



HILDEGARD OF BINGEN : THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL  
USES OF PROPHECY

Sabina Flanagan

Department of History, University of Adelaide

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## ABSTRACT

### Hildegard of Bingen: the psychological and social uses of prophecy

The space commanded by Hildegard of Bingen in the Patrologia Latina is but one indication of her unique position among twelfth-century women. This thesis examines her life and writings in an attempt to explain how she was able to gain recognition in fields generally unfrequented by women.

The opening chapters establish the outlines of her life and subsequent attempts to interpret it. When these accounts are found wanting, the attitudes of Hildegard's contemporaries are investigated. An examination of her correspondence which takes up the greater part of chapter three reveals her widely-accepted status as a prophet.

The next chapters are concerned with the advantages of Hildegard's assuming a prophetic role and discuss the subordinate place of women in contemporary structures of knowledge and authority, as well as the use Hildegard made of the prophetic persona in her writings and life. The final chapter seeks to expose the physiological and psychological bases of her prophetic beliefs and suggest an alternative, secular interpretation of Hildegard's achievements. A translation of Hildegard's Vita from Ms B (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Stiftung Preussische Kulturbesitz, Cod. Lat. 40, 674), forms an appendix to the thesis.