

The seemingly unusual companionship of Samson (of Samson and Delilah fame), Thomas Becket, the murdered Archbishop of Canterbury, and Simon de Montfort, the leader of the Barons War, has come about, for this paper, because of their mutual presence in the British Library's Harley Manuscript 978. Their relationship and, subsequently, the significance of their combined presence shall be the object of this paper.

Samson dux fortissime is the first of eleven antiphons that occupy a manuscript known for the presence of *Sumer is icumen in* (folio 11v), Goliardic poems, and the unique copy of the *Song of Lewes*, written most probably in 1264, immediately after the victory of Simon de Montfort. It is, further, the only manuscript to contain the Prologue and all twelve *Lais* as well as the *Fables* of Marie de France, the first French or Anglo-Norman poetess. Harley 978 is described in the *Catalogus Librorum MSS Bibliothecae Harleianae* as being a parchment codex in quarto, composed of various works, a miscellany.⁽¹⁾

Harley 978 is generally considered to have been written in the Abbey of Reading and is composed of 15 existing collations or gatherings, with Samson appearing on the first folio of the first collation (which is currently called page 2). Becket makes his first appearance on the 10th folio verso in the form of his namesake, Thomas the Apostle, one of the twelve mentioned who are said to be making a wheel of the world as the countries ascribed to each Apostle's evangelization are mentioned. The apostle, Thomas, is said to have taught the Parthians ["Thomas cum parthis informat"]. But there are two poems on this page and in the second poem, the Apostles are arranged in a different order and their achievements vary. Thomas, for example, is placed among the fiery stars, with no mention of his previous area of evangelization ["hortata Thomas in dos inscendere stellas"].

Becket himself appears on the 13th folio, which is a bifolium shared with the first folio of the Samson Antiphon.⁽²⁾ In this last folio of the gathering, Becket is in the light, before the throne of Christ, much like Samson who is no longer in the dark but rather speaking down to us from the light of heaven. This link with Samson links Becket with the Apostle Thomas, who is in the stars. The antiphon which precedes the

Becket-Samson bifolium sings of Mary, *Eterni numinis mater et filia*, help in our prison of exile under the rule of the impious [“nos clausi cartere gravis exilii fravamur misere regno sub impii cum carnis onere”] (folio 12v). She is asked to lead us to a victory, not unlike that already enjoyed by Samson. Mary completes her embrace of Becket with the final antiphon of the gathering, *Gaude Salutata Virgo* (folio 13v).

Becket appears again in the 9th gathering in the *Visio St. Thome martyris* (folio 89v) which continues through folio 90v, upon which begins the *Confessio Regis H*, which continues through folio 91. Becket is physically linked by the manuscript to his king, Henry the Second, who demonstrates his humble respect for the now sainted bishop. Becket links thematically to Samson by this *Visio*, which is similar to the Samson vision of the first antiphon. Becket is preceded and followed by what are called Goliardic poems.

The 10th gathering begins with *Incarnacione domini* (folio 99r) which is, as Becket, surrounded by Goliardic songs, which lead into the *Song of Lewes* on folio 107. This *Song*, praising Simon de Montfort, continues into the 11th gathering (folio 114r). That very folio (114v) begins the story of the marriage of Becket’s parents, which is not unlike that of Samson’s marriage with Delilah.⁽³⁾

Another Becket poem begins on folio 116 with the picture of a bird and a bird-hunting treatise on the verso, continuing into folio 117r. A *becket* was a kind of bird.⁽⁴⁾ The final mention of Becket occurs in the last gathering, in the last hand of the manuscript, as the contents and antiphons and motets are catalogued on folia 160v and 161, which follow the nearly four gatherings of the *Lais* of Marie de France.

This sharing of bifolium and folio in the manuscript by Samson, Becket, and Montfort is not simply happenstance. Rather, this linkage is related to the function and theme of the works in which these men appear. To demonstrate this, I shall begin by laying out the contents and subsequent links between the first and second gatherings of the manuscript, as are relevant to the present study.

The whole of the first gathering is a musical tract in an old hand, in which are found Antiphons.⁽⁵⁾ The first Antiphon begins with the words “Samson dux fortissime” with square notes of what is generally called Gregorian music marked throughout. This is

followed by three Antiphons in praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary with their own musical notations. Next is a harmony in two parts with its music. The Antiphon, *Ave Gloriosa Mater Salvatoris*, follows. Below the Latin Antiphon is visible a periphrastic verse in French, *Duce creature virgine marie*. This is followed by *Felix sanctorum eximius apostolorum duodenarius* (folio 10v) and a second poem on the apostles (folio 11r), which changes their previous order and their missionary territory, as the apostles become a wheel extending over the world. On the verso is the well-known rota or round for four to six voices, *Sumer is icumin in* (folio 11v), with its English words written in black ink. The Antiphon, *Perspice xpicola*, is written in red above it, by syllable, with musical notes. A cross within these words indicates the beginning of entwining as well as singing together. The Rota is followed by the Antiphon, *Eterni Numinis Mater & Filia*, with its musical notes. An Antiphon in praise of Thomas Becket and the Antiphon, *Gaude Salutata Virgo*, conclude the collation.

All these Antiphons of the first gathering, with their own musical notations, are then followed in the next gathering by Guido d' Arezzo's musical scale and other precepts of music. These are followed, in turn, by a Roman calendar, which is by no means complete, with prognostications written in, based on considerations of the aspects of the moon. Only January and February contain feast and saint's days; and of these two months, only February (folio 16r) shows a musical staff to connect the calendar with the preceding music. There are also musical staves for what would be calendar pages for June, August, October, and December, that is, for the recto only of folia 18-21, their verso and alternating months containing thus no staff. These scales and musical precepts, along with the calendar, form a second collation of four bifolia or eight folia, extending from folio 14 to folio 21, which carries the last page of the calendar. This second gathering is linked to the first by its hand [the scribe for the first and second gatherings is the same] and by its content.

The Roman calendar of this second collation is important to an understanding of the presence of Samson and Becket in the first collation and to an understanding of the subsequent presence of Becket and Montfort in the eleventh collation.⁽⁶⁾ The calendar in Harley Manuscript 978 (folia 15v and 16r) reflects both the Proper of Time and the Proper of the Saints for the time after Epiphany. The time after Epiphany is considered

liturgically a time of manifesting the Incarnation of Christ, that is, Christ as both God and man, born of a virgin who remains a virgin, as of light penetrating a glass—the themes of the Antiphons to Our Lady, which follow *Samson dux fortissime*. The traditional Antiphons for the Purification of the Blessed Mother, a major feast of the season, sing of light dispelling darkness and blindness.⁽⁷⁾

The spread of the Gospel throughout the world, the theme of the Epiphany and of the Antiphon of the twelve apostles (folia 10v –11r), is compared to the turning of a wheel, as the message of Christ moves from the Alpha through the world (folio 11r). A wheel is previously mentioned on folio 2, as reference is made to Samson's blindness and his turning of the wheel of the mill for the Philistines. These wheels correspond to the season and a solstice that brings both Samson and Thomas from darkness into the light of heaven. On the verso of the folio that sings of the Apostles and their movement throughout the world is the rota or round, *Sumer is icumin in*.

It is relevant to know that the feast of the apostle, Thomas, is celebrated on the 21st of December, the time of the solstice, when the deepest darkness of winter is just beginning to turn to light. Thomas Becket's feast is celebrated on the 29th of December. His celebration follows the liturgy of his name's sake, the apostle, Thomas. The season of Christmas begins with its Vigil and ends in the Temporal Cycle on the Octave of the Epiphany (January 13); but it has an echo in the Sanctoral Cycle as far as the Feast of the Purification of our Lady (February 2). The feasts of this period follow the liturgy of Christmas, a time related to the winter solstice and the increase of light in the world.

With regard to the solstice, which occurs on the feast of St. Thomas the apostle, it is necessary to mention not only the presence of the calendar but also the dates of the feasts involved therein. The calendar contains the Octave of Christmas [the eighth day following Christmas itself]. However, what would be the Octave of Becket's feast is overshadowed in the calendar both by the Vigil of the Epiphany on the 5th of January and by the feast of Edward the Confessor.⁽⁸⁾ The two feasts of St. Peter's Chair, at Antioch and at Rome, are celebrated, respectively, on January 18 and February 22. The memorial of the January 18th feast is also the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul. St. Simon, bishop and martyr is celebrated February 18th. The Purification of the Blessed

Mother (February 2nd) is a major feast of this calendar, linked as it is to the birth of Christ.

Originally, the Feast of Christmas on December 25, coincided with the pagan feast celebrated at the winter solstice in honor of the birth of a deified sun. Consequently, at Rome, in the fourth century, the Church instituted a Christian feast to replace the pagan rite. “As the Fathers remark, it is at the moment when the sun has reached the lowest point of its course, and is so to speak re-born each year, that the ‘Sun of Justice’ is born again every year at Christmas. The sun of nature and the Sun of souls, whose likeness it is, appear together. ‘Christ is born unto us,’ says St. Augustine, ‘at a time when the days begin to lengthen’ ” (Lefebvre, 1949, p. 32).

The importance of the season in connection to the liturgy or sacred readings can perhaps be seen from a liturgical chart which figures in many Breviaries and Missals. This chart encloses the months of the year like two bookends between winter and summer. The chart begins with December, under which is written “Advent.” Beneath Advent is written “Winter Solstice.” January follows with Christmas. February brings Septuagesima; March brings Lent; and on the edge of Lent, beneath, is written “Vernal Equinox.” April follows with Easter written beneath it. May has the Ascension and June shows Pentecost. Beneath Pentecost is written “Summer Solstice;” and beneath that, the ever-increasing path of light which began at Christmas, reaches its peak with a huge Sun shown at its fullest point. In the center of the Sun is written, “Christ the Sun of Justice.” July has Saints Peter and Paul, while August has the Assumption of the Blessed Mother. September shows St. Michael and, beneath him, is written “Autumnal Equinox.” October shows the Holy Angels, while November has All Saints. Before and after the high point of Christ as Sun, which is in the middle of the liturgical chart, the band of light narrows. Therefore, by the time of the period before Christmas, it has become dark at both extremes of the chart and this darkness is reflected in the antiphons of the liturgical year, affecting thus the readings for the period before Christmas (Lefebvre, liturgical note, p. 32).

The chief characteristic of this season is the great happiness that the world feels in possessing at last its Savior. But it is a joy emanating from the coming of light and the spreading of this light in the world. This light is, of course, associated with Christ, seen as the light of the world. The Introit for Sunday in the Octave of Christmas reads:

“While all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, Thy almighty Word, O Lord, came down from heaven, from Thy royal throne.”⁽⁹⁾ It is, therefore, a season of “great joy to all the people,” the *Gaude* of Mary at the birth of Christ [which figures on the verso of Becket’s folio (folio 13)].

January and February thus begin the reign of Christ as the Sun/Son of Justice. These months continue a celebration of Christmas festivities, elucidating their significance in terms of increased light in the world at large. January celebrates the Epiphany, which commemorates the manifestation of Christ to the world. Such is the usual view of the visit of the Magi to the Holy Family and, specifically, to the Christ Child, on the 6th of January. The idea is that from this first manifestation to the non-Jewish world, knowledge of the Christ has spread to other areas throughout the world. The antiphons to the apostles and Thomas are in this vein. They celebrate the work of each Apostle in terms of the geographic area of his ministry, and, in the case of Thomas and his namesake, in terms of moving from darkness to light.

Having mentioned the calendar and the tone of the Christmas season as it flows through the months of January and February, it is appropriate to present at this point the liturgy or sacred readings relevant to the calendar and to the three men who figure in our study.

First there are the readings for the Apostle Thomas whose feast is, practically speaking, celebrated twice: once on his own feast day of December 21st and, again, on the feast day of Thomas Becket, December 29th, which day incorporates the previous readings of the Apostle into its own celebration.⁽¹⁰⁾ Appropriately, the Apostle Thomas precedes and includes Becket in the progression of the antiphons of the manuscript, just as he would in the usual calendars. Becket was sainted in 1173 by Pope Alexander III and Canterbury, Becket’s place of burial, became a shrine. This shrine is described in folio 13r of the first gathering [“Ante thronum regentis omnia festinatur thome presentia”]. The lauding of Becket and his magnificent shrine are couched in terms of the Apostle Thomas whose name he bears.⁽¹¹⁾ Only the description of the shrine makes it clear that it is Becket who is being praised. Furthermore, in folia 10v and 11r are the antiphons to the apostles of which Thomas is a part. What this means in terms of the occasion and

the season, as well as the manuscript, shall shortly become apparent.

Thomas Becket is honored in the liturgy as bishop and martyr, one who has fallen under the sword of the impious. His feast falls on the day for the remembrance of the Octave of the Nativity. During this time the lessons of the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans are read. In his Epistle, Paul speaks of being called to the apostolate to make all the nations obedient to the faith. (The Conversion of St. Paul is celebrated on January 25th and mentioned specifically in the manuscript at hand). Paul renders thanks to God that the faith is announced throughout the world. He continues speaking of evangelization, saying that the justice of God is revealed in the Gospels by faith, just as it is written: “The just live by faith” (Habac 2: 4). Paul finds in faith the justice of God, which bursts from the heaven against all impiety and injustice and against men who hold the truth of God in injustice. According to commentators one holds God’s truth in injustice either by not communicating it to others or by not putting it in practice.⁽¹²⁾ This not putting it in practice is evident in the Goliardic themes of the poems that follow.

Paul’s discourse on faith (which brings in Samson) is followed in the readings by the story of Becket’s own struggle against impiety and injustice. Becket is honored as a pastor of his flock because he opposed the cupidity of the king, refusing to yield before promises or menaces, even to the point of exiling himself.⁽¹³⁾ When, though the intervention of the Pope and the king, he was recalled from exile, he applied himself without fear to fulfilling the duties of a good pastor, which caused him to be attacked in the church where he was celebrating the office of Vespers. Thomas’ death is told in parallel terms to the life of Christ as the Good Shepherd.⁽¹⁴⁾ The reading for the third nocturne for Becket’s feast gives the gospel according to St. John: “I am the good pastor. The good pastor gives his life for his sheep” (John 10: 11-16).

Among the homilies for this day is that of Saint John Chrysostom who speaks of the dignity of the prelate in the Church. Chrysostom speaks as a bishop to other priests and says that our courage should be that of giving our life for our sheep and of never abandoning them and of resisting generously the wolf. It is in this, he continues, that the pastor differs from the mercenary. The latter thinks of his own interests but the former forgets himself and watches constantly for the salvation of his flock. Chrysostom cites

Ezekiel, who gives his invectives against the pastors of Israel, those who sought their own interests and not those of God (*Breviaire*, 1924, pp. 397-398). These non-pastoral prelates are well depicted in the Goliardic poems that follow.

Readings specific to Becket are interspersed with readings from the feast of his namesake, the Apostle Thomas. These begin with St. John's "Because you have seen me, Thomas, you have believed: blessed are those who have not seen and who have believed" (John 20: 29).

The second reading for the Apostle Thomas tells of his apostolic life: After having received the Holy Spirit, he went to preach the Gospel in many provinces. He taught the truths of the faith and the precepts of the Christian life to the Parthians, Medes, Persians, Hircatians and Bactrians, as is mentioned in our manuscript. Finally he went to India and instructed the inhabitants of these countries in the Christian religion. But the king of the country, adorer of idols, condemned Thomas to death. And so Thomas, the apostle, received the honor of martyrdom.

In a homily of Saint Gregory preached on this day, Gregory recalls the incident in Thomas' life where he was not present and where he doubted that his fellow apostles had seen a risen Christ. Gregory asks the question, do you think it was by chance that Thomas was not there, or was it rather the disposition of Providence. In effect, continues Gregory, the incredulity of Thomas served more to the strengthening of our faith than the faith of the other disciples already convinced. For, in seeing that this Apostle believes on touching Christ, our spirit renounces the least doubt and feels itself fortified in the faith.

Gregory continues: "Why does the Lord then say to Thomas, 'Because you have seen me you have believed?' It is because it is one thing to see and another that he has believed. For a mortal man cannot see the divinity. Yet, Thomas sees Jesus the man and confesses him God saying: 'My Lord and my God!' It is therefore, in seeing that he has believed, it is in considering the veritable humanity of Christ that he proclaims a divinity that his sight is not able to ascertain. The words which follow are for us a subject of joy: 'Happy those who have not seen and who have believed!' This sentence addresses itself especially to us who not having seen him in his flesh hold him in our soul by faith. It is us who the Savior has designated; provided that our works conform with

our faith” (*Breviaire*, 21 December, Saint Thomas, Apostle, pp. 911-912).⁽¹⁵⁾

The liturgy for the feast of Saint Thomas the Apostle moves back and forth from the special readings for the day to those for the Common of the Apostles. Among the readings for the Common of the Apostles are Psalm 18: 4: “The sound of their voice is heard throughout all the earth and their words to the extent of the globe of the earth;” and Mathew 10: 17: “They will deliver you up to their assemblies and flagellate you in their synagogues and you will be brought because of me before governors and kings as a testimony for them and for the nations.” A hymn of Saint Ambrose recalls that these martyrs are the princes of the church, the victorious leaders of its combats, the soldiers of the celestial court, and the true light of the world (*Breviaire*, Common of the Apostles, p. 3).

Peter the Chanter, a contemporary of Becket, held the office of Chanter at Notre Dame from 1183.⁽¹⁶⁾ Evidence suggests he was already a master of theology at Paris by 1173. The Chanter venerated St. Thomas Becket as a model archbishop and as a martyr in the cause of ecclesiastical liberties (104). His views on the relations between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* (temporal and spiritual power or king and church) touch on Becket’s quandary. They are illustrated in Smalley (Smalley, 1973, p. 111) in reference to “the text from the Sermon on the Mount, ‘Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice’s sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 5: 10), which raises the question: ‘Am I to expose myself to death for the sake of ecclesiastical liberties?’ The Chanter answers ‘Yes.’ One should do so for the sake of spiritual things, but not for temporal things such as fields and rents. We often defend temporal things for motives of greed rather than justice” (MS Oxford Merton College 212 (M), fol. 29va). In his choice, Becket stands out against the Goliardic popes and prelates who surround him in the Harley Manuscript.

Montfort, too, struggled under the yoke of the impious and was often compared in the writings of his day with Becket.⁽¹⁷⁾ He fought, not for ecclesiastical liberties, but for a rule of law that would bring justice to England’s people. As Becket was linked with the Apostle Thomas, Simon de Montfort, who was called Simon Bar-Jona in the liturgy created for him after his death, found his corollary in the Apostle Peter.⁽¹⁸⁾ Peter’s work

in Antioch and Rome was mentioned in the Antiphons with that of Thomas and the other Apostles as he led the people to holiness [“Antyothenos atque romuleos pretus obscenos nove geneseos emundat gracia” (folio 10v); “Petrus romanis reseravit dona salutis” (folio 11r)]. There was, furthermore, a correlation between the verses of the *Song of Lewes* and the readings for the celebration of the two feasts of Peter that occurred, respectively, on January 18th (St. Peter’s Chair at Rome) and February 22nd (The Chair of St. Peter at Antioch), as mentioned in our calendar.

In the *Song of Lewes*, Simon became Peter through the usual word play as he was called a stone and, as another Christ, became a foundation stone. Then, just as Christ was seen as the deliverer of his people so too was Simon de Montfort the fulfillment of a covenant. England became Israel by analogy. The idea and necessity of binding [“ligaveris super terram”] by law was greatly developed in the *Song of Lewes*. Furthermore, the *Song of Lewes* had Simon, like Becket, not abandoning his people, even when it was in his interest to do so. This was in direct analogy with the Preface for the Apostles which was read on Peter’s feasts and which asked that the eternal Shepherd not abandon his flock, but rather through the Apostles keep a continual watch over it.

Simon as Peter during this period of the Epiphany and Christmastide had special significance. The season was concerned with the manifestation of Christ as the Son of God and the Son of Man. Consequently, the recognition of Christ as God and Man, as we have seen in the liturgy for Thomas Becket, was an essential part of the readings and songs and antiphons of this period. In Peter’s feast, for example, the Gospel recalled Matthew 16: 13-19 wherein Jesus asked his disciples “ ‘Whom do men say that the Son of man is?’ And they answered various things until Jesus asked them ‘But whom do you say that I am?’ And Simon Peter answered and said: ‘Thou art Christ the Son of the living God.’ ” The significance of Peter’s response must be seen in its appropriateness during the new light of the solstice and the celebration of the Epiphany, the manifestation of the Sun/Son to the world. Peter was the first to recognize the adult Christ as this Son of God.

The Gospel for the Vigil of an Apostle (John 15: 12-16), read the night before this feast, is, in parts, verbatim with the later part of the *Song of Lewes*. Jesus called his disciples His friends, not His servants, because they had been told everything He had

heard about His Father. This communication among equals was compared, in the *Song of Lewes*, to the rapport and knowledge that should exist between a king and his barons. Simon de Montfort was seen as a just man in the *Song*, just as in Ecclesiasticus 44:25-27; 45:2-4, 6-9, which was read as the Epistle for this feast of Peter. Simon was magnified before his enemies and glorified in the sight of kings, exactly as in the liturgical readings for Peter's feast. Simon was, furthermore, seen as one faithful to his vows, girded in justice and crowned in glory.⁽¹⁹⁾ The Epistle of the Apostle Peter, which was read for the Common of a holy Pope (1 Peter 5: 1-4), asked that the leaders of the Church, Feed the flock of God, not by constraint but willingly, according to God: not for filthy lucre's sake but voluntarily; neither by lording it over the clergy but by being an example for the flock from the heart--in marked contrast to the prelates of the Goliardic poetry which preceded and followed the *Song*.

Simon also had his own feast during this Christmas season. St. Simon, son of Cleophas and nephew of Joseph and Mary, was celebrated on February 18. This saint, who was bishop of Jerusalem after St. James, was accused under Trajan of being a Christian and a relative of Christ. Though he lived an enormously long life, he died on the cross, a martyr and witness to the humanity and Godhead of Christ.

Simon has one further role in this calendar. It is on the feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mother celebrated February 2nd. It is the last major celebration of Christmastide. In this feast, Christ as God and Savior of the world is again manifest. But, this time it is not Peter the Apostle declaring the adult Christ the Son of God, but rather the saintly old Simon in the temple who is recognizing the baby Jesus as the Salvation of the world. The readings for this day recall the occasion.

Amid the songs and antiphons that play on the antithesis of the Virgin birth (Moses' burning bush not consumed in the middle of flames, for example), the thirteenth book of Exodus is read wherein Moses is told to consecrate to God the first born male of all that is born in Israel. Leviticus 12: 1-8 continues these instructions, which are read on February 2nd. The male child is to be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth and on the 33rd day the mother is to be purified. Consequently, Luke 2: 22 reads: "After the days of the purification of Mary were accomplished, according to the law of Moses, they took Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord: As it is

written in the law of the Lord: All first born males will be called consecrated to the Lord.”⁽²⁰⁾ “Now while they were in the temple, Simon, a just man who feared God and who awaited the redemption of Israel, had been adverted by God that he would not see death until he had seen Christ the Lord. Thus when he sees the Child Jesus he takes him in his arms and says: Now Lord, let your servant depart in peace, because my eyes have contemplated your Salvation” (Luke 2: 29).

St. Augustine in his Sermon (13th) for that day says that “Christ is born and the desire of the old man is accomplished in the old age of the world. Because he found the world in old age (i.e., sin), Christ came to a man advanced in age.” St. Augustine continues: “The prophets had announced that the Creator of heaven and earth would live on earth with men. An angel carried the news that the Creator of the flesh and of the spirit was going to clothe himself with a body. From the breast of Elisabeth, John the Baptist greeted the Savior in the breast of Mary. Finally the old Simon recognized for God this child” (*Breviaire*, 1924, vol. 1, pp. 969-970).⁽²¹⁾

Simon’s prophesy, even his presence in the midst of a world viewed as ensconced in evil, seems especially appropriate given Simon de Montfort’s presence among the Goliardic songs which sing of bad popes and unpastoral clergy. Furthermore, the Apostles themselves from the first and second gatherings are led into the treatise on medicine (in the same hand), which precedes the Goliardic songs. This is definitely a world where there is sickness and death and where good men such as the Apostles and Becket and de Montfort must act as lights in darkness, battling against sickness and evil. It is a world where Becket and Montfort come as sons/suns of justice to their respective kings and contemporaries.⁽²²⁾

Samson has, of course, introduced this Epiphany.⁽²³⁾ As Illich (Illich, 1993, p. 8) has so appropriately said: “An incipit is like a chord. Its choice permits the author to evoke the tradition into which he wants to place his work.” From an etymology of Samson’s name, St. Augustine derived the following allegory: “Samson,” he explained meant *Sol ipsorum*, or “their sun,” and was therefore a prefiguring of Christ, who was called *Sol justitiae* (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*), (Krouse, 1949, p. 42). This etymology was accepted throughout the Middle Ages. Consequently, Samson would be the appropriate

figure of the coming Light, bringing the Old Testament into the light of the New. In the Antiphon, Samson turns from blindness to light as he discusses from heaven the events of his life that led to a manifestation of God's glory and the reduction of his enemies, even as they held him, blind, turning the wheel for his captors.

Samson's birth into the tribe of Dan was also fortunate in terms of this etymology. He was consequently interpreted by Origin as one meant to judge his people according to Jacob when he said: "Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel" (Genesis 49: 16).⁽²⁴⁾ These judges were sometimes called "saviors." Samson was vowed *nazir* by his mother, that is, one separated and dedicated to God. He was to begin the deliverance of the Danites, just as he was to begin the manuscript. The Danites in British mythology were the British themselves (Ashe, 1990, p.15).

Thus the Old Testament Samson of Judges 13-16 became, by the etymology given his name and by the allegorization of the events of his life, a figure of Christ. Yet it was not to the Book of Judges alone that this vision of Samson was indebted. Rather it was to St. Paul's letter to the Hebrews that Samson owed his sublimation. For it was in this letter explaining and clarifying the humanity and divinity of Christ as the Son of God that Samson appeared as a testament of faith for those who sought and believed in the promise of what was to come.

Samson, therefore, is placed at the head of the manuscript as a figure of Christ. But he is a special representation. By the allegorization of his name he is the Sun/Son of Justice, coming with the solstice of Christmastide to bring light to the world. He represents, by his blind turning of the wheel underground, the turning of the earth that leads to the solstice and the coming of light/Light.

Thomas, who is attached to the Samson bifolium, is part of this coming light, both by his name's sake, the Apostle Thomas, and by his own feast on the 29th of December. Becket rolls in with the turning of Samson into the Light. Becket moves with the Apostle Thomas from the darkness of doubt into the light of the stars. Simon de Montfort, in turn, is united to Becket. By association, he moves into the light as well. Simon, like Becket, also figures as an Apostle, the Simon Peter of Simon Bar-Jona. Thus, in tandem, all three move as Christ figures and Apostles, extending the light of faith throughout the world.

All three, Samson, Becket, and Montfort, play their role in the recognition of Christ as Sun/Son of God, a Christ, both God and man. Thomas by his doubt-pushed-back confirms the Christ before him as “My Lord and my God.” Simon in his role as Simon Peter announces to the Apostles that Christ is the Son of God. And, in his role of Simon of the Temple, an old Simon recognizes that the baby before him is the long awaited Savior of the World. And with his namesake, St. Simon, he becomes both martyr and witness. It is in this triple role of Simon that Simon de Montfort is especially significant, since the function of this post-birth period of Christmastide is to announce Christ as both God and Man to the world, in the same way that Mary is both daughter and mother in the Antiphons of the first gathering.

It is interesting, too, that the three, in their own lives, can also be associated with Christ as the Son/Sun of Justice. Samson, known to us through the 13-16th Book of Judges, was himself a judge, one associated with judgment and justice. Chapter 13 of the Book of Judges shows him as having a special bond with God, the result of his mother’s promise to dedicate him to the service of God. He died, simultaneously delivering his enemies to justice and manifesting the power and glory of his God.

Becket, like Samson, was a judge, Justiciar of all England. He was the chief administrator for Henry II of England, his friend.⁽²⁵⁾ Unfortunately, when Thomas took the post of Archbishop, he promised to uphold the rights of the Church, even against the crown of England. Consequently, when it came time for Thomas to choose between his loyalty to the King and his loyalty to the Church, as he saw it, Thomas chose to uphold the rights of the Church, following his conscience and vows unto death.⁽²⁶⁾

The last of the trio, Simon de Montfort was also, in his time, chief Justiciar of England. He was brother-in-law to the King of England, Henry III, and was Earl of Leicester, one of the most powerful and respected men in both England and France. When Henry brought foreigners to positions of control in England and was giving away more money than the Barons of the land could finance or countenance, Simon got together with the other powerful barons and had the King sign the Provisions of Oxford. These are often viewed as the beginnings of Parliamentary law in England. When the King reneged on his promise to uphold the Provisions and to provide for rule of law for

all the people of England, the Barons under Simon de Montfort went to war. In 1264, they captured the King and took power. Their victory was at Lewes. However, it was short lived. Simon de Montfort was killed, Tuesday, 4 August 1265, and was drawn and quartered by his enemies. He, too, was declared a saint shortly thereafter, with miracles being ascribed to his intervention. (He was never formally canonized, however). Simon de Montfort like Becket, was faithful to the law and to his promise made before God. Simon himself considered his vow at Oxford fundamental to his moral integrity. To uphold it, he gave his life.

Thus we have three very powerful men, all judges in their time, delivering justice to their people in response to their respective vows. In the manuscript, these men are described as other Christs, going to their deaths believing in the power of their God. Yet none of them, in their life, saw the results of his strong faith and conviction. It is only with the passage of time that Samson was called victorious. Even Biblically speaking, he had to wait for St. Paul to place him among the saints for his great faith in the midst of darkness, the darkness of his prison as well as the darkness of his eyes. The Apostle, Thomas, known to history as the Doubter, became also the exemplum of faith, a faith tested and seen to be valid. Thomas Becket because of his name, Thomas, and because of the date of his death, late December, the time of the solstice, waits in darkness for the light and, with the coming of the Sun/Son actually receives it, moving in the Antiphon to the stars. De Montfort had great faith in his work for justice. But, like Samson, he went to his death leaving others to bring his ideas to fruition.

Samson dux fortissime, the first antiphon of the manuscript, shows Samson in heaven, a victorious saint. Becket appears on the same bifolium as Samson. Thus Becket is not only an integral part of this first gathering, but he also enjoys victory and sainthood with Samson by association. Both Samson and Becket, in death, have triumphed over their enemies and moved from the darkness of death. While Samson as victor occupies the first folio of the manuscript, the Becket story is woven not only into the first gathering but also into the structure of the manuscript as a whole. Through this continued interweaving, every part of the manuscript is lifted to this first level of triumph and victory, with darkness moving into light. Becket is not only linked with the Apostles and Martyrs of the preceding Antiphons, but he is also linked to the *Song of Lewes* and its

eulogy of Simon de Montfort. Both Becket and Montfort by metaphor and exemplum are portrayed as other Christs, Sons of Justice, just as is Samson in the first folio. Consequently, Montfort is brought into the structure of the whole and into the victory and sainthood previously bestowed on Becket and Samson.

When Becket moves into union with Simon de Montfort, uniting himself to Simon's idealism and victory, Becket is still linked to Samson from the first bifolium of the MS. Consequently, de Montfort moves with Samson and Becket and Henry into a safe haven of victory. Becket is, of course, linked to Henry II in the center of the MS at the 9th gathering. Thus, it is as if Becket were sanctifying Henry II and as if both were part of the *Visio* that speaks of Becket. This vision plays back to that of the Samson and Becket link in the first bifolium where Samson is seen as lifted up to heaven, victorious. Becket in the vision of his death is also victorious, and, attached, as it were, to his coat tails is Henry II. To have Henry II along with Becket makes the issues Henry fought for still somewhat relevant, but the sainthood of Becket undeniably moves the rights of the church to the same or higher plane, since it is because of Becket that Henry II is included. In like manner, Becket's union with Simon de Montfort, after the eulogy to Simon de Montfort, moves Montfort's idealism and battle for the rights of the people and the primacy of law into the level of victory. Becket's earlier union with the victorious Samson, who is now telling his story from heaven, moves Montfort into the heavenly grouping as well. By association, Becket and those he embraces, Henry II and de Montfort, also become part of the heavenly crowd.

These men are all treated as men of faith, martyrs or witnesses who recognized the power of God in the world and who believed that what they themselves were doing would further His plan and manifest His glory, even if they themselves did not live to see an immediate result. Readings regarding these men would be encouraging during a time of darkness or civil and legal ambiguity. Perhaps this is why many scholars have tried to show that the Goliardic poems, which surround them, were written in a particular time of civil unrest and discord. But every year brings the Light of the solstice into a dark world. Thus saints associated with the recognition of the coming of the Sun/Son into this world are remembered, since in remembering them, the liturgy recalls annually the darkness and doubt of its people, and the real, palpable Christ who came at this dark time. It is this

recognition by the Thomases and Simons of the manuscript of the coming of the real and touchable God made Man, while the world was still in darkness [under the sway of sickness and the impious: the medical treatises and the Goliardic satires and songs], that is celebrated, with the ever increasing Light of the solstice, as Samson leads in the Apostles and saints with their mission of revolving all the exiled on earth into the Alpha of the stars.

Notes:

- (1) This *Catalogus* is published as *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (1831), in 10 Volumes. Volume I, pp. 488-89 contain the description of the contents of Harley 978. All Latin and French translations from this catalogue are mine.
- (2) The presence of Thomas Becket in Harley 978 is somewhat curious. While he does not appear in the calendar for January (folio 15v of the second gathering, ff. 14-21, *Calendarium Romanum, cum prognosticis quibusdam ex consideratione lunae adscriptis*) or even in the Calendar of the *Cartulary of Reading Abbey* in MS. Cott. Vesp. E. v. folia 11v –16v, (which lacks December), he is in fact a recurring presence in the body of the manuscript.
- (3) Samson's marriage with Delilah was said by the Fathers to represent that of Christ and his Church and that of God and the Jewish people or Israel; Thomas' father, in the Apocryphal literature that grew up around Becket, was said to have married a foreign woman.
- (4) See Cottle (1984, p.52), "Becket, N[ickname] 'little mouth/beak' O[l]d[F]rench (Saint Thomas Becket's spurious arms, three Cornish choughs or becquets OF, are simply a heraldic pun)." Barlow (1986, p. 148), mentions Thomas's personal seal, "made from an antique gem engraved with the figure of a Roman god or hero, perhaps Mercury, Mars or Perseus. No genuine example or satisfactory representation of Thomas's official seals as archdeacon or archbishop have survived. But the latter would undoubtedly have been similar to those of his predecessors and successors."
- (5) A further description of the MS contents may be found in Kingsford, pp. vii-xviii.
- (6) See Boland (1996), *Text and Territory: Samson dux fortissime and Harley 978* (folia 1r –16r)," pp. 223-250, for an explanation of Samson as the figure of Christ chosen from Old Testament prototypes for this particular location because of his name, imprisonment, blindness, and movement in a circle. This image is appropriate to the period after Christmas, as treated in the calendar.

- (7) Samson begins the Antiphons of the manuscript as one blind, removed from the light, being interviewed while in prison. Yet in the last lines he is seen to be, in fact, in heaven. The second antiphon, *Regina clemencie maria vocata*, sings of a sealed Virgin, an inflamed tree, a closed gate, a window radiated by sun. She is the rose and the lily, the transformed Eve/Ave, moving from darkness to light. A third antiphon, *Dum maria credidit fide firmans mentem* (folio 6r) tells of Mary being light to the people.
- (8) In the Harley 978 calendar, the 5th of January, the vigil of the Epiphany, celebrates the feast of Edward the confessor. Prior to the beatification of Edward, Reading Abbey, along with other abbeys, was asked to petition Pope Innocent III that Edward be made a saint. Reading was a royal abbey founded by Henry I, the son of William the Conqueror who took over the throne of England upon the death of Edward the Confessor. But not until the time of Henry II, the grandson of Henry I, was the sainthood of Edward given serious thought. Other calendars do not remark Edward's feast on that day. They either celebrate Becket (as does the Paraclete calendar, for example) or the Vigil of the Epiphany on the 5th of January. Perhaps the presence of Henry the II, grandson of the conqueror, was significant in this regard. For William the Conqueror, who was not close kin to Edward, had to wife Matilda of Flanders who was also not close kin to Edward. However, his son, Henry I married the Anglo-Saxon princess Edith/Matilda, who was indeed related to the Confessor. Their daughter, Matilda (called the Empress) married in second noces Geoffrey Plantagenet and bore Henry II. It was in his interest to have a saintly relative--thus the need for Edward the Confessor to appear on January 5th in the Reading Abbey calendar.
- (9) These passages on the solstice and the liturgy are cited from "Text and Territory: *Samson dux fortissime*," 244-45.
- (10) In contemporary calendars Becket is honored December 29th as St. Thomas of Canterbury, Archbishop and Martyr. His feast occurs during the Octave of the Nativity of Christ. The readings for his feast are those of his namesake, the Apostle Thomas, whose feast on the 21st of December falls into the solstice period. Thus Becket's liturgy also becomes part of the pre-solstice readings leading up to

Christmas Day.

- (11) The shrine is in place by 1220.
- (12) *Le breviaire romain* (1924, p.395), *Propre du temps: Saint Thomas de Canterbury*. All translations from this breviary are mine.
- (13) In July 1174, Henry II himself came to do penance at the tomb of the Archbishop. This too is part of the manuscript, occurring after the vision of the death of St. Thomas martyr [Incipit “Cum cepissent crescere dampna noctis prima”] which begins on folio 89v. The *Confession of King Henry II* regarding this death begins on folio 90v and continues for 184 lines.
- (14) The story continues that Thomas opened the door himself, saying to his clerks that The Church of God should not be guarded like a camp; I will suffer freely, willing, death for the Church of God. He then addressed the soldiers and asked that for the sake of God, that not one of his clerks be touched. Following this expression of concern for his flock, he commended the Church and his soul to God through Mary and Saint Denis and presented his head to the sword with the same constancy that he had put to resisting the unjust laws of the king. Because of the great number of miracles, Pope Alexander declared him to be among the saints (*Breviaire*, 1924, pp. 395-97).
- (15) “En effet, l’incredulite de Thomas a plus servi a l’affermissement de notre foi, que la foi des autres disciples deja convaincus; car en voyant que cet Apotre revient a la foi en touchant le Christ, notre esprit renonce au moindre doute et se sent fortifie dans la foi....Puisque l’Apotre Paul dit: ‘La foi est le fondement des choses qu’on doit esperer, et la demonstration de celles qu’on ne voit point’ (Hebr. 11:1), il est clair et certain que la foi est la demonstration des verites qui ne peuvent paraitre a nos yeux; car les verites apparentes ne sont plus l’objet de la foi, mais de la connaissance....Il le vit donc Jesus homme et il le confessa Dieu, disant: ‘Mon Seigneur et mon Dieu!’ (Jean 20: 28). C’est donc en voyant qu’il a cru, c’est en considerant l’humanite veritable du Christ, qu’il a proclame sa divinite que ses regards ne pouvaient atteindre.” (Homelie de saint Gregoire, Pape, 26e sur l’Ev., le 21 decembre, Saint Thomas, Apotre, *Breviaire*, vol. 1, pp. 911-12).

- (16) Smalley (1985, p. 101), *The Gospels in the Schools*. All information regarding Peter the Chanter is from Smalley unless otherwise stated.
- (17) See Wright (1839, pp. 125-126), “The Lament of Simon de Montfort” (MS. Harl. 2253, folio 59r, early 14th century) in *The Political Songs of England*: “Mes par sa mort, le cuens Mountfort conquist la victorie,/Come ly martyr de Caunterbyr, finisht sa vie;/Ne voleit pas li bon Thomas qe perist seinte Eglise,/Li cuens auxi se combati, e morust sauntz feyntise./ Ore est ocys la flur de pris, qe taunt savoit de guere,/ Ly quens Montfort, sa dure mort molt enplorra la terre./...Qe de guerrier e fei tener si bien savoit la sonme./...Sire Simoun, ly prodhom, e sa compaignie,/ En joie vont en ciel amont, en pardurable vie./ Mes Jhesu Crist, qe en croyz se mist, Dieu en prenge cure,/ Qe sunt remis, e detenuz en prisone dure. [“But by his death the Earl Montfort gained the victory/ like the martyr of Canterbury he finished his life:/ the good Thomas would not suffer holy Church to perish,/the Earl fought in a similar cause, and died without flinching./Now is slain the precious flower, who knew so much of war/ the Earl Montfort, his hard death the land will deeply lament./...who knew so well the art of fighting and of holding faith./...Sir Simon, the worthy man, and his company, are gone in joy up to heaven, in everlasting life./ But Jesus Christ, who placed himself on the cross, and God have care of those /who are remitted and detained in hard prison.”] See John Scattergood (2000), Authority and resistance. In S. Fein (Ed.), *Studies in the Harley manuscript*, (pp. 178-185), for social context.
- (18) See Hutton (1907, pp. 161-165), which cites *The Chronicle of Melrose*, ed. Stevenson, (Bannatyne Club), p. 207, on the character of Simon de Montfort, “A comparison cannot be fairly instituted between two objects unless they be placed near together. Thus Simon de Montfort may be compared with Simon Peter (the only one with whom he may be compared);...How beautifully does the one Simon herein correspond with the other! For, while the one continued in earnest prayer before God, night after night, so did the other spend each night in continually meditating upon the words which he was about to announce to the unbelieving people on the ensuing day...Once more, what can I say about his thrift, so frugal, and therefore so praiseworthy, as that was, which he exhibited in the midst of wealth so

abundant and luxuries so profuse, but this—that herein his scanty self-indulgence may be compared with the example of Simon Peter. ...You might have heard grave and religious men, of different orders, saying everywhere throughout England that after Simon was dead they would quite as willingly visit his tomb for the purpose of their praying to God, as they would go to Jerusalem for the same purpose. ...There were others who said that if at the time when they were speaking Simon had fallen for the sake of right (as afterwards he did) they would quite as readily have gone to his sepulchre there to pray to God, as to the great shrine of Saint Thomas the martyr, in which he reposes at Canterbury, endowed by God with many miracles and adorned with precious stones. The remark which they made in their conversation with each other was not devoid of sound reason, for no less did Simon die for the lawful right of the just possessions of England than Thomas for the lawful right of the churches of England.” A note on the Chronicle of Melrose in Hutton, pp. 176-77, says that it contains a special History of Simon de Montfort from 1263 to 1269, “eulogizing at considerable length the character of the earl. ...The elaborate comparison instituted between Simon the earl and Simon the apostle is probably part of a sermon for the benefit of the brethren. ...To the Melrose chronicler Simon is a Christian hero in the fullest sense of the word, and the portrait drawn of him is the most vivid that exists.” J. R. Maddicott (1994), p. 281, plate 13, shows a contemporary dossier of documents from Canterbury Cathedral concerning the battle of Lewes to which a scribe has added Christ’s words, ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona’ (Matthew, 16: 17 : asterisked). A play on his name is also evident in the *Song of Lewes*, Harley 978, lines 261-66, “Lapis hic ab hostibus diu reprobatus,/Post est parietibus duobus aptatus./Angliae divisio desolationis/Fuit in confinio, sed divisionis/Affuit praesidio lapis angularis,/Symonis religio sane singularis.” [This stone, long rejected from the doorway, was afterwards fitted to the two walls. The division of England was on the verge of desolation, but the corner stone was there as a help to the division, the truly singular religion of Simon].

- (19) “Victoris sollemnia sanctaeque coronae/Reddunt testimonia super hoc agone;/Cum dictos ecclesia sanctos honoravit,/Milites victoria veros coronavit.” [The solemnities of the victor, and the sacred crowns, give testimony on this contest; since the Church

honored the said persons as saints, and victory crowned the true soldiers], Wright (1839), *The Political Songs*, “The Battle of Lewes” (MS. Harley 978, folio 128r, of the middle of the 13th century), p.73, vs. 29-32.

- (20) Now of course it was also customary to buy the child back from the Lord--which they did. They could offer for him to the Lord a lamb or a couple of turtledoves or two baby doves. When the lamb or doves were offered before the Lord and prayers were said for the mother, her purification would be complete. Such was the law.
- (21) St. Ambrose (Com. On St. Luke: 2: 25) in his sermon for this feast brings in another aspect of Simon. Simon prophesizes that the Lord Jesus Christ has come as an infallible, equitable judge for the ruin and for the resurrection of a great number, to discern what the good have merited as well as the bad, according to the quality of our acts (*Breviaire*, vol. 1, pp. 971-72: February 2nd).
- (22) The Goliardic poems that surround the *Visio* and *Marriage* of Becket’s parents and which precede the *Song of Lewes*, show a clergy that is not commendable, rather they are seeking their own material interests and are reproached for being avaricious. Avarice traditionally meant seeking other gods. These bishops, popes and even lower clergy are seen in contrast to the virtue of Becket and Montfort, both of whom give up everything in their fight for justice against the misguided. To aid the misguided, *The Song of Lewes* ends as a kind of treatise on how a king should treat his people and how those who are his counselors should advise a king to follow the law. Just as the earlier king, Henry II is raised up and supported by the physical attachment of his *Confession* to the Becket folio, in like manner are Henry III and his son Edward to benefit from Montfort’s counsel.
- (23) Information regarding Samson will be taken from “Text and Territory: *Samson dux fortissime* and Harley 978 (folia 1 r-16 r).”
- (24) Origin’s *Commentarii in Evangelium Joannis*, VI, 12 (Pat. Graec., XIV, 238 f.); as cited by Krouse, p. 36).
- (25) But, when the post of Archbishop of Canterbury became vacant, Henry thought he would have Becket fill the vacancy. The position brought great wealth and power, second only to that of the King.

- (26) It is interesting that Christopher de Hamel's "The Dispersal of the Library of Christ Church, Canterbury, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century," in *Books and Collectors 1200-1700*, (1997, p. 264), mentions at least three volumes of canon law which had belonged to Thomas Becket being sent up for dispersal.

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