

# The Pious Knight in Medieval Hagiography,

c. 930–1058



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*Abstract: Composed by Odo of Cluny (930–942), the Vita Geraldi is the earliest hagiographic work that proposes a layman as a model of sanctity, the Frankish count Gerald of Aurillac (d. 909). The importance and originality of this text lie in the fact that warfare is presented as an instrument for restoring order and protecting the defenceless. About a century later, the Vita of another pious arm-bearer was composed, the lesser-known Vita Burcardi. This short biography recounts the life of a powerful knight, Count Burchard of Vendôme (d. 1007), who is said to have been marked by piety and eagerness to defend the Church. Both Vita Geraldi and Vita Burcardi are interesting cases in the panorama of medieval hagiography as they reflect churchmen’s attempts to promote a new role for warriors as protectors of the weak and defenders of the Church during the Central Middle Ages. By focusing on these two vitae, this paper explores the ways in which the figure of the pious knight emerged and evolved in monastic hagiography between the tenth and eleventh centuries, in conjunction with the rise of the chivalrous ideals.*

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this essay is to examine the ways in which the concept of the *miles Christi* (‘soldier of Christ’) emerged and evolved in tenth- and eleventh-century monastic hagiography as the image of the just Christian knight, protector of the weak and defender of the Church.<sup>1</sup> The rhetoric of the *militia Christi* (‘soldiery of Christ’) is recurrent in medieval monastic culture. Early medieval monastic writers used the image of the *miles Christi* as a way of affirming their

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<sup>1</sup> This work is based on my Master’s thesis, ‘Santi militari nell’agiografia cluniacense: la *Vita s. Geraldi* e la *Vita Burcardi* tra *militia Christi* e ideale cavalleresco (secoli X–XI)’ (unpublished Master’s thesis, University of Rome ‘La Sapienza’, 2019).

identity, presenting the monk as a spiritual warrior who fought against evil through the weapons of prayer, fasting and chastity. But while this metaphor was used in the Early Middle Ages as a discourse of spiritual warfare, linked to monastic models of spiritual progress and holiness, in the ninth and tenth centuries the concept of the *militia Christi* began to be extended also to Christian *bellatores* ('arms-bearers') as servants of God.<sup>2</sup> By the turn of the eleventh century, in southern France, local ecclesiastical authorities became increasingly concerned with limiting the violence of warrior elites through the promotion of the *Pax Dei* ('Peace of God').<sup>3</sup> As the bishops curbed the violence of *milites*, namely, knights, castellans and territorial lords,<sup>4</sup> with peace oaths and threats of excommunication, monastic hagiographers began to offer examples of some pious warriors as models of behaviour. In this paper, I will examine the *vitae* of two of these pious warriors: St. Gerald of Aurillac (d. 909) and Burchard count of Vendôme (d. 1007). These two texts show the different approaches to defining the secular model of the *miles Christi*: thus, comparing them will allow us to better understand how this model evolved in monastic culture, leading to the creation of the new Christian knighthood.<sup>5</sup>

## THE *VITA GERALDI* AND THE *VITA BURCARDI*

Gerald was a Frankish nobleman who lived in the fragmented post-Carolingian world during the late ninth and early tenth century. His *Vita* was written by Odo of Cluny (930–942), who was called upon to investigate some miracle stories attributed to him. Odo initially was sceptical about Gerald's sanctity and presumed that the tales were false; but after a long and careful investigation, he was convinced that this layman was truly a saint.<sup>6</sup> Then, in the earliest

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<sup>2</sup> For the history of spiritual warfare and the related concept of the *miles Christi* in the Christian tradition, see Katherine Allen Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), pp. 71–111.

<sup>3</sup> There are many published studies devoted to the movement of the Peace of God. For an overview, see Dominique Barthélemy, *L'an mil et la paix de Dieu. La France chrétienne et féodale, 980–1060* (Paris: Fayard, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> For the evolving meaning of *miles* and related terminology in France, see Jean Flori, *L'essor de la chevalerie, X<sup>e</sup> et XI<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1986), p. 404.

<sup>5</sup> A comparison between these two texts was proposed by Paul Roussett in an essay published in 1975, which aimed to compare the *Vita Geraldi* and the *Vita Burcardi* through the perspective of the chivalrous ideal: Paul Roussett, 'L'idéal chevaleresque dans deux Vitae clunisiennes' in *Etudes de civilisation médiévale (IX<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècles). Mélanges offerts à E.-R. Labande* (Poitiers: CÉSCM, 1974), pp. 623–33.

<sup>6</sup> It is a usual hagiographical *topos* to mention one's reluctance to write a saint's *vita*, but Odo's disbelief is much more than that. For Odo's doubts about Gerald's sanctity, see Stuart Airlie, 'The anxiety of sanctity: St Gerald of Aurillac and his maker', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 43 (1992), pp. 372–395 (pp. 372–73).

years of his office as abbot of Cluny (i.e. about 930), he composed the *Vita sancti Geraldi Auriliacensis comitis* ('Life of Saint Gerald Count of Aurillac').<sup>7</sup>

The novelty that the figure of St Gerald embodies – a lay saint – makes Odo's *Vita* different from other early medieval hagiographies, which are mainly devoted to the lives of saintly abbots and bishops. Certainly, previous hagiographical narratives had elevated other laymen to the status of saints – especially Merovingian-era hagiography – but they were martyrs or kings, or men who had ended their days in a monastery.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Gerald was the first to be venerated as a non-royal lay saint who lived *in divitiis* ('in luxury') without having become a bishop or a monk, or dying as a martyr.<sup>9</sup> Andrew J. Romig views this hagiographical work 'as a startling pronouncement from an important medieval mind about the possibilities of sanctity and the access of secular men to divine power'.<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly, the most interesting

<sup>7</sup> Odo of Cluny, *Vita sancti Geraldi Auriliacensis*, transl. and ed. by Anne-Marie Bultot-Verleysen (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 2009). Odo's inquiry and his initial scepticism about Gerald's sanctity are reported in the preface of the second book of the *Vita: Vita Geraldi*, pp. 130–32. There are three versions of the *Vita*; however, scholars' use of the title *Vita Geraldi* generally refers to *Vita prolixior prima*, traditionally attributed to Odo of Cluny: see Anne-Marie Bultot-Verleysen, 'Le dossier de saint Géraud d'Aurillac', *Francia*, 22 (1995), pp. 197–202, and Paolo Faccioto, 'Moments et lieux de la tradition manuscrite de la *Vita Geraldi*' in *Guerriers et moines: Conversion et sainteté aristocratiques dans l'Occident médiéval (IX<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, ed. by Dominique Iogna-Prat (Turnhout: Brepols Publisher, 2002), pp. 217–33. The scholarly opinion that the *Vita prolixior prima* was written by Odo of Cluny was established by Albert Poncelet in an essay published in 1895: Albert Poncelet, 'La plus ancienne vie de S. Géraud d'Aurillac († 909)', *Analecta Bollandiana* 14 (1895), pp. 113–36. This thesis has been confirmed by Anne-Marie Bultot-Verleysen in her critical edition of the *Vita Geraldi*, but recently Odo's authorship has been contested by Mathew Kuefler in a book devoted to the study of the cult of Saint Gerald in the late medieval and early modern period, published in 2014: Mathew Kuefler, *The Making and Unmaking of a Saint: Hagiography and Memory in the Cult of Gerald of Aurillac* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). In this book, Kuefler argues that the briefer version of the *Vita*, known as the *Vita brevior*, belongs to Odo of Cluny, while the *Vita prolixior prima* is an early eleventh-century forgery of Ademar of Chabannes (d. 1034), a monk of Angoulême and Limoges. Kuefler's main argument is that the *Vita prolixior prima* contains many errors and anachronisms that are difficult to explain if Odo were the author of the work; however, he makes no attempt to consider Odo's other writings in order to compare their vocabulary and themes with the long version of the *Vita Geraldi*. Therefore, I follow most of the scholarship, which considers the *Vita prolixior prima* as Odo of Cluny's authentic work.

<sup>8</sup> Many Merovingian saints' Lives have as their subject noble laymen belonging to the royal court who became monks or bishops: well-known is the *Vita* of St. Arnulf of Metz (d. 640), advisor of the Merovingian court of King Theudebert II (595-612) who retired to the Abbey of Remiremont. *Vita sancti Arnulfi*, ed. by Bruno Krush, MGH *SS rer. Merov.* (Hannover: Hahn, 1888), 2, pp. 426–46.

<sup>9</sup> On lay sanctity, see Joseph-Claude Poulin, *L'idéal de Sainteté dans l'Aquitaine carolingienne d'après les sources hagiographiques, 750–950* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1975). There is another hagiographical account of a non-royal saint, the anonymous *Vita Gangulfi*, composed in the early tenth century, perhaps even before Odo's *Vita Geraldi*. This *Vita* recounts the story of an eighth-century nobleman, Gengulf of Varenne, assassinated at the hands of his wife's lover. Because of the circumstances of his death, Gengulf was portrayed as a martyr, so the *Vita Geraldi* remains the earliest life of a non-royal saint attested in manuscript tradition. For commentary, see I. Deug-Su, 'Note sull'agiografia del secolo X e la santità laicale', *Studi medievali* 30 (1989), pp. 143–161. For the text, see *Vita Gangulfi martyris Varennensis*, ed. by Wilhelm Levison, MGH *SS rer. Merov.* (Hannover: Hahn, 1919–1920), 7, pp. 142–174.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew J. Romig, 'The common bond of aristocratic masculinity: monks, secular men and St. Gerald of Aurillac', in *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Jennifer D. Thibodeaux (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 39–56 (pp. 39–40).

aspect of Odo's *Vita* lies in the fact that Gerald was a high-ranking man, belonging to the *ordo pugnatorum* ('warrior class'), who never left the world for the cloister but acted piously in the environment into which he had been born. So, while most ecclesiastical men of the tenth century condemned the violence of warfare because it was considered incompatible with Christian values, Odo of Cluny, through his portrayal of Gerald, sought to shape the idea of a new and heroic saint, a secular warrior who fought only to protect the unarmed.<sup>11</sup> In light of this, it is interesting to note that scholars have recognized in the *Vita Geraldi* some parallels with phrasing of Peace of God documents about the protection of the defenceless: historians such as Pierre Bonnassie and Jean-Pierre Poly, for instance, have considered Odo's text as an anticipation of the first *Pax Dei*.<sup>12</sup> Dominique Barthélémy, likewise, says that this hagiographical work is 'at the intellectual origins of the Peace of God'.<sup>13</sup>

In the mid-eleventh century, another hagiographical account of a pious warrior was composed in Francia, the lesser-known *Vita Burcardi venerabilis comitis* ('Life of Count Burchard the Venerable').<sup>14</sup> Composed in 1058 at the monastery of Saint-Maur-des-Fossés (near Paris), this short text recounts the life of a powerful knight, Count Burchard of Vendôme (d. 1007), a generous patron of the house and a high vassal, counsellor, and intimate friend of Hugh Capet (987–996) and Robert II the Pious (996–1031).<sup>15</sup> In this narrative, the author, a monk who calls himself Odo, describes how Burchard reformed and subsequently joined the abbey of Saint-Maur, but what he gives us actually seems more akin to a secular biography

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<sup>11</sup> Already in the tenth century Abbo of Fleury had articulated an ideal of just lay warriors who fight for the Church. See Marco Mostert, *The Political Theology of Abbo of Fleury* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1987), pp. 93–4. For an overview on Christian theology of war and violence in the Middle Ages, see Helen J. Nicholson, *Theory and Practice of War in Europe, 300-1500* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Karl Leyser, 'Early medieval canon law and the beginnings of knighthood', in *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe, 1: The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries*, ed. by Timothy Reuter (London: 1994), pp. 51–71.

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Bonnassie, *Les sociétés de l'an mil: Un monde entre deux âges* (Brussels: De Boeck Université, 2001), p. 318; Jean-Pierre Poly & Éric Bournazel, *La mutation féodale: X<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004), p. 128.

<sup>13</sup> '[...] aux origines intellectuelles de la «paix de Dieu»'. Dominique Barthélémy, *Chevaliers et miracles: La violence et le sacré dans la société féodale* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004), p. 47.

<sup>14</sup> The only modern edition of the *Vita Burcardi* dates to 1892: *Vie de Bouchard le Vénérable, comte de Vendôme, de Corbeil, de Melun et de Paris (X<sup>e</sup> et XI<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, ed. by Charles Bourel de La Roncière (Paris: Picard, 1892). Up to now, very little scholarly attention has been paid to the *Vita Burcardi*. The most complete study is that of Michel Lauwers, 'La "Vie du seigneur Bouchard, comte vénérable": conflicts d'avouerie, traditions carolingiennes et modèles de sainteté à l'Abbaye des Fosses au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle', in *Guerriers et moines*, pp. 371–418. A brief commentary on the *Vita* is found in Flori, *L'Essor de la Chevalerie*, pp. 152–58.

<sup>15</sup> On the historical Burchard, see Barthélémy, 'Sur les traces du comte Bouchard: Domination chatelaines a Vendôme et en Francia ver l'an Mil', in *Le roi de France et son Royaume Autour de l'An Mil. Actes du Colloque Huhues Capet 987-1987. La France de l'An Mil, Paris-Senlis, 22-25 juin 1987* ed. by Michel Parisse and Xavier Barral Altet (Paris: Picard, 1992), pp. 99–109.

than a narrative of the actions and life of a saint – even though the text conforms to hagiographical models. Added to this is the fact that the writing, unlike other saints' lives, was not destined for private reading but it was addressed to a listening audience in a liturgical context, with the purpose of promoting the veneration of this pious nobleman.<sup>16</sup> Such veneration, however, did not result in a real cult, and unlike St. Gerald, whose cult expanded rapidly in neighbouring regions in the early tenth century, the memory of Count Burchard remained confined in the abbey of Saint-Maur-dés-Fossés.<sup>17</sup>

Monks' interest in promoting the memory of Count Burchard was determined by specific circumstances. When Odo of Saint-Maur wrote Burchard's life story, the autonomy of the abbey was seriously threatened by a certain William count of Corbeil, heir of the same Burchard, who several times damaged the monastery's property in order to submit the monks to his authority.<sup>18</sup> In constructing the memory of Count Burchard as the portrayal of the generous patron, thus, the hagiographer likely sought to dissuade Count William from his actions. The portrait of Burchard that he painted is a *exemplum* of the perfect knight – pious, valiant, and loyal – that coincides with the principles promoted by Peace of God movement, and it is possible that he saw in the *Vita* an opportunity to publicize these values as a model of behaviour for other arm-bearers.<sup>19</sup>

Also, Odo of Cluny used his subject as an opportunity to create a mirror image of the *potentes* ('powerful') of his days, offering Gerald *in exemplo potentibus* ('as an example to the powerful').<sup>20</sup> Representing saints as spiritual exemplars to emulate was the main task of hagiographical writings: that was part of the responsibility of all hagiographers. For this reason, hagiographers played a key role in the theoretical definition of the new warrior class, as demonstrated by the two *vitae* here examined, whose subjects are representative of the emerging ideal of the pious knight that arose in the Central Middle Ages.

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<sup>16</sup> The *Vita Burcardi* was also intended as a commemorative text meant to serve the interest of the community and support their claims against local lords. Its memorial function as a narrative in which the abbey's past was remembered and commemorated would explain the fact that this hagiography was meant for be read in a liturgical context, where the audience was the community. See Lauwers, 'Mémoire des origines et idéologies monastiques: Saint-Pierre des-Fossés et Saint-Victor de Marseille au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome*, 1/115 (2003), 155–180 (pp. 168–170).

<sup>17</sup> On the veneration of Burchard, see Lauwers, 'La Vie du seigneur Bouchard', pp. 376–81.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 374–76.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 398–99.

<sup>20</sup> *Vita Geraldi*, p. 134. Translations of the text are my own.

## WITH LANCES AND SWORDS

According to Odo's *Vita*, Gerald was born in a prominent Frankish aristocratic family in Auvergne, at the castle of Aurillac.<sup>21</sup> His birth date is unknown, but we can assume that he was born in the middle of the ninth century.<sup>22</sup> After a brief description of the family and its ancestors, the narrative focuses on Gerald's boyhood training in war and hunting. As a first-born son of a nobleman, Gerald's destiny was to inherit the position of leadership of his father: that meant that he should maintain peace and order in his lands and fight to keep them. So, when he reached the appropriate age, he began to learn how to use a bow and how to ride and hunt with dogs, falcons and hawks.<sup>23</sup> Odo tells us that the boy showed some unwillingness to apply his training, while he engaged in the study of letters with enthusiasm, conscious of how *melior est sapientia quam vires* ('wisdom is better than strength'), as the Scriptures report.<sup>24</sup> Some time later, Odo's story continues, Gerald was struck down by a debilitating illness that rendered him unable to continue his secular training, and then his parents allow him to pursue his interests so that he could undertake an ecclesiastical career.<sup>25</sup> Odo specified that he learnt the psalter, chant, some Latin grammar, the Scriptures and the Roman law.<sup>26</sup> Yet as he grows up his sickness subsides and he takes up his secular responsibilities. When his parents pass away, he inherits a vast region extending from upper Auvergne to Catalonia: in these lands, he wields power in juridical matters, since he is a *vassus dominicus* ('royal vassal').<sup>27</sup>

Earthly power and wealth are seemingly incongruous attributes in a saint, but Odo justifies Gerald's possession of both. He attempts to explain to his readers that there was not incongruity between sanctity and the rightful use of secular power, but he knew that Gerald's status as a lay saint would meet some resistance and scepticism on the part of the ecclesiastics. His insistent and detailed justifications for his subject clearly demonstrate his concerns. He claims, for example, that if Gerald punished criminals with justice, he was indulgent with those

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>22</sup> The earliest mention of Gerald's birth date comes from Ademar of Chabannes's *Commemoratio abbatum Lemovicensium basilice sancti Marcialis*, in which he says that Gerald was born in the fifth year of the rule of Abbo of Saint-Martial as abbot of Limoges, i.e. in 855 or 856.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* The biblical quotation is from Wisdom 6:1 (Stuttgart Vulgate). In this paper, all English translations of the Vulgate Latin are from the Douay-Rheims Bible version.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140–42.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 142.

<sup>27</sup> On Gerald's juridical duties, see Archibald R. Lewis, 'Count Gerald of Aurillac and feudalism in south central France in the early tenth century', *Traditio* 20 (1964): 41–58 (pp. 44–47).

who had committed some crime *non per consuetam maliciam* ('not due to a predisposition to evil'), exempting himself from applying the prescribed sanction, often too severe.<sup>28</sup> Odo goes even further by assuring his readers that Gerald never punished anyone with death or mutilation, even when the law provided for it.<sup>29</sup>

Gerald's warlike activity represents an issue of further concern for Odo. He provides a lengthy argument about the righteous use of violence by focusing upon warfare for the sake of the defenceless. In support of his words, he names some of the many biblical holy men who had fought in wars, such as Abraham and King David, stressing that Gerald only 'fought for the cause of God'.<sup>30</sup> The mission of Gerald was precisely to carry the sword in order to defend the *inermes* ('unarmed'), as Odo writes:

It was therefore permitted to a layman placed in the order of the combatants to carry the sword, in order to defend the unarmed, as one defends the harmless flock against the twilight wolves, as the Scriptures says; also to repress by the law of war or by the constraint of justice those whom the sentence of the Church cannot submit.<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless, Odo found himself in an uncomfortable position: he knew that such a complex and delicate issue as the use of violence would have probably been misunderstood by some ecclesiastics. For this reason, he is careful to stress that Gerald 'never stained his sword with human blood'.<sup>32</sup> In fact, in order to avoid bloodshed, Gerald adopted a curious method of fighting: with the lances turned backwards. This unusual technique of war, Odo says, initially aroused the derision of the enemies and also the disapproval of his own men – following a common hagiographic *topos*, in which saints' behaviours appear foolish in the eyes of the world – but at last, with God's favour, Gerald was always able to obtain the victory over his enemies, and then scorn turned into admiration:

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>31</sup> *Licuit igitur laico homini in ordine pugnatorum posito gladium portare, ut inerme vulgus, velut innocuum pecur a lupis, ut scriptum est, vespertinis defensaret, et quos ecclesiastica censura subigere nequit aut bellico iure aut vi iudicialia compesceret.* *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>32</sup> [...] *gladium suum numquam humano sanguine cruentarit.* *Ibid.*

When the unavoidable necessity of fighting laid on him, however, he [Gerald] ordered his men in a commanding voice to fight with their swords and their lances held back. This would have seemed ridiculous to the enemies if Gerald, strengthened by divine power, had not proved that he was unbeatable; and even his own men would have found this manner of fighting utterly absurd if they had not learnt from experience that Gerald, moved by piety at the moment of fighting, was always invincible. When therefore they saw him triumph over the enemies by piety mingled with a new manner of fighting, they changed their scorn to admiration; and already sure of victory, they executed his orders with impetus.<sup>33</sup>

The primary reason that led Gerald to take up arms against the wicked was the defence of the *inermes*. His vast possessions, in fact, were several times plundered by neighbouring landlords seeking to expand their territories, and peasant populations often fell victim to their predations. Gerald attempted, however, to avoid fighting whenever possible and he always offered peace and reconciliation to his enemies. Sometimes such diplomatic concessions were successful, but even when it was not possible to avoid armed conflict, Gerald tried to spare his enemies.

Gerald's military actions, though, were not for defensive purposes only: at least once, he cooperated on a military campaign with William the Pious, count of Auvergne and duke of Aquitaine (d. 918). This episode serves to highlight Gerald's mercy. Unlike Duke William, who allowed his troops to pillage the territory in which they fought, Gerald prevented his soldiers from despoiling the villages even when they were in absence of provisions, and the hagiographer takes the occasion to remark that he earned the appellation of 'Gerald the Good' among the population by doing so.<sup>34</sup>

Instead, Count Burchard of Vendôme was commemorated among the monks with the title of *venerabilis* ('venerable'), a kind of praise for his large donations to the monastery of Saint-Maur-des-Fossés. In the *Vita Burcardi*, Odo of Saint-Maur presents him as a man of *nobili stirpe progenitus* ('noble ancestry'), but apart from this small amount of information he says no more about Burchard's youth.<sup>35</sup> A few lines below, Burchard is described as a one of

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<sup>33</sup> *Aliquociens autem, cum inevitabilis ei preliandi necessitas incumberet, suis imperiosa voce precepit, mucronibus gladiatorum retro actis, hastas inantea dirigentes pugnarent. Ridiculum hoc hostibus foret, nisi Geraldus vi divina roboratus mox eisdem hostibus intolerabilis esset; quod etiam suis valde videbatur ineptum, nisi experiment probavissent quod Geraldus, quem pietas in ipso preliandi articulo vincebat, invincibilis semper esset. Cum ergo viderent quod novo preliandi genere mixta pietate triumpharet, irrisionem vertebant in ammirationem; et iam victoriae securi, servabant alacres quod iubebat.* Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 180–82.

<sup>35</sup> *Vita Burcardi*, p. 5. The hagiographer does not provide further information about Burchard's origins, although we can presume that he was a descendant of Gerald Count of Paris (d. 779). See Barthélemy, *La société dans le comté de Vendôme: de l'an mil au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1993), pp. 278–79.

the most trusted men of King Hugh Capet.<sup>36</sup> The hagiographer is quite insistent on the bond of friendship between the count and the sovereign: he writes that Hugh Capet rewarded his faithful vassal by giving him several *castra* ('castles') and *possessiones* ('properties'), and eventually the title of *comes regalis* ('royal count') of Paris.<sup>37</sup> Through the marriage to the noblewoman Elizabeth, Burchard also took the title of Count of Corbeil.<sup>38</sup>

With all these titles and lands, Burchard was one of the most powerful and wealthy noblemen of his times. Unlike the *Vita Geraldi*, in which the justification for the possession of power is greatly extended, the author of the *Vita Burcardi* does not feel the need to justify Burchard's social status and wealth but he merely depicts them as the 'will of God' (*Dei iudicio disponente*).<sup>39</sup> This shift in tone between the two *vitae* indicates the profound changes that took place in the political landscape in the Frankish kingdom during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Gerald lived in a period where the collapsing state structures had made room for local lords to seize power, wielding it ruthlessly, and the need to distance Gerald from such a category of men pushed Odo of Cluny to defend his status as a powerful landlord. At the turn of the eleventh century the rise of the new Capetian dynasty led to the reestablishment of a centralized monarchy. This new political context is clearly reflected in the Life of Count Burchard, who had strong ties of friendship and loyalty with the king.<sup>40</sup> So, while Gerald's power is justified as a means to exercise Christian charity through the administration of justice and the protection of the weak, for Burchard the legitimation of power lay in his support to the crown.

Odo of Saint-Maur continues his narrative by focusing on the deeds performed by Count Burchard in favour of the abbey. He tells us that the religious community was in a condition of moral decay because of the abbot who disregarded monastic discipline by living lavishly. Burchard, then, bearing the approval of the king, deposed the abbot and invited St Maieul of Cluny (d. 994) to reform the monastery along Cluniac lines.<sup>41</sup> Odo of Saint-Maur praises Count Burchard at length for his work, placing particular emphasis on his generous donations to the abbey. But the count is not only commemorated in the *Vita* as a generous patron of the abbey: the hagiographer also celebrates him as a valiant knight who fights and

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<sup>36</sup> *Vita Burcardi*, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> In contrast, in Odo of Cluny omit the mention of any royal support for Gerald, even if he maintained his ties to the king as a royal vassal.

<sup>41</sup> *Vita Burcardi*, pp. 7–12.

triumphs against his enemies, describing him as a *defensor ecclesiae* ('defender of the Church'), protector of monks, nuns, clerics, widows and orphans.<sup>42</sup> In sharp contrast to Odo of Cluny, the monk of Saint-Maur is not at all reluctant to describe Burchard's attitude toward warfare. In the incipit of the *Vita*, he illustrates the enthusiasm with which the youthful Burchard undertook his training in military skills, stating that God was making a champion of him.<sup>43</sup>

In the *Vita*, Burchard is involved in an important battle against Count Odo of Blois (d. 996). According to the text, the battle took place in the fields near the town of Orsay. Odo of Saint-Maur says that the count of Blois had gathered a large army whereas Burchard had only few allies with him; but God intervened by confusing Count Odo's warriors, who fought between themselves, massacring each other. Burchard and his army then 'rushed towards the enemies' (*super hostes irruit*) and 'many thousands of men were killed' (*multisque milibus interfectis*). The count of Blois, seeing how easily his men were being decimated, beat the retreat with shame and fear.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, while Gerald of Aurillac fought against the enemy with the spears turned backwards, in Odo of Saint-Maur's narrative it is the enemies who turn their weapons against themselves. Burchard, on the other hand, does not refuse to fight but he joins the battle with determination. It is interesting to compare this battle with the biblical combat of the warrior-prophet Gideon against the Midianites (Judg. 6–9). According to the biblical account, Gideon had only three hundred men against an army of over ten thousand Midianite warriors, but during the battle 'the Lord sent the sword into all the camp, and they [the Midianites] killed one another' (Judg. 7:22). This biblical episode shows clearly that it was thanks to strength of faith that Gideon rescued Israel from slavery, giving him the courage to go forward and fight the enemy despite the numerical inferiority of his army.<sup>45</sup> Odo of Saint-Maur likewise reports that Burchard was sure of victory, since he *vero in Domino fiducialiter* ('had full confidence in the Lord').<sup>46</sup> What is significant about this account of the battle is that it is equivalent to a trial by combat on a large scale, a judgement of God (*iudicium Dei*): the

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19–21.

<sup>45</sup> In the New Testament, St. Paul mentions Gideon as an example of faith for the believers: 'And what shall I yet say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, Barac, Samson, Jephthe, David, Samuel, and the prophets: who by faith conquered kingdoms, wrought justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, recovered strength from weakness, became valiant in battle, put to fight the armies of foreigners' (Hebr. 11:32-34).

<sup>46</sup> *Vita Burcardi*, p. 21.

hagiographer, in fact, underlines that the enemy's army was slaughtered by the *Dei iudicio* ('judgment of God').<sup>47</sup> He also presents Count of Blois as a devil's agent, *instigante humani generis inimico* ('instigated by the enemy of the humankind'), whereas Burchard, labelled as *Deo fidelis* ('faithful to God'), is depicted as an envoy of God.<sup>48</sup>

Further on, Odo of Saint-Maur narrates another military action, aimed at recovering the relics of St Walric of Leuconay (d. 622), stolen from the abbey of Leuconay (at the present Saint-Valéry-sur-Somme) by a certain Arnulfus who can be identified as Arnulf II count of Flanders (d. 988). We know from historical sources that in 980 Count Burchard accompanied King Hugh Capet in a military expedition against Arnulf, who had refused to recognize Hugh as the king of Francia. After the capture of Montreuil-sur-Mer, the count of Flanders had to return the relics of St Walric and that of St Richarius (d. 645), seized by his grandfather Count Arnulf I of Flanders (d. 964), who deposited them at the abbey of Saint-Bertin (Pas-des-Calais). As he had come into possession of the relics, King Hugh Capet commissioned Count Burchard to carry them back to Leuconay.<sup>49</sup> Odo of Saint-Maur demonstrates a very vague knowledge of these facts: according to his account, Arnulf II stole St Walric's relics – St Richerus is not mentioned here – by setting fire to the monastery, while the king – who is Robert the Pious in lieu of Hugh – did not participate in the rescuing of the relics but he merely sent Burchard to rescue them.<sup>50</sup> As the king's delegate, Burchard arrived at Montreuil with a squad of *milites* and surrounded Arnulf's castle, commanding him to give back the relics. The count of Flanders submitted to the request and returned the relics; then Burchard placed them inside a precious silver case and went back with his knights. But along the way they found the road blocked by the overflowing waters of the Somme River. Burchard did not discourage himself in front of the obstacle and invoked the Lord's help. His prayer was answered: the waters divided in two,

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18. For the conception of Burchard's battle as a judgement of God, see Lauwers, 'La Vie du seigneur Bouchard', p. 411. On the interpretation of the civil war in terms of *iudicium Dei* more generally, see Heinhard Steiger, *Die Ordnung der Welt: Eine Völkerrechtsgeschichte des karolingischen Zeitalters (741 bis 840)* (Cologne: Böhlau-Verlag, 2010), pp. 460–523.

<sup>48</sup> *Vita Burcardi*, p. 21.

<sup>49</sup> On Count Arnulf I's relics acquisition, see Edina Bozoky, 'La politique des reliques des premiers comtes de Flandre (fin du IX<sup>e</sup>-fin du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle)', in *Les reliques. Objets, cultes, symboles. Actes du colloque international de l'Université du Littoral-Côte d'Opale (Boulogne-sur-Mer), 4-6 septembre 1997*, ed. by Edina Bozokoy and Anne-Marie Helvetius (Turnhout: 1999), pp. 271-92. See also Bozokoy, 'Le recouvrement des reliques des saints Valéry et Riquier par Hugues Capet', in *Saint Riquier à Saint-Riquier. Actes du colloque du Centre d'Études médiévales de l'université de Picardie-Jules-Verne, Saint-Riquier, 9-10 Déc. 2000*, ed. by Danielle Buschinger (Amiens: Presses du Centre d'études médiévales, 2001), pp. 1–13.

<sup>50</sup> *Vita Burcardi*, p. 24.

thus allowing the troop to pass through the river.<sup>51</sup> Odo of Saint-Maur ends the passage by commenting that ‘the Lord deigned to perform the same miracle which He had done in the sea, through his servant Moses, for the sons of Israel on the escape’.<sup>52</sup> While in the previous episode Burchard is compared to the warrior-prophet Gideon, here the author links the biblical episode of the Red Sea crossing (Gen. 3:14–17), presenting his hero as a new Moses.<sup>53</sup>

## FROM THE WORLDLY *MILITIA* TO THE ARMY OF CHRIST

At the end of the *Vita* we learn that Burchard, after a life spent in the service of the king, retired to the monastery of Saint-Maur-des-Fossés by taking religious vows: this represents one of the earliest examples of the new type of warrior-saint that rose in monastic hagiography during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>54</sup> Hagiographical accounts of adult conversion to religious life became increasingly pronounced from the year 1000 onwards, and the figure of the *miles conversus* (‘converted knight’) constituted a frequent *topos* in eleventh- and twelfth-century *vitae*.<sup>55</sup> According to the standard schema of these narratives, the knight’s conversion was generated by a sudden repugnance for sins committed during a life of violence.<sup>56</sup> From this perspective, the conversion was presented in terms of complete rupture with the world. Burchard’s case is quite different. His monastic life is not intended as a remedy for sins committed, but rather it represents an additional merit to those acquired during his secular life. This view seems to reflect the early models of warrior-saints that dominated the Merovingian hagiography of the seventh and eighth centuries, whose subjects had been influential aristocrats and office holders at the royal court before their entering into a monastery or taking the office of bishoprics. Nevertheless, the purpose of Merovingian hagiographers was to highlight the noble origins of their subjects rather than accentuating their secular life.

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>52</sup> *Ex quo facto illud Dominus reiterare dignatus est miraculum quod per Moysem famulum suum, fugientibus filiis Israel, per medium mare operari dignatus est.* *Ibid.*, pp. 25–6.

<sup>53</sup> Michel Lauwers observes that the crossing of the Somme River also echoes the passage through the river of Jordan by the Israelites carrying the Ark of the Covenant during the conquest of the Promised Land (Josh 3:14–17). Lauwers, ‘La Vie du seigneur Bouchard’, pp. 412–13.

<sup>54</sup> *Vita Burcardi*, pp. 26–7.

<sup>55</sup> For more specifically on the *vitae* of knightly converts, see Smith, *War and Monastic Culture*, pp. 159–96.

<sup>56</sup> Alessandro Barbero, *L’aristocrazia nella società francese del Medioevo. Analisi delle fonti letterarie (secoli X–XIII)*, (Bologna: Cappelli, 1987), pp. 184–85.

While for many of the conversion tales of the eleventh and twelfth centuries the entrance into monastic life is determined by repentance for sins committed, Odo of Saint-Maur describes Burchard's entrance in triumphal accents, presenting his choice as a heroic act of a man who leaves everything at the peak of his prowess to serve the King of kings.<sup>57</sup> In this passage, Burchard is portrayed as a victorious knight who enters the *sacrum ordinem* ('sacred order') with honour and triumph, loaded down with rich gifts for the community. The author makes a lengthy list of these gifts: gold, silver, a precious evangeliary, candleholders, and many other sacramental vessels.<sup>58</sup> In addition to all these objects, destined for the liturgical service of the *sanctae ecclesiae* ('Holy Church'), Burchard also offers his *aureus ensis cum cingulum aureo* ('the golden sword in its golden baldric').<sup>59</sup> This gesture is actually part of a solemn rite, the *depositio cinguli*, attested in monastic charters, chronicles and hagiographical sources, which consisted of the deposition of the knight's sword-belt (and sometimes of his sword) on the altar, to signify the passage from the worldly *militia* to the spiritual one.<sup>60</sup> The early attestations of this rite date back to the eighth century, but it is only in the Carolingian period that the *depositio cinguli* became an integral part of monastic ceremonies for warrior converts.<sup>61</sup> Accounts of ritual deposition of arms recur very frequently in the *vitae* of warrior-saints and the fascination with this solemn rite is testified by hagiographers' tendency to present the laying-down of arms as a crucial moment in their narratives. Monastic authors identified this rite as the tangible sign of the convert's transformation. In the *Vita Burcardi* this ritual assumes even a sacred value, as Michel Lauwers suggests, arguing that the hagiographer positioned Burchard's sword and baldric in the middle of his gifts destined for liturgical functions in order to present them as holy objects.<sup>62</sup>

In Gerald's story, monastic life plays an even more important role. As we have seen, Gerald was inclined to monastic life since his youth; yet, unlike Burchard, he never left the world for the cloister. Odo of Cluny writes that Gerald confessed his desire to enter monastic life to his friend Gausbert bishop of Rodez, who instead persuaded him to remain in the world

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<sup>57</sup> *Vita Burcardi*, p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27–8.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>60</sup> On the ritual of the *depositio cinguli*, see Smith, *War and Monastic Culture*, pp. 181–87.

<sup>61</sup> For early examples of the *depositio cinguli*, see Barthélémy, *La mutation de l'An Mil a-t-elle eu lieu? Servage et chevalerie dans la France des X<sup>e</sup> et XI<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), pp. 262–67.

<sup>62</sup> Lauwers, 'La Vie du seigneur Bouchard', pp. 404–5.

for the sake of its general welfare.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the saint of Aurillac adopted a compromise by adhering to monastic life privately. He tonsured himself and shaved his beard secretly, and from that moment he began to follow a monastic discipline, living *sobrie, pie et juste* ('soberly, justly and piously').<sup>64</sup> Book Two of the *Vita Geraldi* demonstrates clearly how Gerald began to live as a monk in lay clothing. Odo tells us that he dressed modestly and without any ostentation, ate his bread in silence, abstained from wine, and dedicated much of his time to prayer and spiritual readings. He also performed good deeds in the service of others, giving to the poor generous alms and inviting them to dine at his table, aiding widows and orphans and consoling them. More importantly, he maintained celibacy throughout his life: he even refused the marriage to Duke William's sister due to his *castitatis amor* ('love of chastity').<sup>65</sup> This depiction of Gerald seems to coincide with Carolingian models of ideal laity proposed by lay mirrors, i.e. didactic books written by churchmen for aristocratic laymen, containing moral advices based on typically "monastic" virtues such as humility, mercy, temperance and chastity.<sup>66</sup> But if the authors of the early Carolingian lay mirrors had professed the essential capacity of all Christians to enact these virtues, Odo's image of Gerald demonstrates that these achievements depended on a man's willingness and capacity to separate himself from the secular world.<sup>67</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As I mentioned in the introduction, from the late tenth century the Church tried to stipulate for the emerging chivalry class a specific code of moral behaviour through the movement of the Peace of God, which expanded progressively during the late tenth and eleventh century in France. The purpose of this movement was not to eliminate warfare but rather to control it and to contain it in legitimate forms. Likewise, the authors of the two *vitae* shared the principle of

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<sup>63</sup> *Vita Geraldi*, p. 200.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 200–2.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>66</sup> On the figure of St Gerald of Aurillac as a model for aristocratic laymen, see Andrew Romig, *Be a Perfect Man. Christian Masculinity and the Carolingian Aristocracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), pp. 144–154, and Romig, 'The common bond of aristocratic masculinity'. On the Carolingian lay-mirrors, see Alain Dubreucq, 'La littérature des *specula*: délimitation du genre, contenu, destinataires et réception', in *Guerriers et Moines*, pp. 17–39. See also Thomas F. X. Noble, 'Secular sanctity: forging an ethos for the Carolingian nobility', in *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, ed. by Patrick Wormald and Janet L. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 8–36.

<sup>67</sup> Romig, *Be a Perfect Man*, pp. 144–154.

the *bellum iustum* ('just war') and they do agree that it is impossible, in a violent world marked by sin, to maintain peace and order without the righteous use of violence. As we have seen, in both texts warfare is almost always for defensive purposes; it is not intended as a way to widen possessions or to increase power, but rather to maintain law and order, to defend property from unjust seizure, to enforce justice, to protect unarmed people, and finally to rescue stolen relics. More specifically, in the *Vita Geraldi* the justification for fighting derives from the fact that Gerald's warfare is on behalf of the *inermes*. Odo offers a meaningful episode in which the saint of Aurillac prevents his men from plundering villages. Peace of God assemblies began in the late tenth century as public demonstrations against such aggression, with decrees forbidding certain types of violence committed against the unarmed. Burchard's fighting, instead, appears inextricably linked to the conception of *iudicium Dei*: the battles conducted by the count constitute a juridical action on God's behalf. This conception of warfare as a divine judgement is manifested above all in the account of the battle of Orsay, which significantly follows the model of the Old Testament's ancient battles. Another important aspect is the fact that, in order to justify – and even to sanctify – Burchard's warfare, the enemies are labelled as agents of the devil. Odo of Saint-Maur says that the count of Blois acted against Burchard because he was incited by Satan. He also presents Count Arnulf II as a man excited to diabolical fury when he burns the monastery of St. Walric of Leuconay and seizes the relics.

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this essay, both texts illustrate the defining process of the secular image of the *miles Christi* in monastic hagiography. As we have seen, in Odo's *Vita Geraldi* the conception of *militia Christi* is linked more to the monastic ideal pursued by Gerald than to his secular warfare: Gerald is above all a spiritual warrior, an *athleta celesti militia* ('athlete of the celestial militia'), as Odo of Cluny describes him, who 'in the arena of earthly life fought manfully against the forces of evil'.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the ideal of noble lay piety embodied by Gerald remained closely tied to the traditional monastic virtues: Odo of Cluny celebrates him because he was able to lead this sort of monastic life despite his lay state, and the overall result is that Gerald looks more like 'a monk in lay clothing' rather than a layman of his own rank. Indeed, Gerald was a warrior, but descriptions of his military actions only serve to emphasize his mercy toward his enemies. For Odo, Gerald's remarkable capacity to forgive his enemies represents the central component of his heroism. On the contrary, Burchard's martial skills make him a quasi-epic hero in the eyes of his hagiographer. Unlike

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<sup>68</sup> [...] *dudum in palestra mundanae, conversacionis agonizans, cuneos viciorum viriliter debellavit. Vita Geraldi*, p. 198.

the Abbot of Cluny, Odo of Saint-Maur does not seem embarrassed about the ‘worldly’ character of his hero: married to a rich noblewoman, heroic on the battlefield and the king’s closest confidant, Burchard is much more involved in secular affairs and much more fully engaged in the violence of the warrior culture than Gerald. Moreover, Burchard’s fighting was not as strange as Gerald’s was. Certainly, both of them triumph through divine intervention, but as Odo of Cluny himself admits, if God had not granted Gerald success, his tactics would have appeared absurd even to his own men; contrarily, the image of a strong warrior, never hesitant in front of the prospect of an armed confrontation, emerges in the *Vita Burchardi*.

There is another important difference. With his permanent desire to enter a monastery, Gerald embodies two distinct identities – one secular, one religious – which are in continual tension with one another. The narration reveals Odo of Cluny’s uneasiness in trying to place Gerald appropriately in relation to these identities. In the *Vita Burchardi*, instead, secular and monastic values coexist without problems, although according to a schema that places the latter in a hierarchically dominant position. Undoubtedly, Odo of Saint-Maur considers religious life as the most perfect way to achieve sanctity: this view is reflected in the passage of the *depositio cinguli*, where Burchard’s weapons are transformed into sacred objects, proclaiming in this way the superiority of the monk’s spiritual arms to the warrior’s physical arms.<sup>69</sup> However, while the hybrid figure of Gerald emphasizes the difference between lay and monastic values, Burchard’s entrance into a monastery represents a sort of continuity of his secular life. In summary, the comparison of the *Vita Geraldi* and the *Vita Burchardi* illustrates the development on the model of the pious knight in monastic hagiography, reflecting the emerging view that ‘they who fought’ could give, through their *militia*, a saintly service to the Church.



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<sup>69</sup> On the value of the weapons deposited, see Smith, ‘Ungirded for battle: knightly conversion to monastic life and the making of weapon-relics in the central Middle Ages’, in *Between Sword and Prayer: Warfare and Medieval Clergy in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Radoslaw Kotecki (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 182–206.