Virgins on the Throne: The Chaste Marriage of Emperor Henry II and Empress Cunigunde in Medieval Narrative Traditions

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CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

Abstract: Individual cases of sexual abstinence ascribed to medieval rulers have been discussed by scholars from various standpoints and understood as a peculiar dynastic policy, a deliberate "monastification" of rulership, or as the result of problems with an individual's reproductive system. This article carries forward the research on the interrelation between regality and sexual abstinence through the example of Henry II (973-1024), emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and his spouse Cunigunde (c.980-1033), both canonised saints, who were believed to live in an innocent matrimony. The development of the image of the royal marriage is traced first in their contemporary self-representations, then in post-mortem historiographic and polemical narratives, and finally in their hagiographical traditions until c.1250, revealing multiple, often contradictory, understandings of the royal sexual abstinence: as the sign of a succession crisis, as moral impurity, or as the highest saintly virtue. Contrary to the idea that Henry II was imagined as a "virgin king" from his canonisation in 1146 onwards, this article suggests that until the beginning of the thirteenth century the sexual abstinence of Henry II was speculated about though never explicitly stated, even in his hagiographic tradition. Only with the papal acknowledgment of Cunigunde as a holy virgin in 1200 did an image of the perpetually chaste marriage gradually come into being, in which Cunigunde was given equal agency and her husband Henry was defined as a male virgin. The analysis of elaborated hagiographic programs, devised by members of the Bamberg ecclesiastical community to praise Henry and Cunigunde, reveals the forms in which the sanctity, regality, and sexual behaviour of Henry and Cunigunde were conceptualized, negotiated, and represented, while at the same time the hagiographic traditions were adapted to contemporary concepts of chastity and abstinence.

Keywords: cult of saints; hagiography; Henry II; Cunigunde; medieval marriage; royal sanctity; virginity

A sexuality, virginal lifestyles, and chaste marriages were not among the normative practices of the kings and queens of medieval Europe.[1] Rulers were expected to be concerned with the reproduction of heirs within the bounds of a rightful marriage, while any deviation from this pattern, intentional or not, could lead to a political crisis, whether by causing problems in relation to the rightful succession or by sullying a ruler's

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reputation.[2] Therefore, there is a conceptual contradiction between the desire for sexual abstinence, seen as a laudable Christian practice, and the needs dictated by royal succession, or, as Weinstein and Bell put it: "chastity ran counter to every expectation of noble behaviour."[3] Despite this contradiction, there are multiple cases of medieval rulers adopting this almost deviant virginal behaviour.[4] This article analyses one of the lesser-known cases, namely the virginal marriage of the canonised rulers Henry II and Cunigunde. Henry II (973-1024), German emperor from the Ottonian dynasty, and his consort Cunigunde (*c.*980-1033) were retrospectively imagined to have lived in sexual abstinence. Their individual chastity, grounded in the fact that their worldly union remained childless, could have been regarded as an indubitable laudable quality, comparable to that of well-known virgins and martyrs. However, as soon as both spouses entered the *communio sanctorum*, their marriage became increasingly problematic—the questions of the degree of their sexual abstinence, its correlation with their royal status and the ways of achieving and maintaining this chaste marriage received further elaboration in the additional narrative program conceived, most probably, in Bamberg by the middle of the thirteenth century.

The cult of Emperor Henry II flourished in Bamberg, his own foundation and his eternal resting place, from the middle of the twelfth century; the holy ruler was praised for his missionary activities and personal piety among other virtues.[5] Cunigunde also became an object of popular veneration and was officially canonised in 1200.[6] The cults of both saints had their major shrine in Bamberg, whose cathedral and monastic scriptoria functioned as the main loci of the hagiographic and liturgical production. Due to the propagation of these royal saints by Bamberg and their appeal for various communities and individuals, the veneration for Henry and Cunigunde transgressed regional boundaries. In the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, additional centres of intensive veneration were established in Merseburg, Regensburg and Basel; their liturgical veneration has been described for other German regions, medieval Austrian lands and Bohemia.[7] Moreover, their hagiographies, which are the focus of this essay,

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[2] Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 113–131; Karl Ubl, "Der kinderlose König: ein Testfall für die Ausdifferenzierung des Politischen im 11. Jahrhundert," *Historische Zeitschrift* 292 (2011): 323–363.

[3] Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 76.

[4] Some of the cases are discussed by Ubl, "Der kinderlose König"; and Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*. Weinstein and Bell provide a catalogue of examples of male and female chaste saints: Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, 73–99.

[5] On the beginnings of Henry's cult, see: Renate Klauser, *Der Heinrichs- und Kunigundenkult im mittelalterlichen Bistum Bamberg* (Bamberg: Selbstverlag des historischen Vereins, 1957); Klaus Guth, *Kaiser Heinrich II. und Kaiserin Kunigunde: das heilige Herrscherpaar: Leben, Legende, Kult und Kunst*, 2nd ed. (Petersberg: Imhof, 2002); Bernd Schneidmüller, "Heinrich II. und Kunigunde: Das heilige Kaiserpaar des Mittelalters," in *Kunigunde—consors regni: Vortragsreihe zum tausendjährigen Jubiläum der Krönung Kunigundes in Padeborn (1002–2002)*, ed. Stefanie Dick, Jörg Jarnut, and Matthias Wernhoff (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2004), 29–46; Norbert Jung and Holger Kempkens, eds., *Gekrönt auf Erden und im Himmel: Das heilige Kaiserpaar Heinrich II. und Kunigunde* (Bamberg: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 2014).

[6] Recent studies on the cult of St. Cunigunde include: Bernd Schneidmüller, "Kaiserin Kunigunde: Bamberger Wege zu Heiligkeit, Weiblichkeit und Vergangenheit," *Bericht des Historischen Vereins Bamberg* 137 (2001): 13–34; and Klaus Guth, "Kaiserin Kunigunde: Kanonisation und hochmittelalterlicher Kult," *Würzburger Diözesangeschichtsblätter* 62/63 (2001): 409–422.

[7] Heinrich Linke, *Beitrag zur Kulttopographie des Hl. Kaiserpaares Heinrich und Kunigunde: anlässlich des 1000-jährigen Bestehens für das Erzbistum Bamberg zusammengestellt* (Bamberg: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 2007).

were recited throughout the medieval period by different communities (urban, monastic, courtly), included in several popular legendaries and were represented in the visual arts.[8] Even though Henry and Cunigunde did not achieve the status of "national saints" as did, for example, Edward the Confessor or Stephen of Hungary, the cult of a royal chaste couple is a unique and valuable source for studying medieval interrelationships between idealized rulership, marital conduct and virginal lifestyle.

In what follows, I investigate how the chaste wedlock of Henry and Cunigunde was represented and interpreted in contemporary writings and post-mortem historiographic and hagiographic narratives, within the timespan from the eleventh until the mid-thirteenth century. The current essay does not attempt to study the portrayal of these imperial virgins in the entirety of the abundant medieval textual and visual traditions devoted to them. Instead, I tackle the conceptual changes in the understanding of their alleged chastity and virginity and the ways in which they were reconciled with their images as infertile rulers and later saints as reflected in historiographic and hagiographic narratives, while I also analyse multiple reasons for these changes.[9] I aim to emphasize how controversial the notions of a chaste marriage and male virginity were, especially when they clashed with contemporary expectations of royal capabilities for producing offspring and of a conjugal debt. I argue that the unconventional sexual identities of Henry and Cunigunde, manifest already during their reign, contributed to their canonisations and culminated in a tailor-made image of two married virgins, even if this hagiographic interpretation was not overwhelmingly accepted.

The sanctity of Henry II and Cunigunde is relatively well analysed with respect to its establishment, some hagiographic traditions, and the substantial role that this cult had for the community of Bamberg until the mid-thirteenth century, and with a lesser degree of scrutiny for Basel and Merseburg.[10] The idea of sexual continence, an integral part of the saintly images of Henry and Cunigunde, has mostly been mentioned in passing in these studies or has been perceived as something set in stone, neglecting the multiple processes and activities that stood behind the creation and changes in the images of individual abstinence and the idea of the chaste marriage.[11] Henry and Cunigunde, although offering a vivid example of a royal chaste lifestyle and male virginity, have rarely been discussed in detail in the corresponding studies on medieval sexuality and chastity, though these topics have been actively researched in the past

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[8] Marcus Stumpf, ed., *Die Vita sancti Heinrici regis et confessoris und ihre Bearbeitung durch den Bamberger Diakon Adalbert*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica [hereafter *MGH*] Scriptores rerum Germanicarum 69 (Hanover: Hahn, 1999), 159–97; Carla Meyer, "Die konstruierte Heilige: Kaiserin Kunigunde und ihre Darstellung in Quellen des 11. bis 16. Jahrhunderts," *Bericht des Historischen Vereins Bamberg* 139 (2003): 39–101.

[9] Studies by Lewis and Blanton affirm the resourcefulness of analysing the changing perceptions of sexuality of a single saint (Edward the Confessor and Etheldreda, respectively): Katherine J. Lewis, "Becoming a Virgin King: Richard II and Edward the Confessor," in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Samantha Riches and Sarah Salih (London: Routledge, 2005), 86–100; and Virginia Blanton, "Chaste Marriage, Sexual Desire, and Christian Martyrdom in La Vie Seinte Audrée," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, no. 1 (January 2010): 94–114.

[10] For the research on their veneration in Bamberg see footnotes 5 and 6; for Basel and Merseburg, see: Stefan Hess, "Zwischen Verehrung und Versenkung: zum Nachleben Kaiser Heinrichs II. in Basel," *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 102 (2002): 83–143; and Bernd Schneidmüller, *Gründung und Wirkung: das heilige Kaiserpaar Heinrich und Kunigunde in seinen Bistümern Bamberg und Merseburg* (Halle-Wittenberg: Halle an der Saale Universitätsverlag, 2015).

[11] Meyer, "Die konstruierte Heilige," 49–53; Schneidmüller, "Heinrich II. und Kunigunde," 34–38.

decades, especially for female sexuality based on hagiographic materials.[12] Partially, the reason for such an omission lies in the fact that the marriage of Henry II and Cunigunde was not "historically" chaste—that is, the idea of the chaste conduct of this royal couple developed retrospectively more than a century after their deaths. Hence, it has not held much interest for researchers looking for examples of historically authenticated practices of sexual abstinence. I assume, though, that the retrospectively attested chaste marriage of Henry and Cunigunde, particularly its narrative formation and elaboration, can nevertheless illuminate the changing attitudes towards this practice; a practice expected of saints yet deviant for royals.

Before proceeding with the discussion of the royal chaste marriage, a brief note on the terminology of sexual abstinence is in order. In the medieval period, multiple forms of sexual abstinence (permanent or temporary), practices connected with achieving it (individually, in a marriage or as a part of an institution) and the modes for understanding it (in physical or moral terms) are recognizable. This multiplicity is reflected in the variety of vocabulary used in the texts. Here I discuss only those terms which are crucial in relation to Henry II and Cunigunde, thus omitting *syneisaktism,* practiced by early Christian desert ascetics, and a detailed discussion of clerical celibacy and attitudes towards sex in the Middle Ages.[13] Chastity (*castitas*), a commonly used term, can refer to both moral purity and the purity of the body. In the latter case, it can describe not only total sexual abstinence, but also sexual continence achieved after a period of sexual activity or even marital fidelity. Virginity (*virginitas*), on the other hand, presupposes the absence of intercourse and is often understood in physical terms, though there are clear moral connotations ascribed to the concept as well.[14] The Latin and German vernacular forms for describing a virgin are *virgo, magd, junkfrauw* and these are commonly used to describe a "young woman" or a "physically intact woman," though they can potentially refer to a man as well.[15] This signals a problem in defining the virginity of laymen such as Henry II, who were not involved in institutional practices of celibacy: his sexual abstinence is mostly ambiguously defined as chastity (*castitas*), while Cunigunde's virtue is given as virginity (*virginitas*), implying also a specific physical condition.[16]

Defining a marriage based on sexual abstinence is equally challenging. A chaste marriage (sometimes referred to as "spiritual") is described in the *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* as "a normal marriage in every sense except that the participants abstain from sexual activity," noting that marital "chastity" does not presuppose that the spouses did not have any sexual experiences before or within marriage.[17] It was not uncommon for spouses to withdraw to a chaste lifestyle after giving birth to several children, and some ecclesiastical authorities such as

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[12] For example, in her seminal study on chaste marriage Elliot mentions Henry and Cunigunde only in brief: Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 119–120, 128–130.

[13] On these forms of sexual abstinence, see: Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 51–74; and Uta-Renate Blumenthal, "The Prohibition of Clerical Marriage in the Eleventh Century," in *Chastity: A Study in Perception, Ideals, Opposition,* ed. Nancy van Deusen (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 61–76.

[14] Clarissa W. Atkinson, "'Precious Balsam in a Fragile Glass': The Ideology of Virginity in the Later Middle Ages," *Journal of Family History* 8, no. 2 (June 1983): 131–143.

[15] Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2001), 16–31.

[16] The medieval concepts of virginity and chastity are discussed in detail in: Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[17] Margaret McGlynn and Richard James Moll, "Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages: 'It Were to Hire a Greet Merite,'" in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern Bullough and James Brundage (New York: Routledge, 1996), 103.

Augustine favoured this form of chaste wedlock. Furthermore, the issue of mutual agreement in a chaste marriage preoccupied canonists of the twelfth-thirteenth centuries, who connected it with the idea of a "conjugal debt": spouses could be released from this debt only when both willingly agreed to practice abstinence.[18] In the subsequent framing of the marriage of Henry and Cunigunde, this would become a crucial element. Thenceforward I am not using "chastity" and "virginity" (or their derivatives) interchangeably, rather "sexual abstinence" is preferred, though occasionally I use "virgin" as a shorter descriptive for a person who perpetually abstained from sexual activities. My usage of the terms depends also on the words used in the Latin and vernacular sources although with an awareness of each text's authorial and social context. The hagiographic texts, through which the perceptions of royal sexuality are explored in this article, were written predominantly by clerics, who were undoubtfully influenced by clerical and canonical ideologies of chastity, virginity and celibacy and at the same time were prone to use these terms as characteristics of moral purity and saintly qualities.

"Choosing God as his Heir": Contemporary Views on Henry's Childless Marriage

The image of an innocent matrimony between Henry II and Cunigunde developed within a century of their death, spurred on by the fact that the imperial couple were childless. Therefore, before analysing in detail the retrospective framing of the royal couple's alleged sexual abstinence, in this section I outline the mechanics behind the construction of Henry's and Cunigunde's contemporary royal identities with respect to their heirless marriage, since these identities had a direct influence on the later perception and re-shaping of their image.[19] While Henry's political agenda and ecclesiastical policies have been thoroughly discussed in the German historiography, only a select number of events are recounted here, namely those that highlight strategies for coping with royal childlessness, employed by the king himself, his retinue, and contemporary writers.[20] Those strategies include the investment in ecclesiastical foundations as a means of substituting for the lack of an heir and framing the marital union between Henry and Cunigunde as constant and amiable (hence promoting Cunigunde as a royal consort).

It was around 998 when the future emperor Henry II—at that time the duke of Bavaria—married Cunigunde, a daughter of the Duke of Luxemburg.[21] Only in 1002 did Henry succeed Emperor Otto III (980-1002), who died childless at age 21, as Henry's lineage was connected to the royal dynasty. One can only speculate, following the assumption of Fried, whether at the time of Henry's struggle for the throne the nobility and ecclesiastical leaders knew about his inability to provide heirs, which could have been apparent after several years of childless marriage with Cunigunde. In any case, Henry's heirlessness in many ways

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[18] Elizabeth M. Makowski, "The Conjugal Debt and Medieval Canon Law," *Journal of Medieval History* 3, no. 2 (1977): 99–114.

[19] Tanja Michalsky, "Imperatrix gloriosa—humilitatis et castitatis exemplum: das Bild der hl. Kunigunde," in *Kunigunde: eine Kaiserin an der Jahrtausendwende*, ed. Ingrid Baumgärtner (Kassel: Furore Verlag, 1997), 187–222.

[20] For the main studies on the rule of Henry II, see: Bernd Schneidmüller and Stefan Weinfurter, *Otto III.— Heinrich II.: eine Wende?* (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1997); and Stefan Weinfurter, *Heinrich II. 1002–1024: Herrscher am Ende der Zeiten* (Regensburg: F. Pustet, 2000).

[21] Simon MacLean, *Ottonian Queenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 180–206.

defined his political actions and representational strategies.[22]

There is, however, reason to believe that, until a certain point, there was still hope that Henry and Cunigunde would produce an heir and thus eliminate the potential political crisis in the kingdom. When on 10 August 1002 Cunigunde was crowned as queen in Paderborn, concerns for the fertility of the newly ordained queen were voiced in orations that were sung during the ceremony.[23] That is, Old Testament heroines who were known for giving birth late in their lives and were perceived as great progenitrices (e.g. Sarah and Rebecca) were evoked in the prayers.[24] However, it is still disputable whether these invocations were a commonplace or were tailored specifically for Cunigunde.[25]

Finally, during the council in Frankfurt in 1007, the king allegedly himself acknowledged his inability to produce heirs in his marriage. During this ecclesiastical council, when the foundation of the Bamberg bishopric was discussed and eventually authorized, Henry II claimed God to be "his heir"—this phrasing appears first in the foundation charter.[26] A decade later, the chronicler Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg, when describing the council of which his clerical career made him knowledgeable, rendered the phrase and explicitly connected it with Henry's lack of offspring: "For the sake of future compensation and because there remains to me no hope for acquiring offspring, I [Henry II] have made Christ my heir."[27] Henry II's personal misfortune caused a dramatic feeling regarding the fate of the kingdom for Thietmar of Merseburg, who conveyed it to his contemporaries in the first book of his *Chronicle*, commenced around 1012 and devoted to the Ottonian dynasty:

> Woe to a people for whom there is no hope of rule through the succession of their lords' offspring
> and to whom, with dissension and long conflict engendered among them, neither advice nor solace
> is quickly offered. … Beginning with this Henry [King Henry I (919-936)] and continuing with his

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[22] Johannes Fried, *Der Weg in die Geschichte: die Ursprünge Deutschlands bis 1024* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1994), 603–610.

[23] For more about this ceremony, see: Matthias Wemhoff, ed., *Kunigunde – empfange die Krone* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2002), esp. 49–52.

[24] MacLean, *Ottonian Queenship*, 185–186.

[25] MacLean denies the established attribution of this *ordo* as the one used for the coronation of Adelheid in 962 and connects it with Cunigunde instead. He also brings in other sources that supposedly illuminate concerns with the royal couple's progeny, such as a letter by Froumound of Tegernsee: MacLean, *Ottonian Queenship,* 192.

[26] The charter of Henry II from 1 November 1007, Frankfurt (143), in: Theodor von Sickel*,* ed., *Die Urkunden Heinrichs II. und Arduins*, MGH Diplomata regum et imperatorum (Hanover: Hahn, 1900–1903), 3:169–172: "Nam idem rex Heinricus magnus et pacificus, ... ut deum sibi heredem eligeret et conscriberet et episcopatum in honorem sancti Petri principis apostolorum in quodam suae paternae hereditatis loco Babenberc dicto ex omnibus suis rebus hereditariis construeret" (170). Hereafter *Die Urkunden Heinrichs II.* On this council and the foundation of the Bamberg diocese, see: Bernd Schneidmüller, "Die einzigartig geliebte Stadt: Heinrich II. und Bamberg," in *Kaiser Heinrich II. 1002–1024. Begleitband zur Bayerischen Landesausstellung 2002*, ed. Josef Kirmeier and Bernd Schneidmüller (Augsburg: Haus der Bayerischen Geschichte, 2002), 30–51; and Stefan Weinfurter, "Authority and Legitimation of Royal Policy and Action: The Case of Henry II," in *Medieval Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography*, ed. Gerd Althoff, Johannes Fried, and Patrick J. Geary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 19–37.

[27] Robert Holzmann*,* ed., *Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korveier Überarbeitung, MGH* Scriptores rerum Germanicarum nova series 9 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1935), 310: "Ob recompensationem futuram Christum heredem elegi, quia in sobole acquirenda nulla spes remanet michi," hereafter "Chronicon." The translation by: David A. Warner, trans., *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 257–258.

successors, down to the present day, the Saxons have been raised up and honoured in every way. Whatever is praiseworthy among these kings has been diligently continued by the present King Henry [II] of whom I shall write from personal experience. But after him, I fear, it will all come to an end.[28]

It is also worth mentioning that Henry II chose a specific representational pattern that highlighted his strong connection and amity with Queen Cunigunde. As Schneidmüller has noted, some of the charters issued by Henry II contained allusions to an amicable union between the royal spouses, which was achieved by referencing a phrase from Ephesians 5:31–32: "we, who are two in one flesh."[29] This biblical phrase defined the ideal of a Christian marriage, comparing it to the union of Christ and the church.[30] The use of this citation thus pointed to the marital status of the royal couple, which could have been challenged by the lack of offspring. Cunigunde's position as a consort was also reflected in contemporary visual representations, such as in the illumination from the *Pericopes of Henry II*: a coronation miniature, which symbolized the legitimacy of Henry II's royal power.[31] The same goes for the Basler Antependium, a glorious donation of the royal couple, presumably to Basel or Bamberg.[32] In both these representations, King Henry II shares his privileged position next to Christ with Cunigunde.[33] It has also been noted that Cunigunde's parentage, which was traced back to Charlemagne and St. Bishop Arnulf of Metz, supported Henry's imperial claims. This genealogical composition, advantageous for Henry II, preserved in the so-called *Bamberger Tafel* (*c*.1014), reveals the descent of the imperial couple from their holy and imperial predecessors.[34] Therefore, Cunigunde was included prominently in the royal and imperial self-fashioning of her spouse Henry II. She, on the one hand, took part in the ruling ideology and practice of Henry II, and, on the other, was his amiable spouse, "two in one flesh."

Arguably, it is too far-fetched to understand these images of the imperial couple as a tool to drown out concerns with the status of their marriage and its outcomes for the future of the kingdom. However, the aura of utmost piety, together with the image of the childless royal couple amicably ruling hand in hand, defined their royal identity. This image added to an ideal of voluntary chastity, which Henry and Cunigunde would later come to represent; this later ideal is analysed in the third section of the article. First, however, I turn to the images that Henry II acquired before his canonisation in polemical and historiographic texts, while those

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[28] "Chronicon," 24–26: "Ve populis, quibus regnandi spes in subsecutura dominorum sobole non relinquitur et, inter se facta dissensione et longa contentione, aliquod consilium vel solamen cito non providetur! ... Ab hoc, de quo dixi, Heinrico et successoribus suis usque huc Saxones elevati et in omnibus sunt honorati. Quicquid in hiis laudatur, ab equivoco eius, de quo scripturus sum vita comite, diligenter servatur, et post, ut vereor, finitur." The translation by: Warner, *Ottonian Germany*, 81.

[29] "Duo sumus in carne una" is used in charters 368, 375, 376, 394, 406, 407, 409 in *Die Urkunden Heinrichs II,* 470, 479–481, 506, 521–522, 524. For more on this phrase, see: Schneidmüller, "Kaiserin Kunigunde," 23–24.

[30] Stephen Francis Miletic, *'One Flesh': Eph. 5.22–24, 5.31: Marriage and the New Creation* (Rome: Istituto Biblico, 1988).

[31] *Perikopenbuch Heinrichs II.,* Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 4452, fol. 2r. A recent publication explores Henry's agency in the production and usage of this manuscript: Eliza Garrison, *Ottonian Imperial Art and Portraiture: The Artistic Patronage of Otto III and Henry II* (London: Routledge, 2017), 113–163.

[32] Timothy Husband, ed., *The Treasury of Basel Cathedral* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 11–17, 45–47.

[33] Michalsky, "Imperatrix gloriosa," 188–190.

[34] *Bamberger Tafel,* Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 29093, fol. 1v. Stefan Weinfurter, "Kunigunde, Das Reich und Europa," in *Kunigunde—consors regni*, 9–27.

flesh out the connection between one's royal status and sexual conduct, on the one hand, and the influence of the Gregorian reform on lay piety and chastity, on the other.

Negotiating the Chastity of Henry II

One of the perceptions of Henry II during the eleventh and twelfth centuries was that of a childless but not yet a saintly ruler. Several polemicists and historiographers of the period, roughly from the death of Henry II in 1024 and to his canonisation in 1146, attempted to understand Henry's political role and reconcile it with his "counter-productive" sexual behaviour.[35] The present discussion is indebted to the studies of Klauser and Schneidmüller, who uncovered and analysed these sources with regard to the establishment of the cult of St. Henry.[36] However, here these texts are studied to reveal a range of attitudes towards royal childlessness, from condemning the political performance of Henry II to praising his piety and suggesting his abstinence. Often, the attitudes depended on the writers' political standpoints and predominantly ecclesiastical background. These perspectives were shaped by the intellectual climate of the Investiture Controversy, dominated by an opposition between imperial and papal offices, and the Gregorian reform, which brought up also the issue of clerical celibacy and chastity, aimed at "separating clergy from the laity, using sexual activity as the point of demarcation."[37]

The political and spiritual climate of the Reform and the Investiture Contest triggered radical debates among intellectuals concerning the involvement of the German kings in the ecclesiastical system, mainly by appointing bishops and other clerics, and its impact on the Church.[38] In these disputes, the figure of Henry II, known for his alterations of the ecclesiastical map of Europe (e.g. the mentioned foundation of the Bamberg diocese in 1007), was a subject of debate and re-assessment. One of the first proponents of the reform movement, a highly influential churchman Humbert of Silva Candida (*c.*1000-1061), deemed Henry II to be a simonist.[39] Moreover, he suggested that the lack of heirs was a punishment for Henry's overwhelming involvement in ecclesiastical business.[40] In this way, the ruler's marital conduct was subjected to his political actions in a scheme of divine revenge, triggered by the climate of opposition between the Pope and the Empire. A century later, this image of the

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[35] It is noteworthy that Cunigunde was not mentioned in these polemics concerning rulership and childlessness until her canonisation.

[36] Klauser, *Der Heinrichs- und Kunigundenkult,* 29–35; Bernd Schneidmüller, "Neues über einen alten Kaiser? Heinrich II. in der Perspektive der modernen Forschung," *Bericht des Historischen Vereins Bamberg* 133 (1997): 13–41.

[37] Elliot, *Spiritual Marriage,* 94.

[38] For an overview, see: Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); and Hartmut Hoffmann, *Mönchskönig und 'rex idiota': Studien zur Kirchenpolitik Heinrichs II. und Konrads II.* (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1993).

[39] Hoffmann's analysis suggests that Henry II was almost not involved in simony, unlike his successor Conrad II: Hoffmann, *Mönchskönig und 'rex idiota'*, 64–71. Weinfurter discussed possible reasons for ecclesiastical discontent with political ideals and actions of Henry II: Stefan Weinfurter, "Bamberg und das Reich in der Herrscheridee Heinrichs II.," *Bericht des Historischen Vereins Bamberg* 137 (2001): 53–82.

[40] Humbert of Silva Candida, "Libri tres adversus simoniacos," ed. Friedrich Thaner, in *MGH Libelli de lite*, (Hanover, 1891), 1:217: "Siquidem Ottones, prae omnibus ante se regibus sacerdotalis officii praesumptores, vix attigere tertiam. Post quos primus Heinricus nullam."

sinful emperor entered Joachimist apocalyptic traditions: in some treaties, Henry II is represented as one of the seven heads of the apocalyptic dragon.[41]

In the very same Gregorian circle another proponent of the reform lauded Henry II, contrary to Humbert of Silva Candida, for his piety and devotion. Bonizo of Sutri (*c.*1045-*c.*1090), a prominent supporter of Gregory VII, in his *Liber ad amicum* (*c.*1085), a treatise in the spirit of *The Church History*, created a positive image of Henry II and praised him as "a most Christian man of worthy character."[42] Bonizo of Sutri's understanding of Henry II's rule was in accordance with Henry's own representational programme.[43] Bonizo states that the lack of heirs is compensated and balanced by the utmost devotion of the emperor and does not trigger a succession crisis: "Since Henry had no sons, he made the apostles his heirs and when his life drew to a close, he was blessed with a peaceful end."[44]

Emperor Henry II's lack of heirs was re-interpreted—with revolutionary implications for the future saintly career of the royal couple—in the *Montecassino Chronicle* by Leo of Ostia (1046-*c.*1115), composed at the same Benedictine abbey at the end of the eleventh century. Among several legends about Henry II, important for the self-perception of Montecassino, Leo recounts the death of Henry, which is allegedly the first attestation of his chastity:[45] "Apart from other good qualities and virtues which this exceptionally pious emperor was known for, he indeed conducted a life of utmost chastity, so that, when he reached the moment of death, in the presence of bishops he called upon relatives of his spouse Cunigunde and returned her to them, stating: 'Take back your virgin as you have given her to me.'"[46] Leo of Ostia recognized only Henry's sexual abstinence in the marriage with Cunigunde, who is named a *virgo*, as a way of explaining and normalizing the childless marriage through Henry's praiseworthy chastity, either morally or bodily. However, the Benedictine chronicler either did not find the level of sexual continence of a yet-to-be-holy king worth a discussion or he

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[41] Alexander Patschovsky, "The Holy Emperor Henry 'the First' as One of the Dragon's Heads of the Apocalypse: On the Image of the Roman Empire under German Rule in the Tradition of Joachim of Fiore," *Viator* 29 (1998): 291–322.

[42] Bonizo of Sutri, "Liber ad amicum," ed. Ernest Dümmler, in *MGH Libelli de lite* (Hanover, 1891), 1:583: "virum christianissimum, moribus decenter ornatum." The translation by: Ian Robinson, trans., "The Book of Bishop Bonizo of Sutri Which Is Entitled 'To a Friend,'" in *The Papal Reform of the Eleventh Century: Lives of Pope Leo IX and Pope Gregory VII* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 180.

[43] Bonizo of Sutri, "Liber ad amicum," 583: "Pabenbargensem episcopatum, cum non haberet filios, ex sup proprio constituit eumque per cartulam offertionis beato Petro tradidit, ibique ecclesiam beatorum apostolorum principum mirifice ornatam fabricavit."

[44] Bonizo of Sutri, "Liber ad amicum," 583: "Prefatus vero Heinricus, cum filios non haberet, apostolos elegit heredes, et terminum vite suscipiens, beato fine quievit." The translation by: Robinson, "The Book of Bishop Bonizo of Sutri," 180.

[45] The legends about Henry II (including his miraculous healing) are crucial for the prestige of the monastery while they prove that the relics of St. Benedict are preserved intact in Montecassino. See also: Klaus Guth, "Die frühe lateinische und deutsche Überlieferung der 'Legende' von Kaiser Heinrichs II. Heilung im Kloster Montecassino," in *Volkskultur und Heimat: Festschrift für Josef Dünninger*, ed. Dieter Harmening and Erich Wimmer (Würzburg: Neumann, 1986), 317–27.

[46] Leo of Ostia (Marsicanus), "Chronica monasterii Casinensis," ed. Hartmut Hoffmann in *MGH Scriptores* 34 (Hanover: Hahn, 1953), 254 (A): "Super ceteras autem bonitates seu virtutes quas hic imperator religiosissimus habuisse narratur, adeo fertur vixisse castissimus, ut ad mortis articulum veniens, coram presentibus episcopis, vocatis Cunigunde coniugis sue propinquis, eaque illis reddita feratur dixisse: Recipite quam michi tradidistis virginem vestram."

believed the permanent sexual abstinence to be reserved for monastic communities and not for their lay patrons.

In Bamberg, the centre of the *memoria* for Henry II from his death onwards, a similar assumption about the sexual continence of Henry and Cunigunde developed at the beginning of the twelfth century. Frutolf of Michelsberg (d.1103), a monk at the Michelsberg monastery in Bamberg and the author of the *World Chronicle*, interpreted the marriage of Henry and Cunigunde as follows: "Considering that he would have no sons because, as many attest, he never knew Cunigunde his consort in the kingdom but loved her like a sister, he made the Lord, the giver of all good things, his heir."[47] In this way, Frutolf of Michelsberg not only conformed to the traditional interpretation of Henry's piety—choosing God as his heir, especially known and favourable in his home-diocese of Bamberg—but developed it further into an ideal of the chaste marriage. Yet again, the agency of this passage evolved around the idea of marital sexual abstinence as an explanatory tool for the royal childlessness, which in the same period could be seen as a revenge for Henry's political activities (see the discussion of Humbert of Silva Candida above). Neither Leo of Ostia nor Frutolf of Michelsberg conveyed the total sexual renunciation of the king, which was assumed only from the beginning of the thirteenth century onwards. Renate Klauser, the author of the most extensive study on the cult of Henry and Cunigunde in Bamberg, suggested that the claims of Henry's abstinence spread immediately after his death in 1024 and were evident in several contemporary eulogies.[48] However, it is difficult to discern whether the claims of chastity in these verses allude to Henry's sexual abstinence, or—as might equally be the case—to his chastity of spirit. It is thus in the writings of Leo of Ostia and Frutolf of Michelsberg that the earliest consistent attestations of Henry II and Cunigunde's chaste marriage appeared.

It is quite striking that both chroniclers, following different memorial traditions—of Montecassino and Bamberg respectively—asserted a chaste marriage to Emperor Henry. These claims of royal sexual abstinence corresponded to an extent to the monastic and clerical ideals of celibacy and chastity, promoted especially during the reform movement.[49] Sexual abstinence was not only strived for among clerical circles, and actually strictly imposed on the latter starting from the First Lateran council in 1123, but also actively adopted by laity and secular leaders from the tenth century onwards.[50] The adoption of the chaste life among lay leaders was partially encouraged by clerics themselves: the hagiography of the tenth-century noble Gerald of Aurillac, who led an almost monastic life and strived to renounce the secular world, was written by the leader of the Cluniac reform, Abbot Odo.[51] For both Benedictine

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[47] "Ekkehardi Uraugiensis Chronica," ed. Georg Waitz in *MGH Scriptores* 6, ed. Georg Pertz (Hanover, 1844), 192: "considerans se filios non habiturum, quippe qui, ut multi testantur, consortem regni Cunigundam nunquam cognovit sed ut sororem dilexit, Dominum bonorum omnium datorem habere delegit heredem." The translation by: Thomas John Henry McCarthy, ed., *Chronicles of the investiture contest: Frutolf of Michelsberg and his continuators: selected sources* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 85.

[48] Klauser, *Der Heinrichs- und Kunigundenkult,* 32.

[49] John Hugh Arnold, "The Labour of Continence: Masculinity and Clerical Virginity," in *Medieval Virginities*, ed. Ruth Evans, Sarah Salih, and Anke Bernau (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 102–118.

[50] Elliot, *Spiritual Marriage,* 94–131; Margaret McGlynn and Richard James Moll, "Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages," 112–113.

[51] Mathew Kuefler, *The Making and Unmaking of a Saint: Hagiography and Memory in the Cult of Gerald of Aurillac* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

monks, writing around the turn of the twelfth century, an assumption of a chaste royal marriage directly reflected the renewed ideals of moral purity manifested in sexual renunciation as well as the popularity of this lifestyle among lay members of society.

Relating to the previous section on the contemporary representations of Henry II, one can assume that Henry II was, then, relatively successful in his attempts to normalize the interpretation of his childless marriage by claiming God to be his heir and by substituting his utmost religious zeal for the lack of heirs and future political stability. Within two generations, this claim was understood in terms of Henry's chastity—as a praiseworthy moral or physical virtue—in line with popular contemporary religious and cultural ideals. The only negative explanation of this marital irregularity, voiced by Humbert of Silva Candida, came from an anti-imperial circle of the reform movement.

Praising the Chaste Royal Couple

The idea that Henry and Cunigunde lived in sexual abstinence was given a new spin during their canonisation procedures. Their chastity was incorporated in various legends, confirmed by papal bulls, undergoing liturgical elaborations, and becoming a subject of various artworks. Moreover, their chaste wedlock became well-known and was regularly praised by multiple communities as the cults spread: first of all, in the bishopric of Bamberg, whose patrons Henry and Cunigunde became, but also in Merseburg, Basel, the Bohemian lands, Carinthia and many monastic houses.[52] This section thus explores the framing of Henry and Cunigunde's chastity and/or virginity along the lines of the establishment of their cults, which lasted for roughly one century from the middle of the twelfth century. The texts involved in these processes originated from Bamberg's ecclesiastical circles and the papal curia, namely *vitae*, liturgical sequences and papal bulls, which became the cornerstones of any devotional activities for both Henry and Cunigunde. Hence, the image of the chaste couple and the authorial strategies of balancing the "religious observance with proper practice of regality" explored here were well-known among the groups venerating the royal couple and were subsequently transmitted and elaborated further in Central Europe.[53]

Pope Eugene III officially confirmed the cult of St. Henry in 1146 as the result of a common endeavour by the clerics of Bamberg and King Conrad III (1138-1152).[54] Innocent III approved the sanctity of Henry's *consors regni* Cunigunde in 1200 owing to the collective effort of various bishops, abbots and Bamberg clerics and to the patronage of King Philip of Swabia (1198-1208).[55] In spite of this large group of powerful clerics and rulers who supported the legalization of the imperial cults, it was the Bamberg clergy who actually framed the cults and semi-monopolized the hagiographic production dedicated to these saints. Both Henry II and Cunigunde were proclaimed saints because of their posthumous miracles, their pious lives,

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[52] Guth, *Die Heiligen Heinrich und Kunigunde*; Linke, *Beitrag zur Kulttopographie*.

[53] Patricia H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis, *Holiness and Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), 4.

[54] On the canonisation procedure for Henry II, see: Klauser, *Der Heinrichs- und Kunigundenkult*, 22–68; Otfried Krafft, *Papsturkunde und Heiligsprechung: die päpstlichen Kanonisationen vom Mittelalter bis zur Reformation: ein Handbuch* (Cologne; Weimar: Böhlau, 2005), 90–97.

[55] Jürgen Petersohn, "Die Litterae Papst Innozenz III. zur Heiligsprechung der Kaiserin Kunigunde (1200)," *Jahrbuch für fränkische Landesforschung* 37 (1977): 1–25.

and vast donations, all of which were subsequently recounted in their hagiographies and miracle collections.

The sexual abstinence of Henry II does not constitute his main saintly virtue at the time of his canonisation; according to the classification of representations of male virginity devised by Rhodes for the Anglo-Saxon milieu, Henry's abstinence constitutes a nominal, static virtue in his life.[56] The canonisation bull of Henry II from 1146 praises the emperor for his chastity, enumerating it among other virtues of his "spiritual though not royal" lifestyle. The bull contains a remark that "till the last day he [Emperor Henry] maintained the integrity of purity."[57] The formula *integritas castimoniae* is as ambivalent as the term *castitas*, both used in the bull, and can signify either moral purity or sexual abstinence. The ambiguity of these categories, which framed the sanctity of Emperor Henry II, can also testify to the lack of adequate vocabulary for describing lay male continence. Hence, it is still unclear whether the papal see intended to frame Henry II as a virgin king or equivocally praised his piety and renouncement of a royal lifestyle. The fundamental contradiction between royal conduct and the emperor's chaste life, pinpointed at the beginning of the essay, is also present in the papal text: although "having accepted the imperial crown and the sceptre," Henry II led a chaste spiritual life. He represented an idealized practice of overcoming this contradiction, which was also elaborately described in his hagiography.

The first hagiography of St. Henry, which was written in Bamberg around the time of his canonisation in the Michelsberg monastery, might look like a dull recitation of Henry's reign and legends known to the author mostly from Leo of Ostia's *Chronicle* and local oral traditions.[58] However, the overall narrative is skilfully crafted to create an image of a pious king-confessor, a liturgical type that was evoked for Henry's saintly image.[59] Prospective audiences of the *vita* learned that Henry lived in sexual abstinence only after the holy king is shaped as a pious confessor, a defender of Christianity; nevertheless, royal abstinence is portrayed as a valid asset to his saintly figure, and one that explains the dynastic disruption. The abstinence of St. Henry is elaborated upon in the already known episodes, namely the deathbed episode, adopted from Leo of Ostia,[60] and narratives of Henry's choice of God as his

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[56] On different representations of male virginity, see: Cassandra Rhodes, "'What, after All, Is a Male Virgin?' Multiple Performances of Male Virginity in Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives," in *Representing Medieval Genders and Sexualities in Europe: Construction, Transformation and Subversion, 600–1530*, ed. Elizabeth L'Estrange and Alison More (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 15–32.

[57] Eugenius III, *Epistolae et Privilegia*, ed. Jacques P. Migne (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1902), 180: cols. 1118–1119: "Inter quae illud praecipuum et memorabile plurimum attendentes, quod cum diadema sceptrumque imperii suscepisset, non imperialiter, sed spiritualiter vixit. In toto etiam legitimo positus, quod paucorum fuisse legitur, integritatem castimoniae usque in finem vitae conservavit."

[58] For a detailed textual analysis of the *vita Heinrici,* its two redactions and sources, see: Stumpf, *Die Vita sancti Heinrici,* 19–147.

[59] On the first liturgies for St. Henry, see: Robert Folz, "La légende liturgique de saint Henri II empereur et confesseur," in *Clio est son regard: Mélanges d'histoire, d'histoire de l'art et d'archéologie offerts à Jacques Stiennon à l'occasion de ses vingt-cinq ans d'enseignement à l'Université de Liège*, ed. Rita Lejeune and Joseph Deckers (Liege: Mardaga, 1982), 245–258.

[60] Stumpf, *Die Vita sancti Heinrici*, 302–303: "Qui cum cerneret imminere mortis diem, citatis ad se parentibus et cognatis beatissime imperatricis Chunigunde, nonnullis etiam regni primoribus, manu eam apprehensam commendavit illis huiusmodi verbis memoria dignis: 'Hanc ecce', inquit, 'michi a vobis, immo per Christum consignatam ipsi Christo domino nostro et vobis resigno virginem vestram.'"

heir, his lack of carnal knowledge of Cunigunde, and his treatment of her as a sister.[61] This understanding of Henry and Cunigunde's relationship as one between brother and sister is often used as a textual, visual, and performative tool to represent their chaste conduct.

The chastity of the holy couple was also revealed in Henry's *vita* in a previously unknown narrative describing Cunigunde's ordeal, partially modelled upon existing narratives of falsely accused queens.[62] This legend, which later became a key episode in establishing Cunigunde's virginity, revolves around accusations of her unfaithfulness, which were inflicted on her by the devil. In order to showcase her fidelity, Cunigunde walked over burning ploughshares and remained unharmed, thereby openly stating that she never knew any man carnally. This ordeal, in which the chaste marriage of the royal couple is confirmed, is also recited in the third nocturn of the liturgy for Henry II, mentioning that: "The blessed king, touched by eternity and led by wisdom, striving for chastity, disregarded the matrimonial duties."[63] These attestations of Henry's chastity bring Cunigunde to the scene for the first time, although only as a means of proving the abstinence of her spouse. However, after Cunigunde's canonisation in 1200, her agency in pursuing sexual continence came to the foreground along with her identification as a virgin. Her hagiography, written in Bamberg around the time of the campaign for her canonisation, mostly discusses Cunigunde's life in a nunnery at Kaufungen after the death of her husband—a traditional path for performing sexual abstinence, commonly utilized in legends of holy women.[64] At the same time, the opening paragraph of the *vita* praises her chaste conduct in the married life too: "Oh marriage, united not for pleasures but out of good will! Oh holy matrimony, where the pledge of unviolated chastity and the spirit of compassion and verity [are preserved]."[65]

Cunigunde's canonisation bull, issued by Innocent III, highlights the virginity of the saint, using the ordeal as the main proof: "Blessed Cunigunde was bound with St. Henry by marriage, but she never appeared to know him carnally. …Because of her intact virginity, God hallowed and protected her when she, in order to show her innocence, walked barefoot over burning ploughshares and remained unharmed."[66] The virtue of virginity, preserved in a rightful marriage, is stressed in the liturgical verses of *oratio* and *secreta*, the closing elements of the canonisation bull.[67] The shaping of the cult of Cunigunde as one of a virgin saint is likely to have been an intentional policy of the papal curia, supported by the Bamberg clergy, who were

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[61] Stumpf, *Die Vita sancti Heinrici*, 274–275.

[62] Stumpf, *Die Vita sancti Heinrici,* 274–277. On the ordeal, see: Vickie L. Ziegler, *Trial by Fire and Battle in Medieval German Literature* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004).

[63] Folz, "La légende liturgique," 253: "Eterna tactus et tractus sapientia rex beatus, castitatis emulus, matrimoniale ius despexit, sed consortem thalami adulterii suspicio maculat, cui locum euadendi iudicium principum decreta tollebat. Constans regina de obiectis numeroso candentis ferri uomere deducitur, ab illatis iniuriis expurgata."

[64] Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 107–165.

[65] "Vita et miracula S. Cunegundis," ed. Georg Waitz in *MGH Scriptores* 4, ed. Georg Pertz (Hanover, 1841), 822: "O coniugium non voluptate, sed bona voluntate copulatum! O sanctum matrimonium, ubi una fides inviolate castitatis, ubi unus spiritus misericordie et veritatis."

[66] Petersohn, "Die Litterae Papst Innozenz III.," 24: "Qui iurati dixerunt, quod, sicut ex celebri fama et sollempni scriptura nouerunt, beata Chunigundis sancto Henr. imperatori fuit matrimonialiter copulata, sed ab eo non extitit carnaliter cognita ... Suam ergo uirginitatem Domino consecrauit et seruauit intactam, ita quod, cum aliquando instigante humani generis inimico suspicio quedam contra eam fuisset exorta, ipsa, ut suam innocentiam demonstraret, super ignitos uomeres nudis plantis incessit et processit illesa."

[67] Petersohn, "Die Litterae Papst Innozenz III.," 25.

responsible for producing the first *vita* and elaborated liturgical services. Indeed, the papal acknowledgement of Cunigunde as a saint was successful and St. Cunigunde rapidly entered the canon of virgins and was quite popular in this capacity. By the 1220s, her name is mentioned among other virgins in the *Cividale Psalter*, which belonged to St. Elisabeth of Thuringia.[68]

The ideal of virginity itself was by no means novel for promoters of the cults of Henry and Cunigunde or their devotees. Virgin martyrs were among the most venerated saints, whose cults were eagerly adopted and zealously imitated. For example, the stories of the Virgin Martyr Cecilia and St. Alexius proliferated in the religious and literary landscapes of high and late medieval Europe—their popular legends recount the desire of their protagonists to escape a conjugal union and pursue a virginal lifestyle.[69] St. Alexius fled on his wedding night, while St. Cecilia managed to persuade her husband Valerian to remain chaste within the bounds of a lawful marriage. These popular narratives contributed to a literary milieu in which the striving for sexual abstinence was highly praised, thus forming a fertile ground for the relative success of the cults of Henry and Cunigunde, especially of the latter: for instance, Cunigunde was compared to St. Cecilia in one of the sermons.[70] The chaste union of the royal couple was considered to be an extraordinary virtue among the multiple adherents of their cults. The author of a pseudo-Joachimist treatise *De Semine Scripturarum*, which presumably was written in Bamberg in the 1200s, described this royal union as follows:[71] "It is rare that among all imperial rulers at least one is canonised; it is even more remarkable when both in a carnal union are beatified; it is extraordinary indeed that both of them are praised under the signs of purity and chastity."[72]

In the roughly fifty years that passed between the canonisation of the two spouses, within the memory of one or two generations, the image of the royal couple changed incredibly. The inconcise claims of Henry's abstinence and moral purity, voiced in historiographic narratives and then adopted in the canonisation procedure, were mostly utilized to explain the lack of posteriors and glorify his non-royal lifestyle, while his chaste marriage was mentioned in the ordeal narrative. These earliest elaborations of Henry's saintly image conform to the general pattern identified by Salih that "(male) sexual status is rarely the locus of their sanctity, as it is often the case for women."[73] With the canonisation of Cunigunde as a virgin, a new ideal appeared, namely that of a chaste matrimony of saints, a rare case in medieval practice. Therefore, the sexuality of Henry required additional

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[68] *St Elizabeth's Psalter*, National Archaeological Museum, Cividale del Friuli, MS CXXXVIII, fol. 170r. Cited in Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 211.

[69] Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 64–70, 104–108.

[70] "Sermo de sancta Chunigunda," ed. Renate Klauser in *Der Heinrichs- und Kunigundenkult*, 194.

[71] Partially published by Pelster: Franz Pelster, "Ein Elogium Joachims von Fiore auf Kaiser Heinrich II. und seine Gemahlin, die heilige Kunigunde," in *Liber Floridus: Mittelalateinische Studien*, ed. Paul Lehmann and Bernhard Bischoff (St. Ottilien: Eos Verlag, 1950), 329–354. For the analysis of this treatise and its influence, see: Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), esp. 58, 83.

[72] Pelster, "Ein Elogium Joachims von Fiore," 344: "Rarum est, ut sub tanto imperii principatu quis ex duobus alter sanctificetur; rarius, ut ambo sub copula carnis beatificentur; rarissimum est, ut ambo sub sigillo castitatis seu continencie iustificentur."

[73] Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 17.

elaborations, otherwise leaving multiple possibilities for interpretation. Another case of a chaste union of nobles, that of Delphine of Glandèves (1284-1358/1360) and Elzéar, Count of Sabran (1285-1323), the fourteenth-century aristocrats of the Provence region, reveal concurrent praise and disbelief towards such a practice, both from their lay family members, from the papal see, and other ecclesiastical members involved in the canonisation procedures.[74] Even though the circumstances of Henry's and Cunigunde's matrimony differ from those of the Provence saints, a certain scepticism towards their chaste marriage, paired with an overwhelming popular interest, can be identified through the analysis of a supplementary narrative program, discussed in the next section.

Vindicating the Virginal Marriage of Henry and Cunigunde

The popularity that these royal saints achieved during the thirteenth century in Bamberg and other regions triggered the spread of existing and the appearance of new hagiographic writings devoted to Henry and Cunigunde.[75] Not long after 1200, a collection of three narratives was conceived, most probably in Bamberg. These three narratives are known in the historiography as an anonymous addition (or *additamentum*) to the *vita Heinrici*.[76] Two of these supplementary narratives expand upon the already known motifs of the chaste marriage and Cunigunde's ordeal while the third part introduces Henry's lameness (a legend also possibly connected with Henry's sexuality, as is suggested at the end of this section). Some parts of these narratives were subsequently incorporated into Henry's *vita* in its further elaborations (e.g. the epic poem by Ebernand of Erfurt), while the claudication story was transmitted even in two different forms.[77] It is debatable whether one can consider the *additamentum* as an integral unit, since it is only known as such in one thirteenth-century codex.[78] However, I still find it fruitful to look at these three legends in concert as they testify to the disputable nature of the royal virginal marriage and to the perpetual marital chastity becoming the principal virtue of both saints. The first lives of Henry and Cunigunde, described in the previous chapter, only proclaimed the chastity of Henry II and Cunigunde and did not describe the circumstances of achieving and maintaining sexual abstinence in the marriage, leaving room for unfavourable concerns. I suggest that the three narratives of the *additamentum* appeared not only as a response to the popular interest in the deeds of the recently canonised Henry and Cunigunde, but also in order to secure a "proper" interpretation of their sexual continence.

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[74] André Vauchez, *Les laïcs au Moyen Age: Pratiques et expériences religieuses* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1987), 83–92, 211–224; Rosalynn Voaden, "A Marriage Made for Heaven: The Vies Occitanes of Elzear of Sabran and Delphine of Puimichel," in *Framing the Family: Narrative and Representation in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden and Diane Wolfthal (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 101–116.

[75] Stumpf, *Die Vita sancti Heinrici*, 19–147.

[76] Klauser, *Der Heinrichs- und Kunigundenkult,* 108–113.

[77] Klauser, *Der Heinrichs- und Kunigundenkult*, 112–113. Although Ebernand's interpretation of the *additamentum*-narratives is also revealing for the contemporary perceptions of royal chastity, this question will not be discussed within the limits of this article. Some of the aspects are studied by: Maria E. Müller, *Jungfräulichkeit in Versepen des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts* (München: Fink, 1995), 157–190.

[78] Leipzig, *Universitätsbibliothek*, Rep. II 64.

The first part of the *additamentum* introduced a bridal-quest motif to the lives of Henry and Cunigunde.[79] Henry's court advises him to find a spouse and heavily opposes his desire to remain chaste.[80] Though the courtly opinion prevails and the marriage of Henry and Cunigunde is settled, the spouses, despite the abovementioned reproaches, mutually decide to secretly live in a chaste union.[81] This narrative made it especially clear that Henry practiced perpetual sexual abstinence, namely before and during the marriage: "My dearest wife, you should know that I have never experienced the carnal love, by which the spouses are so delighted and are mutually united, neither am I willing to—were Henry's first words to Cunigunde after the marriage had been confirmed—because I have chosen a celibate life and I have been bound by this vow to God for a long time."[82] His spouse, in her turn, revealed an equal fondness for virginity and they both mutually agreed upon living in perpetual sexual abstinence.[83] The anonymous author of this piece added a new narrative to the repertoire of hagiographic descriptions of chaste unions: neither did any of the spouses want to flee from the marriage, like St. Alexius, nor was it the sole initiative of only one of the spouses, as was the case for St. Cecilia. Here, both Henry and Cunigunde mutually agreed upon preserving their virginity in a rightful, formally concluded marriage.

Kalinke and Bornholdt have noticed that the outline of this narrative resembles several vernacular German epics that appeared in the second half of the twelfth century, mostly *Das Münchner Oswald* and *Orendel.* Oswald (St. Oswald of Northumbria) and Orendel, both of royal descend, are also driven by the need of establishing royal succession; once an appropriate spouse is found and the marriage celebrated, the male protagonists receive a divine vocation for sexual abstinence. In this, Oswald and Orendel differ from St. Henry, who had chosen sexual abstinence long before he got married, while Oswald and Orendel are initially motivated by their royal duty to ensure succession. In the end, their marriages are perpetually chaste, which is contradictory to the logic of the bridal-quest narrative and the initial motive of securing heirs for the throne—exactly as in the case of St. Henry and Cunigunde.[84] Whether any of these texts influenced the *additamentum* or the other way round is arduous to establish

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[79] On this motive in German literature, see: Claudia Bornholdt, *Engaging Moments: The Origins of Medieval Bridal-Quest Narrative* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), esp. 147–149; and Claudia Bornholdt, "What Makes a Marriage: Consent or Consummation in Twelfth-Century German Literature," in *Chastity: A Study in Perception, Ideals, Opposition*, ed. Nancy van Deusen (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 127–150. Kalinke discusses various romance-motifs in the late medieval Icelandic redaction of Henry's and Cunigunde's hagiographies: Marianne E. Kalinke, "Hendreks Saga og Kunegundis: Marital Consent in the Legend of Henry and Cunegund," in *Sanctity in the North. Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Thomas Andrew DuBois (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 307–333.

[80] Voaden claims that saints' families acquired a role of hostile forces (similar to those of pagans in the earliest hagiographies), thus giving saints a chance to exercise their virtues: Voaden, "A Marriage Made for Heaven," 107–109.

[81] "Vitae Sancti Heinrici Additamentum," ed. Georg Waitz in *MGH SS* 4, ed. Georg Pertz (Hanover, 1841), 816–818.

[82] "Vitae Sancti Heinrici Additamentum," 817: "Sponsa mea carissima, notum tibi sit, quod amorem, quo carnales coniuges maxime delectantur et mutuo sibi consociantur, numquam expertus sum, sed nec experiri volo, quia celibem vitam elegi et hoc voto domino Deo me iam dudum obligavi."

[83] "Vitae Sancti Heinrici Additamentum," 817: "omnibus diebus vite nostre celibem vitam ducamus."

[84] On the relation of these epics to the hagiographies of Henry and Cunigunde, see: Bornholdt, "What Makes a Marriage," 140–145.

due to the predominantly oral transmission of these legends,[85] but the interplay between the vernacular legends and the *additamentum* undoubtedly reveals the popularity of a chaste marriage in the German-speaking literary climate of the late-twelfth–thirteenth centuries.

The anonymous author of the *additamentum* took the trouble to describe the royal chaste marriage as united by amity and love between the spouses and as legally valid, confirmed by the church. These details give not only a dramatic twist to the already known plot, but also place this chaste marriage, intentionally or not, in accordance with canonical doctrine. As Makowski pointed out in her study on the conjugal debt, "mutual concern, free and unextorted, was as necessary a precondition for a private vow [of chastity] as it was for entrance into the religious life."[86] The requirement of a conjugal debt and exclusive options of eliminating it in a legally binding marriage were discussed in the last cases of the *Decretum Gratiani* and was further elaborated upon by commentators.[87] The ideal union of Mary and Joseph, which was bound by a mutual consent and not by a physical consummation, was another important model for the theological debate on marriage, especially developed by Hugh of St Victor.[88] Hence, the image of the perpetually chaste and nonetheless legally binding marriage of Henry and Cunigunde, created in the *additamentum,* adhered to the theological debate of the mid-twelfth to early thirteenth centuries on the matrimony and conjugal debt, in its turn rooted in the early-eleventh-century discussion of clerical celibacy.[89] However, it is uncertain whether the author, possibly a cleric or a monk, most probably familiar with the statements of the *Decretum* and further theological discussions of marriage, deliberately elaborated upon the mutual agreement between Henry and Cunigunde in order to describe the royal marriage as rightful and to evade any criticism. It is equally possible that the author unintentionally reflected upon the contemporary expectations of sexual abstinence within marriage.

Another episode from the addition, the third in order, reveals the famous ploughshare miracle of St. Cunigunde in its entirety, providing new details and filling the narrative with dialogues.[90] The ordeal of Cunigunde was modelled upon existing hagiographic and biblical models of falsely accused queens, among which are St. Richardis (*c*.840-*c*.895), a wife of Charles the Fat (839-888), who was accused of infidelity and underwent the ordeal of the wax shirt in 887,[91] and Old Testament heroine Susanna, who was also falsely accused of infidelity and then saved by the prophet Daniel.[92] The ploughshare legend, the most famous legend relating to Cunigunde from the late Middle Ages until today, has attracted a considerable amount of attention from historians, who discussed its origins, narrative composition,

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[85] Bornholdt and Kalinke argue that some oral traditions about the chaste marriage of Henry and Cunigunde influenced the named vernacular epics, while Ingrid Bennewitz assumes the opposite: Bornholdt, "What Makes a Marriage," 142; Marianne Kalinke, "Lost German Literature in Icelandic Translation: The Legends of King Oswald and Emperor Henry II," in *Kulturen des Manuskriptzeitalters*, ed. Arthur Groos and Hans-Jochen Schiewer (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2004), 155–180; Ingrid Bennewitz, "Kaiserin und Braut Gottes: Literarische Entwürfe weiblicher Heiligkeit," *Bericht des Historischen Vereins Bamberg* 137 (2001): 144–145.

[86] Makowski, "The Conjugal Debt," 101.

[87] Especially cases 27 and 33; further texts discussed by: Makowski, "The Conjugal Debt."

[88] McGlynn and Moll, "Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages," 103–122.

[89] Uta-Renate Blumenthal, "The Prohibition of Clerical Marriage."

[90] "Vitae Sancti Heinrici Additamentum," 819–820.

[91] Ziegler, *Trial by Fire and Battle*, 146–167.

[92] "Annales Palidenses," in *MGH Scriptores* 16, ed. Georg Pertz (Hanover, 1859), 66; cf. Daniel 13.

influence on other narratives of ordeals and its artistic representations.[93] Therefore, here I only briefly discuss those traits that are crucial for the understanding of the couple's sexual abstinence.

This part of the *additamentum* starts with praise of the chaste amiable matrimony between the emperor and his spouse, similar to the one opening the *vita Cunegundis*. "They were one heart and one soul, and they were not two in one flesh though two in one spirit"—a clear play upon the verse from the *Ephesians*, by which the author hints that their marriage was indeed a spiritual one.[94] Amidst this idyllic life of "blessed spouses, though virgins," a series of dramatic events unfold: a devil disguised as a nobleman made himself visible when exiting Cunigunde's chamber three mornings in a row, which triggered rumours about the empress's infidelity. Upon hearing these rumours, Henry decided to leave his wife and did not even greet her upon his return to Bamberg, even if they eventually did engage in a dialogue. In this conversation, the case of conjugal infidelity is shaped not as a private matter of spouses, but as a crucial issue for the image of the empire. The empress acknowledged that the honour of the empire had been diminished because of her, though she was willing to reinstate it.[95] The matter was indeed solved at the imperial level: the princes and bishops of the empire were summoned to judge the unfaithful queen. Cunigunde proved her faithfulness by walking on the burning ploughshares and, miraculously remaining unharmed, publicly declared her virginity: she knew neither Henry nor any other men carnally.[96] The revelation of their secret chaste marriage irritates Henry and he slaps Cunigunde on the cheek so that it starts bleeding. The legend, however, culminates with Henry's atonement in front of Cunigunde for his wrath and false accusations.

While acknowledging the clever structure of the piece, which offers a great material for narratological analysis, here I will emphasize the representations of sexual abstinence and the royal chaste marriage. Firstly, the inclusion of the intramarital chastity of Henry and Cunigunde in the sphere of imperial history reveals again that the saintly images of Henry and Cunigunde simultaneously represent both an idealized ruling practice and an extreme ideal of sexual abstinence, which stands in conflict with the issue of succession. Secondly, the Job-like testing of the couple's chastity enables the protagonists to perform their virginity—an element intrinsic to hagiographic constructions of the virginity of saints, as showed by Huntington and Kelly.[97] Cunigunde's abstinence is contested and gloriously defended through bodily mutilations (the ploughshare ordeal and Henry's slap), thus reflecting on the perception that female virginity was mostly located in the female body, while male virginity is not connected

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[93] Ziegler, *Trial by Fire and Battle*; in relation to visual representations of Cunigunde: Michalsky, "Imperatrix gloriosa."

[94] "Vitae Sancti Heinrici Additamentum," 819: "erat cor unum et anima una, et erant duo non tam in carne una quam in uno spiritu"; see Miletic, *"One Flesh."*

[95] "Vitae Sancti Heinrici Additamentum," 819: "Honor quidem totius imperii per me videtur imminutus, sed volente Deo quantocius per me reformabitur; quod qualiter fieri possit, si sit cum beneplacito vestro, breviter insinuo."

[96] "Vitae Sancti Heinrici Additamentum," 820: "nec hunc presentem Heinricum, nec quemquam virum alium carnali commercio cognovi." In this part the author uses the wording from the *vita Heinrici*, cf. Stumpf, *Die Vita sancti Heinrici,* 276.

[97] Joanna Huntington, "Edward the Celibate, Edward the Saint: Virginity in the Construction of Edward the Confessor," in *Medieval Virginities*, 119–139; Kelly, *Performing Virginity.*

with physical integrity and thus Henry reveals his bodily chastity only indirectly, as dependent on the sexual performance of his spouse.[98]

The second part of the addition explains the origins of Henry's lameness, an impairment sporadically attributed to him in medieval legends and chronicles (he is often named *Heinricus claudus*), and even depicted as such in visual works.[99] One of the earliest texts that explains the lameness of Henry II is the *Annales Palidenses*, composed in a monastery in Lower Saxony at the end of the twelfth century, in which the author recalls that Henry injured his thigh in a campaign in 1004 when escaping captivity.[100] Because of this incident he was called "Henry the thigh-lame."[101] In contrast, the *additamentum* narrative portrays the claudication as the result of a celestial intervention.[102] On his pilgrimage to Monte Gargano, Henry II was chosen to participate in a heavenly mass, assisted by St. Michael, the patron of the named monastery. There, the angel, who brought Henry the Evangeliary, touched Henry's thigh—and this touch resulted in Henry's supposed lameness.[103] The author testifies that he or she learned of this legend from someone who had heard it in a sermon of Conrad of Querfurt, Bishop of Würzburg (*c.*1160-1202) at Bamberg Cathedral; from the thirteenth century onwards this lameness-narrative was incorporated in various versions of St. Henry's *vita*. Ebernand of Erfurt also included this legend in his poem, though stated that this legend of St. Henry, who "mochte gerne hinken," was known to him from oral legends, and not from the *additamentum* or any other written text.[104] The early-sixteenth century printed legend of Henry and Cunigunde, rendered in vernacular by Nonnosus Stettfelder from Michelsberg monastery in Bamberg, includes the same legend in order to explain "why he is called lame emperor Henry."[105] In these narratives, the lameness of Henry is considered to be a heavenly sign, which Henry II proudly embraced, as opposed to the more profane "historicised" explanation from the annals.

Simultaneously, another version of the claudication of Henry II existed: in its basic outline, it is similar to the events at Monte Gargano, though here Henry II participated in the heavenly mass in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. While the transmission of the *additamentum* narratives is scarcely studied, I only know of two texts from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries that contain the second reading of this legend: a hagiographic collection from Tegernsee abbey and a chronicle written by a humanist Johannes Nauclerus.[106] In this version

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[98] Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, 15. It is also noteworthy that St. Henry did not prove his chastity by resisting temptation, a popular hagiographic trope of performing sexual abstinence: Arnold, "The Labour of Continence."

[99] For the list of sources mentioning Henry's impairment, see: Schneidmüller, "Kaiserin Kunigunde," n27. A more recent article also includes visual representations: Franz Kohlschein, "'Claudus Heinricus—der hincket keyser Heinrich': Kaiser Heinrich II. als Visionär im Michaelsheiligtum des Monte Gargano in Apulien," *Bericht des Historischen Vereins Bamberg* 138 (2002): 77–122.

[100] "Annales Palidenses," 66.

[101] "Annales Palidenses," 66: "Heinricus femore claudus."

[102] "Vitae Sancti Heinrici Additamentum," 818.

[103] In this quality, the author compares Henry to St. Jacob. See: Genesis 32:32.

[104] Ebernand of Erfurt, *Heinrich und Kunegunde*, ed. Reinhold Bechstein (Leipzig, 1860), 107–109.

[105] Nonnosus Stettfelder, *Dye legend und leben des Heyligen sandt Keyser Heinrichs* (Bamberg, 1511), 41–44: "warumb er der hinckey keyser heinrich heyset."

[106] Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 18660 and Johannes Nauclerus, *Memorabilium omnis aetatis et omnium gentium chronici commentarii* (Tubingae, 1516). This textual tradition is currently unexplored and is only mentioned by Kohlschein with regard to Nauclerus's chronicle.

not only the location but also the interpretation of this episode differs: Henry II's claudication is given to him as a sign of his chastity and justice.[107] Hence, the writers and possible readers and listeners of this legend could interpret the lameness of St. Henry as an asset to his chastity and regality.[108]

There could indeed have been a connection between moral and sexual conduct, on the one hand, and bodily disability, on the other. Claudication is an evident physical impairment, but it can also be interpreted, according to antique and medieval theories, as a punishment for moral imperfections or as a sign of sexual impotence. Interpreting lameness or any other disability as a mirror to worldly sins is in line with a popular medieval understanding of the "body as a vessel of spiritual meaning."[109] The second connotation originates from a specific antique perception of reproduction systems, mentioned by Felton with regard to antique literary texts, in which a male thigh functions as the equivalent to a womb; hence, any dysfunction in a thigh (due to an inborn lameness or a wound) could potentially cause impotence.[110] This belief is mostly a remnant of oral culture, harboured only in several antique and medieval legends, in which male thigh wounds are connected with sexuality; it is hardly possible to establish whether this idea was at work when interpreting the lameness of Henry II. However, the appearance of such a narrative, namely of the claudication of Emperor Henry during the heavenly mass, could be meant to refute possible unpleasant interpretations of his lameness, be it the moral imperfection or impotence.[111]

Imagining Henry II as impotent was indeed possible—it provided an explanation of his childlessness and thus threw a shadow on his chaste marriage. Such an interpretation is evidenced in one fifteenth-century anecdote from the *History of the Roman Emperors* (*Chronica regum Romanorum*), written by Thomas Ebendorfer (1388-1464).[112] The chronicler discusses the

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[107] Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 18660, fol. 216v: "hoc tibi erit signum dilectionis dei … propter tuam castitatem et tuam iustitiam." Similar wording is also in Nauclerus, *Memorabilium omnis*, fol. 149.

[108] Although "chastity" in this fragment can also be interpreted in terms of moral purity, a prospective audience could tend to understand Henry's chastity as sexual abstinence—a quality repeatedly emphasized in other two narratives surrounding the claudication legend, as discussed above.

[109] Irina Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment in the High Middle Ages, c.1100–1400* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 38–48. See also: Mikeal C. Parsons, "The Character of the Lame Man in Acts 3-4," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 295–312.

[110] D. Felton, "Thigh Wounds in Homer and Vergil: Cultural Reality and Literary Metaphor," in *Resemblance and Reality in Greek Thought: Essays in Honor of Peter M. Smith*, ed. Arum Park (New York: Routledge, 2016), 239–258; David D. Leitao, *The Pregnant Male as Myth and Metaphor in Classical Greek Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 58–99. As for medieval tradition, a similar interpretation is discussed with regard to Sir Gareth: Daniel F. Pigg, "Caught in the Act: Malory's 'Sir Gareth' and the Construction of Sexual Performance," in *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 633–648, esp. 643. Müller also mentions Henry's claudication as a metaphorical castration or as a punishment for his sins: Müller, *Jungfräulichkeit in Versepen des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts*, 182–183. However, there is no explicit evidence apart from these cultural associations.

[111] It is noteworthy that the *vita* of Henry contains a hint of Henry's sins: when the soul of Henry II was weighed during his Particular Judgement, at first his bad deeds overweighed the good ones (in some versions these sins imply Henry's false accusations of Cunigunde). See: Robert W. Scheller, *Die Seelenwägung und das Kelchwunder Kaiser Heinrichs II* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1997).

[112] Thomas Ebendorfer, *Chronica regum Romanorum*, ed. Harald Zimmermann, *MGH* Scriptores rerum Germanicarum nova series 18 (Hannover: Hahn, 2003), 1:546.

male offspring of Emperor Charles IV (1346-1378): Wenceslas, Sigismund, and John of Görlitz did not have any male successors at that point. In an admonition to these princes, the chastity of Henry II is showcased as a negative dynastic policy that led to the cessation of the royal family. It is also mentioned that Henry II abstained from carnal relations with Cunigunde, not out of piety, but because of his impotence.[113] Even though the author defines this belief as vulgar, there was evidently still a place for similar sentiments or anecdotes in public discourse at the imperial court. This example shows that Henry could have been viewed as an impotent, contrary to the sacral, hagiographic understanding of royal asexuality in terms of a willingly chosen virginity, ardently propagated in Bamberg and other centres of his cult. This supports my suggestion that one of the functions of the claudication-narrative was to secure a saintly image of Emperor Henry, known as *claudus,* and repute any "unhagiographic" explanations for it. The second version of the legend, which places the events in Rome, explicitly interprets Henry's physical impairment as a heavenly sign of his saintly and royal virtues, namely chastity and justice. It is probable that the claudication-legend, together with the other two narratives of the *additamentum,* are all connected with attempts to reshape and confirm Henry's sexual abstinence and his chaste marriage with Cunigunde.

This intense three-folded literary shaping of the virginal marriage theme can be interpreted as a response to the interest of adherents to the cults of Henry and Cunigunde: the curiosity about the conjugal chastity could have been spurred on by the canonisation of Cunigunde and the eventual shaping of a rare double cult of the married virgins against a backdrop of repeated elaborations of the chaste marriage theme in German vernacular epics. Nonetheless, the *additamentum* can also be understood as an attempt to conceal uncanonical interpretations of Henry's lameness and the royal sexual abstinence and to semi-monopolize the narrative in a form which was favourable to the Bamberg impresarios of the cults (if we trust the author of the *additamentum* that the legend of Henry's claudication was spread through preaching in Bamberg). Considering the fact that these three legends were included in this way or another into subsequent hagiographic cycles of Henry and Cunigunde and that they were also transmitted orally, which might explain some variations within these legends, the propagation of the royal chaste marriage was indeed achieved.

Nonetheless, imposing a single reading of the saints and their virtues proved difficult, especially when it came to intrinsically controversial qualities, such as Henry's claudication and a childless marriage in general. Hence, further studies on the reception, negotiation, and transformation of the images of Emperor Henry and Cunigunde in various late medieval and early modern media are called for. For now, one concluding example from the late Middle Ages will go to show how the case of male virginity, exemplified by Emperor Henry, could be taken to its extreme. Through his chaste union with Cunigunde, the way was paved for Henry to enter one of the *Book of Holy Virgins and Women.* This thematic collection of the lives of female saints, which served mostly as edifying reading, was composed in *c.*1460 in the

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[113] Thomas Ebendorfer, *Chronica regum Romanorum,* 1:546: "Quibusdam dicentibus, hoc Karolo permissum a Deo de merito pro eo, quia in sanctum Dei Hainricum imperatorem verbis ludicris, dum Bamberge deguisset, impingere non erubuit, quia sanctam Kunigundem uxorem in suo virginali pudore custodivit affirmans hoc non devocione sed impotencia actum, quia ipsam violare nequivit." Though *impotentia* can also refer to general weakness, it was frequently used as a descriptive for sexual impotence, especially in juridical contexts. See: Charles du Fresne Du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis* (Niort, 1885), 4: col. 311b.

Cistercian cloister in Lichtental near Baden-Baden and included, among fifty-seven vernacular lives of female saints, the hagiography of St. Cunigunde followed by St. Henry's.[114] The compiler of the collection was explicit about the reason for distorting the book of *heilgen megden und frowen* with a hagiography of an emperor: "Cunigunde was a Roman empress and was the spouse of Emperor Henry, who founded the dioceses of Basel and Bamberg. The same emperor desired to remain a virgin and promised it to God," and then "since Emperor Henry and his spouse were virgins, we also want to tell something about him."[115] This inclusion of Saint-Emperor Henry among female virgins, although occurring on the margins of the literary production, testifies to a variety of perceptions of the saint and the fluidity of genders and saintly types. That is, Henry could have been categorised as a female-like virgin saint, reflecting the identification of his spouse Cunigunde, and at the same time conform to the established image of a royal confessor-saint.

The perception of royal sexuality was never stable: it was always actively shaped in specific contexts and by actors with an agenda beyond the construction of certain literary or visual images, though none of the interpretations could achieve a hegemonic status. In this article, I have outlined the multifaceted relationship between regality and sexual abstinence by using the unique example of the canonised royal couple, Henry II and Cunigunde. For this German imperial couple and their contemporaries, the lack of heirs signified a succession crisis. However, a new representational paradigm of pious devotion and choosing God as an heir was created in order to justify and normalize this apparent abnormality. In the context of the canonisation of Henry and Cunigunde and their later veneration, a new image gradually developed, namely that of a couple whose opting for chastity was active and mutual. Cunigunde was given an increasingly active role in performing her virginity, Henry's sexual continence was defined as perpetually virginal, and the idea of the chaste marriage became of great importance, while at the onset of Henry's canonisation his chastity was only an asset to the impressive service record of the saint.

The thirteenth century witnessed a rigorously elaborated image of this chaste royal couple, who were believed to live in perpetual sexual abstinence. However, as the above analysis of textual evidence from the tenth century onwards has shown, this image was not contemporary to the "historical" Henry and Cunigunde, neither was it implied at the time of the canonisation of Emperor Henry in 1146. The caretakers of the royal cults, which can broadly be identified with the clerical and monastic community of Bamberg, had to deal with several difficulties when defining the holy rulers and their sexuality, among them being the following problems: what was the nature of their childless marriage? How did sexual abstinence correspond to Henry's royal duties? How did the proclaimed virginity of Cunigunde influence the sexuality of her spouse? How can a male virgin be defined? Finding a solution to these challenges demanded an innovative elaboration of literary forms and veneration practices, which were nevertheless rooted in examples of other virginal saints, theological

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[114] *Das Buch von den heilgen megden und frowen*, Badische Landesbibliothek, cod. Licht. 69, fol. 204v–211r. Konrad Kunze, "Alemannische Legendare (I)," in *Alemannisches Jahrbuch 1971/72* (Baden: Konkordia AG, 1973), 20–45.
[115] *Das Buch von den heilgen megden und frowen*, fol. 204v: "Kunigundis was ein Romische keiserin und was keiser heinrichs fraw der die stifte zu Basel und zu Babenburg machte. der selb keiser hett wille kusche maget zu bliben und hett das auch got heimlichen gelopt"; fol. 209v: "Syt nu keiser Heinrich ir sponse kusche maget starp, so mogen wir auch zimlich von im sagen."

discussions of the matrimonial law, and contemporary vernacular narratives of chaste marriages. As a result, some of the textual and visual media, especially the *additamentum* and further textual traditions that originate from it, portrayed Henry and Cunigunde as a royal couple of idealized rulers, who lived in perpetual sexual abstinence.