INTRODUCTION

This is a book about literary innovation. It has long been a commonplace of literary history to observe that in the twelfth century, first in the French-speaking territories controlled by the Anglo-Norman and Capetian ruling families, and especially within the milieu of the English royal court, antique and chivalric romances appear simultaneously with a new kind of historical chronicle driven by contemporary affairs. In short order historiography and romance, whether written in Latin or in the vernaculars, become culturally dominant genres of narrative expression throughout the rest of Europe. This simultaneous appearance and spread within the same cultural milieu, which has frequently been remarked, suggests a deeper intimacy that I propose to examine here.

The appearance of a new form of writing is an event of literary history and a question for literary theory. As Bakhtin's work has shown with great clarity, new forms disrupt old systems and create new areas of meaning and new paradigms of meaningfulness; they also alter the significance of already existing modes of literary expression and change the whole constellation of literary forms. Yet why a new kind of writing appears at a particular time, or even appears at all, is not a question that literary theory can answer. To understand the changes in the literary constellation that the emergence together of history and romance effects requires us to consider the structure of literary production as a whole in its relation to the world from which it emerges and to which it
responds. Who writes? and to what end? I suggest in this book that the provocation to romance writing is the same as the provocation to history: they grow out of the same cultural need and intend to do the same cultural work. To put it as briefly as I can, this is the need to make the secular world intelligible as driven by secular imperatives, no matter how mediated through varieties of religious discourses the process might be. This similar provocation and identical cultural task is the basis of the relation of history and romance to each other in their simultaneous appearance, the rapid development and wide spread of their reception, and their formal affinities. Moreover, this cultural need is not our own theoretical abstraction: it was urgent for those who were most practically and immediately involved with secular processes, the literate clerks who produced the texts, served in the courts of royal and territorial administrators, and advised noble elites. In the rearrangements of power that were part of the state-making designs of Capetian and Anglo-Norman ruling families, new imaginative and conceptual entities became matters demanding serious representation, often in new discursive configurations, and often for the first time—the boundaries between self and other, the experience of eros, the differentiation of public from private life all took on new contours. These matters are new urgencies demanding practical knowledge. Thus while artistic activity is never directly reducible to the political sphere, it is nevertheless to the domain of political and social transformation that we must look in order to understand artistic innovation. At the same time, our account of artistic innovation can shed light directly on the process of social change.

While I am writing about a political process and its connection with literary innovation, I am not concerned with narrating the trajectory of political change in itself. I intend rather to deal directly with the pressures on modes of representation that are correlative to changes in the structure of political power. Above all, I do not see the political process as a static or knowable factual context in which to situate artistic change in order to explain it. To paraphrase what Marx refers to as the guiding idea of all his inquiry, it is the sphere of culture in the largest sense in which people become conscious of changes in their existence and in which these changes are fought out. They are fought out theoretically in the realms of political theory, theology, and philosophy and in the realm of literary representation that is the subject of this book. They are also fought out practically in war, internecine battle, and other types of armed struggle and unarmed social conflict—but even in the towns, fortified strong houses, and castles in the midst of conflict it is only through protocols of rep-
presentation that people decide to take sides, take action, understand and assert the significance of the action they take, and justify themselves to themselves and to others. Thus changes in the structure of representation are themselves primary phenomena, and their analysis can provide us with as direct an entry point into the lives of real social actors as quantitative or other hard evidence can.

I am particularly concerned with changes in political power related to the process of state formation in the *longue durée*. In thinking about this process, I am much indebted to the analytic model developed by Charles Tilly in a series of extremely important studies. Tilly’s notion of state formation (a term he introduced to political theory to counter the teleological implications of phrases such as *nation building*) has the great advantage for medieval studies of drawing attention to the wide variety of governmental entities that exist besides the national state and their very fluid possibilities of development and change. For Europe around the year 1000, Tilly signals three basic forms of many diverse organizations of power: petty military despotisms, city-states oriented to trade and the exploitation of their surrounding countrysides, and empires “concatenating central military organizations, thin regional administrations, trading networks, and organizations of tribute in which local and regional rulers — often maintaining cultural identities distinct from that of the empire’s center — enjoyed great autonomy in return for collaboration in the collection of tribute and support in the empire’s military campaigns.”

None of these organizations of power are pre-states or “primitive” states, or necessarily on their way to become states, although in each type we can find a process of state formation — the process of centralization and territorialization of rule and the monopolization of the means of coercion into an organization distinct from any other in the same territory. Moreover, these three basic systems of political consolidation overlap with other kinds of consolidation and territorial identities such as languages, religions, trading systems, and tribal and ethnic unities in a way that defies simple mapping.

During the long twelfth century, some ruling elites in western Europe did nevertheless manage, more or less successfully and with an impact on other competing claimants to local authority, to centralize territorial administration, to exercise clear dominance over other competing claimants to local authority within the territory that they administered, and especially to find more efficient ways of extracting capital and military service from subjects under their control. This new efficiency, which has been much studied, was especially dependent on writing, and it brought with it a new class of clerically educated, literate
and numerate intellectuals who transformed writing from a primarily liturgical instrument into a potent instrument of secular power. Yet state formation as a process within these territories, as important as it is, is one social process among others. It is in conflict with other countervailing tendencies and with other centers of power, and it is by no means destined to become victorious.

My task here is thus to consider the history of state formation without relying on the narrative of the inevitable rise of the state. The traditional narrative of western European development still sees state formation as the paradigmatic postmedieval signifier. In what follows, I treat state formation as something going on within the sphere of governmental power and against other kinds of sovereignties, and my intention is to take it into account without a teleology—without a story of the ultimately successful rise of the state or the sense that the state is the inevitable and proper outcome of the conflict of sovereignties. And while the chapters in this book are arranged in a generally chronological order, this arrangement is merely a convenience for the reader. I am more concerned with tendencies within the longue durée that come to light at particular moments when they become visible for us in particular texts. These changes cannot be ordered into a single trajectory of change over time without doing much violence to the range of their implications. In 1980 Michel Foucault famously remarked, à propos the tendency to treat the state as the natural and “real” form of sovereignty, that political theory still needed to cut off the king’s head. Foucault made that remark at a moment in which liberal democracy in the form of the western European welfare state already seemed to have definitively deposed the king in practice: it seemed, that is, to have put an end to the unique power of centralized coercion. In that context Foucault saw the need to understand scattered hegemonies, microsystems of power, and governmentality directly, without the mediation of state theory. The way I see this task now inevitably arises from our own contemporary situation in which nonstate actors—whether multinational corporations, the drug cartels and money-laundering operations that are their illegal counterparts, or international terrorists—have become important historical agents even as the fragility, if not the outright failure, of the secular state has become increasingly apparent while the state is in no great rush to disappear from the historical arena.

The nationality of the modern national state has always been an ideological fiction in the service of a political program. Whether part of the rhetoric of the demand for statehood by ethnic minorities within larger sovereignties, by former colonial subjects, or by “nationalities” otherwise conceived, or part of
the rhetoric of already hegemonic political entities promoting or enforcing the
dominance of one set of cultural idioms over others, what Homi Bhabha refers
to as the “pedagogic,” appeals to nationality are always an act of construction. Even the most homogenous of modern European states are and have been quite
diverse—polyglot, composed of diverse regional cultures, and always containing minority religions. That the medieval state is fissured with difference does not make it the Other of modernity. Yet the fact that a political boundary is
not an epistemological boundary is obscured for us both by conditions of universal statehood and by the enormous weight of the nation in our contemporary disciplinary structures. Our university departments and the hiring and specialization codes of our learned societies and granting agencies are all organized by the idea of national literatures and national history. For most of medieval Europe, the nation is simultaneously too small and too large to be a useful analytic unit. We need only think of the career of Anselm, born in Lombardy, abbot of Bec and archbishop of Canterbury, or reread Robert Bartlett’s fine chapter on the aristocratic diaspora of the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries to remember how frequently people moved around in Europe through marriages, work, or warfare and carried cultural practices with them as they moved and how central displacement, relocation, migration, and cultural friction were to medieval experience. We can recall the powerful international ecclesiastical culture and its social organization in archiepiscopal dioceses that often crossed political boundaries of all sorts or the allied monastic houses that did the same. And we can remind ourselves as well of the unification of secular culture across national lines and within national territories that occurred not only among the elite, who intermarried, were educated within a similar curriculum, and shared a common political experience, but also among ordinary people, who, in the ancien régime, led overwhelmingly similar lives in labor-intensive cultivation of the land, different as local practices may have been. These large-scale international phenomena that characterize the Middle Ages also do not make it modernity’s Other.

The large variety of overlapping institutional, epistemological, and practical structures of power that the European Middle Ages presents to us in fact provides us with a great opportunity to explore the ways that dislocations and transformations of power are registered in the consciousness of those who live through them. I set out to do this within the disciplinary framework of literary criticism by reading a set of exemplary texts. Some of these texts are very well known; others have rarely been discussed. I read these texts here to
understand how changes in formal representational practices not only witness but participate in the structure of power by their play of complicities and resistances to change. Hence my interest throughout this book in material related to structures of governance that are not reducible to state borders as well as in material that emerges from the Anglo-Norman or Capetian court, and in various kinds of narratives of resistance as well as in the self-justifying narratives of those in power.

For an inquiry of this sort, a survey of many texts is less useful than a few carefully selected examples that can be read closely and in full. I take my texts from borders rather than political centers, and always from contested or ambiguous territory. The border between the Holy Roman Empire and Capetian France, the border between England and other sovereignties on the island of Britain, territories such as the Champagne or Brittany—these margins of sovereignty are the centers of narrative innovation. One could, I am sure, accomplish my ends by choosing other examples, and these examples need not be either European or medieval. I do think the European medieval examples have their own special weight in that they make the process of representation and its transformations available to us in a highly visible way. This is not because the European Middle Ages form the starting point for a continuous narrative of the development of our modernity, the origin of all that comes later, but rather because of the precise and multiform relation of medieval expression to a variety of practices of representation that are themselves continuously reconfigured, reaccented, and endowed with new meaning in later moments of Western narrative practice. Among them are oral storytelling, the rhetorical curriculum derived from Roman civic education, and the privilege of the book as a special location of truth.

Accordingly, my first chapter begins with a consideration of the historiographical project undertaken by Gerard I, bishop of Cambrai. The conjoint Diocese of Arras-Cambrai bridged imperial and Capetian territory and was itself crossed by two linguistic frontiers, and the bishop was simultaneously an imperial appointment, a member of the emperor’s entourage, and, as suffragan of the archbishop of Reims, a member as well of the Capetian ruling elite. Because of its strategic importance, the diocese was riven by serious and prolonged internal disputes when in 1024 Bishop Gerard commissioned the compilation of a huge three-part historical chronicle, the *Deeds of the Bishops of Cambrai*, tracing the history of Cambrai from its mythical founding by its first bishop, St. Gerí, to his own time. Along with the composition of the chronicle, Gerard ordered the
construction of the textual archive on which the chronicle was based. Among the new texts created for this archive was a life of St. Aubert, one of the patrons of the city, and Gerard seems to have commissioned no less than Fulbert of Chartres to write it. These texts are not only important witnesses to contemporary affairs; they are themselves assertions of power, political weapons in the bishop’s attempt to achieve supremacy over his secular and ecclesiastical rivals. At the very moment when secular lords were becoming capable administrators, the bishop of Cambrai claimed an ever wider authority over ever more intimate aspects of secular life and asserted his own right to rule by using the full panoply of coercive spiritual weapons at his disposal. This strategy of control thus opens intimate aspects of secular life to serious representation. At the same time, the bishop’s appeal to the authority of traditional spiritual practices for nontraditional uses puts a tremendous strain on the traditional forms and techniques of narrative representation. In turn, an analysis of these narrative complications reveals the fault lines of his own authority in opposition to other claimants.

The second chapter turns from a consideration of narratives in the service of centralizing power to an exploration of narratives of opposition to the rapid growth of Norman central administration in Britain after 1066. I begin with an examination of the eleventh- and twelfth-century chronicle accounts of the death of Harold Godwinson, the last Anglo-Saxon king. In their attempt to make the stunning defeat and death of the king comprehensible, some of these texts are complicit with political orthodoxy and the contemporary array of power, while others, such as the remarkable Vita Haroldi, enact a serious kind of opposition in which Harold’s military defeat is transformed into victory. In the process Harold becomes a new kind of saint, England becomes a nation, and hagiography becomes romance. Like the body of Harold, the figure of Waltheof, Earl of Northumbria — enemy, captive, collaborator, traitor, English patriot, local hero, and ultimately saint — takes on a spectral life in the various accounts of William the Conqueror’s struggles to control the northern border territories in the 1070s and becomes a powerful engine for narrative invention. In these texts, Waltheof’s inner life and private experience, like Harold’s in the Vita Haroldi, move from the margins of interest to displace what began in both instances as the central political story of the rise of Norman power. By this very act of displacement, these narratives of resistance allow us to understand processes that cannot be seen when narrated from the top down as the story of the triumphant rise to power of the Norman regime.
The texts of the first two chapters emerge from political borders; they also continuously operate on a narrative border that, however fluid, also marks a real distinction—the border between history and hagiography. In their efforts to make secular life comprehensible, these texts continually come up against a historiographical impasse: the truth that the historian seeks seems always about to appear in time—sometimes as the revelation of the secrets of a soul, sometimes as the revelation of a Last Judgment—but it remains always hidden away beyond the historian's ken. Whether we consider historians’ prefaces or their actual practice, it is clear that medieval historians worked under the same principal constraint that historians labor under today—not to narrate beyond the evidence, even if their canons of truth and their sense of what the evidence provides are separated from our own by an epistemological divide. It is clear, too, that medieval historians’ claim to a truth-telling intention, even when their canons of truth had more to do with probable argument and pedagogical efficacy than with narrating the past “as it actually was,” required the reader’s ascent to the mimetic truth value of their narrative. Yet it is equally clear that the effect of mimetic truth value is produced by the historian’s use of the full repertoire of fictional narrative techniques and that fiction and history effectively merge in historiography even while medieval readers recognized some generic and functional distinction between them. In my third chapter, I thus turn from the border that history shares with hagiography to the border that history shares with romance, first by examining the Latin prose of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s pseudohistorical Historia regum Britanniae and then by very close readings of two well-known texts, canonical for all discussions of romance: Chrétien’s Chevalier au Lion and Marie de France’s Guigemar. I argue in this chapter that romance emerges from the desire to seize directly and with the same narrative techniques the kind of truth that seems always just outside the historian’s knowledge, but above all to seize this kind of truth for historical understanding. Similarly, I argue that even when they are most overtly fantasies, romances are immersed in the contemporary secular world. Just as historians absorbed the techniques and narrative voicings that we associate with fiction, writers of romance used pseudo-history to explore the same tensions that provoked the writing of history. Their formal affinities thus derive from identical desires to master experience and make it an object of knowledge.

Finally, my readers will recognize my homage to Sir Richard Southern’s brilliant conclusion to The Making of the Middle Ages in the title of my last chapter, “From Romance to Epic.” Southern wanted to see the relation between
epic and romance as developmental and progressive—romance brought new experience to consciousness, brought new matter to representation, and elaborated a new sense of life that Southern saw as a change for the better. It was dynamic, energetic, looking toward the future. I argue here that we need rather to understand the relation between romance and epic as dialectical and thoroughly mediated by historiography. The epic is addressed to the same experience as romance, presenting it as equally dynamic though ultimately in a very different configuration, and it is always in dialogue with the romance writing. As romance and historiography become the dominant genres of narrative representation, writing in older genres takes on new meanings and is used for new functions. The chansons de geste as we have them do not in any way preexist the chivalric romances. They are their contemporaries. The same forces that provoke the elaboration of new narrative forms are reflected in epic as its traditional aura is used in the service of nontraditional ends. Whereas both historiography and romance ground their authority to convey truth in the fact that they are written documents, the epic claims to speak the truth of the past directly with the voice of tradition. The apparent formal naiveté of the chanson de geste, I argue, is a mere appearance deployed for quite complex purposes of understanding and critique. In the process, tradition itself ceases to be something static and merely at hand, and history becomes a weapon under continuous construction wielded by those who would resist change by invoking precedent.

Medieval techniques of reading and composition, such as monastic meditation and its allied pedagogy derived from Roman topical invention, led to a sense of narrative as a structure of emotionally powerful scenes that could provoke chains of rich textual and experiential associations in the reader. In her studies of memory and invention, Mary Carruthers calls these powerful scenes “cognitive fictions” to draw attention to the fact that their value consisted in their pedagogic or ethical efficacy and that, sensuously vivid as they were, their vividness had nothing to do with mimetic truth value but rather with their memorability. Thus paintings of Jerusalem in Beatus commentaries changed from copy to copy of the same original to reflect changing architectural tastes—the knowledge that the image intended to effect depended, not on its faithfulness in representing the architectural details of the actual Jerusalem, but on its memorability as a starting place for meditation. But to stay with Mary Carruthers’s example, the very changes in architecture—for example, that Spanish copies show Mozarabic arches while later English copies show gothic points—demonstrate the dependence of cognitive fictions on a claim, however construed, to mimetic...
truth. I call this book *Reality Fictions* to underline the deep entanglements of the texts under discussion with the secular reality that they variously engage. Historical writing is thoroughly dependent on the techniques of fiction to represent the reality of the past; epic and romance imagine worlds that never were in order to make the world their readers inhabit available for practical knowledge.

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Chapter One

SACRED AUTHORITY AND SECULAR POWER

The Bishops of Cambrai

The City

Prologue

In 1023, after a decade of tumultuous and contentious rule, Gerard, bishop of Cambrai, began a project he had dreamed of since the day he first entered the city in February 1012. 1 Finally free from enemies at home and abroad, he began to rebuild the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Cambrai. Fearful of never finishing the great task that circumstances had forced him to defer for so long, he was especially grateful for what he considered to be the miraculous discovery of two quarries of beautiful stone a mere quarter-mile from the city, and the work was completed in only seven years. In November of 1030 the church was ready for consecration, and Gerard planned an extraordinary ceremony. Gerard and Richard, abbot of St. Vaast, each dressed in his most splendid robes, entered the church carrying in solemn procession the relics of St. Geri, founding bishop of Cambrai. And while the clergy and people, weeping with joy, sang the laudes to greet the saint, Gerard placed him directly on the bishop’s throne. To his right and his left the relics of the sainted Merovingian bishops Aubert, Vindicien, and Hadulf had already been arranged as if to assist St. Geri in officiating at the ceremony, and in their midst was the bishop’s staff that had belonged to St. Vaast along with that saint’s physical remains. Around the altar, in order according to their rank, were all the sainted dead of the diocese—martyrs, confessors, virgins—so that they all appeared to join the living members of the
congregation in the holy ceremony: “Who is able to describe worthily the splendor of such glory, or who—even the most eloquent—could encompass such a great office in words? When you see the bodies of the saints in a single congregation with the clerics and people of our diocese; and the chorus of monks mixed with the voices of the canons; and not only the inner city but even the whole surrounding countryside overflowing with crowds of men and women.”

The chronicler presents this dedication ceremony as a culminating vision of the unity and hierarchy of the world manifest in the community of Cambrai. The whole history of the diocese participates with the living congregation in a display of order, continuity, hierarchy, and just power. In the miraculously completed building, the founding bishops seem to live again to officiate for a congregation that joins the dead with the living, the clergy with the people, monks living under a rule with secular canons, the urban population with the rural, men with women. The sainted dead of the diocese, each in his own rank, make hierarchy and order visible and present. In this powerful ideological representation the community is imagined as the outcome of a continuous past overseen by an unbroken succession of just authorities stretching from the founders of the town to its current bishop. Of course, this representation is a dream. And like all dreams it speaks also in spite of itself: by summoning up its vision of order and social harmony it tells us, too, of social division, competing interests, and conflict—between cleric and lay, canon and monk, man and woman, city and country, the old and the new, the bishop and his flock. And these are not the only conflicts within Cambrai at the turn of the eleventh century.

Cambrai

By the year 1000, the old Gallo-Roman city of Cambrai stood at the climax of a complex political and economic development. Strategically located on the banks of the Escaut, right on the line of division between the two halves of the Carolingian Empire, Cambrai had passed from Francia into the eastern empire in 925. In 948, the emperor granted the bishop comital rights over the urban
domain, and in 1007 over the Cambrésis as well, effectively ousting the Carolingian urban and provincial counts, the secular lords with whom the bishop had shared power. As prince of the church, the bishop oversaw the more than eighty religious communities of his diocese. And as secular prince he coined money, administered justice, regulated markets, and controlled defense. He was surrounded by a court, originally his hall servants, who by the eleventh century became a distinct urban nobility. In the Empire, the bishop of Cambrai was a great secular lord with no secular peers in his realm. He was an imperial functionary, dependent directly on the emperor for his election and answerable to the emperor, in whose name he collected taxes, enforced the law, and organized military defense. Like Liège at the same moment, Cambrai around the year 1000 had become an ecclesiastical principality, and the bishop-count was its prince.

At the same time, the Diocese of Cambrai and its bishop were equally part of a completely different sphere of power. As head of one of the most extensive dioceses within the thoroughly French Archdiocese of Reims, the bishop of Cambrai was a figure to be reckoned with, not only in the contentious ecclesiastical politics of Reims but also in the secular affairs of the Capetian world. Moreover, the Diocese of Cambrai was also until 1094 conjoined to the Diocese of Arras, a smaller but economically and strategically equally important territory, and the Artois had never been other than part of France. In brief, Cambrai was an imperial diocese and an imperial principality, and its bishop was an imperial appointment and great prince of the Empire, but in political culture, economic development, kinship ties, and language Cambrai was equally a part of France.

Some were very aware of the complex identity of Cambrai and attempted to exploit it in the interests of French domination. In 1024, Robert the Pious was put off from invading the Cambrésis—and only by the receipt of lavish gifts and tribute from Bishop Gerard. Baldwin IV, Count of Flanders, eyed the borders of Cambrai eagerly. He erected castles in the border territories and attempted to put up fortifications even within the Cambrésis. In his attempts on the territory, Baldwin made use of a new political force in the person of the castellan of the city. First mentioned in documents in 972,8 the castellan was officially a non-noble dependent of the bishop, in charge of overseeing those secular matters prohibited for the bishop by ecclesiastical law—such as manning the fortifications of the city and overseeing urban defense. His control of weapons, money, and above all a standing garrison of soldiers, however, made his
position a powerful point of independent opposition to the authority of the bishop.\(^9\) In effect, the castellan was virtually identical in power to the former secular lord, the urban count of Cambrai. Historians have long noted the significant emergence of castellans in France in the last decades of the tenth century. Officially they are representatives of more distant, legitimate authority—indeed, documents often designate them as *vicarius, vicedominus,* or *vicecomes.* But from their castles or strong houses in strategic locations, they easily dominated the surrounding countryside, which they treated as their own possessions. They set themselves up as arbiters of local justice and collectors of local revenue for themselves and equipped themselves within one generation with titles such as *comes,* with regalia, and often with a genealogy tracing their ancestry back to a mythical or Carolingian origin as signs of their territorial legitimacy. They were men of power, essentially kings in their own realm, whose territorial control they were able to pass on to their offspring.\(^10\)

By the time Gerard came to power, the castellany of Cambrai had become essentially a hereditary office belonging to a Vermandois family with ties to the counts of Flanders. The castellan, Walter of Lens, was subordinate to the bishop in theory but in practice was a creature of the Count of Flanders and entirely out of the bishop’s immediate control.\(^11\) He was powerful enough in fact to have seriously disrupted the funeral of Gerard’s immediate predecessor, Bishop Herluin, and even to have occupied the bishop’s house, using it as a stronghold before Gerard’s arrival. Indeed, Emperor Henry II appointed Gerard days before the death of the seriously ill Herluin precisely to avoid what was shaping up to be a coup by a candidate specifically chosen by the castellan and Baldwin IV. During the early years of his reign Gerard used several strategies to gain power over his castellan. Too weak for outright coercion himself, and with his neighbors such as King Robert unwilling or unable to be relied on for aid,\(^12\) Gerard managed to make a kind of peace by binding Walter and his immediate associates into a web of mutual personal obligations and dependencies. In what the chronicler calls “a new custom,” Walter was made to swear a series of oaths of personal loyalty to the bishop and to pledge under threat of excommunication to administer justice to the city and people of Cambrai and provide for their defense under the bishop’s direction. In return for these oaths the bishop pardoned Walter for all previous offenses against his sovereign rule. The oaths were sworn on relics in the presence of witnesses and were repeated in several venues. There was an exchange of hostages. The agreement, carefully recorded verbatim and preserved, included some of the most powerful people in the Capetian world.
as witnesses: among others involved in the elaborate public occasions were the bishop of Noyons, the counts of Burgundy and Flanders, and King Robert the Pious himself (3.42.40–43). Georges Duby recognized exactly what this all amounted to: in a ceremony that was only just beginning to be used in France for similar purposes, Gerard made Walter his vassal.\(^{13}\) The decision to rebuild the Cathedral of Cambrai was clearly prompted by what seemed at the time to be Gerard’s decisive victory over his castellan.

To this point it would seem that I have been simply filling in background, describing a state of affairs around the year 1000 and a set of events that led up to the rebuilding of the cathedral in 1024. What I have actually been doing, in fact, is retracing the main narrative line of the strikingly rich text that both presents the events that I have been narrating and, more significantly, was itself an active intervention in them. And in simply retracing this account, I virtually unwittingly tell the story from a very particular position—that of the bishop’s secular legitimacy. For the power to have his own particular account of experience written, disseminated, and preserved was itself among the most important weapons in the arsenal of the bishop. Accordingly, in 1024, along with the rebuilding of the cathedral, Gerard embarked on a huge, and I think unprecedented, historiographical enterprise: he began to compile the historical rights of the bishops of his diocese. Or shall we say he began to have them invented? The centerpiece of this enterprise is the single work of historical composition whose narrative I have been tracing, the *Gesta episcoporum Cameracensium,* the *Deeds of the Bishops of Cambrai,* and it is therefore to the historiographical argument of this text that we must now turn our attention.

**The Deeds of the Bishops of Cambrai**

Begun in 1024, the *Gesta episcoporum* is disposed in three books. The first traces the history of the city from its primitive founding to the consecration of Gerard I in 1012. The chronological framework of this first book is provided by the succession of bishops, the spiritual and temporal power being handed from one to the other genealogically, as if in an unbroken chain. At the beginning of this chain stand the sainted founders and patrons of the city, and at the culmination stands Gerard. The second book self-consciously interrupts the chronological presentation to survey, as if by means of an itinerary, the wide network of monasteries and monastic foundations subject to the Diocese of Cambrai. The third book returns to chronology and is entirely occupied with the present on which
the historical narrative of the first and the geographical exposition of the second converge, namely the deeds of Bishop Gerard himself. The book begins with his consecration and ends, as originally planned, with his triumph over Walter the Castellan and the rebuilding of the church.

As we now have it, the Gesta episcoporum is the product of two rewritings. The exhaustive researches of Erik van Mingroot have demonstrated that the whole work—that is, books 1 and 2 and book 3 to chapter 50—was planned and executed between 1024 and 1025 by a single writer, a canon of Cambrai, personally close to Bishop Gerard, who remains still otherwise unidentified. Around 1026 the chronicle may have been updated to include the events of the decade after 1025. This updating was very likely done by the original writer. Later, during the reign of Bishop Lietbert, who succeeded Gerard in 1049, a Vita Lietberti was added to book 3 to create the text as we find it in all the eleventh-century manuscripts. To make the addition seamless, van Mingroot argues, around 1055 the writer of the Vita Lietberti rewrote the chapters following chapter 50 of book 3. The notice of the beginning of the rebuilding of the cathedral in 1023 was certainly part of the original chapter 49; the description of the dedication in 1030 had to have been added later, most likely in the original updating.14

Along with the composition of the Gesta episcoporum, Gerard ordered the construction of the textual archive on which the book was based. For the work demanded a library. Existing material needed to be gathered together for the benefit of the writer of the chronicle, while new texts needed to be composed to fill gaps in the historical record. Thus the writer of the Gesta episcoporum began, under Gerard’s instruction, in 1023 by first writing a life of St. Geri, the city’s founder.15 And at the same time Gerard also commissioned the writing of several other saints’ lives and miracle collections relevant to the enterprise, including the Life of St. Aubert, which I shall discuss in the second part of this chapter.16

Digested in the Gesta episcoporum, the newly composed lives appear as if they were ancient and venerable texts that long ago recorded the origins of the authority of the bishops of Cambrai.

The climactic moment of the Gesta episcoporum is reached with the dedication of the church and the display of order, continuity, hierarchy, and power that it celebrates. This moment is first of all a narrative climax—all opposition is quelled, the bishop is firmly in control, and the building that had been begun in fear is completed in joy. More importantly, it forms the climax of an argument that has been pursued in different modalities throughout the extremely various events narrated by the chronicle. The argument most centrally concerns the re-
lation between sovereignty and justice. In brief, the text uses a variety of strategies to contend that the achievement of justice on earth is due to the providential coming into being of a hierarchically ordered society—specifically Christian society, ruled over by a bishop. Modern acquaintance with the chronicle has largely been shaped by Georges Duby’s powerful examination of trifunctional social taxonomy in *The Three Orders*, which carefully analyzes Gerard’s speech against the proponents of the Peace of God as the chronicle represents it. This speech, we remember, provides a very early instance of the proposition that human society is naturally divided into three reciprocally dependent orders—*oratores*, *bellatores*, *laboratores*. In his reading of the speech, Duby was, for various reasons, most concerned with its immediate occasion, Gerard’s opposition to the so-called Peace of God. The emergence of the peace movement is undoubtedly an extremely important stimulus to the historiographical concern with the bishop’s power, but the peace movement is by no means a primary interest of the chronicle. It enters as a small part of a rather extensive concern not with peace but with the nature of sovereignty. The narrative ends with the dedication of a church. Where does it begin?

It does not begin with Adam as Gregory of Tours does, for example, or with a story of foundation by an eponymous relative of Aeneas, a story that will become virtually the standard procedure of later medieval chroniclers. The *Gesta episcoporum* opens rather with a general account of why people began to live in cities. Men at first, writes the chronicler, lived scattered and wandered like wild beasts. They were uncivilized, having no social life (neque mos neque cultus), and, neither being ruled by reason nor knowing anything of the divine, they were dominated entirely by blind desire. After some time, they built protective walls for themselves, and having thus come together they learned to keep their word and to serve justice and became accustomed to submitting their own desires to the desires of others (fidem colere et iustitiam retinere discerent, et aliis parere sua voluntate consuescerent). Indeed, writes the chronicler, they thought it right not only to labor for the common good but even to sacrifice their own lives for it (ac non modo labores excipiendos communis commodi causa, set etiam vitam amittendam estimarent). Thus the prudential building of the city is the immediate cause for the coming into being of a just civil society obedient to imperatives higher than blind need (1.1.25–40).

Now, this “hard” primitivist myth of the naturally savage state of humanity is a commonplace of classical antiquity very rarely found in medieval texts, first of all because it conflicts with the Genesis version of the original human
state on the literal level—Adam is placed in paradisal garden, not in a savage wasteland—and more importantly because it conflicts with the moral readings commonly made of it. Indeed, Lactantius’s *Institutiones*, from which the chronicler seems to have taken this account, his text often echoing it verbally, presents the classical myth precisely as an illustration of the folly of classical philosophy. Lactantius uses the myth to argue that classical philosophy has no knowledge of the true relation between God and humanity and therefore no insight into the meaning of justice. For Lactantius, justice, piety, and mercy are part of the original human essence: what needs to be explained is not why people help others and seek help from them but why they refuse. Because the hard primitivist myth derives justice from something external to the natural condition of humanity, it has exactly the opposite explanatory force: whereas Lactantius imagines justice as an origin and an essence from which humanity has unnaturally fallen, the hard primitivist myth posits rather fear, suspicion, and mutual aggression as the natural state of humanity and justice as a historically fragile prize that humanity painfully seeks to attain.

With a simple change in explanatory direction, the chronicler seems to go out of his way to answer Lactantius’s argument by taking the words out of Lactantius’s mouth. For, says the chronicler, this change in the human condition, and the building of cities that brought it about, is providential in itself. Exactly what Lactantius called a base and absurd fantasy—that wild and dangerous people hiding in fields and foliage became thus gentle and civilized as an outcome of prudential activity—not only is explicitly embraced (“non enim vile aut absurdum fuerat, homines agris et tectis silvestribus abditos ex feris et inmanibus mites reddi ac mansuetos,” writes the chronicler) but even more profoundly is said to signify much higher things (longe altior rerum causa portendebatur). Unknowingly these builders of cities “usefully served a future posterity; namely, that by these walls they thought to construct nothing but what I might call royal edifices. But soon the future holy mother church would obtain in them the principal fortress of its dignity and its apostolic seat.” [superventurae posteritati utiliter ministraret; videlicet ut ipsis suis moenibus nihil aliud pretendere viderentur, nisi quaedam ut ita dicam regia aedificia construere, in quibus mox futura sancta mater ecclesiae principalem suae dignitatis arcem et apostolicam sedem obtineret] (1.1.37–40). The ternary figure that so intrigued Duby is already articulated here at the beginning of the chronicle—not, however, as a social typology of simultaneously dependent functions but
rather as a diachronic chain of social production. Humanity labors, institutes secular order, and in building the secular city creates the conditions for a radically new future. The appearance of the church transforms the royal city into its own “principal fortress and apostolic seat” and thus provides human work with its true cause and ultimate goal. At the end of the process the church emerges as sole governor, described in military and imperial language. Like Gerard’s ceremonial dedication of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, this myth of origin gathers up all of humanity in a single representation that materializes the double significance of the word ecclesia: the material building itself and the lawful structure of the community that it calls into being to assemble there in ritual celebration of itself. In the process, the emperor and his sovereignty over the bishop disappear. The bishop is supreme over all.

Violence and Historical Time

One reason for the appeal to the writer of the Gesta episcoporum of the rarely invoked classical commonplace of primitive society is undoubtedly its evocation for him of the devastation following the Viking raids of the tenth century, a social trauma that was still part of living memory. As such, the primitivist myth serves psychologically to contain violence by locking it away in a past absolutely other than the present—it is savage, pagan, unruly.

The first book of the Gesta episcoporum is filled with origin stories of the various institutions connected to the diocesan governance of the bishop of Cambrai. Abbeys are founded, churches are erected, shrines fill the landscape. The text is accordingly peppered with miracles—the blind see, the lame walk—that manifest the spiritual gifts of founding individuals and the sacred presence of the places they found. Procedures that are institutional and routine in the present of the chronicle are thus represented at their origin as exceptional performances by charismatic individuals. The sudden eruption of the sacred into ordinary life creates the past qua past, utterly different from the present that charisma inaugurates, and this separation gives birth to history. The third book of the Gesta episcoporum, being occupied entirely with the present, is at pains to stress the absolutely routine and institutional basis of the bishop’s power. From the perspective of power derived from election and public rituals of consecration, charisma is disruptive and dangerous. Indeed, charismatic individuals appear in the third book only as enemies of social order, whether they claim to
have a “letter from heaven,” like the proponents of the Peace of God, or claim access to a special revelation outside the institutional church, like the so-called Manicheans who appeared in Arras in 1025.20

The chronicler negotiates the passage from charismatic founding to contemporary legitimacy by filling time and making it continuous. Historically full and unbroken time is the mark of the continuous presence of the sacred in the institutional regularity of the church and its governance by the bishop. The charismatic act is once for all, exceptional, and constitutive; the continuity of the church is its guarantee. In no place is the significance of chronological continuity for social legitimation more apparent than in the chronicler’s treatment of the death of St. Vindicien, third bishop of Cambrai after Vaast, precisely because here we find one of the only places in the first book where the regular chronology of the narrative breaks apart. Prompted immediately by the historian’s anxiety over present social disorder and violence, the narrative rupture leads to a lament for lost time. When he reaches the moment to tell of Vindicien’s death, the chronicler addresses his reader directly to deplore the absence of written records about the sainted bishop. Much writing has surely been lost, he says, on account of the civil violence (seditionibus procellosis) by which the church has been frequently shipwrecked. And he poignantly goes on to insist that a large volume must once have existed, containing an account of Vindicien’s life and miracles. This volume, he imagines, has disappeared, its leaves disbound and scattered to the winds [Fieri enim potest, ut cum tantis subversionibus aecclesianarum una etiam volumina, quibus series vitae et miraculorum huius sancti viri continebatur, auris quidem ridentibus, disperirent] (1.28.48–51).

All we know about Vindicien is that he is buried in a church on Mount St. Eloi (1.28.56–58).

At this point, the narrative suddenly leaps forward several hundred years to the tenth century to tell of the discovery of Vindicien’s tomb. The young sons of a nobleman of Arras, being educated in letters, are sent into the woods by their writing master to make ink. Picking their way through the dense growth of thorns and brambles, the boys come upon the ruined church. While the older boys pray, the younger investigate the interior. One of them begins to dig below the church floor when suddenly he is struck blind. He screams for help and says that he is being punished because of his violation of the tomb. Vowing to become a monk, the young boy soon recovers his sight and returns home “thoroughly chastised” [puer haud mediocriter castigatione reedit] (1.29.60).

The news of the event spreads throughout the region, and people spontaneously
begin to venerate the place. Finally, the whole affair is reported to the bishop, who has the body raised and rebuilds and reconsecrates his burial place as a monastic church.

The motif of blindness and sight is elaborated in two following miraculous cures at the newly created monastic shrine. A young blind boy is cured when he is taken to Vindicien's altar; a blind noblewoman, about to depart on pilgrimage to Rome, has a vision the night before and goes instead to Vindicien's tomb, where she miraculously gains her sight. These two thoroughly conventional miracles remind the chronicler of a third, and the narrative makes yet another sudden and even more unexpected leap forward to the chronicler's own days and the year 1006. Emperor Henry II, Robert the Pious, and Richard, Duke of Normandy, form an alliance to aid Baldwin IV in a struggle with the Count of Valenciennes. Richard's Normans arrive in the Artois, and they raid the monastery in a scene of horrific violence. The Norman soldiers mercilessly slaughter the monks and pillage the treasury, even stealing the ecclesiastical vestments. When they begin to divide the treasure among themselves, however, they are suddenly struck down miraculously in a scene reminiscent of romanesque paintings of the torments of hell: "Some were seized by a demon and twisted; some had their tongues on fire; some bit themselves, others were folded back on themselves, their thighs burned out, a miserable torture." \[Plerique arrepti a daemonio torquebantur; alii linguis adusti, alii proprio morsu precisis, plerique cruribus exustis, misero cruciatu plectebantur\] (1.33.38–40). The soldiers flee, and on his return to Normandy Duke Richard orders an inquisition into the affair "sub sacramento" and demands restitution of everything taken. One of the men secretly keeps a little bell and afterwards becomes paralyzed. He confesses his guilt, makes double restitution, and is completely cured.

This sequence of stories begs to be read as a meditation on history itself. The discovery of Vindicien's burial place, including the motifs of clearing away the undergrowth and digging into the ground, and the series of miraculous cures is entirely about the process of bringing the buried past to light and preserving it in writing. Yet, as Monika Otter has taught us to see, the desire for the past is not without peril: in the story of discovery, the boy who dug into the tomb because he wanted to see what was there committed an outrage in the process and was "thoroughly punished" for it by the inability to see anything at all. That danger is surmountable by the proper reverence: by devoting himself to the saint he has so irreverently found, his vision is restored. Similarly, the soldier paralyzed for wanting to keep a bit of spiritual treasure for himself is cured.
after doubly restoring it to its rightful place. But these surmountable dangers are merely screens for a much greater fear: the fear of present violence that threatens the historiographical scheme and triumphant structure of the chronicle itself. Violence refuses to stay safely buried in the prehistoric past. It erupts again and again into the historian’s consciousness of the present. Things fall into ruin, books disappear, churches are pillaged and destroyed, and it is not only Franks and Vikings —whom the chronicler tellingly lumps together as *gentilitas*— but above all the Christian princes of the contemporary world who turn cities into wastelands and cause people to live like beasts. Who can govern them?

*The Power of the Prince-Bishop*

The answer to the crisis of violence that the chronicle proposes with ever increasing urgency is clear. The hybrid figure of the prince-bishop in whose daily activities the sacred is institutionalized and routinized is the last and only hope for secular peace and justice. It is thus the secular affairs of the bishop that are dwelt on with great attention in the third book. The language is entirely conservative—Bishop Gerard is said to reform deteriorated institutions to their former prosperity and spiritual dedication or to restore good customs that have been long in disuse. He is presented as standing last, heir to the long accumulation of spiritual goods that he wisely invests. But what is in fact narrated is a record of great political innovation. More and more, the bishop uses the full panoply of coercive spiritual weapons at his disposal to rule and regulate secular affairs. In the process, there emerges a new being for the church—it becomes identical to secular society—and a new sense of the meaning of Christianity itself, as the bishop claims an ever wider authority over ever more intimate aspects of secular life.

I have already remarked on the negative light in which any instance of spiritual privilege is treated in the third book, and I have attributed this to the need to ground the bishop’s power in institutional legitimacy. It is not the charismatic gifts of the individual bishop but rather his legitimate election and consecration that invest him with the power to rule. What makes him a good bishop are his abilities as a good governor. Accordingly, with only one exception the third book is entirely free of the miraculous. And that exception is telling precisely because the miraculous here opens entirely new and unexpected spiritual territory. During the account of Bishop Gerard’s efforts to reform
the Abbey of St. Ghislain, at the time part of the possessions of the Count of Mons, there is a cluster of three miracles. Only the first of these miracles is in the chronicle’s main narrative line; the other two are prompted by the first and reported immediately after it as stories that Bishop Gerard liked to tell. All three are stories of miraculous punishments, and all three are involved rather with the bishop’s relations with lay people and his control of a nexus of institutional procedures — penance, excommunication, burial, and above all the offering of the Eucharist — than with the revelation of special spiritual gifts. Together, the three stories form a very concentrated inventional place, pulling into a single thematic unity various aspects of ecclesiastical power. Let me summarize the three stories briefly.

1. A thief, dependent on Count Rainer of Mons, who is described as “himself a thief accustomed to cherish thieves” (ipse raptor raptoribus fa vere consueverat) is in the habit of despoiling the Abbey of Saint Ghislain at Celles. (One desperately wants to look through the text here — I take it that what is being described is the collection of taxes by a knight acting as the agent of a secular lord. The monastery, however, claims the land to be immune.) He is arrested by Bishop Gerard, handed over to the bishop of Utrecht for a year, and then released after the intercession of his relatives. He swears (promittentem videlicet et sancte deierantem) to Bishop Gerard “that he will withdraw from his thievery and remain faithful to the church with all devotion” (quod rapinis se subtraheret, fidelis aecclesiae cum omni devotione mansurus) and then goes back on his oath. He dies, and again at the intercession of his family and unbeknownst to the bishop, he is buried in the monastery’s cemetery. Two years later, his tomb is opened for another burial, and, except for one shoe, not a trace of his body or clothes is found there (3.20).

2. In the days of Bishop Adalbaldus of Utrecht (1010–27), the Maritime Frisians had the custom of not taking the Eucharist on Easter. Offered the Eucharist, one of them, “prompted by the Devil” (instinctu diabolico agitatus) says he would rather have a big glass of beer than “that banquet from the celestial table” (illud celestis epulum mensae) and says that anyone who eats of it will surely die during the coming year. All the people depart in fear, and he goes to the local tavern to drink. Coming home drunk, he falls off his horse, breaks his neck, and dies. The
“blasphemer”—that is all he is ever called—because of his stature in the town, is buried in the cemetery (in atrio). Bishop Adalbaldus hears of this while he is in Saxony with Emperor Henry and is outraged. He orders the body to be disinterred, but since no one will do it out of fear of retribution from the family, the bishop makes the journey home himself, orders a rope put around the feet of the corpse, and has the body dragged from the tomb to a place along the roadside out of town. Dragged for the space of a mile, the dead man, although already buried for fifteen days, vomits up the prodigious amount of beer he drank on Easter (3.21).

3. Albert of Vermandois, brother of Count Odo of Vermandois, characterized as a liar, perjurer, and blasphemer, is struck with a grave illness, and at the urging of Waleran, provost of the Monastery of Saint Hune-gonde, becomes a monk. As his health improves, and at the urging of his mother and friends who think he is insane to have given up wealth and power, he goes back to secular life. His health deteriorates again, and when he is at the point of death “stupid canons” (stulti canonici) bring him the Eucharist. When he tastes it, Albert cries out with his last breath, “The sword that the clerics brought me has killed me” (Ferrum, inquit, quod mihi clerici detulerunt, me occidit). Waleran and other bystanders pry his mouth open with a knife and show his mother and friends that his tongue has been incinerated (moribundum os difficillime cultello reclusit, et linguam usque ad palatum, miserabile visu, crematam matri ac fratri et ceteris adstantibus aperte monstravit). The chronicler comments on the appropriateness of the punishment for one who had always used his mouth to lie and swear falsely (3.23).

All three stories narrate vivid acts of retribution against lay people who refuse to be subject to the sovereign bishops whom the chronicle presumes they are supposed to obey. Significantly, the stories do not involve the bishop’s position within the closed world of the church; all three rather involve secular lords who have defied him, and they present a conflict between ecclesiastical and secular structures of power, which are represented as if they were strictly separable: powerful families and territorial princes on the one hand, bishops and monastic foundations on the other. All three assert the bishop’s right to regulate the conduct of secular life and secular individuals from a position of power that extends even beyond the grave. At the very moment that various ecclesiastic-
tical reform movements were beginning to attempt to create the sharpest possible separation—legal, sexual, and so forth—between the clergy and the laity (to “clericalize the church,” as Jo Ann McNamara recently remarked), the church begins to claim for itself an ever larger arena of secular power and to assert itself as the authoritative governor of the conduct of secular life. In the ensuing conflicts with other structures of secular power—familial, territorial, political, and so forth—with which it is in fact entirely entangled, the secular power of the church is conceptualized by ecclesiastical writers as occupying the highest position in a hierarchical ladder of power, and the secular power of the bishop is posited as absolute. Although the Gesta episcoporum is entirely occupied with his daily affairs, the prince-bishop comes before us not as an imperial functionary but as a transcendent entity. Created by his ordination and anointing, he is himself a “twinned being” like Christ. His power centers on his special relationship to the institutional practices represented in the cluster of stories I have just paraphrased: excommunication, the imposition of public penance, and the regulation of proper burial are all at this time being put to intensive and new uses. At the very center of this conceptualization is the Eucharist, one of the two sacraments with biblical precedent, which the bishop alone can offer or deny. By the end of the century, innovative formulations about the nature of the Eucharist and innovative uses of it as a real social practice will eventuate in a transformed sense of secular society as the societas christiana. Like the church building in which the congregation gathers to see it displayed, the Eucharist is a figure of the bishop’s sovereignty.

The Eucharist and Power

As Miri Rubin among others has pointed out, until the eleventh century and the famous dispute between Berengar of Tours and Lanfranc over the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, eucharistic practices and theological issues such as “the nature of sacramental change, the nature of Christ’s presence, the moment of transformation, the symbolic link between matter and God” remained rather loosely formulated. Rather than theological inquiry into the nature of the sacrament, tenth-century questions regarding the Eucharist tend to be raised concerning practice and appropriate use. For example, Gerbert, archbishop of Reims, wrote three times about eucharistic matters in his letters: once regarding the question of the seriousness of excommunication, once protesting that the judgment of the pope against the archbishop of Sens was illegal and therefore
could not separate him from the sacrament no matter what the pope said,\(^3\) and the third time acknowledging that reconcile penitents ought to be allowed communion.\(^3\) Scholars have, however, remarked a discernable drift in the course of the tenth century toward realism in the general notion of the Eucharist’s substance.\(^3\) It seems to me that this drift in the direction of realism—sufficiently marked that when the dispute between Berengar and Lanfranc arose the realist Lanfranc took up what had clearly become the orthodox position—is inseparable from the need to distinguish the bishop’s power from the power of any other secular lord on ontological and absolute grounds. And the need for the bishop to make this distinction is urgent, for this moment when the bishop has become institutionally identical to any other secular lord is the moment when various secular lords are themselves becoming able territorial administrators.

Rather than looking to the few strictly theological discussions of the sacrament, one needs to consider its deployment in bishops’ lives and other historical and hagiographical writing. Deployed in the miracles we have been considering, the Eucharist acts as a powerful conceptual center, not only symbolically demonstrating the authority of those who are empowered to administer it,\(^3\) but physically bodying it forth as a fully materialized spiritual presence with all-too-real material effects.

In the miracles under discussion, the power of the Eucharist is visible entirely in the context of excommunication and in its baleful effects on those who doubt its power or partake of it without being worthy. Rather than leaving the material world behind to show forth spiritual presence in visions of bodily transformation such as the famous Gregorian miracles of a baby rising above the altar or a finger floating in the glass of wine,\(^3\) the power of the Eucharist manifests itself in the real bodily effects of spiritual retribution against those who contemn it or doubt its power. Albert of Vermandois, for example, experiences the taste of the host as a sword, and its effect is to incinerate his tongue. This is, of course, a direct literalization of the common Latin idiom for war, *ignis atque ferrum*: the warfare by which he lives kills him. Similarly, the excommunicated knight of the first miracle is fully obliterated in the tomb he wrongfully occupies—nothing remains of him save one shoe. I think it is telling that we find proverbial usages, comic effects, and vernacular elements in the vocabulary of these stories,\(^*\) as well as the appearance of folk beliefs, such as the Frisian’s fear that anyone who eats the host on Easter will die during the year. They witness precisely the oral, secular currency of these stories that manifest the awesome power of the Eucharist and of the bishop who controls access to it.
The Eucharist shares this special power with the representation of the church building itself as a sacred place where the community, of which the Eucharist is both sign and manifestation, assembles to see it displayed. This is a place that one violates at extreme peril. We have already discussed the spectacular vengeance meted out to the Norman soldiers who despoiled Arras. Individuals similarly laying claim to what abbeys or churches claim as their own property or privileges meet similarly dire fates if they ignore excommunication. Worst of all is the case of Bishop Berengarius. Wrongfully appointed, he behaves like a warrior, makes and breaks oaths of alliance to secular lords, pursues one of his enemies into the very church he should protect, and kills him there with his own sword. Berengarius dies a horrific death when the founding bishop of Cambrai, St. Geri, rises up from the dead to strike him down (1.83).

The context of all these stories, as I said a moment ago, is the rapidly increasing use of excommunication as a tool of governance of lay society. To be effective, the mysterious power of the Eucharist had to become an object of fear and desire, its deprivation a matter of great consequence to the lay population. It thus became no mere symbol of spiritual union but the very place where the spiritual intersects with the material world, its proper use a matter of literal life or death. That the transformation was in fact successful is nicely attested by the Gesta episcoporum’s Aquitanian contemporary Adhemar of Chabannes. He writes of the “new observance” employed by the bishop of Limoges in the last years of the tenth century: to punish the depredations of warriors and the oppression of the poor (rapina militum et devastatione pauperum), the bishop ordered the cessation of “the divine service and the holy sacrifice” in all the monasteries and churches of his diocese—an act, Adhemar adds, that was considered excommunication. As Richard Landes points out, this new observance is the old practice of the interdict, here put to the new use of coercing a secular lord “through arousing the innocent to protest” by depriving them of the sacrament, a protest unthinkable in earlier centuries before the Eucharist had become so ardently desired.

The realism implied in the punitive miracles of the chronicle is forcefully asserted in the voice of Bishop Gerard himself in the record of Gerard’s inquisition of the heretics who appeared in Arras in 1025. Composed most probably for the bishop by the writer of the Gesta episcoporum, it is distributed in the form of a letter to a certain Bishop R. At the heart of the heresy is an attack on the efficacy of the church, of its personnel, and of the sacraments. Gerard answers their contentions at great length. His argument presents a detailed explanation
of the power of the Eucharist, much of it taken fairly directly from Paschasius, that fully takes up the realist position, along with a demonstration of the sanctity of the altar, the priesthood, the anointed bishop, and the church building itself. The exposition traces the same historical course that we have seen several times in the chronicle. The sudden and exceptional eruption of the divine into the secular world that happened once only in the distant past is reiterated by the routine offering made daily by the priest in the church, and its spiritual effects are visible in day-to-day material life. Secular history thus becomes the privileged sphere of spiritual performance. The spiritual presence, invisible in itself to the ordinary eye, is both made visible and made real by the routine performance of the rite that only the priest can perform in the sole place where it can be performed. In passage after passage the series “Eucharist, bishop, church, salvation” is reiterated. At one point the series is brought together in a passage that could be read as an explication of the ceremony of consecration that began this chapter. The church building is the place where a multitude of oppositions is unified — the past with the present, angels with humanity, God with his angels, humanity with God — and where a diversity of people become united (unanimes), free from all that might divide them, into a single community. Sanctified by the bishop, the community passes from secular experience to a direct contemplation of the majesty of God (maiestatis Dei):

Indeed, for this reason the house itself has the name church, since it contains the Church — that is to say, the people called together by him who unifies them so that they may dwell in the house. It is sanctified by the bishop so that angels might arrive, and men entering it would know that it holds them free from all base speech, and scurrility, and useless thoughts. . . . Thus entering the house of God, the church, where God and His angels are, we must take off the shoes of mortal deeds and think about the conversation of angels and the present majesty of God, and we must invoke the name of the Lord in fervent hymns and spiritual psalms, so that what the psalmist said will be complete in us: “Strengthen, O God, what you have wrought in us; to your holy temple, which is in Jerusalem [etc.]” (Psal. 67).

[Porro ipsa domus idcirco vocabulum habet ecclesiae, qui continet Ecclesiam, id est populum convocatum ab eo, qui facit unanimes habitare]
in domo. Quae ideo sanctificatur ab episcopo, ut in ea velit esse adventus angelorum, et homines in eam introeuntes ab omni turpiloquio, et scurrilitate, et inutili cogitatione norint se continere. . . . Intrantes igitur domum Dei, ecclesiam, ubi Dominus et angeli eius sunt, oportet nos exuere mortuae actionis calceamentis, et cogitare de conversatione angelorum, et de praesentia maiestatis Dei, et assiduis hymnis et psalmis spiritualibus invocare nomen Domini, ut illud compleatur in nobis quod ait Psalmista: “Confirma hoc, Deus, quod operatus es in nobis a templo sancto tuo, quod est in Jerusalem” (Psal. 67).]

The building is the place of full presence, but to narrate it the writer traverses a series of hierarchies. There is an outward ascent in the place itself that passes from humanity at large to the bishop, then to angels, and finally to God, and an inward, contemplative ascent that doubles the first (oportet . . . cogitare de conversatione angelorum et de praesentia maiestatis Dei), passing from the local church to Jerusalem.45

Reality Fictions

In considering the miracles of the Gesta episcoporum, I have at several points called attention to them as inventional places. Monastic pedagogic and meditational practice, as is well known, developed from Roman topical invention. Images—the more vivid the better—form nodal points that can connect long chains of textual and experiential associations, making them memorable and forming powerful emotional starting places for further associational activity.46 Vivid scenes of retribution and punishment, for example, furnish prime instances of rhetorical enargeia and beg to be read as what Mary Carruthers has called “cognitive fictions” with no stake in their literal or mimetic truth. The classic instance of this distinction between cognitive and mimetic truth can be found in those visual representations of the New Jerusalem in Beatus commentaries in which architectural detail varies from copy to copy of the same original—a copy from Spain, for example, shows mozarabic keyhole arches, while a thirteenth-century English copy of the very same original shows gothic points.47 The truth of cognitive fictions lies in their pedagogic or ethical efficacy, not in their mimetic value. The sacraments and elements of the liturgy serve similar pedagogic purposes as starting points for meditational exercises intended to end in an
intuition of the absolute that lies beyond all such images. And the church building itself is a generally useful receptacle and indexing system of commonplaces for a variety of memory systems.

Yet in the Gesta episcoporum these strikingly efficient memory places cannot be simply called “cognitive fictions,” for their inventional and associational efficacy depends on their claim to mimetic truth value, just as the Eucharist is, in these texts, not merely symbolically efficacious as a starting point for meditation on Christ’s incarnation and sacrifice but their real reiteration. In the Gesta episcoporum and in the Acta synodi Attrebatensis, the church building is a meditational place precisely because it is also a real building. One entering it is prompted to meditate on “the conversation of angels and the majesty of God.” But it is also more than a memory place: it is the literal place where the heavenly hierarchy of angels and the society of men meet and find their proper habitation. The emphasis thus falls on the literal truth of the cognitive image.

The Acta synodi Attrebatensis returns to the church as literally both a material and a spiritual entity in the discussion of ecclesiastical administration and the significance of ordination. For the Church consists, Gerard argues, of both men and angels (Sancta Ecclesia . . . ex angelis et hominibus constat), each organized in a hierarchy and each linked with the other: “Part of the Church, made from men enjoying the angelic society, which is ranged in distinct orders, already reigns with God in heaven; the other part, also in distinct orders, is still in exile on earth, and it longs for the heavenly society, where, according to the Apostle, its tabernacle is not constructed.” (Quae, partim ex hominibus societate angelica in ordinibus distinctis perfruens, iam cum Deo regnat in coelo; partim vero in ordinibus distinctis adhuc peregrinatur in terra, et ad supernam societatem suspirat, ubi, secundum Apostolum, tabernaculum est non manufactum.) In this heavenly tabernacle, sitting on the right hand of the Father, is Christ in majesty: “through whom kings reign, and founders of the law discern justice, who rules the heavenly and earthly realm, that is the whole republic, and disposes and governs the whole army, the heavenly and spiritual as well as the earthly and temporal, in distinct orders, and presides over the supernal and earthly courts. In a wonderful order he manages the ministry of angels and men through the variety and occasions of time.” (per quem reges regnant, et conditores legum justa decernunt, coelestem ac terrenum principatum, cunctam videlicet rempublicam regens, et universam militiaem, tam coelestem et spiritualem quam terrenam et temporalem, distinctis ordinibus disponens ac mod-
crans, et supernae atque mundanae curiae praesidens, miro ordine angelorum hominumque ministeria pro temporum varietate et opportunitate dispensat.)

The meditational chain culminates in the real body of Christ, of which the church, the Eucharist, and the consecrated bishop are all real figures. It ties the earthly world of time and space to the spiritual world in an ontology. Meditation on earthly order or earthly rule does not begin with a “cognitive fiction”; the symbolic connection between earth and heaven is epistemologically efficacious precisely because it traces the real.

To support the ontological connection between the heavenly and earthly orders, Gerard directly refers to the authority of both the Old and New Testaments and then continues: “And so the blessed Dionysius the Areopagite, namely the bishop and venerable father, just as he learned from the apostle Paul, who was rapt up to the third heaven, saw the heavenly secrets, and wrote two books about the angelic and the ecclesiastical principality.” (Unde beatus Dionysius Areopagites, antistes videlicet et venerabilis pater, sicut didicit a Paulo apostolo, qui raptus est usque ad tertium coelum, vidit coelestia secreta, duos libros de angelico et ecclesiastico principatu scripsit.)

M.-D. Chenu has discussed the importance of Pseudo-Dionysian ontology for Victorine meditation and pedagogy, and Gabrielle Spiegel has drawn attention to it in the historical schemata of Suger’s Life of Louis the Fat. What I want to underline here is that this same ontology that takes the “varietate temporum” as both symbolic and more than symbolic—a real reflection of divine unity—provides an essential groundwork for the eleventh-century writer of history. I do not at all maintain that Pseudo-Dionysian ontology causes the writer to take historical change seriously, rather the reverse: the urgent need to render comprehensible the ever more complex transformations in secular order prepares the writer to understand the implications of Pseudo-Dionysius for his own task.

Thus the city of Cambrai—reflection on its temporal order is a vehicle for perceiving mystically the order in heaven. In the historical vision of the Gesta episcoporum, Cambrai stands symbolically for Christianity itself. Its emergence from a past that is imagined alternatively as pagan and as bestial is a promise of a future in which all humanity will be saved because all are Christian. The city ruled in historical time by its bishop is a temporal symbol of the New City, the heavenly Jerusalem ruled without mediation by Christ in the reality of his majesty. In the present of the text, Bishop Gerard is the central figure, not because he is exceptionally endowed with charismatic grace, but precisely because
through his ordination and consecration he holds the keys to inclusion in this promised future.

Yet the Pseudo-Dionysian ontological connection between the local and the universal is a two-way street. If its ontology allows the writer to assert the universal truth made manifest by secular history, only in the secular history of Cambrai is such truth made visible. Cambrai can never be entirely a sign. To bear its symbolic weight, Cambrai is always the historical Cambrai where the bishop coins money, grants privileges to the merchants, collects revenue from his dependents, judges malefactors, and struggles for supremacy with all the resources available to him against those who effectively challenge his power. And in this Cambrai, the bishop’s supremacy qua bishop is not a universally held certainty: it is a polemical position wielded by the bishop himself in his struggle with others. To show him repeatedly triumphing over his adversaries is at the same time to show him constantly being challenged by other powers. Even in the affairs of the church, the bishop is in constant struggle, not only with his colleague bishops over questions ranging from succession to the Peace of God, but with his manifest inferiors. For example, the chronicle contains a long letter—itself a small legal treatise on excommunication—addressed by Gerard to the archdeacons of Liège, angrily reminding them that when a bishop excommunicates someone, he stays excommunicated even if he should go to another diocese. For it seems that Gerard had excommunicated for incestuous marriage a certain Erlebaldus, who, upon leaving Cambrai, returned with his wife to his ancestral domain in the Diocese of Liège, where he enjoyed the privileges of his wealth and power and was subsequently ceremoniously buried “inter fideles” (1. 28). To win in these constant struggles required very powerful weapons such as those we have been considering here: first of all, a magnificent building, where the bishop could sit in public display on a splendid throne and make the claim of his own authority visible to the assembled community; second, the power over a sacrament that was imagined to be no mere symbol but a vehicle of the most awesome might; third, the city itself—not only the institutional position of sacred authority legitimated by divine sanction but the control of an effectively coercive governmental apparatus that could administer land, collect income, extract labor, mount defense, hand down judicial rulings, and intimidate those who would prefer not to listen; and, not least important, a big book that tells this very story and a library of precedents to support it.