Living in the Palaces of Love: Love and the Soul in a Vision of St. Aldegund of Maubeuge (ca. 635–684)

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Abess Aldegund of Maubeuge, in dictating her visions to the cleric Subnius in her later years, recalled a vision she had experienced in her youth. She saw herself entering a heavenly mansion, richly bejeweled and “steeped” with Christ’s “sweet odor.” The vision had made a great impression on her. She accredited it with having matured her spiritual understanding, for having first misunderstood the vision’s meaning, she now understood it, “the scales having fallen from her eyes.” Yet as historians we are not as fortunate
As Aldegund claimed to be. Many centuries removed from the events of the seventh century, the scales of subsequently imposed interpretation obscure our own vision of the abbess’s experience. For between Aldegund’s recollection of her formative vision and the written account that has come down to us, much time elapsed in which there was both opportunity and pious motive for revisiting and recasting the vision’s meaning and for interpreting its potent central image. Yet Aldegund’s description of her celestial mansion is like a penitimento: we can glimpse beneath later editing and sensibilities underlying images that are the remnant of earlier ways of thinking and earlier associations from a time when what passed for a “Christian” image was not rigorously defined. Aldegund’s vision exposes the great cultural richness that the image of the celestial mansion held both for classical writers and Christians in late antiquity.

But first let me introduce the visionary. Aldegund of Maubeuge came from the highest Frankish nobility. Her father and uncles held


*On Aldegund’s family and her religious and cultural environment, see, in addition to the works cited above, Alain Dierkens,* *Abbayes et Chapitres*
powerful positions at the Merovingian courts of Chlothar II and Dagobert I. However, when Aldegund was young, her father, Waldegbert, retired from court to pursue the ascetic life. Soon his whole family followed in his footsteps. Aldegund’s older sister married but then retired to a convent. As the youngest, Aldegund was left at home but on her sister’s prompting she too conceived the desire to enter the religious life. Even before she renounced the world, however, Aldegund was unusual. She had constant dreams and visions. Many decades later when Subnious of Nivelles investigated her and recorded her visions, she told him of a vision experienced in her earliest youth. Subnious recorded it as follows:

While she was still in her carnal condition, and still in her parents’ home, the blessed girl learned in a vision of the high measure of riches which she would have. Marveling at the vision’s showing, an unaccustomed vision beyond what could be believed, she did not know its [the enigmatic vision’s] meaning. Then, reflecting on Christ’s secrets, she found herself led to the gate of a great house supported on seven columns ornamented with writing, and she looked inside at the bright ornaments and the fragrant aroma, wonderfully steeped in the sweetness of Christ’s odor. Thereafter she began to see more clearly, the scales now having fallen from her eyes, and she began to know that a celestial gift was promised to her by him who says: “Come to me all ye who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest.”


1Vita Aldegundis 1.5. See n. 1.
As presented in her earliest vita, Aldegund’s vision expressed a moment of personal and intellectual transformation. A girl who at first understood the riches in her vision as literal came to understand those riches as metaphorical: she was to have a celestial not a terrestrial gift. This transformed understanding occurred as she entered Christ’s palace, smelled Christ’s odor, and meditated on Christ’s secrets. This was clearly the palace of Aldegund’s heavenly bridegroom, Christ. Yet other elements in the palace’s description suggested other, interconnected meanings to the reader. The palace had seven columns, which a Christian audience would have immediately recognized as an allusion to the house of Wisdom. Proverbs 9:1 states: “Wisdom has built her house, she has set up her seven pillars” (RSV). It was appropriate to the overall significance of the vision that Aldegund’s newfound spiritual understanding came in the house of Wisdom. In medieval representations Wisdom’s palace was generally presented from an external rather than internal perspective. The personification of Wisdom, Sophia, sat enthroned atop her columns with a confluence of rivers at her feet.

Yet the celestial palace Aldegund entered was far more detailed, one might say far more symbolically furnished, than the terse scriptural and medieval iconography of Wisdom’s house. Aldegund’s vision of the palace encompassed sensations beyond the purely visual. She registered a sense of space, an awareness of emotion, a sensation of familiarity, and a level of comfort. She did not simply see the mansion; she experienced it, participating in its space by entering into it. As Aldegund entered through the great gate, she encountered a space shining with fine ornaments and fragrant with Christ’s odor. In the shining interior she smelled masculine, not feminine perfume: Christ the bridegroom, not Sophia. While Christ and Sophia were theologically

4Wisdom’s house was also described in Sirach 24:4: “I dwelt in high places, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud” (RSV). On later medieval visions of heavenly Wisdom as Sophia, see Ernst Benz, Die Vision: Erfahrungsformen und Bilderwelt (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1969), 574–90.
associated even at this early date, the masculinity of Christ was an essential element in the vision’s overall meaning. Aldegund’s entry into Christ’s palace suggested a connubial relationship. Aldegund’s celestial home was the metaphorical substitute for the riches and security of a terrestrial marriage. Thus while Aldegund’s vision presented to the reader an explicit reference to Wisdom’s abode, there was clearly a greater complexity to Aldegund’s experience of her mansion than is discernible at first glance. In this article, I argue that Aldegund’s vision of the celestial mansion is not drawn from scriptural images of the mansions of the afterlife, but rather the philosophic palace of Love. In this palace we witness a confluence of images of Christ. For while Christ’s palace is represented as Wisdom’s house, Christ’s palace is also the palace of the God of Love. The inspiration for this palace is found in Hellenistic literary depictions of Cupid’s abode.

**THE CELESTIAL MANSION**

The celestial mansion was a common image in early medieval visions. Medieval and modern scholars typically consider the image


[2] Other popular tropes for heaven included the paradisum (garden), influenced by descriptions of the classical locus amoenus (pleasance), and the bejeweled city-scape of the heavenly Jerusalem as described in the Book of Revelation. On the locus amoenus, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), 192–200; on the heavenly garden, see Benz, 371ff., and Claude Carozzi,
of the heavenly mansion in the light of John 14:2: “In my Father’s house there are many mansions” (RSV). Originally these Johannine mansions were indebted to an eschatological understanding of the temple of Jerusalem, but in late antiquity the image was most commonly read as the celestial abode of the righteous. In the Gallican liturgy, prayers for the dead expressed the hope that the soul would reach the heavenly mansions in the afterlife. In some recensions of the liturgy, the inhabitants of the mansions included Moses, Elijah, and Lazarus. An important feature of this tradition was the plurality of mansions; the Gospel of John asserts that there are many mansions. Later commentators indicated that having many mansions reflected degrees of spiritual merit in heaven. Pope Gregory commented that “if there were no distinction of rewards in that blessed abode, there


“The Te Domine Sancte prayer as preserved by Caesarius of Arles solicits “maneatque in mansionibus sanctorum” (Damien Sicard, La liturgie de la mort dans l’église latine des origines à la réforme carolingienne, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 63 [Münster, Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1978], 266. On Moses, Elijah, and Lazarus as inhabitants, see variants of the prayer cited by Sicard, 268–69. Later in the Gelasian V (Verona) variant, the Suscipe prayer associated the mansions with the heavenly Jerusalem: “Suscipe domine servum tuum illum in aeternum habitaculum et da ei requiem et regnum id est hierusalem caelestem” (Sicard, 316).
should be but one dwelling-place, not many. As it is, the dwelling-places in heaven are numerous in order to keep the ranks of good souls distinct and allow them to enjoy the companionship of those of like merits. Since mansions were assigned according to spiritual merit, Gregory surmised that holy men of equal merit who died on the same day would dwell together in the same mansion. Indeed, the righteous were bundled into mansions just as sinners were bundled with like-sinners into tares to be burned in hellfire. Whether these mansions are viewed as single dwellings or communal, whether constructed of real bricks or metaphorical ones, the overriding similarity in all these accounts is the perspective from which these mansions were viewed by the visionary and presented to the reader. The mansions of the afterlife were seen from afar: from across a burning river, as in Pope Gregory’s famous account of a soldier’s vision, or at a distance, as in the vision of the sixth-century Sunniulf of Randan. The visionary does not see what is inside. The mansion seen in Aldegund’s vision, however, presents an interior view. She enters through a great gate to view the splendors within. Aldegund is not the only one to have had a vision of this type. In the sixth century, Abbot Salvius (later bishop of Albi) reported being led “through a door of very great light into that dwelling place (illud habitaculum) in which all the floors shone like gold and silver and with an indescribable

10Gregory, Dialogues 4.36.
11Gregory, Dialogues 4.37. “Ibi mansiones diversorum singulacae magnitudine lucis pleneae.” Maria Pia Ciccarese, Visioni dell’aldilà in occidente. Fonti modelli testi (Florence: Nardini Editore, 1987), 146 n. 9, notes that when subsequent visionary literature mentions a plurality of celestial habitations, rather than a single palace, it is due to the influence of this Gregorian passage. In the Gelasian (Verona) liturgy, the Suscipe prayer asks that the soul be received in aeternum habitaculum (Sicard, 316).
12Gregory, Dialogues 4.36; Gregory of Tours, History of the Franks 4.33, ed. Bruno Krusch in MGH, SRM, 1.1 (Hanover, 1885), 166.
light.” The dwelling was huge and crowded with holy people, and Salvius remembered a sweet scent wafting through the interior that nourished and sustained him. In another case, Valerius of Bierzo described the vision of a seventh-century Spanish monk named Bonellus who was awestruck when he was lead to “a little cell constructed from the purest gold and shining precious stones and gems and pearls with various brilliants.” We should not be misled by his calling this place a little cell, for the wonder of its interior construction inspired awe and amazement. The closed, secret little cell bespoke intimacy in a place that was otherwise overwhelming. In these examples we have a very particular type of vision, one in which the visionary enters into a marvelous interior. Yet scholars have generally linked these descriptions of splendid interiors with mansions seen exteriorly. For example, in her study of Gregory of Tours’s contribution to the literature of medieval visions, Maria Pia Ciccarese draws attention to the Book of Enoch (1 Enoch) as a previously unnoticed source for Salvius’s vision. The cited passage in Enoch describes

13 Gregory of Tours, History of the Franks 7.1: “Deinde per portam luce ista clariorem introductus sum in illud habitaculum, in quo omne pavimentum erat quasi aurum argentumque renitens, lux ineffabilis.”

14 Cellulam ex auro purissimo lapidibusque pretiosis atque diversis coruscantibus gemis et margaritis constructam.” Valerius of Bierzo’s account of the vision of the monk Bonellus is discussed by Manuel C. Diaz y Diaz, Visiones del Mas Alla en Galicia durante la Alta Edad Meda (Santiago de Compostella: Biblioteca da Galicia, 1985), 33–39, with Latin text and Spanish translation, 53–57.

mansions seen exteriorly with tongues of fire springing from open
doors—it does not help us understand the motif of entering into a
bejeweled interior. As Gregory described it, Salvius’s vision embraced
an interior perspective as he was led ever inward. Similarly Bonellus’s
visionary entry into a gem-filled cell, although likewise presented to
him as his promised habitation in the afterlife, was influenced by
sources other than the strictly scriptural.\(^6\)

The problem with cross-referencing scripturally inspired mansions
of the afterlife with visions in which the visionary takes possession of
the celestial mansion is that the sources of inspiration are confused. In
Latin there are no clear terminological distinctions between celestial
residences and earthly ones: they are variously described as \textit{mansiones},
\textit{habitacula}, and \textit{cellula}. However, mansions seen in early medieval
visions \textit{do} hold to a rigorous distinction. Mansions viewed from the
exterior are the abodes of the deceased assigned according to merit.
These mansions are the \textit{destination}: the goal of the soul. As yet, they
are generally seen only from afar and they are inhabited only when the
Christian passes into the afterlife. The Book of Enoch and the Book of
Revelation describe these mansions and, mediated through Gregory’s
\textit{Dialogues}, they became a commonplace in medieval visions. By con-
trast, the mansion into which one enters through a door, the mansion
viewed from within, is the mystic’s lifetime abode. This celestial
mansion, while certainly the anticipated destination in the afterlife,
was also a present habitation the spiritually minded must experience
in order to better understand themselves.\(^7\) For both Aldegund and

\(^6\) Diaz y Diaz cross-references the bejeweled interior of Bonellus’s cell to
descriptions of the mansions of the afterlife in hagiographic works known in
Spain, \textit{Visiones}, 53 n. 64. Interestingly, one of the works cited by Diaz y Diaz,
the \textit{Passion of St. Sebastian}, described the bejeweled interior as a dining room
\textit{(triclinium)}, which along with the vestibule was the most opulent room in
a Roman house.

\(^7\) Salvius learned that he had duties yet to perform, Bonellus learned that
his abandonment of the ascetic life would cause him to lose his promised
prize, and Aldegund learned that she would be wedded to the God of Love.
Salvius, their mansions were pervaded by a sweet scent. Aldegund identified the scent as Christ's own odor; for Salvius it was a scent that nourished and sustained him many days after his vision. Scriptural sources lacked the intimacy and sense of homecoming that characterized these envisioned interiors. The inspiration for the abodes of Salvius, Aldegund, and Bonellus was far removed from the hard, shiny metals that flashed out from the heavenly Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation.

Since scriptural references are inadequate, we must look to other sources to find the warm associations early medieval visionaries found in these interiors. The interior design of this palace owed its inspiration to more contemporary ideas than it did to Scripture's futuristic imagination, for Aldegund, Salvius, and Bonellus were not entering mansions of the righteous at the end of their lives, but the palace of Love. To fully appreciate its design we must first examine the architecture of real houses owned by the élite in late antiquity.

**Entering the Palace of Love**

Many descriptions of home interiors and examples of domestic architecture have survived from Roman times. Avid builders, the Hellenistic Greeks and the Romans lavished particular care on their homes, and as is still the case today, domestic ornamentation in the Mediterranean world privileged interiors over exteriors. Among the wealthier classes these opulent interiors can be described only as gaudy. For while Roman civic architecture emphasized proportion and

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clean-cut design, residential architecture was a different matter. The desire for opulence was served less by architectural line than by richly colored paintings in hallways and colorful mosaics in public areas such as the vestibule and dining room (triclinium). Statuary cluttered the central spaces of the home, providing middle-distance vistas as one looked through the length of the house. The interior was a jumble of deep, rich colors, and ornaments of silver, gold, bronze, and painted stone.

Although it is possible that something of this style of interior survived in Gaul in the villas owned by Aldegund's family, we can say more confidently that details of such splendid interiors were communicated through written sources. Dating from second-century North Africa, Apuleius of Madaura's description of Cupid's palace in his *Metamorphoses* is a significant example of an imagined Roman interior. Apuleius adapted an ancient folktale to tell the story of a beautiful maiden named Psyche (the soul), who was secretly married to the young god Cupid (Love). Rapt up to his palace, she was attended in her every need by invisible servants. The palace's marvelous interior, "fashioned as if for a god," was clearly modeled after the Hellenized architecture of Apuleius's North Africa. Apuleius described it as follows:

In many cities, Roman law confined the homes of even the rich to a cramped urban space. When city boundaries could be circumvented, Romans built oversized monstrosities similar to those marring today's suburban landscapes. Aesthetics of proportion, however, were achieved by trompe-d'oeils and other illusory means (see Thébert, 313–409).

Apuleius of Madaura, a second-century "middle" Platonist, wrote a number of philosophical works. His *Metamorphoses*, often known as *The Golden Ass*, was superficially a ribald tale about a young man's transformation into an ass, but was essentially a religious tale in disguise (Rudolph Helm, ed., *Apulei Platonici Madaurensis Metamorphoseon libri XI* [Leipzig, 1931]). Modern scholarship on Apuleius's work and its influence on later literature is immense (see the bibliography in P. G. Walsh's introduction and translation [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994] and James Tatum's *Apuleius and the Golden Ass* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979].
a princely edifice, wrought and built, not by the art or hand of man, but by the mighty power of a god: and you would judge at the first entry therein that it were some pleasant and worthy mansion for the powers of heaven. For the vaults above were curiously carved out of cedar and ivory, propped and undermined with pillars of gold; the walls covered and sealed with silver; divers sorts of beasts were graven and carved, that seemed to encounter with those who entered in: all things were so curiously and finely wrought that it seemed either to be the work of some demigod, or God himself, that put all these beasts into silver. The pavement was all of precious stone, divided and cut from one another, whereon was carved divers kinds of pictures ... every part and angle of the house was so well adorned by precious stones and inestimable treasure there and the walls were so solidly built up with great blocks of gold, that glittered and shone in such sort that the chambers, porches, and doors gave out the light of day as it had been the sun.  

Apuleius did not describe Cupid's palace from its exterior but noted the splendor of its interior "on first entry." Modeled on the entryway of a Roman villa, the entrance to Cupid's palace was described by Apuleius as a vestibule, one of the two most splendid rooms in a Roman house (the other being the dining room, the *triclinium*). One of the purposes of the vestibule was to awe the Roman aristocrat's clients who, in all likelihood, would never penetrate the house beyond that first gaze. The realism and movement of the animal statuary

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encountered by Psyche reminds us of the mythological scenes so popular in Hellenistic and Roman statuary. The pavement or floors adorned with precious stones echo the mosaics found in particularly elegant Roman vestibules. The homes of the well-to-do also included fine wooden vaulting and columns as standard features. Apuleius wrote that the openings in the house, the porticos and doors gave out light "as it had been the sun," an image so standard in Hellenistic literature that it made its way into the Book of Revelation.

For Psyche, this was the palace of her bridegroom Cupid, the god of Love. The allegorical love story was popular in Christian as well as pagan culture and the description of Cupid's celestial mansion had many imitators in late imperial court literature.

THE WEDDING-SONG: PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN EPIPHALAMIA

Cupid made his most effortless transition into Christian culture through court poetry. In late antiquity, marriage poems (epithalamia) accompanied the nuptial celebration of prominent Romans, pagan and Christian alike. That these marriages cemented political alliances between hardly nubile partners stretched poets to saccharine heights of fancy.22 Perhaps the best known in Gaul was the marriage song prepared by Claudian to celebrate the union of the adolescent Emperor Honorius with Maria, the daughter of his general Stilicho.23 In terms entirely conventional to the genre, Claudian assembled for this Christian


wedding the Roman deities who presided over marriage: Venus, Cupid, and various other mythological attendants. In this poem, it was Cupid’s mission to “wing it” over to Venus’ palace, the palace of Love, to inform her of the impending love-match. Venus’ palace (situated on the island of Cypress) was a fabulous construction: “Vulcan built this too of precious stones and gold, wedding their costliness to art. Columns cut from rock of hyacinth support emerald beams; the walls of beryl, the high-built thresholds of polished jasper, the floor of agate trodden as dirt beneath the foot. In the midst is a courtyard rich with fragrant turf that yields a harvest of perfume.”

From thence a celestial procession accompanied Venus to attend the royal couple’s nuptials. Her presence at the wedding of the exalted Christian couple betokened that in the world of high culture, Venus and Cupid belonged to all.

Christian poets continued to sing of Love and pomp at Christian weddings in the Claudian tradition. There are numerous examples from Gaul. Furthermore Claudian’s epitalamium clearly inspired the Christian poet Prudentius to include a palace of Love along similar lines in his extended allegory on the soul, the Psychomachia. Significantly,

24 Procul atria divae / permutant radios silvaeque obstante virescunt. / Lemnius haec etiam gemmis extruxit et auro / admiscens artem pretiosissima / smaragdi / supposuit caesas hyacinthi rupe columnas. / beryllolores et isapide lubrica surgunt / limina despectusque solo calcatur acha tes. / in medio glaebis redolentibus arca dives / praebet odoratas messes; hic mitis amor, / hic casiae matura seges, Panchaeaque turgent / cinnama, nec sicco frondescunt vimina costum / tardaque sudanti prorepunt balsama rivo” (Platnauer, 248-49).


27 The term is from Macrobius, who distinguishes two types of fable: that which gratifies the ear and the narratio fabulosa, which presents “a decent and dignified conception of holy truths ... presented beneath a modest veil of allegory” (Commentary on the Dream of Scipio by Macrobius, trans. William Harris Stahl [New York: Columbia University Press, 1952], 85). See also the important study by Peter Dronke, Fabula: Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism, Mittellateinische Studien und Texte 9 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974).

Thus the palace of Love as the temple of Wisdom demonstrably entered the Christian tradition.

Yet in epithalamia we are only half way to Aldegund’s palace of Love. In celebrations of mortal marriages, the gods merely observed. Venus attended as the goddess of Love and her child Cupid clung fondly around his mother’s neck. Yet for a marriage in which the visionary participated, a marriage between a mortal and a god, between a Christian virgin and Christ, between the Soul and Love, we must seek a closer parallel in late antique literature. This brings us back to the mortal Psyche’s marriage to her celestial bridegroom, Cupid. What evidence is there that this specific story had a place in Christian religious culture and influenced its celestial mansion iconography?

THE MAKING OF A CHRISTIAN ALLEGORY

From its inception, the story of Cupid and Psyche was a story, a “fabled narrative.” Apuleius’s intention was to compose allegory, not allegoresis. Cupid and Psyche’s story was not presented as an
ancient myth in need of philosophic explication, but as an allegorical cipher for Middle Platonism. In short, it was a philosophic not a religious myth. Christians familiar with the philosophic writings of Apuleius considered this distinction significant, and we know that many read his work. From the fifth-century Christian mythographer Fulgentius we know that elaborate philosophic interpretations of Apuleius's story existed in late antiquity. His contemporary Sidonius Apollinaris advised one young man that if he could not put his mind to more serious works of devotion, he should at least apply himself to the study of Apuleius's works (unspecified) as an exercise in solving "problems." Thus Apuleius's writings had a Christian audience in Gaul, suggesting that Christian and pagan shared a


Fulgentius, Mythography 6, trans. Leslie George Whitbread, Fulgentius the Mythographer (Columbus, Ohio: State University Press, 1971), 88–90. Fulgentius, who disapproved of such indulgence, did not resist a Christian interpretation of his own. He likened Psyche to Adam, who was unaware of his nakedness until he ate from the tree of covetousness, that is, greed. Fulgentius repeats as a falsehood the interpretation of Aristophontes of Athens's Disarestia (no longer extant) in which, among other characters who are interpreted allegorically, Venus represents lust and Cupid represents greed (cupiditatem). (See also Barry Baldwin, "Fulgentius and His Sources," Traditio 44 [1988]: 37–57, esp. 41, "Aristophontes.") At first Psyche does not yield to the pleasure of greed, but then looks upon it, conceives a hot desire for it, and is punished.

Sidonius Ep. 9.13 to Tonantius: "At least borrow from the Platonist of Madaura his patterns of convivial problems, and (to improve your education) solve these when propounded, and propound these to be solved; and busy yourself with such pursuits even in your free time" (Anderson, Sidonius 2:569).
common “allegorical mentality.”\textsuperscript{31} Since Christians would have understood Apulcius’s story as a secular rather than religious myth, there was no need to impose on the story the censorship of an alternative Christian allegory “to disarm the gods.” Thus an ancient folk story reinterpreted by Apuleius as the divinity’s love for the soul slipped into Christian consciousness with barely a ripple of resistance.

In late antiquity, the plastic arts witnessed the immediate and exuberant popularity of the story. The amorous couple are a common motif on decorative reliefs and in garden statuary. The fact that they appear even on sarcophagi is particularly significant. In a funerary context Cupid and Psyche could have been associated only with their allegorical meaning in which the soul reunited with the god of Love and thereby achieved immortality. According to Janet Huskinson’s work on children’s sarcophagi in Rome and Ostia, artists commonly depicted Cupid and Psyche on children’s tombs.\textsuperscript{32} Sculptors also decorated the tombs of adults with scenes from the Cupid and Psyche story.\textsuperscript{33} Indeed, women may have designedly chosen this representation for their tombs and those of their children.\textsuperscript{34}

In the Eastern empire Cupid lived on as Eros, with rather different and distinct attributes to those in the West. As Paul Magdalino has shown, sculpted images of Eros were still visible on ancient public


\textsuperscript{33}See adult sarcophagus in the Ostia Museum, inventory no. 1177.

\textsuperscript{34}Women’s tastes may have had some impact on the prefabricated decorations available on such occasions. Huskinson notes that children’s sarcophagi must often have been bought in haste. Thus predecorated sarcophagi must have been available (t).
buildings in eleventh-century Byzantium depicting the god as a king, enthroned and carrying bow, arrows, and fire. It was by means of a torch that Psyche discovered and then lost the god of Love. In court literature Cupid was depicted as falling victim to Love, pricked by his own arrows, suggesting that in the East, memory of Cupid’s associations with Psyche had been preserved. This Mediterranean evidence may serve as a clue to Cupid’s survival in Gallic sources prior to the Carolingian age. We have evidence that Cupid was depicted in the homes of the rich in Northern Gaul. In the fifth century a domestic mural in a villa at Trier inspired Ausonius of Bordeaux’s poem “The Crucifixion of Cupid.” Regardless of whether the mural’s imagery was intended to be religiously ambivalent, it could certainly have been interpreted that way by subsequent viewers. With all these examples, we should not be surprised that images of Cupid and Psyche crossed over into dreams. As Jean-Claude Schmitt notes of a later age, “Can one see such images without wanting to dream them? Can one see them other than in a kind of dream? Must one not dream them in order to see them truly?”

Let us return to Aldegund’s palace and her vision. As a young woman, still in the secular life, Aldegund saw a vision of a heavenly

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35 Paul Magdalino, “Eros the King and the King of the Amours: Some Observations on Hysmine and Hysminias,” Dumbarton Oaks Papers 46 (1992), 197–204. Paul Magdalino, following Carolina Cupane, notes the transformation of Cupid from a little boy to a grown youth in the eleventh-century poem of the title as an innovation. However, Cupid is already a sexualized youthful adult in Apuleius’s second-century tale.

36 Ausonius of Bordeaux, “The Crucifixion of Cupid,” in Harold Isbell, trans., The Last Poets of Imperial Rome, 65–68. Almost no domestic architecture has survived from the Romano-Gallic or the Merovingian period. Ausonius’s poem is a rare reference to a specific mural depiction in a domestic setting.

mansion. At some point her desires changed from the girlish dreams of an earthly husband and earthly riches to desire for a heavenly bridegroom. Like Psyche, she crossed the threshold into the palace of Love, with its bright ornaments and the fragrant aroma of its celestial inhabitant. There Aldegund realized her true calling: to marry Christ, the God of Love. The bright, close warmth of the mythological palace of Love held powerful associations for Aldegund many decades later. In Christian poetry the interior space of Cupid's palace of Love had already begun to be fused with the biblical house of Wisdom and its seven pillars. For Christ, who was Cupid, the god of Love, was also Sophia, holy Wisdom. Christ, Cupid, and Wisdom were all deities who were enthroned in subsequent tradition, and it was perhaps this tradition that brought to the imagination of one young Western visionary a new means of expressing her mystical union and sapiential transformation.*

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