

Title	The reception and utilization of a Welsh saint in medieval England : a comparative analysis of St Winifred's twelfth century Lives
Sub Title	
Author	中川, 健司(Nakagawa, Takeshi)
Publisher	慶應義塾大学大学院文学研究科英米文学専攻『コロキア』同人
Publication year	2024
Jtitle	Colloquia (コロキア). No.45 (2024.) ,p.1- 18
JaLC DOI	
Abstract	
Notes	英文学
Genre	Journal Article
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN00341698-20241220-0001

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The Reception and Utilization of a Welsh Saint in Medieval England:
A Comparative Analysis of St Winifred's Twelfth-Century *Lives* *

Takeshi NAKAGAWA

St Winifred, also known by her Welsh name Gwenfrewy, is a female saint of North Wales.¹ According to the oldest surviving hagiographies written in the twelfth century, she lived in the seventh century. She was beheaded by Prince Caradog for rejecting his seduction but was resurrected by St Beuno, which led to a spring bursting up from where her head had fallen. The spring, Holywell, attracts many pilgrims today and is viewed as miraculous with the capability of healing injuries. One significant factor contributing to Winifred's rise to national prominence, rather than remaining merely a local saint, was the translation of her relics from Gwytherin, the place of her second death, to Shrewsbury, a city in England in 1137/38. This translation served as a crucial catalyst for the wider dissemination of her veneration, ultimately leading to her recognition among English royalty, who held her in reverence. Indeed, in 1398, Richard II became the first royal family member to make the pilgrimage to Holywell,² and Archbishop of Canterbury Roger Walden ordained that Winifred's November feast be celebrated throughout the province of Canterbury.³

The codified hagiographies also played a significant role in disseminating Winifred's cult. The earliest surviving Latin hagiographies of St Winifred exist in two versions. One is called the Anonymous version and is thought to have been written by a Cistercian monk at Basingwerk Abbey near Holywell in the twelfth century. It is preserved in a single manuscript: London, British Library, Cotton MS Claudius A.v.⁴ The other is known as Robert's version, written by Robert Pennant, Prior of Shrewsbury Abbey, probably in 1139,

* I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Satoko Tokunaga of Keio University and Prof. Emeritus Takami Matsuda of Keio University for their insightful comments and suggestions.

¹ This article focuses on her reception in England. Therefore, for the purposes of the analysis, I use her English name, Winifred, rather than her Welsh name, Gwenfrewy.

² Robert E. Scully, 'St. Winefride's Well: The Significance and Survival of a Welsh Catholic Shrine from the Early Middle English Ages to the Present Day', in *Saints and their Cults in the Atlantic World*, ed. by Margaret Cormack (University of South Carolina Press, 2007), pp.202-28 (p. 208).

³ Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (Hambledon and London, 2000), p. 134.

⁴ Fiona Winward, 'The Lives of St Wenefred (BHL 8847-8851)', *Annalecta Bollandiana*, 117 (1999), pp. 89-132 (pp. 98-100), doi:10.1484/J.ABOL.4.01776.

after the translation of St Winifred's relics. It is preserved in three manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 114, Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.4.42, and Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, MS 8072. Robert's version had a more profound impact than the Anonymous version, with the former serving as the source for William Caxton's fifteenth-century Middle English printed editions and the sixteenth-century Middle Welsh translations. A previous hypothesis purported that the Anonymous version (*Vita Prima*) was written before Robert's version, based on the presence or absence of a reference to the translation of the relics to Shrewsbury. This led to the assumption that Robert's version (*Vita Secunda*) was composed after the Anonymous version. Fiona Winward theorized that the lost Latin *Life* of Beuno was the underlying source for both the Anonymous and Robert's versions; indeed, Winward identified specific episodes in each version that are likely to have originated from *Life*.⁵ James Ryan Gregory, however, recently proposed a new model that the two Latin lives were based on oral traditions and written sources. He also argued that the Anonymous version may have been written later than Robert's version, that is, at the end of the twelfth century.⁶ The debate about which version was written first is ongoing. The likely certainty is, as Jane Cartwright concluded, that both versions were independently produced within a relatively short period during the twelfth century.⁷

While the Anonymous and Robert's versions share the same basic plot, they exhibit notable differences in their specific details and the context in which they are set. A comparative analysis of the two versions provides insight into the historical context of their creation. First, I confirm that each version was established independently by comparing the differences between them. Second, I examine each version's characteristics. The Anonymous version focuses on glorifying Holywell's healing spring, whereas Robert's version emphasizes the justification for the translation and historical continuity from Winifred's time to the twelfth century. Finally, I argue that Robert's version not only highlights Winifred's piety as a nun and her authority as a saint but also strives to integrate her into Shrewsbury's

⁵ Ibid., pp. 118-25.

⁶ James Ryan Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England: Translation, Orality, and National Identity in the Cult of St Gwenfrewy, 1138-1512' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, 2012), pp. 129-221. The titles 'Vita Prima' and 'Vita Secunda' are listed in *Acta Sanctorum* by the Bollandists, but these terms are rarely used today.

⁷ Jane Cartwright, 'The Welsh Versions of the Life of Gwenfrewy', in *Seintiau Cymru, Sancti Cambrenses: Astudiaethau ar Seintiau Cymru, Studies in the Saints of Wales*, ed. by David N. Parsons and Paul Russel (Prifysgol Cymru, 2022), pp. 237-67 (p. 240).

broader societal and religious context, thereby enhancing her veneration in a wider cultural setting.

Before describing the Anonymous version's features, I present a pertinent summary of the *Life* of Winifred from Robert's version. Differences between the two versions are underlined.⁸

On a Sunday, while her parents attended worship at the monastery of Beuno, Winifred remained at home due to her ill health. During their absence, Caradog came to visit her father. As he waited for her father's return, Caradog proposed sexual intercourse, which Winifred interpreted as an offer of marriage. She requested time to retire to her chamber, ostensibly to prepare herself in attire befitting his status, and Caradog accepted this suggestion. However, once in her chamber, Winifred secretly escaped to the monastery through the back door. Despite her efforts at stealth, Caradog discovered her escape and pursued her, ultimately catching her. Following a contentious period, Caradog beheaded Winifred with a sword. Beuno, aware of this tragedy, cursed Caradog, who was engulfed by a crack in the Earth. Subsequently, Beuno placed Winifred's severed head back onto her body and prayed to God. Miraculously, her head and body were reunited, and Winifred was resurrected, bearing only a thin white scar around her neck. Water sprung up at the site where her head had fallen, giving rise to a miraculous fountain. After her resurrection, Winifred continued her spiritual instruction under Beuno and was consecrated as a nun by the Veil. Time passed, and Beuno informed Winifred of his decision to relocate to another region. Following Beuno's departure, Winifred sent him a cloak every year through the spring. The cloak's miraculous virtue of being waterproof gave him the sobriquet 'Beuno the Dry Chasuble.' She resided at Holywell for seven years until divine guidance led her to Gwytherin, where she received counsel from St Eleri and his mother, St Tenoi. Upon Tenoi's death, Winifred succeeded her as abbess. She eventually died a second time in Gwytherin.⁹

In the Anonymous version, Winifred was at home alone, not because she was unwell but rather because she was carrying the tools for the Mass.¹⁰ This reason is described differently

⁸ The differences between the two versions are summarized in Table 1, below.

⁹ David Callander, ed. 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Robert of Shrewsbury; Laud)', *Seintiau*, 10 February 2023 <<https://saints.wales/theedition/>> [accessed 1 October 2024], pp. 8-54. For the contents of Robert's version, I refer to Callander's edition. All English translations are mine.

¹⁰ David Callander, ed. 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Anonymous; Claudius)', *Seintiau*, 25 January 2023 <<https://saints.wales/theedition/>> [accessed 1 October 2024], p.12. For the contents of the Anonymous version, I refer to Callander's edition. All English translations are mine. The passage describing Winifred's role reads: 'Wenefredamque in domo eius genitoris cunctatam fuisse, causa secum ferendi misse necessaria,

in the fourteenth-century Welsh *Life* of Beuno, which states that she was keeping guard at home.¹¹ Therefore, the reasons for Winfred's isolation differ in each version. The details surrounding Caradog also differ greatly. In the Anonymous version, Caradog visits because he is thirsty while hunting and asks for water.¹² Additionally, in this account, when Caradog pursues Winifred after she flees, he does not run but rides on horseback, likely due to the ongoing hunt.¹³ The depiction of the moment when Beuno kills Caradog also contrasts sharply between versions. In the Anonymous version, his demise entails melting like wax rather than being swallowed by the ground.¹⁴

Other notable differences lie in the manner and timing of the annual gift given to Beuno. In Robert's version, the cloak is ceremoniously wrapped in white cloth and offered by being

ignem uidelicet et aquam cum sale (And that Wenefred had delayed in the house of her father, for the purpose of bringing with her the necessities for the Mass, namely fire and water with salt)'.

¹¹ Winifred's Passion and Resurrection are also recounted in the *Life* of Beuno, which only survived in the Middle Welsh version, as the original Latin text is lost. I used the following critical edition of the Middle Welsh version. All English translations are mine. The passage describing Winifred's role reads: 'yd aeth Temic a'e wreic y'r eglwys [...] ac adaw gartref y verch yn gwarchadaw (Temic and his wife went to the church [...] and left his daughter to keep guard at home)'. Patrick Sims-Williams, *Buchedd Beuno: The Middle Welsh Life of St Beuno* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2018), p. 146.

¹² Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Anonymous)', p. 12. In the Anonymous version, Caradog's visit, driven by his thirst, aligns with the overarching symbolism of dryness and wetness that permeates the *Life* of Winifred. This element of the story may retain a pre-Christian character, reflecting ancient beliefs surrounding wells and their symbolic significance. The gushing forth of a spring is an important event in the hagiography, representing moisture; dryness, the opposing concept of wetness, is also frequently invoked. For instance, before the spring's appearance, the area was known as 'Sychnant (Dry stream)' or 'Siccauallis (Dry valley)'. Additionally, Beuno, who possessed a cloak that remained dry, earned the sobriquet 'Beunos Casulasicca (Beuno the Dry Chasuble)'. Moreover, Caradog's thirst when he approaches Winifred, who embodies the life-giving force of moisture, can be seen as a deliberate expression of the contrast between dryness and wetness that is central to the hagiography.

¹³ In some of the Books of Hours, Caradog is depicted on horseback during the portrayal of Winifred's Passion (e.g. New York, Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.105, f. 73r; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Auct. D. inf. 2.11, f. 56v.). Despite the survival of only a single manuscript containing the Anonymous version, assuming that elements of the Anonymous version may have had a more extensive reach than the extant manuscripts alone might imply, would be erroneous.

¹⁴ Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Anonymous)', p. 13. Similar to the reason for his visit, this imagery is also connected to the symbolism of dryness and wetness. In the *Life* of Beuno, the phrase 'y toddes y brenhin yn llynn tawd (the king melted into a lake of molten matter)' creates a more explicit association with water. The depiction in the Anonymous version may have been based on the analogy of 'melting', and the addition of 'wax' may have led to the phrase 'melting like wax'.

thrown into the spring on 1 May each year.¹⁵ In the Anonymous version, the cloak is placed on the rock where Beuno once sat and meditated in the spring, and the gift is presented on the eve of St John's Day, 23 June.¹⁶ Another significant variation in dates is observed regarding Winifred's second death: Robert's version records her second death in Gwytherin on 2 November, whereas the Anonymous version places this event on 24 June.¹⁷ Gregory has contended that these differences, particularly the shift in dates, reflect the influence of the Christianisation of Celtic society. His argument highlights the connection between the Celtic festivals of Beltaine and Samhain and the adapted dates in Robert's version.¹⁸

Gregory further argued that the differences in the aforementioned accounts can be attributed to the coexistence of different versions of Winifred's legend across various regions.¹⁹ If we accept his view and if Robert referred to the Anonymous version or vice versa, then providing a reasonable explanation for the above-mentioned changes is difficult. A more plausible conclusion would be that these variations were rooted in distinct oral or lost manuscript traditions, each of which shaped the narrative in its own unique way.

Another indication that the Anonymous and Robert's versions were created independently lies in the different purposes behind their creation. The Anonymous version functions primarily as a hagiography with a focus on Holywell to emphasize the spring's significance. Contrastingly, Robert's version appears to have been written with the intent of legitimizing the translation of Winifred's relics to Shrewsbury and extolling her miraculous virtues. Notably, the Anonymous version entirely omits the detailed account of Winifred's relocation to Gwytherin seven years after her resurrection, as well as her interactions with SS Eleri and Teno in Gwytherin. Instead, the narrative is condensed to a single sentence: 'Locus quidem, quo cum uirginibus conuersata est, Guytherin uocatur (Indeed, the place where she lived with the virgins is called Gwytherin)'.²⁰ Following the account of her *Life*, the Anonymous version transitions to the *Libellus Miraculorum*, a collection of miracles associated with

¹⁵ Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Robert of Shrewsbury)', p. 25.

¹⁶ Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Anonymous)', p. 14.

¹⁷ Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Robert of Shrewsbury)', pp. 36-37; Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Anonymous)', p. 15.

¹⁸ Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England', pp. 150-59. Beltain is the May Day festival on 1 May, marking the beginning of summer. Samhain is the festival on 1 November, marking the beginning of winter.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 180-81.

²⁰ Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Anonymous)', p. 15.

Holywell after Winifred's second death, which continues to focus on the blessings the spring offers. This section's rhetorical style is markedly distinct from that of *Life*, suggesting that a different author may have penned it.²¹ Nevertheless, a portion of Cotton MS Claudius A.v which contains the *Life* and the *Libellus Miraculorum*, is thought to have been written in *ca.* 1203.²² This suggests that the Anonymous *Life*, which was created in the twelfth century, was primarily perceived as a work celebrating the spring at Holywell until at least 1203.²³ Many of the miracles recounted in this collection appear to function to assert the rights attached to the fountain by punishing those who violate it, whereas such punitive elements are rarely present in Robert's version.²⁴

Furthermore, the Anonymous version differs in how it perceives the land of Wales. In Robert's version, Wales is depicted as a distinct region in Great Britain that is known for its numerous saints and various miracles:

In occidua Maioris Brittannie regione est quedam prouintia Walia uocitata, ex una parte finibus regni Anglie, ex altera oceano mari collimitata. Hec olim a sanctis multorum et diuersorum meritorum est inhabitata, et usque ad hunc diem innumeris eorum prerogatiuis multipliciter decorata.²⁵

(In the western region of Great Britain, there is a certain province called Wales, bordered on one side by the boundaries of the kingdom of England, on the other by the ocean sea. This region was formerly inhabited by saints of many and diverse merits, and up to this day is multiply adorned by their innumerable privileges.)

²¹ Winward, 'The Lives of St Wenefred', p. 115.

²² Cotton MS Claudius A.v is a composite manuscript comprising three separate manuscripts of different monastic origins that Sir Robert Cotton later bound together. The collection of saints' lives, which includes the *Life* of St Winifred, is thought to have been written at Worcester. Notably, William of Malmesbury's *Life* of St Wulfstan, which is also part of this collection, is believed to have been written in the year of St Wulfstan's canonization (1203), suggesting that this section of the manuscript was copied around that time. See A. W. Wade-Evans, *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae*, new edn ed. by Scott Lloyd (Welsh Academic Press, 2013), pp. xviii-xix.

²³ *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books*, ed. by N. R. Ker, 2nd edn (Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1964), p. 102.

²⁴ Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England', pp. 185-98.

²⁵ Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Robert of Shrewsbury)', p. 9.

The Anonymous version, however, lacks such framing and remains focused entirely in the Welsh context. It even mentions local figures, such as a hero named Tyfyd from Gwynedd:²⁶

In diebus igitur quibus Katuanus super Venedocie prouintias regnabat, strenuus quidam miles, trium dumtaxat possessor uillarum, nomine Teuyth Eylud filius, in Tekeynglia manebat.²⁷

(Therefore, in the days when Cadfan was reigning over the provinces of Gwynedd, a certain valiant soldier, possessor of only three estates, named Tyfid son of Eiludd, was dwelling in Tegeingl.)

In this way, the narrative remains entirely closed and does not acknowledge anything beyond the borders of Wales. Moreover, after her resurrection, Winifred is chosen as the leader of the eleven virgins at a meeting of saints held at Brefi:

In diebus illis tocius Britannie sancti ad sinodum Breui contionabantur. [...] Unde contigit beatam Wenefredam undecim uirginibus esse preelectam, ut uite et sancte conuersationis exemplum ab ea exciperent.²⁸

(In those days, the saints of all Britain were assembling for the synod of Brefi. [...] Hence it happened that blessed Wenefred was chosen before eleven virgins, so that they might receive from her an example of life and holy conduct.)

In this context, Winifred is also presented within the hierarchy of saints in Wales. Unlike Robert's version, which views Wales through an English lens, the Anonymous version stays firmly rooted in a purely Welsh perspective. Despite the unclarity regarding whether the Anonymous version was written before or after the translation, the deliberate avoidance of any mention of Gwytherin and Shrewsbury, in either case, suggests the anonymous author's clear intent to focus attention on Holywell. Thus, the Anonymous version, which is deeply embedded in a Welsh milieu, seems designed to promote the miraculous spring or to assert ownership of it.

In contrast to the Anonymous version, which centres on the spring at Holywell, Robert's version strongly emphasizes St Winifred herself and the significance of transferring her relics

²⁶ Tyfyd is Winifred's father.

²⁷ Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Anonymous)', p. 10.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

to Shrewsbury. As Robert mentions in his preface, his version was dedicated to Warin, Prior of Worcester,²⁹ suggesting that its primary purpose is to document the reburial of Winifred's remains in Shrewsbury.³⁰ Unlike the Anonymous version, which concludes the *Life* shortly after the resurrection at Holywell, Robert's account is carefully structured to highlight the continuity from Winifred's time to Robert's own era, tracing the journey from Holywell to Gwytherin, and ultimately to Shrewsbury. Following Winifred's second death at Gwytherin, Robert's text introduces five posthumous miracles, then narrates how Robert and the monks of Shrewsbury became aware of Winifred's miraculous power through the monks of Chester.³¹ This narrative framework aims to create a temporal connection between the era of the saints and the time in which their lives were chronicled, while simultaneously establishing a geographical link through the translation of Winifred's relics. By intertwining these temporal and spatial connections, Robert's version not only honours the saint but also endeavours to create a lasting bridge between past and present, firmly embedding Winifred's remains within the landscape of Shrewsbury.

In addition to the above, I argue that Robert's version places greater emphasis on Winifred's role as a nun than the Anonymous version does. Before substantiating this claim, considering whether this emphasis on her monastic life is a feature introduced solely through Robert's compilation may be crucial, but answering this question definitively is difficult. In his preface, Robert notes that he derived information from both written sources housed in the churches of the region where Winifred lived and oral sources from trustworthy priests:

tibi nuperrime digestam beate uirginis Wenefrede uitam direxi, quam partim per scedulas in ecclesiis patrię in qua deguisse dinoscitur collegi, partim quorundam sacerdotum relationibus addidici, quos et antiquitas ueneranda commendabat et quorum uerbis fidem adhibere ipse religionis habitus compellebat.³²

(I have recently sent to you the arranged life of the blessed virgin Wenefred, which I have partly collected from documents in the churches of the country in which she is known to have lived, and partly learned from the accounts of certain priests, whom both venerable antiquity commended and whose words the very habit of religion compelled one to trust.)

²⁹ Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Robert of Shrewsbury)', pp. 8-9.

³⁰ Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England', p. 188.

³¹ Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Robert of Shrewsbury)', pp. 37-45.

³² Ibid., p. 8. Emphasis is mine.

Given the differences, it is unlikely that the documents Robert mentions in his preface are the same as the manuscript containing the Anonymous version. Robert might have referred to these sources as a rhetorical strategy to enhance his account's credibility.

Whether Robert's version's emphasis on Winifred as a nun derives from an earlier written source or represents Robert's deliberate editing is unclear, but when considering the possibility of oral transmission, some insights might be gleaned. Gregory has suggested that Robert's oral sources were collected both in Holywell and in Gwytherin.³³ This is supported by phrases such as 'multis asseuerantibus (many asserting)' in the scene where Beuno curses Caradog, which likely reflects information Robert heard from the residents of Holywell in the twelfth century:

His dictis, iuuenis ilico ad terram corruens expirauit. Mirumque dictu, in conspectu omnium astantium corpus defuncti liquefactum disparuit, multis asseuerantibus tellure dehiscente absortum fuisse, et cum spiritu suo in baratro demersum.³⁴

(With these words spoken, the young man immediately fell to the ground and expired. And remarkable to say, in the sight of all those standing by, the body of the deceased melted away and disappeared, with many asserting that it had been swallowed up by the Earth opening and plunged into the abyss with his spirit.)

Moreover, Robert's detailed descriptions of activities at Gwytherin and his journey to Gwytherin in search of Winifred's relics may suggest that he was likely to have gathered information at Gwytherin as well. If we accept Gregory's hypothesis that the differences between the Anonymous and Robert's versions arise from distinct oral traditions in different regions, Robert could plausibly have been exposed to oral traditions of Winifred similar to those reflected in the Anonymous version. If this is the case, Robert may not have intentionally incorporated content that closely resembles the Anonymous version. Even if the emphasis on Winifred's monastic life was part of the oral tradition, that Robert deliberately chose to highlight a version that portrays Winifred as a more exemplary nun seems likely. Although it is not my intention in this article to conclusively answer this question, recognizing that Robert's version presents Winifred as a nun with a more devout and prominent character than her portrayal in the Anonymous version is essential, for her

³³ Gregory, 'A Welsh Saint in England', pp. 161-64.

³⁴ Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Robert of Shrewsbury)', pp. 15-16.

depiction in Robert's version underscores the distinctive focus on her religious vocation and the relationship between her sanctity and actual twelfth-century society.

Robert's version intricately weaves the theme of piety throughout the hagiography. For instance, in the scene where Winifred regularly visits Beuno's monastery before her Passion, the Anonymous version succinctly describes the event in a single sentence.³⁵ Contrastingly, Robert's version more profoundly explores Winifred's spiritual life. Not only does it portray her as faithfully attending church, but it explores the internal conflict she faces between her devotion to Christ and her family's expectation of an heir. This scene is depicted in much greater detail, highlighting her consultations with Beuno and her parents and ultimately reaffirming her determination to dedicate herself wholly to Christ:

Multociens quoque, petita et habita a parentibus licentia, ad uirum Dei ueniebat, sitibundo ebibens pectore, quæ ab ipsius mellifluo proferebantur ore. [...] Parentum uoluntatem in hoc concordem et conuenientem non ignorabat, ut, uiro legitime tradita, propagationem sobolis sue sustentaret, uerum se ipsam uirginem castam exhibere Christo sine ambiguitate multo melius fore credebat. In hoc igitur certamine spirituali, uirginis animus non modico distrahebatur anfractu, hinc parentum timore a proposito suo illam reuocante, illinc Dei amore ad perficiendum quod animo conceperat festinanter illam impellente. [...] Ipsi quoque curis eatenus se plurimum opprimentibus expediti, preceptis Dei funditus se mancipabant, uiam iusticie inflexibiliter incedentes. Puella uero adepta optabile desiderium suum, nimio afficiebatur gaudio, gestiensque in spiritu sancto, pedibus beati uiri interdum uotiuâ assidebat, sitibundo hauriens pectore quæ de gloria sponsi sui ab ipsius defluebant ore.³⁶

(Many times also, having asked for and obtained permission from her parents, she would come to the man of God, drinking in with a thirsty heart what was uttered from his honey-sweet mouth. [...] She was not unaware that her parents' will was in agreement and accord on this, that, having been lawfully given to a man, she should sustain the propagation of their offspring, but she believed without ambiguity that it would be much better to present herself as a chaste virgin to Christ. In this spiritual struggle, therefore, the virgin's mind was distracted by no small perplexity, on one side the fear of her parents calling her back from her

³⁵ 'Ecclesiamque paruulam ibidem struxit, in qua missam celebrabat, erudiens diuina cotidie pagina uirginem Wenefredam (And he built a small church there, in which he celebrated Mass, daily instructing the virgin Wenefred in the divine scripture)'. Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Anonymous)', p. 12.

³⁶ Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Robert of Shrewsbury)', pp. 11-12.

purpose, on the other side the love of God urging her on to accomplish what she had conceived in her mind. [...] They themselves, also freed from the cares that had been oppressing them greatly up to that point, entirely devoted themselves to the precepts of God, walking inflexibly on the path of righteousness. The girl, having indeed obtained her desirable wish, was affected by excessive joy, and rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, she frequently sat at the feet of the blessed man, drinking in with a thirsty heart the words about the glory of her bridegroom that flowed from his mouth.)

As the only child in her family, Winifred faces a significant dilemma: With no other children to inherit the father's estate, her devotion to God would prevent her from providing an heir, thus endangering the family's future. Robert's version portrays this conflict between her personal desire to dedicate herself to God and her worldly responsibility to ensure her family's lineage in depth. By illustrating her piety as emergent from overcoming this inner struggle, Robert's version succeeds in presenting her devotion as more robust and resolute.

Even on the day of her Passion, when Winifred refuses Caradog's sexual advance and eventually faces her martyrdom, her piety is depicted with greater clarity and force in Robert's version. In the Anonymous version, Winifred initially rejects Caradog's seduction, but when he becomes enraged, she changes her strategy, pretending to acquiesce before fleeing to the church:

Audiens hec Caradocus furore repletus ait, 'Dimitte insulsa hec friuola nugatoria loqui ... Michi nube et ego te uxorem ducam'. Uidens igitur puella uiri animum in emulationem commotum, ad industriam se uertens ne uiri opprimeretur uiolentia,³⁷

(Hearing this, Caradoc, filled with fury, said, 'Stop speaking these insipid, frivolous, trifling things ... Marry me and I will take you as my wife'. Therefore, seeing the man's mind stirred to jealousy, the girl turned to a plan lest she be overpowered by the man's violence,)

Contrastingly, Robert's version presents a shrewder, more decisive Winifred, who immediately devises a plan and flees to the church when faced with harassment:

³⁷ Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Anonymous)', p. 13.

Deinde dixit ei, 'Cum tu, regio ortus genere, post modicum Deo annuente rex sis futurus, felicitate seculari me opulenter replendam esse non dubito, tuo matrimonio copulatam. Veruntamen paulisper patere, donec pater meus adueniat, et ego interim thalamum meum intrabo, cito ad te reditura'. [...] Concessit tandem ut cameram suam ingrederetur, sperans illam cum decentiore ornatu atque acceptabilius compositam sine dilatione ad se redituram.³⁸

(Then she said to him, 'Since you, born of royal lineage, will soon become king with God's approval, I do not doubt that I will be abundantly filled with worldly happiness, joined to you in matrimony. However, bear with me for a little while, until my father arrives, and meanwhile, I will enter my chamber, to return to you quickly'. [...] He finally agreed that she should enter her room, hoping that she would return to him without delay, more suitably adorned and more acceptably composed.)

Robert's version adds layers of ingenuity to this scene, portraying Winifred's retreat to her bedroom not as a mere submissive act but rather as a calculated manoeuvre to mislead Caradog into expecting compliance. The respective characterisations of Winifred in the two versions contrast starkly: The Winifred in the Anonymous version momentarily yields to the male aggressor's anger, and the one in Robert's version skilfully manipulates the situation to escape without confrontation.

Moreover, the moment of her beheading further underscores her piety in Robert's version. In the Anonymous version, Caradog abruptly rides up on his horse and beheads Winifred without any conversation. In Robert's version, however, Caradog catches up with Winifred, threatens her with his sword, and once again demands that she marry him. Despite the imminent threat to her life, Winifred remains steadfast, boldly declaring her dedication to God as follows:

'eterni et omnium hominum iudicis filio in matrimonio copulata, nullum alium excipere possum, et ne te diutius protraham, nullum preter illum dum uixero admissura sum. Etenim sine illius contumelia hoc fieri non posset. Ideoque exime gladium, exere uires, qualibet feritate accinctus ut placet utere. Certusque esto quia nec terrores tui nec blanditie, nec promissiones siue mine, ab illius dilectionis dulcedine me diuellere poterunt, cuius amplexibus iam astricta sum et deuotioni

³⁸ Callander, 'Vita Sancte Wenefrede (Robert of Shrewsbury)', p. 14.

copulata'.³⁹

(‘Joined in matrimony to the eternal Son and Judge of all men, I cannot accept any other, and not to prolong this for you any further, I will admit no one besides him while I live. Indeed, this could not happen without insulting him. Therefore, draw your sword, exert your strength, armed with whatever ferocity you please. And be certain that neither your terrors nor your flatteries, neither promises nor threats, will be able to tear me away from the sweetness of his love, to whose embraces I am already bound and to whose devotion I am joined’.)

Even as she faces the sword, she reaffirms her spiritual commitment and meets her end with resolute piety. In both versions, Winifred rejects Caradog’s advances, but the way she does so differs significantly. In the Anonymous version, her firm rejection is obscured by male wrath, whereas in Robert’s version, her steadfast refusal is depicted just before her beheading. This decisive rejection, portrayed at the very moment of her impending martyrdom, not only contrasts sharply with the more subdued depiction in the Anonymous account but also heightens her piety through the dramatic interplay of her Passion and Resurrection. Although she has not yet been consecrated, this portrayal powerfully demonstrates the essential nature of a nun who is married to God and renounces worldly ties. Therefore, Winifred, in Robert’s version, emerges not only as a saint of high repute but also as a model of devout commitment, exemplifying the virtues expected of nuns during that era.

Moreover, in Robert’s version, Winifred, even after her resurrection, is depicted as an exemplary figure for the nuns around her, exerting a positive influence on both her religious community and the people living near Holywell:

Iam omnibus fere iocundum erat in illius uicinitate manere, quibusdam totius boni delectamentum salutisque uiam per eam plurimum affectantibus, [...] subdite sibi uirgines, [...] magis inde proficiebant. Uidentes quippe illam cotidianis gemitibus ad Deum suspirare, [...] maiorem ad Deum deuotionem assumebant, et semper meliores efficiebantur.⁴⁰

(It was now pleasant for almost everyone to remain in her vicinity, with some greatly desiring the delight of all good and the way of salvation through her, [...] the virgins under her authority, [...] were benefiting more from it. Indeed, seeing

³⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

her daily sigh to God with groans, [...] they were assuming greater devotion to God, and were always becoming better.)

Her role as a spiritual leader is also emphasized after she relocates to Gwytherin, where St Eleri, who welcomes her, specifically advises the nuns there to imitate her, underscoring Winifred's status as a paragon for nuns:

*'Uos itaque pro ipsius aduentu admodum gaudentes estote, [...] atque ipsam toto conamine imitantes. Etenim ad hoc illam huc destinavit altissimus, quatinus et uos illam inspicientes, merita uestra cum ipsius meritis in celesti reponatis'*⁴¹

(*'Therefore, be extremely joyful for her arrival, [...] and imitate her with all your effort. Indeed, the highest one has sent her here for this purpose, so that you, observing her, may store up your merits with her merits in heaven'*)

After succeeding Tenoï as abbess, Winifred's sanctity peaks, attracting people from all social classes, including the wicked, who come to seek her blessings:

*Optimates quique et nobiles patrie eam dulci deuotione amplectebantur, [...] minoris dignitatis uiri ad illam uenientes, [...] promtiores ad Dei seruitium deinceps reddebantur. Sed et latrunculi [...] corde conpuncti sunt, et quidam illorum exinde mitiores effecti, [...] conuersi sunt ad dominum, publicam de commissis suis penitentiam agentes. [...] nulla etas, nullusque sexus, nullius etiam negotiationis homo infra illam patriam relictus uidebatur, qui de beneficiis huius uirginis aliquod emolumentum non haberet.*⁴²

(All the nobles and aristocrats of the country embraced her with sweet devotion, [...] many men of lesser rank also coming to her, [...] were thereafter rendered more eager for God's service. Even robbers [...] were struck to the heart, and some of them became more gentle, [...] they were converted to the Lord, performing public penance for their crimes. [...] No age, no sex, nor any person of any trade seemed to be left in that country, who did not gain some benefit from this virgin.)

What is depicted here transcends the specific blessings of miraculous healing and emphasizes the broader, more universal love and grace she extends to all. Contrastingly, the Anonymous

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 30.

⁴² Ibid., p. 33.

version, as previously noted, only briefly mentions Winifred's leadership of the eleven virgins in Wales and does not elaborate on her role as a leader or discuss her influence on those around her. Robert's version, however, not only highlights her influence but also situates it within a more realistic and relatable societal context. Rather than depicting her glory in the distant, otherworldly setting of a saint's congress, Robert's portrayal emphasizes her impact in the secular world, which is closer to contemporary readers' reality. In this way, Winifred is presented as a figure whose authority and piety meaningfully impact the everyday interactions and lives of those around her.

Concerning this point, Robert's version's elaboration on Winifred's gradual escalation in status is also significant. After her resurrection, Robert's version clarifies that Winifred is consecrated by Beuno with the holy veil and that she formally becomes a nun:

uir sanctus coram multis illam sacro uelamine indutam consecrauit, atque regularis propositi disciplinis sufficienter confirmauit.⁴³

(The holy man consecrated her, clothed in the sacred veil, in the presence of many, and sufficiently confirmed her in the disciplines of the regular life.)

This scene is absent from the Anonymous version, in which Beuno departs Holywell shortly after Winifred's resurrection. Furthermore, Robert's version also portrays Winifred succeeding St Tenoi as abbess at Gwytherin, a role that further solidifies her authority and influence in the community:

Qua decenter composita et, ut talem tantamque decebat matronam, cum nimio planctu et fletu cunctorum sepulta, uir sanctus beate Wenefrede ceterarum uirginum custodiam et curam commisit.⁴⁴

(After she was properly arranged and buried, as befitted such a great matron, with excessive lamentation and weeping of all, the holy man entrusted the guardianship and care of the other virgins to blessed Wenefred.)

By depicting Winifred's recognition among the approving people around her, Robert presents her as a figure deeply intertwined with the secular world, thereby reinforcing her leadership in a way that would resonate more strongly with a contemporary audience. This nuanced

⁴³ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

depiction could promote Winifred not only as a model of religious virtue but also as a social authority figure.

In conclusion, the Anonymous and Robert's versions, which likely developed independently, can be distinguished by their respective focuses: the spring versus the saint. This distinction is significant when considering the dual nature inherent in hagiography, which traditionally balances the vita of the saint with the promotion of the associated cult. By centring on the miraculous healing spring and using Winifred primarily as a symbol of authority, the Anonymous version may have been more closely aligned with promoting a specific local cult. Contrastingly, Robert's version places significant emphasis on Winifred's piety as a nun and highlights her exemplary conduct as a model of religious devotion. Moreover, Robert's version underscores the positive influence she exerted on the nuns and laypeople around her, presenting her as a figure of both spiritual and societal importance. This focus suggests that Robert's version was intended to be received as a comprehensive narrative that would integrate Winifred into the broader fabric of English society, enhancing her prestige beyond Wales. Thus, the differences between the two versions reflect the varying expectations of hagiography, whether as a means of inspiring devotion through the saint's life or as a tool for advancing localized religious agendas.

	Anonymous version	Robert's version
MS	London, British Library, Cotton MS Claudius A.v	Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 114
Date	12th century	12th century
Language	Latin	Latin
Author	Anonymous	Robert of Shrewsbury
Reason for Beuno's visit	Exiled by Selym's sons	To build a new church
Reason Winifred was home alone	To bring the tools for Mass	Illness
Reason for Caradog's visit	To ask for water after a hunt	To meet with Winifred's father
Caradog's means of pursuit	Riding on horseback	On foot
How Caradog died	Melted like wax	Swallowed by the Earth, or melted away
Beuno's method of prayer	3') Beuno prayed alone.	1) Beuno spread his cloak over Winifred's body 2) Beuno breathed into her nostrils. 3) Beuno and the laity prayed together.
Winifred's scar on the neck	A slight scar that was as narrow as a thread	A slight white scar that was as narrow as a thread
Where the spring gushed forth	The place stained with her blood	The place where her head had fallen
Beuno's explanation of the blessings bestowed on Winifred	-	1) Stones at the spring 2) People who come in search of healing 3) An annual gift to Beuno
The manner of sending cloaks to Beuno	By setting a cloak on the rock at the spring where Beuno had prayed	By wrapping a cloak in a white cloth and setting it at the centre of the spring
Date on which a cloak was sent	St John's Eve (23 June)	1 May
Date of Winifred's second death	24 June	2 November

Table 1 Differences between the Anonymous and Robert's Versions.

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