

Communication and the promotion of cult: the miracles of St Margaret of Scotland and her cult

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St Margaret (c. 1045 - 1093) Queen of Scotland, who had been a Saxon princess and grown up at courts familiar with Roman church practices, married King Malcolm III of Scotland (c. 1031-1093) in 1070. As soon as she got married, she attempted to introduce non-Celtic monasticism into Scotland, by requesting that Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury, send Benedictine monks to the church at Dunfermline.¹ Her contribution to the reform of the Scottish church and her pious life made the monks of Dunfermline venerate her as a saint after she was buried there.² In particular, the affection and support of her three sons, who sat on the Scottish throne, to Dunfermline priory/abbey and the monks reflected the raise of her reputation as a royal saint.³

Queen Margaret has generated much discussion. Most scholars have focused on her life and reputation or achievements, though more recently others have begun to analyse the queen-saint's cult.⁴ Nevertheless, even though Robert Bartlett has edited the materials relating to Margaret's miracles, scholars have on the whole paid little attention to the geopolitical importance of Margaret's miracles and the relationship between her miracles and the cult which grew from them.⁵ Bartlett categorised the miracles and identified their characteristics but his discussion can be developed and his article proceeds to discuss the miracles attributes to Margaret by analysing

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¹ H. Clover and M. Gibson (eds), *The Letters of Lanfranc Archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford, 1979), 160-3.

² The reality of Margaret's contribution to the reform of the Scottish church has been much debated by historians. For this, see J.H.S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (London, 1960), 37-44; Gordon Donaldson, *Scotland: Church and Nation through Sixteenth Centuries* (London, 1960), 18-9; G.W.S. Barrow, 'From Queen Margaret to David I: Benedictines and Tironensians', *Innes Review* xi (1960) 27-38; Ian. B. Cowan and David E. Easson, *Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland* (London, 1976), 4-5; David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England: A History of its Development from the Times of St Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council 940-1216*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1963), 242; Derek Baker, 'A Nursery of Saints': St Margaret of Scotland Reconsidered', in Derek Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women* (Oxford, 1978), 119-41; A.A.M. Duncan, *Scotland: The Making of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1975), 117-32, 150-1; Valerie Wall, 'Queen Margaret of Scotland (1070-93): Burying the Past, Enshrining the Future', in Anne Duggan (ed.), *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge, 1997), 27-38; Richard Oram, *David I: The King Who Made Scotland* (Stroud, 2004), 27-9. For her pious life, see Turgot, *Life of St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland*, ed. William Forbes-Leith (Edinburgh, 1884).

³ Steve Boardman, 'Dunfermline as a Royal Mausoleum', in Richard Fawcett (ed.), *Royal Dunfermline* (Edinburgh, 2005), 139-54; SangDong Lee, 'The Development of Dunfermline Abbey as a royal cult centre c.1070-c.1420', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Stirling, 2014).

the recipients of the saint's miracles and the genres and characteristics of the miracles, relating them politically as potential evidence of an intentional effort by the monks at Dunfermline to promote the cult of their saint.

In this reading, the collection of St Margaret's miracles, which was collated and edited by anonymous monks of Dunfermline Abbey, seems to show a strong intention to draw pilgrims' attention to Dunfermline, and in consequence, to promote the cult of St Margaret. This is supported by a close reading of the characteristics of the saint's miracles, which, as Bartlett points out, often demonstrate the distinctive mark of 'the process of the cure': 'incubation, i.e. sleeping at a cult centre prior to healing, and visual apparitions of the saint (and others) are extremely frequent.'⁶ Of St Margaret's 45 recorded miracles, 27 involved the saint's appearance in vision and incubation. Comparing again to the deeper resources regarding contemporary cults, given that only 225 of 2,050 posthumous healing miracles which occurred in France during the eleventh and twelfth centuries were characterised by the visionary appearance of saints, and that 22 of 161 miracles of William of Canterbury's collection involved St Thomas's appearance in vision, that figure of 60% in St Margaret's case is a curiously high proportion.⁷

One reason could be that the possibility of St Margaret's appearance in vision would have

⁴ Alan J. Wilson, *St Margaret, Queen of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2001); A. Macquarrie, 'St Margaret of Scotland', in *The Saints of Scotland: Essays in Scottish Church History AD 450-1093* (Edinburgh, 1997), 211-23; A. Macquarrie, 'An eleventh-century account of the foundation legend of Laurencekirk, and of Queen Margaret's pilgrimage there', *Innes Review* xlvii (1996) 95-109; Wall, 'Queen Margaret of Scotland (1070-93)', 27-38; Lois L. Huneycutt, 'The Idea of the Perfect Princess: The Life of St Margaret in the Reign of Matilda II (1100-18)', in M. Chibnall (ed.) *Anglo-Norman Studies*, xii (Woodbridge, 1990), 81-97; Boardman, 'Dunfermline as a Royal Mausoleum', 139-54; Peter Yeoman, 'Saint Margaret's Shrine at Dunfermline Abbey', in *Royal Dunfermline*, 79-88; Peter Yeoman, *Pilgrimage in Medieval Scotland* (London, 1999), 71-4; Richard Fawcett, 'Dunfermline Abbey Church', in *Royal Dunfermline*, 27-64; F. C. Eeles, 'The Development and internal arrangements of the abbey Church of Dunfermline', in Erskine Beveridge (ed.), *The Burgh Records of Dunfermline* (Edinburgh, 1917), xxxi-xlvi; Stewart Cruden, *Scottish Medieval Churches* (Edinburgh, 1986), 20-38; Eric Fernie, 'The Romanesque churches of Dunfermline Abbey', in John Higgitt (ed.) *Medieval art and architecture in the diocese of St Andrews* (Leeds, 1994), 25-37; Michael Penman, 'Royal piety in Thirteenth-century Scotland: The Religion and Religiosity of Alexander II (1214-49) and Alexander III (1249-86)', in Janet Burton, Philipp Schofield and Bjorn Weiler (eds), *Thirteenth Century England*, XII (Woodbridge, 2009), 13-30; Michael Penman, "'Sacred food for the soul'?: the devotions to saints or Robert I, c.1306-c.1329', *Speculum* 88 (4) (2013) 1035-62.

⁵ Robert Bartlett (ed.), *The miracles of St Æbba of Coldingham and St Margaret of Scotland* (Oxford, 2003) [hereafter, *Miracula*], xxxi-xxxiv.

⁶ *Miracula*, 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1; Pierre-André Sigal, *L'homme et le miracle dans la France médiévale, XIe-XIIe siècle* (Paris, 1985), 134, 255. For St Thoms's appearance in vision, see Kay Brainerd Slocum, *Liturgies in Honour of Thomas Becket* (Toronto, 2003), 83. Six monks of Dunfermline experienced visionary appearances of St Margaret. Excluding the cases of monks from the list concerning visionary miracles, the proportion (21 out of 45 cases) is still higher in comparison with others.

encouraged miracle-seekers to undertake pilgrimage to Dunfermline. As Augustine put it, the power of sight might lead a man to comprehend unrealistic beings, shapeless ideas and finally God himself. Visual perception thus led to spiritual progress;⁸ in medieval times, a vision helped people to nourish their faith. It also stimulated the recipients to act: prisoners to escape, sick persons to make pilgrimage and a biographer to write a hagiography of a saint.⁹ In particular, St Margaret, when appearing in dreams, commanded the recipients to come to her shrine or specific sites in the church of Dunfermline and to seek the saint's intercessory power.¹⁰ Thus, the recipients were regularly encouraged to visit Dunfermline, and in reality, the appearance of St Margaret in vision was one of the most crucial catalytic agents to draw pilgrims' attention to Dunfermline.

The recordings of St Margaret's appearance in vision also suggest that female laity were more likely to seek this kind of miracle than male, and even than monks and priests. Of 27 miracles relating to the saint's appearance in vision, 13 were females, which accounts for 76% of female recipients of the saint's miracles. Of 14 laymen, only six had experienced the saint in vision.¹¹ Lastly, six monks and two priests (61.5% of these recipients) saw St Margaret's appearance in this way.¹² The higher proportion of females may have related to not only their relatively more intense prayers and vigils but also the widespread perception that females' were more sensitive or emotional than males, but more likely were a politically-motivated choice to inspire pilgrimage from any and all potential candidates.

Also noteworthy is that, of St Margaret's miracles in the *Miracula* involving the saint's appearance and incubation, excepting only a few, most miracles happened at specific locations within Dunfermline Abbey church: at the tomb of the saint, before the door of the monks' choir, or before the altar of St Margaret and St Margaret's fountain (or well). Additionally, a knight, a clerk and a priest experienced the appearance of St Margaret in vision while they slept in their homes.¹³ Although a monk saw St Margaret's apparition while he spent a night at an infirmary¹⁴ and three monks in their own beds,¹⁵ these cases could also be included in the list of visionary miracles occurring at Dunfermline Abbey. Thus, of 18 miracles whose reports indicated neither St Margaret's apparition nor incubation,¹⁶ sixteen occurred in the abbey itself. In two of the cases taking place outside the abbey, the recipients also later visited Dunfermline to give thanks and

⁸ Carolly Erickson, *The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception* (New York, 1976), 38.

⁹ Michael E. Goodich, 'Vidi in Somnium: The Uses of Dream and Vision in the Miracle', in *Miracles and Wonders: The Development of the Concept of Miracle, 1150-1350* (Aldershot, 2007), 100-16.

¹⁰ *Miracula*, chs. 1, 4, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, 30, 39, 41, 42.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, chs. 1, 2, 4, 9, 12, 13, 17, 19, 25, 33, 35, 39, 42; 5, 7, 18, 26, 27, 30.

¹² *Ibid.*, chs. 11, 15, 20, 28, 36, 37, 38, 41.

¹³ *Ibid.*, chs. 7, 38, 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, chs. 15, 28, 36.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, chs. 3, 6 (three cases), 8 (two cases), 10, 14, 16, 21, 22, 23, 24, 29, 31, 32, 34, 40.

report their cures: a boy, the son of nobleman, was healed of his affliction at home with the aid of St Margaret's dust.¹⁷ The remaining case took place at sea: a ship carrying grains which had been purchased by the monks of Dunfermline was allegedly saved by the aid of St Margaret when it encountered danger at sea.¹⁸ In total, seaborne instances included, just five of St Margaret's 45 miracles (11%) occurred outside the abbey.¹⁹ This implication of the great likelihood that miracles would occur at the abbey (89%) might also have been meant to encourage pilgrims to make the journey to Dunfermline, just as the high ratio of appearances of St Margaret in vision there.

Clearly, accounts of St Margaret's miracles demonstrate a relatively homogenous and consistent pattern: the high proportion of miracles relating to vision (60%), and of those occurring in the abbey (89%). These patterns could have resulted from a desire of the monks of Dunfermline to encourage or sustain the cult of St Margaret. A brief comparison might prove helpful here, in order to demonstrate the significance of this more fully.

Books II, III and IV of William's collection of St Thomas' miracles include 45 miracles occurring after drinking or washing with the water of St Thomas; 28 cases through invocations; 22 miracles associated with visions; 12 with various vows; 27 with promises of a pilgrimage to Canterbury; and 27 miracles happening at the tomb.²⁰ In other words, these miracles demonstrate wide variety in terms of agency. This pattern might be a product of the influence of the cult of St Thomas, which spread so quickly that it acquired an international reputation across Europe between 1171 and 1172. Thereafter, the demographics of pilgrims to Canterbury, and miracle recipients, shifted from the lower-classes and women to males, the nobility and the 'foreigner'.²¹ It is clear that the cult of St Thomas drew numerous types of pilgrims, exhibited a broad range in social status, and utilised a variety of miracle agencies.

Considering St Margaret, then, the unusually high proportion of visions and the heavily localized nature of the reports warrant further discussion concerning the strategic purpose of the monks of Dunfermline to secure reliable miracles. As Finucane points out, almost half of the 3,000-odd English and French posthumous miracles from nine major and other minor cults were believed to have happened at a patient's home, while the other half of miraculous healings were performed at the shrines of saints.²² The collectors would likely not, without extraneous motivation, have recorded miracles if they had any doubt. For example, Benedict of

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. 40. Later, a similar miracle is recounted: while King David's corpse crossed the sea en route to Dunfermline, the waters became calm. However, as the body left the beach, the waves at sea began to grow fierce: *CDS*, ii. 116.

¹⁹ *Miracula*, chs. 7, 21, 38, 40, 41.

²⁰ Slocum, *Liturgies in Honour of Thomas Becket*, 83.

²¹ Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, 126; Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record, and Event, 1000-1215* (Philadelphia, 1987), 95.

²² Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, 69.

Peterborough, who collected the miracles of St Thomas Becket from mid-1171 to 1173, classified stories into three groups: ‘the miracles which we saw with our own eyes, or we heard from those ill people already healed and their witnesses, or those things we learned from the testimony of religious men, who had seen them with their own eyes.’²³ Benedict sought ‘proofs’, demanded ‘witnesses’, got upset ‘when people failed to tell him their stories’ and even made ‘trips outside of Canterbury to investigate certain miracles.’ His criteria offered key guidelines to other miracle collectors in a period before the canonisation procedure became complicated and strict.²⁴ When miracles took place away from the shrine, naturally, the collectors expressed more suspicion of the potential for fraud.²⁵ As a particular example, it would have been easier to fake the symptoms of blindness and paralysis, which were believed to be permanent conditions. However, these symptoms, often presumably caused by malnutrition, ailments, shock, mental disorder, or traumas, could disappear according to lifestyle changes, whether psychological, environmental or nutritional circumstances.²⁶

While the symptoms of blindness and paralysis increased the possibility of fraud in accounts of miraculous healing, the appearance of saints in vision could be fabricated with ease. It was difficult to make a distinction between vision, which ‘was usually accepted as a ‘real’ message from the other world’, and dream, which ‘was less significant, perhaps - as some medieval writers claimed - only a result of overeating before retiring.’²⁷ Another reason is that unlike other miracles consisting of physical evidence, a vision could not be seen or experienced by others.²⁸ Concerning St Margaret’s miracles, the relatively high proportion of miracles involving vision possibly resulted from the preparation of a request for St Margaret’s canonisation - the request was conveyed to the pope in 1245²⁹ and the pope eventually declared her canonisation in 1249.³⁰ In other words, since visions could not be traced, they were ideal for accounts to be either exaggerated or even fabricated by collectors less scrupulous than Benedict. Thus, the high ratio of St Margaret’s miracles associated with vision was potentially an intentional choice made by the monks of Dunfermline to support their request for canonisation of the saint.

This motivation could also help explain why 89% of St Margaret’s recorded miracles occurred in the abbey. As mentioned above, it was known that visions were more easily faked than

²³ Benedict of Peterborough, *Miracula S. Thomae Cantuariensis*, ed. J. C. Robertson (London, 1875) [hereafter, *Miracula S. Thomae*], ii. 7.

²⁴ Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, 160-1.

²⁵ Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, 69-70.

²⁶ Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, 37.

²⁷ Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, 84-5.

²⁸ Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, 41.

²⁹ *Registrum de Dunfermelyn liber cartarum Abbatie Benedictine S.S. Trinitatis et B. Margarete Regine de Dunfermelyn*, ed. Bannatyne Club (Edinburgh, 1842), no. 281; D.E.R. Watt, *Medieval Church Councils in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2000), 87-8.

³⁰ *Registrum de Dunfermelyn*, no. 290.

miracles with observable evidence. Therefore, to meet the requirement of investigation in the canonisation process, in particular given the stricter standards for candidates of canonisation in the thirteenth century,³¹ the monks of Dunfermline would have requested that a number of miracles not relying on vision be verified. The best case for avoiding suspicion about the reliability of miracles was presumably to have miracles occur before crowds in public places. The reported miracles occurring in the church before many witnesses might have convinced the investigators in the canonisation process to more readily accept the reliability of St Margaret's miracles. Another possible explanation must be admitted: that the high proportion of miracles involving a vision of St Margaret was perhaps influenced by strong and repeated visual imagery in the abbey associated with the saint on altar paintings, wall paintings, seals, ampullae, stained glass, badges and so forth. The visual imagery from these materials could have become part of a vision of St Margaret in intense prayer or vigil. In addition, a comparison between St Margaret and the Virgin Mary (whether intentional or not) or an overlap of the former with the latter, a suggestion of their sharing something in common - their pedagogical role in the spiritual upbringing of children, perhaps³² - may have contributed to efforts to lead pilgrims to Dunfermline. The maternal Virgin Mary images which were presumably placed in the church

³¹ The development of the examination of miracles began c. 1200 alongside the renovation of the canonisation process during the reign of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216). He made the process of canonisation both more complicated and stricter in stating an uncompromising investigation of miracles, which were, along with the virtue of a candidate, the most important criteria in receiving canonisation. Because he believed that miracles may also possibly have a diabolical origin, he insisted that miracles should be examined more strictly: André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 1997), 36-49. This approach to miracles and canonisation, on the juridical plane, seems to become more apparent after the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The relevant canon was 62 of the Council, which had been initially announced at the synod of Mainz of 813 and already contained in the *Decretum* of Gratian stating, that 'Let no one presume to venerate publicly new ones [relics] unless they have been approved by the Roman pontiff.' Although canon 62 did not specifically mention the right of canonisation, as N. Hermann-Masquard has pointed out, the pope's right to approve the cult of new relics meant that he could control the veneration of the relics of 'uncanonised' saints: see *ibid.*, 29; N. Hermann-Masquard, *Les reliques des saints: formation coutumière d'un droit* (Paris, 1975), 101; *Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215, canon 62*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.asp> (Accessed 7 July 2016). Moreover, since a relic played a significant role in encouraging the cult relating to the relic and the religious community to house the relic, the control of the cults of new relics could help distinguish significant cults possessing valuable or numerous relics from the lesser-known cults housing less valuable relics.

³² Huneycutt, 'The Idea of the Perfect Princess', 81-97; Audrey-Beth Fitch, 'Mothers and Their Sons: Mary and Jesus in Scotland, 1450-1560', in Steve Boardman and Eila Williamson (eds), *The Cult of Saints and the Virgin Mary in Medieval Scotland* (Woodbridge, 2010), 159-60. Margaret gave birth to six sons and two daughters, all of whom were raised to be pious: Wall, 'Queen Margaret of Scotland (1070-93)', 37. They had a strong interest in devotion to religious foundations.

could also have been intended to encourage pilgrims to experience a vision of St Margaret.

All of the miracles, meanwhile, which happened outside Dunfermline Abbey, of which there were only five, would have been relatively reliable. Four happened at recipients' homes: a knight, a clerk who was a son of a knight and later became a monk of Dunfermline, a priest and a boy, the son of nobleman.³³ A final miracle occurred at sea.³⁴ Given that miracles at home tended to be less reliable, it is to be expected that the recipients who benefited from St Margaret's power in their own home all belonged to the upper classes or the clergy, whose testimonies might be more convincing.³⁵ Since stories of sailors' who escaped the turmoil of the sea were, in contrast, perceived to be more reliable, this particular brand of forgery would have been thought improbable. Therefore, those miracles which took place outside the abbey would likely have been considered particularly trustworthy by the investigators in the canonisation process, which was presumably part of the strategy of the monks at Dunfermline.

Therefore, it can be said that a status of St Margaret's cult could only have been built up and sustained with the determined effort of the monks of Dunfermline Abbey. The pattern of *Miracula* collected and edited by the monks shows a relatively high proportion of miracles relating to vision, sidestepping reliability, and an even more staggering percentage occurring in the abbey at Dunfermline. These unusual patterns presumably served to encourage pilgrims to undertake pilgrimage to Dunfermline and so to promote the cult of St Margaret. In the same context, it can also be argued that as none of St Margaret's miracle stories reference the saint's specific relic objects such as the shirt, the gospel book or the holy cross, which were presumably royal possessions and are known from later sources, these omissions were probably intended to focus attention and veneration on the saint's shrine(s), dust and well in order to encourage pilgrims to visit Dunfermline.

A similarly intentional effort by the monks of Dunfermline to promote the cult can be inferred in the strategic choice of the date of the saint's translation on 19 June 1250,³⁶ just before Mid-Summer: an ideal season for the laity to visit Dunfermline, and which split the year in two alongside the date of St Margaret's death on 16 November. Additionally, the 1180 translation,³⁷ which served to show off the prosperity of the cult as well as provide the shrine with more space and allow pilgrims to access the shrine easily, and the miracle engaging William I in 1199, which was presumably intended to remind the king of St Margaret's intercessory power and return his attention to Dunfermline, can also be read as an effort of the monks of Dunfermline to promote or

³³ *Miracula*, chs. 7, 38, 41, 21.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. 40.

³⁵ William, a collector of St Thomas Becket's miracles, stated that evidence from the nobility could be more trustworthy than that from the poor, because the poor were always liars: *Miracula S. Thomae*, ii. 542.

³⁶ *Chron. Fordun*, i. 295; *Chron. Bower*, vi. 297.

³⁷ *Miracula*, ch. 7.

sustain the cult of St Margaret. It can therefore be concluded that though the cult of St Margaret had spread widely among the Scots, it was necessary for the monks of Dunfermline to undertake significant efforts to broaden interest in the cult of St Margaret. Above all, that St Margaret's miracles were characterised by a high proportion of both visions and reception within the abbey was the most substantial factor contributing to the development of the cult of St Margaret: an end which Dunfermline monks presumably intentionally sought.