

St Winefride¹ is one of only two Welsh female saints to have surviving medieval Latin Lives² and the only female to have a Welsh *Buchedd*.³ There is also a substantial transmission of literature focused upon her including multiple manuscripts of her Life, poetry and iconography.⁴ There are two medieval Lives extant for Winefride, the anonymously authored *Vita S. Wenefrede*⁵ and an account written by Prior Robert of Shrewsbury entitled *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae*.⁶ Though reference will be made to the *Vita S. Wenefrede* and the *Buchedd*, it is Prior Robert's *Vita* that will form our main focus here.⁷

Ifor Williams may be correct in his statement upon hagiographical texts that 'they give us fairy tales far too often instead of sober fact'⁸ yet academic reflection upon the value of Saints' *Vitae* has progressed during the decades since Williams was writing. Scholarly thought now situates the *Vitae* within the period in which they were composed, rather than looking to them as a source for biographical information on a particular saint.⁹ As Stephen Wilson asserts 'saints' Lives and other material related to their cults can reflect important features of the societies in which they occur'¹⁰ showing their value as a historical reference when viewed in this manner. With this in mind then, here we will work with Robert's *Vita* to ascertain what the text might

¹ Here I will refer to the saint as St Winefride, but when using other sources you may see variations upon her Welsh name as Gwenfrewy or Gwenfrewi and the English translation of her name Winefrede, Winifrid and similar.

² The other being St Melangell, the patron saint of Hares. St Melangell's Life can be found translated by Pryce, H, 'A New Edition of *Historia Divae Monacellae*' in *Montgomeryshire Collections*. 82, (1994) pp. 23–40.

³ For detailed discussion of the *Buchedd Gwenfrewy* see Cartwright, J. 'The Welsh versions of the Life of Gwenfrewy' in *Seintiau Cymru, Sancti Cambrenses: Astudiaethau ar Seintiau Cymru* (Aberystwyth, 2002) pp. 237–268.

⁴ For detailed discussion of the transmission of Winefride see Cartwright, J. 'The Welsh versions of the Life of Gwenfrewy' in *Seintiau Cymru, Sancti Cambrenses: Astudiaethau ar Seintiau Cymru* (Aberystwyth, 2002) pp. 237–268.

⁵ *Vita S. Wenefrede*, R. Pepin and H. Feiss, trans., *Two Medieval Lives of Saint Winefride* (Toronto, 2000), pp. 97–126. Wade-Evans, A.W., 'The Life of St Wenefred', *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1944) pp. 288–309. For detailed examination of the origins of *Vita S. Wenefrede* see Winward, F. 'The Lives of St Wenefred (BHL 8847–8851)' *Analecta Bollandiana*, 117, 1–2, (1999), p. 89 – 132.

⁶ *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae*, Pepin and Feiss, trans., *Two Medieval Lives*, pp. 27–93. Robert's *Vita* is dated to approximately c.1137–1142, see Winward, F. 'The Lives of St Wenefred (BHL 8847–8851)' *Analecta Bollandiana*, 117, 1–2, (1999), p. 89 and Cartwright, J., *The Welsh versions of the life of Gwenfrewy*. in *Seintiau Cymru, Sancti Cambrenses: astudiaethau ar Seintiau Cymru* (Aberystwyth, 2002) pp. 237

⁷ These shall be referred to here as *Vita S. Wenefrede* and Robert's *Vita*.

⁸ Ifor Williams, 'Wales and the North' in *The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry* ed. by Bromwich, R. (University Press Cambridge, 1980), p. 88.

⁹ For discussion on this change in academic thought see Stephen Wilson, *Saints and Their Cults: Studies In Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹⁰ Wilson, 'Introduction' in *Saints and Their Cults: Studies In Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*, p. 1.

illuminate upon medieval life, particularly with regard to the lives of women and the wider political situation of Wales. We will seek to analyse the text, firstly to explore prominent themes contained within it relating to the wider genre of hagiography and then to determine its purpose, the relevance of its subsequent transmission and the context within which it sits.

Prior Robert entitles his work 'The Life and Translation of St. Winefride,' yet it is St Beuno¹¹ who we first encounter in the text. We meet him described as 'a certain illustrious saint'¹² setting the tone for Winefride's early story, which is almost entirely framed by her relations with men. This informs the reader of her position in society and therefore of the wider situation of women during the medieval period, reflecting the Welsh Laws¹³ of the time which saw women being defined in terms of their relationship with their male kin. Writing upon *The Laws of Women* tractate, Morfydd Owen tells us that women existed 'only as an appendage to some male'¹⁴ detailing the circumstance of women in the Middle Ages. Fiona Winward observes that 'most female saints are minor players in the vitae of male saints,'¹⁵ with this even evident here in Winefride's own *Vita*, thus highlighting the reduced roles often played by women. Though writing upon the *Vita S. Wenefrede*, Winward notes that 'it is not St Wenefred who secures the sanctity of Holywell' but the men surrounding her and we can similarly apply this to Robert's *Vita*. It is Beuno and Winefride's father, Teuyth, who bring the church into being, seen with 'he handed over to the blessed man that manor on which to build a church'¹⁶ displaying the lack of initial involvement of Winefride. The resurrection of Winefride is also framed by Prior Robert as Beuno's miracle,¹⁷ having Biblical connotations of Christ's resurrection of Lazarus.

¹¹ St Beuno was a popular Welsh saint associated with several sites in Wales including Holywell for his involvement in Winefride's story and also Clynnog Fawr where he is said to have established the church there. His Welsh *Buchedd, Hystoria o Uched Beuno* and was found in Jesus College MS.119 in 1346, and can be read in ed. by Wade-Evans, A.W., *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae.*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1944), pp.16-22. For further discussion see Winward, F. 'The Lives of St Wenefred (BHL 8847-8851)' *Analecta Bollandiana*, Volume 117, Issue 1-2, (1999), p. 120.

¹² Pepin and Feiss, trans., *Two Medieval Lives*, p. 27.

¹³ *Cyfraith Hywel*, *The Laws of Hywel Dda* are the Welsh Law texts of medieval Wales. Hywel ap Cadell or Hywel Dda (Hywel the good) governed much of Wales in 10th Century AD and is synonymous with the codifying of medieval law, though stemming from oral tradition we do not know the exact authorship of the laws. For more detail and the full laws see *The Law of Hywel Dda - Law Texts From Medieval Wales*, trans. and ed. Dafydd Jenkins, (Y Lolfa, 2025) and *The Welsh Law of Women*. Ed. Jenkins, D. and Owen, M. E. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980).

¹⁴ Morfydd Owen, 'Shame and Reparation; Women's Place in the Kin' in *The Welsh Law of Women*. Ed. Jenkins, D. and Owen, M. E. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980) p. 40.

¹⁵ Winward, F. 'The Lives of St Wenefred (BHL 8847-8851)' p. 106.

¹⁶ Pepin and Feiss, trans., *Two Medieval Lives*, p. 29.

¹⁷ It is believed that the source for Winefride's story may have been the story of St Beuno, with a version of Winefride's resurrection appearing in *Hystoria o Uched Beuno*, a separate account of the life of St Beuno. For

It is true, however, that the inclusion of Beuno in Winefride's story serves to legitimise her as a saint, as we see similar 'cameos' in other *Vitae*¹⁸ with Winward noting that the appearance of another venerated person was often included to 'aid a saint's claim to sanctity'¹⁹ and was a popular device used in hagiography.

A primary theme of the work, and a popular hagiographical motif in the Lives of female saints, is the preservation of virginity. Virginity was important to those living in the Middle Ages for multiple reasons. In secular Welsh life, an emphasis was placed on protecting virginity until marriage to ensure any resulting pregnancy would carry the desired lineage.²⁰ Owen writes that a medieval woman was 'obliged to preserve her purity'²¹ before marriage showing the emphasis placed on the woman to maintain her virginity. Indeed, *The Law of Hywel Dda* displays the significance placed upon virginity with the inclusion that if a woman is deemed to be a 'twyllforwyn' or 'false virgin,'²² she is 'found to be corrupted'²³ and must be publicly shamed and held to account. On the other hand, virginity was integral in religious life because it denoted purity of spirit, a rejection of the material. As Paula M. Rieder tells us, sex was rejected on religious grounds 'because, like eating and sleeping, it focused on the body rather than the spirit'²⁴ demonstrating the differing reasons placed on elevating virginity, yet both resulting in the control of women's bodies. By fleeing Caradog, Winefride is in the unwinnable dual position of being both the triumphant preserver of her virginity yet also the cause of her own death by choosing not to submit. Thus, as Jane Cartwright notes 'for medieval Welsh society, the best kind of holy virgin was indeed a dead virgin'²⁵ and that it was thought better to be killed than to be raped and incur the loss of virginity. Though it did not occur in a Celtic region,

further discussion see Winward, F. 'The Lives of St Wenefred (BHL 8847-8851)' *Analecta Bollandiana*, Volume 117, Issue 1-2, (1999), p. 120

¹⁸ Notably this happens with the appearance of St Patrick in Rhygyfarch's Life of St David. For the text and discussion see 'Rhygyfarch's Life of St David', ed. by Richard Sharpe and John Reuben Davies *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation*, ed. J. Wyn Evans and J. M. Wooding (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), pp. 107-155.

¹⁹ Winward, 'The Lives of St Wenefred (BHL 8847-8851)', p. 119.

²⁰ For greater discussion on this see Cartwright, J., 'Virginity and Chastity Tests in Medieval Welsh Prose' in Bernau, A. et al. *Medieval Virginites* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003),

²¹ Morfydd Owen, 'Shame and Reparation: Women's Place in the Kin' in *The Welsh Law of Women*, p. 45.

²² For discussion on these terms see Cartwright, J., 'Virginity and Chastity Tests in Medieval Welsh Prose' in Bernau, A. et al. *Medieval Virginites* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p.63.

²³ *The Law of Hywel Dda, - Law texts from medieval Wales*, trans. and ed. Dafydd Jenkins (Y Lolfa, 2025).p. 49.

²⁴ Paula M. Rieder 'The Uses and Misuses of Misogyny: A Critical Historiography of the Language of Medieval Women's Oppression', *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, vol. 38, no. 1, (2012), p. 7.

²⁵ Jane Cartwright 'Dead Virgins: Feminine Sanctity in Medieval Wales', p. 94.

the 20th Century case of 11 year old Maria Goretti²⁶ illustrates this in the context of a modern, documented case. Maria being canonized as a martyred saint following her murder illustrates the attitudes that still prevail in the centuries since the *Vita* concerning Winefride was composed. On Maria's attack, Brian McNeil writes that the inference is that, like the female saints of medieval hagiography, 'she preferred to die rather than commit impurity.'²⁷ Kathleen Z. Young observes that 'the legends and myths of virgin martyrs reinforce passivity and victimization'²⁸ of women and this can certainly be witnessed in the story of Winefride, though the use in hagiography is complex, with female martyrs also being held as strong defenders of their faith.

Biblical allusions are prevalent within hagiography and within Robert's *Vita*. Where the temptation of Eve is to blame for the creation of original sin, here the beauty of the saint is the tempting force. We see Winefride through the male gaze²⁹ as she is described as 'very fair of face',³⁰ a common motif in the Lives of female saints. Attesting to this stereotypical portrayal, Marina Warner writes 'they are presented as universally beautiful, graceful, irresistible, accomplished, and virtuous'³¹ showing the permeation of these features throughout hagiography. Their perceived beauty adding gravitas to their piety with the implication being that they could have married well, serving their families as the 'unifying force'³² that Owen tells us was a primary role of women in medieval times. Instead then, Winefride is seen, not as a unifier between families, but with Christ, providing an earthly link to Heaven, embodying the popular motif of being the 'bride of Christ.'³³ Indeed in Robert's *Vita*, Winefride declares

²⁶ Maria Goretti was 11 years old in 1902 when she was stabbed to death by Alessandro Serenelli, the reason given that she had refused to have sexual intercourse with him. In 1950, Maria was canonized as a Saint by the Catholic Church. Though this essay has a prime focus on Celtic medieval saints, Maria's case is included here to highlight the parallels with Winefride and other female saints with a modern, documented case and the worrying precedent and message this sends. For further discussion see Marina Warner, 'Virgin' *Alone Of All Her Sex: The myth and the cult of the Virgin Mary*, (London, Picador, 1985) p. 74 and Kathleen Z. Young, 'The Imperishable Virginity of Saint Maria Goretti' *Gender and Society*, vol. 3, no. 4, (1989) pp. 474-482.

²⁷ McNeil, Brian., 'Maria Goretti—a Saint for Today?' *New Blackfriars*, vol. 81, no. 957, (2000), p. 499.

²⁸ Kathleen Z. Young, 'The Imperishable Virginity of Saint Maria Goretti' *Gender and Society*, vol. 3, no. 4, (1989), p. 477.

²⁹ For theory on the male gaze see Laura Mulvey's seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' *Screen*, 16, 13, Autumn, (1975), pp. 6–18 which although a theory developed for film media, is applicable to literature and Hagiographical texts.

³⁰ Pepin and Feiss, trans., *Two Medieval Lives*, p. 32.

³¹ Marina Warner, 'Virgin' in *Alone Of All Her Sex: The myth and the cult of the Virgin Mary*, (London, Picador, 1985) p. 73.

³² Owen, 'Shame and Reparation; Women's Place in the Kin', p. 40.

³³ This is a popular motif through female saints' Lives including St Catherine and St Agnes, for a detailed exploration of this motif in relation to St Agnes see Muir, C. D., 'St Agnes of Rome as a Bride of Christ: A

that she is 'joined in matrimony'³⁴ with Christ. As well as being wedded to Christ, Luciana Meinking Guimarães states that a prime concern of *Vitae* 'is the emphasis on the *imitatio Christi*'³⁵ with the saint being the representative of Christ on Earth and we see this replicated in Winefride's story with both her and Beuno's conflicts and actions. Building on this, the male assailants are often seen as the key to enabling the transition from earthly maiden to saint. Meaning that in a retrospective view, the events, however abhorrent, had to unfold exactly as they did for the woman to become venerated.³⁶ Perversely then, the perpetrator becomes an almost celebrated aspect, or at the very least essential to the story. Robert Mills states that 'the operations of power in hagiographical representations can become notoriously blurred'³⁷ pointing out the different dynamics that come into force. We can view the power dynamic between the saint and their adversary as a Biblical parallel to Jesus battling the various manifestations of Evil, the sacred vs the secular. Robert's *Vita* shows this with the condemnation of Caradog with 'since he was a king's son, he thought that he had perpetrated so shameful an act with impunity'³⁸ showing the juxtaposition of religious and secular life. Caradog's death through divine retribution signifies the triumph of God and thus elevates Winefride and Beuno to holy status.

We shall turn now to examine the wider context within which Robert's *Vita* sits and the reasons for its composition. As Cartwright notes 'Winefride was certainly of sufficient political importance'³⁹ possibly indicating why Prior Robert and the monks at Shrewsbury chose

Northern European Phenomenon, c. 1450-1520' *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, vol. 31, no. 3, (2004), pp. 135-55.

³⁴ Pepin and Feiss, trans., *Two Medieval Lives*, p. 35.

³⁵ Luciana Meinking Guimarães, 'The Uses of Secular Rulers and Characters in the Welsh Saints' Lives in the Vespasian Legendary' (Ms. Cotton Vespasian A. XIV', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Freiburg, 2009) p. 12.

³⁶ We see an explicit example of this is the case of St Non whereby it is foretold that for St David to be born, Non must be raped by Sanctus, the prophecy ensuring no true blame is attributed to him, yet also allowing Non to escape shame in becoming pregnant. For the story of the rape of St Non, see 'Rhygyfarch's Life of St David', ed. by Richard Sharpe and John Reuben Davies *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation*, ed. J. Wyn Evans and J. M. Wooding (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), pp. 107-155 and for detailed discussion see Cartwright, J. 'St Non: Rape, Sanctity and Motherhood in Welsh and Breton Hagiography' in *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008) pp. 95-121.

³⁷ Robert Mills, 'Can the Virgin Martyr Speak?' in Bernau, A, Evans, R and Salih, S. *Medieval Virginites*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003,) p. 204.

³⁸ Pepin and Feiss, trans., *Two Medieval Lives*, p. 36.

³⁹ Cartwright 'Dead Virgins: Feminine Sanctity in Medieval Wales', p. 74.

Winefride's relics. In his *Vita*, Prior Robert offers the explanation of a monk's vision leading them to choose Winefride, yet as Catherine Hamaker points out surrounding churches already had relics and so 'Shrewsbury would have the relics of Winefride'⁴⁰ to assert their position also. Cartwright points out that Robert's *Vita* is 'unusual in the context of Welsh hagiography because, in this instance, the hagiographer is also a character in the tale'⁴¹ noting the inclusion of the translation of Winefride's relics from Gwytherin to Shrewsbury. Charles-Edwards tells us that 'because the saint reigns with Christ in heaven'⁴² their physical remains offer a spiritual connection explaining the importance they played in medieval faith for pilgrims. Wilfrid Bonser states that 'the acquisition of relics and the pilgrimages to the shrines in which they were displayed were two of the major activities of the medieval Church.'⁴³ Bonser notes that the two reasons for collecting relics were to heal the sick and to establish a close relationship with a saint.⁴⁴ Arguably there is a third reason- to ensure the financial security of the establishment within which the relics came to lay. Winward tells us that 'holy relics were the most effective way of bringing both gravitas and financial benefits to a religious house'⁴⁵ therefore this motivation could account for Robert's writing of the *Vita*. Robert had a vested interest in elevating the stories of Winefride and Beuno to encourage more pilgrims to visit Shrewsbury Abbey because, as Williams notes of hagiographers, they wished to 'enhance their own patron's glory above all'⁴⁶ and *Vitae* were valuable channels through which to promote a saint. T.W. Pritchard describes Prior Robert's writing as 'publicity'⁴⁷ evidencing that the *Vita* was written in order to attract pilgrims and increase the standing of Shrewsbury Abbey.

The subsequent transmission of Winefride's Life and later related literature surrounding her legend demonstrates her popularity.⁴⁸ There are various differences found within the literature

⁴⁰ Catherine Hamaker 'Introduction' in Pepin and Feiss, trans., *Two Medieval Lives*, p. 11.

⁴¹ Cartwright, 'The Welsh versions of the Life of Gwenfrewy', p. 239.

⁴² Thomas Charles-Edwards 'Saints' Cults and the Early Irish Church', *Clogher Record*, vol. 19, no. 2/3, (2007), p. 175.

⁴³ Wilfrid Bonser, 'The Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages', *Folklore*, vol. 73, no. 4, (1962), p. 235.

⁴⁴ Bonser, 'The Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages', p. 235.

⁴⁵ Winward 'The Lives of St Wenefred (BHL 8847-8851)', p. 89.

⁴⁶ Ifor Williams, 'Wales and the North' in *The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry*, p. 88.

⁴⁷ T.W. Pritchard, 'The Development of the Cult' *St. Winefride, Her Holy Well and the Jesuit Mission c. 650-1930*, (Wrexham; Bridge Books, 2009), p. 45.

⁴⁸ What follows is only a brief discussion on selected transmissions of St Winefride as the purpose of this overview is more to demonstrate the popularity and political utilisation of St Winefride, rather than to present a full historiography. For detailed discussions please see James R. Gregory 'A Welsh Saint In England: Translation, Orality, And National Identity In The Cult Of St. Gwenfrewy', 1138-1512' (unpublished PhD thesis, Georgia University, 2012) Pritchard, T.W. 'The Development of the Cult' *St. Winefride, Her Holy Well and the Jesuit Mission c. 650-1930*, (Wrexham; Bridge Books, 2009), pp. 45 – 88 and Cartwright, J. 'The Welsh versions of

extant, showing the ways in which Winefride's story has been used over the centuries for shifting purposes. We have already established the financial and political reasoning behind Prior Robert's *Vita* yet others sought to use her story for their own means also. Noted by David Callander as the 'earliest extant Middle English,' literature relating to Winefride is John Mirk's *Festial*.⁴⁹ The *Festial* is a collection of sermons written in the 1380s featuring one for Winefride's feast day. Emma Jessica Campbell observes the change made by Mirk regarding Winefride's inspiration for her piety⁵⁰ showing how saints' Lives could be appropriated even subtly. James Gregory points out that 'Mirk de-emphasizes the importance of her healing fountain at Holywell'⁵¹ when recounting the miracles, thus attempting to locate Winefride's cult firmly in the Shrewsbury location. Further to this are changes seen in the Life extant in MS. Bodl. 779. Callander terms these as 'the most extreme example of the erasure of Welsh material'⁵² noting that a reader of this text would undoubtedly view Winefride as an English saint. As Callander and Gregory both explore in their respective works,⁵³ a political reading could view this as a deliberate alteration, the domination of the English over the Welsh through suppression of the Welsh language. Gregory states that the lack of Welsh in the Middle English texts 'subtly overwrite Wenefred's national background'⁵⁴ thus relocating her as an anglicized saint. A gap in scholarly research is noted here and more investigation is needed to reach any definite conclusions and to ensure a fair, unbiased analysis of this aspect of the texts.

the Life of Gwenfrewy' in *Seintiau Cymru, Sancti Cambrenses: Astudiaethau ar Seintiau Cymru* (Aberystwyth, 2002) pp. 237-268.

⁴⁹ J. Mirk, 'De Solempnitate St. Weueffrede' in *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus*. Ed. Erbe, T (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1905) pp. 177-182.

⁵⁰ Campbell notes the change to it being 'only the sermons which inspired Winifred to live a Christian and chaste life, not any special individual or private teaching' as originally featured in Robert's *Vita*. Emma Jessica Campbell. 'The Experience of Listening to Sermons in Late Medieval England' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2021) p. 2.

⁵¹ James R. Gregory 'A Welsh Saint In England: Translation, Orality, And National Identity In The Cult Of St. Gwenfrewy', 1138-1512' (unpublished PhD thesis, Georgia University, 2012) p. 251.

⁵² Callander, D., 'Adapting Winefride in Welsh, Latin and English' in *Medieval English in a Multilingual Context*, ed. by Sara M. Pons-Sanz and Louise Sylvester (Springer Nature, 2023) p. 454.

⁵³ Callander, D., 'Adapting Winefride in Welsh, Latin and English' in *Medieval English in a Multilingual Context*, p.454 and James R. Gregory 'A Welsh Saint In England: Translation, Orality, And National Identity In The Cult Of St. Gwenfrewy', 1138-1512' p. 281.

⁵⁴ Gregory 'A Welsh Saint In England: Translation, Orality, And National Identity In The Cult Of St. Gwenfrewy', 1138-1512', p. 281.

Moving now to the Welsh versions of Winefride's Life, which Cartwright finds are 'clearly based'⁵⁵ on Prior Robert's *Vita*. These are extant in 4 manuscripts⁵⁶ with the anonymously authored Peniarth MS 27ii believed to be the original. In terms of notable differences between Robert's *Vita* and the *Buchedd*, Peniarth MS 27ii contains a significant absence. In this manuscript, and Thomas Wiliem's subsequent copy, the story of the translation of Winefride's relics is not to be found. Cartwright acknowledges one argument for the source having deliberately omitted the section could be 'for political reasons, because included in it is the local Welsh prince's approval of the removal of the relics'⁵⁷ showing the potential reason for manuscript changes in the years following the original *Vitae*. Yet, as Cartwright also notes, these absences could be for other reasons such as deterioration of the original manuscript source making the task of directly copying impossible.⁵⁸ Still, Gregory believes this could be 'an ideological re-writing of the history of the saint's cult'⁵⁹ through the exclusion and therefore denial of the events surrounding Winefride's translation. Indicating the possibility for a purposeful refusal to include the translation of Winefride's relics and therefore the potential intention to sever the association with Shrewsbury for future generations, locating Winefride indefinitely in Wales.

In addition to this, the *Libellus Miraculorum* of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* are of interest with a large list of miracles relating to Holywell. Miracles associated with saints enhanced their perceived divinity, further establishing the saint and their associated location and acting as a lure for anyone with particular ailments to make pilgrimage. Pritchard notes 'the reputation her well gained as a curative shrine'⁶⁰ showing this was the case with Winefride's cult at Holywell. Even during the reformation⁶¹, a time when many local saints became resigned to

⁵⁵ Cartwright, 'The Welsh versions of the Life of Gwenfrewy', p. 242.

⁵⁶ See Cartwright, 'The Welsh versions of the Life of Gwenfrewy', p. 240 who lists these as now being held in Aberystwyth.

⁵⁷ Cartwright, 'The Welsh versions of the Life of Gwenfrewy', p. 257.

⁵⁸ Cartwright, 'The Welsh versions of the Life of Gwenfrewy', p. 260.

⁵⁹ Gregory 'A Welsh Saint In England: Translation, Orality, And National Identity In The Cult Of St. Gwenfrewy', 1138-1512', p. 16.

⁶⁰ T.W. Pritchard, 'The Development of the Cult', p. 55.

⁶¹ The reformation, commonly thought to have occurred between c.1517 and c.1640s, was a time of religious and cultural change, dividing the Church with the founding of Protestantism. During this time Henry VIII initiated the dissolution of the monasteries which saw monasteries and churches removed from power and their wealth stripped. For further historical discussion see Glanmor Williams, *Wales and The Reformation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997).

merely a place name, pilgrimages to Holywell remained.⁶² The miracles found in the *Vita S. Wenefrede* are thought to have been a later addition with Winward stating that there are 'stylistic disparities between the vita and the *libellus* that do seem to give credence to the theory of later addition'⁶³ though the date is uncertain. Cartwright points out that the churches of Wales were 'attempting to fend off Norman influence'⁶⁴ and identifies the 'expression of celebration'⁶⁵ regarding the expulsion of the French found within the *Vita S. Wenefrede*, as evidence of this.⁶⁶ Winward cautions however that there is 'conflicting evidence'⁶⁷ as to the nationality of the unknown author. Hamaker asserts that of the two medieval Latin *Vitae* 'the aims of the two authors were not necessarily at odds'⁶⁸ noting that miracles reported in either location would enhance the reputation of the other. Furthermore, Elissa R. Henken points out that medieval hagiographical texts were;

the product of the Welsh who wished to defend the honour and rights of the Welsh saints against the influx of foreign saints to whom the Normans were rededicating the churches⁶⁹

With this in mind, later transmissions and versions of saints' Lives can be viewed in this light also. The political landscape of England and Wales was highly volatile in the years before and after Robert's *Vita* was composed, with Wales losing independence in 1284 following the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1282, ending native Welsh rule. Therefore, we can see the importance of retaining and elevating well known figures such as saints in an attempt to maintain sovereignty as a nation. This is seen, of course, most notably with St David⁷⁰ yet we can see this on a similar level with Winefride.

⁶² An unbroken pilgrimage tradition has remained at Holywell with the site still popular today. For an overview of her cult at Holywell, see Pritchard, T.W., 'The Development of the Cult' *St. Winefride, Her Holy Well and the Jesuit Mission c. 650-1930*, (Wrexham; Bridge Books, 2009), pp. 45 – 88. For an overview view on the contemporary use of her site see Stumpe, L. H., 'Display And Veneration Of Holy Relics At St Winefride's Well And Stonyhurst', *Journal Of Museum Ethnography*, No. 22, (2009), pp. 63–81

⁶³ Winward, F. 'The Lives of St Wenefred (*BHL* 8847-8851)', p. 115.

⁶⁴ Cartwright 'Dead Virgins: Feminine Sanctity in Medieval Wales', p. 75.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁶⁶ Wade-Evans, 'The Life of St Wenefred', p. 307.

⁶⁷ Winward, 'The Lives of St Wenefred (*BHL* 8847-8851)', p. 117.

⁶⁸ Hamaker 'Introduction' in Pepin and Feiss, trans., *Two Medieval Lives*, p. 16.

⁶⁹ Elissa R. Henken, 'The Saint as Secular Ruler: Aspects of Welsh Hagiography' *Folklore*, vol. 98, no. 2, (1987), p. 230.

⁷⁰ Rhygyfarch's Life of St David was arguably written to promote St David in defence of Norman invasion and to defend Welsh independence, both in terms of government and church. See 'Rhygyfarch's Life of St David', ed. by Richard Sharpe and John Reuben Davies *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation*, ed. J. Wyn Evans and J. M. Wooding (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007).

In conclusion, from the hagiographical themes and Biblical allusions contained within Robert's *Vita*, we can see the influence of saints' *Vitae* upon society across the centuries since they were written, especially in terms of women's lives. Whilst Robert's *Vita* was undoubtedly written to enhance the prospects of Shrewsbury Abbey, Winefride's story connects with the wider political landscape of Wales and England as the various extant manuscript versions demonstrate. *Vitae* then, can be seen to be operating on multiple levels, from the personal to the political. With saints such as St David still used for political reasons today in terms of defining national identity, it will be interesting to observe if there will be more to be added to the story of St Winefride also.

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