

DIGRESSION OR DISCOURSE? WILLIAM OF NEWBURGH'S GHOST STORIES AS URBAN LEGENDS.

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Abstract:

William of Newburgh's inclusion of four ghost stories in his *Historia rerum Anglicarum* has been noted by various scholars. However, the question of why William would choose to insert these seemingly digressive tales into a specific position - one which is lauded for its historical reliability -- has not been adequately addressed. Instead, scholars studying the chronicle have focused on their folkloric or popular roots, their function as religious exempla, or their anthropological significance in relation to twelfth-century views of life and death. Their narratological function in the chronicle as a whole has not been studied. This article seeks to initiate that discussion, tying William's four tales of the supernatural to the history into which they are inserted. Reading them through the lens of urban legend study. Their four-fold display of a cycle of error, loss, expiation, and redemption correlates to William's descriptions of the events during the reign of Richard I which surround the ghost narratives. The interplay of *historia* and *fabula* shows the craftsmanship and artistry of William of Newburgh's chronicle.

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