CHAPTER 1

The Life of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179)

Michael Embach

The basic facts of Hildegard of Bingen's life are well established.[1] Born in 1098, she formally entered a female enclosure attached to the male monastery of Disibodenberg on November 1, 1112 along with two other women. The community of women grew, and, in 1136, when her mentor Jutta of Sponheim died, Hildegard was elected *magistra* by the other women. In 1141, she received divine instructions to write down her visions, which resulted in *Scivias* (Know the Ways), the first of three large theological and visionary treatises. Around 1150, she moved her nuns from Disibodenberg to their newly founded monastic complex at Rupertsberg on the Rhine, and for the next three decades she developed a public persona through her prodigious writing in many genres and through her preaching tours. When she died in 1179, she left behind a large body of works, including a corpus of liturgical music, and she left behind a community anxious to see her elevated to sainthood, which in part is why we have as much information about her as we do.

This chapter fills in some of the details of this biographical sketch, while also pointing to the difficulties in doing so. Although many biographies of Hildegard of Bingen are available in a wide variety of formats, there is still no comprehensive, historical-critical biography for researchers.[2] The main difficulty for anyone trying to assess and confirm the details of Hildegard's life is the conflicting evidence that emerges from the documentary material most closely associated with her lifetime. This chapter begins with a description of the sources from which a biography can be generated. It then proceeds chronologically through her life and after her death,

[1] This chapter was translated by Florian Hild.

[2] See Franz Staab, "Hildegard von Bingen: Fragmente einer Biographie der Heiligen. Aus dem Nachlass," in Staab, *Die "Heiligsprechung" Hildegards von Bingen*, ed. Georg May, Heimatpflege für den Kreis Mainz-Bingen, Bd. 27 (Bingen: Vereinigung der Heimatfreunde am Mittelrhein, 2012); and Michael Embach, *Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179): Leben, Werk und Wirkung* (Trier: Paulinus-Verlag, 2014).

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describing her earlier years, the beginning of her public activities, the founding of Rupertsberg, her travel and preaching activities, reports about her miracles, her final years, the early reception of her work, and lastly the various canonization attempts.

The Sources of Hildegard's Life History

The most important sources for establishing Hildegard's biography come from her lifetime, or shortly thereafter, including the *Vita sanctae Hildegardis* (Life of Saint Hildegard), the *Vita domnae Juttae inclusae* (Life of Lady Jutta the Anchoress), the *Acta inquisitionis* (Act of Inquisition, a canonization document), the correspondence between Hildegard of Bingen and Guibert of Gembloux, as well as two works written by Hildegard herself: the *Vita sancti Ruperti confessoris* (Life of Saint Rupert, Confessor) and the *Vita sancti Disibodi episcopi* (Life of Saint Disibod, Bishop). There are furthermore documents from Disibodenberg and Rupertsberg, as well as introductory remarks from Hildegard's visionary writings.

Notwithstanding their great significance for a reconstruction of Hildegard's biography, these sources present a series of problems. This is especially true for the documents concerning Hildegard's childhood and youth, which contain sometimes contradictory, hard-to-reconcile information. Moreover, as Sylvain Gougenheim justly complains, Hildegard's life story from age eight to her leadership at the women's enclosure at the abbey of Disibodenberg in 1136 is full of holes.[3] The *Vita Hildegardis*, for example, must be regarded as a posthumously assembled work that combines autobiographical writings of Hildegard with two fragmentary biographies by Gottfried of Disibodenberg (1174–1176) and Guibert of Gembloux (before 1180). These disparate materials, possibly including a now lost "miracle book" of Hildegard's miracles, were synthesized by the monk Theodoric of Echternach between 1182 and 1188. Theodoric, however, did not know Hildegard personally, which explains why the *Octo lectiones in festo sancte Hildegardis legende* (Eight Readings to Be Read on the Feast of St. Hildegard), likely from Theodoric, provides the wrong death year (1181) for Hildegard.

For these reasons, there are still gaps and unresolved aspects of Hildegard's biography, which at this point and time simply cannot be cleared up. The following description of Hildegard's life can therefore only claim to be an approximation.

[3] Sylvain Gougenheim, *La Sibylle du Rhin. Hildegarde de Bingen, abbesse et prophétesse rhénane*, Série Histoire et Médiévale 38 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996), 30.

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Family, Birth, and Youth

In the prefatory material to her first visionary and theological work, *Scivias*, Hildegard reports that she received the instruction to write down her visions in the year 1141 and she states explicitly that she was then forty-two years and seven months old.[4] With this information and by consulting further sources, it can be concluded that Hildegard must have been born between August and September 16, 1098. This date should be considered authoritative even though Hildegard herself as well as the last secretary in her retinue, Guibert of Gembloux (ca. 1124–1213), date her birth to the year 1100.[5] The reference to the year 1100 is symbolic, regarded as the beginning of the end of the reign of Emperor Heinrich IV (1084–1105), a catastrophic reign in the church's view. The year 1099 also marks the conquest of Jerusalem and the subsequent rule of the holy city by Godfrey of Bouillon (ca. 1060–1100), as the Christian *princeps* (ruler) and *advocatus sancti sepulchri* (defender of the Holy Sepulchre). Both events, the death of Heinrich IV and the conquest of Jerusalem, were frequently understood in the chronicles of the Middle Ages as symptoms of the birth of a new epoch, to which great meaning was assigned. The *Vita Hildegardis* additionally claims that belief in the doctrine of the Apostles and justice itself began to lose fervor and were doubted at this time. These remarks establish a motive for the necessary reform of the church and the world, and placing Hildegard's birth in that year is a timely coincidence. Against a background of this historical-theological stylization, Hildegard's alleged birth in the year 1100 gains the aura of inaugurating a new spiritual age. Hildegard herself becomes a persona of the new beginning whose historical appearance augured the coming of great events. It is therefore no surprise that the annals of the monastery of Disibodenberg, begun toward the middle of the twelfth century, strongly emphasize the epochal change of the year 1100 by providing a detailed report about the First Crusade and the conquest of Jerusalem.[6]

[4] Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 59.

[5] *Vita sanctae Hildegardis*, ed. Monica Klaes, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis (CCCM) 126 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), 22, lines 39–44: "Nam post incarnationem Christi anno millesimo centesimo doctrina apostolorum et ardens iusticia, quam in christianis et spiritualibus constituerat, tardare cepit et in hesitacionem uertebatur. Illis temporibus nata sum" ("Then in the year 1100 AD the teaching of the apostles and the burning justice which He erected in Christians and clerics began to slacken and turned to doubt. That's when I was born").

[6] *Annales sancti Disibodi*, ed. Georg Waitz, Monumenta Germaniae Historica 17 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1861), 17–19.

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There is only sparse information about the background and the family of Hildegard in the *Vita Hildegardis*.[7] This is bewildering considering that birth and relations were generally of great importance in medieval biographies. It remarks merely that Hildegard's family belonged to the nobility, was wealthy, and that her father's name was Hildebert and her mother's Mechthild. Of Hildegard's father, we know that he belonged to the free nobility, denoting an official position or a feudal relationship but not a formal vassalship. The literature remarks again and again on Hildegard's father's close relationship with the counts of Sponheim, especially Meginhard of Sponheim. The connections between Hildegard's family and the Sponheims, one of the most influential noble families in the mid-Rhine territory, are apparent later when Jutta of Sponheim (ca. 1092–1136), Meginhard's sister, became Hildegard's first teacher in the women's enclosure. There is even less information about Hildegard's mother Mechthild than about her father. Her family's home is supposedly the castle of Merxheim in the Nahe valley.

We know from the sources that Hildegard was the tenth (not necessarily last) child of Hildebert and Mechthild, but knowledge of her siblings is equally sparse. It is at least known that Hildegard's brother Drutwin took over the family home and that another brother, Hugo, was the cantor at the cathedral church of Mainz from 1156 to 1163, which made him one of the three highest-ranking clerics of the diocese. Hugo also worked as a tutor of Rudolf of Zähringen (ca. 1135–1191), the later archbishop of Mainz (from 1160) and bishop of Lüttich (from 1167), and possibly served as a cleric in Hildegard's convent at Rupertsberg from 1175.[8] The next-younger brother, Rorich, is documented together with Drutwin and Hugo as a grantee of property in Bermersheim, although another document only mentions Drutwin and Hugo.[9] Four biological sisters of Hildegard are known by name, although they could also be sisters-in-law, cousins, or nieces: Irmgard, Odilia, Jutta, and Clementia. The latter, Clementia, belonged to the convent at Rupertsberg as a fellow sister of Hildegard. A nephew of Hildegard, named Wezzelin (d. 1185), worked as provost at the St. Andreas monastery in Cologne and helped Hildegard with the compilation of her third book of visions, the *Liber divinorum operum*, after the death of her

[7] Marianna Schrader, *Die Herkunft der heiligen Hildegard*, ed. Adelgundis Führkötter, Quellen und Abhandlungen zur mittelrheinischen Kirchengeschichte 43 (Mainz: Selbstverlag der Gesellschaft für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 1981). Embach, *Hildegard von Bingen*, 8–17.

[8] Guibertus Gemblacensis, *Epistolae quae in codice B. R. Brux. 5527–5534 inveniuntur. P. 2*, ed. Albert Derolez, CCCM 66 A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989), 346–347.

[9] *Registrum bonorum*, Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, Abt. 701 A VII 3, Nr. 5 and *Mainzer Urkundenbuch 2. Die Urkunden seit dem Tode Erzbischof Adalberts I. (1137) bis zum Tode Erzbischof Konrads (1200)*, ed. Peter Acht (Darmstadt: Historischer Verein für Hessen, 1968), 1:1137–1175, no. 230, 415.

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long-time secretary Volmar in 1173. Hildegard mentions Wezzelin in the opening of this book, calling him a *beatus homo* (blessed man) and a man of noble birth, and Guibert of Gembloux describes him as a nephew and close confidante to Hildegard in a letter to Radulf of Villers.[10] An earlier provost at St. Andreas, Arnold I, archbishop of Trier from 1169 to his death in 1183, calls himself Hildegard's blood relative (*cognate sue*) in a letter to her from 1169 and remembers the close relationship they had maintained since their youth.[11] In reference to this remark, Marianna Schrader and Adelgundis Führkötter claimed that Arnold was in fact Wezzelin's biological brother and thus also a nephew of Hildegard;[12] it is possible, however, that Arnold's reference to Wezzelin as *frater noster* (our brother) describes not a genealogical but only a spiritual relationship in their clerical office.

Finally, there is the possibility that Hildegard was related to the archbishop Philip of Cologne (1167–1191). Josef Heinzelmann considers him to be Hildegard's cousin who communicated with her and Guibert of Gembloux and who repeatedly attempted to meet her.[13] Hildegard did indeed call Philip *fidelis amicus meus* (my faithful friend).[14] In his position as cathedral deacon of Cologne, Philip communicated warmly with Hildegard and expressed his love for her motherly goodness.[15] This amicable relationship continued as Philip became archbishop of Cologne.

It seems remarkable that there is no mention of Hildegard's place of birth in the *Vita Hildegardis*; the text merely claims that it was located "in the territory of Eastern Gaul."[16] Several scholars have suggested possible locations. In 1936, the nun from Eibingen and Hildegard expert Marianna Schrader OSB (1882–1970) identified Bermersheim near Alzey as Hildegard's birthplace; an official document from Sponheim from the year 1127 was signed by a "Hiltebertus of Vermersheim" (Bermersheim) and his son Drutwin.[17] According to Schrader, extensive family holdings from around Bermersheim were granted to the

[10] *Guiberti Gemblacensis Epistolae*, Letter 26, 292, lines 828–829. "Reuerende memorie domnus Wescelinus, nepos eius et familiarissimus ei [Hildegardis], sancti Andree Coloniensis prepositus."

[11] Letter 27, in Hildegard of Bingen, *Epistolarium*, ed. Lieven Van Acker, CCCM 91 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), part 1, 76.

[12] Marianna Schrader and Adelgundis Führkötter, *Die Echtheit des Schrifttums der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen. Quellenkritische Untersuchungen*. Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgeschichte 6 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1956), 83.

[13] Josef Heinzelmann, "Hildegard von Bingen und ihre Verwandten," *Jahrbuch für westdeutsche Landesgeschichte* 23 (1997): 61.

[14] J. Stilting, "De S. Hildegarde Virgine, magistra sororum ord. S. Benedicti in monte S. Ruperti juxta Bingium in dioecesis Moguntina," *Acta sanctorum* 668 (1755): 629–701.

[15] Letter 15, in *Epistolarium*, part 1, 33, line 5: "Quia maternam pietatem uestram diligimus."

[16] *Annales sancti Disibodi*, 6 and 21.

[17] Marianna Schrader, "Zur Heimat- und Familiengeschichte der hl. Hildegard," *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktiner-Ordens und seiner Zweige* 57 (1939): 117–133.

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Rupertsberg convent founded by Hildegard, which held power and rights over Bermersheim for centuries. Those ascribing to this theory consider the Romanesque church of Bermersheim to be therefore Hildegard's baptismal chapel. A renewed discussion about Hildegard's birthplace, however, arose in 1997 when Josef Heinzelmann proposed Niederhosenbach in the Hunsrück (near Kirn in the district Birkenfeld) as Hildegard's birthplace instead.[18] Heinzelmann's claim was based on an 1112 document from Disibodenberg that names a Hildebert of Hosenbach, who could be Hildegard's father, but the details of this debate are beyond the scope of this chapter. Finally, it should be mentioned that Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516) suggested another location as Hildegard's birthplace. In the chronicles from Hirsau and Sponheim, he names the castle Böckelheim (Bickelnheim) as her birthplace. Castle Böckelheim belonged to the territory of the county Sponheim.[19] One may assume, however, that Trithemius's ancestral legend was an attempt to paint a close relationship between Hildegard's family and the Sponheims. In his historical writings, Trithemius repeatedly championed the interests of the counts of Sponheim who had, after all, founded his abbey. Certainly his passages should be regarded as pro-Sponheim court historiography rather than historically accurate. Even if the historiographic discussion about Hildegard's birthplace has not yet come to an end, it does not play a decisive role in the evaluation of Hildegard's life and work.

The *Vita Hildegardis* stresses that Hildegard's parents never forgot to be grateful for the gifts of their Creator, despite their wealth and position. This gratitude manifested itself concretely in dedicating Hildegard to the monastic life, a step, according to the *Vita*, that caused much grief for her parents. By handing over their child as an oblate, they followed an old custom of presenting one's own child by paternal fiat as a gift to God, following the Old Testament examples of Samson or Samuel. The *Rule of St. Benedict* includes a passage about oblates (chapter 59), and they were incorporated into the rhythms of monastic life before their eternal profession. Thus, they had the opportunity to receive a high degree of clerical education, liturgical knowledge, and rootedness in a life devoted to God. Offering a child to the church, from the perspective of the parents, was a gesture of the highest gratitude to God by giving up one's most precious possession.

[18] Heinzelmann, "Hildegard von Bingen und ihre Verwandten."

[19] Johannes Trithemius, *Chronica Hirsaugiense*, in Trithemius, *Opera historica* 2, ed. Marquard Freher (Frankfurt: Marne & Aubry, 1601), 133: "Fuit autem haec virgo Hildegardis beatissima, oriunda ex comitatu Spanheimensi, in villa qua vocatur Bickelnheim"; and *Chronicon Sponheimense*, in Trithemius, *Opera historica* 2, ed. Freher, 250 (identical text).

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Monastic life seemed to correspond to Hildegard's inner disposition and vocation; the *Vita Hildegardis* stresses that she was already remarkably pure, mature, and unworldly as a child. Moreover, she already had visions as a young child, as Hildegard reports in the autobiographical parts of the *Vita*: as a three-year-old she saw such a great light that her soul was shaken. The *Vita* also mentions Hildegard's numerous and long sicknesses. Her later ability to console and heal others thus sprang from her own experience of the transitoriness of being human.

The question of when Hildegard entered the enclosure of Disibodenberg is controversial. The *Vita Hildegardis* states that she was barely eight and thus her entry would have taken place in 1106. There are reasons, though, to doubt this claim. We have two further sources about Hildegard's early life, in addition to the later, posthumously finished *Vita Hildegardis*: the report from Guibert of Gembloux (including the spoken prayers of Hildegard and the two other women during their entrance ceremony),[20] written sixty-six years (1177) after the event of her enclosure, as well as the *Vita domnae Juttae inclusae* (Life of Lady Jutta the Anchoress).[21] The latter text was penned by an unknown monk at Disibodenberg in 1137 and is thus chronologically closer to the described events than either the Hildegard *Vita* or the report of Guibert of Gembloux. We will therefore treat the *Vita Juttae* as the source for Hildegard's youth in what follows.

When she took on Hildegard's spiritual education, Jutta of Sponheim was fourteen years old, the age when, according to medieval law, women were considered adults. Jutta took her eternal vows simultaneously with her entry into the enclosure on November 1, 1112, under Abbot Burchard of Disibodenberg (1108–1113). Hildegard took her eternal vows later under Bishop Otto of Bamberg (ca. 1060–1131), who had also bestowed the dedication of a virgin on Hildegard upon her entry into the women's enclosure on the same day as Jutta. Otto held the office of the incarcerated archbishop Adalbert of Mainz, only from 1112 to 1115, which provides a date range then for when Hildegard took her eternal vows. While the precise date is unknown, it had to have been no later than 1115, when she was sixteen or seventeen, just a few years after her enclosure and dedication at Disibodenberg. According to the autobiographical parts of the *Vita Hildegardis*, the educational program of Jutta of Sponheim included the

[20] Guibert of Gembloux, Letter 38, in Guiberti Gemblacensis, *Epistolae*, 2, 372, lines 201–212.

[21] Franz Staab, *Das Leben der Jutta von Sponheim, Lehrerin der Hildegard von Bingen*, Sponheim-Hefte 21 (Sponheim: Freundeskreis der Burg Sponheim, 1999).

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singing of psalms and writing but no work on literature and philosophy; the psalter was Hildegard's central educational, devotional, and song book. Yet Hildegard, in the prefatory remarks to the *Scivias*, specifically mentions the Bible, the church fathers, and unnamed "philosophers" as the basis of interpreting her visions. This suggests that Hildegard continually expanded her educational horizon on her own after the end of Jutta's education,[22] which would not have been unusual in a twelfth-century Germanic context, as Lori Kruckenberg's contribution (Chapter 3) in this volume elucidates.

Jutta of Sponheim, against the will of her parents, had received the dedication of a virgin from Archbishop Ruthard of Mainz and entered into the care of the pious widow Uda of Göllheim, who taught her from the age of twelve or thirteen. Hildegard, too, probably knew or studied with Uda of Göllheim, but where she did so is not mentioned in the *Vita Juttae*; it is likely that Uda taught in the residence of the Sponheims. Hildegard and Jutta went through a lengthy, religious training period prior to Hildegard's regular entry at Disibodenberg.

Jutta of Sponheim originally had serious intentions of pursuing a great pilgrimage, but these plans were in opposition to her brother Meginhard. He and Bishop Otto of Bamberg finally convinced Jutta to found a women's enclosure at Disibodenberg rather than go on a pilgrimage. The Benedictine cloister Disibodenberg (founded in 1108) was considered at the time as the most modern reform cloister in the Mainz diocese. The cloister had originally been built as an Augustinian canonry by Bishop Willigis of Mainz (975–1011). Disibod, whose *vita* Hildegard later wrote, was a seventh-century, Irish-Franconian, itinerant monk.[23] He had settled at an already existing baptismal and missionary church and built a small cloister (*coenobium*) there. When the Benedictines took over from the Augustinians, they built a new

[22] Michael Embach, "Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179) – kryptische Gelehrsamkeit und rhetorischer Sprachgestus," in Edeltraud Klueting T.OCarm and Harm Klueting, eds., *Fromme Frauen als gelehrte Frauen. Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kunst im weiblichen Religiosentum des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit. Öffentliche Internationale Tagung der Diözesan- und Dombibliothek Köln (1. bis 4. April 2009)*, Diözesan- und Dombibliothek, Libelli Rhenani 37 (Cologne: Erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek, 2010), 128–150.

[23] Latin edition: *Vita sancti Disibodi episcopi, Vita sancti Ruperti confessoris*, in Hildegardis Bingensis, *Opera minora II*, ed. Jeroen Deploige, Michael Embach, Christopher P. Evans, Kurt Gärtner, and Sara Moens, CCCM 226 A (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 15–108. English translation: Hildegard of Bingen, *Two Hagiographies: Vita sancti Rupperti confessoris. Vita sancti Dysibodi episcopi*, ed. and English trans. Hugh Feiss; Latin ed. Christopher P. Evans, Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations 11 (Paris: Peeters, 2010). Franz J. Felten, "Disibod und die Geschichte des Disibodenberges bis zum Beginn des 12. Jahrhunderts," in Falko Daim and Antje Kluge-Pinsker, eds., *Als Hildegard noch nicht in Bingen war* (Regensburg: Schnell und Steiner, 2009), 25–34.

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and large abbey church on the Disibodenberg, which became the center of the spacious monastic grounds.[24] The numerous building metaphors in Hildegard's *Scivias* are a response to the simultaneous, actual building of the monastery and prepared Hildegard for her own building project on the Rupertsberg.

We can consider as certain that on All Saints' Day (November 1) 1112, Hildegard, together with Jutta – who was to be her *magistra* from then on – as well as a third woman, also named Jutta, was accepted as an oblate and recluse at the Disibodenberg.[25] Where precisely the women's enclosure was located can no longer be determined; however, Eberhard J. Nikitsch assumes that it was housed in the side aisle of the former cemetery chapel.[26] The three recluses could have participated in the celebration of the Eucharist without having to leave the building, since the chapel was used for liturgical purposes.

We have hardly any information about the years that Hildegard lived in the women's enclosure at Disibodenberg.[27] It is certain, though, that she must have undergone a deep spiritual development and earned the special trust of her teacher Jutta. She was one of three chosen sisters who were allowed to prepare the body of their *magistra* for Jutta's funeral. Jutta of Sponheim's spiritual program must have been very demanding: her ascetic and prayer practices exceeded by far those prescribed in the Benedictine rule. Some researchers consider it possible that Hildegard received a vision of the journey of Jutta's soul after her death, which would make it the oldest visionary text of Hildegard that has been transmitted to us (*Vita Juttae*, chapter 10), about ten years older than the earliest vision of the *Scivias*.

Hildegard lived for twenty-four years under the spiritual care of Jutta of Sponheim, who was approached as advisor in many questions concerning faith and life. Chapter 5 of *Vita Juttae* states that "people came from all around, from all social levels – nobles, non-nobles, rich and poor, pilgrims

[24] Gabriele Mergenthaler, *Die mittelalterliche Baugeschichte des Benediktiner- und Zisterzienserklosters Disibodenberg zwischen Tradition und Reform*, Heimatkundliche Schriftenreihe des Landkreises Bad Kreuznach 32 (Bad Kreuznach: Kreisverwaltung Bad Kreuznach, 2002).

[25] Trithemius, in *Chronicon Hirsaugiense*, in *Opera historica* 2, ed. Freher, 126: "[Jutta] fuit autem inclusa anno Domini 1112 indictione 5 & aliae tres cum ea, videlicet sancta virgo Hildegardis . . . & alia eiusdem nominis virgo."

[26] Eberhard J. Nikitsch, "Wo lebte die heilige Hildegard wirklich? Neue Überlegungen zum ehemaligen Standort der Frauenklause auf dem Disibodenberg," in Rainer Berndt (ed.), "*Im Angesicht Gottes suche der Mensch sich selbst": Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179)*, Erudiri Sapientia 2 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2001), 147–155.

[27] Franz J. Felten, "What Do We Know About the Life of Jutta and Hildegard at Disibodenberg and Rupertsberg?" in Beverly Mayne Kienzle, Debra L. Stoudt, and George Ferzoco, eds., *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 15–38.

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and guests – who were searching only for Jutta and who looked at her alone as a heavenly oracle . . . Many, who lived far away send messengers, often with letters and the request for support in prayer."[28] Guibert of Gembloux refers to Jutta of Sponheim as blessed, a tradition found as well in Trithemius's *Chronicon Hirsaugiense* and maintained today by the Benedictine order in the diocese of Speyer. Trithemius describes Hildegard's teacher further as a *sancta mulier* (holy woman) and ascribes to her the miracles of turning water into wine and walking on the waters of the Glan River.[29]

It is no surprise that Hildegard, at the age of thirty-eight, was elected by her fellow sisters as *magistra* of the community after Jutta's death (December 22, 1136). According to Guibert of Gembloux in a letter to his fellow brother Bovo (letter 38), the election was unanimous; the nuns were certain of Hildegard's *discretio* (discernment) and *temperentia* (restraint), two central virtues of a Benedictine abbess or abbot.[30] The women's enclosure of Disibodenberg had developed into a regular community under Jutta already and many nobles sent their daughters to Disibodenberg for their education. It is assumed that by the time it moved to Rupertsberg (1150/1151), the women's enclosure of Disibodenberg included about nineteen to twenty members. Compared to the ascetic Jutta, Hildegard introduced significant moderations in their way of life, removing the strict rules regarding food and the excessively long prayer and worship times; Jutta sometimes prayed the entire psalter two or three times a day, often kneeling with bare feet in the bitter cold, incurring significant illnesses as a result. Hildegard's changes revealed her as a spiritual authority who also paid attention to the physical and health needs of her community. Her way of life is informed by an attitude that considers the body not as the tomb of the soul but as the temple of the Holy Spirit. While Jutta belongs to the ascetic reform movement of the Benedictine order, Hildegard represents the Benedictine ideal of a middle way between monastic duties and a reasonable moderation of the daily routines. Overall, though, Hildegard observed a great fidelity to the regulations of the Benedictine rule, which she also commented on per the request of an unidentified monastic community.[31]

[28] Staab, *Das Leben der Jutta von Sponheim*, 13–15.
[29] Trithemius, *Chronicon Hirsaugiense*, 126, line 28.
[30] Letter 38, in Guiberti Gemblacensis, *Epistolae*, part 2, 375, lines 300–302.
[31] Hildegard of Bingen, *De Regula sancti Benedicti*, in *Hildegardis Bingensis, Opera minora*, Part 1, ed. Hugh Feiss, CCCM 226 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 23–97. English translation in *Hildegard of Bingen: Explanation of the Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Hugh Feiss (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005).

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The Beginning of Hildegard's Public Activities

The visions and auditions that Hildegard experienced from childhood on became more and more intense and urgent. As she explains in the introduction to *Scivias*, Hildegard received the command to write down what she saw and heard a voice from heaven (*vox de caelo*).[32] Hildegard emphasizes explicitly that her visions were not made up by herself or anyone else. A fruit of her visions was that "the writings of the prophets, of the Gospels, and of other saints and of certain philosophers" were opened up to her.[33] Hildegard viewed all things in the light of God in equally sensuous and spiritual ways. The *Vita Hildegardis* reports on the breadth of her visions: "She saw in spirit the past life and conduct of people, and in the case of some, she could even foresee the way their present life would end, and, according to the character of their conduct and merits, their soul's glory or punishment."[34] The *Vita* reveals as well that Hildegard attempted at first to avoid her prophetic commission by claiming embarrassment and shyness vis-à-vis public opinion.[35] Only after a severe illness, which she considered a divine punishment, did she follow the divine command. Hildegard began by writing down the *Scivias*, an expansive summa of faith, which took about ten years to complete (1141–1151). After five years of work on the book, Hildegard wrote to Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), the greatest clerical authority of the times, for advice on whether she ought to continue to write or remain silent instead.[36] Her letter to Bernard explains that she received her visions in the spirit of mystery (*in spiritu mysterii*) – not with the eyes of the body but with the eyes of the soul: the visions move her heart like a consuming flame and her soul teaches her the depth of interpretation. The famous Cistercian answered Hildegard in a prudent and carefully encouraging way, congratulating her for the mercy of God that reigned within her but also admonishing her to be humble. Bernard further explains that Hildegard had experienced an inner teaching and anointing (*interior eruditio … et unctio docens de omnibus*), which made further admonishments unnecessary.[37] While unacknowledged by previous scholarship, the phrase "inner teaching and anointing" elevates the visionary abilities of Hildegard in a special way as almost a verbatim

[32] Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Adelgundis Führkötter and Angela Carlevaris, CCCM 63 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978), 3.
[33] "The Life of Hildegard," in Anna Silvas, ed. and trans., *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 160.
[34] Ibid., 163. [35] Ibid., 159. [36] Letter 1, in *Epistolarium*, part 1, 3–6.
[37] Letter 1 reply, in *Epistolarium*, part 1, 6–7.

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quotation from John's first letter (1 John 2:20): "But you have been anointed by the holy one, and you know everything" (*Sed vos unctionem habetis a Sancto, et nostis omnia*). By quoting from John's first letter, Bernard ascribes to Hildegard the role of a prophetic authority, illumined by the Holy Spirit.

Hildegard's letter to Bernard of Clairvaux from 1146/1147 is the oldest extant writing of the seer and simultaneously a document of great importance for her later work. However, already in the seer's lifetime, the letter exchange with Bernard of Clairvaux received significant editorial attention along with a number of other letters to and from Hildegard, a process described in detail in Christopher D. Fletcher's chapter in this volume (Chapter 5). The edited version from the *Riesencodex*, a kind of "final edition" of Hildegard's works, became determinative for the view of Hildegard in later centuries.[38] Here, Hildegard appears no longer in the role of the insecure and searching suppliant; rather, Bernard merely confirms a seer already on her way to canonical authority of the church.

Hildegard received another confirmation in the years 1147–1148 when Pope Eugene III visited Trier from November 30, 1147 to February 1148 for a synod. Eighteen cardinals as well as numerous bishops from Germany, France, Belgium, England, Lombardy, and Tuscany were present, supposedly even Bernard of Clairvaux.[39] Hildegard used this favorable opportunity to receive approval from the pope regarding her visionary abilities, while paying great attention to church hierarchy. Bishop Heinrich of Mainz, asked by Abbot Kuno of Disibodenberg, made a report of Hildegard's visionary gifts to the pope. An unmediated relationship between Hildegard and the pope was unthinkable.

The pope did show interest in Hildegard's work; he sent Bishop Albero of Verdun, the *primicerius* Adalbert (a presiding officer of the lower clergy, according to Isidore of Seville's definition), and further qualified authorities to Disibodenberg to submit Hildegard's visionary gift to an official investigation. On their return to Trier, they reported back and the *Vita Hildegardis* states that the pope inquired about and began to read from Hildegard's writings, namely parts of the *Scivias*, still a work in progress. Eugene III was so inspired by the reading that he called on those present to praise the Creator in joyous jubilation. According to the *Vita*, Bernard spoke and demanded of the pope not to let such a bright shining light be covered up by silence but

[38] Wiesbaden, Hochschul- und Landesbibliothek RheinMain, MS 2.
[39] "The Life of Hildegard," in Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard*, 143.

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rather that he should confirm such a gift of grace, revealed by the Lord in his time, through his own authority.[40] If one follows the story of the *Vita Hildegardis*, then the pope agreed willingly to this request.

This event made Hildegard an ecclesiastically legitimized, papally confirmed authority, whose words had the approval of the pope, of Bernard of Clairvaux, of an ecclesiastical synod, as well as of the highest levels of secular and monastic clerics. Her writings thus received aspects of orthodoxy and doctrinal affirmation that were of decisive importance for the continued success of Hildegard's work. In times of rising heresies (Catharism) and virulent conflicts in church politics (papal schisms) the success of Hildegard's visionary work would hardly have been possible without papal and ecclesiastical affirmation.

Founding the Convent at Rupertsberg

In the midst of her work on *Scivias*, Hildegard took the initiative to build her own monastic foundation: Rupertsberg, located near Bingen on the left shore of the Nahe. The reasons for Hildegard's move are no longer completely apparent, but it is certain that the enclosure at Disibodenberg had become too small for the greatly increased women's convent. Furthermore, the move to Rupertsberg allowed Hildegard access to the central Rhine axis from which she could more easily connect to other ecclesiastical and secular powers than from the more remote Disibodenberg.[41] Franz J. Felten also considers that Hildegard's founding of a cloister can be viewed as a final emancipatory act from the overpowering mentor Jutta of Sponheim and the omnipresent supervision by the dominant abbey of Disibodenberg.[42] As well, "double cloisters," administered jointly by male and female monastics, were generally under critique, as has been pointed out repeatedly in scholarship.[43] However it may be, the founding and building of Rupertsberg took place in the years 1147 to 1150.[44]

[40] Ibid., 24.

[41] Alfred Haverkamp, "Hildegard von Disibodenberg-Bingen: Von der Peripherie zum Zentrum," in Alfred Haverkamp, ed., *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld. Internationaler wissenschaftlicher Kongreß zum 900jährigen Jubiläum, 13.–19. September 1998, Bingen am Rhein* (Mainz: Verlag von Zabern, 2000), 15–70.

[42] Felten, "What Do We Know About the Life of Jutta and Hildegard at Disibodenberg und Rupertsberg?" 36.

[43] Kaspar Elm and Michel Parisse, eds., *Doppelklöster und andere Formen der Symbiose männlicher und weiblicher Religiosen im Mittelalter*, Berliner Historische Studien 18 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1992).

[44] "Der Rupertsberg und Eibingen," in Hans-Jürgen Kotzur, ed., *Hildegard von Bingen 1098–1179* (Mainz: Verlag von Zabern, 1998), 73–101.

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Hildegard's decision to move into her own foundation was criticized by the men's convent at Disibodenberg. Her spreading fame had contributed to the renown and importance of the institution, and many who were sick, needed counsel, or sought Hildegard for other reasons had come to Disibodenberg. She supposedly conversed with those of the Jewish faith as well, convincing them through their own Jewish writings of the truth of Christianity.[45] Her move, it was feared, would lead to a loss of prestige that was not to be accepted easily. Numerous written protests by monks but also by fellow nuns and their relatives give witness to the great difficulties of the project. For Hildegard, however, the move away from Disibodenberg had almost existential significance. In a letter to Abbot Kuno or Helenger of Disibodenberg (letter 75), Hildegard lays out her reasons for her decisions: "But I know for a fact that God moved me from that place [Disibodenberg] for His own inscrutable purposes, for my soul was so agitated by His words and miracles that I believe I would have died before my time if I had remained there."[46] Hildegard justifies her disobedience to the abbot as well as the disregard of the *stabilitas loci* (stability of place) demanded by the *Rule of St. Benedict* with her duty to obey her visionary message. As so often in Hildegard's life, a long and severe illness followed this crisis. Impressed by this illness, which they considered a divine call to action, the authorities at Disibodenberg relented and gave Hildegard permission to build the new cloister and move to the Rupertsberg. Decisive support came from the margravine Richardis of Stade, the mother of the eponymous fellow nun of Hildegard: she spoke successfully on behalf of Hildegard's plans to Archbishop Heinrich I of Mainz. The *Vita Hildegardis* reports that Hildegard handed over the majority of the endowments that had been given to the sisters of the enclosure and, in addition, "a not inconsiderable sum of money so that there might remain no just cause for complaint."[47]

Probably in the year 1150, Hildegard and twenty noble nuns were able to take possession of the newly founded convent. A more precise date for the move is hard to determine since the *Vita Hildegardis* provides none, but the year 1150 is based on a 1177 letter from Guibert of Gembloux, Hildegard's last secretary, to his fellow brother Bovo. It is probable that the year 1147, mentioned in the *Registrum bonorum* (the Rupertsberg foundation book), is incorrect, because Hildegard was still at

[45] "The Life of Hildegard," in Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard*, 162.

[46] Letter 75, in *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 163.

[47] "The Life of Hildegard," in Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard*, 149.

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Disibodenberg when a papal commission arrived early in 1148 to examine the *Scivias*.[48] However it may be, on May 1 – at the latest 1151 – the rebuilt chapel on the Rupertsberg was dedicated, as evidenced by a document from Archbishop Heinrich of Mainz from February 15, 1152. The *Vita Hildegardis* also reports that the first years at Rupertsberg were difficult and certainly not without disruptions.[49] Hildegard complained, for example, about the poor furnishings of the settlement, which led to dissatisfaction of some fellow nuns and even the departure of a few of them. The material conditions improved over time due to gifts from wealthy donors who buried their relatives on the convent grounds and donated masses. A wealthy nobleman (*nobilis et dives*) and "philosopher" – assumed by Tilo Altenburg to be Rhine Count Embricho I – is supposed to have supported Hildegard's founding especially strongly, grateful that he could choose Rupertsberg as a final resting place.[50]

The strict dedication to the Benedictine rule caused protest among the sisters and the conflicts with the mother house of Disibodenberg continued for several years. Not until 1158 did a complete resolution take place. On May 22 of that year, Hildegard received two important documents from the archbishop of Mainz, Arnold of Selenhofen (1153–1160), both of which are now in the state archive in Koblenz. The first, which is very important for the economic security of the convent, is a document of ownership in which the grounds – assembled from gifts, exchanges, and purchase – received confirmation from the bishop.[51] The possessions listed include mostly gifts near Bingen from Count Palatine Hermann of Stahleck and his wife Gertrud of Bingen. The second document could be called the "Rupertsberg constitution";[52] it clarifies the legal status of Rupertsberg and regulates the relationship with Disibodenberg. On the basis of these two documents, we know that Rupertsberg was economically independent and exclusively under the archbishop of Mainz. The newly founded cloister received the right to freely choose its spiritual mother (*spiritalis matris*) and was thus excluded from the legal authority and rule of the mother house of Disibodenberg,

[48] Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, Abt. 701 A VII 3, Nr. 5. For *Registrum bonorum* see Schrader and Führkötter, *Die Echtheit des Schrifttums der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen*, 29.

[49] Tilo Altenburg, *Soziale Ordnungsvorstellungen bei Hildegard von Bingen*. Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 54 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2007), 125–137.

[50] "The Life of Hildegard," in Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard*, 173; and Altenburg, *Soziale Ordnungsvorstellungen*, 130–131.

[51] Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, Abt. 164, Nr. 1. Reproduction and commentary by W[infried] W[ilhelmy] in *Hildegard von Bingen 1098–1179*, no. 31, 94–95.

[52] Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, Abt. 164, Nr. 2. Reproduction and commentary by W[infried] W[ilhelmy] in *Hildegard von Bingen 1098–1179*, no. 32, 96–97.

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which only maintained a responsibility to care for the spiritual well-being of Rupertsberg. This meant that Disibodenberg had to provide celebrants for the Mass and for spiritual care. It was furthermore determined that the convent at Rupertsberg would have no secular protector and that protection and church advocacy would remain exclusively with the archbishop of Mainz, who had to represent the cloister in its secular matters. The spiritual supervision excluded, Hildegard had achieved a complete separation of the new convent from Disibodenberg and secured for herself the greatest possible independence. She remained on alert, though, in her relationship with Disibodenberg. When the abbey began to withdraw from its duty to provide a cleric, Hildegard intervened energetically in order to secure the celebration of the Mass and all liturgical activities. She turned to Pope Alexander III (1159–1181) and asked him to take care of providing another monk from Disibodenberg for Rupertsberg after the death of Volmar. Hildegard wrote:

> We are in great distress because the abbot of Mount St. Disibod and his brothers have taken away our privileges and the right of election we have always had. . . . Therefore, my lord, for God's sake, help us, so that we may retain the man we have elected to that office. Or, if not, let us seek out and receive others, where we can, who will look after us in accordance with the will of God and our own needs.[53]

In his response, directed to Wezzelin the provost in Cologne, the pope declared that the issue should be decided according to Hildegard's wishes. Hildegard also went personally to Disibodenberg in order to advocate for her convent's spiritual needs.

A further provision for Hildegard's newly founded convent was achieved by a document guaranteeing protection by Emperor Barbarossa from April 18, 1163.[54] It is assumed that Hildegard personally approached the emperor in Mainz in order to advocate for her community. She must have been successful since the document states it was issued on the request of the honorable abbess Hildegard (*interventu et petitione dominae Hildegardis venerabilis abbatissae*). This is the only time that Hildegard is officially referred to as abbess. All other documents call her mother, mistress, lady, or principal (*mater*, *magistra*, *domina*, *praeposita*). The emperor's document is based on that from the archbishop of Mainz (May 22, 1158), whose privileges it repeats and affirms. Additionally, it announces that the convent does not have to pay taxes, that is, no imperial official has the authority to

[53] Letter 10, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen* 1, 45–46.

[54] Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, Abt. 164, no. 3. Reproduction and commentary by W[infried] W[ilhelmy] in *Hildegard von Bingen 1098–1179*, no. 33:1, 98–101.

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demand any payments whatsoever for the possessions of the convent. In the same year (1163), the half-brother of the emperor, Count Palatine Konrad, supplied Rupertsberg with a document of protection for the possessions in his realm. Konrad also appears as witness to a gift of the abbot Ludwig of St. Matthias of Trier after Hildegard's death.[55] Finally, on November 22, 1184 or 1185, only a few years after Hildegard's death, the Rupertsberg convent received a document of protection from Pope Lucius III (also held in the state archive in Koblenz), in which the pope guarantees ecclesiastical and worldly privileges to the convent.[56]

All of this proves that Hildegard secured her convent comprehensively in ecclesiastical and material matters, and indeed, Rupertsberg soon developed well. Guibert of Gembloux reports in his letter to Bovo of Gembloux that Rupertsberg provides room for fifty sisters, several servants, and guests, and he expresses his approval of the spacious buildings that are supplied with running water. Traditional accounts, which probably began in the thirteenth century, state that Hildegard founded a second cloister in 1165 on the right side of the Rhine near Rüdesheim, due to the persistent influx of nuns as well as the recent consideration of non-noble candidates. In this case, it was not a new building but rather Hildegard supposedly took over the Augustinian cloister in Eibingen, which had been founded in 1148 and temporarily destroyed. She is said to have made a prioress the manager of the house but to have kept the dignity and title of abbess for herself. For years, Hildegard apparently ferried across the Rhine from Rupertsberg twice a week in order to manage the obligations of the filial cloister.[57] This tradition, which belongs to the generally accepted literature about Hildegard, was recently evaluated by Matthias Schmandt.[58] His critical investigation of sources found it difficult to prove the claim of Hildegard's founding of the convent at Eibingen. According to Schmandt, neither the founding document of the convent (extant only in a sixteenth-century copy) nor the *Vita Hildegardis* explicitly reports such an act.[59] In addition,

[55] Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, Großes Privilegienbuch (Privilegien- und Ritenbuch der Klöster Rupertsberg und Eibingen), Abt. 701 A VII 3 Nr. 3, fol. 194.

[56] Reproduction and commentary by W[infried] W[ilhelmy] in *Hildegard von Bingen 1098–1179*, no. 33:2, 98–101.

[57] Matthia Eiden, "Zur Geschichte der Wiedererrichtung der Benediktinerinnenabtei St. Hildegard/Eibingen 1888–1904," *Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte* 43 (1991): 303–323; and Werner Lauter, "Ansicht des barocken Klosters," in Kotzur (ed.), *Hildegard von Bingen 1098–1179*, 112–113.

[58] Matthias Schmandt, "Hildegard von Bingen und das Kloster Eibingen: Revision einer historischen Überlieferung," *Nassauische Annalen* 125 (2014): 29–52.

[59] The founding document is part of the "großen Privilegienbuchs" (Hauptstaatsarchiv Wiesbaden, Abt. 23, Nr. 135, fol. 1a).

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while there are letters from Hildegard to the monasteries at Disibodenberg and Rupertsberg, there are none to Eibingen.

Neither the Rupertsberg nor Eibingen convent buildings have survived. During the Thirty Years War, Rupertsberg was destroyed by the Swedes and disassembled except for parts of the foundation. In place of the destroyed convent buildings at Eibingen, today there is the village church, which houses a shrine containing Hildegard's relics. The present-day St. Hildegard Abbey was opened in 1904 above the village of Eibingen (in the outskirts of Rüdesheim across the Rhine from Bingen) and is the seat of the Benedictines of Eibingen.

Travel and Preaching

Hildegard's letters and the *Vita Hildegardis* (book 3, chapters 17 and 23) reveal that she undertook a number of preaching trips over the course of her life. Hildegard explains that a vision showed her which ecclesiastical communities – men and women – she should visit and that a long disease that tortured her for more than forty days and nights was eased for that purpose. At her destinations, she resolved conflicts. The reasons for Hildegard's travels were her spiritual concern for other monastic institutions as well as the effort to emphasize central aspects of church doctrine and monastic discipline in a new way. The "sermons" given as part of these travels were sermons in the original sense of the word. Hildegard neither preached in the context of the liturgy of the Mass nor would have considered breaking into the realm of the priest's responsibilities. Her strict regard for the Benedictine *discretio*-ideal prohibited that. Furthermore, the sermons pursued no secular or ecclesiastical agendas. It is telling, for example, that Hildegard – contrary to Bernard of Clairvaux – never gave a sermon on behalf of the Crusades. Hildegard's sermons were rather spiritual lectures that she held in front of clerics and the laity and in which she dealt with structural errors or bad developments in church and in the world, described in more detail in Peter V. Loewen's chapter in this volume (Chapter 6).[60] Hildegard stresses that she took on this role not because she wanted to but out of obedience to her divine mission. This attitude expresses itself in her choice of prophetic speech. The *Vita Hildegardis* declares that Hildegard was "not so much led as driven by the Holy Spirit" to her travels,[61] and we know that

[60] Letter 15r, in *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, 1, 60.
[61] "The Life of Hildegard," in Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard*, 191.

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she was accompanied by two fellow sisters.[62] The individual journeys still need further investigation; for some, we hardly know more than their destination.

Reports About Miracles, Healings, and Exorcisms

The third book of the *Vita Hildegardis* is mostly dedicated to her miracles, possibly originating in a lost "miracle book." The text indicates that the miracles happened mostly in the close vicinity of Rupertsberg, often in the neighboring village of Bingen. Most were miracles of healing (*miracula sanitatis*) performed overwhelmingly on women. The reports sometimes name the healed persons, their illness and recuperation, and witnesses who experienced the miracles and confirmed them under oath. The means of healing were spoken words, laying of hands, signing the cross, and blessings but also material means such as water, bread, or a braid of Hildegard's hair. Besides Hildegard's biographer, Theodoric of Echternach, miracle reports are also noted by Hildegard's fellow sisters; and finally, her death is accompanied by supernatural signs and events and numerous miracles took place at Hildegard's grave. The *Acta inquisitionis* also includes miracle reports, partially copied from the *Vita Hildegardis*.[63] This last source was not considered sufficient by the Roman authority for canonization, as the several failed attempts at canonization in the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries reveal.

The most important function of the miracle reports is to prove the supernatural gifts of Hildegard as well as to document her particular closeness to Christ, the *medicus coelestis* (heavenly physician). The portrayal of the miracles is based to a high degree on the norms associated with the genre of "miracle reports." Therefore, we have to take into account that the communicated information is of low quality as far as its attention to detail is concerned. Here, in brief, are a few examples of such miracles from the *Vita Hildegardis*:

A girl, sick with a three-day fever, is healed by Hildegard by laying of hands, blessing, and prayer (book 3, chapter 1). Hildegard heals a brother of her order, named Roricus, in a similar way from his fever (book 3, chapter 2). A woman named Sibilla from Lausanne, suffering from bleeding, is healed by Hildegard by means of sending a written directive (book 3,

[62] "The Life of Hildegard," in Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard*, 171.
[63] "Acta Inquisitionis de virtutibus et miraculis sanctae Hildegardis," in Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard*, 258–272.

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chapter 10). The text communicates the specific words sent, an Adam-Christ-typology: "In the blood of Adam, death arose; in the blood of Christ, death was extinguished. Through the same blood of Christ I order you, O blood, to check your flow!"[64] Hildegard heals an epileptic by blessing him (book 3, chapter 19).

The *Vita Hildegardis* gives much space as well to reports of exorcisms and, here too, a typological relationship to Jesus Christ is established. The text reports, for example, how a demon-possessed woman named Sigewize is led to Hildegard in the eighth year of her predicament (book 3, chapter 21). The visit was arranged by the abbot Geldof of Brauweiler, whose intercession with Saint Nicolas could not heal the possessed woman. Hildegard sends an incantation to Geldof, which exorcises the evil spirit at first but it then returns into the woman. In an extensive effort, with the participation of seven priests, Hildegard finally manages to heal the possessed woman permanently. Worth mentioning among the "post-mortem" miracles occurring at Hildegard's grave is the healing of a demon-possessed woman named Mechthild from the village of Laubenheim.[65]

The *Vita Hildegardis* repeatedly stresses that Hildegard ascribed her healings not to her own powers but to the workings of divine mercy, contending that Hildegard did not perform healings grounded in the power of her own personality alone but rather that her miracles are heteronomous, significatory acts pointing to Christ as the cause and the church as the enabling space of the event. Hildegard explains that her actions originate in humility and that she can do nothing by herself. In the same way, she views her illnesses as a thorn against possible arrogance and cites the Apostle Paul: "So that I don't exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Final Years and Death

Hildegard's final years were overshadowed by severe illness and the loss of her long-time secretary Volmar (d. 1173). Nevertheless, Hildegard continued her literary work unwaveringly. When work on the *Liber divinorum operum* halted due to Volmar's death, Hildegard turned to Abbot Ludwig of St. Matthias in Trier.[66] He undertook the final editorial work of the manuscript and sent the monks Gottfried and Otto to Rupertsberg to assist

[64] "The Life of Hildegard," in Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard*, 187.
[65] "Acta inquisitionis," in Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard*, 259.
[66] Petrus Becker, *Die Benediktinerabtei St. Eucharius-St. Matthias vor Trier*, Germania Sacra NF 34, 8 (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1996), 593–595.

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Hildegard in finishing the text. Otto later created a text-only copy of *Scivias* around 1210, which is located today in the St. Nicolas hospital in Kues.[67] In gratitude for Gottfried and Otto's assistance, Hildegard had given early copies of her work to their monastery at Trier (in fact, a number of modern historical-critical editions of Hildegard's works are based on those Trier manuscripts).[68] These interactions show in an exemplary way that the production and distribution of Hildegard's works were supported by a cooperative Benedictine sphere. More than a logistical accomplishment, they show the imprint of a real monastic spirit on Hildegard's work.

After a long illness, Hildegard died in the circle of her fellow sisters at Rupertsberg on September 17, 1179. The *Vita Hildegardis* explains that she received a vision about the day of her death that she communicated to her fellow sisters. Knowing the hour of one's death was considered in the Christian tradition as a special sign of closeness to God, even of having been chosen by grace. According to the *Vita*, her death took place on a Sunday, the day of the resurrection of the Lord, at the beginning of dusk. The text reports that a circular shape appeared in the heavens with a red, shimmering cross in the center. The funeral was also the source of miracles, but such details belong to the usual, typologically determined contents of the genre of medieval legends of saints. The exact location of Hildegard's original burial is unknown, but possibly her grave was on the outside of the convent church at Rupertsberg and then was moved to the inside. She was, however, buried near Rupert, Bertha, and Wigbert, who were worshipped as saints, a clear sign of her saintlike reputation at the time of her death. According to tradition, Hildegard's gravesite quickly became a place to which many came for solace and intercession and where many miracles took place.

Aspects of Her Works' History

Toward the end of Hildegard's life and then after her death, the visionary's written works garnered a high estimation in the monastic *lectio* (readings).[69] In a letter, dated November 1, 1176, by Guibert of Gembloux to the convent at Rupertsberg, he reports that the *Liber vitae meritorum* was used on account of its wonderful teaching (*mirifica doctrina*) in the Cistercian

[67] Ibid., 127, no. 92.
[68] Michael Embach and Martina Wallner, *Conspectus der Handschriften Hildegards von Bingen* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2013), 254–270.
[69] Michael Embach, "Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179): A History of Reception," in Kienzle, Stoudt, and Ferzoco, *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen*, 273–304.

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monastery at Villers as refectory reading and in the Benedictine monastery of Gembloux as evening reading.[70] The inclusion of Hildegard's work into the canon of monastic *lectio* gave the visionary's work a confirmation that placed it side by side with the undisputed authorities of the tradition. The *Rule of St. Benedict* determines in chapter 38 ("The Reader for the Week") that no one should randomly take a book and begin reading.[71] Referring to the evening reading it states in chapter 42 that one should read the "collationes" of Cassian, the *Vitae* of the Fathers, or something else edifying to the hearers.[72] Hildegard's works were also considered as such indisputably elevated reading material for the monastic reading program. Hildegard herself, in her commentary on the *Rule of St. Benedict*, refers to the monastic *lectio* as a sacred service, which had been equated to the sacrament of the alter in the time of Benedict.[73] The reader, as Hildegard follows Benedict's argument, transmits sacred words.

Hildegard's work also gained increasing respect in the field of academic theology. Between 1210 and 1231, the *Liber divinorum operum*, the *Scivias*, and the *Liber vitae meritorum* were subjected to an investigation by theologians at the University of Paris. As part of his pilgrimage to St. Martin of Tours, the Strasbourg *custos* Bruno delivered Hildegard's writings to the bishop of Paris. The bishop directed that all theology teachers should inspect Hildegard's writings between the octave of St. Martin's Day and the octave of the Epiphany (a two-month period). After finalizing this procedure, Hildegard's writings were handed over to Wilhelm of Auxerre (d. 1231), the famous magister at the University of Paris. The *Acta inquisitionis* reports that Wilhelm confirmed the view of the Paris academics. He supposedly claimed with enthusiasm that the words in Hildegard's writings "were not human but divine" and Bruno, guardian of St. Peter in Strasbourg, said that they originated without an earthly teacher and were created exclusively under the influence of the Holy Spirit.[74] The judgments of Wilhelm of Auxerre and the Paris theologians provided the official inquisition mandate for the planned canonization process.

Also with a view to the planned canonization, a description of Hildegard's life and her performed miracles was produced (the *Vita*

[70] Guibert of Gembloux, "Letter to the Sisters at the Rupertsberg Convent," in *Guiberti Gemblacensis Epistolae*, part 1, 251–253.
[71] *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 60.
[72] Ibid., 64. [73] Hildegard of Bingen, *Explanation of the Rule*, 58–59.
[74] "Acta inqusitionis," in Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard*, 268–269.

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Hildegardis); from around the year 1000, the Roman authorities required a *vita* of the person who was to be canonized, considering the life, reputation, works, and miracles. This text, produced in three stages by three authors, going back mainly to the years 1181 to 1188, as well as the *Octo lectiones in festo sancte Hildegardis legende* (Eight Readings to Be Read on the Feast of St. Hildegard) prove the desire to support the veneration of Hildegard.[75] Probably written by Theodoric of Echternach, the *Octo lectiones* contain a short version of the *Vita*, full of rhymed prose and compiled together with the letters of Guibert of Gembloux. Meant to be read in the cloister's refectory on Hildegard's Feast Day, they emphasize Hildegard's holiness (*sanctitas*) more strongly than the *Vita.*

Hildegard As "Popular Saint" and Official Canonization

Pope Gregory IX (1227–1241) signed a document to the church of Mainz on January 27, 1228 that became the basis for the planned canonization of Hildegard.[76] It claims that the convent at Rupertsberg had officially requested the canonization of Hildegard in a document that is unfortunately not preserved.[77] The pope's reply was affirmative and he mentioned that he had heard about the laudable and saintly life of Hildegard. Hildegard had already performed numerous miracles in the past, the pope wrote, and would undoubtedly continue to do so in the future. The revelation of the Holy Spirit helped her write many books that were worth being brought to the attention of the Roman church. Based on these accomplishments, the pope now wanted to elevate a person whom the Lord in heaven had already honored, and he wanted to enter Hildegard into the catalogue of saints (*sanctorum catalogum asscribentes*). The pope added a *forma interrogationis*, which regulated the process of Hildegard's canonization by questioning credible witnesses. In addition, three commissioners were appointed to act as delegates of the Holy See and manage

[75] *Octo lectiones in festo sanctae Hildegardis legendae, in Vita sanctae Hildegardis*, ed. Monica Klaes, CCCM 126 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), 73–80; English translation in Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard*, 213–219.

[76] Georg May, "Der Kanonisationsprozeß Hildegards im 13. Jahrhundert," in *900 Jahre Hildegard von Bingen: Neuere Untersuchungen und literarische Nachweise*, ed. Wolfgang Podehl, Verzeichnisse und Schriften der Hessischen Landesbibliothek Wiesbaden 12 (Wiesbaden: Hessische Landesbibliothek Wiesbaden, 1998), 27–43. José Carlos Santos Paz, "La 'Santificacion' de Hildegarde en la Edad Media," in Berndt (ed.), *Im Angesicht Gottes suche der Mensch sich selbst*, 561–575.

[77] The documents regarding Hildegard's canonization were collected and published by Peter Bruder, "Acta inquisitionis de virtutibus et miraculis S. Hildegardis, Magistrae Sororum Ord. S. Benedicti in Monte S. Ruperti juxta Bingium ad Rhenum," *Analecta Bollandiana* 2 (1883): 116–129.

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the process: Gerhard, provost of the high cathedral church of Mainz; Walther, dean of St. Peter in Mainz; and Arnold, scholastic of St. Peter. They concluded their investigation on December 16, 1233 and the sealed protocol of the witness statements went to the holy seat.

Despite Rome's positive attitude, the 1228 initiative was not concluded because the cardinals tasked with judging the dossier criticized the canonization documents as incomplete in their description of Hildegard's miracles. Consequently, Pope Gregory IX demanded the completion of the documents from the church of Mainz in his reply (*Supplicantibus nobis*) from May 6, 1237.[78] He also appointed new commissioners: the Mainz cathedral dean and cathedral scholastic as well as a cathedral lord named Walter. Since the new commission did not supply Rome with a more extensive protocol by 1243, the successor of Gregory IX, Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254), turned again to the church of Mainz. In his request *Supplicantibus olim*, dated September 24, 1243, the pope asked for the complete dossier.[79] The church of Mainz put together further details that were included in the text version of 1233, but these were not considered as sufficient. The canonization process halted.

According to unconfirmed reports, Popes Clement V (1305–1316) and John XXII (1316–1334) worked for Hildegard's canonization but again without success. This negative result needs to be considered within the general situation of canonization processes in the thirteenth century. Between 1199 and 1276, only twenty-three of forty-eight Roman investigations regarding canonization were concluded positively and of the thirteen women who were considered for canonization between 1198 and 1431 only five achieved the honor. On December 5, 1324, however, the twelve cardinals of Avignon offered indulgences to those who went on a pilgrimage to the Rupertsberg on Hildegard's Feast Day (September 17). On February 18, 1325, the archbishop of Mainz confirmed the indulgence, generally considered as a kind of substitute for the lacking papal canonization of a person regarded as a saint, and added another one.

Hildegard's grave at Rupertsberg was opened twice in the years 1489 and 1498, which can be seen as further, if not strictly formal, attempts at canonization. The archbishop of Mainz, Berthold of Henneberg (1441–1504), was in charge of these exhumations and motivated by the hope of finding a canonization document in Hildegard's coffin. In 1498, a lifting of the

[78] Pope Gregory IX, "Supplicantibus nobis," in *Nova subsidia diplomatica* 9 (Heidelberg: Goebhardt, 1788), 12.

[79] Pope Innocent IV, "Supplicantibus olim," in *Nova subsidia diplomatica* 11 (Heidelberg: Goebhardt, 1788), 34–36.

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bones (*elevatio*) was performed, which in the Middle Ages was considered an informal canonization. The Benedictine abbot Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516), who was present at this event, composed a multi-strophe sequence for Hildegard, which is an important document for the veneration of Hildegard at the turn of the Middle Ages to the modern era.[80] The text, which unfortunately as transmitted lacks the music, was supposed to be used as part of the liturgy of the Mass in order to intensify the memorial of Hildegard. Numerous similar testimonies prove that Hildegard was considered a popular saint over the centuries and received great estimation and veneration from the clerics of the church and the orders, as well as from the simple faithful.

Only about 800 years after the original initiative did the canonization of Hildegard receive a successful conclusion. After Pope Benedict XVI (2005–2013) restarted the canonization process in the years 2010–2011, Hildegard was officially sainted on May 10, 2012 in Rome. As part of the opening of the thirteenth Roman synod of bishops on October 7, 2012, Hildegard's elevation to Doctor of the Church followed (*doctor ecclesiae universalis*). This honor had to investigate the following points in a strict process: *Orthodoxa doctrina* (right belief of the teaching), *Eminens doctrina* (outstanding character of teaching), *Insignis vitae sanctitatis* (degree of holiness), and *Ecclesiae declaratio* (declaration by the church). Hildegard's elevation to Doctor of the Church declares that the work of the visionary had a decisive influence on the entire Christian theology. Only three other women besides Hildegard have received this honor: Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, and Theresia of Lisieux.

Thus, Hildegard of Bingen, who always called herself a simple woman (*paupercula femina*), has become one of the most highly respected voices of the Christian world.

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[80] Michael Embach, "Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516) als Propagator Hildegards von Bingen," in Haverkamp (ed.), *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld*, 561–598.

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