

HISTORY IN THE COMIC MODE

{ MEDIEVAL COMMUNITIES AND THE MATTER OF PERSON }

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LOW COUNTRY ASCETICS
AND ORIENTAL LUXURY

JACQUES DE VITRY, MARIE OF OIGNIES,
AND THE TREASURES OF OIGNIES

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AS HISTORIANS we turn to those fragments of the past that speak to our own experience and concerns. I first became interested in the thirteenth-century mystic and ascetic Marie of Oignies, and in the writings of her biographer Jacques de Vitry, because I wanted to know more about the lived experiences and constructed genders of medieval women. Since 9/11/01, however, my scholarly priorities have been transformed; I wish to explore not only gender relations but also relations between the predominantly Christian West and the predominantly non-Christian East. And because propagandists both then and now justify armed conflict by highlighting differences, I seek those places where apparent opposites turn out to be quite similar, where hidden desires blur the boundaries separating “us” from “them.” And so I turn again to Marie of Oignies and Jacques de Vitry in an effort to explore a place in which East met West: the space that contained the sepulcher of Marie of Oignies.



Sometime in the last decade of the twelfth century Giles, a chaplain at the castle of Walcourt, which was located in the Ardennes region of what is now southern Belgium, decided to leave his position as a secular priest in order to lead a more formal religious life, following the rule of St. Augustine. Accompanied by his mother and three natal brothers, Giles left Walcourt, which was about fifteen miles southwest of the town of Namur, and settled in a rural area on the Sambre River, about ten miles west of Namur.¹ After

Giles and his brothers had been joined by several other men, their community of regular canons, which came to be known as St. Nicolas of Oignies, chose Giles as its prior. The women in Giles' entourage settled alongside the men's community, in huts between the men's priory and the Sambre River.²

Despite the fact that it remained, throughout its history, an extremely modest priory of between twelve and twenty men, Oignies came to possess two of the medieval southern Low Countries' greatest claims to fame: the female mystic and ascetic Marie of Oignies, and the artistic productions of Giles' brother and fellow canon, the goldsmith Hugh of Oignies.³ Marie's ascetic and mystical practices became both a model of and a model for the semireligious women of Northern Europe who came to be known as beguines. Hugh's artistic productions have come to be recognized as some of the most important exemplars of medieval Gothic metalwork, and largely because of Hugh's work, the treasures of Oignies are listed in guidebooks as one of "twenty-seven things not to miss" in Belgium.⁴

Most medieval historians know something about Marie of Oignies, and most medieval art historians know something about the works of Hugh of Oignies. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the extreme asceticism of the one and the sumptuous luxury of the other were deeply intertwined, we tend to study them as separate fragments embedded within the historiographies of different disciplines. Similarly, those of us who are interested in Western Christian preaching and spirituality have mined only some of the fragments of the life and works of Marie's biographer Jacques de Vitry, leaving a large part of his life and works for historians of the Crusades.⁵

In this paper I attempt to dislodge these embedded fragments and to rearrange them, just as one rearranges fragments of colored glass by turning the wheel of a kaleidoscope, thereby creating a new design. I argue that through the metalworks of Hugh of Oignies, which were created to enhance the space in which Marie of Oignies' holy body was honored and memorialized, precious gemstones from the East were deliberately associated with Marie's holiness. The writings of Jacques de Vitry, the written traditions to which those writings belong, Jacques' gifts to Oignies, and his lifelong relationship with the priory provide important keys to understanding this meeting of East and West.

Marie of Oignies began her religious vocation sometime after 1191, when she convinced her new husband that they should pursue a religious life by working with lepers in the leprosarium of Willambroux.⁶ Over the next decade or so her charitable service, and, even more important, her personal self-denial, earned her an international reputation. At some point in the first decade of the thirteenth century Marie decided to leave both her husband and the lepers of Willambroux to pursue a more inward spiritual vocation

among the women living next to the priory of Oignies. Not long after that, Marie was joined at Oignies by Jacques de Vitry, a Parisian cleric whose personal devotion to her would insure both the fame of the woman and the material comfort of the community of men at Oignies.⁷

Marie's extreme self-denial, most especially her long periods of fasting, resulted in her death in 1213; but before she died she convinced Jacques de Vitry to become a priest and to pursue a career as a preacher.⁸ That career led him first to battle heresy in southern France, and then, between 1216 and 1226, to the bishopric of Acre in the Holy Land, where he both propagandized and participated in the fifth crusade. Ultimately his fame as a preacher earned him the honor of Cardinal Bishop of Tusculum.⁹ But Jacques' first loyalty remained Oignies: he joined its community of regular canons before Marie's death and he returned there sometime between 1226 and 1229 to consecrate the community's new church and to move Marie's body from the priory's cemetery to a sepulcher that was placed near one of the church's altars, where it became a center of pilgrimage.¹⁰ Finally, before his death in 1240 Jacques indicated that he wanted to be buried at Oignies, near Marie, and he endowed the community with 1,500 silver pounds, silk textiles from the Orient, his personal ecclesiastical ornaments, relics of saints, and a large number of books.¹¹ There is good reason to believe as well that Jacques was the source of the precious gemstones that became a part of the wealth of the community and were incorporated into the metalwork of Hugh of Oignies.¹²

Jacques bestowed gifts to Oignies because of his devotion to Marie. And those gifts provided both the occasion and the material means for the making of the "treasures of Oignies" by Hugh of Oignies and his workshop. Indeed, the ceremony of rededicating the church in 1226/1229, over which Jacques presided, seems to have provided the occasion for the "unveiling" of Hugh's artistic talent: none of his works are known to have been created before that date.¹³

The treasures of Oignies owe their claim to fame to Hugh's enormous talent, especially his skill with metal filigree, and his application of the techniques of niello and metal engraving to create images of elegantly draped human figures that have been favorably compared to the Gothic sketches of Villard de Honnecourt.¹⁴ Nevertheless, without Jacques de Vitry's devotion to and promotion of the extreme asceticism of Marie and the sanctity of her body there would be no such treasures. Jacques' writings about Marie, the Orient, and gemstones help to explain why the canons of Oignies drew upon luxurious works of precious metals and gems from the east in their efforts to honor and remember a woman whose extreme acts of personal poverty resulted in her saintly death.

Caroline Bynum has written about one reason Jacques de Vitry and his contemporaries associated ascetics like Marie with precious metals and gems: saintly ascetics were associated with the resurrected body, which was often described as being like precious gemstones and metals.¹⁵ I revisit Bynum's discussion here because these ideas about the resurrected body influenced Hugh of Oignies' work. However, I also argue that there were several other reasons why Jacques de Vitry, the canons of Oignies, and others who were responsible for promoting Marie's cult, such as her second hagiographer, Thomas of Cantimpré, thought that it was more than reasonable to honor and commemorate Marie with precious metals, gems, and treasures from the Orient. Those reasons had a lot to do with the way that Westerners thought about "the East."

In her book *The Resurrection of the Body*, Bynum has demonstrated that as early as the fourth century Christian theologians began to draw on the image of precious stones and metals to represent the change that would occur in the bodies of believers at the time of the final resurrection of the blessed at the end of time. Precious metals and gems worked well in the development of these metaphors because they were beautiful and they were not subject to corruption, decomposition, and change.¹⁶ Theologians argued, moreover, that the bodies of living and dead saints already demonstrated some of the characteristics of the resurrected body. Through their asceticism, saints overcame the need for food and sex—the life processes that are central to individual and collective survival precisely because mortal bodies are subject to decomposition, death, and change. After their deaths, moreover, the bodies of the saints demonstrated certain powers, and those powers, theologians asserted, pointed to the truth in their claims about bodily resurrection.¹⁷

In Jacques de Vitry's own time defenders of orthodoxy perceived that dualist heretics posed a vital threat to the Church's doctrines and authority. Those heretics had begun to challenge Catholic claims about the body. They denied the "real" presence of Christ's body and blood in the elements of the eucharist, they denied the power of the relics of saints, and they did not believe in bodily resurrection.¹⁸ Jacques constructed the *Life of Mary of Oignies* in such a way that her spirituality and miraculous powers served as living proof that the heretics were wrong in denying the spiritual importance of the human body. Marie was extremely devoted to the eucharist—in which the body of Christ was made present in the bread and wine of the mass—and she experienced visions demonstrating Christ's real presence in those elements.¹⁹ Similarly, she was devoted to saintly relics, and in her visions she could authenticate relics, even to the point of learning the name of a saint whose bones had hitherto remained anonymous.²⁰ Moreover, Marie's

asceticism—her extreme fasting, her tendency to go weeks at a time without eating anything but the eucharist—transformed her living body into a resurrection body. She became indifferent to cold and welcomed pain; and Jacques continually described her as a “precious pearl,” a “jewel,” and gold that had been purified in a furnace. After her death, moreover, he heard of someone who had a dream in which Marie’s body appeared “as if transformed into a precious stone.”²¹

Jacques himself wore a silver neck amulet containing the bones of one of Marie’s fingers. He claimed that the relic saved one of his pack mules from drowning, and Thomas of Cantimpré wrote that it delivered Jacques from danger at sea. Jacques later gave the relics and amulet to the man who would become Pope Gregory IX.²² After Marie was exhumed around 1226, another of her fingers was placed in a phylactery that was created by Hugh of Oignies and remained at Oignies until 1817 (see fig. 17.1).²³

Marie’s devotion to relics and the ways in which her own relic-body were treated point to new developments in the cult of relics that developed around the year 1200, and that found expression in the metalwork of Hugh of Oignies and his workshop. First, as Bynum and Michael Lauwers have argued, it was around this time that the fashion for dividing the bodies of saints—for separating their fingers, feet, teeth, hair, and skulls from the rest of their bodies, and then depositing those body parts either in churches or in personal and ecclesiastical jewelry—first took hold.²⁴ Two new kinds of reliquaries—body part reliquaries and jewelry reliquaries²⁵—grew out of this fashion, and we find both among the treasures of Oignies that were created by Hugh and other goldsmiths in the workshop of Oignies. Among the body part reliquaries were two “foot” reliquaries for the relics of the feet of Saint James Major and Saint Blaise.²⁶ Another reliquary, created by Hugh himself for a relic of the rib of Saint Peter that may have been given to the priory by Jacques de Vitry, consisted of a large crescent mounted on a central stem and surmounted by a cylinder of transparent rock crystal containing the relics (see fig. 17.2). The crescent shape was reminiscent of the body part that the cylinder contained.

Hugh and his workshop created six phylacteries—large pieces of ecclesiastical jewelry with small boxes designed to hold relics. One of those, made by Hugh himself with the assistance of his workshop, was the phylactery for Marie’s finger that was created soon after her body was exhumed around 1226 (see fig. 17.1).²⁷ Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century works of art, such as the paintings of Simone Martini and the Van Eyck brothers, give us a clear idea of how pieces of ecclesiastical jewelry resembling these phylacteries were worn by clerics during liturgical ceremonies.²⁸

The second new development in the cult of relics, which we find in the



FIGURE 17.1 Hugh of Oignies and his atelier. Phylactery for the finger of Marie of Oignies, between 1226 and 1230. Brussels, Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire. Gilded copper over wood core, colored glass, rock crystal, enameled copper.

The hinged enamel door opens to reveal the relics within. Around the border of the square surrounding the door are the words identifying the relics, "HIC EST IUNCTURA BEATE MARIE DE OIGNIES."

Caption descriptions adapted from: Robert Didier and Jacques Toussaint, "Trésor des Soeurs de Notre-Dame à Namur. Catalogue critique," in *Autour de Hugo d'Oignies*, Catalogue of exhibition directed by Robert Didier and Jacques Toussaint (Namur, 2003); Didier and Toussaint, "Oeuvres dispersées du Trésor d'Oignies," in *Autour de Hugo d'Oignies*; and Ferdinand Courtoy, "Le trésor du prieuré d'Oignies aux Soeurs de Notre-Dame à Namur et l'Oeuvre du Frère Hugo," *Bulletin de la Commission Royale des Monuments et des Sites* 3 (Brussels, 1952).

PHOTO COURTESY OF MUSÉES ROYAUX D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE, BRUSSELS.

devotion of Marie and the works of Hugh and his workshop, entailed what Hans Belting has called a "need to see," and what Suzannah Biernoff has called the desire for "ocular communion."²⁹ Marie's desire for eucharistic union was so intense, Jacques tells us, and her longing in its absence so great, that she would substitute visual communion for ingestion, begging, after mass had been performed, that she be allowed "to look for a long time



FIGURE 17.2 Hugh of Oignies. Reliquary for the rib of Saint Peter, 1238. Treasures of the Sisters of Notre-Dame of Namur. Gilded copper and silver, gemstones, rock crystal, niello.

The reliquary consists of a crescent mounted on a stand and surmounted by a transparent rock crystal cylinder lined with silk and held in place by four slender columns. The crescent shape, which evokes the shape of the relic, is decorated on this side with two nielloed plates, metal filigree, pearl, ruby, garnet, sapphire, topaz, and amethyst. The inscription on the nielloed plates reads, "IN HOC VASE HABETUR / COSTA PETRI APP."

PHOTO COURTESY OF IRPA-KIK. © IRPA-KIK.

into the empty chalice on the altar."³⁰ One of Marie's visions was sparked by her practice of gazing upon the consecrated host, which was displayed in a pyx. Another took place when she gazed upon the relics of the True Cross. Marie claimed that the host in the pyx had a light brighter than the sun and that the relics of the True Cross shone with "heavenly light."³¹

All of the reliquaries from Hugh of Oignies' workshop responded to this new practice of intense visual devotion, which placed a premium on seeing the object of devotion. The six phylacteries and the two foot reliquaries contained small doors that could be opened to reveal the contents within (see

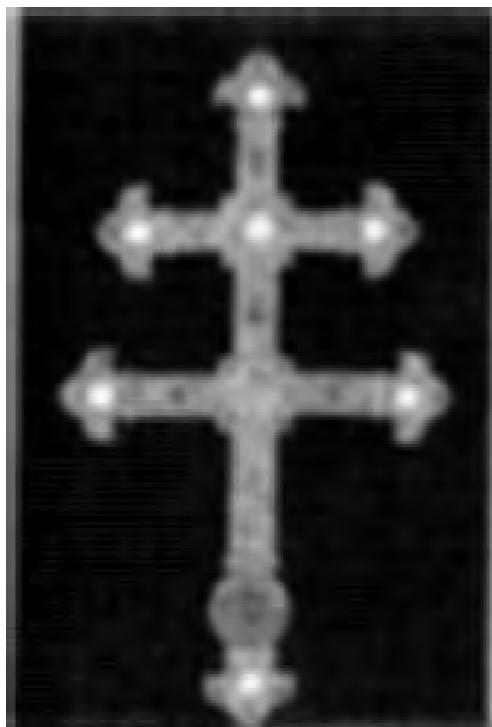


FIGURE 17.3 Hugh of Oignies. Double traverse reliquary cross for pieces of the True Cross, ca. 1228–1230. Brussels, *Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire*. Wood core, gilded silver, rock crystal, gemstones.

The cross is decorated with filigree, niello, amethyst, garnet, sapphire, cornelian, an ancient intaglio, and fragments of millefiori. Six medallions of rock crystal reveal authenticating parchments for various relics. At the lower traversal a small door containing a medallion of transparent rock crystal covers the relics of the true cross, which are identified by an inscription, "DE LIGNO DOMINI."

PHOTO COURTESY OF MUSÉES ROYAUX D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE—BRUSSELS.

fig. 17.1).³² One double traverse cross that Hugh and his workshop made for pieces of the True Cross included cavities for displaying the relics. A similar cross by Hugh himself held the relics under a small door of transparent rock crystal (see fig. 17.3).³³ Finally, both the reliquary for the rib of Saint Peter and one created by Hugh for relics of Saint Nicolas housed the relics in cylinders of clear rock crystal, thus enabling the observer to view both the contents and the container simultaneously (see fig. 17.2).³⁴ Two other reliquaries that were made at Oignies around this time employed vases of carved rock crystal from Fatimid Egypt to house the relics.³⁵ These contain-



FIGURE 17.4 *Detail of fig. 17.2.* Hugh of Oignies. Reliquary for the rib of Saint Peter, 1238. Treasures of the Sisters of Notre-Dame of Namur .

Detail showing large topaz surrounded by two amethysts, two pearls, and filigree work depicting grapes and grape leaves. Below the topaz is a small relic custodial—a later addition—with authenticating parchment.

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ers, which may have come to the priory as containers for some of the relics from the Orient that were given by Jacques de Vitry, were not as transparent as the smooth cylinders of the Saint Peter and Saint Nicolas reliquaries, but the beauty of these items, and the fact that they were from the Orient, nevertheless enhanced the experience of gazing upon the relics within.

In and of themselves, inert bones can speak neither to their own identity nor to the claims that they have miraculous powers because they already participate in the glory of resurrected flesh. Written authentications were essential to clarifying the identity of a relic, and in the reliquaries of Hugh of Oignies we find that these, like the relics themselves, were often incorporated into the reliquary in a way that responded to the need to see: several of the phylacteries from Hugh's workshop and one of the cross-reliquaries for pieces of the True Cross included domes or windows of rock crystal that revealed pieces of authenticating parchment (see fig. 17.3).³⁶ The reliquary for the rib of Saint Peter had a later addition of a small custodial holding relics and a visible piece of authenticating parchment (see fig. 17.4). But authenticating pieces of parchment could convey only the message that particular bones belonged to particular saints; they could not communicate the message that those saints and their bones had had glorified flesh that performed

miracles. That message had to be invoked by the packaging, and like many masters of Gothic metalwork, Hugh of Oignies' communicated that message by creating dazzling frames of precious metal, colored glass, and precious gemstones.

While Hugh of Oignies employed precious materials in all of his reliquaries, he reserved the precious and semiprecious gemstones at his disposal for a subcategory of reliquaries and liturgical objects: those that had a close relationship with the most important suffering and resurrected body of all—that of Jesus.³⁷ The reliquary that he created for the rib of Saint Peter—the prince of Jesus's apostles—contained pearls, garnet, beryl, ruby, sapphire, topaz, amethyst, and an ancient intaglio made of plasma (green chalcedony) (see figs. 17.2 and 17.4).³⁸ A set of Gospel covers that Hugh actually signed included pearls, carbuncle, sapphire, garnets, agates, rubies, aquamarine, an ancient intaglio carved in chalcedony, two intaglios carved in nicolo (blue on black onyx), and an ancient cameo carved from mother of pearl (see fig. 17.5).³⁹ A cross reliquary attributed to Hugh, which was made as a "frame" for pieces of the True Cross, contained ruby, garnet, emerald, topaz, chrysoprase, beryl, turquoise, zircon, pearls, and an ancient intaglio carved in cornelian.⁴⁰ A second cross reliquary (mentioned above), made by Hugh himself and containing pieces of the True Cross, was decorated with garnet, amethyst, sapphire, cornelian, and an ancient intaglio (see fig. 17.3).⁴¹ Both of these crosses evoked the East not only with gemstones but also with their double-traverse style, which had been introduced into the West by pilgrims and crusaders returning from the Holy Land and Byzantium.⁴²

There is a pattern here pointing to the first way in which gemstones created an association with the "Orient." Hugh limited his use of gemstones to objects associated with Jesus' life in the Holy Land: the gospels, the True Cross, and the relics of Saint Peter. Hugh's choice of gemstones worked in another way to establish links between Oignies and the Holy Land because they included ten of the twelve gemstones mentioned in the book of Revelation as adornments on the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem. These gemstones, as well as those worn by the high priest Aaron in the book of Exodus, were the subject of an allegorizing tradition reaching back to late antiquity.⁴³

The association between gemstones and the Orient was also underscored by the tradition of "scientific" works concerning minerals and gemstones, which had undergone a profound change in the late eleventh century, as a result of new contacts between northwestern Europe and southern Italy that grew out of the colonizing activities of the Normans. Before the late eleventh century the mineralogical tradition of the ancient world was known in the West largely through the works of Pliny the Elder and of Isidore of Seville, a seventh-century Iberian who drew primarily on the work of Pliny.



FIGURE 17.5 Hugh of Oignies. Gospel cover (back side, depicting the Crucifixion), ca. 1229–1230. Treasures of the Sisters of Notre-Dame of Namur. Wood core, silver, gilded silver, gemstones.

To the right and left of Jesus' head are a carbuncle and pearl depicting the sun and the moon. The gemstone under his feet is a sapphire, the most valued of medieval gemstones. In the border, directly over Jesus' head, is an ancient intaglio of chalcedony, which originally depicted a gorgon, but was probably intended to represent an angel in this context (there are tiny wings on each side of the head). The ancient cameo directly under Jesus' feet, made with mother-of-pearl and depicting two wrestlers, was probably intended to invoke Jesus' triumph over the forces of evil. The border is also decorated with ruby, garnet, agate, emerald, aquamarine, amethyst, pearl, and two additional ancient intaglios carved in nicolo.

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Both Isidore and Pliny described what gemstones looked like and where they came from—generally from the East: Egypt, Arabia, Persia, and “India,” as it was broadly conceived.⁴⁴

Sometime before the late eleventh century, however, monks working in southern Italy, most notably Constantine the African, translated and incorporated into Latin texts magical lapidaries from Hellenistic Alexandria and from the Arabic tradition. Then in the late eleventh century, Marbode of Rennes, who was active in western Francia, created a versified lapidary that combined the writings of Isidore and these magical texts.⁴⁵ The success of Marbode’s lapidary was enormous. There are more than one hundred fifty manuscripts of the original Latin text, as well as numerous manuscripts of French, Italian, English, German, Danish, Irish, and Hebrew translations.⁴⁶

In many ways the magical powers of gemstones, as described by Marbode, overlapped with the magical powers of relics of the saints. However, Marbode made no attempt to explain the powers of gemstones theologically.⁴⁷ Indeed, the best way to read his lapidary—and the manuscript evidence supports this—is to see it as a medical text.⁴⁸ Thus the lapidary was often copied with herbals and other medical works.

Nevertheless, late-twelfth- and early-thirteenth-century theologians did begin to interpret Marbode’s lapidary tradition in theological ways—especially in two contexts: in works on “the wonders of the East”; and in encyclopedic works “on the nature of things.”⁴⁹ The two authors of the *Lives* of Marie of Oignies participated in this transformation: Jacques de Vitry included a section on gemstones—based loosely on Marbode—in a discussion of “the wonders of the East” in his *History of the Orient*; and Thomas of Cantimpré discussed gemstones in his work *On the Nature of Things*.⁵⁰

Both Jacques and Thomas made it clear that the powers of gemstones came from God, and indeed that they served as proofs of God’s omnipotence. At the beginning of his discussion of the “wonders of the East” Jacques thus claimed that “God marvelously worked many things in those parts of the world,” and that those marvelous things had the effect of converting “good and prudent men” to the “praise and glory of God,” while causing “trivial and curious men” to return to their preoccupation with vanities.⁵¹ At the end of his brief discussion of gemstones Jacques declared that there were other kinds of gems in the East but the ones he had discussed were sufficient “for the praise of divine omnipotence.”⁵² Thomas stated in *On the Nature of Things* that “Many exceptional and favorable miracles of healings are experienced in gemstones. . . . The reason for these miracles is the will of the omnipotent God, who preaches to men through the marvels of things.”⁵³

Once the magic of stones had been “blessed,” so to speak, by this new theological reading, it was natural to see their magic as complementing the

powers of relics. According to Jacques de Vitry, emerald, sapphire, and topaz helped to preserve chastity and cool lust. Emeralds, chalcedony, and beryl, he claimed, were good for sore and infected eyes. Emerald could counteract falling sickness, sapphire was good for pregnant women, topaz could cure hemorrhoids, agate could serve as an antidote for poisons, jacinth (or zircon) provided comfort for those troubled by sadness or groundless suspicions, chalcedony could help the insane and fight noxious humors, and amethyst counteracted drunkenness.⁵⁹

The powers of these stones—all of which were included in the works of Hugh of Oignies for the treasures of Oignies—resembled those of relics associated with Marie of Oignies. Like sapphires, Marie's clothing, which was kept at Oignies, assisted women in labor.⁵⁵ Like jacinth, her finger calmed the troubled mind of the future Pope Gregory IX.⁵⁶ Gemstones, then, helped to symbolize the transformed nature of resurrected bodies in part because they themselves could transform broken bodies back to wholeness, thereby overcoming aspects of mortality.

But the lapidary tradition, which was so important to the thinking of Marie's two biographers, created associations between gemstones and the East on several levels. First, Marbode's poem purported to be a letter from Evax, the king of Arabia, to the emperor Nero.⁵⁷ Hence it perpetuated the idea that knowledge about gemstones and their powers came from the East. Moreover, Marbode and Isidore claimed (correctly, I might add) that the most desirable and best-quality stones came from the East, especially from "India."⁵⁸ Both Jacques de Vitry and Thomas of Cantimpré repeated and elaborated this idea. Thomas even claimed that stones from the East had the most magical power.⁵⁹ Aristocratic records from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries indicate that lay consumers continued to seek out, and value, gemstones and pearls with Eastern origins.⁶⁰

Thomas's claim concerning the magical powers of Eastern gemstones leads us to a third set of associations between gemstones and the East, providing yet another reason for honoring saints like Marie with gemstones: the East—all of it—was construed, in the imagined geographies of Jacques de Vitry, Thomas of Cantimpré, and others, as holy.⁶¹ This was of course true of the Holy Land itself, most of which became unreachable to Latin Christians after Jerusalem fell to Saladin in 1187. And it was also true of "India" (meaning, roughly, the entire Indian subcontinent, Malabar, and Ethiopia).⁶² Thomas of Cantimpré told a story about a virtuous churchman that illustrates the spiritual respect that people rendered to all items coming from the Orient: although that churchman was in the habit of turning down all gifts, he made one exception, for a gift of some nutmeg, because "it was the fruit of the Orient."⁶³

For Jacques de Vitry, "India" was populated by large numbers of mysterious Christians, and by pagans whose holy way of life was nearly Christian, and much like the way of life of Marie of Oignies. As far as Jacques was concerned, the presence of Christians in the Far East had strategic importance for winning back the Holy Land from the Muslims and convincing Westerners to come fight in the Fifth Crusade. In fact, he believed that there were more Nestorians and Jacobites in the East than there were Latin or Greek Christians in the West and in the former Byzantine empire.⁶⁴ Moreover, Jacques' belief in the existence of holy men and women in India who were ignorant of Christian teaching suggested that India was not only a space that was close to paradise (as evidenced by the long tradition in Biblical commentaries that the Ganges was one of the four rivers flowing out of Eden),⁶⁵ but also a space that did not seem to know the consequences of the fall of Adam and Eve.

In order to understand how "Indian" Christians fit into Jacques' strategic hopes for the recovery of the Holy Land, we need to back up and take a look at his broader discussions of the Oriental Christians whom he encountered when he assumed his position as bishop of the port city of Acre in the Holy Land in 1216. Jacques' second letter home described Syrian Christians, Jacobites, Armenians, Maronites, and Nestorians, whose sect, he believed, included the legendary Prester John—a powerful Christian king living somewhere in India.⁶⁶ In his descriptions of these Christian sects, which he developed further in his *History of the Orient*, Jacques expressed an extremely low level of tolerance for religious difference. Some of the differences that he encountered—like the doctrines of the Nestorians concerning the nature of Christ⁶⁷—touched on fundamental issues that had divided Christian communities since the fourth century. These were understandably irreconcilable as far as Jacques was concerned. Other differences, however, were more a matter of religious practice or lifestyle.

Concerning the Jacobites, Jacques received mixed reports as to whether or not their beliefs about the nature of Christ resembled those that had been condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century. He was certain, however, that members of this sect did not make confessions to priests. His discussion of this practice suggested that it was nearly as offensive as differences on the nature of Christ—despite the fact that in the West the requirement of annual confessions to priests had only been instituted a few years earlier, at the Fourth Lateran Council.⁶⁸

Jacques apparently abhorred the Syrian Christians, who "looked" to him too much like the Muslims. Not only did they speak Arabic, but they also wore beards and their women wore veils, like Muslim women. According to Jacques, the Syrian Christians "mingled" with the Muslims and usually

imitated "their crooked ways."⁶⁹ Most of them, he claimed, were untrustworthy, duplicitous, conniving, liars, traitors, easily won over by bribes, and thieves.⁷⁰ Worse still, and this was apparently a sign of their servitude to and corruption by the Muslims, they were "utterly unwarlike, and, like women, useless in battles."⁷¹ Jacques' discussion of the Syrian Christians served as a warning for Latin Christians who had settled in the Holy Land and had become, according to Jacques, "soft" and "effeminate."⁷²

The Armenians irritated Jacques because, despite their profession of obedience to the Catholic Church in 1198, they stuck to their own ways, including the use of communion wine that was not mixed with water. Jacques offered a long historical discussion about how the Jews in Jesus' time mixed wine with water, and a symbolic discussion of how water signified that which is fleeting, thus symbolizing mortal people who were joined to Jesus, the wine. Thus he harbored no doubts that the "Armenians in the Sacrament of the altar neither imitate the Lord nor perceive the mystery [of humanity joined to Christ]."⁷³

Still, Jacques saw reason for hope in the existence of these Oriental sects. He was convinced that with sound preaching (which he himself attempted with these groups) the "errors" of these Christians would be corrected. Indeed, the conversion of Maronites to Western Catholicism in the twelfth century (their leaders even attended the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215) offered an example of one such success. And if we are to believe Jacques, the orthodoxy of the Maronites affected their prowess. Thus, he assures his audience that in battle the Maronites, unlike the Syrian Christians and Armenians, "are skilful and ready with bows and arrows."⁷⁴ Better yet, they were numerous.

By the time he wrote the *History of the Orient*, sometime after 1221, Jacques had begun to place his hopes on two additional groups of Eastern Christians—the Georgians of the Caucasus region and a certain "King David" of India. The Georgians had been impressing Latin Christians with their military prowess since the time of the Third Crusade, when they first formed an alliance with the Latins against the Muslims. Latin Christians were aware, moreover, of the accomplishments of the Georgian king David the Constructor, who in the years between 1089 and 1125 defeated the Turks in his region and conquered a large territory between the Caspian and Black Seas. In 1211 Pope Innocent III reached out to King George IV of Georgia, asking for his help in the Crusader States. In 1220 George IV informed the Crusaders of his intentions to attack the Muslims in north Syria, but he was never able to carry out that plan, due to the fact that his own kingdom was attacked by the Mongols.⁷⁵

According to the Jacques, who was apparently unaware of the Georgians'

defeat by the Mongols, the Georgians were "very warlike, valiant in battle, strong in body and powerful in the countless number of their warriors."⁷⁶ We know in fact that in the time of David the Constructor their armies could reach as many as 300,000.⁷⁷ The Muslims, Jacques went on, feared the Georgians, even going so far as to allow them to visit Jerusalem without paying any tribute, and allowing them to display their Christian banners when they crossed Muslim territory. Indeed, the Georgians were so fierce, Jacques asserted, that even their women were accomplished in battle.⁷⁸ He goes into no details about the "errors" of the Georgians' Christian practices, mentioning only that they read the scriptures in Greek and administered the sacraments according to Greek custom. And while the length of the Georgian men's hair—about a cubit long, he tells us—would have aroused a long discourse had the Syrian Christians worn such hair, Jacques only described the practice, without comment.⁷⁹ Better to remain silent about differences with men whose valor could prove crucial in any pan-Christian effort to win back Jerusalem for Christendom.

Additionally tantalizing to Jacques and his contemporaries was an account about a certain King David of India that reached Damietta, Egypt, in 1221, not long after the participants in the Fifth Crusade, accompanied by Jacques, took it from the Muslims.⁸⁰ The "Account of the Deeds of King David," which was apparently written by an Oriental Christian, purported to relate the military accomplishments of a Christian king of India who was the descendent of a certain King Bulgaboga. We know, in fact, that there really was a Christian king named Bulgaboga, who flourished toward the middle of the twelfth century as king of the Naiman Turks. But the text about this King David does not describe the accomplishments of the Naiman Turks. Rather, it is the earliest surviving account of the rise of Genghis Khan, who actually conquered the Naiman Turks.⁸¹

Within a few years Latin Christians would learn that Genghis Khan was no Christian, and their descriptions of him would turn from hope to horror. In 1221, though, Jacques de Vitry thought that he had learned a true story, which affirmed his belief that the Muslim world was both surrounded and outnumbered by Christians who would ultimately defeat them. Significantly, the leader upon whom he hung his hopes, like the legendary Prester John (whom Jacques had mentioned in his earlier letters), was thought to reside in India.⁸²

Jacques' India was populated not only by these legendary Christian rulers, but also by pagan holy men, such as Brahmans and Gymnosophists. His accounts of these holy men were borrowed from legends about Alexander the Great that had been circulating in the West since late antiquity and had gained wide popularity during the age of the Crusades.⁸³ Accord-

ing to Jacques and his sources, the Gymnosophists, or "nude wise ones," resided in caves, living lives of poverty and humility and despising the vain and transitory things of the world.⁸⁴ When Alexander the Great asked them what they wanted, their only response was "Give us immortal life."⁸⁵ Jacques' Brahmins were quite similar: they resided in caves, ate the fruit of the land without working it, were indifferent to cold, so never built fires, and never gave themselves over to lust. Moreover, they coveted nothing, placed all of their desire in the afterlife, and believed in a god who was "the word," which "created all things" and through which "all things live."⁸⁶

India, then, was not only a place where legendary Christian kings were indomitable in their military accomplishments, it was also a place in which unconverted ascetic pagans already seemed to "know" the Christian truth even before they heard it. These ascetic pagans, with their innate, prelapsarian, goodness, stood in stark contrast to most Western Christians—whose avarice, adultery, and deceit helped to explain, in Jacques' opinion, why God had allowed them to lose Jerusalem.⁸⁷ Moreover, the natural goodness of the Indian ascetics looked a lot like the asceticism of Marie of Oignies. Like the Brahmins, Marie was indifferent to cold, coveted nothing, and refrained from sex.⁸⁸ Like them, Marie ate unprepared products of the land.⁸⁹



For Jacques de Vitry and other literate Latin Christians of the early thirteenth century, gemstones not only symbolized the transformed nature of the resurrected body, they also connected the West to the East. Precious gemstones were thus appropriate for commemorating Marie of Oignies not only because they resonated with the transformed body that she had already begun to exhibit during her lifetime and that her relics continued to exhibit after her death, but also because they reinforced links between Marie, Jesus, the Holy Land, the Far East, and the Brahmins; and they brought the special favor that God had always poured on the East to Marie's resting place. Moreover, gemstones might serve as reminders, to those who were less holy than Marie, that in the East there were pagans who lived more virtuous lives than theirs, and there were Christian rulers whose wealth, power, and military might far exceeded that of Western rulers, perhaps because they too led more virtuous lives than men and women in the West.

Jacques de Vitry had every reason to pay honor to the woman who had played such a central role in his own spiritual and professional growth, and he did so in a way that made sense to him and to his contemporaries on several levels. On the surface, this bringing together of East and West through

luxurious objects from the East played no role in reconciling Christianity with Islam, for which Jacques and most of his Western contemporaries maintained great contempt. Nevertheless, despite Jacques' critique of the avarice and luxurious lifestyle of Mohammed, Muslims, Oriental Christians, and Westerners who assimilated in the Middle East, Jacques, like other Westerners, both desired and consumed the treasures of the East, many of which came their way through Muslim intermediaries. Desire and the consumption of luxurious goods were acceptable, in Jacques' system of values, if they were turned to religious ends. His secular contemporaries, however, were not always so religious in their reasons for bringing home, or demanding, Oriental goods. Indeed, even the canons of Oignies probably had more material reasons for honoring Marie's burial place with dazzling luxurious objects: after all, the greater Marie's prestige, the greater the profits from pilgrims to her place of burial.

While there was no paradox, for Jacques de Vitry and his contemporaries, in the way in which the luxuries of the East met the ascetic West in the burial place of Marie of Oignies, there was a paradox in the distribution of the wealth that came to Oignies because of Marie. Unlike the canons of Oignies, the women who shared Marie's informal religious life—in huts just outside the priory—did *not* benefit from the presence of her relics, nor did they benefit from Jacques de Vitry's generous gifts to the priory. The property records of Oignies make it very clear that gifts to the women were rare and extremely modest. In fact the community of women lasted as long as it did—which wasn't very long—because they passed their huts and personal possessions on from one woman to another.⁹⁰

By the middle of the thirteenth century the Church at large had grown relatively intolerant of informal women's communities, and of the proximity of women's communities to men's. The women of Oignies—the real heiresses to Marie's way of life—were forced, around 1250, to move further away from the priory. And in the first decades of the fourteenth century their community disappeared altogether.⁹¹ Locally, then, Marie had come to be valued as a saintly relic, but not as a role model for other women to follow.

17. LOW COUNTRY ASCETICS AND ORIENTAL LUXURY

1. The story of Giles' conversion is told in somewhat legendary form in the anonymous "Historia foundationis venerabilis ecclesiae beati Nicolai Oigniacensis ac ancillae Christi Mariae Oigniacensis," in *Veterum scriptorum et monumentorum historico-rum, dogmaticorum, moralium, amplissima collectio*, ed. Edmond Martène and Ursin Durand (Paris: Montalant, 1724; repr., New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 6: cols. 327-330; translation used here is from Thomas de Cantimpré, *Supplement to The Life of Marie d'Oignies and Anonymous History of the Foundation of the Venerable Church of Blessed Nicholas of Oignies and the Handmaid of Christ Marie d'Oignies*, trans. Hugh Feiss (Saskatoon: Peregrina, 1987) [hereafter trans. Feiss], pp. 37-41. The basic outlines of the foundation legend are corroborated by documentary sources linking Giles to Walcourt and by Thomas of Cantimpré, who mentions that Giles' mother was one of the women at Oignies: Edouard Poncelet, *Chartes du prieuré d'Oignies de l'Ordre de Saint-Augustin* (Namur: Wesmael-Charlier, 1913), pp. i-vi; Thomas of Cantimpré, *Supplementum vitae Mariae Oigniacensis* [hereafter Thomas of Cantimpré, *Supplementum*] 2.10 (published in *Acta sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur*, ed. Bollandists, vols. 1- [Paris: V. Palmé, 1863-1940] [hereafter *Acta sanctorum*, ed. Bollandists], Iunii:5:576; trans. Feiss, p. 15). Poncelet points out that the date given on the earliest document from Oignies, 1192, is apparently a scribal error, since the bishop who approved the act was not consecrated until 1196.
2. Poncelet, *Chartes du prieuré*, p. lxi. As Walter Simons has stressed (*Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001], pp. 35-36), the beguine movement of the Low Countries emerged in a variety of institutional settings. The situation at Oignies gives us one of those settings; the beginning of Marie of Oignies' religious life at a lepro-sarium gives us another (see text at note 6).
3. The "History of the Foundation of Oignies" identifies Hugh as Giles' brother: "Historia foundationis" col. 327 (trans. Feiss, p. 37). The best introduction to Hugh's work is the beautifully illustrated catalogue of a recent exhibition of his work: *Autour de Hugo d'Oignies*, catalogue of an exhibition directed by Robert Didier and Jacques Toussaint (Namur: Société archéologique de Namur, 2003). On the modesty of Oignies' possessions see Poncelet, *Chartes du prieuré*.
4. In Martin Dunford and Phil Lee, *The Rough Guide to Belgium and Luxembourg*, 3d ed. (London: Rough Guides, 2002), p. xix, the treasures of Oignies are ranked number thirteen.
5. The most complete modern biography of Jacques de Vitry is by Philipp Funk: *Jakob von Vitry: Leben und Werke* (Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance, Herausgegeben von Walter Goetz, Heft 3) (Leipzig: Druck, 1909; repr., Hildesheim: H. A. Gerstenberg, 1973). See also M. Coens, "Jacques de Vitry," *Biographie nationale, Supplement*, Académie Royale des sciences, des lettres et des beaux-arts de Belgique, vols. 1- (Brussels: Bruylant, 1956-), vol. 31, supp. 3, cols. 465-474.
6. Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis* [hereafter Jacques de Vitry, *Vita*] 1.1.14 (published in *Acta sanctorum*, ed. Bollandists, Iunii:5:550; translation used is from Margot H. King, trans., *The Life of Marie d'Oignies* [Saskatoon: Peregrina, 1987], p. 16 [hereafter trans. King]). On the lack of clarity for the chronology of Marie's life, see Funk, *Jakob von Vitry*, pp. 23-24. The date of 1191 is based on Jacques' assertion that Marie was fourteen when she was married, and about thirty-six when she died in 1213; Jacques de Vitry, *Vita* 1.1.12; 2.12.109 (*Acta sanctorum* Iunii:5:550, 572; trans. King, pp. 14, 103).
7. Thomas of Cantimpré, *Supplementum* 1 (*Acta sanctorum*, ed. Bollandists, Iunii:5:573; trans. Feiss, p. 5).

8. *ibid.*
9. Funk, *Jakob von Vitry*; Coens, "Jacques de Vitry."
10. On Jacques joining the priory: Poncelet, *Chartes du prieuré*, p. 101. On possible dates for the consecration: *ibid.*, p. vii; U. Berlière, "Les évêques auxiliaires de Liège," *Revue bénédictine* 29 (1912): 72; Eduardo Formigoni, "Jacques de Vitry et le prieuré d'Oignies," in *Autour de Hugo d'Oignies*, p. 41; Jean-Baptiste Lefèvre, "Le cadre religieux," in *Autour de Hugo d'Oignies*, p. 33.
11. Poncelet, *Chartes du prieuré*, pp. vii, 101–103; *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens (Leiden: Brill, 1960), ep. 6, p. 133. Several items still among the treasures of Oignies—a portable altar, two bishop's miters, a maniple, part of an ivory cross, and two episcopal rings with sapphires—are thought to have been Jacques de Vitry's ecclesiastical ornaments: Robert Didier and Jacques Toussaint, "Trésors des Soeurs de Notre Dame à Namur: Catalogue critique," in *Autour de Hugo d'Oignies*, pp. 267–269, 272–280.
12. Jacques was the most generous patron of the priory and has long been credited with all of the Oriental goods that entered its treasures around his time—hence the logic of associating him with its gemstones from the East.
13. Robert Didier, "Hugo d'Oignies: Prolégomènes," in *Autour de Hugo d'Oignies*, p. 61.
14. Pierre Kurman, "Hugo d'Oignies et Villard de Honnecourt," in *Autour de Hugo d'Oignies*, pp. 83–88. Photographs of Hugh's engravings are in Didier and Toussaint, "Trésors des Soeurs," pp. 230, 233–235; photographs of his niello work, pp. 193, 201, 202, 213, 214, 229.
15. Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 41, 113, 200–201, 209–211.
16. Bynum, *Resurrection*, pp. 8, 107, 120, 162, 230.
17. Bynum, *Resurrection*, pp. 58–114, 200–201.
18. Bynum, *Resurrection*, pp. 214–220.
19. Jacques de Vitry, *Vita* 2.9.86; 2.8.91 (*Acta sanctorum* Iunii:5:566, 567; trans. King, pp. 82, 87). On the topic of women's eucharistic devotion see Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
20. Jacques de Vitry, *Vita* 2.10.91 (*Acta sanctorum* Iunii:5:567–568; trans. King, p. 87).
21. Bynum, *Resurrection*, pp. 220–222; Jacques de Vitry, *Vita*, prologue, par. 9; 1.3.35; 1.3.29; 1.3.37; 1.3.40; 2.8.73–74; 2.12.109 (*Acta sanctorum* Iunii:5:549, 550, 553, 555, 556, 563, 572; trans. King, pp. 9, 17, 29, 38, 41, 70–72, 103).
22. *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, ep. 1, ed. Huygens, p. 72; Thomas of Cantimpré, *Supplementum* 3.16 (*Acta sanctorum*, ed. Bollandists, Iunii:5:578; trans. Feiss, p. 23); Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita Lutgardis* 3.19 (*Acta sanctorum*, ed. Bollandists, Iunii:4:209; trans. Margot H. King, *The Life of Lutgard of Aywieres* [Saskatoon: Peregrina, 1987], p. 98).
23. Didier and Toussaint, "Trésors des Soeurs," p. 295.
24. See Bynum, *Resurrection*, pp. 201–202, and Michel Lauwers, *La mémoire des ancêtres, le souci des morts: Morts, rites et société au Moyen Age: Diocèse de Liège, XI^e–XIII^e siècles* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1997), pp. 410–413. Lauwers' analysis of the causes of the new phenomenon stresses the effects of the new money economy.
25. On body part reliquaries see Bynum, *Resurrection*, pp. 201–202, pls. 19, 20; on jewelry reliquaries, Ronald R. Lightbrown, *Medieval European Jewellery, with a Catalogue of the Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1992), pp. 125, 139, 168–169, 181, 202–204, 223, 226, 232; pls. 127, 128, 131, 133, 134; catalogue nos. 33, 35, 36, 39, 50, 50, 53.
26. Didier and Toussaint, "Trésors des Soeurs," pp. 245–248. These reliquaries date from around 1250 and 1260 and thus postdate the works of Hugo, which were all created between 1228 and 1240 (Didier, "Hugo d'Oignies," p. 61).

27. Robert Didier and Jacques Toussaint, "Oeuvres dispersées du Trésor d'Oignies," in *Autour de Hugo d'Oignies*, pp. 295–296.
28. Of Simone Martini's works see especially "Saint Louis of Toulouse," the Pisa "Altar of St. Catherine," and "Saint Augustine" in the triptych at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge: Gianfranco Contini, *L'opera completa di Simone Martini* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1970), pls. 5, 11, 15. Of the Van Eycks' works, see, in the Ghent altarpiece, the central figure of God, the angel of the Annunciation, bishops, popes, and confessors: Alfons Lieven Dierick, *The Ghent Altarpiece: Van Eyck's Masterpiece Revisited in Color and Lifesize*, trans. Herman Brondeel (Ghent: the author, 1996), pls. 5, 14, 19, 20, 29, 34. See also: Laura Weigert, *Weaving Sacred Stories: French Choir Tapestries and the Performance of Clerical Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), fig. 16.
29. Hans Belting, *The Image and its Public: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. M. Bartusis and R. Mayer (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Caratzas, 1990), p. 80; Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), pp. 140–141. Biernoff argues persuasively that the emergence of this new desire was closely related to the emergence of the practice of the elevation of the consecrated host and to the regulation of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 that restricted lay people's participation in communion to one time per year.
30. "Calicem nudum super altare diu posset inspicere," Jacques de Vitry, *Vita* 2.10.92 (*Acta sanctorum Iunii*:5:568; trans. King, p. 88).
31. "Coelestis claritatis," Jacques de Vitry, *Vita* 2.10.91 (*Acta sanctorum Iunii*:5:567; trans. King, p. 87).
32. Didier and Toussaint, "Trésors des Soeurs," pp. 220–235, 245–248; "Oeuvres dispersées," pp. 295–296.
33. Didier and Toussaint, "Trésors des Soeurs," pp. 211–212; "Oeuvres dispersées," pp. 297–299.
34. Didier and Toussaint, "Trésors des Soeurs," pp. 204–210, 217–219. See also pp. 250–267 on three additional monstrance reliquaries with clear crystal cylinders, which were made at Oignies ca. 1260–1270.
35. Didier and Toussaint, "Trésors des Soeurs," pp. 238–241.
36. Didier and Toussaint, "Trésors des Soeurs," pp. 220, 227; "Oeuvres dispersées," pp. 297–299.
37. The phylacteries were decorated with rock crystal and colored glass: Ferdinand Courtoy, "Le trésor du prieuré d'Oignies aux Soeurs de Notre-Dame à Namur et l'oeuvre du Frère Hugo," *Bulletin de la Commission Royale des Monuments et des Sites* 3 (1951–1952): 165, 167, 170, 171, 173, 239.
38. Didier and Toussaint, "Trésors des Soeurs," pp. 205–207; Laurent Wilmet, "Les intailles et le camée des orfèvreries du Trésor d'Oignies," in *Autour de Hugo d'Oignies*, p. 160. For the identity of the gemstones I have followed Courtoy, "Le trésor du prieuré," pp. 151–152.
39. Didier and Toussaint, "Trésors des Soeurs," pp. 192–199; Wilmet, "Les intailles," pp. 155–159; Courtoy, "Le trésor du prieuré," p. 138.
40. Didier and Toussaint, "Trésors des Soeurs," pp. 211–216; Wilmet, "Les intailles," p. 161; Courtoy, "Le trésor du prieuré," p. 155.
41. Didier and Toussaint, "Oeuvres dispersées," pp. 297–299; Courtoy, "Le trésor du prieuré," p. 242. A third cross containing pieces of the True Cross was not made at Oignies: "Trésors des Soeurs," pp. 260–266.
42. Joseph Braun, *Die Reliquiare des christlichen Kultes und ihre Entwicklung* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder & Co., 1940), pp. 474–475.
43. At Oignies: sapphire, agate, emerald, cornelian, beryl, topaz, chrysoptase, jacinth [zircon], amethyst, onyx. In Rev 21:18–21 but not at Oignies: jasper, chrysolite. For a

- discussion of medieval allegorical commentaries on the gemstones in Revelation 21 and in Exodus 28 (the gemstones of the high priest Aaron's breastplate), see Christel Meier, *Gemma spiritalis: Methode und Gebrauch der Edelsteinallegorese vom frühen Christentum bis ins 18. Jahrhundert* (Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, Bd. 34) (Munich: W. Fink, 1977-), pp. 87-89; Joan Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Particularly in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1976), pp. 29-30, 72-79.
44. Evans, *Magical Jewels*, pp. 30-37, 51-72; Paul Studer and Joan Evans, *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries* (Paris: É. Champion, 1924), pp. x-xiii; Isidorus Hispalensis episcopus, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri xx*, book 16: "De lapidibus et metallis," ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957, 1962), vol. 2 (unpaginated).
 45. Robert Halleux, "Damigéron, Evax et Marbode: L'heritage alexandrin dans les lapidaires médiévaux," *Studi médièvali*, 3d ser., 15 (1974): 328-347; John M. Riddle, *Marbode of Rennes' (1035-1123) De Lapidibus Considered as a Medical Treatise with Text, Commentary, and C. W. King's Translation, Together with Text and Translation of Marbode's Minor Works on Stones* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1977), p. 2.
 46. Studer and Evans, *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, pp. xv-xvi; Léopold Charles Augustin Pannier, *Les lapidaires français du moyen âge des XII^e, XIII^e et XIV^e siècles: Réunis, classés et pub., accompagnés de préfaces, de tables et d'un glossaire* (repr., Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1973), pp. 16, 20-28; Riddle, *Marbode*, p. ix.
 47. Studer and Evans, *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, pp. xiv-xv.
 48. Riddle, *Marbode*, pp. x, 6-8, 132.
 49. For a list of encyclopedic works with lapidaries, see Albertus Magnus, *Book of Minerals*, trans. Dorothy Wyckoff (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), app. B, pp. 268-271.
 50. Iacobus de Vitriaco, *Libri duo quorum prior orientalis, sive Hierosolymitanae; alter occidentalis historiae nomine inscribitur*, 91 (Douai: Balthazar Bellerus, 1597) [henceforth Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis*], pp. 194-198; Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, ed. H. Boese (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), pp. 355-374 [hereafter Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*]. Parts of Jacques de Vitry's *Historia orientalis* have been translated into English, but not the section on the wonders of the East: Jacques de Vitry, *The History of Jerusalem*, trans. Aubrey Stewart (London: Palestine Pilgrims Text Society, 1896).
 51. "Multa enim in partibus illis mirabiliter operatus est Dominus, que sicut iusti et bene affecti et prudentes homines ad laudem Dei convertunt et gloriam . . . ita leves et curiosi homines ad vanitatem retorquent," Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 83 (pp. 164-165).
 52. "Sunt insuper alie gemmarum species in partibus orientis. Ad commendationem autem divine potentie, ut confiteantur Domino opera eius, haec praedicta de lapidibus pretiosis sufficiant," Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 91 (p. 198).
 53. "Excepta autem gratia sanitatum miracula multa et magna experiuntur in gemmis. . . . Horum igitur miraculorum ratio est omnipotentis dei voluntas, qui in rebus humanis mirabilis predicatur," Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, pp. 355-356.
 54. Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 91 (pp. 195-198).
 55. "Historia foundationis," col. 329; trans. Feiss, p. 40.
 56. Thomas of Cantimpré, *Supplementum* 3.15-17 (*Acta sanctorum Iunii*: 377-378; trans. Feiss, pp. 21-24).
 57. Marbode, *De lapidibus*, ed. Riddle, *Marbode*, p. 34.
 58. Isidorus, *Etymologiarum . . . libri*, book xvi, chap. vii, viii, ix, xiii, xiv; Marbode, *De lapidibus*, ed. Riddle, *Marbode*, pp. 36, 38, 47, 50, 53, 54, 58, 76, 79, 84, 85. On the geo-

- graphical origins of precious gems in the Middle Ages see: W. Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au moyen âge*, trans. Furcy Raynaud, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1936), 2:648–658.
59. Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, p. 355.
 60. Examples include: "Mandement de Robert, comte d'Artois [February 1, 1299]," ed. M. le Chanoine Dehaisnes, *Documents et extraits divers concernant l'histoire de l'art dans la Flandre, l'Artois et le Hainaut avant le xv^e siècle*, part 1 (Lille: L. Quarré, Libraire-Éditeur, 1886), p. 105 ["grosses perles fines d'Orient"]; "Inventaire et vente des biens de la reine Clémence de Hongrie [1358]," ed. by L. Douët-d'Arcq, *Nouveau recueil de comptes de l'argenterie des rois de France* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1874), pp. 38–41 ["rubis d'Alixandre; "rubis d'Oriant"; "un saphir d'Oriant"].
 61. For a general discussion of the spiritual qualities associated with the East see Meier, *Gemma spiritalis*, pp. 340–341.
 62. Charles F. Beckingham, "The Achievements of Prester John," in *Prester John, the Mongols, and the Ten Lost Tribes*, ed. Charles F. Beckingham and Bernard Hamilton (Brookfield, Vt.: Variorum, 1996), p. 15.
 63. Thomas, *Supplementum* 3.15 (*Acta sanctorum*, ed. Bollandists, Iunii:5:577; trans. Feiss, p. 21).
 64. Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 77 (p. 149; trans. Stewart, *History of Jerusalem*, p. 77). See also *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, ep. 2, ed. Huygens, p. 95, where Jacques asserts that there are more Christians living among the Saracens than there are Saracens.
 65. Bernard Hamilton, "Prester John and the Kings of Cologne," in *Prester John*, p. 171.
 66. *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, ep. 2, ed. Huygens, pp. 83–85, 96–97.
 67. Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 77 (pp. 148–150; trans. Stewart, *History of Jerusalem*, pp. 77–78).
 68. Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 76 (pp. 144–148, trans. Stewart, *History of Jerusalem*, pp. 73–76).
 69. "Commixti sunt enim inter eos," "mores perversos ex parte magna imitantur," Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 75 (p. 138; trans. Stewart, *History of Jerusalem*, p. 67).
 70. Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 75 (p. 137; trans. Stewart, *History of Jerusalem*, p. 67).
 71. "Prorsus imbellis, et praeliis velut mulieres inutiles," Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 75 (p. 137).
 72. "Molles et effeminati," Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 73 (p. 133; trans. Stewart, *History of Jerusalem*, p. 64).
 73. "Unde praedicti Armeni in altaris sacramento nec Dominum imitantur, nec observant mysterium," Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 79 (pp. 153–155, quotation on p. 155; trans. Stewart, *History of Jerusalem*, pp. 81–83, quotation on p. 82). For background information on the Armenians at this time see C. Cannuyer, "Les armeniens dans l'*Historia orientalis* de Jacques de Vitry," *Revue des études arméniennes* 17 (1983): 197–199.
 74. "Arcubus et sagittis in preliis edocti et expediti," Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 78 (p. 151).
 75. C. Cannuyer, "Les géorgiens dans l'*Historia Hierosolimitani* de Jacques de Vitry," *Bedi Kartlisa* 41 (1983): 175–187; Bernard Hamilton, "Continental Drift: Prester John's Progress Through the Indies," in *Prester John*, pp. 242, 243, 245. Jacques does not mention, in his favorable discussion of the Georgians, that they were defeated by the Mongols.
 76. "Bellicosus valde, et in praeliis strenuus, fortis robore, et potens innumera pugnatorum multitudine," Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 80 (p. 156, trans. Stewart, *History of Jerusalem*, p. 83)

77. Cannuyer, "Les géorgiens," p. 181.
78. Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 80 (p. 156; trans. Stewart, *History of Jerusalem*, pp. 83–84).
79. Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 80 (p. 157; trans. Stewart, *History of Jerusalem*, p. 84).
80. *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, ep. 7, ed. Huygens, pp. 141–153.
81. Jean Richard, "The *Relatio de Davide* as a Source for Mongol History and the Legend of Prester John," in *Prester John*, pp. 139–158.
82. *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, ep. 7, ed. Huygens, p. 141.
83. Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 92 (pp. 199–213). Jacques' account is taken almost verbatim from the *Historia de preliis* 90, 98–102, ed. Oswald Zingerle, *Die Quellen zum Alexander des Rudolf von Ems* (Breslau: W. Koebner, 1885; repr. New York: Olms, 1977), pp. 214–216, 220–236. However, Jacques leaves out, in the correspondence between Alexander and Dindimus, king of the Brahmans, Alexander's responses. For an introduction to medieval Alexander legends, see: George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, ed. D. J. A. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956); and *The Medieval French Alexander*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturrr-Maddox (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002). For an introduction to the theme of the noble savage in accounts of Eastern monstrous races see John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 163–171.
84. Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 92 (pp. 199–200).
85. "Da nobis immortalitatem," Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 92 (p. 199).
86. "Deus verbum est, et verbum istud mundum creavit, et per hoc verbum vivunt omnia," Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 92 (p. 207).
87. See Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, pp. 166–167, on the prelapsarian nature of Brahmans and Gymnosophists. For Jacques de Vitry's discussion of sins of Westerners see *Historia orientalis* 83 (pp. 162–163).
88. Jacques de Vitry, *Vita* 1.4.37; 2.5.46 (*Acta sanctorum* Iunii:5:554, 558; trans. King, pp. 38, 47).
89. Jacques de Vitry, *Vita* 2.5.44 (*Acta sanctorum* Iunii:5:557; trans. King, p. 46).
90. Poncelet, *Chartes du prieuré*, pp. lx–lxiii (but Poncelet erroneously blames the women for the growing restrictions on their contact with the canons); Camille Tihon, "Le testament d'une béguine d'Oignies en 1275," *Namurcum: Chronique de la Société archaéologique de Namur* 14 (1937): 40–44.
91. Poncelet, *Chartes du prieuré*, pp. lxii–lxiii.

18. CRYSTALLINE WOMBS AND PREGNANT HEARTS

Throughout this essay's many permutations since its inception over ten years ago as a Master's thesis for the Art History Department at Columbia University—including versions read at Middlebury College, Barnard College, Princeton University, and the Kunstgeschichtliche Gesellschaft in Berlin—it has benefited from the critical comments of many individuals. To the advisors, students, and friends who shared their insights—most recently, Rachel Fulton, who helped give the paper its present shape—I offer my sincere thanks. Professor Bynum's influence will be apparent throughout; she generously read my thesis when I began studying with her in 1995, and has encouraged my work on Katharinenthal ever since. It is an honor to present this essay to her now, with heartfelt gratitude and admiration.