

FROM THE BODY OF THE DRAGON: BIRTH, REBIRTH, AND THE IMAGERY OF
SAINT MARGARET OF ANTIOCH IN THE LUTTRELL PSALTER

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ABSTRACT

EVA SCLIPPA: From the Body of the Dragon: Birth, Rebirth, and the Imagery of Saint Margaret of Antioch in the Luttrell Psalter
(Under the direction of Dorothy Verkerk)

The pages of the Luttrell Psalter are heavily decorated and display a wide variety of images, including scenes from the life of Christ, scenes of daily life in the fourteenth century, and hundreds of monsters and monstrous animals. These monsters significantly outnumber other forms of artwork in the margins of the psalter, taking a place of central importance in the manuscript. A common theme of bodily emergence imagery is apparent among the monsters, with humans that burst forth from animal or monstrous bodies, creatures that reveal inner creatures, and monsters that swallow and expel beings both human and non-human. I argue that this bodily emergence imagery is tied to Saint Margaret of Antioch, and through her, the Luttrell Psalter is connected to themes of birth and rebirth, two subjects of particular interest for Sir Geoffrey Luttrell, the patron of the manuscript.

DEDICATION

To Gwen, for cuddles, silly voices, and surprise desserts in generous quantities. I consider myself not so much indebted as infinitely grateful and immeasurably lucky.

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INTRODUCTON

There are creatures in the margins of the Luttrell Psalter that, on first glance, are completely bewildering. At times nearly indescribable, these figures are not merely hybrids of other beings; they are impossible conglomerates, monsters in which the boundaries between one individual and another are often blurred. Paging through the manuscript, one is never entirely sure if the creatures are represented as several beings melded together, one creature consuming or disgorging another, or a single creature bursting out of a false outer skin.

Despite their fantastic nature, these beings are not a deviation from the norm within the pages of the Luttrell Psalter, where bizarre beasts fill almost every folio. Though they share space with scenes from the life of Christ and the daily life of the Luttrell family and their tenants, the monsters in the margins are the dominant visual feature of the manuscript. On some pages, they even steal the show from the religious imagery, appearing dramatically oversized and much more vivid in color and detail. This begs two questions of the Psalter: what is the role of these creatures in the manuscript as a whole, and why do they look the way they do? That is, why in this manuscript is there such a heavy concentration of monsters emerging from and entering other monsters?

The Luttrell Psalter (British Library Add. MS 42130) is a manuscript created in the early 14th century—roughly around the 1320s—for Sir Geoffrey Luttrell (b. 1276, d. 1345), the lord of Irnham in the diocese of Lincoln, England. Although the manuscript was never

completed, all of the intended text is present, and most of the pages bear marginal illustrations or larger miniatures. This text is, of course, primarily composed of a selection of psalms, but also features a calendar and the music and words for some hymns, which respectively begin and end the book. At 14.5 by 10.6 inches, the Luttrell Psalter is especially large—perhaps too large for daily personal use—and seems to have been designed more for display. The script is a clear, evenly written Gothic hand, contained within neatly delineated 10 by 7 inch text areas, each one a single wide column. Though there are occasional historiated initials or larger illuminations, the majority of the artwork in the Luttrell Psalter fills the generously-sized margins. This marginal artwork is largely dominated by monsters, the strange hybrid beasts mentioned earlier, with their tangled, complex figures.

These figures are the focus of this paper; specifically, an aspect of their depiction that, for the purposes of this thesis, will be called “bodily emergence imagery.” Throughout the manuscript’s margins, humans burst forth from animal or monstrous bodies, creatures reveal inner creatures like matryoshka dolls, and monsters swallow and expel beings both human and non-human. This type of imagery, though it is not restricted solely to the Luttrell Psalter, appears in the Psalter with greater frequency and intensity than in most other contemporary manuscripts.

The marginal beasts of the Luttrell Psalter have not gone unstudied, though it might be fair to say they have been under-considered. Some sources and scholars have chosen to ignore them entirely. The British Library, the institution which holds the Luttrell Psalter, has devoted a portion of their “Sacred Texts” website to a description and discussion of the Psalter, touching on its origins and contents. The authors of the page have included an image taken from the manuscript to illustrate their article, one that appears to show two men

fighting with jugs—which is how the picture is captioned (Fig. 1). A glance at the image in its context in the original manuscript quickly shows that the version on the Sacred Texts site has been cropped, the bestial lower halves of their bodies removed entirely, along with any difficult questions about the meaning of such unusual elements (Fig. 2).

The British Library’s writers did briefly address the monsters as what they call “those strange animals,” but in what is now a familiarly dismissive way, offering only one explanation: that they “must have been products of the artist’s imagination, and seem unrelated to the text they accompany.”¹ To paraphrase, the author or authors of the page in question dismiss the potential for the marginal monsters to carry meaning that reflects on the work as a whole. This refrain is echoed in other scholarship on the Psalter’s marginal creatures with only slight variations. Previous authors, including Eric Millar, described the creator of these creatures by writing that “the mind of a man who could deliberately set himself to ornament a book with such subjects...can hardly have been normal...”² I admit that I cannot completely discredit this explanation, or any other sourced in the personal quirks of the individuals who physically crafted the manuscript. We know so little about the scribes and illuminators responsible for medieval manuscripts that even a name is a wealth of information, and it would be all but impossible, given this dearth of evidence, to retrospectively psychoanalyze the artist. However, this inability to conclusively determine the state of the artist’s imagination also hampers the arguments of Millar and others.

The suggestion that these images are unrelated to the text is a more serious charge, and in my mind more easily challenged. This idea is especially problematic and

¹ The British Library Board. 2007. *Sacred Texts: Luttrell Psalter*. <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/luttrellpsalter.html>. (accessed March 21, 2013).

² Michelle Brown, *The World of the Luttrell Psalter*. (London: The British Library, 2006), 85.

discouraging in light of the writings of Michael Camille, which I take as the theoretical groundwork for this thesis, and which, along with the work of Lucy Freeman Sandler, are some of the only substantive works on the monsters of the Luttrell Psalter. Camille deals with the Luttrell Psalter and its margins directly in *Mirror in Parchment*, in which he confronts the tendency of previous scholarship to ignore these “fantastic monsters,” ascribing this inclination to an unwillingness to “challenge the credibility of those pictures in the Luttrell Psalter that we wish to see as real.”³ The author, though engaging with the subject in much greater detail, ultimately incorporates the creatures through his theory that medieval images were intended to shape a new reality rather than reflect daily life—in this case, the new reality of the patron, Geoffrey Luttrell. I pull on this groundbreaking concept in my own work, studying the ways in which the creatures, particularly those engaged in the consuming and disgorging activities described above, reflect the conceptual world of Geoffrey Luttrell.

Where *Mirror in Parchment* suggests the connection between marginal monsters and patron in the Luttrell Psalter, *Image on the Edge* explains the role of marginal images in understanding the object they frame or are incorporated into. In this work, Camille establishes the marginal image as something that is not merely a detail, but a part that is directly and complexly related to the whole, both the whole object and the whole page in which it is anchored. These images “gloss, parody, modernize and problematize the text’s authority while never totally undermining it,” and they operate in a “flux of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being.’”⁴ In other words, the creatures in the margins of the Luttrell Psalter have a profound effect on the manuscript they decorate, and they function in a way that is much

³ Michael Camille, *Mirror in Parchment*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 28-29.

⁴ Ibid., 9-10.

less set than the “central” images or text, allowing them to express multiple meanings simultaneously—as a warning of the threat of temptation and a hopeful prayer for salvation, for instance.

In Camille’s view—which is influenced by writing and folklore from the time period—edges and margins are powerful and dangerous places, and act as zones of transformation. In *Image on the Edge*, he writes: “Openings, entrances and doorways, both of buildings and the human body (in one Middle English text there is a mention of a medicine corroding ‘the margynes of the skynne’), were especially important liminal zones that had to be protected.”⁵ The monsters of the Luttrell Psalter, their bodies so often operating as doorways for other creatures to enter or exit by, toy with these powerful liminal zones, and with the “flux of becoming” that qualifies all margins. What is more, they do so while setting the tone for the entire manuscript, orchestrating our impression of the center from the edges. It seems clear that these creatures and their permeable bodies cannot be discounted if we wish to fully understand the Luttrell Psalter.

Camille and Freeman Sandler’s works address the monsters of the Luttrell Psalter, but no previous work deals exclusively with the “bodily emergence” aspect of the creatures.⁶ Bodily emergence imagery does appear elsewhere in the 13th and 14th centuries, but it is not associated with a particular manuscript so much as a particular figure—Saint Margaret of Antioch. Saint Margaret, a particularly popular saint in medieval England, was best known and most frequently depicted at the most dramatic moment of her story, when she bursts

⁵ Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: the Margins of Medieval Art*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 16.

⁶ Rosina Buckland, in “Sounds of the Psalter: Orality and Musical Symbolism in the Luttrell Psalter,” does consider some of the orally-emergent monsters as part of a program of musical symbolism, but they are treated peripherally to issues of visual rhythm and images of actual music-making.

unharmd from within the body of a dragon. This image, repeated throughout the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries, transformed Saint Margaret into the patron saint of childbirth, and also gave her great importance to those seeking their own rebirth or salvation.

For the first chapter of my thesis, I explore what is known of Geoffrey Luttrell's personal concerns, and the ways in which these align with the aid Saint Margaret was perceived to be capable of giving. The points of overlap between the world of Geoffrey Luttrell and that of Saint Margaret are in the concepts of birth and rebirth. Through the promises of salvation after death and help during childbirth in her legend, her own birth-like imagery, and her adoption by the laity as the patron saint of childbirth, Saint Margaret was ideally situated to provide aid in both these areas. Geoffrey Luttrell, in turn, appears to have been a man with a great interest in the kind of aid she could provide, demonstrating a concern with his soul's rebirth above and beyond the standard for his time and culture, and attempting, through pilgrimage and prayer, to alleviate his son and heir's childless state. I explore the evidence for Sir Geoffrey's concern with birth and rebirth, both in his actions and in evocative images in the manuscript itself, from depictions of the Entombment and Resurrection to swaddled infants.

Imagery evocative of rebirth also occurs in the manuscript in the form of snake, skin-shedding, and serpent imagery. In the second chapter, I investigate the appearance of these snakes in connection with rebirth, which in turn forms part of a larger query about the position and influence of local folkloric beliefs in the Luttrell Psalter. Though the serpents may suggest the Biblical association between Christ's resurrection and the snake's rejuvenation through the shedding of its old skin, a strong link also appears to fairy tales of "snake-maidens," which in turn reference Saint Margaret herself. Like the rest of the

manuscript's visual program, I suggest that these serpents may have carried a dual message, but one that bridges the gap between medieval Christian and earlier "pagan" belief systems.

Finally, in the third chapter, I examine the visual evidence linking the Luttrell Psalter to Margaret of Antioch. Comparing creatures from the Psalter with contemporary and earlier (13th century) depictions of Saint Margaret, I draw out motifs such as the regurgitation of folds of fabric from the open jaws of some monsters, and the bursting or peeling back of layers of skin in others. Consistently, the images of bodily emergence in the manuscript appear to mirror the imagery of Saint Margaret and the dragon, at least as depicted by the predecessors and contemporaries of the artists of the Luttrell Psalter.

Geoffrey Luttrell, a landed knight in need of personal salvation and the birth of an heir to his son, found an ideal purveyor of heavenly aid in the form of Saint Margaret of Antioch. Working more closely than most patrons of his time with the clerics and artists who created the Luttrell Psalter, Sir Geoffrey contrived a manuscript in which the marginal images were highly coordinated with the text they surrounded, a document that sought Saint Margaret's aid by invoking her imagery. In the form of monsters demonstrating "bodily emergence," serpents coiled between lines of text, and creatures mimicking the resurrection-like skin shedding of snakes, the creatures of the Luttrell Psalter performed for Geoffrey Luttrell as a protection, insurance, and salve.

CHAPTER I

SIR GEOFFREY LUTTRELL AND SAINT MARGARET OF ANTIOCH

Sir Geoffrey Luttrell, the patron of the Luttrell Psalter, demonstrated a keen interest in his lifetime in the kinds of aid that St. Margaret could allegedly provide. By all accounts, Sir Geoffrey was a man particularly concerned with the fate of his eternal soul, even considering his time period, in which peasant rebellions and the encroaching Black Plague made the unpredictable presence of death highly palpable. In patronage, Geoffrey far surpassed his grandfather, Andrew, who endowed three chaplains to pray for his soul at three religious centers.⁷ Geoffrey's purchases were considered phenomenally extravagant: he arranged for £20 worth of candles to be arrayed around his body at burial, for £200 to be donated to the poor immediately, plus £20 annually,⁸ for 20 chaplains to offer masses for him up to 5 years after his death, and for a sculpted Easter Sepulcher to be placed in the Irnham church (Fig. 3).⁹ This sepulchre sculpture, depicting the empty tomb of Christ and intended to be read as Geoffrey's own empty tomb (shared with his wife, Agnes), clearly indicates a desire to share in Christ's resurrection.¹⁰

⁷ Brown, *The World of the Luttrell Psalter*, 12.

⁸ For context, £1 in 1325 was worth approximately £303.93 today. That makes Geoffrey's costs over £6,000 each for the candles and annual donations, plus over £60,000 immediately, not including the cost of the chaplains' prayers. Officer, "Purchasing Power of British Pounds from 1264 to 2007."

⁹ Brown, *The World of the Luttrell Psalter*, 25. An Easter Sepulchre is a niche or construction in the wall where the Host, representing Christ himself, is placed in a coffin-like box complete with funeral trappings on Good Friday, then "resurrected" from the tomb on Easter morning.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

Imagery in the Psalter itself also communicates a fear of damnation and a distinct concern with rebirth. Scenes from the life of Christ fill the manuscript, with an emphasis on Christ's entombment and resurrection (Fig. 4). The sepulchre or tomb that Christ strides out of bears a distinct resemblance, with its pillars and decorative vaulted arches, to the sepulchre built on Geoffrey Luttrell's command. This is the first of several instances in which Geoffrey Luttrell, perhaps hoping to share in Christ's resurrection, depicts himself in the guise or place of Christ.

The Psalter also addresses the souls at rest or at risk in these final moments. Its pages are filled with crouching, huddling, or frightened human souls, depicted as naked and mostly naked men, such as the individual on folio 157 verso (Fig. 5). This (potentially) lost soul shivers above the hellmouth, a canine or dragon-like maw extended just below the soul's feet. The hellmouth, in turn, gapes wide over a knight's tomb (Fig. 6). Geoffrey Luttrell, an experienced military campaigner, could easily have been represented by this dead warrior, transforming the page into a potent reminder of his own mortality and impending judgment.

As in the parallel between the Easter Sepulchre and the tomb of Christ, Geoffrey often appears in the manuscript in the guise of Christ, taking on his powers of rebirth and resurrection. His appearance as the shrouded knight below the hellmouth is one of these moments. Just as the tomb that Christ strides out of in his resurrection image bears a striking resemblance to the Easter Sepulchre of Geoffrey Luttrell himself, so the tomb of the Geoffrey "stand-in" knight mimics the tomb of the Resurrection—and the real-world sepulchre at Irnham.

Other images of tombs and burials reinforce these links between Geoffrey, Christ, and divine resurrection or rebirth. The entombment of the Virgin (Fig. 7) is perhaps the most

“lifelike”—if such a thing can be said of a burial—to Sir Geoffrey’s time, and to the Psalter’s depictions of contemporary burials. Her casket or tomb is depicted using the same blue, swirled material as the tombs of the resurrected Christ and the dead knight, and the body itself is shrouded in the same way as the fourteenth-century knight’s body, with a twisted knot at the top of the head. Even more interesting, having read of Geoffrey Luttrell’s bequests on his death, are the candles that surround the body in the hands of the mourners. These lights seem to suggest the £20 worth of candles Sir Geoffrey had arranged to surround his body at his funeral, or at least a shorthand reference to them.

Christ’s entombment (Fig. 8) shares many of the same qualities as the Virgin and knight’s shrouded burials. Though there are no candles in this scene and the draped, vaguely Roman garb of the mourners appears more “antique” than contemporary to the 14th century, the blue-gray casket is once again covered in swirls and circles, and the body is wrapped in the same twisted shroud. Where the Virgin’s shroud was bare, this shroud bears the same cross on the chest that the anonymous knight—Geoffrey’s avatar in the manuscript—wears on his, strengthening the ties the knight, Geoffrey, and Christ.

Lastly, there is the most direct instance of Geoffrey Luttrell visually emulating Christ, in which he takes Christ’s place in his own variation on the Last Supper. The Psalter does contain a traditional Last Supper on folio 90v (Fig. 9), in which Christ sits centrally, flanked by his disciples, while Judas kneels before him on the other side of the table. Over 100 pages later in the Psalter, on folio 208r, it looks almost as if the scene is recurring (Fig. 10). Once again, a dominant central figure sits frontally at a table spread with food, flanked with equal numbers of lesser figures on either side. There is even another kneeling figure on “our” side of the table, reaching up in a gesture identical to Judas and drawing attention to the central

figure. This central figure is not Christ, and his supper companions are not the apostles: Geoffrey Luttrell sits in Christ's seat at the table, with his family members and two monks (perhaps those working on the manuscript) on either side of him. Judas has been replaced by a less threatening servant, one who offers Geoffrey his aid. As if to ensure that the reader understands this is Geoffrey and not Christ, the entire family is placed in front of a background bearing the Luttrell arms. At this point in the manuscript, Geoffrey has had himself displayed as or linked to Christ at least twice, both as Christ the dead body, to be resurrected, and as Christ the living man just before his execution, fated for eternal life in Heaven. Within the world of his manuscript, Geoffrey Luttrell has created himself as a man who, like Christ, will be reborn after death and gain salvation.

Why Geoffrey was so concerned with his immortal soul is uncertain. Perhaps it has to do with his participation in multiple military campaigns,¹¹ his involvement in accusations of theft and land grabbing from his neighbors, or his notorious participation in the 1312 raid on Sempringham Priory,¹² in which he and several other lords broke the doors and walls of the religious center, carried off £500 worth of goods, and assaulted several men who tried to stop them. Regardless, his fears are clear, with a concern for salvation overtly expressed in many of the more traditional religious images of the Psalter, such as those relating to the life of the Virgin, to the life of Christ, the Last Judgment, and particularly the Dormition of the Virgin (Fig. 11). Rather than display the Virgin herself being bodily assumed into heaven or simply lying as if dead, the Luttrell Psalter's Dormition displays both the Virgin and her soul. The Virgin's body is in a traditional position, lying on the bed as if resting, but her soul is

¹¹ Brown, *The World of the Luttrell Psalter*, 13.

¹² Joyce Coleman, "New Evidence About Sir Geoffrey Luttrell's Raid on Sempringham Priory, 1312," *British Library Journal* 25, no. 2 (1999): 103.

depicted as a much smaller nude figure in the careful hands of an angel. The nudity of the Virgin's soul is an especially unusual aspect of the image. Other depictions of the Dormition do sometimes contain a small, infant-sized soul, such as a 1321 fresco from the Church of the Dormition (Fig. 12), or a very early fifteenth-century century tempera by Gherardo Starnina (Fig. 13). In each of these images, though, the Virgin's soul is enshrouded in white robes, demarcated as dead by her garb even as she is held in Christ's arms. It is only in the Luttrell Psalter's Dormition that she appears naked as a newborn. Her soul's miniscule appearance, particularly with the supine female figure, Christ blessing the infant/soul, and the crowd of assistants and onlookers, brings to mind depictions of childbirth, turning the Dormition into a scene of literal re-birth. A closer look at the Psalter's nativity scene, on folio 86v, seems to bear out this conclusion (Fig. 14). The poses of the Virgin in each scene are similar; in both images, she reclines under a sheet or robe surrounded by standing individuals, whether well-wishers or mourners. Though the Virgin is naturally more active in the Nativity scene, the presence of the infant Christ in the one and the reborn Virgin's soul in the other ties the two together.

So, it seems clear that Geoffrey Luttrell would be interested in a manuscript that might secure some assistance for the rebirth and salvation of his soul. His biography—and images like the birth-scene Dormition--also reveal concerns with birth—not rebirth, but the birth of grandchildren to carry on the Luttrell line. Andrew, his son, had not produced an heir with his wife, Beatrice, by the time Geoffrey died; according to Michelle Brown, their childless marriage was a source of anxiety for Geoffrey Luttrell in his lifetime. The family often visited pilgrimage sites and made bequests in an attempt to rectify this.¹³ Some images

¹³ Brown, *The World of the Luttrell Psalter*, 74.

in the manuscript, such as the Dormition scene, function on two levels simultaneously, reinforcing Geoffrey's concern with the afterlife and his worries and hopes for mortal birth. Many of the naked souls depicted in the Psalter seem to act in this fashion; bald, nude, and displayed in vulnerable positions, such infant-like bodies express his obsession with birth and rebirth (Fig. 15, 16, & 17). One page even includes an image of an infant wrapped in a swaddling cloth, tucked neatly into a horizontal bar between lines of text (Fig. 18). It is possible that the swaddled infant may, like the Dormition, function on the levels of both birth and rebirth. The Psalm on the page is a portion of Psalm 9, which reads:

16 I will rejoice in thy salvation: the Gentiles have stuck fast in the destruction which they prepared.

Their foot hath been taken in the very snare which they hid.

17 The Lord shall be known when he executeth judgments:

the sinner hath been caught in the works of his own hands.

18 The wicked shall be turned into hell,

all the nations that forget God.

19 For the poor man shall not be forgotten to the end:

the patience of the poor shall not perish forever.¹⁴

The infant may once again represent not only birth—its surface or apparent meaning—but also rebirth, standing in as the soul that must rise above its sins. At first glance, it would be easy to read the infant as another shrouded body, with its elongated form and rigid position. The references to snares and being “caught” may also be significant, in light of the swaddling cloth, which restrains and winds around the infant's body like a net. Where the naked bodies of the Psalter are souls which seem to express a certain “newborn” quality, the swaddled infant is a newborn that expresses qualities of the soul after death.

While primarily focusing on the birth aspects of fertility, the Psalter and its creators pay equal attention to the male aspects, with some of its creatures and monsters strongly

¹⁴ Psalms 9:16-19 (Latin Vulgate Bible)

emphasizing male virility. Certain creatures in the Psalter, such as the fighting hybrid on folio 149v (Fig. 19), are simply endowed with absurdly large phalluses. These creatures' generative organs are more often than not a different color from the rest of their lower body, visually emphasizing this attribute. Far more explicitly reproductive is a simian man on folio 25r (Fig. 20). This creature's phallus, a different color from anything else on his body, extends down the entire length of the right hand margin, framing the page's text. Curving and sinuous, it becomes one of the vines that so frequently appear around the body of the text in the Psalter, blossoming fruitfully in an artistic flourish of leaves. Through these images, both the male and female aspects of fertility are emphasized in the Luttrell Psalter.

Though the suggestions of the phallus' leaves as multiple offspring would be enough, this thick, virile vine also brings to mind the Tree of Jesse. Such images, like a Tree of Jesse from an English manuscript created only twenty or so years after the Luttrell Psalter, feature a male figure with a sprouting vine of a phallus (Fig. 21). The Tree of Jesse, a common medieval iconographic motif, depicts the genealogy of Christ emerging from the seed of David's father, Jesse, and is a powerful image of familial continuity.¹⁵ Just like the Luttrell Psalter's simian figure, this fourteenth-century Tree of Jesse spreads around the text on the page, framing it as an image of virility through the ages. By including these fertile generative organs as frame for the text, Sir Geoffrey appears to have been working in a repetitive prayer of his own, a prayer for the continuity of his line—in other words, for grandchildren.

¹⁵ J. R. Johnson, "Tree of Jesse," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., vol. 14. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 164. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, Web, 8 Feb. 2013. <http://go.galegroup.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX3407711230&v=2.1&u=unc_main&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w>

Geoffrey Luttrell's intent on making the Luttrell Psalter a tool through which to ensure his salvation and the production of grandchildren would have required an intercessory figure to focus the manuscript on, and I argue that this figure was Saint Margaret of Antioch. To determine the impact that popular representations of the myth of Saint Margaret may have had on the images in the Luttrell Psalter, it must first be determined the degree to which such figures and their myths would have permeated the life of Geoffrey Luttrell and his hired clerical hands. The vernacular popularity of saints and miracle stories in medieval English life cannot be underestimated. Miracle collections, in particular, were quite popular in England, and quite often collected through oral transmission; at least 75 miracle collections were produced between 1080 and 1220 alone, during a time of "pan-European interest in committing orally transmitted stories to paper."¹⁶ Though the earlier phases of miracle collection focused on stories transmitted by the clergy, the end of the 13th century saw a rise in material drawn from the laity.¹⁷ This practice can be seen as one of many examples of conflict between popular and institutionally approved beliefs. According to Koopmans, rather than encouraging the spread of such popular and vernacularly produced tales, the collecting process had a stultifying effect, formalizing and correcting the tales; miracle curators, all clergymen, selected only the stories they approved of for their collections.¹⁸

Saint Margaret herself occupies an uncomfortable space in this dialogue between clergy and laity, one that may have set the stage for her comparatively subtle presence in the Luttrell Psalter. Margaret, often referred to as Margaret of Antioch, was a saint with a

¹⁶ Rachel Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England*. (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2011), 1-3.

¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹⁸ Ibid., 7.

particularly powerful cult following in medieval England.¹⁹ Purportedly a Christian maiden in Roman Antioch, Margaret was imprisoned and tortured upon her refusal to marry the pagan governor of the province. Once in jail, she burst forcefully out of the body of a dragon that had swallowed her, and then fought and trampled a demon, banishing it back to Hell. Ultimately, she was executed by the sword, though not before issuing a long prayer for the benefit of any believers who prayed in her name.

Up to and throughout the 14th century, Margaret of Antioch was, to all accounts, highly popular among the laypeople of England. One of the most admired saints of the Middle Ages, accounts of her martyrdom and records of her relics proliferated, along with church decorations, sculpture, stained glass, wall paintings, and even guilds dedicated to her name.²⁰ With more than 250 churches in her name, she had more churches dedicated to her than to any other female saint aside from the Virgin, and her July 20th feast was elevated to the level of “great feast” in 1222.²¹

Her popularity is not difficult to understand. Margaret of Antioch was a dramatic and sensational saint, ferociously dealing out justice and soundly trouncing the enemies of the Lord. One popular version of her fight with the devil reads:

The holy Margaret then grabbed the devil by the hair and threw him to the ground and she put out his right eye and shattered all his bones and she set her right foot over his neck and said to him, “Leave my virginity alone!”²²

Unfortunately, Saint Margaret’s intense story—and her promise of direct intercession—were the main fodder for the disapproval of church authorities. Officially, her

¹⁹ Catherine Pearce, “The Cult of Saint Margaret of Antioch,” *Feminist Theology* 6, no. 16 (1997), 70.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 125.

cult was not suppressed until the Council of Trent in the 16th century, on the grounds that direct help from a saint is blasphemous.²³ The church had been registering its disapproval long before that, expressing discomfort with the sensational qualities of her story, and she had been declared apocryphal by Pope Gelasius I in 494.²⁴

The likely relationship between Geoffrey Luttrell and Saint Margaret of Antioch was a complicated one. As a member of the laity, Geoffrey Luttrell and his family would have been familiar with Saint Margaret, and as a member of a family only recently risen to landowner status, Geoffrey's sympathies may have been even more favorably inclined towards the helper saint. Given this fairly precarious social standing, however, it also would have behooved Sir Geoffrey to accommodate the church's growing discomfort with Saint Margaret. The motivation necessary to spur Geoffrey Luttrell to include references to Margaret of Antioch despite this doctrinal conflict must have been great—and an exploration of his primary concerns in life indicates that it was.

What was it about Saint Margaret that might have pushed Sir Geoffrey to disregard her wobbly official status and work out a way to include her in his masterpiece? Her roles aiding and easing both childbirth and spiritual rebirth are likely candidates. Saint Margaret was officially declared the patron saint of childbirth in the 12th century, in part for the birth-like imagery of emerging unscathed from the body of another creature.²⁵ The image of this

²³ Pearce, "The Cult of Saint Margaret of Antioch," 70.

²⁴ David Hugh Farmer, "Margaret of Antioch," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Oxford University Press, 2 May 2012.
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t100.e1078>
> Despite this history of official condemnation, the last nail wasn't hammered into Margaret's coffin until the 1960s, when the Catholic Church suppressed St. Margaret's legend and excised it from official doctrine, both on the basis of its sensational nature and apparent lack of historical accuracy.

²⁵ Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 4.

scene became Saint Margaret's standard emblem in Western Christendom, repeated on a vast array of materials, from manuscript illuminations to parchment charms, amulets, wall paintings, icons, reliquaries, and embroideries.²⁶ This stands in notable contrast to the cult of Saint Marina, the Greek Orthodox version of Saint Margaret, in which her emblem became her combat with the anthropomorphic demon rather than the dragon scene that was so strongly tied to ideas of childbirth.²⁷ This demon combat was still depicted in the West, but the dragon scene was much more common, so common that it developed its own consistent iconography. The image of Margaret's dress trailing through the mouth of the dragon came to be seen as the established signifier that Margaret had been swallowed, and can be seen not only in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts already reproduced here, but also in items like a mid-fourteenth century amulet for protection in childbirth (Fig. 22), or a late fourteenth-century embossed leather casket (Fig. 23).

A signifier to indicate that Saint Margaret had indeed been swallowed was necessary due to the significant resistance to this idea among a small but institutionally powerful portion of the population: the clergy.²⁸ Many medieval authors challenged or even excised the dragon scene from Margaret's legend. Jacobus de Voragine, the author of the *Golden Legend*, attempts a compromise of sorts by including two versions of her tale, both the traditional dragon swallowing and disgorging and a theory of his own, in which he suggests that Saint Margaret made the sign of the cross when the dragon entered the room, causing it

²⁶ Wendy R. Larson, "The Role of Patronage and Audience in the Cults of Sts. Margaret and Marina of Antioch," in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women, and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, edited by Samantha J.E. Riches and Sarah Salih (London: Routledge, 2002), 23-35, see esp. 27.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Wendy R. Larson, "Who is the Master of this Narrative? Maternal Patronage of the Cult of Saint Margaret," in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, edited by Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 94-104, see esp. 102.

to disappear. Jacobus derides the dragon-emergence account as “apocryphal” and “frivolous,” but, ironically, many copies of the Golden Legend illustrated this passage with the standard emblem of Saint Margaret emerging from within the dragon.²⁹ This exemplifies a typical trend in the production of lives of Saint Margaret, in which, even when the text of a document argued against or excised the story of the dragon, images of this scene continued to be reproduced.³⁰ This persistence indicates the strength of the link between Saint Margaret and emergence imagery in the 13th and 14th centuries. Despite the protest of the authorities, Margaret was consistently depicted emerging from the body of the dragon with her robes trailing from the beast’s mouth, demonstrating the powerfully held belief among the laity in her abilities over the childbed.

Other factors of Margaret’s Western imagery also appear echoed in the Luttrell Psalter. The embossed leather casket previously mentioned, produced a few decades after the Luttrell Psalter was completed, depicts Saint Margaret in her traditional emergence pose on one panel, while the other panels are populated with grotesque figures and hybrid monsters (Fig. 21). The association between Saint Margaret and human-animal hybrids, as seen in the creatures of the Luttrell Psalter, seems to have been well-established by the time this coffer was created. Such combinations may have been part of what prompted contemporary clerics to accuse Margaret’s dragon scene and imagery of frivolousness, an accusation that sounds familiar to suggestions that the monsters of the Luttrell Psalter are meaningless nonsenses.³¹

²⁹ Ibid., 99.

³⁰ Ibid, 100.

³¹ Larson, “The Role of Patronage and Audience,” 30.

Saint Margaret's legend clearly outlines her own role as facilitator of childbirth and rebirth. A thirteenth-century Middle English version of her life includes a confession from the demon she defeats about harming women and children in childbirth: "Thedyr wolde I come belyve [at once], in chilyng to do her harme. / If it were unblessed, I brake it foote or arme, / Or the woman herself in some wyse I dydde harme."³² Furthermore, all the variations on her story involve some sort of explicit promise from God that prayers in her name will be answered positively, but the version from the manuscript Cotton Tiberius A.III is the most wide-ranging and explicit, particularly in emphasizing the importance of including her in books:

...hear my prayer that whoever writes out my passion or hears it read may from that time have his sins blotted out; and if anyone puts a light in my church [bought] from what he has earned, may the sin for which he asks forgiveness not be counted against him. ... And where the book of my martyrdom is [kept] may there not be born a child who is blind or lame or dumb or deaf or afflicted by unclean spirit, but may peace be there and love and the spirit of truth.³³

Margaret additionally requests that "the person who makes a book of my martyrdom ... may have remission of all his sins."³⁴ These itemized lists of veneration and benefits in the saint's prayers can be seen as indicative of the concerns of the community surrounding the saint's cult, and Margaret's power over rebirth and salvation is at least as central to this list as her protection of infants and women in childbirth. As in the images of emergence in the Luttrell Psalter, with their duality of meaning, Margaret's joint powers—over birth and rebirth—are often conflated. While Saint Margaret later acquired her role as protector of mothers during birth, initially her task at such a time was to protect the child from demonic

³² Ibid., 29.

³³ Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 133.

³⁴ Larson, "The Role of Patronage and Audience," 30.

possession, something more akin to her assistance of souls in peril than to her physical aid in childbirth.³⁵ As Larson points out, this links her to Christ, making her story, like that of Jonah, a mirror of his resurrection.³⁶ Margaret's consumption by the dragon is a kind of descensus,³⁷ Christ's descent into and triumph over Hell and its demons, in which Hell is often depicted as a dragon or Leviathan.³⁸

Though Margaret's birth oratory and imagery is often strongly linked to her equally powerful rebirth rhetoric, the two are separated by the constant presence of death in the latter. The prayer already recorded—and all other versions of it—explicitly promises salvation and spiritual rebirth to those who honor Margaret in almost any way, be it praying to her, building a church in her name, or—most significantly for this study—including her in a written manuscript. Furthermore, in many versions of St. Margaret's tale, this prayer to God and the Holy Spirit's response take up an inordinate portion of the text, clearly revealing the intended take-away message: believe in St. Margaret and you will be saved. In the Old English Martyrology, for instance, though she has the longest entry of any save the Ascension, almost all of her entry is dedicated to these promises of aid.³⁹ The Luttrell Psalter is not a life of Saint Margaret—it is a larger manuscript with a vast range of contents to deal with the many kinds of spiritual danger its patron might have encountered—but the inclusion

³⁵ Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 133.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Interestingly enough, in modern medical terminology, “descensus” refers to the slipping or falling out of place of an organ, most often referring to a prolapsed uterus. The images from the Luttrell Psalter that this description brings to mind are many, and the consequent association of the word with birth and fertility—or the lack thereof—is also interesting.

³⁸ Larson, “The Role of Patronage and Audience,” 26.

³⁹ Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 51.

of imagery referencing her may have been intended to act as a kind of dedication, with the hope of receiving her blessings.

Finally, Margaret is a decidedly military saint. Though not a soldier saint per se, her shining moments are in her physical defeat of evil, including her gristly destruction of the demon in the cell. The virginal Margaret describes herself as *Miles Christi*, or a Soldier of Christ, and throughout her story, her declarations carry the theme of defeating the world or the devil. When dying at last, she exclaims: “I have defeated the world.”⁴⁰ Indeed, in the manuscript itself, where Margaret is openly depicted on the bottom of folio 37r, the text is a portion of Psalm 18, which in the translated Vulgate reads:

37 Thou hast enlarged my steps under me;
and my feet are not weakened.
38 I will pursue after my enemies, and overtake them:
and I will not turn again till they are consumed.
39 I will break them, and they shall not be able to stand:
they shall fall under my feet.
40 And thou hast girded me with strength unto battle;
and hast subdued under me them that rose up against me.
41 And thou hast made my enemies turn their back upon me,
and hast destroyed them that hated me.⁴¹

The image of St. Margaret is here directly paired with a war-like passage from the Psalms, focusing on the pursuit and destruction of enemies, and on readiness for battle in the name of the Lord. This pairing clearly highlights Margaret’s importance in the manuscript as a fighter or warrior. The use or interpretation of a psalter as a martial object of spiritual defense was not unprecedented; Kathleen Openshaw has demonstrated that the psalms were

⁴⁰ Ibid., 28-29.

⁴¹ Ps. 17:37-41 (LVB)

often interpreted as spiritual armor.⁴² Saint Margaret's presence in the Luttrell Psalter would have fit into a program of psalter as fortification. Sir Geoffrey, who also chose to depict himself as a Soldier of Christ (Fig. 24), may have felt more strongly attached to this soldierly saint of birth and rebirth because of her militant aspects.

Saint Margaret's likely appeal to Geoffrey begs the question: why not tell Margaret's story directly in his manuscript? Saint Margaret does appear in the Luttrell Psalter, but only once at the bottom of a page, and she is depicted not emerging from the dragon but on top of it. The other visual references to Margaret, which I will discuss in the next chapter, are predominantly the monsters of bodily emergence. The likely answer appears to be that, unlike the manuscripts that feature Saint Margaret's entire vita, the Luttrell Psalter is not a manuscript created for a woman preparing for childbirth, or for a woman at all, but for a man one generation removed from the issue at hand. Though Saint Margaret's popularity among the English laity was a factor regardless of gender, her most prominent patrons were predominantly women. Additionally, the clergy appear to have disapproved of the dragon emergence scene more forcibly than they looked askance at Margaret herself. Depicting Margaret safely on top of—and clearly not emerging from or inside—the dragon and resorting to images that suggest her emergence scene rather than blatantly express it may have been Geoffrey Luttrell's best compromise between societal demands and his own needs.

Geoffrey Luttrell, a man with deep concerns for his earthly family's continuance and his soul's salvation, sought in his magnificently illuminated psalter to create a work that would ensure success in both of these vital endeavors. Though Jonah, a perennial figure of resurrection and salvation, would have provided a suitable focus, St. Margaret of Antioch

⁴² Kathleen Openshaw, "Weapons in the Daily Battle: Images of the Conquest of Evil in the Early Medieval Psalter," *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 1 (1993): 17-38.

stands out as a perfect choice for the relatively new lord. With her militant aspect, remarkable powers of intercession and salvation, and promise of aid in childbirth, Margaret was evidently a potent enough figure to lead Geoffrey to include not only her image, but countless images referencing her miraculous emergence—and, in doing so, to fly in the face of clerical disapproval.

CHAPTER II

SERPENTS AND SNAKE-MAIDENS

There is another symbol, repeated throughout the manuscript, that is tied to both fertility and spiritual rebirth—and, in the myths and legends of the British Isles, to Saint Margaret of Antioch. The snake or serpent appears in the Luttrell Psalter, often as if it were an addendum to another, larger image, a visual asterisk. In images such as those on folios 36 and 23 recto, serpents, coiled or elongated, with snake or human heads, share page space with other images of rebirth (Fig. 25 and 26). On these pages, a Margaretene image—my own term for images suggesting Saint Margaret—of bodily emergence and a swaddled infant/soul occupy the nearby space, but on others the snake appears alone, as on folio 19 verso (Fig. 27). These mysterious serpents, connected as they are to rejuvenation through the shedding of skin, are further signs within the manuscript of Geoffrey Luttrell's interest in rebirth, and potentially another link to Saint Margaret.

It is easy, particularly from a modern standpoint, to read any serpent in a Christian context as a symbol of evil, temptation, or the devil, but this is not necessarily their dominant message. The history of serpents as positive symbols is long, too long for an adequate treatment in this paper, but it is worthwhile to note that one of the most powerful associations of snakes has been with healing and fertility, most famously in the cult of Asklepios.⁴³ More

⁴³ James H. Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Christianized*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 36-37.

importantly for this paper, the snake as healer—or as a symbol of everlasting life—is a motif that appears in the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments. The clearest example of this in the Old Testament is in Numbers 21:8-9, which tells the story of Moses and the brass serpent. In this story, Moses commands a snake to be made out of brass (or, in some translations, copper) and placed on a staff, and tells the Israelites that anyone who is bitten by a serpent need only look on the raised image of the snake to be healed. In the words of Charlesworth, the serpent in this story is the “sign of God’s power to save”—a power deeply important to Geoffrey Luttrell, with his 20 chaplains and £20 of candles.⁴⁴

Moses and the serpent reappear in the New Testament, specifically in the Gospel of John, but also in the writings of early church fathers, who link the serpent not only with rebirth and rejuvenation, but also with Christ himself.⁴⁵ The Fourth Evangelist writes:

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,
so must the Son of man be lifted up:
15 That whosoever believeth in him, may not perish;
but may have life everlasting.
16 For God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son;
that whosoever believeth in him, may not perish,
but may have life everlasting.⁴⁶

There has been some argument on the intended meaning of this passage, largely centering around a disinclination to link Christ with the serpent except in the most limited fashion possible. A closer look at both the passage itself and writings on the passage by later

⁴⁴ Ibid., 381.

⁴⁵ In the Book of Isaiah, a prophesy about the “One-who-was-to-come” (that is, Christ) reads: “Rejoice not, all you of Philistia, Because the rod that struck you is broken; For out of the serpent’s root shall come forth a pit viper, And his offspring shall be a flying serpent.” Charlesworth addresses this predominantly for its image of Christ as a serpent, but it is also interesting to note that Christ is described as descended from serpents. The use of the word “root,” in particular, brings to mind the Tree of Jesse again, and adds suggestions of fertility and familiar continuity or inheritance to the Christian serpent image.

⁴⁶ John 3:14-16 (Latin Vulgate Bible).

Christian thinkers reveals the clear parallel intended between Christ on the cross and the serpent on the staff.⁴⁷ Saint Augustine, clearly playing off the Evangelist's words, wrote: "Just as those who looked on that serpent perished not by the serpent's bites, so they who look in faith on Christ's death are healed from the bites of sin."⁴⁸ Similarly, John Chrysostom, in his thirty-seventh homily on the Fourth Gospel, wrote:

In the former, the uplifted serpent healed the bites of serpents;
in the latter, the crucified Jesus healed the wounds inflicted by
the spiritual dragon.
In the former, he who looked with these eyes of earth was
healed;
in the latter, he who gazes with the eyes of his mind lays aside all
his sins."⁴⁹

Two strong associations are being made here. First, there is the correlation of Christ and the serpent, rendered both through the visual symmetry of the figure on an upraised structure and through the concept of rebirth and rejuvenation.⁵⁰ Serpents shed their skins and are therefore seen as reborn, immortal; Christ, of course, sheds his earthly body and attains eternal life in heaven. The anonymous author of the *Physiologus* homes in on this parallel when he filters a classical-era snake story through the New Testament, writing that "it is recorded that when the serpent grows old, its eyes become dim and, wanting to renew itself, it fasts for forty days and nights, its skin becomes loosened, and it finds a narrow crack in a rock through which to crawl to help it remove its skin."⁵¹ The forty-day fast is an explicit

⁴⁷ Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent*, 362.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 415.

⁵⁰ The Ophites went so far as to worship the serpent as Christ, or Christ in his serpent form, though they were considered heretical by later Christians. For more on the Ophites, see Charlesworth.

⁵¹ Sally Tomlinson, "Demons, Druids, and Brigands on Irish High Crosses: Rethinking the Images Identified as The Temptation of Saint Anthony" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007), 263.

link to the life of Christ, and the language of the passage is also reminiscent of the letter of Paul to the Colossians (3:9), in which he instructs them to “Put off your old nature...and put on the new nature created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”⁵²

Through this link, the serpent once again comes to symbolize Christ; in particular, the serpent’s skin-shedding serves as an example for those wishing to achieve rebirth and eternal life.

The second association made is that between the act of gazing upon the serpent—as a symbol for Christ—and cleansing of the soul, laying aside or being healed from the bites of sin, as Saint Augustine and John Chrysostom would have it. This Christ-as-snake imagery provides a framework in which Geoffrey Luttrell could have sought his own salvation by casting his eyes upon the snake and emulating the shedding of skin—eliminating sins and revealing a new pure life beneath. This skin-shedding motif is one of the sub-categories of image collected under the term “bodily emergence imagery,” and one of the most common visual themes in the margin imagery of the Luttrell Psalter. Creatures such as those on folio 183 recto and folio 150 verso (Fig. 28 & 29) are excellent examples of this pattern. Though not serpents themselves, the monsters echo such ophidian imagery through the repeated sloughing of their skin, which opens and peels back from their limbs in layer after layer. Other creatures peel back their own skin, as in the two-headed beast at the bottom of folio 195 recto (Fig. 30). With its two elongated necks terminating in small heads, the being is much more visually reminiscent of a snake than some of the other skin-shedding imagery in the Psalter. The colors of the layers of skin also seem to be designed to emphasize the idea of shed skin—the old outer skin is a pale, yellowish tan, much like the ghostly shade of an

⁵² Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent*, 264.

actual cast-off hide. Its inner redness suggests the slick, bloody inner side of the flesh, while the newly revealed and rejuvenated body beneath is a deep, vibrant blue, dramatically newer, fresher, and even smoother than the old skin it is replacing. As Margaret's rebirth from the dragon is echoed in the bodily emergence imagery of the Luttrell Psalter, so Christ's rebirth and promise of salvation are echoed in the imagery of the serpent and the snake's shed skin.

It is clear that there is a precedent within Christian tradition for an understanding of the serpent as a symbol of rebirth, particularly the rebirth of Christ and his offer of salvation to those who gaze upon him "with the eyes of his mind," as John Chrysostom put it. But the Luttrell Psalter was a product of its time and culture, and as such would have drawn not only on Christian doctrine, but also on local pre-Christian and folkloric traditions. What is the history of snake imagery in the British Isles, where the Luttrell Psalter was created? Snakes certainly appear in British pre-Christian art with great frequency. Cernunnos, the famous antlered god of Celtic mythology, was customarily depicted holding serpents, which were seen as guardian figures.⁵³ Serpents with spiral-shaped ram's horns were one of the most frequently depicted creatures in Celtic art, as were more "naturalistic" snakes, and serpent-like creatures appear on Irish high crosses, such as the Moone Cross.⁵⁴ Most importantly for the rebirth and salvation model of understanding the images in the Luttrell Psalter, so-called "snake-maiden transformation narratives" were popular in the folklore of Ireland and Great Britain.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., 36-37.

⁵⁴ Tomlinson, 22, 50.

⁵⁵ Karen Smith, "Snake-maiden Transformation Narratives in Hagiography and Folklore," *Fabula* 43 (2002): 252.

What makes the snake-maiden transformation legends so vital is that these stories and the tale of Saint Margaret of Antioch appear to be cognate versions of a single type—that is, they developed from the same source rather than arising independently.⁵⁶ Snake-maiden transformation tales exhibit a fair amount of variation from one to another, but the basic structure is the same: a young, aristocratic maiden is cursed and transformed into a snake, then banished in this form to a distant location, where she guards a treasure and will not give it up unless she is kissed three times by a chaste and pure boy. In some cases her entire body becomes that of a serpent, but in others only her bottom half transforms, and the top half of her body remains that of a woman.⁵⁷ One of the most famous snake-maiden stories is “The Laidley Worm of Spindleston Heugh,” a tale from England in which the main character, notably, is named Margaret.⁵⁸

The visual parallels of such stories with that of Saint Margaret are clear, the maiden-to-serpent-and-back shape-shifting mirrored in Saint Margaret’s ability to go into and then out of the body of the dragon.⁵⁹ The tales also share certain basic elements that solidify their association, both for our understanding today and in the minds of those who lived with the legends on a daily basis, between Saint Margaret and the snake-maidens of popular folktales. As Smith writes, the core of each story is the same: “high-born women, seeking to be set

⁵⁶ Ibid., 259.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 253.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 258-9. Another British Isles story containing parallels to the life of Margaret of Antioch is the story of Simon and Margaret, in which Margaret, the heroine, must once again save herself, “throwing down” a monster with the same language used in Saint Margaret’s tale and eventually winning her bridegroom.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 259. The association between dragon and serpent, though certainly influenced by the creatures’ appearances, is based on more than visual similarity: the serpent in Revelation 12 is equated with both the dragon and the Devil.

free, who turn into serpents.”⁶⁰ The details of each story also play out in neatly linked parallels. In the snake-maiden tales, a maiden is in need of rescuing; in the life of Saint Margaret, the maiden is imprisoned and being forced to marry against her will. In both stories, there is a confrontation between purity and a snake or dragon, and the maiden is rescued as a result of this confrontation. This rescue is often enacted, in the snake-maiden stories, by a hero with a hazel wand; in the life of Margaret of Antioch, Saint Margaret, acting as the hero, rescues herself with a wooden cross. The most dramatic difference is at the end; where the snake-maiden is rescued and rewarded with earthly marriage, Margaret cannot marry herself. Her salvation is her martyrdom, which, in turn, leads her to her own marriage—the union with Christ that she had hoped for throughout her life.

This tie between Saint Margaret and the snake-maidens of English legend is yet another connection between the snakes of the Luttrell Psalter and the concept of spiritual rebirth. Like most of the figures in the Psalter—and, indeed, in the margins of most medieval manuscripts—these snakes are consequently multivalent, standing in both for Christ and for the dragon that lies at the crux of Saint Margaret’s story. The serpent imagery, in turn, is only one part of the larger body of birth and rebirth symbolism in the manuscript. The ways in which the manuscript seeks to address Geoffrey Luttrell’s concerns through the medium of Saint Margaret of Antioch have been discussed, then; what remains is the analysis of the images in the manuscript itself, and the ways in which they evoke Saint Margaret.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 252.

CHAPTER III

SAINT MARGARET OF ANTIOCH IN THE LUTTRELL PSALTER

As covered in Chapter I, by even the earliest years of the 14th century, the iconography of Saint Margaret of Antioch in the Western church had been clearly established. Though she occasionally appears in her militant guise, struggling with the demon sent after her defeat of the dragon, this motif was predominantly used in the Eastern Orthodox Church. In England and in Western Europe as a whole, however, the most common image of Saint Margaret was of her emergence from the dragon, and this scene was depicted on coffers, amulets, and many other objects both religious and secular. In order to best detect the imagery of Saint Margaret in the monstrous imagery of the Luttrell Psalter, it is necessary to study previous and contemporary images of Margaret in illuminated manuscripts.

When depicted in manuscripts, Margaret is, again, most often portrayed emerging from the body of the dragon, as in these 13th century examples (Fig. 31, 32, & 33). These three selections are only a few of many similar images of St. Margaret in Gothic manuscripts, and they best display the standard traits of her appearance and iconography. In each image, Margaret bursts forth from the body of the dragon, which gapes in a wide opening, bloodless and seemingly unharmed by her passage, more like a mouth or vulva than a wound. Additionally, the fabric of Margaret's robe trails or extends out of the dragon's mouth in each case, creating an enlarged second tongue or mouth lining which disappears into the dragon's

head, emphasizing her position in “the belly of the beast.” Finally, the colors of the dragon and saint pairings are fairly uniform, each scene depicted mostly in contrasting blue and orange. The creators of the Luttrell Psalter, working in the early 14th century, would likely have been familiar with these earlier images of Margaret, given their previously discussed popularity.

Margaret herself is depicted in the Luttrell Psalter, though in a slightly different fashion. She appears on the bottom of folio 37 recto (Fig. 34), complete with her subdued dragon, whose winged, armless body perfectly mimics so many of the other creatures in the manuscript, and aligns itself with contemporary and previous depictions of her climactic scene. Margaret’s “official” image in the Psalter is a more formal depiction of her than such emergence images, emphasizing her dignity and her identity as a soldier of Christ, defeating evil. Rather than bursting out of the dragon with her cloak trailing in its mouth, she stands astride it, her cross impaling the monster’s head. Where her official portrait tends toward formality, however, other creatures and scenes throughout the manuscript mimic and echo the classic iconography of her rebirth from the dragon. On folio 36 recto the trailing fabric motif can be seen repeated, with the dangling folds of a purple cloak emerging from the stuffed mouth of a small, dragon-like beast (Fig. 25). Countless other creatures in the Psalter mimic this effect, such as a double-bodied monster with the same gaping, surprised eyes (Fig. 35). Though the fabric is not depicted as literally, the effect of folds emerging from the mouth is still clear, as is the appearance of a winged and armless dragon-like body. This particular monster, like many others in the Psalter, may also draw on descriptions of Margaret’s adversary as being “a most terrifying dragon of many different colors,” and

“spotted like a snake.”⁶¹ This creature, and others like it, bear a striking resemblance to the dragon of Margaret’s legend.

The fabric-folds motif was strongly associated enough with images of Saint Margaret that it continued, seemingly without fail, well past the 13th and 14th centuries. Until the end of the 15th century, Margaret appears again and again in the same stylized scene, and each time her garments, whether blue, orange, or tan, draw an unseen line through the dragon’s body as they trail from her body to its open mouth (Figs. 36, 37, & 38). The creatures in the Luttrell Psalter that carry on and reinforce this tradition are just a few samples of a much larger motif in the manuscript, one which links more subtly to Saint Margaret’s legend than her own image—the theme of emergence and bodily revelation. Like Margaret emerging from the dragons in the 13th century psalters, with their bodies gaping open to reveal another, foreign being, the Luttrell Psalter’s monsters are constantly disgorging other creatures, or even other, alien parts of themselves (Figs. 39 & 40). Some appear to either consume or spit out inner beings and creatures, or even seem to consume and disgorge at the same time. Others reveal seemingly endless inner layers, peeling away their skins like cloaks in a constant play of emergence and revelation (Figs. 28 & 29). Even more of the Psalter’s images play more directly with Margaret’s myth; on three separate pages, armless, winged dragons in blue and orange swallow or attempt to swallow human figures, with the human figures at times struggling to emerge again, like Margaret or her cloak, some of them repetitions of the psalter’s naked souls (Figs. 41, 42 & 43). In the largest of them, on folio 42 recto, the man does, in fact, appear to be successfully fighting his way out of the dragon, achieving the patron, Geoffrey Luttrell’s, greatest hope—rebirth from the beast of this sinful

⁶¹ Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 123-163.

world; salvation. Other figures, (Fig. 44) with serpentine dragon bodies, human torsos, and cloaks or robes covering the join between their forms, seem to prefigure later variations on the St. Margaret image, such as a Dutch 15th century version (Fig. 45), in which the placement of the fabric disguises the join and makes the two appear to be one hybrid creature.

Though the constant disguising of the join with the creature's clothing in these hybrid monsters makes for an intriguing level of uncertainty when it comes to determining the number or unity of beings depicted, these figures do bear a strong resemblance to the simpler hybrids common throughout the manuscripts of the Middle Ages. The fact that the hybrid-like image of Saint Margaret was created after the illustrations of the Luttrell Psalter also makes it difficult to argue that the hybrid was a type that would have readily brought Margaret of Antioch to mind. Even so, the existence of such a hybridized miniature of Saint Margaret and the dragon demonstrates the potential for her imagery to take the form of an animal-human hybrid. Some of the Psalter's hybrid figures are more explicitly woman-serpent hybrids, such as folio 35 recto (Fig. 46). With their human torsos and snake or dragon lower bodies, these hybrids bring to mind the snake-maidens of legend, acting in yet another way as references, both to the serpentine imagery of rebirth and to Saint Margaret. Most importantly, the creatures from the Psalter that do exhibit bodily emergence imagery—and there are many, even beyond those depicted here—do so from within a clear tradition of bodily emergence imagery like that of Saint Margaret's, making her a recurring theme throughout the work.

The hybrid creature and bodily emergence motifs also seem, at times, to suggest Jonah in addition to St. Margaret. Obviously much more familiar to us today, Jonah's

connections to rebirth were as strong as Margaret's, though without the added bonuses of worldly birth or a militant aspect. The fish or whale in Jonah's story is described by later poets and authors as an "emblem of Hell," with the monster itself becoming the Devil and its jaws becoming the Hellmouth.⁶² Rather like Margaret's admittedly much briefer experience, Jonah's time in the whale is equated with Christ's time in Hell preparing for the Resurrection; likewise, his ejection "symbolizes and prefigures the resurrection."⁶³ Imagery dedicated to Jonah, such as a hybrid fish-man on folio 93 recto (Fig. 47), is harder to come across in the Luttrell Psalter. Perhaps this is because, where Jonah's tale is described as relevant primarily to Christ's resurrection, Margaret's legend is construed as both a variation on the resurrection and a model on which to base one's personal struggle for rebirth. Though Jonah was a suitable symbol through which to contemplate the miracle of Christ's resurrection, an individual seeking an archetype for their own salvation would be more able to find it in Margaret of Antioch.

⁶² Malcolm Andrew, "Jonah and Christ in 'Patience,'" *Modern Philology* 70, no. 3 (1973): 232.

⁶³ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The visual inheritance of Christian and pre-Christian folkloric cultures mingles freely in the art of the British Isles, and this is rarely so clear as in the hybrid and “bodily emergent” monsters in the margins of the Luttrell Psalter. Earlier understandings of the margins of the Psalter, while productive in their own right, have focused predominantly on the scenes of daily life, and have considered any other images almost entirely from the viewpoint of the Christian tradition. The exclusion of the Psalter’s monstrous hybrids is clearly problematic, even after a fairly cursory examination of the manuscript, as they constitute the vast majority of the volume’s visual material—almost every page has some sort of unnatural creature on it, and most are dominated by them. Studying these beings through the lens of medieval Christianity is emphatically both appropriate and valuable, but an exclusion of pagan and non-Christian influences can leave many aspects of the monsters unstudied, and can result in other traits being perceived as one-dimensional. In the Luttrell Psalter, the monsters of bodily emergence are the primary point of cultural fusion, blending Christian imagery of Saint Margaret and Christ-as-serpent with folkloric tales of snake maidens.

This diverse imagery of monsters and serpents hinges on the unifying concepts of birth and rebirth, which guided Geoffrey Luttrell’s decisions as the highly-involved patron of the Psalter. Concerned with the lack of an heir to his only son, Andrew, and with the state of his immortal soul, Sir Geoffrey and his artists infused his manuscript with images of birth and resurrection. Within the Christian context, these images ranged from scenes of Christ’s

life to images of judgment and damnation, even including references to Geoffrey himself, both in the role of the dead man and in the role of Christ. Most notably, these images included references to Saint Margaret of Antioch, the virgin martyr saint whose promises of aid in childbirth and in spiritual rebirth matched Sir Geoffrey's needs so well. Though Margaret is overtly depicted at one point in the manuscript, the majority of her appearances are suggested by the bodily emergence imagery of the many convoluted monsters in the margins. Echoing the traits common to the formulaic depictions of her in medieval England, these creatures embed Saint Margaret deeply into the Luttrell Psalter, transforming it into a prayer for her assistance.

Saint Margaret's "official" portrait in the manuscript, her appearance in full regalia, holding a crozier and standing atop the dragon, is a small and thoroughly orthodox image. Not only is this picture of her apparently free of pagan overtones, it avoids the heterodox yet popular emblematic image of Margaret, the scene in which she bursts forth from the body of the dragon. This scene, rendered indirectly in so many of the Psalter's monsters, was the fulcrum of a confusing artistic struggle from the 13th through the 15th centuries. The laity, driven largely by laywomen who had come to rely on Margaret and her birth-like imagery to aid them in labor, insisted on and provided patronage for images of the crucial emergence scene. Members of the clergy, on the other hand, attempted to popularize a version of the story in which Margaret was never swallowed by the dragon, but merely defeated it from the outside. Geoffrey Luttrell would have found himself uncomfortably in between forces and motivations. Seeking the assistance of Saint Margaret on issues of birth and rebirth but not himself in her primary patron population—that of women facing or hoping for safe

childbirth—he formally included her in a style deemed appropriate by the clergy, while invoking her informally but repeatedly in the monsters in the margins.

Geoffrey Luttrell's apparent willingness to graze outside the boundaries delimited by the church took shape again in the serpent imagery of the Luttrell Psalter—not the serpent as a symbol of evil, but as a symbol of rebirth, and as another link back to Saint Margaret. The snakes and snake-bodied monsters that populate the margins, along with the monsters that shed and peel their skin like snakes, represent an intricate, multi-layered message that melds Christian and folkloric traditions.

The association of Christ with the serpent and consequent connection between serpents and rebirth is itself derived from pre-Christian beliefs. Like Geoffrey Luttrell's depiction of himself in a new Last Supper or buried in a tomb that matches Christ's, the serpents of the Psalter aid in Geoffrey's attempt to mimic Christ's resurrection. More explicitly folkloric and magical is the link to the snake-maiden tales of Germany and the British Isles, which evoke Saint Margaret and, more specifically, her resurrection through her symbolic entrance and escape from the jaws of Hell. The snake-maiden and serpent-Christ merge in the Luttrell Psalter, with each other—through images of snakes and skin-shedding—and with the scenes of bodily emergence that allude to Saint Margaret of Antioch and her snake-like dragon.

In the world of Geoffrey Luttrell, in which the torments of damnation and risks of childbirth were concrete realities, the melding of the holy and the profane comes to seem expected rather than shocking. Unable—or unwilling—to openly include images of a scene that was considered by the church to be apocryphal at best, Geoffrey Luttrell chose instead to draw on popular folklore and hagiographic iconography. In the Luttrell Psalter, with its

close-knit associations between text and image, scenes of bodily emergence took on a new meaning, calling on Saint Margaret of Antioch and representing the patron's hopes for physical birth and spiritual rebirth.

FIGURES



Figure 1, “Two men fighting with jars, from the Luttrell Psalter,” from the British Library’s “Sacred Texts.”



Figure 2, Two creatures fighting with crockery, fol. 153r, in the Luttrell Psalter, British Library, Add. MS 42130.

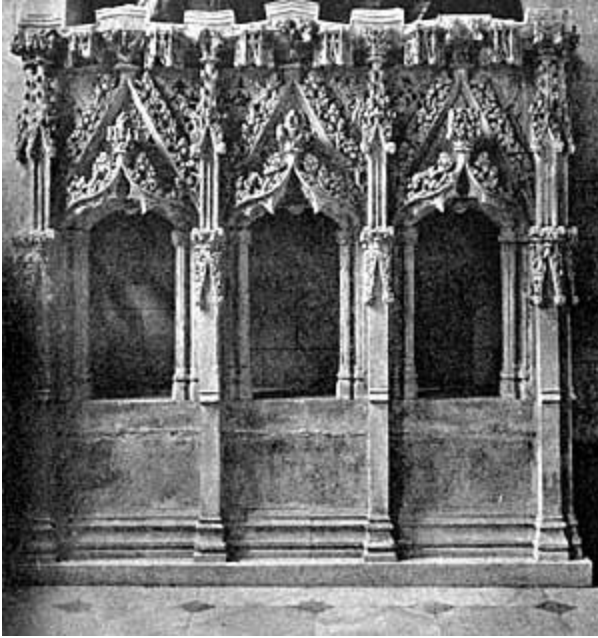


Figure 3, Easter Sepulchre, Irnham, Lincolnshire.



Figure 4, The Resurrection, fol. 95v, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 5, Naked soul over the Hellmouth, fol. 157v, in the Luttrell Psalter.

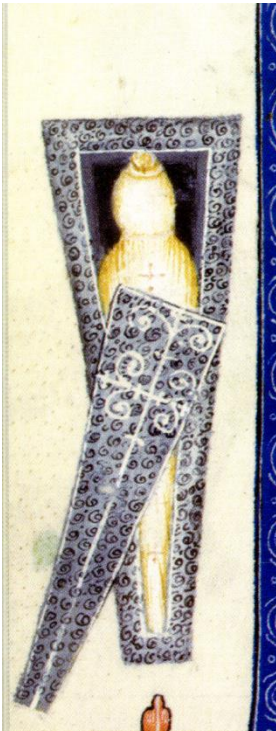


Figure 6, Knight's tomb, fol. 157v, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 7, Virgin's entombment, fol. 99v, from the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 8, Christ's entombment, fol. 95r, from the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 9, The Last Supper, Fol. 90v, the Luttrell Psalter.

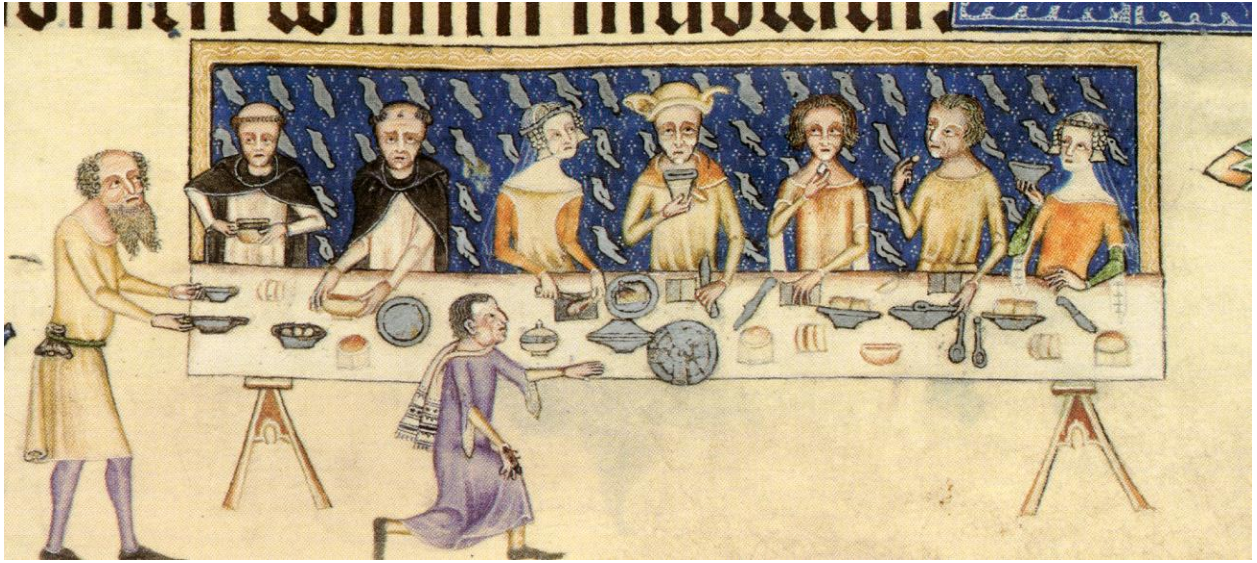


Figure 10, Portrait of Geoffrey Luttrell at a feast, fol. 208r, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 11, Dormition of the Virgin, fol. 98v, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 12, Death of the Virgin, c. 1321, fresco, Church of the Dormition, Gracanica, Manastir, Kosova, Serbia.



Figure 13, The Dormition of the Virgin, 1401-1405, tempera on panel, Italian.



Figure 14, The Nativity, fol. 86v, from the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 15, Fol. 31v, Luttrell Psalter.

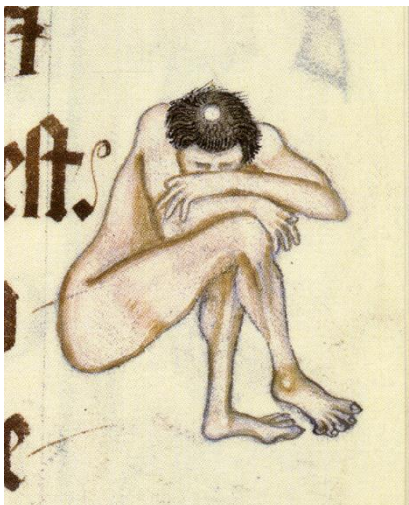


Figure 16, Fol. 54r, Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 17, Fol. 1r, Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 18, Infant in swaddling cloth, fol. 23r, Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 19, Fol. 149v, from the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 20, Fol. 25r, from the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 21, Tree of Jesse, MS. Rawl. G. 185, Bodleian Library, English, 1348-1374.



Figure 22, Metal amulet holder, silver, 14th century, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 23, Embossed leather coffret featuring Saint Margaret (circled in blue) and hybrid monsters, 14th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 24, Portrait of Geoffrey Luttrell as Miles Christi, fol. 134v, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 25, Fol. 36r, in the Luttrell Psalter.

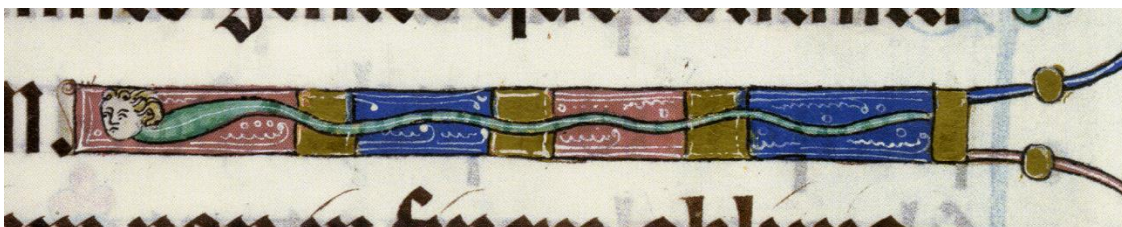


Figure 26, Fol. 23r, from the Luttrell Psalter.

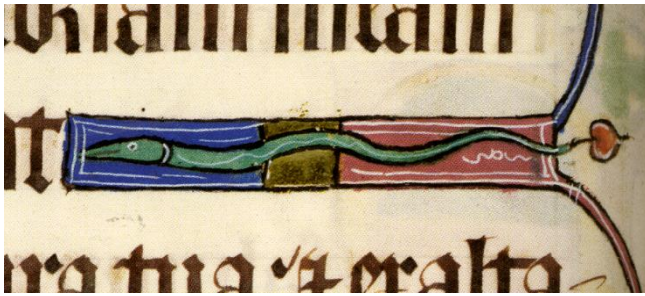


Figure 27, Fol. 19v, from the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 28, Fol. 183r, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 29, Fol. 150v, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 30, Fol. 195r, from the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 31, St. Margaret, MS. Auct. D. 4. 2, Bodleian Library, Flemish, 13th c.



Figure 32, St. Margaret, MS. Douce 118, Bodleian Library, French, 13th c.



Figure 33, St. Margaret, MS. Douce 118, Bodleian Library, French, 13th c.



Figure 34, St. Margaret, fol. 37r, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 35, Fol. 195v, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 36, St. Margaret, fol. 34v, MS. Liturg. 401, Bodleian Library, English and Flemish, 15th c.



Figure 37, St. Margaret, fol. 104r, MS. Douce 268, Bodleian Library, French, 15th c.



Figure 38, fol. 149v, MS. Rawl. liturg. e. 12, Bodleian Library, French, 15th c.



Figure 39, Fol. 188v, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 40, Fol. 146v, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 41, Fol. 52v, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 42, Fol. 52v, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 43, Fol. 42r, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 44, Fol. 82r, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 45, Fol. 169v Miniature, St. Margaret, MS. Ashmole 1291, Bodleian Library, Dutch, 15th c.



Figure 46, Fol. 35r, in the Luttrell Psalter.



Figure 47, Fol. 93r, in the Luttrell Psalter.

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