

Introduction

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The life of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) has been recounted and her works have been explored in many languages and in many formats: in pamphlets, books, and newspapers; on the radio and in audio recordings; in film and television documentaries; and on countless websites and blogs. Anyone encountering this remarkable historical figure for the first time or wanting to begin research on some aspect of her output and legacy might quickly become overwhelmed by the quantity of material available. Scholars have considered her contributions as a nun, a monastic leader, a preacher, a correspondent, a poet, a theologian, a visionary, a prophet, a composer, a scientist, a medical practitioner, a liturgist, a hagiographer, a cryptographer, and as a founder of her own convent at Rupertsberg. Some authors have studied her works in their historical context and others have investigated the historical reception of her works and ideas through manuscript transmission and the modern reception through printed copies and translations of her written works as well as through performances and recordings of her music. Some writers have focused on the reception of Hildegard herself as a historical figure and as a saint, considering early attempts to secure her canonization, a process that culminated in 2012 with Pope Benedict, who named Hildegard as both a saint and a Doctor of the Church.¹ Given these many and diverse approaches to Hildegard and her output, this volume aims to provide a point of entry for understanding her life and the breadth of her activities and to introduce the reader to primary and secondary sources for further study.

¹ “Decrees of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints,” May 10, 2012. VIS. Vatican Information Service. Holy See Press Office. http://visnews-en.blogspot.com/2012/05/decrees-of-congregation-for-causes-of_11.html. Pope Benedict XVI, “Apostolic Letter, Proclaiming Saint Hildegard of Bingen, professed nun of the Order of Saint Benedict, a Doctor of the Universal Church,” October 7, 2012. www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20121007_ildegarda-bingen.html.

This collection brings together thirteen chapters, each written by a different scholar, with a variety of disciplines represented. Suitable for advanced university students and for scholars first immersing themselves in Hildegard studies, the chapters provide a broader context for understanding Hildegard's life and monastic setting and offer comprehensive discussions on each of the main areas of Hildegard's output. Two other volumes in English have done something similar: *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen* (Brill, 2014) and *The Voice of the Living Light* (1998).² This new *Companion* complements that by Brill. Denser in style, the Brill *Companion* covers a number of subjects not addressed here, including, for example, chapters on the history of the Disibodenberg (Hildegard's first monastic home), on the influence of the Hirsau reform on Hildegard's own agenda, on Hildegard's "Unknown" language, and on the comparative visionary experiences of Hildegard and her contemporary, Elisabeth of Schönau. This Cambridge *Companion* diverges from the offerings of the Brill volume by providing contextual chapters on life in a medieval convent and on the education of women religious in the twelfth century, as well as in-depth treatments of Hildegard's sermonizing and her correspondence and assessments of the material witnesses of Hildegard's output through examinations of scribal practices at Rupertsberg and the role of illuminations in the Rupertsberg manuscripts.

In style and coverage, this volume is in some ways more like *The Voice of the Living Light*, edited by Barbara Newman. A collection of nine essays, *The Voice of the Living Light* has chapters explicitly addressing Hildegard as a spiritual leader, a religious thinker, a prophet and reformer, a correspondent, an artist, a medical writer, a composer, and a poet. It was published in 1998, the 900th anniversary of Hildegard's birth, an anniversary that inspired the publication of many important editions, studies, and translations and a steady stream since then. This burst of activity warrants an updated introduction to Hildegard's life and works and to the resources available for further study. Recent publications have included English translations of her correspondence (in three volumes: 1994, 1998, and 2004), her homilies on the Gospels (2011), her lives of Saints Rupert and Disibod (2010), and her third and final book of visions (2018), as well as of the early biographical sources of Hildegard and her mentor Jutta (1999).³ Various editions of her music have appeared as well,

² Beverly Kienzle, Debra L. Stoudt, and George Ferzoco, eds, *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen* (Leiden: Brill, 2014) and Barbara Newman, ed., *The Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Liber Divinorum Operum*, trans. Nathaniel M. Campbell (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018).

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including a facsimile edition of her music from the *Riesencodex* (1998) and a number of editions in modern musical notation (1997–1998, 2013, and 2016).⁴ Since 1998, hundreds of studies on Hildegard and her output have appeared in English and in German (and in numerous other languages), as well as two new single-authored biographies in English (2001 and 2018)⁵ and two major reference works in German: a bibliography of scholarship on Hildegard (1998) and a detailed catalogue of 363 known manuscripts transmitting Hildegard’s works (2013).⁶ Perhaps most transformative for Hildegard studies in the last two decades (indeed for all pre-1600 scholarship) is the online publication of thousands of manuscripts – including a number of manuscripts of Hildegard’s works – made available freely through national and regional digital repositories and libraries; where once scholars either had to travel to see manuscripts or had to rely on black-and-white microfilms, today many manuscripts can be consulted on computer screens – sometimes two or three at a time – with resolutions superior to what is available to the naked eye.

The Cambridge Companion to Hildegard of Bingen not only provides updated scholarship since the publication of the other two volumes in 1998 and 2014 but also brings Hildegard’s lived experience in her community of nuns together with her intellectual and creative activities. Divided into three groups, the chapters outline her living and working conditions, as well as her reputation, and provide a twelfth-century context for the kind of education she might have received, as well as for her visionary activity, her theological writing, her medical writings, her correspondence, her sermonizing, and her liturgical activity. The three chapters in Part I, “Life and Monastic Context,” introduce the main resources for studying the life of Hildegard but also for understanding what life would be like for women in a monastic environment in the twelfth century and how women religious were educated in medieval German lands. In Chapter 1, Michael Embach presents a biography of Hildegard’s life from her early childhood

⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Symphonia Armonie Celestium Revelationum*, 8 vols., ed. and trans. Marianne Richert Pfau (Bryn Mawr, PA: Hildegard Publishing Company, 1997); *Ordo Virtutum: A Comparative Edition*, ed. Vincent Corrigan (Lion’s Bay, BC: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 2013) and *Hildegard of Bingen, Symphonia: A Comparative Edition*, ed. Vincent Corrigan (Lion’s Bay, BC: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 2016).

⁵ Fiona Maddocks, *Hildegard of Bingen: The Woman of Her Age* (London: Headline, 2001) and Honey Meconi, *Hildegard of Bingen* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

⁶ Marc-Aeilko Aris, Michael Embach, Werner Lauter, Irmgard Müller, Franz Staab, and Scholastica Steinle, OSB, eds., *Hildegard von Bingen: Internationale Wissenschaftliche Bibliographie* (Mainz: Gesellschaft für Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 1998), and Michael Embach and Martina Wallner, *Conspectus der Handschriften Hildegards von Bingen* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2013).

to her death in 1179. Translated from German by Florian Hild, the chapter includes an overview of the twelfth-century sources available for reconstructing Hildegard's life. Embach explains some of the difficulties in trying to reconcile seemingly contradictory information and provides multiple theories about certain aspects of her life when the sources have led scholars to different conclusions. In Chapter 2, Alison I. Beach uses a more experiential approach, taking the reader through a "day in the life" of a community of twelfth-century nuns. Using September 30 as a regular day, she tracks hour by hour the activities of the women at Eibingen, a convent across the river from Hildegard's Rupertsberg, her foundation at the confluence of the Rhine and Nahe rivers. To provide us with a context for what Hildegard's daily life might have looked like, Beach starts with the rising of the women two hours before dawn and demonstrates how the religious services of the Divine Office structure the day for the women and interact with their other activities as well as the physicality of the monastic complex. Chapter 3 by Lori Kruckenberg provides a twelfth-century context for Hildegard's demonstrated learnedness, by investigating how women religious acquired knowledge and intellectual skills in medieval German-speaking areas. Kruckenberg draws on a wide variety of evidence about women's education, examining monastic and canonical rules (written regulations that dictate the activities and behavior of nuns and monks), hagiographic literature (specifically the lives of holy women), and material artifacts such as medieval book collections, individual manuscripts, and writing by women. These three chapters together are foundational for the chapters that follow that engage directly with Hildegard's body of work.

Shifting from the life of Hildegard, Part II, "Writings and Reputation," has six chapters that both investigate and contextualize her literary works, focusing on: her theological output, considering her sources, her institutional environment, and her audience; the function and status of her correspondence; her sermonizing through letters, her visionary writings, and her preaching tours; her scientific and medical texts; her reputation as a prophet as developed through the circulation of the *Pentachronon*; and her visionary activity and later reception. In the first chapter in this section (Chapter 4), James Ginther focuses on Hildegard's three major theological and visionary books: *Scivias* (Know the Ways), *Liber vitae meritorum* (Book of Life's Merits), and *Liber divinorum operum* (Book of Divine Works). Ginther considers the authoritative texts that ground Hildegard's theology, the institutional setting of her work, and her implied readers. While acknowledging her wide readership outside of Rupertsberg,

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he connects her theological writing directly to her role as *magistra* (spiritual leader and teacher of her community). He argues that her nuns were her primary audience and suggests that considering her community as her implied readers raises new questions about her theological program, extending beyond her much-discussed calls for reform and mystical apocalypticism.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on Hildegard's correspondence and her sermonizing. In Chapter 5, Christopher D. Fletcher considers Hildegard's letter-writing activity within a twelfth-century context. He reveals that, while her letters do not follow the formal structure of most other letters from the period, their intended function was the same: to reach a wider public and to build personal connections. In Chapter 6, Peter V. Loewen provides a context for Hildegard's preaching practices and an overview of what is known about her preaching tours. He identifies a recurring theme of greenness (*viriditas*) in Hildegard's sermons and sermonizing literature and suggests that she adapts ideas from Ambrose, Augustine, and Gregory to present contrasting ideas of *viriditas* and dryness in relation to faith and spiritual gardening.

Of all of Hildegard's writings, her scientific and medical works, known today as *Physica* and *Cause et cure* (Causes and Cures), have the most complicated history as texts. In Chapter 7, Faith Wallis explains that they were compiled after Hildegard's death and drew on materials that Hildegard herself prepared. Wallis situates these books both within the medical culture of the twelfth century and within Hildegard's worldview, offering numerous extracts from the works themselves. She also provides an overview of their reception and Hildegard's reputation as a healer from the early modern to the postmodern period.

The final two chapters in Part II address Hildegard's status as a prophet and as a visionary. In Chapter 8, Magda Hayton discusses the impact of Gebeno of Eberbach's thirteenth-century compilation of excerpts from Hildegard's writings, typically referred to as the *Pentachronon*, shortened from *Speculum futurorum temporum siue Pentachronon sancte Hildegardis* (Mirror of Future Times or the Five Ages of Saint Hildegard). As Hayton explains, the anthology circulated widely in three related but different versions, all presenting Hildegard as both an apocalyptic prophet, who preached about reform and proffered a new theological understanding of the history of salvation, and a spiritual leader, guiding clergy and other monastic members and leaders. In Chapter 9, Wendy Love Anderson distinguishes Hildegard's reputation as a prophet from her reputation as a visionary. She provides a context for Hildegard's visionary activity within

the twelfth century and an outline of how Hildegard's visions were received from the twelfth to the early twenty-first century.

The final section of the book, Part III, "Music, Manuscripts, Illuminations, and Scribes," comprises four chapters. It begins with Hildegard's musical activity, considering her music in its liturgical environment, and her *Ordo virtutum* in the context of female Benedictine monasticism, and then turns to the material context of Hildegard's activities. The final chapters consider the didactic elements of the illuminations in manuscript copies of two of her visionary texts, and finally scribal practice at Rupertsberg, gleaned from a study of scribal hands in a number of manuscripts associated with that institution founded by Hildegard. In the first chapter in this section (Chapter 10), I situate Hildegard's musical output within a liturgical framework, providing an overview of the manuscript sources and discussing issues of ordering and layout in relation to other liturgical books in the Middle Ages. I describe Hildegard's musical style, focusing particularly on her use of intertextuality, both literary and musical. In Chapter 11, Alison Altstatt discusses Hildegard's *Ordo virtutum*, the only known sung drama with secure authorship from the Middle Ages. Altstatt describes the drama as theologically and liturgically grounded, drawing on processional rituals, the rite of the Consecration of Virgins, and on the *Rule of St. Benedict*.

The final two chapters turn to materiality, considering the manuscripts that originated in the scriptorium at Rupertsberg. In Chapter 12, Nathaniel M. Campbell focuses on two illustrated manuscripts, Hildegard's *Scivias*, produced during her lifetime (and lost during World War II), and the *Liber divinatorum operum* produced forty years or so after her death.⁷ He argues that both illuminated manuscripts aim to secure her visionary authority and to integrate her work into wider Christian traditions. In the final chapter (Chapter 13), Margot Fassler addresses the Rupertsberg scriptorium directly, identifying the features of the scribal hands emerging from there. She demonstrates how crucial it is to undertake the painstaking work of tracking the scribal hands in the Rupertsberg manuscripts, because the large number identified thus far suggests the importance of copying at Rupertsberg and the close engagement the nuns would have had with Hildegard's writings of all descriptions.

What should be clear to the reader by the end of the volume is that, despite its breadth of coverage, this collection of chapters offers just

⁷ *Scivias*, Wiesbaden, Hochschul- und Landesbibliothek RheinMain, MS 1; Jennifer Bain, "History of a Book: Hildegard's 'Riesencodex' and World War II," *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 27, no. 2 (2017): 143–170; and *Liber divinatorum operum*, Biblioteca Statale di Lucca, MS 1942, www.wdl.org/en/item/21658/.

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a snapshot of the vast multilingual literature that exists on Hildegard, her works, and her reception and that scholarship in German in particular is central to the field. What should be equally clear is that, even given the copious scholarship on Hildegard, there are still many avenues open for research. There are practical, historical questions that have yet to be answered conclusively, such as what exactly Hildegard's relationship was to the monastic community in Eibingen, a question raised by both Michael Embach and Alison I. Beach in their chapters, drawing on recent scholarship by Matthias Schmandt.⁸ New research areas also arise by shifting perspective as James Ginther does in his chapter, considering Hildegard's theological trilogy as primarily spiritual texts for Hildegard's nuns at Rupertsberg. Digital methodologies open new possibilities for research, searching, for example, for further evidence of Hildegard's engagement with other medieval works through databases such as the *Patrologia Latina Database*, as Peter V. Loewen demonstrates with Latin text searches in his chapter, and through the *Cantus Database*, as I demonstrate through melody searches in my chapter.⁹ As well, the availability of so many digitized manuscripts online makes this the ideal time to delve deeper into issues of paleography, to consider the activities of the scriptorium at Rupertsberg in particular, as Margot Fassler undertakes in her chapter. Secure identification of the Rupertsberg house style and of specific scribal hands in that scriptorium will open up the possibility of finding other manuscripts that originated there and learning more about the monastic environment that Hildegard cultivated.

While readers are certainly welcome to read the chapters in whichever order they choose, the order presented is pedagogical in design: Part II presumes knowledge about Hildegard's monastic life that is provided in Part I; the final two chapters of Part II deal with the medieval and later reception of Hildegard's writings, the main areas of which (theology, letters, sermons, and scientific writings) are presented in the first four chapters of that section; and the chapters in Part III are grounded in the topics presented in Parts I and II: both Hildegard's monastic environment and her literary output. The Select Bibliography provided at the end of the

⁸ Matthias Schmandt, "Hildegard von Bingen und das Kloster Eibingen: Revision einer historischen Überlieferung," *Nassauische Annalen* 125 (2014): 29–52.

⁹ *Patrologia Latina: The Full Text Database*. Includes the complete first edition of: Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 221 vols. (Paris: 1844–1855). <http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk/>; and *Cantus: A Database for Latin Ecclesiastical Chant – Inventories of Chant Sources*, directed by Debra Lacoste (2011–), Terence Bailey (1997–2010), and Ruth Steiner (1987–1996), web developer, Jan Kolářček (2011–), <https://cantus.uwaterloo.ca/>.

book has four sections, including Latin editions and English translations of Hildegard's works (organized by work); select biographies of Hildegard (in Latin, English, and German); additional resources, such as online databases, bibliographies, and influential collections of essays; and a selection of important manuscripts transmitting Hildegard's works, with URLs provided when available online. Hundreds of other items are cited in the footnotes of the chapters in this volume.

I began research on Hildegard thirty years ago in 1991, when I embarked on graduate study in music theory, and yet from reading the chapters here I still learned much and gained deeper appreciation for Hildegard's creativity and erudition. I hope you do too.

Further Reading

- Benedict XVI, Pope. "Decrees of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints." May 10, 2012. VIS. Vatican Information Service. Holy See Press Office. http://visnews-en.blogspot.com/2012/05/decrees-of-congregation-for-causes-of_11.html.
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PART I

Life and Monastic Context

CHAPTER I

*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).