

Saint Hildegard of Bingen

SYMPHONIA

A Critical Edition of the *Symphonia*

armonie celestium revelationum

[Symphony of the Harmony
of Celestial Revelations]

WITH INTRODUCTION, TRANSLATIONS,

AND COMMENTARY BY

BARBARA NEWMAN

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**Omnis caelestis harmonia speculum divinitatis est,
et homo speculum omnium miraculorum est Dei.**

**All celestial harmony is a mirror of divinity,
and man is a mirror of all the miracles of God,**

SAINT HILDEGARD, *Causes and Cures*

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Preface

Twenty years ago only a handful of medievalists knew the name of Saint Hildegard of Bingen. But no sooner do contemporary tastes change than the past takes on new contours. Names from the margins of our historical awareness are rediscovered, illumined, shifted toward center. So it was that, with the help of a few art historians, the forgotten Georges de la Tour suddenly became a painter of the first rank. So it was that Felix Mendelssohn "discovered" Johann Sebastian Bach; Franz Pfeiffer discovered Meister Eckhart; and a sisterhood of nuns discovered Hildegard of Bingen.

Hildegard, whose personal fame reached from England to Byzantium during her lifetime (1098–1179), has always had admirers in her native Germany. But her reputation suffered eclipse not long after her death. Though celebrated throughout the Middle Ages as an apocalyptic prophet, she was all but forgotten as a versatile writer, composer, and scientist. Between the Reformation and the early twentieth century, an occasional author hailed her as a great woman, a great saint, or a great German. Flurries of publication marked the 750th anniversary of her death in 1929 and the octocentennial in 1979. But her belated emergence as a major representative of twelfth-century civilization owes most to two factors: the feminist quest for a canon, and the critical schol-

arship of the nuns at St. Hildegard's Abbey in Eibingen. Sister Maura Böckeler, who was attempting to revive and modernize Hildegard's distinctive theology, published a German translation of her most famous work, the *Scivias*, in 1928. Böckeler's *Scivias*, reprinted many times, became the first of a series; all of Hildegard's major works are now available in abridged German versions published by Otto Müller Verlag of Salzburg. In the meantime two other Eibingen nuns, Marianna Schrader and Adelgundis Führkötter, broke ground in 1956 with an important historical and paleographic study, establishing the long-contested authenticity of Hildegard's works beyond doubt.¹ Together with Angela Carlevaris, Führkötter also published a critical edition of the *Scivias* for the series *Corpus Christianorum: continuatio mediaevalis* (Turnhout, 1978). But the rest of Hildegard's works, which are extensive, remain in limbo. Most of the printed texts are poor, and for the English-speaking reader, only brief excerpts are available in trustworthy versions.

Yet despite these problems, popular interest in Hildegard is burgeoning. Herbalists have begun to use her prescriptions and diets in their medical practice. A fashionable Catholic guru salutes her, generously but falsely, as the prophet of everything from ecological justice to global ecumenism. Novels and films about her life are under way, and illustrations from her works have been cast in ceramics and needlework for Judy Chicago's mammoth exhibition *The Dinner Party*. Her music in particular has received fresh attention, thanks to several fine recordings by English and Continental ensembles. Peter Dronke, the author of many perceptive essays on Hildegard, finds in her songs "some of the most unusual, subtle, and exciting poetry of the twelfth century."² I believe he is right, and I present this edition of Hildegard's lyrics to make this extraordinary body of work available both to the scholar and to the general reader.

¹Marianna Schrader and Adelgundis Führkötter, *Die Echtheit des Schrifttums der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen* (Cologne and Graz, 1956).

²Peter Dronke, "Hildegard of Bingen as Poetess and Dramatist," in *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1970): 151.

This volume contains a critical text of Hildegard's poetic cycle, the *Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum* [Symphony of the harmony of celestial revelations], together with two sets of facing-page translations, one in plain prose and the other in free verse. It is recommended that the general reader begin with the verse translations. The prose versions are offered partly as a corrective to my poetic license, but principally as an aid to the student who is trying to decipher Hildegard's rewarding but peculiar and often bewildering Latin. These prose versions are quoted in the examples throughout the introduction. The commentary at the end of the book includes manuscript information along with a discussion of each individual poem. For the benefit of musicologists and singers, it also provides cross-references to the German edition of Hildegard's music.³ All biblical citations refer to the Vulgate.

I thank the librarians at the Hessische Landesbibliothek in Wiesbaden and the Bibliotheek der St.-Pieters-&-Paulusabdij in Dendermonde, Belgium, for their hospitality and for providing the manuscript photographs that appear on pages 52 and 53. I am also grateful to the Württembergische Landesbibliothek in Stuttgart and the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna. Oxford University Press has graciously permitted me to reprint the stanzas by Charles Williams which appear on p. 282; they are taken from Williams's play *The House of the Octopus* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1945), as reprinted in his *Collected Plays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963). Twelve of the poems in this volume have previously appeared, in slightly different form, as an appendix to my earlier study, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Parts of the introduction have appeared in *Arts & Sciences*, a magazine published by Northwestern University (Fall 1987).

This project would not have been possible without a travel

³Pudentiana Barth, M.-I. Ritscher, and Joseph Schmidt-Görg, eds., *Hildegard von Bingen: Lieder* (Salzburg, 1969).

grant from Northwestern University, for which I am deeply grateful

As a literary scholar with no claim to expertise in music, I offer my observations on Hildegard's musical style with some trepidation. My particular thanks are due to the musicians and musicologists who have saved me from many errors and offered helpful suggestions: Theodore Karp, Barbara Lachman, William Mahrt, Therese Schroeder-Sheker, and Barbara Thornton. Marianne Richert Pfau kindly agreed, when this project was near completion, to let me include her essay on Hildegard's music. My husband, Richard Kieckhefer, has read the manuscript, as always, with vigilance as well as tender loving care. I thank Lieven Van Acker for sharing his ideas on the thorny manuscript problems discussed in the Appendix. Finally, I am grateful to David Myers for nerving me to "write *poems*" instead of pallid academic facsimiles of Hildegard's Latin. The infelicities that remain are all my own.

A Note on the Second Edition

Ten years after the original publication of the *Symphonia*, I am pleased to offer the reader this second, revised edition. The bibliography and discography have been updated to include more recent editions, translations, studies, and recordings of Hildegard's works. In addition, I have thoroughly revised the prose translations for the benefit of readers and listeners who do not read Latin. Without departing from strict fidelity to Hildegard's texts, I now offer more fluent and elegant versions that do less violence to normal English syntax. Finally, in the case of a single poem (no. 29), I have changed my interpretation of the last three lines and modified my translation and comments accordingly. The other verse translations and all the Latin texts are unaltered.

BARBARA NEWMAN

Evanston, Illinois

SYMPHONIA

Introduction

Biographical Sketch

Hildegard's biography is well documented, and the outlines of her eventful life are well known.¹ The scion of an ancient and noble family, she was born in 1098 in the town of Bermersheim near Alzey, in the diocese of Mainz. As the tenth and last child of her parents, Hildebert and Mechtild, Hildegard was offered to God as a tithe. A noblewoman named Jutta, daughter of the count of Sponheim, had chosen a life of religious seclusion near the recently founded monastery of St. Disibod, and the eight-year-old Hildegard was given to this anchoress as a companion in 1106. Jutta, whom Hildegard would later characterize as an "unlearned" woman, was nonetheless literate enough to teach the girl elementary reading and singing. Their textbook was the Latin Psalter, the centerpiece of monastic prayer. Hildegard undoubted-

¹The main source is a hagiographic life by the monks Gottfried of St. Disibod and Dieter of Echternach, *Vita Sanctae Hildegardis*, in J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus: series latina*, 221 vols. (Paris, 1841-1864; hereafter PL), 197: 91-130; German translation by Adelgundis Führkötter, *Das Leben der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen* (Düsseldorf, 1968); English translation by Anna Silvas, "Saint Hildegard of Bingen and the *Vita Sanctae Hildegardis*," *Tjurunga: An Australasian Benedictine Review* 29 (1985): 4-25; 30 (1986): 63-73; 31 (1986): 32-41; 32 (1987): 46-59. There is a biography in German by Eduard Gronau, *Hildegard von Bingen* (Stein-am-Rhein, Switzerland, 1985).

ly became familiar with other books of the Bible and with the monastic liturgy at an early age, although she was always keenly aware that she lacked "education." She took to the religious life easily, yet by her own account she was a peculiar child: her health was always frail and she was touched from infancy by her exceptional gift of *visio*.

This condition involved unusual and sometimes painful perceptions—such as her vision at the age of three of "a brightness so great that [her] soul trembled"—combined with a kind of clairvoyance. Without losing consciousness or ordinary perception, the girl was able to see hidden things, such as the color of a calf in its mother's womb, and to foretell the future. Hildegard retained this *visio* throughout her life. In her seventies, she characterized it as a nonspatial radiance that filled her visual field at all times, without impairing her natural vision. She called this radiance "the reflection of the living Light," and in it she saw both the "living Light" itself and the complex symbolic forms that fill her visionary writings.² She interpreted these forms with the assistance of a "voice from heaven" which addressed her in Latin, sometimes speaking for God in the first person and sometimes about him in the third. It was this voice, Hildegard maintained, which dictated her books and letters.

Vision, illness, and prophetic authority were inextricably bound together in Hildegard's life. Some of her physical symptoms, together with certain structural elements in her visions—flashing and scintillating lights, concentric circles, and recurrent "fortification figures"—led a historian of medicine to conjecture in 1917 that she suffered from a form of migraine.³ She was extremely sensitive to the weather, especially storms and wind; in her own view, this susceptibility or "airiness" also made her re-

²Letter to Guibert of Gembloux, Ep. 2 in J.-B. Pitra, ed., *Analecta sacra* 8 (Monte Cassino, 1882; hereafter Pitra): 332–33.

³Charles Singer, "The Scientific Views and Visions of Saint Hildegard," in *Studies in the History and Method of Science* 1 (Oxford, 1917): 1–55; rpt. in *From Magic to Science: Essays on the Scientific Twilight* (New York, 1958): 199–239. The theory has been popularized by Oliver Sacks in *Migraine: Understanding a Common Disorder* (Berkeley, 1985): 106–8.

ceptive to the mighty wind from heaven, the Holy Spirit.⁴ Other attacks of illness, however, were brought on by acute conflict between the commands of her divine voice and the limitations imposed by her gender and her own anxiety. Serious illnesses preceded or accompanied all the most important and frightening decisions of her life: to begin writing, to found her own monastery, to obtain financial independence for it, to undertake her first preaching tour. Nevertheless, her determination to obey God always prevailed over her frailty, and the healings that followed action both reinforced her own conviction and helped to persuade opponents that her call was genuine.

Despite her lifelong visionary experience, Hildegard did not emerge as a public figure until the age of forty-three. From adolescence through her twenties and thirties, she lived an apparently unremarkable life in a community of women, suppressing the marks of her singularity. Jutta's hermitage, like many similar retreats, had become the nucleus of a monastery as like-minded women gathered around the anchoress, and at some point they were formally incorporated as Benedictine nuns under the supervision of the abbot of St. Disibod. Hildegard herself took monastic vows in her teens and received the veil from Otto, bishop of Bamberg. We have no further record of her until 1136, the year of Jutta's death, when Hildegard was chosen abbess (*magistra*) in Jutta's stead. Her election may bear witness to her family's high social position as well as to her own spiritual gifts and her emerging talent for leadership.

Five years later, the abbess was stunned by a divine call that commanded her to "tell and write" what she saw and heard in her visions.⁵ Although she resisted at first "on account of humility" and took to her bed in pain, the call persisted, and at last she accepted the challenge. Two close friends—the nun Richardis von

⁴Hildegard of Bingen, *De operatione Dei* [*Liber divinorum operum*] 3.10.38, in PL 197: 1038a.

⁵Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Adelgundis Führkötter and Angela Carlevaris in *Corpus Christianorum: continuatio mediaevalis*, vols. 43–43a (Turnhout, Belgium, 1978): 3. The two volumes are paginated continuously.

Stade and the monk Volmar of St. Disibod, provost of her convent—provided moral support as well as physical assistance with the act of writing. In addition, Volmar served as her copyeditor, correcting her untutored and in some ways defective Latin without substantially altering her work. Hildegard was to remain dependent on Volmar's services until his death in 1173, six years before her own.

The *Scivias*, fruit of these initial labors, took Hildegard ten years to complete. Based on a series of twenty-six visions, it is divided into three books that set forth the grand scheme of creation, redemption, and sanctification. Visual descriptions, often brilliantly original, alternate with much longer allegorical passages in which Hildegard's—or God's—doctrinal teaching is expounded by means of the visionary images. In 1147/48, when this book was about half-finished, Hildegard had a stroke of extraordinary good fortune. It happened that Pope Eugenius III, a Cistercian who had been a disciple of Bernard of Clairvaux, was attending a synod of bishops at Trier, not far from Hildegard's monastery. Less than a year earlier, Hildegard had written to Bernard, the outstanding saint of her age, to seek confirmation of her prophetic call. Bernard had encouraged her, and as he was also present at Trier, he suggested to the pope that so great a light as hers should not remain hidden under a bushel.⁶ Meanwhile a delegation of clergy led by Heinrich, archbishop of Mainz—a weak prelate but a strong supporter of Hildegard—had already approached the pontiff with news of his remarkable visionary nun. On Heinrich's urging, Eugenius sent two legates to St. Disibod to visit Hildegard and procure a copy of her writings. Having obtained it, Eugenius himself, it is said, read from the *Scivias* before the assembled prelates, after which he sent the abbess a letter of apostolic blessing and protection.

The Synod of Trier marked the second major turning point in Hildegard's life. After her official recognition by the highest authority in the Church, she found that she had become a celebrity. Not only was her writing vindicated but her counsel was sought

⁶*Vita S. Hildegardis* 1.5 in PL 197: 94–95; Ep. 29 in *ibid.*: 189–90.

by clergy and laity alike, ranging from ordinary matrons to the emperor Frederick Barbarossa to Odo of Soissons, master of theology at Paris. A letter from this Odo, written in 1148, indicates that Hildegard was already famous halfway across Europe, not only for her visions but also for her novel poems or songs (*modos novi carminis*).⁷ Thus even before she finished her *Scivias*, which ends with a collection of liturgical songs, we know that Hildegard was already at work on the music that she later collected in her *Symphonia*.

In the years immediately following Trier, Hildegard's fame created new opportunities as well as new conflicts. Her sudden prestige brought a steady stream of pilgrims, and hence of revenue, to St. Disibod. At the same time it brought new aspirants to her community, and evidently Hildegard felt that she and her nuns had both physically and spiritually outgrown the double monastery. Hence she determined to start an independent foundation on a site revealed to her in a vision—the Rupertsberg, a desolate mountain slope where the river Nahe flows into the Rhine. Hildegard felt spiritually drawn to Saint Rupert, a ninth-century nobleman whose mother had founded a monastery on this site; it had lain in ruins for centuries, but the abbess resolved to rebuild it. Her decision provoked strong opposition, however, perhaps stronger and more widespread than she had anticipated. Kuno, the abbot of St. Disibod, did not want to lose his monastery's latest source of distinction; nor did he want to lose the nuns' rich endowments; nor was he willing to let Volmar go. The nuns themselves grumbled, reluctant to leave their comfortable quarters for a life of penury in the wilderness. And some of the local families thought Hildegard was quite simply mad, if not possessed.

In this crisis she resorted to a twofold strategy. On the one hand, she went to her two staunchest supporters, Heinrich of Mainz and the countess Richardis von Stade, mother of her favorite nun. With their help, she managed to secure permission for the move and entered into protracted negotiations for the Rupertsberg land. On the other hand, she met the monks' resistance with

⁷Ep. 127 in PL 197: 352a.

a paralyzing illness. Lying in bed like a stone, she remained immobile even when Kuno tried to lift her bodily from the spot—a “miracle” that convinced him that he was indeed resisting God’s will. Upon his conversion, she rose from her sickbed at once.

Construction of the new monastery apparently began in 1148; the nuns moved in 1150, and Heinrich of Mainz consecrated their church in 1152. But despite this triumph, the early 1150s were also a time of deep loss for Hildegard. Because of the Rupertsberg’s initial poverty, a few disgruntled nuns left, or refused to enter, the new foundation. And in 1151 her beloved Richardis departed to become abbess of a distant community near Bremen. Hildegard’s memoirs indicate that she felt abandoned and deeply betrayed, like Moses wandering in the desert. Although she appealed to the countess von Stade as well as to two archbishops and the pope himself, she was unable to prevent Richardis’s defection. She did make the young woman feel guilty enough to agree to return to the Rupertsberg, but before Richardis could actually do so, she fell sick and died, leaving Hildegard penitent and grieving.⁸ In 1153 the abbess lost three more protectors. Heinrich of Mainz was deposed from his see on the charge of embezzling church funds—despite Hildegard’s intervention on his behalf—and in the same year Saint Bernard and Pope Eugenius died. Thus Hildegard’s life was by no means serene and carefree while she was composing the jubilant songs of the *Symphonia*. An ailing woman in her fifties, bereaved and ridiculed, she was embroiled in a long struggle for property rights with the monks of St. Disibod, while attempting at the same time to secure the well-being of her fledgling convent.⁹

Composition and Dating of the Symphonia

Hildegard had finished the *Scivias* in 1151, and it was not until seven years later that she began her second visionary work, the

⁸Marianna Schrader and Adelgundis Führkötter, *Die Echtheit des Schrifttums der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen* (Cologne and Graz, 1956): 131–41; Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984): 154–59.

⁹Letter to her congregation, printed as part of an *Explanatio symboli Sancti Athanasii* in PL 197: 1065b–67a.

Book of Life's Merits. It is most unlikely that, during the turmoil of the 1150s, the abbess envisaged a sequel to the *Scivias*, much less the trilogy that she eventually produced. (The third and greatest volume, *On the Activity of God*, was the work of her old age; she finished it in 1173 at the age of seventy-five.) But once she had taken up the heroic labor of writing—which she believed to be unprecedented for a woman—she never ceased. During the 1150s she engaged in a vast correspondence and, with astonishing energy, turned her creative gifts to two widely diverse fields: natural science and music. It is in this period that she began her encyclopedia, variously known as the *Physica*, the *Book of Simple Medicine*, or *Nine Books on the Subtleties of Different Kinds of Creatures*. These creatures include herbs and trees, mammals, reptiles, fishes and birds, “elements,” gems, and metals, each described with reference to its wholesome or toxic properties and its medicinal uses. The work attests to a mind at once systematic, boundlessly inquisitive, and well versed in traditional but not academic medical lore. Its companion volume, the *Book of Compound Medicine* or *Causes and Cures*, deals with physical and mental diseases; it also includes extensive material on sexuality, introduced through discussions of Adam and Eve. These two works are unique in Hildegard's corpus in that they claim no visionary inspiration. Nor did the abbess make any attempt to publish them, although they are listed in several contemporary accounts of her works. These peculiarities may explain their weak manuscript tradition and the confused state of the texts.

Far different is the *Symphonia*, a work that would scarcely be ascribed to the same author if the historical record left room for doubt. As Odo of Soissons's letter reveals, Hildegard was already composing music in the 1140s, and it seems likely that all her songs written before 1151 were incorporated in the *Scivias*. The last “vision” recorded in that work is not really a vision at all: it is the transcription of a celestial concert that the visionary heard when the heavens were opened to her. In the preface to this concluding segment of her work, Hildegard wrote that she had seen a “most luminous sky” in which she heard a “sound like the voice of a multitude singing in harmony, in praise of the celestial

hierarchy.”¹⁰ There follow fourteen songs in honor of the Virgin Mary, the angels, and the saints, although the *Scivias* manuscripts do not include their notation. After the songs comes a dramatic sketch representing a pilgrim soul torn between the devil and a choir of personified Virtues. This sketch is the kernel of an engaging morality play, the *Ordo virtutum* (*Play of Virtues*), which Hildegard at some point expanded and set to music. It is not clear whether she intended the complete *Ordo*, a sort of cantata, as an independent work or as the final portion of her cycle. It follows the *Symphonia* in only one of the two manuscripts. I have not included the play here because a critical edition of the text, a good translation, and a performance edition are all readily available.¹¹

After completing the *Scivias*, Hildegard continued to compose. In the preface to her *Book of Life's Merits* she says that, when she began working on that book in 1158, she had already spent eight years writing the *Symphonia*, the *Subtleties*, a great many epistles, and several minor works.¹² It is usually assumed, therefore, that the *Symphonia* was substantially finished by 1158, although some pieces may have been added later. But its history is not so simple. The *Symphonia* exists in two manuscripts representing very different versions, which will be described in greater detail below (pp. 51–60). The earlier was prepared under Hildegard's supervision around 1175 as a gift for the monks of Villers and contains fifty-seven songs. A revised and enlarged edition, which includes seventy-five songs, was produced at the Rupertsberg scriptorium in the 1180s, not long after the composer's death. To complicate matters, twenty-six of the *Symphonia* pieces also appear, without their music, in a prose miscellany that has hitherto gone unnoticed. Cardinal J.-B. Pitra published this text in his *Analecta sacra* (1882) under the misleading title of “Epilogue to

¹⁰*Scivias* III.13, pp. 614–15.

¹¹“The Text of the *Ordo virtutum*,” ed. Peter Dronke in *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1970): 180–92; trans. Peter Dronke in record liner for *Hildegard von Bingen: Ordo virtutum*, recorded by Sequentia (Harmonia mundi 20395/96); music ed. Audrey Davidson, *The “Ordo virtutum” of Hildegard of Bingen* (Kalamazoo, 1985).

¹²Hildegard of Bingen, *Liber vitae meritum* [*Book of Life's Merits*], Pitra 7–8.

the Life of St. Rupert,” because the first three pieces in it are addressed to that saint and it follows his *vita* in the manuscripts. In a footnote to this compilation, however, Pitra shrewdly characterized it as a “varied and dramatic program of lyrics, songs, and colloquies which the virgins of Bingen, led by Hildegard in ecstatic fervor, were accustomed to perform outside of choir on their titular feast day.”¹³

Ecstasy aside, this description is a plausible one. We know that the *Ordo virtutum* was intended for performance by Hildegard’s nuns, and after that artistic triumph, she may well have prepared additional if less ambitious “dramatic programs” to enhance the monastic liturgy. I suggest that she composed her songs not to fulfill a conceptual scheme but to suit particular occasions, integrating them with suitable homilies, prophecies, and dramatic exchanges. Such liturgical programs could have been recorded by someone at the time, perhaps by Volmar or one of the nuns, and later arranged in a rather haphazard compilation by an editor who wished to assemble Hildegard’s “collected works.” Another little-known text, her series of homilies on the Gospels, appears to have had a similar genesis.¹⁴ Because the so-called “Epilogue” miscellany has received virtually no attention to date, I have offered some further speculations about its construction and dating in an appendix (pp. 68–73 below).

To summarize my findings, I believe the miscellany indicates at least four new conclusions about the *Symphonia*. In the first place, it suggests that Hildegard did not initially plan to compose a song cycle any more than she planned to write a trilogy. Her music had its origins in the concrete liturgical life of the Rupertsberg, and only when she had composed a substantial body of lyric—probably in the late 1150s—did she decide to collect all her songs and arrange them in a systematic order. After making this decision, she continued to compose new pieces that were incorporated in the cycle only after her death.

Secondly, the miscellany may enable us—very tentatively—to

¹³*Ad Vitam S. Ruperti Epilogus*, Pitra 358–68; quotation, p. 358.

¹⁴*Expositiones quorundam evangeliorum*, Pitra 245–327.

distinguish early, middle, and late periods in Hildegard's oeuvre. By 1151 she had written the fourteen pieces that appear in the *Scivias* and all or part of the *Ordo virtutum*. This earliest layer of composition, including twelve songs in honor of the celestial hierarchy (nos. 29–34, 37–40, and 55–56), shares with the *Scivias* its cryptic and elliptical style. There is no overlap between these fourteen pieces and the twenty-six recorded in the miscellany. Since various segments in the latter suggest a date in the late 1150s, these twenty-six pieces may define a middle period that includes most of the Marian songs and a hymn and sequence to the Holy Spirit. There remain over thirty pieces that appear in one or both of the *Symphonia* manuscripts. Among these pieces are several long and masterful compositions honoring local saints (Matthias, Eucharius, Maximin, and Ursula) which can plausibly be assigned to Hildegard's latest period. It should be stressed, however, that the evidence does not permit conclusive dating of any individual piece.

In the third place, the song-texts in the miscellany differ in significant ways from those in the *Symphonia*. Not only are they embedded in a prose context and copied without notation; they also lack textual cues, such as doxologies and alleluias, which would assign them to particular liturgical genres. It is possible that, if the miscellany segments were transcribed from actual celebrations, this information was omitted as superfluous to a worshipping community that already knew the music and the appropriate rubrics from performance. On the other hand, it may be that Hildegard formalized the genre designations—and tidied up her texts—only when she had her music copied out for a distant community that would have been unfamiliar with the Rupertsberg's distinctive liturgical style.

This possibility leads me to a final speculation. When Hildegard's collected songs were arranged in the final version of the *Symphonia*, did her editors include *all* her lyrical compositions, or were some of them left out? It is a peculiar fact that the second *Symphonia* manuscript (c. 1180–1190) adds twenty pieces to the first, but omits the short antiphons “O frondens virga” (no. 15) and “Laus Trinitati” (no. 26). These two lyrics may have been

deleted for artistic reasons, as Peter Dronke suggests.¹⁵ But at the time this manuscript was prepared the abbeess was no longer alive to delete them, and it may be that their music had simply been lost or forgotten. In fact, it is unlikely that the two *Symphonia* manuscripts, since they differ widely in structure and content, were copied from the same bound exemplar. (The second could not have been copied from the first, which was already at Villers.) Perhaps the texts—with or without their music—had previously been transcribed only on loose sheets of parchment. If the compiler of the miscellany strung some of these sheets together more or less awkwardly, producing an impromptu record of Hildegard as liturgist, the compiler of the second *Symphonia* manuscript may have sifted through them more judiciously to isolate her songs.

In that case, however, a few songlike compositions could have escaped notice, as “O frondens virga” evidently did. This possibility becomes more likely if we assume that the music was not originally written above the text, but learned orally and performed by the nuns from memory.¹⁶ The miscellany, in fact, contains at least four lyrical passages that are thematically and stylistically very close to the *Symphonia* pieces, although no music for them is extant. I propose that these passages represent either “lost” songs or lyrics that Hildegard had originally meant to set to music, but never did. Because of their poetic quality, I have chosen to edit them at the end of the *Symphonia* as “songs without music.” The four compositions are “O Verbum Patris,” “O Fili dilectissime,” “O factura Dei,” and “O magna res.”

Finally, a word on the title is in order. *Symphonia* and [*h*]armonia are overlapping terms, and there is no modern English equivalent that has the same range. The word *symphonia* was used very freely in the Middle Ages and could mean either melody or harmony or simply music in general, whether vocal or instrumental. For late antique theorists such as Cassiodorus and for

¹⁵Peter Dronke, “The Composition of Hildegard of Bingen’s *Symphonia*,” *Sacris Erudiri* 19 (1969–1970): 389.

¹⁶Cf. Leo Treitler, “Oral, Written, and Literate Process in the Transmission of Medieval Music,” *Speculum* 56 (1981): 471–91.

Isidore of Seville, a *symphonia* was a consonant interval (fourth, fifth, or octave) as opposed to a dissonant one; the term was later applied to organum or early harmonized chant. It could also indicate at least two different instruments: a kind of timbrel or hand drum and, more commonly, the hurdy-gurdy used by minstrels.¹⁷ In Hildegard's title, however, the most general meaning is probably the one intended. *Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum* might be rendered as "The Harmonious Music of Heavenly Mysteries."

The Symphonia in the Monastic Liturgy

There is no doubt that Hildegard intended her music for Mass and the Divine Office at her monastery. Guibert of Gembloux, her friend and secretary after Volmar's death, wrote that after she had enjoyed the sweetness of celestial harmony in her visions, she would "make the same measures—more pleasing than ordinary human music—to be sung publicly in church, with sequences (*prosis*) composed in praise of God and in honor of the saints."¹⁸ Some of this liturgical singing even took place beyond the Rupertsberg. Abbot Kuno, once he had forgiven Hildegard for leaving St. Disibod, showed his good will toward her by soliciting revelations about his monks' patron saint: "If God has shown you anything about our patron, blessed Disibod, I ask you to let me know, so that my brethren and I may not hesitate to give him fervent praise for it."¹⁹ In a similar way Heloise had tried to make peace with Abelard after their quarrel by asking him to compose hymns for her nuns. Like Abelard, Hildegard met the request, supplying an antiphon, a responsory, and a sequence (nos. 41, 42, 45). It also seems likely that the pieces honoring saints Matthias, Eucharius, Maximin, and Boniface (nos. 50–54) were written on commission, as all these saints were venerated in the nearby city of Trier,

¹⁷Edgar de Bruyne, *Etudes d'esthétique médiévale* (Bruges, 1946), 1: 323–31; Giulio Cattin, *Music of the Middle Ages*, vol. 1, trans. Steven Botterill (Cambridge, 1984): 127, 168–69, 171, 174, 178–79.

¹⁸Ep. 16, Pitra 385–86.

¹⁹Ep. 38 in PL 197: 203b.

where Hildegard had many connections and where she gave a public sermon in 1160.²⁰ Some of her music may even have been sung at the distant monastery of Villers in Brabant. Around 1175 the abbess sent these Cistercians a copy of her *Book of Life's Merits* as a gift, and she attached the oldest text of the *Symphonia* complete with neumes.²¹

Monastic worship is ordered around the Divine Office, which consists of seven daily "hours" or services of common prayer plus the night service of matins. The basic structure of these services is set forth in chapters eight through eighteen of the Benedictine Rule. Each hour consists in varying proportions of psalmody, lessons from Scripture, and assorted texts of prayer and praise set to music—canticles, antiphons, responsories, and hymns.²² The three Gospel canticles are fixed texts, but the other items vary with each day and hour and constitute a vast corpus of medieval chant. The genre most fully represented in the *Symphonia*, as in the chant repertoire generally, is the *antiphon*. Forty-three of Hildegard's compositions, well over half, belong to this category, which is related to the practice of psalmody.

In standard medieval usage an antiphon, or freely composed text with melody, would be sung before and after each psalm in the Office. Because the Office was designed by Saint Benedict so as to cover the full cycle of 150 psalms every week, this style of psalmody required an enormous number of antiphons. Matins in the monastic usage includes as many as twelve psalms, each with its antiphon. Vespers has up to five, as does the early morning office of lauds; and each of the lesser hours has three. As the antiphon is liturgically subordinate to the psalm, it is usually a brief, unpretentious composition suited to the scriptural theme or the feast of the day. It takes its name from the practice of antiphonal singing: psalm verses would be chanted alternately by two

²⁰Dronke, "Composition" 390.

²¹Letter from the monks of Villers, Ep. 20, Pitra 394.

²²For the discussion of liturgical genres I am indebted to Willi Apel, *Gregorian Chant* (Bloomington, 1958): 13–23; Richard Hoppin, *Medieval Music* (New York, 1978): chap. 4; and Andrew Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office* (Toronto, 1982): 26–43, 50–80.

half-choirs, while the antiphon was sung by the full choir to a simple tune related to the reciting tone. (In more elaborate performance, it might be sung between verses as well as before and after the psalm.) In Hildegard's cycle, the simple psalm antiphon is best represented by a series for matins on the feast of Saint Ursula (no. 63). Other examples are "Karitas habundat" (no. 25), "O mirum admirandum" (no. 41), and a group of short antiphons for the Virgin (nos. 11–15).

Not all antiphons were tied to psalmody, however. It became customary to insert somewhat longer, more elaborate antiphons after the Gospel canticles that concluded the major hours, especially the Magnificat at vespers and the Benedictus at lauds. The Marian devotion of the Middle Ages expressed itself richly in these longer antiphons, a few of which are still in use (such as the "Salve regina" and "Alma Redemptoris Mater"). Hildegard's most complex antiphon to the Virgin, "O tu illustrata" (no. 23), belongs to this category of "free" or votive antiphons. Still others, such as "O gloriosissimi lux vivens angeli" (no. 29) and "O spec-tabiles viri" (no. 31), although not addressed to Mary, are also independent devotional pieces. Of Hildegard's forty-three antiphons, fourteen appear to be votive antiphons, for in the manuscripts they lack the *differentia* or cadence that would connect them with a psalm tone.

The second most frequent item is the *responsory*, represented by eighteen pieces and intended primarily for matins. This service, in the most solemn monastic usage, consists of three sections called nocturns, each nocturn including a group of psalms or canticles with their antiphons followed by four lessons from Scripture. After each lesson is sung a responsory—a freely composed, musically complex piece that alternates solo verses with choral response. Unlike antiphons, responsories tend to give several notes and sometimes highly embellished melodic phrases to each syllable so that the trained soloists and choirs can display their skill. The textual form is also complex and allows for many structural variants. One very common form can be illustrated by Hildegard's solemn responsory, "Rex noster promptus" (no. 59). In the diagram below, R represents the *respond*, composed of

three sections or periods (a, b, and c); its final period, R_c , is called the *repetenda* or refrain. V signifies the verse, and D is the short form of the doxology ("Glory be to the Father"). V and D are sung to the same melody.

choir R_a with solo intonation to*	Rex noster* promptus est suscipere sanguinem innocentum.
choir R_b	Unde angeli concinunt et in laudibus sonant.
choir R_c	Sed nubes super eundem sanguinem plangunt.
solo V	Tirannus autem in gravi somno mortis propter maliciam suam suffocatus est.
choir R_c	Sed nubes super eundem sanguinem plangunt.
solo D	Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui sancto.
choir R_c	Sed nubes super eundem sanguinem plangunt.

Thus the overall form is $R_{abc}-V-R_c-D-R_c$, a form that characterizes the last responsory in each nocturn. In simpler forms the doxology may be omitted, giving the pattern $R_{abc}-V-R_c$, as in "O quam preciosa" (no. 22) and "O vos angeli" (no. 30).

In addition to antiphons and responsories, the *Symphonia* includes fourteen longer pieces that are artistically among Hildegard's most accomplished. According to the manuscripts, four of these pieces are hymns (nos. 17, 27, 50, and 65), although in its musical form "Mathias sanctus" (no. 50) is actually a sequence. Medieval hymns and sequences were normally two distinct genres. *Hymns*, which grew out of early Christian congregational singing, were sung at various points in the Office but never at Mass. A typical twelfth-century hymn was a song in which each stanza followed the same metrical pattern and rhyme scheme and

was sung to the same relatively simple tune. *Sequences* developed in the Carolingian period and underwent a complex musical and poetic evolution.²³ Composed by the thousands, they were to be sung between the Alleluia and the Gospel at Mass. Classical sequences, like those of Notker, are composed of paired versicles rather than stanzas. Following the principle of *strophic responsion*, the two versicles in each pair have the same number of syllables and are sung to the same tune, but the melody and the textual form change from pair to pair. The Easter sequence "Victimae paschali" is a well-known example. By the twelfth century, however, most new sequences were being composed in stanzaic form and followed a set meter and rhyme scheme, even though their music retained the older strophic responsion.

Hildegard, a maverick, preferred the archaic nonmetrical sequence, but exceeded the Carolingian composers in irregularity. In fact, her forms are so free that it is often hard to tell a sequence from a hymn. The *Symphonia* rubrics identify seven pieces as sequences: nos. 20, 28, 45, 49, 53, 54, and 64. But if we add "Mathias sanctus" (no. 50) to the list, on musical grounds we would have to delete "O Ecclesia" (no. 64), as it shows no sign of strophic responsion. In these two exceptional cases, the musical form may have been at odds with the liturgical use. "O Ierusalem" (no. 49) begins stanzaically like a hymn, continues with paired strophes like a sequence, and ends in totally free form.²⁴ Three other pieces—"O viridissima virga" (no. 19), "O dulcissime amator" (no. 57), and "O Pater omnium" (no. 58)—follow neither the hymn nor the sequence form but are through-

²³On origins of the form see Richard Crocker, "The Troping Hypothesis," *Musical Quarterly* 52 (1966): 183-203; Peter Dronke, "The Beginnings of the Sequence" (1965), rpt. in *The Medieval Poet and His World* (Rome, 1984): 115-44; Stephen Ryle, "The Sequence—Reflections on Literature and Liturgy," in Francis Cairns, ed., *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* 1976 (Liverpool, 1977): 171-82. Richard Crocker offers more sustained treatment in "The Sequence," in Wulf Arlt, Ernst Lichtenhahn, and Hans Oesch, eds., *Gattungen der Musik in Einzeldarstellungen* (Bern, 1973), 1: 269-322, and *The Early Medieval Sequence* (Berkeley, 1977).

²⁴Ludwig Bronarski, *Die Lieder der heiligen Hildegard* (Leipzig, 1922): 31-36.

composed, that is, without melodic repetition. Numbers 57 and 58 are designated in the manuscripts as “*Symphonia virginum*” and “*Symphonia viduarum*”—love songs to Christ meant to be sung respectively by virgins and widows, the two types of women in the nunnery. Hildegard may have composed these songs as independent devotional pieces, not connected directly with the Mass or Office.

Finally, the *Symphonia* includes two short pieces for Mass: a setting of the Kyrie and the alleluia-verse “*O virga mediatrix*” (no. 18), to be sung in place of a sequence before the Gospel. The cycle thus includes a total of seventy-seven pieces. All are reproduced here except for the Kyrie, which of course has no independent text. Under no. 63, however, I have grouped together the eight short antiphons for matins of Saint Ursula, because textually they make up a single narrative. This grouping explains the discrepancy between the seventy-seven pieces listed in the older edition and the sixty-nine numbered in this volume.

Aesthetics and Theology of Music

In her memoirs Hildegard recalled, with her characteristic blend of diffidence, pride, and wonder, how she began to compose: “untaught by anyone, I composed and chanted plainsong in praise of God and the saints, although I had never studied either musical notation or any kind of singing.”²⁵ Contemporaries who knew her music were taken with its beauty and its strangeness. Dieter of Echternach, one of her hagiographers, marveled at the “chant of surpassingly sweet melody” that she created “with amazing harmony” (*mirabili symphonia*).²⁶ And Volmar delighted in her *vox inaudite melodie*—strange and unheard-of music, with a gesture toward those unheard melodies which Keats would claim are sweetest.²⁷ Hildegard could say of her musical gift, as she said of the *Scivias*, that she acquired it “not through human

²⁵Vita S. Hildegardis in PL 197: 104a; Dronke, *Women Writers* 232.

²⁶Vita 2.14 in PL 197: 101b.

²⁷Ep. 8, Pitra 346.

lips, nor through human intelligence and ingenuity, nor through a desire for human composition," but through God alone.²⁸ Because of such direct claims to divine inspiration, the *Symphonia* is to medieval hymnography what "Kubla Khan" is to Romantic poetry. Whatever conscious artistry has done or left undone, the inspiration is avowed as Other.

Both Volmar and Dieter, as well as Hildegard herself, mentioned her music in connection with another project, the *Lingua ignota* or "Unknown Language," which also engaged her during the 1150s.²⁹ This exceptional work, a glossary of some nine hundred invented names for earthly and celestial beings, has its own "unknown alphabet" of twenty-three characters. It includes both a liturgical vocabulary and terms for every aspect of daily life in the monastery, such as the names of all objects in the wardrobe, the herb garden, and the scriptorium. The *Lingua ignota* might have been a kind of secret language for the initiated, used to create an atmosphere of mystical intensity in the convent. The fact that Hildegard and her associates spoke of it in the same breath with her music suggests that these works served a common function. Both were revealed from heaven and had arcane significance, and both could be shared by the privileged congregation that was striving to imitate the life of heaven on earth. A few words from the *Lingua* appear in Hildegard's antiphon "O orzchis Ecclesia" (no. 68), and in one manuscript the letters of the unknown alphabet are written on musical staves along with her Kyrie and "O virga mediatrix" (no. 18).³⁰

Hildegard understood music in what would now be called a mystical context, although in the twelfth century hers was a widely shared understanding. When she wrote, in a celebrated apologia for music, that the very soul is symphonic (*symphionalis est anima*),³¹ she was appealing to an insight as old as Pythagoras, transmitted to the medieval world through Boethius's treatise *On*

²⁸Scivias, Protestificatio, p. 3.

²⁹*Liber vitae meritorum*, preface, Pitra 7; letter to Pope Anastasius IV, Ep. 2 in PL 197: 152d.

³⁰Vienna, Nationalbibliothek Cod. 1016, fols. 118v–119r (13th c.).

³¹Ep. 47 in PL 197: 221c.