

MEDIEVAL SAINTS

A READER

edited by

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44. ST. URSULA AND THE ELEVEN THOUSAND VIRGINS

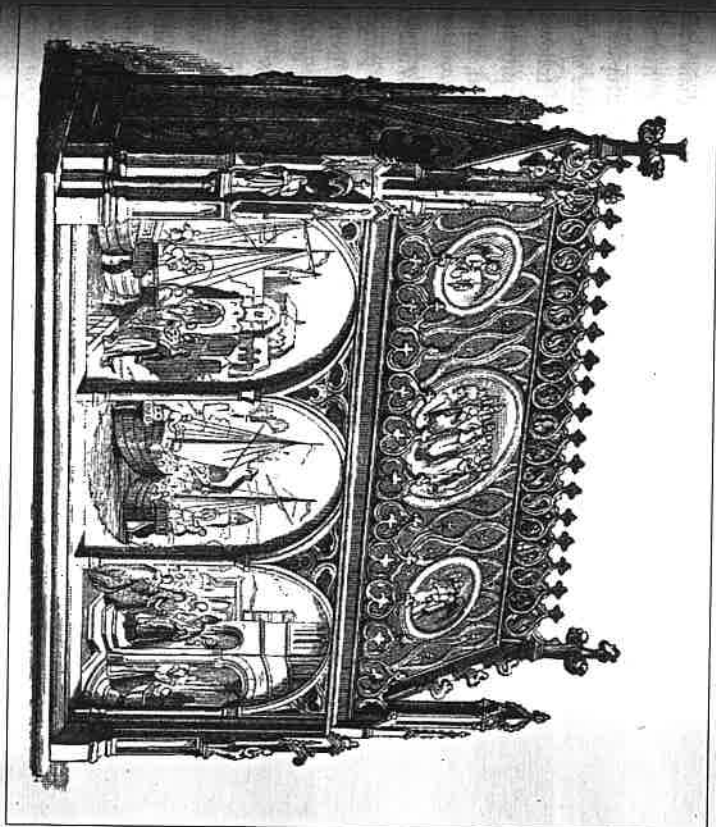
The earliest extant 'life' of St. Ursula and her army of virgin martyrs was written by a Flemish monk named Heric. He claimed to have received it from a German emissary, Count Hoof, who had heard it while on a mission to England from the lip of St. Dunstan himself when he was archbishop of Canterbury. This account, fraught with chronological inconsistencies, has been assigned a date between 969 and 976, but from the eighth century on there is evidence of a growing cult of St. Ursula in Cologne. Its basis was a fourth-century stone inscription (now in St. Ursula's church) commemorating a group of unnamed virgin martyrs and the rebuilding of a church in their honor at the place where they died. The details of the legend gradually took shape in calendars, martyrologies, a tenth-century sermon, and the 'Passio' cited above; the name of the princess-leader changed from Pinnosa to Ursula, the virgins accompanying her achieved a specific number, and the circumstances and flight from Britain were added. But by the twelfth century a tide of skepticism was growing and the version of the legend reprinted here (written c.1100) may be read in the context of other events designed to refute the disbelievers, particularly a series of discoveries of quantities of relics belonging to the saint and her followers and found with the guidance of angelic visions. These were to culminate in the revelations of the mystics Elizabeth of Schönau and Hermann Joseph, which however did not succeed in silencing the critics. But despite the skeptics, the cult of St. Ursula and her virgins continued to flourish throughout Europe.

Source: trans. Pamela Sheingorn and Marcelle Thibéaux, *The Passion of St. Ursula*, *Peregrina Translation Series* 16 (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1990), pp. 13-37; repr. with permission BHL 8428.

The Birth of St. Ursula and Her Marriage Proposal

1, 1. It was during the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, after his passion, resurrection, and ascension, when people from all the ends of the earth had turned to God, and not even the far corners of the ocean could hide from the fervor of his faith, when the people were assembled together, people and kings, to serve the Lord.

At that time there lived in the lands of Britain a certain King Deonotus, known to God by his life as much as by his name. Since he was devout in the observances of the Catholic faith, he learned how to govern men so as not to forget the kind of subservience he himself owed to his Creator. He also learned to exact tribute from his subjects in such a way that he always



[Fig. 45] A reliquary of St. Ursula depicting scenes from her legend on the side panels, by Hans Memling [c.1430-94], in St. John's Hospital, Bruges. The left-hand panel shows the virgins arriving at Cologne on their way to Rome, in the middle they reach Basel, and on the right they are received by the pope in Rome (Baring-Gould, *Lives of the Saints*, 12).

Deonotus, therefore, bearing the yoke of Christ beneath which he blamelessly soldiered, also blamelessly and most justly ruled over others. In continued fulfillment of the promise of future generations, in the blessing of Abraham's seed, he took a wife who was his equal both in lineage and in the manner of her goodness.

But the wrath of God's justice begins here on earth against vessels of wrath that deserve to be shattered with a double blow and this same wrath wreaks irreparable destruction at the last Judgment. Similarly, God's mercy grants to those who love him a foretaste of the wealth of his goodness, generally even in this life. By this means they learn to await patiently the indelible glory that the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, nor has it entered into the human heart.

2. And so while both her parents awaited with highest hope a male child who would be the successor to their earthly kingdom, God's provident

them a female child. This daughter was endowed with a more than manly spirit, so that she might go before them to the inheritance of the heavenly kingdom, to which they would follow. In this way she could prepare for them many good things which would endure without end. Because she was destined one day to strangle the savage bear (that is, the Devil), following David's example, she received from her parents in baptism the prophetic name of Ursula. This was done through the dispensation of God, for he names those whom he predestines.

Ursula was educated with regal pomp as befitted royal offspring. While she was advancing normally in her physical growth, Ursula began to progress beyond the tender years of her age in the maturity of her character. Even at that point the world had grown repugnant to her, because she was imbued with the teachings of the evangelists. She would meditate on the law of the Lord day and night. And because she sighed in her heart and soul for spiritual marriage with her Bridegroom, all her adornment and glory were not without but within. And now she was able to turn away promptly from all earthly things. These things came about because the highest Artificer wished to polish his pearl for some great ornament of the Church. And it was as if even then he had openly proclaimed to her, "Hearken, O daughter, and incline your ear, because the King desires your beauty."

3. In addition to possessing these and other gifts of spiritual grace, the holy virgin was unrivaled in appearance and wondrous beauty. She was glorious to the eyes of all. But this girl, thinking only on the things of the Lord, loved these qualities less in herself because she knew that they were not very pleasing to the eyes of her own Bridegroom. Since the news had spread far and wide that this very noble girl had such innate virtue, word reached the ears of a certain foreign king. He, being powerful and strong, boasted of his military strength, and ruled widely with barbaric ferocity. He had a son of great natural ability, whom he loved deeply with fatherly affection because he was the successor to the kingdom. Because of his son, this king wanted very much to command respect for his royal grandeur. He began, therefore, to consider that his kingdom would be extended and his name and the glory of his prosperity would be increased if it should befall his son to marry a renowned girl.

The son was no less determined, inasmuch as he was already entering the years of early manhood. With his father's approval and the further approval of the leaders of the people, he dispatched legates to the girl's father, along many precious gifts. And he made promise of more things, such as tracts of lands, bodies of water, in short, all of his father's realm, and of the world's delights he was able to offer, or had been able to offer, to

and again he calculated the reckoning of the dowry. He also leveled threats as if he would employ a good deal of force, in keeping with the greatness of his name, so that at all events he might exact what he wanted through fear if he did not gain it through flattery and gifts.

4. The legates received their orders from the king and set forth on their journey. When they had traveled a great distance, they approached the girl's father. Once they were granted an ample opportunity to speak, they very seriously went over the details of the matter that their lord had commanded. After heaping on flattery, like scorpions they unleashed what they believed to be very effective: threats and hostile intimidations. Then the old man, who was prudent and wholly filled with charitable feelings, began to wallow inwardly. For he thought it most shameful to tear his reluctant daughter, who clung ever more closely to her heavenly Bridegroom, from the embrace of the eternal King and to subject her to the defilement of fornication. On the one hand, he might have been willing to spill his own blood on behalf of the Catholic religion and zeal for justice, since for him to live was Christ and to die was gain. On the other hand, the care of the kingdom was entrusted to him, and he despaired of being able to resist with his own armies so savage an assault from that barbarian king. Already he seemed to see taking place right before his very eyes the slaughter of men of every age, the plundering of cities, the rape of married women and girls, the torching of churches, the desecration of shrines, and whatever miseries might at any time befall a defeated people, especially with pagans conquering Christians.

5. Caught up in this dilemma concerning his daughter, the pious king hastened from the presence of the enemy and turned to divine mercy — which was then the only refuge that lay before him — as if to a tower of strength. Wholly bathed in tears, he begged heaven's aid with tireless prayers. In the midst of these events the maiden of God noticed her father's troubled countenance. For although he dissembled, he was unable to hide the fact that she herself was the cause of his distress. Ursula, less anxious for herself, felt sorrow for the anxiety of her father. She swiftly had recourse to her own strength, just as holy Judith and Esther did for the liberation of their country; prayed and fasted throughout the night. She was determined to obtain quickly what she asked for when she addressed the listening ears of her father, with whom she was already truly united in spirit. And while she was in prayer, or rather from days to nights, she continued in vigils and fasts, her limbs collapsing because of her body's weakness, her heart kept beating. And she fell asleep for awhile, and through a vision granted by God she was found worthy to be shown the whole plan of her

life, the number of her co-warriors, and the glorious palm of martyrdom. The outcome of things later bore this out.

6. Therefore, after the first light of the rising dawn, Ursula set about to relieve her father's sorrow. For, indeed, on that day he had to respond to the legates of the powerful king. Light-hearted she came to him, and smiling softly, she said, "My father, do not grieve any further over this matter, but cast your thoughts upon the Lord, who will not give a just man over to endless agitation. And do not ascribe what I say to my girlish years. Understanding this last night a voice came to me – despite my unworthiness as the Lord's handmaiden – in a dream of divine consolation. The voice ordered me not to deny the hope of a wedding to the young man who is trying to win my hand in marriage. Nonetheless I shall die unmarried with the seal of my virginity intact.

This must be a legal provision of the wedding and the document of the marriage contract: that you, father, and the young man who entices me to him, love shall seek out ten maidens in their earliest youth and most carefully selected as to beauty and lineage. Then you shall assign to me, and to each one of them, a thousand maidens of excellent repute. And you shall prepare eleven ships with triple rows of oarsmen to match our number. Let a three-year period of grace be granted to us for the dedication of our virginity. Once these conditions have been met, whatever is pleasing to God will come to pass. There is no one who can alter the immutable plan of divine love that has been provided for me."

7. The father was gladdened by his daughter's words. He had the legates summoned to the court, approved their requests and, as a legal provision of the marriage, he proposed the condition that the girl had demanded. And he cautiously stipulated, as the most important requirement contract, that the young man, after being reborn to salvation through baptism, must be instructed in the Lord through the Catholic faith for three years.

When they had heard these things the legates traveled home on the night by which they had come, as if their prayers had been answered. Swiftly they returned to their lord without interrupting their journey, since they expected to receive honor, glory and reward for a mission well done. After the mandated conditions had been explained in detail to the very happy father, the son's joy exceeded all measure because of the greatness of his love. As soon as the rejoicing of their leaders became known, as was appropriate a general celebration was held in the whole kingdom. Since he most eagerly accepted the legal provisions of the marriage document, the young man began with ardently to demand of his father that he be initiated at once in Christian teachings. He longed to fulfil the girl's wish through the consecration of

Now a new levy was declared for a novel kind of army. Everywhere throughout the two realms well-born and beautiful maidens were sought. They were conducted to the palace, where they received feminine ornaments to increase their royal splendor. No less sumptuously did the building of the ships take place, for both kings were equally zealous. Some men felled trees in the forests; others carried them to the shore; some fashioned the hulls; others the thwarts; some fitted the decks together with fine joints; some made this, some that ornament out of gold, silver and bronze. And since each one busied himself, eagerly striving according to his own skill and task, the work proceeded briskly everywhere.

The Nautical Exercises and Journeys to Cologne and Rome of St. Ursula and her Companions.

8. Through the friendship and effort of the two kings, the fleet was wonderfully constructed according to standards of regal splendor, and the group of very carefully chosen girls was completed to fulfil the number assigned by God. Among the seemingly countless girls of the noblest families, Pinnosa, daughter of a certain Duke Maximus, stood out from the others as much because of her innate virtue as because of her lineage. After St. Ursula she was second-in-command of the virgin army. Her father cherished her as a noble comrade with a special bond of filial affection.

After everything had been magnificently completed, the maiden troops assembled before the princess St. Ursula on the appointed day. Girded up as if for naval exercises, they awaited the orders of their commander. Surrounded by her virgin army, which she had wanted for such a long time, the blessed girl Ursula, with a joyful mien and spirit, first gave to God the thanks she owed him. Then she revealed to them, as if to the most loyal comrades in arms, the secret of her plan. With pious exhortations she instructed and strengthened them in the fear of God or rather the love of God, because "perfect charity banishes fear." Moreover the virgin troops, while listening very eagerly, heeded with rapt attention the most beneficial admonitions of their princess. Lifting their hearts to heaven, they raised their hands as if they had already been sworn to Christ by a military oath of allegiance, and solemnly pledged their devotion to every duty of divine religion. With ardent zeal they urged one another on in this undertaking, inasmuch as they had by then one heart and one soul. And since they had already received from above a foretaste of heavenly sweetness, the world and its glory grew vain in their minds.

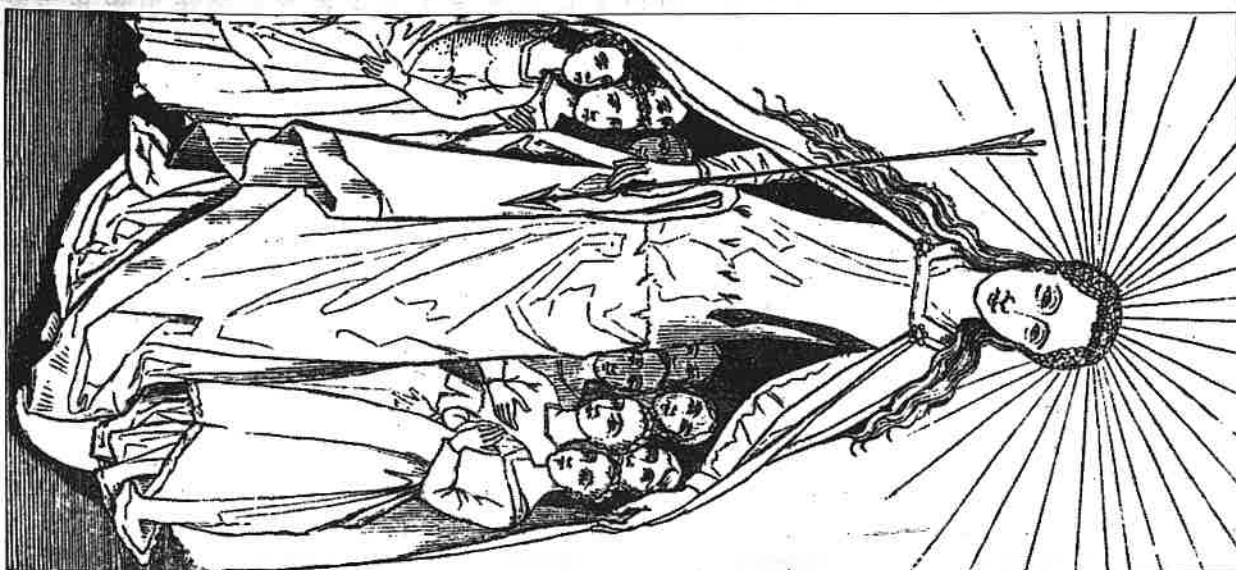
9. As the sea was nearby, once the signal was given they swiftly flocked to their ships. They deployed the rigging and set out to the open sea. Their

practised every kind of exercise: first they steered the ships towards one another, then they scattered. At times they simulated flight, at other times combat. Nothing that occurred to them did they leave untried. As a group of young women they took part in training each and every day. Sometimes they turned back around midday, sometimes at about three in the afternoon and sometimes after spending the whole day in games, they turned back towards evening.

The pious king was often present at this spectacle, along with his very venerable senators and all the leading figures of the realm. And even the common people – as always, greedy for new things – put aside their serious business and applauded the young women's manoeuvres. But, emboldened by persistent daily exercise, the girls rowed farther and farther from the shore. It even happened that certain ships, widely dispersed by gusts of wind, scarcely returned before night. Since the young women were withdrawing the pleasure of the spectacle from the people, the prolonged daily wait and the assurance that they were jaded with the games caused the spectators to grow weary, and they departed one by one to their own tasks, the crowd gradually diffused away.

10. In this way the young women celebrated their three year prelude to martyrdom with great joy. Now the wedding gifts were being prepared for the appointed day of the marriage, and the young man was spurring his thoughts towards his love of the maiden. Blessed Ursula, though not doubting the promise of the divine vision, nevertheless grew anxious because of her own human frailty. She therefore admonished her virginal companions whom she had already instructed in the Lord as much by her example as by her words, that at such a critical point in the matter they should bear more insistently upon the door of divine mercy. For, she told them, she feared that they might lose the armour of chastity beneath whose protection they had soldiered blamelessly for their heavenly King. After she had spoken these words, which were like a goad to incite those already running, the maiden devoted to God poured forth tears from the depths of their hearts. Since each one hoped to dedicate her own chastity to God together with the princess, they began to invoke the aid of heaven with the most burning anguish of spirit.

11. But the loving God, who is always near for all those calling upon him in true need, did not delay his answer to such pious pleas. He brought forth a wind out of his treasure-house and in the span of one day and one night carried the wind-driven fleet on a favorable course with the entire number of ships and young women unharmed into the port called Tiel. They got to the shore as they had desired. Then Ursula, the female captain of the fleet,



[Fig. 46] St. Ursula depicted as the patron saint of young girls, sheltering her virgins beneath her cloak and holding the arrow which caused her death (Hans Memling, produced in Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 2, 511).

venture, led them in song. She was just like Miriam the prophetess after the escape from Pharaoh's army through the Red Sea. They sang an epithalamium of praise honoring their heavenly Bridegroom. Since it was an army of young women, their marriage song resounded not with clamorous noise but with the symphony of attuned hearts. This song of praise reached the ears of the Lord with the scent of sweetness. After they had spent the night in that place, the young women bought some utensils the next day, for Tiel had a market fair. Then they returned to their ships and, weighing anchor, they rowed upstream and finally arrived at Cologne, that well-known city of Germania, where their bodies now rest in peace.

12. Once they had landed they ate their evening meal and, since they were weary from their day's labor, sleep crept over them. Then the most holy virgin Ursula, who already was pleasing to God because she had embraced angelic chastity, saw in her sleep a man with the radiance and authority of an angel. Standing beside her, he first asked Ursula whether she were keeping vigil through the night. The young woman was terrified at his sudden appearance, in the way a girl might be. So he checked her fear gently, saying, "Daughter, know that you will arrive in Rome, just as you have greatly desired, under the protection of the heavenly God, with this very sweet band of comrades, your sisters. After you have fulfilled your vows, you shall return again to this place in peace with the whole number of your companions. Here, I say to you, eternal rest has been predestined for you by God forever and ever. Here you will sleep in peace. And because you have fought a good fight, you have finished your course, you have kept the faith; as to the rest, the crown of justice awaits you. And in order to receive fully this crown from the just Judge, you shall yield your necks to your persecutors in testimony of your faith. After you have laid down the corruptible burden of your bodies in this place, you will attain to the heavenly bridal chamber with the glory of martyrdom." After he had said these things, the man disappeared.

13. The holy virgin Ursula doubted nothing about an oracle of such great authority. As soon as day returned to the earth, she called together her band of young women and poured into their ears all that she had seen and heard. When they had heard these things, there was general exultation because they had been accounted worthy to suffer violence for the name of Jesus. After they had offered up their praises to God, they decided with singleminded determination to complete their journey more swiftly, for they plainly desired to be set free from their bodies and to be with Christ. So as not to cause any delay in realizing the destiny God had chosen for them, they sailed with a favorable wind, disembarked at Basel, left their ships there, and journeyed on foot to Rome.

In Rome they spent several days visiting everywhere the various shrines dedicated to the saints. Keeping vigil, they commended their souls to God in prayer and, with tears, they composed their inner selves, as if they were already about to proceed quite eagerly to the banquet hall of the eternal King. Finally, when they had fulfilled their vows, they returned to Basel on the same route by which they had come. Boarding their ships, they sailed down the Rhine with their hulls riding the current. Armed in spirit, strengthening themselves as much against spiritual iniquities as against all the oppressions of persecution, at last they landed at Cologne.

The Martyrdom of the Eleven Thousand Holy Virgins.

14. At that time the barbarian tribe of the Huns had come to Cologne, their presence compelled by the sins of humankind. They had already laid waste with slaughter and fire the lands of the Gauls, as well as of Germany and Italy, so that cities were destroyed, churches were burned, and scarcely the slightest traces of divine religion were left. Although at this very moment the same barbarians, with their inborn ferocity, had even surrounded the city of Cologne in a tight siege, the news had not yet reached the young women arriving there. Because they were already acquainted with the civility of the inhabitants, it was without any kind of suspicion that the young women stepped out onto the land. And see! When the barbarians had learned of the virgins by sending out the swiftest running scouts according to their custom, they suddenly burst upon the young women with a great outcry. Just like wolves descending upon a sheepfold, they slew that infinite multitude with inhuman cruelty.

15. Slaughtering all the young women in their path with bestial frenzy, the henchmen of death made their way to St. Ursula. Moved by her marvelous beauty, they restrained both their hands and their purpose. Then the prince who commanded their heinous crimes, in a fever of lust as if struck by a thunderbolt, put aside his harshness a little and began to condescend to flattery and words of love. "Truly, your beauty," he said, "gives strong outward evidence that you are a girl born of a noble and great parentage." And he wrote to her, saying, "If you had come forward earlier to intercede with me, you would not have suffered the loss of a single one of the women in your company. But be consoled and rejoice in your fate, beloved. Do not mourn the death of your young women, for I find you worthy of deserving me – the victor over all Europe, the man before whom even the Roman Empire quakes with fear – as a husband."

But the virgin, thinking on the things of the Lord, scornfully pushed aside

this kind of a spouse with the most unrestrained indignation of voice and manner, as if he were the Prince of Darkness. His barbaric mind welled with rage and he bellowed like a wild beast. Not tolerating her refusal, he pronounced the sentence of death upon the blessed virgin, who already longed to be set free from her body and to be with Christ. And so St. Ursula, the queen of the most radiant army, pierced through by the shot of an arrow sank upon the noble heap of her followers like a heavenly pearl.

She was purified by the royal purple of her own blood as if she had been baptized again. With all her victorious troops she ascended, crowned with laurels, to the celestial palace. For she had faithfully fulfilled in her flesh the suffering still to be undergone by Christ. And so Ursula, that wondrous flower vase of the Lord, was now completed to perfection. Not only did the vase gleam whitely with the lilies of virginity, but it was also adorned with just as many roses of martyrdom. By this means, she reddened more seemingly before the eyes of the lofty Examiner.

16. Now, let some people mislead others and be misled themselves, those who are stupefied by worldly vainglory, who extol the triumphs of their kings with infinite praises as if to the skies. They write this and that about the glory of war: vanquished kings who walk before the chariot, innumerable herds of captives being driven on like cattle, and, furthermore, victorious soldiers shining with weapons and armor of many colors, each one flaunting his military emblems, and the leaders themselves sitting high in golden four-horsed chariots, glittering with golden cloaks. Let them add other things: they wish a festive day for the city, the joy of proud senators, the shouts of the crowd, and the dancing of the people. But if these things were which compared with the triumph of Ursula and her comrades they would have to be called misery rather than glory. For those who are adorned in their royal purple and gold have descended to shadows and eternal torments; whereas these holy virgins, clothed in the vestments of immortality, enjoy the vision of the Lord and the company of angels.

See! According to the voice of the Lord, the fertile earth patiently brought forth a yield which was at once sixty times and a hundred times that of the seed which had been sown. And these virgins at the appointed time went away; they went away weeping as they sowed their seeds, but now coming back, they came back singing, bearing their sheaves. Yes, they even went as far as to lay down the chaff of their bodies before they carried the thrashed and well-sifted wheat into God's granary.

Oh, what dancing there was in heaven on this day, and what a gathering of the citizenry of the skies! And besides, what a rejoicing of the apostles! How harmonious the glory of the martyrs and holy virgins exulting in the

increase of their order! How pious the thanks of the patriarchs, prophets, and confessors at the time when the souls of the holy virgins earned the right to be made sharers in rejoicing in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns, world without end, Amen.

And so that the people of the blessed city of Cologne – made more blessed by this incomparable treasure – might know how much honor and reverence they forever owed to the virgins' most sacred ashes, they realized when they gained their liberation how precious was the death of the virgins in the sight of the Lord. The people learned how magnificently the blessed virgins were living in the council of the saints, they whose bodies – some lying unclothed – had been so potent. For after the bestial savagery of the Huns had completed their slaughter, God brewed a cup of wrath, confusion, and insanity for these would-be torturers. They were given over to a false perception – they believed they saw as many battle lines of armed soldiers pursuing them as the bodies of the virgins they had slain. And that fierce barbarian horde, accustomed to victory, did not know how to flee, nor did they dare to make a stand.

When the enemies of peace had fled therefore, and peace had been unexpectedly restored to the besieged citizenry, these citizens of Cologne were freed from their long struggle. They burst through the city gates. And see! Everywhere they found the unburied corpses of the virgins on the bare ground. Nor did this discovery deceive them for long. On the contrary, they recognized the clothing, features, and ships of the holy young women who had already passed this way before. They readily understood that the virgins devoted to God had fallen in the agony of martyrdom for the seal of chastity they had determined to preserve. These citizens of Cologne further understood that through the merits of their protectors they had escaped not only death but also barbaric tortures which are harsher than every kind of death. With a single mind, reverencing them not as if they were human but as if they were God in human bodies, they spared neither private nor public expense. They busied themselves, each one, undertaking the task not only with the duty of humanity, but with the zeal of most humble veneration. Some gathered up the scattered and lacerated limbs of the martyrs, some covered them with clothing, some dug the earth, others placed the bodies in sarcophagi. Within a short time, just as may be seen there today, the most holy relics of the virgins rested in peace to the eternal glory of Cologne.

18. From this time divine religion was already growing in Cologne. A custom arose among the people that eventually became a solemn obligation, namely that within the precinct of the virgins' burial place, no one up to this day may bury a body of any dead person.

After a certain length of time had passed, a religious man by the name of Clematius who had been frequently exhorted by God and summoned as if by an embassy of the holy virgins, arrived from eastern lands, in fulfillment of his vow he completed the building of a church, from its foundations, over the most holy ashes in honor of the holy virgins. Therefore, Cologne, praise the Lord, for he has strengthened the bolts of your gates and he has brought peace to your realm and, according to his promised pledge, he has blessed your children within you.

19. There was, however, in the same most sacred military comradeship of virgins a certain girl named Cordula. While the other young women met their deaths in the Passion of Christ, she alone went into hiding that same night in the hull of a solitary ship. The next day she bold-heartedly offered herself to the death she had fled, following the virgin hosts, gaining equal glory in martyrdom. But no one should be shocked at this, as if that blessed virgin had in any way dishonored her crown because of her paltry fear. Neither Peter in his denial nor Thomas in his doubting was driven from the honor of apostleship. For Peter, who through God's will would become a great benefit to the Church, had confidence in himself as a man and asserted that he would die together with his Master. But he became greatly alarmed for his own safety when he heard the insinuation of the maidervant within the dootkeeper. Yet afterwards he persevered all the way to his own crucifixion, nor did he tremble even before the ruler of the city of Rome.

Perhaps that blessed virgin too, presuming on the purity of her earlier life and on the constancy of her faith, had some confidence in her ability to endure martyrdom. For that reason she had to be humbled so that she might learn to take pride not in herself but in the Lord and, thus humbled, might pass over more gloriously to her heavenly bridal chamber. In the same way faithful David, although he said to the Lord, "I have sworn and am determined to keep the judgments of your justice," soon made a substitution, as he had relapsed, saying: "I have been afflicted in every way."

Nor should infirm limbs despair of health, if ever in a crisis of suffering they may gradually grow feeble because of human frailty. For the very Mediator between God and men, when taking on the role of those who are weak, said, "My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Father, if it may be, let the chalice pass from me." So you see, he who had the power of laying down his own life and taking it up again yet desired that the chalice of his Passion might pass from him. There was never any time when the Son might not be harkened to by the Father, but the head was speaking for the feeble limbs, whose role he then had taken upon himself.

Perhaps that heavenly Gardener wished to prune the fruit-bearing branch

so that it might bear more fruit. It is the same thing with some statuette that is very finely wrought by the sculptor's skill. The artist contemplates it and likes it smooth so that what pleases the eyes of other people may not in any way displease his own eyes. But who has known the mind of the Lord? For this reason it serves no useful purpose to probe God's hidden judgments. As long as faith is sound, there is no danger in not understanding. Clearly it is agreed and always will be agreed that Cordula, the athlete of God, was delayed in order to be tested, not condemned.

20. Consequently, after a long succession of years had gone by, Cordula, the saint of whom we have spoken, appeared in a vision then to a certain recluse called Helmdrude, who was of unparalleled life and particular merit. Addressing Helmdrude as if she were her comrade-in-arms, Cordula asked whether she recognized her. But Helmdrude, although a holy woman and already close to God in spirit, was nonetheless still mortal. And as a mortal creature unable to endure an immortal presence, she shuddered at this pervasiveness of divine elegance and authority. For this was a virgin of God, marvelously attired beyond all human skill and she wore on her head a crown interwoven with lilies and roses.

Then Helmdrude, God's handmaid, recovering from her sudden fear, replied that she was unworthy of the recognition of such a great majesty. "For I am still under the dominion of the laws of carnal sin," she said. "But you have already been received into the rank of heaven-dwellers and are a stranger to all fleshly corruption." Then Cordula said, "Know that I was one of the sacred number of the virgins of Cologne. After they triumphed I lived some night longer, but the next day I was eager for death and offered myself of my own accord to those butchers. In that way I died in Christ. I did not desert my sisters, nor did I lose my share in their crown of martyrdom. But although all Cologne now observes with due worship the day of their most glorious death, not even a brief testimony of any kind has yet been made to my name. That is why I come now and impose this task upon you. You must on my behalf inform the nuns who devoutly keep vigil at the burial place of our bodies that when they celebrate the triumphal glory of my sisters, they should also pay me some kind of veneration the very next day. For it affords your sisters little profit that among all those who sleep in that place there should be no reverence for my name alone."

And when Helmdrude inquired what her name was, she was commanded by the virgin to gaze upon her forehead, so that Helmdrude might know for herself, without any doubt, the name she would find inscribed there. Helmdrude complied. She saw and read the separate syllables and discovered what was distinctly written there: Cordula.

21. Helmarinde, God's handmaid, thereupon reported the heavenly dream to the nuns, and it was believed. From then on the custom was established that while the feast of the holy virgins took place the day before, the following day would be devoted to the praises of St. Cordula. But Helmarinde's vision should not be considered by anyone to have a lesser authority; it should it seem that she had been deluded in a mocking dream. This should be recalled to memory: Peter also while asleep saw in a vessel God's invitation to the Gentiles. And Paul did not doubt that he heard a man from Macedonia calling him into Illyria. And our patriarchs, Abraham of course, Isaac, and Jacob, Joseph as well, Gideon and Daniel, saw many great secrets of the heavenly mysteries. The Magi too were instructed while sleeping about the change in their return route. And Joseph, the very foster-father of the Lord, was warned in a dream by an angel to flee into Egypt, and when the persecutors of Christ had died, he was advised to withdraw to Nazareth for fear of Archelaus, and to dwell there.

(But why are these declarations necessary, when the handmaid of God has whom this revelation was shown, was so renowned in her life, and of such saintly conduct that she herself had to be considered as the most certain testimony of the truth? For there is a place in Saxony called Heerse, where this day resides a glorious community of nuns. There that holy woman was born and nurtured. There, with the course of her most holy life completed, her body now rests in peace, although she spent some of her last years in the same holiness on the mountain where the city of Iburg is located. To her way of life and sanctity, there are as many witnesses as there are nuns at Heerse today, or as there were in those days. And it is clear that these witnesses, the most truthful since God has now confirmed the words of human beings, testify to this day it is frequently reported that at her tomb sight is restored to the blind, the power of walking to the lame, the infirm are restored to the enjoyment of life, and the possessed are cleansed of impure spirits. For these reasons Helmdrude's testimony was reliable and it is impious to doubt that God has designed to unfold a revelation to the saint about the saint, to the bride about the bride, and to the beloved concerning his beloved.)

22. Therefore let the heavenly Jerusalem boast, and let the court of heaven boast, increased by so many worthy citizens, where there is neither slave nor free, male nor female. Let Britain boast, for even while begetting in the manner of Adam, she nevertheless teemed with her native yield of virgins. Let Germany boast, for she gathered in so many, the choicest flowers of the Ocean. Let Rome boast, for she returned the number of virgins that she had received. Let Cologne boast, for she has kept within herself such a treasure. Let your blessed community of nuns boast, entrusting your perpetual

salvation to the patronage and intercession of so many holy virgins served so devoutly. Blessed be the glory of the Lord in that heavenly place!

And you nuns, moreover, protectresses of so many celestial gems, busy yourselves especially in faithful obedience, so that even if you do not achieve a yield of a hundredfold or even sixtyfold, you may at least, in following their footsteps, gather the ears of grain of divine mercy. Let us all together very humbly entreat their most holy patronage and intercession. We do not dare to aspire nor are we able to attain a share in their glory, nevertheless, in my father's house there are many mansions. So through the merits of their just protection may we obtain citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem, at least at the last judgment, in the presence of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen. Hosanna signifies saying, that is, lead to salvation.

Here ends the Passion of the Eleven Thousand Holy Virgins.