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A DEMILITARIZED SAINT:
ÆLFRIC'S LIFE OF SAINT SEBASTIAN

Abstract: *Ælfric's Life of St. Sebastian* is in many ways typical of the saints' lives in his whole collection concerning a male, secular, military saint. Saints such as these were likely appealing models of behavior for *Ælfric's* secular, military patrons for the *Lives of Saints* collection. Nevertheless, a close comparison of the source for this particular saint's life and the life that *Ælfric* produced reveals a disjunction between the concerns of the anonymous early Christian writer and that of the Anglo-Saxon monk especially in regards to Sebastian's military role and attendant imagery. The Latin *Passio* rhetorically highlights the contradictions of Sebastian's life: that he is a soldier and Christian; that he fights the arrows of the devil but is famed for being shot full of arrows at his martyrdom; and the fact that he hides his religion and participates in the machinery of Roman persecution. *Ælfric* shifts the rhetorical focus away from these themes in his translation and goes out of his way to minimize and even neutralize those very aspects the Latin author exalts. The result is a life which seems to be about a soldier, but most trappings of his soldiery have been removed.

In translating Abbo of Fleury's Latin *Life of St. Edmund* into Old English, *Ælfric* retains his source's comparison of the death of Edmund with that of Sebastian and its striking metaphor:

Hi scuton þa mid gafelucum swilce him to gamenes to
oð þæt he eall wæs besæt mid heora scotungum
swilce igles byrsta, swa swa Sebastianus wæs. (116–118)¹

[They shot at him [Edmund] with javelins as if for their amusement, until he was all beset with their missiles, like the bristles of a hedgehog, just as Sebastian was.]

¹ Walter W. Skeat, ed., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, 4 vols., EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 (1881–1900; reprinted in 2 vols., Oxford: Oxford UP, 1966), (Edmund) 2: 314–34; all references to *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* are to this edition and are cited by line number, following the edition. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Compare Abbo's fuller account: "Quare aduersarii in furorem uersi quasi ludendo ad signum eum toto corpore sagittarum telis confodiunt, multiplicantes acerbiter cruciatu crebris telorum iactibus, quoniam uulnera uulneribus imprimebant dum iacula iaculis locum dabant. Sicque factum est ut spiculorum terebratis aculeis circumfossus palpans horreret, uelut asper herecius aut spinis hirtus carduus, in passione similis Sebastiano egregio martyri"; see Michael Winterbottom, ed., *Three Lives of English Saints* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1972) 78.

The brevity of Ælfric's allusion suggests that the story of Sebastian's martyrdom was well known in Anglo-Saxon England, and other evidence supports this. Sebastian's Latin *Passio* is preserved in a number of manuscripts from Anglo-Saxon England, among them the Cotton-Corpus legendary.² He is ubiquitous in early medieval martyrologies³ and liturgical calendars from England.⁴ In other words, Sebastian and his martyrdom show up everywhere in Anglo-Saxon England where one would expect to find saints. The form and content of the Latin *Passio* (BHL 7543) was fixed by the Anglo-Saxon period.⁵ The text is consistently reproduced with only minor variations; as Whatley notes, the text "... was apparently well known throughout the Anglo-Saxon period".⁶ Such a stable text – where we can be rather certain about Ælfric's Latin source – allows modern critics to discern the types of changes Ælfric makes to his source, and reveals his particular concerns.⁷

² For the manuscripts connected to Anglo-Saxon England, see E. Gordon Whatley *et al.*, "Acta Sanctorum", in Frederick M. Biggs, Thomas D. Hill, Paul E. Szarmach, and E. Gordon Whatley, eds., *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, vol. 1, *Abbo of Fleury, Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and Acta Sanctorum* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001) 22–486, at 417–20; for a list of extant early manuscripts, see James E. Cross, "The Use of a *Passio S. Sebastiani* in the Old English Martyrology", *Mediaevalia* 14 (1991 for 1986): 39–50; on the Cotton-Corpus legendary and its manuscripts, see Patrick H. Zettel, "Saints' Lives in Old English: Latin Manuscripts and Vernacular Accounts: Ælfric", *Peritia* 1 (1982): 17–37; Peter Jackson and Michael Lapidge, "The Contents of the Cotton-Corpus Legendary", in Paul E. Szarmach, ed., *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts* (Albany: SUNY P, 1996), 131–146.

³ See, for example, the Old English Martyrology, in Günther Kotzor, ed., *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, 2 vols. (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980) 2: 21; Bede's Martyrology, in Henri Quentin, ed., *Les martyrologes historiques du moyen âge*, 2nd ed. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1908) 91; and John McCulloh, ed., *Rabani Mauri Martyrologium*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, Continuatio Mediaevalis 44 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979) 14–15.

⁴ Sebastian appears in all of the calendars printed by Francis Wormald, ed., *English Kalendars before A.D. 1100, Texts*, Henry Bradshaw Society 72 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1934). See now Rebecca Rushforth, *An Atlas of Saints in Anglo-Saxon Calendars*, ASNC Guides, Texts, and Studies 6 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, 2002); Sebastian appears in 24 of the 24 calendars which contain the month January.

⁵ See Socii Bollandiani, ed., *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1898–1901) 2: 1093–4; *Supplementi editio altera auctior* (Brussels, 1911) 275–6; H. Fros, ed., *Novum supplementum* (Brussels, 1986) 772–3.

⁶ Whatley 2001, 418.

⁷ All references to the *Passio Sebastiani* are to Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 17 (Paris, 1879) col. 1111–50, cited by section and column number

This Ælfrician saint's life has perhaps long eluded critical scholarly attention because on the whole it seems straightforward and unproblematic. However, careful analysis of Ælfric's translation techniques demonstrates that Ælfric simplifies his translation of the *Life* dramatically. Ælfric reduces the subtlety of the Latin *Passio* in order to produce a more readily 'digestible' version; that is, one whose lessons and meanings are glaringly obvious. In particular, he seems to avoid exploiting the theme of Sebastian as *miles Christi*, because, I suggest, if he were to deal with that topic, he would also have to treat questions of how Sebastian can guiltlessly conceal his religion from secular authorities. Ælfric's aims are clearly different from those of the Latin source's author; this article examines some of the unexpected changes Ælfric makes while converting an essentially Roman text into an Anglo-Saxon context.

THE LATIN *PASSIO*

The *Passio Sebastiani* tells a good story; it presents a linear, progressive, interesting narrative, interspersed with polished homiletic speeches and debates between main characters on a variety of theological and doctrinal issues. It begins by describing Sebastian, a Roman soldier who is secretly a Christian during the reign of the emperors Diocletian and Maximianus. His faith is secret, we are told, not to protect his own life, but to maintain the proximity to persecuted Christians that his job allows him, so that he can embolden them to martyrdom should their spirits flag. He is essentially a guard on death row; here we find the first problematic aspect of this popular saint: he apparently participates in the killing of Christians. His meeting two Christians who are scheduled to die, the brothers Marcus and Marcellianus, initiates a series of conversions through the agency of Sebastian and these brothers, beginning with the brothers' families and quickly spreading to Roman officials and their households. All of this Christianizing activity is accompanied by speeches and debates about key issues in Christianity. These

and reference letter; this is a reprinting of the text found in *Acta Sanctorum*, editio novissima, *Januarius*, tomus 2 (Paris, [1863]), 629–42. For comparative purposes – and to ensure that my perception of Ælfric's translation choices are not merely a result of his having a variant source text – I have checked and given the parallel references in the other printed versions: Boninus Mombritius, ed., *Sanctuarium seu vitae sanctorum*, 2nd ed. (1910; reprint Hildesheim: Olms, 1978) 2: 459–76; Ángel Fábrega Grau, ed., *Pasionario Hispánico*, tom. 2, *Texto*, Monumenta Hispaniae Sacra, Serie Litúrgica 6 (Madrid: Atenas, 1955) 148–76; I have also consulted the unpublished 'A' manuscript of the Cotton-Corpus legendary: London, British Library Cotton Nero E.i, pt. i, fol. 102^r–114^r (hereafter abbreviated Nero E.i and cited by folio). Overall, I have found no major discrepancies among the versions of the Latin text.

speeches are delivered not only by Sebastian, but also by Marcus and Marcellianus as well as other Christians. This expanding circle of conversion, which notably does not keep Sebastian as its focal point, constitutes the majority of the *Passio*. Near the end of the *Passio* we are given a rather rapid depiction of the individual martyrdoms of the recently converted Christians, culminating in Sebastian's two-fold martyrdom at the behest of Diocletian.

Ælfric's translation reduces the story in many of the ways a reader of Ælfric's hagiography would expect.⁸ Thus, we find a great reduction in the amount of direct speech combined with an overall de-emphasizing of speeches.⁹ This is where the greatest amount of source material is lost. We find a conflation of episodes and removal of minor characters. Ælfric's *Life* is much shorter than the Latin source, and he is successful in his attempt to make the story more streamlined. In doing so, however, much of the rhetorical thrust of the *Passio* is lost, especially the military themes of the Latin version.

ÆLFRIC, SEBASTIAN, AND MILITARY SAINTS

There are a number of reasons why Ælfric may have chosen to include the life of Sebastian in his *Lives of Saints*. The most obvious would be the widespread popularity of Sebastian – a saint of universal veneration – combined with the almost certain inclusion of Sebastian in the Latin *sanctorale* which served as his source.¹⁰ In addition is the literary connection between the life of King Edmund and that of Sebastian noted above; although Abbo of Fleury had originally made this connection, Ælfric translated it and may have felt a need for continuity within his own work. Furthermore, Sebastian – who, with his January feast day, appears very early in the collection¹¹ – may have also had particular appeal to Ælfric because of

⁸ On Ælfric's translation techniques in the *Lives of Saints*, see E. Gordon Whatley, "Lost in Translation: Omission of Episodes in Some Old English Prose Saints' Legends", *Anglo-Saxon England* 26 (1997): 187–208, esp. 187–92; on the *Life of Sebastian* in particular, see Dorothy Bethurum, "The Form of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*", *Studies in Philology* 39 (1932): 515–33, esp. 519–23; see also Anne Middleton, "Ælfric's Answerable Style: The Rhetoric of the Alliterative Prose", *Studies in Medieval Culture* 4 (1973): 83–91; and Cecily Clark, "Ælfric and Abbo", *English Studies* 49 (1968): 30–6.

⁹ For a consideration of this aspect of Ælfric's translations, see Ruth Waterhouse, "Ælfric's Use of Discourse in Some Saints' Lives", *Anglo-Saxon England* 5 (1976): 83–103, and Bernadette Moloney, "Another Look at Ælfric's Use of Discourse in Some Saints' Lives", *English Studies* 63 (1982): 13–19.

¹⁰ See Lapidge 1996, 115–30.

¹¹ Sebastian (feast day January 20) is the fifth item in the collection as reflected by the earliest manuscript (London, British Library, Cotton Julius E.vii); see La-

the similarity of Sebastian's actions and Ælfric's intentions for the collection as a whole. As Ælfric notes in his Latin preface to the *Lives* (emphasis added):

Illa uero que scripturus sum suspicor non offendere audientes, sed magis fide torpentes recreare hortationibus, quia martyrum passiones nimium fidem erigant languentem. (14–17)¹²

[But I think that those things which I am now going to write will not offend the hearers, but will rather revive by their exhortations those who are inactive in the faith, since the passions of the martyrs greatly encourage a weakening faith.]

As Ælfric's translation of the *Life* explains early on, Sebastian's only motive for continuing in the service of the emperor was because:

... geseah Sebastianus hu sume þa cristenan
woldon awacian for ðam ormətum witum,
and gehyrte heora mod to þæs hælendes geleafan,
and þa Gode gebrohre þe se deofol ætbredan wolde (21–24)¹³

[... Sebastian saw how some Christians would grow weak because of those immense punishments and exhorted their minds to faith in the savior and then brought to God those whom the devil wished to steal.]

Ælfric's greatest reason for including Sebastian, however, may have been because of his role as one of the many military saints, and as such likely had particular appeal for Ælfric's patrons of the *Lives of Saints*, Æthelweard and Æthelmær, military nobles themselves.¹⁴ This group of secular saints included in the *Lives* has recently attracted some scholarly attention. Sebastian's role as a template for the martyrdom of King Edmund, another military saint, amplifies his importance in Anglo-Saxon England. Sebastian, who according to the Latin *Passio* is a distinguished, high-ranking Roman soldier who remained in the service of the emperors throughout his life, is held up for Edmund as a model of passivity in the face of enemies. This lack of resistance has led James Earl to suggest that Edmund can be seen as

pidge 1996, 118 and 128, where he notes that Sebastian inexplicably appears before, rather than after, St. Maur (feast day January 15).

¹² Skeat 1881–1900, repr. 1966, 1: 3–7.

¹³ For the parallel section of the Latin *Passio*, see below.

¹⁴ On Æthelweard and Æthelmær see Jonathan Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces* (Durham: Durham Medieval Texts, 1994) 50; see also Malcolm Godden, "Ælfric's Saint's Lives and the Problem of Miracles", in Marie Collins, Jocelyn Price, and Andrew Hamer, eds., *Sources and Relations: Studies in Honour of J.E. Cross* (*Leeds Studies in English*, n.s., 16, 1985): 83–100, at 95; and the same author's "Experiments in Genre: The Saints' Lives in Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*", in Szarmach 1996, 261–87, esp. 261–2.

representing Ælfric's ideal of nonviolence expected of a Christian king.¹⁵ Hugh Magennis has suggested that Edmund not be viewed as a pacifist because the king declares that he would have preferred to have died fighting than to have been captured.¹⁶ Gordon Whatley has done much to resolve this seeming disjunction of presentations.¹⁷ Drawing upon the works of Ambrose and Augustine, Whatley argues that Ælfric is neither playing pacifist nor overly obscuring the business of war in his *Lives of Saints* collection. Rather, following his patristic sources, Ælfric is able to promote the just fighting of *bellatores* who participate in divinely sanctioned public violence while at the same time celebrating the decisions of military martyrs, who passively accept death, refusing to fight or flee to save their own lives. Sebastian is obviously one of the military saints who have a place in this discussion. Magennis shows how Ælfric actually downplays Sebastian's role as a soldier compared with his presentation in the Latin source, making him more a member of the emperor's household than an active soldier.¹⁸ As it is, however, the Latin does not present Ælfric with many of the problems found in other military saints' lives, because we are not told about any particular military actions of Sebastian. Unlike other lives in Ælfric's collection, such as those of St. Oswald, the Maccabees, the Theban Legion, or the Forty Soldiers, the Latin *Passio Sebastiani* does not present Sebastian engaged in actual warfare at all.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the *Passio* author does exploit the fact that Sebastian is an actual soldier in the imperial army in order to contrast it with his more important role as a *miles Christi*, or soldier of Christ. Ælfric, however, does not follow his source in this, and instead carefully negotiates the salutary aspects of Sebastian's life and the problematic ones, more often than not suppressing those connected with Sebastian's role as a soldier.

Before delving into the changes Ælfric makes to the militaristic language of his source text, I offer a humorous example of Ælfric's asserting himself during the act of translation. At one part in the narrative, Chromatius, a Roman prefect in the process of conversion, raises his concern about the level of education among Christians. This is expressed similarly in the Latin and Old English:

¹⁵ James W. Earl, "Violence and Non-Violence in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric's 'Passion of St. Edmund'", *Philological Quarterly* 78 (1999): 125–49.

¹⁶ Hugh Magennis, "Warrior Saints, Warfare, and the Hagiography of Ælfric of Eynsham", *Traditio* 56 (2001): 27–51, esp. 44–5.

¹⁷ E. Gordon Whatley, "Hagiography and Violence: Military Men in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*", in Charles D. Wright, Frederick M. Biggs, and Thomas N. Hall, eds., *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2007) 217–238; I am grateful to Professor Whatley for allowing me to read his article prior to publication.

¹⁸ Magennis 2001, 45.

¹⁹ On these lives and Ælfric's presentation of warfare in them, see Whatley 2007.

Chromatius þa cwæð, sume cristene synd
to þam bilewite menn þæt ðu ne miht afindan
of anum þusende anne þe mæge
þe eawfæstlice spræce sprecan oððe leornian.
Hu mihton þas becuman to Cristes geleafan? (219–23)²⁰

[Chromatius then said, "Some Christians are so simple that you might not find one in a thousand who is able to speak the religious language or learn it. How might these men come to Christ's faith?"]

Sebastian's response in the *Passio* may have caused a little discomfort for Ælfric (emphasis added):

Nam ab origine mundi cum rucolis et pastoribus ovium Deus habuit rationem, et juxta finem mundi veniens non elegit grammaticos et oratores, sed piscatores²¹ et simplices, et ipsis tradidit notitiam suam. (51.1135C)

[For, since the beginning of the world God has had concern for farmers and shepherds, and coming into the world he did not choose grammarians and orators, but fishers and simple men, and to them granted his knowledge.]

By the time of the writing and publication of the *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric had very likely already written his *Grammar*.²² It is therefore not surprising that Ælfric recasts this sentence, and rather than God *not choosing* grammarians, he makes simple folk into teachers:

Sebastianus cwæð, Crist geceas fram frymðe
hyrdas and yrðlingas and anfealde fisceras,
and hi siððan gelærde and to lareowum gesette. (224–6)

[Sebastian said, "From the beginning Christ chose shepherds and farmers and simple fishermen, and afterwards taught them, and made them teachers."]

This is a minor point, and not as weighty as considerations of how, we shall see, Ælfric otherwise manipulates his *exempla* in his translation of this epic tale of Roman conversions and martyrdoms. But it is an example of how careful source study allows us to see Ælfric's working method and understand why he chooses to omit certain ideas to best suit his ideals for his tenth-century readers. Similar concerns can be discerned when exploring his removal of military themes from his *Life*.

²⁰ Skeat 1881–1900, repr. 1966, 1: 116–47; compare *Passio*, 51.1135C.

²¹ I have restored the *Acta Sanctorum*'s reading *piscatores* for the Patrologia Latina's *peccatores*; the PL reading is probably a modern error. The other printed editions, as well as the Cotton-Corpus legendary, read *piscatores*: Mombricitus 1978, 2: 470, Fábrega Grau 1955, 166, and Nero E.i, fol. 110'.

²² Peter Clemons, "The Chronology of Ælfric's Works", in Peter Clemons, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of their History and Culture presented to Bruce Dickens* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1959) 212–47.

MILITARY LANGUAGE IN THE *PASSIO* AND ÆLFRIC

The author of the fifth-century *Passio Sebastiani*²³ develops a number of themes that he uses rhetorically to unite the work as a whole. In particular he develops the notion that Sebastian is simultaneously an actual soldier in the army of the pagan Roman emperors and a metaphorical soldier of Christ. Directly associated with this theme in the Latin *Passio* are references to Sebastian's military dress and the arrows of the devil, both of which are echoed at the scene of Sebastian's death. Much of the military imagery is derived from the famous passage in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, 6: 11–17, which begins “Induite vos arma Dei, ut possitis stare adversus insidias diaboli” [Put you on the armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil.]²⁴ The author of the Latin life seems to draw directly on the language of Paul's epistle in a speech by Sebastian to Chromatius, a recently converted Roman, in speaking about the ability of different people to resist the devil:

Nisi enim lorica[m] habens, non eripitur ictibus sagittarum. Galea enim et scuto et hasta utitur docta manus in praelio, ut ex munimine armorum et impetu feriendi assumat audaciam, et terga non vertat. Similiter et milites Dei, qui scuto fidei muniuntur, et lorica tegminis Christi proteguntur, habentes galeam fidei et salutis, ipsis est tutum inire certamen. Pugnant enim acerrime et fortiter vincunt, quia contra invisibilem hostem die noctuque infatigabiliter praeliantur; et sunt tecti in omnibus membris, fide potius armati quam ferro. (53.1136C)²⁵

[Only one having a breastplate is not killed by the blows of arrows. For the trained troop uses the helmet and shield and spear in battle so that it may receive boldness from the defense of the shoulders and the blow of striking, and not retreat. Likewise, the soldiers of God, who are defended by the shield of faith and protected by the breastplate of the protection of Christ, having the helmet of faith and salvation, may safely enter battle. For they fight most keenly and

²³ On the possible date of composition, see Walter Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter*, 4 vols. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1986) 1: 75.

²⁴ The relevant section runs as follows: “Induite vos arma Dei, ut possitis stare adversus insidias diaboli, quia non est nobis conluctatio adversus carnem et sanguinem, sed adversus principes et potestates, adversus mundi rectores tenebrarum harum, contra spiritalia nequitiæ in caelestibus; propterea accipite armaturam Dei, ut possitis resistere in die malo et omnibus perfectis stare; state ergo succincti lumbos vestros in veritate, et induti lorica[m] iustitiæ, et calciati pedes in praeparatione evangelii pacis, in omnibus sumentes scutum fidei, in quo possitis omnia tela nequissimi ignea extinguere, et galeam salutis adsumite et gladium Spiritus, quod est verbum Dei”; Robert Weber, ed., *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) 1814–1815.

²⁵ Cf. Mombricitus 1978, 2: 470–71; Fábrega Grau 1955, 167; Nero E.i, fol. 110^r.

conquer bravely because they battle against the invisible enemy day and night without tiring; and they are covered on all their limbs, armed with faith rather than iron.]

The use of military imagery, such as depicting monks and martyrs as soldiers, the soul as a besieged fortress, the weapons – usually arrows – of the devil, and the Christians' defense against them with spiritual weapons, is common in medieval Christian literature. Joyce Hill reminds Anglo-Saxons in particular that such language, while quite popular in Anglo-Saxon England, belongs to the larger Christian discourse rather than to a particular Germanic one.²⁶ The popularity of such imagery in Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry as well as in other genres of Old English literature has now long been realized.²⁷ Ælfric was obviously familiar with the passage from Ephesians 6, and even felt that in certain contexts it could be shared with a vernacular audience, as when he translates it within his Catholic Homilies.²⁸ Considering how popular this sort of motif is in Anglo-Saxon England in general, one would imagine that it would have had particular appeal for Ælfric's patrons Æthelweard and Æthelmær. Gordon Whatley has noted the particular military bent of the *Lives of Saints* collection as a whole, and in particular that secular, male, military saints constitute the single largest group in Ælfric's collection.²⁹ Nevertheless, in the *Life of Sebastian*, Ælfric shies away from this sort of language. The Latin speech cited above is translated as direct speech, and maintains the essential ideas, but only one aspect of the militaristic imagery is retained, that of the metaphorical *lorica* (highlighted in bold):

²⁶ Joyce Hill, “The Soldier of Christ in Old English Prose and Poetry”, *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s., 12 (1981): 57–80.

²⁷ See John P. Hermann, *Allegories of War: Language and Violence in Old English Poetry* (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1989); Martin Irvine, “Cynewulf's Use of Psychomachia Allegory: The Latin Sources of Some ‘Interpolated’ Passages”, in Morton W. Bloomfield, ed., *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981) 39–62; Stephen Morrison, “OE *cempa* in Cynewulf's *Juliana* and the Figure of the *Miles Christi*”, *English Language Notes* 17 (1979): 81–4; Marcia A. Dalbey, “The Good Shepherd and the Soldier of God: Old English Homilies on St. Martin of Tours”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 85 (1984): 422–34, esp. 424–7 for Ælfric.

²⁸ Malcolm Godden, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, the Second Series, Text*, EETS s.s. 5 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979), 123; (CH II 12.464–73).

²⁹ E. Gordon Whatley, “Pearls before Swine: Ælfric, Vernacular Hagiography, and the Lay Reader”, in Thomas N. Hall with assistance from Thomas D. Hill and Charles D. Wright, ed., *Via Crucis: Essays on Early Medieval Sources and Ideas in Memory of J.E. Cross* (Morgantown: West Virginia UP, 2002), 158–84, esp. 182; and Whatley 2007.

Pa þe habbað geleafan and leornodon to **campienne**
 ongean þone swicolan feond unforhte þurh god,
 and habbað Cristes byrnan, hi magon tobrecan ða godas. (242–44)

[Those who have belief and have learned to **fight** against the treacherous fiend, unafraid because of God, and have Christ's **mail-coat**, they may destroy those gods.]

There are only two other times in the *Life*, and these only near the beginning, when Ælfric retains some of the militaristic language of his source, though in a reduced form; a comparison of the first occurrence of military language in the Latin *Passio* with Ælfric's version is exemplary of his translation technique in this *Life*.³⁰

Passio Sebastiani:

O fortissimi milites Christi, o instructissimi divini praelii bellatores, per nimiam virtutem animi fortiter pervenistis ad palmam, et nunc per misera blandimenta coronam deponitis sempiternam? Discat nunc per vos Christi militum fortitudo, fide potius armari quam ferro. Nolite victoriarum vestrarum insignia per mulierum blandimenta abjicere, et subjectas pedibus vestris hostis devicti cervices ad victricia et rediviva iterum bella laxare, cujus quamvis saeva contra vos extiterit et periniqua instantia, saevior tamen efficitur ira repetita. Erigite igitur a terrenis affectibus tropaeum vestri certaminis gloriosum, et nolite illud amittere fletibus parvulorum. (9.1116B)³¹

[Oh, bravest soldiers of Christ, oh, most trained warriors of the divine battle, you have attained the palm bravely through the exceeding virtue of courage, and now for wretched enticements you abandon the eternal crown? Let the bravery of Christ's soldiers learn now through you to be armed with faith rather than the sword. Do not reject the emblems of your victories for the enticements of women, and [do not] loose again the necks of the conquered enemy laid low at your feet to allow them renewed and victorious battles, whose anger, although it has been cruel against you and very unfair in its force, once restored will nevertheless be made crueler. Therefore, raise the glorious trophy of your struggle from earthly desires and do not lose it to the weeping of little ones.]

Ælfric's Life of Sebastian:

Eala ge godes cempa, ge becomon to sige,
 and nu ge awurpað eowerne cynehelm
 for þam earmlican swæsnyssum þissera heofiendra.
 Ne awurpe ge ic bidde eowerne beorhtan sige
 for wifa swæsnyssum oððe for cyldra tearum.

³⁰ Also compare *Passio* 37.1129D [Mombritius 1978, 2: 467; Fábrega Grau 1955, 161; Nero E.i, fol. 107'] and Ælfric's *Life*, lines 150–1.

³¹ Cf. Mombritius 1978, 2: 460; Fábrega Grau 1955, 150; Nero E.i, fol. 103'.

Arærað eower sigebecn fram eorðlicum gewilnungum,
 and onginnað eower gefeoht ongean ða ungesewenlican fynd. (54–60)

[Oh you soldiers of God, you have come to victory and now you throw away your crown for the wretched enticements of these crying ones? Do not throw away, I beg you, your bright victory for wives' enticements or for children's tears. Raise your victory-emblem from earthly desires and begin your fight against the invisible enemy.]

There are three further significant passages of militaristic language in the *Passio* which Ælfric omits entirely.³²

Based on the evidence of his other texts, it is safe to say that Ælfric does not have a particular aversion to this sort of military-spiritual imagery. In this example from his second series of Catholic Homilies he actually amplifies the militaristic imagery of his source in writing:³³

Se ðe wile campian ongean ðam reðan deofle mid fæstum geleafan. and gastlicum wæpnum. he begyt sige ðurh godes fylste. and se ðe feohtan ne dear mid godes gewæpnunge ongean ðone ungesewenlican feond. he bið þonne mid ðam deofellicum bendum gewyld and to tintregum gelædd. (CH II 25.129–34)³⁴

[He who will fight against the cruel devil with firm belief and spiritual weapons will obtain victory with God's help; and he who does not dare fight with God's weapons against the invisible enemy will be subdued by devilish bonds and led into torments.]

Ælfric also employs this sort of imagery within his *Lives of Saints* collection, most notably in his adaptation of Maccabees and the Prayer of Moses.³⁵

THE ARROWS OF THE DEVIL

Another motif, related to that of the *miles Christi*, which is present in the Latin and is common and popular in other Old English works, but left out of Ælfric's *Sebastian*, is that of the arrows of the devil.³⁶ This motif, with its

³² See *Passio* 27.1124C [Mombritius 1978, 2: 464; Fábrega Grau 1955, 157; Nero E.i, fol. 106'], 60.1139C [Mombritius 1978, 2: 472; Fábrega Grau 1955, 168–9; Nero E.i, fol. 111'], and 66–7.1141–2 [Mombritius 1978, 2: 473; Fábrega Grau 1955, 170; Nero E.i, fol. 111'].

³³ See Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary, and Glossary*, EETS s.s. 18 (Oxford: Oxford UP), 569, who notes that the military allusion has no parallel in Ælfric's main source, and is only suggested by a possible secondary source; the passage seems to be Ælfric's own addition.

³⁴ Godden 1979, 234.

³⁵ Skeat 1881–1900, repr. 1966; Prayer of Moses, 1: 282–307, lines 41–54; Maccabees, 2: 66–125, lines 688–704 and 823–32.

³⁶ See Hill 1981, 63.

origins in the Psalms and Ephesians 6, was already developed by the Anglo-Saxon period in patristic writings and Christian Latin poetry. The motif is perhaps best known to Anglo-Saxonists because of Cynewulf's extended treatments of it in *Juliana* and *Christ II*, as well as its description in Vercelli Homily 4.³⁷ Ælfric also was not unfamiliar with this theme and uses it in other vernacular homilies in various contexts.³⁸

Ælfric's omission of this theme from the *Life of Sebastian* is surprising because knowledge of both this motif and of the means of Sebastian's "first death"³⁹ is exploited in the Latin *Passio* in such a way as to serve as a unifying image for the whole work. Thus we find in chapter 19 of the *Passio*, in a description of hell, "in qua atroces angeli commorantur, quorum brachia capita draconum sunt, quorum oculi ex se igneas sagittas jaculantur" [19.1121A; where dreadful angels abide, whose arms are the heads of dragons, whose eyes issue forth fiery arrows].⁴⁰ Also in chapter 27, in a speech by Marcus full of militaristic imagery rebuking his relatives for asking him to renounce Christianity, we find explicit reference to the arrows of the devil, against which one must defend, "et contra omnes sagittas affectuum carnalis desiderii clypeum virtutum opponere" [27.1124C; to hold up the shield of virtues against all the arrows of the loves of carnal desire].⁴¹ Also relevant is the militaristic speech of Sebastian in chapter 53 cited above, which begins with a reference to metaphorical arrows ("Nisi enim loriam habens non eripitur ictibus sagittarum"). All of these allusions, separated by hundreds of lines, come to a climax in Sebastian's first death scene, where even the language is thick with now literal arrows:

Tunc iratus Diocletianus iussit eum duci in medium campum, et ligari quasi signum ad sagittam, et iussit ut sagittarii eum figerent.⁴² Tunc posuerunt eum milites in medio campo, et hinc inde eum ita sagittis repleverunt, ut quasi hericius ita esset hirsutus ictibus sagittarum. (85.1148C)⁴³

[Then Diocletian, angered, ordered him to be led into the middle of a field and to be bound like a target for an arrow, and ordered that the archers shoot him. Then

³⁷ On the poetic uses of this motif in Old English, see Hermann 1989, 41–5. For Vercelli 4, see Donald G. Scragg, ed., *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS o.s. 300 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) 102–3.

³⁸ See for example Peter Clemons, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, the First Series, Text*, EETS s.s. 17 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 209 (CH I 4.78–82), Godden 1979, 84–5 (CH II 10.126–131), and 192 (CH II 20.62–64).

³⁹ So called because the arrows, so often associated with Sebastian's death, do not actually kill him, just as the Viking's target practice is not the immediate cause of Edmund's death.

⁴⁰ Cf. Mombricitus 1978, 2: 462; Fábrega Grau 1955, 154; Nero E.i, fol. 104^v.

⁴¹ Cf. Mombricitus 1978, 2: 464; Fábrega Grau 1955, 157; Nero E.i, fol. 106^r.

⁴² Nero E.i, fol. 113^v has *sagittarent*, emphasizing the arrows even further.

⁴³ Cf. Mombricitus 1978, 2: 476; Fábrega Grau 1955, 175; Nero E.i, fol. 113^v.

the soldiers placed him in the middle of a field and filled him so much, here and there, with arrows, that he was thus as prickly as a hedgehog with the points of arrows.]

The anonymous Latin author uses verbal repetition of the word *sagitta* to serve as a unifying device, an echo-word of sorts,⁴⁴ to maintain unity in a long piece of prose. Saint Sebastian and method of his martyrdom are so well known that the use of the word early in the narrative of the life would certainly have been noticed by medieval readers. In addition, the author is subtly able to keep the focus of the whole work on Sebastian even when the narrative of the tale is discussing other characters. Ælfric does not employ the same rhetorical strategy. In his reduction of the militaristic language of the text, the earlier references to arrows are removed, so that the first and only time arrows are mentioned in the Old English version is at the scene of Sebastian's death; even here the arrows themselves are not emphasized through repetition the way they are in the Latin:

Ða wearð Diocletianus deoflice gram
and het hine lædan on heardum bendum
ut to anum felda and hine þær gefæstnian
and hentan his mid fl anum oð þæt he his feorh ageafe.
Ða læddan þa cempa þone Cristes þegn,
and setton hine to myrcelse swa swa se manfulla het,
and heora fl an him on afæstnodon foran and hindan,
swa þicce on ælce healfe hwylce iles byrsta,
and forleton hine swa licgan for deadne. (421–29)

[Then Diocletian became devilishly angry, and ordered him led in hard bonds out to a field, and for him to be bound there and assailed with arrows until he gave up his life. Then the soldiers led the servant of Christ and set him as a mark as the sinful one commanded, and they fastened their arrows into him, in front and in back, as thick on each side as the bristles of a hedgehog, and left him there thus, lying for dead.]

That Ælfric minimizes the verbal presence of the arrows is surprising, because the means of Sebastian's death was certainly well known to him and likely to his Anglo-Saxon readers as well. The three martyrologies noted above include both the detail of arrows as the means of Sebastian's first

⁴⁴ I borrow the terminology from scholarship treating Old English poetry, specifically, J.O. Beatty, "The Echo-Word in *Beowulf* with a Note on the *Finnsburg Fragment*", *PMLA* 49 (1934): 365–73; see also Eugene R. Kintgen, "Echoic Repetition in Old English Poetry, Especially *The Dream of the Rood*", *Neu-philologische Mitteilungen* 75 (1974): 202–23; James L. Rosier, "Generative Composition in *Beowulf*", *English Studies* 58 (1977): 193–203; and Horst Richard Paul Battles, "The Art of the *Scop*: Traditional Poetics in the Old English *Genesis A*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1998), esp. ch. 3.

death, and the comparison with a hedgehog. Also noted above is Ælfric's alluding to Sebastian's martyrdom when describing that of King Edmund, as well as Ælfric's familiarity with the motif of the devil's arrows and his use of it elsewhere. Ælfric could have followed his source and used the arrows as a running theme, but he does not.

HIDING RELIGION *SUB CLAMYDE*

In the Latin *Passio*, the fusion of the military and Christian aspects of Sebastian's life is also highlighted in reference to Sebastian's clothing. Throughout the work, the Latin author refers to Sebastian's dress to remind the audience that Sebastian is always both a Roman soldier and a Christian at the same time. At the beginning of the life we are told about this 'double life' of Sebastian in particular terms:

Christo igitur quotidie sedulum exhibebat officium, sed agebat quatenus hoc sacrilegis regibus esset occultum, non passionis timore perterritus, nec patrimonii sui amore constrictus, sed ad hoc tantum *sub chlamyde* terreni imperii Christi militem agebat absconditum, ut Christianorum animos, quos inter tormenta videbat deficere, confortaret, et Deo redderet animas quas diabolus conabatur auferre. (2.1113B)⁴⁵

[Therefore he was daily doing zealous work for Christ, but he was acting so that this was secret from the sacrilegious kings, not frightened out of fear of suffering, nor bound by the love of his inheritance, but for this reason alone was he acting as the soldier of Christ hidden under the cloak of earthly power, so that he might comfort the minds of Christians, whom he saw grow weak amidst torments, and return to God those souls which the devil tried to capture.]

A distinctive feature of Sebastian's life is his hiding his Christianity from the Roman government. Even though he always acts as a Christian, he does so under a false pretense. The Latin author does not see this as a problem, having made clear why Sebastian acts the way he does, and states the situation straightforwardly. Sebastian's hidden Christianity is also highlighted by the use of an echo-word, here *chlamys*, *-ydis*, 'military cloak.' Each time this word is used in the *Passio* it refers to the fact that Sebastian is both a soldier and a Christian.⁴⁶ When Sebastian himself explains his dual life the author uses this word to unite the passages:

⁴⁵ Cf. Mombricitus 1978, 2: 459; Fábrega Grau 1955, 148; Nero E.i, fol. 102^r.

⁴⁶ Even if the reader, or Ælfric, did not know that the Greek loanword *chlamys* was specifically a military cloak, the text of the Latin *Passio* makes it clear: each of the five times the word is used it is in an immediately military context; in addition to the passages discussed, see too *Passio* 9.1116B [Mombricitus 1978, 2: 460; Fábrega Grau 1955, 150; Nero E.i, fol. 103^r], "intererat S. Sebastianus, vir per omnia christianissimus, quem occultabat militaris habitus, et *chlamydis*

Tunc B. Sebastianus dixit Chromatio: Sicut ipse nosti, principatum primae cohortis ago, sed utrum sit militia hominis, nescire olim decrevi, nec vellem. Ad hoc tantum *sub chlamyde* latere volui, ut nutantium animos instruerem, et dubitantes constantes efficerem, ne passionum doloribus cederent, quos fides fecerat bellatores. (60.1139C)⁴⁷

[Then blessed Sebastian said to Chromatius: "Just as you yourself know, I head the first cohort, but whether it was the soldiery of man I decided some time ago not to know, nor did I wish to know. For this reason alone I wished to hide under the *chlamys*, so that I might guide the minds of those faltering, and make constant those wavering, lest they yielded to the pains of suffering whom faith had made warriors."]

As with the theme of the arrows, this motif culminates in the saint's martyrdom. Immediately preceding his betrayal to Diocletian, Sebastian's position as both soldier and secret Christian is reiterated in the same terms:

His ita gestis, B. Sebastianus ab insidiantibus conventus est: et quia, ut diximus, videbatur *sub chlamyde* latere, cum miles esset dignissimus Christi, suggessit de eo praefectus Diocletiano imperatori. Quem Diocletianus ad se convocans, ait: Ego te inter primos palatii mei semper habui, et tu contra salutem meam in injuriam deorum hactenus latuisti. (85.1148B)⁴⁸

[When these things were done, blessed Sebastian was discovered by plotting men; and because, as we said, he seemed to hide under the *chlamys*, although he was the worthiest soldier of Christ, the prefect told Emperor Diocletian about him. Summoning him to his presence, Diocletian said, "I always held you among the best men in my palace. And you have been hiding all along, against my safety and as an affront to the gods."]

The Latin author, then, seems comfortable with the fact that Sebastian hides his religion throughout his life, and is even willing to draw attention to the fact through verbal repetition. Ælfric's opinion on the matter is less easy to discern. He presumably could not condemn or object to the hiding outright, as it is an essential part of this saint's life. Instead of emphasizing this theme as the Latin does, Ælfric does his best to leave out of his text all references to Sebastian's and other Christians' religious hiding. In the opening of the *Life*, when Sebastian's situation has to be explained, Ælfric rephrases the situation thus (emphasis added and explained below):

Dæghwamlice he gefylde his drihtnes þenunge geornlice,
ac he bediglode swa þeah his dæda þam casere

obumbrabat aspectus"; and 23.1122D [Mombricitus 1978, 2: 463; Fábrega Grau 1955, 155; Nero E.i, fol. 105^r], "Igitur cum haec beatissimus Sebastianus, indutus *chlamyde*, succinctus balteo, ex suo ore proferret".

⁴⁷ Cf. Mombricitus 1978, 2: 472; Fábrega Grau 1955, 168–9; Nero E.i, fol. 111^r.

⁴⁸ Cf. Mombricitus 1978, 2: 476; Fábrega Grau 1955, 175; Nero E.i, fol. 113^v.

Dioclitianæ se wæs deofles biggencga.
 He lufode swa þeah ðone halgan wær,
 nyste þæt he gelyfde on þone lifigendan god. (8–12)

[Daily he performed his Lord's service readily, but he concealed, however, his deeds from the emperor Diocletian, who was a devil-worshipper. He, however, loved the holy man, and did not know that he believed in the living God.]

Ælfric's version states that the only thing Sebastian is explicitly hiding is his helping of martyrs (*bediglode... his dæda*), not his Christianity *per se*, as in the Latin. In addition, Ælfric overshadows Sebastian's situation with the cruelty of the emperor. He interpolates in the next line an alliterating, derogatory epithet for Diocletian (*deofles biggencga*). This in itself is a normal technique for Ælfric,⁴⁹ but here, coming at the culmination of three lines of alliteration on the letter *d*, it is highly unusual. By my count, Ælfric only includes one other occurrence of continued alliteration on the same letter over three lines in the whole of the *Life of Sebastian*.⁵⁰ While the passage as a whole is given emphasis by this alliterative technique, the climax of the alliteration focuses attention on Diocletian as a devil worshipper and away from the brief reference to Sebastian's hiding. The next two lines use paronomasia and alliteration to highlight Sebastian's belief, with the common pun on the words *love – belief – live* (*lufode ... gelyfde ... lifigendan*),⁵¹ at the same time as shifting the focus from Sebastian's active hiding of his deeds to Diocletian's ignorance of them (*nyste*). Instead of dwelling on the issue of Sebastian's secret faith, as the Latin does when it makes a point of explaining his actions, Ælfric notes it briefly while obfuscating the fact with less problematic details.

The theme of hiding is not brought up again in Ælfric's text until the point of Sebastian's death. Here again Ælfric changes the focus from that of the Latin source. In the Latin, Sebastian's hiding is stated matter-of-factly by the narrator; in Ælfric, the reference to hiding is only present in Diocletian's

⁴⁹ The following examples from the *Life of Sebastian* demonstrate this technique: *þa wearð Dioclitianus deoflice gram* (421, cf. Latin: *iratus Diocletianus*, 85.1148C); *þa beseah Dioclitianus, se deofollica cwellere* (447, cf. Latin: *Diocletianus*, 87.1149A); *Fabianus þa se feondlica dema* (372, cf. Latin: *judex Fabianus*, 76.1145A); *Fabianus þa þæs feondes þen* (382, cf. Latin: *Fabianus* 82.1147C).

⁵⁰ The other occurrence of continued alliteration over three lines is at lines 209–11; continued alliteration over two lines occurs only ten times in the 474-line *Life*, at the following lines: 33–4, 68–9, 94–5, 100–1, 104–5, 118–9, 129–30, 215–6, 268–9, 423–4.

⁵¹ See Eugene R. Kintgen, "Lif, Lof, Leof, Lufu, and Geleafa in Old English Poetry", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 78 (1977): 309–16; Samantha Zacher, "Cynwulf at the Interface of Literacy and Orality: The Evidence of the Puns in *Elene*", *Oral Tradition* 17 (2002): 346–87, esp. 363–5.

stern rebuke for what he sees as a betrayal. Again Ælfric uses alliteration to diffuse the controversy of Sebastian's hiding, where the verb for hiding (*lutodest*) is linked to the phrase *laðum cristendome*. Since referring to Christendom as 'hated' is something which highlights the emperor's foolishness, Ælfric is also able to draw his audience to question Diocletian's allegation of 'hiding':

Þa het se kasere hine gefæccan hraðe,
 and cwæð him sona to mid swicolum geþance,
 Ic hæfde þe mid þam fyrmestan þe minum hyrede folgodon,
 and þu lutodest oð þis on þam laðum cristendome,
 þam godum to teonan and me to unþearfe. (410–14)

[Then the emperor commanded him to be fetched quickly, and said to him immediately with a treacherous thought, "I held you among the foremost of those who accompany my household, and you lurked until now in hated Christianity, as an insult to the gods and to my detriment."]

Ælfric, then, makes a point of removing references to Christian hiding except where absolutely necessary. When he must allude to hiding for basic narrative purposes, he reduces its importance by overshadowing the situation with comments about the cruelty and ignorance of Diocletian.

HIDING IN ÆLFRIC: NEGATIVE ADDITIONS

The only four references which Ælfric makes to hiding and secrecy in this *Life* are in negative contexts. In fact, three of these references are additions by Ælfric to his source, and all occur in the same narrative section. A significant portion of both the Latin *Passio* and Ælfric's *Life* concerns the conversion of Chromatius, the Roman prefect in whose charge the brothers Marcus and Marcellianus have been placed.⁵² This section contains many speeches and debates between the Christians and Chromatius concerning the nature of Christianity versus paganism. In the course of these events, which culminate in Chromatius' conversion to Christianity, Ælfric interpolates references to hiding and secrecy which present these activities in a distinctly negative light and which have no parallel in the Latin.

When Tranquillinus, recent convert and father of Marcus and Marcellianus, first confronts Chromatius and rebukes the pagan gods, Ælfric adds the comment, "eac ne bediglode þæt he on drihten gelyfde" (160; and he did not conceal that he believed in the Lord), which has no parallel in the Latin (see 38.1129D–41.1130D). Ælfric maintains the Latin's detail that Chro-

⁵² In the *Passio*, this section runs from 38.1129D to 63.1140C, approximately one third of the whole. In Ælfric's *Life*, this section occupies lines 151 to 321, a little more than one third of the whole.

matius' attempted – and failed – simony was committed at night and in secret, “on niht and ... digellice” (184; Latin: per noctem occulte, 47.1134A). After his conversion, Chromatius agrees to destroy all the idols in his house and offers to have his servants carry out the work. Sebastian, however, objects, saying that it is too important a task for recent converts and should be done by those with a more secure faith in Christianity, and he explains why:

Dubii et timidi et infideles si ea confregerint, inveniet diabolus per quamcumque negligentiam eorum occasionem laedendi eos, et statim ut laesi fuerint, dicent infideles, propterea eos laesos esse quia idola confregerunt. (53.1136B)⁵³

[If doubtful and scared unbelievers break them, the devil will find a chance to harm them through some carelessness of theirs, and as soon as they are harmed, the unbelievers will say that they were harmed because they broke those idols.]

In rendering this passage, Ælfric again adds a detail to highlight the problem of secrecy:

Sebastianus cwæð, hi ne cunnon ðone geleafan,
ne eac hi gebletsian, and bið se deofol gearu
hu he him derige for sumum dyrnum gylte,
and cwæðaþ þa hæðenan þæt hi wurdon gehynde
forþan þe hi þa anlicnyssa æfre tobrecan dorston. (237–41)

[Sebastian said, “They do not know the faith, not even how to bless themselves, and the devil is ready for how he can injure them because of some secret guilt, and then the pagans will say that they were afflicted because they dared to destroy the images.”]

Finally, in reference to the now-converted Chromatius' neglecting to mention his astrological device during the destruction of idols, Ælfric writes, “Chromatius hæfde behydd on his digolnysse” [250; ‘Chromatius had hidden [it] in his secrecy / a secret hiding place’⁵⁴], where the Latin presents the situation neutrally (see 54.1136D–1137A). Ælfric, then, is not comfortable with the notion of secrecy in a positive or practical context. On the contrary, he makes additions to his source to highlight secrecy as a problem, and even makes it a running theme within a major section of the *Life*.

In addition to the recurrent allusions to Sebastian's military dress and hiding throughout the *Passio*, the question of Christians' hiding from persecution constitutes a turning point in the narrative overall. The two major sections of the story – the expanding circle of conversions and the depiction of the multiple martyrdoms – are separated by a debate over the morality of saving one's own life by hiding. When the now rather large group of

⁵³ Cf. Mombricitus 1978, 2: 470; Fábrega Grau 1955, 166–7; Nero E.i, fol. 110ʳ.

⁵⁴ See *Dictionary of Old English A–G on CD-ROM* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2008), s.v. *digolnysse*.

Christians, including Pope Gaius, realizes that it is no longer safe to remain in Rome, a number of them decide to flee the city for safety. The Latin author does not hesitate to note that the reason for their fleeing is because they can no longer hide their Christianity: “opinio ipsa Christianitatis ejus celari non posset” (66.1141A; the knowledge of their Christianity could not be hidden). The situation causes a dispute between Sebastian and Polycarpus, both of whom wish to remain in the city and face almost certain martyrdom. The pope decides that it would benefit the group for Polycarpus, a priest, to accompany them out of the city. The pope then comments on the different ways one can lead a Christian life:

Dominus noster Jesus Christus, praescius fragilitatis humanae, duos in se creditibus constituit gradus, confessionis scilicet et martyrii, ut hi qui martyrii pondus se posse perferre desperant, confessionis gratiam teneant, et dantes latus bellantibus, Christi militum, qui pro ejus sunt nomine pugnaturi, sollicitudinem gerant. (66.1141C–42A)⁵⁵

[Our Lord, Jesus Christ, prescient of human fragility, established two grades for those believing in him, namely that of confession and martyrdom, so that those who have no hope of being able to endure the weight of martyrdom may take the grace of confession, and acting as companions they take care of the warriors, the soldiers of Christ who are going to fight for his name.]

After the group leaves, those remaining in Rome with Pope Gaius and Sebastian make a final move, and again the *Passio* baldly states their need for hiding, “Sed quia tutus nullus inveniri poterat locus ad latebram confovendam, morabantur omnes apud Castulum quemdam Christianum zetarium palatii” [69.1143A; but because no place could be found that would be safe for hiding, they all were living with a certain Christian named Castulus, a valet of the palace].⁵⁶ It is shortly after this that the martyrdoms of all those Christians still in Rome are described.

Ælfric is forced by his source text to deal in some way with this discussion of Christians either hiding or fleeing. Not surprisingly, he simplifies the story, removing controversial issues and making clarifying additions. He prefaces the first situation of Christian hiding by again stressing the ignorance of the emperor. He tells us “þam casere næs þa gyt cuð þæt Chromatius cristen wæs, and he begeat ða leafe þæt he of þam lande moste” [327–8; it was not yet known to the emperor that Chromatius was a Christian, and he obtained permission to leave the country] which has no parallel in the Latin.⁵⁷ He replaces the pope's discussion of two types of Christian life with the succinct, “ure hælend lyfde þæt mann his life gebeorge; fara nu se þe wille

⁵⁵ Cf. Mombricitus 1978, 2: 473; Fábrega Grau 1955, 170; Nero E.i, fol. 111ʳ.

⁵⁶ Cf. Mombricitus 1978, 2: 473; Fábrega Grau 1955, 171; Nero E.i, fol. 112ʳ.

⁵⁷ See *Passio* 66.1141A; cf. Mombricitus 1978, 2: 473; Fábrega Grau 1955, 170; Nero E.i, fol. 111ʳ.

forð mid Chromatiæ, and wunige se þe wille mid me on þyssere byrig” [332–4; our savior allowed that a man should protect his life; he who wishes go now with Chromatius, and whoever wishes stay with me here in this city], thereby giving the Christians divine approval to flee. At the end of this section, after describing those who remain in the city, Ælfric reiterates the divine role in the Christians’ hiding, by making another addition to the Latin, “þa oþre ealle endemes ferdon awæg mid Chromatiæ, swa swa him Crist gewissode” [345–6; then the others all together went away with Chromatius, as Christ had shown them].

CONCLUSIONS: A DEMILITARIZED SAINT

Three major themes found in the Latin *Passio*, the *miles Christi*, the arrows of the devil, and the acceptability of hiding one’s religion, are closely linked within that text. The militaristic metaphors fit well in the Latin version because the author explicitly contrasts Sebastian’s role as worldly soldier and *miles Christi*. The theme of the arrows of the devil, a common component of the Christian militaristic metaphor, is also particularly apt in this story because of the famous method of Sebastian’s martyrdom. Finally, the narrative action demands that something be said of Sebastian’s hiding his religion – he could not maintain his proximity to persecuted Christians if he did not conceal his belief. Again, the Latin author exploits this situation and draws it into the narrative whole by uniting the passages referring to Sebastian’s hiding with references to his military dress. Because Ælfric could not easily refer to one of these themes without alluding to them all, he was compelled to minimize the prominence of all of them in his translation. In the Latin, the author presents a number of complicated and sometimes almost contradictory situations: Sebastian is both a Roman soldier and a Christian; he encourages others not to avoid martyrdom while avoiding it himself; some Christians choose to live while others are praised for their dying. Ælfric’s translation avoids the contradictions and instead stresses the simple virtues of the Christians and the errors of the pagans.

I began this study by considering Sebastian as one of the important group of male, secular, military martyrs in Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints* collection. Sebastian should obviously fit into this category, yet he defies categorization in some ways. We are told, at least in the Latin, that he is a distinguished soldier and commander, yet we are given no evidence of this. No battles or wars are mentioned at all. He is also famed as a martyr, but he does not fit easily into that category either. He does not make a conspicuous show of laying down his arms, nor does he spend a great amount of time flying in the face of persecutors of Christians. On the contrary, he spends his life enjoying the favor of the Roman emperor while hiding his religion. He is even a participant – and an important one – in the machinery of persecution in Rome. Sebastian’s fame comes in part from his helping Christians die while he stays alive.

Ælfric obviously would want to avoid these issues in creating a version suitable for laymen, particularly military men, such as the patrons of the *Lives* collection, Æthelweard and Æthelmær.⁵⁸ Ælfric himself famously explains that the sort of subtle development and intertwining of difficult issues found in the *Passio Sebastiani* is the type of material he hopes to avoid in his *Lives of Saints*. In explaining to his Latin-reading audience why he has not translated anything from the collection of lives of desert fathers, he states,⁵⁹

Ideoque reticemus de libro vitae patrum, in quo multa subtilia habentur quae non conueniunt aperiri laicis, nec nos ipsi ea quimus implere. (12–14)⁶⁰

[Therefore we are silent about the book *Vitae patrum*, in which are contained many subtle / delicate things which would not be fitting to reveal to laymen, nor are we ourselves able to treat them fully.]

Likewise, the *Passio Sebastiani* contains many subtle things which might not be fitting to reveal to laymen. While the sometimes contradictory situations of other military saints could still offer a valuable lesson in Ælfric’s time, like the just warfare of the Maccabees or the noble sacrifice of Edmund, Sebastian’s hiding seems to be a part of his life that would not be salutary to promote. In the Latin life, Sebastian’s hiding is directly connected to his role as a soldier, and thus tied to the Christian military language. Ælfric chooses to omit metaphors which may have had a particular appeal to his audience, doing so, not surprisingly, in the interest of clarity and transparency of meaning. His concerns and those of the anonymous Latin author, living half a millennium before him, are quite different. While telling essentially the same story, these authors create very different works. The great difference lies in *how*, exactly, each author tells his story, especially considering what he does or does not emphasize. The Latin life is complex in its ideas and subtle in its presentation of them. Ælfric, on the other hand, places clarity of both narrative and meaning above all else, even above employing themes from the Latin *Passio* which would almost certainly appeal to his patrons and other Anglo-Saxon readers.⁶¹

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DAMIAN FLEMING

⁵⁸ See note 14 above.

⁵⁹ See Whatley 2002, 174–6; see also Wilcox 1994, 156.

⁶⁰ Skeat 1881–1900, repr. 1966, 1: 2.

⁶¹ An earlier version of this paper was read at the 2003 meeting of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists in Arizona; I am grateful for the comments of Allen Frantzen on that occasion. I am also thankful to Andy Orchard, Pauline Thompson, Robin Norris, and Tess Owens Fleming for comments and advice throughout the writing of this piece.