually and politically dynamic; thus the monks of the monastery were certainly not sheltered or protected from the outside world. Orderic himself moved among the Norman aristocracy, and also had occasion to travel to other monasteries both on the mainland and in England. He also may have attended the council of Rheims in 1119.[32] Thus many of his observations were likely first- or second-hand accounts. Orderic did, however, spend the better part of his childhood, and the whole of his adult life, as a monk, and his work manifests his profession. His narratives have been compared to that of the *chanson de geste*, but with a distinctively Christian emphasis in which the duties and importance of soldiers are superimposed over those of good Christians.[33] He viewed history as "...a record of events that was full of moral examples," which is clear throughout the accounts examined below.[34] His history is lively and colourful, and provides us with a thorough illustration of individuals from all walks of life.

William of Malmesbury was also a native of England, and also of Anglo-Norman parentage. His date of birth was sometime around 1090-1095, and he is thought to have

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[31]Marjorie Chibnall. Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*. vol. 1. ed. Marjorie Chibnall. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 1.

[32]Chibnall, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 1, 25.

[33]Chibnall, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 1, 38.

[34]Chibnall, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 1, 35.

been born either in the county of Wiltshire or Somerset.[35] William also entered a monastery at a young age, however in his case he remained in England, at Malmesbury. His most extensive work, *De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, was intended as a continuation of the work of Bede. Since Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* had been written, no one had attempted to write a continuous history of England. William was then commissioned to write the *Historia Novella* by Robert of Gloucester in 1140, and completed it in 1143. It is a much shorter work than his *De Gestis Regum* and serves as a more contemporary history, one that begins with the empress's return to England after the death of her husband, Henry, emperor of Germany.

Like the other historians, William also had a certain degree of exposure to the outside world. He spent a great deal of time traveling all over England in order to collect material for his books. He described himself in the Prologue to the *Historia Novella* as "William, the librarian of Malmesbury," which gives one an indication of his life's work.[36] As King indicates, not only was he well-traveled and extremely well-read, he was also well-connected, both to political and literary circles.[37] Thus in William we again find a writer who, although devoted to the monastic life, was also well positioned to provide a comprehensive historical account of the English people. The *Historia Novella* also displays the influence that a monastic life had on his work, both as to Christian morals and

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[35]Edmund King, ed, in the introduction to William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, trans. K.R. Potter. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), xix.

[36]William, *Historia Novella*, 2.

[37]King, *Historia Novella*, xxiii.

expectations, and thus shares an intellectual world with Guibert and Orderic.

Our final author, Otto, the bishop of Freising, came from a significantly different background than the others. While he was also an ecclesiastical writer, he did not spend his childhood in a monastery and instead entered into the religious life as a young adult. Otto was a member of one of the German princely houses, Babenberg. He was the half brother of Conrad III and uncle to Frederick Barbarossa.[38] He was well placed to take on the role of being Frederick's official biographer. Otto was born in Germany around 1110 and from 1127 or 1128 studied in Paris where he was influenced by scholars such as Abelard, Gilbert de la Porrée, and Hugh of St. Victor. Sometime around 1133 he left Paris and entered the Cistercian Order at the abbey of Morimond in Champagne, over which he may have become abbot. He did not stay there long, however, as in 1137 he was elected bishop of Freising and remained so until his death in 1158.[39]

Otto is particularly well known for his work the *Two Cities*, which consists of a world history up to 1146 in eight books. Written as something of a philosophical history, the *Two Cities* has been described as one that "...depicts history as the working out in time, upon the world as a stage, of the conflict of the eternal principles of good and evil."[40] In *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*, however, Otto's approach was more that of a chronicler as he recorded various events significant to the rise and conquests of

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[38]Charles Christopher Mierow. Otto Bishop of Freising, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa. trans. Charles Christopher Mierow. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 4.

[39]Mierow, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa, 5.

[40]Mierow, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa, 5.

Frederick. As well, the prevalent moral tone that one finds in the other histories does not stand out as clearly in the *Deeds*. His entries tend to be rather brief and factual, and, while he does record the lives and deaths of numerous individuals throughout his work, he does not dwell on details. Otto's perspective was also different from the others, as he held a more worldly position as bishop and also accompanied Frederick on his expeditions; thus he was more intimately involved in the events he reported and in many instances was able to record them first-hand. Furthermore, this was a work that was written specifically for Frederick and under his direction and thus, as Mierow suggests, certain details of events were suppressed or omitted altogether, all in order to cast Frederick in a favourable light.[41] Still, his work provides a special perspective on the various attitudes toward death and dying in the twelfth century.

First it will be necessary to examine what these histories have to tell us about attitudes toward death and dying as a whole. The previous chapter outlined the rituals and conditions that were meant to assist a dying individual achieve an 'ideal death.' As illustrated in the first chapter, however, real life was not so straightforward, and thus one might expect that only under the most favourable conditions could this ideal be met. Christopher Daniell argues that it was believed that the cause of death signified whether a person achieved a good or bad death, as a symbolic representation of the life he or she led. He associates fore-knowledge and preparedness with a good death, and suggests that in the case of sudden death, when these elements were not present, the deceased was

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[41]Mierow, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa, 6.

believed to have been a bad person, a pagan, heathen, or non-Christian.[42] In particular, Daniell points to instances of drowning as unchristian, stating simply that "Christians could not drown."[43] He argues that only saints could undergo a death by drowning without jeopardizing their souls. Anyone else was believed to have been lost. Daniell also makes the same assertion in instances of death caused by thunder, lightning and earthquake.

The distinction Daniell makes between Christian and non-Christian deaths is reductive and is a misrepresentation of attitudes toward death and dying in the broader context of medieval life, in which it would appear that it did not necessarily follow that one who did not have a 'good death' was also not a Christian. I found that actual historical accounts do not consist of simple examples of 'good deaths' and 'bad deaths', but rather various accounts of in-between deaths. There were many different kinds of deaths in the twelfth century and while some do match the ideal, many others were 'not as good'. It would be interesting and important to know why.

What emerges quite clearly in the accounts is that achieving an ideal death still belonged to monks, in the midst of their brethren in the monastery. Monastic conditions remained the best way to make a peaceful and safe journey from this life into the next. Guibert and Orderic provide the most detailed accounts in terms of the rituals involved and their significance for each individual's death, and in many cases they did follow the ideals as laid out in the customaries. For example, Orderic says of the death of Abbot

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[42]Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550, 71.

[43]Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550, 71.

Osbern:

> ...as his sickness increased he had himself borne into the chapter-house... Then he encouraged the brethren and begged them to pardon his mistakes and keep him in their memory. So after making confession and receiving Holy Communion he died in the arms of the brethren as they devoutly chanted litanies for him.[44]

This account is fairly straightforward in its relation of the events. There are other accounts by Orderic, however, which place considerable emphasis on the importance of the ritual sacraments surrounding death: during the final hours of a certain hermit, Guthlac, he "...strengthened himself with the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ."[45] We find the same in his account of Hugh, the bishop of Lisieux, who "...had been purified by confession and absolution, cleansed by prayer and abundant weeping, and fortified by Holy Communion."[46]

Thus Orderic emphasized not only the proper rituals that should be performed at one's death, but also the purpose or meaning behind such rituals. One makes a confession in order to *purify* oneself in the eyes of God. One *fortifies* oneself with the Holy Communion in order to prepare oneself for the difficult journey one has to make towards God and eternal salvation. These rituals were not simply intended as a form of duty or expectation that one followed routinely. They had an important function in the minds of believers in that they would truly assist them in their hour of need. We find here that

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[44]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, Historia Ecclesiastica, vol. 2 (Book III), 133-1335.

[45]"*...communione corporis et sanguinis Christi se muniuit.*" trans. Chibnall. Orderic, Historia Ecclesiastica, vol. 2 (Book IV), 335.

[46]"*Confessione et poenitentia purgatus, oratione et fletuum imbre ablutus salutaris misterii communione feliciter instructus.*" trans. Chibnall. Orderic, Historia Ecclesiastica, vol. 3 (Book V), 15.

intention, as discussed above, becomes the driving force behind the preparations of those final hours.

In Guibert's *Memoirs*, we find an instance where a bishop, whom Guibert describes as a sinful man, does not show repentance before God and does not request that the sacraments be performed. Thus, as Guibert relates, "...[he] was so suddenly wrapped in the shadow of death that he was unable to speak rationally. Confession, anointing, and the sacrament were forced upon him by the care of others and not by his request." Guibert does not elaborate further on the event, only that "After he had died in this manner..." the bishopric remained vacant for two years.[47] To have died *in this manner* implies that it was believed, at least by the author, that the fate of the bishop's soul lay in the balance, as obviously his intentions were not virtuous and his fate was uncertain.

An indication of the desire to meet one's end within the community of a monastery is provided by the number of accounts that tell of individuals who entered a monastery and took the habit only days or hours before their deaths. Orderic tells us of a man named Arnold, who received a vision after he had fallen ill:

> ...St. Nicholas the bishop, appeared to him... and spoke these words of command to him: 'Give no more thought, my brother, to the health of your body, for tomorrow you must die; but strive to bring about the salvation of your soul before the just tribunal of the eternal judge.[48]

When Arnold awoke from the vision, he immediately sent for the brethren of St. Evroul and asked to become a member of their monastery. Following that, Orderic states, "...he

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[47]Guibert, Self and Society in Medieval Europe, 150.

[48]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 2 (Book III), 125.

renounced the world and with true piety of spirit became a monk. Then, repenting his sins and rejoicing in God, he died that same day."[49] According to the narrative, this particular man had not led a very virtuous life and had offended his lord, Duke William. But by taking measures of conversion and monastic incorporation he vastly improved his position in anticipation of the judgement that would visit him after his death. Fear of judgement served as a strong motivation for many individuals to enter into the monastery where death was better handled.

It is significant, however, that Orderic points out that Arnold undertook this action with *true piety of spirit*, as again, we see the author's emphasis on the intention of the individual. It was not enough for one to simply ask to be allowed to become a monk on one's deathbed; one had to be prepared for the responsibilities that went along with it. Orderic tells of another man, a secular priest named Ansered who, upon becoming ill, also began to fear for his salvation and became a monk, as he too had not led a virtuous life. However, in his case he recovered and found himself tied to a community and a set of rules that he had never intended to honour. He then began to slip back into his sinful ways. Orderic remarked in his own form of judgment: "'Travel may change the scene but not the mind,' so this man changed his dress, not his way of life."[50] The man begged to be allowed to give up his commitment, after which he completely returned to a sinful life. We are told that since his intentions regarding the salvation of his soul were never pure and honest, he was ultimately lost to God and would not enjoy the pleasures of heaven.

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[49]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 2 (Book III), 125.

[50]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 2 (Book III), 45.

The majority of the accounts in these narratives generally dealt with men, and there were relatively few accounts of the deaths of women; but, it is clear that the ideal situation for a woman was to die a virgin, as in the case of Agatha, the daughter of King William, described by Orderic. Having been betrothed by her father to a Galician king, Agatha "...besought the Almighty with tears that he would rather take her to himself than suffer her to be led away to Spain."[51] Orderic indicates that her prayers were heard, and she subsequently died a virgin before she reached Spain. There are several accounts, as well, that indicate that many women were likely to enter convents later in life, most often after the deaths of their husbands, but that many also chose to take the habit once they had finished raising their children. Through incorporation they were able, they hoped, in the eyes of God, to wash away the stains of worldly pleasures and the loss of their virginity.

The monastery therefore provided many people with a place where they could go to cleanse themselves of sin and prepare for their passage into death, as well as the judgement that would follow. The reason for this, of course, was that the monastery was the one place that was thought to be removed from the outside world. It was a place where monks devoted their lives to the spiritual well being of themselves, their brethren and, through their prayers, to those who lived in the world. Monks were seen as spiritual soldiers of Christ, fighting evil in the world by means of daily prayer and devotion to God. Theirs was the spiritual battleground in the fight between good and evil. In several of the historians' accounts of deaths we see the battle between God's faithful servants and Satan being carried out to the bitter end .

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[51]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 3 (Book V), 115.

Guibert tells of a man who, having taken the habit on his deathbed, then proceeded to engage in an intense battle with Satan and his minions:

> Soon swarms of devils rushed upon him, from all quarters, tearing him and dragging him prostrate over the floor and striving with mad violence to pluck his holy habit from him, while he held on to the hood with his teeth and clasped his arms to prevent its being torn off.[52]

Guibert then states that "...having by punishment in this world wiped away all stain of sin, he passed free and joyful through death and into life."[53] As he points out, all of humanity is in perpetual danger of eternal damnation because of sin. He explains:

> ...the prince of this world once came to the Son of God, against whom he had no claim. And if he came to Him, how much more certain is it that the Devil in his rage summons his volatile passions against us, over whom he has an almost complete claim.[54]

One must, therefore, fight against Satan through a constant process of purification and unwavering devotion to God, and what better place to accomplish that than in the security and community of the monastery, where all of the brethren participated in the battle together.

The number of people who actually benefitted from the monastic life was few in comparison to those who lived out their lives outside the monastery. Thus other measures were taken by some individuals to earn their salvation. The most common form of preparation was the donation of land or wealth to the church, often made on one's deathbed. Orderic provides us with numerous examples of knights and nobles who

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[52]Guibert, Self and Society in Medieval France, 142.

[53]Guibert, Self and Society in Medieval France, 142.

[54]Guibert, Self and Society in Medieval France, 114.

bequeathed such gifts and he repeatedly emphasizes that such deeds would ensure the redemption of their souls and gain them eternal salvation. That combined with careful observance of the proper Christian sacraments of confession, absolution and communion, would surely provide one with the necessary means to gain favour in the sight of God. In this way one was able to clear both one's worldly and spiritual affairs.

We find these preparations emphasized particularly in the accounts of the deaths of princes. Both Orderic and William provide us with examples of the good, Christian deaths of kings and queens, and these would also serve as important models for their Christian followers. William writes of the arrangements that King Henry of England made as he neared his end: "Let my debts be paid, let quittance and payment be made to my creditors; let the rest be distributed amongst the poor."[55] Following that he received the sacraments and, as we are told, he then died in peace.

In Orderic's account of the death of King William the same arrangements concerning the distribution of his wealth were made and, in addition, he also ordered the release and pardon of several prisoners whom he was holding in captivity. Having been a leader of armies and two nations, William held a great deal of worldly power and thus was at considerable risk with respect to the salvation of his soul. He expressed his anxiety over this in a speech made on his deathbed:

> 'O my friends,' he said, 'I am weighed down with the burden of my sins and tremble, for I must soon face the terrible judgement of God and do not know what I shall do. I was brought up in arms from childhood, and am deeply stained with all the blood I have shed. The ills that I have done in the sixty-four years I have passed in this troubled life cannot be numbered;

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[55]William, *Historia Novella*, 27.

and for them I must soon render account before the most just Judge.'[56]

Through the extensive donation of his wealth and the continuous purification of his soul, it was thought that William was able to bring himself closer to God and the kingdom of heaven.

The same was true of Christian queens such as Matilda, queen of England, and Margaret, queen of Scotland.[57] These women were remembered most notably by Orderic for the charity they demonstrated toward the poor. Written on Matilda's monument were the words:

> ...Comforter of the needy, duty's friend;
> Her wealth enriched the poor, left her in need.
> At daybreak on November's second day
> She won her share of everlasting joy.[58]

In Otto's account of the death of Conrad III, there is less emphasis on spiritual preparations as his life drew to a close. However, Otto does make particular note of Conrad's sense of duty, and commitment to his responsibilities and members of his court, "...unbroken by the pain of his illness."[59] Otto still leaves us with the impression that Conrad was a courageous and powerful leader, one who led a good, honourable life and was respected by many. He states: "There, reft of life amid the lamentations of many and retaining in his last trial the courage of his former endurance, he brought his life to a close

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[56]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 4 (Book VII) 81-83.

[57]Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 4 (Book VII), 45-47 and vol. 4 (Book VIII) 271-273.

[58]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 4 (Book VII) 47.

[59]Otto, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa, 110.

on the Friday following Ash Wednesday."[60] Regarding his spiritual affairs, Otto tells us that Conrad had wished to be buried in the monastery at Lorch, which he did not receive, but arrangements were made for a burial that "...was most suitable and honourable both for that church and for the empire."[61] Thus we find here, as well, an indication of the importance of both secular and spiritual duties of a Christian king.

Up to this point we have examined accounts in the histories that illustrate the important features of a good death. There are, however, several accounts that, strictly speaking, do not follow expected lines and that received different treatment by these authors. The circumstances of each death seem to have overridden ideals. The most common of these involved some kind of unexpected death, whether it be through war, accident, illness, murder, or by natural disaster. To be sure, these types of deaths were not desirable, but in many cases twelfth-century historians found some way of redeeming those unfortunate individuals who happened to die unexpectedly so as to avoid the appearance that their souls were given over to the perils of damnation. Thus while there were many who did not achieve what was considered to be a 'good death', it did not necessarily follow that they met a 'bad end'. In these cases, the author often provides us with some insight into the victim's life as a way of explaining why such an unfortunate death occurred, whether it was through their own fault or the result of another's evil doings.

In the case of war, we have extensive commentary by Otto and Orderic. Otto's

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[60]Otto, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa, 110-111.

[61]Otto, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa, 111.

work reads like a chronicle of the battles of Frederick and his predecessors. He does not elaborate on the deaths of individual men, but he does display his respect for the courage and dedication of their valiant deeds, praising their virtues as soldiers. In his account of a battle between the Saxons and the Bohemians, he states: "...such great slaughter of the Saxons and especially of their noble and illustrious men had taken place...;"[62] and in their battle against the Hungarians: "In this battle many noble and illustrious men fell, and an innumerable multitude of common people."[63] Otto further demonstrates the extent of religious support that the armies received from the church since the pope in Rome had absolved all those who had shed blood in the battle against the Romans, asserting that "...a soldier fighting for his own prince and bound to obey him (warring against enemies not only of the empire but also of the church), though he sheds blood may be declared, by divine as well as secular law, to be not a murderer but an avenger."[64]

The same sentiments are expressed by Orderic with respect to those who went on crusade and into battle as avengers of Christ; but in his narratives concerning war, he wrote from a moral perspective, treating each instance as an example of either a demonstration of courage and virtue, or of folly and disgrace. In his account of the battle of 1066, Orderic describes the event as one that was a demonstration of the divine judgement of God that brought down severe punishment on the Normans and English

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[62]Otto, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa, 53.

[63]Otto, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa, 69. Note that while Otto does not elaborate on the contribution of the common people, he does recognize them as contributors to the efforts of the armies, and thus also counts them among the many noble men who fell in battle.

[64]Otto, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa, 152.

alike, as he states: "...God punished countless sinners in both armies in divers ways."[65] The English suffered because they "...long before had unjustly murdered the innocent Alfred;" and the Normans because "...they had been guilty of coveting the goods of other men."[66]

Throughout his history Orderic identifies the faults and responsibilities of many of those who died in the course of war. For example, in a battle against the Norwegians, a famous earl, Hugh, whom Orderic describes as a very just and noble man was struck down and killed instantly by one who was "...prompted by the devil."[67] Since Hugh had led a very honourable life, there is no indication from Orderic that this was by any means a dishonourable death, however unexpected it may have been. There were others, however, whom Orderic suggests brought about their own deaths through their lack of skill or courage in war, thus ending their lives shamefully. In the case of a certain marcher lord, Robert, Orderic describes him as a man who was full of pride and greed, and who went into battle foolhardily and unprepared, which ultimately "...brought him to a terrible end."[68]

Accidental death was normally explained in a similar fashion. One could even say that there was no such thing as an accident. For instance, a certain Robert 'the eloquent', of Chaumont, who happened to be involved in some criminal mischief and was "...violently carrying away some booty from the territory of St. Ouen," fell from his horse, thus

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[65]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 2 (Book III), 177.

[66]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 2 (Book III), 177-179.

[67]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 5 (Book X), 225.

[68]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 4 (Book VIII), 141.

breaking his neck in the fall and, as Orderic says, "he died wretchedly."[69] One is left with the distinct impression in this case that Robert had such a death coming to him.

One of the most significant and tragic accidents to occur was the wreck of the White Ship on 25 November 1120, as recorded by Orderic, which resulted in the deaths of several of King Henry's nobles as well as his own son. In his account, Orderic spares no words in describing the evil events that led up to the terrible disaster, for which he places the responsibility entirely on the sailors in charge of the vessel. Before the ship left port the sailors on the boat had already drunk a great deal of wine and were completely intoxicated by the time they set sail. Furthermore, when the priests came by to bless them and their passengers before they sailed, the sailors laughed at them and told them to leave. This was particularly significant to Orderic, as he states that "All too soon they were punished for their disrespect."[70] Due to the careless actions of the sailors, and lack of attention to where they were going, the White Ship crashed into a huge rock and the vessel quickly sank. All but one were drowned. Orderic clearly interprets this event as a form of punishment by God for the reckless abandon of the crew, a group who "...had in their hearts no filial reverence for God," and who were then also responsible for the tragic death of the king's son.[71]

Sudden illness was sometimes seen as a form of punishment leading to death as well. Guibert writes of the death of a priest who unexpectedly fell ill. He explains that

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[69]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 2 (Book III), 155.

[70]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 6 (Book XII), 297.

[71]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 6 (Book XII), 297.

because this man was "...outwardly religious, but then and afterwards was hopelessly given up to monstrous vices from which he could be kept by no human care, [he] began to grow feeble."[72] In the end, Guibert tells us that when the man died his soul was lost to Satan forever as a direct result of his terrible misdeeds in life and lack of true faith in God.

Orderic relates an account of Count Baldwin of Flanders, who was an enemy of King Henry, and whose vices also led to his downfall. After he had advanced into Normandy, Baldwin was injured during a battle against Henry's supporters, after which Orderic relates, "...on the following night, the story goes, he ate freshly killed meat, drank mead, and slept with a woman."[73] Orderic believed that it was this indulgence that led to the fatal illness that eventually caused Baldwin's death.

It was also believed that illness might be the result of being wronged by the unjust. William writes that Roger, bishop of Salisbury, was afflicted by a terrible fever, which he suggests was contracted "...from mental suffering, having been assailed by King Stephen with injuries so many and so great."[74] Even more common, however, was the suspicion of poison in instances of unexpected illness. Such was the case in Otto's account of the death of Conrad III,[75] and there are several such instances throughout Orderic's history. The most common instigators of such treachery were believed to have been physicians, Jews, Saracens, and women; and the latter were denounced with particular fervor, as in the case

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[72]Guibert, Self and Society in Medieval France, 110.

[73]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol.6 (Book XII), 191.

[74]William, *Historia Novella*, 65.

[75]Otto, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa, 110.

of Robert Guiscard, the "illustrious duke of Apulia," who: "...was not struck down by military might, but was destroyed by the envy of woman, by which the first Adam was driven from Paradise."[76]

In many instances, however, murder was considered a just reward for the evils committed by certain individuals. In the murder of Mabel, the wife of Roger of Montgomery, it was believed that by the divine judgement of God on earth, she suffered a fate that she truly deserved when her head was struck off by a sword. She is described as a cruel woman who throughout her life treated others unjustly, and it was because of her actions that God "allowed" her to die in such a way.[77] Thus the historian believed that while the deed was carried out by the hands of men, it was the judgement of God that was at work.

One of the most famous accounts of murder is Guibert's narration of the death of the bad bishop Gaudry in the revolt at Laon in 1112. In his account Guibert makes it abundantly clear that Gaudry brought this disaster upon himself in practically every way. As a result of the countless abuses of his power and authority, and as Guibert states, "...because he had wrongly and in vain taken up that other sword, he perished by the sword."[78] Gaudry's murder came about as the result of an uprising of the commune in Laon, which began in the cathedral and then spilled out into the streets. Many people died in the revolt, nobles and peasants alike, but the force of their violence was directed most

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[76]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 4 (Book VII), 39.

[77]Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 3 (Book V), 135.

[78]Guibert, Self and Society in Medieval France, 175.

particularly toward Gaudry. He was murdered in a most cruel and shameful fashion, especially for one of his position. However, in his account Guibert impresses upon the reader that Gaudry was clearly responsible for his own demise. It was nearly a full day before his body was collected to be prepared for burial; and even then, it was Anselm of Laon who began the necessary preparations, and was forced to beg the people of Laon for permission to provide Gaudry with a Christian burial. Only by virtue of his title was this permitted, as it was strongly believed that a man as sinful as he, and as deserving of the terrible circumstances of his death, would not under other condition have received the offices due to a good Christian.

We are thus drawn closer to what it truly meant to endure a 'bad death'. Individuals who died badly did not have time to prepare themselves properly; and these cases are then clearly tied in with the type of lives they led and the type of people they were. Someone who was good and virtuous in life could still hope for salvation in the event of an unexpected death; and in many cases, as we have seen, those deaths were usually interpreted as the result of the evil doings of others. Those who led evil, sinful lives, and who met their ends in unexpected and cruel ways, were thought to deserve such fates and were thus viewed as the authors of their own deaths; and that is what may be described as a 'bad death'. One's salvation was not limited to the final hours at the end of life. While it is true that one could still make amends for one's life upon one's deathbed, as we have seen, all too often death occurred before one had the opportunity to accomplish that reconciliation. Thus, as these authors emphasize to their readers through their works, it was very important that everyone remembered that as they went about their everyday

affairs.

We are now left with a final type of unexpected death, natural disaster. As with the others, our authors struggled to explain the reasons why such events occurred, as well as why certain individuals perished while others survived. Nearly all cases of natural disaster were seen as the wrath of God, as Otto said of a flood that came as a result of a sudden storm: "Considering this a divine punishment rather than a natural inundation, we were the more dismayed."[79] Orderic also associated the sudden occurrence of a storm combined with lightning as a divine punishment against groups of people for their sins:

> Therefore while Duke William was puffed up with worldly pride, and the people of Normandy were wallowing shamefully in every kind of luxury, giving no thought to the expiation of their countless sins, a terrible crash of thunder resounded in the chancel of the basilica at Lisieux, and a fatal thunderbolt struck down the populace standing in the cathedral church.[80]

The randomness of these events was interpreted as a further warning of the need to live one's life in a good, Christian way. The victims of such occurrences were held up as examples of what could happen to anyone who might happen to stand in the path of God's wrath and judgement.

Thus there were certainly right and wrong ways to die in the twelfth century according to twelfth-century thought, but as each case indicates, the consequences were not always the same. Throughout, however, the emphasis remained on the importance of faith in God and the observance of proper Christian virtues, with the 'ideal death' remaining the goal that all Christians might hope to attain. One can imagine the difficulties

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[79]Otto, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa, 81.

[80]Trans. Chibnall. Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. 3 (Book V), 15.

twelfth-century historians faced in recording the many different ways that people died within the context of a code for dying well. They could not simply report the deaths as they happened, but had also to interpret them and measure them against the ideals of a 'good death'. Rarely are there instances when an individual is portrayed as completely lost to a 'bad death', as historians continued to illustrate in their narratives the possibilities for achieving salvation for all who desired it.

Conclusion

Dying and, indeed, living are complex historical acts surrounded by ideals, specific circumstances, societal pressures, and economic and social realities. The *ars moriendi* tradition in part tried to simplify, in part to enoble the act of dying. Its goals were to establish normative values and to incorporate the individual in a greater Christian and corporate whole. There was a clear conception by the twelfth century of what constituted a good death, one that displayed an attitude toward death and dying that was held by medieval people throughout society. This conception would have informed their daily activities throughout their lives and in the moments leading up to their deaths. Thus the ideal death came to be viewed as a way of life, as well.

As we have seen, an ideal of death was held up as the standard which twelfth-century people were meant to follow in preparation for their own deaths. In its strictest sense, this ideal was not the only way to accomplish a good death and, as a result, achieve salvation, but it was a template. The expectations were highest for members of monastic communities. Monks had an important responsibility to ensure that they led pure, prayerful lives, as guardians of the spiritual security and salvation of members of the outside world. Part of that responsibility was continuing their strict observance of the faith right up until the moment of death. As protectors of the church and its followers, monks were also thought to be at considerable risk from Satan and his demons and thus faced many struggles in those final hours and moments before their departure from the world; as, for

example, in Guibert's account of the monk who, on his deathbed, fought off demons who tried to tear off his habit (thus, removing him from his monastic profession) before he died.[1] As a result, continuous purification and fortification, such as confession and communion, were necessary to assist them in achieving their goal.

The duties involved in a good death were not limited to individual monks. Every member of a monastic community had a responsibility to assist other brothers on their journey toward death, with all of them taking part in the sacraments and prayers that would carry their brother safely to the next world. With such a force of faith and prayer in place, it was expected that each monk would accomplish his goal of departing from life as a spiritually pure and faithful servant of God, so that he would receive his reward of salvation at the resurrection.

Outside the monastery, however, it could not be expected that people would be able to benefit from the same level of communal support and commitment as found in monastic communities. There still existed high expectations for all Christians as each person approached his or her death, but it did not necessarily follow that if they did not meet the ideals in every particular that they would be denied personal salvation. If one had demonstrated throughout his or her life that he or she had faith in God and had lived a virtuous life to the best of his or her abilities, he or she could still die secure in the knowledge of his or her own salvation, even in instances when an individual was unable to perform the expected rituals before death.

As we find in the writings of historians, twelfth-century people recognized the

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[1]See above, page 76.

difficulty in reporting the deaths of individuals that fell outside the expectations of the ideal. They must have realized the repercussions that would follow for those who did not fulfill the expectations of a good, Christian death to its fullest extent, for they might lose the opportunity to receive redemption and salvation. When we consider that the majority of people living in the twelfth century would have fallen into this category, it makes little sense to assume that such a large number of people would have been excluded from the privileges due to a Christian simply because they were ill-equipped to achieve the perfect death expected of a monk. Thus while the ideal certainly presented a challenge to historians, it did not undermine the personal salvation of those individuals who experienced less than perfect deaths.

In *reality* a 'good death', in the sense that one died as a good Christian, was in fact available to a great many people in the twelfth century. Those who were thought to have died a 'bad death' had not fulfilled their duties as a Christian in life or at the moment of death. In cases such as these we are left with the impression by contemporaries that those individuals had made a choice not to accept salvation from God. Their actions while alive, then, contradicted the teachings and beliefs of the Christian faith, and in many instances their miserable deaths were taken as a reflection of the imperfect lives they had led. Guibert expresses this sentiment most clearly in his account of the death of the bad bishop Gaudry at Laon.[2]

When we consider the context of these historical accounts of deaths in the twelfth century, as presented at the beginning of the thesis, we gain some insight into the

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[2]See above, pages 84-85.

reasoning behind the apparent flexibility that was afforded to so many Christians. The realities of illness and disease were, by modern standards, extreme in the twelfth century. Mortality rates were high and illness due to a variety of conditions was a common feature of life and death for many people. As found in archaeological studies, medieval people suffered from a number of afflictions due to poor diet, hard work, and exposure to a wide range of diseases and degenerative conditions. Life in the twelfth century was not simple or easy, and twelfth-century people faced hardships on a daily basis.

Throughout these adversities, however, emerged a strong belief in a better existence beyond death that, in turn, might have provided a sense of order and consolation amidst all the chaos. Through the customaries, illustrations, parables, and histories, twelfth-century people were promised salvation, redemption, and joy. All that was required of them in order to receive this gift was their faith in God and belief in the church. Thus, while these guides were intended to provide instruction on the way one was expected to prepare for one's good death, they were at the same time a symbol of hope for all those who anxiously approached the end of their lives and wondered and worried about the fate of their souls in the afterlife and beyond. For finally, what the twelfth-century emphasis on dying a good death did was to confirm the value of life itself and of the Christian society that embraced the living, the dying, and the dead.

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Ideals and Realities of Death and Dying in the Twelfth Century

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June 25, 2001

Table seven

	Number of burials				*Percentage*			
	Plague		**Non-plague**		**Plague**		**Non-plague**	
	M	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**
Juvenis (14-19)	34	57	151	327	5.2	10.0	2.9	8.5
Adultus (20-39)	317	353	1687	1654	48.8	61.9	32.6	43.0
Maturus (40-59)	261	134	2593	1364	40.2	23.6	50.1	35.4
Senilis (60-)	37	26	741	505	5.8	4.5	14.4	13.1
Total	649	569	5172	3850	100	100	100	100
Sex ratio	114		134					

As indicated in the chart, in non-plague periods more died in the *maturus* age group (40-59) than the *adultus* age group (20-39), but the case was reversed during plague periods, which then also contributed to an overall shortening of life. However, as Russell points out, death rates in non-plague periods were still fairly high, with an estimated 20 percent death rate of children before the age of seven, a figure he indicates is likely an underestimation given the assumption that many children would not have been buried in regular cemeteries.[25]

The following table (*eight*) provides a further breakdown of burials strictly according to age group.[26]

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[25]Russell, "Medieval Cemetery Patterns: Plague and Nonplague," 152-153.

[26]Excerpted from Russell, "Medieval Cemetery Patterns: Plague and Nonplague," 152.